Master Yuanyin, the Third Patriarch of Heart Esotericism

Contents

Preface

Author’s Preface

A Brief Biography of Master Yuanyin (Autobiographical)

Preface

The Buddhist teachings—the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the scriptures—are vast as an ocean, broad and profound. Yet their ultimate aim is no more than to quell delusion, reveal the true, and restore one’s original mind-nature. As the Lotus Sūtra says: “The Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, appear in the world solely because of the one great cause and condition.” This one great cause and condition is to open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha’s knowledge and vision—that is, the wisdom and awakened nature inherently possessed by every person.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: “If one does not understand one's own mind, how can one know the true path?” The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “Clearly know for oneself, attain the fundamental wondrous mind, eternally abiding and never perishing.” The Mahāvairocana Sūtra likewise says: “What is bodhi? It is to know one’s own mind as it truly is.” Thus we know that the thousands of sūtras and myriad treatises all directly point to the intrinsic nature of sentient beings.

Therefore, realizing one’s own original mind and seeing one’s own intrinsic nature are truly the essence of the Buddhadharma and the key to realizing the Way. As the Fifth Patriarch, Master Hongren, said: “If you do not recognize your original mind, studying the Dharma is of no benefit.” The Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, was likewise endowed with exceptional wisdom and vigorously proclaimed sudden awakening to one’s intrinsic nature and seeing one’s nature to become a Buddha: “I transmit only the Dharma of seeing one’s nature, which transcends the world and destroys erroneous doctrines.”

This enabled later practitioners to abandon the branches and seek the root, directly accord with the source of mind, and spread the Dharma gate of sudden teaching throughout the land. Its influence developed into the five houses and seven schools

of the Chan school, nurturing great Dharma exemplars and producing outstanding persons generation after generation.

Yet in recent times, Buddhist practitioners have often regarded realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as a daunting path. They do not take awakening to and realizing the fundamental essence as their foremost task; instead, they cling to circumstances and attach to appearances, seeking Dharma outside the mind. Thus they give rise to delusion and create karma, revolving without cease. Though they may study Buddhism for many years, their suffering remains unchanged. Some even fail to understand that all Buddhist teachings are skillful means for liberating sentient beings, and that there is no fixed Dharma to be taught. They often stubbornly cling to views of Dharma, mistake the finger for the moon, and dispute what is superior or inferior, right or wrong. This is deeply regrettable!

Master Yuanyin (the lay elder Li Zhongding), now ninety-one years old, has deeply entered the ocean of Chan and thoroughly awakened to the essential point of mind. For several decades he has lived in seclusion by the shores of Shanghai, leaving behind family ties and cutting off attachment, renouncing fame and profit. Integrating Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism, he teaches according to each person's capacity, labors silently, and remains unmoved by praise or blame.

Recognizing that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, thoroughly awakening to one's original nature, are truly the guiding principle of the Buddhadharma, the Elder has issued an urgent call and vigorously promoted this teaching. Adapting it to the times, he has energetically propagated the Dharma of direct pointing: directly pointing to the human mind, seeing one's nature, and becoming a Buddha.

He also recognizes that Chan practitioners, lacking the forceful guidance and probing examination of an accomplished teacher, often investigate for many years without receiving any news. Therefore, he frequently uses the formless esoteric Heart-of-Heart Dharma, which is close to Chan and simple and direct in practice, as a skillful means to guide practitioners. Relying on the empowering force of the Three Mysteries, they swiftly attain samādhi and wisdom and suddenly open the true eye. Faithful students come in an unbroken stream.

The Elder is the third-generation lineage holder of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma gate. In his early years, he wrote an essay, "A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature," and also expounded Master Wang Xianglu's Inscription on Awakening to the Mind. These two writings explain in great detail the content, essentials, and meaning of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature; the methods of practice before and after awakening; and such matters as realizing the

essence and giving rise to its function. Their subtle meanings are profoundly penetrating.

In addition, in recent years he has lectured to students in Wenzhou on the koans in Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin's Blue Cliff Record of the Song dynasty, elucidating the subtle meaning of the Flower Sermon, inspiring prajñā, analyzing ultimate principles, and pointing to things to transmit mind; every word reveals the truth. He has also discussed rebirth through eliminating karma and rebirth while carrying karma in the Pure Land Dharma gate, as well as key questions concerning rebirth in the Western Pure Land. He explains the profound meaning that Chan and Pure Land are nondual, that when the mind is pure the Pure Land is pure, and the importance of earnest Buddha-recitation and one-pointedness of mind without distraction.

