Mind-Seal Sayings

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What the Chan school most warns against is what seems right but is not, yet this is an unavoidable stage. The first is literati Chan: it leans toward textual prajñā, delights in clever repartee, sometimes expresses itself through poetry, sometimes inclines toward empty quiescence, or deliberately displays eccentricity, imagining itself lofty. It measures the Buddha by what is seen, heard, felt, and known; this is not Chan.

The second is desiccated and quiescent Chan: rigidly clinging to empty samādhi and taking it for the ultimate, like the school of Zhihuang; attached to stillness and averse to the toil and dust of the world. This is binding oneself with dharma views; it is not Chan.

The third is incense-hall Chan: rigidly adhering to the dead method of sitting in the meditation hall, fixating on a single huatou and unable to use it flexibly. Ten or twenty years may pass without any news; one may become discouraged and regress into dullness, or become dry and tasteless and fall into annihilationist emptiness, even growing deranged through one-sided attachment. This is not Chan.

The fourth is wild and uninhibited Chan: unable to attain freedom, one misunderstands the meaning of unobstructedness in all things and therefore deliberately indulges oneself, taking this for liberation. Yet one has not at all realized the Original Face; this is not Chan. Know that although such people are heterodox from the standpoint of the Chan school, they do have a realm of their own, and are somewhat superior to those who remain utterly bewildered. Still, this is altogether habitual tendency from former lives, entered from without. They are called Chan guests: they remain in the guest's seat and have not seen the host.

In the work of the Chan school, correct understanding is the foremost principle. Under a teacher's guidance, one must first investigate the great matter of today: what, precisely, is it? One cannot entirely avoid a rudimentary knowledge of terminology and doctrinal classifications, but one should not delve deeply into them.

The causal ground at the outset must be correct. Proceed continuously and closely, as though seeking the road home: simply keep walking forward, never stopping until you arrive home. Do not calculate the distance; naturally, each stretch of the way will have its own scenery.

But know that you have not yet arrived home; do not become complacent halfway. Yet when one asks where home is, the path one has been seeking is no longer to be seen. Chan is the work of putting mind into practice, not empty words spoken by the mouth. Do not cling to koans and recorded sayings, rashly investigating from the standpoint of your own views. Simply let go of all conditions. Before a single thought arises, look into what it is; investigate what the Original Face ultimately is like. First slay and clear away every thought, so that not even a speck of dust remains; then you will naturally receive some news.

This matter requires the bold spirit of a heavenly steed soaring through space, exceptional innate intelligence, alertness in venturing deep into dangerous ground, perseverance in careful self-examination, and the urgency of having a close relative die without any means to arrange the burial. One must also bring it to completion in a single sustained effort, like cooking a whole pot of rice through, and encounter an enlightened teacher who can supervise and urge one at every moment. Only then can there be accomplishment. Otherwise, one will be half-cooked and raw, neither donkey nor horse. Such is the difficulty of these causes and conditions.

The work must be done, but one must never employ deadened effort. Those who have not seen their true nature yet continually speak of emptiness are precisely attached to existence everywhere. True emptiness is not something to be talked about; it must be realized directly. Once it falls into verbal formulation, it is no longer it. The ancients' function without contrivance is precisely this function of non-contrivance, this use of non-use: one cannot attach even the slightest bit to it. Outsiders do not understand this meaning. Whoever thinks of publicizing or promoting something is no different from worldly people who delight in showing off; such people have not yet thoroughly died to self.

For one whose concern with birth and death is urgent, the wish to transcend birth and death is urgent. What is the fruition of birth and death? It is the state resulting from thought after thought of grasping attachment. Therefore, one must constantly remain vigilant and examine oneself. In ordinary life, test and verify yourself: does attachment to reputation, gain, or dharmas still remain?

If you still fear criticism—which means that you enjoy flattery; fear losing face—which means that you crave vanity; fear the hardships of life—which means that the desire for gain has not died; fear not becoming a Buddha—which means that you do not understand emptiness; fear falling into emptiness—which is precisely falling into

existence; or fear various obstacles—which means that you have not attained the wisdom of nonobstruction—then these all show that the root has not yet been understood. This single word “fear” clearly establishes attachment to self.

