



YUAN YIN LAO REN

— 元音老人 —

Teachings on Mind, Practice, and Liberation

A New Translation from the Chinese with Dialogues and Reflections



明心見性
離苦得樂

✧ Compiled, translated, and edited by Soh ✧

Integrated edition · August 2026

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Portrait reproduced from the 2025 compilation; the same portrait is preserved in the BFnn Yuan Yin archive. See Selected Sources and Image Notes for provenance.

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Edition Note

This integrated edition is built on complete English translations of the Yuan Yin source texts gathered for this volume, newly prepared directly from the Chinese sources. When a question of wording or interpretation arises, those Chinese texts are the primary reference. The 2025 compilation is used separately for photographs, disciple recollections, historical conversations, links, and earlier reflections.

The translated teaching chapters are not freely rewritten simply for smoothness. Editorial additions are visibly separated from Yuan Yin Lao Ren's words. Historical conversations retain their documentary character and are not silently rewritten to reflect terminology adopted years later.

Images. Historical photographs are reproduced from the 2025 compilation; detailed provenance is given in Selected Sources and Image Notes. The front cover is newly created artwork based on the archived portrait and is not a historical photograph.

Editor's Preface

Over the past several years I have translated, collected, and studied portions of Yuan Yin Lao Ren's (元音老人) teachings. My interest in his work was renewed by a vivid dream, probably around 2022, though I cannot be certain of the date. In the dream, I experienced him as deeply realized, highly accomplished in practice, and powerfully inspiring. The impression remained with me, prompting me to revisit writings I had previously judged too quickly and to apply myself more earnestly to practice.

In the 2023 conversation reproduced later in this book, I gave fuller context for why I sometimes take dreams seriously when they seem to carry practical significance. I recalled a dream in which I felt that someone who had just joined our group had strong karmic conditions to break through and was about to realize something; a few days later he had a non-dual breakthrough. In the same conversation I said of Yuan Yin Lao Ren: perhaps he really appeared in my dream and tried to inspire me to practice harder.

An older 2008 transcript preserves another episode. I dreamt that my mentor, John Tan, had sent me an online video link and asked me to watch it; two days later, he did exactly that. These experiences form part of the personal history behind this book.

Later, on the day before I printed a selection of Yuan Yin Lao Ren's teachings to share with Dharma friends in Singapore, I dreamt of him again, this time as bestowing blessings. I do not dismiss experiences of this kind merely because they occur in dreams. Buddhist contemplative traditions have long described dreams in which practitioners receive teachings or guidance from masters, encounter teachers or deities, or seem to receive indications concerning future events. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, for example, distinguishes karmic dreams from "dreams of clarity" and notes that the latter may include advice or predictions concerning future events. Traditional literature and practitioner accounts contain many reports of this general kind; John Tan and I have also had such experiences on numerous occasions.

At the same time, I do not regard such dreams as badges of attainment. Their value lies in how they function—whether they clarify, warn, encourage, or turn one more seriously toward practice. The Yuan Yin dreams were unusually vivid, meaningful, and consequential for me. I regard them as auspicious dreams and, borrowing a term from Tibetan dream-yoga literature, as dreams of clarity. The first prompted me to re-examine his teachings; the later dream of blessings deepened my sense that bringing his teachings together might benefit others. That is my hope in offering this book: whatever one makes of the dreams themselves, may you find something here that is of genuine benefit. Readers interested in traditional discussions of dream yoga and "dreams of clarity" may find the works by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche listed in the Selected Sources and Image Notes worthwhile.

Returning to Yuan Yin's writings through a much fuller translation from the Chinese changed the character of this book. The earlier compilation was valuable as a record of discovery, but it mixed translations, biographical material, conversations, links, and my own comments. This edition lets Yuan Yin speak first. The new translation therefore forms the main body, while selected photographs, historical conversations, and editorial reflections are added only where they genuinely help the reader.

After spending much more time with the Yuan Yin source texts gathered and translated in this volume, my assessment of him has grown stronger. I have great confidence in the depth of his realization and practice. What persuades me is not an isolated phrase, a convenient doctrinal agreement, or any of the dreams described above. It is the depth and clarity of realization expressed throughout the teachings themselves. Again and again he speaks with unusual specificity about what actually happens in practice: the difference between a passing meditative state and genuine insight, the danger of mistaking blankness for no-mind, the subtle tendency to cling to luminosity or knowing, the difference between an initial breakthrough and mature realization, and the long work of carrying realization into activity while wearing away habitual tendencies. Just as importantly, he refuses to let the teaching remain theoretical: one must practice, personally realize one's own nature, and then test and mature that realization amid actual circumstances.

His autobiographical account describes sustained discipline—two-hour sittings as the basic Heart-Center session, repeated retreats, and periods in which he intensified practice far beyond that minimum. Equally persuasive is the consistency of this practical intelligence across autobiography, lectures, question-and-answer sessions, letters, and detailed commentaries. He can give radically direct instructions in one context and very concrete advice on discipline, conduct, devotion, compassion, and the handling of meditative experiences in another, without treating a temporary experience as the completion of the path. These writings do not read to me as a body of theory assembled at second hand; they carry the texture of instructions forged through long contemplative practice and repeatedly tested in lived experience.

Although Yuan Yin Lao Ren is remembered as the Third Patriarch of the Chinese Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma, the range of his teaching is much wider than that title alone might suggest. His own training passed through Tiantai, Pure Land, Yogācāra, Huayan, Chan, and esoteric practice. His later writings and lectures range across Chan records, Buddha-recitation and Pure Land, Heart-Center practice, major Mahāyāna sūtras, Mahāmudrā, and discussions of Great Perfection and other Tibetan esoteric systems. What is striking is not merely the number of traditions he discusses, but his persistent effort to relate them to the practical work of realizing one's true nature, loosening attachment, stabilizing realization, awakening wisdom and compassion, and bringing practice into ordinary life. For that reason, I believe these teachings can be of genuine benefit far beyond the boundaries of his own lineage—to

practitioners of Chan or Zen, Pure Land, Vajrayāna, Huayan, Tiantai, Yogācāra, and other Buddhist traditions.

I also hope the book can speak to readers who do not identify primarily with a Buddhist school or lineage. Those drawn to Advaita Vedānta, Neo-Advaita, or other nondual and contemplative traditions may find important points of resonance, but also differences worth examining carefully—especially Yuan Yin’s insistence that an initial nondual realization is not the end of the path, that realization must mature in conduct and daily life, and that fixation can persist inside apparently elevated spiritual states. More generally, anyone compelled by questions such as “What am I?”, “What is consciousness?”, “What is the nature of reality?”, or “What would liberation mean in lived experience?” may find much here to contemplate. One need not accept every traditional cosmological, devotional, or doctrinal claim in advance. My invitation is simpler: read carefully, compare the teachings across the source texts gathered in this volume, and test in practice and experience what can genuinely be tested.

A reader’s map of Yuan Yin’s teachings

The texts gathered here were composed at different times, in different genres, and for readers at different stages of practice. They do not form a single linear treatise. Yet a small number of concerns recur so consistently that keeping them in view makes the pages that follow much easier to navigate. The map below is descriptive, not a substitute for Yuan Yin’s own arguments, examples, and changing pedagogical emphases.

Realizing one’s true nature is the central aim, but not completion. Yuan Yin is unusually emphatic about this. In Section 8 he calls apprehending Mind and seeing nature the guiding principle and essential core of Buddhism, the common aim around which different methods are organized. The point is not merely to form a correct idea about mind, but to realize one’s own nature directly. Yet the breakthrough, though decisive, is not final: seeing the nature must be followed by protecting and stabilizing realization, training amid circumstances, wearing away habitual tendencies, bringing forth unobstructed function, and allowing wisdom and compassion to mature. Sections 8 and 9 and much of Ganges Mahāmudrā repeatedly return to this distinction.

This realization is presented as attainable, not as a distant privilege reserved for a few saints. In the 1997 teaching Yuan Yin directly rejects the thought that apprehending Mind and seeing nature belongs only to sages, Buddhas, and bodhisattvas: because all beings possess the same undefiled self-nature, he says, “each and every one of us can awaken to the Way.” His Heart-Center instructions make that confidence concrete. Section 6 says that one or two sittings may be practiced each day, each sitting lasting two hours, and that when a practitioner of suitable capacity practices continuously without interruption, completing one thousand sittings will definitely lead to apprehending Mind and seeing nature. The same passage immediately explains that roughly three years is stated with the slowest practitioners in mind and that those of sharper faculties need not complete all thousand sittings. In Part III he is equally

emphatic: if formal practice and observation after the sitting are genuinely carried out as instructed, one will open up what is original within three hundred to five hundred sittings; he adds that many people did so within one hundred. These are Yuan Yin's own strong assurances, but he does not reduce awakening to arithmetic: he repeatedly conditions them on correct method, continuity, earnestness, and practice outside formal sitting. His autobiography also says that many fellow practitioners opened up what is original and saw the true nature while practicing the fourth mudrā; Wude's later memorial makes the broader claim that such disciples were "extremely numerous," which this edition preserves as later-source testimony rather than Yuan Yin's own statistic.

Diligence, continuity, and long-term resolve matter more than counting sessions. Yuan Yin repeatedly contrasts steady, continuous practice with practicing for a while and then stopping. In one Mahāmudrā passage he says that if practice is intermittent, even thirty or fifty years may not be enough, while sincere continuous training can be swift. His formal Heart-Center instructions are demanding but graduated: beginners are sometimes advised to begin with one two-hour sitting a day so pain or exhaustion does not make them abandon the practice; after the first hundred sittings he urges practitioners to increase the amount of sitting when possible, even joining several sittings together. Yet he also tells practitioners not to force the pace: if longer continuous sittings are beyond one's present capacity, they may be divided, and he explicitly warns that "haste makes waste." At the same time, he warns against turning the thousand-sitting assurance into a countdown. Lecture Seventeen says not to count sittings and not to "set the mind on waiting for awakening": when practice, causes, and conditions mature, breakthrough comes suddenly and naturally. Nor does completing one thousand sittings automatically mean one should stop. In his letters and Q&A, Yuan Yin says the question is whether the Way has actually been accomplished and whether one remains undeluded amid circumstances; until then, one should continue practicing well. His governing principle is plain: "I sit in order to seek awakening and realize the Way, not to seek numbers."

The Heart-Center regimen summarized here belongs to an empowered esoteric lineage and should not be treated as a self-guided practice reconstructed from descriptive passages in a book. Yuan Yin explicitly says that these esoteric methods are not to be publicly transmitted for practice without empowerment. Readers wishing to undertake the method should therefore receive its empowerment and instructions within the lineage. The sitting times and practice principles summarized here describe Yuan Yin's teaching; they do not substitute for that transmission.

Formal sitting and ordinary life form one continuous field of practice. On the seat, the Heart-Center method emphasizes mental recitation and attentive listening, with the practice carried out correctly rather than mechanically. Off the seat, Yuan Yin repeatedly instructs students to maintain clear observation: notice thoughts as they arise, neither grasp nor reject them, do not follow them, and do not let circumstances drag the mind away. One of his most useful images is that formal sitting sharpens the knife, while life after the sitting is where the knife is

actually used. In a later instruction he states the priority even more strongly: “clear observation is the main practice; sitting meditation is the auxiliary practice.” This does not belittle formal sitting; it prevents practice from being confined to the cushion. Work, relationships, attraction and aversion, praise and blame, and adverse conditions reveal whether realization has acquired real strength.

After awakening, practice changes form but does not simply stop. Yuan Yin repeatedly warns against turning a breakthrough into a certificate of completion. One first protects the realization closely; one then trains amid circumstances and diminishes habitual tendencies until the mind is no longer carried away. If meditative stability remains weak, more formal sitting may still be necessary. As stability matures, practice becomes less strained and more natural—what he calls the cultivation of no-cultivation—yet this ease is the fruit of maturation, not an excuse for premature passivity. His recurring sequence is realization, protection, training, and unobstructed functioning.

Right view and personal verification are indispensable. Yuan Yin says that to realize the fruit of the Way one must begin with right view; if the direction is wrong, effort alone cannot produce the result. At the same time, correct ideas are not enough. He repeatedly insists that one must personally realize original nature: merely talking theory is “painting cakes to stave off hunger.” This also explains his refusal to use visions, bliss, unusual states, or spiritual powers as the criterion of realization. Experiences may occur and may sometimes be useful, but the question is whether grasping has loosened, whether the mind is free amid circumstances, and whether wisdom and conduct actually transform.

No-mind and no-thought do not mean blankness. One of the most persistent cautions in the book is against confusing liberation with the suppression of thought. Thoughts may arise; the practical question is whether the mind grasps, follows, or abides in them. Yuan Yin repeatedly contrasts living samādhi and responsive functioning with a dead stillness in which nothing moves. This is why phrases such as no-mind, no-thought, non-action, and non-abiding need to be read together rather than as instructions to make the mind inert.

True mind is not an excuse to flee appearances. Yuan Yin uses strongly affirmative language—true mind, Buddha-nature, numinous knowing, luminosity, essence and function, mirror and reflection—but he also repeatedly warns against taking luminosity or knowing as a new place to stand. Nature and appearance, mirror and reflection, mind and its functioning are presented as inseparable in crucial passages. The practical emphasis is therefore not to turn away from sights, sounds, thoughts, and activity in search of a hidden background, but to cease grasping while the ordinary field of experience functions vividly.

Emptiness is not annihilation. Phenomena are repeatedly compared to dreams, reflections, bubbles, shadows, or conditioned appearances, yet Yuan Yin does not treat realization as the destruction of appearances or responsive life. He pairs emptiness with functioning, speaks of true emptiness together with marvelous presence, and repeatedly rejects blank, nihilistic, or

merely formless states. The reader should therefore expect both deconstructive language and positive language, often in the same teaching.

Great resolve, vows, ethical conduct, bodhicitta, and a broad compassionate mind are foundations of the path, not decorative additions to meditation. The first Heart-Center mudrā is itself the Bodhicitta Mudrā: Yuan Yin says students must establish great resolve and great vows—seeking the Buddha-way above and benefiting beings below—because without that foundation, hardship and setbacks easily lead to retreat. Elsewhere he joins faith in the Buddhas and Dharma with respect for the Saṅgha, precepts, humility, generosity, patience, diligence, and compassion. His six key points of practice conclude by urging a vast capacity of mind: even when others treat one badly, respond with greater kindness; do good according to conditions; and remain free from fixation on gain and loss, praise and blame, success and failure. His treatment of greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt makes the same point from another direction: realization must transform habits and conduct, not merely produce an intense experience.

Different methods are medicines for different conditions, but whichever method is chosen must actually be practiced. Chan, Pure Land, and esoteric practice are repeatedly presented as mutually illuminating rather than mutually exclusive. Yuan Yin's principle is that Dharma is prescribed according to the illness and the practitioner's capacity. Direct pointing, huatou investigation, Buddha-name recitation, mantra and mudrā, doctrinal analysis, and post-awakening observation can therefore appear side by side without being interchangeable. His own life also illustrates the complementary lesson: after choosing the Heart-Center method, he practiced it continuously rather than endlessly changing methods.

Where to begin. Readers who want Yuan Yin's central practical message in concentrated form can begin with Section 6, The Key to Becoming a Buddha, and Section 8, A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature. Section 6 is especially direct about the purpose of practice, the immediacy of original nature, and the thousand-sitting framework; Section 8 explains why realizing one's true nature is central and why it must be followed by cultivation. Part III, especially the formal-sitting and post-sitting Q&A, is the most practical reference for detailed instructions. Part IV develops the same architecture through Mahāmudrā: right view, samādhi, diligence, non-abiding, training amid circumstances, and post-awakening maturation. The 1997 California teaching in Part V is particularly clear that awakening is not reserved for a spiritual elite. Readers especially interested in Pure Land will find extended treatments in Ripples in the Sea of Chan and Part V. Part VI is best read after the source texts, since it preserves later historical conversations rather than Yuan Yin's own voice. The Editorial Reflection that follows belongs in the front matter because it explains the distinction that shapes my present reading: the difference between preliminary I AM realization, mature nondual anattā, and Yuan Yin's stage-sensitive use of true-mind language. It remains clearly marked as editorial reflection, while the source texts retain their own voice and structure.

Editorial Reflection — Reading the Corpus, Not a Snapshot

Why I changed my reading of Yuan Yin

The 2023 conversation reproduced in Part VI records a genuine change in my judgment. I said there that I had previously regarded Yuan Yin Lao Ren as “substantialist non-dual.” John Tan cautioned me not to draw a conclusion from a snapshot, but to compare several writings. The transcript preserves that earlier judgment and the later reassessment; it does not document every reason behind my first impression, so I will not supply a retrospective intellectual history that the sources do not support. What can be set out fully is the reasoning behind my present view. In the comparative vocabulary used in “Different Degrees of No-Self,” substantialist or essentialist nonduality is a genuine collapse of subject and object that nevertheless grants consciousness ontological privilege as an inherently existing or unchanging source or substratum, with phenomena as its display. Insustantial nonduality, or nondual anattā, leaves no independent Awareness behind, beneath, or apart from the luminous display. These are my comparative labels, not Yuan Yin’s own terms.

Yuan Yin can sound substantialist when read in isolated passages. He uses a robust positive register—true mind, Buddha-nature, numinous knowing, original nature, luminous mirror, essence and function. In “Phenomena and self are not two,” while explaining Su Dongpo’s water-and-moon verse, he even says that the false appearances of the myriad things change while their “actual essence remains unchanged,” and that the wise recognize “the true essence that is the same in things and sentient beings.” Read as a two-layer metaphysics—changing appearances here, an independently unchanging luminous reality behind them there—this would indeed be a substantialist position. Yet the same essay and the wider body of source texts gathered here repeatedly refuse that separation. The question, then, is how this positive register functions across stages of instruction and within the corpus as a whole.

The preliminary realization is exactly I AM

Before following Yuan Yin’s teaching further into the de-reification of awareness, it is important to identify clearly the preliminary realization from which that movement begins. Here my comparative judgment is stronger than a claim of resemblance: the initial realization Yuan Yin describes is the same realization that Awakening to Reality calls I AM, expressed in a different vocabulary. This identifies the realization; it does not make “I AM” a translation of Yuan Yin’s Chinese terms. Yuan Yin describes the immediately present “wondrous awareness” as numinously luminous, vividly clear, solitary, formless, able to speak and hear, and says that directly recognizing it is “only initial awakening.” Elsewhere his instruction is still more explicit: do not take the physical body as yourself; take empty quiescence as yourself; take numinous knowing as your own mind rather than delusive thoughts. In Awakening to Reality terminology, this direct realization of pure, self-evident Presence/Awareness as one’s true identity is exactly the I AM realization. I am not mechanically translating every occurrence of true mind (真心), Buddha-nature (佛性), numinous knowing (灵知), self-nature (自性),

wondrous awareness (妙觉), or awareness-nature (觉性) as I AM. The claim is narrower but also definite: the described initial realization itself is the same realization.

This realization is genuine, important, and precious; it is not an error that later insight simply cancels. It gives direct certainty of luminosity and presence. Yet Yuan Yin is equally clear that one must not stop there. In “Phenomena and self are not two,” Feng Jichuan’s understanding that the physical body is not the real “I” while an imperishable numinous nature is the real “I” is called only an ordinary principle. Yuan Yin says that Feng had not yet awakened to the secret that phenomena and self are not two and that nature and appearance are inseparable; Dahui’s corrective verse then collapses the split between the body and the numinous principle. The same corpus thus contains both the I AM-style initial pointing and the later deconstruction of a separate luminous Self.

The next distinction is experiential, not merely terminological. By nondual anattā I do not mean only the negative or conceptual conclusion that a self lacks inherent existence, nor a luminous nondual experience in which appearances are recognized as mind while Mind remains as an underlying ground. Two inseparable aspects must converge in direct experience. First, the reified internal reference point—the seer, hearer, thinker, doer, owner, or agent—is seen through. Second, consciousness is authenticated as the vivid, changing appearances themselves: sound, sight, sensation, thought, action, and the whole six-sense and cognitive display. Hearing is not an awareness behind sound; there is simply vivid sound with no hearer added. The same is true of seeing, sensation, thought, and action. Mere negation without this vivid authentication remains incomplete; luminous One-Mind or nondual experience without de-reification is likewise not anattā.

The 2023 Awakening to Reality discussion “When Sound Hears Itself: The Journey to Experiencing Anatta” brings these two aspects together. Yin Ling pairs activity with “no one home” and clear-light mind appearing as ordinary things, warning that either side alone is skewed. John Tan makes the same distinction in a 2023 exchange with the AtR chatbot: seeing through the reified construct of self is one insight, while directly tasting consciousness as appearances is the other; if the self is merely negated without that direct authentication, the understanding remains conceptual. It also clarifies his comment in the 2023 Yuan Yin conversation: “That is anatta and authentication of appearances as one’s radiance.” This remains an editorial comparative framework, not terminology imposed on Yuan Yin.

When Sound Hears Itself: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/05/nice-advice-and-expression-of-anatta-in.html>

A related discussion, “Definition of First Bhumi, Stream Entry, Etc.,” sharpens the practical distinction without requiring the reader to adopt its path-mapping terminology. It instructs practitioners to become familiar with the stable, bright knowing capacity—the mirror-like clarity that can serve as a basis for practice—while explicitly saying that this is “not yet stream entry.” My clarification there is that clarity is first recognized directly; later, the empty nature of that clarity must be realized. The point here is not to settle a contested taxonomy of bhūmis or stream entry. It is practical: the initial luminous realization can be genuine,

important, and exactly the I AM realization while still not being the mature realization of anattā and emptiness.

Definition of First Bhumi, Stream Entry, Etc.: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/definition-of-first-bhumi.html>
Thusness/PasserBy Seven Stages: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2007/03/thusness-six-stages-of-experience.html> ·
Mirror analogy and agency framework: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/01/mirror-analogy-is-outright-misleading.html>

Mirror and reflection: from reciprocity to de-reification

Once the preliminary realization is clear, the next question is how its luminous certainty is de-reified without being denied. It helps here to distinguish reciprocal manifestation from bilateral nonseparability. Yuan Yin sometimes says that appearances are needed for true mind to reveal itself and that true mind is needed for appearances to be formed. Taken by itself, this reciprocal language does not settle whether Awareness is independently established. It can still be read substantially, as an unchanging ground that needs appearances only in order to display or know itself, or insubstantially, as a relation in which neither side can be established apart from the other.

Other formulations go further. In the Pure Land discussion, Yuan Yin says: “Apart from mind there is no land; apart from land there is no mind. Mind is land, and land is mind.” This is already bilateral dependence and nonseparability, not merely the claim that appearances reveal a prior ground. In the same section, his account of conditioned mind and objects makes a parallel point: “Mind is not mind by itself; because of objects, there is mind. Objects are not objects by themselves; because of mind, there are objects,” a “mutually dependent and mutually conditioning relation.” The cumulative question is no longer whether appearances merely disclose an independent Awareness, but whether either side can be established apart from the other.

John Tan’s 2009 “Three Levels of ‘Understanding’ of Non-dual Awareness” clarifies the remaining distinction. Its second case is already nondual: manifestations are required for the mirror to see itself, yet the mirror remains inherently established. The third goes further: manifestations have always been the mirror, and there is no Awareness apart from them. Yuan Yin’s mind-and-land identity belongs on this stronger side. So do his formulations “mirror is reflection and reflection is mirror,” “apart from reflection there is no mirror,” true mind “cannot be obtained apart from sense objects,” and mind is appearance and appearance is mind. Section 9B closes the remaining escape route by saying that numinous awareness itself must not become an abiding place. With non-abiding there is neither a separate aware subject nor an object of awareness; if an “experience of knowing” is still left standing as something, it is already wrong.

Different Degrees of No-Self: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/04/different-degrees-of-no-self-non.html> · Three Levels of Non-dual Awareness: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/01/three-levels-of-understanding-of-non.html> · 2023 Yuan Yin reassessment: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/11/yuan-yin-lao-ren-writings-chatgpt.html>

Greg Goode’s “From Advaita to Emptiness,” together with his first-person Nāgārjuna account reproduced at “Greg Goode on Advaita/Madhyamika,” offers a useful methodological

comparison. He describes an earlier framework in which appearances depended on Awareness while Awareness remained independent; the later analysis made the dependence bilateral. This does not make Yuan Yin genealogically dependent on Madhyamaka, replace his vocabulary, or imply that he studied Greg Goode. Its value is diagnostic: saying that Awareness needs manifestations in order to reveal itself can still preserve it as an independent ground; bilateral dependence removes that independence by showing that Awareness itself cannot be established or obtained apart from manifestations.

Greg Goode — From Advaita to Emptiness: <https://greg-goode.com/article/from-advaita-to-emptiness/> · Greg Goode on Advaita/Madhyamika: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/08/greg-goode-on-advaitamadhyamika-9.html>

This diagnostic clarifies Yuan Yin’s positive register; it should not erase it. His sources genuinely speak of true mind, Buddha-nature, numinous knowing, luminosity, unbornness, unchangingness, constant abiding, mirror imagery, and essence and function. Those expressions belong to his teaching and should remain visible in translation. The interpretive task is to read them together with non-abiding, mirror/reflection inseparability, nature/appearance inseparability, the inability to obtain true mind apart from appearance, and the disappearance of a separate knower and known. John Tan’s historical description “Insubstantial non-dual” records the 2023 reassessment; my present use of nondual anattā rests on the wider Yuan Yin source corpus examined here, not on importing a later label into his Chinese.

John Tan’s later criticism of the mirror analogy is especially helpful at this transition. He called the mirror “great for an initial point out” toward pure presence—“Like I AM”—while warning that practitioners can turn away from the living reflections and chase an imagined mirror behind them. He also said that genuine realization begins with seeing that there is no mirror for dust to alight upon, while explicitly adding that this does not mean the non-existence of consciousness. Taken by itself, however, the criticism does not classify Yuan Yin as substantialist. The question is whether Yuan Yin uses the image as stage-sensitive instruction and then moves beyond it. His own Q&A makes the beginner/post-awakening distinction explicit; his 1997 teaching says, “There is no fixed Dharma,” and compares teachings to medicine prescribed according to the illness; his mirror/reflection and non-abiding passages leave neither a separate knower nor a separately obtainable mirror behind experience. Read across those stages, the preliminary pointer is not his final ontology.

Mirror analogy and agency framework: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/01/mirror-analogy-is-outright-misleading.html>

Stage-sensitive pedagogy: what is said to beginners and what is said after awakening

One passage makes this stage-sensitive structure unusually explicit: the Q&A numbered Question 75 in the older compilation, which appears in Part III of this volume without that legacy number. The question asks: “If all dharmas are empty and only Buddha-nature is not empty, does this not make Buddha-nature and the ten thousand things into two separate

things?” Yuan Yin answers: “All dharmas are empty and Buddha-nature is not empty” is spoken for beginners in Buddhism; “All dharmas are Buddha-nature” is spoken for people after awakening; “The two must not be confused.” The answer does more than invoke skillful means in general. It prevents the beginner’s contrast—empty phenomena on one side, non-empty Buddha-nature on the other—from hardening into a mature ontology of two separate things. The current Xinmi archive preserves the same exchange as Question 75.

Yuan Yin Q&A — Question 75 (Chinese archive): <https://www.xinmizi.com/book/id/51/child/472>

Seen in this light, the mirror’s bright clarity belongs to a stage-sensitive pedagogy. Passages in which reflections arise and cease while mirror-luminosity remains present can turn a beginner who still identifies with body and discursive thought toward the luminous Presence that Awakening to Reality calls I AM. John Tan likewise called the mirror “great for an initial point out” and “Like I AM.” The contrast can be useful and experientially decisive at that stage. Reified into two ontological layers, however—a changeless mirror-substance or Awareness behind transient reflections—it becomes the very split that the post-awakening teaching dismantles. At the mature level, no independently established mirror stands behind the reflections: mirror is reflection, reflection is mirror, true mind is unobtainable apart from sense objects, neither luminosity nor display becomes an abiding place, and no separate knower survives. In the comparative vocabulary used here, that is nondual anattā, not an unchanging substratum watching a changing world.

“Worldly appearances constantly abide”: no separate substrate behind change

In “Phenomena and self are not two,” Yuan Yin brings this relation into its most demanding form. He begins with the Chan case in which a monk asks Master Dasui whether the dharmakāya is destroyed when the great trichiliocosm is destroyed. Dasui answers, “The dharmakāya is also destroyed.” Yuan Yin first sets out the apparent contradiction: dharmakāya is unborn, undying, unmoving, unchanging, and constantly abiding. He then explains Dasui’s answer through nonseparation. The world is the manifestation of dharmakāya; “worldly appearances are precisely dharmakāya, and dharmakāya is precisely worldly appearances”; principle is revealed through phenomena and phenomena are accomplished through principle; nature and appearance are nondual. Nor does he leave the point as an abstract formula. He says that the pressure of Dasui’s answer can make the practitioner abruptly awaken that “the worlds in the ten directions are his own whole body” and “the worlds in the ten directions are his own radiance.” Yuan Yin then states his source logic directly: the great trichiliocosm and dharmakāya “originally share one essence and have never been separate.” If the world truly perished, dharmakāya would have to perish with it; because dharmakāya constantly abides through all time and does not perish, he reasons in reverse that the great trichiliocosm likewise does not perish.

The structure of the argument is clear: Yuan Yin will not allow dharmakāya to become one thing and the world another. His language of constant abiding and non-perishing must be

read in the light of that nonseparation. The passage neither presents a hidden permanent substance behind a disposable world nor confines itself to an ordinary description of transient appearances. It asks how change and abiding are to be understood when world and dharmakāya, principle and phenomena, nature and appearance are not two.

That context also governs the subsequent Su Dongpo water-and-moon passage. Yuan Yin says that, from the surface perspective, the world changes from instant to instant, while the flowing water is never exhausted and the moon's waxing and waning do not amount to absolute gain or loss. He uses this to speak of the false appearances of things changing while an "actual essence" remains unchanged, and of a "true essence" common to things and sentient beings. Isolated from the rest of the essay, this strong language can sound like substance metaphysics. Within the essay's equation of worldly appearances and dharmakāya, its nature/appearance inseparability, and its correction of Feng Jichuan's separate imperishable "real I," I do not read it as two things—a permanent spiritual substrate plus a disposable world. To place Buddha-nature in an independently existing, unchanging background while everything else alone is transient would simply re-establish the substantialist, non-Buddhist structure under another name.

The commentary on the Inscription on Awakening to Mind supplies a further key by giving three explanations of "worldly appearances constantly abide." First, all phenomenal affairs arise from true mind and therefore are said to abide in the Dharma-position; true mind constantly abides, so phenomenal affairs also constantly abide. Second, phenomena undergo transformations—the proverbial mulberry fields becoming seas—but their continuity is not annihilated; as with flowing water and the waxing and waning moon, change does not amount to a simple falling into nothingness. Third, "all phenomenal appearances are illusory and unborn; therefore they also do not perish." This third explanation is crucial to the mature reading because it relocates constant abiding from the endurance of a hidden entity to the logic of non-arising. What is unborn is not a thing that manages to persist unchanged through time; arising and ceasing cannot be established in the reified way conceptual thought imagines them.

Another Q&A keeps the positive register fully in view. Worldly dharmas and the body are impermanent, yet Yuan Yin says that all phenomenal affairs are inseparable from true nature: "true nature constantly abides, worldly appearances also constantly abide," while worldly change is conditioned transformation and false appearance. That statement should stand in its own voice rather than be rewritten into later Awakening to Reality terminology. My interpretive claim is that constant abiding must be read alongside the passages that identify nature and appearance, leave no separate abiding knower, and finally explain abiding through the unborn and therefore unperishing character of illusory phenomena.

Yuan Yin Q&A on "worldly appearances constantly abide":

<https://www.xinmizj.com/upload/202603/334213e0dc4a165d5efc92e61c7d8280.pdf>

John Tan's 2021 formulation offers a useful way to read 常住 without falling back into a substrate model. At the ultimate level, "in the seen only the seen" leaves no seer, seeing, or thing seen that can be tracked from one state to another. He says, "There is no changing nor unchanging," and calls that the ultimate view. Conventionally, however, he immediately affirms change, impermanence, and dependent origination as the appropriate expressions. I therefore understand Yuan Yin's mature language of constant abiding, unmoving, and unchanging through non-arising and nondual anattā, not through the persistence of a metaphysical Witness. Ultimately there is no independently existing thing that could be found to change or remain unchanged; conventionally, the dependent flow of appearances is rightly described as changing and impermanent.

The same reading leaves room for positive words such as permanent, non-arising, unmoving, unchanging, pristine, luminous, and unconditioned in mature Buddhist language. Once anattā and emptiness are clear, such qualities can be spoken of as spontaneously present without designating a second thing that persists behind phenomena. John Tan made the distinction sharply in 2021: "Permanent" does not refer to something that simply fails to undergo change; it points to the absence of a truly caused arising. Non-arising or unchanging, in this sense, is not an eternal Witness enduring through a sequence of transient experiences. The luminous display that conventionally originates in dependence and changes is, when its nature is seen, unestablished as something that truly arose in the first place. Positive language can remain without rebuilding the substrate that anattā has dismantled.

No Movement / no changing nor unchanging: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/in-seen-only-seen-is-also-no-seer-no.html> · Yuan Yin — Phenomena and self are not two (Chinese PDF): <https://www.xinmizi.com/upload/202403/bfd1403f770810eb62ff760b7d697a8f.pdf>

Dōgen and Huineng as Zen parallels

This reading has close Zen parallels. In Bendōwa, Dōgen attacks the very structure of "body changes, mind-nature remains," identifying it with the Senika non-Buddhist view. His point is more than an association of body and mind: the Buddha Dharma upholds their oneness and does not divide essence from form. If one speaks from immutability, all things are immutable without making mind a special exception; if one speaks from mutability, all things are mutable without separating essence from form. He goes further still: birth-and-death itself is nirvāṇa, so liberation cannot mean rescuing an immutable mind-nature from a perishing body. Genjōkōan likewise warns that a confused view supposes the self-nature of mind to be permanent, whereas intimate practice reveals no unchanging self. In the Buddha-nature fascicle, Dōgen takes the Sixth Patriarch's statement "impermanence is Buddha-nature" with radical seriousness: the impermanence of grasses and trees, body and mind, lands, mountains, and rivers is itself Buddha-nature. John Tan summarizes the experiential point by saying that Dōgen asks us to authenticate Buddha-nature directly in transient phenomena—the mountains, trees, sunshine, and footsteps—not in a "super awareness" standing apart from them.

Huineng's dialogue with Xingchang in the Platform Sūtra performs a related reversal of the usual language of permanence and impermanence. Huineng says "impermanence is the Buddha-nature" and deliberately calls the discriminating mind "permanent." He then explains that if Buddha-nature were a fixed permanence there would be no meaningful arising of bodhicitta, while if dharmas were reified as impermanent things each would possess its own self-nature and undergo birth and death. His "true permanence" and "true impermanence" thus overturn both eternalism and a reified doctrine of momentary things. As a comparative Zen witness, the dialogue helps show how mature Buddha-nature language can refuse the split between an immutable spiritual substance and a second, merely transient world.

The practical warning is equally important. Discussing Huineng in 2021, John Tan explained "original face" as the realization that appearances have always been one's own radiance-clarify, primordially luminous and naturally free—not the discovery of a primordial knower behind them. He also warned that practitioners can engage so-called highest teachings while retaining a dualistic, substantialist, or hidden-ground view if they emphasize primordial knowing without recognizing the nature of appearances. This bears directly on Yuan Yin's mirror language. The beginner may first recognize luminous clarity—the realization identified here as I AM—but mature realization cannot leave that clarity on one side and its reflections on the other. The living appearances themselves must be authenticated as the radiance, with no separate mirror-substance or knower established behind them.

Taken together, these passages support my present comparative assessment: Yuan Yin is better understood as expressing insubstantial nonduality—nondual anattā—than as a substantialist nondualist. The conclusion does not rest on the weaker claim that true mind and appearances merely reveal one another; that reciprocal language can still leave an unchanging substrate intact. The stronger cumulative pattern begins with explicit bilateral nonseparability—"Apart from mind there is no land; apart from land there is no mind. Mind is land, and land is mind"—and continues when Yuan Yin says "apart from reflection there is no mirror," says true mind cannot be obtained apart from sense objects, identifies mind with appearance and mirror with reflection, refuses abiding in either luminosity or its display, leaves neither a separate aware subject nor object of awareness in non-abiding, and explicitly distinguishes the beginner's "Buddha-nature is not empty" teaching from the post-awakening "all dharmas are Buddha-nature." His positive register remains fully visible: true mind, Buddha-nature, numinous knowing, luminosity, unbornness, unchangingness, constant abiding, and mirror imagery are all genuinely present in his sources. The mature reading does not delete them; it refuses to turn them into an independently existing Witness or substratum behind appearances that Yuan Yin's own texts make inseparable from them. Luminosity is authenticated as the vivid appearances themselves, without a separate seer, hearer, thinker, doer, owner, agent, or knower standing behind them. That is the sense in which I use nondual anattā here.

The purpose of these comparisons is not to recast Yuan Yin Lao Ren as an example of Awakening to Reality, John Tan, Dōgen, Huineng, Madhyamaka, or Greg Goode. It is to preserve the force, specificity, stage-sensitive pedagogy, and sometimes provocative character of his own teaching while stating my later comparative reading with equal clarity. The Chinese source remains primary. Yuan Yin’s words remain Yuan Yin’s words; the comparisons are interpretive lenses and comparative witnesses, not replacement translations.

Dōgen — Bendōwa (White Wind Zen Community): <https://www.wzc.org/bendowa/> · Dōgen — Genjōkōan: <https://genjokoan.com/> · Dōgen — Buddha-Nature translation witness: <https://otani.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/9215/files/EB9-1-07.pdf> · Platform Sūtra (BDK): https://www.bdk.or.jp/document/dgtl-dl/dBET_T2008_PlatformSutra_2000.pdf · AtR — Dōgen’s Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/03/dogens-impermanence-is-buddha-nature.html> · AtR — Huineng on Impermanence and Buddha-Nature: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/impermanence-is-buddha-nature-sixth.html>

A Note on This Edition

Source texts. The Chinese originals are the primary reference for Yuan Yin Lao Ren’s teachings, and the English translation in this edition was prepared directly from them. Older English translations and web versions were consulted only for comparison. Additional Chinese-language material included here was likewise translated from its identified source.

Chinese source companion. Readers who prefer the original Chinese, or who wish to compare the main translation with its source texts, can consult the companion used for Sections 1–11: https://files.awakeningtoreality.com/YuanYinLaoRen_Chinese_Originals.docx. Supplementary Part I sources, including Wude’s memorial, are cited separately. Where wording or interpretation is disputed, the relevant Chinese text remains the reference point.

Voices. Source-text chapters contain Yuan Yin Lao Ren’s translated words. “Editorial Interlude” marks later contextual material or reflection. “Historical Dialogue” preserves conversations as conversations; speaker identity and chronology take precedence over stylistic polish.

Later biographies and recollections. When a later biography, memorial account, or disciple recollection is included, its source and authorship are identified once and the account is then allowed to speak in its own voice. Extraordinary events are translated or retold as their sources present them rather than interrupted by repeated editorial qualifications.

Terminology. Buddhist technical terms are handled contextually rather than by blanket substitution. Apparent parallels with Awakening to Reality terminology are not ordinarily treated as proof of identical doctrine. Where the editor explicitly makes a specific identification of realization—most notably the front-matter discussion identifying Yuan Yin’s described initial luminous realization with the AtR I AM realization—that identification is stated as editorial interpretation and does not turn the AtR label into a translation of Yuan Yin’s Chinese terms. Difficult or source-shaped language is retained when smoothing it would alter the teaching.

Brief Chronology

This chronology distinguishes material contained in Yuan Yin Lao Ren's 1996 autobiography from later biographical sources. The autobiography is the primary source for the period it covers; supplementary dates and details are drawn from the National Taiwan University Digital Library of Buddhist Studies Author Authority Database, the notice “元音老人坐化” in Chan (禪), 2000, no. 2, and Wude's “元音老人坐脱立亡” in Meifo Huixun (美佛慧讯), no. 69 (2000).

Date	Event
23 Nov 1905	Born in Hefei, Anhui.
1917	Moved with his father to Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, and studied at Zhenjiang Middle School; visits to Buddhist monasteries became part of his early religious formation.
1923	Moved to Shanghai and entered the University of Shanghai (Huijiang University).
1925	His father died of typhoid fever; he began postal work while continuing his studies and supporting his mother.
1958	Received Ācārya empowerment. His autobiography says he was “undeservedly listed among the teachers”; Wude's memorial says he succeeded as Third Patriarch of the Heart-Center Dharma.
1978	By his own account, he began writing essays for fellow practitioners seeking guidance in practice and clarification of doubts.
28 Feb 1996	Date of the autobiographical source text that opens this book.
1997	Taught at Fayin Temple in California; the complete translated teaching appears in Part V.
5 Feb 2000	Chan notice: died seated in Shanghai. Its age figure of ninety-six is consistent with traditional Chinese nominal-age reckoning (94 elapsed years from 23 Nov 1905). Wude: 8:15 p.m.; remains transferred to Mount Putuo; cremated 6 Apr 2000.

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Part I — Life and Context

The autobiographical source is presented first and left intact. It is followed by a complete translation of Wude's 2000 memorial account, carrying the biographical story through Yuan Yin Lao Ren's final years. A short selection of later disciple recollections follows. The editor's present interpretive reflection appears in the front matter and is visibly labeled as editorial. Historical conversations remain in Part VI after the Yuan Yin source texts, so that documentary reception history is not confused with Yuan Yin's own voice.

1. 心密三祖元音老人传略 / Biographical Source Text

Biography of Yuan Yin Lao Ren, the Third Patriarch of the Heart-Esoteric Lineage

Chinese source: 《心密三祖元音老人传略》



Figure 1. Yuan Yin Lao Ren seated in formal robes. Reproduced from the 2025 compilation. A later Yinxin Tiandi reminiscence appears to identify this chair-backed portrait as having been taken at the Jinan Military Region Photography Center; the individual photographer is not named.

Li Zhongding, whose Dharma name was Yuanyin, was born in 1905 in Hefei, Anhui, and was in his ninety-first year at the time of this account. As a child he studied the Confucian classics under a local private tutor. He often wondered: from where does a person come at birth, and to where does one go at death? However much he pondered it, he could not resolve the matter. At the height of this perplexity, he would sometimes become dazed, as if he had lost any sense of where he was; frightened by this, he did not dare to keep pursuing the question.

When he grew a little older, he entered a municipal higher primary school. He read the Diamond Sutra together with his father; it felt strangely familiar, yet he did not understand its meaning, so he asked his father about it. His father said, “These are the words of sages. They are not something you, still a child, can know. Just apply yourself to study. Later, when you examine this precious scripture in depth, you will naturally receive inexhaustible and genuine benefit from it.”

In 1917 his father took up the post of assistant manager at the Merchants Steam Navigation Company in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, and he accompanied him there to study at Zhenjiang Middle School. Zhenjiang was a Buddhist center, with many monasteries and many eminent monks. Among them, Jinshan Jiangtian Monastery and Gaomin Monastery of Yangzhou were both regarded as ancestral seats of Chan study. In his free time he would often go with classmates to visit Buddhist monasteries. On the way there, being young and high-spirited, they ran,

jumped, laughed, and fooled around, exuberant and feeling invincible. Then suddenly, on hearing a single stroke of the monastery bell, his agitated mind came to rest at once, still as standing water; he felt cool and joyful, though he did not know why.

At that time there was an awakened eminent monk at Jinshan whom everyone respectfully called a living Buddha. Unfortunately, I was young and ignorant then, and did not know the proper way to respectfully ask his Dharma name. I only saw people crowding around him, all vying to ask questions. I pushed my way into the crowd and knelt before the monk. Without asking anything, he picked up the large mallet used for striking the wooden fish in the Mahāvīra Hall, tapped me on the head with it, and said, “Study diligently and make good effort; boundless good fortune lies ahead.” Everyone was startled, and I withdrew in embarrassment.

In 1923 my father was transferred to work at the Shanghai office of the Merchants Steam Navigation Company, and I moved with him to Shanghai, where I was admitted to the University of Shanghai. In 1925, because of the strain of work, my father unfortunately contracted a severe case of typhoid fever. Medical treatment failed, and he passed away. In my grief, besides studying hard, I still had to find work in order to support my elderly mother. Yet I was introverted by nature, not good at socializing, and even less willing to ask relatives or friends for help. Just then the post office placed an advertisement recruiting postal clerks. I applied for the examination and was fortunate enough to be accepted.

From then on I worked while studying. Though life was fairly tense, I did not feel it to be bitter. At that time work at the post office took only six hours a day, and university study followed a credit system. Unlike now, one did not have to live at school all day; one could choose a few appropriate courses and graduate once the required credits were completed.

During this period of work and study, I passed through a stretch of life and tasted some of its flavors. I came to feel deeply that the turmoil and struggles of worldly people all arise from conflicts over money and romantic love; and that human life is like morning dew, gone in an instant; the span of life is impermanent. Even if one exhausts all one’s energy and toils one’s whole life, in the end there is nothing gained. One finally departs with only emptiness, suffering, grief, loss, sorrow, and regret. What needless suffering—truly not worth it.

At the same time, because of the pain of losing my father, I studied the Buddhist scriptures and Chan records he had left behind. I came to understand, roughly, some of the marvelous principles spoken by the Buddha and some of the profound, subtle, and incisive sayings unfolded by the great patriarchs. I felt deeply that worldly people, in order to satisfy their private material desires, chase and grasp greedily without ever being content. They create karma and undergo retribution, needlessly suffering the pains of rebirth through the six paths. This is truly foolish, truly tragic. One should turn back early, relinquish all illusory seeking, gather the whole power of the mind, choose a Dharma gate suited to one’s own temperament, and practice earnestly, so as to recover the luminous original Buddha-nature

and leave the sea of birth-and-death suffering. To awaken the deluded dreams of worldly people and to leave the wheel of suffering together: this is the true meaning of human life, and this is where its value lies.

Having resolved to study Buddhism, I vowed not to marry. For the sake of supporting my elderly mother, although I wished to leave home, I bore an unavoidable responsibility and could not go away from her side. When the calamity of the Cultural Revolution arrived, because I had transmitted the Dharma and accepted disciples on behalf of my teacher, I was regarded as a ringleader of the “Four Olds,” a superstitious element and a bad influence who poisoned the young. I was placed under investigation in isolation for two and a half years. Only after they found no unlawful conduct was I released. During the Cultural Revolution my home was searched and ransacked many times, and my elderly mother, frightened by this, fell ill and died. At that time the fourfold assembly was itself in distress; even though I wished to shave my head and become a monk, there was no way to do so. Thus I have remained alone to this day.

When I first studied Buddhism, I was introduced by a colleague to follow the Tiantai elder Master Xingci, studying Tiantai teachings and practicing Pure Land. Every day, besides studying the Tiantai doctrinal outlines, I held fast to Amitābha’s sacred Name without daring to slacken even slightly. Outside the formal lessons, I also studied Consciousness-Only with the elder layman Fan Gunong. In winter I joined the assembly in seven-day Pure Land retreats. Later, through the introduction of Dharma friends, I followed Elder Master Yingci, a Huayan lecturer, studying Huayan and practicing Chan contemplation.

At that time, those able to continue the Huayan teaching lineage were only the elder Chan master Yekai of Tianning Monastery in Changzhou and his eminent disciples, Masters Yuexia and Yingci. After Master Yuexia passed away in Hangzhou, only Elder Yingci remained as the sole surviving pillar of the great Huayan tradition, making him all the more precious. His teaching was precise and rigorous, and his compassion especially great. Because my work kept me entangled and I could not always attend the lectures with the assembly on time, he would specially teach me alone on Sundays, explaining the Three Contemplations of Huayan and the profound mysteries of the Dharma realm. He encouraged me, saying, “In this country, only this lineage advocates bringing Chan practice and doctrinal study together. Apart from it, those who spread Chan do not study the teachings, and those who study the teachings do not investigate Chan; this seems somewhat one-sided. You should study this well, enter deeply into Chan contemplation, and not fail my intention.”

Following Elder Yingci in the study of doctrine and the investigation of Chan, I seemed to gain an entry. One day, after listening to a lecture, my human body suddenly vanished; luminosity was clear and distinct, the whole body was cool and refreshing, and I felt incomparably light and at ease. I reported this to the master. He said, “Although this does show some progress, it is still a passing guest, not the host. Pay no attention to it. Strive onward until the great earth sinks away and empty space shatters; then there will be a small degree of accord.” Because of

this I made even greater effort in sitting meditation. In the twelfth lunar month I joined the assembly for a seven-day Chan retreat. But because of work, I could not begin and end it properly; by the end of three seven-day periods, I had still made no further progress.

Later, through the introduction of a close Dharma friend, I went to Shengshou Monastery to hear the great Vajrayāna Ācārya Master Wang Xianglu lecture on the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch. I gained considerable insight. After the lecture I followed the master to his residence, the Seal-Mind Hermitage, to request instruction.

The master asked, “Which school have you been practicing?” I answered truthfully, “Chan investigation.” He asked, “Have you opened up what is original and personally seen the nature?” Ashamed, I hesitated and replied, “I have not yet seen it.” The master said, “Why not follow me in studying the esoteric teaching?” I said, “Esoteric ritual procedures are complex, whereas my nature prefers simplicity and plainness; I do not seem very compatible with esoteric practice.”

The master said, “My Heart-Center Dharma is the very heart of the esoteric school. It is an esoteric practice of the highest vehicle that does not rely on visualization. Practicing it yields twice the result with half the effort and can directly lead to seeing the nature. It is not the same as other esoteric methods that rely on visualization. Although it is called ‘esoteric,’ in actuality it is Chan. It has none of the cumbersome ritual procedures of preliminary or preparatory practices, and none of the troublesome need, after visualization has been successfully established, to dissolve the visualized form into emptiness. Moreover, it also interpenetrates with the Pure Land school; through it one may be reborn in the Western Pure Land or in the pure lands of Buddhas in other directions. It is truly a great Dharma that integrates Chan, Pure Land, and esoteric practice into a single Dharma.”

“Śākyamuni Buddha said in this school’s practice text, The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Connected with the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, that this is the Dharma best suited to beings in the Dharma-ending age for ending birth and death. Relying on the compassionate empowering force of the Buddha’s mantra and mudrā, one can quickly eliminate obstacles, awaken wisdom, and fully realize bodhi. One may also rely on the power of the fourth mudrā to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, and may further be reborn in any Buddha-land according to one’s vow. Thus this Dharma takes Chan as its essence, esoteric practice as its function, and Pure Land as its destination. It integrates the three schools into a single Dharma and is a great Dharma suitable for beings in the Dharma-ending age to practice and accomplish the Way.”

The master also said, “Chan investigation relies entirely on one’s own strength. Students must arouse the doubt-sensation and investigate with their whole strength before there can be an entry. If the doubt-sensation is difficult to arouse, the inquiry cannot take hold. Moreover, modern people are busy with work and do not have much free time; they cannot, like people of old, spend twenty or thirty years single-mindedly investigating a huatou. Therefore those

who awaken through Chan investigation are few, and Chan has consequently declined. If one studies the Heart-Center Dharma and practices by relying on the empowering force of the Buddhas, it is very different.” Since his words were earnest and reasonable, I received the Dharma and took refuge.

After the empowerment I returned home to practice. In the very first sitting with the first mudrā, my whole body flew up as if a helicopter were shooting straight into the sky; startled and frightened, I came out of samādhi. Only then did I realize that this Dharma was indeed different from other methods. I therefore settled down to practice it step by step and no longer changed my mind by shifting to other methods.

This Dharma has six mudrās and one mantra. Its method is simple and easy to learn. It requires no preliminary or preparatory practices and no visualization or contemplation of forms. Like Chan, it begins its practice at the eighth consciousness; and because it has the empowering support of the Buddhas, it easily leads directly to seeing the nature. I heard the master say that secret mantras are esoteric words into which Buddhas and bodhisattvas transform their own minds in samādhi, just as we use codes when sending telegrams. Mudrās are like seals impressed on important documents, and also like the antenna of a television set. Through them, the student’s mind communes with the minds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and becomes one and inseparable from them; therefore the empowering force is great and realization of the Way is swift.

Pure Land practice likewise relies on the Buddha’s power through recitation of the Buddha’s name. But Buddha-name recitation is external in origin, and its power is not as great as holding the Buddha’s heart-mantra. Therefore Master Hanshan once said that if Buddha-recitation does not take hold, one may switch to holding mantras; this is precisely the principle.

The Heart-Center Dharma has six mudrās because each mudrā has a different function. The first is the Bodhicitta Mudrā. It teaches students to establish a great resolve and make great vows: above, to seek the Buddha-way; below, to transform beings. It secures the initial aspiration for practicing the Way. It is like building a hundred-zhang tower: first one must firmly lay the footings and build the foundation. If the foundation is not firm, the tower will collapse. If a student of the Way does not establish great resolve and make great vows, then on encountering hardship he will surely retreat, and on meeting setbacks he will stop. He will never be able to struggle arduously to the end with indomitable perseverance and realize noble fruition. Therefore this mudrā is most important. In the esoteric school there are more than ten thousand mudrās, and this mudrā is the king of all mudrās.

The second is the Mudrā for Accomplishing Bodhicitta. It can remove karmic obstacles from past lives, heal illnesses, and prepare the way for wisdom to open. After I practiced this mudrā, I had diarrhea three times, and body and mind felt light, agile, clear, and refreshed.

This was because the empowering force of the mudrā expelled the defilements, stains, filth, and impurities of former lives through the bowels.

The third is the Mudrā of Directly Bestowing Bodhi. It is the essential mudrā through which Buddhas and bodhisattvas radiate light to empower practitioners, propel them forward, and quickly bring them into samādhi. It is also a marvelous means for treating the illnesses of others. During my period of practice, when affairs were occasionally troublesome and my mind was disturbed, holding this mudrā could quickly turn things around and enable me to enter deeply into samādhi. Through the compassionate empowerment of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, I also used the practice several times to treat friends at a distance, and they recovered afterward.

The fourth is the Tathāgata-Mother Mudrā. It is the great mudrā for awakening wisdom, accomplishing the Way, and being reborn in the Pure Land. Therefore, after completing two cycles of practice from the first through the sixth mudrā, when one specializes in the second and fourth mudrās, the second mudrā is practiced for only one day while the fourth must be practiced for six days. This shows the importance of this mudrā. Many fellow practitioners opened up what is original and saw the true nature while practicing this mudrā.

The fifth is the Tathāgata All-Gathering Dhāraṇī Mudrā. This mudrā gathers into one the merit, power, and marvelous function of the secret mantras of all Buddhas. Its power is immense and its momentum swift and fierce. It can subdue demons, eliminate deviant non-Buddhist teachings, move mountains and overturn seas, and eliminate afflictions such as the surfacing of latent karmic seeds. Therefore, in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, there is no danger of demonic deviation and no risk of being troubled by deviant non-Buddhist teachings.

The sixth is the Tathāgata-Speech Mudrā. After practicing this Dharma, one can grasp all the sūtras spoken by the Buddha and all the treatises composed by bodhisattvas at a glance, understand them thoroughly, and have not the slightest doubt. It also enables one to invoke Buddhas and bodhisattvas, receive their empowerment, and develop great spiritual powers. These six mudrās must be practiced sequentially and continuously. One may not skip ahead or leap over levels; still less may one practice intermittently, starting and stopping.

Following the master's instructions, I sat at the appointed time every day, completing two hours in each sitting. Earnestly and diligently, according to the oral instructions given by the master, I practiced by mentally reciting the mantra and listening attentively to its sound, never interrupting the practice. After completing one hundred sittings, I added more sittings and practiced intensively. From sitting four hours a day, I gradually increased to six hours, eight hours, and eventually eighteen hours. Every Sunday and public holiday, I sat at home all day and did not go out for leisure. Because of this the master often encouraged me to speak on the Dharma on his behalf and to encourage fellow practitioners.

While I was practicing the fourth mudrā, one night in a dream I suddenly heard my elderly mother cough. At that instant body, mind, and world vanished together, yet numinous

knowing remained unobscured, clear and distinct. In the morning I asked the master about it. He said, “Although this is an encouraging sign, the practice has not yet fully matured. You must make still greater effort and must not slacken even slightly.”

One day, after finishing the practice, I walked to the post office for the early shift. Passing along Sichuan North Road, I suddenly heard an explosion. Body and mind, the road, vehicles, and pedestrians all vanished at once, while the numinous knowing was clear and distinct; not a single thought arose, and I did not even feel that a person was walking. When I reached the entrance of the post office, a thought suddenly arose: “I have arrived.” Then the post office gate appeared before my eyes. Without the feet having moved, the person had already arrived at the post office. The body was light and relaxed, and the mind utterly free, as if a thousand-pound burden had been put down. I was filled with joy, so delighted that I could hardly contain myself. Is this what the marvelous presence of Buddhadharma is like?! How could such an experience be described by brush and ink?

One day, while sitting peacefully, I saw a Buddha come forward and entrust me with a solar disk. Just as I stretched out my hand to receive it, the solar disk suddenly exploded. Buddha, self, solar disk, world, and empty space all vanished at once, and the wondrous bright true mind stood clearly revealed. The Buddha’s grace is vast; in empowering and guiding beings, nothing is overlooked. In gratitude, I could not help weeping. We later-born children, even if our bodies were pulverized and our bones shattered, could not repay even one part in ten thousand of this deep kindness.

Another day, while sitting, I saw an old woman seated calmly on a chair carved with coiling dragons, with a young attendant standing beside her. She called to me, “Come, come. I have a copy of the Heart Sūtra to transmit to you.” I replied, “This wordless Heart Sūtra is profound and inconceivable. How can you, Venerable One, transmit it?” The old woman then stepped down from her seat, and I also bowed and withdrew. Once, while practicing the sixth mudrā, my consciousness suddenly left the body and moved about the room when a Dharma friend came to visit and knocked on the door; it then returned to the body. Such trivial matters are all like dreams and illusions, and are basically not worth speaking of. I briefly list one or two and invite correction from all quarters.

My grandmaster, Ācārya Dayu, in order to spur us Dharma brothers to rise higher and higher, often posed difficult questions to test us. For example, he asked, “What is it like when all seventeen hundred public cases are threaded through on a single string?” One Dharma brother answered, “Bitter!” The grandmaster pressed him: “Who is bitter?” The brother could not answer. I covered my ears and walked out from the side. The grandmaster said, “Someone has rescued you.”

On another occasion, a Dharma brother took the grandmaster’s fan and said, “This is Master Dayu’s.” Later the grandmaster asked, “If it is Dayu’s, why is it in your hand?” I answered for him, “May I ask, what is outside my hand?” The master nodded. Again, the grandmaster asked,

“Have you contemplated the mind and seen it?” A Dharma brother answered, “I have seen it.” The grandmaster pressed him: “Where is it?” From the side I stretched out my palm and said, “Here it all is, laid out in the open.” These bits of family disgrace are not worth publicizing; I mention them only to provide readers with a smile.

Time passes swiftly; in a flash, several decades went by. During that time, although I practiced diligently and without interruption, and although I undertook many seven-day retreats and intensive nine-sitting practices, because my roots were shallow and my obstacles heavy, I gained nothing at all. I truly did not dare utter even a single word before others, lest I pollute their hearing. But when my late master passed away and there was no one to succeed to the Dharma seat, I was called upon to temporarily take the teaching seat. With no other choice, I reluctantly undertook the task. In 1958, after receiving the Ācārya empowerment, I was undeservedly listed among the teachers.

In response to invitations from various quarters, I went to monasteries, hermitages, and associations in many places to lecture on the Śūraṅgama, Lotus, Laṅkāvatāra, Huayan, Diamond, Perfect Enlightenment, Heart, Amitābha, and Platform sūtras, and to participate in Chan-study forums and discuss Chan records with fellow Chan students. My travels extended east to Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang; west to Yunnan and Sichuan; south to Guangdong and Hainan; and north to Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai. I almost traveled throughout the whole country. Among disciples who received the Dharma, besides the fourfold assembly within China, there were also a small number from overseas—the United States, Germany, France, Canada, Japan, and other countries—who came upon hearing of it.

As for writing, my level was limited, and I was also occupied with many Dharma-teaching responsibilities, leaving little spare time to write. Only beginning in 1978, at the request of fellow practitioners in different places, in order to guide later students in practice, answer doubts, and remove confusion, I hastily stitched together a few crude essays, such as *A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature*, *A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to Mind*, *Lectures on the Blue Cliff Record*, *Ripples in the Sea of Chan*, *Key Questions Concerning Rebirth in the West*, as well as records of Chan retreats and empowerment instructions. These have successively been published in various Buddhist periodicals and magazines. In addition, *The Hidden Meaning of the Heart Sūtra*, *An Essential Explanation of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, and *A Brief Explanation of Mahāmudrā* are currently being prepared for printing and have not yet met the wider community of Buddhist practitioners.

In sum, for decades I worked with the same steadfastness day after day, propagating the teaching on my teacher’s behalf and proclaiming the Dharma for the Buddha, traveling from place to place, conscientious and diligent, never daring to slacken. Fortunately, through the Buddha’s compassionate protection and the support of the fourfold assembly, I did not disgrace my late teacher’s noble virtue or fail to live up to the Buddhas’ profound kindness. Beyond deeply thanking all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the broad community of faithful

followers for their great virtue in supporting and protecting me, I also feel immeasurably fortunate and deeply ashamed.

February 28, 1996

Full Memorial Account — Yuan Yin Lao Ren Passes Away While Seated

元音老人坐脱立亡 · Complete translation from Chinese · Wude (悟德) · Meifo Huixun (美佛慧讯), no. 69 · 2000

Chinese source scan: https://wisdombox.org/Yniva_s.pdf.

Yuan Yin Lao Ren, the Third Patriarch of the Signless Heart-Center Dharma, passed away while seated at 8:15 p.m. on February 5, 2000—the first day of the first lunar month—at the age of ninety-six. Before his passing, the Ācārya had remained in very good health and his daily life continued as usual. People came in an unending stream to ask about the Buddhadharma, and he always answered every question, speaking freely on the Dharma in a full, resonant voice. On the evening of February 3, the Little New Year’s Eve, he bathed as usual; there was no outward sign that he was about to leave this world. On the morning of February 5 he told those around him, “I am going back home.” They said, “Master, you cannot go! We all need you!” He replied, “All is illusory. I have not left you. Remember: coming yet not coming, going yet not gone; this coming and going too is neither coming nor going.” That day he still gave empowerment and blessings to those who came to request the Dharma. Dinner was as usual, again with nothing outwardly suggesting that he was about to pass away. After the meal he sat in the chair he ordinarily used and spoke with those around him about the Dharma, instructing them on how the Buddhadharma should be realized and practiced in daily life. After speaking for about forty-five minutes, he suddenly raised his eyes toward the sky as though seeing something, immediately stood up, and then slowly sat down. Thus a true spiritual friend revered by humans and devas peacefully relinquished the body, personally displaying the ease and freedom, unhindered in birth and death, with which a practitioner can pass on.

For several days after he relinquished the body, an extraordinary fragrance continuously filled the room. His remains were then taken to Mount Putuo and kept there for sixty days. On the day of cremation, April 6, many disciples from throughout China and from overseas—although no notice had been issued, they had learned the date through various channels—came together of their own accord before the cremation kiln on Mount Putuo. Wishing to commemorate the Ācārya’s virtuous work and filled with profound reverence, they came to make their final farewell. When the executor of the will finished reading it aloud, an unusual sign appeared: above the assembled crowd a green lotus appeared, and three rays of golden light descended from the sky. One ray shone directly onto the center of the crowd, while the other two shone down on either side, covering everyone present. Purple radiance also appeared upon the lotus and moved back and forth. A video camera recorded the scene on the spot. During the cremation a lotus also appeared over the Ācārya’s chest, and many of those present witnessed this wonder amid the flames. After many consecutive days of continuous

rain, that day was extraordinarily clear, with a cloudless sky stretching for ten thousand li. After the cremation, auspicious clouds in the forms of dragons and phoenixes appeared in the sky above the cremation kiln, at times remaining for a long while and at times moving back and forth. The scene appeared several times over the course of several hours, each appearance lasting for quite some time—a beautiful sight in the completely cloudless sky.

The following day, while the relics were being collected, the sky was again perfectly clear. A vast five-colored circular halo appeared, with four rays of golden light streaming from its center. Within the halo, purple, red, blue, magenta, and other colored lights repeatedly appeared, filling the whole circle; within it the Ācārya appeared seated upright on a lotus. This auspicious sign lasted for forty minutes. It too was recorded on video, leaving precious material capable of inspiring strong faith.

If the lotus above the crowd and the three golden rays descending from the sky on the day of cremation were blessings for those present, then the great circular halo, the many colored lights filling it, and the dignified sacred image of the Ācārya indicated that the Dharma of his lineage would shine forth and flourish ever more brilliantly, illuminating the great thousandfold world. All those present to collect the relics, on seeing these auspicious signs, felt immeasurable gratitude toward the Ācārya and together vowed to practice still more diligently in order to repay the kindness of the master. Many people who were not disciples also marveled at what they saw and vowed to study and practice the unsurpassed Buddha-Way. That day many śarīra relics and relic-flowers were collected.

As early as 1989 the Ācārya had intended to leave this world, but after his disciples pleaded earnestly with him, he agreed to continue remaining. Five years before his passing, a certain lay practitioner casually asked when he would relinquish the body. The Ācārya answered, “The year 2000.” In 1999 he prepared his will in advance. To avoid alarming his many disciples and creating unnecessary difficulties, he allowed only a few close disciples to know of it so that they could discuss the arrangements that would follow. These close disciples again urged him to remain, but the Ācārya said, “Whatever is born must perish; even the Buddha was the same. My karmic affinities in this life are drawing to an end. But I will not leave all of you. My grandmaster and the lineage patriarch are also constantly empowering the disciples who practice.” On the day before his passing he told everyone, “I have always urged you to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. I will set an example for you: I too will be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.” Having said this, he immediately recited the Rebirth Mantra in a loud voice. During the several days before his passing, while receiving disciples who came to ask about the Dharma, he repeatedly hinted that he was about to leave, but because his health remained so good the disciples did not understand what he meant. Only afterward, looking back, did they realize it. Some had sensed his meaning but did not dare ask. A Dharma master from Mount Putuo came to ask the Ācārya about the Dharma and had originally planned to return on the first day of the lunar month. Unusually, the Ācārya asked him to remain one extra day and said, “When you go back, take a few things

with you and convey my greetings to Great Abbot Miaoshan.” The Ācārya then passed away that very day. That his remains were later able to be kept for a period on Mount Putuo, as stipulated in his will, was arranged through this Dharma master and with Great Abbot Miaoshan’s agreement. Otherwise it would have been extremely difficult to keep the body there for a period without alarming disciples throughout the country. This was truly one of the Ācārya’s skillful arrangements. (In the early 1980s the Ācārya had taught sūtras to the senior monks on Mount Putuo and therefore knew Great Abbot Miaoshan. Elder Miaoshan himself passed away on the twenty-second day of that same month.)

A lay practitioner far away in Shandong telephoned the Ācārya on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth lunar month and asked to come to Shanghai to care for him. The Ācārya replied, “Is there still any need for that?” The lay practitioner thought this unusual. On earlier occasions he had also asked to come and care for the Ācārya, but the reply had always been, “Your family needs you too; I am still all right.” This time both the answer and the tone of voice were different. Two days later the practitioner dreamed of a grave upon which the character “Yuan” (元) appeared. Thinking about the Ācārya’s unusual answer two days earlier and about the dream, he felt something was strange and hurried to Shanghai, only to find that the Ācārya had already passed away. Throughout the country, many disciples who had received the Dharma had, even before the Ācārya’s passing, received dream-omens that he would soon leave. People therefore often telephoned suddenly to ask after his condition, yet felt unable to speak directly about what they had dreamed. When they later spoke of these events, all felt them to be inconceivable. This was truly the empowering force of the Ācārya’s extraordinary virtue.

When young, the Ācārya studied Tiantai teachings with the eminent Tiantai master Xingci. He then studied Yogācāra with the elder layman Fan Gunong, and afterward studied Huayan and practiced contemplation of the Dharma realm under Elder Master Yingci, the Huayan lecturer. Finally he relied on Ācārya Wang Xianglu, the Second Patriarch of the Signless Heart-Center Dharma, and practiced the Heart-Center Dharma, thoroughly awakening to the essential point of mind and attaining great accomplishment. In 1958 he succeeded to the position of Third Patriarch of the Heart-Center Dharma. He later lived in seclusion by the Shanghai waterfront for several decades, abandoning fame and gain, integrating Pure Land and esoteric practice, teaching according to conditions, quietly cultivating, and remaining unmoved by praise or blame. During the decade of upheaval he was slandered in various ways because he transmitted the Dharma and accepted disciples, and he was isolated and investigated for two and a half years. After religious freedom was restored, the Ācārya was already seventy-six. Yet he felt deeply for the suffering of sentient beings: not understanding the truth of the universe and human life, they take illusory existence to be truly existent, cling and cannot let go, and therefore revolve ceaselessly in birth and death with no time of release. He also saw many students of Buddhism burrowing into piles of names and terminology and unable to get free, grasping the finger as though it were the moon and thereby gaining nothing toward subduing afflictions. Those who sincerely wished to practice for liberation, because they did not

understand the truth, often practiced blindly, wasted their time, and could even go astray and fall into demonic deviation. Seeing this, the Ācārya came forward and emphatically proclaimed the importance of apprehending Mind and seeing nature. This, he said, is the key to ending birth and death. Only by recognizing one's own original mind, seeing one's own original nature, and returning to what is original can sentient beings leave the sea of suffering of birth and death. No Buddhist school or lineage can go beyond this. Even in the Pure Land school, which embraces beings of all three capacities, after one is reborn in the West one must still "when the flower opens, see the Buddha" in order to "realize non-arising." "When the flower opens and one sees the Buddha" means that the flower of mind opens and one sees the Buddha of one's own nature. Is this not simply another expression for apprehending Mind and seeing nature?

The Ācārya further felt that sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age have little merit, heavy karma, deep obstacles, and shallow wisdom. To say nothing of accomplishment in this very life, even rebirth in the Western Pure Land is truly not easy. As the ancients often lamented, "Those who recite the Buddha's name are as numerous as rolling waves; among them, scarcely one or two attain rebirth." The reason, he said, is that sentient beings cannot let go. If there is even one thing in the Sahā world that has not been released, rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss is impossible. Saying "let go" with the mouth is not truly letting go; only letting go in the heart is real letting go. And how difficult it is to let go in the heart! Look at our own attachments and delusive thoughts: if they are not subdued, they will inevitably lead us into the cycle of birth and death. If practice has not become one continuous piece, rebirth is hard to hope for. The Heart-Center Dharma, he maintained, is an especially powerful and rapid method for subduing afflictions and is therefore particularly suited to these conditions. This great Dharma is an especially excellent method through which beings in the Dharma-ending age may attain accomplishment in this very life or be reborn in the West. The Ācārya also pointed out that the practice is simple and easy, relies upon the empowering force of the Buddha, swiftly and powerfully removes offenses, accumulates merit, realizes essence and brings forth function, and can cut off obstructions from external māras. The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Connected with the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī says:

"At that time the Tathāgata arose from samādhi and said: Good sons, excellent, excellent! Do you know that sentient beings are sinking and perishing? Now these sentient beings do not understand my Dharma and do not know my mind. Held by māra (the māra of afflictions), how are they to be saved? Who has a method to protect sentient beings? Who has a method to contain this poison? ... Among the assembly was a bodhisattva named Shide, who said to the Buddha: World-Honored One, if these vajra beings, bodhisattvas, devas, and immortals are all unable to contain it, how can the Buddha now cause sentient beings to escape this difficulty? The Tathāgata then said to Bodhisattva Shide: Only the Tathāgata's Heart-Center can do so; nothing else can equal it. Why? Because it can cause the māras to give rise to great compassion ... it can cause the Buddhas never to depart ... it can cause the bodhisattvas to become one's retinue ... it can cause the vajra beings to

bestow their power ... it can cause the hosts of devas constantly to protect and support one ... and it can cause one never to regress until bodhi ...

The scripture also says:

“... Those who wish to be reborn in the West, those who wish freely to be reborn in the lower direction, those who wish freely to be reborn throughout the ten directions, and those who wish for worldly eloquence without deficiency should only contemplate wholeheartedly the matter they themselves hold in mind and recite [the dhāraṇī] one thousand times each day. Within seven days they can attain it; once they leave this world, they will not return again ...”

And again:

“... At the end of life, Buddhas of the ten directions will come to the crown of one’s head and personally welcome one into their own worlds ...”

The power of this Dharma is boundless and its excellence incomparable; its principle is profound, wondrous, and difficult to fathom. The scripture also says:

“... Among all bodies, none surpasses the Buddha-body; among all essential and wondrous Dharmas, none surpasses the Heart-Center. Show mind to sentient beings, and sentient beings are the Buddha-body. Such great sacred power even bodhisattvas cannot know. After kalpas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, I have only now entrusted it once. If one can practice according to it, one becomes equal to this body of mine ...”

Thus, beings in the Dharma-ending age who have the conditions to practice this great Dharma may not realize that these conditions have been called forth by wholesome roots cultivated over many kalpas. If someone slanders this Dharma or obstructs the propagation of the true Dharma, the severe karmic consequences would likewise be inconceivably grave; I will not cite them here.

In brief, this Dharma takes prajñā as its essence, esoteric practice as its function, and Pure Land as its destination; it integrates Chan, Pure Land, and esoteric practice into one. The Ācārya personally practiced this Dharma and attained great accomplishment. Therefore, to repay the kindness of the Buddha, his teachers, and sentient beings, he continued to exert himself in propagating it even when nearly eighty years old—this later phase of propagation having begun after the decade of upheaval—and he directed practitioners toward the Pure Land. People often traveled thousands or tens of thousands of li simply to resolve one or two doubts. His residence was frequently crowded with people seeking the Dharma and asking questions. His Dharma teaching flowed without exception from the samādhi of self-nature; he never favored one school or lineage over another, but taught according to conditions and prescribed medicine according to the illness. When he taught, people often experienced an extraordinary fragrance filling the room. The Ācārya had many other inconceivable qualities and deeds. Because people today have poor faculties and scant wholesome roots, many do not

believe unusual events; and even among those who do believe, many become attached to them and easily go astray. The Ācārya therefore never permitted those who knew of such things to speak about them, and for that reason they were not made public.

During approximately the last ten years, the number of people who received the Dharma from the Ācārya reached the tens of thousands. They were spread throughout China and in the United States, Germany, France, Canada, Japan, and other countries. Among them there were also a few who attained accomplishment in practice; those who apprehended Mind and saw nature were extremely numerous; and those reborn in the Pure Land, or who had already fulfilled the qualifications for rebirth there, were beyond counting. For this reason, many Han Chinese went to great tulkus in Tibet to seek the Dharma, and the great tulkus all told them that Yuan Yin Lao Ren in the Han Chinese regions was a truly accomplished great spiritual friend; consequently, all the Dharma students returning from the Tibetan regions to the Han Chinese regions drew close to the Ācārya. In this turbid Dharma-ending age, when people's capacities are especially poor, how difficult it is to enable so many beings to receive the genuine benefit of the Buddha-Dharma! The Ācārya was like a bar of red-hot steel upon a land of ice and snow, melting the attachments of sentient beings; and like a ship traveling across desert sands, laboriously ferrying people toward the other shore. This was truly an inconceivable great undertaking. We believe that in the years to come there will surely emerge from among the Ācārya's disciples outstanding Buddhist sons and daughters who have studied, practiced, and realized, who will raise vast bodhi vows, come forward to save beings from fire and water, and propagate the true Dharma. This is what Buddhist practitioners who aspire to unite genuine study with genuine practice eagerly look forward to.

In his spare time the Ācārya wrote *A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature*, *A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to Mind*, *Lectures on the Blue Cliff Record*, *Ripples in the Sea of Chan*, *The Hidden Meaning of the Heart Sūtra*, and *Key Questions Concerning Rebirth in the West*, all of which were collected in *Essential Points for the Cultivation and Verification of the Buddhadharma*. He also published *An Explanation of Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State*. His *Direct Explanation of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra* was regrettably lost. *A Brief Explanation of Ganges Mahāmudrā* and *Questions and Answers on the Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization* were soon to appear; the *Questions and Answers* and related works would greatly benefit practitioners without access to direct instruction.

Although the Elder has relinquished the body, his dharmakāya is ever-present, and through many skillful means he continues to empower his disciples. This is what many disciples engaged in practice silently pray for.

Wude (悟德)

March 30, 2000



Figure 2. Śarīra (relics) displayed after Yuan Yin Lao Ren's cremation. Reproduced from the 2025 compilation; the same photograph remains publicly displayed on the Awakening to Reality Yuan Yin biography page. The individual photographer is not identified.

Disciple Recollections — Character in Everyday Life

Selected later reminiscences

Source note. The following vignettes are selected from recollections preserved in the 2025 compilation and in a 2024 Yinxin Tiandi reminiscence anthology. Contributor names or handles are preserved in the underlying sources; the prose below is a concise editorial retelling rather than a direct quotation.

Frugality without stinginess. Several recollections emphasize how little Yuan Yin wasted in daily life. One remembers him folding away a used napkin so it could serve another purpose later; another remembers him picking up leftover peanuts one by one after visitors had gone. Yet a different disciple recalled that when a practitioner close to him was living in a house with a leaking roof, Yuan Yin gave the person 20,000 yuan for repairs. Read together, the stories present thrift not as hoarding but as an unwillingness to waste coupled with readiness to help when help was needed.

Patience in ordinary distress. One observer recalled elderly women coming to Yuan Yin with long complaints about small family troubles. The observer became sleepy and bored listening to what seemed like trivial domestic matters, while Yuan Yin continued listening for hours without showing impatience. Looking back, the writer understood the episode as a simple expression of compassion: not dramatic instruction, but the willingness to give another person undivided attention.

Offerings and practice. Another recollection says that a disciple, after returning home from requesting Dharma in Shanghai, mailed Yuan Yin some money as an offering. Yuan Yin sent it back. When the disciple sent it again, a monastery receipt eventually arrived showing that Yuan Yin had made the offering to the Three Jewels in the disciple's name. The accompanying message, as remembered by the disciple, was that if one wished to make an offering, "opening what is original and seeing nature" was the best offering.

Chan directness and humor. In another remembered exchange, Yuan Yin asked the familiar question: if an ox pulls a cart and the cart does not move, should one strike the ox or strike the cart? After several people offered answers, he had one practitioner put the question back to him. Yuan Yin answered with a sudden shout: “Hit you!” The room fell silent. Whether read as humor, shock, or direct pointing, the anecdote conveys something of the abrupt, practical Chan style that formal biography alone does not show.

Reception beyond the immediate lineage

Later Buddhist reception is not evidence that a doctrinal interpretation is correct, but it helps place Yuan Yin’s historical influence. In a published recollection, the Chan elder Ben Huan compared Yuan Yin’s lay form of teaching with Vimalakīrti and repeatedly described his merit in spreading the Dharma as “inconceivable.” A direct transcript at [佛教导航](#) identifies the speaker as Ben Huan.

Chan master Jing Hui offered a different kind of appraisal. Recalling how he first read and published Yuan Yin’s *A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature* around 1990, he said the work showed not only view but actual practice, and later remarked that many of his own practice ideas had benefited from Yuan Yin’s instructions. The interview record is available at [佛教导航 / Jing Hui on Yuan Yin](#).

Lay Buddhist scholar Wu Limin, in a 2007 preface to a book on Yuan Yin, praised him for integrating teaching and practice and for harmonizing exoteric and esoteric approaches, while emphasizing his direct orientation toward mind. The published preface is available at [佛教导航 / Wu Limin’s preface](#). Published editions of Yuan Yin’s works also preserve title calligraphy by Zhao Puchu; one scanned edition shows “赵朴初题” on the title page. A public scan can be consulted [心经抉隐 public scan](#). These notices are included as reception history, not as substitutes for reading Yuan Yin’s own texts.

Part I sources. Yuan Yin Lao Ren’s 1996 autobiography is the primary source for the first biographical section. The complete 2000 memorial account reproduced above is by Wude (悟德) in Meifo Huixun, no. 69; the same text was later reproduced in Heart-Center archives. A contemporaneous notice in Chan (禅), 2000, no. 2, also records his death while seated in Shanghai on February 5, 2000, at age ninety-six; that figure is consistent with traditional Chinese nominal-age reckoning (94 elapsed years from the 23 November 1905 birth date used in this edition). The disciple recollections are drawn from the 2025 compilation and a later Yinxin Tiandi anthology. The short reception section is based on later interviews, prefaces, and published-book evidence identified in Selected Sources and Image Notes.

Part II — Mind, Practice, and Liberation

This part gathers Yuan Yin Lao Ren's central expositions on mind, non-abiding, practice, and liberation. It moves from the Inscription on Awakening to Mind through the integration of Chan, Pure Land, and esoteric practice, extended Chan case material, practical work with afflictions, empowerment instructions, and the sustained discussion of apprehending mind and seeing nature. The source chapters remain in their source order and wording; this short orientation is editorial.

2. A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to Mind

Yuan Yin Lao Ren

Chinese source: 《悟心铭》浅释.

The Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma is a method of practice that relies on the compassionate empowerment of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. For this reason it is easy to enter samādhi, open up what is original, and realize the true mind. To use the analogy of traveling: those who practice by self-power alone rely entirely on their own two feet; practicing the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma is like traveling by boat or by carriage, or even by airplane. Therefore it is swift and reliable, and achieves twice the result with half the effort.

My late teacher, Venerable Xianglu, in order to help Heart-Center practitioners awaken to the true mind more swiftly and transcend the ordinary and enter sagehood, composed a poem called Inscription on Awakening to Mind. It consists of forty lines of four characters each, one hundred and sixty characters in all. Though brief in wording and few in characters, its meaning is rich and far-reaching. It fully reveals the true purport of becoming a Buddha and the essential instructions for mind practice. It may truly be called an essential work whose words are few but whose meaning is abundant, concise yet complete, and it is also a rare modern appraisal of awakening to mind. If students, apart from their formal practice, recite it several times each day until it is thoroughly familiar, in time it will respond immediately when they encounter circumstances, and from the real essence they will obtain great capacity and great function. In order to help later students understand its hidden profound meaning and more easily awaken to mind, I will give a brief explanation line by line. I hope students will value it and not regard it lightly.

Full text of the Inscription on Awakening to Mind

It is neither a matter of having mind
nor of being without mind.
It is not that seeing ceases;
it is not that hearing ceases.
Clearly and distinctly aware,
one does not cling to seeing and hearing.
Open and without abiding:
this is called no-mind.

If the mind does not abide,
on what could delusion stand?

When delusion no longer stands,
past obstructions naturally disappear.
Ask where mind comes from:
it arises because of objects.
Objects too do not exist;
they are alike illusory images.

Wondrous functions, as countless as the sands of the Ganges,
all arise through the mind that engages conditions.
When the mind that grasps at conditions comes to rest,
one suddenly realizes non-arising.
The true reality of non-arising
cannot be seen by the eye.
Dim and subtle, dark and hidden,
within it there is essence.

Those who realize it
are called those who see the nature.
Therefore, with nothing sought,
the mind naturally becomes tranquil and unified.
With no mind that can be deluded,
this itself is great samādhi.
Those who attain great samādhi
have no movement and no stillness,
no gain and no loss,
no joy and no anger.

Without shifting from the original position,
they respond to the myriad conditions.
Unchanging while following conditions:
this is to have no birth and death.
The essential secret of becoming a Buddha
is simply this.

Brief explanation

At the beginning, the Inscription on Awakening to Mind says: “It is neither a matter of having mind nor of being without mind.” These two lines lay out the essence and function of the

wondrous bright true mind in their entirety. The wondrous bright true mind does not belong to being, and it is not non-being. If you say it exists, no characteristics can be seen and no sound can be heard. If you say it does not exist, then in speech and silence, movement and stillness, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, there is not one thing that is not its functioning. Ancient masters compared it to “the taste of salt in seawater” and “the binder in pigment”: although it cannot be seen with the eyes, in essence it is not absent. Śākyamuni Buddha tells us that it is the great treasury of true emptiness, marvelous presence—marvelous presence, true emptiness. “True emptiness” differs from inert emptiness and annihilationist emptiness; because it is marvelous presence, it is empty yet not empty, not empty yet empty. “Marvelous presence” differs from false existence or truly established existence; because it is true emptiness, it exists yet does not exist, does not exist yet exists. Next, from the standpoint of manifestation and function, it is also neither existent nor non-existent, neither non-existent nor existent. If you say it does not exist, all shapes and colors appear vividly before you and its wondrous functions are as countless as the sands of the Ganges. If you say it exists, all forms arise from causes and conditions and have no intrinsic essence of their own; the activities that arise are like the moon in water or flowers in the sky, with nothing that can be grasped.

The Heart Sutra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” This means that form and emptiness are not two, neither existent nor non-existent. All forms are manifestations of the wondrous essence of true emptiness, and the wondrous essence of true emptiness cannot show its function apart from forms. Nor is there another true emptiness apart from forms. It is like waves arising from water: water is waves, waves are water. Apart from waves, water cannot be obtained; apart from water, waves cannot be obtained either. In our practice we must not take forms to be truly existent and cling to them, but neither should we turn away from forms, reject existence, and attach to emptiness. Therefore, whether sitting in meditation or rising to function after meditation, we must have neither grasping nor rejection. Only then do we accord with the principle of the Middle Way and set out upon the great path of “true emptiness, marvelous presence”. When students practice until delusive thoughts melt away, the mind that can recite and the mantra that is recited drop off at once; body and mind within and the world without vanish together without a trace. Pure and uncovered, not a single thread is worn; clean and stainless, not a speck of dust remains. Yet it is clear and distinct, not like wood or stone. What is this that is threadless, uncovered, and a single expanse of empty luminosity? If it is not the wondrous bright true mind of this very person, neither existent nor non-existent, vividly present, what else could it be? At such a time, form and emptiness cannot reach it, being and non-being cannot touch it. When spoken of as empty, it pervades the Dharma realm; when spoken of as existent, not even the finest hair can be established. The hundred schools and all arts and crafts, even the pure lands of all Buddhas and sentient beings as countless as the sands of the Ganges, are all gathered within it.

The second line says, “It is not that seeing ceases; it is not that hearing ceases.” This teaches us that in practice we must not practice in a dead way, but must train the mind flexibly and

responsively amid circumstances. Do not close the eyes and refuse to see, or block the ears and refuse to hear. You must see without anything seen and hear without anything heard; only then can one function wondrously, freely, and responsively, and accomplish the great Way. I often see people practicing wrongly: they close their eyes so they do not see things, block their ears so they do not hear sounds, and think that by doing this they can empty the mind and accomplish the Way. They do not realize that even if, when the eyes are closed and the ears blocked and the mind is not contacting objects, they can make the mind dead and unmoving, the moment they open the eyes and unblock the ears, when the mind faces objects, the delusive mind inevitably follows forms and sounds and turns without cease. Removing objects in order to extinguish mind is not true realization; moreover, even while the eyes are closed and the ears blocked, the inner mind is not necessarily free from secret stirring. In addition, closing the eyes and blocking the ears carries another great danger. If students use such a method of shutting out and actually manage to make the mind dead and unmoving, then they have gone to the dead waters behind the black mountain. Not only can they not become Buddhas, there is even the danger of becoming like earth, wood, metal, or stone. Therefore students must be careful.

To truly ensure that the mind is not swayed by objects, one must train precisely amid objects. As the Chan school says, “Where you fall to the ground, there you must get up.” To leave objects and seek emptiness will ultimately come to nothing. The Diamond Sutra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” All forms and sounds arise from causes and conditions and have no independent reality. No matter whether beautiful forms appear before you or wondrous sounds fill your ears, they are all merely heat shimmer, flowers in the sky, and mirages temporarily appearing. Once this principle is recognized, and after days and months pass and after thousands upon thousands of difficult trainings amid objects, mind and spirit will naturally become peaceful and still, and one will encounter objects without being moved. In his Verses on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister, Master Dongshan, in the verse on the fourth rank, “arriving within the inclined,” the rank of practicing the Way, says: “Arriving within the inclined, when two blades meet there is no need to avoid them. A skilled hand is like a lotus in fire; a great man naturally has the will to soar into the sky.” This teaches us to train flexibly and responsively amid circumstances; we need not avoid seeing and hearing, for this opens up the later great capacity and great function.

The third line says, “Clearly and distinctly aware, one does not cling to seeing and hearing.” Continuing the previous two lines, “It is not that seeing ceases; it is not that hearing ceases,” this further explains how we should practice flexibly rather than rigidly so that we do not enter a wrong path. We practice in order to become living Buddhas; therefore it is not by sitting dead and unmoving, sinking into emptiness and stagnating in stillness, sitting behind the black mountain, that we can realize the Way. Yunmen said, “This very seeing and hearing is not seeing and hearing; no other sounds and forms can be presented to you.” He tells us clearly and openly: do you wish to thoroughly see the true mind? It is right here, in the present seeing of forms and hearing of sounds. Awaken to who it is that sees forms and hears

sounds. Apart from that which sees forms and hears sounds, you have nowhere to seek it. But if you cling to seeing forms and hearing sounds, and are deluded by sounds and forms, you will not see it either. How flexible and responsive this practice is! How could one see the Way by sitting dead and unmoving, neither seeing nor hearing? It is also said, “The mysterious and empty great Way is originally without attachment; in seeing forms and hearing sounds there is no need to be deaf.” This shows that practice must be flexible and responsive, not rigid and lifeless. Rigid, lifeless practice not only cannot accomplish the Way, but may even flow into the ways of demons and outsiders.

Therefore my late teacher told us that practice must be applied flexibly in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, in movement and stillness, leisure and busyness. One must not be like wood and stone, without knowing. One must be clear and distinct; yet while clear and distinct, one must not cling to sounds and forms. In other words, one must see without anything seen and hear without anything heard, not fail to see and fail to hear. Only in this way can wondrous functioning unfold freely and responsively. Even while sitting, right mindfulness must be bright and clear; one must be clear and distinct and must not be blankly without knowing, falling into dullness or indeterminate blankness. Master Yongjia said, “Lucid and quiescent is right; lucid with wild thinking is wrong. Quiescent and lucid is right; quiescent but blankly indeterminate is wrong.” This is precisely a footnote to “clearly and distinctly aware, one does not cling to seeing and hearing.”

The fourth line says, “Open and without abiding: this is called no-mind.” Ordinarily we think that no-mind means not one thought arising, and that not one thought arising means pressing thoughts down so they do not arise. Therefore everyone uses the dead method of suppression, forcing down thoughts and not allowing them to arise. They think that having not a single thought is good practice, and they further think that if the period of not one thought arising grows from short to long, this is the practice rising higher and higher. They do not realize that if they practice deadness in this way, not only can they not become Buddhas; they may well end up like earth, wood, metal, or stone. The Buddha is a great awakened one, vital and responsive, a great person of wondrous functions as countless as the sands of the Ganges. How could he be a dead, rigid block like wood or stone, a carved statue without any awareness?

If in practice one does not train oneself amid the many differentiated circumstances so that the mind remains nonabiding, but merely suppresses thoughts so they do not arise, what wondrous function could ever arise? Have you not seen the Sixth Patriarch's rescue of Wolun? At first Chan Master Wolun thought that suppressing thoughts so they did not arise was good practice, so he composed a verse: “Wolun has a skill; he can cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day.” When the Sixth Patriarch saw it, he knew Wolun had entered a wrong path of dead water, and rescued him with this verse: “Huineng has no skill; he does not cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind arises repeatedly; how could bodhi grow?” Wolun recognized the mistake, corrected it, and only

then entered the Way. Thus we know that no-mind is not suppressing thoughts so they do not arise, and it is not the lengthening of a period of no-thought that counts as progress. The true practice of no-mind is that one responds to conditions and meets things while the mind does not abide; one manages countless affairs while the intention is not stained. The inner mind is like drawing on water: as soon as the brushstroke arises, the surface of the water immediately closes, without the slightest trace. This is the truly good practice of no-mind.

The Diamond Sutra says, “Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind.” The character “ying” in “ying wu suo zhu” is often misunderstood as the “should” or “ought” of “one should not abide.” Actually it is not so. This character means “responding” in “responding to conditions and meeting things.” It teaches us that in daily life, when dealing with all events and responding to all people, the mind must not abide; it must be open and unstained. It is not merely telling us, on the level of principle, that one should not abide anywhere. If we can respond to conditions without abiding, then the true mind, with wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, naturally appears at all times without obstruction. Therefore no-thought is dynamic and responsive: it is responding to conditions without abiding or staining. It is not suppressing thoughts so they do not arise and dying there unmoving. When a thought arises, we only need to let it arise without abiding; do not grasp at conditions or let it linger; let it subside as soon as its function is served. This is no-thought.

In the past, a monk asked Zhaozhou, “What is no-thought?” Zhaozhou said, “Playing ball on swift water.” Later Zhaozhou asked Touzi in return, “What is the meaning of playing ball on swift water?” Touzi said, “Thought after thought does not remain.” From this we can see that the arising of thoughts without abiding is no-thought; it is not that no-thought means not a single thought may arise. Again, Chan Master Farong, known as “Lazy Rong,” says in his Song of No-Mind: “Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning; no-mind is precisely functioning, and constant functioning is precisely no-mind.” That is to say, even amid functioning, one does not see any mind arise to function. This exhausts the meaning and wondrous function of no-mind.

The fifth line says, “If the mind does not abide, on what could delusion stand?” Practitioners all dislike the delusive mind and want to eliminate it and strike it down. They do not realize that delusion originally does not exist; it is only thought making trouble. All external objects are like the moon in water and are not truly existent. Sentient beings, through ignorance, mistakenly take them to exist, grasp them, and cannot let go; thus they become delusion. If one can awaken right there and see through these illusory objects, delusion vanishes without a trace. It is like a person dreaming: while dreaming, one takes it to be real; upon waking, not even a trace remains. This is because the true mind is like the luminous clarity of a mirror, and all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas are like reflections appearing in the mirror. Ordinary beings, ignorant and dull, turn away from the mirror’s luminous clarity and grasp the reflections, creating karma and undergoing retribution, unable to end birth and death. The sages of the two vehicles, though they do not cling to sense objects, turn away from

the reflections and abide in luminosity; because they abide somewhere, this again becomes delusion about the Dharma. They end only fragmentary birth-and-death and do not end transformational birth-and-death. Students of the One Vehicle thoroughly understand both Buddhadharma and worldly dharmas; they are neither identical with the reflections nor apart from them. Since all reflections appear through the mirror's luminous clarity, mirror is reflection and reflection is mirror. Apart from the mirror there is no reflection; apart from reflection there is no mirror. One must neither turn away from the mirror and abide in reflections, nor leave reflections in order to seek the mirror. Knowing deeply that neither reflection nor mirror is anything to abide in, there is no attachment or aversion in the mind, nor any fixation on grasping or rejecting objects.

Therefore students need not fear delusion. Only deeply accord with the profound meaning of the One Vehicle; with regard to objects, neither grasp nor reject, neither rejoice nor get angry, and delusion will naturally disappear. Moreover, many students think that "ignorance" is difficult to break; some even blanch at its mere mention, as one would at the mention of a tiger. In fact, so-called ignorance is not truly existent. It is only the delusive mind making trouble, clinging to sense objects, deluded and unaware; it is a provisional name. If the practitioner can become sharply aware right there, delusive objects are broken and ignorance naturally disappears. It is like a dark room of a thousand years: one lamp can make it bright; no long period is needed to remove the darkness. Therefore, so-called ignorance and delusive mind exist only because we are unaware. If we can maintain clear observation constantly, remain sharply alert everywhere, making the mind clear, empty, expansive, and lucid, without fixation or grasping, why worry that ignorance will not be broken and delusive mind will not cease?

The sixth line says, "When delusion no longer stands, past obstructions naturally disappear." The mind is originally numinously responsive and unobstructed; only because we are deluded by objects and cling to marks do obstructions form. What are called past obstructions are the delusive habits accumulated through many lives and kalpas through being deluded by marks and creating karma. These delusive obstructions cover the luminosity of original nature, preventing one from freely benefiting from its unobstructed functioning, and again making pain, hardship, affliction, and vexation endless. Now that we know all phenomena are originally empty and the mind leaves no blockage, and that karma itself is not established, where can false obstructions lodge? Chan Master Damei said, "For one who has arrived, all karmic obstructions are like hot water melting ice, like light removing darkness; there is nowhere for them to stand." What are called obstructions are only provisional names and have no independent reality. The sutra says, "Offenses arise from mind; through mind they are extinguished." It also says, "When mind arises, all kinds of obstructions arise; when mind ceases, all kinds of obstructions cease." If one is directly without mind, delusion has nowhere to stand; when delusion does not stand, past obstructions naturally disappear.

Someone may say, “Present karma is easy to eliminate, fixed karma is hard to avoid; mental karma is easy to remove, bodily karma is hard to extinguish.” This too cannot be generalized. Have you not seen how Bodhidharma instructed the Second Patriarch Shengguang: “You will have the karmic result of being killed, but because of preventing the true Dharma from being slandered, this debt may be exempted.” Another ancient worthy suffered a stroke and his mouth twisted. His attendant laughed and said, “Venerable, you spend all day scolding Buddhas and insulting patriarchs; now you are undergoing retribution.” The ancient worthy said, “You have attended me for several decades, yet this is how you look at me? You should know that all karmic obstructions on the body of a patriarch are like flowers in the sky and the moon in water. Even if there is repayment, it is like not repaying; moreover, if he wants to repay, he repays, and if he does not want to repay, he does not. See whether my mouth is crooked or not!” As he spoke he slapped his mouth with his hand, and it immediately became straight. He then scolded the attendant, saying, “You beings who cling to marks conceive of karmic obstruction within original emptiness, and conceive of repayment where there is no repayment. Because of this, karmic obstructions are not ended and you suffer without limit.” From this we know that all karmic obstructions are tied to mind. If mind is truly empty, there is no so-called obstruction and no so-called repaying or not repaying. Because there is neither repayment nor non-repayment, one need not cling to non-repayment as non-repayment; even if repayment takes place, it is still as if there is no repayment.

A monk asked an ancient worthy, “What is karmic obstruction?” The worthy said, “Originally empty.” The monk further asked, “What is originally empty?” The worthy said, “Karmic obstruction.” Originally empty is not inert emptiness or annihilationist emptiness; it means that all things and all karmic obstructions are, in their very actuality, originally empty, with nothing whatsoever of their own. Therefore the Second Patriarch Shengguang, although instructed by the First Patriarch, after transmitting the Dharma to the Third Patriarch still went to repay the debt of being killed without the slightest difficulty, and at the time of execution sang out: “Bringing the head before the white blade is just like cutting the spring wind.” What bearing this is! This is truly the model of one who has realized.

The seventh line says, “Ask where mind comes from: it arises because of objects.” “Mind originally has no arising; it exists because of objects.” This is the famous saying of Viśvabhū Buddha. Our mind, that is, thought, originally does not exist. Because it faces objects, images arise; when these are grasped and not let go, delusive thinking arises. This is mind. This mind arises through the conjunction of the mind faculty and its object; hence the expression “mind arises through the gathering of conditions.” It consists of residual impressions left by the six sense objects and is purely illusory, without independent reality. In Buddhist scriptures, the word “mind” in “everything is made by mind alone” and “the three realms are mind-only; the myriad dharmas are consciousness-only” refers to this illusory, image-like mind arising from the reflection of objective external conditions. Therefore it too is an external object; it too is an object, and it is not apart from matter. One must not take it as a subjective mind and treasure it as the “true god” ruling the world. In practice, we must not cling to the external

objects of the myriad phenomena; still more, we must melt away this illusory delusive mind. What is called “inwardly body and mind, outwardly the world, all vanishing together” is when the wondrous bright true mind finally appears. Conversely, if one takes this illusory mind to be something subjectively real in its own right, the true nature is covered and cannot be seen. Therefore when we speak of “everything is made by mind alone,” the word “mind” is treated as something objective to be dissolved; it is not saying that mind is the ruler of all things. I ask the broad community of Buddhists to be clear about this and not misunderstand.

The eighth line says, “Objects too do not truly exist; mind and objects alike are illusory images.” The sutra says, “Mind is not mind by itself; because of objects, there is mind. Objects are not objects by themselves; because of mind, there are objects.” This explains clearly the mutually dependent and mutually conditioning relation between mind and objects. Since mind exists because of objects, objects also cannot stand independently apart from mind, for objects arise from causes and conditions and have no intrinsic essence of their own. Take reflections in a mirror for example: though they have ten thousand differences and a thousand variations, without the mirror’s luminous clarity, the reflections cannot appear. Objects are also like this. Without mind, objects cannot be formed. Even if there are beautiful scenes and fine surroundings, if there is no mind to receive and appreciate them, their existence is the same as non-existence. Since objects are not objects by themselves and do not call themselves beautiful or excellent surroundings, and since mind and objects arise in relation to each other and apart from one there is no other, objects and mind are both not real. They are alike illusory images.

Some may say: all scenes and things in the Sahā world are karmic results summoned by our collective karma, false and not real, so it is acceptable to call them illusory images. But as for the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, it is the true realm that Amitābha Buddha, through many lives and kalpas of diligent practice for the benefit of all sentient beings, accumulated merit until the causes ripened and the result was complete. It seems one cannot call it an illusory image. This point truly deserves careful discussion. Because so many people now practice Pure Land, if they do not clarify the true situation of the Pure Land and do not understand what it ultimately is, their practice cannot readily take hold, still less can they deeply realize the samādhi of buddha-recitation and be reborn in the highest grade. First, from the standpoint of appearances, the Sahā world is the evil fruit of the five turbidities brought about by the karma created by beings burdened with karmic obstructions, while Ultimate Bliss is the pure world manifested by Amitābha’s fulfilled vows and perfected virtues. Therefore one is turbid, ugly, and defiled, and the other is wondrously adorned and beautiful; there is a great difference. But land is born from mind. Apart from mind there is no land; apart from land there is no mind. Mind is land, and land is mind. Thus the sutra says, “If you wish to purify the land, first purify the mind.” It also says, “As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure.” This teaches us to recognize what the Pure Land is, so that we may know how to practice toward realizing it, avoiding futile grasping at external marks and falling into a wrong path.

Since outside land there is no mind and outside mind there is no land, since mind and land are not separate, and since the one true Dharma realm, the true mind, is not increased in sages and not decreased in ordinary beings, the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss flows out from the pure and wondrous true mind. How, then, could the defiled Sahā land be obtained apart from the pure Buddha-nature? Therefore, although Ultimate Bliss is pure and Sahā is defiled, both are images appearing within the true mind, like reflections appearing within a mirror's luminous clarity. Although there are differences in form and distinctions of purity and defilement, both are like the moon in water and are utterly unobtainable. One must never falsely claim that Ultimate Bliss is obtainable because it is like the pure reflection of the moon in water. Next, as to true and false, the Diamond Sutra says, "All marks whatsoever are false." As explained above, all such appearances are like reflections in a mirror and are utterly unobtainable; therefore they are illusory and not real. One must never divide true and false on the basis of purity or defilement, beauty or ugliness. Thus, although the land of Ultimate Bliss is completely good and completely beautiful, it too is an illusory appearance.

To go one step further, speaking of true and speaking of false are both the fault of us ordinary beings clinging to marks, setting up names, and making false distinctions. What are called true and false exist only relatively; apart from one, the other cannot be obtained, so both are provisional names. Since true and false exist relatively, when you speak of true, false is already within it; when you speak of false, true is already within it. As the proverb says, "When the false is taken as true, the true too becomes false." To falsely set up true and false where there is no true or false—is this not ordinary people disturbing themselves? Moreover, because the mirror must reveal images, where there is true mind, false appearance is not absent. Without appearances there would be no way to reveal true mind; thus the Amitābha Sutra displays the adornments of Ultimate Bliss. Because the image is not apart from the mirror, where there is false appearance, true mind is not absent. Without true mind there would be no way for false appearance to be formed; thus the Diamond Sutra reveals the wondrous essence: not one dharma is established. Since nature and appearances are inseparable, as closely joined as water and waves, seeing appearance is seeing nature. Because not one thing can be taken as real, it is called "the wholly false is just true." Seeing nature does not discard appearances; it perfects differentiated wondrous functions. Therefore it is called "the wholly true is just false." True and false, false and true—all of this is the mischief of our delusive minds. In reality, the numinous wondrous true mind does not establish a single thing. What true or false could there be to speak of?

Therefore, if one says the world of Ultimate Bliss is real, then the Sahā world is real too. If one says Sahā is false, then Ultimate Bliss is false too. Thus the two lands, pure and defiled, both flow out from the one true Dharma realm. One must never, because ordinary beings in bondage are ignorant of the true mind and create karma and undergo retribution, deny their numinous nature and say that the karmic appearances of the defiled land that appear are not flowing forth from Buddha-nature and true mind. Furthermore, the world of Ultimate Bliss has the distinctions of four lands and nine grades. In the lowest, the Land Where Ordinary

Beings and Sages Dwell Together, there are many kinds of splendid appearances. But in the Land of Expedient Means with Remainder and the Land of Real Reward and Adornment, the higher the land, the more the appearances become clear, light, subtle, and wondrous. At the highest, the Land of Eternally Quiescent Light, it is even purer, subtler, more wondrous and bright, while not a single characteristic is established. Yet even the non-establishment of a single characteristic does not go outside the three lands mentioned above. Therefore those who practice while clinging to marks obtain only lower-grade rebirth, while those who realize the emptiness of marks and see the nature can be reborn in the highest grade. For this reason, those who truly practice Pure Land neither cling to marks nor discard appearances. They simply put everything down, sit upright, sincere and reverent, and hold fast to the Name, using the breath as the rosary, reciting continuously and closely through the six periods of day and night, for a long time without slackening. They will naturally attain the samādhi of buddha-recitation. By then, even before death and rebirth in the West, they will already have attained a place on a lotus of the highest grade.

The ninth line says, “Wondrous functions, as countless as the sands of the Ganges, all arise through the mind that engages conditions.” As said above, in practice we must not suppress thoughts so they do not arise and extinguish the delusive mind. We should only redirect it flexibly: when thoughts arise, do not heed them and do not allow grasping at conditions to continue. The reason is that later, when great capacity and great function must arise, this delusive mind is still needed. If this delusive mind is pressed to death, there is no way for the true mind to give rise to wondrous functioning. It is like water producing waves because of wind; if the waves are completely removed, the water is gone as well. In the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment, after saying, “At all times do not give rise to delusive thoughts,” it immediately adds, “With regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.” This teaches us to practice flexibly so that the wondrous functioning of prajñā can arise later.

In the daily life of ordinary beings, all our creations and inventions are none other than the wondrous functioning of this “delusive mind.” Apart from it, we would be like idiots or fools, unable to accomplish anything. For ordinary beings, it is precisely this that functions. Later, when one becomes a worthy or a sage, the vast numinous functions that arise are not apart from it either. Only, at the level of ordinary beings, because there is abiding and attachment, it is called delusive mind or consciousness-spirit; at the level of sages and worthies, when all attachment and entanglement have been removed, it is called prajñā or numinous knowing. I once asked someone, “How far apart are consciousness-spirit and suchness?” Hearing this, the person was greatly startled and said, “Suchness and consciousness-spirit—one is true mind and one is delusive consciousness. How can they be mentioned together?” He then quoted Master Xuansha's verse as evidence: “Students of the Way fail to recognize the true because they have always mistaken the consciousness-spirit for it. The root of birth and death through immeasurable kalpas—fools call it the original person.” Hearing this, I could not help laughing and said, “Do you recognize the Original Person? If you do not recognize it, suchness becomes consciousness-spirit. If you recognize it, consciousness-spirit is suchness. How could there be

two?” As said above, waves are originally water, and water is not apart from waves. If you leave waves in order to seek water, where could water be obtained? Moreover, if water does not raise waves, it is only dead water—how could it be vast and magnificent? If suchness does not rely on consciousness-spirit, it is also like a dull child and has no way to function.

Xuansha's verse is not saying that consciousness-spirit is bad. The critical point is whether or not one recognizes the Original Person. If one recognizes it, consciousness-spirit is directed by the master and accomplishes all vast and magnificent wondrous functions. If one does not recognize it, then an evil servant bullies the master and rebels.

The tenth line says, “When the mind that grasps at conditions comes to rest, one suddenly realizes non-arising.” The sutra says, “Settle the mad mind, and that itself is bodhi.” This principle is just like the image and mirror, water and waves discussed above. Images and waves cannot be apart from mirror and water. Likewise, the delusive mind is not apart from bodhi, true awakening. Because it is not apart from it, if the delusive mind were removed, there would be no true awakening. Therefore, if practitioners want to personally realize the true suchness nature that is unborn and undying, they must not use any method to eliminate the delusive mind. They can only use the practice of “settling,” allowing the delusive mind that grasps at objects to come to rest. It is just as waves, when they come to rest, are simply water. Then the wondrous bright true mind suddenly appears. If students truly know that all external objects are like heat shimmer and flowers in the sky, without independent reality, and do not grasp after conditions or give rise to delusive thoughts, then spirit becomes peaceful, wisdom clear, the numinous light shines alone, and the inner mind is bright and pure like a mirror reflecting things—without grasping or rejecting, without attachment or aversion. Though clear and distinct, not one thought arises; though not one thought arises, it is clear and distinct. Right there one personally realizes the true reality of non-arising. There is no need to use any clumsy effort besides settling the mind.

All Dharma gates, whether buddha-recitation, mantra-holding, or Chan investigation, are only tools and means for this one word, “settle.” They teach you, by buddha-recitation, mantra-holding, or Chan investigation, to settle the mad mind, thereby opening up what is original and clearly seeing the true mind. They are not about obtaining something strange, special, or mysterious from buddha-recitation, mantra-holding, or Chan investigation. Ancient worthies said, “In the Buddhadharma there is no room for mental contrivance.” They also said, “Putting on clothes and eating food are it; the moment the mind stirs and a thought arises, you have already gone astray.” Since Buddha-nature is originally possessed by sentient beings, not obtained from outside, there is no need to seek it and no need to take it, so there is no need to apply force. On the contrary, the more one exerts effort seeking outwardly and asking it from others, the farther away one goes; the more strength one uses to take it, the less it can be obtained. Thus Buddhadharma is the greatest effort-saving undertaking. Unlike worldly endeavors, it does not require painstaking planning and strenuous exertion before anything can be attained. Laozi said, “In pursuing the Way, one decreases day by day.” If students can put down everything they know, everything they understand, everything they possess, all of it

without remainder, then when the mad mind comes to rest, non-arising is suddenly realized. As the saying goes, “After wearing out iron shoes, nowhere is it found; once obtained, it costs no effort at all.” There is good reason for this.

The eleventh and twelfth lines say, “The true reality of non-arising cannot be seen by the eye; dim and subtle, dark and hidden, within it there is essence.” This true suchness wondrous nature, unborn and undying, not coming and not going, not increasing and not decreasing, is the equal, true characteristic—great without outside and small without inside. The Diamond Sutra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” All phenomena bearing defining characteristics arise through causes and conditions and have no intrinsic essence of their own; therefore they are illusory and unreal. The true characteristic is the pure and wondrous great characteristic that is without characteristics. Because this great characteristic has no form, the eye cannot see it. Yet when practice reaches the point where the bottom of the bucket drops away and subject and object both perish, the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground can see the Way.

But this “seeing” is not seeing with the eyes. It means view, understanding, direct knowing, and realization. Although it is dim and subtle, dark and hidden, with no characteristics that can be seen and no flavor to smell, it is neither annihilation nor inert emptiness; it has “true essence” and “wondrous essence.” In other words, this true, wondrous essence is “numinous knowing free from thought.” When your practice reaches the falling away of sense faculties and sense objects, and both person and dharmas are forgotten, then naturally, when the time ripens, you know: all at once you comprehend and directly experience that this pure and uncovered, clean and stainless, numinously bright true essence is the very source of your life. Having realized the wondrous nature, when you turn back, because the images are not apart from the mirror, all the myriad phenomena seen by the eyes, heard by the ears, and touched by the body are nothing other than manifestations of this true essence, nothing other than its wondrous functioning, and nothing other than annotations to it. When students reach this stage, they hear the Way at all times and see the nature everywhere. The Sixth Patriarch said, “A person who has truly seen the nature, even wielding a blade on the battlefield, is also seeing the nature.” Dahui said, “A thoroughly awakened person can see the Way even with physical eyes.” With one phrase, the wondrous principle that nature and appearances are not two is completely revealed.

The thirteenth line says, “Those who realize it are called those who see the nature.” Modern practitioners all regard the phrase “apprehend Mind and see nature” as something belonging to sages and worthies, lofty beyond reach, something ordinary people like us cannot climb to or attain. To end birth and death, they think they can only recite “Amitābha Buddha” again and again and be reborn in the West. They do not realize that apprehending Mind and seeing nature is not difficult, and certainly not beyond reach. The principle involved has been explained in detail in my essay *A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature*, so I will not repeat it here. We only need to follow the method explained above: settle the mad mind, do not cling to objects before us, do not extinguish right mindfulness, and do not seek

anything strange, special, or mysterious. Then in clear distinctness, not a single thought can be obtained; though not a single thought can be obtained, it is clear and distinct and does not fall into dimness or indeterminate blankness. This is the “true essence” described above in “dim and subtle, dark and hidden, within it there is essence.” It is also the great Way that Master Yongjia called “quiescent and lucid, lucid and quiescent.” Students must seize the moment. At this hair-trigger instant of clarity without thought, take hold of it at once: this is called seeing the nature. If one pauses even slightly to deliberate, one is again deluded by its shadow. If one abandons this and seeks elsewhere, or suspects there is some further mystery, then it can never be obtained. In the verse on the rank of seeing the Way, “the upright within the inclined,” Master Dongshan's Verses on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister says: “At daybreak, an old woman meets the ancient mirror. Face to face, clear and distinct, there is no other truth. Stop being confused about the head and still taking its reflection as real.” This admonishes us that at the crucial moment we must summon full alertness, grasp the point inwardly, and not miss the opportunity. If it is examined in this way, how difficult is apprehending Mind and seeing nature?

It is a pity that students in the Dharma-ending age have dull faculties and heavy habits, and many cling to spiritual powers. At this time, because they do not see marvels or mysteries, they mistakenly dismiss it as not genuine and hurriedly let it slip past. Ancient worthies lamented, “Precisely because it is so close at hand, one recognizes it too late.” How lamentable! After a practitioner first sees the nature, the practice is not finished. One must still maintain clear observation constantly, train the mind amid circumstances, work hard at polishing, and eliminate habits; only then can birth and death be ended. Otherwise, when facing objects one gives rise to mind, and delusive thoughts surge without stopping. This is called being deluded after awakening, and birth and death remain unresolved. Therefore ancient worthies often practiced the ox-herding conduct after awakening, preserving it closely until it matured. It is not that with one awakening everything is finished. Although there are occasionally those who suddenly awaken, suddenly practice, and suddenly realize, without needing this practice of preservation, such people are few after all and cannot be treated as the general rule. After the rank “the upright within the inclined,” corresponding to the stage of seeing the Way, Master Dongshan further composed the verse “arriving within the inclined” for the stage of practicing the Way, teaching us that after seeing the Way we must not be satisfied with little, but must still train the mind amid circumstances, eliminate all delusive habits, and rise higher and higher until the ultimate is reached.

On this point, the Chan school speaks of the Three Barriers. First, one breaks through the root investigation and clearly sees the true nature. This is breaking the Initial Barrier, “cutting off the streams.” Second, one protects it closely and nourishes the sacred embryo of awakening; amid all objects and conditions one is free and unobstructed, until one no longer needs to protect and yet there is no deviation at all. This is breaking the Multiple Barrier, “covering heaven and earth.” Third, one lets go and acts; there is nothing that is not it. One can enter

Buddha and also enter demon; as is said, the road is the home and the home is the road. This is breaking the Prison Barrier, “following the waves and flowing with the stream.”

The fourteenth line says, “Therefore, with nothing sought, the mind naturally becomes tranquil and unified.” Ancient worthies said, “When one is free of seeking, one’s character is naturally lofty.” When a person seeks something, that is precisely a sign of attachment to objects and clinging to marks. If the mind is truly empty and not one thing is seen, what is there to seek? Someone may say, “I am not seeking other things; I am seeking birth in the West and Buddhahood.” I reply: you are originally Buddha. There is no need to seek. If you seek, you do not see. As said above, settling the mad mind itself is bodhi; one need only settle, not seek. Mahāsattva Fu said, “Every night I sleep embracing Buddha; every morning I rise together with him.” It shines at all times through your six faculties and lacks nothing in the slightest; what is there still to seek?

As for seeking birth in the West, one need only practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly. Apart from buddha-recitation there is no other mind. As is said, the whole Buddha is mind and the whole mind is Buddha; mind and Buddha enter into communion and become one and inseparable, and then one will certainly be born in the Pure Land. Since Amitābha is the Buddha of one’s own mind, and the Pure Land is the Ultimate Bliss originally possessed by one’s own mind, buddha-recitation awakens the Amitābha of one’s own mind and one is reborn in the Pure Land originally possessed by one’s own mind. What need is there to seek? For those who practice Buddha-recitation, the precious thing is to obtain one mind. One mind is no-mind; since it is no-mind, what is there still to seek? If one deliberately directs Buddha-recitation toward a Buddha outside the mind and seeks birth in a land outside the mind, then one is far from the Way. Moreover, those who attain the samādhi of buddha-recitation do not see any distinction between mind, Buddha, and sentient beings, or any difference between East and West. Though there is birth, it is unborn; though unborn, it is not without birth. What need is there to seek rebirth? Again, when seeking is carried to its limit, seeking itself ceases. Thus those engaged in seeking, when they carry it through to the end, still return to no seeking and no grasping. Birth in the West is not apart from faith, vows, and practice. Since practice can include faith and vows, if one can diligently and tirelessly practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly, faith and vows are already included. If we can truly arrive at non-seeking and non-attainment, the mind becomes tranquil without seeking tranquility, and becomes unified without wishing for unity. When practice reaches this point, one returns home and sits securely; learning has ended and one is established in the unconditioned, passing the days at ease, free and unrestrained.

The fifteenth line says, “With no mind that can be deluded, this itself is great samādhi.” Regarding samādhi, people all think there is a distinction between entering samādhi and leaving samādhi. Sitting here without moving, thinking, eating, or urinating is considered entering samādhi; once there is movement or speech, it is considered leaving samādhi. In fact, this is a mistaken understanding of samādhi. Sitting here unmoving is dead samādhi, not great

samādhi. Great samādhi has no entering or leaving. It is not being deluded by any object, and functioning responsively as conditions arise, without abiding. It is not dead sitting unmoving as though there were something to enter. Confucians also described this principle: “If Mount Tai collapses before him, his expression does not change; if an elk appears to his left, his eyes do not blink.” Since dead sitting unmoving is only suppressing thoughts so they do not arise and extinguishing feeling and perception, it is not true realization. Even if one were to remain in such samādhi for a million kalpas, when the time of the kalpas passes, thoughts would again arise, one would cling to marks, create karma, and undergo retribution. Thus, even if one attains the four formless absorptions and is born in the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception, one still falls into saṃsāra and cannot end birth and death. Ancient worthies compared this kind of dead samādhi to pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows again; therefore it is not ultimate. Nanyue's polishing a tile to awaken Mazu was precisely to rescue him from dead samādhi.

Those who practice the Great Vehicle Buddhadharmā do not take up this kind of dead samādhi, because it is not ultimate and does not provide true benefit. In the past, Emperor Wu of Liang went hunting and encountered an old fellow who had been in samādhi for five hundred years. He was greatly surprised and full of praise, and wanted to compare him with Chan Master Zhigong. He ordered palace women to bathe naked together with the two masters. At first the old fellow could still see and hear freely; then he closed his eyes and could not move; afterward, he had no choice but to push away the palace women and flee. By contrast, Zhigong talked and laughed at ease, unmoved and unalarmed. Without such living mastery of samādhi, how could he have attained this? Thus we can see that attaining samādhi is not a matter of sitting dead and unmoving, nor of how long dead sitting lasts. One must train the mind amid circumstances, not be deluded by objects, exercise great capacity and function, and not be affected by anything; only this is true samādhi. Moreover, the truth that samādhi has no entering and leaving is clearly proven by the account of Chan Master Zhihuang's entry into the Way in the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch and by the gong'an of the woman entering samādhi in the records of the Chan school. Students need not doubt this.

The sixteenth through eighteenth lines say, “Those who attain great samādhi have no movement and no stillness, no gain and no loss, no joy and no anger. Without shifting from the original position, they respond to the myriad conditions.” Above, we said that attaining great samādhi means the mind is not deluded, not that one sits dead and unmoving. Here we describe further the way one does not get deluded by objects. Practitioners often remain steady in stillness but lose that steadiness in movement; remain steady during formal sitting but lose it outside formal sitting. Some are happy when they gain and worried when they lose; they rejoice when things accord with their wishes and get angry when they go against them. Those who can remain unmoving when settled, but give rise to mind when facing objects, are split into two pieces and do not have true samādhi. People who have truly attained great samādhi are the same in movement and stillness, the same in leisure and busyness. Regarding

affairs, they have no mind of success or failure, gain or loss. Regarding objects, they have no intention of attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejection. Regarding mind, they have no emotion of joy, anger, sorrow, or pleasure, and no stain of seeing, hearing, sensing, or knowing. Their mind is empty as if washed clean, vital and uncontrived, naturally following conditions and functioning responsively as circumstances require. They will never be settled in a tranquil mountain forest but disturbed in a noisy city; nor will they lose illumination when encountering affairs and shift away from their original position. Thus great samādhi transcends phenomena, moves freely beyond emotional entanglements, is not controlled by any circumstance, and obtains true benefit. It is not wearing a cage and chains, binding the hands and feet, and dying there unmoving.

When, in daily activity, we train to respond to things and meet conditions while the mind neither clings nor becomes stained and has no fixation, this is not shifting from the original position. This original position is the position of the One Vehicle Dharma realm; it is also the position of Buddha. The Lotus Sutra says, “These dharmas abide in their Dharma-position; worldly appearances constantly abide.” Simply put, it means doing all things without making a thought of doing things; speaking all words without making a thought of speaking; manifesting the myriad phenomena without making a thought of manifesting. In this way, although there is doing, there has never been doing; although there is speaking, there has never been speaking; although there is manifesting, there has never been manifesting. Yet this does not mean refraining from doing, speaking, or manifesting. This is not shifting from the original position; this is responding to the myriad conditions; and this is worldly appearances constantly abiding.

As for the principle of worldly appearances constantly abiding, I will explain it briefly again. First, all phenomena arise from true mind; this is called abiding in the Dharma position. Since the true mind constantly abides, phenomena likewise constantly abide. Second, there is change within phenomena—so-called blue seas becoming mulberry fields—but continuity is unbroken and it is not annihilation. Though water flows and the moon waxes and wanes, the flow never ceases and the cycle of waxing and waning never ends. Third, all phenomena are illusory and unborn; therefore they also do not perish. The Huayan Sutra says, “The ten times, ancient and present, from beginning to end do not depart from the present thought; boundless oceans of lands, self and other, are not separated at the tip of a hair.” The marks of time and space all exist because delusive thoughts arise and cease and because distinctions are made. If not one thought arises, then vertically one transcends the three times, and horizontally one pervades the ten directions. No matter how distant in the past something is, it all appears vividly before one. When Master Zhiyi recited the Lotus Sutra and reached the Medicine King chapter, before entering the Lotus samādhi he personally realized that the assembly on Vulture Peak was still present and had not dispersed. This is iron proof of worldly appearances constantly abiding.

The nineteenth line says, “Unchanging while following conditions: this is to have no birth and death.” Everyone knows that studying Buddhism and practicing the Way is for the sake of ending birth and death. But how can birth and death truly be ended? I am afraid not every Buddhist knows the answer. What is called birth and death has two kinds: fragmentary birth-and-death, and transformational birth-and-death. Fragmentary birth-and-death is the sixfold wheel of rebirth; this is relatively easy to understand. Transformational birth-and-death is an invisible layer of birth and death beyond the sixfold wheel, an obstruction caused by incomplete practice of the Dharma. Therefore ordinary people find it harder to understand. I will explain it briefly. Small Vehicle sages such as arhats have cut off the delusions of view and thought and do not suffer fragmentary birth-and-death in the wheel of rebirth. But they are biased toward the principle of emptiness, thinking that there are dharmas to practice, a Way to accomplish, birth and death to end, and nirvāṇa to realize. Fixated on a pure land beyond the three realms, brought about through supporting conditions associated with cognitive obscuration, they abide in dharmas and do not think of transforming their bodies and following conditions to liberate beings. Their cognitive delusion is not yet exhausted. This is another layer of birth-and-death rooted in dharma-clinging, beyond ordinary birth and death.

To end this kind of birth and death, one must first know that methods of practice are only like taking medicine and must not be clung to and held fast. Second, one must be clear that birth and death and nirvāṇa are like flowers in the sky: there is no birth and death to end, no nirvāṇa to realize, not one dharma established, no wisdom and no attainment. After that, one must further clearly understand, exercise great capacity and function, transform in response to conditions, and widely liberate sentient beings while the original position is not changed; one must not abide in dharmas and remain unmoving. The whole Heart Sutra first empties ordinary beings’ foolish clinging to sense faculties, sense objects, and consciousnesses; next it empties Small Vehicle sages’ dharma-clinging with respect to the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of dependent arising; afterward it empties bodhisattvas’ clinging to wisdom, allows great capacity and function to unfold, and returns to no attainment. Only then does one realize anuttarā samyaksambodhi.

Those who truly end birth and death do so because no dharma can be obtained and because they follow conditions without changing. Even if they come and go in the six realms, they do not see any difference of birth and death or separation of paths. Even if, following conditions, they transform their bodies and forms and liberate all sentient beings, the original position is unchanged, and they do not see a single sentient being as having been liberated. In the past, a monk asked Chan Master Dasui, “After your teacher’s nirvāṇa, where was he reborn?” Dasui said, “My teacher became a horse at the eastern house and an ox at the western house.” The monk praised him for having thoroughly awakened and settled the matter: not one dharma established, following conditions and going among different kinds of beings, while the fundamental essence did not shift in the slightest. In Master Dongshan’s Verses on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister, the final verse, “arriving within the combined,” says: “Not involved with being or non-being—who dares harmonize? Everyone wants to leave the

ordinary stream; folded back, he returns to sit in the coals.” This praises the final rank. Those who have truly ended birth and death take non-ending as true ending. It is not that leaving the six realms and abiding in a Pure Land is truly ending birth and death. Therefore what is called remainderless nirvāṇa is no nirvāṇa to realize; it is nonabiding nirvāṇa.

Unchanging while following conditions is function arising from essence. Following conditions while unchanging is gathering function back into essence. Essence and function are both suchness; without abiding or staining, without shifting or difference, this is truly ending birth and death.

The twentieth line concludes: “The essential secret of becoming a Buddha is simply this.” The thirty-eight lines above have revealed in full the whole mystery and key of becoming a Buddha. Perhaps someone will say, “These words are ordinary and commonplace; there is nothing strange or mysterious in them. Can becoming a Buddha really be such an inconspicuous affair? Is it not said that becoming a Buddha means Dharma power without boundary and vast spiritual powers? Here no spiritual powers or mysteries have been discussed!” They do not know that Buddhadharma is originally nothing extraordinary, nor is it something to be understood through conceptual reasoning. Above all, do not stir up trouble. We only need to have a mind that abides nowhere, live each day as conditions unfold, and be a person of the Way with nothing to do. To become a Buddha at fruition endowed with the six superknowledges, one must first, at the causal stage, awaken to the original nature. After clearly seeing the true nature, one must diligently eliminate habits and partially break ignorance, and only then can spiritual powers manifest. It is not that one can immediately become a Buddha at fruition, complete with the three bodies and the six superknowledges fully manifest.

Regarding awakening to the original nature, some people take spiritual powers as the measure. They think that only if spiritual powers have appeared has one apprehended Mind and seen nature; otherwise it is not seeing the nature. These are the bad habits of ordinary beings clinging to existence and attaching to the wondrous and strange. People who cling to such bad habits not only mislead themselves, they also mislead others. What is called the true nature is nowhere else; it shines through one's own six faculties. As the Chan school says, “The child in the eye is the person before the eyes; the golden crow beneath the sea is the sun in the sky.” Not recognizing it oneself, not knowing to nurture it and let it grow into Buddhahood, and instead criticizing those who recognize it as wrong and telling them not to take it up as their own—is this not pitiable and laughable?

If we speak in terms of spiritual powers, every raising of the hand, every stepping of the foot, every word, laugh, spit, or cough is spiritual power and wondrous function. Layman Pang said, “Spiritual powers and wondrous functions: carrying water and hauling firewood.” Of all these movements, speech, coughing, spitting, and activities, which is not the true mind giving rise to wondrous function? Can a dead person's hands, feet, mouth, and tongue speak, laugh, and act? One spends the whole day within numinous functioning without recognizing it, and

instead seeks spiritual powers elsewhere. Is this not what the Chan school calls “sitting beside the rice bucket while countless people starve to death”? Moreover, clinging to spiritual powers is having a dharma to obtain, which is dharma-clinging. In the future, not only will one be unable to become a Buddha; one may well become a demon. You should know that what are called spiritual powers are this: the wondrous functioning of the true mind is the “spiritual,” and being without abiding, attachment, or obstruction is the “penetrating.” They must not be understood in terms of the strange, marvelous, or mysterious.

As soon as one thinks in terms of wonders and mysteries, poison enters the mind, obstructs the gate of awakening, and one has no chance of accomplishing the Way. Among today's practitioners, out of a hundred practitioners, all hundred are deluded by and attached to the strange and mysterious. They are all busy playing tricks and manipulating small spiritual powers, then feeling smug and pleased, thinking these are signs of accomplishing the Way. They do not know that this is dabbling with spirits. This is precisely the consciousness-spirit functioning, as Xuansha rebuked: “Students of the Way fail to recognize the true because they have always mistaken the consciousness-spirit for it.” How could they ever have dreamt of Buddhadharma? These ignorant people waste their whole life's energy on meaningless branches and twigs and do not attend to proper practice. When the thirtieth day of the twelfth month arrives, their so-called spiritual powers are nowhere to be found, and in this muddled and hazy way they report to Old Yama. Moreover, because while alive they showed off wonders and claimed abilities, clung to marks, and created karma, they must still undergo grievous retribution.

These fools do not get onto the right track, do not practice the fundamental great Dharma, and still use spiritual powers to test and measure others. How could they know that studying Buddhism is a matter of practicing and awakening for oneself? Whether others awaken or not, what business is it of yours? If they awaken, you cannot thereby accomplish the Way. If they do not awaken, it does not harm you. Why do you need to test them? Moreover, if you want to measure others, you must first have a view beyond ordinary people. If you use spiritual powers to measure people, you have already fallen below them. The root of awakening to the Way is not being deluded by objects, not whether spiritual powers arise. If you become deluded by objects, then no matter what great spiritual powers you may manifest, you will have no true benefit and cannot end birth and death.

People who have not clarified the root cannot remain unstained when meeting affairs. Even if they practice methods and gain powers, or rely on others—gods, ghosts, or spirit-beings—to gain powers, because they cling to objects and abide in marks, afflictions remain as before and they cannot be free. In contrast, people who are not deluded by objects have a mind empty as if washed clean, without the slightest attachment. Even if for the moment they have no powers, before long all five superknowledges will naturally arise together, because not being deluded by objects is itself the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. When the root is firmly established, one need not worry that the branches will fail to flourish. Therefore we

must constantly test and examine ourselves: when facing objects, is the mind unmoved? If for the time being it is not yet stable and still shakes, then moving from much movement to little movement, and from little movement to no movement, is rising higher and higher and is the sign of accomplishing the Way. We must not focus on spiritual powers, mistakenly thinking that the manifestation of spiritual powers is awakening to the Way. Still less should we test others against our own inner experience, lest delusive thoughts multiply and we lose our own resolve for the Way. At the same time, if spiritual powers arise, do not use them. Because there is no abiding and no attainment, they must not be displayed to others.

Finally, there is another important matter students must know. Some young people think that only when body and mind are at leisure and the environment is quiet can they practice the Way. Because of this, they often fail to seize the opportunity and practice diligently, and instead sit waiting for a good time and fine circumstances to arrive. But ordinary beings have heavy obstructions and many affairs. As the saying goes, “Before one matter is settled, another arrives.” When will there ever be a time of complete leisure, with nothing demanding attention? As for place, there is even less need to spend thought choosing one. The important thing in studying Buddhism is to work with the mind; it does not value dead sitting in forests and mountains. Much has been said above: when facing objects, the mind must neither cling to nor be stained by them—this is true practice. If you want not to be stained by objects but do not train the mind amid sense objects, and instead sit dead in the mountains and forests, how could you train an unmoving mind? Therefore you need only recognize that all forms, sounds, and other sense objects are images displayed by one's own true mind, like reflections appearing through a mirror's luminous clarity, with nothing that can be grasped. At the same time, true mind cannot be obtained apart from sense objects, just as the reflections are none other than the mirror's luminous clarity and that luminous clarity is not apart from the reflections; therefore there is nothing to reject either. Constantly observing and training in this way, with mind empty and intention at ease, naturally free, without seeking and without attainment—this is the natural Buddha. Why wait for some fine place and auspicious time to arrive? I earnestly advise all of you: while you are young and able, seize the opportunity and strive diligently. Do not idly waste time and miss the chance. Do not wait until the young head has turned white and there is only empty sorrow. Take care!

3. 禅净密互融互通的修法 / The Method of Practice in Which Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism Mutually Interpenetrate

Chinese source: 《禅净密互融互通的修法》

When people study Buddhism and slander one another, they create karma without even realizing it. Those who practice Pure Land do not understand Esoteric Buddhism and rashly say that Esoteric Buddhism is a religion of ghosts and spirits, and that only Pure Land is best. I once heard a certain great master in the Northeast say that Esoteric Buddhism was the worst. He was a very remarkable master. After hearing this, I asked him, “In your Pure Land practice, do you recite mantras? Do you recite the Great Compassion Mantra? The Rebirth Mantra? The Ten Small Mantras?” He replied, “Yes.” I said, “Are these mantras not esoteric mantras? You yourself cannot do without Esoteric Buddhism. It is an offense to slander the Buddhadharma!”

Even Master Hongyi of the Vinaya school once said that Esoteric Buddhism was a religion of ghosts and spirits. Later, after he read the esoteric teachings in full, he realized that Esoteric Buddhism is so complete: it proceeds from shallow to deep, from small to great, and is no different from Chan. Only then did he know that he had been wrong, and he wrote a repentance essay that was included in his collected works.

On Esoteric Buddhism: the sequence of esoteric practice

All such remarks are careless talk by people who do not understand Esoteric Buddhism. They know only themselves, not others, and they speak irresponsibly. Is Esoteric Buddhism a religion of ghosts and spirits? At the very beginning, Esoteric Buddhism inevitably includes some elements involving ghosts and spirits. This is because Tibetans’ spiritual capacities were relatively weak; they wanted a bit of mystery, a bit of response or sign. If one wants mysterious effects, relying on ghosts and spirits is faster, while learning the Buddhadharma is slower. But when esoteric practice reaches the later stages, it has nothing to do with ghosts and spirits.

Esoteric Buddhism speaks of a nine-vehicle sequence, a nine-step path. It begins with the outer three vehicles: one first studies the exoteric teachings, the Small Vehicle, the Buddha Vehicle, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle. Only after these doctrinal principles have been thoroughly understood does one practice the inner three vehicles. The inner three vehicles are actual practice: after the doctrinal principles are understood, one then practices esoteric methods.

These methods teach how to remove karmic obstructions, avert disasters, cure illness, and bring wealth. Wealth practices are wealth-deity practices, and wealth deities are spirit beings;

so practices involving ghosts and spirits do exist. But this is only the beginning. Later, Esoteric Buddhism has the great Dharma of completion. For example, the Mahāmudrā of the Tibetan Kagyü school speaks in a way completely consistent with Chan. Mahāmudrā teaches view, samādhi, and conduct. View is seeing one's original nature, recognizing one's original nature. Only after recognizing the original nature does meditative stability arise. One then knows that all worldly things are false appearances and does not chase after them. When the view is correct, conduct naturally accords with the Way and the precepts are naturally kept. On the basis of that meditative stability, one practices the great Dharma, purifies habitual tendencies, and realizes noble fruition. Therefore it is exactly the same as what Chan says.

The Great Perfection Dharma of the Nyingma school is the same. Our body has five kinds of light, and the outside also has five kinds of light. The five kinds of outer light stimulate one's own five kinds of light, transforming the whole body into a rainbow body; and even toward the rainbow body one must not form attachment. The Nyingma tradition states very clearly that if we realize this rainbow body but cling to it, we are still only a wandering spirit in the universe. A wandering spirit in the universe has not yet accomplished the Way. To accomplish the Way, one must also dissolve even this rainbow body into emptiness. Only then can one ascend further. This is equivalent to what Chan calls "going beyond the dharmakāya."

Chan speaks of breaking through the Three Barriers. The Prison Barrier is the final barrier, which is going beyond the dharmakāya. The Multiple Barrier is the proper position of the dharmakāya: one does not abide in any circumstance or experience, and one remains unshaken. Going beyond the dharmakāya means that even if great spiritual powers appear, one does not abide in those powers; there is no Buddha to become, and one clings to nothing at all.

Speaking of Esoteric Buddhism: opening the treasury of wisdom

In mainland China today, Buddhist practice is tending toward Esoteric Buddhism. Many people misunderstand Esoteric Buddhism as something secret; they say it is about displaying spiritual powers and that it is a method involving ghosts and spirits. These are all misunderstandings. The "esoteric" in Esoteric Buddhism is not some secret that is hidden away. It means opening the secret treasury of wisdom and seeing our original face.

Where is the original face? We do not know. Even if scientists, physicians, or anatomists cut open the heart or cut open the brain, they cannot find it. Because our wondrous essence of suchness has no characteristics that can be apprehended, it cannot be seen by looking for something that bears characteristics. "The path of language is cut off, and mental activity ceases." This is the truth. Thus the Yogācāra school says "persons and dharmas are empty"; the truth of these two emptinesses is called suchness. This truth is abstract.

Doctrinal commentators also speak of dependent arising and emptiness, saying that all events and things lack an essence of their own, are compounded through causes and conditions, and

have no intrinsic essence. Their nature is empty; there is no thing there. The truth that mind is empty, suchness, and Buddha-nature—Esoteric Buddhism does not go beyond these principles.

What is needed is the method of practice empowered by the three mysteries: the empowerment of body, speech, and mind. Through the three mysteries, our minds are opened so that we see our own original face. Therefore Esoteric Buddhism is the opening of the secret treasury. It is not a matter of secrecy, of not transmitting the Dharma, or of displaying spiritual powers. The Buddha also said that in the Dharma-ending age, sentient beings' karmic obstructions are deep and heavy, and Esoteric Buddhism is the most suited to their capacities. Without the empowerment of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, successful practice and realization are difficult.

During the “Esoteric Buddhism fever,” a certain master wrote several essays that were published in Beijing's Fayin magazine on the issue of Buddhist practice and realization amid the esoteric craze. This craze was mainly a turn toward Tibet to study Tibetan Esotericism. Strictly speaking, Tibetan Esotericism is not necessarily suited to Han Chinese practitioners, because Tibetan Esotericism was formulated according to Tibetan customs and the level of their culture.

It begins with the four preliminaries or five preliminaries: one hundred thousand refuges, one hundred thousand full prostrations, one hundred thousand recitations of the Hundred-Syllable Mantra, and one hundred thousand maṇḍala offerings. First practicing the preliminaries and only afterward taking up the main practice is equivalent to taking a roundabout road. Han Chinese have their own cultural traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, and they have good roots. They do not necessarily need to learn Tibetan esoteric methods from Tibetans.

Han China has its own esoteric Dharma. During the Tang dynasty there was Tang Esotericism. In the Jin period, Master Huiguo transmitted esoteric Dharma to the Japanese master Kūkai, and Japan still has an esoteric lineage today called Eastern Esotericism. Chinese Esoteric Buddhism was completely cut off in the Ming dynasty under Zhu Yuanzhang. He worried that if people used esoteric methods to display spiritual powers, they might even cause him to lose his imperial throne, so he forbade the people from transmitting esoteric Dharma.

Editorial source note. The controlling Chinese explicitly says “in the Jin period” (晋朝) here, and the translation preserves that wording. Historical sources place Kūkai's study under Huiguo in Tang Chang'an in 805; later in this same volume Yuan Yin himself also gives the Tang-period version. The discrepancy therefore appears to lie in the received source wording rather than in the English translation.

The Heart-Center Dharma that we transmit now is an esoteric Dharma handed down from the Tang dynasty. It existed long ago; it is not something newly created today. Its practice text is found in the Tripiṭaka as The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Connected with the Great Wish-

Fulfilling Dhāraṇī. This is a Chinese esoteric Dharma. It can directly point to the human mind, enabling one to see the nature and become a Buddha. This kind of practice enables you to personally see what is original, see your own nature, and understand what mind is and what nature is. After knowing this, you practice in accord with it and protect your own mind-nature, thereby avoiding many detours. Therefore this Dharma is very good.

Apprehending Mind and seeing nature is not difficult. Everyone regards apprehending Mind and seeing nature as extremely difficult, thinking that it is something reserved for sages and that ordinary people cannot do it. In fact, all sentient beings inherently possess the Tathāgata's Buddha-nature. Unfortunately, we do not recognize it; we chase the defilements of outer objects and are deluded by them. Now, by pointing it out to us, we are enabled to recognize our own original nature. Therefore apprehending Mind and seeing nature is not difficult.

The benefit of practicing esoteric Dharma is that one relies on the Buddha's empowering strength. Empowerment is like helping us walk. Practicing by one's own strength is like walking on two feet. Relying on the Buddha's empowering support in our practice is like riding in a car or airplane; naturally it saves much effort. Therefore esoteric practice is actually the same as Chan practice. It is not a matter of secrecy or displaying spiritual powers, so everyone should avoid misunderstanding esoteric practice.

Tibetan esoteric methods are somewhat different. Because Tibetans are attached and their habitual tendencies are strong, they want some minor signs of spiritual power. Therefore, in the beginning there are methods involving ghosts and spirits: how to dispel disasters and remove obstructions, how to become wealthy, and so on. At the beginning, Tibetan esoteric methods adopt some practices involving ghosts and spirits as expedients suited to people's capacities. Later they practice the nine-vehicle sequence. The first stage is Action Tantra (Kriyā); afterward one practices the generation stage. Generation means that from nothing present, a visualized form is brought forth. One accomplishes visualization of channels, winds, and drops, visualizing the human body as having three channels and five wheels, or three channels and seven wheels, with different methods in different systems.

Although the methods differ, they are all used to gather the mind, to grasp our thinking and keep it from moving. This is called accomplishing visualization. After visualization is accomplished, one must know that this is not true accomplishment, because Buddha-nature is without characteristics and is not itself a phenomenon bearing characteristics. Visualization is like having a large sore on the body. First one uses medicine to treat it, making the wound gradually shrink into a small sore. It has become a tiny wound, but the sore is still poisonous; that is still not enough. Therefore one must proceed from the generation stage to the completion stage. In the completion stage, the visualized forms generated in the generation stage are dissolved into emptiness, until not the slightest trace of those generated forms remains. Only then can one see the original nature. Thus, the later practice of Esoteric Buddhism is completely consistent with Chan practice. In Esoteric Buddhism one practices

the generation stage and the completion stage. The completion stage is divided into the Great Completion Stage, the Incomparable Completion Stage, and the Unsurpassed Completion Stage. When the practice reaches its culmination, it is completely consistent with Chan.

Chan and Esoteric Buddhism Are Originally Interconnected

Let me give an example to show that Chan and Esoteric Buddhism are completely interconnected. The Nyingma tradition says that if, after realizing the rainbow body, one clings to the rainbow body, one is still a wandering spirit in the universe. One must recognize that even this rainbow body is unobtainable. Chan has the same kind of koan. Once a Chan master asked Caoshan, the patriarch of the Caodong school, “Master, what about when the bright moon is directly overhead?” “The bright moon directly overhead” means a tremendously bright moon shining above my head, like the great round halo on a Buddha image, illuminating the whole body. Is this not a luminous body? Is this not very good? Patriarch Caoshan said, “You are still a man below the steps”—still below the form realm, not yet having entered the hall.

The Chan monk said, “Please, Master, be compassionate and pull me up.” Patriarch Caoshan answered, “We shall meet when the moon has set.” To meet after the bright moon directly overhead has set means that you must dissolve even your light into emptiness and dissolve the luminous mark to which you are attached.

In practice, there are three states: emptiness, bliss, and clarity. When our practice reaches the point where subject and object both vanish, and mind and dharmas are both extinguished, the world turns empty, the great earth subsides, and space shatters. At that moment, although there is nothing at all, there is empty luminosity and deep stillness; numinous clarity remains unobscured, with lucid, continuous knowing—not like wood or stone. Reaching this state is awakening; it is the true transformation into emptiness. Therefore, some today become extremely blissful and speak of “layer upon layer of the taste of *prajñā*”; after bliss there is a great release of light. But none of these three may be abided in. If one abides in bliss, one does not leave the desire realm; if one abides in luminosity, one does not leave the form realm; if one abides in emptiness, one does not leave the realm of emptiness—that is, the formless realm. Therefore none of these three can be abided in. Not abiding, one leaves the three realms.

Now let us discuss the issue of Buddhist practice and realization. Fundamentally, the Buddhadharma has no words to be spoken, because all sentient beings possess the Tathāgata’s undefiled self-nature. Whenever there is speech, the true meaning is already missed. Because everyone seeks outwardly, loses sight of the original nature, craves without limit, creates karma, and undergoes retribution, this elicited Śākyamuni Buddha’s responsive appearance in the world, where he manifested a body and taught the Dharma. The many different Dharmas he taught are actually all for the purpose of leading us to recognize the

original face. Dharma after Dharma is equal; all are the same. Only because sentient beings have different faculties does he respond to their capacities and prescribe different medicines for different illnesses.

Chan: investigating a huatou and reciting a huatou

Chan was originally the most outstanding among the four great Chinese schools. It is the most perfect and sudden: it cuts straight through, directly pointing to the human mind and revealing one's nature, so that one sees the nature and becomes a Buddha. The other schools inevitably circle around outside. But today's Chan practitioners have difficulty arousing the doubt-sensation when investigating a huatou. Thus "investigating" a huatou has turned into "reciting" a huatou, keeping the phrase "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" on the lips.

If the doubt-sensation does not arise, one cannot cut off inside and outside, nor can one cut off deluded thoughts. Once the doubt-sensation arises, it envelops the whole body; the entire body and mind are immersed in the doubt-sensation. Only then can inside and outside be cut off so that the inside cannot go out and the outside cannot enter. Only then can one reach a breakthrough and open up to see the original face.

Today people take the huatou and use it for recitation, reciting "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" all day long. If the doubt-sensation does not arise, inside and outside cannot be cut off. Reciting "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" all day long, however long one does it, still does not receive the Buddha's empowering support. In that case, it would be somewhat better to recite "Amitābha Buddha." Merely reciting "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" without arousing the doubt-sensation cannot cut off inside and outside, cannot stop deluded thoughts, and cannot see the true suchness nature. This has caused Chan to degenerate into transmission by lineage scroll. No wonder Master Taixu sighed, "Today's Chan descendants all transmit the Dharma by lineage scroll, not after apprehending Mind and seeing nature... When have they ever awakened to mind?" A lineage scroll is a long genealogical scroll with the words "Treasury of the True Dharma Eye" written at the front. It records the succession from the first patriarch down to the present generation and is handed on from generation to generation. In fact, the teacher has not awakened, and the disciple has not awakened either. This brings the Buddhadharma into disrepute. It is truly painful! Under such conditions, people turn toward esoteric methods of practice; this is the greatest factor behind the esoteric craze.

Chan: the origin of the huatou

The earliest Chan masters all pointed directly; they did not tell people to investigate huatou. Before the Sixth Patriarch, teachers transmitted to teachers through direct pointing and did not tell people to investigate huatou. When the Sixth Patriarch transmitted to Huiming, he also pointed directly: "Do not think of good; do not think of evil." "Do not think of good; do not

think of evil” means to put everything down and not move thoughts. When Huiming remained for a long while without moving thought, the Sixth Patriarch directly indicated, “Right at just such a time, that is your original face.” “That” is perfectly clear. It asks you to be without a single thought arising. It is not asking you to touch a stone and say you do not know. It still has knowing and numinous awareness. “That” is without a single thought arising, without limit or boundary, without ordinary perception and without felt sensation; but it is neither wood nor stone. That is your original face. This is called direct pointing; it is called apprehending Mind and seeing nature.

Later people did not understand direct pointing. They said, “That was not direct pointing; it was a question.” Thus it became the Sixth Patriarch asking him, “Which one is your original face?” In Chinese, “that” and “which” can both be written with the same character. Interpretations differ according to the reader. If you awaken right then, you know it is a pointing, like the English word “That.” If you do not understand, it becomes “What.” This gives the passage flexibility. On the mainland, there was once endless dispute over these two characters—whether it was a “question” or a “pointing.” We need not litigate this anymore; just look at the later patriarchs and it becomes clear.

For example, Lingxun asked Guizong, “What is Buddha?” Chan Master Guizong said, “It is you yourself”—you are Buddha. Official Yu Xiu asked Chan Master Ziyu, “What is Buddha?” The master called, “Official!” He answered, and the master said, “It is just like this; there is no other thing.” Again, Damei asked Mazu, “What is Buddha?” Mazu said, “This very mind is Buddha.” These are all direct pointings; there is no need to investigate a huatou.

Editorial source note. The controlling Yuan Yin source names the official 于岫, hence “Yu Xiu” in this edition. Classical Chan records of the same Ziyu/Yaoshan case identify the official as 于頔 (Yu Di). Because the controlling source is the translation authority, the body text is not silently renamed; the historical identity variance is recorded here.

By the Song dynasty, people’s minds had gradually declined. After Śākyamuni Buddha’s nirvāṇa, the five hundred years of the True Dharma had already passed, and the thousand-year Semblance Dharma age had arrived. The earlier method of direct pointing seemed to come without effort. It was like obtaining ancestral wealth without labor; precisely because one had not paid the price in sweat and blood, one did not know how hard-won it was and did not know to treasure it, but squandered the money until it was gone. Chan was the same. “Ah! This is it?” “This is it.” “Then why have I not displayed spiritual powers?” Modern people especially are like this. You tell them, “When not a single thought arises and yet all is clear and distinct, that is the original face.” Since it is the original face, they expect spiritual powers to appear. Why have they not appeared? Because they do not see marvels and wonders, they think it is not so, refuse to take it up as their own, and instead seek Dharma outside the mind in hopes of miraculous effects. Therefore, the patriarchs had no choice but to stop pointing directly and instead use huatou investigation. They took a phrase without flavor or meaning and placed it upon the student’s mind to arouse a great doubt-sensation. When one’s entire

body and mind are plunged into the mass of doubt, and the time and conditions arrive, the bottom of the bucket drops out. Huatou investigation began only from the Song dynasty.

Originally, huatou investigation did not mean that everyone investigated one fixed huatou in a standardized way. It differed according to the person. The Chan master looked at the capacity of the person who came and gave him a huatou. Later, when enlightened teachers became fewer, everyone uniformly investigated “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” is also very good. One must focus the inquiry on the word “who”: “Who, ultimately, is reciting the Buddha’s name? Is it I who am reciting? If it is I, is the body I? The body clearly is not. When breathing stops, the person dies; the body remains, but it cannot recite the Buddha’s name. Now I can recite ‘Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha.’ Who exactly is reciting?” Let the doubt-sensation arise there. Only then can inside and outside be cut off. If the doubt-sensation does not arise, merely reciting the huatou is useless. Therefore, the Buddhadharma has gradually declined.

Mahāmudrā

For example, the highest Dharma practiced in the Kagyü school is Mahāmudrā. Mahāmudrā is not a matter of raising another mudrā, forming some hand-seal, or reciting some mantra. Why is it called a hand-seal? It is our one Dharma realm; it is our undefiled self-nature. In Journey to the West, Sun Wukong can turn a somersault and travel for many miles. Śākyamuni Buddha says, “Try turning over in my palm!” Sun Wukong thinks, “How big can your hand be? I will flip right out of it.” Could he really get out? After turning several somersaults, he still could not escape; he was still in Śākyamuni Buddha’s palm. The true Dharma realm, pervading all space and all Dharma realms, is a single hand. Therefore there is no hand-seal to be formed; it is the mudrā of no mudrā. For this reason it is called Mahāmudrā.

The Great Perfection Dharma

The esoteric Dharma of the Nyingma school—the Great Perfection Dharma—is completely consistent with Chan. The Great Perfection Dharma has two steps. The first is trekchö, and the second is tögal. Trekchö means “direct severance”: immediately cutting off deluded thoughts so that you apprehend Mind and see nature. Tögal means “direct transcendence”—going beyond the dharmakāya. Chan speaks of breaking through the Three Barriers—the Initial Barrier, the Multiple Barrier, and the Prison Barrier—and finally going beyond the dharmakāya. What the Great Perfection says is completely consistent with Chan.

To practice tögal is to transform the physical body completely into a rainbow body: skin, flesh, muscles, and bones all become a body of light. At departure there is a ray of light and not even the physical body remains. But if you have already realized the rainbow body, and there is still a rainbow body in your mind, then you are still only a wandering spirit in the universe; it is

not ultimate, because there is still attachment. As Chan says, as soon as there is any attachment, it becomes a nest or rut.

No matter what Dharma one practices, in the beginning the entry may differ. For example, Pure Land begins with buddha-recitation; Chan begins with investigating a huatou; Esoteric Buddhism begins with mantra recitation and forming mudrās. But later they all return to Chan; all enter meditative absorption. In the end, none fail to return to the Pure Land. Our mind is the land; the land is mind. When the mind is pure, that is the true Pure Land. If there is even a little something on the mind, it is not the Pure Land.

After Chan practice finally opens the original mind and sees the nature, birth and death are still not ended. Apprehending Mind and seeing nature is only breaking the Initial Barrier. Although the nature has been seen, birth and death are not yet ended, because only delusions of view have been cut off; delusions of thought have not been cut off. One's view is correct, but our delusions of thought—that is, the mind's arising toward objects—are still hard to avoid. Because the seeds in the eighth consciousness remain, when they encounter conditions they manifest. Therefore birth and death are not yet ended.

For this reason, Pure Land practitioners often slander Chan and say that Chan is not good: even if one apprehends Mind and sees nature, birth and death are not ended. Better to be born in the Western Pure Land; once one sees Amitābha, everything is solved. This is because ordinary people do not understand Chan's standpoint. Chan itself also knows that apprehending Mind and seeing nature does not mean birth and death are ended. Master Linji explained this very clearly: if one understands the first phrase, one cannot yet save oneself. He said, "Look at the puppets performing on the stage; all their movements depend entirely on the puppeteer inside the booth." It is like watching a puppet show: in the play, Sun Wukong's battle with the White Bone Demon is wonderful, but without the puppeteer inside the booth pulling the strings, however good the puppet is, it cannot move. Human beings are the same. In this analogy, human speech, walking, and all kinds of movement are the functioning of Buddha-nature, like a puppeteer pulling the strings.

Recognizing the wondrous function of Buddha-nature still does not save oneself, because the seeds in the eighth consciousness remain. When you meet objects, the mind still arises; your thinking still moves. The Yogācāra school explains this even more clearly: "When the initial mind is aroused, one reaches the Joyous Ground; co-emergent attachments still manifest, binding one and lying dormant. After the Far-Going Ground, one is entirely free of outflows; observation, perfectly luminous, illumines the great thousandfold world." "Aroused" here means brought forth and developed, as when a businessman develops an enterprise or a scientist develops new technology. A person practicing Buddhadharma opens his own secret treasury and sees the nature; this is seeing the bodhisattva who has entered the grounds. The first ground is the Joyous Ground. "Co-emergent attachments" refers to the innate dharma-clinging and self-clinging that still follow you, binding your original nature so that when you meet objects the mind arises and you become dim and muddled, as if asleep.

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese at this sentence reads 见到登地菩萨, literally supporting the “seeing the bodhisattva who has entered the grounds” wording above. A received Yuan Yin witness instead reads 成为登地菩萨, “becoming a bodhisattva who has entered the grounds.” The edition preserves the controlling reading rather than silently choosing the smoother variant.

“After the Far-Going Ground, one is entirely free of outflows” refers to practice: rising from the first ground to the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh. The seventh ground is the Far-Going Ground, and the eighth is the Immovable Ground. Only at the eighth ground does one enter the stage free of outflows. Only after attaining the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows does one truly enter the penetration of the Way. Only here is there no retrogression; before this, one can still regress. At this point the seeds of the eighth consciousness are dissolved, and one transforms to the ninth consciousness, the amalavijñāna. Amalavijñāna is translated into Chinese as “purified consciousness.” Even realizing purified consciousness is still not reaching home. Although innate self-clinging is dissolved, the seeds of innate dharma-clinging remain. In other words, discriminative self-clinging and dharma-clinging have been dissolved, but one still has to train in affairs, remove the dust-and-sand delusions of beginningless ignorance, and transform from the ninth consciousness to the tenth consciousness. Only this is truly seeing the nature and becoming Buddha.

Therefore Chan practice must continue for a long time; it is not something that can be cleared away all at once. This depends on the depth of our practice. It is said to take three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. The three “greats” are the three stages: the stage of seeing the Way, the stage of practicing the Way, and the stage of realizing the Way. The length of these three stages depends on the depth of one’s practice. Śākyamuni Buddha received a prediction of Buddhahood from Dīpaṃkara Buddha. Because Śākyamuni Buddha practiced with heroic diligence, he became Buddha seven kalpas ahead of time. Therefore the length of the three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas is not fixed; it depends on how diligently you yourself practice. Ānanda and Śākyamuni Buddha were cousins. They resolved to study Buddhism together, but when Śākyamuni Buddha attained Buddhahood at fruition, Ānanda still had not awakened to the Way. From this one can see that practice depends on oneself: if one is diligent and heroic, it is fast; if one is lazy, it is slow. For this reason, in this Dharma-ending age, practice by one’s own strength is even more difficult; one must rely on the Buddha’s empowering force so that the practice can take hold.

China’s own esoteric Dharma: the Heart-Center Dharma

The Heart-Center Dharma was not learned from Japan and was not learned from Tibet. It belongs neither to Eastern Esotericism nor to Tibetan Esotericism. It is an esoteric Dharma native to China from the Tang dynasty. Because no one transmitted it, even my grandmaster did not know of this esoteric Dharma until he left home and went to study at Donglin

Monastery on Mount Lu in Jiangxi, the ancestral monastery of the Pure Land school, where he received this Dharma.

Master Huiyuan established the Pure Land method at Donglin Monastery. Pure Land has two kinds of samādhi: one is buddha-recitation samādhi, and the other is pratyutpanna samādhi. Buddha-recitation samādhi is easier to practice: one sits cross-legged, forms the Dharma-Realm Samādhi Mudrā with the hands, and recites “Amitābha Buddha,” thereby attaining buddha-recitation samādhi. Pratyutpanna samādhi is difficult to practice: all day long one walks inside a room, not being allowed to sit or sleep. When pratyutpanna samādhi is accomplished, the Buddha appears in front of you and rubs the crown of your head.

My grandmaster formed a great resolve and chose to practice the Dharma that others found hard to practice: pratyutpanna samādhi. All day long he did not sleep but walked inside the room. Physically, this was very hard to endure. His legs became so swollen he could not walk, but since he had made a great vow, even when he could no longer walk he did not stop; he crawled on the ground. When both palms swelled and he could not crawl, he rolled on the ground! He endured such great hardship and trained in this way until the clinging mind had completely fallen away, and he entered great samādhi. In samādhi there was a response: Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appeared, rubbed the crown of his head, and taught him the Dharma, saying, “In this Dharma-ending age, undertaking such ascetic practice is very rare and precious. But in the esoteric division there is the Heart-Center Dharma, by which one can rely on the Buddha’s empowering support and need not undergo such great suffering. Practicing the Heart-Center Dharma through the Buddha’s empowerment can bring twice the result with half the effort. Practice this Dharma well. After you have practiced it well, go down the mountain and transmit it widely to the people.”

Today Japan and Tibet also have this Dharma, but they do not transmit it lightly. One must practice for decades before it is transmitted. Nona Hutuktu was Tibetan. When he came to Shanghai, he transmitted it to only one person. When others asked him for Dharma and requested transmission, he said, “None of you have sufficient qualifications. This is esoteric practice without visualization, a Dharma whose practice goes straight to seeing the nature from the outset. This Dharma is not easy to practice. You can only practice the generation stage first and first practice well with channels, winds, and drops.”

In Japan, too, the Heart-Center Dharma is not lightly transmitted. There was a young monk from Taiwan who went to Japan’s Mount Koya to study esoteric Dharma for six years. When he saw the Heart-Center Dharma practice text, he asked his teacher to transmit it to him. His teacher said, “You are still a young monk and do not have the qualifications. Wait until you have attained a rank equivalent to that of an ācārya; when your qualifications are sufficient, it can be transmitted.” He asked, “Can I not learn it after living here for six years?” The teacher would not transmit it, so he had no choice but to go down the mountain and study in Tibet.

Tibetan Buddhism has the Kagyü, Gelug, Nyingma, and Sakya schools. Apart from the Nyingma school, the other schools do not have the Heart-Center Dharma. The Nyingma teacher said, “If you want to learn the Heart-Center Dharma, you may; live here another ten years. First learn other esoteric Dharmas, and afterward I will transmit it to you.” From this one can see that Tibet and Japan both have the Heart-Center Dharma, but they do not transmit it lightly. It belongs to the high and profound heart-essence portion of esoteric Dharma.

Therefore Samantabhadra Bodhisattva told our grandmaster: practice it well, and after practicing it well, go down the mountain to transmit it widely, so as to make up for the insufficiencies of Chan and Pure Land. In other words, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva saw the time and conditions and recognized that the causes and conditions for the Heart-Center Dharma to appear in the world had arrived. People practicing Chan could not arouse the doubt-sensation, could not open up, and could not see the original nature. The Heart-Center Dharma was used to remedy the insufficiencies of Chan and Pure Land. My grandmaster practiced on the mountain for eight years before realizing the Way, and only afterward did he descend the mountain to transmit the Heart-Center Dharma widely.

When my grandmaster came down the mountain and prepared to transmit the Heart-Center Dharma, everyone was very unfamiliar with it. They did not know what the Heart-Center Dharma was, and no one wanted to learn from him. He had no choice but to display a little spiritual power to attract people’s attention. The Buddhadharma is the true Dharma; one should not make a show of spiritual powers. By displaying spiritual powers in this way, my grandmaster drew criticism from Master Taixu and Master Yinguang, who thought that displaying spiritual powers lent support to a religion centered on ghosts and spirits and did not benefit the brightness of the Buddhadharma. My grandmaster said, “I too am unwilling to display spiritual powers, but I did it as a means for transmitting the Dharma, because Chinese esoteric Dharma had been interrupted for a very long time!”

The most important thing in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma is to practice the ten kinds of conduct-vows—that is, to make ten kinds of vows. Only then is one qualified to practice the Heart-Center Dharma. Only after practicing these ten conduct-vows can one come into accord with the Heart-Center Dharma.

First, trust all Buddhas; have no doubt about any Dharma; regard the pure Sangha with respect as teachers. Second, uphold the precepts without deficiency; keep the mind constantly in samādhi; see all dharmas as empty and equal, without attachment. Third, have a compassionate mind toward sentient beings; earnestly practice non-killing; regard sentient beings as oneself and be unable to bear eating their flesh. Fourth, when others have needs, give with an impartial mind; be gentle, humble, and modest, and do not give rise to pride. Fifth, do not violate your original vows; always benefit self and others; do not praise yourself and do not see others’ faults. Sixth, whether poor or rich, noble or lowly, the nature is originally nondual; let your speech always be soft, causing others to give rise to joy; let mind and intent be straightforward, far from flattery; respond appropriately to human

circumstances and skillfully employ conventional truth. Seventh, personally embody and practice the Buddha's instructions; protect the Buddhadharma as you would protect your own life; rescue and protect sentient beings without expecting repayment; even if sentient beings are arrogant, do not retreat in mind. Eighth, do not slight the true Dharma and do not cause others to slight it; do not slander the Three Jewels and do not cause others to slander them; when there are those who slight or slander, explain kindly so that they may enter through faith and not fall into the net of wrong views. Ninth, always guard right mindfulness; remain upright even when no one is watching; remain firm in excellent conduct and do not grow weary despite fatigue; make vast vows and gather the mind without retreating; always abide in the Great Vehicle and eliminate wrong views. Tenth, uphold one by one every part of the Dharma you practice; keep the pure esoteric mudrās and do not form them in defiled ways; practice for the sake of benefiting oneself and others, and do not use them for fame or material support.

Trust all Buddhas; all Dharmas are unobstructed

Trust all Buddhas. Whether they are Buddhas of the east, west, north, south, the four intermediate directions, above, below, left, or right, trust every Buddha. It is not that one Buddha is good and another is not good. Some people say Amitābha Buddha is higher than Śākyamuni Buddha, or that one Buddha is higher than another. In fact, all Buddhas are equal and have no high or low.

All Dharmas are unobstructed. Today people often criticize one another: Pure Land criticizes Chan, and Chan looks down on Pure Land. The Heart-Center Dharma is a higher-level Buddhist teaching within Esoteric Buddhism. As we discussed previously, Esoteric Buddhism has a nine-vehicle sequence: the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles. The Heart-Center Dharma belongs to the very summit of the secret three vehicles; it is the final Great Perfection Dharma—the Yoga of Incomparable Completion—and thus accords with the Great Perfection of the Nyingma school.

You may wonder: the Great Perfection is the highest Buddhadharma in the Nyingma school, but if the Heart-Center Dharma does not belong to the Nyingma school's Great Perfection, how can it be in accord with it? Let me explain. The Great Perfection of the Nyingma school is divided into two parts. One part is trekchö, translated in Chinese as "direct severance": as soon as a deluded thought arises, cut it off so that you do not wander after it, and so that mind itself appears. The second part is tögal, translated as "direct transcendence": practicing it enables one to transcend the three realms and end the cycle of birth and death.

The Heart-Center Dharma is precisely a practice of direct severance and direct transcendence. It is esoteric practice without visualization: with one mantra and six mudrās, one practices and directly sees the nature. There is no need to use any visualized form as a transition. In visualization-based methods, one must establish such visualized forms in practice and

afterward dissolve them into emptiness before one can see the original nature. That requires many detours and cannot be direct severance and direct transcendence.

Our original nature has no characteristics that can be seen, cannot be touched, and cannot be heard. At first, no one knows how to begin. Therefore Tibetan Esotericism must take many detours: first making full prostrations and other four preliminaries, then performing preliminary visualizations, bringing forth visualized forms to provide something concrete to work with before one can further practice the Dharma of seeing nature. The preliminary to Great Perfection trekchö also first practices with channels, winds, and drops. One first works with the winds and visualizes the channels—the central, left, and right channels, the crown wheel, throat wheel, heart wheel, navel wheel, perineum wheel, and so on—and after visualizing them well, dissolves those visualized forms into emptiness. This is called the preliminary to Great Perfection trekchö; it is a skillful means before practice.

We use the six mudrās and one mantra. We do not visualize channels. Right then and there, we gather our deluded mind onto one mantra. When reciting, we recite the mantra mentally and listen attentively: each syllable is formed in the mind, and its sound is heard clearly. This grasps the deluded activity of the mind faculty so that deluded thoughts do not arise, and one can immediately enter deep samādhi. This kind of practice is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's perfect penetration through the ear faculty.

Among the six faculties of beings in the Sahā world, the ear faculty is the sharpest. For example, the eyes can see many things and can see far away, but if a sheet of paper blocks them, they cannot see. The ears are not like this; even through a mountain, sound can still be heard. Again, if someone is asleep, showing him a piece of paper will not wake him, but if you call out, he wakes. Therefore the ear faculty is the sharpest, and it is best to use the ear faculty for practice. The Śūraṅgama Sutra explains this very clearly. Twenty-five great bodhisattvas each described their own methods of practice. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva said that he entered through the ear faculty. Finally, the Buddha asked Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva to choose which faculty was most appropriate and fastest for beings in the Sahā world to use in practice, and Mañjuśrī selected Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Dharma gate of the ear faculty. Because the ear faculty is the sharpest, we now use the ear faculty to listen to the sound of our own mantra-recitation. This grasps the mind faculty, and the sixth consciousness does not move. This method is more direct than Great Perfection—more of a “direct severance.”

Mental Recitation with Attentive Listening: Practicing According to the Dharma

Everyone should pay attention: when practicing, you must recite the mantra mentally and listen attentively to it; you must practice according to the Dharma. You absolutely must not recite the mantra with the mouth while the mind thinks about other matters. Reciting with the mouth while the mind is absent is useless. Buddha-recitation is the same. If you recite

“Amitābha Buddha” with the mouth while the mind is scattered, with thoughts in a mess, the Buddha-name is not recited properly, and in the future you will not reach the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, because the mind is too disturbed. If the mind is not pure, then when the Buddha appears, you will not see him. Master Yongming Yanshou said—Master Yongming Yanshou was a great patriarch of Chan and also a great patriarch of Pure Land; he was a grand-disciple in the Fayan school and finally turned his heart to Pure Land, so he is also a great Pure Land patriarch—“If the mouth recites ‘Amitābha’ while the mind is scattered, even shouting until the throat breaks is still in vain.”

Why did he say this? He said that the mind is like water. When the mind is forever pure, it is like river water becoming clear: the reflection of the moon in the sky then appears. Amitābha Buddha is like the moon in the sky, and our mind is like the water. If the water is not clear, the moon in the sky cannot appear. If the mind is not pure, Amitābha Buddha cannot appear in your mind; then you cannot see Amitābha Buddha come to welcome and guide you, and you cannot be reborn there.

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva teaches us to “gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” One must use the single sacred Name “Amitābha Buddha” to gather in the six faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and recite “Amitābha Buddha” calmly and quietly until one reaches one-pointedness of mind. Only then can one be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Among the six faculties, the mind faculty is the hardest to gather. Once one becomes still, deluded thoughts appear. Because we are used to movement, we do not know this before becoming still. Sometimes the mind is disturbed, and we do not even know it; after becoming still, it becomes easy to see. Why is this? When water becomes clear, the mud and sand settle and can be seen. When the water is not clear, the mud and sand cannot be seen. Therefore after sitting down, they are seen.

Delusive thoughts are distorted, and it is very hard to keep them from arising. Therefore we must practice mental recitation with attentive listening to gather the six faculties, cut off deluded thinking, and let body and mind fall away; then the original Buddha-nature manifests. Thus, practicing according to the Dharma is extremely important. If one does not practice according to the Dharma, one cannot see the nature.

All of you have practiced the Heart-Center Dharma for quite some time and ought to have some accomplishment. Why? Because you are originally Buddha; if you are willing to put things down, you can recover what is original and see the Way. If you have practiced for a long time and still cannot do it, it is because you have not practiced according to the Dharma.

The first kind of person who does not practice according to the Dharma sits and stops, stops and sits: today he sits, tomorrow he says his body is not well or affairs are busy, and he lets the practice lapse. Practicing this way will not do. It is like cooking rice: before the rice is cooked, you take it off the stove, let it cool, and then cook it again; taking it off again in this way makes the rice hard. Our study and practice of the Dharma is like rowing a boat

upstream. If we do not row with effort, the boat will be carried downstream by the water. Therefore intermittent practice is not good.

The second problem is failing to practice mental recitation with attentive listening. The recitation is not being heard clearly; one recites the mantra while also indulging deluded thoughts: “How should this matter be handled? How should that matter be solved?” This is not practicing according to the Dharma. The deluded mind is not cut off. If it is not cut off, how can one open up what is original? How can one see the original nature?

The third important reason is that outside formal sitting, one does not maintain clear observation; one forgets. During formal sitting, one practices diligently and earnestly, but outside formal sitting, one follows deluded thoughts and runs after objects. This is like practicing for one day and neglecting it for ten; the practice can hardly mature. Especially in this turbulent period, everyone invests in stocks. The mind goes to stocks: “Ah, have the stocks I bought made money? Have they risen? Have they fallen? Have I lost money?” One engages in upside-down delusive thinking and does not maintain clear observation. In practice, one must maintain clear observation at all times. As soon as a thought arises, see it and do not follow it. One must be clearly aware that what can speak, can see, and can hear is my original nature, and must not be swayed by objects. If these shortcomings are not corrected, one cannot see the Way.

The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate

When practicing the Heart-Center Dharma during formal sitting, use the method of vajra recitation: the lips move slightly while reciting the mantra, but no sound is produced. Reciting the mantra aloud injures the qi; silent recitation injures the blood. In practicing Dharma, first we must pay attention to the body. We must not damage it; therefore in sitting and practice we must protect the body. But when, in sitting, latent seeds surface and the mind becomes confused, when one is so restless one cannot sit, or when one is sinking into sleep and confused dreams arise, then one should recite the mantra aloud to remove those confused deluded thoughts and sleep demons so that one can enter samādhi. When this situation has not occurred, one should still use vajra recitation. The speed of mantra-recitation is ten to twelve times per minute.

When reciting, the mind must recite and the ears must hear. Each syllable passes through the mind. It is not recited with the mouth while the mind is absent. Use the ears to listen to the mantra sound arising inwardly, hearing it clearly and distinctly. In this way deluded thoughts can be gathered and held unmoving, and one gradually enters samādhi.

Our six faculties are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The mind faculty is like a monkey long accustomed to moving wildly. To make it quiet and unmoving, without giving rise to deluded thoughts, is very difficult. But if it is not gathered in and kept still, one cannot enter samādhi, awaken wisdom, and accomplish the Way. Therefore Mahāsthāmaprāpta

Bodhisattva teaches us that in buddha-recitation we must “gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” That is, when practicing Buddha-recitation, one must use the sacred Name “Amitābha Buddha” with utmost sincerity and earnestness to grasp eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind and keep them from moving; only then can one peacefully enter samādhi.

Among these six faculties, mind and ear are the hardest to gather. The eyes can be closed and not look at things; then the eye faculty is gathered. The mouth can hold the mantra; then the tongue faculty is gathered. The nose can avoid smelling different odors; then the nose faculty is gathered. The body can avoid contacting external objects; then the body faculty is gathered. But the human ear is the most sensitive. It can hear sounds very, very far away; even sounds separated by a mountain can be heard, and outer noise can disturb the mind. As for the mind faculty, it is even harder to gather. When you do not want it to move, thoughts spring up involuntarily. Why? This is habitual tendency from many lives and kalpas. It has become so accustomed to moving that it cannot remain still. In Buddhist terminology this is called “mental engagement.” It is also the first of the five omnipresent mental factors taught by the Yogācāra school: mental engagement, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. It exists within the eighth consciousness and moves constantly from moment to moment, flowing unceasingly like water. Therefore it is called continuous arising and ceasing. It is extremely subtle; ordinarily we cannot see it.

Some people say, “When we do not practice Dharma and do not sit, we have no thoughts. Once we practice Dharma and sit, thoughts appear. Is it that practice has ruined us and produced thoughts?” No. It is because ordinarily the mind is scattered and you do not see the thoughts moving wildly. After your mind becomes a little still, you see the thoughts moving.

What should be done? How can deluded thoughts be stopped? The only method is to use the ear faculty to gather the mind faculty. Use the ear faculty to listen quietly to the sound of buddha-recitation and gather the deluded thoughts. Because the mind cannot be used in two ways at once, if it single-mindedly listens to the Buddha-name and focuses on the Buddha-name, deluded thoughts naturally do not move. Therefore, in buddha-recitation one must focus on the six-character Chinese phrase, rendered here as “Namo Amitābha Buddha,” or the four-character phrase, “Amitābha Buddha,” hearing each syllable clearly and distinctly. Only then can one gather the deluded thoughts and keep them unmoving. Similarly, in mantra-recitation, each syllable must pass through the mind and be heard clearly by the ears. Only then is it according to the Dharma.

Thus, the essential point of sitting meditation is “mental recitation with attentive listening”: gathering deluded thoughts and keeping them unmoving so as to enter samādhi. Otherwise, while you sit here, your mouth recites the mantra or the Buddha-name, but your brain is thinking seven things and eight things. Then you cannot enter samādhi. You must recite mentally and listen attentively, and you must sit with the mind utterly resolved.

But the most important thing is still for the mind to be empty. Practice is for transcending the three realms and not remaining within the five phases, so everything must be put down in order to enter the Way. Household practitioners have one more layer of obstruction than monastics: they have families and many afflictions. Before one matter is settled, another arrives; there is no end to them. Therefore we must remain alert at all times and see through these worldly circumstances as false and unobtainable. If the mind does not love and cling to them, coarse delusions can cease to arise.

Next, one diligently applies effort in sitting and mantra-recitation. Subtle delusions will inevitably come to invade. These are habitual tendencies from many lives and kalpas; they are used to moving and cannot stop all at once. But do not fear them. When a thought jumps out and you can see it, do not pay attention to it, and the deluded thought naturally dissolves. If a thought comes and you cannot see it, then you run along with it, and that prevents you from entering samādhi.

The most important thing in sitting is to put everything down. The mind must be clear and distinct. When a thought comes, see it; do not pay attention to it. Do not dislike it or suppress it. Disliking is itself a kind of deluded mind. Suppression will not do either; it cannot be suppressed to death. It is like pressing grass down with a stone. When the stone is removed, the grass grows again; this will not do. Even if you could suppress it to death, you would instead become like earth, wood, metal, or stone, unable to function. Therefore one must use a flexible method of redirection, not a method of suppression. When a thought comes, simply do not pay attention to it; resume reciting the mantra, and the deluded thought naturally transforms and dissolves.

As one practices sitting and mantra-recitation so diligently, when one reaches one-pointedness of mind, the mantra naturally drops away and can no longer be recited. Why is this? The mind with which we hold the mantra is still a deluded mind with subject and object: there is the mind that recites and the mantra that is recited. Buddha-recitation is the same: there is the mind that recites and the Buddha who is recited. Subject and object in opposition are deluded mind. What is relative is false, not real. The real mind is absolute and without characteristics. Whatever bears characteristics is illusory. If we truly hold the mantra to the point of one-pointedness of mind, all relative and illusory things drop away and vanish completely. At that time body, mind, and world are all emptied, space itself shatters, and the genuine, uncontrived original nature is revealed in its entirety.

After receiving empowerment and practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, there may be a period of diarrhea. Do not be afraid. This occurs because the Dharma's power is taking effect. This Dharma's empowering force is extremely great, causing filth, defilement, and habitual obstructions to be discharged through the bowels. It is like changing the belly; it is a good thing, so do not fear it.

Awakening at the level of principle must still be followed by direct realization

After practicing Dharma for a period of time, you may gain some understanding when reading Chan materials. That is awakening at the level of principle. Understanding words is not of much use. Because there is no direct realization and meditative stability is insufficient, even if you understand some principles, when events arise you cannot withstand them. Therefore conceptual awakening cannot end birth and death. Only direct realization—personally seeing original nature—has practical force.

Seeing it is of course not seeing with the eyes, but direct realization of the original nature by the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground. The original nature has no characteristics that can be seen. The eyes can only see things that have form. At that time you yourself are not there, so what eyes are there? What seeing is there? Although the dharmakāya has no characteristics that can be seen, it is not annihilationist emptiness. It is real great function, great energy. All phenomena and circumstances in the world are its manifestations and transformations. It is like electricity: the eyes cannot see it, but without it the world could not operate. It is also like “the salty taste in seawater.” People can see seawater, but they cannot see the saltiness in the seawater; yet it really exists. When our practice reaches the point where body, mind, and world have all dissolved into emptiness, when the time ripens one naturally knows; the mind comprehends, and one realizes the Way. This is called the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground being able to see the Way.

After seeing the Way, is one successful? Many people think that one is successful in this way. No. One is not successful; one is still very far from it. One has just opened the treasury and caught only a glimpse. This is only the threshold of the dharmakāya; it does not yet count. Birth and death still cannot be ended. One must still strive forward and remove all bad habits before the practice is complete.

Because of this point, Pure Land practitioners often say Chan is not good: even if one apprehends Mind and sees nature, birth and death still cannot be ended; it would be safer to practice Buddha-recitation and be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss to end birth and death. At the moment of first apprehending Mind and seeing nature, it is only initial awakening, breaking through one’s fundamental case, just crossing the first threshold. Deluded habits remain, and birth and death cannot yet be ended. One must diligently protect it, train the mind amid circumstances, and extinguish all the deluded habits of attachment accumulated through many lives and kalpas. One must truly accord with the Diamond Sutra’s statement, “All marks whatsoever are false”: not delighted by favorable conditions, not troubled by adverse conditions, and not moved in the slightest. Only then can delusions of thought be ended and fragmentary birth-and-death ended.

The Diamond Sutra says, “Past, present, and future mind cannot be obtained.” Since mind cannot be obtained, what is there to move? For one who has truly seen the nature, there is

only this awakened awareness; everything else is unobtainable. One must go further upward still: not abiding even in awakened awareness and unobtainability is true completion. If, upon seeing circumstances, the mind arises and turns according to thoughts, that is not a person who has seen the nature and awakened.

Many appearances may arise in the course of sitting, such as beautiful lights of Buddhas and bodhisattvas or ugly demonic appearances. Do not pay attention to any of them. Whatever bears characteristics is false. Once one clings to marks, one easily falls into demonic influence. Also, as one passes from a phase in which appearances remain to one in which they fall away, some changes can arise, such as the body disappearing, or the hands, feet, and head disappearing. Do not pay attention to them. Or perhaps the breath seems about to stop, or the head seems about to explode. There is no need for fear. These are preludes to the falling away of body and mind. If one becomes afraid or startled, all previous effort is lost and one comes out of samādhi.

When the practice reaches full maturity, there is suddenly a great explosion: inwardly body and mind, outwardly the world, all disappear together, and space itself shatters. Then the original nature appears. But you must not attach to marks and seek this explosion. Once you attach to marks, you are covered by deluded thoughts; not only will there be no explosion, you will not even enter emptiness. Esoteric Buddhism has this benefit: it often receives the empowering aid of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, using external explosive sounds to trigger an inner explosion. But one must absolutely not seek it, imagine when it will come, or keep the mind waiting for it or welcoming it. All appearances arising in meditative states during sitting must be ignored. You must set them aside and pay them no attention. The warning line of the Diamond Sutra must be firmly remembered: “All marks whatsoever are false.” All such appearances are false. If you do not pay attention to them, there is no problem. Once you pay attention to them and cling to them, there is danger of demonic attachment.

For second-fruit arhats, as soon as one thought moves, the next thought notices it. Although they can avoid abiding in marks and, once it is noticed, return home and sit securely, thoughts still arise and cease; there is still birth and death. Therefore they still undergo three rounds of birth in the heavens and descent to the human realm before they can end fragmentary birth-and-death. Thus a person who has opened up what is original has not finished the great matter. One must still diligently remove habitual tendencies, enter the stage of the third-fruit arhat in which the mind does not move when meeting events, and then go further upward into the unconditioned, reaching avaiartika, the stage of non-retrogression. Only then is there an initial completion.

Thought, delusive attachment, and contrivance all belong to conditioned activity. In practice, from the first ground through the seventh ground is conditioned. Entering the eighth ground is unconditioned. Although the seventh ground has already attained the unconditioned, there is still an “unconditioned,” still a trace of the unconditioned, so it is not yet clean. At the eighth ground, that trace of the unconditioned is removed. Therefore each of us must measure

ourselves: when meeting objects, is the mind not moved at all? If there are still rises and falls of deluded mind in ordinary times, that is not acceptable. Amid circumstances, attachment to objects is even more unacceptable. At all times and all places, the mind must be empty and washed clean, able to function responsively as conditions arise, without attachment. The application of true emptiness as marvelous presence and marvelous presence as true emptiness—that is real awakening.

When thoughts arise, do not follow

Aside from sitting meditation, the most important thing is daily practice. Always watch yourself. As soon as a thought arises, see it and do not follow it. If a thought arises and you do not see it, and only after running after it for a long distance do you notice it, that will not do. Chan says, “Do not fear thoughts arising; only fear noticing them too late.” It is not a problem that a thought arises; the problem is that you do not notice it and follow it. Following thoughts is birth and death. Only after following thoughts for a long way do you notice—this means you have already been dead for a long time, and it also proves that in the future you will not be able to end birth and death. If a thought arises and in the next moment we notice it without following it, then we can be free in taking birth. Freedom in taking birth is not yet the end of birth and death. Birth and death are still present, but at the point of birth and death one can determine one’s own course and go wherever one wishes, and not be dragged by karmic obstructions into undergoing karmic retribution.

Degrees of Practice

The first step: when thoughts arise, do not follow. The first step in practice is this: when thoughts arise, do not follow. If you can do this, you can remain in command amid birth and death, not be dragged by karma, and gain great freedom.

The second step: personally realize the unconditioned. Whatever matters come, let them come; my mind does not move. This is genuinely adapting to circumstances, not suppressing things to keep them from moving. Suppressing them so that they do not move will not do. One must handle all kinds of affairs, adapt to whatever circumstances arise, and not discriminate between good and bad. One is not pleased by what is good or disgusted by what is bad. In this way our mind can be peaceful and reach a state of equality in the unconditioned. When one reaches this point, one can transform freely; one can transform freely even within fragmentary birth-and-death, and fragmentary birth-and-death is thereby ended. The first step is to gain freedom within birth and death. The second step is freedom in transformation: one can transform the coarse into the subtle and the short into the long, reaching the stage of an eighth-ground bodhisattva and manifesting the three kinds of mind-made bodies.

The third step: extinguishing the subtle stream. The subtle stream is the “mental engagement” mentioned above. Mental engagement flows within the field of the eighth consciousness.

Ordinarily you cannot see it. Only by entering deep Vajra-Potalaka Great Samādhi can one see and extinguish it. At this step, after the subtle stream has been completely extinguished, one can manifest hundreds of thousands of millions of emanation bodies and liberate hundreds of thousands of millions of sentient beings. Only then has one truly reached home. It is not that everything is finished after a single awakening; the difference is very great. Therefore one must still practice well.

Without bodhicitta, one cannot accomplish the Way. What is bodhicitta? In simple explanation, it is “seeking above and liberating below”: above, seeking the Buddha Way; below, liberating sentient beings. We practice Dharma in order to liberate sentient beings below, not for our own liberation.

That everyone today can receive this Dharma is truly a supreme blessing. Chan practice requires decades of dedicated investigation to open up what is original. Today, people do not have the time to investigate Chan all day long. Relying on the Heart-Center Dharma with the Buddha’s empowering support is much easier and faster. Chan investigation by one’s own strength is like walking on two feet; practicing the Heart-Center Dharma with the Buddha’s empowering support is like riding in a car or airplane. Therefore the two differ in speed.

Having received this Dharma, you must cherish it, take it seriously, protect it, and practice diligently without interruption. Practicing today and stopping tomorrow definitely cannot succeed. The Heart-Center Dharma is even more wondrous because it melts the myriad Dharmas into one furnace. Śākyamuni Buddha taught that forming the fourth mudrā in Heart-Center practice can lead to birth in the Western Pure Land, and can also lead to birth in the Pure Lands of the ten directions according to one’s vows—this is Pure Land. Opening up what is original and seeing the original nature is Chan. Realizing to the end, the mind penetrates the worlds of the ten directions: the worlds of the ten directions are perfectly present in my mind; the Buddhas are in my mind, and I am in the Buddhas’ minds; light and light mutually include each other in layer after layer without end, interpenetrating one another without obstruction—this is the Huayan school. Therefore, when we say that the Heart-Esoteric school includes all schools without remainder, it is really not an exaggeration.

This Dharma is not easy to receive. I earnestly ask everyone to practice well, persist in sitting meditation and in maintaining clear observation, and not treat it lightly. More important still is practice outside formal sitting. It is not that after sitting two hours, one can let the wild horse loose and act recklessly. One must also, in walking, sitting, standing, and lying down, never forget to maintain clear observation. Only then can one come into accord with the Great Way.

Six essential points of practice

First, put everything down and be utterly resolved. What use is it to cling to worldly things and be unable to put them down? Every thing and event in this world is formed by causes and

conditions and has no independent reality. It is like passing clouds before the eyes: empty and unreal, impossible to obtain, impossible to take away. Even your own body is provisionally existent; it cannot be kept and cannot be obtained. As for things outside the body, that goes without saying. Therefore, taking things as real and gripping them tightly is such foolishness that those who understand would scarcely find it worth laughing at. Studying Buddhism and practicing the Way is an undertaking for people of great resolve and wisdom; those of shallow capacity and little wisdom cannot sustain it. To accomplish the Way, the first requirement is to see through everything. Only by sitting with complete, settled resolve can one enter samādhi and awaken. If, during formal sitting, you think about this and that and let deluded thoughts fly everywhere, it is finished. You must put everything down and be like a dead person.

Second, sit and hold the mantra with mental recitation and attentive listening. This is the essential point of Heart-Esoteric practice. It is extremely important for entering samādhi and awakening, so I remind everyone again and again: follow this instruction exactly, without compromise. Our delusive thinking is deeply habituated to movement. If you do not single-mindedly listen to the sound of the mantra as you recite it mentally and gather the mind faculty, deluded thoughts will not settle. If deluded thoughts do not settle, how can you enter samādhi and awaken? Therefore the mantra must be recited mentally and heard clearly, syllable by syllable. Only then can the mind faculty be gathered so that deluded thoughts do not arise, and one gradually enters samādhi.

Third, when a thought arises, notice it immediately; do not suppress it and do not follow it. When thoughts come, you must be able to see them. If you do not see them, you follow them and run. Once you run after thoughts, deluded thoughts fly everywhere and you cannot enter samādhi. Therefore, when a thought arises, notice it immediately. Do not wander along with them, and do not suppress them to keep them from arising. Simply do not pay attention to them; reestablish right mindfulness and hold the mantra single-mindedly, and deluded thoughts naturally dissolve so that you peacefully enter samādhi.

Fourth, begin each sitting at a fixed time, neither hurried nor slack. Sit at a fixed time every day. Once a habit is formed, it becomes easier to enter samādhi. The best time is morning; dawn is even better. When sitting, do not be anxious to enter samādhi. With a peaceful mood and an ordinary mind, sit down calmly and recite the mantra in an unhurried and unforced way. Do not seek to enter samādhi or awaken, and still less should you delusively seek spiritual powers. A single thought of seeking samādhi, awakening, or spiritual powers is itself deluded mind. Once this mind arises, it obstructs the gate of one's own awakening. Not only will one not awaken, one will also be unable to enter samādhi.

Fifth, outside formal sitting, maintain continuous, close observation. Extend the stillness and samādhi developed during sitting into daily activity. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, quietly and steadily apply it for yourself, maintaining continuous, close observation. In

all things, do not abide. Do not let objects drag you away, and do not wander along with deluded thoughts.

Sixth, make the mind vast and open, able to contain everything. A practitioner's mind must not be narrow; one must be broad-minded and magnanimous, able to contain everything. Even if others are not good to me, I must be even better to them, without the slightest thoughts of attachment, dislike, delight, or aversion. Do every good deed as conditions allow and according to one's capacity. At all times and places, be natural, free, and at ease, with no mind of worrying over gain or loss, and no thought of praise or blame, success or failure. This is the greatest spiritual power. Remember these six points and practice according to them. You will certainly be able to open up what is original and personally realize Buddha-nature. If you do these six points well without the slightest slackening, I guarantee you can perfectly realize bodhi and attain great accomplishment!

4. 禅海微澜 / Ripples in the Sea of Chan

4A. 高峰、主人公在什么处 / Gaofeng: Where Is the True Host?

Chinese source: 《禅海微澜》; the subsection sequence follows the Chinese source.

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When Chan Master Gaofeng Miao first called on Venerable Duanqiao Lun, Duanqiao instructed him to investigate the saying, “From where do you come at birth, and to where do you go at death?” From then on he worked day and night without slackening, neither sleeping nor resting. Later he called on Venerable Xueyan Qin. Qin asked, “Who is it that dragged this dead corpse here for you?” Before the master could answer, he was beaten and driven out. This happened who knows how many times, yet the master not only felt no resentment; he became even more reverent in his inquiry. (People today need not be beaten repeatedly; even if the words are only a little stern, they become displeased, turn their backs, and walk away. From this we can see how earnest and sincere the ancients were in their practice. With such focused and wholehearted effort, how could they not awaken and realize the Way? How can we later students not feel ashamed, arouse ourselves, and advance vigorously?)

While investigating the huatou, the master once remembered in a dream the saying that Duanqiao Lun had raised in the interview room: “The myriad dharmas return to one; to where does the one return?” The doubt-sensation suddenly arose, and for three days and nights he did not close his eyes. (In Chan investigation, it is essential to arouse the doubt-sensation. Once the doubt-sensation arises, it envelops the whole body and condenses into a single mass; then a breakthrough is near.)

One day, on the anniversary of Bodhidharma’s passing, he went with the assembly to the Three Stupas to chant sutras. He happened to lift his head and saw, on the wall, an image of Venerable Wuzu Fayan (of the Baiyun Duan branch of the Yangqi line of Linji, and teacher of Yuanwu Keqin). The encomium on the portrait said, “A hundred years, thirty-six thousand mornings; again and again, originally it is this fellow.” Suddenly he awakened, breaking through the huatou of dragging the dead corpse.

After awakening, he went to Nanming and again paid respects to Venerable Qin. As soon as Qin saw him, he asked, “Who is it that dragged this dead corpse here?” The master immediately shouted. (After awakening, his bearing was extraordinary.) Qin picked up his staff. (Testing him again.) The master seized it and said, “Today you cannot strike me.” (Truly a worthy fellow.) Qin said, “Why can I not strike you?” (Heavens! He let one move slip past.) The master brushed his sleeves and left. (Fortunately there was this move.)

The next day Qin asked, “The myriad dharmas return to one; to where does the one return?” (What boundless paternal compassion!) The master said, “A dog licking a hot oil cauldron.” (He also knows that you want to advance but cannot, and want to retreat but cannot.) Qin said, “Where did you pick up this empty trick?” (Who are you asking? It came from the Venerable’s harsh testing.) The master said, “Precisely to make the Venerable doubt it.” (With the principle on his side, he yields no ground.) Qin stopped. (There was nothing he could do with him; he could only swallow his words and fall silent.) From then on, the master yielded to no one in Chan repartee. (Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored.)

One day Qin asked an ordinary-sounding question: “In the vast busyness of daytime, can you remain in command?” (Casting a line a thousand feet deep, his intention is on the golden-scaled fish; why cut into healthy flesh and make a wound?) The master said, “I can remain in command.” (I had thought otherwise—but so this was how it was. Sure enough, he had lost his fixed point of reference.) Qin then asked, “In sleep and dreams, can you remain in command?” (Frost added to snow; a repeated offense cannot be excused.) The master replied, “I can remain in command.” (Still he is not awake; how deep in the mud his feet are sunk!) Qin then asked, “When you are actually asleep, with no dreams and no thinking, no seeing and no hearing, where exactly is the true host?” (I ask the Venerable; it would not hurt to add one more blow. Could it be somewhere else?) The master had no words. (The ancient Buddha had long passed by; he had already shown his defeat.)

Qin instructed him, “From today on, I do not want you to study Buddha or study Dharma; I do not want you to exhaust antiquity and the present. Just eat when hungry and sleep when tired. As soon as you wake from sleep, gather your spirit and ask me: in this sleep, where does the true host find its footing and make its home?” (Better not mislead other people’s sons and daughters; for now, treat this living horse as though it were beyond saving and try a last-resort treatment.) The master then roused his resolve to investigate. He vowed to himself: even if I spend my whole life as an ordinary rice-and-gruel monk, I must understand this matter. (Worthy of a true man; how could a good man be willing to rot away together with grass and trees?)

One day, while he was napping at noon, a fellow monk staying in the same room was careless and knocked the master’s pillow to the floor. With a thud, the master became greatly and thoroughly awakened. (Already eight watches too late! Could this monk have been a manifestation of Great Compassion Bodhisattva?) (Note: the remarks in parentheses are the author’s inserted comments.)

Reading this koan, besides sincerely revering and admiring Patriarch Gaofeng’s tireless and devoted spirit of investigation and his profound realization, we also gain the following precious lessons.

First, if we truly want to transcend rebirth and end birth and death, then in Chan investigation we must let go of everything, be utterly resolved, and hold firmly to a single huatou devoid of

conceptual meaning. Morning and evening, whether wandering or in adversity, investigate it diligently and tirelessly day and night. Only then can we open up what is original and personally realize true reality. It is absolutely not that one understands a little textual doctrine, can engage in a few rounds of Chan repartee, can give a few turning words, or can play with words and write a few verses, and then count this as awakening. Nor does being relaxed, happy, peaceful, and at ease when the physical body is strong and life is comfortable count as awakening.

Second, Chan investigation must arouse the doubt-sensation. When the doubt-sensation arises, it can cut off deluded thoughts and gather explosive power. Once the time and conditions arrive, it is like gunpowder meeting a spark: it explodes at once, and right there one opens the mysterious pass and the lock of consciousness, personally seeing the original reality. Otherwise, deluded thoughts do not cease, there is no power to explode, and time is wasted in vain. Thus the ancients said, “Great doubt, great awakening; small doubt, small awakening; no doubt, no awakening.” This is not an empty saying.

Third, although Chan people who can speak verbal Chan and play with words may for a time seem to have some Chan flavor, this is only a temporary false semblance. Their minds are not empty, clear, and open; before their eyes there is always some thing. Even if they force themselves to quiet the mind and sit, there is still faintly some thing in the mind. The light never shines through unobstructed. How then can they dissolve body, mind, and world and directly realize what is original? Having not directly realized what is original, how can they quiet the restless monkey-mind and galloping thoughts and attain the great calm samādhi? Therefore, once adversity arrives, the peaceful and pleasant mood they usually speak of disappears to who knows where. Such people cannot remain in command in dreams; they cannot do so even in ordinary daytime activity. Let alone being steadily unmoved in agreeable conditions that are harder to detect, without the slightest shifting—even when the more easily recognized adverse condition comes, they cannot help following the condition in anger and resentment. Especially when the demon of illness comes upon them, they are utterly unable to withstand it; they groan in pain and are helpless in every way. Chan Master Dahui Gao scolded such Chan people as being like mercury in medicinal solution: when it meets fire, it flies off. They do not gain genuine use. How then can they end birth and death and leave saṃsāra? Therefore he warned us later students of Chan that we must truly investigate and genuinely inquire, and not seek the key among words and doctrines.

Fourth, Chan Master Gaofeng’s first two replies, “I can remain in command,” are indeed good practice. They are a model and example for us later students in practice. We study Buddhism and practice the Way precisely in order to remain in command at the brink of birth and death, not being dragged by karmic obstructions into the sea of suffering. To accomplish this, while alive we must first remain in command amid ordinary daytime activity: not swayed by favorable or adverse conditions and not carried away by delusive emotional reactions of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure. Only after that can we remain in command in dreams. If one

cannot even do this, what is there to say about ending birth and death? The root of birth and death is precisely that deluded thoughts do not cease and one follows objects into grasping. For practitioners at the present stage, to remain in command by day and not be led by conditions is already not easy—how much more must one remain in command in dreams? Dreaming is a state of partial stupor; at death, when the four elements disperse, there is deep stupor. If one cannot remain in command in the lesser stupor, how can one remain in command in the greater stupor and end birth and death? Thus, to practice the mind and realize the Way, to leave the round of birth and death, one must first remain in command in dreams.

Yet even for those of generous, heroic, and vigorous spirit, although in the daytime they may be free of cares and of both aversion and attachment amid favorable or adverse conditions, in dreams they are often helplessly captured by dream-demons and carried along. Now, that Chan Master Gaofeng could remain in command in dreams and not be led by dream-demons—what extraordinary mastery of samādhi this was! Without such arduous investigation that made him break into a heavy sweat time and again, how could he have reached this? For a practitioner of mind to reach this level in practice is truly not easy. How can we fail to admire and praise him?

Looking back at people who practice today, most are unwilling to stand firmly on solid ground and investigate diligently. Instead they take the easy way out: they make intellectual interpretations of words and doctrines, or seek ready-made answers from the mouths of others. After understanding a few similar-sounding principles, they play with words, write essays, compose verses, and give turning phrases, thinking that they have thoroughly awakened and realized the Way. In reality, they are only eating other people's leftovers and scraps. None of this touches their own great matter, and at the brink of birth and death they cannot remain in command in the slightest. Words, phrases, essays, and verses must flow from one's own breast and heart; only then can they cover heaven and cover earth.

Some people, while practicing, occasionally experience a minor meditative state—for example, the physical body grows large, they fly through space, breathing stops and they enter a fetal-breathing state, or some kind of spiritual power appears—and they then believe they have realized the Way and become sages. In reality these are only illusory states appearing within meditative absorption, still very far from realization of the Way. In meditative absorption, one must not attach to any state. Once one attaches, one stagnates and cannot go forward. Especially after some spiritual powers appear, one must even less become complacent, taking oneself to have attained something. Once there is satisfaction in having attained, not only can one not realize the Way; there is great likelihood of entering demonic states. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra's fifty skandha-demon states refer precisely to such illusory processes that obstruct the Way. Practitioners must never attach to them, lest they mistakenly enter a wrong path and fall into demon ways.

Some arrogant people quote the Heart Sūtra and the Diamond Sūtra, saying, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form,” and “All marks whatsoever are false.” Since all phenomenal appearances are illusory, unreal, and unobtainable, then whether they are favorable or adverse, beautiful or ugly, I need only respond to them without mind and not be led by them. What need is there to investigate Chan or practice Buddha-recitation? If there were Chan to investigate or a Buddha to be mindful of, would that not be adding delusion to delusion? These words may appear not to be wrong, but as soon as adversity is encountered or some unexpected accident occurs, everything falls apart and comes to nothing.

There are also some who mistakenly think that one awakening finishes everything. Having first broken through the fundamental case, they think the practice is complete, and no longer diligently maintain clear observation or train the mind amid conditions. As a result, old habits remain as before; they become wild, arrogant, and conceited, and gain no genuine use. In the end, they fall into post-awakening delusion and continue wandering with birth and death. Is this not needless suffering? Still others mistakenly listen to people who say that spiritual powers can be used to verify whether one has awakened. When the practice takes hold and reaches the crucial point, suddenly body, mind, and world dissolve into emptiness and shatter, while numinous clarity remains unobscured and everything is clear and distinct. Yet because they do not see mystical spiritual powers, they do not know what this is and mistakenly think it is not their own original life-source; they let it slip by in haste. How regrettable! Having missed this critical opportunity and thereby set themselves back, they then use this to deny others. This is truly self-inflicted misfortune from which one cannot escape. The ancients once lamented, “Precisely because it is so close at hand, one recognizes it too late.” How deeply lamentable.

Today we record this koan for everyone’s reference in the hope that you will draw lessons from it, know where to improve, strive upward, and truly realize it, so as not to waste time and miss this life.

After learning from and praising the protagonist’s sincerity in the Way and his deep proficiency in practice, we should further discuss the subtle points of the koan and the key to practicing the Way, so that everyone may deeply understand the exact meaning of the Chan school, go straight to the source, and not be misled by halfway stages of practice. Only then will we not fail the deep intention of the ancients.

Patriarch Gaofeng’s first two replies, “I can remain in command,” are indeed good practice, beyond what ordinary Chan monks can reach. But if we examine them carefully from the standpoint of the Chan school’s “sudden awakening,” they still fall somewhat short. I will briefly state the subtle point as follows.

Chan is the Dharma gate of directly seeing the nature and suddenly awakening to Buddhahood. It is not a Dharma gate of gradual practice through stages. The ancients once said, “Even Equal Enlightenment and Wondrous Enlightenment are still only the one who

carries its straw sandals.” If even Equal and Wondrous Enlightenment are not worth a glance, how much less anything below them? Therefore, in the Chan school, no intermediate process is allowed; there can be no trace of practice mixed in. Chan—the treasury of the true Dharma eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa—is without a single thread, without a single speck of dust: pure and uncovered, clean and stainless. Since there is no relative objective realm and no subjective person who sees and hears, who is there to command whom?

After Xueyan Qin could not break Gaofeng with the first two questions, “Who dragged this dead corpse here for you?” and “The myriad dharmas return to one; to where does the one return?”, he deliberately made ordinary conversation to bait Gaofeng and see whether he had already eradicated everything and reached the stage of effortless functioning. But who would have known that Gaofeng’s footing was not yet stable? As soon as he was baited, he bit, answering unreflectively, “I can remain in command.” Does this not establish a fixed point, together with relative subject and object? It is not in accord with pure, uncovered Chan. In the Chan school, this reply is called “damaging the blade and wounding the hand; failing to cut through completely.” It binds one’s own hands and feet. By the second answer, “I can remain in command,” he had bound his whole body solidly and could not move. When the third question came, “When there are no dreams and no thinking, no seeing and no hearing, where is the true host?” he could only choke back his voice, fall silent, and become trapped by the words.

When the time and conditions later matured, the pillow fell to the ground and he was thoroughly released. Only then did he awaken as if from a dream: the true host was never elsewhere. The mountains, rivers, great earth, grasses, trees, and forests are all nothing other than the true host’s manifestation. Birds singing, flowers fragrant, orioles calling, swallows dancing—all are nothing other than the true host’s wondrous function. What need is there to speak of a master or no master, much less of being or not being in command? Were his previous answers not a complete mess?

Finally, I will offer three other answers to Xueyan’s questions for the enjoyment of fellow practitioners, and also as a greeting-gift to meet Chan Master Gaofeng.

1. Question: In the daytime, can you remain in command?

Answer: Hungry, I eat; tired, I sleep.

2. Question: In dreams and sleep, can you remain in command?

Answer: The morning sun rises; the moon holds the mountain.

3. Question: When there are no dreams and no thinking, no seeing and no hearing, where is the true host?

Answer: In the great void, drinking light, long separation dissolves; the wind stirs pale green, willow strands light.

4B. 开示悟入佛知见 / Opening, Revealing, Awakening to, and Entering the Buddha's Knowing and Seeing

The World-Honored One, out of compassion for sentient beings who originally possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata but do not know it, saw that they were deluded by sounds and forms, sinking in the six paths with no prospect of escaping suffering. Therefore he descended into the world, manifested a body, and taught the Dharma, in order to awaken sentient beings from their dream of delusion, to realize this one mind of quiescent extinction, to leave the sea of suffering, and to ascend the shore of awakening.

Yet because sentient beings' afflictions and defilements were heavy, he did not dare immediately reveal this wondrously numinous one mind. He began in the Āgama assemblies by teaching the ten wholesome deeds that lead to human and heavenly rebirth, so that beings might avoid falling into the three evil destinies. Later he taught impermanence, emptiness, suffering, no-self, the Four Noble Truths, and the twelve links of dependent origination, enabling sentient beings provisionally to leave the three realms and make a temporary departure from birth and death. Next he taught *prajñā*, revealing "true emptiness, marvelous presence", thereby breaking the two vehicles' attachment to one-sided emptiness.

After forty years, when the Buddha was about to enter *nirvāṇa*, only then, in the Lotus assembly, did he speak solely of true reality and directly reveal the one mind. In doing so he made clear the equal Buddha-nature: the three vehicles return to one, the five natures all enter, and all who have mind can become Buddhas. Only at this point were the World-Honored One's original intent and his original purpose in liberating beings fully expressed.

This mind-essence is originally numinous and bright, open, clear, and all-pervasive; numinously fused, clear, and still, such as it is and without constraint. Ordinary beings and sages are of one suchness; sentient beings and Buddhas are equal. Deluded about it, birth and death continue without beginning; awakening to it, samsaric wandering ceases at once. The key lies in forgetting words and inwardly realizing it, cutting off conceptual thought so that the mind opens. Therefore practitioners of Chan investigation value arousing the doubt-sensation, relying on it to cut off deluded attachment and false thoughts, thereby opening up what is original and personally realizing self-nature.

But when beginning Chan investigation, one must first establish the proper causal basis for practice—what one takes as the practice, and what one takes as the point of return. Once the direction is clear and the principle is settled, only then can one empty what has been attained. The term Chan is an abbreviation of *chánà* (禅那), the Chinese transcription of Sanskrit *dhyāna*; it means "quiet contemplation" or "contemplative practice." Because practitioners' mental dispositions differ and their aims vary, their practice and realization also differ. According to Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi's Preface to the Source of Chan, "Within the gate of

Chan there are shallow and deep levels, with different grades. According to differences in the causal basis of practice and the fruit realized, they may be divided into five types.”

First: those who hold deviant views and practice by aspiring upward while despising what is below—this is non-Buddhist meditation.

Second: those who have correct faith in cause and effect, but still practice with a mind of joyful aspiration and revulsion—this is the Chan of ordinary people.

Third: those who awaken to the principle of the emptiness of self, but only to the biased truth—this is the Chan of the lesser vehicle.

Fourth: those who awaken to the true principle revealed by the emptiness of both self and dharmas—this is Mahāyāna Chan. (The above four types all include distinctions of the four dhyānas of the form realm and the four formless absorptions.)

Fifth: “If one suddenly awakens that one’s own mind is originally pure, that from the beginning there are no afflictions, that the undefiled wisdom-nature is originally complete, that this mind is Buddha and is ultimately no different, and if one practices in dependence on this, this is the supreme-vehicle Chan. It is also called the samādhi of one practice and the samādhi of suchness. It is the root of all samādhis. If one can practice it thought after thought, one will naturally and gradually attain hundreds and thousands of samādhis. What was transmitted from generation to generation in Bodhidharma’s gate is this Chan.”

From this we can see that since the Chan transmitted by the Chan school is the fifth type, then before a Chan practitioner begins investigating a huatou, one should first open the Buddha’s knowing and seeing, understanding that one originally possesses the Tathāgata’s wisdom and is no different from the Buddha. Only after that should one hold firmly to a huatou and investigate it diligently and tirelessly. Further relying on the skillful prompting of a clear-eyed teacher, one can then open up what is original and enter the Buddha’s knowing and seeing.

What is precious in the Lotus Sūtra is that it directly reveals to us without the slightest concealment: all sentient beings originally possess the same numinous, subtle, perfect, open, and penetrating mind-essence of quiescent extinction as the Buddha. Practicing from this, none fail to accomplish. Therefore the most crucial essence of that sutra lies in opening, revealing, awakening to, and entering the Buddha’s knowing and seeing.

In order to urge students to work, guide practitioners to awakening, and help later generations advance, the patriarchs of past ages each had subtle and lucid expressions and appraisals of this key point in practice. These are often seen in Chan records.

At the end of the Qing dynasty, Patriarch Fazhu of Chishan in Nanjing was a great contemporary master of the Linji school. His Dharma style spread far, and dragons and elephants all returned to him. For a time, eminent figures such as Yuexia and Chuquan gathered under him and followed him in investigation.

One day the master ascended the hall and instructed the assembly: “When the Buddha-selection ground opens, heroic talent appears. Each of you must speak forth your true seeing. This is the Buddha-selection ground, the place where dragons and elephants are trained. It is not a place for you to come eat idle meals, sleep, and doze. Today I am going to test you, to see who among you is a hero of this matter and a talent of the school. The essential meaning of the entire precious Lotus Sūtra lies in opening, revealing, awakening to, and entering the Buddha’s knowing and seeing. Within it are profound meanings; the patriarchs of successive generations each displayed their own distinctive insight and skillful means, with layer upon layer of increasingly wondrous instruction and exposition. It is truly like flowers and brocade, too beautiful to take in. All who read it revere, admire, praise, and benefit greatly. But that belongs to each of those patriarchs. It is not your own. To pick up other people’s spittle and remain in letters and phrases is of no benefit to awakening. Today I want each of you to speak from your own breast. Let us see who has genuine knowledge and true seeing.”

After Patriarch Fazū said this, he drew from the bamboo lot holder a marked bamboo tally bearing a name and called out, “Chuquan”—the Dharma ancestor of Laiguō of Gaomin Monastery in Yangzhou—“you speak first. ‘Open’—how do you open?” Chuquan had no words. The patriarch rebuked him: “What have you been doing here all these days? Investigating Chan like this is simply child’s play. You are wasting your time. How will you ever break through? Kneel and investigate!”

The patriarch ordered the rector to burn incense and strike the board for stillness. He instructed everyone to investigate together and said that he would examine each person individually. After one stick of incense had burned down, the rector struck the board to end the period. The patriarch again pressed Chuquan, “How do you open?” Chuquan still could not answer. The patriarch sighed, “If you investigate Chan like this, when will you ever settle the matter?” He then ordered him to continue kneeling and investigating.

After two sticks of incense had passed, Chuquan was still silent. The patriarch would not let it go. He rebuked him, “If you cannot open it today, I will make you kneel to death right here!” He forced him to go on kneeling and investigating. Poor Chuquan was burning with urgency. Kneeling there, his legs and knees hurt, and sweat drops as large as soybeans kept dripping down. Just as the third stick of incense was about to finish burning, the rector raised the board and struck it to end the sitting period. With a tok-tok sound, Chuquan suddenly awakened. He cried out loudly, “I have it, I have it! It has opened!”

The patriarch asked, “How does it open?” Chuquan answered immediately, “Opening forth what is originally present.” The patriarch then questioned him one by one: “What about revealing?” Chuquan said, “Revealing forth what is originally absent.” “Awakening to what?” “Awakening to there being neither existence nor nonexistence.” “How does one enter?” “Entering and exiting without obstruction.”

After hearing this, the patriarch praised him: “Good! This examination paper has been handed in clearly and beautifully. If you are not forced, you refuse to work. Drifting along idly all day, how could you ever finish? Today you did not kneel through three sticks of incense in vain.”

In his joy, the patriarch next called on Yuexia. (Yuexia was a Dharma son of the great Chan elder Yekai of Tianning Monastery in Changzhou.) “Yuexia, try saying it. How does one open, reveal, awaken to, and enter?” Yuexia answered at once without thinking, “I will borrow Brother Chu’s four replies and use them.” The patriarch said, “How will you borrow them?” Yuexia said, “‘Opening forth what is originally present’ is the Dharma Realm of Principle. ‘Revealing forth what is originally absent’ is the Dharma Realm of Phenomena. ‘Awakening to there being neither existence nor nonexistence’ is the Dharma Realm of Nonobstruction Between Principle and Phenomena. ‘Entering and exiting without obstruction’ is the Dharma Realm of Nonobstruction Among Phenomena.”

The patriarch loudly praised him: “Good! This is even somewhat better than Chuquan. This place deserves the name “Buddha-selection ground.” Today, all at once, two Buddhas have been selected.” Truly, “Without one spell of cold that chills to the bone, how could the plum blossom send out fragrance that reaches the nose?” The worthies of old were not afraid of hardship in their practice, and therefore they had accomplishment. We, too, must not fail ourselves. We should investigate earnestly and advance with vigor without slackening, so that excellence is not left to the ancients alone.

Now I will try taking the four words “open, reveal, awaken, enter” and compose two verses for the enjoyment of readers—one placing those words at the beginnings of the lines, the other at the ends. I do not know whether they still accord with the intent of the Buddhas and patriarchs, and whether they can barely be handed in as an answer sheet.

1. Open forth the face without shape; reveal it as the bodies of the ten realms. Awakening lies in delusion not yet ended; entering even demons is without obstruction.
2. One must let the flower of mind fully open; only then does one understand the revealing of the insentient. Originally there is neither delusion nor awakening; how could consciousness and wisdom have exit or entry?

4C. 物我不二 / Phenomena and self are not two

A monk asked Chan Master Dasui, a Dharma heir of Guishan Lingyou, “When the great trichiliocosm perishes, does the Dharma-body perish or not?” Dasui said, “The Dharma-body also perishes.” These words have perplexed people throughout the world. But when Chan Master Touzi Qing heard them, he lit incense and bowed, saying that Dasui was an ancient Buddha appearing in the world.

The wondrous essence of the Dharma-body of true suchness is unborn and undying, does not come and does not go, does not move or shake, does not change or alter; it is a wondrous

essence evergreen through all time. How could it be destroyed when the great trichiliocosm perishes? These words seem greatly at odds with what the Buddha taught. Could it be that he had wrongly set down a phrase, misleading people in the world and thereby deserving to fall into the Vajra Hell? But if he had truly been wrong, Touzi Qing was a great Chan adept—why would he have lit incense and bowed, praising him as an ancient Buddha appearing again?

The reason is this: what is called “the world,” no matter what thing it may be, is a transformation and manifestation of the Buddha-nature—the Dharma-body—of all sentient beings. Apart from the Dharma-body, there is nothing at all. The Lotus Sutra says, “These dharmas abide in their Dharma-position; worldly appearances constantly abide.” This means that every single thing in the world is manifested and established in dependence on the Dharma-body. “These dharmas” means any and every thing; the “Dharma-position” means the one true Dharma realm. That is to say, worldly appearances are the Dharma-body, and the Dharma-body is worldly appearances.

We know that principle is revealed through phenomena, and phenomena are established by principle; principle and phenomena cannot be separated. Since principle and phenomena cannot be divided, the sutras say, “Nature and appearance are not two; mind and objects are one and inseparable.” Since mind—the Dharma-body—constantly abides and does not perish, then worldly appearances also naturally abide.

Looking from the surface of worldly appearances, it seems as though oceans turn into mulberry fields and all things change in an instant, without lasting long. But the fundamental essence of things is not actually destroyed. It is simply that when something perishes here, it is born over there; it has merely changed location.

In his Former Ode on the Red Cliffs, Su Dongpo wrote: “Do you, sir, know the water and the moon? What passes away is like this, yet has never gone; what waxes and wanes is like that, yet in the end neither increases nor decreases. If one looks from the perspective of change, then heaven and earth cannot remain for even an instant; if one looks from the perspective of what does not change, then things and I are inexhaustible.” By means of water and moon he explained that the false appearances of the myriad things change, while their actual essence has never changed. Going further, he showed that people whose minds are not open and who cling to false appearances see the world as oceans turning into mulberry fields, changing in an instant; while open and wise people, recognizing the true essence that is the same in things and sentient beings, know that everything between heaven and earth constantly abides without changing.

Dharma Master Sengzhao, in the Treatise on the Immutability of Things, also cited several examples to discuss in detail the truth that things do not move at all. I will not list them one by one; please, good friends, examine them yourselves. As for why things do not change and are not destroyed, when we investigate the matter in reality, it is because the root that manifests

and establishes these things—the Dharma-body—is naturally unborn and undying, abiding forever through all time.

Now this monk asked, “When the great trichiliocosm perishes, does the Dharma-body also perish?” If the great trichiliocosm truly perished, how could the Dharma-body not also perish? The monk asked in this way because he did not understand the principle that phenomena and self are not two. Dasui was a great master of immense skill. He did not talk at length or expound Buddhist principles at length. He simply followed the thread of the monk’s words and answered along that very line, making the words strike home; when thought could go no further, the monk might suddenly turn back and glimpse his self-nature. Therefore Dasui answered directly, “The Dharma-body also perishes.”

This answer carried the weight of ten thousand thunders. Everyone knows that the Dharma-body is unborn and undying, changeless and unaltering. How could one say that the Dharma-body also perishes? Could this be the wild talk of a drunkard? But Dasui was a great adept of his time—why would he speak this way? This sudden thunderclap shook away, all at once, the student’s ordinary doctrinal interpretations and wandering thoughts. In that lightning-fast instant when not one thought arose, if this monk had any living blood in him, he would have broken through right there and gone home to sit steadily.

When Chan masters answer, there are different methods: direct exposition, direct pointing, side-striking, reverse stimulation, and so on. Their sole aim is to enable the questioner to catch the pivotal point in the words and awaken at the very utterance. Therefore they all respond according to the person’s capacity, applying suitable instructions or severe tongs and hammer blows, so that the student’s attachments and entanglements are cut off and what is original is personally realized. This is what the Chan school calls great capacity and great function.

For example, when Venerable Yanyang visited Zhaozhou, he asked, “When not one thing is brought, what then?” Zhaozhou said, “Put it down.” The venerable said, “Since not one thing is brought, what is there to put down?” Zhaozhou said, “If you cannot put it down, carry it away.” At these words the venerable greatly awakened.

The phrase “carry it away” often gives rise to debate. Some say it is reverse stimulation: you do not know your mistake, and since you cannot put it down, he tells you to carry it along, thereby making you reflect that, if there is nothing, there is no need to carry anything; if you are still carrying it, there is still something. This forces you to recognize what you cannot put down, put it down, and awaken. Others say it is a rebuking phrase: you ask, “When not one thing is brought, what then?” Yet in your mind there is clearly a “not one thing is brought.” This means there is still an “empty” there. If there is an emptiness, there is still abiding; it should be put down. Even emptiness must not be abided in. When you insist, “What is there to put down?” refusing to admit it, he pours a bowl of foul water over you and scolds you: “Carry it away!” This is like when Yunji visited Nanquan and, though repeatedly instructed, still did

not awaken; Nanquan scolded him, “Go! You do not understand my words,” making him feel the sting of the words and turn back to recognize it for himself.

Still others say this is direct pointing. The self-nature is empty and numinous, without the slightest thread hanging on it, without a speck of dust staining it. This “not one thing is brought” is precisely the time when the self-nature is manifest. This mind, where there is no mind to mind and nothing to put down, is precisely where one finds one’s footing and makes one’s home. Therefore Zhaozhou told him to carry it away; that is, he instructed him not to decline the responsibility, but to take it up directly. For this reason Venerable Yanyang awakened at once.

These three explanations each have their own logic; each refuses to yield, and each has its own excellence. It is truly “one drop of ink becoming dragons in three places.” But according to my shallow view, whether it is reverse stimulation, rebuke, or direct pointing, one who understands may play with it horizontally or pick it up vertically, and it will all become the wondrous truth. But if one recognizes and clings to a “not one thing is brought,” so that there is an empty state present, then one has missed it by far.

When Dasui answered this monk’s question, he wanted him to reflect, on the basis of a constant principle he already understood, upon a truth he had not yet understood. Every student of Buddhism knows that the Buddha taught that the Dharma-body constantly abides and does not perish. Now, hearing the statement “the Dharma-body also perishes,” which contradicts the Buddha, how could he accept it? This compels him to doubt. At the moment when he can neither advance nor retreat, cold ashes suddenly explode like popping beans: he abruptly awakens that the worlds in the ten directions are his own whole body, and the worlds in the ten directions are his own radiance.

The great trichiliocosm and the Dharma-body originally share one essence and have never been separate. If the great trichiliocosm perishes, how could the Dharma-body not also perish? But since the Dharma-body constantly abides through all time and never perishes, the great trichiliocosm also does not perish. Thus this monk is made to realize the truth from the reverse side. With a single phrase, Dasui enabled someone to awaken to the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra. Dasui was truly a lion’s cub; his means of receiving people were subtle in this way, truly worthy of our utmost reverence and praise.

An ancient worthy wrote a verse on the Lotus teaching that the appearances of the world constantly abide: “The appearances of the world constantly abide; the yellow oriole cries in the green tree. How lovely it is—once it moves, it flies away.” Our Dharma-body is so splendid and free: there is nothing it does not encompass and nothing it does not know. Yet this endless and resplendent scenery cannot be described. It is just as Chan masters say: “Such fine elegance cannot be painted.” Here this great Chan adept used only the faint phrase “the yellow oriole cries in the green tree” to sketch out this entire scene of endless elegance and beautiful spring light. It truly deserves to be called a brushstroke that dots the dragon’s eye.

When in our practice we recognize this infinitely beautiful scenery, after first seeing the self-nature we must be good at preserving it. At all times and in all places, we must illuminate and observe: outwardly, not pulled along by events and objects; inwardly, not stained by seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing. At all times, be empty, pure, and without abiding. By no means should one become frivolous and arrogant, thinking that one has arrived and the matter is finished. One should know that first seeing the self-nature is only like a newborn baby: it cannot yet stand on its own or function by itself. One must temper it in circumstances, diligently remove old habits, and nurture the sacred embryo of awakening. Only when it has grown up can it function. Otherwise, through arrogance and reckless indulgence, it will die in its swaddling clothes. Therefore after “the yellow oriole cries in the green tree,” the verse continues, “How lovely it is—once it moves, it flies away.” If you do not properly protect it and instead move wildly in arrogance, then even though you have first seen the self-nature, you will end up deluded after awakening.

Someone asked whether, apart from practicing the Dharma, Buddhist practitioners also need to practice qigong as an auxiliary aid. I once composed a verse in which I also spoke of post-awakening preservation. I record it here:

The mind-ground Dharma-gate gives birth to the king;
 Why borrow qigong to sharpen its edge?
 Seeking dharmas outside mind, pursuing something to gain,
 Only brings vain toil and ends in nothing.
 Where sense faculties and sense objects drop away, the self-nature appears;
 Closely preserve it—do not lightly forget.
 Plant your feet firmly, without leaning to one side;
 Seeking nothing at all, the Way is truly constant.

When Chan Master Dasui answered the monk, his purpose was to turn the inquiry back upon him and press him to investigate it to the end, so that he might awaken to the principle that phenomena and self are not two. Had Dasui not thoroughly realized the unity of nature and appearance, how could he have followed the momentum of the monk’s words and responded so aptly, enabling him with such ease to find his way home on hearing the reply? Therefore Touzi lit incense and bowed, acclaiming him as an ancient Buddha returned to the world.

If Chan masters have not yet reached the point where phenomena and self are not two, their speech and words inevitably become ridiculous. Let us give one example. Long ago, when the Chan practitioner Feng Jichuan saw a painted skull on the wall of Mingyue Hermitage, he wrote a verse beside it:

“The corpse is here;
 Where is the person?
 Thus I know that the one numinous essence
 Does not dwell in the skin bag.”

Looking at this verse, we can see that he had only awakened to the ordinary principle that the physical body is not the real “I,” and he treated the numinous nature as the real “I.” He held that the numinous nature constantly abides and is not destroyed, can freely come and go apart from the body, and is not constrained by the body. Therefore he said, “Thus I know that the one numinous essence does not dwell in the skin bag.” He had not yet awakened to the secret that phenomena and self are not two, and that nature and appearance are inseparable.

When Chan Master Dahui Gao came to the hermitage and saw it, he did not approve. He composed another verse:

“Just this form and skeleton
Are precisely that person.
One numinous essence and the skin bag;
The skin bag and the one numinous essence.”

A person who has truly awakened to the Way knows deeply that one is all and all is one, with no division between self and other and no separation between phenomena and self. Thus the Chan school often says, “Pick up one blade of grass and make it a sixteen-foot golden body.” This is exactly the meaning.

The same kind of case, when pointed out by a person of awakening, has a completely different vista. Long ago, when Prime Minister Pei Xiu was attending Chan Master Huangbo, he saw an image of Bodhidharma on the wall and asked the master, “The image is here; where is the person now?” The master called out, “Pei Xiu!” Pei Xiu responded. The master said, “He is not somewhere else.” Pei Xiu had an awakening right then. Under the instruction of a clear-eyed great master, what a delight it is to awaken! This is why Chan investigation values the pointing of a clear teacher.

From this we can know that awakening to the Way is awakening that phenomena and self are not two. If there still remains an intention to run outward in seeking, a mind hoping to obtain something, constantly speculating over what the Dharma-body is like and imagining how to obtain the enjoyment and emanation bodies, then one is still playing with shadows and has not truly awakened to what is original. Such a person is not called a person of the Way.

Do you not see what Patriarch Linji said? “Your one thought of pure mind-light is the Dharma-body Buddha in your own house. Your one thought of non-discriminating mind-light is the enjoyment-body Buddha in your own house. Your one thought of non-differentiating mind-light is the emanation-body Buddha in your own house. In the teaching schools, these three bodies are discussed as the ultimate. In this mountain monk’s view, however, it is not so. These three kinds of bodies are names and words, and they are also three kinds of dependent illumination—all of them are light and shadow. Great worthy, for now just recognize the ‘person’ who is playing with the shadows; he is the source of all Buddhas. If you recognize this person, every place is where you return home.”

Editorial source note. Yuan Yin's controlling text prints 三种依明 here, which gives the unusual "three kinds of dependent illumination" above. The received Record of Linji instead reads 三种依 ("three kinds of dependences") and continues with an additional explanatory line. This edition preserves Yuan Yin's transmitted wording and records the received-text difference rather than silently rewriting the quotation.

Thus we can see that the three bodies are originally complete in everyone. Purity without stain is the Dharma-body; radiant illumination is the enjoyment body; the transformation and manifestation of things without attachment is the emanation body. There is no need to speculate, grope, seek, or obtain. Once you recognize what is originally present, simply stop delusion and remove habits; thought after thought, do not forget this true person—that itself is the Buddhas and patriarchs.

Master Hanshan said, "The reason prajñā brings results so quickly is that everyone originally possesses this mind-light." Master Guifeng said, "The true principle can be realized suddenly; only the accumulated habits of many lives are difficult to remove all at once. One must remain vigilant over a long period, reducing them again and again; only then can one realize perfectly." From this we can see that awakening to the Way is not difficult; what is difficult is not forgetting preservation after awakening.

People today have more than enough cleverness, but not enough honesty. I have often seen people who have awakened to what is originally present, but because their habits are heavy, they are often seized by circumstances, drifting along with deluded thoughts without knowing how to stop. As a result, their practice cannot advance, and they end up in a half-ripened state, or else become deluded after awakening. This is truly lamentable. As for those who have not yet awakened, that is another matter. But for those who have awakened and yet do not know to return to truth thought after thought and guard it strictly, allowing themselves to drift and sink—is this not a terrible waste?

If, after awakening, we remain attentive to this true person of no rank, thought after thought, just as the Amitābha Sutra speaks of concentrating single-mindedly on reciting the Buddha's name—if for one day, two days, or even seven days we protect the original truth continuously without forgetting, wisdom will arise day by day. How much more so over one or two years: the practice will surely become continuous and seamless.

In summary: as long as we do not fear hardship and do not fear the long road, correct our views, practice with vigor, recognize that this numinous knowing free from thought is our original face, and then protect it rigorously, training without slackening amid events and circumstances and diligently removing deluded habits, then it is absolutely not difficult to gather the myriad things back to oneself and personally realize the perfect noble fruition in which phenomena and self are nondual. As the proverb says, "Nothing in the world is difficult, provided one has the will." Since no matter what difficult thing it is, a determined person who is willing to climb can accomplish it, then he is a great man and I too am a great man; if he can

accomplish it, I too can accomplish it. What hardship is there to fear? I share this encouragement with all good friends.

4D. 眼处闻声始得知 / Only by Hearing Sound at the Eye Can One Know

After Patriarch Dongshan Liangjie awakened to insentient beings expounding the Dharma, he composed this verse: “How greatly wondrous, how greatly wondrous! Insentient beings expounding the Dharma is inconceivable. If you try to hear it with the ears, you will never understand; only by hearing sound at the eye can one know.” These were the joyful words that flowed from him after he had clearly awakened to the subtlety of speaking without speech and had opened the true eye.

Originally, this Way is an infinitely elegant and wondrous affair that cannot be spoken in words or expressed in phrases. Once it falls into verbal explanation, it becomes a fixed nest and is no longer the original face. Therefore the ancients often said, “If you ask about this matter, the mouth born of father and mother will never tell it to you.” Others said, “If you wish to understand this Way, you must realize it where the path of language is cut off and mental activity ceases.” Others said, “The matter beyond is not transmitted even by a thousand sages.” In short, this Way is the supreme principle that cannot be transmitted by words; it can only be tacitly understood in the mind.

In truth, the great matter of transcendent awakening cannot be transmitted in words; even worldly affairs, when they reach a subtle point, often cannot be expressed in language and can only be inwardly understood. The saying “at this moment silence surpasses sound” depicts just such a subtle realm of experience. In giving Dharma talks and instructions, one can only strike from the side, set off the moon by painting the clouds, and show a slight clue. There is no way to portray the true mind completely for people to see.

Therefore there is no object that can be used as an adequate comparison. As soon as one says it resembles anything, one misses the mark; nothing can be said. If it were otherwise, why would it be said that “the matter beyond is not transmitted even by a thousand sages”? Does studying Buddhism and practicing the Way also involve keeping secrets, like an ancestral secret prescription of worldly people—kept hidden from others and allowed to disappear? If that were truly so, then Śākyamuni Buddha would not have needed to descend from Tuṣita, appear in the world, and teach the Dharma.

Yet when the crucial moment comes, if one wants to guide people, there is still no way to state it in words. What then is to be done? The patriarchs had a marvelously deft move: they would brush their sleeves and return to the abbot’s quarters, revealing only the faintest glimpse, so that a sharp fellow who intuitively caught the hint might awaken through it. Such wordless teaching truly surpasses anything spoken aloud.

Long ago, when Mahāsattva Fu taught the Diamond Sutra for Emperor Wu of Liang, he ascended the seat, struck the desk once with the ruler, and then descended from the seat and

returned to the abbot's quarters. Baozhi, who was at the side, said, "The Mahāsattva has finished teaching the sutra." Look how brilliantly deft that was! How could the vajra prajñā be fully explained by language?

Again, when Subhūti was sitting at ease in a cave, Śakra Devānām Indra rained down flowers as an offering. Subhūti asked, "Who is raining flowers for me?" Śakra said, "I honor the venerable one for skillfully teaching prajñā; therefore I rain flowers as an offering." Subhūti said, "I have never taught Dharma." Śakra said, "You had no speaking; I had no hearing. This is the true essence of prajñā." Thus we can see that no speaking and no hearing are precisely true speaking and true hearing.

When students read the verse "only by hearing sound at the eye can one know," they often misunderstand it, thinking that to hear sound at the eye one must first develop spiritual powers. It is as if, like people practicing qigong today with extraordinary functions, the ears can read characters and the eyes can hear sounds; when the six faculties can function interchangeably, then one can hear the Dharma spoken by insentient beings. They do not understand that insentient beings expounding the Dharma means speaking without speech. It is not that there is some subtle sound waiting until you no longer listen with the ears, but can hear with the eyes, before you can hear it.

This insentient expounding of the Dharma is a subtle and wondrous realm of experience in which, on encountering a scene, wisdom arises; one understands tacitly in the mind, hearing without hearing, and the mind opens and understands. There is absolutely no need to wait until one has developed spiritual powers before one can hear its Dharma sound.

For example, in the morning we see flowers blooming with incomparable brilliance, and by evening they have withered; from this we understand the impermanence of human affairs. We see the moon sometimes full and sometimes waning, while the moon itself neither increases nor decreases; from this we reflect that, although the illusory appearances of the human body and the myriad things arise and cease, their fundamental essence neither comes nor goes, neither increases nor decreases. Again, ordinary sayings such as "when the column base grows damp, rain will come; when the moon has a halo, wind will come" are examples from ordinary experience of inferring what is to come from subtle signs. How could such knowing require first developing spiritual powers?

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese prints 楚潤而雨 in this proverb, and public Yuan Yin witnesses reproduce that spelling. The classical expression is 础潤而雨: when a column's stone base grows damp, rain is coming; a lunar halo foretells wind. Because the intended proverb is unambiguous, the English above renders its sense while leaving the source's character-level anomaly explicitly disclosed.

Seen from another angle, however, the fact that we can be stirred by a scene and infer one thing from another is itself not other than spiritual power and wondrous function. Our raising a hand, moving a foot, wearing clothes and eating food—even defecating and urinating—are

all, without exception, the numinous functioning of our own self-nature. Apart from self-nature, this world would have no living vitality; nothing at all could move. Therefore Layman Pang said, “Spiritual powers and wondrous function: carrying water and hauling firewood.” Is this not a clear portrayal that all acts, all thoughts, and all speech are spiritual powers and wondrous function?

From this we can see that what is called spiritual power is unobstructed numinous functioning: not abiding in external objects, not being blocked or cut off by things, and responding to conditions freely without obstruction. This is a merit and virtue originally complete in everyone. It is extremely ordinary and commonplace; there is nothing rare, marvelous, or mystical about it. There is no need to be startled, and still less any need to cling to it or seek it.

Of course, through diligent and painstaking training, when the obscurations of material desire have been completely removed, one can manifest extraordinary numinous functioning and hear subtle sounds that ordinary people cannot hear. For example, Master Bodhidharma heard ants walking as if they were thunder. When Chan Master Daoxin was guiding Niutou Farong, Daoxin, although asleep and snoring like thunder, heard two white lice on Farong’s body fighting; one fell to the ground, broke its leg, and cried out in pain, while Farong, who did not lie down and had not slept, heard nothing.

Such spiritual powers seem rare and certainly attract people’s longing. Yet these are functions originally complete in everyone; they are not obtained by seeking outside. We need only stop delusion and return to truth. After recognizing self-nature, if we preserve it continuously and closely, do not follow thoughts, do not drift with objects, exhaust outflows and afflictions, and restore the radiance of self-nature, then the six superknowledges can all manifest. If one has not awakened to the original truth and seeks outside, one merely wastes mental effort; it can never be obtained. Even if something is obtained, if one clings to marks and abides in such experiences, all of it belongs to the demons of the aggregates. Not only will one fail to become a sage; one will very likely fall into demonic states.

Chan Master Yangshan said, “I will now tell you this plainly: do not fixate on such things. Simply practice genuinely within the ocean of your own nature. Do not seek the three knowledges and six superknowledges. Why? These are only secondary matters of the sages. Right now you need only recognize mind and realize nature. Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches. In time, they will naturally be fully present. If you have not attained the root and instead try to learn such things through emotion and intellect, you will never obtain them; even if you do, they will not be genuine.” These words are truly correct—golden and jade-like words for those practicing the Way.

I have often seen some people who believed they had obtained spiritual powers; after not much time, the so-called powers disappeared somewhere. What they could see, they could no longer see; what they could hear, or know in advance, they could no longer hear or know.

Some obtained spiritual powers through certain esoteric methods designed to activate such abilities. Because their minds were not yet free of grasping, when they suddenly saw a terrifying form they were frightened out of their wits and developed mental illness. Some, because they foresaw that a certain calamity would occur, became mentally and physically unsettled, anxious and disturbed, and developed serious illness. When life was ending, they knew and understood nothing, and in muddled confusion followed karma into the evil destinies.

Still others, because ghosts, spirits, or nature-spirits attached to their bodies, developed some so-called spiritual powers and used them to treat illness, read feng-shui, tell fortunes, and so forth. Before long they became mentally disordered and met a miserable end. I say these things not to frighten everyone, but because I have seen many such cases. I cannot bear to let later students step onto wrong roads, fail to practice the Way, and instead bring disaster on themselves. Therefore I cry out loudly, hoping everyone will practice the Way sincerely and not seek spiritual powers.

If one wants to manifest spiritual powers, one must first apprehend Mind and see nature, and then further train diligently in daily activity, exhausting deluded habits and first attaining the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. After that, the other five superknowledges can manifest. Those are spiritual powers genuinely realized from what is originally complete in self-nature; they are spiritual powers that will never disappear, that abide forever without change. This is the correct path of practice taught in the Mahāvairocana Sutra. Students must absolutely not read over it casually.

On the path of practice, besides the above point that one must not cling to spiritual powers or seek them, there are many other common misunderstandings. I will now briefly describe the most important of them.

First: valuing the rare and mysterious, and not valuing right view.

People of the present who study Buddhism often follow inverted views and do not value right view; therefore few accomplish the Way. Chan Master Dahui Gao said, “If a student asks, ‘What is Buddha?’ and you answer him, ‘Mind itself is Buddha,’ he regards it as ordinary and does not take it seriously. But when he asks, ‘What is Buddha?’ and someone says, ‘The lantern climbs the wall up to Tiantai,’ then he says, ‘How extraordinary!’ Is this not following inversion?” From this we can see that even the ancients had already begun to prize what is rare and mysterious; no wonder people today place still greater emphasis on the mysterious.

If you tell such a person to sit upright and investigate Chan or recite the Buddha’s name, he regards it as dry and tasteless, with nothing mysterious in it, and will not practice. If you teach him a method to develop the divine eye, knowledge of others’ minds, or the like, he gladly obeys and happily accepts it. He does not know that these are merely illusory arts and borrowed spiritual powers that lead people onto a wrong road and cannot end birth and death. Practicing them wastes time and brings no real benefit; if one handles them badly, one

may even create karma and undergo karmic retribution. Yet people today flock to such things in droves, fearing only that they might not receive the transmission. This is the great disease by which one enters wrong roads without knowing it, regards ordinary right view as dung, blocks the gate of one's own awakening, and cannot enter the Buddha's knowing and seeing.

Second: clinging to dead emptiness, taking blank, unmoving emptiness to be the Way, and not recognizing that what functions all day long is true nature.

Those who do not practice need not be discussed. Among those who truly are willing to practice, many cling to the mark of emptiness. They take blank, unmoving emptiness to be the Way, not knowing that this Way centers on recognizing what is originally present, not clinging to marks, not being swayed by objects, and being able to function vividly and freely—only then is there real benefit.

For example, when Yunji visited Nanquan, he asked, “The maṇi jewel is not recognized by people; it is personally received and stored within the Tathāgata-garbha. What is the Tathāgata-garbha?” Nanquan said, “It is what comes and goes with you.” This refers to deluded thoughts coming and going without cease. Yunji said, “What about what does not come and go?” This points to empty, unmoving stillness. Nanquan said, “That too is it.” Yunji then asked, “What is the jewel?” This question struck the crucial point. Nanquan called out, “Yunji.” Yunji responded. One must urgently look right here: who is it that responded? But Yunji did not recognize it—a pity! This fellow passed it by in confusion. Nanquan scolded him, “Go! You do not understand my words!”

From this we can see that simply abiding in emptiness without recognizing what is original is only gold; it is not yet the precious jewel. If one wants real benefit, one must, after recognizing what is original, preserve it closely and remove old habits; only then can one gradually enter the profound. To abide constantly in emptiness can only forge one into a stagnant pool of dead water, like earth, wood, metal, or stone. It is an illness, not the Way. Therefore one who truly apprehends Mind and sees nature absolutely does not abide constantly in dead emptiness.

Third: taking no arising of a single thought and constant silent abiding in samādhi as awakening.

Ordinary people always think that a person who has apprehended Mind and seen nature constantly abides silently in emptiness with not one thought arising; otherwise, they think, that person is not awakened. In fact, to reveal mind-nature is the great dhāraṇī: it can give rise to all wondrous functions and lacks nothing. If one guards an empty state with not one thought arising and cannot display it vividly and freely in function, one has died in the mark of emptiness. Not only will one fail to receive real benefit; one will have no way to see the whole body thoroughly.

Long ago, a monk asked Monk Hui, who had once visited Nanquan, “After the venerable saw Nanquan, how was it?” Hui was silent. The monk asked further, “Before the venerable saw

Nanquan, how was it?" Hui said, "It could not have been anything else." Looking at these words, we can see that Monk Hui was stuck in silent emptiness. Therefore Master Xuansha said of him, "The person sitting atop a hundred-foot pole, though having gained entry, is still not real. Take one more step from the top of the hundred-foot pole, and the worlds of the ten directions appear as the whole body."

This Way must be pure and uncovered, free and unstained; free in every direction, granting and taking away without constraint; not a single thread hanging, not a speck of dust defiling it. Samādhi is all right, movement is all right; in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, there is nothing that is permissible or impermissible. Only this is true awakening.

Fourth: reciting Buddhist scriptures to accumulate merit in the hope of awakening.

Many Buddhist students, seeing that the Buddha said the merit of reciting sutras is inconceivable, cling to marks of merit and value reciting many sutras. They do not investigate the profound intent within them. They think that the more they recite, the greater the merit; even being able to recite them forward and backward by memory becomes even more inconceivable merit, and by accumulating merit in this way they will be able to awaken. They do not know that reciting like this without understanding the meaning is merely parroting words. How could it open the gate of the mind and personally see Buddha-nature?

When Master Dayu Zhi heard that a monk recited the Diamond Sutra one hundred times a day, he instructed his attendant to invite him over and asked, "I hear that you recite the Diamond Sutra one hundred times a day, is that so?" The monk said, "Yes." Zhi asked, "Have you ever investigated the meaning of the sutra?" The monk said, "No." Zhi said, "Then just recite it once a day and investigate the Buddha's intent. If you awaken under one sentence, it will be like drinking a single drop of seawater and knowing the taste of all rivers." The monk followed his instruction. One day, reciting to the line "One should know thus, see thus, believe and understand thus, and not give rise to the mark of dharmas," he suddenly had an awakening. Thus we can see that in reciting sutras one must investigate the Buddha's intent before one can gain an entry. If one only craves merit and thinks the more the better, one merely plants good causes and sows a field of merit; this is not the genuine merit and virtue that leads to Buddhahood.

Fifth: valuing quickness in Chan repartee and not valuing genuine conduct in practice.

People today all think that an awakened person must have quick Chan repartee; if someone responds even a little slowly to the occasion, they must not yet have awakened. In fact, this is like the point that after awakening, spiritual powers do not yet manifest until habits have been removed: it is not a fixed standard by which to measure whether a person of the Way has awakened or not. For example, head monk Yuan of Baofeng was a person of the Way, yet his replies were slow and dull. Hong Juefan called him "Yuan Five-Dou," because after opening his mouth to reply, one had to wait until five dou of rice had cooked before he could answer with a turning phrase.

Dahui Gao said, “One who practices the Way need not have Chan repartee in order to be awakened. Long ago, Master Zhi of Yungai had a clear Dharma-eye. When a prefect entered the mountain and rested in the Pavilion for Discussing Emptiness, he asked, ‘What is the Pavilion for Discussing Emptiness?’ Zhi said, ‘It is just a Pavilion for Discussing Emptiness.’ The prefect was displeased and later raised the question to Master Ben. Ben said, ‘The pavilion itself explains the Dharma; why use the mouth to discuss emptiness?’ The prefect was delighted and transferred Ben to reside at Yungai. But if we discuss the Way, then compared with Zhi, Ben was far behind. Thus we know that the real matter cannot be judged by Chan repartee.” From this we can see that those who speak glibly are not necessarily true awakened people of the Way.

In summary, in practicing the Way, what we value is pure and correct view and wholehearted, resolute, genuine investigation. One must not harbor even the slightest hope of getting by through luck, take shortcuts and mistakenly enter side gates, or pursue spiritual powers and wrongly fall into demonic paths. Still less should one mistakenly heed improper words that sow confusion about original nature, block the gate to one’s own awakening, waste one’s time, and cause one to miss this entire life.

As for insentient beings expounding the Dharma, one must of course “hear sound at the eye” before one knows; and even when a great adept of the Chan school points directly without sound, the student likewise must “hear sound at the eye.” For example, Tianlong raised one finger and Juzhi understood one-finger Chan; Longtan blew out the candle and Deshan awakened; Niaohe blew a hair and his attendant received the meaning. How are these any different from awakening through the wordless teaching of insentient beings?

What we call sentient and insentient, sound and no sound, are discriminations born of our delusive attachment. Because of ignorance, we grasp the four-element body as “me” and cast aside the rest as the receptacle world, judging it to be insentient. We do not understand that mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests are all, without exception, myself. When practice takes hold and delusive attachment dissolves, inwardly body and mind and outwardly the world all vanish together; then true mind is all-pervasive. Where then could there still be a division between sentient and insentient, or a distinction between sound and no sound?

Even from the worldly standpoint, once we pass from this life and leave the physical form, does this bodily shell not become insentient, just like wood and stone? Therefore, as long as we do not cling to deluded discrimination, sentient and insentient merge into one; sound and no sound likewise form a single whole, with no division between this and that. The sutra says, “Sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom.” This is precisely the meaning. Since there is no division between sentient and insentient, sound and no sound, there also no longer exists a distinction between hearing with the eye and hearing with the ear. Once this point is understood, hearing sound at the eye has nothing miraculous about it; there is absolutely no need first to develop spiritual powers before one knows.

Speaking of spiritual power, hearing sound at the ear is also not other than spiritual power, because the ear's ability to hear sound is wholly the function of true mind. Apart from true mind, nothing can be heard. Modern scientists also understand a little of the principle that it is not the ear that hears. They say that the eyes cannot see and the ears cannot hear; our ability to see and hear is entirely the function of the brain. When the brain has an illness, the eyes cannot see and the ears cannot hear. To attribute seeing and hearing to the brain is already a step beyond the ordinary person, but it is still not completely correct. The brain and nerves are only like an electrical grid. To function, it still needs electricity. If electricity does not pass through, then however densely the grid is laid out, it cannot function. This electricity is our true mind.

Therefore every word and deed, every raising of a hand and movement of a foot, is nothing other than the wondrous function of true mind. We spend all day within wondrous function without knowing it, and instead seek some other wondrous function elsewhere. Is this not extreme foolishness? A great adept of the Chan school once said, "Sitting beside the rice basket, countless people starve to death." How lamentable!

Going a step further, if at the crucial moment of asking Dharma and hearing Dharma the mind abides in something and wisdom is blocked by something, then even if a clear-eyed master points it out directly, how could one seize that fleeting instant and tacitly accord with the wondrous word, clearly seeing self-nature? Thus, hearing with the ear is not what people ordinarily call spiritual power, yet it is not other than spiritual power; and although it is not other than spiritual power, one does not cling to it as spiritual power. This is true spiritual power. But because this true spiritual power is something everyone can accomplish, people instead regard it as ordinary and do not find it wondrous. As for what ordinary people cannot do, because it is rarely seen and therefore strange, they regard it as miraculous and cling to it as spiritual power. In reality, it is also present in everyone; it fails to manifest only because delusive attachment obstructs it and the five desires cover it.

If we can, as described above, let go throughout the whole body, and in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down constantly turn the light inward, cultivating in each thought, then it is not difficult to smash the emotional barrier of birth and death, emit great light, and manifest great spiritual powers. Precisely:

Insentient beings expounding the Dharma leave nothing to debate;
hearing sound at the eye is also not strange.

Wearing clothes and eating food are ordinary affairs,
yet all are my numinous functioning—do not doubt.

No speaking, yet there is hearing—cling to neither;
responding to conditions freely, one is naturally at ease.

4E. 直指与参话头 / Direct Pointing and Huatou Investigation

When Bodhidharma came from the West to transmit the seal of the Buddha-mind, he directly pointed to the human mind so that one sees the nature and becomes Buddha; there was as yet no talk of investigating a huatou. Chan is the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the treasury of the true Dharma-eye. It is the innate Buddha-nature originally complete in everyone; it is not attained through practice, nor does it need to be sought and accomplished. Only because beings are deluded by sounds and forms, forget the original reality, create karma, and undergo its results do they sink into the six paths. If one can awaken to the fact that all sounds, forms, wealth, and gain are like flowers in the sky and the moon in water, with nothing to be pursued, and if one resolutely lets them go without the least clinging, then there is no need to practice some method; right then one can recover the original reality and sit steadily at home.

For this reason, from ancient times the patriarchs directly pointed out the matter to students, enabling them to awaken upon hearing the words. They did not put students through needless difficulty by sending them down the detour of huatou investigation and wasting their time. For example, when asked, “What is Buddha?” one answered, “Mind itself is Buddha.” Or one asked, “Facing you and clearly conversing—if this is not Buddha, what is?” Or one said, “If I tell you, I fear you will not believe me.” When the student, terrified and reverent, replied, “How would I dare not believe the monk’s sincere words?” the answer came, “You yourself are it.” Or the teacher would call out to the student; when the student responded, the teacher pointed out, “This itself is it; there is no other thing.” Or the teacher would instead ask back, “What is it?” causing the student to turn back and awaken.

In the Chan school, beginning above with Śākyamuni Buddha holding up a flower and Kāśyapa smiling as the seal of mind, thereby opening this heroic and unique lineage of a special transmission outside the teachings, and extending down to the sages and worthies before the Tang and Song, all the sayings and verses used to instruct students directly and without concealment indicated true mind to them. They never taught people to practice huatou investigation.

For example, Baozhi said, “This Way is complete as it is. It does not need to be sought; it does not need to be learned. There is no room for mental contrivance. Simply come to rest right now—that is it.” Again, in the final two lines of his Song of the Twelve Hours, he said, “Those who have not yet understood, listen to one word: right now, who is it that speaks?” How direct and clear his words are.

Mahāsattva Shanhui said: “There is a thing before heaven and earth, originally still and without form; it can be lord of the myriad things and does not wither as the four seasons turn.” He also pointed directly: “Night after night I sleep embracing Buddha; morning after morning I rise together with him. Rising and sitting, he is always with me; speaking or silent,

we dwell together. Never apart by even a hair's breadth, like body and shadow. If you wish to know where Buddha is, it is just this voice."

Mahāsattva Fu's Inscription on the Mind-King is even more an admonition for a thousand ages. In it he said: "It is certainly existent, yet its form is not seen. It dwells and abides within the body; it goes in and out through the face. Responding to things, it follows forms; it is not past, future, or present." How frank, genuine, and forthright these words are! Mahāsattva Fu truly showed the most earnest compassionate solicitude.

Nanyue Huisi said: "The source of the Way is not far; the ocean of nature is not remote. Just seek toward yourself; do not look for it from another. If you seek it, you will not obtain it; even if obtained, it is not true." He also said: "Sudden awakening to the source of mind opens the treasury; hidden and manifest, numinously penetrating, it shows the true form. Even if it blocks and fills all of empty space, when looked at, not even the mark of a mote of dust can be seen. Laughable, this thing, without comparison; the mouth spits out a bright pearl, its light dazzling." Again he said: "Heaven cannot cover it, earth cannot support it; no going, no coming, no obstruction; no long or short, no blue or yellow; not in the middle, nor inside or outside. Transcending the crowd, beyond all others, mysterious as the great void—it points to things to transmit mind, but people do not understand." The ancients' direct pointing to transmit mind truly showed the utmost compassionate solicitude. Yet people do not understand—how sad this is.

The Cloth-Bag monk said: "Just this mind, mind, mind is Buddha, the most numinous thing in the worlds of the ten directions. Its free and wondrous functioning is marvelously alive; nothing is as real as mind." He also said: "I have a body of Buddha that worldly people all fail to know. It is not molded, not decorated; not carved, not engraved. Not one drop of lime or clay, not one speck of color. People cannot paint it; thieves cannot steal it. Its form is naturally so; its purity does not come from wiping. Although it is one body, it divides into hundreds of billions of bodies." These sayings are so clear and direct that a person understands at a glance without doubt. What huatou is there still to investigate?

This is how direct and straightforward patriarchal Chan is. It causes people to awaken greatly upon hearing the words, without having to take a winding detour of practice. This Dharma gate of directly opening people to seeing the nature—without practice, without realization, and without attainment—is not found only in Chan. The profound esoteric teaching of Atiyoga is no exception. They instruct students: "One should know that the Buddha, all lineage gurus, and my own mind are not different"; "all practices of view, meditation, and conduct are subsumed within mind"; "all pure and impure dharmas are completely contained in the immediate stainless, empty, luminous, and open inner realized wisdom—original awareness, or original nature"; "there is no need to undertake laborious practice using dhātu-wisdom as the entrance. Simply realize that these present appearances are all appearances manifested by my true mind, with nothing to grasp and nothing to seek; this transcends strenuous practice and causality."

All these instructions are no different from what Chan masters say: they too teach people to know their own original mind and see their own original nature right now. Yet practitioners of that system cannot take up this Dharma immediately. They must begin with the four preliminaries, slowly enter the generation stage, practice visualization-based esoteric methods, and then gradually pass into the completion stage, dissolving those visualized forms into emptiness, before they can slowly accord with this Dharma. Who knows how many years this gradual course would consume? How could that compare with Chan, so direct, decisive, and swift? Therefore among all Dharma gates of practice, Chan is the simplest, swiftest, most complete, and most sudden. To have obtained it, what tremendous roots of blessing we must have built up through practice in past lives!

After the Tang and Song, however, people's minds declined and their capacities weakened. They did not treasure the true and ultimate words of direct pointing, but esteemed mysterious, strange, and eccentric sayings. They thought pure and correct words contained nothing extraordinary, so they neither respectfully received and upheld them nor used them for close protection and nurturing of the sacred embryo of awakening until perfect bodhi was realized. Instead, through disdain, they drifted into the six paths with no prospect of release. This is like pampered sons of wealthy families who, because the ancestral estate did not come from their own hard work, do not cherish it, squander it without measure, and finally starve to death.

Out of compassionate pity, the patriarchs adapted to circumstances and changed direct pointing into huatou investigation. They placed before the student's mind a saying with no conceptual meaning and no rational path to follow. It was like swallowing a chestnut burr: one could not spit it out, could not swallow it down, could not advance, and could not stop. In this way, a great doubt-sensation arose. After a period of bitter investigation and concentrated study, when one walks without knowing one is walking and sits without knowing one is sitting, some sudden encounter or impact triggers the breakthrough; it is like meeting one's own father face to face at the crossroads, and one personally realizes what is original. Only then does one know that the Buddha is originally complete, and that all that arduous seeking was merely riding a donkey in search of a donkey—wasted effort and needless suffering. Yet without undergoing this difficult investigation, how could the original reality be seen? The patriarchs took great pains in devising this method.

To investigate a huatou, one must arouse a great doubt-sensation. Only then can deluded thinking and deluded thoughts be cut off, ignorance broken through, and the original reality personally seen. Otherwise, it has no effect. Even if one investigated until the end of time, there would still be no way to awaken. This is what is meant by "great doubt, great awakening; small doubt, small awakening; no doubt, no awakening."

Yet for a sharp person, there is really no need to expend much effort, endure much hardship, or spend many years investigating. When the patriarchs throw a huatou with no rational path straight at one's face, so that one has no principle to state, no words with which to answer,

and no mind left to bring into play, one need only turn the light inward in a single glance: all these thoughts are empty, yet the knowing that all these thoughts are empty is vivid and not blank at all—what is this? One can thereby awaken greatly.

The patriarchs' huatou, devoid of conceptual meaning and rational path, were not meant to force you to answer with some principle. They were meant to make you, when there is nothing to be said and not one thought arises, look within: who is this one that “does not understand”? For example, when one asks a master, “What is Buddha?” he may answer, “Eastern Mountain walks on water,” or, “The lantern climbs the wall up to Tiantai.” This leaves you unable to make head or tail of it, bringing you to the point where the path of language is cut off and mental activity ceases. At that moment, although no thought can arise, you are not like wood or stone, devoid of knowing. Just at this decisive instant, as if a thousand pounds hangs by a single hair, turn the light inward in a single glance: “Who is this?” Then the matter of Chan investigation is finished.

For those unable to awaken there, if they investigate the huatou and arouse the doubt-sensation, many years of painstaking investigation can indeed bring great, thorough awakening. But for this to be completed, there must still be a clear-eyed teacher's appropriate hammering and forging, timely instruction according to the person and situation, and an exact pointing at the crucial moment. Someone who investigates and practices blindly in isolation is like a person building a cart behind closed doors; awakening will be very difficult. If the doubt-sensation cannot be aroused and one is merely reciting a huatou, there is even less hope.

In recent times, most fellow Chan practitioners cannot arouse the doubt-sensation. When they investigate “Who is reciting the Buddha's name?” they do not direct their inquiry into the word “who”; instead they recite with the mouth, “Who is reciting the Buddha's name? Who is reciting the Buddha's name?” This loses the function of “investigation.” As a result, although they work for many years, they cannot awaken. Is the present decline of Chan not due to the scarcity of capable people, the lack of truly awakened persons to transmit and spread it, and its degeneration into transmission by lineage scroll?

Reciting “Who is reciting the Buddha's name?” is not as good as reciting “Amitābha Buddha.” By reciting “Amitābha Buddha,” one receives the Buddha's empowering force and in the future can rely on it to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. But reciting “Who is reciting the Buddha's name?” without being able to arouse the doubt-sensation neither brings awakening nor receives the Buddha's empowering force for rebirth in the West. Apart from planting a small good cause, I fear there is no other harvest.

Since modern Chan practitioners are unable to arouse the doubt-sensation and, because of work, cannot spend twenty or thirty years painstakingly investigating, it would be better to imitate the ancient method of directly pointing out the nature to students, revealing self-nature to those who come for instruction. After awakening, they can then closely preserve it,

diligently remove habits, and gradually reach completeness. This might be a more effective way to train a large number of capable practitioners and revive the sacred teaching.

Speaking of directly pointing out the nature to students will certainly meet opposition and criticism from many quarters. Because they have long been accustomed to seeing the nature through huatou investigation, they always think that what is awakened to without personally undergoing bitter investigation is not seeing the nature. They say, “What enters through the gate is not the family treasure”; what one sees in books or receives through another’s instruction is useless. Only what one opens up through genuine personal investigation is true awakening and has real efficacy in practice.

This is not wrong. One truly must practice oneself until deluded thoughts dissolve and, inwardly, body and mind, and outwardly, the world, all vanish together; only then is it direct realization. But present-day Chan practitioners cannot arouse the doubt-sensation; investigating the huatou is useless for them. They cannot open what is original or see the nature. Therefore, as a last resort, to accord with the present time and conditions, we adapt the ancient method for present use.

