Literary Writings and Letters

Guru Wang Xianglu

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A Eulogy for Master Yinguang

Master Yinguang, the thirteenth patriarch of the Pure Land school, passed away at Lingyan Mountain in the winter of the Gengchen year. The whole world mourned him. From then on, the Pure Land school lost its support and refuge. How scant are the favorable conditions for sentient beings in this Dharma-ending age! The Master’s hidden practices were beyond fathoming. In former days, while residing on Mount Putuo, he performed his daily evening practice without fail. Each night, thousands of mountain mice would crowd together outside his window, quietly listening to the Buddha’s name; only when the practice was over would they depart. Xu Weiru’s brother-in-law told me this, and thus one may know something of the transformative power of the Master’s hidden virtues. I regret my lack of literary ability and am unable to praise even a fraction of them. I should make the vow to spread Pure Land practice widely; this essay, too, is but an attempt to assuage my grief.

How admirable was Master Yinguang, a patriarch of his age. Zhongnan rises from the earth, its lofty peaks standing majestic and strong.

It gave birth to this sage, in whom spiritual excellence was concentrated. Thoroughly versed in both Confucianism and Buddhism, he was like a divine dragon.

Clouds arose in Shaanxi, and Dharma rain traveled eastward. Over sixty years, he awakened the deaf and enlightened the ignorant.

Grieving for this latter age, he hoped to reverse its declining ways. He personally embodied the Dharma, venerating the virtue of the precepts.

While in Shanghai, we all looked up to the Dharma platform. Seeking the benefit of the Dharma, I was fortunate enough to behold him.

We traveled by boat together to Ningbo and spoke joyfully with one another. He encouraged me toward diligent practice and opened for me the contemplation of Chan.

Only then did I understand his earnest intention: it was not to cling to a single sūtra. In order to open expedient means, he established this exemplary model.

The single phrase “Amitābha Buddha” he made the inscription of his heart. How could he have delighted in lesser teachings or drawn divisive distinctions?

The Master’s hidden practices were unknown to the world. His virtue transformed even birds and beasts; such marvels are beyond conception.

Untiring in instructing others, he bestowed the greatest gift. His towering merit and virtue were no less than those of Master Lianchi.

Alas, humans and devas have lost this field of merit. Who now will be our support and refuge? My heart remains bound in longing.

Lingyan stands before my gaze, at the summit of its precipitous heights. Clouds of compassion abide eternally throughout the three-thousand great-thousand world.

Respectfully inscribed by Wang Xianglu of western Zhejiang, at the New Year of the Xinsi year of the Republic of China.

Commemorative Address for the Second Anniversary of the Amitābha Dharma Assembly

The Amitābha Dharma Assembly at Shousheng Vihara on Guizhou Road in Shanghai was established by the elder monk Diming. On the appointed days of each month, Buddha-recitation is held, and the elder layman Wang Xinzhan is invited to expound various sūtras and treatises. The merit and virtue of this gift of Dharma are inconceivable. In the eighth month of last winter, the elder monk Diming passed away; the Dharma assembly has since been maintained by Master Dayuan. Now, to commemorate its second anniversary, a commemorative publication is being issued,

and I have been asked to give a brief account of the causes and conditions of Buddha-recitation. I respectfully offer what little I know in rejoicing.

In Buddha-recitation, taking return to the source as the ultimate aim is essential. Although it is clear that the ultimate cannot be attained, for all dharmas bear the mark of emptiness and have no self-nature, a provisional goal is established for beginners so that they may have something to take as their guiding principle. Thus, return to the source is made the ultimate aim. Yet return to the source is not the work of a single moment. Before one can return to the source, one should first take up a method—namely, the unsurpassed, simple, and direct true Dharma of Buddha-recitation taught by Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva.