The poorer a person is, the harder it is to weaken the desire for gain. The higher a person’s status, the harder it is to break attachment to reputation. The deeper a person’s practice, the harder it is to eliminate attachment to dharmas. The birth-and-death mind is reinforced and sustained in this way; through habituation it becomes a disposition. Unless its root is first pulled out, it will remain a great difficulty—like ten loads of sesame oil spread over a tree, with simply no place to begin.

The difficulty of Chan practice lies in this: it cannot be grasped, yet it cannot be discarded. It is originally before one’s very eyes, but there is nowhere to begin; thus it cannot be grasped. But if one says, “This itself is it,” that is mere muddleheadedness; thus it cannot be discarded either. The ancients said, “It is like one person facing ten thousand enemies: at close quarters, do not relax even for an instant.” Yet do not fall into dualistic opposition here. This is not a matter of opposition; turn the light back upon yourself, and you will attain it.

The work of the Chan school is entirely one’s own affair. It cannot be spoken—so how can it be taught? It cannot be drawn—so how can it be represented? It was never the work of merely one lifetime. But when this is said, people become intimidated by its difficulty, retreat, and belittle themselves.

Ask yourself: is your inner disposition close to this Way or not? If it is not, then you have not planted wholesome roots before even one or two Buddhas. Whoever is willing to set out on the road will surely have a day of arriving home.

If one had not planted wholesome roots with immeasurable thousands and millions of Buddhas, how could one have such recognition? Once one has recognized it, how could one attain fulfillment without cleaning and clearing it away hundreds of millions of times, life after life? How, then, could one be self-satisfied halfway along? Awakening and realization may have moments of thoroughness, but the development of one’s strength has no limit. Be humble toward others, and do not be lax in disciplining yourself. To expose oneself to the sun one day and the cold ten days brings no benefit in the end.

The more unwilling one is to take a roundabout road, endure hardship, and apply oneself, the less one can accomplish in practice. Unable to accomplish it, one increasingly seeks an easy advantage and looks outward for something to gain. Seeking yet gaining nothing, one takes the ears for the eyes. Already bewildered, one then has no choice but to seek a teacher; but how can one discern the proper Dharma? Thus one seeks every teaching and bows to every teacher. After being busy

for half a lifetime, one has instead neglected the matter beneath one's own feet. When old age arrives and strength is insufficient, courage is gone, and another lifetime has passed!

In this matter, one must first thoroughly clear away consciousness before there can be even a slight correspondence. Yet you turn instead to consciousness to understand it—is that not even farther away? You hear of an Original Face and then exert yourself to seek a face, not knowing that it is a face without a face. How, then, could you ever see it with your eyes? Know that this original nature itself is the face. Since it is original, why seek it further? Yet without undergoing a period of painful and vexing investigation, without traveling many roundabout roads, one will not see this original nature.

To regard the Chan school from the outset as something extraordinary is already a fundamental error; there will be no day of accomplishment. Even if one realizes one's way home, it is an utterly ordinary matter. But sentient beings' dispositions have endured for a long time: attachment to reputation has not died, and the inferior view of aspiring to what is lofty and distant is difficult to remove at once. Thus one refuses to undertake this ordinary matter. Since one ordinarily scorns what is ordinary, one naturally passes it by in neglect, missing it right before one's face countless times. One cannot seize it directly and see what it is. This is always because one has not taken birth and death painfully and urgently to heart.

In beginning the work of the Chan school, one need only first recognize one's own mind. To come to know one's own mind as it truly is is the single-minded work of advancing upward; it is indeed the most painful and urgent practice. As one gradually enters the ground of non-contrivance, the practitioner must make the practice alive and flexible.

To slight the Buddhadharma is the way of a madly arrogant person. To seek cultivation and realization without relying on the Buddhadharma is the way of a self-important person. To depend on the Buddhadharma while seeking something to gain is the way of an incapable person who will never amount to anything. None of these three kinds of people can attain accomplishment. Only those of exceptional greatness, who attain a transcendent realm and differ from ordinary views, are not bound by dharmas on either side. They receive the benefit of the Dharma without suffering harm from dharmas; they are true children of the Buddha.

Consider those who lavish excessive care on themselves, or those who willingly subject themselves to undue hardship: neither is truly on the path. The one is bound by the body; the other is bound by views. Both are afflictions of self-nature. How could they have leisure to turn toward the supreme gate?