Speaking of Buddha-nature and true mind, someone who turns the light inward in a single thought and recognizes it through direct indication is ultimately no different from someone who recognizes it after bitterly investigating for several decades, nor from someone who recognizes it by practicing the Heart-Center esoteric Dharma with the empowering force of the Buddhas. Only the strength and function differ slightly. The one who recognizes it through a single inward turn of the light has the weakest initial force and may not hold steady when circumstances arise, often being pulled along by situations and objects and unable to remain master. The one who recognizes it after bitterly investigating for several decades has the strongest force: because the long, arduous detour has given them firm footing, they can function freely when circumstances arise without losing their ground.

Yet even one whose strength is still weak, as long as they do not become content with a minor attainment, but constantly heighten alertness and diligently train in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and in daily functioning, can gradually remove the clinging habits accumulated through vast kalpas and many lives, ascend step by step, and reach complete accomplishment. This was originally the model by which the ancients instructed and transformed later people.

Regarding huatou investigation, the ancient worthies were not without criticism. Chan master Guanghai Lian once addressed the assembly: “Originally, there is nothing to be done in Buddhadharma. From above, all the sages have merely fabricated marvels, uttering subtle strange words and profound phrases to confuse people’s minds. Later, teaching people to investigate huatou was even more forcibly creating branches and joints, degrading the good into the lowly and burying the descendants. Moreover Yunmen, Zhaozhou, Deshan, and their kind never woke up and suffered humiliation their whole lives. Here with this old monk it is

not so: even if old Śākyamuni came forth, I would demote him to another world and make him walk a dead-end road. Why? To keep him from destroying my descendants. This old monk has spoken thus—how do all of you understand? If you understand here, is that not joyful? It will teach you to shed your clothes and become a free and easy patch-robed monk. If you do not understand, next year there will again be new twigs, disturbing the spring wind without end.”

How thoroughly and decisively this saying cuts off everything! Where is there any room here for deliberation or mental contrivance? We need only keep our own proper place, live as conditions unfold, and not recklessly stir the mind or let thoughts arise, spinning out extraneous conceptual interpretations: “I must leave birth and death; I must practice and awaken to the Way; I must become Buddha, possess wisdom, eloquence, and spiritual powers; I must establish a Buddha-land and pure land...” Right now it is the bright, clear universe, a world at peace. Without spending any effort, one at once recovers the innate Buddha-nature, returns home, sits steadily, and enjoys peace. From this we can see that apprehending Mind and seeing nature does not necessarily require huatou investigation.

Even in the Tang and Song, many of the great patriarchs had essential direct indications. I will cite a few examples briefly below.

Chan master Yongming Yanshou said: “From ancient times, Buddhas and patriarchs have transmitted mind to mind, and there was not a single Dharma given to people. They only teach you to grasp firmly the precious sword of the Vajra King, cut off everything known, seen, heard, felt, and awakened to, and leave only this—utterly naked and bare, unstained by a mote of dust, with not a thread clinging; then the great matter is completed.” He also composed a verse: “A conjured person asks an illusory man; in the empty valley, the spring’s sound replies. If you wish to understand our school’s meaning, the clay ox walks on water.”

Zhenjing Wen said: “Buddhadharma is supremely wondrous and without duality. Simply know your own mind as it really is, and in the ultimate sense you are originally Buddha.” He composed a verse: “Buddha-nature is originally just this way; who says there is some other teacher? In wearing clothes and eating food, in coughing and swinging the arms, only my own mind functions; when has it ever moved through thought? Beings are all equal, yet in daily functioning they themselves harbor many doubts.” He also said: “Do not intend to think and deliberate with mind. Each and every thing is natural and uncontrived; each and every thing is bright and wondrous. Therefore, deluded in one’s own mind, one is a sentient being; awakened to one’s own mind, one becomes Buddha.”

Chan Master Foguo said: “Just step back. The more you step back, the brighter it becomes; the more you do not understand, the more power there is. As soon as a different thought arises, as soon as an intending mind is born, fiercely cut it off and do not allow continuity. Then wisdom becomes utterly clear; step by step you tread solid ground, and naturally attain great liberation.”

Yunmen said: “All of you come running here without reason—what are you looking for? This old monk just eats rice and shits. What else do you understand me as doing?” He also said: “Students do not trust their own mind, do not awaken to their own mind, do not experience the luminous, wondrous benefit of their own mind, and do not obtain the peace, joy, and liberation of their own mind. Outside mind they falsely posit Chan and the Way, set up something extraordinary, and delusively give rise to grasping and rejecting; even if they practice, they fall into non-Buddhist paths, the Two Vehicles, dead Chan, and annihilationist views.”

Dahui Gao said: “Ultimate principle forgets words, but people of the time do not know this. They force themselves to practice other methods, taking them to be effective, not knowing that their own nature is a subtle, wondrous gate of great liberation, complete with all wondrous functions and lacking nothing from ancient times to the present. It is like the disk of the sun: near and far, all are illuminated. Though it reaches all colors, it does not combine with any of them. Its spiritual illumination is wondrously bright; it does not rely on forging and refining. Because people do not understand, they grasp at phenomenal appearances. This is only like pressing on the eyes and falsely seeing flowers in space, exhausting themselves in vain. If one can reflect inwardly, there is no second person. Every action and activity is nothing but reality itself. People often say their own faculties are dull. Try reflecting inwardly and looking: the one that can know dullness—is it also dull?”

Dahui also instructed Wang Yanzhang: “If you become discouraged and retreat, saying your faculties are low and inferior, and then seek some other point of entry, this is exactly like standing inside Hanyuan Hall and asking where Chang’an is. When you are directly taking up and attending to the huatou, who is it? The one that can know the faculties are low and inferior—who is that? The one seeking a point of entry—who is that? Miaozi does not shrink from incurring verbal karma; for you, layman, he states it plainly: there is only Wang Yanzhang, and no second one. Since there is only one Wang Yanzhang, where could there be some other one who takes up the huatou, some other one who knows the faculties are low and inferior, and some other one who seeks a point of entry? You should know that all these are Wang Yanzhang’s shadows; they have nothing to do with the real Wang Yanzhang. If it is the real Wang Yanzhang, his faculties cannot be low and inferior, and he certainly does not need to seek some point of entry. It is only that his trust in his own true host is insufficient; all this labor and bustle is unnecessary.”

Miaozi had already shown the utmost compassionate solicitude, yet one more note must be added: at the level of the person, there is Wang Yanzhang; at the level of faith, there is the one who knows that his faculties are inferior and seeks a point of entry. If, right when directly taking up the huatou, one turns back and reflects on the one who can take it up—is that Wang Yanzhang or not? At this point not a hair can be inserted. If one pauses to think or stops the movement, one is already deluded by the shadow.

Sincere, compassionate direct indications like these, offered for people's sake so that they may see the nature right then, are too numerous to count when one turns through the Chan records. On one hand, this shows the great patriarchs' profound compassionate solicitude: they held nothing back and wished people to leave the sea of suffering together and realize the true and constant together. On the other hand, it also shows that awakening to mind and realizing the Way does not necessarily require huatou investigation.

We need only, under a teacher's clear indication, suddenly awaken and deeply trust without doubt that this which can function is our own original face. There is nothing mystical or extraordinary about it. We then only need to preserve it closely in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, struggle against our own deluded habits of clinging to marks, and gradually eliminate them; then we can reach the mysterious depth.

If one doubts that this method of direct indication may not give students enough power in awakening, one can change the method. When the student comes to ask, throw back a reply that offers no rational path, leaving the student with nothing to say and no line of reasoning to advance; then point them to turn the light inward in a single glance and personally realize what is original. For example, if they ask, "What is Buddha?" answer, "Face west and look east." Hearing this, because there is no rational path to follow, the student will necessarily freeze, at a loss. Then immediately ask, "Who is it that has nothing to say?" They will surely understand even less. Then ask again, "Your eyes move blankly; you want to speak but cannot, and want to let the matter go but cannot—is this not your own original face?" At this the student is bound to have some awakening. If they still do not understand, one can point still further: "If you wish to personally see Buddha-nature, recognize what it is that does not understand; there is no other!" I think that after this kind of detailed indication, if one still does not understand, one probably is not a person of our Way.

This direct Dharma gate for seeing the nature and accomplishing the Way is a magnificent heart teaching that enters in one leap. It is like a prince born to the throne and does not depend on external merit. Therefore it does not require practicing dhyāna concentration or any method involving forms. A prince born to the throne will certainly inherit the throne and become king. Any conditioned dhyāna or formal method of practice, however well developed, is only an outer minister who establishes merit and receives reward; he can never become king. Therefore the Sixth Patriarch said, "Only discuss seeing the nature; do not discuss dhyāna concentration and liberation."

That we can confirm this nonconceptual numinous knowing as our true mind and Buddha-nature, without the least doubt, is truly a great causal condition. People without merit and virtue cannot take it up as their own. But then again, after confirming this incomparably noble Buddha-nature, one must not become absurdly careless, thinking that the practice is complete and that nothing more remains to be done. One must protect it strictly and nurture it properly, so that inwardly it does not drift along with deluded thoughts, and outwardly it is not pulled along by objects and situations. Day by day and month by month, one gradually

approaches completeness and only then obtains real benefit. Otherwise, if one becomes wild, arrogant, and unrestrained, allowing oneself to go astray, nothing will be right. Not only will birth and death remain as before; by taking what has not been attained as attained, one will also sink into the evil destinies. How could one not be careful?

Speaking of preservation, it is originally not difficult. It is only because we are used to agitation in ordinary life that we are easily pulled along by deluded thoughts and by objects and situations, forgetting to preserve it. Often we drift through many rounds with deluded thoughts and follow objects and situations for a long time before suddenly noticing what has happened; therefore the practice cannot become continuous and seamless. The ancient saying “Do not fear thoughts arising; only fear noticing them too late” is not false. If we can heighten alertness, gather the power of mind, and watch thoughts the moment they arise without following them in their flow; if we do not cling to or become stained by whatever appears before us, then within three to five years the practice can become continuous and seamless.

Furthermore, the practice of “preserving and entrusting” has two stages, moving from shallow to deep. They are not the same thing. “Preserving” means protecting; “entrusting” means allowing freedom. One first practices protection, just as after an infant is born it must be properly protected and cared for so that it does not die young. Only when the deliberate practice of protection has reached completion, so that in daily functioning there is no misstep at all, can one enter the practice of “entrusting.” One lets it move freely: if it wants to sit, it sits; if it wants to walk, it walks, with no constraint at all. Only then can one enter the proper position of the unconditioned.

Going further upward, one dissolves even the trace of the unconditioned and forgets it. There is no so-called conditioned or unconditioned. All day long one is like an idiot or a dullard: hungry, one eats; tired, one sleeps. Only then is there real benefit. But if, while carrying out the practice of “preserving,” one applies effort too intensely and watches too tightly, then after a long time one becomes dull as a wooden chicken, dead and unable to transform; that too is not right. Therefore there are three difficulties in practice: first, the difficulty of recognizing what is original, standing firmly on one’s feet, and having no doubt; second, after recognizing what is original, the difficulty of close preservation without forgetting; third, the difficulty of not dying in protection, but letting it function freely and vividly. Having passed these three, then in heaven above and earth below, only you are the honored one.

Someone may ask: “Chan master Dahui Gao denounced the various parties’ silent sitting and observing mind as silent-illumination heretical Chan. Now you teach people, after direct pointing and seeing the nature, to observe closely and protect true mind. Does this not fall into the category of silent-illumination heretical Chan?” I answer: Dahui denounced the various parties as silent-illumination heretical Chan because they did not know that there is something—they did not recognize the original nature—and were only sitting there emptily, laboring in vain, with the added danger of falling into stagnant water and indeterminate blankness. Therefore he denounced it as heretical Chan. Now we first recognize the original

nature and then protect it closely. This is not empty preservation; it is preservation in which the true host has been recognized and marvelous presence is known. It is like protecting and raising a child after the child has been born, not empty preservation when there is no child. This is completely different from what Dahui denounced as heretical Chan and must not be confused with it.

Since recognizing one's own original mind and seeing one's own original nature are so important on the path of practice, the importance and key role of direct pointing become even more evident. Since direct pointing to seeing the nature is so important, the great patriarchs who could open students' own nature, enabling them to awaken right then and avoid many winding detours, truly had immense merit.

Among the five houses of Chan, great patriarchs capable of directly revealing true mind to students in a clear and doubtless way have appeared in every generation. Yet among them, the one who spoke most directly and forthrightly, enabling people to awaken upon hearing, was none other than Patriarch Linji. Not only did he explain with perfect clarity what the Buddha-nature of each person is and where this nature is; he also disclosed without reserve, through the "Three Mysteries and Three Essentials," how to preserve it after awakening and the stages by which practice advances upward. Unlike other schools, which swallowed back the crucial words just as they reached the mouth, causing people instead to doubt and feel at a loss, this is probably why the other schools have fallen silent today, while Linji alone can still continue.

Patriarch Linji instructed students: "What makes me no different from all Buddhas is that I recognize this person who speaks Dharma and listens to Dharma. He is the person with no dependency. He is the mother of the Buddhas; all Buddhas come forth from him." He also said: "Raise your eyebrows, straighten your spine, and reveal this majestic person who speaks Dharma and listens to Dharma—this is a living Buddha and living patriarch." He also said: "On the lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank, constantly going in and out through the face of every one of you." Again he said: "Do you want to know this true person of no rank? It is just the one now speaking Dharma and listening to Dharma."

He also said: "People should seek true view; they should not seek the extraordinary. The extraordinary arrives of itself. What is called true view? Your four-element body cannot speak Dharma or listen to Dharma; your spleen, stomach, liver, and gallbladder cannot speak Dharma or listen to Dharma; empty space and the objective realm cannot speak Dharma or listen to Dharma. What is it that can speak Dharma and listen to Dharma? It is this immediately present, clear and distinct, solitary brightness without a shape—this is what speaks Dharma and listens to Dharma. If you see in this way, then you are no different from the Buddhas and patriarchs."

He also said: "Do you wish to know the Buddhas and patriarchs? It is simply you who can listen to the Dharma. If you cannot trust this and seek outwardly, then even if you find

something, it will all be words, letters, names, and marks; you will never obtain the intent of the living Buddhas and living patriarchs.” Again: “From this mountain monk’s view, I am no different from the World-Honored One. In the many kinds of daily use, what is lacking? The numinous light functioning through the six sense pathways has never ceased. If you can see in this way, you are a person with nothing to do for your whole life.”

He also said: “If you want freedom in birth and death, in going and staying, recognize right now the one listening to the Dharma: without shape or characteristics and without an abiding place, vividly alive, responding through the myriad situations and functions, yet nowhere fixed. The more you search for it, the farther away you turn; the more you seek it, the more you go against it. This is called secret.” Patriarch Linji saw truly and spoke earnestly. His repeated exhortation to students—“the person who speaks Dharma and listens to Dharma”—appears in too many places to count. His whole intent was that people trust it right now and recognize it thoroughly; only then can the great matter be completed.

If we later students can recognize the clue of original nature here, have no doubt at all, and preserve it closely in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, exhausting deluded habits and fully realizing bodhi, then we will not fail Linji’s sincere intention for people. As for the “Three Mysteries and Three Essentials,” they expressed Linji’s own inward realization. Because his practice was meticulous and he had personally gone through the process, he spoke clearly and thoroughly. He said that whenever one sings forth the ancestral vehicle, a single phrase must contain the Three Mysteries, and each gate of Mystery must contain Three Essentials. We must examine these Three Mysteries and Three Essentials carefully before we know the mysterious depth by which one proceeds from initial awakening to gradual fullness.

Yet through the generations, the various parties have each clung to their own view about what the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials actually are, disputing without end and refusing to yield. Some, such as the old abbot Guta, Hong Juefan, and Zhang Wujin, said they were like the sound of a poison-smeared drum—once heard, one dies and the matter is finished. Others said they meant cutting off the streams and standing like a wall ten thousand fathoms high, until all covert seeking ceases and one awakens to what is original. Others said they were like the banner of cool extinction, and so on. Only the old abbot Guta rejected the various opinions, saying that since Linji spoke of the Three Mysteries, we should return the Three Mysteries to him: how can one phrase cover them all? He therefore collected sayings to display the Three Mysteries, but even within this he omitted several Essentials, so it still felt somewhat fragmented and disjointed.

Amid all these differing theories, with no agreement possible, Chan master Fenyang Shanzhao summarized the matter in a verse: “The Three Mysteries and Three Essentials are hard to divide; when the meaning is obtained, forgetting words makes the Way easy to approach. One phrase clearly encompasses the myriad phenomena; at Double Ninth in the ninth month, chrysanthemums are fresh.” He was a fifth-generation descendant of Linji. If he said they are hard to divide, who would dare divide them again? From then on, the meaning of the Three

Mysteries and Three Essentials was sealed away on a high shelf, and there was no one who raised it again.

It was not until the early Qing, when Chan master Sanfeng, a Dharma heir of Miyun Yuanwu of Tiantong, appeared in the world, that he asked his teacher about the real meaning of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials of the founding patriarch of their school. Master Wu answered him with Fenyang Zhao's verse. Sanfeng did not accept this and asked his teacher to point out clearly and distinctly which three constituted the Three Mysteries; moreover, since each Mystery contains three Essentials, the Three Mysteries should contain nine Essentials—what were those nine Essentials? One should not simply muddle through by saying vaguely that they are “hard to divide.” This caused discord between teacher and disciple and further dispute. The Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing regarded this as insubordination, stopped the circulation of Sanfeng's recorded sayings, and burned his books, leaving us today unable to consult how he expounded the mysterious meaning of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. This is truly a great regret.

Since there is nothing we can do about this, I will carefully draw from the discussions of previous worthies on the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials, choosing what is suitable as a standard for modern people's practice, and record it briefly below. Linji said, “A single phrase contains the Three Mysteries.” Before clarifying the Three Mysteries, one must first understand what this single phrase is. If one does not understand this phrase, how could one penetrate the Three Mysteries? It turns out that this phrase is what was said above: “On the lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank; it is just the one now speaking Dharma and listening to Dharma.” This phrase is of utmost importance; it is the general principle of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. Only after understanding this phrase and recognizing the original face can one go on to discuss the Mysteries and Essentials—the process of practice. Otherwise, it is like discussing military strategy on paper: empty talk without benefit.

The so-called true person of no rank who speaks and listens to the Dharma is the innately genuine person of the Way: uncontrived, not perfected through practice, and dependent on nothing. What can now speak Dharma and listen to Dharma is not the four-element body; it is each person's immediately present “wondrous awareness,” numinously luminous, vividly clear and solitary, without form. To recognize this “wondrous awareness” is only initial awakening. Habits are not yet removed, and one cannot save oneself; one must train the mind amid circumstances and advance upward, step by step, before one can walk hand in hand with the Buddhas and patriarchs. Therefore Linji divided this progressive path into the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials.

From the phrase of the true person of no rank who speaks Dharma and listens to Dharma, according to people's different faculties and the depth or shallowness of what they awaken to, the Three Mysteries are distinguished. What are they? First, the Mystery in the Essence. Second, the Mystery in the Meaning. Third, the Mystery in the Phrase. The essential meaning

issues from the wondrous essence that has been realized; from meaning, wondrous function is articulated as words and phrases. For readers to understand and enter more easily, I will reverse the order of Linji's three phrases and explain them in sections from shallow to deep, beginning with the third: the Mystery in the Phrase.

1. The Mystery in the Phrase

“Look at the puppets performing on the stage;
all their movements depend entirely on the puppeteer inside the booth.”

This means that when we watch a puppet show, the wooden figures can move only because a puppeteer inside the booth is pulling the strings. This teaches us to understand from there that our ability to speak and act is entirely the function of Buddha-nature. Apart from Buddha-nature, this physical body would be like wood, unable to move at all. Through this indication one awakens to what is original. But this is only initial awakening; clinging habits are still present, so at this time one cannot save oneself. After awakening, however, as long as one does not become lax or take a little as enough, but diligently and closely engages in the practice of preservation, one can remove all habits and end birth and death.

Thus the process of advancing in practice is here divided into Three Essentials. The Initial Essential: at initial awakening, one disengages from all marks and recognizes the original reality; this is the initial stage of the Mystery in the Phrase. The Middle Essential: having recognized the original reality, habits still remain, so one must protect it closely without the slightest slackening. The Upper Essential: using oneself to protect oneself, there are imagined lights and shadows one wants to leave behind, yet the strength of practice is not enough and one still cannot forget them. At this time, however strict the protection is, there are still marks that cannot be forgotten. Therefore Linji said that one cannot save oneself.

2. The Mystery in the Meaning

“How could wondrous understanding leave room for Asaṅga to ask? How could frothing bubbles bear the pivotal force that cuts off the stream?”

The wondrous principle of this Way is so difficult to explain that it cannot be put into words; this is truly wondrous. Since it is wondrous beyond verbal explanation, is not the person who raises a thought to ask already mistaken? Even Bodhisattva Asaṅga, so skilled in questioning, has no words to set forth at this point. At the beginning of the unconditioned Dharma-gate, one has already awakened to the pivotal force that cuts off the stream—that is, one has recognized what is original and entered the proper position of the unconditioned, so the many streams of deluded thought are cut off. “Frothing bubbles” means bubbles in water arising and ceasing, joining into a mass. Even if hundreds of thousands of millions of verbal questions and answers gathered into one mass of bubbles, how could they bear the great capacity and great function that cuts off all streams?

The meaning is this: however many hundreds or thousands of questions and answers there may be, they finally belong to explanation. How could they compare with the wondrous understanding that has no explanation, in which everything is let go, with no question and no answer, and right then the streams are cut off and one sits upright realizing the unconditioned? Here the progress of practice is also divided into Three Essentials. The Initial Essential continues from the Upper Essential of the Mystery in the Phrase: because the practice of preservation is continuous, one can leave behind imagined lights and shadows, yet there is still a “leaving” in the meaning. The Middle Essential: the practice becomes still more continuous, the word “leaving” is forgotten, and one then enters the proper position of the unconditioned. Body and mind are light and at ease; the benefit is incomparable. At first, inward illumination was largely deliberate; now it has become quiescent illumination, and one sits upright in the unconditioned, merely a person of the Way with nothing to do. The Upper Essential: at this time there is no so-called practice; the practice of no practice is very great practice. Even the unconditioned has dissolved its traces, so there is no so-called unconditioned. At this point one does not seek spiritual powers and transformations, yet spiritual powers come of themselves. Having clarified two Mysteries and six Essentials at this stage, one can teach humans and devas. Therefore Linji said that one who recognizes this phrase can be teacher of humans and devas.

3. The Mystery in the Essence

“When the seal of the Three Essentials opens, the vermilion point is still narrow; before deliberation can arise, host and guest are already distinct.”

These Three Essentials are not the Initial, Middle, and Upper Essentials discussed above, but the Three Essentials of body, speech, and mind. The Three Essentials discussed above concern returning to the root and completing one’s own great matter. These Three Essentials concern opening the mind-ground—the vermilion point—bringing forth hundreds of thousands of dhāraṇīs, establishing gates of transformation, and arousing wondrous function to liberate beings. To liberate beings, the body outwardly manifests dignified conduct; speech responds according to the occasion; and mind operates with wisdom and compassion together. Using these as the seal opens the mind-ground until it is vast and boundless. In every assessment, granting and taking away, provisional and real, illumination and function, host and guest, all are naturally clear and distinct without deliberation. For example, if monks from the east and west halls both step forward and shout at the same time, can you still distinguish who is host and who is guest?

Here too there are Three Essentials. The Initial Essential: when practice becomes wondrous to the utmost, the wondrous cannot long flaunt its wondrousness and returns to plainness. This plainness is the return to plainness when the wondrousness of practice has reached its absolute limit; it is not the plainness falsely spoken of by someone who has not passed through the Mystery and Essentials in the Meaning. Plain as water—water has no flavor. One

is the same as a foolish person, with neither discriminating consciousness nor deliberate knowing, simply putting on clothes and eating food.

The Middle Essential: our essence has originally been so, and now it is again so; nothing has been added. This principle truly cannot be exhausted by the word “wondrous”; only the word “plain” is good. But as soon as most people enter plainness, they feel lonely and isolated and fly away from it. Only the wise can settle there and delight in it. Although plainness has no flavor, within no flavor there is a supreme flavor. Originally it is not form, not emptiness, not one, not many, not an ordinary being, not a sage, not a realm, not an object, not conditioned, not unconditioned, nor is it even “not.” In walking, standing, sitting, lying down, movement and stillness, receiving and responding, coming and going, it is clear, solitary, and bright, like the bright moon overhead. Push it away and it does not go; pull it toward you and it does not come. There is never the slightest trace of continuity or interruption.

The Upper Essential: at this point, nothing can be said or put into words. When the World-Honored One saw that Mañjuśrī and Kāśyapa had struck the gavel, he descended from the seat. From ancient times, when Chan adepts reached this point, they brushed off their robes and returned to the abbot’s quarters. Only Chan master Caoshan had one phrase that can be used to clarify this Upper Essential. A monk asked Caoshan, “What about when the bright moon is overhead?” Caoshan said, “He is still a man below the steps.” The monk said, “Please, Master, guide me up the steps.” Caoshan said, “We shall meet when the moon has set.” Readers, after the moon has set, could it simply be pitch dark without any light? No. This is when the practice has reached the ultimate point: traces have dissolved and been forgotten, and there is not the slightest mark, like our being in the air and forgetting that it is air. At this time, if someone were to ask further, “How do we meet after the moon has set?” I would bow to him and withdraw.

From this we can see that when our practice reaches the ultimate point, not the slightest trace remains. If one still clings to spiritual powers and transformations, one misses it by a great distance. Therefore Linji said that at this stage one can be teacher of Buddhas and patriarchs. Ever since Fenyang Zhao said that Linji’s direct heart teaching for seeing the nature and accomplishing the Way—the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials—was “hard to distinguish,” later people have mostly avoided explaining their actual content. They merely muddled through by saying “mud pellet,” or by shouting “Ho!” to cover it over.

Speaking of the shout: if one has truly penetrated the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials and reached the ultimate point, then this shout not only measures up to the highest point of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials—“when the seal of the Three Essentials opens, the vermilion point is still narrow”—even the Buddhas of the three times are driven back by it. But if one merely muddles through with a vague shout, then Zhang San or Li Si—who cannot shout? What is such a shout worth? A shit-stick!

The functions of the staff and shout in Chan are broad and subtle. Deshan's staff and Linji's shout are ancestral models resounding through past and present. Who knows how many bold and outstanding people opened the true eye there and returned home to sit steadily? This shows how subtle their function is, beyond anything words can express. I will offer one case involving a shout to the assembly, so that we may glimpse a little of its subtlety.

During the time of Emperor Huizong of Song, the grand commandant of the court invited elders from the various mountains to his home to hold an unrestricted Dharma assembly. The great Chan adept Yuanwu Keqin was present, and Emperor Huizong also came in plain clothes to rejoice in the gathering. During the assembly, a Huayan lecturer raised a question: "According to our teaching, to become Buddha one must pass through three great *asaṃkhyeya kalpas*. But the Chan school says that with one blow of the staff or one shout, one can realize the Way. This differs greatly from what the Buddha said and cannot fail to make people doubt. Now that adepts of the ancestral school are here, if one shout can penetrate the five teachings of Xianshou, then everyone can be convinced that the staff and shout truly have such effect. If it cannot penetrate the five teachings, then the claim that staff and shout can enable people to accomplish the Way is the same as demonic speech. I respectfully ask the adepts of the ancestral school to open instruction for us foolish ones."

At that time Yuanwu looked toward Chan master Jingyin Cheng. Cheng understood his meaning and said to the assembly, "This question is very simple; it is not worth troubling the senior elders to answer. I, a junior elder, will try to answer. To penetrate the five teachings, we must first establish clearly the meanings of the five teachings, so that there will be no confusion when the shout is given."

"First, the Small Vehicle teaching: the Small Vehicle clings to existence and takes as its meaning that there are dharmas to be practiced, birth and death to be ended, and *nirvāṇa* to be realized.

Second, the initial Mahāyāna teaching: this is the Dharma Realm of Principle—true emptiness beyond characteristics; it esteems not establishing a single Dharma and not being stained by a single dust mote.

Third, the final Mahāyāna teaching: this takes neither emptiness nor existence as its meaning. Emptiness and existence are both negated; this is the Dharma Realm of Phenomena, in which one abides in neither emptiness nor existence.

Fourth, the sudden Mahāyāna teaching: this takes both emptiness and existence as its meaning. Emptiness does not obstruct existence, and existence does not obstruct emptiness; this is the Dharma Realm of Nonobstruction Between Principle and Phenomena, in which emptiness and existence function together.

Fifth, the perfect Mahāyāna teaching: this takes "not emptiness and not existence; not existence and not emptiness; perfect interpenetration without obstruction" as its purport.

This is the Dharma Realm of Nonobstruction Among Phenomena, the very heart of the Buddhas and patriarchs.”

After presenting them, Cheng asked the Huayan lecturer, “Are the meanings and purports of the five teachings like this?” The lecturer said, “Yes, yes.” Cheng then gave a great shout and asked the assembly, “Did you hear it?” The assembly said, “We heard it.” Cheng said, “Then this is ‘existence,’ and it can penetrate the Small Vehicle teaching.” After a long while, when the sound had vanished, Cheng asked the assembly, “Do you still hear it?” The assembly said, “We do not hear it.” Cheng said, “Then this is ‘emptiness,’ and it can penetrate the initial Mahāyāna teaching.”

Cheng continued: “Now there is no sound, but just now there was sound; this is not empty. Although just now there was sound, now there is none; this is not existent. This neither existence nor emptiness can penetrate the final Mahāyāna teaching. Further, when we now speak of emptiness, it is because there was existence just now that emptiness can be spoken of. If there had just now been no existence, there would now be no basis for speaking of emptiness. Therefore when emptiness is spoken of, existence is present in emptiness. By the same example, because there is emptiness, existence can be spoken of; if there were no emptiness, what existence could be spoken of? Therefore when existence is spoken of, emptiness is present in existence. This is their relative mutual completion; this is precisely emptiness as existence and existence as emptiness. Thus it penetrates the sudden Mahāyāna teaching.”

“As for the perfect Mahāyāna teaching’s “not existence and not emptiness; not emptiness and not existence”: I do not treat this single shout as merely a shout. In doing all things, there is no coming, going, clinging, or stain. Eating all day, I have never bitten a grain of rice; wearing clothes all day, I have never hung on a single thread. Without moving body and mind, I respond to myriad conditions every day; sitting upright in the unconditioned, wondrous functions are countless as the sands. When speaking of nonexistence, it pervades worlds as many as sands; when speaking of existence, not a hair is established. The Hundred Schools of Thought and the hundred crafts and arts are all likewise so. This is the purport of the perfect Mahāyāna teaching, perfectly interpenetrating without obstruction.”

When the assembly heard this, all were convinced, praised it, and marveled; Emperor Huizong, sitting there, nodded again and again. This case shows us that every movement, every action, every word, and every deed are nothing but the wondrous function of true mind. As long as, after recognizing it, we do not forget preservation, train at all times and in all places amid events and situations, and remove old habits completely, then we can arouse great capacity and great function and fully realize bodhi. We truly do not necessarily have to investigate a huatou devoid of conceptual meaning.

But if a person’s habits are deeply ingrained and their clinging is strong, then although they can recognize this person who speaks Dharma and listens to Dharma, because their

meditative stability is insufficient they cannot clearly see deluded thoughts as they arise and do not know how to protect the mind in practice. When objects and situations are before them, they have even less strength to transform. Such a person may choose a Dharma gate suited to their own habits, such as counting the breath, Buddha-name recitation, investigating a huatou, or practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, and add sitting meditation in order to strengthen meditative stability. In this way, perhaps in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down they will not forget preservation, and will finally complete the practice leading to perfect and thorough realization.

4F. 大机大用 / Great Capacity and Great Function

The original purpose of studying Buddhism is to gain genuine benefit, to be free and at ease, to arouse great capacity and great function, and to benefit the many. It is not for seeking marvelous spiritual powers in order to show oneself off. Still less is it for sitting dead behind the black mountain, continually abiding in the attainment of cessation, unmoving like wood or stone.

When people hear of great capacity and great function, they often think of mysterious spiritual powers. They do not know that great capacity and great function are right in the ordinary. Not only do present-day beginners in Buddhism fail to know this; even the attendant of Chan master Niaoke once did not understand this capacity and function. He complained that the Chan master had not revealed the essentials of Dharma for him and planned to leave for another place. He said to the master, “Previously I have not received the master’s compassionate instruction in the essentials of Dharma. Now I intend to take my leave and go elsewhere.” The Chan master said, “When I want to drink tea, you bring tea for me to drink; when I want to eat, you bring food for me to eat. Is this not Buddhadharma?” The attendant suddenly gained insight. He understood that drinking tea, eating food, bringing tea, and fetching food are precisely the capacity and function of our Buddha-nature.

From this we can see that the great capacity and great function of Buddhadharma are right in the most ordinary responses, exchanges, and laughter of daily life. I want tea and you bring tea: this is great capacity. You bring tea and I receive it and drink: this is great function. Likewise, when you bring food and I receive it and eat, and in all other daily activities, there is great capacity and great function. The so-called true Buddhadharma is precisely in ordinary daily use. If, when I want tea, you bring rice, or when I want rice, you bring tea, then everything is thrown into disorder. Not only is this not the Buddhadharma of great capacity and great function; it does not even measure up to worldly functioning.

Master Mazu was, in the Chan forests, the great master most praised for great capacity and great function. We can see something of this from the way he used Chan capacity and function to guide Baizhang. One day Baizhang was attending Mazu while they were walking in the mountains. Mazu saw a flock of wild geese flying over. He raised his hand, pointed, and asked Baizhang, “What is that?” Baizhang lifted his head, looked, and answered, “Wild geese.” Alas—he missed it right before his face. Mazu saw that he saw the finger but not the moon, and that he was stuck on the object. After the geese had flown past, he asked again, “Where have they gone?” Baizhang lifted his head, no longer saw the geese, and said, “They have flown away.” Still he was not awake.

Mazu saw that Baizhang was simply fixated on objects, with his mind clinging to them; he did not understand Mazu’s capacity, mistook the object for the fixed point of reference, and did not know its function. Mazu therefore applied an even more skillful hand: he twisted Baizhang’s nose and pressed him further, saying, “And you still say they have flown away?”

Baizhang cried out in pain and thereby awakened to Mazu's capacity and function. Originally Mazu was pointing east while asking about the west in order to have him recognize: who is it that raises the hand and points to things? He was thereby to find his way home. It was not that Mazu did not even know the wild geese. Moreover, while Baizhang was in pain, he pressed the question: have they flown away or not? Baizhang then knew that this nature which knows pain and itching is unmoving and unshaken, does not come or go, and has no past or future. Thus he awakened in the midst of pain.

One day, while Baizhang was standing in attendance on Mazu, Mazu looked at the whisk hanging at the corner of the bed. Baizhang asked, "Does functioning lie right here, or apart from this?" After his initial awakening, Baizhang already understood how to function with this when appropriate and apart from this when appropriate; he used the question to test Mazu. Look at the ancients: in every movement and stillness, whenever sights met the eye or sounds reached the ear, they brought it all into accord with the Way. Therefore their progress was swift. If we too stayed with it morning and evening, whether wandering or in adversity, applying ourselves steadily and tirelessly to clear observation, would we not also progress quickly? It is only a pity that today's Buddhists are lazy and loose. They do not apply themselves with earnest urgency. All day long they chase spiritual powers and dabble in marvels instead of working with the mind. Thus they squander their time and delay their own progress. How lamentable!

Mazu saw that Baizhang was following the verbal thread and turning with it; there was still a point of fixation, and the matter was not settled. So he struck directly at the point and said, "How will you later teach the Dharma and guide those who come after you?" Baizhang took down the whisk from the bed-corner and held it up to show Mazu. This was certainly a spontaneous, marvelous move—wordless speaking, a wondrous indication—yet there was still a point of fixation. Seeing that he was still turning with the verbal thread and stuck on "this," Mazu used Baizhang's own spear to stab him: "Does functioning lie right here, or apart from this?" Baizhang then hung the whisk back at the corner of the bed.

To ordinary people, this move seems wondrous to the utmost. He hung the whisk back: no attachment to anything, utterly clear and clean, with no words left to say. Yet he had still not escaped Mazu's verbal current and was now stuck on "apart from." Mazu therefore gave a thunderous shout. Baizhang was startled at once and was deaf for three days.

Readers, was Baizhang really deafened by Mazu for three days, so that he could not hear any sound at all—neither wind and birdsong, nor chickens crowing and dogs barking, nor the speech of people before him except as mouths moving without sound? No. Under that shout, his views of "this" and "apart from this" were cut off. Clean and uncovered, stainless, inwardly he was not pulled along by seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing; outwardly he was not stained by any form; and yet he did not fall into emptiness. Reality was present and complete. What a wonder: the great treasure-store that he had not seen through kalpas of many births

was fully seen in a single morning. He could not release it and could not advance; for three days he was as if foolish and dazed, fallen within it, and only afterward did he let it go.

Although he had thoroughly awakened this time, he was still deaf for three days, so there remained a regrettable element of gradual progression. Fenzhou Wen said, "Once awakened, that is enough. Why talk of being deaf for three days?" Shimen said, "Without three days of deafness, how could one awaken?" Fenzhou Wen said, "My way of saying it is half a month's journey beyond Shimen." This is truly not empty talk.

Later Huangbo came to meet Mazu, but Mazu had already passed away. Baizhang therefore told Huangbo the circumstances of his awakening. On hearing it, Huangbo stuck out his tongue and praised Mazu highly: "Truly great capacity and great function!" Hearing this, Baizhang's realization became still more thorough, and he thereupon praised Huangbo highly, saying, "You indeed have a view that surpasses the teacher." This was a sincere word from Baizhang's heart.

Speaking of capacity and function: every movement and every action is nothing but great capacity and great function. Just follow the time, occasion, causes, and conditions, with nothing twisted or contrived in the heart, without stagnation or attachment. This is what is meant by being free in every direction, gathering and releasing without restriction. Green bamboo and yellow flowers are all mysterious capacity; killing and giving life, granting and taking away, are none other than wondrous function. When great elders of the ancestral school reached the end, they all had this great capacity and great function. For example, Nanquan cut the cat, and Guizong cut the snake; each possessed the free means of killing and giving life.

Yet when people read these cases, they often cannot pass through them and cannot help doubting in their minds: does not cutting a cat or killing a snake violate the precept against killing? How could great practitioners engage in such acts of taking life? It surely cannot be fact; perhaps it is only an allegory, used to indicate killing the deluded thoughts of greed, anger, contention, and so on within the mind. Around 1956, an elder worthy named Hu gave lectures on the Records of Pointing to the Moon at Jing'an Monastery in Shanghai. When he reached the case of Nanquan cutting the cat, he told everyone: "Please do not understand this as really cutting the cat. It is only an allegory. As Layman Pang said, 'To protect life one must use killing; only when killing is exhausted can you be at peace.' It means killing off the greed, anger, delusion, clinging, and habitual delusions in one's own mind." This statement is also correct, but one must see what degree of practice a person has reached. If practice is truly deep, then when killing and giving life are simultaneous, killing is giving life and giving life is killing. Not only is there no distinction between killing and giving life; there is not even a trace of distinction. In that case it may indeed be fact.

At that time an old practitioner in the assembly would not accept his statement. He stood up and said, "This is only your own state of realization, elder. It is not the original intent of

Teacher Wang. Teacher Wang held no conception of killing versus giving life. Even while cutting, he gave life; it may indeed be a real event.” Elder Hu would not agree, and the two sides argued. Just as they were stuck in dispute, no one knows which old practitioner gave a cat’s meow. Hearing it, everyone was suddenly startled into realization, and the dispute ended.

As for the case of cutting the cat, Nanquan’s intent was originally not to cut the cat. He only wanted someone from the two halls to come forward and utter one mind-seal word to clarify the mind-ground; that would have been enough. But no one understood this intent and no one could say the word that would save the cat. Since Nanquan had already spoken, he then followed through and cut with the knife. At that time it may not have been that no one among the two halls was capable; perhaps they were waiting to see one step further what Nanquan’s maneuver would ultimately be, and for that reason refused to come forward and utter a word to save the cat.

Later, when Zhaozhou returned, Nanquan told him what had happened. Zhaozhou took off his sandals, placed them on his head, and walked out. Nanquan praised him, saying, “If you had been there, you would have saved the cat.” Here I will briefly show the hidden meaning. Those who explain this usually say that Zhaozhou knew who the one cutting the cat was, and that the one who showed sandals on his head was also that very one. In fact, the ancients’ maneuvers, every movement and stillness, every word and action, all had their basis. They were not merely clarifying who the one wearing sandals on his head was. Recognizing the one who puts the sandals on his head is only awakening; to arouse great capacity and great function is the final matter. Sandals are worn on the feet, but now he placed them on the head—is this not going in reverse and acting contrary? The two halls were arguing over the cat; that was already inverted conduct. Teacher Wang killed the cat because of this; for those who know, this is not to be discussed, but would not those who do not know slander the Dharma and damage the wheel of the true Dharma? That too is contrary action. Now, by placing sandals on his head and leaving, Zhaozhou not only swept the monks of the two halls into it; he caught Teacher Wang in the same net as well.

Teacher Wang was certainly no weakling. Although Zhaozhou went out, Teacher Wang still did not let him off. He spoke what seemed greatly like praise: “If you had been there, you would have saved the cat.” The words sound like praise, but their intent is not kind. They are like a needle hidden in cotton: if you squeeze it, it pricks your hand. Once Guishan and his disciple Yangshan were walking in the mountains. Guishan sat on a rock, and a flying bird carried a red fruit and offered it before the rock. Yangshan said, “My teacher’s majestic virtue is such that even birds know to make offerings.” Guishan said, “You too cannot be without a share.” Do you, benevolent ones, recognize what lies within this?

Speaking to this point, I happen to remember a modern case. During the War of Resistance, Chan master Xuyun was living in seclusion in Chongqing. The faithful in Chengdu wished to meet him and learn from his venerable example, so they asked Nan Huaijin’s teacher, Yuan

Huanxian, to invite him. Yuan went to Chongqing and met Elder Xu. After exchanging greetings, he posed a question: “Chan practitioners in Chengdu have three different views: first, after awakening one must truly practice; second, once awakened, one rests and need not practice further; third, practice is no-practice, and no-practice is practice. May I ask, Venerable: which of these three views is most correct?” This question appears ordinary, but it is actually a Chan-school test in which the host examines the guest. It lays handcuffs and shackles right in front of you to see whether you will be taken in and put them on yourself.

Xuyun was an accomplished Chan adept of his day and did not fall into the trap. He answered, “All crows under heaven are equally black.” After that, the two turned to other matters and did not cross swords again. Yuan later wrote a letter to layman Jia Titao in Chengdu, describing the whole matter from beginning to end. At the time Ācārya Dayu was also living in seclusion in Chengdu. After reading the letter he said, “Elder Yuan asked well, and Elder Xu also answered wonderfully, but he did not press the blade home. What a pity.” Jia asked, “In what way did he fail to press the blade home?” Master Yu said, “He let Yuan pass.” Jia asked further, “How should he have answered so as not to let him pass?” Master Yu said, “Answer him: ‘Which of the three are you?’” This turns the other man’s own spear back on him. From this we can see that the questions and answers of a lineage master are truly not ordinary; there is much subtlety in them; they are no child’s play.

Another example: Chan masters Zhenjing Wen and Foyin were once at a tea gathering. Foyin arrived late. Master Zhenjing asked, “Why are you late?” Foyin said, “Because I passed through Zhenjing’s belly wearing straw sandals.” Master Zhenjing said, “I swallowed you.” Foyin said, “But you cannot spit me out.” Master Zhenjing said, “If I cannot spit you out, I will shit you out.” When lineage masters cross swords, it is unlike ordinary people. Advance and retreat are determined entirely by the depth of capacity and function in their practice.

To awaken great capacity and great function, one must first recognize the original face; otherwise great capacity and great function cannot even be discussed. Recognizing the original face is not difficult, because the original nature is nowhere else; it is fully present right before us. Unfortunately people do not recognize it and miss it. This is all because, on hearing the word “nature,” they think of something lofty, profound, and mysterious. They do not know that right now, this which can see, hear, speak, and act is the original person. If you seek apart from this, then the more you seek, the farther away you go; the more you look, the less you see. When two people face each other and four eyes look at one another, directly point out: who is this that can see? Then one can transcend directly in a single leap, with no difficulty at all.

Chan master Zhenjing has a verse: “Everyone has a natural Buddha; / its wondrous function ranges everywhere, yet none know it. / Today I point it out clearly to all: / when cutting a snake or raising a whisk, who else could it be?” How direct, candid, and forthright this pointing is! With profound compassionate solicitude and without the slightest concealment, the Chan master presents true mind to students, telling everyone there is no need to raise any

doubt-sensation and that they can awaken right then without the slightest effort. From there, capacity and function open. What a delight!

Esoteric Buddhism is no different. The Dharma essentials taught in Atiyoga, the most profound heart-essence of Esoteric Buddhism, are completely consistent with Chan. It too directly reveals the view, enabling students to recognize the numinous true mind at once and to understand the wondrous functioning of the Dharma, enjoyment, and emanation bodies. The Great Perfection instruction *The Three Statements That Strike the Vital Point* says: “Pure and free of thought, lucidly clear and distinct—this is the dharmakāya; radiant illumination is the saṃbhogakāya; seeing all phenomenal appearances as illusory transformations and responding to conditions without the slightest abiding is the nirmāṇakāya.” This is of one pattern with what Patriarch Linji said: “One thought of pure mind-light is the dharmakāya Buddha; one thought of non-discriminating mind-light is the saṃbhogakāya Buddha; one thought of non-differentiating mind-light is the nirmāṇakāya Buddha.” The original nature perfectly includes the three bodies; there is no need to seek them outside the body.

Therefore one Karmapa said, “The highest esoteric Dharma is Chan; Chan is the most profound esoteric Dharma.” This statement is indeed true and not false. Unfortunately, many Buddhists today do not understand this principle. They discriminate foolishly: those who practice Chan regard the esoteric school as heterodox, and those who practice esoteric methods cling to spiritual powers and reject Chan. They make Chan and esoteric practice seem as incompatible as ice and charcoal in a single furnace. This is all because they do not penetrate the true essence of each school and lineage.

If we wish to awaken great capacity and great function, then after recognizing the original reality we need only preserve it closely, train diligently in functioning amid events and circumstances, and remove all habitual delusions of clinging, doubt, stagnation, greed, anger, and so forth. When functioning has become mature, one naturally merges into the realm of great capacity and great function. Never be frightened by the word “great” and think of something lofty, profound, or mysterious. All capacity and function are right before you. One need only meet each occasion without obstruction or doubt. The moment doubt or stagnation appears, the functioning slips away.

Consider Baizhang’s wild-fox case. When a monk asked, “Does a person of great practice still fall into cause and effect?” and the answer given was, “He does not fall into cause and effect,” there was originally nothing especially wrong with that answer. Yet the one who gave that answer then became doubtful himself and fell into a fox’s body. Pitiful indeed: after five hundred years he was still not awake. Fortunately Baizhang compassionately resolved his doubt for him by saying, “He is not blind to cause and effect.” Only then did he let go of that mass of doubt and pass away relieved. “Not falling” and “not blind”: there is only one word’s difference, yet the difference in their import is as great as that between life and death, heaven and the abyss. But for a person who has arrived, there is truly not the slightest difference. Since Buddha-nature is natural and uncontrived, without a single thread and unstained by a

single dust mote, not one Dharma is established. Causes and results—where could they attach? Since death itself is nonexistent, from where could life come? Within this, can right and wrong, correct and mistaken, still be accommodated?

For this wild fox to awaken through “not blind” was indeed fortunate. But if he could have awakened through “not falling,” the sea would have been wide and the sky open—that would have been even better. When he was about to pass away, he still wanted Baizhang to perform the funeral rites for a deceased monk and cremate him; this was further clinging. Baizhang also complied with his request, thereby fully entering into conventional entanglement and falling into cause and effect.

In our practice, after recognizing the original reality, we need only constantly pay attention to preserving the original truth without forgetting it. When preservation becomes mature, do not cling to dead preservation and refuse to let go; instead let it be natural. Even the most subtle deluded thoughts will be clearly seen, and one will not follow them and flow away. Finally, when all traces have blended away and been forgotten, spiritual powers and wondrous functioning arise. One observes the capacities of beings as if viewing the lines in one’s palm, and applies wondrous functions suited to them as easily as taking something from a bag. There is truly no need to seek near and far, to exert oneself anxiously over this, and to spend each day in panic.

Still, this kind of practice unfolds differently from person to person. For some, it becomes manifest in this very life; for others, only after they have shed this bodily shell. Everyone need only settle the mind and practice, remove deluded habits, and not seek marvelous spiritual powers. In time, spiritual powers will certainly unfold, and one will attain great capacity and great function. Otherwise, there will be no hope of accomplishing the Way.

4G. 谈谈往生西方的关键问题 / On the Key Issue in Rebirth in the West

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Recently, among Pure Land practitioners, a debate has been brewing over whether rebirth in the West requires “one-pointedness without confusion.” Summarizing the focus of their dispute, there appear to be three different opinions:

1. If one merely possesses faith and vows, then even reciting the Buddha’s name with a scattered mind can bring rebirth.
2. Reciting the Buddha’s name with a scattered mind can only plant good roots. To ensure rebirth in the West, besides faith and vows, one must also practice earnestly and reach one-pointedness without confusion.
3. As long as one relies on the power of Amitābha’s vows, one can be reborn while carrying karma; why is one-pointedness without confusion necessary?

Of these three differing opinions, the third makes things sound easiest: one almost need not practice at all, but can rely solely on the power of Amitābha's vows and be reborn. The second is more difficult: one must be one-pointed and unconfused before rebirth is possible. The first is easier: as long as one has faith and vows, even recitation with a scattered mind can bring birth in the West. Each side has its own reasoning, and they have reached an impasse. This leaves later students unable to decide what is right and without any clear course to follow, not knowing how, after all, they should practice in order to accord with the subtle Way.

“How can one truly be reborn in the Pure Land?” This is a major and crucial question for the Pure Land school. If it is not clarified and set right, it truly harms Pure Land practice. The Pure Land Dharma gate is praised as an extraordinary expedient means: it offers horizontal transcendence of the three realms, rebirth in the Pure Land, transcendence of birth and death, and perfect realization of bodhi. If one has not even clarified how to practice, how can one avoid taking the wrong road and losing direction? How could one reach the goal of rebirth in the Western Land safely and smoothly? If one merely talks about rebirth in the West while in fact being unable to accomplish it, then the whole purpose is lost, and it becomes meaningless. Therefore, how one can truly be reborn in the Pure Land, and whether one must be one-pointed and unconfused, is indeed a major question worth investigating. I therefore cannot remain silent and let things drift, harming later students. Not measuring my own shallowness, I too join the discussion of this major issue of principle. I now briefly express my limited view, hoping that worthy sages throughout the land will correct me.

To make it easier to arrive at a clear answer, I will divide the three opinions above into three questions and discuss them one by one, so that the issues of how one can be reborn in the Pure Land and whether one needs one-pointedness without confusion may be clarified.

I. Examining the claim: “If one merely possesses faith and vows, Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind can also bring rebirth.”

First, I feel that the wording of this view is somewhat unclear in meaning. What exactly is meant by “scattered mind”? Does it refer to a beginner whose mind cannot yet be pure, and who should not vainly hope for quick results, but must rely on the practice of holding the Name to sweep away deluded thoughts and gradually attain one-pointedness? This would be as Masters Lianchi, Yinguang, and others have said: habitual deluded movement accumulated over many lives cannot be swept clean by a short period of Buddha-recitation, just as a long-standing illness cannot be cured with one or two doses of medicine. Therefore Buddha-recitation requires a long-enduring resolve: recite steadily and continuously, without slackening. After long effort and deep practice, one will certainly see results and attain one-pointedness.

Or does it mean that, though we now resolve to practice Buddha-recitation and seek rebirth in the West, we may still let ourselves remain entangled with ignorance and karmic habit, gluing the circumstances of the *Sahā* world into the mind as if with lacquer, and then, when old age

and death arrive, naturally be reborn in the West? If the intention is the former, then this encourages later students not to fear difficulty, not to fear the mischief of a scattered mind, but to establish heroic resolve, make great vows, strive upward, certainly attain one-pointedness, and decisively be reborn. Then we should raise both hands in agreement. But if the intention is the latter, we find it truly regrettable. That is arsenic and poison that harms later students, and must absolutely not be accepted.

We want to be born in the Pure Land, yet the mind remains attached to spouses, wealth, children, official position, and all the things of *Sahā*. The ancients called this “trying to row while the boat remains tied to the mooring post.” One cannot even move; how could one enter responsive communion with Amitābha, mind and Buddha becoming one and inseparable, and be born in the Western Pure Land? National Master Yulin said, “In all practice, one must measure oneself and measure the Dharma, acting with a straightforward mind and straightforward conduct. If one truly feels revulsion toward the three realms and firmly resolves on rebirth, then one should rely solely on the Amitābha Sūtra, settle firmly on the sacred Name, gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession. This is what is called holding the Name in one-pointedness without confusion, and one will certainly be reborn. This is the way of first benefiting oneself and afterward benefiting others. But if one has not yet relinquished attachment to present wealth, honor, fame, and rank, and has not yet developed deep revulsion toward the desires for sex and food, then it is not easy to have deep faith in the Dharma gate of rebirth. Even if one believes it, what benefit is there in practicing Pure Land with the body while the mind remains attached to *Sahā*?” Patriarch Hanshan said, “If the mouth recites ‘Amitābha’ while the mind is scattered and confused, even shouting until the throat breaks is still in vain.” Is this not clearly saying that Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind is fruitless? Are these great patriarchs less penetrating in doctrine than you? Are their words untrue?

Someone may say that these are words of Chan patriarchs and differ somewhat from the Pure Land school. Then let us cite a passage from Master Lianchi’s “Third Universal Exhortation to Buddha-Recitation” as evidence. The master said, “Someone asks: Nowadays one sees many people reciting the Buddha’s name, yet few are born in the West. Why is this? There are three reasons. First, though the mouth recites the Buddha’s name, the mind is not wholesome; because of this, one cannot be reborn. I advise worldly people: since you recite the Buddha’s name, you must follow what the Buddha taught. Accumulate virtue and build merit; be filial to your parents; serve the ruler loyally; have elder and younger brothers love one another; have husband and wife respect each other; be utterly sincere and truthful; be gentle and patient; be fair and upright; practice hidden virtue and expedient kindness; have compassion for all. Do not kill living beings; do not insult servants; do not oppress common people. Whenever an unwholesome mind arises, exert yourself in Buddha-recitation, and you must recite until that unwholesome mind retreats. Only like this are you someone who practices Buddha-recitation; only then will you certainly be reborn and become a Buddha. Second, though the mouth recites the Buddha’s name, the mind is filled with random thoughts; because of this, one

cannot be reborn. Pay attention, pay attention! I advise worldly people: when reciting the Buddha's name, restrain the restless monkey-mind and galloping thoughts. Each syllable must be clear, and each moment of mind illuminated, as if you were personally in the West, face to face with Amitābha, not daring to be scattered. Only like this are you someone who practices Buddha-recitation; only then can you be reborn in the West." This passage is so explicit that I think, after reading it, everyone will no longer hesitate or argue that Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind can bring rebirth in the West.

There is also the record of Chan master Chewu in Jingtū Shiyao, which gives the essential Pure Land practice as: "Truly act for birth and death, arouse bodhicitta, and, with deep faith and vows, hold the Buddha's Name; use focused gathering of the mind as the starting expedient, one-pointedness without confusion as the destination, and auspicious signs of rebirth as verification." Is this not also a Pure Land patriarch who did not advocate Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind? But why is recitation with a scattered mind unable to bring rebirth? We need to clarify this further. Otherwise, merely echoing others and swallowing their words whole without digesting them, without understanding why, will only deepen confusion and obstruction. When it comes time to practice, our effort will be weak and powerless, unable to overcome the enemy and win the result. How then could we hope for birth in the West and accomplishment of the Way? I will therefore discuss this in further detail below.

As everyone knows, all sentient beings originally possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata. They are originally Buddha and originally unborn and undying. Only because beginningless ignorance deludedly moved, mistaking the false for the real, did they arouse delusion, create karma, and undergo karmic retribution, vainly undergoing the sufferings of birth-and-death and rebirth where there is originally no birth-and-death. Now, if one wishes to be born in the West and escape birth-and-death, one must use the practice of Buddha-recitation to recite away this very deluded mind that gives rise to delusion and creates karma, transforming the deluded mind into Buddha-mind—so that the whole Buddha is mind and the whole mind is Buddha. If one lets the deluded mind remain inverted, grasping, attached, and deludedly active, how could one avoid being entangled and dragged along by karmic circumstances into the six paths? How could one, at the end of life, beat back the phantasms of karmic consciousness and be born in the West? A sūtra says, "If you wish to purify your land, first purify your mind. As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure." Therefore, if one wishes to be born in the Western Pure Land, one must first put everything down, recite the Buddha's name with one mind, and purify the mind. A sūtra says, "Everything is made by mind alone." If the mind is scattered, confused, and defiled, it is utterly out of accord with the Pure Land. In the end, one can only be born in a defiled land; this is unavoidable.

Someone may say: "Rebirth in the West relies entirely on other-power, Amitābha Buddha's compassionate power to welcome and guide beings. It is not like other Dharma gates, which rely on self-power to accomplish the Way." I reply: other-power does not depart from self-

power. Apart from self-power, there is absolutely no other-power. In worldly matters—between countries, between people, and even among grasses, trees, and forests—there is no case of anything surviving entirely by relying on another person or another thing while having no ability of its own to survive. Examples are too numerous to count. Transcendent Dharma is no exception. Ānanda and the Buddha resolved to practice at the same time, but because Ānanda's practice was not strong, only after the Buddha's nirvāṇa did he realize the Way, and he was still who knows how far from Buddhahood. Rāhula, because his father was the Buddha, did not practice himself and was rebuked by the Buddha. These and many other examples show that if one makes no effort of one's own and relies completely on other-power, nothing can be accomplished.

As for Amitābha's great vow to welcome and guide beings, this is responsive communion. When the practitioner's mind is pure and pure karma has matured, Amitābha appears before that person. It is not that he runs to the practitioner and pulls that person to the West. Practitioners of pure karma must not misunderstand this point. Just look at the scriptures: they all say that the Buddha and holy assembly "appear" before the person; they do not say the Buddha "comes" before the person. This one-word difference between "comes" and "appears" has vastly different implications and cannot be conflated. On this point, Chan master Yongming and Master Yinguang both gave definite explanations: "When Buddha-recitation reaches one-pointedness without confusion, responsive communion occurs, and that Buddha appears before one, like the moon appearing in water when the water is clear. If the water is turbid, though the moon is in the sky, its reflection does not manifest. The mind of a Buddha-recitation practitioner is like water, and the Buddha is like the moon. If the water of the mind is turbid, the Buddha cannot appear before one, just as the moon cannot appear in turbid water." From this we can see that besides other-power, self-power is also required. Without self-power, other-power has nowhere to land. Therefore the Pure Land Dharma gate is practice through the combined power of self and other. If one relies solely on other-power and has no self-power, the result is invariably defeat.

If this were not so, why would Master Yinguang teach us to recite the Buddha's name "with deep faith and vows" and "as if rescuing one's head from fire"? Nowadays some Pure Land practitioners, because they do not understand this principle, practice weakly. At the end of life, when they do not see the Buddha appear, they become flustered and think the Buddhadharma is not efficacious, mistakenly believing that the Buddha's vows are empty promises. They do not know that because the water of their own mind is not pure, even if the Buddha personally appeared before them, they would not see him—just as someone born blind, because he has never seen the sun, slanders the sun for not coming before him. Is this not unjust? All this comes from a faulty causal basis, from greed for convenience, and from having been deceived by blind teachers who say that Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind is enough, and that merely by relying on the power of Amitābha's vows one can be reborn. They do not know that the result is not only failure to be reborn, but also the grave offense of

slandering Buddha and Dharma; in a later life they will still have to undergo heavy painful retribution. Is this not terribly unjust?

Someone may say, “You know only one side and not the other. Why, then, did Master Ouyi say in *On Name-Holding Buddha-Recitation through the Nine Grades and Four Lands*: ‘If one wishes certainly to attain rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, there is no better way than taking faith as the guide in front and vows as the whip behind. If faith is true and vows are urgent, then even if one recites the Buddha’s name with a scattered mind, one will certainly be reborn. If faith is not true and vows are not fierce, then even one-pointedness without confusion will not bring rebirth’? Why did he also later say, ‘Those who practice Buddha-recitation with deep faith and urgent vows, but whose minds are often scattered while reciting, are precisely those reborn at the lowest level of the lowest grade’? Does this not clearly tell us that Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind can bring rebirth in the West? We now seek only rebirth at the lowest level of the lowest grade, or even birth in the borderland doubtful city; that is enough to fulfill our wish. Once born in the Pure Land, one obtains non-retrogression, so there is no need to demand middle or upper grades and uselessly invite hardship. Therefore we now need only recite the Buddha’s name with a scattered mind, leisurely and loosely, carefree and unrestrained, enjoying ourselves. At death we can still be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss in a lower grade and eventually become Buddhas all the same. Why not do this? Why insist on exhausting delusive attachment, extinguishing craving and defilement, and tirelessly holding to one Buddha-name in a dry, flavorless way, making oneself suffer?”

I answer: Master Ouyi’s words must be read very carefully. Please do not read them glibly, fail to attend to the whole passage, and focus only on the four-character phrase, translated here as “Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind.” Thinking that the master advocated recitation with a scattered mind, that there is laziness to be indulged and convenience to be gained, you feel it suits your heart perfectly and gladly spend some time muddling around in *Sahā*, expecting that at death you will still have the West to be born into and great bliss to enjoy. But your wishful calculation is mistaken. At the end of life, you will see only the black karma of your life entangling you, not the Buddha coming to extend his hand. By then, though regret and remorse overwhelm you, it will be too late. Let us now analyze and study this passage in detail.

First, when he says that with deep faith and urgent vows one will certainly be reborn even if the mind is scattered, while without true faith and urgent vows one will not be reborn even with one-pointedness without confusion, he is making a discriminating judgment about those who use holding Amitābha’s sacred Name as an aid for entering *samādhi* but do not think of being reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss—that is, those who have no faith and vows. In the late Ming, many Chan students often borrowed name-recitation as an expedient for entering *samādhi*. Therefore Master Ouyi said, “Even if your Buddha-recitation is so deep that wind

cannot enter and rain cannot wet it, if you lack faith and vows, you absolutely cannot be reborn.”

Second, the words “faith is true and vows are urgent” are placed before “Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind”; only then can there be rebirth. He did not simply say that Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind can bring rebirth. There is a great deal contained here; please do not pass over it lightly. Let me ask: what counts as true faith, and what counts as urgent vows? To strengthen the persuasive force, please look at how the great patriarchs explained and described “true faith and urgent vows.”

First, regarding faith: one must first believe that mind, Buddha, and sentient beings—these three are without difference. We are Buddhas not yet accomplished; Amitābha is a Buddha already accomplished; the nature of awakening is nondual. Next, one must believe that we are Buddhas at the levels of identity in principle and verbal identity, while Amitābha is a Buddha at the level of ultimate identity. Though this nature is nondual, the difference in stage is as vast as heaven and abyss. If we do not single-mindedly keep that Buddha in mind and seek birth in that land, we will certainly continue to revolve according to karma and undergo immeasurable suffering. Next, one must believe that although we are heavily obstructed by karma and have long dwelt in a realm of suffering, we are sentient beings within Amitābha’s mind; and although Amitābha, adorned with myriad virtues, is beyond ten trillion Buddha-lands, he is the Buddha within our own mind. Since mind-nature is not two, responsive communion naturally occurs. Our bitter urgency can certainly evoke him, and the Buddha’s compassion can certainly respond, like a magnet attracting iron, without any doubt.

As it is said: “The Tathāgatas of the ten directions are mindful of sentient beings with compassion, as a mother remembers her child... If the child remembers the mother, as the mother remembers the child, then mother and child, life after life, will not be far apart. If the minds of sentient beings—pay attention to the word ‘mind’—remember the Buddha and are mindful of the Buddha, then now and in the future they will certainly see the Buddha” (Śūraṅgama Sūtra). It is also said: one must pass from beginning to end without changing, and meet benefit or harm without altering; only then is it true faith. True faith has three aspects. First, faith that Amitābha embraces beings who recite the Buddha’s name and brings them to rebirth in the West; this is absolutely not false. Second, faith that if one holds Amitābha’s Name, from one day to seven days, in one-pointedness without confusion—please pay attention—then one obtains rebirth. I should practice according to this teaching. Third, faith that the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate transmitted by Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta and the Pure Land patriarchs contains absolutely no false words. I should rely on it, practice with courageous vigor, and accomplish samādhi.

Also: the mind with which we practice Buddha-recitation enters concentration through wisdom, illuminating yet constantly quiescent—this is faith in the Buddha originally present. Through concentration, wisdom is brought forth; quiescent yet constantly illuminating—this is faith in the Dharma originally present. Concentration and wisdom interpenetrate,

quiescence and illumination are nondual—this is faith in the Saṅgha originally present. Again it is said: faith does not mean merely believing that the West is an adorned Buddha-land. One must simultaneously deeply believe that one's own nature is itself Amitābha and can originally become Buddha in the same way. "Every person can become Yao or Shun"; all sentient beings can become Buddha. The only difference is delusion or awakening. The Buddha-land of Western adornment in its dependent and primary aspects is the Pure Land in terms of phenomena; the purity of my own nature is the Pure Land in terms of principle. Since mind pervades everywhere, everywhere is the West; the ten directions are not different from the West. It is not simply believing that Sahā is suffering, the West is blissful, and Ultimate Bliss certainly exists.

Second, regarding vows: first, at all times—pay attention, at all times; not one way when things are disagreeable and another way when one is joyful—one must loathe the suffering of birth-and-death and afflictions in Sahā, joyfully aspire to the bliss of bodhi in Ultimate Bliss, and strive for rebirth. Next, one must vow to follow the Pure Land Dharma gate transmitted by Buddhas and patriarchs, practice courageously and vigorously, purify defiled habits, and cause body and mind to be clear and peaceful, so that one is in Ultimate Bliss in the present life. Next, one must resolve to accomplish unsurpassed awakening, perfect bodhi, and make offerings to all Buddhas. Next, one must form the vast aspiration to liberate sentient beings universally: until the realm of sentient beings is emptied, one vows not to become Buddha. Next, whatever one does, whether good or evil—if good, one dedicates it toward rebirth; if evil, one repents and vows toward rebirth, with no second intention. It is also said: the mind of Buddha-recitation that wishes to obtain one-pointedness without confusion—though one must not intentionally seek it, because seeking makes it farther away—is called a pure vow. Not resting until one is born in the West is called a constant vow. Accomplishing unsurpassed awakening and broadly liberating sentient beings is called a great vow. To form such aspirations is called true faith and urgent vows.

Fellow practitioners, if we truly possess faith and vows like these, will the food, sex, wealth, children, honor, status, and so forth of the Sahā world still be kept in the mind and endlessly calculated over? If all these circumstances, like flowers in the sky and the moon in water, can be put down, what deluded thoughts would still coil around the mind and confuse us? Since no deluded thoughts confuse us, then while reciting the Buddha's name, as Master Lianchi said above, we will be as if personally facing Amitābha, too reverent, sincere, and urgent to be distracted. What deluded thoughts would still be moving chaotically? Is this not attaining one-pointedness without expecting one-pointedness? Therefore Master Ouyi said, "If faith is true and vows are urgent, then even if one recites the Buddha's name with a scattered mind, one will certainly be reborn." You must pay attention to the word "even." It means: if faith is truly real and vows are truly urgent, as if rescuing one's head from fire, then there is no fear that you will fail to become one-pointed.

At such a time, even inverted delusive thought would be unobtainable; this is why Master Ouyi uses the word “even.” The statement is also made in contrast to the case discussed below: one who lacks faith and vows cannot be reborn even if one’s Buddha-recitation practice is good. Therefore, do not misunderstand it to mean that one may lazily and carelessly recite ‘Amitābha’ with the mouth while thinking of Sahā’s wealth and sensual pleasures and then be reborn in the West with ease. Furthermore, the statement that “one who practices Buddha-recitation with deep faith and urgent vows, but whose mind is often scattered, is precisely one reborn at the lowest level of the lowest grade” refers to a practitioner whose habitual obstructions are deep. Although deep faith and urgent vows are now present, delusive habits cannot be purified all at once. Coarse delusions that crave the world may already have been cut off, while subtle habitual delusions still intrude from time to time. As an ancient said, “Though the wind has stopped, the waves still surge; though principle appears, thoughts still intrude.” Such thoughts are subtle, but because there are thoughts apart from Buddha-recitation, this still has to be called “scattered mind.” Yet because they are subtle, the moment a thought arises it is noticed and does not turn into inverted grasping; one simply raises recollection of the Buddha, and the deluded thought immediately dissolves and purity returns. Guifeng described this practice as: “If deluded thoughts arise, do not follow any of them; even if there is an intermediate state, karma cannot bind you.” Since karma cannot bind, one can vow for rebirth. By contrast, if one still craves Sahā, remains inverted in deluded thinking, and continuously grasps after conditions, yet tries to cite this case as precedent for one’s own rebirth, that is truly daydreaming. Still, if someone is naturally open and not deeply attached to worldly conditions—or ordinarily did not believe in Buddhism but also did not slander it, and had not been able to recite with one mind—then at the end of life, upon hearing a spiritual teacher’s instruction, that person may suddenly repent and awaken, put everything down completely, recite the Name single-mindedly, seek birth in the West, and attain rebirth through ten recitations or even one. But people of such sudden capacity are exceedingly rare. The decisive thought at death depends on training in ordinary life; for someone who has not practiced well in ordinary times to turn around and remain in command in the final thought is harder than winning first prize in a lottery. It certainly cannot be held up as a general rule.

1. If attachment to the Sahā world has not died away, the root of attachment has not been cut off, and emotional attachment and fixed views have not been removed, and one merely practices Buddha-recitation with a clinging mind of inverted delusive thinking, then even if one has a little faith and vows, because they are not deep and urgent, one only plants good roots as a distant cause and cannot attain rebirth in this life. One must wait until a future life and make further effort before the wish can be fulfilled.

2. If, in the final thought at death, one suddenly turns around and changes course, there is still some hope of rebirth; but this is far too risky and the opportunity is extremely slight—scarcely one person in ten million. Therefore it cannot be held up as a general instruction. (Those who attain rebirth through ten recitations at death are chiefly people who had never

heard the Buddhadharma during life. Only when the signs of death appear do they hear a spiritual teacher's instruction, repent and awaken completely, and let go with their whole being; therefore their ten recitations can come into accord. People of such sharp capacity would have accomplished ten years earlier had they heard the Dharma ten years earlier, or twenty years earlier had they heard it twenty years earlier. If we heard the Buddhadharma early yet still look for a shortcut, remain unable to let go of worldly attachments, and vainly expect rebirth through ten recitations, this itself is already divided mind; how could we come into accord?)

II. Examining whether one-pointedness without confusion is necessary

Once the first question is clarified, the second is not difficult to resolve. One-pointedness without confusion is the counterpart of a scattered mind. Since a scattered mind is unacceptable, the need for one-pointedness without confusion is self-evident. Still, truth becomes clearer through discussion, and because the matter is important, let us examine it in detail. "One-pointedness without confusion" was not invented or prescribed by any patriarch. It was proclaimed by Śākyamuni Buddha himself and is plainly stated in the short Amitābha Sūtra. The short Amitābha Sūtra clearly says that if a good man or good woman hears Amitābha Buddha's name and holds it, whether for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days, in one-pointedness without confusion, then at death Amitābha Buddha and the holy assembly will appear before that person. When that person's life ends, the mind will not be inverted, and that person will immediately be born in Amitābha's Land of Ultimate Bliss. Since the Buddha's golden mouth spoke this, what patriarch would dare say it is unnecessary—and how much less could fools like us do so? The Buddha is one of right and universal knowing. If we wish to practice and accomplish the Way, and yet do not listen to the Buddha's words, whose words should we listen to? But why is one-pointedness without confusion necessary? What is the principle? We touched on this when discussing the first issue; now let us examine it more fully.

Śākyamuni Buddha said that to be born in the Pure Land, one must not lack good roots, blessings, and causal conditions. Nothing displays the abundance or insufficiency of these three better than the depth or shallowness of one's Buddha-recitation practice. Therefore Buddha-recitation must reach one-pointedness without confusion before good roots, blessings, and causal conditions are complete and one can be born in the Pure Land. It is said that the short Amitābha Sūtra translated by Master Kumārajīva was an interpretive translation. According to the Sanskrit meaning, while adapting it to the expression of the Chinese language, he used the four characters "one-pointedness without confusion." Master Xuanzang, based on the Yogācāra principle that everything is "manifested by mind alone and transformed by consciousness alone," said that Buddha-recitation requires "binding mindfulness without confusion," transforming deluded consciousness and maturing pure karma before birth in the West can occur. (This is the general sense; I can no longer recall the exact wording of the sūtra.) Although the wording of the two translations differs slightly, their

meaning is the same: both teach Buddha-recitation practitioners to put everything down, practice Buddha-recitation with sincere mind, cut off the root of attachment, and have mind and Buddha enter into communion and become one and inseparable before rebirth in the West is possible.

The great patriarchs have given many different explanations of “one-pointedness without confusion.” Summarized, they do not go beyond the following aspects. First, one-pointedness without confusion means that there is no mind that can be confused; one has reached the state where mind, thought, and consciousness are completely dissolved, true and false do not stand, and subject and object are both gone. In other words, it is the moment of awakening spoken of in the Chan school, when, with a sudden cry of “huo!”, the bottom of the bucket drops out. At that moment, mind is land and land is mind; outside mind there is no land, and outside land there is no mind. Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings have become completely one and inseparable.

Textual source note. Several Yuan Yin source loci preserve this Chan exclamation through unstable electronic forms such as ㄗ, ㄗ+力, or a bracketed character-construction. Comparison of the repeated loci identifies the intended rare character as ㄗ (huò), hence “huo!” in this edition. Ordinary ㄗ (“pa!”) and the deliberate ㄗ practice shout (“pei!”) remain separate sound families.

Second, one-pointedness without confusion has deep and shallow levels, and there is a distinction between one-pointedness of principle and one-pointedness of phenomena. One-pointedness of phenomena means sustaining the Name steadily and continuously so that the Buddha-name in the mind is clear and distinct. In wearing clothes, eating food, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, the single great Name continues steadily without interruption, like breathing itself—neither scattered nor sunken. Holding the Name in this way is called one-pointedness of phenomena, that is, gathering the mind into one. One-pointedness of principle means directly investigating the suchness of all dharmas, without dual characteristics. So-called sentient being and Buddha are not two; self and other are not two; cause and effect are not two; environmental and personal recompense are not two; pure and defiled are not two; suffering and bliss are not two; joyful aspiration and revulsion are not two; grasping and rejecting are not two; bodhi and afflictions are not two; birth-and-death and nirvāṇa are not two. These paired dharmas all share the same characteristic; the single Way is level and clear throughout, requiring no forced arranging. One simply investigates suchness as it is. When investigation reaches its extreme, it suddenly accords with one’s own original mind. Then one knows that wearing clothes and eating are all samādhi; joking, laughter, anger, and scolding are nothing but Buddha-activity; and one-pointed mind and confused mind are all conceptual proliferation. Throughout the twelve double-hours of the day, not even a hair’s breadth of differing characteristic can be obtained. The West is right here in the present; the ten directions are not different from the West. Non-arising is birth, and birth is non-arising. This is called one-pointedness of principle.

Third, whether one-pointedness of principle or one-pointedness of phenomena, both are within the reach of ordinary beings; all who have mind can practice and learn them. One must not relegate them to a lofty realm reserved for sages, willingly remain inferior, and think this is not one's own responsibility. We must know that everything is made by mind alone. To be born in the Pure Land, one must first purify the mind. If the mind is not pure, the Pure Land is hard to be born into. If the mind is pure, one naturally attains one-pointedness without confusion and will certainly be reborn in the Pure Land. From this we can see that one-pointedness without confusion is originally meant to purify the mind until it is like clear water, so that the Buddha can appear before one and welcome and guide one to rebirth. It is not some lofty, far-fetched goal. Especially one-pointedness of phenomena is the practice that Buddha-recitation practitioners must possess; it is not something unreachable. There is no need to fear it. As long as we understand the key and practice diligently, we can certainly succeed. Even what you may consider the supreme state of one-pointedness of principle and seeing the nature is not absolutely impossible. Because all sentient beings originally possess this unborn, undying, pure, undefiled Buddha-nature; it is neither sought from outside nor attained through practice.

Mountains and rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, forests, men and women, old and young, eating and drinking, daily activities, all sounds, all forms, all mind, and all dharmas—none is not the manifestation of the nature, and none is not the functioning of the nature. As long as we recognize it and clearly understand that nature is the essence of appearances and appearances are the function of nature, then when seeing forms and hearing sounds, if we are not swept along by sounds and forms, we can see the nature through forms and appearances. In other words, if in daily functioning we respond according to conditions and are not deluded by the false appearances of things, without becoming attached to them in mind or being disturbed inwardly, then in quiescent clarity and clear quiescence we can transform all things without being swayed by them; at all times, we are not swept along by time. This is seeing the nature. From this perspective, the lofty state of one-pointedness of principle is our inherent capacity, and is certainly not something impossible.

If we can realize one-pointedness of principle, the mind is pure and unstained, naturally in accord with the Western Pure Land. Moreover, all Buddhas are originally of the same essence, so one can become one and inseparable with Amitābha; for this reason, one can be reborn in the Pure Land in the upper grade. Someone may say: "It is easy to say, but hard to do." I reply: once we clearly recognize the aim, make a firm decision, and struggle with deluded habits, relying steadily on a single Buddha-name as a weapon, then as soon as a deluded habit stirs and begins clinging to objects, we immediately raise the great Name high and drive it back. Raising it again and again, striking again and again, day after day and year after year—why fear that it cannot be accomplished? For people of good capacity, there is no need to raise and remind themselves again and again. As soon as they hear it pointed out, they return home and sit steadily.

Someone may say: “That is a Chan state and has nothing to do with Pure Land practitioners.” I say: do not look down on Pure Land. Pure Land is originally Chan, and Chan is Pure Land. Pure Land is supremely perfect and vast, supremely lofty and unsurpassed; it is not an inferior Dharma gate. Chan is the Chan of Pure Land, and Pure Land is the Pure Land of Chan. Chan and Pure Land are not separate families. Unfortunately, recent Pure Land practitioners willingly make themselves low and small. They think it is enough if their wish is fulfilled by birth in the borderland. They do not diligently practice Buddha-recitation by holding the Name, but merely go through morning and evening services perfunctorily and think the matter is finished, making the excellent Pure Land Dharma gate look improper. They do not know that the modern Pure Land great master Yinguang also went into seclusion several times to specialize in Buddha-recitation and realized Buddha-recitation samādhi. His writings describing that samādhi are completely consistent with Chan, and include the Dharma phrase: “Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm.” Please consider: is this Dharma gate lofty? Does it require one-pointed Buddha-recitation and unremitting careful practice? To avoid further dispute, let us temporarily set aside these profound principles and leave them for a later special discussion of Pure Land. For now, let us speak of one-pointedness of phenomena.

When discussing the first issue, we already said that for rebirth in the West, the water of the mind must be clear and pure; only then can the Buddha and holy assembly appear. If the water of the mind is not pure, even if the Buddha is before one, it is like a person born blind who cannot see the sun. Therefore, to be born in the West, the mind must be pure. We also said that with true faith and urgent vows, one naturally puts down Sahā—this defiled, ugly, suffering world—and cuts off the root of attachment, emotional attachment, and fixed views. Under the fierce force of holding the Name, one naturally and without intending it reaches one-pointedness without confusion. We also said that even fellow practitioners of slightly inferior capacity and heavier deluded habits, when coarse delusions have been cut off but subtle delusions still come to invade, can still hope for rebirth in the West as long as they firmly bring recollection of the Buddha to the fore, illuminate and break through deluded thoughts, and do not follow them and wander away. These words define one-pointedness of phenomena and explain whether it is needed.

Because we can cut off and put down the things of the Sahā world, and not be bound or disturbed by emotional attachments, only then, deep within the mind, can a sacred Name be nurtured steadily and continuously, neither scattered nor sunken. When subtle deluded habits come to disturb us, we will not be shaken by them, and therefore the sacred Name can be clear and distinct, continuing without interruption. At the same time, as our practice takes hold, the mind becomes still clearer and purer; we can put down worldly conditions even more, practice Buddha-recitation with greater sincerity, and our concentration becomes deeper. In this way, these factors mutually reinforce one another. Only by reciting one-pointedly like this can the mind become still and the water bright, the sacred Pure Land vision appear, and rebirth in the West occur. Among those who truly want to be born in the West, I

think no one would dare say, and no one would be willing to say, that this kind of one-pointedness without confusion is unnecessary.

Searching through the records of the patriarchs, there is not a single person who says one-pointedness without confusion is unnecessary. On the contrary, they all praise one-pointedness without confusion, encourage students to realize it, and warn later generations not to disregard it. Master Lianchi has a special essay on this in *Bamboo Window Jottings*. Let us cite a few examples. Master Jieliu, in “Instructions to the Assembly at the Opening of a Seven-Day Intensive Retreat,” said, “If one has not reached the state of one-pointedness without confusion, this is precisely what is called few good roots, few blessings, and few causal conditions. How could one hope to be born in that land?” Master Yinguang, in a letter to layman Chen Xizhou, said, “Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind makes rebirth hard to attain; one-pointed Buddha-recitation will certainly bring rebirth.” In another letter he said, “The Dharma of Buddha-recitation is the most simple, most easy, most vast, and most great Dharma. One must be earnest and sincere to the utmost before responsive communion can occur, and before one can personally obtain real benefit in this very life. If one is lazy and lax, without any reverence or fear, one only plants distant causes. The offense of irreverence and negligence is beyond imagining. Even if one obtains birth among humans or gods, one will certainly not join the vast assembly on high.” Laziness and laxness—is this scattered mind or one-pointed mind? This is equivalent to saying that Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind cannot bring birth in the West.

Master Lianchi, in his reply to layman Sun Guangliang, said, “In practice, nothing is better than single-minded Buddha-recitation. When recitation reaches its extreme, one awakens; once awakened, there is no need to discuss further. Even if one does not greatly awaken, leaving this Sahā and being born in that Pure Land is already world-transcendence. Extinguishing miscellaneous thoughts so that right mindfulness is pure and undivided is true reality. Now do not concern yourself with whether it is transcendent or not, true or not. When practice reaches one-pointedness, it is naturally settled.” In another reply, to layman Yuan Xinyuan of Suzhou, he said, “Now one should only practice Buddha-recitation with dedicated sincerity. After long practice, reciting until one-pointedness without confusion, one will certainly attain awakening. Even if one does not awaken, the power of a lifetime’s recitation will, at the end of life, make one know for oneself that after death one will certainly be born in the Pure Land.” Such examples are countless. From this, the importance of one-pointedness without confusion for rebirth in the West is beyond question.

I fear that only worldly-minded Buddha-recitation practitioners who inwardly have some wish to be born in the West while at the same time clinging to Sahā, unable to put down beloved spouses and children, unwilling to give up glory, wealth, and honor, together with lazy people afraid of hardship, invent clever explanations for themselves and fabricate a set of erroneous teachings that depart from scriptures and teachings in order to fool women and children, saying, “One need not be one-pointed and unconfused; Buddha-recitation with a

scattered mind can still bring rebirth in the West.” They do not know that by enjoying a moment of glib talk, it is one thing to harm themselves, but by harming others they descend to hell as fast as an arrow! Someone may say: “If one must be one-pointed and unconfused to be reborn, then there are too few people who can be born in the West.” I reply: according to the standard of one-pointedness of phenomena explained above, the requirement is not high and is not impossible. As long as practitioners are willing to sacrifice present enjoyments, release the attachments around them, and add some hard effort, sustaining the Name steadily in the mind, everyone can realize it and be born in the West. What difficulty is there?

As for simply speaking of whether many or few are reborn in the West, from ancient times onward the number of people born in the West does not seem to have been very large. The reason is precisely that these mistaken and erroneous teachings—“one-pointedness without confusion is too difficult and unnecessary; Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind can bring birth in the West”—harm people. They cause practitioners to crave worldly blessings and refuse to practice, so few are born in the West. Look again at Master Lianchi’s “Third Universal Exhortation to Buddha-Recitation” cited above. At the beginning he sighs deeply, “Nowadays one sees many people reciting the Buddha’s name, yet few are born in the West. Why is this?” He then sorrowfully identifies the reason: “Though the mouth recites the Buddha’s name, the mind is filled with random thoughts; because of this, one cannot be born in the West.” What a deep regret! What ironclad evidence!

Fellow practitioners, you must know that seeking birth in the West is a great matter of ending birth and escaping death. It is not an occasion for asserting oneself against others, arguing over right and wrong, or acting out of personal pique. One needs to think calmly and evenly: when I recite the Buddha-name with a scattered mind, in daily functioning—especially at the crucial points of gain and loss, favorable and adverse circumstances, sorrow and joy—can I remain in command? Can I keep recollection of the Buddha present without being swayed by circumstances? Going further, ask yourself: when sleeping and dreaming at night, can I remain in command? When laughing, startled, or frightened, can I remain unmoved by dream-objects, with recollection of the Buddha clearly present? If none of this is possible, then when the thirtieth day of the twelfth month arrives, with spouse and children surrounding the bed, sickness and confusion pressing in, the wind-knife dismembering the body, suffering urgent and severe, and with events experienced during life and entanglements left unresolved after death all surging into the mind one by one, how could one remain in command and practice Buddha-recitation to seek birth in the West? Know this: if one can remain in command by day, one may retain only half that command in dreams; if one can remain in command in dreams, one may retain only half of it at death. This is because dream is half-confusion, while death is great confusion. If, because practice is weak, one cannot be reborn at death, then the talk “one need not be one-pointed and unconfused; Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind can bring rebirth” becomes an empty check and brings harm upon oneself.

I am not deliberately writing startling words to frighten you, nor am I making lofty demands that you must do this and that or else be unable to be born in the West. The reason is that, to be truly born in the West, one absolutely cannot easily go there while making no effort oneself and relying exclusively on the power of Amitābha's vows to welcome and guide one there. Seeing that many present-day Pure Land practitioners are greedy for convenience and unwilling to practice, and that in the end they either think of worldly conditions, cling to family property, suffer unbearable illness, or fall into unconsciousness, so that those said to be born in the West have in fact wandered who knows where in birth and death—because of this, I risk disapproval and dare to offer you words that are hard to hear. This is truly compelled by conscience; I cannot but speak boldly and try to stem this harmful trend of the times.

III. Examining “relying solely on the power of Amitābha’s vows to be reborn while carrying karma”

The phrase “rebirth while carrying karma” has no explicit wording in the Buddhist scriptures. It was developed by the patriarchs through integrating the meanings of sūtras and śāstras. Its actual meaning is this: ordinary beings have heavy karmic obstructions and deeply accumulated habits that cannot be exhausted through the practice of one life. Even if one has greatly and thoroughly awakened, the final portion of ignorance has still not been destroyed, because even at the stage of Equal Enlightenment, one portion of ignorance remains. Who, then, can practice to the stage of Equal Enlightenment in one lifetime? This unfinished ignorance is karma of delusion. “Rebirth while carrying karma” means being reborn while carrying this “karma.” Even a Buddha-recitation practitioner who realizes one-pointedness of principle likely does not surpass a bodhisattva at the stage of Equal Enlightenment, so there is still unavoidable ignorance. Therefore, if such a person wishes to be reborn, that rebirth is still “rebirth while carrying karma.” It absolutely does not mean that while practicing, a Buddha-recitation practitioner may do some bad things and benefit oneself at others’ expense, yet later be reborn while carrying karma.

Someone may say: “Master Yinguang said that people who commit the five heinous acts and ten evils, who ordinarily do not know how to practice but also have not slandered the Buddha, can meet a good spiritual friend at death, receive instruction, arouse vows, recite the Buddha’s name, seek birth in the West, and be reborn while carrying karma. Does this not clearly tell us that we can do some bad things now and later still be reborn while carrying karma?” I reply: pay attention. These great evildoers, at death, meet a good spiritual friend, can maintain clear right mindfulness, let go of body and mind, disregard the pain of illness, recite the Buddha’s name with one mind, and seek birth in the West. What power is this? What good roots, blessings, and causal conditions are these! Is this something ordinary people can attain? I have personally seen many people who had practiced Buddha-recitation for years, yet at death were tormented by illness and could no longer practice it; some even did not want to hear the sound of the Buddha’s name. Some longed for relatives and were

unwilling to remember the Buddha or be mindful of the Buddha. Some fell into unconsciousness and could neither engage in Buddha-recitation nor hear the Buddha's name. Yet these great evildoers can, at death, accept instruction, put everything down thoroughly, keep clear right mindfulness, practice Buddha-recitation with one mind, overcome the obstructing skandha states, and be born in the West. What power causes this? Is the Buddha close to them but distant from others, generous to the former but harsh to the latter? There are truly great causal conditions involved here.

In some cases, practitioners in past lives did not understand the essentials of mind, and only worked at attaining concentration, exerting themselves to suppress the deluded mind and prevent it from moving. This is like pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows again. It is not ultimate. Therefore, when life ends and they turn around and come back, their habitual tendencies move deludedly even more fiercely than before, and they become evil and rebellious. But as soon as they hear instruction, the past cause is touched, and they can immediately put everything down, concentrate single-mindedly on Buddha-recitation, and seek birth in the Pure Land. This is not accidental. Or they may be bodhisattvas practicing in reverse, manifesting traces in this life for the sake of liberating beings, defiling their outer appearance to conceal their practice. These are not examples that ordinary people can opportunistically imitate and invoke as precedents for their own rebirth.

Someone may say: "Great Chan masters directly realize the Buddha-ground; it is said that Equal and Wondrous Enlightenment are merely those who carry their sandals. Surely such people have no final portion of ignorance. Then when they are born in the West, do they not need rebirth while carrying karma?" I say: what Chan realizes is Buddha in principle; the realized principle-nature is no different from Buddha. But in terms of phenomena, one has not yet realized Buddhahood at fruition, and therefore cannot be placed on the same level as Śākyamuni or Amitābha. Do you not see that when the emperor asked Xuansha, "When the Chan school says seeing the nature and becoming Buddha, has one reached Buddhahood at fruition?" Xuansha said, "It is only a Buddha at the causal stage, not yet a Buddha at fruition." Therefore awakening and seeing the nature generally means only ascending to the first ground, corresponding to the stage of seeing the Way. One must still practice and realize further, break ignorance portion by portion, and perfectly realize the dharmakāya. Thus to say that after seeing the nature in the Chan school one immediately ascends directly to the stage of no practice, no attainment, and no realization is a great mistake, because there is still something like having lost one's parents. How could such a person not need rebirth while carrying karma?

Furthermore, so-called no practice, no attainment, and no realization is true from the standpoint of principle, and it is also the speech of one who has arrived home. Since all sentient beings are originally Buddha, what practice or realization is needed? Yet while ignorance and karmic habits are not ended, craving and attachment remain, and one is still

bobbing up and down in the evil paths, one is still a sentient being. Since there are karmic habits, there are illusory experiences; since there are illusory experiences, there must also be illusory practice, illusory attainment, and illusory realization. Therefore the statement of no practice, no attainment, and no realization is also the true speech of one who has arrived home, because in ordinary beings it is not decreased, in sages it is not increased, in defilement it is not lost, and in purity it is not gained. But if one is still on the road and already speaks of no practice, no attainment, and no realization, is this not speaking too soon?

Someone may say: “The end is equal to the beginning. Birth-and-death is *nirvāṇa*; the road itself is home. Although birth-and-death is ended, one remains within the six paths.” I reply: all things not being two is true principle, but one must realize to this point for it to count. If right now there is still suffering and pleasure, fear, anger, concern over gain and loss, and so forth, then the road is not home and birth-and-death is not *nirvāṇa*. This is because the aggregates have not been broken and illusory experience remains. In the human path one still has views of suffering and pleasure, let alone in other paths. Consider Devadatta in hell: he experienced it as the bliss of the third *dhyāna*. How far apart are these states? As different as heaven and earth. Therefore practitioners of mind must be very careful. Do not speak empty grand words and wander recklessly into calamity.

Furthermore, those who truly realize no practice, no attainment, and no realization do not say “no practice, no attainment, and no realization.” Once one says “no practice, no attainment, and no realization,” is one not precisely sitting within practice, attainment, and realization? However, among Chan practitioners, awakenings differ greatly in depth and shallowness and cannot be treated the same. Some go straight through to the end, with accumulated habits and ignorance broken all at once. This is what the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* means by “awakening to principle is sudden; with that awakening, all delusion is dissolved at once.” Such people are those of no practice, no attainment, and no realization. But great-rooted people of this kind are few and rare; they cannot be taken as the general case. Others, though they have seen the nature, still have accumulated habits, and must use close preservation to gradually remove habits, break ignorance portion by portion, and perfectly realize the *dharmakāya*. This preservation is practice that is no-practice. Because they do not employ any particular method of practice, and they do not hope to obtain or accomplish anything, they simply use the practice of alert noticing in ordinary times: whenever a thought arises, one notices it and it becomes empty; emptiness too is not abided in; they move freely and naturally, enjoying ease. Later there is no awareness and no non-awareness, no emptiness and no non-emptiness, no freedom and no non-freedom; all day they are like fools or simpletons, without gain or loss. This is the point of complete attainment, when the matter is finished. This kind of practice is what the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* means by “practice is gradual, and remaining habits are exhausted in sequence.” Most present-day practitioners belong to this category of sudden awakening followed by gradual practice. Enough; we are not discussing Chan here and have strayed too far from the topic. We will leave that for later. Now let us return and speak of rebirth while carrying karma.

Regarding “rebirth while carrying karma,” what is regrettable is that practitioners of various schools today often expand and misunderstand the meaning of this phrase. Some think that this is the compassion and broad tolerance of Buddhas and bodhisattvas: as long as they make offerings to the Buddha, practice Buddha-recitation, investigate Chan, or hold mantras each day, then even if they commit some offenses or do bad things, it does not matter; Buddhas and bodhisattvas will forgive and pardon them all the same. In Pure Land, Amitābha Buddha will welcome and guide them to the West; other schools have their corresponding Buddhas and bodhisattvas to protect them and help them transcend cyclic existence. Because of this, without the slightest scruple they practice and recite the Buddha’s name while at the same time doing bad things, bringing the whole of Buddhism into disrepute. Thus worldly people slander and say, “If you want to find black-hearted people, look among vegetarian Buddhists,” and, “The mouth recites ‘Amitābha’ and ‘Śākyamuni’ while the heart is greedy, thieving, deceitful, and fraudulent.” Hearing this, how could one not feel pained?

Let me ask Pure Land practitioners with this kind of thought: is your mind pure? Can it be in accord with the Pure Land? Can it enter responsive communion with Amitābha, mind and Buddha becoming one and inseparable? Yet some blind fellows still harden their mouths and say it does not matter: “We have Amitābha Buddha as our refuge. Although we have done some bad things, at death the Buddha will still pity us, forgive us, and come to welcome and guide us to the West.” Ha! If Amitābha Buddha still came to welcome and guide you to the West under such circumstances, he would become someone who encourages you to do evil in the world. Is there such a principle? If that were truly so, why would the Buddha teach cause and effect and karmic retribution? Why would he exhort people to do no evil and practice all good?

Someone may say: “Are not people who commit the five heinous acts and ten evils grave offenders? How can they be born in the West through ten recitations at death?” I say: please do not misunderstand. They did not believe in the Buddha and then commit the five heinous acts and ten evils. Previously they did not understand cause and effect and inadvertently committed these offenses; therefore, once they come to believe in the Buddha, they can awaken to their error, repent thoroughly, eliminate their mental karma, and be reborn in the West. By contrast, for those who already believe in the Buddha and then commit offenses, they knowingly commit the offense, making it graver. Add to that weak practice and feeble Buddha-recitation, so that their karma is not purified through repentance: how could they be reborn? I think that when these people put on a brave front and insist, “It does not matter,” inwardly they still cannot avoid trembling with fear. Because everyone has conscience; after doing bad things, one is condemned by conscience and suffers deeply with fear. Even if greed for gain and desire temporarily cloud them, obscuring their conscience so that they feel no shame or fear, at the final instant of death their evil deeds can no longer be hidden and will each appear before them. They will be deeply reproached by conscience and suffer intensely. The pain of such condemnation by conscience surpasses all severe punishments and tortures. It is like Mount Tai pressing down on the head, a great fire burning the body, the wind-knife

dismembering the body—pain beyond endurance. Thus they weep and howl in pain; their breath grows short and their minds become confused. Bewildered and adrift, they follow karmic circumstances and wander into the evil paths. At that time, can they still speak stubbornly and say, “I have Amitābha to welcome and guide me”?

Fellow practitioners, you must not misunderstand “rebirth while carrying karma.” You cannot think that it is all right to practice Buddha-recitation while doing some bad things. This is absolutely unacceptable. Because rebirth through the six paths is governed entirely by wholesome and unwholesome karma; it is not subject to human will. If now you further seek birth in the Pure Land and escape birth and death, but your mind is not kind and wholesome, you do not even qualify for the human path; how could you be born in the Western Pure Land? Therefore, when Master Ouyi describes “true faith,” he says that besides faith in oneself and faith in the other, one must also believe in cause and effect and in principle and phenomena. This teaches us that the mind must be pure and wholesome before one can obtain the blessed result adorned with myriad virtues: the Pure Land.

Furthermore, as cited above, Master Lianchi, among the three kinds of people who cannot be reborn in the Pure Land, lists people whose minds are not kind and wholesome as the first kind. From this we can see that a kind and wholesome mind is the first prerequisite. If we have faults, please from today quickly repent bitterly before the Buddha, never commit them again, and also vigorously practice all goodness to redeem former faults. Only then can there be hope of birth in the West. If one relies solely on the Buddha’s power to welcome and guide one, does bad things, and expects rebirth while carrying karma, this is truly heading east while traveling west.

Next, regarding the issue of being welcomed and guided through other-power, I already touched on it briefly in the first section. Now, because we are discussing this topic, we need to examine it in greater detail. First, from the three provisions for birth in the West—faith, vows, and practice—we can see that, like the three legs of a tripod, not one can be missing. Since they cannot lack even one, practice is therefore extremely important in addition to faith and vows. Since practice is extremely important, it is clear that birth in the West does not rely solely on other-power. For those who rely exclusively on the power of Amitābha’s vows: if one can rely solely on Amitābha, then what is practice for? Since practice is needed, besides other-power, self-power is especially required.

Some people greedy for convenience and afraid of effort may say: Master Ouyi said, “Whether one obtains rebirth depends entirely on whether faith and vows are present; whether the grade of rebirth is high or low depends entirely on the depth or shallowness of holding the Name.” From this it seems that practice, that is, holding the Name, is only the basis for determining whether the grade of rebirth is high or low, while birth in the West depends entirely on faith and vows, which is relying solely on the Buddha’s power. We only need to be born in the West; we do not care whether our grade of rebirth is high or low, and even birth in

the borderland would fulfill our wish, because “once we see Amitābha, why worry about not awakening?” We only need to be born in the West.

They do not know that the master’s statement is a paired couplet and cannot be split apart or quoted out of context. Above he says faith and vows; immediately afterward he says practice. The meaning is that faith and vows guide practice, and practice completes faith and vows. That is to say, to be born in the West, one must take faith and vows as the guide. Without faith and vows, one cannot be reborn. At the same time, this was said in response to those who have practice but lack faith and vows. As we said in the first section, many Chan practitioners in the Ming dynasty borrowed Buddha-recitation as an expedient for entering samādhi; they had practice but lacked faith and vows. But rebirth in the West is divided into nine grades, and those different grades of rebirth are determined entirely by the depth or shallowness of the practice of holding the Name. Does this not clearly tell us that for birth in the West, a higher grade of rebirth certainly requires deeper Buddha-recitation practice, and even a lower grade of rebirth requires shallower Buddha-recitation practice before they can be reborn? It is not decided solely by the Buddha’s power. Understanding it this way accords with Master Ouyi’s true meaning and with the teachings of the other Buddhas and patriarchs.

If practice were unnecessary and one could be reborn by faith and vows alone, why did the Buddha in the Amitābha Sūtra instruct us to hold the Name? Why did he teach us in the Sixteen Contemplations Sūtra to practice the various contemplations? Master Ouyi was a teacher of a generation. How could he violate the Buddha’s intention and invent baseless talk to mislead later people? How could one say that the master’s opinion surpasses the Buddha’s? Again, look at what Master Yinguang said in his letter to layman Chen Xizhou: “Take faith and vows as the guide; take Buddha-recitation as practice and realization. Faith, vows, and practice are the essential doctrine of the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate. Practice without faith and vows cannot bring rebirth. Faith and vows without practice also cannot bring rebirth. When faith, vows, and practice are complete and lacking nothing, rebirth is certain.” From this we can see that faith, vows, and practice are the three essentials of birth in the West, like the three legs of a tripod. One cannot be missing. Master Ouyi and Master Yinguang are both Dharma patriarchs of the Pure Land tradition, standing in an unbroken line of transmission. It is impossible that the former misled the latter, or that the latter opposed the former. Thus those who say only faith and vows are needed and practice is unnecessary are merely blind fellows using laziness as an excuse.

Moreover, according to ordinary common sense, if there is faith and vows, why would one not practice? If one does not practice, how can that show that faith and vows are present? How could faith and vows be perfectly fulfilled? Therefore faith and vows guide practice, while practice is where faith and vows find their fulfillment. Without faith and vows, practice cannot be initiated; without practice, faith and vows cannot be completed. They mutually support and complete one another. The three cannot be missing even one. From this we can see how important the practice among faith, vows, and practice is. Since practice is as important as

faith and vows, practice must look like practice. One absolutely must not casually recite the Buddha's name with the mouth while thinking of Sahā in the mind and perfunctorily count that as enough. Practice like that is the same as not practicing. If the mouth recites the Buddha's name but the mind does not turn, then deluded thoughts cannot be cut off, the deluded mind cannot be transformed, and deluded habits cannot be removed. Practicing and practicing, one remains in the same old place, never having advanced a step. This is only self-deception and deception of others. What benefit is there?

If we practice, we should follow the instructions left by Buddhas and patriarchs. As if rescuing our head from fire, with utmost sincerity and earnestness, we should nurture a single Buddha-name in the mind and not forget it from thought to thought. Like pushing a heavy cart uphill, we must press forward with all our strength and not slacken for a single step. The six-syllable great Name should pass through the mind one syllable after another, one phrase after another, each syllable and each phrase clear and distinct. We must, with caution and awe, take the single great Name of myriad virtues as the precious sword of the Vajra King and use it to battle our deluded thoughts, the root of attachment, emotional attachment, and fixed views. Moreover, throughout the twelve double-hours of the day, we must gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession. If we can exert ourselves like this, neither seeking quick results in the morning or evening nor vainly hoping for a Buddha outside the mind to come and receive us—thereby stirring up demonic events—then we will certainly begin from the beginner's scattered and disturbed Buddha-recitation, gradually get onto the road, eliminate deluded thoughts, and attain one-pointedness without confusion. Looking at it this way, what is so unreachable and frightening about so-called one-pointedness without confusion? What goal is there that cannot be attained, requiring dispute? If the mind is afraid, practice will certainly lack strength. If practice lacks strength, nothing can succeed. Therefore firm confidence is the first essential. Matters are accomplished by human effort: as long as we first clarify the principle, find the key, then go straight forward and never retreat, there is no reason any task cannot be completed.

Furthermore, other-power practice definitely does not mean that one expends no effort at all and can succeed by leaning completely on someone else. The ancients used the analogy of mosquitoes and flies clinging to the tail of a swift horse. But the mosquitoes and flies still must first fly to the horse's tail, and they must still use strength to hold on. It is absolutely not that they use no effort at all. Therefore, complete reliance on the Buddha's power for birth in the West is utterly untenable. Only the combined power of self and other can accomplish the matter. Speaking further of self and other, they are originally not two. Only because of the deluded mind's discrimination do self and other begin. At root, mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are originally one in essence, like a room of a thousand lamps whose lights are not different from one another. Because of ignorance, one deludedly mistakes the reflected image before one for self; because self is posited, other exists, and right and wrong arise. Now, if recitation of the single Buddha-name fully takes hold and the deluded mind of this very thought dissolves, self does not stand; from where could other come? Therefore self and other

are originally one in essence. What self-power and other-power is there to speak of? To speak of self-power and other-power is precisely not recognizing self and other. Alas!

Furthermore, in terms of the common general explanation of “other-power,” when a Buddha appears in the world and teaches you the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate, is this not other-power? When practicing, you have the great Name of myriad virtues as your support; at the same time, because you hold the Name, you receive the empowering support of the adornment of Amitābha’s causal mind and the wisdom-light of his fruition—is this not other-power? At the end of life, because responsive communion occurs, the Buddha appears in your mind—this is the Buddha’s welcoming guidance—and the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss becomes your support; is this not even more other-power? Having so much other-power as enhancing conditions, you have already gained every advantage. Yet you still feel it is not enough and want to expend no effort at all, expecting the Buddha to pull you up to heaven. Is there such a principle? If there were, then we have not believed in the Buddha and recited the Buddha’s name only today; we should long ago have been reborn in the West and become Buddhas. Why have we wandered until today and suffered here?

Someone may say: “Although we have believed in the Buddha for more than one life, perhaps in past lives we practiced other schools and did not recite the Buddha’s name, and therefore were not reborn; after all, Pure Land is a Dharma gate in which ten thousand practice and ten thousand go.” If this were so, why from ancient times has there been the lament, “Those who practice Buddha-recitation are many; those born in the West are few”? Could Amitābha pull us away, while Śākyamuni could not pull us away? All Buddhas of the ten directions vow to liberate all sentient beings. If pulling were possible, then as soon as one Buddha appeared in the world, all sentient beings should have been liberated. Thus it is clear that relying on the Buddha’s power to pull you away is not what is meant. An ancient said, “Even if you take him by the arm, you cannot make him go; only when he himself assents can there be accord.” Know this: the Buddha’s power is boundless, but the karmic power of sentient beings is also boundless.

Master Yinguang most praised relying on the Buddha’s compassionate power to welcome and guide one to the West, yet he also said that Buddha-recitation must be earnest and sincere before one can join the vast assembly on high. Does this “earnest and sincere” not require hard effort? Going further: one who has self-power does not seek other-power, yet other-power naturally comes. Conversely, one who desperately seeks other-power while having no self-power absolutely cannot obtain other-power; even if other-power is present, it can do nothing. When practitioners can truly be utterly sincere, earnest, and vigorous without slackening, they invisibly evoke the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless and protect them. When the practice takes hold, deluded thoughts drop away, and their minds accord with the Buddha’s mind. Self and other are one in essence, sentient being and Buddha are not two, and one further receives the protective care of all Buddhas of the ten directions, who extend their hands, rub one’s crown, and bestow prediction. But lazy people who refuse to practice, or who

practice weakly, have minds filled with filth and defilement, not connected to the pure Buddha-light. What they see and meet is only a mass of black karma. Therefore, even if the Buddha appears before them and extends his hand to welcome and guide them, they are like the born-blind who cannot see the sun. This is why in the first section we said: self-power is other-power, other-power is self-power; with self-power there is other-power, without self-power there is no other-power. Fellow practitioners, please consider this deeply.

Actually, Pure Land is Chan, and Chan is Pure Land; the two schools are not different. Do not deludedly distinguish self-power and other-power. However, in Chan, only those of great roots and superior wisdom can penetrate the subtle pivot, recognize that appearances are nature and mind is Buddha, and at all times and places not be controlled by things but freely transform them. Pure Land does not necessarily require investigating these profound principles. It simply sets the single sacred Name of Amitābha in the practitioner's mind, to be sustained steadily and continuously without interruption. Naturally, without knowing it, the scattered and confused deluded mind is gradually transformed into pure Buddha-mind, and in this way one realizes the Buddha-way. This is like the hair and nails on the human body: although the human eye does not see them growing, they naturally grow little by little. The marvel of Buddha-recitation is that it carries out an immediate transformation at the very root of the practitioner's birth-and-death—on deluded thought—causing one to remember Buddha, remember Dharma, and remember Saṅgha, and naturally not remember greed, anger, and delusion. It subtly and invisibly transforms the deluded mind and pulls the practitioner out of birth-and-death. It does not require investigating profound principle, yet naturally and secretly accords with the subtle Way. As long as one holds the Name and practices Buddha-recitation with one mind, one naturally accomplishes the unsurpassed Way. Therefore Pure Land Buddha-recitation is the vast Dharma gate that universally embraces all three capacities. This truly is the wise function of skillful means flowing from old Śākyamuni's great compassionate mind.

When, through heartfelt devotion and sustained practice with the Name, you personally see Amitābha's true nature, only then will you know that self-power and other-power have always been not two, and that sentient beings and Buddhas are originally one in essence. Looking back on former disputes and debates will be like speaking of dreams within a dream; how could you not be ashamed and sweat with embarrassment? I have dragged this out at length, but must still remind everyone: Pure Land practice is not limited to the single method of reciting the Buddha's name. Observing the mind, holding mantras, reciting scriptures, practicing goodness, and so forth can all, like Buddha-recitation, be dedicated toward the West and toward rebirth in the Pure Land. One-pointedness without confusion is the crucial issue in the Pure Land Dharma gate. If we simply put everything down, grasp the Buddha-name firmly, and recite steadily and continuously, we will naturally reach the destination steadily and peacefully.

As this discussion is about to end, a compassionate bodhisattva suddenly comes forth and says, “You fellow, opening your mouth and babbling on at such length, are you not afraid of offending the worthy ones everywhere and provoking everyone’s anger?” I say: “Have you not seen the patriarchs say: the Buddhadharma admits no personal considerations; rely on the Dharma, not on persons. And have you not seen the Yellow-Faced Gautama say: in forty-nine years of teaching Dharma, I never spoke a single word? Then even if I used empty space as paper, the great ocean as an inkstone, and Mount Sumeru as ink, writing until the universe were filled, I would still never have written a single word. How could I have offended anyone?” Precisely: “Writing throughout the universe from compassion to benefit beings, / not one brushstroke has opened, not one character has formed. / If there is Dharma to speak, one topples onto the side of phenomena; / if there is no Dharma to speak, clouds stretch ten thousand miles. / Pitiful are the seekers probing mysteries, / discussing Buddha-activity endlessly within a dream. / One-pointedness without confusion is not difficult: / thought after thought Amitābha, syllable after syllable clear.” Ha ha! Tell me, has anything been said or not? Take care! Take care!

4H. 消业往生与带业往生 / Rebirth through the Elimination of Karma and Rebirth while Carrying Karma

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Recently, almost everywhere in the country, a lively debate has arisen around the Pure Land school's special expedient of "rebirth while carrying karma." One side says: to be truly reborn, one must eliminate deluded karma. The other side says: that is not necessary; one may be reborn while carrying karma. Each side has its reasons, and the two do not harmonize.

Proponents of "rebirth through the elimination of karma" say: "Rebirth while carrying karma" is a harmful and mistaken doctrine. It not only destroys the Pure Land practitioner's hope of rebirth at life's end; it also damages the dignified, pure, and solemn image of the whole Pure Land school. Karma itself is pollution and obstruction. It is not in accord with the Pure Land, and moreover it is a cause that obstructs the Way. How could one carry it into rebirth in the Buddha-land of the West? Therefore the Buddhas and bodhisattvas never, in any sūtra or śāstra, taught this extremely mistaken saying, "rebirth while carrying karma."

Those who advocate "rebirth while carrying karma" say: the phrase "rebirth while carrying karma" was not spoken directly by Buddhas or bodhisattvas, but its meaning is certainly present in the sūtras and śāstras. For example, the Nāgasena Bhikṣu Sūtra says: "If a large stone is placed on a boat, by relying on the boat's power, the stone does not sink. Without the boat, even a small stone sinks." The stone is an analogy for the "karma" created by worldly people, and the boat is an analogy for the Buddha's power. Does this not very clearly say that by relying on the Buddha's power, one can be reborn while carrying karma? Therefore, as Pure Land practitioners, if our faith is firm, our vows are earnest, and we single-mindedly recite the Buddha's name, there is no need to eliminate any karma; at life's end we will definitely be reborn. The claim of rebirth through elimination of karma is demonic speech. It cannot be trusted, and it must be completely refuted and eliminated.

These two views each cling to their own position and refuse to yield. They have stirred up the Buddhist world so that people are in an uproar, with no clear standard to follow, leaving later students uncertain how to practice in a way that accords with the marvelous Way. Therefore, we should invite eminent teachers from all quarters to express their views and discuss the matter vigorously, so that a correct conclusion can be reached, the clouds of doubt can be cleared, the record set straight, and later students may avoid entering byways.

To judge which of these two positions is right or wrong, we must first clarify the origin of both arguments. Then, by comparison and discussion, it will not be hard to see where their contradictions lie and to arrive at a correct conclusion. Why do these two views insist on their own positions and oppose each other like water and fire? The reasons do not go beyond the following.

A. Proponents of “rebirth through the elimination of karma”

First, they see that many Pure Land practitioners today do not honestly recite the Buddha’s name. They merely drift along, casually joining others in morning and evening services, as though they were schoolchildren handing in homework. Once the daily recitations are finished, they consider their Buddha-recitation work complete. They make no further effort in Buddha-recitation to transform their own habits of attachment and craving, to transform their deluded imaginings and thoughts, and to eliminate the defilements in their own minds. Instead, they often shift the future responsibility for rebirth in the Pure Land entirely onto Amitābha Buddha. If at death they do not see Buddhas and bodhisattvas come to welcome and guide them and they are not born in the West, they mistakenly think this is the responsibility of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. For this reason, Master Lianchi once lamented, “Many practice Buddha-recitation, but few are born in the West.” All this is because Buddha-recitation practitioners are not single-minded and earnest, but merely seek the easy way and thereby set themselves back. Therefore a loud alarm must be sounded, advocating “rebirth through the elimination of karma” in order to awaken the dreamlike confusion of Buddha-recitation practitioners.

Second, many people who practice Buddha-recitation today misunderstand the meaning of “rebirth while carrying karma.” They think that as long as they have faith and vows, and as long as they also do morning and evening services, it does not matter even if they do some improper things, because in any case they can be reborn while carrying karma. In Shenjiamen, I saw many people drying fish and shrimp. I asked them, “Is it not the case that most people around Zhoushan believe in Buddhism?” They said, “Yes. We are all Buddhists.” I could not help asking in puzzlement, “Then why do you still kill living beings?” They said, “We can be reborn while carrying karma!” If they understand “rebirth while carrying karma” in this way, are they not destroying the sacred and pure image of the Pure Land school?

Third, in order to clear away the recent corrupt and polluting tendencies in the Pure Land school and revitalize Buddhism, they loudly proclaim “rebirth through elimination of karma.” Their aim is to rouse the deaf and awaken the confused, so that Pure Land practitioners may truly be born in the West, and not merely shout slogans, lest the true meaning of the Pure Land teaching be buried and gradually disappear.

B. Those who advocate “rebirth while carrying karma”

First, they fear that people will feel daunted and not dare to have faith, enter the teaching, and practice, thereby harming the Pure Land school and cutting off the wisdom-life of sentient beings.

Second, they misunderstand the difficulty of “rebirth through the elimination of karma.” They do not know what counts as eliminating karma or how one is then reborn. Generally, they think that only when ignorance is completely removed, karma is exhausted, and attachments are emptied away, can this be called eliminating karma. Would this not be far too difficult? How many people could do it? Therefore they resolutely oppose the view.

Third, they have not truly understood the profound inner meaning of “rebirth while carrying karma.” They know only that “carrying karma” seems easy, but do not know what karma is actually carried. Nor do they understand that, as they recite the Buddha’s name thought after thought, they are precisely eliminating their own mental karma at the most immediate point and establishing the right cause for future rebirth.

From the two viewpoints above, whether one speaks of “rebirth through the elimination of karma” or “rebirth while carrying karma,” both arise from good intentions. Both aim to protect Pure Land practitioners so that they can actually be reborn in the West and avoid going astray and failing. Since the great aim is entirely the same, and since there is no unavoidable opposition like water and fire, it should not be difficult to reconcile what is common, integrate the differences, and arrive at a unified conclusion.

To arrive at such a conclusion, we should first investigate the word “karma,” because karma is the central issue in both positions. What, then, is karma? The Awakening of Faith says: “With ignorance as cause, the three subtle aspects arise.” The first of these three subtle aspects is the “karmic aspect.” What is the karmic aspect? From beginningless time, suchness has not remained in its own nature; the mind, deluded by ignorance and unawakened, moves: this is karma. Therefore karma has the meaning of “activity.” In the sūtras, it is called deluded karma.

As for “aspect”: because the mind moves and loses the original perfect clarity, suchness—which is originally without characteristics—gives rise to the deluded appearances of space and the four great elements; this is what Yogācāra calls the object-aspect. The originally present light of wisdom is transformed into deluded seeing, which is the seeing-aspect. All the myriad dharmas that bear characteristics in the worlds of sentient beings are established through these two aspects, the seeing-aspect and the object-aspect. These two aspects are also the second and third of the three subtle aspects in the Awakening of Faith: the “perceiving aspect” and the “objective-realm aspect.” From this we know that karma means fabrication and activity. Because sentient beings differ in delusion and awakening, the karma they create differs, and the results they experience differ as well.

Ordinary beings create karma with outflows and experience the results of fragmentary birth-and-death in the three realms and six paths. The two vehicles create karma free of outflows and experience the result of the Land of Expedient Means with Remainder. Bodhisattvas create karma that is neither with outflows nor free of outflows and experience the result of the Land of Real Reward and Adornment. Ordinary beings are too deeply deluded. They take illusory objects to be truly existent, mistake false appearances for reality, and in order to satisfy selfish desires, they do not hesitate to create vast evil karma. Therefore birth and death do not end, and cyclic wandering does not cease. If one now wishes to be reborn in the Pure Land and achieve horizontal transcendence of the three realms, yet does not remove this root of birth and death—the karma born of being deluded by marks and acting out of delusion—how can the original intention be fulfilled and true rebirth in the Pure Land be achieved?

Someone may say: “Rebirth in the Pure Land depends on being welcomed and guided through the power of Amitābha Buddha’s vast, profound, compassionate vows. Why must karma be eliminated before rebirth can be attained?” I reply: if deluded karma is not purified, one will inevitably cling in delusion to all the false appearances of the Sahā world. Although the Buddha comes to welcome and guide one, because the mind is deluded and stained by karma, one does not see the Buddha and misses the good opportunity for rebirth. Master Yongming Yanshou said: “The Buddha is like the moon in the sky, whose reflection appears in a thousand rivers and ten thousand waters, but muddy water does not show it. If the mind of a Buddha-recitation practitioner is not clear and pure, it is like muddy water that cannot show the moon, and therefore one does not see the Buddha.” If one does not see the Buddha at life’s end, how can one be reborn?

There are many Buddha-recitation practitioners who, because they cling to gold, silver, wealth, and treasure, fall into becoming treasure-guarding ghosts; or because they are attached to spouses and children, fall into becoming house-guarding ghosts; or because they cling to the body, or are deluded by the beautiful and solemn decorations of tombs and burial goods, fall into becoming corpse-guarding ghosts, and so on. The ancients said: “Rowing while the boat remains tied to the mooring post can never work.” This means that if we wish to be born in the West but still cling to the Sahā world and refuse to let go, it is like trying to row while the boat remains tied to a stake on the shore. No matter how hard we row, the boat cannot move forward. How then can we be born in the West?

Does this mean birth in the West is very difficult? No, not difficult at all. Have you not seen the Buddha say: “Reciting Amitābha’s sacred Name once can extinguish the grave karmic offenses accumulated through eighty koṭis of kalpas of birth and death”? We now practice Buddha-recitation daily and at all times. We do not recite merely once, so why fear that karma cannot be eliminated and offenses cannot be removed? Therefore rebirth through the elimination of karma is not some difficult matter. We only need to see through all these things of the Sahā world—music, sensual pleasures, goods, profit, spouse, wealth, children, and official salary—recognizing them as dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, unobtainable, and cease pursuing or clinging to them. Turning around, we put our whole heart into the Buddha-recitation method of “mental recitation with attentive listening,” reciting diligently and earnestly with full effort. Then even great karma is not difficult to dissolve into nothing at all.

Someone may ask: “Why is it so easy?” Because karma is born from mind; it does not come from anywhere else. Now our mind remains single and undivided, with thought after thought resting on the Buddha. The Buddha is mind, and mind is Buddha. The whole mind is Buddha; the whole Buddha is mind. Where then is there a place for karma to stand? Moreover, at the very instant of rebirth at life’s end, when we see only Amitābha Buddha and the Holy Assembly coming to welcome and guide us, and see nothing else at all, what karma or non-karma could there be? Is this not precisely our ordinary Buddha-recitation practice eliminating karma? Is this not also the compassionate power by which Buddhas and bodhisattvas embrace and support us, enabling us to eliminate karma?

Stated in this way, the doctrine of “rebirth through the elimination of karma” seems to stand firm. Does that mean “rebirth while carrying karma” is mistaken? No. “Rebirth while carrying karma” is not mistaken either, because the reason we are able to be reborn is that Buddha-recitation practice has become mature and we no longer remain bound to Sahā. In technical language, this is called “the maturation of pure karma.” This pure karma is not defiled karma, but is it not still karma? If one carries it into rebirth, is that not “rebirth while carrying karma”?

Those reborn in the lower grades are not yet empty and pure in mind. They still cling to marks; there is still a place, and there is still birth. Therefore they can only be born in the Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together. The word “ordinary” here refers precisely to sentient beings who carry karma. In the higher grades, birth is non-arising and non-arising is birth; one direction is the ten directions and the ten directions are one direction; pure and defiled are not separate, east and west are not divided. The mind is empty and the intention pure, yet one does not see emptiness or purity. Learning has ended and one is established in the unconditioned, yet one does not even know it as the unconditioned. Then there is no so-called carrying karma or not carrying karma. Not carrying karma means that karma has been eliminated, does it not?

Perhaps someone will say that calling matured pure karma “rebirth while carrying karma” seems somewhat forced. Then let us go one step further and discuss what ordinary people mean by defiled karma carried into rebirth. From beginningless kalpas, we sentient beings have been deluded and unawakened. We cling deeply to marks and have accumulated thick defilements. Now, through diligent, strenuous practice of Buddha-recitation, we have gained some awakening and come to understand that worldly and supramundane dharmas are all unobtainable, and that karmic obstructions and offenses are fundamentally like flowers in the sky and moons in water. Although this principle has been deeply realized, old habits are difficult to remove all at once. They must still be swept away and polished over a long period before one gradually reaches higher attainment. It is absolutely not possible to exhaust ignorance and habitual obstructions completely all at once.

In Chan, one who has awakened is said to enter the first ground, the stage of seeing the Way. In Yogācāra this is the stage of penetration. After that come the stage of practicing the Way, from the second through the tenth ground, and the ultimate stage beyond the tenth ground, culminating in Buddhahood. The practitioner must diligently remove ignorance and habitual obstructions one portion at a time, and only then ascend stage by stage. Who could accomplish all this in a single lifetime, exhaust ignorance, and suddenly realize Buddhahood? The sūtras say that bodhisattvas at the stage of Equal Enlightenment still have one final portion of ignorance not yet exhausted. Is this final portion of ignorance not karma? If even bodhisattvas at the stage of Equal Enlightenment still have karma present, who can reach Equal Enlightenment in one lifetime? To be reborn while carrying residual karma not yet exhausted—is this not precisely rebirth while carrying karma?

Therefore, saying “rebirth while carrying karma” is not wrong. It is only that one must not misunderstand its meaning and mistakenly think that a Buddha-recitation practitioner can also do some bad things, since in any case one can be reborn while carrying karma. In

summary: when we practice Buddha-recitation, we are precisely engaging in the practice of eliminating karma. Rebirth in the Pure Land originally occurs by eliminating deluded karma, and this karma is eliminated through the Buddha's compassionate power. There is nothing difficult about it. Therefore there is no need to fear or doubt the view of "rebirth through the elimination of karma," nor to rise up in agitated opposition because of that fear and doubt. At the same time, proponents of "rebirth through the elimination of karma" also need not oppose rebirth while carrying karma, denounce it as demonic speech, and make everyone uneasy and uncertain because the exact phrase "rebirth while carrying karma" was not personally proclaimed from the golden mouth of the Buddha in the sūtras.

Everyone should know that times differ, and the grammar and modes of expressing ideas differ accordingly; naturally, the vocabulary used also differs. More than two thousand years have passed since the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. Although at that time there was no phrase "rebirth while carrying karma," it is enough if the sūtra text contains this meaning. From the analysis above, carrying karma and eliminating karma appear different on the surface, but essentially they are completely the same. Within eliminating karma there is carrying karma; within carrying karma there is eliminating karma. They are one yet two, two yet one, and there is no contradiction. Why argue endlessly over minor details?

Moreover, in this debate, some people also maintain that rebirth while carrying karma means carrying past karma, not present karma. Of course, this view comes from good intentions, fearing that people will misunderstand and, after practicing Buddha-recitation, still do bad things and lose the chance of rebirth. But considered in terms of the argument's essential claim, it seems inadequate. The so-called past karma and present karma are simply karma created in the past and karma being created now, or karma created over kalpas and past lives and karma created in this present lifetime. From the perspective of the three times—past, present, and future—as displayed by an ordinary being's deluded thoughts, this seems reasonable and proper. But from the reality of suchness, past, present, and future fundamentally do not exist. The Diamond Sūtra says: "Past mind cannot be obtained, present mind cannot be obtained, future mind cannot be obtained." This means that the minds of the three times are all illusory projections of deluded thought and are actually unobtainable.

The so-called three times are divided into past and future by taking the "present" as the foothold. But the present has no foothold. As soon as one says "present," it has already become past. Look at the second hand of a clock, turning without the slightest stop. Where has there ever been a "present"? Since the present has no place to stand, where could past and future exist? Therefore the Avatamsaka Sūtra says: "The ten times, past and present, from beginning to end, never depart from the present thought." When this single thought of the present is empty, so-called past and future all vanish like flowers in the sky. Where can the three times be found? Since the three times are unobtainable, one should not say that only past karma is carried and present karma is not carried.

Furthermore, as explained above, karma means activity. It is not only doing bad things that counts as karma; doing good things is also karma. In one lifetime, who knows how much karma we have created? And since no one below the level of sagehood is without fault, it is probably hard to avoid occasionally doing some bad things. Sometimes one intends to do

good, yet instead harms people and turns it into something bad. Or perhaps one does something bad and does not know it at the time. If rebirth while carrying karma means carrying only past karma and not present karma, then would not all these people, whether doing good or bad, be unable to be reborn? If that were truly so, why does the Sūtra on the Contemplation of Immeasurable Life say that even a person who has committed the five heinous acts and ten evils, if at life's end he meets a good spiritual friend who instructs him, repents wholeheartedly, and completes ten recitations, can also attain rebirth? The Buddha speaks no falsehood, and the sūtras contain no false words. Such people who have committed the five heinous acts and ten evils are reborn through ten recitations at death. Does this not prove that one can also be reborn while carrying what the proponents of that view call "present karma"? From this we know that rebirth while carrying karma does not distinguish past karma from present karma.

Moreover, karma originally arises from our deluded movement in ignorance. Once we awaken and shine the light of true wisdom upon it, whether present or past karma, it immediately dissolves. This is called mind empty, karma gone. Therefore even those who committed the five heinous acts and ten evils can be reborn through ten recitations at death. This is like a dark room. Whether it has been shut for many years or has only now been sealed, once the door and windows are opened or the electric light is turned on, the darkness is immediately eliminated. Where is there any distinction between present and past?

At this point someone may ask: if present and past karma can be eliminated at once, why did the text above say that one is reborn carrying residual karma? If karma is completely eliminated, what residual karma remains to be carried? This is a good question. Although the darkness in a room is driven away at once, because the room has been closed for a long time, the moldy odor is not immediately eliminated. It must be ventilated for a long time and slowly swept, scrubbed, and wiped before it can gradually return to its former condition. This moldy odor not yet fully removed is like our residual karma that has not yet ended. Therefore one must carry it into rebirth.

Finally, after clarifying these issues, I hope that those who previously mistook morning and evening services as the completion of Buddha-recitation will correct this error. In addition to morning and evening services, one should also sit upright for Buddha-recitation, just as one sits in Chan. The ancients taught us to recite the Buddha's name one hundred thousand times each day because they hoped that, without letting the mind become heedless, we would transform the deluded mind into Buddha-mind, as provision for genuine rebirth in the future. If we can carry this out, while doing all good and refraining from all evil, then surely "of ten thousand who practice, ten thousand go." What doubts or fears could remain? May everyone be peaceful and at ease, and be born in the highest grade in the Land of Peace and Nourishment!

4I. 《解脱歌》浅释 / A Brief Explanation of the Song of Liberation

In December 1996, Elder Yuan Yin explained the Song of Liberation composed by Master Dayu. Dayu's song follows the rhyme-pattern of Yongjia Xuanjue's Song of Realizing the Way. Master Dayu left very few writings: apart from the Song of Liberation, there is only a farewell poem he left behind when he departed into seclusion without announcement. This song is precious because it explains very clearly how we should practice and how to realize the Way; it is therefore very helpful for practice. Yongjia's Song of Realizing the Way has a classical cadence and a lucid spirit, with much to commend it; Hongde's commentary on it also has its own distinctive insights. Dayu gathered these into one furnace, added his own seeing, and composed the Song of Liberation. Therefore this song contains not only the insights of those two worthy teachers but also Dayu's own lived understanding, making its meaning richer and more useful for practice.

"After awakening, joy—what is that joy? Listen while I teach you to sing the Song of Liberation." In our ordinary speech and conduct, whenever we cling to marks we are dreaming. In a dream, everything seems real; once we wake up, nothing remains, not even a trace. After awakening through Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, or practice of the Way, it is just like waking from sleep: we understand that all things are empty, nothing can be sought and nothing can be obtained. Letting everything go, we become free and at ease, joyful and peaceful beyond measure. Therefore practice must be directed toward apprehending Mind and seeing nature. Seeing the nature is awakening to the fact that all things are empty of self-nature and arise through conditions; all phenomena arise from causes and conditions, have no self-nature, and are illusory images. Our own nature, however, is the actual essence—marvelous presence, true emptiness—the root from which all phenomena arise; all things are its contingent display and transformation. Knowing this, one understands that worldly appearances are illusory and ungraspable, and one no longer clings to them. What, then, is this joy after awakening? Listen as I sing it.

"Not letting the ancients alone have the lofty tone, why should I not pick up a line and harmonize with them?" It is not only Master Yongjia who could awaken to the Way. All of us can see the nature and awaken, because all of us are endowed with the Tathāgata's Buddha-nature. After awakening, why not write out the situation of one's awakening and harmonize with Yongjia's Song of Realizing the Way for everyone to see? Strictly speaking, awakening is the summit of the wondrous peak where speech and thought are cut off; there is nothing to say. Since our Buddha-nature is absolute true emptiness and has no characteristics that can be seen, nothing can be compared with it. Once it is put into words, it is already off the mark. This is what is meant by "The matter beyond is not transmitted even by a thousand sages." No Buddha can draw it for you and explain it to you. Yet for the sake of guiding people and helping later students, why not speak a few words within the unspeakable, sketch the scenery after awakening from the side, and lead people through the gate? Thus, apart from not speaking, one may still speak, telling people about the true mind one has realized and the joy one has found.

“Originally there is no delusion, and there is no truth either; these two dharmas have always been empty of self-nature.” Buddha-nature is the true nature without characteristics that is neither true nor false, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor shaking, neither defiled nor pure. It is the wondrous essence beyond speech and thought, completely uncovered, stainless, and without even a mote of dust. Nothing can be added to it, whether praise or slander. Yet in daily life we are immersed in discriminating dharmas, thinking that there is truth and falsity, arising and ceasing, and all sorts of differences. We do not know that all these are relative discriminations and deluded thoughts, themselves devoid of self-nature. Phenomena themselves have no views of true or false, right or wrong, long or short, beautiful or ugly. These are all deluded discriminations of the human mind. What accords with oneself is called true, good, and beautiful; what does not accord with oneself is called false, evil, and ugly.

For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and the Sahā world do not themselves have a true-false distinction. Some people discriminate and say that the Land of Ultimate Bliss is true while the Sahā world is false. Heard roughly, that seems reasonable, because the West is a Buddha-land while this place is an ordinary land. But if we reflect carefully, the claim is not right, because both lands bear characteristics. The Diamond Sūtra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” If Sahā is false, then the West is also false: if one is false, all are false. Conversely, since both lands flow from the one true Dharma realm, if the West is true, Sahā is also true: if one is true, all are true. From this we can see that truth and delusion are originally absent; they are only discriminations of our deluded mind, creating needless affliction. Therefore in studying and practicing the Dharma, we must let everything go and stop producing deluded discriminations over names and conceptual labels. If we simply focus our whole mind on practice, then whatever Dharma gate we practice can readily succeed. If instead we fixate on names and conceptual labels and generate discriminations, we will have difficulty reaching the goal.

The purpose of studying Buddhism is to obtain real benefit and eliminate every affliction. If day after day we deal with greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt, dividing truth from delusion, afflictions will be endless and it will be hard to realize the Way. We should also know that our Dharma-body is marvelous presence, true emptiness. It is not inert emptiness, and still less annihilationist emptiness. It can produce inexhaustible wondrous functions, give rise to the myriad dharmas, and is lacking nothing. All phenomena are false images transformed and displayed by it; they cannot be pursued or grasped. Simply function according to conditions: do not reject what is present, and do not force what is absent. This is unobstructed wondrous functioning.

“Without self-nature and without characteristics, do not cling to emptiness: this is the Tathāgata’s true nature.” In daily life, we should not stop on any matter and keep pursuing it, letting afflictions go on without end. When a matter comes, respond; when it has passed, stop. Do not leave the slightest trace in the mind. Only then does one accord with practice. All marks are conditionally assembled, unreal, and lacking self-nature. Do not be deceived by them, cling to them, and thereby cover over the light of one’s own nature. These marks are empty, like flowers in the sky and the moon in water: they can appear to be seen, but cannot

actually be reached. If one mistakenly takes them to be real and pursues them with all one's strength, afflictions are inevitable. Human desires are inexhaustible, but what one does cannot always bring what one seeks; when the sought object cannot be obtained, affliction naturally arrives. Therefore the first thing in practice is to know that all dharmas are illusory marks without self-nature and not to chase them.

"Not clinging to emptiness" means that although dharmas have no self-nature, provisional appearances are not absent. They are not the inert emptiness of sheer nonexistence, but empty, illusory appearances that cannot be obtained or grasped. In practice we must neither cling to existence nor veer into one-sided emptiness, abandoning all things and falling into nothingness, becoming like earth, wood, metal, stone, or a stagnant pool. That is wrong. Socrates, the great Greek philosopher, took his practice to an extreme point and also knew that everything in the world is unreal and unobtainable, but he veered into one-sided emptiness, renounced everything, and even slept by the roadside in a drainage ditch. Such one-sided emptiness is also wrong. We should know that although appearances are false and not to be clung to, they still have function: clothes can protect against cold and heat, and houses can shelter from wind and rain. We simply use them according to conditions, neither clinging to existence nor clinging to emptiness. When neither side is established, the middle also naturally does not stand; this non-establishment is the meaning of the Middle Way.

Once we understand this, we neither cling to emptiness nor cling to existence. Responding to conditions and dealing with beings, we function wondrously and inexhaustibly, doing all we can to benefit others. This accords with the true Mahāyāna meaning of seamless integration without obstruction. When some criticize Buddhism as leaning toward emptiness, that is because they have misunderstood. The emptiness spoken of in Buddhism is not the emptiness of nothing at all. It means that all marks are unobtainable, ungraspable, and cannot be sought; it does not mean there are no appearances and no world. Consider the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss: is it not marvelous? Those who do not understand think Buddhism contradicts itself: the Diamond Sūtra says everything is empty, while the Amitābha Sūtra speaks of golden sands, jeweled trees, lotus ponds, and waters of eight merits. They do not know that the emptiness taught by the Buddha is seamless and unobstructed: empty yet not empty, not empty yet empty—marvelous presence, true emptiness.

When true emptiness is taught, it means that our fundamental essence, Buddha-nature, has no characteristics that can be seen. Yet it can manifest all appearances and function wondrously in every way, so it is not inert emptiness. When marvelous presence is taught, it means that although appearances are present, they are not truly existent; they are provisional appearances functioning according to conditions. They are like reflections in a mirror: visible, yet unobtainable. In this world, even if one plans bitterly, cheats and struggles, and obtains great wealth, in the end one leaves empty-handed and cannot take anything along, while the karma one created is carried along. This karmic creation and retribution too is neither empty nor existent. The things cannot be carried away: that is empty, not existent. Karma cannot be flung off and is carried along: that is existent, not empty. Thus, in practice we must abide in neither side; only then do we accord with the true meaning of personally realizing the great Way. To realize the wondrous nature that is neither empty nor existent, both empty and

existent, is “the Tathāgata’s true nature.” All sentient beings possess this wondrous nature. Pitifully, we do not know it; we chase external objects, greedily pursue without end, confuse ourselves, and suffer the vain pain of birth-and-death and cyclic rebirth. Therefore the Buddha appeared in the world to wake us up: do not dream any longer. All appearances are shadows in our own mind. We must neither cling to them as existent nor, because appearances arise through conditions and lack self-nature, fall into one-sided emptiness. If everyone can wake up and function wondrously and without obstruction in daily life, one naturally enters Buddhahood and personally realizes the Tathāgata’s true wondrous nature.

“Seeing true reality, all dharmas are empty; in an instant’s sudden awakening, the ten thousand dharmas are the same.” True reality here means the reality that never decays, spoken of in contrast to illusory appearances. True reality is without characteristics. Personally realizing true reality without characteristics is awakening to the Way. All phenomena in the world that bear characteristics are false: they pass through formation, abiding, change, and extinction and do not endure. Our Buddha-nature never decays; it has existed from beginningless time to the present, and its characteristic is precisely the absence of characteristics. To see this true reality, one must practice: Chan, Buddha-recitation, or mantra recitation. When practice reaches one-pointedness, when there is no mind to be minded, what is original opens up and the nature is seen. That is personally realizing true reality whose characteristic is the absence of characteristics, and awakening.

When true reality is seen, everything is empty; the countless differentiated marks lose all standing as graspable realities, so all dharmas are the same. “Dharmas” has a very wide scope: not only Buddhist teachings but also worldly matters, our thoughts, and all phenomena are dharmas. All these various dharmas are the same in that none has self-nature; all are illusory images and all are empty. Once one sees the nature and awakens, understanding this, one no longer clings to false marks and is one and inseparable from the universe. Furthermore, all appearances are manifestations of our one true Dharma realm, so the Dharma gates share one source. Hence the Chan master said, “Hell and heaven have no sameness or difference.” The myriad dharmas are consciousness-only; the three realms are mind-only. Apart from Buddha-nature, there is nothing at all. “Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm.” Therefore nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. Realizing this principle, one enters the gate of nonduality in a snap of the fingers. In practice, do not divide everything into sectarian categories and calculate which is long or short.

“Once the scenery can no longer be hidden, it stands fully revealed before you.” After awakening, our joy is inexhaustible. We know that all things are illusory images manifested by our own mind, and we no longer pursue them. Previously we were bound by clinging to marks and created our own afflictions; now, letting everything go, body and mind are open and bright, filled with lightness, peace, and joy; free and at ease, serene in movement and stillness. How could one not be delighted beyond measure? Such a situation cannot be described by brush and ink, and so the song says, “What fine elegance, no painting can capture it.” This free scenery fills empty space and pervades the Dharma realm. Great light shines forth and illuminates the great thousandfold world; how could it be concealed? When practice reaches the point where deluded thoughts break off, inwardly body and mind and outwardly

world all become empty, and the true nature appears in a flash. It is like meeting one's own father face to face at a crossroads. The flavor of this cannot be described by pen and ink. Having personally realized the nature, one sees that all phenomena are one's own nature, with no distinction of you, me, and others. The Diamond Sūtra's "no mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, no mark of lifespan" points to this principle.

"The decisive teaching: the Buddha's mind-seal; some people will not believe it as it is." The Buddha's teaching includes provisional and real teachings, definitive and provisional scriptures, lesser vehicle and great vehicle teachings. These were given according to the different capacities of people. If one spoke only the truth and the real teaching, some would not believe it. When the Buddha taught the Lotus Sūtra, five thousand monks who had realized arhatship left the assembly. They did not believe that all sentient beings possess wisdom and Buddha-nature. It is like my telling you now: when a thought breaks off, the clear and distinct numinous knowing is your true suchness. Would you believe it? Probably not. Why? You think that if this numinous knowing were my true suchness, then I would have seen the nature and awakened, and I should manifest supernormal powers. Since such powers have not appeared, you do not believe it. You do not know that awakening to the Way and the arising of powers come in sequence. One does not manifest powers at the first awakening, because habitual tendencies accumulated over many lifetimes are heavy; after awakening, one must remove old habits through diligent training amid circumstances before powers appear. Moreover, what is called supernormal function is already present in dressing and eating, for all these actions are the wondrous function of Buddha-nature. Apart from Buddha-nature, this body could not move at all; all of it is numinous functioning.

The decisive teaching of the Buddha's mind-seal directly points you to the mind-seal of seeing Buddha-nature. "Seal" means that the Buddha's mind and our mind match exactly; everyone's mind-seal is the same. Yet sentient beings are foolish, heavily obstructed, and unwilling to believe. Therefore the Buddha taught people to recite the Buddha's name. If you truly believed that this numinously knowing mind is Buddha and let everything go, you would not need to recite the Buddha's name: I am originally Buddha, neither defiled nor pure, with nothing to take or reject. What Buddha would there still be to be mindful of? But because sentient beings will not believe, Śākyamuni Buddha had to devise a method, go around by a skillful route, and tell us to practice Buddha-recitation. Practicing until sense faculties and sense objects fall away and subject and object both vanish, one personally sees that the Buddha's mind-seal truly is the real Buddha, and then one can believe without doubt. "Directly cutting to the root, it is finished right now; picking leaves and seeking branches gradually teaches people." Ending birth-and-death is like cutting down a tree: one must cut at the root. Even though the branches and leaves may remain green for a time after the root is cut, before long they will wither. We who practice the Great Vehicle must practice from the root rather than from branches and leaves. In the Heart-Center Dharma, one works directly from the eighth consciousness, cutting at the root so that the eighth consciousness turns over and one personally realizes the source. Buddha-recitation, by contrast, begins from the sixth consciousness, so there is some difference. If one merely removes branches and plucks leaves step by step without severing the root, the tree still will not die and may sometimes grow

even more vigorously. Thus, in practicing a great Dharma, one must also cut at the root. Yet people's capacities differ. Some need a gradual method, proceeding step by step and being led slowly into the Buddha-way; others need direct instruction to see the nature right now. Capacities differ because people created different karma in past lives and because the wholesome roots they formed by drawing near to the Buddha vary in depth. In practicing Buddhadharma, however, we should practice the Great Vehicle, for the Great Vehicle accords with the Buddha's original intent.

The mind-ground Dharma gate is the fundamental Dharma gate of Buddhism. Although the methods of practice of all schools differ in content, none departs from the Dharma of mind. To speak Dharma apart from mind is all the same as demonic speech. Looking at students today, many are deluded by supernormal powers, despise the mind Dharma, and often enter crooked paths without knowing it. This is deeply regrettable. Practice of the Way is practice of the mind. The scripture says, "This mind is Buddha; this mind becomes Buddha." It is not supernormal power that becomes Buddha. If one grasps the root, works with the mind, and removes deluded habits completely, one need not worry that powers will not appear. Conversely, seeking powers and clinging to powers not only prevents one from becoming Buddha; one may well become a demon. I hope everyone will ponder this repeatedly.

"How many times born, how many times dead—from ancient past to now it has always been so." This does not refer to dying and being born again in the six paths. It refers to the process in Buddhist practice where there are "eighteen or nineteen great awakenings, and countless small awakenings." In practice, we may seem suddenly to clarify our own nature, with clinging to marks seemingly fallen away, yet not completely uprooted. When circumstances appear, the mind arises again and wavers. Therefore there are many great awakenings, not one single event after which one sits firmly at home. Gaofeng's teacher, Chan master Xueyan Qin, was also like this: after several awakenings, he still wavered in circumstances, until at the end the bottom of the bucket thoroughly fell out and only then was it final. Practicing Buddhism is not necessarily finished in one awakening; if someone can do that, that person is a great bodhisattva come again. Therefore the Śūraṅgama Sūtra speaks of two approaches: one is sudden awakening and sudden realization: "Awakening to principle is sudden; with that awakening, all delusion is dissolved at once." In the instant of awakening, all past habits are completely dissolved. Such people are few. Therefore it also says, "In practice, habits are gradually removed and exhausted in sequence": after awakening one must train amid circumstances and gradually remove deep habits step by step. This is addressed to the capacities of the broad majority. Hence "how many times born, how many times dead": one awakens once, not thoroughly, still wavers in circumstances, and must deepen the practice further until complete awakening.

When we open up what is original and personally see our own nature, we have only reached the first ground. We still must advance upward through the stages: second ground, third ground, all the way to the tenth ground, and above that the stages of Equal Enlightenment, Wondrous Enlightenment, and Perfect Enlightenment. Only by passing through these layers does one become Buddha. Practice is spoken of in three ways: sudden awakening, where one awakening finishes it; genuine practice after awakening, where one

slowly removes habits; and “practice is non-practice; non-practice is practice.” Actually these three are one. After awakening, we understand that everything in the world is false and unobtainable, and that everyone is originally Buddha. What is there to practice? Therefore Master Guishan said that removing habits is practice. Do not speak in terms of practicing or not practicing, for practice and non-practice are two extremes. Master Zhongfeng said that if someone still has habits after awakening, that person has not awakened. This was because some people of his time had not awakened at all: after reading a few books, understanding some principles, and hearing a few seemingly Chan phrases, they thought they had awakened. When they could not pass through circumstances, they used “habits” as a shield, so the teacher did not allow it. He was not saying that habits cannot remain after awakening. This process has been so from ancient times to now.

“Demon heads and ghost faces come in many forms; returning to the root and source has not a thing.” Today there are all kinds of methods and ways, ornate and numerous. These are not true Buddhadharma. What is true Buddhadharma? It has nothing at all: it only teaches people to recognize their own original mind and see their own nature. Once the nature is truly recognized, one sits steadily at home and returns to the root and source. Present-day deviant non-Buddhist methods use supernormal powers to entice people and lead them onto side paths. If we cling to powers, that is a grave mistake: not only will we fail to become Buddha, we may become demons. True Buddhadharma shatters people’s deluded dreams; it is pure and unconditioned, abiding in nothing, free, at ease, and joyful beyond measure. Even if powers arise, there is not the slightest clinging. As Master Linji said upon awakening, “After all, Huangbo’s Buddhadharma does not have much to it.” Everyone is originally Buddha; turn around and it is so. It is extremely ordinary, with nothing mysterious or extraordinary. Today people are restless, with shallow roots and heavy obstacles, deluded by powers and lacking confidence. I have said above that at the gap where one thought ceases, the clear and distinct numinous knowing is one’s original face. Are you willing to take it up as your own? Can you stand firmly without doubt? I suspect this is not so easy, because you think there must be something to see and powers to obtain in order to have seen the nature. Do not be mistaken: Buddha-nature has not a single thing. It is completely uncovered, without one thread, not establishing even one dharma and not stained by even one mote of dust. Yet note carefully: having nothing at all is not annihilationist emptiness; it is non-clinging to marks.

When practice reaches the stage of the unconditioned, great light shines forth and the five superknowledges arise together. Yet even if great light shines and illuminates the ten directions, and even if all six superknowledges arise, one must not cling to views of light or powers. Only then can one keep advancing upward to the ultimate. A person who has truly arrived at home abides and clings nowhere whatsoever. In the end it is just like the beginning; the road itself is home, and home itself is the road. If there is birth-and-death to end or Buddhahood to attain, one is still not awake from the great dream.

“Studying the exoteric teachings and practicing esoteric Buddhism, expedient gates differ but return to the same source.” Studying exoteric teachings means using the exoteric Dharma gates to practice, such as Pure Land practice, Buddha-recitation, and scripture recitation, using them to still delusion, return to truth, thoroughly realize true mind, and be reborn in the

Pure Land. In exoteric teaching, principles can be discussed, dharmas can be practiced, and doctrines can be studied. Practicing esoteric Buddhism refers to actual practice; one no longer talks merely about principles but relies on the three mysteries to practice directly. This is the esoteric practice that opens the hidden treasure. But before entering actual practice, one must still study the scriptures and understand the essential meaning of the Three Vehicles' teachings before entering actual practice and realization. Although the methods seem different, they are only expedient doors suited to sentient beings' capacities; they are not fixed real dharmas. The sūtras say, "Expedients are many, but return to the source is not two," and "These dharmas are equal, with no high or low." When one arrives home, it is the same; there is no need to establish sectarian views and discriminate between exoteric and esoteric.

"Since I have walked everywhere on the road of nirvāṇa, I know that birth-and-death is originally empty." In practicing the Way, we must realize the fruit of nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa means no birth and no death; quiescent cessation is bliss, and cyclic birth-and-death no longer continues. There are four kinds of nirvāṇa, hence "walking everywhere on the road of nirvāṇa." First is nirvāṇa of self-nature: our Buddha-nature is originally unborn and undying. Second is nirvāṇa with remainder: arhats and pratyekabuddhas have realized the emptiness of persons, but not the emptiness of dharmas; they do not return to cyclic birth-and-death, but still have a tail—clinging to a self in dharmas remains, and transformational birth-and-death remains. Third is nirvāṇa without remainder: persons and dharmas are both empty and truly purified; not a trace of tail remains, and both fragmentary and transformational birth-and-death are ended. Fourth is nonabiding nirvāṇa. True emptiness is not staying somewhere unmoving. Truly ending birth-and-death is within birth-and-death: one can walk into the womb of an ox or belly of a horse, run through the hells, and go anywhere without a fixed abode. Moving back and forth in the six paths, one has no view of coming and going, appearing and disappearing. It is just like abiding in a pure land beyond the world, never having moved. Only then does one know that birth-and-death was originally unobtainable. Buddha-nature itself abides forever; even if one wanted to die, one could not. Where could birth-and-death be?

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese for the second category, nirvāṇa with remainder, is internally inconsistent: after saying that the personal self is empty but the dharma-self is not, it immediately prints a clause saying that the dharma-self is gone and transformational birth-and-death is gone. Yuan Yin's surrounding explanation, the following third category, and his parallel explanations elsewhere all require the opposite for nirvāṇa with remainder. The English therefore follows that contextual sense—dharma-clinging remains and transformational birth-and-death remains—rather than reproducing the apparent source contradiction literally.

"Walking is empty, sitting is empty; speech, silence, movement, and stillness are all empty." True emptiness is not sitting motionless with nothing at all; it is doing things while the mind abides nowhere. If one does something and then forgets oneself, running after circumstances, that is not emptiness. A true person of the Way is the same in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; there is no time that is not empty. Speaking and not speaking, moving and not moving are the same. In the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate, Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta taught us "pure mindfulness in continuous succession,"

precisely to reach this point. Thus the Pure Land school is a profound great Dharma; when unfolded, it is exactly the same as Chan and is not something shallow. In practice we must always be attentive to “speech, silence, movement, and stillness are all empty.” Before awakening, this is hard to accomplish, but we should know to train in this way and do it with effort: in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, never forget illumination; do not follow thoughts or be moved by conditions. If one can do this, awakening becomes easy. After awakening, train the mind amid circumstances and preserve it steadily and continuously; then speech, silence, movement, and stillness become continuous and seamless.

“Even if a white blade comes to the head, it is like a sharp sword cutting spring wind.” When the practice is complete, even if a knife is placed at one’s head, one is not afraid. Why? Because “I” do not die. Only this body, this bodily shell, is damaged; the Dharma-body is not destroyed. After Second Patriarch Shenguang awakened, Bodhidharma told him, “You still have a life-debt to repay, but so that the true Dharma will not be slandered, this debt may be exempted.” A person who truly accomplishes the great Way is like this: if there is repayment, repay; if not, do not. Why? Because the mind is empty and pure, and no dharma is established. What debt is there to repay? It is like a radio: if it is not switched on, then although radio waves are outside, it will not sound. So although there is a debt, when the mind does not move the creditor cannot find you; it can be left unpaid. If the mind is not empty, this is impossible. Thus Master Nanquan said, “Old Wang’s practice has not fully taken hold; ghosts and spirits have seen him.” This was Nanquan blaming himself because his practice had not fully matured: the arising and movement of mind had been seen by ghosts and spirits. Pay attention: not giving rise to thought does not mean that thoughts do not arise; it means that when thoughts arise one does not cling or abide. That is called no-thought. Otherwise, if no thoughts arose at all, how would one do anything? No-thought means not clinging to marks and not stopping. Moment after moment not stopping is no-thought. Stopping upon something is deluded thought. Thus the thought of no-thought is right mindfulness. When the Second Patriarch’s mind was truly empty, after transmitting the Dharma to the Third Patriarch, he went to repay his debt. To a great wealthy person, repaying a small debt is like one hair from nine oxen, nothing worth minding. Before he was executed, he said, “Bringing my head before the white blade is like cutting spring wind.” In practicing Buddhism we must have this great person’s spirit: bold, robust, magnanimous, knowing everything is false, letting go without clinging, fearing nothing, and originally without birth-and-death. But courage does not mean reckless bravado, doing all manner of bad deeds without fear; that would be terrible.

“Suddenly awakened, the wondrous source of mind; the shell of ignorance cracks all the same.” In an instant one awakens: the one by which I can speak and you can listen is the source of mind, Buddha-nature. Without doubt, seeing the nature is right here. This is the highest type of person. Looking elsewhere is already wrong; the more you seek, the more you stir thought, and once thought stirs, delusion covers it and it is not seen. Therefore in Chan, blows and shouts are used together: a sudden strike or shout makes you startled and stunned, cutting off deluded thoughts. At that time not one thought arises, yet this is not dullness like wood or stone; it is clear and distinct. Who is this clear and distinct one? Turn the light inward

in that instant and you personally see true mind and self-nature. Chan receives people so directly and swiftly. But those of middling and lower capacity cannot accept it.

The “shell of ignorance” is this bodily shell—our body. To empty it is to empty this shell. If there were not ignorance and clinging to marks, when one’s parents came together, how could you have run inside? How could there be “you”? When the shell cracks, no matter which Dharma one practices, once practice causes this bodily shell suddenly to burst open, inwardly body and mind and outwardly world all vanish together, and the quiescent true nature naturally becomes manifest. Then it is the same. Also, when body and mind have become empty in practice, if there is still emptiness present, or a black hollow emptiness, that is beginningless ignorance. One must continue forward and break through this beginningless ignorance before seeing the nature.

“In dreams the six destinies are plainly there; after awakening, utterly empty, there are no sages or ordinary beings.” In dreams, everything is present; after waking, not a trace remains. Right now, too, we are dreaming: practicing Buddhism and becoming sages are all dream states. In truth everyone is Buddha; there are no sages and ordinary beings. Because we are now deluded by external objects, cling to marks, chase and pursue, create karma and undergo retribution, we vainly suffer cyclic birth-and-death within what is originally free from birth-and-death. Thus there appear the false appearances of the six paths: doing good karma and being born in the heavens, doing evil karma and descending into hell. If one wakes up right now and is no longer deluded by false appearances, it is like awakening from a great dream. Where are the images of the six paths? All mountains, rivers, earth, and the manifold phenomena are the one true Dharma realm. All sentient beings possess the Tathāgata’s wisdom-nature. The four realms of sages and six realms of ordinary beings are all created by discriminating deluded mind. Do not think only sleep is dreaming; clinging to marks while awake is also dreaming. Now I teach Dharma to you; it is dream-talk within a dream. What Buddhadharma is there to obtain?

“The root of affliction is bodhi; karmic offense and merit have no self-nature—where can they be sought?” That which can give rise to affliction is the root of affliction. We ordinarily say Buddha-nature is the root of becoming Buddha, and Dharma-nature is the root of all phenomena. This root is our awakened awareness. Without this fundamental nature, no function could arise. Afflictions are like waves on water: without water there can be no waves, yet when wind meets water, waves arise. When we become angry, it is our bodhi-nature functioning deludedly. Therefore bodhi-nature is the root of afflictions. The scripture says “afflictions are bodhi,” not meaning that if we are afflicted all day we have attained bodhi, but that the root which gives rise to afflictions is Buddha-nature. Remove waves and water would be gone too; therefore afflictions should not be destroyed, but only allowed to settle, and bodhi is restored. Karmic offense and merit have no self-nature. Suffering painful consequences or enjoying blessings is all brought about by our deluded mind. Doing wholesome karma creates merit and brings fortunate retribution; doing evil karma creates karmic offenses and brings painful retribution. Each person bears the results of their own actions; no one else rules or commands them. Therefore karmic offense and merit are empty of self-nature and are created by mind alone. Laozi said, “Misfortune is what fortune depends

upon; fortune is where misfortune hides.” Calamity and blessing have no fixed gate; people call them upon themselves. This is the natural law of cause and effect. There is no need to seek it, and nowhere to seek it. We simply abide nowhere at all times and places, and naturally do wholesome deeds according to conditions. Yet do not intentionally do good deeds in order to seek reward; otherwise the mind is not empty and falls into merit, unable to accomplish the great Way.

“After liberation from self-binding without rope, one struts freely and rests in great ease.” In doing things, when we cling everywhere and seek to gain something, we bind ourselves with a rope. If you understand that reputation, wealth, wife, children, and all such things are like flowers in the sky and the moon in water, unobtainable, and you let everything go, then like awakening from a great dream you realize you were never bound, and you are liberated immediately. The Sixth Patriarch said, “The previous thought confused is an ordinary being; the later thought awakened is Buddha.” Once we cling to marks, we are tied by marks. Originally the nature is pure and unstained, with nothing at all; all afflictions and karmic obstructions are created by our own clinging to marks. If you do not cling to marks and create karma, then there is neither karmic offense nor merit. Understanding all this, one is free and at ease, strutting freely and resting in great ease. A person who has truly realized the Way can go anywhere. Walking into the womb of an ox or the belly of a horse is not frightening; going to hell does not matter. These are all transformations of our own nature, so what mark is there to cling to? Yet awakening has degrees of depth. The five-hundred-year-old wild fox kōan is an example of breaking attachment. When asked, “Does a person of great practice fall into cause and effect?” he answered, “Does not fall into cause and effect.” Later he reflected that the Buddha taught cause and effect is not empty; saying “does not fall” seemed wrong. With that doubt, after death he fell into a fox body. Because he had practiced for five hundred years and had good roots, he could transform into a human body. When Baizhang taught Dharma, he came to listen. After the teaching everyone left, but he stayed. Baizhang asked if he had a question. He asked, “Does a person of great practice still fall into cause and effect?” Baizhang answered, “Does not obscure cause and effect.” Hearing this, he suddenly awakened and was liberated. He then asked Baizhang to cremate him as a deceased monk, saying there would be a black-haired fox behind the mountain. In truth, “does not obscure cause and effect” and “does not fall into cause and effect” differ by only a hair. If the mind is empty and abides nowhere, one comes and goes freely; even falling into a fox body is of no matter. If one still asks to be cremated as a deceased monk, then there remains a discriminatory view of different kinds, and this is not yet true liberation, because a fox is also Buddha. What difference is there?

“Do not reach out after conditions, do not cling; follow conditions, follow your share, follow food and drink.” The previous lines spoke of realizing the essence; now the song speaks of functioning. What ruins sentient beings is grasping at conditions and clinging: from A we grasp at B, from B we grasp at C, all day long pursuing without cease. Deluded thoughts turn upside down, we cling to phenomena and cannot let go, and from the originally excellent Buddha-essence we sink into sentient beinghood. Conversely, do not chase conditions, do not cling; just function according to conditions. “Follow your share” means be content with your

own portion. People's social positions differ because the causes each created in past lives differ, so the results experienced in this life differ. Conditions are also like this: there are wholesome conditions and adverse conditions. Do not compare yourself with others and do not chase. Food, clothing, and housing, whether abundant or meager, are all passed through according to conditions. If causes were good in a former life, the supplies in this life are ample; if causes were poor, the results in this life are meager. Therefore live according to conditions.

“Unchanging, follow conditions and act without obstruction; free and at ease, follow the mind in great peace and joy.” Unchanging while following conditions means that although one acts in accord with the conditions one has received—being promoted or demoted, as one's affairs change—the self-nature remains unchanged. It means that on the path of practice we must not waver. Gold, for example, may be made into different ornaments and utensils. Although the form changes, the essence is unchanged: it is still gold. We act according to conditions, yet the essential nature remains unchanged. Acting without obstruction means doing whatever benefits people, and never doing what harms them. One can do all kinds of things, but must abide nowhere. Whether rising or falling, one remains unmoved. Being above others is nothing to rejoice in; being demoted is nothing to grieve over. One simply does one's best for everyone without clinging. This is unobstructed action. Freedom means there is no bondage. If there is bondage, one is not free. Since everything is false and nothing can be pursued, there is no worry over gain and loss; this is freedom. To “follow the mind” is what Confucius meant by “at seventy, I followed what my mind desired without overstepping the bounds.” Confucius also practiced the Way. Confucianism and Daoism are great teachings native to China. At seventy, Confucius realized the great Way; whatever he wished to do benefited others and did not overstep the bounds. Not overstepping means not going beyond the proper range; harmful things must not be done. Because there is no overstepping, one gains great peace and joy.

“Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches. Wondrous function unfolds freely, vivid and alive.” What is the root? It is our true mind. All things are born from mind; practice and Buddhahood also do not depart from this mind. Therefore, practicing the Way by cultivating the mind is the correct cause of becoming a Buddha. In contrast, taking the body, channels, qi, or supernormal powers as the basis of practice belongs to the peripheral meritorious ranks and offers no hope of Buddhahood. When we realize our own nature, we have obtained the root. If, on the other hand, we have not realized the nature and cling to powers, we will enter the demonic. Without obtaining the root, we cannot manifest genuine powers; if powers do appear, they have come from outside and are not genuine. Clinging to powers leaves the mind impure; birth-and-death is not ended, and one may enter the demonic. Powers are wondrous functions arising from mind; they are branches. Our nature originally has powers, but because we cling, are afflicted, and are full of inverted deluded thoughts, the light of the nature is covered. Remove deluded thoughts, inversion, and attachment, and the functions naturally manifest. Therefore settle the mind in practice, remove the afflictions of the five desires, and first attain the penetration of the Way—the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. After that the five superknowledges may arise;

only then are they genuine. Non-Buddhists may also have the five superknowledges—the divine eye, the divine ear, miraculous abilities, knowledge of others’ minds, and recollection of past lives, but without the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows they cannot end birth-and-death or become Buddha. Those who cling to numinous functioning without knowing what self-nature is are all non-Buddhists. Therefore, to manifest powers, first attain fundamental wisdom—the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows—and that is the correct path. Once that root is attained, one need not worry that the five superknowledges will not appear. After awakening, wondrous function is boundless and clings to nothing; one is unconstrained amid favorable and adverse conditions and free in every direction. Awakening is vital and dynamic, not dead and motionless. No-thought is not a state where no thought arises at all; it is that when thoughts arise, one does not follow them, and when matters come, one does not abide. If absolutely nothing moved, one would be a corpse. What use would that be?

“With a snap of the fingers, knock open the gate of nonduality; ascend the hall and directly enter the Tathāgata’s chamber.” Awakening occurs in an instant: at the break of a single thought, turn the light inward and recognize it, and the great matter is finished. It is as fast as sparks from striking stone or a flash of lightning. As soon as one deliberately seeks to see it, one has already missed it. This wondrous essence cannot be thought of or sought. Seeking itself is deluded thought and covers the self-nature. When practice is applied properly, suddenly sense faculties and sense objects fall away, the self-nature is personally seen, and this takes only the time of a finger-snap. Seeing the nature, all doubts melt away like ice. The one for which we had longed day and night was right before the eyes. To “ascend the hall and directly enter the Tathāgata’s chamber” means that in that instant one thoroughly sees the nature and enters the room; one becomes a Buddha. Yet this is only a Buddha at the causal stage, not yet a Buddha at fruition. One must still practice well. Fundamental wisdom has been obtained, but subsequently attained wisdom has not yet been obtained. One still must train diligently, eliminate habits, widely liberate sentient beings, and accumulate merit before becoming a Buddha at fruition, with both wisdom and merit complete.

“Penetrating the source and the teachings, a round bright sun shines in the clear sky.” Here “source” means the central purport: seeing the nature is called penetrating the source. “Teachings” refers to the doctrine expressed in the scriptures spoken by the Buddha. To penetrate both source and teachings means to be unobstructed in both realization and doctrinal understanding. The masters said, “To penetrate the source but not the teachings is to understand only one side; to penetrate the teachings but not the source is like being paralyzed on one side of the body.” Therefore, in studying Buddhism, one should penetrate both realization and doctrine. A round bright sun shining in the clear sky means that when we realize the root, it is like a round great sun with ten thousand rays illuminating everywhere. This does not mean that at awakening one sees a great sun. It is a metaphor: after awakening, there is nothing not known and nothing not understood, and wondrous function is boundless. When we truly awaken, there is nothing apart from numinous awareness. But after training and the removal of habitual tendencies, the light can illuminate the great thousandfold world

and mutually interpenetrate with the Buddhas of the ten directions, personally realizing the Avatamsaka realm. Yet this must not be sought by clinging to marks.

“Hundreds and thousands of samādhis and immeasurable meanings are only within ordinary daily use.” There are many kinds of samādhi—one-practice samādhi, one-mark samādhi, Buddha-recitation samādhi, pratyutpanna samādhi, and so on. Their names are many, and their wondrous meanings are inexhaustible. Where are these immeasurable meanings? In our ordinary daily functioning. Because all immeasurable wondrous functions arise from our true mind, apart from true mind nothing can be obtained. Therefore all wondrous meanings are right in daily use. If someone asks, “What is Buddha-nature?” and the teacher drinks water and asks, “Do you understand?” Who raises the cup? Who drinks the water? If one understands from here, what a delight! Ordinary things constantly reveal the wondrous meaning of Buddha-nature. The sound of wind and birdsong are the outflowing of Dharma-nature; raising a hand or moving a foot is nothing but the display of the Dharma-body. Sentient and insentient beings are always teaching Dharma and displaying wondrous meaning everywhere. Thus in ordinary daily use, if one functions vividly and abides nowhere, that is the most profound wondrous meaning. Do not seek mystery elsewhere. Understand this and the capacity by which we now see, speak, and hear is our Buddha-nature, shining right before us at every moment. What else is there to seek?

“The mind-essence from which perception and knowing arise: sentient beings and Buddhas are the same; sentient and insentient spring from the same source.” This mind-essence, from which perception and knowing arise, is our root, our Buddha-nature. Sentient beings and Buddhas are the same; there is no difference. Buddhas do not have one more share of luminosity or spiritual powers than we do, nor do we have one share less. Why, then, do we now seem different from Buddhas? Because the light of our mind-essence is covered by deluded thoughts and attachments, so great function cannot arise. Remove deluded thought and attachment and it is the same. How can sentient and insentient spring from the same source? Humans have feeling and awareness, while an insentient thing such as a table lacks awareness. How can they spring from the same source? Because all worldly appearances are manifestations of mind alone and transformations of consciousness alone; not one thing is not ourselves. Do not think that because we are aware and can move while insentient things cannot move, there is a true difference. When our breath fails and the eighth consciousness leaves the body, this body is just like a wooden table and cannot move either. Now, enclosed by ignorance, we grasp the body as self and so only this body functions. If we realize the Way, exhaust ignorance, open out, and restore original wondrous function, then everywhere there are transformations and manifestations of the four great constituents inherent in our Buddha-nature (earth, water, fire, and wind). There is no longer a view of sentient and insentient. Thus sentient and insentient spring from the same source; they are not separate.

“No bondage, no liberation, no obstruction; when deluded, one obstructs oneself; when awakened, one is naturally unobstructed.” Originally sentient beings and Buddhas are the same, free and at ease, without bondage or liberation. But because sentient beings are deluded by outer marks and cling to them, they are trapped by things, like silkworms making cocoons and binding themselves, and so they are not free. We originally could have done

without this body, but when our parents had intercourse, the mind of craving stirred and we entered it ourselves, becoming bound by this bodily shell. After birth, clinging to marks grew stronger: the eyes were deluded by the five colors, we followed conditions and created karma, and bondage was added to bondage, so birth-and-death remained unresolved. If one awakens right then, seeing all forms as images displayed by one's true mind and Buddha-nature, unobtainable and unseekable, and thoroughly lets go, then one wakes from the dream right where one stands. All sentient beings are originally pure and unstained, without bondage or constraint; what need is there for liberation? Knowing that Buddha-nature pervades everywhere is awakening to the Way. When deluded, one clings to marks and obstructs oneself. After awakening, one understands that all is an illusion of true mind and is unobtainable; one no longer clings, and then numinous functioning appears, powers arise, and the great Way is realized.

"Without form, supremely numinous and wondrous; unless personally realized, how could one know?" "Without form" describes our self-nature, our Dharma-body: it has no form whatsoever. Do not seek seeing the nature by clinging to marks. It is pure, unstained numinous knowing, without sound or color, and has no characteristics that can be seen. Yet it is supremely numinous and wondrous, able to know all things, manifest all appearances, and give rise to countless transformations. After awakening, the Sixth Patriarch said, "Who would have thought that self-nature is originally complete in itself? Who would have thought that self-nature can give rise to the myriad dharmas?" Some say that when they saw the nature they saw a great sun, a new moon, or a Buddha. That is not seeing the nature. The Diamond Sūtra says, "All marks whatsoever are false." Whatever bears characteristics is false. The nature is the true essence and has no characteristics that can be seen. Thus the scripture says, "True reality is without characteristics." The Śūraṅgama Sūtra also says, "When seeing sees the seeing-nature, that seeing is no longer seeing. The seeing-nature is beyond seeing, and seeing cannot reach it." Thus neither the seeing subject nor the object seen is it. What seeing the nature is like cannot be described; it has nothing to compare with, no words can reach it, and thought cannot arrive there. Unless one reaches that state oneself, whatever is said remains vague. The tradition says, "The matter beyond is not transmitted even by a thousand sages." In truth, the gap where one thought ceases is that very thing. There is no particular appearance to it, much less anything strange or mysterious. It is the utmost ordinary mind.

"It is not hard to see reflections in a mirror; how could one grasp the moon at the bottom of water?" All worldly scenes are mirror images, because worldly appearances are transformations and manifestations of true mind. Apart from true mind, not one thing exists. True mind is the root by which all phenomena are established, like a mirror; phenomena are like reflections in the mirror. Although the reflections can be seen, trying to seize them is like scooping for the moon in water: they cannot be obtained. "The lion's roar, fearless speech; hearing it, all beasts are struck dumb." The Buddha's teaching is like a lion's roar. The lion is king of beasts; when it roars, all beasts submit. Fearless speech means the Buddha speaks truth, suchness, reality, and non-deception; no one can refute him. Because the Buddha speaks the true, perfectly unobstructed, wondrous principle—not shallow little dharmas that abide somewhere, but the great true Dharma that holds everywhere—those who hear can

only praise it and cannot speak irresponsibly. Therefore, when non-Buddhists heard the Buddha teach, they did not dare debate. Even if a few bold non-Buddhists came to debate, in the end they failed and returned, because their teachings clung to marks and were not the complete great Dharma. Finally they took refuge in the Buddha and bowed as disciples.

“If the fragrant elephant runs about, it loses its majesty; devas and nāgas listen silently and joyfully.” The king of elephants is called the fragrant elephant. When a fragrant elephant crosses a river, it does not run about; standing in the water, it cuts off the current. This line indicates that our Buddha-nature is truth, majestic and unmoving. The waves are the ever-changing inverted delusions. In studying the Dharma, we must cut off these ever-changing inverted delusions like a fragrant elephant crossing a river: not fleeing from thoughts, but cutting off the torrent. Devas, nāgas, and the eight classes hear the Buddha teach and rejoice beyond measure, praising, practicing, taking refuge, and becoming Dharma protectors. Some explain the fragrant elephant as an arhat who is proud of his own attainment but loses prestige upon hearing the supreme one-vehicle Dharma, and the devas and nāgas as bodhisattvas on the grounds who, sealing the teaching with their own inner realization, feel incomparable joy and intimacy. This is also good. But for the situation of practitioners today, it is more appropriate to compare fragrant elephant and devas-nāgas to great Chan teachers. First, in Chan, dragons and elephants often symbolize great spiritual friends. Second, now that crooked teachings flourish, many abandon the right for the crooked. We may say that Chan practitioners of the true Dharma, if they cannot withstand the lure of false teachings and run after them, lose their majesty, while true great worthies hear the right Dharma with joy and are not moved by deviant teachings.

“The lion cub is followed by the multitude; at three years old it can roar mightily.” A lion cub is still young, yet the other beasts can only follow behind and dare not go ahead. A person newly awakened to the Way has not yet realized Buddhahood at fruition, but is like a lion cub; those who practice non-Buddhist ways cannot surpass such a person, because the awakened one has realized the root while they have not. Though the lion cub is young, it already has the basic nature of a lion and can roar like the lion king, subduing the beasts. The newly awakened person is the same: the principle he realizes is no different from the principle realized by a Buddha at fruition. When he teaches Dharma, it is like representing the Buddha in teaching, and he need not fear the harassment or debates of non-Buddhists. “If a wild jackal chases the Dharma king, a hundred thousand goblins only open their mouths in vain.” The lion symbolizes the Dharma king. The wild jackal resembles a lion and can seem to imitate one, but once it opens its mouth, its cry lacks a lion’s majesty and it is exposed; it cannot subdue the beasts. Today many methods and ways all claim to be Buddhadharma, but they are non-Buddhist paths impersonating Buddhadharma. They are goblins; what they teach lures people by powers and leads them into deviant paths. It is not the right Dharma and has no use.

“Who has no thoughts? Who has no arising? Do not mistake mirror images for the real.” Of course ordinary people have thoughts and birth-and-death. But after awakening, does one have no thought at all? Many assume that after awakening there must be no thoughts. This is wrong. No-thought does not mean that not a single thought arises. It means that thoughts

arise as though they had not arisen: they arise without abiding or lingering. The Sixth Patriarch said, “I do not cut off a hundred thoughts” and “In response to circumstances, thoughts arise repeatedly.” Thoughts are still present. Therefore we must recognize the correct road and not take the wrong road of becoming dead and unmoving without thoughts. When a thought arises, one knows it, does not follow it, and does not remain in it; that is no-thought. Non-arising means that arising continues ceaselessly without anything being dwelt upon; it does not mean cutting off the continuity of life. Layman Pang once said, “I have a son who does not marry, and a daughter who is not given in marriage; the whole family gathers in a circle, speaking of non-arising.” His whole family of four realized the Way, which was very rare. Later a great monk responded with a verse: “No son to marry, no daughter to give; the assembly gathers round—why speak of non-arising?” Both are excellent. One speaks of non-arising, while the other asks why speak of it; each displays consummate skill. But non-arising does not mean merely refusing birth; birth after birth may itself be non-arising. We may compose another verse: “A son may marry, a daughter may be wed; children beget grandchildren without end—this is speaking of non-arising.” Children and grandchildren continue, birth after birth without end, yet the mind is unmoved. This is non-arising. It is the boundless wondrous function of true mind, not taking dead immobility as non-arising. Ceaseless arising is non-arising. This reveals Buddhadharma as perfectly integrated and free of attainment. Do not look at only one side and think non-arising means no one may move or marry. That has nothing to do with it. One may marry, but must not cling to sexual desire. If one clings to sexual desire, that is wrong, and birth-and-death will be endless. After marriage, one may raise a child and then cease abiding in sexual desire; there is no problem in that. This is the arising of wondrous function, not taking dead immobility as non-arising. “Do not mistake mirror images for the real”: the continuing births and generations of descendants are all images in a mirror; do not take them as real and cling to their marks. To give birth while remaining in non-arising is not easy; without the great functioning that follows awakening, do not expect to manage it. Some people may maintain a forced semblance of non-arising, but once they come near a woman, they lose control and cling; then birth-and-death cannot be ended. This requires special attention.

“If one takes annihilation as ultimate, how is one different from a person with non-Buddhist wrong view?” Buddhism is neither empty nor existent, both empty and existent; emptiness itself is existence. It is not annihilationist emptiness with nothing at all. Annihilationist emptiness is a wrong view. We must understand that emptiness is not the emptiness of nothing; it is the emptiness of what cannot be obtained or grasped, which manifests appearances and functions according to conditions without abiding or attachment. If this is misunderstood and one thinks there is absolutely nothing, that is an annihilationist view and a major error. Those who hold it are non-Buddhists who think there is existence while alive and nothing after death.

“A great person holds the sword of wisdom; the prajñā edge and vajra flame.” A great person must have the spirit to let everything go. Do not be petty, unable to release this or discard that. If one grasps tightly, the Dharma is hard to practice. All things are false; why not let go? To hold the sword of wisdom means to awaken great wisdom, recognize all things as

false, and use that to cut off every affliction. Afflictions are all self-sought, born of clinging to marks. Originally there is nothing, but one insists on clinging and pursuing, wasting one's strength and ending empty-handed. To study Buddhadharma is to awaken wisdom: knowing nothing exists to cling to, we naturally cut off afflictions. In the practice of Buddha-recitation, the sacred Name "Amitābha Buddha" is the precious sword of the Vajra King; it cuts off everything. All emotion, love, and attachment have no foothold, so the mind becomes empty, abides nowhere, and is reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Conversely, if one clings to the Sāhā world, at the end of life one will certainly not be able to leave, being bound by affection and unable to be born in the West. Whether practicing Pure Land, Chan, or esoteric Dharma, we must take the development of prajñā as the core and uncover our originally existing wisdom before we can realize the Way. Before realization, we should use the Name of Amitābha Buddha or an esoteric mantra as the precious sword of the Vajra King to cut off all attachments. This sharp edge of prajñā is like an indestructible vajra fire-flame that burns away entrenched old habits completely. It can not only destroy non-Buddhist ways of thinking but also eliminate demonic views.

"Within a hair-tip, heaven and earth are settled; throughout the great trichiliocosm and worlds as numerous as sands, not an inch of soil remains." A hair-tip means something as tiny as a single hair from the head or body; heaven and earth means the vast world and universe. The whole enormous world is within one hair-tip. Why? Because our own nature can be great or small. Our Dharma-body is great with nothing outside it and small with nothing inside it. Let it out and it fills the six directions, covering heaven and earth; gather it back and it retreats into the hidden, with not even a hair-tip. This expresses the free wondrous function of Buddha-nature. Everything is oneself, and within a hair-tip the great Dharma wheel turns. A great world-system is a Buddha's world; each Buddha's world is a great trichiliocosm. Yet why is there not even an inch of earth? Because mind itself is land and land itself is mind. The masters say, "If a person recognizes the mind, on the great earth there is not an inch of soil." Realizing the nature, everything is gathered back into self-nature; where could there be land outside mind? Therefore the final stage of practice is called the ultimate Dharma realm: there is no dharma, no powers, and no Buddha. If even a drop remains, if even the slightest thing exists, it is not the final completion. Before reaching the ultimate, lights, Buddhas, and powers may be seen, because it is not yet ultimate and clinging to marks remains. Some even enjoy showing off before others, saying they have powers. In truth this is not great power; it is only a little wondrous function appearing, or else spirit possession. Genuine great power is abiding nowhere, free and at ease, all outflows exhausted. That is great power.

"Let them slander; let them destroy. A fire burning the sky only exhausts itself." In studying Buddhadharma, one must have the capacity to tolerate people. There are many Dharma gates, each different. Without recognizing the different subtleties of each, people inevitably slander others. Pure Land practitioners, for example, often slander the esoteric school as bad, yet they themselves do not leave esoteric Dharma: besides reciting Amitābha's name, they also recite the Great Compassion Mantra, the Śūraṅgama Mantra, the Ten Small Mantras, and the Rebirth Mantra. Are these not esoteric Dharma? To turn around and say esoteric Dharma is bad is to slander oneself. Sadly, they create great karmic offenses without

knowing it and still feel pleased with themselves. When Master Hongyi first became a monk, he also did not know what esoteric Dharma was and said the esoteric school was too complicated and dizzying. Later, after reading its doctrines, he deeply admired it and repented, writing a repentance essay warning later people not to slander esoteric Dharma if they do not understand it. Not understanding means not understanding; do not pretend to understand and show off, lest you ignorantly create offenses. If your own practice is good, say it is good, but do not say others are bad. Everyone practices their own Dharma. Let others slander; there is no need for fear, doubt, or affliction. If what one practices is the right Dharma and others slander it groundlessly, they are only like someone holding a torch to burn the sky. Can the sky be burned? They only exhaust themselves; what use is it?

“What I hear is just wind in empty space; how could it obstruct profound great samādhi?” If someone slanders the Dharma, once we hear it, let it pass like wind and pay no attention. Debating with him will further arouse his slanderous mind. When he gradually awakens on his own, he will regret it. His wasteful and slanderous words do not harm or interfere with the samādhi realized through our practice. Samādhi is right concentration and right absorption. To remain unaffected by any experience is right absorption. One remains unaffected not only by slander but also by praise and commendation. That is true right concentration and right absorption. “All sounds are true suchness; harsh sounds and pleasant words are no different.” All sounds are sense-objects, so good and bad are no different. Some words we hear are praise and sound pleasant; others are unpleasant slander. But harsh speech and pleasant words are the same: sound-objects, guests, of no real weight. We must recognize who it is that can speak and who it is that can hear sounds. Recognizing the host, one’s practice is not in vain. Our hearing-nature—our own nature—is neither good nor bad and is never intermittent. Ordinary people, however, follow sound-objects: if someone scolds me, I flare up; if someone flatters me, I am pleased. This is being swayed by sound-objects, seized by circumstances, and deceived. We must transform circumstances and not be swayed by them. Sound-objects themselves have no good or bad; it is our deluded mind that discriminates and produces views of good and bad. He gives the example of a Suzhou person using a local insult on a Northeasterner, who laughs because he does not understand. When someone explains the insult, he becomes angry and fights. This shows it is deluded mind at work. In practice we must see the nature at every moment and not let deluded mind raise its head; only then can we end birth-and-death and realize the great Way.

“Do not distinguish friend from foe because of slander or praise; only then do you accord with the equality of original mind.” Do not divide people into friends and foes because they praise or slander me. Make no distinction between friend and foe; regard all equally, because everyone is Buddha. This is the spirit of a great person. Do not have a petty mind that remembers someone who scolded you and looks for a chance to retaliate. That is ruinous and cannot become Buddha. The mind that becomes Buddha must be as vast as empty space and able to contain all things. Not distinguishing friend from foe accords with the equality of original mind. Mind is equal because it is without characteristics, and because everyone is Buddha. Once distinguishing characteristics are posited, inequality appears: male and female, good and bad, and so forth. Amitābha Buddha is equality upon equality. It is not that he

welcomes and guides us because we practice Buddha-recitation and refuses to welcome and guide us if we do not, distinguishing friend from foe. That is our ordinary mind's conjecture, not the Buddha's mind. The Buddha's mind is equal: not only does he rescue those who believe and practice the Dharma; with great loving-kindness without conditions, he also welcomes and guides those who do not believe or practice. Therefore we must use the Buddha's mind to transform our deluded mind, not use our ordinary mind to guess at the Buddha's mind.

"Praise adds nothing; slander subtracts nothing. Bird-tracks in the sky are written in the clouds." Our Buddha-nature neither increases nor decreases. It does not increase because someone praises us, nor decrease because someone slanders us. Even while we are ordinary beings not yet awakened, it lacks not one share of light. Even after realization, it gains not one share of light. In practicing the Way, do not cling to marks. Whether praise or slander is heard, let it be like a bird flying through the sky, leaving no trace in the mind. Then the mind becomes equal and realization of the Way is easier. "Great emptiness drinks in light, erasing intimacy and estrangement; an echo in a deep valley speaks of evening smoke." These lines use scenery to describe vastness of heart and the beauty of self-nature. Great emptiness includes every radiance and scene within it. There is no distinction between intimacy and estrangement. Likewise we should treat all people equally. If someone says something bad about me, I should examine whether I actually have that fault. If I do, I should repent and correct it. If I do not, I should use it to encourage myself not to commit that fault in the future. A great person rejoices on hearing faults and has no resentment. Many Buddhists in temples fail to get along because they cling to the view of self, lack equality of mind, and create disputes. Since all are studying the Dharma and practicing the Way, everyone should keep an open mind, cling to nothing, and live harmoniously. If something is handled improperly or views differ, sit down, discuss it, and move in the right direction. Do not cling to the view of self and insist that one is right and others are wrong, creating conflict and damaging Buddhism. Since we are Buddhist practitioners, we are the Buddha's disciples and children, one family; how could we still divide people into friend and foe?

The line also recounts Master Dayu's own situation. When he first descended the mountain to propagate the Dharma, no one knew what the Heart-Center Dharma was and no one came to receive it from him; his vow to spread the Dharma could not be fulfilled, so he displayed a little spiritual power. This brought some criticism from Masters Taixu and Yinguang, but Dayu, wishing to spread the Dharma, bore humiliation and did not respond. After transmitting the Dharma to Wang Xianglu, he returned to seclusion. "Great emptiness drinks in light, erasing intimacy and estrangement" means that he had no grudge toward the two masters. There was another misunderstanding around his retirement: at that time, during Northern Warlord conflicts, others tried to force Dayu to use his powers in battle. He refused and left in disguise. Those who did not know the circumstances thought he had gone into hiding because his powers failed. Was this not unjust?

"When silent, speaking; when speaking, silent. The gate of great giving opens without obstruction." To speak without clinging to marks is the same as not speaking; not speaking is itself speaking. Why? Because Buddha-nature is without characteristics, beyond speech and

thought, with nothing to say. Therefore speaking and hearing are not true speaking and true hearing; no speaking and no hearing are true speaking and hearing. Moreover, not only spoken words teach Dharma. Gestures teach Dharma; coughing teaches Dharma; striking or scolding can also teach Dharma. The proverb says, “At this moment, silence surpasses sound.” The Amitābha Sūtra says that wind, birdsong, and other sounds are all Dharma-sounds flowing forth, so spoken words are not the only way to teach Dharma. The gate of great giving opens without obstruction: in practicing Buddhism, one must give everything away completely, uncovered and unstained. One must not keep even a little; even Buddhadharma must not remain. Even Buddhadharma must be unobtainable. This is the gate of great giving opening. If everything has been given away, what obstruction could remain? With all directions open and no coming or going, the heart is open and broad, and one can realize the great Way. In practice, one must open the gate of great giving, empty everything out, and let the bottom of the bucket fall away before one can contain all things and perfectly realize the fruition of Buddhahood.

“Someone asks which school I understand; I am a guest of mahā-prajñā.” Master Dayu transmitted the Heart-Center Dharma, but at first people did not know what Dharma this was and would ask, “What school are you? Pure Land, Chan, or esoteric?” In truth, there is no school at all. Buddhadharma teaches people to recognize the root, stop clinging to outer marks, and recover what is original. When the Buddha was in the world, he did not establish sectarian divisions; he taught according to capacity. Schools were established only later. Mahā means great; prajñā means wisdom. If one realizes mahā-prajñā, every school is included within it. The Heart-Center Dharma includes all ten Chinese Buddhist schools. For example, it includes Faxiang by breaking through marks and seeing the nature; it includes Huayan when one perfectly realizes the ten directions, the Buddhas of the ten directions are in my mind and I am in the minds of the Buddhas of the ten directions, mutually interpenetrating without obstruction. Therefore all schools are included.

“In the past I spoke; now I am lazy to speak. Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are the broad, long tongue.” Master Dayu once taught constantly, widely liberating beings north and south of the Yangtze, and later entrusted the Dharma to Wang Xianglu to continue teaching. When he composed this song, he no longer taught. Yet “lazy to speak now” does not mean no Dharma is taught; mountains, rivers, and the great earth are all teaching Dharma at every moment. Some awaken on seeing flowing water: water follows the landform and flows without abiding; even though water flows, it has not really flowed, for the stream continues without interruption. Likewise, in practice, thoughts may arise according to conditions, but if they do not abide or stagnate, this is enough; though birth-and-death changes occur, the self-nature is unborn and undying and abides from ancient times. Mountains, rivers, earth, and all phenomena are manifestations of our self-nature; apart from mind, there is not a thing. Su Dongpo’s line, “The stream’s body is the broad, long tongue; mountain colors are none other than the Dharma-nature body,” expresses this well. “Whether right or wrong, people do not know; going against or going along, even heaven cannot fathom it.” Wondrous function may sometimes accord with ordinary expectations and sometimes run counter to them. As long as it benefits people, one does not care about one’s own reputation. Jigong is a clear example: to

conceal himself and not let people see that he was a great bodhisattva, he often did things ordinary people found unacceptable. He did not seek fame; whenever something benefited beings, he did it. Such power of sometimes seeming right and sometimes seeming wrong is unfathomable even to the heavens.

“Always walking alone, always stepping alone; straw sandals underfoot fierce as a tiger.” Practitioners often walk alone and step alone, not following the crowd. Why? Because refined music has a high tone and few can harmonize with it. Wearing straw sandals is the true style of a monk. “Fierce as a tiger” means mighty and dignified like a tiger, frightening away jackals, wolves, foxes, and dogs, and subduing all demons, non-Buddhists, and deviant paths. It indicates a practitioner’s non-clinging and complete freedom from hindrance. Only the power in which the great earth sinks level and empty space shatters is the peerless functioning of an authentic person of the Way. “Raising the foot crushes the vajra ground; without noticing, one treads off the road by which one came.” The ground is said to be indestructible like vajra, yet the lifting of the foot crushes it. Why? Because the great earth has sunk flat and empty space has shattered; nothing remains. On our mountain outing the other day we said, “Raise a hand and trace the track of a bird in flight; take a step and cut off the sound of flowing water.” A bird flies through the sky, yet with a raised hand its track is traced in empty space; take one step, and even the rushing sound of flowing water is cut off. This portrays the conduct of one who has realized the Way. When the mind clings to no marks and not a thing remains, one realizes this state. Buddha-recitation reaching this point is the same. “Without noticing, one treads off the road by which one came”: coming means birth, going means death. When the road of coming and going is cut off, birth-and-death is cut off. Birth-and-death is this deluded mind of ours. Deluded thought exists because of clinging to marks; after awakening it turns into wondrous function. Thus thought is not absent. Thought still exists, but if there is no clinging, it is wondrous function; if there is clinging, it is deluded thought. The difference is extremely fine. Therefore after awakening it is not that there are no thoughts; thoughts are present as wondrous function, consciousness has turned into wisdom, and ordinary clinging to existence, the root of delusion and birth-and-death, is severed.

“A mad fool, a wordless scripture, tongue wagging casually yet inexhaustibly.” This old man speaking here is just like a mad fool. Our true mind is the wordless scripture. The true scripture has no words; scriptures with words are provisional, because whatever has words cannot say everything. Our nature cannot be described or written down. Spoken words only strike from the side and cannot reach the essence. Thus the true scripture has no words. All definitive and provisional teachings, worldly and world-transcending dharmas, can never be exhausted in speech. Why? Originally there are no words to speak; what is spoken cannot exhaust the true meaning. “The golden crow beneath the sea is the sun in the sky; the child in the eye is the person before the eyes.” This points us to seeing the nature. The golden crow means the sun. The golden crow beneath the sea is the sun after it sets below the horizon; when it rises into the sky, it is the sun. The child in the eye is the pupil, which is just oneself. This tells us: where is true nature? It is right before the eyes—the very functioning of seeing and hearing. Without this functioning, there would be no pupil. Therefore, whenever appearances are seen, one should see the nature.

“Awaken and it is finished, with no effort applied; phenomena and self both vanish, mind and objects are empty.” When one awakens, the great earth sinks flat and nothing remains. No further practice is needed. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “Recognize illusion, and you are free of it; no expedient means need be applied. Freedom from illusion is awakening; there is no gradual sequence.” In practice, one need only know that everything is illusory and not cling to it; then the Way is realized immediately. Thus the Way is a matter of awakening, not of practice. Where there is self, there are phenomena; where there are phenomena, there is self, for the two arise correlatively. If self is absent, where can phenomena be? If phenomena are absent, where can self be? Thus when mind is empty, sense faculties and sense objects fall away, phenomena and self both vanish, and self-nature appears. In Buddha-recitation, when the mind that recites and the Buddha-name that is recited fall away together, mind and objects are empty and the great Way is realized.

“Lotus stalks branch by branch support the night moon; osmanthus leaves leaf by leaf fan fragrant wind.” This line speaks of insentient beings teaching Dharma. Lotus here symbolizes Buddha-nature; the lotus, emerging unstained from mud, indicates that although we are in this afflicted and polluted world, true mind is unstained. “Branch by branch” refers to leaves not yet emerged from the water. The moon’s light shines most brightly at night. This means that before we are free of worldly entanglements, true mind is still unstained and luminous. Once we are free of worldly entanglements, it shines forth greatly. All sentient beings have Buddha-nature; it is not one share less in them. Osmanthus blossoms are fragrant petal by petal; our true nature is like osmanthus, each leaf fanning fragrant wind, each one endowed with inexhaustible wondrous function. We simply do not recognize it, are deluded by circumstances, pursue outer objects, cling to marks, create karma, and suffer greatly. Therefore we should turn back early and practice the Dharma with reverence.

“Some people seek in scriptures and treatises; year after year they seek understanding and do not practice.” Some intellectuals know the value of Buddhism and therefore study scriptures and treatises. Scriptures are the Buddha’s words teaching us how to practice; treatises are bodhisattvas’ explanations of their own insights and principles. Yet if one spends all day studying doctrinal terminology and discussing principles without practicing, this is useless. Some who study Faxiang, in particular, only study Buddhist learning and do not practice. Wang Yangming’s saying “To know and not act is not to know” is an unshakable truth. “Discriminating among terms and concepts, when will they ever know to stop? Entering the sea to count sand, they only exhaust themselves.” Intellectuals debate among the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates and discriminate without end, but do not practice. This is like counting grains of sand in the sea: can they ever be counted? It only brings toil and no benefit. The Buddha repeatedly warned us not to count others’ treasures. Merely reading scriptures and treatises without practicing accordingly, while discriminating whether others are awakened, is of no benefit to oneself. “Always stumbling, practice does not go smoothly; one can hardly avoid falling in vain into the pit of words.” If one does not walk steadily and bravely straight ahead, but circles around practicing this method and that method, going out and returning again, one wastes energy with no benefit. If one only studies, writes poems, and composes essays without actually practicing, one falls into the pit of words and buries oneself.

Some people even fail to practice themselves and do harmful things, using textual criticism to claim that the Śūraṅgama Sūtra or the Awakening of Faith are forgeries. Fallen in the pit, they harm others without knowing it. How foolish this is.

“Foolish and dull-witted, taking a mirage over the sea as real.” Counting others’ treasures—what use is that? A mirage over the sea is a false image produced by sunlight on mist, yet one takes it as real. “Mistaking the finger for the moon, effort is wasted; among sense faculties and sense objects, one blindly gropes and guesses.” A finger points to the moon to help one see the moon, but if one looks only at the finger and not the moon, this is wrong. One clings to the mark of words and fails to see the moon to which the finger points: self-nature. Thus among sense faculties and sense objects, among mind and circumstances, one blindly guesses and even mistakes a deer for a horse, taking light or Buddha images for self-nature. This is beyond speech and beyond thought; it must be personally realized through genuine investigation.

“Mind is the faculty; circumstances are its objects. These two are like marks on a mirror.” Mind functions as the faculty, and circumstances as its objects. These two are like stains and dust on the mirror of the Dharma-body. Both must be swept away; the faculty and its objects must fall away before the Way is realized. In practice we must reach the falling away of the faculty and its objects; otherwise it is hard to see self-nature. “When stains and dirt are completely purified, light finally appears; when mind and objects both vanish, the nature is true.” When the mirror’s dust and filth have been completely removed, light shines forth. This means that when practice is appropriate, suddenly the faculty and its objects fall away and the mind-light appears. When mind and objects both vanish—when the deluded mind holding a mantra or reciting the Buddha’s name, and the mantra or Buddha-name being held or recited, all fall away—one sees self-nature. Therefore do not cling to practice, thinking there is a mantra to hold or a Buddha-name to recite and grasping it tightly. One must recite until subject and object both vanish before seeing the true nature.

“What is deemed wrong is not fixed as wrong; what is deemed right is not fixed as right; a hair’s breadth of error leads a thousand miles astray.” Do not get caught in right and wrong, gain and loss. Right and wrong have no fixed conclusion, because people’s views, preferences, personalities, times, and interests differ, giving rise to different opinions of right and wrong. If the starting point is off by a little, after walking on, the distance will be vast. Therefore in practicing the Way one must recognize the correct road, practice from the mind-ground rather than basing practice on appearances. “The mind-ground Dharma gate truly gives birth to a prince.” Like a crown prince who will certainly become emperor, the mind-ground Dharma gate will certainly lead to Buddhahood. Other Dharma gates belong to the peripheral meritorious ranks: at most they lead to being enfeoffed as a prince or marquis, not to becoming emperor—that is, a Buddha. Do not cling to powers or follow deviant teachings. Know the correct cause of realizing the Way, grasp the principle, and advance with effort. We have pointed again and again; do not miss it.

“If it is so, the dragon girl suddenly becomes Buddha; if not, Good Star loses his human body.” The dragon girl’s sudden Buddhahood means that if the path of practice is correct, then like the dragon girl offering her jewel, one can immediately become Buddha. The story of the

dragon girl offering her jewel is told here as a story from the Avataṃsaka Sūtra. Becoming Buddha is not difficult: if we let go completely with our whole being, we can become Buddha immediately. The Good Star allusion means that although Buddha-nature is originally fine, if the causal basis is wrong and one enters a crooked path, the result is that one cannot even keep a human body and falls into the animal realm. “If one’s disposition is deviant and one’s understanding mistaken, one cannot reach the Tathāgata’s original intent.” Here, disposition refers to people’s spiritual capacities: Great Vehicle views, Two Vehicle views, ordinary views, non-Buddhist views, deviant views, and so on. If one’s disposition is not sound and one’s understanding is mistaken, one cannot understand the Tathāgata’s true intent, practice the right Dharma, and realize the bodhi path of widely liberating sentient beings. “Two Vehicle austerities are not ultimate; non-Buddhists refining the body will finally decay.” Arhat and pratyekabuddha practice is not ultimate because dharma-clinging has not been eliminated and transformational birth-and-death has not ended; this is nirvāṇa with remainder. Today many practice qigong thinking the body can remain forever and become deathless, but that is impossible. Even if the physical body lived a thousand years, it would still die. Daoists also refine the body, calling it dual practice of nature and life, but this life of the physical body cannot be immortal. In truth, nature is life and life is nature; nature is the root of all phenomena, abiding from beginningless time to now and never decaying. This is true long life. Therefore, by apprehending Mind and seeing nature, one obtains the wondrous secret of long life.

Editorial source note. The controlling Chinese explicitly identifies the dragon girl’s jewel-offering story as an Avataṃsaka Sūtra story, and the translation preserves Yuan Yin’s statement. Standard Buddhist textual sources locate the jewel offering and the dragon girl’s sudden Buddhahood in the “Devadatta” chapter of the Lotus Sūtra. This is therefore a source-level attribution discrepancy, not a silent correction to Yuan Yin’s words.

“Inconceivable is the power of liberation; the earth of worlds as many as Ganges sands cannot bear it.” Liberation means understanding that nothing can be obtained, and not binding oneself through deluded seeking; then one naturally gains liberation. This power is inconceivably great—not even the earth of worlds as numerous as Ganges sands can bear it. Why? It swallows all Buddhas of the three times in one mouthful, to say nothing of mere worlds. “Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā, profound prajñā-pāramitā.” These lines praise the greatness of prajñā-pāramitā. Prajñā is great wisdom and a compassionate boat. Pāramitā means crossing over the bitter sea of birth-and-death to the other shore. Relying on the compassionate boat of prajñā, one crosses the bitter sea of birth-and-death and reaches the other shore. Prajñā is therefore the mother of success, the support by which the Way is realized and Buddhahood accomplished, and the great pillar upholding the whole of Buddhism. Without prajñā, nothing can be accomplished; without prajñā, there is nothing. How great prajñā-pāramitā is! Therefore we must never forget prajñā-pāramitā, relying on its power to cross layer after layer of demonic obstruction and reach the other shore.

“The perfect sudden teaching makes no concessions to sentiment; turning over, it tramples down nirvāṇa city.” The great perfect sudden teaching does not cater to worldly sentiment, because the Dharma-body is without characteristics, uncovered and uncontrived, not

establishing even one dharma. The slightest thing retained will not do. Therefore the Great Vehicle teaching cuts straight through, severing everything and making no concessions to sentiment. If one caters to sentiment, one cannot cut off everything and personally see the Dharma-body. To trample down nirvāṇa city means that now, as ordinary beings, we cling to marks; turn over and no longer cling, and one becomes Buddha, reaching the other shore. Trampling down nirvāṇa city means abiding nowhere; even nirvāṇa is unobtainable. “From before King Awesome Sound until today, what fine elegance—no painting can capture it.” King Awesome Sound here refers to our Dharma-body. Awesome Sound means the great sound that is rarely heard, inclusive of all. “That shore” refers to before the world had formed; after the world arises, it becomes this shore. To recover our self-nature, we must reach that shore of King Awesome Sound, the time when forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and dharmas all vanish. Because we have been enclosed by ignorance and created birth-and-death karma, we have drifted down to today. Fortunately, now we know our error and have heard the Dharma, so we must practice diligently and carefully in order to recover the light of our nature, cross the bitter sea of birth-and-death, and reach that shore, not wasting this life. Once what is original opens up and self-nature is personally seen, freedom, joy, peace, and ease are beyond comparison. This state cannot be depicted. Mental activity ceases and the path of language is cut off; only one who personally realizes it knows.

“Expedient gates are skillfully opened; a lotus born in fire is never destroyed.” All Buddhist practices are expedient gates. Originally there is no dharma, hence “the Dharma is originally no dharma.” Skillful opening means teaching according to capacity: this school opens this door, that school opens that door, but the purpose is one. Pure Land is one such skillful gate, using Buddha-recitation to transform the ordinary mind into Buddha-mind, be reborn in the Pure Land, and realize the Way. But if Buddha-recitation does not take hold, we may practice another Dharma for quicker accomplishment; there is no need to be rigid. Conversely, if esoteric practice does not succeed, one may practice Pure Land. A lotus born in fire represents withstanding testing. This Sahā world is the evil world of the five turbidities and is full of affliction. Every family has a difficult scripture of its own. If within affliction one trains until the mind is empty and pure, does not cling, and realizes self-nature, then one’s power is tremendous. Chan master Dahui said such a person’s practice is twenty times more powerful than a monastic’s practice, and such a person can remain non-retrogressing life after life until reaching Buddhahood at fruition.

“Brave Giving committed grave offenses yet awakened to non-arising; long ago he became Buddha without obstruction.” In studying Buddhism one must have great wisdom and great courage; for this reason the main hall in a monastery is called the Hall of the Great Hero. Offenses can be light or grave. If we have violated precepts, we must have the courage to examine ourselves, repent, and not repeat them. Here “grave” can mean grave offenses, and also repeated offenses after one has already offended. Because people today have weak roots, they may repeat offenses, so if one offends a second time, one must be especially careful. Do not merely think, “Oh no, I have violated the precepts; everything is hopeless.” Have the courage to correct it, but absolutely do not do it again and again, or there will be no way to turn around. The word awaken in “awakened to non-arising” is very important. If you

awaken, the offense is of no weight, because after awakening the mind is empty. The mistakes committed in the past are like acts done in a dream; now one is awake and has not really done them. It is finished. If one does not awaken, the mind is not empty and the karmic obstruction holds on to one. When it is understood, it is empty; when it is not understood, old debts must be repaid. “Long ago he became Buddha without obstruction” means that when the mind is given away completely, empty, and abides nowhere, Buddhahood is accomplished. In ancient India there was a monk named Brave Giving who committed the four fundamental grave precept offenses and felt deeply disturbed. Seeking repentance, he met a venerable who instructed him to investigate the root of the offenses. At last he discovered that the nature of offense is originally empty and unobtainable, suddenly awakened, saw his own nature, and realized the great Way.

“Every place is an āraṇya; neither noisy nor quiet, free of cares.” Āraṇya means a monastery, a quiet place well suited to practice. Practitioners often hope to find a quiet place for practice, but if the mind is not quiet, even a quiet place will not help. Since practice takes mind as primary, if the mind is quiet, even a noisy place is unobstructed. Therefore every place is a quiet place for practice. When beginning practice it is best to have a quiet place, but if such a place is not available, do not discriminate that this place is noisy and that place is quiet; the key is that the mind be empty. Do not cling to noise or quiet. “Serenely dwelling in the palace without covering, playing in the human world, truly carefree.” Serene means that the mind is peaceful and joyful, utterly empty, with nothing in it. The palace without covering is not another place somewhere else; it is our true mind, without anything covering it. Our true mind is originally unmoving, originally not establishing even one dharma, originally pure and unstained. No matter how noisy the outside world is, it has nothing to do with me. I play freely in the human world, carefree and unattached.

“River moon shines; pine wind blows; where else is there any activity to seek?” This uses scenery to write the mind. On a quiet night, the moon shines in the sky and is reflected in the river; the water is clear, and the moon’s reflection in it is crisp and clear. Buddha-recitation and mantra recitation are also like this: when the mind is like clear water, the Buddha is like the moon shining upon it. Pine wind means wind blowing through pine needles with a clear fragrance. It is a metaphor that once the mind is pure, no matter how noisy things become, the mind remains pure and unafflicted. At this point the mind is empty and clean, with no practice, no attainment, and no realization. What further activity could there be? Thus Buddha-recitation awakening and Chan awakening are the same. “Ages past and present are like a flash of lightning; the ocean of worlds in the great trichiliocosm is a single reed.” Time passes quickly, like a whisk passing once or a flash of lightning. This world may seem billions of years old, yet it is like a single flash and cannot be clung to. Any world is likewise unobtainable. The great trichiliocosm is like an ocean of dust-mote worlds, innumerable beyond measure, yet it too is as unobtainable as a single reed.

“In a sandalwood forest there are no mixed trees; dense and deep, there the lion dwells.” The sandalwood forest means that our mind and the minds of all beings are all Buddha-nature, without admixture, originally fragrant and pure. One only has to awaken, not cling to worldly entanglements, and the self-nature is restored, dwelling peacefully in the dense deep

sandalwood forest. “In the still forest, one wanders alone; beasts and birds all go far away.” This portrays coming and going alone in the deep quiet forest. It means that when the mind is empty and abides nowhere, it does not take the myriad things as companions but goes alone and comes alone. Since absolute true mind has no relative counterpart, it is pure and unstained and is described as solitary coming and going. If relative things are present, then self and other, right and wrong appear, and it is not pure. Yet once the mind is truly pure, even entering the bustling marketplace is like the secluded forest. Beasts and birds going far away means that deluded thoughts, inversions, and all pollution are gone.

“The mind is bright; illumination is unobstructed; vast, lucid, and transparent, it pervades the Dharma realm.” When all deluded thoughts are absent from the mind, it illuminates the great thousandfold world without obstruction, as the Amitābha Sūtra says of that Buddha’s light: immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction. Our nature is the same. Vast means expansive like empty space; lucid and transparent means incomparably bright, without a speck of dust. Dharma realm means the ten Dharma realms, the four realms of sages and six realms of ordinary beings, all illuminated without omission. “The myriad phenomena in all their array appear and disappear within; one round brightness has neither inside nor outside.” Mountains, rivers, earth, food and drink, daily life, and all the countless different circumstances appear and disappear within our mind, while absolute true mind perfectly illuminates all without inside or outside. Because every phenomenon is its display and transformation, and every phenomenon vanishes in a moment and is illusory, its illumination has no inside or outside.

“The sun may turn cold and the moon may turn hot; how could wrong views destroy true speech?” Even if the sun could cool and the moon could heat up, wrong views could not destroy truth. “Without sinews, empty power is incomparable; how could a mantis stop a cartwheel?” Having no support at all is “without sinews.” If there were support, there would be sinews and bones. The power of emptiness with no sinews and no bones, not a single thing, is the greatest. Wind is more powerful than water or fire. At the destruction of the meditation heavens, fire burns the first dhyāna heaven, water floods the second, and wind blows away the third. The power of empty mind is even greater. A mantis may have legs like knives, but can it stop the carriage wheels? It cannot; the cart rolls over and crushes it. Likewise, wrong views cannot stop the power of true Dharma.

“Sing it as it is; hear it as it is. Before the mouth has opened, the harmony is already complete.” True speaking is no speaking, and true hearing is no hearing. Before the mouth opens, it has already been taught; what is spoken now is extra speech. “The Buddhas of the three times all sing in harmony; to the end of future time it is inexhaustible.” The Song of Realizing the Way was composed by Master Yongjia; the Song of Liberation was Master Dayu’s harmonizing with Yongjia’s original rhyme. To the end of future time, all Buddhas of the three times will sing and harmonize with this song without end, because this song is the voice of mind, and mind abides from ancient times without exhaustion; therefore the song too is sung and harmonized without end. Moreover, the Buddhas of the three times speak as no speaking and no speaking as speaking, so wind, birdsong, mountain collapse, ocean roar—

none is not the singing and harmonizing of this song. To the end of future time, worlds are inexhaustible, and this song too is inexhaustible.

When the song was finished, the singer suddenly burst into loud laughter. Someone who was harmonizing shouted, “Aren’t you afraid that once you open your mouth, you will not be able to close it?” Everyone, say a word: this madman laughing loudly—what is it ultimately? “This mouth born from father and mother will never tell you!” What a sorry spectacle—it comes down to nothing but a whole scene of nonsense!

4J. 《悟心铭》浅释（重刊本） / A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to Mind (Reprint Source Body)

Textual note. The Chinese source contains a second occurrence of 《悟心铭》浅释 within 《禅海微澜》. The reprint states that the essay was originally published in 《禅》, 1990, issue 2. This edition follows the local wording of the reprint wherever it differs from Section 2.

The Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma is a method of practice that relies on the compassionate empowerment of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. For this reason it is easy to enter samādhi, open up what is original, and realize the true mind. To use the analogy of traveling: those who practice by self-power alone rely entirely on their own two feet; practicing the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma is like traveling by boat or by carriage, or even by airplane. Therefore it is swift and reliable, and achieves twice the result with half the effort.

My late teacher, Venerable Xianglu, in order to help Heart-Center practitioners awaken to the true mind more swiftly and transcend the ordinary and enter sagehood, composed a poem called Inscription on Awakening to Mind. It consists of forty lines of four characters each, one hundred and sixty characters in all. Though brief in wording and few in characters, its meaning is rich and far-reaching. It fully reveals the true purport of becoming a Buddha and the essential instructions for mind practice. It may truly be called an essential work whose words are few but whose meaning is abundant, concise yet complete, and it is also a rare modern appraisal of awakening to mind. If students, apart from their formal practice, recite it several times each day until it is thoroughly familiar, in time it will respond immediately when they encounter circumstances, and from the real essence they will obtain great capacity and great function. In order to help later students understand its hidden profound meaning and more easily awaken to mind, I will give a brief explanation line by line. I hope students will value it and not regard it lightly.

Full text of the Inscription on Awakening to Mind

It is neither a matter of having mind
nor of being without mind.
It is not that seeing ceases;
it is not that hearing ceases.

Clearly and distinctly aware,
one does not cling to seeing and hearing.
Open and without abiding:
this is called no-mind.

If the mind does not abide,
on what could delusion stand?
When delusion no longer stands,
past obstructions naturally disappear.
Ask where mind comes from:
it arises because of objects.
Objects too do not exist;
they are alike illusory images.

Wondrous functions, as countless as the sands of the Ganges,
all arise through the mind that engages conditions.
When the mind that grasps at conditions comes to rest,
one suddenly realizes non-arising.
The true reality of non-arising
cannot be seen by the eye.
Dim and subtle, dark and hidden,
within it there is essence.

Those who realize it
are called those who see the nature.
Therefore, with nothing sought,
the mind naturally becomes tranquil and unified.
With no mind that can be deluded,
this itself is great samādhi.
Those who attain great samādhi
have no movement and no stillness,
no gain and no loss,
no joy and no anger.

Without shifting from the original position,
they respond to the myriad conditions.
Unchanging while following conditions:
this is to have no birth and death.
The essential secret of becoming a Buddha

is simply this.

Brief explanation

At the beginning, the Inscription on Awakening to Mind says: “It is neither a matter of having mind nor of being without mind.” These two lines lay out the essence and function of the wondrous bright true mind in their entirety. The wondrous bright true mind does not belong to being, and it is not non-being. If you say it exists, no characteristics can be seen and no sound can be heard. If you say it does not exist, then in speech and silence, movement and stillness, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, there is not one thing that is not its functioning. Ancient masters compared it to “the taste of salt in seawater” and “the binder in pigment”: although it cannot be seen with the eyes, in essence it is not absent. Śākyamuni Buddha tells us that it is the great treasury of true emptiness, marvelous presence—marvelous presence, true emptiness. “True emptiness” differs from inert emptiness and annihilationist emptiness; because it is marvelous presence, it is empty yet not empty, not empty yet empty. “Marvelous presence” differs from false existence or truly established existence; because it is true emptiness, it exists yet does not exist, does not exist yet exists. Next, from the standpoint of manifestation and function, it is also neither existent nor non-existent, neither non-existent nor existent. If you say it does not exist, all shapes and colors appear vividly before you and its wondrous functions are as countless as the sands of the Ganges. If you say it exists, all forms arise from causes and conditions and have no intrinsic essence of their own; the activities that arise are like the moon in water or flowers in the sky, with nothing that can be grasped.

The Heart Sutra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” This means that form and emptiness are not two, neither existent nor non-existent. All forms are manifestations of the wondrous essence of true emptiness, and the wondrous essence of true emptiness cannot show its function apart from forms. Nor is there another true emptiness apart from forms. It is like waves arising from water: water is waves, waves are water. Apart from waves, water cannot be obtained; apart from water, waves cannot be obtained either. In our practice we must not take forms to be truly existent and cling to them, but neither should we turn away from forms, reject existence, and attach to emptiness. Therefore, whether sitting in meditation or rising to function after meditation, we must have neither grasping nor rejection. Only then do we accord with the principle of the Middle Way and set out upon the great path of “true emptiness, marvelous presence”. When students practice until delusive thoughts melt away, the mind that can recite and the mantra that is recited drop off at once; body and mind within and the world without vanish together without a trace. Pure and uncovered, not a single thread is worn; clean and stainless, not a speck of dust remains. Yet it is clear and distinct, not like wood or stone. What is this that is threadless, uncovered, and a single expanse of empty luminosity? If it is not the wondrous bright true mind of this very person, neither existent nor non-existent, vividly present, what else could it be? At such a time, form

and emptiness cannot reach it, being and non-being cannot touch it. When spoken of as empty, it pervades the Dharma realm; when spoken of as existent, not even the finest hair can be established. The hundred schools and all arts and crafts, even the pure lands of all Buddhas and sentient beings as countless as the sands of the Ganges, are all gathered within it.

The second line says, “It is not that seeing ceases; it is not that hearing ceases.” This teaches us that in practice we must not practice in a dead way, but must train the mind flexibly and responsively amid circumstances. Do not close the eyes and refuse to see, or block the ears and refuse to hear. You must see without anything seen and hear without anything heard; only then can one function wondrously, freely, and responsively, and accomplish the great Way. I often see people practicing wrongly: they close their eyes so they do not see things, block their ears so they do not hear sounds, and think that by doing this they can empty the mind and accomplish the Way. They do not realize that even if, when the eyes are closed and the ears blocked and the mind is not contacting objects, they can make the mind dead and unmoving, the moment they open the eyes and unblock the ears, when the mind faces objects, the delusive mind inevitably follows forms and sounds and turns without cease. Removing objects in order to extinguish mind is not true realization; moreover, even while the eyes are closed and the ears blocked, the inner mind is not necessarily free from secret stirring. In addition, closing the eyes and blocking the ears carries another great danger. If students use such a method of shutting out and actually manage to make the mind dead and unmoving, then they have gone to the dead waters behind the black mountain. Not only can they not become Buddhas, there is even the danger of becoming like earth, wood, metal, or stone. Therefore students must be careful.

To truly ensure that the mind is not swayed by objects, one must train precisely amid objects. As the Chan school says, “Where you fall to the ground, there you must get up.” To leave objects and seek emptiness will ultimately come to nothing. The Diamond Sutra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” All forms and sounds arise from causes and conditions and have no independent reality. No matter whether beautiful forms appear before you or wondrous sounds fill your ears, they are all merely heat shimmer, flowers in the sky, and mirages temporarily appearing. Once this principle is recognized, and after days and months pass and after thousands upon thousands of difficult trainings amid objects, mind and spirit will naturally become peaceful and still, and one will encounter objects without being moved. In his Verses on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister, Master Dongshan, in the verse on the fourth rank, “arriving within the inclined,” the rank of practicing the Way, says: “Arriving within the inclined, when two blades meet there is no need to avoid them. A skilled hand is like a lotus in fire; a great man naturally has the will to soar into the sky.” This teaches us to train flexibly and responsively amid circumstances; we need not avoid seeing and hearing, for this opens up the later great capacity and great function.

The third line says, “Clearly and distinctly aware, one does not cling to seeing and hearing.” Continuing the previous two lines, “It is not that seeing ceases; it is not that hearing ceases,”

this further explains how we should practice flexibly rather than rigidly so that we do not enter a wrong path. We practice in order to become living Buddhas; therefore it is not by sitting dead and unmoving, sinking into emptiness and stagnating in stillness, sitting behind the black mountain, that we can realize the Way. Yunmen said, “This very seeing and hearing is not seeing and hearing; no other sounds and forms can be presented to you.” He tells us clearly and openly: do you wish to thoroughly see the true mind? It is right here, in the present seeing of forms and hearing of sounds. Awaken to who it is that sees forms and hears sounds. Apart from that which sees forms and hears sounds, you have nowhere to seek it. But if you cling to seeing forms and hearing sounds, and are deluded by sounds and forms, you will not see it either. How flexible and responsive this practice is! How could one see the Way by sitting dead and unmoving, neither seeing nor hearing? It is also said, “The mysterious and empty great Way is originally without attachment; in seeing forms and hearing sounds there is no need to be deaf.” This shows that practice must be flexible and responsive, not rigid and lifeless. Rigid, lifeless practice not only cannot accomplish the Way, but may even flow into the ways of demons and outsiders.

Therefore my late teacher told us that practice must be applied flexibly in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, in movement and stillness, leisure and busyness. One must not be like wood and stone, without knowing. One must be clear and distinct; yet while clear and distinct, one must not cling to sounds and forms. In other words, one must see without anything seen and hear without anything heard, not fail to see and fail to hear. Only in this way can wondrous functioning unfold freely and responsively. Even while sitting, right mindfulness must be bright and clear; one must be clear and distinct and must not be blankly without knowing, falling into dullness or indeterminate blankness. Master Yongjia said, “Lucid and quiescent is right; lucid with wild thinking is wrong. Quiescent and lucid is right; quiescent but blankly indeterminate is wrong.” This is precisely a footnote to “clearly and distinctly aware, one does not cling to seeing and hearing.”

The fourth line says, “Open and without abiding: this is called no-mind.” Ordinarily we think that no-mind means not one thought arising, and that not one thought arising means pressing thoughts down so they do not arise. Therefore everyone uses the dead method of suppression, forcing down thoughts and not allowing them to arise. They think that having not a single thought is good practice, and they further think that if the period of not one thought arising grows from short to long, this is the practice rising higher and higher. They do not realize that if they practice deadness in this way, not only can they not become Buddhas; they may well end up like earth, wood, metal, or stone. The Buddha is a great awakened one, vital and responsive, a great person of wondrous functions as countless as the sands of the Ganges. How could he be a dead, rigid block like wood or stone, a carved statue without any awareness?

If in practice one does not train oneself amid the many differentiated circumstances so that the mind remains nonabiding, but merely suppresses thoughts so they do not arise, what

wondrous function could ever arise? Have you not seen the Sixth Patriarch's rescue of Wolun? At first Chan Master Wolun thought that suppressing thoughts so they did not arise was good practice, so he composed a verse: "Wolun has a skill; he can cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day." When the Sixth Patriarch saw it, he knew Wolun had entered a wrong path of dead water, and rescued him with this verse: "Huineng has no skill; he does not cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind arises repeatedly; how could bodhi grow?" Wolun recognized the mistake, corrected it, and only then entered the Way. Thus we know that no-mind is not suppressing thoughts so they do not arise, and it is not the lengthening of a period of no-thought that counts as progress. The true practice of no-mind is that one responds to conditions and meets things while the mind does not abide; one manages countless affairs while the intention is not stained. The inner mind is like drawing on water: as soon as the brushstroke arises, the surface of the water immediately closes, without the slightest trace. This is the truly good practice of no-mind.

The Diamond Sutra says, "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind." The character "ying" in "ying wu suo zhu" is often misunderstood as the "should" or "ought" of "one should not abide." Actually it is not so. This character means "responding" in "responding to conditions and meeting things." It teaches us that in daily life, when dealing with all events and responding to all people, the mind must not abide; it must be open and unstained. It is not merely telling us, on the level of principle, that one should not abide anywhere. If we can respond to conditions without abiding, then the true mind, with wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, naturally appears at all times without obstruction. Therefore no-thought is dynamic and responsive: it is responding to conditions without abiding or staining. It is not suppressing thoughts so they do not arise and dying there unmoving. When a thought arises, we only need to let it arise without abiding: do not grasp at conditions or let it linger; let it subside as soon as its function is served. This is no-thought.

In the past, a monk asked Zhaozhou, "What is no-thought?" Zhaozhou said, "Playing ball on swift water." Later Zhaozhou asked Touzi in return, "What is the meaning of playing ball on swift water?" Touzi said, "Thought after thought does not remain." From this we can see that the arising of thoughts without abiding is no-thought; it is not that no-thought means not a single thought may arise. Again, Chan Master Farong, known as "Lazy Rong," says in his Song of No-Mind: "Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning; no-mind is precisely functioning, and constant functioning is precisely no-mind." That is to say, even amid functioning, one does not see any mind arise to function. This exhausts the meaning and wondrous function of no-mind.

The fifth line says, "If the mind does not abide, on what could delusion stand?" Practitioners all dislike the delusive mind and want to eliminate it and strike it down. They do not realize that delusion originally does not exist; it is only thought making trouble. All external objects are like the moon in water and are not truly existent. Sentient beings, through ignorance, mistakenly take them to exist, grasp them, and cannot let go; thus they become delusion. If

one can awaken right there and see through these illusory objects, delusion vanishes without a trace. It is like a person dreaming: while dreaming, one takes it to be real; upon waking, not even a trace remains. This is because the true mind is like the luminous clarity of a mirror, and all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas are like reflections appearing in the mirror. Ordinary beings, ignorant and dull, turn away from the mirror's luminous clarity and grasp the reflections, creating karma and undergoing retribution, unable to end birth and death. The sages of the two vehicles, though they do not cling to sense objects, turn away from the reflections and abide in luminosity; because they abide somewhere, this again becomes delusion about the Dharma. They end only fragmentary birth-and-death and do not end transformational birth-and-death. Students of the One Vehicle thoroughly understand both Buddhadharma and worldly dharmas; they are neither identical with the reflections nor apart from them. Since all reflections appear through the mirror's luminous clarity, mirror is reflection and reflection is mirror. Apart from the mirror there is no reflection; apart from reflection there is no mirror. One must neither turn away from the mirror and abide in reflections, nor leave reflections in order to seek the mirror. Knowing deeply that neither reflection nor mirror is anything to abide in, there is no attachment or aversion in the mind, nor any fixation on grasping or rejecting objects.

Therefore students need not fear delusion. Only deeply accord with the profound meaning of the One Vehicle; with regard to objects, neither grasp nor reject, neither rejoice nor get angry, and delusion will naturally disappear. Moreover, many students think that "ignorance" is difficult to break; some even blanch at its mere mention, as one would at the mention of a tiger. In fact, so-called ignorance is not truly existent. It is only the delusive mind making trouble, clinging to sense objects, deluded and unaware; it is a provisional name. If the practitioner can become sharply aware right there, delusive objects are broken and ignorance naturally disappears. It is like a dark room of a thousand years: one lamp can make it bright; no long period is needed to remove the darkness. Therefore, so-called ignorance and delusive mind exist only because we are unaware. If we can maintain clear observation constantly, remain sharply alert everywhere, making the mind clear, empty, expansive, and lucid, without fixation or grasping, why worry that ignorance will not be broken and delusive mind will not cease?

The sixth line says, "When delusion no longer stands, past obstructions naturally disappear." The mind is originally numinously responsive and unobstructed; only because we are deluded by objects and cling to marks do obstructions form. What are called past obstructions are the delusive habits accumulated through many lives and kalpas through being deluded by marks and creating karma. These delusive obstructions cover the luminosity of original nature, preventing one from freely benefiting from its unobstructed functioning, and again making pain, hardship, affliction, and vexation endless. Now that we know all phenomena are originally empty and the mind leaves no blockage, and that karma itself is not established, where can false obstructions lodge? Chan Master Damei said, "For one who has arrived, all karmic obstructions are like hot water melting ice, like light removing darkness; there is

nowhere for them to stand.” What are called obstructions are only provisional names and have no independent reality. The sutra says, “Offenses arise from mind; through mind they are extinguished.” It also says, “When mind arises, all kinds of obstructions arise; when mind ceases, all kinds of obstructions cease.” If one is directly without mind, delusion has nowhere to stand; when delusion does not stand, past obstructions naturally disappear.

Someone may say, “Present karma is easy to eliminate, fixed karma is hard to avoid; mental karma is easy to remove, bodily karma is hard to extinguish.” This too cannot be generalized. Have you not seen how Bodhidharma instructed the Second Patriarch Shenguang: “You will have the karmic result of being killed, but because of preventing the true Dharma from being slandered, this debt may be exempted.” Another ancient worthy suffered a stroke and his mouth twisted. His attendant laughed and said, “Venerable, you spend all day scolding Buddhas and insulting patriarchs; now you are undergoing retribution.” The ancient worthy said, “You have attended me for several decades, yet this is how you look at me? You should know that all karmic obstructions on the body of a patriarch are like flowers in the sky and the moon in water. Even if there is repayment, it is like not repaying; moreover, if he wants to repay, he repays, and if he does not want to repay, he does not. See whether my mouth is crooked or not!” As he spoke he slapped his mouth with his hand, and it immediately became straight. He then scolded the attendant, saying, “You beings who cling to marks conceive of karmic obstruction within original emptiness, and conceive of repayment where there is no repayment. Because of this, karmic obstructions are not ended and you suffer without limit.” From this we know that all karmic obstructions are tied to mind. If mind is truly empty, there is no so-called obstruction and no so-called repaying or not repaying. Because there is neither repayment nor non-repayment, one need not cling to non-repayment as non-repayment; even if repayment takes place, it is still as if there is no repayment.

A monk asked an ancient worthy, “What is karmic obstruction?” The worthy said, “Originally empty.” The monk further asked, “What is originally empty?” The worthy said, “Karmic obstruction.” Originally empty is not inert emptiness or annihilationist emptiness; it means that all things and all karmic obstructions are, in their very actuality, originally empty, with nothing whatsoever of their own. Therefore the Second Patriarch Shenguang, although instructed by the First Patriarch, after transmitting the Dharma to the Third Patriarch still went to repay the debt of being killed without the slightest difficulty, and at the time of execution sang out: “Bringing the head before the white blade is just like cutting the spring wind.” What bearing this is! This is truly the model of one who has realized.

The seventh line says, “Ask where mind comes from: it arises because of objects.” “Mind originally has no arising; it exists because of objects.” This is the famous saying of Viśvabhū Buddha. Our mind, that is, thought, originally does not exist. Because it faces objects, images arise; when these are grasped and not let go, delusive thinking arises. This is mind. This mind arises through the conjunction of the mind faculty and its object; hence the expression “mind arises through the gathering of conditions.” It consists of residual impressions left by the six

sense objects and is purely illusory, without independent reality. In Buddhist scriptures, the word “mind” in “everything is made by mind alone” and “the three realms are mind-only; the myriad dharmas are consciousness-only” refers to this illusory, image-like mind arising from the reflection of objective external conditions. Therefore it too is an external object; it too is an object, and it is not apart from matter. One must not take it as a subjective mind and treasure it as the “true god” ruling the world. In practice, we must not cling to the external objects of the myriad phenomena; still more, we must melt away this illusory delusive mind. What is called “inwardly body and mind, outwardly the world, all vanishing together” is when the wondrous bright true mind finally appears. Conversely, if one takes this illusory mind to be something subjectively real in its own right, the true nature is covered and cannot be seen. Therefore when we speak of “everything is made by mind alone,” the word “mind” is treated as something objective to be dissolved; it is not saying that mind is the ruler of all things. I ask the broad community of Buddhists to be clear about this and not misunderstand.

The eighth line says, “Objects too do not truly exist; mind and objects alike are illusory images.” The sutra says, “Mind is not mind by itself; because of objects, there is mind. Objects are not objects by themselves; because of mind, there are objects.” This explains clearly the mutually dependent and mutually conditioning relation between mind and objects. Since mind exists because of objects, objects also cannot stand independently apart from mind, for objects arise from causes and conditions and have no intrinsic essence of their own. Take reflections in a mirror for example: though they have ten thousand differences and a thousand variations, without the mirror’s luminous clarity, the reflections cannot appear. Objects are also like this. Without mind, objects cannot be formed. Even if there are beautiful scenes and fine surroundings, if there is no mind to receive and appreciate them, their existence is the same as non-existence. Since objects are not objects by themselves and do not call themselves beautiful or excellent surroundings, and since mind and objects arise in relation to each other and apart from one there is no other, objects and mind are both not real. They are alike illusory images.

Some may say: all scenes and things in the Sahā world are karmic results summoned by our collective karma, false and not real, so it is acceptable to call them illusory images. But as for the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, it is the true realm that Amitābha Buddha, through many lives and kalpas of diligent practice for the benefit of all sentient beings, accumulated merit until the causes ripened and the result was complete. It seems one cannot call it an illusory image. This point truly deserves careful discussion. Because so many people now practice Pure Land, if they do not clarify the true situation of the Pure Land and do not understand what it ultimately is, their practice cannot readily take hold, still less can they deeply realize the samādhi of buddha-recitation and be reborn in the highest grade. First, from the standpoint of appearances, the Sahā world is the evil fruit of the five turbidities brought about by the karma created by beings burdened with karmic obstructions, while Ultimate Bliss is the pure world manifested by Amitābha’s fulfilled vows and perfected virtues. Therefore one is turbid, ugly, and defiled, and the other is wondrously adorned and beautiful; there is a great

difference. But land is born from mind. Apart from mind there is no land; apart from land there is no mind. Mind is land, and land is mind. Thus the sutra says, “If you wish to purify the land, first purify the mind.” It also says, “As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure.” This teaches us to recognize what the Pure Land is, so that we may know how to practice toward realizing it, avoiding futile grasping at external marks and falling into a wrong path.

Since outside land there is no mind and outside mind there is no land, since mind and land are not separate, and since the one true Dharma realm, the true mind, is not increased in sages and not decreased in ordinary beings, the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss flows out from the pure and wondrous true mind. How, then, could the defiled Sahā land be obtained apart from the pure Buddha-nature? Therefore, although Ultimate Bliss is pure and Sahā is defiled, both are images appearing within the true mind, like reflections appearing within a mirror’s luminous clarity. Although there are differences in form and distinctions of purity and defilement, both are like the moon in water and are utterly unobtainable. One must never falsely claim that Ultimate Bliss is obtainable because it is like the pure reflection of the moon in water. Next, as to true and false, the Diamond Sutra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” As explained above, all such appearances are like reflections in a mirror and are utterly unobtainable; therefore they are illusory and not real. One must never divide true and false on the basis of purity or defilement, beauty or ugliness. Thus, although the land of Ultimate Bliss is completely good and completely beautiful, it too is an illusory appearance.

To go one step further, speaking of true and speaking of false are both the fault of us ordinary beings clinging to marks, setting up names, and making false distinctions. What are called true and false exist only relatively; apart from one, the other cannot be obtained, so both are provisional names. Since true and false exist relatively, when you speak of true, false is already within it; when you speak of false, true is already within it. As the proverb says, “When the false is taken as true, the true too becomes false.” To falsely set up true and false where there is no true or false—is this not ordinary people disturbing themselves? Moreover, because the mirror must reveal images, where there is true mind, false appearance is not absent. Without appearances there would be no way to reveal true mind; thus the Amitābha Sutra displays the adornments of Ultimate Bliss. Because the image is not apart from the mirror, where there is false appearance, true mind is not absent. Without true mind there would be no way for false appearance to be formed; thus the Diamond Sutra reveals the wondrous essence: not one dharma is established. Since nature and appearances are inseparable, as closely joined as water and waves, seeing appearance is seeing nature. Because not one thing can be taken as real, it is called “the wholly false is just true.” Seeing nature does not discard appearances; it perfects differentiated wondrous functions. Therefore it is called “the wholly true is just false.” True and false, false and true—all of this is the mischief of our delusive minds. In reality, the numinous wondrous true mind does not establish a single thing. What true or false could there be to speak of?

Therefore, if one says the world of Ultimate Bliss is real, then the Sahā world is real too. If one says Sahā is false, then Ultimate Bliss is false too. Thus the two lands, pure and defiled, both flow out from the one true Dharma realm. One must never, because ordinary beings in bondage are ignorant of the true mind and create karma and undergo retribution, deny their numinous nature and say that the karmic appearances of the defiled land that appear are not flowing forth from Buddha-nature and true mind. Furthermore, the world of Ultimate Bliss has the distinctions of four lands and nine grades. In the lowest, the Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together, there are many kinds of splendid appearances. But in the Land of Expedient Means with Remainder and the Land of Real Reward and Adornment, the higher the land, the more the appearances become clear, light, subtle, and wondrous. At the highest, the Land of Eternally Quiescent Light, it is even purer, subtler, more wondrous and bright, while not a single characteristic is established. Yet even the non-establishment of a single characteristic does not go outside the three lands mentioned above. Therefore those who practice while clinging to marks obtain only lower-grade rebirth, while those who realize the emptiness of marks and see the nature can be reborn in the highest grade. For this reason, those who truly practice Pure Land neither cling to marks nor discard appearances. They simply put everything down, sit upright, sincere and reverent, and hold fast to the Name, using the breath as the rosary, reciting continuously and closely through the six periods of day and night, for a long time without slackening. They will naturally attain the samādhi of buddha-recitation. By then, even before death and rebirth in the West, they will already have attained a place on a lotus of the highest grade.

The ninth line says, “Wondrous functions, as countless as the sands of the Ganges, all arise through the mind that engages conditions.” As said above, in practice we must not suppress thoughts so they do not arise and extinguish the delusive mind. We should only redirect it flexibly: when thoughts arise, do not heed them and do not allow grasping at conditions to continue. The reason is that later, when great capacity and great function must arise, this delusive mind is still needed. If this delusive mind is pressed to death, there is no way for the true mind to give rise to wondrous functioning. It is like water producing waves because of wind; if the waves are completely removed, the water is gone as well. In the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment, after saying, “At all times do not give rise to delusive thoughts,” it immediately adds, “With regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.” This teaches us to practice flexibly so that the wondrous functioning of prajñā can arise later.

In the daily life of ordinary beings, all our creations and inventions are none other than the wondrous functioning of this “delusive mind.” Apart from it, we would be like idiots or fools, unable to accomplish anything. For ordinary beings, it is precisely this that functions. Later, when one becomes a worthy or a sage, the vast numinous functions that arise are not apart from it either. Only, at the level of ordinary beings, because there is abiding and attachment, it is called delusive mind or consciousness-spirit; at the level of sages and worthies, when all attachment and entanglement have been removed, it is called prajñā or numinous knowing. I once asked someone, “How far apart are consciousness-spirit and suchness?” Hearing this, the

person was greatly startled and said, “Suchness and consciousness-spirit—one is true mind and one is delusive consciousness. How can they be mentioned together?” He then quoted Master Xuansha's verse as evidence: “Students of the Way fail to recognize the true because they have always mistaken the consciousness-spirit for it. The root of birth and death through immeasurable kalpas—fools call it the original person.” Hearing this, I could not help laughing and said, “Do you recognize the Original Person? If you do not recognize it, suchness becomes consciousness-spirit. If you recognize it, consciousness-spirit is suchness. How could there be two?” As said above, waves are originally water, and water is not apart from waves. If you leave waves in order to seek water, where could water be obtained? Moreover, if water does not raise waves, it is only dead water—how could it be vast and magnificent? If suchness does not rely on consciousness-spirit, it is also like a dull child and has no way to function. Xuansha's verse is not saying that consciousness-spirit is bad. The critical point is whether or not one recognizes the Original Person. If one recognizes it, consciousness-spirit is directed by the master and accomplishes all vast and magnificent wondrous functions. If one does not recognize it, then an evil servant bullies the master and rebels.

The tenth line says, “When the mind that grasps at conditions comes to rest, one suddenly realizes non-arising.” The sutra says, “Settle the mad mind, and that itself is bodhi.” This principle is just like the image and mirror, water and waves discussed above. Images and waves cannot be apart from mirror and water. Likewise, the delusive mind is not apart from bodhi, true awakening. Because it is not apart from it, if the delusive mind were removed, there would be no true awakening. Therefore, if practitioners want to personally realize the true suchness nature that is unborn and undying, they must not use any method to eliminate the delusive mind. They can only use the practice of “settling,” allowing the delusive mind that grasps at objects to come to rest. It is just as waves, when they come to rest, are simply water. Then the wondrous bright true mind suddenly appears. If students truly know that all external objects are like heat shimmer and flowers in the sky, without independent reality, and do not grasp after conditions or give rise to delusive thoughts, then spirit becomes peaceful, wisdom clear, the numinous light shines alone, and the inner mind is bright and pure like a mirror reflecting things—without grasping or rejecting, without attachment or aversion. Though clear and distinct, not one thought arises; though not one thought arises, it is clear and distinct. Right there one personally realizes the true reality of non-arising. There is no need to use any clumsy effort besides settling the mind.

All Dharma gates, whether buddha-recitation, mantra-holding, or Chan investigation, are only tools and means for this one word, “settle.” They teach you, by buddha-recitation, mantra-holding, or Chan investigation, to settle the mad mind, thereby opening up what is original and clearly seeing the true mind. They are not about obtaining something strange, special, or mysterious from buddha-recitation, mantra-holding, or Chan investigation. Ancient worthies said, “In the Buddhadharma there is no room for mental contrivance.” They also said, “Putting on clothes and eating food are it; the moment the mind stirs and a thought arises, you have already gone astray.” Since Buddha-nature is originally possessed by sentient beings, not

obtained from outside, there is no need to seek it and no need to take it, so there is no need to apply force. On the contrary, the more one exerts effort seeking outwardly and asking it from others, the farther away one goes; the more strength one uses to take it, the less it can be obtained. Thus Buddhadharma is the greatest effort-saving undertaking. Unlike worldly endeavors, it does not require painstaking planning and strenuous exertion before anything can be attained. Laozi said, “In pursuing the Way, one decreases day by day.” If students can put down everything they know, everything they understand, everything they possess, all of it without remainder, then when the mad mind comes to rest, non-arising is suddenly realized. As the saying goes, “After wearing out iron shoes, nowhere is it found; once obtained, it costs no effort at all.” There is good reason for this.

The eleventh and twelfth lines say, “The true reality of non-arising cannot be seen by the eye; dim and subtle, dark and hidden, within it there is essence.” This true suchness wondrous nature, unborn and undying, not coming and not going, not increasing and not decreasing, is the equal, true characteristic—great without outside and small without inside. The Diamond Sutra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” All phenomena bearing defining characteristics arise through causes and conditions and have no intrinsic essence of their own; therefore they are illusory and unreal. The true characteristic is the pure and wondrous great characteristic that is without characteristics. Because this great characteristic has no form, the eye cannot see it. Yet when practice reaches the point where the bottom of the bucket drops away and subject and object both perish, the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground can see the Way.

But this “seeing” is not seeing with the eyes. It means view, understanding, direct knowing, and realization. Although it is dim and subtle, dark and hidden, with no characteristics that can be seen and no flavor to smell, it is neither annihilation nor inert emptiness; it has “true essence” and “wondrous essence.” In other words, this true, wondrous essence is “numinous knowing free from thought.” When your practice reaches the falling away of sense faculties and sense objects, and both person and dharmas are forgotten, then naturally, when the time ripens, you know: all at once you comprehend and directly experience that this pure and uncovered, clean and stainless, numinously bright true essence is the very source of your life. Having realized the wondrous nature, when you turn back, because the images are not apart from the mirror, all the myriad phenomena seen by the eyes, heard by the ears, and touched by the body are nothing other than manifestations of this true essence, nothing other than its wondrous functioning, and nothing other than annotations to it. When students reach this stage, they hear the Way at all times and see the nature everywhere. The Sixth Patriarch said, “A person who has truly seen the nature, even wielding a blade on the battlefield, is also seeing the nature.” Dahui said, “A thoroughly awakened person can see the Way even with physical eyes.” With one phrase, the wondrous principle that nature and appearances are not two is completely revealed.

The thirteenth line says, “Those who realize it are called those who see the nature.” Modern practitioners all regard the phrase “apprehend Mind and see nature” as something belonging

to sages and worthies, lofty beyond reach, something ordinary people like us cannot climb to or attain. To end birth and death, they think they can only recite “Amitābha Buddha” again and again and be reborn in the West. They do not realize that apprehending Mind and seeing nature is not difficult, and certainly not beyond reach. The principle involved has been explained in detail in my essay *A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature*, so I will not repeat it here. We only need to follow the method explained above: settle the mad mind, do not cling to objects before us, do not extinguish right mindfulness, and do not seek anything strange, special, or mysterious. Then in clear distinctness, not a single thought can be obtained; though not a single thought can be obtained, it is clear and distinct and does not fall into dimness or indeterminate blankness. This is the “true essence” described above in “dim and subtle, dark and hidden, within it there is essence.” It is also the great Way that Master Yongjia called “quiescent and lucid, lucid and quiescent.” Students must seize the moment. At this hair-trigger instant of clarity without thought, take hold of it at once: this is called seeing the nature. If one pauses even slightly to deliberate, one is again deluded by its shadow. If one abandons this and seeks elsewhere, or suspects there is some further mystery, then it can never be obtained. In the verse on the rank of seeing the Way, “the upright within the inclined,” Master Dongshan's *Verses on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister* says: “At daybreak, an old woman meets the ancient mirror. Face to face, clear and distinct, there is no other truth. Stop being confused about the head and still taking its reflection as real.” This admonishes us that at the crucial moment we must summon full alertness, grasp the point inwardly, and not miss the opportunity. If it is examined in this way, how difficult is apprehending Mind and seeing nature?

It is a pity that students in the Dharma-ending age have dull faculties and heavy habits, and many cling to spiritual powers. At this time, because they do not see marvels or mysteries, they mistakenly dismiss it as not genuine and hurriedly let it slip past. Ancient worthies lamented, “Precisely because it is so close at hand, one recognizes it too late.” How lamentable! After a practitioner first sees the nature, the practice is not finished. One must still maintain clear observation constantly, train the mind amid circumstances, work hard at polishing, and eliminate habits; only then can birth and death be ended. Otherwise, when facing objects one gives rise to mind, and delusive thoughts surge without stopping. This is called being deluded after awakening, and birth and death remain unresolved. Therefore ancient worthies often practiced the ox-herding conduct after awakening, preserving it closely until it matured. It is not that with one awakening everything is finished. Although there are occasionally those who suddenly awaken, suddenly practice, and suddenly realize, without needing this practice of preservation, such people are few after all and cannot be treated as the general rule. After the rank “the upright within the inclined,” corresponding to the stage of seeing the Way, Master Dongshan further composed the verse “arriving within the inclined” for the stage of practicing the Way, teaching us that after seeing the Way we must not be satisfied with little, but must still train the mind amid circumstances, eliminate all delusive habits, and rise higher and higher until the ultimate is reached.

On this point, the Chan school speaks of the Three Barriers. First, one breaks through the root investigation and clearly sees the true nature. This is breaking the Initial Barrier, “cutting off the streams.” Second, one protects it closely and nourishes the sacred embryo of awakening; amid all objects and conditions one is free and unobstructed, until one no longer needs to protect and yet there is no deviation at all. This is breaking the Multiple Barrier, “covering heaven and earth.” Third, one lets go and acts; there is nothing that is not it. One can enter Buddha and also enter demon; as is said, the road is the home and the home is the road. This is breaking the Prison Barrier, “following the waves and flowing with the stream.”

The fourteenth line says, “Therefore, with nothing sought, the mind naturally becomes tranquil and unified.” Ancient worthies said, “When one is free of seeking, one’s character is naturally lofty.” When a person seeks something, that is precisely a sign of attachment to objects and clinging to marks. If the mind is truly empty and not one thing is seen, what is there to seek? Someone may say, “I am not seeking other things; I am seeking birth in the West and Buddhahood.” I reply: you are originally Buddha. There is no need to seek. If you seek, you do not see. As said above, settling the mad mind itself is bodhi; one need only settle, not seek. Mahāsattva Fu said, “Every night I sleep embracing Buddha; every morning I rise together with him.” It shines at all times through your six faculties and lacks nothing in the slightest; what is there still to seek?

As for seeking birth in the West, one need only practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly. Apart from buddha-recitation there is no other mind. As is said, the whole Buddha is mind and the whole mind is Buddha; mind and Buddha enter into communion and become one and inseparable, and then one will certainly be born in the Pure Land. Since Amitābha is the Buddha of one’s own mind, and the Pure Land is the Ultimate Bliss originally possessed by one’s own mind, buddha-recitation awakens the Amitābha of one’s own mind and one is reborn in the Pure Land originally possessed by one’s own mind. What need is there to seek? For those who practice Buddha-recitation, the precious thing is to obtain one mind. One mind is no-mind; since it is no-mind, what is there still to seek? If one deliberately directs Buddha-recitation toward a Buddha outside the mind and seeks birth in a land outside the mind, then one is far from the Way. Moreover, those who attain the samādhi of buddha-recitation do not see any distinction between mind, Buddha, and sentient beings, or any difference between East and West. Though there is birth, it is unborn; though unborn, it is not without birth. What need is there to seek rebirth? Again, when seeking is carried to its limit, seeking itself ceases. Thus those engaged in seeking, when they carry it through to the end, still return to no seeking and no grasping. Birth in the West is not apart from faith, vows, and practice. Since practice can include faith and vows, if one can diligently and tirelessly practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly, faith and vows are already included. If we can truly arrive at non-seeking and non-attainment, the mind becomes tranquil without seeking tranquility, and becomes unified without wishing for unity. When practice reaches this point, one returns home and sits securely; learning has ended and one is established in the unconditioned, passing the days at ease, free and unrestrained.

The fifteenth line says, “With no mind that can be deluded, this itself is great samādhi.” Regarding samādhi, people all think there is a distinction between entering samādhi and leaving samādhi. Sitting here without moving, thinking, eating, or urinating is considered entering samādhi; once there is movement or speech, it is considered leaving samādhi. In fact, this is a mistaken understanding of samādhi. Sitting here unmoving is dead samādhi, not great samādhi. Great samādhi has no entering or leaving. It is not being deluded by any object, and functioning responsively as conditions arise, without abiding. It is not dead sitting unmoving as though there were something to enter. Confucians also described this principle: “If Mount Tai collapses before him, his expression does not change; if an elk appears to his left, his eyes do not blink.” Since dead sitting unmoving is only suppressing thoughts so they do not arise and extinguishing feeling and perception, it is not true realization. Even if one were to remain in such samādhi for a million kalpas, when the time of the kalpas passes, thoughts would again arise, one would cling to marks, create karma, and undergo retribution. Thus, even if one attains the four formless absorptions and is born in the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception, one still falls into saṃsāra and cannot end birth and death. Ancient worthies compared this kind of dead samādhi to pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows again; therefore it is not ultimate. Nanyue's polishing a tile to awaken Mazu was precisely to rescue him from dead samādhi.

Those who practice the Great Vehicle Buddhadharma do not take up this kind of dead samādhi, because it is not ultimate and does not provide true benefit. In the past, Emperor Wu of Liang went hunting and encountered an old fellow who had been in samādhi for five hundred years. He was greatly surprised and full of praise, and wanted to compare him with Chan Master Zhigong. He ordered palace women to bathe naked together with the two masters. At first the old fellow could still see and hear freely; then he closed his eyes and could not move; afterward, he had no choice but to push away the palace women and flee. By contrast, Zhigong talked and laughed at ease, unmoved and unalarmed. Without such living mastery of samādhi, how could he have attained this? Thus we can see that attaining samādhi is not a matter of sitting dead and unmoving, nor of how long dead sitting lasts. One must train the mind amid circumstances, not be deluded by objects, exercise great capacity and function, and not be affected by anything; only this is true samādhi. Moreover, the truth that samādhi has no entering and leaving is clearly proven by the account of Chan Master Zhihuang's entry into the Way in the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch and by the gong'an of the woman entering samādhi in the records of the Chan school. Students need not doubt this.

The sixteenth through eighteenth lines say, “Those who attain great samādhi have no movement and no stillness, no gain and no loss, no joy and no anger. Without shifting from the original position, they respond to the myriad conditions.” Above, we said that attaining great samādhi means the mind is not deluded, not that one sits dead and unmoving. Here we describe further the way one does not get deluded by objects. Practitioners often remain steady in stillness but lose that steadiness in movement; remain steady during formal sitting

but lose it outside formal sitting. Some are happy when they gain and worried when they lose; they rejoice when things accord with their wishes and get angry when they go against them. Those who can remain unmoving when settled, but give rise to mind when facing objects, are split into two pieces and do not have true samādhi. People who have truly attained great samādhi are the same in movement and stillness, the same in leisure and busyness. Regarding affairs, they have no mind of success or failure, gain or loss. Regarding objects, they have no intention of attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejection. Regarding mind, they have no emotion of joy, anger, sorrow, or pleasure, and no stain of seeing, hearing, sensing, or knowing. Their mind is empty as if washed clean, vital and uncontrived, naturally following conditions and functioning responsively as circumstances require. They will never be settled in a tranquil mountain forest but disturbed in a noisy city; nor will they lose illumination when encountering affairs and shift away from their original position. Thus great samādhi transcends phenomena, moves freely beyond emotional entanglements, is not controlled by any circumstance, and obtains true benefit. It is not wearing a cage and chains, binding the hands and feet, and dying there unmoving.

When, in daily activity, we train to respond to things and meet conditions while the mind neither clings nor becomes stained and has no fixation, this is not shifting from the original position. This original position is the position of the One Vehicle Dharma realm; it is also the position of Buddha. The Lotus Sutra says, “These dharmas abide in their Dharma-position; worldly appearances constantly abide.” Simply put, it means doing all things without making a thought of doing things; saying a single sentence without making a thought of speaking; manifesting the myriad phenomena without making a thought of manifesting. In this way, although there is doing, there has never been doing; although there is speaking, there has never been speaking; although there is manifesting, there has never been manifesting. Yet this does not mean refraining from doing, speaking, or manifesting. This is not shifting from the original position; this is responding to the myriad conditions; and this is worldly appearances constantly abiding.

As for the principle of worldly appearances constantly abiding, I will explain it briefly again. First, all phenomena arise from true mind; this is called abiding in the Dharma position. Since the true mind constantly abides, phenomena likewise constantly abide. Second, there is change within phenomena—so-called blue seas becoming mulberry fields—but continuity is unbroken and it is not annihilation. Though water flows and the moon waxes and wanes, the flow never ceases and the cycle of waxing and waning never ends. Third, all phenomena are illusory and unborn; therefore they also do not perish. The Huayan Sutra says, “The ten times, ancient and present, from beginning to end do not depart from the present thought; boundless oceans of lands, self and other, are not separated at the tip of a hair.” The marks of time and space all exist because delusive thoughts arise and cease and because distinctions are made. If not one thought arises, then vertically one transcends the three times, and horizontally one pervades the ten directions. No matter how distant in the past something is, it all appears vividly before one. When Master Zhiyi recited the Lotus Sutra and reached the

Medicine King chapter, before entering the Lotus samādhi he personally realized that the assembly on Vulture Peak was still present and had not dispersed. This is iron proof of worldly appearances constantly abiding.

The nineteenth line says, “Unchanging while following conditions: this is to have no birth and death.” Everyone knows that studying Buddhism and practicing the Way is for the sake of ending birth and death. But how can birth and death truly be ended? I am afraid not every Buddhist knows the answer. What is called birth and death has two kinds: fragmentary birth-and-death, and transformational birth-and-death. Fragmentary birth-and-death is the sixfold wheel of rebirth; this is relatively easy to understand. Transformational birth-and-death is an invisible layer of birth and death beyond the sixfold wheel, an obstruction caused by incomplete practice of the Dharma. Therefore ordinary people find it harder to understand. I will explain it briefly. Small Vehicle sages such as arhats have cut off the delusions of view and thought and do not suffer fragmentary birth-and-death in the wheel of rebirth. But they are biased toward the principle of emptiness, thinking that there are dharmas to practice, a Way to accomplish, birth and death to end, and nirvāṇa to realize. Fixated on a pure land beyond the three realms, brought about through supporting conditions associated with cognitive obscuration, they abide in dharmas and do not think of transforming their bodies and following conditions to liberate beings. Their cognitive delusion is not yet exhausted. This is another layer of birth-and-death rooted in dharma-clinging, beyond ordinary birth and death.

To end this kind of birth and death, one must first know that methods of practice are only like taking medicine and must not be clung to and held fast. Second, one must be clear that birth and death and nirvāṇa are like flowers in the sky: there is no birth and death to end, no nirvāṇa to realize, not one dharma established, no wisdom and no attainment. After that, one must further clearly understand, exercise great capacity and function, transform in response to conditions, and widely liberate sentient beings while the original position is not changed; one must not abide in dharmas and remain unmoving. The whole Heart Sutra first empties ordinary beings’ foolish clinging to sense faculties, sense objects, and consciousnesses; next it empties Small Vehicle sages’ dharma-clinging with respect to the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of dependent arising; afterward it empties bodhisattvas’ clinging to wisdom, allows great capacity and function to unfold, and returns to no attainment. Only then does one realize anuttarā samyakṣambodhi.

Those who truly end birth and death do so because no dharma can be obtained and because they follow conditions without changing. Even if they come and go in the six realms, they do not see any difference of birth and death or separation of paths. Even if, following conditions, they transform their bodies and forms and liberate all sentient beings, the original position is unchanged, and they do not see a single sentient being as having been liberated. In the past, a monk asked Chan Master Dasui, “After your teacher’s nirvāṇa, where was he reborn?” Dasui said, “My teacher became a horse at the eastern house and an ox at the western house.” The monk praised him for having thoroughly awakened and settled the matter: not one dharma

established, following conditions and going among different kinds of beings, while the fundamental essence did not shift in the slightest. In Master Dongshan's Verses on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister, the final verse, "arriving within the combined," says: "Not involved with being or non-being—who dares harmonize? Everyone wants to leave the ordinary stream; folded back, he returns to sit in the coals." This praises the final rank. Those who have truly ended birth and death take non-ending as true ending. It is not that leaving the six realms and abiding in a Pure Land is truly ending birth and death. Therefore what is called remainderless nirvāṇa is no nirvāṇa to realize; it is nonabiding nirvāṇa.

Unchanging while following conditions is function arising from essence. Following conditions while unchanging is gathering function back into essence. Essence and function are both suchness; without abiding or staining, without shifting or difference, this is truly ending birth and death.

The twentieth line concludes: "The essential secret of becoming a Buddha is simply this." The thirty-eight lines above have revealed in full the whole mystery and key of becoming a Buddha. Perhaps someone will say, "These words are ordinary and commonplace; there is nothing strange or mysterious in them. Can becoming a Buddha really be such an inconspicuous affair? Is it not said that becoming a Buddha means Dharma power without boundary and vast spiritual powers? Here no spiritual powers or mysteries have been discussed!" They do not know that Buddhadharma is originally nothing extraordinary, nor is it something to be understood through conceptual reasoning. Above all, do not stir up trouble. We only need to have a mind that abides nowhere, live each day as conditions unfold, and be a person of the Way with nothing to do. To become a Buddha at fruition endowed with the six superknowledges, one must first, at the causal stage, awaken to the original nature. After clearly seeing the true nature, one must diligently eliminate habits and partially break ignorance, and only then can spiritual powers manifest. It is not that one can immediately become a Buddha at fruition, complete with the three bodies and the six superknowledges fully manifest.

Regarding awakening to the original nature, some people take spiritual powers as the measure. They think that only if spiritual powers have appeared has one apprehended Mind and seen nature; otherwise it is not seeing the nature. These are the bad habits of ordinary beings clinging to existence and attaching to the wondrous and strange. People who cling to such bad habits not only mislead themselves, they also mislead others. What is called the true nature is nowhere else; it shines through one's own six faculties. As the Chan school says, "The child in the eye is the person before the eyes; the golden crow beneath the sea is the sun in the sky." Not recognizing it oneself, not knowing to nurture it and let it grow into Buddhahood, and instead criticizing those who recognize it as wrong and telling them not to take it up as their own—is this not pitiable and laughable?

If we speak in terms of spiritual powers, every raising of the hand, every stepping of the foot, every word, laugh, spit, or cough is spiritual power and wondrous function. Layman Pang

said, “Spiritual powers and wondrous functions: carrying water and hauling firewood.” Of all these movements, speech, coughing, spitting, and activities, which is not the true mind giving rise to wondrous function? Can a dead person's hands, feet, mouth, and tongue speak, laugh, and act? One spends the whole day within numinous functioning without recognizing it, and instead seeks spiritual powers elsewhere. Is this not what the Chan school calls “sitting beside the rice bucket while countless people starve to death”? Moreover, clinging to spiritual powers is having a dharma to obtain, which is dharma-clinging. In the future, not only will one be unable to become a Buddha; one may well become a demon. You should know that what are called spiritual powers are this: the wondrous functioning of the true mind is the “spiritual,” and being without abiding, attachment, or obstruction is the “penetrating.” They must not be understood in terms of the strange, marvelous, or mysterious.

As soon as one thinks in terms of wonders and mysteries, poison enters the mind, obstructs the gate of awakening, and one has no chance of accomplishing the Way. Among today's practitioners, out of a hundred practitioners, all hundred are deluded by and attached to the strange and mysterious. They are all busy playing tricks and manipulating small spiritual powers, then feeling smug and pleased, thinking these are signs of accomplishing the Way. They do not know that this is dabbling with spirits. This is precisely the consciousness-spirit functioning, as Xuansha rebuked: “Students of the Way fail to recognize the true because they have always mistaken the consciousness-spirit for it.” How could they ever have dreamt of Buddhadharma? These ignorant people waste their whole life's energy on meaningless branches and twigs and do not attend to proper practice. When the thirtieth day of the twelfth month arrives, their so-called spiritual powers are nowhere to be found, and in this muddled and hazy way they report to Old Yama. Moreover, because while alive they showed off wonders and claimed abilities, clung to marks, and created karma, they must still undergo grievous retribution.

These fools do not get onto the right track, do not practice the fundamental great Dharma, and still use spiritual powers to test and measure others. How could they know that studying Buddhism is a matter of practicing and awakening for oneself? Whether others awaken or not, what business is it of yours? If they awaken, you cannot thereby accomplish the Way. If they do not awaken, it does not harm you. Why do you need to test them? Moreover, if you want to measure others, you must first have a view beyond ordinary people. If you use spiritual powers to measure people, you have already fallen below them. The root of awakening to the Way is not being deluded by objects, not whether spiritual powers arise. If you become deluded by objects, then no matter what great spiritual powers you may manifest, you will have no true benefit and cannot end birth and death.

People who have not clarified the root cannot remain unstained when meeting affairs. Even if they practice methods and gain powers, or rely on others—gods, ghosts, or spirit-beings—to gain powers, because they cling to objects and abide in marks, afflictions remain as before and they cannot be free. In contrast, people who are not deluded by objects have a mind empty as

if washed clean, without the slightest attachment. Even if for the moment they have no powers, before long all five superknowledges will naturally arise together, because not being deluded by objects is itself the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. When the root is firmly established, one need not worry that the branches will fail to flourish. Therefore we must constantly test and examine ourselves: when facing objects, is the mind unmoved? If for the time being it is not yet stable and still shakes, then moving from much movement to little movement, and from little movement to no movement, is rising higher and higher and is the sign of accomplishing the Way. We must not focus on spiritual powers, mistakenly thinking that the manifestation of spiritual powers is awakening to the Way. Still less should we test others against our own inner experience, lest delusive thoughts multiply and we lose our own resolve for the Way. At the same time, if spiritual powers arise, do not use them. Because there is no abiding and no attainment, they must not be displayed to others.