In summary, the Elder's essential outline of practice and realization takes prajñā as its principle, dhāraṇī as its method, and the Pure Land as its ultimate destination. The writings mentioned above have appeared in Chan studies series compiled by the editorial department of Chan in Hebei, the monthly magazine Dharma Voice in Beijing, and Selected Writings of Guanghua, published by the Buddhist Scripture Distribution Office of Guanghua Temple in Fujian. They may be said to bestow the flavor of ambrosia, open the gate of skillful means, directly point to the source of mind, and return together to the Pure Land. This book is truly a precious raft for awakening to the mind and an excellent guide to practice and realization. I respectfully append these words, adding to the joy of the Dharma.

Xu Hengzhi

Beginning of Spring, February 4, 1996

Author's Preface

In the spring of 1980, while giving lectures on the Śūraṅgama Sūtra in Shanghai at the request of fellow practitioners, everyone urged me to write a concise account of the central question of the Buddhadharma—the practice and realization of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature—for study and discussion, lest they forget what they had heard. At the same time, seeing that many Buddhist disciples greatly misunderstand realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, I felt deeply concerned.

Nowadays, practitioners generally regard realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as a lofty matter belonging to Buddhas and bodhisattvas, attainable only by bodhisattvas who have returned to this world, and beyond the reach of ordinary beings. Thus, they do not even dare to ask about it or discuss it. Their practice merely circles around the periphery and cannot penetrate to the center.

Although they may practice arduously for many years, because they do not understand the essential point of mind or recognize the original truth, their habitual tendencies and deluded attachments remain as before, and they cannot attain liberation. Wrongly and vainly, they wander along the shore of birth and death, betraying their own inherent spirit. As a result, the Chan spirit has failed to flourish, the Chan school has declined, and this has indirectly hastened the decline of the entire sacred teaching, until today it is at its last gasp. How can this not be heartbreaking?

We sentient beings inherently possess an intelligent and awakening nature, the wondrously luminous true mind, no different from that of the Buddha. When Śākyamuni Buddha awakened to the Way upon seeing the morning star on the eighth night of the twelfth lunar month, he clearly told us: “There is not a single sentient being who does not possess the wisdom of the Tathāgata; yet because of deluded thoughts, inverted views, and attachment, they do not realize it.” (Avataṃsaka Sūtra, Chapter 37, “The Manifestation of the Tathāgata.”)

Thus, ordinary beings and Buddhas are not fundamentally different. It is only because we become deluded by sounds and forms, forget our Original Face, create karma and undergo karmic retribution, that we sink into the bitter ocean of birth and death. If we can awaken and recognize that all sounds, forms, wealth, and gain are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—neither to be sought nor obtained—then, by thoroughly relinquishing them and abiding nowhere, we may immediately return to simplicity and truth, return home, and sit securely. There is no difficulty in this. As the saying goes: “Lay down the butcher's knife and become a Buddha on the spot.” So long as we are willing to let go, becoming a Buddha is also our rightful task, for we inherently possess these provisions.

Because practitioners do not understand the truth, they set up obstacles for themselves. Mistakenly believing that realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature is extremely difficult and beyond their reach, they do not dare to seek it. This is all the work of an inferiority complex: they believe that, as ordinary beings, they are vastly different from Buddhas; that seeing one’s true nature cannot be realized and must not be sought presumptuously. Thus they distance themselves from the Buddha Way and drift toward the common stream. Is this not regrettable?

On the other hand, some reckless people read a couple of Chan records and several sūtras and treatises, acquire some intellectual understanding of words and principles, make a few clever turning phrases, or write a few gāthās, and then consider themselves awakened. Yet because they have undertaken no actual training, their thieving mind has not died, and their deluded habits remain as before. When they encounter circumstances, they become attached; arrogant and conceited, they make others afraid even to approach them. This, in turn, further

deepens people's misunderstanding of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, leading them to believe that it is not something ordinary people can truly accomplish.

