How to Eliminate Greed, Anger, Ignorance, Pride, and Doubt

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A disciple asked, “How can greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt be eliminated?”

Greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt belong to the delusions of thought. Doctrinal teachings divide ignorance into delusions of views, delusions of thought, dust-like delusions, and delusions of ignorance—from coarse to subtle, from subtle to extremely subtle. Delusions of views are deluded afflictions that arise from losing sight of such truths as non-arising and non-self. They belong to the sphere of principle and are therefore called delusions of principle. They are divided into five kinds: the view of self, extreme views, wrong views, attachment to views, and attachment to precepts and observances. All are incorrect views.

For example, being attached to spiritual powers while never asking whether one has realized the mind and seen one’s true nature is an incorrect view commonly found among practitioners.

Delusions of views are easy to remove. When we practice a Dharma method, awaken, see our true nature, and correct our views, these delusions are entirely removed. But delusions of thought cannot easily be removed all at once. Only after awakening and cutting off delusions of views must one further realize one’s true nature and cultivate the truth; then these delusions can gradually be eliminated.

Delusions of thought are delusions concerning phenomena that arise from contemplating the illusory things of the world. Their nature is dull and obscure, and they are divided into the five delusions of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. Thus, they are not easily removed suddenly. If delusions of views and delusions of thought are not eliminated, one cannot transcend the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, to eliminate these ten delusions—the five of self, extremes, wrong views,

attachment to views, and attachment to precepts and observances, together with greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt—one must first understand one's true nature and attain great awakening.

Know deeply that all things are illusory and unobtainable. Thoroughly see the point where a single thought ceases: that clear and distinct numinous knowing is our true nature. At all times, protect and temper it amid circumstances, wearing away all the habitual tendencies of attachment accumulated over many lives. Only then can greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt perish. The teachings say that these four delusions have as many as eighty-eight grades throughout the nine grounds of the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. They must be removed gradually, step by step; they cannot be eliminated all at once. Therefore, one must possess a deep and enduring resolve and strive diligently amid circumstances.

Most important, we must know that our true mind inherently possesses the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya; there is no need to seek them outside ourselves.

Our present single thought of pure mind is the clear and distinct numinous knowing that remains after the preceding thought has ceased and before the next thought has arisen; this is our dharmakāya. The wisdom-light by which we can see all things is our sambhogakāya. The varied manifestations of all things are transformations of our Dharma-nature; these are our nirmāṇakāya. The dharmakāya and sambhogakāya are easy to understand.

When we cut off our thoughts, we nevertheless remain clear and distinct; it is not that awareness is absent. At that time, this clear numinous knowing is our dharmakāya, which everyone can experience immediately. The sambhogakāya is the wisdom-light by which we presently see all these things. Without the wisdom-light of the dharmakāya, we could not see them.

For example, without light, we could not see things, just like blind people. That which sees is the luminosity of our dharmakāya; the dharmakāya shines forth luminously, which is the shining forth of wisdom-light. The nirmāṇakāya is somewhat harder to understand. All things—cups, fruit, houses, and so forth—are transformations of myself; they are all my nirmāṇakāya.

How can these be my nirmāṇakāya? Are they not insentient things? The material world is insentient, whereas people and animals are sentient. How can they be my nirmāṇakāya? Because apart from the wisdom of my Dharma-nature, these things would not exist.

Take the houses in which we live. Before a house is built, a plan must first be designed. How does an engineer conceive such a plan in the mind? The engineer

takes in external images and, through thought and analysis, considers how to alter and develop them so that they meet human needs, thereby drawing a new design. What function is this? Is it a function of the brain? It may indeed appear to be a function of the brain, but the various nerves in the brain—such as the visual and auditory nerves—are like electrical wires: even when the wires have been laid, they remain useless unless electricity flows through them.

What is electricity? Electricity is a function of our dharmakāya. What is Buddha-nature? Nature means capacity or function. Capacity means function. It can function, yet has no form that can be seen. Take electricity as an example: one cannot see its form, but once the current flows, lamps can shine and machines can operate.