Finally, there is another important matter students must know. Some young people think that only when body and mind are at leisure and the environment is quiet can they practice the Way. Because of this, they often fail to seize the opportunity and practice diligently, and instead sit waiting for a good time and fine circumstances to arrive. But ordinary beings have heavy obstructions and many affairs. As the saying goes, “Before one matter is settled, another arrives.” When will there ever be a time of complete leisure, with nothing demanding attention? As for place, there is even less need to spend thought choosing one. The important thing in studying Buddhism is to work with the mind; it does not value dead sitting in forests and mountains. Much has been said above: when facing objects, the mind must neither cling to nor be stained by them—this is true practice. If you want not to be stained by objects but do not train the mind amid sense objects and sit dead in the mountains and forests, how could you train an unmoving mind? Therefore you need only recognize that all forms, sounds, and other sense objects are images displayed by one's own true mind, like reflections appearing through a mirror's luminous clarity, with nothing that can be grasped. At the same time, true mind cannot be obtained apart from sense objects, just as the reflections are none other than the mirror's luminous clarity and that luminous clarity is not apart from the reflections; therefore there is nothing to reject either. Constantly observing and training in this way, with mind empty and intention at ease, naturally free, without seeking and without attainment—this is the natural Buddha. Why wait for some fine place and auspicious time to arrive? I earnestly advise all of you: while you are young and able, seize the opportunity and strive diligently. Do not idly waste time and miss the chance. Do not wait until the young head has turned white and there is only empty sorrow. Take care!

4K. 法身、报身、化身 / Dharmakāya, Saṃbhogakāya, and Nirmāṇakāya

Spoken in Hangzhou on November 12, 1990. What are the dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya? Patriarch Linji said, “One thought of pure mind-light is the Dharmakāya Buddha. One thought of non-discriminating mind-light is the Saṃbhogakāya Buddha. One

thought of non-differentiating mind-light is the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha. The three bodies—dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya—are all fully present in the original nature; there is no need to seek them outside.”

“One thought of pure mind-light” means that when not a single thought arises, when there is no thought at all and yet there is clear, distinct numinous knowing, not the same as wood or stone, this is pure. If even one thought exists, it is not pure. Likewise, if there is a thought of Buddha, or a mind that is reciting a mantra, that is still not pure. Only when the mind that can recite and the mantra that is recited fall away at the same time, so that subject and object both vanish, is there one thought of pure mind-light. This is the dharmakāya. When in our practice we constantly speak of apprehending Mind and seeing nature, we are speaking of seeing this original nature.

“One thought of non-discriminating mind-light” is the Saṃbhogakāya Buddha. “One thought of non-differentiating mind-light” is the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha. Where, then, is the distinction between non-discriminating mind-light and non-differentiating mind-light? Are “non-discriminating” and “non-differentiating” not the same in meaning? How can non-discriminating mind-light be the saṃbhogakāya, while non-differentiating mind-light is the nirmāṇakāya? It is because the saṃbhogakāya Buddha is a body of light—one expanse of radiance, with no other forms. How could there be differentiated appearances in it? Therefore one thought of non-discriminating mind-light is called the Saṃbhogakāya Buddha.

To actually realize the saṃbhogakāya Buddha at fruition, compassion and wisdom must function together: one must broadly liberate beings and accumulate merit and virtue. After we realize the original nature, the mind of great compassion naturally wells up. We have awakened and know that all phenomena in the world are false, unreal, and illusory, like the reflection of the moon in water: they cannot be obtained. Therefore we do not create karma, and we transcend the wheel of suffering. Yet beings do not know this. In the vast obscurity of karmic consciousness, they continually create karma and undergo its retribution, with no way out of suffering. Great compassion cannot help but arise, and we make great vows to broadly liberate beings.

This great compassion is born from great wisdom. Without wisdom, the mind of great compassion cannot arise; without great wisdom, one also cannot liberate beings. To liberate beings, one must discern their capacities and teach Dharma suited to them. Therefore liberating beings requires both wisdom and compassion together. It is not something that can be accomplished merely by understanding a little theory. When merit and virtue are perfected, the saṃbhogakāya thereby attained is the great radiant saṃbhogakāya endowed with the virtues of fruition.

For example, when Sudhana saw Maitreya Buddha—Maitreya Bodhisattva dwelling in the inner court of Tuṣita, the place to which we aspire to go—Maitreya told Sudhana: “You have obtained fundamental wisdom,” which means the original nature that has been realized, “but

you have not yet obtained differentiating wisdom.” Differentiating wisdom is subsequently attained wisdom: the great wisdom obtained in the process of liberating beings, when the dust-and-sand delusions and subtle ignorance are completely exhausted. One can then teach beings the Buddhadharma suited to their different capacities and habitual tendencies, liberating them from the sea of suffering. Maitreya continued: “You do not yet have this differentiating wisdom. You must still be tempered in the world and broadly liberate beings; only then can differentiating wisdom be perfected. When the merit and virtue of liberating beings is complete, you will attain a saṃbhogakāya like mine. I, Maitreya Buddha, attained this purple-gold body precisely through broadly liberating beings; it came forth all at once!”

Whoever realizes the saṃbhogakāya realizes a body of light, so it is undifferentiated. The nirmāṇakāya is different: the nirmāṇakāya has form, and where there is form there is differentiation. Men and women, old and young, grasses, trees, fish and insects, sun, moon, heaven and earth—all have differences. Since there are differences, why does Linji say that one thought of non-differentiating mind-light is the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha? Because although appearances differ, the dharmakāya—the fundamental essence from which all appearances arise—is without differentiation. All beings are Buddhas, because all have Buddha-nature. All the scenes of the world are formed and manifested by our Buddha-nature. Whatever the circumstances, good or bad, since they are formed and manifested by Buddha-nature, all are equal and nondual. Therefore our world of the five turbidities and the Western Pure Land are equal, without difference.

Everything that exists in the world is a transformation of our one thought of non-differentiating mind-light; therefore all things are the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha. Difference exists at the level of appearances, but the essential nature from which those appearances arise is equal. Thus one thought of non-differentiating mind-light is the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha. Once this principle is understood, we will no longer doubt how the apparently similar meanings of non-discriminating mind-light and non-differentiating mind-light can refer respectively to the saṃbhogakāya and the nirmāṇakāya.

When we recognize one thought of pure mind-light and have no doubt at all, we see the nature right then and there. There is no need to search anywhere else; it is shining right before your own face. One thought of pure mind-light is the falling away of sense faculties and sense objects. It is when, in practice, the mind that can recite and the mantra being held suddenly fall away together, and body, mind, and world all melt away. Yet within this cessation, it is not annihilation: clear, distinct numinous knowing appears. This numinous knowing is our original nature; it is also dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya.

To truly attain the capacity to manifest hundreds of thousands of billions of nirmāṇakāyas, manifest bodies throughout the worlds of the ten directions, and broadly liberate hundreds of thousands of billions of beings—displaying transformations like those in the Investiture of the Gods—one must realize the great wisdom of complete awakening. That is to say, even the most subtle delusive thoughts must be completely exhausted. Our delusive mind and delusive

thoughts divide into coarse delusion, fine delusion, subtle delusion, and extremely subtle delusion. The extremely subtle is called the subtle stream. It is like a very fine current of water: you see it as if it were not moving, but in fact it is moving. Its underlying movement is so rapid and intense that it appears motionless. When even this is cut off and no longer moves, one can manifest hundreds of thousands of billions of *nirmāṇakāyas*, liberate hundreds of thousands of billions of beings, and exercise great wondrous functioning.

In practice, first we cut off the view of a personal self; next we cut off the view of a self in dharmas. The view of a personal self is the distinction between others and oneself. The view of a self in dharmas means that there is still some “dharma” there. What is this self in dharmas? Arhats, for example, know that the fleshly body—the physical body—is unobtainable, that the world is illusory, and that to leave suffering and gain happiness one should depart from this world. But within this they give rise to another self in dharmas. They think there is Dharma to practice, birth and death to end, and *nirvāṇa* to realize. At the same time, they take the four great generative constituents within Buddha-nature—earth, water, fire, and wind—as self.

Our Buddha-nature originally includes seven great generative constituents: earth, water, fire, wind, space, faculty, and consciousness. Among these seven constituents, earth, water, fire, and wind are the most important. The world is composed of earth, water, fire, and wind; our bodies too are composed of earth, water, fire, and wind. Having awakened in their practice of the Way, they no longer cling to the physical body. Instead, they cling to the constituent elements within Buddha-nature—earth, water, fire, and wind—as self, taking these to be real and the fleshly body to be false. They fail to realize that earth, water, fire, and wind—the four great generative constituents within Buddha-nature—are only some of Buddha-nature’s constituent elements.

They are not the whole, just as our eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are not the entire human body. Now, by mistakenly thinking that one possesses some existent thing, one falls into dharma-clinging and does not reach the ultimate. Here, “generative constituent” means a seedlike factor capable of giving rise. Just as rice seed planted in the ground can give rise to rice, and wheat seed can give rise to wheat, this body of ours arises from the four great generative constituents, and everything in the world is inseparable from them.

Arhats and *pratyekabuddhas*, having been refined by the *Buddhadharma*, know that the forms arising from the four great elements are false and cannot be grasped. But they then mistakenly take the four great generative constituents to be a real self. They do not know that once there is abiding and grasping, it is not real; how much more so when these four are only some of Buddha-nature’s constituents, not the whole. Therefore they have not truly seen the nature, and the Buddha rebuked them as scorched sprouts and ruined seeds.

In our practice we must neither falsely cling to the four great elements as self, nor abide in Buddha-nature. As soon as there is any abiding, one has fallen into a nest. Therefore one who

truly becomes Buddha does not even have the shadow of a Buddha. If you say, “I have become Buddha,” then you have not become Buddha; you have become a demon. This is because you still have a foothold, something lodged in your chest that has not yet been cleared away.

Our dharmakāya is like empty space: not a thread is hung on it, not a speck of dust stains it. It has neither temporal nor spatial characteristics. Therefore, when we practice, we must cut off everything; there absolutely must not be the slightest abiding. Yet to truly eliminate the personal self, one must reach the seventh bodhisattva ground. “Only before the Immovable Ground is the storehouse designation relinquished”—the Immovable Ground is the eighth ground. “After the vajra path, the maturation designation falls away”—the vajra path is the tenth bodhisattva ground. Only after the tenth ground can clinging to a self in dharmas be removed. Otherwise one still abides in that clinging.

Thus it is often said, “One who dwells at the top of a hundred-foot pole, though having gained entry, is still not real.” Sitting at the top of a pole, one still has a foothold. Therefore one must “take one more step from the top of the hundred-foot pole, and the whole body appears throughout the worlds of the ten directions.” The worlds of the ten directions are all your body; when even the foothold is removed, clinging to a self in dharmas falls away. At that point you have the great wisdom of complete awakening and can manifest as hundreds of thousands of billions of nirmāṇakāyas.

This is how we practice. You always ask, “How far are we still from home?” If you look ahead, the road seems extremely long. You think, “Oh no! It is terrible—we are still very, very far away!” Then it is hard not to lose confidence. If you look back and compare with the past, seeing that you have made progress, the mind becomes much more settled. Therefore the Buddha is very compassionate. He says, “You beings lack boldness; your courage is small. I will manifest a conjured city for you to stay in and rest. Before reaching Buddhahood, first go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss to settle your body and rest your feet; or go to Tuṣita Heaven; that is fine too.” But great-minded bodhisattvas say, “I will not go anywhere! If the hells are not empty, I vow not to assume the position of a Buddha. I will liberate all beings in the hells.”

The hells are not frightening. When you realize, you will not fear them. As said above, in one thought of non-differentiating mind-light, hell and heaven are the same. What difference is there between beautiful and ugly, pleasure and suffering?

(Teacher Shen interjected: When the Master teaches Dharma, do you think only we humans are listening? Heavenly beings are listening too.)

At that time our teacher was teaching Dharma in Beijing. There were two disciples who were not human. One was a fox and one was a python. The fox came first and later introduced the python. When they came, they manifested human form. They said, “We do good deeds: we gather medicine for people and cure illnesses, and we never do evil. We want to study the Buddhadharma and practice so as to attain true fruition.” They told the Dharma brothers,

“You have obtained human bodies but do not practice well. What a pity! In order for us to obtain human bodies, we must practice for a very long time before we can manifest human bodies and practice Buddhadharma.”

One day, while the teacher was teaching Dharma, he asked them to sit up front, where there were still two seats. They said, “We cannot come! There are celestial foxes in front!” The fox disciple was an earth fox. Later, when our teacher returned to the south, they saw him off as far as the bank of the Yellow River and said, “We cannot cross the Yellow River. We can only escort you this far and no farther. Please, Master, take care.” When you hear this, it may seem mysterious and fantastical, like listening to the Arabian Nights, yet it is indeed a fact. Because all beings have Buddha-nature, they too can accomplish the Way. You must not doubt that something does not exist just because you have not seen it.

For example, because people who do not practice have not seen our dharmakāya, they keep saying it does not exist. But it truly exists. After everyone practices in accord with the Dharma and personally realizes it, they will believe without doubt. The dharmakāya—Buddha-nature—is indeed true emptiness, marvelous presence. It is a great treasury endowed with all capacities. Moreover, all beings possess it. It truly exists; it is not vague nothingness.

When we speak of “true emptiness, marvelous presence,” this applies not only to Buddha-nature; everything is like this. For example, take a cup. Its essential nature is empty because the cup has no intrinsic essence; it does not exist in and of itself. A glass cup is made of glass; glass likewise has no intrinsic essence, for it is developed from mineral deposits. Mineral deposits, in turn, are formed through geological changes over countless ages, together with changes in temperature, pressure, and so on. Therefore none of these has an intrinsic essence of its own. Since Buddha-nature has no characteristics that can be seen, it is called true emptiness. Yet although things lack intrinsic essence, their provisional appearances are not absent: they can fully perform their functions. Since the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature is boundless, it is called marvelous presence.

As said above, all things are transformed and made by Buddha-nature. Since Buddha-nature is “true emptiness, marvelous presence,” all things are of course also “true emptiness, marvelous presence.” Someone may ask: “Why do people, who are composed of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—have feelings, while things compounded from the four great elements have no feelings?” The answer is: if breathing stops, does this physical body still have feeling? From this we can see that feeling is not in the physical body; it is in the numinous nature.

The reason people distinguish between human bodies and other objects is that the minds of ordinary beings are limited in scope. They grasp only a small portion of the four great elements, burrow into a shell of flesh, and take it to be “me.” They cannot pervade all things broadly, and so they create the distinction between sentient and insentient. In fact, when a

person's breath stops, is that physical body not just like wood or stone? Where is there any knowing or feeling? Is it not also an insentient thing?

When in practice we reach the point where body, mind, and world have dissolved into emptiness and we realize the vast, boundless true nature pervading all space and the Dharma realm, then we can pervade all things, with no distinction between sentient and insentient. The case of “Shenggong teaching Dharma and stubborn stones nodding their heads” is clear proof. Therefore the sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, forests, and the myriad phenomena—all are our *nirmāṇakāya*.

I urge all of you to practice diligently. Do not become heedless, give yourselves over to play, or cling to music, sensual pleasures, goods, and profit, neglecting this great treasury. To let yourselves down in this way, to come into the world in vain like entering a treasure mountain and returning empty-handed, is such a pity, simply not worth it, and a needless waste. May everyone take care.

4L. 桥流水不流 / The Bridge Flows, the Water Does Not Flow

Spoken in Hangzhou on November 14, 1990. “Empty-handed, I grasp the hoe; walking on foot, I ride the water buffalo. A person passes over the bridge; the bridge flows, the water does not flow.” This verse by Mahāsattva Fu seems rather mysterious at first and leaves people unable to make sense of it. “A person passes over the bridge” is easy to understand: we go across the bridge. But how could “the bridge flow and the water not flow”? How can one “empty-handed” still “grasp the hoe”? How can one “walk on foot” yet “ride the water buffalo”? What is the principle here?

Actually, it is saying that this physical body is like the house in which we live, while Buddha-nature is what the verse calls the true person dwelling inside. Beings are deluded by visible forms and mistakenly take the physical body to be “I.” They do not know what Buddha-nature is, and so they create karma, undergo its retribution, and fail to end birth and death. This verse reminds us to recognize the master and not mistake false appearances for reality.

Last time I cited Master Linji's words: “Look at the puppets performing on the stage; all their movements depend entirely on the puppeteer inside the booth.” This means that this body itself cannot move, cannot speak, and cannot listen. Our ability to move, work, walk, speak, listen, and so on is all the functioning of this master. Mahāsattva Fu's verse is praising this very master.

“Empty-handed, I grasp the hoe.” I have not taken hold of anything; the hand that takes hold of things—that is, the body—is like your hoe. It is the master who directs your movements. “Walking on foot, I ride the water buffalo.” Your ability to walk and run is also the marvelous function by which the master drives the body, just like someone riding on a water buffalo and urging it onward. “A person passes over the bridge.” The physical body is compared to a

bridge. The person is the master. We stay in this world only for a time and then depart, then pass away, just like walking across a bridge.

Therefore, on the basis of the impermanence of human life, the ancients said: “Heaven and earth are the inn of the myriad things; time is the passing guest of a hundred generations.” This society, this world, is an inn: we stay here temporarily and then have to leave. Why must everyone fight here to be king and hegemon, struggle without cease, and keep killing without end?

“A person passes over the bridge; the bridge flows, the water does not flow.” The person passes over the bridge. This physical body of ours is not long-lasting; it changes. A person grows from youth into strength, from strength into old age. Is this “bridge” not flowing on and changing? “The water does not flow”: water represents our Buddha-nature. It does not flow. It is ever-abiding through past and present, not coming and not going, unmoving and unshaken. This verse about the master is good: it asks us to apprehend Mind and see nature. Yet to open up and see what is original is only to reach the threshold of the dharmakāya. It is like returning home but only arriving outside the house; not only have you not entered the room, you have not even stepped into the hall. There is still a vast distance. In practice, you must never become lax.

If you practice today and stop tomorrow, how could that possibly work? You should understand the expression *dazuo* 打坐, “sitting meditation”: *da* 打 means to strike dead deluded thoughts, while *zuo* 坐 means to sit and see the original nature. If at every moment you can sit and see the original nature, that is true sitting meditation. It is not sitting there while false thoughts churn, putting on an act and calling it meditation. Therefore in our practice we must work with the mind and not relax for even a moment. The first sentence of the Heart Sutra is “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.” Here the phrase is not being used as a general designation for some particular bodhisattva; rather, it instructs us how to practice: *guān zìzài*—continually illuminate our own nature and do not stray from the original position. If you cannot remain steady during formal sitting, and after formal sitting you do not gather the mind and maintain clear observation, but let deluded thoughts roam, then you are wandering. You will miss this lifetime.

Merely reaching the threshold of the dharmakāya does not count. At this stage one cannot save oneself; one must continue to work, enter the proper position of the dharmakāya, and further go beyond the dharmakāya. Only then can the fruition of Buddhahood be perfectly realized. What is “going beyond the dharmakāya”? A monk asked Chan Master Changsha Jingcen: “Master, please instruct me. What is going beyond the dharmakāya?” He said, “One needle, three feet of thread.” This means everything is ordinary: functioning according to conditions without clinging to mystery. The monk did not understand and asked the master to instruct him again. The master said, “Cloth from Yizhou, silk from Yangzhou.” Yizhou cloth and Yangzhou silk were both famous. This teaches us that after awakening to the Way, in everyday activities we must be free and at ease amid both favorable and unfavorable conditions.

It is not that when things go well you are pleased and laugh happily, while when things go against you, you become vexed and angry. You must be able to be at ease whether conditions are favorable or adverse—relaxed, free, unburdened by things, letting all things exhaust themselves naturally. Only then are you an idle person of the Way who has ended learning and is established in the unconditioned. At this point, even sitting is unnecessary; one rests at peace, with nothing further to do. Confucius said, “At seventy, I followed what my heart desired without transgressing the bounds.” This means that whatever he wished to do, he could do, and he still would not go beyond the rules. Because his mind was empty, he no longer clung to marks and would no longer do immoral things.

Someone asked me: “If I sit until my mind is empty, can I go kill people and set fires?” This kind of question is truly childish and laughable. If you kill people and set fires, is your mind still empty? Why would you kill people and set fires? Is it not for the sake of clinging to marks—to rob goods and seize wealth? This is precisely attachment to existence; how can you still speak of an empty mind? If your mind is truly empty, compassion and wisdom will function together. You will pity beings because they do not understand true reality and instead remain caught in delusive attachment, creating karma day after day and needlessly suffering in the cycle of birth and death. You will think of every way to rescue them. How could you still do things that offend Heaven and violate principle?

Going beyond the dharmakāya means going beyond the standpoint of principle and functioning seamlessly amid affairs, without obstruction. It is not sitting dead and motionless all day long. Dead sitting can never accomplish the Way. To exhaust the clinging habits accumulated through many lives and kalpas, one must train in circumstances. One must meet many setbacks and take many knocks amid circumstances before the habits can be worn away. If you do not train in circumstances but remain dead in samādhi, the seeds of deluded habit lie hidden inside. Once they are stirred, the habits are even stronger and cannot be suppressed. Therefore to exhaust deluded habits, one must train amid situations and pull them out by the root. It is not enough to enter the attainment of cessation and suppress the seeds of delusion there.

Our ignorance is divided into four levels: coarse delusion, subtle delusion, very subtle delusion, and extremely subtle delusion. These four levels of delusion, especially the latter two, must be worn away through training amid circumstances and engagement with beings before they can be eliminated. Beings’ habits and tendencies are all different. If you want to liberate them, you must set yourself aside and follow others; to follow others, you must first exhaust your own habits before you can go along with them. Therefore bodhisattvas have the four means of gathering beings. This is the means of gathering through shared activity: by working alongside others, you can draw them in. Every being has a different temperament. If you can adapt to them all and respond according to their capacities, your own subjective subtle habits can be exhausted, and the scope of your mind expands.

This ignorance is extremely subtle, as numerous as sand and dust; in the teachings it is called the dust-and-sand delusions. These delusive thoughts must be ended through liberating beings. Therefore when you liberate beings, you must never take credit for yourself. You should instead thank beings, because your accomplishment of the Way depends on beings helping you accomplish it. Without beings, your habits could not be changed, and merit and virtue would have no way to accumulate. At the beginning, practice still involves conditioned activity and attachment. But as one proceeds step by step and practice matures, one goes from protecting to letting function, from letting function to transformation, and then enters the unconditioned. Without even abiding in the unconditioned, one goes further until all is merged and forgotten, and only then can bodhi be perfectly realized.

Practice does not fall from the sky. There is no naturally born Śākyamuni. All Buddhas attain Buddhahood through practice and training. Every one of us has Buddha-nature, the same as all Buddhas. As long as we practice diligently and remove deluded habits, all can succeed. Someone asks: “If through practice we now eliminate ignorance and become Buddhas, will ignorance enter again in the future, turning Buddhas back into beings?” The answer is no. Since beginningless time, when we have had this Buddha-nature, ignorance has also been present; there has never before been awakening. It is like gold in the mine, mixed with sand. Through smelting, ignorance is removed. Once it becomes pure gold outside the mine and its impurities are cleared away, it does not go back into the mine again. Once practice succeeds, ignorance will not arise again.

“The human body is hard to obtain; now we have obtained it.” Although there are billions of people in the world, those who obtain a human body are only like the dirt under a fingernail. Compared with the soil of the whole earth, those who do not obtain human bodies are far, far more numerous. Bacteria, fish, insects, mosquitoes, flies, and the like are beyond counting. They are pitiable because they cannot obtain human bodies. Since we have now obtained a human body, we should cherish it. We should not take it for granted, mistreat it, or waste it. We should hold it in due esteem and use it to do things that benefit beings, so that coming into this world as a human being is not in vain.

“The Buddhadharma is hard to hear; now we have heard it.” How many people can hear the Buddhadharma? Even fewer. What some people hear as “Buddhadharma” is only burning incense and bowing to Buddhas, praying for Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless them with long life, fortune, filial children, a good spouse, business prosperity, and so on—a “Buddhadharma” in which everyone seeks something. This is not the true Buddhadharma. The Buddhadharma teaches us how to be human, how to remove deluded attachment, how to understand the origin of human life and the universe, how to end birth and death, and how to teach and transform beings so that together they can transcend the suffering of the six realms of rebirth and share the innate joy of the original nature.

Yet our Buddhas and bodhisattvas are moved by great compassion. In order to broadly liberate beings, they first lead beings through the door. They first satisfy beings’ desires: if

you want cattle, they give you cattle; if you want wealth or office, they let you obtain wealth or office. Whatever you want, they give you that. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Medicine Buddha are the most typical examples. When you obtain these things, a seed is planted in your mind. All of this has been bestowed by Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Once the Buddha-seed is planted, future Buddhahood is certain. This is called “first drawing them in through their desires.” After you study the sūtras and treatises and clarify the principle, you then know that all these things are false and unreal, like the moon’s reflection in water—unobtainable. Then you put everything down, and great Buddha-wisdom awakens. Through further diligent practice, you exhaust the deluded habits and realize the great Way; then you can benefit others and liberate beings. This is “afterward leading them into Buddha-wisdom.” To liberate beings, the Buddha uses every possible method. How compassionate he is!

Our Heart-Center Dharma also exists for awakening wisdom and becoming a Buddha. The six mudrās have different functions. The second mudrā can clear karmic obstructions, heal illnesses, and also open the heavenly eye. When the heavenly eye opens, one can see Buddhas, bodhisattvas, hells, the ghost realm, and worlds of the ten directions. But you must not be afraid. All appearances are yourself. If you are afraid, then do not use it. In the past there was a person who wanted to open the heavenly eye. He practiced the second mudrā for a year, and suddenly he saw a Vajra demon-subduing deity, whose appearance was terrifying. He was terrified out of his wits; he developed mental illness and later died. Therefore if the mind is not empty, do not open the heavenly eye, lest disaster befall you and you lose your life.

There was a person in Shanghai who practiced another esoteric method. In sitting meditation he saw Buddhas and bodhisattvas and felt delighted. Suddenly he remembered that some demons can also transform into the forms of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to delude people, so he went to ask his teacher how to distinguish Buddhas from demons. His teacher told him, “To test whether it is true or false, just recite ‘om ah hum’ to examine it. A true Buddha will not flee; a false one will not be able to stand steadily.” He followed his teacher’s words. When a Buddha appeared again, he recited “om ah hum” to test him and saw that the Buddha did not move. He was happy, thought this was a real Buddha, and every day during meditation saw Buddhas and bodhisattvas, feeling very pleased. He did not know that once one abides in marks, demons take advantage of the opening. One day, as he sat, a very frightening image suddenly appeared and stretched out sharp steel claws to grab him. He was terrified and developed mental disorder; from then on he went mad and lost awareness. This was his teacher’s fault.

When any appearance is seen, one should simply not bother with it and not pay attention to it. One should neither delight in good appearances nor fear bad ones. If the mind does not move, nothing happens. One of our Dharma brothers, while meditating, saw a huge hairy hand the size of a fan covering his face. He was terrified and hurried to recite mantras—this mantra and that mantra, every mantra he knew—but the huge hairy hand did not go away. Then he changed his thought: “If it will not go away, so be it. After all, the physical body is false; the

dharmakāya is indestructible. Let it do as it likes.” In this way his mind was empty and unmoving, and the huge hairy hand disappeared. Therefore when appearances are seen, the mind must not move. Do not be afraid, and do not rejoice. In sitting, all kinds of phenomena may appear. Never move; never be afraid.

To give another example: there was a man in Beijing whose home had more than ten rooms. One room was used especially for storing trunks. One day he was meditating in his own room. When he came out of samādhi, he suddenly discovered that he was in the trunk room. Because the outside was locked, he could not get out, so he called from inside. His family came and opened the door, asking how he had gotten there. He himself did not know. What had happened? Previously he had once had the thought that this clothes-storage room was quiet and good for sitting. During meditation he entered samādhi; the mind-seal and the mental factor of wisdom came into accord, and at once he went there. Because when he entered samādhi his mind was empty, the bodily form disappeared. Therefore he could pass through walls and barriers. This is the principle by which we can obtain spiritual powers. When the mind is truly empty, spiritual powers naturally manifest.

When Kumārajīva was young, he went with his mother to burn incense at a temple. He lifted a large incense burner all at once. Afterward he thought, “How can I, at such a young age, lift something so heavy?” The mind moved. When he tried to lift it again, he could not. Once the mind arises, there is obstruction, and he could not lift it. Likewise, Li Guang was hunting and saw a large stone in the grass, thinking it was a tiger. With a “pa!” he shot an arrow into it. When he came closer and saw it was not a tiger but a large stone, he wondered how the arrow could have entered a stone. When he shot again, it would not go in. The power of our minds is this great. As said earlier, when Shengong taught Dharma, stubborn stones nodded their heads. This was because his mind was vast in scope. The ordinary person’s mind is too narrow: it can pervade only one’s own physical body and cannot move anything else. Therefore, if we want to go beyond the dharmakāya, we must train and expand the narrow “vermillion point”; only then can great function arise. If one sits behind a black mountain, one lifetime, two lifetimes, even three lifetimes will not bring success.

Śākyamuni Buddha said that in the final period of the Dharma-ending age, the Buddhadharma will be in the hands of lay practitioners, not in the hands of monks and nuns. Precepts, samādhi, and wisdom differ between the Great Vehicle and the Small Vehicle. For example, with the precept on alcohol, alcohol can make one lose self-control. In the Small Vehicle, one may not drink it oneself, but one may sell it to others to drink. In the Great Vehicle, one may drink it oneself, but one may not sell it to others. Why? Because if one drinks it oneself, one has assurance and will not drink to excess. In the Small Vehicle, “I do not drink, so I will not get into trouble”; whether others get into trouble is not my concern.

There are two kinds of saṅgha. One kind is the arhat saṅgha of the Small Vehicle: they study the Small Vehicle’s three trainings of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, shave their heads, and wear monastic robes. The second kind is the bodhisattva saṅgha of the Great Vehicle: they

study the Great Vehicle's three trainings of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, do not shave their heads, do not wear monastic robes, and wear lay clothing. If we follow the Buddha's teaching, uphold precepts and practice, have no family household, realize the original nature, and can teach the Dharma to others, then this is saṅgha; this is leaving home. We should practice well and not belittle ourselves, saying, "Ah, I am just an ordinary being." No. We are all Buddhas; we are all bodhisattvas. Between us and the Buddha there is only one small difference: when we form our resolve, we do not dare to affirm, "We ourselves are Buddhas," and take this up as our own.

Buddhism has five vehicles. All beings are Buddhas. All possess the same undefiled wisdom as the Buddha; their function is no different from the Buddha's, and all can become Buddhas. To form such an aspiration is the Buddha Vehicle. To look down on oneself and say, "I am an ordinary being; at most, in the next life I will become a good person or ascend to heaven to enjoy some fortune," is the lowest human-and-deva vehicle. Christianity is the human-and-deva vehicle, because it relies on God. After death one ascends to heaven, but at best that is only the Great Brahmā Heaven. Great Brahmā Heaven is still in the form realm and does not transcend rebirth. From this we can know that the differences among the human-and-deva vehicle, arhat vehicle, pratyekabuddha vehicle, bodhisattva vehicle, and Buddha Vehicle are all determined by the scope of our own aspiration. They are not arranged by any Buddha, bodhisattva, or anyone else.

Chan Master Guifeng said: "Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water; rely on the sun's warmth to melt it. Realize that the ordinary being is precisely Buddha, and draw on the Dharma's power for sustained cultivation. When the ice melts, water flows and moistens, only then showing its function of irrigation and cleansing. When delusion is exhausted, the mind becomes numinous and unobstructed; only then does the functioning of powers and light manifest." This tells us that ordinary beings are Buddhas, but they must draw on Buddhadharma and continue this sustained cultivation, just as ice is water but must borrow sunlight to melt. When ice melts into water, it can flow, irrigate, and cleanse. When through effort and Dharma practice we exhaust deluded habits, we too can manifest spiritual powers and give rise to marvelous function.

Everyone can manifest spiritual powers; there is nothing strange about it. Some people are very proud and look down on others. This is wrong. Everyone can express marvelous function. We often say, "Spiritual powers and marvelous function: carrying water and hauling firewood." Who cannot carry water and haul firewood? If this is not spiritual power and marvelous function, then who is the one able to "carry" and able to "haul"? Is this not the numinous functioning of our true nature? As for being unobstructed, it means free passage without obstruction. As soon as false thoughts arise, there are obstructions everywhere. Without false thoughts, one is naturally unobstructed.

False mind, false thought, and false imagining sound like the same thing, but there are important distinctions among them. False mind is our originally true mind mixed with

ignorance. Therefore the eighth consciousness is a composite of the arising-and-ceasing and the non-arising-and-non-ceasing. Because ignorance is present and sticks to external objects, it is like water giving rise to waves and becomes false mind. After false mind contacts conditions, the mind moves and thoughts arise; this is false thought. Once false thought arises, with what is loved one wants to obtain it and possess it; with what is not loved and conflicts with one's mind, one dislikes it and wants to reject it. When the mind sticks to an object and does not let go, it becomes false imagining. Chinese characters are very meaningful: the character xiǎng 想, "imagining," places xiàng 相, "appearance," above xīn 心, "mind"; when an appearance sticks to the mind and will not leave, it becomes imagining. The character nian, "thought," means one person with two minds: when the originally pure and true mind sees an object and moves, a second mind arises; that is thought.

To remove delusion, the mind must not move. When the mind does not abide in marks, false imaginings are gone. But one must not suppress thoughts so they do not arise. Suppression is ineffective. It is like pressing grass down with a stone; when the stone is removed, the grass grows again. Even if you press them dead, you turn yourself into earth, wood, metal, or stone and cannot give rise to marvelous function. How could that be Buddhahood? Therefore one must use a living method of transformation. When a thought comes, notice it and transform it. If the force of false thoughts is strong, practice Buddha-recitation or hold the mantra, shifting the mind onto Buddhadharma, and the false thoughts are transformed. If thoughts arise and you fail to notice them, but follow them, that is wrong. Therefore the ancients said, "Do not fear thoughts arising; only fear noticing them too late." Let thoughts come. When they come, I transform them, not letting them stay and not following them. If you have a hundred thoughts arise, I have a hundred and one transformations. In the end I still win; I exceed you. Quantitative change becomes qualitative change.

You know that in chemistry, to change an acid into an alkali, if there are one hundred milliliters of acid, one uses one hundred and twenty milliliters of alkali to neutralize it. In the end the acid follows the alkali and all becomes alkali. Therefore when false thoughts come, there is no need to fear. What one should fear is failing to notice. When thoughts arise and you follow false thoughts without noticing, they become false imaginings. The seeds of delusion are planted into the eighth consciousness, and the false mind grows thicker: delusion added upon delusion. How could one accomplish the Way? Therefore practice is gradually eliminating deluded habits until they are completely exhausted.

Esoteric Buddhism can realize the Way because it has the excellence of the Buddha's empowering force and does not require twenty or thirty years. Yet nowadays many people practice a true Dharma falsely: while sitting they indulge in false thinking, "Ah, how should I arrange this matter? How should that matter be settled?" Others sit today and stop tomorrow. How could that work? They are not as good as qigong practitioners, who practice false Dharma truly. Qigong cannot end birth and death; it is a false Dharma. Yet they practice very

earnestly, exerting themselves fiercely. “One can sell ten fakes in a day, but in ten days it is hard to sell one truth.” Beings in the Dharma-ending age are truly foolish in the extreme.

After we receive this Heart-Center Dharma through empowerment and transmission, Dharma protectors guard you. If you do not practice, they will weep. You have received this great Dharma but do not cherish it or practice diligently; you betray the deep concern of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. How regrettable—and how ignorant! A disciple in Shanghai made a mistake in forming the mudrā. He heard someone beside him say, “The mudrā is wrong.” He was startled: “Who is speaking to me?” Looking left and right, he saw one person standing on one side with a blue face and one person on the other side with a red face. He was terrified. These were Dharma protectors manifesting to point out his error and encourage him to practice well. Therefore, after receiving the Dharma, rouse yourself and practice diligently. Do not be careless and betray the kindness of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

At Tianmu Mountain in Hangzhou there was Chan Master Gaofeng. When he investigated Chan, he always became sleepy. He thought, “When will I ever accomplish the Way like this? I will go to the Inverted Lotus to investigate!” The Inverted Lotus was a sheer cliff. Standing there, one had to be very careful; one careless moment and one would fall, with danger of shattering one’s body. He thought that practicing Chan there would heighten his alertness so he would not doze. Yet his habit of sleepiness was heavy, and while standing on the cliff he still dozed. Suddenly he fell with a thud. “Oh no! This time my life is over.” But in the end he was safe and sound. Opening his eyes, he saw a golden-armored deity holding a demon-subduing vajra standing before him. “Is this not Skanda Bodhisattva?” he thought. The one who came was indeed Skanda Bodhisattva.

He suddenly gave rise to a thought and said to the bodhisattva, “Skanda Bodhisattva, you have come to protect me in my practice. There probably are not many people who practice as diligently as I do, are there?” Skanda Bodhisattva said, “There are as many as ox-hairs who practice like you. Because you have aroused this arrogant and conceited mind, I will not come to protect you for a hundred kalpas.” Having said this, he disappeared. Hearing this, Gaofeng was overwhelmed with regret and could only sit there crying: “Now it is ruined! Without the bodhisattva’s protection, how can I practice?” After crying awhile, he thought, “When I originally practiced the Way, I did not think of relying on Skanda Bodhisattva to protect me. I had set birth and death aside. I will treat it as though he is not there and stand up there again to practice!”

He practiced and practiced. In a haze he again fell down, thinking this time he was truly finished. Yet again he was safe and sound. Opening his eyes, he again saw Skanda Bodhisattva before him. He scolded the bodhisattva: “Ah! You bodhisattva, you lied. You said you would not protect me for a hundred kalpas. Why have you come again?” Skanda said, “You foolish fellow, you do not understand. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says, ‘One thought suddenly transcends a million kalpas.’ One thought of courageous vigor can exceed a million kalpas. Let alone these hundred kalpas; even a million kalpas have long since passed.” “Oh, I was confused! I bow, I

bow.” Gaofeng, deeply ashamed, confessed his fault and practiced even more vigorously. Later he became a great Yuan-dynasty master of the Linji school.

Chan investigation relies entirely on one’s own power. One must arouse a great doubt-sensation. It is said: great doubt, great awakening; no doubt, no awakening. Without the doubt-sensation, false thoughts cannot be cut off, and there is no way to open up what is original. Modern Chan practitioners cannot arouse the doubt-sensation. They sit there reciting “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” Therefore their inquiry does not take hold, and they cannot awaken. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, seeing this, transmitted the Heart-Center Dharma—a practice that relies on the Buddha’s power—to Master Dayu, to supplement what Chan lacked and continue the Buddha’s wisdom-life. Therefore we must cherish this great Dharma, practice it with reverence and sincerity, and never be careless. It is not easy to receive this Dharma of ours. In Tibet, one can only receive and learn it after twenty or thirty years of practice, because Tibetans need something with form to rely on; without a support, they cannot practice. Japanese Tōmitsu also has this Dharma, but because it is the heart-essence of esoteric Buddhism and the most profound Dharma, it cannot be transmitted lightly. Only someone who has attained the rank of an ācārya may transmit it, and ordinary people cannot learn it. Now that we can receive it, this is truly unsurpassed good fortune. Therefore we must practice with all our strength, quickly open up what is original and see Buddha-nature, then train the mind amid circumstances, diligently remove habits, and progress upward from ground to ground.

By the third ground one can manifest mind-made bodies; above the fifth ground one can manifest three or five nirmāṇakāyas and perform transformations. Above the eighth ground, the first five faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—undergo transformation, and the world also undergoes transformation. The so-called mind-made body that arises in all varieties without deliberate activity includes mountains, waters, houses, flowers, grasses—every kind of thing—and all can be manifested. Though such manifestations occur, they leave no trace. This is the unconditioned. It does not mean that nothing occurs; rather, no deliberate action is involved, and transformations occur naturally.

As said above, Maitreya Buddha told Sudhana: “Because I broadly liberated beings and accumulated merit and virtue, I thereby attained an adorned land of recompense. You must also practice in this way, diligently remove deluded habits, and broadly liberate beings. Only then can you obtain subsequently attained wisdom and perfect the saṃbhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya.” Therefore we must not be satisfied with a small attainment. After realizing the original nature, we must progress upward and upward, attaining the thirteenth ground before fully realizing Buddhahood at fruition.

The length of time needed to realize the fruition of Buddhahood is entirely in one’s own hands; there is no fixed limit. For example, Śākyamuni Buddha saw the infinite luminous saṃbhogakāya of an ancient Buddha and felt great admiration. He thought, “I too must realize this saṃbhogakāya.” So he practiced with desperate intensity, day and night, and as a result

succeeded seven kalpas early. In our practice, we often put off today until tomorrow, tomorrow until the day after tomorrow, and keep postponing until even when Maitreya Buddha descends we will still not have succeeded. If we can devote our whole lives to practice, there is no one who cannot accomplish the Way ahead of time.

In the “Bestowal of Predictions” chapter of the Lotus Sūtra, Śākyamuni Buddha bestowed predictions upon his great disciples, telling each of them when they would become a Buddha and what name they would have. Are the stated times fixed? No. If one truly applies effort and sweeps away all habits, one can become a Buddha earlier. The so-called three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas are the three unknowable periods for realizing the fruition of the Way—the stage of seeing the Way, the stage of practicing the Way, and the stage of realizing the Way. Whether these periods are long or short depends entirely on whether one makes effort. Venerable Ānanda and Śākyamuni Buddha resolved to practice the Way together, yet when the Buddha had already realized the fruition of Buddhahood, Ānanda still had not awakened. This is clear proof.

The mantra “om bala bala...” clears away habits very quickly. Ordinarily, when you are about to become angry, you can recite the mantra aloud and extinguish your anger. In practicing the Way, we must constantly accord with beings. It is not that we make others accord with our own mind. To accord with beings for a moment is still easy; to accord with them constantly over the long term is difficult. Therefore it is said that doing one good deed is easy, but doing it enduringly is difficult. Yet as children of the Buddha, we must train this power of endurance.

Awakening is not something to seek anxiously. Do not become impatient; when the conditions are ripe, it will come naturally. When mantra recitation reaches the point of no-thought, the recitation naturally ceases. When, in one moment, the mind that can recite and the mantra being held suddenly fall away, what is original opens up and one personally realizes the original nature. But as soon as one seeks, it does not come.

The complete and sudden Dharma-gate teaches that principle and phenomena are nondual: principle is phenomena, and phenomena are principle. When one has realized the principle, realization should reach the phenomenal side as well. If one says that one has realized the principle but not the phenomenal side, then one has not awakened to the principle; only when realization reaches the phenomenal side is it genuine awakening. Fundamentally it does not speak of habits: if one still speaks of habits, there has not been thorough awakening. Once awakening is thorough, what habits remain? The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “Awakening to principle is sudden; with that awakening, all delusion is dissolved at once.” That is to say, at thorough awakening all habits are exhausted.

Later people, relying on this principle, said that Chan as a school only extends to the Sixth Patriarch; after that, it no longer counts as the school but only as teaching. Why? Because afterward Chan practitioners all spoke of sudden awakening followed by gradual practice: awakening suddenly to the principle and gradually practicing on the phenomenal side. Once

there is gradual sequence, it is teaching. “Awakening to principle is sudden; with that awakening, all delusion is dissolved at once,” and “in practice, habits are gradually removed and exhausted in sequence.” The teachings distinguish sudden awakening and gradual practice, so the Śūraṅgama Sūtra is speaking of two kinds of Dharma. The first is sudden awakening; the second is gradual practice. To combine them into one Dharma is not correct. Yet now, accommodating beings’ habitual tendencies and capacities, we join sudden awakening and gradual practice together, saying that one first opens up what is original and realizes the essential principle, then trains amid phenomenal circumstances and gradually removes deluded habits. The Dharma originally taught by the Buddha takes on different excellences according to each person’s realization-state.

When the Buddha was in the world, after one teaching the disciples discussed it and began arguing, each saying he was right. They asked the Buddha, and the Buddha said, “What you say is not my meaning, but all of it can be used.” If it suits each person’s capacity and can be used, then that is enough. Sudden awakening and gradual practice suit the capacities of people today, so they may be used and may be considered correct.

Huineng’s and Shenxiu’s two verses are both not good. Shenxiu’s verse speaks of gradual practice, whereas Chan is the complete sudden Dharma of sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization, so the Fifth Patriarch did not give him the robe and bowl. The Sixth Patriarch said, “Originally there is not a single thing.” This falls to one-sided emptiness. Therefore the Fifth Patriarch said, “He still has not seen the nature!” If he had truly seen the nature, why would the Fifth Patriarch still explain the Dharma to him at midnight, and only when the line “Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind” was spoken did the Sixth Patriarch greatly awaken? This verse could be revised: “Bodhi is provisionally made into a tree; the bright mirror is provisionally made into a stand.” Appearances and marvelous functioning—temporarily making them into tree and stand is also no hindrance. “Originally it is unstained; speaking of purity is also dust.” If there is something called purity, that is still dust. The original nature is neither defiled nor pure, empty without a single thing. Since defilement does not exist, from where would purity come? Yet now if we combine these two verses, they are also very useful. Because modern people’s faculties are dull. If they do not “constantly and diligently wipe it clean,” sweeping away deluded habits, how could they accomplish the Way? If they do not understand “originally there is not a single thing,” how could they avoid attachment to existence? Therefore modern people say: combining the Sixth Patriarch with Master Shenxiu, the Sixth Patriarch is one eye of Maheśvara, while Shenxiu has both eyes perfectly bright. This is indeed trustworthy.

4M. 融禅净密于一体的心中心法 / The Heart-Center Dharma Integrating Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Practice into a Single Dharma

Spoken in Hangzhou on February 27, 1994. The Heart-Center Dharma appears to be esoteric Buddhism, yet it is a great Dharma that takes Chan as its essence, esoteric practice as its function, and Pure Land as its destination, integrating these three schools into a single Dharma. Unlike other visualization-based esoteric methods, which must pass from visualization-based practice to practice without visualization before one can personally realize what is originally true, this Dharma directly sees the nature without taking a detour. Moreover, like Chan, it begins its practice at the eighth consciousness; therefore, in essence it is Chan.

Chan practitioners must first understand the teachings, then hold firmly to a single huatou and investigate it with concentrated care. Only then can they find an entry. Otherwise, practicing blindly and haphazardly is like a headless fly battering against a paper window, unable to find a way out. Esoteric Buddhism is no exception. To practice esoteric Dharma, one must first understand the exoteric teachings. Thus esoteric Buddhism speaks of nine vehicles, commonly described as the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles. The outer three vehicles first study the teachings of the Arhat, Pratyekabuddha, Bodhisattva, and Buddha vehicles. The inner three vehicles enter the stage of actual practice; they are divided into Action Tantra (Kriyā), the generation stage, and the completion stage. I will now explain them briefly one by one.

First, Action Tantra (Kriyā). This is an esoteric practice applied in accordance with beings' wishes and requests—for healing illness, averting calamity, and increasing benefit. It is also a skillful means for drawing the public into the Buddhist path—"First draw them in through their desires; afterward lead them into Buddha-wisdom." Most people who study Buddhism and practice today do so in order to heal illness, become wealthy, or obtain spiritual powers. Of those who are truly practicing in order to apprehend Mind, see nature, and end birth and death, not even one in a hundred can be found. This is truly pitiable.

There is of course nothing wrong with healing illness. But wanting to get rich is foolish indeed. This is especially common among people from Hong Kong and Taiwan and among overseas Chinese. When they come to learn Dharma, they all want to learn wealth-deity practices to satisfy their desire for enjoyment. They do not know that forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, dharmas, and all such sense-objects are flowers in the sky and the moon in water: they can be longed for but cannot be grasped. No matter how you exhaust your schemes and spend all your energy, the so-called "pleasant feelings" you obtain are all dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; there is not the slightest bit of real benefit in them. At the time of death, not only can you take none of it with you, but the evil karma you created while alive will follow closely after you and cannot be shaken off, and you will undergo its

painful retribution. A scripture says: “Of the myriad things, none can be taken along; only karma follows the body.” How can we fail to be deeply vigilant about this?

As for spiritual powers, truly there is no one who does not want them. But only after deluded thinking has been fully exhausted and old habits completely removed do spiritual powers unfold naturally from true suchness—one’s self-nature; only these are genuine and irreversible. Powers obtained through practicing a method, or sought through reliance on external things, are not genuine spiritual powers. Not only do they bring no real benefit; they can also lead to great disasters and future evil retribution. Therefore, while deluded thoughts have not ceased and the deluded mind is not yet empty, one must never seek them recklessly, lest one drift in confusion, meet with calamity, and suffer painful retribution in the future.

Second, the generation stage. Here one truly begins to enter the course of actual practice. To end birth and death and leave the sea of suffering, esoteric Buddhism has many methods of practice. Proceeding from shallow to deep, one first practices the generation stage, such as phowa, channels, winds, bindu, and so on. One begins with visualization, bringing forth the functioning of the channels, bindu, and so forth where previously there was none. The so-called bindu is the eighth consciousness; it is moved from the perineum to the Brahma aperture, rising and descending with the breath. Once this is refined to completion, at the time of death one can transfer consciousness and be reborn in the Pure Land. Yet all these accomplishments are still visualization-based practices; they still cannot accomplish the Way. One must further practice the completion stage.

Third, the completion stage. The channels, bindu, and other phenomena established through visualization are dissolved into emptiness and brought into accord with the dharmakāya. This is entry into the completion stage, so as to realize Buddhahood in this very life. The dharmakāya is without characteristics. It establishes not a single dharma; it is utterly bare and unstained, without even a speck of dust. Electricity has no visible form, yet all functions arise from it: without electricity, lamps cannot shine and machines cannot operate. The dharmakāya is the same. Our ability to speak, listen, walk, and move is all its functioning. Apart from it, this body is like a stone slab or a block of wood: not only can it not move, it will rot and stink. Our present practice is precisely to personally realize this dharmakāya without characteristics, so that we do not cling to marks and can end birth and death, leaving saṃsāra.

The completion stage comprises three vehicles—the secret three vehicles. First is Mahāyoga, the yoga of great completion. It completely dissolves the channels and other phenomena produced through visualization into emptiness, so that one comes into accord with the dharmakāya. Here, “accord” means yoga; yoga means “accord.” Second is Anuyoga, the yoga of unsurpassed completion, which uses dhātu-wisdom as the entryway and further dissolves all manifestations into the one true reality. Third is Atiyoga, the yoga of incomparable completion. These three together form the Great Secret Mantra Vehicle. Among the secret three vehicles, Atiyoga is the highest; it is also called the nondual Great Perfection. Its

meaning is that all defiled and pure dharmas are fully present within the original awareness now manifest—stainless, luminous and empty, open and clear.

This is precisely how the Heart-Center Dharma deepens layer by layer: existence is transformed into emptiness; emptiness too is unobtainable; then existence is displayed again from emptiness. Therefore the Heart-Center Dharma we practice is a great Dharma in which no characteristics can be apprehended and in which one directly sees the nature. Those with the karmic connection to receive this Dharma truly have supreme good fortune. If they had not planted vast good roots in previous lives, how could they receive it?

The Heart-Center Dharma is in accord with Chan and is also integrated with Pure Land, since Pure Land is its destination. The Buddha-Heart Sūtra says that the fourth mudrā of the Heart-Center Dharma can bring rebirth in the Western Pure Land. It can also bring rebirth, according to one's vow, in other Pure Lands. Thus this Dharma is marvelous to the utmost. For beings in the Dharma-ending age who wish to leave birth-and-death saṃsāra, apart from this Dharma, I fear there is nothing else to seek.

The reason practicing this Dharma can bring rebirth in the Pure Land is that mind is land and land is mind. The scripture says: "If you wish to purify the land, first purify the mind. As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure." All things grow by relying on the earth; likewise, all worldly and supramundane dharmas are born from mind. The four realms of sages—Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats, and Pratyekabuddhas—and the six realms of ordinary beings—gods, humans, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals—these ten Dharma realms, together with mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and the myriad phenomena, are all created and manifested by our true mind.

When we say that all ten Dharma realms are created by our true mind, everyone can still understand it and accept it rather easily. But when we say that mountains, rivers, the great earth, and the myriad phenomena are also manifested by our dharmakāya, people find it harder to understand. So let me give a simple example that is easier to grasp. Suppose a house is to be built. First an engineer designs the plans, and then workers build according to the plans. Are not both the designing of the plans and the building of the house the wondrous functioning of true mind? Apart from true mind, this body cannot move at all. How could this body think, draw up plans, and build houses? Therefore everything in the world is the work of true mind and a manifestation of original nature. Apart from true mind, there is nothing whatsoever.

The Western Pure Land is no exception. It is the great fruit of merit and virtue called forth by Amitābha Buddha's true nature and pure mind. If we wish to be reborn in the Pure Land, we must first wash our minds clean so that they come into accord with the Pure Land; only then can we be reborn there. Otherwise, if the mind is filthy and defiled, we can only be born in a defiled land and cannot be reborn in the Western Pure Land.

Pure Land practitioners recite the Buddha's name 108,000 times every day in order to use the sacred Name to wash away the accumulated grime and defilement from the mind, preparing for future rebirth in the Pure Land. When we practice the Heart-Center Dharma, forming mudrās and holding the mantra every day, we too are cleansing the mind and reforming ourselves, relying on the empowering support of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to remove the deluded habits of inversion and attachment accumulated through many lives and kalpas, so as to open up what is original and personally realize Buddha-nature.

When what is original opens up, because the mind is pure and unstained, that very moment is the Pure Land. One need not wait until death for rebirth; one has already been born into the Pure Land in this very life. Since while alive one has already come into accord with the Pure Land, after death one can naturally obtain rebirth in the Pure Land according to one's wish. When Pure Land teaching speaks of "the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising," it does not mean that after death one is born in the West, sits inside a lotus womb, practices intensively for many kalpas, waits for the lotus to bloom, meets Amitābha Buddha, and only then awakens to original non-arising and non-ceasing. It means that when our practice reaches the point where deluded thoughts are extinguished, the mind-flower opens and we personally see the true nature that is not two from the Buddha.

Whether we can be reborn in the Pure Land depends entirely on whether our mind is pure; it does not depend on which Dharma we practice. Some people misunderstand the true meaning of Pure Land and think that only those who recite the Buddha's name can be born in the Western Pure Land, while those who do not recite cannot. If that were really so, then the Buddha's heart would be as narrow as that of us attached ordinary beings. Could such a narrow heart and such inferior conduct of discrimination, taking, and rejecting accomplish Buddhahood? Even at the level of ordinary beings, we must cut off discrimination, taking, and rejecting and work broadly for the welfare of the public—how much more so for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have already accomplished the Way! Such wrong views amount to judging a noble person by the petty person's own mentality; they are not worth discussing.

According to the esoteric scriptures, the Buddha arouses great loving-kindness without conditions. No matter what Dharma you practice or what school you study, even if you do not study Buddhism, at the time of death the Buddha treats all alike and universally emits light to welcome and guide beings to rebirth in the Pure Land. It is absolutely not that he only welcomes and guides Buddhists and ignores all others. It is only that people who do not study Buddhism have heavy karmic obstructions, and therefore do not see the Buddha welcoming and guiding them, just as someone born blind does not see the sun. Thus they fail to receive the Buddha's grace. Some people with very heavy karmic obstructions even fear the Buddha's intense light and flee wildly toward dark places, thereby falling instead into hells or the hungry-ghost realm to suffer.

Therefore, if one wishes to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, then besides reciting the Buddha's name, one may equally recite sūtras, hold mantras, perform good deeds, and so

forth. As long as the mind is swept clean and one vows to be reborn there, one will certainly be able to fulfill the vow. Conversely, if the mind is not pure and one clings to the *Sahā* world, then even if one recites the Buddha's name many times, one cannot be reborn there. Because if the mind has attachment, it is like "rowing while the boat remains tied to a mooring post." Even if one uses up all one's strength, the boat cannot move because the mooring rope is tied to a wooden post on the shore. Rebirth is then hopeless.

Thus, as stated above, whether one can be reborn in the Western Pure Land does not depend on what method one uses; it depends on whether the mind is pure and whether one has made the vow. We only need to hold the mantra single-mindedly and vow for rebirth; we will definitely be able to fulfill the vow. There is no need to practice a separate Pure Land Buddha-recitation method in addition to sitting and practicing this Dharma. The Heart-Center Dharma is a great Dharma that integrates Chan, Pure Land, and esoteric practice into a single Dharma. Our late teacher Wang Xianglu said that the Heart-Center Dharma is a wondrous Dharma whose essence is Chan, whose function is esoteric practice, and whose destination is Pure Land. This is indeed an accurate and decisive statement.

Grandmaster Dayu was deeply compassionate. Fearing that we might worry about failing to accomplish this Dharma in this life, he also revealed the Maitreya Mantra for forming a connection with Maitreya Buddha and being reborn in *Tuṣita* Pure Land, thus giving us insurance. For those who do not wish to be born in *Tuṣita* but wish to be reborn in the West, one may also hold the "Broad Rebirth Mantra" and be reborn in the Western Pure Land. This mantra in fact belongs to the Pure Land school itself; in *The Ten Essentials of Pure Land*, there is a special essay explaining its merit and efficacy. Unfortunately, modern Pure Land practitioners no longer know it and have forgotten it. This is truly regrettable.

By practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, we can personally realize the original nature in one lifetime and attain great accomplishment; we also have double insurance for rebirth in the Pure Land at the end of life. What is there to worry about? For us to encounter this great Dharma in the present Dharma-ending age is exceedingly rare. If we still do not practice diligently, we truly are wasting the opportunity, betraying the Buddha's kindness and betraying ourselves.

In learning Buddhism, people have five different kinds of faculties. These differences arise from the varying depth and breadth of good roots planted in past lives; they are not arranged or decided by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, or anyone else.

First is the vehicle of humans and gods. In the world there are many kindhearted people who think that as long as they do good deeds, aid the endangered and relieve the distressed, help others, and do not harm anyone, their life's task is complete. They think there is no need to study Buddhism, let alone practice the Dharma. Such good people are indeed beneficial to society, but through doing good they can only obtain blessed rewards and limited fruition in the human and heavenly realms; they cannot transcend *saṃsāra*.

Second is the Arhat vehicle. These people have more wisdom than the first group. They know that although doing good brings blessings, once the blessings are exhausted they still fall back into saṃsāra and suffer. To truly eliminate the suffering of birth and death, one must leave the six realms of rebirth. Therefore they resolve to study Buddhism and practice the Dharma. Yet they are concerned only with liberating themselves and are unwilling to rescue others. They awaken only to the principle of one-sided emptiness and have not ended dharma-clinging, so the Buddha scolds them as scorched sprouts and ruined seeds.

Third is the Pratyekabuddha vehicle. Like Arhats, they are concerned only with self-liberation, but they are sharper than Arhats. Seeing subtle signs, they know what follows; from causes they infer effects. Therefore the Dharma they practice is the twelve links of dependent origination, unlike Arhats, who practice the Four Noble Truths and investigate causes from effects. In times when no Buddha appears in the world, they see flowers bloom and fall and awaken to suffering, emptiness, and impermanence, thereby realizing the Way. Thus they are slightly superior to Arhats.

Fourth is the Bodhisattva vehicle. Bodhisattvas awaken to the principle that both self and dharmas are empty. They practice the six pāramitās and the four means of gathering beings, awakening themselves and awakening others in order to realize the Way.

Fifth is the Buddha vehicle. One awakens that one's own mind and the Buddha are not two and not different; one's undefiled wisdom has never diminished in the slightest. Only because one has not awakened, and has been deluded by sounds and forms and created karma, has one become a sentient being. If now one awakens, sees that the six sense-objects are like flowers in the sky, with nothing to grasp, and lets everything go, then one can recover the originally existing radiance. It is like a dark room that has stood for a thousand years: one lamp immediately illumines it. It is not necessary first to undergo endless hardship before one can accomplish it. Nor is it some hopelessly unreachable matter from which everyone must shrink. This is the matter of those with great faculties and sharp capacity; it is not something that people of small roots and inferior capacity dare hope to approach.

In learning Buddhism, we must have this courage: dare to affirm, "I am Buddha," and take this up as one's own. Then, willing to sacrifice everything, decisively lay down the "butcher's knife," turn the light inward at all times and places, and cultivate in each thought. Then we will certainly be able to complete the great undertaking of perfectly realizing the fruition of Buddhahood. Each of these five kinds of faculties has its own corresponding level; one cannot force a leap beyond one's capacity. Therefore we must diligently accumulate merit and virtue, widely plant good roots, and develop our own foundation. We must never think that simply sitting and practicing the Dharma is enough.

Most modern Pure Land practitioners do not dare to affirm for themselves that they are Buddha. Those who can confirm without doubt that they truly possess tathāgata Buddha-nature are already extremely rare. In truth, this is not like offering a meal to guests; there is

no need for humility or yielding. Once you courageously take it up as your own, a powerful driving force arises imperceptibly and propels you straight ahead in diligent practice. If a single sacred Name is recited until the mind-flower opens, you can be reborn in the highest grade and walk together with the Buddha. Otherwise, at most you will only attain lower-grade rebirth. The nine grades of rebirth in the Pure Land depend entirely on our own recognition and diligent effort; they are not arrangements by which Buddhas and Bodhisattvas favor some and slight others.

Speaking of awakening, apprehending Mind and seeing nature is actually not difficult. The difficulty is that one does not recognize it and keeps deceiving oneself at every turn. We have said that the function that can speak, listen, move, and act is Buddha-nature. Because it is without characteristics, it cannot be seen with the eyes; it can only be directly apprehended. Therefore it is said that the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground can see the Way.

In the past, Chan patriarchs directly instructed students to see the nature right then and there. It was not like now, when one must investigate a huatou. Only after the Southern Song, because students did not respect direct pointing, was it changed to huatou investigation. Master Linji, the founding patriarch of the Linji school, once instructed students in a direct and straightforward way: “On your lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank. Do you want to know this true person of no rank? It is the one who is right now speaking Dharma and listening to Dharma!” Look at how clear, direct, candid, and sincere this instruction is! The so-called true person of no rank is the true nature of suchness, without characteristics. The Diamond Sutra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” This capacity without characteristics is the real, non-false dharmakāya. Where is it? It shines through your six faculties; that is why he said “on the lump of red flesh.” Fearing that we still might not understand, he added: “It is the one who is right now speaking Dharma and listening to Dharma.” With such frank and clear instruction, what doubt could remain?

When we practice the Heart-Center Dharma and hold the mantra continuously and closely until no mind is left to bring into play, the mind that can hold and the mantra being held suddenly fall away. Internally, body and mind, and externally, the world, vanish all at once. Yet this is not the insentience of wood or stone; numinous knowing remains vividly clear. This is the moment when true mind appears, and it is the moment of personally realizing what is original. Do not look down on this point. All future manifestation of spiritual powers is based on it. It is like a golden-winged garuḍa whose single wingbeat can fly hundreds of thousands of miles; it depends entirely on the push from its feet. If the feet do not touch the ground, it cannot soar upward. Personally realizing what is original is the point at which one gains firm footing. This is completely different from understanding gained by reading books or hearing others speak.

The reason the Heart-Center Dharma prescribes one thousand sittings is that, within those one thousand sittings, if one practices without interruption and in accord with the method, one will certainly open up what is original and personally see the real nature. If one has not

yet arrived, either one has practiced intermittently, or one has not practiced according to the method—holding the mantra while simultaneously indulging in false thinking—or, when the moment of opening came, one became frightened and halted the breakthrough. Or else one slipped past it with a slight dullness. These setbacks and detours occur because the practitioner’s merit and virtue are insufficient. Yet this still does not matter. If today there are still those who do not understand, I will explain it again for everyone: the one that can speak Dharma and listen to Dharma is each person’s own true nature of suchness.

As long as you hear this, deeply trust it without doubt, plant your feet firmly, protect it continuously and closely, are not pulled outwardly by objects and circumstances, and are not inwardly carried along by delusive thoughts, then after long effort the practice will certainly become continuous and seamless, and you will perfectly realize the fruition of Buddhahood. If you half-believe and half-doubt, then the fault is your own; even the Buddhas and patriarchs will have no way to help.

At this point some people cannot help asking: “If the one that can speak and listen is true suchness and Buddha-nature, and we now understand this—if this amounts to awakening, why do we not manifest spiritual powers? Is it not said that awakened people manifest great supernatural transformations?” Yes, a thoroughly awakened person will manifest great spiritual powers, because our original nature fully possesses the six superknowledges. But now this is only initial awakening. It is like an infant just born from its mother’s womb: it cannot yet function and must be carefully nurtured until it grows up; only then can it function.

Therefore we must protect it continuously and closely, diligently remove deluded habits, abide nowhere in anything, first obtain the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows, and then manifest the five superknowledges. Only then is it genuine penetration of the Way. By contrast, powers obtained through practicing methods, or powers obtained by relying on possession by ghosts, spirits, demons, and the like, are false powers. True powers abide forever and do not change. False powers come to an end when breathing stops.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “Awakening to principle is sudden; with that awakening, all delusion is dissolved at once. In practice, habits are gradually removed and exhausted in sequence.” Originally this speaks of two Dharma-gates: one is the perfect-and-sudden Dharma, and one is the gradual Dharma. People of great faculties awaken completely at once; in the instant of awakening, all attachment and deluded habits are extinguished, and spiritual powers can immediately manifest. Those with slightly duller faculties must, after awakening, train amid affairs and gradually remove habits before the function can slowly emerge. But in the present Dharma-ending age, people’s faculties are dull and their obstructions heavy. They cannot achieve sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization. We therefore have to combine the two Dharma-gates into one: after awakening at the level of principle, one preserves it and removes habits, gradually manifesting powers and realizing the fruition.

Master Linji personally passed through this process of practice and realization; because he applied himself with meticulous care, he explained it with great clarity and thoroughness. He said that whenever one expounds the school's vehicle, a single phrase must contain the Three Mysteries, and each mystery-gate must contain Three Essentials. These Three Mysteries and Three Essentials are the heart teaching of the Linji school. We must investigate and penetrate them carefully to understand the profound mystery by which initial awakening gradually reaches completion.

He said that a single phrase contains the Three Mysteries. What phrase is this? It is the phrase mentioned above: "On the lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank; it is the one who is right now speaking Dharma and listening to Dharma." The so-called true person of no rank that speaks Dharma and listens to Dharma is the person of the Way in one's original, genuine state—uncontrived, not something produced through practice, and dependent on nothing. Now as we speak and listen to Dharma, the four-elements physical body does not know how to speak and listen to Dharma. The spleen, stomach, liver, gallbladder, empty space, and external objects do not know how to speak and listen to Dharma. That which knows how to speak and listen to Dharma is each person's "this" that is right now vividly clear and luminously alone, without form.

To recognize this "this" is only initial awakening. Since habits have not yet been removed, one still cannot free oneself. One must train the mind through circumstances and progress upward and upward. Therefore Master Linji divided this path into the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. From this one phrase about the true person of no rank who speaks and listens to Dharma, he divided it into the Three Mysteries. What are the three? First is the Mystery in the Essence; second is the Mystery in the Meaning; third is the Mystery in the Phrase. From the marvelous essence that has been awakened to, the great intent unfolds; from that intent, wondrous function takes shape as words and phrases. Master Linji had one phrase for each mystery. I will list and explain them for you. Because this is largely the same as the explanations of the Three Mysteries, Three Essentials, and the cases of the "shout" in Ripples in the Chan Sea, a portion is omitted here.

In practice, we must have absolutely no stagnation or remaining attachment. We must be free and at ease. Even while responding to endlessly changing work and affairs, we should be as if nothing were happening, with not the slightest emotional movement. Only this is great capacity and great function, and only this accords with the purpose of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is absolutely not by sitting dead and motionless, guarding emptiness and stillness, that one can accomplish the Great Way.

I hope that after hearing this, first you know "there is": you understand that the person of no rank who listens to Dharma is your own original Buddha-nature, and you no longer seek outside. Second, you protect this "true person of no rank," empty, numinous, and abiding nowhere; as soon as a thought arises, you immediately notice it and let it go, neither abiding in objects nor guarding emptiness. Third, do not protect it in a dead way. When a child grows

up, you must let it be free; you cannot restrain it and refuse to let go. If it wants to sit, let it sit; if it wants to walk, let it walk. Without the slightest constraint, free and easy, you will then obtain real benefit.

Thus it is said: “Attached to existence, one does not understand emptiness and loses sight of the true host. Abiding in neither emptiness nor existence—that itself is great spiritual power. Abiding in emptiness and not knowing existence, one is in dead water behind the Black Mountain. If a person understands this meaning, facing west, he looks east.”

4N. 学佛无难，但观自在 / Studying Buddhism Is Not Difficult: Just Observe Whether You Yourself Are Present

Spoken at Santai Mountain, Hangzhou, on March 3, 1994. Studying Buddhism is not difficult, because all beings possess the Tathāgata’s wisdom and virtuous characteristics; they all have Buddha-nature. It is only that people do not recognize it. They chase external objects, grasp at visible forms, forget their original face, create karma and undergo retribution, and sink in the six realms. As long as we awaken, turn the light inward, do not run toward external objects, and do not cling to external marks, then turning back is enough.

The functioning of Buddha-nature can be seen most clearly in the example of seeing external objects. It is not the eyes that see. Modern scientists also say that the eyes alone cannot see; what enables seeing is the function of the brain. But this still has not reached the root, because the brain and nerves are only like electric wires and a power grid, while the eyes are like light bulbs. Even if the grid is laid and the bulbs are connected, without electricity they still cannot function. What is this electricity? It is our true mind. Our ability to smell and taste, to speak and move, is entirely the functioning of Buddha-nature. As long as we understand this point, do not cling to external marks, and constantly turn the light inward, we succeed. Therefore there is nothing difficult about studying Buddhism.

Master Hanshan said, “The reason practicing prajñā succeeds swiftly is that everyone originally possesses this mind-light...” All beings originally possess this mind-light; it is not obtained by seeking outside. The Buddhas are free from delusion. Having realized this mind-light, they can manifest spiritual powers and wondrous functioning. Sentient beings remain deluded and unaware, and therefore revolve in the six realms and suffer through inversion. If we can understand that this mind-light is originally ours, turn the light inward, and cultivate in each thought—applying effort before a thought has arisen, seeing it as soon as it arises, not running after it, and using the light of wisdom to clear away all the seeds of attachment in the field of the eighth consciousness—then it will not be difficult to succeed in the practice.

The Dharma gate of the mind-ground gives birth to a prince who will certainly become a Buddha in the future. If one practices some other method in pursuit of spiritual powers, that belongs only to the peripheral meritorious ranks. However accomplished the practice and however great the spiritual powers, one can only bow one’s head and serve as a minister; one

cannot become emperor—that is, a Buddha. Therefore one must work with the mind. This is the most fundamental Dharma.

In truth, all Dharmas are superfluous. The Diamond Sutra says, “The Dharma is like a raft.” After Patriarch Linji received three blows from Patriarch Huangbo and awakened, he said, “After all, Huangbo’s Buddhadharma does not have much to it.” There is nothing mysterious or complicated in it; because we cling to the mysterious, we make it complicated. The Sixth Patriarch said that Buddha-nature originally possesses all spiritual powers and wondrous functions. This means that everyone has spiritual powers. They cannot manifest now because our deluded thoughts, inversions, and attachments are making trouble and covering over our light. If we can constantly turn the light inward, not cling to external marks, and disperse the dark clouds of attachment, then the light is restored.

The first line of the Heart Sutra, “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva” (Guān Zìzài), is read here as an instruction to “observe whether you yourself are present.” This is an instruction for practice. Here, guān 观, “observe,” means clear observation: constantly watching the point where thoughts arise without wavering. Zì 自, “self,” means oneself. What is this self? We all mistakenly take the physical body to be ourselves: “This body of mine should enjoy itself, eat well, dress well,” and with insatiable craving we create karma and undergo retribution. This physical body is not me; it is the house in which we live. Inside there is a true person; this true person alone is me.

This true person is precisely the functioning now shining through the six faculties—the capacity to see and hear. When, right now, not a single thought arises, the previous thought has ceased, the later thought has not yet arisen, and there is no thought in between, then although not a single thought arises, it is not the insentience of wood or stone. Yet all is clear and distinct. It sees without seeing; it hears without hearing. What can see and what is seen, what can hear and what is heard, are all unobtainable; subject and object both vanish. This is our original nature. This is oneself.

Chan Master Guifeng said, “Do not identify with the physical body; take empty quiescence as the essence.” Our original nature is like empty space: empty space is I, and I am empty space. If there were some empty space apart from this “I,” with an emptiness still standing outside it, that would be an emptiness sought outside oneself, not what is meant here. We should not seek outwardly; just let go. Do not seek the true; only let delusion cease. Do not seek! You are originally Buddha, so what Buddha is there still to seek? When the deluded mind is put to rest, that is bodhi. “Bodhi” means right awakening; it means awakening.

When we contemplate this self, at the beginning we have merely understood the principle, and the mind still cannot be held steady; it still runs after objects. We therefore need to practice, watch it, and observe whether this original nature remains in its original position. When the practice is mature, going a step further, even contemplation is no longer needed. Contemplation is function with effort; one must go on to function without effort. In the

unconditioned Dharma, everything is unobtainable, and even contemplation is no longer needed.

But one must pay attention: only when the practice has reached this stage can one dispense with contemplation. If the practice has not yet reached this stage and you let go of contemplation, you will drift. Some people say that practicing at all times is itself a kind of abiding. At the beginning, however, one does need to stay with the practice; if you do not keep to the practice, you will follow objects and run after them. The Heart-Center Dharma is also like this. At the beginning it has you observe and remain unmoving. Without sufficient meditative stability, one cannot do this, so it gives you a Dharma in which to abide, and all other things are dropped. This is a method of redirecting the mind, just like Buddha-recitation. When we recite the Buddha's name, the mind recites the Buddha's name, and Buddha is mind. By being mindful of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, one is no longer mindful of greed, anger, and delusion.

At the beginning, however, one cannot do without such a support, because habits from many lives and many kalpas are deep and heavy; one still needs a Dharma to practice. Esoteric Buddhism has many methods for bringing functions into play. Many people practice in order to obtain spiritual powers or seek wealth. They do not know that practicing the Heart-Center Dharma is to practice the great Way and become a great vessel. If one now uses some method to obtain a little minor power, not only is it useless, it can also bring disaster, because the mind is not yet empty.

Some people attain the heavenly eye and see frightening images, and they are scared into mental illness. In non-Buddhist practice, practicing while clinging to marks and having consciousness leave the body is also not good; it can cause one to fall under demonic influence later. Yet people all like this kind of thing. Seeking such things, one cannot become a great vessel and cannot get beyond the six realms of rebirth. One should instead train the mind until it is empty, abide nowhere in anything, and allow the spiritual powers intrinsic to one's own nature to manifest. Even when they manifest, it is as though there were no spiritual powers; it is as ordinary as our ability now to put on clothes and eat. There is nothing mysterious or extraordinary about it. These capacities are originally present in all sentient beings. They have not yet manifested because they are covered by deluded thinking, inversion, and attachment.

Why are human beings more intelligent than animals? It is because the obscurations of humans are fewer and lighter than those of animals. The obscurations of animals are heavier and denser, so they are much more foolish than humans. It is enough for us to remove these obscurations. When the Heart Sutra says "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva" (Guān Zìzài), Yuan Yin reads it here as an instruction for practice: "contemplate" means to observe and illuminate oneself so that one remains unmoved in the original position, while "zìzài" is read as "the self is present"—this original nature of mine is present at all times. Ordinarily, however, we are not "present"; we run after objects. Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin said, "If for one moment you are

not present, you are just like a dead person.” One is then a walking corpse. One must be “present” at all times.

When this “being present” has matured, even the “self” is no longer needed; if there is “self,” there is still contrivance. The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “At all times, do not give rise to delusive thoughts; with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either. Dwelling in the realm of delusive thinking, do not add discrimination; when no discrimination is added, do not distinguish true reality.” Do not extinguish the delusive mind, because delusive mind is precisely true mind. Waves are water; if you remove the waves, there is no water. Therefore when delusive mind arises, do not suppress and extinguish it. Just transform it and do not run after it. Buddha-recitation and mantra-recitation are the best living, vibrant methods for transforming delusive thoughts. Place the mind on the Buddha or on the mantra, and delusive thoughts are transformed.

“Dwelling in the realm of delusive thinking, do not add discrimination” means: do not cling to oneself; keep recognizing oneself at every moment. At this point, even the “self” is no longer needed; only this “being present” remains. “When no discrimination is added, do not distinguish true reality” means that all is unobtainable: true is false, false is true, there is no further distinction between sages and ordinary beings, and everything merges back into oneself. There is neither “being present” nor “not being present”; even this “being present” is gone. The meanings taught in all sutras are these.

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese here reads 到此时, “自”就不要了—“at this point, even the ‘self’ is no longer needed.” Public Yuan Yin witnesses also circulate the sentence with 知 (“knowing”) in place of 自. Because that variant changes the doctrinal object of what is relinquished, the English deliberately retains the controlling source’s 自 reading and discloses the difference.

The Heart Sutra is a Dharma for becoming Buddha; it is not enough merely to recite it. If all beings can “observe whether they themselves are present,” they are the bodhisattvas described by the Heart Sutra. If you cannot, then you are a sentient being. In practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, one uses the threefold empowerment of mudrā, mantra, and contemplation to dissolve the deluded mind. Sense faculties and sense objects fall away; person, phenomena, the world, and empty space—all vanish. The great earth levels out, and empty space shatters, causing you personally to realize it once. This is the manifestation of Buddha-nature.

Yet people are uncertain and doubtful: “I am afraid this is not it, right? Why have no spiritual powers appeared? Clearly this cannot be it!” In fact, this is it. It truly, actually is it. The reason you cannot yet manifest spiritual powers is that your habits of attachment still remain and have not been completely removed. Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi said: “Although the true principle is suddenly realized, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once; one must remain constantly vigilant, reducing them again and again.” We understand the principle, but

through vast kalpas of turning in the six realms of rebirth our habits have become deep and our attachments extremely strong. They cannot be removed immediately. We need to remain vigilant at all times, train amid circumstances, and reduce them again and again.

Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi explained it very well: “Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water; rely on the sun’s warmth to melt it. Realize that the ordinary being is precisely Buddha, yet draw on the Dharma’s power for sustained cultivation. When the ice melts, the water flows and moistens, only then displaying the function of irrigation and cleansing. When delusion is exhausted, the mind is numinous and unobstructed, only then beginning to manifest the function of powers and light.”

When we practice the Heart-Center Dharma, we use this Dharma to cross the river; we must not cling to the Dharma. Our late teacher Master Xianglu said that one thousand sittings of the Heart-Center Dharma is enough. Many people are misled by this “one thousand sittings” statement and think that if they have not succeeded after one thousand sittings, then the Dharma is useless and there is no need to practice further. Actually this is not the meaning. “One thousand sittings” means that this Dharma has such great power that it can open up what is original and see the nature. Once one has seen it, then one should not cling to the Dharma.

Those of us who meditate have experience of this. During the first four or five hundred sittings there is some pain: the hands hurt, the legs are numb, the chest feels tight. Ordinarily the mind is like a monkey that is used to jumping around; if it is not allowed to jump, it feels uncomfortable. After five or six hundred sittings, when the mind settles, it becomes comfortable. The four dhyānas unfold in a gradual sequence: in the second dhyāna there is joy; in the third, bliss. Because at this time the body has changed and qi and blood circulate smoothly, this delight naturally comes. In sitting meditation there are three states: emptiness, bliss, and clarity.

Emptiness means that everything has dissolved into emptiness. Bliss means incomparable happiness. Some people say they fear hardship and therefore do not practice the Dharma. They are wrong. Dharma practice is not suffering; it is enjoyment. Its joy is inexhaustible; it is great bliss, not something worldly pleasures can compare with. Clarity here refers to luminosity: when the mind becomes empty, great light is emitted. But emptiness, bliss, and clarity all must not be abided in. If one abides in bliss, one cannot leave the desire realm. If one abides in clarity, one cannot leave the form realm: the appearances of the form realm are subtle and luminous, unlike the coarseness of the desire realm. If one abides in emptiness, one cannot leave the formless realm and cannot get beyond the four formless heavens.

Therefore when Master Xianglu said that after one thousand sittings one need not sit, he meant that one should not cling to the Dharma. The Dharma too is unobtainable; it is only borrowed for use. Do not misunderstand this point. The real practice is carried out outside

formal sitting. During formal sitting one sharpens the knife; after the sitting one uses it, seeing whether this knife is sharp and whether it can cut through the strands of affection.

The Śūraṅgama Sutra says that human beings have two great faults: emotion and thinking. Emotion is the worst, because it arises following love. When people who love each other must part, tears come. When one sees something tasty, saliva naturally comes. Love can produce water, and the nature of water is to flow downward; therefore when emotion arises, it flows downward. If Pure Land practitioners cannot cut through this emotion, they cannot be born in the Western World. The Western World is a heavenly realm: if you cannot fly upward, you flow downward. Masters Hanshan and Zibo both said that whether Buddha-recitation is effective depends on whether the sharp sword of your Buddha-name is sharp enough to cut through the strands of emotion. Only if it can cut through the strands of emotion can one be born in the West. If one cannot cut them and, like a lotus root broken while its fibers still remain, affection still connects, then one can only remain in the Sahā world.

Why can one not leave? Because when this emotional attachment is strong, it is like “rowing while the boat remains tied to a mooring post”: the cable of the boat is tied fast to the wooden post on the shore, and the boat cannot move. What about thinking? Wanting to become wealthy, thinking of one’s beloved—these are no good. The Śūraṅgama Sutra says, “Pure thought flies upward.” If we think of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and think of Amitābha Buddha, this is pure thought, which rises upward. In our practice, practice means cutting through emotional attachment and fixed views while maintaining clear observation at all times. My original nature is uncovered and stainless, without even a speck of dust; there is nothing to long for. Even this body is nothing to long for. No one can avoid birth, aging, sickness, and death, so what is there to say of things outside the body? Therefore we must have great wisdom. Once we understand, everything is naturally let go. If one can let go and not cling, one accomplishes the Way, and the light rises day by day.

When light first appears, it is like the sun just rising, the pale white color of a fish’s belly. Gradually it becomes bright and emits great light, but there are still dark spots in the center, with the edge bright. Why? Because ignorance still remains. The death-light described in the Dharma for Liberating Beings in the Intermediate State appears in the same way at the end of life. In fact, it is the same as the process of our practice: when ignorance is dissolved, the blackness is gone, and it becomes bright.

In practice, we must understand the key. This key is to recognize that when not a single thought arises, the clear and distinct numinous knowing is the true nature of each of us, and from there to protect it continuously and closely until the fruition of Buddhahood is perfectly realized. Never seek the miraculous or cling to the mysterious. You must know that the ordinary mind in which not a thread can be obtained is the wondrous essence by which we accomplish the Way.

Protection has several stages. At initial awakening, it is like a newborn infant; it must be well nursed and protected, otherwise it will die young in its swaddling clothes. Many people think that once they have awakened and understood the original nature, they are remarkable, and they give themselves over to wildness. That ruins it. Because habits still remain, they fall into post-awakening delusion, which is very dangerous. Therefore at initial awakening one must protect it strictly; in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down one must not be the least bit lax. Yet one also cannot grasp it too tightly; too tight and there will be stuffiness in the chest and pressure in the head. It is like the string of a musical instrument: too tight and it breaks, too loose and it makes no sound. One must be skilled in adjusting the proper degree of looseness and tightness—loosen it somewhat when too tight, tighten it somewhat when too loose.

To protect it constantly is not easy, because our habits of attachment remain strong. Once we get caught up in affairs, we forget and revert to our old ways. At that point one must catch it: as soon as one forgets, quickly pull it back. When protection is truly mature, protection is no longer needed. But at that point it is again not easy to leave protection behind and forget protection, because mature protection has become like a changed habit: the original habit of clinging to things has been replaced by the habit of clinging to Dharma, and it still takes a period of time to leave protection behind.

Going a step further, when one can truly leave protection behind, a sense of “no longer needing protection” still remains. This process of practice is very subtle. One must let go even of this sense of having left protection behind and forget it completely. When one reaches this step, one abides in the original position of the unconditioned. At this point, spiritual powers come without being sought. Because the obscurations mentioned above have been removed, the function of the original nature manifests, and spiritual powers naturally come. Only these are spiritual powers manifested from the original nature. Those that rely on a Dharma, rely on a mantra, or—lower still—rely on ghosts, spirits, nature-spirits, and the like, are borrowed spiritual powers; they are not spiritual powers manifested from the original nature.

When one truly reaches this unconditioned realm, even the unconditioned is unobtainable; there is no so-called unconditioned. “A carefree person of the Way for whom learning has ended and who is established in the unconditioned” embodies great wisdom that appears foolish, like a simpleton or an idiot. Yet people all like to be clever. Worldly cleverness is intelligence that clings to marks; it is not true wisdom. Even if in one’s practice one reaches the point of seeming like a simpleton or idiot, the practice has not yet reached completion. One must still progress further, until all traces blend away and are forgotten; great light blazes forth and illuminates the great thousandfold world; the Buddhas enter my body and I enter the bodies of the Buddhas. The Huayan Sutra compares this to ten mirrors mutually illuminating and mutually containing one another without obstruction. Even at this stage the practice is still incomplete. At the end, there is no Dharma that can be spoken and no words that can be said.

Here is a koan. A monk asked Caoshan, “What is it like when the bright moon is directly overhead?” Caoshan said, “You are still a man below the stairs.” The monk said, “Please, Master, bring me up the stairs.” Caoshan said, “When the moon has set, we will meet.” How does one meet after the moon has set? All traces blend away and are forgotten—that is precisely the point. When the practice reaches this stage, it is like being in air all day long without knowing that it is air. At that time there is nothing one can put into words; with a “Hey!” one waves a hand and returns to the abbot’s quarters.

The Heart-Center Dharma is neither empty nor existent. Say it is empty, yet it has mudrās and a mantra; say it exists, yet the mudrās and mantra have no conceptual meaning to discuss and leave nothing for discursive thought to work on. It teaches you to single-mindedly hold the mantra, pressing you forward. When the mind has become empty to the proper degree, it is like rice reaching the right point in cooking: the breakthrough comes spontaneously, and what is original opens up. The Japanese have a good analogy: Dharma practice is like putting gunpowder into a jar. Today you put in a little, tomorrow a little more. When it reaches saturation, “boom!”—it explodes.

When practicing the Dharma, we must above all avoid seeking. Seeking to enter samādhi, seeking awakening, seeking spiritual powers—this ruins things. You will not settle into samādhi, you will not awaken, and still less can you manifest spiritual powers. Some people even say there is no great benefit in Dharma practice. I say: this great treasure has been given to you, but you lack the fortune to enjoy it; you sit there indulging in deluded thinking. Therefore our effort must be urgent and sincere. We must not hold the mantra while indulging in deluded thinking. We must let everything go.

Yesterday one lay practitioner put it very well. He said, “I was ill and in terrible pain. What could I do? I made up my mind: fine, let me die! Once I made that decision, things turned around: after one sitting I entered samādhi; my body was gone and there was no pain at all.” Chan also says that one must not set the mind on waiting for awakening. In our practice we must not intentionally seek. It should be completely ordinary, as if there were nothing going on.

We ourselves obscure these spiritual powers. We have the five coverings of wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep. The mind that wants wealth is itself unobtainable, yet people all want wealth. This is especially true of some overseas Chinese and Hong Kong people studying Buddhism; they ask to be taught wealth-deity practices so they can make a little money. Esoteric Buddhism has nine vehicles: the secret three vehicles, inner three vehicles, and outer three vehicles. The first of the inner three vehicles is Action Tantra, which includes methods for pacifying calamities and increasing benefit, with yellow, black, and white wealth deities, and so on. People all want these Dharmas. A young monk in Hong Kong said, “Someone announced that today there would be a wealth-deity empowerment, and everyone came; several thousand people came seeking empowerment.” They flocked to it in droves!

This Dharma in esoteric Buddhism is a transitional Dharma. It is “First draw them in through their desires; afterward lead them into Buddha-wisdom.” First it satisfies sentient beings’ desires and leads them through the gate. After they have entered, it leads them to awaken wisdom. Once they have Buddha-wisdom, they understand that everything is unobtainable. Obtaining wealth after practicing a wealth-deity method is very dangerous; it can bring disaster. In genuine Dharma practice, we must apply ourselves with complete, settled resolve, because fundamentally everything is unobtainable. We come empty-handed and leave empty-handed. Rather than be forced to let go at the moment of death, it is better to awaken wisdom now and let go sooner; then one can accomplish the Way and end birth and death. If you do not let go, in the end you cannot carry away even the slightest thing. That is delusion.

Among the three poisons of greed, anger, and delusion, delusion is the most fundamental. If one is not deluded and has wisdom, one does not greedily seek, and therefore one is not angry. The sixfold rebirth is also seen in terms of greed, anger, and delusion: greed is the hungry ghost realm; anger is the asura realm; delusion is the animal realm; all three together make the hell realm. The Heart-Center Dharma is esoteric practice without visualization. It can open up what is original and directly see the nature. Chan is the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the treasury of the true Dharma-eye; it is also our original nature. When we open it and see original nature, that is Chan. Therefore the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma takes Chan as its essence.

When Pure Land is understood ultimately, land is mind and mind is land. When the mind is pure, right here is Pure Land. When there are no miscellaneous thoughts, no afflictions, no abiding anywhere, and no seeking anything in the mind, this is Pure Land. When our mind is pure, the Sahā world is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. It is not in the least different from the Buddha-land adorned in the West, from Maitreya Buddha’s Inner Court of Tuṣita, or from the Eastern Lapis-Lazuli World; all are Pure Land.

Grandmaster Dayu feared that we might not accomplish the Dharma in this life, and so he explained the Maitreya Mantra for us, using it to form an affinity with Maitreya Buddha and prepare us for future rebirth in the Inner Court of Tuṣita. The Buddha-Heart Sūtra says that the fourth mudrā of the Heart-Center Dharma is precisely for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. When we form the fourth mudrā, if we simply vow to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, we can be reborn there. Moreover, we can be reborn in any of the worlds of the ten directions according to our vows, because Pure Land is not only the Western Pure Land; east, south, west, north, the four intermediate directions, above, and below are all Pure Lands.

Some people think that only reciting Amitābha Buddha’s name can bring birth in the West. This is a misunderstanding among Pure Land practitioners. In studying Buddhism, besides reciting the Buddha’s name, one may equally recite sutras, hold mantras, or perform good deeds. Amitābha emits light not only to guide those who practice and study the Dharma, but also to welcome and guide those who do not, illuminating all sentient beings. The Dharma for

Liberating Beings in the Intermediate State says that Buddhas and bodhisattvas emit light to illuminate sentient beings: Amitābha radiates red light, Avalokiteśvara white light, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta bluish-green light. All shine upon sentient beings and welcome and guide them. But beings with heavy obstructions are afraid when they see the light and run toward dark places; some then run into the hells.

If one practices the Heart-Center Dharma and wishes to be born in the West, one does not need, apart from this Dharma practice, to recite Amitābha Buddha's name separately. Yet if one wants to recite Amitābha Buddha's name, that is also all right, because all of these transform the power of our mind. Some Pure Land practitioners mistakenly believe that Pure Land practice consists only of reciting Amitābha Buddha's name, and that practicing other Dharma-gates, such as esoteric Buddhism, is no good. They do not know that reciting the Great Compassion Mantra, the Śūraṅgama Mantra, the Ten Small Mantras, the Rebirth Mantra, and so on are all esoteric Dharma. They are already practicing within esoteric Dharma without recognizing it, yet they say esoteric Buddhism is bad. This is like cursing one's own ancestors, and in this way one incurs karmic fault.

We do not need to establish a separate Pure Land practice. Otherwise it would be like our already being Buddhas now while still going outside to look for and seek Buddha. Therefore Chan says that we are sitting beside a basket of rice, yet starving to death because we do not know to eat.

People who practice qigong today practice a false Dharma with genuine diligence. Qigong is also very good; it can strengthen the body and prolong life. It is just that they cling to qi and cannot empty it, so it is not ultimate. Yet they bring genuine diligence to that false Dharma. I have seen people on a tram still working, watching the qi, circulating the small heavenly circuit and opening the channels. I said: you truly work hard, while those of us who practice a true Dharma do not work so hard. We should maintain clear observation in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, but we forget.

Pure Land practitioners too can practice a true Dharma falsely. They may recite Amitābha Buddha's name while gossiping about Zhang San and Li Si—this one's merits, that one's faults. How can such confused practice succeed? It is even inferior to people who practice qigong. This is truly regrettable. Now that we know where to begin, we must maintain clear observation constantly, watching the point where thoughts arise. When a thought comes, immediately resume the mantra or take up the Buddha-name, and the thought is transformed. Keeping watch in this way is clear observation; practice means not relaxing. Then one will make progress.

How far has one progressed? Test yourself: Do I still cling to marks? Is there still something in my mind? When good and wholesome circumstances come, do I still like them and waver? When bad and disagreeable circumstances come, do I still become afflicted? One must be

unmoved by the eight winds. If one still moves, that will not do. We can easily notice bad circumstances, but good circumstances and happy times are difficult to notice.

There is a koan in the Chan school. A disciple was bidding farewell to his teacher and going out to travel on pilgrimage. The teacher warned him to be careful and cautious along the road. The disciple said, "Yes. When I speak with people, I will be careful: I will flatter them, so they will not take offense or oppose me." The teacher said, "You really know how to handle things." The disciple replied, "Yes, everyone likes being flattered; only you, Master, do not." The teacher said, "I do not like flattery." And just like that, the disciple had already flattered him. With good and pleasant things, one unknowingly becomes attached to them.

Therefore in our practice we must maintain continuous, close observation: continuous without interruption, close without looseness, constantly paying attention. Those huatou and koans are precisely tests of whether one's mind is always empty, empty and numinous, abiding nowhere. Studying Buddhadharma is the enterprise of a great person. One must be generous, heroic, and willing to sacrifice. People of narrow disposition find it difficult to come into accord with the Buddhadharma. Generous and heroic people easily enter the Way.

All worldly dharmas are Buddhadharma; one must remain alert and aware at every moment and be willing to sacrifice everything. Some people ask, "Is it better for me to leave home, or is it better to remain at home?" They hesitate over this question, wanting to leave home yet fearing it. In truth, everything is the marvelous functioning of our mind. As long as one abides nowhere, whether one leaves home or does not leave home is unobstructed.

Nowadays it is also difficult to practice after leaving home. Most monasteries now perform sutra-repentance services. Some charge tens of thousands of yuan for one Water-Land ritual. To earn money they perform Buddhist services and repentance rites; otherwise they have no income for building Buddha halls, repairing bell towers, and so on. A few monasteries do not perform repentance services, but first one has to farm; without farming there is no food. Gaomin Monastery in Yangzhou is a Chan monastery and rarely performs repentance services. Chan monasteries like this are already very few. Tiantong Monastery in Ningbo, Lingyin Monastery in Hangzhou, and Jingci Monastery are all Chan monasteries, but they no longer practice Chan. Nowadays only Gaomin Monastery in Yangzhou, Jinshan Monastery in Zhenjiang, and Wolong Monastery in Xi'an still maintain Chan practice. I heard a young monk say that after a day of exhaustion, by evening there is no energy left; when he sits down to practice Chan, he only dozes off. This is truly a pity.

As for remaining at home, there are worries involving one's wife, children, and various affairs. But this does not mean that Dharma practice is impossible either at home or after leaving home. It does not mean that. We must train within circumstances. The most important thing is first to understand ourselves, to understand that everything is the marvelous function of mind and abides nowhere. Then whether one leaves home or not is all right. We must train amid circumstances, constantly abiding nowhere, understanding that what can function is my

Buddha-nature. This is where one begins the practice of clear observation. It is not necessarily a matter of sitting in meditation. Being able to maintain clear observation is the practical starting point. If one cannot sustain observation amid circumstances, follows circumstances and runs after them, and has no meditative stability at all, then one still needs to set aside time for sitting meditation.

But the most important thing is first to understand oneself. A great garuḍa can fly hundreds of thousands of li with one wingbeat. That it can fly so far depends on a bit of power beneath its feet. If the feet do not touch the ground, it cannot soar into the air. Do not underestimate recognizing original nature. If you can recognize this point and deeply trust it without doubt, then you have already gained firm footing; in the future you will certainly be able to fly ten thousand li like the garuḍa.

Patriarch Linji had us recognize “on the lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank: it is the one who is now speaking Dharma and listening to Dharma.” This function that can listen and can speak is our original nature. If one can deeply trust this without doubt, grasp this point, and apply one’s practice right at this point, then that is it. The subtlety of our Dharma is that it combines the methods of practice of the two bodhisattvas Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Avalokiteśvara. Mahāsthāmaprāpta teaches us that in Buddha-recitation one must “gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” Reining in the thoughts is what he calls “gathering in all six faculties,” meaning to gather in eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

“Pure mindfulness in continuous succession”: most people think that if they quietly practice Buddha-recitation, give rise to no other thoughts, and only the Buddha-name continues unbroken, that is pure mindfulness in continuous succession. Actually that is not so. Because there is still the mind that recites and the Buddha that is recited; subject and object are opposite, and where subject and object remain, there is no purity. Subject and object must both vanish; the mind that recites and the Buddha that is recited must fall away together and become empty and pure. Only then is it pure mindfulness. Holding a mantra too must be carried to the point where subject and object both vanish. “One thought in accord is one thought of Buddha; thought after thought in accord is thought after thought of Buddha.” This means that when this one thought breaks free and becomes pure, that one thought is Buddha. When thought after thought is like this, then thought after thought is Buddha; it must continue without interruption.

Sustaining “pure mindfulness in continuous succession” is very difficult. Today it may be like this, but tomorrow one may not be able to break free and it may not be like this. Today, sitting meditation explodes open; tomorrow it may not happen again. Why? Because the practice is still unfamiliar and immature. “Continuous succession” means that it is like this today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and every day thereafter. One must practice vigorously. It is not that one day it explodes open and then success is complete.

Continuation in stillness—being like this during formal sitting—is still not enough. It must continue in movement as well. Amid all activities, the mind must be empty, exactly as during formal sitting: empty, pure, and abiding nowhere. One must be like this morning and evening, in ease and in adversity, without any difference. Only this is true continuity. True continuity is movement and stillness as one. Pure Land practice is very deep. Ordinary people do not apply themselves seriously to practice; after reciting “Amitābha Buddha” a few times, they think everything is fine. They reason: “Amitābha has vowed to welcome and guide us. At death I can be reborn while carrying karma, so doing a few bad things now does not matter; Amitābha will welcome and guide me. If he does not welcome and guide me, then the Buddha has lied.” This is a mistake.

Rebirth while carrying karma does not mean carrying this kind of karma. Knowingly violating the Dharma adds further offense; that karma cannot be carried along. What is carried is the habit of our attachment, because it has not yet been completely exhausted. Even a bodhisattva at the stage of Equal Enlightenment still has the last fraction of ignorance not yet emptied; that is karma. Karma is movement of mind: when a mental thought moves, that is karma. It is not that the Buddha comes before you to welcome and guide you. The Buddha is an image manifested within your mind, like the moon’s reflection appearing in water. If your mind is not pure, it cannot manifest; it is not that the Buddha does not come.

Our Heart-Center Dharma is also Pure Land. When the mind that can hold the mantra and the mantra being held fall away together, of course one is born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. There is no need to establish a separate Pure Land practice. Many people think Pure Land is more reliable. They are wrong. They do not understand the marvelous function of the Heart-Center Dharma: it takes Chan as its essence, esoteric practice as its function, and Pure Land as its destination. Grandmaster Dayu received this Dharma through great hardship. In Tibetan esoteric Buddhism, without twenty or thirty years of training in visualization-based methods, this Dharma is not transmitted. It is a profound Dharma, the final Dharma of the secret three vehicles. That all of you can receive such a Dharma is unsurpassed good fortune. You should know to cherish it and practice diligently.

40. 耳根圓通法門 / The Dharma-Gate of Perfect Penetration through the Ear Faculty

Spoken in Shenzhen, December 1994.

A. Essentials of Practice and Realization

In the chapter on the ear faculty’s perfect penetration in the Śūraṅgama Sutra, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara says to us: “At first, within hearing, I entered the stream and forgot what was heard. When what had been entered was stilled, the two characteristics of movement and stillness clearly did not arise. As this gradually deepened, hearing and what was heard both

came to an end. Not abiding when hearing is exhausted, awareness and its object became empty. When the emptiness of awareness was perfectly complete, emptiness and what was emptied were extinguished. When arising and ceasing had ceased, quiescent extinction appeared. Suddenly I transcended the mundane and supramundane worlds, and in the ten directions perfect brightness appeared; I attained two supreme excellences...”

When we practice Dharma, using Avalokiteśvara’s method of the ear faculty’s perfect illumination—turning hearing back to hear the self-nature—is the method by which practice most readily takes hold. This is because among the six faculties of beings in our Sahā world, the ear faculty is the most sensitive and sharp. It is therefore especially easy to succeed in practice by using it. In Dharma practice, we must let everything go and gather the mind’s power to listen intently to the soundless sound of the mantra recited by our own mind. Each syllable must be heard distinctly, and only then can the entire body and mind—the six faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—be fully gathered and held so that deluded thoughts do not arise. From there one enters samādhi, opens up what is original, and personally sees Buddha-nature.

In practicing Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma, we combine the methods of practice of the two bodhisattvas Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Avalokiteśvara. Mahāsthāmaprāpta teaches us that in Buddha-recitation one must “gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” We now use the ear faculty, the keenest of the six faculties and the one selected by Avalokiteśvara, to gather the other five faculties and hold the mantra continuously and closely. This is precisely practicing in accord with Mahāsthāmaprāpta’s instruction to “gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” In this way the methods of practice of these two great bodhisattvas are combined into a single practice, and therefore it is especially easy to succeed in practice.

Now let us compare this with how Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara brought his practice of clear observation to fruition. He said, “At first, within hearing, I entered the stream and forgot what was heard.” Avalokiteśvara initially practiced by using the ear faculty to turn back and contemplate his own nature of hearing—the capacity by which sounds are heard. When we hold the mantra by mentally reciting it and listening attentively, this is likewise turning back to contemplate self-nature. When we hold the mantra and quietly listen to the sound of each syllable, we place the whole body and mind in the stream of the nature of hearing; placing body and mind within the Dharma-nature through which hearing occurs is “entering the stream.”

There are several explanations of “entering the stream.” One explanation says that it enters through one ear and flows out through the other, meaning that what enters flows away and does not remain in the mind. Taken according to the literal meaning, this also makes sense. Another explanation says that “entering the stream” means “going against the stream”: when sound comes, one does not follow the sound and drift along with it, and one does not run after the sound. This too is well explained; at the very beginning, the method of entering the stream

is not to run after sounds. The correct explanation of “entering the stream,” however, should be to place the entire body and mind within the stream of the nature of hearing—within the Dharma-nature through which sound is heard.

“Forgetting what was heard” means that the external objective environment, such as sounds, has all dissolved. If one can accomplish “entering the stream and forgetting what was heard,” then body and mind settle down and are no longer disturbed by external circumstances. Therefore the first step in practice is mental recitation with attentive listening. Only then can deluded thoughts be caught and held so that one does not drift along with them, and only then can one enter samādhi.

Avalokiteśvara next says, “When what had been entered was stilled, the two characteristics of movement and stillness clearly did not arise.” This means that in our practice, when the mind that can recite has come to rest and deluded thoughts no longer move, the mantra cannot be recited. Even if one forcibly tries to resume recitation, the mantra will not come forth. At this point one should not try to recite it again. “When what had been entered was stilled” means that our deluded mind is quiescent and unmoving. When deluded thoughts stop moving, then there are no two characteristics of movement and stillness. Movement and stillness exist only in relation to each other. Since there is no movement or disturbance, there is also no stillness.

“Clearly did not arise” means that although the two characteristics of movement and stillness are absent, this is not like wood or stone, devoid of perception; it is simply that movement and stillness clearly do not arise. When, in practice, we are in samādhi, there is no need to resume reciting the mantra. Simply observe it quietly: who is this that is thought-free, quiescent, and yet clear? At this point, although the two characteristics of movement and stillness clearly do not arise, this state has not yet dissolved into emptiness; there is still a single thought of non-arising present.

Going further, Avalokiteśvara tells us: “As this gradually deepened, hearing and what was heard both came to an end.” At this point practice has reached the stage where both hearing and what is heard have completely disappeared. One is in a state of quiescent meditative absorption, with great joy and a profound sense of lightness and serenity; worldly pleasures cannot compare with it. Yet one must not remain in this state of bliss. As soon as there is abiding in it, one cannot advance and cannot see original nature.

When we practice and reach this point, a minor spiritual power may manifest, and we become complacent, thinking the practice is complete. We do not realize that we are still very far away. Therefore Avalokiteśvara next says, “Not abiding when hearing is exhausted, awareness and its object became empty.” If at this point we emit great light, or see Buddhas and bodhisattvas appear, or encounter many other wondrous states, we must not move the mind and must not pay attention to them. As soon as there is abiding, not only will one fail to see the nature, there is also danger of falling into demonic influence. If frightening states appear, or ghosts and demons manifest, do not be terrified. These phenomena are illusory

appearances and are not truly existent. They may be illusions from karmic obstructions, or they may be Dharma-protectors testing you to see whether your mind moves when illusory states appear. In any case, they are all illusory appearances. Do not fear them and do not pay attention to them; then there will be no problem.

“Not abiding when hearing is exhausted, awareness and its object became empty” means, simply, that when hearing and what is heard have been exhausted, and one has entered deep meditative absorption and obtained certain blissful experiences or minor spiritual powers, one still must not abide there and halt one’s progress. One must not abide in any state at all—no matter whether it is a good state or a bad state—but must let it dissolve into emptiness. Going further, even the awareness involved in “not abiding when hearing is exhausted” must also dissolve into emptiness; only then can the aware mind and its object be completely emptied. Because the aware mind and its object still stand in relative opposition, this awareness remains delusive; without emptying both, one cannot see the nature.

But when deluded awareness has dissolved into emptiness, emptiness is still present. Emptiness is still an illusory image, and there remains the relative, delusive opposition between an emptying subject and what is emptied. This is beginningless ignorance, and it too must be seen through. Therefore Avalokiteśvara says further, “When the emptiness of awareness was perfectly complete, emptiness and what was emptied were extinguished.” This means that the emptying subject and what is emptied—the relative, delusive pair—are both extinguished. Only when one reaches a state with nothing whatsoever clinging, not a single Dharma established—utterly bare and unencumbered—can one thoroughly see the true mind.

When our practice reaches its culmination and suddenly the mind that can recite and the mantra being recited, or the observing mind and the object observed, fall away all at once, this is the moment of breakthrough. At this point it is a matter of a thousand-pound weight hanging by a single hair; one urgently needs to summon full alertness and look directly: when no mind is left to bring into play, who is it that is clear and distinct? Is this not one’s own original face? If one pauses even slightly to ponder, one is deluded by its shadow. If one cuts it off decisively in the very moment and seizes it, one personally realizes original nature.

But practitioners often mistakenly think that emptiness is best, that having nothing at all is the most peaceful, and they abide in emptiness without thinking of going forward. They do not realize that this is a side road. As soon as one clings to emptiness, one falls into “indeterminate blankness”—dying right there. Chan scolds practitioners who abide in emptiness as “cold-water-soaked stones in the ghost cave behind the Black Mountain.” Such people will never see the nature. Therefore even emptiness must be eliminated. Only by going a step further can one reach the state where “when arising and ceasing had ceased, quiescent extinction appeared,” and only then can one see original nature.

“Arising and ceasing” refers to all events, all things, all appearances, and all thoughts, because all of these arise and cease. When all these arising-and-ceasing things have been exhausted, and even emptiness has vanished, then Buddha-nature—unborn and undying, unmoving and unshaken, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing—can become manifest. Only this is truly realizing original nature. When in our practice subject and object both vanish—when the mind that can recite and the mantra being recited fall away all at once, internally body and mind and externally the world vanish together, and empty space also shatters—then there is a sudden vast opening and one personally realizes original nature.

After realizing original nature, is one completely home? Not yet. Because our accumulated habits from many lives and many kalpas are deep and heavy, unless one has the very highest faculties, a single awakening will not carry one through completely. One still must train the mind amid circumstances and exhaust deluded habits before spiritual powers can manifest and the fruition of Buddhahood be perfectly realized. There must be a process in which “awakening to principle is sudden, while practice is gradual.” Therefore one still has to do the practice of continuous close protection, removing all deluded habits, before one can emit great light, brilliantly illuminate the ten directions, and realize the supreme fruition of “perfect brightness in the ten directions” that Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara realized.

B. The Essential Points for Protecting and Realizing the Way

1. Where not a single thought arises, the clear and distinct numinous knowing is one's own Buddha-nature. If students can avoid fear and doubt at this point, deeply trust it without suspicion, plant their feet firmly, abide in it and protect it, purify deluded habits completely, and perfectly realize the fruition of Buddhahood, then they have planted good roots not under just one, two, three, four, or five Buddhas, but under immeasurable Buddhas.
2. Clear observation means turning the light inward, looking within the mind and not looking outward. Observe the point before any thought has arisen. When a thought arises, see it. Do not pay attention to it, and do not drift along with it. This step is most important. If a thought arises and you do not see it, that will not do. After realizing original nature, one must clearly observe and protect it in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. “Outwardly not being pulled by objects and inwardly not being carried along by thoughts” is the best method of protection. When thoughts arise, do not abide in them; do not follow them and drift on without end. This is no-thought. It is not suppressing thoughts so they do not arise, nor is it lengthening the time in which not a single thought arises and calling that no-thought.
3. In ordinary response to conditions and dealings with things, one must be “without mind in affairs, and without affairs in mind.” This means that while doing something there is no second thought: neither a mind concerned with gain and loss, nor thoughts of praise or blame, success or failure. After the matter is done, there is not the slightest obstruction in the mind, as if it had not been done. It does not mean avoiding affairs and shutting oneself into dead inactivity.

4. After realizing original nature, all deluded mind, deluded thinking, and deluded thoughts are transformed into the marvelous functioning of true mind. The difference between marvelous functioning and deluded activity lies precisely between “abiding” and “not abiding.” If there is abiding, marvelous functioning becomes deluded activity; if there is no abiding, deluded activity is gathered back into marvelous functioning.
5. In practice of protection, first one must protect continuously and closely, never forgetting it at any time. Next, while protecting, one must not guard it in a dead way. Finally, once one is no longer guarding, one must be able to transform freely.
6. If one can train diligently within circumstances and keep doing it in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, then in three to five years the practice can certainly become continuous and seamless. Without seeking spiritual powers, spiritual powers will arise of themselves.
7. With nothing sought and nothing attained, one can enter Buddha and also enter demon—this is truly arriving home. Practitioners often cling to spiritual powers and think that if one has not manifested spiritual powers, one has not seen the nature. This is a great error. You must understand: being able to plant the feet firmly and not be deluded by demonic words and deviant speech, being free and at ease at every time and place and obtaining real benefit—this itself is the greatest spiritual power.
8. The mind-ground Dharma gate gives birth to a prince. If one works with the mind, one will certainly become a Buddha in the future. All other exceptional form-based Dharma gates belong to the peripheral meritorious ranks. Even if one manifests some great spiritual power, one can only render meritorious service, receive a reward, and bow one’s head as a minister; one cannot become a Buddha.

5. 如何消除贪嗔痴慢疑 / How to Eliminate Greed, Anger, Delusion, Arrogance, and Doubt

Chinese source: 《如何消除贪嗔痴慢疑》

Spoken in Hangzhou on June 17, 1995. A disciple asked, “How can greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt be eliminated?” Greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt belong to the delusions of thought. In the teachings, ignorance is divided into delusions of view, delusions of thought, dust-and-sand delusions, and the delusion of ignorance, proceeding from coarse to subtle, from subtle to extremely subtle. Delusions of view arise from losing sight of truths such as non-arising and no-self. They pertain to the standpoint of principle and are therefore called delusions concerning principle. They include five kinds: identity view, extreme views, wrong views, clinging to views as supreme, and clinging to precepts and observances as supreme. All are incorrect views. For example, clinging to spiritual powers while not asking whether one has apprehended Mind and seen nature is an incorrect view commonly found among practitioners.

Delusions of view are easy to remove. When we practice, awaken, and see the original nature, our view is corrected and delusions of view are completely removed. But delusions of thought cannot be removed all at once. After awakening and cutting off delusions of view, one must continue to see the nature and practice in accord with the truth before these delusions can gradually be cut off. Delusions of thought are delusions concerning phenomena, arising from thinking about the illusory things of the world. Their nature is dull and obscure, and they are divided into the five delusions of greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt. Therefore they are not easy to remove suddenly. If delusions of view and thought are not removed, birth-and-death in saṃsāra cannot be ended.

Therefore, to eliminate the ten delusions—identity view, extreme views, wrong views, clinging to views as supreme, clinging to precepts and observances as supreme, and greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt—one must first understand the original nature and have a great awakening. One must deeply know that all things are illusory and unobtainable, and thoroughly see that the clear and distinct nature of numinous knowing at the point where this thought has ceased is our original nature. Constantly protect and train it within circumstances, and grind away all the habits of attachment accumulated through many lives. Only then can greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt disappear. The teachings say that, across the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm, these four delusions span nine grounds and eighty-eight grades. They have to be removed step by step; they cannot be removed all at once. Therefore one must have a long-term, deep resolve and struggle diligently amid circumstances.

Editorial source note. The controlling source and public copies of this same talk print “nine grounds and eighty-eight grades,” so that number is preserved above. The standard Abhidharma

enumeration is nine grounds with nine grades in each, totaling eighty-one; Yuan Yin's separate Essentials of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra likewise states "nine grounds and eighty-one grades." This is therefore a source-level numerical discrepancy, not an English arithmetic correction.

Most important is to know that our true mind originally possesses the three bodies: dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. There is no need to seek them outside. Our present one thought of pure mind—when the previous thought has already ceased and the next thought has not yet arisen—that clear and distinct numinous knowing is our dharmakāya. The wisdom-light by which we can see all things is our saṃbhogakāya. The manifold appearances of all things are transformations of our Dharma-nature; they are our nirmāṇakāya.

Dharmakāya and saṃbhogakāya are easier to understand. When thoughts cease, all is still clear and distinct; perception has not disappeared. At this time, that clear numinous knowing is our dharmakāya, which everyone can directly experience. Saṃbhogakāya is the wisdom-light by which we now see all these things. Without the wisdom-light of the dharmakāya, one could not see these things. For example, without light one is like a blind person and cannot see anything. What sees is the light of our dharmakāya. The light of the dharmakāya shining brightly is the wisdom-light shining brightly.

Nirmāṇakāya is not so easy to understand. All things—cups, fruit, houses, and so on—are my transformations; they are all my nirmāṇakāya. How could they be my nirmāṇakāya? Are these not insentient things? The receptacle world is insentient, while people and animals are sentient. How could all these be my nirmāṇakāya? Because apart from my Dharma-nature and wisdom, these things would not exist. Take the house we live in. Before building it, someone first designs the plan. How does an engineer think up this plan in the brain? He takes in external scenes, reflects and analyzes, considers how to transform and develop them and how to make them suit human needs, and then draws a new kind of plan. What function is this? Is it the function of the brain? It appears to be the function of the brain, but the various brain nerves, such as the optic and auditory nerves, are like electric wires: once laid, they still cannot function without electricity. What is the electricity? It is the function of our dharmakāya.

What is meant by Buddha-nature? "Nature" means capacity or function. It can function, yet no visible form can be seen. For example, one cannot see the form of electricity, but once power is connected, an electric lamp can shine and a machine can run. The brain nerves are like electric wires; the power that makes them function is the function of our Buddha-nature. Therefore, whether designing the plan or later hiring craftsmen to build the house, all of this is the function of our Buddha-nature. These are all manifested by Buddha-nature; they are the nirmāṇakāya of Buddha-nature.

Once one understands that dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are all fully present in true mind, then, by continually refraining from abiding in marks—knowing that everything is a reflection manifested by the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom of my

dharmakāya—the mind does not move, one does not grasp at marks, and there is nothing to pray for or seek. Practicing in this way, greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt gradually disappear. If one does not understand this principle and fixates on spiritual powers and clings to marks, then not only will greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt fail to disappear, they will instead increase. Why want spiritual powers? Is it not for fame and material support? For flattery, reputation, and offerings? Then greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt increase even more; this does not help at all.

Therefore, to eliminate greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt, seeing the nature is indispensable. Without seeing the nature, it will not do. The root lies in apprehending Mind and seeing nature; this is the root of Buddhism. Some people today have gone wrong. They do not want to apprehend Mind and see nature; they want spiritual powers. As soon as they hear that a Dharma can produce spiritual powers, they hurry after it: “This Dharma has spiritual powers; quickly, go learn it!” That is not removing greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt. It is increasing the mind of greed.

Therefore, when we practice, we must let go of everything. Do not even seek to enter samādhi. If you seek samādhi, you will instead be unable to enter samādhi, because the mind that seeks samādhi is a deluded mind. When the deluded mind moves, how can one enter samādhi? To enter samādhi, one must let go of everything, seek nothing at all, and treat everything as perfectly ordinary. Only then can the mind settle at ease, calmly enter samādhi, open up what is original, and personally realize Buddha-nature.

In truth, realizing the Way has nothing mysterious or extraordinary about it. It is extremely simple and ordinary. Yet I heard some brothers and sisters in Hangzhou say, “Among us in Hangzhou, not one person has accomplished anything.” This is terrible; they must have misunderstood the true meaning of accomplishment. What counts as accomplishment? Must one manifest spiritual powers for it to count as accomplishment? If one has not manifested spiritual powers, has one therefore not apprehended Mind, not seen nature, and not accomplished the path? This is obviously a great error.

Let us first discuss what accomplishment is, or in other words, what the purpose of studying Buddhism is. The purpose of studying Buddhism is to leave saṃsāra and end birth-and-death. This is our great purpose. How can birth-and-death be ended and saṃsāra left behind? Can spiritual powers get us out of saṃsāra? No. Non-Buddhist practitioners also have the five superknowledges—the divine eye, divine ear, knowledge of others’ minds, miraculous abilities, and recollection of past lives—but they cannot end birth-and-death. Because they do not recognize what their own original nature is, they cling to external objects and pursue them; they grasp and abide. Birth-and-death cannot be ended that way.

Therefore, to end birth-and-death and leave saṃsāra, the mind must be empty and open, abiding in nothing. Knowing that all transformations are manifestations of the functioning of one’s own Buddha-nature, with nothing pursued and nothing grasped, free and at ease—this

is great accomplishment, great freedom, and great spiritual power. If one still pursues and seeks, then afflictions remain as before. Even if all five superknowledges manifest, that is not accomplishment.

Therefore what we study in Buddhism is freedom and ease. In society, we accord with conditions in all things, do all we can to serve the community, remain equally at ease in high or low positions, and pursue or grasp nothing. Only when one is truly free and at ease is this the true meaning of Mahāyāna Buddhism; only then does it count as accomplishment. If while alive we can be unattached to all circumstances, with no attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection, then when “the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month” arrives—the moment of death—naturally we will not cling to any circumstance, and will be free and at ease with no birth-and-death to end.

We now cling to there being birth-and-death because we grasp objects. The fact that today we have this physical body, this body of flesh, is because, when our parents had intercourse, we ourselves moved our minds and ran in. If you did not cling to that circumstance and did not go in, then you would not have this physical body; you would be very free and at ease, able to wander anywhere. Now that there is a physical body, it becomes a burden; one cannot move freely. This is our own doing.

Now that we practice, we must understand this principle: dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are all fully present in one mind. Do not pursue anything. Do not want any spiritual powers. Let everything go, and you will be free and at ease. Free and at ease, with nothing clung to: if life is like this, death is also like this. Wherever you wish to go, you can go; everything is decided by yourself. Is birth-and-death not thereby ended?

Ultimately speaking, there is fundamentally no birth-and-death. Our original nature is originally unborn and undying, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither defiled nor pure, unmoving and unshaken. Fundamentally there is no birth-and-death. Clinging to birth-and-death is simply our deluded mind stirring wildly, grasping circumstances and clinging to things. Let everything go, and is this not great freedom? This is great freedom. With no birth-and-death, what greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt could there be? Greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt exist because we do not understand the original nature, chase external objects, and are deluded by visible forms and external sense objects. Once we understand what our original nature is and do not grasp external objects, greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt naturally disappear completely.

Likewise, if one can truly be free and at ease, seeking nothing and grasping nothing, then the five superknowledges will arise naturally. They are fully present in our original nature; they are originally there. They are not acquired through practice. Therefore we say that the Way is a matter of awakening, not of practice. Awakening means waking up, just as one wakes from a dream and no longer continues dreaming. In ordinary life we are all within a dream-state, chasing dream-scenes; because people do not know they are dream-scenes, they take them as

real and chase them. Thus, when there is seeking, there is greed. When greed is not satisfied, there is anger. Clinging to greed and anger is delusion. Arrogance means slighting others: “None of you is as good as I am; I am the best.” Thus there is the mark of person and the mark of self.

As for doubt, it is even harder to avoid. For example, when I say that the clear and distinct numinous knowing at the point where this thought has ceased is our true mind, you will inevitably doubt: “This is true mind? That cannot be right. If this were the original nature and I had seen the nature, I should manifest great spiritual powers. Why do I not have the slightest spiritual power? Then this cannot be it.” Doubt arises, and this ruins things. Because you do not truly believe, you cannot protect your own original nature with your whole heart and strength. You run after circumstances and go down another road. Originally, you had walked quite well along this road and were nearly home; it would have been enough to keep practicing and protecting it. But because of doubt, you turn back and walk another road. You stop practicing this Dharma and practice another. After practicing that for a while it seems wrong, so you practice yet another. In the end, because one’s mental energies are scattered, you change methods again right when the crucial point is near. None of it works. This is the error of refusing, because of doubt, to practice in a steady and down-to-earth way. Many people waste their energy and accomplish nothing for this reason.

If we can, without the slightest doubt, recognize that what is clear and distinct at the point where this thought has ceased is our original nature, protect it at every moment, never forget to protect this original nature in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, avoid being submerged by circumstances, and not run after circumstances—if no circumstance can pull us along, and we know that all these are illusory appearances, that the only real thing is my present nature of numinous knowing while everything else is false and need not be attended to—then if one truly practices in this way, within no more than three to five years you will naturally be able to manifest great spiritual powers. Because you are not chasing after them, the spiritual powers originally present will naturally appear.

The reason they cannot manifest now is that they are covered by your greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt—by your deluded thinking, attachment, and pursuit. You want spiritual powers, and so spiritual powers do not come. Therefore spiritual powers are not obtained through practice or seeking. Whatever is obtained by seeking is false, not genuine; it all involves spirit attachment. Because you have a seeking mind, ghosts and spirits come along, cater to your mentality, and enter your mind. This is why, among qigong practitioners with special abilities today, eighty or ninety percent have such spirit attachments; those abilities are not their own. This is because they have a mind of greedy acquisition.

To study Buddhism is to awaken wisdom: understanding that our true mind is precisely the numinous knowing at the point where a thought has ceased and no thought arises. Speaking of realizing the Way is very simple. Directly point it out to you, and that is it; there is nothing mysterious. It is not that once realization of the Way is mentioned, mystery and profundity all

appear and all kinds of Dharmas appear. In fact, our Chinese Chan school is the best of the best: it cuts straight through, does not establish words, directly points to the human mind, and enables one to see the nature and become a Buddha. It is the supreme esoteric Dharma. The highest level of esoteric Buddhism is Chan. This is not something I invented. The Karmapa, a great accomplished master who genuinely practiced Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, once said, “In our esoteric Buddhism, the Great Perfection is spoken of as the most profound. Does China have the Great Perfection? Yes. That is Chan. The Chan school is the Great Perfection.” Is this right? Yes, exactly right.

We studied Great Perfection with Master Gongga. Great Perfection has “preliminaries” and “main practice.” The preliminaries teach ritual procedures and form-based practices. The main practice directly points out what Buddha-nature is; this is the instruction on the view, exactly the same as Chan’s direct pointing, with no difference. Chan directly and straightforwardly points you to seeing the nature, without detours. When asked, “What is Buddha?” one replies, “Who is speaking with you face to face? If this is not Buddha, who is?” What is it that is speaking face to face? The saying points directly to the one speaking with me: if this is not Buddha, who is? Extending it further, who is this that can hear sounds and can move? Is this not our Buddha-nature? This simple, direct, and essential sentence points you straight to seeing the nature.

Or when asked, “What is Buddha?” the master calls your name; when you answer, he seizes that moment to point out, “This is Buddha!” See how straightforward it is—what a delight! Awakening to the Way is this easy; there is nothing mysterious or extraordinary about it. This is the most profound Chan Dharma; this is China’s Great Perfection Dharma. Unfortunately later people had weaker faculties and greater doubt, and would not take it up as their own. “The point where this thought has ceased is the original nature? It is that easy? I am afraid that cannot be right!” They doubted. Among greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt, doubt harms people most fiercely; it makes them lose the true mind.

When the patriarchs saw that direct pointing no longer worked, they stopped directly revealing it and made a detour, telling students to investigate a huatou. Asked, “What is Buddha?” one might answer, “East Mountain walks on water,” or “Take off your straw sandals and walk barefoot,” or say something at random without directly telling you. Because you do not understand the meaning of that reply, a doubt-sensation arises. Through this doubt-sensation, deluded thoughts are cut off. When the time and conditions arrive, you can personally realize the original nature.

In Chan, after awakening to the essential principle, one immediately carries out continuous close protection, trains amid circumstances, and diligently removes deluded habits, until the practice becomes continuous and seamless and one fully penetrates the Three Barriers. We can give many examples. Take the Sixth Patriarch. Through the Fifth Patriarch’s instruction, “Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind,” he awakened to the Way. After awakening, he knew that all daily functioning is me. As long as there is no abiding, one is free

and at ease, and that original nature, the marvelous bright true mind, naturally appears before one. He then closely protected it in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Only when the Way was complete and conditions were mature did he come out and open the teaching seat.

Speaking of protecting and letting be: first there is protection, then letting be. First one protects it: when thoughts arise, one does not follow them; when circumstances appear, one is not swayed by them. Once this is mature, one drops the protection and goes on to letting be—letting go and acting freely, without constraint and without clinging. This is like Confucius saying, “At seventy I followed my heart’s desires without overstepping the bounds.” One can do anything, can enter Buddha and can also enter demon.

Later, look at Mazu’s disciple Damei. Damei asked Mazu, “What is Buddha?” Mazu answered, “Mind itself is Buddha.” Mind is Buddha, and Buddha is mind. Damei awakened immediately. After he had protected it for three years, Mazu wanted to test whether Damei truly understood, so he sent an attendant to say, “Senior brother, recently the master’s Buddhadharma has changed.” Damei asked, “How so?” The attendant said, “Now he also says: neither mind nor Buddha.” Damei said, “This old fellow confuses people without end. Let him say ‘neither mind nor Buddha’; I simply keep to ‘mind itself is Buddha.’” When Mazu heard this, he said, “The plum has ripened!” A person who has truly awakened stands firmly and is not swayed by other people’s words.

Chan points directly in this way; Great Perfection is also like this. Only at the end does Great Perfection speak of “the empty aspect of the essence is dharmakāya.” At the beginning it is unwilling to speak like this. Only after decades of practice will it tell you this: the empty aspect of the essence, without the slightest characteristic, is dharmakāya; the manifest clarity aspect of the essence is sambhogakāya; and all things are transformations and manifestations of my Dharma-nature, with nothing sought and nothing grasped—this is my nirmāṇakāya. It explains this very clearly. This is called the Great Perfection view.

Therefore, it is not that there is no one accomplished in Hangzhou. You are deceiving yourselves and have gone wrong by turning toward spiritual powers. To say that no one in Hangzhou has accomplishment misses the point: in fact, you are already in the midst of accomplishment without realizing it. You also say you do not know how functioning occurs. Yet functioning is occurring all day long—how could you not know it? Is drinking water not functioning? Are eating, putting on clothes, walking, and working not functioning? If these are not functioning, what would count as functioning? It is all because of grasping: you want spiritual powers and extraordinary mysteries, to be able to do what others cannot, and you regard only that as function. If everyone can do it, you do not count it as function. You do not know that if it were the physical body functioning, then once breathing stops, could the body still move? Who is functioning now? Is this not the function of our Buddha-nature? Is it not the function of true mind? Therefore a Chan master said, “All day long they sit beside the rice basket, yet countless people starve to death.” The rice is right beside them, yet they do not

know how to eat; marvelous function is occurring, yet they do not recognize it. Is this not a terrible waste?

Therefore we say: do not be deceived by yourselves. Understand this principle. To truly eliminate greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt, you must see the nature. If you do not see the nature, how can you remove greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt? There is always grasping and abiding, greed without satisfaction: if one has ten thousand one wants a hundred thousand; if one has a hundred thousand one wants a million or a hundred million. Greed is never satisfied. Therefore in studying Buddhism we must let everything go.

When we sit, we must be utterly resolved, like a dead person, caring about nothing, mentally reciting the mantra and listening attentively. It is the mind that holds the mantra, not the mouth. The ears listen clearly. When discursive thought does not stir, the mind is gathered. Once gathered, one can enter deeply into meditative absorption, the mind can settle, and what is original can open up.

After the sitting, one must observe the mind. One must maintain clear observation at every moment, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and never forget. Inwardly, do not be carried along by thoughts: when a thought arises, notice it immediately; once noticed, it is empty. If a thought has arisen and you do not know it, do not see it, and have followed it along, then only later realize there has been a thought, it is already late. As soon as a thought arises, know it immediately and do not follow it. Outwardly, do not be dragged by circumstances: whatever changes occur outside cannot pull me along. Know that all of these are false appearances, all reflections of my own nature, and do not run after them. Practicing in this way, within no more than three to five years, all can enter the great Way. Therefore we must explain the principle clearly and let everyone know what path is correct. It is absolutely not the case that manifesting spiritual powers is accomplishment.

After understanding true mind, protect it at every moment. When one is truly free and at ease, with nothing pursued, the five superknowledges naturally manifest. Now I have given you the instruction and revelation of the view: the numinous, vividly aware nature at the point where this thought has ceased is our original nature. This is awakening at the level of principle. After awakening at the level of principle, one still has to protect it. In protecting it, one watches thoughts and does not run after them. When this becomes mature, the mind that can observe and the thoughts that are observed fall away all at once, just as when we sit in practice and the mind that can recite and the mantra being held fall away all at once; body, mind, and world all become unobtainable, and one personally realizes the original nature.

What is the difference between awakening at the level of principle and direct realization? The essential principle realized by both is the same, with no difference. The essential principle realized in a single thought is exactly the same as what we realize after several years of practice when everything drops away, and it is also the same as what Chan practitioners realize after thirty years of huatou investigation. But the strength is different. If one realizes it

in a single thought without prior practice, then when affairs come one often cannot withstand them and the mind becomes disturbed. This means the delusions of thought have not been ended, and greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt have not been eliminated. When, during formal sitting practice, body, mind, and world all dissolve into emptiness, the strength born of direct realization is present. When affairs come, one can withstand them, and greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt can be eliminated. Thus the strength is different.

Still, if we can truly stand firm, recognize that the point where this thought has ceased is my original nature, no longer doubt, and protect it, that is also good. Recognize that this one nature is the three bodies—*dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*—and that everything is my *nirmāṇakāya*. Do not doubt, do not take things as real, and do not chase after them. In this way, over three to five years, things will gradually be brought to completion. This too is very good. This is how practice should be carried out. There is nothing mysterious about it. The essential instruction is simple. When Master Linji awakened, he said, “After all, the Buddhadharma does not have much to it.” There is nothing special. Right now, this is it; right now, it is realized. Therefore practice never departs from the present moment; we practice at every moment.

What ruins things is that everyone doubts. Pure Land practitioners also doubt: “Can I be reborn in the West by practicing Buddha-recitation like this? I am afraid I cannot.” When doubt is heavy, Buddha-recitation has no strength, and rebirth in the West becomes difficult. One must have full confidence: “Practicing this way, I will definitely accomplish it; I will definitely be reborn in the West; this is certain!” Then there is strength. Wholeheartedness has strength.

The most important thing is that we first attain the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. Studying Buddhism is to be free and at ease. If one still spends every day in affliction, worry, and sorrow, then this is not Buddhadharma and does not accord with Buddhadharma. We say, “Whether food and clothing are plentiful or sparse, live according to conditions.” Everything follows conditions. If conditions are good, live with the good; if conditions are bad, live with the bad. It makes no difference. They are all false appearances. If good conditions make you laugh happily, but bad conditions make you worried and afflicted, then what Buddhism are you studying? Is not everything unobtainable? Is not everything a dream-state? Why is your mind still moved?

Someone asks, “Have I awakened?” Whether you have awakened or not, ask yourself: “Am I still infatuated with circumstances? Am I still attached to marks?” If you still become infatuated with circumstances, then you have not awakened. Awakening means waking up and no longer dreaming. In a dream, there is everything: good circumstances make one extremely happy, while bad circumstances make one extremely miserable; some people even wake up crying or shouting. But after waking, there is not the slightest trace. If you still become afflicted when meeting circumstances, then you have not awakened. Not rejoicing in

favorable circumstances, not becoming afflicted or angry in adverse circumstances—that is correct. Only then can greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt truly be eliminated.

If one has fundamentally not apprehended Mind and seen nature, then there is no question of eliminating greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt; not the slightest bit can be removed. To remove greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt, seeing the nature is indispensable. After seeing the nature, one must still train and protect it amid affairs and circumstances. If strength is insufficient and the mind still moves when meeting circumstances, then one should sit more. When one is deluded by circumstances and the mind moves, this is delusion of thought. In practice, first understand what true mind is. This is the most important point. Only then can one begin protecting it and know where to focus one's effort. If one does not understand what true mind is and does not even know where to focus one's effort, how can one realize the Way?

In practice, one must have self-knowledge. If meditative stability is insufficient, sit more. Sitting more strengthens it. We used to practice this way too. Whenever we rested on Sundays, we did not go out for recreation; we stayed home and sat for an entire day. When we finished the day's sitting that night, the mind was extraordinarily pure. No circumstance moved it at all. Things originally liked were now not wanted at all. There was only lightness and ease, together with incomparable Dharma-joy. Therefore, if meditative stability remains insufficient, one still has to sit more in order to protect continuously and closely. When the mind is truly empty and pure, free and at ease, this is the penetration of the Way; it is also the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. Once this penetration is obtained, there is no need to worry that the other five superknowledges will not manifest. This is what is meant by, "Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches." Because the five superknowledges are fully present in the original nature, once it opens they naturally manifest; before it opens, they remain obscured. If the things one grasps have not been removed and the mind is always shaken, then seeking spiritual powers is going against the Way. It is attachment added upon attachment, greed, anger, and delusion added upon greed, anger, and delusion. How could one get what one wishes? One must let everything go.

The Heart-Center Dharma is a great Dharma that integrates Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric practice into a single Dharma. At every moment it has us directly see the nature. During practice, it is neither empty nor existent. The mudrā and mantra are existent; but what do the mudrā and mantra mean? They cannot be thought through or considered. They are present, yet as though absent: present but not truly existent—that is, not existent in their own right. Because there is a mudrā and mantra, it is not empty; this is also "not empty." Giving you a mantra to recite and a mudrā to form is emptiness that is not empty, neither empty nor existent. It propels you forward, enabling you to realize the original nature. After realizing the original nature, it returns to Chan. When the mind is truly empty and pure—pure and uncovered, clean and stainless, without a single speck of dust—is that not Pure Land? The land is mind, and mind is land. Then wherever you wish to be reborn—east, south, west, or

north—you may be reborn there; all are Pure Lands. Free and at ease as conditions unfold, the three are integrated as one.

The true Pure Land is our Pure Land of Eternally Quiescent Light, the Pure Land of original nature. It is originally pure and uncontaminated. It is only because our deluded mind clings that this evil world of the five turbidities is created. When our mind is pure, the evil world of the five turbidities is transformed into Pure Land. Therefore the Heart-Center Dharma is the heart-essence portion of Esoteric Buddhism; it is the view of Great Perfection.

Realizing the Way can be divided into four steps. The first step is “seeing the original nature.” Now, understanding that the numinous knowing at the point where this thought has ceased is the original nature amounts to the same thing. Great Perfection also points it out directly, allowing people to see their original nature immediately. Next comes the practice of protection. In the midst of protecting comes “growth in awakening and experiential benefit.” This is the second step. Here “awakening” means awakening and vigilant awareness: not being confused and not being swayed by circumstances. With true awakening, one gains genuine experiential benefit and will no longer be afflicted. Otherwise, in adverse circumstances you will be afflicted and get angry. Once awakened, you know that all of this is false, all reflections. Not clinging, not pursuing, and not being afflicted, you experience genuine benefit; Dharma-joy fills you, and throughout the day you are light and at ease, filled with delight. Therefore the first ground is called the Joyous Ground. As awakening and experiential benefit grow, one advances in realization step by step—first ground, second ground, third ground, and so on. One continually examines oneself: “How am I now compared with before? Have I made progress?” Of course one does not ascend to the tenth ground, Equal Enlightenment, or Wondrous Enlightenment in a single step. There is a process.

The third step is “the luminous body advances.” The luminous body means a body of light. As it advances, great light is emitted and brightly illuminates the worlds of the ten directions. The Buddhas of the ten directions enter my body, and my body enters the bodies of all Buddhas; they interpenetrate one another without obstruction. This is the realm described in the Avatamsaka Sutra. Because growth in awakening and experiential benefit has reached this point, greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt are absolutely gone, not a trace remains. But this is still not ultimate. Only the fourth step is “Dharma realm completion.” All light is unobtainable, and all spiritual powers are unobtainable; everything is gathered back into self-nature and no longer appears. In Great Perfection terms, this is “like the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth month.” Can the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth month still be seen? It cannot. Everything has been gathered back into one’s own mind; none of it remains. Chan speaks the same way at this point.

Last time I mentioned a koan. A monk asked Caoshan, “What about when the bright moon is directly overhead?” A bright moon overhead means the great full moon shining above one’s head. Caoshan answered, “He is still a man below the steps.” He has not arrived home. The monk said, “Please, master, guide me up the steps.” He was asking the master to be

compassionate and pull him up. Caoshan answered, “We will meet when the moon has set.” Therefore Chan and Esoteric Buddhism are the same; do not misunderstand. The profound Esoteric Dharma, the highest-level Esoteric Dharma, is Chan.

Thus, if you can stand firmly and not be misled by other people’s words, you can realize the great Way. If, as soon as you hear someone say, “A living Buddha has come, with great spiritual powers,” you follow along, then you will go down a forked road. There is no Esoteric Dharma higher than Chan, and moreover seeking spiritual powers brings misfortune and leads to demonic attachment. A young woman who came from Guangzhou this time studied qigong and sought to develop special abilities. As a result, two ghosts entered her body. The first one that entered was still all right; when something happened the ghost would tell her, so she seemed to have a little spiritual power. But when another one came, her physical body could not bear it and she suffered. This is the evil consequence of seeking spiritual powers.

Therefore, in studying Buddhism we must understand and walk the correct path. We must know that the most important thing in Buddhism is not manifesting spiritual powers, but ending birth-and-death. How is birth-and-death ended? By not clinging to circumstances, not running after thoughts, and not clinging to any circumstance whatsoever. Only then can birth-and-death be ended. Seeking spiritual powers is not ultimate and cannot end birth-and-death. People who seek spiritual powers are all attached to marks and are all seeking fame and material support. I have heard of qigong masters first giving talks with “transmitted energy,” selling tickets to make money, then charging money for healing illnesses, and later selling “information objects.” These are all irrelevant things. To put it plainly, they are money-making frauds. Would following them not be a terrible waste?

In studying Buddhism, we must recognize the mind-ground Dharma-gate: “Only this one is true; the other two are not real.” To practice outside the mind-ground Dharma-gate—to seek Dharma outside the mind—is to follow a non-Buddhist path. Accomplishment is not manifesting spiritual powers. It is a mind that is empty and abiding nowhere, vast and open, free and at ease. To be unobstructed by favorable or adverse circumstances, free and at ease—this is the greatest spiritual power. Apart from this, even if the five superknowledges appear, the mind is still not free.

For example, if one has knowledge of past lives and knows what one did in past lives, the mind may become distressed: “I did so many bad things in past lives!” There was an arhat like this. In a past life he had killed his own father. After obtaining this superknowledge, his mind became distressed: “How could I have been so unfilial as to kill my own father?” He could no longer sit steadily. Śākyamuni Buddha said to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, “This arhat has developed knowledge of past lives and knows that he killed his father. His mind is unsteady. Let us put on a play and teach Dharma to save him.” Then Mañjuśrī drew his sword to kill the Buddha. Everyone was terrified. The offense of killing one’s father is already grave; killing a Buddha is even worse. The Buddha said, “Do not be alarmed. Mañjuśrī has no mind to kill the Buddha. All of this is the stirring of your deluded mind and deluded thoughts. In reality, these

matters are like dream-scenes appearing in a dream. They are all illusory; there are no real events.”

Therefore, what was done in past lives is like what was done in a dream. Once awake, it is gone, and the mind becomes stable. The Buddha taught this arhat Dharma in this way, causing his mind to settle. Thus we must understand that wrong deeds done in the past are like deeds done in a dream. Now that one has awakened, let go and empty the mind, and they are gone. When the mind is empty, karmic obstructions disappear; when the mind is not empty, trouble follows, and one must undergo karmic retribution. Therefore, if one attains knowledge of past lives while the mind is not empty, afflictions become boundless. Practitioners should work with the mind at every moment and not vainly seek spiritual powers. Walk the correct road and do not enter side paths; only then can birth-and-death truly be ended.

6. 成佛的诀窍 / The Key to Becoming a Buddha

Chinese source: 《成佛的诀窍》

The Key to Becoming a Buddha. Spoken in Jinan in June 1996. The purpose of our practice is to open up what is original and see the nature. The Heart-Center Dharma is the heart-essence division of esoteric Dharma. Esoteric Dharma includes the sequence of nine vehicles: the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles. The Heart-Center Dharma is the final heart-essence portion of the secret three vehicles. In Tibet and in Japan, one has to practice for many years before this Dharma can be transmitted. Now we need not pass through many years of preparatory and preliminary practices; the main practice can be transmitted directly. Why? Because Chinese civilization is ancient and possesses a Mahāyāna character. The Daoist and Confucian teachings born in this land embody profound wisdom and cultural depth. When the Patriarch came from the West, he spoke directly of Chan, and so Chan flourished most. Chan is direct pointing: it is the most direct and straightforward, without detours or circling around. It directly points to the human mind so that one sees the nature and becomes a Buddha; it is the quickest path. Because this foundation is good, our Heart-Center Dharma can also proceed directly to the main practice without preliminaries. You have all practiced for quite some time, so you should have gained some experience. Let us exchange and discuss how your practice has been. When one practices alone, without exchange with Dharma brothers and sisters or with people who have practiced and realized, one inevitably feels a bit puzzled. By talking it through, the knots can be loosened and everyone can continue forward with greater clarity and understanding.

Why do we say that Heart-Center Dharma practice takes one thousand sittings? With the foundation laid by these thousand sittings, there will certainly be an opportunity to open up what is original and see the nature. Certainly there will be one. What is feared is that sometimes a person misses that opportunity and lets it pass without noticing. At the point where recitation reaches non-recitation, there is a feeling that is not quite clear: as though one knows and yet does not know. It seems to pass by, to slip away. This is extremely regrettable. In truth, our original nature is always shining right before us; it is not hidden. The capacity by which we can see, hear, speak, sit, and walk is our Buddha-nature. It shines right before us at every moment and is never hidden. Even when we are asleep, it remains lucid and clearly aware. Even in dreaming, the function that gives rise to dream-scenes is still it. In explanation, when dreaming, the seeds of the eighth consciousness have surfaced, and the sixth consciousness takes up these seeds to form the dream-scene. But without Buddha-nature, how could there be an eighth consciousness? How could the sixth consciousness form the dream-scene? Fundamentally, this function is still Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is always present, never lacking and never concealed; therefore there is no pattern of interruption followed by continuation. It is never first cut off and then resumed; no, it is continuously so at every moment.

Our practice is just this: to recognize Buddha-nature. I will now point it out in more detail. Our Buddha-nature is evident precisely when one thought has ceased—when the previous thought has already ceased and the next thought has not yet arisen. When the previous thought has ceased and the next has not yet arisen, knowing has not ceased; it remains clear and distinct. That moment is a hair-trigger opportunity, the crucial moment, the most important moment. Yet people often miss it. Not recognizing it, they slide past it. It is certain that everyone has one second of purity. No matter who a person is, there is surely one second when thought does not arise. When thought does not arise, all is still clear and distinct; if one does not recognize this, one misses it. Most important is to recognize this original nature, the one that is always shining right before us.

You all know that Huang Shangu was as famous as Su Dongpo. His poetry, painting, and calligraphy were all excellent. When he investigated Chan, his teacher, Elder Huitang, told him to investigate the line, “Do you, my young friends, think I conceal anything from you? I conceal nothing from you.” What kind of saying is this? This was spoken by Confucius to his students: “You students, do you think that I, your teacher, have some hidden or secret place that I have not spoken to you about? Do you think I have anything concealed? Is there something hidden, something not openly taught to you? I have no concealment. I have told you everything openly. I am sincere and open toward you students. It is not that I teach more to one who pleases me and less to another who displeases me. No. I treat all alike and speak to all of you with an open and sincere heart. I have no concealment from you.” Huitang told him to investigate this *huatou*. Huang Shangu was a learned man: “How could I not know this? Why would he ask me to investigate it? I know what it means.” He explained many meanings, but Elder Huitang rejected them all: “Not right, not right; say more and it is still not right.” Huang Shangu became displeased: “I am a scholar. How could I not know? I understand the meaning; how can it be wrong?” He felt somewhat resentful and had opinions about the teacher: “The teacher is deliberately putting me down, saying my answer is wrong, wrong. It is already very correct, yet still not right?” He was unhappy and stopped speaking.

But after returning, he thought, “Elder Huitang is a good spiritual teacher with five hundred people under him. Such a great patriarch would not deliberately put me down. There must be another meaning. What, then, is the meaning of ‘Do you think I conceal anything from you? I conceal nothing from you?’” He investigated it for quite some time. One day he went out with his teacher to roam in the mountains. Our practice is not done rigidly; sometimes one also goes out to relax the mind and mood. Keeping the mind bound too tightly is also not good. Sometimes one should loosen; sometimes one should tighten. It is like playing a musical instrument: if the string is too tight it snaps, and if it is too loose it gives no sound. Our practice needs the same balance. When too tight, loosen a little; when too loose, tighten a little. So they went out to wander and relax. It was the eighth lunar month and the osmanthus flowers were in full bloom. A gust of wind carried a burst of osmanthus fragrance, and Huang Shangu blurted out, “What a fine scent of osmanthus!” Muxi means osmanthus. His teacher immediately pointed him out: “I conceal nothing from you.” I have nothing concealed; you too

have nothing concealed. Who is it that smells the fragrance of osmanthus? Huang Shangu awakened right then: “Ah! This one that can smell is my Buddha-nature!” Yes: it is always shining right before me. The function by which we can put on clothes and eat is Buddha-nature. We never depart from Buddha-nature for even a moment. Therefore seeing the nature is not difficult; it is right before us. This point must be clearly pointed out so that everyone understands and sees it, and knows at every moment that this is Buddha-nature.

But after we understand and know this Buddha-nature, is everything finished? Is the great matter complete? Have we arrived home? No. If, after understanding this Buddha-nature, our habits are still present, that will not do. We will not be able to pass through in actual affairs. The purpose of studying Buddhism is to end birth-and-death and no longer undergo the suffering of samsaric birth-and-death in the six destinies. If our habits remain, and when a circumstance appears before us we still stir the mind and run after it, then birth-and-death is not ended. Even if you understand that what remains clear and distinct where one thought has ceased is your Buddha-nature, if your habits remain and the mind stirs—if the mind moves in relation to circumstances—it is useless. We have our present bodies because, when our parents had intercourse, we ourselves moved in mind and entered. No one arranged it for us or assigned us to it; we went because our own mind moved.

To move in mind toward circumstances is bad. Most especially, sexual desire is the worst. Sexual desire is the root of birth-and-death. In true practice, sexual desire has to be completely cut off. But if it cannot be cut off all at once, then cut it off gradually. Lay practitioners are permitted proper sexual conduct; for monastics, even proper sexual conduct is not allowed. But it has to be gradually cut off. Those who are reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss also have to cut off sexual thoughts completely. If these are not cut off completely, they cannot be born there. Therefore we must train until the mind does not move in relation to circumstances; only then can birth-and-death be ended. If one understands this principle but still moves the mind in relation to circumstances—laughing happily when things are good, and when adverse circumstances and misfortune come, becoming completely disoriented and suffering terribly—then that will not do; birth-and-death cannot be ended.

For this reason Pure Land people often say Chan is not good and slander Chan. Even if Chan practitioners awaken, they say, if their delusions of thought are not ended, birth-and-death is not ended. Delusions of thought are precisely the mind arising in relation to circumstances: thought stirs, one clings to circumstances, and birth-and-death cannot end. Only when delusions of thought are also ended—when the mind does not move in relation to circumstances—will it do. Therefore, after we understand this principle, we must practice all the more and intensify our practice. In the Heart-Center Dharma we have this opportunity at every moment. Because Heart-Center Dharma practice relies on the Buddha’s empowering support, sometimes while sitting we can suddenly open and see the nature. Sometimes it can happen while walking, because it is not that practice stops when we walk: in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, we all have to practice, watching the point where thoughts

arise and not running after them. Then, for a moment, it may also open. Even while sleeping and dreaming, it may open. It does not open only during formal sitting; while working, walking, or dreaming it can all open. The trouble is that sometimes one does not know and misses the opportunity. Therefore today I am pointing this out to everyone: recognizing the original nature is the first and most important measure. If one does not recognize the original nature, one practices in vain; practice after practice, one still does not know what original nature is.

The Heart-Center Dharma is quick in opening up what is original and seeing the nature. To say “one thousand sittings” is already lenient; the measure has been broadened. In reality, one does not need one thousand sittings. If you truly practice wholeheartedly at every moment, then when sitting you must be utterly settled and let no thought arise. You must be utterly settled in mental recitation with attentive listening. The mantra must be recited mentally, not with the mouth; the ear must hear each syllable clearly and distinctly. Only by keeping discursive thought from moving can one easily enter samādhi. Outside formal sitting, maintain continuous, close observation. Watch the point where thoughts arise and do not run after them. When circumstances appear, do not be moved by them. If you practice this way, it is very quick: in three hundred or five hundred sittings one can open up what is original and see the nature. This Dharma is very quick in seeing the nature.

After seeing the nature, one must go further and remove habits. When habits are completely removed, delusions of thought are ended. Ignorance is divided into four levels, from coarse to subtle. First are delusions of view: views and understanding. When views are not correct, it is like many people practicing today who have incorrect views and run after qigong: “Qigong has great functions; it can develop special abilities!” They follow qigong. Following qigong cannot end birth-and-death. At most, qigong concerns the body: exercising the body, strengthening essence, qi, and spirit, making the qi circulate flexibly, and preventing illness. It cannot end birth-and-death. Moreover, they cling to special abilities. Where do special abilities come from? Special abilities are not one’s own; they come from outside—that is, through possession. Among today’s qigong masters with special abilities, ten out of ten rely on such external possession; the abilities do not arise from themselves. Therefore this is not worthy of instruction or pursuit.

Some people hear that a certain teacher transmits a way through which spiritual powers can be obtained, and they rush there like people chasing after a craze, like flies seeing blood. Are those true spiritual powers? They are not. True spiritual powers first require penetration of the Way. Penetration of the Way is the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows: in the mind there is not the slightest attachment, one wants nothing at all, all afflictions have leaked away, and the mind is truly empty and pure. That is the manifestation of the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. When this superknowledge opens, then miraculous abilities, recollection of past lives, the divine eye, and the divine ear arise. When such powers arise from this basis, they are true spiritual powers. These powers cannot be sought, nor can they

be brought about through practice; practice cannot produce them. Spiritual powers are originally complete within our own nature. One must open up the original nature and see what is original, and clear away the attachments and habitual tendencies covering it; then they naturally unfold. That is true spiritual power.

We must understand this principle, not be swayed by others, stand firmly on our own feet, and end delusions of view. Our view must be correct. Correct view is very easy: know that we are practicing proper Buddhadharma. Whether Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism, practice proper Buddhadharma and do not dabble in other things; then the view is correct. Cutting off delusions of thought is harder. They are comparatively subtler. To have the mind arise in relation to circumstances is a human habit; people's minds all move. In particular, whether male or female, old or young, on seeing the opposite sex the mind moves. Therefore, when the mind sees circumstances it must not move at all. Why? Because our awakening to the Way must be deep. We must know that apart from original nature, all affairs are false, illusory, and unreal. The Lotus Sutra says, "Only this one thing is real; the other two are not true." Only our original nature is real; only this one thing is real. Everything else is false, all reflections within our Buddha-nature. Therefore none of it is reliable; do not cling to it. Do not move in relation to circumstances. Train amid circumstances until these habits are exhausted; only then can birth-and-death be ended. When delusions of view and thought are ended, when delusions of thought are cut off and one no longer runs after circumstances, then one does not go; not going means one does not take birth. Thus birth-and-death is ended. If, seeing a fine circumstance, one runs toward it, then one takes birth. Therefore this is very dangerous.

Thus, after recognizing original nature, one is exactly at the point where practice should begin. It is not that once original nature is recognized, there is no need to practice.

Recognition of original nature is the first step; it is precisely the best time to practice. We must exert ourselves diligently. Now there are two kinds of people. One kind, when this is spoken and they are told to recognize original nature, does not accept it: "This is original nature? I fear not. Why? If recognizing this were recognizing original nature, why have I not developed spiritual powers?" They abide in spiritual powers; they abide in the divine eye, divine ear, knowledge of others' minds, miraculous abilities, and recollection of past lives. "I have not developed powers, so I still do not know. That cannot be it. If I had truly recognized original nature, I ought to have powers." This kind refuses to accept.

The other kind becomes wild: "Oh! This is original nature? Good, good! I have awakened to the Way! I can stop practicing!" If they stop practicing, they are finished. Why? Because habits are still present, and birth-and-death cannot be ended. The great Chan patriarch Linji explained this to us very clearly. He said, "If you understand by the first phrase, you still cannot save yourself from birth-and-death." What is the first phrase? It is: "Look at the puppets performing on the stage; all their movements depend entirely on the puppeteer inside the booth." This means that when we watch a puppet show, the puppet stands on the stage, while a puppeteer inside the booth pulls the strings so the puppet can move. For example, in a

puppet show of “Sun Wukong Thrice Defeats the White-Bone Demon,” the puppet can strike and move entirely because someone pulls the strings. This is an analogy for us. Now we can speak, walk, and work because, in the analogy, there is a puppeteer inside the booth pulling the strings. This body is just like a puppet. Who is pulling the strings? It is our Buddha-nature. Once one recognizes this principle—“Ah, now I can speak, listen, stand, and walk; this is my Buddha-nature”—one has recognized it. But one is not yet free. Why? Habits remain. When faced with circumstances the mind still arises and wavers, so birth-and-death is not ended. Patriarch Linji cautions us that after recognizing it we must protect it continuously and practice.

Chan protects continuously by watching the point where thoughts arise, exactly as we teach: at every moment one practices continuous protection, watching the point where thoughts arise and not running after them. When all circumstances appear—wholesome or unwholesome, favorable or adverse—do not waver. Train in this way and exhaust the habits; only then can birth-and-death be ended. Therefore Master Linji divided progress here into nine steps, advancing step by step. The first step is this: when we want to protect, we forget to protect. Because we are accustomed to moving in thought and running after circumstances, once a circumstance arises, we run after it and forget protection. Quickly pull it back, until one no longer forgets to protect. From forgetting protection, one arrives at not forgetting protection: at every moment one keeps watch over the *huatou*. This protection is not rigid protection. It is not, “I will watch; I must not speak; I must watch and not speak.” It is not like this. This protection is flexible, free, and relaxed. It is not suppressing thoughts: “Oh, this thought must not arise, must not arise.” It is not that. Let it arise. If it arises, I pay it no attention. When a thought arises and I do not heed it, it passes. It is like pedestrians on the road: many people come and go; if you do not pay attention, they pass. If you pay attention—“Hey!”—and stop them to talk, they do not leave.

Therefore our protection is flexible and responsive, not rigid or dull, not suppressing thoughts. When doing something, there is just the one thought of doing that thing, and no second thought arises. That is protection. One must also know that protection is not staring at some place or abiding at a particular point like Daoist guarding of the dantian or guarding an aperture. No. It is free and responsive: when a thought arises, do not run after it; remain free and at ease. From forgetting to protect one arrives at not forgetting to protect; this is a major process. When one can always watch, truly not forgetting to protect, one must still progress further and forget even the protection. One must disengage from protection. Why? Because at this point protection itself has become superfluous. Buddha-nature is originally so: originally unborn and undying, undefiled and pure, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing. We protect now because our habits are heavy. If we do not protect in this way, the habits will not stop. When this protection succeeds, the mind naturally does not move. When all circumstances come, one is neither delighted nor annoyed; this is progress in practice.

In Chan this is already called “the dharmakāya abiding correctly.” The first step of seeing the nature is called “the threshold of the dharmakāya.” At this threshold, it is like coming to the doorway of this Buddha-hall and sticking one’s head in to look around. If one has not yet reached the point where good does not delight and bad does not annoy, then one has not arrived. If one can truly do this without the slightest forcing, that is dharmakāya abiding correctly. It is like entering the room and reaching the inner hall; practice has become comparatively good. Then, gradually, one forgets all of this “do not forget to protect”; even forgetting is forgotten. But even having forgotten is still not enough: one must pass from deliberate effort into the unconditioned. At that point one does not seek spiritual powers; spiritual powers naturally appear. The unconditioned is the stage of an eighth-ground bodhisattva. Going further still, even the unconditioned is unobtainable. If there remains an unconditioned to abide in, that is still not good; there is still a little view and a little dharma-clinging. This too must be completely canceled, so that one further advances to going beyond the dharmakāya. Chan speaks of the Three Barriers. The Initial Barrier is “the threshold of the dharmakāya,” as just discussed. The second stage, the Multiple Barrier, is “dharmakāya abiding correctly.” The third stage, the Prison Barrier, is going beyond the dharmakāya. Even if spiritual powers arise, they are unobtainable; even if great light is emitted and illuminates the ten directions, it is unobtainable. Everything is gathered back into self-nature. Therefore all things return to oneself; the whole array of myriad phenomena is my own nirmāṇakāya. Not clinging to marks in the slightest—that is the ultimate Dharma realm.

Our practice must follow this sequence. Never be satisfied with a little. Now there are two kinds of people: one kind cannot take it up as their own and does not recognize this as self-nature. The other kind knows a little principle and thinks it is enough: “Ah, I have arrived home; I need not practice any further.” In reality this is very far off. It is not arriving home; it is only beginning to take the first step. In Esoteric Great Perfection this is stated very clearly: recognizing original nature is the first step. Therefore our practice of Heart-Center is Great Perfection Dharma. Because it is perfectly complete and ultimate, fulfilling Buddhahood completely, it is called Great Perfection. The first step is recognizing original nature. All of you have practiced Heart-Center for quite some time and should have this view. Recognize original nature right where one thought has ceased. Do not seek it outside; if you seek outside, you will not find it. It shines right before your own face at every moment.

After recognizing it, continuous protection is the second step. In Esoteric terms, this is “growth in awakening and experiential benefit”: day by day one awakens more. One knows that all these circumstances are transformations of one’s own Buddha-nature. Here you may not understand: how can all things be transformations of one’s own Buddha-nature? Let me explain by analogy. Take this great hall. Before building this hall, was it not necessary to draw a design and make a blueprint? Was the drawing of the design and blueprint not done through the thinking and planning of the brain? How could the brain think and design? Is this the brain’s own function? If it were the brain, then when we die and the brain is still there, why can it no longer move? How am I able to think and design now? This “ability” is the function of

our Buddha-nature. It is the function of Buddha-nature, not the function of the brain. The brain is like an electrical wire, and Buddha-nature is electricity. When electricity passes through the wire, the function is accomplished through the brain. Then workers follow the drawing and blueprint to build the house. What is the function by which everyone builds it? This too is the function of Buddha-nature. Therefore the completion of this great hall is something manifested by Buddha-nature; it is a manifestation of Buddha-nature.

Now our seeing this great hall is also the function of Buddha-nature. The eyes themselves cannot see; seeing through the eyes also depends on the brain, and the brain also has to be “electrified.” That electricity is Buddha-nature. So, when traced to the root, the one that can see is still Buddha-nature. Scientists do not recognize this Buddha-nature, so they attribute our ability to see things to the functioning of the brain. In reality it is still our Buddha-nature. The ability to see and hear is Buddha-nature. All these myriad phenomena in their countless diversity are transformations of our Buddha-nature; they are our *nirmāṇakāya*. Therefore our *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya* are completely present right now; there is no need to seek them outside. Now, at the point where one thought has ceased, what is clear and distinct is *dharmakāya*. Our ability to see all things is our wisdom-light; this luminous wisdom that can see is our *saṃbhogakāya*. These myriad phenomena in all their diversity are transformations of our Buddha-nature; they are our *nirmāṇakāya*. So the three bodies—*dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*—are perfectly complete right before us; do not seek them outside. They are right here now.

Understanding this principle makes practice much easier and less effortful. At every moment, watch the point where thoughts arise and do not run after thoughts; do not cling to marks. Although endlessly varied circumstances appear before you, do not run after them. They are all reflections within our *dharmakāya*. The *dharmakāya* is the mirror, and things are its reflections. Reflections in a mirror are unobtainable and cannot be grasped. Before all circumstances, do not move the mind; protect it, and you will accomplish the Way. Therefore practice is easy and not difficult. To fully actualize Buddha-nature and perfectly accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood is not difficult, provided we know the key and know the method. The difficulty lies in not knowing the key or the method and therefore wandering aimlessly in blind, haphazard practice. That is not good. Today I am explaining this clearly. In our practice, we must recognize original nature. Original nature is nowhere else; it shines right before us. The capacity that can see and hear is our Buddha-nature. Our practice is simply to protect it.

What about sitting? Sitting strengthens meditative stability. If we lack meditative stability when encountering circumstances, we will run after them. Actually, if we know this as understanding, it is still principle and not yet affairs. Originally, principle is affairs and affairs are principle. But in practice there is a certain distinction. As the *Śūraṅgama Sutra* says, “Awakening to principle is sudden; with that awakening, all delusion is dissolved at once.” Principle is awakened to at once; there is no “awakening a little today and a little tomorrow.” “Today I recognize original nature; ah, this is my original nature.” That is enough. “All is

dissolved together with awakening” means that all unclear deluded thoughts, views, and ignorance are dissolved at once. “In practice, habits are gradually removed and exhausted in sequence.” In affairs one must train, because habits are too heavy. Our great patriarch Guifeng Zongmi said, “Principle can be suddenly awakened to,” but in affairs, because our habits have accumulated through many kalpas, they cannot be removed all at once. “They cannot be removed suddenly.” “One must remain vigilantly aware for a long time” means that this watchful examination must be sustained. Call your own name: “Ah, all of this is false; do not move, do not move!” One must awaken; do not be muddled.

For those who practice Pure Land, reciting Amitābha’s name is using the Buddha-name to wake oneself up, to make oneself clearer and less muddled. In reality it is the same. Pure Land people today do not know this. Master Lianchi, a Pure Land patriarch, said, “Each sound calls awake the master.” Each recitation of “Amitābha Buddha” is calling our master awake. Chan says the same: “Call your own name!” For example, I am called Yuanyin; I call, “Yuanyin! Yuanyin!” and I answer, “Yes!” “Stay lucid!” This means that at every moment you should remain lucid and not muddled. At every moment we must not be muddled. This is most important. Our practice is to maintain this lucidity, not to be muddled and not to cling to marks. To remove habits, one must sustain vigilance and awakening over a long period; this is lucidity. Examine yourself: what faults did I have today? Where was I wrong? Where did I violate the precepts again? Where did I cling to marks again? Quickly correct and remove them. Reduce and reduce again, decreasing day by day. Laozi of Daoism also said, “For the Way, daily decrease.” To succeed in practicing the great Way, one must reduce one’s habits and deluded thoughts day by day. “Daily decrease” means daily reduction, daily wearing away. Practice proceeds in this way. Once you understand this principle, you will have long-term resolve and will not be anxious.

People now often become anxious: “Ah! Why is my progress so slow? Why is the effect so small?” “Why is progress slow? I have not developed spiritual powers!” This is wrong. Why do you think seeking spiritual powers means rapid progress? Real progress is examined in affairs: formerly I was very afflicted about a certain matter; now I am not afflicted. Formerly I was very pleased and delighted about something; now I am not pleased or elated by it. That is great progress. True progress lies in training in affairs and examining oneself, not in using spiritual powers to test oneself. If, in actual affairs, you truly do not move thoughts and are not afflicted, spiritual powers will come of themselves without seeking. The patriarchs all spoke this way. For instance, Patriarch Yangshan of the Guiyang school, disciple of Guishan, said, “Spiritual powers are secondary matters of the sages. Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches.” Once one recognizes original nature clearly, truly stands firmly, and is not swayed by circumstances, there is “no worry about the branches”: these secondary spiritual powers will certainly manifest. Spiritual powers cannot be sought. If you seek them, you cannot obtain them; even if you obtain something by seeking, it is false, not genuine. The patriarchs spoke in this way. Therefore our progress is shown by freedom and liberation in affairs. If in affairs one can be free, at ease, peaceful, and happy at every moment, with no

affliction at all, that is great progress. Do not examine yourself through spiritual powers. To examine ourselves, we should look back at the past, not look forward. Why? If you look forward, the road is very long. The path to Buddhahood is not very short, because our habits are so great. Look back: how was I in the past, and how am I now? Have I made progress? Then one has confidence. “Ah, compared with before, I have progressed. In the past I could not let go of a certain matter; now I can let it go. My mind can be empty there.” That is great progress.

Progress should be seen there. Therefore one must maintain vigilant self-observation over the long term. Growth in awakening and experiential benefit means that day by day one awakens more, and day by day this benefit is more fully lived. Here, “experiential benefit” means actual freedom and ease, not sensual indulgence. The trouble with people now is pleasure-seeking: wanting good food, good clothes, good housing, good transportation—wanting everything. They all compare upward and never downward, so desires are endless. Because desires are endless, society becomes unstable. You want it, he wants it, everyone fights for it; then corruption and bribery all come. What Yuan Yin calls “right experience” is precisely this: the mind is open and empty, peaceful and at ease, very free. What is the point of spending the whole day in suffering, distress, affliction, grief, and worry? At longest, a human life lasts only a little over a hundred years. In the eyes of the Buddha, it passes in the blink of an eye and does not amount to anything. Therefore we ourselves must understand that Buddha-nature is real, while all phenomena and affairs are false, like reflections. Do not pursue them; let each follow its own conditions. The karma each person created in the past differs, so the results each receives differ. Now we again act and create karma, so the future results will differ as well. This is the reason. To look upward and expect everything to be good—impossible! Each has different conditions and different karma; it is impossible. Therefore it is enough to be at ease according to conditions, functioning naturally and freely. Fortunes differ and conditions differ. If the mind is empty and one has enough to eat and enough warmth in clothing, that is enough. Why compare upward? Those above have their conditions; those below have theirs.

If compared upward, we are insufficient; if compared downward, we have more than enough. Look downward: there are still people who lack more than we do. Perhaps you do not know this now, but when we go to poor mountain villages and look, those people suffer terribly. Even eating enough is not possible, let alone eating well. What kind of clothes do they wear? If they are warm, that is already good, already a lot. Therefore, if compared upward we are lacking, but if compared downward we have more than enough—that is already good. Each has his or her own conditions and freedom. As long as we work hard to the best of our ability, the compensation we obtain is what our ability brings; do not then compare upward. Those above have their ability; we have ours. Everyone differs, and the division of labor in society differs. So awakening and experiential benefit should continue to grow until there is not the slightest affliction in the mind and one is naturally peaceful and at ease. When this truly increases to saturation—when the mind is truly empty and pure, which is the saturation point—then great spiritual powers are released. Chan speaks this way, and Esoteric

Buddhism also speaks this way. If you do not seek spiritual powers, spiritual powers come seeking you, and you obtain great spiritual powers.

At that time it is called “luminous body advancing.” This is an Esoteric term; Chan does not put it this way. Chan speaks of the Multiple Barrier and the Prison Barrier. “The luminous body advances” means that the body of light has advanced. “Advances” means progress; “arrives” means reaching the destination, like a deep attainment. When this stage is reached, great light is emitted and shines through the worlds of the ten directions. The Buddhas of the ten directions are perfectly present in my mind, and I am perfectly present in the minds of all Buddhas; we mutually interpenetrate without obstruction. This is the realm realized in the Avatamsaka Sutra. Therefore our Heart-Center Dharma fully includes all Dharma-gates. If we practice Heart-Center Dharma in this way, we can realize this realm, the Avatamsaka realm. When we realize original nature and understand original nature, that is Chan. When our mind is pure and unstained in the slightest, that is Pure Land. Therefore Pure Land, Chan, and every school are included within it; one school includes many schools. This does not mean that only Heart-Center Dharma includes all schools and other schools do not. They are all the same. Pure Land can also include all schools. When one recites the Buddha-name until the flower of the mind opens and one sees original nature, that is Chan. After the flower of the mind opens and one sees original nature, if habits dissolve and light shines through the ten directions, that is the Avatamsaka realm. Using one Buddha-name together with the empowerment of the three mysteries to open the secret and see the secret original nature is Esoteric Buddhism. Therefore each school can interpenetrate with the others. It is not that one school is best and another is inferior. Dharmas are equal, without high or low; they are all the same. Thus we now often encourage elderly lay practitioners to practice Pure Land. Pure Land is, after all, a little more convenient. It does not require two hours per sitting; the time can be freely long or short—half an hour, or two or three hours, as one likes. Reciting one Buddha-name is also very convenient. So we advise elderly lay practitioners to use effort in Pure Land practice; that too is very good. Everything is the same.

When we have realized the Way, the step of “luminous body advancing” is still not ultimate. Why? Because there is still a Dharma to be obtained; light remains, and spiritual powers remain. Light and spiritual powers must all be gathered back into self-nature. Everything is unobtainable. Dharma too is unobtainable, Buddha too is unobtainable, nothing whatsoever is obtainable, and even unobtainability is unobtainable. That is the ultimate Dharma realm; that is what Chan calls going beyond the dharmakāya. Therefore the Dharma spoken in Esoteric Buddhism and the Dharma spoken in Chan are exactly the same. Esoteric Buddhism is Chan, and Chan is Esoteric Buddhism; they are exactly the same. Thus, when practicing Dharma, do not divide into schools and do not say that one school is good and another is bad. In truth they are all the same. Each has its own conditions, foundation, and preference; one can choose according to oneself without forcing. It is like eating vegetables: if you like spicy food, spicy food tastes very good; if I do not like spicy food, it is frightening and inedible. If you like sweet

things, sweetness is good; if you do not, then sweetness is not good. Do not divide into sects and categories and slander one another; that is not good. All schools are good.

We are explaining the progress of practice so that everyone can clearly understand the road and proceed along it, continually advancing until the ultimate is realized. If spiritual powers arise, or if one realizes a body of light shining through the ten directions and thinks this is arrival home, that is a great mistake. Esoteric Buddhism says the same: if you realize the body of light so that the entire physical body completely transforms into a luminous body, you are still only a wandering spirit in the universe. It is still a wandering spirit and not ultimate, because you cling to marks. Even the body of light must disappear and dissolve. Chan says the same. If light shines on you and your whole body is enclosed in a tube of light, that light must dissolve; as long as light remains, it will not do. There is a very clear example in Chan. Chan has many koans. Those who practice Heart-Center Dharma can read Chan koans and investigate them; koans help our practice. A Chan monk asked Master Caoshan. Caoshan, together with Dongshan Liangjie, founded the Caodong school. The monk asked Caoshan Benji, "What about when the bright moon is directly overhead?" This means that the practice has emitted great light, shining over the whole body. Master Caoshan said, "He is still a man below the steps." You are still below the stone steps outside the great hall. The monk still thought he had arrived home: "Ah! If that is not arrival home, then please, great master, compassionately give me a hand and guide me up the steps." Master Caoshan said, "We will meet when the moon has set." Only after this bright moon of light has fallen away can there be meeting. That is, you still have views of light, dharma-clinging, and views about dharmas. You must practice until this light is thoroughly transformed and forgotten—forgotten within the light, without feeling that there is light. It should be like our being in the air now without noticing that there is air. When it is thoroughly transformed and forgotten, with not a trace remaining, then one arrives home.

Practice has to reach this point before one arrives home. Do not think, "Ah, I recognize Buddha-nature; after hearing the teaching I have recognized Buddha-nature. Good, no need to practice." This is a great error. A group of people make this mistake. Knowing a little theory, they recognize it and say, "Ah, when this one thought ceases, that is our Buddha-nature. Good, I have arrived home; no need to practice. I have already become a Buddha." In reality you have not become a Buddha. You are a Buddha at the causal stage; fruition has not yet been realized. It is still a hundred and eight thousand li away—very far off. Hurry up and practice. Therefore today I take this opportunity to warn everyone: if you have this view, turn back quickly. It is not that you need not practice; it is exactly the right time to practice. Hurry and exert yourself. Observe at every moment. If observation is not strong and you still run after circumstances, then you must sit more. If you do not sit, meditative stability will not deepen, and circumstances will still drag you along. That will not do.

Great Master Yekai was a great Chan master of Tianning Monastery in Changzhou. His disciples, Dharma Master Yuexia and Dharma Master Yingci, were both very famous. After this

great monk had investigated Chan and awakened, his teacher assigned him to serve as a temple officer. After doing it, he said, “Ah! This will not do. My mind still moves.” He had no choice but to go to his teacher: “Master, although I have now awakened and seen the nature, it still will not do. I am still swayed by circumstances. This will not do!” See how wise he was; he knew it would not do. His teacher said, “Good. Go into retreat.” Since his strength was insufficient, he entered retreat. After three years of retreat he came out and said, “Ah, the strength is enough now. In doing affairs, the mind no longer moves.” This is how people applied effort. It is unlike us, who go wild after knowing a little principle: “Good, I have arrived home; no need to practice.” This is a grand delusive dream. Birth-and-death cannot be ended this way. Making grand claims can even send one to hell. Truly: to call what one has not attained “attained,” and what one has not realized “realized,” is the kind of false claim that leads to hell. So be careful. If you have not realized the Way, do not say that you have. You are still far from it. Can you pass through in actual affairs? If not—if you still smoke, drink, and eat meat—look how heavy your habits are. And you call that having arrived home? Nonsense! So I urge everyone not to think this way; correct it quickly. All right, that is enough for today. We will use the remaining time for questions, discussion, and exchange.

Question: After beginning a sitting, sometimes it seems that I cannot bring up the mantra; when I try to recite it, it feels as though I do not have enough strength.

Answer: There are different situations here, and they must be distinguished. Some people think, “Reciting the mantra is just one more thing to do; it is troublesome. Better to put it down and stop reciting.” Others truly reach the point where, at the end, the mantra can no longer be recited. These are different. If you stop because you find the mantra troublesome, that will not do. The mantra is a tool—a tool for sweeping away our deluded thoughts. If you stop reciting it, are your deluded thoughts really gone? They are still there. If you discard this tool, how will the deluded thoughts come to rest? If your deluded thoughts were truly gone, body, mind, and world would all have become empty and disappeared. If body and world have not become empty, deluded thoughts are still present. All circumstances are realms of deluded thought; they are all delusive realms. If the realm of circumstances has not emptied, deluded thought is still there. Therefore do not reject mantra recitation as troublesome. That is a great mistake. You must still bring it up and continue reciting. But if it has naturally dropped away, that is good. You have to distinguish whether it has dropped away naturally or whether you simply dislike the trouble and stop reciting. If you deliberately do not recite because you find it troublesome, that is a great mistake; from then on you will never be able to break free. You must not dislike the trouble; you still have to resume reciting it. Continue reciting until the mantra can no longer be recited. You keep trying to recite, but no mantra comes forth—only then has it dropped away. When it drops away without your knowing, that is true non-recitation. If you intentionally do not recite, that will not do. There are two different situations in natural dropping away. In one, you have fallen asleep and it drops away; that will not

do. You go “mmm...” and fall asleep, so of course you are not reciting. What can be recited while asleep? That will not do. It is not falling asleep; it must be entering samādhi. Because the mind that recites the mantra is deluded mind. When deluded mind does not move, the mind that recites the mantra is absent and the mantra is absent. The mind that can recite and the mantra being recited fall away at once; sense faculties and sense objects drop away. That is seeing the original nature, and that is what counts. If one is asleep and sunk in dullness, what use is that? Dullness is especially detestable. Look to see whether our mudrā has fallen or scattered. If the mudrā has fallen or scattered and the mantra cannot be recited, that is sleep and is useless. If you truly enter samādhi, the mudrā does not fall; it remains as it is, not scattered. The body has dissolved into emptiness, yet the mudrā still does not fall or scatter: that is true entry into samādhi, and that is good.

Everyone should examine this carefully in light of their own situation. If you stop reciting because you dislike the trouble, quickly bring it up and recite. If you stop because you have sunk into dullness and fallen over, that will not do: quickly form the mudrā, open your eyes, and recite the mantra aloud to dispel the sleep-demon. After driving away the sleep-demon, remain clear and awake, and recite until there is no reciting mind and nothing left to recite. When the mind no longer wavers and one cannot recite, naturally unmoving, that is good. Everyone should carefully distinguish this. Do not say, “My strength is insufficient; I have no energy, so I will not recite,” and then fall asleep. That will not do. Reciting the mantra does not require energy. It turns in the mind: “Om...” Without making sound, what effort does that require? It does not require effort. Reciting aloud uses energy; “Om...” aloud uses energy. Because vocal recitation uses energy, we tell everyone to use vajra recitation, without making sound. But if you do not even recite silently, that will not do. You must recite until there is no reciting mind and nothing left to recite. Only then will it do.

Question: Often there seems to be some unknown force that forcibly pulls the mudrā apart several times in one sitting. How should this be stopped?

Answer: That is still the vibration of qi. If your hands shake apart, it is the vibration of qi. That does not matter; just form the mudrā again. If it happens because the qi mechanism has activated and shaken it open, that is all right; form it again. Also, do not be afraid. What are you afraid of? There can be the sensation that your head is bursting. When qi rises with a “bang,” it feels as though the head is about to explode: “Oh!” Do not lift your hands to hold it; do not hold your head. Do not be afraid. If the head truly exploded, that would actually be good. Do not fear; you will not die. Death is the destruction of our body, but Buddha-nature never dies, so do not be afraid. Such sensations do occur. When the qi is full—bang!—it bursts, as if the head has burst. Do not be afraid. Once you fear, “Oh no!” it is ruined; as soon as that thought flashes, it will not explode and will retreat. Therefore when transformations occur, do not be afraid. If frightening appearances arise, such as fierce Dharma-protectors or wrathful

Vajra forms, do not be afraid. If fierce wild beasts appear, do not be afraid. They are all unobtainable; pay them no attention. If favorable appearances arise, such as Buddhas and bodhisattvas appearing, do not be afraid either. Sometimes when we sit well, a Buddha may come to empower us, but one must not seek it. It is only an analogy: the Buddha comes and gives you a great treasure; as you receive it, bang! It explodes, and your body, mind, and world are all blasted empty. That is the Buddha's empowerment. Just as you receive it, it explodes; once received and exploded, body, mind, and world all become empty and gone. Such things can come. But they can only be encountered, not sought. Do not sit there during formal practice thinking, "Come, come." That will not do.

Question: When the mudrā feels heavy and cannot be lifted, what is happening?

Answer: That does not matter either. It is one of the eight touches: heaviness. It is all right. There is heaviness and there is lightness. The body may feel very light, as if floating or flying. There can be expansion and contraction, becoming large or small. The body may feel numb or itchy. All these changes can occur. Pay them no attention. They are all good signs; do not heed them.

Question: After entering samādhi, is it possible not to wake up?

Answer: No. You cannot yet reach a point where, after entering samādhi, you cannot wake up. Your periods of samādhi probably will not be long. To have long periods, one must pass several times through the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling before it can be long. It cannot be done all at once; one must enter the attainment of cessation several times. At first, the attainment of cessation does not last very long. At longest, it may extend to one or two days. Gradually it can become longer—a week, ten days, half a month, a month. After that, it may suddenly last much longer, but it cannot jump all at once to a duration of many years. That is the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling, and that state is not beneficial. Entering that samādhi is a dead samādhi. "Dead water does not hide a dragon"; it does not function and is useless. Therefore the samādhi we speak of is dynamic and responsive, capable of great functioning amid circumstances. To meet circumstances without clinging—that samādhi is true samādhi. Thus the Sixth Patriarch said very clearly, "Samādhi is not sitting there unmoving; samādhi is not being deluded by circumstances." See how clear this is. Sitting there unmoving and entering samādhi is not samādhi. If there is entering and leaving samādhi, it is not true samādhi.

Chan has the koan of "the woman entering samādhi." A woman entered samādhi next to Śākyamuni Buddha. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva came along and saw her: "This woman is behaving improperly. How can she sit beside the Buddha and enter samādhi? I will pull her out of samādhi." He snapped his fingers before her, but she did not leave samādhi. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva has great spiritual powers. He lifted her to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, yet she did not leave samādhi. He cast her down to the eighteenth level of hell, and still she did

not leave samādhi. Her samādhi was very deep. Śākyamuni Buddha said, “You cannot make her leave samādhi. Down below there is a bodhisattva named Wangming who can make her leave samādhi.” Just as he was speaking, Bodhisattva Wangming arrived from below. “Ah, you have come at the right time. Make this woman leave samādhi.” Bodhisattva Wangming snapped his fingers in front of her, and “Ah!” she came out of samādhi. Regarding this koan, I ask everyone: Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva is the teacher of seven Buddhas. Śākyamuni Buddha was the seventh Buddha to appear in the world, preceded by six Buddhas. Why could Mañjuśrī not make this woman leave samādhi, while the minor bodhisattva Wangming from below could? What is the reason? It means that one must not give rise to views. No one may give rise to views. Mañjuśrī was the first to give rise to a view: “This woman has entered samādhi in front of the Buddha. That should not be, should not be.” Such a view must not arise.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva represents great wisdom; he is called Great Wisdom Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva. There is also Great Vow Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, Great Practice Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, and Great Compassion Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Mañjuśrī represents great wisdom. Great wisdom must not give rise to views. What does “Wangming” mean? “Wang” means unobtainable: all cleverness and wisdom are unobtainable. Therefore do not have this view. With one snap of the fingers she left samādhi. Therefore, do not rely on petty cleverness; knock down your clever intelligence. Confucius went to see Laozi to ask about the Way. See how humble Confucius was: he asked Laozi about the Way. Among us there are those with pride in accomplishment: “I am extraordinary; I will not go ask him.” Confucius did not have this view. Laozi said, “Strike down your cleverness.” “Strike down” means to knock it down, and “your” means your own: knock down your clever intelligence. Worldly cleverness and talent are not wanted. To realize the Way, we must let go of all such worldly cleverness and petty intelligence. Only when the mind is empty and open can one realize the great Way.

Therefore Patriarch Dahui Gao praised this koan in verse: “If there is entering samādhi and exiting samādhi, that samādhi is not true samādhi.” If one can enter and leave samādhi, that samādhi is not true samādhi. True samādhi has no entering or leaving; great samādhi has no coming in or going out. It is samādhi at every moment. Therefore samādhi is not sitting there unmoving. True samādhi is not wavering or becoming confused in relation to circumstances. It is not that entering and leaving samādhi is samādhi; only being in samādhi at every moment is true samādhi. Do not be afraid; you will wake up. There is no need to fear entering samādhi.

Question: If someone shakes me while I am in samādhi, will the body be damaged? If they touch some place, will that place decay?

Answer: Even if you enter samādhi, do not be afraid. Also, there is no need for others to shake you. If you truly enter samādhi, they need only strike the hand-bell beside you and you will emerge. There is no need to poke or shake you. Even if they shook you, the body would not decay. Do not be afraid. You are taking precautions before the rain has even begun: before you have even entered samādhi, you are already worrying about how to emerge from it.

Question: When sitting, it seems as though a great wind blows and I am about to fly. What should I do?

Answer: Then fly. It does not matter. Just fly. Let everything follow conditions and nature. It is all right; do not be afraid. You will not fall down and you will not die. It is not that your body is floating; it is your consciousness that is floating. The body is still there, so do not be afraid. Nothing is wrong.

Question: During the thousand sittings, if I miss one or two sittings, must I begin again from the start?

Answer: You mean you stopped once or twice? It is best not to stop. Stopping is not best. If you have stopped once or twice, then from now on definitely do not stop.

Question: What is “turning the light inward”?

Answer: Did I not just explain? At every moment, keep watch over the huatou; this is turning the light inward. What does it mean? It means not looking outward, but looking inward. Looking at what? Look at the point where thoughts arise. As soon as a thought arises, see it and do not run after it. It is not looking at a particular place. As I just said, do not abide at any point or any aperture; do not guard an aperture. Do not abide at any point. Very lightly, when a thought comes, “Ah, you have come. I will not pay attention to you.” That is turning the light inward. It is not looking outward at this and that, clinging to marks. “Seeing without anything seen”: even though outside things are seen, do not see them as anything. When a thought arises, I see it and watch my own thought. This is called turning the light inward. The light does not go outward, does not look outward; it looks inward. What does it look at? It looks at the point where thoughts arise. It is not looking at the brain, not looking at my heart, not looking at my dantian. It looks at none of these. To look at the point where thoughts arise is simply to notice, “Ah, a thought has arisen.” The meaning is to let the thought that looks outward come to rest; this is turning the light inward.

It is not looking at some place: “Look at my brain; look at my heart; look at my dantian.” Do not look at any of these. Very relaxed and at ease, know as soon as a thought arises and do not run after it. This is turning the light inward. When a circumstance comes, do not run after it; pull it back. That is called turning the light inward. If one does not feel that the mind should be pulled back and instead lets it go farther and farther, that is not good. At every moment pay attention and observe. In all four postures—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—one must observe.

Question: Sometimes during sitting there is a sudden jolt, and sometimes I become so muddled that I cannot sit. What should I do?

Answer: If there is sometimes a sudden jolt, that is all right. Let it jolt and pass; it does not matter. The qi mechanism has moved and jolted. There is no obstruction; it is all right. Let it jolt. If you are too muddled to continue sitting and then do not keep sitting, that

is the worst. You should continue sitting. If you do not continue, you have missed a sitting, have you not? Then are you not sitting? If muddled, quickly open your eyes, straighten the chest, and recite the mantra aloud to dispel the sleep-demon. In other words, you still have to sit on. It is not that if you cannot sit, you call it quits. If you cannot sit and then do not sit, you have stopped. That is not good. You must not stop; continue sitting.

Question: I have completed three hundred sittings, but my hands still hurt when forming the mudrā. Is this because karmic obstructions have not yet been eliminated?

Answer: You have completed three hundred sittings and your hands still hurt when forming the mudrā—perhaps the second mudrā still hurts. If the mudrā still hurts, that truly means the karmic obstruction is heavy. But the pain itself is a good sign: as it hurts, the obstruction is being cleared. Knowing, “Ah, my karmic obstruction is heavy,” quickly rouse yourself and sit. Sit more. As karmic obstructions are eliminated, it will no longer hurt. Sit more; do not fear the pain. The pain means the obstruction is being worked through.

Question: When reciting the mantra, is it good to recite only mentally without moving the mouth?

Answer: Reciting only mentally with the mouth unmoving is not good. Why? If the mouth does not move and is closed tight, that is silent recitation. Silent recitation consumes the blood and easily leads to dullness. It has two drawbacks: it easily leads to dullness and consumes the blood. Moving the lips does not consume blood and does not easily lead to dullness, so it has advantages. Therefore vocal recitation injures the qi and silent recitation injures the blood; it is not good.

Question: When practicing Heart-Center Dharma, must one practice strictly at the same time every day?

Answer: We have discussed the time and place of practice many times. Morning, noon, and evening are all possible. Place also does not matter; any place is possible. But there is the issue of habit. If you are accustomed to sitting in the morning, then when you sit at noon or evening, you may not settle immediately. If you are accustomed to sitting in one place and change to another place, you may not settle immediately. You may need to sit several times before samādhi comes. This is an issue of habit. Time and place are not originally an issue; it is just that habit is a bit of an issue.

Question: If I sit at night and continue past midnight, does it count as that day's sitting?

Answer: In other Dharmas, after midnight, today has ended and after twelve it is the next day, so it would not be permitted. But in the Heart-Center Dharma, because you began sitting before midnight, even if you sit past midnight it still counts as today; going a little past is all right. In other Dharmas it would not be permitted; Heart-Center Dharma is a bit more flexible, so a little past is all right. Because you still have to sit

the next day, it is not that you say, “Oh, after midnight the next day’s time has already been sat, so I will not sit again.” You still have to sit. If today you go past midnight and sit until one o’clock, tomorrow you still have to sit. Do not say, “I have already sat tomorrow.” No. This is acceptable. Other Dharmas do not allow it; Heart-Center Dharma allows it.

Question: What should I do if ordinarily I do not have two hours?

Answer: If you do not have two hours, then you are not sitting! However, after you have completed one sitting, if there is some additional time but not enough for two hours, then you may practice a convenient method. This point cannot be blurred. If you have already completed one sitting today and there is extra time insufficient for two hours, you may practice a convenient method. I tell you this can be done as a convenient practice. But if you have not sat for two hours and only practice the convenient method, that is useless; it is equivalent to missing a sitting. It has been missed; that will not do. You have blurred this point. If, after completing one sitting, you have less than two hours and want to sit again, that is a convenient time. There is a convenient mudrā: place the right hand on the left hand, palm up, and pinch the middle finger with the thumb as the convenient mudrā. Still recite this mantra. After reciting the mantra several dozen times, you may stop reciting and simply watch. The convenient mudrā exists, but be clear: if you have not completed one sitting that day and you sit using the convenient mudrā, you have missed a sitting. It cannot substitute for a full sitting.

Question: While sitting, suddenly there was a sheet of white light, and within the white light was a bright point. What was it?

Answer: Do not concern yourself with this. In our practice we are not permitted to see light and see Buddhas; that is clinging to marks. A sheet of white light and a bright point within the white light—do not concern yourself with them. In Esoteric terms, the white light is the light of our self-nature, and the bright point is the eighth consciousness. But the eighth consciousness is still consciousness; that will not do. We have to break open this consciousness and see the nature. Therefore do not concern yourself with it; do not pay attention. Do not become pleased with yourself: “Oh, I have white light and a bright point. Good!” That is bad—it is ruined. Do not heed it.

Question: When mind is clarified and the nature is seen, is what is revealed an image or an actual thing?

Answer: I have said this before. You can experience it right now. It is called experiencing. How do you experience it? “Cut off!” Cut off thought. I am not telling your mouth to say “cut off”; I am telling your thought to cut off. When I tell you, “Cut off!” at that moment when not a single thought arises, is there an image? I ask everyone: is there an image? No image, right? Therefore seeing the nature is not an image. Is there a

thing? There is no thing. Therefore it is not a thing and not an image. It is numinous awareness—“numinous” in the sense of vivid, responsive knowing. It is not like wood or stone. Wood is insentient; here, clear and distinct awareness remains. Numinous awareness is not an image and not a thing. Is this not verified right now? Because all of you have sat today, I tell you to verify it; verify it right now for yourselves. Is this still not clear? There is no picture and no thing, but it is not an annihilated state. It is not annihilation; clear and distinct awareness remains, does it not? Numinous knowing is our original nature.

Therefore Chan Master Heze Shenhui, a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, said, “The one word ‘knowing’ is the gate of all wonders.” This is numinous knowing without an object of knowing. Once a particular object is taken as known, that is already mistaken: “Oh, this is a cup.” That is discriminating cognition, not the objectless numinous knowing meant here. It is knowing without an object of knowing. Numinous knowing is our original face; it is our Buddha-nature. It is not an image and not a thing, yet it is not annihilation. Good. Is this now clear in actual experience? It is not enough merely to say you understand; you yourselves must understand it, and everyone must understand it. Once you understand this, pay attention: this does not mean the practice is complete and everything is finished. This is precisely where practice begins. Protect it at every moment. You may protect it with one phrase of Amitābha—“Amitābha, Amitābha...” That is fine. You may protect it with one mantra—“Om mani...” That is fine. You may use “Om... hong patu.” That is fine too. Any of these can be used to protect it. Therefore our great Chan patriarch Dahui Gao used the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī of our Heart-Center Dharma to protect himself; he recited “Om... hong patu.” Chan masters recite mantras too. Do not think Chan masters do not recite mantras. Master Hanshan said very clearly, “Chan masters throughout the generations all secretly held mantras.” It is not that they did not hold them; they secretly held them and did not tell people. Therefore they did hold mantras. Every school is inseparable from Esoteric Dharma; if separated from Esoteric Dharma, nothing remains. Pure Land is inseparable from Esoteric Dharma. Pure Land practitioners recite the Great Compassion Mantra, the Śūraṅgama Mantra, the Ten Small Mantras, and the Rebirth Mantra. They are inseparable from Esoteric Dharma, yet they still say Esoteric Dharma is not good. Pure Land people do not know; they are confused. When they speak this way, they do not know they are slandering Dharma. Do not speak recklessly and unknowingly create offenses.

Question: When not sitting, may one recite the mantra without forming the mudrā?

Answer: Yes. When not sitting, you can recite the mantra while walking on the road. Even while urinating or defecating, you may recite the mantra, but not aloud. Recite mentally without sound. Walking and doing things, you can all recite.

Question: When forming the fifth mudrā, the index finger is supposed to rest on the first joint-line of the ring finger, but I cannot put it there. What should I do?

Answer: It can be placed there. Draw it back. After the mudrā is formed, lean it upward and draw it back. Keep these two rings of the mudrā tightly looped, and leave the second joint of the middle finger outside the ring. Let it show outside the ring, and then the hand can lean up easily. Draw it back; when drawn back, it rests there. It is not that it cannot rest. Most important is that the second joint of the middle finger is exposed outside. See, it is exposed outside. If it is enclosed inside, it is spoiled. When it is exposed, the mudrā is correctly formed; the most important thing is that it be exposed.

Question: If other mantras appear while sitting, should one ignore them?

Answer: Yes. While sitting and reciting the mantra, when one is about to enter samādhi, other mantras may insert themselves. That is because that mantra is relatively familiar; because it is familiar, it inserts itself. It does not matter. If other mantras or even the Buddha-name insert themselves, it does not matter. Since we recite in order to reach the point where the reciting mind falls away, it is best when the mantra itself is absent. If it inserts itself, it is all right. When you know it, change it back. It does not mean you should then recite that other mantra. It is all right; no problem.

Question: After practicing for more than a hundred days, I found that I had formed the third and sixth mudrās incorrectly.

Answer: They were incorrect? Then correct them and ask someone to teach you.

Question continued: They have now been corrected, and I have already redone the sixth mudrā.

Answer: Then it is all right. If corrected, that is fine; no problem.

Question: After a person dies, where does he go?

Answer: Where does he go? He turns according to karma. Whatever karma you have created, you go to that place. If you created wholesome karma, you go to a wholesome place; if you created unwholesome karma, you go to an unwholesome place. Now that you practice Dharma, you should not go elsewhere, should you? Now you set your aim. Our grandmaster was compassionate: whether you still want to go to Tuṣita Inner Court or to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, if you want to go to Tuṣita Inner Court, recite the Maitreya Mantra; if you want to go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, recite the Broad Rebirth Mantra. He gives you a destination. Originally there is no place to go; Buddha-nature is omnipresent. Why is there a destination? Because one clings to marks and the mind is not empty and pure. Since Buddha-nature has no thing and no image, if there were a thing it would need a place to be put. But if there is no thing, what is there to put? It pervades empty space and the Dharma realm, free and at ease. What place is needed? No place is needed. When one clings to marks, one

needs a place. Having a body, one needs a pleasant place to rest and be nourished. Because our grandmaster considered that we people cling fiercely to marks and have worries, he said: do not worry; I will give you a place—Tuṣita Inner Court or the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Whichever you like, recite that mantra. Then you need not fear.

Question: Does the intermediate-state body lack Buddha-nature?

Answer: Could there be an intermediate-state body apart from Buddha-nature? Apart from Buddha-nature there is nothing at all. What is the intermediate-state body? The intermediate-state body is the illusory emanation body of the seventh consciousness. Is the seventh consciousness apart from Buddha-nature? It is not. The previous body has already broken down, while the next body has not yet formed; this interval is called the intermediate state. At that time, wind-element predominates, whereas our present body is dominated by earth-element. When wind predominates, a gust of wind can send it flying. But it is not apart from Buddha-nature. Apart from Buddha-nature there is nothing. This too is Buddha-nature.

Question: What function does the Great Light Mantra have?

Answer: The function of the Great Light Mantra is very great. It can avert calamities, increase benefit, bring wealth, accomplish matters, liberate the deceased, and obtain whatever one seeks. The Great Light Mantra has enormous function. Therefore it would be very good for you to do your utmost to hold the Great Light Mantra. Its power to liberate the dead is even greater. Even if a person died long ago and has fallen into an evil destiny, it can pull that person out and raise him to the heavens. It has such great power. The Great Light Mantra has great power and can make wishes fulfilled; whatever one thinks of can be obtained.

Question: May the mantra words be spoken?

Answer: Mantras are not to be explained casually. Mantras are secret. Exoteric teachings can be spoken; mantras are not spoken, they are held. Mantras are symbols transformed from Buddha-nature; do not explain them. Mantras should be held continuously and closely.

Question: How many sittings should one do per day?

Answer: How many sittings have you practiced so far? If you have just begun practice, do not do too many. One sitting per day is enough. After one hundred sittings, you can sit more; you need to sit more. Sitting two hours per day is too little time and the strength is very weak. You should sit more, three or four sittings if possible. How many sittings does it count as? It counts as one sitting. Do not say it counts as three sittings because you sat three sittings. If you think, “Ah, if sitting more counts as one sitting, then I will not sit; I will sit less,” that is also wrong. I sit in order to seek awakening and realize the Way, not to seek numbers. Seeking numbers will not do.

Sitting more is best; if you sit rigorously, realization of the Way is fast. In the past when we visited our grandmaster, he asked, “How are you sitting?” I said I sat one sitting per day. “No, no,” he said. “Sit two or three sittings joined together.” Two or three sittings joined together means four or six hours sitting continuously. He instructed us in this way. You cannot hear me say it counts as one sitting and then say, “Oh, then I will sit less; if it only counts as one sitting, it is not worth it.” You are seeking realization of the Way; that is not how it should be discussed. It is still better to require yourself to be stricter.

Question: Is rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss a kind of seeking?

Answer: Rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss is not seeking something. What is sought? It is seeking to realize the Way and liberate beings. Rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss is not seeking enjoyment. It is seeking to realize the Way and liberate beings, not seeking anything else. It is not seeking spiritual powers, not seeking enjoyment, and not seeking happiness. Rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is seeking to become a Buddha and liberate beings widely. The Amitābha Sutra speaks very clearly of “eating and walking meditation.” You know that “walking meditation” means walking. Some explain it as people in the West, after eating enough, having nothing to do and strolling around for fun. That is not the meaning; it is completely wrong. In the phrase “eating and walking meditation,” the characters for eating are understood as “returning” and “feeding”: to feed back, to return and feed others. Just like crows: when young crows grow up, they bring food back for the old crows, catching worms and bringing them to the old crows to eat. This is called returning the feeding. In the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, after hearing Buddhas and bodhisattvas teach scriptures and transmit the Way to completion, one returns and practices throughout the ten directions, giving food to beings. This is ten-direction walking practice. “Feeding back” means giving the food of Dharma to sentient beings. It is not eating rice; it is feeding beings with Dharma-food. This is returning the feeding; this is “eating and walking meditation.” Therefore, when we go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, we have this obligation: to realize the Way and liberate beings. It is not to be born in the West to enjoy happiness. Do not misunderstand.

Question: Sometimes when copying out the Great Compassion Mantra, I become irritated. What is happening?

Answer: You still become irritated? That is not right. How can you let yourself become irritated? Your mind is still so unwilling to let go and become empty. Hold the mantra more and sit more. If you are already irritated now—even while copying out the Great Compassion Mantra—your mind is still far from empty. Hurry and sit much more. Be patient and do not give in to irritation; you must keep sitting. Why does Heart-Center Dharma require two-hour sittings? Precisely to train this easily irritated mind. If you do not sit for two hours, it does not count. Even when irritation arises, keep sitting.

Patiently sit on—keep sitting patiently—and the irritation will subside. You must persevere through it. You simply have not been sitting enough.

Question: What should I do if chills come over my body in waves?

Answer: Ah, is that really a problem? You say waves of chills come over you? In this hot weather there is even an advantage: the chills keep you from feeling hot, and that is comfortable. Hold the mantra more and your condition will improve. Hold the mantra more and sit more; your body will gradually adjust, and the waves of chills will stop. I advise you to sit more.

Question: Master, may we use the Mantra for Rectifying Omissions?

Answer: Yes, you may.

Question: May we use it after finishing sitting? May we hold it seven times after sitting?

Answer: Yes, you may use it.

Question: When holding the Great Light Mantra, should we form a mudrā?

Answer: You should form a mudrā. The Great Light Mantra has a mudrā: with the left hand form a Vajra Fist. The thumb pinches the third joint-line of the ring finger; these three fingers hold the thumb, and the index finger pinches the knuckle of the thumb. This bone must be held; this is called the Vajra Fist. The left hand forms the Vajra Fist; the right hand opens all five fingers, extends the palm, and radiates great light. This forms the mudrā. The Great Light Mantra mudrā consists of the Vajra Fist together with the gesture of radiating great light.

Question: Does the Heart of the Śūraṅgama Mantra have a mudrā?

Answer: Yes. Its mudrā is formed as follows: the ring fingers touch each other, the other fingers do not touch, and the wrists are joined.

Question: Once one recognizes that which knows and moves as Buddha-nature, how can one be reborn without confusion?

Answer: This requires practice. To be reborn without confusion requires practice. When practice reaches the level of an eighth-ground bodhisattva or above, one can be reborn without confusion. Otherwise, bodhisattvas below the eighth ground still undergo confusion when passing through the intermediate state. To reach this, one's own practice must be deep. At the eighth ground and above, one can be reborn without confusion. Now you must not chase after wine, sex, wealth, and temper. Begin training now. If you want not to chase after wine, sex, wealth, and temper in the future, you must first do it now. If you still chase after wine, sex, wealth, and temper now, how could you do it after rebirth? Start training amid circumstances. Do not chase after wine, sex, wealth, and temper. Sit more, observe more amid circumstances, train and grind away the habits until there is nothing to practice and

no practice left to do, until the mind is genuinely empty and pure. Only then can it be done.

Question: If one practices two or three sittings every day, may they be sat consecutively?

Answer: Yes, they may be sat consecutively, not necessarily separated. Four or six hours can be sat in one stretch. Can you do it? If you cannot, then temporarily separate them; sit one sitting in the morning and one in the evening. When you train until you can sit continuously, then sit continuously. This is also acceptable. Do not demand too much speed; haste makes one fail to arrive. Sitting two or three separated sittings every day is not the same as sitting them continuously; the effect is somewhat smaller. Joined sittings have a greater effect, because the mind is willing to become pure and can endure. Ordinary people cannot endure. Like the person who just asked: the mind is too irritated, even irritated while writing the Great Compassion Mantra. According to the rule, while copying scripture or mantra, the mind should be very pure, yet he is still irritated. If one can sit continuously for four or six hours, one has developed considerable meditative stability. When sittings are separated, the strength is somewhat weaker.

Question: After a hundred sittings, should one read grandmaster's books and compare oneself with them? Why?

Answer: Reading books increases your wisdom. This is very important. When you encounter problems in sitting, reading grandmaster's books can solve them, which is very good. Why read? To increase wisdom. It can prevent you from taking wrong roads while sitting, from going behind Black Mountain. If you do not know what entering samādhi is, how will you know whether it is correct? Read grandmaster's instructions: "That kind of samādhi is not true samādhi; it should be clear and distinct. Only samādhi that remains dynamic and responsive is true samādhi." Then you can correct yourself. Reading grandmaster's books is very helpful and should be done. Chan books are also good to read. Chan koans also help our practice; they are accounts drawn from the practice experience of masters and patriarchs. Reading is very helpful.

Question: How should the Mantra for Rectifying Omissions be recited?

Answer: The master teaches the Mantra for Rectifying Omissions. In fact, it is all right not to recite it. It is not necessary. If you want it, use it; it is not required. This was added by later practitioners. In truth it is not needed. We do not rely on this mantra to produce some special transformation. What we rely on is purity of mind. No matter what further result one expects from it, if the mind is not pure, it is useless. It still depends on our own recitation. If the mind is reciting this mantra and is not yet taken over by thoughts, then it has use. Ah, you think that if you recited it wrong or too few times, you can make up the omission? Useless! It is still the mind. If your mind is chaotic and not empty and pure, even more recitation is useless. Therefore Pure Land

practitioners today have a great error: they chase after numbers. Because Chan Master Yongming Yanshou said one must recite the Buddha's name one hundred thousand times, they hurry to count. They recite until they are gasping. Look: what use is this? One must rely on quality. Only when the mind can truly be pure and not give rise to deluded thoughts is it useful. They are all mistaken, grasping at numbers. In truth, our master and grandmaster never taught us this Mantra for Rectifying Omissions. It was added by you later people. We follow your wishes: "Ah, fine, fine." But this was never spoken by the masters. Later people added it. To accord with beings, if you want to use it, then fine. In truth, purity of mind is most important, not numbers. It is unrelated to being short a few times or having a few extra times. The highest point is still purity of mind. Do we not say one must recite until there is no reciter and nothing recited? When the mantra has dropped away and disappeared, do you say there is still a mantra? Later there is no need for mantra; what omission would remain to rectify? Therefore, you are only adding something superfluous.

Question: After a hundred sittings, if one fears not awakening, is it better to additionally recite the Maitreya Mantra or the Broad Rebirth Mantra?

Answer: What is this "not awakening"?

Question clarified: If after a thousand sittings one fears not awakening, is it better to add the Maitreya Mantra or the Broad Rebirth Mantra?

Answer: You have misunderstood. As I just said, it is not that one mantra is good and another is bad. It is whether you want to be born in Tuṣita Inner Court or in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Wherever you wish to be born, recite that mantra. It is not that one of the two mantras is good and one is bad; it is your aspiration. Buddhas and bodhisattvas accord with beings' aspirations. Buddhas and bodhisattvas have no discriminating mind; you are the ones with discriminating mind. Wherever you wish to be born, go there. If after one thousand sittings you have not awakened, what is the reason? It is that you yourselves have not practiced in earnest. You have not gripped the mantra firmly at every moment; you have not held the mantra well; you have not practiced mental recitation with attentive listening; you have not maintained clear observation outside formal sitting. If during formal sitting you are truly utterly settled in mental recitation with attentive listening, and outside formal sitting you maintain continuous, close observation, there is no one who will not awaken. Because everyone fully has Buddha-nature; once you receive the Buddha's empowering support, how could you not awaken? It is only that while sitting you think east and west, without mentally reciting the mantra and listening attentively. Outside formal sitting you also fail to observe clearly and instead run after circumstances, deludedly thinking all day. How could that work? In practicing Dharma you have to put your mind to it and practice in earnest. With genuine practice there is no one who will not awaken. Truly. Very many people have awakened; how could you be unable to awaken? You too

should practice in earnest. During formal sitting you must be utterly settled and also attend to mental recitation with attentive listening. The mind recites the mantra; it is not the mouth reciting the mantra. Mouth reciting while the mind does not recite is useless. The mantra must be recited mentally and heard clearly. Here the ear is the mind: when the mind hears clearly, the ear hears clearly. Then maintain clear observation outside formal sitting. There is no one who will not awaken.

Question: While sitting, if suddenly there is an especially urgent matter, or if the body feels especially unwell, may one pause?

Answer: What matter is most urgent? Is birth-and-death most urgent, or are other matters most urgent? If you answer that sitting is most urgent, then why not sit? The most urgent matter is ending birth-and-death. If you can put down this most urgent matter, how can you not put down other matters? You have reversed what is heavy and light, putting the ending of birth-and-death on the light side. Master Yinguang pasted a huge character “death” on the wall directly before him in his room to warn himself at every moment. If you were about to die, what else could you do? The matter of birth-and-death is great; impermanence is swift. This most urgent matter you do not do, and you go do other things. Look: have you not reversed heavy and light?

Question: Is “reading books is very good” a form of dharma-clinging?

Answer: When reading books, what is read is practical benefit. To follow the words spoken in the book and practice accordingly does not count as dharma-clinging. If in reading you only memorize words and phrases, remembering the text but not practicing, then it is useless and is dharma-clinging. Read and then do. Having done, let it go. This is not dharma-clinging. This must be understood. Reading to gain practical benefit, and then practicing according to what the book says, is best. Otherwise you will not know how to practice.

7. 传心中心法灌顶时之开示 / Instructions During the Empowerment for Transmitting the Heart-Center Dharma

Chinese source: 《传心中心法灌顶时之开示》

Instructions During the Empowerment for Transmitting the Heart-Center Dharma. Spoken in Shanghai in August 1993.

The mind-ground Dharma gate. In practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, when sitting one uses the method of vajra recitation: the lips move slightly while holding the mantra, but no sound is made. Reciting aloud injures the qi, while silent recitation injures the blood. In practicing Dharma we must first pay attention to the body; we must not damage it. Therefore in sitting and in practice one must protect the body well. However, when latent seeds surface during sitting, the mind becomes agitated, and one cannot sit still, or when one sits until one grows drowsy and falls asleep with chaotic dreams appearing, then one should recite the mantra aloud, clearing away those confused deluded thoughts and the sleep-demon so that one can enter samādhi. When one has not encountered such a situation, one should still hold the mantra by vajra recitation.

The speed of mantra-holding is ten to twelve recitations per minute. When reciting, one must practice “mental recitation with attentive listening”: each syllable passes through the mind, not reciting with the mouth while the mind is absent. Use the ears to listen to this mantra sound arising inwardly, hearing it clearly and distinctly. In this way deluded thoughts can be gathered in so that they do not move, and one gradually enters samādhi.

Among our six faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—the mind faculty is like a monkey accustomed to jumping about. To make it quiet and unmoving, without giving rise to deluded thoughts, is very difficult. Yet if it is not gathered in and kept still, one cannot enter samādhi, awaken wisdom, and realize the Way. Therefore Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta teaches us that in Buddha-recitation we must “gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” That is, when practicing Buddha-recitation, one must use the sacred Name “Amitābha Buddha” with utmost sincerity to gather in the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, preventing them from moving; only then can one peacefully enter samādhi.

Of these six faculties, the mind and the ear are the most difficult to gather in. If the eyes are closed and do not look at things, the eye faculty can be gathered in. If the mouth holds the mantra, the tongue faculty can be gathered in. If the nose does not smell strange odors, the nose faculty can be gathered in. If the body does not contact external objects, the body faculty can be gathered in. But the human ear is most acute: it can hear sounds from very far away, even across a mountain, and outside noises can irritate the mind. As for the mind faculty, it is even harder to gather in. When you do not want it to move, thoughts involuntarily leap out

from within. Why? This is the habit-energy of many lives and kalpas. It is used to moving and cannot stop. In Buddhist scriptures this is called “mental engagement” (zuoyi).

It is also the first of the five omnipresent mental factors spoken of in Yogācāra—mental engagement, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. It exists within the eight consciousnesses, stirring at every moment, flowing without cease like running water; therefore it is called “continuous arising and ceasing.” It is extremely subtle, and ordinarily we do not see it. Some people say, “When we do not practice or sit, we have no thoughts; once we practice and sit, thoughts arise. Has practice damaged us and produced thoughts?” No. It is because the mind is normally chaotic, so you do not see thoughts moving wildly. When the mind becomes slightly quiet, you then see thoughts moving.

What should be done? How can deluded thoughts be brought to rest? The only method is to use the ear faculty to gather in the mind faculty. Use the ear faculty to listen quietly to the sound of Buddha-recitation, and in this way gather in deluded thought. Because the mind cannot be used in two ways at once, when one wholeheartedly listens to Buddha-recitation and focuses on the Buddha-name, deluded thoughts naturally do not move. Therefore in Buddha-recitation one must focus on the six-character Chinese phrase, rendered here as “Namo Amitābha Buddha,” or the four-character phrase, “Amitābha Buddha,” hearing each syllable clearly, one by one, so that deluded thought is gathered in and does not move. In the same way, when holding a mantra, each syllable must pass through the mind and be heard clearly by the ear; only then is the practice according to Dharma.

Therefore the essential point of sitting is “mental recitation with attentive listening”: gather in deluded thoughts so that they do not move, and enter samādhi. Otherwise, if you sit here with your mouth reciting mantra or Buddha-name while the mind is thinking this and that, you cannot enter samādhi. You must practice mental recitation with attentive listening and sit with utter resolve.

But the most important thing is still emptiness of mind. Practice is for transcending the three realms and not remaining within the five phases. Therefore everything must be put down before one can enter the Way. Household practitioners have one more layer of obstruction than renunciants: they have families and many afflictions. Before one matter is settled, another arrives; there is no end to them. Therefore we must be alert at all times. See through these worldly circumstances as false and unobtainable. If the mind does not cling to them, coarse delusion cannot arise.

After that, one diligently applies effort by sitting and holding the mantra. Then subtle deluded thoughts inevitably intrude. This is the accumulated habit of many lives and kalpas; it is used to moving, so it cannot stop all at once. But do not fear it. When a thought jumps out, if you can see it and do not pay attention to it, the deluded thought naturally dissolves. If a thought comes and you do not see it, you will run along after it, and then you cannot enter samādhi. When sitting, the most important thing is to put everything down. The mind must be clear and

lucid. As soon as a thought comes, see it; do not heed it. Do not hate it or suppress it either. Hatred itself is a kind of deluded mind. Suppression will not do, for it cannot be suppressed to death. It is like pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows up again. That will not work. Even if it were suppressed to death, one would instead become like earth, wood, metal, or stone and be unable to function. Therefore one must use a flexible method of redirection, not a method of suppression. When thoughts come, simply do not heed them; resume reciting the mantra, and deluded thoughts naturally transform and dissolve.

When one practices and sits with such vigor until the mind is undisturbed, the mantra will naturally dissolve and fall away, and one will no longer be able to bring it up. Why is this? Because the mind that holds the mantra is still deluded mind: it has subject and object, namely the mind that can recite and the mantra that is recited. Buddha-recitation is the same: there is the mind that can recite and the Buddha who is recited. Subject and object standing in opposition are all deluded mind. What is relative is false and not real. The true mind is free from all opposition and without characteristics. Whatever bears characteristics is illusory. If we truly hold the mantra until the mind is undisturbed, all relative and illusory things fall away and vanish completely. At this time body, mind, and world are all emptied; even space is shattered. Only then does the genuine, uncontrived original nature reveal itself in its entirety.

After empowerment, while practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, there may be a process of diarrhea. Do not be afraid. This is the Dharma's power taking effect. This Dharma's empowering force is extremely great; it causes filth, defilement, and habitual obstructions to be discharged through the bowels, as though cleansing the belly. This is a good thing, so do not fear it.

After practicing for some time, when you read Chan materials and understand them somewhat, that is awakening at the level of principle. Verbal and textual understanding is not of much use, because without direct realization, meditative stability is insufficient. Although one may understand a little of the principle, when circumstances come one cannot withstand them. Therefore conceptual awakening cannot end birth-and-death. One must realize directly; one must personally see the nature before there is practical strength. "Seeing" of course is not seeing with the eyes. It is direct realization of the nature through the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground. The nature is without characteristics. The eyes can only see things that have form. At that time you yourself are no longer there, so what eyes are there? What seeing is there?

Although the dharmakāya has no characteristics that can be seen, it is not annihilationist emptiness. It is a real great function, a great energy. All phenomena and circumstances in the world are its manifestations and transformations. For example, electricity cannot be seen by the eye, yet apart from it the world could not function. Again, it is like "the taste of salt in seawater": people can see the seawater, but they cannot see the salty taste within the seawater, and yet it truly exists.

When our practice reaches the point where the mind that grasps at conditions has come to rest and the world has dissolved into emptiness, when the time ripens one naturally knows; the mind comprehends, and one realizes the Way. This is why it is said that the mind-ground Dharma-eye can see the Way. After seeing the Way, has one succeeded? Many people think one has succeeded at that point. No. One has not succeeded; one is still far from it. Having just opened the treasury and caught only a glimpse brings one only to the threshold of the dharmakāya; it is not yet the essential point. Birth-and-death still cannot be ended. One must continue striving forward and eliminate all bad habits; only then has one reached completion.

Because of this, Pure Land practitioners often say that Chan is not good: even if one apprehends Mind and sees the nature, birth-and-death still cannot be ended; it would be safer to practice Buddha-recitation and be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, where birth-and-death can be ended. At the very beginning, when one has just apprehended Mind and seen nature, it is only initial awakening, breaking through one's fundamental case. One has merely crossed the first threshold. Deluded habits are still present, and birth-and-death cannot yet be ended. One must diligently protect it, train the mind through circumstances, and extinguish the deluded habits of attachment accumulated over many lives and kalpas. One must truly accord with the Diamond Sutra's statement, "All marks whatsoever are false": when in favorable circumstances, one is not pleased; when encountering adverse circumstances, one is not annoyed; one is not moved in the slightest. Only then can one end the delusion of thought and thereby end fragmentary birth-and-death.

The Diamond Sutra says that past, present, and future mind are all unobtainable. Since mind itself is unobtainable, what is there to move? For one who has truly seen the nature, there is only this awakened awareness; everything else is unobtainable. Yet one must go even further upward: not abiding even in awakened awareness and unobtainability is true completion. If, seeing circumstances, one gives rise to mind and turns with thoughts, one is not a person who has seen the nature and awakened.

That arhats are divided into four fruits is also based on whether the mind moves. A first-fruit arhat in the mountains and forests is pure and undefiled, but when he goes into the city he cannot help being dazzled and stirred up by thoughts. This is because the delusion of thought has not yet ended. "Delusion of thought" means giving rise to mind in relation to circumstances and misapprehending phenomena—taking illusory circumstances as real and producing the deluded thought of possession.

In the course of sitting, many appearances may arise: beautiful lights of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and other favorable appearances, or ugly demonic appearances. Do not pay attention to any of them. Whatever bears characteristics is false. Once one clings to marks, one easily falls into demonic influence. Also, as one passes from a phase in which appearances remain to one in which they fall away, certain transformations may arise: the body may seem gone, or the hands, feet, or head may seem gone, and so forth. Do not bother about any of it. Or the breath may seem about to stop and the head may seem about to explode. There is no

need for fear; these are preliminaries to the dropping away of body and mind. As soon as one becomes afraid and startled, all previous practice is abandoned and one comes out of samādhi.

When the practice reaches full maturity, there is all at once a great explosion: inwardly body and mind, and outwardly the world, all vanish together; even space is shattered, and the original nature is immediately present. But you must not cling to the mark and seek this explosion. Once you grasp at the mark, deluded thought covers you; not only will there be no explosion, you will not even be able to enter emptiness. Esoteric practice has this advantage: it often receives the empowering aid of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, so an external explosive sound may trigger the inner explosion. But one must absolutely not seek it, imagine when it will come, wait for it with the mind, or welcome it. All appearances within meditative absorption during sitting must not be paid attention to; they must be set aside. You must firmly remember the Diamond Sutra's warning: "All marks whatsoever are false." All such appearances are false. If you do not heed them, there is no problem. If you heed them and cling to them, there is danger of falling into demonic influence.

For a second-fruit arhat, as soon as one thought moves, the next thought notices it. Although such a practitioner can avoid abiding in marks and, once it is noticed, return home and sit steadily, thoughts still arise and cease. Therefore he must still undergo another round of birth-and-death, ascending to heaven and falling to earth, before he can end fragmentary birth-and-death. Thus for a person who has opened up what is original, the great matter is not finished. One must still diligently eliminate habits, enter the stage of third-fruit arhatship where one does not move the mind when meeting events, and then go further upward into the unconditioned, reaching avaivartika, the stage of non-retrogression. Only then is there an initial completion.

Thought, delusive attachment, and contrivance all belong to conditioned activity. Practice from the first ground through the seventh ground is conditioned. Entering the eighth ground is the unconditioned. Although the seventh ground has already attained the unconditioned, there is still an "unconditioned" present; there is still a trace of the unconditioned, so it is still not clean. At the eighth ground, that trace of the unconditioned is removed. Therefore each of us must measure ourselves: examine whether the mind is unmoved in the slightest when facing circumstances. If normally there is still the rising and falling of deluded mind, that will not do. If within circumstances one clings to circumstances, that is even worse. At all times and places, when the mind is empty as if washed clean, able to function according to conditions without attachment—true emptiness as marvelous presence, marvelous presence as true emptiness—that is true awakening.

Apart from sitting, the most important thing is daily effort. Watch yourself at all times. As soon as a thought arises, see it and do not run after it. If a thought arises and you do not see it, and only after running a long way do you notice it, that will not do. Chan says, "Do not fear thoughts arising; only fear noticing them too late." When thoughts arise, that is not to be

feared; only failing to notice them and running along after them is birth-and-death. If you run after thoughts for a long stretch and only then notice it, you have already been dead for a long time. This also proves that in the future you will be unable to end birth-and-death. If a thought arises and in the next moment we notice it without running after it, then we can be free in taking birth. Freedom in taking birth is not yet the ending of birth-and-death. Birth-and-death is still present; however, at the point of birth-and-death one can determine one's own course and go wherever one wishes, and not be dragged by karmic obstructions into undergoing karmic retribution.

Levels of practice. The first step in practice is this: when thoughts arise, do not follow them. If one can do this, then within birth-and-death one can remain in command, not led by karma, and one obtains great freedom. The second step is personally realizing the unconditioned. Let all matters come as they may; my mind does not move. This is genuine accord, not suppressing the mind and making it unmoving. Suppressing it into immobility will not do. One must deal with all kinds of affairs, accord with all situations, and have no discriminating feeling of good and bad: not pleased by the good, not averse to the bad. In this way the mind can become level and peaceful and reach a state of equality in the unconditioned. When this stage is reached, one can be free in transformation; fragmentary birth-and-death is ended. The first step is freedom within birth-and-death; the second step is freedom in transformation. One can transform coarse into subtle, short into long, reaching the stage of an eighth-ground bodhisattva, and at minimum manifest over thirty mind-made bodies.

The third step is extinguishing the subtle stream. This subtle stream is the mental engagement discussed above. Mental engagement flows within the field of the eighth consciousness; ordinarily you cannot see it. Only by entering the great samādhi of Vajrasattva deeply can you see it and extinguish it. When this stage is reached and the subtle stream has been completely extinguished, one can manifest hundreds, thousands, millions, and billions of emanation bodies to liberate hundreds, thousands, millions, and billions of beings. Only then has one truly arrived home. It is not that everything is finished as soon as one awakens; one is still very far away. Therefore one must continue practicing diligently.

Without bodhicitta one cannot realize the Way. What is bodhicitta? Put simply, it is “seeking above and liberating below”: above, seeking the Buddha-way; below, liberating sentient beings. We practice Dharma in order to liberate beings below, not for our own personal liberation.

That everyone today can receive this Dharma is truly unsurpassed good fortune. Chan practice requires several decades of wholehearted investigation before one can open up what is original. Moreover, in the present day, people do not have time to investigate Chan all day long. Relying on the Heart-Center Dharma with the Buddha's empowering support is much easier and faster. Chan investigation by self-power is like walking on two feet; practicing the Heart-Center Dharma with the Buddha's empowering support is like riding in a car or airplane. Thus the two differ in speed. Since you have received this Dharma, you must cherish

it, treat it carefully, and protect it. Even more, you must practice diligently and continuously. If you practice today and stop tomorrow, you certainly will not succeed.

The Heart-Center Dharma is even more wonderful in that it melts the myriad Dharmas into one furnace. Śākyamuni Buddha said that in practicing Heart-Center, forming the fourth mudrā can bring rebirth in the Western Pure Land, and moreover can allow rebirth in the pure lands of the ten directions according to one's aspiration—this is the Pure Land school. Opening up what is original and seeing the nature—this is the Chan school. When one realizes to the end, the mind communicates with the worlds of the ten directions: the worlds of the ten directions are perfectly present in my mind; the Buddhas are in my mind, and I am in the Buddhas' minds; light and light mutually contain one another, layer upon layer without end, interpenetrating one another without obstruction—this is the Huayan school. Therefore, when we say that the Heart-Esoteric school includes all schools without remainder, it is truly no exaggeration.

This Dharma is not easy to receive. I earnestly ask everyone to practice diligently, persist in sitting meditation and in maintaining clear observation, and not treat it lightly. More important still is carrying the practice into daily activity. It is not that after sitting for two hours you may let the wild horse loose and behave recklessly. You must, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, never forget to maintain clear observation at all times. Only then can you accord with the great Way.

The six key points of practice. First: put everything down and sit with utter resolve. If you cling to worldly affairs and cannot let them go, what use is that? All things in this world arise through causes and conditions; they have no independent reality. They are like passing clouds before the eyes: empty, unreal, impossible to obtain, impossible to carry away. Even your own body is provisionally existent; it cannot be kept, and it is unobtainable. External things need not even be mentioned. Therefore, taking things as real and grasping them tightly is such foolishness that a person of understanding would scarcely find it worth laughing at. Studying Buddhism and practicing the Way is the great undertaking of a person of great wisdom, not something that those of small faculties and small wisdom can undertake. To realize the Way, first one must see through everything. Only by sitting with utter resolve can one enter samādhi and awaken. If during formal sitting you think of this and that, with deluded thoughts flying chaotically, then it is finished. You must put everything down, as though you were a dead person.

Second: sit, hold the mantra, and practice mental recitation with attentive listening. This is the essential point of Heart-Esoteric practice and is extremely important for entering samādhi and awakening. Therefore I remind you again and again: follow this instruction exactly, without compromise. Our delusive thinking is deeply habituated to movement. If one does not single-mindedly listen to the sound of the mantra as it is recited mentally and gather in the mind faculty, deluded thought cannot come to rest. If deluded thought does not rest, how can one enter samādhi and awaken? Therefore one must practice mental recitation with attentive

listening: the mantra is recited mentally, syllable by syllable, and heard clearly and distinctly. Only then can one gather in the mind faculty so that deluded thought does not arise, and gradually enter samādhi.

Third: when thoughts arise, notice them immediately; neither suppress nor follow. When thoughts come, you must be able to see them. If you do not see them, you will run after them. Once you run after thoughts, deluded thoughts fly everywhere and you cannot enter samādhi. Therefore, when thoughts arise, notice them immediately: do not follow them in their wandering, and do not suppress them so that they cannot arise. Simply do not pay attention to them. Reestablish right mindfulness and hold the mantra single-mindedly; deluded thoughts naturally dissolve, and you peacefully enter samādhi.

Fourth: sit at regular times, neither hurried nor lax. Sit at fixed times every day. Once the habit is formed, it is easier to enter samādhi. It is best to sit in the morning, and even better before dawn. When sitting, do not be anxious to enter samādhi. With a level, ordinary mind, sit down peacefully; hold the mantra calmly, neither hurried nor lax. Do not demand entry into samādhi or awakening, and do not deludedly seek spiritual powers. The very thought that demands samādhi, awakening, or spiritual powers is deluded mind. Once this mind arises, it blocks the gate of your own awakening; not only will you fail to awaken, you will not enter samādhi.

Fifth: after formal sitting, maintain continuous, close observation. Extend the stillness and meditative stability developed during sitting into daily activity. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, quietly and steadily apply it for yourself, maintaining continuous, close observation. In all things, do not abide. Do not let circumstances drag you away, and do not wander along with deluded thoughts.

Sixth, make the mind vast and open, able to contain everything. A practitioner's mind must not be narrow; one must be broad-minded and magnanimous, able to contain everything. Even if others are not good to me, I should be even better to them, without the slightest thoughts of attachment, dislike, delight, or aversion. Do every good deed as conditions allow and according to one's capacity. At every time and place be free and at ease, without a mind of worrying over gain and loss, and without thoughts of praise or blame, success or failure. This is the greatest spiritual power. Remember these six points and practice according to them. You will certainly open up what is original and personally realize Buddha-nature. Carry out these six points without the slightest slackening, and it is guaranteed that you can perfectly realize bodhi and attain great accomplishment.

8A. 略论明心见性 / A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature—Introduction and Part A

Chinese source: 《略论明心见性》; parts A–F follow the work's internal progression.

A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature. By Yuan Yin Lao Ren. Serialized in Chan magazine, 1991, issues 1 through 4.

Introductory remarks. We sentient beings, from beginningless vast kalpas until now, have lost sight of our own original face. We take the false to be real, call the servant the master, and deludedly arouse greed and anger. We create karma and undergo retribution, like silkworms spinning cocoons: we bind and entangle ourselves, with no time of liberation. The foolish, not knowing, endure hardship without seeking liberation. The wise know that birth and death are a great matter and that the sea of suffering is boundless, yet they suffer because they do not know the gate of release.

In ancient times, the six non-Buddhist teachers searched for the origin of all things in the universe. Some posited a spiritual self, others primordial matter or annihilationism. In the present, scientists and philosophers investigate the origin of human life and the myriad things; some speak of dualism, some of monism. Each may speak confidently and with great subtlety, yet all are like blind men feeling an elephant, with no point that is truly correct.

Śākyamuni Buddha, moved by compassion for sentient beings who had no way out of suffering, appeared in the world and taught beings. For forty-nine years, in accord with the time and the capacities of beings, he taught great and small, partial and complete, sudden and gradual teachings. With his whole heart, through skillful and indirect exposition, he opened up the two roots: first, the beginningless root of birth and death; second, the originally pure essence of bodhi and nirvāṇa. In this way he clarified the mystery of life and the universe and revealed the root of birth-and-death cyclic wandering, so that beings might recognize their own original mind, see their own original nature, return to the true and constant, leave birth and death, and bring the wheel of suffering to rest.

We sentient beings originally possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata. We are numinously clear, empty, and quiescent, no different from the Buddhas. But because of ignorance and non-awakening, inverted delusive grasping, and ceaseless agitation, we create karma and undergo retribution. Thus, through shared karma, mountains, rivers, and the great earth appear; through individual karma, the twelve classes of beings are drawn forth. In this way things repeat themselves, cycle after cycle, and birth-and-death saṃsāra does not cease. If we now wish to recover what is original and leave birth and death, we must first awaken to and break through ignorance. If ignorance is not broken through, we remain deluded about ourselves and pursue objects; seeing circumstances, the mind arises, and birth and death can never be ended.

Therefore all scriptures and treatises, and all Dharma gates, unfold around this central point: apprehending Mind and seeing nature. They enable people to see through deluded attachment, eliminate ignorance, leave delusion and return to the real, and find their way home. The reason Buddhism differs from other teachings and surpasses non-Buddhist paths is that it directly strikes the source of sentient beings' birth and death, and of their return to cessation. That source lies in whether one has apprehended Mind and seen nature. Thus apprehending Mind and seeing nature is truly the essence of Buddhism and the crucial key to transcending birth and death. For this reason, although the scriptures and treatises are many and their expositions and appraisals may differ, their purport is one. Although Dharma gates are vast and their methods may differ, their aim is not different. As it is said, skillful means have many gates, but returning to the source has no two roads.

Outline. Introduction. The meaning of apprehending Mind and seeing nature. How apprehending Mind and seeing nature is realized. Genuine practice after awakening. Realizing the essence, bringing forth function, and the question of where one returns. Conclusion.

Yet in recent times, in this latter age, Buddhist students have greatly gone astray. Not only do they not dare to advocate and spread the grand and profound purpose and essence of this era's teaching—apprehending Mind and seeing nature—they seem to turn pale at the mere mention of it. They dare not even let the phrase appear in speech, writing, or public explanation. If one examines this carefully, the causes are no more than the following.

First, Chan practitioners lack teachers. When they practice, there is no one to guide them, no one to give timely prompts in accord with their situation, no one to apply the fierce tongs and hammer to cut through attachments and entanglements. At the crucial moment, still less is there anyone to open the true eye for them so that they personally see what is original. Most of them cling to a single lifeless *huatou* used in exactly the same way by everyone—"Who is reciting the Buddha's name?"—and bitterly investigate for decades without the slightest breakthrough. Because of this, they regard seeing nature as an extremely deep and difficult matter, high and unreachable. So they relegate it to a realm reserved for sages, do not dare to aspire to it, and even less dare to proclaim and advocate it.

Second, the overwhelming majority of Pure Land practitioners say that the Pure Land method is different from all others: it advocates horizontal transcendence and birth in the West, and does not require apprehending Mind and seeing nature. They do not realize that Pure Land is a great teaching that gathers in all three capacities. For those of lower capacity, it does not explicitly speak of apprehending Mind and seeing nature, and only emphasizes horizontal transcendence and birth in the West. Yet in fact it has already secretly included the essential meaning of apprehending Mind and seeing nature within its practice.

Look at its method. In practicing Buddha-recitation, one must "gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession." Is this gathering in of all six faculties not precisely putting everything down? If everything is not put down, how can the six sense gates

be tightly closed and seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing all be gathered into a single Buddha-name? The four-character phrase “pure mindfulness in continuous succession” carries deep and broad meaning; I will explain it in detail below. For now, speaking only from the surface of the words, to practice Buddha-recitation continuously with a pure mind is to use sustained recollection of the Buddha to redirect delusive thoughts, moment after moment. Because human beings cannot be without thought: if they do not think of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, then they think of greed, anger, and delusion. Now, through skillful means, one uses a single Buddha-name to replace deluded thought, so that without noticing it one transforms the deluded mind into Buddha-mind.

As it is said, “When the Buddha-name is cast into a confused mind, the confused mind cannot help but become Buddha.” What is Buddha? If it is not apprehending Mind and seeing nature, what else is it? The Pure Land teaching further says, “Entering samādhi is foremost.” What is samādhi? Samādhi is meditative absorption. When Buddha-recitation is realized to the point of samādhi, the mind that can recite and the Buddha who is recited both fall away at once. This is the time when sense faculty and sense object fall away, when subject and object both vanish. When Buddha-recitation reaches this point, it is precisely the time in the Chan school called the bottom of the bucket falling out, apprehending Mind and seeing nature. At this point, what Pure Land and what Chan are there? Thus Pure Land is Chan and Chan is Pure Land; Chan and Pure Land are not two families.

For those of lower capacity, there is no need to say much profound Chan principle. One only teaches them to lay down body and mind and recite straightforwardly. When they recite until feelings disappear and the mind is empty, they will naturally realize. If those of superior capacity awaken as soon as they hear, there is even less need for many words. Therefore, in Pure Land practice, those of lower and superior capacities find it easiest to succeed. Those of middling capacity seem clever but are not truly clever, and seem dull but are not truly dull. Because they are not truly clever, they do not easily see through worldly entanglements and put everything down. Because they are not truly dull, they refuse to be down-to-earth and sincerely practice Buddha-recitation with honest, earnest effort. Therefore they do not easily succeed.

Furthermore, in recent times most Pure Land practitioners only seek to save effort, relying solely on Amitābha Buddha to welcome and guide them to rebirth in the West. They themselves are unwilling to exert effort in Buddha-recitation to sweep away deluded mind and habit-energy and to transform themselves. They give this a fine name, saying, “Ours is the Dharma gate of other-power; we rely on other-power in practice.” When they hear of “one-pointedness without confusion,” they shake their heads again and again, saying, “No need, no need. In Pure Land, as long as there is faith and vow, Amitābha naturally welcomes and guides us; whether our practice is effective or not is not important.” What need do they have for “apprehending Mind and seeing nature”? How could they know that “one-pointedness

without confusion” and “when the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising” are synonymous with apprehending Mind and seeing nature?

Third, Esoteric practitioners also mostly tend toward spiritual powers and marvels. Some even flaunt them before worldly people to satisfy their desire for fame and material support. Fundamentally they do not value the practice of realizing the essence, awakening to the Way, and ending birth and death. They have turned an excellent Esoteric Buddhism into something thick with a demonic atmosphere. Esoteric Buddhism’s own banner of becoming a Buddha in this very life or in this very body—namely apprehending Mind and seeing nature—has long been thrown beyond the ninth heaven.

Since the three major schools now present in China have become so weak and disordered, other schools that have names but no actual content need not even be mentioned. The whole bright and splendid Buddhadharma has been spoiled by its unworthy descendants into such smoke, murk, and misery. How could those who come later know where the spirit of Buddhism lies? How could they discipline themselves and nurture their nature, recover natural genuineness, and end birth and death? To speak of this, how could one not feel deep pain?

Going further, Buddhism is the great teaching that educates people to understand truth, abandon deluded views, change evil into good, leave the perverse and return to the correct, and transform humankind. It is a wholesome Dharma that makes people awaken from deluded dreams, cease greed and selfishness, do their utmost to serve the public, and seek welfare for all beings—universally benefiting sentient beings. Even more, it is the wondrous Dharma that enables beings to remove delusion and realize the real, put down their burdens—the things clinging in the mind—and live lightly, joyfully, meaningfully, and valuably, receiving genuine benefit.

Therefore Buddhism is a great religion with immense real and positive significance for society and the nation. For every social unrest and national disturbance arises from the working of people’s three great bad roots: greed, anger, and delusion. Because material desire blazes and greed rises high, people stop at nothing: corruption and lawbreaking, speculation and profiteering, smuggling and bribery, even plots and rebellion, forming cliques for selfish ends, and many other crimes. Buddhism is precisely the teaching that cuts into these three poisonous roots: greed, anger, and delusion.

As for the movement of the world and the experiences of human beings, they are all karmic results brought about by people’s own delusive stirring born of ignorance and by clinging to objects and creating karma. In other words, they are what people themselves make and themselves undergo; they are not the work of ghosts or spirits. Moreover, once people swiftly and fiercely awaken, recognize their own original mind, and see their own original nature, every person can become a Buddha. The Buddha advocates a vast teaching in which all are

equal and there is no class distinction. For this reason, many people maintain that Buddhism is not a religion.

Again, from the standpoint of Buddhism's purport, the complete and sudden teaching starts from the most ultimate point: there is no birth and death to end, no nirvāṇa to realize, no Buddha and no sentient beings; every Dharma is empty. The moment the mind stirs and a thought arises, one has already departed from the essential purport of one's own school. As it is said, "The moment the mind stirs, it is already mistaken; the moment a thought arises, one has already gone astray." Its school is to take no school as its school. To take no school as the school is the true school of Buddhism; for if there is something taken as a school, one falls into partial view. Therefore many people, for this reason, also call Buddhism non-religious. But they seem to forget that although Buddhism takes no school as its school, this does not mean there is no principle; there is still the school of no-school. Therefore it is also not non-religious.

What Buddhism teaches is dialectical truth. Because it has no school, one should not say it is religion. Because it takes no school as its school, one should not say it is not religion. Neither empty nor existent, neither existent nor empty: this is the accurate purport of Buddhism's middle way that does not establish two extremes. To understand this purport, one must apprehend Mind and see nature. From this we can see that apprehending Mind and seeing nature is an extremely important topic for students of Buddhism. Since it is so important, what exactly is contained in apprehending Mind and seeing nature? How can one realize it? What is the scene or realm when it is realized? What function does it have after realization? These many questions are what students of Buddhism wish—and should—understand, and what urgently needs to be studied. For clarity and ease of understanding, and so that readers may realize it, I will briefly discuss them separately below.

Part A. The meaning of apprehending Mind and seeing nature.

Briefly and generally explained, "apprehending Mind and seeing nature" means to investigate and clarify the form and functioning of people's "mind"—the original mind—and thereby thoroughly see, awaken to, and inwardly recognize the wondrous essence and truth of "nature"—original nature, the source of life. Through this, one awakens from the deluded dream, ends birth and death, and realizes great nirvāṇa. If analyzed in detail, its meaning is extremely deep and broad, because it is the essence of this era's teaching. One could say that the twelve divisions of the Tripiṭaka are all commentaries on it. Here we can only select its essentials and speak of them briefly.

Before discussing the content of apprehending Mind and seeing nature and how to do so, let us first sketch the outline of mind and nature, so that it is easier to begin analyzing and discussing the meaning of apprehending Mind and seeing nature. What, then, is mind? And what is nature?

What is called mind is not the lump of flesh in our chest. It is the thoughts and ideas that arise in response to circumstances. The Buddhist scriptures describe it as the conditioned impressions of the six sense objects—the residual impressions left by forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas. In brief, mind is said to arise through the gathering of conditions. This means that originally we have no mind—no thoughts and ideas. Because objects such as visible forms are present, we apprehend their respective images, form cognitions, discriminate their similarities and differences, establish names, give rise to attachment and aversion, grasp and reject, and engage in further mental fabrication; only then do various thoughts arise. This mind arises together with its environment; it does not arise one-sidedly or alone. This is why mind is said to arise through the gathering of conditions. In modern terms, this is “thought as the reflection of objective conditions.”

To speak in detail of its form and content, the Yogācāra text *Treatise on the Establishment of Consciousness-Only* explains it very clearly: it can be divided into eight primary consciousnesses and fifty-one mental factors. To save time and space, I will not speak of it in detail here. Readers may study the *Treatise on the Establishment of Consciousness-Only* for themselves.

Since mind is like this, what is nature? Nature is the root that gives rise to mind; it is the source of mind. Modern theories might call it the energy that gives rise to mind. Without it, mind could not arise in response to objects. That we can give rise to mind in relation to objects is entirely its function. It is without shape and without characteristics, so the eye cannot see it. Yet it can produce all kinds of function, so it truly exists. The ancients compared it to the binder in pigment or the taste of salt in water: though one cannot see it with the eyes, in fact it truly functions. In the Buddhist scriptures it has many different names: the one true Dharma realm, suchness, tathāgatagarbha, Buddha-nature, true mind, great perfect victorious wisdom, and so on.

Because sentient beings are deluded and do not awaken, they do not know this wondrous essence. Since beginningless time, they have only merged it with arising and ceasing, turning it into deluded mind. Therefore mind and nature are originally one thing, like water and waves; they are not two matters. The world today advances rapidly by relying on automation, and automation relies on heat energy. Without heat energy there is no motive power; without motive power, everything is still and dead. In the same way, our ability to think, work, create, invent, and so forth also relies on the power within the body, and this power is the function of nature. Therefore although nature cannot be seen by the eye, it truly performs all functions. It is like electricity: though the eye cannot see electricity, all illumination, movement, and operation depend on its functioning.

In the Buddhist scriptures, nature is called the essence and mind is called the function; nature is principle and mind is phenomena. But in the Chan school the two are often used interchangeably: mind is called nature, and nature is called mind. As long as we penetrate

their underlying meaning and clarify their distinction, we will not mix the two up and become confused.

Having understood the outline and definitions of mind and nature, we must further investigate: how does “nature”—the source of life—conditionally give rise to mind in relation to objects? From what do objects arise, resulting in the unbroken entanglement of birth and death? We must also understand what is included in the meaning of apprehending Mind and seeing nature, and how one can clarify it, see it, and leave birth and death. Let us now divide this into five sections and discuss it in detail.

First: apprehending Mind and seeing nature means understanding that mind is false and unobtainable, settling the mad mind, and seeing the true nature. If we wish to end birth and death, we must first know where birth and death come from. If one wants to cut off a stream, one must first know where its source lies; only then can one block the source, stop the stream, and roam freely beyond birth and death.

What, then, gives rise to the endless bobbing up and sinking down of the multitudes of beings in the six paths? Śākyamuni Buddha tells us in two concise sentences: “The three realms are mind-only; the myriad dharmas are consciousness-only.” Analyzing this, it means that all sentient beings originally possess the tathāgatagarbha nature. It is unborn and undying, undefiled and unpurified, neither coming nor going, an essence endowed with all capacities, without characteristics and numinously responsive. It belongs neither to delusion nor awakening; its essence transcends the distinction between ordinary beings and sages. But because sentient beings remain unaware and lack experiential recognition, they do not know that the wondrous essence is originally luminous. They give rise to a single thought that takes luminosity as something to be affirmed, thereby turning the originally present wondrous light of awakened wisdom into a false illumination and an object illuminated by it.

Awareness and luminosity are originally one and inseparable: awareness is luminosity and luminosity is awareness, not two. Yet they are divided into opposing poles of awareness and luminosity: luminosity is set outside awareness and awareness outside luminosity; awareness becomes what luminosity illuminates, while luminosity becomes what awareness knows. Thus subject and object are both established. This is what the Śūraṅgama Sutra means by “The nature of awareness is necessarily luminous; delusively, luminosity is set up as something known by awareness.” Because of this ignorance—this luminosity set up as something known is what we ordinarily call ignorance—beings become deluded about the original perfect luminosity and transform original suchness, which is without characteristics, into the ālaya-consciousness, like a normal person becoming drunk on wine.

Then true emptiness, numinously luminous, becomes inert emptiness. Within this inert emptiness, ignorance stirs delusively and condenses into the deluded forms of the four great elements. The tathāgatagarbha nature originally possesses the capacities of the four great element-seeds—earth, water, fire, and wind—and because of deluded movement they appear

as forms; the world is formed from the condensation of these four great elements. This is what the *Śūraṅgama Sutra* means by “from delusion and falsity there is space; relying on space, the world is established.”

Once the deluded forms of the four great elements appear, the originally present light of wisdom is transformed into deluded seeing, which then takes those deluded forms as its objects. As this deluded seeing persists, it gathers up a small portion of the four great elements and takes it to be “me,” relying on those elements as its body. In other words, ignorance envelops the eight consciousnesses and lodges them in the bodily faculties. The four great elements are originally without knowing, but when deluded seeing appropriates them, they come to be endowed with cognition. The true mind is immeasurable, yet ignorance now seals it in and confines it within the four great elements, which are then taken to be mind. This is what is meant by “form mingles with deluded thought, and thought takes shape as the body”: thus a sentient being of the five aggregates comes to be. This is also what the *Śūraṅgama Sutra* means by “thought clarifies into lands; knowing and awareness become sentient beings.”

From this it can be seen that the deluded arising of body, mind, and world is in fact the fault of a single thought that takes luminosity as an object of recognition—that is, ignorance. Once sentient beings lose sight of their original nature and take things to be themselves, they pursue external objects, are deluded by them and refuse to let go, create karma and undergo its results, and wander without ceasing. The scriptures say, “When mind arises, various dharmas arise; when dharmas arise, various minds arise.” Seeds give rise to manifest activity; manifest activity again perfumes seeds. From causes there are results; results again summon causes. Causes upon causes, results upon results; results upon results, causes upon causes—cyclically and without end. For this reason beings, from within what is originally free of birth and death, wrongly suffer the pain of birth-and-death *saṃsāra* without rest.

Therefore our mind is illusory and unreal. It consists only of residual impressions left by the six sense objects; and those sense objects—the myriad things of the world—are themselves illusory manifestations arising as ignorance delusively congeals, and are originally unobtainable. As the Buddhist scriptures say, they are not born from themselves, not born from another, not born from both, and not born without cause. The deluded mind that arises from them is even more an illusion within illusion. Modern philosophers also say that mind is a reflection of objective matter, but they only say that mind is produced by matter and do not reveal from what matter itself is produced. Their account is not as complete as the Buddhist scriptures. The Buddha said, “Mind is not mind by itself; because of things there is mind. Things are not things by themselves; because of mind there are things.” This makes completely clear the principle that mind and things mutually function as cause and effect and illusorily arise.

Since mind and things are both illusory and unobtainable, when we awaken from the dream and realize that body, mind, and world are originally empty, this is apprehending Mind. In the

place of original emptiness, it is not like wood or stone, without knowing or awareness. Instead, there is empty luminosity, clear and distinct. Though clear and distinct in this empty luminosity, it is quiescent and unmoving, without a single thought arising. What is this? If this magnificent and yet plain scene is not the intrinsic essence of our own true suchness—unborn, undying, and abiding from time immemorial—what else could it be? When this intrinsic essence suddenly stands openly revealed, to seize it in that very moment is called personally realizing the original face; it is also called seeing nature.

Seeing nature does not mean using the eyes to see something. It is a direct, penetrating experiential recognition and inward realization through the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground. The scripture says, “When seeing sees the seeing-nature, that seeing is no longer seeing.” Therefore apprehending Mind and seeing nature means thoroughly seeing the true nature when deluded knowing and deluded views are shattered, the mad mind comes to rest, and body and mind vanish.

For example, the Second Patriarch Shenguang came to the First Patriarch Bodhidharma and said, “This student’s mind is not at peace; I beg the master to pacify my mind.” The Patriarch said, “Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it for you.” After a long while, Shenguang said, “I have searched for the mind and it is completely unobtainable.” The Patriarch then pushed the boat with the current and said, “I have finished pacifying your mind.” At these words, Shenguang greatly awakened. This is precisely, at the point where the searched-for mind is completely unobtainable—when the previous thought has ended and the next thought has not yet arisen—to thoroughly see this nature of clear numinous knowing that does not fall into annihilation (for although thought has ceased, it is not like wood or stone, devoid of knowing).

The marvel of this kōan is that mind arises through a gathering of conditions and is illusory; it has no real place from which it comes. As soon as it is questioned, it vanishes completely. Yet although thoughts come to rest and are empty, the capacity—that is, nature—is not extinguished. One who understands can, right at that moment, summon full alertness, turn the light inward, and recognize it. This is seeing nature. As to the indestructibility of energy, modern scientists also acknowledge it. Of all energies, none is greater than the capacity of nature. Because nature is without shape and without characteristics, it is supremely vast and firm: great without outside, small without inside. It can break all things, while nothing can break it. Therefore it cannot be measured or compared. What takes birth in the six paths and suffers or enjoys is it; what ends birth and death and roams free beyond transformation is also it. Therefore to end birth and death, one must apprehend Mind and see nature.

Second: apprehending Mind and seeing nature means understanding that the wondrous function of mind all arises in dependence on the essence of nature: seeing the essence from its function and reaching the source from the stream. An ancient said: essence has no form; without function it is not revealed. Nature has no form; without mind it is not made clear. Function arises precisely to reveal the essence; only by apprehending Mind can one see nature. This means that to see nature one must begin with apprehending Mind. Apart from

mind there is no nature to be seen. Because the essence of nature has no form and cannot be seen, while mind is function, and function is not revealed without appearances, one sees the essence of nature, which is without characteristics, through the mind's functioning as appearances.

As said above, our thinking, work, creation, invention, and even the civilization of today's world are all functions of mind. To see nature, one must see it from within these functions. Apart from function there is no nature to be seen. This is like principle and affairs in the world: without principle, affairs cannot be accomplished; without affairs, principle is not revealed. Principle is established precisely in order to accomplish affairs, and affairs are accomplished precisely in order to reveal principle. Principle is affairs and affairs are principle; principle and affairs are not separate. Therefore to see principle one must see it from affairs. Apart from affairs there is no principle to be seen.

Long ago, King Yijian asked Venerable Prajñātāra, "What is Buddha?" The Venerable said, "Seeing nature is Buddha." The king said, "Has the master seen nature?" The Venerable said, "I see Buddha-nature." The king said, "Where is nature?" The Venerable said, "Nature is in function." The king said, "What function is it? I do not see it now." The Venerable said, "Its clear, radiant function is something the king does not see for himself." The king said, "Is it present in me?" The Venerable said, "If the king functions, there is nothing that is not it. If the king does not function, the essence too is hard to see." The king said, "When it is functioning, in how many places does it appear?" The Venerable said, "When it appears, there are eight." The king said, "Please explain these eight modes of appearing for me." The Venerable said, "In the womb it is called body; in the world it is called person. In the eye it is called seeing; in the ear it is called hearing. In the nose it distinguishes fragrance; in the tongue it talks and discusses. In the hands it grasps and holds; in the feet it moves and runs. Spread out, it pervades and includes the Dharma realm; gathered in, it is in a single mote of dust. Those who know it know it to be Buddha-nature; those who do not know it call it a spirit." Hearing this, the king awakened.

Again, in the Diamond Sutra, before the World-Honored One taught the Dharma, why did he first insert the passage of putting on robes, taking up the bowl, entering the city, begging for food, and then arranging the seat and sitting down? It was because, in order to awaken the assembly to the functioning of prajñā, which has no form, he had to make use of the manifest forms of the six pāramitās. Without essence there can be no function; all present appearances and functions everywhere reflect back and reveal the prajñā-essence, which has no characteristics. But we do not recognize this. Therefore the Buddha specially made use of manifest activities and conduct to secretly show the wondrous essence that has no form and enable us to realize prajñāpāramitā. Nature is certainly not nonexistent, but it cannot be heard with the ears, seen with the eyes, known by ordinary knowing, or recognized by consciousness. It can only be illuminated by wisdom, contemplated wondrously, realized, and

intuitively comprehended. Hence the saying, “Awaken and comprehend in this way; awakening and comprehension are just so”—that is all.

The hidden practice of the six pāramitās is the World-Honored One’s wordless teaching of Dharma. When prajñā thus emitted light, only Subhūti immediately accorded and understood. In response to the condition, he rose from his seat and asked, thereby bringing about the wondrous scripture of Diamond Prajñā.

Third: apprehending Mind and seeing nature means clarifying that mind is originally nonexistent and seeing that nature is originally existent. As said above, mind and nature correspond respectively to phenomenal functioning and the essential principle. Phenomenal functioning has form and can be seen by the eye, yet though it seems existent, it is actually nonexistent, because what arises dependently is empty of self-nature. The essential principle has no characteristics that can be seen, yet though it seems nonexistent, it truly exists, because what is empty of self-nature arises dependently. The two support and complete one another: apart from essence there are no appearances, and apart from appearances there is no essence. Therefore it is neither empty nor existent, both empty and existent, and emptiness is itself existence.

We must not cling to phenomena and fall to one side. We must see through illusory phenomena and clearly discern the genuine essence of nature. The Śūraṅgama Sutra says, “The nature of form is true emptiness; the nature of emptiness is true form.” The essence of nature is true emptiness and has no form; only true emptiness without characteristics is the essence of nature. All forms bearing characteristics are deluded forms. Deluded forms have no essence of their own and are unobtainable, like flowers in the sky or the moon in water; they are only deluded thought. Therefore the Heart Sutra says that nothing is established: there are neither the worldly dharmas of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind with forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas, nor the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha dharmas of suffering, origin, cessation, path, and the twelve links of dependent origination, nor even the bodhisattva’s wisdom and attainment. Precisely when everything is seen to be unobtainable, anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi is attained. This reveals that, when mind is clarified as originally nonexistent, one thoroughly sees the originally present essence of nature.

In the Chan school this is called the school of extinguishing and cutting off, with nothing to rest upon. Layman Pang asked Mazu, “Who is the one who does not take the myriad things as companions?” Mazu said, “Wait until you swallow the West River in one gulp, then I will tell you.” When thoughts completely cease and both emptiness and existence dissolve, the wondrous essence of true emptiness naturally appears.

Again, in more recent times, Chan Master Chuquan visited Dharma Patriarch Chishan. One day the patriarch asked, “In the Lotus Sutra, the opening, revealing, awakening to, and entering the Buddha’s knowing and seeing—the patriarchs of the past each have their own explanations. But all of those are the patriarchs’ own; they have nothing to do with your

matter. Now I want you to speak from your own chest. How do you open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha's knowing and seeing?" The master had no words. The patriarch sighed, "If you investigate Chan like this, you are only wasting time. What benefit is there?" He punished him by making him kneel and investigate. After he had investigated through three sticks of incense, he heard the sound of the wake-up board struck by the disciplinarian and suddenly awakened.

The patriarch examined him, asking, "How do you open the Buddha's knowing and seeing?" He replied, "Open out what is originally present"—that is, the originally present essential principle of self-nature. The patriarch pressed, "How do you reveal?" He replied, "Reveal what is originally absent"—that is, all the functioning of mind and all phenomena are unobtainable, and through the unobtainability of mind's functioning the original true essential nature is revealed. Again he asked, "How do you awaken?" He replied, "Awaken to neither existence nor nonexistence"—erasing the traces of delusion and awakening. Again he asked, "How do you enter?" He replied, "Entering and leaving are unobstructed"—attaining great benefit, free and unobstructed in speech and silence, movement and stillness.

Fourth: apprehending Mind and seeing nature means awakening that mind is nature and nature is mind. Chan Master Zhenjue said: although mind and nature seem to be divided into essence and function, principle and phenomena, when examined in reality they are neither one nor different. Speaking from the standpoint of phenomena, wondrous function responds to conditions and appears as the myriad kinds, seemingly taking form, while the wondrous essence remains unmoving, cuts off all oppositions, and is apart from every mark. Therefore they are not one. Yet function arises from essence and never departs from it; essence gives rise to function and never departs from it. Speaking from this non-separation and non-opposition, they are not different. The scriptures say, "All phenomena are manifestations of nature." Although phenomena differ and fall into categories, their nature is one. Therefore it is said, "Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm."

A bright mirror does not fail to show images, and every image is nothing other than the bright mirror. All appearing images come from the bright mirror; without the mirror, images cannot appear. Mind and nature are also like this. Nature is the wondrous essence of true emptiness; mind is its functioning manifested as appearances. Therefore where there is the essence of nature, there must be functioning as appearances; without appearances, there is no way to reveal the essence. Thus appearance is nature and nature is appearance; outside appearances there is no nature, and outside nature there are no appearances. It is not like inert emptiness, insentient and unresponsive, lifeless and unknowing, falling into annihilation.

Sentient beings, confused about their head and taking only its reflection as real, cling to marks and create karma; therefore they summon the defiled land of the five turbidities. Buddhas see nature and cast off marks; they are pure and unstained, and therefore they experience the adornment of pure lands. Although true and deluded, pure and defiled are different, the

essential nature that manifests appearances is one. We only need to transform the error of taking reflections as real and rejecting the mirror into recognizing the mirror and letting reflections go. Then this defiled land is, right now, the pure land; it need not wait until after death to be born there. The scripture says, “As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure. If one wishes to purify the land, first purify the mind.” This is indeed so.

“True emptiness, marvelous presence” distinguishes it from inert emptiness: from essence, function arises. Because it is true emptiness, it can respond to conditions; because it is marvelous presence, it can function. “Marvelous presence, true emptiness” distinguishes it from truly established existence: gathering function back into essence. Because it responds to conditions and functions, manifesting many illusory appearances, the Amitābha Sutra speaks of the adornment of the Buddha-land. Because the essence of nature is pure and unstained and does not adhere to a single dharma, the Diamond Sutra speaks of not establishing a single thing. Not establishing a single thing is precisely the adornment of the Buddha-land; the adornment of the Buddha-land is precisely not establishing a single thing. Therefore the Diamond Sutra is the Amitābha Sutra, and the Amitābha Sutra is the Diamond Sutra; they are not two different things.

Mind and nature, appearance and essence, seem to differ, but in reality they are one, like water and waves. Water takes wetness as its essence, and waves take movement as their characteristic. Water-nature and the characteristic of waves appear not to be one, but waves are water and water is waves; the wet nature is not different. Therefore those who truly see nature can not only see the Way with the mind-ground Dharma-eye; even with their physical eyes they can thoroughly see true nature. This is because nature is appearance and appearance is nature. An ancient said, “Amid the myriad phenomena, the body alone stands revealed.” Another said, “Mountains, rivers, and the great earth all reveal the body of the Dharma King.” This means that all the myriad things of this world are manifestations of the essence of my nature.

The Diamond Sutra says, “If one sees all marks as not marks, one sees the Tathāgata.” If we can thoroughly investigate this principle, then in everyday life we see nature right amid appearances. Whatever sensory conditions and appearances arise, we do not regard them merely as sensory conditions and appearances; we immediately transcend all states of existence and roam free beyond the three realms. When Daosheng taught Dharma, the stubborn stones nodded: sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom. Everything the eyes reach and everything the ears hear is Buddha. In the Chan school, this is called directly pointing to mind-nature.

For example, Damei asked Mazu, “What is Buddha?” The patriarch said, “This very mind is Buddha.” At these words, Damei greatly awakened. Again, Lingxun asked Guizong, “What is Buddha?” Guizong said, “If I tell you now, I fear you will not believe.” Lingxun said, “How could I dare not believe the master’s sincere words?” Guizong said, “It is precisely you.” At these words, Lingxun had an awakening. Look: how decisive! How swift! What a delight!