In the work of the Chan school, having applied the effort, one must also be able to let it go. The difficulty lies in knowing when it is time to release one's hold. Without applying effort, it is not genuine; without letting go, it is not alive. If it is not genuine, one's realization is not incisive; if it is not alive, one's strength is not complete. Let go too early, and it slips away; set it aside, and ten years may pass. Worldly people inherently tend toward greed and laziness. With only partial understanding, they proclaim themselves complete. This sickness is the most poisonous. The ancients were unwilling to grant approval lightly and required a person to acknowledge it for themselves, precisely to guard against this sickness.

Chan practice is often easy to discuss but difficult to see; and it is easy to see but difficult to put into practice. Those who have not truly seen it will necessarily speak vaguely and indistinctly. Those who have not truly put it into practice will find that what they see is superficial and insubstantial. When one has truly arrived home, then tell me: what is there left to say?

Language is writing spoken aloud; writing is language on paper. What benefit is there in a sheet of wastepaper or a string of empty words? The root of the matter lies entirely elsewhere, yet people insist on trying to understand through such waste and engage in endless disputes. Why undergo such suffering? Therefore, no matter how lofty a principle may be, even if it is a sūtra or treatise spoken by the Buddha, once one grasps it, it becomes the speech of Māra—it is all dung. Those who do not understand this meaning merely call me mad; what can be done about it?

One must begin this matter fiercely, allowing oneself not the slightest indulgence. Thought after thought, remain in the terrifying pit of birth and death; forget sleep and food, with one's very soul and dreams bound to it. The ancients, before awakening, were like people mourning deceased parents. I consider even this insufficiently urgent. It should be as if one's parents have died and their bodies lie upon the bed, while one has not a penny in hand and no means to arrange matters —yet one must urgently find a way. It should also be like seeking medicine for an acute illness, or seeking rice and grain in a year of famine: if it is not obtained, one dies. Only with such alarm and urgency does one come somewhat close to the point.

One who is not intelligent cannot undertake this matter. Yet intelligent people often seek deeply in principles and arguments, and thereby cannot undertake it either, because they are ruined by calculation and discursive thought. Once one falls into dharma views, it is no longer right. But if one abandons every mental attitude, what use is there for any dharma? Still, to cling to no-mind is again to establish a dharma. Tell me, then: how does one attain no-mind? Like the unknowing of wood and stone? Then one becomes wood or stone. By using your intelligence? Then it is no longer a matter of intelligence. Only a person of great wisdom can strike down that intelligence and see clearly for oneself.

To understand the meaning of nondefilement, one must still personally see the characteristic of nondefilement; only then is there nondefilement. Yet this has already become defilement. Nor does it stop there: it will continue to generate defilement upon defilement, and one will drift about in confusion and emptiness.

To race outward in pursuit is a fundamental error; even if one studies for a hundred years, there will be no accomplishment. But if one deliberately turns inward, then inward is outward as well. For seeking establishes opposition; opposition then establishes mind and grasps at dharmas, and one turns again to not seeing. In short, seeking is mistaken—but if one does not seek, what then is to be done?

Without great courage, one is not equal to this great matter; one must not be dependent. Long ago Chan Master Dahui said, “Can Chan be transmitted? What does it mean that Buddhas and patriarchs realized and awakened by themselves?” He therefore left and traveled everywhere, becoming a great master of his age. As for visiting teachers everywhere to seek confirmation of whether one is right, this may fall into the naturalist heterodox path. Originally, one doubts for oneself and awakens for oneself; no one else can do it in one’s place.

Venerable Rāhula, relying on being the Buddha’s son, did not seek diligent practice but waited for the Buddha to liberate him. Knowing his intention, the Buddha one day, after eating, asked him, “Am I full?” He replied, “The Buddha ate by himself. Why ask whether someone else is full?” The Buddha said, “Then I became a Buddha by myself; it has nothing to do with you.” At these words, the Venerable One experienced great awakening and subsequently became foremost in secret practice. For beginners, having no model to follow is indeed painful. If a teacher merely instructs them to seek the Dharma, he has, from the very outset, pushed them into a pit of fire; who knows when they will be able to get out?