The nerves of the brain are like electrical wires, and the current flowing through them is the functioning of our Buddha-nature. Thus, whether it is designing plans or later engaging craftsmen to build houses, all are functions of our Buddha-nature. These are manifestations transformed by Buddha-nature; they are the nirmāṇakāya of Buddha-nature. Once you understand that the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are all inherently complete within the true mind, do not abide in appearances at any time. All things are reflections manifested by the great perfect mirror wisdom of my dharmakāya. Then the mind will not be stirred, appearances will not be grasped, and nothing will be sought. Practicing in this way, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt will gradually disappear.

If one does not understand this principle and instead abides in spiritual powers and clings to appearances, not only will greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt fail to disappear, but they will increase. What are spiritual powers sought for? Are they not sought for fame, gain, and offerings? One wants flattery, reputation, and offerings, and greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt increase all the more. They provide no help at all. Thus, to eliminate greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, one must realize one's true nature. Without seeing one's true nature, it cannot be done. The root still lies in realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature; therefore, the foundation of Buddhism is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

Nowadays some people have it wrong: they do not seek to realize the mind and see their true nature, but seek spiritual powers. As soon as they hear that a method can produce spiritual powers, they hurry after it: "This Dharma has spiritual powers—go learn it quickly!" Rather than removing greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, this only increases the mind of covetousness.

Therefore, when we practice a Dharma method, we must let go of everything. We should not even seek to enter samādhi; if we seek to enter samādhi, we will instead be unable to enter it.

For the mind that seeks to enter samādhi is itself a deluded mind. Once the deluded mind is stirred, how can one enter samādhi? Therefore, to enter samādhi, one must let go of everything, seek nothing, and take everything in an ordinary manner. Only then can the mind be at ease and one can enter samādhi calmly, thereby opening up one's original nature and directly realizing Buddha-nature. In fact, realizing the Way involves nothing mysterious or extraordinary; it is exceedingly simple and ordinary.

Yet I have heard some fellow practitioners in Hangzhou say, "Not a single person in Hangzhou has attained accomplishment." This is troubling. They must surely have misunderstood the true meaning of accomplishment. What is accomplishment? Must one manifest spiritual powers before one can be considered accomplished? If one has not manifested spiritual powers, does that mean one has not realized the mind and seen one's true nature, and cannot attain accomplishment? This is clearly a very great error.

Let us first discuss what accomplishment is—that is, what is the purpose of our study of Buddhism? The purpose of studying Buddhism is to leave the cycle of rebirth and transcend birth and death. This is our great aim.

How can one transcend birth and death and leave the cycle of rebirth? Can manifesting spiritual powers enable one to leave the cycle of rebirth? No. Non-Buddhist paths all possess the five spiritual powers—divine eye, divine ear, knowledge of others' minds, spiritual travel, and knowledge of past lives—yet they cannot transcend birth and death. Because they do not recognize their own true nature, they cling to and pursue external circumstances, grasping at things; therefore, they cannot transcend birth and death.

Therefore, to transcend birth and death and leave the cycle of rebirth, the mind must be completely empty and abide nowhere. Know that all transformations are manifestations of the functioning of one's own Buddha-nature. Seek nothing, grasp at nothing, and remain free and at ease. This is great accomplishment, great freedom, and great spiritual power.

If one pursues or seeks anything, and afflictions still remain in the mind as before, then even if all five spiritual powers manifest together, it is not accomplishment. Therefore, our study of Buddhism is to learn freedom and ease: amid all circumstances in society, accord with conditions, do one's utmost to serve the public, be able to rise or descend, seek nothing, and grasp at nothing.

Only when one is truly free and at ease does one embody the true meaning of Mahāyāna Buddhism; only then can one be said to have attained accomplishment. If, while alive, we can indeed refrain from clinging to any circumstance and have no mind of attachment, anger, grasping, or rejection, then when the thirtieth day of the

twelfth lunar month arrives, we will naturally not cling to circumstances and will be free and at ease, with no birth and death left to transcend.