Fifth: apprehending Mind and seeing nature means clarifying that mind-nature does not abide, that not a single thing is established, and that one returns to nothing to be obtained. Mind-nature is originally empty, numinous, and without abiding; only thus can it become wondrous function. As soon as there is abiding, it becomes a nest. Mind-nature originally has not a single thing. To speak of emptiness or existence, delusion or awakening, true or false—all are relative formulations and all are conceptual proliferation. As it is said, “Whenever there are words and speech, there is no real meaning.” If one thoroughly awakens to the source of mind and clearly sees true nature, delusion is no more; where could awakening be established? Not establishing is also not established; there is completely no dharma to be obtained. Therefore it is said: the emptiness of persons is not true emptiness; there must also be the emptiness of dharmas, and then even emptiness itself must be emptied. Only then has one truly returned home and sat securely.

This is also what the ancients meant by saying that no accomplishment, no attainment, no practice, and no realization are true accomplishment, true attainment, and true realization. If one recognizes that one has a Dharma to obtain or a Way to accomplish, one falls precisely into dharma-clinging at the stage of sagehood. In a small way, birth and death will not be ended; even if fragmentary birth-and-death is ended, transformational birth-and-death can never be ended, because dharma-clinging is precisely the obstruction of transformational birth-and-death. In a great way, one may become deranged and turn into a demon; the consequences are unbearable to imagine.

The teaching of no practice, no attainment, and no realization is the liberating speech of one who has thoroughly awakened and arrived home. It is also a teaching for those at the causal stage who first understand the Tathāgata’s secret cause. Sentient beings are originally Buddhas; they do not become Buddhas through practice. Only because they do not awaken, are deluded about themselves, and pursue objects do they become sentient beings. Now, if they sharply awaken, it is like a lamp illuminating a dark room of a thousand years: they recover their original nature. What practice or realization could there be? Therefore it is said that there is no need to borrow toil or labor, no need for keen effort in practice and realization. However, if habit-energy is thick and deluded grasping is deep, then even if one understands this principle, when facing circumstances the mind still arises; in that case, diligent, continuous sweeping away is still necessary. Again, if one only understands the principle that sentient beings are originally Buddhas but has not personally seen self-nature, this is merely the cause for becoming a Buddha in the future; one must still practice earnestly and diligently in order to personally realize. One must never open a big mouth, speak big words, deceive oneself and others, deny practice and realization, and thereby recklessly and wildly bring calamity upon oneself.

When one thoroughly awakens to mind-nature, not a single Dharma is established, there is no Buddha and no sentient being. All day long, as if foolish and dull, one spontaneously follows conditions; everything is Buddha-activity. Joking, laughter, anger, and scolding, together with

coughing and swinging the arm, are all the ocean-seal emitting light; putting on clothes, eating food, carrying water, and hauling firewood are nothing but spiritual power and wondrous function. In this, there is nothing to grasp or reject and nothing to rely upon or value. Therefore it is called returning to nothing to be obtained.

As soon as there is something one values, it obstructs the gate of one's own awakening. Therefore the great masters of the Chan school were all skilled at undoing attachments and removing bonds, immediately making students put down their heavy burdens and open the gate of awakening. For example, when Mazu saw that someone had fallen into his earlier answer, "This very mind is Buddha," and another monk asked, "What is Buddha?" he answered, "Not mind, not Buddha." Fearing that people would fall into "the true person of no rank on the lump of red flesh," Linji, when another monk asked, "What is the true person of no rank on the lump of red flesh?" pushed the monk away and said, "What is this true person of no rank worth—a dry shit-stick?" Again, as in the second case discussed in the fourth section, when Lingxun had an awakening at these words and asked, "How should I preserve and maintain it?" Guizong said, "When a cataract is in the eye, flowers fall chaotically through the sky." These examples all show very well that true nature is without abiding and does not establish a single thing.

Therefore, if we want to thoroughly awaken to true mind, we must not seek by clinging to Buddha, and even less may we cling to spiritual powers and marvels. Zhaozhou said, "The single word 'Buddha'—I do not like to hear it." Later people may criticize him as still having a point of attachment in "not liking," but Zhaozhou's intent was to end views about dharmas and show people that there is not a single Dharma to obtain and nothing on which to rely. The point is not liking or disliking.

As for the defect of establishing words: as soon as there is speech, there are inevitably traces. It is like a numinous turtle sweeping away its tracks with its tail; although the tracks are gone, it again leaves the trace of sweeping. Therefore, when the great masters of the Chan school reached the very end, nothing further could be said; they simply shook out their sleeves and returned to the abbot's quarters, thereby showing the final point.

In sum, apprehending Mind and seeing nature is truly the guiding principle of Buddhism and the standard for students of Buddhism. If we truly wish to leave birth and death and accomplish the great Way, no matter which school we practice, we must struggle and advance toward this great aim of apprehending Mind and seeing nature. We must never retreat out of fear of difficulty. The systems of instruction and methods of practice established by the various schools are all means for quieting the mind and bringing thoughts to rest, and all these means take apprehending Mind and seeing nature as their aim. Therefore apprehending Mind and seeing nature is the general principle of all Buddhist schools. If one does not practice in reliance on this general principle, one is not a Buddhist practitioner. Furthermore, the reason we have birth and death is ignorance and non-awakening. If we do not awaken to and break through ignorance and unfold the light of wisdom, how can birth and death be

ended? Therefore apprehending Mind and seeing nature is the key gate to ending birth and death and the hinge for realizing the great Way. Buddhists of every school must not disregard it, deny it, or depart from it; rather, they must exhaust their wisdom, courage, and strength in striving to realize this magnificent aim.

8B. 明心见性之证成 / How Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature Is Realized

B. How Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature Is Realized. Having discussed in detail the meaning of apprehending Mind and seeing nature, we deeply know that it is of immense importance to Buddhism. If Buddhists all practice, propagate, and advocate it, Buddhism can flourish and prosper. If the reverse is true, Buddhism will be left gasping for breath and will fail to rise again. The rise or decline of a religion depends on its spiritual essence. If it has only an outer form but no essential content, that religion is bound gradually to decline.

Apprehending Mind and seeing nature is Buddhism's general principle and essential core. Therefore every school and every Dharma gate revolves around it. Skillfully adapting to sentient beings' differing habits and individual capacities, they establish many kinds of methods of practice in order to spread it and bring it to fulfillment. Though the methods are many, their aim is one. If practitioners do not follow the ritual forms and Dharma gates established by their respective schools, and if they do not practice reverently, diligently, and sincerely, but merely make burning incense, bowing, and seeking a few blessings their business, they cannot attain the true purport of those schools: apprehending Mind and seeing nature.

If one cannot apprehend Mind and see nature, one naturally cannot reach the true aim of studying Buddhism. If the spiritual aim of Buddhism cannot be brought forth, how could it fail to become dispirited, decline day by day, and lose vitality? Therefore, if we are to revive Buddhism, we must advocate apprehending Mind and seeing nature. What method, then, can we use to reach this aim? And what method is fastest, simplest, and most feasible? In order to accord with the inclinations of practitioners of the three capacities—higher, middle, and lower—and to make it convenient for people of different habits to enter quickly, I will select from Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism the simplest, fastest, and most convenient methods of practice and introduce them in detail below.

As for the other schools, as said above, they have the name but not the actuality, and there are no real practitioners of them. For example, although Tiantai has its method of calming-and-contemplation, practitioners nowadays all practice Pure Land. Although Huayan has the three contemplations of Huayan, practitioners either enter Chan or enter Pure Land and no longer practice contemplation. The Faxiang school also has consciousness-only contemplation, but its practitioners nowadays discuss doctrine, analyze technical terms, and carry out Buddhist studies; they do not enter contemplation, and they argue endlessly with those of the nature

school, as if drawing water from opposite sides of a river. Other schools, such as the Three Treatise school, are gradually forgotten even in name and meaning. Therefore, for the time being, I will put them aside and not discuss them.

1. Chan. When speaking of apprehending Mind and seeing nature, the most direct and quickest method is none other than the Chan school. This is because Chan is a special transmission outside the teachings, not establishing words and letters, directly pointing to the human mind, seeing nature and becoming Buddha. It is not like other schools, which take roundabout paths and establish many ritual rules so that practitioners practice step by step and realize gradually. To use an analogy: if one wishes to enter deeply into the treasury, Chan has only one gate. Once it is opened, one can enter. The other schools have at least two gates, and in many cases more than three or four.

Therefore Chan is the orthodox school of Buddhism. Its house style is lofty and severe; its force is magnificent; its talents appear in succession; its atmosphere is vast and many-sided. It alone is called the “school gate.” The flourishing of Chinese Buddhism depended on this school as the central pillar that bore the main beam. Unfortunately, in recent times, this one gateless gate seems to have been blocked. Not only are talents in this school scarce, with none of the life-and-death vigor of the great masters of the past or their methods for guiding people through capturing and releasing, killing and giving life; there is also no longer the marvelous hand that gives timely prompts in accord with the situation and awakens people when conditions arise.

The so-called Chan of recent times, whether in the south or the north, the east or the west—one may travel everywhere and find only this: people are taught to investigate a rigid, dead *huatou*, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” If you ask the teacher to show some other skillful means besides “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” having no way to get out of it, he merely says that Chan must be investigated by oneself and that one need not ask others. He cannot bring forth any other skillful approach or reveal the matter in a way that lets students awaken right then and there. As a result, Chan practitioners bitterly investigate for decades and still make no breakthrough. So-called apprehending Mind and seeing nature is then treated as an historical relic and put away on a high shelf.

Master Taixu said with immeasurable grief, “Today’s Chan descendants all transmit the Dharma by lineage scroll; they do not transmit it after apprehending Mind and seeing nature. So-called descendants of the Linji school in such-and-such a generation are backed by nothing more than a blank sheet of paper. When did they ever awaken to mind?” When one speaks of this, how could it not grieve the heart? What matters most in Chan is the teacher. The reason students can awaken quickly is entirely because of clear-eyed teachers who press, forge, and temper them from the side, give timely prompts, and point through in accord with the moment. Otherwise, for sentient beings burdened by karma, with the mysterious gate shut tight and the lock of consciousness difficult to open, how easy could it be to investigate and realize by one’s own power?

But teachers are so lacking now—where can one find such master hands, who help others with sincerity and skill? Thus some wild fox spirits use the same rigid *huatou* that everyone else repeats, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” as a place to hide. If you ask him, “What is Buddha?” he tells you to go investigate “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” If you ask him, “What is it that is not mind, not a thing, and not Buddha?” he also tells you to go investigate “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” In short, apart from “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” he has no instruction to give. In this way, those above do it and those below imitate them, reducing Chan to an empty name and a filthy mess. Is this not lamentable?

If every time something arises he says, “Go investigate it yourself,” what use is there for a Chan master? Once the matter is laid bare, it is simply laughable. It turns out that the so-called master has not himself opened the true eye; he is also a blind man with his eyes open. To ask him to use skillful means to help others is like asking a blind man to cast alluring glances. If one or two clear-eyed people say that one need not investigate in this way and may instead use direct pointing—directly pointing out what the original face is and having the student see nature at once—such a person slanders them as wild-fox Chan. Because he himself has applied effort for decades without a breakthrough, he doubts that anyone else can see nature. Or he says that what the ancestral court transmits is “investigate ‘Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?’”; how could there be any “direct pointing”? This is a case of being incapable oneself and then doubting others. How could Chan not decline and sink?

In fact, from ancient times Chan did not require investigating any *huatou*; it consisted of direct pointing. Mahāsattva Fu said, “Night after night I sleep embracing Buddha; morning after morning I rise together with him. Rising and sitting, he is always with me; speaking or silent, we dwell together. Never apart by even a hair’s breadth, like body and shadow. If you wish to know where Buddha is, it is just this voice.” Baozhi’s Song of Praise to the Mahāyāna and Song of the Twelve Hours are both direct pointing. The last two lines of the Song of the Twelve Hours say, “Those who have not yet understood, listen to one word: right now, who is it that speaks?” This is even more direct and clear.

Master Huisi of Nanyue wrote this verse: “Heaven cannot cover it, earth cannot carry it. It has no going or coming and no obstruction. It has no length or shortness, no blue or yellow; it is not in the middle, nor inside or outside. Beyond the crowd and together with the crowd, vast and mysterious like great space; pointing to things and transmitting mind, people do not understand.” The Cloth-Bag monk wrote, “Just this mind, mind, mind is Buddha; it is the most numinous thing in the worlds of the ten directions. Its free and unrestrained wondrous function is marvelously alive! Nothing compares with the reality of mind.” He also said, “I have one body of Buddha. People of the world all fail to recognize it. It is not molded or adorned, not carved or engraved. It has not one drop of clay and not one speck of color. People cannot paint it; thieves cannot steal it. Its form is naturally so; its purity does not come from wiping.” Sayings of this kind are too numerous to count.

Even patriarchal Chan is nothing more than answering directly at the point where the person's question arises, removing that person's abiding attachment, and forcing them, where deluded mind cannot go, to turn the light inward and directly see what is original. This is because Chan is the treasury of the true Dharma-eye and the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa. It is a perfect-and-sudden Dharma gate; it belongs to awakening, not to practice. The great masters of old all grasped the purport beneath a word and recognized the pivotal point before a phrase; they saw nature and realized the Way. Not one of them awakened by investigating huatou for a long time.

For example, when the Sixth Patriarch heard someone recite the Diamond Sutra, he awakened at once. After the Fifth Patriarch instructed and confirmed him, when he taught Huiming he only said, "Do not think good; do not think evil. Right at such a time, that is Venerable Ming's original face." Huiming then awakened at those words. We do not hear that he was taught to investigate any huatou. This Huiming case once stirred up a controversy. Some said, "This is the Sixth Patriarch's direct pointing. When one does not think good and does not think evil, when not one thought arises, yet there is lucid clarity and no falling into annihilation—that is the original face. The word 'that' should be understood as that." Others said, "No. 'That' should be understood as what; he was being told to investigate for himself. It was not directly being told to him." Both sides clung to their own opinions and fought many battles of ink, yet still did not settle the matter.

In my foolish view, whether it is understood as "that" or "what" depends entirely on the person. If one can immediately receive the Sixth Patriarch's prompt, then "what" is precisely "that." If one is muddled and confused and does not know what it is about, then "that" becomes "what." Why insist on dividing that and what? Chan sayings are originally two-edged blades: one side kills, one side gives life. One cannot grasp only one side and look at it fixedly. Still more, the great masters of old often used direct pointing. For example, Linji instructed the assembly, "On the lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank. Do you wish to know this true person of no rank? It is precisely the one now speaking Dharma and listening to Dharma." Again, when a monk asked Huihai, "What is Buddha?" Huihai said, "Facing you and clearly conversing—if this is not Buddha, what is?" Again, as cited earlier, a monk asked Guizong, "What is Buddha?" Guizong said, "You yourself are just it." Examples like this are countless. How direct and forthright such instructions are!

If we also use direct pointing to instruct students and do not teach them to investigate any huatou, would we not also be able to train some capable practitioners? Unfortunately, many people criticize direct pointing and say, "The method of direct pointing was long ago buried under a stone; Master Yaoshan already negated its existence." They cite this case: Official Yu Xiu asked Chan Master Ziyu, "What is Buddha?" Ziyu called, "Official!" Yu Xiu answered. Ziyu said, "This is it; there is no other thing." The official had an awakening. Was this not direct pointing? But when Yaoshan heard of it, he said, "Official Yu Xiu has been buried in Ziyu's mountain." Does this not mean he did not approve of direct pointing? Later, when Official Yu

Xiu heard Yaoshan's words, he became greatly doubtful and went to see Yaoshan. Yaoshan said, "If you have doubts, just ask." The official asked, "What is Buddha?" Yaoshan also called, "Official!" The official answered. Yaoshan seized the moment and pressed him, "What is it?" The official greatly awakened. See how powerful this question was! How could the effect of this great awakening be reached by direct pointing?

When I hear this, I cannot help laughing and saying: you know only one side and not the other. The method of direct pointing changes in many ways; it is not the same fixed pattern repeated thousands of times. Yaoshan did not approve Ziyu in order to test whether Official Yu Xiu had truly gained firm footing. If he had truly awakened, even if a Buddha appeared in the world, it would be as if he did not hear or see. If he had not truly awakened, he would inevitably be led by others and swayed by their words. After Mazu showed Damei that "this mind is Buddha," he also sent an attendant to test Damei by saying "not mind, not Buddha." Therefore Yaoshan dropped a testing word as bait to see whether the official would bite. Unexpectedly, Yu Xiu had not yet gained firm footing; as soon as he heard it, he became doubtful. He was not like Damei, who had awakened thoroughly and had no doubt: when the attendant came to test him, Damei instead rebuked Mazu, saying, "That old fellow is confusing people's minds!" and did not waver at all.

When Yu Xiu came to Yaoshan and asked as before, Yaoshan did not fail his question. He changed the manner of direct pointing and tacitly indicated that the one who responded was precisely Buddha, causing him to awaken. Since Yu Xiu asked, "What is Buddha?" the reply should not depart from the place of the question; it should answer what Buddha is and should not answer with something else. Otherwise it is not answering the question. Therefore, after the official responded, Yaoshan pressed him, "What is it?" Is this not equivalent to clearly telling him that this very responding is Buddha? So this question-form answer is another implicit method of direct pointing. It appears to be a question, but when read together with the context above and below, it is equivalent to an affirmative statement. Though Ziyu's and Yaoshan's wording differs, the method is one. Without Ziyu's affirmative statement before it, a confused person hearing only Yaoshan's question-form answer, "What is it?" would probably again interpret it as a question.

Why, in later generations, did these methods cease to be used and why was *huatou* investigation adopted instead? Because people's minds later became treacherous and slippery, and their roots became increasingly thin, weak, and shallow. If direct pointing were used, those who were clever and sharp might understand, but because it came too easily and too lightly, they would not value it. It would be like spoiled children receiving the inheritance of father and grandfather. Since they never labored and sweated for it themselves, they do not know how hard it was to come by; they waste it madly and lavishly, and in the end become poor and destitute, dying in a foreign land. Such people do not appreciate the patriarchs' compassionate sincerity in helping others. Instead they treat it lightly, cannot follow

instruction, cannot maintain it continuously and carefully, cannot guard the Way and nourish the nature, and cannot realize the right fruition.

As for the foolish, even after being pointed out and instructed in every possible way, because they do not see anything strange, miraculous, or mysterious, they dismiss it as not genuine and refuse to take it up as their own. They always seek Dharma outside the mind, hoping for miraculous effects. Though those who preside over the Dharma are full of painful compassion and wish everyone could see nature immediately and become Buddha and realize the fruition, one cannot press an ox's head down to make it eat grass; one cannot take it up on someone else's behalf. Therefore, as a last resort, in the Song dynasty Chan Master Dahui Zonggao changed to huatou investigation. There had been huatou investigation before, but it had not yet become a widespread style.

He placed a huatou devoid of conceptual meaning in the student's mind to arouse a great doubt-sensation. It was like swallowing a chestnut burr: one cannot swallow it down and cannot spit it out. One's whole body and mind are pressed into a mass of doubt. Walking, one does not know one is walking; sitting, one does not know one is sitting. Without one being aware of it, all delusive thoughts and emotional imaginings are completely transformed into that doubt-sensation. When the time and conditions arrive—that is, when the practice is mature—the bottom of the bucket falls out. It is like running into one's own father at a crossroads. Only then does one know that everything one did before was like dreaming in broad daylight: muddled and confused, contending for fame and profit. How shameful! After awakening to mind, one then knows that even such arduous investigation had been superfluous, because Buddha-nature is naturally genuine and does not belong to practice or realization. Yet without taking this seemingly needless detour, how could one open the tightly locked mysterious barrier of consciousness and see the original face? Though the path is longer and seems unnecessary, it has at least given one firm footing. This is unlike merely reading Buddhist scriptures and recorded sayings while engaging in empty theoretical talk. Such people may appear to understand and may discuss Buddhist principles, but when circumstances arise they lack strength and are often carried away by them. Dahui Gao rebuked them as medicinal mercury: when it meets fire, it flies away. This was the patriarchs' painful sincerity in helping people—skillful transformation in accord with the time, done out of unavoidable necessity.

Although the patriarchs established the household style of huatou investigation, they absolutely did not teach everyone to investigate the same rigid huatou. Rather, they taught according to the person: people of different capacities investigated different huatou. A huatou becomes effective only when it arouses the doubt-sensation. If the doubt-sensation does not arise, it has no effect at all. Therefore the school says, "Great doubt, great awakening; small doubt, small awakening; no doubt, no awakening." Moreover, some huatou can break only the Initial Barrier or the Multiple Barrier; they cannot carry the practitioner all the way through the Prison Barrier. Thus it is definitely not the case that one huatou can teach all people.

Huatou investigation therefore requires the teacher's wisdom-eye to discern the student's capacity and give an appropriate huatou that can immediately arouse the doubt-sensation when investigated; only then can the student benefit. Otherwise, it merely wastes time and has no effect.

Furthermore, while the student is investigating, the teacher must constantly pay attention and carefully observe the student's progress, pushing from the side. Above all, the teacher must seize the timing and conditions connected with the huatou the student is investigating, press and prompt the student, and allow the student to have an awakening then and there, recognizing one's own original mind and seeing one's own original nature. For example, Huang Shangu investigated under Huitang. Huitang had him investigate a statement Confucius used to teach his disciples: "Do you think, my two or three students, that I have something hidden from you? I have nothing hidden from you." Shangu investigated for a long time without awakening. One day, while Shangu and Huitang were walking in the mountains, a gust of wind brought the fragrance of osmanthus blossoms. Shangu blurted out, "What a fine fragrance of osmanthus!" Huitang then pointed in accord with the opportunity: "I have nothing hidden from you." Shangu awakened at these words. From this, one can see how important teachers are in Chan. But where, today, can one find this kind of clear-eyed great master?

Because Chan has become lifeless by clinging rigidly to old conventions and is declining day by day, the present plan seems to require changing the strings and altering the course—walking another short path in order to open up the deadlock and revive Chan. Judging from the Chan conditions of the present stage, in my foolish opinion it seems that we should return to directly showing the original face. We should not keep guarding a single rigid, dead huatou. This will help students awaken quickly. The teacher should respond directly along the line of the person's question, force them to turn the light inward and see for themselves where consciousness cannot go, and then instruct them to maintain it continuously and carefully, dissolve deluded habits, and perfect the fruition of the Way.

There are many good examples from ancient times of this kind of direct showing. Someone asks, "What is Buddha?" The answer is, "Who is the one asking?" He says, "It is I." The challenge is, "What do you call 'I'?" He says, "Seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing are me; the body is me." The teacher challenges, "The body is you. Then who is the one who knows that the body is you?" He says, "That too is I." The teacher says, "If the body and the knowing are both you, are there not two of you?" He says, "If both the body and the knowing are not I, would that not fall into annihilationist emptiness?" The teacher then calls him, "So-and-so!" He answers, "Yes?" The direct pointing is, "What is this? Is it annihilationist emptiness?" This clear, numinous knowing—without body and without knowing, yet not falling into annihilationist emptiness—if this is not Buddha, what is it? The person then suddenly awakens.

Again, someone asks, “Can the original face be seen?” The answer is, “It cannot be seen.” “Why can it not be seen?” “The original face is yourself. If you yourself then want to see the original face, would there not be two original faces? How could the eye see itself?” “Then is the original face nonexistent?” “Although the eye cannot see itself, the eye is not nonexistent.” The teacher asks, “When you now do not think good and do not think evil, do you still have delusive thoughts?” “Not one thought arises.” “When not one thought arises, is it like wood or stone without knowing?” “There is lucid, continuous knowing.” The direct pointing is, “What is this lucid, continuous knowing that is neither existence nor nonexistence? Is it not your original face?”

Again, someone asks, “What is my own self?” The answer is, “Is the one asking right now not your own self?” “May I then take this questioner as my own self?” “No.” “Why not?” “Although the questioner is your own self, if you fixate on ‘self,’ you immediately create two selves. To say that the questioner is your own self and then take the questioner to be self—are these not two selves?” The person then awakens with relief. Direct pointing in accord with the situation, enabling immediate awakening—is this not swift and straightforward? Compared with bitterly investigating for decades without a breakthrough, the distance is more than that between heaven and earth.

Someone may say, “Those who are pointed to awakening in this way may not hold steady when matters arise.” I say: if they truly affirm it and take it up as their own, then even if their habitual defilements are deeply ingrained and for a time they may still go astray, if they can maintain it continuously and carefully like the ancients herding the ox after awakening—twenty-four hours a day holding tightly to the ox-rope and whip, watching so that it is not allowed to wander off—then after two or three years, one need not worry that their practice will not become continuous and seamless or that it will not reach a state like a perfectly tempered furnace. What is most to be avoided is the slippery Chan type: seemingly right but actually wrong, like a passing reflection of light. Though their words may seem smooth and round, their mind-nature has in fact not been clarified and awakened. Moreover, they refuse to practice solidly, train the mind through conditions and events, and maintain it continuously and carefully. If they let it roam and run astray, they will in the end become ruined.

Even so, if from the vast sea of people one can bring forth even one or two who open the true eye and become the eye of humans and devas, that is much better than bitterly investigating for decades without a breakthrough, having no one inherit the Dharma lineage, and being forced to fall back on transmission by lineage scroll. Moreover, when we examine the intent of the ancient masters in having people investigate huatou, it was simply to make them turn the light inward and see for themselves where thought cannot function. But people of the present age have crude and inferior roots. When struck by this dull staff-blow, they simply die beneath the staff and cannot turn back to life. Why not use direct pointing, let them affirm it and take it up as their own, and then let them maintain and perfect it? This seems more fitting.

Furthermore, Chan is the treasury of the true Dharma-eye and the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa. It clings to nothing and gives the mind nothing on which to fasten. Huatou investigation, by contrast, deliberately gives the mind something on which to fasten. Wherever the mind has something on which to fasten, there is attachment to marks. Only when the mind has nowhere to fasten is it rightly engaged. A monk asked an ancient master, “How should one direct the mind in investigating the original face?” The master answered, “The original face gives you nothing on which to fasten the mind.” “Investigation” itself already gives the mind something on which to fasten. The monk asked, “If there is nothing on which to fasten the mind, how should it be engaged?” The answer was, “Only when the mind has nowhere to fasten is it rightly engaged. Wherever the mind has something on which to fasten, there is attachment to marks.” The monk asked, “If there is nothing on which to fasten the mind, does this not fall into emptiness?” The master answered, “Who is it that knows it falls into emptiness?” “It is I.” “Since this is you, how could it fall into emptiness?” The monk asked, “May I then take the one who knows it falls into emptiness as I?” The answer was, “No.” “Why not?” “Though gold dust is precious, when it falls in the eye it becomes a cataract.”

The Chan school’s system of instruction was established by the great patriarchs in response to sentient beings’ capacities and the conditions of the times; it has no fixed model. Since in the past it was possible to change from direct pointing to huatou investigation, why can it not now be changed from huatou investigation to using pointed questioning and pressure to reveal the nature? Huatou investigation has, over time, produced defects. It has degenerated into a single rigid dead huatou. People cannot arouse the doubt-sensation and thus investigate bitterly for decades without a breakthrough. Moreover, the environment is different now. Everyone is very busy; no one can spend decades solely investigating Chan as people did in the past. Even if there are people with such painstaking resolve willing to spend a long time bitterly investigating, the age does not allow it.

Furthermore, Chan is a path of awakening through wisdom: it uses exceptionally powerful wisdom to open the tightly locked mysterious barrier of consciousness, rather than attaining awakening through accumulated meditative proficiency. If we now change to the method of direct pointing, point students directly to seeing nature, and then use the ox-herding method to maintain it and eliminate habits so as to complete realization, this is more appropriate to the present time and does not violate the purport of Chan. Because Chan is apprehending Mind and seeing nature, and because the methods used for apprehending Mind and seeing nature included many forms of direct pointing in ancient times, this is not something newly invented today. What could be wrong with it?

To deepen readers’ confidence, I will cite another swift and easy direct-pointing Chan method below to show that my words are not false. Chan Master Zhenjue was reading the Śūraṅgama Sutra together with his attendant. When they came to the line “When I press my finger, the ocean-seal emits light,” the attendant asked, “What is the meaning of this?” The master said, “Old Śākyamuni deserves thirty blows!” The attendant said, “What fault did he have, that he

should receive thirty blows?" The master said, "What need was there to press the finger?" The attendant said, "But the moment the mind stirs even briefly, defiling thoughts arise first." The master shouted, "That too is the ocean-seal emitting light!" The attendant greatly awakened and said, "Ah! For many years I took every stirring of mind to be defiling delusive thought. I did not know that it was originally the ocean-seal emitting light."

Everyone, look at this direct-pointing instruction: how forthright, how clear, how swift! A listener awakens at the words; how could this not bring lifelong joy and immeasurable delight? As for the difference between delusive thoughts and emitting light—that is, wondrous function—it lies in whether one clings while functioning in daily life, responding to conditions, and engaging with things. If there is clinging, the ocean-seal's radiance becomes defiling delusive thought. If there is no clinging, defiling delusive thought is precisely the ocean-seal's radiance. The Sixth Patriarch said, "If, in each turn of thought, one does not retain attachment, then amid all the flourishing activity one forever abides in naga-samādhi." Master Hanshan explained, "As for what is called transforming consciousness into wisdom, there is no special technique. In the daily flow of thought-moments, if one retains attachment-laden thoughts and becomes bound by them, wisdom becomes consciousness. If, in each turning thought-moment, the mind is without binding attachment and does not form roots of attachment, consciousness becomes wisdom. Then at all times one constantly abides in the great naga-samādhi."

Master Hanshan also dreamed of ascending to Tuṣita, where Maitreya explained consciousness-only to him: "Discrimination is consciousness; non-discrimination is wisdom. Relying on consciousness is defilement; relying on wisdom is purity. In defilement there is birth and death; in purity there are no Buddhas." How concise and clear these words are—like pouring sweet dew into a parched throat. How fortunate we are to hear them! If we do not, at this very moment, part the fog of delusion, clearly see Buddha-nature, and maintain and perfect it in daily functioning, what more are we still doubting?

Someone may say, "Chan investigation must go through hard huatou investigation and awakening; only then can great function appear. Chan based on direct pointing, sudden awakening, and seeing nature is only verbal Chan, literary Chan, even wild-fox Chan; it is of no use. Furthermore, even if practitioners of other schools practice to the point of seeing nature, that is still not Chan. Only huatou investigation is the legitimate Chan of the special transmission outside the teachings." People who say this seem to forget whether Mahākāśyapa, the first Chan patriarch, received the Buddha's mind-seal because he bitterly investigated a huatou and awakened, or because he smiled when Śākyamuni held up a flower before the assembly and thereby received the seal. One must know that Chan is the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa and true suchness Buddha-nature. As long as one clearly awakens without doubt, that is it. It does not lie in what method is used. All methods are only means for clearly seeing it; they are not the criterion for true or false. Such means must accord with the differences of the age and the sharpness or dullness of people's faculties; one must adapt to

circumstances and not cling to fixed opinions or rigidly guard old rules. Otherwise, it is very difficult to develop capable practitioners and continue the seed of Buddhahood.

Conversely, because the twenty-eight Indian patriarchs and the six Chinese patriarchs did not awaken through huatou investigation but through direct pointing to the human mind, seeing nature and becoming Buddha, there are also many who say that Chan ended with the Sixth Patriarch and that what came after is only teaching, not Chan. Therefore Chan as Chan absolutely does not lie in one traditional method. As for the claim that “great function appears,” I do not know what people are referring to. If they think that displaying spiritual powers is what counts as great function appearing, they are far too attached to marks and far too narrow. One must know that what the Chan school calls great capacity and great function refers to a style of conduct and of engaging the world that is open-hearted, spirited, impassioned, heroic, and outstanding; it refers to a way of remaining unaffected by any experience, not clinging when things arise, and seeing the opportunity before it appears. As the saying goes, “When Mount Tai collapses before him, his expression does not change; when an elk appears at his side, his eyes do not blink.” It is not a matter of whether spiritual powers have been displayed.

If we speak of spiritual powers, are putting on clothes, eating food, inventing and creating not spiritual powers? If you say they are not, why did Layman Pang say, “Spiritual powers and wondrous function: carrying water and hauling firewood”? This shows that if you look down on ordinary daily use as not being spiritual power, your inferior habit of clinging to marks, seeking marvels, and loving mystery is at work. To put it another way, your mind has fundamentally not become empty, you have fundamentally not seen nature, and you are still seeking while attached to marks. If you continue in this way, then even if you develop spiritual powers, you will become a demon, because clinging has not been severed. Many people hold this view, so I will cite one more example to show that ordinary daily functioning is spiritual power and wondrous function, and that one should not seek strange and marvelous mysteries outside it, lest one dabble with spirits and enter the demonic path.

After Magu and four other eminent masters had awakened to the Way, they traveled on foot to visit teachers and gain further benefit. It was hot and they were thirsty. Seeing an old woman by the road selling tea, they called out, “Please bring us five cups of tea.” Seeing five monks arrive, the old woman asked, “Venerables, where are you going?” They said, “To visit spiritual teachers.” After bringing the tea, the old woman said, “My tea here can only be drunk by those who have spiritual powers. Those without spiritual powers cannot drink it!” Although the five masters had already awakened, their spiritual powers had not yet developed. They looked at one another and did not dare lift their cups to drink. Seeing this, the old woman laughed loudly and said, “Five dull birds watching this old woman display spiritual powers and drink tea!” She lifted the cups and drank them all one by one. Having seen this, the five suddenly awakened and said together, “Only today is the time when we have truly awakened to the Way! We are constantly in spiritual powers without knowing they

are spiritual powers, yet we still run about seeking outwardly. If we had not met this old woman today, we might again have missed this life!" Although this was Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva appearing in an emanated form to instruct them, was it not also a pointing-out of our own delusion?

Bodhidharma said, "When deluded, form captures consciousness; when awakened, consciousness captures form. Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches." If one is directly pointed to seeing nature and truly affirms it without doubt, one will certainly put everything down through the whole body, lodge concentration within wisdom, and in daily use remain absolutely settled, without clinging or fixation. Even if habitual defilements are deeply ingrained and cannot be completely purified at once, and even if the mind still arises toward a few particular conditions, as soon as the preceding thought arises, the following thought immediately notices it. One will not linger, wander, and forget to return. Then, through continuous polishing and constant tempering, it is certain that "the skin will be completely shed, revealing only the one reality"; one need not worry that great spiritual powers will not unfold. As for those who half-believe and half-doubt and hesitate without decision, that is another matter.

If people say that the other schools, even when they practice to the point of seeing nature, are still not Chan, why does the scripture clearly say, "If a person only recites Amitābha's name, this is called unsurpassed, profound, and wondrous Chan"? When Pure Land practitioners practice Buddha-recitation to the point of "one-pointedness without confusion" and "when the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising," is that not in accord with Chan? Therefore the ancients said, "Chan is the Chan of Pure Land; Pure Land is the Pure Land of Chan." "Chan is Pure Land, Pure Land is Chan; Chan and Pure Land are not separate households." Since the relationship between Chan and Pure Land is like this, how could it not be so with the other schools? They are all spoken by the Buddha, all apprehend Mind and see nature, and all end birth and death. Why insist on splitting into schools and factions, you denouncing me and I scolding you, brothers fighting inside the same house?

As said above, some people say, "Chan belongs to awakening, not to practice. Chan is sudden, not gradual. Chan as Chan only lasted until the Sixth Patriarch; after that it was only teaching, not Chan." Their reasoning is that the teaching school discusses gradual practice, ascending step by step, with practice, attainment, and realization, while Chan rests as soon as it awakens; at all times and in all places it simply accords freely with conditions, moves naturally at ease, and has no practice, no attainment, and no realization. After the Sixth Patriarch, Chan adepts everywhere all spoke of gradual practice and discussed how realization is attained; therefore, they say, this was only teaching and not Chan.

These words sound very lofty, but when examined in reality, I fear they are not correct. The distinction between the school and the teaching, or between sudden and gradual, awakening and practice, is certainly present, but the distinction lies in how one enters practice; it does not lie in how quickly or slowly realization occurs. Those who, by studying doctrine, greatly

open perfect understanding and realize original nature are called the teaching school. Those who, by directly pointing to the human mind and seeing nature and becoming Buddha, enter the matter are called the school gate. When they arrive at the destination, there is no difference between them; they are the same. Therefore the ancients said: the teaching is Chan with sound, and Chan is the teaching without sound.

One cannot, because people who study Chan today have gradually inferior roots and because their habitual defilements remain unpurified after awakening and they must rely on gradual practice to end the remaining habits, declare that this is teaching and not Chan. If one insists that only awakening all at once, with no need for maintaining, ox-herding, or cleaning away remaining habits, and immediately returning home and sitting securely without any deviation, counts as Chan, then the Sixth Patriarch, who after awakening still spent more than ten years hiding among hunters and concealing his light while nurturing it, would not count as Chan either. Thus one cannot say so arbitrarily: “Only awakening once and being done is Chan; gradual practice after awakening is teaching.”

For many kalpas and lifetimes we have been upside down and agitated; we have been accustomed to clinging. This accumulates as habit-energy and is deeply embedded in the field of the eighth consciousness. Now, although one has awakened, what can be done when habitual defilements are deeply ingrained and their influence is hard to dissolve? It is like a manure bucket in which dung has been stored for many years. Even if it is emptied all at once, the stench has entered deeply into the wood and absolutely cannot disappear in a single moment. It must be soaked, washed, and scrubbed for a long time before the remaining odor gradually disappears. Therefore those who truly practice with feet on the ground know the sweetness and bitterness of this and do not dare speak wildly. On gaining only the slightest entry into awakening, they do not mistakenly praise themselves as already without practice, attainment, or realization. As for those who upon one awakening reach no practice, no attainment, and no realization, of course one cannot say there are absolutely none; but they are ultimately few and not something everyone can hope for. Moreover, for people of such supreme capacity, today’s sudden awakening and sudden realization is not unrelated to gradual practice and gradual realization in the past. The ancients said: today’s suddenness is precisely the gradualness of former days. Therefore one cannot wipe out, with a single stroke, those who practice gradually, awaken gradually, and realize gradually, saying that they are not Chan. Moreover, among Chan practitioners from ancient times, such people who practiced gradually after awakening were the great majority. Even the supremely famous Chan master Zhaozhou had the saying, “At eighty, I still go on pilgrimage.” How much more so for others?

In the past there was a scholar who read a few books of Chan patriarchs’ recorded sayings and claimed that he had already greatly and thoroughly awakened. He went to see Chan Master Guizong and said that he had reached no practice, no attainment, and no realization. Guizong only smiled and nodded. When the scholar took leave and left, Guizong saw him to the gate and said, “Sir, how did that big hole get in the back of your brocade robe?” The

scholar hurriedly asked, “Where? Where?” Guizong scolded, “What fine no practice, no attainment, and no realization!” The scholar’s face turned red and he left in shame. Is this not a vivid portrait showing how those who boast of no practice, no attainment, and no realization expose their own disgrace?

To sum up: when we do not think good and do not think evil—when the preceding thought has already ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen—although there is empty quiescence and no thought, it is not like wood or stone. Suddenly turn around and recognize this clear, numinous knowing as the original face. With neither confusion nor concentration, functioning in accord with conditions without the slightest clinging or fixation: this is apprehending Mind and seeing nature. Furthermore, nature is true emptiness, marvelous presence; it is not inert emptiness. Because it is true emptiness, it necessarily has appearance and function; because it has appearance and function, it is true emptiness. Therefore nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. If, in daily use, we can see nature through appearances and not be swept along by them; if we recognize that all phenomena and every appearance and function are the manifestation of nature and the wondrous function of mind; if we make use of things to benefit beings without being controlled by them, that is apprehending Mind and seeing nature. The ancient said, “Pick up a single blade of grass and it is the sixteen-foot golden body.” This is a footnote to post-awakening; one must never imagine it as something strange, special, or mysterious. Strange marvels themselves are delusive thinking. Not only do they obstruct the gate of one’s own awakening and prevent apprehending Mind and seeing nature; they also carry the danger of entering the demonic. One must know that all spiritual powers and marvels are based on apprehending Mind and seeing nature. As long as, after awakening, one diligently removes the five coverings—wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep—and is not affected by any sensation, then things will naturally come to fruition, and all six superknowledges will unfold together. It is like the great garuḍa spreading its wings for tens of thousands of miles; it all depends on a single push from its feet. If its feet do not push once against the ground, it has no way to fly.

If, after this account, one still cannot firmly decide, still refuses to take it up as one’s own, yet still wants to apprehend Mind and see nature, then there is nothing better than practicing Esoteric Buddhism and passing from Esoteric practice into Chan. This is comparatively less arduous and more secure. Because Esoteric Buddhism relies on the Buddha’s empowering support, it seems much faster and easier than Chan investigation by self-power. Moreover, Esoteric Buddhism has special and superior skillful means and draws on many kinds of power to guide practitioners. It is not like Chan investigation, which apart from a teacher’s pressing, forcing, and pointing has no other method. Therefore its accomplishment is more excellent and rapid than Chan. Just as riding in a car or airplane is naturally more effortless and faster than walking, so it is here. But Esoteric Dharma gates are vast and deep, and their ritual procedures are many; students cannot easily see their full scope at once. If one chooses the simplest, quickest, easiest method close to Chan, there is nothing better than the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma. This Dharma is esoteric practice without visualization. It has no complicated

ritual procedures, does not require setting up an altar, and can be practiced by anyone at any time and in any place. Furthermore, without twists and turns, without practicing preliminaries, and without passing from visualization-based practice to practice without visualization, it can directly realize the essence and bring forth function. Therefore people often praise it as “Chan-Esoteric.” Although this wording is not quite proper, its meaning has much that is worthy. As for its practice method, I will leave it for the following section on Esoteric Buddhism.

2. Pure Land. The Pure Land school has Dharma gates that are deep and vast. It universally embraces all three capacities and completely includes the eight teachings. Since mind is land and land is mind, outside mind there is no land and outside land there is no mind. Therefore the scriptures say: “If one wishes to purify the land, first purify the mind”; “As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure.” Land is mind, and mind is also the greatest energy in the universe, great with nothing beyond it and small with nothing inside it. Since nothing lies beyond the scope of mind, there is also no school that can transcend Pure Land. Therefore Pure Land can be high or low, deep or shallow.

If we speak from Pure Land’s original meaning, when the practitioner’s mind is pure, then every land and every place is pure and free. The worlds of the ten directions are simultaneously transformed into Pure Lands. If the mind is not pure, then even in an adorned Buddha-land there is still inversion and affliction. The ancient said: “When the mind is pure, Avīci is itself Pure Land; when the mind is defiled, Pure Land is itself Avīci.” As for the West, it expresses the meaning that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west: the completion and rounding off of the fruition. Therefore Great Being Samantabhadra, through the ten great vows, sought birth in the Western Pure Land in order to complete Buddhahood.

Those who truly practice Pure Land constantly observe their thoughts. They may use Buddha-recitation contemplation, or contemplate the adornments of the Pure Land and the sacred image of Amitābha Buddha, or even contemplate that their own body is Amitābha, and so on. They do not allow climbing after conditions or abiding in attachment. As soon as a thought arises, they keenly notice it and it turns empty, or bring recollection of the Buddha to the fore to transform the delusive thought and prevent its continuation. If they sustain this practice with concentration for a long time, when the time and conditions arrive, suddenly the dualities of contemplator and contemplated, reciter and recited, fall away at once. Amitābha’s true nature appears blazing clearly; they personally see the Dharma-body and are born in the Pure Land in this very present life. In Chan this is called apprehending Mind and seeing nature; in Pure Land it is called “when the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising.” Though the words differ, the meaning is one. Therefore Chan and Pure Land are not separate households.

To be truly born in the Pure Land, one need not wait until after death to be reborn. One must work hard in this very life and be able to be born right now; only then is there assurance. The phrase in the Amitābha Sutra, “at the time of approaching the end of life,” is generally

interpreted as “when the breath has stopped and one dies.” In fact, this is only interpreting according to the literal wording. If one follows the subtle meaning of the scripture, “at the time of approaching the end of life” does not mean the time of dying. It means “when the root of birth and death is about to be cut off.” What is the root of birth and death? It is our upside-down deluded thinking. Therefore, immediately after speaking of the end of life, the Amitābha Sutra says that the mind is not confused and that the Buddha appears before one. When we practice contemplation or practice Buddha-recitation and the practice gains force, walking, we do not know we are walking; sitting, we do not know we are sitting. We continue with intense perseverance, and apart from recollection of the Buddha there is no other thought. This root of birth and death—delusive thought—is about to be cut off. At the end, suddenly sense faculties and sense objects fall away; one-pointedness without confusion is attained. Right then one personally sees the true Buddha and is born in the Pure Land. At that time one comes to know that Sahā is precisely Sukhāvatī and Sukhāvatī is precisely Sahā; the usual distinctions of east and west, purity and defilement, are all like dreaming in broad daylight. Therefore it is said that those truly born in the Pure Land are born yet without birth, go yet without going.

If there is still a distinction between Sahā and Sukhāvatī, between Pure Land and defiled land, that is precisely that the mind is not yet pure and delusive thoughts are not yet exhausted. Unfortunately, at the present stage, ordinary Pure Land practitioners all look toward the very lowest level and start their practice there. In one voice they say, “We practice the Pure Land school with birth in the West as our aim. Birth in the West depends on the Buddha’s compassionate power to welcome and guide beings. It is other-power practice, not the Chan school’s self-power practice. There is no need to apprehend Mind and see nature.” If one asks, “What is ‘one-pointedness without confusion’? Why does the Amitābha Sutra say to ‘hold the Name for one day up to seven days, with one-pointedness without confusion’?” they keep saying, “No need, no need.” Master Lingfeng Ouyi said, “Whether one attains birth or not depends entirely on whether one has faith and vows.” They say: as long as we possess true faith and earnest vows, at the end of life Amitābha Buddha will naturally welcome and guide us to rebirth in the West. As long as we can be born in the West, even if it is the lowest level of the lowest grade, or even the borderland of doubt, that is enough to satisfy our vow. Once in the West, becoming a Buddha is only a matter of whether the time is fast or slow, long or short; in the end one will attain the stage of one lifetime from Buddhahood and be destined to become a Buddha. Compared with sinking through the six realms in Sahā, that is better by ten thousand times.

Because they have this pleasant calculation to rely on, some good men and women often push the responsibility for birth in the West onto Amitābha Buddha and refuse to practice hard and advance with courage themselves. Apart from doing two periods of morning and evening recitation, they do not in the slightest follow the ancient methods of practice: continuously and carefully sustaining the Buddha-name to sweep away delusive thoughts, transform habit-energy, purify the mind, and store up the provisions for rebirth. How could they know that

Master Ouyi's statement is a two-part paired statement and absolutely cannot be cut apart and quoted out of context? Faith, vows, and practice are the three essentials of Pure Land practice; none may be missing. Eminent Pure Land masters have explained this principle very clearly. Without faith and vows, one cannot connect with the power of the Buddha's compassionate vows and be born in the West. Without practice, not only is there no way to show that faith is true and vows are earnest; there is also no way to complete faith and vows. Therefore, after speaking above about faith and vows, the master immediately said: "Whether the grade of rebirth is high or low depends entirely on the depth or shallowness of holding the Name." This means that to be born in the highest level of the highest grade, one certainly needs very deep practice and merit; even for the lowest level of the lowest grade, one must have a corresponding degree of practice before attaining rebirth. Ineffective practice precisely means that faith is not true and vows are not earnest. It is not that cats and dogs who practice Buddha-recitation with the mouth while the mind is impure can all be reborn. Moreover, the master's earlier statement was made in response to people of that time who sought meditative concentration through Buddha-recitation but did not think of birth in the West.

Master Yongming Yanshou said, "When the practitioner's pure karma is mature, the mind is pure and accords with the Buddha, then one sees the Buddha appear before one and welcome and guide one to rebirth in the West." Although the Buddha appears, in reality there is no coming or going. It is like the moon in the sky: in a thousand rivers and ten thousand waters, it appears all at once, yet the moon is not divided. The mind is like water. If the mind is not pure, it is like turbid water. Though the moon is in the sky, its reflection does not appear. Therefore, for those whose minds are inverted and confused, even if the Buddha emits light to welcome and guide them, they are like people born blind who cannot see the sun. According to Esoteric Buddhism, Amitābha Buddha gives rise to great loving-kindness without conditions: there is no one he does not welcome and guide and no being he does not save. At the time of death, whatever kind of sentient being it may be, he treats them all equally, emitting light everywhere to welcome and guide them to rebirth in the West. Only because sentient beings' obstructions are heavy can they not connect with him. Some, because the Buddha-light is blazing, become frightened and flee into the evil paths. Is this not sad and lamentable?

Therefore, if we wish truly to be born in the West, we must put our feet on the ground and work hard. We absolutely must not love bargains, fear hardship, and put the responsibility for birth in the West entirely on Amitābha Buddha. Otherwise, why would the Contemplation Sutra teach us various methods of entering contemplation, and why would the Amitābha Sutra teach us to hold the Name to the point of one-pointedness without confusion? Visualization or contemplation of forms requires a subtler mind and is more difficult than name-recitation. Therefore, Pure Land practitioners of recent times mostly practice only name-recitation. Now let us discuss the practice and subtlety of the Dharma gate of holding the Name and practicing Buddha-recitation.

Śākyamuni Buddha silently observed that sentient beings in the latter age are deeply stained and obstructed. They find it difficult to open the mysterious gate and the lock of consciousness, leave suffering, and attain happiness. From his compassionate mind, he used vast wisdom and skillfully established the Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation. He placed a single pure prayer bead—the great Name of myriad virtues—within sentient beings’ deluded and defiled minds, secretly and closely transforming their upside-down delusive thinking, cutting off the roots of birth and death at the most immediate place, so that the flower of the mind opens, the Amitābha Buddha-nature is seen, and they are reborn in the Pure Land.

Everything is created by mind, and people cannot be without thought. If they do not think of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, they will think of greed, anger, and delusion. Thinking of greed, anger, and delusion gives rise to the evil karma of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. When evil karma arises, birth-and-death saṃsāra continues without stopping. The Buddha therefore guided beings according to their tendencies: he grasped the fact that they cannot be without thought and skillfully used a single thought of the Buddha to replace delusive thoughts, so that, without noticing it, their delusive thoughts were transformed into thoughts of the Buddha and the defiled mind into a pure mind, thereby easily attaining rebirth in the Pure Land and leaving birth and death.

The ancients said, “When a purifying jewel is placed in turbid water, the turbid water cannot help but become clear. When the Buddha-name is cast into a confused mind, the confused mind cannot help but become Buddha.” Master Lianchi said, “Buddha-recitation is the most direct and simplest transformation, applied at the point nearest to sentient beings’ birth and death—the deluded mind.” If we do not appreciate the Buddhas’ and patriarchs’ deep intention and great instruction, if we do not seriously use Buddha-recitation practice to transform ourselves, and if we rely solely on the power of Amitābha’s vows to welcome and guide us to rebirth, how could we reach the aim? The ancients said, “Single practice—relying only on the power of Amitābha’s vows—makes birth in the West difficult. Dual practice—one’s own practice in accord with the Buddha’s power—makes birth in the West easy.” This is truly an immortal saying. Once we understand the function of Buddha-recitation and the principle of birth in the West, we know that Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva’s method of Buddha-recitation, “gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession,” is an exact, unshakable principle that cannot be altered.

Whether one is of higher, middle, or lower capacity, every kind of person must follow this exact instruction. Inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world: put everything down. Gather the six faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—entirely onto one Buddha-name. Sustain it continuously and closely without break. Naturally, without knowing it, one transforms the deluded mind into Buddha-mind and enters responsive communion with Amitābha of the West, mind and Buddha becoming one and inseparable. Therefore the ancients said, “Of ten thousand who practice, ten thousand go.”

When practicing Buddha-recitation, one must not be too urgent and chase after numbers, lest one harm the qi and consume the blood. Nor may one be careless and slow, giving delusive thoughts an opening through which to slip in. One must not seek one-pointedness without confusion, lest delusion be added on top of delusion. Still less should one regard maintaining seamless continuity in buddha-recitation as difficult and then shrink back in fear. If we have truly seen through the red dust of worldly life and know that all is illusory, with no thought of attachment at all, we can certainly, with complete, settled resolve, firmly hold to one Buddha-name and sustain it with force; we will not recite with the mouth while the mind is confused and delusive thoughts roll without cease. If in practicing Buddha-recitation one can exert oneself like pushing a heavy cart up a mountain, with each phrase connected to the next and every syllable clear, then even people of the lowest capacity need not fear that their recollection of the Buddha will fail to become continuous and seamless or that the mind will not awaken.

Buddha-recitation practice does not lie in understanding profound and mysterious principles. What matters is single-mindedness. When the mind does not run outward, one can put everything down and, with the mind utterly committed, practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly. After a long time, when the practice is mature, why worry that the deluded mind will not melt away or that Buddha-nature will not be seen? Therefore it is said: the lowest of the low capacities possesses the highest wisdom. Seeing through the red dust of worldly life, putting everything down, and practicing Buddha-recitation with one-pointed mind—this is the highest wisdom.

Eminent Pure Land masters instruct people not to worry about whether they have one-pointedness without confusion and not to ask whether they have apprehended Mind and seen nature. They should simply recite directly, calmly and steadily; the result will follow naturally as the practice matures. First, this is because if we seek one-pointedness without confusion or apprehending Mind and seeing nature, we add delusion on top of delusion and instead spoil the matter ourselves. Second, it is because if the requirement is set too high, timid beings will fear it, retreat before difficulty, and not dare advance in practice. This does not mean that the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate does not require one-pointedness without confusion or that it has nothing to do with apprehending Mind and seeing nature. Pure Land lodges profound principle within plain practice and secretly accords with the subtlety of the Way in genuine practice. Therefore those of higher, middle, and lower capacities, by following its teaching and practicing Buddha-recitation plainly and steadily, can all see nature. It is unlike Chan, which receives only those of higher capacity and sharp wisdom; those of middle and lower capacity have no way to approach it. This is why the Dharma gate is deep and vast.

Some may say, “This is a Chan-school explanation and does not accord with Pure Land rules.” To increase the reader’s confidence, I will excerpt a passage from Master Yinguang’s *Buddha-Recitation Samādhi* to show that my words are not false: “If one discusses the method of realizing samādhi, then when practicing Buddha-recitation one must turn the recitation

around and contemplate, concentrate on one object, and not let the mind run outside. Thought after thought, attend to the source of mind; mind after mind, accord with the Buddha-essence. Reciting while turning recitation back; contemplating while turning contemplation back. Reciting is contemplating, and contemplating is reciting. One must make the whole of recitation be contemplation and the whole of contemplation be recitation. Outside contemplation there is no recitation; outside recitation there is no contemplation. Although contemplation and recitation are blended like water and milk, they still have not been driven through to the root. One must, right on this one thought ‘Namo Amitābha Buddha,’ investigate again and again and firmly lift it up. The more one investigates, the more urgent it becomes; the more one lifts it up, the more immediately present it becomes. When power reaches its utmost and the practice is pure, suddenly, together with the recitation, it falls away, and one realizes the state of no-recitation and yet no non-recitation. This is what is meant by: “The numinous light shines alone, utterly free from sense faculties and sense objects. The true and constant essence stands revealed; it is not bound by words and letters. Mind-nature is unstained, originally complete in itself. Only leave delusive thoughts, and one is then a Buddha of suchness.” When practice reaches this point...”

“... one has attained the Dharma of buddha-recitation; responsive communion occurs, and this is precisely where one should continue to exert effort. It is like clouds dispersing in the vast sky and the blue heavens completely revealed. One personally sees what is original; originally there is nothing to be seen. Seeing in which nothing is seen is called true seeing. At this point, the sound of streams and the colors of mountains are all the truth of ultimate meaning; the cawing of crows and the chattering of magpies are none other than the supreme true vehicle. Lively and vivid, one responds to all phenomenal appearances without abiding in any dharma; bright and clear, one illuminates all objects while not a single thing is established. Speaking of its function, it is like the rising sun in the east, round, clear, and fully bright. Speaking of its essence, it is like the bright moon setting in the west, pure and quiescent. It is illumination precisely as quiescence, and quiescence precisely as illumination; both are preserved and both are dissolved, beyond all duality and perfectly integrated. It is like snow covering a thousand mountains and the sea swallowing the myriad phenomena: only one color, with no different flavor. Speaking of its benefit: while still not having left Sahā in the present, one always participates in the vast assembly; at life’s end, one ascends the highest grade and suddenly realizes the Buddha-vehicle. Only people inside the house know the affairs inside the house. If spoken to people outside the gate, slander is certain without doubt.”

Everyone, look at this passage. Is it not entirely of one track with Chan? When practicing Buddha-recitation, one must not only have contemplation and recitation in accord; one must also, on this single thought of Amitābha, investigate again and again and firmly lift it up. Is this not precisely the practice of Chan huatou investigation? When one investigates ever more urgently and raises the Buddha-name into ever more immediate presence, and power reaches its utmost and the practice is pure, one suddenly falls away and realizes the state of no-recitation and no non-recitation. Together with the long passage below describing the state

after awakening, is this not precisely the Chan state in which investigation opens up the original face—apprehending Mind and seeing nature? For ordinary people nowadays, we do not speak of investigation and lifting up. We speak only of mental recitation with attentive listening, contemplation and recitation in accord, and vigorous investigation. When the practice matures, they can naturally fall away suddenly and realize samādhi. This is completely no different from Chan's apprehending Mind and seeing nature. But it cannot be like ordinary people now, who regard morning and evening liturgy as the completion of the matter. When speaking to this point, it is truly hard to establish words. Even Master Yinguang, with his lofty virtue and weighty reputation, still had to sigh at the end, "If spoken to people outside the gate, slander is certain without doubt." How much more so for others! When the Buddha taught at the Lotus assembly, five thousand people still left their seats. How could it be possible, especially in the latter age, to make everyone enter in faith without doubt or slander?

3. Esoteric Buddhism. For liberating beings in the Dharma-ending age, Esoteric Buddhism is the most convenient and complete Dharma gate and the one best suited to their capacities. It is also a Dharma gate from which none of the schools can depart. From essence to function, from small to great, from shallow to deep, from branches to root, it includes everything and lacks nothing. Unfortunately, modern students of Buddhism do not devote themselves to right practice, realizing the essence and accomplishing the Way. They merely pick up a superficial smattering and a few methods of bringing forth function, dabble in the mysterious, and show off spiritual powers, making the whole thing reek of demonic energy. Upright people of attainment and integrity look down on this. Even Master Hongyi, because he did not understand Esoteric Buddhism as it really was and was deceived by its outer form, once slandered Esoteric Buddhism. Later, after deeply studying Esoteric doctrine and contemplation, he came to know that Esoteric Buddhism is profound, vast, and inconceivable, that its Dharma gates are complete and lack nothing. He deeply repented and warned later students not to doubt or slander because of misunderstanding Esoteric ritual forms; they should first deeply study Esoteric scriptures and teachings, thoroughly understand the doctrine, and only then discuss the practice of the ritual procedures.

Precisely because Esoteric students do not devote themselves to right practice, those who practice Chan and Pure Land all avoid Esoteric Buddhism, fearing they will be tainted by demonic energy. In fact, this is unnecessary. The Esoteric vehicle is the mind-seal of all Buddhas. The Buddhas of the three times cannot leave it and become Buddhas; how much less can later students of Chan, Pure Land, and the other schools do so? If you want to leave it and avoid it, it is like fleeing from your shadow in the midday sun: you only add to your own toil. For example, although Pure Land does not advocate apprehending Mind and seeing nature, in order to eliminate karmic obstructions and ensure birth in the West, practitioners must recite the Śūraṅgama Mantra, the Great Compassion Mantra, the Rebirth Mantra, the Ten Small Mantras, and so forth. Please tell me: are all these mantras not Esoteric Dharma? When those who investigate Chan reach the point where latent seeds surge up, they can neither advance

nor retreat; they are so stifled and tormented that they feel they may die. At such a time, if they do not rely on the empowering support of esoteric mantras and of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, they cannot pass through this difficult gate, break open the mass of doubt, and personally realize what is original.

Master Hanshan said, “The great Chan masters of past generations all secretly held divine mantras and quietly relied on the Buddha’s power, but they kept it hidden and did not proclaim it. I now openly point this out to you all: when investigating Chan reaches the point where the seeds of beginningless ignorance surge up and one is tormented almost to death, one must swiftly empower oneself with the Heart of the Śūraṅgama Mantra. By relying on the Buddha’s compassionate power, one can cross the difficult gate.” Thus even Chan—which boasts of self-power practice, raises high its lofty and severe house style, proclaims a special transmission outside the teachings, and directly points to seeing nature—does not depart from the Esoteric vehicle. How much less the other Dharma gates!

According to Japan’s Outline of Esoteric Teachings, the emperor once summoned eminent masters of each school to the imperial palace to hold a Dharma assembly and discuss which school was best and which realized the Way fastest, so that he could choose one to follow and practice. After the patriarchs of each school presented the advantages of their own school and boasted that theirs was the best, fastest, and most complete, the Esoteric master Kōbō said to the emperor: “All the schools are good and each has its strengths, but none can leave Esoteric Buddhism. Without Esoteric Buddhism there are no schools. Since Esoteric Buddhism is the mind-seal of all Buddhas, how could there be any school apart from the Buddha-mind? Therefore Esoteric Buddhism truly gathers the strengths of all schools. It is the most complete, most convenient, and swiftest Dharma gate, the path that the Buddhas of the three times must follow to accomplish the Way.” The emperor deeply approved of this, and therefore Japanese Esoteric Buddhism alone flourished.

Esoteric Buddhism takes the Mahāvairocana Sutra and the Vajraśekhara Sutra as its basis. It establishes the ten kinds of mind, comprehensively gathers all teachings, establishes the maṇḍala, and through the accord of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind, the ordinary being becomes a sage. Its inconceivable power and function can be known only by the Buddha; it is not something bodhisattvas at the causal stage can fathom. It is profound, secret, and mysterious, and because its teachings may not be shown to those who have not received empowerment, it is called Esoteric Buddhism. Its schools and Dharma gates are numerous and not within the scope of this discussion, so I will not elaborate. I will only select and briefly discuss the important points that relate to apprehending Mind and seeing nature.

When Esoteric Buddhism is mentioned, it seems to mean magical transformations. For this reason Emperor Wuzong of the Tang deeply feared that Esoteric practitioners would use spiritual powers to topple his realm and bring down his imperial position, so he ordered Esoteric Buddhism suppressed. Later, Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming was even more suspicious of Esoteric Buddhism and strictly prohibited it, so Esoteric Buddhism disappeared

from China. Later people instead went to Japan and Tibetan regions to study, calling these Eastern Esotericism and Tibetan Esotericism. Is this not lamentable? In the present day, students of Buddhism still do not value the Way; they value only spiritual powers. They mistakenly believe that apprehending Mind and seeing nature means displaying great spiritual powers, and that if one has not displayed spiritual powers, one has not apprehended Mind and seen nature. This wrong view not only misleads oneself but also misleads others.

They do not realize that although the principle awakened to in apprehending Mind and seeing nature is no different from that of the Buddhas, the habitual defilements accumulated over many kalpas and lives are deeply ingrained and difficult to dissolve all at once. At this time one is only a Buddha at the causal stage. Like a newborn infant, though also human, one cannot yet function. One must practice on the basis of awakening, diligently remove habits, and nourish the sacred embryo of awakening before spiritual powers begin to unfold. The Śūraṅgama Sutra says, “Awakening to principle is sudden; with that awakening, all delusion is dissolved at once. In practice, habits are gradually removed and exhausted in sequence.” The Mahāvairocana Sutra says, “When a bodhisattva abides here and diligently removes the five hindrances, before long all five superknowledges will arise together.” Unfortunately, many Buddhist disciples do not understand this principle. They devote themselves only to spiritual powers, cater to what people like, and show off their abilities. As a result, those who study Esoteric Buddhism rise up to imitate one another. They attend only to branch methods of functional spiritual transformations and ignore the fundamental great Dharma of realizing the essence and ending birth and death. This is truly lamentable.

Within Esoteric Dharma, each lineage has its own highest and most supreme Dharma. Their power and function are all inconceivable; if practiced according to the Dharma, all can bring true benefit and enable one to realize noble fruition. Yet among them, the most complete, most perfect, and most supreme is the Nyingma school’s Great Perfection. It is the highest Dharma gate of the nine-yāna sequence, with none above it. Its preliminary approach—the Ganges Mahāmudrā—is equivalent to Chan’s direct showing of mind, and is even more complete than Chan. The first half of Great Perfection practice, trekchö, in which the three emptinesses mutually accord, corresponds to Chan’s seeing nature. The latter half, tögal, in which the body transforms into rainbow light, is Chan’s upward passage. Chan relies only on self-power for practice and realization and has few skillful means for guiding practitioners, so its results are slow. Esoteric Buddhism, in addition to self-power, also receives the Buddha’s empowering support and has many special skillful means for guiding practitioners. Its superior guidance is like the principle of modern laser light—very scientific—so the results are quick and strength comes rapidly.

Although a small portion of the great Esoteric Dharma has already been incorporated into Chan and Pure Land methods, if practitioners can add Esoteric practice outside of Chan and Pure Land in order to make up for what Chan and Pure Land lack, their progress will be faster and the results broader. Master Hanshan said, “Those for whom Buddha-recitation is not

effective can hold the vidyā, that is, hold mantras. By relying on the power of the Buddhas' mind-seal, one can achieve twice the result with half the effort." This is especially so for Chan practitioners. If they investigate one rigid huatou without a clear-eyed teacher to forge, temper, and press them, and if they make no breakthrough and waste their energy, it is better to switch to Esoteric practice. By relying on the Buddha's compassionate power, it is easier to awaken and accomplish.

But if practitioners dislike complicated ritual forms, elaborate visualizations, and the slowness of preliminaries, then there is nothing better than practicing the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma. Although Great Perfection is complete and lacks nothing, before practicing it one must first practice preliminaries, and when practicing trekchö one must again do various visualizations involving forms. These are complicated and cumbersome. They are not as simple and easy as the Heart-Center Dharma. Heart-Center is esoteric practice without visualization, direct and uncomplicated. It does not need to pass from visualization-based practice to practice without visualization, does not require practicing preliminaries, and does not require visualization. It directly realizes the mind-source, which is without characteristics. It is truly the simplest, easiest, fastest, and most wondrous Dharma within Esoteric Buddhism. But if one's nature inclines toward visualization and one likes to begin with visualized forms—the deity, seed syllables, three channels, five wheels, and so forth—then practicing Great Perfection is appropriate.

The Heart-Center Dharma is a teaching of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, and Eastern Esotericism also preserves a transmission. In the past, Guru Nona transmitted it in Shanghai to Yuan Xilian. Unfortunately, because it is a higher-level esoteric practice without visualization, in Tibet one must first practice visualization-based esoteric methods for twenty or thirty years before receiving and practicing it. It was therefore not widely transmitted, and this great Dharma nearly disappeared into obscurity. Its present wide dissemination is entirely due to Ācārya Dayu, who practiced the pratyutpanna samādhi on Mount Lu, endured extreme hardship, and entered deep meditative concentration. In response, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appeared, bestowed empowerment, and transmitted the Dharma to him. Samantabhadra also told him that the Esoteric section of the Japanese Taishō Tripiṭaka contains The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Connected with the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, the practice text for this Dharma, which practitioners could consult for details. After Elder Yu received the Dharma and brought the practice to fruition, he deeply felt that the Buddhadharma was declining and that the Buddha's kindness was difficult to repay. Not shrinking from hardship, he descended the mountain and transmitted the Dharma widely. Later, Elder Wang Xianglu received and transmitted it, and disciples who received the Dharma came to be found throughout nearly the entire country; only then did the Dharma begin to flourish in the world.

This Dharma is simple, convenient, and swift. Students all call it Chan-Esoteric. Though the wording seems improper, the meaning is in fact equivalent. Perhaps the time and conditions

have arrived, and the Dharma should arise throughout the land to benefit vast numbers of sentient beings. The Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma uses six mudrās together with one mantra, empowered by the three mysteries. It may be practiced with or without setting up an altar. During practice, the hands form the mudrā and the mouth holds the mantra. There is no visualization; one simply turns hearing back to the soundless sound of the mantra held by the mind, much like Buddha-recitation contemplation. When holding the mantra, one uses vajra recitation: the lips move, but the mouth does not make sound. It continues without interruption. Because one receives the Buddha's empowerment, entry into meditative concentration is extremely rapid.

Practicing in this way neither harms qi nor harms blood, and it is also a wondrous method for nourishing the body. Reciting out loud harms qi; silent recitation harms blood. Now, by doing vajra recitation, with mental recitation and attentive listening, the intention does not run outward. The recitation continues in an unbroken stream; the mind becomes clear, resolve becomes concentrated, qi and blood harmonize, one peacefully enters concentration, the spirit becomes bright and healthy, and the body becomes well. The foundation of apprehending Mind and seeing nature is built right here. This Dharma may be practiced one session or two sessions each day. There are also seven-day retreat and nine-session methods. Each session is practiced for two hours; the hand mudrā is not released, and the mouth's mantra-recitation does not stop. One may not release the mudrā and end a session halfway through; otherwise the session does not count and must be begun again from the start. If one's capacity is suitable, and one can practice continuously without interruption, then after completing one thousand sessions one will definitely be able to apprehend Mind and see nature. After seeing nature, one brings forth function from essence and polishes habit-energy; this then accords with Chan. If, in addition, one borrows the practice methods of Great Perfection tōgal and practices diligently and arduously, transforming the body into rainbow light and realizing the fruition of Buddhahood will also not be difficult.

The above methods, such as Heart-Center and Great Perfection, are Esoteric Dharma. Because they may not be openly shown without empowerment, their practice methods are not discussed in detail here. Those with aspiration should find a teacher, receive empowerment and transmission, and practice accordingly; there will naturally be a correct way. All sentient beings are originally Buddhas. Originally there is no need to practice a Dharma in order to realize the fruition of Buddhahood. Only because accumulated defilements are deep and heavy, and because even when they meet a clear-eyed person who directly shows mind-nature they still refuse to trust it and take it up as their own, they have no choice but to borrow a Dharma to practice, like using yellow leaves to stop a child from crying. Among practice methods, because their skillful means differ, the pace of practice can be faster or slower. Chan investigation often takes several decades before one has any breakthrough, and some remain mired in perplexity their whole lives without awakening. Those who practice other schools often do not dare speak of apprehending Mind and seeing nature; this is especially true of the Pure Land school. The Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma discussed above

can be called very convenient and swift, yet even it requires practicing one thousand sessions—about three years—before one can personally see the original face. This is speaking of the slowest case; those with sharp faculties who accomplish quickly need not sit the full one thousand sessions. If we speak realistically, all of this amounts to putting on a cangue and shackles for no reason and taking a needless detour when nothing is amiss. Only when the bottom of the bucket falls out and one sees what is original does one realize that it was complete from the beginning and that all this had been superfluous.

For one who turns the light inward in a single thought and sees nature, one who sees nature after one thousand sessions of Heart-Center Dharma practice, and one who sees nature after decades of Chan investigation, the difference in how long they take is beyond comparison. Yet taking a longer, seemingly needless detour has its compensation and its benefits. The extra walking at least strengthens one's legs. Those who have not taken such a detour have weak legs; as soon as they set out—that is, when they meet conditions and face circumstances—they immediately find that their strength is insufficient. Why is this? Although the principle awakened to by these three kinds of people is no different, there is a great difference in power and function. In one case, because awakening came very easily and there was no training and tempering in meditative concentration, the mind is constantly shaken by conditions and cannot master itself, so its strength is insufficient. In the other case, one has long practiced sitting meditation and developed deep mastery in samādhi, and has undergone investigation, tempering, lifting up, and contemplative observation; once awakening occurs, one can be free and at ease, not swayed by sense objects.

The ancient saying, “No effort is wasted; the Dharma is not bestowed in vain,” refers to this. Xuedou said, “For decades he underwent hardship; for you, he descended several times into the blue dragon's cave. Wronged! Wronged! It can be spoken of; clear-eyed patch-robed monks must not take it lightly.” This is precisely what the verse praises. Practicing the Heart-Center Dharma takes about three years. Through the Buddha's empowerment, one can awaken. Though this takes more time than turning the light inward in a single thought, compared with thirty years of diligent Chan investigation it saves ten times the toil, and one can obtain the same power, function, and effect. For us descendants in the latter age, apart from deeply rejoicing in what blessings have allowed us to encounter this great Dharma, and deeply thanking the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for their compassionate kindness, what else is there to say?

Furthermore, besides apprehending Mind and seeing nature and accomplishing in this very life, the Heart-Center Dharma also allows one to vow to seek birth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. If Buddha-recitation is not effective and the sacred Pure Land vision does not appear, one may borrow this Dharma for practice in order to realize samādhi; then one has full assurance of rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Although this Dharma is called Esoteric Dharma, in reality it is a perfectly wondrous great Dharma that fuses Chan and Pure Land into one furnace. Those with aspiration should seek it out and practice it.

Finally, I urge fellow practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism: be careful not to use Esoteric Dharma to commit criminal deeds and thereby suffer severe karmic punishment. Esoteric Dharma certainly has many secret and subtle spiritual powers and wondrous functions, but one must know that powers gained through practicing any such subtle Dharma are not true powers. They cannot be spoken of in the same breath as the powers realized when the wisdom-light of the exhaustion of outflows is revealed. Such powers obtained through Dharma practice are merely borrowed spiritual powers, similar to the techniques of non-Buddhist paths. They can only please and dazzle ignorant petty people; they do not enter the halls of refinement. Even if one can masquerade as a sage for a time and obtain a little renown and material support, when one's eyes fall to the ground at death, not only will one's spiritual powers vanish without support, one will also follow one's karma and undergo harsh and terrible retribution.

8C. 悟后真修 / Genuine Practice after Awakening

C. Genuine Practice after Awakening. Before apprehending Mind and seeing nature, no matter what Dharma gate you practice or how hard you work, you cannot get beyond the category of "blind and misguided practice." Because you have not awakened to the true mind, doubt cannot but remain in your practice. Although you may exert yourself diligently, doubt and hesitation still lodge in the chest, and the sign of unease cannot be avoided. This very sign of unease is the root of birth and death. Therefore, even when counteractive practice is deep, it is not genuine practice.

Chan Master Puzhao says in *Essentials of Mind Practice*: "Practice before awakening, though one exerts oneself diligently and does not forget to cultivate thought after thought, still gives rise to doubt at every step and cannot be unobstructed. It is like having something obstructing the chest: the sign of unease is constantly present. As time passes and the counteractive practice matures, body, mind, and the adventitious afflictions may seem light and at ease. Yet even with this lightness and ease, the root of doubt has not been cut off. It is like pressing grass with a stone; one still has no freedom in the realm of birth and death." Therefore it is said, "Practice before awakening is not genuine practice."

Yet no one can avoid going through this period of blind and misguided practice. Only after the bottom of the bucket has dropped out and one clearly recognizes what is original can one find one's way home, eliminate habits as conditions arise, and practice samādhi and wisdom together spontaneously. Natural and uncontrived, one remains in Chan whether moving or still; this is genuine practice as non-practice.

The *Essentials of Mind Practice* says: "Even in the case of those with inferior capacity, after seeing nature their afflictions may be heavy and their habit-energy deep. Facing objects, thought after thought may give rise to emotion; meeting conditions, mind after mind may posit them as existent. They may even be thrown into confusion by conditions and objects and

lose sight of what is original. Although they then borrow various counteractive expedients to remove their inferior habits and clear away their pollution, and this still involves effortful practice, yet because thought after thought is without doubt and does not fall into obstruction, as time passes, their strength becomes full and their practice pure, and they naturally accord with their genuine, uncontrived wondrous nature. In spontaneous quiescent knowing, they are no different from those of superior capacity.” Therefore Buddhist practitioners must first take apprehending Mind and seeing nature as their aim. After apprehending Mind, eliminating habits is genuine practice.

This is also why I loudly call out that there is no need to investigate a fixed, dead *huatou*. Instead, let the teacher directly point out mind-nature, so that students awaken right then and there and then begin genuine practice, avoiding the waste of time.

Someone may ask: “Apprehending Mind and seeing nature means becoming a sage. Not only should there be no further need for practice; one should also manifest all sorts of spiritual transformations and appear greatly different from ordinary people. This is called great capacity and great function, unfathomable spiritual transformation. Why, then, do you say instead that only after awakening does genuine practice begin?”

The answer is that present-day students of the Way make two kinds of mistakes. First, they think that after awakening one is already a sage and should manifest all sorts of spiritual transformations. If one cannot transform and appear miraculously, then it is not awakening but only verbal Chan, empty talk about truth. Because of this, many become discouraged and fall into the error of thinking awakening is beyond them.

Second, they say that in the Chan school there is originally no practice, no attainment, and no realization: once awakened, one rests. Why should there be any further practice or refinement? Consequently, although they have awakened at the level of principle, their habit-energy remains as before. Over time, they continue as before to drift in birth and death, unable to avoid the wheel of the six realms.

This point has already been discussed above, and it may seem unnecessary to speak of it again. But because it is immensely important to the success or failure of practitioners, and because it is the root of present-day students’ misunderstanding, I do not mind using more words and will discuss it again in detail. The *Essentials of Mind Practice* says: “There are many gates for entering the Way. To speak in essentials, they do not go beyond the two gates of sudden awakening and gradual practice.” It also says: “These two gates, sudden and gradual, are the rule of a thousand sages. All the sages above, without exception, first awakened and then practiced; through practice, they then realized. So-called spiritual powers and transformations are developed through practice based on awakening and appear through gradual cultivation. It is not that they appear at the time of awakening.”

Chan Master Guifeng says: “Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water; rely on the sun’s warmth to melt it. Realize that the ordinary being is precisely Buddha, and rely on the power

of the Dharma for sustained cultivation. When ice melts, the water flows and moistens; only then does its function of irrigating and cleansing appear. When delusion is exhausted, the mind is empty and unobstructed; only then does the function of powers and light appear. In practical matters, spiritual powers and transformations cannot be accomplished in one day; they appear through gradual cultivation.”

Yangshan instructed the assembly: “I will now tell you this plainly: do not fixate on such things. Simply practice genuinely within the ocean of your own nature. Do not seek the three knowledges and six superknowledges. Why? These are only secondary matters of the sages. Right now you need only recognize mind and realize nature. Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches. In time, they will naturally be fully present. If you have not attained the root and instead try to learn such things through emotion and intellect, you will never obtain them; even if you do, they will not be genuine, and in the future you may become a demon.”

From the above quotations we can know what sudden awakening is. When ordinary people are deluded, they falsely grasp the four great elements as the body and false thinking as the mind. They do not know that their own nature is the true Dharmakāya and that their own numinous knowing is the true Buddha. They constantly seek Buddha outside the mind, running east and west. Then, suddenly, a spiritual teacher points out an entryway. In a single thought they turn the light inward, see their own nature, and recognize their own mind.

This mind-nature originally has no affliction and no birth or death. It is originally perfectly complete and originally fully endowed; it is no different at all from the Buddhas. Moreover, from the ordinary person to the Buddha-stage there are no ranks or stages. Therefore it is called sudden awakening. Although it is called sudden awakening, it is sudden only in principle. In actual practice, attachment reinforced by habit-energy through many lives and kalpas of birth and death is difficult to remove all at once. Therefore one must practice on the basis of awakening and gradually remove habit-energy. Only when delusion is exhausted do spiritual powers appear. They definitely do not appear immediately at the moment of sudden awakening at the level of principle.

Practitioners of the Way must understand the process and distinguish what comes first and what comes later. They must not doubt themselves because spiritual powers have not yet appeared, and even less should they doubt others, thinking that none of them have awakened. If, because of this, they seek another path and mistakenly enter a byway, then even after kalpas as numerous as dust particles, they will not accomplish the Way.

Moreover, whether spiritual powers appear is not sufficient to show whether one has awakened to the Way. First, there are many kinds of powers. Some are attained through esoteric practice; some rely on spirits and ghosts attaching themselves and giving information; some are received as karmic recompense from cultivation in previous lives; and so on. One cannot say that all such people have awakened to the Way. Such powers either

have something they depend on and are not true powers, or are only semblance powers. Once the physical body breaks down and they lose what they depend on, they vanish.

Second, the ancients spoke of awakening first and then powers, and powers first and then awakening. Therefore one cannot say that as soon as powers appear, this is awakening to the Way. For example, when the Ming-dynasty Chan Master Poshan was practicing the Way at Tiantong, before awakening he could send consciousness out of the body, steal a village person's ducks, and perform playful samādhi. Later, when the matter was exposed, Chan Master Miyun Wu scolded him: "Though your playful spiritual powers are not absent, you have not even dreamed of the Buddhadharma!" Poshan knelt and asked for instruction; after further vigorous investigation, he finally awakened.

Coming down to recent times, sentient beings' faculties are even poorer and their karmic obstruction and habit-energy even heavier. Among ten million people, not one will first have powers and then awaken. Therefore we must, after awakening, practice on the basis of awakening, gradually remove habit-energy, develop spiritual powers, and attain fruition. All the former sages and patriarchs through the generations did this without exception. Thus the two gates of sudden awakening and gradual practice are the rule for Buddhists and should be upheld and followed by practitioners of every school.

Someone may ask: "Principle is phenomena, and phenomena are principle. Principle and phenomena are nondual. If one suddenly awakens to the principle, the phenomenal side should accord with it. If one cannot penetrate through on the phenomenal side and obstruction remains, how can one say that one has awakened to true principle?"

The answer is: principle and phenomena are neither one nor different. Phenomena are established by principle; principle is revealed through phenomena. Principle does not depart from phenomena, and phenomena do not depart from principle. From the perspective of this nonseparation, they are not different. But true principle has no shape, while wondrous function follows conditions and responds to the ten thousand kinds of beings. Delusively established illusory appearances do have shape. In this respect, phenomena have appearances whereas true principle is without characteristics; thus they are not one.

Now, when one awakens to the Way, one has clearly awakened that one's own empty, quiescent numinous knowing is the true Buddha. Yet because the habit-energy of many lives is deep and heavy, it cannot be removed all at once. When encountering affairs, one may still give rise to mind; when seeing objects, it may be hard at once to be without thought. But when mind arises and thought moves, one is no longer like a blind person who does not know that sense objects are originally empty and therefore clings, chases, wanders, and forgets to return. Rather, when the preceding thought moves, the following thought immediately notices it and sweeps it empty at once. Compared with someone whose mind does not move at all, however, there are still traces of arising and ceasing, and the power is slightly weaker.

If one can preserve it closely and maintain clear observation at all times, then, as time passes and practice deepens, one's practice will naturally become continuous and seamless. The herding-the-ox practice of the patriarchs of every generation is precisely the model of post-awakening practice. An ancient said: "Though sudden awakening is the same as Buddha, the habits of many lives are deep. When the wind stops, the waves still surge; when principle appears, thoughts still intrude." Therefore after awakening one must remain constantly watchful. If delusive thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Diminish them and diminish again until reaching the unconditioned; only then is it ultimate.

All the spiritual teachers under heaven who display spiritual powers and transformations in actual circumstances acquired this ability only through gradual cultivation, not in a single day. Besides, spiritual powers are only secondary matters of the sages; for those who have realized, they are not valued. Even if they appear, they do not wish to use them. If one has not obtained the root—apprehending Mind and seeing nature—but only seeks the branches—spiritual powers—not only will one fail to accomplish the Way, one also risks becoming possessed by demons. One cannot be too cautious.

Today's Buddhists often use spiritual powers to measure others. They mistakenly think that at the moment of one thought's awakening, immeasurable wondrous functions and spiritual transformations immediately appear. If there are no spiritual powers and transformations, then even though the eye of the Way is thoroughly clear, they say it is not awakening. Such people are truly confused people who do not know root and branch and do not understand what comes first and later. They become discouraged themselves and do not believe others, cutting off their potential for Buddhahood. Nothing is more lamentable.

As for the second modern illness—thinking that once one awakens, one rests, and that there is no practice, no attainment, and no realization—although it seems closer to awakening than the previous view of expecting powers as soon as one awakens, because the view is not thorough it mistakenly enters a byway. Its loss is no different from that of the previous unawakened view, and it may even do greater harm. The former merely gives rise to discouragement in oneself, does not believe oneself, and also does not believe others. When the time and conditions arrive, such a person may still break through confusion and step onto the right road. But the latter, taking himself to be awakened, has deep-rooted wrong view, dismisses later practice, continues to drift as before, enters deeply into cyclic existence, and cannot extricate himself.

As said above, no practice, no attainment, and no realization are true from the standpoint of principle, and they are also the final words of those who have arrived home and completed the matter. They are definitely not a state one attains at the very moment of one thought's awakening. Especially among people of the present Dharma-ending age, faculties are poor and obstructions heavy. Still less can they, after awakening and without further practice, immediately attain the stage of effortless functioning. Those who say there is no need for

further practice and refinement and that one rests once awakened are either mad or foolish; they really cannot be trusted.

All sentient beings originally possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous qualities. Only because they are deluded and do not know, take the false as true, create karma and undergo retribution, and flow through the six realms, are they called sentient beings. Yet even while among sentient beings, their original nature is not lost. With a single awakening, they are no different from the Buddhas and do not depend on practice for completion; therefore it is said, "no practice." All marks whatsoever are false; originally empty and quiescent, there is not a single Dharma; therefore it is said, "no attainment." When realization reaches the ultimate, even Buddha is not established; therefore it is said, "no realization."

But when delusive habits have not been removed, when one still chases conditions, clings, and flows through birth and death, one is still a sentient being. Therefore one must cultivate thought after thought and maintain clear observation from one mind-moment to the next. After great awakening, one cuts off evils while there is no cutting off, and practices what is good while there is no practice to grasp. Having entered the hall and gone into the chamber, returning home and sitting securely—what is called the idle person of the Way who has ended learning and is established in the unconditioned—only then is it the time of no practice, no attainment, and no realization. If before reaching this stage one talks loftily of no practice, no attainment, and no realization, is this not deceiving the worthy, lying to the sages, and bringing trouble on oneself?

Someone may ask: "Sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization have existed from ancient times. Are such people not those who rest as soon as they awaken? And do such people also need gradual practice after awakening? If such people existed in ancient times, surely they must also exist now."

The answer is: those who can enter sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization are none other than people of the very highest faculties. To speak realistically, the reason such people's faculties are high and deep is that in past lives they practiced on the basis of awakening and accumulated through gradual cultivation. In this present life, when the timing and conditions ripen, they can awaken as soon as they hear and complete everything at once. On the surface it seems to be sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization, but in reality it is also a situation of first awakening and then practicing. An ancient said: "Today's suddenness is also the gradualness of former days."

As for the present age, students' faculties are poor and inferior. Unless a great bodhisattva has come again, sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization are truly difficult. Even if there are one or two people of great capacity who understand a thousand things upon hearing one and complete everything at one awakening, they still cannot be without practice, without attainment, and without realization. The habitual defilements of ignorance cannot be exhausted in a single lifetime. What is more, as soon as one speaks of no practice, no

attainment, and no realization, one has already fallen into having practice, having attainment, and having realization.

The Essentials of Mind Practice says: “Ordinary people, since beginningless kalpas, have wandered through the six realms, firmly clinging to the mark of self, with deluded thinking turned upside down. The seeds and habitual tendencies of ignorance have long since become deeply ingrained. Even if in this present life they suddenly awaken to the self-nature as originally empty and quiescent and no different from the Buddhas, these old habits are difficult to remove all at once. Therefore, when meeting favorable or adverse circumstances, anger, joy, and judgments of right and wrong flare up and subside, and adventitious afflictions are no different from before. Without vigorously cultivating with *prajñā*, how could one counteract them, restore purity and clarity, and reach the state of great rest and great cessation?”

Chan Master Dahui Gao said: “Often people of sharp faculties dispatch this matter without much effort, then give rise to an attitude of ease and no longer practice or refine themselves. Over time, they continue to drift as before and cannot avoid cyclic existence. How could a single period of awakening exempt one from later practice?” Therefore after awakening one must remain constantly watchful. Do not be careless. When a delusive thought suddenly arises, either immediately notice it or bring recollection of the Buddha to the fore, until one reaches the unconditioned; only then is it ultimate. Thus the meaning of sudden awakening and gradual practice is like the two wheels of a cart: one cannot be missing.

Since sudden awakening and gradual practice are the rule of Buddhist practice and the ford and bridge for accomplishing the Way, how should one practice? And how is it different from practice before awakening? I will discuss this as follows.

First, post-awakening practice cannot be discussed uniformly. It must be determined according to how deeply rooted the student’s delusive habits are and how severe the afflictions are. For those whose habitual obstructions are slight, there is no need to apply counteractive methods. They need only remain watchful as conditions arise. When a thought arises, they immediately notice it; upon being noticed, it turns empty. Practicing in this way thought after thought, they naturally and gradually attain hundreds and thousands of *samādhis*.

The Essentials of Mind Practice says: “Just illuminate that delusion has no root and let thought after thought not abide. The empty flowers of the three realms are like smoke rolled away by wind; the illusory six sense objects are like ice melted by hot water. The adventitious afflictions naturally all become ghee.” If students can practice in this way thought after thought, without ever neglecting watchful attention, holding *samādhi* and wisdom equally, then attachment and aversion naturally weaken, and wisdom naturally increases. If the subtle stream is forever cut off and the great wisdom of complete awakening alone remains

brilliantly clear, then one manifests hundreds of billions of emanation bodies, responding wherever beings' needs call throughout lands of the ten directions, without obstruction.

The Essentials of Mind Practice also says: "Although one practices the ten thousand practices, one takes no-thought as the essential principle. The spiritual teachers under heaven, in their post-awakening ox-herding practice, though they have later practice, have already awakened suddenly beforehand. Delusive thoughts are originally empty, and mind-nature is originally pure. Although they cut off evil habits, there are no evil habits that can be cut off. Although they diligently practice merit and wisdom, there is no merit or wisdom that can be practiced. Practicing yet without practice, removing yet without removal—this is genuine practice and genuine removal."

It also says: "When seeing forms and hearing sounds, just be so—that is, in seeing forms and hearing sounds, be like a bright mirror reflecting things or like wind passing through trees, without making any other thought. When putting on clothes and eating, just be so. When defecating and urinating, just be so. When dealing with people and meeting things, just be so. Even in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, whether speaking or silent, whether joyful or angry, at all times let each be just like this. Be like an empty boat riding the waves, rising and falling as they do, while thought after thought does not abide; like flowing water turning around a mountain, meeting bends or straight passages without deliberate knowing from one mind-moment to the next. Today, open and free in spontaneous functioning; tomorrow, spontaneous functioning open and free. Following all conditions, without obstruction or hindrance. Straightforward and without falsity, seeing and hearing ordinary, not a single speck of dust stands in opposition—what need is there for any effort to dispatch and sweep away? Without a single thought giving rise to emotion, there is no need for the effort of forgetting conditions."

Such spontaneous quiescent knowing is originally practice in non-action and is actually equivalent to non-practice. There is no need to establish a separate practice, cling to a method in practice, maintain visualizations in silence, or make stillness the practice. How vastly different this is from practice before awakening, when one does not understand what one is doing, clings rigidly to Dharma marks, holds fast to ritual procedures, covets merit, rushes to meet assigned practice quotas, and practices as though wearing cangue and chains!

Second, those whose habitual defilements are deeply ingrained and whose ignorance is strong may still be swayed back and forth by movement and stillness when confronted with wholesome or unwholesome, favorable or adverse circumstances, so that the mind does not remain calm and clear. For them, there is still a need for counteractive practice that dispels and sweeps away delusive conditions. Among such methods, if restlessness is strong, use an appropriate samādhi practice to gather the scattered mind; if dullness is strong, use the wisdom approach to contemplate emptiness. (For the particular practice to use, see the next section, "Ten Practice Methods.") One must bring samādhi and wisdom into equal balance,

until movement and stillness both fall away and one enters the unconditioned; only then is it complete.

The Essentials of Mind Practice says: “First use the concentration gate to gather restlessness, so that the mind does not follow conditions and accords with original quiescence. Next use the wisdom gate to rouse oneself from dullness, discern dharmas and contemplate emptiness, so that it accords with original knowing. Use concentration to treat disorderly thinking, and wisdom to treat indeterminate blankness. When dullness and disorder both disappear and counteractive effort is finished, then facing objects, thought after thought returns to the source; meeting conditions, mind after mind accords with the Way. Only then do concentration and wisdom function together spontaneously, with nothing further to contrive.”

Someone may ask: “If one practices by such counteraction, is this not just the same as the gradual practice of people of inferior capacity before awakening? What, then, is the point of speaking of sudden awakening?”

The answer is: because such people have inferior faculties, heavy habits, deep obstruction, and thick defilement, although they too have awakened to the self-nature as pure, empty, and quiescent, fully endowed with the ten thousand virtues and no different from Buddha, nevertheless when facing objects they give rise to emotions and when meeting conditions they become obstructed. They are carried away by dullness and confusion, obscuring quiescent, continuous knowing. If they do not use counteractive practice to balance dullness and confusion, not only will they be unable to enter the unconditioned; they will instead fall into “post-awakening delusion.” One cannot be too cautious. I will now cite one or two public cases of post-awakening delusion to warn those who, after awakening, do not undertake genuine practice.

1. Betraying the teacher. Practitioner Xian had long studied with Xuedou. After receiving the Dharma, Xuedou intended to appoint him as abbot of Jin’e, but Xian did not comply. Later, when he emerged into the world and opened the hall, because Chan Master Deshan Yuan’s influence and reputation were both higher than Xuedou’s, he changed and claimed succession from Yuan. He sent messengers with letters to the various mountains. An old woman in front of the mountain happily asked, “For whom did Head Seat Xian burn incense when he came out into the world?” The messenger said, “Chan Master Deshan Yuan.” The old woman scolded him: “Xuedou shook out his very guts and bladder to speak Chan for you, and only then did you have today. How could you be so ungrateful and betray his kindness?”

Elder Jue of Kaisheng in Hezhou first studied with Changlu “Iron Legs” Fu for a long time without obtaining anything. Later he went to Dongshan under Wuzu Yan and received the Dharma. When he emerged to reside at Kaisheng and saw that Changlu’s Dharma seat was flourishing, he changed his lineage to Fu and did not name the source of his attainment. When he was offering incense, he suddenly felt his chest being pounded. At the place of pain, a

carbuncle opened into a hole. He used cakes of frankincense to plug it, but it did not heal for a long time, and in the end he died.

2. Betraying a friend. The scripture-master Qing, a man of Shu, was well known in the monastic communities. One day he and Master Xiu traveled together into the capital to study with Chan Master Fayun Yuantong. When they arrived at Fayun, Xiu was permitted to lodge in the meditation hall, but scripture-master Qing was not granted permission. Qing happened to fall ill at Zhihai. Xiu wished to go ask after his illness, but the monastery gate gave no leave, so he secretly went to Zhihai to see Qing. Qing, instead, wrote a letter to Yuantong reporting that Xiu had violated the rules by going in and out. When Yuantong learned this, during the evening instruction he scolded him harshly: "Out of friendship and righteousness, he risked being expelled to come ask about your illness, yet you wrote a letter to accuse him. Is this the conduct of an upright gentleman?" When Qing heard this, he stopped breathing. The communities all said that Qing died from one scolding by Yuantong.

3. Rebelling against the teacher. Attendant Ping of Dayang was an outstanding disciple of Chan Master Ming'an of the Caodong school. One day Chan Master Guangzhao of Langya came to visit. Ming'an said to him, "The one who will revive this one school of Dongshan will be either Yuan or Jue." Guangzhao said, "Attendant Ping is here." Ming'an said, "Ping's old habits are deep." Pointing to his chest, he said, "This place is also not good." Then, pinching the fork between his thumb and finger, he showed it and said, "In the future Ping will die here."

After Ming'an passed away, Ping was living at Dayang and planned to seize the gold and silver objects donated during his teacher's lifetime by Commandant Li Hewen, even to the point of destroying his teacher's stūpa. Although the senior elders on the mountain earnestly admonished him, he would not listen. When the stūpa was opened, the teacher's face and appearance were as if alive, and when the firewood burned out he remained solemn and intact. Everyone was shocked and amazed. Ping then dug open the teacher's skull, added oil and firewood, and in a moment it became ashes. When people reported this matter to the authorities, Ping was convicted for plotting to take the objects inside the stūpa, was declared unfilial, and was forced to return to lay life. Because all quarters rejected him on account of his corrupt character, Ping wandered without support. Later, at a three-forked road, he was eaten by a tiger. In the end he could not escape Ming'an's prediction about the fork. How sad!

Public cases of this kind are too numerous to list. They all come from, after awakening, not applying counteractive methods and earnest practice, allowing deep accumulated habits to obscure the natural conscience, moving the mind when seeing gain, forgetting kindness and betraying righteousness. Although a person can display cruel, stubborn, treacherous cleverness, how could the Dharma-protecting spirits tolerate it? It is appropriate that such people do not end well.

One must know this: even when one temporarily uses counteractive practice to regulate habitual tendencies, because one has first suddenly awakened that mind-nature is originally

pure and afflictions originally empty, one does not cling to a method in practice or fall into the inferior view that there is practice, attainment, and realization. Therefore thought after thought returns to the source and mind after mind accords with the Way, without losing the purport of sudden awakening. Conversely, in practice before awakening, because one has not seen nature, though one cultivates thought after thought, doubt arises at every step. One cannot be free and unobstructed. At the same time, one clings to Dharma marks, grasps at merit, and cannot end birth and death. Thus, though one uses the same counteractive methods, for an awakened person it is only a temporary expedient, like borrowing a road for a brief stay, without falling into attachment to the Dharma. Over time, one naturally accords with the wondrous Way and accomplishes unsurpassed bodhi. There is no difference from those of superior capacity with shallow habits who practice without practice and do not practice while practicing. This, too, must be understood.

Take, for example, Pure Land practitioners engaged in Buddha-recitation. Before awakening, they do not know that thought after thought returns to the source. They only run outward in search and practice by clinging to marks. Worse still, some cling to marks of merit, take greater quantity as superior, and chase the number of sūtras and mantras recited, even making themselves ill. After awakening, only then do they know that mind is Buddha and Buddha is mind; being mindful of Buddha is being mindful of mind, and being mindful of mind is being mindful of Buddha. Thought after thought is Buddha-recitation; thought after thought awakens the original mind. This is what is called mind and Buddha entering into communion and becoming one and inseparable. Therefore the ancients said that one phrase of the Buddha-name can be raised in its entirety only after apprehending Mind and seeing nature. Before awakening, one neither understands the essential point of Buddha-recitation, nor is one free of doubt at every step, and so one cannot obtain real use from it.

After awakening, having recognized the original source of mind, reciting is all right and not reciting is also all right; there is no issue of reciting or not reciting. One neither clings to marks in order to seek recitation, nor avoids and abandons recitation by refusing to recite. All day long, open and uncovered, free and at ease, unobstructed in following conditions—only then can this truly be called pure mindfulness in continuous succession; every thought is a recollection of the Buddha.

As for the phrase “pure mindfulness in continuous succession,” there is much to understand in it. It is exactly no different from the post-awakening practice of preserving and entrusting in the Chan school; it is a measure of progress for a Buddha-recitation practitioner. I will not begrudge extra words and will describe it briefly. The two words “pure mindfulness” do not mean, as ordinary people imagine, that practicing Buddha-recitation with a pure mind is pure mindfulness. Rather, when Buddha-recitation becomes pure and mature, the mind that recites and the Buddha that is recited fall away at once; subject and object both vanish, and emptiness and existence are both extinguished. Only this right mindfulness is pure mindfulness. As for “continuous succession,” there are differences in depth: continuity in

stillness, continuity in movement, movement and stillness as one, and so forth. I will analyze them below.

1. Continuity in stillness. When a Buddha-recitation practitioner recites to the point where subject and object both vanish and the original nature is revealed, pure mindfulness first manifests. Afterwards, because beginningless habits of clinging to marks are deep and heavy, it cannot appear in every sitting. It may reappear only after several weeks, several months, or even a year, depending entirely on the practitioner's faculties and on how consistently or intermittently one practices. At this time the practitioner must practice with increased diligence, so that the interval gradually shortens: from a year to several months, from a month to several days, and finally until it appears in every sitting. This is continuity in stillness. It corresponds to the first stage of the Chan school's practice of "protecting." It is one-pointedness of principle.

2. Continuity in movement. If in stillness one can maintain continuity at all times, but when meeting objects and conditions in movement and disturbance one again loses it, this cannot be called true continuity. One must temper it in daily functioning until one is unobstructed in every direction, unconstrained by favorable and adverse conditions. Just as in stillness, solitary brightness remains clear and vivid, without any going astray; only then is it continuity in movement. At times one may occasionally forget and move when meeting conditions, but immediately notice it and return to emptiness. This corresponds to the second stage of the Chan school's practice of "protecting." It is one-pointedness of phenomena.

3. Movement and stillness as one. Whether in movement or stillness, there is no going astray, and there is also no mind that keeps watch over it; everything is left entirely to its natural course. This corresponds to the first stage of the Chan school's practice of "letting be." It is one-pointedness of principle and phenomena.

4. Even continuity cannot be obtained, and even the mind of "not guarding" is absent. All former marvels and wonders are swept empty. All day long one is like an idiot or a fool, bland and without flavor; yet within no flavor there is the supreme flavor. This corresponds to the second stage of the Chan school's practice of "letting be." It is one-pointedness of phenomena and phenomena. This is true pure mindfulness in continuous succession.

For the convenience of later students in choosing a Dharma and practicing it, I will excerpt the ten practice methods spoken by Yuan-dynasty Chan Master Zhinul for everyone's reference:

Editorial source note. The controlling Chinese reads 元知訥禅师, which presents Zhinul as a Yuan-dynasty Chan master. Standard scholarship identifies Jinul/Zhinul (知訥, 1158–1210) as a Korean Seon master of the Goryeo period, before the Yuan dynasty. This edition preserves the source's historical label in the translated paragraph rather than silently normalizing it.

Question: "What method does the Chan school use to train the mind?"

Answer: "It uses the method of no-mind to remedy the deluded mind."

Question: “If a person had no mind, they would be no different from plants and trees. As for the teaching of no-mind, please explain it skillfully.”

Answer: “What we now call no-mind does not mean that the mind’s essence is absent. It means only that there is nothing in the mind. It is like speaking of an empty bottle: because there is nothing in the bottle, it is called an empty bottle; it is not called empty because the bottle itself is absent. Therefore the patriarch said: simply let the mind have no affairs, and in affairs have no mind; naturally empty yet numinous, quiescent yet wondrous—this is the essential purport of no-mind.” This means the absence of deluded mind, not the absence of true mind and its wondrous functioning.

Since ancient times the teachers have explained the practice of no-mind in various ways. I will now gather the general meaning and briefly clarify ten kinds.

First is vigilant observation. When practicing, ordinarily cut off thoughts and guard against thoughts arising. As soon as a thought arises, immediately notice it and see through it. Once the previous thought has been seen through, the following thought does not arise. Even this discerning function need no longer be applied. When both delusion and the act of noticing are forgotten, this is called no-mind. Therefore the patriarchs said, “Do not fear thoughts arising; only fear noticing them too late.” Another verse says: no need to seek truth; only need to cease views. This is the practice of vigilant observation that brings delusion to rest.

Second is resting. When practicing, do not think good and do not think evil. When mind arises, let it rest; when conditions are encountered, let the mind come to rest. Thus it is said: go like a strip of white silk, go cold and clear, go like an incense burner in an ancient temple. Only when one reaches the point of no slightest trace, separated from discrimination, like an idiot or a fool, is there a small degree of accord. This is the practice of resting the delusive mind.

Third is extinguishing mind while preserving objects. When practicing, let all delusive thoughts come to rest. Do not bother about outer objects; only rest the mind itself. Once deluded mind has rested, what harm can outer objects do? This is the ancient method of “Taking Away the Person but Not the Environment.” Layman Pang said: if you yourself have no mind toward the ten thousand things, what harm is there if the ten thousand things constantly surround you? This is the practice of extinguishing mind while preserving objects that ceases delusion.

Fourth is extinguishing objects while preserving mind. When practicing, contemplate all inner and outer objects as empty and quiescent, leaving only one mind standing alone. Therefore the ancients said: do not be a companion of the ten thousand things; do not set yourself against the sense objects. If mind clings to objects, mind is delusion. Now that there are no objects, where could delusion exist? This is the ancient method of “Taking Away the Environment but Not the Person.” Thus it is said: the flowers in the imperial garden have already fallen, yet carriages and horses are still gathered thickly. This is the practice of extinguishing objects while preserving mind that ceases delusion.

Fifth is extinguishing both mind and objects. When practicing, first empty and quiesce outer objects, then extinguish inner mind. Once inner and outer, mind and objects, are all quiescent, where in the end could delusion come from? Therefore Guanxi said: in the ten directions there are no walls; on all four sides there are no gates. This is the patriarchal method of “Taking Away Both Person and Environment.” Thus there is the saying: clouds disperse, waters flow away; people are still, and heaven and earth are empty. This is the practice of extinguishing both mind and objects that ceases delusion.

Sixth is preserving both objects and mind. When practicing, mind abides in the position of mind, and objects abide in the position of objects. At times mind and objects are opposite one another, but mind does not go toward objects, and objects do not come upon mind. Each does not reach the other; naturally delusive thoughts do not arise, and there is no obstruction to the Way. Therefore the sūtra says: “These dharmas abide in their Dharma-position; worldly appearances constantly abide.” This is the patriarchal method of “Taking Away Neither Person nor Environment.” Thus there is the saying: a single moon rises over the sea; how many houses have people ascending the tower? This is the practice of preserving both objects and mind that extinguishes delusion.

Seventh: inner and outer are entirely the same in essence. When practicing, see mountains, rivers, the great earth, sun, moon, stars, the inner body, the outer vessel-world, and all dharmas as not differing from the essence of true mind, clear, empty, and bright, without the slightest difference. The great trichiliocosm and worlds as numerous as sands merge into one undivided whole. From what place could deluded mind arise? Therefore Master Sengzhao said: heaven and earth share the same root with me; the myriad dharmas and I are of the same essence. This is the practice of extinguishing delusion by seeing inner and outer as entirely the same in essence.

Eighth: inner and outer are nothing but function. When practicing, take all inner and outer, body and mind, vessel-world and dharmas, and all movements, functions, acts, and conduct, as the wondrous function of true mind. As soon as any thought arises, wondrous function is present. Since everything is wondrous function, where can deluded mind settle? Therefore Yongjia said: the real nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature; the illusory, transformed body, empty in itself, is the dharmakāya. This is the practice of ceasing delusion by seeing inner and outer as nothing but function.

Ninth is essence itself as function, function itself as essence. When practicing, although one inwardly accords with true essence, uniformly empty and quiescent, numinous clarity is implicit within it: this is essence as function. Within numinous clarity, empty quiescence is implicit: this is function as essence. Therefore Yongjia said: lucid and quiescent is right; lucid with deluded thinking is wrong. Quiescent and lucid is right; quiescent but blankly indeterminate is wrong. Since indeterminate blankness is not allowed within quiescence, and disorderly thinking is not used within lucidity, how can any deluded mind be born? This is the

practice of essence itself as function and function itself as essence, which extinguishes delusion.

Tenth is penetrating beyond essence and function. When practicing, do not distinguish inner and outer, and do not distinguish east, west, south, and north. Take the four directions and eight quarters as one great gate of liberation. Round and complete, essence and function are not divided; there is not the slightest leakage. The whole body becomes seamless and undivided. Where could delusion arise? An ancient said: the whole body has no seam or gap; above and below are formed into one round whole. This is the practice of penetrating beyond essence and function, which extinguishes delusion.

It is not necessary to do all ten of the above modes of practice. If just one gate is accomplished, delusion naturally comes to rest and true mind appears. According to whichever Dharma one's past roots have affinity with, one may practice it. This is practice beyond deliberate effort; it is not intentional exertion. Even those who have not awakened to the true mind can practice it and readily see true mind right then and there. This Dharma gate for resting deluded mind is most crucial for students of the Way. Therefore I have not feared giving detail and have recorded it to show later students. Do not regard it as adding legs to a snake.

All ten of these modes of practice are applied while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. While dressing and eating, defecating and urinating, speaking and working—at all times and in all places—one must continuously maintain noticing and clear observation. There is no need to sit in meditation and investigate. If one's habitual obstructions are deep-seated and one's strength is insufficient, and one still needs to sit and apply the practice, that too is permitted. But after formal sitting, one must carry the practice developed in meditative concentration into engagement with circumstances and train amid activity. Then one may sooner bring the practice into seamless continuity and reach the great accomplishment beyond deliberate effort, perfectly accomplishing the great Way of bodhi.

As for Esoteric Buddhism, after awakening one must still practice esoterically, in hopes of attaining accomplishment in this very body. The breadth of its methods and the abundance of its expedients are far beyond exoteric Buddhism. But Esoteric Dharma values teacher-lineage, empowerment, and transmission. It cannot be publicly disclosed, so I omit it here.

8D. 证体起用 / Realizing the Essence and Bringing Forth Function

D. Realizing the Essence and Bringing Forth Function. Concerning the appearances associated with realizing the essence, the ancients usually did not speak in detail. First, this realized state cannot be reached by words or thought; once it is put into words, there is already a danger of fixation. Second, those who truly realize find that there is nothing attained and do not wish to flaunt it before others. Third, they feared that those who had not awakened would appropriate such words as their own, thereby confusing others. Fourth, they feared that people would cling to states and seek them, instead obstructing the gate of awakening. Fifth, each person's passing through such states is not entirely the same.

For these and other reasons, they only gave approximate descriptions such as “clouds disperse in the vast sky, and the blue heaven is utterly revealed,” “a clear sky stretching ten thousand miles without a cloud,” “the mind-moon is solitary and round, its light embracing the myriad phenomena,” “neither bright nor dim, neither large nor small, neither blue nor yellow,” or “round and full, brilliant with light.” I too seem to be no exception. Besides, I have no realization, no attainment, and no ability to speak of it; I can only borrow a few established public cases and offer them to readers. As for the detailed situation, that can only be left for readers themselves to apply themselves, realize it, and experience it firsthand.

When we practice to the point where subject and object are both forgotten, and mind and dharmas both dissolve, no matter which school we are practicing, there is a sudden breaking and an explosive cutting off. It is like an explosive suddenly bursting: inwardly body and mind, outwardly the world, and even empty space, all at once drop away, shatter, and vanish completely—even the very notion of “nothing” is gone. This is what is called “the great earth sinking flat and empty space shattering.” At that moment, although there is nothing whatsoever, there is empty luminosity and deep stillness; numinous clarity remains unobscured, with lucid, continuous knowing—not like wood or stone.

Although this knowing is lucid, there is neither a knowing subject nor a known object. This lucidity in its entirety is one expanse of empty, bright, numinous knowing; there cannot be any further knowing subject or known object. To add another act of “knowing” would be to place another head atop one's own; it would no longer be this. After realizing this true state, when we turn back, only then do we recognize that this “numinous knowing” is not somewhere else. All day long it shines through the six faculties. It is not apart from us by the slightest bit, nor separated by the least interval. All speech, actions, and movements are nothing other than its numinous and wondrous functioning.

Formerly, for its sake we suffered a thousand hardships and made every kind of search and investigation. Originally it was only right before us, yet we did not recognize it. Instead we dirtied and humiliated it, revolving through the six realms and enduring suffering—how unjust and bitter this was! The ancients said, “The sentence before sound is not transmitted by the thousand sages; the single thread before one's face has never been interrupted through

the ages.” They also said, “Having worn through iron shoes in a fruitless search, one obtains it without spending any effort.” These sayings point to this.

Yet this is only the plain Dharmakāya. One must still polish it diligently and continuously remove habitual tendencies before it can greatly radiate light. When the practice is mature, even in deep sleep the crown of the head is illuminated like the mid-autumn moon. When the radiance is refined and pure, the vast heavenly eye naturally opens wide, and the worlds of the ten directions appear all at once. I enter into others and others enter into me, like Indra’s net, mutually interpenetrating layer upon layer, with inexhaustible wondrous function.

Textual source note. The underlying Chinese string 我入我 is opaque and nonstandard. Publicly available Yuan Yin texts consulted for comparison reproduce the same string, and no verified character variant has been found. The reciprocal English sense “I enter into others and others enter into me” is therefore an explicitly inferred reading from the surrounding Indra’s-net/interpenetration context, not a claimed transparent word-for-word parsing.

Someone may say: “This kind of appearance is what practitioners of Chan or Esoteric Buddhism realize. But Pure Land practitioners who recite the Buddha’s name should not experience this, because their aim is rebirth in the Western Pure Land. In samādhi they should see Amitābha Buddha and the sacred realm of the West. It should not be that there is nothing whatsoever to see. If there is nothing whatsoever to see, how can they be born in the Pure Land?”

The answer is: Have you not seen the previously quoted passage from Master Yinguang on the samādhi of Buddha-recitation? Master Yinguang strongly advocated relying on the Buddha’s compassionate power to welcome and guide one to rebirth in the West. Why, then, did he also say, within the samādhi of Buddha-recitation, that seeing in which nothing is seen is true seeing, and true seeing sees nothing? It is because suchness and Buddha-nature are without shape and without characteristics, unstained by a single dust and not hung with even one thread. As soon as one says it resembles any particular thing, one has already missed it. Therefore the true Buddha is actually beyond words and has no visible shape.

Yet this Buddha-nature without shape is not inert emptiness. Therefore it can manifest appearances and function according to conditions. But because appearances arise according to conditions, they are merely provisional names, not real in themselves. Therefore to see a Buddha with form is not to see the true Buddha. An ancient said, “The enjoyment and emanation bodies are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who speaks the Dharma.” The Lotus Sutra calls them a conjured city, not the treasure-place. If one wishes to be born in the highest level of the highest grade in the Western Pure Land, one must pass beyond the temporary resting place of marks and realize the wondrous essence of the true Buddha, which is without characteristics; only then can one’s wish be fulfilled. Conversely, if one clings to a Buddha with form and a Pure Land with marks, one can only be born in the lowest level of the lowest grade. This is an unalterable truth.

Therefore, when Master Yinguang spoke of the highest state of Buddha-recitation—the samādhi of Buddha-recitation—he also had to say that the seeing in which nothing is seen is true seeing. When one realizes such a profound state, mind and land become one and inseparable: mind is land, and land is mind. Vowing to be born in the West is precisely being born in the Pure Land of one's own mind. Since birth is birthless, why fear that one will not be born in the highest level of the highest grade?

After seeing nature, if one clings rigidly to an empty state or indulges in quiet dwelling and does not know how to function amid circumstances, one is like a poor son who, after obtaining wealth, does not know how to use it and remains no different from a poor person. Moreover, if one does not train amid affairs and circumstances, one will not attain the great samādhi of the perfect interpenetration of principle and phenomena, much less attain the realm of phenomena unobstructedly interpenetrating phenomena and thereby perfectly accomplish the great work of Buddhahood. Therefore one must take the principle one has awakened to and polish it amid affairs and circumstances, wearing away its sharp corners, before attaining perfect wondrousness.

Yet those newly awakened often do not know the method for bringing forth function, and even less do they understand its process. Sometimes, because their strength is temporarily insufficient and they are shaken when encountering affairs, they again doubt whether what they awakened to was correct and so shake the root itself. Bewildered and at a loss, they become very pitiable. I will now select and excerpt the essentials from *The Process of Realizing the Essence and Bringing Forth Function*, written by my late teacher, Venerable Xianglu, to help readers after awakening to develop the function of prajñā and bring the supreme work of the unconditioned to completion. How fortunate this would be!

The wondrous essence of true reality originally has the wondrous function of non-abiding. Students must take the pure and free state they have realized and apply it precisely when human affairs are inverted and confused, transforming existence back into emptiness, transforming inversion into purity, and transforming affliction into freedom. Not only does this extinguish one's own suffering; it can also extinguish the suffering of others. This is called liberating beings.

The deeper one's practice, the more numerous and quicker the stirrings of habit-energy. Students need not be afraid. These are latent seeds naturally surfacing from the field of the eighth consciousness. Although they arise quickly, they also subside quickly. Their arising may be stronger than usual, but each time they arise, they become smaller, shorter, and fewer, and they no longer grow. The deeper one's practice, the greater the courage. If one suddenly meets something frightening, there is only one startle and no further startle. Moreover, the more this strength is used, the stronger it becomes.

The deeper one's practice, the more one may suddenly become forgetful, and then suddenly the memory becomes very strong; day by day it also becomes quicker and sharper. The power

of perception also becomes strong. Often one responds to things without relying on deliberate thought. This is the first sign of penetration. Constantly contemplate what is original and silently accord with it. When habit-energy comes, immediately notice it. Once noticed, it turns empty. At the same time, use *prajñā* to sweep away this emptiness; then use *prajñā* to sweep away this sweeping itself. When one has swept to the point where there is nothing that can be swept, then one accords with what is original and with the meaning of the great emptiness of *prajñā*.

In practice, one must be accurate, fierce, self-examining, willing to wait, impartial, and steady. “Accurate” means clearly seeing the direction, with no doubt or retreat. “Fierce” means restraining oneself without leaving the slightest leniency; with regard to even the smallest fault in oneself, one must not be indulgent. “Self-examining” means constantly turning back and examining oneself. “Waiting” means allowing the necessary time; without a suitable period of time, one’s strength cannot become sufficient. “Impartial” means seeing everything as equal. Whatever obstruction there is arises because the mind is not equal and discriminates gain and loss. Not knowing that dharmas are originally unborn, why worry about gain? Not knowing that dharmas are originally unextinguished, why worry about loss? If one can be impartial, then naturally there is no alarm, fear, or dread, and one enters the realm of freedom in a transcendent way.

People often have notions of time, gain and loss, and success and failure. When all kinds of habitual tendencies arise, one cannot break through them. This shows that meditative stability and wisdom are insufficient; in other words, *prajñā* lacks strength. Therefore one must wait: when the time arrives, the strength will naturally be sufficient. It is like walking on a road: what matters is that the direction is not wrong and that one advances step by step, not whether the pace is fast or slow. “Steady” means being stable like this and never turning back. Apprehending Mind and seeing nature is a matter of ending birth and death throughout immeasurable kalpas—how weighty it is! One absolutely cannot take mere understanding as sufficient. If it is obtained through understanding alone, with no meditative stability at all, then deranged wisdom and inversion arise; this still cannot be called apprehending Mind.

There are seven stages in this process. First, with exceptionally strong wisdom, one sees what is original and thereby attains a small measure of *samādhi*, as in entry through Chan; or, when meditative stability is strong, *prajñā* is activated and one sees what is original, as in entry through the practice of the Heart-Center esoteric Dharma. Second, after seeing it, one must deeply believe without doubt, taking direct acceptance and responsibility as foremost. Third, when one sees that the original nature pervades the Dharma realm, then everything in the Dharma realm without exception is nature. If one speaks of illusion, everything is illusion; if one speaks of truth, everything is truth. Ultimately, true and illusory are both merely provisional names, with no reality of their own. When the mind is not confined by them, this is called non-abiding.

Fourth, because everything is without abiding, although it is empty, it does not fall into annihilation; wondrous function is vividly present. The illusory mind is not nonexistent; this is called non-arising. Fifth, although it is called non-abiding, with regard to good and evil one is not unaware and does not fail to distinguish. One simply distinguishes without abiding and enters the realm of equality and nonduality. Sixth, once the mind is equal, naturally there is no obstruction, fear, or dread, and one is free everywhere. Seventh, strength often advances and retreats, sometimes as samādhi and sometimes as wisdom. Later, samādhi and wisdom are not divided; there is only advance and no retreat. This is truly apprehending Mind in which principle and phenomena perfectly interpenetrate.

After apprehending Mind, the view of self cannot immediately be removed, and habits cannot immediately become pure. When the view of self and habit-energy arise moment by moment, and moment by moment one can turn and transform them, this is truly apprehending Mind. If the power to turn and transform them is small, that is another issue. What is to be feared is only not knowing how to turn them and not knowing how to transform them; then one cannot turn them and cannot transform them. Therefore in studying Buddhism, first is to open up clear knowing, like obtaining wealth; second is to use this knowing skillfully, like using wealth; third is to empty even this knowing; fourth, there is no question of empty or not empty—it is originally thus. It is like a truly wealthy person who forgets that he has much wealth.

Once clear observation arises, habit-energy immediately dissolves. Yet there are differences in how quickly this occurs, and the process unfolds through ten stages. First, circumstances arise and one does not notice. Second, circumstances arise and one notices only afterward, while bringing up that noticing is extremely laborious. Third, when circumstances arise, noticing is no longer difficult. Fourth, circumstances arise and one notices immediately, with only a slight sequence between them. Fifth, circumstances and noticing arise together, though sometimes the noticing is lost. Sixth, they arise together and the noticing is not lost. Seventh, noticing precedes circumstances, though at times it comes afterward, and occasionally one even falls back into forgetting. Eighth, noticing remains continuous and unwavering. Ninth, noticing is not yet pure. Tenth, one is constantly quiescent and constantly illuminating, without abiding even in noticing. Only then is the strength truly sufficient.

It has always been easy to remove large habits and difficult to remove small habits; this is still a matter of not being equal. Therefore there are still results of alarm, fear, and dread. During this process there may be sudden ups and downs, but these should not be called retrogression. In ordinary times one should constantly use the method of reverse contemplation, examining one's own habitual tendencies. Whether good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, whatever is not easy to transform and eliminate belongs to the root of birth and death. One must never stubbornly preserve something because one regards it as good. The more difficult it is to transform and eliminate, the more one must transform and eliminate it. Constantly going against oneself is progress in practice.

Removing habitual tendencies is like waging an inner battle; one must fight a hundred battles before one can overcome them. It is certainly not the practice of a single morning or evening. Only after apprehending Mind does one have the qualification to enter this battle. This is bringing forth function: from small battles to great battles, from small victories to great victories, until one fundamentally defeats the enemy and forever has no future trouble. In practice, one must never suppress or avoid them. For example, the roots of greed and anger must be uprooted and resolved. If one only knows how to guard precepts, samādhi, and wisdom and use them to counteract greed, anger, and delusion, then the two views of good and evil leave traces in the mind. It is like an enemy coming to attack a city: although for a time the enemy cannot enter, the enemy has still not left and may take advantage of an opportunity to enter the city. This is not ultimate.

Therefore do not suppress or avoid them; it is best to eliminate them. When neither side leaves traces and the mind is unstained by anything, enemy and self are transformed together; this is entering great samādhi. When circumstances arise and one pays them no mind, and no thought arises, yet this is not annihilation, that is samādhi in stillness. Facing circumstances without confusion, still responding to them, moving yet unmoving, that is samādhi in movement. When movement and stillness are of one suchness, and there is nothing that is permissible or impermissible, that is great samādhi.

In training the mind, one must train the capacity. This lies in thoroughly understanding the principle of cause and effect. Constantly arouse contemplation. When the practice is mature, great capacity and great function arise. All afflictions arise from emotional attachment and fixed views. Emotional attachment is self-love; fixed views are self-grasping. When emotional attachment and fixed views become entrenched, they become obscurations. The capacity to contemplate causes and comprehend results is then not nimble; this is why the function of capacity does not arise. Those who attain knowledge of others' minds rely entirely on the nimbleness and speed of this capacity to contemplate causes and comprehend results. Therefore, with principle and phenomena fully understood, they do not need to deliberate; everything is vividly apparent. This depends entirely on samādhi and wisdom assisting each other and on the maturity of the practice. This is spiritual power; there is no special marvel to seek.

Being willing to do what one disdains doing, willing to say what one does not want to say, and willing to associate with those one does not want to meet—then one is not far from the light of impartial wisdom. Seeing the faults of others not only makes it difficult to enter nonduality; it also obstructs one's own path to sagehood and gives rise to arrogance. This is what practitioners of the Way most need to avoid. When practice becomes intensely urgent, there will inevitably be a period when one is out of step with worldly conventions and ordinary human relations. Therefore it is said to be like mourning for one's parents. When the urgency of practice reaches an extreme, one is bound to lose some etiquette and deportment. People

often do not understand, and call it arrogance and self-importance, or suspect it to be madness. This is a process everyone must go through and is difficult to explain.

When one's effort is suddenly diligent and suddenly lazy, seeming to advance and seeming to retreat, do not become suspicious or apprehensive. This is the time when practice is advancing. Do not be impatient and despondent. Liking stillness and disliking disturbance is precisely inequality; one must never do this. One should know that stillness and disturbance are discriminations of one's own mind and have nothing to do with circumstances. For a practitioner to praise himself and criticize others, suppress others and magnify himself, is most shameful and laughable. Be careful not to be ridiculed by those who know.

One should not make vows carelessly, because making vows is easy while carrying them out is hard. A vow should be vast and firm, and one's own mind must not be mixed with the slightest trace of emotional attachment or fixed views. Among the eight winds, four are easy to guard against and four are difficult to defend against. Adverse ones are easy to recognize; favorable ones often draw one into their trap without one knowing. Therefore, when something accords with one's wishes and satisfies one's intent, one must be even more alert, guarding against being swept up in favorable circumstances. There is nothing strange or extraordinary here; just remove habits and do not construe any such experience as sagely realization. So-called mysterious and wondrous spiritual transformations are also ordinary and commonplace. Because one rarely sees them, one finds them strange, takes them as mysterious, forgets what is original, and enters a demon path—how regrettable!

In practice, do not compare yourself with others. Instead, quietly examine and reflect on yourself. Practice methods are temporary expedients; do not cling to the Dharma. Greed for Dharma is the same as greed for fame and profit: it is the same birth and death. What is called becoming a Buddha means becoming as empty of self-nature as the Buddha. When the mind has something it clings to, it immediately loses what is original and departs from the Buddha's state; therefore one should be alert at every moment.

Removing habits also depends on causes and conditions, so there are differences in slowness and speed. After apprehending Mind, preserve and continue closely—by “preserve and continue,” do not press the mind down so that it cannot arise; it is enough to be able to transform without abiding. After a suitable period of time, there is the wonder of habits suddenly disappearing. All the myriad sufferings of beings come only from one word: disorder. Disorder arises from inferential cognition. For a person who has seen nature, seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing are clear and distinct. When thought does not move and mind faces objects, it is direct perception. When thought moves and distinguishes, it moves yet is unmoving; although inferential cognition functions, direct perception remains present. To remain constantly like this is called seamless continuity.

The scope of one's skillful means varies with the strength of one's wisdom. That strength, in turn, depends on whether contemplation is complete and all-encompassing. When

contemplation is complete, it is unobstructed; when it is unobstructed, it is complete. Here, “unobstructed” means that the mind itself is without obstruction. Obstruction means the mind obstructing itself. When the mind is luminous, complete, and unconfused, it is unobstructed. This is called unobstructed wisdom, arising from the Great Compassionate Heart Dhāraṇī. Dhāraṇī is mind at its utmost emptiness and utmost subtlety.

The method for training the mind is simply to endure and pass through what is obstructive. For example, no habit has any fixed definition, and originally there is nothing that simply must be a certain way. The suffering lies in having formed habits oneself and then insisting that unless things are like this, they will not do. Thus one cannot bear to go against oneself, and this is how obstruction is established. If one can bear it and pass through it, then there is no obstruction, because originally there is no obstruction. Take concerns about saving face: they are inherently illusory and unreal. At worst, one merely loses an illusory reputation. See whether this truly obstructs you; it brings only temporary discomfort. Once one overcomes it, the unobstructed wisdom thus gained could not be bought with ten thousand pieces of gold.

Therefore studying Buddhism is a matter for a great person. One must be able to endure and able to let go. Do not drift along with worldly conventions, and do not oppose worldly conventions either. Being in harmony while not being the same is precisely transcending the ordinary and entering sagehood. The appearances that arise in dreams can be used to examine the depth or shallowness of one’s practice. When one’s practice becomes close and intense, the mind is reflected in dreams. If one can be in command within a dream, that is proof that one will not enter the three evil destinies. Those who enter the three evil destinies must do so because the mind has lost its master. They have the power of following but no power of mastery; following karma high and low, they enter without realizing it. Moreover, if there is one part strength in a dream, there must be ten parts strength when awake. As for the relationship between mind and body, dreaming is half-separation; death is full separation. Death and dream are not greatly different.

All wondrous function is not apart from worldly knowing. Therefore, after apprehending Mind and seeing nature, one must pay close attention everywhere to human relations and worldly affairs, practicing until one is thoroughly versed in them, and using this engagement to remove habitual tendencies. When one is familiar with the principle of cause and effect, one can then gain foresight and exercise great capacity and function. The Commentary on the Chapter on Abiding Mind in the Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: “When a bodhisattva first clarifies the Way, in that very life he attains the samādhi of removing obscurations. He abides together with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, manifests the five superknowledges, obtains the dhāraṇī that knows the languages of all beings, can know all the mental activities of all beings, performs all the activities of the Buddhas and broadly liberates beings,” and so on.

“Clarifying the Way” means seeing nature and becoming Buddha. “Removing obscurations” means removing habits. Only when habits are pure do the five superknowledges unfold; they cannot be sought beforehand. After obtaining spiritual powers, one uses knowledge of others’

minds as a skillful means to liberate beings. This is the process of realizing the essence and bringing forth function. One who enters otherwise than by this path is an outsider to the Way.

After clarifying the Way, although the five superknowledges may not be fully manifest all at once, one is already not the same as ordinary people. Because one has realized the root, the removal of obscurations and the manifestation of spiritual powers both begin to unfold at the same time; only their strength is still slight. After awakening, one is still the same as before awakening; until one reaches plainness, the furnace flame cannot burn pure blue. This is what is called great wisdom seeming like foolishness: all day long one seems like an idiot or a fool, and yet the practice is continuous and seamless throughout.

What has been recorded above is truly a bridge to awakening the wondrous function of prajñā after apprehending Mind and seeing nature. If students can have faith in it and enter it without doubt, then after realizing the essence, moment by moment they should raise and sharpen the matter, training themselves amid human relations and worldly affairs, deeply understanding the mental conduct of beings, and becoming familiar with the principle of cause and effect. Then obscurations will be removed, the five superknowledges will arise, and great capacity and great function will unfold.

8E. 归宿问题 / The Question of Where One Returns

E. The Question of Where One Returns. A visitor asked: after a person who has apprehended Mind and seen nature passes away, where does that person return? Others have asked: when the Sixth Patriarch was about to pass away, he said, “I myself know where I am going.” Yet he did not state that place clearly. Was this because he knew but did not say, or because he did not know and therefore did not say?

Where one is reborn at the end of life is indeed a major and critical question for practitioners. If it is not clarified, it will greatly obstruct the course of practice and make the eventual attainment of fruition unnecessarily circuitous.

Generally speaking, countless sentient beings rise and sink through the six paths, turning in saṃsāra without cease, being born and dying without knowing why. Now that one has awakened, recognized one’s own original mind, and seen one’s own original nature, one should understand from where birth comes and to where death returns. If one is still muddled and does not know, would this not be arrogant self-deception, taking non-awakening to be awakening?

Yet what are called birth, death, coming, and going are spoken of for deluded people when they cling to marks. For an awakened person, once the correct eye is opened and true mind is thoroughly seen, the three realms and six paths are not truly existent; the pure lands of the ten directions are like the moon reflected in water. Since it is originally unborn, how could there be extinction? Since it is originally undying, how could there be birth? Since birth and extinction are absent, how could there be coming and going? How could there further be a location?

After the Sixth Patriarch awakened, he said, “Who would have thought that self-nature is originally pure? Who would have thought that self-nature neither arises nor ceases? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally complete in itself? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally unmoving? Who would have thought that self-nature can give rise to the myriad dharmas?” What is called apprehending Mind and seeing nature is precisely seeing this real nature of true emptiness, marvelous presence: unmoving and unshaken, not coming and not going, unborn and undying, yet able to manifest appearances according to conditions and give rise to every kind of wondrous function. Since one has clearly seen that the self-nature is unborn and undying, not coming and not going, why would one then grasp at marks of coming and going, birth and death, and speak of some place of return? Therefore, if one asserts a real end of life and a real rebirth, then in truth one has not awakened and seen nature.

When the Sixth Patriarch said, “I myself know where I am going,” he was picking up yellow leaves to stop a child from crying. When he did not explicitly state a destination, it was because in truth there is no destination. This nature is like empty space; how could empty space have a place to which it returns? If one sees that there is a place to go, then one has

made it into something real and clung to marks. Once one makes it real and clings to marks, birth and death are not ended. With nowhere to go, one can go everywhere; and although one can go everywhere, in truth one has never gone. Thus return is precisely no-return, and no-return is precisely return. Everywhere is a place of return; wherever one goes is return.

Furthermore, because true emptiness is also marvelous presence, it is not inert emptiness; and because marvelous presence is also true emptiness, it is not delusive existence. Therefore one who thoroughly awakens to the mind-nature integrates form and emptiness and unites essence and function. One neither inclines toward emptiness nor clings to existence. In what is without birth and death, one may freely manifest birth and death: although there is birth, it is unborn; although it is unborn, there is nothing that is not born. Therefore, in the heavens above and the earth below, in the four modes of birth and six paths, and even in the pure lands of the ten directions, there is nowhere one cannot be born. Where there is no coming or going, one may still rise and sink, manifesting everywhere while in truth there is no coming or going; though there is no coming or going, one comes and goes as usual. This is not a matter of becoming dry and lifeless, sitting behind the Black Mountain and calling that “no birth, no death, no coming, and no going.”

Layman Pang’s Song of the Unborn says: “There is a son who does not marry; there is a daughter who does not wed. The whole family, round and complete, together speaks of the unborn.” A Chan master responded: “There is no son who can marry; there is no daughter who can wed. The great assembly, round and complete, what talk is there of the unborn?” I would try responding: “There is a son, and he also marries; there is a daughter, and she also weds. Sons and grandsons continue without end: this is speaking of the unborn.” Taken together, these three verses exactly reveal the nature of true emptiness, marvelous presence: unborn and nothing not born, nowhere present and nowhere not present.

A person who has truly seen nature follows conditions freely and does not cling to marks in the slightest. There is no distinction between purity and defilement, ordinary beings and sages, or between the four modes of birth and the six paths. What are called birth and death, coming and going, are all the samādhi of play; they are not established as truly existent. Since this is so, what need is there to point to an actual destination?

For example, a monk asked Changsha, “After Nanquan passed away, where did he go?” Changsha said, “At the eastern house he becomes a donkey; at the western house he becomes a horse.” Another monk asked, “After Nanquan passed away, where did he go?” Changsha said, “If you want to ride, then ride; if you want to dismount, then dismount.” Another monk asked, “After Nanquan passed away, where did he go?” Changsha again said, “When Shitou was a novice, he visited the Sixth Patriarch.” When asked again, he said, “Let him think it through.” Later the monk asked three more times, and Changsha remained silent three times. These replies praise the wondrous nature of suchness as appearing and disappearing in mysterious ways, inconceivable and impossible to get hold of anywhere! Sansheng, a Dharma heir of Master Linji, hearing this, said, “Changsha’s answers can be called unprecedented before or

since, rarely heard in ancient or modern times.” From this one can see that the wondrous nature of numinous knowing is present everywhere. We need only put everything down, abide nowhere in the slightest, and not seek any fixed place where it resides. Then it is everywhere, and wherever one dwells one remains joyful.

However, people who have clearly awakened to the self-nature, if old habits are deeply ingrained, and if in daily functioning they cannot be unconstrained by favorable and adverse conditions and unstained by sounds and forms, have not ended fragmentary birth-and-death. They still cannot roam freely and at ease as described above. They still need seven or three round trips between the human and heavenly realms before gaining freedom. On this point, according to the depth or shallowness of one’s practice, Chan Master Guifeng distinguished three kinds of freedom in order to encourage students to make vigorous effort. First, when delusive thoughts arise and one does not follow them at all, then at the end of life karma naturally cannot bind one; even if there is an intermediate state, one is free to go wherever one wishes; in heaven or among humans, one may take rebirth as one chooses. This is freedom in taking birth. Second, if thoughts of attachment and aversion have already been extinguished, one no longer takes on a body subject to fragmentary birth-and-death and can naturally turn a short lifespan into a long one and a coarse body into a subtle one. This is freedom through transformation. Third, if the entire subtle stream is completely brought to quiescent extinction and only the great wisdom of complete awakening remains brilliantly clear, one can manifest hundreds of thousands of billions of nirmāṇakāyas according to conditions, liberating beings with affinity. One is then called a Buddha. This is ultimate freedom.

Fellow practitioners, after clearly awakening to the original nature, we should guard and preserve it strictly, strive to advance, and diligently and unceasingly exhaust the present karmic stream of consciousness, so as to reach ultimate freedom and attain the final fruition. We must never be satisfied with a little, stop progressing, and drift downward. If our strength falls short and conditions do not come together, we should at least strive to attain freedom through transformation. If even this cannot be done, then we can only make vows for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Inner Court of Tuṣita, or other pure Buddha-lands, so as to end the two kinds of birth and death and realize the true and constant. Since the Ming dynasty, many Chan masters, such as Lianchi and Chewu, made vows after awakening to be reborn in the Western Pure Land; perhaps this was precisely because they could not attain freedom through transformation and therefore had to vow for rebirth in a pure land.

Those who practice the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma, if they are concerned that they may not reach complete accomplishment in this lifetime, recite Maitreya Bodhisattva’s root mantra forty-nine times each day in addition to their regular Dharma practice. This lays the foundation for future rebirth in Tuṣita and helps ensure progress without regression. They, too, have taken great pains over this.

Of course, great-hearted ordinary beings, for the sake of liberating beings, do not fear birth and death. They enter the three evil paths as readily as they would enter the four realms of sages, without the slightest reluctance. Such people are truly great heroes whose lofty resolve soars to the clouds; they are revered by humans and gods and protected by Buddhas and bodhisattvas. They do not fall under the case discussed here.

8F. 结论 / Conclusion

F. Conclusion. Above, in a loose and rambling way, I have discussed the meaning of apprehending Mind and seeing nature and the methods of realizing it. I have also introduced expedients for genuine practice after awakening, and further restated the process of realizing the essence and bringing forth function, while also excerpting the writings of eminent masters of ancient and recent times. It seems that the Dharma gate of apprehending Mind and seeing nature, sudden awakening and gradual practice, and accomplishing the matter in one lifetime has already been described in exhaustive detail. But in the final analysis, all of this is only useless talk that puts living beings through needless difficulty—not worth mentioning and entirely superfluous. Since all beings are originally Buddhas, there is no need to practice and no need to realize. Their wondrous function is originally boundless and their spiritual penetrations unobstructed. If one simply functions naturally—putting on clothes and eating, responding to conditions and dealing with things—without grasping or rejecting, without attachment or seeking, one is then a Buddha of suchness.

Patriarch Linji said: “Right now before you, this clearly distinct, solitary illumination without shape or characteristics is the living Buddha and living patriarch.” That is, before one’s eyes there is a clarity without shape and without characteristics, clear as space, distinct and uninterrupted, utterly without counterpart. He also said: “Your one thought of pure mind-light is the Dharmakāya Buddha; your one thought of non-discriminating mind-light is the Saṃbhogakāya Buddha; your one thought of non-differentiating mind-light is the Nirmāṇakāya Buddha.” He further said: “In this mountain monk’s view, it is no different from Śākyamuni. In all the many daily functions, what is lacking? The numinous light of the six sense pathways—that is, the functioning of the six faculties—has never ceased. If this is not Buddha, what is it?”

If, in all affairs and conditions, we can have no leaning toward and no turning away, no grasping and no rejecting, responding with ease, free in granting and taking away, then joking, laughter, anger, and scolding are all spiritual penetration and wondrous function; walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all the ocean-seal radiating light. What is called spiritual means that whatever is done is the numinous light of true mind in operation: all appearances arise from it, and all undertakings are accomplished through it. What is called penetration means unobstructed and unhindered, unstuck and unblocked; amid circumstances there is neither aversion nor attachment, neither joy nor worry. If it is like this, body and mind are light and at ease, one transcends the burden of dust, one is neither mind nor Buddha, eats when hungry and sleeps when tired. What else is there to practice?

Unfortunately, sentient beings lack the eye to see clearly. They either chase appearances and pursue things, clinging to marks and seeking outwardly, or else are heavy with delusive thinking and deeply entrenched in emotional attachment and fixed views. Because of this, they cause all the Buddhas to bear blame, appear in the world, talk on and on, explain this and that, wade into the muddy waters of convention, and lower themselves into provisional

teaching. This went so far that Yunmen spoke of clubbing the Buddha to death and feeding him to the dogs, all to bring peace to the whole world. Yet the Buddhas' compassion is profound and urgent. They are not afraid of carrying the blame and do not fear being beaten to death; they still come in vast procession, giving their heads, eyes, bones, and marrow for living beings. Where there was no opening from which to speak, they provisionally taught the twelve divisions of scripture; where there was no place to lay a hand, they established the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates. This was only so that we would awaken from the deluded dream, find our way home, and recover the original face. They have gone to great pains!

If, after this detailed exposition, we still cannot become certain, still do not dare to affirm that "one's own mind is Buddha," or even do not understand that putting on clothes and eating is itself spiritual penetration and wondrous function, and instead cling to marvels, mysteries, and special powers, then we must not only diligently practice Buddha-recitation and Chan investigation, but also all the more reverently practice the esoteric Dharma, so that wisdom arises from samādhi and one awakens to what is original. Only then can we advance to guarding and sustaining the realization, removing habits, sitting steadily at home, and ending birth and death. We must never blindly proclaim no-practice, no-attainment, and no-realization, thereby delaying ourselves for life and bringing harm into future generations. Still less should we fear difficulty, fail to advance, and lose the good opportunity.

What are called spiritual penetrations and transformations are in fact ordinary, because they are wondrous functions inherent in original nature; they do not come from outside. Ordinarily these functions remain unmanifest because they are obstructed by delusive thought. Now, once delusion is exhausted and they manifest, people see little and therefore find much strange, thinking them marvelous and unfathomable. In fact, everyone originally has them and everyone is capable of them, just as everyone can put on clothes and eat. What is so extraordinary? The ancients said that entering the three evil paths is no different from entering the four realms of sages; the ten Dharma realms are all the same spiritual penetration and transformation. What is there to prize, and what is there to find strange? Moreover, once one clings to the strange and marvelous, one enters the path of Māra. This too must be carefully guarded against.

As for doing the practice of no-thought, one must never press thoughts down so they do not arise. Rather, when thoughts arise, do not follow them, do not climb onto them, and do not dwell on the marks of whatever appears. Human beings are not wood or stone; how could they have no thoughts? Becoming a Buddha means great capacity and great function, an awakened one who is vital, lucid, and utterly free; how could such a one not give rise to thoughts? Therefore the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment teaches: "At all times, do not give rise to delusive thoughts, yet also do not extinguish delusive minds." The Diamond Sūtra says: "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind." The Sixth Patriarch's verse countering Wolun's mind-extinguishing verse also says: "Huineng has no skill; he does not cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind arises repeatedly; how could bodhi grow?"

Therefore we need only keep the mind empty at all times. Toward all affairs and things there is no grasping and no rejecting, without arousing attachment-laden thought. Although we respond to conditions and handle things, we do not see a mind arising to respond; when the matter is finished, not the slightest trace of mental contrivance remains. Thus all day long one moves and has never moved; all day long thoughts arise and not one thought has arisen. Chan Master Farong's Song of No-Mind says: "Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning; no-mind is precisely functioning, and constant functioning is precisely no-mind." This is truly the best portrait of no-mind.

Furthermore, doing the practice of no-thought does not mean gradually lengthening the empty, thought-free interval after the previous thought has ceased and before the next thought arises, taking that as progress—for example, today having no-thought for only one minute and then slowly extending it to five minutes, ten minutes, one hour, or twenty-four hours, as if that were success. You should know that no-thought is living and vibrant; it is not rigid like a block of wood or stone. A monk asked Zhaozhou, "What is no-thought?" Zhaozhou said, "Playing ball on swift water." Later someone added a phrase: "Thought after thought does not remain." Thus what is called no-thought does not mean that no thought ever arises; rather, thoughts cease as they arise, without the slightest trace of abiding in marks. Therefore, as explained above, precisely while thoughts arise in response to conditions, one does not see thoughts arising. Since there is no arising, how could there be ceasing? Because there is no arising and ceasing, it is called no-thought. When one is not responding to conditions and dealing with things, even if not a single thought arises, it is still only like walking on a tiger's tail or spring ice: when conditions are met, thought arises. It is not the lifeless stillness and unknowing of wood and stone.

Someone may ask: "After today's detailed explanation, I deeply trust that the empty, quiescent numinous knowing when not a single thought arises is our true nature. Yet why can I still not penetrate all the public cases of the Chan school?"

The answer is: there is nothing especially strange about Chan public cases. They merely test whether students can avoid being fooled and avoid being carried away by circumstances; whether they can avoid establishing views and being deceived by words and phrases; and whether they can avoid falling into annihilation while their capacity and function remain free and abundant. Students only need to recognize the root, then guard and sustain it continuously. Prajñā will naturally unfold day by day; the light of wisdom will naturally become fuller and rounder day by day. There is no worry that they will not understand these sayings. As it is said, "Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches. Only fear that you have not become a Buddha; do not worry that a Buddha will not understand words." The sayings of the Chan school are not deliberately set up as strange marvels or used to play with mystery. They are used to test the sharpness or dullness of a student's capacity, and to observe the strength of one's daily realization and one's care for what is original.

Therefore, if our daily training has become deep and our mind is like great space, we will not be fooled by such testing situations. At all times and in all places the mind is empty and without abiding, so its response to circumstances is naturally swift. Any word, phrase, or public case—once it passes before the eyes, one immediately grasps its point. For example, Chan Master Weishan Lingyou instructed the assembly: “After this old monk’s hundred years are done, I will be reborn as a water buffalo in a donor’s house at the foot of the mountain. On its right flank will be written: ‘Monk So-and-so of Weishan.’ If you call me the monk of Weishan, it is still a water buffalo. If you call me a water buffalo, it is still the monk of Weishan. What will you call me?” This uses the two labels—water buffalo and monk of Weishan—to test your eye and see whether you are taken in. If your mind is not empty and pure, and you operate within labels and concepts, you will certainly be deceived by his “buffalo” and “monk” and will form views based on those labels and concepts. Then you have been taken in by the setup. Therefore one must answer by a method of release, leaving “buffalo” and “monk” behind; only then is there a way out. For what are called monk and buffalo are nothing but temporary provisional appearances and provisional names. From the standpoint of true nature, where is there any buffalo or monk? Thus, looking from the true, not a single thing is established, and one passes through the encirclement.

At that time no one in Weishan’s assembly could answer. Later a senior monk answered very well. He said, “The master has no other name.” Though he did not speak of name, he did not leave name. He both said that originally there is no name and yet that names can be freely given. He neither clung to monk and buffalo nor left monk and buffalo. He both broke through names and concepts to reveal suchness, and also showed that suchness is not apart from these names and concepts. This is indeed a wonderful phrase with a double meaning. Yet today we too need not let the ancients alone have the beauty. We can add another phrase to answer the ancients. Because the wondrous function of the original nature is boundless, it can be turned and handled freely in every direction, described as one wishes, and need not be confined to one pattern. The answer above was spoken from the standpoint of essence. Now we may instead answer from function: “Idle names have always filled the five lakes.” Do you understand? Say, is this the same as the previous phrase or different?

Again, when Chan Master Gaofeng asked students, “Why does a great practitioner who trains the mind not observe the Vinaya?” this was also to test whether students were bound by names and concepts. In the same way, one need only answer in a way that releases one from the bind: “Because he does not know good from bad!” Since Buddha-nature is pure and unstained, not hung with a single thread, without good and without evil, what precepts or no-precepts, wisdom or no-wisdom could there be? Speaking of precepts, speaking of samādhi, and speaking of wisdom are all like cutting into healthy flesh and making a wound—merely causing oneself needless toil.

Furthermore, even if one’s speech is smooth and one’s responses are mysterious, one must still examine carefully before knowing whether there is true awakening. Some Chan students

have read a few public cases in books or heard a few turning phrases from other people. They steal them as their own and toss them around with the tongue. If occasionally they happen to match with one fitting phrase, others take them to have already awakened. That is a great mistake.

For example, Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun ascended the hall and instructed the assembly: “If one must speak of this matter, it is like an ancient mirror: when a barbarian comes, a barbarian appears; when a Han person comes, a Han person appears.” Xuansha came forward and asked, “What about when a mirror comes?” The master said, “Barbarian and Han are both hidden.” Xuansha said, “The master has not yet gained firm footing!” This was not approving Xuefeng. Recently a Chan investigator said, “Why not answer him: ‘Break the mirror and meet!’” The phrase is also quite fine. But one must examine whether the person has genuine view. I therefore pressed him, asking, “Once the mirror is broken, how do you meet?” He was immediately speechless and could not answer. From this one can see that such matching phrases did not flow from his own breast, but were hearsay obtained from outside. This is what Chan Master Guizong called “toad Chan”—it can only jump once. The ancients said, “One fitting phrase becomes a stake for tethering donkeys for ten thousand generations.” How could one not be afraid?

Again, at Tiantong Monastery, Chan Master Miyun Wu, at the winter solstice, ordered his attendant to take a padded robe to a senior monk living in a thatched hut so he could keep warm. The senior monk said to the attendant, “This old monk already has the robe he was born in; I do not need winter clothing.” The attendant returned and reported this to Miyun Wu. Wu said, “This monk seems to have had some awakening, but I fear it is not genuine. Test him further by pressing him on his own words.” He therefore told the attendant to ask him again: “Before your mother gave birth to you, what clothes did you wear?” The senior monk could not answer. Wu told him to investigate this saying. Three years later the monk passed away, without having given an answer. At the cremation there were countless relics, and the assembly was astonished. Wu said, “Ten bushels of relics are not worth a single turning phrase. Try answering on his behalf.” Everyone was silent. This public case shows that one similar-sounding phrase is not true awakening, and relics after cremation are not realization of the Way. One must truly recognize one’s own original mind and see one’s own original nature. Then one is like a gourd pressed on the surface of water: touch it and it turns over, perfectly unobstructed, responsive, and free. To repay readers and settle this public case, I do not mind exposing my ugliness in broad daylight and will put forth a phrase on his behalf. When asked, “Before your mother gave birth to you, what clothes did you wear?” just say to him: “No sooner have the tender peach and plum blossoms faded than fresh chrysanthemum and winter-plum blossoms appear.” This also spares Master Wu the trouble of testing his depth once more.

We must not pose as people who understand after gaining only a partial intellectual grasp of the principle, then become pleased with ourselves and take it for awakening to the Way. We

must practice earnestly, making it steady and continuous. Even if, for a time, we do not understand these public cases, that is not especially important. As long as we recognize what is original with genuine clarity, protect and sustain it strictly, keep mind after mind not different and thought after thought without deviation, diligently remove delusive habits, and transform ourselves, then within three or five years we will certainly be able to “shed the skin completely, revealing only the one reality.” Then, as for these old monks’ tongues, there will be no worry that they cannot be pierced seven times and eight times; however one turns and handles them, all will become wondrous truth. All such sayings and all spiritual penetrations and wondrous functions are nothing but idle furnishings within one’s own self-nature mind. What is there in them to find extraordinary or to rely on? Moreover, one who has truly reached the culmination returns to no-attainment. As it is said, there is no Buddha and no sentient being, no realization and no attainment. If there is even the slightest marvel or the slightest supernatural strangeness, then one is clinging to an experience. Not only will one be unable to become a Buddha; one may well become a demon. Unfortunately, nowadays even some well-known people are attached to spiritual powers and functions, and their minds are not peaceful and pure. When commenting on people ancient and modern, they either say that someone had great spiritual powers or that someone had no ability, but they do not point out where those people were stuck and attached, so later students can know how to advance and be encouraged. This shows precisely that they still have something they value and have fallen into a rut. How could this not move one to endless sighs?

For the sake of helping later students distinguish true mind from deluded mind, know how to advance bravely and vigorously, and avoid mistakenly entering a wrong path, I will further excerpt the section on distinguishing true mind from deluded mind from Chan Master Zhina’s Straight Talk on True Mind.

Editorial source note. The controlling Chinese here prints 知衲禅师 as the author of Straight Talk on True Mind, hence the source-faithful “Chan Master Zhina” above. The work has traditionally been attributed to Jinul/Chinul (知訥, 1158–1210), but modern scholarship has questioned that attribution; influential studies argue for the Jurchen Chan monk Zhengyan (政言, d. ca. 1184–1185), while other scholars continue to defend the traditional attribution. The source’s differing name-form is therefore recorded without silently replacing it with a bibliographic certainty that scholarship itself does not possess.

“Someone asked: When true mind and deluded mind face objects, how are they distinguished? The answer: When deluded mind faces objects, it knows through objectifying cognition; toward favorable and adverse circumstances it gives rise to greed and anger, and toward neutral circumstances it gives rise to delusion. Since greed, anger, and delusion, the three poisons, arise in relation to circumstances, this is enough to show that it is deluded mind. True mind, however, knows without objectifying cognition. Because it illuminates impartially and comprehensively, it differs from grass and trees; because it does not give rise to aversion or attachment, it differs from deluded mind. Facing circumstances with empty clarity, neither

averse nor attached, it knows without objectifying cognition—this is true mind. Therefore the Zhao Lun says: The mind of the sage is subtle and wondrous, without characteristics; it cannot be considered existent. Its functioning never rests; it cannot be considered nonexistent. Because it is not existent, it knows and yet is without knowing; because it is not nonexistent, it is without knowing and yet knows. Thus non-knowing is itself knowing; there is no basis for saying that it differs from the mind of a sage.”

“Again, deluded mind clings to existence when in existence and clings to nonexistence when in nonexistence. It always remains on the two sides and does not know the middle way. Yongjia said: ‘Reject deluded mind and take true principle; the mind of rejecting and taking becomes clever falsity. Students who fail to understand take this as practice; truly they mistake a thief for their son.’ If it is true mind, it dwells in existence and nonexistence without falling into existence and nonexistence; it always abides in the middle way. Therefore the patriarchs said: ‘Do not pursue conditioned existence; do not settle into an acceptance of emptiness. With an even, open mind, all traces naturally fade away.’ The Zhao Lun says: Thus the sage dwells in existence yet is not existent, and abides in nonexistence yet is not nonexistent. Although he does not take up existence and nonexistence, he also does not reject existence and nonexistence. Therefore he harmonizes his light and mixes with the dust, moves through the five destinies, goes in quiescence and comes in serenity, serene in non-action, yet leaving nothing undone.”

“Again, true mind is ordinary mind, while deluded mind is not ordinary mind. Someone asked: What is ordinary mind? The answer: Everyone has one point of numinous clarity, clear like empty space and pervading everywhere. In relation to worldly affairs it is provisionally called principle-nature; in relation to deluded consciousness it is provisionally called true mind. It has not the slightest discrimination and is not deluded in meeting events; it has not one thought of grasping or rejecting, and it responds fully to whatever it encounters. It does not shift with the myriad circumstances. Even if it follows the stream and attains the wondrous, it does not depart from the limpid clarity of this very place. Seek, and you know; do you not see? This is true mind. Someone asked: What is not ordinary mind? The answer: Distinctions such as ordinary beings and sages, defilement and purity, annihilation and permanence, birth and death, movement and stillness, going and coming, good and ugly, beautiful and evil, up to the ten thousand distinctions and differences, are all called nonordinary circumstances. When the mind arises and ceases in accordance with such nonordinary circumstances, in contrast to the ordinary true mind mentioned before, it is called nonordinary deluded mind. Someone asked: Does true mind, being ordinary, not arise? The answer: True mind sometimes functions, but it does not arise by pursuing objects. It is simply wondrous function and play, not deluded about cause and effect.”

May students give this their careful attention three times over.

Finally, I must offer students one more word of loyal advice. After we recognize true mind and realize what is original, we still need to practice all good deeds. First, this polishes our own

habits and increases the light of wisdom. Second, it accumulates merit and virtue as the provisions for becoming a Buddha. Although our suchness is pure in its essential nature, beginningless habits and stains from vast kalpas have not yet been removed. Without using various expedients for repeated cultivation, the afflictions cannot become pure. And since these afflictive stains pervade all places, one must practice all wholesome deeds as the remedy. Furthermore, the Buddha is the Honored One complete in both wisdom and merit; only when both are perfectly complete can one become a Buddha. If one has wisdom but no merit, one is merely an arhat and cannot become a Buddha. Therefore one must broadly practice all goodness and accumulate merit and virtue. Never rely complacently on innate purity, neglect wholesome deeds, become lazy, mistakenly fall into evil paths, and make a great error.

Yet when doing good, one must accord with no-mind and not grasp at blessings and rewards. If one grasps at blessings, one falls into the human and heavenly rewards of ordinary beings; it is difficult to realize suchness and one does not leave birth and death. If one accords with no-mind, then this becomes an expedient for becoming a Buddha. One can both transcend birth and death and also possess vast blessed conditions. The Diamond Sūtra says: “When a bodhisattva gives without abiding in marks, the merit and virtue are inconceivable.” These words are worth more than a thousand pieces of gold.

At the end, in a playful mood, I composed another ci poem to the tune “Treading on Grass,” harmonizing the “Chenzhou Inn” poems of Qin Guan and Tao Zhu, to conclude this article. In former days Chenzhou’s surroundings were desolate and sparsely populated, and it was a place of demotion and exile. Because Shaoyou was banished there over the dispute about political reforms, he was dejected and wounded in spirit; his poem therefore has much feeling of sorrow, grief, longing for the past, and remembering old friends. Tao’s poem, however, was written after Chenzhou had already been built up with flourishing vitality, developed industry, and pleasant surroundings; his heart was open and bright, so he reversed the intention and harmonized with it. Therefore the poem is bold, clear, crisp, and varied. Both poems appeared in newspapers and for a time became a much-talked-of literary event. Now I combine the meanings of both poems and harmonize with them once more, to show that Buddhadharma is not apart from worldly dharmas and that worldly dharmas themselves are Buddhadharma. I use this to help you all train amid circumstances, remove habitual obstructions, fully realize bodhi, and radiate great brilliance in worldly dharmas. Where I fall short, I ask readers to correct me generously.

Mist veils the towers; green floods the creek crossing.

The Peach-Blossom Spring is not apart from ordinary places.

Circumstances themselves are neither good nor bad; it is the mind that makes distinctions.

In spontaneous ease, do not set up conceptual views.

A bridge leaps like a long rainbow; fish carry letters.

The scenery is originally beyond all counting.

Following conditions, free and open, let sinking and floating be;
Gladly become spring mud to protect the fragrant blossoms.

Writing to this point, I could not help bursting into laughter. Suddenly I heard someone say, "What are you laughing at? Are you not afraid that once your mouth opens you will be unable to close it?" I gave a stern shout and said: "Who has seen my mouth open?" Precisely:

Having spoken all the feelings of clouded mountains and ocean moon,
The lips have not moved and the mind has not stirred.
The jade rabbit carries a fetus; the clam holds the moon.
The clay ox enters the sea; the wooden dragon chants.

Part III — Questions and Answers on Practice

A sustained question-and-answer corpus on practice, realization, doctrine, and the integration of methods.

9. 佛法修证心要问答集 / Questions and Answers on the Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization

9A. 一、教理（一）佛学常识 / Part One: Doctrine—(1) Basic Buddhist Knowledge

Chinese source: 《佛法修证心要问答集》

Questions and Answers on the Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization. On September 9, 1999, Master Yuan Yin entrusted Dharma Master Wude to gather and compile these materials.

The Buddhadharma has immeasurable Dharma-gates. They guide practitioners to turn away from sense objects and accord with awakening, to apprehend Mind and see nature, and then, on the basis of awakening, to practice: sweeping away accumulated habits, ending birth and death, and accomplishing bodhi.

The Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma is an esoteric vehicle without visualization that arose in the 1920s. It was first transmitted to the world by Ācārya Dayu, whom people respectfully call the First Patriarch. It was then transmitted to Master Wang Xianglu, revered as the Second Patriarch, and in the third generation to Yuan Yin Lao Ren (Layman Li Zhongding), revered as the Third Patriarch. This Dharma has simple ritual forms and convenient methods of practice. Through a practice that brings the three mysteries into accord, sense faculties and sense objects fall away, and one enters the samādhi of self-nature—a state free of marks, nonabiding, and no-thought. It is a distinctive superior practice within the esoteric vehicle without visualization.

Yuan Yin Lao Ren entered esoteric practice from Chan. With deep great compassion, he widely benefited beings. Basing himself on the secret ritual text in the Tripiṭaka, The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Connected with the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī (two fascicles, translated in the Tang by Bodhiruci), he conferred empowerment and transmitted the Dharma. Students spread throughout mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and countries such as the United States, Japan, and Singapore.

Now, although the Elder passed away at the age of ninety-six in the Chan manner described as “departing while seated or standing,” entering parinirvāṇa peacefully, students, in order to revisit his instructions and commemorate his virtue, have prepared for publication a collected volume of letters and conversations from many places, already compiled, and personally corrected and finalized by the Elder himself as this Questions and Answers Collection.

The collection gives detailed instructions on methods of practice and realization, the essentials of awakening to mind, and especially practice after awakening: guarding,

maintaining, and removing habits. It reveals the Elder's compassionate, earnest style and his compassionate vow to benefit sentient beings widely. The publication of this book may be called a companion volume to *Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization*.

Everything the Elder said was teaching according to the situation, giving medicine according to the illness, and skillfully guiding students. Those who read this book are urged not to cling to the words and not to fall into verbal explanations. Infer three from one, free yourselves from attachments and bonds, and proceed directly toward bodhi. I briefly write this preface to explain the circumstances, wishing to encourage all students everywhere.

Xu Hengzhi, March 25, 2000.

I. Doctrine

(1) *Basic Buddhist Knowledge*

Q: What is a non-Buddhist path?

A: To posit a Dharma outside mind is already a non-Buddhist path. Not receiving the Buddha's transforming teaching, one follows some separate mistaken Dharma; the mind wanders outside the Way, and so it is called an outside path. Ultimately speaking, even arhats are outside the Way, because they still have a Dharma to attain and have not removed dharma-clinging.

Q: What is meant by responsive communion?

A: This means that this side makes the call and the other responds. Reciting the Buddha's name or holding a mantra is the "call"; the Buddhas and bodhisattvas empowering the practitioner is the "response." When the two sides become one seamless whole, this is responsive communion.

Q: What is meant by "neither identical with nor apart from"?

A: "Not identical" means that the two are not simply the same. "Not apart" means that apart from one, the other cannot be found. This speaks of the nonduality of nature and appearance, and of form and emptiness not being different.

Q: What is meant by the body within the body and the body outside the body?

A: The body within the body is Buddha-nature, the true body. After recognizing the original nature, if one constantly protects it until the six faculties are no longer moved by objects and have become pure, one's consciousness can emerge without waiting until death. The body that emerges is called the body outside the body, that is, a mind-made body.

This is still a provisional body; it belongs to the seventh consciousness, and after it emerges it can still undergo transformations. The first level is called the mind-made body born of the bliss of meditative attainment, and it relies on the power of seated meditation. At that time one cannot yet go out at will; one must enter samādhi before it can emerge, and it

cannot emerge in activity. Beyond the fifth bhūmi, one can manifest three bodies. From the eighth bhūmi upward, it is the mind-made body that arises in all varieties without deliberate activity. It can freely transform into plants, animals, mountains, rivers, the earth, and all kinds of things. If one does not recognize the original nature, then even if one can send out a yang-spirit, there is still birth and death.

Patriarch Lü Chunyang later met Patriarch Huanglong and only then fully awakened, saying, “Since I met Huanglong, I have regretted wasting my previous effort.” In Daoism there remains abiding, and only at the very end is it dissolved into emptiness. Qigong has even more abiding; therefore it cannot end birth and death. Daoism and qigong take refining essence, qi, and spirit as their basis, while the Buddhadharma takes bodhicitta as its root, and realizes the Way by diligently practicing samādhi and wisdom and accumulating merit. One is a conditioned basis; the other is unconditioned virtue. Therefore they cannot be discussed as if they were the same.

Q: What is no-thought?

A: No-thought is not suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise, resembling a dead person. It means that when thoughts arise, one does not follow them; thought after thought does not remain. Though one does all kinds of things, the mind leaves not the slightest trace and has not the slightest attachment.

Q: What does it mean to engage in activity without abiding?

A: Buddhadharma is not passive world-weariness; it actively enters the world. Therefore disciples of the Buddha should take the lead among others in undertaking all kinds of demanding work; they must not escape reality. While working, one should act according to conditions, yet not keep the slightest mark of merit in the mind. When the mind contains not a single thing and remains empty and open, as though nothing had been done, that is engaging in activity without abiding.

Q: What is meant by without outflows?

A: Practice proceeds from having outflows to being without outflows. “Without outflows” means that all your deluded thinking and attachments, together with all marks of merit, have leaked away completely. When there is no good, no evil, no joy, and no affliction left to leak, that is without outflows. If there is even a little joy, pleasure, or affliction, it is still with outflows. Right now you have deluded mind, deluded thinking, and deluded thoughts; quickly let them go. Do not follow them. Wear them all away. When there is nothing left to leak, it is called being without outflows. Therefore one should let go of everything and not cling to anything. When one realizes the state without outflows, the ten directions are perfectly luminous, the penetrations of the Way are complete, and the marvelous virtue of fearlessness is accomplished.

Q: What is patient acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas?

A: True wisdom abiding unmoved in the essential principle of true reality is called patient acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas. Our Buddha-nature is fundamentally unborn and undying. If there is no birth, how could there be death? Patience means abiding unmoved; this is meditative stability. Even in the bitterest situations one no longer feels suffering. Even in the womb of an ox or the belly of a horse, one does not suffer. This is the great strength of patient acceptance inherent in self-nature; it is the Dharmakāya, unborn and undying.

All phenomena are illusory. If you do not accept them, there is no suffering; if you accept them, there is suffering. For one who endures suffering, there is no suffering to endure; this is precisely having no mind that can be moved. One must have sufficient strength in practice to realize patient acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas. Though one moves throughout the six destinies, it is still non-arising; it is not that sitting in some pure land outside the realm is non-arising. As we now say, at the point where one thought is cut off, there can arise the great function that is clear and distinct; this is our Buddha-nature. To acknowledge it, without the slightest doubt or wavering, is called the Dharma of non-arising. Going one step further, even this Dharma of non-arising cannot be obtained; only then is it called patient acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas. It is the natural state in which the practitioner realizes the original nature and there is no further arising and ceasing; at that time the Way is accomplished.

Q: What is the subtle stream?

A: It refers to very subtle deluded thoughts. In Yogācāra terms, it is the “mental engagement” among the five omnipresent mental factors, flowing without cease like water. Ordinary people cannot see it because it flows so quickly. One must enter vajra-like samādhi before one can see its movement.

Q: What are view, samādhi, and conduct?

A: View is seeing the nature, in which emptiness and compassion are not two. Not clinging to marks is great samādhi: empty, luminous, and unsupported. Conduct means acts of liberating beings without clinging to the mark of liberating beings; self-nature illumines perfectly, and all six pāramitās are practiced together.

Q: Is the practice of leaving no traces amid all circumstances the correct path of practice?

A: The practice of leaving no traces is precisely the correct path of practice. Yet within non-abiding, one must still perfectly manifest the marvelous function of great compassion and reveal immeasurable merit.

Q: What books should those of us who practice this Dharma read?

A: Before practicing the Dharma, all exoteric scriptures and treatises may be read. But the emphasis should be on books that clarify right view, develop bodhi and compassionate vows, and establish correct conduct of body and mind. After the master has transmitted the Dharma to you, you should read scriptures, treatises, and other reference works related to the practice of this Dharma.

Q: What is meant by Guānzìzài (“Observing Ease”)?

A: It means observing oneself and remaining unmoved in the fundamental position. Here “oneself” does not refer to the physical body; rather, clear, numinous knowing is oneself. Yet one must not abide in that clear, numinous knowing either.

Q: What is meant by arousing the doubt-sensation?

A: It means driving you to the point of death, with nowhere to be buried.

Q: What does one awaken to?

A: The Buddhas of the three times do not know it either! Do you understand? In Chan-school answers, one must absolutely avoid explaining principles; the meaning must be beyond the words. People nowadays have very dull faculties, and it is not easy for them to awaken through practicing meditative absorption. Only the combined practice of Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism seems relatively suitable; this is truly a matter of helpless circumstance. Yet when there are people of aspiration with the necessary conditions, one may also accept one or two as students and teach them.

Q: What is the Heart-Center Dharma?

A: Its full name is “Heart within the Heart, and again the Heart”: the false mind, the true mind, and the mind in which both true and false mind are unobtainable—that is, realization of the wondrous mind. The Heart-Center Dharma is the essence within Dzogchen; it is the center of the center. It is the unsurpassed great Dharma of using the provisional mind to open the true mind and fully reveal the wondrous mind.

Q: Does the Heart-Center Dharma speak of provisions for Buddhahood? If so, what are they?

A: The provisions for Buddhahood are: first, sitting in meditation and entering samādhi, removing obstacles and awakening wisdom; second, broadly doing good deeds and accumulating merit. For the Buddha is complete in wisdom and merit: both are perfectly fulfilled.

Q: What is a yin-spirit?

A: Others cannot see you, but you yourself know.

Q: What is esoteric Dharma?

A: To open the secret treasury is called esoteric Dharma. One practices it through the empowerment of the three mysteries. Empowerment by the three mysteries means using the power of the deity to empower the student's body, speech, and mind. The body remains unmoving, the hands form a mudrā, and the legs are crossed in full lotus: this is the mystery of body. The mouth holds the mantra without interruption: this is the mystery of speech. The mind does not imagine or think, but quietly listens to the sound of one's own mantra recitation: this is the mystery of mind. To use esoteric practice without visualization to open the secret treasury and see the original nature is true esoteric Buddhism.

Q: Why must esoteric Buddhism have empowerment?

A: Empowerment is a ritual. Empowerment can plant in you the seeds for removing karmic obstructions, opening the Brahma aperture, and bodhi. After empowerment, one can receive empowering support through practice. Therefore, after empowerment, one often has diarrhea or vomits; this is the force of empowerment. In esoteric Buddhism one must receive empowerment before practicing the Dharma.

Q: What is direct perception?

A: Direct perception means that things appear just as they are, without discrimination. It is like a camera taking a photograph, producing an image without discriminating. The first five consciousnesses, as the Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities, are direct perception. What spoils it is when the sixth consciousness enters in: "This is Zhang San; that is Li Si. Zhang San treats me well; Li Si treats me badly." That is inferential cognition. In doing practice, we must not discriminate. Consciousness should not run after the first five consciousnesses, nor be drawn along by inner images and sense objects. Free from all dualistic oppositions, what is present manifests completely just as it is; direct perception is clear and distinct. This is the state of true direct perception.

Q: Where do conditions come from?

A: Conditions are brought about by karma created in past lives. Karma gives rise to conditions; the movement of mind is a condition. Conditions are also the wondrous capacity of the original nature. The arising of conditions through great compassion and the adornment of Buddha-lands all appear from the causal conditions of bodhi.

Q: What is the relationship between Buddha-nature and awakened awareness?

A: Buddha-nature is precisely awakened awareness. What is Buddha-nature? It is the root of becoming a Buddha. There is also Dharma-nature, the root of all phenomena. Taken together, these are our one numinous true nature, also called the one true Dharma realm. It is the most genuine, most precious great treasure, the root of all things.

Q: The Diamond Sūtra says, “All sages differ by means of the unconditioned Dharma.” How can sages differ? What difference is there?

A: Sages differ in level. There are the four sage realms and the six ordinary realms. Arhats, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas are all sages—are these not differences? Beyond this, there are also conditionally arisen differences in vows, compassion, wisdom, skillful means, and so forth; only through these does the great function of benefiting beings come to fulfillment.

Q: What is the essential point of true-reality buddha-recitation?

A: Do not cling to marks; be mindful of self-nature. Observe inwardly as thoughts arise and do not follow them: this is called true-reality buddha-recitation.

Q: If one goes to Tuṣita Heaven, can one still regress? Is becoming a Buddha in Tuṣita Heaven faster than in the Western Pure Land?

A: There is no regression; one likewise reaches avaivartika, the stage of non-retrogression. As for whether Buddhahood is fast or slow, it depends entirely on one’s own practice. Śākyamuni Buddha and Ānanda practiced together; Śākyamuni had long since become a Buddha at fruition, while Ānanda had not yet awakened. Wherever one is, it all depends on the degree of one’s diligence in practice.

Q: Regarding liberating sentient beings, before one has realized what is original, may one reduce external involvements, practice peacefully, and mainly liberate oneself?

A: Yes.

Q: What condition is indeterminate blankness?

A: When not a single thought arises and one knows nothing at all, that is indeterminate blankness.

Q: Bodhisattva means “an awakened sentient being.” How should this be understood?

A: Here, “awakening” means seeing through and breaking one’s emotional attachment and fixed views. All sentient beings have emotion. This emotion is the worst thing. Emotion is love; love produces water; water flows downward, and birth and death cannot be ended. Therefore we must see through and break craving, emotional attachment, and fixed views. We must awaken ourselves and also awaken others, helping them see through and break these attachments and views. Master Hanshan said, “With one phrase of Amitābha, one must cut off one’s own emotional attachment and fixed views before one can be reborn in the West.” If emotion is heavy, one cannot be reborn in the West. Again, awakening is the right awakening of bodhi, while sentient beings are beings with feeling. A bodhisattva has awakened and realized for himself, and with compassionate mind awakens all sentient beings; therefore he is called an awakened sentient being.

Q: What does “the point where Dharma-nature is exhausted” mean? How does the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma explain accomplishment in this very body?

A: “The point where Dharma-nature is exhausted” means that when practice reaches the very end, not only is there no Dharma to obtain; even so-called Dharma-nature cannot be obtained. Not only are spiritual powers unobtainable; even Buddha is unobtainable. Only then is there accomplishment in this very body.

Q: Does the meaning of the Middle Way have any true characteristic?

A: No. True and false are both unobtainable. The meaning of the Middle Way is neither to reject the provisional nor to cling to the true. One abides in neither emptiness nor provisional existence; there is neither grasping nor rejecting.

Q: Someone asked Taixu: “If a snake is cut into two pieces, in which piece is the Buddha-nature?”

A: Buddha-nature is everywhere.

Q: Is it good for us to read too many scriptures and books?

A: Too many, and you open a general store. Then there is too much intellectual understanding. Therefore our master said not to read books during the first hundred sittings, lest they disturb the one-pointed mind in meditation. With too many views and understandings, it is not easy to attain samādhi.

Q: What should one do if one cannot become a Buddha in this life?

A: One can be reborn in a pure land, or one can return by taking birth again as a human being. One must make great vows. The power of vows is inconceivable. One must vow sincerely and earnestly to become a Buddha and liberate sentient beings. The World-Honored One vowed to liberate beings in the evil world of the five turbidities, going to the most bitter places to liberate beings.

Q: Are cause and effect also provisional appearances of dependent arising?

A: Of course. Only the Buddha alone transcends cause and effect; even great bodhisattvas still cannot leap out of the circle of cause and effect.

Q: Does “Buddha-activity within a dream” refer to the kind of things done by people who have not seen the nature, such as bowing to Buddhas, reciting scriptures, and performing meritorious deeds?

A: Teaching the Dharma and liberating beings are also Buddha-activity within a dream.

Q: How should we students bring function into studying? What should we do during examinations?

A: When the teacher lectures, you hear clearly, keep it in mind, and understand it; this is bringing function forth. If, while studying, you think of other matters, do not hear what the teacher is saying, and then cannot answer on the exam, that means function has not arisen. It is not dead memorization; one must understand. “Grasp the meaning and forget the words; then the Way draws near.” One must not become trapped in the words.

Q: What is the key to doing practice?

A: Do not cling to the strange, the miraculous, or the mysterious. Recognize that the clear, distinct numinous knowing in which not one thought arises is one's own original nature. With ordinary mind, handle all affairs while not the slightest thing is obtainable.

Q: The principle, no matter how it is explained, is this simple; but when I try to do it, I always lose it.

A: Buddhadharma is originally this simple; there is nothing mysterious or complicated. But accumulated habits from many lives cannot be removed in a single day. Since these accumulated habits were not formed in one lifetime, removing them also requires a long period of diligent practice and training. Students need only be aware at all times, diminishing and diminishing again; in due course the practice will mature, and the day will come when the fruition is perfectly realized.

Q: How can one accomplish realization quickly?

A: All sentient beings are originally Buddhas; what accomplishment is there still to seek? Have no seeking and no attachment in all things. Only stop delusion; do not seek truth. Then naturally one returns home and sits securely.

Q: I have heard that when the central channel and the left and right channels are opened, this is the accomplishment of the saṃbhogakāya. Is there such a teaching?

A: This sounds like a teaching from non-Buddhist or deviant schools. Our physical body is a karmic body, not the Buddha's enjoyment body (saṃbhogakāya). To base one's practice on this physical body is a grave error. If you practice in this way, you will not accomplish Buddhahood even when Maitreya Buddha descends to the world.

Q: Venerable Milarepa reached the state where “practice is a great deluded thought, and not practicing is also a great deluded thought,” yet he grew weary of responding to patrons and hoped to practice in the snowy mountains. Why? Was it because his habits were not exhausted?

A: In truth, all that can be said has already been said. Yet you still ask him to teach the Dharma. Let me say one phrase of speech that has no speech: when you go to the snow mountains where no one is, and there are no words to say, what is it? Do you understand?

Q: Recently I have found it difficult to feel reverence for all form-based Buddhist teachings and practices. If even the visible world is illusory, how can one develop absolute faith in worlds one cannot see?

A: Although appearances are illusory, it is not that they have no function. Therefore we say: neither empty nor existent; existence is emptiness, and emptiness is existence. One cannot abide on either side. The vastness of space and the multiplicity of worlds are still beyond the reach of modern science. Only the Buddha-eye is clear and bright and sees everything distinctly. If you single-mindedly practice according to the Buddhadharma, when sense faculties and sense objects fall away, the so-called worlds that cannot be seen will naturally be seen.

Q: How can Buddhism be revived?

A: There are many who cling to marks, and few who do not abide. There are many who believe superstitiously, and few who believe with wisdom. There are many who seek from Buddhas, and few who practice. Among monastics, many perform Buddhist ritual services, going from one scripture-recitation and repentance service to another, while few truly practice diligently. This is very unfortunate; therefore Buddhism is not flourishing. As long as everyone practices well, Buddhism has hope.

Q: Before the master goes abroad, I would like to come with several fellow practitioners to pay respects to you and listen to your teaching. May we?

A: Non-abiding in all things, free and at ease, is great numinous function. The essence of Buddhadharma is fully contained in this. Any teaching beyond this is demonic teaching. Have you not seen Master Yunmen say, “This very seeing and hearing is not seeing and hearing; no other sounds and forms can be presented to you”? What else is there to say? Why take the trouble of going back and forth and wasting energy? Better to rest and nourish yourselves at home.

Q: If the mind is unmoved, will the brain become dull?

A: No. The brain’s response will instead become faster. “The mind unmoved” does not mean not giving rise to mind in function. It means not clinging to false marks and not being swayed by them. We know that all phenomena are false; with an unmoving mind, whatever matter arrives, as soon as it arrives, there is response, and one is more sensitive. Too much deluded thinking instead makes one dull. In doing things, we must skillfully apply right mindfulness; otherwise, how could we do anything? But while doing things, the mind does not abide in marks. It responds according to conditions, has no stray thoughts, and is clear and distinct.

Q: Sometimes I use knowledge I have read in scriptures to assess my own condition. Is this correct?

A: It is useful. You can compare your own words and actions with the principles in the scriptures and examine what is wrong in yourself. The function of morning and evening liturgy in monasteries is to teach us how to be human and understand how to practice. Reciting the evening liturgy means comparing yourself with the scriptures and checking whether the day's conduct was correct; morning liturgy reminds you that the day's conduct must follow what the scriptures say.

Q: The Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra says, "In the Dharma-ending age, scarcely one person attains the Way." What does attaining the Way refer to?

A: Resolving fragmentary birth-and-death, cutting off delusions of thought, realizing non-arising, transcending cyclic existence, and abiding permanently. In the Dharma-ending age, beings have heavy obstacles and shallow wisdom, with deep evil habits; this is very difficult to do.

Q: How should we understand no-thought as the principle?

A: "No" means no deluded thoughts and discriminations. "Thought" means mindfulness of true suchness and awakened awareness. To be mindful of true suchness is to be mindful of the original nature. Not one thought arises, yet all is clear and distinct; thought after thought remains in the fundamental position. Protect it and see the nature at every moment. This is true practice. Our practice is flexible and skillful, not rigid.

Q: If one must make everything empty everywhere, will one fall into emptiness?

A: The emptiness spoken of in Buddhadharma means that all things are unobtainable; it does not mean that there are no things. This is "true emptiness, marvelous presence." Emptiness means emptying out illusory thoughts that grasp at deluded marks; it does not mean being unable to function wondrously. Existence appears from mind, and existence is yet non-existence, so there is nothing to cling to. Some people talk about emptiness with every word, but their minds constantly cling to existence; this will not do. Even if one can truly "empty all that exists," if one cannot manifest the wondrous functioning of great compassion, then one is precisely "making real all that does not exist" and has fallen to the side of vacant emptiness.

Q: Someone recites Amitābha Heart Mantra for one thousand sittings and then goes on to recite Amitābha Buddha's name. Is this all right?

A: Amitābha Heart Mantra is Amitābha Buddha. The heart-mantra embodies the power of the minds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas and is immensely powerful. Seven recitations of the mantra are equivalent to a thousand recitations of the Buddha's name. Of course, one should also recite Amitābha Buddha's name often. For besides deeply entering the mind-essence of Amitābha Buddha's Dharma realm, one must also manifest Amitābha's ocean of

compassionate vows and skillful means of liberation, so that the merit of benefiting oneself and others can be perfectly accomplished. Therefore the heart-mantra is the wondrous capacity of the Buddha's mind-essence; the Buddha-name is the outward manifestation of the Buddha's compassionate vows. Inner and outer are consistent; essence and function are not two. Only then can the Pure Land's merits in both phenomena and principle be brought to perfect completion.

Q: After attaining the Buddha-stage, can one still become deluded?

A: No. The Buddhist scriptures describe it as gold that has come out of the mine and is no longer mixed with mud, sand, and ore. Sentient beings are like gold still in the mine. It is not that there is no gold, but it is mixed with sand and stone; therefore they are deluded by things. Practice cuts off ignorance completely, like purifying the sand and stone away until only pure gold remains. Then one will no longer become deluded.

Q: Why should we make vows?

A: Vow is the mother of success in all things. Vows can accomplish matters. Therefore in practice one must make great vows: to become a Buddha and liberate sentient beings. Then one does not fear difficulty or suffering, practices with courage and vigor, and does not retreat from the initial resolve when encountering any setback. If people have no vows, when they meet difficulties they refuse to practice. In our Heart-Center Dharma, the first mudrā is the Bodhicitta Mudrā; one must make the great vow to become a Buddha. To become a Buddha, one must rely on sentient beings. The Buddha is complete in merit and wisdom. Without great vows and without doing the work of liberating beings, where will merit come from?

Q: I truly feel my own existence among the sentient beings around me. Does the Buddha feel this?

A: The Buddha is perfect awakening that universally illumines, perfect realization that universally benefits. If he had such a feeling, he would not be a Buddha. To measure the Buddha's mind with your ordinary mind is a great error.

Q: What is the difference between Tuṣita Pure Land and the Western Pure Land?

A: They are the same. Tuṣita Pure Land is the pure land of our Sahā world. Śākyamuni Buddha descended from Tuṣita Heaven, Maitreya Buddha will also descend from Tuṣita Heaven in the future, and all future Buddhas descend from Tuṣita Heaven. This kalpa of ours is the Fortunate Kalpa, in which one thousand Buddhas appear in the world. Śākyamuni Buddha is the fourth Buddha, and there are still nine hundred and ninety-six Buddhas to appear. All Buddhas descend from the inner court of Tuṣita. Therefore many great Chan patriarchs ascended to the inner court of Tuṣita. West and East do not go beyond our original nature. The Western Pure Land and Tuṣita Pure Land are not two and not different.

Q: Is there an Extremely Blissful World?

A: There is. But it is not truly existent; it is “true emptiness, marvelous presence.” The Heart Sūtra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” Form and emptiness are not two, and one must not cling. Amitābha Buddha will also retire from his position, and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will succeed him. That land will be even better than the present Extremely Blissful World, because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s merit is great. He long ago became a Buddha, and for the sake of liberating beings manifests the body of a bodhisattva. He too will retire, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva will succeed him. Therefore the Diamond Sūtra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.”

Q: Is The Ten Essentials of Pure Land very important for those who practice Pure Land?

A: The Ten Essentials of Pure Land is indeed an important text for Pure Land practice. Unfortunately, people nowadays often do not value it. They only covet convenience and say things like “even distracted recitation of the Buddha’s name can lead to rebirth in the West.” Because of this, when life’s “thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month”—the time of death—arrives, they will inevitably be flustered and unable to be reborn in the West.

Q: If there are no deluded thoughts in my mind, how is that different from the Western Pure Land?

A: In terms of mind-essence, there is no difference. As the mind becomes pure, the Buddha-land becomes pure. But some people talk big and refuse to empty the mind. When affairs come, they still cling to marks; once they cling to marks, it is not a pure land. If one understands the principle but cannot keep up in actuality, it is useless. Rebirth in the West while clinging to marks can only be rebirth in the Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together.

The West has four different lands. First, one single-mindedly recites the Buddha’s name, yet does not know that everything is an illusory manifestation and clings to it as truly existent; one is then born in a Pure Land at the phenomenal level, and still receives the enjoyment of the adornments of Sukhāvatī. Second, with mind empty and non-abiding, one realizes the samādhi of non-arising and has ended delusions of view and delusions of thought; one enters the Land of Expedient Means with Remainder. Third, with vast bodhi and compassionate vows, one universally practices the six pāramitās and the ten thousand practices; the four marks are suddenly emptied, and the wondrous manifestation of true reward appears, so one is born in the Land of True Reward and Adornment. Fourth, when the virtues of fruition reach perfection, the three bodies are perfectly realized, the four wisdoms are perfectly luminous, and quiescent light is perfect and constant; one is born in the Land of Eternally Quiescent Light. If one merely has no deluded thoughts but the mind does not possess the virtues of the Pure Land, one is still far from the true Pure Land.

Q: What is precept?

A: Precept means restraining your mind from moving deludedly so that it easily enters samādhi. Therefore the most important thing is mind-precept. The mind not being moved by objects, and being unstained and unattached amid all conditions, is the root of all precepts. From this unmoving wondrous mind, one then brings forth the great compassionate skillful means that benefit sentient beings, embracing and benefiting them wherever one goes. Only then can the merits of all precepts be complete.

Q: Are good deeds mainly a skillful means for counteracting one's previous selfish habits and reaching a "state of no-self"?

A: Good deeds are indeed important, but they are not the most important thing. The main thing is still to awaken wisdom. "Buddha" means one who awakens and does not cling to marks. If one does not awaken wisdom and only does good deeds, at most one becomes a person who enjoys blessings. Once those blessings are exhausted, one still falls into hell and still cannot end birth and death. But if, after clearly awakening to mind-nature, one performs all good deeds that benefit beings with bodhicitta, then all good deeds can become assisting conditions on the path of practice.

Q: Many people in the world do not believe in Buddhism and even mock those who study Buddhism. Therefore, is "vowing to liberate all sentient beings" very difficult or unrealistic? Should one only liberate beings with whom one has affinity?

A: One's vows must be vast. One must not distinguish between those with and without affinity, or according to whether people are personally close or estranged, nearby or far away. As for whether they can be liberated, that depends on conditions. Even the Buddha cannot liberate beings without affinity.

Q: To liberate beings, one must first awaken and have spiritual powers. Otherwise one cannot speak of liberating others, and people will not believe you. But if one only practices for oneself and does not liberate others, one will be criticized as someone concerned only with one's own liberation. How should this view be understood?

A: Your view is wrong. Right now, practicing the Dharma oneself is precisely practicing for the sake of liberating others; it is not practicing in order to seek happiness for oneself. This is the Mahāyāna Dharma of a bodhisattva's heart. Conversely, seeking only to leave the sea of suffering oneself and ignoring others is Hīnayāna Dharma. Moreover, liberating others does not depend on spiritual powers, but on the Dharma-eye being bright and correct so that one does not lead others onto wrong roads. If one uses spiritual powers to liberate people, then non-Buddhist practitioners and māras also have spiritual powers; can they all liberate people? You practitioners all cling to spiritual powers. This is a great mistake! You must know that becoming a Buddha does not depend on spiritual powers; it depends on developing prajñā.

Q: Master, is the essence awakened to at the level of principle the same as the essence directly realized?

A: Yes. Although the essence is no different, the functioning in affairs is different. Awakening at the level of principle amounts only to intellectual understanding; when affairs arise, it fails. One who directly realizes it, however, can meet affairs without confusion and face conditions without being moved.

Q: What is the difference between right samādhi and ordinary sleep?

A: When your mastery of samādhi deepens, even while asleep you remain clear and distinct rather than murky and dull.

Q: What is the wondrous function of true nature?

A: Doing things without clinging to marks and without giving rise to a second thought—doing is equivalent to not having done. This is the wondrous function of true nature. Even putting on clothes, eating meals, welcoming guests, and seeing guests off are all the full expression of self-nature's great function.

Q: I now know that all things are transformations of Buddha-nature. But I still feel suffering, especially physical pain when ill. When I meet material obstacles, I also cannot be my own master.

A: You are still clinging to marks and your mind has not been emptied. Moreover, your meditative stability is very weak. You should sit more in meditation and develop meditative stability. Intellectual understanding is deluded consciousness and is of no use. You must have your body, mind, and world dissolved into emptiness; only then will it work. Truly protect the mind and do not let it turn with conditions. Even while walking, it can drop away: there is no "I" walking, no road, no cars, yet you still arrive at your destination. When practice is genuine, it can drop away even in dreams. Conceptual awakening will not do; direct realization is necessary. To pass through, you must practice well.

Q: Is this statement correct: for genuine practitioners, the less they know and the fewer views they have, the better; they need only rely on a good teacher and one or two scriptures, and need not broadly study scriptures and treatises. If they honestly investigate Chan and recite the Buddha's name, they will certainly accomplish the great matter.

A: Practicing the Dharma does not mean not studying scriptures and treatises. If you do not understand the principles, how will you practice? This statement is meant to prevent people from clinging to words, getting bogged down in textual minutiae, failing to practice, and delaying their practice. If one can master the teachings and principles and then let everything go, no longer clinging to the mark of words but practicing in a down-to-earth way, that is best.

Q: Master, please speak about the “mind-made body.”

A: Everyone is capable of manifesting a mind-made body. It arises from the seventh consciousness. When the six faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—keep it sealed in, it cannot emerge. Right now our six faculties are impure: we think wildly, perceive appearances, and cling to their marks, thereby keeping it sealed in. When purity reaches a certain degree, it emerges of itself. Skilled qigong practitioners whose minds have become pure can also manifest one. But they can manifest only one and cannot make it emerge at will. It can emerge in samādhi, but not outside samādhi.

Q: Can one function before seeing the nature?

A: All functioning is the functioning of our Buddha-nature. Otherwise, how could one speak or listen? This itself is functioning. Wondrous functioning is simply functioning without abiding in marks. It does not mean sitting there unmoving and ceasing to function. One must be flexible, do things earnestly, and not cling to marks. This is what it means to function.

Q: What is the difference between the intermediate-state body and the mind-made body?

A: They are different. The intermediate-state body is the body in the interval after the previous body has died and before the next body has formed, prior to taking rebirth. The mind-made body is not something everyone has; it belongs to people who have reached a certain level in practice. It is a bodhisattva body that takes birth as wished in order to aid and liberate sentient beings. There are three kinds of mind-made body: the mind-made body born of the bliss of meditative attainment; the mind-made body of awakening to the self-nature of dharmas; and the mind-made body that arises in all varieties without deliberate activity.

Q: What is the difference between soul and Buddha-nature?

A: Soul is the combination of Buddha-nature and ignorance. If you have not recognized the original nature and cling to marks, that is soul. A mind marked by discrimination and attachment is soul. There is also a difference between hún and pò. Some speak of three hún and seven pò. Hún is yang qi; pò is yin qi. The human body has both yin and yang, yin polarity and yang polarity. In an ordinary person, the luminous side is only three parts, while the dark side is seven parts. Therefore one must dissolve the dark side, the habits of attachment. Patriarch Chunyang is called “Pure Yang” because the yin qi was completely eliminated. If one clings to marks, one cannot leave the three realms; if one clings to a yang-spirit, there is still birth and death. It is best not to cling to anything at all.

Q: Bodhisattvas at the stage of Equal Enlightenment still have one grade of ignorance of the arising characteristic not yet broken. How can ordinary people like us practice the

Heart-Center Dharma for two or three years, break ignorance, and abide in the six destinies to liberate beings?

A: It is not that everyone who practices the Heart-Center Dharma can break ignorance completely and abide in the six destinies to liberate beings. It depends on the depth of each person's realization: according to one's own vows, one may be reborn in a pure land to complete the matter, or abide in the world with sentient beings to liberate them.

Q: To what degree must one practice before one can transmit the Dharma?

A: A practitioner must truly awaken and realize the Way before being qualified to transmit Dharma. "If you want to know the road in the mountains, ask someone who has passed through." If you have not passed through, how can you recklessly transmit to others when you do not know the road? During practice, doubts require someone to point things out, just as a traveler at a crossroads needs someone to point out which way to turn. If you yourself have not walked that road, how can you blindly point it out? Would that not be the blind leading the blind, all going together into hell?

Q: "Only fear that the mind has not died; do not fear that it will not come alive." If the mind first dies completely, can it still come alive?

A: Here, for the mind to die completely means that attachment dies away; it does not mean that wondrous functioning dies. During practice, pay attention to appropriate training. When attachment to things has completely died away and one no longer clings, numinous functioning immediately appears.

Q: If all dharmas are empty and only Buddha-nature is not empty, does this not make Buddha-nature and the ten thousand things into two separate things?

A: "All dharmas are empty and Buddha-nature is not empty" is spoken for beginners in Buddhism. "All dharmas are Buddha-nature" is spoken for people after awakening. The two must not be confused.

Q: "Until hells are empty, I vow not to become a Buddha." Has Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva become a Buddha?

A: "Vowing not to become a Buddha" means vowing not to assume the position of a Buddha. If Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva did not have the qualifications of a Buddha, how could he go to the hells to liberate beings? How could he liberate bodhisattvas of the ten directions so that they become Buddhas? He has the qualifications of a Buddha but does not assume the position of a Buddha. In fact, from Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva's perspective, the hells are originally empty. The Heart Sūtra says that all dharmas are characterized by emptiness. Moreover, to have no Buddha to become is truly to become a Buddha.

Q: “These dharmas abide in their Dharma-position; worldly appearances constantly abide.” How should this be understood?

A: Worldly dharmas are like mulberry fields becoming seas: they change in an instant and do not last. Our bodies do not last either. Su Dongpo has two lines in Former Red Cliff that say it very clearly: “Do you also know that water and moon? That which passes is like this, yet has never gone...” Look at water and the moon. Water flows rushingly; though it flows, it does not diminish. Likewise, though the moon waxes and wanes, it neither increases nor decreases. This shows that phenomena are just like this. Is this not permanent abiding? “This Dharma abides in the Dharma-position” means that all phenomena are inseparable from true nature. True nature permanently abides, and worldly appearances also constantly abide. The world is only the changing of conditions; all are illusory appearances.

Q: First, seeing mountains as mountains and waters as waters; further, seeing mountains as not mountains and waters as not waters; later, seeing mountains still as mountains and waters still as waters. How should this be understood?

A: Seeing mountains as not mountains and waters as not waters is when practice is truly and earnestly underway: there is no seeing and no attachment to anything. Turning back, one sees: oh, mountains are merely mountains and waters are merely waters; this is simply how they naturally are, with nothing mysterious. Then one follows conditions freely, functioning spontaneously and without obstruction. If one insists that mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters, that is annihilation. Mountains and waters are manifestations of the original nature. All forms are manifestations of our Buddha-nature; they are all wondrous function. Naturally, then, one does not cling to marks.

Q: Is the movement of thought wondrous function?

A: Yes, the movement of thought is all wondrous function. More precisely, when thought moves and does not abide in marks, it is wondrous function; when thought moves and abides in marks, it is deluded thinking. “Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning; no-mind is precisely functioning, and constant functioning is precisely no-mind.” This is wondrous function. Precisely while mind is functioning, no mind can be found to function; what is required is that “constant functioning is precisely no-mind.” When thought moves without abiding in marks, that is the ocean-seal emitting light.

Q: When Elder Xuyun was at Gaomin Monastery, his eyes could see through walls and see someone urinating outside the room. Can this be called awakening?

A: This is not awakening. It is a state of the form aggregate. One must not cling to it; if one clings, one will enter demonic states. Elder Xuyun wrote in his autobiography, “The root of doubt was suddenly cut off—the joy of a lifetime.” Those eight words describe the moment when the teacup fell to the ground and the root of doubt was suddenly cut off.

Q: When one apprehends Mind and sees nature, will images appear?

A: There are no images and no things, but this is not annihilation; it is lucid and distinct. This lucid numinous knowing is our original face. After understanding this, pay attention: this is not final attainment; it is precisely when one should apply oneself to practice. Protect it at all times. One may use the Buddha-name or a mantra to protect it. Chan patriarch Dahui Zonggao used our Heart-Center Dharma's Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī to protect himself. Chan masters all know how to recite mantras. Master Hanshan said very clearly that Chan masters throughout the generations secretly held mantras; no school is apart from esoteric Dharma.

Q: All speech and movement, including my currently picking up the pen to write this letter, are the wondrous function of the original nature. In itself it is "unborn and undying, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither defiled nor pure." Yet it is not like earth, wood, grass, or stone, but is a nature of numinous knowing with which everyone is endowed. To awaken to this is to see the nature. Is this right?

A: No. This is only understanding; it is not seeing the nature. Such understanding has no power when affairs arise and is useless. To see the nature and awaken to the Way, first one must have body, mind, and world dissolved into emptiness. After awakening at the level of principle, one must still pass through in actual affairs. If one cannot pass through in actual affairs, it is not seeing the nature. If one can pass through in actual affairs but remains only empty and numinous, without revealing the wondrous functioning of great compassion, it still does not count as true seeing of the nature.

Q: I think that during formal sitting I should follow the master's requirement of reciting with the mind and hearing with the ears, adding as many sittings as possible; outside formal sitting I should observe the mind. I should know that walking, standing, sitting, lying down, reciting the Buddha's name, holding mantras, and so on are all done by self-nature, and should let true mind appear constantly as much as possible. Is this right?

A: It is both right and not right. The part that is right is that you must work hard in practice and not take it lightly. The part that is not right is the phrase "as much as possible, let true mind constantly appear," because true mind is not hidden; it constantly shines right before you. Since you know that all actions and functions are the wondrous function of true mind, is it not constantly present? What need is there to "let true mind constantly appear as much as possible"?

Q: After seeing the nature, is the most diligent practice never forgetting what is original at any moment?

A: No. The original nature cannot be lost. It is only that you cling to marks and are deluded by objects, just like the sun being covered by dark clouds and not appearing. Diligent practice is simply steady, continuous protection. When practicing, be like leading troops to attack

the enemy, pressing forward without looking back. When not practicing, let everything go and regard it as nothing. This is true diligence.

Q: Not forgetting what is original means working on awareness. When doing things, one knows they are the wondrous function of the original nature; when there is nothing to do, the nature of numinous knowing has not diminished. Then naturally, according to time and conditions, the great Way will be accomplished.

A: No. The ancients said, “Only exhaust ordinary feelings; there is no separate sagely understanding.” If you constantly cling to the nature of numinous knowing, that is still abiding somewhere. One must not cling to any marks and must function according to conditions. The nature of numinous knowing also must not be clung to. To work on awareness is an even greater mistake.

Q: Constantly being in accord with self-nature is being in accord with the master. If one practices according to Dharma, the master and the Buddha are right beside one. Is this understanding correct?

A: Yes.

Q: One must return to nothing obtainable; all things are utterly unobtainable. But is there not still an experience of empty openness with knowing? If this too were swept away completely, would it not be annihilation?

A: It is not a matter of sweeping away this numinous awareness, but of not abiding in it. Because there is no abiding, there is neither one who is aware nor an object of awareness; therefore one returns to nothing obtainable. If an experience of knowing remains, it is already wrong—what more is there to say about empty openness?

Q: This essential nature without characteristics, though without characteristics, can be experienced when there is no thought. Is that so?

A: No. It is not only to be experienced when there is no thought; it must also be experienced amid functioning and phenomena. Both functioning and phenomena are manifestations of self-nature. Appearance is nature, and nature is appearance; they cannot be separated. If one experiences it only when there is no thought, would that not fall into a stagnant pool of dead water?

Q: In ancient Chan masters’ awakening verses, they wrote, “He now is precisely me; I now am not him,” and “When spring arrives, flowers are fragrant and everywhere is beautiful; mountains, rivers, and the great earth are Tathāgata.” Are these not footnotes to the nonduality of emptiness and existence?

A: One cannot make a sweeping statement. In the first verse, “I now am not him” requires clearly recognizing guest and host; one must not be vague and muddled, thinking it means nonduality. When realizing the essence, not a single thing is established. Yet when bringing

forth function, each and every thing appears without abiding. Realizing the essence and bringing forth function together are precisely “mountains, rivers, and the great earth are Tathāgata.” Realizing the essence does not mean abiding immovably in the position of suchness and dying there; it is wondrous functioning, free and responsive, responding to things and following conditions without abiding anywhere.

9B. 一、教理（二）关于禅密 / Part One: Doctrine—(2) Concerning Chan and Esoteric Dharma

(2) Concerning Chan and Esoteric Dharma

Q: Since Buddha-nature is not something produced by practice, why is there still any need to practice a Dharma? Would it not be better to keep reflecting inwardly in daily life, especially when afflictions arise and one cannot get through them?

A: Because ignorance is still present. When you encounter situations, you cling to marks and are not free. Therefore you must practice. Practice is not for producing Buddha-nature; it is for eliminating ignorance and habitual tendencies. If you can constantly gather yourself in samādhi at all times and places, without being carried away by circumstances, that itself is practice. When practice has fully matured, even samādhi is unobtainable; only then is further practice unnecessary.

Q: The Heart Sūtra says, “No ignorance, and also no ending of ignorance.” “No ignorance” means ignorance has already been broken through; “also no ending of ignorance” means that even the absence of ignorance is not established. Should these two lines not already belong to the highest stage of Buddhahood? How can they be classified within the twelve links of dependent arising?

A: Speaking of “no ending of ignorance” is precisely to sweep away the traces of awakening, remove attachment to dharmas, return to nothing obtainable, and enter the Mahāyāna Buddha-stage.

Q: I think the deluded mind has no locus, while true mind has a locus.

A: Wrong. The deluded mind grasps objects, and therefore has a locus. True mind has no thing; it is nowhere absent, and therefore has no locus.

Q: Does wisdom unfold all at once, or little by little? What is subsequently attained wisdom? What is the relationship between apprehending Mind and seeing nature and awakening great wisdom?

A: Small awakenings are countless; great awakenings are eighteen or nineteen. One goes from small awakening to great awakening, and then to thorough awakening. Yet this is not a fixed rule, and it need not be gradual. Subsequently attained wisdom is spoken of in contrast to fundamental wisdom; it is wisdom in functioning. After attaining fundamental

wisdom, one puts it to use in liberating beings, polishes away one's own habitual tendencies, and elicits spiritual powers. According to the differing capacities of sentient beings, one teaches different Dharma methods. This is the wondrous wisdom that liberates sentient beings.

Q: After apprehending Mind and seeing nature, do the latent seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness surge up even more violently?

A: The surfacing of latent seeds occurs throughout the whole process of practice. After thorough awakening, latent seeds no longer surface. Therefore I tell you not to be satisfied with little attainment. You must gradually clear away habitual tendencies as you meet circumstances, remove all these defiled seeds, and attain thorough awakening.

Q: After the mind has died, what should one do when it comes alive again?

A: That is hard to avoid. The Patriarch said in the Song of Liberation, "How many times born, how many times dead—from ancient times until now, it has only been like this." If the first dying-off is incomplete, one must undergo the great death; otherwise the mind will move again. In our Dharma practice there is the process of "great awakenings seventeen or eighteen, small awakenings countless."

Q: When one first sees the nature, has one gained firm footing? If one follows this path, later there will still have to be a great turning-over. Is that right?

A: Initial awakening reaches only the threshold of the dharmakāya. The road to accomplishing the Way is still long, and one must proceed diligently. Beyond this still lie the proper position of the dharmakāya and going beyond the dharmakāya. What is the proper position of the dharmakāya? When one has trained to a certain degree, habitual stains dissolve; one can liberate beings freely and spiritual powers appear. If pollution in the mind has not been removed, spiritual powers cannot manifest. It is not enough for the mind not to move by being pressed down and held still. It must be naturally unmoving, without the slightest clinging to marks and without the slightest seeking.

Q: When thoughts arise and one does not follow them, has one arrived at the proper position of the dharmakāya?

A: When thoughts arise and one does not follow them, that is a small achievement, and one can be free in taking birth. But it does not count as the proper position of the dharmakāya. One must certainly cut off the delusions of thought before one can arrive at the proper position of the dharmakāya. After arriving at the proper position of the dharmakāya, one must still go upward. One must leave this position; clinging to this position is still not acceptable. For Chan practitioners, "When the bright moon is overhead, one is still a person below the steps." Only when the moon has set does one meet; only then is the whole perfectly luminous.

Q: Why must one still sit in meditation after seeing the nature?

A: There is no fixed rule. If clinging habits are still present, meditative stability is insufficient, and one cannot maintain it, then one must sit in meditation to strengthen that stability and pass through the Multiple Barrier. Some people say, “As soon as I sit, I feel there are more deluded thoughts than usual.” It is not that sitting has produced more deluded thoughts; it is that only after sitting do you see the deluded thoughts. When you do not sit, it is like a basin of muddy water: the sand and mud cannot be seen. After sitting, the water settles and you see the sand and mud.

Q: Master Shenhui said that the single word “knowing” is the gate of all wonders. Other patriarchs also said it is the gate of all calamities. How should this be understood?

A: That is right. Who is this one that can know? When you recognize original nature, is that not the gate of all wonders? When the great golden-winged garuḍa flies ten thousand miles, it relies entirely on the small force of its feet touching the ground. Our practice relies entirely on this “knowing.” Later, people cling to this “knowing” and make a nest of it; then it is wrong again. Therefore the patriarchs called it the gate of all calamities. One speaks according to the occasion; Dharma has no fixed Dharma.

Q: After apprehending Mind and seeing nature, can one practice Tögal in the Great Perfection?

A: In the Great Perfection there are two steps. First, “Trekchö,” which means “cutting through.” Second, “Tögal,” which is “leaping over,” the body transforming into rainbow light. This requires going into mountain retreat to practice. You young people are often ambitious beyond your actual capacity. After seeing the nature, can you go on and undertake such arduous practice?

Q: The original nature is unborn and undying, an unmoving essence. How should this be understood?

A: It has no coming or going, and so it is called the unmoving essence. It has no birth and death and no direction or location, yet it can manifest according to conditions. If a person needs a male body in order to be liberated, it manifests a male body to liberate him. If another person needs a female body in order to be liberated, it manifests a female body to liberate her. It manifests in different forms according to conditions. If one truly accomplishes the Way, one can even go into a cow’s womb or a horse’s belly, yet the original nature has no change or alteration.

Q: After a period of reflection, this disciple has gained a deeper understanding of seeing the nature. Previously I thought that after awakening the great matter was finished, and removing habits was merely a secondary process. Now I truly know that seeing the nature has only just cut off delusions of view; at most, it is only understanding the principle. Habitual tendencies are still present. When circumstances arise, the mind still moves and

cannot pass through them. If one wants truly to end birth and death, one must continue to work hard and must never slacken. Only after completely breaking through the delusions of thought, dust-and-sand delusions, and the delusion of ignorance is the great matter finally finished. If one thinks that one's birth and death are already ended now, that is deceiving oneself and others; one cannot fool King Yama.

A: What your letter says is very appropriate. In seeing the nature there is a difference between awakening and realization. One who has genuinely broken through and personally seen original nature has only cut off delusions of view and has not yet cut off delusions of thought; therefore birth and death have not yet ended. One must practice after awakening and cut off delusions of thought completely before one can end fragmentary birth-and-death. One must then advance higher and higher, breaking through dust-and-sand delusions and the delusion of ignorance before one ends transformational birth-and-death. It is not the case that one awakening can end birth and death. Recently people's minds are very impatient. They think that gaining a little view and understanding counts as seeing the nature and no longer apply themselves to practice. This is absurd in the extreme.

Q: How should "the end equals the beginning" be understood?

A: It means that after finally accomplishing the Way, one is the same as before one studied Buddhism. At the beginning, when one studies Buddhism, one is in the six realms of rebirth; at the end, one is also in the six realms of rebirth. But one is no longer led by karmic obstruction; one is there because of great vows. One liberates sentient beings in the six realms and no longer clings to circumstances. From the outside it looks the same, but in actuality it is different. When first studying Buddhism, one suffers in the six realms. Later, recognizing that these circumstances are illusory, one no longer clings to marks and therefore no longer suffers. To remain unaffected by any experience is right absorption; this is samādhi. In truth, there is originally no birth and death; coming and going are all false appearances. Also, the Way seen at the first arousal of bodhicitta is completely identical with the fruit realized at the end. Therefore the Avatamsaka Sūtra says, "At the first arousal of bodhicitta, one immediately accomplishes right awakening." From this one can see how important the fundamental wisdom of first seeing the Way is for final accomplishment.

Q: In the Dharma-ending age, the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma reappears like a red sun in the open sky, incomparably supreme.

A: The Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma is the heart-essence of esoteric Dharma and can be practiced only by people of great capacity.

Q: Since respectfully reading your writings, Elder, I have gained a correct understanding of the Dharma spoken by the Buddha. Buddhadharma does not rely only on understanding; it depends even more on one's own down-to-earth practice.

A: Very good. Now that you have correct understanding, you should work tirelessly in practice so as to personally realize the original face. Mere understanding without engaging in proper practice is like talking about food without filling the stomach.

Q: Our Heart-Center Dharma relies on the empowerment of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Is this not a Buddha outside mind?

A: Buddhas exist. Śākyamuni Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, Dīpaṃkara Buddha, and so on all exist. Yet the thousand Buddhas and ten thousand Buddhas share one essence; the dharmakāya is one. Those who study Buddhism must realize the nonduality of principle and phenomena, and the nonduality of self and other.

Q: Some people say that if one starts with the sixth consciousness, practice and accomplishment are easy, whereas if one starts with the eighth consciousness, only those of superior capacity can achieve accomplishment. Is that right?

A: This statement is utterly wrong. Starting from the sixth consciousness does not easily overturn the nest of deluded consciousness; success is very difficult. Starting from the eighth consciousness more easily overturns the nest of deluded consciousness and gives twice the result with half the effort. Some people in the Pure Land school do not recognize the advantages of other schools, and even tell people that reciting the Buddha-name with a scattered mind can also bring rebirth in the West. Who knows how many people this has harmed. In our practice, there is no need to practice several different Dharmas. According to your own inclination, choose one Dharma suited to you and practice it single-mindedly. The Heart-Center Dharma is a great Dharma integrating Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism into a single whole. The scripture says that by practicing the fourth mudrā, at the end of life one can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, and may also, according to conditions, be reborn in the pure lands of the ten directions. From this it can be seen that practicing the Heart-Center Dharma is precisely practicing Pure Land, and one can be born in the highest level of the highest grade.

Q: How far must one's practice have developed before one can open a Heart-Center Dharma center and propagate the Dharma?

A: Work hard. When you are able to move freely in every direction, are not deluded by circumstances, and are unconstrained by favorable or adverse conditions, then you can open your own Heart-Center Dharma center and greatly propagate the sacred teaching.

Q: For us beginners, must we first dissolve body and mind into emptiness, first break through “existence,” and then break through “emptiness”?

A: In practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, just keep practicing. At a certain time, it suddenly bursts open: body, mind, and world are all dissolved into emptiness, and emptiness too is unobtainable. But you must not seek that bursting-open. The deluded thought of seeking it will obstruct it.

Q: Master, please instruct us on the meaning of “All marks whatsoever are false.”

A: “All marks whatsoever are false” means that reflections are all false. Our Buddha-nature itself has no such reflection; it is without characteristics. One must turn around and recognize that these reflections are the wondrous function arising from your own Buddha-nature. If you cannot turn around and instead take the reflections to be real, then you are in trouble. For example, this house, chair, table, and so on are all our reflections. If you cling to them, are you not in trouble? Yet these reflections can function wondrously. A house can protect one from wind and cold; clothing can cover the body and keep it warm; a table can be used for work and eating. Is this not wondrous functioning? But you cannot cling to it. If you follow the reflections and run after them, that is bad. These reflections are the wondrous function arising in the mind; they are all transformations manifested within our mind. This is not to say there are no reflections, because this mind is alive rather than dead; it functions wondrously. We possess the three bodies of dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya in full. It is not only dharmakāya. Dharmakāya is the essence; it must manifest all phenomena and function wondrously in every way. If it cannot manifest all phenomena and function, it is of no value. Sitting in meditation does not mean sitting there dead and unmoving. If one sits there dead and unmoving, what use is that? Therefore one must function wondrously in every way. Yet one must recognize the essence. If you do not recognize the essence, how can you function? Clinging to marks is terrible; it creates the karma of birth and death. If you understand this essence from which all kinds of wondrous functioning arise and do not cling to marks, you do not create the karma of birth and death. Being deluded about the essence and clinging to marks creates the karma of birth and death; this is an undeniable principle. Moreover, appearances are manifested through nature. These appearances are illusory images, yet they are not apart from self-nature. Therefore seeing appearances is seeing nature; nature and appearances are nondual. All that is illusory is itself the true. The crucial point is not to become attached to objects and not to cling to marks. If thoughts arise without abiding and functioning occurs without attachment, this is the Dharma-gate of liberation.

Q: Why is it said that “the physical eye cannot see the Way,” and why is it also said that “the physical eye can see the Way”?

A: When we first see the Way, the physical eye cannot see the Way, because dharmakāya is without characteristics. How could the physical eye see the Way? It is the Dharma-eye of

the mind-ground, using the eye of no-eye, using the wisdom-eye to realize it. Conversely, the physical eye can see the Way: this refers to seeing appearances, for all appearances are transformations manifested within our mind. When the physical eye sees the Way, it is thorough; function can unfold from the essence. Essence, appearance, and function—the three bodies of dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya—are all present. It is not only dharmakāya without saṃbhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya. At the beginning, one cannot say that the physical eye sees the Way; one can only say that the Dharma-eye of the mind-ground can see the Way, and that the physical eye cannot see the Way. Conversely, when the physical eye sees the Way, it is complete: essence, appearance, and function are all present. Nothing can be grasped and nothing can be discarded. Nothing can be grasped—all are reflections, unobtainable. Nothing can be discarded—all are transformations within one's own mind and cannot be discarded or separated from. In Buddhism, completeness has to be explained in this way. At the beginning, one can only explain it this way: the essence of dharmakāya is without characteristics, so none of the appearances one sees should be taken as the Way. Conversely, one must manifest all kinds of appearances and function wondrously in every way.

Q: The Diamond Sūtra says, “No mark of person and no mark of self.” Who speaks and who hears?

A: It means only that there are no such marks; it does not mean there is no speaking or no hearing. If absolutely everything is absent, that falls into annihilationist emptiness. The ever-abiding true mind is without characteristics, like empty space. Because it is empty, it can contain all things. Dharmakāya is like empty space, but one cannot abide in the mark of emptiness; once one abides, there is a point of attachment. It is the same with speaking Dharma. As soon as discriminating views and understanding arise, there is a point of attachment. Therefore, in the end, no-speaking and no-hearing are used to break attachment to verbal explanation and return to wondrous functioning that is free, responsive, and unattached to marks.

Q: Master Hanshan said, “Birth and death, day and night; water flows and flowers wither. Today, I finally believe that the nostrils face downward.” Please explain.

A: It means that today one has finally realized one's own fundamental matter. In the past one was deluded by dreamlike matters such as birth and death, day and night, water flowing and flowers withering. What good fortune today—to personally realize the original face without expending the slightest effort. It is precisely the natural scenery right before one. The fundamental matter is originally just this way, without the slightest extraordinariness. There is no need to spend effort exploring or searching for it. Therefore one only needs to let everything go. The more one uses force, the more it is wrong; the more relaxed, the better.

Q: Holding firmly to a single huatou, investigating it morning and evening, with firm footing and every step steady and solid, until an iron tree blooms and cold ashes pop like beans—only then does one believe that within the ancestral school there is something extraordinary. Even so, one must possess versatile means before one can establish the realm beyond conventional bounds, and one must have the discerning eye of an adept. What are these versatile means?

A: First, one must be versed in both Chan and the doctrinal teachings. Second, one must understand the subtle essentials of the methods and distinctive teaching styles established by masters of the various lineages. Third, one must recognize the capacities of practitioners who come from different quarters for instruction. Fourth, according to what is appropriate, one assigns each practitioner a huatou suited to their capacity.

Q: Not turning along with the thread of words—is that not answering beside the point?

A: In Chan repartee, the main point is not to fall into attachment. Like a gourd floating on water, when pressed it turns; therefore this is called a “turning word.” It is not answering beside the point. Not turning along with the thread of words means answering the question directly, yet without clinging to marks. For example, suppose someone asks how many stories the pagoda at Jinshan Monastery in Zhenjiang has. Someone answers, “Seven,” but the master does not allow it. You must answer without being confined to the pagoda itself, yet still address this very question. How should you answer? You can draw a circle and ask the other person, “How many stories does this have?” When your practice has matured, you will naturally know how to answer.

Q: Master once wrote an article, “Key Questions Concerning Rebirth in the West.” An article in Guangdong Buddhism raised a different view. Please discuss your opinion.

A: I have already seen that article. Its meaning was: the requirements you raised are so high that you frighten people so they dare not practice the Pure Land school; are you not harming people? Actually, I did not deny rebirth while carrying karma. Many people misunderstand, thinking that rebirth while carrying karma means there is no need to practice, and that one can be muddled and loose and still be reborn in the West. Can one go like that? Master Lianchi said, “Many practice Buddha-recitation, but few are born in the West,” because their Buddha-recitation is not urgent and sincere. My article did not deny rebirth while carrying karma; it urged everyone to practice well and achieve one-pointedness without confusion. The Amitābha Sūtra says that if for one day, two days, up to seven days, one is single-minded and unconfused, then one can be born in that land. I have seen many people who have no skill in practice. At the end of life, they cannot sustain Buddha-name recitation and fall into stupor. Some even say, “It hurts so much—what Buddha is there to recite?” Ask yourself: how can such a person be reborn while carrying karma? Therefore one must look at the central point and attain seamless continuity in the practice. One-pointedness without confusion is not difficult. If one can recite “Amitābha

Buddha” steadily and continuously in the mind at every moment, then even on meeting the best circumstance one is not delighted, and even on meeting the worst and most afflictive circumstance one is not afflicted, but still practices Buddha-recitation single-mindedly and the mind does not waver. This requirement is not high. It is correct that one carries karma. To put it even more strongly, even a practitioner who has reached the stage of Equal Enlightenment still has karma, because a bodhisattva at the stage of Equal Enlightenment still has one portion of ignorance of the arising characteristic remaining; ignorance is the cause that creates karma, and only with ignorance can karma be created. Master Ouyi also said that one must have “faith, vow, and practice,” meaning that people must apply themselves to true faith and earnest vows. Having only “faith and vows” without “practice” cannot bring accomplishment, just as a tripod has three legs and cannot lack one of them. “Practice” can encompass faith and vows. Without practice, faith is empty faith and vows are empty vows; they are not true faith and earnest vows. If one does not practice, how can one be reborn while carrying karma? That is what truly harms people. Once one’s view is correct, the level to which one’s practice has developed determines the grade of rebirth; this is vastly different from those who do not actually practice toward one-pointedness.

Q: Please discuss the relationship between mind and objects. What are inner objects and outer objects?

A: Here, “object” means an illusory scene that arises with thought. With each thought there is a corresponding image. Mind is object, and object is mind. Without mind, one looks but does not see, listens but does not hear; then there are no objects. If one can dissolve mind and objects completely, that is good. “Mind and objects suddenly dissolve together” means that in one moment both mind and objects dissolve completely. In sitting meditation, reciter and recited fall away together; mind and object are both absent. Inner objects are our body, mind, world, and thoughts. Outer objects are mountains, rivers, and the great earth. “Then one clearly understands form and emptiness”—and also understands that all of this is the manifestation of our own original nature. This is what studying Buddhism is about.

Q: Sometimes my mind naturally empties out and becomes free of thought, and it is very clear. Sometimes, even while walking, it can likewise empty out naturally, but in a flash it is gone and is not stable.

A: Natural emptying-out is very good. When it is gone, let it be gone. Remain naturally nonabiding; otherwise it becomes dead samādhi.

Q: After entering samādhi, is it possible that one will not wake up?

A: No. Right now you cannot yet reach the point of not waking up; your samādhi will not last long. If you want to enter samādhi for a long time, you must first pass several times through the cessation of perception and feeling. It cannot be done all at once. At the beginning, entering the cessation of perception and feeling is not very long, at most one or

two days. Gradually it can lengthen to a week, ten or more days, half a month, or a month. After that, perhaps suddenly the duration of samādhi can become long, but it will not suddenly become many years; that is impossible. Some people greatly admire those who can enter samādhi for years, hundreds of years, or even thousands of years. But you must know that this cessation of perception and feeling is not good; it is dead samādhi. It is said that stagnant water does not hide a dragon. If it cannot function wondrously, it is useless. Great samādhi is alive and vibrant. Amid circumstances it can function fully without clinging to objects. Nonabiding is great samādhi; it is true samādhi. One must be in samādhi at every moment. Great samādhi has no entering or leaving. If there is leaving samādhi and entering samādhi, it is not true samādhi. There is a Chan case: a woman entered samādhi before Śākyamuni Buddha. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva came over and saw this, saying, “This woman is outrageous. How can she sit in samādhi before the Buddha?” He wanted to pull her out of samādhi. He snapped his fingers at her, but she did not leave samādhi. He lifted her up to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, but she did not leave samādhi. He struck her down into the eighteen hells, and she still did not leave samādhi. Śākyamuni Buddha said, “Below there is a Bodhisattva Wangming who can call her out of samādhi.” Just as he was speaking, Bodhisattva Wangming arrived from below. This Bodhisattva also snapped his fingers before the woman, and she came out of samādhi. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva is the teacher of seven Buddhas; why could he not call her out of samādhi, while Bodhisattva Wangming could? Some people say it was a matter of karmic affinity. That has nothing to do with it. The issue is that one must not give rise to views-and-understanding. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva had given rise to a fixed view: “How can this woman enter samādhi before the Buddha?” This fixed view must not arise. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva represents great wisdom; great wisdom must not give rise to fixed views. This is teaching through symbolic enactment. What does Wangming mean? Wang means unobtainable: all intelligence and wisdom are unobtainable. Therefore, because there were none of these fixed views, one snap of the fingers brought her out of samādhi. Therefore you must knock out your cleverness. Laozi said, “Strike down your intellect.” That means emptying out your worldly intelligence and clever debate. When the mind is empty and open, one can realize the great Way.

9C. 二、修法（一）座上修行 / Part Two: Practice Methods—(1) Formal Sitting Practice

Part Two: Practice Methods

(1) Formal Sitting Practice

Q: When practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, if one adds extra sittings, may they be shorter than two hours?

A: Added sittings are very much needed, but they must not be less than two hours.

Q: When sitting in cold weather, should I cover my head? May my eyes be open?

A: Do not cover the head. When it is cold, you may cover up to the back of the head; the rest of the body should be covered. The eyes may be opened a slit, looking downward. If you cannot keep them open, close them.

Q: When my mood is bad, may I sit?

A: When your mood is bad, do not sit. If you press it down, it may lead to liver trouble. First go out for a walk, let the bad mood disperse, and when your mind is peaceful and even, then sit.

Q: During a two-hour sitting, may I change legs?

A: It is best not to change legs. Moving around affects entry into samādhi. Just when you are about to enter samādhi, changing legs makes you come out of samādhi. But if the pain is very severe, affecting entry into samādhi so that the mind cannot settle, then at that time you may change legs. Whether half-lotus, full-lotus, or a free cross-legged posture, do whatever is comfortable. Leg pain is one barrier; once you pass through this barrier, it will be all right. Some people press their legs with stones. They have all endured hardship; after the pain has passed, it is all right.

Q: When first practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, may one sit twice a day?

A: It is better to sit once. Often, after two sittings, one feels the pain is too much and may become afraid of practicing or stop practicing. In practice, one needs long-term resolve and diligence.

Q: May one sit at the zi hour?

A: As long as you have slept enough and have energy, you may sit. If your energy is insufficient, wait until you have slept enough before sitting. The zi hour is good; it is precisely the time when heart and spirit meet. Sitting meditation is also the meeting of heart and spirit. In our seven-day intensives, we begin formal sitting at the zi hour.

Q: After practicing, I feel tightness in my chest. How can I avoid this?

A: Pay attention to three points. First, when lifting the mudrā close to the chest, the arms must not press against the chest. Second, if you need to belch, let yourself belch; if gas needs to be released downward, let it release; if you need to yawn, let yourself yawn. Do not hold it in. Breathing should be natural. Third, if the body bends downward, you will become very tired. Sleep well first, then sit.

Q: For our Dharma, is the statement that one should practice until great, thorough awakening within one thousand sittings only an expedient way of speaking?

A: Some people have thoroughly awakened within one thousand sittings. But there are also people who, during formal sitting, recite the mantra with their mouths while their minds do not recite it. If it is not in accord with the Dharma, what use is that? I have told you

again and again: the mind must recite and the ears must hear. Outside formal sitting, maintain clear observation; watch thoughts as they arise. Practice depends on oneself. “The teacher leads you through the gate; practice depends on the individual.”

Q: In what direction should one face when sitting?

A: Any direction is fine. Do not attach to marks.

Q: Sometimes when I travel for work, I cannot light incense and have no yellow cloth, so I cannot practice the method. What should I do?

A: It does not matter if you cannot light incense, but you must form the mudrā. If you have no yellow cloth, a clean handkerchief or towel may also be used. The practice must not be interrupted; only then can your practice remain continuous.

Q: When I practiced the first hundred sittings in the past, I felt my mind was rather scattered and not in accord with the Dharma. Should I start again from the beginning now?

A: No. As long as you are now practicing in accord with the Dharma, that is enough. You must recite the mantra mentally and listen attentively to it. When delusive thoughts come, neither grasp nor reject them; pay them no attention.

Q: In hot weather, may I sit without covering my legs?

A: No. The knee joints must not be exposed to wind. If wind enters them, you may get arthritis.

Q: May I sit in an air-conditioned room?

A: In hot weather, sitting in an air-conditioned room is all right. But do not set the temperature too low, and do not let the air-conditioning wind blow directly onto the body. In summer, sitting in the early morning is best.

Q: At home I can no longer sit after three hours, but at a monastery I can sit longer.

A: The very place where you cannot sit is where you must sit; you must train. Not being able to sit is the mind moving. Do not crave quiet places. Train until you can sit anywhere, with no difference of place.

Q: We are very busy with work and cannot possibly practice eight hours a day. What should we do?

A: Make sure to practice for two hours every day. When you have free time, such as on Saturdays and Sundays, you can practice eight hours a day.

Q: When sitting, should one use half-lotus or full-lotus?

A: Either is all right. A free cross-legged posture is also all right. In this posture, the hips should be raised a little to keep the body from leaning backward. For women, half-lotus is still better. One cannot sit on a chair; sitting with the legs hanging down is not good.

Q: After empowerment, must we persevere in practicing every day?

A: Yes. Our empowerment is not an empowerment for establishing a Dharma connection; it is an empowerment that transmits the Dharma. Therefore assess yourself first. If you have no time to practice, then do not receive the empowerment.

Q: Do those who practice the Heart-Center Dharma still need to do great prostrations and recite the Vajrasattva Heart Mantra or the Hundred-Syllable Mantra to confess and remove karmic obstructions? Do they still need to request the Great Perfection teaching?

A: Those who practice Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma need not make full prostrations and need not recite the Hundred-Syllable Mantra, because the second mudrā can already remove all karmic obstructions. Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma is itself Great Perfection.

Q: May I accomplish the Way soon, so that I can share a little of the teacher's responsibility for benefiting beings!

A: With this aspiration, the Dharma-protecting bodhisattvas will naturally protect you at all times.

Q: In the heat of summer, some fellow practitioners sit in the Buddha hall bare-chested, wearing only underwear. Is this in accord with the Dharma? Is wearing an undershirt all right?

A: It is not in accord with the Dharma. One should wear a short-sleeved undershirt, and the knees should be fully covered.

Q: In half-lotus, which leg is better on top?

A: They are the same. Generally speaking, the right leg on top is called the demon-subduing posture; the left leg on top is called the auspicious posture.

Q: Why is it best not to drink water before sitting?

A: Because you may need to urinate before two hours have passed.

Q: After sitting nearly two hours and reciting the mantra a thousand times, if I still want to continue sitting, may I stop reciting the mantra?

A: If you continue sitting, you must continue reciting the mantra. Mantra recitation is a precious means of clearing delusive thoughts. Only when delusive thoughts no longer move and the deluded mind no longer functions can you naturally stop reciting.

Q: Is there any difference between practicing in the morning and practicing at night?

A: There is no difference. However, in night practice, because one is tired from a day's work, one is liable to become drowsy. In morning sitting, after a night of rest, one feels refreshed and energetic; one will not be drowsy and it is easier to enter samādhi.

Q: The most important point in practice is not to interrupt it. If special circumstances cause me to stop for one or two days, is the effect serious?

A: It is best not to interrupt it. Practice is like rowing upstream: if you do not advance, you retreat. Therefore, if you stop practicing for one day, you may lose the equivalent of three days' progress.

Q: When practicing the sixth mudrā, my hands sometimes come together involuntarily. What is the reason?

A: First, the wrists may not be pressed closely together, so the fingers above close up. Second, you may not be alert enough and may be somewhat drowsy.

Q: This winter I have decided to do four seven-day intensives. Please instruct me on the concrete schedule for the intensive.

A: In the first two sittings, practice the fourth mudrā; in the last sitting, practice the second mudrā. Each sitting is four hours, three sittings a day, making twelve hours in all. On the seventh day, practice only the fourth mudrā. Each sitting is six hours, making eighteen hours in all. The schedule is as follows:

First six days: twelve hours.

00:00-04:00; 06:00-10:00; 12:00-16:00.

Seventh day: eighteen hours.

00:00-06:00; 08:00-14:00; 16:00-22:00.

Q: Usually one begins formal sitting one hour after eating. If one deliberately eats less, may one sit earlier?

A: One hour is not a long time; otherwise it is easy to develop stomach trouble.

Q: Soreness and swelling in the waist and back affect my sitting and keep recurring. What should I do?

A: Be patient and sit until the qi channels open.

Q: Sitting has gradually come to feel plain and ordinary, and clear observation has become more continuous. Yet my habitual defilements are still heavy, and I still lose that continuity at times. Do I need to increase sitting practice?

A: Sitting strengthens meditative stability and is indeed an important means of becoming unmoved by circumstances.

Q: Recently my sleep has been better, so my husband and I have been sitting twice a day for almost ten days. I feel too tired. May I keep adding sittings?

A: If the body is not tired, you may sit twice. If you can sit in a settled state, it can only be beneficial and will not cause insomnia. Also, being able to enter samādhi for one hour is equivalent to sleeping seven hours; your energy will be abundant.

Q: About forty minutes after I begin a sitting, my right back hurts and I belch continuously, affecting mantra recitation.

A: Right back pain means the qi channels are not open. Afterward it will heal. Belching expels stale gas and cleanses the inside of the body. This is a good thing and needs no medical treatment.

Q: After practicing the second mudrā, I had diarrhea for five days, more than ten times. Is this normal?

A: It is normal. It is expelling impurities.

Q: Since studying Buddhism, I have always enjoyed reading scriptures. If I do not read them, I feel at a loss. Master, how should I remedy this?

A: You may hold mantras or recite the Buddha's name; these can nurture the mind-nature. Having nothing to do is precisely true mind appearing. As soon as a sense of barren stillness arises, that is a delusive emotional reaction. Holding mantras and reciting the Buddha's name are both ways of roaming in the Tathāgata's sea of quiescent cessation. Though you hold mantras or recite the Buddha's name, do not form the notion that you are doing so. Whatever mantra you hold and whichever Buddha's name you recite are all acceptable.

Q: Where is it best to practice?

A: People like to run around. They run here and there: this place is not good, so they go there; that place is not good, so they go here. It is all disorderly. In fact, everywhere is good; only your mind is not good. When your mind is truly pure, everywhere is good.

Q: Some fellow practitioners, knowing that I have added sittings, came to advise me not to cling to Dharma and criticized me for thinking there is a Dharma to practice and a Way to accomplish.

A: This is all useless talk. Tell them to ask themselves whether they have already reached the point of no practice and no realization. If their minds still move when facing circumstances, what talk is this about clinging to Dharma? Before the boat has reached the other shore, leaving the boat means drowning. These are muddled people speaking nonsense, claiming attainment when they have not attained, claiming realization when they have not realized, talking big and boasting, misleading people's wisdom-life. It would be strange if they did not fall into hell! In fact, practicing the Way is a great long-term matter. How could one stop practicing just because one has sat a few times?

Q: Mahāyāna Buddhadharma always speaks of seeking above, liberating below, and universally liberating sentient beings. But I now feel more and more indifferent, and that resolve is becoming ever less earnest.

A: Without great vows, how can you accomplish a great matter? Your resolve is not earnest, so your practice lacks strength. You should quickly correct this fault.

Q: When adverse conditions are encountered, should one avoid them or try facing them?

A: Avoiding them means one is not a good practitioner. One should respond according to one's strength. My teacher, the venerable Xianglu, said, "If you wish to practice the supreme vehicle, worldly entanglements are provisions for the path; when all adversaries arrive together, they adorn this place of practice."

Q: In his songs, Venerable Milarepa repeatedly emphasized renunciation and mountain-dwelling meditative contemplation. Is this something modern young people, although studying Buddhism, have never truly developed, so that their practice remains superficial—like scratching an itch through a boot or a dragonfly merely touching the water's surface?

A: Modern people's minds are often restless and agitated. They truly should sit more, strengthen meditative stability, and remain unmoved in all circumstances; only then will there be a small degree of accord. They must never indulge in empty talk, saying what they cannot do, thereby misleading themselves and others.

Q: This disciple has practiced for over a year. Although I understand some things in principle, I still have not directly realized the state in which body and mind fall away. Master, if one has not directly realized this, will one's strength not to move the mind when facing circumstances be poor? Is direct realization rather difficult? If one wants to realize it directly, does it mainly depend on sitting and practicing the method?

A: Practice does not consist only of sitting and practicing the method. One must also be tempered in affairs, not turning along with circumstances; only then does the practice take hold. But if one's meditative stability in dealing with affairs is insufficient, one must still sit more in order to strengthen it. This Dharma makes it easy to directly realize what is original.

Q: When a dispute arises, should one explain oneself or ignore it?

A: A practitioner does not get caught up in right and wrong.

Q: Sometimes when I am sitting there, unmoving things move. What is happening?

A: It is your mind moving.

Q: May I hold the mantra in ordinary times?

A: Yes. You may hold it while walking, and also while sleeping. If you hold it until you fall asleep, and it becomes familiar, even in dreams you will be holding the mantra. You may even hold it while urinating or defecating, but do not recite aloud.

Q: Why must one sit and realize samādhi?

A: Because when you are told and pointed out, you do not believe and do not understand. Even if you understand the principle, your meditative stability is still insufficient; when circumstances come, you still run after them. Therefore you must sit and realize samādhi. After Chan Master Yuexia awakened through Chan investigation, he felt his mind still

moved. His teacher, Elder Yekai, had him enter retreat for three years; only after those three years did he come out. Master Yinguang also went into retreat several times. After Elder Xuyun awakened while sitting at Gaomin Monastery, he also went into retreat at Zhongnan Mountain. Elder Laiguo sat at Jinshan Monastery, and after awakening, he also went to Zhongnan Mountain for retreat. Several modern masters practiced in exactly this way.

Q: When I sit with no thoughts, does that mean I lack wisdom?

A: If you know that you have no thoughts, that very knowing is wisdom. Having no thoughts is very good; that is meditative stability. If, when there are no thoughts, you do not know and are muddled, then wisdom is absent. In samādhi one must remain perfectly clear and distinct.

Q: What is the difference between the Heart-Center Dharma and the Lotus Mudrā?

A: Practicing the Lotus Mudrā single-mindedly can also accomplish the Way. The Heart-Center Dharma is somewhat faster than the Lotus Mudrā because one sits longer and there are six mudrās. Our internal organs have a close relationship with the hands. When the mudrā is formed, the five viscera and six bowels are set in order; when the mantra-wheel blows, the qi channels are easily opened; when the qi channels are opened, it is easy for body and mind to dissolve into emptiness and see the nature.

Q: This disciple now practices the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra every day, and respectfully asks the Master for instruction.

A: Devotedly practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra is very good. As long as you can let everything go, set your heart firmly on it, and enter deeply through one gate, practicing any Dharma gate can bring accomplishment. Otherwise, if a shortcut-seeking mentality persists, or if you keep switching from one Dharma to another, you will not succeed even when Maitreya Buddha descends into the world.

Q: When practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, may one hold the “Maitreya Mantra”?

A: Yes. One may also hold the “Broad Rebirth Mantra.”

Q: Is reciting the Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī at the time of death good?

A: The Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī has relatively few characters and is convenient. Whatever pure land one wishes to be born in, one can go there.

Q: In the past I recited the Broad Rebirth Mantra. Now I want to switch to the Maitreya Mantra. May I?

A: Yes. Those who vow to descend with Maitreya Buddha at the Three Dragon-Flower Assemblies to liberate beings should recite the Maitreya Mantra. Each follows each one’s own vow; there is no compulsion at all.

- Q:** Every day I persist in morning and evening recitations of the Buddha's name. In ordinary walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, I train myself diligently to keep the Buddha-name present, silently reciting whenever it comes to mind.
- A:** This method of Buddha-recitation is very good. It can indeed clear away delusive thoughts for a time. As long as you keep struggling with them, slowly they can go from many to few, and from few to suddenly cut off, whereupon mind and Amitābha Buddha become one and inseparable.
- Q:** I have always practiced the "holding-the-Name" method of Buddha-recitation. Although I have now received the Heart-Center Dharma, I still do not wish to abandon the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate. If, in addition to Buddha-recitation, I add one daily sitting of the Heart-Center Dharma as an auxiliary practice for Buddha-recitation, does this become mixed practice?
- A:** If you single-mindedly practice the Pure Land Dharma gate, you need not practice other schools' methods. But in addition to Buddha-recitation, it is best to add recitation of the Broad Rebirth Mantra.
- Q:** When reciting the Buddha's name, after all, there are still more delusive thoughts than name-recitation. Thus I know that even honest Buddha-recitation is not easy.
- A:** Pay attention: when thoughts come, do not fear them and do not suppress them. Simply ignore them and bring recollection of the Buddha to the fore; the delusive thoughts will naturally dissolve.
- Q:** What is the difference between the Broad Rebirth Mantra and the Rebirth Mantra?
- A:** Both mantras are acceptable. Regarding the Broad Rebirth Mantra, read the twelfth section in the eighth essential of *The Ten Essentials of Pure Land*, "Direct Pointing on Buddha-Recitation in the Samādhi of the King of Jewels." It explains this very clearly.
- Q:** Those who practice the Heart-Center Dharma can help friends heal illness, but I have not yet practiced. My friend is in the hospital for surgery. How should I help him?
- A:** You may hold the Heart Mantra of Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha and empower him with it. This mantra is in the *Medicine Buddha Sūtra*. It would be even better for your friend to recite it himself and ask Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha for blessing.
- Q:** Mantras are the heart teaching of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Sincere recitation is most important; pronunciation is secondary. I have grown used to reciting a certain mantra, but my pronunciation is inaccurate. Should I change it?
- A:** Do not change it. Once you are used to it, it is fine.
- Q:** After sitting one full session, if there is still time but not enough for two hours, is there any expedient method of practice?
- A:** You may practice the expedient samādhi mudrā. Place the right hand on the left hand; use the thumb to pinch the middle finger, and still recite this mantra. After reciting several

dozen times, you may stop reciting and simply watch over thoughts. But you must not use this method as a substitute for one full sitting.

Q: After a lay practitioner has held the Cundī Mantra one million times, how should he practice?

A: Most people who hold the Cundī Mantra have some seeking. What is this lay practitioner seeking? Has it now been fulfilled? If it has been fulfilled, he should then use the mantra to seal the mind, empty the mind completely, and no longer have delusive thinking, so as to realize entry into the Tathāgata-ground and thereby fulfill Bodhisattva Cundī's original intention: "First draw them in through their desires; afterward lead them into Buddha-wisdom." Without forming the mudrā, the effect is not great; he should also form the mudrā. In daily activity, while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, he should also continue vajra-recitation of the mantra without interruption.

Q: When I now recite the Four Refuges, the prayer text, and the mantra, I imitate the teacher's pronunciation. I have suddenly realized that this seems to involve attachment to marks.

A: Do not give rise to this delusive thought. You must know that all dharmas are expedient dharmas, but one must not abide in them. Yet if one is to be without abiding and without contrivance, one must first bring the deluded mind into one place; only afterward can both what one abides in and what one does be dissolved away.

Q: Esoteric Buddhism emphasizes lineage and respect for the guru. If, when holding the mantra, one imitates the teacher's sound, rhyme, and tone as much as possible, one can imperceptibly receive the guru's empowering support, swiftly remove karmic obstructions, and settle body and mind. Does Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma, as an esoteric vehicle without visualization, have this requirement?

A: One may do this. In any case, one must practice with single-minded concentration before accord can arise. When mantra pronunciation is accurate, the response is powerful and swift.

Q: The Collected Works of Wang Xianglu says, "In mantra recitation, accurate pronunciation is the first principle. Whenever one seeks a mantra and has recited it until half familiar, one should then ask the empowerment master to correct the sounds and rhymes. The heavy and light syllables, divisions, continuities, and breaks in the phrases must each be investigated one by one. It is not only a matter of sounding alike; one must also obtain likeness in spirit. When it becomes familiar, it becomes natural." Does "not only sounding alike, but also obtaining likeness in spirit" mean that one should recite as much as possible like the sound, tone, and rhythm of the master who transmitted the Dharma?

A: Likeness in spirit means the quality that arises naturally from a mind that is empty and nonabiding.

Q: May the Śūraṅgama Mantra be recited at any time?

A: It may be recited at any time.

Q: Practicing the Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī easily brings entry into samādhi, while practicing the Heart-Center Dharma causes latent seeds to surge up fiercely.

A: You find it easy to enter samādhi when practicing the Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī because of your prior Heart-Center practice. Because you have practiced the Heart-Center Dharma for a long time, the very seeking to enter samādhi keeps you from settling. When you practice the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī for a short time and have no seeking, body and mind are let go, so it is easy to enter samādhi.

Q: When practicing the Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, several times I had this situation: my whole body seemed to be pressed down by a huge stone, and the pressure changed along with mantra recitation.

A: Reciting mantra can remove obstruction, so the “stone” changes. In short, pay no attention to anything; the mind must be empty in order to accomplish the Way.

Q: Which mantras are suitable for liberating deceased spirits?

A: One may recite the Hearing-Liberation Mantra, the Great Secret Mantra of Original Awakening, the Six-Realm Vajra Mantra, the Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Mantra, and the Great Light Mantra. These are the most important mantras. During the intermediate state, reciting these mantras is very important. They should be recited many times, for their effect is great. One may prepare “vajra sand.” The method is: take one box of sand, wash it clean, and dry it in the sun. Thread a red silk thread through a needle, insert the needle into the sand, hold the end of the red silk thread at the root of the ring finger of the left hand, form the vajra-fist mudrā, hold the right hand over the sand, and recite 108,000 times. This sand can then help liberate all deceased spirits. Even for spirits who died many years ago and have fallen into the three evil paths, if one sprinkles it over their corpse or ashes from the feet toward the head, they can be reborn in the heavenly realm. The other mantras then need not be recited.

Q: When first lying down to sleep, is it better to hold the mantra or to maintain clear observation?

A: Holding the mantra is better. Recite the mantra until you fall asleep. If you observe thoughts too tightly, it is instead difficult to fall asleep.

Q: Is there any difference between observing mind and holding the mantra?

A: Observing mind is equivalent to holding the mantra. Observing mind is self-power; holding the mantra is other-power.

Q: Is it not good to practice only in the mountains?

A: Practicing in the mountains is not bad. Training in the mountains for a period is acceptable. But relying entirely on living in the mountains will not do; one must also come to the city to train. If one practices only in the mountains, then when one sees the city, the mind becomes scattered again. Reclusion in a great city is true reclusion. Daoists also say: “The lesser recluse hides in the mountains; the greater recluse hides in the marketplace.” Arhats are divided into first fruit, second fruit, third fruit, and fourth fruit. A first-fruit arhat may remain entirely unmoved in mountain forests, but when he comes to the city, the mind moves. A second-fruit arhat, when he comes to the city, notices the previous thought as soon as it moves. Practicing in the mountains has its benefit: first train until the mind is empty, then come to the city to train.

Q: Because of work, I can sit only once every day.

A: Maintaining clear observation outside formal sitting is good. If you do not maintain clear observation properly, even sitting twice is useless. If you can maintain clear observation, you can certainly accomplish the Way.

Q: I feel that my practice keeps circling in place and does not go upward.

A: Do not be anxious. Once you are anxious, it is spoiled. There is no going upward or downward; Buddha-nature is originally unmoving. Let go. Just plow; do not ask about the harvest. As soon as you set up an expectation, it is spoiled. Wanting to go upward instead makes you unable to go upward.

Q: May people who have not practiced the Heart-Center Dharma read *One Hundred Cases of Realizing the Essence and Bringing Forth Function*?

A: People practicing a mind-ground Dharma gate, and even those who single-mindedly wish to end birth and death and leave saṃsāra, may read it.

Q: The Precious Garland for the Supreme Path says: do not one-sidedly abandon desire, because pleasure can nourish and enhance realization and meditative experience. How can pleasure have this function?

A: It allows you to arouse a joyful mind and have a good feeling, so that you become even more courageous and diligent. But if you cling to it and do not let go, you will enter demonic states or be unable to leave the desire realm.

Q: After practicing Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma for one thousand sittings, should one no longer sit, or continue?

A: This question has been discussed many times. Whether to sit or not depends on whether you have accomplished the Way. Until you have reached the point of not being deluded by circumstances, you must continue practicing well. If during practice you can reach not a single thought arising while everything remains clear and distinct, and fully recognize the

original face at a glance, then it is also acceptable not to sit; the main practice is tempering oneself in affairs, what is called practice after awakening.

Q: If after one thousand sittings I still have not opened up what is original, what should I do?

A: If, during formal sitting, one truly practices with mental recitation and attentive listening, and outside formal sitting maintains close, continuous observation, you will certainly open up what is original within three hundred to five hundred sittings. Many people open it up within one hundred sittings; this Dharma is very powerful. If it has not opened after one thousand sittings, that is not good. What should you do? Start again from the beginning. During formal sitting, develop meditative stability in accord with the Dharma; outside formal sitting, maintain clear observation to develop wisdom.

Q: I have affinities with some lamas and have paid homage to several gurus. They transmitted some methods to me, and I practice them all. Is this too mixed? Venerable, what should I do?

A: It is too mixed. You must concentrate on practicing one method. Choose the Dharma method you like most and enter deeply through one gate. Dharma is medicine. When sick, one must take medicine; if one takes every kind of medicine, the illness is not easily cured. When the medicine fits the illness, one medicine is enough. It is also like digging a well: you dig two or three feet in this place and find no water, then change to another place; digging here and there, you still cannot reach water. You should choose one Dharma suited to you and practice it.

Q: This disciple thinks that esoteric Dharma is passed down in one continuous lineage and should not be mixed in practice. Mixed practice is like two people, each running very fast, but tied together as they run; then they are bound.

A: Correct. With this clear understanding, you will not be deceived again.

Q: Although it is said that results come naturally when the conditions mature, time waits for no one. Please instruct us on how to practice in the limited years ahead.

A: Train in circumstances. Remain nonabiding in all things; remain unconstrained by favorable and adverse conditions and move freely in every direction. Then you can come and go freely, transform freely, and end fragmentary birth-and-death. Otherwise, hold the Maitreya Mantra or the Broad Rebirth Mantra more, and you can be reborn in a pure land. What is there to worry about?

Q: May my husband and son do retreat together?

A: For retreat, first, one must truly be able to remain in retreat, with the mind truly settled. Second, there must be someone to guard the retreat. Do not damage a child; forcing too hard can cause problems.

Q: Must nine sittings be done only after a seven-day intensive?

A: Not necessarily. On the fifteenth day of a thirty-day lunar month, one may do nine sittings, eighteen hours, forming the fourth mudrā.

Q: On the fifth day of the seven-day intensive, during formal sitting, a field of white empty space appeared. There was nothing, and I myself was not there, but in my mind I was very clear. I asked myself, “What is this? Could this truly be the self-nature appearing?” I even moved my head, but I felt it was too plain. Once doubt arose, I could not recognize it and grasp it.

A: This is the luminosity of your self-nature. Within nothing whatsoever, recognize who it is that knows there is nothing, and the great matter is settled. If this is not self-nature, what is it? Do not miss the good opportunity! Moving your head means you were deluded by its shadow. This is originally utterly ordinary, yet it is also earth-shaking. It is a pity that your recognition was insufficient. You say you could not grasp it—when knowing has nothing that can be known, what is there to grasp?

Q: After returning from the seven-day intensive, my state of mind felt much plainer. It is just that I am still attached to some things, and my strength is not yet sufficient, so they are hard to cut off suddenly.

A: Life is like a dream. Everything is like flowers in the sky and the moon in water. What is there to cling to or be stained by?

Q: Sometimes when I silently recite the Buddha’s name, it seems there is a Buddha-recitation machine inside automatically reciting, which cannot be driven away. Whether I deliberately resume reciting the Buddha-name or refrain from doing so, neither seems to work. But I neither like it nor dislike it. What should I do?

A: You must not listen to it. Just recite by yourself. Otherwise, you may recite aloud. In short, any inner sound must not be listened to. You must honestly recite the Buddha’s name yourself; otherwise you may go astray and enter demonic states. If you can neither like nor dislike it and treat it as if nothing is happening, then there is no obstruction.

Q: What is meant by Buddha-recitation reaching the point where “the outside is cut off but the inside is not cut off”?

A: The outer sound has stopped, while the mind is still reciting.

Q: When sitting quietly and investigating a huatou, I recite, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” Later I become dazed and muddled, and only hear one sound, “It is I”; then there is a buzzing in the brain and I can no longer continue reciting.

A: It is not a matter of reciting the words; rather, it is “quiet contemplation” of who is reciting the Buddha’s name. This is investigation! The answer “It is I” is a response generated by the sixth consciousness. It is delusive thinking, not true wisdom; therefore your body and mind cannot dissolve into emptiness.

Q: Is meditative absorption just sitting meditation?

A: Meditative absorption is not necessarily sitting meditation. Not being deluded by circumstances is meditative absorption; it is not sitting there without moving. Sitting there without moving is withered-tree Chan. Walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all Chan. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says it very well: “Recognize illusion, and you are free of it; no expedient means need be applied. Freedom from illusion is awakening; there is no gradual sequence. All bodhisattvas and beings of the Dharma-ending age, by practicing in reliance on this, can thus forever leave all illusions.” Knowing that all these are illusory appearances and unobtainable, one no longer clings. Like the moon in water, we will not try to scoop it up. Leaving illusion is great meditative absorption. That is “no expedients are needed.”

Q: I have practiced Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma for over two years and have gained a great deal. Many things I once feared or loved suddenly no longer become problems, giving me a feeling of unexpected joy. Because of this, I have developed great faith in the teacher and in Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma.

A: This is indeed a great gain. We practice Dharma in order to end birth and death and leave saṃsāra. Birth and death are not ended because, when facing circumstances, the mind arises and clings without letting go. Now, if there is nothing feared and nothing loved, then in this very thought, birth and death have nowhere to stand.

Q: I think that in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, first, there is the Buddha’s empowering support; second, one practices according to the requirements, neither hurried nor slack, letting everything go, with mental recitation and attentive listening. Then one naturally receives the empowerment of the three mysteries and will not go astray.

A: Yes. In practice, one must be neither hurried nor slow, practicing steadily according to the Dharma and advancing step by step. But when the appropriate time comes, one must intensify sitting practice and not always remain as before, practicing in a weary, sloppy way without vigorous diligence. Therefore, after one hundred sittings, if one’s time and energy are sufficient, one should undertake a seven-day intensive or sit nine sittings to help bring the true fruition to completion.

Q: In esoteric Buddhism there is guru-yoga. In Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma, how are accord and continuity established?

A: What we practice is esoteric practice without visualization. Not abiding in anything, with no mark obtainable, is the fullest accord. Through all twelve hours of the day, while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, at all times and in all places, being none other than this is continuity. Going one step further, even this state of continuity cannot be obtained; even the continuity one can observe is unobtainable. That is true continuity.

Q: Since receiving the Heart-Center Dharma last year, the lines in my hands have been changing. Why?

A: Such small changes do not amount to anything. There must be a great change from quantitative change to qualitative change!

Q: In general, what stages does practice pass through?

A: In practice, one must pay attention. The first step is that body, mind, and world all dissolve into emptiness; meditative stability and wisdom are complete, and then one can personally see the original nature. Without this first step, the later stages of practice cannot be carried through. The second step is to protect this Buddha-nature, protecting it so that it does not cling to circumstances or run after them. Once protection is mature, do not protect; you must forget protection. The third step is letting be. This is like a child who has grown up; adults no longer need to manage him, and he can stand on his own. Finally, even “letting be” is no more. Buddha-nature is originally like this, and practice proceeds layer by layer. Have we arrived home once we have awakened and seen the nature? No. Do not be confused. That is only the initial step. Sixth Patriarch Huineng could awaken to the Way just by hearing someone recite the Diamond Sūtra. With such good faculties, after awakening to the Way under the Fifth Patriarch, he still had to hide for fifteen years among hunters, tempering himself in circumstances. This means that although we have seen the nature, the habits from many lives and many kalpas remain; clinging habits remain, and the mind can still move. Therefore one must practice after awakening. One must cut off these delusions of thought—the confusion of the mind arising in response to circumstances, greed, anger, delusion, and the like. Only then will it work; only then can birth and death be ended. Is it enough as soon as we awaken to the Way? No. Master Zhaozhou also had extremely good faculties, yet after awakening to the Way he still had to protect for forty years. He said it very clearly: “For forty years, this old monk has had no miscellaneous use of mind except during the two daily rice-gruel meals.” Therefore, when Chan speaks of the Three Barriers, this is not a fiction; there truly is such practice. Seeing the original nature is the Initial Barrier, that is, breaking through one’s fundamental case. The next stage, the Multiple Barrier, is the practice of protection. When protection reaches the point where even “protection” is gone, one has passed through the Multiple Barrier. At this time one does not delight in good circumstances and is not afflicted by bad circumstances. Favorable and adverse conditions do not bind one; one is free and at ease. That is passing through the Multiple Barrier. Having passed through the Multiple Barrier, one must still go upward; there is also the Prison Barrier. That means practicing until one reaches the stage of the unconditioned, with great spiritual powers and great luminosity shining through the ten directions yet with no abiding anywhere. Although great spiritual powers all fully appear, one does not conceive of spiritual powers; everything is unobtainable. Therefore it is said: the road is the home, and the home is the road; one can enter Buddha and also enter Māra. When one has truly arrived home, the end equals the beginning. In the beginning, one knows nothing; at the end, great wisdom is like

foolishness, equivalent again to not knowing. There is no knowing of anything, no spiritual powers or wondrous functions, and no clinging to even the slightest point. Once the mind is truly empty and pure, the six paths of rebirth themselves are what it means to end birth and death, and ending birth and death is itself the six paths of rebirth. Hell and heavenly palace are the same; there is no discriminating mind at all. One can walk freely even in the animal realm; it is utterly natural, without the slightest forcing. If you cannot go like this, then you should still aspire to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Only when practice reaches the Prison Barrier is the ultimate culmination of the Dharma realm reached, and then one may go anywhere. Practice well; this is not something completed all at once.

Q: Master, please instruct us on knowing and doing in practice.

A: Knowing without doing is equivalent to not knowing. Doing without knowing—how is that not blind? Therefore, in actuality, knowing is doing and doing is knowing; knowing and doing are nondual. Even if you do not yet know, go and do it. When you have done it to a certain point, suddenly everything opens up; you understand, and then you truly know. Knowing without doing is very shallow. Without actual practice, it remains conceptual understanding, not true knowing. You must practice before you can attain true knowing. Honest people do not understand many principles, but they can set their hearts firmly on reciting “Amitābha Buddha! Amitābha Buddha!...” With mental recitation and attentive listening, when the practice matures, before and after are cut off; suddenly everything opens up, and the mind becomes completely empty and pure. Then they understand. Therefore it is said that the more foolish a Pure Land practitioner is, the better. The ancients said, “Only the wisest and the most foolish do not change.” The most foolish person is willing to do it. He can keep reciting “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” and so he can attain samādhi. Clever people are unwilling to do it. Understanding a little principle, they become self-righteous and are unwilling to set their hearts firmly on reciting. This is not good.

If you do not do it, you cannot arrive at this point, and you cannot truly understand. It is like eating something: once you have eaten it, you naturally know its taste. If you have not eaten it, thinking about it all day cannot let you know that taste. Therefore, even if you do not know this truth, it does not matter. As long as you single-mindedly continue doing it, you can reach this degree, and it will naturally become clear to you. All thoughts and ideas are born from this mind: “Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm.” Whether reciting the Buddha’s name or reciting a mantra, with mental recitation and attentive listening, and with the heart set firmly, when everything is gone yet clear, distinct knowing remains, at that moment you look back and suddenly understand: ah, this is the wondrous function of our true mind; this is true knowing. Merely understanding a little principle without doing it, without genuine realization, will not work when one encounters

situations. When situations come, one becomes confused and does not know that the situation is false and empty, taking it instead as real.

Q: How does the Yogācāra school point out the stages of practice?

A: The Yogācāra school explains it very clearly. The one who has first awakened reaches only the initial realm of the Dharma realm, the Joyous Ground, which is entry into the first bodhisattva ground. There are still ten grounds afterward. Therefore one must temper oneself in circumstances, protect well, apply oneself in practice, and not become negligent. Some people think that once they have awakened, nothing matters anymore: they drink, smoke, eat meat, and give themselves free rein. Have they truly reached that point? No. That is reckless behavior. They are still far from the final culmination. We must certainly pay attention: one who has truly awakened remains unmoving in suchness when facing all circumstances. If one is still moving, that will not do.

To know whether one has truly awakened, ask yourself: “When circumstances come, does my mind still move? Can I pass through affairs?” If circumstances come and the mind still moves, if one runs after circumstances, then one has not awakened. If you have truly awakened to the Way, you know that all these are illusory appearances and unobtainable. Only if you can remain unmoved, abiding nowhere in anything, is this true awakening. Therefore, when one reaches the Joyous Ground, the initial realm of the Dharma realm, the innate self-clinging and dharma-clinging are still present and must be removed. Before the eighth ground of bodhisattvahood, one may regress if one does not keep practicing. Nowadays many people are muddled: today they sit a little, tomorrow they stop; today they practice a little, tomorrow they go out to play, running everywhere. How can this work? It will not do. Therefore one must not forget to practice and must not be negligent in the slightest. Only when one has truly practiced to the point where there is no further effort to apply can one let go. Only at the eighth bodhisattva ground can innate self-clinging be removed, and only at the tenth bodhisattva ground can innate dharma-clinging be removed. Yogācāra explains it this clearly. “Observation, perfectly luminous, illumines the great thousandfold world.” After the tenth bodhisattva ground, one perfectly illuminates everything, and the worlds of the ten directions are within one’s mind. Practice well. You do not arrive home in a single step. Practice requires patience, perseverance, and long-term resolve.

9D. 二、修法（二）座中反应与境界 / Part Two: Practice Methods—(2) Reactions and States During Sitting

Part Two: Practice Methods

(2) *Reactions and States During Sitting*

Q: During formal sitting, the mudrā I was forming suddenly pulled apart. What happened?

A: That is a vibration of qi. Your body has not yet emptied out. It does not matter; form the mudrā again. When the qi is full, this kind of feeling can occur. It may feel as if the head is about to burst; do not be afraid, and do not clutch your head. You will not die. Our Buddha-nature never dies. But once a thought moves, it will no longer burst; it will recede. Therefore, during these transformations, even if you see frightening states—fierce Dharma protectors, wrathful forms of Buddhas, vajra deities, or ferocious wild beasts—do not be afraid. If you see favorable states, such as Buddhas and bodhisattvas appearing, do not pay attention to them either. Sometimes, when we are sitting well, a Buddha may come to empower us, but this must not be sought. For example, if a Buddha comes and gives you a treasure, and you reach out to receive it, it may suddenly explode. With that explosion, your body, mind, and world are all blasted empty. Recognizing it in that instant, you directly see what is original. This is the Buddha's empowering support.