This bodhisattva's Buddha-recitation is based on the instruction of the Buddha Surpassing the Light of Sun and Moon. Through Buddha-recitation, one directly realizes samādhi: gathering the six sense faculties into a single thought, with thought after thought continuing without interruption, one attains samādhi. This is the essential tradition. Moreover, in the Contemplation Sūtra of Amitāyus Buddha, Śākyamuni Buddha tells Ānanda: "This mind makes Buddhas; this mind is Buddha. The ocean of the perfect and universal knowledge of all Buddhas arises from the mind's conception. Therefore, one should single-mindedly bind one's mindfulness to it."

Thus, this Buddha-recitation necessarily places great emphasis on visualization, taking return to the source as its ultimate aim. Further, in the Sutra of the Compassionate Lotus, the Tathāgata Ratnagarbha explains the causes and conditions of Amitāyus Buddha before he attained Buddhahood: through the power of his great vows, that Buddha chose a pure land free from the five turbidities. This takes the power of vows and return to the source as its ultimate aim.

All of this takes mind as primary. Therefore, the method of Buddha-recitation gathers in the six sense faculties, first collecting the scattered mind into one. The one returns to emptiness, and one does not cling even to emptiness; this is called purity. From this one enters the great light treasury, the fundamental ground of equality, which perfectly pervades the ten directions. Its power reaches without boundary; hence it is called attaining great strength.

These words were not an invention of Prince Nimo. When he made his vows, he immediately received predictions of Buddhahood from Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges in the ten directions. The Buddha lands all underwent the six kinds of trembling at once, and mandārava flowers rained down as a common testimony to the pledge. This was an unsurpassed and excellent affinity. Therefore, when the World-Honored One taught the Amitābha Sūtra, he repeatedly enjoined us that we should make vows. From this we know that every gateway for entering the

Buddha Dharma takes mental mindfulness as primary. For Buddhahood depends on the mind; it does not depend merely on the mouth.

Those who cultivate pure karma and uphold the name also rely on the three mysteries: forming Amitābha's mind-seal is the mystery of body; orally upholding the name is the mystery of speech; and creating visualization in the mind is the mystery of mind.

Indeed, "Namo Amitābha Buddha" is actually a mantra. It is the first phrase of the Short Rebirth Mantra, the seven characters "Namo Amituo Poye." Yet these seven characters are in fact a corrupted pronunciation; the correct pronunciation is the eight characters "Namo Amituo Puda Ye." When recited quickly, they again become six characters, translated as "Namo Amitābha Buddha."

Formerly, for the convenience of beginners and to achieve uniformity of pitch, Dharma instruments were added and the tones were prolonged. Over time, people forgot that it was an esoteric practice and came to emphasize Pure Land practice alone. This was the beginning of the Pure Land school.

Yet though the sounds differ, if one upholds them until attaining one-pointedness of mind without distraction, one likewise realizes samādhi and naturally receives the mindfulness and protection of the Buddhas of the ten directions. How is this any different from the Chan school? Foolish people forcibly divide them into three, severing the meaning of the sūtras; how is this different from slandering the Dharma?

I respectfully cite words from the Treatise on Breaking through Appearances by First Patriarch Bodhidharma as proof. The treatise says: "Those who are mindful of the Buddha must have correct mindfulness. Ultimate meaning is correct; non-ultimate meaning is deviant. Correct mindfulness surely brings rebirth; how could deviant mindfulness reach that land? Buddha means awakening: that is, awakeningly observing body and mind, and not allowing evil to arise. Mindfulness means remembrance: that is, remembering and upholding the practices of the precepts without forgetting, diligently striving to understand them."

"Such is the meaning called mindfulness. Therefore, know that mindfulness lies in the mind, not in words. One seeks fish by means of a trap; once the fish is caught, one forgets the trap. One seeks meaning through words; once the meaning is gained, one forgets the words. Since one speaks of being mindful of the Buddha's name, one must know the way of mindfulness of Buddha. If the mind lacks sincerity while the mouth recites an empty name, if the three poisons arise within and attachment to self and others fills the breast, then, with an ignorant mind, one does not see the Buddha and merely wastes one's effort."