Our present attachment to birth and death is itself our grasping at circumstances. Today we have physical bodies of flesh because, when our parents had intercourse, our own minds were stirred and we ourselves entered into it. If you did not cling to circumstances and did not go, then you would not have this physical body. You would be free and at ease, able to roam everywhere.

Now that we have a physical body, it has become a burden; we cannot move freely. This is something we brought upon ourselves. In practicing a Dharma method now, we must understand this principle: the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are all complete within the one mind. Do not pursue anything; do not seek any spiritual powers; let go of everything. Then you will be free and at ease. Free and at ease, clinging to nothing—if it is so in life, it is so in death. You may go wherever you wish, wholly master of yourself. Would you not then have transcended birth and death?

Ultimately speaking, there is fundamentally no birth and death. Our true nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither moving nor wavering. Fundamentally, there is no birth and death. Attachment to birth and death is merely the confused movement of our deluded mind, grasping at circumstances and clinging to things.

Therefore, if we let go of everything, are we not greatly at ease? This is great freedom. If there is no birth and death, what greed, anger, ignorance, pride, or doubt could there be? Greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt arise because we ourselves do not understand our true nature, pursue external circumstances, and become deluded by material appearances and external objects.

Therefore, once we understand what our true nature is and do not grasp at external circumstances, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt will naturally disappear completely. Likewise, if one can truly be free and at ease, seeking nothing and grasping at nothing, then the five spiritual powers will naturally come forth. For they are inherently complete within our true nature; they have always been there and do not arise because of practice.

Therefore, we say that the Way belongs to awakening, not to cultivation. Awakening is waking up, like awakening from a dream and no longer continuing the dream. We ordinarily live amid dream states, pursuing what is in the dream. Not knowing that it is a dream, people take it as real and pursue it. Thus, seeking brings greed; when greed cannot obtain what it seeks, anger arises; and attachment to greed and anger is ignorance.

Pride means looking down on others: “None of you measure up to me; I am the best.” Thus, the notions of person and self arise.

Doubt is even more unavoidable. For example, when I say that the clear and distinct numinous knowing at the point where a thought ceases is our true mind, you will inevitably doubt it: “Is this really the true mind? That cannot be right. If this were my true nature, then having seen my true nature, I should manifest great spiritual powers. Why do I not have any spiritual powers at all? Then this cannot be it.”

Then doubt arises, and that is where things go wrong. Because you do not truly believe, you cannot wholeheartedly safeguard your own intrinsic nature; instead, you follow circumstances and take another path. You were doing well on this path and were nearly home; all you needed was to continue your practice and safeguard realization.

Because of doubt, you turn back and take another path: you stop practicing this Dharma and practice another.

After practicing it for a while, you find that it too seems wrong, so you take up yet another Dharma. In the end, you keep changing practices. Because your mental strength is not concentrated, just as you reach a crucial juncture, you change to another Dharma again. Thus none of them succeeds. This is the fault of doubting and refusing to practice with one’s feet firmly on the ground. Many people waste all their effort in this way and attain nothing.

If we can recognize without the slightest doubt that the clear knowing at the point where a thought ceases is our intrinsic nature, and safeguard it at every moment—never forgetting to safeguard this intrinsic nature while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, never allowing it to be obscured by circumstances or following after circumstances, never being pulled about by any circumstance—then we know that everything is a false appearance. The only reality is the nature of spiritually aware knowing present here and now; everything else is false, so do not attend to it.

If you can truly practice in this way, then within three to five years your spiritual powers will naturally manifest greatly. Because you do not chase after them, the spiritual powers that you inherently already possess will naturally reveal themselves.

The reason they cannot now manifest is that they are obscured by your greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. You entertain deluded thoughts, cling, and pursue spiritual powers, and so they do not come. Spiritual powers therefore cannot be cultivated or sought. Whatever is obtained by seeking is false, not genuine; it is all dependent on something else.

Because you seek, ghosts and spirits come along, accommodating themselves to your mentality and entering your mind. Thus, among those who practice qigong and possess extraordinary abilities, 80 or 90 percent have something attached to them; the abilities are not their own. This is because they have a covetous mind.