Q: When sitting, it seems as if a great wind is blowing me until I am about to fly up.

A: Then fly. Let everything accord with conditions. It is all right. Do not be afraid; you will not fall down, and you will not die. Your physical body is not floating; your consciousness is floating, while the body is still there.

Q: If one can see scenes of the six paths, is this because what is seen has not yet emptied? Does it affect practice?

A: If you do not abide in marks, there is no obstruction.

Q: I deeply feel my karmic burden is heavy, so I practice the second mudrā every day. Sometimes, after an hour and a half, the pain is unbearable and my legs are covered in sweat; sometimes my whole body is very hot, especially the palms of my hands.

A: Pain is the very removal of obstructions; when obstructions are removed, the pain disappears. Sweating and bodily heat show the Dharma's power at work. These are all good things. Do not doubt them. Press forward with effort, and you will become light, peaceful, and at ease.

- Q:** At present, when I practice the second mudrā, there are sensations of held breath and shortness of breath. It feels as if all the qi is rushing straight up through my whole head, and in an instant my entire head feels light, sharp, and alert.
- A:** This is the experience of clear qi rising and opening the channels in the head. Pay no attention to any phenomena during sitting. Just hold the mantra single-mindedly and let everything be natural. You will certainly not go astray. The greatest taboos are clinging to marks and becoming frightened.
- Q:** Yesterday, when practicing the second mudrā, I several times had a feeling of held breath and chest tightness, as if the qi were being pulled straight upward and as if this breath were about to stop.
- A:** When one truly enters samādhi, the breath does stop. Do not be afraid.
- Q:** It is said that the second mudrā of the Heart-Center Dharma can lead to caṇḍālī samādhi. How should it be practiced?
- A:** Caṇḍālī samādhi is the visualization of one's own true fire rising; it is a visualization practice. You practice the Heart-Center Dharma and enter deeply into meditative absorption—how could true fire fail to arise?
- Q:** Please instruct me on the effects of practicing the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth mudrās, and how I should arrange them. May I form the mudrā and sit at any time, without being restricted to beginning formal sitting at a fixed time?
- A:** Ordinarily, practice the second and fourth mudrās more. When the mind is uneasy, you may add the third mudrā. For healing illness, practice the second mudrā. If you are healing someone else and cannot go there yourself, you may practice the third mudrā and ask the Dharma protectors to treat the person on your behalf. When demonic obstructions are heavy, practice the fifth mudrā. When you need to understand various kinds of languages, practice the sixth mudrā. The time need not be fixed, but you must practice for a full two hours. Sit more; deepen your meditative stability, and only then will you remain unstained by circumstances.
- Q:** When mind-demons are heavy, one practices the fifth mudrā. What is meant by heavy mind-demons?
- A:** You have misunderstood. The fifth mudrā is not for breaking mind-demons; it is for breaking external demons. Mind-demon means the movement of mind—that is, lustful thoughts moving wildly. One must recite the Heart of the Śūraṅgama Mantra to counteract them.

- Q:** When one reaches the point where self and others are both empty and mudrā and mantra are also gone, do mudrā and mantra still have any function at that time? Are mudrā and mantra also false?
- A:** Mudrā and mantra are like a boat for crossing the river. Once you have reached the other shore, why remain on the boat instead of going ashore? Therefore they are called false. Because they have great function, they are also called real. Once you reach the other shore, you must abandon them and must not abide in or cling to them. Therefore the Buddhadharma is the middle way that is neither empty nor existent, with nothing to abide in or cling to.
- Q:** Sometimes, at four or five in the morning, when I am preparing to sit, fearful phenomena appear. Actually there is nothing there, but I am afraid. It seems as if something with a strange face or bared teeth is beside me, mocking me. Sometimes, just after lying down, half-asleep and half-awake, there is nothing there, but I am afraid. It also happens while sleeping, though not during formal sitting.
- A:** Fear is your bad habit of grasping at life and fearing death. You must know that the physical body is an illusory appearance, with only provisional birth and death. The dharmakāya, Buddha-nature, has always remained through past and present, unborn and unceasing, without birth or death. If you truly and thoroughly realize this principle, what is there to fear?
- Q:** Around five in the morning, while neither fully awake nor asleep, I often see light, starry space, high mountains, and a sun in a silent sky. Later, perhaps because I abided in marks, I slept uneasily at night and saw ghostly shadows before the window, becoming extremely frightened. Sometimes a dark ignorance seemed to press down toward my head and frightened me awake; I also felt that someone was slapping my mouth in sleep, so I jumped up in terror and struck wildly with my hands.
- A:** This comes from practicing form-based methods and clinging to marks. Now contemplate everything as empty. Do not abide in marks, and all illusory images will vanish. Devoutly practice the Heart-Center Dharma; external demons will not invade, you will sleep peacefully, and you will perfectly realize great awakening.
- Q:** During a seven-day intensive, I am always unable to sit steadily and have many delusive thoughts. My practice during formal sitting is very poor; this makes me lack confidence, and I always feel that I am progressing more slowly than others.
- A:** In the midst of a hundred demands, you still do not forget to practice and even make time for a seven-day intensive. This shows excellent faculties of the highest order. As long as you persevere and advance, you will certainly accomplish the fruition of the Way. Being able to sit for four hours shows meditative stability; otherwise you could not remain seated. As for having many delusive thoughts, that is habitual conditioning. As long as you keep battling with them without interruption, final victory will surely belong to you.

- Q:** During sitting, I involuntarily speak many languages I do not understand or recite many scriptures, accompanied by various gestures and mudrās, which automatically keep changing. After the sitting, I feel very light and refreshed, and I feel especially energetic.
- A:** Pay no attention to any phenomenon in samādhi, whether good or bad. These are all illusory images of the sixth consciousness, not real things. You absolutely must not cling to them; otherwise it is easy to enter a demonic path.
- Q:** Sometimes, during formal sitting, the mantra being recited stops without my noticing it. The hands are still forming the mudrā, knowing remains clear and distinct, and there are no delusive thoughts. In this situation, should I stop reciting the mantra and continue sitting, without clinging to any notion of time?
- A:** You still know that the hands are forming the mudrā. This shows that the body has not yet emptied out and deluded knowing has not yet ceased. At that time, if thoughts have truly stopped—that is, the previous thought has ceased and the next thought has not arisen—then body, mind, and world are all unobtainable. Where would there still be mudrā and mantra? Of course there would be no need to recite the mantra. If you have not emptied out, you must still recite the mantra. If you truly cannot bring it up, you may also refrain from reciting, but you must maintain clear observation—that is, observe this right mindfulness in which no thought arises. When conditions ripen, it will naturally empty out; at that point, what notion of time could there still be?
- Q:** Once during sitting, grief suddenly arose and tears flowed like a spring; afterward, scriptures were sung and recited from my mouth. Why did this happen?
- A:** The singing and reciting of scriptures and the grief arising from within occur because the power of the Dharma has penetrated deeply into the field of the eighth consciousness, causing wholesome roots from past lives to surface. Once all this passes, it is finished; do not cling to it and refuse to let go.
- Q:** I have practiced the Dharma for a year and a half without interruption. During the first hundred sittings, I dreamed that I was holding a firecracker in one hand; after the firecracker exploded, everything was gone. I did not recognize it and only knew to recite the Buddha's name, so I returned from it, thus failing to live up to the deep kindness of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas who had empowered me.
- A:** This is an excellent sign. It was precisely the Buddha's empowering support. After the great explosion, everything was empty, yet numinous knowing remained vivid and distinct. This numinous knowing is your original face; this was precisely meant to let you see your own original nature.
- Q:** A fellow practitioner, while practicing the Dharma, felt as if he had fallen into a very deep, dark place. He became afraid and stopped.
- A:** This is beginningless ignorance. He should not have been afraid. Just have him continue steadily practicing the Dharma.

Q: When I sit, after ten or more minutes the mantra can no longer be recited, though the mudrā has not dispersed. What is happening?

A: You have settled into samādhi. Is it a problem to remain in samādhi? At first, no; it feels very comfortable. But if one remains there too long, one may become attached, so do not stay there—come out of samādhi. When the mantra cannot be recited and there are no delusive thoughts, ask yourself in return: 'What is this?' If this triggers a flash of insight, you will see the nature.

Q: After entering samādhi, one does not know it. If one knows one has entered samādhi, it is not true samādhi. Is that right?

A: Right.

Q: I have practiced the Heart-Center Dharma for exactly nine months without interruption. At present, during the last half-hour of formal sitting my legs are rather painful, but it is not a problem. I think this may be a matter of my sense of time. I often feel I have been holding the mantra for only a few minutes, but when I come back to clarity it is often half an hour or even more than an hour. I also do not know whether I have been reciting the mantra or not. The mudrā has never dispersed, and my sitting posture remains very upright. Sometimes, both during formal sitting and in daily activity, my back feels hot; recently, my lower abdomen and stomach have also begun to feel hot. Master, please instruct me on what I should do from now on.

A: This proves you have already entered samādhi; that is why several hours pass in a flash, the mantra drops away, and the mudrā does not disperse. Heat in the body is caused by inner qi being activated. Do not pay attention to it. Eat more vegetables and fruit that clear heat.

Q: I sit from midnight until five in the morning without the slightest sign of dullness.

A: This is very good; it is a good sign of entering deeply into meditative absorption.

Q: When I sit, there is a period when I know absolutely nothing. What is the reason?

A: There are two possibilities: one is dullness, the other is indeterminate blankness. It is like being dead, knowing nothing at all. When there is dullness, rouse yourself and recite the mantra aloud to drive away the sleep-demon. When there is indeterminate blankness, sharply ask: 'Who is this?!' Numinous knowing must remain vivid and distinct.

Q: After sitting for an hour, I did not know anything, and my legs no longer hurt.

A: If you know there is nothing, this is numinous knowing, though still carrying a little dull samādhi. If you do not even know that there is nothing, then you have fallen into indeterminate blankness and must resume reciting the mantra.

Q: Recently, during sitting, several times the mantra being recited stopped, inwardly there was no body or mind, outwardly there was no world, yet it was clear and distinct, with not

a single thought arising. I immediately acknowledged it: I had directly realized the original face.

A: Very good.

Q: What is the difference between dullness, dull samādhi, and right samādhi?

A: Dullness is falling asleep: the hands drop and the mudrā disperses. In dull samādhi, the head is a little lowered, the hands do not drop, and the mudrā does not disperse; it is like being drowsy or asleep, yet there is still perception and a hazy feeling. In right samādhi there is no hazy feeling; everything is perfectly clear, without thoughts. When one truly enters samādhi, no sound can be heard. When samādhi becomes deep, spiritual powers are about to emerge, and even the sound of ants crawling can be heard. From dull samādhi to right samādhi there is a process; gradually one becomes clear. Sometimes, after remaining in dull samādhi for a long time, it can turn into right samādhi.

Q: What should one do if, after entering samādhi, one cannot come out?

A: That will not happen. For the time being, one will not reach the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling. If one enters the attainment of cessation, one has to sit for several days at a time. Coming out of samādhi is also very easy: strike an inviting-bell beside the ear and one will come out. If there is no inviting-bell, use a metal vessel, because the sound of metal is sharp and piercing. This kind of samādhi is a disaster; it is produced by forcibly suppressing thoughts so they do not arise in practice. There was a lay practitioner whose usual practice was to suppress thoughts. One day he entered samādhi in a monastery. People thought he had died and buried him. Samādhi is needed, but it must not be dead samādhi. Remaining unmoved when facing circumstances is true samādhi.

Q: I have passed four hundred sittings. Since winter began, dullness during morning sitting has been overwhelming; out of ten sittings, only about three are clear.

A: The methods for counteracting dullness are extremely simple: first, get enough sleep; second, do not eat or drink before early-morning sitting; third, do more physical exercise; fourth, when sleepiness comes, quickly open both eyes wide and recite the mantra aloud. But you must note: if it is entry into samādhi, then you need not do this. Fifth, do not become too fatigued during the day; in this way dullness will not arise.

Q: I have practiced formal sitting for more than six months, but I still have many delusive thoughts during formal sitting. How should I counteract them?

A: When sitting, you should be wholehearted and resolute, thinking of nothing else. When thoughts come, do not attend to them; let them arise and cease by themselves. Only hold the mantra single-mindedly and listen attentively to the sound of the mantra recited in the mind. Delusive thoughts will naturally stop.

- Q:** In the past week, as soon as I begin formal sitting, I naturally enter a rather brief state without thoughts; body and mind also feel comfortable. Only wisdom has not opened up yet. Why is this?
- A:** What kind of wisdom are you expecting to open up? Do you mean knowing the mental activities of others, or knowing information about past and future? If so, you are mistaken. Awakening wisdom means recognizing the original nature, not being swayed by circumstances, being free and at ease with no abiding in anything.
- Q:** Recently I have often experienced the reverse effect of physiology on psychology. After the mind empties, will the physical body change?
- A:** Yes. As the mind changes, the physiology also changes.
- Q:** My experience in sitting is extremely unstable; sitting in the daytime differs from sitting at night. Is it time to overcome this obstacle?
- A:** This is a matter of habit. Those who are used to sitting in the morning feel bad once they switch to sitting at night, and vice versa. It is not that there is any real distinction of good or bad in the time. If you alternate between the two regularly, they will become balanced and no different. In addition, when facing tests from favorable and adverse conditions, one must indeed respond with an ordinary mind. Do not rejoice when conditions are favorable or be startled and vexed when they are adverse. This is something practitioners must pay attention to.
- Q:** How does one prevent Chan sickness in practice?
- A:** What Chan sickness is there? As long as you see all favorable and adverse meditative experiences and pay no attention to them, but only hold the mantra and dissolve them into emptiness, there is no obstruction. With respect to every experience, neither grasping nor rejecting is the best way to release attachment and dispel delusion. Also do not seek to enter samādhi, awaken, or develop spiritual powers; then there will naturally be no Chan sickness. As for all other physiological and psychological changes, let them be natural. Do not take charge on your own by deliberately inducing or suppressing physiological or psychological changes.
- Q:** When practicing during formal sitting, sometimes as soon as I think of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, or the revered teacher, my whole body has a fine tingling, relaxed, cool feeling; sometimes the skin seems to get gooseflesh.
- A:** This is a response evoked by the mind's thought. Do not cling to it; just treat it as if there were no such thing.
- Q:** After opening up what is original, outside formal sitting I feel as if tears are about to flow but do not. What is the cause?
- A:** This is because, after opening up what is original, you feel as though you had lost your parents. That you can apply yourself single-mindedly to practice and attain this result in

the evil age of the final Dharma is truly not easy. I hope you will absolutely not be content with a small attainment. Advance vigorously and diligently; diligently remove old habits, and there is hope of perfectly realizing Buddhahood.

- Q:** At the beginning of sitting, I focus the mind on the mantra. After sitting for a while, the mantra sometimes seems to sound beside my ear, sometimes at the dantian in the lower abdomen, and sometimes by the nostrils. This happens without my noticing, while the mantra continues in the mind.
- A:** Single-mindedly listen to the soundless sound of your own mind reciting the mantra. Do not bother with where it is. Let everything follow its natural course. When recitation continues until the mind becomes empty, the mind that can recite and the mantra being recited fall away at once; body, mind, and world are all emptied together, and the true nature appears directly.
- Q:** When sitting, suddenly a field of white light appears, and within the white light there is a bright point. What is this?
- A:** Do not bother with it. In our practice, we do not allow seeing light or seeing Buddha, because we fear you will cling to marks. From the standpoint of Esoteric Buddhism, that white light is the luminosity of our self-nature, and the bright point is the eighth consciousness. The eighth consciousness is still consciousness; one must break through this consciousness in order to see the nature. Do not bother with it, and do not be secretly pleased, thinking: 'I have white light; I have a bright point.' If you become pleased with yourself, you are attached to marks.
- Q:** When sitting and reciting the mantra, I feel there are two layers of things: the upper layer is flowing thoughts, and the lower layer is the sound of the mantra. If I resume reciting the mantra, the upper layer becomes the mantra, and the lower layer becomes a thick black fog. After a while, mixed thoughts come again and the mantra becomes the lower layer again.
- A:** The thick black fog is ignorance. You must resume reciting the mantra and break through ignorance.
- Q:** When sitting, I see some of the things I remain attached to—some dirty things. I know I must change, but when actual situations arise, I still often cling. How should I practice so that I no longer cling?
- A:** Observe! When you see that you have become attached to them again, you must quickly let go. Your noticing must be quick; if it is slow, it will not work. Clear observation lets you see the dirty things. Being attached to things means you have not let go and your strength is insufficient. If you can observe and see but cannot let go, then sternly rebuke yourself and quickly let go, or quickly recite the mantra and use it to dissolve the attachment. Therefore you must build up strength at every moment. If your strength is insufficient, sit more. Sitting more can strengthen meditative stability. Once that stability is strong enough, a

single noticing will dissolve it into emptiness. Everything is false. When the clinging mind has completely died away, it no longer moves with circumstances. If it has not died away completely, you still cannot pull yourself free and remain trapped.

Q: Should one avoid telling others about the experiences that arise in practice?

A: The reason one should not speak of them is that it may cause others to cling and chase after those experiences. They may think: why don't I have this kind of experience? Their minds become disturbed and they cannot enter samādhi. Furthermore, fundamentally there is no thing. When one does not abide in marks, nothing whatsoever can be obtained. Such experiences do occur; it is like sitting on a train from Shanghai to Zhenjiang and seeing scenery along the way. But if one does not abide in marks, they simply pass by.

Q: Sometimes after practicing the Dharma, my ears buzz.

A: It is good that they buzz. This is the prelude to an explosion. Do not pay attention to it; the qi channels are being opened.

Q: During formal sitting, when the mind is chaotic and cannot attain samādhi, how should I counteract it?

A: At present, the problems practitioners encounter are generally similar: the mind is chaotic, delusive thoughts are many, so many that one cannot sit and wants to end the sitting. This phenomenon is very common. The cause is that the mind is chaotic and unsettled, because one does not know that all things in this world are false appearances and still clings to this world, unwilling to let go; so the mind becomes very chaotic. You must know that everything in this world is unobtainable, all like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. None of it can be obtained. Then this deluded mind will move much less, and you can sit with wholehearted, settled resolve. At the very least, coarse delusive thoughts will not move. Do not let your mind cling to family matters, social affairs, work, or anything else. When you no longer cling, once you begin formal sitting, the mind will naturally become settled, quiet, and calm. At that time, thoughts that turn up from inside will still come. When thoughts come, do not pay attention to them; let them arise and cease by themselves. Only hold the mantra single-mindedly and listen attentively to the sound of the mantra recited in the mind. You must hear it clearly and distinctly. In this way, delusive thoughts will naturally not be many. When delusive thoughts do not move, it becomes very steady, comfortable, and joyful. Actually, later in sitting it becomes very comfortable and joyful. Some people chase after this joy: 'May joy quickly come!' All right—once you chase it, things become worse. With such a heavy deluded mind, how can you enter samādhi? Therefore you must not chase anything. Put everything down, sit with a settled mind, and practice mental recitation with attentive listening; only then can you enter samādhi. When you reach this state of ease and bliss, you still cannot cling to that peace and happiness. If you cling to it, things again go wrong; the mind is abiding in

something, and once settled there you cannot get free. Because there is joy to be obtained, there is movement, and one necessarily falls into a nest.

Q: Once, after sitting and then going to sleep, my body began to become large, extremely large. I thought I should quickly break free, and as soon as this thought moved, everything disappeared.

A: Ha ha—if you had not paid attention to it, it would have burst. Do not think about the matter. Sometimes it becomes huge, huge, huge beyond measure; sometimes it becomes tiny, tiny, tiny beyond measure. All are fine. If thought does not move, you break free; once delusive thought arises, it will not work. That is why I tell you not to get up immediately after the sitting. Rest for a while, leaning on the bed, and a breakthrough may come. During sitting, you still seek to enter samādhi quickly and awaken quickly. After the sitting, you seek nothing at all; then the breakthrough comes. But you must not wait expectantly for a breakthrough!

Q: A few days ago, after lying down in bed, empty space suddenly shattered, and body and mind were lost all at once, with tremendous force. Sometimes this experience also appears when I listen to recordings, but I do not cling to it. Ordinarily, in turning the light inward, whenever a thought arises, I use the word 'Pah!' to cut it off.

A: Practicing in this way, you will certainly bring the practice to complete fruition.

Q: Within the first hundred sittings, the state in which 'everything empties out, and only numinous knowing remains' appeared repeatedly, and it still often appears after the hundred sittings. After mixed practice, my state of mind became tangled and chaotic.

A: After sitting for not long, you obtained this good state. You are truly blessed. Mixing practices is a major taboo in practice; you absolutely must not commit it again.

Q: At night, when I sleep, I lose command of myself. What should I do?

A: If your daytime practice reaches a certain degree, you will also be able to practice in sleep. Those who recite the Buddha's name will still recite 'Amitābha Buddha' when asleep; those who recite mantras will still recite them when asleep. To remain in command in dreams, first remain in command by day. Dreaming is half stupor; at the time of death, it is complete stupor. Therefore practice must be earnest and urgent.

Q: In a dream, I realized that my body was gone, and immediately knew to remind myself: 'Who is it that is clear and distinct at this time?' Yet in the end no breakthrough came; I only heard a kind of miscellaneous sound from head to foot until I awoke.

A: Having this thought is itself an encouraging sign. Letting go even of this thought is truly arriving home.

Q: Before sleeping I recite the mantra. As I recited, I fell asleep and felt that a little person went out. My mind knew it all, and I also felt pleased by it. I said, 'Come back!' The little person came back, and I recited the mantra again. After a while, with a 'hong!' it went out

again. I thought it would not do to keep going out, so I said, 'Come back!' The little person obediently returned. Please instruct me, Master.

A: That is not a true mind-made body; it is an illusory image of the sixth consciousness. Even if one can manifest a mind-made body, it does not mean one has awakened, because one has not clarified the original nature and still clings to marks. Such situations can occur in practice. In the past, Patriarch Poshan practiced at Tiantong Monastery in Ningbo. He was young and liked to play. While sitting in Chan, his mind-made body went out to steal someone else's ducks. After this was discovered, Chan Master Miyun Wu said, 'You have acquired the ability to play with spiritual powers, but you have not yet even dreamed of the Buddhadharma.' Patriarch Poshan had thought he had accomplished the Way; at this point, he knelt down and asked the teacher for instruction. Chan Master Miyun Wu had him investigate: 'Who were you before your parents were born?' Later he awakened. Appearances arise from conditions; they are compounded by causes and conditions. Without Buddha-nature, appearances could not manifest. But one who has clarified the original nature does not abide in the slightest. If one clings to spiritual powers and displays spiritual powers, then one may well become a demon. Patriarch Liangshan said: 'Spiritual powers cannot be sought; if sought, they cannot be obtained; if obtained, they cannot be used.' Therefore one must conceal one's light and remain inconspicuous.

Q: If sexual relations between husband and wife are not discontinued, is it difficult to open up what is original in practicing the Dharma?

A: What is there to say? If sexual desire between husband and wife is not cut off, how can one open up what is original? But if one can respond to it without the mind moving, that is a different matter.

Q: Recently my lustful mind has been moving strongly. I hope the Master will instruct me on how to cut off this mind quickly.

A: It does not matter. This is the surfacing of latent seeds. These lustful seeds, deeply stored in the field of the eighth consciousness, cannot be eliminated without surfacing again and again. Every great patriarch of the past went through the surfacing of latent seeds; therefore they all secretly relied on the Heart of the Śūraṅgama Mantra for empowering support.

Q: As for cutting off lustful mind, outside formal sitting I have no problem maintaining clear observation or reciting the Heart of the Śūraṅgama Mantra; but recently in dreams I keep dreaming of such matters.

A: This is because of clear observation outside formal sitting and because the prajñā-fire of seated practice activates the seeds from within, causing them to surface. Therefore these phenomena occur in sleep and dreams. You still need to practice more diligently. In the daytime, if not even the slightest thought of men and women moves, at night you will naturally be clear and awake, without these dream appearances.

Q: On the fifteenth day of the seventh lunar month this year, I had sexual relations. At the time I did not know it was a precept day. Only afterward did I discover it, and I felt deeply ashamed: ashamed before the teacher and before the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for their compassionate empowering protection, ashamed before sentient beings, and ashamed that I had not let go of all illusory transformations and had lost a good opportunity.

A: Ah, my good child! Everyone has lustful mind, especially when practice has deepened and lustful seeds surge up; then one feels distressed. You have told me the truth, so I will teach you a method for eliminating it.

Q: My lustful mind is blazing. Through the teacher's instruction, I have used two methods to counteract it: first, contemplation of impurity, and second, redirecting and guiding it. But in the process of counteracting it, I sometimes go astray. I know I should repent and eliminate it, but I cannot arouse sincere repentance. I do not know what to do. I ask the revered teacher for instruction.

A: When lustful mind blazes, young men and women alike cannot avoid it. But if one can clear the mind and sit quietly, using psychology to influence physiology, it can gradually be cleared away. If one truly cannot, one may also marry. Buddhist practice differs from person to person; one need not force it.

Q: I know that if lustful mind is not cut off, one cannot become a Buddha. Now my lustful mind is very faint.

A: It is very good that you know this. How old are you now? Is your lustful mind truly faint? Do your private parts still become erect at night?

Q: When I sit diligently and essence-qi is full, the desire in my mind also becomes stronger.

A: Poor child. In this desire realm, the lustful minds of all sentient beings are very heavy; that is why birth and death are not ended. You are only a twenty-four-year-old young man—how could lustful mind not move? But as we study Buddhism and practice the Way, we must deeply know that this is the root of birth and death. If lust is not cut off, one absolutely cannot become a Buddha. When energy is full and lust is strong, the mind is not pure; how could one enter samādhi? Therefore there are two ways to handle this. One is to deeply know the danger of lust, fearing it as one fears snakes and scorpions, and not dare to let the mind move. Carefully sit and enter deeply into meditative absorption, and thereby empty out lust. The other is that if sexual desire surges so fiercely that it is truly unbearable, it is all right to marry first. But one must keep sitting carefully and continuously, strengthening meditative stability, using mental discipline to overcome physiological urges and thereby dissolve lust. If a practitioner sits and practices well, each time husband and wife share a bed, the lustful mind becomes a little lighter; before one is thirty or forty, the lustful mind can disappear completely. The patriarchs in Tibet's white, flower, and black schools did it in this way, but absolutely do not indulge desire! In short, everyone has lustful mind; it depends on how one removes it. If one's mind for the Way is strong, then through diligent sitting practice, one uses the strength of mind to overcome

physiological urges, and lustful mind cannot raise its head. This is how I resolved lustful mind. I hope you can do the same. If you cannot, I hope that through marital relations you can gradually dissolve and cut off lust, and realize the great Way. My good child, absolutely do not sink into lust!

Q: After returning from Shanghai, when practicing the fourth mudrā, subtle seeds of sexual attachment stirred during sitting. Now they are gone. [Teacher's note: Are they truly gone?] It is only after entering deeply into meditative absorption that I occasionally see people and events I encountered in the past. [Teacher's note: Do not let them coil around in your mind.] I feel that as my practice deepened, I occasionally noticed a faint stirring of sexual desire. [Teacher's note: If the practice has truly deepened, would sexual desire still arise?] At such times I would recognize it and immediately dissolve it. [Teacher's note: If you can dissolve it, then your practice has truly deepened.] Sometimes I do not dream, and in sleep, without being aware of it, I have seminal emission without any movement of sexual desire in the mind, about once a month.

A: Seminal loss is a major taboo in practice. You are still young and sexual desire has not yet been purified, so seminal emission is unavoidable. Now I will teach you a method to secure the essence gate. Do it once each morning and once each evening. First, exhale the turbid qi from the chest and abdomen through the mouth. Then close the mouth, contract the anus, and inhale through the nose. After inhaling fully, pause the breath—neither exhaling nor inhaling—then exhale and relax the anus. Let the length of the breath-hold be natural; do not force it. The movements should be slow; the slower the better. Do this thirty times. While doing it, do not have lustful thoughts; otherwise it will not easily be effective. If you feel tightness in the chest while doing it, do four or five repetitions, then stop and rest or walk around. After several minutes, continue.

Q: Regarding the method you taught for securing essence, after practicing it for one month, should I continue? How long should thirty repetitions take?

A: It is best to continue, because your mind is not yet steady. The length of time depends on one's lung capacity and the length of the breath-hold; it cannot be the same for everyone. Also, do not desperately hold the breath; proceed slowly and gently. The slower, the better.

Q: When sitting, I feel light and peaceful, without thoughts, and feel that body and mind have emptied out. Sometimes I only feel that time passes very quickly, with only a very faint clarity and distinctness, but without clear illumination, like the instant just before falling asleep. Is this sinking into empty annihilation? If I feel comfortable, is that falling into a nest?

A: If body and mind have emptied out, this does not mean there is no knowing; rather, there is a slight clarity and distinctness. This is not sinking into empty annihilation. If you feel comfortable but do not abide in it, that is also not falling into a nest. Only if you settle into the comfort and delight in it without tiring have you fallen into a nest.

Q: I have a stomach illness. When sitting, I feel my stomach distended with qi and it is uncomfortable.

A: There are two causes. First, the sitting posture is incorrect: you are bending at the waist and compressing the abdomen. Second, you are focusing on the mantra too tightly. Mantra-recitation should be as if existent and as if nonexistent; then the qi will not bloat. Since you have stomach illness, it is also not appropriate to sit too much. Recite the Great Compassion Mantra more. When ill, you may practice leaning on a sofa or sit for a shorter time; when the illness is better, then practice. The mudrā formed by the hands and the body should make a forty-five-degree angle. Relax; do not let it fall down. While recovering from illness, do not practice the Heart-Center Dharma, because the Heart-Center Dharma must be done for two hours. During recovery, it is better to recite the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra. The time may be shorter, and it is more convenient.

Q: When sitting, my head feels distended. Is that good?

A: Good. That is qi moving, but the blockage has not yet cleared. Once it clears, there will no longer be distension. There may be pain after the distension; after the pain, the blockage clears. Sometimes the head may make cracking sounds; these are all qi moving.

Q: When sitting, I have obstructions in the qi channels.

A: You used to do qigong, did you not? Many people who did qigong have this obstruction. You must forget qi. When qi arises, do not pay attention to it. The Buddhadharma is different from qigong: the Buddhadharma works on the mind-ground, whereas qigong fixates on the body. Let the mind be empty and pure; qi is only a byproduct. Blood circulates by means of qi. If qi does not move, circulation will not flow. When reciting the mantra, just listen to the mantra and do not pay attention to qi. If you interfere with qi, you will go astray. Let it run by itself; however it wants to run, let it run. Do not use consciousness to control or guide it.

Q: During sitting, when the mantra cannot be recited, the mind is very pure, and suddenly a brightness flashes before me. After a while it is gone, like the sun briefly appearing among clouds. Sometimes it is like lightning, and my whole body feels as if bound by something.

A: The instant of brightness is that your mind has opened a crack, like a lotus opening slightly and emitting a little light. This is the luminosity of your original nature. Feeling that something binds you indicates that in a past life you practiced the Dharma but did not see the nature. If you had seen the nature, it would not be like this. Some people feel they are drilling through a black hole and cannot get out; this too is a feeling that comes from having practiced in a past life without opening up what is original.

Q: Sometimes, when sitting, there is an extremely strong sense of bliss. Over time it can arouse lustful mind. How should I handle it?

A: Do not abide in that bliss. In meditative absorption there may be three kinds of experience: emptiness, bliss, and clarity. Do not abide in any of them. If one abides in bliss, one cannot

leave the desire realm. Let the feeling of bliss go; do not pay attention to it. Emptiness corresponds to the formless realm, bliss to the desire realm, and clarity to the form realm. As soon as there is any abiding, one cannot leave the three realms.

Q: Sometimes when sitting, I feel there are countless things like flowers.

A: Those flowers are the light of your nature; they are transformations of the sixth consciousness. Whether good or bad, do not pay attention to them. You cannot attach to marks; otherwise you may become possessed.

Q: One day when sitting, qi suddenly rushed upward. Sometimes, after waking from sleep in the morning, my head makes a sound like a balloon exploding.

A: It does not matter. When sitting, clear qi rises and turbid qi descends; the qi channels are being opened, and the body will naturally change. But you cannot abide in this qi. Do not pay attention to it, and then it will not swell there. Thinking of the soles of the feet can guide the qi downward.

Q: When extremely clear and quiet during sitting, a field of light suddenly flashed out, and I split into two people: one was reciting the mantra, while the other went out to socialize. I knew this was an illusion, and as soon as I noticed this, the one who had gone out merged with the one reciting the mantra.

A: Once you know it is illusory, you are free of it; you will not go astray. If you take it as real, you will fall into a demonic state.

Q: Once, when I had been sitting for nearly two hours, my whole person seemed to melt and dissolve.

A: When practicing the Dharma and entering samādhi, there is the feeling of emptying out. Because all things are false appearances and entirely rely on body and mind to sustain them, one must not take the deluded as truly existent. Therefore, once the deluded mind melts away, false appearances are no longer there.

Q: When sitting, I very much want to empty out the body, but I repeatedly cannot do it.

A: Having this thought is itself attachment to marks. You should not cling to this.

Q: When extremely clear and quiet during sitting, a field of light suddenly flashed out. It was not very bright. At that time, I was mentally reciting the mantra and listening attentively, and did not cling to the light.

A: Practice diligently and keep advancing. Especially outside formal sitting, diligently maintain clear observation, and do not cling to any circumstance or experience. After the six faculties are purified, you will be able to emit great light and illuminate the ten directions.

Q: Once, when practicing the fourth mudrā in the morning, my mind was extremely pure and quiet. Above the space between my eyebrows, a ball of light about the size of a ping-pong ball shone. The feeling at that time is hard to describe in words.

A: 'When the mind is quiet, light arises.' This is precisely the luminosity of your self-nature. Because the mind was pure, a crack opened and a little light appeared. Do not attach to marks or rejoice; you should practice even more carefully and diligently.

Q: Once, when practicing the second mudrā, I suddenly felt as if someone was holding a pure vase, and water from the vase poured down from the crown of my head. It felt as though it flowed throughout my whole body, and in an instant I entered samādhi.

A: The Great Compassion Bodhisattva came to confer empowerment upon you, but do not cling to marks. If you cling to marks, you fall into a demonic state.

Q: During the last seven-day intensive, the revered teacher instructed us, and I understood very clearly in my mind. Other people saw lights and visions; I had nothing at all. The revered teacher said this was best. But I thought he was encouraging me, and I still have not reached the degree of what the teacher said: 'Having nothing at all is the best state.'

A: If you understand that the mind-light of a single pure thought is the dharmakāya Buddha, then you are a person of great wisdom. Seeing no light or meditative vision is indeed best; it was not encouragement. Because the dharmakāya is without characteristics and there is only numinous knowing free from thought, having nothing at all is best.

Q: When entering samādhi, I am like a mirror emitting light, and nothing at all remains. Is this attachment to marks?

A: This is the light of your own nature, not attachment to marks. Our Buddha-nature emits light like a mirror. The reason we cannot see it is that clinging and afflictions cover the light. When your mind settles, the original nature naturally emits light. The light of our original nature and the light of Amitābha Buddha are the same; it can illuminate the great thousandfold world.

Q: In samādhi I saw a tall, large person resembling a Buddha or bodhisattva, sitting cross-legged with huge legs. Beneath the seat, a naked infant climbed up the large legs with both hands, arduously and repeatedly, while I also felt very tired.

A: That large one is yourself. The arduous, repeated climbing upward reflects the difficult process of removing habitual tendencies.

Q: When entering samādhi, can external sounds be heard?

A: When one truly enters samādhi, external sounds cannot be heard. If sounds can still be heard, one has not entered samādhi. True entry into samādhi has neither seeing nor hearing, yet knowing remains clear and distinct, without attachment to seeing or hearing. If one sees things or hears sounds, then one has not entered samādhi or has only partly entered samādhi. In samādhi, even if you walk on a busy street, you do not hear the sound

of vehicles, yet you walk just the same. At this point in practice, spiritual powers are about to emerge. Very small sounds can be heard; one can hear ants crawling, and even hear rain falling in other worlds. When function arises, everything is heard. Therefore the Sixth Patriarch said: 'Not apart from the conditions of seeing and hearing, one transcends and ascends to the Buddha-ground.' Let function operate fully, while the mind does not cling in the slightest.

Q: During formal sitting, sometimes I cannot sustain mantra-recitation. As soon as I try to recite the mantra, it feels as though I lack the strength. What is happening?

A: Concerning mantra-recitation, nowadays some people say that reciting mantra adds one more matter, that it is troublesome, and that it would be better to drop the mantra and not recite it. This is a great mistake. Practice should be like this: during formal sitting, be wholehearted and resolute; outside formal sitting, maintain continuous, close observation. It must be this way! You must know that the mantra is a tool used to sweep away our delusive thoughts. If you do not want to recite the mantra and are tired of it, that itself is a delusive thought. It means your mind is chaotic. If you do not recite the mantra, you will recite greed, anger, and delusion. If you are told not to move thoughts, you cannot do it. The mind moves chaotically—if not this, then that—in utter disorder. Therefore the patriarchs of the Chan school said: before one matter is settled, another has already arrived; there is no end to them. If you do not use the tool of mantra to dissolve delusive thoughts, how can delusive thoughts come to rest? If there truly are no delusive thoughts, body, mind, and world will all be empty, and then nothing remains. At present you have not yet emptied; body and mind are still there, the world is still there, circumstances are still there, so delusive thoughts are present. To dislike reciting the mantra as troublesome is truly muddled. If you go on this way, you will never get free. You must practice properly, resume reciting the mantra, and continue until it can no longer be recited; only then has it naturally dissolved. The mantra must fall away without your knowing it; only then is it truly non-recitation. Deliberately deciding not to recite will not do. When the mantra naturally falls away, there are also two cases. One is that it falls away because one has fallen asleep; one becomes muddled and drowsy, and of course no longer recites. This will not do. The other is that one has entered samādhi: the deluded mind no longer moves, and the mind that recites the mantra is gone. That is, the mind that can recite and the mantra being recited fall away at the same time; then one sees the original nature. If one has fallen asleep or become dull, what use is that? There is a method for checking dullness: look whether our mudrā has fallen down or dispersed. If the mudrā has fallen down and dispersed, and the mantra cannot be recited, then one is asleep; it is useless. In true samādhi, the mudrā neither falls nor disperses. Even when the body has emptied out, the mudrā still neither falls nor disperses. That is entry into samādhi. If one does not recite because one finds it troublesome, one must quickly resume reciting it. If there is dullness, quickly form the mudrā, open the eyes, recite the mantra aloud, and dispel the sleep-demon. After driving away the sleep-demon, recite the mantra softly again.

Q: Sometimes I feel that reciting the mantra is very tiring and I cannot recite it. In this situation, should I still recite?

A: In this situation, you should still recite. Do not force the recitation too tightly; relax a little. Being very tired and unable to recite is not purity of mind. After entering samādhi one is not tired; one is very relaxed, and the body feels as if it is about to fly.

Q: What is going on when special experiences arise in practice?

A: The teacher asked in return: 'What special experience do you have?' So-and-so had no words. The teacher cut him off with one phrase. After a long while, so-and-so answered further: 'I do not have any special experience.' There was still a mind seeking the mysterious and wondrous, and a mind of grasping and rejecting. The teacher prompted him: 'Wearing clothes and eating, working and studying, wife and children, mountains, rivers, and the great earth—are these not all the circumstances and phenomena before you?!' So-and-so gained some insight right then.

Q: When I am not working, I can still see thoughts, but while working my mind is like a wild horse and cannot be controlled. What should I do?

A: When working, if the mind becomes chaotic, shout 'Cut!'; after a minute, continue working. When you forget to maintain clear observation, shout 'Cut!' Cutting it once does not hinder the work. It is best to shout 'Cut!' dozens of times each day. Once clear observation becomes familiar, it will be all right.

Q: Sometimes now I no longer deliberately maintain clear observation as I did before. What is happening?

A: Before, observation was still somewhat unfamiliar, so you had to bring it up deliberately. Now it is more familiar, so you no longer need to bring it up deliberately. If you still forget frequently, you need to reestablish it deliberately. You must adjust skillfully. It is like our mantra-recitation: when the recitation is unfamiliar, recite the mantra attentively and clearly. Once it becomes familiar, if attention lapses, the recitation becomes mechanical—the mouth recites but the mind is no longer engaged. When the recitation becomes mechanical, it is not easy to enter samādhi; the body cannot empty out, mantra and thought separate, and thought starts flowing. Therefore when reciting the mantra, you must listen clearly and gather in the thoughts. A little slower does not matter; when the time arrives, it naturally falls away. Do not have a delusive thought of 'wanting to empty out.' Then you will naturally enter samādhi.

Q: Sometimes, while sitting and observing, there is something I need to do, but a force will not let me move, so I still sit there.

A: This is because clear observation has developed a certain meditative stability. But when there is something to do, you should still do it. You must be flexible and responsive; you cannot remain there in dead samādhi. As soon as you move, you come out of samādhi. It is

good to have less ordinary emotional entanglement, but necessary tasks still have to be done.

Q: Outside formal sitting I feel very light and peaceful, do not feel there is a body, my eyesight has improved, and at the baihui point on the crown of the head there is a feeling of qi rushing upward.

A: Pay no attention to any changes. Let them be natural, and there will be no imbalance. When practicing the Dharma, the physical body naturally changes, but one must not seek this.

9E-1. 二、修法（三）种子翻腾与座下观照、见性与保任 / Part Two: Practice Methods—(3) Latent Seeds Surfacing, Observation Outside Formal Sitting, Seeing Nature, and Protection—Opening Portion

Part Two: Practice Methods

(3) Latent Seeds Surfacing, Observation Outside Formal Sitting, Seeing Nature, and Protection—Opening Portion

Q: When latent seeds surge up fiercely while practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, to the point that it is almost unbearable, what should one do?

A: Do not be afraid. Simply recite the mantra aloud, and the seeds can be dissolved. After hundreds or thousands of cycles of surfacing and subsiding, one can attain immovability.

Q: Sometimes, during formal sitting, latent seeds surge up violently; sometimes an entire sitting is very empty and pure; sometimes there is an indescribable stuffiness and discomfort in the mind. Why is this?

A: Seeds cannot be eliminated all at once. You must continually train within circumstances. Therefore you must not be careless or arrogant. Before practice has become established, reversals cannot be avoided. So you must strive onward and not be lax.

Q: If I keep practicing only the fourth mudrā, can all the latent seeds be brought to the surface and exhausted?

A: No. You still have to temper yourself in affairs. But sitting and practicing the Dharma can help you pass through in affairs. Formal sitting develops samādhi; tempering yourself in affairs develops wisdom. It is best to develop samādhi and wisdom together.

Q: After practicing to a certain stage, a condition repeatedly appears in which the heart feels as if cut by a knife, the mood is agitated, and there is anxiety. How should this be counteracted?

A: Latent seeds in the eighth consciousness are surfacing, so these feelings arise. Practice is not always smooth sailing. As long as you patiently break through this difficult pass of rising and falling waves, you will find another village beyond dark willows and bright

flowers. Also, when it feels unbearable, recite the mantra aloud; this makes it easier to pass through the difficult pass.

Q: In my practice, because of physical weakness and mental vexation, I often advance and retreat. Should I insist on adding more sittings?

A: This cannot be avoided. Before practice has reached the stage of immovability, fluctuations of advance and retreat will always arise. This happens because the seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness are stirred by the fire of prajñā and begin to surface. When these seeds surface, it is very uncomfortable; one feels as though one has regressed—standing feels wrong, sitting feels wrong, even lying down to sleep feels wrong. At such a time you must be able to hold steady, not be frightened, and pass through it. In fact, this is progress. You may add practice of the third mudrā and recite the mantra aloud. But if you truly feel that the body cannot support it, you should also relax slightly and reduce the sitting time. Practice is like rowing upstream: if you do not advance, you retreat. You must practice diligently.

Q: A few days before each menstrual period, I clearly feel that my mental strength is insufficient. Unlike usual, I cannot keep clear observation steady, and my mind wants to run outward. This time I even felt like gossiping about others. I clearly felt I should not be this way, yet I could not control myself and was instead carried away by external circumstances. I am truly ashamed and have failed the teacher's instruction.

A: This is a physiological reaction. It does not matter; go outside for a walk and relax your mind. When women reach menopause, physiological reactions are especially strong. Especially for practitioners, when latent seeds surge up intensely, it becomes even harder to remain in command. Once this stage passes, it will not be a problem. Clear observation should be neither too tight nor too loose.

Q: After sitting, I feel that my sleep is not very good, and I still dream.

A: Do not sleep too heavily. Dreaming is a sign that latent seeds are surfacing; it is a good thing.

Q: How should one subdue latent seeds when they surface?

A: Studying and practicing the Buddhadharma is not smooth sailing. Before practice becomes thorough, there will be reversals; they come wave after wave. You must urge yourself not to run after the delusive thoughts that arise as latent seeds surface. Therefore the great Chan masters of the past all recited the Heart of the Śūraṅgama Mantra, using it to subdue these seeds. The worst seed is sexual desire; this is the deepest root of birth and death. Once this root is cut off, things are all right. If latent seeds are surging up fiercely and you cannot sit, just recite the mantra; you may also go out to relax a little. When it has passed, come back and sit again. There are too many seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness. Therefore, after apprehending Mind and seeing nature, one still cannot end birth and death. Many people who have apprehended Mind and seen nature still make mistakes,

because seeds lie hidden within; when they meet conditions, they produce manifest activity and surface. Therefore you must understand this principle. You have to temper yourself in affairs and grind the seeds away.

Q: I have practiced the Dharma for six months now and ask the teacher to instruct me on some issues. After sitting for a while, agitation appears. My mind becomes vexed and chaotic, I tend to lose my temper, and I cannot control myself; afterward I regret it. Agitation has appeared several times, causing me to stop sitting twice, for a total of five days. It seems that I can never get past this step. In the last one or two sittings, there has also been some agitation during formal sitting. How should I counteract this?

A: This is caused by an unsettled mind and the surfacing of latent seeds. At such a time you may recite the mantra aloud to pass through this barrier. Above all, you must not stop your sittings or discontinue practice.

Q: Although I have added sittings, afflictions do not seem to have decreased very much, and there is often stuffiness in the heart. I dislike others and hate myself. Is this because I have been sitting too long?

A: Sitting practice should be something you enjoy, without the slightest affliction. Instead you are vexed to the point of despair; you have gone in the opposite direction. You should adjust things a little: go out into the mountains and enjoy the scenery, and then come back to sit. Talking more with trusted friends and opening your heart to them can also be a good adjustment. Prescribe the medicine according to the illness; there is no fixed Dharma. In general, sitting practice should leave the mind calm, steady, comfortable, and without affliction. Even if latent seeds are surfacing and there is a feeling of losing your bearings amid advance and retreat, reciting the mantra aloud for a while can bring you safely through. “Disliking others and hating yourself” is an old habit of narrow-heartedness surfacing. Quickly rebuke yourself and let go of all these bad habits that should not be there.

Q: Recently I encountered a little adverse condition, and it made me so angry that delusive thoughts flew everywhere. I am completely fed up and want to move to the Pure Land as quickly as possible. Although I understand that all dharmas are illusory, I still have hopes and fears.

A: Alas! To become a Buddha is not to seek comfort and pleasure, but to be unafraid of hardship. A Buddha enters the world to save sentient beings; he does not turn away from the world and flee. The Buddha is the Honored One complete in both wisdom and merit. If you do not undergo hardship, from where will merit and virtue be gathered? Without merit and virtue, how will you become a Buddha, and still more, how will you leave the six paths? Therefore, to escape suffering, one must not be afraid of suffering. Only by training amid hardship can attachments be worn away and the luminosity of original nature restored.

Q: Once, because of a small matter, I clashed with someone. At the time I knew it was not good, but I could not restrain myself. This was all because my heart was narrow and I was concerned with saving face. This is also a great taboo in Dharma practice. What should I do?

A: This is because your clear observation has not taken hold. Everyone has the habit of caring about face, but in truth this is the most foolish thing. For the sake of this baseless concern with face, one drags oneself into birth and death. If you ask what to do, the answer is: quickly let go.

Q: In removing habitual tendencies, is it true that one must not be too anxious, because anxiety itself is also a habitual tendency?

A: Correct. You must not be anxious. Once your mind is empty, will there still be bad conduct? To speak of counteraction already falls into the lesser vehicle. When the mind moves, just shout "Pei!" once, and it is finished.

Q: As long as the mind is always empty and pure, and one accomplishes "when thoughts arise, do not follow," that is enough. Actually there is no such thing as "habitual tendency," is that right?

A: Habitual tendency means clinging to circumstances and being swayed by circumstances. If one can avoid being swayed by circumstances, habitual tendencies naturally disappear.

Q: After realizing what is original, the most difficult thing is eliminating habitual tendencies. I had always thought I could let go of fame and profit, but as soon as I heard that I could take an entrance examination for graduate study at no cost, my mind moved. For several days, whenever I began formal sitting, I was troubled by the thought, "Should I go, or should I not go?"

A: This is called "when what should be cut off is not cut off, one instead suffers the resulting turmoil." All circumstances are like flowers in the sky and the moon in water; they cannot be obtained. We simply play within them, neither clinging nor abandoning. If you do not do it, that is also all right. What is there that cannot be let go of? In studying Buddhism one should be relaxed, free, and at ease: sit when you wish to sit, walk when you wish to walk, without the slightest constraint. Only then is one unobstructed.

Q: What should I do if I sometimes cannot help becoming angry?

A: When anger arises, recite the mantra. When thoughts arise, do not abide in them; when thoughts arise, do not cling to them.

Q: This disciple has completed around a hundred sittings. Because my karmic habits are deep and heavy, my meditative stability is still very weak. But I feel there has still been progress: my mind is much steadier and calmer than before.

A: That is not bad. Diligent practice is never in vain. Moreover, you are practicing such a Dharma—how could there be no progress at all? In practice, you must not be impatient.

You have to persist patiently before there can be accomplishment. Because our habitual tendencies from many lives and many kalpas are deep and heavy, they cannot be eliminated in a short time so that one personally realizes the Buddha-way. Continue practicing diligently.

Q: If one practices the Dharma with utmost sincerity, then once wisdom opens, are karmic obstructions eliminated? Since practice begins with the resolve, I cannot help being concerned about this, and respectfully ask for instruction.

A: If you truly practice the Dharma with utmost sincerity and dissolve delusive thoughts into emptiness, when even mind is not present, how could there be obstruction? What are called obstructions are all the mischief of delusive mind. If you sincerely resolve to study Buddhism, you can sincerely practice the Dharma. Above all, avoid empty talk, pride, and arrogance.

Q: In my present practice, I take steady progress as the principle. After the sitting, I pay attention to food and drink and make sure to get sufficient rest, regarding these as support. Is this attachment to the body?

A: In practicing the Dharma, one should pay attention to maintaining the physical body. This is called using the provisional body as a support for true practice. How could there be any suspicion of attachment to the body?

Q: This week I feel that obstructions are heavy. I have been practicing the second mudrā every day and am preparing to do so for one or two weeks. Is that all right?

A: That is all right. What is more important is to understand what is meant by heavy obstructions. "Obstruction" is not a thing. Bring it out and let us see it. Therefore obstruction is illusory. It is still the mind: the mind clings to marks. It is still that the clinging mind has not completely let go. When the clinging mind has completely let go, there is strength. Therefore Yuezang asked Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, "I clearly know that birth and death are originally empty, so why do I still undergo the flow of birth and death?" Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva said, "Your strength is not yet sufficient." Where does this strength come from? The key is that the clinging mind must let go completely. If you truly know that everything in this world is false and empty, then naturally there is power. But if the mind is not pure, clinging has not completely fallen away, and one has not truly known that this original nature is neither defiled nor pure, unborn and undying, then it will not do. Therefore one's rational understanding is still insufficient. Chan says: only after great death can there be great life. If that dying-off is incomplete—if you remain half-dead and half-alive—it will not do. Therefore we absolutely must not cling to marks.

Q: How does one protect it?

A: Awakening is not difficult, but protecting it is not easy. If you do not protect it, you will run after thoughts; miscellaneous thoughts will fly everywhere, and all kinds of disorderly things will come. Therefore you must protect it continuously and closely in order to

dissolve delusive habits. But protection must not become rigid, and still less may it turn into attachment. As soon as you notice, bring it back; that is enough. This is “when thoughts arise, do not follow.” External affairs are all flowers in the sky and the moon in water. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “Knowing them to be flowers in the sky, there is no cyclic turning.” What arises through conditions is empty of self-nature; knowing that everything is false, do not run after delusive thoughts. Accord with all conditions. If the causes and conditions are like this, then we act like this. Go ahead and do things, yet do not move the mind in the slightest; do all things for sentient beings while the mind does not cling. If one can constantly do this, in not many years “the skin will be completely shed, revealing only the one reality.” Then great light will shine forth and spiritual powers will appear, but one must not cling to spiritual powers either. After recognizing what is original, before returning to the source, when one runs after thoughts, one must be like someone herding an ox and strike it with a whip. Which patriarch did not practice this way? In practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, when you open up what is original and see the nature, it is no different from the moment when not a single thought arises yet everything is clear and distinct. But you must personally realize it once. Ah! Originally there is nothing at all, yet everything is clear and distinct. Awakening is relatively easy, but maintaining close, continuous protection is not a matter of one or two days. After Jiashan awakened under Monk Boatman, he hurried into the mountains and protected it for eighteen years. Sitting after recognizing the nature is different from sitting before recognizing it. After recognizing it, sitting itself is protection. When thoughts come, do not pay attention to them. While walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, protect it at every moment; guard yourself from clinging to marks.

9E-2. 二、修法（三）种子翻腾与座下观照、见性与保任 / Part Two: Practice Methods—(3) Latent Seeds Surfacing, Observation Outside Formal Sitting, Seeing Nature, and Protection—Continuation and Completion

Part Two: Practice Methods

(3) Latent Seeds Surfacing, Observation Outside Formal Sitting, Seeing Nature, and Protection—Continuation and Completion

Q: During formal sitting, I settle the mind and practice the Dharma; outside formal sitting, I maintain close, continuous observation, constantly allowing self-nature to manifest. If I continue practicing in this way, when the right time and conditions arrive, there should be no worry about failing to awaken. Is this view correct?

A: This view is not bad.

Q: How should one practice the latter half of the Heart-Center Dharma?

A: Observe thoughts as they arise; do not turn along with them. When varying circumstances appear before you, do not let the mind move because of them. This is the Chan method of protecting the original nature. If you practice in this way, you will be able to end birth and death.

Q: Concerning “mental recitation with attentive listening,” I feel that if I try to attend separately both to the listening and to the mental recitation, the mind easily becomes confused. What should I really do?

A: Here, “hearing” means the nature of hearing itself; it does not mean directing attention to the physical ears. When the sound of the mentally recited mantra is heard, delusive thoughts do not arise.

Q: The purpose of practicing the Dharma is to apprehend Mind and see nature. After seeing nature, one can understand the true reality of all dharmas and thereby no longer be deluded and inverted, create karma, and undergo retribution. The key to practicing the Dharma lies in mental recitation with attentive listening, without paying attention to any bodily sensation. One simply continues reciting the mantra clearly, syllable by syllable; finally even the mantra is dissolved, and what remains alone is the nature of numinous knowing, solitary and clear. But even this must not be clung to. Is that right?

A: Yes. When delusive thoughts dissolve into emptiness, the mantra can no longer be recited. Right then, suddenly the faculties and sense-objects fall away, the world dissolves into emptiness, and the true nature is present.

Q: Does “when thoughts arise, do not follow” amount to suppressing thoughts?

A: No.

Q: When I first met the master, I felt that I was originally a Buddha; therefore, in the instant of one clap of the hands, I understood that the self-nature is originally empty. But after time passed, afflictions arose again.

A: Poor thing—recite the mantra aloud to transform them.

Q: When thoughts arise, I unconsciously try to suppress them. Is that right?

A: You must not suppress thoughts. Let functioning arise as it may, but do not turn along with it and do not pay attention to it. This is called, “The green mountain is originally unmoving; let the white clouds come and go as they please.” The problem is not that thoughts arise; the problem is following thoughts as they run. It is not suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise, but rather thought after thought not remaining—only this is no-thought. As the Sixth Patriarch said, “No-thought means being apart from thoughts amid thoughts.” This is inferential cognition without departing from direct perception: inferential cognition knows and discriminates, while direct perception remains unmoving. This still differs somewhat from a mirror reflecting things. When a mirror reflects things, it does not

care whether they are good or bad and makes no distinction; we, however, know good and bad, beautiful and ugly, yet the mind does not move. When practice reaches this point, that is enough. But one must see the nature; without seeing the nature, one cannot do this. Therefore it is very difficult to practice flexibly and responsively.

Q: Please instruct me on “when thoughts arise, do not follow” and “absolutely no discrimination.”

A: “When thoughts arise, do not follow” is not telling you to become an idiot who does not even know good and bad or right and wrong. Rather, you know clearly, but you do not abide or cling. This is the first stage of practice. The second stage, “absolutely no discrimination,” means skillfully distinguishing the myriad objective dharmas while remaining unmoving in the ultimate truth. That is, you know right and wrong, long and short, gain and loss, but the mind within does not move and is not affected or defiled by anything.

Q: When this disciple practices clear observation outside formal sitting, sometimes there is not a single thought, but after a while I forget; once I forget, I follow delusive thoughts away.

A: When right observation is present and not a single thought arises, know that the numinous knowing present in this thought-free state is the original nature. If after a while you forget, quickly pull it back and do not turn along with thoughts.

Q: Ordinarily I know not to cling to marks, but when something happens I forget again.

A: What use is that?! This is because you have only understood a little principle and have not truly trained. You should quickly correct this, practice diligently, sit more, and maintain close, continuous observation.

Q: Please speak about “continuous clear observation.”

A: Our thoughts are countless; many arise in a single instant. This is because there are so many seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness, where both good and bad are stored. For example, when we look at a banana, if only visual consciousness is functioning and mental consciousness is not, a banana is simply a banana. The eye is like a camera. But once mental consciousness becomes involved, on seeing the banana we think: “This is a banana; it is delicious. This one is large; that one is small.” As soon as mental consciousness functions, discrimination arises. The ear faculty works in the same way. When mental consciousness follows along, information from the six consciousnesses is passed to the seventh consciousness; the seventh consciousness then passes it to the eighth consciousness, and seeds are formed. Therefore one must maintain continuous clear observation. Clear observation means this: as soon as a thought moves, know it and do not follow it; observe the point where it arises.

Q: Does “abiding and protecting” mean continually keeping and protecting this luminous, quiescent condition in which there is no thought yet perception remains clear, so that it accords with circumstances as one meets people and affairs? Or, as soon as a thought arises, should one quickly turn the light inward, let the thought dissolve into emptiness, and accord with this emptiness?

A: Correct. When responding to conditions and engaging with things, there is only the single thought appropriate to the matter at hand, with no second thought. Once it is done, retain no thought of it at all, as though it had never been done. This is the practice of nonabiding and nonattachment.

Q: When hearing a sound, if I simply inquire, “Who is hearing?” there are times when it seems almost thought-free and empty, yet perception remains; then it is lost again. Should I first take this up as my own? How should I take it up?

A: Asking “Who is hearing?” is a method used before awakening. If you have already awakened and know that the one who hears is precisely your own true host, there is no need to ask. Simply protect this without abiding in sound. There is still less need to raise a thought to take it up as your own; raising such a thought would be adding a head on top of a head.

Q: While delusive thoughts are flowing, I often turn the light inward and observe the empty luminosity in the interval where the previous thought has ceased and the next thought has not yet arisen. Is it good to practice this way?

A: No. Where delusive thought ceases, self-nature itself is empty and luminous; there is no need to raise another thought of observation.

Q: Because I am busy with work, sometimes my power of clear observation is insufficient, so I use the Great Perfection method of “Cut!” for thoughts dozens of times a day. Amid confusion, this seems to give me somewhat more ability than before to hold steady.

A: This simple Chan method is especially suitable for busy people. If you can do it dozens of times every day, as time passes and practice deepens, it will naturally become seamless before you even realize it, and you will return home and sit securely.

Q: Outside formal sitting, does the “Cut!” method for thoughts mean shouting “Cut!” when one is busy or when the mind runs outward and becomes scattered?

A: You do not necessarily have to shout “Cut!” Simply noticing is enough.

Q: Outside formal sitting I rarely forget to protect; it is the same while working or resting. Sometimes, as soon as I think of Avalokiteśvara's sacred Name or Amitābha's sacred Name, the sound of buddha-recitation automatically rings in my ears; even popular songs can arise in the same way. What should I do?

A: Pay no attention to any of these sounds in the ears. Let them arise and cease by themselves.

Q: Sometimes I do not notice a thought when it first arises and only realize it at the tail end.

A: Then you have noticed too late; your strength is insufficient. You must catch the thought at its head: as soon as a thought comes, let it dissolve into emptiness. If the thought has already gone around a circuit before you notice it, you are only seeing its tail. Therefore Chan says, “Do not fear thoughts arising; only fear noticing too late.” The benefit of clear observation is that when a thought comes, you know it. When circumstances arise, sometimes clear observation is ahead of them and sometimes it follows afterward. Favorable circumstances are not easy to notice, whereas adverse circumstances are easier to notice.

Q: The Prajñā Right Observation Dharma Gate discusses observation and asks one to begin observing from the heart area, neither grasping nor rejecting, in order to avoid problems such as high blood pressure caused when some practitioners concentrate too heavily in the head. Is that right?

A: Observing mind means observing where thoughts arise and not wandering off after them. As soon as a thought arises, notice it; once noticed, it is empty. Do not fixate on the heart area or the head, nor on the dantian or the feet. In holding the mantra, too, there is only “mental recitation with attentive listening,” without fixing on any location. Tension and relaxation must be adjusted as needed, neither too tight nor too loose.

Q: In clear observation outside formal sitting, one should remain lucid and clearly aware. I should know clearly what thought has arisen—is that right?

A: You should know when a thought arises, but you must not follow it. Do not retain the thought. As soon as a thought arises, notice it; once noticed, it is empty, like drawing a picture on water.

Q: How does one observe mind?

A: Mind here means thoughts. When a thought comes, let it dissolve and do not follow it. At first, one uses mantra-recitation to dissolve delusive thoughts; as soon as you see a thought, it is gone. When meditative stability has strengthened to a certain point, thoughts no longer need to be deliberately dissolved; they dissolve by themselves, until one is quiescent yet constantly illuminating, and illuminating yet constantly quiescent. Being clear and distinct is illumination; being unmoving is quiescence. When wondrous function operates—when responding to conditions and engaging with things—thoughts arise; when there are no conditions to respond to, there are no thoughts. This is the best Chan method. Observing mind is a fundamental Dharma gate of Buddhism.

Q: Does “Guān Zìzài”—“observing whether oneself is present”—mean not becoming attached to any affairs or things, yet not neglecting them either, so that everything is completely natural? Like a wild goose passing through the vast sky and leaving no trace, one simply

spends one's days honestly according to conditions—is this understanding correct? Also, my husband and I will begin a seven-day intensive on January 27.

A: Your understanding is entirely correct! Simply spend your days honestly according to conditions in this way. This is what is meant by “following conditions to exhaust old karma, and creating no new calamity.” It is also the ordinary mind of “when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep”—the idle person of the Way who has ended learning and is established in the unconditioned.

You and your husband are truly admirable! You have awakened in principle, yet you also do not abandon actual practice. In this bitterly cold season, you do not forget to undertake a seven-day intensive and practice diligently. In the future you will surely realize the great Way and complete bodhi.

Q: I still do not understand how to begin the practice of clear observation outside formal sitting. At present I see three possible ways to begin. (1) Observe delusive thoughts directly and clearly, without grasping or rejecting them. (2) Observe the point where thoughts arise; when a thought arises, immediately know it and do not chase after conditions or wander along with it. (3) Observe that all affairs and things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; they are all impermanent, illusory phenomena, and one should remain free from greed and attachment.

A: The first two seem to be two methods, but in fact they are one. If one can know a thought as soon as it arises, that itself is directly observing delusive thought; otherwise one could not know the thought as soon as it arises. Not following the thought's turning is non-grasping. When a thought comes, one simply does not turn along with it; this is not suppressing it so that it cannot arise, nor is it disliking and rejecting it. Therefore these two are one Dharma. The third method is very good. In addition to working with delusive thoughts, one must apply the same clear observation to affairs and circumstances.

Q: This disciple uses the third method above. Does this accord with the master's requirement?

A: If you only observe circumstances and do not observe thoughts, you will follow thoughts in their flow. Even when delusive thoughts are not confronting external circumstances, they still flow without ceasing—as it is said, “the household thief is hard to guard against.” It is not that when no external circumstance is present, not a single thought arises. Therefore this is still ineffective; you must keep clear observation on both mind and circumstances.

Q: Someone said that thought after thought not remaining is also a stage in practice. But according to the master's instruction, thought after thought not remaining is the great capacity and great function of the original nature. Please instruct me further.

A: If, in “thought after thought not remaining,” there is still a thought of “thought after thought not remaining,” it is not ultimate and must still be dissolved. What I mean by “thought after thought not remaining” is function: “right now is emptiness.” There is no need deliberately to dissolve it.

Q: In “illuminating yet constantly quiescent, and quiescent yet constantly illuminating,” do thoughts arise or not arise?

A: Illumination is function; it is thought after thought not remaining. There is no thought to think and no arising to initiate; manifestation occurs naturally, with spontaneous responsiveness to conditions.

Q: Is what we protect ordinarily this numinous knowing?

A: Yes. What you protect is precisely this numinous knowing; you are not protecting emptiness and not guarding some empty state. When thoughts come, you do not pay attention to them; this not paying attention is numinous knowing.

Q: When we are doing things, should we also be clear and distinct?

A: Yes! When we recite the mantra and hear it clearly and distinctly, that too is being clear and distinct. If the mantra is not clear, it is not so. There is no separate state apart from this that is somehow “clear and distinct.” When a certain point is reached—“pa!”—there is a sudden breaking free. At the moment of breaking free, everything is still clear and distinct: there is nothing at all, and the one true nature alone is present.

Q: The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says, “Good friends, there are also people who teach sitting, watching the mind and contemplating stillness, unmoving and not arising, and applying effort from this. Deluded people do not understand and become attached, turning this into derangement; there are many such people. From teaching in this way, we know it is a great mistake.” How are these two points not contradictory?

A: “Watching the mind and contemplating stillness, unmoving and not arising” is suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise; therefore it is a great mistake. Now, when you are instructed in clear observation, you are told to watch delusive thoughts as they arise and not follow them as they run. It is not suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise. Therefore these are not the same and there is no contradiction.

Q: Ordinarily, practice is nothing other than calming delusion and revealing the true. But the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “Good sons, all bodhisattvas and sentient beings of the degenerate age should, at all times, not give rise to delusive thoughts, and with regard to all delusive minds, also not extinguish them.” This seems to leave one with nothing to hold onto. Therefore, in ordinary clear observation and in seated contemplation of mind, this disciple always feels wrong on both sides, cannot determine the concrete method, and is both afraid of thoughts arising and afraid of committing the fault of suppressing thoughts.

A: When you are told to observe the mind and not follow thoughts away, that is not giving rise to delusive thoughts. Ordinarily do not deliberately give rise to thoughts and do not grasp outwardly at conditions; yet when delusive thoughts arise, also do not cling to the delusive thoughts. When a thought arises, notice it immediately; do not pursue it and do not

suppress it. Simply remain lucid and clearly aware, without discriminating. This is how one practices “with regard to all delusive minds, also not extinguishing them.”

Q: After the sitting, when the mind arises toward circumstances and I am swayed by circumstances, how should I practice?

A: Outside formal sitting, you must maintain clear observation at all times. This is even more difficult, because people all run along after circumstances. Right after the sitting, a meditative state still lingers, and one knows to keep watch over oneself and not let the mind move chaotically. But once one gets caught up in affairs, one forgets clear observation and runs along with circumstances, becoming as disorderly as before one sat; this is not good. Therefore, during formal sitting, we must be utterly committed to mental recitation with attentive listening; outside formal sitting, we must maintain close, continuous observation and must not forget. Yet when facing circumstances we also easily forget. Talking heart-to-heart with a few friends or starting to do something, we immediately become disordered. When thoughts come, quickly bring the mind back and keep watch over yourself. You must practice this way; otherwise you cannot get onto the path. Later, once practice has matured and observation has become familiar, there is no need to continue observing; doing so would be superfluous. Therefore, at first one must begin with “observing.” Later one must not “observe” anymore; only when this word “observe” is forgotten can there be progress and practice can continue advancing. Going one step further, even “forgetting” is no longer there; then practice passes from deliberate practice into the unconditioned. Practice must gradually pass from deliberate practice into the unconditioned. The unconditioned cannot be reached all at once. In the beginning, one must observe deliberately; that is, one practices intentionally. Later, one practices without deliberate mind, until there is no practice at all; then one has advanced further.

Q: Some people think that the Heart-Center Dharma's practice of clear observation outside formal sitting has not been explained clearly, while the practice of clear observation transmitted by a Taiwanese Chan master has a definite starting point. They think that clear observation means that dharmas are equal and no discrimination arises. In doing anything, one must be clear about everything and not overlook any detail. In clear observation, one is finished with it right there; thought after thought must not remain. If there is any remaining, then there is some place that is not clear, and this is delusive mind.

A: Has it really not been explained clearly? If a beginner observing the mind tries to be clear about every single thing, this is observing circumstances, not observing mind. Observing mind means knowing that circumstances are originally false and not letting the mind follow circumstances; knowing that mind is originally empty and not abiding in mind. Mind and circumstances are both empty, and right then there is no-thought. At the very moment of no-thought, one also does not cling to no-thought; when thoughts arise, one also does not fall into having thoughts. Being and nonbeing are both dissolved, and right then there is numinous awareness. The nature of this numinous awareness is neither mind

nor circumstance; it is wholly empty. Precisely while empty, however, it is also clear and distinct; it is wholly provisional. Emptiness and the provisional are nondual, and there is no further discrimination, grasping, or rejection. Precisely at this moment, right observation is vividly present. Is this not clear observation in accord with reality? Must one, as that person says, keep the taste of food in the mind, or store sexual pleasure from intercourse in the mind and brain for a long time, before this counts as clear observation? If that is clear observation, it is only demonic “clear observation”—a practice that leads to hell.

Moreover, even speaking of clear observation is already superfluous; it already puts practitioners through needless trouble. Originally everyone is a Buddha. One need only awaken: this single thought not arising, everything clear and distinct, is one's own Buddha-nature. The arising of thoughts is wondrous function. Only when there is no need to observe emptiness is it the true Chan method. This person tells everyone not to overlook any detail—is that “not giving rise to discrimination”? Is that not clinging to marks? Carefully savoring the taste of food and sexual pleasure, even trying to experience how food passes through the throat, gullet, intestines, and stomach—is that “finished with it right there”? On the one hand he wants thought after thought not to remain; on the other hand he tells people to develop and expand sexual thoughts into every part of the body and into all of life. Is this not slapping his own face? The demon king's teaching is contradictory in exactly this way.

Q: Some people in certain places say that someone has awakened. Is their teaching correct?

A: Understanding is not awakening. To understand a little doctrine and then say that someone has awakened and no longer needs to practice is a great mistake. Awakening at the level of principle is useless; when one meets circumstances, one still cannot pass through. Like a fly seeing blood, one immediately lands on it; as soon as one sees circumstances, the mind moves. If this were enough, Patriarch Linji would only have needed to say one phrase; why would he have spoken three phrases? Chan also speaks of the threshold of the dharmakāya, the proper position of the dharmakāya, and going beyond the dharmakāya. In the past, the ancients had strong faculties; a single indication was enough for them to understand, and then they protected it closely and would not slacken. Modern people cannot protect it and run along after circumstances. The mistake comes later, when people are told not to practice and not to sit. One should protect closely; practice must continue to advance, and awakening and experiential benefit should continue to grow. Recognizing the original nature is the first step; protecting it closely is the second step; leaving protection behind is the third step, because protection too is attachment. Forgetting protection is not easy. To forget even the forgetting is the fourth step. I long ago told him: do not be satisfied with a little; be careful and cautious, and practice well. I asked him several questions, and he could not answer them. In Chan Master Yongming Yanshou's *Records of the Source-Mirror*, there are ten criteria for confirming awakening. The first is that all recorded sayings and sūtra passages can be understood at a glance. He cannot do this.

Q: If one can always remain continuously in clear observation and coarse delusive thoughts are absent, then when subtle delusive thoughts arise, is it a matter of not following them in their flow while seeing them clearly and distinctly?

A: Even clear observation is ultimately superfluous. It is of course permissible while one is practicing, but in the end there is no practice to perform.

Q: In sitting meditation and reciting the mantra, the body need not dissolve into emptiness; as long as one recognizes this awakened awareness, clear and distinct, that is seeing nature.

A: This is only understanding; it is not direct realization.

Q: If one relies only on understanding and takes “the one that can hear and write” to be it, does that count as seeing nature?

A: These are all understanding; they do not count as personally realizing what is original.

Q: I think that before a practitioner's mass of doubt is broken, one may gather the mind into one-pointedness. Then, upon meeting a great adept who recognizes the opportunity and directly points to the mind-source, with an “Oh!” the faculties and sense-objects fall away and one enters the realm of direct perception. Is this true seeing nature?

A: If the faculties and sense-objects truly fall away and one is clear and distinct without dullness, then of course it is true seeing nature.

Q: Through practicing the Dharma and reciting the mantra until subject and object both vanish, empty space shatters, body and mind dissolve into emptiness, and one is clear and distinct; when arising and ceasing have ceased and quiescent extinction appears, only when there is this state is it seeing nature, and only then does one know how to protect it.

A: Correct!

Q: If one understands in principle that what arises dependently is empty of self-nature and that form and emptiness are nondual, but mind and circumstances have not dissolved, is that seeing nature?

A: That is not seeing nature.

Q: Which kind of seeing nature should be taken as the standard?

A: Direct realization of what is original is, of course, the correct standard.

Q: When a person sees nature, must the faculties and sense-objects completely fall away? Must everything explode?

A: When the Heart-Center Dharma is practiced to a certain point, the faculties and sense-objects will fall away. But not everyone is exactly the same; for some people, it is not an explosion. In fact, when a single thought is cut off, that is the very state; only the strength differs, while the original nature realized is the same. When there is no-thought, body, mind, and world are all gone, but awareness remains; this numinous knowing is the original nature. When practice reaches that point, one naturally arrives there.

Q: When one breaks free, can external sounds be heard?

A: There is no difference between entering samādhi and breaking free. At this time there is no sound, no time; everything is absent, and there is only one absolute true nature. Conversely, once we have this level of practice, spiritual powers manifest—for example, with the heavenly ear, one can even hear the sound of rain in other worlds.

Q: Does everyone have to explode? Is there sound in the explosion?

A: Each person's constitution, faculties, and habitual tendencies differ; there is no single pattern. Explosion must not be sought, and still less waited for. For some people the explosion has sound; for others it does not. As long as subject and object fall away, that is it.

9F. 二、修法（四）其它 / Part Two: Practice Methods—(4) Other Matters

Part Two: Practice Methods

(4) Other Matters

Q: In 1993 I practiced the "Lotus Mudrā." In 1994, while my son and I were sitting together—he was eight at the time, and at five he had once shown the ability of clairvoyance and remote vision—he happened to see a layer of yellow light covering my body, a Buddha's head above my crown, and a yellow halo above that Buddha's head. A few days later, a horizontal band of green light appeared on the forehead above the eyebrows, and three Buddhas were sitting upon it. A few days after that the Buddha images disappeared, and the halo around the body changed. At first there was yellow light and purple light; finally it became a layer of red flame covering the body. As time passed, the color of the flame became redder and redder, and the light grew longer and longer. When it reached about three inches, it stabilized. I do not understand what is going on. Please instruct me, Master.

A: The lights and Buddhas appearing on the body and above the head are all manifestations of the self-nature. Do not be amazed by them or cling to them; naturally you will ascend step by step. If there is even the slightest clinging, there is danger of falling into a demonic state. Be careful! Be careful!

Q: I have now practiced for one full month. During formal sitting, I have a feeling of lightness and ease. Sometimes I sit until there are no legs, no hands, and no body, as if I were in empty space, with only the sound of the mantra flowing out naturally. At this time there is not the slightest stray thought; I am only quietly attending to the mantra. Sometimes during formal sitting I am hazy and indistinct, and the mantra seems to be recited and then

to stop, stopping and continuing, and before I know it the session is over. Basically, in every session I can enter samādhi.

A: When the whole body is gone, that is best. When it is truly no-thought, the mantra too drops away and is gone. Truly excellent! But you still must go further, sitting until body, mind, world, and empty space all disappear together, while numinous knowing is not dimmed. Only then is it seeing nature.

Q: I generally sit in the latter half of the night. After sitting, I recite the Wish-Fulfilling Mantra as I fall asleep. Sometimes, just as I lie down and begin reciting the mantra, in a moment of haziness I feel the body rise into the air and travel around. In the past I could see the blue sky and stars; recently I can see villages on the ground. Once I looked at the clock deliberately: from rising into the air until becoming clear again was about fifteen minutes. This kind of phenomenon generally happens about once every ten days to half a month. Is this the subtle body leaving?

A: This is consciousness roaming through space, but you must not cling to it. If you cling too much, you will fall into demonic states.

Q: Another time, after sitting, I had just lain down when I heard a buzzing sound in my head, as if it were circling inside the head, for about six or seven seconds. Does this mean the channels and qi have opened?

A: Yes. At this time do not move; let it sound. Suddenly, with one explosive sound, the whole body, mind, and world vanish, and the innate Buddha-nature appears before you.

Q: Through the master's care, through practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, and through reading sutras, I feel that I suddenly understood. Actually, an awakened person is clear and distinct at every moment. (Master's note: Very right!) Only by practicing in this way can one have a clear direction and avoid confusion. The Śūraṅgama Sutra says, "When seeing sees the seeing-nature, that seeing is no longer seeing," and "the path of language is cut off, and mental activity ceases." Whatever can be put into words misses it. Actually, the "original" is precisely what is present before a thought has moved. (Master's note: Correct! If you have understood this, that is seeing nature. But when affairs arise, you are not yet through with them; you absolutely must not be satisfied with a little, thinking, "I have seen nature; everything is finished; there is no need to practice anymore." That would be wrong. You must redouble your effort, practice diligently, and temper yourself amid affairs and circumstances, eliminating all the clinging, false habits accumulated through many lives and kalpas. When meeting good things, do not rejoice; when meeting bad things, do not become vexed. You must also completely exhaust the subtle stream before the practice can be considered complete. I hope you will practice diligently.) That very clarity and distinctness, intrinsically endowed with all dharmas, is both true emptiness and marvelous presence. Now, both during formal sitting and in daily activity, I feel that I have already awakened to what is original. (Master's note: Correct! Very good!) Yet I am also

afraid of making the mistake of claiming attainment when I have not attained, thereby harming myself. I ask the master to confirm this and point out the path through confusion.

A: After reading your letter, I see that you are not mistaken, and I am delighted and comforted. You have practiced for only fifteen months and yet have realized such a state. This is enough to show that your roots are good, that you are willing to advance diligently and strive upward with one mind; only then could you have such results. It also proves that the Heart-Center esoteric practice is profound and lofty, and that the strength of the Buddhas' empowerment is especially great, which is why results come so swiftly.

Q: Since I began practicing the Dharma, through the master's teachings and blessing and through my own effort, I feel that I have improved a great deal compared with the past. In my heart I am deeply grateful to the master and to the Dharma brothers who have helped me in practice. Since beginning practice, I basically sit in the latter half of the night; after the sitting, I lie down and hold the Wish-Fulfilling Mantra, and ordinarily I hold the mantra during the day as well. I often dream of flying through the air. Recently, after one sitting, I had just lain down when in a haze I felt myself walking unclothed beside a clear river, as if playing in the water. My foot stepped on a drawing pin, and I was startled. Walking further, I struck another drawing pin on a wall and was startled again. With that shock, body, mind, world, river, wall, and so forth were all gone; only numinous knowing remained, clear and distinct. This was my original nature appearing before me! I took it up as my own right then. After a thought moved, there next appeared a stretch of blue, yet it was not like a blue sky. At that time there was nothing else, only blue. Later I found my body again and again flew through the air. Master, I have resolved that I must accomplish the path in this life. No matter how many difficulties and hardships there are on the path of practice, I can overcome them. Please hold me to strict standards, so that this disciple may practice.

A: You are practicing very well. Everything is empty, and only numinous knowing remains; this is your original face. That you can see it is truly the rich fruition of deep roots of merit accumulated through Dharma practice over many lives. This is not easy. Protect it well, and go further in your practice. Train amid affairs, and completely melt away all afflictions of the five desires—wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep. Only then is the practice complete. By all means do not be satisfied with a little, thinking that seeing nature and awakening to the Way are already enough to finish the matter; that would mislead your own future and prevent Buddhahood. You should know that once the great matter is clear, there is still the matter of being "as if bereaved of one's parents."

Q: Whenever I think of the master, a powerful blessing pours through my whole body, and body and mind become peaceful and steady. Now that I have met a true teacher, tears fall and I weep with sorrow and gratitude. I deeply feel how fortunate I am to have met my

gracious teacher in this life. The master's kindness and virtue cannot be repaid in a lifetime!

A: This is your own merit and fortune; it has nothing to do with me!

Q: I deeply feel that I have a very deep karmic affinity with the master. Before awakening, I went to Shanghai. While riding the subway for half an hour, for no known reason, sorrow rose from within and tears streamed down my face; only after I got off did it stop. It was as if I were going to meet a relative I had not seen for many years. What causes and conditions from past lives could have brought about such a response?

A: That you can awaken is your own merit and fortune. But do not be satisfied with a little. You must protect it well and practice diligently; only when the subtle stream has truly been exhausted may you stop. You and I share a supreme karmic affinity. In Śākyamuni Buddha's presence, we once served him together; therefore there is this response.

Q: I have studied Buddhism for about ten years. Although in the past I obtained some Chan concentration, I took many wrong turns. If I had not met my gracious teacher and studied the Heart-Center Dharma, I truly would not know where I would have gone. In the future I will certainly repay the master's great kindness by spreading the Dharma.

A: That is exactly how it should be.

Q: During the first session of my first mudrā practice, breathing stopped for several minutes, and then the whole body felt as if it were on fire. It was unbearably hot, and I sweated all over. Is this what esoteric Dharma calls inner-heat (tummo) samādhi?

A: Yes! You also should let it be natural and not pay attention to it. Then you will ascend step by step without trouble.

Q: Yesterday, when practicing the fourth mudrā, I could no longer recite the mantra, and breathing stopped. The scenery outside the room appeared before me—road and houses, clear and distinct. Later the mind moved, and I came out of samādhi. What should I do at such a time?

A: Let it appear naturally and do not bother about it. This is a state of the form aggregate; it is not spiritual power.

Q: On the eighth day of practice, I could no longer recite the mantra. Body and mind were both empty, and I felt a subtle force causing the mind to emerge from samādhi. Is this the subtle stream, or is it the formation aggregate among the five aggregates?

A: This is the formation aggregate.

Q: When sitting, I can seldom sustain mantra-recitation. Thoughts also arise very little; when a thought arises, it is immediately noticed, and once noticed, it is empty. In the first half-month, when practicing the second mudrā, I saw many benevolent Dharma-protecting deities and heavenly kings, Acala Vidyārāja of esoteric Dharma, the Secret-Trace Vajra, and also Weituo Bodhisattva. When practicing the third mudrā, after breathing stopped,

suddenly there was a force as if it were going to break through the Brahma aperture at the crown of the head and fly upward; I became frightened and left samādhi. If I meet this situation again, what should I do? What if it rushes out?

A: Do not be frightened. This is a change in qi and blood. If it rushes out, it is qi opening the Brahma aperture; it is not consciousness leaving the body. When consciousness leaves the body, great luminosity will appear, and at the back of the head there will be a great resounding vibration. Even if consciousness leaves the body, do not be afraid. The first time this occurs, do not go far. Walk slowly in the room, and consciousness can immediately reunite with the body.

Q: Around two o'clock at night, while I was sleeping, I suddenly felt a very strong wind blowing on my face, roaring loudly. I was frightened, and my body seemed to be bound by something invisible; I could not move. After a while I opened my eyes, and the area between my eyebrows was twitching violently. I got up and reflected: the body is illusory; nothing can obstruct my practice. That night, after lying down, I remained in Chan concentration the whole night, clear and distinct. During the day I worked as usual and continued to maintain it. This continued for three days and nights without sleep, and I was not sleepy at all. Later this phenomenon appeared intermittently for more than ten days. May I ask the master: was what appeared at night a disturbance by heavenly demons? Now that the whole-night clear and distinct state no longer appears, is it because I ate too much, or is there some other reason?

A: Do not indulge in wild thinking. What heavenly demon disturbance could there be? It was all a mistaken perception caused by your own fright. Why could it not be Dharma-protectors startling you out of dull sleep so that you entered samādhi lucid and alert? In practice, it is best to remain lucid and not sleep. That it cannot reappear now is because your mind has gradually become attached to experiences and disturbed. Quickly put down body and mind, and the pure state can reappear, but you must not abide in that state.

Q: Once while sitting, I saw the deity, Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, extend a hand to touch the crown of my head. I immediately felt joy throughout the body. Many heavenly flowers fell. The form of the deity I saw was different from the usual form; the whole body seemed to be wearing golden armor.

A: You absolutely must not cling to marks. Beware of falling into demonic states.

Q: Recently, when sitting, I am often within a field of light, bright as daytime, and body and mind are peaceful and at ease. Is this luminosity samādhi? At such a time, must one still recite the mantra?

A: When you enter this samādhi deeply, body and mind are both unobtainable. What mantra is there to recite?

Q: Several times after sitting down, before finishing the Four Refuges Mantra, I had already entered samādhi. When I opened my eyes, more than an hour had passed; afterward I again formed the mudrā and held the mantra. Is this in accord with Dharma?

A: It is acceptable. You may also extend the subsequent period of mantra recitation.

Q: Almost the whole sitting is within luminosity and no-thought. After the sitting and moving about, I feel that Śākyamuni Buddha and the master are truly too compassionate. Cundī, Avalokiteśvara, counting the breath, buddha-recitation, mantra-holding, illusory contemplation, observing the mind, contemplation of white bones, Great Compassion, and countless samādhis all interpenetrate. All Dharma-gates studied and practiced are preliminary skillful means; in the end they all merge into the great ocean of perfect awakening. Not a single dharma is established, yet not a single dharma is abandoned. The twelve divisions of the Tripiṭaka are also skillful means. Śākyamuni Buddha, the master, and all Buddhas and bodhisattvas are truly too compassionate toward us lost children.

A: Well said! Child, you truly are a seed of Dharma practice. Practice well onward. By all means do not be satisfied with a little; in the future you will certainly fully realize noble fruition.

Q: My degree of protection is more advanced than before. Sometimes even in sleep I can remain bright and clear; even while riding a motorcycle I can protect it. Formal sitting and daily activity are the same. Sometimes, without protecting, it protects itself. Occasionally it is lost for a moment, but I immediately notice it. Today I entered the first session of the second cycle; my meditative stability is now incomparably greater than before. In the first session, breathing stopped for several minutes. A few days ago, when practicing the sixth mudrā, in two sittings body and mind were both empty, and breathing stopped for more than an hour.

A: Very good. Practice still more diligently; do not be negligent. When you meet affairs without being defiled, when thoughts arise and you do not follow, and when the subtle stream has dissolved, the practice will have reached completion.

Q: Outside formal sitting, I have not dared to be careless, and I protect it very well. From the time I returned from Shanghai until now, while eating and working I have not lost it. Once in a while it is lost, but very quickly it returns. Sometimes, even without protecting, I am within protection. Sometimes I experience that the ears can replace the eyes, and the eyes can replace the ears. Is this right?

A: Yes! But you must not cling to it.

Q: In Chan concentration, I made vows as follows. (1) The suffering of beings is my suffering. The difficulty of beings is my difficulty. (2) All demon kings and demon hosts, and all human and non-human beings, who obstruct my practice and entrance into correct samādhi: after I become a Buddha, I will liberate them first. (3) All human and non-human beings who have resentment or hatred toward me, who harm me, afflict me, envy me, or

kill me: I will liberate them all. (4) Only after all beings—moisture-born, egg-born, transformation-born, and womb-born, human and non-human, devas, and asuras—have all become Buddhas will I then become a Buddha. If even one being has not become a Buddha, I vow not to attain perfect awakening. (5) After I become a Buddha, the world I establish will be incomparably wondrous and freely transform according to wish, with immeasurable lifespan and endowed with immeasurable, boundless virtues. Those who dwell there will all be liberated beings. Master, was it somewhat rash for me to make such vows? But I made these vows from great compassion that arose in Chan concentration, without the slightest trace of emotional attachment or fixed views.

A: If you have such a deep mind and great vow, and if you can carry it out diligently and carefully, you will certainly become a Buddha in the future.

Q: When speaking Dharma to others, I obtain supreme joy just as they do. Moreover, while speaking Dharma, I see the causes and effects of worldly and supramundane dharmas clearly. Any matter at all can accord with Buddhadharma, because everything is Buddhadharma. Sometimes body and mind are so joyful that, seeing all people, I want to bow to these future Buddhas. I have practiced the Heart-Center Dharma for nearly a year. Awakening and experiential benefit have grown. I eat very little, yet my weight has increased by twenty jin; my complexion is rosier and more lustrous than before. When the master sees me, I fear you will not recognize me.

A: To have a child like this—how could I not be deeply comforted?

Q: I received the master's letter. Again there were several days when I did not sleep all night and remained clear and distinct. I have resolved to act in accord with my vows; only benefiting others can truly benefit oneself.

A: Correct!

Q: Sometimes I can know other people's mental activity and the condition of their practice, and I can roughly know a little of their prior causes and subsequent effects; sometimes I can also know in advance what is about to happen. What should I do? Should I discard it or develop it?

A: Let these situations develop naturally, but you must not be pleased with yourself, and still less cling to them as spiritual powers and show them off to others.

Q: It has been almost a month since I returned from Shanghai and practiced the Dharma. My meditative stability has improved beyond comparison with before. The strength and speed of this Dharma cannot be compared with other methods. In addition, I have a request: in the future, could the master transmit the Tögal Dharma to me?

A: To practice Tögal, one must leave ordinary work and undergo intensive retreat practice. Can you do that? It also requires pristine mountains, waters, and forests. Do you have such a good place there?

Q: The ancients disregarded their bodies for the Dharma, and I am willing to emulate them. How long does Tögal practice take? As for retreat, must I still be together with the master?

A: In retreat practice of Tögal, the length of time has no fixed rule; it depends on whether you practice diligently. In short, it must be practiced until the physical body completely transforms into rainbow light; only then is the practice accomplished. There is no need to practice together with the teacher.

Q: In the future I still want to practice Tögal, whatever the cost. Master, will you transmit this Dharma to me in the future? To what degree must one practice before one may practice Tögal?

A: At present the four elements of my physical body are out of balance, and I cannot transmit Dharma. When you truly realize the Prison Barrier of the Chan school, Tögal Dharma is naturally contained within it.

Q: While walking, a few phrases came to mind. Please correct them, Master: All the merit of Buddhadharma that is free from marks comes from great compassion. Only great compassion grounded in nonseparation can be free of self and dharmas; only then can one be liberated and at ease; only then can one truly benefit others. Great compassion comes from the nonduality of self and other; only nonduality can ground such nonseparation.

A: Correct!

Q: Sometimes I visualize in this way: the master, the deity, and I are indivisibly united.

A: Do not abide in marks.

Q: My retreat practice during the first lunar month went very well, and the benefit was great. I have several questions for the teacher to answer. (1) From the first day onward, I sat for twelve hours each day. I entered a samādhi of emptiness, with qi surging upward and scattered subtle thoughts. Afterward I paid attention to reducing food and repenting. I entered luminosity and no-thought; body and mind both vanished; this lasted two hours. For most of this day I was in the warmth stage, and the body was very hot.

A: This was not in vain. Very good!

(2) On the second day, I was still within the warmth stage and empty luminosity, and compassion arose. During the third sitting, I entered empty luminosity, and very distant scenery appeared before me, along with fellow practitioners I knew. This lasted about two hours.

A: Be careful; do not cling to marks!

(3) On the third day, Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Avalokiteśvara appeared before me as an illusory image. The scenes I saw included Śākyamuni Buddha teaching Dharma, emperors and kings, palaces, monastics, crowds, and high mountains. All scenes appeared naturally, like television. That morning, when I rested from four to six, because after eating I fell into dull sleep and lost vigilant awareness, I entered a dream state. In the dream I saw

a very short woman fiddling with her genitals; my mind moved slightly, and there was seminal emission. Afterward I got up and sat, and dullness arose. The root cause was greed for food. In the next sitting I entered luminosity and no-thought for more than an hour, with illusory images arising one after another.

A: Your habit of clinging to marks is very deep; it is a serious illness.

(4) Before sitting I made a vow: may beings in the six realms quickly be liberated, and may birth-and-death afflictions be smashed beyond doubt. When the sitting was close to two hours, my genitals became erect for several minutes and then returned to normal; body and mind were peaceful, at ease, and pure.

A: The seeds of sexual desire are not yet purified; you entered a state of slight dullness.

(5) On the fourth and fifth days I paid attention to food, eating one meal each day, and gradually improved. Energy was abundant. Two hours of sleep restored my strength, and while sleeping I could remain clear and distinct. During sleep there was a voice, neither far nor near, saying: "Seek your own mind, and you can become a Buddha."

A: Do not pay attention to it.

(6) On the sixth day, while sleeping I was clear and distinct. For a long time I took up Avalokiteśvara's sacred Name, until all of space was filled with the sound of the sacred Name. Later I entered a dream state and took the dream scene as real. Suddenly I felt the whole body as if electricity passed through it, and I was startled. An invisible force made the body unable to turn, and later nothing happened. If I meet this situation again, what should I do?

A: Simply pay no attention to anything. The feeling as if electricity passes through is a phenomenon of the physical body's qi transformation.

(7) On the seventh day, I sat and entered a state of true reality. Body and mind were both empty, the ten directions were perfectly bright; truly it did not fall into any location and could not be spoken. I was in a boundless, limitless great treasury of light for as long as four hours. Later, when the eyes opened, my own treasury of light merged into countless, boundless treasuries, light shining upon light, each illuminating the others without obstruction.

A: The great treasury of light is you; you are the great treasury of light. It is not that you are inside the great treasury of light. If a treasury of light still surrounds you, that is not the great treasury of light meant here. No matter how vast and perfect this treasury of light is, you must not cling to it. You must dissolve it and not cling to even the slightest bit; only then is it right.

(8) From the eighth day until more than ten days later, in general I was in empty luminosity. Sometimes subtle seeds surfaced. Great light appeared every day, for varying lengths of time. In the final days I did not eat food, only drank water. There was no distinction between formal sitting and daily activity; vigilant awareness was present at all times.

Sometimes even vigilant awareness itself was emptied; fundamentally, one was already within it. On the fifteenth day, I entered great light for several hours without forming mudrās or holding the mantra. It was truly without self and without dharmas, not falling into any location. It cannot be put into words. The ten directions were perfectly bright; the numinous light shone alone, far free from faculties and sense-objects. When I left retreat, no affair could sway the original suchness. Truly, "sentient and insentient beings are all the broad, long tongue; sound and soundlessness are all the wondrous music of the heavenly drum." May I ask the master: is this the subduing of coarse thoughts?

A: These are fine thoughts, seeds of subtle thoughts deeply stored in the eighth consciousness. You must still polish them amid affairs and circumstances. Further, you must eliminate innate self-clinging and dharma-clinging. From the first bhūmi, gradually ascend into the second, third, and so on up to the eighth bhūmi, cutting off innate self-clinging; only then is fragmentary birth-and-death ended. Going further, remove dharma-clinging and end transformational birth-and-death. Only then can it be counted as ultimately subduing great afflictions and cutting off the extremely subtle ignorance. Only then can "mind" turn from the ninth consciousness, the purified consciousness, into the tenth consciousness, the stainless consciousness, and become a Buddha.

(9) I now sit once each day. Great light appears almost every day, for varying lengths of time. Sometimes there is neither observing nor illuminating; sometimes I remain within vigilant awareness.

A: Do not cling to marks. Light is an appearance; it must not be clung to, and you must not lose illumination. You must train until it is mature before you can enter quiescent illumination.

Q: Outside formal sitting, things are plain and quiet, and within this there is only clear and distinct numinous knowing. I feel that my way of relating to people and things has changed, and I handle problems more harmoniously than before. When circumstances arise, I can also turn the light inward to self-nature, responding according to conditions.

A: Very good, but do not abide in numinous knowing.

Q: Since the eighth day of the second lunar month, I suddenly felt the mind to be incomparably pure and free of greed and attachment. The affairs, people, and things experienced during the day seemed, when I practiced Dharma at night, not to be remembered; it was as if nothing had happened.

A: Do not dwell on those memories. Follow that purity; let go of everything, and dissolve body, mind, and world into emptiness. Only then can you apprehend Mind and see nature.

Q: Clear observation has already become continuous and seamless. Sometimes I enter the state of quiescent illumination. Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, basically I do not lose it; all day I am within a state of direct perception. After the seven-day retreat after the New Year, there appeared a period of seamless continuity lasting half a month;

afterward it repeated several times. Recently this stage has been relatively stable. When I sit, before forming mudrās and holding the mantra, I already peacefully enter samādhi.

A: Has the practice truly become continuous and seamless? When favorable and adverse circumstances come, does the mind still move? If the mind still gives rise to a subtle current, then it has not yet become continuous and seamless.

Q: When I was young, states of direct perception often occurred, but I did not know what it was. Now, having received the teacher's correction and confirmation, I do not dare be careless in the slightest, for fear of losing it again. Now, walking, moving, sitting, and lying down, I can basically hold it. Within this, several situations are mixed together. (1) The phenomenon of the ox eating grass is hard to see even once in several days. (2) Most of the time the ox very obediently follows along. (3) For a very short period I am in this condition: the ox is no longer seen, as if dull and foolish, as if I do not feel that I am practicing anymore. It is plain and flavorless. Is this the phenomenon of letting-be?

A: This is very good. Practicing to the end is simply plain as water, yet inwardly clear and distinct.

(4) Sometimes there is not the slightest memory; sometimes causes and effects are vividly seen; sometimes, when the other person speaks, I already know that person's level, where the obstruction lies, and how to remedy it.

A: Do not abide in this.

(5) I can basically answer questions about Buddhadharma, but some koans of the Chan school still cannot be completely penetrated.

A: Your practice has not yet fully matured. Continue practicing and you will get there. You must be without the slightest abiding and not become self-satisfied. Practice has no end.

Q: Ordinarily, I basically do not lose clear observation. Sometimes, without deliberately maintaining it, I am already within clear observation. Because I deeply know that all phenomena are originally empty and quiescent, there is no need to eliminate them. Is this already the process of entering quiescent illumination?

A: Yes!

Q: Now I have more courage. I used to be afraid whenever matters arose; now I am no longer afraid. While living in the world, one cannot avoid having things to deal with.

A: Not right! What affairs are there? The moment the mind treats something as an affair, it is already wrong. "In the mind, no affairs; amid affairs, no mind"—that alone is correct.

Q: During formal sitting, most of the time I am in a state with no thoughts, no mantra, no body, and no mind. Sometimes when fine thoughts arise, I use the single word "Notice!" to cut them off. Is this all right?

A: It is all right.

- Q:** Outside formal sitting, I am much more stable than some days ago. I can protect it. Sometimes even the thought of protecting is gone. But in adverse environments, there are still occasional times when I forget to protect.
- A:** Practice is just like this: there is advance and retreat. Once it is truly mature, you will no longer forget or lose it.
- Q:** The stage of protection is the process of removing habitual tendencies. When does one turn into the stage of letting-be?
- A:** You must wait until, amid circumstances, there is no getting carried away at all—until you are unhindered by favorable and adverse circumstances, free and at ease in every direction. When this is truly accomplished, there is no need to turn; naturally there is effortless freedom.
- Q:** As for maintaining the protection outside formal sitting, there are occasional times when I run off. Half a month ago, my child's face was burned. Even then, I did not lose my meditative stability, and I could still take good care of him. I feel that the more one is in adverse conditions, the more wisdom can grow; the worse someone treats me, the more that person helps my practice.
- A:** Correct. All adverse circumstances are assisting conditions that help you advance. But do not form thoughts of adversity and favorability, and do not form thoughts of good and bad about people. Simply accord with conditions and act. Before practice reaches culmination, it is hard to avoid times when you run off. As long as you notice it as soon as you get carried away, and do not follow it into wandering and forget to return, there is no obstruction. After a long time, practice will deepen, and there will be no running off; it will become continuous and seamless.
- Q:** My wife came back from you and has been very diligent. A few nights ago, after practicing the fourth mudrā, she entered samādhi and recited the mantra, with no body. After the sitting she maintained it until she went to bed. We each live in a separate room, and the mind was clear and pure. She felt sounds coming from the ten directions around the body, like firecrackers, as if they were going to explode the head and belly. The mind was frightened, and she thought, "Am I already dead?" The sound then continued for half an hour, and she fell asleep.
- A:** This is a favorable meditative experience brought about by the Buddha's empowerment, causing the whole body, mind, and world to explode into emptiness so that she can see nature immediately. If she meets it again in the future, she should not be frightened. Let it be natural, and through that emptiness she will be able to see the nature.
- Q:** I have good news to tell the master. One week after I returned from Shanghai, my wife lost six hundred yuan. I explained the Dharma of impermanence to her and told her that she must truly see through worldly affairs. In the afternoon, when she was in the barber shop, she realized true reality for nearly half an hour, and she did not lose it while working.

During the month since she began practicing the Lotus Mudrā, her resolve for the Way has grown. Every day she persists in sitting for more than an hour. We separated into two rooms very early on and rarely have marital relations; we deeply feel the suffering of sexual desire and are determined to cut it off. She said, "All the benefit obtained depends entirely on the master's blessing." She deeply feels that she has conditions with the master. Now she has completely changed into another person. She asked me to ask the master: what causes and conditions did we have in past lives to receive this karmic result in this life?

A: In past lives you were both practitioners who fell in love and became husband and wife. In this life you have gathered together again and practice together. If you do not practice diligently and put an end to birth and death, you will betray those former causes.

Q: I have a six-year-old boy. Perhaps because of our influence, he will not eat any food containing meat. When we sit, sometimes he also follows and sits for a while. He says he also believes in Buddhism. Now I do not read any sutra books at all and single-mindedly protect it. Is it right to do this? May I explain Dharma to others, or should I focus only on practicing Chan concentration and not involve myself with affairs and conditions?

A: Your child has also come to practice. You should raise him well. Single-mindedly protecting it does not obstruct reading sutras. Explaining Dharma to others and encouraging people to study Buddhism is a good thing; you should do more of it. To face circumstances without confusion is great Chan concentration.

Q: Our family of three is very good, but sometimes the thought of leaving home arises. I feel that being busy all day for livelihood is not as good as dedicating body and mind to Buddhism.

A: If this thought arises, then the mind is not empty—how can you accomplish the Way? If the mind is truly empty, one should be busy all day and yet not feel busy. Your whole family is practicing; have you not already left home? What other leaving home is there? After all this, you are still very attached to marks. How did Layman Pang and his whole family practice?!

Q: When sitting, body and mind are empty and quiescent, but sometimes, in a single instant, I feel that there are countless extremely subtle thoughts, as if related to the movement of blood and the beating of the heart. Must the heart stop beating in order to eliminate these subtle thoughts?

A: This is the consciousness aggregate becoming manifest. Thoughts are extremely subtle and flow very quickly; ordinarily they are not easy to detect. One must enter deep Chan concentration before they can be known. In practice, one must cut off this subtle stream of consciousness.

9G. 三、与修法相关的 / Part Three: Matters Related to Practice

Part Three: Matters Related to Practice

Q: Why is it that people who practice phowa can depart only at the time of death and cannot go earlier?

A: When it is not yet time to go, one should not go. To go while the body is still healthy would amount to suicide. There are countless worms within the human body; they too are sentient beings. To go while the body is healthy would be equivalent to killing them. Before death, these lives within the body die first; only then do you depart.

Q: I have now moved into a new house. The feng shui is bad, and strange things often occur.

A: That is easy to deal with: recite the Great Light Mantra. Walk around your house reciting it repeatedly. First recite outside the house, then inside, forming the mudrā as you recite.

Q: Nowadays, after a person dies, cremation is done after three days. Because the consciousness has not yet departed, when the body is burned, anger arises, and most people fall into bad places. If the body is kept in the funeral home, it must be refrigerated, and the dead person may also give rise to anger because of the cold. Is there any way to spare everyone this distress?

A: The deeper a practitioner's practice, the more slowly they depart. Ordinary people leave after three days. Where circumstances permit, lay the body properly in a small coffin and cremate it after forty-nine days.

Q: At what point in practice does one no longer become confused when passing through an intermediate state?

A: When the subtle stream is exhausted, there is no longer any confusion when passing through an intermediate state.

Q: What are unidentified flying objects?

A: They are devas. Devas are even more intelligent than we are. The extraterrestrials reported in newspapers are devas of the desire realm.

Q: If a person is unconscious at the time of death, does that mean the destination will be bad?

A: Unconsciousness is not very good. Someone nearby should call to him, saying, "Do not fall asleep; stay awake, stay awake." Will he become annoyed if you call him? No. But do not touch him. Our rebirth mantra recited into the ear is very useful.

Q: When assisting someone with recitation for rebirth, where should those assisting with the recitation sit?

A: Do not sit above his head. His consciousness is to leave through the crown of the head. You may sit on either side.

Q: What is going on when the physical body does not decay?

A: The person has entered samādhi. The true fire of samādhi has burned to death the bacteria within the body, so it does not rot. There are many bacteria in the human body; they too are sentient beings. In liberating sentient beings, one should first liberate the sentient beings within one's own body.

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese here prints 三昧真火. Public Yuan Yin witnesses are divided between that form and the conventional Buddhist expression 三昧真火. The English "true fire of samādhi" follows the technical sense already established by the surrounding Buddhist usage, while preserving the printed Chinese variant as a source-text issue rather than silently treating 三昧 and 三昧 as identical.

Q: What is the bardo body like?

A: After the body has broken down and before the next embryonic body has formed, the intervening period is called the bardo. The bardo body can last at most forty-nine days. A change occurs every seven days, and each successive seven-day period brings a further decline, so the earlier liberation rites are performed, the better. Those born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss do not have a bardo body; as soon as the breath stops, they are reborn there. Birth in the heavens is also like this, and those who fall into the hells also have no bardo body. For birth in the other destinies, there is a bardo body. The bardo body is pulled by karmic force into the corresponding destiny to take birth. Therefore, in ordinary times, we must practice diligently. Once all obstructions have been cleared, luminosity shines forth fully, and one does not turn with thoughts, then even if there is a bardo it cannot bind you, and karmic force cannot pull you. If demons, yakshas, or tigers chase you afterward, you know they are all false, and you are not afraid. While alive in the world, one must train so that when thoughts arise one does not follow them, and when circumstances arise the mind remains unmoved. This brings great benefit. In this way, one has freedom in taking birth.

Q: After a person dies, if one personally refuses to enter a womb, can one avoid rebirth in the six destinies?

A: No. Can you really not enter a womb? As soon as the mind moves, you take birth. There was a practitioner who sent out his yang-spirit and saw a plump white woman under a large tree. His mind moved and he went to embrace her. In fact, it was a sow about to give birth to piglets; because of karmic force, what he saw was a plump white woman. At that moment he heard someone say, "My sow has given birth to piglets." He looked and saw that he had become a piglet, so he quickly rammed himself against a wall and died. With a whoosh, he flew back. Habitual tendencies make your mind move, so you must train now. The Sixth Patriarch still went among hunters to train himself; the Second Patriarch also went to wine shops, teahouses, and brothels to train the mind. Therefore everyone must clearly understand the road and advance courageously. The most important thing is to recognize the original nature and practice until habitual tendencies are polished away.

From the first bhūmi, second bhūmi, and so on, one rises step by step, removing habitual tendencies.

Q: Does the bardo body have Buddha-nature?

A: Apart from Buddha-nature, could there be a bardo body? Apart from Buddha-nature there is nothing at all. The bardo body is an illusory transformation-body of the seventh consciousness. Can the seventh consciousness be apart from Buddha-nature?

Q: After a person dies, where does the self-nature go?

A: It turns according to karma. Whatever karma you create determines where you go. If you create good karma, you go to good places; if you create bad karma, you go to bad places. Now that you practice the Dharma, do not go anywhere else. How compassionate Patriarch Dayu was! He told us: if you wish to go to the inner court of Tushita, recite the Maitreya Mantra; if you wish to go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, recite the Broad Rebirth Mantra. He gave you a destination. Originally there is no destination, because Buddha-nature is everywhere. Why is there a destination? Because one clings to marks and remains attached, and because the mind is not empty and pure. Buddha-nature has no image of its own and does not need a place. When one clings to marks, then one needs a place.

Q: Some lay Buddhists treat the sutras they recite as "sutra tickets," and others go to people's homes to perform Buddhist services and charge fees, making this their profession.

A: "Sutra tickets" are indeed superstition. Some practitioners do not understand the truth and use this as a pretext for gathering money. Worse still, some have not recited sutras at all, but put red dots on yellow paper and sell them as sutra tickets, deceiving themselves and others. They care only about present enjoyment and do not care about the painful karmic retribution they will undergo in hell. This is truly foolish in the extreme.

Q: If one is unwilling to participate in certain Buddhist activities but is interested in sūtra lectures and Dharma teaching, does that reflect a discriminating mind?

A: Practitioners should choose the wholesome and act accordingly.

Q: Now sexual desire has clearly faded. Sometimes, out of consideration for the marital relationship, I feel compelled to go along with it; however, I can observe the mind without movement and merely go through the motions. I do not know what effect this has on my practice.

A: Sexual desire is the root of birth and death, and it is a great obstruction to practicing the Way. If sexual desire is not cut off, one absolutely cannot accomplish the Way. Only when one is truly finished with this is one really finished; otherwise it is all empty talk, with no practical meaning at all. When you go along with your wife, can your mind really remain unmoved? You must be careful!

Q: Can someone who has seen the nature and awakened still get married?

A: Would someone who has truly awakened still want to get married?! A person who wants to get married has absolutely not awakened! Sexual desire is the root of birth and death. How could someone who has truly awakened do that kind of impure thing with a woman?

Q: If a layperson practices the Dharma and sits in meditation at home, what should be done when illness arises?

A: It depends on what illness it is and whether one can practice the Dharma. If you do not have enough physical strength, do not practice; do not force yourself. If illness arises just when you should be applying yourself in practice, that means karmic obstructions are heavy. You may lie in bed and observe the mind or hold the mantra.

Q: This disciple has a son who depends on others for eating, drinking, urination, and defecation. Yet whenever someone comes near, he grabs their hair, and he also has convulsions in daily life. We have always used medicine to control it. Some people advised me not to treat him anymore and to let nature take its course, but I cannot bear it. I truly do not know what to do.

A: There is really no good solution here. If there is illness, it must be treated; you can only be patient. You may pray for the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless him so that he may soon pass from this life and be reborn in the heavens.

Q: Recently I often feel that there is much suffering in the world, and work and other affairs keep me busy. Perhaps this is because of debts owed to others in former lives. It is just that my physical obstacles have not been removed, and whenever illness and pain trouble me, I think of leaving home to practice the Way.

A: Many affairs are precisely the opportunity to train you to dissolve false habits completely. If you truly respond to affairs with no mind, you will certainly not feel tired. Leaving home means leaving the nest of entanglement in false thoughts; it does not mean leaving one's family. If the mind is not pure, then even if one leaves one's family, there will be endless trouble in the monastery. If you can practice the Dharma diligently, you will surely have accomplishment in the future.

Q: In illness and pain, I sometimes feel great suffering, with tears often in my eyes and not knowing what to do. I truly want to go to Shanghai to pay respects to you, Elder Master, and personally hear your instruction, so that I may be freed from suffering and my mind may open to understanding.

A: Do not seek here and there. Single-mindedly recite the Buddha's name. Pray for the Buddha's blessing and seek birth in the West. For Buddha-recitation, sit in meditation and, following the breath, unite mind and breath in vajra-recitation of the Buddha's name. Do not recite aloud. Take good care of the body, do not have much sexual intercourse, and also follow the doctor's instructions and take medicine.

Q: Bodily pain keeps appearing in subtle twinges. How should I further break through this illusion?

A: That which knows the pain is precisely the true host. The true host that knows pain does not itself hurt. Simply observe this aching illusory body; then there is no problem.

Q: I have heard that in the past some students who practiced other Dharma-gates became mad, vomited blood, and so on because they practiced too intensely or used an improper method. What is going on here?

A: Madness comes from first becoming attached to extraordinary meditative experiences, which later turn into frightening adverse experiences. Vomiting blood comes from leaning the back against a chair or wall, or from practicing too intensely so that internal heat rises.

Q: In your compassionate telephone instruction, you said that this student's headache illness may in the future lead to "senile dementia" and the like. What past causes brought this about? What method should I now use to resolve it?

A: The causes of headache are many. Disharmony among the physiological four great elements is the triggering condition; the main cause is past karma. Yet all things are empty, like flowers in the sky or the moon in water—unobtainable. Sentient beings are foolish and take the false as real. Karmic obstruction is originally empty, yet they cling to the existence of karmic obstruction; there is originally no undergoing of retribution, yet they take there to be retribution. Thus cause and effect entwine and cycle, and affliction, suffering, and pain do not cease. Now that you have headaches, practice the Dharma single-mindedly and do not take them as pain. When the mind is empty and the qi flows, the pain will then be resolved. What senile dementia is there to fear?!

Q: The doctor diagnosed me with colitis. On investigation, the cause is blocked qi movement and emotional tension. Is the blocked qi movement related to my sitting posture? How should I adjust my tense emotions? May I now temporarily stop practicing the fourth mudrā and practice only the second mudrā? If I use the mantra's power to treat illness, how many times a day should I practice? If I recite the Great Compassion Mantra over a cup of water for someone else, will it affect me? I pray for the master's instruction.

A: (1) You may practice only the second mudrā. (2) Put everything down, and the emotions will no longer be tense. (3) Practice twice a day. (4) You may bless water with mantra to treat someone else's illness; it will not harm you.

Q: When using the "healing mantra" to treat illness, should one use vajra-recitation? How long should one rub the diseased area? Should medicine also be taken?

A: Recite often in ordinary times. When treating illness, the mind should be sincere and reverent. For reciting the mantra, do not use vajra-recitation; recite softly, just audibly. Rub the affected area 108 or 120 times. Medicine may be taken.

Q: If everything is put down and ignored, even children are ignored, people will say that one is very selfish.

A: Toward children, we must fulfill our responsibility to educate them. Some children simply do not listen to their parents; what use is worry? Affairs must be done, but the mind should not cling to them, and one should not be flustered. "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind." A layperson from Ningbo was sitting in meditation and his meditative stability was very good. Someone ran in and told him, "Your child has fallen into the water!" He paid no attention. That is not right. If you have not fulfilled your human responsibilities, that will not do.

Q: Where we live there is a person practicing Daoist exercises who claims to have seen the nature. The nature he refers to is the "elixir" in the abdomen. Is this correct?

A: Forming an elixir is at most sending out the yang-spirit. The yang-spirit is still consciousness; it is not the fundamental essence. As Patriarch Huanglong said, "Even if it lasts through a million kalpas, it still comes to nothing." What benefit is there?

Q: In *The Life of Milarepa*, it says that at the end of practice spiritual powers are displayed. Does this indicate accomplishment of the Way?

A: You are again attached to spiritual powers. At that stage, spiritual powers naturally manifest. Spiritual powers are not produced through practice; they are originally fully present. They cannot function because the mind is not pure. Spiritual powers produced through special methods are not reliable. If you want spiritual powers, ghosts, spirits, and demons will come to possess you. The patriarchs repeatedly said: spiritual powers cannot be sought. What is obtained by seeking is not genuine; it comes from spirit possession.

Q: This disciple has resolved to practice the Dharma diligently, so as not to fail the kindness of my teacher or the great compassionate empowerment of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

A: This is the most crucial point. If one does not practice the Dharma diligently, then even if one speaks so beautifully that flowers fall from the sky, it will be useless at the critical juncture of birth and death. In practicing the Dharma, by all means do not cling to spiritual powers. Spiritual powers are originally fully present in everyone. It is only because greed, anger, and delusion make mischief, and because one seeks outwardly and grasps at illusory images, that the luminosity of the original nature is covered over and these powers cannot function. Now, as long as one lets the mad mind cease and eliminates the deluded thoughts, inversions, and attachments of greed, anger, and delusion, spiritual powers will naturally manifest. Therefore Great Master Yongjia cried out loudly: "Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches." Spiritual powers cannot be sought, and even if sought, they cannot be obtained. Even if they are obtained, they are false and are not the originally possessed spiritual powers. The *Mahāvairocana Sutra* clearly says, "One must first attain the penetration of the Way—the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows; afterward the five superknowledges arise without seeking." From this we can

see that seeking spiritual powers through Dharma practice is utterly mistaken. Yet now, among practitioners, one hundred percent seek spiritual powers and thereby go astray. This wastes energy, wastes money, and carries the danger of entering demonic states. It is truly not worth it. I hope you come sharply to your senses and stop following others in seeking spiritual powers.

Q: Recently some Buddhist disciples have changed from the Buddha-recitation Dharma-gate to the practice of "Ruyi Vajra Dharma." It is said to originate in the Great Perfection heart-essence of Anuttarayoga Tantra, the highest vehicle of Buddhist esotericism. Yet looking at how quickly its practitioners supposedly "perfect the Dharma-nature," and at the ensuing phenomena in which the force of the method propels their "external exercises" and "internal regulation," I do not know what is going on.

A: I do not know the source of this method, so I should not make reckless judgments about it. In general, "to teach a Dharma apart from mind is demonic teaching." This is an incontrovertible truth and allows no bargaining. At present, all kinds of goblins and monsters are rising up like a swarm, each saying that theirs is the highest Buddhadharma. In reality, they are merely manipulating the consciousness-spirit and playing with ghostly powers.

Q: There are scorpions, centipedes, and other poisonous insects in the room. How should they be dealt with?

A: In general, if you leave them alone, they will not sting you.

Q: Old Master Xuyun and Old Master Laiguo are now both in Tushita Heaven. Will they still come down?

A: If there are causes and conditions, they will come down. If the conditions are present today, they will come down today. After coming down, they can also go back up. They can come and go very freely.

Q: Master, what were we like in past lives, and what is our spiritual capacity like?

A: Your present family, social position, and economic situation plainly tell you what your past was like. The fact that you can now believe in Buddhism means you have wholesome roots. Especially if you can encounter the Heart-Center Dharma, you have supreme wholesome roots; this shows that in past lives you were also practicing. Whether your spiritual capacity is good or poor, do not ask others—ask yourself. If you are not afraid of hardship and practice diligently and vigorously, that is superior capacity. If you fear hardship and do not practice diligently, then your spiritual capacity is not good. All sentient beings have Buddha-nature just as the Buddha does, lacking not even the slightest bit. It is only that they are deluded, so they must quickly awaken.

Q: I ask my gracious teacher to give me a few words to take as my motto.

A: With the mind empty and nonabiding, be naturally free and at ease. Only exhaust ordinary feelings; do not seek sagely understanding.

Q: In both my inner mind and my outward conduct, whatever is incorrect, I hope the master will criticize me harshly. Otherwise, when will this ordinary being with deep obstructions and little wisdom personally realize bodhi?

A: Bodhi is right before you, yet you still do not recognize it? Who is the one asking this question? If that is not bodhi, what else could it be?!

Q: I wish to obtain a photograph of the master as an assisting condition for this foolish later student.

A: Studying Buddhism and practicing the Dharma is a matter of the mind. One must not seek it in visible forms. If you want to contemplate an image, contemplate the great bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or Amitābha Buddha.

Q: Can even a clear-eyed spiritual teacher show partiality—placing special value on, favoring, and blessing disciples with whom the teacher has especially strong affinities?

A: Amitābha Buddha! There should not be any partiality. All sentient beings equally possess Buddha-nature, so all are equal and without difference. But because past roots differ slightly, and past affinities also have varying depth, this can imperceptibly make it seem to others that some disciples are treated a little differently. Any such impression is due to the observers' own faulty discriminating views. There is really no way around this. In practicing the Dharma, as long as the mind is empty and you do not treat people differently according to closeness or distance, then the mind has no obstruction, practice progresses more easily, and one's practice of the Way bears fruit. Otherwise, contention over self and others and disputes over right and wrong proliferate; this does not benefit Dharma practice, and there is no hope of accomplishing the Way.

Q: I heard a Dharma brother say that our ability to draw near to the Master and practice the great Heart-Center Dharma is said to come from having heard the Dharma together with the Master in Śākyamuni Buddha's presence 2,500 years ago and having served the Buddha. Is that exceptional past karmic connection the reason for our excellent affinity today?

A: Since you already know that you had excellent affinities in former lives, why still discuss the details? Is this not clinging to marks? You must know that all things are empty and without self-nature. What is there to say about past, present, and future, or about east, west, south, north, and center?!

Q: This disciple turned from qigong to practicing Buddhadharma and has gone through a long process. I deeply believe that within the universe and human life there is a luminous Way, and so I resolved to study and practice the true Dharma.

A: To have this understanding is also due to wholesome roots planted deeply in former lives.

Q: Some disciples have practiced for quite some time yet made little progress. Investigating the reasons, they are no more than three: (1) they do not uphold the precepts, from the five precepts through the bodhisattva precepts; (2) they do not eat vegetarian food; (3) they do not cut off sexual thoughts and sexual conduct. They speak loftily about exalted states, yet their own habitual tendencies are heavy. Over time they lose the resolve for the Way or change to another method.

A: Yes! Such people lack the merit and fortune to practice this Dharma. They cannot accomplish the Way. They have brought this upon themselves!

Q: How should one release living beings?

A: First give them refuge. Say to them, "Your karmic obstructions are heavy. I will first recite the Three Refuges for you." You may recite the mantras mentioned in the Dharma for Liberation in the Intermediate State. The three most important are the Six-Realm Vajra Mantra, the Hearing-Liberation Mantra, and the Great Secret Mantra of Original Awakening. In addition, there are the Great Light Mantra and the Broad Rebirth Mantra. These mantras should be recited many times; each mantra should be recited at least 108 times.

Q: Should one eat dinner?

A: Not eating dinner is not very good. You may eat a little less; if you do not want to eat, you may also refrain from eating. If the stomach feels hungry, then forcing yourself not to eat will not do. Some people meditate well at night and find that eating makes them easily become dull, so they do not eat dinner. In the Chan hall, people easily become hungry at night, so one may also let everyone eat a little. Accomplishing the Way does not depend on going hungry.

Q: What effect does diet have on Dharma practice?

A: The body cannot do without nutrition. But this does not mean allowing you to eat meat and fish. Eating meat and fish means taking life; without great compassion, that is not good. In fact, vegetarian food provides all kinds of nutrition, and this is enough. But all kinds of vegetables should be eaten; do not eat only one kind. You may also drink some milk. There is no need to eat fish or meat anymore. We have eaten vegetarian food for a long time; are our bodies not doing well?

Q: We took Master Hsuan Hua as our teacher at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Now that we wish to study the Heart-Center Dharma and receive empowerment from another teacher, is there any conflict?

A: There is no conflict. I myself have studied under several teachers. My first teacher was Old Dharma Master Xingci of the Tiantai school. Later I studied under Chan masters and also under Patriarch Yingci of the Huayan school. After studying esoteric Dharma, I took Guru Gongga, Mr. Wang Xianglu, and the elder layman Fan Gunong of the Yogācāra school as teachers. There is no problem. This Dharma of ours is precisely Chan; there is no need for concern.

Q: Does practicing the Heart-Center Dharma require vegetarian food?

A: We advocate vegetarian food. Some people are used to eating meat, and if they are not accustomed to vegetarian food all at once, they may continue eating meat for a while. Once you practice diligently and reach the point where qi and blood transform, even if you are told to eat meat you will not want to eat it. Therefore it is best not to eat it.

Q: How should one repent?

A: In the past, all of us created karma unwittingly. Offenses arise from the mind; use the mind itself to repent. When the mind is empty and pure, that is true repentance.

Q: This disciple has dull faculties, and I once harbored many doubts about the teacher. My karmic obstructions are truly deep. I hope my gracious teacher will scold me and clear away my karmic obstructions.

A: In practicing the Way, one must above all avoid doubt. If one's faith is not strong enough, nothing can be accomplished; there is even less hope of accomplishing the Way. You must quickly repent. Otherwise, not only will you be unable to accomplish the Way, but you will also incur great karmic obstruction and further suffer harmful consequences. You must be careful!

Q: How should the various obstacles that appear in life be handled?

A: They are all opportunities to strengthen your meditative stability—supporting conditions that help you accomplish the Way. Do not be afraid. Everything is made by mind alone. When the mind is empty, obstructions vanish. If the mind clings to marks, obstructions will never be eliminated. When the mind moves, karma is created; therefore, as soon as the mind moves, one must repent. When the mind is empty and pure, it is good.

Q: How should someone who studies Buddhism maintain good relationships with others?

A: When one practices the Dharma and the mind is empty, how could interpersonal relationships not be handled well? When interpersonal relationships are not handled well, it is always because one clings and will not let go, and because one's own subjective views are too strong.

Q: Before thorough awakening, how should one respond to conditions and interact with people?

A: Remain nonabiding in everything; do not let the mind turn with circumstances—that is all.

Q: Before thorough awakening, should one ignore everything and wait until meditative stability and wisdom are fully developed before responding and adapting according to conditions and training the mind amid circumstances?

A: No. Right now you must train the mind amid circumstances. In the process of training the mind, both meditative stability and wisdom grow.

9H-1. 四、信函摘抄（一）弟子信函与上师批示、上师复函（开头部分） / Part Four: Excerpts from Correspondence—(1) Disciples' Letters with the Master's Comments and the Opening Master Replies

Part Four: Excerpts from Correspondence—Opening Portion

Part Four: Excerpts from Correspondence

(1) Disciples' letters and the Master's comments

I am a young teacher. Through various causes and conditions, I encountered the Buddhadharma and came to love it. From then on, under the permeating influence of the Buddhadharma, my life took a turn. Not long ago, at Lingyan Mountain, I took refuge in the Three Jewels and became a lay disciple. Master's comment: "This is due to your deeply planted wholesome roots. How very fortunate!"

Yet my own karmic obstructions are deep. My faith, vows, and practice are not pure; I have no strength. It is as if I were covered by layer upon layer of dense dark clouds and could not see the light. Although I recite the Buddha's name and recite sutras, it is hard to obtain real benefit. In daily life, in dealing with people and responding to things, false thoughts arise one after another and unwholesome karma continues without cease. Nor have I had the conditions to meet a spiritual teacher; I cannot find a way out. My faith gradually rises and falls with external circumstances, yet I am truly unwilling to drift along with the current. The anguish in my heart is beyond words. Master's comment: "To know a fault and immediately correct it—there is no greater good! This comes from your Buddha-recitation not being earnest enough. You should sit in meditation every morning and evening, for at least one hour each time, and gradually lengthen the time. When sitting, sit cross-legged, form Amitābha's samādhi mudrā with the hands, and do not use counting beads. Recite the Buddha's name in accord with the breath: one inhalation and one exhalation, one recitation of the Buddha's name. Quietly use the ear faculty to listen to the soundless sound of the Buddha's name arising from within the mind; do not recite aloud. Gather the mental faculty firmly, and you will gradually enter samādhi. After the sitting, you still must maintain clear observation at all

times: as soon as a thought arises, notice it and do not follow it into grasping at conditions and wandering away. As practice deepens over time, the deluded mind will not arise; the dark clouds will disperse, and you will then feel light, peaceful, and free. Even after laboring all day, you will no longer feel a heavy burden."

Not long ago, through fortunate conditions, I respectfully read your teaching "A Brief Discussion of Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature" in Chan magazine. Although for the moment it was hard for me to grasp its essential meaning, I deeply believe that you are a spiritual teacher rare and hard to encounter in the present age, of lofty virtue and deep realization. It was as if a drowning person had met a rescuer, and I was filled with joy. I long ago wanted to write to you, but feared that my mind was not sincere, and so I repeatedly did not dare to pick up the pen. Today I have finally gathered the courage to beg you, in your compassion, to show me a clear path. Master's comment: "In this age of the Dharma's decline, the Dharma-gate of Buddha-recitation is the simplest and most convenient. You should simply sit and recite the Buddha's name every day according to the method described above. During formal sitting and in daily activity, you must put everything down. Once an affair has passed, do not retain it—just as drawing on water leaves no trace on the surface when the stroke is made. If you can practice in this way, signs of samādhi will certainly appear within three months. May you strive on! In leisure time, read widely in the various sutras and treatises."

Venerable Master, I have not cried like this for ten years. I do not dare imagine what condition I might fall into if I lost your teaching. Only with you—the teacher I trust in my heart—do I feel safe, grounded, and happy. How I wish I could do something for you; how I wish I could serve you in person! Master's comment: "Those far away are close; those nearby are few. Body and shadow have never been apart."

Through fortunate conditions I have personally received the Heart-Center Dharma from the honored teacher. This disciple is greatly fortunate. In this age of the Dharma's decline, in order to widely liberate sentient beings, the honored teacher has made this unsurpassed great Dharma public in the world. The merit is immeasurable! Master's comment: "To have the conditions to practice this great Dharma is truly unsurpassed merit and virtue."

For this disciple, the path from qigong to Buddhist practice was a long one. In the more than ten years of practicing energy-work, and in real life, I deeply felt how inconceivable the universe, the world, and the material within the human body are. I therefore deeply believed that the universe and human life contain another luminous Way, and so I resolved to practice and study the true Dharma. Master's comment: "To have this understanding is due to deeply planting wholesome roots in former lives."

Thereafter I worked tirelessly, overcame difficulties, and sought out eminent teachers and great adepts. I practiced, among other methods, the Avalokiteśvara Dharma-gate, the Buddha-recitation Dharma-gate, and phowa. Master's comment: "Returning to the source has no two roads; skillful means have many gates."

After respectfully reading *Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization*, I deeply felt that I had received it too late. Every word and sentence in the book shows the honored teacher's precious counsel born of personal practice and direct realization, and the compassionate heart of the Buddhas and patriarchs in liberating beings. Master's comment: "You and I have affinity; therefore you have this feeling."

Especially in this age of the Dharma's decline, the re-emergence of the Heart-Center Dharma is like a red sun high in the sky—incomparably supreme. Therefore I immediately set out for Shanghai to meet the revered Master and request the Dharma.

Master's comment: "The Heart-Center Dharma is the heart-essence portion of esoteric Dharma. Only people of great capacity can practice it."

(2) The Master's replies

Recently I have heard that some people are giving blind guidance. They think that if one recognizes the great function that can speak, can hear, can act, and can do things, this is awakening, and there is no need to practice further. They do not realize that to recognize this great function as one's own original face is only understanding; it is still worlds apart from direct realization. Conceptual awakening amounts only to intellectual understanding. As soon as circumstances arise, that understanding vanishes; it has no practical efficacy at all, and at the brink of birth and death it cannot take charge even a little. In the Chan school, this is called "one fitting phrase—a donkey-tethering stake for ten thousand generations." Those who truly intend to end birth and death—how can they fail to be careful?! Because I cannot bear to see students everywhere misled by blind guides, entering crooked paths, abandoning Dharma practice, and failing to end birth and death, I raise this urgent cry. Until one's practice reaches the point where inwardly body and mind, and outwardly the world, completely vanish while one remains vividly clear, it does not count as seeing nature. Even if one reaches this point, habitual tendencies still remain, so one still cannot stop practicing. One must still exert oneself in Dharma practice, strengthen meditative stability, and complete the practice of protection and maturation. Only then can we all realize bodhi together and not have passed this life in vain.

Fellow practitioners in Shanghai pooled funds to print copies of an esoteric treasure, *The Secret Dharma for Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State*, written by Master Padmasambhava. It is an essential Dharma for helping Buddhist disciples who did not practice successfully during life attain liberation after death. Padmasambhava's compassionate concern was profound and urgent. Moved by compassion for Buddhist disciples whose practice lacks strength and who have not ended birth and death, he offers them further aid so that they may attain liberation at death. The care he took was extraordinary. How fortunate are we to obtain it! Give a copy to fellow practitioners who genuinely practice (do not distribute it indiscriminately, for there are not many copies) so that it may help them attain liberation and thereby form wholesome affinities. In this way, the

Shanghai practitioners and those in your area can widely form wholesome affinities. I hope you will value the text highly, handle it properly, and neither treat it carelessly nor waste it.

In practicing the Buddhadharma, what matters is going deeply into one gate; one must not mix practices. The great Heart-Center Dharma is the supreme heart teaching of esoteric Buddhism and cannot be mentioned in the same breath as form-based Tibetan esoteric methods. How could you practice such a profound heart teaching and then listen to other people's reckless talk, whose depth you do not know, and change to practicing other Dharma-gates, taking a needless detour? Fortunately, you knew to change back, resumed practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, and again recovered the luminous state of samādhi. Do not again mix in other methods. Single-mindedly practice the Heart-Center Dharma with firm resolve and fully realize noble fruition. You say that you violated the sexual precept and that your practice suffered a setback. Yes. Sexual misconduct is foremost among all evils. Even a person with excellent practice will greatly regress once he commits sexual misconduct. Even someone who has developed spiritual powers will lose them if he violates sexual conduct. How old are you this year? Still so impulsive! Was the violation of the sexual precept intercourse with your own wife, or was it with a third party? This must be stated clearly so that I can remedy it for you.

I have received your letter. You have made great progress—this is worthy of joy and congratulations. The book *Liberation in the Intermediate State* is indeed an esoteric treasure. It teaches us how those who have not been liberated while alive can attain liberation and Buddhahood at the time of death. Without great merit and good fortune, how could one encounter it? Your cherishing it and giving it to others with care accords deeply with my wishes. You have moved into a new residence, and everything accords with your wishes; your blessings and affinities are very good. I hope you will better guard your own numinous mind, diligently remove old habits, and thereby greatly radiate light, perfectly realize the enjoyment and emanation bodies, and perfectly accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood.

The questions raised in your letter are answered as follows. "When the mind is empty, phenomena withdraw": all phenomena are originally empty and quiescent. Only because the deluded mind climbs onto conditions do all kinds of illusory appearances arise. Once the mind that grasps at conditions ceases, the illusory phenomena also naturally cease. Thus when you went up the mountain and the mind was empty and without abiding, the mountain colors and the trees all vanished without remainder. Yet when the illusory phenomena ceased, "awakened awareness was vividly clear, not like wood or stone." This is the realized state described in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*: "When the extinction of illusion is itself extinguished, what is not illusory is not extinguished." Since you have seen this, you should skillfully protect it yourself: keep the mind empty at all times and do not follow circumstances. When a thought arises, cut it off immediately and do not let it continue. If you nurture this with such diligence, it will mature within a few years. For retreat, first, the mind must be empty and at ease; otherwise, you will find the stuffiness unbearable. Second, there

must be a quiet retreat room. Third, there must be provisions for the Way. Fourth, there must be someone to guard the retreat. Fifth, there must be a guiding teacher. The effect is that one can sooner bring the practice to seamless continuity.

The points asked in your letter are answered item by item below. (1) While lying quietly, false thoughts do not move. Through the permeating influence of prajñā from your ordinary Dharma practice, the inner mind opened and an explosive sound burst forth. When that explosion occurred, body and mind could not be obtained, while right mindfulness was vividly clear and was not the same as wood or stone. What is this? At this point, summon full alertness and recognize it decisively; that is seeing nature. If you abandon this and seek elsewhere, there will be no place to find the Buddha. (2) "Empty space shattered to powder; the great earth sank flat" means that precisely at the time of the great explosion, inwardly the body and mind were not seen, outwardly the world was not seen, and even empty space did not exist. (3) The first six consciousnesses are in the brain; the seventh consciousness is in the vessel where the heart and lungs intersect; the eighth consciousness is within the pericardium. The first six consciousnesses govern thinking and discrimination; the seventh consciousness constantly examines and calculates around an "I"; the eighth consciousness stores seeds. (4) Jue, "noticing," means alertness. When a thought arises, notice it and do not run after false thoughts. Guan, "observing," means watching. Use right mindfulness to watch false thoughts: as soon as a false thought arises, notice it and do not run after it. Zhao, "illumination," is like sunlight or a bright lamp shining clearly. Without needing to observe, it naturally illuminates everything, vividly clear and not attached to a single mark.

You say that because you went out, your practice was interrupted. This means you have treated practice as a fixed routine. You think that only forming mudrās and holding the mantra during formal sitting counts as practice, while walking and doing things outside formal sitting do not count as practice. This is a great error. You must know that real practice is carried out in daily activity outside formal sitting. When we respond to conditions and engage with things, amid tension and busyness, even though body, hands, head, eyes, and so forth all labor, the mind does not waver and does not turn with objects. It simply responds clearly, with neither gain nor loss and neither aversion nor attachment; all day long the mind is empty and open. This is real practice. If clear observation lapses even for a moment and the mind has something in it, that is interruption; otherwise it is not called interruption. When practice matures, one must also sweep away traces of awakening and overturn the old nest: no awakening, no attainment; no Buddha, no sentient beings. Nothing is established, yet marvelous function is inexhaustible; nothing at all can be obtained, yet spiritual powers are immeasurable. This is the vast, boundless, profoundly subtle samādhi. Practice begins with awakening to our own original mind and seeing our own original nature; then we maintain close, continuous observation, not allowing even the slightest view of dharmas, things, or Buddha to remain in the mind. All day long we are empty, open, and unsupported, putting on clothes and eating food according to conditions, wearing away completely the habitual tendencies nurtured through countless kalpas. Naturally we will greatly radiate light, brightly

illuminating the worlds of the ten directions without any remainder. There is truly no need to undertake any "rainbow-light practice." If this rainbow-light practice is practiced badly—that is, when the mind has not yet been emptied completely—not only will the body fail to transform into light, but deviations may occur, and the eyes may even go blind. All of you have cataracts; practicing with light will more easily deepen the cataracts and lead to blindness. Therefore I advise you to follow the Chan method: progress through awakening, protection and maturation, and perfect realization. This is a safer approach. You say that in practice you have no particular feeling, that you always feel calm and plain. This is the best feeling. As soon as there is some mysterious meditative experience, it is all imagination in your mind. There should be no meditative experience at all. Then, suddenly, with a single sound, inwardly body and mind and outwardly the world all transform into emptiness together. Precisely then, numinous awareness is vividly clear: there is neither a knowing subject nor a known object, neither a thinking subject nor an object of thought. This alone is your original face.

You also say that you cannot bring the practice to seamless continuity. This is because your practice has not yet matured. As long as you continue to train without interruption amid all circumstances, before long your practice will mature naturally. Your present practice already has a considerable foundation. If you continue practicing diligently, I think before long the bottom of the bucket will fall out. I hope you will take good care of this.

During formal sitting, body, mind, and world transform into emptiness, while numinous knowing is vividly clear: this is precisely original nature manifesting. Sometimes awareness is not vividly distinct, yet this is not dozing either. This is knowing without objectifying cognition, free from abiding in awareness; it too is a good sign. Just do not fall into indeterminate blankness. It is not that you have accomplished nothing. You have already realized the original face. As long as you train in affairs, transform old habits into emptiness, and remain unmoved by any favorable or adverse circumstance, you can further greatly radiate light, manifest spiritual powers, and transform the physical body into the luminous enjoyment body. But by all means do not seek this. Simply continue training naturally in this way. When the time is ripe, the result will come naturally. Then, if you need to manifest a mind-made body, you manifest a mind-made body; it is not some difficult matter. I hope you take good care of this.

All of you gather once a week at a fellow practitioner's home, mutually discuss and refine the practice, and urge one another forward. Especially in the height of summer, you still do not stop practicing; this is truly rare and precious. All phenomena are originally illusory and non-existent. They all gather and appear because our deluded mind stirs. If the mind does not move, illusory phenomena naturally vanish. Thus the ancients said, "When false thoughts are exhausted, the illusory body dissolves"—this is certainly not false. When you establish right mindfulness, the deluded mind does not move; when the deluded mind does not move, delusive phenomena naturally vanish. Therefore all persons and objects become dull and unmoving. Conversely, once the deluded mind arises, all delusive phenomena arise again. At

this time, if even right mindfulness is also cast off—that is, there is no so-called right mindfulness and no false thought, and all are unobtainable—then not even the shadows of objective phenomena can be found—not even the dull images of sense objects. I hope the fellow practitioners will strive forward and be diligent in noticing and clear observation; the day of full attainment will not be far away. All Mahāyāna sutras may be read. If you have the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment, the Heart Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, the Śūraṅgama Sutra, the Laṅkāvatāra Sutra, the Lotus Sutra, the Avataṃsaka Sutra, and the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch that was discussed last time, these are all must-read sutras for Dharma practice and can each be investigated in detail.

For a seven-day intensive, one should wait until the weather becomes a little cooler; right now it is still too early. Starting in the tenth lunar month is most appropriate. One person says they have had no breakthrough and therefore do not want to do an intensive; another says they have already had a breakthrough and therefore there is no need to do an intensive. Both have misunderstood the meaning of the intensive. If there has been no breakthrough, that is exactly when an intensive should be done. Once the deluded activity of the seventh consciousness ceases, a breakthrough naturally comes. If the seventh consciousness is surging high and you do not apply concentrated effort to bring its deluded activity to an end, how could there be a breakthrough? If a breakthrough has occurred, still more should you do an intensive. Only when the deluded activity of the seventh consciousness has completely ceased can the eighth consciousness transform, allowing its great capacity and great function to unfold fully. How could one be satisfied with a little and think that because there has been some breakthrough one need not do an intensive? If the deluded mind of the seventh consciousness has not completely subsided, how can habitual tendencies be ended? Inner turmoil is the phenomenon of deluded-mind seeds being stirred up by the fire of prajñā; they are about to be broken through but have not yet broken through. At this time, you must be patient and composed. Do not panic. When it becomes hard to endure, you may recite the mantra aloud. By all means do not end the sitting halfway merely because the mind is vexed and confused. Since the intensive is precisely meant to bring the deluded activity of the seventh consciousness to an end, when that activity is about to cease, it naturally struggles desperately; therefore you experience inner agitation, disorder, and distress. If you do not press through at this time and bring it to an end, then with the slightest indulgence all your previous work will again be abandoned. Therefore giving up sitting at this point is truly a great mistake. In the future, when you meet this situation, you must endure it and continue sitting. Once the deluded activity of the seventh consciousness ceases, a magnificent vista opens before you. You may do the intensive in your own room; no ritual is required, because this is esoteric practice without visualization. During formal sitting, sometimes you are comfortable and light; sometimes you are irritated and uneasy. This is an inevitable phenomenon when practice has not yet settled. Because the discriminating mind has not completely subsided, it still reacts, so there are ups and downs. In sum, when it is good, do not rejoice; when it is bad, do not worry. Simply keep sitting with the mind abiding nowhere.

When your mind is truly empty and pure, you will naturally be peaceful, comfortable, and free from worry and vexation. "The ten thousand things are originally at ease; only people disturb themselves." It is also said, "This Dharma abides in its Dharma-position; each does not interfere with the others." All things originally do not disturb us. It is our own deluded mind that moves chaotically, grasps at objects and attaches to marks, so vexations become heavy. When you watch television and the mind becomes empty, you are not disturbed by the scene. At that time, your body and mind and the television do not interfere with one another. This is exactly why I teach you to maintain vigilant awareness at all times. You now know how to use it, and I am very pleased. You must still deepen your practice, until at any time and in any place it is the same, and you are not disturbed by circumstances. After that, even vigilant awareness is no longer needed; the mind remains empty as if washed clean, and even emptiness cannot be obtained. Only then can you let go.

What is called "the immediate present" is the time when all false thoughts have ceased and there is vivid clarity. This "vivid clarity" is one's own Buddha-nature. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, one must remain attentive to the "immediate present" and not turn with thoughts or run after circumstances. To be unmoved and non-discriminating when facing circumstances is the state of direct perception. Yet the vividly clear self-nature is essence, not function; seeing forms and hearing sounds without clinging or fixating is function. The two must not be confused.

During formal sitting, when body and hands transform into emptiness, this is an encouraging sign. Who is it that "knows" the body and hands have transformed into "emptiness"? You should look precisely into this. At this time, it is not that there is no knowing; it is simply that false thoughts have disappeared. When you hear a sound and are startled awake, who is it that hears that sound? From this one can see that you were neither asleep nor fallen into indeterminate blankness. If you were asleep, the mudrā would already have loosened and the person would not sit upright. If it were indeterminate blankness, how could you hear a sound and be startled awake? When truly entering samādhi, there should be nothing whatsoever. If meditative experiences arise, pay them no attention; all illusory appearances will naturally vanish. If, within an experience, you are muddled and unable to take charge, then you have entered a dream-state. You must rouse your spirit, open your eyes, and recite the mantra aloud to drive away the sleep-demon and gather yourself into right samādhi. I hope you will practice diligently and not enter a wrong path. The wondrous contemplation based on the accord of the three mysteries is somewhat different from Mr. So-and-so's Dharma-gate of observing mind. The contemplation of the three mysteries is a Dharma-gate for seeing the nature and protecting it, in which body is inner emptiness, mind is secret emptiness, and the external world is outer emptiness—the three emptinesses are brought into accord. Mr. So-and-so's observing mind is a Dharma-gate of seeking mind before seeing nature, so they are different. In that practice, although one can observe false thoughts as they arise and immediately transform them into emptiness, one still does not know what the true mind is. In

the former, one already knows the true mind and no longer gives rise to doubt; therefore they are different.

That you can maintain clear observation at all times, protect what is original, and not wander off following circumstances is genuine practice. Conversely, although one may sit in meditation and recite the Buddha's name every day, if after the sitting one forgets oneself, lets false thoughts move chaotically, and follows circumstances and is carried along by them, that is merely superficial practice and has in reality little benefit. Whatever phenomena occur during sitting, whether good or bad, none may be attached to. As soon as the mind arises and moves, this is deluded awareness; once deluded awareness arises, even a good meditative experience cannot be maintained. This is because the thought that wants to maintain it is itself the deluded mind. When in sitting body, mind, and world all become empty while vivid clarity remains, what is this? This is your original face. Having seen this empty, pure, luminous face without characteristics, could you still cling to the false appearances of the world? Going further, protect it at all times and in all places, and do not let it follow circumstances, give rise to mind, and be carried away. Then this empty, pure, clear state will be present at all times. You ask why this state appears only rarely. It is because throughout many lives and kalpas you have been habituated to attachment; the habitual tendencies of ignorance are deeply ingrained. Although now, in one stroke, you have broken through and seen what is original, the roots of those deeply ingrained habitual defilements still remain. Therefore you must further protect it at all times and in all places. As soon as a thought arises, it must be removed; do not let it wander in arising and ceasing. When these habits and defilements of clinging to marks are eliminated part by part, the great task is complete and noble fruition is realized. This point is extremely important. I hope you will remember it well and apply yourself diligently to protecting it!

Do not attach to luminosity. Simply empty the mind. When the mind is pure, luminosity naturally arises. Because original nature is the essence of luminosity, the reason your luminosity is now slight is that the mind is not pure. If the mind is truly without any attachment and does not seek luminosity, luminosity will naturally shine forth greatly. True samādhi means remaining unconfused amid circumstances. What use is dead samādhi?

Forgetting is not a bad thing. Whatever we do, it should be as though nothing had been done. Why must we keep it constantly in mind and remember it? The ancient worthy said, "Eating rice all year, he has never bitten a single grain of rice." This is precisely teaching us that the mind must be empty and without abiding.

Now I answer the questions in your letter as follows. If at times you are deluded, as long as you remain diligently alert and continuously temper yourself amid circumstances, you can dissolve deluded attachment. As for the bardo, it is entirely determined by your practice while alive. If you are not deluded now, then you can take charge in the bardo. If you cannot take charge now, then in the bardo you will become confused. At that time, you can only ask fellow practitioners to help remind you and awaken you from the deluded dream, and only then can

you be liberated. When practicing the Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, the right hand may not be placed on the thigh. If you truly cannot hold it high, it may be lowered slightly and placed near the chest and abdomen. You may also practice without forming the mudrā, simply holding the mantra, but the effect will be somewhat weaker. You may practice this.

When you can see yourself while resting after the sitting, this is consciousness suddenly leaving the body. After meditation, because the mind has settled, it is unlike during sitting, when there are still all kinds of false thoughts such as wanting to enter samādhi and wanting to accomplish the Way; these seal the seventh consciousness tightly, so it cannot freely go out and enter. While resting after sitting, everything in the mind is empty; once the seventh consciousness is no longer sealed in, it can leave the body and move about. Therefore I teach all of you that when sitting, put everything down. Do not think of anything and do not seek anything. Let it follow its own natural course, and you can peacefully enter samādhi, awaken, and accomplish the Way. Dreaming of eating meat dishes is a reaction to your daughter urging you to eat meat. If you can eat it without savoring it, without craving or attachment, that is what vegetarian practice means. For vegetarian practice here means being free of craving around food; it does not hinge on eating or not eating. In addition, regarding retreat, it may be simple or elaborate according to how one chooses to practice. What is called retreat means shutting the door and not going out, practicing intensively at home. Some people sit all day, do not speak, and eat only one meal. Some alternate sitting with walking meditation, read sutras, and also do not speak. Others may also say a few things. In sum, it means tightly closing the gate of one's own consciousness, not allowing it to move chaotically, in order to perfectly realize bodhi sooner.

That so-and-so has gone abroad to teach the Dharma is worthy of joy and congratulations. Some Dharma brothers do not understand him because they have not opened the Dharma-eye and do not recognize a true person. You have now received his guidance and gained some entry into awakening; how fortunate this is! But by all means do not be satisfied with a little and think that you have reached completion and have nothing more to do. You must be diligent and careful, train diligently amid circumstances, diligently remove habitual tendencies, and exhaust the present karmic stream of consciousness; only then may you let go. Otherwise you will end up deluded after awakening, having practiced in vain—would this not be a pity? I am old and do not wish to travel; I only intend to rest peacefully. I hope you will practice diligently and not stop halfway.

Your practice method conflicts with mine, so I am unable to help; what can be done? Since you are devoted to qigong, why not study under a qualified qigong teacher and receive guidance as you progress, so that you do not enter a crooked path? Without guidance from a qualified qigong master, one can hardly avoid deviations such as obstruction, separation, stagnation, and so forth. Not only is this of no benefit to the physical body, it is also harmful to life. Practicing qigong trains the physical body and does not reach what is here called the “true self.” It is like knowing only how to decorate the house while not knowing how to care for the

master who lives inside it. Therefore, however good the practice is, it cannot end birth and escape death. What I devote myself to is the master within while also caring for the house; therefore it is inconsistent with your practice, and I have no way to help you advance. I ask your understanding!

A practitioner's practice has roughly three levels of depth. (1) When false thoughts arise, one notices them as they arise and does not follow them in wandering back and forth. At the time of death, even if there is a bardo, one can move freely wherever one wishes. Those who fail to notice them need not be discussed. (2) At any time and place, if attachment and aversion both vanish, then one has freedom to transform at will. (3) When the subtle stream of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure is cut off, then one proceeds in step with a Buddha at fruition and is ultimately free. Consider for yourself which of these three levels you have reached, and strive to advance; you can then naturally become ultimately free.

The seven sittings may either be completed in one stretch or divided over seven days, with one two-hour sitting each day. Completing all seven in one stretch is more effective. So-and-so has the aspiration to spread esoteric Dharma; this is very good. The Dharma brothers—not only you alone—should all work together with one mind to support his Dharma work. I do not know whether, apart from you, the other fellow practitioners are willing to exert themselves. Pray for the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless you and help you smoothly establish a place of practice.

What your letter says is very appropriate. For people who never believe, talking oneself hoarse is useless; it is better to remain silent. Teaching Dharma in a dream and serving as the abbot of a Buddhist monastery is a sign that there will be great accomplishment in the future; this is worthy of joy and congratulations. Where there is birth there must be death. This is a natural law. Therefore one must practice diligently, break free of the confines of birth and death, and only then will this life not have been in vain.

As for explosions during practice, this is basically ordinary. When practice reaches a certain stage, the qi-mechanism bursts forth, like water boiling in a furnace, overflowing with a rushing surge and making sounds; there is no need to be startled. As for the threads hanging from the lampshade outside swaying and the sound of a stool falling that your wife heard, these occurred because the shock wave affected external objects and because your energies are interconnected. When practice reaches a certain degree, an external sound can also trigger an explosion that shakes loose the universe, body, and mind, so that one thoroughly sees what is original. When beginning formal sitting, you must put everything down. Do not give rise to mind or move thoughts, and do not think about principles or affairs. Even if the spirit leaves the body and roams through space, simply pay it no heed. When the great explosion occurs, body, mind, and world are all blasted away together. When not a single thing is established and even emptiness is not clung to, summon full alertness and recognize: who is it that "knows" not a single thing is established? At this critical moment, with a thousand pounds hanging by a single hair, the opportunity vanishes with the slightest delay. If

at this point you see through it in one glance, the matter of Dharma practice in this life is finished, and you are carefree and free. It cannot be said that you do not practice diligently, but your mistake lies in thinking about principles and affairs. Therefore, during the great explosion, you were unable to explode body, mind, and world into emptiness together. You also opened your eyes to look at external things, which is still attachment to marks; therefore you missed the good opportunity and could not thoroughly see original nature. I hope you will continue your practice diligently—as before and, in daily functioning, never forgetting clear observation. The breakthrough will come naturally! Strive on, strive on!

People of small roots and inferior wisdom, when they hear the Buddha teach the supreme vehicle, cannot avoid fear and panic. Thus at the Lotus assembly five thousand people withdrew. A student who, upon hearing that all sentient beings are just like Śākyamuni Buddha, dares to take this up as their own and has not the slightest doubt or hesitation is certainly someone who has planted wholesome roots not before one Buddha or two Buddhas...

When a certain teacher came to Wenzhou, it was naturally the student's duty to bow, visit, request instruction, and seek confirmation. But if one's feet are not yet steady and one rises and falls along with him, then one goes far astray. Studying Buddhism and awakening to the Way are not easy matters. Therefore Chan practitioners often need twenty or thirty years of unremitting vigor before they gain an entry. If people today practice for one day and then lapse for many, then even after several hundred years I fear there will still be no gate through which to enter. Now, relying on the Buddha's compassionate power, we have obtained a resting place quite easily and without much effort. We deeply feel that the Buddha's grace is vast and mighty, and it is hard to repay it in the end. Yet although one suddenly realizes the true principle and awakens to this nature of numinous knowing as the dharmakāya, no different from the Buddha, deluded habits accumulated over many lives have become deeply ingrained. Completely exhausting the subtle stream of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, leaving it pure and unstained, cannot be accomplished overnight. One must sustain vigilant awareness over a long period and diminish them again and again. When the wind suddenly stops, the waves gradually settle. One must neither be overly impatient nor be the least careless. At all times recognize the empty, quiescent essence rather than taking the physical body as oneself; remain lucidly alert in numinous knowing rather than taking deluded thoughts as mind. If false thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Only when the mind of attachment and aversion has vanished will one no longer undergo fragmentary birth-and-death. I hope you will practice diligently and advance vigorously. By all means do not be satisfied with a little. Not to fail this life would be most fortunate indeed.

Textual source note. At the instruction translated here as recognizing the “empty, quiescent essence,” the local controlling Chinese prints 空寂之体. Other internal Yuan Yin parallels read 空寂为自体 / 空寂之体, and public witnesses are divided. “Empty, quiescent essence” follows those

internal parallels while leaving the local 空寂 reading documented as a source-text anomaly rather than silently treating it as unproblematic.

Reading your letter, I felt quite pleased. During formal sitting, you discovered so many beautiful and ugly states, yet your mind was not moved by any of them. With the good you were not delighted; with the bad you were not disgusted. This is truly rare and precious. What is still lacking is just one cry of “huo!”—a sudden collapse, an explosive severing, so that inwardly body and mind and outwardly the world are all shattered at once. All such conceptual positions—“having characteristics,” “without characteristics,” “not existent,” “not without characteristics,” and “not-not without characteristics”—are unobtainable; even unobtainability itself is unobtainable. Then the original face appears vividly, and the matter of study in this life is finished. As for luminosity, it is originally fully possessed by self-nature. For worldly people, it cannot manifest because of false thinking, attachment, inversion, and affliction. Now, during practice, the mind is quiet and the deluded mind has opened a crack, so you briefly see luminosity. This is not its complete manifestation. At this time you must not attach to it; you must still exert yourself and advance. If you stop there even slightly, luminosity itself becomes an obstruction and you cannot see nature; this is the false light at the gate of light and shadow. Only after all marks are broken through and original nature is thoroughly seen can true light be revealed. At that time, even though vivid luminosity shines forth greatly, you do not make it into a view of luminosity, because all marks are illusory and delusive and there is nothing to grasp or attach to. Outside formal sitting, just as during formal sitting, respond to conditions and engage with things with no grasping and no rejecting. When doing affairs, “be without mind amid affairs”; after affairs are finished, “have no affairs in the mind.” The ancient worthy said, “Eating rice all year, he has never bitten a single grain of rice; wearing clothes all year, he has never hung on a single thread.” This is what it means. If there is the slightest stopping or lingering, see through it immediately and do not let the mind abide there. This is the “ox-herding practice.” When the wild ox has lost its wildness and there is nowhere it runs off to, even illumination is no longer used. All day long one is simply “hungry, eating; tired, sleeping”—a person of the Way with nothing to do.

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese source’s character after “what is still lacking is just one cry” is garbled in the electronic text. A publicly available letter text preserves a rare vocalization character, and repeated Yuan Yin passages support the “huo!” reading used here. Because the local graph itself is unstable, this is an editorial reconstruction from source evidence rather than a fully secure character-for-character reading.

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese source used for this edition gives the five-position sequence represented above: 有相 / 无相 / 非有 / 非无相 / 非非无相. A publicly available letter text additionally prints 非非有 (“not-not existent”). The English follows the controlling five-position sequence and does not import the additional position from that comparison witness.

The peace and tranquility you feel in daily functioning, your freedom from heated vexation, and your day-by-day growth in compassion all result from your strength in the Way having

grown through practice in stillness. You are not far from seeing nature. I hope you will practice still more diligently and advance. Brilliant, splendid scenery awaits you not far ahead.

Knowing that you do not avoid hardship and have courageously taken up the heavy responsibility of spreading the Dharma gives me great comfort. If a student wishes to eliminate subtle dust-and-sand delusions, it is virtually impossible to fulfill that wish without being tempered in the practice of liberating sentient beings. Subtle clinging to dharma-self and person-self cannot be eliminated without long-term tempering in close engagement with sentient beings. Moreover, when explaining Dharma to others, one often becomes suddenly clear as though aided by an unseen hand, gains new understanding of the question, and increases the depth of one's comprehension. This too is a fine way of benefiting oneself while benefiting others. As for your saying that some Buddhists are selfish and that the mind that wants to accomplish for oneself and live a few more years is not to be taken up, this is truly so. All sentient beings are originally without birth and death; what talk is there of living longer or shorter? They are originally Buddhas; what accomplishment or failure is there? Those are the words of deluded people. Awakened people absolutely do not speak in this way. It is very good if everyone can gather once a month on the first day to discuss. With you coming forward to preside, I am very at ease. I hope you will not fear hardship and will carry it through well.

If the mind is truly without abiding, then even in dreams it greatly radiates light. In this way, when breathing stops, although the body decays, the mind-light is greatly revealed. That is your luminous enjoyment body. When this body is accomplished, one transcends saṃsāra.

First of all, when not a single thought arises, there are no marks at all. When functioning, one responds according to conditions; this does not mean being an "idiot" or a "fool." You should reach the point where you are always in samādhi. It should not be that for a while you enter samādhi and then for a while you leave samādhi; that is not right samādhi. During formal sitting, even while holding the mantra, it should be as if you are not reciting; outside formal sitting, even while responding to conditions and handling affairs, it should be as if there are no affairs. You have not yet protected it well—how could this be spontaneous functioning? It is right to cut off sexual desire completely.

In Chan, one must arouse the doubt-sensation before awakening becomes possible. The doubt-sensation is not doubt about the Buddhadharmā; it arises around the huatou under investigation. For example: "Before your parents were born, what is your original face?" The student arouses the doubt-sensation right at this question in order to cut off deluded attachment and open up what is original. This has nothing to do with esoteric practice. There are three difficulties in practice: (1) recognizing original nature and holding to that recognition with certainty is difficult; (2) after recognizing it, protecting and maturing it without forgetting is difficult—after recognition, one must be skilled in protection and diligently remove habitual tendencies; (3) not turning protection into rigid, lifeless guarding is difficult—practitioners often, because they are diligent in protection, become stuck in

emptiness and unable to function. Therefore one must abide nowhere while functioning responsively according to conditions. "When deluded thoughts suddenly dissolve, only then are form and emptiness clear. If you wish to know the original face, it is amid green mountains and white clouds." The "original face" is nowhere else. Simply let the mind rest and look: when not a single thought arises, when there is no mind to be minded and no thought to be thought—what is it like then? Is this still your original face or not? This is the critical opportunity of a thousand pounds hanging by one hair; it is gone with the slightest delay. If you pause even slightly and stand there thinking, you are already deluded by its shadow. In fact, this directly present state of no-thought is precisely the original face everyone seeks to see. The trouble is that everyone fails to recognize it. Because it has no mystery and nothing extraordinary, they easily slide past it and seek elsewhere, wasting time and ultimately not seeing the Way. This is truly lamentable. The method of close-pressing recitation is common to all Dharma-gates, because by means of it one can gather false thoughts so that they do not move and thereby enter meditative absorption. As for the relationship between mantra-recitation and breathing, let it be natural and do not consciously regulate it. Good and bad periods in sitting are due to the mind not being settled. Before practice settles into place, fluctuations are unavoidable. Especially when practice is about to deepen, the turning-over of seeds is even more difficult to bear. Therefore, when the great adepts of the Chan school reached this point, they all recited mantras, seeking the blessing of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to eliminate it. For one's proficiency in Dharma practice to advance steadily, you must pay attention to the following points. (1) Sit on time every day and do not interrupt the practice. (2) Put everything down, as if you were a great dead person. (3) In holding the mantra, the mind must recite and the ear must hear, with every syllable distinct; the slightest blur is false thought. (4) When false thoughts arise, you must see them and not follow them. Neither suppress them nor indulge them. Simply resume reciting the mantra, and the delusive thoughts will naturally dissolve. (5) Do not seek to enter samādhi, awaken, or develop spiritual powers. As soon as there is anything sought, it is false thought and instead prevents entry into samādhi. (6) Continuous clear observation at all times is most important. After the sitting, carry the meditative stability developed in formal sitting into daily activity. Although you respond to all affairs, the mind does not move, as if someone else were doing them. Functioning according to conditions without attachment is what the Diamond Sutra calls "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind." "Responding" means responding to the ten thousand conditions while abiding nowhere; then the true mind of quiescent extinction appears vividly.

Your letter asks, "What if the great death cannot occur?" This is only because attachment is heavy. All visible forms are flowers in the sky and moons in water; there is nothing to grasp or attach to. Simply focus on looking into this: who is it that "can see all appearances" and "can manifest all images"? Direct your practice here: let grasped marks fall away and see nature. As for "when nothing at all is sought, the Way is naturally constant," this does not refer to the post-awakening state of protection and maturation; rather, it says that to awaken and see

one's own original nature, one must seek nothing whatsoever, and only then will the great Way naturally appear. The proverb says, "Take the highest as the model, and you obtain only the middle." In our Dharma practice, we must indeed look upward and not downward; this does not count as attachment. "Nothing in the world is difficult, if only one has the will." As long as we do it with all our heart and strength, and carry it out through a hundred setbacks without wavering, there is nothing that will not succeed—to say nothing of the fact that we are originally Buddhas and have merely, through deluded attachment to visible forms, lost sight of what we originally possess. We need only turn the light inward at all times, not be pulled by external circumstances. How could we fear that we cannot recover the original face? Regarding "things and self are not two," studying Buddhism and practicing the Way cannot be attained by taking risks and hoping for luck, but neither is it so difficult that it cannot be attained. As long as we have a spirit that does not fear hardships and dangers, acts directly and decisively, and advances courageously, we will certainly accomplish it. Music, sensual pleasures, wealth, profit, and the like develop into a dazzling array of alluring worldly circumstances. They seem like thousands of demon armies surrounding people on all sides, so that people cannot help but be moved inside and follow them in wandering, forgetting to return. But if one can recognize that all such objects are flowers in the sky and moons in water—unobtainable and not to be sought—then, letting go of everything at once, without expending effort one immediately returns home and sits stably, free and at ease, joyfully enjoying great peace. The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says, "Knowing it to be a flower in the sky, there is no transmigration." It also says, "Recognize illusion, and you are free of it; no expedient means need be applied. Freedom from illusion is awakening; there is no gradual sequence." How could practicing the Way be difficult? Therefore Madam Pang said, "Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the coming from the West is on the tips of a hundred grasses."

Yet because accumulated habits are deeply ingrained, they cannot be exhausted in a short time. Therefore one must maintain close, continuous observation at all times and in all places, struggle against deluded habits of clinging to marks, and exhaust the present karmic stream of consciousness; only then can one dwell at peace. At the beginning, one cannot avoid losing illumination and becoming attached to circumstances and feelings. But as long as one increases alertness and continues the struggle with the mind of "treading on thin ice," one will gradually become mature. Amid all circumstances, do not forget vigilant awareness. Then advance from vigilant awareness to quiescent illumination; further, let even the trace of quiescent illumination dissolve, so that there is no question of illuminating or not illuminating. All day long one is like a fool or dullard, and the benefit is inexhaustible. May you strive on! Your letter says, "In principle I already understand, but in affairs I often forget and lose it." This is precisely the difficulty in our Buddhist study. Because habits of attachment accumulated over many lives and kalpas are deeply ingrained, they cannot be transformed in a short time. Therefore one must remain aware, examine them, and reduce them again and again until maturity is reached; this is not the practice of a single day. As for saying, "My ambition for undertakings is strong, and in human affairs I easily give rise to a discriminating

mind,” that is the speech of ordinary people. According to the Buddha’s teaching, “Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind.” Strong aspiration for undertakings is precisely a necessary condition for benefiting and bringing joy to sentient beings. Without this mind, one would tend toward passivity and only perfect oneself. “Giving rise to the mind” is precisely giving rise to this aspiration for undertakings. The essential point is to give rise to mind without abiding; one must not abide in affairs and give rise to a discriminating mind. A difference of a hair’s breadth becomes the separation of heaven and earth. When habitual tendencies arise and one cannot redirect them, one may rely on the mantra’s power to transform them. Vigorously take up the sacred mantra, and any stubborn deluded habit can be dissolved into emptiness in an instant. Of course, because meditative stability varies in depth, the speed of transformation also differs. But there is no need to be dejected or regretful. Simply keep struggling against them; in time, the practice will naturally mature.

Speaking of practicing Chan, one can indeed recognize this numinous knowing apart from thought as one’s own original nature, and from there protect and mature it closely, diligently remove habitual tendencies, pass through the Multiple Barrier and the Prison Barrier, and perfectly realize bodhi. But there are not many people of this kind. Most merely say it with their mouths while their minds turn with circumstances: they have it when speaking, but not when using it. Therefore the Chan masters do not permit this—it is truly lamentable! In fact, most ancient Chan worthies first awakened at the level of principle and later completed protection and maturation. Did the Sixth Patriarch ever undertake Chan investigation? After the Fifth Patriarch pointed it out to him, he hid among hunters for fifteen years before “the skin was completely shed.” Is this not a clear example? Please tell everyone to practice diligently. During formal sitting, be utterly determined, single-mindedly holding the mantra, mentally reciting the mantra and listening attentively. Outside formal sitting, do not forget clear observation. After long practice becomes pure, one can naturally directly realize what is original and fully realize noble fruition. Do not hope to rely on someone else to help you accomplish it. Practicing the Way depends only on one’s own diligent practice; others have no way to help. So-and-so changed to practicing qigong because she hoped to obtain spiritual powers. That is because she did not understand the origin of birth and death or the way of liberation, and was misled by miraculous transformations. This is also the consequence of having begun from an unsound basis for practice. In Dharma practice, it is best not to see any visionary appearances. Since all marks whatsoever are false, if one becomes attached to illusory appearances, there will never be a day of seeing the nature. Cracking sounds throughout the joints and bones of the body come from changes in qi and blood. Because psychology affects physiology, the physical body naturally undergoes some changes during the process of Dharma practice. Buddhist sutras such as the *Śūraṅgama*, *Laṅkāvatāra*, and *Avatamsaka* should all be read and recited, and the recorded sayings of the Chan patriarchs should also be studied. During the plum-rain season Shanghai is still fairly cool; once the rains end in a week, hot waves will invade and the temperature will rise. Yet practitioners must

train amid cold, heat, chill, summer heat, and favorable and adverse circumstances, and not be disturbed by them. Only then can one attain great freedom at the brink of birth and death.

All sentient beings originally possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous characteristics. It is only because they cling deludedly to sounds and forms that they lose sight of what is original. Now, if one wishes to return to the root and revert to the source, one can only do so by following the Buddha's teaching, choosing a practice suited to one's own character, entering deeply through a single gate, and practicing diligently and perseveringly without giving up; only then can there be a small degree of accord. In this present age of the Dharma's decline, sentient beings have inferior roots and heavy obstructions; relying on self-power in practice is truly difficult to accomplish. Of course, individual people of great capacity or great bodhisattvas who have returned are exceptions. Therefore Chan Buddhism, the uniquely brilliant flower of Chinese Buddhism, is now also at its last breath, degenerated into transmission by lineage scroll and unable to extricate itself. Śākyamuni Buddha compassionately foretold that sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age who wish to leave the bitter sea of birth and death have only Pure Land and esoteric Dharma as viable practices. Therefore present-day Buddhist disciples should take Pure Land practice as the most secure. If you trust my words, then morning and evening recite the Buddha's name with sincere reverence. Do not seek to enter samādhi, and do not hope for awakening. Just honestly recite in this way. When recitation reaches the point where person is empty and the objective realm vanishes, the true eye suddenly opens, and one directly sees Amitābha's Buddha-nature, in accord with Chan. This is "having Chan and having Pure Land." It is not telling you to investigate Chan in addition to Buddha-recitation. Studying and practicing the Buddhadharma is originally for ending birth and death. Awakening—seeing the nature—is only the forerunner to ending birth and death. The ancients said, "true practice after awakening," because only after awakening does one know the "true" and the "false," and from there protect original nature without being deluded by false appearances. This is what the Chan school calls "the practice of protection and maturation," and what the teaching school calls "eliminating the delusions of thought." When the delusions of thought are exhausted and one is not deluded when facing circumstances, birth and death are ended. This is speaking from the Chan standpoint. In Pure Land, it is not necessary to be like this. If one's Buddha-recitation practice is well established, then at the end of life the Buddha welcomes and guides one to rebirth in the West, and birth and death are ended.

Because you practice without slackening, you have become unobstructed amid favorable and adverse conditions and free in every direction; this is truly worthy of celebration. Practicing the Dharma and studying the Way are for ending birth and death and transcending saṃsāra. Birth and death exist because, when facing circumstances, the mind arises and clings. If, when facing circumstances, one does not give rise to attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection, then birth and death have nowhere to set foot. What is called apprehending Mind and seeing nature means recognizing that the mind is originally unborn and the nature is originally natural and true. It is the great energy—the root—from which all things arise, and it is also

the numinous knowing that remains vividly clear when a single thought is cut off, while all things are its reflections. As long as we recognize this principle, then when seeing appearances, we do not cling to them as real but know them to be manifestations of the nature; this is directly seeing original nature. Once nature has been seen, one still must pass through in affairs. Only if, when any affair appears, one is not emotionally moved in the slightest, is it true awakening. Now that you can be not delighted in favorable circumstances and not vexed in adverse circumstances, this is worthy of joy and congratulations.

“Those far away are close; those nearby are few.” As long as you practice at all times, even though we are separated by ten thousand li, we meet face to face morning after morning. Conversely, even if we meet every day, we may still be separated as far as the horizon. When Dharma practice takes hold, the body undergoes changes, but one must not attach to them. As soon as there is attachment, the practice stops there and it is hard to progress. If the body had chronic illness in the past and it now comes out, do not be afraid. After a period of practice, it will be pulled out by the roots and completely cured. Of course, when one should seek medical treatment, one should still seek medical treatment. To attain accomplishment, one must form a great resolve; only then can one endure hardship and toil, remain firm, and not retreat. Otherwise, at the slightest setback, one retreats. The greatest taboo in Dharma practice is stopping and starting; one must sustain it continuously from beginning to end. Sentient beings of the desire realm each have deep and heavy sexual desire. Therefore one should sit much in meditation and beat this deluded mind to death, only then dwelling at peace. As soon as this deluded thought first moves, you should sharply reestablish right mindfulness and ask: from where does this deluded thought come? This thought is originally false and has no real existence. Through this one question, it vanishes without a trace. To cut off this delusion at the root, one must, after awakening, train amid circumstances; only then can one succeed. Observing mind outside formal sitting means concentrating the mind and looking into what it is like before a single thought has arisen. As soon as a false thought is born, notice it and remove it. You simply watch it. After a long time, the right mindfulness that can watch and the false thought being watched both dissolve together; then one directly sees what is original. Because this Dharma is easy to accomplish, only those complete in wholesome roots, merit, and virtue can take it up.

Based on your letter, I now answer item by item. (1) What is essential in Dharma practice is to sustain it without interruption; do not keep starting and stopping. If practice is intermittent, meditative stability is not easily developed, qi-channels are extremely hard to open, and the body is not easily improved. (2) All karmic obstructions are made by mind; when the mind is empty, obstructions naturally vanish. The Song of Realizing the Way says, “When realization occurs, karmic obstructions are originally empty; before realization, one must still repay old debts.” (3) Intermittent Dharma practice, even repeated many times, is not in accord with Dharma. Concentrated practice of the second mudrā can treat illness, but it must be practiced continuously. (4) Movement of the body during meditation belongs to old obstructions, but one must advance courageously and not pay attention to it—neither suppressing nor

assisting it. After a period of time it will naturally stop. (5) Clearly watching the point where a single thought arises—noticing it as soon as thought arises and not following it as it climbs onto conditions and wanders away—is the proper practice of the Dharma-gate of observing mind. In Dharma practice one should maintain clear observation at all times and not relax even the slightest bit. One must especially avoid having only an arrogant, deluded mind, making a resolve that is not firm and not carrying it out in earnest; the result will surely be that nothing at all is accomplished. Be careful! Be careful! (6) In the past your resolve was vigorous, but recently you can no longer arouse it. This is because your resolve was not genuine. In addition, your girlfriend mixed with an unwholesome boyfriend, which further knocked out your resolve for the Way. I hope you deeply repent and change.

Koans must all be understood dynamically, but practice does not consist in explaining koans; it lies in actual daily functioning. If one remains attached amid affairs and circumstances, even the finest explanation of koans is useless. People who study Buddhism today devote themselves to empty talk rather than actual practice. Their habitual obstructions are deeply entrenched, their emotional attachments run deep, and they refuse to let go with utter determination and practice in earnest. Therefore I teach them to recite the Buddha's name, seek birth in the Pure Land, and plant all kinds of wholesome roots. They cannot take up the Mind-Ground Dharma-gate. Amitābha! You have Buddhist affinity with Nantong and can speak Dharma as appropriate to visitors at the mountain, showing the way to those who are lost. This too is a worthy undertaking. If so-and-so takes you as his teacher, then teach according to conditions and help him leave the sea of suffering. To accept responsibility when it is one's duty is to be a true bodhisattva.

When the crown of the head feels swollen and painful during meditation, that is clear qi rising. This is a very good natural phenomenon; do not be alarmed. When meditation practice advances, qi and blood circulate; turbid qi descends and clear qi rises, and only then can the blood channels open. Otherwise, if there is no sensation at all, how could the channels be opened, the physical body dissolve, and the true nature originally present be directly realized? Bodily discomfort is because you do not understand what is happening and become panicked and irritated. As long as you settle the mind, single-mindedly hold the mantra and sit in meditation, and do not pay attention to how qi and blood circulate, letting them move naturally, then when the deluded mind is empty and quiescent, the breath ceases, the physical body transforms into emptiness, and the world vanishes, you will directly realize original truth. If you are alarmed, irritated, and unsettled, not only will you be unable to enter samādhi, but you will instead cause qi and blood to become obstructed. Pay attention! Pay attention! When sexual desire becomes intense, it is because the fire of prajñā is permeating within and stirring the seeds in the eighth consciousness. Increase your mantra recitation to dissolve it. Pain in the hands while forming the mudrā is because your old obstructions are heavy; pain is needed to eliminate obstruction. For every portion of pain you endure, one portion of obstruction is eliminated. I hope you will exert yourself.

9H-2. 四、信函摘抄（二）上师复函（续完） / Part Four: Excerpts from Correspondence—(2) The Master's Replies, Continuation and Completion

Part Four: Excerpts from Correspondence—Continuation and Completion

Recently there have been many people in Xi'an practicing the Heart-Center Dharma. Yet I do not know whether they are all practicing in accordance with the Dharma and advancing diligently without slackening. In their spare time, can everyone still gather to discuss and investigate, help one another, and urge one another forward? How has your progress been lately? Can body and mind dissolve into emptiness, with no abiding anywhere? There are three difficulties in practice: it is difficult to recognize true mind and hold to it without doubt; after recognizing it, it is difficult not to forget preservation; and it is difficult not to turn that protection into something dead and rigid. May you practice diligently.

I now answer the questions in your letter one by one. (1) The final state realized by Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism should be no different. An ancient worthy said, "Skillful means have many gates; returning to the source has no two roads." This means that although practice methods differ, the Buddha-nature realized is indeed without difference. The wondrous essence of true suchness is not only the same for all sentient beings; it is also no different from that of the Buddhas. A thousand Buddhas and ten thousand Buddhas share one essence. Yet before practice has reached the final point, there are still differences in depth and shallowness of practice. Not only do the three traditions differ somewhat; even within the same tradition there are differences. This is not because the Dharma differs, but because practitioners' faculties may be sharp or dull. (2) Is esoteric Buddhism "above" Chan? On this question, practitioners of esoteric Buddhism often praise their own methods as profound and complete, claiming that they are above Chan. In fact, this is a mistaken statement that does not understand Chan's ultimate point. Take even the Great Perfection, which in esoteric Buddhism is the highest, deepest, and most complete Dharma: its final realized state is exactly the same as Chan, with not the slightest difference. How then can it be called above Chan? Esoteric methods simply have some additional expedient means, while Chan relies entirely on one's own letting go of body and mind and realizing directly for oneself. Expedient means can be beneficial, yet they are also easy to cling to; in that respect they are not as uncluttered and direct as Chan. Therefore, according to the differences in practitioners' faculties, some practice esoteric Dharma and some practice Chan, each according to what is appropriate. One cannot make a blanket judgment. (3) After one has recognized the original face, does one still need to practice the Heart-Center Dharma? After recognizing one's own original nature, one need only protect it at all times: do not follow thoughts and do not be carried along by circumstances. As practice deepens over time, it will naturally become continuous and seamless. This is what is meant by "after awakening, practicing without practice"; this is true practice. But if thoughts arise and one does not notice them, or notices them only after they

have already been present for a while, or if one cannot hold steady when facing objects and conditions and instead drifts along with circumstances, then one's meditative stability is too weak to protect it continuously and closely. This amounts only to conceptual awakening, without genuine benefit. One must then put one's feet firmly on the ground and vigorously practice the Heart-Center Dharma, so as to strengthen meditative stability and directly realize true reality. Only then can the practice be brought to completion. (4) Buddhism and Daoism differ and do not coincide when practice reaches the highest point. Daoism has something to abide in and cannot empty everything completely; Buddhism has no abiding, and emptiness itself is also dissolved. Daoism retains an attainable numinous function, so its functioning is not complete; Buddhism has neither wisdom nor attainment, so its wondrous functioning is boundless. This is why Patriarch Chunyang took refuge with Patriarch Huanglong.

A year passes easily; it too is impermanent. Another year has been added to our age, and our illusory life has been shortened by another span. Seen from the standpoint of change, this is nothing to rejoice over. But for us as practitioners, there is no sorrow or anxiety. Fundamentally, we have no birth and death. Rising and sinking in this world and in other worlds is only an illusory game.

What your letter says is quite right. Those who speak only of mind and those who speak only of matter each understand only one side of the matter. Mind is matter; matter is mind. Mind and matter are neither one nor two. Because they are not two, we say that matter is mind and mind is matter. Because they are not one, we say it is neither matter nor mind, because positing two is already mistaken.

Moreover, mind is the greatest energy. Apart from this energy, the ten thousand things have no way to arise, and all things without exception return and transform into energy. Therefore a sutra says, "Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm." Understanding this, to protect this wondrously clear true mind at all times, closely and continuously, not letting the dust of toil cover it and not letting objects stain it, is precisely right practice. All Dharma-gates such as reciting the Buddha's name, holding mantras, and investigating Chan are no more than means of accomplishing this "protection of true mind"—keeping delusive thoughts from wandering. Therefore, among the many Dharma-gates, Chan is the swiftest and most direct, because it points directly to the human mind, enabling one to see the nature and become a Buddha. The other Dharma-gates must cross several more thresholds and are comparatively circuitous and slow. If you can trust this, then the one who came to ask the Dharma, who made great vows, and who intends to become a Buddha and liberate beings is precisely your true mind. The one that shines all day right before you, raising the hand and moving the foot, is precisely your original face. Then there would be no need to practice other Dharma-gates. Why still plan some future time to come to Shanghai to learn the Heart-Center Dharma? If you cannot trust this, the weather has now gradually become cool and breezy. You may first practice the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, sitting one hour every morning and evening, or two hours if possible. After practicing for one

and a half months, come to Shanghai to learn the Heart-Center Dharma. I will say no more. May you accomplish it.

That you rely on Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows to vow to become a Buddha and liberate beings is ample proof of deeply planted wholesome roots and profound vows. How could I not be deeply comforted! The Heart-Center Dharma belongs to the unsurpassed mind-esoteric teaching. Although it is an esoteric Dharma, it is in fact a Chan Dharma, because it does not rely on visualization and directly leads to realization of the mind-ground, and has no difference from Chan. Although the entry point is slightly different, with the Buddha's empowering support, it is easier to enter realization than through Chan investigation. Yet it still requires diligent practice; it cannot be attained lightly. After receiving the Dharma, if you can diligently nurture it through practice at all times and places, whether during formal sitting or outside formal sitting, then realizing and entering siddhi will be assured. After such realization, one may be reborn in the pure lands of the ten directions according to one's vows. In this it also agrees with the Pure Land school. When winter arrives, I will write and invite you to come to Shanghai to receive the Dharma.

Some of the words that have arisen from within stillness for you are plausible yet not truly correct. In the future, do not indulge in reverie, and still less enter into any kind of state. Only then can you accord with the wondrous essence and open undefiled wisdom. The Pure Land Dharma-gate belongs to the teaching, not to the school of direct transmission. Esoteric Dharma can also connect with the direct transmission, but one must see what kind of esoteric Dharma it is. Because esoteric methods are complex and varied, they are collectively called the esoteric teaching, not the direct school. Chan alone is called the school of direct transmission, because the direct transmission is the center, the destination, and the true purport; it cannot be compared with expedient or gradual methods. As for the four preparatory practices, they are the second of the five stages established by the Yogācāra school. The first, the stage of accumulation, is the stage of the three worthies; the second is this stage of preparation. "Warmth" means the initial stage after passing through the three worthies, before the "sacred fire" has arisen. "Peak" means that at this point one may go upward or downward, like being on a mountain summit where one can either ascend or descend. When practice reaches this point, if it goes upward, it reaches the stage of patience; if it goes downward, one may fall into hell. "Patience" means that practice has become stable and can only rise, not fall. "Supreme worldly Dharma" is the highest and most superior among worldly dharmas with outflows. These are small wholesome roots in the transition from the three worthies to the first ground, and so they are classified as the stage of preparation. Although patience also has high, middle, and low grades, it is nevertheless unlike warmth and peak, where one may fall down into the three evil destinies. The later three stages are the stage of seeing the Way, that is, apprehending Mind and seeing nature; the stage of practicing the Way, that is, true practice after awakening; and the ultimate stage, that is, realizing the fruition of Buddhahood. Thus, seeing nature is only the initial ascent to the first ground. One must still practice diligently in order to fully realize Buddhahood at fruition. May you practice

diligently. In meditation, it is especially important not to intentionally wait for samādhi, the appearance of exalted meditative states, and so on. Because any intentional mind is false thought, not only can one not awaken, one cannot even enter samādhi. In samādhi there can be no deliberate noticing; the moment such noticing occurs, one comes out of samādhi again. Even more, one must not cling to exalted meditative states. To cling to a state is to become demonic. Be careful, be careful!

What your letter says is quite right. But the pleasant feeling of "body becoming light and mind melting" is only an incomplete release experience, a passing guest; it is not yet the true host—the true mind laid fully open. Therefore it appears and disappears and cannot become continuous and seamless. Since you have these wholesome roots, if you add diligent nurturing and careful practice, it will not be difficult to bring it to seamless continuity. There is a great difference between "practicing first and awakening afterward" and "awakening first and practicing afterward." When one practices first and awakens afterward, practice before awakening is blind practice. When one awakens first and practices afterward, the practice after awakening is true practice. Practicing first and awakening afterward is like a person in a dark room: one does not know where the filth is, and one cannot see how the objects are scattered about, so there is no way to begin sweeping and arranging things. Thus it is blind practice. Awakening first and practicing afterward is like switching on the electric light in the room: one clearly sees where things are scattered and where the filth is, so it is easy to put things in order and sweep them clean. Again, practicing first and awakening afterward may appear to take more time, but because one has traveled the longer road, one's footing is stronger and one is less easily tripped. Awakening first and practicing afterward can yield an awakening that is shallow and unstable; when actual situations arise, it may not hold up, and one easily falls. Therefore one must truly practice after awakening, diligently sweeping away old habits, so as to perfectly realize bodhi and proceed in step with a Buddha at fruition.

In studying Buddhism, the mind is prized for being focused, sincere, constant, and steady. One must avoid both excessive haste and lax slowness. Your character is pure and genuine, and wholesome roots are planted from former lives. If you practice single-mindedly, you will naturally have accomplishment in the future. Samaya precepts mean equality, vows, alertness, not transgressing, and removing defilements and obscurations. Since you have already made great vows, and since at the time of empowerment the defilements and obscurations were removed on your behalf, if in ordinary times you maintain alertness and clear observation, attain right fruition through practice, liberate beings in equality, and do not transgress these vows, then you have obtained the essence of the samaya precepts. That is truly keeping the samaya precepts. How could it be compared to having only an empty name? At the beginning of practice, there is no need to be too urgent. Arrange the practice schedule according to the time available. If you have much free time, you may practice two sessions; otherwise, practicing one session every day is enough. When practicing, if the legs become numb or painful, you may adjust them slightly, but the mudrā must not be inverted or fall apart. As for mantra-recitation, the principle is not to stop. But if you enter emptiness and recite until you

can no longer recite, then let it naturally stop. When an empty state first appears during sitting, it may be dim and hazy, like falling asleep, yet perception and knowing remain; it is unlike dull sleep with no knowing. At this time you must not deliberately rouse yourself or stir the mind to resume mantra-recitation. Simply follow the downward-sinking momentum and let go; then one peacefully enters samādhi, and body and mind dissolve into emptiness. If one suddenly becomes alert and stirs the mind to recite again, one comes out of samādhi. But if it is dull sleep without knowing, then one must rouse oneself and recite the mantra aloud to drive away the sleep-demon. The distinction between the two is subtle. May you carefully experience and practice this. As for the number of sittings, it need not be fixed. Sometimes one may sit one session, sometimes two. But every day you must ensure at least one sitting; you must not skip one day and then sit twice the next day to make it up. When sitting two sessions in one day, after completing the six mudrās, practice the fourth mudrā in the first session, and the second mudrā in the second session. If you add even more, add only the fourth mudrā, not the second.

That you can occasionally experience the wondrous nature of true suchness, suddenly feeling the body become light and the mind melt, with incomparable delight, is not easy, even though the time is not long and it gradually vanishes without your noticing. If you had not deeply planted wholesome roots in past lives, how could you arrive at this? The ancients' awakening to the Way was also like a spark struck from stone or a flash of lightning; they could not maintain the experience of awakening for a long time either. They too had to preserve it closely and continuously for a long time after awakening before it could become continuous and seamless. Chan Master Zhaozhou said, "Apart from the two daily meals of gruel and rice, for forty years this old monk never scattered the mind among miscellaneous concerns; only then did it become continuous and seamless." Chan Master Longya said, "In practicing the Way, awakening must come first; crossing over is like racing dragon boats." This means true practice after awakening: preserving it closely and continuously, removing clinging, attachment-laden thoughts, and habitual tendencies. "Though the old garden is but idle fields, only after winning the race may one finally rest." This means that although all sentient beings are originally Buddhas, one must still exhaust habitual tendencies and fully realize the ultimate before one may stop. There is still something further: if one truly experiences the wondrous nature of true suchness, then all false thoughts are true mind, because without true mind there would be no arising of false thoughts. It is like waves, which are originally water; without water, how could waves form? One who understands this principle sees water precisely when seeing waves and is not swept along by the waves. Likewise, one awakened to the Way sees the nature precisely when seeing all circumstances, appearances, and delusive thoughts, and is not carried away by objective appearances or delusive thoughts. According to the mind-esoteric teaching, where false thought arises it is like drawing on water: as soon as the stroke is made, there is absolutely no trace. Practitioners should become thoroughly familiar with what is original precisely where delusive thoughts arise. The Fifth Patriarch said, "For one who has truly seen the nature, even brandishing a sword in battle is seeing the

nature." This is the meaning. Finally, let me introduce one more koan to help you awaken clearly and resolve doubt. Once, when Chan Master Zhenjing and his disciple were reading the Śūraṅgama Sutra together, they came to where Śākyamuni Buddha said, "If I press my finger, the ocean-seal emits light." The disciple asked the master, "What is Śākyamuni Buddha's meaning?" The master said, "Śākyamuni Buddha deserves thirty blows." The disciple said, "What fault did the Buddha have?" The master said, "Why press the finger?" The meaning is that the ocean-seal—the Buddha-nature of true suchness—emits light at all times, whether or not the finger is pressed. The disciple said, "Although this is so, what about the moment the mind is raised and false thoughts fly in confusion?" The master shouted sternly, "That too is the ocean-seal emitting light!" At the shout, the disciple was greatly awakened and said, "Ah! For decades I have missed it right here!" Look: how direct and swift the ancients' awakening to the Way was. Could they still be entangled by delusive thoughts or carried away by objective appearances? Since all objective appearances and delusive thoughts are true mind, within them one sees only true mind, and objective appearances and delusive thoughts are no longer seen as such. Their no longer being seen as such does not mean that they are absent; rather, all objective appearances and delusive thoughts are transformed into wondrous functioning. Can you realize this wondrous point?

That you can turn away from qigong and return to Buddhism shows that your wholesome roots are deep. This is joyous and praiseworthy. Your method of practice is completely correct; there is no need to be afraid. Just keep sitting as before. As for the feeling of alarm and fear when you recite the Buddha's name, that is your own psychology playing tricks; it is not that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are punishing you. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are most compassionate. They only rescue all sentient beings and bestow blessings on all sentient beings. No matter how you distance yourself from them, scold them, or insult them, they still care for you and protect you with the same kindness and affection; they absolutely do not blame you. Practice with a settled mind. Do not be full of suspicion and worry, preventing your proficiency in practice from developing quickly. None of the experiences that arise in your practice are mistaken. Just let them be natural: do not rejoice at what is good and do not worry over what is bad. In this way, deviation will not occur. Moreover, you have a good husband who can help correct you when needed, so you should be even less afraid. Just advance courageously. Practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra is very good. You may also add recitation of Amitābha Buddha in the morning and evening; there is no conflict. Both are connected with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Western direction. After reciting, make vows, and you can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. After you can sit for two hours, I will confer empowerment for you to practice the Heart-Center Dharma.

That you can take time out of your very busy schedule to sit in meditation and practice the Dharma is truly rare and precious. You have already entered the second round of practice; dullness and agitation have both decreased, and you are about to step onto a broad, smooth road. This is joyous and worthy of congratulations. I hope you persist to the end and do not retreat out of fear of difficulty. As for your "strong attachment to family bonds," this is a habit

accumulated over many lifetimes. Just see through everything in the world: whether husband and wife, mother and child, all are a spring dream. If the mind does not cling longingly, that attachment dissolves into nothing.

Your letter has been received. What you say is quite right. Awakening and seeing nature are recognized right at the instant when the previous thought has already ceased and the later thought has not yet arisen. But this is only recognition. One still has to put effort into polishing in the midst of circumstances, sweeping away all old habits of clinging to marks and grasping at objects. Whether conditions are favorable or adverse, one must be unmoved everywhere and at all times, seeing only the nature and no longer taking marks as real. Going further, even the nature is unobtainable. Only then, spending the whole day as if foolish and dull, can one reach the ultimate.

What your letter says accords well with the wonder of the Way; reading it fills me with joy. Only be careful not to misunderstand "ordinary mind is the Way." "Ordinary mind" is not the ordinary mind of us people that clings to marks. It means level and not crooked, constant and not temporary. When ordinary beings see forms and hear sounds, they are constantly swayed by circumstances and waves arise in the mind, so it is crooked and not level. For those first entering the Way, practice has not yet become established; sometimes it is empty and sometimes not empty, so it is temporary and not constant. True practitioners maintain clear observation at all times and constantly examine themselves until practice becomes fully mature and all traces are blended away and forgotten. There is neither one who observes nor anything observed; there is neither level nor crooked, neither temporary nor constant. This is the true ordinary mind. From this ordinary mind, one follows conditions in daily use and everything remains as before; one displays no traces of supernatural marvels and does not cling to extraordinary wondrous functions. As the saying goes, "Still the same person of old, yet no longer walking the old paths." That marks true completion.

The six-path sentient beings, in all their movements, conduct, actions, and thoughts, are nothing other than the wondrous function of true mind. Unfortunately, because they engage in false thinking and cling to marks, they are deluded and do not recognize it, vainly creating karma, undergoing retribution, and sinking and drifting in birth and death. Out of compassion for sentient beings, the Buddha manifested in the world and taught the Dharma, instructing them to find their way home along the very road they were already on and recognize that this ordinary functioning that gives rise to all actions is precisely one's own Buddha-nature. Therefore he said, ordinary mind is the Way. It is not saying that since ordinary mind is the Way one need not practice and may be careless and undisciplined. Penetrating the principle intellectually amounts only to conceptual awakening. If it does not hold up in actual situations, birth and death cannot be ended. After awakening at the level of principle, one must diligently maintain clear observation, just like what the direct school calls "keeping watch over the huatou," training amid affairs and sweeping away false habits completely. Only then may one let go.

The late master said, "It must open in samādhi; do not treat mere understanding as enough and finish carelessly." Opening in samādhi does not only mean opening while practicing samādhi during formal sitting. It means that at all times, whether in movement or stillness, leisure or busyness, one is constantly gathered in samādhi, not swayed by circumstances and not moved by the wind. Only then can it become continuous and seamless and one can recognize this "ordinary mind."

"Opening through samādhi" refers to attaining samādhi through Dharma practice, through which wisdom opens. Once wisdom has opened, one personally realizes and knows that all things are illusory and there is nothing that can be grasped. Therefore, in daily life, one freely follows conditions, lets go broadly, moves spontaneously, and is peaceful, happy, and at ease. The great adepts of old realized and knew that this true mind is not somewhere else but is precisely within daily functioning; therefore they followed the assembly in its ordinary routines, blended their light with ordinary people, and did not set themselves apart, nor did they seek mysterious marvels in order to praise themselves. This is why there is the famous saying, "ordinary mind is the Way." "In sitting, do not seek samādhi"—this statement is very right. As soon as there is something sought, the radiance of original nature is covered; wanting samādhi instead produces disturbance. Seeking signs of attainment, seeking something to gain, and so on are all false mind. The more one seeks, the farther away one goes. Not only does one fail to gain what one seeks, one instead becomes scattered and unsettled. Practitioners often seek to see light, see Buddhas, experience explosions, develop spiritual powers, and so on. They do not know that these are not genuine signs of realization. They are only passing guests, not the true host. A genuine sign of realization is neither something seen nor something attained. Since even I am not, what could be seen or attained? The Śūraṅgama Sutra says, "When seeing sees the seeing-nature, the seeing-nature is not an object of seeing." Thus in true seeing there is no object seen, and in true attainment there is nothing attained. Then what, ultimately, is the genuine measure of realization? To remain unstained in favorable and adverse circumstances; to function while no mind can be found functioning; to have neither defilement nor purity; to be able to enter Buddha and also enter demon—even moving in reverse—this is the genuine sign of full attainment. You must always use this as a yardstick for yourself. You must truly be able to accomplish each item; you must not be careless or lightly let yourself pass. Thus it is said, "Whether one has the Way or not, one knows for oneself." Do not let your footing be shaken by seeing others emit light, explode, or display some spiritual powers, and then go seeking mysterious marvels. That would be putting filth on your own clear, unstained, radiant Buddha-nature; in the end, not only would you fail to become a Buddha, you would be in danger of becoming a demon. Remember this! Remember this! Because self-clinging has lessened, your way of seeing affairs and circumstances has changed greatly. This is natural. Now even toward the person dearest to you, your attachment has diminished; this is great progress. But diminishing attachment does not mean not caring. It means caring without attachment. Caring without attachment is right conduct. I hope you practice diligently in this way.

After reading your letter, I felt quite comforted. In the short course of your study and practice, you have been able to gradually disperse—from thick to thin, like driving away dark clouds—the deepest and most harmful root of calamity in the human world: the emotions of love between men and women. Although it has not yet been completely eliminated, for you, in the prime of youth, to cut so resolutely through this root of birth and death that binds ordinary people is no easy matter. How rare and precious it is! Originally all sentient beings are Buddhas; it is only because they are deluded, cling to marks, seek outwardly, and give rise to emotions when encountering objects—especially because infatuation is even deeper in the matter of male-female affection—that they create karma, undergo retribution, and sink into the six paths. Now you can come sharply to your senses, see through false appearances, raise the sword of wisdom, cut off the threads of emotion, and cling to nothing longingly. If you had not deeply planted wholesome roots in past lives, how could you arrive at this? If we want to accomplish the Way, we should train ourselves within all kinds of complex circumstances, not be swayed by any circumstance, and throughout the twenty-four hours keep the mind empty and clean as if washed. As soon as a thought arises, one must immediately notice it with full alertness. Still less should one be moved by circumstances into sorrow, grief, and affliction. If you study and practice like this, although ordinary emotion may temporarily still linger, there will always come a day when circumstances are empty and emotional attachment has vanished, and mysterious wondrous function is fully manifest before you.

That you are not afraid of difficulties and are determined to turn toward the Way is due to wholesome roots planted in former lives. I hope you persevere, advance courageously and diligently, and do not give up halfway and let this life go to waste. When sitting in meditation, put everything down. Do not indulge in random thinking, do not demand to enter emptiness, and still less should you anxiously hope for awakening or seek spiritual powers. Be like a great dead person: think of nothing and attend to nothing; simply hold the mantra single-mindedly, observing and listening to the sound of the mantra, firmly gathering in the mental and auditory faculties and reciting steadily on. When recitation reaches a state of dim haziness, seeming asleep yet not asleep, while the hand mudrā has not inverted or fallen apart, mantra-recitation continues, and inwardly it remains vividly clear, one has attained the initial dull samādhi. If one persists further, reciting until recitation can no longer be sustained, and then lets go with the momentum, body and mind suddenly dissolve into emptiness and the original face appears before one. Conversely, if the mantra can no longer be recited but one is dull and unaware, the mudrā has fallen apart or inverted, and the body leans forward and backward, this is dull sleep, not samādhi. When you hold the mantra silently, it is (1) easy to deplete the blood and (2) easy to fall into dull sleep. It is better to adjust with the vajra-recitation method, that is, alternating between moving the lips slightly and not moving them, rather than clinging one-sidedly either to moving the lips or to keeping them still. Also, in practicing the Dharma and holding the mantra, one must continue until one cannot continue, that is, until the deluded mind no longer functions and one cannot exert force to hold it. One must not stop halfway. If one stops by oneself, consciousness is still operating and body and

mind cannot dissolve away. Your letter says that once you felt a slight lightness and ease, forgot to hold the mantra, and then it was no longer as calm and still as before. This is a matter of habit, because previously you practiced quiet sitting and are not yet familiar with the mantra-holding Dharma-gate. Give it some more time and you will naturally enter stillness. I hope you practice diligently. Wenzhou has long been a place where Buddhism flourishes, so there are many people who believe in Buddhism. In this Dharma-ending age, the Pure Land Dharma-gate most suits the capacities of the time. Because it is simple and easy to practice, reliable and convenient, and through the Buddha's empowering support one is welcomed and guided to rebirth in the West, it truly is the swiftest path for becoming a Buddha and ending birth and death. I hope all fellow practitioners enter deeply through one gate, practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly, and vow for birth in the West; then one can achieve twice the result with half the effort.

In your letter you said, "In our Dharma practice, we have now reached a crossroads and do not know the direction forward." I truly do not understand what this means. Those among you who have opened up what is original should preserve and nurture it, remove habits, test and train yourselves in all circumstances, and eliminate all old habits of clinging to emptiness and clinging to existence. Then spiritual powers will naturally unfold fully, and you will personally realize the fruition of Buddhahood. Those who have not opened up what is original and revealed the mind-ground should diligently sit in meditation, advance vigorously, and make a great vow not to stop until awakening. If it cannot be accomplished in this life, return in the next life to continue practicing. Because of great vows, one can continue to obtain a human birth and carry on the practice. Those who feel apprehensive may vow for rebirth in the West or in the Tushita Pure Land, continue practice there, and certainly accomplish it. I have already explained these things again and again. How can you still be at a crossroads, not knowing the direction forward? As for guiding others, this can only be done as conditions allow; it cannot be forced. If someone has the conditions, believes, can practice, and can realize, that is of course the highest of the high. If someone believes and practices but cannot realize, this is a matter of root-capacity and cannot be blamed. You should know that with practice methods, no matter which Dharma-gate, it is never the case that everyone succeeds as soon as they practice. From the Chan standpoint, "To bring across even one or two people is already the greatest good fortune." How could all hundred who practice realize, or all thousand who practice attain? Even in the most convenient Pure Land school, it is not the case that all hundred who practice attain rebirth. Because each person's roots differ and the effort each applies in practice differs, one absolutely cannot impose one uniform standard and expect the same result. What are you still afraid of? Whether the spreading of Dharma can flourish or not is all the more a secondary matter. I do my utmost to spread the Dharma in order to rescue sentient beings and repay the Buddha's kindness, not for fame or material support. If it can flourish, sentient beings have affinity; my mind does not rejoice. If it cannot flourish, sentient beings have no affinity; my mind does not worry. What anxiety is there in this? Whether I come or not is not important. If you find a good place and my health and

energy are good, it would of course be very good for me to come and meet with everyone. If I cannot come, you are already grown children, weaned from mother's milk; you no longer need adults to look after you. I hope you take good care of yourselves.

Your letter has been received. Occasional setbacks in Dharma practice need not trouble you. Just advance vigorously, encounter difficulty without retreating, and in the end you will certainly accomplish it. You are exceptionally intelligent and have unusual capacity, but intelligent people often tend to drift and become ungrounded and are unwilling to practice honestly. Because of this, they often like to play with words and ink, discuss mystery and speak of marvels, thereby counting grains of sand in the ocean and wasting their effort in idle pursuits. Although I have not looked over your Outline of the Chan School, judging from the outline you listed, the content must be rich and excellent, and it should be of great help to modern Chan students or to those intending to investigate the profundities of Chan study. Therefore, as long as it does not affect your practice, you may certainly devote yourself to compiling it into a book to offer to later students. Next, as for writing and lecturing on sutras, it is not that these cannot be done. Only, when lecturing, do not create the notion of lecturing; when writing, do not create the notion of writing. Whether lecturing on sutras or writing, remain unmoved. Conversely, if the act of lecturing carries you away, or the act of writing carries you away, then you should not lecture on sutras or write. The Heart-Center Dharma is our proven method of practice. With your qualifications, if you can truly persevere in practicing it without interruption, fully awakening to what is original is surely within your grasp. But if you practice for one day and lapse for ten, or treat practice during formal sitting and outside formal sitting as two separate things—that is, if outside formal sitting you lose vigilant observation and stop practicing—then you will let down your own talent and wisdom. Your wife is very good and has deep roots from former lives. Congratulations on having such a capable and supportive wife! May she be able to persist to the end and thereby urge you continually forward, so that you may together realize bodhi. Then the lovely tale of a “couple fit for the immortals” will live on forever in the forest of awakening. Thank you for your warm invitation for me to visit your city. It is very possible that, on the way back to Shanghai, I will come to your home to visit all the fellow practitioners, so that we may freely discuss the unborn. Respectfully wishing that loving affection between you and your wife deepen day by day.

What your letter says about not abiding on the two sides is very good. Amid activity, to be carried away slightly is an unavoidable phenomenon for those who have just clarified the mind-ground. As long as one maintains sustained clear observation and constantly trains amid circumstances, one will be able to be as an ancient worthy said: “At midnight, the bell sounds when struck, yet nothing adheres; in a cold pool, the moon's reflection meets the ripples, yet does not scatter.” At Zhaozhou's words in the Dharma hall, where there was “understanding and careful protection,” you suddenly had awakening; mind and objects became empty and still, clear and unobstructed. But have you remained fixed in “understanding”? If some fixed “understanding” remains, that too is a point of attachment.

After practicing the Heart-Center Dharma for one hour, your mind is always uneasy because the mind has not yet settled. At the beginning, it does no harm to be a little tight; after that, relax with the momentum and let it dissolve, and then there will be no problem of unease. Also, once the mind is peaceful and objects are empty, you need not keep practicing the Heart-Center Dharma at all times; instead, shift to the practice of preserving and nurturing. Practice one sitting of the Heart-Center Dharma now and then to see whether your state of mind differs from when you are not practicing. If it remains the same whether practicing or not, that proves your practice is not split between formal sitting and daily activity. Otherwise, you should practice the Heart-Center Dharma more, until every trace of covert seeking is exhausted. Only then can the Way be accomplished.

If one's footing is not stable and one is swayed left and right by what people say, one has truly not awakened. If one had truly awakened, one would not waver even if a living Buddha stood before one. I read a little of Mr. So-and-so's General Meaning of the *Laṅkāvatāra*, and what he says is not wrong; what he says and what we teach have no difference. People have sharp and dull faculties; the Dharma has no high or low. Whether it is ultimate or not depends entirely on whether the practitioner can let go through the whole body, without the slightest clinging. If one is constantly calculating gain and loss and thought after thought does not forget fame and profit, then no matter how lofty and wondrous a methodless Dharma may be, it is still not ultimate. For it to be truly ultimate, there must be no practice, no attainment, and no realization. If Mr. So-and-so still holds to a Dharma, it is also not ultimate. We do not act for fame or material support, nor do we establish a separate sect. When there are conditions, liberate people; when there are no conditions, liberate yourself. Do not contend or compare with others. I hope you take this deeply to heart.

In studying Buddhism, what matters is awakening to mind: at all times and places, thoroughly see self-nature and do not be pulled along by affairs, objects, or circumstances. This is like the birth of a prince; in the future he will surely become the Son of Heaven, a Buddha. Those who practice provisional methods remain at secondary levels, within the peripheral meritorious ranks. No matter how great your spiritual powers may be, you are still only in the rank of prince or marquis. How could you rise to become the Son of Heaven? Because all affairs, objects, and circumstances are manifestations of the wondrous function of my subtle and wondrous true mind, when the eyes see all things, see only original nature and do not be disturbed by images. To maintain clear observation like this at all times is true practice. When practice matures, clear observation falls away, and one returns home and sits steadily. Not understanding this principle, if one directs attention toward meritorious ranks, then no matter what Dharma one practices, no matter how diligently and painfully one applies effort, because there is still Dharma present, in the future one will unavoidably bow one's head as a subject. What a needless waste. How sad!

When practice reaches the point where one can neither advance nor retreat, this is precisely the moment when a breakthrough is about to occur. Who is this that knows advance yet

cannot retreat? Turn around and look back at once, and all beauty springs forth. Ancient worthies compared this point to “a dog licking a cauldron of oil”: wanting to lick but unable to lick, wanting to leave but unable to leave. It is the moment of being unable either to advance or retreat. At this time, simply let this urgent and agitated mind that does not know what to do settle down and observe. Then dog and cauldron are both empty, advance and retreat vanish, and right then the flags are furled, the drums stilled, and ease and peace prevail. I hope you practice diligently, protect what is original at all times, and do not let it become attached to or tainted by objective conditions. Then it can become continuous and seamless. If you do not practice in this way, even undertaking a seven-day intensive retreat will be futile.

Regarding ordinary mind being the Way: originally, this clear numinous knowing mind that knows cold and warmth, knows hunger and thirst, is our original face. There is no need to chase and grasp outwardly, and even less should one cling to the slightest marvel. In ordinary daily life, one follows conditions, without grasping or rejection and without aversion or attachment. That is why the ancients said, “Wearing clothes and eating rice is it!” But as soon as one clings to circumstances and retains something, it again becomes: “As soon as mind is raised and thought stirs, one has already gone astray.” Your letter says, “For now, may I remain in this state for now and move beyond it later when my strength is sufficient?” Would that not itself amount to “abiding somewhere”? When the mind has something where it abides, it becomes false thinking. Nurturing false thinking in order to accomplish the Way is like boiling sand and hoping it will become rice. How could it be obtained? If your present strength is insufficient, then diligently maintain clear observation, not allowing any abiding or clinging. All day, remain quiescent and lucid, lucid and quiescent. You absolutely must not become lax and dwell in a comfortable state, sinking into subtle delusion and obscure stillness, until final failure results. Such awakening is only the beginning of awakening to the Way. If, after conceptual awakening, you can vigorously correct the deluded tendency to cling to objects, maintaining clear observation with effort at all times and places, and as soon as thoughts arise, noticing them—not merely applying oneself at the level of speech and writing—then after a long time you will be able to reach the state your letter mentions: “when discriminating mind ceases, the great Way appears before one.” The Buddha taught all dharmas in order to liberate all minds. Since every Dharma is illusory, it is said that Dharma originally has no Dharma. It is also said that all dharmas are equal, with no high or low. Yet people today deludedly make distinctions, saying this is good and that is bad, liking this and hating that. This is because the mind is not equal. Your community is of course no exception. In spreading the Dharma, one must accord with timing and conditions; it cannot be forced.

Regarding the question of ability, what matters most is right view and genuine experiential understanding from Dharma practice. If one has not directly realized what is original, one cannot open the adamant eye of the Way for others; one may even lead people into a dead alley, guide them into side paths and heterodox ways, and delay them. Now you can guide people in Dharma practice and theory; this is enough. What else is needed? When first guiding

people, some timidity and unfamiliarity are unavoidable; after you have gone through this for a long time, this timidity and unfamiliarity will fade.

Actually, in the Great Perfection Dharma of the Nyingma school, the first part, trekchö, corresponds to seeing nature in Heart-Center practice. Because trekchö has many practice methods, those with inferior faculties need to pass through visualization-based methods. Conversely, direct accord with the three emptinesses, with no practice, no realization, no distraction, and no establishment of any Dharma, is Chan. After practicing the Heart-Center Dharma and seeing nature, what further "trekchö" method is needed? As for tögal, it is the higher practice corresponding to Chan's upward passage. If one can maintain continuous preservation after seeing nature, before long great light will shine forth, brightly illuminating the ten directions. Tögal simply provides additional expedient means for swift completion. To practice tögal, one must first have seen the nature; only then can it be undertaken. Because only when the mind does not move can one use light to guide. After guiding out the light, one can then avoid clinging to marks. Otherwise one will abide in the light, and the light will become delusion. You are still young, so there is no need to hurry into retreat. Right now you are needed to guide beginning students. For now, practice Dharma while also guiding students. I now answer the questions in your letter as follows. (1) The conditions for you to enter retreat now are not mature. (2) To enter retreat to practice tögal, one needs to face south so as to look at the sun and moon. There also needs to be a large body of water nearby, so that one can sit by the water and look at the light on the water. One also needs an electric lamp, to look at lamp-light. Still more, the environment must be pure and quiet, with no noisy sounds. (3) Provisions for the Way must be sufficient. Even more important is that body and mind be pure and without the slightest entanglement; otherwise retreat may lead into demonic deviation. (4) As for the matter of laypeople guiding monastics, worldly people have many biases. They think that the status of a layperson is not as noble as that of the Sangha, that laypeople should rank after monastics and cannot be discussed on equal footing with bhikṣus, much less teach the Sangha. They do not know that the Jewel of the Sangha refers to those who have genuine attainment through practicing the Buddhadharma, whose observance of the precepts is rigorous, and who can serve as teachers for others. It has nothing to do with whether one has left home or not. Moreover, there are two kinds of Sangha. First, there are those who leave home, shave the head, and wear dyed robes; these constitute the arhat saṅgha of the Small Vehicle. Second, there are those who have genuine attainment through practicing the Buddha's three trainings, who do not shave the head and who wear lay clothing; these constitute the bodhisattva saṅgha of the Great Vehicle. This follows the entry "Sangha—Two Kinds of Sangha" in the Buddhist Dictionary. So you need not be timid; simply teach with confidence and good reason. If you want to leave home, you must obtain your family's consent. You and your wife practice Buddhism together and do not think of yourselves as a worldly married couple. This makes you the finest kind of companions on the path to awakening. (5) It is best to practice the Heart-Center Dharma for more time. In this way your footing becomes stable and you are not swayed by circumstances. Otherwise

your strength will be comparatively weak. Although you may have had some awakening, if you are not free in favorable and adverse circumstances, you will in the end lapse into delusion after awakening. (6) Light appearing once and not reappearing shows that your practice in stillness is apparently still weak. You should practice much more, until the body is within the light yet no light is noticed, and all traces blend away and are forgotten. Only then is it acceptable. (7) If there is aversion, there is joy; both are relative delusive states. We should have neither joy nor aversion. Zhaozhou said, "The word 'Buddha'—I do not like to hear it," and he was still scolded by all the Chan adepts. How much more so aversion to written words? (8) The emotional rift between so-and-so and his beloved cannot be repaired by practicing dual-body practice. Dual-body practice is not sexual intercourse between husband and wife; for practitioners with genuine mastery, it is a test of whether they are free from birth and death. Both sides must have the ability to pull back at the brink, without leakage of essence. Otherwise, it is simply sexual intercourse, and one falls into hell.

I have read your letter. Knowing that you are somewhat unclear about the process of Dharma practice, I now answer your questions one by one. (1) You have not yet passed through the barrier of "quiet ease." Regarding this, you need only know that attachment to quiet ease is also an illness and not cling to it. Although at present it cannot be eliminated all at once, if you continue practicing diligently, over time it will naturally be exhausted. There is no need to rush it. If you do not know it is an illness and take it to be clear and wondrous, then you guard a secluded stillness within and fall into bewilderment. Once, when Yaoshan was sitting on a rock, his teacher Shitou asked, "What are you doing?" Yaoshan said, "I am doing nothing at all." Shitou said, "If you are doing nothing at all, are you not just sitting idly?" Yaoshan said, "Sitting idly is doing something." Shitou said, "It is so, it is so." Look at the exchange between teacher and disciple: it shows that settling into quiet ease is already off the mark. (2) Memory being sometimes good and sometimes poor is a common ailment of practitioners who have not yet undergone the great turn. Once you have died and come back to life, this illness will no longer exist. (3) Nervousness and a pounding heart while teaching arise from: first, not yet being used to it; second, being concerned about saving face and fearing you will not teach well; and third, taking the podium while carrying a heavy burden. With these several factors, how could your heart not pound? These are all clinging to marks, illnesses from the mind not yet being fully empty. Just put everything down. Enter as if there were no one present, with no one lecturing and no one listening to the lecture; then the mind will be peaceful and harmonious, and wondrous meanings will arise naturally. (4) Dullness in sitting: if you have fallen asleep, it is useless. If you seem asleep yet are not actually asleep, while inwardly it remains vividly clear, this is dull *samādhi*. At this time do not try to rouse yourself. Like dropping a stone into water, let it sink all the way to the bottom; then it will suddenly open into clarity. Trying to rouse yourself instead will spoil it. Many daytime affairs and poor results in sitting are due to insufficient meditative stability. Therefore, while doing things, do not create the thought of doing things; only then can the mind be empty and without abiding. (5) You say: "When external circumstances arise, my sensitivity is keen, and I notice thoughts

as soon as they arise, but it is difficult to remove them." This statement is contradictory. If you can truly notice a thought as soon as it arises, what is there still to remove? The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says, "Recognize illusion, and you are free of it; freedom from illusion is awakening." Since you already notice the false thought as soon as it arises, the false thought dissolves without a trace. Fundamentally there is nothing there; what else is there to remove? If you say that although you know the false thought has arisen, it still circles in the brain and will not go away, then you did not truly notice it; you are still clinging to marks. Then bring down the Chan hammer on this deluded mind that clings to circumstances. If you use the word "forget" in a skillful way, you may certainly use it. (6) In teaching, one should prepare lessons, but do not cling to them. In wearing clothes and eating rice, with neither grasping nor rejecting, the single original intent is naturally fulfilled—this is the great Way. When encountering anything unusual, notice it sharply and let it dissolve. This kind of practice is not accomplished in a single leap; it must go through a thousand hammerings and a hundred refinings. You are still young. As long as you strive diligently toward this goal, success will come naturally in due course. I hope you apply yourself well.

When practice has sunk into blank, lifeless stillness, and your mind also seems unresponsive while teaching or writing, these are signs preceding a leap forward in practice. Do not be afraid. Work through this phase with all your strength, and you will naturally obtain the wonderful scenery of "willows dark, flowers bright—another village appears."

Your letter says, "This experience marked great progress. I have overcome many psychological obstacles and become much freer amid affairs and conditions." Originally, all obstruction comes from "having mind." When the mind is empty and pure, there is no obstruction. The point of practicing Dharma and awakening to the Way is to empty out this "mind," not to gain spiritual powers and marvels. Students of the Way today all seek spiritual powers and marvels, yet do not know to empty the mind, and thus go astray. This is truly lamentable. If the mind is not empty and pure, then even if spiritual powers manifest, not only does one fail to gain freedom, one adds another layer of obstruction. This is harmful to Buddhist practice and brings no benefit; this too must be understood. On the first of the month, when you go to Hebei, speak with the Chan practitioners as appropriate: when speaking to Chan practitioners, speak of Chan; when speaking to esoteric practitioners, speak of Esoteric Dharma. There is no need to be confined to a single approach. Dharma has no fixed Dharma; teaching differs according to the person. As a Dharma king, I am free in the Dharma and obstructed by neither circumstances nor people. The mind-ground Dharma gate gives birth to a prince. First recognize your own original mind and see your own original nature; then establish your footing firmly, diligently remove old habits, and do not be shaken by any deviant teachings. In the future you will certainly become a Buddha. If one uses a method to develop spiritual powers, that belongs to the peripheral meritorious ranks. However great one's meritorious attainments, at most one is enfeoffed as a prince or marquis; one cannot become emperor—that is, a Buddha. If spiritual powers have not yet manifested, do not feel inferior, thinking you are not as good as others and becoming timid and hesitant. Speak

openly and uprightly in accord with self-nature, adapting your teaching to each person as appropriate.

Being a teacher and exemplar for others is truly not easy. One must willingly take on hard work and bear complaints, as well as exclusion and jealousy from every side. But this is a good thing. If it were not like this, how could one's own habitual tendencies be ground away completely? Therefore, only through liberating sentient beings can the dust-and-sand delusions be exhausted; sitting motionless cannot accomplish this. The sutra says, "Only by relying on sentient beings can one become a Buddha." There is good reason for this. Do not be discouraged. The ancients rejoiced upon hearing of their faults, because they could then correct them. Carefully examine what comes from every side: if you have the fault, correct it; if not, guard against it. Then your virtue will increase and your practice of the Way will advance day by day.

During the plum-rain season, the weather in Shanghai is still fairly cool and breezy. In a week the plum rains will end; heat waves will soon arrive and temperatures will soar. But practitioners must train amid cold and heat, winter and summer, and favorable and adverse circumstances without being disturbed by them. Only then can they attain great freedom at the brink of birth and death.

9I. 五、禅偈撮略与编写者后记 / Part Five: A Brief Selection of Chan Verses and the Compilers' Closing Note

Part Five: A Brief Selection of Chan Verses

The natural essence of quiescent extinction
has never been attained by anyone.
One must rely on the principle of the twofold emptiness;
then one will realize the body of the Dharma King.

Where there is mind, all is delusion;
without attachment, it is called true.
If you realize that it is neither dharma nor non-dharma,
you wander free beyond the six sense objects.

The mind turns along with the ten thousand things;
the very turning is truly subtle and profound.
Recognize the nature as conditions arise;
there is neither joy nor sorrow.

The golden crow beneath the sea is the sun in the sky;
the pupil within the eye is the person before your face.

If one can trust the treasure within one's own home,
birdsong and mountain flowers alike are spring.

Seeing form has nothing to do with form;
hearing sound is not sound.
Where form and sound do not reach,
one personally arrives at the Dharma King's city.

Buddha-nature is originally just this way;
who says there is some other teacher?
In coughing and swinging the arms,
in wearing clothes and eating rice,
not the slightest effort is spent;
when has deliberate thought ever stirred?
Sentient beings are all equal,
yet in daily functioning they themselves harbor many doubts.

Note: qingkai refers to coughing and, by extension, speech and laughter. Diaobi refers to the free movement of the arms while walking.

While your body is in the ocean, stop searching for water;
while you walk each day in the mountains, do not seek the mountain.
Oriole calls and swallow chatter are all alike;
do not ask about "the first three" and "the last three."

The Chan river remains still as it follows the waves;
the waters of samādhi remain clear as they follow the ripples.
In limpid clarity, awakened awareness arises;
when thought is forgotten, deluded attachment ceases.

At initial awakening one has only reached the dharmakāya's threshold;
diligently remove old habits and strengthen your practice.
When one unmistakably realizes the unconditioned,
unconstrained by favorable or adverse conditions, spiritual powers manifest.

Marks and seeking are both delusive;
With no form and no seeing, one falls into one-sided barrenness.
Majestically present and seamless—when has there ever been a break?
A beam of cold light shines through the great void.

Neither a sentient being nor a mark;
in spring warmth, yellow orioles sing in the willows.
Though one exhausts in words the mood of mountain clouds and the moon over the sea,
if one still does not understand, one laments in vain.

Lamenting in vain:
for ten thousand miles no cloud—the sky is all one.

Mind and objects suddenly dissolve;
only then are form and emptiness clear.
If you wish to know the original face,
it is amid green mountains and white clouds.

Compilers' Closing Note

Venerable Master Yuan Yin lived to the age of ninety-six. Throughout his life he abandoned fame and gain, studied the Buddhist canon deeply, integrated the teachings of Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism, thoroughly awakened to the essentials of the Buddhadharma, and attained great accomplishment.

In view of the capacities of present-day sentient beings and the conditions of the times, the Master held the compassionate Mahāyāna vow of a bodhisattva to bring universal benefit. He devoted himself to propagating the great Dharma of direct pointing and broadly transmitted the esoteric vehicle without visualization, the Heart-Center Dharma. Relying on the compassionate protection and empowerment of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas through their mantras and mudrās, he skillfully guided students, pointing them to see the nature immediately. He then instructed them to preserve it closely and continuously, remove habitual tendencies, train amid circumstances through personal practice, and thereafter realize the essence and bring forth function, thereby helping them bring the fruition of Buddhahood to completion.

In the Master's public teachings, written replies, marginal comments, and spontaneous conversations, whatever he answered flowed from the samādhi of self-nature. Each response was medicine given according to illness, teaching given according to the person's capacity: it inspired students, opened them to the Buddha's knowledge and vision, and went straight to the source; every word revealed the truth.

The Master once wrote in a letter: "Collecting letters and conversations concerning the practice and realization of the Buddhadharma, then editing and printing them as a volume, can help later students resolve doubts and support diligent practice." This was an undertaking that would "benefit the community and yield very great results." In August 1998, with the Master's consent and support, we began collecting and arranging these materials. Over more than a year, we received strong support from Dharma brothers and sisters in many places, gathered and arranged the materials, and compiled them into the book *Questions and Answers on the Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization*, which we then published and circulated.

During the final days of the Master's life in this world, he still cared about the compilation of this question-and-answer collection. Despite the strain of desk work, he personally reviewed

the proofs that had already been compiled and sent to him, corrected them one by one, and finalized the first 106 questions and answers. These passages, personally revised by the Master, became his final writings and are therefore especially precious. The final proofreading and correction work for the portion after the first 106 entries was entirely continued and completed by our Dharma-uncle, Elder Xu Hengzhi.

With a petal of heart-incense, we pay homage to our gracious teacher. On the occasion of this question-and-answer collection going to print, we should respectfully hear the Dharma and awaken to mind through the great wisdom, great compassion, and great light that naturally flow forth from the Master; cut off delusion and realize the principle; remove attachments and cast off bonds; and find our way home. Let us respectfully remember the Master's earnest intention and repeated instructions.

Everyone! Practice! Press forward! Practice diligently! Press forward!

Compiled by Dharma Master Wude and others.

Part IV — Ganges Mahāmudrā

The complete source sequence is preserved: prefatory material followed by Lectures One through Seventeen in original order.

10. 大手印浅释 / 恒河大手印（序 + 第一讲至第十七讲全文） / A Brief Explanation of Mahāmudrā: Ganges Mahāmudrā (Prefatory Material and Lectures One through Seventeen)

Chinese source: 《大手印浅释》 / 《恒河大手印》; the source contains separate prefatory material followed by Lectures One through Seventeen; this edition preserves that sequence.

10.0 序 / Prefatory Material

By Yuan Yin Lao Ren. Ganges Mahāmudrā is a high-level practice within Buddhist Esoteric Dharma. It is practice without practicing; practice itself is no-practice. It is where the path of language is cut off and mental activity ceases. One probes the crucial point where not a single thought arises and yet all is clear and distinct, and where, though all is clear and distinct, not a single thought arises. Then one awakens to afflictions as bodhi, deluded thoughts as marvelous functioning, emptiness and existence as nondual, essence and function as inseparable, and all dharmas as Buddhadharma.

At the advanced age of ninety-four, Yuan Yin Lao Ren—Mr. Li Zhongding—still lectured on sutras and Dharma and wrote books and treatises without sparing any effort. This book is another major work following Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization. Again and again it offers earnest reminders and lays everything out without reservation. Its presentation is vivid and lively, illuminating related principles from each case. It is truly a precious raft for ferrying beings and an essential key to Buddhahood. I hope that people of aspiration and integrity who read this book will open the wisdom eye, enter the gate of signlessness, bring forth great capacity and great function, and sustain inexhaustible compassionate vows, thereby not failing to live up to the Elder's painstaking intention.

Respectfully prefaced by later student Xu Hengzhi, January 1999.

Preface

Here I will explain Mahāmudrā to everyone. Mahāmudrā is the highest-level Dharma within Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism distinguishes a sequence of nine vehicles, and this teaching belongs to the highest vehicle. In Tibetan it is called Atiyoga—the Completion Yoga of the Heart-Center Dharma. Everyone here has practiced the Heart-Center Dharma for a long time and should by now have made some progress. Some have already opened up what is original and seen the original nature; others may have had the original nature appear during formal sitting but failed to notice it and let it pass. Therefore today I will explain what Buddha-nature is, how it can be seen, and, after seeing it, how to advance further, bring forth

wondrous function, and fully accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood. This is to remind and encourage everyone to progress together.

Note: In the Esoteric Buddhist classification, the Buddhadharma is divided into nine vehicles: the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles. I will briefly explain the content of these nine vehicles. The outer three vehicles are the Śrāvaka Vehicle, Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and Bodhisattva Vehicle. They refer to the practices of the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, the six pāramitās and myriad practices followed by arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas; broadly speaking, they refer to exoteric teaching.

The inner three vehicles are Kriyā, Caryā, and Yoga. Kriyā is also known as Action Tantra. It includes methods of increasing, pacifying, magnetizing, subjugating, and so forth. These methods respond to sentient beings' wishes and serve as skillful means for drawing beings into the Buddhist path: "First draw them in through their desires; afterward lead them into Buddha-wisdom." They are not ultimate. Caryā practice aims to end birth and death and emerge from the sea of suffering; only at this point does actual practice begin. It starts with visualization and includes practice with winds, channels, bindu, and methods such as phowa. Yoga means "accord." In Yoga practice, activity accords with principle, speech accords with conduct, above one accords with the Buddhas, and below one accords with sentient beings. From here arise three further levels—the secret three vehicles.

The secret three vehicles are Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Mahāyoga means the Yoga of Great Completion: the visualized winds, channels, and other form-based phenomena are dissolved into emptiness, bringing the practice into accord with the dharmakāya, which is without characteristics. Anuyoga means the Yoga of Unsurpassed Completion: using dhātu-wisdom as the entry gate, it further transforms all manifestations into the one true reality. Atiyoga means the Yoga of Incomparable Completion: it further unites the three vehicles within a single Great Mantra Vehicle.

Ganges Mahāmudrā is exactly the same as the Chan school. It does not speak of practicing some particular method; instead it speaks of no-practice, no-attainment, and no-realization, directly pointing to the human mind so that one becomes a Buddha. But this no-practice, no-attainment, and no-realization is the natural wisdom of true suchness, our original nature. Only when we have realized this state can we speak of no-practice, no-attainment, and no-realization; otherwise it is merely empty talk. If one merely understands some principles but has not reached a state in which mind and objects are of one suchness, favorable and adverse conditions no longer constrain one, and one functions freely in every direction, yet speaks of no-practice, no-attainment, and no-realization, then those words have completely lost their meaning. Therefore we need to explain Ganges Mahāmudrā to everyone.

What is called Mahāmudrā is not a mudrā used as a method of practice. It is not like our practice of the Heart-Center Dharma, in which there are six mudrās and one mantra and one

must form the mudrās and recite the mantra. This is a Dharma-gate of direct pointing: it directly explains what true mind is, how wisdom is opened, and how wondrous function is brought forth. It is therefore direct and straightforward. This teaching is very useful for practitioners of the Heart-Center Dharma, because the Heart-Center Dharma likewise does not proceed through visualization-based practice but directly realizes the mind-ground.

There are many kinds of Mahāmudrā. Ganges Mahāmudrā is the supreme Mahāmudrā Dharma-gate among them. It requires neither visualization, winds and channels, bindu, deity practice, nor related methods. Nor does it require recitation of a mantra. It directly points out seeing the nature and becoming a Buddha, and is therefore the highest level of Dharma.

What is called Mahāmudrā is the one true Dharma realm. What is the one true Dharma realm? The one true Dharma realm is the wondrous essence of our original nature, true suchness. It is also the root of becoming a Buddha. Why is it called the great mudrā? Because our Buddha-nature is great without outside and small without inside. As it is said, “The great image has no form; the great sound is scarcely heard.” The greatest characteristic is precisely the characteristic of being without characteristics; what has no characteristics that can be seen is the greatest image. Our original nature is neither empty nor existent, neither blue nor yellow, neither large nor small: all designations do not fit it. Therefore, if you say it resembles even a single thing, you miss it. Nothing can be used to compare it, because it is without shape and without characteristics, beyond all comparison. It is so vast that it exhausts empty space and pervades the Dharma realm; there is no thing it does not include and no dharma it does not contain.

The hand is mind, and mind is the hand. The common saying “when the mind reaches it, the hand responds” expresses this principle. Without mind, the hand would not move. The “seal” means that our mind accords with the Buddha’s mind: the Buddha’s mind is my mind, and my mind is the Buddha’s mind. Therefore the scripture says, “Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings—these three are without difference.” It also says, “A thousand Buddhas and ten thousand Buddhas share one essence.” This is the same meaning. Thus Mahāmudrā is our great mind—our original nature. All things arise from it, manifest from it, and transform through it. This is called Mahāmudrā. Ganges Mahāmudrā is so excellent and lofty that below we will openly explain this precious Dharma to everyone.

10.1 恒河大手印（第一讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture One)

第一讲 大手印三要释义 / Lecture One: Explanation of the Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā

统摄于心的见、定、行 / View, Samādhi, and Conduct, All Gathered within Mind

I. 心、佛、众生三无差别 / Mind, Buddha, and Sentient Beings Are Not Different

“You should know that the lineage masters and my own mind are not different.” As disciples of the Buddha, we should know that our mind—our Buddha-nature—is nondual and no different from the patriarchs of past generations. Here the lineage patriarchs stand in for all Buddhas, because the Buddha has already entered nirvāṇa and the Buddhadharma is now transmitted by the patriarchs. Thus the patriarchs represent the Buddhas, and the two are treated together.

Since our mind is not different from the lineage masters, this is equivalent to saying that it is not different from the Buddhas. At this point some people will inevitably become doubtful: we are ordinary beings, while the Buddha is a sage; ordinary beings and sages are not the same, so how could there be no difference? They do not know that the essential nature is neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. Whether one is an ordinary being or a sage, it is the same. The reason the Buddha has vast spiritual powers and boundless wondrous functioning, while we do not, is that the defilements and accumulated grime covering the Buddha’s essential nature have all been washed away. Because we cling to the false appearances of things and fall into inverted deluded thinking, we defile the original nature. It is like the sun being covered by dark clouds: the sunlight cannot appear, and therefore we cannot manifest numinous functioning. Yet however thick the dark clouds may be, and however much they cover it, the sun is still there; its light has not diminished in the least. Once the clouds disperse, the sun appears in ten thousand rays of light.

That is to say, although our mind is defiled—because of attachment to marks—as soon as we wash away the defilement and accumulated grime, it shines just like the Buddha’s. What is called “not increasing in sages and not decreasing in ordinary beings” means that our being ordinary beings does not make us lose the luminous essential nature. It is simply because, through clinging, inverted views, and deluded thinking, our habitual stains are deep and heavy, covering the original nature so that its radiance cannot appear. The fundamental essence itself remains the same.

Why is this sentence said? It is extremely important because we now want to become Buddhas, end birth and death, leave saṃsāra, and liberate sentient beings. First we must know how to practice. In practice, the first requirement is correct view. View is the causal basis of practice: when beginning practice, one must first know what to use in practice and

how to practice. Only then can one swiftly bring practice to completion; otherwise one will take many detours. Therefore we first need to know that our original nature is originally the same as that of all Buddhas, without difference. Practicing and realizing on this basis is like cooking rice with rice: there is no possibility of failure. Once this point is clear, we will no longer doubt that we can practice and become Buddhas, and our practice will bear fruit swiftly.

Otherwise, if the Buddha is highest and supreme, impossible to reach, and we are ordinary beings, how could we become Buddhas? How could our practice succeed? Once doubt arises, one hesitates and does not move forward, and then attainment becomes impossible. Faith is the mother of success. To accomplish anything, first one must have full confidence. Without confidence, nothing can be accomplished. For example, those who practice the Pure Land school must first deeply believe without doubt that there truly is a Pure Land in the West. If I simply make the vow and recite the Buddha's name, then at the end of life I will surely be welcomed and guided by Amitābha Buddha to rebirth in the West. Then, by diligently reciting the Buddha's name, one can accomplish it at death. If one's faith is not deep and one is half believing and half doubting—"Ah, my karmic obstructions are heavy; can I really be born in the West? I am afraid I may not be able to"—then that will not work. Because one is doubtful and unsettled, one lacks the strength to sustain the practice and cannot press forward single-mindedly; therefore one cannot succeed.

Therefore faith comes first. This is true of anything, even worldly affairs. If I believe a matter can succeed, I will be willing to work at it. Even if I fail, I will not be afraid; I will keep trying, and in the end it will certainly be accomplished. Otherwise, as soon as one meets a setback, one becomes discouraged and loses resolve, and will inevitably accomplish nothing. The opening sentence asks us to trust completely that our nature and the Buddha's nature are not different.

Because the lineage masters represent the Buddha and are the same as the Buddha, our nature is the same as the masters' nature and therefore no different from Buddha-nature. In practicing the Way, view is of first importance. If the view is wrong, the result must be winding and crooked and one will take the long way around. If we can truly trust that our nature and the Buddha's nature are the same, without difference, and practice on this basis—training on the basis of the fundamental essence, transforming inverted deluded thoughts, and restoring the original face, rather than directing practice to the physical body or seeking outwardly—then we will certainly become Buddhas.

When we can trust this, we no longer seek outside. Otherwise we run outward in pursuit: today seeking the Buddha here, tomorrow seeking the Buddha there, or exerting effort on the physical body. After all that seeking, everything comes to nothing, because we do not know that the original nature is Buddha. Instead of seeking inwardly, we turn outward to grasp and waste our energy. If practice is to succeed, we should seek from our own original mind. Wake up our own true host: do not remain confused and do not keep dreaming. The forms of this

world are all false; they are flowers in the sky and the moon in water, unobtainable. Do not lose yourself in wife and children, wealth, treasures, or status; all of them are like a flower that blooms for only a moment, unobtainable.

Therefore the Lotus Sūtra says, “Only this one matter is real; the other two are not true.” The only reality is our one true Dharma realm—the real original nature. What is the Dharma realm? The Dharma realm is the dharma-nature, also called true reality. “Dharma” means all dharmas; “realm” means their divisions. It gathers all that exists, and in broad outline it is divided into ten: the four realms of sages and the six realms of ordinary beings. The four realms of sages are those of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and arhats. The six realms of ordinary beings are the six destinies: humans, devas, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. All are manifestations of this nature.

Therefore not only are the nature of human beings and the nature of all Buddhas the same; even beings of the six destinies are not different from the Buddhas’ true mind. Unfortunately, they are deluded by sounds and forms, their karmic obstructions are deep and heavy, and they do not know it themselves. Therefore the Buddha, out of compassion for us, appeared in the world to awaken us: do not keep clinging and dreaming. You are all no different from me, the Buddha. Wake up quickly and leave the suffering of birth and death and saṃsāra.

When the Buddha saw the morning star on the eighth night of the twelfth month and awakened to the Way, he said, “How wondrous! All sentient beings have the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata. It is only because of deluded thinking, inversion, and clinging that they cannot realize it.” From this we can see that we sentient beings do not lose Buddha-nature because of birth, death, and saṃsāra. As soon as we wake up and are no longer deluded by sounds and forms, we can recover our original face.

Ganges Mahāmudrā is extremely profound. From the very start it reminds us that the minds of all lineage masters and our mind are the same, without distinction. Do not think they are so high that we cannot reach them. Our mind and the minds of all Buddhas are exactly the same, with no duality at all. Once this is firmly affirmed, we will not doubt that we ourselves are Buddhas. It is only because we are deluded and do not awaken, because we cling to marks and invert ourselves, that we fall into saṃsāra. Now that we have awakened, are no longer deluded by marks, and no longer grasp at them, we recover what is originally ours. This is the first essential for becoming a Buddha. Therefore the opening begins with this crucial sentence. Below it explains how our mind is not different from the minds of all Buddhas, how we restore what is originally ours, and how marvelous functioning is opened forth. This sentence is the general outline; it is extremely important.

“View, samādhi, and conduct: all practices are gathered within mind.” The three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are the three secrets of Mahāmudrā, and they are also the essentials of practice in every Dharma-gate. Why say this? Because in practice, the first requirement is correct view. What was said above—that our mind and the minds of all

Buddhas are not distinct—is called correct view. When view is correct, the causal basis is correct; when the causal basis is correct, fruition can be correct. Otherwise one inevitably goes astray, takes a wrong road for the right path, and cannot realize true fruition. Thus it is said, “If the causal basis is not correct, the result is twisted.” If a practitioner’s causal basis is not correct, one will take a winding path and ultimately fail; therefore view is extremely important.

We ordinary beings all have identity view. We cling to this physical body as “me,” and we cling to it desperately. The body must be well nourished, must eat well, dress well, and be well provided with every comfort. All this is for the sake of this shell. Look at the masses of sentient beings: who is not busy for the sake of this shell? From morning to night they are busy for the body’s enjoyment. All the great and small affairs of the world revolve around this shell. People always want to keep this body in comfort and honor. Because they want enjoyment, they are not afraid to do every kind of harmful and immoral deed. If they do not have something, they seize it from others. The wars in this world are fought to seize things: if you will not give them to me, I will attack you, destroy your country, and take everything you have. This robber-like behavior is all for the body’s enjoyment.

There is no criminal act in society that is not for this shell. A person wants to eat well and play well, but has no money; what then? So he kills, burns, and robs. In fact, if you create bad causes, you must undergo bad results. The law of cause and effect is fixed: plant melons and you get melons; plant beans and you get beans. It is not off by the slightest hair. If you do evil, you must later undergo evil retribution. But these poor ordinary beings remain deluded and fail to awaken. For the sake of present pleasure, they pay no attention to future painful results.

If you kill someone, you must be punished by law: you may lose your head. If you rob others of their things, you will face charges and go to prison. Think about it: after doing bad things, can you escape? Alas, this is all delusion. Present-life retribution is not all; in the future there is also the terrible retribution of hell. That is dreadful. Some people do not understand this principle. They say, “You say there will be terrible retribution, but we see some bad people enjoying blessings now. On the other hand, some good people suffer. Cause and effect do not correspond.” They do not know that cause and effect must be viewed across three lifetimes.

The Buddhist scriptures have two lines: “If you wish to know the causes of past lives, look at what you receive in this life; if you wish to know the results of future lives, look at what you do in this life.” The blessings a person receives in this life come from good deeds done in the past. If he now does bad deeds, he will suffer evil results in the future. Not only will he suffer evil results in the future; even his present blessings will be reduced and his lifespan shortened. When you now see good people suffering, that is because in the past they did bad deeds and are now experiencing painful results. If they now do good deeds, their bad retribution is invisibly reduced: what originally would have been a great deal of suffering is now already lightened. These karmic results are being transformed in ways unseen, yet

people do not know it. The Buddha-eye sees it clearly. Therefore it says, “If you wish to know the causes of past lives, look at what you receive in this life.”

The Buddha-eye does not see things like the eyes of us ordinary beings. What we cannot see, the Buddha can see. Thousands of years ago, when the Buddha was in the world, there were neither telescopes nor microscopes, yet he told us: “Humans see a cup of water; the Buddha sees myriad tiny creatures.” In a cup of water he saw thousands upon thousands of tiny living creatures, and saw them very clearly, while human beings could not see them. Now, with our naked eyes, we see only one sun in this world. Only with astronomical telescopes can we see stars many hundreds of millions of light-years away, and can know that in space there are other planets, suns, and fixed stars, and that on other planets there are also living beings. But the Buddha knew this long ago and saw it clearly. He told us that in empty space there are many worlds: upward-facing worlds, downward-facing worlds, slanted worlds, and so forth. At the same time there are many suns. This is the same as what scientists now say, without difference. Therefore the Buddha knew in advance and saw very clearly, while people are very muddled. We should act in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching.

Our view must be correct. If view is not correct, one will “recklessly and wildly meet calamity.” In the Buddhist scriptures, delusions of view and delusions of thought are discussed. This refers to the delusions arising from incorrect views and from thoughts clinging to objects. Just now we spoke of identity view. This is the first of the delusions of view. Next is extreme view. Because of identity view, when the body cannot remain permanently in the world and must die, people ask: where does one go after death? Some say that after death there is nothing; this is annihilationist view. Others say that something still exists; this is eternalist view. Either one clings to eternalism or one clings to annihilationism: both fall into the two extremes. Not leaving the two extremes of annihilation and eternalism is called extreme view.

There is also wrong view, which denies cause and effect and says there is no cause and effect in the world. This harms people terribly. In the future, when such people fall into hell and suffer, they will know. There is no need to speak only of the future; even present results are not off. If you do bad deeds, you may be executed or imprisoned. Can you escape? Therefore wrong view does the most damage and harms people the most. There are also, among non-Buddhist paths, clinging to views as supreme and clinging to precepts and observances as supreme. Clinging to views as supreme means a deluded attachment to false views—taking the first three views as correct views. Clinging to precepts and observances as supreme means falsely clinging to tormenting the body—accepting all kinds of deviant precepts and ascetic practices as causes for being reborn after death into happy human or heavenly states. For example, nowadays certain deviant religions falsely claim that the end of the world has arrived and that everyone should quickly commit suicide and ascend to heaven, leading people into mass suicide.

These five views—identity view, extreme view, wrong view, clinging to views as supreme, and clinging to precepts and observances as supreme—are all incorrect views. When one's view is incorrect, the result must be twisted. When we understand that mind is Buddha and Buddha is mind, and that practice does not seek outwardly and does not cling to identity view, this is correct view. When we recite the Buddha's name, we are reciting mind; when we recite mind, we are practicing Buddha-recitation. We exert effort so that this mind becomes straight and without crookedness, without clinging; we remove its tendency to abide and its greed for acquisition, thereby restoring what is originally ours. This is correct view. Only by practicing in this way can one accomplish anything. Therefore correct view is extremely important.

Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi said: "Because practitioners' views differ, the fruits of their practice and realization fall into five kinds. First, those who hold heterodox views—seeking dharmas outside mind—and practice by seeking higher states and rejecting lower ones engage in non-Buddhist meditation. Second, those who rightly believe in cause and effect but still practice through aspiration and revulsion engage in the meditation of ordinary beings. Third, those who realize the one-sided truth of self-emptiness and practice accordingly engage in Hīnayāna meditation. Fourth, those who realize the true principle revealed by the emptiness of both self and dharmas and practice accordingly engage in Mahāyāna meditation. Fifth, those who realize that this mind is originally pure and free of afflictions, that its undefiled wisdom-nature is originally complete, and that this mind is Buddha engage in Supreme Vehicle Chan. The Chan transmitted in Bodhidharma's lineage is this Chan." This shows how important view—the causal mind—is throughout the process of practice.

What is samādhi? Practitioners all know that to become a Buddha and realize the Way, one must sit in meditation and enter samādhi in order to develop wisdom and fully realize bodhi. But there are many kinds of meditative absorption. Tathāgata Chan speaks of the four dhyānas and eight absorptions. Practitioners gradually ascend from the first dhyāna to the second, third, and fourth dhyāna heavens; these are the four dhyānas. Above them are the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothing whatsoever, and the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception; these are the four formless absorptions. Together with the preceding four dhyānas, they constitute the eight absorptions. These are absorptions developed and realized through gradual Dharma-gates.

Patriarchal Chan is different: it is sudden practice, sudden awakening, and sudden realization. Its practitioners do not train in these absorptions. Instead, with exceptionally keen wisdom, they open up what is original, personally realize Buddha-nature, and naturally accord closely with samādhi. They say that samādhi with entering and leaving is not great samādhi. Not being deluded when facing circumstances is true samādhi. In any circumstance, when the mind is neither shaken nor deluded nor thrown into confusion, this is called great samādhi. One cannot be stirred by beauty and greedy for gold and silver, yet count the ability to enter samādhi while sitting as genuine samādhi. Some people further think that being able to sit without moving for several days and nights, or even many years, is great samādhi. In fact they

are wrong. That is not great samādhi; it is merely the attainment of cessation of perception and feeling. The manifest activity of dharma-clinging in the seventh consciousness has not ceased; only because one does not grasp the six external sense objects does one mistakenly imagine that consciousness has ceased. Once one emerges from samādhi and encounters objects, one may react even more strongly than before entering it. Such a state is not ultimate and is not great samādhi. Therefore Chan does not advocate practicing this kind of absorption.

Here is an example that demonstrates this. Long ago the Sixth Patriarch met Chan Master Wolun. Wolun said: “Wolun has a skill; he can cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day.” Chan Master Wolun was boasting of his depth in samādhi: he could keep thought completely still throughout the day; whatever circumstance arose, he would not be shaken, and the wisdom of bodhi would increase day by day. At first glance such mastery of samādhi seems remarkable, but in fact it is mistaken. Why? Because he abides in samādhi without moving and becomes stuck there. Buddhahood means becoming a living Buddha, not a dead Buddha. Wondrous functioning must be vital and responsive, not dead sitting without movement. Therefore this is not right samādhi. Right samādhi has no entering or leaving and can bring forth wondrous function. If one clings to mastery of samādhi, sits without moving, and cannot function, what use is such samādhi?

Therefore the Sixth Patriarch corrected him by saying, “Huineng has no skill.” You have ability; I have none. Speaking of ability, nowadays many practitioners cling to it: “I have spiritual powers, so my ability is great. You have no spiritual powers, so you have no ability at all.” They do not know that by clinging to spiritual powers they have already fallen into a fixed rut and become stuck there. Whenever practitioners abide in anything, what they abide in blocks the radiance of the original nature, so they cannot see the nature and become Buddhas. Thus, however great your spiritual powers may be, not only will you fail to become a Buddha; in the future you may instead become a demon. To become a Buddha, the mind must be empty and pure, without the slightest attachment.

Therefore the Sixth Patriarch said, “Huineng has no skill.” I, Huineng, have no tricks or abilities: you have ability; I have none. Why say this? Because as soon as one claims an ability, one has already fixed upon something. The original nature is pure and uncovered, clean and stainless, establishing not a single dharma and unstained by a single speck. The moment one posits some ability, one has already departed from the original nature. “Huineng has no skill” precisely exposed where Wolun was stuck. “He does not cut off a hundred thoughts” means that I do not extinguish all thought. Why? Because thought is still needed for wondrous functioning that liberates sentient beings. The Buddha is vital and responsive, with boundless wondrous functioning; he is not dead and unmoving. When the Buddha appears in the world to teach Dharma, thought must also function. If thought did not move, how could he teach us? Therefore the verse says, “He does not cut off a hundred thoughts.”

No thought needs to be extinguished, because we still need thought to function. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts,” and

immediately continues, “Yet with regard to all deluded minds, do not extinguish them either.” If you extinguish deluded mind, right mindfulness is also gone and everything becomes dead. This is because deluded mind arises from true mind, just as waves arise from water. If the waves were eliminated, the water too would be gone. If we extinguished deluded mind, we would become earth, wood, metal, or stone. Could one then realize the Way? One would merely become a large rock, a large log, or a lump of clay. Therefore do not be impressed if someone enters samādhi for a week, several months, several years, or even hundreds or thousands of years. That is useless. To realize the great Way, one must awaken to the complete-and-sudden understanding, practice in accord with reality, train tirelessly amid circumstances, and remain free of the delusive and illusory appearances manifested by one’s own mind. Only then can one accord with the Way. The practice of sitting blankly will not do; it is dead samādhi and cannot realize the Way.

Here is another gong’an demonstrating the point. When Śākyamuni Buddha was in the world, a woman entered samādhi while sitting beside him. Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī came by and thought: Why does this woman have so little propriety, entering samādhi beside Śākyamuni Buddha? She should withdraw far behind the Buddha. He therefore snapped his fingers in front of her and called her out of samādhi, but she remained completely unmoving and did not emerge. Seeing that she had not emerged, Mañjuśrī displayed spiritual power and lifted her to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, but she still did not emerge. When this did not work, he cast her into the eighteen levels of hell, yet still could not cause her to emerge.

Śākyamuni Buddha said, “You cannot make her emerge from samādhi. Below there is a Bodhisattva Wangming who can make her emerge.” As soon as these words were spoken, Bodhisattva Wangming arrived from below. The Buddha said, “You have come at just the right time. Please make this woman emerge from samādhi.” Wangming snapped his fingers in front of her, and the woman emerged. This gong’an is very puzzling. Mañjuśrī is the teacher of seven Buddhas and possesses immense wisdom. How could he be unable to make this woman emerge from samādhi? Wangming, by contrast, is merely a bodhisattva from below. How could a single snap of his fingers make her emerge?

This gong’an should be understood through its essential meaning. The woman entered samādhi by grasping at a sign; that was already a serious mistake. As we said, if one abides in the sign of samādhi, there is abiding and therefore it is not right samādhi. To become a Buddha, there must not be the slightest attachment. One must function wondrously, freely, and vividly, not remain deadened in samādhi. The woman’s abiding in samādhi was wrong from the start. Mañjuśrī represents great wisdom. Is great wisdom not excellent? Yet what we ordinarily call wisdom is worldly cleverness and debating skill, not the great wisdom of prajñā. To become a Buddha, this deluded intelligence must be removed completely. Such clever intelligence constitutes cognitive obscuration and cognitive delusion, blocking the gate of awakening and preventing realization.

Long ago, when Confucius went to meet Laozi, Laozi told him, “Strike down your cleverness.” This means knocking down clever intelligence so that the mind is empty and open, with nothing at all and nowhere to abide. Only then can one realize the Way. Therefore we should not boast of being clever. Showing off petty cleverness is a great obstruction. Great wisdom appears foolish: the mind is unmoved and free of abiding attachment, and only then can the great Way be accomplished. A settled, unmoving mind without abiding attachment is not like wood or stone, knowing and understanding nothing. Rather, it is an unmoving mind that is perfectly clear and distinct, with neither rejecting nor grasping and neither attachment nor aversion. We must therefore understand that right samādhi means not being deluded by objects and having no entering or leaving; it is not dead sitting without movement. Why could Bodhisattva Wangming make the woman emerge? “Wangming” indicates the relinquishing of worldly cleverness and debating skill. When such clever knowing is absent and there is no attachment, the great wisdom of prajñā appears. Thus this gong’an is a symbolic teaching. It does not mean that Mañjuśrī truly could not make the woman emerge from samādhi, still less that Wangming was superior to Mañjuśrī.

Therefore, if we wish to realize the Way, we must relinquish worldly cleverness and debating skill. At all times the mind should be empty as if washed clean: inwardly not turning with thoughts, outwardly not being drawn along by objects. Only through diligent training and letting go again and again can one succeed.

The Sixth Patriarch said: “Who would have thought that self-nature is originally pure? Who would have thought that self-nature neither arises nor ceases? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally unmoving? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally complete in itself? Who would have thought that self-nature can give rise to the myriad dharmas?” Since the self-nature is complete with everything and lacks nothing, and since it is originally pure and not different from the Buddha, if our mind can be empty and unstained, what could we fail to accomplish?

Later, Dahui Zonggao composed a verse on this gong’an of emerging from samādhi: “Whether one emerges or does not emerge, it is samādhi but not right samādhi.” If one keeps making an issue of entering and leaving samādhi, that is not right samādhi; it is dead samādhi. True samādhi has no entering or leaving. Movement is thus, and stillness is also thus. It is not dead sitting without movement, but boundless wondrous functioning. Speaking and acting do not take one outside samādhi. Rather, the mind abides nowhere, and in movement does not fixate on movement. If one abides in the sign of stillness, it is not right samādhi. Wangming and Mañjuśrī, two great bodhisattvas, still made an issue of emerging from and entering samādhi, and therefore could not avoid departing from the original position. The Chan school says, “If one is absent for even a moment, one is just like a dead person.” To depart from the original position is to lose one’s very life. Thus Dahui Zonggao’s verse concludes, “Wangming and Mañjuśrī have utterly lost their lives.”

The two great bodhisattvas, the Buddha, and the woman enacted this scene for us so that we would know how to practice. This point is extremely important. In practice we must never grasp dead samādhi; we must remain free and unobstructed in all activities. Chan Master Farong, known as “Lazy Rong,” said, “Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning; no-mind is precisely functioning, and constant functioning is precisely no-mind.” This means that precisely while doing things and speaking, the mind remains unstained and unclinging, abiding unmoved. It is not that one can be settled only while sitting motionless, yet becomes confused as soon as events arise. Movement and stillness must be of one suchness; only this is true samādhi.

What is conduct? It encompasses all forms of practice, including our spiritual practice and our behavior and actions. For practitioners, view, samādhi, and conduct are of utmost importance; therefore they are the three essentials of Ganges Mahāmudrā. The view discussed above means that when beginning practice, we must first set our view straight so that we do not take needless detours. We must know how to proceed, how to practice, and what basis to use; therefore view belongs to causal-stage practice. What becomes Buddha is mind, not the body. If the causal basis is mistaken, fruition will be twisted. Whatever Dharma-gate we practice, it is the mind that is being trained. Mind must be empty and pure, without clinging or stain; only then can the Way be accomplished. Therefore view must be correct, and one must choose and practice a Dharma-gate suited to one’s own capacity. Such practice is conduct.

Only by practicing a Dharma suited to one’s capacity, entering deeply into meditative absorption, and opening great wisdom can one realize the fruition of Buddhahood. The Mahāmudrā taught here is the great Dharma of no-practice, no-attainment, no-realization, no-contrivance, and no-distraction. It points out that the very functioning of speaking, acting, knowing, and perceiving is Buddha. It tells us to awaken immediately and see the nature; it is the unsurpassed wondrous Dharma that does not rely on gradual practice. There are many Dharma-gates of practice: partial and complete, sudden and gradual. Ganges Mahāmudrā is a direct-pointing Dharma within the complete and sudden approaches. It tells us to see the nature immediately, without practicing any particular method.

Yet whether or not one practices a particular method, all practice is encompassed by true mind. Therefore it is said that all practices are gathered within mind and embraced by mind. As the scripture says, “Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm.” Although Ganges Mahāmudrā directly points us to see the nature immediately, without needing to practice a particular method, the deluded habits accumulated over many lives cannot be removed all at once after seeing the nature. Therefore it also speaks of conduct. After seeing the nature, one must still protect and sustain it closely, eliminate old habits completely, enter the original position of the unconditioned, and then let even the remaining traces blend away. Only then can everything become seamlessly integrated and unobstructed.

II. 法尔正见 / Right View of Reality as It Naturally Is

“View means clearly knowing the one true Dharma realm—the tathāgatagarbha mind as it naturally is—which manifests innumerable defiled and pure dharmas and embodies the principle that they are naturally equal.” What does “view” mean here? It means apprehending Mind and seeing nature. To become a Buddha, one must first have a clear view. We must recognize that this one true Dharma realm—the tathāgatagarbha mind as it naturally is—shines through the gateways of our six faculties. Then, by diligently protecting and sustaining this recognition, we can finally fully realize the fruition of Buddhahood.

The one true Dharma realm is our true mind and original nature. “One true” means that only this original nature is real; all else is illusory. The Dharma realm, as explained above, means the ten Dharma realms: the four realms of sages and the six realms of ordinary beings. Here the one true Dharma realm is the fundamental essence of all four realms of sages and six realms of ordinary beings. It contains neither sage nor ordinary being and is therefore called the one true Dharma realm. Our original nature is neither ordinary nor sage, utterly bare, and establishes not a single dharma.

The tathāgatagarbha mind as it naturally is means that it has always been just this way, without any fabrication. Buddha-nature is originally just this way; it is not something produced later through contrivance. Here, “as it naturally is” means “originally just this way.” The term tathāgatagarbha has two senses here. At the stage of ordinary beings, it is a concealed store: the Tathāgata’s original nature lies hidden within. After one realizes the Way, it is a treasury—a treasure store in which every wondrous function is complete. Like a wish-fulfilling jewel that can rain down many treasures, it contains all wondrous functions. Because all wondrous functions are fully present within it, it is called the tathāgatagarbha. Once the treasury is opened, one draws from it inexhaustibly and uses it without end. Such a great treasure has always been right beside us, yet we do not know it. How pitiable—what a needless waste!

The Lotus Sūtra says that a wish-fulfilling jewel lies in a pocket close to a person’s body, yet unfortunately people do not know it and instead go outside begging for food. This is truly the height of foolishness. Alas, this is the condition of sentient beings in the six destinies: wandering through the six destinies is like living as a beggar. Originally, one is supremely honored and noble, a wealthy person complete with everything; now one has instead fallen into the street and begs for food. What a needless waste! This teaching is meant to help you recognize and see your own original true nature, so that you do not die without ever knowing it.

Therefore Mahāmudrā tells us directly: not only human beings, but all sentient beings fully possess Tathāgata Buddha-nature. It is only because they are obscured by ignorance, clinging, deluded thinking, inverted views, afflictions, and so forth that they cannot see it. If we cease clinging to external marks and completely exhaust all deluded thinking and inversions, we can

recover the radiance of the original face. The great treasure that was forgotten will return to our hands. This treasure is not outside. Do not seek or search for it outside. It is shining through the gateways of your own six faculties. You need only turn the light inward. When the previous thought has ceased and the later thought has not yet arisen, cast a cool, detached glance right there, and you will understand that originally you yourself are Buddha.