In my ordinary responses to all people and affairs, and in places wholly unrelated to them, all are places for my practice. Everywhere there are afflictions, yet everywhere there is bodhi. Even when one who has seen one’s nature goes into battle and kills enemies, it is still seeing one’s nature—provided one does not forget one’s own name and surname.

The slightest fear is an enormous hindrance and a disgrace to one who cultivates the Way. What is important is to recognize it at every moment and not regard it lightly. Practice is nothing other than gathering in the mind, but there must not be the slightest trailing residue. The root of illness transforms and arises precisely from such residue; remember this carefully.

What happens after a wholesome thought arises? What happens after an unwholesome thought arises? What happens after a sudden awakening? And what happens when one is serene and without thoughts? After awakening, cut it cleanly in

two with a single stroke; do not drag along any further tail. If further calculations arise and one does not return to this original ground, then even awakening becomes an illness. This is what is meant by trailing residue. If it is not cut off here, it will be carried on again. These are seeds of birth and death. Have you ever truly experienced this?

The direction is only one road, though its transformations are myriad. However myriad the transformations may be, I still remain on one road. Tell me, what is this one road? Climb to the summit of Mount Taihua and look down upon everything: nothing is not encompassed. Yet if you stand firmly on this very spot beneath your feet, you still do not see it. Only by soaring into the air and ascending further can there be no place left out. To awaken to this is to understand the great functioning of non-abiding.

Ask where you are standing right now, and you will know where you will be later. Karmic force and the force of the Way are nothing more than this single thought. When a thought is obscured, it is karmic force; when a thought is empty, it is the force of the Way. When this prevails, that yields; when this advances, that retreats. It is all merely this one turning.

Now use the force of the Way to sweep away karmic force: in a single thought it has already been swept clean. Once karmic force is exhausted, the Way too is absent. Both are fundamentally equally delusive; originally there is no distinction of difficulty and ease. Ordinary beings mistakenly establish views of difficulty and ease, following along and preserving them. Thus karmic force ripens day by day and the force of the Way arises day by day; they stir up the Tathāgata-garbha, originally awakened and perfectly luminous, amid forms and appearances, vainly undergoing every kind of suffering. This is truly a pitiful and base condition.

A true person possesses extraordinary spirit and a special resolve to transcend the dust of the world and leave the mundane behind. Opening the vajra eye, one sees through to the fundamental emptiness of birth and death and urgently seeks complete resolution. This is no ordinary undertaking. But what is the force of the Way? One must not be muddled about it or speak of it vaguely.

Amid a thousand urgent tasks and a hundred confusions, proceed as though you had nothing to do; in quiet stillness, when there is nothing to do, be as precarious as treading on a tiger’s tail or on spring ice. When first seeing the Way, practice letting go when taking up, and practice taking up when letting go. After a long time, there is no longer any so-called taking up or letting go; when even that which takes up and lets go is ultimately unobtainable, that is true letting go.

To cut off desire is easy; to cut off attachment is difficult; to cut off attachment to the Dharma is more difficult still. Unless one has truly reached selflessness, attachment

to the Dharma will not cease. This belongs to the Buddha's stage; even sages are still troubled by it. To sever attachment to the Dharma, begin by not seeking fame and gain. Chan Master Benjing said: "The first thing a cultivator of the Way must not do is turn toward the Way. To turn toward the Way is to grasp at dharmas, thereby establishing dharma-views. Views become attachment, and that is not the Way." Thus it is said that no-mind is the Way, lacking nothing further. The wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges all issue from this. Do not fear falling into emptiness; fear only not being empty. If one can truly be empty, great capacity and great functioning are naturally complete.

What exists through causes and conditions exists; emptiness is originally empty. Investigate the two words "originally empty": they are the sword in a swordsman's hand and must not be let go.

The doctrines of the Three Baskets and Twelve Divisions of the teachings, Chan practices, esoteric practices, Pure Land practices, the recorded sayings of ancient worthies, and even all Dharma functions are all articles of my daily use. They are like clothes in a cabinet, food in a kitchen, utensils in a room, or the four treasures of the study upon a desk: they merely provide what I need. Whether they are present or absent is of no consequence; if they are present, they are only expedient means.

What truly matters is the master. If every object is fully prepared but no one enjoys them, how are they different from offerings and funerary objects for spirits? Even offerings and funerary objects must take the spirit as primary; all those lifeless things are ultimately useless. Therefore it is said: do not cling to seeking the Buddha. Yet this does not mean discarding everything; one continues to make the customary offerings and observances, merely using them as borrowed means. Those who do not understand this principle invert root and branch and fail to comprehend cause and effect.