Moreover, in recent times there have been few capable people in the Chan school. Chan practitioners merely cling to the rigid huatou, "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" and investigate it. They have neither enlightened teachers to guide them appropriately nor clear-eyed Dharma companions to give timely instruction. Moreover, when investigating it, they cannot arouse a sense of doubt; they merely keep repeating, "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" As a result, even after decades they gain no news. This further increases the mistaken belief that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is difficult beyond difficulty.

There is also a group attached to spiritual powers. Their practice may indeed be earnest, but when their effort becomes effective and reaches precisely the right point, suddenly their sense faculties and their objects fall away, and the divisions of past and future are cut off. Because they do not see spiritual powers appear, and no one instructs them, they do not recognize what this is and miss the excellent opportunity to realize the mind and see their true nature. It would be bad enough if they alone failed to recognize it and let the opportunity pass, but they even use this to deny others, claiming instead that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is exceedingly difficult. Is this not both laughable and tragic?

Moved by these circumstances, I have written this brief and humble essay in order to help everyone understand clearly the essential purport of the Buddhadharma and the key to practice. May they no longer belittle themselves: so long as they practice sincerely and in accordance with the Dharma, they will surely be able to realize the mind and see their true nature within one lifetime. At the same time, I wish to urge eminent elders of the Chan school to transform its style. They should no longer have students investigate a single rigid huatou, but should instead give flexible and timely pointers suited to circumstances, so that students may gain realization beneath a phrase and awaken at the point of a word. In this way, more capable people may be cultivated, the Chan spirit may be revived, and the sacred teaching may be continued and enlarged.

Moreover, I am moved by the fact that many fellow practitioners of Chan meditation and Buddha-recitation, when they find no entry point in Chan practice or gain no strength from Buddha-recitation, do not know to turn toward Esoteric Buddhism and draw upon the compassionate protective power of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to clear away delusive obstacles, break through difficulties, and thereby advance and achieve the intended result.

Even when discerning people understand this, they are deterred by the complexity of the visualizations and ritual procedures of form-based esoteric practice, and by the lengthy preliminaries and offerings, and therefore do not consider practicing it.

They do not realize that the Dharma gates of Esoteric Buddhism are profound and vast. Within the highest of the Nine Vehicles of Esoteric Buddhism is the formless esoteric Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Its practice is simple and direct, its results are swift, and it is most closely related to Chan. It does not involve the many arrangements of form-based esoteric practice described above. After receiving empowerment, one may begin practicing it directly.

If one has suitable faculties, receives the Buddha's powerful blessings, and can practice single-mindedly in accordance with the Dharma, one may swiftly attain samādhi, awaken wisdom, and clearly realize the essential point of mind. The wonder of this Dharma depends entirely on mantras and mudrās.

A mantra is a symbol transformed by the Buddha's own mind while in samādhi, much like the code used in sending telegrams in the world. A mudrā is like the antenna of a television set: through it, the minds of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and practitioners may be connected, mind sealing mind, to form an unbroken whole. Therefore, its power of blessing is strong, and accomplishment is readily attained. Such great benefit is little known among practitioners, and I truly cannot remain silent. Therefore, without presuming upon my shallow knowledge, I have briefly set forth my humble views in this poor essay, hoping to cast a brick in order to attract jade. I sincerely hope that worthy and accomplished people throughout the country will not begrudge their instruction, but will each offer their valuable views to remedy my deficiencies. That would indeed be most fortunate.

The lectures on The Blue Cliff Record were delivered in Wenzhou in 1987 at the request of fellow practitioners there. What is included here are two koans, transcribed from audio recordings and arranged by the lay practitioner Song Zhiming, then published in the magazine Chan. The remaining material has not yet been organized because of lack of time. Once there is leisure, it will be published successively.

The two essays "Rebirth Through Eliminating Karma and Rebirth While Carrying Karma" and "A Discussion of the Key Questions Concerning Rebirth in the Western Pure Land" were written because at present a small number of Pure Land practitioners are often unwilling to recite the Buddha's name honestly, and even shift the responsibility for rebirth onto Amitābha Buddha.

They all say in one voice: "We have Amitābha Buddha to rely upon. When our lives come to an end, the Buddha will naturally come to guide us; with even ten recitations, we may attain rebirth while carrying karma." Thus, they lazily recite a few

invocations of the Buddha's name while chatting and laughing idly, believing that in this way they can receive the Buddha's blessings, be guided by him, and attain rebirth.