Therefore Mahāmudrā is a Dharma-gate of direct pointing: it points directly to seeing the nature. It does not require you to investigate a huatou and arouse the doubt-sensation before awakening. What is called “seeing” is not seeing something with the eyes, but direct experiential realization. How, then, does one see this one true Dharma realm? When you think neither good nor evil and all deluded thoughts do not arise, turn the light inward in a single glance. Who is it that, while not a single thought arises, is clear and distinct and yet not like wood or stone? Everyone can test this immediately. When not a single thought arises, is it not still clear and distinct? Is it like wood or stone, without perception or knowing? Obviously not. It remains clear and distinct—hearing plainly and seeing clearly—like a mirror illuminating things, but without giving rise to discrimination and without the slightest attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection. This clear, non-discriminating numinous knowing is our original nature: the one true Dharma realm.

Therefore view means clearly knowing the one true Dharma realm, the tathāgatagarbha mind as it naturally is—the treasure with which everyone is originally fully endowed. It is not somewhere else; it is shining through each person’s six faculties. Yet sentient beings do not recognize it. They know only how to grasp at external marks, thereby obscuring their own radiance and falling into the six destinies. Is this not sad and lamentable? We need only turn the light inward once and recognize that this clear and distinct, thought-free numinous knowing is originally our own nature: the root of becoming a Buddha and the basis from which all things and worlds are formed.

Thus it says, “It manifests innumerable defiled and pure dharmas and embodies the principle that they are naturally equal.” Let us first explain “manifests innumerable defiled and pure dharmas.” All men and women, old and young, mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, forests, and so on are manifested by this mind—the true mind. “Defiled” means polluted or undesirable things; “pure” means clean and beautiful things. For example, this Sāhā world of ours is an impure, defiled land, while the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is a pure land. Whether pure or impure, what forms and manifests a land? Both are formed and manifested by our one true Dharma realm. Therefore the Buddhist scripture says, “Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm.” From this we can see that the mountains, rivers, great earth, men and women, old and young now before us are also manifested by this one true Dharma realm. Without this one true Dharma realm, how could there be mountains, rivers, the great earth, men and women, old and young?

Some people will doubt this: how could mountains, rivers, the great earth, men and women, old and young be manifested by the one true Dharma realm? To explain this takes some time.

Before the mountains, rivers, and great earth were formed, in our country's ancient language it was called the primordial vastness of the universe, or the unopened chaos. In the Buddhist scriptures it is called "awareness made bright, emptiness grown dim." Here, "awareness" means our original awakening. Every person and every sentient being has this awareness—the capacity to perceive and know. Here, "nature" means energy: the innate capacity to perceive and know, the function through which perception and knowing arise. Awareness itself has no fault. The problem begins when one takes this awareness as something real and fixes the idea that one truly possesses awareness. This is called "giving rise to brightness upon awareness." Here, "brightness" means making awareness explicit by asserting, "I definitely possess awareness." This is knowing added upon knowing—needless duplication. This added brightness then becomes ignorance.

Awareness is already clear, and this clarity is awareness itself. Once one adds an explicit knowing on top of awareness, division and opposition arise. One then considers, "Since I have a capacity that knows, there must also be something known—things for me to know." In that primordial era of emptiness and dimness, the earth had not yet formed and there were no things. Restless movement arose, seeking something that could serve as an object of knowing. But during the kalpa of emptiness there was nothing: this is called empty. Because nothing could be found, there was only darkness and confusion: this is called dim. The more dim and confused it became, the more movement intensified. When movement reached an extreme, wind arose; thus the great wind wheel appeared. It rubbed against the earth element among the seven great generative constituents—earth, water, fire, wind, space, faculty, and consciousness—originally complete within our one true Dharma realm. The friction of earth and wind gave rise to the fire element. Fire flamed upward; the turbid sank and the clear rose. Thus the world composed of earth, water, fire, wind, and space arose. The earth on which we now live arose in this way.

Therefore this world, whether the earth, trees, the sun, or the moon, is formed by the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. These four elements are the constituents inherent in our original nature, just like what chemists call elements. Look at the earth. The earth has a crust: that is the earth element. There is water above and below the ground: that is the water element. The earth's center has fire, so there are volcanic eruptions: that is the fire element. The earth constantly rotates, revolving on its axis and orbiting: that is the wind element. Therefore the earth is entirely a composite of earth, water, fire, and wind. Even a large tree does not depart from earth, water, fire, and wind. The trunk is hard: that is earth. There is moisture in the tree: that is water. The tree's body is wood and has the fire-nature that can give rise to fire: that is fire. The circulation by which the tree absorbs nutrients, and its movement and swaying in the wind, are wind. Therefore a large tree too is composed of the four great elements. Human beings are also like this. The skin, flesh, and bones of the body are earth; blood and fluids are water; fire is the heart—every person has a body temperature of 37 degrees Celsius; wind is our breathing, blood circulation, digestion, and so on, constantly turning and moving. These belong to wind. Thus everything, without exception, is manifested

by our true mind. This is called the immeasurable manifestation of defiled and pure dharmas. All worlds, pure lands and impure lands, are manifested by our mind.

Next it says, “It embodies the principle that they are naturally equal.” What does this mean? Whether pure land or impure land, all are manifested by true mind and are therefore equal, equal, and again equal. We must not infer inequality merely because our impure land is the karmic result of sentient beings while pure lands arise from the pure minds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, as though the difference between purity and impurity made their fundamental nature unequal. At the same time, we must know that all forms are illusory images. Whether good or bad, beautiful or ugly, all are unobtainable and therefore equal. Although we have now fallen into sentient existence, the one true Dharma realm remains equal. Ignorance has only temporarily obscured the radiance of the original nature; the fundamental essence itself remains neither defiled nor pure, unmoving and unchanging. Its light being covered does not mean that the essence itself has become polluted.

For example, if a pearl is temporarily buried in mud and its light is hidden and unseen, has the light been lost? No. Dig it out and wipe away the mud, and the pearl is still just as bright. The light of its essence is not lost because it was wrapped in filth. Therefore it is said that the original nature does not increase in sages or decrease in ordinary beings; it is equal, equal, and again equal. Because we do not know this meaning of equality, there is grasping and rejection, attachment and aversion. This is good and pure; that is defiled and bad. In fact, all are manifested by our true mind. Therefore those who truly see the Way neither grasp nor reject and are neither attached nor averse. When, through practice, we remove ignorance and completely extinguish all pollution, clinging, afflictions, and inversion, we can recover the radiance of the original nature and manifest the originally pure Dharma-essence. At that time, the pure land is right here.

There are two senses of the Western Pure Land: the Western Pure Land in principle and the Western Pure Land at the phenomenal level. In principle, it is our pure mind and is called the mind-only Pure Land. At the phenomenal level, beyond this world of ours and past ten trillion Buddha-lands, there is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Yet although that Western Land is distant, it is not cut off from us, because our true mind fills empty space and pervades the Dharma realm. Whatever pure lands there are in the ten directions, none lie outside our true mind. It depends only on whether your mind is pure. If the mind is pure, the Pure Land is not separate from you; it is right before you. If the mind is impure, separation inevitably appears, and the Pure Land is ten trillion Buddha-lands away.

Our mind is complete with everything; all practices are gathered within mind. The scripture says, “The three realms are mind-only; the myriad dharmas are consciousness-only.” Apart from mind, there is nothing at all. Therefore, as explained above, the deluded mind is not to be forcibly extinguished. Why not? Because deluded mind is manifested by true mind. Without true mind, how could there be deluded mind? Without water, how could there be waves? Waves represent deluded mind, while water represents true mind. If the waves were simply

eliminated, the water too would be lost. Therefore deluded mind is not to be destroyed; it can only be allowed to settle. Thus it is said: let the mad mind rest, and that is true suchness. All Dharma-gates merely teach us to let deluded mind settle. Do not grasp after sagehood; simply let mind rest. Once deluded mind settles, that is enough.

Mahāmudrā is a direct-pointing Dharma-gate. It tells us that to see the one true Dharma realm, we must let the deluded mind settle. When not a single thought arises, turn the light inward once; seeing the radiance of the original nature is one's own original face. Do not go seeking any other wondrous, mysterious thing. The moment there is seeking, the moment there is something to obtain, that is attachment to marks. Not only will one never accomplish the Way; one may instead become a demon. Why? Because our original nature is originally complete with everything and lacks nothing. Therefore it is the tathāgatagarbha, a treasure store. Once you open it, its use is inexhaustible. You do not need to seek outwardly. As soon as there is seeking, the mind is not empty and pure; it abides in marks and becomes a skandha-demon.

Therefore after seeing the Way, we must protect and sustain it closely, diligently removing old habits of attachment. This is called practicing the Way. Why must this be done? Because after seeing the Way, one has only recognized one's own original face; the habits of clinging accumulated since beginningless time have not yet been exhausted. Through beginningless vast kalpas we have grown accustomed to attaching to marks. These habits have accumulated so deeply that one cannot instantly become completely pure, non-abiding, and free of attachment. For example, if a dark room has been sealed shut for many years and its doors and windows are suddenly opened or a lamp is switched on, the darkness is dispelled and the room becomes bright. Yet because it has been sealed for so long, the moldy odor cannot disappear all at once. The room still requires prolonged airing, sweeping, and scrubbing before the odor accumulated over many years gradually fades away.

Again, consider a filthy bucket that held excrement for many years. Even after the contents are dumped out, the stench cannot immediately be eliminated, because it has penetrated deep into the wood. The bucket must be soaked, steeped, washed, and scrubbed over a long period before the smell can gradually disappear. The principle is the same. Even if we suddenly see the original face, recognize our own true mind, and know that all things and innumerable phenomena are manifested by true mind, it is still very difficult to exhaust all habits at once, remain free of the slightest attachment amid circumstances, and be completely unmoved. Therefore after awakening one is only at the stage of seeing the Way. One must still pass through the stage of practicing the Way, training diligently amid circumstances and exhausting habits of attaching to marks and clinging to objects. Only then can one fully realize the fruition of Buddhahood and enter the stage of realizing the Way.

At the stage of seeing the Way, one is like a newborn infant who cannot yet walk, speak, or do things. The infant must slowly grow into an adult before being able to speak, walk, work, and eventually become a hero or a person of great accomplishment. Therefore after seeing the

Way, we must still pass through the stage of practicing the Way, and only afterward can we realize the Way. But the first and most important thing is seeing the Way. Without seeing the Way, one does not know what the original face is or what true mind is. Doubt persists, one continually runs outward seeking, and there is no firm ground within. One therefore remains confused, inverted, and attached to marks, and in the end cannot realize the Way.

Therefore practitioners must first see the original nature and understand what the original truth is. Only then can they begin sweeping away the illusory deluded habits. It is like turning on the electric light in a room: once one clearly sees where the filth is and where there is trash, one can begin to sweep. If the light is not turned on and the room is pitch dark, not only is there no way to begin; even if one forces oneself to sweep, one will inevitably bump east and west, hitting oneself until nose and face are bruised, and still the room will not be clean. Therefore to accomplish the Way, first one must open the Buddha's knowledge and vision and know that this one true Dharma realm is originally complete in all sentient beings; it is not something brought about through practice. The Chan school says, "The Way is a matter of awakening, not of practice." This is the principle.

When we truly understand this principle, Dharma practice is on the right track. As explained above, although truth is suddenly awakened to, old habits of clinging to marks from many lives cannot immediately be removed. One must still protect the realization at every moment. As soon as a deluded thought arises, recognize it; upon recognition it dissolves into emptiness, and do not abide even in emptiness. Only then can there be perfect interfusion without obstruction. The practice deepens gradually, moving from unfamiliarity to familiarity. When it becomes thoroughly familiar, even deliberate remembering is forgotten; once it is forgotten, the remaining traces dissolve, and responsive transformation becomes unobstructed.

Therefore we must first maintain vigilant awareness and gradually advance to quiescent illumination. Awareness here means knowing: when thoughts arise, know them and do not run after them. This is effortful functioning. If, when you see thoughts stirring, you cannot let them go, your meditative stability is insufficient and you cannot cut off their continuation. That will not do. You must immediately rely on the Buddha's empowering support to interrupt them. Those who recite the Buddha's name quickly take up the sacred Name of Amitābha Buddha and anchor the deluded mind in the Buddha-name, so that the deluded thought cannot continue. Those who hold mantras immediately take up the mantra, and the deluded thought is transformed. Those who investigate Chan constantly attend to the *huatou*, and deluded thoughts naturally do not arise. If deluded thoughts arise unnoticed and you run along with them, the practice is lost.

Therefore after seeing the Way, one must protect closely and continuously. When this safeguarding becomes mature, there is no need to maintain it deliberately, and one advances from vigilant awareness to quiescent illumination. "Quiescent" means unmoving: one no longer deliberately maintains awareness, and even illumination is forgotten. Illumination

occurs naturally without attachment to illumination. If a sense of illumination remains, there is still abiding and still effortful functioning. With no illumination and nothing not illuminated, one enters the unconditioned. Functioning without deliberate effort has immense efficacy. Only here can one enter the stage of non-retrogression. “It embodies the principle that they are naturally equal” means that good and bad, defiled and pure, long and short are all equal, equal, and again equal, without difference, because all sentient beings are Buddhas.

Do not look down on cattle, horses, and other animals. They too are Buddhas. It is only because they committed many harmful actions and bear heavy karmic obstructions that they fell into the three lower destinies. We should arouse great compassion and vow to liberate all sentient beings so that all reach the shore of awakening. Only this accords with the Buddha’s original intention in appearing in the world to save sentient beings. Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva adorns the hells and saves the beings there, broadly employing the power of Dharma to awaken them from their deluded dreams and help them understand that the Buddha-nature of those suffering there has not decreased by even a fraction. It is only because they failed to awaken, clung to marks, and created karma that they fell into hell and undergo suffering. If they quickly awaken, repent, and recover the radiance of their original nature, they will immediately rise beyond and be liberated.

From this we can see that the first requirement for practitioners is to apprehend Mind and see nature. After seeing the nature, one will not create karma and undergo retribution. If one does not see the original nature, one inevitably engages in blind practice. Only after seeing the original nature does right practice begin. When you truly see the original nature, you also understand that the Western Pure Land and the defiled land in which we live are equal. The scripture says, “As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure.” If your mind is pure and unstained, then right now is the pure land. When the mind is pure, without grasping or rejecting, where can there be any distinctions of good and bad, beautiful and ugly? Once the mind gives rise to discrimination, things go wrong; good and bad, beautiful and ugly are produced along with it, and people accordingly give rise to attachment and aversion, grasping and rejection, inevitably creating karma and undergoing retribution.

Practice is for leaving saṃsāra and transcending the three realms. Therefore one must first correct one’s view, recognize the equal mind originally complete in everyone, understand the equality of all things, and only then begin removing habits and transforming consciousness into wisdom. To fully realize the fruition of Buddhahood, practitioners must transform consciousness into wisdom. Here “consciousness” means cognition—the discriminating mind of ordinary beings that attaches to objects and creates karma. Through diligent practice, this must be transformed into the great wisdom of complete awakening; only then is the aspiration fulfilled. In this process, the sixth consciousness is first transformed into Wondrous Observing Wisdom and the seventh into the Wisdom of Equality. Only afterward are the first five consciousnesses transformed into the Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities and the eighth into Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. Deluded consciousness cannot be transformed into the

great wisdom of complete awakening all at once. Therefore the Sixth Patriarch said, “The sixth and seventh are transformed at the causal stage; the eighth and the first five are perfected at fruition.” This is the meaning.

“You should know that the lineage masters and my own mind are not different.” One who sees the Way deeply knows that my mind is Buddha’s mind and Buddha’s mind is my mind. My mind is therefore not different from the lineage masters, nor is it different from any thing or circumstance. Under such a realization, what attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection could remain? If discrimination still arises—this is beautiful, so I want to grasp it; that is ugly, so I want to reject it—then your mind is still unequal and you have not truly seen the Way. Therefore we must know clearly that the one true Dharma realm is originally neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, and complete with everything. In other words, one is originally Buddha. As long as we do not remain deluded, do not run along with deluded thoughts, and do not attach to objects and chase things, we can find our way home and recover the original nature.

Therefore Ganges Mahāmudrā tells us: you need not practice. You are originally complete with true-suchness Buddha-nature. As long as you turn the light inward, attach to nothing at all, know a thought as soon as it arises, and do not follow the thought, this is right practice and right conduct. But first one’s view must be correct. This is practice at the causal stage. If one’s view is incorrect, the result will be twisted. Therefore from the very start Mahāmudrā says that one’s view must be correct.

After seeing the original nature, one can always be in samādhi. Why? Because after awakening, one deeply knows that all marks are unobtainable, all are flowers in the sky and the moon in water, and none can be grasped. Only the original nature is real. While responding to conditions according to circumstances, the mind is unmoving. The Diamond Sūtra says, “Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind.” Only this is great samādhi—dynamic, responsive, and boundless in wondrous functioning. Only this kind of practice is the true conduct of practitioners. Therefore a practitioner’s mind must be equal and without bias. In meeting people and responding to things, there should be no distinction based on closeness or distance. If there is still a view of difference, then you have not yet reached the state of true equality.

View, samādhi, and conduct are all gathered by mind and complete within mind. Therefore in studying Buddhism we should study the Dharma gate of the mind-ground. It gives birth to the royal heir—like an emperor’s own crown prince, who is certain to become emperor; likewise, one is certain eventually to become a Buddha. Practicing other Dharma gates belongs to the peripheral meritorious ranks. However accomplished the practice, one can at most be enfeoffed as a prince or marquis; one cannot become emperor—that is, a Buddha. This is especially so for modern people practicing qigong, who all cling to the physical body. They work on the small heavenly circuit and great heavenly circuit, or even play with shamanic arts and sleight of hand, showing themselves off and fooling the ignorant. They think their

schemes are successful, but in fact they are merely dabbling with spirits. However great your spiritual powers may be and however healthy your body may be, in the end it will still decay and cannot last. Thus the Chan school says, “Non-Buddhists who train the body will finally see it decay.”

Therefore in practice, we must have correct view. We must know the root of becoming a Buddha and practice diligently on that basis; only then can we bring right fruition to completion. In Direct Pointing on the Heart Sūtra, Master Hanshan said: “The reason practicing prajñā succeeds swiftly is that everyone is complete with this wondrous true-suchness nature. When the Buddhas realize it, it becomes spiritual powers and wondrous functioning. When sentient beings are deluded about it, it becomes false thinking and defiling affliction. Thus they use it every day without knowing it; obscuring this original truth, they undergo suffering in vain. Is this not lamentable? If one can suddenly awaken to what is originally present, immediately turn the light inward, and let that single awakened thought permeate one’s practice, then the emotional barrier of birth and death suddenly collapses. It is like a dark room of a thousand years: one lamp dispels the darkness, and no other expedient need be sought.” From this we can see that we need only awaken, not be deluded by forms, and continually turn the light inward, practicing within the mind-ground Dharma-gate. Without relying on other Dharma-gates, we will certainly become Buddhas in the future.

Textual note. In the Chinese source, “III. The Mind-Ground Dharma-Gate” appears immediately before the Lecture Two marker while introducing the lecture that follows. This edition keeps the heading with Lecture Two so it remains attached to its explanatory content.

10.2 恒河大手印（第二讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Two)

三、心地法门 / III. The Mind-Ground Dharma-Gate

Speaking of the mind-ground Dharma-gate, I am reminded of the public case of Huanglong and Lü Chunyang. Lü Chunyang practiced Daoism. Daoism emphasizes refining essence, qi, and spirit, gathering the great medicine and refining it into the great elixir—the so-called golden elixir—which transforms into an infant, an indestructible vajra-like yang-spirit. When he visited Chan Master Huanglong, he had already completed the elixir and could send the yang-spirit out of the body. In Daoism, after the golden elixir is accomplished, one can roam in all directions and visit spiritual teachers on famous mountains. One day he passed by Mount Huanglong, saw purple clouds forming a canopy over the mountain, and knew that an extraordinary person was there, so he went to pay a visit. It happened that Chan Master Huanglong had ascended the Dharma seat to teach, and Lü mixed into the crowd to hear what Huanglong would say.

Huanglong knew that it was Lü Gong and wanted to draw him into the Way, so he sternly said, “Today I will not teach the Dharma. Beside the seat there is someone stealing the Dharma!” Lü Chunyang immediately stepped out and asked Huanglong, “In one grain of millet the world is

hidden; in a half-sheng cauldron mountains and rivers are cooked. Tell me, what does this mean?” Huanglong pointed at him and said, “This corpse-guarding ghost!” Lü Chunyang said, “But in my bag I have an elixir of immortality.” Huanglong said, “Even if you pass through eighty thousand kalpas, in the end you still come to nothing.” When Lü Chunyang heard this, he was greatly startled. He then sent his flying sword at Huanglong. Huanglong flicked it with his whisk, and the flying sword fell to the ground. Here “sword” is a play on “view”; when the sword fell, it signified that his view had been defeated. Lü Chunyang immediately knelt and asked for instruction. Huanglong said, “I will not ask about ‘in a half-sheng cauldron mountains and rivers are cooked.’ What is ‘in one grain of millet the world is hidden?’” At these words Lü Chunyang greatly awakened. What did he awaken to? He awakened to the mind without characteristics. This mind without characteristics is the root of becoming a Buddha and the foundation for realizing the great Way. This immense energy, without shape or characteristics, that can manifest the yang-spirit is the natural Buddha that never decays. One must not cling to forms, because they are reflections of the true mind and in the end will decay.

After Lü Chunyang suddenly awakened, he said: “I cast away the gourd and bag and smash the qin. From now on I no longer refine gold in water. Since meeting Huanglong, I have begun to realize that I had previously directed my efforts wrongly.” “Water” here means mercury, the medicine used in elixir-refining. Daoist elixir practice emphasizes taking kan to fill li. Water is the yin, named kan; the gold taken from it is the yang, named li. Taking kan to fill li means uniting yin and yang in order to refine the golden elixir of the yang-spirit’s great Way. “From now on I no longer refine gold in water” means: now I will no longer refine this thing. Patriarch Chunyang had recognized original nature—the mind without characteristics, the natural Buddha. It is originally and naturally so; it is not produced by contrived practice or refining. Sentient beings are simply deluded by external objects and do not recognize it. Once one recognizes it clearly, one no longer grasps at external objects. In our practice, the first thing is to understand the root of becoming a Buddha. If the direction is wrong, one misses by a thousand miles and has no hope of accomplishing the Way. It is like cooking rice: only rice can be cooked into a meal; if one cooks mud and sand, then however many days or tens of thousands of years one cooks them, they will never become rice. Therefore view is extremely important. What is the root? It is our one true Dharma realm—our original nature—not anything else, and it has nothing to do with refining qi or elixirs. Once one recognizes original nature, one has correct view.

After seeing nature, there should originally be no practice, no attainment, and no realization. Yet because one’s habits have not been exhausted, one still must practice. Why? Once one becomes a Buddha, even Buddha is unobtainable; what then could be attained? Since there is nothing to attain, what is there to realize? Since there is no attainment and no realization, one is originally Buddha rather than becoming Buddha through practice; hence no practice. Yet habits remain, so practice is still necessary. How does one practice? Through the practice of no-practice: constantly maintaining clear observation without imposing any fabricated

method of practice. After recognizing original nature, one understands that all the forms in the world are manifestations of this one true Dharma realm—the original nature. Therefore nature is appearance and appearance is nature; nature and appearance are not two. This is why Buddhism speaks of the Dharma-gate of nonduality. The Heart Sūtra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” These forms are manifestations of our one true Dharma realm—the essence that is marvelous presence, true emptiness. It is not that, when one says “form is emptiness,” form becomes a sheer nothingness. That would be wrong. Sheer nothingness would amount to inert emptiness and annihilationism, and that is not right.

Therefore when we say that all forms are empty, we mean that they have no intrinsic essence of their own and no self-nature; they are originally empty, that is, everything is unobtainable. There are several kinds of emptiness. Generally speaking, there is emptiness set over against existence, annihilationist emptiness, analytic true emptiness, and so forth. For ordinary beings, when something is present it is existence, and when it is absent that absence is called emptiness. Non-Buddhists hold to annihilationist emptiness, believing that after a person dies everything ends completely. The two vehicles understand analytic true emptiness: they divide form and mind into separate dharmas. Taking the five aggregates as an example, they treat form as a form-dharma and feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness as mind-dharmas. They then suppose that the body is useless in practicing the Way and should be discarded. But that is not so. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form; all forms, including our body, are the true mind. It is like a mirror: if a mirror could not manifest reflections, it would not be a mirror; it is called a mirror because it can manifest them. Our fundamental essence is marvelous presence, true emptiness. Marvelous presence means that it is fully endowed with the myriad dharmas; it is not an empty nothingness. Therefore it can manifest the reflected images of all things and function wondrously. If it could not manifest all things and function wondrously, it could not be called the nature of true emptiness.

Thus “form is emptiness and emptiness is form” means that all forms are manifested by the true mind—the nature of true emptiness—and are accomplished by the true mind. The nature of true emptiness, the true mind, has no form; it cannot be seen or touched. It has to be reflected and manifested through phenomena, through form. Stated in this way, the meaning is more thorough. Therefore there is the saying, “Phenomena are accomplished through principle; principle is revealed through phenomena.” “Phenomena are accomplished through principle” means that all things are accomplished through the essential principle. Where can this essential principle—our one true Dharma realm, without shape or image—be seen? It is seen in phenomena; it is revealed through things. Therefore it is said that principle is revealed through phenomena. For example, if we want to build an airplane, we first draw up a design, and then an engineer directs the workers to manufacture it according to that design. Once completed, the airplane takes to the sky. The airplane is a concrete thing, a phenomenon with form; its successful completion shows that the design plan and drawings were correct, and therefore it can fly. If the drawings, plan, data, and so forth were incorrect, the airplane would not be able to take off, or it would fall from the sky. The plan, drawings, and data constitute

the essential principle, while the airplane is the phenomenon. The airplane, as a phenomenon with form, is accomplished through the plan, drawings, and data: this is “phenomena are accomplished through principle.” The completed airplane proves that its plan, drawings, and data are correct: this is “principle is revealed through phenomena.” This is an analogy. Our true mind is without characteristics; its characterlessness is revealed through concrete phenomena. The mountains and rivers, great earth, men and women, old and young, sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, forests, and all the myriad transformations before us today are manifestations of our one true Dharma realm. Therefore seeing appearances is seeing nature; nature and appearances are not two.

The old masters said, “Verdant bamboo is entirely dharmakāya; luxuriant yellow flowers are nothing but prajñā.” Bamboo is an elegant thing. Su Dongpo wrote a clever poem about it: “Without bamboo, one becomes vulgar; without meat, one becomes thin. If you want to be neither vulgar nor thin, then every meal should have bamboo shoots fried with meat.” Bamboo shoots fried with meat taste very good; one is neither vulgar nor thin. This shows how elegant bamboo is. To see verdant bamboo is to see our dharma-nature body; to see luxuriant yellow flowers is to see our prajñā. Why say this? Because principle is revealed through phenomena. But does this mean that these things are entirely us, and that we are entirely these things? One must not say it that way.

Why not? In the past, Monk Dazhu said: if verdant bamboo were the dharma-nature body, then when we eat bamboo shoots, would we not be eating the dharmakāya? Suppose a bowl were your dharmakāya; if you smashed the bowl, would you also smash the dharmakāya? That is not right either. Then is the saying ultimately correct or not? It is correct, but one must understand it as “neither one nor two.” From the standpoint of characteristics, the dharma-nature body is without form or characteristics, whereas things bear characteristics; thus they are not identical. Yet nature does not depart from appearances, and appearances do not depart from nature. From the standpoint of nonseparation, they are not two but one and inseparable.

There are reflections in a mirror, and the reflections never leave the mirror. Can you take the reflections out of the mirror? You cannot. If you wrap the mirror in cloth, the cloth’s weave is reflected in it, and the image is still there. If you turn the mirror toward the ground, the things under it are still reflected in it. If you turn it toward the sky, the clouds, stars, sun, and moon in the sky are all reflected in it. There are always images in the mirror. Therefore, from the standpoint of nonseparation, the mirror is the image and the image is the mirror. Yet the image is still the image and the mirror is still the mirror. From the standpoint of characteristics, one bears characteristics while the other is without characteristics, so they are not identical. Therefore they are “neither one nor two.” This principle must be understood.

In the past, when Patriarch Dongshan was crossing a river, he lowered his head to roll up his trouser legs. Just then he saw his reflection in the water and suddenly awakened. He

composed a verse containing the marvelous lines: “He now is precisely me; I now am not him.” This proves that he had truly awakened to the Way. Here “he” does not mean a channel; it means “that one.” “He now is precisely me” means that the myriad images throughout the world are manifestations of our true mind; all these images are my self-nature. “I now am not him” means that I am not these images. This is neither identical nor separate: “not separate” means that the dharma-nature body is revealed without departing from these images; “not identical” means that these images are not simply me. Buddhist principles are stated very clearly, yet they are also profoundly subtle. Once we clearly understand these phenomena and Buddha-nature, we know how to realize the essence and bring forth function; otherwise, we remain confused. At first Chan Master Dahui Zonggao wondered: “Dongshan had awakened—why does he still speak of him and me? Once awakened, there should be neither other nor self.” Only after Dahui himself thoroughly awakened did he understand that the me-that-is-other and the other-that-is-me are both unobtainable. Yet within this unobtainability it is not that even a single illusory appearance is absent. All appearances remain undestroyed and are all the wondrous functioning of our true mind. Therefore we must understand these questions clearly.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says, “The nature of form is true emptiness; the nature of emptiness is true form.” This nature is marvelous presence whose essence is true emptiness. It is free of all attachments, unstained by a single speck of dust, and has not the slightest form. “If you say it is like a thing, you miss the mark.” This essence of true emptiness, endowed with all capacities, structures and manifests all things. In other words, this emptiness is not the emptiness of nothing at all; it is the true emptiness of marvelous presence. Because all forms without exception are manifested by the essential nature of true emptiness and marvelous presence, they are all functions arising from our self-nature. Apart from self-nature, there are no forms. Therefore all forms are self-nature, and self-nature is all forms.

Self-nature is without characteristics. It is a true emptiness that exists yet does not exist, and is not empty yet is empty. Forms are marvelous presence: not existent yet existent, empty yet not empty. All forms are originally no different from true emptiness, marvelous presence. Yet worldly people often cling to visible form as real, become deeply deluded by it, and are impossible to dislodge. Out of compassion for beings, the Buddha taught us to recognize the truth clearly and emphatically pointed out, “Form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form.” “Does not differ” means there is no difference.

Why is “the nature of form true emptiness, and the nature of emptiness true form”? Because the nature is empty, it can manifest forms. If the nature were not empty—if it had already become something real with color and form—then it could not manifest all appearances. Why? To give a simple example: only if this room is empty can tables, cabinets, and other things be moved in. Conversely, if the room is already packed full and no empty space remains, nothing else can be moved in. Thus, because the essential nature is true emptiness without characteristics, it can manifest all forms and display myriad wondrous appearances.

Precisely because self-nature is without characteristics and cannot be seen by the eyes, it is also called the wondrous essence. You cannot find it anywhere inside or outside the body. If you open the head, you cannot find it. If you dissect the body and cut open the heart, you cannot find it. It is neither in the brain nor in the heart. It leaves no trace at all and is utterly unobtainable. This means that the nature has no trace or sign and cannot be seen with the eyes. All formed objects before the eyes can be seen through the nature of seeing, but who can see this very nature of seeing itself? First, the eyes can see only things with form. Second, the eyes can see only what stands opposite them; what is not opposite the eyes cannot be seen. For example, can our eyes see our own eyes? Because they are not opposite the eyes, they cannot be seen. Self-nature is the absolute true mind, not something relative, so it cannot be seen with the eyes. If there were a seeing of it as an object, that would not be true seeing.

The nature has no trace or sign and cannot be seen by the eyes; therefore the nature is true emptiness. Although it is true emptiness, it can respond to conditions and give rise to function. That is to say, when it encounters an object, consciousness arises and distinguishes what this is and what that is. Therefore the nature is also marvelous presence, not inert emptiness. When the nature of seeing functions through the eyes to distinguish forms, those forms become manifest. For example, when we see a person, how do you know it is a person and not something else? How do you know whether it is male or female, Zhang San or Li Si? All of this depends on discriminations of consciousness, which allow that person's appearance to manifest. Since forms are manifested through the nature of seeing, forms are nature.

From this we can know that the six kinds of nature—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, tactile awareness, and knowing—function through the six faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, thereby manifesting all sensory phenomena—the six sense-objects. Therefore all forms and all phenomena are manifestations of the nature. Form cannot leave nature, and nature cannot leave form. Apart from nature there is no form; apart from form there is no nature. Someone may ask: taking the nature of seeing as an example, which comes first, form or seeing? We may analyze this. If one says seeing comes first and form comes afterward, then seeing should be before and form afterward. But without form, what could one see? How could it even be called “seeing”? It is called seeing only because there are forms, so one sees what this is and what that is. Without forms, how could seeing function? Conversely, if form came first and seeing afterward, then form would precede seeing. Yet without seeing, how could form become manifest? If no one saw it, even if form existed it would be as though it did not, and it could not manifest. Thus nature and appearance cannot be separated. What is true of the nature of seeing is also true of the corresponding functions of hearing, smelling, tasting, tactile awareness, and knowing. Since the fundamental essence of nature is empty, how could the fundamental essence of form differ from emptiness? Form and emptiness are therefore utterly without distinction: form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form.

We often say that Buddhism is the Dharma-gate of nonduality. This is exactly what it means: everything is nondual. It is one and yet two, two and yet one. If you say it is one, it is also two; if you say it is two, it is also one. They are originally one and inseparable; they cannot be divided apart. If you insist on discriminating, you enter a mistaken road. We have repeatedly used water and waves as an example. Water and waves are also one because both have wetness as their essence. Water is characterized by stillness, while waves are characterized by movement. When wind causes waves to arise from water, the characteristic changes from stillness to movement. The characteristic changes and they look different, but water and waves remain one and inseparable. Therefore it is one and two, two and one. The principle of mirror and reflections is the same.

No matter what material it is made of or what form it takes, so long as it is a mirror, it can manifest reflections. If it could not manifest reflections, it would not be a mirror. Because mirror and reflection cannot be separated, mirror is reflection and reflection is mirror; this is why it is called the Dharma-gate of nonduality. From birth onward, as soon as knowledge develops, we take the mountains, rivers, earth, and myriad things—the images manifested by nature—as truly existing and chase after reflections. We see and know only the reflections, without knowing that they are manifested through the mirror's luminous clarity and without recognizing that clarity. If we recognize the mirror's luminous clarity, we recognize Buddha-nature. Reflections come and go, arise and cease, while the mirror's luminous clarity remains present. When a cat comes, the mirror shows a cat; when a dog comes, it shows a dog. The reflected images come and go, arise and cease, but the mirror's luminous clarity does not change. Mountains, rivers, earth, and all phenomenal appearances are likewise reflections within the light of eternal quiescence. Thus we speak of seas becoming mulberry fields and mulberry fields becoming seas. Yunnan in China, for example, was once an ocean and has now become mountains and fields. Although these forms and the mirror-reflections just discussed are constantly changing—coming and going, arising and ceasing—the mirror's luminous clarity, like essential nature, neither arises nor ceases and is unmoving suchness. Without the mirror, reflections cannot appear; without reflections, it cannot be called a mirror.

This is to say, nature cannot leave forms, and forms cannot leave nature. Therefore nature is form, and form is nature. This principle is the Buddhist Dharma-gate of nonduality. To penetrate this point is apprehending Mind and seeing nature. Do not think that apprehending Mind and seeing nature is something impossibly difficult that only sages can realize.

Practitioners often become frightened by the four words “apprehend Mind and see nature.” They think it is too high to reach and not something modern people can do. Therefore, as soon as apprehending Mind and seeing nature is mentioned, they become as frightened as if speaking of a tiger and do not dare come near. They think that ordinary people like us cannot reach this state, and that the only way out is to rely on the Pure Land school, use the Dharma-gate of Buddha-recitation, and seek birth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. After reaching the Western Land, they say, one can hear the Buddha teach and then apprehend Mind and see nature. For ordinary good men and good women, this statement is perfectly true. In this

present Dharma-ending age, beings have dull faculties and heavy obstructions, and practice in the Sahā world is indeed difficult to bring to fruition. Yet even in the Dharma-ending age there is true Dharma, and people of superior capacity are not absent. One must not apply a single rule to everyone, relegate apprehending Mind and seeing nature to a remote realm reserved for sages, and shrink from taking it up as one's own.

But apprehending Mind and seeing nature is nowhere else. It is right before your eyes, in your ability to see, hear, act, and function. Turn the light inward in a single glance and recognize that this numinous knowing is your own Buddha-nature; then one's study and practice for this life are complete. All sentient beings can see and hear; therefore all sentient beings are Buddhas. This wisdom-nature, endowed with every capacity, does not decrease in ordinary beings or increase in sages. Since all sentient beings can see and hear and are complete with the Tathāgata's wisdom-nature, do not again relegate apprehending Mind and seeing nature to a remote realm reserved for sages, as though it were unreachable. You need only turn the light inward through these great functions of seeing, hearing, and so on, recognize who it is that sees and who it is that hears, affirm it directly, and give rise to no further doubt. Then protect and preserve it closely. Do not allow it to become stained by forms and objects; remain empty and numinous at all times. As soon as a thought arises, immediately notice it and see through it; just as it is about to attach to an object, immediately turn it back. By not following thoughts inwardly and not being moved by objects outwardly, how could you fail to completely realize bodhi?

Self-nature is the wondrous essence of true emptiness, without characteristics. Nature is empty and non-abiding, and forms are likewise empty and unobtainable; therefore there is no need to seek or to worry over gain and loss. The Diamond Sūtra says, "If one sees all marks as not marks, one sees the Tathāgata." Once one understands the truth that the nature of form is true emptiness, one no longer gets caught in visible forms or is controlled and shaken by them. One becomes one's own master rather than being fooled and controlled by servants; one does not abide in any marks or cling to things, but maintains clear observation continuously and closely. In this way one can enter the realization of apprehending Mind and seeing nature. All appearances are manifestations of self-nature; without self-nature there would be no appearances and nothing could be seen. It is through the nature of seeing that forms can be seen. Since seeing appearances is seeing nature, and appearances are manifested through the nature's functioning as seeing, appearance is nature and nature is appearance. Because nature is genuine and not false, forms are likewise genuine and not false. The Lotus Sūtra says, "These dharmas abide in their Dharma-position; worldly appearances constantly abide." All appearances in the world are manifested by nature; because nature is real, appearances are likewise not false and constantly abide—this is "the nature of emptiness is true form." Therefore it is said: when one is true, all is true; when one is false, all is false.

Someone asks: is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss ultimately true or false? The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is neither true nor false, yet both true and false—true and false at once.

If here you divide true from false, that is still the discrimination of the deluded mind. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is also manifested by Buddha-nature. From the standpoint of appearances, whatever is manifested by the nature belongs to the nature; the nature is true, and appearances are also true, so the Western Land is true. From the standpoint of essential nature, the nature is real and appearances are reflections. The Diamond Sūtra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” All such appearances are illusory reflections, so the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is false. Let us not indulge in deluded thinking and discrimination. Once one genuinely understands that nature and appearances are of one suchness and that form and emptiness are nondual, seeing appearances is seeing nature: one can penetrate all forms and see self-nature. Seeing nature is also seeing appearances; one can let wondrous function unfold from nature—spontaneous functioning, open and free; open and free in spontaneous functioning; luminous and at ease—and completely realize bodhi. Buddha-nature’s wondrous functioning is boundless. Thus Mahāmudrā says, “It manifests innumerable defiled and pure dharmas and embodies the principle that they are naturally equal.” Buddha-nature is fully endowed with everything and can manifest innumerable pure and defiled objects and appearances. All such objects and appearances are equal, because our original true mind is equal. Our mind and the minds of all Buddhas are equal and nondual: it is not diminished because we remain ordinary beings, nor increased because the Buddhas have attained sagehood. After understanding this, the mind has firm ground, and our Dharma practice is no longer confused or disordered. If one does not understand the principle of true mind, one chases outwardly, remains doubtful and unsettled, and receives no real benefit.

We study Buddhadharma in order to gain genuine benefit. Therefore Buddhadharma is a Dharma for settling the mind and realizing that benefit; it is not like non-Buddhist paths that seek something to obtain. Nowadays many people who study Buddhism want to develop spiritual powers and show them off before the crowd in order to display themselves. Ah! This is wrong. To use a mind of obtaining to practice a Dharma of nonattainment—is this not running counter to the Way? From the very beginning of practice, one must know that everything is unobtainable. Only our true mind—Buddha-nature—is real; all other dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. They are unobtainable and cannot be sought. When you restore the radiance of your own Buddha-nature, spiritual powers and wondrous functions manifest fully without being sought. But when they appear, you still must not cling to them. As soon as there is attachment, it becomes a nest, and you fall into it unable to free yourself. If your mind abides somewhere, Māra will take the opportunity to enter. In the future you will not accomplish Buddhahood; you may well become a demon instead. Be extremely careful! Originally, in studying Buddhism there is no practice, no attainment, and no realization. Yet within this process of no-practice, no-attainment, and no-realization, there are still certain traces and signs. As we discussed earlier, at the beginning of awakening one is like a young child, who must grow to adulthood before functioning fully. Within this maturation process, stages are unavoidable. How long the process takes depends on each person’s faculties, method of practice, and diligence or laziness. Initial awakening reaches

only the threshold of the dharmakāya; one has not yet entered it fully. One must therefore train diligently amid affairs and circumstances, eliminate habits completely, and continue advancing upward before Buddhahood is accomplished.

四、临济三玄三要 / IV. Linji's Three Mysteries and Three Essentials

According to the doctrinal schools, for us ordinary beings to become Buddhas requires passing through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. The Chan school does not speak this way. Patriarchal Chan is a perfect and sudden Dharma-gate: it speaks of no practice, no attainment, and no realization, and does not speak in terms of meditative absorption and liberation. Even so, it still proceeds in stages. The Linji school speaks of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. Chan Master Linji said, “Within one phrase are the Three Mysteries; within one Mystery are the Three Essentials.” This is the innermost purport of Linji’s realization. Because his practice was meticulous and he had personally traversed the path, he explained the progression of practice clearly and thoroughly from shallow to deep, from the first step to the last. He said, “Whenever one expounds the ancestral vehicle, one phrase must contain three gates of Mystery, and each gate of Mystery must contain three Essentials.” Linji gave three phrases. If one counted mechanically, three times three would make nine Mysteries, and three Essentials within each would make twenty-seven Essentials. But that is not what is meant. The three phrases explain three levels; only by examining them carefully can one understand the subtle progression from initial awakening to complete fulfillment. Yet through the ages, people have disputed which Three Mysteries and Three Essentials these are. Before clarifying the Three Mysteries, one must first know what Linji’s “one phrase” is. It is: “On this lump of red flesh there is a true person of no rank; it is the one now speaking and listening to the Dharma.” This phrase is the crucial overall key. Only after understanding it and recognizing the original face—the one true Dharma realm—can one speak of the Mysteries and Essentials, the course of practice. Otherwise it is like discussing military strategy on paper: empty talk is useless.

Our original face, the one true Dharma realm, is without practice, realization, or attainment. Recognizing this original face is only initial awakening. Since habits have not yet been removed, one cannot yet save oneself; one must still train the mind amid circumstances and continue advancing upward before one can walk hand in hand with the Buddhas and patriarchs. Therefore Linji divided this progressive course into the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. They describe three stages: first, initial awakening and establishment of the essential view; second, close protection and preservation, training amid circumstances, and removal of habits; third, bringing forth great capacity and function until original nature is completely realized.

The first phrase is the Mystery in the Phrase: “Look at the puppets performing on the stage; all their movements depend entirely on the puppeteer inside the booth.” This refers to first seeing the nature and recognizing original nature. Our body can move; our hands can work;

our feet can walk; our eyes can see; our ears can hear; and our mouth can speak. What is functioning in all these activities? If breathing stops, can this body still act or move? It cannot. Then what is moving? “All their movements depend entirely on the puppeteer inside the booth.” In a puppet show, someone below the stage pulls the strings; without that operator, the puppet cannot move. Who is this operator? It is the one true Dharma realm, our original nature. Recognizing this puller is initial awakening and recognition of original nature. But has one thereby accomplished the Way? No.

Linji said that a person who merely recognizes this phrase still cannot save themselves; rebirth in the six paths has not yet ended. Initial seeing of the nature reaches only the threshold of the dharmakāya, like a small child. Therefore Pure Land practitioners have criticized Chan precisely on this point, saying that Chan cannot yet end birth and death, whereas rebirth in the West is secure. It is true that Chan practitioners still have the delusions of thought and cannot yet end rebirth in the six paths or fragmentary birth-and-death. But whether one practices Chan or another school, awakening to what is original and seeing the nature is not enough. One must continue practicing, preserve it closely, and remove habitual tendencies. This is why Chan speaks of herding the ox. The ox-nature is wild: one must hold the nose-rope tightly and raise the whip high; whenever its wildness breaks out, one strikes it. In practice, this means maintaining vigilant awareness at every moment, carefully attending to the *huatou*, not allowing the mind to fall into deluded thought or be swayed by circumstances. Only through constant protection and preservation can habits be exhausted and birth and death ended.

How should one practice after awakening? This first phrase contains Three Essentials: Initial, Middle, and Upper. The Initial Essential is seeing the nature. After seeing what is original, one must understand without error, personally affirm it and take it up as one’s own, and no longer doubt. Hearing someone else say it and then becoming doubtful does not count. If one is half-believing and half-doubting, one’s footing is not firm. When one truly stands firm, even if Buddhas and patriarchs appeared in the world, one would not be shaken. This is not easy. Consider the case of Official Yu Xiu visiting Chan Master Ziyu. Yu Xiu asked, “What is Buddha?” Ziyu called, “Official!” Yu Xiu answered, “Yes!” Ziyu said, “This itself is; there is nothing else.” Yu Xiu understood and awakened. Later, however, Chan Master Yaoshan said, “Alas, Yu Xiu has been buried under Mount Ziyu.” When this reached Yu Xiu, he thought, “Perhaps what I awakened to was not it. Why does Yaoshan say Ziyu buried me? Was my awakening wrong?” Doubt arose; his footing was unsteady, and Yaoshan hooked him away with a single line.

Yu Xiu hurried to Yaoshan and said, “Great Monk, I hear that you say I was buried by Ziyu and that what I awakened to was not correct. Please instruct me.” Yaoshan laughed, thinking, “Sure enough, this man’s footing is unsteady; I cast the hook and he came.” He said, “All right. Ask, and I will answer.” Yu Xiu again asked, “What is Buddha?” Yaoshan, like Ziyu, called, “Official!” Yu Xiu answered, “Yes!” Yaoshan immediately asked, “What is it?” Yu Xiu turned the light inward to see: what is this? “Oh!” This time he awakened to the Way. The method was

still direct pointing, but the technique differed. One master directly told him; the other questioned him back. Because Yu Xiu asked what Buddha is, the reply could not be irrelevant, yet neither master explained Buddha-nature as this or that. Ziyu pointed directly to what had answered: “This itself is; there is nothing else.” Yaoshan asked, “What is it?”—who is it that answered me? This is Buddha. Thus Yu Xiu awakened.

It appears very simple, but everything depends on whether one’s footing is steady. If it is truly steady, direct telling also works. When Damei visited Mazu and asked, “What is Buddha?” Mazu replied, “Mind itself is Buddha.” Damei awakened and immediately returned home. Mazu later sent an attendant to test him: “Tell Damei that Mazu’s Buddhadharma has changed. It is no longer ‘mind itself is Buddha,’ but ‘neither mind nor Buddha.’ See how he responds.” The attendant went and told Damei. Damei said, “Bah! That old fellow is confusing people. Let him say ‘neither mind nor Buddha’; I only keep to ‘mind itself is Buddha.’” See how steady his footing was: he did not doubt in the slightest. Therefore when we truly see the Way, our footing is firm and we are not shaken. This initial apprehension of Mind is the Initial Essential of the first phrase.

The Middle Essential begins after awakening: one must protect and preserve at every moment, because one awakening is not the end and habits still remain. When the mind of a Buddha-recitation practitioner moves, one immediately takes up the Buddha-name; a mantra practitioner immediately resumes the mantra; a Chan practitioner immediately notices: fundamentally, nothing can be obtained. In Mahāmudrā, the moment the mind moves, one gives a sharp “Peh!” directly at it, shouting the deluded thought down on the spot. This is the supreme pith instruction for preservation in Mahāmudrā. Every practitioner must know how to preserve; this is the middle Essential. At the Upper Essential, once protection and preservation have matured, one must stop protecting; continuing to protect would be superfluous. One must let protection itself fall away and enter effortless functioning. Yet because one’s practice proficiency is not yet sufficient, letting it go all at once is not easy. One wishes to let it go but cannot yet do so; this is the Upper Essential of the first phrase. It shows that practice is a process. One awakening is not the end. There are, of course, cases of sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization in which everything is complete at once, but these are great bodhisattvas returning again, not what ordinary people can generally do. Even such bodhisattvas proceeded gradually in the past. We must understand the sweet and bitter parts of the process and practice diligently.

Therefore I often tell people that one awakening is not the end. One must move from the threshold of the dharmakāya into its proper position and then continue advancing upward. The second phrase is the Mystery in the Meaning: “How could wondrous understanding leave room for Asaṅga to ask? How could frothing bubbles bear the pivotal force that cuts off the stream?” Buddha-nature is without characteristics and is the source of the myriad dharmas. It can only be illuminated and recognized through the light of wisdom; it cannot be seen by the eyes. To understand that all the myriad differentiated phenomena of the world are reflections

manifested and brought forth by our wondrous nature—that nature is appearance, appearance is nature, nature and appearance are nondual, and wondrous function is boundless—is indeed marvelous. Yet so long as there are still marks to be apprehended and something that can be put into words, it is not the true marvel. Only when all luminosity and spiritual powers are gathered back into one’s own mind, with not the slightest abiding, not one dharma established, not a single thread of attachment remaining, and no words that can be spoken, is it truly marvelous. Thus the scripture says, “Whatever is put into words has no real meaning.” Understanding must reach what cannot be verbally understood, and the marvelous must reach what cannot be verbally called marvelous. At that point even Bodhisattva Asaṅga, so skilled in asking questions, has no way to open his mouth. “Frothing bubbles” refers to questions and answers arising in response to one another. However many questions and answers there are, however much one speaks of mysteries and marvels, they still belong to explanation and are only bubbles. How could even a vast mass of verbal bubbles bear the great capacity and great function that cuts off the many streams? Thus, “The matter beyond is not transmitted even by a thousand sages”: it cannot be reached by language or understood by thought. One must let go of everything, practice for oneself in actuality, genuinely realize this state, and illuminate and recognize it through wisdom.

This is the Mystery in the Meaning. “Meaning” is the great intent that arises from the luminous fundamental essence—the great meaning of the coming from the West. From meaning, words and phrases arise; without meaning, how could words be expressed? This is why, at a meeting, people ask, “What is your opinion? What do you mean?” Meaning is expressed as speech. What is the Initial Essential here? In the Upper Essential of the Mystery in the Phrase, one wanted to forget protection but could not yet do so. Here, after practicing for a long time, one can finally forget it: one forgets protecting and no longer protects. This is lighter and more joyful than the stage of protection, because while protection remains one is still carrying a burden. Even if ninety-nine pounds of a hundred-pound load have been dropped, one pound remains. When even protection is gone, one is truly entering the unconditioned and is naturally light and at ease. Yet although protection has been forgotten, it sometimes still resurfaces; the forgetting is not yet complete. This is the Initial Essential of the Mystery in the Meaning.

At the Middle Essential, one truly enters the proper position of the unconditioned. There is no inside or outside, no long or short, no blue or yellow; nothing whatsoever can be found, and not one dharma can be obtained. It is like the full mid-autumn moon shining directly overhead: it cannot be pushed away or pulled toward one. Every person has this luminous essence; it is not seen only because of inverted delusion and attachment. When these false things have been cleared away and are no longer present, as delusion is purified, clear radiance naturally manifests. At this Middle Essential, one is naturally filled with incomparable ease and joy as the luminosity shines clearly.

At the Upper Essential of the Mystery in the Meaning, even the unconditioned is unobtainable. At the Middle Essential, there is still an unconditioned present. Thus when practice reaches the seventh bodhisattva ground, one enters the unconditioned but still cannot forget the unconditioned; at the eighth ground, even the unconditioned is gone. Practice progresses layer by layer. At this point there is no longer any “practice” to speak of. What is practice? Ah—it is all gone. This is practice beyond deliberate effort, and its efficacy is immense: all traces of practice and of the unconditioned are blended away and completely dissolved, so there is no longer any so-called unconditioned. One does not seek spiritual powers or transformations, yet they arise of themselves. Having clarified two Mysteries and six Essentials, one can teach humans and devas. Therefore Linji said that one who recognizes this phrase can become a teacher of humans and devas. This is the Upper Essential.

Has one reached complete attainment at this point? Not yet. There remains the Mystery in the Essence, the final phrase: “When the seal of the Three Essentials opens, the vermilion point is still narrow; before deliberation can arise, host and guest are already distinct.” Originally there is only one phrase: our single quiescent mind, the one true Dharma realm. This one true Dharma realm is unfolded into three levels to indicate the subtle stages of practice, so that people do not speak vaguely of suchness and muddle through Buddha-nature, taking what has not been realized to be realized. The “vermilion point” is our true mind. “Narrow” means that at this stage the true mind is not yet broad in function and its wondrous activity is not yet great; it must still be trained at three crucial junctures.

What are these Three Essentials? They are not the Initial, Middle, and Upper Essentials discussed above, but the Three Essentials of body, speech, and mind. They are like the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind through which empowerment operates in Heart-Center esoteric practice. Whatever school one practices in, and whatever worldly undertaking one performs, none can be carried out apart from body, speech, and mind. The body manifests dignified bearing. When practice reaches a certain degree, one’s physical appearance and bearing also change; body and mind are endowed with dignity, and one becomes an example to others. One is not drooping, dull-eyed, and listless, but dignified, upright, and full of spirit. Practitioners must teach by example, especially in all conduct. Their food, clothing, dwelling, and daily life cannot simply follow worldly habits; they must strictly observe the precepts and embody dignified bearing, the bearing of a great person.

Therefore one must not look only at whether a person’s words are lofty or their tone elevated; one must look at the level of their conduct. If conduct is low and words are not carried out, that will not do. To speak a yard and practice only an inch is worse still. Not only practitioners, but worldly people too should make words and actions accord. This is the Dharma Realm of Nonobstruction Between Principle and Phenomena. Later, in the Dharma Realm of Nonobstruction Among Phenomena, everywhere and at every moment the body manifests dignity. The Mind Essential is the great intent issuing from the fundamental essence: how one will teach and transform different sentient beings. The Speech Essential is

responding according to the occasion when speaking and teaching Dharma. The Dharma has no fixed Dharma; medicine is given according to the illness. At first one is naturally unfamiliar. After gaining experience and becoming skilled in observing capacities, one can clearly see the conditions of sentient beings and teach precisely according to each occasion. These are the Three Essentials of body, speech, and mind.

Through this training, the vermilion point—our true mind—is opened like a seal, and vast, boundless wondrous function arises. A seal is like an official seal: once stamped, it authorizes the handling of the matter before it. The seal spoken of here is our mind; our mind itself is the seal. When mind reaches this point, great capacity and great function arise. There is nothing it does not know and no matter it cannot handle. This is the meaning of “When the seal of the Three Essentials opens, the vermilion point is still narrow.” “Before deliberation can arise, host and guest are already distinct” means that whatever comes before one is completely clear without the need to think or calculate. If one reaches this level of practice, one can become a teacher of Buddhas and patriarchs. This does not mean becoming the teacher of Amitābha or Śākyamuni, who have already become Buddhas. It means becoming a teacher for great persons who vow to become Buddhas and patriarchs in the future, guiding them onto the right road to realize the great Way and attain the fruition of Buddhahood.

At the Initial Essential of the Mystery in the Essence, the Upper Essential of the Mystery in the Meaning has already dissolved even the trace of the unconditioned. This is great functioning beyond deliberate effort; there is no further “practice” to speak of. One returns to the root and source, from the marvelous back to the plain. At the stage when luminosity shines overhead, corresponding to the eighth bodhisattva ground, spiritual powers and wondrous functions arise. Only by not abiding in them can one return from the marvelous to the plain. If one clings to them, one cannot return and will enter a demonic path. Therefore practice admits no attachment: everything is unobtainable and must return to nonattainment. As the Heart Sūtra says, “Because there is no attainment, one attains unsurpassed complete awakening.” If there is anything attained, it is spoiled. Thus one returns from the marvelous to the plain: unobtainable, unobtainable, everything unobtainable. This plainness is not a blankness in which nothing exists. It is like water—plain, plain, plain—yet within that plainness is the supreme flavor, an indescribable and unsurpassed taste. This is only an analogy, for there is no way to speak of it.

At the Middle Essential, one spends the whole day muddled and dull, as if foolish and stupid, doing nothing but putting on clothes and eating meals. Layman Pang’s daughter said, “It is neither easy nor hard: hungry, I eat; tired, I sleep.” The sayings of Layman Pang’s family are words of the Three Barriers. Layman Pang said of the Initial Barrier, “Difficult, difficult, difficult—spreading ten loads of sesame oil on a tree.” His wife said of the Multiple Barrier, “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the coming from the West is on the tips of a hundred grasses.” His daughter spoke of the Prison Barrier: “Neither easy nor hard; hungry, eat; tired, sleep.” Many people hear this and find it unsatisfying. They wonder whether all spiritual

powers have disappeared and one has become a fool. They prefer to hear about transformations and great wondrous functions. Hearing only of putting on clothes and eating, they say there is nothing there and find it lonely and tasteless. Only a person of great wisdom can understand it without doubt and delight in it. Such practice requires a true great person; it cannot be accomplished by people of little cleverness and shallow wisdom. At this Middle Essential, it is plain beyond speech. Yet it is neither conditioned nor unconditioned. In walking, standing, sitting, lying down, movement and stillness, encounters and responses, coming and going, there is vivid solitary clarity, like illumination shining directly overhead. It cannot be pushed away or pulled toward one, and there is not the slightest trace of continuity or interruption. In the Mystery in the Meaning the luminosity was like moonlight; here it has become as brilliant as sunlight. This is why it is said that illumination shines directly overhead.

What about the Upper Essential? Ah—it is even more beyond words. At this point, nothing can be said or put into words. When the World-Honored One saw that Mañjuśrī and Kāśyapa had struck the gavel, he descended from the seat. From ancient times, when Chan adepts reached this point, they brushed off their robes and returned to the abbot's quarters. At this stage even the sunlike radiance of one's illumination is no longer held as something present. A monk once asked Caoshan, "What about when the bright moon is directly overhead?" Caoshan said, "You are still a man below the steps." The monk said, "Please, Master, guide me up the steps." Caoshan said, "We shall meet when the moon has set." At the final point of practice, all traces are blended away and forgotten. Does this mean annihilating emptiness, a pitch-black state without luminosity? No. As said above, within tastelessness is the supreme flavor. Luminosity has not vanished; it is simply no longer noticed as something, seen as an object, or clung to. It has been thoroughly assimilated and forgotten, without the slightest trace.

五、大手印三要 / V. The Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā

At first, when we see luminosity, we feel that it is very bright. Once completely familiar with it, however, we no longer feel that we are "in luminosity." We live in air now—do we notice the air? Usually not. But if one is shut in a room cut off from air, one immediately feels suffocated and longs for air; only then is its presence noticed. After living in air for a long time, one no longer notices it. "We shall meet when the moon has set" means that one must not cling to luminosity. If this is still something one has, it is a nest. Even the slightest attachment prevents attainment of the fruition of Buddhahood. Therefore no spiritual power or transformation may be clung to; one should be as though nothing were there, as if foolish and dull. This does not mean that luminosity or spiritual powers have disappeared. They are present but no longer noticed or regarded as extraordinary, just as everyone can put on clothes and eat without treating these as marvels. When familiarity is complete and not the slightest trace remains, everything is blended away and forgotten. Esoteric practice is the same. At the end it is like the moon on the thirtieth night of the lunar month: no moon is seen. One has forgotten every light and abides in none of them; only then has the practice truly

reached completion. At that time, only the great wisdom of complete awakening—whole and complete—remains brilliantly clear; nothing else is established.

The great wisdom of complete awakening means that nothing stands as an object of awakening and no subject-object opposition remains. If an awakening subject and an object of awakening remain, things have gone wrong. Only when practice reaches this point is attainment complete. At this time one can gather all the myriad things of the universe back into oneself: all these things are me. Therefore Master Sengzhao said, “Who can gather the myriad things back into oneself? Only a sage!” Can only a sage do this? Yes. What ordinary person can know that all the myriad things are oneself? Only a sage can do so.

Speaking of this, I think of a public case. A monk asked Chan Master Dasui, “When the great trichiliocosm is destroyed, is the dharmakāya destroyed or not?” We know that the great trichiliocosm passes through the four stages of formation, abiding, decay, and emptiness. In the end it will certainly be destroyed. When the great trichiliocosm is destroyed, is the dharmakāya destroyed or not? We all know that the Buddha taught that the dharmakāya is a marvelous essence that is unborn and undying, does not come or go, does not move or shake, does not change or alter, and is evergreen through the ages. The questioner raised the issue: when the great trichiliocosm is destroyed, is the dharmakāya destroyed or not? If it were us, we would immediately answer, “The dharmakāya is not destroyed.” But to respond like that without examining the questioner’s intent would be wrong.

Why? In answering, one must follow the thread of the questioner’s words and drive the response into the heart of the question, making the words strike home; when thought can go no further, the questioner may suddenly turn back and see the original nature. If you do not drive the response home, the questioner cannot awaken. Do not explain principles to him; at such a time, explaining principles is useless. Therefore Chan speech is not a matter of explaining doctrine. It is a double-edged blade: one side kills you, the other side gives you life, enabling you to come alive from within death. Therefore Dasui answered him, “The dharmakāya is also destroyed.” Ah! Does this not contradict what the Buddha said? Did he not utter a mistaken statement and mislead people, thereby deserving to fall into the Vajra Hell? But if this statement were truly wrong, why did Chan Master Touzi Qing, a great Chan adept, light incense, bow, and praise him as an ancient Buddha appearing again?

The reason is that everything in what we call the world, whatever the particular thing, is a transformation and manifestation of the Buddha-nature of all sentient beings—that is, the dharmakāya. Apart from the dharmakāya there is nothing at all. Therefore the Lotus Sūtra says, “These dharmas abide in their Dharma-position; worldly appearances constantly abide.” This means that all things in the world without exception are established in dependence upon the dharmakāya. “This Dharma” refers to anything whatsoever; the “Dharma-position” is the one true Dharma realm—that is, our dharmakāya. “This Dharma abides in the Dharma-position” means that all things and events in the world are manifestations of the dharmakāya and are established in dependence upon the dharmakāya. Hence the appearances of the world

are precisely the dharmakāya, and the dharmakāya is precisely the appearances of the world. We know that phenomena are accomplished through principle and principle is revealed through phenomena; principle and phenomena cannot be separated. Thus the scripture says, “Nature and appearances are nondual; mind and objects are one and inseparable.” The appearances of the world are precisely what reveal our dharmakāya. An ancient said, “Amid the myriad phenomena, the body alone stands revealed.” Since mind—the dharmakāya—constantly abides and is indestructible, the appearances of the world naturally abide. On the surface, worldly appearances seem to change in an instant, as seas become mulberry fields. Yet the fundamental essence of things is not actually destroyed: what passes away here arises elsewhere, merely changing location.

In his Former Red Cliff Ode, Su Dongpo wrote: “Do you, sir, know the water and the moon? What passes away is like this, yet has never gone; what waxes and wanes is like that, yet in the end neither increases nor decreases. If one looks from the perspective of change, then heaven and earth cannot remain for even an instant; if one looks from the perspective of what does not change, then things and I are inexhaustible.” River water flows on without ceasing. Although it flows away, it has not vanished; the river continues endlessly. The moon waxes and wanes, appears clear or obscured. When it wanes, nothing is lost; when it is full, nothing is added. Through water and moon, Dongpo explained that the false appearances of the myriad things change while their actual essence remains unchanged. He further showed that people whose minds are constricted and who cling to false appearances see the world as seas turning into mulberry fields, changing from instant to instant. Open and wise people who recognize the true essence that is the same in things and sentient beings know that everything in heaven and earth constantly abides without change. A true awakened person is free and at ease in this way: horizontally picking up or vertically pointing, everything becomes a marvelous truth; whether speaking in reverse or straight on, every utterance is a wondrous blossom. Such marvelous flavor cannot be described by brush and ink. Therefore we must practice diligently, without laziness or delay, realize the great Way within this lifetime, and widely liberate sentient beings; only then will we be worthy of this life.

10.3 恒河大手印（第三讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Three)

The root verse says: “For the essential view, there is only the light of prajñā; by wisdom’s illuminating observation, one may discern and decide.” [View] In practice, the first priority is that the view be correct. We said earlier that only when the cause is correct will the result be correct; if the cause is incorrect, the result will inevitably go awry. View is the causal basis at the beginning of practice, so it must be correct. Especially at the present stage of the Dharma-ending age, where fish and dragons are mixed together, deviant dharmas flourish, and all kinds of crooked paths run unchecked, practitioners must have the Dharma-selecting eye and be able to distinguish true teachers, so as not to enter a wrong path and take a needless detour.

Regarding view, we have already said that because learners differ in capacity and knowledge, there are many kinds of view. Some people are generous, bold, and high-spirited; they can sacrifice themselves and benefit others, yet they are unwilling to study Buddhism. They think that being upright as a person, delighting in goodness, and practicing generosity is already the highest kind of person in the world. This is the view of the human and heavenly vehicles.

Some are self-righteous and pay no attention to the birth-and-death of others. As the saying goes, each person sweeps the snow before his own gate and need not care about frost on another's roof tiles. This is the Lesser Vehicle view of one-sided emptiness. Some see the suffering of others as their own suffering and, for the sake of rescuing others, rouse themselves to practice the Way. This is the view of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva. Others, having been steeped in Buddhist learning, know that all sentient beings possess the same undefiled wisdom-nature as the Buddhas; because they are deluded by external objects, they do not know it, but if they turn the light inward, they can restore original nature's luminosity and allow its wondrous functions to unfold. This is the Buddha-view of the Supreme Vehicle.

There are also people who seek dharmas outside mind and abide in spiritual powers. This is a heterodox view. In general, no matter what kind of view is being discussed, only a view grounded in great compassion and putting others before oneself is correct. Otherwise it is a deviant view. If one does not take great compassion as the basis, then no matter what Way one practices, one either falls into one-sided emptiness or abides in attachment to spiritual powers. One will certainly not realize the correct samādhi in which emptiness and compassion are mutually fused, and therefore one cannot perfectly accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood.

From this we can see that, if one is to choose correct view as the causal basis for studying Buddhism, one must use the great wisdom of *prajñā* to discern carefully; only then will one avoid error. Unfortunately, modern Buddhist students do not know what is correct. They all incline toward spiritual powers and think that possessing spiritual powers means possessing a great Dharma. They go off to learn this practice and that path, not realizing that practices and methods that wear a Buddhist label but are practiced apart from mind-nature are heterodox teachings. Their supposed spiritual powers come from possession by ghosts, spirits, demons, and strange beings; they are not genuine spiritual powers arising from one's own self-nature. Learning them is not only useless; it also carries the danger of entering demonic states.

There are also some fellow practitioners who have studied Buddhism for many years and should know that practicing from the mind-ground—the root—is the correct path. Yet because their greed has not been extinguished and they cling to spiritual powers, they too act as though under a spell, abandon the true Dharma, and follow those fraudulent demons and monsters, becoming accomplices in their wrongdoing. This is needless suffering brought on by their lack of *prajñā* wisdom and their incorrect views.

The root verse says: “Emptiness is inseparable from great compassion. Prajñā and bodhi are united in equipoise; therefore only the union of emptiness and compassion is correct samādhi.” [Samādhi] On the road of practice and realization there is another fork that must be known; otherwise one may mistakenly enter an “attainment of cessation” that falls into one-sided emptiness. Some people, when practicing, suppress thoughts so that they do not arise and sit there motionless, taking this as ultimate. Sitting in a dead-water pond, they turn into earth, wood, metal, or stone and fall into another form of birth-and-death rooted in sterile quiescence. This too is the fault of having no great compassion and not thinking of bringing forth its function to liberate beings.

As shown by Chan Master Wolun’s verse in the Platform Sutra: “Wolun has a skill; he can cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day.” This describes a practitioner who has taken a wrong road and cannot accomplish the Way. One must know that, although our dharmakāya is empty and without characteristics, its wondrous functioning is boundless; it is not lifeless stillness incapable of functioning. If one rigidly suppresses the mind so that not a single thought arises, one not only falls into the attainment of cessation but also has no way to realize the Dharma realm in its entirety. The original nature is empty because its emptiness embraces all phenomena; it is not a dead or inert emptiness devoid of appearances. Therefore it is not apart from great compassion and brings forth all kinds of wondrous functions that liberate beings.

Only when essence, appearance, and function are all present is the Dharma realm whole. Otherwise, if it is dead and unmoving, how could one perfect both merit and wisdom and realize the fruit of Buddhahood? Therefore, in practicing the Way, emptiness and wisdom must be mutually fused, and neither can be absent. What is called emptiness is wisdom: to recognize that everything is an image of one’s own mind, unobtainable and ungraspable, so that one thoroughly lets go and the mind is empty as if washed clean. What is called compassion is merit: great compassion gives rise to the great vow to liberate sentient beings widely, tirelessly performing all kinds of good deeds that benefit beings, yet without abiding. By accumulating merit in this way, one can realize the fruition of Buddhahood, in which wisdom and merit are both perfected.

Otherwise, if one develops wisdom without developing merit, one falls into the saying that “arhats receive meager offerings.” If one develops merit without developing wisdom, one falls into the incomplete reward of “an elephant hung with necklaces.” If in practicing the Way we can establish correct view, recognize that the original nature is the root of accomplishing the Way, and begin on the path where emptiness and compassion are practiced in union, then with diligent effort it will not take long to open up what is original and personally see Buddha-nature. Then one knows that each and every thing is a manifestation of my original nature; at all times and in all places, nothing is apart from the marvelous function of prajñā. All is one, and one is all. How then could there be distinctions among person, self, things, and sentient beings?

If there is the slightest attachment or the finest barrier, one will inevitably be deceived by phenomena or by an old monk's tongue, betray a flaw in word or deed, and lose freedom. A lay practitioner once went to visit Elder Xuyun. Elder Xuyun asked, "What practice are you doing?" The practitioner answered, "I observe the mind." Elder Xuyun asked, "Ah, have you observed your mind?" The practitioner could not answer. Elder Xuyun said, "You still need to practice diligently." In fact, it is very easy to answer. When asked whether you have observed it, answer, "I have."

Strictly speaking, one should not answer in this way, because true mind is without characteristics and cannot be seen by the eyes. Moreover, mind is utterly free from sense faculties and sense objects, a solitary luminosity shining alone, with no opposing subject and object. Yet when speaking with a great monk, one may as well throw oneself across the tiger's jaws and see how he bites. Elder Xuyun would certainly not let you pass. He would press further: "If you have observed it, where is the mind?" At that point, stretch out your palm and say, "Here it all is, laid out in the open."

This displays your true mind in full. True mind is not somewhere else; it is constantly radiating light right before you. What is difficult to answer? An ancient worthy said, "The Way cannot be departed from even for a moment; what can be departed from is not the Way." True mind has no characteristic of interruption or continuity, so it cannot be separated from. Because it cannot be separated from, one is constantly in samādhi, without entering or leaving.

If a samādhi has entering and leaving, it is not correct samādhi. A samādhi biased toward emptiness lacks great compassion and therefore is not correct samādhi; likewise, a samādhi with entering and leaving is not correct samādhi. Correct samādhi is neither biased toward emptiness nor subject to entering and leaving. What is great samādhi? It is not being deluded when facing objects. Whatever situation appears before you, you do not move in the slightest, just as the Confucian saying puts it: "Though Mount Tai collapses before one, one's expression does not change; though an elk suddenly appears at one's left, one's eyes do not blink."

Therefore in practicing the Dharma we must train in this way at every moment: hone ourselves amid turmoil, and train while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down and amid all dealings with people and affairs. Do not imitate either a samādhi biased toward emptiness or one that involves entering and leaving. Train instead in the correct samādhi in which emptiness and compassion are mutually fused. Training in correct samādhi is essential to practicing the Way.

The root verse says: "Those who possess correct view and correct samādhi accord with the sprouts from which Buddhas arise; this is the course of bodhisattva conduct. All the six pāramitās and myriad practices that benefit others are what make one a practitioner of good capacity." [Conduct] Once we possess correct view and correct samādhi, our practice will not enter bypaths and will more readily succeed. Therefore, in practicing the Way, one must have

correct view and correct samādhi. Without correct view and correct samādhi, everything is like boiling sand in hopes of making rice; it is impossible and cannot accomplish the Way.

“Accord with the sprouts from which Buddhas arise” means that when we have correct view and correct samādhi, the sprout of bodhi has emerged. In the future it will certainly grow strong, mature, and bear the fruit of Buddhahood. When the cause is correct, the result is correct; if the causal basis is not correct, the result will go awry. This is “the course of bodhisattva conduct”: the correct road of bodhisattva practice. To do this is to practice the bodhisattva path, and only then can one become a Buddha in the future.

The starting point of practice for us Mahāyāna practitioners is to benefit others, not to benefit ourselves. This is like a lifeguard at a swimming pool. To save someone who has fallen into the water, the lifeguard must first learn to swim and master lifesaving skills. If he has not first learned how to save others and jumps into the water, not only will he be unable to save them; he himself will drown first. Therefore in studying Buddhism we must study the Mahāyāna. We study Buddhism for the sake of rescuing sentient beings, not merely for ourselves. Merely seeking to end one’s own birth-and-death and be reborn in the West to enjoy blessings is not our aim.

Those who seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land must also go to the Western Pure Land and practice there until they accomplish the great Way, and afterward return to liberate beings; only then does it accord with the heart of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore in studying Buddhism, we must never, at any time or moment, be apart from sentient beings. Returning to this point: if we depart from sentient beings, we cannot become Buddhas. Why? Because apart from sentient beings, your wisdom and merit cannot become complete.

Have we not said that one must break the four kinds of delusion: delusions of view, delusions of thought, dust-and-sand delusions, and the delusion of ignorance? Dust-and-sand delusions are the subtle delusions that remain after the delusions of view and thought. They are the subtle seeds of afflictive habits, as numerous as grains of sand and as fine as dust. To break them and sweep them clean, one must train through liberating sentient beings. Why? Because the habits and habitual tendencies of sentient beings are all different. To liberate them, you must set aside your own preferences, accommodate them, and draw near to them before you can guide them into the gate.

To do this, you must first sweep your own habits away completely. Otherwise, if your own habits remain and you are arrogant and self-important, how can you accord with others? Therefore one of the bodhisattva’s four means of gathering beings is gathering through shared activity—working alongside others. Only when you work together with sentient beings can you draw them in. Every sentient being has a different character and temperament. When you can adapt to all of them and respond to each one’s capacity, your own subtle habits of subjective bias are exhausted, the scope of your mind expands, dust-and-sand delusions can be cut off, and wisdom can be perfected. Therefore dust-and-sand

delusions can be ended only through liberating sentient beings. Wisdom cannot be perfected apart from liberating sentient beings.

What about merit? If you do not work for others, how can merit be accumulated? You must serve others and make sacrifices for them. Śākyamuni Buddha sacrificed himself for others more than once. When sentient beings, because of the heaviness of collective karma, suffered famine and had no food to fill their hunger, Śākyamuni Buddha transformed into an enormous animal and descended from the sky so that everyone could eat. After they were full, he then taught them the Dharma, so that they received both the gift of food and the gift of Dharma, and were freed from famine and from the bitter sea of birth and death. What a great model of studying Buddhism and liberating beings this is!

Since we study Buddhism, we must sacrifice for sentient beings and serve sentient beings; only then can we accumulate merit. The Buddha is called “the Honored One Complete in the Two”: to become a Buddha, one must perfect both wisdom and merit. Therefore one depends on sentient beings in order to become a Buddha. Without sentient beings, you fundamentally cannot become a Buddha. Without sentient beings, at most you can become an arhat, and views about dharmas have still not been removed. Because dust-and-sand habits cannot be changed, wisdom is not complete and merit is still less complete. Therefore, if you can become a Buddha, you must also thank sentient beings. It is sentient beings who help you accomplish the Way. Without sentient beings, your habits cannot be changed, and there is no way to accumulate merit. You certainly cannot become a Buddha.

Thus it says: “All the six pāramitās and myriad practices that benefit others are what make one a practitioner of good capacity.” The six pāramitās and myriad practices are generosity, ethical discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom. First, generosity: giving to others. There is material giving, the giving of Dharma, the giving of fearlessness, and so on. Second, ethical discipline: upholding the precepts established by the Buddha. The most basic are the five precepts: not killing, not stealing, not sexual misconduct, not false speech, and not drinking alcohol. The purpose of maintaining precepts is to make the mind pure.

Third, patience. People all misunderstand patience, thinking that when someone scolds me or hits me, I just bear it and do not move. This will not do. If this goes on for a long time, one will become ill. What is patience? There is no insult to be endured. Patience is not mere endurance; it is acceptance, genuine inward acknowledgment and accord. The Diamond Sutra says: “No mark of self, no mark of person.” With no mark of self, who is scolding whom? With no mark of person, who is scolding me? Both sides are unobtainable and empty. If someone insults me, I fully accept it. With no self, his scolding is like wind blowing through a tree; once it has passed, it is over. With no mark of person and no mark of self, empty and unobtainable, this is patient acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas. Such patient acceptance means truly accepting the truth of the universe and human life: the entire great trichilocosm is an illusory appearance and fundamentally has neither arising nor ceasing. All things are manifestations of the wondrous functioning of our self-nature, and all arise through causes and conditions:

“Dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I say, are empty.” Being empty, not a single dharma can be obtained. Where is arising? Without arising, where is ceasing? Since nothing at all can be obtained, what is there to endure? Again, patience is not endurance. It is acceptance: when the mind is truly empty, fully accepting, and without contention, this is the practice of patience.

Fourth, diligence. To liberate sentient beings, one must accomplish the Way; without accomplishing the Way, how can one liberate beings? To accomplish the Way, one must be diligent. This is tireless diligence for liberating sentient beings, not for oneself. Fifth, meditative concentration. At all times and moments one practices meditative concentration; when facing objects, the mind does not shake and does not flow along with delusive thoughts. Sixth, great wisdom. Only with great wisdom can one, according to different circumstances and capacities, liberate sentient beings through skillful means. All these wholesome actions that benefit others are bodhisattva conduct; otherwise one is not a bodhisattva. Ganges Mahāmudrā is a great Dharma of Esoteric Buddhism. It does not speak of minor methods, and therefore it immediately speaks to the main point.

六、重在实修 / VI. The Emphasis Is on Actual Practice

The root verse says: “If one can again, in a quiet place, put down all affairs and conditions and practice diligently with single-minded focus, then in this very life, from the originally pure essence of mind, one will certainly gain correct liberation and ascend to Wondrous Enlightenment.” A practitioner who recognizes self-nature and can adapt even in a noisy environment can function freely and fully. Such a person need not practice any particular method; he simply trains amid sensory conditions, wearing away his habits. But some people cannot adapt, because their faculties are relatively weak. What should they do? There is a way: they can “again, in a quiet place, put down all affairs and conditions.” Find a quiet place, such as a tranquil mountain forest or a relatively quiet home environment. That is very good.

But even if you have a good place, you must put down all affairs and conditions. If you have a quiet place but your body is in a pure setting while your mind remains impure, it is still futile. Practice and accomplishment of the Way depend on the mind. If your mind is chaotic and full of random thoughts, that is equivalent to being in a busy marketplace, so it will not do. To accomplish the Way, you must put down all affairs and conditions. When you sit to practice, every matter must be put down before practice can truly begin. Therefore I often advise everyone: during formal sitting, be as though already dead; do not concern yourself with anything at all and do not continue thinking wildly.

You absolutely must not think: how should this matter be handled, how should that matter be arranged, how should I teach my son or daughter, and so on. If you keep thinking of these things when you sit, it is terrible. We should pay no attention to anything. Worst of all is continuing to worry about one’s children during formal sitting: “Ah! Amao, Agou, it is time; if you do not get up, you will be late. Hurry up, get up, get up!” Ah! If one’s mind is used for two

things and its power is scattered, how can one sit well? I have seen many such things. This is not made up out of thin air; I have truly heard and seen it. Ah! How could one meditate well like this?

Therefore when we sit, we cannot concern ourselves with anything at all. Just regard ourselves as dead and unable to manage so much. I emphasize again: when sitting, put down all affairs and conditions; regard yourself as dead and do not move. Only by doing this can you derive real benefit and attain correct samādhi. Otherwise, how can you attain samādhi? The mind cannot settle into samādhi. Therefore in practicing the Dharma, one must put down all affairs and conditions. If you cannot put them down, then even if there is a quiet place to go to, you should not go; going would be useless. Your mind is in a chaotic uproar; staying in a quiet place would be just like being on Nanjing Road, extraordinarily bustling.

Thus the key point of practice is truly being able to put things down. Only when you can put them down can you be single-minded and diligent. If you can truly put them down and practice single-mindedly, then no matter what Dharma you practice, you will quickly come into accord with your own mind. We often hear people say: “Ah, so-and-so was very quick! He did not sit much, yet he realized the original face. Why have I sat for so long and still do not have this state?” Ha ha! His mind could put things down and became pure, so he could swiftly realize. Your mind cannot put things down, is chaotic and confused, and cannot become pure; how could there be a state of direct realization? Of course there is none.

Therefore the length of time spent in practice is not the issue. The issue is whether your mind is pure or not, whether worldly entanglement has fallen away or not. To speak plainly: if worldly entanglement has truly fallen away, then not long after you sit down, you will peacefully enter samādhi; meditative lightness, serenity, and joy will naturally arise, and naturally great brightness will radiate. If your mind is not pure, how could any realized state arise? Of course they will not be there. Therefore, in practicing the Dharma, do not discuss whether the time is long or short. Look at whether your mind is pure and whether worldly entanglement has fallen away. This is the crucial point.

If one can truly let go of the ten thousand conditions and practice diligently with single-minded focus, then “in this very life, from the originally pure essence of mind, one will certainly gain correct liberation and ascend to Wondrous Enlightenment.” “In this very life” uses the character 生, “life.” Esoteric Buddhism speaks of becoming a Buddha in this very life: one is to become a Buddha in this lifetime. Some instead write 身, “body,” and say that this very body is to become a Buddha; Esoteric Buddhism also has such a way of speaking.

Last time we spoke of the Great Perfection and Great Perfect Supreme Wisdom. These Dharmas teach accomplishment in this very body. Mahāmudrā is the forerunner of the Great Perfection. The Great Perfection is divided into two sections: trekchö and tögal; one is direct severance, and the other is direct transcendence. Direct severance means cutting off all afflictions, delusive thoughts, and attachments immediately and decisively, so that the original

nature is clearly revealed. Direct transcendence means immediately transcending the three realms and becoming a Buddha. Mahāmudrā is a trekchö Dharma. It directly points you to cut off delusive thinking and see the nature right now, without using any method of practice. Later it will speak of accord with the three emptinesses; we will discuss that later and will not speak of it for now.

Therefore Mahāmudrā is a very profound esoteric Dharma that directly points you to accomplish the Way. In this lifetime, if we can put things down, we will certainly, within the originally pure essential nature, attain true great liberation. The originally pure essential nature means that our originally present wondrous nature is originally pure and without defilement. Why is it defiled now? Because of clinging to marks and pursuing objects, being deluded by external objects and not knowing what is original. In the past, ancient people had strong faculties and light attachments. Once a teacher pointed it out, they understood, could immediately take it up as their own, no longer became deluded, put objects down, and then protected the self-nature and removed delusive habits; they accomplished the Way very quickly. People today have duller faculties and heavier obstructions. Even if you speak until your throat breaks, they still cannot recognize it; they still cling to objects, so they must take many needless detours.

My teacher, Mr. Wang Xianglu, once said: “A Chan practitioner may investigate the phrase ‘Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?’ for thirty years without going astray before opening up what is original and personally seeing Buddha-nature. We practice the esoteric Dharma, and in three years we can open up and see the nature.” In terms of time, this is already ten times shorter than Chan, so it is already very swift. But from the standpoint of the original nature, even investigating Chan is unnecessary. Whether three years or thirty years, it is all a needless detour. Because everyone is originally Buddha, there is no need to investigate Chan here, nor to sit here practicing while reciting something like “ongbala...” Is this not like putting on shackles and a cangue, inventing trouble where there is none, and needlessly trapping oneself?

If you put everything down and recover the true Buddha of your self-nature, then when you wish to sleep, sleep; when you wish to sit, sit. How wonderful—free, uncontrived, and natural! As Layman Pang’s daughter Lingzhao said: “It is not difficult and not easy: when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep.” The original nature is this free, peaceful, and happy. Why cut flesh to patch a wound and seek affliction for oneself? Yet we must know that Lingzhao was speaking after penetrating the Prison Barrier. Without first penetrating the Initial and Multiple Barriers spoken of by Layman Pang and Madam Pang, one cannot do this. Although we are endowed with tathāgata Buddha-nature, our habits accumulated through many lives are deep. Without undergoing arduous training, those habits will not be removed and we will not obtain genuine benefit. Therefore we must still investigate Chan and sit in meditation, traveling the necessary detour through the Initial and Multiple Barriers.

Layman Pang said, “Difficult, difficult, difficult—spreading ten loads of sesame oil on a tree.” This describes breaking the Initial Barrier, the most difficult stage. When we first begin practicing, delusive thoughts fly in all directions, the mind cannot settle, and it is difficult to see the original nature—like trying to spread sesame oil over a tree. Madam Pang said, “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the coming from the West is on the tips of a hundred grasses.” This describes breaking the Multiple Barrier. Once through practice we recognize the original face, it becomes extremely easy: the original face is evident on the tips of all the grasses. “A hundred grasses” refers to the myriad things and affairs. What is there above their tips? Nothing at all. Is this not all empty and pure? There are many public cases like this.

In ancient times, Chan Master Chuanzi studied together with Yunyan and Daowu under Chan Master Yaoshan, and they had their awakening confirmed there. When he left Yaoshan, he said to his two Dharma brothers, Daowu and Yunyan: “In the future you should each occupy a place and establish Yaoshan’s lineage. I am coarse and unrestrained by nature, fond only of mountains and waters, delighting in my own ease; I cannot shoulder the great task of teaching and transforming sentient beings. Later, if you know where I am staying and encounter a sharp-witted Dharma teacher, direct one to me. I will transmit to him what I have gained in this life, to repay the kindness of the teacher.” He then went to the shore at Huating in Xiuzhou, floated in a small boat, ferried travelers back and forth, and lived according to conditions while awaiting the right recipient. Therefore people called him “Monk Boatman.”

Once, when Daowu went to Jingkou, he encountered Jiashan giving a Dharma talk. A monk asked, “What is the dharmakāya?” Jiashan said, “The dharmakāya is without characteristics.” The monk asked, “What is the Dharma-eye?” Jiashan said, “The Dharma-eye has no flaw.” Hearing this, Daowu could not help laughing. Jiashan came down from the seat, bowed, and asked humbly, “Great Master, there must have been something wrong in the answer I just gave, causing you to laugh. Where was I wrong? Please compassionately explain it.” Daowu said, “I will not tell you, but you may go to Huating and seek out Monk Boatman.” Jiashan asked, “What is this person like?” Daowu said, “Above him there is not a single roof tile; below him there is no place to plant an awl. If you go, it would be best to change your clothes.” Jiashan dismissed his assembly, changed his clothing, and went to Huating to visit Chuanzi.

As soon as Chuanzi saw him, he asked, “Dharma teacher, what monastery do you live in?” Jiashan answered, “As for a monastery, I do not abide; if one abides, it is not it.” Chuanzi asked, “Not it—what is it like?” Jiashan said, “Nothing before my eyes resembles it.” Chuanzi asked, “Where did you learn this?” Jiashan said, “It is not reached by ears and eyes.” Chuanzi said, “One phrase that hits the mark becomes a donkey-tethering stake for ten thousand kalpas.” Then he asked, “The fishing line hangs a thousand feet; the intent is in the deep pool. Three inches from the hook—why do you not speak?” Jiashan was just about to open his mouth—whack! Chuanzi struck him with the pole and knocked him into the water. Jiashan had just climbed back onto the boat when Chuanzi again said, “Speak! Speak!” Jiashan was just about to open his mouth—whack! He was hit into the water again.

At that moment Jiashan suddenly awakened and nodded three times. Chuanzi said, “Good, good, good. Come up!” Why? At that moment there was nothing in Jiashan’s mind; everything was empty and pure. It was empty and pure, yet not inert emptiness—numinous and unobscured, clear and distinct—so he could only nod. This is why Madam Pang said, “The meaning of the coming from the West is on the tips of a hundred grasses.” It is extremely easy: see nature without clinging to marks. Do not cling to marks, and it is very easy. Therefore we say that seeing the nature and awakening to the Way is not difficult. Do not cling to marks, and do not cling to great spiritual powers. Yet I often hear people say, “If this is awakening, why have I not developed great spiritual powers? Awakening should bring spiritual powers; without them, it is not awakening.” Ah! In practice we must understand the proper sequence. First recognize the original nature, take it up as one’s own, and protect it closely and continuously. When it is protected until the skin has entirely fallen away, nothing at all is abided in, and no circumstance can shake you, great luminosity will naturally blaze forth—not like the light of one or two suns, but like the light of hundreds of thousands of suns. Then the divine eye, divine ear, knowledge of others’ minds, recollection of past lives, and miraculous abilities will naturally function.

In fact, everyone is endowed with this great luminosity. As the Amitābha Sutra says: “That Buddha’s light is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction.” The two words “that Buddha” have a very broad scope. Do not narrow them and think that they refer only to Amitābha Buddha. “That Buddha” refers to everyone in the great assembly. It is that Buddha, not our physical body; the body is not Buddha, so do not misunderstand. To say there is a Buddha within the body is like saying a person lives within a house. That Buddha is “that Buddha”—all of you in the assembly. The luminosity of the original nature of all sentient beings is incomparable and immeasurable, shining clearly through the lands of the ten directions without obstruction. If you do not believe it, practice and see for yourselves.

Now that you are listening to Ganges Mahāmudrā, you must recognize that the numinous knowing at the point where this present thought breaks off is Buddha-nature. Only this is genuine; all other appearances are false—mere reflections of the true nature. Put everything down and, with complete and settled resolve, recite the Buddha’s name, recite mantras, and practice diligently. When the mind is truly empty, great luminosity will blaze forth, and in this very life one can gain true liberation and ascend to the stages of Equal and Wondrous Enlightenment. Whether one reaches these stages depends on how deeply and continuously one practices. If our practice is deep and continuous, it can be accomplished in this very life; if our practice is shallow, intermittent, lazy, and repeatedly postponed, one will still not accomplish the Way even when Maitreya descends. Even if we rely on the power of Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, we must still practice diligently. If one wishes for rebirth there while the mind remains attached to wife, wealth, children, and official status in the Saha world, the ancients called it “rowing while the boat remains tied to the mooring post.” The

boat cannot even move; how could one enter responsive communion with Amitābha, mind and Buddha becoming one and inseparable, and be reborn in the Western Pure Land? Therefore first of all, everything must be put down.

State Preceptor Yulin once said: “People who want to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss but cannot let go will not be born there.” If you cling to the Sahā world and cannot let go, then do not recite the Amitābha Sutra; it would be better to recite the Medicine Master Sutra and make offerings to Medicine Master Buddha. Medicine Master Buddha made great vows to protect people so that everything goes smoothly and to fulfill their private desires. If in this world you hope for wealth, he gives you wealth; if you hope for children, he gives you children; if you hope for high office, he gives you high office, satisfying people’s desires. When your private wishes are fulfilled, this causes bodhicitta to arise naturally in you: “Oh, everything I have obtained is the blessing of the Buddha. The Buddhadharma is truly inconceivable.” When you deeply thank the Buddha, you then resolve to study Buddhism and practice the Dharma so as to accomplish the Way. Therefore reciting Medicine Master Buddha and making offerings to Medicine Master Buddha has great benefit.

If you truly want to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, you must put down everything. To practice while attached to the Sahā world runs counter to the Way and is utterly wrong. Yet merely saying that one has let go while the mind has not let go, refusing to practice diligently and remaining lazy and lax while still hoping for rebirth there, is equally futile. It is like wanting to row to the opposite shore but refusing to pull hard on the oars. Therefore no matter what Dharma we practice, we still have to practice diligently. Without diligent practice, one cannot rely solely on the Buddha’s power to welcome and guide beings.

Actually, to be reborn in the West, it is not only buddha-recitation that can bring rebirth. Investigating Chan, holding mantras, reciting sutras, and making vows for rebirth can also lead to rebirth there. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not like ordinary people of the Sahā world with narrow minds, refusing to welcome and guide you because you did not practice Buddha-recitation. Rather, they arouse great loving-kindness without conditions; there is no one they do not welcome and guide and no being they do not save. No matter what sentient being it is, at the time of death the Buddhas and bodhisattvas treat all equally, releasing light to illuminate them and welcome and guide them to rebirth in the West. It is only because sentient beings have heavy obstructions that they cannot respond to it. Some, because the Buddha-light is intense, even fear it and flee, rushing into the lower realms. How pitiful and lamentable!

If one does not exert effort oneself and relies solely on the Buddha’s power to welcome and guide beings, one cannot be reborn, because the Buddha cannot drag us to the West. If he could, the Buddha would have dragged us all away long ago. How could we still be revolving in this five-turbidity world and suffering? The Buddha has three things he cannot do: he cannot transform another’s karma on that person’s behalf, he cannot make another person a Buddha, and he cannot liberate sentient beings who lack a karmic connection. If you want to

be born in the West and want to accomplish the Way, yet are unwilling to practice, there is truly nothing to say. Therefore an ancient worthy said: “Even if you take him by the arm, you cannot make him go; only when he himself assents can there be accord.” You yourselves must be willing to practice, everyone!

The root verse says: “But especially important is to make the body abide securely like Mount Sumeru, and to make the mind quiescent and clear, not pulled along by external objects; then one may practice anywhere.” This emphasizes that among view, samādhi, and conduct, the most important thing is to make the body abide securely like Mount Sumeru, unmoving. If you can remain seated, the mind settles; if the mind is not settled, you cannot remain seated. If the mind is unsettled and jumps like a monkey, you certainly cannot remain seated. Therefore we often ask: when sitting in meditation, can you remain unmoving? If not yet, pay attention and train gradually. Do not be impatient; with perseverance, continue sitting and slowly you will cease moving. We repeatedly emphasize that the mudrā must not be loosened. At the beginning, if the legs become so numb that it is truly unbearable, move them slightly, but do not fidget. Gradually even the legs should no longer move. Once formal sitting begins, do not move at all. Only then is it easy to enter samādhi; if you keep moving around during formal sitting, how could you enter samādhi?

Therefore those who hold prayer beads in their hands while reciting the Buddha’s name cannot settle in samādhi no matter how much they recite. Their mouths recite “Amitābha Buddha,” but their hands count the beads. Moving this way and that, however much they recite, they cannot enter samādhi. Add to that reciting the Buddha’s name while gossiping about others, and still less can they attain the buddha-recitation samādhi. Can Buddha-name recitation like this lead to birth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss? Could it really be that easy? Therefore Master Lianchi sighed: “Those who recite the Buddha’s name are many, but those born in the West are few. Why? Because the mind in buddha-recitation is not earnest and intense: though the mouth recites the Buddha’s name, the mind is full of wild thoughts; therefore one does not attain rebirth.” Master Hanshan also said: “If the mouth recites ‘Amitābha’ while the mind is scattered, even shouting until the throat breaks is still in vain.”

“Make the mind quiescent and clear, not pulled along by external objects; then one may practice anywhere.” When the body abides securely like Mount Sumeru and does not shake, and the mind becomes quiescent and clear like a cup of clear water without the slightest mud or sand, only then is it not disturbed or pulled by external objects. When the mind is truly quiescent and clear, no external circumstance can shake you, and you can practice anywhere, at any time. One who has truly attained great samādhi and whose mind is truly quiescent and clear can practice on Nanjing Road. Even with traffic and crowds surging, the mind does not move in the slightest. But people just beginning practice cannot do this, and so they need to find a quiet place to practice.

Therefore the verse above says to find a relatively quiet place, put down the ten thousand conditions, and practice. Later, one can practice at any time and anywhere. The ability to

practice anywhere requires time; it is not demanded that everyone immediately accomplish it. What is required now is that, in a quiet place, you can immediately put the mind down. If in a quiet place the mind cannot be put down, then what will you do in a noisy place?

No matter what Dharma you practice—Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, or Pure Land—the mind must be put down. Without doing this, how can one accomplish the Way? Never imitate some modern practitioners of Pure Land who say, “I do not need this. In any case, I rely on Amitābha Buddha’s other-power to welcome and guide me; I do not need self-power. We only need Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha. If we recite for ten breaths, Amitābha Buddha will pull us up to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.” Ah! This is misunderstanding the ten-recitation method.

The ten-recitation method uses breath to gather the mind. Using one breath, recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” Then take another breath, keep the mind unmoving, and recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” Continuing in this way for ten breaths trains the mind to remain gathered and unmoving, releases emotional attachment and craving, and supports rebirth in the Western Pure Land. They do not know that the ten-recitation method was specially established for people busy with worldly affairs who have no time to sit, using breath to gather the mind. After the mind is gathered and unmoving, one must maintain this state under clear observation, training amid daily affairs so that no matter what situation comes, the mind does not move. One cannot forget it as soon as one walks out the door. Therefore one must practice diligently. Without diligent practice, rebirth in the Pure Land is difficult to attain. It is not that one can be lazy, careless, and sloppy and still be born in the West.

The root verse continues: “Or if one cannot yet do this, but only directs the mind single-pointedly toward these three gates, one should not give rise to greed, anger, and delusion or engage in actions that create karmic obstructions; in future lives one will thereby turn from suffering to happiness.” If a person practicing Dharma has weak faculties and cannot yet practice single-mindedly within the three gates of view, samādhi, and conduct, then at least that person should not give rise to greed, anger, and delusion or create various forms of unwholesome karma. Greed, anger, and delusion are the three poisons, and the unwholesome karma we create all comes from them. If there is no greed, if you are content and always happy, you will not do bad things. If you are not content and are insatiably greedy, wanting more when you already have much and wanting better when things are already good, your mind will never become pure, and it is impossible to avoid creating evil karma, because you are always greedy and insatiable, single-mindedly wishing to take what belongs to others for yourself. To achieve your aims, you will stop at nothing, even scheming for wealth and taking life.

Anger is hatred. When people or affairs do not accord with one’s wishes or one’s intent, one hates others and afflictions come. Greed and anger both originate in delusion, because one lacks wisdom, does not recognize the fundamental essence of true nature, and takes false

appearances—mere images—as real. This is called delusion. Because of delusion, one does not know that everything in the world is false, does not know that all things and events are empty and unobtainable, all born from causes and conditions and all without intrinsic essence of their own. Therefore one has greed and anger. Thus delusion is the root. Lack of wisdom is ignorance: without wisdom and without light, everything is dark and obscure.

Greed, anger, and delusion, the three poisons, are the worst things. They are poisons and unwholesome karma in the mind. The three unwholesome bodily actions are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; the four unwholesome acts of speech are divisive speech, harsh speech, frivolous speech, and false speech. Among the ten unwholesome actions, greed, anger, and delusion are the worst and are the root of our suffering. Overcome these three, and the other seven will naturally change accordingly. Therefore, even if we cannot practice the three gates of view, samādhi, and conduct single-mindedly as described above, we still should not give rise to greed, anger, and delusion. These three poisons are great toxins and great obstacles to Buddhahood. If we wish to leave birth-and-death, become Buddhas, and liberate sentient beings, we must remove them. If these three evils cannot be removed, then one is finished and cannot become a Buddha.

If we can remove the three poisons—not being greedy, not being angry, and not being deluded—then even if we cannot single-mindedly practice view, samādhi, and conduct and accomplish the great Way, in future lives we can still turn suffering into happiness and will not go to bad places. That is to say, in the future we can be born in the three fortunate destinies and will not fall into the three lower realms. Chan practitioners must make great vows to preserve human birth: they must become Buddhas, liberate sentient beings, and attain accomplishment. When the vow is vast, it protects one from losing human birth. Life after life one will be born human, with deep and strong faculties; once reborn, one will be able to continue the practice; upon hearing one point, one can awaken to a thousand. Chan practice has this benefit. Mahāmudrā is the same as Chan: if we direct our minds toward the three gates but our practice of view, samādhi, and conduct remains inadequate, then we should still not give rise to greed, anger, and delusion or create various forms of unwholesome karma. In future lives, we can then turn suffering into happiness and will not go to the three lower realms.

七、直指自心实际 / VII. Directly Pointing to the Actual Reality of One's Own Mind

The root verse says: “These three essentials—view, samādhi, and conduct—are the lifeblood for cutting through delusion; they are the Dharma-gate that directly points to the actual reality of one's own mind.” The three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are the lifeblood for cutting through delusion. We ordinary beings have delusions of view, delusions of thought, dust-and-sand delusions, and so on. Delusions of view mean lacking right knowledge and right view, and being deluded by external marks.

At present, many people studying Buddhism hold confused views. They do not know what Buddha-nature is, and their feet are not firmly planted. For example, someone who has already resolved to study the Buddhadharma hears that a heterodox qigong practitioner has formidable spiritual powers, and then thinks, “Ah, I should go practice qigong instead.” He stops practicing the Buddhadharma and turns to heterodox teachings. I will tell you a real example. On a certain mountain, a young monk served as an administrator at the Buddhist academy there. When he heard that a certain qigong master had spiritual powers, he abandoned Buddhist practice and took up qigong in pursuit of special abilities, following a heterodox path. This is what it means to be deluded by spiritual powers.

This kind of delusion arises because we are not deeply earnest in studying Buddhism and because our view, samādhi, and conduct are not sound. View is the foremost matter in practicing the Dharma and studying the Way. If one’s view is incorrect, one will inevitably become deluded in practice and go astray. Delusion in one’s view is a great enemy of practice. Therefore, in studying Buddhism, one must first establish right view and eliminate delusions of view; only then can one eliminate delusions of thought.

What are delusions of thought? They are the various clinging thoughts that arise when the mind responds to circumstances. All these delusions arise from incorrect view. Once view is correct and delusions of view are ended, delusions of thought can also be ended; only then can one establish firm footing and avoid following heterodox paths. No matter how great the spiritual powers of heterodox practitioners are, if they do not attain the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows and do not recognize Buddha-nature, they definitely cannot end birth-and-death. Ours is a mind-ground Dharma-gate: by recognizing Buddha-nature, we can end birth-and-death.

Consider the meeting between Patriarch Lü Chunyang and Patriarch Huanglong. At the time, Lü Chunyang had already perfected the yang-spirit, but Huanglong said, “You corpse-guarding ghost.” Lü Chunyang said, “Ha ha! In my pouch is an elixir of immortality.” This “elixir in the pouch” admits two explanations. One is an external elixir: a golden elixir refined and kept in an actual pouch. The other takes the “pouch” to be the stinking skin-bag—the body—in which the golden elixir has been refined. Once the golden elixir is perfected, it is the elixir of immortality, so there is no need to guard this bodily shell.

Patriarch Huanglong said, “Hah! Even if you pass through eighty thousand kalpas, in the end you still come to nothing.” Even if you could live for eighty thousand great kalpas, in the end it would still come to nothing. Because you do not recognize Buddha-nature, what use are spiritual powers? You cling to marks and take this yang-spirit to be real. In fact this yang-spirit is also false—a dream, illusion, bubble, and shadow, merely an illusory body manifested through the wondrous function of our true mind. For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and the body manifested by Amitābha Buddha are both mind-made bodies of Amitābha Buddha.

A mind-made body is not limited to a physical body; all realms and phenomena are mind-made bodies. Thus mountains, rivers, and the great earth are also our mind-made body. We fail to recognize this and separate them from ourselves, taking only this physical body to be “me” and taking mountains, rivers, and the great earth to be “not me.” Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are composed of earth, water, fire, and wind, and our body is composed of the same four elements. Our Buddha-nature can be great or small: “so great that nothing lies outside it, so small that nothing lies within it”; “released, it fills the six directions; gathered, it withdraws and is hidden in the most secret place.” Ignorance has constricted it, confining it within the bounds of this body, so that we fail to recognize mountains, rivers, and the great earth as also our mind-made body. Yet this mind-made body too is false. Amitābha Buddha will eventually relinquish his position, and the Land of Ultimate Bliss will change. When Amitābha relinquishes that position, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will succeed him. Avalokiteśvara’s world will no longer be called the Land of Ultimate Bliss; it will be another world, even more beautiful and adorned than Amitābha’s present world. Why? Avalokiteśvara turns the vessel of compassion back toward beings; he is an ancient Buddha who returns to become a Buddha again. This is like a magical display put on for you. Do not take it as ultimately real; once you do, everything goes wrong.

If one is taken as true, all are true; if one is taken as false, all are false. If you say this Sahā world is false, then the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is also false. If you say the Land of Ultimate Bliss is true, then the Sahā world is also true. In fact, they are neither true nor false, both true and false, at once true and false. Dividing them into true and false is the work of your discriminating, delusive mind; in reality no such distinction exists. Therefore after understanding this principle, your mind no longer abides in marks. If you do not understand this principle, you keep abiding in marks and discriminating: “The Western world is beautiful, so it is true; the Sahā world is ugly, so it is false.” In fact all this is the fault of lacking right view and being deluded by circumstances.

We ordinary beings are all deluded by circumstances. Therefore, when Śākyamuni Buddha saw the morning star on the night of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month and awakened to the Way, he said: “All sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata. Why do they not know it themselves? Because they are obscured by delusive thinking, inversion, and attachment.” They do not know and are therefore deluded. Therefore to accomplish the Way, we must cut off the root of delusion. To cut delusion off at the root, one’s view must first be right. This is of foremost importance.

Once view is correct, diligently practice correct samādhi. Train at every moment: the body unmoving like Mount Sumeru, the mind still like settled water without a ripple. Enter deeply into meditative absorption, awaken wisdom, and realize the original nature. After recognizing the original nature, one must diligently maintain clear observation and protect and sustain it continuously: outwardly not being pulled by circumstances and inwardly not being carried along by thoughts, not clinging to marks or abiding in circumstances, training the mind amid

circumstances and exhausting habitual tendencies. Then true mind shines with great light, illuminating the ten directions. All delusive mind, delusive thinking, and delusive thoughts are transformed into the marvelous function of Buddha-nature. At every time and place, everything is the manifestation and functioning of our Buddha-nature. Whatever is done, at every time and place, is for the benefit of everyone, not for oneself. This is the wondrous conduct of prajñā.

Therefore view, samādhi, and conduct are called the three secret essentials of Mahāmudrā. They are also the essential principles for practicing every Dharma-gate. They are the lifeblood for cutting through delusion and the Dharma-gate that directly points to the actual reality of one's own mind. Ganges Mahāmudrā is a direct-pointing method within the complete and sudden teaching. It points us directly, here and now, to see the wondrous bright fundamental essence—the wondrous bright true mind—that is without practice, without adjustment, and without distraction; it is the fundamental Dharma-gate through which the great Way is accomplished.

When we practice the Heart-Center Dharma, we still need to form mudrās and hold the mantra single-mindedly. Chan practice still requires arousing a great doubt-sensation. In buddha-recitation, one must also gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession before one can accomplish the Way. Speaking this way, it seems that to accomplish the Way one must pass through a process of practice and realization, and that this is not as lofty and subtle as Mahāmudrā. But one must know: although the fundamental teaching of Mahāmudrā is that there is nothing at all to practice, and that it simply points you to recognize your own wondrous bright true mind, this is because Buddha-nature is unborn and undying, does not come and does not go, is unmoving and unshaken, neither defiled nor pure, and neither increases nor decreases. What is there to practice? Buddha-nature has no distraction, so what is there to set in order? Therefore it is without practice, without adjustment, and without distraction. From this standpoint, all such practice is a needless detour.

But without doing any practice, can you recognize that this thought-free numinous knowing is your own original nature and thereby accomplish the Way? You must know that Mahāmudrā is the culminating method of the Kagyü school. Yet at the outset, one must still pass through a period of hard training before entering the level of Mahāmudrā practice. Therefore if we want to open up what is original, realize the original nature, and accomplish the great Way, we must still practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly, arouse a great doubt-sensation, recite the mantra continuously and apply ourselves to the practice, without the slightest slackening!

10.4 恒河大手印（第四讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Four)

Although we are discussing Mahāmudrā as taught in Esoteric Buddhism, we do not divide the teaching along sectarian lines; we discuss Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism together. In fact, Mahāmudrā and Chan speak with one voice. Both directly point to mind-nature and

teach people to become buddhas here and now, so that they need not take needless detours. This is a complete-and-sudden Dharma-gate. But after several talks, people still do not fully understand “form” and “emptiness.” Last time someone asked whether this “emptiness” is an emptiness apart from form. For example, there is a house here, with so many men and women, old and young, gathered together. Does emptiness mean leaving behind the house and everyone here, so that no appearances remain? No. That misunderstands the meaning of form and emptiness.

We therefore need to understand clearly what form and emptiness mean. Once we understand the purport of Mahāmudrā, practice can proceed more smoothly; otherwise we cannot avoid needless detours. So what exactly is form, and what is emptiness? I once cited the gong’an in which Chan Master Bhadra questioned Dharma Master Daosheng; today we may as well take it up again. At the time, Dharma Master Daosheng’s name resounded throughout the country, and he was celebrated in the saying, “When Master Daosheng expounded the Dharma, even stubborn stones nodded.” Chan Master Bhadra came to see him and asked, “Great Master, at your age you are still lecturing on the sūtras. Which sūtra are you teaching?” Daosheng replied, “I teach the Prajñā Sūtra.”

We know that the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra comprises six hundred fascicles and is devoted to explaining form and emptiness. Its abridgment is the Diamond Sūtra, and the Diamond Sūtra’s abridgment is the Heart Sūtra. The Heart Sūtra says, “Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form is precisely emptiness; emptiness is precisely form.” This explains the meaning of form and emptiness. Chan Master Bhadra asked, “Then please tell me: what is meant by form?”—that is, what is form? Master Daosheng replied, “The aggregation of many motes is called form.”

“Many motes” refers to the “dust-motes in a great trichiliocosm” mentioned in the Buddha’s question to Subhūti in the Diamond Sūtra. This entire world is formed from aggregates of dust-motes. The houses we now see are likewise aggregates of dust-motes. How so? Bricks, tiles, timber, steel bars, and cement are all aggregations of such motes. Are bricks and tiles not made from clay? Clay is shaped into blanks and fired in a kiln to make them. What about timber? It comes from large trees. And where do large trees come from? A tree grows as its seed draws nourishment from the soil and receives sunlight, gradually taking shape through the gathering of conditions. Everything is compounded in this way: it is an aggregation of many motes. No particular thing exists in and of itself. None exists independently in its own right; each is simply an aggregation of many motes.

Chan Master Bhadra then asked, “Then what is meant by emptiness?” Master Daosheng replied, “That the many motes lack self-nature is called emptiness.” In other words, even the dust-motes have no independent existence; they too are composed of other factors. Modern scientists say that all matter is composed of chemical elements—for example, water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen. Chemical elements are made up of atoms; atoms are made up of nuclei and electrons; and nuclei and electrons are composed of still smaller elementary

particles. Yet even elementary particles are not truly “elementary”: they are composed of subtler things. Analysis proceeds all the way to wave-particle duality—like a wave and like a particle, yet neither simply a wave nor simply a particle. In fact, Buddhist scriptures long ago spoke of the “ultimate particle” (*paramāṇu*), also called the “mote bordering on space.”

At this point, people may understand it this way: before things are combined, there is nothing at all, and that is emptiness. In other words, “The aggregation of many motes is form; before the motes aggregate, there is emptiness.” But this is not what Buddhism means by “emptiness.” Master Daosheng did not say, “The aggregation of many motes is form, and before the motes aggregate there is emptiness.” What he said was very good: “That the many motes lack self-nature is emptiness.” The motes themselves do not exist independently in their own right—that is, they lack self-nature. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. This is not an emptiness understood as sheer nonexistence; sheer nonexistence is annihilationist emptiness.

The “emptiness” spoken of by Master Daosheng is the emptiness of self-nature—our original nature itself. All phenomenal forms are manifestations of our original nature. Our original nature is Buddha-nature, the basis of all phenomenal forms. Why is it called “Buddha-nature” rather than “Dharma-nature”? What is the difference? Dharma-nature is the basis of all dharmas. Everything—every thing and event, including our thoughts—is called a dharma. In Buddhist scriptures, dharma has a very broad scope. All things, all events, and even our thoughts are produced by our numinous, luminous true nature and are manifestations of its wondrous functioning. Our numinous, luminous true nature is the basis of all dharmas; hence it is called “Dharma-nature.”

Buddha-nature is the basis for buddhahood. When we clear away all false thoughts, cut through ignorance completely, and recover our original face, the wondrous functioning of our numinous, luminous true nature is fully present. The three bodies and four wisdoms are fully present: that is buddhahood. There is no separate Buddha to be attained. Our numinous, luminous true nature is the basis for buddhahood; hence it is called “Buddha-nature.” Buddha-nature and Dharma-nature both refer to the one true Dharma realm—our numinous, luminous true nature. Thus this numinous, luminous true nature is the basis of all buddhas and the source of all dharmas.

“Form” is “emptiness.” All forms are manifested by our numinous, luminous true mind. All phenomenal forms are none other than our numinous, luminous true mind, and this true mind is none other than all phenomenal forms. It is not that one leaves all phenomenal forms behind to seek emptiness. That would be sheer nonexistence mistaken for emptiness, and it would be wrong. Thus Master Daosheng said, “The aggregation of many motes is form; that the many motes lack self-nature is emptiness.” He did not say, “Before the motes aggregate, there is emptiness.” At this point Chan Master Bhadra pressed him further: “What about before the many motes have aggregated?”

Master Daosheng had said, “The aggregation of many motes is form.” But did this account exhaust what form is? He had not reached the root. In truth, form is our self-nature, for without self-nature no form could manifest. Master Daosheng said, “The aggregation of many motes is form.” Then what about before the motes have aggregated? What is there before they gather? Master Daosheng was at a loss—at this point he could not answer. This shows that his understanding of form and emptiness was not yet ultimate. In fact, answering this question is very easy. Asked, “What about before the many motes have aggregated?” one may reply, “At midnight the sun is blazing red!” Midnight is the third watch of the night, yet at the third watch the sun blazes red—“At midnight the sun is blazing red.”

There is another way to answer. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra already gives us the phrase: “The nature of form is true emptiness.” Here, “the nature of form” refers to form as the display of our true mind—marvelous presence, true emptiness. This true emptiness is not inert emptiness. But does “the nature of form” mean that the nature itself has form? Have we perhaps spoken incorrectly? We know that Exoteric Buddhism teaches that this “true mind of marvelous presence”—Buddha-nature—has not the slightest characteristic; it is without characteristics. Esoteric Buddhism, however, speaks of subtle appearances and exquisitely subtle forms. Likewise, it would not be correct to say that the four heavens of the formless realm have absolutely no form at all; extremely subtle form remains.

Thus Esoteric and Exoteric Buddhism describe this somewhat differently. But this form is not coarse; it is refined, subtle, and extremely subtle. “The nature of form is true emptiness”—why is it true emptiness? Because it pervades all space and the entire Dharma realm; it is everywhere. Thus space is it and it is space: they are not two things. Master Daosheng had not truly understood the meaning of form and emptiness. Even so, when he said, “The aggregation of many motes is form, and that the many motes lack self-nature is emptiness,” he went one step beyond the notion that emptiness is found by leaving appearances behind. He did not speak of sheer nonexistence. He said that the many motes have no self-nature, just as a house does not exist independently in its own right, but is formed through the combination of steel bars, cement, bricks, and tiles. A sofa likewise does not exist independently in its own right; it is formed through the combination of springs, wooden boards, leather, and other materials. No thing has an independent essence of its own. Thus lacking self-nature is called emptiness; emptiness does not mean that appearances are absent.

Some people say that if it is empty, there should be no appearances, and that if appearances are present, it is not empty. This is a misunderstanding. The emptiness we speak of is “marvelous presence, true emptiness.” In other words, all phenomenal forms are manifestations of our self-nature. Without this nature—that is, without our numinous, luminous true mind—there would be no mountains and rivers, great earth, sun, moon, stars, men and women, old and young. Their present manifestation is the display of this numinous, luminous true mind.

Why explain this principle? The purpose is to help everyone understand that these phenomenal forms are none other than our true mind. Do not seek true mind apart from appearances; if you seek it apart from appearances, you will not find it. Buddha-nature is said to have boundless wondrous functioning because it manifests appearances in their infinite variety and its wondrous functioning is boundless. Once you understand this truth, do not seize upon or cling to marks. Let every appearance manifest unobstructedly, and it becomes easier to see true mind and fully realize buddhahood. Without knowing where mind is, one has no point of application in practice.

For example, if you recite the Buddha's name without knowing the essential point of Buddha-recitation, you recite "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha..." while seeking a buddha outside the mind—seeking the Buddha of the Land of Ultimate Bliss, ten trillion buddha-lands beyond the Sahā world—without realizing that your mind is Buddha and Buddha is your mind. Buddha is nowhere else; Buddha is right in your own mind. There is no need to seek elsewhere. Thus when Chan Master Bhadra questioned Master Daosheng about the meaning of form and emptiness, Daosheng's answer was not correct.

Chan Master Bhadra then asked, "Besides the Prajñā Sūtra, what other sūtra do you teach?" Master Daosheng replied, "I also teach the Nirvāṇa Sūtra." Master Bhadra asked, "What is the meaning of nirvāṇa?" Master Daosheng replied, using a Chinese character-gloss, "Nie means non-arising; pan means non-ceasing." Master Bhadra asked, "Is non-arising and non-ceasing nirvāṇa?" Daosheng replied, "Yes." Master Bhadra said, "That is the Buddha's nirvāṇa at the fruition level. Where is nirvāṇa at the causal stage?" Master Daosheng could not answer. He asked, "Does nirvāṇa have two meanings?" Nirvāṇa is all the same—how could it have two meanings?

Seeing that Master Daosheng had not grasped his meaning, Chan Master Bhadra picked up a ruyi scepter and asked, "Do you see?" Daosheng answered, "I see." Master Bhadra asked, "What do you see?" Daosheng replied, "I see the ruyi scepter in the Chan master's hand." Chan Master Bhadra threw it to the ground with a smack and asked, "Do you still see?" Daosheng replied, "I see." Master Bhadra asked, "What do you see?" Daosheng replied, "I see the ruyi scepter fall from the Chan master's hand to the ground." Chan Master Bhadra laughed loudly and said, "Judging from your understanding, you have not gone beyond the ordinary run. How then has your name resounded throughout the universe?" He meant: your understanding has not gone beyond the ordinary run. Like an ordinary person, you are attached to marks and let your mind turn with the object in my hand.

(At this point Master Yuan Yin picked up a book and asked, "What is this?" The assembly answered, "A book—a Buddhist scripture." The Master laughed and said, "Ah! You are caught on it—ha, ha!") You throw this thing to the ground, yet your mind still turns with circumstances. You do not understand that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. How, then, did your reputation become so great? How utterly undeserved! Chan Master Bhadra turned and left.

Master Daosheng had many disciples, and they were perplexed: “What is going on? Could our teacher have taught it incorrectly?” They hurried after Chan Master Bhadra and asked, “Dharma Master, Dharma Master, how do you explain form and emptiness?” Chan Master Bhadra replied, “What your teacher taught cannot be called wrong. He simply does not understand form and emptiness at the causal stage; he understands only form and emptiness at the fruition level.” The disciples asked, “What is form and emptiness at the causal stage?”

Chan Master Bhadra said, “Because one mote is empty, the many motes are empty; because the many motes are empty, one mote is empty. Within the emptiness of one mote there are no many motes; within the emptiness of the many motes there is not even one mote.” One mote is empty: a single dust-mote is fundamentally empty; it does not exist independently in its own right—that is, it has no self-nature. If one dust-mote is empty, the other dust-motes are naturally empty as well. By extension, all the motes are empty. Because the many motes are empty, one mote is empty: since all dust-motes are empty, a single dust-mote is empty too. Because one mote is empty, there are no many motes: if even one dust-mote is empty, what multitude of motes could there be? Because the many motes are empty, there is not even one mote: if all the motes are empty, can even one dust-mote be found?

What he taught through “the many motes are empty; one mote is empty; one mote is empty; the many motes are empty” is that all phenomena are utterly unobtainable. All phenomenal forms are the wondrous functioning of our true mind. We therefore need to understand the meaning of form and emptiness. Once we truly understand it, we see the nature amid circumstances; there is no need to leave circumstances in order to see the nature. Suppose someone points to a tree and asks, “What is this?” If you say “a tree,” you are caught on it; if you say “not a tree,” you contradict what is before you and turn away from the circumstance. What, then, is it? Put differently, you might say, “You cannot fool this monk.” In one reply you cling to neither side; the numinous knowing that cannot be deceived stands revealed, and the whole bind is released. Chan uses this method of releasing the bind, so that one is not bound by the visible object. The question tests whether you cling to existence or emptiness. If you cling to neither side, one reply releases the bind. But you cannot say, “I am neither empty nor existent.” That is still only explaining a principle and will not do. You must utter a wondrous phrase that, on its surface, clings to neither emptiness nor existence, yet implicitly conveys both; only then does it accord with the wonder of the Way.

To realize such a state, one must maintain clear observation at every moment, clearly understanding that all appearances are manifestations of self-nature, neither clinging to marks nor turning away from appearances. This is what Chan calls “neither identical with nor separate from.” Only when this is understood can wondrous functioning become perfectly harmonious and unobstructed. Worldly dharmas likewise do not depart from phenomena and principle. As the saying goes, “Affairs are accomplished through principle”: one successfully carries out affairs by relying on the principle of emptiness. “Principle is revealed through affairs”: only when an affair is accomplished is the principle made manifest. Without

principle, affairs cannot be accomplished; without affairs, principle cannot be revealed. This is called the perfect integration of principle and phenomena.

What is principle? Let us take an example. When a scientist designs something and wants to build it, the scientist first sets out formulas and calculates data. These formulas and data are principle. By building according to the formulas and data, the thing is produced. For example, when we build a house, we first draw plans showing how many stories it will have and what design it will have, and then calculate how much steel, cement, and other materials will be needed. Workers then follow the plans and construct the house. If it is built well, that proves the plans were right—that the principle was correct. If it is built badly, the plans were wrong and the principle was incorrect. Thus phenomena are accomplished through principle, and principle is revealed through phenomena.

Principle and phenomena cannot be separated. Phenomena are principle, and principle is phenomena. We must understand this principle and train ourselves amid circumstances at every moment, tempering our true mind. Therefore, we must understand the meaning of form and emptiness and never interpret emptiness as sheer nonexistence. This emptiness is marvelous presence, true emptiness—our wondrous mind, our true mind. Where is true mind? It is right within phenomena, not apart from them. Yet clinging to phenomena is also wrong; that is attachment to things themselves, and it too is mistaken.

Our Chan school has two lines: “Luxuriant yellow flowers are none other than prajñā; green bamboo is entirely dharmakāya.” Master Dazhu said: if green bamboo is dharmakāya, then when people eat bamboo shoots, are they not eating dharmakāya? Bamboo grows from shoots. If we stir-fry and eat the shoots, are we not eating dharmakāya? Thus clinging to dharmakāya or to phenomena is wrong. But if one leaves phenomena behind, one falls into emptiness, and that too is wrong. Therefore one must be neither identical with nor separate from them, see the nature through phenomena, and abide in none of them.

Thus the Diamond Sūtra says, “Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind.” Do not cling to anything. The wondrously functioning true mind is manifest at every moment. Here, “bring forth” means “manifest”: your true mind of marvelous presence manifests. Therefore, we must remain nonabiding at every moment and continually temper this nonabiding true mind.

八、法贵当机 / VIII. A Dharma Is Valuable When It Suits the Practitioner's Capacity

In our Dharma practice, whether we follow Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism, we must practice in this way. For example, when reciting the Buddha's name, must we also practice contemplation? What is contemplation? It is meditative contemplation—that is, training in samādhi. When reciting the Buddha-name, one must recite with the mind and hear with the ears, quietly listening to the sound of the recitation; only then can the mind be gathered and enter samādhi. This is called contemplation in Buddha-recitation. Buddha-recitation is not singing a folk song, and still less can one recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” while

talking with someone else. That will not do. One must practice contemplation in Buddha-recitation. Such contemplation is Chan practice.

There are many kinds of Chan: the Chan of ordinary beings, Lesser Vehicle Chan, Mahāyāna Chan, Supreme Vehicle Chan, and non-Buddhist meditation. The Chan of ordinary beings and Lesser Vehicle Chan both proceed from mistaken distinctions in the mind. What are these mistaken distinctions? They are divisions imposed by the mind: mistakenly regarding mind and dharmas as unrelated, and emptiness and form as different things; clinging to marks in pursuit of bodily health; thinking that mind-dharmas are not form-dharmas and form-dharmas are not mind-dharmas; or practicing Chan from a one-sided view of emptiness. All of these are mistaken distinctions.

What about non-Buddhist meditation? It likewise proceeds from mistaken conceptions. It either falls into emptiness, inclining toward annihilationism, or clings to existence by taking a “yang-spirit” or “spiritual self” as real. None of these is the genuine Way of Chan. In practicing Chan, we must first clarify the right causal basis and establish right view; then we should choose an authentic Dharma method suited to our own capacity and disposition. Only in this way can we avoid going astray. To make this clearer, let us explain non-Buddhist, Lesser Vehicle, Mahāyāna, and the other kinds of Chan once more.

Aspiring to the Buddha Way and feeling revulsion toward the Sahā world is called “the mind of joyful aspiration and revulsion.” From the Pure Land perspective, this is very good: one recites the single phrase “Amitābha Buddha” with joyful aspiration and revulsion both fully present, aspiring to reach the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and leave this Sahā world. From the standpoint of Chan, however, any mind that aspires toward the higher and rejects the lower remains the Chan of ordinary beings. It has not entered sagehood and remains at the level of an ordinary being.

Non-Buddhist practitioners likewise aspire toward the higher and reject the lower. They want to become immortals and leave this ordinary world. They do not understand that immortals are ordinary beings and ordinary beings are immortals; buddhas are ordinary beings and ordinary beings are buddhas—all are originally one in essence. Because they aspire upward and reject downward, seek outside mind, and fail to know that self-nature is true, they are called non-Buddhist.

Those who practice after realizing self-emptiness but remain one-sidedly attached to the true are practitioners of Lesser Vehicle Chan. They know that body and mind are compounded of the four great elements and five aggregates. The body consists of earth, water, fire, and wind. Mind here means thought; thought is mind, and this mind comprises feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Together with the physical body composed of the four great elements, these make up the five aggregates. Lesser Vehicle practitioners know that this compound of the four great elements and five aggregates is illusory and unreal. Unlike

ordinary beings, they do not cling to the body as self and insist on good clothing, food, lodging, and every comfort, thereby creating karma and undergoing retribution.

Lesser Vehicle sages know that the four great elements and five aggregates are illusory and unreal. They know that this “personal self”—the body—is empty and not real. Yet they lean one-sidedly toward emptiness. What sort of emptiness? They say, “After I leave the six paths of rebirth, I will dwell unmoving in a pure land beyond the three realms—that is, beyond the desire, form, and formless realms.” They still cling to the four great generative constituents—earth, water, fire, and wind—as self. Their dharma-clinging remains unresolved, and they do not yet understand that all illusory appearances are wondrous functions manifested by our true mind.

Thus, although they realize “self-emptiness,” they remain “one-sidedly attached to the true”—to a true mind regarded as real and unfailing. They do not understand that “the false is the true, and the true is the false; the whole false is precisely the true, and the whole true is precisely the false.” Without the false, where would the true be? Without the true, where would the false be? Thus the false is the true and the true is the false. To divide true from false here is still delusive mind, still discrimination.

For example, people regard the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss as true and the Sahā world as false, so they wish to leave the Sahā and aspire toward Ultimate Bliss. This divides true from false. In reality, if the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is true, then our Sahā world is also true. Why? The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is manifested by the Buddha-nature of Amitābha Buddha and all supremely virtuous beings; it is therefore a pure land manifested by pure mind. Our Sahā world is manifested by the karma-obscured minds of sentient beings; it is therefore an evil world of the five turbidities. Yet what is this karma-obscured mind—the ālaya-consciousness? It is our Buddha-nature; it is our true mind.

The eighth consciousness, the ālaya-consciousness, is true mind. If it were not true mind, from where could the ālaya-consciousness arise? It is called ālaya-consciousness because the arising-and-ceasing and non-arising-and-non-ceasing aspects are mixed together within it. Remove the arising-and-ceasing aspect, and what remains is the pure essence. Thus the ālaya-consciousness is not separate from the pure essence. Though it is the defiled mode of that essence, it is still true mind. What is true mind like? It is unmoving: so when pure, and so when defiled. It is like falling asleep and dreaming—now frightened, now delighted, now an emperor, now a beggar—while the body never leaves the bed and lies there unmoving.

Our true mind is unmoving. It is unborn and undying, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor still, neither defiled nor pure. It has never moved. Everything is manifested by it; apart from it, nothing exists. Thus if you call it true, the Sahā world too is true; if you call it false, the Western Land too is false. Why? “All marks whatsoever are false.” One must not cling to marks. What are marks? They are reflections of true mind, images appearing in a mirror.

Do not mistake the reflections for the mirror. We need only refrain from taking the reflections and images within true mind as real; why insist on grasping a separate “true”?

Thus both calling something true and calling it false are discriminations of delusive mind. It is “neither true nor false; both true and false; precisely true and precisely false.” Simply remove discriminating mind. Sages of the two vehicles do not understand this truth. They think there is something truly real: their attainment of sagehood is true, while ordinary beings in the six paths are false. This is therefore not Supreme Vehicle Chan, but the Chan of the two vehicles.

Those who practice after awakening to the true principle revealed by the emptiness of both self and dharmas practice Mahāyāna Chan. We have discussed the Chan of ordinary beings, non-Buddhist meditation, and Lesser Vehicle Chan. At the Mahāyāna level, one has awakened that self is unobtainable and dharmas are unobtainable. As just explained, Lesser Vehicle sages—arhats and pratyekabuddhas—realize only the emptiness of persons; they have not realized the emptiness of dharmas. A self in dharmas means that apart from the personal self they still take the four great generative constituents as self; they still posit the dharmakāya as an object of practice, a Buddhadharma to obtain, a nirvāṇa to realize, and birth-and-death to end. Dharmas are still established as existent, so the emptiness of dharmas has not been realized.

Going a step further, neither a personal self nor a self in dharmas exists. Everything is manifested by my true mind of wondrous functioning; this true mind of marvelous presence is empty by nature, and all phenomena are unobtainable. Yet even awakening to the principle that persons and dharmas are both empty is not ultimate and is still not the highest. What is highest? What we are now explaining: if one suddenly awakens that self-nature is originally pure and originally without afflictions, that its wisdom-nature free of outflows is originally complete, and that this mind is Buddha, and one believes this truly without doubt, then one has gone a step further. This is Supreme Vehicle Chan.

That is, if we realize that our own mind is originally pure and undefiled, originally without afflictions, and that the wisdom-nature free of outflows is originally complete—“with outflows” means conditioned dharmas involving thought and fabrication; “free of outflows” means that no fabrication remains, things are naturally just so, all afflictions are absent, and great wisdom is originally complete—and that this mind is Buddha, no different from Buddha, then this is the highest. Since we are Buddha and no different from Buddha, why do we not know it? Since mind is originally pure and without afflictions, why do we now have so many afflictions and not the slightest purity? Because ignorance is at work.

Because of ignorance, we falsely think and discriminate, are deluded by external objects without knowing it, run after circumstances, and drift along with false thoughts. The reason we create karma, undergo retribution, revolve in the six paths, and have no end to it lies in being deluded and not awake. Therefore I do not tire of explaining the truth in detail so that everyone may awaken. All sentient beings fully possess this true mind of marvelous presence.

When Śākyamuni Buddha saw the morning star on the night of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month and awakened to the Way, he said, “How wondrous! How wondrous! All sentient beings on the great earth possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata.” Why do they not know it themselves? It is precisely because of false thoughts, inversion, attachment, and affliction, while they themselves do not know.

Therefore, when we explain the scriptures, we point out the way through the maze of delusion and make clear the wondrously bright true mind that we originally possess. Buddha-nature is nowhere else; it shines right before us. How does it shine? Who sees things? Who hears sounds? Who smells fragrance and stench? Who speaks with the tongue? Who knows sour, sweet, bitter, and spicy tastes? Who makes contact with external objects? Who walks? Who does the work? These are all wondrous functions through which our self-nature shines forth. We must recognize it.

If we awaken to the Way immediately, this is sudden awakening. Our mind is originally so pure, originally without even the slightest affliction, originally complete with the Tathāgata’s wisdom. This mind is Buddha. Do not seek Buddha outside. Understanding this principle and practicing accordingly is Supreme Vehicle Chan. If one does not understand this principle and practices blindly, one takes a crooked road, goes in circles, and cannot get out no matter how long one circles. Therefore the causal basis must be correct. One must understand this principle and know at every moment that we ourselves are Buddha and that Buddha is not elsewhere.

You may ask: “Am I already Buddha right now? Then why do I not display spiritual powers? A buddha has the three knowledges and six superknowledges.” The ancient worthies said: “Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water; rely on the sun’s warmth to melt it.” This is an analogy. In the cold of winter, the water in a pond freezes into ice, yet this ice is water. “Recognize” means to know. Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water: know that this frozen pond is entirely water. This analogizes that sentient beings are originally buddhas. “Borrow the sun’s warmth to melt it”: one must borrow sunlight to melt the ice. Only after it melts can it accomplish the function of irrigating. Ice is solid and cannot flow. This analogizes that sentient beings do not have the three knowledges and six superknowledges. After it melts, it can flow and can irrigate fields. This analogizes that buddhas have the three knowledges and six superknowledges.

The next line says: “Realize that the ordinary being is precisely Buddha; draw on the Dharma’s power for sustained cultivation.” “Realize that the ordinary being is precisely Buddha” means that we awaken to the fact that this ordinary mind is Buddha-mind and know it as such. “Draw on the Dharma’s power for sustained cultivation”: here “draw on” means to rely on assistance. What provides the assistance? The power of Buddhadharma. We must draw on the power of Buddhadharma to support our practice. Although we have awakened, it is only awakening at the level of principle—the beginning of actualized awakening. Habits remain heavy and cannot be ended all at once. We must therefore rely on the Dharma’s power

and continue this sustained cultivation. We do so through methods such as Buddha-recitation, forming mudrās, mantra-recitation, and watching the huatou to arouse the doubt-sensation. These methods repeatedly condition and transform the false and defiled seeds in the field of our eighth consciousness into pure seeds, transforming habits into wondrous functioning.

After understanding the principle, one must still draw on the power of Buddhadharma to practice. Without practice, this understanding never becomes actual and is useless. Merely saying and understanding it is absolutely not enough. Perhaps right now you realize that everything is false, let everything go, and cling to nothing. But once you leave here and walk down the street, it may vanish immediately. Several friends have told me, “Ah! Today I went to the crematorium and became utterly disenchanted with worldly things. When a person stops breathing, the body is burned to ashes and nothing remains. What is there to cling to? I will not cling anymore!” For a moment, their attachment seemed dead and the mind empty. Yet before they had gone far, they wanted everything again. Habits are heavy.

Therefore we have no choice but to speak of sudden awakening followed by gradual practice. Strictly speaking, this formulation is inconsistent: if gradual practice is still required, then the awakening was not complete. This is the standpoint of the Prajñā scriptures. Yet setting the teaching so high will not work for us, because we lack that strength. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra therefore presents two approaches: “In principle, there is sudden awakening; with that awakening, delusion is simultaneously dissolved. In practice, habits must be gradually removed and exhausted in sequence.” When principle is explained, such a person immediately awakens; with awakening, all habits dissolve, nothing is retained, and the mind is at once empty and pure. Such people do exist, but they are extremely few: those of supreme faculties who return with deep practice from past lives. Without such prior practice, one cannot penetrate completely in a single awakening.

Yet today’s suddenness is the gradualness of former days. It was accumulated through practice long ago, before that, and before that again, little by little; therefore today—snap!—everything drops away. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra’s statement, “In principle, there is sudden awakening; with that awakening, delusion is simultaneously dissolved. In practice, habits must be gradually removed and exhausted in sequence,” originally describes two Dharma-gates: the complete-and-sudden Dharma and the gradual Dharma. A very small number of practitioners of supreme faculties, returning with deep practice from past lives, awaken as soon as they hear the principle; in the instant of awakening all habits are extinguished, and spiritual powers and wondrous functions can manifest. Most practitioners of middling or lower faculties must, after awakening, train amid affairs and gradually remove habits; only then can functioning slowly unfold.

Now we may combine the two Dharma-gates into one: “awakening to principle is sudden; in practice, habits must be gradually removed.” We combine the sudden and gradual approaches in practice. Why? Because this is the Dharma-ending age, when sentient beings’ faculties are dull and their obstructions heavy. They cannot suddenly awaken, suddenly practice, and

suddenly realize. We therefore combine the two Dharma-gates: after awakening at the level of principle, one carefully preserves it, diligently removes habits, and gradually manifests superknowledges and realizes fruition. Strictly speaking, combining sudden awakening with gradual practice is theoretically inconsistent, but it accords with present conditions and may be provisionally adopted.

This principle is difficult to explain clearly, so let us use a story from Śākyamuni Buddha's lifetime. Two of the Buddha's disciples debated a statement he had made. Each insisted on his own interpretation, and neither could persuade the other. They went to ask, "Buddha, which of our explanations accords with what you meant?" The Buddha replied, "Neither accords with my meaning, but both can be used." Why? Because both suited the actual circumstances. Therefore, for present purposes, we have no choice but to speak of sudden awakening followed by gradual practice.

How, then, should one practice? Pure Land practitioners recite the Buddha's name—"Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha"—using the Buddha-name to sweep away the impurities, habits, and afflictions in the mind. As soon as an affliction begins to emerge, recite "Amitābha Buddha" loudly, turn the mind, and let the affliction dissolve into emptiness. Chan practitioners keep watch over the *huatou* at all times. As soon as affliction stirs, ask, "Who are you?" Then deliver a direct staff-blow: "Who stirred this affliction? Who is it that gives rise to affliction?" This direct staff-blow is what it means to watch the *huatou*. Esoteric practitioners, as soon as affliction arises, immediately recite the mantra to transform it.

Although the methods differ, the principle is the same. Do not say, "My Pure Land school is good and your Chan school is wrong," "My Chan school is good and your Pure Land school is wrong," or "My Esoteric school is good and both Chan and Pure Land are wrong." Such sectarian boundary-making shows that your understanding is not yet thorough. Once your understanding is thorough and wondrous functioning arises, you will say: Chan is good, Pure Land is good, Esoteric is good—all are means. Skillful means have many gates; returning to the source has no two roads.

We borrow the power of Buddhadharma, practice diligently, sweep clean our habits, and dissolve our afflictions into emptiness. Then "when the ice melts, water flows and moistens, and only then is its irrigating and cleansing function revealed; when delusion is exhausted, mind is empty and open, and the functioning of powers and light manifests in response." When the flower of mind is open and bright, spiritual powers manifest and marvelous function is boundless. These are all realized through practice. If you say practice is unnecessary, will that do? No. Therefore one definitely must practice.

Someone asked: when the lifespan of an awakened person ends, where does the numinous nature go? This is a major question. After awakening to the Way, where does one go? Many people ask it. A person from Hong Kong wrote to me saying that, when an awakened person approaches death, he should know his destination in advance; if he does not, he has not

awakened. Is that correct? No. Why not? If one is truly awakened, there is no birth or death, no coming or going—what destination could there be? As I said, this true mind of marvelous presence is subtle form, and subtle form is space itself. What fixed location can space have? If you require a location, there is still coming and going, still birth and death, and therefore no awakening. The writer did not understand this principle, so he asked where one goes when this lifespan ends. This is not only his question; it is everyone's question. Today, therefore, let us use a passage from Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi to discuss it again.

Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi said: "All sentient beings, without exception, possess awakened awareness. It is numinous and bright, empty and quiescent, no different from the Buddhas. But since beginningless kalpas they have never realized it. Falsely clinging to the body as the mark of self, they give rise to feelings of attachment and aversion. Following feelings, they create karma; following karma, they undergo retribution. Birth, aging, sickness, and death continue through long kalpas of cyclic existence. Yet awakened awareness within the body has never undergone birth and death. It is like a dream in which one is driven and made to labor, while the body itself remains peaceful and at ease; like water becoming ice, while the nature of wetness does not change. If one can awaken to this nature, it is dharmakāya; originally unborn, what reliance could there be? It is numinously bright and unobscured, lucidly and continuously knowing, coming from nowhere and going nowhere. Yet delusive clinging over many lives becomes habitual and forms a second nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure form a subtle stream. Although the true principle is suddenly realized, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once. One must remain constantly vigilant, reducing them again and again, like wind suddenly stopping while waves gradually settle. How could practice in a single lifetime immediately equal the power and functioning of all Buddhas? Just take empty quiescence as yourself, and do not take the physical body as yourself; take numinous knowing as your own mind, and do not take false thoughts as your mind. If false thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Then, when life ends, karma naturally cannot bind you. Even if there is an intermediate state, you are free to go wherever you wish; in heaven or among humans, you may take rebirth as you choose. If thoughts of attachment and aversion have been extinguished, you no longer take on a body subject to fragmentary birth-and-death; naturally you can transform the short into the long and the coarse into the subtle. If the entire subtle stream is completely quiescent and extinguished, and the great wisdom of complete awakening alone remains brilliantly clear, then, responding according to capacities and conditions, you manifest hundreds of thousands of koṭis of emanation bodies to liberate sentient beings with affinities; this is called Buddha."

Now let us explain this passage from Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi. "All sentient beings, without exception, possess awakened awareness, numinous and bright, empty and quiescent, no different from the Buddhas." All sentient beings—not only human beings, but ants, insects, flies, lions, apes, and so on—without exception possess awakened awareness. Tell me, which sentient being lacks awakened awareness? Look at a mosquito: if you have blood here, it immediately flies over to bite you. A fly: if you bring a piece of steamed cake, it can fly over

from very far away and land on it. They have awakened awareness. People need even less explanation. Here, “awakened awareness” means the capacity to perceive and know. Do you know when your belly is hungry? Do you know that the weather is warm today? These are all expressions of this capacity to perceive and know. Therefore all sentient beings possess awakened awareness.

“Numinous and bright, empty and quiescent”: “numinous and bright” means luminous, transparent, and perfectly clear—numinous knowing lucidly evident, while suchness remains unmoving. Here, the “bright” in “numinous and bright” is said to have two explanations: “empty” means that nothing whatsoever is established; “quiescent” means unmoving and unshaken, neither coming nor going. “No different from the Buddhas” means no different whatsoever from Śākyamuni Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, or any other Buddha; there is no distinction between them.

Textual source note. The Chinese explicitly says that 明 (“bright”) has two explanations and then labels those explanations 空 (“empty”) and 寂 (“quiescent”). Independent received Yuan Yin witnesses reproduce the same sequence. Because the relation is internally unusual, the English preserves what the source says rather than silently normalizing it into a different term.

“But since beginningless kalpas they have never realized it, falsely clinging to the body as the mark of self; therefore they give rise to feelings of attachment and aversion.” “Beginningless” means that there is no beginning; in the future there is no end either. The cycle continues without interruption. “Never realized it” means that they have never awakened and have never known that they themselves are a great treasury. The Lotus Sutra gives this analogy: a person has a wish-fulfilling jewel sewn into his clothing but does not know it. The jewel can rain down every kind of treasure, so he is not poor. Everything he needs is already present, and whatever he requires the jewel can provide. Yet, not knowing this, he goes outside to beg. Our present wandering through the six paths and drifting through birth-and-death is like begging for food. We possess a great treasury but do not know it; this is what “never realized it” means.

“Falsely clinging to the body as the mark of self”: because of false clinging, one fails to recognize the true and instead mistakes the false for the true. This body is fundamentally not me, yet we take it to be me. The body is equivalent to the house we live in; in this metaphor, there is a “person” inside. What is this person? It is our numinous, luminous true mind. Not knowing this, we take the “house” to be me: “This body is me! This body is me!” “Therefore they give rise to feelings of attachment and aversion.” Thus attachment and aversion arise: I like this and dislike that; this person is friendly toward me and that person is not friendly toward me. There are many discriminating minds; all are false thoughts. What one likes, one seizes as one’s own; what one dislikes, one tries to get rid of. Thus one creates karma and undergoes retribution.

“Following feelings, they create karma; following karma, they undergo retribution. Birth, aging, sickness, and death continue through long kalpas of cyclic existence.” Originally there is no birth-and-death. Yet once attachment and aversion arise, we create karma in accordance with them. If we want something that belongs to another and cannot obtain it, we may seize it or even kill the owner; this creates the karma of killing. Having created karma, one undergoes its retribution and revolves through the six paths. Wholesome karma leads to heaven; unwholesome karma leads to hell. Thus birth, aging, sickness, and death continue through long ages of cyclic existence. Ah! Originally there is no birth-and-death, yet we fall into birth-and-death, appearing and disappearing in the six paths, born and dying without liberation.

“Yet awakened awareness within the body has never undergone birth and death; it is like a dream in which one is driven and made to labor, while the body itself is peaceful and at ease; like water becoming ice, while the nature of wetness does not change.” Although we revolve through the six paths in birth-and-death, our awakened awareness has never undergone birth and death. It is not born because you are born, and it is not extinguished because your physical body dies. If you fall into hell, it does not suffer; if you rise to heaven, it is not happy. It is originally unborn and undying, empty, numinous, and non-abiding. It has never undergone birth-and-death and has never moved. It is like in a dream, when we are chased and killed by evil people, terrified, and running wildly without stopping, yet in reality the body still lies peacefully and unmoving on the bed. It is also like water becoming ice while the nature of wetness does not change. This analogizes that although we revolve through the six paths, Buddha-nature does not change.

“If one can awaken to this nature, it is dharmakāya; originally unborn, what reliance could there be?” If we can awaken to the fact that this awakened awareness is dharmakāya, and understand that it is the basis of all things and events, originally never born and never extinguished, on what could it still depend? If you are truly awakened, you need neither a support nor a destination.

I remember a Wenzhou man who spoke very amusingly. He claimed to have awakened. Someone asked him, “We are not Pure Land practitioners seeking rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss; we practice Chan. After we pass away, where do we go?” Listen to his answer. He said, “One can attach to grass and cling to trees; one can lodge in a stone, a great tree, or withered grass. Any of these will do.” Ah, terrible! One would become a spirit attached to grass and clinging to trees. How could that do? To attach to grass and cling to trees is to become a ghost that still clings to embodiment. In Shanghai’s Fuxing Park there is a thousand-year-old bodhi tree said to be extraordinarily numinous, and everyone goes to worship it. In fact, a numinous ghost is attached to it. If after death one attaches to grass and clings to trees, one becomes a ghost. What Way has such a person awakened to? It has nothing to do with the Way; all of it is false.

Our awakened awareness is “originally unborn; what reliance could there be?” Do not seek any reliance. Those who attach to grass and cling to trees have not had even the slightest

glimpse of awakened awareness. In the past there was an abandoned broken stove that had gone unused for many years. A spirit attached itself to the stove and sent dreams to people: “Come make offerings to me at this stove, and whatever you want, I will give you.” People said that a spirit inhabited the stove and went to make offerings. Many came, and the spirit fulfilled their wishes. Word spread from one person to ten and from ten to a hundred, until the broken stove became enormously popular.

In that place there was a Chan master, a disciple of State Preceptor Huian. Seeing that the spirit attached to the broken stove was causing people to kill living beings as offerings and thereby create karma, he went to teach it the Dharma. Taking his Chan staff, he struck the stove—dong, dong, dong—and said, “I ask you: this stove is made of bricks, tiles, clay, and mortar. Where does numinousness come from? Where does spirit arise? Bricks, tiles, clay, and mortar possess neither numinousness nor spirit. What is conscious and aware is your own mind. Why are you attached to this brick-and-clay stove?” At the Chan master’s direct pointing, the stove spirit awakened: “That is right. Numinous awareness is not in the bricks, tiles, clay, or mortar; it is my own mind. I should abandon this broken stove at once.” That night it came to bow and thank the Chan master, and then ascended to heaven. Later everyone called the master Pozao Duo, “the Monk of the Fallen Stove,” and his real name was forgotten. Chan teaches us not even to cling to the body; how could clinging to grasses and trees be right? Therefore do not seek reliance. We are originally unborn and originally without reliance.

“It is numinously bright and unobscured, lucidly and continuously knowing, coming from nowhere and going nowhere.” If you have truly awakened to the Way, there is lucid, continuous knowing, numinously bright and unobscured. Every place is me. Wherever affinities are present, one manifests a body there. Therefore this is called “nonabiding nirvāṇa.” There is no fixed locus; one may manifest anywhere so long as affinities are present. If one has truly awakened thoroughly, how could there still be a fixed place? To require a fixed place is not awakening. “Numinously bright and unobscured” means that there is not the slightest characteristic of dimness. “Lucidly and continuously knowing” means knowing clearly and distinctly without interruption. It is not that one knows now and, after a while, no longer knows; that would be useless. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Since there is no coming, how could there be going? Coming and going are mutually dependent and therefore relative; whatever is relative is false. It is true mind, absolute rather than relative, so it has no coming or going, no entering or leaving.

九、如实知自心 / IX. Knowing One’s Own Mind as It Really Is

Next he instructs us how to practice to realize the Way and thereby accomplish buddhahood. “Yet delusive clinging over many lives becomes habitual and forms a second nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure form a subtle stream.” What we are now discussing is Supreme Vehicle Chan: “one’s own mind is Buddha; Buddha is one’s own mind.” If you can hear this

Dharma and deeply believe it without doubt, you must have planted roots of virtue not before one, two, three, four, or five buddhas, but over many lives and kalpas. Yet over those many lives and kalpas, false clinging has become habitual: we cling to external circumstances as real and take the body to be self. “Ah, this body is me; it is most precious. Do not touch me!” In fact it is a stinking dung-bucket. What is there to prize?

In the Qing dynasty there was an emperor who fell in love with a concubine whose body was said to emit a fragrance. This Fragrant Concubine was from Xinjiang and was reputed to have an unusual scent. What scent was it? A fox-like stench! Yet the old emperor called it fragrance. From this one can see that there is no fixed standard by which things are good or bad. What you like seems good; what you do not like seems bad. Once something becomes habitual, even what is bad no longer seems bad. As the proverb says, “After spending a long time in a salted-fish shop, one no longer notices the stench.” Once a habit has accumulated, its force is difficult to reverse. This is an irrefutable truth.

Upon hearing this, some may think, “This body is me, and everyone thinks so. You say the body is not me—who will believe you?” Ah! Throughout many lives and kalpas we have falsely clung to external circumstances until the habit has become second nature. We have developed all sorts of views about the circumstances and things we encounter, judging everything by our own likes and dislikes. Whatever accords with our preferences we grasp; whatever does not, we reject. Hence there is “joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure forming a subtle stream.” Everyone experiences joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure, fear, alarm, and grief. When things go our way, we beam with delight; when they go against us, we fly into a rage. When we lose something, we become despondent; when something pleases us, we smile broadly. These are all expressions of the subtle stream.

“The subtle stream” consists of extremely subtle delusive thoughts moving without interruption. At the root of delusive mind are the five omnipresent mental factors: mental engagement, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. These five factors accompany every wholesome or unwholesome thought that arises and operate throughout the eight consciousnesses, continually stirring all wholesome and unwholesome seeds in the eighth consciousness. Because this activity is extraordinarily subtle, it is called “continuous arising and ceasing.” The term “stream” means an unending current—not the stormy waves of the ocean or the surging billows of a river, but a quiet stream flowing almost imperceptibly. In fact it moves so rapidly that it appears motionless. Ordinarily you cannot see it and take it to be still. This is what is meant by extremely subtle delusive thought.

We have spoken before of coarse delusion—thoughts that arise in response to objects. If one understands that objects are mind and mind is objects, one does not cling; without clinging, coarse delusive thoughts do not arise. Yet the subtle delusive seeds remain. They are exceedingly subtle and seem motionless, though in fact they move with great speed. How can this subtle stream be cut off? Only by entering deeply into Vajrasattva samādhi can one see it and bring it to an end; nothing short of Vajrasattva samādhi will suffice. Therefore one must

enter deeply into samādhi. Buddha-recitation practitioners must attain Buddha-recitation samādhi; without it, the practice cannot succeed. Chan practitioners must arouse a great doubt-sensation. Once the great doubt-sensation arises, false thoughts stop moving and the doubt-sensation envelops the whole body. When the time and conditions mature—snap!—it bursts open, and one personally sees the original nature. Esoteric practitioners proceed in the same way: through the empowerment of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind, they rely on the Buddha's power to support and propel them forward until causes and conditions mature. Snap! It bursts open, and the subtle stream is cut off.

This subtle stream is extremely subtle; you cannot see it. You must practice and become settled before you can see it. For example, in a cup of muddy water, you cannot see the mud and sand inside. Once it settles, the water above becomes clear, and only then do you see that there is so much mud and sand below. When it is shaking and muddy, you cannot see it. Everyone must first become settled before being able to see the subtle stream.

“Although the true principle is suddenly realized, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once.” We say that mind is Buddha and Buddha is mind. This is the true principle. You may suddenly awaken to it: “Yes, yes! We are originally buddhas. If we were not buddhas, how could we speak? How could we ask, ‘Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?’ How could we practice Buddha-recitation, write, or walk? Once this body ceases breathing, it no longer moves; movement is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature.” The true principle is suddenly realized and understood, yet “these feelings are difficult to remove all at once.” Here, “these feelings” means deluded emotion—attachment rooted in affection. Such attachment is difficult to remove! The ancient worthies said, “If one remembered the Buddha as one remembers romantic love, one would have accomplished the Way long ago!”

We ordinary beings find attachment rooted in affection hard to relinquish. Such attachment takes many forms: love between men and women, between mother and child, between husband and wife, and attachment to sensual pleasures and worldly diversions. There are also countless hobbies—antiques, stamp collecting, calligraphy and painting, growing flowers, raising birds, and so forth. People love far too many things. For women, the hardest attachment to sever is often the love between mother and child. Once there is a child, the child remains forever in the heart and cannot be forgotten, even at death: “I cannot bear to leave my child!” There was an old woman who practiced Buddha-recitation. At her deathbed we advised her, “Let go and be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.” She replied, “I will not go. I cannot bear to leave my children and grandchildren.” With such deluded attachment, how could she be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss? Ordinary beings all find “these feelings difficult to remove all at once.” “All at once” means immediately. Since our emotional attachments cannot be removed immediately, we have no choice but to speak of sudden awakening followed by gradual practice.

After sudden awakening, one practices gradually. This is unavoidable, and it accords with the habitual tendencies of sentient beings in the Sahā world at the present stage. Do not indulge

in lofty talk, claiming that yours is sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization and therefore that no further practice is needed—no practice, no attainment, no realization. It is easy to say this, but can you actually live it? Boasting is useless; one must truly accomplish it. If you only boast, King Yama will not let you off and will still send his summons. Only genuine accomplishment can cancel King Yama's summons.

“One must remain constantly vigilant, reducing them again and again, like wind suddenly stopping while waves gradually settle.” One must remain vigilant over a long period; this is what sustained practice means. For Pure Land practitioners, it means taking up the single phrase of the Buddha-name. When thoughts stir, immediately bring the Buddha-name forcefully to the fore and recite aloud: “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” thereby dissolving delusive attachment. Delusive attachment must be dissolved; otherwise the practice cannot succeed. “Reducing them again and again” means diminishing delusive attachment day by day, diminishing habits, afflictions, and attachments day by day—reducing, reducing, and reducing again. Delusive attachment cannot be removed in a single day.

“Like wind suddenly stopping while waves gradually settle.” When wind blows, waves arise at once. After the wind stops, the waves continue to surge and only gradually come to rest. Therefore the ancient worthies said, “When the wind stops, waves still surge; when principle appears, thoughts still intrude.” “Principle appears” means that the truth becomes manifest and one awakens, yet delusive thoughts still press in. Therefore they must be removed gradually.

“How could practice in a single lifetime immediately equal the power and functioning of all Buddhas?” To practice for one life and then immediately want to have the three knowledges and six superknowledges just like all Buddhas, to have the same power as all Buddhas—this cannot be done. Although right now we have not manifested the three knowledges and six superknowledges, we must believe deeply without doubt that our mind is Buddha-mind, and apart from this there is no Buddha-mind.

Speaking of this, I would like to discuss an important issue. I have often heard people say, “The cutting off of the former and later moments is not awakening; only when subject and object are both forgotten is there awakening.” In fact, such people do not understand what the cutting off of the former and later moments means. They have not recognized the original, yet pretend to be people of great capacity. They have not read the doctrinal texts and nevertheless speak recklessly. In the past, when Master Chengguan lectured on the Huayan Sutra to Empress Wu Zetian—do not think Empress Wu was bad; she was an awakened ruler—the opening verse now recited before scriptures, “The unsurpassed, profound, subtle, wonderful Dharma is hard to encounter in hundreds of thousands of millions of kalpas. Now that I see, hear, receive, and uphold it, I vow to understand the Tathāgata's true meaning,” was composed by Wu Zetian in praise of the Huayan Sutra. Master Chengguan explained to her:

“When not one thought is born, the former and later moments are cut off; the illuminating essence is bright and clear, and this is a Buddha of suchness.”

When not one thought is born, the former and later moments are cut off. “Former moment” means the preceding thought; “later moment” means the following thought. The former and later moments—snap!—are cut off. “Illuminating essence” means the original nature, the essence that can illumine all things and function wondrously in every way. “Bright and clear” means free from attachment to all marks. “This is a Buddha of suchness”—this is Buddha! See how clearly it is stated. Yet some people do not understand and say that the cutting off of the former and later moments is not awakening. They do not know what this cutting off means, yet pose as spiritual teachers. Are they not harming people? Not knowing themselves and also misleading others, they fall into hell as swiftly as an arrow shot from a bow.

When our present thought is cut off and yet we remain perfectly clear, what is this? Apart from this, if you seek Buddha-nature elsewhere, there is none. Do not conclude that because one has not manifested the three knowledges and six superknowledges, or lacks the power and functioning of all Buddhas, one is neither awakened nor a buddha. Practice in a single lifetime cannot immediately produce the same great power and functioning as all Buddhas. Initial awakening to the Way is like a newborn infant. Although an infant lacks an adult’s power and functioning, cannot work or walk, cannot eat unaided, and still needs to be fed and carried, you cannot say that the infant is not human. Initial awakening to the Way is a Buddha at the causal stage. One must remain vigilant at every moment, guarding and sustaining it closely and continuously, reducing habits and afflictions day by day. Then this “little baby” grows into an adult, with power and functioning fully mature. Practicing after recognizing the original is called true post-awakening practice. Before awakening, it is blind and haphazard practice.

For example, if you practice Buddha-recitation without awakening to the original, you are reciting the name of a Buddha outside the mind. Buddha-recitation practitioners must understand that reciting Amitābha Buddha’s name awakens our own true host and keeps it alert at every moment, so that we do not cling to forms, become carried along by circumstances, or fall into ordinary emotional attachment rooted in delusive grasping. Practice in this way and you can succeed. This is extremely important.

“Just take empty quiescence as yourself; do not take the physical body as yourself. Take numinous knowing as your own mind; do not take delusive thoughts as your mind.” We must understand that this physical body—this fleshly body, this shell—is not what we ourselves are. Our true fundamental essence is precisely empty quiescence: unmoving and unshaken, neither coming nor going, unborn and undying. It is not this shell. The shell gradually changes, from youth to old age and from old age to death. Do not take the fleshly body as yourself. This physical body is not oneself. Never, ever take it as oneself; recognize empty quiescence as oneself. This Buddha-nature—empty and quiescent, neither coming nor going, unmoving and unshaken—is what we ourselves truly are!

“Take numinous knowing as your own mind, and do not take delusive thoughts as your mind.” What are delusive thoughts? Any thought accompanied by abiding attachment is delusive. If a thought arises and the mind becomes fixed there—abiding and attaching—that is a delusive thought. If a thought arises without abiding or attachment, it is the wondrous functioning of true mind. This perfectly clear numinous knowing is true mind; it is not dead. To sit unmoving and suppress thoughts until not one thought arises is to turn oneself into a great stone or a block of wood. Perfectly clear numinous knowing, without abiding, grasping, attachment, or aversion, is the wondrous functioning of true mind. When there is abiding and discrimination, that is delusive attachment.

Yet one point must be made clear: it is not that discrimination cannot occur. Rather, there is discrimination without abiding in it. This person is good—I know it. That person is bad—I see that clearly too. It is not that good and bad become indistinguishable and one turns into a muddlehead. Is muddle-headedness true mind? No. One must know good and bad, yet without aversion or attachment, grasping or rejection. It is not that we like a good person and hate a bad person. Nor do we abandon bad people. Why? We should guide them, show them compassion, help them, and enable them to turn around. That is correct. This is how true mind functions. Thus true mind and delusive mind are not difficult to distinguish. At every moment, do not take delusive mind to be yourself. Know that perfectly clear numinous knowing, without abiding in marks, is true mind. As soon as mind abides anywhere, it forms a nest or den and falls into marks.

“If false thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Then when life ends, karma naturally cannot bind you.” This concerns the end of life. What happens at death? If one wants freedom at rebirth when life ends, one must ordinarily practice “when false thoughts arise, do not follow them at all.” If our false thoughts have not been completely cut off and another arises in an instant, notice it immediately and do not run after it. If the thought is strong and, although aware of it, you cannot stop it, quickly recite the Buddha-name, recite a mantra, or take up the huatou and ask where the thought came from, thereby dissolving it. If you have followed the thought a long way before noticing it, then it is too late.

The speed with which one notices a thought and the speed with which one dispels it depend on the strength of one’s practice. It is like the difference in brightness between candlelight and electric light. At first, the illumination reaches only a short distance; farther away things remain unclear, so a false thought may have been active for a long time before one notices it. This is candlelight. When practice has matured, one sees a thought the instant it arises, like a powerful electric lamp shining before you so that every pit and hollow is clearly visible; when walking at night, you no longer fall into pits or ravines. This is electric light. One has reached the stage of quiescent yet constantly illuminating, illuminating yet constantly quiescent. One does not intentionally illuminate, yet illumination occurs naturally. There are great differences of depth within this practice. We must remain vigilant at all times and practice continuously without gaps. If, out of twenty-four hours, one practices for only one or two and

neglects the other twenty-two, that is far too slack; the practice will not gain strength. Therefore, throughout the four postures—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—we must practice and remain vigilant at every moment. Then the practice can develop.

Furthermore, if false thoughts arise, do not follow them. Do not decide that a particular false thought is good and then run after it. Some people have a pleasant dream and, after waking, cannot bear to let it go; they continue thinking about it. Dream scenes are illusory, so why cling to them? In a dream you become an emperor—are you truly an emperor? In a dream you obtain a great gold ingot—did you truly obtain it? To remain attached is foolish. This is how foolish people are! Chan Master Guifeng, speaking with earnest compassion, tells us that when false thoughts arise we must not follow them or run after them. If we truly accomplish this, “then when life ends, karma naturally cannot bind you.” “Bind” means to tie up. All sentient beings are carried along by karma: wholesome karma leads upward to heaven, and unwholesome karma downward to hell. If one truly accomplishes “when false thoughts arise, do not follow them,” then karma cannot bind one, and one is free.

“Even if there is an intermediate state, you are free to go wherever you wish; in heaven or among humans, you may take rebirth as you choose.” Those who are truly awakened do not have an intermediate-state body; those reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss do not have one either. What is the intermediate state? It is the interval after the previous body has broken down and before the next body has arisen. The body existing in that interval is called the intermediate-state body. It is predominantly constituted by the wind element and therefore possesses a limited degree of the five superknowledges. Of the six superknowledges it lacks the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows; its other five are only partial, not equal to those of a Buddha. It has the superknowledge of miraculous travel: wherever parents with whom it has karmic affinity may be, even thousands or tens of thousands of miles away, it reaches them in an instant. It also has the divine eye and can see across such distances. Those reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss go directly there and do not pass through an intermediate state. Those who descend directly to hell do not pass through one either. Beings taking birth in the other paths do.

“Even if there is an intermediate state, you are free to go wherever you wish.” If one truly reaches the point where thoughts arise but are not followed, karmic obstructions cannot seize, bind, or hinder one. One is free to go wherever one wishes. “In heaven or among humans, you may take rebirth as you choose.” This is the most elementary level of practice. False thoughts have not yet been cut off, but when they arise one can refrain from following them. When practice reaches this point, even though there is an intermediate state, one remains free and at ease. If false thoughts arise and one follows them, freedom is lost. Therefore this is only the most basic step, the lowest level.

“If thoughts of attachment and aversion have been extinguished, you no longer take on a body subject to fragmentary birth-and-death.” “Attachment” means liking and cherishing; “aversion” means dislike and rejection. The mind of attachment and aversion is gone. It is no

longer a matter of grasping what seems good and rejecting what seems bad. Since all things are dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, what good and bad are there to divide? What is there to be attached to or averse to? This must be genuinely accomplished. If you can perform it while someone is instructing you, but once out of sight still harbor attachment and aversion, that will not do. “Thoughts of attachment and aversion have been extinguished”: “extinguished” means ended. When these thoughts are gone, one no longer undergoes fragmentary birth-and-death and escapes the cycle of birth and death. Of course, dharma-clinging has not yet been removed.

“Naturally you can change the short into the long and the coarse into the subtle.” This refers to function. Such a person can transform freely: the short can become long, and coarse or inferior things can become refined and wondrous. Even within the six paths, transformations can occur in numinous and marvelous ways. You often ask, “What stage has my practice reached?” You may examine and verify for yourselves. First, when false thoughts arise, can you refrain from following them? If so, you can be free to go wherever you wish. Going a step further, if the mind of attachment and aversion has been extinguished—no liking, no aversion, everything equal, equal, and equal again—then fragmentary birth-and-death is eliminated and transformation becomes free.

Further still: “If the entire subtle stream is completely quiescent and extinguished, and the great wisdom of complete awakening alone remains brilliantly clear, then, responding according to capacities and conditions, you manifest hundreds of thousands of koṭis of emanation bodies to liberate sentient beings with affinities; this is called Buddha.” This is the Supreme Vehicle. Our practice is to bring the entire subtle stream to complete quiescence and extinction, eliminate every seed of subtle delusion, and thoroughly realize the state in which “the great wisdom of complete awakening alone remains brilliantly clear,” thereby perfectly accomplishing the fruition of Buddhahood. If in this life we can begin by seeing the nature and breaking through the Initial Barrier, then train amid circumstances, diligently remove habitual tendencies until favorable and adverse conditions no longer constrain us and we are unobstructed in every direction, and after breaking through the Multiple Barrier continue advancing until the subtle stream is exhausted, we will radiate great light, illumine the ten directions, and remain unobstructed.

You need not seek superknowledges; they will come of themselves. Thus one can respond according to conditions by manifesting hundreds of thousands of koṭis of emanation bodies to liberate sentient beings with affinities. Buddhas and bodhisattvas respond to beings’ calls in this way, manifesting bodies according to conditions in order to liberate them. There are three kinds of mind-made body: first, the mind-made body born of the bliss of meditative attainment; second, the mind-made body that realizes the self-nature of dharmas; third, the mind-made body that arises in all varieties without deliberate activity. By entering deeply into samādhi in seated meditation, one can manifest the mind-made body born of the bliss of meditative attainment. The mind faculty is the seventh consciousness; a body manifested

through the mind faculty, the seventh consciousness, is called a mind-made body. These bodies multiply from few to many, until hundreds of thousands of millions of emanation bodies are complete. “Arising in all varieties without deliberate activity” means that mountains, rivers, the great earth, towers, terraces, pavilions, and so forth can all appear in manifold transformations.

To what level must practice reach before the subtle stream can be cut off? “Subtle” refers to what we cannot presently see. Only after sustained practice and entering deeply into Vajrasattva samādhi can one see: “Ah! There are so many subtle delusive seeds, moving so fiercely.” Once this movement is recognized, bring it to an end. When movement ceases, retaining an “unmoving” still will not do; the unmoving too must not be kept. Break through it, and the domain of the consciousness aggregate is shattered. Consciousness is the last of the five aggregates. Once the consciousness aggregate is broken through, one reaches accomplishment.

Therefore we must practice; this is true post-awakening practice. But if one has not awakened to true mind and does not understand the principle, how can one practice? Recognizing true mind and understanding the principle are therefore most important. Today I have again explained the meaning of form and emptiness, reemphasized the importance of recognizing true mind—that is, having right view—explained why true mind must be recognized, and discussed where a practitioner ultimately goes when life ends. You must practice in this way at every moment: “remain constantly vigilant, reducing again and again.” Remain vigilantly observant at every moment: “Ah, a thought has come. Ah, I have attached to marks again. Ah, a false thought has arisen.” Immediately remain unmoved; do not follow it. This is reducing again and again.

Do not claim that one awakening finishes the whole matter. I am afraid it is not so easily accomplished. Do we not often hear people say, “Ah, why do I still have so many thoughts?” See? Eliminating all thoughts completely in a single stroke is not easy. Therefore one must remain constantly vigilant, reducing again and again. How should we examine whether we have progressed? Look back and compare with the past: how strongly did I cling, how readily did I become afflicted? If now there is somewhat less clinging and affliction and the mind is more peaceful and even, then there is progress. Recognizing progress strengthens faith. During practice, bodily warmth and the manifestation of light are positive signs, but we must not pursue them. Pursuit ruins the practice; it is abiding and clinging—false thought and delusive attachment. In post-awakening practice, let it proceed naturally, like flowing water rushing past without stopping. Do not abide, do not run after circumstances, and do not drift along with false thoughts. Reduce false thoughts and habitual tendencies again and again until they are exhausted; only then can the great Way be accomplished.

This is the key to practicing Dharma. Therefore, if one does not recognize true mind, practicing Dharma is useless; if one recognizes true mind but does not know the key, one cannot accomplish it.

十、净土要义 / X. The Essential Meaning of Pure Land

When we recite Amitābha Buddha's name, we are awakening our own mind; we are not seeking the Amitābha Buddha of the West. When we vow to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, we enter mind-to-mind accord with Amitābha Buddha. This involves both self-power and other-power. If we understand the function of Buddha-recitation—using the Buddha's sacred Name to clear away the defilements and afflictions in our minds, and relying on the Buddha's light to illuminate us and dispel our karmic obstructions—then when we vow to be born in the West, we can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. How does such rebirth occur? One must cut off the root of attachment. If one can do so, success is certain.

If you remain attached to this world, then no matter how often you insist, "I have other-power, I have other-power, I have other-power," in the end you cannot be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Since you have not cut off the root of attachment and are still bound to this Sahā world, how could you leave? In fact, other-power is self-power, and self-power is other-power; self and other are nondual. Dividing self and other into two is mistaken. In practice, both must be brought together: self-power and other-power must be joined. Relying only on other-power is useless if self-power does not develop. Because you have not removed false thoughts and still cling to this Sahā world, other-power cannot pull you away. If buddhas and bodhisattvas could pull us away, they would have pulled every one of us away long ago.

How do buddhas and bodhisattvas welcome and guide beings to rebirth in the West? They emit light to illuminate you. If you do not open your eyes, they may shine upon you, but you cannot see their light. What use is that? Chan Master Yongming Yanshou therefore said that our mind is like a basin of water, while the buddhas and bodhisattvas are like the moon in the sky. Amitābha Buddha emits light to illuminate us. If the water of our mind is pure, the moon's reflection can appear. This is responsive communion: other-power and self-power have come together. If the water of our mind is filthy, it cannot reflect the moon. It is not that the Buddha fails to shine upon you; the Buddha is not partial. The Buddha's light shines universally, but your mind is deeply defiled. Thus a blind person does not see light, and filthy water does not reflect the moon. This is entirely a misunderstanding on our part; it is not that the Buddha fails to illuminate us.

Therefore we must bring self-power and other-power together in practice. To be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must let go of everything and recite the Buddha-name earnestly and sincerely: "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha..." thereby awakening one's own mind. Amitābha's mind is our own mind, and our own mind is Amitābha's mind. Mind and Buddha merge into one whole; this is mind-Buddha communion. "At life's end, that Buddha appears before one." Here "at life's end" does not refer only to physical death; it also means the time when the root of birth and death is severed.

What does it mean for the root of birth and death to be severed? It means that our delusive attachment, false thoughts, and delusive mind die away and are cut off. This is the “end of life” meant here. The root of birth and death is precisely delusive attachment, false thoughts, and delusive mind. Where is there any birth-and-death for us in the first place? It is delusive attachment, false thoughts, and delusive mind that cling to forms, create karma, undergo retribution, and revolve through the six paths in illusory birth-and-death. We recite the Buddha-name one-pointedly until the practice matures. When the time and conditions arrive—snap!—delusive attachment, false thoughts, and delusive mind are cut off, and the root of birth and death is severed.

“At life’s end, that Buddha appears before one.” “That Buddha” is Amitābha Buddha, who is none other than the Buddha of our own nature; the self-nature Buddha is Amitābha Buddha. “Appears before one” means that the original nature becomes manifest. This is called “when the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising.” The flower of mind opens, one sees the self-nature Buddha, and awakening occurs. To “awaken to non-arising” means awakening to the original nature that neither arises nor ceases. This is the Pure Land teaching—the genuine Pure Land teaching.

We must never place the entire great matter of birth-and-death on Amitābha Buddha alone. Do not say, “This is other-power. Amitābha Buddha, if you do not save me, it is your fault, not mine.” That is wrong. If your own delusive attachment, false thoughts, and delusive mind have not been cut off, how can that Buddha appear before you? How can you awaken to non-arising? The fault lies entirely with you; how can you blame Amitābha Buddha? Pure Land is Chan, and Chan is Pure Land. As the great spiritual teachers of old said, “Chan is the Chan of Pure Land; Pure Land is the Pure Land of Chan.” Chan is Pure Land, and Pure Land is Chan. They cannot be divided into two and treated as separate matters; they are in fact one and inseparable.

Great Master Yongming Yanshou, for example, was a Chan master. How then did he become a great patriarch of the Pure Land school? Master Lianchi was also a Chan master, as was Master Chewu. How did they all become great patriarchs of Pure Land? Chan and Pure Land have always breathed through the same nostril. Only later people, failing to understand the principle, forcibly divided Chan from Pure Land. When we vow to be born in the West, the mind must be genuine and earnest, without doubt. The vow must be sincere and urgent—not merely spoken aloud—and there must also be genuine practice. If the mind is distracted and the practice scattered, there is no hope. Stay with it morning and evening, whether wandering or in adversity, never forgetting it for a moment; then you will soon accomplish the Way.

Chan practitioners must do the same: remain constantly vigilant, guard it at every moment, and attend to the *huatou*. Those of us who practice Esoteric Dharma must do the same. I have repeatedly said that practicing the Heart-Center Dharma cannot rely only on two hours of sitting. Clear observation in daily activity is most important; practice in daily activity is even

more important than formal sitting itself. Outside formal sitting, train the mind amid circumstances and see whether it is empty. This is the most crucial point.

I often hear people say, “Ah! Today I was furious. So-and-so is really terrible.” I ask you: are you someone who studies Buddhism? What are you still angry about? If you study Buddhism, you should not remain angry. Everything is empty: there is neither person nor self, neither self nor other. What is there to be angry about? If anger still remains, then you have not truly studied Buddhism; you have not remained constantly vigilant or trained the mind amid circumstances. The more adverse the situation and the more infuriating the people and events, the more they can train you and reveal whether you still become angry. If you still become angry, then you have not been trained. Without such training, how can you become a buddha? Adversity is actually a beneficial circumstance: it trains you and reveals whether you are awake. Do not say that adversity is bad. Whether it is harmful depends on whether you awaken and know how to use that circumstance to train yourself. Whether practicing Chan, Pure Land, or Esoteric Dharma, Buddhist practitioners must train the mind amid circumstances at every moment. Without doing so, there can be no accomplishment.

10.5 恒河大手印（第五讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Five)

Textual note. The Chinese source includes a “Ten Difficulties” block after Dongshan’s verse; it is retained here in that position.

Our wondrous bright true mind is neither existent nor nonexistent. If you say it exists, no characteristics can be seen and no sound can be heard. If you say it does not exist, then in speech and silence, movement and stillness, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, there is nothing that is not its functioning. Ancient worthies compared it to “the taste of salt in seawater” and “the binder in pigment”: although it cannot be seen with the eyes, in essence it is not absent. Śākyamuni Buddha tells us that it is the great treasury of true emptiness, marvelous presence—marvelous presence, true emptiness. True emptiness differs from inert emptiness and annihilationist emptiness; because it is marvelous presence, it is empty yet not empty. Marvelous presence differs from false existence or truly established existence; because it is true emptiness, it exists yet does not exist, does not exist yet exists.

From the standpoint of manifestation and function, it is likewise neither existent nor nonexistent, neither nonexistent nor existent. If you say it does not exist, forms of every kind appear vividly before us, and its wondrous functions are as countless as the sands of the Ganges. If you say it exists, all forms arise through causes and conditions and possess no intrinsic essence of their own; the activities and functions they give rise to are like the moon in water and flowers in the sky, impossible to grasp or hold. The Heart Sutra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” This means that form and emptiness are nondual, neither existent nor nonexistent. All phenomena are manifestations of the wondrous essence of true emptiness, and that wondrous essence cannot exist separately from forms. Just as water rises in waves, apart from the waves water cannot be found.

In practice, we must neither take forms to be truly existent and cling to them nor turn away from forms one-sidedly, rejecting existence and clinging to emptiness. Therefore, whether training in samādhi during formal sitting or bringing forth function outside formal sitting, we must neither grasp nor reject anything. Only then do we accord with the Middle Way and enter the great Way of “true emptiness, marvelous presence”. Yet all of us still understand the principle of form and emptiness only poorly. Therefore, I further explained the meaning of form and emptiness above, cited the recorded sayings of Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi, reemphasized the importance of recognizing true mind, and discussed where a practitioner ultimately goes at the end of life. This was to help everyone accord with the purport of Mahāmudrā, avoid needless detours in practice, and proceed directly along the great Way of “true emptiness, marvelous presence”.

Recognizing the Dharmakāya

I. Letting Coarse Delusion Settle and Clear: Neither Grasping nor Indulging

We now return to Ganges Mahāmudrā. Earlier we said that Mahāmudrā is a practical Dharma gate that directly points us to seeing true mind. Mahāmudrā is the one true Dharma realm; it is our true mind; it is the fundamental essence without practice, adjustment, or distraction.

Yet to enter the level of Mahāmudrā practice, one must initially undergo a period of arduous practice. Without sustained practice, you cannot recognize that the numinous knowing free from thought is precisely your own original nature, and therefore you cannot accomplish the great Way. Why? Mahāmudrā says: “Coarse delusive thoughts that turn with circumstances obscure one’s own mind as it originally is.”

What are coarse delusive thoughts that turn with circumstances? When we give rise to thoughts in response to circumstances and pursue them without cease—seeing one thing and thinking about it, seeing another and thinking about that, inwardly unable to let anything go, thinking wildly, chaotically, and upside down—this is called coarse delusion. Coarse delusion is like dark clouds covering the sun: it obscures our luminous mind as it originally is and therefore must be cut off. If coarse delusion is not cut off, your practice cannot get on track. Why? During formal sitting you are filled with delusive thoughts and inversions, thinking of this and that; outside formal sitting you turn with circumstances and pursue them without cease. You fundamentally cannot see your own mind as it originally is. This is wandering through birth-and-death. How could your practice get on track? How could the great Way be accomplished?

“Although there has been direct pointing, one still cannot see; therefore first let coarse delusion settle and clear. Hence it is shown: at the very beginning, let the mind abide in open ease, neither grasping nor indulging.” We have directly pointed out true mind many times—where it is and what it is like. If, after such direct pointing, we still cannot see it, that shows

that our delusive mind is heavy. We should therefore practice by cutting off coarse delusion. Awakening and realization of the Way unfold in stages; practice likewise proceeds in stages.

How are these stages distinguished? At the beginning of practice, one must cut off the coarse delusions that turn with circumstances. What are coarse delusions? They are thoughts that arise in response to circumstances and pursue them without cease—seeing one thing and thinking about it, seeing another and thinking about that. In practice, we do not engage them and let everything go; this is cutting off coarse delusion.

Once coarse delusion is cut off, subtle delusion remains—the various subtle notions in the mind. Those of you who have practiced know that when coarse thoughts subside, subtle notions imperceptibly pop up one after another. These are called subtle delusion. In the Faxiang school, this is explained through the five omnipresent mental factors possessed by every sentient being: mental engagement, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. Together they constitute the most basic delusive mind. Here, “mental engagement” is identified with the mental faculty. It is active at every moment, like a fish moving deep under water, and it moves very quickly. Though its movement cannot be seen on the surface, its flow never ceases. This is subtle and extremely subtle delusive thought.

These extremely subtle delusive thoughts are also called the subtle stream. They are exceedingly subtle. Even when they appear limpid and unmoving, they are like water flowing at tremendous speed: it seems not to move at all, yet in fact it moves extremely fast, beyond what the human eye can see. Only by entering deeply into Vajrasattva samādhi can one see them. Therefore, once coarse delusion is cut off, subtle, very subtle, and extremely subtle delusions still remain. This is all the more true at the beginning of practice, when all we may have accomplished is keeping the body still.

How can we see these extremely subtle delusive thoughts? Only by settling the mind and sitting in meditation, first letting coarse delusion settle and clear, can we see subtle and extremely subtle delusive thoughts, and thereby cut them off and realize our own mind as it originally is. Therefore, first one must break through coarse delusion. How should one practice? Mahāmudrā instructs us in this way: “At the very beginning, let the mind abide in open ease, neither grasping nor indulging.”

At the beginning of practice, first let the mind be open and at ease. Do not cling or be troubled; do not be tense or bound. Be open, broad, and unburdened; put everything down. Confucian teaching says, “The noble person is open and expansive; the petty person is constantly anxious.” Petty people keep calculating personal advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss, turning them over and over in their minds. They worry about gaining and losing and therefore remain constantly anxious. Noble people do not worry over gain and loss; nothing weighs upon them, so they are open and expansive. Those of us who practice Dharma should be true noble people and great persons; all the more should we be open and expansive, put everything down, and rest in open ease without abiding.

“Open” means level and straight, without bends or crookedness. When the mind has no crookedness, the straightforward mind is the place of the Way. “Expansive” means sweeping everything completely clear, without abiding or attachment. Thus one is open, at ease, and free. Mahāmudrā first instructs us to practice in this way. If we cannot do so—if something remains held in the mind and keeps turning without stopping—then we must apply the Dharma as a remedy. How? Through “neither grasping nor indulging.” Grasping means seizing a thought and pressing it down; indulging means letting it run loose. We neither seize nor indulge it; we let it arise and pass naturally.

During practice, if we seize thoughts too tightly and dare not let them move at all, the mind gradually becomes dead. Yet we must not let thoughts arise unchecked either, for that falls into indulgence and is also wrong. When thoughts come, do not engage them. This is neither grasping nor indulging. In truth, every Dharma practice trains us not to engage with thoughts. It is not that thoughts cease to come or arise. Let them come and arise; do not engage them, and they naturally transform and dissolve.

Whether reciting the Buddha-name, holding a mantra, or investigating Chan, when thoughts come one must neither grasp nor indulge them. Thoughts cannot in fact be seized or suppressed; they will come, just as an ancient worthy said, “When the wind stops, the waves still surge.” For those who recite the Buddha-name, when thoughts come, do not engage them; bring the Buddha-name to the fore. For those who investigate Chan, bring up the huatou. For those who practice Esoteric Dharma, bring up the mantra. Stay single-mindedly with the Buddha-name, the huatou, or the mantra, and delusive thoughts will naturally transform.

With respect to thoughts, it is not that we prevent them from arising, nor that we let them drift along freely; rather, we transform them. This is living practice, not dead practice. Last time we mentioned Chan Master Wolun’s verse: “Wolun has a skill; he can cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day.” That is suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise. It is dead and will not do. One must neither grasp nor indulge them—one must not engage them. Though it is of course troublesome when delusive thoughts arise, suppressing them into dead stillness ruins the practice. Delusive thoughts arise from true mind just as waves arise from water. To eliminate thoughts by suppression is like eliminating the waves and thereby eliminating the water as well; true mind would then lose its living functioning.

We know that true mind is vividly alive: it encompasses all things, gives rise to all dharmas, and functions wondrously. If you truly suppress delusive thoughts into dead stillness, true mind becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone and can no longer function wondrously. Earth, wood, metal, and stone are one category among the twelve classes of beings. They are insentient. At a superficial glance they seem unrelated to humans, because humans and all beings revolving through the six paths—gods, humans, asuras, hungry ghosts, animals, and hell-beings—are sentient, possessing emotional attachment and fixed views, as well as love. Human beings are creatures of feeling, while earth, wood, metal, and stone are dark, stubborn,

and unresponsive, dead and unmoving; they seem to have nothing to do with us. In fact, this is not so.

Although the twelve classes of beings differ in kind, all are manifestations of the one numinous true nature and the one true Dharma realm. They share the same root and source as human beings and are not fundamentally other. Buddha-nature is originally true and unfailing, the numinous root that gives rise to all dharmas and is endowed with every wondrous function. Yet because we cling to external marks, are enveloped in ignorance, abide in circumstances, cling to emotional attachments, create karma, undergo retribution, and lose sight of true mind, the one true reality is split into inner and outer. What is called the “inner true” is our own body and mind; the “outer true” is the external mountains, rivers, great earth, sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, forests, and all other things—what we call things outside the body. In fact, they are all ourselves.

Because of ignorance, we take a small portion of earth, water, fire, and wind, bind it within a bodily shell and take it as ourselves, while disregarding the far larger portion of earth, water, fire, and wind and treating it as something external. Thus the twelve classes of beings come to be distinguished. In reality, sentient and insentient alike have the same root. Therefore the scripture says, “Sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom.” The insentient too are ourselves. “Realize perfect wisdom alike” refers to a Buddha’s all-aspect wisdom: above, it knows all the ways in which the Buddhas employ the Dharma—that is, all their Buddhadharmas—and below, it knows the causal seeds of all sentient beings.

Nowadays, when practitioners encounter a minor meditative experience, someone may speak at their ear and tell them what is about to happen, who is coming, and what that person looks like. An ear-whispering spirit is telling them. Some people then imagine that they possess wisdom and supernormal powers and can foresee who will come and what will happen. Pleased with themselves, they think, “Ah, how wonderful—I have foreknowledge.” In fact, this is not good at all. It is a message-transmitting ghost causing trouble. If you remain entangled with it for long, it will use you and eventually harm you.

How does such a ghost arise? While alive, such a person specialized in forming factions for selfish ends, aiding evil, and stirring up lawsuits—helping others do wrong, litigate, plot for wealth, take lives, and so forth. Having committed karma leading to hell, that person fell into hell and suffered. After that suffering was exhausted, the old, deeply ingrained habit of factional scheming and wrongdoing remained. The ghost therefore attaches to a person as its embodiment and tells that person about future events. For this reason it is called a message-transmitting ghost; it is nothing beneficial. When we practice, we must not imagine that we possess supernormal powers merely because a voice at the ear tells us something. This is not a good sign; it is a ghost.

The scriptures describe several kinds of ghosts. Consider those who greedily hoarded wealth while alive, craving money and gold—the more, the better. Because greed led them to commit

evil, they fell into hell. After their suffering was exhausted, the habit of greed remained: whatever they encountered, they wanted. When they encountered grasses or trees, they took them as their own embodiment. They therefore attached themselves to vegetation and displayed uncanny effects. It is said that a bodhi tree in Shanghai's Fuxing Park was regarded as extraordinarily efficacious. People swarmed there to supplicate and bow, believing that every problem could be solved. This was a strange ghost attached to vegetation and causing trouble.

There are also lustful men and women. Since sexual desire is a fire of craving, they are burned by that fire when they fall into hell. After exhausting this suffering, the light and frivolous habit of lust remains; encountering wind, they take form and depend on wind as their body, becoming ba ghosts—female demons. Others depend on great mountains or bodies of water as their embodiment. What kind of ghosts are these? They are wangliang spirits, ghosts born of wrong views. In former lives they held distorted views, were arrogant and self-important, and insisted that they alone were right. When others disagreed, they used schemes and tricks to frame and harm them, and thus fell into hell. After exhausting that suffering, their wild arrogance remained. They took the vital essence of the sun and moon as their embodiment, drew upon the light of the sun and moon, and attached themselves to mountains or waters to display uncanny effects. People therefore declared such places extraordinarily efficacious.

For example, some time ago a story spread widely in Hangzhou about a "Water-Splashed Guanyin." On Ziyang Mountain there was a smooth stone on which nothing ordinarily appeared, but when water was poured over it an image of Guanyin emerged. People therefore called it the Water-Splashed Guanyin. Word spread that the place was extraordinarily efficacious, and people came from every direction to obtain and drink its water as a cure for all illnesses. In fact, this was a ghost using the vital essence of the sun and moon as its embodiment. Thus all ghosts and spirits—even earth, wood, metal, and stone—are ourselves. Hence it is said, "Sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom." Our Buddha-nature can know the causal seeds of all sentient beings and the wondrous Dharmas of all Buddhas; it is the complete and fully endowed essence of great prajñā.

II. Insentient Beings Expound the Dharma

Last time someone asked: it may be understandable that sentient beings can realize perfect wisdom, but how can insentient beings do so? How can bricks, tiles, wood, and stone realize perfect wisdom? How can they become Buddha? Today I will explain this further. Bricks, tiles, wood, and stone are all our own original nature. Who is it that perceives them? Is it not the numinous light of our Buddha-nature shining upon them?

Wherever the numinous light of our Buddha-nature shines, all that appears—sentient and insentient beings, mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, and stars, men and women, old and young, birds and beasts—is a reflection and manifestation of Buddha-nature. You are Buddha; therefore everything illumined by your numinous light is Buddha. It is like a

kingdom: if I am the king, everything within the land is mine. By the same principle, you are Buddha. The light of your Buddha-nature illumines the ten directions, pervades empty space, and fills the Dharma realm. Everything is illumined by the numinous light of Buddha-nature; therefore everything is Buddha, and nothing is not Buddha.

However, if we do not practice well, do not know how to function flexibly and wondrously, and instead suppress thoughts into dead stillness, we become like earth, wood, metal, and stone. In the past, two practitioners sat motionless beside a great mountain until grass grew on their heads and in their ears; they had become like wood and stone. This was the result of suppressing thoughts into dead stillness. Therefore all things are ourselves; all are our Buddha-nature. All the forms we see are Buddha. Benches, chairs, tables, platforms, and everything else are likewise Buddha; nothing is not Buddha. Thus it is said, “The luxuriant yellow flowers are none other than *prajñā*; the verdant bamboo is entirely *dharmakāya*.” Flowers and bamboo alike are manifestations of Buddha-nature; they are Buddha. This question may seem very difficult, but once the principle is understood, it is not difficult.

Let us discuss this question through a *gong'an*. Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie once also failed to understand it and went to Patriarch Guishan to inquire. He said, “Recently I heard the case in which National Teacher Zhong of Nanyang spoke of insentient beings expounding Dharma, but I have not fathomed its subtle point.” Guishan asked, “Do you remember it?” Dongshan answered, “I do.” Guishan said, “Present it once.” Dongshan then related the case.

A monk asked, “What is the mind of an ancient Buddha?” The National Teacher answered, “Walls, tiles, and rubble.” The monk asked, “Are walls, tiles, and rubble not insentient?” Walls, tiles, and rubble are dull and unresponsive; they have no perception. A Buddha is an awakened one who knows all and is capable of all. If walls, tiles, and rubble are insentient and unresponsive, how could they be the mind of an ancient Buddha? According to your answer, would walls, tiles, and rubble then not be insentient? This was the monk’s challenge.

The National Teacher answered, “They are.” This reply contains profound meaning. The distinction between sentient and insentient arises only through discrimination; sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom. Without such discrimination, all sounds and forms, mountains, rivers, the great earth, even food and sex are completely encompassed within mind-nature, while not a single dharma is obtainable. What distinction of sentient and insentient could then remain? Once dharmas are taken to be obtainable, one divides them into categories, forming attachment and aversion, grasping and rejection; afflictions proliferate, and one turns endlessly in *saṃsāra*.

We said earlier that our body is itself a temporary combination of the four great elements and in that respect is no different from the insentient. Only because true mind is enveloped by ignorance, appears as delusive mind, and is confined within this shell compounded of the four great elements—which we cling to as our own body—does delusive knowing arise.

Otherwise, would our body not be just like walls, tiles, and rubble? The monk did not understand this principle and therefore raised the following doubt.

The monk asked, “Can they also expound Dharma?” A Buddha expounds Dharma to liberate beings. If ancient Buddhas expound Dharma and the insentient are the mind of ancient Buddhas, then of course the insentient should also expound Dharma. Like ordinary beings today, this monk remained fixed on the forms and sounds that are seen and heard and did not recognize the seeing-and-hearing nature itself.

The National Teacher answered, “They expound it constantly, blazing forth, without interruption.” Insentient beings do not expound Dharma only intermittently, speaking at one time and falling silent at another; they expound it at every moment, blazing like a raging fire, without pause. We habitually cling to what is seen and heard and fail to understand that no-speaking is true speaking. Hearing sound is hearing, but hearing the absence of sound is also hearing. Thus no-speaking is true speaking, for “the great sound is scarcely heard”: the greatest sound has no sound. If one insists on a sound that can be heard, that is not true hearing, for one has become attached to what is heard. The nature of hearing does not lie in either sound or silence. Sounds arise and cease and are therefore false; the nature is never interrupted and is therefore true.

The monk asked, “Why do I not hear it?” The National Teacher answered, “You yourself do not hear it, but that does not hinder the one who hears.” You do not hear because you are muddled about Buddha-nature, cling to there being a sound to hear, and do not understand that no-hearing is true hearing. Look more deeply: who is it that hears no-hearing? Who hears the absence of sound? You say that you do not hear, yet the nature of hearing is shining at your ear faculty right now. Hearing the absence of sound is still hearing. When sound is present, you follow it, discriminate, and run after it. When sound and discrimination are absent, the nature of hearing is vividly present; this is true hearing. Your own failure to hear cannot hinder that which can hear.

The National Teacher was scolding, pointing out, and alerting the monk. At the very moment when no sound can be heard and the nature of hearing is in the very act of hearing, the monk nevertheless says that he does not hear. He is simply not alert and does not understand, while the nature of hearing is still clearly and distinctly present. The monk asked, “Who can hear it?” Throughout the whole world, not one person fails to hear. Who does not hear? Who lacks the nature of hearing? When one does not cling to sound, in whom is the nature of hearing not shiningly clear? Sadly, one’s own gaze has never turned back to glimpse it.

The National Teacher answered, “All sages can hear it.” Buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and other sages can hear it; ordinary beings cannot. This answer of the National Teacher has a flaw, because everyone is originally Buddha, the dharmakāya is without characteristics, and the distinction between ordinary beings and sages does not stand. How then could there still be any sage or non-sage? The National Teacher was pressed

closely by this monk and used this sentence provisionally to cover his eyes, but the monk saw through it and pressed further.

The monk asked, “Does the Master also hear it?” Can you yourself hear it? Because the National Teacher had said that all sages hear it, this question pressed him directly until he had little he could say. If he claimed to hear, he would be praising himself; if he said he did not hear, he would be neither a sage nor a teacher. The National Teacher answered, “I do not hear it.” He could only plead guilty.

The monk asked, “Since the Master does not hear it, how do you know that the insentient can expound Dharma?” This was a forceful question: he turned the National Teacher’s own spear back upon him, leaving nowhere to evade it. The National Teacher answered, “Fortunately, I do not hear it. If I heard it, I would be equal to all sages, and then you would not hear me expound Dharma.” The monk’s question was difficult to escape, but the National Teacher was a skilled Chan master and knew how to turn the situation. With “Fortunately, I do not hear it,” he deftly transformed danger into safety. Yet whatever is put into words has no ultimate meaning. Originally there is no Dharma to be spoken and no person who hears Dharma. If there is still a Dharma spoken and a person hearing it, one is clinging to the marks of person and self. Therefore even the National Teacher’s statement, “Then you would not hear me expound Dharma,” was a form of self-slander.

The monk pressed on: “If so, sentient beings have no share in it.” If that were so, sentient beings could not hear the insentient expound Dharma and would have no hope of accomplishing the Way. The National Teacher answered, “I speak for sentient beings, not for all sages.” He shifted the direction of the exchange. The monk asked, “What happens after sentient beings hear it?” He held the National Teacher firmly to the point: what happens after sentient beings hear your teaching? The National Teacher answered, “Then they are not sentient beings.” Going with the flow, he parried the monk’s challenge. If sentient beings hear the insentient expound Dharma and recognize this unborn and undying nature of hearing, they transcend the ordinary and enter sagehood. Hence he said, “Then they are not sentient beings.”

The Diamond Sutra says, “Those called sentient beings—the Tathāgata says they are not sentient beings; therefore they are called sentient beings.” Sentient beings—where are any sentient beings? All sentient beings are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; none are ultimately real. They are called sentient beings because they have not awakened. If they awaken on the spot, they are no longer sentient beings. Yet while they remain within the dream and have not awakened, they cannot but be sentient beings; therefore they are provisionally called sentient beings. One must therefore awaken from the dream without delay.

Someone once objected: “You say that there is nothing at all. Suppose my ear is struck deaf and I can no longer hear sounds—this condition still exists. The fact that my ear is deaf is still

there; it cannot be declared empty.” This is clinging to marks, with the mind attached to them, without awakening. Wake up quickly; stop dreaming. In a dream we may be beaten or even beheaded, yet upon waking we have not been beaten or killed and our head is still intact. Your deafness is likewise an illusory appearance, unobtainable like being beaten or killed in a dream. Do not cling to the dream. Recognize its emptiness and awaken. Once awake, none of the dream remains.

After Guan Gong was beheaded by Lü Meng, he cried out in pain, “Give me back my head! Give me back my head!” When Master Zhizhe learned of this, he went to liberate him. The Master sat cross-legged and blocked Guan Gong’s path. Guan Gong thought, “This monk is very bold to block my way. I will show him my power.” With a whoosh, he raised a violent wind that hurled sand and stones at the Master, but Master Zhizhe did not move in the slightest. Guan Gong thought, “If violent wind and flying sand do not frighten you, I will bring down a great mountain.” A mountain then pressed down from above, yet Master Zhizhe remained unmoved. Guan Gong was impressed: “This monk has genuine mastery in practice.” He hurried forward and bowed. Master Zhizhe taught him: “You keep crying, ‘Give me back my head!’ You lost one head and demand that it be returned, but how many heads did you cut off in your lifetime? Can you return them to their owners? Moreover, although your head is gone, nothing is lacking. You have merely lost this illusory physical body; your numinous knowing and true mind are not diminished in the slightest.”

We have explained: take empty quiescence as your essence; do not take the physical body as your essence. Empty space is our true body. This shell is not the true body; it merely serves as a house. Take numinous knowing as your mind; do not take delusive thoughts and fantasies as your mind. Delusive thoughts and fantasies are not real; they arise by clinging to marks and pursuing objects. The nature of numinous knowing is the capacity to perceive and know cold, heat, pain, and itching. It does not abide in marks and has neither head nor tail, neither name nor word.

In the past, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng asked the assembly: “I have one thing: it has no head or tail, no name or word, no back or face. Do you recognize it?” Shenhui stepped forward and said, “It is the source of all Buddhas and Shenhui’s Buddha-nature.” The Sixth Patriarch said, “I told you it has no name or word, yet you still call it source and Buddha-nature. Even if in future you establish a thatched hut and teach, you will only become a follower of intellectual understanding.” The nature of numinous knowing—our original nature—is without characteristics and has no name. Even calling it “one thing” already misses the point. Shenhui added names to it, and that was already delusive thought. Therefore do not take delusive thought as mind; recognize the nature of numinous knowing.

Master Zhizhe taught Guan Gong in this way: the feeling that your head hurts is delusive mind clinging. Your bodily shell has already broken and is gone; what could still hurt? Once the mind is emptied of grasping, great light blazes forth and Buddha-nature stands brilliantly clear—what pain or absence of pain could remain? Through Master Zhizhe’s pointing, Guan

Gong clearly awakened and resolved to become a protector of the Buddhadharma. Thus, if sentient beings awaken from the dream and recognize the unborn and undying original nature, they transcend the ordinary and enter sagehood; they are no longer sentient beings. This is why National Teacher Zhong of Nanyang said that after sentient beings hear the insentient expound Dharma, they are no longer sentient beings.

The monk again asked, “On what scriptural teaching is the claim that the insentient expound Dharma based?” He had never heard that the insentient could expound Dharma. Was there any basis for it? Which scripture taught it? Was the National Teacher simply inventing it? The monk clung tightly to the question. The National Teacher answered, “Certainly. Words unsupported by scripture are not matters a noble person would discuss. Have you not seen the Huayan Sutra say, ‘Lands speak, sentient beings speak, and the three times all speak’?” Of course the monk was right to ask. If the teaching had no basis in scripture, it would be meaningless and unworthy of a noble person’s speech. The Huayan passage means that every dust mote and every land expounds Dharma; “all sentient beings” is inclusive of everything: whether the sentient world or the insentient world, all expound Dharma; the dharmas of past, present, and future all expound Dharma.

This was National Teacher Zhong of Nanyang’s instruction to the monk. Dongshan did not understand it and therefore related the gong’an to Patriarch Guishan. After hearing it, Guishan said, “Here with me too there is this; it is simply rare to meet the right person.” Even here the insentient expound the Dharma, but it takes the right person to receive it. Hence Guishan said that the right person is rarely met. Dongshan earnestly requested, “I have not understood. I beg the Master to instruct me.” Guishan raised his whisk and asked, “Do you understand?” This itself was the insentient expounding Dharma. Could Dongshan recognize it?

Insentient things expound the Dharma without sound, but that does not mean no Dharma is expounded. Flowers blooming and falling are insentient things expounding the Dharma. A flower is insentient: it blooms in delicate beauty, yet before long it withers and falls. What Dharma does it speak? The Dharma of impermanence. River water rushes onward without abiding or stopping, flowing today and tomorrow without cease. It tells us that the illusory appearances of the myriad things change, while reality itself has never changed. Su Dongpo understood this principle and said, “That which passes is like this, yet it has never gone.” Flowing water is insentient, yet it expounds Dharma. The insentient are always speaking; we simply fail to recognize it.

When Guishan raised the whisk, he was in effect asking: who raises the whisk? Expounding Dharma does not require opening the mouth; this single raising itself expounded the Dharma. Yet Dongshan still failed to understand and said, “I do not understand.” He honestly admitted that he had not comprehended. In fact, this was the most direct and immediate moment. Once you think you understand, you have already fallen into subjective attachment and fixed views, and some principle seems obtainable. When you do not understand, however, not a single thought is arising. Turn the light inward at once—what is this? Right there the nature is seen.

Sadly, Dongshan still assumed that some principle remained to be understood, misconstrued the point, and missed the opportunity.

Dongshan then said, “Please, Master, explain.” Guishan replied, “The mouth born of father and mother will never explain it for you.” The mouth of this physical body born from one’s parents can never convey it. Why? However much one says, words never reach it. Language cannot touch it and thought cannot approach it: “the path of language is cut off, and mental activity ceases.” Once spoken, it misses the mark; once conceptualized, it has already been misconstrued. Guishan was hinting that no-speaking is true speaking and no-hearing is true hearing—this is the insentient expounding Dharma. Sadly, Dongshan still remained muddled and failed to understand.

People habitually cling to the six sense-object domains—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas—encountered by seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing. They cling to what is seen and heard, and when nothing is seen or heard they assume that the nature is absent. They do not realize that the true nature which sees and hears even when there is nothing seen or heard has never been interrupted, bears no trace of succession, and is unmoving suchness. Buddha-nature is therefore also called “suchness.” This shows how deeply entrenched the habits of delusive thinking and attachment are.

Guishan’s statement, “The mouth born of father and mother will never explain it for you,” also carries another meaning: one must practice for oneself, and awaken to Buddha-nature for oneself. Ancient worthies said, “What enters through the gate is not the family treasure.” What you hear enters through the ear faculty, one of the six faculties that open outward. A principle received through hearing is not your own family treasure. Only what you awaken to for yourself is genuine. If you ask me to explain it to you, it will do you no good; later you will only resent me.

Speaking of this, I recall Patriarch Xiangyan, who encountered the same issue. Patriarch Xiangyan and Patriarch Guishan were both disciples of Patriarch Baizhang. Patriarch Xiangyan was very familiar with Buddhist scriptures. If someone asked about Dharma, he would often answer ten points from one question, and he thought himself very extraordinary, inwardly praising himself: “My wisdom is like the sea!” But while Baizhang was alive, he had not yet attained through Chan inquiry. After Baizhang passed into quiescence, he had to go to his senior Dharma-brother Guishan to practice Chan.

Guishan said to him, “Junior brother, I hear that at the place of our late teacher Baizhang, if asked one question you could answer ten, and if asked ten you could answer a hundred.” He quickly said, “I dare not, I dare not.” Guishan said, “That is your cleverness and sharpness, your conceptual interpretation and discriminative thinking, the root of birth-and-death. Now I have a question for you; answer it for me if you can.” Xiangyan asked lightly on the surface, “What question?” But inwardly he was saying, “What question could there be that I cannot answer? Hmph!” Guishan said, “I do not ask you anything else. I ask only: before your parents

gave birth to you, what was your original face? Try to say one sentence.” After Xiangyan heard this, he was utterly at a loss. He returned to his quarters and searched through the scriptural and treatise texts he had read in ordinary times, from beginning to end, trying to find a sentence to answer with. In the end he found nothing. He sighed to himself, “A painted cake cannot satisfy hunger.”

He repeatedly begged Guishan to explain it outright. Guishan said, “If I explained it to you, you would later scold me. What I say would be mine; ultimately, it would have nothing to do with you. You had better investigate for yourself.” Xiangyan then burned all the writings he had formerly studied, took leave of Guishan, and went off to investigate alone. Morning and night, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, he investigated continuously. One day, while weeding a field, his hoe struck a stone. He picked it up and casually threw it; it hit a bamboo with a sharp “pa!” Suddenly he awakened and opened up what is original. He returned, bathed, burned incense, and bowed from afar toward his senior Dharma-brother Guishan, praising him: “The Master’s great kindness surpasses that of my parents. If you had explained it to me then, I would never have had today’s breakthrough.” Thus one must practice for oneself.

For this reason Patriarch Guishan said to Dongshan, “The mouth born of father and mother will never explain it for you. An explanation would be useless; you must investigate for yourself.” Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie still could not awaken. Feeling that this encounter had not accorded, he asked, “Is there someone else who pursued the Way together with you?” Guishan then directed him to inquire with Chan Master Yunyan.

Dongshan took leave of Guishan and went directly to Yunyan. He related the preceding gong’an of insentient beings expounding Dharma and asked, “When the insentient expound Dharma, who can hear it?” Yunyan answered, “The insentient can hear it.” National Teacher Zhong of Nanyang had said, “All sages can hear it,” whereas Yunyan said, “The insentient can hear it.” In fact, a pure and empty mind is what is meant by sagehood. Neither ordinary nor sage stands; nothing is established. Each and every thing reveals a wondrous form and extends a broad, long tongue, ceaselessly proclaiming the Dharma. This is how the insentient expound Dharma.

What does “the insentient can hear it” mean? When emotional attachment and fixed views are extinguished and one no longer clings to sensory objects such as forms and sounds, one can hear the insentient expound Dharma and awaken to original nature. We have said that people have two troublesome things: emotion and thought. If deluded emotion and attachment rooted in affection are severed, that is good. Why? Emotion arises from love, and love produces water. Water flows downward and cannot ascend; therefore such emotion must be severed. When we encounter food we love, saliva arises. When someone dear leaves or travels far away, tears flow; when a loved one dies, grief is even greater. Passion between men and women need hardly be mentioned. Water is moist and flows downward. In the same way, attachment-laden emotion sinks downward. If we wish to be born in the Western Land of

Ultimate Bliss, we must rise; if we sink downward, there is no hope. Such emotional attachment and fixed views must therefore be severed completely. If emotional attachment is not severed, birth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is impossible. Thus this attachment-laden emotion is harmful.

Thought is somewhat better. Here “thought” does not mean wild and random thinking; such thinking still belongs to emotion. Because emotional attachment is present, the mind schemes wildly. If we desire someone, we devise every possible means to obtain that person. If that person already has a partner, we may scheme to get the partner out of the way and then possess the person. Plays and novels are filled with such plots; without them there would be no drama. Yet this creates karma, and karma brings retribution. Wild thinking is still emotional attachment and will not do.

What, then, is the better kind of thought? It is focused contemplative practice: thinking about how to leave the realm of sentience and realize the original face, or contemplating the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, fastening the mind upon the West, and diligently reciting the Buddha-name. This is relatively wholesome. Ultimately, however, both thought and emotion must be left behind. Without emotion, how could thought arise? Without thought, how could emotion persist? They are inseparable. The Śūraṅgama Sutra says that through genuine concentrated contemplation the seventh consciousness can leave the physical form or assume the form imagined; this is called “Pure thought flies upward.” Yet this is still not complete purity. In genuine purity even thought is absent. If there is still a Buddha to be recited, purity is not yet complete. When nothing whatsoever is established, that is the Pure Land of Eternally Quiescent Light.

When practicing Buddha-recitation and seeking birth in the West, however, we should not set the requirement unrealistically high. Birth in the Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together is already sufficient. When emotional attachment has been cut off and pure thought flies upward, birth in the West is not difficult. In practice, one contemplates the excellence of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, Amitābha Buddha’s radiance, and his welcoming guidance. At the time of passing away, the sacred vision of the West naturally appears: Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, and the bodhisattvas come to welcome one, and one is borne aloft to birth in the West. “Pure thought flies upward” means that wholesome roots matured through Pure Land practice manifest as this sacred vision.

When people speak of Pure Land today, they usually mean only the West, but the Śūraṅgama Sutra speaks of pure lands throughout the ten directions and rebirth in them as conditions lead, not solely of the Western Pure Land. We therefore know that anyone wishing to be born in a pure land must completely sever attachment rooted in affection and deluded emotion. Accomplished practitioners are free of emotional attachment and fixed views; if emotional attachment remains, it will not do.

What is called a bodhisattva? The Chinese word translated “bodhisattva” abbreviates a transcription of the Sanskrit bodhisattva and is explained as “an awakened sentient being.” This means first seeing through and breaking all of one’s own emotional attachment and fixed views, not clinging to sensory objects such as sounds and forms, and clearly awakening to one’s own nature. Only then can one help others awaken from and break through their delusive dreams, sweep away delusive attachment, and together leave the sea of suffering. Therefore Chan Master Yunyan said, “The insentient can hear it.” Dongshan pressed him closely and asked, “Does the Master hear it?” Dongshan was still muddled at this point. Yunyan answered, “If I heard it, then you would not hear me expound Dharma.”

This is exactly the same as National Teacher Zhong: if I could hear it, then I would not be expounding Dharma for you. Why? First, if I heard it, I would be equal to all sages; the enjoyment and emanation bodies of the sages are not the true Buddha, nor are they the ones who expound Dharma. The true dharmakāya of all sages has no speaking and no hearing. If I heard it, then I would have accomplished the Way like the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Neither ordinary nor sage could be found. Neither ordinary nor sage would be established, and nothing at all would be established. Could you still hear me expound Dharma? Pay attention!

“Nothing at all is established” is not annihilationist emptiness. Rather, there is, yet without abiding: speaking yet not speaking, not speaking yet speaking. It is not dead clinging to not speaking, and still less is it clinging to something spoken. All activity is provisionally established. There is no Buddha either; even the single word “Buddha” is a convenient provisional name. If there were still some matter above all Buddhas, then Buddha would not be Buddha. Therefore we must not abide in marks. True accomplishment of the Way is that not the slightest thing is established.

Second, if I heard it, I would be the same as the insentient. For the insentient, not speaking is proper speaking; it is not verbal explanation. How then could you today hear me expound Dharma? Further, if I heard it, I would be attached to sound as an object; I would have something in which I abide, and my attachment to views about the Dharma would not yet have been removed. How could I be a teacher of others? Therefore I do not hear it. No-hearing is true hearing. It is also “no verbal explanation”: there is no speech that can be spoken. You must carefully comprehend the meaning beyond the words. You only understand Dharma with language and Dharma that can be spoken. The words you now hear me speak are all verbal explanations; they are not the real. Now I speak to you in this way so that you may comprehend the meaning beyond the words and, beyond words, understand the true speaking of no-speaking and the true hearing of no-hearing.

Yet Dongshan still did not comprehend. He again asked, “Why do I not hear it?” He asked Yunyan: “Insentient beings expound Dharma; I should hear it. Why can I not hear it?” He was still clinging to sensory objects such as sounds and forms. What meaning is there in chasing like this? Why not turn hearing around and hear your own nature? It is shining right before

your face. Is this not natural hearing—hearing in no-hearing? Worldly people are muddled in this way; it is truly pitiful.

At this time, Yunyan, like Guishan, raised his whisk. If Dongshan had grasped this opportunity and asked himself, “Who is seeing the whisk raised?” and at this very point summoned full alertness, he would have awakened right then. Unfortunately, he missed it again. Yunyan asked, “Do you hear?” Although raising the whisk has no sound and no words, the great sound is scarcely heard—vivid and unmistakable, like thunder resounding in the ears. Why? Because the sound of no-sound is the greatest sound. This is called “the great sound is scarcely heard.”

People often cling to there being sound to hear and try to comprehend where there is sound to hear. But if you truly want to see the nature, you cannot cling where there is sound to hear. Sound and no sound are merely the arising and ceasing of sound, while our nature of hearing shines before us at all times and in every moment. It has no interval and no continuity. Therefore ancient worthies said, “After wind and rain among peach blossoms along both banks, where can the horse’s hooves avoid the fallen red?” Both sides of a small path are planted with peach trees. After a spell of wind and rain, the path is covered everywhere with peach petals. When a horse rides through this place, how could its hooves avoid the scattered petals and not step on them? The meaning is that Buddha-nature functions always and everywhere. It is never absent in time and nowhere absent in place. Can you avoid it? Therefore do not discriminate over whether appearances are present or absent, or whether sound is present or absent.

When we do not see light, we see darkness; seeing darkness is still seeing. When we do not hear sound, we hear no-sound; hearing no-sound is still hearing. Is this not evidence that the nature of seeing and the nature of hearing are unborn and undying? Sadly, Dongshan answered, “I do not hear.” He was attached to sound; because he did not hear a sound, he said he did not hear. This is like casting a charming glance before a blind person: he missed it right before his face, truly a pity. Yet we should also say that fortunately he did not hear; if there were hearing, he would again be attached to marks. No-hearing is true hearing.

Yunyan said, “You still do not hear me expounding Dharma; how much less the insentient expounding Dharma?” I am expounding Dharma to you by raising the whisk. Although there is no sound, there is still movement; yet even this you neither hear nor comprehend. How much less could you hear the true speaking and true movement that are without speaking or movement? Worldly people are foolish in precisely this way. Entangled in delusion and karma around the forms and sounds they see and hear, they never turn the light inward in a single glance to recognize the nature that sees and hears, speaks and moves. This nature is the original true Buddha.

They even mistakenly think that not hearing a sound is no-hearing, and not seeing light, images, or forms is no-seeing. How could they know that the nature of seeing and the nature of hearing shine right before them at every moment, never concealed and never interrupted?

Even when there is no sound to be heard and no appearance to be seen, there is still seeing and still hearing. Because hearing a no-sound is still hearing; seeing when no appearance is present is still seeing. How could one say there is no seeing and no hearing?

Dongshan then asked, “On what scriptural teaching is the claim that the insentient expound Dharma based?” This was the same as the monk in the previous gong’an asking the National Teacher. Chan Master Yunyan answered, “Have you not seen that the Amitābha Sutra says: water, birds, and forests all proclaim the Buddha and the Dharma?” At this time Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie suddenly awakened somewhat. Finally, through sound he awakened to no-sound. At last he comprehended and awakened. He blurted out a verse: “How greatly wondrous, how greatly wondrous! Insentient beings expounding Dharma is inconceivable. If you use the ear to hear, you will never understand; only by hearing sound at the eye can you know.”

How wondrous! How strange and marvelous! That the insentient can expound Dharma is subtle beyond words, inconceivable, and beyond imagination. Can the insentient expound Dharma? They can. If you use your ears to listen, you cannot understand, because the Dharma expounded by the insentient has no sound. Only by using the eyes to listen can one comprehend the marvel within it. The eyes cannot hear sound, yet no sound is precisely the marvelous sound. From this we can see that Chan Master Dongshan had comprehended sound and had gone from sound to no-sound, but he still had not comprehended that no-sound is sound and sound is no-sound. It was not yet thorough or ultimate.

These words express the true teaching of the insentient—the true teaching without speech, not something reached by listening with the ears. Thus Caoshan said, “I do not know what words or phrases it consists of, yet all who hear it lose their lives”—they lose the deluded life. Those present, amid the turbulent sense-objects immediately before you, can you recognize the mysterious Great Way beyond speech and hearing—the purity within turbidity? The insentient expounding the Dharma is not so difficult to understand. When inquiry penetrates its most subtle workings, words can no longer express it; it can only be inwardly realized. Even in worldly affairs, when matters become subtle, do we not speak of “hearts communicating through a single subtle resonance” and say that “at this moment silence surpasses speech”? This is precisely a gloss on “only by hearing sound at the eye can you know.” Baizhang once said, “Every word and phrase, mountains, rivers, and the great earth—each must be turned back and returned to oneself.” After completing his verse on the case, Xuedou likewise turns it back to oneself: “Difficult, difficult! Picking and choosing, understanding—examine them for yourself!” Yet Madam Pang said, “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the coming from the West is on the tips of a hundred grasses!” Did not the verse begin, “The supreme Way is not difficult; it is right at the point before words and speech take form”? The patriarchs’ direct pointers to seeing nature are too numerous to count. Is awakening not easy? Why, then, is it called difficult? Because awakening cannot remain empty

talk; it must be borne out in actual practice. Real difficulties arise here. Ten are outlined below.

1. It is difficult to arouse the doubt-sensation, and difficult to still delusive thoughts. In Chan investigation, if the doubt-sensation does not arise, the day of awakening will never come. One must hold firmly to a huatou one cannot penetrate—unable to spit it out or swallow it down—and investigate with all one's strength, until walking without knowing one walks and sitting without knowing one sits; only then can one enter accord. In mantra recitation or Buddha-name recitation, mind must recite and ears must hear, pressing on with full strength, before delusive thoughts can dissolve without trace.
2. The Great Way is directly before the eyes, yet students simply fail to recognize it. An ancient said, "Precisely because it is so close at hand, one recognizes it too late." These are not empty words.
3. The clever drift into written words and verbal facility and do not practice in earnest; the plain and earnest often become trapped by the words themselves. This is why the Chan style has declined.
4. True and false are difficult to distinguish. Xuansha said, "Students of the Way fail to recognize the true because they have always mistaken the consciousness-spirit for it. The root of birth and death through immeasurable kalpas—fools call it the original person." Operating through the consciousness-spirit and calling it awakening is especially common today.
5. Dead water does not harbor dragons. Students often delight in abiding in meditative states, fall into blank indeterminacy, sit in a ghost cave, and do not know it.
6. One abides in a meditative state and takes it as attainment. A student may occasionally encounter an exalted meditative state in samādhi, think it is attainment, hold on to it without letting go, and become trapped by that state. One who clings to bliss cannot leave the desire realm; one who clings to luminosity cannot leave the form realm; one who clings to emptiness cannot leave the formless realm, and so forth.
7. Practice and awakening are conflated. Many students do not recognize the difference between progress in practice and awakening. They mistakenly take the arising of some supernormal ability or the opening of the channels as awakening, and if these do not occur, they conclude that awakening has not taken place. They do not understand that however great the powers or however deep the practice, if true mind is not recognized, one remains caught in fixation; birth and death are not ended, and it is certainly not awakening.
8. Arrogance and impatience are difficult to abandon. Before awakening, students are often impatient for rapid success; after awakening, delight easily turns into pride. Impatience readily leads to collapse, and pride readily turns into wildness. Both are grave pitfalls for practitioners and must urgently be relinquished. Yet practitioners often fail to notice them, or defend their own shortcomings and refuse to face them. Many therefore begin diligently but

end in indolence, or become wildly unrestrained. Is this not one reason why so many practice the Way today while so few realize it?

9. Being diligent in preservation and eliminating old habits is difficult. It is truly not easy to eliminate at once the habits of clinging to marks accumulated through many lives and kalpas. As the saying goes, “Mountains and rivers are easy to change; habitual tendencies are hard to alter.” Unless one maintains constant clear observation, guards and cherishes the original true nature, and diligently transforms oneself, it is difficult ever to purify these habits completely. Yet students are often satisfied with a small attainment, assume that one awakening completes the matter, and do not continue transforming themselves. Not only are they unable to advance toward realizing subsequently attained wisdom; they are also in danger of falling into post-awakening delusion. How could one not be cautious?

10. It is difficult to realize completely without abiding. Many students think that once they have awakened to the natural Buddha that can speak, cough, raise an arm, and act, they have reached completion, and that any further practice would be dharma-clinging. They do not know that this is only actualized awakening, not original awakening; one must still rely on original awakening and practice diligently before great awakening is accomplished. Others cling to the essence of nature and settle into the state they have realized, unconsciously falling into an exalted domain and never leaving the old nest. All these are grave errors that prevent complete realization of bodhi. These are the great difficulties in practice, where a minute deviation leads a thousand miles astray; lesser details need not all be listed. Because there are so many difficulties, Xuedou said, “Picking and choosing, understanding—examine them for yourself.” He urges everyone to examine where they stand: are you making discriminative choices among particular Dharmas, people, or matters; settling into intellectual understanding and letting the consciousness-spirit run rampant; clinging to some state arising from the aggregates and taking pride in attainment; dabbling with spirits and pursuing supernatural marvels; becoming arrogant and complacent and lapsing into madness; or making a livelihood in emptiness, bliss, and clarity? You must examine your own actual state and not muddle through vaguely. Examine yourselves carefully. If there is any deviation, correct it quickly, lest you enter the treasure mountain and return empty-handed and waste an entire life. If you can do this, it will be most fortunate.

There are many gong'an cases of awakening to the Way through sound. Let us cite one more example. In the past, Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin served as attendant under Chan Master Wuzu Fayan and practiced Chan with him. One day, a scholar came to visit Wuzu Fayan. Fayan said to the visitor, “If you ask about self-nature or dharmakāya, did you ever read a little love poem when you were young? In those poems there are two lines quite similar to this: ‘Calling Little Jade again and again was not because anything was the matter; it was only to let her lover recognize her voice.’” The meaning is: she keeps calling, “Little Jade! Little Jade!” Little Jade is a maidservant. For what reason is the young lady calling her? Nothing is the matter. Then why call? Her purpose is to let her lover hear this calling voice and know that she is

there. That is, she deliberately sends a message to her lover, because he recognizes her voice; hearing the call, he knows that she is there. This uses a love poem to speak Chan.

Borrow this poem to ask in return: by whom is this calling voice issued? And by whom is it heard? Are all these not the functioning of self-nature? Are they not all manifestations of true nature? Wuzu Fayan's quotation of this little love poem contains deep meaning. Originally all forms and all sounds have no meaning; all are flowers in space and the moon in water, all unobtainable. This accords with the first line, "nothing was the matter." Yet everything whatsoever is the functioning of self-nature and the manifestation of true nature. This accords with the second line, "recognize the voice." The point is to inspire us all to recognize our original face.

Yuanwu Keqin stood nearby and heard these words, gaining an initial awakening. As he left the abbot's room, a large rooster on a fence crowed loudly, "wo, wo!" Hearing it, his inner responsiveness was suddenly stirred; the sound struck directly upon the word "voice" in Wuzu Fayan's line, "It was only to let her lover recognize her voice." He suddenly awakened greatly. Is this not sound? It is the manifestation of self-nature. Reflections cannot be separated from the mirror; apart from the mirror, where could any reflection appear? Everything whatsoever is the functioning and manifestation of true nature.

Through the explanations above of several gong'an, we should not misunderstand "hearing sound at the eye" as a special paranormal ability. Many of us practitioners like spiritual powers, and we often mistakenly think that only when the ears can see words and the eyes can hear sounds, when the six faculties function interchangeably and supernormal powers manifest, can one hear the insentient expound Dharma. Little do we know that the insentient expound the Dharma through no-speaking. It is not that there is some subtle sound waiting for you to hear when you are not using the ears and not using the eyes.

"Hearing sound at the eye" is not a paranormal ability. Dongshan's line, "Only by hearing sound at the eye can you know," instructs us not to abide at the ear faculty. Where there is no sound to be heard, where delusive thought does not arise, and where circumstances begin to stir emotion, turn the light inward and intuitively recognize it: when not a single thought arises and yet all is perfectly clear and distinct, this is precisely the numinous and wondrous true mind. Once we recognize our original face and understand that everything is the functioning and manifestation of true mind, we understand that "the insentient are sentient, and the sentient are insentient." Mountains, rivers, the great earth, sun, moon, stars, walls, tiles, and rubble are ourselves. Why? Are mountains, rivers, and the great earth not within empty space? Can they leave empty space? They cannot. Our true mind is like empty space: as vast as empty space is, so vast is true mind. True mind pervades empty space and exhausts the Dharma realm. The ten Dharma realms and everything in empty space are all within my mind; mountains, rivers, and the great earth therefore never leave my mind. The Zuo Zhuan says, "Under all heaven, no land is not the king's land; within the borders of the land, no one is

not the king's minister." I am Buddha; they too are Buddha. All are Buddha. Therefore "the insentient are sentient, and the sentient are insentient."

Furthermore, the insentient are earth, water, fire, and wind. For example, the earth is composed of the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. The earth rotates; it has rotation and revolution. Movement is wind. The earth has a crust; the crust is hard, and this is the earth element. On the earth's surface and below the ground there is water, which is the water element. The earth's core is a blazing, molten, lava-like substance, and on the surface there are often volcanic eruptions; this is the fire element. Earth, water, fire, and wind are all complete. The earth is a composite of the four great generative constituents: earth, water, fire, and wind. "Seed" means that which can give rise to things; thus the four great generative constituents can give rise to the myriad things. Our Buddha-nature includes seven great generative constituents: earth, water, fire, wind, space, faculty, and consciousness. These are therefore called the seven great generative constituents. All things in the world arise from these seven generative constituents: "sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom." Therefore the insentient are sentient, and the sentient are insentient. Whether sentient or insentient, all are ourselves. Since all are ourselves, what distinction of sentient and insentient is there? When this principle is understood, one knows that the table is also Buddha, the chair is also Buddha, the brick is also Buddha, and the tile is also Buddha. There is nothing that is not Buddha. All sentient and insentient beings are Buddhas.

10.6 恒河大手印（第六讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Six)

Further Clarifying "Sentient and Insentient Alike Realize Perfect Wisdom"

We have used gong'an cases to discuss how the insentient are precisely sentient, and how "sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom." Yet quite a few people still do not understand this very well. Therefore it is necessary to speak again about why sentient and insentient are the same, and in what respects they are the same. We may summarize it as follows.

First: all insentient things are encompassed within the wondrous bright true mind. True mind is Buddha-mind; therefore the insentient are precisely sentient. True mind is not, as our delusive mind imagines, something covered by ignorance and shrunk into this shell of a body as a tiny point. Once you break through in practice, you discover that it originally exhausts empty space and pervades the Dharma realm: as vast as empty space is, so vast is true mind. Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun said, "True mind is like an ancient mirror. As wide and vast as empty space is, so wide and vast is the ancient mirror."

Why say "like an ancient mirror"? "Ancient mirror" means that it is not something newly produced in this present life. It is used as an analogy for our true mind, which has existed from beginningless time. Why compare it to a mirror? Because a mirror can reflect all things; the myriad phenomena in all their array can appear within it. Our true mind is also like this: it

brightly illumines the great trichiliocosm, its reach pervading worlds as numerous as sands without obstruction. “Worlds as sands” means limitless and boundless worlds, so numerous that they cannot be counted, like the sands of the Ganges.

There are very many worlds in empty space. Modern science has also shown that there are beings on other planets, and that stars like the sun are not limited to just one. The more science develops, the more it can prove that what the Buddha said is true and not false. Our true mind is like empty space; all worlds are within our mind. Since the worlds are within our mind, are insentient things not also within our mind? For example, a house we construct is insentient. It stands on the earth, and the earth is within empty space. Is the house not also within empty space? Therefore all insentient things are within my mind.

Because they are within our mind, we say that our true mind numinously contains the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things are within my true mind; true mind is Buddha-mind. If the ten thousand things are not Buddha, what are they? Therefore we say that sentient and insentient have no distinction. Why must we understand this principle? Because once we understand that the insentient are precisely sentient, our mind becomes vast in scope and can contain the ten thousand things. Then we no longer cling to marks or struggle to possess things, and practice can make progress more easily. Therefore we must have a correct and clear recognition of the insentient being precisely sentient. This is the first point.

Second: all insentient things are nothing other than compositions of the four great elements, and the four great elements are elemental seeds of true mind. For example, the earth is insentient, and it too is composed of earth, water, fire, and wind. A great tree is the same: it is composed of the four great elements and is insentient; it has no feelings or attachments. The earth rotates and revolves—is that not the wind element? The earth has a hard crust—is that not the earth element? On the surface there are oceans, and below the ground there is groundwater—is that not the water element? There is fire inside the earth, and when a volcano erupts the fire comes out—is that not the fire element? Therefore all are earth, water, fire, and wind.

A tree is also like this. When the tree sways without stopping, is that not the wind element? The trunk is the earth element. If you peel off the bark, water comes out—that is the water element. The tree itself has the nature of fire and can burn—is that not the fire element? Therefore it too is made of the four great elements. Earth, water, fire, and wind are the basic elements of our Buddha-nature; they are the four great generative constituents. Here, a “generative constituent” is explained as a seed capable of giving rise to things. A rice seed planted in the ground grows rice; a wheat seed planted in the ground grows wheat. Therefore “seed” means that which can produce and grow.

Thus our Buddha-nature is an essence endowed with every capacity. Everything is created by it, invented by it, and manifested by it. Therefore everything is our Buddha-nature. Do not think that they are things outside the body. They are all ourselves.

Third: by whom are insentient things discovered? By whom are they made? Apart from our Buddha-nature, they cannot be discovered. Suppose there is a tree here, and on the tree there is a flower. If we do not look at it, who can know that there is a flower on the tree? Then who sees the flower? Is it the eyes? It is not the eyes. Modern scientists also understand that seeing things is not done by the eyes but by the functioning of the brain, because if the brain does not function, the eyes cannot play their role and cannot see things. Yet scientists know only that the brain enables the six faculties to function; they do not go a step further and know that the brain itself also cannot function on its own.

The brain's nerves are like an electrical grid. To function, energy—electricity—must be sent in. If no energy is sent in, the brain has no power and cannot function. It is like an electric lamp: if electricity does not come, it cannot shine. What is this energy? It is our Buddha-nature. When Buddha-nature departs, although the brain is still there, it cannot function. Therefore every word and action, every gesture and movement, is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. Apart from Buddha-nature, we cannot function.

Thus our eyes' ability to see insentient things is the manifestation of Buddha-nature, and insentient things are also brought into being through Buddha-nature. Why? For example, we give rise to the thought: how should this flower be planted, and how should it be cultivated? Then we study the techniques of growing flowers and cultivate it carefully, and the flowers bloom abundantly. If this is not the functioning of our Buddha-nature, what is it? If Buddha-nature has left a person, that person's body is like a stone. Could the brain still work? Could the hands and feet still move? Could the person still cultivate flowers?

Who builds a house? People build it. If engineers, craftsmen, and masons were apart from Buddha-nature, could their brains still operate, and could their hands and feet still move to design blueprints and build houses? Therefore all insentient things are also manifestations of our Buddha-nature and are brought into being through Buddha-nature. For this reason, apart from Buddha-nature there are no insentient things. If insentient things were apart from Buddha-nature, could they still exist? Absolutely not. Therefore the insentient are precisely sentient; they are precisely Buddha-nature.

These insentient things are like reflections appearing in a mirror, and the mirror is like our true mind, our Buddha-nature. Our true mind, our Buddha-nature, is Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. It brightly illumines the ten directions without obstruction; in the worlds of the ten directions there is nothing it does not reveal and nothing it does not see. The mirror reflecting things is only an analogy; it is still insufficient to describe Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. Are the things we see before us, or the light arising before our eyes, Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom itself? No, no; they are still far from it.

The mirror can display reflections; the mind-mirror can illumine the myriad appearances. Reflections cannot depart from the mirror. Can a reflection leave the mirror? Apart from the mirror, the reflection is gone. The reflection does not leave the mirror; appearances do not

leave mind. Apart from mind, appearances have nowhere to manifest. Without reflections, it would not function as a mirror; likewise, apart from appearances there is no way for true mind to manifest. True mind is without characteristics and cannot itself be seen; it must be revealed through phenomena—that is, through form. Therefore true mind can bring all things into being, and conversely all things reveal true mind. Such is the subtle relation between mind and appearances. For this reason, mind is appearance and appearance is mind; the reflection is the mirror and the mirror is the reflection. Therefore the insentient are precisely sentient. This is the third point.

Fourth: insentient things are originally Buddha-nature. Only because of ignorance and nonawakening do we delusively take a small portion of the four great elements as our body, abandon the greater part of the four great elements as things outside the body, classify them as insentient, and thereby give rise to the delusive discrimination of sentient and insentient. From the examples analyzed above, all insentient things are originally manifested by Buddha-nature. Sentient beings, merely because of ignorance, unknowingly grasp a small portion of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—as their own physical body, while abandoning over ninety percent of the four great elements outside, regarding them as external things. Then they discriminate: this is sentient, that is insentient. In truth, everything is oneself. This is the fault of ignorance.

Therefore when our practice takes hold and breaks through ignorance, we can personally realize that mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests are without exception ourselves. Taking me as the point of reference, you and everything around us are reflections within my mind. Taking you as the point of reference, all these are reflections within your mind. There is a good saying: “Each sentient being possesses the Dharma realm in its entirety.” What does “the Dharma realm in its entirety” mean? The Dharma realm is the one true Dharma realm—that is, true mind. To possess everything without lacking even the slightest thing is what “in its entirety” means. Complete in what sense? Every sentient being possesses it in full, without one being’s possession obstructing another’s. You are you, I am I, he is he; Zhang San is Zhang San, Li Si is Li Si. What does each possess? The Dharma realm in its entirety. That is, every person has true mind, without the slightest part missing.

For example, in your mirror there is me, and in my mirror there is you. They mutually include one another without obstruction. Or again, suppose there are many electric lamps in a room. The light of this lamp and the light of that lamp merge with one another and include one another; they do not repel one another. From this we can know that sentient and insentient are one in essence. Only because of our ignorance and nonawakening do we delusively make such distinctions. Once ignorance is broken through, one can truly recognize the marvelous functioning of true mind, and will no longer regard the insentient as external things.

Fifth: insentient things are earth, wood, metal, and stone. If we practice badly and we press delusive thoughts to death, then we turn into insentient things—into earth, wood, metal, and stone. Earth, wood, metal, and stone are one of the twelve classes of birth. The Vajra Sutra

speaks of ten classes of beings; the Śūraṅgama Sutra speaks of twelve classes of beings. Some say the six paths of rebirth are all sentient and have nothing to do with the insentient. Actually, if you practice badly, or engage in non-Buddhist practices and press the mind dead, you may also transform into earth, wood, metal, and stone, becoming insentient. Seen this way, are sentient beings not also insentient?

Therefore, after we understand that mountains, rivers, the great earth, men and women, young and old, sentient and insentient, are all manifestations of our Buddha-nature and are all ourselves, our practice must be empty, numinous, and without abiding: neither suppressing nor indulging. “Not suppressing” means that when delusive thoughts come, we do not press them down and forbid them to move, thereby turning into earth, wood, metal, and stone. “Not indulging” means we do not let delusive thoughts run wild and thereby wander in birth-and-death. We neither press delusive thoughts down nor follow them; let them come, and I simply pay them no attention.

It is not that delusive thoughts are absent. They are present. Delusive thoughts formed over many kalpas and many lives—do you expect that as soon as you begin practice they will be gone? That is easy to talk about but impossible to do. Therefore in practice we first cut off coarse delusion. Coarse delusion is the delusive thought that arises when we give rise to mind in relation to objects. How do we stop coarse delusion? We must know that circumstances are unobtainable; they are all reflections manifested by self-nature. My true mind is the mirror, and those other things are reflections. We should grasp the mirror, not grasp the reflections. If we do not cling to reflected appearances, true mind does not move, delusive thoughts do not arise, and coarse delusion is stilled.

If coarse delusion is not stilled, sitting in meditation is sitting in vain. For example, when sitting, if we think about what our son is doing or what our daughter is doing, we cannot sit well. If we then let imagination run on about how to spend our money, what we should buy, where things are cheap, who is good, who is bad, and so forth, can we still sit well? We cannot. Coarse delusion must be stopped. Pay no attention to the reflections in the mind. Reflections in a mirror cannot be grasped.

Someone may say, “The reflection in the mirror cannot be grasped, but the things that appear here can be grasped. Look, I have picked up this pen.” Alas, you are dreaming. This is a dream-state. Things in a dream also seem to be grasped; delicious food is eaten; conversation with good friends is very pleasant; meeting an enemy is frightening and alarming. But when the dream is over, there is nothing at all. Right now we are in a dream-state. Do not cling to marks. Nothing whatsoever can be grasped. When the next breath does not come, nothing can be carried away. Since in the future you will have no choice but to let go, why not let go early and spare some energy?

If you want to wake up—to awaken—then you must practice. Those who practice Buddha-recitation and those who hold mantras must single-mindedly bind the mind to the recitation,

cut off delusive thoughts, and let body, mind, and world all vanish together and dissolve into emptiness. Only the clear and distinct true mind appears. At that time it is like waking from sleep and dreams: everything seen and obtained in the dream is empty and gone. What thing is there still to grasp? Therefore all the appearances now before us are reflections. Do not seek them.

For this reason it is now necessary to explain this clearly to you, so that you understand the principle that the sentient are precisely insentient. Do not make delusive discriminations. Let go, let go. The insentient are precisely sentient, and the sentient are precisely insentient. What mark is there still to cling to? If you are truly wholehearted and resolute, it becomes easy to enter samādhi when you sit in practice. Once coarse delusion is cut off, subtle delusion will still invade; do not fear it and do not press it down. Just pay no attention to it. Where delusive thinking ceases, true mind appears. “When arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent extinction appears.” This is nirvāṇa. Nonarising and nonceasing is nirvāṇa; arising and ceasing is delusive mind. When delusive thoughts and delusive attachment are extinguished completely, this nonarising and nonceasing Buddha-nature appears.

Why does one not sit well in practice? One must reflect on oneself. Where is our mind still attached? Why does it still cling to that? Quickly let it go. Everything is a reflection within our mind. Why are you still attached to it? It is unobtainable. It is false; it is empty. Let it go. If you truly let go, whether practicing Buddha-recitation or holding mantras, subject and object both vanish, sense faculties and sense objects drop away, and Buddha-nature naturally appears and one awakens. Whether you have seen the nature or not, do not ask others. Taste it for yourself. The supreme taste of awakening is like a mute person having a dream: there is no way to tell others, yet within the mind it is clear.

I have explained the questions of having characteristics and being without characteristics again and again, striving to explain it clearly and thoroughly. The purpose is for everyone’s view to be correct; that is the essential meaning of Mahāmudrā beginning by establishing view as the root. Taking view as the root is central to the Buddhadharma. When view is correct, and when one recognizes what Buddha-nature is, practice becomes easy to begin. If one does not recognize Buddha-nature, one inevitably engages in blind and misguided practice. Therefore Mahāmudrā is not a mudrā and mantra for us to practice; it first teaches the root of view, corrects one’s view, and enables us to recognize what Buddha-nature is.

Based on the discussion above, I think everyone has already clarified why the insentient are precisely sentient, why all insentient things are precisely Buddha, and what is meant by “sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom.” If you truly understand this, then if someone asks you, “What is Buddha?” you will not stare blankly, tongue-tied and at a loss. You may simply raise anything at hand. Heaven above and earth below, sun above and moon below, inside the window and outside the window, bright flowers and shaded willows—all these insentient things are Buddha. Pick up anything at random and it becomes a marvelous truth. How easy!

Above, we spoke of the insentient expounding Dharma. How do insentient things expound Dharma? We explained one layer of principle: Dharma that can be spoken in words and heard as sound is not the true Dharma. The true Dharma is speechless. “The path of language is cut off, and mental activity ceases.” That is, speech cannot reach it, and thought cannot conceive it. Dharma that has words and speech is not the true Dharma. Although we do not hear the insentient expounding Dharma, they are precisely expounding Dharma, because “the great sound is scarcely heard.” No-speaking is true speaking; no-hearing is true hearing. If you hear a sound, that is not the true Dharma. Therefore it is said, “If you use the ear to hear, you will never understand; only by hearing sound at the eye can you know.”

You may wonder: if no sound is heard, how can it be said that the insentient are expounding Dharma? Because the truly wondrous, mysterious, and profound meaning cannot be expressed in words; it can only be directly apprehended and intuitively known. If one abides in verbal expression, one cannot meet the true meaning. Therefore it is said, “If you use the ear to hear, you will never understand.” Do not abide in sound. The wondrous meaning cannot be heard. “Only by hearing sound at the eye can you know.” Why? This insentient expounding of Dharma is the subtle and wondrous state in which an encounter with a scene evokes an inner response, the mind directly understands, and there is hearing in no-hearing. When practice and investigation reach no-speaking and no-hearing, where delusive thought does not arise, an encounter with a scene can evoke an inner response and one can directly understand the profound meaning within it.

This is like when Dongshan asked his two teachers, “Can you hear the insentient expounding Dharma?” Both teachers answered the same way: “If I heard it, you would not hear me expounding Dharma.” The meaning is that true hearing is no-hearing. If I could hear it, I would be clinging to marks. If I clung to marks, I would not have the qualification to expound Dharma and could not teach Dharma to you. We spoke of this meaning last time, and can add more. The true dharmakāya of all Buddhas is no-speaking and no-hearing. The enjoyment and emanation bodies are not the true Buddha; they have speaking and hearing. Therefore, “The enjoyment and emanation bodies are not the true Buddha, nor are they expounders of Dharma.” If there is speaking and hearing and one remains attached to verbal expression, how could that do?

As just said, if I heard it, I would be equal to all Buddhas; I would be all Buddhas. The true dharmakāya of all Buddhas is without speaking, so I would not be able to expound Dharma here. If I can expound Dharma, then I am not the same as all Buddhas. This is another layer of meaning. We ordinary beings cling to marks at every moment. When our eyes see something or our ears hear a sound, we then discriminate good and bad, beautiful and ugly, according to our own views. Those who have truly seen the nature, in the midst of all sounds and forms, see with nothing seen and hear with nothing heard. If one abides in sound-objects or visual forms, one becomes an ordinary being. Therefore, “If I heard it, I would not be able to

expound Dharma to you.” If I heard it, I would be clinging to marks. Once clinging to marks, would I still be qualified to teach Dharma? I would not.

Let me summarize several implied meanings in the patriarchs’ words. First, if I heard it, I would be clinging to sound-objects, abiding somewhere, with subject and object opposed. Attachment to views about the Dharma would not yet have been removed; I would not be a person of the Way and would not be qualified to expound Dharma. Second, if I heard it, I would be the same as the insentient. The insentient take non-speaking as true speaking; they do not speak in words, and you therefore would not hear me expounding Dharma. Third, if I heard it, I would be equal to the sages. Yet the enjoyment and emanation bodies of the sages are not the true Buddha and are not expounders of Dharma; the true dharmakāya of the sages is no-speaking and no-hearing. If I now speak to you, it is only a skillful means to guide you.

III. The Caodong Five Ranks of Lord and Minister

We speak of these principles so that all of you understand that forms and sounds are unobtainable. At all times, keep the mind empty and pure, and preserve true mind. If true mind is not preserved, the Way cannot be accomplished. To preserve true mind, first one’s view must be correct, and one must see the original nature of true mind.

Why must it be so? We can corroborate this through Chan. Someone may ask: “The Ganges Mahāmudrā we are discussing is esoteric Buddhism. Why use Chan gong’an from the Wudeng Huiyuan to corroborate it?” It is because the principles taught in esoteric Buddhism are exactly the same as those of Chan and Pure Land: they are not two and not different. In all schools of Buddhadharma, though their terminology differs, the ultimate principle is the same. Therefore Pure Land is esoteric, esoteric is Chan, and Chan is Pure Land. All are Dharma taught by the Buddha for accomplishing the Way; only the tools used are different, while the fruition of the Way they realize is no different. Ganges Mahāmudrā is the supreme esoteric Dharma within esoteric Buddhism and is extremely close to Chan, so it is necessary to corroborate it using Chan principles.

Among the five houses of Chan, the Caodong school corresponds most closely with esoteric Buddhism. Caodong speaks of the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister, five ranks that lead us from ordinary views to opening the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. Opening the Buddha’s knowledge and vision is the stage of seeing the Way. Further on is the stage of practicing the Way, and after practicing the Way comes the stage of realizing the Way, the successful realization of Buddhahood. The five ranks contain three gradual stages: seeing the Way, practicing the Way, and realizing the Way. This is the same as Mahāmudrā, which likewise begins with the stage of seeing the Way.

How does Caodong see the Way? It teaches the upright rank and the inclined rank. The upright rank represents essence, emptiness, and principle; the inclined rank represents function, form, and phenomena.

The first rank is: “Inclined within the upright. Before moonlight at the beginning of the third watch, do not be surprised that meeting face to face, one does not recognize; faintly, one still harbors old resentment.” This is the rank of an ordinary being. The ordinary being is like “before moonlight at the beginning of the third watch,” a moonless night, completely dark. Why? Because such a person does not know what Buddha-nature is, recognizes nothing but external forms, is covered by ignorance, and has a mind in total darkness.

“Do not be surprised that meeting face to face, one does not recognize.” All of us are within Buddha-nature at every moment, meeting Buddha-nature at every moment, yet we simply do not recognize it. In eating, rising and resting, and all our daily activities, if Buddha-nature were not functioning, how could we move? For example, in the morning we get up, wash our face, brush our teeth, go out, buy vegetables, go to work, and do our tasks. Who is doing this? Who is this? We may ask ourselves in the same way Chan asks, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” You tell me: if it is not original nature, who is it? Since it is original nature, why do we meet face to face and not recognize it? Do not blame original nature for being hard to recognize. In fact, it is because we cling to marks, are ignorant, and lack wisdom. Ignorance is dark night. In the long night, how can one meet and recognize?

“Faintly, one still harbors old resentment.” “Faintly” means not obvious. The habits to which we usually cling are faintly making trouble there. We only run outward to covet, seek, and grasp, and we are unwilling to turn the light inward: Who is it that can move? Who is it that can function? If we can turn the light inward and ask: “Who is this?” then we recognize. Therefore “inclined within the upright” means that we are originally in the upright rank of the essential principle—the rank of Buddha-nature—yet because we are unaware and unawakened, we fall into the inclined rank and cling to phenomena. The upright rank is the essential principle; the inclined rank is form. The upright rank is emptiness; the inclined rank is existence. Emptiness and existence, principle and phenomena, essence and appearance are all relative. This is “inclined within the upright,” clinging to the inclined rank. Among the five great Chan houses, the methods of receiving people differ; Caodong’s principles are easy to understand. This first rank is the rank of an ordinary being: not recognizing Buddha-nature.

The second rank is: “Upright within the inclined. At daybreak, an old woman meets the ancient mirror; clearly face to face, there is no other truth. Stop being confused about the head and still taking its reflection as real.” This is the stage of seeing the Way. In the daily functioning of the inclined rank, the essential principle appears. That is, in wearing clothes and eating food, one constantly recognizes that this is my Buddha-nature functioning. The Way has been seen; this is the stage of seeing the Way.

Earlier it was said to be completely dark; now it is bright. “Daybreak” means dawn is breaking and daylight appears. The image of the old woman is subtle: she has white hair, and when dawn is breaking, whiteness appears. “Meets the ancient mirror” means looking in the mirror. A mirror is bright and luminous, symbolizing light. When the old woman meets the ancient mirror, dawn breaks and the light appears. When a practitioner’s practice reaches this dawn-

like light, one sees one's own original nature. Therefore it says, "A woman at daybreak meets the ancient mirror." "Clearly face to face, there is no other truth": "clearly" means clear and distinct; "face to face" means direct encounter. You and the reflection in the mirror meet face to face. The reflection appearing in the mirror is you, and you are the mirror. Apart from this reflection, is there any other truth? Apart from this reflection, there is nothing else. Therefore it says, "Clearly face to face, there is no other truth."

For example, Lingyun opened the door and saw a mass of blooming peach blossoms; suddenly he greatly awakened: "Ah! If it is not my nature manifesting this appearance, who is manifesting it? Apart from my nature, where could I see these peach blossoms? Conversely, apart from the reflection of the peach blossoms, where could the mirror of my nature be revealed?" Therefore with a single inward turn of the light, he recognized that "clearly face to face, there is no other truth" and saw original nature.

The patriarch Dongshan was also awakened when, crossing a river, he saw his own reflection. At that time he had already asked about the insentient expounding Dharma, and his teacher had explained it to him. Although he had some awakening, he had not yet understood thoroughly and still had some doubt. One day, as he was about to cross a river and lowered his head to roll up his trouser legs, he saw his own reflection appear in the water. "Ah!"—only then did he suddenly attain great awakening and compose a verse: "By all means avoid seeking from another; far, far away it becomes distant from me. Now I go on alone, and everywhere I can meet him. He now is precisely me; I now am not him. One should understand in this way; only then can one accord with suchness."

What does this verse mean? "By all means avoid seeking from another": in practicing Dharma and learning the Way, we must not run outward in pursuit and must not seek from others. Only what we awaken to ourselves is real. For example, Pure Land practitioners recite Amitābha Buddha's name and pray to Amitābha Buddha in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss: "Come pull me, come pull me." This is seeking from another, and that is not right. Therefore Master Lianchi said that practicing Buddha-recitation is "calling out with each sound to awaken the true host." Buddha-recitation is to awaken our own true host. Do not be drowsy, do not fall asleep, do not cling to marks. Be clear and awake. The myriad phenomena are reflections in mind. Do not cling to marks. Our capacity to perceive and know is Buddha-nature; it is Amitābha Buddha. If you seek from another, you are grasping outwardly. Seeking outwardly and asking Amitābha Buddha to come pull you is mistaken.

Amitābha Buddha arouses great loving-kindness without conditions; there is no one he does not welcome and guide and no one he does not save. But he does not pull you. Rather, he emits light to illumine you and thereby welcomes and guides you; you enter that light and that is enough. If you want Amitābha Buddha to come pull you, that will not do. Therefore Chan Master Yongming Yanshou said, "When practitioners' pure karma has matured, their mind is pure and accords with the Buddha; only then do they see the Buddha appear before them and welcome and guide them to rebirth in the West. Although the Buddha appears before them, in

truth there is no coming or going. It is like the moon in the sky: in a thousand rivers and ten thousand waters, it appears all at once, yet the moon is truly undivided. The mind is like water. If the mind is not pure, it is like turbid water and does not show the reflection. Therefore for those whose minds are inverted and confused, although the Buddha emits light to welcome and guide them, they are like people born blind who cannot see the sun.”

The Buddha is like the moon in the sky, and the mind with which we practice Buddha-recitation is like water. If the water is pure, the reflection of the moon appears in the water, and the Buddha-image appears within your mind. If the mind engaged in Buddha-recitation is not pure, although the moon shines on you just the same, your mind is turbid, muddy water, and the moon’s reflection cannot appear. Amitābha Buddha is not seen. Therefore, “By all means avoid seeking from another.”

If you look outward and seek outward, then “far, far away it becomes distant from me.” Seeking outside mind puts you a hundred and eight thousand miles away from Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is not elsewhere; it is shining right before you. Who is seeing things? Who is hearing sounds? Who is smelling fragrance and stench? Who is speaking? Who is moving? If this is not my Buddha-nature, what is it? Why do you seek from another?

“Now I go on alone.” Now, at all times and in all places, I neither grasp nor reject external things. Everything is “alone,” absolute. I do not see any counterpart and do not see anything relative. Absolute true mind is “alone,” absolute, without a single thing, and has nothing relative. When Emperor Wu of Liang asked, “What is the first meaning of the holy truth?” Patriarch Bodhidharma answered, “Vast emptiness, nothing holy.” Emperor Wu then asked, “Who is facing me?” The patriarch answered, “I do not know.” Why “I do not know”? In relative terms, you know me and I know you. But I alone—absolute true mind—am absolute. Who knows whom? To speak of knowing or not knowing within absolute true mind is already talk of two extremes.

If one can be like this, then “everywhere I can meet him”: at all times and in all places this absolute true mind can appear, and at all times and in all places one can see the true suchness of one’s own nature. “He now is precisely me.” “He” is the reflection. Mountains, rivers, the great earth, sun, moon, stars, and all things are without exception my reflections. They are all my manifestations. But “I now am not him”: my dharmakāya is without characteristics. Although the reflections are all my manifestations, I am not the reflections. That is to say, although all appearances are me, I am not all appearances, because dharmakāya is without characteristics. Even if you remove all appearances, since they are not me, there is no damage to me. Therefore do not cling to marks. All marks are unobtainable. It is right that not a single dharma is established.

“One should understand in this way; only then can one accord with suchness.” Practitioners of the Way should understand in this way. Only then can true mind abide constantly, accord with unmoving suchness, and not be influenced by any object or circumstance. There is no place

apart from my true mind, as inseparable as a shadow follows a form. Therefore at every moment we must not pursue outwardly. Practicing Buddha-recitation is reciting one's own mind. Reciting Amitābha Buddha's name is to awaken one's own mind and not cling to marks. "A woman at daybreak meets the ancient mirror; clearly face to face, there is no other truth." This is you. Apart from this, if you search elsewhere, you will not find it. There is nothing else.

Thus we have repeatedly pointed out to all of you: this true mind, this awakened awareness, is me. Apart from it, there is nothing. If you think, "This has no five superknowledges of divine eye, divine ear, recollection of past lives, knowledge of others' minds, and miraculous abilities, so it is not true mind and awakened awareness," then you are mistaken. For although, after being pointed out, you recognize this wondrous bright fundamental essence—true mind and awakened awareness—your habits of delusive thinking and attachment from many lives and many kalpas are extremely numerous and have not yet been removed. How could spiritual powers suddenly arise all at once? It is like a mirror covered with thick dust: how could it reflect things? You must wipe and polish it until it shines, and then it can brightly reflect. But first you must obtain the mirror. If you do not obtain the mirror, what will you wipe and polish?

Therefore you must first, through pointing-out, recognize what the wondrous bright fundamental essence is, and then diligently remove habits and restore the radiance of our fundamental essence. Afterward various wondrous functions arise, the great Way is accomplished, and all spiritual powers become complete. Therefore Chan Master Guifeng said: "Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water—the whole of delusion is precisely true—and rely on the warmth of the sun to melt it. Realize that the ordinary being is precisely Buddha—the ordinary being is Buddha—and draw on the Dharma's power for sustained cultivation; when the ice melts, the water flows and moistens, and only then is the function of irrigation and washing revealed. When delusion is exhausted, the mind becomes empty and unobstructed—with all delusion swept away and defilement cleared away; the functioning of powers and light appears in response—brightly illuminating all things, brightly illuminating heaven and earth. As for spiritual powers and transformations in events, they cannot be accomplished in a single day; they are revealed through gradual cultivation."

In learning Buddhism and practicing Dharma, first and foremost we must recognize the original nature and firmly affirm that this which can speak and act is our true mind. Once our footing stands firm and we have not the slightest doubt, then we protect it well, carry it forward, magnify its radiance, and realize noble fruition. Mahāmudrā teaches us first to firmly affirm Buddha-nature and then to begin practice. If this point cannot be affirmed, there is no way to begin what follows, and practice cannot mature. Therefore Patriarch Dongshan spoke well: "Clearly face to face, there is no other truth." Apart from this reflection, if you go searching further, there is nothing to find. Buddha-nature is our capacity to perceive and know: to know cold and warmth, overcast and clear skies, fullness and hunger, pain and itching. You must protect it at all times.

The last line, “Stop being confused about the head and still taking its reflection as real,” means: do not go on being confused yourselves. Do not chase after reflections. Being confused about the head and taking reflections as real is an example the Buddha gave in the *Śūraṅgama Sutra*. The Buddha said that in the city of Śrāvastī there was a performer named Yajñadatta. One day he took a mirror and looked at himself. He saw in the mirror a made-up theatrical face and did not see his original face. He mistook it for a monster and ran about for no reason, looking outside for his head. In truth, his head was still on his own shoulders and had not been lost. This analogy urges us not to be deluded by external marks and mistake them for our original face.

“Still taking reflections as real”: at every moment you continue to take reflections as real. In truth, those reflections are illusory images manifested by you. Why mistake the false for the true? Women often find it hardest to put down children and keep them in mind all day. What about men? The young love girlfriends; the old love money. Confucius said it well: “When young, with blood and qi not yet settled, guard against sex... When old, with blood and qi already declining, guard against acquisitiveness.” These all amount to greedily taking reflections as real. Do not take reflections as real. Let go. “Stop being confused about the head and still taking its reflection as real” means that amid myriad illusory appearances—the inclined—recognize true mind, the upright, and do not be deluded by reflections. This is the second rank, “upright within the inclined,” the stage of seeing the Way.

The third rank is: “Coming from within the upright. Within emptiness there is a road out of the dust. If only one does not touch the present taboo, that surpasses the severed-tongue eloquence of old.” This is the stage of practicing the Way. Earlier we spoke of the stage of seeing the Way. The “upright” is the upright rank; the upright rank is the essential principle. From within that essential principle, one comes forth into functioning, and within functioning one trains oneself and wears away one’s habits. This is “coming from within the upright.”

“Within emptiness there is a road out of the dust.” We say everything is nothing and everything is empty, but this “nothing” and this emptiness are not annihilationist emptiness, not absolute nothingness. This nothingness, this emptiness, is the essential principle, free from clinging to any mark. If you can be empty at all times and not cling to marks at all times, and if you go along this road, you can leave the three realms and emerge from cyclic rebirth. Actually, this emptiness that we practice at every moment is not an emptiness opposed to existence, not annihilationist emptiness. Do not be afraid of falling into emptiness. Ancient people said, “Empty, empty, empty; within emptiness success is achieved. After the root has been planted and cultivated, what fear is there of snow and wind?” When the mind is truly empty and pure, Buddha-nature appears. Before us appears a bright and open road that can lead us beyond the phenomenal domain of the three realms.

We sentient beings are in the dust of the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm, circling without end in the six paths. If we can truly stand firm at every moment, clearly recognize our self-nature, protect it at all times, and as soon as a thought arises, immediately

notice it and let it go, then we can leave the three realms, emerge from the sea of suffering, and accomplish the great Way. For example, when Pure Land practitioners have delusive thoughts arise, they take up the Buddha-name: “Amitābha Buddha,” and thereby cut off delusive thoughts, attachments, and afflictions. When you get angry, immediately recite “Amitābha Buddha.” If that is still not effective, recite aloud or loudly, and in this way cut off the affliction. If you do not do this, you run after circumstances, delusive thoughts fly about without end, and how can you accomplish the Way?

Therefore first one must clearly recognize one’s original face: recognize it as having the characteristic of being without characteristics, as the essence endowed with every capacity, able to function wondrously, and protect it at every moment. Only by training oneself amid all favorable and adverse conditions can one attain liberation. This is most important. Therefore it says, “Within emptiness there is a road out of the dust.”

“If only one does not touch the present taboo, that surpasses the severed-tongue eloquence of old.” This line is even better. What is a taboo? Names may require avoidance. For example, if the emperor’s name contains the character “correct,” then your names cannot use that character; you must avoid the taboo and cannot have the same name as the emperor. Or if your father’s or grandfather’s name contains the character “bright,” then your name cannot use “bright”; you must avoid it and not share a name with an elder. “Not touching the present” refers here to the emperor, and it is used as an analogy for our Buddha-nature. It means not violating it at any time. For example, this fist of mine: if I call it a fist, I violate it; yet it is a fist, and if I do not call it a fist, I go against it. Violating it is not right; going against it is also not right.