For lay practitioners, cultivating the Way is twenty times more effective than for bhikshus. Only Chan Master Dahui Gao could have said such a thing. To cultivate the supreme vehicle, take worldly toil as provisions; when adversaries all arrive together, they adorn this place of practice. When I first said this, people did not dare believe it. Therefore, in times of misfortune, do not waste your bad fortune. Apply effort right there, and you will realize bodhi.

It is neither intentional mind nor non-intentional mind, nor is there any measure of being or nonbeing. This is called the direct mind. To enact the direct mind everywhere is itself the place of practice.

There is no other method for this practice. Do not seek the true, do not seek the mysterious and wondrous; simply let every mental activity cease and look. When the mind has ceased, and there is no mind that can be made into an object of mind, no

thought that can be made into an object of thought—what is that state like? This very scene of transcendent, unattached direct presence is where you settle yourself and establish your life. Do not take this point lightly.

Can you remain like this constantly? Amid a thousand urgent tasks and a hundred confusions, can you be like this at a sudden moment of alertness? What is this called, and can you assume responsibility for it? All the powers of samādhi, wisdom, and precepts; the eighty-four thousand merits and virtues; and wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are all opened forth from this one point. Do not underestimate it. The moment a different state appears, you forget and lose it again. What is precious is being able to hold fast to it.

But as soon as one deliberately attends to it, one again falls into the duality of subject and object and into comparative measurement; the mind no longer ceases, and that is not it either. Thus practice has two difficult ends. First, at the outset one must be single-minded and hold firmly to what is real—this is difficult. Second, at the end one must not forget it, while remaining lively and dissolving freely—this too is difficult. One must practice it a thousand times, a hundred times, until it becomes fully mature without becoming rigidly attached.

You must know that it is originally just so; it is not something I forcibly make to be so. Therefore, although it is utterly present and ordinary, you must not take it lightly. Yet it is also exceedingly extraordinary and not easily attained, so you must not grasp at it. It is not an object that has gain and loss, success and failure. The only problem is that it is easily forgotten and lost, difficult to make mature, difficult to be honest about, and difficult to use flexibly. There is no other wondrous method and no other principle.

Be compassionate toward others, but do not be compassionate toward yourself. Do not excuse yourself or relax your efforts; constantly see your own faults, yet do not become too tense. Sentient beings are like kites whose strings have broken: carried by the wind, they do not know where they will fall. This is because they cling to existence. Cultivators of the Way, moreover, fear clinging to emptiness; not knowing that such fear means they have never truly become empty, they therefore do not die through completely. Thus, unless one reaches a great death, one cannot turn oneself around and come alive again. At that point, if dharma-views have not been purified, one may fear attachment and become attached to not clinging, thereby falling into another pit from which one cannot turn around.

Officials constantly keep the thought of rank and fame on the crown of their heads; merchants constantly keep the thought of making a fortune on the crown of their heads. This is naturally laughable. Yet in the matter at hand, one must likewise keep the terrifying matter of birth and death constantly on the crown of one’s head

before there can be even a small degree of accord. But birth and death are not settled merely by one moment of fear. Do not make fear itself your main concern.

First, thoroughly understand what birth and death ultimately are; how birth and death arise; and how one transcends birth and death. Then proceed to understand that birth and death are originally nonexistent. Because there is no birth and death, there is consequently no nirvāṇa either. Gradually shedding everything until it is completely exhausted, one naturally accomplishes the Buddha Way.

“There is no Dharma to be spoken” has two meanings. First, this cannot be expressed in words. It is the sphere in which mind functions, and in its very substance it is quiescent and extinguished—what further is there to say? Since mind itself is not present, how can the mouth express it or the pen move? For dharmas are fundamentally dependently arisen illusions.

Second, even if there is provisionally speech, it must be given according to the person. If, while walking a road, one has reached a certain point and cannot advance further, then one asks and is given instruction. But if one has not even begun the road and knows absolutely nothing of what lies ahead, there is nothing one can ask; what then is there to say? Recently, students ask about the Dharma less and less. Is it because they have no doubts, or because there is no need to ask? This cannot be known. When beginners request the essential points of the Dharma, their questions are either too childish or largely useless. One leads them into the Way, and suddenly they slip away again; truly, there is nothing to be done. They do not recognize what is valuable and are unwilling to apply themselves earnestly, drifting through an entire lifetime.