But when the time of death arrives, because their Buddha-recitation lacks strength and their responsive power is weak, they do not see the Buddha come to guide them. They then mistakenly conclude that the Buddha's vows are empty and are carried away by the stream of their karma. Moreover, because of this misunderstanding, they add another burden of karmic retribution for slandering the Buddha. This is terribly frightening and tragic. Therefore, though risking great censure, I wrote these two essays. They were published in such magazines as Dharma Voice, in the hope that they might have the effect of awakening those who are deafened and startling those who are benumbed. I certainly did not write them to court popularity. I hope that noble and worthy people throughout the country will understand and forgive me, and offer corrections where needed.

A Brief Biography of Master Yuanyin (Autobiographical)

I, Li Zhongding, Dharma name Yuanyin, was born in Hefei, Anhui, in 1905. I am now ninety-one years old. As a child, I studied the teachings bequeathed by Confucius and Mencius under a local tutor. I often wondered: Where do people come from at birth, and where do they go after death? After pondering it endlessly without finding an answer, I became so deeply confused and distressed that I seemed to lose all sense of myself. Frightened, I no longer dared to think about this question.

When I was somewhat older, I transferred to a municipal higher primary school. I read the Diamond Sūtra with my father; it seemed strangely familiar, yet I could not understand why. So I asked him. He said, "These are the words of a sage, beyond the understanding of a child like you. But study diligently, and later, when you investigate this precious text more deeply, you will naturally gain inexhaustible true benefit from it."

In 1917, my father took up a post as assistant manager at the China Merchants Bureau in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, and I went with him to attend Zhenjiang Middle School. Zhenjiang was a sacred Buddhist site, with many monasteries and eminent monks. Jinshan Jiangtian Monastery and Gaomin Monastery in Yangzhou were especially renowned as ancestral centers of Chan learning. In our spare time, my classmates and I often went together to visit Buddhist monasteries. In those days, high-spirited and full of youthful vigor, we ran and jumped about, laughing and playing boisterously, proud and unrestrained. Then, suddenly, we would hear the sound of

a temple bell struck once. At once our agitated minds would grow still, quiet as unmoving water, cool and joyful, though we did not know why.

At that time, there was an awakened eminent monk at Jinshan whom everyone revered as a living Buddha. Alas, I was young and ignorant and did not know to request instruction. Seeing people crowd around him and compete to ask questions, I forced my way through the throng and knelt before him. Without asking me anything, the monk picked up the large mallet used to strike the wooden fish in the Mahāvīra Hall, tapped me on the head, and said, “Study and practice diligently; your future blessings will be inexhaustible!” Everyone was astonished, and I too withdrew in embarrassment.

In 1923, my father was transferred to work at the China Merchants Bureau in Shanghai. I moved with him to Shanghai and was admitted to the University of Shanghai. In 1925, worn out by his work, my father unfortunately contracted a severe case of typhoid fever. Treatment proved ineffective, and he passed away. Amid my grief, besides applying myself diligently to my studies, I also had to find work in order to support my aged mother.

Yet I was by nature introverted, poor at socializing, and even less willing to ask relatives or friends for help. Just then, the post office advertised an examination to recruit postal clerks. I registered, took the examination, and was fortunate enough to be accepted. Thus, I worked while continuing my studies. Although life was rather demanding, I did not find it burdensome. At that time, postal work required only six hours a day. University education was based on credits, unlike today, when students must live and study on campus all day. One could select suitable courses and graduate once the required credits had been completed.

In the course of working and studying, I passed through a stage of life and tasted something of its flavor. I came to feel deeply that the worldly turmoil and conflict of human beings all arise from the tensions surrounding money and love. Yet human life is like morning dew, vanishing in an instant, and lifespan is impermanent.

Even if one exhausts all one’s strength and thought and labors through an entire lifetime, one gains nothing at all in the end, but only departs with a heart full of emptiness, suffering, grief, loss, and regret. How unjust and painful it is—how utterly unworthy of pursuit.