Our study of the Buddhadharma is for the development of wisdom: to understand that our true mind is the spiritually aware knowing present when a thought ceases and not a single thought arises. To speak of realizing the Way is very simple: one need only point it out to you directly. There is nothing mysterious about it. It is not that, once realization of the Way is mentioned, all sorts of mysteries, marvels, and teachings appear.

In fact, our Chinese Chan school is the very best: it goes straight to the point, does not rely on words and letters, points directly to the mind, and enables one to see one's true nature and attain Buddhahood. It is the highest Esoteric Dharma. Chan is the highest level of Esoteric Buddhism. I did not invent these words. The Great Karmapa, a true great adept of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, once said: "Speaking of our Esoteric Buddhism, the Great Perfection Dharma is the most profound."

"Does China have Dzogchen? Yes: it is Chan. The Chan school is Dzogchen." Is this correct? Yes, entirely correct. We studied Dzogchen with Guru Gonga. Dzogchen has "preliminary practices" and "main practice."

The "preliminary practices" concern ritual procedures and form-based practices. The "main practice" directly reveals what Buddha-nature is: it is an exposition of the view, exactly the same as the direct pointing of the Chan school, with no difference at all. The Chan school directly points out how to see one's nature, without taking a roundabout way of teaching.

For example, someone asks, "What is Buddha?" The reply is, "We are conversing face-to-face—who else could it be but Buddha?" What else could the one speaking face-to-face be but Buddha? This means that the one able to converse face-to-face with me—who else is it but Buddha? Extending this meaning, who is it that can hear sounds and move? Is this not our Buddha-nature? A simple, intimate, crucial, and concise sentence directly points out how to see one's nature.

Or someone asks, "What is Buddha?" The master calls out to you, you answer, and he immediately seizes that opportunity to point out, "This is Buddha!" See how direct and swift it is! Awakening to the Way is that easy; there is nothing mysterious or strange about it. This is the most profound Chan Dharma; it is China's Dzogchen.

Unfortunately, people of later times have weaker faculties and greater doubt, and they are unwilling to take responsibility for it. "This point where thought ceases is intrinsic nature? Could it really be so easy? Surely not!" Thus they doubt. Of greed,

anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, doubt harms people most severely and causes them to lose the true mind. When the patriarchs saw that direct pointing would not work, they no longer gave direct instruction but instead took a circuitous route, telling people to investigate a huatou (critical phrase).

Someone asks, “What is Buddha?” The reply is, “East Mountain walks on water.” Or, “Take off your straw sandals and walk barefoot.” The master says something of this sort at random, without telling you directly. Because you do not understand the meaning of the reply, you give rise to doubt; through doubt, deluded thoughts are cut off. When the time and conditions arrive, you can directly realize the original nature.

After awakening to the principle, the Chan school proceeds to safeguard it continuously and seamlessly. One tempers oneself amid circumstances, diligently removes habitual delusions, thereby becomes continuous and undivided, and thoroughly penetrates the three barriers.

We could cite many examples. Take the Sixth Patriarch: upon receiving the Fifth Patriarch’s instruction, “Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere,” he awakened to the Way. After awakening, he knew that all daily activities are the wondrous functioning of our Buddha-nature. So long as one abides nowhere and is free and at ease, that intrinsic nature, the wondrous and luminous true mind, naturally appears before one.

He therefore safeguarded it continuously and seamlessly while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Only when the Way had been realized and conditions had matured did he emerge to establish a teaching seat and expound the Dharma. Speaking of safeguarding realization, one first safeguards and then lets be. First, one safeguards: when a thought arises, do not follow it; do not run after thoughts. When circumstances arise, do not be turned by them.

Once this has become familiar, relinquish the safeguarding and proceed to let things be. Let go and move freely in emptiness, allowing things to proceed naturally, without constraint or attachment. It is like Confucius’s saying, “At seventy, I could follow my heart’s desires without transgressing the bounds.” One can do anything, entering Buddhahood or even entering Māra.