The various affected poses in the Chan school—such as blows and shouts, raising a whisk, bowing like a woman, speaking of the cypress tree in the courtyard or three pounds of flax, and presenting poems or speaking verses—are all responses to the potential of the moment. They are not displays of mysterious profundity.

If one used such words and gestures face-to-face with someone who lacked the corresponding potential, would it not become a joke? All great teachers are simply honest and straightforward; they do not casually strike out. When the occasion accords, they give a confirming indication in one or two words, causing the whole person to feel at ease, as if unbound or as if drinking clarified butter. This cannot be attained by imitating appearances.

We who practice cultivate heart esotericism, but we need only return to the mind-ground, realize this state of quiescent cessation and ease, and give rise to all the unattached and free functions. This is returning to the source. There is truly no need to take up many Dharma gates. Yet it is not that they absolutely cannot be studied; the time has simply not yet arrived.

Chan is a dharma of no dharmas. If one deliberately establishes it as a dharma, how is it any different from the teachings? A single huatou is an expedient method of guidance adopted only because there is no alternative; if one places even slight excessive emphasis upon it, one falls into the teachings. This was precisely the difference between the Southern and Northern schools in the time of the Sixth Patriarch. Originally, everything is fully present; since it is fully present, nothing at all is needed.

Yet sentient beings have everything fully present but do not see it and do not know how to use it. Thus they are compelled to awaken and realize for themselves, which entails much trouble. Later generations cling to the notion that they cannot do without these methods, misleading themselves and misleading others. Is that not laughable? Therefore books such as the recorded sayings may be consulted only after one has seen one's nature. If there are poetic lines or colloquial expressions one cannot understand, discard them rather than force an interpretation. Moreover, not everyone in them necessarily attained thorough realization; there are many defects of expression. Other people's clothes and hats were never suited to my body, and there is even less need to imitate a lady's manner like a maidservant. Cultivating the Way is originally for removing habitual tendencies; now one adds bonds upon bonds, which goes against the intent of Mind-Seal.

Those who awaken through cultivating heart esotericism each have their own causes and conditions. The Dharma claims no merit and accepts no blame; it depends on the practitioner. Yet for several decades, people in the world have no longer known what learning the Buddha is for, or what the mind Dharma is. The purpose is only to break open this deadlock: first enabling cultivators to understand the correct cause for entering the Buddha's path and returning to the source, and guiding them to recognize the original ground.

Esoteric Buddhism was one of the World-Honored One's final methods for liberating sentient beings. Those without great blessings, merit, and wholesome roots have no such causes and conditions. It is like someone who, relying on a sharp weapon, falsely passes himself off as a strongman: though he himself lacks strength, he can still contend with others and prevail. This, too, is causes and conditions. Therefore, it is easy to obtain but difficult to preserve, and one must especially not harbor the slightest sense of self-satisfaction or arrogance. Furthermore, all who have an affinity with heart esotericism were ascetic practitioners in the Chan school in past lives. Although they are now guided and opened up through it, their old habitual tendencies from past lives may also easily be stirred up. This must be understood.

The Buddha-Dharma is no small matter. Though it is but this one thing, it is exceedingly difficult. Tell me, where does the difficulty lie? If one recognizes it wrongly, it becomes difficult beyond measure. One must know how to use all

dharmas that exist to realize the mindlessness of every mind. Even if one attains the ease of quiescent cessation, how could one dare call it ultimate?

Beginners should first be made to investigate the features of the mind: What is mind? They must awaken to it and recognize it for themselves. The more strictly they are pressed, the firmer their foundation becomes. They should further be instructed to seek the point at which the mind arises, and then to observe what it is like when there is no mind. Do not grant approval lightly; they must understand it completely. Yet they must first practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for at least five hundred meditation sessions. Only then will verification carry weight; otherwise, it will still be superficial.