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 gained a rough understanding of some of the wondrous principles taught by the Buddha and the incisive, profound teachings elaborated by the great patriarchs. I felt deeply that people, in seeking to satisfy their own selfish material desires, greedily pursue and grasp without end,

create karma and undergo its retribution, and suffer unjustly in the cycle of rebirth through the six realms. This is truly foolish

and tragic! One should turn back as early as possible, relinquish all vain and illusory pursuits, concentrate one's strength of mind, choose a dharma gate suited to one's own disposition, and practice it diligently in order to restore one's luminous original Buddha-nature and escape the bitter ocean of birth and death. To awaken people from their deluded dreams and enable them all to leave the wheel of suffering together—this alone is the true meaning and value of human life.

Having resolved to study Buddhism, I vowed not to marry. Although I intended to leave home and become a monastic, I could not evade my responsibility to support my aged mother and could not leave her side. When the calamity of the Cultural Revolution descended, I transmitted the Dharma and taught disciples on my teacher's behalf. I was therefore branded as a ringleader of the "Four Olds" and superstitious practices, and as a bad element who poisoned the youth. I was held in isolation for investigation for two and a half years. Only after the investigation found no unlawful conduct was I released.

During the Cultural Revolution, repeated house searches and confiscations frightened my aged mother so severely that she fell ill and died. At that time, the fourfold assembly was suffering persecution. Though I wished to shave my head and become a monastic, there was no way to do so. Thus I have remained alone ever since.

When I first began studying Buddhism, a colleague introduced me to the venerable Tiantai master, Elder Dharma Master Xingci. I studied Tiantai doctrine under him and practiced Pure Land Buddhism. Every day, besides studying the essential teachings of the Tiantai school, I upheld the sacred name of Amitābha Buddha and did not dare slacken even slightly. Outside class, I also studied Consciousness-Only under Elder Lay Practitioner Fan Gunong. In winter, I joined the community in seven-day Pure Land retreats.

Later, through the introduction of a Dharma friend, I studied the Avataṃsaka teachings and practiced Chan contemplation under Elder Monk Yingci, the Avataṃsaka lecturer. At that time, the only ones able to continue the legacy of the Avataṃsaka teachings were the Chan elder Yekai of Tianning Monastery in Changzhou and his eminent disciples, the two Dharma masters Yuexia and Yingci. After Dharma Master Yuexia entered parinirvāṇa in Hangzhou, only Elder Ying remained. He alone upheld the great Avataṃsaka tradition, making him all the more worthy of reverence.

The elder's teaching was exacting and rigorous, and his compassion especially profound. Because my work often prevented me from attending the communal

lectures on time, he specifically gave me private lectures on Sundays on the Three Contemplations of the Avataṃsaka and the profound realm of the dharma realm. He encouraged me, saying, “Within this country, there is only this one tradition that promotes both a school and doctrinal teaching. Those who propagate Chan elsewhere do not study doctrine, while those who study doctrine do not investigate Chan. This is not without its imbalance. You should study well here, enter deeply into Chan contemplation, and do not disappoint my hopes.”

As I studied doctrine and investigated Chan under Elder Ying, I seemed to gain some entry. One day, after a lecture, my bodily sense suddenly vanished. Brilliant light appeared distinctly; my whole body was pervaded by coolness, and I felt incomparably light and at ease. I reported this to my teacher, who said, “Although this is not without some indication, it is still only a passing traveler, not the host. Do not attend to it. Strive forward with all your strength until the great earth sinks level and empty space shatters to powder; only then will there be a slight correspondence.” Thereupon I applied myself still more diligently to seated meditation. During the twelfth lunar month, I joined the community in a seven-day Chan retreat. But because of work, I could not see it through from beginning to end. Even when the three seven-day periods had concluded, I had gained no further indication.

Later, through the introduction of a close Dharma friend, I went to Shengshou Monastery to hear the great Esoteric Buddhist acharya, Master Wang Xianglu, lecture on The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch. I gained many insights that resonated with me. After the gathering, I followed the Master to his residence, Mind-Seal Vihara, to seek instruction. The Master asked me which school I practiced. I answered truthfully, “I investigate Chan.”

The Master asked, “Have you opened up the original nature and directly seen your true nature?” Ashamed, I hesitantly replied, “I have not yet seen it.” The Master said, “Why not study Esoteric Buddhism with me?” I replied, “Esoteric Buddhist rituals are elaborate and complex, whereas I prefer simplicity and plainness by nature. It does not suit me very well.”