Later, consider Damei, a disciple of Mazu. Damei asked Mazu, “What is Buddha?” Mazu replied, “Mind itself is Buddha.” Mind is Buddha, and Buddha is mind. Damei immediately awakened. After safeguarding this realization for three years, Mazu wanted to test whether Damei truly understood, so he sent an attendant to tell him that the master’s teaching on the Buddhadharma had recently changed.

Damei asked, “How has it changed?” The attendant replied, “He now says, ‘Neither mind nor Buddha.’” Damei said, “That old fellow confuses people without end. Let him say ‘neither mind nor Buddha’; I simply maintain that mind itself is Buddha.” When Mazu heard this, he said, “The plum is ripe!” A person who has truly awakened to the Way stands firmly on their own feet and is not swayed by the words of others.

The Chan school points directly in this way, and Dzogchen does the same. Only at the end does Dzogchen explain that “the empty aspect of the basis is the dharmakāya.” At the beginning, it is unwilling to say this; only after one has practiced for decades is it willing to tell you so.

The empty aspect of the basis has not the slightest appearance; this is the dharmakāya. “The manifest aspect of the basis is the sambhogakāya.” All things are transformations and manifestations of my dharmatā. Seeking nothing and grasping nothing—this is my nirmāṇakāya. This is explained very clearly; it is called the Great Perfection View.

Thus it is not that no one in Hangzhou has attained realization. You are deceiving yourselves and have gone wrong, turning toward spiritual powers. You say that no one in Hangzhou has attained realization, when in fact you are already within realization and do not know it. Yet you still say that we do not know how to function.

You function from morning to night; how can you say that you do not know how to function? Is drinking water not functioning? Are eating, dressing, walking, and working not functioning? If these are not functioning, then what is? You are all grasping at something: you want spiritual powers and mysterious marvels, want to do what others cannot do, and think that this alone is functioning. If everyone can do it, you do not count it as functioning.

They do not realize that if it were the body that functioned, then once a breath no longer came, could the body still move? Who is functioning now? Is it not the functioning of our Buddha-nature, the functioning of the true mind? Therefore, a Chan master said, “People spend all day beside the rice basket, yet countless starve to death.”

Food is beside them, yet they do not know to eat. They are exercising wondrous functioning yet do not know it—is this not a great injustice? Therefore, do not be deceived by yourselves; understand this principle. To truly eliminate greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, you must see your nature. If you do not see your nature, how can you remove greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt? You are always grasping and clinging, insatiably greedy: with ten thousand, you want one hundred thousand; with one hundred thousand, you want a million or a hundred million. Greed is never satisfied. Therefore, in studying the Buddhadharma, we must let go of everything.

When we sit in meditation, we must be utterly resolute, like a dead person, taking no concern with anything. The mind recites the mantra, and the ears hear it. It is the mind, not the mouth, that holds the mantra. Hear it clearly with the ears, while the discriminating consciousness of the brain does not move; then you have grasped it. Once you grasp it, you can enter samādhi deeply, settle the mind, and open through.

After rising from meditation, you must observe the mind. Contemplate continuously, while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; you must not forget. Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts: when a thought arises, immediately become aware of it; once aware, it is immediately empty. If a thought arises and you do not know it, do not see it, and follow it instead, without even realizing that a thought remains, then it is too late. As soon as a thought arises, know it at once and immediately turn it away.

Outwardly, do not be pulled along by circumstances. No change in external circumstances can move me, for I know that all of this is false appearance, all of it the shadow of my own intrinsic nature; I do not run after it. If you practice in this way, within three to five years you can all enter the great Way. We must explain the principle clearly, so that everyone knows the correct path. Manifesting spiritual powers is absolutely not attainment. Once you understand the true mind, safeguard it at every moment. When you are truly free and at ease and pursue nothing, the five spiritual powers will naturally manifest.

I have now given you a direct exposition of the view. You know that, at the point where a thought ceases, the lucidly aware nature is our intrinsic nature. This is awakening at the level of principle. After awakening at the level of principle, you must still safeguard it. While safeguarding it, watch over thoughts and do not follow them.

Once this becomes familiar, the mind that contemplates and the thoughts contemplated both fall away at once. This is like the mind that recites and the mantra recited both falling away at once when we meditate. Body, mind, and world are all unobtainable; one directly realizes one’s intrinsic nature.