“Moreover, reciting and mindfulness differ vastly in principle: what is in the mouth is called recitation; what is in the mind is called mindfulness. Therefore, know that mindfulness arises from the mind and is called the gateway of awakened practice; recitation is in the mouth and is merely the mark of sound. To cling to marks and seek principle can never succeed. Therefore, know that the cultivation of all past sages was not external discourse; they simply examined the mind. The mind itself is the source of all goodness; the mind itself is the king of all virtues.”

The constant bliss of nirvāṇa arises through resting the mind. The cycle of birth and death in the three realms likewise arises from the mind. Mind is the gateway of a lifetime; mind is the crucial passage to liberation.

How could one who knows the gateway worry that accomplishment is difficult? How could one who knows the crucial passage fear not reaching the destination? I have privately observed that those of shallow understanding today know only to regard outward forms as merit. They squander wealth, greatly harm creatures of water and land, vainly erect images and stupas, and needlessly press people into labor. They pile timber and heap mud, paint in blue and green, exhaust their hearts and strength, harm themselves, and delude others. They do not understand shame or remorse; how could they ever awaken? When they see conditioned things, they diligently cling to them; when nonappearance is spoken of, they sit blankly as though bewildered.

They greedily seek the small compassion of this present life and do not perceive the great suffering to come. Such cultivation and study merely exhausts them; they turn away from what is right and return to what is deviant, falsely claiming to gain blessings. But if one can gather the mind and inwardly illuminate it, awakeningly contemplate and outwardly clarify; eradicate the three poisons so that they are forever extinguished; and close off the six thieves so that they cannot intrude—then naturally, merit and virtue as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, every kind of adornment, and innumerable Dharma gates will each be accomplished. To transcend the ordinary and realize sagehood will be visibly not far away.

“Awakening occurs in an instant; why wait until one’s hair is white? The true gate is deep and secret—how could it all be fully set forth?” He also says: “Buddha-nature is not attained outside the mind. When mind arises, that is the time when sin arises. I originally sought the mind, not the Buddha. Clearly knowing that the three realms are empty and without a single thing, if you wish to seek the Buddha, seek only the mind. This very mind, mind, mind is Buddha.” The Patriarch states plainly: what is in the mouth is called recitation; what is in the mind is called mindfulness.

Mindfulness arises from the mind and is the gateway of awakened practice. The cultivation of all past sages simply examined the mind. Therefore, when upholding

the name, one must indeed be mindful of the Buddha, remembering the Buddha in one's heart as a child remembers its mother. People of the world confuse vocal Buddha-recitation with mindfulness of Buddha, taking a loud voice and large numbers of recitations as superior. To achieve one-pointedness of mind without distraction is already difficult enough; how much less should one divide into schools and establish factions? They mistakenly suppose that the fruition realized by each school differs, as though the bodhi realized through Esoteric Buddhism differs from that realized through the Chan school, and as though what other schools cultivate is absolutely not Pure Land. Thus they mislead themselves and others; who knows where they will end up?

Those who cultivate pure karma also have a piece of mere verbal Chan: "rebirth while carrying karma." If this is misunderstood, the harm is far from slight. Karma is divided into wholesome karma, unwholesome karma, pure karma, defiled karma, and indeterminate karma. Strictly speaking, wherever there is karma, there is no purity. How, then, can it be called pure karma? This pure karma is pure only in comparison with worldly karma; it is merely relative purity.

From the two views of purity and defilement, aversion and attachment constantly arise. Where there is a mind of aversion and attachment, ignorance is nurtured. If one seeks purity through the mark of defilement, how can one accomplish anything? Consider the words spoken by the World-Honored One to Bodhisattva Pure Wisdom in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: "Worldly people are attached to the five desires; this is called ordinary beings. If they encounter a good spiritual friend who teaches and causes them to awaken, they have already attained purity of the dharma realm."