What is meant by “not touching it”? It means that when you practice in earnest until you recognize your own Buddha-nature, you still must not constantly recite to yourself, “This is my Buddha-nature.” Abiding in Buddha-nature is also not acceptable. Even when practice reaches the point where even awareness is no longer established, do not abide there. Therefore it is said: if awareness and observation are still present as something one abides in, it is still birth-and-death and liberation has not been attained. Abiding in a noble state is still conditioned and is not ultimate. Ordinary beings, of course, have neither awareness nor observation; all day they are muddled and dazed, as if dreaming. Laozi once said, “The people of the world are sharp and clear; I alone am dull and muddled.” The people of the world are actually muddled and dazed, so why say they are sharp and clear? “Sharp and clear” means cleverness used for fame and profit. Laozi’s “dull and muddled” means that practice has reached the ultimate place, great wisdom is like foolishness, and there is not the slightest abiding.

Therefore in practice one must both recognize original nature and not abide in it, thinking there is something attained. This is “not touching the present taboo.” The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “At all times, do not give rise to delusive thoughts; with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either. Dwelling in the realm of delusive thinking, do

not add discrimination; when no discrimination is added, do not distinguish true reality.” When practice reaches this, it is ultimate. Therefore in the end even Buddha is unobtainable. “Unobtainable” does not mean not becoming Buddha; it is precisely becoming Buddha. For “Buddha” is also a provisional name, and not the slightest thing can be obtained. If you have a Buddha to become, you have not yet become Buddha.

This is just like the gong’an we discussed earlier, in which Chan Master Dongshan’s teacher said: “If I heard the insentient expounding Dharma, I would be equal to the sages.” Being equal to the sages means that in my mind there is a Buddha. If there is a Buddha, it is not the true Buddha. Therefore, even a view that puts one on a level with Buddha still leaves an obstruction at the Buddha-ground. Thus you must not even retain a view of Buddha. Only when all of it has been cleared away is it truly pure. Hence, “If only one does not touch the present taboo, that surpasses the severed-tongue eloquence of old.”

There is an allusion here. In the past there was a person—I have forgotten his name—whose wisdom was extremely great. The emperor and treacherous ministers cut off his tongue, and he used the blood from the severed tongue to write characters. Our accomplishment of the Way surpasses this talent of the cut tongue by far. The talent of a cut tongue is merely worldly cleverness and eloquence; it is small wisdom. Prajñā is great wisdom. This speaks of practice—the third rank.

The fourth rank is traditionally written: “Arriving within the combined. When two blades cross, there is no need to avoid them. A good hand is like a lotus in fire; naturally there is a will that soars to heaven.” Some say that the name should not be “arriving within the combined,” 兼中至, but “arriving within the inclined,” 偏中至, and that the transmitted text may contain a printing error. I think this interpretation is correct. “Combined” means that the upright and inclined are joined as one; it has the meaning of combining. The third rank, “coming from within the upright,” expresses coming from the essential principle of the upright rank into functioning. The fourth rank should continue by saying that within the daily events of the inclined rank one can achieve nonobstruction between principle and phenomena. Therefore “arriving within the inclined” is the contextually appropriate reading here.

“Arriving within the inclined” means that all day long, in the midst of doing things, one does not depart from the upright rank. One can achieve nonobstruction between principle and phenomena, not fearing any adverse conditions or afflictions, and allowing marvelous functioning to unfold. This too is the stage of practicing the Way. “When two blades cross, there is no need to avoid them”: when fighting, blades and spears come and go; do not be afraid and do not avoid them. It is an analogy: amid all adverse conditions, do not be afraid and do not be afflicted. If you have a rebellious child at home, do not be afflicted. Ah, all this is unobtainable, unobtainable. If the child is rebellious, let the child be rebellious. You merely spend a little more money. Go ahead and spend it. Since I owe you a debt, repaying debt with money is proper. It does not matter; there is no affliction.

“When two blades cross, there is no need to avoid them.” When adversity comes, can you avoid it? You cannot. Therefore there is “no need to avoid.” Speaking of avoidance, I recall a gong’an. A disciple asked Chan Master Dongshan, “When cold and heat arrive, how should one avoid them?” Chan Master Dongshan said, “Go to the place where there is no cold and no heat.” The disciple asked again, “What is the place where there is no cold and no heat?” Dongshan said, “When it is cold, let the cold kill you; when it is hot, let the heat kill you.” What does this mean? When warm, do not make a thought of warmth; when cold, do not make a thought of cold. If you make thoughts of cold and warmth, you give rise to discriminating mind and afflictions appear.

What should be done when adversity is present? Two lines of poetry say it well: “Boiling cauldrons and furnace coals are blown and made to cease; sword-trees and knife-mountains are shouted down and destroyed.” Boiling cauldrons, furnace coals, sword-trees, and knife-mountains—my mind does not fear them. With one blow I make them cease; with one great shout I destroy them. Let adversity come as it will. If my mind does not move, it is extinguished. Pay attention: it is not that when adversity comes, I think about how to avoid it; nor is it figuring out how to eliminate affliction. Rather, our mind must let go. Everything does not matter; everything is unobtainable. There is nothing to fear. If you want to kill me, then come kill me. “Offering the head to a white blade is like cutting the spring wind.” My mind does not move. Let adversity come; I do not avoid it. This is “when two blades cross, there is no need to avoid them.” My mind does not waver and does not fear. This is “blown and made to cease; shouted down and destroyed.”

This rank speaks of the stage of practicing the Way. Practicing the Way means that we constantly train ourselves amid clusters of adverse conditions, without alarm and without fear, able to endure the test. Only then can we realize the marvelous fruition through genuine practice. Therefore it says, “A good hand is like a lotus in fire; naturally there is a will that soars to heaven.” A true good hand is someone whose practice has genuine strength—not a lotus blooming in a pond, but a lotus blooming in fire. Therefore Chan Master Dahui Zonggao said that lay practitioners have twenty times the strength of monastics. Chan Master Dahui Zonggao was an extraordinary great Chan patriarch. He said, “Great elders such as Yang Wengong, Li Wenhe, and Zhang Wujin broke through; their strength surpasses that of us monastics twentyfold.” These three were lay practitioners of that time who awakened to the Way.

Why did Chan Master Dahui speak this way? Because our habits are heavy. We have both discriminative self-clinging and discriminative dharma-clinging, as well as innate self-clinging and innate dharma-clinging. Even if, in a single moment, we open up what is original and directly realize Buddha-nature, the two innate forms of clinging have still not been shed. The third stanza on mental consciousness in the Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses says: “When the initial mind arises on the Joyous Ground, innate tendencies still manifest as entanglement and latency.” After awakening, if one does not undergo a period of hard training

and wear away the two innate forms of clinging in events and circumstances, one cannot easily reach the ultimate.

Monastics have “one bottle and one bowl; in responding to daily circumstances, they do not have so many enemies that obstruct the Way. With one mind and one intent they investigate this matter.” Lay people, however, “with eyes open and eyes closed, meet nothing that is not an enemy-spirit obstructing the Way.” Monastics “break in from outside,” while lay people “break out from inside.” What do “inside” and “outside” refer to? Inside what, and outside what? This refers to “worldly entanglements.” Worldly entanglements are like “a great mass of fire”; they are conditions that obstruct the Way. Monastics are in a pure place, not dragged down by family and relatives, like being outside the great fire, like white lotus flowers in a pond. Lay people are amid worldly entanglements, like being inside the great fire. If they can accomplish the Way, they are like red lotuses in fire. Chan Master Dahui said: “Those who break in from outside have weaker strength; those who break out from inside have stronger strength.”

All sages and worthies who accomplished the Way throughout the past went through hardships, endured great suffering and great toil, and underwent all kinds of training before accomplishing the Way. If one fears suffering and fatigue and cannot withstand the training and testing of adverse conditions, one cannot accomplish the Way. Our original teacher Śākyamuni Buddha also underwent hardships and all kinds of training. Finally, seated beneath the Bodhi tree, he made the great vow: “If I do not realize the great Way, I will not rise from this seat!” Only then, on the night of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, did he see the morning star and realize the great Way. In a past life, even when King Kali cut his body apart, he did not move his mind. What a great mind of the Way this was. The Buddha himself set us this example: practicing the Way requires such extraordinary endurance to be accomplished.

As for conditions that train body and mind, there is actually no need to deliberately seek hardship. Right now we are constantly amid all kinds of adversity. As the saying goes, “Unpleasant matters are usually eight or nine out of ten.” In real life, adverse conditions contrary to our wishes are present at every moment. Today the world is beset by many disasters; contention over self and others erupts, and disputes over right and wrong abound. Added to the karmic obstructions of each sentient being, every household has troubling matters. Some people do not yet know suffering—this itself is “the suffering of suffering.” Fortunately, now we know to practice the Way. We must stand firmly on our feet, not be moved by these dreamlike, shadowy worldly affairs, not fear suffering, and go forward courageously. Until the Way is accomplished, we vow not to stop. Therefore, “A good hand is like a lotus in fire,” and “naturally there is a will that soars to heaven.” A great person has a soaring aspiration, does not fear hardship or suffering, and does not bow before setbacks or failure.

Practicing the Way requires the spirit of a great person: able to practice great giving, not confined by petty details, unafraid when adversity comes, not delighted when favorable conditions come, remaining true to one's course and advancing bravely. Without the spirit of a great person, it is hard to succeed in practice. The reason Śākyamuni Buddha taught the Pure Land school was that he feared we were timid, weak, afraid that the road was far, and did not dare to practice. Therefore he taught a good place to rest: in the West there is a World of Ultimate Bliss, and at the end of life Amitābha Buddha will come to welcome and guide you to rebirth there. Go there at ease; do not fear. Therefore Buddhadharma is the best: everything is complete. There is Dharma for the timid and Dharma for the brave.

In reality, Chan is not dangerous. As long as you make a great vow: "I must become Buddha and liberate sentient beings; until I succeed, I vow not to stop!" With this great vow sustaining you, you will never lose the human body; when you return in another life, hearing one teaching you will awaken to a thousand. To speak honestly, if one fears suffering it is not easy to become a Buddha, because one's habits cannot be trained away. Do not think that in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss one need not practice, and that one comfortably enjoys oneself and then accomplishes the Way. How could it be so easy? The scriptures say that in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the sounds of water, birds, and wind are all "flowing proclamations of Dharma-sound." What Dharma-sound do they proclaim? They "proclaim the sounds of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and no-self." They are telling us not to cling to that beautiful world, enjoy pleasure, and fail to practice. That world too is empty and illusory; clinging is suffering. All appearances are impermanent, not graspable, and not worth attachment. One must let go, let go, and let go again.

The scriptures also say one should "after eating, walk in meditation." Some people mistakenly think that in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, after eating one has nothing to do and just strolls around for fun. This is a great mistake. "Eating" is here reread as "feeding back": after practicing the Way and taking in Dharma-food fully, one should "walk throughout" the ten directions and feed Dharma-food back to sentient beings—that is, widely liberate sentient beings. Through liberating sentient beings, one trains one's own habits; only in this way can the Way be accomplished. Otherwise, the Way cannot be accomplished. To accomplish the Way, we must, through liberating sentient beings, train away habits and accumulate merit and virtue; only then can one perfectly accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood.

Why? Because sentient beings' habits each differ. If you wish to liberate them, you must set yourself aside and follow others. To accommodate them, you must first eliminate your own habits; only then can you continually accommodate others. Therefore among Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows is the vow to "constantly accord with sentient beings." This is not easy to do. Only when you truly do it and exhaust your own habits can you cut off "dust-and-sand delusions." Only then can your mind become vast in scope, and great spiritual powers and wondrous functions will arise of themselves without being sought. Therefore

practicing the Way requires the spirit of a great person: “naturally there is a will that soars to heaven.”

The above speaks of training amid events and circumstances; it is still the stage of practicing the Way. We must undergo hard training to reach the state of nonobstruction between principle and phenomena. The final rank is “arriving within the combined”: the upright rank and the inclined rank draw together and merge. Patriarch Dongshan’s “Verse on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister” uses the lord to symbolize the upright rank and the minister to symbolize the inclined rank. Lord and minister merge, hence “arriving within the combined.” The verse says: “Arriving within the combined. Not falling into existence or nonexistence—who dares respond? Everyone wishes to emerge from the common stream; in the end, returning again, one sits in the charcoal.”

What does “Not falling into existence or nonexistence—who dares respond?” mean? We have said before: regarding our Buddha-nature, to say it exists is not right, and to say it does not exist is not right. We ordinary beings love to cling. If one speaks of existence, we cling to existence; if one speaks of nonexistence, we cling to nonexistence, and take both as principles to understand. In reality, Buddha-nature is neither existent nor nonexistent; even further negations of these two alternatives are unobtainable. Buddha-nature is originally like this. If you say it exists, it has no obtainable characteristics. If you say it does not exist, it can function wondrously. Is this not precisely what it means to be neither existent nor nonexistent? Buddha-nature is so, and phenomena are also so.

For example, a teacup has no intrinsic essence of its own. The cup does not exist in and of itself; it is clay shaped and then fired in a kiln. If you say it does not exist, its form is clearly present and can be used to drink water and tea. Does this not show that it is neither existent nor nonexistent? The fundamental essence of Buddha-nature is neither existent nor nonexistent, and all worldly phenomena are likewise neither existent nor nonexistent. “Not falling into existence or nonexistence—who dares respond?” When singing poetry or composing songs, I sing one line and you respond with another; this mutual singing is called responding. Who dares respond? At this final rank, it is difficult to frame any response. To say “exists” is wrong, and to say “does not exist” is also wrong. One can only be without speaking and without hearing.

When Śākyamuni World-Honored One was at the nirvāṇa assembly, he said: “If one says I enter nirvāṇa, that person is not my disciple. If one says I do not enter nirvāṇa, that person is also not my disciple.” All of you: did the Buddha enter nirvāṇa or not? What does it take to be a disciple of the Buddha? Someone may say, “Neither existent nor nonexistent.” Not right. If you say “neither existent nor nonexistent,” you still fall into the concept of “neither existent nor nonexistent.” Then how should it be said? Leaving aside existence and nonexistence, the negation of each, and even further negations of those denials, how would you speak? “Mirages have many strange colors; after rain, the rainbow is especially lovely.”

“Everyone wishes to emerge from the common stream.” “Common stream” refers to ordinary beings, because ordinary beings are all flowing through the bitter sea of birth-and-death in the six paths of rebirth. To emerge from the common stream is to end birth-and-death and leap out of the bitter sea of cyclic rebirth in the six paths. Everyone who has come here today wants to become Buddha and leap out of the bitter sea of birth-and-death. “In the end, returning again, one sits in the charcoal.” “In the end” means at the final outcome. “Returning again to sit in the charcoal” means returning to the place where you originally were.

Before we practiced Dharma, afflictions and attachments obscured the radiance of original nature. Through practice, we gradually restored that radiance. Why, at the end, would we return again to sit in black charcoal? Is this line mistaken? It is not mistaken. In esoteric Buddhism, the final stage of practice is described just this way. It says that when the practice reaches home, it is like the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month. On the last day of the twelfth lunar month, can the moon still be seen at night? There is a folk joke used by debtors: “I will repay when there is a moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month.” Is there a moon then? No. If there is none, the debt is not repaid.

Why, when practice of the Way reaches its final stage, is it like the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month? Because even when radiance shines forth greatly and spiritual powers manifest on a grand scale, this is still not the ultimate stage. One must gather everything back into one’s own mind, leave not a single dharma remaining, not hang onto a single thread, and not be stained by a single dust mote. Only then is it the point of completion. Therefore the rank of complete blackness is used to represent it. Furthermore, when practice reaches home, there is no birth-and-death to be ended, because Buddha-nature originally has no birth-and-death. The six paths are all the Tathāgata’s sea of quiescent cessation. Therefore coming and going are free, and one liberates beings in response to conditions. After passing through the Prison Barrier, the six paths of rebirth are precisely ending birth-and-death, and ending birth-and-death is precisely the six paths of rebirth. Birth-and-death and nirvāṇa are both unobtainable.

“In the end, returning again, one sits in the charcoal”: the last is equal to the first. Truly arriving home is like having no practice at all. Buddha-nature is like a great circle, without beginning or end. But do not misunderstand this to mean that after becoming a Buddha one returns to be an afflicted sentient being. For a Buddha, afflictions are unobtainable, bodhi is unobtainable, sentient beings are unobtainable, and Buddha is also unobtainable. There is nothing to grasp and nothing to reject. Sentient beings give rise to mind in relation to objects and delusively grasp and seize. How could this be the same? This “arriving within the combined” speaks of the stage of realizing the Way.

However, if one has only the stage of realizing the Way and not the stage of seeing the Way, what is there to realize? First there must be the stage of seeing the Way. Apart from the stage of seeing the Way, it is impossible to enter the stage of realizing the Way. Therefore Ganges Mahāmudrā begins by teaching the stage of seeing the Way, showing that this stage is very

important. Today two lay practitioners asked me about the “Five Ranks of Lord and Minister,” so I have taken their content and sequence and compared them with Ganges Mahāmudrā. The sequence is: inclined within the upright, upright within the inclined, coming from within the upright, arriving within the inclined (the reading Yuan Yin prefers here over the transmitted “arriving within the combined”), and arriving within the combined. The first two are the stage of seeing the Way, the middle two are the stage of practicing the Way, and the last is the stage of realizing the Way. This is the same as Ganges Mahāmudrā: first one must see the Way—that is, apprehend Mind and see nature, the “root of view.” This is extremely important.

Because many people still do not quite understand “sentient and insentient alike realize perfect wisdom,” we have therefore explained it again. Who would have known that once opened, it would pour out like a flood and so much would be said? Yet we still have not departed from Mahāmudrā’s “root of view.” This is what is meant by “amid ten thousand changes, one does not depart from the root.”

IV. Dispelling Attachment to Emptiness, Bliss, and Clarity

Earlier we said that in practice one must “neither suppress nor indulge”: one must not press delusive thoughts down and forbid them to arise, thereby becoming earth, wood, metal, and stone; nor should one indulge delusive thoughts and let them run wild, thereby wandering in birth-and-death. Now the text continues:

“To be free of delusive thoughts is one’s own mind-nature abiding in the unconditioned; it is wisdom-light.” If we can be free of delusive thoughts, not only while sitting in practice but also at all times in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, this is one’s own mind-nature abiding in the unconditioned. It is the original face appearing. At all times and in all places, not clinging to marks and not letting the mind abide in the slightest reflection is called the unconditioned. This does not mean doing nothing. If there are tasks, just do them. “Eating all day, one has never bitten a single grain of rice; wearing clothes all day, one has never hung onto a single thread.” This is the mind without abiding. The mind without abiding is our natural original nature.

However, when one first sees original nature and still has no spiritual powers and wondrous functions, it is called the plain dharmakāya. It is like having bought a piece of plain cloth without any patterns. The mind that can abide as unconditioned is the plain dharmakāya; it is the light of wisdom. Some say this plain dharmakāya has no spiritual powers and wondrous functions, and its light is not great. This is because you still have a place of abiding: you cling to “abiding as unconditioned,” and this is not true nonabiding. This is the delusive attachment that covers your original nature. After it is removed, thought after thought does not cling to marks, and only then can the light of wisdom appear. You must not give rise to mind and move thoughts to seek it, because it is originally luminous. For example, a jewel has light, but if a layer of mud covers it, the light cannot appear. After the mud is removed, the light

naturally shines forth. Is there still a need to seek another light? Therefore do not seek anything. Simply remove delusive thoughts, and the light of wisdom naturally appears.

“If one takes contrived practice as the Way, one will certainly not realize the original source.” Conversely, if we practice through contrivance, with the mind abiding somewhere, then there is something blocking us and it is difficult to accomplish the Way. Here, “contrived practice” means that something is being sought. Taking something sought as “the Way” is delusive mind, a mind with abiding and attachment, and it is a hundred and eight thousand miles away from the empty, numinous, nonabiding true mind. In this way one absolutely cannot clearly awaken to the original face. If one does not understand true mind and does not recognize what is original, that is blind and misguided practice. Wanting to accomplish the Way in this way is like “boiling sand to make rice”: there is no such principle.

For example, Pure Land practitioners who pray to the Amitābha Buddha in the West, “Come pull me, come pull me,” are practicing with a seeking, contrived mind. It is very difficult for them to be in accord with Amitābha Buddha. Because they do not know what mind is and what Buddha is, they split mind and Buddha into two sides. There is seeking, expectation, and abiding attachment; the mind is not pure. They absolutely cannot be born in the Western Pure Land. Nowadays many Buddhists want to become rich. This is especially true among lay practitioners from Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and overseas Chinese communities. When they come to learn Dharma, they all ask: “Is there some method that can make my business prosper and bring me wealth?” They study Buddhism not for ending birth-and-death, but for making money. Dharma students in the mainland mostly want spiritual powers. These are all forms of practice driven by seeking and contrivance. People who practice in this way will certainly not realize the original source. They absolutely cannot awaken and realize the original face, because their intention is not correct: they are still clinging to marks and still have something sought.

The mind must be washed empty and pure. Want nothing; cling to nothing. Practice without seeking or contrivance is what accords with the original truth. Once there is any seeking, one turns one’s back on the Way and runs in the opposite direction; one cannot awaken to the Way. If you say you only want spiritual powers, that is even more wrong. If you want spiritual powers, the demon king seizes the opportunity to make trouble. He may transform into a Buddha to delude you. You take it for a true Buddha, your heart blossoms in delight, and the demon seizes the opportunity to enter your mind, causing you to become a demon; even the Buddha cannot save you. Therefore those who take contrived practice as “the Way” will certainly not realize the original source. They will absolutely not awaken, absolutely not recognize the root, absolutely not know what the root, Buddha-nature, is, and absolutely not accomplish the Way. How could one accomplish the Way while abiding and clinging somewhere? One may instead end up becoming a demon.

Therefore in practicing Dharma, we must recognize the root, have nothing sought, and know that we are originally Buddhas. It is enough to dissolve our delusive attachment; do not seek

anything. Once there is seeking, one is about to become a demon. Demons have spiritual powers. They know your mind has moved, and they come. Therefore when the mind-demon moves, external demons arrive. What is called the mind-demon? Abiding somewhere is the mind-demon. When the mind clings to marks, external demons seize the opportunity to enter. When the mind does not cling to marks and does not move, external demons have no gate through which to enter. If a demon comes and I pay it no attention—"All marks whatsoever are false"; if Buddha comes, cut down Buddha, and if demon comes, cut down demon; everything is unobtainable—how can it get in? Do not fear demons. Demons are manifestations of mind. If your mind is not demonic, then no matter how excellent the powers of external demons may be, they cannot enter.

In learning Buddhism and practicing Dharma, the causal basis must be correct. First one must clarify this question: our numinously luminous true mind, lucid and continuously aware, is Buddha. Apart from this, there is no Buddha. The thousand Buddhas and ten thousand Buddhas, together with this lucid and continuously aware true mind of ours, are originally one in essence; they are originally one. Even if a Buddha-form appears before us, we pay it no attention. Knowing that all marks are false, all are unobtainable, and that this wondrous bright true mind is the true Buddha, you will not enter demonic states and can accomplish the great Way. Otherwise, if the mind is not pure and there is abiding and seeking, one will surely invite demons, enter demonic states, and become a demon. This has not the slightest relation to the Way. Therefore Mahāmudrā emphasizes that practitioners who take the "conditioned" as the "Way" certainly cannot awaken to and see their original nature and cannot accomplish the great Way.

"This is the wisdom originally and innately present in one's own mind. But although beginners wish to settle naturally and abide in the original source, what they abide in does not go beyond attachment to the attainments of bliss, clarity, and no-thought." This wisdom-light beyond discriminating knowing is not obtained from outside; it is the capacity originally complete in one's own mind. However, even if beginners very much wish to let the mind naturally abide in the pure original source, they cannot do so. Because they have not understood the original face, they still fall into contrived practice. What they abide in has not gone beyond these meditative attainments of bliss, clarity, and no-thought—that is, emptiness. Do these attainments occur? They do. For example, bliss: when your practice reaches the blissful state of the third dhyāna, all worldly happiness cannot compare with it. Yet do not greedily abide in it. Although it exists, one must treat it as if it did not and not cling to it. If you greedily abide in bliss, clarity, and no-thought, you spoil things. Especially if you greedily abide in no-thought, that is even worse, because this no-thought is dead. Sitting there unmoving without a single thought, you turn into earth, wood, metal, and stone, pressing your own mind to death.

Attachment to bliss brings the demon of joy; attachment to clarity brings the demon of brightness; attachment to no-thought brings the demon of emptiness. The light of our original

nature is great light. Although it shines brilliantly through the ten directions without obstruction, it itself does not say that it is light and does not abide in the mark of luminosity. If you abide in the mark of luminosity and are covered by the mark of luminosity, you obscure the boundless numinous functions of your marvelous essence. Therefore one cannot abide in light. Thus when we sit in meditation, seeing light and seeing Buddhas is not permitted. It still will not do to have light that can be seen. It is not that you are not even allowed to look; rather, you are not allowed to greedily abide in it. When you see it, it must be the same as not having seen it. Why? Because the first light that appears is weak light. The slightest movement of mind makes the light vanish. If the light comes and you pay it no attention and do not move, the light grows greater and greater. As soon as you attend to it and your mind moves, the light is covered over. Therefore, if you practice while carrying mistaken conceptions, at best you merely abide in bliss, clarity, or no-thought; at worst, because you are seeking something, demonic influences seize the opportunity to enter. Therefore do not practice with mistaken conceptions.

“One should relinquish attachment to such states produced by meditative practice and settle at once; only then does the uncovered, thoroughly clear original essence of self-nature appear.” When we practice, we should dispel the above-mentioned states produced by meditative practice: bliss, clarity, no-thought, and so on. Why? Because these are only reflected appearances of preliminary samādhi states. The uncovered original essence of self-nature has not yet appeared. They are no more than a faint shadow of meditative attainment beyond a beginner’s experience. Meditative proficiency is not awakening.

For example, the patriarch Gaofeng. His teacher asked him, “In the vast activity of daytime, can you remain in command?” A practitioner, amid all the circumstances of daily activity and functioning, must remain in command: not pulled by circumstances and not running after them. Only then is there a small measure of meditative stability and a slight accord with the original essence. Therefore his teacher asked whether, in daily activity and function, he could see through all circumstances: not joyful in joy, not pleased in pleasure, not sorrowful in sorrow, not bitter in suffering, not dwelling even in empty purity, not disturbed by circumstances. Could he remain in command? Gaofeng said, “I can remain in command.” His teacher asked again, “In sleep and dreams, can you remain in command?” When asleep and dreaming, if you know it is a dream-state and are not shaken—if whatever comes, you do not fear; a tiger comes and you are not afraid because it is false; an enemy comes and you are not afraid because it is false; great wealth comes and you do not want it because everything is false—this is remaining in command within sleep and dreams.

Remaining in command within sleep and dreams demonstrates ten times the strength of remaining in command during the day, because when we are awake we are merely deluded, while when asleep we are in a stupor of delusion. In a stupor of delusion, if you can still be clear and distinct and know plainly that this is an illusory state, a dream-state, with mind unmoved, that strength is great. To remain in command at death, we must first remain in

command in dreams, because death is a great stupor of delusion and sleep-dreaming is a small stupor of delusion. If one cannot remain in command in the lesser stupor, all the less can one do so in the greater stupor. Patriarch Gaofeng's practice was good and his ability great. Gaofeng twice answered, "I can remain in command." This was indeed good practice and is a model and example for later students like us.

We learn Buddhism and practice the Way precisely in order to remain in command at the brink of birth-and-death, not dragged down by karmic obstructions into the bitter sea. To achieve this, we must all first learn to remain in command in daily life, not swayed by favorable or adverse conditions and not carried away by delusive emotional reactions of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure. In favorable situations, do not rejoice; in adverse situations, do not worry. Everything is like flowers in space and illusory reflections, unobtainable, without clinging or abiding. Only afterward can one remain in command in sleep and dreams. If even this cannot be done, how can one talk about ending birth-and-death? The root of birth-and-death is precisely that delusive thoughts do not cease and one follows circumstances and grasps after conditions.

There was a laywoman in Ningbo. While she was sitting in meditation and practicing, someone suddenly came to report that her son had fallen into the water. She sat there without moving at all. Someone scolded her, "How can you be so unfeeling? Your own flesh and blood has fallen into the water, and you actually do not go save him?" She still remained unmoved and continued her practice. Her meditative stability was strong, but refusing to rescue someone in mortal danger is not good; it is inevitably cruel. What is the right way? One should still save the person, but the mind should not move. After saving, it should be as if one had never saved. It is not sitting there without moving at all. That said, her practice can still be considered pretty good. As for us, our minds would already be in complete disorder.

Once, a family's house caught fire. The woman of the house remembered that her child was still inside. In panic and confusion, she rushed into the house, grabbed something from the bed, came out, and looked: "Oh no!" She had carried out a pillow by mistake. She immediately fainted, and the child was burned to death. See: this is the result of total inner disorder. Therefore whether your mind moves or does not move amid circumstances is a major test, and this too is practice. Patriarch Gaofeng, amid daily functioning, could remain unshaken and in command no matter what came. His practice was quite good. In sleep and dreams he could also remain in command, which is even more extraordinary. His teacher saw that his practice was indeed quite good and wanted to examine his capacity for awakening. So he asked further, "When there is no dream and no thought, where is the true host?"

Gaofeng was stunned: if there is no dream and no thought, where is the true host? He thought left and right but finally could not answer. His teacher told him to go investigate. Master Yuan Yin said, "All of you, answer on behalf of Patriarch Gaofeng: when there is no dream and no thought, where is the true host?" Everyone was silent. The Master said, "Shall I try answering on behalf of everyone?" Then he shouted sternly, "Precisely! Precisely!" Patriarch Gaofeng

went on investigating and later awakened. After awakening, Patriarch Gaofeng entered a sealed life-or-death retreat at Lion Cliff on Mount Tianmu. Thus, meditative proficiency is one thing, and awakened capacity is another.

If, when we practice, we can dispel the states produced by meditative practice such as bliss, clarity, no-thought, and so forth, and if our practice reaches the point where subject and object both vanish, sense faculties and sense objects drop away, and the intervals before and after are cut off, then with a “pa!” it suddenly bursts open. Inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world; and even empty space itself are all shattered at once and vanish completely. One suddenly settles, unmoving. At this time, although there is nothing at all and one abides unmoving, it is not like wood or stone; rather, numinous knowing is clear and distinct. Then our “uncovered, thoroughly clear original essence of self-nature” appears.

Therefore, no matter which school we practice, we must practice until subject and object both vanish, and mind and dharma both disappear. With a “pa!” —“the great earth sinks flat and empty space shatters”—the original essence of self-nature that is utterly without anything yet clear and distinct can appear. For example, in the Buddha-recitation Dharma-gate, with the one Buddha-name “Amitābha Buddha...” one gathers in all six faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—at once. When the recitation truly returns to oneness, when there is no mind to take as mind and no thought to take as thought, then even reciting is gone and Buddha is gone. “Pa!”—right there one directly sees the true Buddha and is born in the Buddha-land.

Those of us who study the Heart-Center Dharma are the same. With the one Buddha-heart mantra, “Om bala bala...,” the six faculties are gathered. The mantra is recited mentally and heard clearly; attention does not run outward. When the time and conditions arrive, “pa!”—the one reciting and what is recited suddenly drop away, and the thoroughly clear, nonabiding fundamental self-nature manifests plainly and unmistakably. We must practice. Otherwise there is no way to open up what is original and see one’s own original nature. Merely talking empty theory is like painting cakes to stave off hunger; there is no such principle.

We must remain in command amid daily functioning. If, as soon as you meet a situation, you cannot remain in command, then you are like mercury in a medicinal solution: as soon as it meets fire, it flies away. You will not be able to withstand birth-and-death. Through practice, what is original opens up. One awakens from the dream and knows that everything is a dream-state. What mind is there to move? All entanglements of gratitude and resentment, all disputes over right and wrong, vanish. This is called “upon awakening, everything is extinguished.” All matters are dream-states. Without awakening, one clings to them as truly existent. With one awakening, like hot water melting ice, all karmic obstructions are empty. This is what is usually meant by “once realized, karmic obstructions are originally empty.”

Therefore we must practice. Without practice, how could the time and conditions for awakening come? How could one open up what is original? Some ask me how long practice

requires. This depends on whether your practice is steady and continuous. If it is intermittent, it will not do. If our practice is steady and continuous—sitting today, sitting tomorrow, without interruption—and after formal sitting we never forget clear observation and do not run after circumstances, then in no more than three to five years you will thoroughly see original nature. Why do we say that those who practice the Heart-Center Dharma should complete a thousand sittings? It means that three years of earnest practice will do. If you do not practice steadily and continuously, if you practice and stop, stop and practice, “three days on, two days off,” then not only will three to five years not do; even thirty or fifty years will not do.

Some also ask: after a thousand sittings have been completed, what then? This question has been addressed many times, and here I repeat it once more. A thousand sittings means that this Heart-Center Dharma relies on the empowering force of Buddhas and bodhisattvas; the method is excellent. If one practices sincerely and earnestly for three years, one can definitely open up what is original and directly see self-nature. If one practices in a sloppy, intermittent way—one day of effort followed by ten days of neglect—then not only will a thousand sittings not bring seeing the nature; even three or five thousand sittings will not bring seeing the nature. Some also ask: after a thousand sittings, does one stop practicing Dharma? We said last time that even if you are of sharp capacity and suddenly awaken, habits from many lives and many kalpas cannot be exhausted in a single moment. You must still maintain clear observation constantly, train amid events and conditions, diminish and diminish again, and eliminate habits completely. Practice after awakening is the practice of no-practice; that is true practice. It is not that one does not practice, but that you do not cling to sitting meditation, fall into blissful states, and thereby create the obstruction of dharma-clinging. Conversely, if your meditative stability is insufficient and you still move when encountering circumstances, then you must add more sitting practice and strengthen it to pass through the Multiple Barrier. If meditative stability is adequate, then simply remain sharply aware at all times. This requires not the slightest strain; it is extremely relaxed and effortless. It is not a matter of still having to practice this Dharma, accumulate that merit, and busily occupy yourself with the forms of Dharma practice. Whether you have awakened or not, busying yourself with the forms of Dharma practice is a waste of energy, creates trouble for yourself, and there is nothing right about it. Therefore, the more effortless and relaxed the practice, the better; the more strained, the worse.

V. Suddenly Cutting Off Delusive Thoughts, the Self-Nature Appears

“Urgently call out the syllable ‘pei!’ and suddenly cut off the current of delusive thinking.” When a delusive thought moves, urgently call out “pei!” This is the essential instruction in Mahāmudrā for cutting off delusive thoughts. Those who practice Buddha-recitation do not need this method; they only need to bring the Buddha-name to the fore and recite a single “Amitābha Buddha”. Other practitioners, when a delusive thought moves, urgently call out “pei!” and immediately become sharply aware; the stream of delusive thought is cut off at

once, “pa!” For example, if we think of making money, then “pei!”—what money are you making? Daydreaming! In this way the delusive thought is cut off. If the force of the delusive thought is strong—that is, if greed is heavy—and “pei!” cannot cut it off, then one must hold a mantra, relying on the Buddha’s power to dissolve it.

“When the coarse delusive mental factors are stilled and one settles in samādhi, then one leaves the state of grasping at all dharmas; self-nature becomes lucid and clear, and the uncovered wisdom free from delusive mind appears and abides as suchness.” When the coarse delusive mental factors are stilled—the mind and its associated factors are analyzed into eight primary consciousnesses and fifty-one mental factors; among them the worst are the five omnipresent mental factors: mental engagement, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. Here Yuan Yin glosses “mental engagement” as the mental faculty; its force of churning is so strong that it has never stopped. Do not think it stops when you sleep; it is proliferating dream-states and still has not stopped. Only at the final Vajrasattva samādhi can it be settled. When we still the coarse delusion of giving rise to mind in relation to objects, we can remain settled in samādhi without moving. If one can practice so that mind does not arise in relation to objects, then one has developed considerable proficiency in practice.

We human beings give rise to delusive mind in relation to objects at every moment, constantly grasping at conditions, thinking from this to that and from that to this without cease. If this grasping mind can stop, then one can peacefully enter samādhi, depart from all delusive states of fantasizing and grasping, and our self-nature becomes lucid, transparent, and openly revealed—that is, it is clearly present. Then the great prajñā—free from arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence, empty and numinous, nonabiding, and unmoving in suchness—stands revealed. That is to say, the first step in our practice must be to still the coarse delusion of giving rise to mind in relation to objects. Going further, we leave the state of grasping; the mind no longer moves chaotically. Our original self-nature then appears clearly and distinctly, cleanly and transparently, openly revealed. The luminous great wisdom, unmoving in suchness and free from the delusive mind, also appears.

Therefore Buddhadharma is marvelous: it teaches us to recognize truth and not run after illusory appearances. If we are deluded by illusory appearances, that is rebirth in the six paths. If we cease following illusory appearances and recognize true mind, we transcend and can realize great superknowledges and great freedom. Therefore if we truly want to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, it is not enough to casually recite the Buddha-name a couple of times or recite a few lines of scripture. We must use Amitābha Buddha’s wisdom-sword to cut off our deluded attachment to the illusory appearances of this Saha world. Only then can we be born in the West.

Therefore it is said, “Pure thought flies upward.” This is what we usually call initial samādhi. When our practice can reach the point that even if the true Buddha comes, we simply recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” and have nothing else whatsoever—only this thought is Buddha, my whole thought is Buddha, Buddha is my whole thought, the whole

Buddha is thought and the whole thought is Buddha—then you will definitely be born in the West. If you are not like this, if you merely recite “Amitābha Buddha” a few times, now attentively and now inattentively, while in your mind you are thinking of this matter and that matter, then it will not do.

Some ask: why does practicing the Buddha-recitation Dharma-gate require reciting sutras? Reciting sutras is to make you recognize the truth. Buddhist sutras say that to attain the highest level of the highest grade, one must read and recite Mahāyāna scriptures. Why? Reading and reciting Mahāyāna scriptures enables one to understand the principle. One understands that all is originally Buddha, and sentient beings are Buddha. It is only that we are deluded, cling to marks, and forget self-nature. We must not be deluded and abide in marks. We must not greedily cling to merit and virtue. Merit and virtue are our own mind. One’s own mind is the mother of great merit; when great merit is accomplished, that is becoming Buddha.

Whether we humans revolve through the six paths or are born in the Western Pure Land is caused by the mind. The root of the ten thousand virtues is mind; all ten thousand virtues come from mind. “Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm.” Therefore mind is the root; it is the root of all dharmas. Usually I ask everyone to read and recite Mahāyāna scriptures precisely so that we understand this principle.

The Pure Land Dharma taught here is the Mahāyāna Pure Land Dharma, whose principle is fully in accord with Chan. Pure Land is a Mahāyāna Buddhadharma that universally embraces all three capacities; it is not only for those of medium and lower capacities. People of all three capacities are included within it. It is all the same mind. Pure Land is mind, and mind is Pure Land. The Amitābha Sutra says, “From here to the west, beyond ten trillion Buddha-lands, there is a world called Ultimate Bliss.” The ten trillion Buddha-lands are the ten pāramitās and ten thousand practices—that is, using giving, discipline, patience, vigor, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, vows, power, and knowledge to empty the mind and awaken great wisdom. When the mind is empty, one crosses the ten trillion Buddha-lands and arrives in the West. Therefore the West is not far away; it is right before you. To put it simply: when your mind abides nowhere and everything is empty, your mind is Buddha and Buddha is your mind. Here is the West and the West is here. Right now, you are born in the West. Do not wait until after death. Being born in the West while alive is truly being born in the West. If one cannot be born in the West while alive and waits until death to be born there, I fear it will be difficult.

10.7 恒河大手印（第七讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Seven)

Thoroughly Understanding and Leaving the Extremes; Abiding in Wisdom-Nature Beyond Speech and Thought

“Thoroughly understanding, one leaves all extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and non-existence; one transcends the realm of verbal and mental discrimination, and naturally abides in the state of wisdom-nature beyond speech and thought. This refers to the Wisdom of the Essential Nature of the Dharmakāya, yoga, and the essential view.”

This means that we must clearly understand that relative views such as arising and ceasing, existence and non-existence are false. We must leave these extreme views and transcend the relative realm constructed through language and mental discrimination. Then, quite naturally, we abide in the original self-nature—the brightly illuminating great wisdom beyond anything that can be said or thought.

“Thorough understanding” means to understand clearly and completely—to comprehend it through and through. To “leave all extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and non-existence” means to leave all the many kinds of extreme views, such as arising and ceasing, existence and non-existence. Views of arising and ceasing, existence and non-existence, are all relative false knowing and false seeing, like a mirage: illusory, unreal, and not in accord with the meaning of the Middle Way. Therefore they are extreme views.

Yet at all times and in all places we live immersed in a delusive world of opposites, discriminating good and bad, right and wrong, long and short, never leaving the extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and non-existence. For example, to think that while the human body is alive there is existence, and that after death there is nothing at all, is an extreme view. If we recognize that whatever appears only through opposition is merely an illusory reflection and do not pursue or grasp it, then, when the delusive mind comes to rest, we can thoroughly understand the originally present true mind beyond all opposites.

True mind is Buddha-nature. It is not existent, not non-existent, not long, not short, not arising, not ceasing, not good, not bad, not beautiful, not ugly—none of these categories applies. Language cannot describe it, reasoning cannot infer it, and from the beginning there is no discrimination of any kind.

This is “transcending the realm of verbal and mental discrimination.” The realm of verbal and mental discrimination is the realm produced by language and discriminating consciousness. It means that when we speak, the mind faculty in the brain is constantly moving. It keeps distinguishing right and wrong, good and bad, long and short, and relative views blaze up. For example, some people talk while practicing Buddha-recitation: “Amitābha Buddha, how bad my daughter-in-law is; Amitābha Buddha, how good my daughter is.” This is the realm of verbal and mental discrimination. How could this be acceptable? If one could be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss like this, then there would be many more people born there.

We must cut off deluded attachment and extreme views. Not abiding in anything at all, we single-mindedly recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” until every thought is of the Buddha. Buddha is my mind, and my mind is Buddha. Mind and Buddha enter into communion and become one seamless whole; only then can we be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Therefore we must transcend the realm of verbal and mental discrimination, understand that all such discriminated phenomena are false and unobtainable, and not follow them or be swayed by them. Put everything down, and put it down again. For instance, a Brahmin once came to offer mandārava flowers to the Buddha, holding them in both hands. The Buddha instructed him, “Put it down.” The Brahmin put down the flower in one hand. The Buddha again said, “Put it down.” The Brahmin put down the flower in the other hand. The Buddha again said, “Put it down.” Hearing this, the Brahmin was bewildered and quickly asked the Buddha, “I have put down the flowers in both hands. There is nothing left. What else am I to put down?” The Buddha said, “I am telling you to put down the outer six sense objects, the middle six consciousnesses, and the inner six faculties—put everything down.” That is, everything inner, middle, and outer is let go completely; everything is unobtainable. Hearing this, the Brahmin awakened.

Thus, to transcend the realm of verbal and mental discrimination, one must put everything down, and put it down again, until everything is completely released. Then one naturally abides in the state of wisdom-nature beyond speech and thought. “Beyond speech and thought” means transcending language and thinking. The “state of wisdom-nature beyond speech and thought” is the great wisdom inherently complete in self-nature, beyond language and thinking. If you transcend the realm of verbal and mental discrimination, you will naturally abide in this great wisdom and enjoy inexhaustible benefit.

To remain entirely natural at every moment, without the slightest deliberate effort, is very difficult. We are all still engaged in effortful practice. From the first through the seventh bodhisattva grounds there is still effortful practice; only from the eighth through the tenth grounds is there effortless practice. For ordinary beings like us, it is not easy to attain effortless practice all at once. Therefore we must proceed step by step from effortful practice to effortless practice.

What is effortful practice? It means maintaining vigilance and clear observation at every moment, keeping watch over your own mind. As soon as a thought moves, immediately alert yourself: “Ah, do not move. I see you.” If you fail to notice it, you cannot see it clearly. You may follow the thought a hundred and eight thousand li without even knowing it. Therefore, sustained vigilance and clear observation are effortful practice. When clear observation has matured, there is no need deliberately to notice; clear observation then continues naturally, and the mind naturally does not waver. Quiescent yet constantly illuminating, illuminating yet constantly quiescent—this is effortless practice. In the end, even stillness cannot be obtained and illumination cannot be obtained; only then have we truly arrived home.

Only by practicing constantly in this way can we move from effortful practice to effortless practice; we cannot reach heaven in a single leap. How is this practice carried out? Stay alert at every moment and abide in the brightly illuminating great wisdom where nothing can be said and no thought can move—what the Chan school calls “the path of language is cut off, and mental activity ceases.”

When our mind does not move, it naturally illumines brightly and responds with extraordinary quickness. If your mind moves, abides, or is afflicted, its response becomes sluggish. This is because you have been pulled away by circumstances; the brightness of mind has been covered by circumstances and cannot illumine brightly, so response becomes dull. If you can constantly abide in the state of wisdom-nature beyond speech and thought—where nothing said, thought, or otherwise conceived can be grasped—then you are naturally clear and distinct, and all spiritual powers and wondrous functions will manifest. If you do not do this, yet want spiritual powers, they cannot be obtained.

Ordinary beings calculate and discriminate at every moment, worrying about gain and loss; therefore they cannot be peaceful, at ease, and free. We practice and realize the Way in order to leave delusive thinking, remove attachment, restore original nature’s luminosity, and allow great capacity and great function to unfold. Our Buddha-nature is like the sun, with immeasurable radiance, but it is covered by delusive thinking and discrimination, so its great radiance cannot shine forth and its numinous functioning cannot unfold. When the dark clouds vanish, the sun emits great light. Once delusive thinking and attachment are left behind, all kinds of spiritual powers and wondrous functions arise of themselves, without seeking.

The Mahāvairocana Sutra says: “When bodhisattvas abide here and practice, without long and arduous toil they attain the samādhi that removes all obscurations. If they obtain this, they will abide in the same state as all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, manifest the five superknowledges, and obtain dhāraṇīs of immeasurable languages and sounds.”

“Bodhisattvas abide here”—where do they abide? They abide “in the state of wisdom-nature beyond speech and thought.” When one continues to practice diligently within this state in order to remove old habits, before long all five superknowledges will arise together, and one will have unobstructed eloquence.

The five superknowledges are the divine eye, the divine ear, knowledge of others’ minds, recollection of past lives, and miraculous abilities. A Buddha has six superknowledges: beyond these five there is also the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. This means that all outflows—delusive thinking, attachment, discrimination, affliction, and so on—are completely cleared away. This is exactly the “wisdom-nature beyond speech and thought.” In our practice, we first obtain the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows and naturally abide in the state of wisdom-nature beyond speech and thought. This is also called “Wisdom of the Essential Nature of the Dharmakāya,” “yoga,” and “the essential view.”

The dharmakāya is without characteristics, yet there is no appearance that is not it; in Buddhas it does not increase, and in sentient beings it does not decrease. Wisdom of the Essential Nature of the Dharmakāya is the great wisdom that transcends all relative views and all worldly wisdom. “Yoga” means accord. Accord with what? With the dharmakāya Buddha. This is the essential view: clearly recognizing that relative views such as arising and ceasing, existence and non-existence are false; leaving these extreme views; transcending the relative realm discriminated by language and the mind faculty; and naturally abiding within the self-nature of great wisdom—naturally radiant, originally complete, beyond anything that can be said or thought. This is what is meant by Wisdom of the Essential Nature of the Dharmakāya.

In practicing the Dharma and realizing the Way, there are Five Great Wisdoms: Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom, Wisdom of Equality, Wondrous Observing Wisdom, Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities, and Wisdom of the Essence-Nature of the Dharma Realm. In Ganges Mahāmudrā, Wisdom of the Essence-Nature of the Dharma Realm is called Wisdom of the Essential Nature of the Dharmakāya. Wisdom of the Essential Nature of the Dharmakāya is the overarching all-aspect wisdom. The eighth consciousness is transformed into Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom is perfected only at the end. The Sixth Patriarch said, “The sixth and seventh are transformed at the causal stage; the first five and the eighth are transformed at fruition.”

This means that while practicing the Way, one begins with the sixth and seventh consciousnesses. The sixth consciousness has the strongest force; at all times and in all places it is the one discriminating and stirring. If the delusive thinking of the sixth consciousness no longer moves, then there is no delusive information to pass to the seventh consciousness, and the seventh consciousness is transformed. The seventh consciousness performs a transmitting function: it receives information from the sixth consciousness and then relays it to the eighth consciousness. When the sixth and seventh consciousnesses are transformed into Wondrous Observing Wisdom and Wisdom of Equality during causal-stage practice, then the eighth consciousness and the first five consciousnesses subsequently transform into Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom and Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities because there are no delusive seeds to store and no interference from the sixth consciousness.

Therefore, from the standpoint of removing habits through practice amid events and circumstances, transforming consciousness still begins with the sixth consciousness. The eighth consciousness must still be transformed later; it is impossible to transform the eighth consciousness into Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom all at once. At every moment our practice is directed at the sixth consciousness, so delusive thinking does not move and the mind is not carried along by circumstances. Recollecting the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is to transmit noble and pure seeds to the seventh consciousness; the seventh consciousness then transmits them to the eighth consciousness. In this way defiled seeds are transformed into pure seeds, and one may be born in the Western Pure Land and end birth-and-death.

Thus, among the eight consciousnesses, the seventh consciousness constantly examines, deliberates, and clings to the mark of self. It thinks “I am right and others are wrong,” and its arrogance is extreme. It always takes “me” as central; everything belongs to “me,” and its greed is insatiable. Therefore the seventh consciousness is the worst. For this reason, when we practice a seven-day retreat, “beating the seven” means beating down the seventh consciousness. In reality all sentient beings are equal and of one suchness—where could there be an “I”? Yet people’s self-clinging blazes fiercely. They look down on everyone else: others are not good enough; only I am best. Thus, in human relationships, there is no equality.

Once the seventh consciousness is transformed, distinctions of self and other, right and wrong, and gain and loss no longer arise. Everything is alike; all dharmas are equal and without difference. Although we are now studying the Buddhadharma, before the seventh consciousness has been transformed, we inevitably still make unequal distinctions. For example, those who practice Pure Land say that Pure Land is the very best and that other methods do not work; those who study Chan say that Chan is highest and that the others are not good; those who practice Esoteric Buddhism say that Esoteric Dharma is the most perfect and the rest are not so good. Alas! Affirming oneself and negating others comes from not having truly realized the Wisdom of Equality; the mind remains unequal.

In truth all Dharma-gates are the same. They are tools and means, not the goal. Our goal is to become Buddhas. You may succeed by using this means, and I may succeed by using that means. If both of us succeed, is that not the same? Therefore it is said, “The skillful means are many, but in returning to the source there are not two.” All Dharmas are the same, so it is said, “All dharmas are equal, with no higher or lower.” The reason there is inequality is that the seventh consciousness is making mischief. Therefore, once our seventh consciousness is transformed, there is equality. All distinctions—right and wrong, self and other—are equal; every opposition is equal. Equality, equality—everything, absolutely everything, is equal. Then one awakens thoroughly to the great Way.

Transforming the sixth consciousness into Wondrous Observing Wisdom means that it changes from delusively fabricating distinctions of right and wrong, gain and loss, into the wisdom that perfectly and subtly observes all things and handles them correctly. For example, how should this matter best be done? How should that person be assigned or dealt with appropriately? How should one transform a bad person, helping him turn from bad to good and from an ordinary being into a sage? Wondrous Observing Wisdom is clear and lucid, unmoving and unwavering: direct perception operates together with inferential cognition, and inferential cognition does not depart from direct perception. Direct perception means that things appear just as they are, without added discrimination. Inferential cognition means comparing whether something is good or bad, long or short, right or wrong. When this wisdom is realized, although one clearly distinguishes right and wrong, gain and loss, there is no attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejection. Although one handles all things equally, it is

not that one fails to know right and wrong or long and short. Therefore this is the great functioning of wisdom.

Transforming the first five consciousnesses into Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities refers to the functioning of the eyes seeing forms, the ears hearing sounds, the nose smelling odors, the tongue tasting flavors, and the body sensing contact. The reason we can think, work, create, and invent—that is, the four great wisdoms discussed above—is entirely due to the functioning of Wisdom of the Essence-Nature of the Dharma Realm. In Mahāmudrā, Wisdom of the Essence-Nature of the Dharma Realm is called Wisdom of the Essential Nature of the Dharmakāya; it is fundamental wisdom. “Yoga” and “the essential view”: view means one’s understanding; yoga means accord—a Dharma through which mind comes into accord. Mahāmudrā teaches accord at every moment: ordinary beings accord with Buddha, and one’s own mind accords with empty space. These are the analogies of a seal impressed on space, water, and mud. To be in accord at every moment is yoga. The essential view of yoga refers to the view that accords at every moment with the originally present self-nature.

VI. Not Recognizing Self-Nature, Practice Is of No Benefit

“If one does not recognize this and yet practices, then one has not left the functioning of mind and a view rooted in contrivance. One is vastly distant from the path of self-nature’s Great Perfection and does not obtain the luminous wheel of no-practice.”

If you do not recognize your own wondrous mind, do not have correct view, and do not know to take Buddha-nature as the basis of practice, but instead cling to marks and seek outwardly, then you have not left the functioning of delusive mind. That is a deviant view rooted in contrivance. It has nothing whatever to do with the “path of self-nature’s Great Perfection,” and one cannot obtain the “luminous wheel of no-practice.”

Self-nature’s Great Perfection means that Buddha-nature is inherently complete and originally perfect. It is not obtained by grasping and is not produced through practice. The luminous wheel of no-practice means that Buddha-nature is originally immeasurably luminous, illuminating lands in the ten directions, fully endowed with all wondrous functions, and able to give rise to countless transformations. The luminous wheel is not produced through practice; it is inherently complete in one’s own mind. Therefore it is said, “The Way is not a matter of practice but of awakening.”

Awakening to the Way means waking up, understanding, entering into true mind, and recovering what was original. When practicing the Dharma, at the point where a thought breaks off, there is a sudden cry of “huo!”—and one realizes original reality. After awakening, must one still practice? Yes! Because the two forms of clinging, to self and to dharmas, have been present since beginningless time and still remain, one cannot yet develop great numinous functioning. Only when these two forms of clinging are exhausted can one thoroughly realize the source.

How then should one practice? This depends on the heaviness or lightness of each person's habitual defilements, so different methods are used. Yet the best is the practice of no-practice: the method of maintaining clear observation. The Mahāmudrā method is that when a delusive thought arises, one shouts “pei!” and cuts it off, thereby protecting true mind. But we may also use other methods, such as buddha-recitation or mantra-holding. When delusive thought arises, recite Amitābha Buddha's name or a mantra phrase; do not follow the delusive thought, but transform it. This likewise protects true mind. Or when delusive thought arises, with one sharp moment of noticing, everything dissolves into emptiness, and the delusive thought comes to rest. Therefore, to obtain the “luminous wheel of no-practice,” one must first clearly realize this wondrous bright true mind.

If you do not understand what true mind is, you cannot obtain it. “If the essential view has not been confirmed, then even though one practices, there is no basis for preserving and entrusting. Therefore confirming the essential view is foremost.”

The essential view is right knowledge and right view: through repeated familiarization with right knowledge and right view, one recognizes original nature. If you still do not recognize original nature, then “even though one practices, there is no basis for preserving and entrusting.” Even if you practice diligently and earnestly, you will not obtain the luminous wheel of no-practice, because you have no basis for preserving and entrusting. You do not know what to protect. That is to say, you are still uncertain about the right knowledge and right view explained earlier; you do not recognize original nature, your footing is not yet firm, and you remain doubtful. What, then, could you protect?

For example, if we have a small child, we must care for and protect him: not letting him go hungry, not letting him be cold, not letting him fall, caring for him in every possible way and raising him until he grows up. If you do not have a child at all, then whom are you protecting? The practice of “preserving and entrusting” has two stages: first preserving, then entrusting. It is like a child. First you protect him. Once the child grows up, you let him act freely; he becomes self-sufficient and independent, doing things and working by himself, and you need not manage him. “Preserving and entrusting” looks like only two words, but in actual practice, there is quite a long way to go.

To undertake the practice of preserving and entrusting, one must first see original nature. If you have not seen original nature, what is there to protect? What is original nature? Much has been said above: it is the nature that can see and can hear right now. Recognize it, do not doubt it, and protect it well.

How should it be protected? “It is not that seeing ceases; it is not that hearing ceases,” but rather, “clear and distinct knowing, not clinging to seeing and hearing.” In daily life, it is not that one does not look at things or does not listen to sounds. Rather, one does not discriminate good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and one does not give rise to attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection. Simply see and hear, while retaining nothing at all in the

mind—“utterly free of abiding.” This is “protecting.” When protection has matured, there is no need to protect. Put even that down. One can go anywhere and do anything without obstruction, while not abiding in the slightest. This has arrived at the state of unobstructedness in every matter and spontaneous freedom and ease.

Regarding “unobstructed in every matter,” Chan Master Zhenjing Kewen has a verse: “In every matter unobstructed, / as one wishes, freely at ease. / In his hand he holds a pig’s head; / in his mouth he recites the pure precepts. / Chased out from the brothel, / not yet repaying his wine debt, / at the crossroads / he opens the cloth bag.” Holding a pig’s head in his hand, he gnaws on the pork while reciting the precepts: not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct... “I am eating vegetarian food; I have just come out of the brothel—ha, ha, ha!” “Chased out” means being driven out. “Brothel” means a house of prostitutes. In the brothel he spent all his money and was driven out by the madam. He also owes money for wine, and the tavern comes to collect, but he is too poor to pay. So bedraggled and fallen, yet free and at ease, carefree and without anxiety.

Someone may ask: holding a pig’s head and reciting the pure precepts—if he is not vegetarian, is he not breaking the precepts? No! He has never eaten meat; he is eating vegetarian food. Why? His mind is empty. He does not cling to marks. He never feels that meat is delicious and therefore eats more, or that vegetables are not tasty and therefore eats less. Having no attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection, is what “eating vegetarian food” means here. Conversely, although some people eat vegetarian food, they cling to flavor: this dish tastes good and fresh; that dish tastes bad and is hard to eat. They are extremely picky. This is equivalent to not eating vegetarian food.

If our mind is truly empty and pure, eating is still equivalent to not eating; even holding a pig’s head is no problem. Having said that, if you have not realized this stage and yet let yourself go in this way, you will shoot into hell like an arrow. If your mind is not truly empty and pure, then karma sticks to you, binds you, and will not let you pass.

Here is a gong’an of this kind. In the past there was a Chan master who liked to eat beef. He said, “Eating is precisely not eating!” Was his mind empty and pure? No. He merely paid lip service; his mind was not empty. Karmic obstruction stuck to him and demanded repayment. When this Chan master’s breath stopped, he entered a cow’s womb and became an ox to repay the debt. One day the farmer led the ox out and encountered Chan Master Baozhi. Baozhi looked and said, “Oh! Is this not such-and-such Chan master? Did you not say, ‘Eating is precisely not eating’? You should not have become an ox. How have you become an ox to repay a debt?” The ox streamed tears from its eyes and rammed itself to death. Therefore, before one has reached the stage of true emptiness and purity, reckless boasting will send one to hell. We have resolved to realize the great Way. We should say only what accords with the stage we have realized; we must not behave recklessly.

If one wishes to realize the stage of “unobstructedness in every matter,” first one must establish a pure and correct view, clearly see true mind, and then further remove delusive habits and enter into the unconditioned. Practice driven by attachment to marks or by contrivance cannot realize “unobstructedness in every matter.” Nowadays some people’s minds are not empty and pure, yet they delusively seek spiritual powers. This is disastrous. Not only can they not become Buddhas; they may instead become demons. If you want spiritual powers, then demons will manifest spiritual powers in your mind and take on the appearance of a Buddha for you to see. You think it is a true Buddha and happily hold to it; then the demon has entered and is dwelling in your mind. The demon king will also expand his influence, making you go out to speak Dharma and gather in a group of demon children and demon grandchildren. All of this is due to clinging to marks. Therefore we must not cling to marks and must not practice through contrivance.

“Therefore confirming the essential view is foremost.” This is the most important sentence. The essential view is clearly seeing original nature. Ganges Mahāmudrā gives foremost priority to the essential view, and the Caodong school’s Five Ranks of Lord and Minister also highlights this point. The Linji school has the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials; within the “Mystery in the Phrase,” the Initial Essential is precisely to recognize one’s own original mind and see one’s own original nature. This likewise highlights the same point.

“Only then can one confirm the naturally abiding wisdom. This is abiding in one’s own original nature; it is not sought from another, nor is it something absent before and present now. This is the Initial Essential.”

First one must realize original nature. Only then can “naturally abiding wisdom” manifest. After clear awakening, preserve original nature without losing it, practice diligently and arduously, and sweep away delusive habits. If, in any favorable or adverse circumstance, the mind can be like still water without the slightest wavering, then all kinds of spiritual powers and wondrous functions arise of themselves, without being sought.

“Abiding in one’s own original nature” means that this wisdom is inherently complete in one’s own mind and arises naturally from original mind. “Not sought from another” means it is not obtained by practicing some method, nor is it bestowed on us by Buddhas and bodhisattvas; still less is it the manifestation of some ghost or spirit possessing the body. “Nor is it something absent before and present now” means that it is not that previously it did not exist and now it newly exists; it has always existed from the beginning.

Someone asks, “You say it has always existed, so why do I not have it now?” Because your delusive thinking and delusive habits have not yet been completely eliminated. First, you must recognize Buddha-nature and clearly awaken to this nature that can see and can hear—this is original nature. Then constantly protect it. Do not cling to marks and do not run after circumstances. When protection is fully matured and the mind is truly empty and pure, spiritual powers will naturally manifest.

If it is not a matter of “abiding in one’s own original mind”—if these abilities are not developed from within oneself—then they are irrelevant. When breathing stops, all such functions are gone, and one does not even know where one will go. If one has done bad deeds, one must still fall into hell. This is very dangerous. In Shanghai we had several so-called “people with spiritual powers.” When they approached death, the spirits attached to them left them and went away. At that time they not only had no spiritual powers; their bodies were in great pain, and mentally they were even more tormented by remorse and the condemnation of conscience. They only cried, “Pain! Suffering!” and fell into the three lower realms. We who practice the true Dharma must take this as a warning.

10.8 恒河大手印（第八讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Eight)

Textual note. The Chinese headings “熟识法身 / 一、烦恼即菩提” occur immediately before the Lecture Eight marker; this edition places them under Lecture Eight so they remain with the discussion they introduce.

Becoming Familiar with the Dharmakāya

I. Afflictions Are Bodhi

“Let the mind be like a river, naturally and spontaneously abiding. As it rises and falls, neither establish it nor drive it away; then one realizes the intrinsic characteristic of the dharmakāya.”

In our practice, we must let the mind be like a river, bending where there is a bend and turning where there is a turn. We impose no subjective fixation of our own; everything unfolds spontaneously as conditions arise, without any view of self or obstruction. At all times, flow peacefully and freely like water. This is how practice should proceed.

We ordinary beings are heavy with private concerns and many kinds of delusive thoughts. Everything must accord with our own wishes: “I want it this way, so only this way is good; otherwise my mind becomes afflicted.” Therefore our karmic obstructions are deep and heavy, and we cannot see the Way. Now that we are practicing the Way, we must change this delusive habit of abiding. We must be able to follow conditions and accord with things: if it bends, then bend; if it turns, then turn. We cannot rigidly hold to our own opinions.

For example, when we do work, if we are promoted, then we are promoted; if we are demoted, then we are demoted. Neither matters. We must not be happy because we rise, and afflicted because we fall. Everything is done in service of the people, not for oneself, so one must be able to accept either promotion or demotion. Once we study Buddhism, we know that all sights, sounds, material goods, and personal gain are like flowers in the sky and the moon in water: they cannot be sought and cannot be obtained. The mind is constantly empty and quiescent, without affliction. Therefore every issue can be discussed amicably, and every task can be shouldered selflessly and carried through courageously.

If everyone could act in this way, putting oneself aside for others, society would be peaceful, the people would flourish, and the nation would be strong. Therefore studying Buddhism greatly benefits the moral condition of the world and the hearts of people; it truly should be vigorously advocated. When we do things, we do not concern ourselves with success or failure. We simply do our utmost. If things succeed, we do not rejoice; if they fail, we are not troubled. We summarize the experience, correct the mistakes, and continue with renewed effort.

If one can arrive at a mind that is open, level, and vast, without crookedness or selfishness, unmoving and unshaken, one naturally realizes the original face of the dharmakāya. Likewise, when a thought arises, do not give rise to the idea, “The light of mind has been covered by dark clouds.” When delusive thoughts come to rest, do not give rise to the idea of “removing” them. As soon as the thought of “leaving” or “getting out” arises, one is adding delusion on top of delusion; there is still attachment, and one cannot be liberated.

Mahāmudrā speaks of acting without contrivance: remaining unstained in everything, spontaneously following conditions, and always being this way. This practice is one level higher and is harder to carry out. If for the time being one cannot do this, then one still has to use other methods; those will be discussed later. Therefore, at all times, when thoughts come, do not heed them, do not suppress them, and do not follow after them. Spontaneously follow conditions and respond to myriad situations without abiding: this is the intrinsic characteristic of our dharmakāya.

Our own dharma-nature is originally just like this. It can respond to circumstances and function wondrously; it is not dead and unmoving. Its responsiveness is extremely swift, faster than the speed of light. The reason ordinary beings respond slowly is that they have many delusive thoughts. It is like the sun being covered by dark clouds so that its light cannot shine forth and its function becomes reduced. Manifesting spiritual powers is the complete unfolding of mind’s functions after delusive thoughts have been exhausted. All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, and Buddha-nature inherently possesses inexhaustible spiritual powers and wondrous functions.

So long as we can be without mind like flowing water, letting things be naturally—as it is said, “falling flowers have intention, flowing water has no mind”—and can be spontaneously free and unbound at all times, we will be able to recover the intrinsic characteristic of the dharmakāya and greatly manifest spiritual powers. The intrinsic characteristic of the dharmakāya is not the non-arising of a single thought, dead and stiff, knowing nothing at all. It is vital and responsive, adapting as conditions arise, with boundless wondrous function. What is called no-thought does not mean that not one thought arises; rather, thoughts arising without abiding is called no-thought.

Emptiness is existence, and existence is emptiness. Speaking of emptiness and existence, this relationship is extremely important for the study of Buddhism. Only after one has completely

penetrated the relation between emptiness and existence can one advance swiftly. People who practice always say, “Everything is empty; do not attach to existence,” while ordinary beings, in doing things, always attach to existence. Emptiness and existence seem like irreconcilable opposites. This is because people understand “emptiness” and “existence” differently.

When ordinary beings speak of emptiness, they mean that nothing exists. When the Buddhadharmas speak of emptiness, it means only that phenomena lack intrinsic nature; it does not mean that illusory appearances are absent. Therefore we say, “Form itself is emptiness.” We do not speak of emptiness apart from illusory appearances. The emptiness we speak of is different from the ordinary person’s emptiness of absolute nothingness. It is the emptiness that does not abide in illusory appearances; it is the emptiness of “emptiness is existence, existence is emptiness; emptiness and existence are not two.” Therefore no-thought is not the non-arising of a single thought; it is that thoughts arise without being followed and without abiding. This principle must be thoroughly understood.

Buddha-nature is true emptiness, but this does not mean that it does not manifest, because when function arises, manifestation necessarily occurs. If emptiness meant the absence of appearances, it would not be self-nature. Wherever there is mind, there is necessarily appearance. Mind is appearance, appearance is mind, because mind and appearance are not two. As I said last time, a mirror necessarily has reflections in it. Without reflections, it would not be a mirror. Thus Buddha-nature necessarily manifests appearances; without appearances it could not be called Buddha-nature, because without wondrous functioning Buddha-nature would become dead emptiness, inert emptiness.

But Buddha-nature is not inert emptiness. It is numinously luminous, vast, and penetrating; it can give rise to all wondrous functions and manifest all kinds of forms. Therefore, “the myriad phenomena in all their array are perfectly complete within mind.”

Having come to this point, let me tell you a story. In Zhenjiang there is Jinshan Monastery, and in the monastery there is a treasure that guards the mountain. This treasure is Su Dongpo’s jade belt, made of square pieces of jade strung together with gold thread. How did this jade belt come to remain at Jinshan Monastery? Su Dongpo and Chan Master Foyin, the abbot of Jinshan Monastery, were close friends. Su Dongpo was excellent at poetry and prose. He also believed in Buddhism and practiced, and he was proud of having reached the point of being unmoved by the eight winds. Chan Master Foyin wanted to test the depth of his practice, so he intentionally belittled him, saying, “Su Dongpo’s poetry is not worth a dog’s fart.”

When Su Dongpo heard this, anger rose in his heart. He stormed across the river in anger to demand an explanation from Chan Master Foyin. Chan Master Foyin laughed and said, “Well, well! The eight winds do not move you, but one fart has blown you across the river.” This is a joke.

Another time, Su Dongpo came to Jinshan Monastery to visit Chan Master Foyin. At that time the master was in the Chan hall leading the assembly in sitting meditation, and it was just the period of stillness, when outsiders were not permitted to enter. Su Dongpo knew this rule, so he sat in the guest hall and waited for Chan Master Foyin to come out. When that incense period was finished, another incense period was added, so the master came out very late. Su Dongpo waited a long time and became very agitated.

When the incense period ended and stillness was released, Chan Master Foyin came out: "Ah! Grand Academician Su, please sit, please sit." Su Dongpo said, "Hah, you still tell me to sit? I want to sit on your head, you bald donkey!" They were close friends, so this was joking speech, scolding the Chan master as a "bald donkey." Hearing this, the master said, "Oh, you want to sit on this old monk's head? Good, good, good. I have a question to ask you. If you can answer, this old monk's head will serve as your seat. If you cannot answer, then untie the jade belt from your body and give it to us as a mountain-guarding treasure."

Su Dongpo laughed loudly: "Ask whatever question you like. For each question I can give ten answers; I have many subtle interpretations and broad explanations." Chan Master Foyin said, "Good. I ask you: the four elements are originally empty, and the five aggregates do not exist. Where will you sit?" The meaning was: you want to sit on my head, but my body is the four elements and five aggregates, empty and without anything at all. How will you sit?

Su Dongpo thought: the four elements are empty; the five aggregates fundamentally do not exist; nothing exists. Then I have ended up in emptiness. Where could I sit? I cannot sit in empty space. He thought and thought, walked back and forth three times, and for the moment could not answer. Chan Master Foyin seized the opportunity and called to the young novice: "Come, untie his jade belt. He cannot answer." So Su Dongpo's jade belt remained at Jinshan Monastery as the mountain-guarding treasure.

This is a public case about emptiness yet existence, existence yet emptiness. Actually, this question is not hard to answer, because emptiness is not inert emptiness, existence is not real existence, emptiness does not obstruct existence, existence does not obstruct emptiness, emptiness is existence, existence is emptiness, mind is appearance, and appearance is mind. One could answer him, "True emptiness does not obstruct marvelous presence, so I will sit right on top of your illusory appearance!" Or one could simply sit on the chair and say, "Sitting thus!" Or one could raise a finger and say, "I sit right here!" Or one could raise a finger and ask him, "Where does one sit?" Such answers come readily to hand; there is truly no need for contrived thought.

Someone asked a lecturer on the Diamond Sutra: "If there is no mark of person and no mark of self, then who speaks and who hears?" This question looks difficult. If there is no person and no self, then there is no speaker and no hearer; how could there still be teaching and listening to the sutra here? Actually, the Diamond Sutra breaks through marks in order to see the nature. It does not belong to inert emptiness. Though phenomenal appearances are

empty, Buddha-nature is not absent. One may answer: “It says only that there are no marks; it does not say there is no person.” Our Buddha-nature is marvelous presence that is not existent, true emptiness that is not empty.

If everyone clarifies the principle of emptiness and existence, existence and emptiness, and then goes a step further, preserving it continuously and closely at all times, neither abiding in marks nor falling into emptiness, then one can completely realize the great Way. Otherwise, whenever appearances arise, we grasp at them as fixed marks and are not free. When will this ever be finished?

There are many public cases like this in the Chan school. In the Song dynasty, during the reign of Emperor Huizong, a prime minister invited the elders of the various schools and lineages to hold an unrestricted assembly. “Unrestricted” means that nothing was hidden: each would state his own view and directly, openly present the nature, fully realizing the great Way.

A lecturer on the Huayan Sutra said, “In our teaching tradition, becoming a Buddha requires three great *asaṃkhyeya* kalpas. But the Chan school says that with a single staff-blow or shout, one can become a Buddha. This completely fails to accord with what the Buddha taught and naturally raises doubts. Now I ask all the eminent Chan masters present: if a single shout of yours can penetrate the Huayan school’s five teachings, then I will acknowledge that a staff-blow and a shout can truly enable one to become a Buddha. If it cannot penetrate the five teachings, then the claim that a staff-blow and a shout can enable one to become a Buddha is demonic speech. I respectfully ask one of the eminent Chan masters to instruct this ignorant person.”

The Huayan school divides the Buddhadharma into five teachings: the Small Vehicle teaching, the initial Mahāyāna teaching, the final Mahāyāna teaching, the sudden Mahāyāna teaching, and the perfect Mahāyāna teaching. Their doctrinal meanings go from shallow to deep, and their practices proceed step by step. Among the eminent Chan masters attending the assembly was Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin, who was over eighty years old and was the teacher of Chan Master Dahui Zonggao. He glanced toward Chan Master Jingyin Cheng, then in his forties. Chan Master Jingyin Cheng understood his meaning and stood up.

He said to the Huayan lecturer, “Your question is not difficult to answer. It is not worth troubling the great patriarchs seated here to explain it to you. Let this junior elder speak to you. First, let us determine the meanings of the five teachings. The Small Vehicle teaching attaches to existence: there is a Way to accomplish, a *nirvāṇa* to realize, and birth and death to end. The initial Mahāyāna teaching speaks of emptiness. The final Mahāyāna teaching speaks of neither emptiness nor existence: it is not emptiness and not existence. The sudden Mahāyāna teaching says that emptiness is precisely existence. The perfect Mahāyāna teaching speaks of not emptiness and not existence, not existence and not emptiness: perfect interpenetration without obstruction. Is this the meaning?” The Huayan lecturer said, “Yes.”

Chan Master Jingyin Cheng gave a great shout and asked the assembly, “Did you hear it?” The assembly said, “We heard it!” Cheng said, “If you heard it, then that is existence. We have penetrated the Small Vehicle teaching.” At that time Emperor Huizong, wearing simple blue clothing and a small cap, was sitting mixed in with the assembly. He had instructed the prime minister not to reveal this, so that he could listen well to how the matter would be explained.

After a while, the sound had dispersed, and Cheng asked again, “When you listen now, is there still sound?” The assembly said, “There is none!” Cheng said, “None is emptiness. We have penetrated the initial Mahāyāna teaching.” He continued, “The fact that now there is none while just now there was sound is not emptiness; the fact that just now there was sound while now there is none is not existence. Is this not neither emptiness nor existence? We have penetrated the final Mahāyāna teaching.”

“Furthermore, if there were not the previous existence, what present emptiness could be spoken of? If there were not present emptiness, what previous existence could be spoken of? When existence is spoken of, emptiness is within existence; when emptiness is spoken of, existence is within emptiness. Does this not show that emptiness is precisely existence? We have penetrated the sudden Mahāyāna teaching.”

“And the perfect Mahāyāna teaching? I do not take a shout merely as a shout. Although I shout, I have never shouted. At all times and in all places, do not attach to marks. While eating, one has not bitten a single grain of rice; while wearing clothes, one has not hung on a single thread of gauze. Although work is very busy, it is just as if one has never worked. This is the essential meaning of the Diamond Sutra’s ‘Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind.’ When speaking of existence, not even the finest hair is established; when speaking of emptiness, it pervades worlds as numerous as sands. Not abiding in emptiness or existence, complete and unobstructed—this is the supreme perfect Mahāyāna teaching, the highest realm described in the Huayan Sutra: the Dharma Realm of Nonobstruction Among Phenomena. This is also the essence of Chan.”

On hearing this, the whole assembly was convinced and full of praise, and Emperor Huizong nodded repeatedly. The Buddhadharma truly is the loftiest religion and the finest philosophy of life. If we can accept it in faith and put it into practice, what anxieties over success or failure, gain or loss could remain? Ganges Mahāmudrā teaches the highest-vehicle Buddhadharma. Since we have been extraordinarily fortunate to hear this Dharma, we should practice in accordance with the teaching, constantly keeping the mind like a river and acting spontaneously without abiding, in order to realize the intrinsic characteristic of the dharmakāya.

“When mind arises, know it to be the functioning of wisdom; during clear observation and at all times, it is just so. Therefore, whether in laxity and non-practice or in diligent, sustained practice, its dharma-nature neither increases nor decreases.”

When a thought arises in the mind, one should know that this is the functioning of wisdom, the wondrous functioning of dharma-nature. Not only is this so during clear observation; it is so at all times. Therefore, when one is lax and does not practice, dharma-nature is not reduced; when one practices diligently and continuously, dharma-nature is not increased. Dharma-nature itself neither increases nor decreases.

Quite a few people, in studying Buddhism and practicing, often suppress thoughts so that they do not arise. They think that sitting for ten days or half a month, or even ten years or eight years, with not one thought arising, is good practice. They do not realize that to practice dead samādhi in this way does not bring true benefit and cannot leave the three realms. It only suppresses things for a while. Once they are stirred up again, delusive thoughts arise even more forcefully than before. Even if nothing is stirred, what use is it to sit there dead? Remaining for a long time in dead samādhi can turn one into earth, wood, metal, or stone.

To truly practice, one must train flexibly and responsively amid affairs and circumstances. Know that the arising of thought is the wondrous functioning of the original nature. If one does not attach to marks, wisdom increases day by day. In our practice we must become living Buddhas, not dead Buddhas. We must function wondrously in all kinds of ways to benefit and bring joy to sentient beings. Only then is it valuable. If one only sits there dead and unmoving, has one not become a clay bodhisattva?

As explained earlier, after seeing the original nature one must diligently eliminate habitual tendencies amid affairs and circumstances. Clear observation is the best means for eliminating habitual tendencies. Clear observation itself is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. Not only is it wondrous functioning when one maintains clear observation; it is wondrous functioning at all times. For instance, traveling through mountains and rivers, visiting relatives and friends, watching opera, or dancing are all wondrous functioning.

It is not that one cannot watch opera. But do not let the opera take hold of you, and do not be swept along by its plot. While watching, if one repeatedly gives rise to joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure in response to the play's sorrows and joys, separations and reunions, and after watching still cannot forget it, brooding over it with the mind always following the plot—"this person is so good, that person is so bad"—this is called being watched by the opera. How could this be acceptable? Watching opera can also become an occasion for practice and mind-training: observe whether the mind is moved. If one can reach the point of "like a wooden person watching flowers and birds," that is good practice.

But this does not mean one does not know who in the opera is good or bad, or does not know the plot. If one knew nothing at all, would that not be a pool of stagnant water? It is not that one does not know; rather, one does not discriminate, grasp, or reject, and is not moved by the plot. Seeing yet not seeing, not seeing yet seeing, without the slightest abiding. "Human affairs are, after all, all a play." We cannot put down this or put down that, but in fact all of it is illusory like a play. When breathing stops, this play is over. What is there to cling to?

When we practice diligently and earnestly, the dharmakāya does not increase by even one part. When we are lax, the dharmakāya does not decrease by even one part. In other words, when we become Buddhas, the dharmakāya does not increase by even one part; when we are sentient beings, it does not decrease by even one part. When we ascend to heaven, it does not increase by even one part; when we descend into hell, it does not decrease by even one part. It has no arising or ceasing, no coming or going; through ten thousand ages, it does not change.

In America there is a “living Buddha” named Lu Shengyan who says, “When one practices, Buddha-nature, the heavenly mind, rises up to heaven, while the bad, evil mind descends underground.” One rises up and one descends; a single true mind is divided into two. That is truly terrible. Some Dharma masters, when lecturing on sutras, say, “If we have done bad deeds, the delusive mind that did bad deeds goes to hell, while the true mind rises to heaven.” This also divides true and delusive into two minds. They do not know that true mind (Buddha-nature) and delusive mind are originally one in essence: delusive mind is true mind, and true mind is delusive mind. For example, water, which symbolizes true mind, gives rise to waves, which symbolize delusive mind. Waves are water and water is waves. How could there be two?

Someone asks, “If there are not two, why do people speak of the three hun and seven po? Are the three hun and seven po not ten things?” If that were really so, would one person not become ten people? It is not so. What is called hun belongs to yang: the upright qi that is luminous and without selfishness. What is called po belongs to yin: dark and filthy evil thoughts. The three hun and seven po mean that the luminous portion in a person is small, only three parts, while the dark and shameful things are many, seven parts. It does not divide one person into ten things. If we drive out the seven parts of dark and evil mind and turn them all around, completely transforming them into luminosity, then the Way is realized. The reason Patriarch Lü Chunyang is called “Pure Yang” is that the po were completely eliminated; darkness was transformed into luminosity, and the Way of immortality was accomplished.

Therefore true mind and delusive mind are not two things. When you descend into hell, true mind goes down to hell with you, but its luminosity is not reduced and it is not defiled; it also does not suffer. It is like a pearl wrapped in filthy mud: the pearl’s luminosity is not reduced. When you ascend to heaven, it is not happy, and its luminosity is not increased. Our self-nature, at all times and in every moment, is neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor shaking, neither arising nor ceasing.

“As for greed, anger, afflictions, and feelings of suffering and pleasure, know that their nature is naturally just so; then one realizes the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya.”

The reason we have greed, anger, afflictions, and feelings such as suffering and pleasure is that these are all the natural wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. If there were no dharmakāya, these feelings could not arise. But the many transformations of such feelings—at times joy, at times worry and affliction—are all the mischief of the three poisons of greed,

anger, and delusion. When we encounter something not to our liking, we become afflicted. When we seek and do not obtain, we become angry. When our wishes cannot be satisfied, we grieve, suffer, resent, and hate. When our desires are satisfied, we rejoice and are happy. These feelings are all empty and without self-nature; they are delusive thoughts that arise in relation to objects. As it is said, “The myriad dharmas are originally idle; only people disturb themselves.” All of this is because of fundamental ignorance.

When ignorance is mentioned, people who practice the Dharma are all afraid. It is ignorance that harms us and keeps us cycling through the six paths. If it were absent, we would long since have become Buddhas. But do not fear it: ignorance is not truly existent. It is only a delusive thought, an illusory image. We need only awaken to it, and we can see through it. Because it is not something truly existent, it cannot be smashed with some object. One need only awaken to the fact that greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, doubt, and so on are all delusive feelings that arise from clinging to circumstances and letting the mind cling to them; they are all delusions born of ignorance. They are naturally just so, empty and without anything whatsoever. “Naturally just so” means originally like this, not intentionally fabricated.

Once we understand this wondrous principle, then with a single awakening all suffering, pleasure, and afflictions dissolve and fall away. This is just as the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “Recognize illusion, and you are free of it; no expedient means need be applied. Freedom from illusion is awakening; there is no gradual sequence.” Ordinarily we speak of “deep and heavy karmic obstruction.” What is karmic obstruction? Karmic obstruction is your attachment to marks. If you do not attach to marks, there is no affliction at all. Where could karmic obstruction come from? All painful feelings and pleasant feelings are like dreams we have while asleep. Within the dream, nightmares and beautiful dreams are vivid; but when you wake, nothing at all remains. Therefore if we can suddenly wake up, put everything down, and not attach to marks, we obtain the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya.

The wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya is not difficult. We only need to be awake at all times, not abiding in marks. Someone says, “Ah! Investigating Chan and practicing Esoteric Buddhism are difficult. It is still easier to practice Buddha-recitation and seek rebirth in the West.” In fact, he has mistaken the matter. Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, and Esoteric practice are all the same. There is no inherent distinction of difficulty or ease. It is only that, according to each person’s different faculties, one chooses a Dharma gate suitable for oneself.

Buddha-recitation uses the Buddha-name to sweep away the grime accumulated in one’s own mind. Through the practice of holding the Name, one awakens oneself. Master Lianchi said that buddha-recitation is “sound after sound awakening the true host.” That is, one recites the sacred Name reverently, sound after sound, to awaken one’s own original nature, not abiding in marks and not clinging to objects, thereby personally seeing Buddha-nature and, at the end of life, being able to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Chan investigation is the same. At all times, one watches over the huatou and looks at where delusive thoughts come from. As soon as a thought arises, one asks it: where have you come from? This is a direct blow to the head. This delusive thought fundamentally does not exist; it is an illusory image. Strike it, and it is gone. This is the same as buddha-recitation: both are for exhausting delusive thinking and thereby personally realizing what is original.

But some people say they are not the same. They say that in buddha-recitation there are Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, and all the bodhisattvas in the vast assembly at the lotus pond who welcome and guide one to rebirth in the West, horizontally transcending the three realms, while Chan investigation cannot do this. In fact, they are also mistaken. Welcoming guidance and horizontal transcendence do exist. But such welcoming guidance does not mean being pulled there.

Chan Master Yongming Yanshou explained this very clearly: the Buddha is like the moon in the sky, and the mind is like a basin of water. Only when the mind is clear and pure can the moon's reflection appear. If the mind is not clear and pure—if it is muddy water—then even though the moon in the sky exists, that is, even though the Buddha emits light to shine on you, you cannot see it, and it cannot appear. Then you cannot be born in the West. Master Hanshan said that in buddha-recitation one must recite effectively and cut off the root of attachment; only then is there hope of birth in the West. The root of attachment is the emotionally driven stirring of ignorance; it is the root of birth and death. If one does not cut it off, the mind is like muddy water: the moon's reflection cannot appear in muddy water. It is not that the Buddha does not come to welcome and guide you, or does not emit light to shine on you. It is only that you yourself cannot see it, just as a blind person cannot see the sun.

Furthermore, if a Chan practitioner practices until the mind is empty and pure, that itself is the Pure Land. Mind is land, and land is mind. The Buddha said, "If you wish to purify the land, first purify the mind. As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure." Only when the mind is purified is the Buddha-land purified. At that time, if you vow to be born in the West, you will certainly be compassionately welcomed and guided by Amitābha Buddha and be reborn there. Amitābha Buddha is not like us ordinary beings. Ordinary beings have feelings of attachment and aversion: if you have formed good affinity with me, I will welcome and guide you; if you have not formed affinity with me, I will ignore you. Buddhas and bodhisattvas practice great loving-kindness without conditions. They do not have such inferior views. If you have not formed affinity with me, all the more I will form affinity with you and compassionately welcome and guide you.

From the standpoint of esoteric Buddhism, regardless of whether you practice buddha-recitation or some other Dharma gate, when your life is ending, Amitābha Buddha emits light to shine on you and welcomes and guides you to rebirth in the West. Moreover, he shines not only on practitioners but also on people who do not practice and on people who create evil; he also shines upon them and welcomes and guides them. It is only that people who create evil have deep and heavy karmic obstructions. They cannot see the Buddha-light, or when

they see the Buddha-light as strong and intense, they are frightened and flee, lacking the merit to be born in the West. The Amitābha Sutra says, “One cannot be born in that land with few good roots, merit, and causal conditions.” Good roots, merit, and causal conditions: not one of these three may be lacking. To be born in the West, one must be complete in good roots, merit, and causal conditions. It is not that by casually reciting “Amitābha Buddha” a few times one can go.

Bodhisattvas, we must practice in earnest and bring the delusive mind completely to rest; only then can the Way be accomplished. Mahāmudrā teaches the Dharma gate of the mind-ground. The one true Dharma realm—the Flower Treasury World—is Mahāmudrā. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is within this Mahāmudrā; it does not go outside Mahāmudrā. The Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is on the thirteenth level of this Mahāmudrā, and the Land of Real Reward and Adornment is the twentieth level of the Flower Treasury World. Our Sahā world is also on the thirteenth level, parallel with the Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together in the West. The Buddha said, “From here, toward the west, passing ten trillion Buddha-lands, there is a world called Ultimate Bliss.” This means that from here, going toward the west, is the Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together of the world of Ultimate Bliss.

So long as we deeply believe without doubt, do all good deeds, make vows, and dedicate the merit toward rebirth, we can go there; Buddhas and bodhisattvas will not refuse us. It is not that one cannot go unless one has recited Amitābha’s sacred Name. Some say, “I have practiced Buddha-recitation only a little; I am afraid I cannot go.” This statement is incorrect. Whether one is born in the West does not depend on how much one recites. This is not buying and selling. It depends on the quality of your buddha-recitation: whether one’s mind is reverent and pure. If your mind is truly pure, then at the time of death even one recitation can bring birth in the West. If we can contemplate that all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas are like flowers in the sky and the moon in water, unable to be sought or obtained; if with one letting go all is let go, and with purity unstained one recites “Amitābha Buddha” once, this single pure thought-moment can come into accord with the Buddha and be born in the West. One does not need ten recitations, a hundred recitations, or ten million recitations. It depends on whether, at the end of life, one can be single-minded and undisturbed, with right mindfulness clear and distinct.

At the end of life, if the mind is not confused, the intent is not scattered, and right mindfulness is clear and distinct, this is deep mastery of buddha-recitation samādhi. The ability to reach this stage depends on the accumulation built now by diligently sweeping away delusive habits. Therefore in our practice now, one must reverently let go, let go, and let go again, making the mind pure and unstained. Only then, in the future, can one be assured of success in being born in the West. This too is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. We fuse Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism into one furnace because they are originally one and

inseparable. Do not divide them into Esoteric Buddhism, Chan, and Pure Land. Fundamentally, the Buddhadharma is one.

II. The Great Natural Abiding of No-Practice

“If one does not understand natural, spontaneous functioning, delusive thoughts will certainly run in profusion and one will fall into ordinary foolishness. Therefore one should never depart from the great natural abiding of no-practice.”

In all times and all places, our acts and activities are the wondrous functioning of true mind, and all forms are our own emanation bodies. Naturally, we should accord with the various causes and conditions, responding and acting accordingly, exerting our own strength to benefit the community. This is called “natural spontaneous functioning.” If one does not understand or fully grasp the principle of natural spontaneous functioning, one will inevitably become attached to objects, with the mind clinging to them, greedily giving rise to delusive thoughts in order to satisfy one’s desires. Then one buries a perfectly good living Buddha as an ordinary fool.

Originally, we practice the Dharma in order to see the nature and realize the Way, attaching to nothing at all. If we want to manifest spiritual powers, want to obtain something, or seek the protection of Buddhas and bodhisattvas so that we can be promoted, become officials, or get rich, then we have turned our backs on Buddhist practice. Now we only need, in every moment, to be spontaneously without abiding: within every realm of delusive thinking, not adding discrimination, yet not being like wood or stone, and clearly and distinctly responding as circumstances require and following conditions. This is Buddha-activity.

Earlier we said: do not take this physical body as oneself; take empty quiescence as one’s essence. Do not take delusive thoughts as one’s mind; take numinous knowing as one’s mind. If one practices through the Dharma gate of the mind-ground, it is like cooking a meal from rice: it will certainly succeed. If one does not practice in this way, it is like trying to cook rice from sand; however much effort is spent, no rice can result. When we understand that this numinously knowing mind, pure and unstained yet clear and distinct, is Buddha, then we no longer attach to marks. We serve the community naturally and spontaneously, using affairs and circumstances to train ourselves, eliminating delusive habits completely and fully realizing the fruit of Buddhahood. Otherwise, delusive thoughts will certainly fly about in profusion, one will fall into ordinary foolishness on one’s own, and birth and death will not be ended.

We ordinary beings have, through many lives and kalpas, grown used to attaching to marks. We cannot change this all at once. Not only do we pick and choose in food, clothing, dwelling, and daily life; even in Dharma practice we keep on picking and choosing. One person says, “Pure Land is good and reliable; Chan is dangerous and unreliable.” Another says, “Esoteric Buddhism is good.” Someone else says, “Esoteric Buddhism is not good either; Esoteric Buddhism is full of demonic influences.” Ah, this is good, that is not good—all of this is like

blind people feeling an elephant, making false discriminations and speaking nonsense. They do not know that the Dharma taught by the Buddha is equal, equal, and again equal. It is only that, in response to people's different faculties, different Dharma gates are taught. This is called "giving medicine according to the illness."

It is like eating food. If you like sweet things, take sweet food. If you like sour things, take sour food. If people who love sour food say sweet food is bad, and people who love sweet food say sour food is bad; if those who practice Buddha-recitation say Chan is dangerous—actually Chan is not dangerous—or those who investigate Chan say Esoteric Buddhism has demonic influences—actually Esoteric Buddhism has no demonic influences—all of this is partiality toward what one personally likes and false discrimination. Not only does one bring affliction upon oneself, one unknowingly commits the offense of slandering the Dharma. Practice whichever school you like. Do not say that other schools are bad. Every school is the same. If you say Chan investigation is difficult, practicing other schools is not easy either; if you say buddha-recitation is easy, practicing other schools is not difficult either.

Layman Pang said, "Difficult, difficult, difficult—spreading ten loads of sesame oil on a tree." This speaks of beginning practitioners who do not understand the key of practice, and therefore find it extremely difficult, like a slippery fish climbing a slick pole. The scales on a fish are sticky and slippery; to climb an oily bamboo pole—how could that be easy? But once it has been pointed out, one sees that what can speak, act, cry, and laugh is precisely our self-nature. All day long it shines right before our face, without the slightest concealment. There is no need to search or pray for it; just put everything down and that is it. This is exactly, "After wearing out iron shoes, nowhere is it found; once obtained, it costs no effort at all." Therefore Madam Pang immediately responded, "Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the coming from the West is on the tips of a hundred grasses."

It is not difficult, not difficult at all; investigating Chan and awakening to the Way is very easy. "On the tips of the hundred grasses" means on top of anything whatsoever. The meaning of "on the tips" here is to see without clinging to marks; do not look downward and become caught in them. The capacity to see things without clinging to marks is the wondrous functioning of self-nature. Is this not very easy? Therefore in our practice, do not divide schools and lineages, saying this is difficult and that is easy. In every moment, simply recognize this true mind, free from marks yet clear and distinct. Do not take reflections as real; reflections cannot be grasped.

At this point, although the principle is understood, the habits of abiding in marks accumulated through many lives and kalpas will still invade. Chan Master Guifeng said, "Delusive clinging over many lives becomes habitual and forms a second nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure form a subtle stream. Although the true principle is suddenly realized, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once. One must remain constantly vigilant, reducing them again and again." Therefore we must remain constantly vigilant. When any thought arises, immediately notice it and let it dissolve. If the force of delusive thought is strong and for the time being

cannot be transformed, then practice Buddha-recitation or hold a mantra in order to transform it. The Buddha-name and mantras are wisdom-swords used to cut through the delusive mind and emotional entanglements that cling to marks; they have inexhaustible power. So long as we recite them reverently, we will certainly receive the blessing of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore accomplishing the Way is not difficult.

Likewise, to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, any school can lead there so long as one makes the vow. We often say that the scope of buddha-recitation is very broad. It is not that only reciting “Amitābha Buddha” is buddha-recitation. Reciting sutras is also buddha-recitation. Doing good deeds without attaching to marks is also buddha-recitation. Remaining lucidly aware is also buddha-recitation. Why? Because Buddha means awakening. If you are never deluded and you dedicate the merit toward the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, is this not buddha-recitation?

The Pure Land school says that to be born in the highest level of the highest grade, one must “read and recite the Great Vehicle.” Why should one read and recite the Great Vehicle? It is to make you understand the principle. It is to make you understand where phenomena such as birth and death come from, and how birth and death can be ended. When you have understood these principles, emptied the delusive mind completely, and have no abiding at all, then you can be born in the highest level of the highest grade. If you abide in marks, rigidly attached, thinking that this world is not good and that you want to go to the West to enjoy blessings there, then it has gone wrong. Even if you can go, it is only birth in the lowest level of the lowest grade. Because your mind is not empty and pure, you can only be born in the Land Where Ordinary Beings and Sages Dwell Together; you cannot be born in the Land of Expedient Means with Remainder or the Land of Real Reward and Adornment.

What is Chan? It is the pure mind in its original, uncontrived freedom—what the Chan school calls “the treasury of the true Dharma-eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa.” Is this wondrous mind of nirvāṇa not precisely the Pure Land? Is it not also the secret treasury of Esoteric Buddhism? Therefore Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism appear to be three schools, but in reality they are one and inseparable. Esoteric Buddhism has many methods for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, such as phowa, the Great Amitābha practice, and transference of consciousness. These are all for birth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Reciting Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s name likewise leads to birth in the West, because Avalokiteśvara is in the West; he too emits light to shine on you and welcomes and guides you to rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

The reason rebirth has nine grades lies in whether one attaches to marks or does not attach to marks. If you understand that mind is land and land is mind, that birth is unborn and the unborn is birth, and you do not abide in marks in the slightest, then within the unborn, there is no obstruction to rebirth. Such rebirth is wondrous functioning. The unborn is not dying there unmoving. Unceasing arising is precisely non-arising; non-arising is precisely unceasing arising. Only this obtains the wondrous truth of non-arising.

“Therefore one should never depart from the great natural abiding of no-practice.” What is called no-practice means that “the practice of no-practice is true practice.” Mahāmudrā is the supreme esoteric Dharma. It does not require you to recite mantras, form mudrās, or practice some method. Everything unfolds naturally and spontaneously, without the slightest abiding: that is it. This kind of practice is the great natural abiding.

After awakening, the Chan school is the same: practicing through no-practice, without antidotal treatment. Antidotal methods are practices for removing delusion that are undertaken specifically according to each person’s habitual tendencies. For example, people with heavy lust specifically practice the contemplation of impurity and the contemplation of skeletons; people who especially love to talk practice silence, and so on. These are expedient methods for calming delusion and returning to truth.

Mahāmudrā does not use such antidotes. It tells us that all forms are manifestations of self-nature and are the wondrous functioning of true mind. To be without abiding at all times is the great practice of no-practice. For people who practice Buddha-recitation, when a thought arises, one notices it and it is empty: this is buddha-recitation. It is not that one must recite the phrase “Amitābha Buddha” for it to count as buddha-recitation. But one’s practice must suit one’s own faculties. It cannot be confined to a single pattern.

There are several different ways of practicing Buddha-recitation. To notice a thought as soon as it arises is true-reality buddha-recitation. To visualize oneself as Amitābha Buddha is visualization buddha-recitation. Contemplating the Buddha’s marks and excellent features is Buddha-recitation by contemplating the Buddha’s form. To never depart, at any time, from the phrase “Amitābha Buddha” is Buddha-name recitation. In our practice, we must choose a method suited to our own disposition. Only then can we gain twice the result with half the effort. If you cannot notice a thought as soon as it arises and let it be empty, then recite the Buddha-name. If silent recitation still does not work and thoughts still move, then recite aloud, “Amitābha Buddha...” In every case, you must cut through delusive thoughts and turn them toward no-thought.

With the same buddha-recitation, whether one understands this principle or does not understand it makes a great difference in the effectiveness of the practice. If one recites without understanding the principle, one constantly attaches to marks and clings to Amitābha Buddha in the West. If one recites with understanding of the principle, one knows that buddha-recitation borrows Amitābha Buddha’s sacred Name to sweep clean the filth in our own minds, turning around the afflictions and foolishness that attach to marks, in order to realize the same pure Buddha-nature as Amitābha Buddha. Because methods of practice differ, the grades of rebirth in the West accordingly differ as well. This practice without attachment to marks is precisely the “great natural abiding of no-practice”; abiding without abiding is called natural abiding.

A Chan master gave instruction in this way: “Where there is Buddha, do not linger; where there is no Buddha, quickly walk past.” Where there is Buddha, do not stop; where there is no Buddha, quickly walk past. This means that one must neither attach to existence nor incline toward emptiness. Neither of the two extremes of existence and non-existence is established, and there is no middle either. This is the meaning of the Middle Way; it is also the Tiantai school’s “emptiness, provisionality, and middle” as the three contemplations in one mind. Therefore appearances are not absent; they manifest illusorily and function. If true nature could not manifest illusory appearances and function through them, it would be a pool of stagnant water. What value would Buddha-nature still have? Our practice is to eliminate completely the delusive habits of clinging to illusory marks, not to sit there dead and unmoving. If we can awaken, never abiding in marks and also not clinging to any practice method, then we have entered the right path and entered the “great natural abiding of no-practice.”

“At all times, solely by recognizing the directly pointed essential view, everything is gathered in.”

No matter what time or place, take the original nature shown by direct pointing as the right view. Truly realize that this mind of ours is the one true Dharma realm. The one true Dharma realm gathers in everything; the myriad phenomena are all included within it. Any form whatsoever is the wondrous functioning manifested by one’s own mind. Therefore, do not attach to marks. Whether circumstances are favorable or unfavorable, whether they accord with my wishes or go against them, do not concern yourself with it. Then at every moment you are seeing the nature.

The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch says, “One who sees the nature must see it in the very words; one like this can see it even wielding a blade on the battlefield.” When one goes into battle, if the mind holds views of birth and death, going out and coming in, that will not do. Even if someone kills me, it is no matter: “Bringing the head before the white blade is just like cutting the spring wind.” Ha! If it is cut off, let it be cut off. Once this shell of a body is cut away, our true mind is neither increased nor decreased, neither born nor destroyed; upright and dignified, it cannot be cut. This is the conduct of a person who sees the nature.

In the past, when Chan Master Yuanguì of Songyue was sitting quietly, he saw an emperor with many attendants standing before him in imposing majesty. The emperor saw that the Chan master did not rise to receive him and felt displeased. He asked the master, “Do you know who I am?” The master said, “I contemplate Buddhas and sentient beings as equal. Can I look at you with a special eye?” The emperor said, “I am the mountain god. I hold great authority over birth and death. I can make people live, and I can make people die. How can you look at me with an ordinary eye?”

The master laughed loudly and said, “I am fundamentally unborn. Can you make an unborn person die? As I see it, body and empty space are not two, and I and you are not two. Can you

damage empty space and yourself? Even if you could, my true mind is unborn and undying. What you can damage is only my body; you cannot damage my true mind. You have not yet realized this true mind, so how can you say you can make me live or make me die?"

Hearing this, the mountain god was stunned: "Ah, I have never heard such words. Is there still a deathless true mind?" The master continued instructing him: "For example, you are now a great god, but before, you were also a human being. Only because you were upright, firm, and impartial as a person and did many good deeds have you now become a great god who wields authority over birth and death. But who became the mountain god? The shell of the body you had as a person is already gone. It is the consciousness-spirit that became the mountain god. That consciousness-spirit of yours differs from our Buddha-nature by just a little. What is the difference? When ignorance is present, Buddha-nature becomes consciousness-spirit. When ignorance is removed completely, consciousness-spirit is restored as Buddha-nature. Even though ignorance is still present, Buddha-nature is not reduced by one part, because it neither increases nor decreases. Who is now the mountain god? It is precisely this unborn and undying Buddha-nature, yet you do not know it at all!"

After the mountain god received the Chan master's instruction, it was as if he woke from a dream. Right then he took Chan Master Yuangui as his teacher and took refuge in Buddhism. As for those who attach themselves to grasses and trees and manifest spiritual responses, what kind of spirits are they? They are ghosts. When they were alive, they were greedy without end, committed offenses, and fell into hell. After their suffering in hell was completed and they left hell, because their greedy habits remained, when they encountered grasses or trees they attached themselves to them, and those grasses and trees became efficacious. This is actually the mischief of greedy ghosts; they are not gods. Gods are great ghost-kings whose spiritual powers are greater than other ghosts. All of them attach to marks.

Therefore, at all times, what is essential is to recognize the true mind indicated by the "direct pointing to the essential view". The capacity of mind is as vast as empty space; not one of the myriad phenomena is excluded from our mind-nature. If we want to recover our original capacity, we must begin now: put everything down, constantly recognize this Buddha-nature, and do not abide in marks. As soon as there is abiding, quickly practice Buddha-recitation, quickly hold a mantra, and best of all, once noticed, it is empty. If one understands this principle and practices, whether one practices Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism, one can easily and swiftly bring the practice to fruition. If one practices without understanding this principle, it is difficult to realize the true fruit.

"Do not apply a separate antidote to each delusive thought as it rises and subsides."

This says that one should not counteract delusive thoughts separately, one by one, as they rise and subside. Practice must be directed to the common root from which delusive thoughts arise. Ordinary beings have many delusive thoughts. Some are terribly lustful, some are terribly greedy for wealth, some are terribly fond of fame. Each person's delusive thoughts

and habitual tendencies are different. If one treats them one by one with separate antidotes, using delusion to cure delusion, the delusion becomes even worse. If one begins at the point where the delusive mind first stirs, then resolving that root resolves everything, and one returns home to sit securely.

The doctrinal schools also have antidotal methods. For example, within the “six pāramitās and myriad practices,” the pāramitā of giving is an essential method for countering our small-mindedness and stinginess. The five precepts—against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants—are likewise Dharma gates for countering the stirring of delusive mind. The more than two hundred bhikṣu precepts are also nothing apart from preventing the mind from moving. Therefore the greatest precept is the mind-precept. As soon as the mind moves, that is violating the precept; it is not only after the act is carried out that it counts as violating the precept.

In the past, a disciple asked his teacher, “Master, what is breaking the precepts?” The teacher said, “When the woman next door is washing and wiping her face, if you hear the sound of her hairpins, rings, and ornaments, that is breaking the precepts.” Why is hearing these sounds breaking the precepts? Because when you hear the sounds you attach to marks. Hairpins and ornaments are women’s adornments; once you attach to the mark of a woman, other thoughts arise.

Mahāmudrā practice begins at the root and does not speak of treating every kind of delusive thought one by one. After seeing original nature, constantly watch over it. Do not let this mind abide in circumstances. Continually contemplate emptiness. Let true mind encompass everything: the myriad phenomena in all their array—the whole array of myriad phenomena—are all within the wondrous bright true mind. Mind is the root. If, when encountering all circumstances, the mind does not move and one pays no heed to any of them, what difficulty could there be in accomplishing it in this very life? If one practices on the branches and tips, treating delusive thoughts one after another, then the trouble is endless. That truly is difficult, difficult indeed.

Not speaking of antidotes is the method of Mahāmudrā practice. If this approach does not suit the faculties of some of you, you may also practice antidotal Dharma gates. For example, if lust is heavy, practice the contemplation of impurity, the contemplation of skeletons, and so on, choosing different methods of practice according to each person’s situation.

10.9 恒河大手印（第九讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Nine)

III. Meeting of Child and Mother Luminosities

“Delusive thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya’s originally awakened wisdom.”

Delusive thoughts and afflictions are both manifestations of the dharmakāya's originally awakened wisdom. The dharmakāya is without characteristics, yet there is no appearance that is not it. To say it is without characteristics means that the dharmakāya in its fundamental essence has no concrete visible form. To say there is no appearance that is not it means that the myriad phenomena in all their array—the whole array of myriad phenomena, all manifest phenomena—are manifestations of the dharmakāya; nothing that appears is outside the dharmakāya. Delusive thoughts and afflictions likewise arise as manifest phenomena, so of course they are not outside the dharmakāya.

Where do delusive thoughts and afflictions come from? Their source is dharma-nature, and dharma-nature is the root from which all dharmas arise. Buddha-nature is the root of becoming Buddha. Dharma-nature and Buddha-nature are spoken of as two things, but in reality they are one and the same; neither is apart from the dharmakāya. Original awakening is the awakened awareness originally complete in everyone; it is the numinously luminous true mind inherently present in everyone. This true mind can give rise to vast wisdom, function wondrously in every way, and manifest appearances in all their innumerable variety. Therefore, whether delusive thoughts or afflictions, all are the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya's fundamental essence. The dharmakāya is the root. Without this root, how could there be delusive thoughts and afflictions?

Only when there is water can there be waves. Water is the root, and waves are the turbulent aspect of water. Only when there is a mirror can there be reflections. The mirror is the root, and its ability to show reflections is the mirror's wondrous function. Only when there is the dharmakāya can there be delusive thoughts and afflictions. The dharmakāya is the root, and delusive thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya's originally awakened wisdom. If there were no dharmakāya, there would be no basis from which delusive thoughts and afflictions could arise.

“Their own nature is precisely the reality of the luminosity of the dharmakāya's fundamental essence.”

The nature of delusive thoughts and afflictions themselves is precisely the genuine, unfailing manifestation of the luminosity of the dharmakāya's fundamental essence. Here luminosity is mentioned. The dharmakāya's fundamental essence is replete with immeasurable luminosity; it is a “great treasury of luminosity.” In the course of practice, some people see red light, some see yellow light, some see blue light, some see green light—all kinds of colors appear. If you practice Dzogchen tögal, you must gaze at light. After the light expands, you will see bindus. At first these bindus are white; as you keep looking, they become colorful: lights of five, six, and seven colors all appear. This is the light of our original nature, triggered by sunlight, moonlight, lamplight, and so on.

This is the same principle as modern laser technology. When a ruby is placed in a laser device and a pulsed xenon lamp emits strong light to illuminate it, the light of the ruby's own specific

frequency is stimulated by that light and is suddenly released. A common saying goes, “The eyes are the windows of the mind.” According to esoteric Buddhist theory, the eighth consciousness—the ālaya-consciousness—is in the pericardium, and two channels connect the pericardium and the eyes from behind. In the esoteric practice of contemplating light, outer light enters through the eyes and stimulates the dharma-nature light inherent in our own mind. Its principle is no different from laser technology; therefore esoteric Buddhism is quite scientific.

According to Chinese medical theory, the five viscera and six bowels connect through the channels and network vessels throughout the whole body, and each finger has corresponding organs. Forming mudrās arranges the positions of the organs, and reciting mantras uses mantra sound to activate the movement of qi. Mantra sound is not random; it is not that any words casually recited will do. Rather, it is a symbol formed by Buddhas and bodhisattvas from their own minds while in meditative absorption. When you recite the mantra attentively, it matches the symbol emitted by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. You can thereby enter into communion with Buddhas and bodhisattvas and receive their empowering force. This is the same as the scientific principle of resonance. Therefore esoteric Buddhism is very scientific; it is not superstition.

The Ganges Mahāmudrā we are discussing now is practice through no-practice: at all times and in all places, practice unfolds naturally and spontaneously. This most readily brings us into communion with Buddhas and bodhisattvas, because Buddhas and bodhisattvas likewise function naturally and spontaneously. First we must recognize our own true mind. We must first understand that all things, including delusive thoughts and afflictions, are the wondrous functioning arising from our own true mind. This is what was discussed earlier as “the essential view,” and it is what Chan calls “apprehending Mind and seeing nature.” After that, guard it at all times and in all places, never clinging to marks. When this guarding and maintaining is brought to completion, the Way is realized. This Dharma is very direct and decisive; it is not a method of applying countermeasures one by one. The practice of no-practice is true practice. Therefore Mahāmudrā is called a practice of the highest vehicle.

Do not fear delusive thoughts. Do not fear afflictions. Delusive thoughts and afflictions are the wondrous functioning that arises from the dharmakāya. You only need to let these delusive thoughts and afflictions come to rest. When the mad mind comes to rest, that is bodhi; it is not that one must get rid of them. Just as, if waves were removed, there would be no water, if delusive thoughts and afflictions were removed, would that not also remove the dharmakāya? But how could the dharmakāya ever be removed? One only lets delusive thoughts and afflictions come to rest; one does not get rid of them. Do not think delusive thoughts and afflictions are bad. They are precisely manifestations of true mind, where spiritual powers manifest and wondrous functioning arises. Ganges Mahāmudrā teaches us to recognize this wondrous principle and, while engaging in all work, not to grasp at the marks of things, but to

transform the delusive mind and delusive thoughts into the wondrous functioning of true mind.

“Knowing this is called the luminosity of abiding in the fundamental essence.”

Knowing this principle is called “the luminosity of abiding in the fundamental essence.”

“Abiding” means unmoving. If you can know that delusive thoughts and afflictions are all the wondrous functioning of the fundamental essence, and can let them settle without stirring, then in handling affairs you neither cling nor abide, but function responsively as conditions arise. This kind of “knowing” is precisely the dharmakāya’s “luminosity of abiding in the fundamental essence.” Here “abiding” means remaining settled. It means one’s footing is steady; in Chan this is called “gaining firm footing.” Recognizing true mind as the very source from which delusive mind arises, and no longer seeking elsewhere—this is gaining firm footing.

Why still seek a master to open the crown and transmit the Dharma to you? Can a teacher open your crown and make you realize the Way? To speak honestly: there is no such thing. If a teacher could open your crown and make you realize the Way, then the Buddha, being so compassionate, would long ago have opened everyone’s crown and made everyone realize the Way. How could there still be so many ordinary beings? The claim that a teacher opens your crown is symbolic; it comforts you, puts you at ease, and settles your mind, making it easier to enter the Way; that is all it does. After we understand this principle, we must rouse ourselves and practice, opening our own crown and not relying on others.

Clearly recognize that true mind is nowhere else: the arising of delusive thoughts and afflictions is precisely the wondrous functioning of our true mind. Protect it at all times and do not follow delusive thoughts as they turn. As soon as the mind strays, quickly engage in Buddha-recitation or hold a mantra, and let the delusive thought dissolve. Turning the light inward is the wondrous method of protecting true mind. In practice, direct the illumination inward, not outward. There are too many outer things: delicious food, fine clothes, amusing entertainments—all of these are reflections, utterly unobtainable. If you follow them as they turn, you are finished. You must abide steadily, unmoving, with firm footing, and exhaust the old habits of attaching to marks. Naturally, great luminosity will expand.

In fact, we are emitting light all the time. The stirring of a thought is already emitting light, but this is delusive light. What the delusive mind emits is delusive light; only the light emitted by true mind is true light. What is delusive light? When delusive thoughts arise through attachment to marks, that is delusive light. Delusive light too has luminosity. Scientists in the former Soviet Union invented a machine that could photograph the light emitted by the human body; according to reports, that luminous halo was seven or eight centimeters thick. Delusive light has a measure, while true light is measureless. If we can always protect this naturally present true light, it will shine more and more widely, even illuminating the Buddha-lands of the ten directions without obstruction. This is the great treasury of

luminosity inherent in our own mind. We should abide in this way. This is abiding without abiding. It is not abiding on anything; it means keeping the mind settled, unwavering, and free from doubt.

“When recognition of self-nature’s intrinsic characteristic has fully matured, this essential view that directly points to the luminosity of self-nature is called the actualized-awakening luminosity of practicing the Way.”

Above, we discussed original-awakening luminosity: delusive thoughts and afflictions are the expression of original-awakening luminosity. Now we discuss actualized-awakening luminosity. What is actualized-awakening luminosity? It is the luminosity of “directly pointing to self-nature.” It directly points out to you: this numinously knowing mind, in which not a single thought arises yet which is clear and distinct, is Buddha-nature, is the one true Dharma realm, is Mahāmudrā. To recognize it in this way is the essential view; it is actualized-awakening luminosity.

But through immeasurable kalpas we have become used to attaching to marks. “Giving rise to mind when facing objects” is the familiar road, while “utterly open and nonabiding” is very unfamiliar. There still has to be a process of “turning what is familiar into unfamiliar, and turning what is unfamiliar into familiar.” This is what is called the process of “guarding and maintaining”; it is also the process of “clear observation.” “When recognition of self-nature’s intrinsic characteristic has fully matured, it is called the actualized-awakening luminosity of practicing the Way.” Here “mature” refers to the full maturation of recognition—not to habitual attachment to marks, but to the maturation of clear observation and of the realization gained through apprehending Mind and seeing nature. At all times, one does not abide in marks and has not the slightest doubt. This is what it means for recognition of self-nature’s intrinsic characteristic to have fully matured.

If, after hearing this, we are half-believing and half-doubting—“Is this Buddha-nature? Is this the root of becoming Buddha? Perhaps it is not. If it were, great spiritual powers should appear. Why are there no spiritual powers?”—then your recognition has not yet matured; you are still unfamiliar with it. If we do not doubt it at all and can remain attentive to it at all times, this is the actualized-awakening luminosity of practicing the Way. This is true practice. It does not necessarily have some visible form. It does not necessarily take the form of sitting meditation, Buddha-recitation, or mantra recitation. Rather, as soon as a delusive thought arises, one sees it, does not follow it as it runs, does not heed it, and it immediately becomes empty and utterly unobtainable. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, it is always like this. You cannot tell by looking that such a person is practicing, yet in fact they are practicing at every moment and everywhere. This is mind-ground practice, and it is called the “actualized-awakening luminosity of practicing the Way.”

Why call it “luminosity”? As soon as a thought arises, one can see it. If this were not luminosity, how could you illumine and see it? Some people say, “My Buddha-recitation is not

going well. I have been reciting for a long time, but I still have many delusive thoughts.” I would say, “Your Buddha-recitation is actually quite good: when delusive thoughts arise, you can illumine and see them. This is actualized-awakening luminosity.” Delusive thoughts are like dust flying around in a room; without light, you cannot see them. If a line of sunlight penetrates the room, you discover, “So there was this much dust!” Therefore, seeing delusive thoughts while sitting in meditation or during Buddha-recitation is a good thing, not a bad thing. This is actualized-awakening luminosity; awakening has begun. Going one step further, do not follow delusive thoughts as they run. Do not heed them. Focus all your attention on reciting the Buddha’s name or holding the mantra, reciting mentally and hearing each syllable clearly. Delusive thoughts will naturally come to rest. This is the “actualized-awakening luminosity of practicing the Way.”

“To function naturally here without discriminating between the respective appearances of the two luminosities—essence-luminosity and path-luminosity—is what is called the meeting of child and mother luminosities. The mother is original awakening; the child is actualized awakening.”

Delusive thoughts and afflictions are original-awakening luminosity. Realizing the essential view and practicing the Way are actualized-awakening luminosity. Original-awakening luminosity is the “essence-luminosity,” and actualized-awakening luminosity is the “path-luminosity.” Although these “two luminosities of essence and path” have different appearances, in their fundamental essence they are one and undivided. To function naturally within this, within the undifferentiated essence of these two luminosities, is what is called “the meeting of child and mother luminosities.” The mother is original-awakening luminosity; the child is actualized-awakening luminosity. This meeting means actualized awakening joining with original awakening, the two luminosities becoming one and inseparable.

The method for liberating beings in the intermediate state is based on this principle. The intermediate state is also called the intermediate existence. After a person dies, there is a three-and-a-half- to four-day state of profound unconsciousness; afterward the intermediate-state body arises, resembling a three-year-old child. Within forty-nine days there are seven cycles of birth and death, and all kinds of visions appear. This “profound unconsciousness” is a deep coma. During this coma, delusive thoughts do not move, because the person’s body—the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind—has dispersed, and the faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body have lost their capacity to receive external objects. When delusive thoughts do not move, the luminosity of self-nature is about to appear. This luminosity is called the death-light, the light that appears after death, and it arises twice within three to four days. Each appearance of the death-light lasts only the time it takes to eat a meal, then suddenly vanishes.

The death-light is also the light of self-nature. If, when the death-light appears, one can “seize it in one grab” and recognize it in time, one immediately realizes the Way. The death-light is the mother luminosity; the capacity to notice it is the child luminosity. Recognizing it in time

is the meeting of mother and child luminosities. If one merges with it at once, one can suddenly realize saṃbhogakāya buddhahood. This is the first stage of liberation in the intermediate state: the bardo of dying. If one cannot recognize it in time, one misses this opportunity.

Then the intermediate-state body arises, and all kinds of karmic appearances manifest. If one did good deeds while alive, good appearances manifest; if one did evil deeds, evil appearances manifest. Both beautiful and terrifying appearances manifest. At the same time, during the first fourteen days, each day Buddhas and bodhisattvas radiate intense lights of various colors and manifest paired forms in union to welcome and guide the being. At this time, if one does not fear the intense light or give rise to wild, deluded discrimination, and if one merges with the light in time, one can also be born in a pure Buddha-land. On the fourth day after the intermediate-state body has arisen, Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, radiates an intense red light and manifests a paired form in face-to-face embrace with the White-Robed Buddha Mother. If at that moment you give rise to no discrimination, surprise, or fear and resolutely merge with the light, you can immediately be born in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. The first fourteen days, when Buddhas and bodhisattvas welcome and guide the being, are the second stage of liberation in the intermediate state: the bardo of dharmatā. Immediately following this is the third stage of liberation in the intermediate state: the bardo of becoming. The book *The Esoteric Instructions for Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State* explains this in great detail, so I will not say more about it here.

In our sitting meditation and practice, being able to illumine and see delusive thoughts is a good thing. Do not give rise to doubt. Continue to practice diligently. When the practice matures, with a sudden snap it will open up: the child and mother luminosities merge into one—a great treasury of luminosity. That is realizing the Way. People who practice Buddha-recitation are the same. At all times and in all places, one continuously holds to a single phrase of the Buddha's name. When, after long practice, the practice matures, the mind that recites and the Buddha who is recited both drop off at once. There is no person who recites and no Buddha who is recited, yet it is bright and distinct, clear and evident. This too is child and mother merging; this too is “the meeting of child and mother luminosities.”

“Do not forget the already recognized intrinsic luminosity of the essential view. With regard to the delusive thoughts and afflictions that arise amid circumstances and functioning, it is most essential not to give rise to any intention to suppress or expel them, follow or validate them, grasp them, or reject them.”

Do not forget the already recognized “intrinsic luminosity of the essential view.” What is the intrinsic luminosity of the essential view? Our ability to illumine and see all things is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya's fundamental essence. One illumines and sees things without being turned by them, and recognizes that this very capacity to see is our original nature. Thus, one sees nature in appearances—through appearances, one sees the

original nature. This is the essential view. The essential view is also the dharmakāya's wondrous functioning. It is also the radiant aspect of the dharmakāya itself. This radiant aspect itself has no defining characteristics; it is called the "intrinsic luminosity of the essential view."

This is not seen with the eyes or heard with the ears. Earlier we discussed insentient things speaking Dharma: "If you use the ear to hear, you will never understand; only by hearing sound at the eye can you know." That speaks of listening to sound with the eyes. Here, we are using the ears to see luminosity. How can the eyes hear? How can the ears see? The capacity to illumine all things and hear all sounds is our original nature. Apart from original nature, nothing at all can be found. If one can recognize it in this way, this is the intrinsic luminosity of the essential view. Can this luminosity be seen with the eyes? Therefore we say it is seen with the ears. Is this seeing? It is a matter of tacit accord, experience, realization, and intuitive comprehension.

With regard to delusive thoughts and afflictions that arise amid circumstances and functioning, do not give rise to any intention to suppress or expel them, follow or validate them, grasp them, or reject them, because all are illusory appearances and nothing can be grasped or rejected. Pay them no heed and give rise to no intention; only then does one accord with the subtlety of the Way. "Suppressing" means covering over or pressing down; "expelling" means driving them away. Both are forms of repression. "Following or validating" means following them as they run.

For example, suppose you lose money in business and affliction arises. Then another thought comes: "I am someone who studies Buddhism; I should not be afflicted like this. Why am I still afflicted? This is bad, bad!" The more you think this, the more regretful you become, and the more you stir things up, the more afflicted you become. This is suppression and expulsion. Or suppose you are already able not to be moved by success or failure in affairs, and you think your meditative stability is strong: "The eight winds cannot move me; I sit upright on the purple-golden lotus." "This state is excellent!" This is validation. We should practice in this way: whether movement or stillness, whether favorable or adverse, whether ease and lightness or affliction—all are utterly unobtainable, and none of them is placed in the mind. Even suppressing or expelling, following or validating, grasping or rejecting—none of these intentions is placed in the mind either. When delusive thoughts and afflictions arise, neither follow them as they run nor heed them. Let them arise and cease on their own. Simply notice it sharply—that is enough. Earlier we already said that if your practice reaches the point of having no mind of attachment or aversion, then after death you will no longer revolve in the six paths.

The two points—"do not forget" and "do not give rise"—are most important: do not forget the "intrinsic luminosity of the essential view," and do not give rise to any intention to suppress or expel them, follow or validate them, grasp them, or reject them. This is most, most important. We must not forget that this capacity to see, know, speak, and act is the wondrous

functioning of original nature; we must become familiar with it at every moment. When delusive thoughts and afflictions arise, neither suppress nor follow them. Do not try to expel or validate them, and do not form attachment or aversion, and do not grasp or reject them. Everything is utterly unobtainable. Open and calm, plain and ordinary, with an even, open mind, all traces naturally fade away. However much wind and cloud may change, I myself have no joy and no sorrow. Let the mind always be empty, the qi always level, and the intent always light and plain. We must practice like this at all times and in all places. This practice applies no matter which school one follows.

IV. Repeatedly Remove the Attainments of Bliss, Clarity, and No-Thought

“After one has guarded and maintained such a state for a long time, if the attainments of bliss, clarity, no-thought, and the like obscure the original face, one should strip away this shell; then the appearance of self-nature can be laid bare and revealed. This is wisdom shining clearly from within.”

After one has guarded and maintained the state of “not forgetting” and “not giving rise” discussed above for a long time, states such as “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” appear. These are initial states of entering the Way arising from the maturity of one’s practice. Bliss is happiness; clarity here refers to luminosity; no-thought is the mind’s emptiness. The state of “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” appears. The inner mind is empty and pure, incomparably light and at ease. The body seems to have vanished, as light and relaxed as if a heavy burden had been set down. One is joyful, delighted, and incomparably happy—a hundred times happier than “timely rain after a long drought, meeting an old friend in a foreign land, the wedding night in the bridal chamber, or finding one’s name on the examination list.” No worldly happiness can compare with this kind of happiness. In the four dhyānas and eight absorptions, when practice reaches the third dhyāna this bliss arises; only at the fourth dhyāna does this bliss dissolve.

Mind-light emerges: bright and utterly clear, like a full moon shining overhead. Whether awake or dreaming, one is bathed in luminosity. Are “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” good? They are good, but if you abide in them and give rise to thoughts such as, “Wonderful! I have attained emptiness and purity; I have bliss; I emit light,” then it goes wrong. Then these states obscure the original face. What is the original face? It is the self-nature repeatedly emphasized above. If you attach to the marks of “emptiness, bliss, and clarity,” it is like wrapping self-nature in a shell. How then could you see self-nature? You should strip away this shell and not abide in this “emptiness, bliss, and clarity.”

I have repeatedly cautioned all of you: in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, you are not allowed to see light, and you are not allowed to see Buddhas. This does not mean you are forbidden to have such visions; it means you are not allowed to attach to marks. Self-nature is neither bright nor dark. If you say it is bright, that is wrong; if you say it is dark, that is also wrong. We discussed earlier that when practice reaches its culmination, it is like the moon on

the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month: no light is seen. But this is not darkness. It is like people in air not seeing air, and fish in water not seeing water. “Like entering a room full of orchids: after smelling them for a long time, one no longer knows their fragrance.” There is no grasping and no rejection; all traces blend away and are forgotten. When it says “not allowed,” it means you are not allowed to abide in marks. Abiding in marks means validating and grasping them; these are all forms of delusive thinking and attachment. Only by removing this delusive thinking and attachment can one thoroughly awaken to what is original.

The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva “Dharma gate of perfect penetration through the ear faculty” is also like this in its later stages: “Awareness and the object of awareness become empty; the awareness of emptiness reaches perfect completion; emptiness and what is emptied are extinguished.” When awareness and the object of awareness have been emptied to perfect completion, the awareness that empties and what is emptied also disappear; even emptiness is gone. Then “when arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent extinction appears.” The awareness that empties and what is emptied are subject to arising and ceasing; the experience of bliss and what is experienced as bliss, and illumination and what is illuminated, likewise arise and cease. When all these things that arise and cease are completely extinguished, the “quiescent extinction” of great nirvāṇa, which neither arises nor ceases, stands clearly revealed.

“Quiescent” means quiescent yet constantly illuminating; illumination gives rise to functioning in the myriad opportunities. “Extinction” means illuminating yet constantly quiescent; quiescence is unmoving suchness. Unmoving suchness is “such”; responding to and functioning in the myriad opportunities is “come.” How could the realm of the Tathāgata be compared with ordinary “emptiness, bliss, and clarity”? This alone is truly becoming Buddha. One should strip away the shell of “emptiness, bliss, and clarity”; only then can the appearance of self-nature be revealed bare and unobscured. “This is wisdom shining clearly from within”: this is wisdom-light shining forth inwardly. This is true luminosity, able to shine clearly through the ten directions without obstruction. The luminosity associated with “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” is limited in measure and cannot clearly shine through the ten directions.

“Therefore one should repeatedly remove bliss and clarity. It is said: the spring water’s surging torrent is wondrous.”

Therefore one should repeatedly sweep away this “emptiness, bliss, and clarity.” Chan practice is also like this. A monk asked Caoshan, “What about when the bright moon is directly overhead?” It was like a full moon brightly shining overhead, filling the mind with luminosity: “Please look at my practice. Is it all right now? What about such a situation?” Chan Master Caoshan said, “You are still a man below the steps.” When practice reaches this point, one is still below the stairway; one has not yet ascended the hall and entered the inner chamber. There is still a long way to go. The monk said, “Please, Master, guide me up the steps.” “Please, Master, be compassionate and guide me up the steps so I may ascend the hall and enter the

chamber.” Caoshan said, “We shall meet when the moon has set.” Wait until the moon has fallen; then we shall meet.

Master Yuanyin asked the assembly, “When the moon has fallen, how do we meet? After the moon has fallen, how do we meet?” The assembly was silent for a long time. The master said, “Stop! Stop! Do not think about it.” He flicked his sleeves and returned to the abbot’s quarters.

“The spring water’s surging torrent is wondrous”: spring water runs with the force of the mountain terrain, the waves surge powerfully, and the current is strong and difficult to stop. This compares to practice reaching a certain maturity, when subtle wisdom bursts forth like “the spring water’s surging torrent,” impossible to block. In the past, Master Hanshan was very gifted in literary expression and skilled at writing poetry and verse. He practiced until he forgot all poetry and verse. Someone asked him to write a poem, and he could not produce a single line. Later, someone brought a few Tang poems and asked him to recite them. As soon as he recited the Tang poems, lines of poetry immediately leapt out. He did not need to think at all; it was like a mountain flood bursting forth, impossible to stop once released. Master Hanshan knew this was not right: he could not let literary inspiration obscure Buddha-nature. Resolutely, he cut off with a snap this mysterious marvel like “the spring water’s surging torrent.” These are all shells that can obscure the “original face.” “If one should cut it off but does not, one will instead suffer the resulting turmoil.” One should decisively strip it away.

“When the force of bliss and clarity arises, or worldly joy, pleasure, and similar appearances arise, forcefully bring down from above the syllable ‘Phaṭ!’—explained here as combining the skillful means that gathers and the prajñā that cuts—to break through the shell formed by attachment to these attainments.”

When the force of bliss and clarity arises, and when phenomena such as worldly joy and pleasure arise, forcefully recite one “Phaṭ!” Fiercely drop this “Phaṭ!” from above, in order to break through the shell formed by greedy attachment to the attainments of “emptiness, bliss, and clarity,” thereby allowing self-nature to stand clearly revealed. The source commentary renders the exclamation as “pei” and explains it through two sounds: “pha,” associated with skillful means that gathers, and “e,” associated with prajñā that cuts. Gathering means receiving and encompassing; cutting means severing and removing. Taken together, the exclamation is said to encompass all wondrous meanings and remove all obstructions. This is why “Phaṭ!” is presented as so effective.

Editorial source note. Yuan Yin’s source itself links the practice exclamation 呬 with 泼吒 / Phaṭ and explains it through two sounds associated with gathering skillful means and cutting prajñā. The local phonetic/glyph decomposition does not map cleanly onto the standard mantra syllable phaṭ. This edition therefore preserves Yuan Yin’s practical explanation while not presenting the derivation as settled philology.

V. Practicing “the Great Practice of No-Practice”

“For one who at all times guards and maintains the crucial point of no longer measuring progress by meditative experiences, until the inexpressible self-nature is thoroughly clear, conduct is no different in or out of samādhi, and practice is no different during formal sitting or outside formal sitting.”

As discussed above, at all times one can guard this “crucial point of no longer measuring progress by meditative experiences” and rest naturally in this “inexpressible self-nature.” This means repeatedly using meditative experiences to assess one’s practice of the Way: one constantly checks how one’s practice is going and what degree of progress one has reached. Have emptiness, bliss, and clarity appeared? If a little has appeared, one is delighted beyond measure and the mind remains attached to them. Others have experienced none of these and have no spiritual powers, so they keep thinking about such things and use them to measure themselves: “Why have I had no sign of progress? Why do spiritual powers not arise? Is it that I am no good? Is it that this Dharma is not effective?” With these things obstructing the mind, never mind realizing the Way—even the states of emptiness, bliss, and clarity are obstructed and will not appear. Earlier we said that emptiness, bliss, and clarity appear in the process of sitting practice and maintaining self-nature. Even if they appear, one must break free of them with a single “Phat!” If you do not have them, is that not even better, since you have one fewer layer of obstruction? But for those who genuinely practice the Way, emptiness, bliss, and clarity naturally develop during the course of practice. One simply must not seek them. Let them develop naturally without abiding in them, and there will be no obstruction.

“No longer measuring progress by meditative experiences” means letting go of and ceasing this constant checking. “Key point” means the crucial point, the essential point. Not using experiences such as “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” to judge whether one has accomplished the Way is the key to realizing the Way and the essential point of practice. Self-nature is the dharmakāya. The dharmakāya is without characteristics, yet there is no appearance that is not it; it cannot be spoken and does not fall within thought. However you try to speak of it, there is no describable appearance of it. However you try to think of it, there is nothing there to be thought. Language cannot speak it; thought cannot reach it. This is called “the path of language is cut off, and mental activity ceases.” The sutra says, “Only this one real matter is real; the other two are not true.” Any phenomenon bearing characteristics that can be spoken of or conceived is false and unreal, and utterly unobtainable. Only this self-nature in which “the path of language is cut off and mental activity ceases” is the sole genuine reality, called “true reality.” This is the “seal of the one true reality” of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

We should never forget “the crucial point of no longer measuring progress by meditative experiences,” not using experiences such as “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” to test whether the Way has been realized; and at all times we should rest naturally in this “inexpressible self-nature,” neither grasping nor rejecting. This guarding and maintaining must not lapse for even an instant. Here, “fully clear” means clear and thorough. When practitioners guard and

maintain in this way until self-nature is fully clear, “the familiar has become unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar has become familiar.” This is what is meant by “fully clear.” At this time, “conduct is no different in or out of samādhi, and practice is no different during formal sitting or outside formal sitting.” Great samādhi has no entering or leaving. If, when entering samādhi, the mind can settle, but after leaving samādhi the mind again runs after external objects, that is not great samādhi and not true samādhi. True great samādhi means being in samādhi at every time and at every moment. Whether in the quiet of a Chan hall or the noise of a marketplace, whether sitting in samādhi or busy doing things, it is all the same; in conduct there is no difference.

True practice is no-practice; not practicing is great practice. Heart-Center practice does not consist only of forming mudrās and holding mantras during formal sitting. Even more, outside formal sitting, we must not abandon clear observation even for a second. I have long told all of you: clear observation is the main practice; sitting meditation is the auxiliary practice. Yet there are still many people who neglect clear observation. Here I emphasize again: clear observation is the main practice and must not be neglected. Clear observation is precisely the “guarding and maintaining” just discussed. During formal sitting, forming mudrās and holding mantras keeps this mind gathered and contained. Outside formal sitting, maintaining close, continuous observation also keeps this mind gathered and contained. There is no difference in practice between formal sitting and outside formal sitting.

10.10 恒河大手印（第十讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Ten)

V. Practicing “the Great Practice of No-Practice” (continued)

“This is the great practice of no-practice, the wisdom that abides naturally, equal and all-pervading. Like the yoga of a river, there is not the slightest correction, yet not an instant of slackening or distraction.”

The practice method of Ganges Mahāmudrā is the “great practice of no-practice.” True practice has no appearance of practice. When you look at such a person, it seems as if they are not practicing; in reality, they are practicing at every moment. This is the great practice of no-practice. Because they maintain clear observation and guard their own numinous mind at every moment, there is no appearance of practice; this is called “no-practice.” Everything is utterly unobtainable, even “emptiness, bliss, and clarity”; this is called “no attainment.” One is originally Buddha. One need only extinguish delusive thinking and attachment; there is no need to add anything further. All wondrous functions are originally complete; this is called “no realization.” This is what is meant by “no practice, no attainment, no realization.” No-practice means that it originally neither arises nor ceases. No attainment means that it is originally empty and quiescent. No realization means that one is originally Buddha.

This is “the wisdom that abides naturally, equal and all-pervading.” “Equal” means impartial equality; “all-pervading” means extending everywhere. It means naturally abiding in the great

wisdom that is equal and all-pervading. Equal pervasion means that all times, all places, and all people are equal. No one is above while I am below, nor am I above while others are below; nor is my Dharma higher than yours.

People like to argue and quarrel. Each clings to his own view, thinking that what he says is true and then slandering others, judging right and wrong, good and bad, from his own standpoint. To give an example: there is a kind of automatic umbrella that is very convenient to use but is not sturdy. After a short time it breaks, so people call it a “short-lived umbrella.” In the eyes of consumers in our country, this umbrella is bad, because we like things to be sturdy and durable. But in the eyes of foreigners, this kind of umbrella is very good, because it is easy to use, cheap, and good value for the price: one uses it for a while and then throws it away. We are not accustomed to throwing things away, so we say the umbrella is bad. They are accustomed to throwing things away, so they say the umbrella is good. In fact, an umbrella is just an umbrella. The umbrella itself has no good or bad. Calling it good or bad is discrimination by people’s delusive minds. This is what is meant by “the myriad things are naturally at rest; foolish people disturb themselves.” If the “wisdom that abides naturally, equal and all-pervading” is clearly revealed, without giving rise to a mind of discrimination, grasping, or rejection, you will be able to hear the “short-lived umbrella preaching the Dharma.”

Earlier we discussed “insentient things preaching the Dharma.” How do insentient things preach the Dharma? If you cannot hear insentient things preaching the Dharma, it is because ignorance has covered your true mind and your discriminating mind still plainly remains. Therefore your capacity to perceive and know pervades only your own body. If someone strikes your head, your head hurts; if someone strikes your foot, your foot hurts. But if someone strikes this chair, you have no sensation. If you break through ignorance, remove the habit of “giving rise to mind when facing objects,” and sweep away the mind of discrimination, grasping, and rejection, then awakened awareness can pervade all things. The scope of mind becomes like empty space, with nothing whatsoever outside your mind. Then you span the ten directions horizontally and exhaust the three times vertically, with nothing beyond your knowing or understanding. The sun, moon, stars, the vast universe, mountains, rivers, and the great earth, flowers, birds, insects, fish, and all sentient and insentient beings are all within your mind.

It is like the jewels in Indra’s net: the light of each jewel reflects all the others, and each jewel contains all the others in completeness. Each is within your mind, and you are within each. You contain me, and I contain you. Take up any one jewel, and the whole is present. It is just like the modern “laser hologram”: any tiny part contains the information of the entire photograph. This is “equal pervasion.”

If one wishes to be like this, one must begin practice. How should one practice? “Like the yoga of a river, there is not the slightest practice or realization, yet there is also not an instant of slackening or distraction.” “Yoga” means accord. “Like the yoga of a river” means being in

accord like the flow of a river. Look at river water: if the rivercourse bends, it flows in a curve; if the rivercourse is straight, it flows straight. It accords everywhere with its circumstances. It is not that it can only be straight and cannot bend, nor that it can only bend and cannot be straight.

Our true mind is originally like a river, in accord with all circumstances. Have we not already discussed this earlier? “Delusive thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya’s originally awakened wisdom.” Dharmakāya is our true mind; it is self-nature. It has never come or gone, has been neither defiled nor pure, and has never increased or decreased. It has never required the slightest correction, nor has it ever lapsed for even an instant into slackening or distraction. This is the fundamental basis of all things.

When we practice, we begin at the root. We should also be like a river, in accord with all circumstances, without success or failure, gain or loss, attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection. Whatever needs to be done, do it as it should be done. While doing it, everything is orderly and each point is appropriate. When it is done, it is as if it had not been done; no trace remains in the mind. Acting in this way, wisdom and skill arise as needed. One is busy but not confused, handling many things without disorder, and efficiency is very high. If beforehand one is full of expectation or fear, carrying a mental burden, then when doing things one will not be able to act with ease. Still more, if afterward one becomes smug and pleased because of success, or frustrated and angry because of failure, then “the wind of joy blows down the bodhi tree; the fire of anger burns down the forest of merit.” That is already no longer “yoga.”

We must be like a river: when there is a bend, bend; when there is straightness, go straight; if the wind comes and raises a few waves, that does not matter either. Joy, laughter, anger, and scolding are all wondrous functions of Buddha-nature. Even losing one’s temper a little is all right. Why? If you comply with someone too much, he may think you weak and easy to bully, his desires may swell even further, and in one moment he may harm many people. How could that be allowed? At such a time one needs “a bodhisattva heart and a rakshasa face”: one flares up and reprimands him, or even strikes him once, so that he quickly turns back. This is a form of teaching. Therefore we Buddhists cannot always be soft and weak. When we see wrongdoing, display anger when it is needed. Is it really anger? The anger is an outward display, a means of educating people. It is not that the mind has lost control, nor that a mind of hatred has arisen.

In the past, under Chan Master Liangshan Yuanguan there was a garden steward, the monk who managed the vegetable garden and grew vegetables for the assembly. He asked Liangshan, “What about when the household thief is hard to guard against?” The household thief is a metaphor for delusive thoughts. If one runs after delusive thoughts, the light of self-nature is covered; this is like the “household thief” of delusive thoughts stealing your Dharma wealth. When delusive thoughts come, what should one do? Liangshan said, “Recognize it, and you will not be led astray.” If you can see a delusive thought for what it is and not follow it, then you will not be led astray. If you run after them—and clinging to them or suppressing

them are both forms of running after them—then you have practiced in vain. What a waste that would be!

But the garden steward was an awakened person. He would not be satisfied with just hearing a few words. He wanted to present the matter face-to-face, seize the essential point, and not let the *huatou* slip by. After several questions and answers, he suddenly asked, “What about when suddenly the pools are overturned and the mountains toppled?” That is, what about when a huge temper suddenly bursts forth like a mountain torrent, even overturning the mountains? Chan Master Liangshan came down from the Dharma seat, grabbed the garden steward, and said, “*Ācārya*, do not let it wet the corner of this old monk’s robe!” Not even the corner of the robe may be wet: this is a metaphor for the mind not moving. In other words, however much you express anger, the mind must remain firmly held, without moving in the slightest. At this point, there is “not the slightest correction, yet not an instant of slackening or distraction.” There is neither *samādhi* nor disorder. *Samādhi* and disorder are both unobtainable: equal and of one suchness; of one suchness and equal. If you say, “Here I have entered *samādhi*,” then you still have “*samādhi*.” Where there is “*samādhi*,” there will certainly be disorder, because “*samādhi*” is spoken in contrast to “disorder.” If there were no disorder, what would be the need to speak of *samādhi*? Once truth is posited, falsity is necessarily implied; once good is posited, evil is implied; once beauty is posited, ugliness is implied. If there were no “false, evil, and ugly,” what would be the need to speak of the “true, good, and beautiful”? Our mind must be truly equal, with neither disorder nor *samādhi*, neither correction nor slackening or distraction. Practice must reach this level.

“The verse says: Never practiced, yet never apart; nor apart from the purport of no-practice.”

This verse has three parts: first, “never practiced”; second, “never apart”; third, “nor apart from the purport of no-practice.” “Never practiced” is the great practice of no-practice just discussed: not the slightest correction, yet not an instant of slackening or distraction. This is not failing to practice. Practice still has to be done. Therefore it says “never apart”—one has not departed from practice. But you must not abide in practice. Having practiced, it is still as if nothing had been done. This is “nor apart from the purport of no-practice.”

Although one practices, one does not give rise to a view of oneself as practicing. Doing is unobtainable, and leaving is also unobtainable. Practice is like taking a boat across a river. If the boat is still in midstream, one cannot leave the boat. If one leaves the boat at that time, would one not fall into the current—the stream of birth and death—and drown? Once the boat has reached the other shore, one must leave the boat. If one does not leave the boat, how could one arrive at the other shore of *nirvāṇa*, which is unborn and undying? When practice has truly reached completion, neither practice nor departure can be established. There is neither this shore nor the other shore; no six paths to fall into and no buddhahood to attain; no birth and death to end and no *nirvāṇa* that can be realized. Only when there is no birth and death to end is birth and death truly ended; only when there is no *nirvāṇa* to realize is *nirvāṇa* truly realized. This is not established merely by saying so. Only through realization does one

know. It is exactly as said: “Like a person drinking water, cold and warm are known for oneself.”

“On this fundamental path of self-nature’s Great Perfection, whether one attains the accomplishment symbolized by the svastika sign (卐)—understanding the perfect Dharma in due measure—or gains liberation in an instant, all of this is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya revealed through the great release from identification with form and mind. There is neither practitioner nor object of practice.”

In the Great Perfection Dharma there are several kinds of practice. The most important are “trekchö” and “tögal.” Trekchö means “direct severance”: immediately cutting off delusive thoughts, delusive mind, and delusive habits. Tögal means “direct transcendence”: suddenly transcending the bitter sea of birth and death. The sequence is to practice trekchö first and then tögal. One must first cut through directly; that is, one must first see self-nature. Seeing self-nature is seeing the root. Ganges Mahāmudrā points us at every moment to seeing self-nature. Therefore Mahāmudrā is the forerunner of Great Perfection and the root of Great Perfection. One may also say that Mahāmudrā is itself Great Perfection. Thus it is called “the fundamental path of self-nature’s Great Perfection.”

On the Buddha’s chest there is the sign “卐.” Originally this sign was not pronounced “wan.” Because it represents adornment with myriad virtues and purity unstained, everyone came to pronounce it as “wan.” Being adorned with myriad virtues and remaining pure and unstained is precisely “understanding the perfect Dharma in due measure.” The svastika sign turns to the right, as it is written. Some say that if the sign “卐” on the chest turns to the right, it is a true Buddha, and if it turns to the left, it is a false Buddha, and that this is how to distinguish true from false Buddhas. But demon kings can also manifest a Buddha-form, so how would you distinguish them? Others say that if the sign “卐” on the Buddha’s chest emits light that makes people’s minds cool, it is a true Buddha, while if it makes people’s minds hot and troubled, it is a false Buddha. All of this makes an issue of marks and does not address the root.

We say that the true Buddha is without characteristics, whereas any Buddha bearing characteristics is a false Buddha. This is because “the enjoyment and emanation bodies are not the true Buddha, nor are they the ones who teach the Dharma.” The enjoyment body manifests a luminous appearance; the emanation body manifests a physical form. The Diamond Sutra says, “If one sees me through form, if one seeks me through sound, that person follows a deviant path and cannot see the Tathāgata.” The Buddha’s emanation body has the thirty-two characteristics and eighty subsidiary features, but that is a provisional body. If you take this provisional body as real and cling to it, you cannot see the Tathāgata. Dharmakāya is the true Buddha, and dharmakāya is without characteristics. The enjoyment and emanation bodies bear characteristics, so they are not the true Buddha.

If we speak ultimately, however, the false is true and the true is false; the false in its entirety is the true, and the true in its entirety is the false. Without dharmakāya, how could the enjoyment and emanation bodies manifest? Could they manifest apart from dharmakāya? Just as waves cannot appear apart from water and reflections cannot appear apart from a mirror, the enjoyment and emanation bodies cannot appear apart from dharmakāya. Where is dharmakāya? Dharmakāya is precisely the myriad phenomena right before our eyes. Apart from dharmakāya, the myriad phenomena would have no way to appear. We see the nature through appearances: nature is appearance, and appearance is nature.

Dividing true and false is all discrimination of our own delusive mind. Dharmakāya is without characteristics, and yet there is no appearance that is not it. Dharmakāya is originally just so. “Those who attain the accomplishment symbolized by the svastika sign” means being adorned with myriad forms and remaining pure and unstained; it is precisely “understanding the perfect Dharma in due measure.”

“Or who are liberated in an instant.” Whether we recite the Buddha’s name, investigate Chan, or practice esoteric Dharma, we should maintain practice at all times and in all places, without being apart from it for even a moment. Walking is like this; sitting is like this; sleeping is like this; eating is like this; doing things is like this. After a long time, when practice has matured and conditions provide a trigger—“pa!”—it suddenly breaks. The delusive habit of clinging to forms has been developed through many lives and kalpas. It is because of it that cyclic rebirth through the six paths occurs. It binds you like a rope, preventing your Buddha-nature from being revealed. Now, in diligently practicing the Dharma, you are wearing through this rope. It becomes thinner and thinner, thinner and thinner, until at last it is as fine as a hair, and with a “pa!” it snaps. This is called “being liberated in an instant.” If you do not practice diligently, there will be no instant liberation.

The instant of liberation does not necessarily occur during formal sitting. I have told all of you again and again: in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, one does not necessarily open up what is original during formal sitting. It may happen while walking. It may happen while asleep and dreaming. It may happen while doing some task: suddenly, inwardly, body and mind are not seen; outwardly, the world is not seen; with a “pa!” it opens up. But your practice must remain close and continuous. If today you practice and tomorrow you stop, “three days fishing, two days drying the nets,” or if during formal sitting you practice but outside formal sitting you let the wild horse loose, that will not do. Because you have not worn thin the rope of delusive thinking and attachment, it will not snap. We should sustain the practice at every moment and abide in the “fundamental path of Great Perfection.” When practice matures, there will be “liberation in an instant.”

“They are then all the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya manifested through the great release from identification with form and mind.” Being accomplished like the sign “卐” or liberated in an instant is the wondrous functioning of dharmakāya, and this wondrous functioning is revealed through the great release from identification with form and mind.

“Form” here means the physical body, this bodily shell. “Mind” means the delusive mind of delusive thinking and attachment. Our mind always abides in this shell and clings to it as “me.” This is “identity view,” the first of the five deluded views. Because this view is deluded, this bodily shell is called the “shell of ignorance.” The “great release from identification with form and mind” means no longer clinging to this bodily shell as “me.” Once the “shell of ignorance” is broken, the wondrous functioning of dharmakāya appears.

Among people who study Buddhism, quite a few pursue spiritual powers. Seeking spiritual powers is worst of all. As soon as there is seeking, one cannot “understand the perfect Dharma in due measure” and cannot “be liberated in an instant.” In other words, seeking spiritual powers obstructs seeing the nature. Seeing the nature is the root. Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches. You only need to abide in original nature, practice at every moment, day by day reducing your delusive mind and delusive habits—reducing and reducing again, reducing and reducing again—then “pa!” it breaks open, and spiritual powers and wondrous functioning naturally appear. They do not come from seeking. Spiritual powers obtained through seeking are useless. Whatever is obtained through seeking is a conditioned dharma and cannot be relied on.

Some people claim to have spiritual powers and say they can know the future in advance. In fact, this is “borrowed spiritual power”: they depend on an “ear-whispering spirit.” What is an ear-whispering spirit? It is the “numinous ghost” we discussed earlier. Because in past lives it had heavy greed and committed great evil, it fell into hell and endured great suffering. After its painful retribution was exhausted, it left hell, but because its habit of greed still remained, it was reborn in the hungry ghost path. It often attaches itself to people’s bodies and sucks their essence and blood. If a person’s mind is empty and without abiding, it has no way to attach. If a person seeks spiritual powers, that gives it precisely the opening it needs.

Ghosts have “ghost powers.” If you are taken advantage of by one, it will whisper in your ear: tomorrow such-and-such person will come, or such-and-such event will happen. The next day it indeed happens. If you mistakenly think you have spiritual powers, you have been tricked by it. In reality, this has nothing whatsoever to do with spiritual powers. You must not listen to it, pay attention to it, or depend on it. If you depend on it, you will be entangled by it and unable to accomplish the Way. We must not pursue spiritual powers. At all times and in all places, we must practice closely and continuously, paying no heed to any experience or circumstance. If we continue diligently in this way for a long time, we will suddenly open up what is original: subject and object both vanish, sense faculties and sense objects drop away, and in an instant there is liberation. The falling away of sense faculties and sense objects is the “great release from identification with form and mind.” When subject and object both vanish, there is neither practitioner nor Dharma that is practiced. At this time there is “neither practitioner nor object of practice.”

Buddha-nature is originally complete and fully endowed with everything. Its wondrous functioning is boundless and can manifest myriad phenomena. We only need to persist in

diligent practice. One day we will suddenly break free, and the state of “neither practitioner nor object of practice” will be clearly manifest. At that time all spiritual powers and wondrous functions arise of themselves without being sought. We must have a firm mind, continue with perseverance, keep the mind empty and without abiding at every moment, and let every matter dissolve into self-nature. Only then can accomplishment be perfected.

VI. The Method of Practicing Samādhi for Ordinary Beings of Lower Capacity on the Gradual Path

“If one has not yet become firm, then one is an ordinary being of lower capacity on the gradual path, with delusive thoughts arising and being carried away by external forces. One must still leave noisy, distracting places, and diligently practice so as to establish complete, firmly consolidated samādhi. Otherwise, even if one practices for a long time, signs of meditative progress will not arise.”

“Not yet become firm” means not having a firm mind and being unable to persevere. The practice method discussed above—the great practice of no-practice—was spoken for people of superior faculties. Their roots are very good. They can follow Mahāmudrā’s instruction and apply themselves diligently, advancing in practice; this is being able to become firm. If a person is not like this, cannot persist in diligent effort, then he has not yet become firm. People who have not become firm are always lazy and procrastinating, always having excuses for not practicing: perhaps recently the body has been unwell, with a cold or cough; perhaps today there are too many affairs and no time; perhaps the environment is noisy and too disturbing. In short, today will not do, so wait until tomorrow. In this way, “tomorrow after tomorrow, how many tomorrows there are!” When will they accomplish the practice? Such people certainly are “ordinary beings of lower capacity on the gradual path, with delusive thoughts arising and being carried away by external forces.” They run after delusive thinking and are swept along by circumstances. Their faculties are inferior, suited to following the gradual path of three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. In this life they will only plant various wholesome roots; it will not be easy for them to accomplish the Way in this very lifetime.

However, people who have not yet become firm are not completely without hope of accomplishing the Way in this life. “One must still leave noisy, distracting places, and diligently practice so as to establish complete, firmly consolidated samādhi.” Inwardly, they must not turn along with delusive thoughts; outwardly, they must not be moved by circumstances. They need fully developed meditative stability. This is what the text calls “firmly consolidated samādhi.” They must abandon bustling and lively places, because such places stir their minds into confusion. They must find a peaceful, quiet place and diligently practice samādhi, thereby developing the meditative stability they require. If they persevere in this way, they still have hope of succeeding in this life.

Otherwise, “even if one practices for a long time, signs of meditative progress will not arise.” If one is in a marketplace, without meditative stability, the mind turns along with

circumstances, yet one is unwilling to leave the marketplace and go to a quiet place to practice samādhi, then even if one practices a certain Dharma gate for a long time, signs of meditative progress will not arise. The signs of meditative progress spoken of here are the experiences of “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” discussed earlier. Did we not say that one must cast off “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” and urgently call out “Phaṭ” to strip away their shell? Yes. That was to have you directly realize “the essential view,” not cling to “emptiness, bliss, and clarity,” and certainly not think that obtaining “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” is accomplishing the Way. It is not that “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” are bad. They are good states, but it is better to have no state to cling to. If one gives rise to a mind of seeking and abiding with regard to “emptiness, bliss, and clarity,” one cannot fully penetrate “the fundamental path of self-nature’s Great Perfection.” Therefore we do not explain “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” in detail.

But since we have now brought up these signs of meditative progress, let us briefly discuss a little of the gradual approach. The gradual sequence of seated meditation and samādhi has eight stages: coarse abiding, subtle abiding, desire-realm concentration, access concentration, first dhyāna, second dhyāna, third dhyāna, and fourth dhyāna. Here, such signs indicate which stage one has reached. Take Buddha-name recitation as an example. If one can tie the mind to the Buddha’s name and not let it scatter, this is “coarse abiding,” which has only subdued coarse delusion. Going a step further, when the mind remains steadily unmoving and becomes seamlessly joined with the Buddha’s name, with no Buddha outside mind and no mind outside Buddha, this is “subtle abiding,” which has subdued subtle delusion.

Going a step further still, the mind suddenly becomes open and bright, and the body is like a cloud or shadow floating in the air, as if it has left the seat. This is “desire-realm concentration.” The so-called “three realms” are the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. Hells, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and the six heavens all belong to the desire realm. Above this, the first, second, third, and fourth dhyānas belong to the form realm. Above that are the heavens of the formless realm, divided into four levels: the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothing whatsoever, and the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. After reaching “desire-realm concentration,” if one continues practicing and the body and world suddenly dissolve into emptiness, this is “access concentration”: one has left the desire realm but has not yet reached the form realm and has not yet reached the first dhyāna.

When practice advances further, inwardly body and mind are not seen, and outwardly the world is not seen; then one has arrived at the first dhyāna. The first dhyāna has the “eight contacts and ten merits.” The eight contacts are movement, itching, lightness, heaviness, cold, warmth, smoothness, and roughness. One feels the body is gone, yet these eight kinds of sensations arise. The eight sensations do not necessarily appear at the same time, but they do not go beyond these eight. Movement means moving in a floating and carefree way, surpassing worldly revelry. Itching means an itching that is joyful and delightful, surpassing

worldly sensual pleasure. In short, the eight contacts are all comfortable and happy feelings. Because joy and bliss are born from leaving desire, the first dhyāna is called “the stage of joy and bliss born of seclusion.”

The ten merits are emptiness, clarity, samādhi, wisdom, wholesome mind, pliancy, joy, bliss, liberation, and accord. “Emptiness, bliss, and clarity” are already included here. Samādhi means not being disorderly; wisdom means not being foolish; joy means not being worried. There are also wholesome mind, pliancy, liberation, and accord. These are all excellent states, so they are called the “ten merits.” Only by relinquishing the experiences of the first dhyāna’s eight contacts and ten merits can one enter the second dhyāna. The second dhyāna is called “the stage of joy and bliss born of samādhi”: joy and bliss arise within samādhi. Only by relinquishing the “joy” of the second dhyāna can one enter the third dhyāna. The third dhyāna is called “the stage of sublime bliss beyond joy”: a subtle bliss beyond joy arises. Only by relinquishing all experiences can one enter the fourth dhyāna. The fourth dhyāna is called “the stage of purity of equanimity and mindfulness.” At this time there is purity and equality, and no experiences such as “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” remain.

What we practice is Mahāyāna Chan, the perfect and sudden Chan; we do not practice the gradual Chan described above. Therefore, of course, we do not dwell on these step-by-step stages of practice. Yet we also have not departed from them. Whatever meditative state we encounter, we pay it no attention at all, and these sensations soon pass. We take seeing the nature as our guiding principle; we do not concern ourselves with such matters. Not concerning ourselves with them is not the same as their not existing. These processes are still there; they merely pass by in a flash. Ganges Mahāmudrā is Mahāyāna Buddhadharma. It regards “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” as a shell. This shell must be stripped away before the appearance of self-nature can be revealed bare and unobscured.

If someone is an ordinary being of lower capacity on the gradual path, the mind is unstable and continually runs after circumstances. A person who is lustful sees a young and beautiful woman, and his mind runs after her. A person greedy for food sees delicious food before him, and his mind stirs restlessly. During formal sitting and outside formal sitting, he is always letting the wild horse loose. He cannot even directly accord with “the essential view”; even “emptiness, bliss, and clarity” will not appear. Therefore it says that for such a person, “even if one practices for a long time, signs of meditative progress will not arise.”

“Therefore, practice in retreat to prevent conduct and discipline from being readily defiled by habitual tendencies; then one can merge the wisdom intrinsic to fundamental samādhi—which confirms one’s strength in the Way—with subsequently attained wisdom, or the wisdom attained after transcending samādhi.”

Leaving noisy, distracting places, and finding a peaceful, quiet place to practice in retreat, can prevent “conduct and discipline” from being defiled by habits. “Conduct and discipline” means conduct in practice and ritual discipline. For example, in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma,

if outside formal sitting we forget to maintain clear observation and the mind is carried away by external circumstances, this defiles the conduct. If during formal sitting the mantra cannot be sustained and the mind flows along with delusive thoughts, this defiles the discipline. What are called “habitual tendencies” are habits that become nature: one becomes so accustomed to them that they seem natural. The greatest habitual tendency of ordinary beings is to give rise to mind when facing objects; they are always clinging to marks.

For example, when a person who loves wealth sees an opportunity to make money, his heart pounds wildly, and at night he cannot sleep. In the past Layman Pang said, “Much gold disturbs people’s minds.” When there is a lot of money, the mind becomes disturbed; therefore he sank his vast family fortune into the river. He sought only to apprehend Mind and see nature; he did not want gold, silver, and treasure that obstructed practice of the Way. He was a true practitioner, and later attained great accomplishment. Are there still such people today? Of course we cannot say there are none at all, but they are indeed very few.

Ordinary beings of lower capacity on the gradual path are readily defiled by habits in their conduct and discipline. If they can practice in retreat, then “one can merge the wisdom intrinsic to fundamental samādhi—which confirms one’s strength in the Way—with subsequently attained wisdom, or the wisdom attained after transcending samādhi.” The wisdom intrinsic to fundamental samādhi that confirms one’s strength in the Way is fundamental wisdom. The merging of fundamental wisdom and subsequently attained wisdom is the “meeting of child and mother luminosities” discussed earlier. This means that if ordinary beings of lower capacity on the gradual path can practice in retreat, they too can accomplish the Way in this life.

This passage adds a parenthetical note after “the wisdom intrinsic to fundamental samādhi”: “that is, the wisdom that confirms one’s strength in the Way.” Here “confirmation” means experiential confirmation. What is being confirmed? For a practitioner, it is one’s strength in the Way. This is the wisdom that confirms one’s strength in the Way. Through what can one’s strength in the Way be confirmed? Apart from the “numinous knowing that is without a single thought and yet clear and distinct,” what else is there? This is the “nature” in the phrase “apprehending Mind and seeing nature.” This is fundamental wisdom. “Subsequently attained wisdom” also has a note: “or the wisdom attained after transcending samādhi.” Here “transcending” means going beyond samādhi and non-samādhi. This is wondrous functioning. Subsequently attained wisdom is wondrous functioning.

“In practicing in retreat, although there is protection and support, practice relies upon the essential nature of fundamental samādhi.”

In retreat one must have people providing protection and support. There are two kinds of retreat support: outer support and inner support. Outer support takes care of your food and the necessities of daily life. When you are practicing in the retreat room, you cannot go out to buy vegetables and have no time to cook, so someone must support you; this is outer support.

Inner support is someone who guides your practice, prevents you from falling into demonic states, and guides you toward realizing the great Way. Although there is support and protection in retreat, the main thing is still “practice that relies upon the essential nature of fundamental samādhi.” The essential nature of fundamental samādhi is self-nature. Self-nature is originally unborn and undying, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. Only because, since beginningless kalpas, ignorance has stirred delusively and mind has arisen in response to objects have we fallen into the six paths. The one who tied the bell must untie it. We still have to rely on our own diligent practice and break through ignorance; we cannot rely on others. If the people who support the retreat could accomplish the Way on our behalf, then Śākyamuni Buddha and Amitābha Buddha would long ago have liberated all of us. How could there still be so many ordinary beings?

Being born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is not so easy. Even Amitābha Buddha cannot pull you there. You still have to recite the Buddha’s name diligently and cut off the root of attachment before you can be born in the West. Master Yinguang said that for birth in the West, “the Sahā seal must be broken, and the Pure Land writ completed.” If your root of attachment is not cut off, if you greedily cling to gold, silver, and treasure and are attached to wife and children, then clearly the “Sahā seal” has not broken. How, then, could you be born in the West? Therefore, even if one practices in retreat, one cannot depend on the people who support the retreat. One must still rely on one’s own diligent practice, open up the fundamental wisdom originally complete within oneself, and then merge it with subsequently attained wisdom. Only then can one accomplish the Way.

10.11 恒河大手印（第十一讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Eleven)

VI. The Method of Practicing Samādhi for Ordinary Beings of Lower Capacity on the Gradual Path (continued)

“Yet if one does not know how to nurture subsequently attained wisdom and bring it into accord with conduct and observances, then relying only on antidotes will be futile. One will be unable to overcome external conditions and will be drawn by the conditions of delusive thinking into the obstruction of ordinary beings’ delusion.”

Subsequently attained wisdom is spoken of in relation to fundamental wisdom. To obtain fundamental wisdom is “the essential view”—apprehending Mind and seeing nature. After that, one must still polish and train amid circumstances so that vast wondrous functioning can unfold. Subsequently attained wisdom is precisely this wondrous functioning. To nurture subsequently attained wisdom means to care for and preserve fundamental wisdom over a long period without interruption, constantly training amid circumstances and guarding the true mind so that immeasurable wondrous functions can arise.

“Conduct and observances” refers to behavioral norms and practice observances. For example, in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, outside formal sitting one constantly

maintains clear observation, does not follow thoughts, and is not shifted by circumstances; this is conduct. Sitting in practice for at least two hours each day, keeping the mudrā intact throughout the sitting and the mantra uninterrupted constitute the observances. “Antidotes” refers to what was discussed earlier: if lust is heavy, one practices contemplation of impurity; if the mind is severely distracted, one enters retreat and devotes oneself to practicing samādhi, and so on.

However, if one does not know how to nurture subsequently attained wisdom and bring it into accord with one’s behavioral norms and practice observances, and merely relies on antidotal methods in practice, the effort will be fruitless. One will be unable to overcome the influence of external conditions. Why? Because “if one does not recognize the original mind, studying Dharma is of no benefit.” Merely using antidotal methods not only vexes the mind, but also very easily leads to attachment to marks. Not only will it fail to overcome the influence of external factors—one’s environment—it will also cause one to be entangled by internal factors, that is, delusive thinking, and thus fall into the “obstruction of ordinary beings’ delusion.” The delusion of ordinary beings is the “delusion” in the triad of greed, anger, and delusion. Because it obstructs accomplishment of the Way, it is called the obstruction of ordinary beings’ delusion.

VII. Thoroughly Realizing the Dharmakāya and Maintaining Lucid Quiescence

“Therefore, sustaining subsequently attained wisdom over the long term and bringing it to full maturity is especially important.”

Therefore, sustaining subsequently attained wisdom over the long term and bringing it to full maturity—preserving it while polishing oneself amid circumstances—is especially important. How, then, does one do this?

“There is no other method here: simply do not depart from the view of the dharmakāya’s original stability. Free of discrimination between subject and object or right and wrong, one functions naturally and spontaneously, preserving lucid quiescence. This is the calming-and-contemplation of non-discriminating wisdom; it is the dharmakāya’s intrinsic characteristic—unconditioned, co-emergent, and naturally so—and the essential point of all practice and conduct.”

To recognize the dharmakāya’s original stability is called “the view of the dharmakāya’s original stability.” When one enters into this correct view, there is no “person who practices,” no “Dharma that is practiced,” no right or wrong, and no discrimination. One is open and free in spontaneous functioning; spontaneous functioning, open and free. One is lucid without confusion and quiescent in great samādhi. The great Way is without shape; self-nature is quiescent and vast. The dharmakāya, unmoving in suchness, is the essential nature of great samādhi; this has nothing to do with whether you believe it or make any effort to enter samādhi.

How does one sustain subsequently attained wisdom over the long term and bring it to full maturity? There is no other method. One must not abandon the “view of the dharmakāya’s original stability,” and must abide moment by moment in original nature, training oneself in affairs and circumstances. Do not cling to marks. Do not have discriminations of “subject and object,” “right and wrong,” and so forth. This is most important. People are always swarming with delusive thoughts and discriminate about everything: this is good and that is bad; this is right and that is wrong; this is true and that is false. They keep discriminating without end. If you can, moment by moment, be free of discriminations of “subject and object,” “right and wrong,” and so forth, neither abiding in marks nor clinging to circumstances, knowing that everything is unobtainable and that even unobtainability is unobtainable, then original nature is clearly revealed at all times. This is precisely not departing, at any moment, from the “view of the dharmakāya’s original stability.”

“There is not much to Buddhadharmā”: it is easy to speak of, but merely hearing and understanding it is not enough. It must be put into actual practice. One must practice this way moment by moment before it becomes real. One must “naturally and freely function, preserving lucid quiescence.” Quiescence means that not a single thought arises; it carries the meaning of “unmoving.” Unmoving is samādhi. Lucidity means clear and distinct; it carries the meaning of “clear observation.” Clear observation is wisdom. To preserve the “numinous knowing that is without a single thought and yet clear and distinct” is the complete integration of samādhi and wisdom: there is wisdom within samādhi, and there is samādhi within wisdom. Wisdom without samādhi is wild wisdom. Samādhi without wisdom is dead samādhi. Therefore it is not enough for ordinary beings of lower capacity on the gradual path merely to enter retreat and practice samādhi. After leaving retreat, they must still polish and train amid affairs and circumstances in order to sustain subsequently attained wisdom over the long term and bring it to full maturity.

“Naturally and freely functioning” is following conditions. “Preserving lucid quiescence” is not changing. Following conditions while not changing; not changing while following conditions: if one becomes enormously wealthy, it does not matter; if one is utterly penniless, it does not matter either. If there is gruel, eat gruel; if there is rice, eat rice. Do not give rise to a mind of discrimination, grasping and rejection, or clinging to conditions. An ancient worthy said, “Lucid and quiescent is right; lucid with delusive thinking is wrong. Quiescent and lucid is right; quiescent but blankly indeterminate is wrong.” This is the marvelous key instruction for “sustaining subsequently attained wisdom over the long term and bringing it to full maturity.” Not only does it contain samādhi within wisdom and wisdom within samādhi, it also prevents dead samādhi and wild wisdom.

“This is the calming-and-contemplation of non-discriminating wisdom.” The calming-and-contemplation spoken of here is not Tiantai’s Great Calming-and-Contemplation or any other Dharma gate of calming-and-contemplation. It is the calming-and-contemplation carried out by non-discriminating wisdom. Quiescence is calming; lucidity is contemplation. Calming is

samādhi; contemplation is wisdom. “Unconditioned” means utterly open, without contrivance. “Co-emergent” refers to the entire array of myriad phenomena. “Naturally so” means originally like this. These three terms—unconditioned, co-emergent, and naturally so—vividly bring out the true reality of the dharmakāya, which is without characteristics.

“The essential point of all practice and conduct” means the core of all Dharma gates of practice. No Dharma gate of practice departs from lucid quiescence, from the mutual support of samādhi and wisdom, or from calming-and-contemplation. Those who recite the Buddha’s name focus the mind on the Buddha-name, so no other thoughts arise: this is calming. Hearing each syllable of the Buddha-name distinctly and clearly is contemplation. For those who investigate Chan, the doubt-sensation envelops the whole body, with no leisure for delusive thoughts to arise: this is calming. Taking up a single huatou with clear distinctness is contemplation. In practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, forming the mudrā and holding the mantra gather body and mind: this is calming. Mentally reciting the mantra while hearing each syllable clearly and distinctly is contemplation. Ganges Mahāmudrā teaches us to “naturally and freely function, preserving lucid quiescence.” Quiescence is calming; lucidity is contemplation.

At the end of the Ming dynasty, Chan Master Miyun Yuanwu served as abbot of Tiantong Monastery in Ningbo. At that time, outside Tiantong Monastery there were many huts for monks who were vigorously investigating Chan to live in and practice intensively. One year, around the winter solstice, Chan Master Miyun ordered an attendant to deliver padded winter garments to the monks in the huts. One old seasoned monk in a hut said to the attendant, “This old monk already has the robe he was born in; I do not need winter clothing.” The attendant reported this to Chan Master Miyun. Chan Master Miyun said, “This monk seems to have some awakening, but I fear it is not real. Test him further by pressing him on his own words.” He then ordered the attendant to go back and ask, “Before your mother gave birth, what clothing did you wear?” The old monk could not answer. Chan Master Miyun instructed this old monk to investigate the huatou “Before your mother gave birth, what clothing did you wear?” Three years later, the old monk passed away. He had not broken through the huatou and had not uttered a turning word. After cremation there were countless relics. Many people were astonished and exclaimed, “So many relics—this old monk practiced very well!” Chan Master Miyun said, “Ten bushels of relics are not worth a single turning word. Try answering on his behalf.” Not only could those who praised the relics not answer; even the five hundred monks at Tiantong Monastery at that time could not answer. Chan Master Miyun Yuanwu sighed, “Practitioners of the Way are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, yet not one awakens.”

If one cannot answer, it is because one has not entered into the “dharmakāya’s intrinsic characteristic—unconditioned, co-emergent, and naturally so.” If one enters into this true reality, one answers without deliberation. One might answer him: “No sooner have the tender peach and plum blossoms faded than fresh chrysanthemums and pear blossoms appear.”

Tender peach blossoms and plum blossoms have just withered; fresh chrysanthemums and pear blossoms then open in succession. What does this mean? It lays bare the dharmakāya's intrinsic characteristic—unconditioned, co-emergent, and naturally so, directly and completely. Earlier we spoke of insentient things preaching the Dharma, and we spoke of "the myriad dharmas return to one; to where does the one return?" Where does the one return? At all times and everywhere, it does not depart from the dharmakāya; at all times and everywhere, it does not depart from self-nature. These flowers and plants are insentient; insentient things, too, can preach the Dharma. None of this departs from my dharmakāya.

Self-nature is unmoving suchness, yet its transformations are inexhaustible. Its unmoving suchness is called dharmakāya; its inexhaustible transformations are called the enjoyment and emanation bodies. The three bodies are originally a single body. Some people always think that only transforming into many human bodies is the emanation body. They do not know that the myriad phenomena in all their array—the whole array of myriad phenomena—are our emanation bodies. The sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, the great earth, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats, tables, stools, eating, drinking, daily living, men and women, old and young: all manifest the dharmakāya's intrinsic characteristic—unconditioned, co-emergent, and naturally so. All flow forth from the one true Dharma realm. All are our emanation bodies. Only because you delusively think and cling, deliberately making discriminations, do you needlessly give rise to "the mark of self, the mark of person, the mark of sentient being, and the mark of lifespan," thereby burying a perfectly good natural Buddha in the six paths, illusorily manifesting the six paths of rebirth where there are no six paths, and illusorily manifesting the boundless sea of suffering where there is no suffering. Now, so long as you make a firm resolve, practice the Dharma diligently, and remove the habits of attachment and discrimination formed through beginningless kalpas, you can attain realization immediately and be liberated right where you are.

"If one enters the net of achievement-seeking through a discriminating mind, one will never be liberated." Some people take spiritual powers as the standard of accomplishing the Way. They think that only with spiritual powers has one truly accomplished something. They are always discriminating and speculating: so-and-so has spiritual powers; so-and-so has no spiritual powers. Do you yourself have spiritual powers? If you do not have spiritual powers, how can you distinguish whether others have them? More importantly, spiritual powers cannot be used as the standard for liberation. Ghosts and spirits all have spiritual powers; have they all been liberated? If they have all been liberated, why are Buddhist rites still performed to liberate them? Seeking spiritual powers means falling into the net—the net of achievement-seeking. Once one falls into that net through a discriminating mind, one will never be liberated.

Reciting the Buddha's name is also for protecting our own originally luminous essence, and also for removing the discriminating mind. If you discriminate about the number of rounds of Buddha-name recitation and keep doubting: "Are three hundred recitations a day too few? I

have practiced for only one year—can I be born in the West?” all of this is discriminating mind. Whether Buddha-recitation is good or not depends on its quality. Master Hanshan said, “If the mouth recites ‘Amitābha’ while the mind is scattered, even shouting one’s throat hoarse is still in vain.” If the quality is poor, no matter how many repetitions there are, they are useless. One must remove the discriminating mind. The discriminating mind is the worst. Once there is discriminating mind, one falls into the net of achievement-seeking and cannot be born in the West. In being born in the West through Buddha-recitation, although there is birth, there is no birth; although there is going, there is no going. This is the unconditioned Dharma: unconditioned, yet leaving nothing undone. Though there is no going, one nevertheless goes; though there is no birth, one nevertheless is born. Therefore a great patriarch of the Pure Land school said, “As for birth, birth is certain; as for going, in reality there is no going.” The notions of arising and ceasing, coming and going, are all products of the discriminating mind. Buddhadharma is unconditioned Dharma; one should remove the discriminating mind. Buddha-recitation requires deep faith, earnest vows, and vigorous practice. It does not require discriminating mind. Still less should one contend for superiority and slander other Dharma gates. That is an even stronger discriminating mind. Not only does one fall into the net of achievement-seeking and fail to be liberated, one also incurs the fault of slandering the Dharma.

“This is the openly revealed wisdom of the dharmakāya’s natural abiding, the mind of awakened awareness that has never been deluded. One must decisively protect and sustain its continuity. (The above is the second secret meaning.)”

The non-discriminating calming-and-contemplation explained above is the wisdom of the dharmakāya’s natural abiding—the wisdom of abiding without abiding. It does not come from outside and is not obtained from other people. It is wholly the revelation of self-nature’s innate qualities. It has never been obscured in the slightest and is openly revealed from the beginning. Therefore it is called “the openly revealed wisdom of the dharmakāya’s natural abiding.” If one earnestly follows this Dharma gate of non-discriminating calming-and-contemplation, practices diligently, and over a long period protects and nourishes this “openly revealed wisdom of the dharmakāya’s natural abiding,” all great spiritual powers will be obtained naturally without seeking. If one has a mind that seeks spiritual powers, one falls into the net of achievement-seeking; not only will one be unable to be liberated, even spiritual powers will not manifest. If the discriminating mind that seeks spiritual powers is exploited by spirits, ghosts, or demons and attracts them to possess you, then the consequences are still more unbearable to contemplate.

This “openly revealed wisdom of the dharmakāya’s natural abiding” is the “numinous knowing that is without a single thought and yet clear and distinct.” It is the mind of awakened awareness that originally has neither delusion nor awakening. “To open, reveal, awaken, and enter is to go beyond the ten realms; the myriad phenomena are natural and uncontrived, without delusion or awakening.” The sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, the

great earth, men and women, old and young, all events and things are natural and uncontrived; all possess Buddha-nature, and all are naturally so. There is no delusion and no awakening. Therefore this is called “the mind of awakened awareness that has never been deluded.” Awakened awareness has never been deluded, and there is also no such thing as awakening. Entering the Buddha realm, it does not increase; passing through the hells, it does not decrease. But because ignorance covers it and because of delusive clinging and grasping, Buddha-nature cannot be revealed. This is provisionally called “delusion.” So long as one practices the Way diligently, breaks through ignorance, trains amid affairs, and removes the habits of giving rise to mind when facing objects and of delusively clinging and grasping, one can restore the natural, uncontrived character of self-nature. This is provisionally called “awakening.”

Delusion and awakening are both provisional names. If only we break through ignorance, then delusion too is unobtainable, and awakening too is unobtainable. Buddha-nature does not belong to delusion or awakening. Even when wrapped in ignorance, the luminosity of original nature still exists just as before and has never increased or decreased by even the slightest trace. “In pursuing learning, one increases day by day; in pursuing the Way, one decreases day by day.” What practitioners of the Way need to decrease is only ignorance and habitual tendencies. Innate Buddha-nature has never been deluded or awakened, and has never increased or decreased. If practice does not succeed, it is because one has not protected and sustained this innate Buddha-nature well. Therefore the text says, “One must decisively protect and sustain its continuity.” This is extremely important. “Decisively” means earnestly making great vows and forming great resolve. “Protect and sustain” means not following thoughts and not being shifted by circumstances. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, one does not depart from this; second by second, one does not depart from self-nature. “Continuity” means it cannot be interrupted at any moment.

If one practices intermittently—three days on, two days off, advancing one step and retreating two—and cannot continue without interruption, one cannot accomplish the Way. For example, in practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, if one does one sitting per day, that is only two hours; there are still twenty-two hours left. If during those twenty-two hours one lets the wild horse run loose, with only two hours of samādhi practice, the ratio of time is not even one-tenth. How, then, could one accomplish the Way? Still more, if one practices today and stops tomorrow, accomplishment of the Way is even more impossible. Therefore we say that clear observation is the main practice, and sitting meditation is the supporting practice. Clear observation means not following thoughts and not being shifted by circumstances, so that second by second one does not depart from self-nature. This is precisely for the sake of protecting and sustaining its continuity.

Pure Land practice is also like this. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva teaches us the method of Buddha-recitation: “Gather in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” “In continuous succession” means unbroken continuity. “Pure mindfulness”

refers to the Buddha-recitation practice becoming mature, so that the mind that recites and the Buddha who is recited drop away at once. With no subject and no object, no purity and no defilement, innate Buddha-nature is clearly revealed. Only this can be called “pure mindfulness.” Some people misunderstand, thinking that being able to continuously recite “Namo Amitābha Buddha” is “pure mindfulness in continuous succession.” In fact, that is very far from it. One must know: “If the mouth recites ‘Amitābha’ while the mind is scattered, even shouting one’s throat hoarse is still in vain.” The Pure Land school’s requirements are not low; they are very high. Nowadays some people are lazy and unwilling to practice diligently. They casually recite the Buddha-name a few times without “utmost sincerity,” which is the same as not reciting, and then fantasize about being born in the West. If they cannot be born there, they blame Amitābha Buddha. They also instruct others that one-pointed, undistracted mind is unnecessary. Alas! A wonderful Pure Land school that vertically exhausts the three times, horizontally spans the ten directions, universally embraces beings of the three capacities, and includes the sharp and the dull alike has been misunderstood by them to such an extent. How could this not be painfully distressing?

Decisively protecting and sustaining continuity: this is the second secret essential meaning. What, then, is the first secret essential meaning? It is the “essential view” discussed earlier. Mahāmudrā is the one true Dharma realm; the one true Dharma realm is our innate Buddha-nature. It is present at all times and in all places. The myriad phenomena in all their array—the whole array of myriad phenomena—are its transformations. One must first see the nature; only then can one protect and sustain it. If you have not seen the innate Buddha-nature, then what are you protecting and sustaining? Put briefly, first comes apprehending Mind and seeing nature; second comes close, continuous preservation. These are the first secret essential meaning and the second secret essential meaning.

Not Departing from the Dharmakāya

I. The Importance of Recognizing the Essential Wisdom of Liberation

“Samādhi is the most essential practice and conduct. If one lacks the strength in the Way born of liberating wisdom, and abides only in a practice of resting, then one still cannot go beyond the form and formless realms. This is because one has not been able to subdue the conditions that give rise to greed and anger, nor the streams of karmic activity.”

“The most essential practice and conduct” means conduct and practice that are of the utmost importance. The “samādhi” in “view, samādhi, and conduct” is precisely this most essential practice and conduct. Liberation wisdom refers to the essential view and its protection discussed above. The strength in the Way born of liberating wisdom means the capacity, arising from the view of the fundamental essence, for immeasurable wondrous functioning. This is what the Chan school calls great capacity and great function. Here, “resting” refers to resting the mind and stopping thoughts. This “practice of resting” means pressing thoughts down so they do not arise—the kind of practice likened to “pressing grass down with a stone.”

To abide only in this practice of resting is to remain at the stage of pressing thoughts down so they do not arise. We mentioned the three realms earlier: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. Here the “form realm” and “formless realm” refer to the four dhyāna heavens of the form realm and the four heavens of the formless realm.

The meaning of this passage is: although practicing samādhi—even entering retreat for intensive samādhi practice—is an extremely important practice and conduct, if one merely rests the mind and stops thoughts and lacks the capacity to realize the essence and bring forth function, then it is still worldly meditative absorption. Even though it has gone beyond the desire realm, it has not yet gone beyond the form or formless realms; it is still within the heavenly realm of the six paths.

Why is this so? “Because one has not been able to subdue the conditions that give rise to greed and anger, nor the streams of karmic activity.” Such a person can rest the mind and stop thoughts, and greed and anger can be temporarily suppressed, but the conditions that give rise to greed and anger still remain. Here, “conditions” means supporting conditions. “Conditions giving rise to greed and anger” means the conditions through which greed and anger arise. Why can resting the mind and stopping thoughts not subdue the conditions that give rise to greed and anger? Because one does not recognize original nature, and the habitual tendency to give rise to mind when facing objects still remains. When circumstances come, one is not free and is swayed by them. For example, when a beautiful woman appears before you, in order to subdue lust you contemplate her as white bones and a skull, as a skin-bag filled with pus and blood. This is still an antidotal method. From the root, all marks whatsoever are false; all appearances are reflections manifested by true mind. If true mind is clearly revealed, male and female forms cannot be found at all. For true mind to remain clearly revealed and not be lost in the face of circumstances is the strength in the Way born of liberating wisdom. Without this strength in the Way, one will be deluded by circumstances, follow them, and be swept along by them. Because of delusion one creates karma; because of karma one undergoes retribution. Causes and effects, effects and causes continue without end, and there is no end to the six paths of rebirth. This is the “streams of karmic activity.”

Abiding in the “samādhi” of resting the mind and stopping thoughts can only temporarily suppress greed and anger. It cannot subdue the conditions that give rise to greed and anger. In the Chan school this is called “soaking stones in cold water” and “dead water cannot hide a dragon.” Once meditative stability wanes and habitual tendencies surge up, greed and anger become even stronger. It is like pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows again. Such practice naturally cannot subdue the streams of karmic activity.

“Because one has not developed strength in the Way born of certainty, one gives rise to craving when favorable conditions present desirable objects, to anger and hatred when adverse conditions thwart one’s wishes, and to perceptions of suffering when illness and pain arise.”

Not having obtained strength in the Way born of certainty means not recognizing original nature. If you recognize original nature, know that phenomena are illusory, and know that phenomena are reflections of true mind, with absolutely no doubt, then when facing circumstances you will not move the mind and will not cling to marks. Therefore we must directly realize original nature. Mahāmudrā points out seeing the nature and teaches us diligently to protect it, to train amid circumstances, and to realize it within that training. We must, within that training, let body, mind, and world dissolve into emptiness and truly see original nature; only then does one have the “strength in the Way born of certainty.” If one does not train, there will be no real strength. Sitting here listening to the teaching, at this moment you may seem to have great strength, but as soon as you go out the door, you immediately forget. What use is that? One still must practice in a grounded and earnest way.

Here I will introduce two methods of practice. One is that after hearing the instruction and recognizing original nature, one protects it at every moment: “morning with it, evening with it; in displacement with it, in adversity with it.” At every moment one protects it so that it does not waver. As soon as thoughts arise, one turns them around and does not run along with them. One persists in this over a long period. The other is to practice a specific Dharma gate: Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, or the Heart-Center Dharma. One must not only practice during formal sitting, but also practice outside formal sitting. One must maintain clear observation at all times and preserve it closely and continuously; only then will there be results. Otherwise, when you see beautiful things, you will still move the mind; when you encounter adverse situations, you will still get angry and resentful. This is what is meant by, “one gives rise to craving when favorable conditions present desirable objects, to anger and hatred when adverse conditions thwart one’s wishes, and to perceptions of suffering when illness and pain arise.”

Now let me cite a few examples showing how ancient worthies met illness. Chan Master Mazu Daoyi was an extraordinary great patriarch of Chan. He was known as Great Master Ma. He guided more than a hundred disciples to realize the great Way, and they went out to different regions to teach and transform the world. In his later years, Master Ma became ill. The temple steward came to ask after him: “How is your Reverence these days?” Master Ma said, “Sun-face Buddha, Moon-face Buddha.” What does this mean? Sun-face is daytime, symbolizing health; moon-face is nighttime, symbolizing sickness. Buddha means awakened awareness. By day one remains in awakened awareness, and by night one remains in awakened awareness. In health it is like this; in sickness it is also like this. Although there are only six Chinese characters in the phrase, it directly and clearly reveals Master Ma’s “strength in the Way born of certainty.”

Chan Master Ciming Chuyuan of the Song dynasty was also an extraordinary great patriarch of Chan. In his later years he suddenly had a stroke, and even his mouth became crooked. His attendant anxiously stamped his feet: “What can be done? All your life you scolded Buddhas and reviled patriarchs; now it has come to this.” What can be done! Ordinarily you scolded

Buddhas and reviled patriarchs, and now retribution has arrived. Chan Master Ciming said, “Do not worry. I will straighten it for you.” No need for you to worry; I will straighten it. As he spoke, he used his hand to move his mouth back, and the crooked mouth immediately became normal. Illness and pain are also karmic obstruction: “When realized, karmic obstruction is originally empty; when not realized, one must repay old debts.” Karmic debts on the body of a great patriarch who has realized the Way are something he undergoes if he wants to undergo them, and does not undergo if he does not want to. The body is like a house: sooner or later it will break down. If it can be lived in, live in it; if it cannot, just abandon it. If it has broken down and you still cling to it and refuse to let go, then suffering arrives. This suffering is what you have brought upon yourself.

When Chan Master Zhihui of Chongyun was about to pass away, he wrote a verse for everyone to see: “I have a single hut, built by father and mother. I have lived in it for eighty years; lately I notice it is damaged. I long ago planned to move elsewhere, yet moving early would involve aversion and attachment. When it collapses by itself, for both sides there will be no obstruction.” After writing it, he sat in full lotus and passed away.

It is not always in this manner. Let me cite another example. When Chan Master Kezhen of Cuiyan was about to enter nirvāṇa, he manifested the signs of an extremely painful illness. On a mat spread on the floor, he rolled back and forth, tossing and turning without stop. His attendant cried and said, “All your life you scolded Buddhas and reviled patriarchs; why is it like this now?” If you had not scolded Buddhas and reviled patriarchs all your life, how could it be like this now? Chan Master Cuiyan stared at the attendant for a while, then scolded him: “Do you also make this kind of interpretation?” Are you too holding this kind of view? Then Chan Master Cuiyan sat in full lotus and ordered the attendant to burn incense. As soon as the smoke of incense arose, the master passed away.

Everyone, since Chan Master Cuiyan had the mastery to pass away seated or standing, why did he manifest such painful signs of illness? He was teaching the Dharma with his body: suffering itself is liberation; afflictions themselves are bodhi; birth and death themselves are nirvāṇa. How could he ever have “formed perceptions of suffering in response to illness and pain”? If you form perceptions of suffering in response to illness and pain, then things become terrible: the demon of illness will torment you all the more. If the mind does not abide in illness and pain—“If it hurts, let it hurt; it does not matter; it is of no concern”—then, on the contrary, one does not feel pain.

For example, when practicing the Heart-Center Dharma and the fingers hurt badly while forming the mudrā, do not let the mind think of the hands. Concentrate attention on the mantra. Forget the hands, and then the hands will not feel painful. But if you give rise to a joyful mind, “Ah! My hands no longer hurt,” as soon as you think this, the hands immediately hurt again. Therefore the feeling of pain ultimately comes down to whether the brain accepts it or not. So long as our mind is empty and without abiding, illness can also heal; even if there is pain, one does not feel suffering.

The Pure Land school expresses it this way: “At the time of death, the body is free of pain, the mind is not confused, and attention is not scattered.” “The body is free of pain” means not being tormented by illness. It does not necessarily mean that not the slightest illness arises. When you can be sick without thinking about the sickness, and simply recite the Buddha’s name—“Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” —with attention concentrated on the Buddha-name, and do not feel pain, this is what it means for the body to be free from the suffering of illness. If your mind becomes disordered and you think about the illness and pain, crying “Aiya, aiya!” then it hurts unbearably. Suppose you have applied effort deeply in ordinary times and have deep proficiency in practice: then there is no such thing as illness or not illness, pain or not pain. “When the mind can turn things, that itself is the Tathāgata.” If one truly keeps the mind empty and without abiding, even illness can be turned. It is like Chan Master Ciming: with one movement of his hand, the mouth crooked by stroke immediately became normal. Even with somewhat less proficiency in practice, one can still avoid being tormented by illness.

Therefore we must make the mind empty and pure at every moment. If our mind is not empty and pure, and at the end of life we are pressed by illness, suffering and distress, then the mind will not be at peace. I have seen many people who practice Pure Land. At the end of life, when instructed, “You must now make every effort to recite the Buddha’s name. This is the crucial moment. You are about to be born in the West. The crucial moment has arrived; quickly recite the Buddha’s name,” guess what they say? They say, “Aiya! What Buddha-recitation? I am almost dying from pain. I am suffering terribly and cannot recite.” They simply do not recite, because their minds are scattered and disordered. Our present Buddha-recitation practice prepares us for that final instant at the end of life. If, at the end of life, the mind is not scattered and one can still recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” in this way, then birth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is absolutely assured. Everyone, please practice diligently! There are truly far too many examples like this.

10.12 恒河大手印（第十二讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Twelve)

I. Recognizing the Essential Wisdom of Liberation (continued)

“Everything that arises is a manifestation of self-nature’s functioning. Therefore, recognizing the essential wisdom of liberation is of utmost importance.”

Earlier we had just discussed why one must not “give rise to craving and attachment in pleasant situations and favorable conditions, to anger and hatred in adverse situations and thwarting conditions, or to perceptions of suffering when illness and pain arise.” Why should one not think in this way? Because “everything that arises is a manifestation of self-nature’s functioning.” Do not think that pleasant situations and favorable conditions are good, while adverse situations and thwarting conditions are bad; or that health is good while sickness is bad. Where do these supposedly bad adverse situations and thwarting conditions—even

illness and pain—come from? They are all manifestations of self-nature. Without self-nature, where could any of these circumstances and conditions exist?

Right there, we must become sharply aware and know that these circumstances and conditions—even anger and hatred themselves—are manifestations of self-nature. Then anger and hatred naturally cease. Self-nature itself is neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going, unmoving and unshaken. If there were no bodhi-nature, even afflictions could not exist, just as without water there could be no waves. Precisely because waves themselves are water, it is said that “afflictions are bodhi.”

In practicing the Way, we must remain keenly alert at every moment. As soon as affliction arises, become sharply aware. In that instant of awareness, one returns to the original position; self-nature naturally stands clearly revealed, and affliction immediately becomes utterly unobtainable. This is the essential wisdom of liberation. “Therefore, recognizing the essential wisdom of liberation is of utmost importance.” For this reason, recognition of the essential wisdom of liberation is extremely important.

Recognize the mind of numinous knowing; do not identify with delusive thoughts. Recognize the essence that is empty and quiescent; do not identify with the physical body. As soon as delusive thoughts arise, become sharply aware at once. The mind of numinous knowing comes clearly to the fore, and delusive thoughts immediately collapse and melt away. One cannot identify the physical body as “I.” If one clings to this bodily shell, trouble follows. The physical body is like a house; it is not “I,” but only a temporary dwelling. We must practice this way at every moment.

II. Method for Eliminating Delusive Thoughts: Not Departing from the Dharmakāya

“If one has not grasped the essential point of thoughts arising and ceasing, then all delusive thoughts that leak through become karmic causes of saṃsāra. Therefore, whether coarse or subtle, delusive thoughts must dissolve without trace as they arise and cease, and one should skillfully guard and correct. That is, neither indulge them and let them blaze up, nor counter thought with thought. Simply do not depart from the natural fundamental essence; maintain clear observation so that they do not continue, like drawing on water: each stroke disappears as it is made.”

The essential point of arising and ceasing is the key to how thoughts arise and cease. What, then, is this essential point? “The green mountain is originally unmoving; white clouds may come and go as they please.” The green mountain is an analogy for self-nature; the white clouds are an analogy for delusive thoughts. Self-nature does not move or shake, while delusive thoughts arise and cease. Though thoughts arise and cease, “recognize them, and you will not be led astray.” To recognize them is to have grasped the essential point of arising and ceasing. If you do not recognize them, and delusive thoughts have arisen while you do not even know it, then you have not grasped the essential point of arising and ceasing.

“If one has not grasped the essential point of arising and ceasing, then all delusive thoughts allowed to leak through become karmic causes of saṃsāra.” In practicing the Heart-Center Dharma, we emphasize that “clear observation is the main practice; sitting meditation is the auxiliary practice.” This is precisely to highlight the function of clear observation. When delusive thoughts come, one must see them and immediately become sharply aware, paying the thoughts no heed. If you do not see them, you are clearly running along with them; this is “leakage.” Every delusive thought allowed to leak through becomes a karmic cause for the six paths of saṃsāra.

When one runs along with thoughts, one inevitably turns with circumstances. Clinging to circumstances leads to creating karma, and creating karma leads to undergoing retribution, so there is no end to the six paths of saṃsāra. It is like a water bucket with a leak: the water of self-nature’s wondrous functioning leaks away completely, and one falls into the six paths as an ordinary being. Falling is the karmic result; leakage is the karmic cause.

The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “At all times do not give rise to delusive thoughts; with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.” The first half teaches us not to allow leakage: do not let delusive thoughts pass unchecked, but snap into sharp awareness so that they do not arise. Fearing that we might misunderstand and engage in “dead samādhi” practice by pressing thoughts down so they do not arise, the sutra immediately adds the second half: “with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.” Do not eradicate delusive thoughts completely. Why? So that boundless wondrous functioning can unfold and immeasurable sentient beings can be liberated.

If true mind is in command, then speech, conversation, raising the hand, moving the foot, and even the arising of mind and stirring of thought are all wondrous functions of self-nature. A seer with five superknowledges once asked the Buddha, “What is that one superknowledge?” He had five superknowledges; the Buddha has six. What, then, was that one? The Buddha called out, “Seer with Five Superknowledges!” He answered, and the Buddha said, “That one superknowledge—you ask me about it?” One call and one response, one question and one answer: this vividly revealed the wondrous functioning of self-nature. This is “that one superknowledge”—the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows. “Exhaustion of outflows” means that not even the slightest leakage remains; leakage has been completely exhausted.

Therefore, although the true mind may seem like a fool, and great wisdom appears foolish, if no thought ever arose, how could boundless wondrous functioning unfold? If the waves were eradicated altogether, would there not be only a pool of dead water? Thus, “with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.” If one recognizes the true mind and true mind is in command, delusive thoughts become wondrous function. If one does not recognize true mind and delusive thoughts take command, this is leakage, and it is the karmic cause of saṃsāra. This is the essential point of arising and ceasing.

Again using green mountains and white clouds as an analogy, we may put the essential point of arising and ceasing in verse: “White clouds cover the green mountain; the green mountain still remains. The green mountain is simply the green mountain—how could it be obstructed by white clouds?”

“Therefore, whether coarse or subtle, delusive thoughts must be allowed to dissolve as they arise and cease, and one should skillfully guard and correct.” Delusive thoughts have coarse and subtle levels. What is the difference between coarse delusion and subtle delusion? Coarse delusion is the mind reacting to circumstances: rejoicing in favorable conditions, worrying in adverse conditions, and unknowingly being carried along by them. We must cut off this coarse delusion first, knowing that all external circumstances are illusory, like flowers in the sky and the moon in water, utterly unobtainable.

The Diamond Sutra says, “All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and also like lightning—one should observe them in this way.” Here the word translated as “should” also carries the sense of responding to circumstances. Deal with all external circumstances, favorable or adverse, as needed, while maintaining precisely this clear observation. Observe all external circumstances as being like dreams, illusory appearances, bubbles, shadows, morning dew, and lightning—utterly unobtainable. Maintaining clear observation in this way at every moment, over time one will no longer be moved by external circumstances, and coarse delusion will basically be cut off.

After this, there are still “habitual tendencies.” These are habitual seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness. Even if you do not deliberately think of them, they can surface on their own; this is called “latent seeds surfacing.” These delusive thoughts are subtler than the coarse delusion just discussed, but they are still not what is meant here by “subtle delusion.” When sitting in meditation, it is easier to notice latent seeds surging up; we likewise pay them no heed and thus peacefully enter samādhi. Only what appears in samādhi is subtle delusion. It is like an undercurrent beneath the water, flowing unseen. If one has not entered deeply into meditative absorption, one simply cannot see subtle delusion.

No matter whether delusive thoughts are coarse or subtle, “they must dissolve without trace as they arise and cease, and one should skillfully guard and correct.” When delusive thoughts come, you must notice them, become sharply aware, pay them no heed, and not run along with them. They will naturally dissolve without leaving a trace. This is “arising and ceasing dissolve as they occur”: with that immediate awareness, the arising and ceasing of thoughts dissolve without trace. If you do not notice them, or if you do not become sharply aware, delusive thoughts keep moving without cease, thought after thought continuing without interruption; then they become karmic causes of saṃsāra.

“Skillfully guard and correct” means protecting what should be protected and correcting what should be corrected. What is protected, and what is corrected? Protect the true mind that is numinously bright and without abiding; correct the delusive thoughts that keep flowing and

shifting without cease. When one notices delusive thoughts, one must immediately become sharply aware; immediately the arising and ceasing dissolve as they occur. Do not run along with them for a while and only then become sharply aware. Some people know that a delusive thought has arisen, but they are reluctant to stop it. They say, “Let me think about it a little more; let me consider it first and become sharply aware afterward.” Since you already know it is a delusive thought, why keep thinking it through? Is that not utterly foolish? This is clearly flowing along with delusive thoughts. One should not do this. Quickly become sharply aware and let the thoughts dissolve without trace as they arise and cease. At every moment protect our true mind: remain lucidly and continuously aware, without abiding or clinging. This is what “skillfully guarding and correcting” means.

“That is, neither indulge them and let them blaze up, nor use thought to treat thought.” To indulge means to let them loose like wild horses, running along with the thoughts. To let them blaze up is to let thoughts burn on without stopping, linking from Zhang San to Li Si, from Li Si to Zhao Wu, and so on without cease, like a great fire burning more and more fiercely. To indulge thoughts so that they continue blazing without stop is “indulging them and letting them blaze up.” We cannot “indulge them and let them blaze up”; we must turn them around at once.

How does one transform them? There are two methods. One method is to reflect within: what are the consequences of “indulging them and letting them blaze up”? They are terrible beyond imagining. They are karmic causes for the six paths of saṃsāra, suffering beyond words. Quickly become sharply aware so that self-nature is clearly revealed. If the force of delusive thoughts is strong and this sharp awareness still cannot transform them, then use the second method: quickly recite the Buddha’s name or quickly recite the mantra, using Buddha-recitation or right mindfulness to displace delusive thoughts. Both methods are “not indulging them and letting them blaze up.” But one must absolutely not “use thought to treat thought.”

What does it mean to use thought to treat thought? It is to raise a delusive thought in order to suppress the original delusive thought: “Oh, this thought is delusive; bad, bad—quickly, do not move.” This is called treating thought with thought. Why is treating thought with thought bad? It has two possible results. One is that one cannot suppress the delusive thought and instead it becomes “delusive thought flowing on.” The other is that even if one can treat it temporarily and press the thought to death, this is like “pressing grass beneath a stone; when the stone is removed, the grass grows again.” After a thought has been pressed to death, one becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone—dead. This kind of “dead samādhi” has a time limit. Even if you can remain in such samādhi for hundreds or thousands of years, when that meditative stability wanes, delusive thoughts return with even greater force. The cycle of rebirth through the six paths continues as before; it is still not ultimate.

Therefore we do not treat thought with thought and do not press thoughts to death. We transform them by snapping into sharp awareness and turning them around. When the strength is insufficient, recite the mantra or recite the Buddha’s name. “Simply do not depart

from the natural fundamental essence; observe them clearly so that they do not continue, like drawing pictures in water: as they are drawn, they disappear.” The natural fundamental essence is our innate Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is unborn and undying, unmoving and unshaken, not coming and not going, not increasing and not decreasing. Clear observation is the “sharp awareness” just discussed. As long as one becomes sharply aware, one returns to the natural fundamental essence—that is all.

We must not depart from the natural fundamental essence at any moment. When delusive thoughts come, become sharply aware, so that delusive thoughts cannot continue. If delusive thoughts come and you still do not know it, then the practice has failed. Therefore clear observation has two meanings: first, when delusive thoughts come, you must know it; second, you become sharply aware. There is an analogy, “like a cat catching a mouse”: delusive thoughts are compared to mice. One must have the alertness of a cat; as soon as the mouse pokes out its head, it is immediately spotted. In Chan this is called “keeping watch over the *huatou*.” Here, “keeping watch” means guarding it attentively. This thought of “keeping watch” is right mindfulness. In practice, right mindfulness must not be lost. Right mindfulness is like a constable at the magistrate’s gate, keeping unauthorized people from entering. Right mindfulness is the wondrous function of Buddha-nature.

If right mindfulness is lost, then either one cannot detect the swarm of delusive thoughts, or one engages in dead *samādhi* practice and becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone. These are two wrong paths in practice. Therefore in Chan one must arouse the doubt-sensation; in Pure Land one must hold firmly to the Buddha-name; in Esoteric practice one must recite the mantra and form the *mudrā*; and in *Mahāmudrā* we are told “not to depart from the natural fundamental essence, but to maintain clear observation.” What is the purpose of clear observation? “So that they do not continue.” It is to prevent delusive thoughts from continuing, to cut them off.

Thus we say the function of Buddha-recitation is to cut off delusive thoughts. The Buddha’s sacred Name is a wisdom-sword: “*Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...*” When recollection of the Buddha is present, it naturally cuts off delusive thoughts without leaving a trace. If, while reciting the Buddha’s name, one is also swept into confusion by delusive thoughts, then this is not Buddha-recitation. When practicing Buddha-recitation, one must have “stilling and contemplation”; one must recite the Buddha-name inwardly and listen to it clearly. When the Buddha-name is recited mentally and delusive thoughts do not arise, this is stilling. When each syllable is heard clearly and distinctly, this is contemplation. Whatever Buddhist practice one undertakes, the purpose is to prevent delusive thoughts from continuing. “Like drawing pictures in water: as they are drawn, they disappear.” Let the arising and ceasing of delusive thoughts be like drawing pictures on the surface of water: each line disappears as it is drawn, leaving not the slightest trace. Arising and ceasing dissolve as they occur.

“Although delusive thoughts may extinguish by themselves, this is still not purity. Merely knowing them as delusive thoughts is still not enough to cut off the karmic stream of delusion

and disturbance.” Even if delusive thoughts naturally cease and no longer arise, that still does not count as purity. Someone may become puzzled: “If delusive thoughts have vanished, should that not be purity? Why say it still is not purity?” Because “merely knowing them as delusive thoughts is still not enough to cut off the karmic stream of delusion and disturbance.” Merely knowing them as delusive thoughts—knowing, “This is a delusive thought”—is not yet enough if one has not recognized the true mind. Only after recognizing the true mind can one cut off the karmic stream of delusion and disturbance.

Here, “delusion and disturbance” means that after one encounters circumstances, one becomes deluded and the mind becomes disordered. Seeing gold ingots, the mind starts racing: one wants to get rich. Seeing someone attractive, the mind becomes agitated: the fire of lust burns through the body. These are all instances of delusion and disturbance. You clearly know they are mere reflections, illusory and unobtainable, yet you still cannot cut them off. Why? Because you only know delusive thoughts for what they are, but you do not recognize the true mind. You do not know what the true mind is, and therefore you have no strength. When you encounter circumstances, the mind still moves; therefore you cannot cut off the karmic stream of delusion and disturbance.

We ordinary beings, having lost sight of our own nature, take external things to be ourselves, chase after objects and circumstances, create karma and undergo retribution, continuing like flowing water. Past karma is like seeds planted in the field of the eighth consciousness. How is one to cut it off? Only by directly realizing the true mind and severing the root can this stream be cut off. Therefore, to cut off the karmic stream of delusion and disturbance, one must directly realize the true mind. Merely knowing that delusive thoughts extinguish by themselves is not enough.

“At the same time that one knows delusive thoughts extinguish by themselves, one must immediately recognize and clearly see the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness; then one rests naturally.” The “wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness” is the fundamental consciousness. It is the eighth consciousness turned from delusion back to awakening. Once the eighth consciousness turns, it is amalavijñāna, also called the purified consciousness. This is what is called “turning consciousness into wisdom”: transforming the eighth consciousness into Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. The phrase “clearly see the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness” means seeing Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom clearly. It is self-nature standing clearly revealed: the numinous true mind, with not a single thought arising yet lucidly clear. Only in this way can one cut off the karmic stream of delusion and disturbance.

“Clearly seeing the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness” is not difficult; the difficulty lies in not understanding it and not recognizing it—that is, not “recognizing and knowing” it. To “recognize and clearly see the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness” is called, in Chan, “grasping it at once”; in Pure Land, it is called “when the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising”; in Esoteric Buddhism, it is called “realizing and entering siddhi.”

At the very same time one knows that “delusive thoughts extinguish by themselves,” one must “immediately recognize and clearly see the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness.”

When there are no delusive thoughts, recognize the true mind; recognize our genuine Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is wisdom-nature—the nature of wisdom—because all practice, all spiritual powers, and all wondrous functions arise from it, so it is called wisdom-nature. Merely knowing that delusive thoughts, as they arise and cease, disappear accordingly, without recognizing the true mind, still cannot cut off the karmic stream of delusion and disturbance.

One must recognize the true mind and further know that the delusive mind arises from the true mind. When the delusive mind is cut off and not a single thought arises, what is it that remains lucidly and continuously knowing? This is precisely the true mind; this is precisely Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom. When delusive thoughts are cut off, one must recognize and experience the true mind. If one cannot grasp it at once, one misses it right before one’s eyes and cannot see the nature. What is called “seeing the nature” means clearly realizing that the delusive mind is unobtainable and that it is the wondrous function of true mind. When the delusive mind comes to rest, one immediately “catches hold of” the true mind.

This does not mean using the hand to grasp some thing. True mind has neither shape nor characteristics; “to speak of it as resembling one thing does not hit the mark.” There is no thing bearing characteristics waiting for you to grasp it. Rather, you must experience it, recognize it, and affirm it. When the delusive mind has stopped, recognizing the true mind is extremely, extremely important. I have repeatedly reminded everyone: at the time “before and after are cut off”—when the previous thought has already ceased and the next thought has not yet arisen—what is this? At precisely this moment, summon full alertness, recognize and affirm the true mind, trust it without doubt, and take it up as your own.

After recognizing the true mind, one no longer clings to marks, and all delusive thoughts are transformed into wondrous function. True mind has no form. Whatever has form is an illusory appearance, a reflection, utterly unobtainable. Knowing this, we will no longer cling to anything bearing marks. Only then do we have the strength to let go of whatever bears marks, relinquish it, and not abide in it. If one does not recognize the real, one will always be deluded by the false. “When the false is taken as real, the real too becomes false.” Because one does not recognize the real, one inevitably takes the false as real; that is “mistaking a thief for one’s father” and burying the true mind. This is the most important issue.

One must recognize from where delusive thoughts come. What are delusive thoughts? Delusive thoughts are not bad things. Delusive thoughts are wondrous functions that arise from our true mind. Do not fear delusive thoughts. Only do not run along with them. Recognize their original face clearly: do not cling to circumstances, do not abide in circumstances, do not cling to marks. At every moment, when a thought arises, be aware of it; when a thought arises, cut it off. When a single thought is cut off, the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness will be clearly revealed.

So-called “no-thought” does not necessarily mean that not even one thought arises. If not even one thought arose, one would become earth, wood, metal, or stone. That is annihilationism and indeterminate blankness, not no-thought. No-thought means that when thought arises, it does not abide. A monk asked Zhaozhou, “Does a newborn baby still possess the six consciousnesses?” A baby newly born knows nothing; surely it does not give rise to mind when facing circumstances or let delusive thoughts fly everywhere. Does the baby possess the six consciousnesses—the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousnesses? This actually uses the baby as an analogy to ask, “What is no-thought?” Zhaozhou answered, “Playing ball on swift water.” The monk then asked Touzi, “What is the meaning of playing ball on swift water?” Touzi answered, “Thought after thought does not remain.” When one plays ball on very swift water, can the ball stay still? In an instant it is swept away. “Not remaining” means no abiding. Thus when thought arises without abiding, this is no-thought; it is not that no-thought must mean there is not a single thought.

We have repeatedly pointed out: when a single thought is cut off, what remains clear and distinct is our mind of numinous knowing. This is true mind; this is suchness, Buddha-nature. Buddha-recitation means being mindful of this Buddha. “Buddha” signifies awakened awareness. Buddha-recitation means remaining in awakened awareness, thought after thought. This is the true meaning of Buddha-recitation. If one does not understand this true meaning and practices Buddha-recitation in a muddled haze, that is equivalent to not truly practicing Buddha-recitation. My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, said in the past: if people practice Buddha-recitation for many years without obtaining wondrous function or gaining strength, they should quickly switch to Esoteric practice. After practicing Esoteric Buddhism until they come into accord and attain samādhi, they can turn back to Buddha-recitation and will then understand the essential point of Buddha-recitation.

Therefore, those of us who study Buddhism must recognize where delusive thoughts come from and, when they come to rest, recognize the true mind. This is most important. After recognizing the true mind, “then one rests naturally.” Resting without abiding is what is meant by “resting naturally.” Naturally and steadily, lucid and quiescent, quiescent and lucid, one is no longer shaken by circumstances and no longer troubled by delusive thoughts. Studying Buddhism in this way is truly gaining strength. Otherwise, all of it is misdirected practice. Some people say, “I have already recited so many sutras, and still have to recite so many more; I need to fulfill my vow!” Doing such things is precisely not waking from the great dream. It is not true practice, not true study of Buddhism. True study of Buddhism is to recognize the wondrous bright true mind that is originally without abiding, to remain awake at every moment and nonabiding everywhere. Only this offers hope of becoming a Buddha. What use is it to recite so many Buddha-names, recite so many sutras, mark off little red tally dots, burn the tally sheet, and fulfill one’s vow? With such attachment to marks, can one become a Buddha? No.

“When delusive thoughts cease, purity is obtained accordingly; this is even more important.” When those delusive thoughts cease, the originally pure true mind immediately appears. When the waves settle, is this not pure water? Recognizing this true mind is even more important. Merely knowing that delusive thoughts arise and cease without leaving a trace, without recognizing the true mind, cannot cut off the karmic stream of delusion and disturbance. We have just spoken at length about this.

“Thought arises and ceases in the same instant, like drawing on water: each stroke disappears as it is made; originally all is pure. Thoughts arise and cease by themselves; practice steadily and continuously, without rest or interruption, and natural uncontrived functioning is attained.” As soon as a thought arises, if it is not lodged in the mind, it immediately ceases by itself and leaves no trace. This is called “thought arising and ceasing in the same instant.” It is very similar to drawing on water. As soon as a thought arises, it is as if we have drawn one stroke across the water—the water of mind. As soon as the thought ceases by itself, it is as if the picture drawn on water has left no trace. Therefore it says, “as soon as it is drawn, it disappears; originally all is pure.”

The Buddha said, “In the forty-nine years I dwelt in the world, I never spoke a single word.” This is “as one draws, it disappears”: once it has been spoken, it is the same as not having been spoken. The Chan school says, “Eating rice all day long, one has never bitten even a single grain; wearing clothing all year long, not one thread has ever hung on one.” It is not that one does not eat rice or wear clothing. Once one has eaten or dressed, the matter is finished; one does not discriminate and fuss over it. Only when the mind is empty and pure like this can one accomplish the Way.

“Arising by itself and ceasing by itself, steady and continuous, without rest or interruption, one obtains natural uncontrived functioning.” As soon as delusive thoughts arise, they naturally extinguish by themselves. This is what was discussed earlier: “The green mountain is originally unmoving; white clouds may come and go as they please.” My green mountain—true mind—does not move. I let you, white clouds—delusive thoughts—come and go. Though you come and go, after you pass, nothing remains; this is called “arising by itself and ceasing by itself.”

“Steady and continuous, without rest or interruption” describes how one must practice. The difficulty of practice lies precisely here. 绵 means enduring over time; repeated as 绵绵, it means persevering for a long time. 密 means not sparse; repeated as 密密, it means without gaps or interruption. Together, 绵绵密密 means continuing steadily over a long period without interruption. “Without rest or interruption” likewise means continuing without stopping. This is how one must practice. If we can truly practice this way, we will certainly succeed in three to five years. When I say three to five years, that is already long. My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, once said, “I guarantee accomplishment in a year and a half; if you do not accomplish it, come ask me.” This is true. If we can remain “steady and continuous,

without rest or interruption,” how could we fail to accomplish it? We will certainly accomplish it. What ruins our practice is precisely our inability to remain “steady and continuous, without rest or interruption.” We practice and stop, stop and practice—“three days fishing, two days drying the nets.”

This passage is very important, so I will repeat it again: when delusive thoughts stop, what is clear, pure, and distinct is suchness, self-nature. Apart from this, nothing else is it. Do not remain there doubting: “This cannot be it, can it? If this is it, why have I not developed spiritual powers?” If you think in this way, you are ruined: you have fallen into the demon of spiritual powers. Do you want to see spiritual powers? I will display them for you right now: is my speaking here not spiritual power? Is your listening here not spiritual power? Is your walking here not spiritual power? These are all spiritual powers; they are all wondrous functions of suchness, self-nature. Suchness, self-nature is the “spiritual”; absence of obstruction is the “penetrating.” When the mind abides nowhere, it is naturally unobstructed. Only, our present spiritual powers are minor spiritual powers. So long as we protect suchness, self-nature “steadily and continuously, without rest or interruption,” after a long time great spiritual powers will manifest.

The future arising of great spiritual powers depends precisely on this point today: recognizing and taking up the true mind. When we now recognize the true mind, it is like a newborn baby. It cannot yet function like an adult, so we must protect it. Once it grows up, it can function like an adult. The adult is equivalent to Buddha; we now are equivalent to children. We ask the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to protect us, and we protect it ourselves. We practice by bringing other-power and self-power together. This is called “nurturing the sacred embryo of awakening”: protecting and nourishing it over a long period so that it grows. Once it grows up, it can unfold wondrous functioning like a Buddha. If you do not protect it, what will happen? The child will die young; the newborn baby will die before growing into an adult. If after hearing this you do not believe it, saying, “Oh, I am afraid this is not it,” and, not believing, you go seek elsewhere, then it dies young. You have not protected it, and so it cannot grow up, cannot become a Buddha, and cannot manifest great spiritual powers. Recognizing this point is extremely important.

My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, often said, “The great golden-winged garuḍa can fly ten thousand li with one flap of its wings, but it all depends on a single push from its feet.” If the garuḍa’s foot does not push even a little against the ground, it cannot fly up. Have you seen how country people catch hawks? They dig a narrow trench, narrower than the hawk’s body, and place in the trench several newly hatched chicks. The chicks chirp. The hawk’s eyes are very sharp. Circling in the sky, it sees, “Ah! There are chicks below,” and comes down to catch them. Its body cannot get in and is stuck above the trench. It reaches its claws inside, but the claws cannot touch the ground and hang in empty space. Its wings beat on both sides, “pa, pa,” yet it cannot fly up, and the country people catch it. Why can it not fly? Because its feet cannot gain purchase on the ground. Our present recognition of true mind is likewise a matter of

gaining firm footing. Otherwise, we cannot fly up and cannot unfold boundless wondrous functioning.

If we can truly remain steady and continuous, without rest or interruption, then “one obtains natural uncontrived functioning.” One follows conditions and functions naturally, free and at ease. People have afflictions because they cannot function naturally and freely. They have far too many demands: wanting wealth, wanting promotion, wanting their children to become successful, and so on without end. But if in the past you did not practice giving, how can you become wealthy? If in the past you did not serve the public, how can you be promoted? When people seek and cannot obtain, their afflictions are endless. If one recognizes and takes up the true mind, knowing that all things are unobtainable, then one follows conditions and functions naturally, free and at ease. What would one need those things for? Not only may one fail to obtain them; even if one could obtain them, one still comes with nothing and goes with nothing, born empty-handed and dying empty-handed. Yet in order to achieve one’s aims, one stops at nothing and creates all kinds of karma; this follows you, and even if you drive it away, it will not go. In the end, one must undergo retribution. Awaken quickly! Practice in earnest! Only in this way can one function naturally, free and at ease.

III. Relying on Delusive Thoughts to Train in the Dharmakāya

“Therefore, as for delusive thoughts that arise, let them arise. The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says, ‘With regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.’ One should know that whatever arises is all conduct of the Way within the originally pure nature. When practice reaches this point, there is not the slightest clinging or stagnation; delusive thoughts themselves become conduct of the Way, unfolding wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Because no-thought is precisely having thoughts, and having thoughts is precisely no-thought; thinking yet not thinking, not thinking yet thinking.”

If delusive thoughts are going to arise, then let them arise. Do not suppress them. This is not indulging them; indulging means chasing conditions without cease. “Let them arise” means there is not the slightest chasing after conditions. The parenthetical citation gives the words of the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: “With regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.” We have already discussed this sentence earlier. The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment gives four sentences in sequence: “At all times do not give rise to delusive thoughts; with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either; dwelling in the realm of delusive thinking, do not add discrimination; when no discrimination is added, do not distinguish true reality.” These four sentences are four steps of practice: coarse, subtle, very subtle, and extremely subtle.

“Coarse” is the first sentence: “At all times do not give rise to delusive thoughts.” At any time, do not give rise to delusive thoughts and do not grasp at external conditions. This is speaking in a coarse, initial way; it is the first step of practice. “Subtle” is the second step: “With regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either.” Why not extinguish them? As we

explained earlier, it is so that wondrous functioning can unfold. One must not press delusive thoughts to death. Yet one also must not run along with them or indulge them. This requires getting the balance right; it is comparatively subtle.

The third step is, “dwelling in the realm of delusive thinking, do not add discrimination.” What does it mean to dwell in the realm of delusive thinking? It means to be in this condition where delusive thinking is neither pressed to death nor indulged. Actually, the sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, the great earth, self and others, sentient beings, flowers, birds, fish, insects, and all such phenomena belong to the “realm of delusive thinking”; they are all accumulations of delusive thinking. If delusive thinking had not accumulated, there would be no such realm of self and others. Because we do not recognize suchness, our own nature, ignorance stirs delusively and pursues and grasps at the marks of objects; as a result, these objective appearances are brought forth. Yet we continue to take the false as real and cling to and grasp them delusively. How confused this is! Because of confusion, karma is created; because of karma, retribution is undergone. Thus the six paths of saṃsāra are brought forth where none existed, and a boundless sea of suffering where there was none.

You may say, “I feel these are quite real. Why do I not feel that this is a realm of delusive thinking?” This is subtle. Your mind is coarse and cannot detect subtle aspects; you must engage in subtler practice. How does one practice at this subtler level? “Dwelling in the realm of delusive thinking, do not add discrimination.” Within the condition where delusive thinking is neither pressed to death nor indulged, do not add discrimination. Why not add discrimination? Because every phenomenon bearing characteristics belongs to the realm of delusive thinking, and it is also manifested by true mind. The realm of delusive thinking is true mind, and true mind is the realm of delusive thinking. Without true mind, where could realms of delusive thinking come from? It is like there being no waves without water and no images without a mirror. Therefore do not discriminate, grasp, or reject this realm of delusive thinking. This is “not adding discrimination.”

The fourth step is, “when no discrimination is added, do not distinguish true reality.” Our mind is always caught in relative oppositions such as existence and non-existence, true and false. In fact, all this is the mischief of the discriminating mind. All such notions of existence and nonexistence, truth and falsity, are conceptual proliferation. To say “existent” is the slander of addition: it is simply as it is, yet you add another “existent,” plainly duplicating what is already so and gratuitously adding to it; that amounts to slandering it. To say “non-existent” is the slander of diminution: originally it is utterly unobtainable, so what need is there to diminish it? If you add another “non-existent,” is that not the slander of diminution? To say “both existent and non-existent” is the slander of contradiction—self-contradiction. To say “neither existent nor non-existent” is the slander of conceptual proliferation. Existent, non-existent, both existent and non-existent, neither existent nor non-existent: all four statements are slander of the Dharma. Relative dharmas such as true and false are likewise—all are like this.

Only by directly realizing suchness—one's self-nature—can one leave behind every kind of relativity. The slightest deviation falls back into relative oppositions such as existence and non-existence, true and false. This is extremely subtle. "Do not distinguish true reality" means do not discriminate that this is true and that is false. True is false; false is true. True is false and false is true; neither true nor false, neither false nor true; also true and also false, also false and also true. For example, in practicing Pure Land, if one says that the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is true and our Sahā world is false, that is mistaken. If the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is true, then our world here is true too. If the Sahā world is false, then the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is false too.

Why say this? Because all things flow out from the one true Dharma realm. They are all derivative manifestations of suchness, self-nature; they are all waves in the great ocean of perfect awakening. As it is said, "Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm." This Dharma realm is the great ocean of perfect awakening. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is a pure land because it is manifested through the power of Amitābha Buddha's vows and the pure minds of the great bodhisattvas. Our Sahā world is a defiled land because it is manifested by sentient beings like us clinging to circumstances and creating karma. Yet clinging to circumstances and creating karma is also the wondrous function of true mind. In terms of true mind, all of it is real. Viewed as reflections, all of it is false. "All marks whatsoever are false." The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is also a reflection of true mind. After recognizing the wondrous essence of true mind, one is absolutely assured of birth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

"Mind itself is land, and land itself is mind. As the mind is pure, so the Buddha-land is pure." What is called "birth in a pure land" is actually birth in the pure land within one's own mind. Naturally, it requires no effort at all; there is no need for coming and going. Therefore a great patriarch said, "The one born is definitely born; the one going actually does not go."

"One should know that whatever arises is all conduct of the Way within the originally pure nature." We should know that all functioning that arises, every thought that arises, and everything we recognize are all "conduct of the Way" within the "originally pure nature." The originally pure nature is suchness, self-nature. Conduct of the Way refers to activity in practicing the Way; this is precisely the wondrous function of suchness, self-nature. We should know that everything that arises is the wondrous function of suchness, self-nature.

"When practice reaches this point, there is not the slightest clinging or stagnation; delusive thoughts are all conduct of the Way, unfolding wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges." "When practice reaches this point" means when practice has reached this stage. What stage? The stage of lucidly knowing that whatever arises is all conduct of the Way within the originally pure nature. If practice reaches this point, there is not the slightest clinging or stagnation. Clinging to delusive mind and delusive conditions without letting them go is what "clinging" means. Stopping and not advancing on the unsurpassed Way is called "stagnation." Without clinging, one no longer abides in marks, no longer discriminates and

grasps or rejects, and the mind is naturally open and empty. Without clinging there is no stagnation, and one naturally advances swiftly on the great path of practice. Then the thoughts that arise are all “conduct of the Way, unfolding wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.”

The Ganges is a great river in India, and the sand in it is very fine. One can imagine how numerous the grains of sand in the Ganges must be. Buddhist scriptures often use “sands of the Ganges” as an analogy for great number. “Wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges” means infinitely many wondrous functions. As just discussed, conduct of the Way is conduct in practicing the Way. In ordinary speech, when we say that a certain great Dharma master has profound conduct of the Way, we mean his grounding in practice is deep and solid. Therefore conduct of the Way also refers to the foundation of practice. When one reaches this stage and there is not the slightest clinging or stagnation, delusive thoughts become conduct of the Way and can unfold immeasurable, boundless wondrous functions.

“Because no-thought is precisely having thoughts, and having thoughts is precisely no-thought; thinking yet not thinking, not thinking yet thinking.” Is it not excellent to be without delusive thoughts? Why did we just say that “delusive thoughts are all conduct of the Way, unfolding wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges”? Because no-thought is having thoughts, and having thoughts is no-thought; thinking yet not thinking, not thinking yet thinking. Earlier, when discussing the four sentences of the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment, we analyzed existence and non-existence, true and false, and the like at sufficient length, so here we will not repeat too much explanation of “no-thought is having thoughts ... not thinking yet thinking.” I believe everyone can infer the rest from one example and understand correctly.

Briefly stated: no-thought is having thoughts—what thoughts does it have? Right mindfulness. Right mindfulness is “clear and distinct.” Having thoughts is no-thought—it has no deviant thoughts. Deviant thoughts are thoughts of “clinging and stagnation.” Thinking yet not thinking is “playing ball on swift water”—“thought after thought does not remain.” Not thinking yet thinking is “when delusive thoughts cease, purity is obtained accordingly.” Comparing these with the four sentences of the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: no-thought is having thoughts—“at all times do not give rise to delusive thoughts,” where there is a thought of “not giving rise to delusive thoughts”; having thoughts is no-thought—“with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either”; thinking yet not thinking—“dwelling in the realm of delusive thinking, do not add discrimination”; not thinking yet thinking—“when no discrimination is added, do not distinguish true reality,” meaning no discrimination, grasping, or rejecting: this is pure right mindfulness.

Layman Pang of the Tang dynasty composed a verse: “If you have a son, do not arrange his marriage; if you have a daughter, do not marry her off. The whole family sits together, speaking words of non-arising.” Layman Yang Jie of the Song dynasty, not to be outdone by his predecessors, composed a matching verse: “When a man grows up, he should marry; when a

woman grows up, she should wed. Why waste idle effort speaking again of non-arising?" Chan Master Haiyin Xin, seeing these two verses, also responded with one: "I have no son to marry, and no daughter to wed. When tired I simply sleep; why bother with talk of non-arising?" Seeing these three ancient ones, I too wrote a matching verse: "If there is a son, let him marry; if there is a daughter, let her wed. Children and grandchildren continue on and on—this is speaking words of non-arising." Everyone, from these four verses, can you see even the slightest clinging or fixation? If you ask, "The four verses seem to have different positions: after all, should one marry or not, should one wed or not?" then you yourself are caught in the words. "To interpret the meaning by following the words is to wrong the Buddhas of the three times!" We too can only seal our lips and say no more.

10.13 恒河大手印（第十三讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Thirteen)

III. Relying on Delusive Thoughts to Train in the Dharmakāya (continued)

"Even as a thought is arising, no thought that could arise can be found. This is called no-thought. It is not the ordinary idea that no thought whatsoever arises and that this is no-thought."

So-called no-thought does not mean that not even one thought arises. It means that even though thoughts arise, they do not abide anywhere and do not stagnate or remain. The no-thought imagined by ordinary people as "not one thought arising" is the suppression of thoughts so that they do not arise. They think that having no thoughts at all is good practice. In fact, to remain dead there in this way not only fails to accomplish the Way; one may instead end up like earth, wood, metal, or stone.

Have you not seen the gong'an of how the Sixth Patriarch rescued Chan Master Wolun? Wolun first thought that suppressing thoughts so they did not arise was good practice, and therefore composed a verse: "Wolun has a skill; he can cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day." Seeing that he had entered a dead end, the Sixth Patriarch rescued him with this: "Huineng has no skill; he does not cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing objects, his mind arises repeatedly; how could bodhi grow?"

For mind to arise is precisely no arising of mind; for thought to move is precisely no movement of thought. The Sixth Patriarch was non-abiding. "Facing objects, his mind arises repeatedly" means that wondrous functioning unfolds. If there were no arising of mind or movement of thought at all, one would simply be dead there. What wondrous functioning could then unfold? Could one still teach Dharma to people? One could not.

Bodhi is self-nature. It is unborn and undying, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. It is not decreased in ordinary beings; even in hell it is not less. It is not increased in sages and worthies; even when Buddhahood is accomplished it is not more. In ancient

times someone asked a great Chan master, "What is it like after awakening?" The master answered, "Not increased by even one part." The person asked again, "And before awakening?" He answered, "Not decreased by even one part." Therefore Wolun was wrong when he said, "bodhi grows day by day."

"Relying on delusive thoughts, train in the dharmakāya: then all appearing delusive thoughts are adjusted so as to manifest as the wondrous experience of self-nature. That is, even the coarse delusive thoughts manifested by the five poisons can all be endowed with the luminous power of self-liberation, so that luminosity and emptiness become lived experience."

Relying on the arising and ceasing of delusive thoughts to train in the dharmakāya means this: when delusive thoughts arise, immediately become aware of them, recognize them, and do not run along with them. It does not mean pressing delusive thoughts to death so that they do not move. One must remain aware and maintain clear observation at every moment, and not run along with delusive thoughts. If one runs along with delusive thoughts and becomes attached to circumstances, that will not do.

Therefore the Pure Land school emphasizes buddha-recitation at every moment. This is not so that you pursue large recitation counts or cling to marks of merit. It is to keep you alert so that you recognize and protect the dharmakāya. Our practice must address delusive thoughts directly. There is no second method. Whether one practices Buddha-recitation, recites mantras, or investigates Chan, the purpose is to regulate these delusive thoughts. Thus, relying on delusive thoughts to train in the dharmakāya means practicing directly with delusive thoughts, cutting off their continuity so they do not carry on without end. All Buddhadharma is training in the dharmakāya; all of it is practice directed at delusive thoughts. Do not treat buddha-recitation as a way of accumulating merit tied to marks. That is a mistake.

For this reason Master Lianchi said, "Sound after sound, awaken the true host." Buddha-recitation awakens the true host; it is meant to awaken you. If you know how to practice directly with delusive thoughts, relying on delusive thoughts to train in the dharmakāya, "then all delusive thoughts that appear are adjusted so as to manifest as the wondrous experience of self-nature. That is, even the coarse delusive thoughts manifested by the five poisons can all be endowed with the strength in the Way and luminosity of self-liberation and enter a state of luminous, numinous openness."

In other words, one can transform the poison of the "five aggregates" into the wondrous experience of self-nature, making them tools for practice and realization and provisions for attaining Buddhahood. If we regulate our own mind well, do not abide in marks, do not abide in circumstances, and do not give rise to affliction, we gain profound experiential benefit. Here, "wondrous experience" means a subtle, excellent experience that is deeply beneficial.

Gaining genuine experiential benefit is good, but craving sensual enjoyment is harmful. In Chinese, the two expressions differ by only one character, yet they are as far apart as heaven and earth. If one insists on fine food and clothes, seeks romantic company, dances, watches movies, and indulges in nightlife, luxury, and sensual excess, and then commits crimes when these conditions are unavailable in order to obtain such enjoyment, it has gone badly wrong. This is craving enjoyment.

But if at all times the mind is empty and non-abiding, peaceful and at ease, without chasing external objects; if even plain porridge is enough and a broken thatched hut causes no concern; if one's heart is open and broad, one's conscience at ease, and one remains content, joyful, and free amid changing conditions—this is what Yuan Yin means by wondrous benefit. When one knows how to practice directly with delusive thoughts and regulate one's self-nature, one naturally gains it.

"With an even, open mind, all traces naturally fade away."

"An even, open mind" means that there is not the slightest crookedness in the mind: it is even, straightforward, and open. "All traces naturally fade away" means that the mind is open and empty, without the slightest affliction. How beautiful this is! Thus, practicing Buddhism brings profound experiential benefit and unfolds great wisdom. Practicing Buddhism is not about seeking something. As soon as there is seeking and expectation, it has gone wrong. Seeking blessings or spiritual powers is not Buddhist practice; seeking wealth or official position is even further from it. Everything is false, like flowers in the sky and the moon in water. In the end, it all comes to nothing.

Therefore we must recognize the true mind at every moment. We must rely on delusive thoughts to train in the dharmakāya, and not let delusive thoughts cover the true mind. Recognize that delusive thoughts are the wondrous functioning arising from true mind; thereby, not abiding in marks, one gains genuine experiential benefit and does not give rise to affliction. What happens in reverse? If one does not know how to rely on delusive thoughts to train in the dharmakāya, afflictions become endless and desire becomes insatiable. Having one hundred, one wants one thousand; having one thousand, one wants ten thousand; having ten thousand, one wants ten million or a hundred million. There will never be a time of satisfaction, and affliction and suffering will have no end.

"All delusive thoughts are wondrous functions arising within the field of conditions fully manifest and known within self-nature."

This further explains the dependent arising of delusive thoughts. Delusive thoughts indeed arise from true mind, but without objective conditions there would be no way for them to arise. These objective conditions constitute the "field of conditions fully manifest and known within self-nature." As we have said repeatedly above, sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, the great earth, self and others, sentient beings, flowers, birds, insects, and fish are all manifestations of self-nature.

But since these are all objective conditions for ordinary beings, why do they differ in many ways? This is because of karmic conditioning. Ordinary beings do not recognize self-nature and therefore are deluded. Because of delusion they create karma; because of karma they undergo retribution. Mountains, rivers, and the great earth appear through collective karma, while the twelve classes of beings appear through individual karma. Because the causes of good and evil differ, the objective conditions that appear also differ.

All these different objective conditions are responsively manifest and fully known within self-nature. They have no independent reality and are false, delusive, and unreal. From the standpoint of self-nature, cause is present within it, and result is present within it as well. Self-nature transcends cause and result. These many different objective conditions all belong to the "field of conditions fully manifest and known within self-nature." This is what is called the object-aspect of the eighth consciousness.

The seeing-aspect of the eighth consciousness then discriminates, grasps, and rejects the object-aspect. This discrimination, grasping, and rejecting is what is called delusive thought. It is one and the same eighth consciousness—the ālayavijñāna. In delusion it is the eighth consciousness; in awakening it is the tathāgatagarbha mind. Therefore, if one can "rely on delusive thoughts to train in the dharmakāya"—returning from delusion to awakening—then "all delusive thoughts are wondrous functions arising within the field of conditions fully manifest and known within self-nature." Delusive thoughts are the wondrous functioning arising from true mind.

"Protect and sustain it with a mind free of grasping and rejecting, for the arising and ceasing of delusive thoughts cannot go beyond the realm of the dharmakāya's sovereign wondrous functioning."

As the name implies, "delusive thoughts" are false and unreal thoughts. Since they discriminate, grasp, and reject false and unreal external objects, their discrimination, grasping, and rejection are also false and unreal. Although delusive thoughts are "delusive," they are the wondrous functioning of true mind. Once one has recognized true mind, one must properly "protect and sustain it." To protect is to guard; to sustain is to maintain. Guard it well and maintain its position as the true host. For this reason, true mind is also called the host.

How should one protect and sustain it? "Protect and sustain it with a mind of neither grasping nor rejecting." One must protect the true mind by not grasping or rejecting external objects. Toward all external objects, do not give rise to discriminating thoughts: "This thing is good; I must obtain it. That thing is bad; I must discard it." Do not have a mind of attachment and aversion, grasping and rejection. Removing this mind of attachment and aversion, grasping and rejection is protecting true mind. The reason we do not attain liberation is that we go wrong precisely at attachment, aversion, grasping, and rejection. "Ah! This gold is so good; I must get it. This place is bad; I must leave quickly."

Speaking of this brings to mind a modern gong'an. There was a Dharma master in Hangzhou who said, "Many people lecture on the Diamond Sutra, but I can defeat them with one sentence. The Diamond Sutra says there is no mark of person, no mark of self, no mark of purity, and no mark of defilement. Well then, here is a lump of excrement. Since you claim there are no marks, eat it!" This is not a challenge to those who lecture on the Diamond Sutra; it challenges the meaning of the Diamond Sutra itself. In fact, his question is very easy to answer. One could answer him: "Please bring it over in your mouth." Since you are telling me to eat it, please carry it here in your mouth. That is the polite answer. If one were impolite, one would shout at him: "Hey! You Dharma master have actually been buried by a lump of excrement."

When he saw that lump of excrement, he attached to a mark; this is equivalent to being buried by excrement. All of this is the mischief of the discriminating mind of attachment and aversion, grasping and rejection. Therefore we must not give rise to attachment and aversion, grasping and rejection toward external objects. This is protecting true mind.

Why should one protect true mind in this way? "Because their arising and ceasing cannot go beyond the realm of the dharmakāya's sovereign wondrous functioning." The arising and ceasing of delusive thoughts cannot go beyond the realm of the dharmakāya's sovereign wondrous functioning. The wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya embraces everything; therefore it is called "king." The arising and ceasing of delusive thoughts is of course also within the realm of the dharmakāya's sovereign wondrous functioning; it does not go beyond the scope of true mind's wondrous functioning. Therefore, even though delusive thoughts arise and cease, as long as I do not follow them, am not led by them, and am not moved by them, that is protecting true mind.

"Although delusive thoughts bear images of form conditioned by ignorance, their nature does not lie outside the purity of the wisdom-dharmakāya."

The Heart Sutra says, "Clearly seeing that the five aggregates are all empty." The five aggregates are also called the five skandhas: form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. The form aggregate belongs to material phenomena, which have forms. Men and women, old and young, mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests are all forms and appearances. Feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are mental phenomena, which have no form. Delusive thinking belongs to mental dharmas. Why, then, is it said that delusive thoughts "bear images of form conditioned by ignorance"?

For delusive thoughts to arise is to have abiding and grasping. What do they grasp? They grasp illusory images of material phenomena—they grasp at forms. When a delusive thought arises, an image of form appears in the mind. Therefore it is said that delusive thoughts "bear images of form conditioned by ignorance." In truth, mental dharmas are material dharmas and material dharmas are mental dharmas. Apart from true mind, how could there be two

dharmas? But because of ignorance, as soon as a mental dharma moves, it is an image of material form; hence it is called an image of form conditioned by ignorance.

These images of form conditioned by ignorance are likewise false, delusive, and unobtainable. If you can "rely on delusive thoughts to train in the dharmakāya," then "all delusive thoughts that appear are transformed into the wondrous experience of self-nature." Why can delusive thoughts be transformed into wondrous experience? Because "their nature does not lie outside the purity of the wisdom-dharmakāya." Here, "their nature" means the nature of the delusive thoughts themselves. That nature is false and unreal; one may also say that delusive thoughts have no self-nature.

They are like "flowers in the sky"—as if one sees flowers in empty space. This happens because the eyes are diseased; there is a cataract in the eye, and then one sees flowers in the sky. In fact there are no flowers in the sky. A cataract in the eye is an analogy for the delusive thinking and attachment of one's own mind. Seeing flowers in the sky is an analogy for taking the false to be real and delusively grasping and appropriating. Not only is one deluded about empty space—failing to see the true suchness nature—one also fails to discern where the apparent flowers actually arise: one cannot understand that delusive thoughts and delusive objects are both the wondrous functioning of true mind.

Ignorance and delusive thoughts are all like flowers in the sky: they have no independent reality and are all false and delusive. But why can they arise? It is because we possess the numinously bright true mind. True mind is like the great ocean; delusive thoughts are like waves. Without the ocean there are no waves; without true mind, from where would delusive thoughts come? True mind is the wisdom-dharmakāya, and true mind is originally pure. Therefore the nature of delusive thoughts does not lie outside the purity of the wisdom-dharmakāya. The Song of Realizing the Way says, "The real nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature; the illusory, transformed body, empty in itself, is the dharmakāya." The real nature of ignorance is suchness, Buddha-nature; the originally empty body that is like illusion and transformation is the wisdom-dharmakāya. Because the false body and mind have not gone beyond the scope of the pure wisdom-dharmakāya, this is true reality; this is the one true Dharma realm.

"Therefore, within the illumination of vast, unbroken luminosity, the nature of delusive thoughts is originally empty."

What is "vast, unbroken luminosity"? It is our wisdom-dharmakāya. The dharmakāya is incomparably vast, forever unbroken, and immeasurably luminous. The Amitābha Sutra says, "That Buddha's light is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction; therefore he is called Amitābha." Amitābha means immeasurable light and immeasurable life. Immeasurable light is the vastness of space; immeasurable life is the unbrokenness of time. Amitābha is "vast, unbroken luminosity."

In our practice, whether practicing Buddha-recitation, investigating Chan, or practicing Esoteric Dharma, all of it is practice directed at the mind. When the mind is empty and pure, great light will shine forth. Why does this light not shine forth now? Because it is covered by ignorance, just as a pearl wrapped in filthy mud cannot show its brightness. But although it is not seen, it is still there. In fact, luminosity has never left us. In daily life—working, writing, creating, inventing, and so on—all of these are still luminosity and the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya; they simply have not yet unfolded fully.

Within the clear illumination of this vast, unbroken luminosity, the nature of all delusive thoughts is originally empty and quiescent. Do not fear delusive thoughts. When delusive thoughts settle, that is true mind. If delusive thoughts arise, they should be like lines drawn on water, disappearing as they are drawn. Do not let them remain; do not attach to them. Immediately become sharply aware, and let the thought dissolve as it arises and ceases. Pure Land practice takes up the Buddha-name, Chan arouses the doubt-sensation, and Esoteric practice employs mudrās and mantras—all of these are for transforming delusive thoughts and protecting true mind. If one proceeds in this way steadily and continuously, after only a few years of practice one will certainly accomplish it.

What is feared is that we are unwilling to do this, unwilling to protect it continuously and closely, and instead allow delusive thoughts to fly about chaotically, indulging them and letting them blaze up like a great fire. Then accomplishment is impossible. Therefore, as long as one recognizes that the nature of delusive thoughts is originally empty, one need not fear them. They are the wondrous functioning of true mind; this itself is conduct of the Way. The purpose of practicing Buddha-recitation, investigating Chan, and practicing Esoteric Dharma is to cut off their continuity and not wander along with them. If no delusive thoughts seep through, the karmic causes of saṃsāra are cut off.

"If one thus habituates and practices for a long time, then delusive thoughts naturally regulate themselves; movement and stillness are undivided, and one attains indestructible abiding."

Stay with it morning and evening, whether wandering or in adversity, practicing at every moment and never forgetting it; this is called long-term habituation. Here, "practice" means actually carrying it out, while "sustaining the practice" means persisting in it over the long term. If one habituates and practices for a long time in this way, then "delusive thoughts naturally regulate themselves; movement and stillness are undivided, and one attains indestructible abiding."

For delusive thoughts to regulate themselves means that you do not need to subdue them; they subdue themselves. In practice, we are like people herding oxen. At the beginning one must discipline and train the ox at every moment. After it has been tamed, one need not manage it and it still obeys. At that time, thoughts arise when needed and do not arise when unneeded. They arise only to perform a function. This is success in practice. Ordinary beings cannot govern their thoughts: even when they do not want thoughts to arise, they still arise,

jumping out of the mind by themselves; therefore they are called delusive thoughts. If practitioners are also like this, their practice has not been done properly. They must then correct their understanding and practice diligently.

"Movement and stillness are not divided" means that whether in movement or stillness, whether sitting in meditation or working, there is no distinction: all is like this. Thoughts move when needed and remain still when not needed. Movement and stillness are of one suchness. Precisely when thoughts are arising, one still does not see where any thought arises from. This is to be at all times without any thought that can arise. It is not a dead pool of water without a single thought; it is simply non-abiding. When one reaches this point, one "obtains indestructible abiding"—this abiding can no longer be broken.

This physical body of ours will break down and die; when conditions are exhausted, the four elements will separate. But the dharmakāya does not break down. To obtain indestructible abiding is to accomplish the Way. Mahāmudrā teaches us to practice with the mind. There is no need to practice some other Dharma gate. Practicing directly with the mind is enough. Maintain clear observation at every moment, like drawing pictures on water, without the slightest abiding. If one practices in this way, over time delusive thoughts are naturally tamed; then the fruit of the Way matures and one obtains indestructible abiding. Therefore the highest-division practices of Esoteric Buddhism are the same as Chan. Chan also teaches practice through no-practice. Thus the mind-ground Dharma gate is extremely important.

"When the practice has been carried to its utmost, although delusive thoughts of joy, worry, and doubt appear just as they do in ordinary beings, one does not, like ordinary beings, cling to formation and destruction as real, accumulate karmic actions, or get carried along by the force of craving."

Here, "carrying the practice to its utmost" means bringing this practice of clear observation to its fullest extent. At this time, "although delusive thoughts of joy, worry, and doubt appear just as in ordinary beings," when bad things happen one worries, when good things happen one rejoices, and when handling affairs one may still have doubts—but this is definitely not doubt toward the teacher or the Dharma, and definitely not doubt concerning the fundamentals. These states of joy, worry, and doubt are delusive thoughts, just like the joy, worry, and doubt of ordinary beings.

"Yet unlike them, one does not cling to formation and destruction as real." That is, one is not like ordinary beings, taking the circumstances one likes, worries over, or doubts about to be truly existent. Although the delusive thoughts of joy, worry, and doubt may move for a moment, one does not cling to them rigidly. One understands that "all marks whatsoever are false" and does not think there is anything real that comes into being or is destroyed. Ordinary beings take phenomena projected by delusive thinking as real, and their minds are constantly uneasy, brooding over them day and night. Affliction upon affliction! Ordinary beings pass their whole lives in delusive thinking and affliction. How bitter this is! This is

delusion. Because of delusion they create karma, and because of karma they undergo retribution: this is "accumulating karmic actions and being carried along by the force of craving." Ordinary beings cannot remain in command of themselves; instead they are carried along by the force of craving.

People who practice genuinely and have carried their practice to its utmost may also have "delusive thoughts of joy, worry, and doubt," but these turn and pass immediately. They are not carried along by the force of craving; they do not brood over them or calculate endlessly day and night. Therefore they are different. When they encounter something sad, it is not that they do not cry. When they encounter something happy, it is not that they do not laugh. But after one bout of crying or one burst of laughter, it is over; inwardly the mind remains level and even. A person who has "carried the practice to its utmost" is not someone who cannot laugh when happy, or cannot cry when sad. Such a person is not a dead person or a wooden figure. When practice has reached that point, joy, laughter, anger, and scolding are all Buddhadharmas; all are conduct of the Way.

IV. Essentials for Practicing Mahāmudrā and Several Possible Deviations

"When a thought arises, at first one recognizes the appearance of that delusive thought, and its appearance disappears accordingly, like meeting an old acquaintance. Next, delusive thoughts are certain to vanish of themselves, like a snake-knot untying itself. Finally, delusive thoughts quietly fade away, neither beneficial nor harmful, like a thief entering an empty room. This is the most essential and wondrous method of liberation."

When delusive thoughts arise, at the beginning of practice, one recognizes the appearance of each delusive thought, and that appearance immediately disappears, just like meeting someone one used to know. But after this familiar person leaves, there is still an image in the mind. Although the delusive thought has disappeared, its image still remains.

Next, when practice has improved somewhat, delusive thoughts will certainly arise and cease by themselves, like a snake that has been tied in a knot and can untie itself—the attached mind has loosened. When practice reaches its final stage, "delusive thoughts quietly fade away, neither beneficial nor harmful." It is not that the arising of delusive thoughts is harmful, or that their cessation is beneficial. Rather, they are neither beneficial nor harmful and naturally fade away. Even though delusive thoughts arise, I know this is the wondrous functioning of true mind; therefore I do not abide in them, and they naturally disappear. One no longer gives rise to discrimination with regard to delusive thoughts.

Some practitioners like to discriminate: "Ah! My delusive thoughts are not arising; this is beneficial, my practice has improved." Or, "Oh no! My delusive thoughts have arisen again; this is harmful, harmful—I have regressed." In fact, delusive thoughts originally have no self-nature and have no good or bad. As long as we practice earnestly, in the end we will no longer give rise to the discriminating mind of "benefit" and "harm," and delusive thoughts will naturally fade away as they arise. "Like a thief entering an empty room" means there is

nothing to steal. "This is the most essential and wondrous method of liberation." This is the most important and most wondrous method for liberating delusive thoughts.

Because this is "the most essential and wondrous method of liberation," the following again explains these three levels of practice. When delusive thoughts arise, first recognize them and do not run along with them; the delusive thoughts disappear accordingly. But at the very beginning, the strength of our recognition of delusive thoughts is not sufficient. Although the delusive thoughts have disappeared, there are still their images and traces in our mind. It is like meeting an old acquaintance: although the person has gone away, our mind begins stirring—this person has not been seen for many years; what was he like in the past, and how is he now? Although the person has left, the image remains. Although delusive thoughts have disappeared, their images and traces still remain. This is because the power is not yet sufficient.

Next, one further recognizes delusive thoughts and knows that they are certain to disappear by themselves. The strength of recognition is greater than before. Yet the illusory appearance of delusive thoughts is still present, and it remains for a period of time before disappearing. This is like a "snake-knot untying itself." A snake would not tie itself in a knot, but if you tie a knot in it, after some time it will be able to untie itself. When practice reaches this point, even when the "old acquaintance" leaves, the mind will no longer be stirred and churned up. Compared with before, this is another step forward.

Further still, one recognizes that delusive thoughts are without benefit and without harm. The arising and ceasing of delusive thoughts has nothing to do with me. Because true mind does not move or shake, my true mind is not diminished by one part because delusive thoughts arise, and is not increased by one part because delusive thoughts cease. True mind has no increase or decrease. Therefore delusive thoughts are without benefit or harm; let them arise and cease as they will. It is most important to recognize this point. It is best and most wondrous to accomplish this. If, after delusive thoughts have arisen, we still let them revolve in the mind, cannot let them go, and keep mulling them over, this is because our strength is insufficient.

Many people are like this. At night they have a dream; after waking they still want to think it over—what was this dream like, what was that dream like—and still want to tell others about it. If we can do this instead: know it was a dream, pay no attention to it, and leave not the slightest trace in the mind, then there is real strength in the practice. "Like meeting an old acquaintance," "like a snake-knot untying itself," and "like a thief entering an empty room" are different levels in how we regard delusive thoughts and in the strength with which we let them dissolve. Each of you should examine for yourself: at which level can you eliminate delusive thoughts?

"Knowing how to practice but not understanding is no different from the dhyāna heavens."

Practicing without running along with delusive thoughts, yet not understanding that "all delusive thoughts are wondrous functions arising within the field of conditions fully manifest and known within self-nature"—this is what is meant by "knowing how to practice but not understanding." If one knows only how to practice the Way but does not know what true mind is or recognize it, this amounts only to attainment of the dhyāna heavens. If you practice diligently in this way and even carry the practice to its utmost, with considerable depth in samādhi, but do not recognize true mind, then at most you will be born in the first dhyāna heaven, second dhyāna heaven, third dhyāna heaven, or fourth dhyāna heaven. You still will not leave the form realm. Let alone liberation—you will not even have reached the formless realm.

"If one's practice lacks this essential understanding, then even if the mind remains firmly in meditative absorption, one will still fall into the absorptions of the higher realms."

Practice that lacks this essential understanding is precisely "knowing how to practice but not understanding." Although the mind can remain firmly in meditative absorption, meaning that the mind can remain unmoving and enter very deep absorption for one year, two years, three years, or even one kalpa, two kalpas, or thousands and millions of kalpas, one will still only "fall into the absorptions of the higher realms." At most, one falls into the absorptions of the four dhyāna heavens or the four formless heavens. This is still the meditative absorption of the form realm and the formless realm; it is still within the three realms and is not liberation.

If one does not recognize and take up true mind, one cannot leave the three realms; one is the same as practitioners of non-Buddhist paths. Why can practitioners of non-Buddhist paths not leave the three realms? Because they do not know what true mind is. They cling to the yang-spirit, taking it to be real and indestructible. The yang-spirit is what Buddhism calls the mind-made body; it is a body arising from the seventh consciousness, the mind faculty, and is still a false reflection. The Diamond Sutra says, "All marks whatsoever are false." Every phenomenon bearing characteristics is false. The yang-spirit is also false; it does not leave the three realms and is not ultimate.

Only by recognizing and taking up suchness, self-nature, and diligently protecting it can one practice in this way and accomplish the great Way. We have said again and again: everyone must protect the Dharma-essence of suchness well. One must remain lucidly and continuously aware, without abiding, and protect it steadily and continuously at every moment. Over time, one will naturally realize and accomplish the great Way; one will certainly accomplish it. Recognizing and taking up true mind is like obtaining rice. Then one cooks it over a fire and it becomes rice. What is meant by using fire to cook it is protecting it at every moment, not allowing delusive thoughts to invade or disturb it anywhere, not running along with delusive thoughts, and keeping the mind empty and without abiding. Then one is certain to become a Buddha. This is extremely important. If one does not practice in this way, then even if one enters deeply into samādhi and remains there for a long time, one still cannot realize and accomplish the great Way.

Many people today admire depth in samādhi: "Oh, this Dharma master's practice is very good; he has been in samādhi for a week." "Oh, no, no! That Dharma master's practice is even better; he has been in samādhi for three months." Here we must shout at them: No! That is dead samādhi. It absolutely cannot realize and accomplish the great Way. True meditative absorption means not being deluded by circumstances and remaining non-abiding at all times. If one is settled during formal sitting but loses that stability outside formal sitting, how can that be adequate? It cannot. Therefore, if one does not recognize and take up the Dharma-essence of suchness but engages in blind, misguided practice, one certainly cannot accomplish the Way. One must recognize and take up true mind, and practice by protecting it, in order to accomplish the great Way. This is an extremely important principle that Buddhist practitioners must understand.

"If one is satisfied merely with knowing the arising and abiding of delusive thoughts, one is no different from those of inferior capacity who are wild and confused."

Some people practice and, once they know the arising and abiding of delusive thoughts, they are satisfied. They say: "Oh, I understand. I know how delusive thoughts arise and what they abide in. Where do delusive thoughts arise from? Delusive thoughts arise from circumstances; they are reflections of circumstances. Where do delusive thoughts abide? They abide in circumstances. Delusive thoughts do indeed arise from circumstances. Without circumstances, there are no delusive thoughts." "Mind originally has no arising; it exists because of objects"—this was taught by Viśvabhū Buddha. But how do circumstances themselves arise? If one is satisfied merely with knowing where delusive thoughts arise and abide, then "one is no different from those of inferior capacity who are wild and confused."

This is no different from the wild confusion of those of inferior capacity. Buddhadharma is a sublime and wondrous Dharma: with samādhi one does not run wild, and with wisdom one is not confused. Such wildness and confusion are not Buddhadharma. Those who are satisfied merely with knowing where delusive thoughts arise and abide are of the lowest capacity. What use is it merely to know their arising and abiding? One must recognize and take up the Dharma-essence of suchness, make it the basis of practice, and clearly observe and protect it at all times and in all places. Only then can one accomplish the Way. To merely know the arising and abiding of delusive thoughts and fantasize about accomplishing the Way is like cooking rice with sand; even after ten million kalpas, it will still never become rice.

"Or one may incline one-sidedly toward emptiness and entertain such conceptual deliberations as seeking confirmation and accord with the dharmakāya. But when one meets adverse conditions, one's practice cannot free one from the grip of circumstances; instead one's own faults become manifest."

Those who take knowing the arising and abiding of delusive thoughts to be sufficient are of course people of lower faculties, because they are attached to circumstances and think circumstances truly exist. But "inclining one-sidedly toward emptiness" will not do either.

Attaching to existence is of course wrong; falling into emptiness is also wrong. Why? Because our dharmakāya is neither empty nor existent, both empty and existent. It is not emptiness, nor is it existence; to say it exists is wrong, and to say it is empty is also wrong.

"Seeking confirmation of accord with the dharmakāya": "Seal" means confirmation, while "accord" means consonance. The phrase means seeking confirmation of one's accord with the dharmakāya. If one has fallen into one-sided emptiness, one does not accord with the dharmakāya; how could such confirmation and accord be possible? Therefore this can only be called "conceptual deliberation." The dharmakāya does not fall within conceptual deliberation. As soon as one falls into conceptual deliberation, one goes against the dharmakāya. All kinds of conceptual deliberations that attach to emptiness or attach to existence do not accord with the dharmakāya.

"But when one meets adverse conditions, one's practice cannot free one from the grip of circumstances; instead one's own faults become manifest." When these people who incline one-sidedly toward emptiness meet adverse conditions, their practice cannot free them from the grip of these circumstances, and they remain bound by them. Their "emptiness" is only a conceptual deliberation; when real events arise, they cannot see them as empty. They are still holding an idea of emptiness; has that idea not itself become an existent thing?

In the past, there was an elder in Shanghai's Pudong who said, "You people say empty, empty. Then why are there still mountains, rivers, the great earth, men and women, old and young?" He understood emptiness to mean that there is nothing at all. This is not the same as the emptiness we understand. When we speak of emptiness, we mean seeing appearances as empty: do not abide in their marks; their unobtainability is emptiness. "All marks whatsoever are false" means only that one should not attach to marks. Appearances still manifest. Without appearances, how could wondrous functioning arise? If this house were absent, how could we take shelter from wind and rain? If this stool were absent, how could we sit at ease? "Dharmas arisen from causes and conditions—I say they are emptiness." They have no essence of their own and no self-nature; that is emptiness. It does not mean that appearances do not exist.

Conceptualizing "emptiness" is useless; when circumstances are encountered, one will not be able to see through them as empty. Our self-nature is neither empty nor existent, both empty and existent; existence is emptiness, and emptiness is existence. Existence itself, in its very actuality, is unobtainable—this is true emptiness. If one clings to one-sided emptiness and does not recognize self-nature, one has no strength and cannot pass through circumstances. If one recognizes self-nature, all kinds of circumstances are nothing other than the wondrous functioning of self-nature, just like images in a mirror and waves on water. Recognizing the mirror and knowing the water, one will not be deluded by the images and waves; all circumstances naturally become easy to see through as empty. If one does not recognize self-nature, one cannot see through them in this way. Our first priority is to recognize the Dharma-essence of suchness. This is the most important thing of all. Therefore apprehending Mind and

seeing nature is fundamental. No matter which school one practices, apprehending Mind and seeing nature is the foundation. Without apprehending Mind and seeing nature, it will not do.

If one merely understands the arising and abiding of delusive thoughts, or inclines one-sidedly toward emptiness, yet fails to recognize self-nature, then when adverse conditions occur, the proficiency gained through one's practice cannot free one from the grip of circumstances, and "instead one's own faults become manifest." Ordinary beings do not recognize what true emptiness is. When adverse circumstances arise and they feel obstructed by them, they become full of doubts and worries and then slander the Buddhadharma. They say: "This should be empty! Why can it not be emptied? It still exists. Therefore, the Buddhadharma's teaching of emptiness is wrong." Beings in the four formless heavens are like this. They practice until reaching formless absorption. When the karmic duration of that formless absorption comes to an end, they leave samādhi; seeing external circumstances, they give rise to doubt: "Eh? It was said to be empty. Why does it still exist? The Buddha's teaching is deceitful; he is a liar, a liar." They are still attached to marks; clinging to marks creates karma, and creating karma brings results. Turning around to slander the Buddhadharma, they fall into hell. This is "instead one's own faults become manifest." Therefore we must recognize the true meaning of Buddhadharma and understand what Buddha-nature is. This is the most important thing. Buddha-nature is neither empty nor existent, both empty and existent, also empty and also existent. If one attaches to emptiness and falls into emptiness, and practices without recognizing the original nature, that practice will not succeed. The result is that one creates evil karma and instead manifests one's own faults.