What is the difference between awakening at the level of principle and direct realization? The principle-essence realized by the two is the same, without distinction. What is realized in a single thought is completely identical in principle-essence to what we realize after several years of practice, and also to what practitioners of the Chan school realize after thirty years of Chan practice.

But their strength differs. Those who realize it in a single thought have not done any practice; when circumstances arise, they often cannot withstand them, and their minds become confused. This is because the delusions of thought have not been

eliminated—that is, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt have not been eliminated.

Now, when we practice in meditation, body, mind, and world all dissolve into emptiness, and the strength of direct realization arises. When circumstances come, we can withstand them, and greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt can be eliminated. Thus the strength differs. Yet if we can truly stand firm, recognize that the point where thought ceases is our own intrinsic nature, no longer doubt it, and safeguard it, that too is good.

Recognize that this single nature is the three kāyas—the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. Everything is my manifestation body. Do not doubt, do not take things as real, and do not pursue them. After three or five years of this, clarity will gradually arise; this too is very good. This is how one should practice; there is nothing mysterious about it. Keep your words concise. When Chan Master Linji awakened, he said, “Originally, there is not much to the Buddha Dharma.” There is nothing at all: this very moment is it; this very moment is realization. Therefore, without departing from the present moment, we practice diligently at every moment.

The problem is that everyone is doubting. Even Pure Land practitioners doubt: “Can my Buddha-recitation bring me rebirth in the Western Pure Land? Perhaps it cannot.” When doubt is heavy, Buddha-recitation has no strength, and rebirth in the Western Pure Land becomes difficult.

One must have complete confidence: “Practicing in this way, I will certainly attain accomplishment; I will certainly be reborn in the Western Pure Land—certainly!” Then there will be strength; wholeheartedness brings strength. First, the power of the exhaustion of outflows is what we most need to attain. Learning the Buddha Dharma is meant to make us carefree and at ease. If one still spends all day troubled and sorrowful, that is not the Buddha Dharma; it is not in accord with the Buddha Dharma.

We say, “Whether clothing and food are plentiful or scant, live according to conditions.” Let everything follow conditions: if circumstances are good, live well; if they are bad, live through them as they are. It does not matter; all are false appearances. If you laugh heartily when conditions are favorable but become worried and afflicted when they are unfavorable, what kind of Buddha are you learning from? Are not all things unobtainable? Are not all things like a dream? Why then stir your mind?

Someone asks, “Have I awakened?” Ask yourself whether you have awakened: “Am I still infatuated with circumstances? Am I still attached to appearances?” If, when

circumstances arise, you are still infatuated with them, then you have not awakened. Awakening means waking up and no longer dreaming.

In dreams, everything is present. Pleasant circumstances bring boundless delight, while unpleasant circumstances bring boundless distress; some people even wake crying or shouting. But once awake, not a trace remains. If you still become afflicted when encountering circumstances, then you have not awakened. When favorable circumstances arise, do not rejoice; when adverse circumstances arise, do not become troubled or angry. Only then is it right, and only then can greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt truly be eliminated. Without realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, there can be no talk of eliminating greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt; not one of them can be removed. To eliminate greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, one must realize one's true nature!

After seeing one's true nature, one must still temper and safeguard it amid circumstances. If one's strength is insufficient and the mind still moves in response to circumstances, one should meditate more. To be deluded by circumstances and have the mind stirred is precisely delusion of thought. In practice, one must first understand what the true mind is. This is the most important point. Only then can one begin to safeguard it, knowing where and how to apply one's effort.

If you do not understand what the true mind is, nor where to apply effort, how can you realize the Way? In practice, one must have self-knowledge. If meditative stability is insufficient, meditate more. Only by meditating more can one increase meditative stability.

We too were like this in the past. Whenever we rested on Sundays, we did not go out for recreation, but sat in meditation at home all day. When we rose from meditation in the evening, the mind was utterly pure and unmoved by any circumstances. Things we had formerly liked no longer mattered at all; there was only ease and tranquility, and incomparable Dharma joy.