The Master said, “My Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the very essence of Esoteric Buddhism. It is a supreme formless esoteric practice. Practicing it yields twice the result with half the effort and enables one to directly see one’s true nature. It is unlike other form-based esoteric practices. Though its name is Esoteric Buddhism, in actuality it is Chan. It has neither the cumbersome rituals of additional and preliminary practices nor the trouble of dissolving visualized forms into emptiness after successfully visualizing them.”

“Moreover, it is also connected with the Pure Land school. Through it, one may attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land and in the pure lands of other Buddhas in all directions. It is truly a great Dharma that integrates Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism into one.”

“In the fundamental text of this tradition, The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Corresponding to the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, Śākyamuni Buddha said that this Dharma is the most suitable practice for sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age to transcend birth and death. Relying on the compassionate empowerment of the Buddha’s secret mantra and mudrās, one can rapidly eliminate obscurations, open wisdom, and perfectly realize bodhi. Through the power of the fourth mudrā, one may also attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, or, according to one’s vows, be reborn in the Buddha-lands of all directions. Thus, this Dharma takes Chan as its essence, Esoteric Buddhism as its function, and the Pure Land as its ultimate destination. It integrates the three traditions into one and is a great Dharma suited to sentient beings of the Dharma-ending age who seek to practice and realize the Way.”

The Master continued, “Investigating Chan depends entirely on one’s own strength. A student must arouse a sense of doubt and investigate the huatou with all one’s strength before there can be entry. If the sense of doubt is difficult to arouse, one gains no strength from the practice. Moreover, people today are busy with work and have little free time. They cannot, like people of old, devote twenty or thirty years wholeheartedly to investigating the huatou. Therefore, few people who investigate Chan realize the Way, and the Chan school consequently declines. But if one studies the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and practices with the empowerment of Buddha’s strength, it is altogether different.”

Because the Master’s words were earnest and reasonable, I received the Dharma and took refuge. After receiving empowerment, I returned home to practice. During my first session of the first mudrā, my entire body rose into the air, soaring straight up into the sky like a helicopter. Frightened, I emerged from samādhi. Only then did I realize that this Dharma was indeed different from other practices. Thereafter, I devoted myself to practicing it in sequence and no longer changed my mind upon seeing other teachings, or turned to practice another Dharma.

This Dharma has six mudrās and one mantra. Its practice is concise and easy to learn. It requires neither additional nor preliminary practices, nor visualization or contemplation of forms. Like the Chan school, it begins practice from the eighth consciousness, and because it carries the empowerment of Buddha’s strength, it is easy to directly see one’s true nature.

According to the Master, secret mantras are secret words formed when Buddhas and bodhisattvas transform their own minds in samādhi, like the cipher codes used when we send telegrams. Mudrās are like seals affixed to important documents, and also like the antenna of a television set. They enable the minds of students and of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to form an unbroken whole. Therefore, their empowering force is great, and realization of the Way is swift.

Reciting the Buddha's name in the Pure Land school likewise relies on Buddha's strength for practice. Yet the Buddha's name comes from without, and its power is not as great as that of upholding the Buddha-mind mantra. Therefore, Master Hanshan once said that if Buddha-recitation is ineffective, one may instead uphold a mantra. This is the principle involved.

The reason heart esotericism has six mudrās is that each mudrā has a different function. The first is the Bodhicitta Mudrā. It teaches practitioners to establish great aspirations and make Great Vows: above, seek the Buddha Way; below, liberate sentient beings. It thereby strengthens the practitioner's original resolve to cultivate the Way. It is like building a hundred-story tower: one must first lay firm foundations. If the foundation is not solid, the building will collapse.

If those who study the Way do not establish great aspirations or make great vows, they will inevitably retreat when difficulties arise and stop when they encounter setbacks. They can never persevere through every adversity and strive to the end in order to realize the fruits of sagehood. Therefore, this mudrā is most important. In Esoteric Buddhism there are more than ten thousand mudrās, and this mudrā is the king of all mudrās.