If a person's innate disposition is shallow, and in ordinary life they do not know filial piety and fraternal respect, then even if they are highly intelligent and exceedingly diligent, they certainly cannot attain accomplishment in this lifetime. Even if they can manifest the dharmakāya, it will still be extremely difficult for them to put it into function. Once prajñā opens, karmic force will arrive with it, and they must undergo bitter hardships and tempering. Without arousing great compassion to liberate sentient beings, they will certainly find accomplishment difficult. This is the difficulty of selecting people.

In assessing a practitioner, first examine their innate disposition; second, observe the signs of their blessings; third, discern their spiritual capacity; fourth, consider their environment and causes and conditions. Only then can one determine the extent of their possible accomplishment. Apart from this, they merely plant wholesome roots, and there is very little hope in this lifetime. Yet those who repent deeply, reform thoroughly, and are willing to make amends must still undertake meritorious deeds with form as support; otherwise, they will find it difficult to overcome their karmic force.

Some say that they feel lonely and desolate. They do not know that loneliness may indeed be present, but quiescence is not. If one can cultivate oneself to quiescence, one will naturally no longer be lonely. If one truly sees the aspect of tranquil quiescence and cessation, one will be content and at ease everywhere. The whole universe is complete within oneself; what loneliness or desolation could there be?

Although practitioners who cultivate the Way may already have seen their nature, their habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated. Still, they differ from those who have not seen their nature, because they have a method. Yet others cannot fathom this and often do not believe that they have seen their nature, criticizing them instead. If they themselves have seen it but not thoroughly, they too often come to doubt the very foundation, because their strength is not yet sufficient, and thus say that what they have realized is not right. This is a grave error.

When first receiving someone, one must first know where they stand, and thus know where their ailment lies. Address what troubles them, open up their rigid attachments, inspire fresh potential in them, and lead them toward the ultimate. One must not harbor a sense of superiority. Administer a blow according to their capacity, and do not make it too heavy. The difficulty lies in hitting the mark precisely; this is the function of responding to a person's potential.

Even so, under present-day conditions, investigating Chan is extremely difficult. Even if every condition were fully present, where are the qualified teacher and student? Moreover, life is impermanent; it certainly will not grant you ten years to investigate and realize, or thirty years to become continuous and undivided. After my teacher, Acharya Dayu, transmitted the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma to the world, people finally had an easier method for returning to the origin.

With the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma, after completing one thousand meditation sessions, one will certainly realize samādhi, open prajñā, and see one's own intrinsic nature. The diligent may attain accomplishment in no more than three years. So long as one is willing to sit steadily, one has the necessary affinity for this Dharma. Those who investigated Chan in past lives and possess the capacity for prajñā are especially suited to it. Thus, when practicing this Dharma, it accords particularly well with the Chan school; for this reason, people call it Chan-Esoteric Buddhism.

But this name is strange and laughable. One must know that the two gates each have their own standpoint, and their methods of practice also differ. The Chan school begins where there is nowhere to begin. Those in the Dharma-ending age, burdened with heavy karma, lack the blessings to receive it and do not easily gain entry and realization. Even if they experience some awakening, because they cannot withstand their past karma, they will inevitably become wild and unrestrained, disliked by the world. Only the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma partly relies on the Buddha's power and proceeds steadily and securely.

At the very least, one should practice continuously until completing five or six hundred meditation sessions, gradually opening prajñā so that one awakens for oneself to what is original, sees one's own intrinsic nature, and gains personal benefit. There is no need at all to imitate the Chan school's repertoire of blows and shouts. Therefore, acting on my teacher's instructions, this practice center transmits only the esoteric Mind-Seal and does not hang out the Chan school's signboard.

Moreover, I do not understand the doctrinal teachings clearly, nor am I conversant with the school traditions. How could I dare bewilder people with strange and striking words? I merely honestly keep to my proper role, guiding those who come to learn by means of the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma, or other esoteric mantras, so that their causal ground is correct and their views are correct, and they may

naturally attain realization and awakening. That is all. What was discussed previously was in answer to students' questions; it was not a discussion of the Chan school.

There is nothing to discuss about Chan; to discuss it is already not it. There is nothing to say about the school; to speak of it is already to depart from it. One should directly experience the place where the path of words is cut off and mental activity ceases. Having understood it, do not then cling to a Dharma-view and mislead yourself. In short, all words and phrases are merely frivolous discourse. To have said this whole long account is precisely my own fault.