Therefore, if meditative stability is insufficient, one must still meditate more, so as to safeguard [realization] continuously and seamlessly. When the mind is truly empty and pure, carefree and at ease, that is penetration of the Way; it is also the power of the exhaustion of outflows. Once this power is attained, one need not worry that the other five spiritual powers will fail to arise. This is called, "Once the root is obtained, there is no need to worry about the branches."

The five spiritual powers are inherently complete in our intrinsic nature. Once it is opened up, they naturally manifest; before it is opened up, they remain covered within. If attachment to appearances has not been removed and the mind is always wavering, then to seek spiritual powers is to go directly against the Way. It is attachment added to attachment, greed, anger, and ignorance added to greed,

anger, and ignorance. How could one possibly have one's wishes fulfilled? One must let go of everything.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is a great Dharma that unifies Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism. At every moment it calls upon us to directly see our true nature. When practicing this Dharma, it is neither empty nor existent. The mudrā and mantra exist, but what do they mean? They cannot be thought out or deliberated. Existence is equivalent to nonexistence: though existent, they are not existent, and thus are nonexistence. Yet because there is a mudrā and mantra, they are not empty; thus they are nonempty.

Giving you a mantra to recite and a mudrā to form is emptiness that is not emptiness, neither empty nor existent. These propel you forward so that you can realize your intrinsic nature. Once you realize your intrinsic nature, you return to the Chan school.

When the mind is truly empty and pure—purely naked and utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust—is this not the Pure Land? The land is mind, and mind is the land. Thus, wherever you wish to be reborn—east, south, west, or north—everywhere is a Pure Land. One is free and at ease in accordance with conditions; all are integrated as one.

The true Pure Land is our Land of Eternal Quiescent Light, the Pure Land of intrinsic nature, originally pure and undefiled. It is solely because of our deluded mind and attachment that we have created this Sahā world of the five turbidities. Once our minds are purified, the Sahā world of the five turbidities becomes a Pure Land. Therefore, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the heart-essence of Esoteric Buddhism; it is the Great Perfection View.

Realizing the Way may be divided into four steps. The first is "seeing one's intrinsic nature." To understand now that the luminous knowing at the point where thought ceases is one's intrinsic nature is also the same. Great Perfection likewise gives direct instruction, enabling people to see their intrinsic nature at once. Next comes the practice of safeguarding it. In the course of safeguarding it, "realization and experience increase." This is the second step.

Awareness means awakening and contemplative awareness: not being deluded and not being moved or turned by circumstances. Genuine awakening brings genuine benefit, and one no longer has afflictions.

Otherwise, when adverse circumstances arise, you will become afflicted and angry. Once awakened, you know that all of this is false, all of it mere shadows. You do not cling, pursue, or become afflicted, and thereby receive genuine benefit. You are filled with Dharma joy, at ease and delighted all day long, immensely happy.

Thus the first bhūmi is called the Ground of Joy. As realization and experience increase, one realizes step by step upward through the first bhūmi, second bhūmi, third bhūmi, and so on. One should constantly examine oneself: “How am I now compared with before? Have I made any progress?” Naturally, one does not ascend to heaven in a single step, immediately reaching the tenth bhūmi and the two awakenings of equal and wondrous enlightenment. There must be a process. The third step is “clarifying the luminous essence and advancing.”

The luminous essence is the body of light. As one progresses, great light shines forth, brilliantly illuminating the worlds of the ten directions. The Buddhas of the ten directions enter my body, and my body enters the bodies of the Buddhas; they interpenetrate one another without obstruction. This is the state described in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra. Because realization and experience have increased to this extent, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt are then absolutely absent—not the slightest trace remains.

Yet this is not ultimate. Only the final, fourth step is “the ultimate Dharma realm.” All light is unobtainable, and all spiritual powers are unobtainable; all are gathered back into intrinsic nature and no longer manifest. In the language of the Great Perfection, this is “like the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month.” Can one still see the moon on that night? It can no longer be seen. Everything is gathered back into one’s own mind; nothing remains.