Yet they do not realize that they then cling to an understanding of purity, thereby producing the hindrance of purity; thus they are not free within perfect enlightenment. Bodhisattvas who have not yet reached the bhūmis also have views as hindrances. Even after severing views, they still abide in awareness of views; therefore, awareness of views is a hindrance, and they are not at ease, and so forth. What is called attaining purity of the dharma realm is pure karma. Severing views and abiding in awareness of views are both pure karma.

It is called karma because it is not yet ultimate; therefore, it cannot be called accordance with awakened nature. Yet to cultivate to this point is already no easy matter. At this time, however, one's affinity with the Western Pure Land has ripened; the karmic retribution of this life is about to end, and although the subtle view of dharmas has not yet been completely removed, one may still carry it into rebirth. Once reborn, one need only begin with the five faculties and five powers and cultivate away the remaining karma of this subtle view of dharmas.

This is karmic activity of views, not evil karma. People mistakenly take this pure karma to be the sinful karma of defilement and evil. If so, could all those who break the law and violate the precepts attain rebirth? As for those who, at the time of death, attain rebirth through ten recitations, there are three kinds. First, their affinity with the Western Pure Land, whether from past lives or the present life, has already matured; they have attained one-pointedness of mind without distraction, and before they have even recited the sacred name ten times, they attain rebirth.

Second, some bodhisattvas, through the power of their vows, specially manifest evil conduct in order to liberate sentient beings through adverse means. At the time of death, they demonstrate the ease of rebirth in order to encourage worldly people to aspire single-mindedly toward it; hence they undertake such conduct. They speak in the strongest terms of how a single turning of thought can suddenly transcend the grave sins of birth and death accumulated over eighty billion kalpas. This is the skillful means and compassion of bodhisattvas.

Third, there are sentient beings of evil conduct who possess strong resolve and straightforward dispositions. Although they engage in evil conduct, they turn their thoughts extremely quickly. At the time of death, realizing that all is empty, they let everything go at once and attain rebirth. Yet they too must first possess the requisite causes and conditions. The sūtras clearly state that this cannot occur with scant wholesome roots, merit and virtue, and causal conditions.

If sentient beings of evil conduct are weak in aspiration and character, unable even in ordinary life to shoulder worldly affairs, how could they have strength at the time of death? Even if they form an aspiration for a moment, it is like shooting an arrow into empty space: once its force is spent, it falls back down. They can absolutely not attain rebirth. Therefore, effort must be made in ordinary times. Only if one has strength in ordinary times can one maintain control at the time of death. If one is drawn along by worldly emotions and sensual desire, relying solely on ten recitations or on others' assisted recitation can never succeed. Moreover, "ten recitations" means orally upholding the name ten times; it is one thought, a single-minded and focused recollection. This should be explained carefully to beginners, lest they misunderstand.

In sum, every school returns to purity. What is meant by purity is that all things are unobtainable. One must reach the point where subject and object both perish, and even the view of the Western Pure Land is not established; this is called purity. If the mind truly abides nowhere, then in this very state one has already entered Buddhahood. The Buddha-recitation of the Pure Land school, the investigation of huatou in the Chan school, and the mantra recitation and preliminary practices of Esoteric Buddhism are all illusory methods for entering purity. They are not yet called purity, but only pure karma.

If one speaks of purity, what marks does purity have? There is simply no place for you to open your mouth! I urge those in the world who cultivate the Pure Land school to take purity as their principle. Do not cling to distinctions between East and West, or between Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism, and thereby rank them as superior or inferior. Those who cultivate the Chan school likewise need not make sarcastic remarks or cite koans in order to decide victory and defeat. (The original text in Awakening Sentient Beings reads “sarcastic remarks” here—proofreader’s note.)