The second mudrā is the Mudrā for Accomplishing Bodhicitta. It can eliminate past karmic obstacles and treat all illnesses; it is the prelude to opening wisdom. After I practiced this mudrā, I had diarrhea three times, and both body and mind felt notably light, agile, clear, and refreshed. This was because, through the empowering force of this mudrā, the filth, defilement, and impurities of past lives were all expelled through my bowels.

The third mudrā is the Bodhi Mudrā of Direct Transmission. It is the essential mudrā through which all Buddhas and bodhisattvas emit light to bless practitioners, propel them forward, and swiftly bring them into samādhi. It is also a marvelous means for healing the illnesses of others. During my period of practice, when I was occasionally troubled by affairs and my mind became disturbed, receiving the blessing of this mudrā would immediately transform the situation and enable me to enter dhyāna deeply. Through the compassionate blessings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, I also healed distant friends on several occasions; after practicing this method, they recovered.

The fourth mudrā is the Tathāgata-Mother Mudrā. It is the great mudrā for opening wisdom, realizing the Way, and attaining rebirth in the Pure Land. Therefore, after completing two rounds of practice of the first through sixth mudrās, when one specializes in the second and fourth mudrās, the second mudrā is practiced for only one day, whereas the fourth must be practiced for six days. This shows the importance of this mudrā. Many fellow practitioners, while practicing this mudrā, have opened to their original nature and seen their true nature.

The fifth mudrā is the Tathāgata Well-Gathered Dhāraṇī Mudrā. This mudrā unites within itself the merit and virtue, power, and wondrous functions of the esoteric mantras of all Buddhas. Its power is immense and its force swift and fierce. It can subdue evil demons, destroy heterodox and corrupt teachings, move mountains and overturn seas, and eliminate afflictions such as the stirring of karmic seeds. Therefore, in practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, there is no danger of demonic deviation, nor any trouble from heterodox and corrupt teachings.

The sixth mudrā is the Tathāgata Speech Mudrā. After practicing this Dharma, all sūtras spoken by the Buddha and treatises composed by bodhisattvas can be grasped at a glance, thoroughly understood, and comprehended without the slightest doubt. One can also invoke the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, receive their blessings, and develop great spiritual powers.

These six mudrās must be practiced sequentially and continuously. They must not be skipped or practiced out of order, still less practiced intermittently, advancing and stopping repeatedly. Following my teacher's instructions, I sat in meditation punctually every day, for a full two hours in each session. I diligently practiced according to my teacher's oral instruction, "the mind recites and the ears hear," never interrupting my practice.

After completing one hundred meditation sessions, I added further sessions and practiced intensively, gradually increasing from four hours of sitting each day to six hours, eight hours, and even eighteen hours. Every Sunday and public holiday, I spent the entire day practicing seated meditation at home and did not go out for recreation. Because of this, my teacher often encouraged me to teach on his behalf and commended my fellow practitioners.

While practicing the fourth mudrā, I suddenly heard my aged mother cough one night in a dream. At once, body and mind and the entire world vanished together, while clear and distinct spiritual knowing remained undimmed. The next morning, I sought my teacher's instruction. He said, "Although this is welcome news, the time is not yet ripe. You must make further diligent effort and must not slacken in the least."

One day, after finishing my practice, I walked to the post office for my morning shift. As I passed along North Sichuan Road, there was suddenly an explosion. Body and mind, the road, vehicles, and pedestrians all vanished at once, while spiritual knowing remained clear and distinct. Not a single thought arose, and I was unaware even that I was walking. When I reached the entrance to the post office, a thought suddenly arose: “I have arrived.” At once, the gate of the post office appeared before my eyes.

My feet had not moved, yet I had arrived at the post office. My body felt light and relaxed, and my mind was utterly free, as though a burden of a thousand catties had been removed. I was filled with joy and could scarcely contain my delight. Such is the wonder of the Buddhadharma! How could such a scene and feeling be described by brush and ink?

One day, while sitting in meditation, I saw a Buddha come and offer me a sun disc. Just as I stretched out my hand to receive it, the sun disc suddenly exploded. The Buddha, myself, the sun disc, the world, and empty space all vanished at once, and the wondrous, luminous true mind appeared clearly before me. The Buddha’s grace is vast: in blessing and guiding sentient beings, nothing is overlooked. Overwhelmed with gratitude, I could not help weeping bitterly. We younger disciples could truly be ground to powder and still never repay even a fraction of such profound grace.