The Chan school speaks in the same way at this point. Last time, I spoke of a koan. A monk asked Caoshan, “What is it like when the bright moon is directly overhead?” The bright moon directly overhead means the full moon shining above one’s head. Caoshan replied, “You are still a man below the steps.” You have not yet arrived home. The monk said, “Please, Master, lead me up the steps.” Please, Master, out of compassion, give me a hand. He replied, “We shall meet when the moon has set.”

Therefore, Chan and Esoteric Buddhism are the same; do not misunderstand this. The profound Esoteric Dharma, the highest level of Esoteric Dharma, is precisely the Chan school. Thus, only if you can stand firm and not be misled by what others say can you realize the great Way. If, upon hearing someone say, “A living Buddha has come, and he has great spiritual powers,” you follow him along, then you will go down a divergent path.

There is no Esoteric Dharma higher than the Chan school. Moreover, if you seek spiritual powers, you will meet with misfortune and become possessed. A young woman who came from Guangzhou this time studied qigong and sought to develop extraordinary powers. As a result, two ghosts entered her body.

The first one that entered was not too bad. The ghost would tell her about things, and she seemed to have acquired a little spiritual power. But when another came in,

her physical body could not bear it, and she suffered greatly. This is the harmful result of seeking spiritual powers. Therefore, when we study the Buddha Dharma, we must understand and follow the proper path. The most important thing in the Buddha Dharma is not to develop spiritual powers, but to transcend birth and death.

How does one transcend birth and death? By not clinging to circumstances, not following thoughts, and not sticking to any experience whatsoever. Only then can one transcend birth and death. Seeking spiritual powers is not ultimate and cannot transcend birth and death. Those who seek spiritual powers are all attached to appearances and do so for fame and profit. I have heard that qigong masters first give lectures while displaying their powers and sell tickets for money; then they treat illnesses and amass money; later, they sell so-called information objects.

These are all irrelevant things. Frankly speaking, they are all schemes for swindling money. Would it not be a great injustice to follow them? In studying the Buddha Dharma, we must recognize the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate: “Only this is true reality; the other two are not true.” To practice apart from the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, seeking dharmas outside the mind, is a non-Buddhist path.

Accomplishment does not mean developing spiritual powers. It means that the mind is empty and non-abiding, open and unconfined, carefree and at ease. To remain unbound by either favorable or adverse circumstances, carefree and at ease—this is the greatest spiritual power. Apart from this, even if one develops the five spiritual powers, the mind will not be at ease.

For example, once one has gained the supernormal power of knowing past lives and knows what happened in past lives, one may feel remorse: “I did so many bad things in past lives.” There was an arhat who was like this. In a past life, he had killed his own father. After gaining this power, he was distressed: “How could I have been so unfilial as to kill my own father?!” He could not even remain seated.

Śākyamuni Buddha said to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, “This arhat has developed the supernormal power of knowing past lives. He knows that he killed his own father, and his mind has become unsettled. Let us put on a little play, teach him the Dharma, and save him.” Thereupon Mañjuśrī drew his sword to kill the Buddha. Everyone was terrified at the sight: the crime of killing one’s father is already grave, but killing a Buddha is even more grave.

The Buddha said, “Do not panic. Mañjuśrī has no intention of killing the Buddha. All this is merely the foolish stirring of your deluded minds and deluded thoughts. In reality, these events are like the dream scenes that appear in a dream: all are illusory; there are no real events. Thus, what was done in past lives is like a dream dreamt in sleep. Once one awakens, it is gone, and the mind becomes settled.”

In this way, the Buddha taught the Dharma to the arhat and settled his mind. Therefore, we must understand that the wrongs we committed in the past are all like dreams dreamt in sleep. Now that we have awakened, if we let go and empty the mind, they are gone. When the mind is empty, karmic obstacles are eliminated; if the mind is not empty, that is a problem, and one must undergo the retribution of karmic obstacles. Thus, if one gains the supernormal power of knowing past lives while the mind is not empty, afflictions will be boundless. Practitioners should work on the mind-ground at every moment and should not vainly seek spiritual powers. Only by following the right path and not entering mistaken byways can one truly transcend birth and death!