We all dwell in the ocean of birth and death; the other may not be better than this. One should first quickly resolve one’s own matter, honestly recite the Buddha’s name, and reach purity in one thought, purity in thought after thought. If it is so for one day, and so for seven days, one attains rebirth. If one does not attain rebirth while alive, how can one attain rebirth after death? A Dharma assembly is an assembly in this Dharma, just as exemplary people gather friends through literature. A thousand assemblies and ten thousand assemblies are all this one assembly. How could the ocean of Amitābha’s nature have two? To repay the Buddha’s kindness, we should diligently cultivate ourselves and join forces in maintaining this Dharma assembly, so as to extend the gift of Dharma. I respectfully wish the Amitābha Dharma Assembly immeasurable diligence!

(This article was published in the combined nineteenth and twentieth issues of volume 7 of the semimonthly journal Awakening Sentient Beings, June 1946.)

Preface to “A Buddhist Practitioner’s Insight”

Since the German Mr. Einstein (Einstein—editor’s note) formulated the theory of relativity in 1915, Western scientific thought has undergone a profound transformation. For in using science to investigate all that exists in the universe, it has entered upon a more expedient Dharma gate. The theory of relativity takes above and below, left and right, front and back, past and future as relative pairs; it accords deeply with the principles of our country’s Book of Changes.

All changes among the myriad things in the universe fall within this. Yet the four words spoken by our Great Hero—“formation, abiding, decay, and emptiness”—already fully encompass the marvel of their cyclical arising and ceasing. Thus, with scientific discoveries, other theistic religions lose their basis, whereas the Buddhadharma becomes ever more manifest.

Moreover, such statements in the Buddhist sūtras as that sounds pervade worlds, that contemplating the body is like seeing a cluster of insects, that water is everywhere full of sentient beings, and that space is inexhaustible, worlds are inexhaustible, and they mutually contain one another like the jeweled net of the

Tathāgata—all accord with science. Thus, the Buddha uses scientific methods to point out what is illusory and to relieve the suffering of sentient beings. Yet sentient beings, in turn, use scientific methods to cling deludedly to fantasies, thereby increasing their own afflictions.

Therefore, the Western application of science and the Eastern reliance on philosophy are indeed not free from error. Their benefits and harms, positive and negative, are alike; moreover, they cling to names and self-views and never achieve integration. This is a major reason why Eastern and Western cultures cannot communicate.

Mrs. Klanrou, embracing the vow to propagate the Dharma widely and benefit sentient beings, wishes to use the Buddhadharma to join Eastern and Western cultures hand in hand. She previously wrote Why I Believe in Buddhism, and now there is also her book A Gain from Studying Buddhism, which adduces Indian philosophy and the teachings of various schools to corroborate one another. Thus, the outlook of Western science will again undergo a transformation. Having finished reading it, I could not contain my joy and admiration, and so I have taken up my brush to write this preface.

Wang Xianglu of Haiyan, December 1927

(A Gain from Studying Buddhism was written by the British upāsikā Mrs. Klanrou and translated by Wuxu—editor's note.)

Collected Letters of Master Yuanyin

Dear Zhongding,

I have received your letter and the remittance.

Xinjiu is one who applies herself to practice, yet also one who does not know how to practice. All who practice seek to gain something; this is precisely not knowing how to practice. There is another group who think that this is all there is, who do not seek deeper attainment or apply further effort.

They drift vaguely and aimlessly, entering the current of waves without realizing it; they incline toward emptiness without realizing it. How can such people be said to practice? They fear deluded thoughts, seek to enter samādhi, and claim that the moment they open their mouths they see the mind. But ask them: what do they call a deluded thought, and what do they regard as samādhi? Those whose wisdom-eye has only just opened should make further effort to recognize these matters clearly. They must not be careless and think that this alone settles everything once and for all.

To settle everything once and for all is indeed how it originally is. But one's strength is still insufficient; what one sees for the moment remains at the threshold of light and shadow, and one cannot yet truly be as one originally is. People therefore divide principle and phenomena into two. The scriptures also say: principle belongs to sudden awakening, while phenomena require gradual removal. Thus, merely seeing it does not yet count. When deluded thoughts first arise, one fears them and insists on killing them off—hence the saying, "To protect life, one must use killing."