V. Following Delusion, Originally Pure

"Cessation when a subsequent thought arises, cessation on its own, and cessation through samādhi are all ways in which delusive thoughts themselves cease; as delusion ceases, original purity is revealed."

If delusive thoughts can arise, they can also cease. There are three modes of cessation: cessation when a subsequent thought arises, cessation on its own, and cessation through samādhi. The first means that when the next delusive thought arises, the preceding one ceases. Cessation on its own means that a delusive thought ceases by itself. Cessation through samādhi means entering samādhi through practice, thereby bringing delusive thoughts to cessation. These modes differ in speed and in the strength involved. Whatever the mode, it is the delusive thought itself that ceases; therefore the text says, "all are ways in which delusive thoughts themselves cease." In fact, delusive thoughts are themselves false, delusive, and unobtainable, so there is no real issue of extinguishing or not extinguishing them. Not abiding in them is regarded as their cessation. After delusive thoughts cease, "as delusion ceases, original purity is revealed": with the cessation of delusive thoughts, the originally pure dharmakāya of suchness is revealed.

The sutra says, "Settle the mad mind, and that itself is bodhi." How does delusive mind arise? "Mind originally has no arising; it exists because of objects"—this is the clear statement of Viśvabhū Buddha. Delusive mind exists because of objects. Without external objects there is no delusive mind. But objects are just as illusory and unobtainable as mind: "Mind is not mind by itself; because of objects, there is mind. Objects are not objects by themselves; because of mind, there are objects." Mind and objects arise in relation to each other; apart from either one, the other cannot stand. Therefore my late teacher, Venerable Xianglu, said, "Objects too do not truly exist; mind and objects alike are illusory images."

As long as you clearly know that all external objects are like dreams, illusions, and flowers in the sky, without independent reality, and do not grasp after them or give rise to delusive thoughts, then the spirit is serene and wisdom clear, the numinous light shines alone, and true mind is bright and pure, like a mirror reflecting things, without grasping or rejecting, without attachment or aversion. Though clear and distinct, not one thought arises; though not one thought arises, it is clear and distinct. Right there one personally realizes the dharmakāya of suchness. Beyond settling the mind, there is no need for any further clumsy practice.

If you truly recognize the dharmakāya of suchness, then delusive thoughts are the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya of suchness. Delusion itself is purity. This is like recognizing that waves themselves are water: when one does not cling to the waves as real, there is no need to wait for the waves to become calm; the waves themselves, in their very actuality, are water. This is the profound meaning of "following delusion, originally pure." The central point explained here is that we must recognize delusive thoughts and not fear them. Delusive thoughts are the wondrous functioning of true mind. As long as one does not run along with them, one can cut off their continuation. Following delusion, originally pure: along with the arising and ceasing of delusive thoughts, there is the fundamentally pure dharmakāya of suchness. The dharmakāya of suchness is originally pure in itself. It is not because delusive thoughts exist that the dharmakāya of suchness becomes impure. As long as one does not run along with delusive thoughts or get controlled by them, but at every moment remains attentive to the dharmakāya of suchness and protects it steadily and continuously, over time one will certainly fully realize the great Way and the fruit of Buddhahood.

10.14 恒河大手印（第十四讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Fourteen)

V. Following Delusion, Originally Pure (continued)

"This mode of dissolving and releasing is precisely the single essential point of the direct perception of self-liberation." Earlier we spoke of "following delusion, originally pure." From where does delusion arise? Delusion arises in dependence on circumstances. If there were no circumstances, delusive thoughts would not arise. Although delusive thoughts arise in response to delusive circumstances, our true mind is not polluted by them; it remains pure.

We have used a pearl as an analogy. If a pearl is wrapped in mud, the pearl itself is still pure and luminous. It does not become black and dirty just because it is wrapped in mud. Once the mud is removed, the pearl is still luminous as before.

Therefore one only needs to recognize and take up true mind; there is no need to fear delusive thoughts. To dissolve one's mistaken understanding of delusive thoughts and release the knot of fearing them, thereby recognizing and taking up true mind—this is called the mode of dissolving and releasing. "This mode of dissolving and releasing is precisely the single essential point of the direct perception of self-liberation." Direct perception means that everything is presented openly and completely, without adding discrimination, like a mirror reflecting things. When it reflects something round, a round image appears; when it reflects something square, a square image appears. If it reflects ten thousand taels of gold, the mirror is not pleased; if it reflects a lump of dung, the mirror is not upset. This is direct perception.

Direct perception manifests in accordance with the appearances of objective things, without adding the slightest delusive discrimination. If one discriminates, "this is good, that is bad; this is long, that is short; this is beautiful, that is ugly," then this is inferential cognition. In practicing the path of liberation, one transforms the eighth consciousness into the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom, which brightly illuminates the ten directions. The myriad phenomena all appear within our true mind, without the slightest attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection. This is "liberated direct perception."

Although the mirror is used as an analogy, it is not entirely the same as a mirror. Its displaying forms in accordance with objective conditions is like a mirror. However, a mirror has no power of discernment and no capacity to perceive or know. We do have that capacity: we know right and wrong, long and short, gain and loss. It is simply that there is no attachment or aversion, no grasping or rejection. This is exactly as the sutra says: "Skillfully distinguishing the characteristics of all phenomena, yet unmoved in ultimate truth." Although distinctions function, they do not settle in the mind. This is inferential cognition functioning without departing from direct perception.

If there were only direct perception, we would become fools and dullards. We would not even know right and wrong, good and bad, long and short. How could that do? Practice must be alive and responsive: at every moment, inferential cognition functions without departing from the true mind of direct perception. Inferential cognition is what is called delusive thought here. Therefore we must understand the principle stated by the Buddha in the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: "With regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either." Use it when needed; being able to use it is wondrous functioning. This is the profound meaning of the "mode of dissolving and releasing."

This mode of dissolving and releasing is liberated direct perception; it is the "one essential point," the single most important point. Recognizing and taking up true mind is most important. Where is true mind? True mind is shining before each person. Where is the

luminosity? I see things, I hear sounds, I smell fragrance and stench, I know all kinds of circumstances—this is the luminosity. Some people only want to eliminate delusive thoughts. Yet after delusive thoughts have ceased and true mind is clearly revealed, they do not recognize and take up true mind; instead, they continue practicing solely to stop thoughts. If they continue in this way for a long time, their practice falls into dead rigidity, and free and responsive wondrous functioning cannot unfold, because they have not recognized and taken up true mind. We said earlier: merely ceasing delusive thoughts without knowing the fundamental essence is useless. One must recognize the fundamental essence at the cessation of delusive thoughts. This alone is the essential matter.

"This is also the unshared essential key of the exceptional Dharma gate of the Great Perfection of self-nature." Great Perfection has concrete methods that can be practiced, but here it speaks of the "Great Perfection of self-nature." Self-nature is originally perfect and complete, originally filling empty space and pervading the Dharma realm. However vast empty space is, it is that vast; the worlds of the ten directions and all sentient beings are complete within self-nature. Whether Pure Land, Esoteric Buddhism, Chan, Yogācāra, Tiantai, Huayan, or any other school, none can depart from this wondrous bright true mind. "Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm." This Dharma realm is the one true Dharma realm, the wondrous bright true mind.

Ganges Mahāmudrā is an "exceptional Dharma gate" that directly enters the "Great Perfection of self-nature." "Exceptional" means especially excellent: this Dharma is outstanding and not comparable with other methods. It is not shared with other methods: "common" means shared, while "uncommon" means distinct and not held in common. This is the highest vehicle of Esoteric Dharma. The other vehicles within Esoteric Buddhism do not speak in this way. The highest Esoteric Dharma and Chan share the same essential principle. Pure Land does not speak in this way; Pure Land emphasizes single-minded buddha-recitation and rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. After arriving in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one continues practice beside Buddhas and bodhisattvas and attains the stage of non-retrogression, *avaivartika*. This has its own marvel, and in the end it too converges in the one true Dharma realm; I will not say more about it here. Every Dharma gate has its own marvel and the beings and capacities to which it is suited, and in the end all must converge in the one true Dharma realm. Ganges Mahāmudrā, however, enters directly, without taking a winding road. It is not the same as other methods of practice. This is the "unshared essential key of the exceptional Dharma gate of the Great Perfection of self-nature." Here "essential" means the key point, while "subtle" indicates its subtle profundity. This unshared essential key is the distinctive point not held in common with other Dharma gates.

"When one possesses this essential key, whatever afflictions and delusive thoughts arise all manifest as the *dharmakāya*." Possessing this essential key means recognizing the wondrous functioning of true mind. After one possesses this essential key, "whatever afflictions and delusive thoughts arise all manifest as the *dharmakāya*." No matter what affliction it is—

illness, heartbreak, failure in one's work, and so on—when afflictions crowd in and delusive thoughts churn, all of them manifest as the dharmakāya. This is because "delusive thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya's originally awakened wisdom." Just as without water there can be no waves, if there were no true mind, how could there be afflictions and delusive thoughts? When afflictions and delusive thoughts arise, that itself is the manifestation of the dharmakāya.

Everyone must understand that this sentence is extremely important. When afflictions swarm and delusive thoughts churn, immediately recognize: this is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. Then afflictions and delusive thoughts will crumble and melt away like ice. Once the dharmakāya is recognized, one no longer runs along with delusive thoughts. If one does not recognize the dharmakāya, one will run along with delusive thoughts, suffer endless affliction, and may even want to commit suicide. Some people today, heartbroken in love, suffer so intensely that they want to kill themselves and feel they cannot go on living. They do not recognize the dharmakāya. They do not know that afflictions and delusive thoughts are all the wondrous functioning of true mind.

The Universal Gate Chapter of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara says, "If someone holds the Name of this Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, even if he enters a great fire, the fire cannot burn him, because of the awesome spiritual power of this bodhisattva. If he is swept away by a great flood and invokes his Name, he will immediately reach the shallows." No matter how great the fire of your afflictions is, and no matter how high the waves of your delusive thoughts are, as soon as you turn the light inward, and recite "Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva," ah—so this is the wondrous functioning of true mind. Those afflictions and delusive thoughts immediately come to rest. This is the key, the most important key. Many people study Buddhism for years but still do not know this key. They do not recognize true mind and do not know where true mind is. If they cannot find it, what do they do? They go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss to look for it. How vastly far away that is! In fact, true mind is shining right before you.

Mahāmudrā is excellent because it tells us directly and straightforwardly what true mind is. All of you have sufficient merit, and your conditions have matured, so you are able to hear this great Dharma. After hearing this great Dharma, do not let yourselves down. At every moment protect true mind. Know that when delusive thoughts arise, that very arising is the wondrous functioning of true mind; recognize and take up true mind in the very arising of delusive thoughts. If you practice in this way for one year, two years, three or five years, how could you fail to accomplish the Way? You will absolutely succeed. Last time I said that my teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, said: "Practice does not require two or three years. In a year and a half one succeeds. If you do not succeed, come ask me." We keep refusing to do the practice and keep following our habitual tendencies. How, then, could we succeed?

"Delusive thoughts are all wisdom; adverse conditions become helpful companions; afflictions become conduct of the Way." If one possesses this "unshared essential key of the exceptional

Dharma gate of the Great Perfection of self-nature," then "delusive thoughts are all wisdom." Right when delusive thoughts are flying and afflictions are crowding in, make an immediate turn in awareness: ah—this is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. To be able to make such a turn is great wisdom. When facing circumstances, let inferential cognition function without departing from direct perception, not attaching to circumstances, not clinging to them, and not abiding in them—this does not mean being unable to distinguish beauty from ugliness or right from wrong. This is wisdom. If, after discriminating, one then grasps and rejects, abides in circumstances, lets the mind cling to them, runs along with circumstances, suffers unbearably, and becomes trapped, this is delusive thought. In reality, delusive thought is wisdom; the key lies in whether you know this. Therefore, "with regard to all delusive minds, do not extinguish them either."

If the dharmakāya of suchness is in command, delusive thoughts become servants and attendants. When the master directs the servants to work, this is "Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities." When true mind is in command, the first five consciousnesses—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile—transform into the Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities. True mind directs them: you, show me what this thing is; you, let me hear what sound this is; you, let me smell whether it is fragrant or foul; you, let me taste whether it is sour or sweet. Seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing all become the wondrous functioning of true mind—delusive thoughts are all wisdom.

"Adverse conditions become helpful companions." Everyone likes the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, where all conditions are favorable and nothing goes against one's wishes. Gold forms the ground, there are pools of the seven treasures, water of the eight merits, and the water birds, groves, wind, and birdsong all proclaim the Dharma. Everything is good; there are no adversaries. It is not like our evil world of the five turbidities, where troublesome adversaries are countless. For example, at work many things do not go as one wishes: this person steps on your foot, that person kicks your leg. At home, too, many things do not go as one wishes: you think this way but she insists on thinking that way; you do this but she insists on doing that. The household too is full of quarrels and disputes.

But you must understand: these adverse conditions are companions that help you accomplish the Way. They alert you and keep you from abiding in circumstances. You know that these adverse conditions are suffering, and so the mind of renunciation arises: ah! this world involves so much suffering—quickly find a way out. How does one leave suffering? By recognizing true mind and not running along with circumstances. Otherwise you become stuck to this world and cannot bear to leave it, thinking this world is truly agreeable and comfortable. Then you will not study Buddhism or practice the Dharma, and you will not accomplish the Way.

In the past I met an overseas Chinese living in France who had a great deal of money. His family's warehouse was connected to the railway, and trains could drive right into it. He also had faith in the Buddhadharma and did many good deeds. When he returned to China to visit

relatives, he always made offerings at monasteries. I said to him, "You believe in the Buddhadharma and are willing to give. It would be even better if you yourself practiced the Buddhadharma. Merely doing good deeds and giving amounts to practicing wholesome conduct and building merit; it cannot accomplish the Way. You also need to practice wisdom. Only through the joint practice of merit and wisdom can you accomplish the Way. Therefore you still need to practice and study the Buddhadharma." He said, "No, no. I am too comfortable and too happy. I do not need to endure hardship in practice." He was immersed in his blessings, satisfied with his present state, and did not want to practice. If this is true for humans, how much more for gods?

If one meets various adverse conditions, suffers every kind of hardship, and feels great pain, then one will arouse the great resolve to escape suffering. To leave suffering, what should one do? Quickly practice and study the Buddhadharma. Therefore it is said that "adverse conditions become helpful companions." Adverse conditions help you train amid circumstances and see whether your mind still abides in circumstances. If your mind is truly empty, there is no so-called favorable or adverse condition, and no so-called running along or not running along. Among Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows there is the vow to "constantly accord with sentient beings." To accord with sentient beings continually means going along with them. You like spicy food? Good, I will eat spicy food with you. You like sweet food? Good, I will eat sweet food with you. You want to play ball? Good, I will play ball with you. You want to dance? Good, I will dance with you. You want to believe in Christianity? Good, I will go along with you in believing in Christianity. One can adapt to all of this without fixation. Why? To train true mind. I am empty, with nothing to attain; everything is the wondrous functioning of true mind. Even running along with you is wondrous functioning, in order to draw you in. This is called "gathering through shared activity." Among the bodhisattva's four means of gathering beings is this means of gathering through shared activity.

Many practitioners do not wish to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Why? Because the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss consists of favorable conditions, and the time required to accomplish the Way is very long. One day in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is equal to one great kalpa here. How many days are in one great kalpa? Too many to calculate. A great kalpa has four medium kalpas, and a medium kalpa has twenty small kalpas. How long is each small kalpa? Suppose the human lifespan is eighty-four thousand years. Every hundred years, the lifespan decreases by one year, until it reaches ten years. Then every hundred years it increases by one year, until it again reaches eighty-four thousand years. One decrease and one increase is the duration of one small kalpa. Eighty such small kalpas make one great kalpa. How many days is that? One day there is as long as that entire span here.

Moreover, over there all conditions are favorable. Everything accords with your mind. Whatever you want, that is what happens. Whatever kind of house you want to live in, you have that kind of house. Whatever clothing you want, you have it. Whatever things you want

to use, you have them. Therefore habits are not easily cut off, and the time required to accomplish the Way is long. For this reason, many bodhisattvas who have aroused great resolve say, "You go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. I will train true mind in the Saha world amid adverse conditions." This is the spirit of a bodhisattva with great resolve. It is very rare and precious. "A great man naturally has the will to soar into the sky; he does not travel to Brahmā heaven or to a Pure Land." Not going to Great Brahma Heaven or to the Pure Land—this is the mettle of a true great person. If you truly have the bearing of a great person, you must be able to withstand training. If you cannot withstand training and are drawn away by the demon king, becoming a demon-child and demon-grandchild, then you are finished. If you cannot withstand training, then you had better go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss; it is far more secure than here. Therefore there is no fixed Dharma; it depends on each person's mettle and spiritual capacity. There is no single unchanging rule.

Now, as we practice the Dharma and apply ourselves, when we encounter adverse conditions, do not lose heart. These are helpful companions assisting you to accomplish the Way. I had one Dharma brother whose wife was a Christian and insisted that he go with her to church. He said, "Good, good, I will accompany you." After listening to the pastor's sermon, he said to her, "I accompanied you to hear the pastor preach. You should also accompany me to a monastery to hear a great Buddhist teacher explain the Buddhadharma." She said, "I will not go, I will not go. That is a demon king. You are not allowed to go either. Let us go home." So he followed her home. It looked like an adverse condition, but he was not afraid. You cannot wear me down. I go along with you. My mind is empty; I am utterly free and at ease. Therefore their relationship as husband and wife was very good. She asked, "Do you say I am a demon king?" He replied, "No, I say you are very good. You are a great bodhisattva." She said, "I am not a great bodhisattva. I am the Lord God." He immediately replied, "Good, good! You are the Lord God." These are all helpful companions, training the mind in emptiness. A poem says it well: "Empty, empty, empty: within emptiness success is gained. When the root is firmly planted and cultivated, why fear snow and wind?" When the root is firm, one is not afraid of heavy snow or fierce winds. When all adverse conditions come, do not fear them. Know that they are companions that aid the Way.

Adverse conditions too are good things; do not fear them. "Afflictions become conduct of the Way." Speaking of "conduct of the Way," some people say, "Lady White Snake has only five hundred years of attainment in the Way, while Fahai has a thousand years." In fact, all that is myth; there is no such White Snake Lady at all. If we know how to use afflictions and wake up in the midst of them—"this is the wondrous functioning of my true mind"—then afflictions help you accomplish the Way, and afflictions become conduct of the Way. The greater the afflictions, the more profound one's conduct of the Way becomes. If you can withstand the training of afflictions and the mind becomes empty, then your strength is great, and you can be forged and grow in the fierce fire of afflictions. This is "a lotus born in fire is never destroyed." This is extraordinary practice. A lotus in water cannot withstand fire; once fire bakes it, it is finished. Only a lotus in fire has strong vitality.

"Without abandoning saṃsāra, one abides in purity." Saṃsāra is the six paths of rebirth: gods, humans, asuras, hell-beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. To completely end birth and death does not necessarily mean leaving the six paths of saṃsāra. Why? If one merely abides in a pure land beyond the three realms—that is, beyond the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm—then one is only a Small Vehicle arhat. If one wants to become a Buddha, one must have the conduct of a bodhisattva with great resolve, liberating beings within the six paths and not abandoning saṃsāra.

Let me relate a public case. After a Chan master passed into quiescence, someone asked his disciple, "In which Pure Land was your teacher reborn? Was it the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Pure Lapis Lazuli World, or Tushita's inner court?" The disciple answered, "My teacher does not go east, nor does he go west." The questioner asked, "If he goes neither east nor west, where did he go?" The disciple answered, "At the eastern house he becomes an ox; at the western house he becomes a horse." The questioner said, "You are cursing your teacher!" The disciple laughed and said, "Heavens! Heavens! Wronged, wronged!" His meaning was: I am praising my teacher, yet you say I am cursing him. This is truly being wronged. My teacher's conduct of the Way is profound and he has firm assurance; he dares to "become an ox at the eastern house and a horse at the western house," to take birth among other kinds of beings, "without abandoning saṃsāra while abiding in purity." Do you have this assurance? I am praising him, but you do not know it. Therefore this "Heavens! Heavens!" carries profound meaning.

Chan Master Zhaozhou, whom people called "Ancient Buddha Zhaozhou," spoke in an exquisitely subtle way, soft and gentle like a ball of cotton, yet you could not squeeze it. Why? There was a needle hidden in the cotton; squeeze it and it pricks your hand. Once he went to Mount Tiantai to see Amitābha Buddha. Who was Amitābha Buddha? Chan Master Fenggan was an emanation of Amitābha Buddha. Under Master Fenggan were Hanshan and Shide, emanations of Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. As Zhaozhou arrived at Mount Tiantai, it had just rained, and the ground was clearly stamped with many ox-hoof prints. He saw a boy riding on the back of an ox and playing a flute. This boy was Hanshan. The boy asked Zhaozhou, "Venerable, do you still recognize the ox?" "Venerable" is an honorific for a monk. He asked Chan Master Zhaozhou: do you still recognize the ox? If one answered "I recognize it," one would be caught; that would prove one had not yet gone beyond the ordinary condition of clinging to circumstances and letting the mind cling to them.

Another Chan master, Danxia Tianran, once asked a visiting monk, "Where have you come from?" The monk said, "From below the mountain." Danxia said, "Have you eaten yet?" The monk said, "I have eaten." Danxia said, "The person who brought food and gave it to you—did he have eyes?" Did the person who gave you food have eyes or not? His meaning was: he saw the wrong person and made offerings to you, an ordinary fellow who attaches to circumstances and lets the mind cling to them. Chan Master Zhaozhou was a great Chan master; he would not be taken in by this. Hanshan asked, "Venerable, do you still recognize

the ox?" Zhaozhou answered, "I do not recognize it." This is like Patriarch Bodhidharma's answer to Emperor Wu of Liang. Emperor Wu asked, "Who is it facing me?" Bodhidharma said, "I do not know." Did Patriarch Bodhidharma not even know himself? Did Chan Master Zhaozhou not even recognize an ox? That is not the meaning. To fix one's eye on recognizing or not recognizing is already wrong. Bodhidharma's answer "I do not know" was aimed at the "who" in the question; Zhaozhou's answer "I do not recognize it" was aimed at the "ox" in the question. The two answers come from the same track: both sweep away all fixation and entanglement, transcend subject-object opposition, do not fixate on "who" or on "ox," and openly reveal the bare, clean, stainless, numinously bright true mind.

When Hanshan heard Chan Master Zhaozhou answer "I do not recognize it," he pointed at the ox-hoof prints and said, "These are five hundred arhats roaming the mountain." Zhaozhou asked, "If they are arhats, why have they become oxen?" Hanshan said, "Heavens! Heavens!" What does this mean? It is saying: your discriminating mind is blazing. All sentient beings are Buddhas; all possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous characteristics. Yet from footprints you still discriminate arhat and ox! "Heavens! Heavens!" With this, he cornered Chan Master Zhaozhou. Zhaozhou, after all, was a great master. He was good at turning around where there is no place to turn, just like taiji push-hands, deflecting a thousand pounds with four ounces. So he laughed loudly. Hanshan asked, "What are you doing?" What are you laughing at? Zhaozhou said, "Heavens! Heavens!" The meaning was: when you ask "what are you doing," there is still something there. Hanshan praised him: "This fellow truly has the bearing and resourcefulness of a great person." You possess a great person's resourcefulness and the bearing of one liberated.

The Chan school teaches us to see the nature at every moment, and to see the nature in all functions, without running along with circumstances. Chan Master Yongjia said, "Walking too is Chan, sitting too is Chan; in speech or silence, movement or stillness, the essence remains at ease." In the Chan school, everywhere is Chan and every moment reveals its essential principle; therefore it is said, "Every day is a good day." Thus, "without abandoning saṃsāra, one abides in purity." The fundamental essence is pure; everywhere is a place of practice. What mark of saṃsāra can still be obtained?

VI. Effortless Conduct

"Freed from entanglement in defilement and purity, one corrects without deliberate effort and functions spontaneously." If one keeps discriminating between defilement and purity, one becomes entangled and bound by those concepts. To be freed from this entanglement is what is meant by "freed from entanglement in defilement and purity." The Diamond Sutra says, "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind." "Responding" means adapting to circumstances; "without abiding" means not clinging or stagnating. Following all conditions without clinging to them, one brings forth the numinous, wondrous, non-abiding mind. This is what is meant by "correcting without deliberate effort."

Bodhisattvas before the eighth ground still rely on deliberate correction. For example, when we teach everyone to remain attentive to what is original at every moment, this attentiveness is deliberate correction. But you cannot neglect that guarding, because habits are heavy. Once you forget, you again abide in marks, abide in circumstances, and run along with delusive thoughts. Therefore one must remain attentive and maintain clear observation at every moment. This is the method for moving from deliberate effort to effortless functioning. Only bodhisattvas at the eighth ground and above can "correct without deliberate effort and function spontaneously." Here correction means not becoming scattered; it means right mindfulness bright and clear at every moment, clear and distinct, lucid and quiescent, quiescent and lucid. Without deliberate effort means that even the mind engaged in clear observation is gone. Only then is this "correction without deliberate effort." Please pay attention: this is not asking you to accomplish it immediately now. One must proceed from deliberate effort to effortlessness. While applying deliberate correction, do not think that practicing this way is enough or that the practice is complete. We must progress, progress, and progress further. The eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds are not the end; even the stages of Equal Enlightenment and Wondrous Enlightenment are not the end. One must reach Ultimate Enlightenment and perfectly accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood before the matter is finished. Therefore one must practice diligently. Only when practice reaches its culmination can functioning become spontaneous. One must begin with "deliberate correction." Without this, how could one reach the level of "correction without deliberate effort"? For that, one must recognize true mind at the cessation of delusive thoughts, and protect it at every moment. This point is most important.

"If one lacks this strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma, then even the highest view and the most profound practice bring no benefit to the mind." Here, "understanding the Dharma" means recognizing the dharmakāya. If one only knows how to practice in a dead, mechanical way, or if one can explain the principles very well but does not recognize the dharmakāya, then one "does not have the strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma." Without this strength, "even the highest view and the most profound practice bring no benefit to the mind." The highest view means understanding many principles and explaining them well. The most profound practice means that one's sitting practice is well developed and one enters deep samādhi. If one does not recognize the dharmakāya, having only these is not enough.

Chan Master Xiangyan was originally a disciple of Chan Master Baizhang. He was very intelligent, thoroughly versed in sutras, treatises, and Chan sayings; asked one question, he could answer ten. Yet he did not have the strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma and had not recognized the dharmakāya. After Chan Master Baizhang passed into quiescence, Xiangyan went to ask his senior Dharma brother, Chan Master Guishan. Seeing Xiangyan arrive, Guishan said to him, "I have heard that when you were with the late Master Baizhang, if asked one question you answered ten, and if asked ten you answered a hundred. This is your intelligence and sharpness, your intellectual interpretation and discriminating

thought—the root of birth and death. Before your parents were born, try to say one phrase." Xiangyan was stopped by this question, utterly at a loss and unable to answer. He searched in the scriptures and books and in the writings he had read, yet could not find a single sentence as an answer. He sighed to himself, "A painted cake cannot satisfy hunger." Repeatedly he begged Chan Master Guishan to explain it to him. Guishan said, "If I explained it to you, later you would curse me. What I say is mine; in the end it has nothing to do with you."

Therefore, if one does not possess the strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma, there is no real benefit to the mind. Xiangyan then burned the writings he usually read and said angrily, "In this life I will not study Buddhadharma. I will just be an ordinary rice-and-gruel monk, so as not to toil my mind and spirit." He then wept, took leave of Chan Master Guishan, and went to live in an abandoned ancient monastery, the former site of National Teacher Nanyang Zhong, supporting himself by farming. Burning the writings and no longer studying Buddhadharma swept away "the highest view." Living as an ordinary rice-and-gruel monk and sparing the mind and spirit removed "the most profound practice." Yet he never forgot the huatou "before your parents were born" at any time or place.

The Chan method of investigating a huatou was powerfully advocated in the Song dynasty by Chan Master Dahui Zonggao and became popular throughout the Chan monasteries. Chan Master Xiangyan was a Tang dynasty person. At that time Chan mostly used direct pointing; huatou investigation had not yet become widespread. One may say that Chan Master Xiangyan pioneered an early form of huatou investigation. Walking he investigated, sitting he investigated, farming in the fields he investigated—just as is said, "in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, never apart from this." He had not only cast aside worldly fame and profit and left home to study the Way, but had also swept away concepts such as "awakening" and "accomplishing the Way," making the mind one-pointed. Continuing in this way for a long time, a breakthrough was near.

One day, while clearing wasteland and farming, he swung his hoe and struck a shard of tile. He picked it up and threw it, and it happened to hit the bamboo at the edge of the field. With a "pa!" sound, he was jolted awake from the great dream of birth and death. Suddenly he opened up what is original. Ah! Originally it is like this. In the Chan school this is called "breaking through Chan inquiry"—he had broken through the huatou he was investigating. Then what is the face before one's parents were born? Chan Master Xiangyan did not say it outright. Fortunately he did not say it. Otherwise, "before your parents were born" could no longer be used as a huatou for investigation. If there were a ready-made answer, the doubt-sensation could not arise.

By the Song dynasty, due to Chan Master Dahui's advocacy, huatou investigation flourished. There was a monk who also investigated the huatou "before your parents were born." He was not like Chan Master Xiangyan, who burned the writings, stopped studying Buddhadharma, lived as an ordinary rice-and-gruel monk, and spared the mind and spirit. This monk had not thoroughly swept away the highest view and the most profound practice; he therefore kept

straining his mind and spirit and pursued the huatou too urgently. Over time he became crazy, muttering constantly, sleeping on streets and in alleys. Yet "the original face before his parents were born" was never forgotten at any time or place. One day he encountered two brothers fighting, with their uncle stepping in to stop them. The uncle said, "When your father was alive, he was a man with a face..." To have a face means to have dignity and social standing. When this monk heard "has a face," he foolishly pushed into the surrounding crowd to look for this face. The uncle criticized his two nephews: "You are fighting. What sort of behavior is this? You have no face!" When the monk heard "no face," suddenly empty space shattered and the great earth sank away; the true reality of suchness was clearly revealed. He broke through Chan inquiry and awakened. From then on he was no longer mad or deranged, and went off free and at ease.

"No face" is the true reality that is without characteristics; it is self-nature. Merely knowing the theory of what is without characteristics, without seeing self-nature, does not reach actual realization. Even if you speak so beautifully that flowers fall from the sky and golden lotuses spring from the earth, it is useless. It must be made actual in the depths of the mind, and self-nature must be clearly seen; only then can one pass through all kinds of circumstances.

After Chan Master Xiangyan broke through Chan inquiry and awakened to the Way, he bathed, burned incense, and bowed toward Guishan from afar, saying, "The venerable master's great compassion exceeds the kindness of my parents. If at that time he had explained it to me, how could today's matter have occurred?" He then made this verse: "At one strike I forgot all that I knew; no further practice was needed. In every movement and bearing I manifest the ancient path, never falling into the mechanism of silent quiescence. Nowhere is there any trace; beyond sound and form, the bearing is majestic. Those who have reached the Way in all quarters all call this the highest capacity."

This verse reached Guishan. Chan Master Guishan said to his outstanding disciple, Chan Master Yangshan, "This fellow has penetrated." Yangshan, however, said, "This was composed through the contrivance of mind and discriminating consciousness. Wait until I personally examine him." He wanted to test Xiangyan himself. When Yangshan saw Xiangyan, he said, "The venerable master praised you, junior brother, for having clarified the great matter. Try saying something." Xiangyan presented the previous verse. Yangshan said, "This was made from ingrained learning and memorization. If you have true awakening, say something else." Xiangyan again made a verse: "Last year's poverty was not yet poverty; this year's poverty is poverty indeed. Last year I still had ground enough to plant an awl; this year even the awl is gone." Yangshan said, "I grant that you understand Tathāgata Chan, but you have not even dreamed of Patriarch Chan." Chan Master Xiangyan then made another verse: "I have one pivotal response: I blink and look at him. If someone does not understand, do not call him a novice monk." Hearing this, Yangshan was greatly delighted and reported to Guishan: "Happily, junior brother Xian understands Patriarch Chan." Xiangyan's Dharma name was Zhixian, so Yangshan called him "junior brother Xian." He originally studied Chan with Chan

Master Baizhang, but later awakened under Chan Master Guishan's stimulation, and so became a disciple of Chan Master Guishan. We cannot wander too far here, so I will not explain this public case further. I leave it for you to penetrate for yourselves.

Do not suppose that because many people are listening here, their footing is necessarily firm. If they lack the "strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma," their footing may not be firm. Hearing someone say, "My Dharma is so good, so marvelous, so lofty," they are carried away at once; they want to study "the highest view." Hearing someone say, "My Dharma has so much power and can manifest such great spiritual powers," they immediately run along with it; they want to study "the most profound practice." They do not know that true mind is the root.

"If one lacks this strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma, then even the highest view and the most profound practice bring no benefit to the mind." Your theory cannot withstand birth and death; your spiritual powers do not count as liberation. If you do not recognize the root, it is useless. If you do not attain the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows, then even if one manifests the five superknowledges, they are demonic powers. Not only will you be unable to attain liberation, there is also the danger of falling into demonic deviation. This is because, "without the strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma... there is no benefit to the mind."

"When the force of afflictions has not subsided, this is not the true Way." Why is the "strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma" so important? Because without this strength, one does not recognize true mind without characteristics. Then "the force of afflictions has not subsided; this is not the true Way." If the force of afflictions in your mind has not subsided and you remain constantly within affliction, this is not the great Way of true liberation. In studying Buddhism, we must recognize the root and thereby obtain this "strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma." Only this is "the true Way." One must not follow deviant, demonic, or non-Buddhist paths. If one follows such paths, in the future one will become a demon-child and demon-grandchild, and will not become a Buddha.

"If one obtains this marvelous key by which thoughts arise and cease on their own, then even without maintaining the highest view or relying on conditions for profound practice, one's self-nature will certainly be liberated from entanglement in the two attachments." We have recognized that delusive thoughts are fundamentally unobtainable; therefore we do not need to interfere with them and do not need to suppress them. Let them arise by themselves and cease by themselves. At the very moment thoughts dissolve as they arise and cease, "following delusion, originally pure," one turns the light inward in a single glance and takes hold of true mind at once. This is to obtain "this marvelous key by which thoughts arise and cease on their own."

When we sit in meditation, if a thought comes, do not heed it. Simply hold the mantra and let the thought arise by itself and cease by itself. If you want to suppress it and keep muttering

inwardly, "Do not arise, do not arise," your chest will become oppressed. You will become very tense, very uncomfortable, and very uneasy. This is what is happening to many people who feel tightness in the chest: they are too tense. As long as you do not run along with the thought and let it arise and cease by itself, you will be relaxed and refreshed. Over time, samādhi develops. As your mantra practice deepens, you gradually enter samādhi, and then wisdom arises from samādhi. The same applies during formal sitting and in daily life. It is like standing at the intersection of Nanjing Road and Xizang Road, a busy place in Shanghai, where people come and go and vehicles come and go. Their coming has nothing to do with you. If you do not pull them, they pass by. When thoughts arise, let them arise. They arise and cease by themselves; they do not last long and naturally cease. But if thoughts arise and you are unaware of them, that is bad. Clearly you are running along with delusive thoughts without knowing it; clearly you are grasping at conditions and abiding. How can this still be called practice? Therefore being aware of thoughts as they arise, not running along with them, and letting them arise and cease by themselves is extremely important.

"If one obtains this marvelous key by which thoughts arise and cease on their own, then even without maintaining the highest view or relying on conditions for profound practice, one's self-nature will certainly be liberated from entanglement in the two attachments."

"Maintaining the highest view" refers to the "highest view" in the previous sentence; "relying on conditions for profound practice" refers to the "most profound practice." Having a "highest view" to maintain and a "most profound practice" to rely on is still unreliable. The "strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma," namely "the marvelous key by which thoughts arise and cease on their own," is the most important thing. The previous sentence says that if one does not obtain the marvelous key, then even with high view and deep practice one does not attain liberation. This sentence says that if one obtains this marvelous key, then even without high view and deep practice one can attain liberation. These two sentences, one negative and one positive, emphasize the importance of the "strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma." In reality, obtaining this marvelous key is what deserves to be called the highest view; possessing this strength is precisely the most profound practice. The height and depth of the view and practice mentioned before are still tied to marks and are relative. Obtaining this marvelous key and possessing this strength is transcendent, free from marks, and absolute in its height and profundity.

"One's self-nature will certainly be liberated from entanglement in the two attachments."

"Two attachments" means attachment to dual extremes; it can be explained in many ways. Attachment to good and bad, to existence and non-existence, to right and wrong, to emptiness and existence; and also grasping at a personal self and grasping at a self in dharmas. There are many forms of two-sided attachment. All involve falling into one of two extremes. "Grasping at a personal self" means taking this body or this thinking to be me: this is me; I am the master; none of you may resist; you must all follow me, carry out my opinions, and obey my will. Pride and arrogance all arise from this. The two vehicles, that is, arhats and pratyekabuddhas, have already removed grasping at a personal self, but they still have

"grasping at a self in dharmas"—there are dharmas to practice and a Way to accomplish. The Great Vehicle school of emptiness speaks of "emptiness"; its view is lofty and its theory is very subtle and precise. Yet one still must not cling to it. To cling to it is "attachment to emptiness." The Great Vehicle school of existence, such as Yogācāra, speaks of "existence"; its view is also lofty and its theory is also very subtle and precise. Yet one still must not cling to it. To cling to it is "attachment to existence." Through many lives and kalpas, people have become accustomed to attachment and are deeply entangled and bound by the "two attachments," what is meant by "entanglement in the two attachments." These bind us and prevent liberation.

But if you obtain this "marvelous key by which thoughts arise and cease on their own" and possess this "strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma," they cannot bind you for long. You will certainly be liberated from "entanglement in the two attachments."

"It is like arriving on a golden continent: seek another stone, and none can be found." A golden continent is a place made entirely of gold. Does such a place exist? Not only does it exist; there is an even better place. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is even better than a golden continent. In the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, it is impossible to find even a piece of stone. The towers, terraces, palaces, and pavilions are not built of stone or brick; they are formed from the seven treasures, extraordinarily solid and filled with light. If you arrive at a "golden continent," a place made purely of gold, you simply cannot find any other stone that is not gold—"seek another stone, and none can be found." This is an analogy for when we obtain the marvelous key by which thoughts arise and cease on their own and possess the strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma: it is like arriving at a golden continent, where apart from gold there is nothing else. It means that apart from liberation there is nothing else. Only liberation remains; nothing else can be found; one will certainly accomplish the Way.

"Whatever moving or still delusive thoughts arise, they are all only the already-present true state of samādhi." This means that no matter what delusive thought arises, whether moving delusive thought or still delusive thought, it can only be the already-present true state of samādhi. It is no longer any kind of delusive thought. Just like "arriving on a golden continent: seek another stone, and none can be found," at this point there is only the true state of samādhi, and no delusive thought can be found. Why can delusive thoughts become the true state of samādhi? Because one has obtained the marvelous key by which thoughts arise and cease on their own and possesses the strength in the Way born of understanding the Dharma.

You may ask: delusive thoughts are all moving, so are there also still delusive thoughts? Yes. Seeking stillness is also delusive thought. Single-mindedly pursuing entry into samādhi, insisting on being in samādhi for several kalpas, abiding in samādhi and taking a state of samādhi to be something attainable—this is still delusive thought. Therefore we say: when sitting, do not have the expectation of entering samādhi. To pursue entering samādhi as soon as one sits down is precisely "still delusive thought." Once delusive thought arises, that sitting will not go well. Let entry into samādhi occur naturally, without concerning oneself with

whether samādhi is present or absent. Always hold the mantra without interruption, reciting it phrase after phrase, and then one will naturally enter samādhi. Also, when one clearly knows that circumstances do not permit it and the conditions are not present, yet insists on going to a quiet place to practice, this too is "still delusive thought." "Moving delusive thoughts" are even more numerous: wanting this and wanting that—all are moving delusive thoughts. Although moving and still delusive thoughts are many, all of them are the already-present true state of samādhi. Thoughts arise and thoughts cease; do not heed them. At every moment recognize true mind, recognize and take up the original face, and do not run along with delusive thoughts. Of course one attains liberation; of course this is the state of samādhi. We have said that samādhi is not dead sitting there without moving. Rather, it is not being deluded by circumstances. Whatever circumstance appears, my mind is not shaken. This is the great samādhi without entering or leaving.

For example, a sixteen-year-old beauty, a young girl—what is she? A skeleton of white bones, a stinking shell. She stinks terribly. What is there to look at? Why does your mind move when you see her? Why do you run after her? Clearly the mind of lust is making trouble. "A sixteen-year-old beauty's body seems soft as cream; at her waist she carries a sword that cuts down ordinary men. Though you do not see heads falling, in secret she drains the bones and marrow dry." Lust is the root of birth and death. Everyone, if lust is not cut off, one cannot be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Some say, "Is sex between husband and wife not permissible?" Ha! Calling marital sex "proper" is merely an expedient statement adapted to your habitual tendencies. Since marital desire cannot be cut off all at once, the teaching provisionally speaks of proper marital relations to indicate that one must not engage in sexual misconduct. Ultimately, even marital sex must be relinquished. Why? To be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must cut off the mind of lust. If lust is not cut off, one cannot be pure. If one's mind is not in accord with the Pure Land, how can one be born in the Pure Land? The mind of lust is the worst. Even if you have manifested spiritual powers, once the mind of lust arises, those powers are gone.

After Chan Master Yunmen was a king for three lifetimes, he had not the slightest spiritual power left. In a previous life he had been a human king, with three palaces, six courtyards, and seventy-two consorts. There were too many women, and all his spiritual powers were lost. In India there was a great arhat whose physical body could fly. The king invited this arhat to the palace to receive offerings, and the arhat immediately flew into the palace. The king respectfully honored the great arhat and had the queen come out to offer wine. This queen was extremely beautiful. When the arhat saw her, his mind moved slightly. With just that movement, his spiritual power was gone, and he could not fly back. There are many examples like this. Therefore the mind of lust must not move.

"Furthermore, if one again seeks anything that could confuse self-nature, none can be found." After recognizing and taking up self-nature, preserve it steadily and continuously at every time and place. Over time one accomplishes the Way. Then, turning back to search for the

ignorant delusive thoughts that confuse self-nature, one can no longer find them—"if one again seeks anything that could confuse self-nature, none can be found." Some ask: after I recognize Buddha-nature and am no longer deluded, after becoming a Buddha, could I become deluded again? You need not worry. The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment says: "It is like smelting gold ore: gold does not come to exist through smelting. Though gold is originally present, it is finally refined to completion through smelting. Once it has become true gold, it never again becomes ore." Here "smelting" is what we now call refining. Gold ore originally contains gold; it is not that smelting produces the gold, because "gold does not come to exist through smelting." This is an analogy for sentient beings originally possessing Buddha-nature. It is not that originally there was no Buddha-nature and then, through practice, it comes to exist. Yet although this is the recovery of gold originally present in the ore, refining is still required to bring it to completion—"Though gold is originally present, it is finally refined to completion through smelting." This is an analogy for sentient beings possessing the "wisdom of original awakening." Fundamentally, awakened awareness is present, but because of delusive thinking and attachment, and because they also possess ignorance and afflictions, they must, through practice, obtain the "wisdom of actualized awakening." When actualized awakening unites with original awakening, ignorance is broken and afflictions are cut off, and only then can the Buddha-nature originally possessed be opened and revealed. "Once it has become true gold, it never again becomes ore." This means that once the Way is accomplished, one will never again become deluded.

The True Mahāmudrā Is Reality as It Naturally Is

I. The Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā Are One and Inseparable

10.15 恒河大手印（第十五讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Fifteen)

The True Mahāmudrā Is Reality as It Naturally Is (continued)

I. The Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā Are One and Inseparable (continued)

"The three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are the center of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times and the summit of all vehicles; therefore they are called the mother of all Buddhas." Earlier we discussed this. "View" means understanding the one true Dharma realm—the tathāgatagarbha mind as it naturally is—and knowing that the innumerable manifestations of pure and impure dharmas fully embody the principle that they are naturally equal. Only the "essential view" is right view. "Samādhi" does not mean dead samādhi; it means dynamic samādhi. Therefore only the fusion of emptiness and compassion is correct samādhi. "Conduct" means that inwardly one is not carried along by delusive thoughts, and outwardly one is not moved by objective circumstances. One lets the mind rest

naturally and spontaneously, like a flowing river, preserving lucid quiescence. This is right conduct. These three essentials are three key points.

"The three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are the center of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times." The three times are past, present, and future. The center of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times is true suchness self-nature, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the one true Dharma realm, the wondrous bright true mind, the true reality of suchness, the tathāgatagarbha mind, the great ocean of perfect awakening, suchness, bodhi, dharmakāya, Buddha-nature, dhāraṇī, the great Buddha-crown, the true host, the bottomless bowl, the stringless lute, the inexhaustible lamp, the rootless tree, the hair-blowing sword, the land of the unconditioned, the maṇi jewel, the keyless lock, and even the clay ox, wooden horse, mind-source, mind-seal, mind-mirror, mind-moon, mind-pearl, and so forth. Though the names are many, the meaning is actually one.

The word "secret" in "secret intent" means that it has no characteristics that can be seen, cannot be spoken, and has no Dharma that can be stated; it is not an object of language. It is not that one deliberately keeps it secret and refuses to tell people. Although it cannot be spoken, it is the center. This is the "seal of the one true reality" of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the criterion by which one judges whether something is Mahāyāna Buddhism. If one turns away from this central purport and does not reach this point, it is not Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The Great Collection Sutra says, "In the Dharma-ending age, among billions of people who practice, rarely will one attain the Way; only by relying on buddha-recitation can they cross beyond birth and death." Here niàn, "recitation" or "mindfulness," is glossed as the present mind—the mind of this very thought-moment. Buddha means awakening, that is, true-suchness self-nature and the seal of the one true reality. The method of practicing the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct keeps each thought aligned with awakening, never departing from the seal of the one true reality. This is precisely "true-reality buddha-recitation."

The Contemplation Sutra explains sixteen kinds of contemplation. Practicing these sixteen contemplations is also buddha-recitation, called "visualization buddha-recitation"; contemplation after contemplation never departs from the wondrous bright true mind. Gazing upon the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and Amitābha Buddha's sacred form, wondrously adorned, with utmost sincerity, faith, joy, and the vow to be born in that land, is also buddha-recitation; this is called "Buddha-recitation by contemplating the Buddha's form"; here too, at every point, it never departs from the wondrous bright true mind. Holding fast to the sacred Name of Amitābha Buddha, reciting mentally and listening attentively, gathering in and steadying the confused, restless mind, transforming delusive thoughts into recollection of the Buddha, and carrying the single phrase "Namo Amitābha Buddha" through from beginning to end, is called "name-holding buddha-recitation." When has name-holding buddha-recitation ever departed from true mind by even half a step? If the mouth recites while the mind is not engaged in the practice, that is not buddha-recitation. Master Hanshan

said, "If the mouth recites 'Amitābha' while the mind is scattered, even shouting until the throat breaks is in vain." When practicing in the Dharma-ending age, if one wishes to cross beyond birth and death, one relies only on the various methods of buddha-recitation epitomized by "gathering in all six faculties, with pure mindfulness in continuous succession." Ganges Mahāmudrā is the most direct. It is precisely true-reality buddha-recitation. It is precisely the center of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times.

"The summit of all vehicles." Esoteric Buddhism classifies Buddhadharma into a nine-vehicle sequence: the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles. Ganges Mahāmudrā and Great Perfection both belong to the highest level. Therefore the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are said to be the summit of all vehicles, like a jeweled pagoda reaching its topmost point. "Therefore they are called the mother of all Buddhas." This is the mother of all Buddhas of the ten directions and the three times. All Buddhas come forth into the world relying on this Dharma, and all Dharmas are derived from here.

"As stated above, the three essentials are the view, samādhi, conduct, and fruition of the Great Perfection of self-nature. In the state of fully realizing self-nature, the four are unified and inseparable. This is the supreme heart-essence of practice. It is also the essential point that samādhi is conduct and conduct is samādhi." "The view, samādhi, conduct, and fruition of the Great Perfection of self-nature" refers to the four stages of practice in the Great Perfection of self-nature. The three essentials discussed above—the three essentials of right view, correct samādhi, and right conduct—are the center of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times, that is, our true suchness original nature. The purpose of practicing the Great Perfection of self-nature is to apprehend Mind and see nature, and thereby realize the fruit of Buddhahood. Without right view, there is no correct samādhi; without correct samādhi, there is no right conduct. How then could there be right fruition? The sutra says: when the causal basis is not right, the result becomes crooked. Therefore only with right view, correct samādhi, and right conduct can one realize true-suchness Buddha-nature and ultimately become a Buddha. Thus the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are the view, samādhi, conduct, and fruition of the Great Perfection of self-nature.

"The four" refers to the four stages of practice: first establishing the right view of liberation; then cultivating samādhi to gather in and subdue the scattered mind; after the mind has become settled, polishing oneself amid affairs and circumstances through the six perfections and myriad practices; and finally realizing the fruit of Buddhahood. "The state of fully realizing self-nature" is the state of mind of the Great Perfection of self-nature. In this state of mind, view, samādhi, conduct, and fruition are unified and inseparable. They cannot be separated. This is the ultimate heart-essence of practice, its crucial core and key point. "It is also the essential point that samādhi is conduct and conduct is samādhi." Conduct is samādhi, and samādhi is conduct: samādhi and conduct cannot be separated. This applies not only to samādhi and conduct: view, samādhi, and conduct cannot be separated, but must be one and

inseparable. Only after view is correct does one know what the great samādhi without entering or leaving is, so that one does not fall into dead samādhi; only then does one know how to practice effortless conduct, avoid detours, proceed directly toward true suchness, and ultimately become a Buddha.

"That is: whenever one realizes the plainly revealed wisdom-nature, at that very time one realizes the essential view of self-nature wisdom." The plainly revealed wisdom-nature is our Buddha-nature—pure and uncovered, clean and stainless, without shape or characteristics, numinously bright and quiescently illuminating, with nothing covering it. Buddha-nature is great wisdom, the great wisdom that knows everything and can accomplish everything. At whatever time one can realize this plainly revealed wisdom-nature, at that very time one "realizes the essential view of self-nature wisdom." To realize the essential view of self-nature wisdom is to recognize and take up self-nature, to enter into accord with the Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom, and to realize the essential purport. It is to apprehend Mind and see nature. After realizing the essential view, one will no longer seek outwardly, will no longer seek Dharma outside the mind, and will not fall into non-Buddhist paths again. No matter what great spiritual powers may appear over there, here one is not shaken in the slightest; one's footing is firm. If one has not directly realized this point, one's footing will not be firm, and one can hardly avoid being shaken.

In the past, below Mount Nanquan, there was a hermitage master. Someone told him, "Recently Monk Nanquan has appeared in the world. Why do you not go pay respects to him?" In other words, Nanquan had come out to teach and liberate beings; why would you not go bow to him? The hermitage master said, "Never mind Nanquan appearing in the world; even if a thousand Buddhas appeared, I still would not go." His meaning was that he had already recognized what is original, that his footing was firm and would not be shaken. When Chan Master Nanquan heard of this, he told his disciple Zhaozhou to go test him and see whether his footing was genuinely firm. Zhaozhou went and bowed to the hermitage master. The hermitage master paid no attention and sat unmoving on the Chan couch. Zhaozhou walked from west to east and from east to west, yet the hermitage master still paid no attention. This hermitage master's footing was fixed: whatever living Buddha might appear in the world, he would pay no attention. He had already recognized and taken up his own original face—clear and distinct, pure and uncovered, clean and stainless, without a single thing. Having already realized it, what would he still seek? He was already free and at ease; this very ease and freedom is great spiritual power. Everyone should note: ease and freedom are great spiritual power; great spiritual power does not mean anything strange or bizarre.

Zhaozhou had no way forward. With a crash he pulled down the hermitage master's curtain and said, "The petty brigand has been soundly defeated." You do not dare speak; you are not a great man, but only a petty brigand, and you have suffered a crushing defeat. The hermitage master still paid no attention. Zhaozhou had no choice but to return to the mountain defeated. Back on the mountain he told his teacher that this hermitage master had real attainment in

the Way: whatever Zhaozhou had done, the hermitage master remained unmoved. Chan Master Nanquan said, "I have always had doubts about this fellow." I have long doubted whether his footing is genuinely firm. You failed to stump him; let me go test him myself. The next day, Nanquan took a novice, carried a bottle of tea and three teacups, went to the hermitage, and threw them to the ground, saying, "Yesterday's, yesterday's." The hermitage master asked, "Yesterday's—what?" Yesterday I remained unmoved in suchness, and your disciple was completely out of moves. What does that show? At this point the fox's tail was exposed: there was still a "what" that needed showing! Chan Master Nanquan slapped the novice on the back and said, "You tricked me into coming! You tricked me into coming!" Then he flicked his sleeves and returned. I have seen through you. You still have something there; you still moved. Your footing is not yet firm, and you still fall far short.

In our practice we must stand firm. No matter what qigong you practice or how vast your spiritual powers, you are on a non-Buddhist path; I will not follow you. I practice the Dharma gate of the mind-ground. I recognize self-nature. In the future I will certainly realize noble fruition. If you do not know what self-nature is, in the end you cannot realize noble fruition. We previously discussed the public case of Patriarch Lu Chunyang. He had already accomplished a yang-spirit, yet Patriarch Huanglong said of him, "This corpse-guarding ghost." Lu Chunyang replied, "What can you do about the deathless medicine in my bag?" "Bag" refers to the body. You say I am a corpse-guarding ghost, yet in this corpse I guard—in this bag—there is deathless medicine! This medicine refers to the "golden elixir" refined through Daoist practice—the yang-spirit. Patriarch Huanglong said, "Even if it passes through eighty thousand kalpas, it will still come to nothing." You will still come to nothing, though your lifespan is longer than other people's. The yang-spirit is a body manifested through the seventh consciousness, manas; it is called a mind-made body and is false and unreal. If one does not recognize true mind, one still comes to nothing. If one recognizes true mind, one is free and at ease, without abiding in marks in the slightest. First one attains the superknowledge of the exhaustion of outflows—the penetration of the Way. This is true penetration and the root. Once the penetration of the Way is attained, one need not worry about not obtaining the five superknowledges. Just attain the root; do not worry about the branches. This point is very important. Everyone should pay attention to it. So: at whatever time one realizes the plainly revealed wisdom-nature, at that very time one obtains the essential view of self-nature wisdom.

"Although view and samādhi are described separately, in essence they are actually one." Although view and samādhi are explained separately, they are not two; they are one and inseparable. So-called view means recognizing the original face. Only with correct view does one know what the great samādhi without entering or leaving is; only then can there be correct samādhi. Conversely, only when one has attained correct samādhi can there be correct view. View and samādhi have not departed from our self-nature; both flow from self-nature. At the level of essence, they are one and inseparable. It is not only view and samādhi whose

"in essence they are actually one." View, samādhi, and conduct are also one and inseparable. None of them departs from our wondrous bright true mind.

II. Mahāmudrā Is the Essence of the Nine-Vehicle Buddhadharma

"One who practices in this way the unerring essential path of the originally pure Great Perfection of self-nature is truly at the peak of the nine vehicles." "Great Perfection of self-nature" has already been explained. "Originally pure" means that self-nature is originally perfect and complete, originally pure. The "unerring essential path" is an exceptionally important path of practice that is free from error. How does one "practice in this way the unerring essential path of the originally pure Great Perfection of self-nature"? Precisely through the method of practice of the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct discussed above: first recognizing the fundamental essence, and then practicing from the fundamental essence. One recognizes that delusive thoughts and afflictions are exactly the wondrous functioning of the fundamental essence. One neither follows nor suppresses them, but lets them arise and cease on their own, dissolving as they arise and cease. One only needs to recognize the fundamental essence and bring everything back to the fundamental essence. This is how one practices this "unerring essential path." To deviate from this path is to err.

Among those who practice qigong, many go down wrong roads and develop deviations; this, of course, is departing from the essential path. Some people practice Chan but do not know the correct method; they also get it wrong, pursuing dead samādhi and becoming like wood or stone. This too departs from the essential path. Pure Land can also be practiced wrongly. Some people treat buddha-recitation as copper coins, as cash; they treat the Buddha-name as paper money to be burned and stored in King Yama's treasury, so that after death they can draw on it in King Yama's realm. How could there be such a Pure Land Dharma gate? There were many such people in the past, and there are many now too. They are gravely mistaken. Pure Land is for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Who told you to go to King Yama's realm? Is this not turning things upside down? All of these are departures from the essential path.

One who practices this unerring essential path "is truly at the peak of the nine vehicles." Earlier, when we discussed "the summit of all vehicles," we mentioned that Esoteric Buddhism classifies Buddhadharma into a nine-vehicle sequence: the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles. Now let us briefly explain the contents of these nine vehicles. The outer three vehicles are the śrāvaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle. They refer to such Dharmas as the Four Noble Truths, the twelve links of dependent arising, and the six perfections and myriad practices practiced by arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas. These broadly comprise the exoteric teachings. The inner three vehicles refer to the three divisions of practice: Kriyā, Caryā, and Yoga. Kriyā is also known as Action Tantra, with methods for increasing, pacifying, magnetizing, subjugating, and so on. These are all Dharmas that respond to sentient beings' wishes; they

are also skillful means for guiding beings, "First draw them in through their desires; afterward lead them into Buddha-wisdom." They are not ultimate. The purpose of Caryā practice is to end birth and death and leave the sea of suffering; only then has one entered actual practice. It begins with visualization and practice involving winds, channels, and drops, such as the phowa method and so on.

Yoga means "accord." In Yoga practice, activity accords with principle, speech accords with conduct, above one accords with all Buddhas, and below one accords with sentient beings. From here arise three further levels: the secret three vehicles. The secret three vehicles are Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Mahāyoga means the yoga of great completion: one dissolves visualized channels, winds, and other form-based phenomena into emptiness, so that one comes into accord with the dharmakāya, which is without characteristics. Anuyoga means the yoga of unsurpassed completion: using dhātu-wisdom as the entrance, one further transforms all kinds of manifestations into the one true reality. Atiyoga means the yoga of incomparable completion: going further, it unites the three vehicles into one great mantra vehicle. "One who practices in this way the unerring essential path of the originally pure Great Perfection of self-nature is truly at the peak of the nine vehicles." This is the Dharma gate of the highest vehicle. In the great mantra, there is no mantra to recite; in Mahāmudrā, there is no mudrā to form. At this point, "Everything flows from this Dharma realm, and everything returns to this Dharma realm." Therefore it is called the peak.

"The paths of the remaining vehicles follow along as steps, scaffolding, and supports for this essential path." Since this unerring essential path is the peak of the nine vehicles, the highest vehicle, then "the paths of the remaining vehicles"—the other eight vehicles—"follow along as steps, scaffolding, and supports for this essential path." A step is part of a staircase, something one uses to climb to the top level. Scaffolding is like the frame we put up when building a house; it is only used temporarily. A "support" provides help and accompanies the path; it is not the primary practice. To accomplish the Way, one must practice this unerring essential path. The other Dharmas are only steps, scaffolding, and supports. If one does not practice this Dharma gate of the mind-ground, one cannot accomplish the Way. If one does not recognize true mind, how can one accomplish the Way? If one does not know that true mind's manifesting delusive thoughts is precisely wondrous functioning, and does not know that delusive thoughts are exactly manifestations of true mind's originally awakened wisdom, but only suppresses thoughts so they do not arise, then even if one suppresses delusive thoughts to death, one still cannot accomplish the Way. If one knows what delusive thoughts are about, does not fear them, lets them arise and cease on their own, allowing them to dissolve as they arise and cease, and does not run along with them, how relaxed and joyful this is! Then the chest no longer feels constricted, the head no longer feels swollen, and over time one will certainly realize the great Way.

"When one sees the luminous manifestation of the originally pure prajñā of self-nature, then the functioning of prajñā born of meditative concentration becomes even more blazing, like a

waterfall in summer." "Originally pure" means originally pure and clean. The luminous manifestation of the *prajñā* of self-nature is the luminosity displayed by self-nature—that is, by *prajñā*, great wisdom. This is not only the light one sees in sitting meditation. The light seen during sitting meditation is bright light. But the "luminosity" spoken of here does not necessarily mean bright light. All wondrous functioning is luminosity. For example, when the mind turns and knows how this matter should be handled or how to respond to this person, this too is luminosity. It is not that luminosity must be seen as bright light; all wondrous functioning is a manifestation of wisdom's luminosity.

"When one sees the luminous manifestation of the originally pure *prajñā* of self-nature"—when one sees the luminous wisdom manifested by originally pure true-suchness Buddha-nature—then at this time "the functioning of *prajñā* born of meditative concentration becomes even more blazing." The wondrous wisdom arising from correct *samādhi* has even greater functioning. "Blazing" means flaming vigorously, like flames burning fiercely. One may even not seek spiritual powers, yet spiritual powers arise naturally. We said earlier that after recognizing the *dharmakāya*, one protects it through practice at all times, not running along with delusive thoughts and not following objective circumstances. This is *samādhi*. At all times and places, one continually remains gathered in *samādhi*. Over time, wisdom arises from *samādhi*, and its functioning becomes even more vast, "like a waterfall in summer." In summer, ice and snow melt, the water source is abundant, and there is much rain as well, so waterfalls flow continuously and powerfully. This is an analogy for the inexhaustible wondrous functioning of *prajñā*.

"From the original abiding of emptiness, great compassion arises, and one enters boundless compassionate concern. This too unfolds naturally." Dharma-nature and Buddha-nature are originally empty; therefore this is called emptiness. All things are empty and unobtainable; this is what is meant by being "empty by nature." Their nature is empty—the original nature of true emptiness. This emptiness is originally unmoving and unshaken, unborn and undying, not coming and not going, not increasing and not decreasing. This is called original abiding. "From the original abiding of emptiness, great compassion arises." Great compassion must arise. One cannot only care about ending birth and death for oneself; one must also rescue the vast multitude of sentient beings. "Entering boundless compassionate concern" means that compassion has no boundary and is infinitely vast. The compassion of ordinary beings is narrow and limited. What do they have compassion for? They have compassion for their own children: my son, my dear one, my precious treasure. Other people's children can be left alone. They will support their own parents; other people's parents, they do not care. The range of compassion is far too small. Boundless compassion means that, no matter which direction, one has compassion for the sentient beings of the worlds of the ten directions and vows to broadly liberate them.

"This too unfolds naturally." In other words, it happens of itself. When practice reaches accomplishment, compassion naturally becomes boundless, and great compassion wells up of

itself. Some people say that arhats do not have great compassion; in fact, this is not so. It is that they have not yet realized the fourth fruition of arhatship. When they reach the fourth fruition, great compassion too wells up of itself. When they first set out on the path, they contemplate the three realms as a prison and regard birth and death as an enemy. This is like some people who practice Pure Land today saying, "Once I reach the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, I will not come back again, because this world is too painful and too full of affliction." If they are truly born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, they will still come back. Why? Because after they hear the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the vast assembly at the lotus pond proclaim the great Dharma, they will feel ashamed. To accomplish the Way, one must broadly liberate sentient beings. Without liberating sentient beings, one cannot accomplish the Way! For them too, "one enters boundless compassionate concern; this too unfolds naturally." If one realizes fourth-fruition arhatship and sees that all Buddhas and bodhisattvas are liberating beings within the six paths, how could one sit there unmoving without embarrassment? It is like everyone working in the same unit: if everyone else is laboring while you alone sit there doing nothing, would you not feel embarrassed? Thus the mind of "great loving-kindness without conditions and great compassion grounded in nonseparation" wells up of itself. This is called "turning from the Small toward the Great." Turning from the Small toward the Great likewise unfolds naturally.

"When the essential path of the union of emptiness and great compassion is directly realized, then all forms of conduct, like rivers flowing to the sea, each naturally manifests its function, like the sun and its light." If one truly realizes emptiness, then the self-centered partiality of ordinary beings is gone. Ordinary beings care only for their own wife, children, and family, not for others. After the mind is empty, great prajñā is clearly revealed, and ordinary feelings disappear completely. When partial affection falls away, all-embracing concern and great compassion naturally arise. This is the union of emptiness and great compassion. This is the essential path—the essential point of practicing the Way and the essential point of accomplishing the Way. Direct realization means that it is clearly and immediately revealed. When this essential path of the union of emptiness and compassion is clearly revealed, "all forms of conduct, like rivers flowing to the sea, each naturally manifests its function." The great ocean is where hundreds and thousands of rivers return; each river has a different function. The Yangtze and Yellow Rivers also have many tributaries, and these small tributaries too have their different functions. Here they can support boats and transportation; there they can irrigate and grow rice; elsewhere there may be abundant fish and shrimp. This is an analogy for how, after we realize emptiness and broadly give rise to great compassion, we liberate beings within the six paths of rebirth and can manifest different wondrous practices at all times and in all places. "Like the sun and its light" means they are inseparable like the sun and light. With the sun there is light, and then you can see things; without the sun, you are in darkness and cannot see things. The relationship between emptiness and great compassion is just like the relationship between the sun and light: inseparable. Only with the sun is there light; without the sun, where could light come from? The sun is an analogy for

emptiness; light is an analogy for great compassion. The two are closely joined and inseparable.

"In this way, together with the accumulation of merit, one broadly performs conduct that benefits others, in order to bring the true essential view to completion and support unstained quiescent bliss." To realize emptiness is to have wisdom; to give rise to great compassion is to have merit. Merit is accumulated by broadly liberating and serving sentient beings. If one has only wisdom but no merit, or if the accumulation of merit is insufficient, one cannot become a Buddha, because a Buddha is the "Honored One complete in both merit and wisdom." Therefore our practice must embrace both merit and wisdom. If one practices only wisdom and emptiness, but does not build merit or serve sentient beings, one's merit is not complete, and one cannot perfectly accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood. Arhats have a limited aspiration: they care only about self-liberation and do not liberate sentient beings or serve sentient beings. They are complete only in wisdom, not in merit, and therefore cannot become a Buddha. They will inevitably "turn from the Small toward the Great."

"In this way, together with the accumulation of merit." Here, *zi* means resources or capital, and *liang* means provisions for the path. The provisions for accomplishing the Way are like travel money for a journey: indispensable. Therefore one must form a vast resolve, arouse bodhicitta, and make one's practice embrace both merit and wisdom in order to perfectly accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood. From the first arousal of bodhicitta, a great bodhisattva directs that aspiration toward broadly liberating sentient beings. He says: I study Buddhism not for myself, but for sentient beings. For example, sentient beings are about to drown in the great ocean. I want to go save them, but if I do not know how to swim and do not know rescue techniques, how could I save them? My study of Buddhism and self-liberation are like first learning to swim and learning rescue techniques. Once I have mastered them, I can go liberate sentient beings. Self-liberation is only the means; liberating beings is the purpose. To study Buddhism is for sentient beings, not for oneself. This is the vast aspiration of a bodhisattva. If one forms only a limited aspiration for one's own escape from birth and death and the wheel of rebirth, then one can only accomplish the fruit of arhatship; one cannot be called a bodhisattva. This is the difference between Mahāyāna bodhisattvas and Small Vehicle sages.

The wisdom that realizes emptiness works together with the merit accumulated through broadly liberating sentient beings, and one "broadly performs conduct that benefits others." To perform broadly means to do much, not little. Conduct that benefits others means things beneficial to sentient beings. One must do many things that benefit sentient beings. Doing one good thing is easy; doing it for a long time is difficult. Doing it every day without interruption is even more difficult. For example, maintaining clear observation for a short time is easy, but not forgetting it at all times is difficult. However, nothing in the world is difficult for one who sets his mind to it. If you can maintain clear observation continuously for seven days and not forget it at any time during those seven days, then afterward it will no longer be difficult. The

Amitābha Sutra says, "If for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days one is single-minded without confusion, when that person approaches the end of life, Amitābha Buddha and the holy assembly will appear before him." If one can maintain continuous clear observation throughout seven days, afterward one will not easily forget. To broadly perform conduct that benefits others means doing things beneficial to sentient beings widely and for a long time, being willing to sacrifice oneself and help others, "in order to bring the true essential view to completion and support unstained quiescent bliss." One uses broadly performed other-benefiting conduct to perfect and complete the true essential view, to bring the essential view one has realized to full completion.

Let us explain "quiescent bliss." Only when even bliss cannot be obtained is it called quiescent bliss. If bliss still remains, it is not yet complete, because bliss and suffering are relative. Where there is bliss, there is suffering; when there is bliss, suffering is already within it. In quiescent bliss, even bliss cannot be obtained, so how could there be suffering? The "Land of Ultimate Bliss" is the utmost point of bliss; even bliss cannot be obtained there. Worldly dhyāna is like this too: the second dhyāna has joy, the third dhyāna has bliss, and at the fourth dhyāna, the "stage of purity of equanimity and mindfulness," even bliss cannot be obtained, and it is pure. "Unstained quiescent bliss" is quiescent bliss that has never been polluted. This is precisely the wondrous bright true mind, the one true Dharma realm, and the great ocean of perfect awakening. Broadly performed conduct that benefits others supports "unstained quiescent bliss." Great compassion accompanies emptiness; the six perfections and myriad practices accompany prajñā. We have said much above about how to practice and develop wisdom. Developing wisdom alone is still not enough; one must also broadly perform conduct that benefits others and build merit. There are many forms of other-benefiting conduct, and I will not explain them in detail here. We should do our utmost to help sentient beings. As it is said, those with money give money, those with strength give strength. We should do everything within our ability. Even if one can help others only by saying a good word, that too is good.

III. Summary of the Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā

"As for the three essentials: knowing what one's own mind is like, by observing delusive thoughts as they take objects as conditions and arise accordingly, one observes one's own mind as it originally is and recognizes the self-nature of the dharmakāya. (This is view.)" The three essentials are the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct. This passage explains "view." To know what one's own mind is like is to know what one's true mind is like. Does true mind have any characteristics of its own? True mind is without characteristics; this is what is meant by emptiness. So-called knowing what one's own mind is like means knowing that concepts such as self, person, sentient being, and life-span fundamentally do not exist, that everything is utterly unobtainable and completely without abiding, and that the myriad dharmas are all empty. At the same time, one must also know that true mind has boundless

wondrous functioning, and that delusive thoughts and afflictions are all wondrous functions arising from it.

Textual source note. The controlling Chinese root line reads 认知法身自性, hence "recognizes the self-nature of the dharmakāya." A received Yuan Yin witness instead reads 认知法身自相. This matters because the immediately following commentary separately discusses 法身自相 as the dharmakāya's intrinsic characteristic. The edition therefore keeps the controlling 自性 reading rather than harmonizing the two terms.

One observes one's own mind as it originally is through "delusive thoughts taking objects as conditions and arising accordingly." From where do delusive thoughts come? They arise in dependence on objective circumstances. Delusive thoughts manifest in dependence on external circumstances; this is their dependent arising. By examining the dependent arising of delusive thoughts, one observes one's own mind as it originally is. Delusive thoughts arise because of circumstances. But if there were only circumstances and no true mind, delusive thoughts could not arise. For example, objective circumstances are wind, true mind is water, and delusive thoughts are waves. Without water, wind alone cannot raise waves. Delusive thoughts that arise in dependence on circumstances can arise only because there is true mind; therefore, based on the dependent arising of delusive thoughts, one can observe one's own mind as it originally is, just as seeing waves is seeing water. In this way one "recognizes the intrinsic characteristic of the dharmakāya." Our true mind, the dharmakāya, is originally without characteristics. Yet when circumstances arise, true mind takes them as conditions and manifests delusive thoughts. Through the arising of delusive thoughts, one can confirm true mind by reverse inference and recognize the intrinsic characteristic of the dharmakāya—its being without characteristics.

With only an eyeball, one cannot see things. Because of the wondrous functioning of original nature, the eye is used as a tool through which visual perception arises; only then can one see things. If this dharmakāya without characteristics did not give rise to visual perception, one would look yet not see. When one is ill and the foot hurts badly—"Ah, it hurts unbearably!"—this too is the wondrous functioning of true mind. The dharmakāya without characteristics uses the nervous system as a tool to give rise to tactile perception; only then can one feel pain. Otherwise, how would you know there is something wrong with the foot? If there were no true mind, one would neither feel pain nor cry out in pain. Recognizing true mind through the dependent arising of delusive thoughts is called view. Ganges Mahāmudrā expounds this view again and again. I too am explaining it here again and again. If everyone still does not know it, that will not do. In fact, it is not that you do not understand or do not know; it is that doubt remains. This is exactly the "seal of the one true reality" of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Everyone, do not doubt it anymore.

"Fusing delusive thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, one becomes thoroughly familiar with the dharmakāya. (This is samādhi.)" The samādhi we speak of is not sitting dead and unmoving. Then how is this "samādhi" practiced? Just like this: "Fusing

delusive thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, one becomes thoroughly familiar with the dharmakāya." Recognize delusive thoughts and the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya as one and inseparable. The wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya is delusive thought, and delusive thought is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya; the two are not different in the slightest. Again take waves and water as an analogy. Not only are waves completely water when they have subsided; even when they have not subsided, they are completely water. Why do we begin by speaking of waves subsiding? Because that includes a state of stillness, which is easier to recognize and take up. After recognizing and taking it up, one must also smash this mark of stillness; only then is the matter finished. Sentient beings are accustomed to clinging to marks. The mental path of recognizing phenomena that bear characteristics is well worn, while the path of directly realizing what is without characteristics remains unfamiliar. This requires a process of "making what is unfamiliar familiar, and making what is familiar unfamiliar." The eighty-four thousand Dharma gates of Buddhism are all this kind of process. Mahāmudrā is the most direct: it directly points out "fusing delusive thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya." If you can directly take this up as your own, then in one thought you go beyond three asaṃkhyeya kalpas, and directly become "thoroughly familiar with the dharmakāya." This alone is truly the great samādhi without entering or leaving.

At that time you will not fear delusive thoughts. Let delusive thoughts arise as they may; all of them are the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. You need only refrain from heeding them, abiding in circumstances, or clinging. Maintaining clear observation in this way at all times and places, you will gradually become thoroughly familiar with the dharmakāya. You may say, "Eh? Why are you still talking about a process of practice? Maintaining clear observation in this way is not the same as directly becoming familiar with the dharmakāya." Correct! That is because you have not directly taken it up as your own, so I have no choice but to speak in this way. If you truly take it up as your own without doubt, what need would there still be for clear observation? Everyone, in taking this matter up as your own, you must be extremely careful. The real cannot be made false, and the false cannot be made real. "Like a person drinking water, who knows for himself whether it is cold or warm"—in your own mind, you know most clearly. If you cannot take it up as your own without doubt, then you still need to maintain clear observation every moment while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Speaking is wondrous functioning; working is also wondrous functioning. See everything in this way. Once it becomes thoroughly familiar, you recognize only the dharmakāya and no longer take external circumstances as real. That is called realizing the great Way. At that time, even clear observation is no longer needed.

"On the cessation of thoughts, being firm and settled; thoughts do not continue, and the view of the dharmakāya is not forgotten. (This is conduct.)" The two phrases, before and after, explain conduct. The conduct method of Ganges Mahāmudrā never departs anywhere from the wondrous bright true mind. It is a conduct method of the highest vehicle. If understood from a crude and shallow level, it may be misunderstood. Let us analyze this passage from

two levels. The first level: "On the cessation of thoughts, being firm and settled." "On the cessation of thoughts" means at the break in a thought, when delusive thoughts come to rest. "Being firm and settled" means that the mind is not shaken and peacefully enters samādhi. "Thoughts do not continue, and the view of the dharmakāya is not forgotten." Thoughts not continuing means not one thought arising; this is stilling. The view of the dharmakāya not being forgotten means clear and distinct; this is contemplation. You can certainly hear that this kind of explanation is talking about the practice of sitting meditation and entering samādhi, the practice of stilling and contemplation. We have already spoken quite a lot about Ganges Mahāmudrā, so you will certainly say, "This does not seem to be the conduct method advocated by Ganges Mahāmudrā. But is this not exactly what the passage says?" Actually this is not the meaning. This is a rough understanding of the literal wording, or we could say it is the surface meaning of the passage. "To interpret only by the words is to wrong the Buddhas of the three times." Now we will go deeper, into the inner meaning, to explain this passage.

The second level: "On the cessation of thoughts, being firm and settled" does not mean that not one thought arising is called the cessation of thoughts. Since "delusive thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya's originally awakened wisdom," if one can turn the light inward in a single thought and recognize and take up the dharmakāya, then delusive thought is no longer delusive thought. Taking up the dharmakāya rather than delusive thought is "the cessation of thoughts." "On the cessation of thoughts, being firm and settled" means firmly and steadily taking up the dharmakāya on this basis. This is the great samādhi without entering or leaving.

"Thoughts do not continue, and the view of the dharmakāya is not forgotten." If one forgets that "delusive thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya's originally awakened wisdom," then delusive thoughts are again delusive thoughts. This is thoughts continuing and forgetting the dharmakāya. If at all times and places one is alert and firmly recognizes and takes up the dharmakāya, then the present thought is no-thought. This is thoughts not continuing and the view of the dharmakāya not being forgotten. The previous phrase speaks of "the cessation of thoughts"—recognizing and taking up the dharmakāya, that is, realizing the essential view—apprehending Mind and seeing nature. If one can be "firm and settled," then it is accomplished once and for all. If one has not yet become firm, then there is the following phrase. The following phrase describes the practice of steady, continuous protection and clear observation.

The Diamond Sutra says, "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind." Here "responding" refers to responding to affairs, objects, and myriad occasions. When people come and guests go, one still has to respond, and inevitably one gives rise to thoughts. But this is the wondrous functioning of original nature; as long as one does not abide and does not run after thoughts, that is enough. Just when a thought is arising, one still does not see any thought that can arise. This is being firm and settled. It does not mean preventing every thought from arising and dying there unmoving. We use delusive thoughts to deal with people

and things and handle everyday affairs; we are not running along with delusive thoughts. Our true mind remains without abiding and without following, unmoved and unshaken. Thoughts not continuing means not allowing delusive thoughts to form an unbroken chain of associative grasping. From Zhang San one associates to Li Si; from Li Si to Zhao Wu; from Zhao Wu to Wang Liu... delusive thoughts fly about without stopping. That is bad. At such a time one must become sharply aware, not heed them, and the train of delusive thought is cut off.

Yesterday someone asked me about Chan investigation. He said he liked to investigate Chan, investigating "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" but he could never arouse the doubt-sensation. I told him: to investigate Chan one must arouse the doubt-sensation. If it cannot be aroused, that is a problem. You can either change methods, or when a thought comes, ask where it comes from. This is not heeding the thought; it is tracing where it arises. When a thought subsides, ask where it goes. This is not holding the thought in place; it is observing where it ceases. It is like a cat catching a mouse. The cat crouches at the mouse hole; as soon as the mouse pokes out its head, the cat immediately pounces. The mouse is an analogy for delusive thought. You must be alert at all times, like the cat. As soon as a delusive thought shows its head, immediately investigate where it came from. When the delusive thought subsides, observe where it ceases. This is the Chan Dharma gate, and its purpose too is to make "thoughts not continue." Practicing like this over time, the familiar habit of continuous thinking becomes unfamiliar, while the previously unfamiliar non-continuity of thoughts becomes familiar. When practice matures, on contacting an opportunity and meeting a condition, the observing mind and the observed thought dissolve without a trace in one instant; with a sudden "ho!" subject and object both vanish, sense faculties and sense objects drop away, and you realize the great Way. So-called "the view of the dharmakāya is not forgotten" is still practicing, being alert at all times and places and not forgetting the dharmakāya. This is the conduct within view, samādhi, and conduct; it is still at the stage of practice. At the moment of suddenly realizing the great Way, even the view of the dharmakāya cannot be obtained.

In the past there was a monk who was skilled at lecturing on the Vimalakīrti Sutra. Chan Master Dongshan asked him, "It cannot be known by wisdom and cannot be cognized by consciousness—what kind of statement is this?" He answered, "A statement praising the dharmakāya." Chan Master Dongshan said, "Calling it dharmakāya is already praising it." To call it the dharmakāya is already to have praised it; to add another praise phrase such as "it cannot be known by wisdom and cannot be cognized by consciousness" is needless duplication, an entirely superfluous addition. These are the words of one who has arrived home. Chan Master Dongshan ordinarily always taught students to "walk the bird path." The bird path is a narrow road, a narrow winding path. A monk asked Dongshan, "Master, you ordinarily teach students to walk the bird path. I have not yet understood: what is the bird path?" Chan Master Dongshan answered, "Not meeting a single person." On a broad road, carts and horses crowd together and there are many people. Walking the broad road is an analogy for mixed thoughts multiplying and delusive thoughts flying about. The bird path is a

narrow, secluded trail where people rarely travel. Walking the bird path is an analogy for the mind like still water, with not one thought arising. The monk further asked, "How does one walk it?" Dongshan said, "You must go straight on without selfishness." Walking the bird path refers to the mental path of practice. "Without selfishness" means that the mind is free of selfishness; when the mind is free of selfishness, heaven and earth are vast. Why do delusive thoughts fly about and attachments persist? All arise because of selfish benefit. If the mind is free of selfishness, seek out delusive thoughts and none can be found.

The monk further asked, "Just this walking the bird path—is it not the original face?" Dongshan asked in return, "Ācārya, why are you upside down?" The monk said, "Where is this student upside down?" Chan Master Dongshan said, "If you were not upside down, why would you take the servant for the master?" The original face is the master. Walking the bird path is a method of practice; it is only wondrous functioning, only a servant, not the master. If one takes "walking the bird path" as the original face, this is calling the servant the master. How is this not upside down? The monk further asked, "What is the original face?" Chan Master Dongshan said, "Not walking the bird path." When it comes to the original face, even the bird path need not be walked. Therefore, "On the cessation of thoughts, being firm and settled; thoughts do not continue, and the view of the dharmakāya is not forgotten" is only a conduct method. Strictly speaking, this sentence is not ultimate. It is not yet the original face. It is still "walking the bird path," still on the road. Wait until practice becomes fully mature; with a sudden "ho!" what is original opens up, and even the view of the dharmakāya cannot be obtained. Then one "does not walk the bird path," and fundamentally there never was any bird path to walk.

IV. The Essential Within the Essentials of Mahāmudrā

"Mind attends to the eyes; the eyes attend to space: this is the essential within all essentials. (One must refer to the practice method of Yangthig.)" "Mind attends to the eyes; the eyes attend to space." In our ordinary practice, the mind must be alert. The mind attends to the eyes—what is called the "eye of the mind." In his later years Bai Juyi wrote a line: "What can ferry the eye of the mind across? With one phrase of Amitābha." This refers to the eye of the mind. The eyes look at space: the eye of the mind contemplates emptiness. That is, one sees everything as empty; everything is unobtainable. Whatever one sees, one does not hang it in the mind; it is equivalent to not having seen it. One sees yet without anything seen—this is not closing the eyes so as not to see. One hears yet without anything heard—this is not blocking the ears so as not to hear. "It is not that seeing ceases; it is not that hearing ceases. Clearly aware, one does not cling to seeing and hearing." If one practices in this way, one will certainly accomplish the great Way.

"This is the essential within all essentials." This is the essential instruction among all essential instructions. Practice requires a key, and this is the most important key of all. This "essential within the essentials" may be referred to in what Yangthig teaches. Yangthig is a lineage

within Esoteric Buddhism. Its meaning is that all dharmas are inseparable, and the beings of the five destinies are all pure bodies. The pure body is the dharmakāya: the bodies of gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-beings are all the pure dharmakāya. This is just as Chan Master Yongjia says in the Song of Realizing the Way: "The real nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature; the illusory, transformed body, empty in itself, is the dharmakāya." These are words of one who has arrived home. When esoteric practice reaches the highest division, it converges with Chan. Therefore Chan is called the "great esoteric school."

10.16 恒河大手印（第十六讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Sixteen)

The Fourth Empowerment and the True Mahāmudrā

"A Mahāmudrā teaching not received through the esoteric vehicle's fourth empowerment cannot be called Mahāmudrā." This is speaking of the esoteric school's rule concerning "empowerment." Let us briefly explain the origin of empowerment. Empowerment was an ancient Indian custom. When a crown prince ascended the royal throne, an empowerment ceremony was held for him. Water from the four seas was used, and jewels, incense, and rare and precious things were placed in the seawater. The crown prince then mounted an elephant, and the water was poured over his head along the elephant's tusk. This form was used to bless the king with peace, health, and long life, and to bless the country with peace, national prosperity, a strong populace, longevity, and abundant harvests. The empowerment ceremony symbolized auspiciousness.

Adapting to sentient beings, Śākyamuni Buddha followed this custom and likewise conferred empowerment on the assembly. Thus the empowerment rite was transmitted within Buddhism, and esoteric Buddhism places great emphasis on empowerment. But what is meant here by the "fourth empowerment"? Esoteric Buddhism speaks of four kinds of empowerment and five bodily sites. They are explained below.

The first kind is the light empowerment: light is radiated onto the crown of the practitioner. The second kind is the nectar empowerment: the practitioner is empowered with nectar. The third kind is the seed empowerment: one visualizes a seed mantra entering the practitioner's mind. The fourth kind is the mudrā-holding empowerment: one forms a mudrā with the hands and empowers the practitioner at five places on the body. These five places correspond to the Five Directional Buddhas, so the fourth empowerment is also called the "Empowerment of the Five Directional Buddhas."

First: the center, Vairocana Tathāgata—in some scriptures, Amitābha Tathāgata—representing the Wisdom of the Essence-Nature of the Dharma Realm, at the practitioner's forehead. Second: the south, Ratnasambhava Tathāgata, representing the Wisdom of Equality, at the practitioner's right shoulder. Third: the north, Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata, representing the Wisdom of Accomplishing Activities, at the practitioner's left shoulder. Fourth: the east, Akṣobhya Tathāgata, the Immovable Tathāgata, representing Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom, at

the practitioner's heart. Fifth: the west, Amitābha Tathāgata—in some scriptures, Vairocana Tathāgata—representing Wondrous Observing Wisdom, at the practitioner's throat.

The Five Directional Buddhas empowerment rite, which empowers the practitioner at five places—the forehead, right shoulder, left shoulder, heart, and throat—is called the “fourth empowerment.” Esoteric Buddhism stipulates that one must undergo the fourth-empowerment ceremony before one is considered to have received the Mahāmudrā teaching. If one has not received the fourth empowerment, one cannot be considered to have received Mahāmudrā. In reality, this human empowerment ceremony is only a form. The true empowerment comes only when you attain the bodhisattva stage of Equal Enlightenment and receive the empowerment of all Buddhas of the ten directions—only that is true empowerment. India was the birthplace of Buddhism. When the throne passed to a new Indian king, an empowerment ceremony was performed, and Śākyamuni Buddha also used this form to empower people. Thus the empowerment rite was transmitted within esoteric Buddhism. Nowadays, when esoteric teachings are transmitted, students receive empowerment.

The True Mahāmudrā Is Reality as It Naturally Is

“Reality as it naturally is—that is the true Mahāmudrā. Not practicing, not adjusting, and not being scattered is its supreme Dharma gate.” “Reality” can properly be spoken of only with regard to true-suchness Buddha-nature; hence the term “true reality.” True reality is without characteristics; being without characteristics, there is no appearance that is not it. Here, “as it naturally is” means “originally just this way.” Our Buddha-nature has always been this very reality; it has nothing to do with practice. It is originally boundless in luminosity and inexhaustible in wondrous functioning. Because it is covered by ignorance, it manifests as ordinary beings—this too is wondrous functioning. Genuine and not false, originally just this way: this “is the true Mahāmudrā.” Mahāmudrā is the one true Dharma realm; it is our wondrous bright true mind. This is the true Mahāmudrā. The fourth empowerment is only a form and is not necessarily the true Mahāmudrā. Forming a mudrā and engaging in a practice is also not necessarily the true Mahāmudrā.

The true Mahāmudrā is precisely our true mind. It requires no practice. Fundamentally, there is nothing to practice or adjust in it, and it is never scattered. Only if there is scatteredness does adjustment become necessary. Since it has no scatteredness, what is there to adjust? “Not practicing, not adjusting, and not being scattered is its supreme Dharma gate.” This is the Dharma gate of the highest vehicle. This Dharma gate is to recognize true mind right now; only this counts as truly obtaining Mahāmudrā. To recognize true mind right now, protect it and keep it from running after circumstances—this is the supreme Dharma gate of esoteric Buddhism. Chan is also like this.

A student of Chan asked his teacher, “What is Buddha?” The teacher said, “If I tell you, I am afraid you will not believe it.” The disciple said, “Master, if you speak honest words, how

would I dare not believe them?" The teacher said, "If you believe, you are Buddha." The disciple realized at once: "Ah, it is originally like this!" After the disciple took it up as his own, he preserved it steadily and continuously, and within a few years of practice he realized the great Way. The reason he could accomplish the Way was that he could take it up directly as his own and preserve it steadily and continuously in practice.

The supreme Dharma gate of esoteric Buddhism is the same as Chan. It also speaks in this way: right now, when you know cold, know heat, know pain, know itching, and so on—this capacity to perceive and know is your true mind. You need only protect it at all times. You must know that all circumstances are the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. Through circumstances, recognize true mind. True mind is like a mirror; circumstances are like images. Recognize the mirror alone; do not take the reflected images as what is real. Practicing in this way is the highest-vehicle Mahāmudrā, the most perfect Dharma gate, and the swiftest path to Buddhahood.

Emptiness, Bliss, and Clarity

"Emptiness, bliss, and clarity—clarity is also called wisdom. Emptiness is no-thought; therefore they are also called bliss, clarity, and no-thought." Earlier, when we discussed signs of meditative progress, we spoke of "emptiness, bliss, and clarity" as three kinds of meditative experience that naturally arise in the course of diligently practicing the Way. Clarity does not necessarily mean visible light; it refers to mind-light becoming manifest, and therefore clarity is also called wisdom. Without delusive thoughts, yet clear and distinct, with the mind empty as if washed clean—this is the meditative experience of "emptiness." "Emptiness is no-thought; therefore they are also called bliss, clarity, and no-thought." Sometimes "emptiness, bliss, and clarity" are also called "bliss, clarity, and no-thought." Bliss here means lightness, ease, and joy. This joy cannot be compared with any worldly happiness. Clarity here means the wondrous brightness of true mind. When the luminosity inherent in Buddha-nature shines forth fully and prajñā wisdom is revealed, one is naturally open, unencumbered, carefree, and at ease. No-thought does not necessarily mean that there is not a single thought. When thoughts arise but do not abide, and are empty in their very actuality, this is called "no-thought." We have already said a great deal about this when discussing these signs of meditative progress, so we will not say more here.

Safeguarding One's Own Mind and Samaya

"Do not give rise to a mind of corrective adjustment, and yet be utterly without scatteredness, in order to guard your own mind. To be in this way without abiding, without grasping at conditions, and spontaneously functioning, without departing from the bright, pure fundamental essence of one's own mind, is like holding a bright lamp in the hand and dispelling the darkness. This is what it means to safeguard samaya well." "Do not give rise to a mind of corrective adjustment" is the same as the "not practicing and not adjusting" just discussed. "And yet be utterly without scatteredness" is the same as the "not being scattered"

just discussed. Not practicing, not adjusting, and not being scattered is its supreme Dharma gate. "In order to guard your own mind" means using this supreme Dharma gate to guard the wondrous bright true mind. The wondrous bright true mind is originally awakened wisdom. It is originally without characteristics, originally without abiding, and originally unmoving. It pervades empty space and fills the Dharma realm; originally it has no scatteredness. Whether one ascends to heaven or descends into hell, it is ever constant and unchanging.

Therefore, when we practice preserving and entrusting—that is, guarding one's own mind—we should not arouse any mind of counteracting, grasping and rejecting, or corrective adjustment. At all times and in all places, put everything down, remaining open and numinous, abiding nowhere; only then does one accord with true mind. Only in this way can one realize the great Way. Without abiding means having no attachment. Without grasping at conditions means not pursuing conditions. Spontaneous functioning means responding naturally to circumstances. Everything arises in response to causes and conditions; do not let the mind be moved along with what arises through conditions. Whatever the circumstances are, I respond accordingly; when circumstances change, I respond with them. Do not impose any fixed view or agenda of your own; accord with all causes and conditions. If you insist on having things your own way—wanting this or wanting that—or go along grudgingly, it will not do.

"To be in this way without abiding, without grasping at conditions, and spontaneously functioning, without departing from the bright, pure fundamental essence of one's own mind" means that being without abiding, without grasping at conditions, and spontaneously functioning in this way does not depart from the bright, pure fundamental essence of one's own mind—that is, self-nature. To depart from it means to go against it and go off course. Self-nature is originally unmoving and unshaken, yet you are wavering and unsettled. Self-nature originally neither comes nor goes, yet you are coming and going without stop. Self-nature originally is unborn and undying, yet you continue in ceaseless arising and ceasing. This is departing from the bright, pure fundamental essence of one's own mind. Self-nature is originally unborn and undying, neither defiled nor pure, not coming and not going, not increasing and not decreasing; yet you move and waver, come and go, and arise and cease without end. This does not accord with it. We must remain in accord with original nature at every moment: without abiding, without grasping at conditions, spontaneously functioning, and never departing from the bright, pure fundamental essence of one's own mind.

If one can do this, then "it is like holding a bright lamp in the hand and dispelling the darkness." It is like holding a bright lamp in your hand: all darkness is dispelled and everything before your eyes is bright. Even if the road ahead is pitted and uneven, there is no fear; even if you walk at night, there is no fear. If you want not to fall into a deep pit, you must dispel the darkness. Otherwise, if there is a pit ahead, you will not know it. Therefore, when we face circumstances, do not move the mind. "When Old Man Sai lost his horse, who could know it was not a blessing?" "Good fortune is where disaster rests; disaster is where good

fortune lies hidden." If you see a very good chance to get rich and your mind moves, that chance to get rich may very well harm you. Why say this? If you become rich, kidnappers may come, tie you up, and extort money from you—would that not turn into a bad thing?

In the Tang dynasty, Layman Pang Yun sank his vast family fortune into the Xiang River. He said, "Much gold unsettles the mind." When there is much wealth, the mind becomes disturbed; it also provokes envy and makes it impossible for you to be settled. It is a source of disaster, so do not want it. If we recognize only the wondrous bright true mind, do not follow circumstances, and are not deluded by money, sensual beauty, and so on, then Buddha-nature will remain constantly manifest, and the mind will not be disturbed. Rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss also definitely requires "one-pointedness without confusion." Once the mind is confused, one cannot be reborn there. We must be without abiding, without grasping at conditions, and spontaneously functioning at all times and in all places, without departing from the bright, pure fundamental essence of one's own mind. This is like holding a bright lamp in the hand and dispelling the darkness. If one can do this, one is safeguarding samaya well.

What is samaya? It is equality, vow, and non-transgression. Equality means that Buddhas and all sentient beings are equal. The bright, pure fundamental essence of mind is equal in all, without any distinction of high or low. Originally there is no sea of suffering; only because sentient beings delusively cling and delusively grasp does the boundless sea of suffering illusorily appear. Vow means that one must enable everyone to be liberated from the sea of suffering and must make great vows to rescue beings. One should learn from Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva: "Until the hells are empty, I vow not to become a Buddha." One should learn from Samantabhadra Bodhisattva: constantly accord with sentient beings and accompany them through the six paths. Non-transgression has just been explained, so it will not be repeated here.

We must be alert at all times and in all places. Do not be deluded by circumstances. At all times and in all places, remove defilements and obscurations, and eliminate our defiled habits. If, after a small setback, one loses heart and backs out—"Ah, this is too painful. My hands hurt, my legs are numb. I will not practice anymore, I will not practice anymore. I feel stifled and miserable. It would be better to take it easy, go watch a show, or chat with friends"—then while watching and chatting, without realizing it, one ends up in the three evil destinies. If one truly wants to end birth and death, one must make great vows, must not fear hardship, and must practice diligently while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Relying only on two hours, or three or four hours, of sitting meditation is still not enough. One must also be alert at every moment, not be deluded by circumstances, and protect the pure original nature. This is what it means to safeguard samaya well.

Leaving Discrimination and Attachment Forever

"If there is discrimination and attachment, how could this merely be a violation of samaya?" Conversely, if discrimination still does not cease and attachment is still not relinquished, how could that merely be a "violation of samaya"? It is not merely a violation of samaya; it is the seed of rebirth in the six paths, the seed of hell. Discrimination and attachment are plainly the delusive mind moving chaotically, refusing to put down one's own private interests. With this kind of practice, how could one accord with the vast and open Great Way?

All of you should pay attention. Non-discrimination absolutely does not mean failing to know what is good or bad. What we are saying is that discrimination must not continue without end, with thought following thought and no way to put on the brakes. When functioning, good and evil are clear, right and wrong are distinct. Once the function is used, nothing clings or lingers; there is no attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection, and no trace is left behind. If one can be like this, then direct perception remains present while inferential cognition functions, and inferential cognition does not depart from direct perception; this is not discrimination in the sense meant here. One knows perfectly well in the mind whether something is good or bad, but one does not therefore favor good people and dislike bad people. We hope that bad people transform into good people, and that good people advance still further.

In the past, someone in a monastic community stole something. He thereby violated the precept against stealing and did so repeatedly. The monastic steward wanted to expel him from the community. He wept bitterly and begged to confess and repent. Because this was not his first offense, the steward would not accept his repentance and insisted on expelling him. Yet the abbot wanted to keep him and give him another chance to reform. The steward and some upright practitioners said to the abbot, "If you keep him, we will all leave this place." The abbot said, "Even if all of you leave, I will still keep him." The steward said, "We may leave, but let us make one thing clear. If you keep him and not us, does that mean that among all of us there is not even one good person, and that we are not even as worthy as one monk who has broken the precepts?" The abbot said, "It is precisely because every one of you is better than he is that I keep him and not you. Wherever you go, you can still continue to practice. If he leaves, who will take him in? What outcome could await him except further downfall?" These words deeply moved everyone, and none of them left. The monk who had violated the precepts was even more moved. From then on he single-mindedly committed himself to reform, not only never stealing again, but also practicing diligently; later he too attained accomplishment.

Therefore, non-discrimination absolutely does not mean not distinguishing black from white or not discerning right from wrong. It means great loving-kindness without conditions and great compassion grounded in nonseparation, not acting from self-interest through attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejection. Here, direct perception remains present while inferential cognition functions, and inferential cognition does not depart from direct

perception. Although direct perception has no discrimination, inferential cognition still knows good and bad. Our Buddha-nature is aware; it is not like wood or stone. Yet one must not have discrimination and attachment. If there is discrimination and attachment, how could this merely be a violation of samaya? It is the seed of rebirth in the six paths; one may even descend into hell. Discrimination and attachment bring endless future trouble.

"Only by leaving discrimination and attachment forever, and bringing forth the mind without abiding anywhere, can one thoroughly discern the true meaning of all the teachings in the Tripiṭaka, leaving nothing uncomprehended." As explained above, if one does not leave discrimination and attachment, one not only violates samaya but brings endless future trouble. Therefore one must "leave discrimination and attachment forever." Even if you have a vast family fortune, you cannot cling to it. Can you keep it? You cannot. Because you will have to die; after you die, you cannot take away even one coin. You will still leave empty-handed. In the end you must put it down. Even if you are unwilling to let it go, you will still have to let it go. Why not be a little smarter and put it down now, thereby obtaining great wisdom and great benefit?

Let alone at death: even when it is right before your eyes, you may not be able to keep it. Śākyamuni Buddha said that wealth is "shared by five parties." It is not yours alone; it is vulnerable to these five. Which five? Water, fire, thieves, the king, and relatives. Your property may be entirely washed away by flood, burned up by fire, stolen by thieves, confiscated by the king, or fought over by relatives. How is it yours? Once any of these five parties takes it, whether you let go or not, you will have to let go. Therefore, let us be wiser and stop discriminating and attaching. We must "leave discrimination and attachment forever, and bring forth the mind without abiding anywhere." To be without discrimination and attachment at all times and in all places is called "leaving forever." When the mind neither craves nor clings and thought is free of fixation, this is called "without abiding anywhere." This does not mean that the mind is like dead ashes; rather, wondrous functioning unfolds freely and responsively. This is called "bringing forth the mind." If one is truly like this, then one "can thoroughly discern the true meaning of all the teachings in the Tripiṭaka, leaving nothing uncomprehended."

If we can truly be without abiding and attachment at all times and in all places, and bring forth the numinously bright true mind, free and responsive in its wondrous functioning, then we can thoroughly and clearly see the true meaning of Buddhadharma and fully comprehend it, leaving nothing unclear. Suppose instead that we do dead practice: "a withered tree leaning against a cold cliff, without warmth through three winters." At most, one realizes the arhat fruit, but that is still within transformational birth-and-death. Why? Because such a one abides in a pure land beyond the three realms and remains unmoving, dead there; this is another layer of birth and death. Ordinary beings have fragmentary birth-and-death; arhats have transformational birth-and-death. Therefore we must bring forth the mind that abides nowhere, bring forth the mind of boundless wondrous functioning.

The Diamond Sutra says, "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind." The Sixth Patriarch awakened from this. In response to Shenxiu's verse, "The body is like the bodhi tree; the mind is like a bright mirror stand. At all times polish it diligently; do not let it gather dust," the Sixth Patriarch composed this verse: "Bodhi originally has no tree; the bright mirror is not a stand. Originally there is not a single thing; where could it gather dust?" Master Shenxiu was attached to existence, while this verse of the Sixth Patriarch leans toward emptiness. When you speak of existence, I speak of emptiness. Actually, both held one-sided views; therefore the Fifth Patriarch said, "He too has not yet seen the nature." Some people think the Fifth Patriarch said this falsely because he feared that those who supported Shenxiu would harm the Sixth Patriarch. In reality, it was not false. If it had been false, why did the Fifth Patriarch still call the Sixth Patriarch into the abbot's room at the third watch and give him further instruction?

The Fifth Patriarch explained the Diamond Sutra to the Sixth Patriarch. When he reached "Responding without abiding, bring forth the mind," the Sixth Patriarch awakened greatly at those words. Ah! It turns out that self-nature is originally vital and responsive; it is not empty nothingness, and it is not dying there unmoving. The Sixth Patriarch sighed in amazement and said, "Who would have thought that self-nature is originally pure? Who would have thought that self-nature neither arises nor ceases? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally complete in itself? Who would have thought that self-nature is originally unmoving? Who would have thought that self-nature can give rise to the myriad dharmas?" The Sixth Patriarch said "Who would have thought?" five times. His understanding came alive. Before this, the understanding of Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch, was actually biased toward emptiness and was dead. "Originally there is not a single thing; where could it gather dust?" is emptiness taken to an extreme; this too is not ultimate. The Fifth Patriarch saw that he had great potential, so he struck the rice-pounding mortar three times with the staff in his hand and left, secretly signaling him to enter the room at the third watch. He then explained the Diamond Sutra to him, whereupon he awakened suddenly.

Therefore, we must not do dead practice. We must do living practice, and must function wondrously at every moment. "He now is precisely me"—all are my reflections, all are my wondrous functioning. But "I now am not him"—one also must not attach to wondrous functioning. We are not afraid of sentient beings and not afraid of demons; these are all wondrous functioning and are not empty nothingness. Some people say that the Diamond Sutra teaches emptiness, empty nothingness. This is an erroneous understanding; it is wrong. The Diamond Sutra teaches boundless wondrous functioning; it reveals true mind. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss exists; there is such a beautiful world: gold as the ground, seven-jeweled lotus ponds, waters of eight virtues, and the sounds of wind and birds proclaiming the Dharma. It is indeed this wonderful and is genuinely present—how could it not be? But it is marvelous presence, not truly established existence. Originally it was not there; it is manifested through the powerful vows of Amitābha Buddha and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the vast assembly at the lotus pond. Inert emptiness is wrong, and truly

established existence is also wrong. "True emptiness, marvelous presence": empty yet not empty, existent yet not existent; not empty yet empty, not existent yet existent. If one can be like this, then this is "leaving discrimination and attachment forever" and this is "bringing forth the mind without abiding anywhere."

Then one "can thoroughly discern the true meaning of all the teachings in the Tripiṭaka, leaving nothing uncomprehended." The Buddhadharma of the Tripiṭaka and its twelve divisions, with its vast and boundless teachings, can all be clearly understood in the mind. Throughout the Tripiṭaka and its twelve divisions, there is nothing that does not depict true mind. Once you have understood true mind, you have grasped the true meaning. You are then a person of the household, no longer an outsider. Of course you understand the things in your own home at a glance, without anything left over. In the scriptures of the Tripiṭaka and its twelve divisions, nothing in them remains doubtful or unclear, and nothing is beyond your explanation; you know them all, with nothing remaining.

Uncontrived Practice and Observing the Mind

"In uncontrived practice, observing the mind is most essential." "Uncontrived practice" is effortless conduct. To use the mind to practice the mind is effortful conduct: there is still a mind intent on practice and a mind deliberately engaged in practice. Effortful conduct is the initial stage; gradually one passes into effortless conduct, that is, "uncontrived practice." In uncontrived practice, "observing the mind is most essential." Observing the mind is the most important thing.

Earlier we said that observing the mind means alertly watching thoughts as they arise. When a thought comes, ask where it comes from; when the thought ceases, ask where it goes. Observing the mind is clear observation: watch the thought and see it clearly. In this way, thoughts will not chaotically arise and cease, shifting and flowing without pause. If one does not maintain clear observation, delusive thoughts fly about, and countless thoughts and considerations arise; yet one becomes accustomed to it and does not feel that this is disorder. How could that do? Therefore one must be alert and must watch carefully.

True mind and delusive mind must be made clear. The mind engaged in clear observation is still delusive mind, because this too involves giving rise to thought and mental activity. Without true mind, this delusive mind could not arise. Delusive mind arises from true mind and is its wondrous functioning. When it is being used rightly—that is, when one is rightly observing the mind—do not discriminate whether it is true mind or delusive mind. Continue applying this until the delusive mind no longer moves; the observing mind and the observed thought will drop off at the same time. Then subject and object will both vanish: the observing mind and the observed thought will both be gone. If one does not maintain clear observation, subject and object will not both vanish and one will not break free. Therefore one must maintain clear observation.

Buddha-recitation is also a form of clear observation, as well as stilling and contemplation. "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha..." The practitioner's mind is gathered in by the Buddha-name and no longer moves; this is stilling. One recites and listens to one's own recitation, hearing it clearly and distinctly; this is contemplation. Even if no sound is voiced while the mind recites "Amitābha Buddha," one still hears clearly; this is illumination. Attending to the Buddha-name without scattering the mind among other concerns is stilling. Keeping the Buddha-name clearly and distinctly present is contemplation. Observing the mind does not mean observing the physical heart; it means observing thoughts in the mind.

Our practice of the Heart-Center Dharma is also observing the mind. During formal sitting, we hold the mantra by mentally reciting it and listening attentively, each syllable clear and distinct. Outside formal sitting, we maintain clear observation, staying alert as thoughts arise, like a cat catching a mouse. As soon as a thought arises, one sees it; one does not follow the thought or get carried away by circumstances. To know the thought as soon as it arises is what Chan calls "recognizing it." Once it is recognized, it cannot deceive you.

Someone says: "When I am not reciting the Buddha-name, things seem fine and there are no delusive thoughts. As soon as I recite the Buddha-name, things go wrong and delusive thoughts become extremely numerous." Has reciting the Buddha-name made things worse? No. In fact, when you were not reciting the Buddha-name, your mind was in great disorder; you simply did not notice it. You ran after delusive thoughts and circumstances, constantly turning in the six paths of rebirth. Now that you are reciting the Buddha-name, the mind has settled down, and you see the delusive thoughts, see the causes of rebirth. This is a very good thing. It is like a room with a small hole: a strand of sunlight shines in, and you see dust flying in that beam of light. Where there is no light, you cannot see the dust. In fact, dust is everywhere; when the sunlight shines on it, it appears. Therefore seeing thoughts is a good thing. This is the initial manifestation of wisdom-light.

You hope to have no thoughts all at once; this is just like hoping to ascend to heaven in one step. How could it be so fast? This is a common fault among practitioners: all want to succeed at once and become a Buddha at once. It is not so easy. Yet it is not truly difficult either. Once you know the method, go do it. Do it today, do it tomorrow, do it the day after tomorrow; after several years of practice, success is certain. But to want to succeed all at once, to succeed in a single day—there is no such thing. Some of us who practice the Heart-Center Dharma sit for two hours a day and still find it unbearable. They force themselves to sit for a few days, then cannot keep going. The fault lies in having no perseverance. Then they switch to reciting the Buddha-name with a scattered mind: the mouth says, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha..." while the mind has delusive thoughts flying everywhere. Does this work? This amounts to not reciting the Buddha-name at all. It will not do.

V. View, Practice, Conduct, and Fruition

10.17 恒河大手印（第十七讲） / Ganges Mahāmudrā (Lecture Seventeen)

Terminology note. 懒融 is identified here as "Lazy Rong," the sobriquet of Chan Master Farong.

The King of View: Transcending Extreme Views, Attachment, and Conceptual Imputation

"Only by transcending all extreme views, attachment, and conceptual imputation can there be the true king among views. (View.)" We all have extreme views. What are extreme views? Clinging to existence and clinging to nonexistence—these are the extremes of existence and nonexistence. Clinging to good and clinging to bad—these are the extremes of good and bad. There are also long and short, right and wrong, gain and loss, emptiness and existence, and many other kinds of extreme views. Wherever there is relativity, there are two sides, and these are all extreme views. Extreme views are the relative views of ordinary beings.

What is attachment? To fixate on one matter and be unable to put it down or free oneself from it—this is attachment. What is conceptual imputation? It means measuring, calculating, and reckoning about everything. There is not one thing one can put down; one wants everything. This is what the Yogācāra school calls the "conceptualized nature." Ordinary beings in the six paths of rebirth are all like this. There is not one ordinary being who does not calculate and compare. Some people say aloud that they do not want this or that. Do not believe them. In fact, they want everything. "Fish is what I desire; bear's paw is also what I desire"—they want both the fish and the bear's paw. If they say there is one thing they do not want, it is only because they already know that they "cannot have both." In reality, none of it can be obtained. Ah, all of this is conceptual imputation and attachment.

We who practice must put these things down. Put everything down. If one cannot put them down, it will not do. Putting down is transcending. "Only by transcending all extreme views, attachment, and conceptual imputation can there be the true king among views." Only this is right view; only this is the king among views. Why? Because only this accords with our original nature. "View" means recognizing our original nature, recognizing our original face. If you do not "view" in this way, how could you recognize the original nature? All extreme views, attachment, and conceptual imputation must be put down, left far behind, and transcended. Only this is truly the king among views.

The King of Practice and the King of Conduct

"As for practice, only when there is not the slightest scattering from the luminous essence of one's own mind is there the true king of practice. (Practice.)" View, samādhi, and conduct: just now we spoke of "view"; now we speak of "samādhi," which here is "practice." "Only when

there is not the slightest scattering from the luminous essence of one's own mind is there the true king of practice." The luminous essence of one's own mind is our own original nature. It is boundless in luminosity and inexhaustible in wisdom; therefore it is called the luminous essence. This luminosity is intrinsic to our fundamental essence. One must not be scattered in the slightest or be enticed by external circumstances and drawn away from self-nature, our fundamental essence. If one runs after circumstances and thinks wildly, then one is scattered.

At every moment one must see clearly and hold steady at the original nature. Only this is the true king of practice. We are all accustomed to running after circumstances. Only after we have run a hundred and eight thousand li do we realize, "Oh no! How have I run so far after delusive thoughts? Pull it back!" But then it already feels too late. In Chan there is a saying: "Do not fear thoughts arising; only fear noticing them too late." This tells us to maintain vigilant awareness at all times and not be carried away by delusive thoughts. If you notice only after having followed delusive thoughts far and for a long time, that is not good. Let thoughts arise if they arise; as soon as they arise, I can see them. As soon as I see them and leave them alone, they are seen through. Seeing them through without following them is precisely non-scattering. Only this is the true king of practice.

"As for conduct, only by abiding securely in the luminous essence of one's own mind, without contrivance and without seeking, is there the true king of conduct. (Conduct.)" Conduct means how practice is carried into action. How should one conduct oneself? "Only by abiding securely in the luminous essence of one's own mind, without contrivance and without seeking, is there the true king of conduct." Here again the luminous essence of one's own mind is mentioned. One must abide securely in this essence that is boundless in luminosity and inexhaustible in wisdom. "Without contrivance" means that one should not intentionally fabricate anything; everything unfolds spontaneously as conditions arise. Some people, when practicing a Dharma, do not practice in accord with the Dharma. They always think themselves clever and add something to it. This is intentional fabrication. "Without seeking" means not pursuing anything at all. Do not seek spiritual powers; do not seek to enter samādhi. The more you seek to enter samādhi, the more you cannot enter samādhi. The more you seek spiritual powers, the less they manifest. Because such seeking gives rise to delusive thought and obscures mind-light. Only without contrivance and without seeking is it right. Only this is the "true king of conduct."

If one does not practice in this way, then even if one practices with great effort, one still cannot accomplish the Way. Because if one does not know what the luminous essence of one's own mind is, one is like someone boiling sand to make rice: it can never succeed. First one must know what the luminous essence of one's own mind is; then one protects this luminous essence of one's own mind. Whether Buddha-name recitation, mantra-holding, or maintaining clear observation, the purpose is to protect this luminous essence of one's own mind. This is the prerequisite, and it is extremely important. If one practices in this way, one will certainly accomplish the Way. Therefore it is called the "king of conduct." If one does not know what

the luminous essence of one's own mind is, then all of it is blind and misguided practice. In the end one is only circling outside and cannot reach the heart of it; ultimately one cannot accomplish the Way.

The Fruition: No Seeking, No Abiding, Following Conditions Without Changing

"If one speaks of the path of fruition, then with regard to sages and ordinary beings, high and low, nirvāṇa and birth-and-death, there must be no longing or seeking, no abiding anywhere: the truly unsurpassed following of conditions while not changing, not changing while following conditions, quiescent yet constantly illuminating, illuminating yet constantly quiescent, equal to all Buddhas—only this is fruition. (Fruition.)" Ganges Mahāmudrā continually emphasizes the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct. What are these for? They are for realizing noble fruition. View, samādhi, and conduct are only the means; realizing noble fruition is the purpose.

"If one speaks of the path of fruition," if one wants to speak of what counts as realizing noble fruition, then "with regard to sages and ordinary beings, high and low, nirvāṇa and birth-and-death, there must be no longing or seeking." Sages or ordinary beings, high or low, nirvāṇa or birth-and-death—all of these are distinctions of our delusive mind. We are originally Buddhas; originally we have never departed from the great Way. Our fundamental essence is unborn and undying, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. "Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings" are without difference. What sages and ordinary beings, high and low, birth-and-death and nirvāṇa could there be? At the ultimate point there are no such relative opposites; what could you still hope for or seek? When the fundamental essence has been directly realized, there are neither sages nor ordinary beings. Sages and ordinary beings are one in essence; all are the originally luminous self-nature. Since there are neither sages nor ordinary beings, what high and low could there be? There is no "I am above and you are below," nor "you are above and I am below." There is no arrogance or pride. All are equal in suchness. High and low are originally unobtainable.

Yuan Yin glosses the Chinese characters here as follows: 涅 as "unborn" and 槃 as "undying." The fundamental essence has never had birth and death. What nirvāṇa could there still be to speak of? Since there is no nirvāṇa, what birth and death could there be? Therefore, originally there is no birth and death. To speak further of ending birth and escaping death—is that not superfluous? Since none of these opposites is fundamentally established, what is there to pursue? Therefore it says, "there must be no longing or seeking," and "no abiding anywhere." True nirvāṇa is "nonabiding nirvāṇa."

We have explained before that nirvāṇa has four kinds. First is the nirvāṇa of self-nature. Self-nature is our true mind; it is originally unborn and undying, originally nirvāṇa. Second is nirvāṇa with remainder. Small Vehicle sages realize this, but transformational birth-and-death has not yet been ended; therefore it is called "with remainder." Third is nirvāṇa without remainder. Transformational birth-and-death has also been ended, and nothing further

remains. In the Small Vehicle teaching, this is the nirvāṇa realized by the Buddha. Fourth is nonabiding nirvāṇa. Even Buddha cannot be obtained; only this is true nirvāṇa. This is what is meant by "birth-and-death and nirvāṇa are like flowers in the sky." At this point, anything may exist and one may be anywhere. Nothing is excluded, and nowhere is inaccessible. "From the beginning, the real was delusion; now, delusion is all real. Only return to original nature; not a single dharma is new." There is no abiding. Since one does not abide even in nirvāṇa, there is nowhere one cannot be.

We discussed before: after passing away, where is one reborn? The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Pure Lapis Lazuli World, or the inner court of Tushita? "Responding without abiding"—if there is a place to abide, it is already wrong. A Buddha is fundamentally without characteristics, follows conditions in everything, constantly accords with sentient beings, and goes wherever their conditions lead. Wherever there are conditions, one goes there to liberate beings; there is no fixed place. Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva does not take birth in a Pure Land, but liberates sentient beings in the hells: "Until the hells are empty, I vow not to become Buddha." Do you think Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva has not become a Buddha? Do you think Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva is not in the Pure Land? In reality, the hells are originally empty; Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva has long since become a Buddha and is at all times and in all places within the Pure Land. In the eyes of sentient beings it is hell, because sentient beings have a hell-mind—a mind in which greed, anger, and delusion blaze fiercely. Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva has no hell-mind, so everywhere is the Pure Land.

"No abiding anywhere" is the "truly unsurpassed following of conditions while not changing, not changing while following conditions." Following conditions while not changing means following the conditions of all sentient beings. If sentient beings are in the heavens, I go to the heavens; if sentient beings are in the hells, I go to the hells. Whether one ascends to heaven or enters the hells, the original nature does not change. Ascending to heaven does not increase it or make it any purer; entering the hells does not diminish or defile it. It is like gold: according to conditions, it is fashioned into a ring, a necklace, or a bracelet. According to conditions, it takes on different forms, but the fundamental essence of gold does not change; gold is still gold. Not changing while following conditions means that although the fundamental essence of gold does not change, its form can change. This is precisely wondrous functioning. True mind is endowed with boundless wondrous functioning. Following conditions while not changing is essence; not changing while following conditions is wondrous function.

"Quiescent yet constantly illuminating, illuminating yet constantly quiescent": quiescent means quiescent and unmoving. In essence, it is quiescent and unmoving. Illuminating means illuminating and knowing the myriad dharmas. Being able to illuminate the myriad dharmas is wondrous function. This too speaks of essence and wondrous function. Earlier we discussed vigilant awareness. At all times one must remain aware and alert, without running after circumstances. Later, even deliberately aroused awareness is no longer needed. If one is still deliberately arousing awareness, there is still contrivance. Only when there is no contrivance

can this be called “non-action.” When practice has matured, clear awareness functions naturally without deliberate arousal. Not deliberately arousing awareness is quiescence; its natural illuminating function is illumination. This is “quiescent yet constantly illuminating” and “illuminating yet constantly quiescent.” Although wondrous functioning unfolds, the fundamental essence remains unmoving in suchness. Only when practice reaches this point is it truly complete. If deliberate awareness is still being maintained, practice is not yet complete. But one cannot be like this all at once; one must always pass through the stage of deliberately arousing vigilant awareness. One must repeatedly maintain vigilant awareness until it becomes thoroughly familiar. When this awareness has become thoroughly familiar, one is like someone immersed in air who no longer notices it. “As when one enters a room of orchids, after long smelling them one no longer knows their fragrance”: all traces have blended away and been forgotten.

Like all Buddhas, one follows conditions while not changing and does not change while following conditions; like all Buddhas, one is quiescent yet constantly illuminating and illuminating yet constantly quiescent. This is being equal to all Buddhas. “Equal to all Buddhas—only this is fruition.” Only this counts as realizing fruition. When we begin practicing, we must know what the original nature is. After knowing the original nature, we must constantly observe the mind and maintain vigilant awareness. By practicing in this way, one can realize the fruit of Buddhahood. If one does not maintain vigilant awareness and does not practice, how could one realize fruition? To reach heaven in one step is impossible. No one is born already a Buddha, because their ignorance remains and they still cling to marks. As soon as an infant develops perception and awareness, it clings to the body and is already strongly self-centered. When it has something, it is unwilling to give it away; if you take it, the infant cries and makes a fuss. This is all because of ignorance.

Therefore, to realize the fruit of the Way, one must begin by establishing right view. The first step is: with a snap, what is original opens up—“Ah! This is my self-nature!” The second step is to diligently protect it at all times and in all places. The third step is realizing fruition. If today you can truly recognize self-nature, then when you go on to recite the Buddha-name, you will certainly gain profound benefit in lived experience. At that time your Buddha-name recitation differs from how you recited before. Formerly, when reciting the Buddha-name, you did not know what “reciting” was about; you only knew to seek toward the West. Now you understand: “Oh! Each recitation of the Buddha-name is a recollection of my self-nature, making my own mind pure.” “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” In this way all the defilement of your own mind is swept away, and the attachments and afflictions of your own mind are cut off at the root. Then your Buddha-name recitation brings genuine benefit. Therefore establishing right view is extremely important. View is first. Only when view is right can one attain correct samādhi. Only then does Dharma practice count as right conduct.

VI. The Necessity of Practice

No-Thought Is Not Indeterminate Blankness

"No-thought is not indeterminate blankness; that is beginningless ignorance." "No-thought" is not indeterminate blankness. What is indeterminate blankness? It is like wood or stone, without a single thought. This is what is called "indeterminate blankness." Indeterminate blankness is identified here with the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, in which perception and feeling have ceased, one does not receive any information from the outside world, and there is no activity of thought whatsoever. Such indeterminate blankness is beginningless ignorance. It is not a good thing; do not take it as something good. Some people pursue this and worship it. "Ah! So-and-so's practice is good; he can enter samādhi for a week without moving. Ah! So-and-so's practice is even better; he has not moved for a month. Ah! So-and-so has already sat for three years!" These are all instances of indeterminate blankness. Even if you could enter samādhi for eighty-four thousand kalpas, at most it would only be the absorption of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. That is still worldly meditative absorption. It is still within the six paths of rebirth and has not brought liberation.

To become a Buddha is to become a living Buddha whose wondrous functioning is free and responsive. It is not to sit there dead and unmoving. What use is sitting there dead and unmoving? During the Tang dynasty, Dharma Master Xuanzang went to India to obtain the scriptures. When he reached the region of the Himalayas, he saw purple clouds forming a canopy and knew that there must be someone practicing the Way in the mountains. So everyone went to search. There had originally been a cave on the mountain, but over long years trees had fallen and grass had grown up, so the cave had been covered over. Searching and searching, suddenly someone saw what seemed to be a cave and began digging there. After they dug in, it was indeed a cave, and inside there was a person seated. Xuanzang's disciples said, "This person is dead. Look, he is cold as ice, and nothing remains but a skeleton covered in skin." Dharma Master Xuanzang touched his chest and found it was still slightly warm. This showed that he was not dead: the eighth consciousness had not yet departed. The eighth consciousness is the consciousness associated with warmth and lifespan. Since there was still a little warmth at the chest, it showed that lifespan still remained.

Dharma Master Xuanzang struck the small hand-chime, and this practitioner emerged from samādhi. The practitioner opened his eyes and saw: "Ah! The Buddha has come to speak Dharma for me." He had been sitting there waiting for Śākyamuni Buddha to appear in the world and speak Dharma for him. So when he saw Dharma Master Xuanzang, he thought Śākyamuni Buddha had come to guide and liberate him. Dharma Master Xuanzang said, "I am not Śākyamuni Buddha. Śākyamuni Buddha entered perfect quiescence many years ago." Śākyamuni Buddha's appearance in the world corresponds to the time of King Zhao of Zhou. Tang Xuanzang lived in the time of Li Shimin of the Tang dynasty. A very long time had

already passed. The practitioner wept: "Ah! I have missed the opportunity. I was waiting for Śākyamuni Buddha to appear and liberate me, but I never imagined that the Buddha had already entered perfect quiescence." Dharma Master Xuanzang said, "Do not cry. The Buddhadharma of Śākyamuni Buddha still remains. I am going to the Buddha's land to obtain the true scriptures, and in the future I will return to China and greatly revive the Buddhadharma. This body of yours can no longer be used. You have sat for more than a thousand years"—he had been in samādhi for over a thousand years, not three or five years—"so it cannot be used. Take another body. Quickly go and take rebirth in China. When you have grown up, I should also have returned. You should take birth in a place with tall buildings and glazed roof tiles; do not go to some small place."

The practitioner went to take rebirth, and was born into the family of Yuchi Gong, becoming a young prince. This practitioner entered samādhi for more than a thousand years, so his practice should have been very good, should it not? No. This kind of attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling is useless. It is like pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows back, and even more vigorously. After he grew up, he clung to marks, became licentious, and caused a great calamity. He was sent to the ancestral temple and was to be beheaded. Yuchi Gong was a meritorious minister, and his family had been granted princely rank. To execute a prince, he first had to be sent to the ancestral temple. But if he left home and became a monk, he could be spared execution, so he had no choice but to become a monk. Yet he still wanted to bring women, a music troupe, and fine food and amusements. These things filled three large carts. People mocked him as the "Three-Cart Monk." Later, Dharma Master Xuanzang awakened him to his previous life. He suddenly came to his senses and wanted none of the "three carts." This was Dharma Master Kuiji, Xuanzang's chief disciple, who later attained very high accomplishment and became the second-generation transmitter of the Faxiang school.

Therefore, we must practice flexibly and responsively. Sitting there dead and unmoving is useless. True samādhi is remaining undeluded amid circumstances. Whatever may happen, my mind is not disturbed. Whatever female beauty comes before me, my mind does not move. However much wealth and treasure there may be, it cannot move my mind. This is true samādhi. If the mind moves when facing circumstances and one then presses it down, that is still not true samādhi; there is still an arising-and-ceasing mind. Why does a first-fruit arhat still have seven births in the heavens and seven births among human beings? It is because he still has an arising-and-ceasing mind. When thoughts come, he immediately becomes alert and immediately extinguishes them; this too is an arising-and-ceasing mind. Where there is arising and ceasing, there must be seven returns among humans and devas. Our practice must be genuine: at all times and in all places, protect true mind without losing it. It is extremely important to understand clearly that no-thought is not indeterminate blankness.

"It is also distinct from non-Buddhist practitioners and ordinary beings." Seeking Dharma outside the mind is a non-Buddhist path. Non-Buddhist practitioners also speak of no-

thought, but their no-thought is dead. The qigong practiced by ordinary people has not left attachment behind, and they too speak of no-thought. Their no-thought is even less the true no-thought. They cling to qi: where has this qi gone, now to the Baihui point, now to the dantian, now to the Yongquan point; the great heavenly circuit, the small heavenly circuit, and so on. Could such things count as no-thought? Therefore the no-thought we speak of is different from the no-thought of non-Buddhist practitioners and ordinary beings. It has nothing to do with those practices.

Actualized Awakening and Original Awakening: Child Luminosity Merging with Mother Luminosity

"From non-awakening, awakening is actualized. Actualized awakening is the child luminosity born from original awakening, and it merges with mother luminosity." All our practice proceeds "from non-awakening to actualized awakening." Previously we were not awakened. Through entering the Way and practicing, we begin to awaken. I am now speaking Dharma to everyone in the hope that everyone will begin to awaken. The wisdom-light arising from actualized awakening "is the child luminosity born from original awakening." Original awakening is our Buddha-nature. Original awakening is "mother luminosity"; actualized awakening is "child luminosity." Child luminosity is born from mother luminosity, just as a mother gives birth to a son. "And it merges with mother luminosity" means that actualized awakening merges with original awakening. When child and mother merge, the Way is accomplished; if child and mother do not merge, the Way cannot be accomplished. One must maintain clear observation constantly, and not cling to external circumstances. This is the process of actualized awakening merging with original awakening. When actualized awakening and original awakening merge inseparably, child and mother have merged.

For example, in our Heart-Center Dharma, the fourth mudrā is the "Tathāgata-Mother Mudrā." Mother can give birth to child; child and mother merge, and thereby the great Way is realized. The Pure Land school also speaks this way: "The Tathāgatas of the ten directions think compassionately of sentient beings as a mother remembers her child. If the child runs away, what use is the mother's remembering? If the child remembers the mother as the mother remembers him, then mother and child, through life after life, will not be far apart." This passage was spoken by Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva. When we recite the Buddha-name, the Buddha is the mother and we are the child. The Buddha is always welcoming and guiding us at every moment. If the child remembers the mother just as the mother remembers the child, then child and mother merge, and accomplishment of the Way becomes very swift.

The Tripiṭaka and its twelve divisions all express the same fundamental principle. We must grasp this general principle. If we truly understand it, then the entire Tripiṭaka and its twelve divisions can be thoroughly understood. If we do not grasp the general principle and instead take broken passages out of context, everything becomes fragmented and disjointed, and one

no longer knows what to follow. Therefore, seeing the original nature at every moment is the most important thing.

“Although the essential view has been established, it still cannot be realized without practice.” Although we have established the essential view, have right view, clearly know what the original nature is, and know that only by practicing on the basis of this original nature can the Way be accomplished, this does not mean that practice is unnecessary. Without practicing the Way, can the Way be realized? No. Therefore it says, “it still cannot be realized without practice.”

"Gold-bearing sand has the quality of gold, but it is not yet gold. There must be a process of smelting and refining." Gold-bearing sand means sand that contains gold—ore that contains gold. "Gold-bearing sand has the quality of gold": by nature, the gold-bearing sand contains gold and has the quality of gold. "But it is not yet gold": although it contains gold, it is not yet completely pure gold, because sand and other impurities are mixed within it. "There must be a process of smelting and refining": there must be a process of refining, removing sand and impurities, and only then can it become pure gold. This is an analogy. All sentient beings—the gold-bearing sand—have the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata and possess Buddha-nature—they have the quality of gold. But ignorance is still present, and delusive thinking and attachment are still present. They are not yet Buddhas at the level of fruition. In other words, although sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, they are not yet Buddhas. There must be a process of practice—like smelting and refinement. One must suddenly break through ignorance and then remove delusive thinking and attachment completely; only then can one become a Buddha. This passage uses smelting gold ore as an analogy, intending to emphasize the necessity of practice. How should one practice? Look at the following passage.

VII. The Three Doors of Practice

Body Practice

"The three doors of practice: body practice means leaving all contrived activity, such as worldly matters that have no benefit, other world-transcending methods of practice, and so forth, and only letting the body settle at ease, spacious and open." The three doors of practice are body practice, speech practice, and mind practice. Esoteric Buddhism emphasizes the empowerment of the three mysteries, which refers to body, speech, and mind. The three doors of practice also refer to body, speech, and mind.

The first is body practice: a method of practice based on this body of flesh and blood. "Leaving all contrived activity" means relinquishing all kinds of deliberate activity, "such as worldly matters that have no benefit." In this world there are matters with no benefit—for example, playing mahjong. This has no benefit; it squanders precious time. Among all of you, perhaps there are quite a few who like playing mahjong and even use “we are one player short” as an

excuse, gathering four people every day to play several rounds. This will not do. Do not engage in matters without benefit. Refraining from worldly matters of no benefit is itself practice—body practice.

"And other world-transcending methods of practice, and so forth": there are many such methods. If today one practices this and tomorrow practices that, this too will not do. One must go deeply into a single Dharma gate, commit to one Dharma, and practice it all the way to the end. Today one hears Zhang San say this Dharma is good and so practices it; tomorrow one hears Li Si say that Dharma is good and goes off to practice that one. Constantly changing course and switching from one method to another in this way, even though all the Dharmas being practiced are wondrous world-transcending Dharmas, will still yield no result, because the mind is not single-pointed and cannot come into accord with the wondrous Dharma. Moreover, many Dharmas are of no benefit. For example, if one recites a mantra and can bore a hole in a blade, this is a practice of no benefit. It has no benefit for liberation. Seeing that one can bore a hole in a blade, one becomes delighted: "Good, I will practice this Dharma." What use is practicing this?

I once heard a monk speak of the causes and conditions by which he left home. Before leaving home he practiced martial arts, training boxing and swordsmanship with his maternal uncle. One day, on the Sichuan border, he saw two young Tibetan lamas smoking opium. He could not stand it and interfered: "Hey! You are monastics. How can you be smoking opium?" The young lamas said, "Do not look down on us for smoking opium. We have magical arts." He asked, "What magical arts do you have?" The young lamas saw that he was carrying a saber and said, "Use that saber of yours to chop me. Once I recite a mantra, you will not be able to chop me." Hearing this, he found it very strange and quickly asked, "There really is such a method?" The young lama answered, "Of course. If you do not believe it, try it. But first wait until I finish smoking the opium." After a while he had finished smoking: "Come, I will recite the mantra; you chop." In fact the man did not dare to chop for real. The saber was very sharp; if he cut off the lama's hand, things would be hard to settle. He struck with the back of the saber, and the saber bounced up. "Oh! How did you make my saber bounce up?" The young lama said, "Even if you chop with the edge, I am not afraid." "You really are not afraid?" "Of course I am not afraid." "If I cut it off, I will not be responsible!" "You need not be responsible; go ahead and chop." This time he really chopped with the edge, and the saber bounced up again. He was convinced and thought: "The Buddhadharma is remarkable—better even than the martial skills I had trained in." This encounter led him to study the Buddhadharma. In fact, this was a practice of no benefit; learning it is of no use.

"Only letting the body settle at ease, spacious and open." Simply let the body settle at ease, spacious and open, without any entanglement or obstruction, not tense or busy. The Heart Sutra says, "Because there is no obstruction, there is no fear; far from inverted dreams and thoughts, one reaches ultimate nirvāṇa." If there is obstruction, there will be fear and inverted dream-thinking. With no obstruction, the mind is empty, and one's heart becomes spacious

and open. Therefore, “The noble person is broad-minded and at ease; the petty person is constantly anxious.” The petty person worries over gain and loss and is often anxious all day long. The noble person's heart is open, at ease, and free. Everyone should note: letting the body settle at ease, spacious and open—this is body practice. If the mind is always worrying over gain and loss, then this is not in accord. Letting the body settle at ease, spacious and open, with no affliction and no concern in the mind, always calm, harmonious, light, and happy, the body will become healthy and illnesses will rarely arise. Living in the world in this way, one can then practice the Dharma. This is body practice.

Speech Practice

"Speech practice means stopping worldly speech that has no benefit and stopping mantra-recitation that has no benefit, becoming quiet like a valley." The second of the three doors of practice is speech practice—practice at the level of speech. Telling jokes, flattering someone, belittling some affair, and so on—all these idle worldly words have no benefit for practicing the path of liberation. They are worldly speech without benefit. To debate right and wrong, long and short, over this person and that affair is all the more idle disputation. In the so-called “Black Teaching” within Tibetan esotericism, there are many mantras that are not for practicing the path of liberation but are used to work effects on people; those are mantra-recitation without benefit. Do not speak of such things and do not recite them. "Worldly speech that has no benefit and mantra-recitation that has no benefit should all be stopped." We study the Buddhadharma and practice the path of liberation, so we must go deeply into a single Dharma gate. Do not dabble indiscriminately in other things. Do not speak worldly words without benefit, and do not recite mantras or liturgies without benefit.

Editorial source note. The controlling Chinese calls this 黑教 “the ‘Black Teaching’ within Tibetan esotericism,” and the translation preserves that classification. In modern scholarship, Bön is treated as a distinct Tibetan religious tradition that developed alongside and in close interaction with Tibetan Buddhism, rather than simply as one Tibetan Buddhist school. This note identifies the taxonomy issue without rewriting Yuan Yin’s source wording.

We should observe the “three things to reduce”: fewer affairs in the mind, fewer words in the mouth, and less food in the belly. Human beings have a bad habit: when their tasks are finished and they have a little free time, they go on endlessly about Zhang San, Li Si, and Wang Ermazi. Practicing the path of liberation cannot be like that. Would it not be better to remain silent? “Quiet like a valley”: do not speak too many words. Let the mind be peaceful and quiet, like an empty, secluded valley. “A secluded valley echoes words in the evening mist.” If you have a question to ask me, then I answer you in detail, without tiring of it. When there is no question, do not go on thinking and discriminating. Let the mind be empty and open: “The great void drinks in the light, dissolving separation.”

Mind Practice

"Mind practice means leaving conceptual proliferation, discursive thought, and comparative thinking; even visualization and deliberate mental engagement are stopped. (Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning.)" The third door of practice is mind practice, practice at the level of thought and consciousness. What use is it to cling to whole systems of empty theory unrelated to the path of liberation? Analyzing and inferring about them is "conceptual proliferation"; thinking of them and evaluating them is "discursive thought." One should leave conceptual proliferation, discursive thought, and comparative thinking. Let the mind be utterly empty and pure, far from conceptual proliferation and discursive thought, and also far from comparative thinking. Taking everything and comparing it—what are you comparing? Whether I am better or you are better, whether I am superior or you are superior. Such a mindset is unequal; it is precisely delusive thinking and discrimination. Such "comparative thinking" must be left behind all the more.

"Even visualization and deliberate mental engagement are stopped." Visualization is a method of practice, as we mentioned earlier. To imagine something is still a form of deliberate practice. For example, in "visualization-based Buddha-recitation," one visualizes Amitābha Buddha above one's head and visualizes oneself as Amitābha Buddha. Visualization involves deliberate mental engagement; it deliberately stirs thought and conceptual consciousness. Even this visualization and deliberate mental engagement must be stopped. Maintain clear observation with care; that is enough. When a thought arises, see it; after seeing it, pay no attention to it and do not run along with it. Visualization is a gradual method. After visualization has succeeded, one must still continue practicing to dissolve the visualized image before one can see the original nature.

My teacher, Guru Wang Xianglu, had an analogy for this. Suppose a large patch of sores has grown on the body. Medicine is used to treat it, and the sore gradually contracts, contracts again, and contracts further. In the end it contracts into a small opening, and even into a single point. All the other places have healed, with only this one point remaining. This is an analogy for successful visualization. But this one point is still a sore. If it is not removed, it may break out again later. Therefore, going a step further, one must dissolve the visualized image. Only then can it be settled once and for all; only then does it count as truly realizing and entering the dharmakāya. If the visualized image is not dissolved, the original nature cannot manifest. Therefore, visualization methods require crossing one extra threshold. All visualization-based esoteric systems must cross one extra threshold, because in the end they must all dissolve the visualized image. How is that image dissolved? One must continue practicing, visualizing it as large—large, larger, ever larger—until it is boundless, and then the visualized image disappears. Or in reverse, one visualizes it as small—small, smaller, ever smaller—until nothing remains. One method expands it; one method contracts it. In this way the visualized image is dissolved. After that image is dissolved, one sees the original nature, but one has crossed one additional threshold. Mahāmudrā is the most direct Great Vehicle mind-ground

Dharma gate and does not require these processes. Therefore it says, "even visualization and deliberate mental engagement are stopped." Mahāmudrā does not travel this road and does not cross all these thresholds. When a thought arises, see it; after seeing it, pay no attention to it. Protect true mind—that is enough.

The sentence in parentheses is taken from a verse by Chan Master Farong, known as "Lazy Rong," as a note on "mind practice." Master Farong's verse is very good, and people often like to cite it. Most often they quote four lines: "Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning; no-mind is precisely functioning, and constant functioning is precisely no-mind." The complete verse has eight lines: "Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning. Roundabout discussion of terminology is wearisome; direct speech is free from complexity and burden. No-mind is precisely functioning; constant functioning is precisely no-mind. Now, speaking of the place of no-mind, it is not different from having mind." When, in the very midst of practice and functioning, no thought can be seen arising, this is "Precisely when mind functions, no mind can be found functioning." To speak in circles at length about Buddhist terminology wearies the mind and consumes effort. Directly pointing to the mind-source and speaking no other words is not so complicated or heavy. This is "Roundabout discussion of terminology is wearisome; direct speech is free from complexity and burden." The great Way has no shape, and true mind is without characteristics. Although the great Way has no shape and true mind is without characteristics, it is functioning everywhere and at every moment. Although all things and events are its wondrous function, when one seeks it in itself, it is utterly unobtainable. This is "No-mind is precisely functioning; constant functioning is precisely no-mind." Now that we directly point out this "no-mind" and speak of it directly, it is not different from "having mind"—this is "Now, speaking of the place of no-mind, it is not different from having mind."

VIII. Immediately Realizing the Unsurpassed Path of Perfect Awakening

"From the crown of the head to the feet, empty like a bamboo tube. The mind equal to empty space, utterly transcending all discrimination, free from sinking, agitation, and indeterminate blankness, and maintaining evenness, sustaining, lucidity, and quiescence. Luminous clarity without grasping, rejecting, or attachment, abiding in the originally wondrous, luminous, and pure essential nature: this is Mahāmudrā samādhi."

"From the crown of the head to the feet, empty like a bamboo tube" means that from the top of the head down to the feet, it is empty like a bamboo tube. The whole body and mind are utterly empty, without a single thing. Look at a bamboo tube: put it on water and it drifts along with the current. When the stream bends, it bends. Whether high or low, sinking or floating, it does not care. A wave knocks it down, and it immediately floats back up, rising and sinking with the current. One whose practice is accomplished is just like this: "Open and unrestrained, follow conditions and let rising or sinking be; become spring mud and protect the myriad flowers."

"The mind equal to empty space, utterly transcending all discrimination": the heart should be as vast as empty space. It makes no distinction between beautiful and ugly, and can contain everything. Within empty space there is everything. When tall buildings and mansions are built, empty space never says it cannot contain them. When you demolish the house, empty space does not become broader; when you enlarge the house, empty space does not become narrower. An airplane flies up into it, and empty space does not care. Dark clouds cover it, lightning flashes, thunder rolls, yet empty space has never shown the slightest reaction. It does not mind. Our true mind is originally like empty space and has never moved. Now that we recognize true mind, we must make the "mind equal to empty space, utterly transcending all discrimination." Whatever happens, I remain untroubled. Empty space can contain the myriad things, and I too can contain the myriad things. The worlds of the ten directions are within empty space; the worlds of the ten directions are also within my mind. In nonabiding nirvāṇa, one can go anywhere and is not confined to any one place. The heart is vast like empty space, broad like empty space, without abiding like empty space, and without attachment like empty space. Empty space is not without things, yet it has no obstruction whatsoever. "Utterly transcending all discrimination" means that all thoughts of discrimination, grasping, and rejection are transcended and relinquished. Discrimination, grasping, and rejection are all delusive thoughts; being delusive thoughts, they must be relinquished completely.

"Free from sinking, agitation, and indeterminate blankness, while maintaining evenness, sustaining, lucidity, and quiescence." "Free from" means leaving them behind. Sinking is dullness and dozing. "When a lazy ox takes to the road, it finds plenty of occasion to sleep." It is like that lazy ox: when it is not on the road, sleepiness does not come, but as soon as it sets out, it starts dozing. Some people are all right when they are not sitting, but as soon as they sit, dullness appears and they begin to snore. Agitation means restlessness and many delusive thoughts, sitting there tossed about by one chaotic delusive thought after another. Practicing this way absolutely will not do. We must avoid dullness and avoid agitation, but we also cannot fall into indeterminate blankness. Indeterminate blankness means that even right mindfulness is gone, like a block of wood or a stone. This too will not do. One must be clear and distinct, with right mindfulness bright and evident. We often speak of observing the mind; one must maintain clear observation. One cannot fall into indeterminate blankness; right mindfulness must still be present. Evenness means equality; sustaining means holding evenly. Lucidity is observation; it is wisdom. Quiescence is calming; it is samādhi. What is called "samādhi and wisdom equally sustained" means that quiescence and lucidity are equal, with neither higher nor lower. It is not that there is more lucidity and less quiescence, or more quiescence and less lucidity; they are equal in measure and sustained evenly. It is both clear and distinct and quiescent and unmoving; it is quiescent and unmoving and also clear and distinct. Samādhi and wisdom are one and inseparable. Within samādhi there is wisdom; within wisdom there is samādhi. Only because they are one and inseparable can they be equally sustained.

"Numinous clarity without grasping, rejecting, or attachment": true mind is numinously clear—the numinous light shines alone, utterly free from sense faculties and sense objects; numinous light is quiescently illuminating, clear and distinct. There is no grasping and no rejecting, and still less attachment. It is agile, lucid, and responsive, like trying to catch a gourd on the surface of water: catch it on the left and it turns left; catch it on the right and it turns right. One can never catch it. Earlier it was compared to being "empty like a bamboo tube." A bamboo tube and a gourd are alike: floating on the water, they are incomparably agile and responsive, and cannot be caught. Only when there is no grasping, no rejecting, and no attachment can there be numinous clarity. Grasping, rejecting, and attachment must all be thoroughly put down.

"Abiding in the originally wondrous, luminous, and pure essential nature: this is Mahāmudrā samādhi." Where does one abide? One abides in the "originally wondrous, luminous, and pure essential nature." True mind is originally boundless in wondrous functioning, originally boundless in luminosity, and originally pure and undefiled. This is the essential nature of true mind. To abide in the fundamental essence of true mind is precisely "abiding nowhere." Since the fundamental essence of true mind has no form, how could one abide in what is without characteristics? Abiding without abiding anywhere—this is Mahāmudrā samādhi. Nowadays people often talk about Mahāmudrā. What is Mahāmudrā? The fundamental essence of true mind is Mahāmudrā. Has everyone understood clearly? Do not ask again how to form a Mahāmudrā mudrā with the hands—with the left hand or the right? The fundamental essence of true mind is Mahāmudrā. Boundless in wondrous function, boundless in luminosity, pure and undefiled, abiding without abiding anywhere: this is Mahāmudrā samādhi.

"Always practicing in this way, suddenly, in a kṣaṇa, it is like a lamp being lit in a dark room: the room becomes bright and clear." Just now we spoke of the three doors of practice—body, speech, and mind. "Always practicing in this way," always practicing like this, one will suddenly summon full alertness. "Suddenly, in a kṣaṇa, it is like a lamp being lit in a dark room: the room becomes bright and clear." In the space of a kṣaṇa, it is like a lamp suddenly being lit in a dark room; mind-light is revealed, and everything suddenly opens into clarity. What is this? This is awakening. This is the bottom of the bucket falling away. This is opening up what is original. This is opening a great treasury of luminosity, mind-light illuminating heaven and earth, the worlds of the ten directions all complete within your mind. If one has not reached this point, then even if there has been some awakening, it can only be counted as "the mind opening only a narrow crack." There is only a narrow opening of luminosity, and it still does not count. When one reaches this point, it is like a great explosion: with a tremendous burst, empty space shatters and the great earth sinks flat. Person, self, and world all vanish without remainder.

When does such a breakthrough come? There is no way to know. When the time, season, causes, and conditions arrive, with a snap it breaks open. There is no fixed place. It is not necessarily in any particular location. Must it be at home? Must it be during sitting practice?

None of that is certain. Sometimes it occurs on the road, sometimes in a public place, and sometimes even in a dream. When practice has matured and the time, causes, and conditions have come together, the breakthrough occurs naturally. This is called “when the water arrives, the channel forms.” When water arrives, the channel naturally forms; without water, it cannot be said that the channel has formed. You need only keep practicing in this way; when the time, causes, and conditions come together, it suddenly happens. This “suddenly” is extremely important. There is no designated time. If there were a time, you would have a mind of waiting, and you must not “set the mind on waiting for awakening.” You cannot wait for awakening. As soon as there is a waiting mind, it is ruined. It will never come; one will never awaken.

Those of us who practice the Heart-Center Dharma must pay attention: do not count your sittings. Do not keep repeating, “I have already sat several hundred sittings; how many more until one thousand are complete?” Do not count. Quickly put it down. Counting them will not do. This is a waiting mind, and it is unacceptable. The breakthrough erupts suddenly. When practice has matured, it will naturally erupt. Do not have a waiting mind; keep practicing diligently. When you hear me say “a tremendous burst,” do not think it is like hearing thunder. It is not. It is only an inner experience: you feel as if there is a tremendous burst; other people do not hear it. The most important thing is to practice well. If you practice, it will come naturally; if you do not practice, it will not come. If you expect it and wait for it, with this waiting mind, it also will not come.

“The nirvāṇic self-nature—the wisdom-light of co-emergent original awakening—fully manifests. One immediately realizes the unsurpassed path of perfect awakening.” What is the “nirvāṇic self-nature”? It is the self-nature that is originally unborn and undying. “The wisdom-light of co-emergent original awakening”: co-emergent means arising together with our life. Original awakening means originally awakened, not only beginning to awaken at some later time. The wisdom-light of co-emergent original awakening is the wisdom-light inherently complete in one’s own mind, originally present. “Fully manifests” means that it manifests completely, without the slightest concealment. This means realizing it firsthand. Right now, I am speaking and you are listening. What you hear enters through the ear faculty. “What enters through the gate is not the family treasure.” You must realize this for yourself. With a snap, what is original opens up and you realize it firsthand; only then does it count. “One immediately realizes the unsurpassed path of perfect awakening” means immediately realizing the supreme path of unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening. At that time you will know: speaking of birth and death, talking about nirvāṇa, debating whether something is thorough or not, ultimate or not—all of it is conceptual proliferation. At that time you can manifest in bodily form to teach the Dharma and, for beings with whom you have affinities, “lead them all into nirvāṇa without remainder and liberate them.” Everyone, practice diligently! Keep advancing! Apply yourselves and press forward!

Part V — A California Teaching, 1997

A late teaching given at Fayin Temple in California, preserved as the final Yuan Yin source section in this edition.

11. 元音老人 1997 年在美国加州法印寺的开示 / Teaching Given by Yuan Yin Lao Ren at Fayin Temple, California, USA, in 1997

Chinese source: 《元音老人 1997 年在美国加州法印寺的开示》; descriptive English subheadings in this chapter are editorial navigation aids and are not present in the Chinese source.

Teaching Given at Fayin Temple in California, USA

A transcript from the recording of Yuan Yin Lao Ren's 1997 teaching at Fayin Temple, California, USA. Reposted and arranged by Miaohui.

All you great spiritual friends:

All Dharma Gates Are Equal; Pure Land Must Be Practiced with Wholehearted Effort

Speaking of the Buddhadharma, originally there is nothing to say. Because all sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata, no verbal formulation expresses the true intent. The Buddha's teaching the Dharma is still like "picking up yellow leaves to stop a little child from crying." There is no fixed Dharma. When the Buddha teaches Dharma, he prescribes medicine according to the illness: for whatever illness arises, that medicine is taken. There is nothing fixed. Any medicine that fits the illness is good medicine. Therefore all Dharma gates and schools are equal, without higher or lower.

In recent times, because circumstances and the general situation have changed, the faculties of sentient beings are comparatively dull and weak, and their karmic obstructions are deep and heavy. Because these obstructions are deep and heavy, their faculties are comparatively weak. Looking at methods of practice, Pure Land is still the most appropriate: it accords with principle and with capacities, and is most suitable for sentient beings' practice and realization. The Pure Land Dharma gate is extremely simple, suitable, and easy to practice. Simply holding the single phrase "Amitābha Buddha" can resolve every problem. This single phrase, "Amitābha Buddha," can include within itself the scriptures of the Tripiṭaka and its twelve divisions, and can encompass and contain all schools. It is indeed a good Dharma that universally gathers all three capacities and perfectly includes the eight teachings.

Unfortunately, some present-day Pure Land students do not single-mindedly hold this sacred Name. In mainland China a very bad saying has spread: "practicing Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind, one can be reborn while carrying karma." This means that one may practice Buddha-recitation while letting the mind wander and talking nonsense, and still be reborn in

the West carrying karmic obstructions. If it were really that easy, Master Lianchi would not later have said, “There are many who practice Buddha-recitation, but few who are born in the West. Why? Because their mind of buddha-recitation is not urgent and sincere.” Why are there many who practice Buddha-recitation yet few who are born in the West? Because the mind with which we practice Buddha-recitation is not reverent, sincere, and deeply earnest, but careless and perfunctory. Therefore Master Hanshan said, “If the mouth recites ‘Amitābha’ while the mind is scattered, even shouting until the throat breaks is still in vain.” If the mind is all confused and chaotic, then even if one shouts the Buddha’s name until the throat breaks, it is useless. This talk of “practicing Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind and being reborn while carrying karma” is very bad. In mainland China an even worse saying has spread: “So long as we believe in Amitābha Buddha, we need not practice Buddha-recitation; at the end of life we can still be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.” It has spread from bad to worse. The former at least called for practicing Buddha-recitation with a scattered mind; this one dispenses even with that. By spreading such confusion, they destroy the Buddhadharma, while still thinking they have found the secret key.

We say that whether it is Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism, one must practice diligently. If one does not practice diligently, relying only on other-power without self-power, one cannot succeed. A common saying goes, “Without passing through a spell of bone-piercing cold, how could the plum blossom give off its penetrating fragrance?” In buddha-recitation we must be wholehearted, unwavering, sincere, and honest. As Master Hanshan taught us, “Buddha-recitation is like pushing a heavy cart up a mountain: exert all your strength and keep pressing forward.” One syllable follows another, one phrase follows another, each syllable clear and distinct. Only then does the practice take hold.

Chan Master Zibai said that whether our buddha-recitation can lead to birth in the West is something we can examine for ourselves. How should we test it? Test it at both extremes: favorable circumstances and adverse circumstances. When circumstances are favorable, you are delighted beyond measure and forget buddha-recitation entirely; there is no thought of the Buddha. When circumstances are adverse, affliction and anger flare up, and again there is no thought of the Buddha. If at these two extremes you lose command of yourself and run after circumstances, then at the end of life you will be in great danger. Because right mindfulness cannot be sustained, at the end of life, when the four elements disperse, it is extremely painful. Especially when the wind element disperses, the body feels as if it is being scraped away layer by layer with knives; the suffering is unbearable. At that time one may be unconscious. Can you still sustain Buddha-name recitation? Therefore Śākyamuni Buddha taught us to “grasp and sustain the Name, whether for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days, single-minded and unconfused.” Here, “grasp” means to hold it tightly, while “sustain” means to continue with firm perseverance. It means that the Buddha-name and our mind come into accord: mind and Buddha are not divided in two but become one and inseparable. Mind is Buddha, and Buddha is mind; they accord completely. Only in this way can one maintain one-pointedness without confusion for one to seven days,

from beginning to end. Therefore it is extremely important for us to practice Buddha-recitation single-mindedly.

The Samādhi of Buddha-Recitation, Seeing the Self-Nature Buddha, and Pure Land as Chan and Esoteric Practice

Whether birth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss through buddha-recitation requires the samādhi of buddha-recitation is a key question, and it must be clarified. Some people say, “Our birth in the West depends on other-power, on being welcomed and guided to rebirth in the West through the power of Amitābha Buddha’s vows. It does not depend on ourselves, so it is not necessary.” They do not realize that if one wants other-power, one must first have self-power. If one has not the slightest strength oneself, relying only on other-power cannot accomplish it. Take worldly affairs as an example: if one asks someone else to help accomplish something, but has not the slightest ability oneself, can one succeed by relying only on others? Buddhadharma is worldly dharma; worldly dharma is Buddhadharma. Since worldly dharma is like this, how could Buddhadharma not also be like this? Therefore, in relying on other-power, one must first have a certain degree of strength oneself.

Master Yinguang once said that in buddha-recitation one must “urgently raise it and tear through.” “Raise” means to gather the whole spirit and bring this phrase of the Buddha-name into the mind. “Tear through” means to tear it open. It means that when practicing Buddha-recitation, one should also investigate: “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha...” From where is the Buddha-name being recited? Who is the one reciting the Buddha’s name? This looks like investigating a huatou; in fact Pure Land is precisely Chan. Master Yinguang said, “One must, upon this single thought of ‘Namo Amitābha Buddha,’ investigate layer upon layer, and urgently raise it and tear through. The more one investigates, the more urgent it becomes; the more one raises it, the more immediately present it becomes. When effort reaches its utmost and the practice is pure, suddenly, together with the recitation, it drops away, and one realizes and enters the state of no-thought in which recitation is never absent.” “Suddenly, together with the recitation, it drops away” means that buddha-recitation reaches the point at which nothing remains to be recited. The mind engaged in Buddha-recitation is originally delusive mind. When the delusive mind does not move, the Buddha-name cannot be recited. The mind that can recite and the Buddha-name that is recited drop away at once. This is tearing through.

Master Yinguang also said, “When practice reaches this point, one has attained the Dharma of buddha-recitation, responsive communion occurs, and this is precisely where one should continue to exert effort. It is like clouds dispersing in the vast sky and the blue heavens fully revealed: one personally sees what is original, yet originally there is nothing to be seen. Seeing in which nothing is seen is true seeing; when there is something seen, one follows after sense objects. At this point, mountain colors and stream sounds are all the truth of ultimate

meaning; crows cawing and magpies calling are none other than the supreme true vehicle. Lively and vivid, one responds to all dharmas while not abiding in any dharma; bright and clear, one illuminates all objects while not a single thing is established. Speaking of its function, it is like the rising sun in the east, perfectly luminous and clearly illuminating; speaking of its essence, it is like the bright moon setting in the west, pure and quiescent. It is illumination as quiescence and quiescence as illumination, both preserved and both dissolved, beyond opposition and perfectly integrated. It is like snow covering a thousand mountains, or the sea swallowing ten thousand streams: only one color, without the slightest difference in taste, unhindered and unobstructed, free and at ease. As for its benefit, in the present, before leaving the Sahā world, one constantly participates in the vast assembly; at death, one ascends to the highest grade and immediately realizes the Buddha Vehicle. Only those inside the house know the affairs of the house. If this is spoken to those outside the gate, slander will certainly arise.” The fundamental essence is without characteristics; to describe it as any kind of thing already misses the point. Yet when it functions, it is like the rising sun in the east, universally illuminating the great thousandfold world, its light swallowing the myriad phenomena. Our true-suchness Buddha-nature is just such a wondrous essence and wondrous function. Through buddha-recitation one can realize it.

In the Pure Land school there is a common saying: “When the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising.” This means that when we practice diligently and recite the Buddha’s name well, reciting until the delusive mind is cut off and the Buddha-name drops away, the mind-flower opens. Our physical heart is like a lotus flower: round on top and pointed below. The lotus is used to represent the mind first because of its shape, and second because it “emerges from the mud unstained.” Although we are in the Sahā world and amid all afflictions, the constantly abiding true mind is not stained by even a speck of dust. So long as we practice diligently, recite the Buddha’s name single-mindedly, and the mind becomes pure, the mind-flower will open.

Our physical heart can open in two situations. One is when one enters samādhi: it can open, and the greater the opening, the greater the luminosity one sees. The other is at the moment the breath is cut off. When the final breath is exhaled, it touches the fatal point at the edge of the pericardium, and our physical heart opens. The eighth consciousness then leaves, and the person dies. The eighth consciousness is the last to leave. The Yogācāra school says, “It leaves last and comes first, acting as the master.” “Leaves” means it leaves later; “comes” means it comes first. If we have done our practice well and the mind-flower opens, we can see our self-nature Buddha. Amitābha Buddha is precisely the self-nature Buddha. This is because the myriad Buddhas share one essence; they are not two. It is like the light of electric lamps: light and light mutually contain one another without obstruction. Therefore seeing the self-nature Buddha is seeing Amitābha Buddha. The saying “When the flower opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to non-arising” teaches us to practice well. Then, right now, the mind-flower can open; right now, one can see the self-nature Buddha. When the mind is pure, right now is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. In the Amitābha Sutra there is the phrase, “in that land,

whether they have already been born, are now being born, or will be born.” This means that to be born in the West, we do not necessarily need to die first. One can be born there here and now; it depends on how we practice.

When the samādhi of buddha-recitation has been realized, that is Chan and that is Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism relies on the empowerment of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind to open the secret treasury. Pure Land’s reciting the Buddha-name is equivalent to holding a mantra: it opens our own original nature, which is also opening the secret treasury. During practice, body, speech, and mind are all empowered through the three mysteries. We sit cross-legged, the hands forming the Dharma-Realm Samādhi Mudrā, with hands and feet unmoving; in this way the body does not easily move. This is the mystery of body. The mouth recites the Buddha-name without stopping; this is the mystery of speech. While reciting, one must not speak casually. Some people are very bad: they recite the Buddha’s name while talking nonsense, speaking of the affairs of Zhang’s family and Li’s family, of how the daughter-in-law is bad and the daughter is good. How could such a mind become single and unified? The mystery of speech means that the Buddha-name continues steadily and without interruption until delusive thinking is cut off and the Buddha-name can no longer be recited. That is precisely the right moment.

At this time people often become afraid: “Ah! Why is there no recitation? The Buddha-name is gone too. Am I going to leave the Buddha? Am I going to fall into emptiness?” In fact this is precisely the right time. They do not know that this is the moment when mind and Buddha enter into communion and become one and inseparable. It was originally very good: they were about to enter, about to enter the samādhi of buddha-recitation. But once fear arises, they retreat. During Buddha-recitation, keeping the mind unscattered and unconfused is the mystery of mind. We must know this kind of state in buddha-recitation. Therefore, Pure Land is Chan. Opening up what is original and seeing self-nature—is that not what Chan calls “the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa”? Is it not what Esoteric Buddhism calls “opening the secret treasury”? Therefore Pure Land, Chan, and Esoteric Buddhism are completely the same; there are no two.

Chan’s Direct Pointing and the Wondrous Function of Buddha-Nature

When we speak of Chan, it is even easier to understand. The other schools inevitably circle around outside, but Chan goes straight to the matter: directly pointing to the human mind, seeing one’s nature, and becoming Buddha, without circling around at all. A prince born into the royal house will certainly inherit the throne and become king; likewise, one will become Buddha. Unfortunately, people in the Dharma-ending age have poor and inferior faculties and cannot immediately see their nature through direct pointing. Seeing that our faculties are not good, the great patriarchs of Chan did not give us direct pointing, but taught us to investigate a huatou. If I directly point and tell you to see the nature, you do not believe it. You think, “Can seeing the nature really be this easy?” In fact, our Buddha-nature is nowhere else. It is

constantly shining right before us. Our ability to see, speak, hear, walk, and do things—all of this is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. Apart from Buddha-nature, we could not move. What enables us to see things is not the eyes, but the functioning of Buddha-nature.

Now scientists also say that what enables us to see things is not the eyes, but the functioning of the brain's visual nerves. If the brain's visual nerves are damaged, then no matter how good the eyes are, one still cannot see. The visual nerves play a major role. But this is only half right. Why? The visual nerves are only electrical wires; the eyes are light bulbs. If our breath stops, even though the eyes remain and the brain remains, you cannot see anything. What is the reason? Because Buddha-nature has left you; the electricity has been cut off. Electricity has no visible form, but through the light bulb we can see its functioning.

Being able to see things is the wondrous function of Buddha-nature. On the night of the eighth day of the first lunar month, Śākyamuni Buddha saw the morning star and awakened to the Way. How did he awaken to the Way? His mind was empty, and suddenly he understood: "I can see the morning star—what is functioning here?" It is the functioning of Buddha-nature. Everything in the world is the manifestation of Buddha-nature; apart from Buddha-nature, nothing exists. Being able to see all things is the wondrous function of Buddha-nature. Then sentient beings are all able to see and hear; is this not the same as the Buddha? Why do they not know it? Although sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata, because of inverted delusive thinking and attachment, they lose sight of the original nature. Desires for external objects cover and obscure the luminosity of the original nature. In the Chan school this is expressed as: "Precisely because it is so close at hand, one recognizes it too late." Because it is so close at hand—always shining right before you—you do not see it. It is like covering your eyes with your hand: then you cannot see. We are constantly within the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature, yet do not know it ourselves.

Some people study Buddhadharma seeking spiritual powers. They do not know that we are constantly within spiritual powers. Wearing clothes and eating food are spiritual powers! "No, no, everyone can wear clothes and eat food. How can that be spiritual power?" In fact everyone has great spiritual powers. If your breath stops, can you still wear clothes and eat food? Who is wearing the clothes? Who is eating the food? Is this not the wondrous function of Buddha-nature? Unfortunately, because our mind clings, its functioning is obstructed. It fixates on certain things and thoughts and refuses to let them go. Therefore, although wondrous functioning is present, it cannot operate freely because the mind abides in marks. If you know that all appearances are reflections manifested by nature, and you do not abide in them—using them without being used by them—then you have awakened to the Way.

The patriarchs said, "Sitting beside the rice basket, countless people starve to death." If you are sitting beside the rice basket and are hungry, just take rice and eat. Why look at it without seeing it, even to the point of starving to death? We are constantly within the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature without knowing it, and instead seek so-called spiritual powers elsewhere. People think that only the divine eye, divine ear, miraculous abilities, recollection

of past lives, and knowledge of others' minds are real spiritual powers. In fact these too are the wondrous functions of Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is capable of everything, hence its functioning is called "spiritual"; but when attachment is present, that functioning is obstructed. Wealth, sex, fame, food, sleep, and all worldly things are false: flowers in the sky, the moon in water, flowers seen before diseased eyes, appearing only because the eyes are ill. Can the moon's reflection in water be scooped up? Therefore do not try to scoop it up. Because habits are deep and heavy, and one cannot put them down all at once, the Buddha taught us the Dharma gate of buddha-recitation: "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha..." Use the Buddha-name to transform delusive mind, to clear away all habits of attachment, so that you no longer cling, remain attached, or pursue. When the seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness have been purified, consciousness can be transformed into wisdom.

Investigating the Huatou, Awakening, Spiritual Powers, and the Three Kinds of Mind-Made Body

Chan's investigation of a huatou works on the same principle. Investigating "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?": if one says, "I" am reciting the Buddha's name, what is this "I"? Is the body "I"? If the breath stops, the body cannot move; can it still recite? Is thought "I"? Viśvabhū Buddha said, "Mind originally has no arising; because of objects, it exists." Mind means thought. It originally does not exist, but comes into being by reflecting the objective world outside. It consists of residual impressions left by the six sense objects. The body is not you, and thought is not you. Then what are you? On this point one arouses a great question, cutting off all one's delusive thoughts. When external objects cannot enter and internal thoughts cannot emerge, one is truly unmoving, and a breakthrough is at hand. When the time and conditions arrive, "snap!"—it opens. Chan uses this marvelous method to help you open up.

The great Chan masters of past generations originally directly indicated to students how to see the nature and awaken to the Way. But after the Song dynasty, people's minds gradually became inferior, and the method of investigating a huatou was instituted. Because direct pointing seemed too easy, people would not accept it precisely because it came so easily, thinking that seeing the nature and awakening to the Way must involve the arising of spiritual powers. If you have no spiritual powers, then you have not awakened to the Way. They use spiritual powers to measure whether there has been awakening. In fact, awakening and spiritual powers are two different things, just as awakening and entering samādhi are two different things. Your mastery of samādhi may be very strong; you may reach the first dhyāna, second dhyāna, third dhyāna, and fourth dhyāna. Yet there are not a few who still have not awakened, because they abide inside samādhi. First dhyāna has joy, second dhyāna has bliss, third dhyāna has subtle bliss, and fourth dhyāna has purity. There are plenty of people who abide in purity and do not awaken. Does the arising of spiritual powers mean awakening? Non-Buddhist practitioners all have spiritual powers; have non-Buddhist practitioners

awakened? Arhats all have spiritual powers; have arhats seen the nature and awakened? No. They have only cut off clinging to a personal self; clinging to a self in dharmas has not yet been removed. Therefore awakening and spiritual powers are two different things. In the past, ancient people had very deep and strong faculties. Some first manifested spiritual powers and later awakened; these were powers ripening from karmic fruition, based on practice in past lives and coming to fruition in this life. It is still all right if one first has powers and then awakens. But if instead one abides in spiritual powers, one will become a demon; that is not good.

We often cite an example from more recent times. When Zhang Xianzhong rebelled, Patriarch Poshan was teaching the Dharma at Shuanghui Hall in Sichuan. He was a disciple of Chan Master Miyun Yuanwu of Tiantong Mountain in Ningbo, Zhejiang. Before awakening, Poshan could send out a mind-made body. He often sent out a mind-made body to catch ducks belonging to villagers, and was reprimanded by Miyun Yuanwu: “Spiritual powers are not absent, but you have never even dreamt of the Buddhadharma.” What is a mind-made body? Mind-made body is a Buddhist term; Daoists call it yang-spirit. The seventh consciousness, the mental faculty, is the root of the sixth consciousness. When the seventh consciousness emerges, it is called a mind-made body. It is an image—the consciousness-spirit—rather than our original face or the wondrous essence of Buddha-nature and true suchness. Yet Daoists take it to be the original face, so Daoism is not ultimate.

There are three kinds of mind-made body: the mind-made body born of the bliss of meditative attainment; the mind-made body that realizes the self-nature of dharmas; and the mind-made body that arises in all varieties without deliberate activity. The first kind of mind-made body can emerge even without awakening. If one practices seated meditation well, enters deeply into meditative absorption, and the six faculties become pure—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are purified and unmoving—the seventh consciousness can emerge freely. This is because the seventh consciousness performs a transmitting function. It receives images and information from the first six consciousnesses and relays them to the eighth consciousness, the storehouse consciousness. When the first six consciousnesses do not move, there is nothing being transmitted to it to keep it constrained, so it naturally emerges. The first kind of mind-made body is called the “mind-made body born of the bliss of meditative attainment.” One enters deeply into samādhi and is incomparably blissful; this bliss cannot be compared with any worldly happiness. There is a saying: “What fine elegance—no painting can capture it.” At this time it cannot be described or depicted. When one is unmoving at this time, the seventh consciousness can emerge freely, forming the “mind-made body born of the bliss of meditative attainment.” The latter two kinds of mind-made body require reaching the fifth ground or above. The fifth ground is called the “Difficult-to-Conquer Ground”; this barrier is even harder to pass through. Only when one awakens through Chan does one ascend to the first ground. One must then continue upward from the first ground through the second, third, and fourth, all the way to the tenth. The fifth-ground barrier is difficult to pass. Our habits of attachment are deeply ingrained; awakening does not make them disappear all at once. Many

seeds of habitual tendencies still remain in the field of the eighth consciousness. These habitual tendencies include both delusions of view and delusions of thought.

Delusions of view are incorrect views. There are five kinds of views: identity view, extreme views, wrong views, clinging to views as supreme, and clinging to precepts and observances as supreme. Identity view takes the body to be “I”: “I” want enjoyment, and enjoyment requires money; one may even stop at nothing to get money, stealing, robbing, and smashing things, disturbing society and preventing peace. Identity view is therefore the first of these harmful views. Extreme views concern whether there is something after death or not: some say there is, some say there is not, falling to one side or the other. Wrong view denies cause and effect, saying there is no cause and effect and no hell, and that one may do bad things as one likes. This is wrong view. Clinging to views as supreme means holding incorrect views yet regarding them as correct, and spreading them in the world, poisoning many people. Clinging to precepts and observances as supreme means adopting deviant precepts. All these are incorrect views. But these are easy to remove: once view is correct, they can be cut off.

Next I will briefly discuss the “five abiding grounds of affliction.” First is the abiding ground of all views gathered in one locus, that is, the delusions of view mentioned above. Second is the abiding ground of desire-attachment, that is, the afflictions of the desire realm. Third is the abiding ground of form-attachment, that is, the afflictions of the form realm. Fourth is the abiding ground of attachment to existence, that is, the afflictions of the formless realm. Fifth is the abiding ground of ignorance, that is, all ignorance throughout the three realms, also called “the delusion of ignorance.” The three in the middle are called “delusions of thought.” These latter four must be eliminated after awakening.

First let us speak of the three kinds of delusions of thought. The first is the affliction of the abiding ground of desire-attachment. Sentient beings in the desire realm have very strong sexual desire; they are also attached to other sensual attractions, such as music, sex, hunting, and horses. Where there is attachment, there is abiding; where there is abiding, affliction follows, and one must undergo the corresponding karmic result. The afflictions of the desire realm must be eliminated. The second is the affliction of the abiding ground of form-attachment. The form realm lies above the desire realm. The desire-realm heavens have six levels; above them are the heavens of the four dhyānas in the form realm, which are themselves divided into four levels. The scenes of the dhyāna heavens are more refined and subtle than those of our desire realm, more beautiful, and even more likely to make people linger and forget to return. In seated meditation and Dharma practice, the first dhyāna is characterized by joy, the second by bliss, the third by subtle bliss, and the fourth by purity. People easily become attached to these states and abide in them; they may remain within purity and be unable to emerge, as though trapped in a pit. This attachment too must be broken and eliminated. The third is the affliction of the abiding ground of attachment to existence in the formless realm. The formless realm sounds as though it has no form, but in fact subtle form remains. It is much more refined, approaching the “ultimate particle”

(paramāṇu), also called the “mote bordering on space,” and cannot be seen by our physical eyes.

After the afflictions associated with the three attachment-based abiding grounds have been completely eliminated, there remains beginningless ignorance, called one-thought ignorance. This is the ignorance co-emergent with Buddha-nature that has accompanied us throughout our existence. Buddha-nature and ignorance are not divided in two. It is not that Buddha-nature exists first and ignorance comes later. When there is Buddha-nature, there is ignorance; this is called co-emergent ignorance. Only when the delusions of view and thought have been eliminated can one remove this affliction of the abiding ground of ignorance. The abiding ground of ignorance concerns a self in dharmas; the preceding grounds concern the personal self. After clinging to the personal self is removed, clinging to a self in dharmas must still be removed. Therefore practice is not so simple; it cannot be completed all at once. After awakening in Chan, one cannot yet end birth and death, because after awakening, the afflictions associated with clinging to a self in dharmas have not yet been brought to an end, and one still comes and goes through birth and death.

Some Pure Land practitioners often slander Chan because of this, saying that Chan is not good: “Even if one apprehends Mind and sees nature, one still cannot end birth and death. My Pure Land school is better: once one arrives in the West, everything is resolved.” They also cite many examples: Wuzu Jie and Caotang Qing. Wuzu Jie was a third-generation transmitter of the Yunmen school and was later reborn as Su Dongpo. Did Su Dongpo awaken? Did he end birth and death? Caotang Qing was later reborn as Zeng Lugong. Did he succeed in seeing the nature? No. “Therefore my Pure Land school is still better.” In fact, each school has its own standpoint. Do not slander one another. Chan requires one to make great vows. If one does not awaken at this time, one will practice further in a future life; because great vows sustain one, the human body will not be lost and wholesome roots will not be cut off. So long as one opens up what is original and sees the original nature, even if fragmentary birth-and-death has not been ended, at worst one will be born seven times in the heavens and return seven times among humans, and then fragmentary birth-and-death will be ended. This is the worst case. Better than that, one returns three times between heaven and human realms, and fragmentary birth-and-death is ended. Better still, one succeeds in one lifetime. Therefore practice depends on how each person carries it out.

It is not that once one investigates Chan and awakens, everything is finished. Because habits are deep and heavy, Chan speaks of breaking the Three Barriers. Seeing the nature and awakening is breaking the Initial Barrier; this cuts off the delusions of view, but delusions of thought have not yet been brought to an end. It is like wanting to enter this Chan hall: the body has not entered, but the head is first stretched in; one has seen the situation inside the Chan hall, but the person has not truly entered. One must still remove habits and eliminate the afflictions associated with the attachment-based abiding grounds before one can ascend the hall and enter the room, entering the proper position of the dharmakāya. This is called

breaking the Multiple Barrier. What is it like at this point? One reaches the point where, regarding all favorable circumstances, there is not the slightest mind of liking; regarding all adverse circumstances, there is not the slightest intention of affliction. This is because they are all illusory appearances, all reflections, and all unobtainable. What is there to be pleased or afflicted about? The mind is truly empty and pure, not moving at all, without the slightest abiding. If a circumstance arrives and one still abides, it does not count. When one reaches this point, spiritual powers naturally arise.

The Yogācāra school says, “When the initial mind is aroused, one reaches the Joyous Ground; co-emergent attachments still manifest, binding one and lying dormant. After the Far-Going Ground, one is entirely free of outflows; observation, perfectly luminous, illumines the great thousandfold world.” “When the initial mind is aroused, one reaches the Joyous Ground” means opening up what is original and seeing the original face. The first ground is called the Joyous Ground. “Co-emergent attachments still manifest, binding one and lying dormant”: after awakening, co-emergent self-clinging and dharma-clinging still bind you, tie you up, and prevent you from awakening to non-arising. There are still seeds; when they meet conditions, they still produce manifest activity. In other words, there is still attachment. Manifest activity means pursuing objects and creating karma; therefore it is still not acceptable. “After the Far-Going Ground, one is entirely free of outflows”: the Far-Going Ground is the seventh ground, so after the Far-Going Ground is the eighth ground. Only at the eighth ground does one reach what is called the stage free of outflows; only then is it the true unconditioned. “Observation, perfectly luminous, illumines the great thousandfold world”: one must train the mind amid circumstances, tempering oneself in situations and eliminating habits of attachment before one can end fragmentary birth-and-death and before spiritual powers can arise. The divine eye, divine ear, miraculous abilities, recollection of past lives, and knowledge of others’ minds then all arise at once.

The Mahāvairocana Sutra, the root scripture of Esoteric Buddhism, says this very clearly: “When a bodhisattva abides here and diligently removes the five hindrances, before long all five superknowledges will arise together.” Where do bodhisattvas abide? They abide in awakening—in the realization of original nature. Diligently removing the five hindrances means continuing to practice and train amid affairs, removing the afflictions associated with the attachment-based abiding grounds. In this way one can ascend the hall and enter the room, and the five superknowledges all arise. Therefore spiritual powers must not be sought. If you seek them, you cannot obtain them. Whatever can be obtained by seeking is false, the result of spirit possession. Now many people say they have spiritual powers, but in fact these are all false. Why? Real spiritual powers arise only when the mind is truly empty and pure and does not cling to marks in the slightest. If you are now flaunting and showing yourself off, is that not abiding in marks? How can one who abides in marks give rise to spiritual powers? If you say you have spiritual powers, they are certainly the result of spirit possession. In mainland China now it is said that several people have spiritual powers. In fact they are all false, the result of spirit possession. Do not be deceived. Only when the mind is truly empty

and pure, and does not abide in marks, can spiritual powers arise. Such a person neither seeks fame nor material support and does not show off. What would be the point of showing off? A genuine adept does not show off; one who shows off is not genuine. Many people seek spiritual powers and end up being taken in by spiritual powers and cheated. In Taiwan too, many people are falsely rumored to possess spiritual powers, but in fact these claims are all false. Experts from five countries, including Italy, the United States, and Australia, once successively went to Xi'an, Chengdu, Shanghai, and other places in mainland China for field investigation. They tested so-called people with spiritual powers on the spot, and in the end not one was genuine. Later in Shanghai they gave a special report saying that China's so-called extraordinary abilities were all false and deceptive. Therefore do not be taken in. In studying Buddhadharma we must genuinely work with the mind: "This mind is Buddha; this mind becomes Buddha." We must work with the mind, not with the body.

Esoteric Buddhism, Heart-Center Dharma, and the Warning Against Clinging to Marks

Speaking of Esoteric Buddhism, it is even more diverse and multifaceted. Esoteric Buddhism includes Tibetan Esotericism, Eastern Esotericism, and Tang Esotericism. But Tang Esotericism no longer exists now, because the Ming emperor feared that esoteric practitioners would display spiritual powers and overthrow his imperial throne, so he abolished and prohibited the circulation and transmission of Esoteric Buddhism. During the Tang dynasty, Master Huiguo transmitted the esoteric Dharma to the Japanese master Kūkai. After Kūkai returned to Japan, he established an esoteric practice center at Kōyasan; to this day, Japanese esoteric Dharma remains comparatively flourishing. Because the Japanese emperor promoted Esoteric Buddhism, he once invited elders from all the mountains and convened an unrestricted assembly, asking everyone to speak directly in accord with self-nature, without concealment or hiding, saying, "Since I, the emperor, also want to practice Buddhadharma, I will see which school is best and practice that school." The elders of the various mountains all spoke of their own standpoints and strengths. Finally, Master Kūkai said, "Your schools are all good, but apart from Esoteric Dharma, none of you could exist, because which school can leave esoteric mantras behind? The Pure Land school needs to recite the Great Compassion Mantra, the Ten Small Mantras, and the Rebirth Mantra; other schools cannot leave esoteric mantras either." Some Chan practitioners say, "We rely on self-power to investigate Chan and do not need to recite mantras. Other methods rely on other-power, so they need to recite mantras." But Master Hanshan said, "The Chan patriarchs of successive generations all secretly recited mantras." Yes. Not one great patriarch failed to recite mantras. What is the reason? Because when Chan investigation reaches the later stage and the seeds of the eighth consciousness surge up, it is unbearably difficult: standing is not right, sitting is not right, lying down is not right, and walking is not right. Only by relying on the power of esoteric mantras and on the empowering force of Buddhas and bodhisattvas can

the seeds be eliminated. Therefore they all secretly recited mantras. Is this statement correct? It is extremely correct. At the place where the modern Elder Xuyun sat in meditation, the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra was written. Chan Master Dahui Zonggao of the Song dynasty recited the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, “om mani dari hum phaṭ.” This mantra appears in our Heart-Center Dharma practice text. The power of this esoteric mantra is extremely great: removing disasters, eliminating obstructions, increasing longevity, enabling one to act as one wishes, and bringing wishes to fulfillment. It seems that the patriarchs of successive generations all secretly recited mantras and could not dispense with mantra recitation. The Japanese emperor chose Esoteric Buddhism, so Japanese esoteric Dharma has been able to continue and be transmitted down to the present.

Now some who want to study Esoteric Buddhism go to Japan to study Eastern Esotericism, and some go to Tibet to study Tibetan Esotericism. In fact, mainland China also has esoteric Dharma; it was only later no longer transmitted and was cut off. The Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma we transmit exists within Tang Esotericism. But the method we practice was not transmitted down from any particular patriarch of Tang Esotericism. Some people also ask, “Was the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma you practice transmitted by the Nona Hutuktu?” The Nona Hutuktu did transmit the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma when he came to the mainland, but in Shanghai he transmitted it to only one person: Yuan Xilian. He said this was esoteric practice without visualization, not easy to practice, and ordinary people could not practice it. Therefore very few people received the transmission. Japan and Tibet both have this Dharma, but they do not transmit it lightly, so people do not know. Do not think that the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma we transmit was created by ourselves. It was not. The Heart-Center Dharma already existed in the Tang dynasty, and its practice text is found in the Great Canon under the title *The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Connected with the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī*. “Also connected” means that it communicates with the esoteric mantra of the Great Wish-Fulfilling Bodhisattva. This is the dhāraṇī of the heart-center of all Buddhas, the common esoteric mantra of all Buddhas, and its empowering force is especially strong. Our grandmaster, Master Dayu, received the Heart-Center Esoteric Dharma we practice while he was practicing the Pratyutpanna Samādhi at Donglin Monastery on Mount Lu.

In the Pure Land school there are two kinds of samādhi. One is the samādhi of buddha-recitation: one sits cross-legged and practices Buddha-recitation, entering deeply into meditative absorption and samādhi. The other is Pratyutpanna Samādhi: inside a room, throughout the whole day and without stopping even for a moment, one walks, neither eating nor sleeping. Ordinary people’s bodies cannot bear it. But our grandmaster had made a great vow: since I have left home to practice, I must practice what is difficult to practice; so long as one breath remains, I must keep practicing this Dharma, stopping only with death. He practiced with hardship, endurance, and perseverance. When his legs became so swollen that he could no longer walk, he crawled with both hands. When his hands swelled and he could no longer crawl, he rolled with his body. After this extraordinarily arduous struggle, every trace of covert seeking was exhausted, and he entered deeply into great samādhi. In response,

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appeared, touched his crown, and gave him a prediction, telling him: “The Heart-Center Dharma relies on the empowering force of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and it is easy through it to apprehend Mind and see nature. You should practice it well, and after succeeding, transmit it widely to the public, to supplement what is lacking in Chan.”

Most of today’s Chan practitioners cannot arouse the doubt-sensation when investigating a huatou. “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” “Who” is reciting the Buddha’s name? They cannot arouse the doubt-sensation at the word “who,” so investigating a huatou becomes reciting a huatou: “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name? Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?...” If it is like this, it would be better to recite the sacred Name of Amitābha Buddha, because reciting the sacred Name of Amitābha Buddha has the empowering force of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, whereas reciting a huatou relies entirely on self-power. Present-day Chan practitioners do not transmit the Dharma on the basis of awakening to the Way; instead, they transmit it by handing down lineage scrolls. Master Taixu once lamented with boundless feeling: “Today’s Chan descendants all transmit the Dharma by lineage scroll, not after apprehending Mind and seeing nature. So-called descendants of the Linji school in such-and-such a generation are backed by nothing more than a blank sheet of paper. When have they ever awakened to mind?” How could such words fail to pain us? What is a lineage scroll? It is like a scroll painting, rolled up. When opened, one sees written on it the four large characters, “Treasury of the True Dharma Eye.” Śākyamuni Buddha transmitted the “Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa” to Venerable Mahākāśyapa. Thus a lineage scroll records: the first-generation patriarch is Venerable Mahākāśyapa, the second-generation patriarch is...; suppose my name is listed as the forty-fifth generation in the Linji school. You are Zhang San, and I transmit to you; then on the lineage scroll I write, “Forty-sixth-generation patriarch Zhang San,” and hand the lineage scroll to you. Has Zhang San apprehended Mind and seen nature? If he has not apprehended Mind and seen nature, the lineage scroll should not be handed down to him. This is what Master Taixu meant by “transmission by lineage scroll.”

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva had long ago made a great vow that in the future he would appear before those who truly practice and teach the Dharma to them. For example, the Lotus Sutra, in the chapter “Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s Encouragement,” says: “In later ages, in the last five hundred years, in the turbid and evil world, if bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, upāsakas, or upāsikās seek, receive and uphold, read and recite, or copy this Lotus Sutra and wish to practice it, they should be single-minded and vigorous for twenty-one days. When twenty-one days have been completed, I will ride a six-tusked white elephant, surrounded by immeasurable bodhisattvas, and with a body that all sentient beings delight in seeing, appear before that person, and for that person teach the Dharma, showing, teaching, benefiting, and bringing joy.” Because our grandmaster could practice what was difficult to practice and endure what was difficult to endure, he was able to receive a response in which Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appeared, empowered him, and transmitted the Heart-Center

Esoteric Dharma. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva instructed our grandmaster to use this Dharma to supplement what is lacking in present-day Chan.

If by relying on self-power one cannot arouse the doubt-sensation, then rely on the empowering force of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Esoteric Dharma relies on the compassionate empowering force of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. What kind of empowering force is it? One is the esoteric mantra; the other is the mudrā. The mantra is the symbol into which Buddhas and bodhisattvas transform their own minds in meditative absorption. It may be compared to the secret code we use when sending a telegram. When we send a telegram and transmit the secret code, the other side can receive it. The mudrā may be compared to an antenna. Our mind communicates with the mind of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. When we transmit the esoteric mantra, Buddhas and bodhisattvas give us empowering force. Therefore this Dharma has strong empowering force. The Heart-Center is also the common heart of all Buddhas. With the conductive function of mudrās, it is easier to communicate with Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore this Dharma has very great power, and seeing the nature is comparatively easy. Each age of Buddhadharma has the causes and conditions of that age. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva observed the causes and conditions, saw that the Heart-Center Dharma could be brought forth and widely propagated, and told our grandmaster to practice it well and, once his practice succeeded, descend the mountain and transmit it widely to the public. This Dharma is generally not lightly transmitted in Tibet or Japan; it is very secret. Therefore Samantabhadra Bodhisattva told our grandmaster to come forth and transmit it widely. In fact, China has many Dharma methods and lacks nothing. They were only lost to transmission because of imperial obstruction and prohibition.

Chan is the best, quickest, and most fully integrated method in Mahāyāna Buddhism. People today have poor faculties, yet instead they go to Tibet to study Tibetan esoteric methods. This is truly losing sight of the head and taking its shadow for the real thing. Chan is the highest level of Esoteric Dharma. The Karmapa in Tibet, who had awakened to the Way, said, “The Han region has profound esoteric Dharma, the esoteric Dharma of Great Perfection.” The young lamas did not understand: “What esoteric Dharma does the Han region have?” “It is Chan. The Chan school is the most profound esoteric Dharma.” What he said was not false in the slightest; it was entirely correct. This is because the highest level of Esoteric Dharma, such as the Mahāmudrā of the Kagyü school and the Great Perfection of the Nyingma school, when they speak in the later stages about methods of practice and the measure of realization in accomplishing the Way, are completely the same as Chan, without the slightest difference. But Tibetans have weaker faculties and cannot accept this Dharma all at once. They must practice according to the nine-vehicle sequence: the inner three vehicles, the outer three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles.

The so-called outer three vehicles begin by studying the scriptures of the exoteric teachings. After studying the scriptures thoroughly and clearly, one then proceeds to actual practice. The inner three vehicles are the generation-stage practices. One first practices Action Tantra

(Kriyā): how to eliminate obstacles, how to cure illness, how to bring wealth. Esoteric Buddhism truly has wealth-deity practices. Many overseas Chinese practice esoteric methods and ask to have wealth-deity practices transmitted to them: “First let me get rich.” Why can practicing esoteric Dharma bring wealth? Because Buddhas and bodhisattvas are compassionate. The Buddhist scriptures say, “First draw them in through their desires; afterward lead them into Buddha-wisdom.” “Desire” means satisfying your desires and requests, leading you through the gate: “Oh! Buddhadharma is so good, so efficacious. If I want wealth, then I become wealthy.” The Universal Gate chapter of Guanyin Bodhisattva says: “If there is a woman who wishes to seek a son, and she bows and makes offerings to Guanyin Bodhisattva, she will bear a son endowed with merit, virtue, and wisdom. If she wishes to seek a daughter, she will bear a well-formed daughter of fine appearance, one who planted roots of virtue in the past and is loved and respected by many.” Bhaiṣajyaguru Lapis-Lazuli-Light Buddha is also like this: if you wish to become an official, gain wealth, seek children, and so on, these wishes are all fulfilled. This too is “First draw them in through their desires; afterward lead them into Buddha-wisdom.” When you know that this was given to me by Guanyin Bodhisattva, and that this was given to me by Bhaiṣajyaguru Lapis-Lazuli-Light Buddha, then you constantly recite the Buddha, honor the bodhisattvas, do good deeds, study the scriptures, practice Dharma, and realize the Way.

Why do Tibetans first need these things? They first need a spiritual response before their faith is aroused; without such a response they do not believe. Tibetans’ cultural level was low and they were very attached. They could not understand from the start, so they first needed a spiritual response and therefore had to practice such methods. This once aroused the common indignation of Buddhist students in the Han region, who accused Esoteric Dharma of being a method involving ghosts and spirits. Master Hongyi also once said that Esoteric Dharma was a method involving ghosts and spirits. Later, after he read the esoteric teachings in full, he came to understand how Esoteric Dharma proceeds from shallow to deep and from small to great, leading step by step to realization of the Way. Only then did he understand that Esoteric Buddhism’s methods of practice are complete, perfect, and lacking nothing. He exclaimed, “Esoteric Dharma is truly good! Truly good!” Therefore he wrote a repentance essay, which still exists today. So if you do not understand Esoteric Dharma, do not make reckless judgments, lest you create offenses.

At the beginning, Tibetans practice Action Tantra (Kriyā). Only after completing Action Tantra can one practice the generation stage, visualizing oneself as a particular yidam, emitting particular lights, and visualizing one’s channels, winds, and drops, thereby focusing one’s attention on the visualized forms of the channels, winds, and drops, gathering the mind, and leading one into samādhi. After generation-stage visualization succeeds, it must then be dissolved, and then one practices the completion stage. In practicing the completion stage, one must dissolve the generation-stage forms. This is because our Buddha-nature is without characteristics and cannot be seen as an object; not one dharma is established, and not one speck of dust stains it. Nothing bearing characteristics is Buddha-nature itself. The Diamond

Sutra says, “All marks whatsoever are false.” “If one sees me through form, if one seeks me through sound, that person follows a deviant path and cannot see the Tathāgata.” If you cling to marks and take the marks you see as real, things go wrong: you cannot see the original nature. Why? Because the enjoyment-body Buddha and emanation-body Buddha are not the true Buddha. The Buddha has the thirty-two characteristics and eighty subsidiary features. Śākyamuni Buddha is a responsive emanation-body Buddha; the enjoyment body is Rocana Buddha. These are not the true Buddha. “The enjoyment and emanation bodies are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who speaks Dharma.” Nothing bearing characteristics is the true Buddha. The dharmakāya Buddha is the true Buddha. The dharmakāya Buddha does not speak Dharma; the dharmakāya Buddha is without characteristics. To accomplish the Way, one must realize the dharmakāya. If one does not realize the dharmakāya, how could one accomplish the Way? The dharmakāya is the root; the enjoyment and emanation bodies are not the root. If you cling to marks, how could you realize the dharmakāya? This is because the dharmakāya is without characteristics.

Only after the dharmakāya is realized can that visualized form be dissolved. For example, when a sore forms on the body, after medicine is applied it gradually draws together into one lump. But that lump is still toxic; it too must be eliminated before the sore can heal. Nothing bearing characteristics is the dharmakāya. One must eliminate and dissolve all such marks. No matter whether you investigate Chan, recite the Buddha, or practice Esoteric Dharma, in the end there is suddenly a great explosion: sense faculties and sense objects drop away, subject and object both vanish; not a single speck of dust remains as a stain, and not one dharma is established. As Guanyin Bodhisattva says at the end, “When arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent extinction appears.” Arising and ceasing refers to all thoughts bearing marks; all of them arise and cease. Once these things have all disappeared, it is what is called “empty space shatters and the great earth sinks level.” Object and self both disappear; everything is gone. At this time our original mind can truly manifest. Before reaching this point, your original mind cannot manifest, because it is covered by grasped marks. Therefore we must not cling to marks.

When we investigate Chan, recite the Buddha, or hold mantras, we must not entertain any other thoughts such as, “I should quickly enter samādhi and awaken,” or “I should see the Buddha.” None of this should be present; these are all delusive thoughts. Even if we see the Buddha, we should not cling to it; if we cling, we will fall into a demonic state. In Shanghai there was a person who practiced very diligently and very austerely. He saw a Buddha appear before him, with heavenly maidens scattering flowers beside him. “Oh, beautiful!” Then he thought, “Sometimes it is not a true Buddha appearing; it may be a demon transforming and appearing. How can I distinguish it?” So he did not dare look. Later he said to his teacher, “When I sit in meditation, I see an extremely majestic Buddha-image, with heavenly maidens scattering flowers beside it. But I do not know whether it is true or false. Please, Master, tell me a method to distinguish it.” His teacher practiced Gelug esoteric Buddhism, and told him, “If you see it again, recite ‘om ah hum’ to it. If it is a true Buddha, it will not be moved; if it is

false, it will be unable to stand there, will flee, and will change form.” Om ah hum can emit blue, white, and red lights, and is extremely powerful. “Thank you, Master, for teaching me the method.” He was very happy. After returning home he began sitting in meditation and again saw the Buddha-image, with heavenly maidens scattering flowers around it. He was delighted, and recited “om ah hum” at the Buddha several dozen times. The Buddha-image did not move. “It is a true Buddha, and there are heavenly maidens scattering flowers for me to see. My practice is really not bad!” Later that Buddha changed into a bloody gaping mouth, with a blue-green face and tusk-like fangs, stretched out both arms to grab him, and frightened him out of his wits. He developed mental illness and died. Therefore, in the midst of vigorous practice, whatever appearance arises, do not cling to it. Chan has a saying: “If Buddha comes, cut down Buddha; if demon comes, cut down demon.” None of it can be obtained. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra teaches fifty skandha-demon states: each of the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—has ten such states. They all appear to be spiritual powers. In fact, they are not spiritual powers but transformations of the five aggregates. One must neither cling to nor abide in them. Once you abide in marks, they become obstructions that cover the luminosity of self-nature’s wondrous essence; they are called skandha-demon states. Such a state is an obstruction. Here the term translated as “skandha” is explained in the sense of “obscuring”: it covers the luminosity of original nature so that it cannot manifest. Therefore we must not cling to marks in the slightest, no matter which school we practice. His teacher should have taught him a different method. Why? Because he was abiding in marks. This is not surprising; when I see Gelug practitioners practicing esoteric methods, most of them abide strongly in marks. We should not abide in marks.

Tibetan Esotericism proceeds in stages. First one practices the generation stage. One then progresses through completion yoga in three steps: the Yoga of Great Completion, the Yoga of Unsurpassed Completion, and the Yoga of Incomparable Completion. The practice proceeds through increasingly higher levels until finally one sees the Way, realizes the Way, and becomes a Buddha. But one cannot reach the culmination of practice in a single leap. Tibetans must practice for several decades before they can come into accord. Our Heart-Center Dharma is equivalent to the final Yoga of Incomparable Completion. In Tibet this cannot be transmitted all at once. One must first undertake the preliminary practices, make full prostrations, recite the Hundred-Syllable Mantra—the esoteric mantra of Vajrasattva, used to eliminate karmic obstructions—perform the guru-offering practice, and recite the Four Refuges. One hundred thousand of this, one hundred thousand of that—completing all these sets of one hundred thousand takes more than ten years. This is circling around outside and taking detours.

Heart-Center Dharma as Chan-Esoteric Practice and Seeing Nature through Appearances

Our Heart-Center Dharma belongs to Chan-esoteric practice. It takes Chan as its essence and leads us straight to seeing our nature by pointing it out directly. Everyone thinks the barrier of apprehending Mind and seeing nature is very difficult: “That must be something reserved for sages, for Buddhas and bodhisattvas; we ordinary beings cannot do it.” In fact, they have understood wrongly. Each and every one of us can awaken to the Way. Why? Because all sentient beings possess undefiled self-nature; all have the same undefiled self-nature as the Buddha, not lacking the slightest bit. It is not increased in sages and not decreased in ordinary beings. It is only that our own delusive minds and external objects cover it, so we fail to recognize it and become deluded. With pointing-out, we can see it. It is constantly shining right before us and has never left us for even a moment; only we do not know it.

We often give this example. Huang Shangu was a Song-dynasty literary master as famous as Su Dongpo; his poetry and lyric writing were both excellent. His teacher Huitang had him investigate a saying of Confucius: “My disciples, I hide nothing from you.” That is, “In transmitting the Way, do I still conceal anything? I conceal nothing. I am open and sincere with you, laying everything out plainly, directly indicating it, without hiding the slightest bit.” The Confucian transmission of the Way is not like a martial arts teacher who still keeps one trick back when teaching disciples. Huang Shangu thought, “This is too easy to understand. I am a great scholar of Confucian learning; how could I not know the meaning of Confucius’s words?” So he explained to Huitang what the sentence meant, and Huitang rejected each explanation. Huang Shangu felt a little unhappy and impatient: “How could I not understand what Confucius said? Do I not understand as well as you monks?” He wanted to go home. He left, but halfway home he thought again: “Patriarch Huitang is a great spiritual teacher with five hundred followers and so many people attending him. He would not deceive me or toy with me. But what exactly does this sentence mean?” So he investigated it. After investigating for more than two years, he still did not know what it meant. Later, when he and Patriarch Huitang were out walking, suddenly a wave of osmanthus fragrance blew over. He blurted out, “What a fine burst of osmanthus fragrance!” Patriarch Huitang seized the moment and pointed directly: “I hide nothing from you!” Huang Shangu suddenly awakened: “Who is it that sees the osmanthus blossoms and smells their fragrance?! It is not hidden! It is always shining right before me! It is only that I did not know it before. Now I completely understand.”

Everyone chases after external objects. Because of greed, anger, delusion, arrogance, and doubt, the luminosity of one’s own original nature is covered and does not manifest. In fact, our original nature shines at all times, and we can see it at all times. How do we see it? Through appearances. Mountains and rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, forests, men and women, old and young, eating, drinking, and daily life—we can see them at all times. Seeing appearances is seeing nature, because appearances are manifestations of nature. Apart from

Buddha-nature, there are no appearances. For instance, when we build a large building, first we must conceive and draw up the plans, then build according to them. Is this building not a manifestation of mind-nature? Has it left Buddha-nature? When we see this building, is that not seeing nature? In apprehending Mind and seeing nature, our physical eyes can see the Way. So long as one does not cling to marks, one can see through appearances and see nature. These appearances are all reflections manifested by Buddha-nature. Do not cling to them; see the nature. All of them are the wondrous mind. Are you not seeing the nature at all times? If you see the nature at all times and protect it well, you will accomplish the great Way. I wish that all of you may fully realize the great Way.

Part VI — Historical Dialogues and Reassessment

The Yuan Yin source texts selected and translated for this edition appear before this part. The conversations below are reception history: they document how Yuan Yin was discussed and re-read, not Yuan Yin's own doctrinal terminology. The dialogues are lightly edited for publication: every substantive interpersonal turn is retained, while acknowledgement-only filler and chat-interface debris are reduced, and clearly broken same-speaker micro-fragments are joined only where no meaning, tone, speaker identity, or chronological sequence is lost. Historical URLs, disagreements, hesitations, humor, dream material, translation-method discussion, and meaningful reactions remain. Chinese source quotations pasted into the historical conversations remain in documentary form; where an English reader would otherwise be stranded, the corresponding passage in the translation printed elsewhere in this book is supplied in a clearly marked editorial note rather than substituted into the speaker's historical words. Very long Yuan Yin passages or early machine translations that would duplicate whole chapters already printed elsewhere are signposted and cross-referenced rather than silently paraphrased.

Historical Dialogue — John Tan on Yuan Yin Lao Ren (2008)

Edited historical transcript · 22 August 2008

Source: the 2025 compilation, checked against the surviving timestamped Awakening to Reality transcript. John Tan—Soh’s mentor—appears under his historical chat name “Thusness,” and Soh Wei Yu as “AEN.” “Longchen” is Sim Pern Chong’s internet-forum name, not a reference to Longchenpa; for clarity it is rendered as “Longchen [Sim Pern Chong].” The substantive sequence is preserved, with only acknowledgement filler, chat-interface debris, and safely joinable same-speaker fragments lightly cleaned. Historical URLs and stage labels remain; corrupted strings are marked rather than reconstructed.

Public transcript URL — 22 August 2008 exchange: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/09/heart-sutra-talks-in-chinese-by-yuan.html>

Earlier comment before the dated exchange

Thusness: <http://www.tudou.com/playlist/playindex.do?lid=3173479> — There is non-dual insight. Do not misunderstand that the master does not know non-duality or emptiness. There is deep clarity. :)

Conversation — 22 August 2008

Thusness: You must watch the second video.

AEN: Which one—the one that explains oneness, right?

Thusness: And know the difference between Advaita non-dual and Buddhist anatta. Not only that.

AEN: You mean the second or third video?

Thusness: Second and third.

AEN: By the way, the video is Advaita non-dual, right?

Thusness: I already watched the second.

AEN: The third one is talking about what... momentum?

Thusness: The cartoon, yes...

AEN: I see.

Thusness: The second is much deeper.

AEN: By the way, is that still stage-based or like Stage 2? You mean the third video?

Thusness: The URL I posted to you.

AEN: Huh, which one? Wait—the URL you posted leads to the chanting, the first video. Are you talking about the donkey one or what?

Thusness: Yuan Yin Lao Ren? No. The second set of explanations. I will watch all of it if I have time.

AEN: Wait—the one you said is in the same series, right?

Thusness: Yes.

AEN: I can't find which one is Yuan Yin Lao Ren. The first is chanting, the second is oneness, the third is the donkey, the fourth is chanting beads, and the fifth is the spider.

Thusness: Then you posted wrongly on the Buddhism forum.

AEN: o.o Then what did you click, lol? You said it was in the same series, right?

Thusness: Too bad. He is the level of practitioner I am looking for—but he has passed away.

AEN: Wait. You mean the Yuan Yin Lao Ren video is not the cartoon series?

Thusness: No. Not cartoon.

AEN: Oh, then I was wrong. By the way, the cartoon—you said Stage-2 understanding but Stage-5 experience. Then is that pathless?

Thusness: No. The cartoon is not about emptiness.

Thusness: Some explanations are still okay.

AEN: But is it pathless or a stage-like experience?

Thusness: Not pathless.

Thusness: That is just my view. You just have to know.

AEN: By the way, is the Yuan Yin Lao Ren video about twenty minutes?

Thusness: Longer than that—about an hour.

AEN: Aiya, you sent me the wrong URL just now; it sent me back to the cartoon, hahaha.

Thusness: If you can understand what he said, you will understand the essence of 5 and 6.

AEN: He also describes Stage 6?

Thusness: Not describing it—direct experience.

Thusness: One who broke through Stage 5 and understands Stage 6, but without philosophical concepts. Direct experience.

AEN: You mean he didn't use emptiness as a raft?

Thusness: I don't know.

Thusness: Got to listen more.

Thusness: He is the sort of practitioner I seek—self-liberation.

AEN: By the way, the cartoons are not from Yuan Yin Lao Ren.

AEN: Yuan Yin Lao Ren said he would go to the Pure Land. By the way, is he a Vajrayāna practitioner?

Documentary note. Between these two sentences AEN pasted a Chinese quotation concerning Yuan Yin Lao Ren's Pure Land aspiration. The quotation is corrupted in the surviving export and is therefore not reconstructed.

AEN: Ahaha, the last part is a bit funny—someone thought he had attained enlightenment and called the master; the master told him, “You have not attained enlightenment yet.”

<http://www.tudou.com/playlist/playindex.do?lid=1672155&iid=9857580>

AEN: The master seems to recommend chanting and rebirth in the Pure Land more than meditation.

AEN: <http://www.tudou.com/playlist/playindex.do?lid=1672155&iid=9857580> — Video 19, from about 14:00 onward: the master talks about Shenxiu's poem on the mirror as still grasping at form, and Huineng's poem on the mirror without a stand as grasping at formlessness. He then gives his own verse.

Documentary note. The Chinese verse referred to in the preceding turn is corrupted in the surviving export. AEN then posted a further Chinese quotation two minutes later; that quotation is also corrupted and is not silently reconstructed.

AEN: By the way, a few days ago I dreamt that you sent me an online video link and told me to go watch it; then two days later you really sent me a video link, hahaha.

Thusness: From non-dual to anatta and to emptiness—you must have clarity.

AEN: I just finished watching the first video.

Thusness: The second one is important.

AEN: Oh, you finished Part 2—the one that started with tantric practice?

Thusness: Then tell me why it is so important. You have to refine your understanding of non-duality from Ken Wilber and Advaita, and the Buddhist approach. When you have the experience later, you will know what I meant—but it is not easy.

Thusness: No-self from the five aggregates to the eighteen dhātus to dependent origination to Empty Luminosity.

AEN: By the way, the second video—is it the one that started with tantric practice?

Thusness: 36

Documentary note. The meaning of “36” is unclear in the surviving timestamped transcript.

Thusness: Yes.

AEN: Yes, that one started by discussing tantric practice. I haven't watched it yet; I'll watch it later.

AEN: The second one is important because it incorporates emptiness, right? It talks about non-duality but also explains that all forms are empty and impermanent.

Thusness: Not only that. Compare what he said about Stage 6. Anyway, I wrote something about Stage 6 for you to have a clearer understanding—why it is very important to have a clear understanding of emptiness, and how you should move from non-dual to Buddhist anatta, dependent origination, and emptiness.

AEN: Okay.

Thusness: After stabilizing non-dual experience, it is very important to establish a firm view of emptiness. Don't be afraid of establishing a firm view of emptiness and dependent origination, and don't worry about being non-conceptual. Non-dual experience will lead you naturally to non-conceptuality, to naked awareness. But for prajñā-wisdom to arise, establish firmly your understanding of dependent origination and emptiness. After understanding non-dual experience through the Buddha's teachings of anatta, dependent origination, and emptiness, you will become very clear.

Thusness: It takes a few years to understand non-duality through the Buddha's teachings. The prerequisite is a stabilized non-dual experience.

AEN: Yes, Longchen [Sim Pern Chong] also realized emptiness after stabilizing his non-dual experience, about two to three years after first realizing non-duality, right?

Thusness: You will understand correctly why there is impermanence yet no movement. Yes.

Thusness: But you still need to incorporate non-dual experience into anatta, emptiness, and dependent origination. This will need another two to three years. I will write something about it. It is very important.

AEN: You mean it will take another two to three years after stabilizing non-dual experience?

Thusness: After stabilizing non-dual experience for two years, another two to three years are needed to understand the emptiness aspect of our non-dual luminosity.

AEN: So Longchen [Sim Pern Chong] is only beginning to understand emptiness and still needs a few years?

Thusness: Understand—as in direct experience of the empty nature of dependent origination. Yes, and that is just the beginning. I told you there will be a period of desync, and the practitioner will find it easier to rest in naked awareness. But he will miss something valuable. Not many can escape these phases.

Thusness: The video—you need to hear it a few times. Compare it with the comments on Stage 6.

AEN: Okay.

Thusness: Know that insight must arise with a certain “feeling.”

AEN: I see.

Thusness: What is most important in Video 2?

AEN: Emptiness?

Thusness: What emptiness—which phrase?

AEN: Many phrases, haha.

Thusness: Like?

Thusness: Don't paste whatever I told you in the forum.

AEN: Okay. I can't remember which phrase already.

Thusness: Within a short video there are some very important pieces of advice that only a true practitioner with intuitive insight into emptiness and non-dual insight would know.

Thusness: What is the URL for the BuddhaChat discussion with Element?

AEN: <http://www.buddhachat.org/forum/showthread.php?t=9891&page=6> — I haven't posted since; no time.

Thusness: Haha. :) Don't think of Longchen [Sim Pern Chong]'s non-conceptuality first. You should focus on deepening your clarity from Advaita non-duality to the Buddhist form of non-duality—anatta—then emptiness. Experience this until the entire teaching of the Buddha becomes so clear to you.

Thusness: Longchen [Sim Pern Chong]'s phase is also the result of understanding emptiness, and that understanding aligns with his non-dual experiences. Therefore he is entering the right understanding of Stage 6. But Stage 6 is the right “view” of non-duality, and it has to burn the bonds of the senses first, then move into non-registration of impressions. It is not suitable for you. Because his non-dual experiences have stabilized, the understanding of emptiness helps articulate all his non-dual experiences. That is the arising of non-dual insight. Later it will become so clear moment to moment, and the subtle “bond” of the six senses gradually dissolves into one dependent-origination experience. So for you, first understand with clarity and know the various subtle stages and their differences. Even after aligning non-dual experience with the view of emptiness, dissolving the bond on each sense organ differs. A practitioner starts to walk out of meditation and finds it easier to be authenticated in activities. With the eyes open, walking, it feels like the ground reality. But when returning to sit quietly in meditation, that non-dual experience is gone, or not so obvious. That is what I meant by the subtle bond.

AEN: Why, when sitting, is the experience gone?

Thusness: Actually it is because we become more aware of the “center.” The center is still there. It becomes more obvious when we sit; that tendency becomes more obvious.

AEN: Oh—no wonder you said:

1. *There is a mirror reflecting dust (I AM). Mirror-bright is experienced but distorted: dualistic and inherent seeing.*
2. *Dust is required for the mirror to see itself. Non-dualistic but inherent seeing (beginning*

of non-dual insight).

3. Dust has always been the mirror (the mirror here is seen as a whole). Non-dualistic and non-inherent insight.

AEN: By the way, the center is just a bond?

Thusness: Yes, but the “bond” is still strong. There are some points you have to take note of. A person after stabilizing non-dual experience and understanding emptiness is different from one who has not. That is, have no fear of establishing a firm view of emptiness—especially for a non-dual experienter—because it becomes a medicine for the deeply held propensity. The understanding will dissolve into the non-conceptual experience of non-dual presence. The reason non-dual experience becomes more difficult to maintain when not in activity is that the view of emptiness has not replaced the deeply held dualistic/inherent view.

Thusness: Without the right view, a non-dual practitioner will still struggle unknowingly, and naked awareness and non-conceptuality can at this phase become an escape. So it depends which level a practitioner is in. Once the view is firmly established, it serves as an antidote. When sitting, touch, taste, and sound are emptiness and operate like dependent origination: first the five aggregates, then the eighteen dhātus, then mere dependent origination. All are non-dual experiences, but the depth differs. I told you the five aggregates are already non-dual insight and experience, right? Then the extra layer of mental formation begins to subside; it stops registering imprints, or registers less, transforming to the eighteen dhātus without that layer of mental formation.

Thusness: But the previous tendency is still strong, so sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mind still act with that tendency.

Thusness: At this stage one can rest in naked awareness or firmly establish the view of emptiness. It will dissolve the six senses into one dependent-origination, empty nature: just this is that; no eyes, ears... It is anchored at the deepest level. The practitioner will know it when sitting, opening the eyes, and all activities become non-dual; the sense of self almost dissolves. Then experiences become non-dual and non-local. That is Stage 6.

AEN: What does “non-local” feel like?

Thusness: It is just a “bond” that there is locality—that consciousness is at some place. It is a clear experience of non-movement and all-pervadingness, yet ceaseless manifestation.

AEN: The master told a story of Su Dongpo visiting Foyin Chan-shi and joking, “Why sit on this chair—no good or what?” Then the Zen master asked him, “All the four greats and five skandhas are empty; now tell me, where are you sitting?”

Thusness: What is “no movement”? There is arising and ceasing, but there is no movement. This is due to the empty nature of our non-dual luminosity. There is no from point A to point B; there is A, B. There is only movement when there is a from A to B. But when the center is gone and non-dual experience aligns with the nature of emptiness, this becomes clear.

Thusness: After stabilizing Stage 6 is the lóu jìng tōng. Each dissolving of each organ becomes a tong (siddhi).

Documentary note. The surviving transcript added the following parenthetical after “lóu jìng tōng”: “from internet: 6. Āsavakkhaya—supramundane knowledge relating to the destruction of āsavas and the recognition of the Four Noble Truths.” The standard Chinese term is 漏尽通 (lòujìn tōng), one of the six superknowledges, associated with the exhaustion of the āsavas. The historical internet gloss is preserved here as part of the documentary record rather than silently rewritten inside John Tan’s words.

AEN: Why?

Thusness: Because it becomes non-local and non-dual. The “bond” that limits and obstructs is gone. Its disappearance is usually not obvious because the bond is very subtle. So fearlessly open up. Let go of everything.

AEN: Sometimes it is very hard to let go, haha.

Thusness: That is because you have not oriented yourself totally with the nature of emptiness. This is very important—but only after non-dual experience can one realize the importance.

Thusness: Watch the video of Master Yuan Yin.

AEN: Yeah?

Thusness: You cannot grasp the essence?

AEN: I need to watch again, haha.

Thusness: :)

AEN: Another day, maybe. I’m studying for exams, and my mind today is not so good—a bit depressed over certain things.

Thusness: Work hard. :)

AEN: Okay, thanks.

Historical Dialogue — Re-reading Yuan Yin (2023)

Edited historical transcript · 28 November 2023

Source: the 2025 compilation. The core 28 November 2023 exchange through John Tan’s “Insubstantial non-dual” was checked against the surviving public Awakening to Reality post; the later follow-up printed below is preserved from the 2025 compilation and is identified separately at its start. The substantive exchange is preserved with light cleanup of acknowledgement filler and one broken same-speaker fragment. One realization label is deliberately narrowed in this edition at Soh’s present instruction: where the public post says “broke through to non-dual anatta,” the dialogue here reads “had a non-dual breakthrough,” because Soh is not certain that

the event should be classified as realization of anattā. This is an explicitly disclosed editorial correction rather than a claim about the post’s exact historical wording. A long Yuan Yin Chinese paste and its early GPT-4 translation immediately before John Tan’s first reaction are cross-referenced rather than duplicated here; the surrounding human turns, short source quotations, historical URLs, reactions, dream material, and translation discussion remain.

Public transcript URL — 28 November 2023 reassessment: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/11/yuan-yin-lao-ren-writings-chatgpt.html>

Soh Wei Yu: I’m impressed with GPT-4 at translating Yuan Yin Lao Ren’s texts.

Soh Wei Yu: Translate:

Documentary note. Soh then pasted a long Yuan Yin passage beginning with the fourth of ten methods for stopping delusive thought, followed by material on realization and application; in the present edition, see Ripples in the Sea of Chan beginning “Fourth: extinguishing objects while preserving mind,” and the subsequent “About Realization and Application” passage. GPT-4 then returned an English translation of that paste. John Tan’s next comment refers to it. The early translation is not reproduced here because the same Yuan Yin material appears in the main Chinese-controlled translation elsewhere in this volume.

John Tan: Wow... Very good translation.

Soh Wei Yu: Someone should translate the whole book.

Yin Ling: I will make myself read the Chinese, hahaha. Don’t send me translation, Soh—my Chinese needs to be saved.

John Tan: Lol. I probably will read both and see how GPT-4 translates, whether it imagines and fills in the blanks using Zen-master models...

John Tan: Soh must have realized his mistake in describing Yuan Yin Lao Ren as substantial non-dual...

Soh Wei Yu: Yeah... often my dreams tell me something useful. Like that time I dreamed someone who had just joined the group had strong karmic conditions to break through and was about to realize something; I knew I had to guide him, then a few days later he had a non-dual breakthrough. Likewise, when I dreamed of Yuan Yin Lao Ren and felt he was very enlightened and a strong practitioner—and very inspiring—I take it seriously. Maybe he really appeared in my dream and tried to inspire me to practice harder.

Yin Ling: “托梦” (dictionary: “phr. (of the spirit of one’s deceased) appear in one’s dream (to deliver a message)”) to talk to you.

John Tan: Haha... auspicious—but lazy in contemplation.

Soh Wei Yu: Lol.

John Tan: How did you tell GPT-4 to translate?

Soh Wei Yu: I just say ‘translate:’ then paste the Chinese text.

John Tan: Did you type TL;DR?

Soh Wei Yu: No. TL;DR is ‘too long; didn’t read’; it’s for summarizing texts. In this case I want the full translation.

John Tan: Yeah.

Soh Wei Yu: Ask ChatGPT to translate like this: with Chinese followed by English paragraph by paragraph so you can compare.

John Tan: Means translate paragraph by paragraph?

Soh Wei Yu: Yeah. Maybe you prompt: ‘Translate and respond with one paragraph in Chinese followed by the translated paragraph in English for my comparison.’ I told it line by line; then it started one line by one line, and then evolved into that—but I think one line is too short.

John Tan: Actually, after authenticating that appearances are radiances, I see the next most important step is for insight into dependent origination and emptiness to arise. It is a sort of special insight that sees the “middle path,” and we use this insight to reorient our conventional worldview and understand that the eight extremes do not apply.

Soh Wei Yu: It’s like a mirror is a mirror because it reflects, and reflection is reflection because of the mirror; or the sun is the sun because of shining, and shining is shining because of the sun. There is no sun apart from shining, nor shining apart from the sun. Both have no essence of their own; therefore they dependently originate and are dependently designated. Rather than ‘the sun can only shine if it has its own essence,’ the sun can shine not because it is a thing in itself but precisely because it has no essence—it is dependent designation and dependent origination.

Yin Ling: Yeah.

Soh Wei Yu: Was re-reading some by Yuan Yin Lao Ren just now. I think Yuan Yin Lao Ren might have a non-substantialist view even though he talks about mirror and reflection:

“鏡子能現影子，心鏡能照萬相，影不能離鏡。影子能離開鏡子嗎？離開鏡子，影子就沒有了。影子離不開鏡子，相離不開心；離開了心，相就無處顯現了；沒有影子，就不成鏡子，同樣，離開相也無從顯現真心。真心無相可見，必由事相來顯。因此真心能夠成就萬物，反過來萬物顯現真心，心、相就是這麼微妙。因此之故，心就是相，相就是心，影子就是鏡子，鏡子就是影子，所以無情就是有情，這是第三點。”

For comparison, the corresponding passage in Part IV, Lecture Six, under “Further Clarifying ‘Sentient and Insentient Alike Realize Perfect Wisdom,’” reads: “The mirror can display reflections; the mind-mirror can illumine the myriad appearances. Reflections cannot depart from the mirror. Can a reflection leave the mirror? Apart from the mirror, the reflection is gone. The reflection does not leave the mirror; appearances do not leave mind. Apart from mind, appearances have nowhere to manifest. Without reflections, it would not function as a mirror; likewise, apart from appearances there is no way for true mind to manifest. True mind is without characteristics and cannot itself be seen; it must be revealed through phenomena—that is, through form. Therefore true mind can bring all things into being, and conversely all things reveal true mind. Such is the

subtle relation between mind and appearances. For this reason, mind is appearance and appearance is mind; the reflection is the mirror and the mirror is the reflection. Therefore the insentient are precisely sentient. This is the third point."

John Tan: And we do not see emptiness—we only see appearances. Therefore Tsongkhapa in his Three Principal Aspects of the Path: appearance eliminates the extreme of existence, and emptiness eliminates the extreme of nonexistence.

John Tan: Depends.

Soh Wei Yu: I think Malcolm also said before: emptiness cannot be seen; we see presence/appearance. Might have recalled wrongly.

John Tan: No sun apart from shining, and no shining apart from sun—is like the relation example. So you must relate correctly and don't refute wrongly.

John Tan: There is another unique part of Tsongkhapa. He questions whether it is even right and possible to say 'freedom from all conceptualities'—that is, can there be no parts and no concepts at all from sentient being to Buddhahood, since a Buddha also engages in conventional terms.

Soh Wei Yu: Malcolm also said that's a controversial question and views vary, lol.

John Tan: Lol. His view has changed recently, if you noticed—more and more Gelug.

Soh Wei Yu: Yeah, in the early days he was firmly of the view that Buddhas have no thoughts.

John Tan: So in Tsongkhapa's view, in that case, emptiness and dependent origination are enough—why speak of freedom from all elaborations?

Documentary note. Soh then pasted the following Yuan Yin passage:

“逢古鏡，照鏡也，鏡子是亮光的，比喻有光明。老婆逢古鏡，天破曉了，光明顯現了，用功的人用到這晨光，見到自己的本性了，所以說「失曉老婆逢古鏡」。「分明覲面別無真」，鏡子中影子顯現出來了。分明，清清楚楚，覲面，面對面。你和鏡子裏的影子面對面相見，鏡子裏現的影子就是你，你就是鏡子，除這影子之外，還另有真的嗎？除了這影子之外就再沒有了，所以說「分明覲面別無真」。如靈雲開門見一片盛開的桃花，豁然大悟，噢——！不是我的性顯現這個相，是誰顯現呢？離開我的性哪里能見到這桃花呢？反過來，離開桃花這影子，又哪里能顯現我的性鏡呢？所以，他回光一瞥，識得這分明覲面別無真的，見到本性了！又如洞山祖師”

Editorial translation and source note. The surviving 2023 paste breaks off at “and likewise Patriarch Dongshan...”; that abrupt ending is in the historical post, not a loss introduced by this edition. In the translation printed in this book, the preserved passage reads, in part: “When the old woman meets the ancient mirror, dawn breaks and the light appears. When a practitioner's practice reaches this dawn-like light, one sees one's own original nature... The reflection appearing in the mirror is you, and you are the mirror... Apart from this reflection, there is nothing else. Therefore it says, ‘Clearly face to face, there is no other truth.’” Yuan Yin then gives Lingyun's awakening on seeing peach blossoms. The continuation, including the Dongshan

example begun by the truncated paste, appears in Part IV, Lecture Six, under “The Caodong Five Ranks of Lord and Minister.”

John Tan: Yuan Yin Lao Ren?

Soh Wei Yu: Yeah.

John Tan: So you must look into several writings and 对照.

Editorial note. 对照 here means to compare the writings side by side.

John Tan: Like you kept telling me initially that Mipham sounded very much like substantialist non-dual.

John Tan: You cannot take a snapshot and conclude.

Soh Wei Yu: Yeah, actually I thought Yuan Yin Lao Ren was substantialist non-dual until I had a dream about him earlier this year that was inspiring, lol—then I re-looked at his writings.

Editorial date note. Soh’s present recollection in 2026 places this first Yuan Yin dream around 2022, while the surviving 28 November 2023 conversation says “earlier this year.” The discrepancy is retained rather than silently harmonized because the exact date is uncertain.

Documentary note. The public 2023 post introduces a “Full text” paste of Ganges Mahāmudrā, Lecture Six, then marks the remainder “[long text snipped].” The complete translation appears in Part IV, Lecture Six.

John Tan: That is anatta and authentication of appearances as one’s radiance. Next step is what?

Soh Wei Yu: “以一切影像皆是鏡光所成，鏡即是影，影即是鏡；離鏡無影，離影無鏡，既不可背鏡住影，亦無須離影求鏡。既深知影鏡皆無所住，當能心無愛憎之情，境無取捨之住。故學者不必怕妄，但深契一乘玄旨，於境無取無捨，無喜無瞋，則妄自除矣。”——元音老人

Soh Wei Yu: “古人云：『但尽凡情，别无圣解』，你时时执在灵知性上，就是有所住着。须不着一切相，随缘起用才是。灵知觉性亦不可着。在觉知上用功更是大错。不是将此灵觉扫光，而是不住此灵觉。以不住故，即无能觉与所觉，故归无所得也。有个觉知的光景，早不是了，还说什么空空然？”——元音老人

Soh Wei Yu: “妄心不要灭掉，因为妄心就是真心，波浪就是水，把波浪去掉，水就没有了，所以妄心起来亦不压灭它。只要转，不跟它跑即是。”——元音老人

Corresponding passages in the present translation: (1) “Since all reflections appear through the mirror’s luminous clarity, mirror is reflection and reflection is mirror. Apart from the mirror there is no reflection; apart from reflection there is no mirror. One must neither turn away from the mirror and abide in reflections, nor leave reflections in order to seek the mirror. Knowing deeply that neither reflection nor mirror is anything to abide in, there is no attachment or aversion in the mind, nor any fixation on grasping or rejecting objects. Therefore students need not fear delusion... with regard to objects, neither grasp nor reject, neither rejoice nor get angry, and

delusion will naturally disappear.” (Section 2.) (2) “If you constantly cling to the nature of numinous knowing, that is still abiding somewhere. One must not cling to any marks and must function according to conditions. The nature of numinous knowing also must not be clung to. To work on awareness is an even greater mistake.” Elsewhere in the same Q&A: “It is not a matter of sweeping away this numinous awareness, but of not abiding in it. Because there is no abiding, there is neither one who is aware nor an object of awareness; therefore one returns to nothing obtainable. If an experience of knowing remains, it is already wrong.” (Section 9B.) (3) “Do not extinguish the delusive mind, because delusive mind is precisely true mind. Waves are water; if you remove the waves, there is no water. Therefore when delusive mind arises, do not suppress and extinguish it. Just transform it and do not run after it.” (Section 4N.)

John Tan: Insubstantial non-dual.

Documentary note. The original post records a thumbs-up reaction to this message.

Later follow-up preserved in the 2025 compilation

Soh Wei Yu: Posted a full ChatGPT translation of a Yuan Yin Lao Ren text here:

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/11/inscription-of-enlightened-mind.html>.

Editorial note. The original platform preview read “Inscription of the Enlightened Mind”; the linked page is now titled “A Brief Explanation of the ‘Inscription on Awakening the Mind.’”

Yin Ling: Wow, I read 25%—didn’t realize it is so long, but very well written. I’ll drive home then read. Thanks.

Soh Wei Yu: That is just one article out of about twelve—this one is on Mahāmudrā. I went through all of them. Link: <https://book.bfn.org/article/0383.htm>. Sorry—seventeen articles, lol.

Soh Wei Yu: He foretold when he would die, sat in meditation posture when he passed away at 95 years old, and had countless śarīra relics:

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/12/yuan-yin-lao-ren.html>. *96 years old.

Soh Wei Yu: I also bought some of his books for my mom before:

<https://www.taobao.com/list/item/wap/611526050673.htm> — new edition of his collected works here, I think.

Soh Wei Yu: Many of his writings are also available here:

<https://www.bfn.org/yuanyin/article.htm>

Yin Ling: Cool, thank you. Gonna take me one hour to read that excerpt because it is 繁体字.

Soh Wei Yu: I rely on my phone to read to me, like always.

Yin Ling: I read very slowly and need to 咬文嚼字 to understand, so audio won’t work.

Editorial note. 繁体字 means traditional Chinese characters. 咬文嚼字 here conveys reading closely, word by word, with careful attention to the wording.

Editorial note. This dialogue records a real change in interpretation after rereading multiple Yuan Yin passages. The dreams are preserved substantially in the terms Soh used at the time. One realization label has been deliberately narrowed from the public post’s “non-dual anatta” to “non-dual breakthrough” at Soh’s present instruction because he is not certain that the event should be classified as anattā. The source note above discloses that intervention. The dreams are treated here as personally meaningful experiences within a wider Buddhist context.

Editorial note. The full present-day editorial reflection—including the I AM identification, the complete beginner-versus-post-awakening Q&A, the mirror/appearance analysis, “worldly appearances constantly abide,” and the Dōgen/Huineng parallels—appears in the front matter, where it frames the source texts. The historical dialogues above remain here as documentary material.

End Matter

Translation and Editorial History

The path to this edition passed through several distinct layers. In 2023, exploratory GPT-4 translations helped reopen Yuan Yin Lao Ren’s writings for English-language discussion. The 2025 compilation preserved many of those translations together with source links, commentary, photographs, and historical conversations. That compilation remains valuable as a record of discovery and reception, but its older translations are not the textual authority of this book.

The teaching chapters in this edition were translated from the collected Chinese sources and revised through repeated comparison with those texts. Where the 2025 compilation contains an earlier English version of the same passage, this edition uses the new translation from the Chinese. Older English renderings are retained only where they are historically relevant, especially inside documentary conversations.

This distinction matters especially in the documentary conversations. The 2008 and 2023 speakers are not generally rewritten to sound as if they had access to a translation prepared years later. Their substantive interpersonal turns, historical URLs, dream material, reactions, and sequence are preserved. The one deliberate exception in the 2023 dialogue is disclosed at the point of use: Soh has authorized narrowing one realization label from “non-dual anatta” to “non-dual breakthrough” because he is not certain that the event should be classified as anattā. When a very long early machine translation or Yuan Yin source paste appears inside the historical thread and the same passage is already printed in the main body, an editorial note marks the omission and directs the reader to the corresponding passage elsewhere in the book.

Glossary of Recurrent Terms

This glossary describes recurring usage in this edition; it is not a one-to-one Chinese–English substitution list. Yuan Yin’s vocabulary is contextual, and the same English word may render different source expressions while a single Chinese term may require different English renderings in different doctrinal settings.

Historical and comparative labels

Thusness. The historical online name used by John Tan in the 2008 dialogue. John Tan is Soh Wei Yu’s mentor; the book preserves “Thusness” where it belongs to the original chat record and uses John Tan elsewhere for clarity.

Longchen. In the 2008 dialogue, “Longchen” is Sim Pern Chong’s internet-forum name. It does not refer to Longchen Rabjam (Longchenpa), the fourteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist master. The transcript therefore renders the name as “Longchen [Sim Pern Chong]” wherever it occurs.

Anatta (Pāli anattā). An editorial comparative term used explicitly in the front reflection and also in Part VI when reproducing John Tan and Soh Wei Yu’s historical discussion of no-self. It is not imposed retroactively as Yuan Yin’s own preferred label or as a blanket equivalent for every Chinese expression concerning selflessness.

I AM (Awakening to Reality comparative terminology). The preliminary direct realization of pure, self-evident Presence/Awareness. In this edition, Soh explicitly identifies the specific initial realization Yuan Yin describes as immediately present, formless, numinously luminous “wondrous awareness”/numinous knowing—recognized as one’s true identity rather than the body or delusive thought—as the same realization AtR calls I AM, under different terminology. This is not Yuan Yin’s own term and is not a blanket translation of true mind, Buddha-nature, awakened awareness, numinous knowing, or self-nature. The identification concerns that specifically described realization; Yuan Yin himself says it is only initial awakening and later requires phenomena/self nonduality, non-abiding, and deeper maturation.

Substantialist and insubstantial nonduality (editorial terminology). In Soh's later comparative usage, "substantialist" nonduality means that subject and object are experienced as nonseparate while consciousness is still treated as an independently existing or unchanging ground. "Insubstantial" nonduality, or nondual anattā, does not preserve such an independent Awareness behind appearances. These are not Yuan Yin's own labels. The front editorial reflection explains why Soh now applies the latter description to Yuan Yin by reading his positive true-mind and luminosity language together with his stronger de-reifying formulations: mirror and reflection cannot be obtained apart, true mind cannot be obtained apart from sense objects, neither luminosity nor its display is an abiding place, and no separate knower remains over against what is known.

Radiance / luminosity. In the front editorial reflection and Part VI historical material, "radiance" and "Empty Luminosity" belong principally to John Tan's later comparative vocabulary. Yuan Yin's own luminous and knowing terminology is translated contextually in the source texts gathered here and is not mechanically collapsed into this later vocabulary.

Yuan Yin terminology and practice terms

Apprehending Mind and Seeing Nature (明心见性). The rendering used throughout this edition for a central Yuan Yin phrase. It refers to the direct realization of mind and one's true nature, not merely to forming a conceptual recognition. Yuan Yin repeatedly stresses that this realization must be followed by preservation, training amid circumstances, and the removal of habitual tendencies.

Bodhicitta (菩提心). The aspiration for awakening together with the commitment to benefit beings. In Yuan Yin's Heart-Center instructions it is repeatedly summarized as seeking the Buddha-way above and transforming or liberating beings below.

Buddha-nature (佛性). One of Yuan Yin's principal positive terms for what is to be directly realized. The edition preserves this language while also preserving his repeated warnings against grasping, fixation, and treating conditioned appearances as independently real.

Chan (禅). The Chinese Chan tradition. "Chan investigation" in this book commonly includes huatou inquiry, direct pointing, post-awakening training, and the language of seeing the nature.

Clear observation (观照). A recurrent practice term, especially for cultivation outside formal sitting. It means clearly noticing thoughts and reactions as they arise without following or grasping them and without being carried away by circumstances. Yuan Yin repeatedly pairs formal sitting with this continuous observation and, in one instruction, says that clear observation is the main practice while sitting meditation is auxiliary. It is not blankness or the forcible suppression of thought; the practical issue is whether thoughts and objects can arise without taking the mind captive.

Dependent origination (缘起 and related causal language). The arising of phenomena in dependence on causes and conditions. Yuan Yin repeatedly uses causal dependence to deny independent intrinsic essence. In Section 2 he describes conditioned mind and objects as “mutually dependent and mutually conditioning”: mind is not mind by itself but exists because of objects, while objects are not objects by themselves but exist because of mind. In the Pure Land discussion he states the stronger bilateral relation directly: “Apart from mind there is no land; apart from land there is no mind. Mind is land, and land is mind.” The front reflection accordingly distinguishes reciprocal manifestation—which can still admit either a substantial or an insubstantial reading—from explicit bilateral nonseparability and from the still stronger non-obtainability and non-abiding formulations that leave no independent Awareness behind appearances.

Dharmakāya (法身). The Dharma-body. Yuan Yin uses the term both within the three-bodies teaching and in Chan/esoteric discussions of the “proper position of the dharmakāya” and “going beyond the dharmakāya.”

Emptiness (空 and related expressions). Rendered contextually. The edition does not assume that every occurrence of “empty,” “emptiness,” “true emptiness,” or “empty luminosity” is the same technical expression; local source wording and argument govern.

Guarding and maintaining / protection (保任). Post-awakening cultivation in which realization is protected, stabilized, and made increasingly familiar amid circumstances while habitual tendencies lose force. Yuan Yin warns against both laxity and over-tight effort: protection must be continuous, but gripping it too tensely becomes another obstruction. As realization matures, this guarding becomes increasingly natural and effortless.

Heart-Center Dharma (心中心法). The esoteric practice lineage at the center of Yuan Yin’s teaching career. In the source it is repeatedly presented as a practice drawing together Chan, esoteric methods, and Pure Land, with six mudrās and one mantra.

Huatou (话头). A Chan inquiry phrase used to arouse the doubt-sensation. Yuan Yin sharply distinguishes genuinely investigating a huatou from merely reciting the phrase verbally.

Mahāmudrā (大手印). Literally “Great Seal.” Part IV contains the complete Mahāmudrā preface and seventeen lectures, where Yuan Yin discusses view, samādhi, conduct, essence and function, non-abiding, and realization.

No-mind (无心) and no-thought (无念). Related but not interchangeable terms. Yuan Yin repeatedly rejects the idea that either means inert blankness or forcibly suppressing thought; the practical emphasis is responsive functioning without abiding in or following thoughts.

No-practice / practice through no-practice (无修 and related expressions). Yuan Yin uses this mature-practice language for cultivation that is no longer contrived or manufactured, not for abandoning practice. In Ganges Mahāmudrā he describes the point as “not the slightest correction, yet not an instant of slackening or distraction,” and immediately clarifies elsewhere that “This is not failing to practice. Practice still has to be done.” It therefore does not mean passivity or merely doing nothing; it names effortless, non-abiding cultivation made possible by realization and maturation.

Non-abiding (无住). A central practical term in Yuan Yin’s teaching. Thoughts, distinctions, and responsive activity need not be suppressed; the point is that the mind does not settle on, grasp, or remain fixed in what arises. Yuan Yin repeatedly links non-abiding with responsive functioning, so it should not be read as inert blankness or withdrawal from circumstances.

Non-arising / birthlessness (无生). Rendered according to context. Yuan Yin does not use non-arising to mean that life, thought, or appearances must literally stop: he explicitly explains that thoughts may arise without abiding, and in Pure Land discussion he can say that “birth is birthless.” Elsewhere he speaks of the true-suchness nature as unborn and undying. The term should therefore be read through its local context rather than as annihilation.

Numinous knowing / numinous awareness / numinous brightness (灵知, 灵觉, 灵明, and related forms). These are contextual renderings, not interchangeable labels. 灵知 is commonly rendered “numinous knowing”; 灵觉 can be “numinous awareness” where the syntax concerns awareness; 灵明 is ordinarily rendered as a quality such as “numinously bright” rather than as another noun for knowing; and 了了觉知 / 了了常知 are rendered according to local syntax as clear, lucid, or continuous knowing. None of these expressions should be reified into an independently existing hidden observer.

Prajñā (般若). Wisdom or insight. Yuan Yin frequently contrasts the living wondrous functioning of prajñā with rigid suppression, conceptual attachment, or merely intellectual understanding.

Pure Land (净土). The Pure Land tradition and, contextually, Buddha-lands such as Amitābha’s Land of Ultimate Bliss. Yuan Yin repeatedly argues for the interpenetration rather than mutual exclusion of Pure Land, Chan, and esoteric practice.

Samādhi (三昧; 定 in some contexts). Meditative absorption or stability. Yuan Yin distinguishes living “great samādhi,” which functions responsively without being deluded by objects, from dead or rigid immobility.

Seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing (见闻觉知). A recurrent functional expression for ordinary sensory and cognitive activity. Yuan Yin uses this field both to point directly to present knowing and to warn against being stained by or clinging to what is seen, heard, sensed, and known. The expression should therefore not be isolated as proof of a separate hidden observer.

Self-nature (自性). A standard Buddhist rendering retained where the Chinese explicitly uses this term. In this edition the expression is not silently modernized away, but neither should the English word “self” by itself be taken as proof of an independently existing personal essence; the local context and argument remain decisive.

Suchness / true suchness (真如 and related suchness language). Used contextually for Yuan Yin’s suchness vocabulary. Expressions involving suchness, unmovingness, essence, and function are translated according to their local doctrinal role rather than by a mechanical single-word rule.

Three bodies (三身). The dharmakāya or Dharma-body, saṃbhogakāya or enjoyment body, and nirmāṇakāya or emanation body. Yuan Yin also explains these experientially through purity, illumination, and responsive manifestation.

True emptiness, marvelous presence (真空妙有). A paired expression central to Yuan Yin’s account of emptiness and functioning. “True emptiness” is explicitly distinguished from inert or annihilationist emptiness; “marvelous presence” indicates that appearances and responsive functions are vividly present while lacking independent, graspable existence. The two sides are meant to be read together rather than turned into separate substances.

True Host (主人公). A Chan direct-pointing expression prominent in the Gaofeng discussion in Ripples in the Sea of Chan. The dialogue asks where the “true host” is when there is no dreaming, thinking, seeing, or hearing; after Gaofeng’s breakthrough, Yuan Yin comments that the true host was never elsewhere and that mountains, rivers, grasses, trees, birdsong, fragrance, and ordinary functioning are its manifestation. The term is therefore best read in that full Chan context rather than as a simple equivalent of a personal ego.

True mind (真心; 妙明真心 and related forms). A major positive term in Yuan Yin’s own register. It should be read together with his statements on non-abiding, the unfindability of mind and objects, dependent arising, and the nonseparation of nature and appearances, rather than silently replaced by later Awakening to Reality terminology.

Unconditioned (无为, when doctrinal). Used where 无为 functions as a Buddhist technical term concerning the unconditioned. Ordinary Chinese negations of doing or acting are not mechanically forced into this technical rendering.

Wondrous function (妙用). Yuan Yin’s term for responsive activity once fixation is absent, often paired with essence, nature, luminosity, or true mind without positing a separate agent.

Selected Sources and Image Notes

Primary Chinese sources. Yuan Yin Lao Ren (元音老人), collected Chinese source texts used for Sections 1–11 of this edition. These texts are the reference point for the English translation; individual works are identified by title in the main text.

URL — Chinese source companion: https://files.awakeningtoreality.com/YuanYinLaoRen_Chinese_Originals.docx

English translation. The English teaching text in this edition was newly prepared from those Chinese sources. Earlier English versions were consulted for comparison but do not determine the wording where they differ from the Chinese.

Supplementary compilation. Soh, A Compilation of Yuan Yin Lao Ren’s Teachings and Translations, version dated 28 December 2025. Used for historical dialogue, disciple recollections, earlier editorial history, photographs, links, and source leads. Where it contains an earlier translation of material also present in the main translated source body, the translation printed in this edition is used instead.

Bibliographic authority. National Taiwan University Digital Library of Buddhist Studies, “[Buddhist Author Authority Database: 元音老人](#).” The author record gives November 23, 1905–February 5, 2000 and lists major publications and journal appearances.

URL — NTU author record: <https://dlbs.liberal.ntu.edu.tw/en/author/authorinfo.jsp?ID=27507&comefrom=bookdetail>

Published-book record. National Taiwan University Digital Library of Buddhist Studies, bibliographic record for [佛法修證心要](#) (1996, 法雨出版股份有限公司).

URL — NTU book record: https://dlbs.liberal.ntu.edu.tw/search/search_detail.jsp?comefrom=authorinfo&seq=298852

Secondary scholarship. Su Cheng-ming (蘇正民), [元音老人心中之研究](#), MA thesis, Huaan University, 2020. Useful for historical context, lineage history, and the reception of Yuan Yin Lao Ren’s teaching.

URL — NTU thesis record: https://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/en/search/search_detail.jsp?seq=670303

Contemporaneous death notice. “[元音老人坐化](#),” *Chan* (禪), 2000, no. 2. The notice reports that Yuan Yin Lao Ren died while seated in Shanghai on February 5, 2000, and gives his age as ninety-six, a figure consistent with traditional Chinese nominal-age reckoning (94 elapsed years from 23 November 1905). It provides a near-contemporaneous record of the date, place, and manner of his death.

URL — Chan death notice: <https://chan.bailinsi.net/2000/2/2000220.htm>

Full later-life memorial account. Wude (悟德), “元音老人坐脫立亡” (“Yuan Yin Lao Ren Passes Away While Seated”), *Meifo Huixun* (美佛慧訊), no. 69; later reproduced in Heart-Center archives. The complete article is translated in Part I. Its closing byline is printed as March 30, 2000 although the narrative includes the April 6 cremation; this edition retains the source’s printed byline.

URL — Wude memorial scan: https://wisdombox.org/Yniva_s.pdf

Historical conversations. The 22 August 2008 and 28 November 2023 exchanges are documentary reception history, not Yuan Yin source text. They are reproduced from the 2025 compilation. The core 2023 exchange through John Tan’s “Insubstantial non-dual” was checked against the surviving public Awakening to Reality post; the later follow-up printed after it is preserved from the 2025 compilation and is not presented as text verified on the current public page. The public core exchange includes John Tan’s “You cannot take a snapshot and conclude,” “That is anatta and authentication of appearances as one’s radiance,” and “Insubstantial non-dual.” Soh’s remark there establishes that he had previously thought Yuan Yin was “substantialist non-dual” and then re-looked at Yuan Yin’s writings; this edition does not invent an undocumented explanation of why he held that earlier impression. Speaker order, substantive turns, disagreements, hesitations, humor, dream material, historically important wording, meaningful reactions, and substantive link/media posts are retained, subject to the expressly disclosed correction of one realization label in the 2023 dialogue: “non-dual anatta” is narrowed to “non-dual breakthrough” at Soh’s present instruction because he is not certain the event should be classified as anattā. Chinese source quotations pasted into the historical exchanges remain in documentary form; concise English translations are supplied in editorial notes where needed. Very long Yuan Yin source passages or early machine translations that would otherwise duplicate whole chapters are signposted and cross-referenced rather than silently paraphrased. Chat-interface debris is omitted.

URL — 2008 public transcript: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/09/heart-sutra-talks-in-chinese-by-yuan.html>

URL — 2023 reassessment conversation: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/11/yuan-yin-lao-ren-writings-chatgpt.html>

Comparative nonduality terminology. Soh, “Different Degrees of No-Self: Non-Doership, Non-dual, Anatta, Total Exertion and Dealing with Pitfalls,” Awakening to Reality. Used in the front editorial reflection and Part VI historical framing to define the editor’s later distinction between substantialist and insubstantial forms of nondual realization; it does not supply or control Yuan Yin’s terminology.

URL — Different Degrees of No-Self: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/04/different-degrees-of-no-self-non.html>

I AM realization and later insight. Thusness/PasserBy’s Seven Stages of Enlightenment, Awakening to Reality, identifies Stage 1 as the direct realization of I AM: pure existence/Presence that is not body or thought. In the front editorial reflection Soh explicitly identifies the specific initial luminous realization described by Yuan Yin—immediately present, formless, numinously luminous wondrous awareness/numinous knowing recognized as one’s true identity—as the same realization AtR calls I AM, under different terminology. This is an identity judgment about the realization, not a blanket translation of Yuan Yin’s technical vocabulary. “Definition of First Bhumi, Stream Entry, Etc.” is cited

separately for the later distinction between recognizing clarity and realizing the empty nature of that clarity.

URL — Thusness/PasserBy's Seven Stages of Enlightenment: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2007/03/thusnesss-six-stages-of-experience.html>

URL — Definition of First Bhumi, Stream Entry, Etc.: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/definition-of-first-bhumi.html>

Experiential anattā in the editor's comparative vocabulary. Soh, "When Sound Hears Itself: The Journey to Experiencing Anatta," *Awakening to Reality*, May 1, 2023. The post preserves Yin Ling's pairing of passages attributed there to Naropa and Tilopa and her point that the two insights must be present together, as well as John Tan's 2023 exchange with the AtR chatbot distinguishing de-reification of self from direct authentication of consciousness as appearances. It is cited only to explain the editor's later comparative use of "nondual anattā"; it does not control Yuan Yin's text or terminology.

URL — When Sound Hears Itself: The Journey to Experiencing Anatta: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/05/nice-advice-and-expression-of-anatta-in.html>

Mirror analogy and its limits. Soh, "Mirror analogy is outright misleading and promote dualistic and agency framework," *Awakening to Reality*. The post preserves John Tan's comments distinguishing a mirror-like initial pointing-out from a mature non-reifying view. The citation is not used to classify Yuan Yin as substantialist; Yuan Yin's own mirror passages, skillful-means pedagogy, and the wider Yuan Yin source texts examined in this edition remain primary for interpreting Yuan Yin.

URL — Mirror analogy is outright misleading and promote dualistic and agency framework: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/01/mirror-analogy-is-outright-misleading.html>

Three-level mirror diagnostic and two-way dependence. Thusness/PasserBy, "*The Three Levels of 'Understanding' of Non-dual Awareness*," *Awakening to Reality*, January 26, 2009; and Soh, "*Two-Way Dependency/Dependent Designation*," *Awakening to Reality*, December 19, 2014. These sources are used only to clarify the editor's comparative distinctions: reciprocal self-revelation can still leave an inherent mirror or Awareness, whereas bilateral nonseparability excludes that independence; Yuan Yin's still stronger non-obtainability and non-abiding formulations close the remaining escape routes. They do not control Yuan Yin's text or terminology.

URL — The Three Levels of "Understanding" of Non-dual Awareness: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/01/three-levels-of-understanding-of-non.html>

URL — Two-Way Dependency/Dependent Designation: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/12/two-way-dependencydependent-designation.html>

Public Chinese witness for the decisive preliminary-versus-mature distinction. Yuan Yin Lao Ren, 禅海微澜 (Ripples in the Sea of Chan), 物我不二 ("Phenomena and self are not two"). This public full-text witness contains the Feng Jichuan / Dahui contrast used in the front editorial reflection: recognizing the body as not the real "I" while treating a numinous nature as the real "I" is explicitly described as not yet awakening to phenomena/self nonduality and nature/appearance inseparability. The same essay also contains the Dasui discussion, including the practitioner's awakening that the worlds in the ten directions are his own whole

body and radiance, followed by Yuan Yin’s statement that the great trichiliocosm and dharmakāya originally share one essence and have never been separate. A current 印心典藏 Yuan Yin catalog also lists 禅海微澜 among Yuan Yin’s works. Quotations from this passage follow the Chinese source and the English translation printed in the main text.

URL — Ripples in the Sea of Chan — Phenomena and self are not two: <https://www.xinmizi.com/book/id/1/child/3>

Related supplementary Yuan Yin source. Yuan Yin Lao Ren, 楞严要解 (Essentials of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra), current eighth “ten demonstrations of seeing” subsection. Some older contents tables label it 心物一如，显见不二 (“mind and things are of one suchness; revealing seeing as nondual”); the current 印心典藏 archive instead uses 文殊启见，显见不二 (“Mañjuśrī elicits the teaching on seeing; revealing seeing as nondual”). It is not a separate standalone article title. This source is cited only as supplementary convergence; it is not among the core Chinese works translated as Sections 1–11.

Permanence, impermanence, and non-substrate Buddha-nature. Yuan Yin’s “Phenomena and self are not two” and the Q&A material on Questions 75 and 77 are the primary Chinese witnesses for the front reflection’s discussion of dharmakāya/worldly appearance identity, beginner-versus-post-awakening pedagogy, and “worldly appearances constantly abide.” Dōgen’s Bendōwa is cited as a comparative Zen witness against separating an imperishable mind-nature from a perishing body; Genjōkōan for its warning against taking mind’s self-nature as fixed and permanent; Dōgen’s Buddha-Nature fascicle for the impermanence/Buddha-nature formulation; and the Platform Sūtra’s Xingchang dialogue for Huineng’s deliberate reversal of permanence and impermanence. These are editorial comparisons, not replacement translations of Yuan Yin.

Yuan Yin — Phenomena and self are not two:

<https://www.xinmizi.com/upload/202403/bfd1403f770810eb62ff760b7d697a8f.pdf> · Yuan Yin Q&A — Question 75:

<https://www.xinmizi.com/book/id/51/child/472> · Yuan Yin Q&A — “worldly appearances constantly abide”:

<https://www.xinmizi.com/upload/202603/334213e0dc4a165d5efc92e61c7d8280.pdf> · Dōgen — Bendōwa:

<https://wwwzc.org/bendowa/> · Dōgen — Genjōkōan: <https://genjokoan.com/> · Platform Sūtra (BDK):

https://www.bdk.or.jp/document/dgtl-dl/dBET_T2008_PlatformSutra_2000.pdf

Direct-text PDF witnesses — Dōgen — Bendōwa: <https://wwwzc.org/sites/default/files/Bendowa-book.pdf> · Dōgen — Genjōkōan (Shohaku Okumura):

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5604b6bbe4b0612d66a6df30/t/639a204141b3f75ff38bf5ba/1671045185342/Genjokoan.pdf> · Platform Sūtra (BDK): https://www.bdk.or.jp/document/dgtl-dl/dBET_T2008_PlatformSutra_2000.pdf

No movement / no changing nor unchanging. Soh, “In the seen only the seen is also no seer, no seeing and nothing seen / No Movement,” Awakening to Reality, October 2021. The exchange records John Tan distinguishing the ultimate nondual formulation—no changing nor unchanging—from the conventional language of change, impermanence, and dependent origination. It is used in the front reflection to explain Soh’s present reading of Yuan Yin’s “worldly appearances constantly abide,” not as a source for Yuan Yin’s wording.

No Movement: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/in-seen-only-seen-is-also-no-seer-no.html> · AtR — Dōgen’s

Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/03/dogens-impermanence-is-buddha-nature.html> · AtR — Huineng on Impermanence and Buddha-Nature:

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/impermanence-is-buddha-nature-sixth.html>

Source-text discrepancies, historical identifications, and controlled variants. A small number of statements in the received Yuan Yin source base are preserved in the translated body even though comparison with internal parallels, received Buddhist texts, or historical references raises a clear question of chronology, attribution, number, character identity, or wording. Local editorial/textual source notes identify the cases most likely to mislead a reader or to make the English look inexplicably unusual: the Jin/Tang dating of Kūkai's study under Huiguo; the historical identity of Yu Xiu/Yu Di; the Linji 三種依明 / 三種依 quotation; the dragon girl's jewel offering; the eighty-eight/eighty-one thought-delusion count; the dating and name-form of Jinul/Zhinul and Straight Talk on the True Mind; the Bön classification; the 楚潤而雨 / 础潤而雨 proverb anomaly; the 三昧 / 三昧 "true fire of samādhi" variant; the rare 因 exclamation and the later garbled decisive-cry glyph; the 自/知 and 自性/自相 source variants; and several places where the English necessarily follows an explicitly disclosed contextual or inferred reading. These notes do not replace the controlling Chinese with web wording. They make source-level uncertainty visible while preserving the documentary translation.

URL — Kōyasan Shingon official history of Kūkai's Tang-China study under Huiguo: <https://www.koyasan.or.jp/en/shingonshu/kobodaishi.html>

URL — Lotus Sūtra, "Devadatta" chapter, dragon girl and precious jewel: <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/lsoc/Content/12>

URL — Jinul (1158–1210), historical overview: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/jinul-1158-1210>

URL — Recent scholarly discussion of Straight Talk on the True Mind authorship: <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/16/7/825>

URL — Bön as a distinct Tibetan religious tradition: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/eastern-religions/buddhism/bon>

URL — Classical Ziyu/Yaoshan record identifying the official as 于頔 (Yu Di): <https://deerpark.app/cbeta/X1594/32>

URL — Received Record of Linji — 三種依 reading: <https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/%E9%8E%AE%E5%B7%9E%E8%87%A8%E6%BF%9F%E6%85%A7%E7%85%A7%E7%A6%AA%E5%B8%AB%E8%AA%9E%E9%8C%84>

URL — Standard eighty-one grades of thought-delusion (nine grounds × nine grades): <https://zh.wikisource.org/zh-hans/%E4%BD%9B%E5%AD%B8%E5%A4%A7%E8%BE%AD%E5%85%B8/%E5%85%AB%E5%8D%81%E4%B8%80%E5%93%81%E6%80%9D%E6%83%91>

URL — Classical proverb 月晕而风，础润而雨: <https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E6%9C%88%E6%99%95%E8%80%8C%E9%A3%8E%EF%BC%8C%E7%A1%80%E6%B6%A6%E8%80%8C%E9%9B%A8>

URL — Essentials of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra — current archive: <https://www.xinmizj.com/book/id/55/child/517>

Comparative account of two-way dependence. Greg Goode, "From Advaita to Emptiness," especially its contrast between unilateral dependence in awareness teachings and bilateral dependencies in emptiness teachings; see also Soh, "Greg Goode on Advaita/Madhyamika," Awakening to Reality, which preserves Goode's first-person account of the Nāgārjuna passage. The comparison is used methodologically, not as an authority over Yuan Yin's own texts. In this edition, the weaker statement that appearances reveal true mind is not treated by itself as decisive. The stronger Yuan Yin evidence includes his statements that "apart from mind there is no land; apart from land there is no mind," and "mind is land, and land is mind"; that mirror

and reflection cannot be obtained apart; that true mind cannot be obtained apart from sense objects; and that numinous awareness is not an abiding place.

URL — Greg Goode — From Advaita to Emptiness: <https://greg-goode.com/article/from-advaita-to-emptiness/>

URL — Greg Goode on Advaita/Madhyamika: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/08/greg-goode-on-advaitamadhyamika-9.html>

Selected later reception. Ben Huan’s appraisal is preserved in the transcript “本焕老和尚谈元音老人” at 佛教导航. Jing Hui’s 2004 interview is preserved as 净慧老和尚谈元音老人和心中心. Wu Limin’s 2007 preface appears under the Chinese title 吴立民老居士为《元音老人》一书作序 and dates itself to 2007. A public scan of 心经抉隐 preserves Zhao Puchu’s title calligraphy. These sources document reception and publication history; they do not control the translation or the book’s doctrinal interpretation.

URL — Ben Huan on Yuan Yin: <https://www.fjdh.cn/wumin/2009/04/07133349819.html>

URL — Jing Hui interview: <https://www.fjdh.cn/wumin/2009/04/07133349820.html>

URL — Wu Limin preface: <https://www.fjdh.cn/wumin/2013/10/143252300786.html>

URL — Heart Sūtra scan with Zhao Puchu title calligraphy: <https://dhanaka.com/Dyinxin/XinJingJueYin.pdf>

Further reading on dream yoga. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *Buddhist Dream Yoga: Dzogchen and the Practice of Natural Light* (Shambhala, 2025), with a text by Jamgön Mipham and edited by Michael Katz. Shambhala’s published excerpt from the earlier edition distinguishes karmic dreams from “dreams of clarity” and states that dreams of clarity may include advice or predictions concerning future events. A related Shambhala discussion of the same work describes receiving the clarity of teachings, meeting deities, and discovering teachings from masters in dreams. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep: Practices for Awakening*, edited by Mark Dahlby (Shambhala, revised edition, 2022), presents Tibetan Bön dream- and sleep-yoga practices as vehicles for spiritual transformation and liberation. These sources situate the editor’s language within traditional dream-yoga literature; they are not used as evidence of spiritual attainment.

URL — Dream Yoga and the Practice of Natural Light excerpt: https://www.shambhala.com/snowlion_articles/dream-yoga-and-the-practice-of-natural-light/

URL — Shambhala review of the same work: https://www.shambhala.com/snowlion_articles/dream-yoga-and-the-practice-of-natural-light-2/

URL — Buddhist Dream Yoga: <https://www.shambhala.com/buddhist-dream-yoga-9780834845817.html>

URL — The Tibetan Yogas of Dream and Sleep: <https://www.shambhala.com/the-tibetan-yogas-of-dream-and-sleep.html>

Disciple recollections. “印心三祖元音阿闍梨法偈和故事选,” Yinxin Tiandi, February 25, 2024. This later reminiscence anthology reproduces several memories also preserved in the 2025 compilation, including accounts of frugality, generosity, patient listening, and Chan-style exchanges. The source preserves contributor names or handles where available; the vignettes in Part I are concise editorial retellings and are presented as recollections.

URL — Yinxin Tiandi reminiscences: <https://yinxinzong.uk/index.php/印心三祖元音阿闍梨法偈和故事选/>

Image notes and provenance. The title-page portrait and Figures 1–2 come from the 2025 compilation and are also publicly displayed on the Awakening to Reality Yuan Yin biography page. The exact title-page portrait is additionally hosted directly in the 報佛恩網 (BFnN.org)

Yuan Yin archive. The BFnn homepage expressly states that material on the site is welcome for reprinting, recording, reposting, and circulation. That notice provides an explicit archive-level reuse basis for the portrait as hosted there, although the individual photographer is not identified. It is not relied upon as permission evidence for Figures 1–2. A 2024 Yinxin Tiandi reminiscence identifies Figure 1 as the chair-backed portrait taken at the Jinan Military Region Photography Center; no individual photographer is named. Figure 2 belongs to the older memorial/relic-photo tradition and is reproduced on the public Awakening to Reality biography page; its individual photographer is likewise not identified. The front cover is new artwork based on the archived title-page portrait and is not documentary photography.

URL — BFnn homepage reuse notice: <https://www.bfnn.org/>

URL — BFnn Yuan Yin archive: <https://www.bfnn.org/yuanyin/gb/index.html>

URL — BFnn Precious Photos page: <https://www.bfnn.org/yuanyin/gb/photo.htm>

URL — Awakening to Reality Yuan Yin biography and source images: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/11/the-biography-of-yuan-yin-lao-ren.html>

URL — BFnn archived title portrait: <https://www.bfnn.org/yuanyin/images/teacher.jpg>