Another day, during meditation, I saw an old woman seated serenely upon a coiled-dragon chair, with an attendant youth 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 transmit it, venerable lady?” The old woman then descended from her seat, and I too bowed and withdrew.

Once, while practicing the sixth mudrā, my spirit suddenly left my body. As it was moving about the room, a Dharma friend came to visit and knocked at the door, whereupon it reunited with the body. Such trivial matters are all like dreams and illusions, hardly worth mentioning. I briefly list one or two only to invite correction from those in all quarters.

In order to urge us fellow disciples to advance ever higher, my master’s teacher, Acharya Dayu, often posed difficult questions to test us.

For example, he asked, “If the 1,700 koans were strung together, what then?”

One fellow disciple answered, “Suffering!”

My master’s teacher pressed him: “Who suffers?”

My fellow disciple could not answer. I covered my ears and walked out from the side.

My master's teacher said, "Someone has rescued you."

On another occasion, a fellow disciple picked up my master's teacher's fan and said, "This belongs to Master Dayu."

Master Dayu then asked, "If it belongs to Dayu, why is it in your hand?"

I answered for him, "May I ask what is outside my hand?" He nodded in approval.

Again, Master Dayu asked, "Have you observed the mind to the point of seeing it?"

A fellow disciple replied, "I have seen it."

Master Dayu asked further, "Where is it?"

From the side, I extended my palm and said, "Presented in its entirety."

Such family embarrassments are hardly worth airing abroad. I offer them merely for the reader's amusement.

Time passes swiftly; in a moment, several decades have gone by. During this period, although I practiced diligently and without slackening, and undertook many seven-day retreats and intensive nine-session retreats, my capacities were shallow and my karmic obstacles heavy. I attained nothing at all and truly did not dare utter a single word before others, lest I offend their eyes and ears. But when my late teacher passed away, no one succeeded him in the teaching seat, and I was reluctantly summoned to take his place temporarily. Having no alternative, I undertook the task despite its difficulty.

After receiving empowerment from an acharya in 1958, I was unworthily included among the ranks of teachers. At the invitation of various groups, I went to monasteries, viharas, and associations in many places to lecture on the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Lotus Sūtra, Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, Avataṃsaka Sūtra, Diamond Sūtra, Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment, Heart Sūtra, Amitābha Sūtra, Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, and other works. I also attended Chan-study lectures in various places and discussed Chan records with fellow students of Chan.

My travels extended eastward to the three northeastern provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang; westward to Yunnan and Sichuan; southward to Guangdong and Hainan; and northward to Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and other provinces. I traveled through nearly every part of the country. In addition to the fourfold assembly within China, a small number of disciples who received the Dharma came from abroad, including the United States, Germany, France, Canada, and Japan, having heard of it and come to take refuge.

As for my writings, my abilities are limited, and the affairs of propagating the Dharma are numerous, leaving me little spare time for writing.

Only from 1978 onward, at the request of fellow practitioners in various places, did I compose a few unpolished and inadequate essays in order to guide younger practitioners in their further studies, resolve their doubts, and dispel their delusions. These included A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature, A Simple Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to the Mind, Lectures on the Blue Cliff Record, Slight Ripples on the Ocean of Chan, Key Questions Regarding Rebirth in the Western Pure Land, and records of teachings given during Chan seven-day retreats and Dharma-transmission empowerments. They have successively been published in various Buddhist journals and magazines.

In addition, there are Revealing the Hidden Meaning of the Heart Sūtra (included at the end of this book in 1998), Essential Explanations of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, and A Simple Explanation of Mahāmudrā, which are being prepared for printing and have not yet met the wider community of Buddhist practitioners.

In short, for several decades I have remained as I was on the first day, propagating the teaching on my teacher's behalf and proclaiming the Dharma for the Buddha. I have traveled tirelessly in many places, conscientiously and diligently, never daring to slacken in the least. Fortunately, through the compassionate protection of the Buddhas and the support and safeguarding of the fourfold assembly, I have not fallen short of my late teacher's abundant virtue or betrayed the profound grace of the Buddhas. Beyond my deep gratitude to the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and vast body of faithful supporters for their generous aid and care, I feel profoundly fortunate and deeply ashamed.

(February 28, 1996)