In the middle stage, one comes to know that deluded thoughts are deluded. Since they are called "deluded," they are not real; why then fear them? One need only guard against them. Later still, one knows that delusion is like smoke and flame. If no fire is kindled at the root, on what could delusion depend in order to stand?

Thus, true and deluded are nondual, both being conditioned shadows. There are no sages or ordinary beings, no movement or stillness, no defilement or purity, and so forth. Since there is neither arising nor ceasing, one need only remain constantly alert. Once there is seeing, do not cling to that seeing any further—this is what is meant by "once seen, do not see again." Since it is originally so, once all has been settled, one no longer speaks of settling it.

As for what is called "awakening," tell me: what is it that awakens? One awakens to mind and Dharma; as it is said, "What further effort is needed?" One should seek and attain this for oneself, without needing to adopt many more methods or contend with the ancients over superiority and inferiority. The various circumstances in the koans recorded in The Record of Pointing at the Moon are all different; I use them only for verification. It is not that they may not be read, but do not seek excessively to delve into them, thereby making a pure delusion: leaving one sea only to enter another.

As your letter says, if you can truly remain undeluded from thought to thought, wisdom will naturally arise continually. Then you will not be deluded by anything in any circumstance, nor will you be deluded when reading sūtras and treatises. To seek principles or spiritual powers is already to be deluded. Clearly seeing the worlds of the ten directions in samādhi, and so forth, is the functioning of spiritual powers; such samādhi is not delusion. Later, when your strength is fully developed, there will be no barriers whatsoever, and nothing in the dharma realm with which you do not interpenetrate.

That there is neither a seer nor a seen means not clinging to subject and object; it does not mean being apart from subject and object. The ancients said, "When seeing forms and hearing sounds, there is no need to become deaf." This is precisely the meaning. Your discussion inclines too much toward emptiness and nonexistence. Your strength is not yet sufficient, like a small tree which, though it has taken shape,

cannot yet be used as timber for a beam. Nevertheless, it will eventually have such potential. Impatience, too, is a habitual tendency; excessive doubt is precisely an affliction.

The esoteric practices recorded in Awakened Sentient Beings were cultivated by Tibetans, who still did not understand Chinese writing and therefore could not elucidate the meaning of attaining Buddhahood. Yet people, fond of novelty, seek them out; they likewise fundamentally do not understand what attaining Buddhahood is. In the end, they do not understand the meaning of seeing one's true nature and attaining Buddhahood, and always suppose that possessing spiritual powers makes one a Buddha. This principle must not be treated carelessly. We shall leave further discussion for another day. The two meanings of essence and function must be clearly distinguished. People value function but not essence, branches and leaves but not the root. What can be done?

Furthermore, the teaching of breaking through the three barriers is no easy matter. Until the eighth or ninth bhūmi, one cannot break through the major barrier. Even after breaking through the major barrier, the ancients would still not permit one to call it Chan. What Chan originally is—once it reaches your mouth, it becomes mere verbal Chan. Ha ha.

By the end of the month I may be able to reach Shanghai. I am trying to obtain a travel permit; at most it will take one month, and cannot take any longer.

I reply hastily, and offer my wishes for:

your daily well-being.

Written by Xiangliu

The twentieth day

Letter in Reply to Lay Practitioner Chao Hairong

On Using the Buddha's Wisdom to Meet Adverse Circumstances

(Letter Sent)

To Master Xiang:

When I bade you farewell in Shanghai, I personally received your esteemed instructions. Since your westward departure, I have missed you for years. Recently I heard that you are residing in Jiangnan, widely bestowing the rain of Dharma: elucidating the teaching of perfect enlightenment in the Buddhist scriptures and

transmitting the unsurpassed esoteric teaching at the Dharma altar. I gaze toward your lotus seat with boundless reverence and admiration.

This disciple is deficient in virtue and ability, unable to alleviate the hardships of the times. I lack the means to benefit sentient beings and rescue them. Though I strive to be diligent and careful, I can scarcely avert the overwhelming calamity; though I seek to be impartial and sincere, I cannot dissolve the selfishness of attachment to self.

Reflecting sorrowfully on society's stage and life's farce: the ways of the world delight in contention, and latter-day customs prize struggle. Cause and effect follow one another, and calamities recur in turn. People bustle about for power and influence, or mediocrity and fame and profit; amid confusion and turmoil, they bind themselves. The sun and moon pass overhead, while the body and appearance decay below; yet suddenly the great matter of liberation is delayed and missed. This is the profound anguish of every person of aspiration. Now that postal delivery has resumed, I respectfully offer this poor letter and humbly inquire after your well-being. I earnestly pray that you will grant me instruction from time to time, to awaken me from my ignorance and stubbornness.

With utmost respect, I wish you health and well-being in your Dharma body, harmony among the four elements, immeasurable radiance and longevity, and accomplishment in all your endeavors.

Your disciple, Hairong, bows in reverence

(Reply)

Benevolent younger brother Hairong:

1. I have received the letter forwarded from Wuzhong, which greatly relieves my anxious concern. Knowing that, owing to your circumstances, you often lack interest in things, I have been unable to put you out of my mind. You should know that all circumstances are nothing but means for perfecting us. Everywhere are causes and conditions that aid the Way; whether enemies or friends, all are our good spiritual friends. To receive such instruction is rare and precious; you should think of repaying this kindness. This is the source from which great compassion arises.

2. In living in this world, all that matters is to keep the mind-field settled. To live in the world, one must engage with it, yet one must not oppose it. Whatever one cannot bear to see is opposition; greedily clinging to joy is also opposition; numb indifference is also opposition. One should clearly know these things without being swayed by them. One must realize the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena; in

emptiness, the mind naturally settles. If the power of emptiness is insufficient, all kinds of discriminations and afflictions arise.

You should know that the Sahā world is called the five turbidities, and also an evil age. If one enters a latrine yet seeks fragrance, whose fault is that? Bodhisattvas know this clearly, yet do not begrudge their toil in seeking to liberate beings. Do whatever can be done, even if only a little; do not calculate success or failure, gain or loss. On the one hand, do your utmost; on the other, train the mind. Even when matters still more unbearable press before your eyes, having long understood that this is simply how things are, why should you be hurt by them?

3. As for speaking of saving the world today, there is no need to exert too much effort at the level of results; it is laborious and brings no appreciation. One need only strive more at the level of causes, becoming one who first knows and first awakens. At present, this is not yet the time for people like us to act freely and accomplish things. Everything awaits its causes, conditions, and proper time; for now, it is best to enrich yourself more fully.

4. With your talent and fine qualities, you will surely be of great use in the future. This is precisely the time to cultivate strength of spirit. Such circumstances are a blessing, not suffering; everything depends on them to perfect you. In your recent practice, you should apply yourself to the two words “without obstruction.” In every situation, try to see whether there is truly any obstruction. Obstruction and nonobstruction are both fabrications of our deluded minds. Thinking there is obstruction, we give rise to inverted views; this is self-binding, not meditative stability. You should open your heart and see that everything is originally thus. Though the sun and moon pass away, I do not pass away. Is my work limited to this one lifetime?

5. When the wise live in the world, they see every place as a place of practice and clearly understand that everything in the world is illusory and impermanent. At first one thinks there is hope, but on hearing the news, one cannot help feeling disappointed. You should know that this is simply how things are; it is precisely because of our hopes that such disappointment arises. You have fully tasted hardship and gained no small amount of instruction. Do not fail this environment. With a single turn, it is bodhi; is this not a joyful thing? Living away from home, you should take good care of your health. Let the body labor, but do not let the mind labor; let the mind labor, but do not let the spirit labor. This body and mind have much great work yet to do. I urge and hope this most earnestly.

I write this reply in haste. With immediate wishes for

your continued well-being.

Xianglu, with palms joined

Letter to Acharya Zhang Renhai After Reading the Postscript to Layman Zhao Shijin’s Letter to Hai Chao Yin

In respectful reply: Having read the letters from both parties, I find that what this gentleman says seems excessively dogmatic. His attacks on Wang are called defense of the true Dharma, yet he does not understand that contention itself is not the true Dharma and is unworthy of a son of the Buddha; it cannot be tolerated. In this Dharma-ending age, strife and contention are firmly entrenched—this is precisely what we see today. In short, people and the Dharma cannot be discussed as one. The Dharma was transmitted by the Buddha; karma is created by people.

To slander the Dharma because of a person is to enter hell together; such folly is truly beyond measure. I do not know what kind of person Wang is, but the Dharma he transmits is indeed the orthodox tradition of Mount Kōya. If someone considers it improper, then there are countless practitioners of East Asian Esoteric Buddhism; yet I have not seen anyone call it a demonic dharma and slander it in doubt.

If, because Wang is a lay practitioner, it is held that he should not transmit the Dharma, then that person should not make this argument to you, since you too are a lay practitioner who has received the rank of acharya. From beginning to end, he does not understand what the word “saṅgha” means. What Lay Practitioner Zhao says is indeed entirely correct: the words “demon” and “Buddha” are very difficult to distinguish.

Attachment is demonic; non-attachment is Buddhahood. Views are demonic; no views are Buddhahood. Attachment to views of Buddha is demonic, and discriminating between these two views is also demonic. If Mañjuśrī clings to a view of Buddha, he is cast down to the Iron Enclosure Mountain. This is a great guiding principle of the Buddhadharma; no personal favor may be allowed in it.

In all things, the mind-ground is primary. Without understanding the mind-ground, all inverted afflictions arise from attachment to self; this is what is most difficult to overcome in the turbidity of views. A common failing of people today is that they delight in defying the world in order to proclaim their own superiority. They do not know that when others have faults, the Buddhadharma regards them as one's own faults. To oppose them is to assist their wrongdoing by fueling their flames of anger; the responsibility then lies with oneself.

Therefore, one must deal with this skillfully, with great compassion. If one has sufficient power to transform them and contention will be beneficial, then the ancients sometimes did not hesitate to risk their lives for it. If one lacks the power to transform them, however, contention is useless; it is better to endure and wait for an opportunity, or to cite sūtras and treatises in order to correct and persuade them.

If one attacks an individual's private moral conduct, one enters hell first oneself, only then pitying others for entering hell. This is absolutely not reasonable; what true Dharma is there, then, worth defending? There is no concealing the decline of bhikshus. Over the past several decades, fortunately, lay practitioners have come forward to propagate the Dharma. The suspicions and jealousies of bhikshus have grown ever more numerous, and they then seize upon certain aspects of the precepts to accuse others of destroying the Three Jewels and disparaging the Saṅgha Jewel.

They do not understand what the word “saṅgha” means, nor do they understand why “monk” cannot be used exclusively for saṅgha. They also cannot distinguish between the substance of the precepts and their formal aspects, and so they think that the Buddhadharma will thereby perish. How could they know that the Buddhadharma does not truly perish, but only declines—and that the cause of its decline lies precisely with such people? Their sectarian views are deeply entrenched, and their views of self and others are excessively rigid. Clinging to a single word or sentence, they discard the entire sūtra and its full meaning.

Those who delight in lesser teachings are ultimately unfit to read the sūtras. At the Lotus Dharma Assembly, five thousand withdrew from their seats—these are precisely such people! In short, they are governed by preconceived ideas and do not proceed from prajñā. Whenever they encounter the Dharma, they become bound by it; seeing the Dharma, they give rise to doubt. There is no way to persuade or explain it to them.

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