In practicing Buddhism, the first priority is Right View

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The very first priority in Buddhist practice is to establish the right view. Why do we study Buddhism? We must first establish a correct goal, then plan how to begin, what to learn, and how to cultivate. Only then can we hope to realize the intended result. As the ancient masters said: "If the ground of the cause is not upright, the resulting fruit will be distorted."

This means the initial "cause" of your practice—the "why" behind your decision to follow the Buddha—must be clarified first. If it is not clear, the final result will not be perfect. Not only will you take detours during your cultivation, but you also risk falling into dangerous, misled paths. Therefore, Right View is the most essential matter in practicing Buddhism.

Last time, we discussed at length how to practice in order to awaken to the mind and see one's true nature, how to protect and preserve the realization after seeing one's true nature, and how, at a further stage, to let it function freely. Yet many still do not fully understand this. Consequently, when people who do not practice the true Dharma speak of seemingly miraculous or supernatural things, others are easily drawn away.

In this modern age, "demonic" influences are rampant. Countless malevolent individuals use various tricks to deceive people, extort money, and lead them down wicked paths. Thus, it is critical that your view is first made upright to avoid being cheated or deceived. Today, we must once again emphasize the vital importance of Right View.

Speaking of views, there are many different types. Today, we will use this article from Chan magazine—"The Relationship Between Chan and Esoteric Buddhism"—to

explain them to everyone in a brief and concise manner: what the views of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism are, whether their methods of practice are the same, and whether the results of their realization are identical.

Beyond the five types of Buddhist views, there is another known as the 'ordinary person's view' (mundane view). The ordinary person's view clings to the idea that all phenomena are substantially real—that everything exists in a concrete, solid way. Consequently, people pursue and grasp at external things, driven by insatiable greed; because of this, they create karma, undergo its retributive effects, and remain trapped in the endless cycle of birth and death. This is the view of ordinary worldly people. In studying Buddhism, this is precisely the view we must eliminate.

According to the Buddhadharma, there are five types of views:

The first is the Human and Deva Vehicle (the Human-Heavenly Vehicle). Practitioners of this vehicle understand the law of cause and effect (karma); they strive to do good deeds, avoid doing bad deeds, help others, and sacrifice themselves. However, they do not know how to practice the Buddha Dharma, nor do they know how to cultivate the path. This is precisely the Vehicle of Humans and Devas. It can enable one to maintain their human birth without losing it, or even to ascend to heaven to enjoy blessings in the heavenly realm.

The second type is the Arhat view (the Arhat perspective). They also understand cause and effect, but they lean toward biased emptiness and fail to realize 'wondrous existence'. If everything were utterly blank and nonexistent, how could any world be established? Why would there be any need to practice Buddhadharma? The emptiness taught in Buddhism is not a vacuum of nothingness; rather, it means that phenomena are ungraspable and unobtainable. It istrue emptiness and wondrous existence, not a biased, dead emptiness.

What we call 'empty' means that Buddha-nature has no physical form to be seen—it cannot be seen or touched, and thus it is empty. Yet, it is not completely nonexistent; its spiritual nature is present, and all activities are initiated by it. Our ability to see objects, hear sounds, work, walk, and so forth, are all functions arising from Buddha-nature. All phenomenal forms are illusory appearances manifested by Buddha-nature.

If our body, eyes, ears, and so forth were without the Buddha-nature, they could not function. Likewise, apart from the Buddha-nature, all phenomena in the universe could not manifest.

For instance, once our breath stops and this body becomes like a piece of wood, it loses all consciousness. The eyes can no longer see, the ears cannot hear, the mouth

cannot speak, the limbs cannot move, and the brain cannot think—the construction of the world would be impossible.

Therefore, our current capacity to speak, see, hear, and act is entirely the functioning of Buddha-nature. Thus, this is true emptiness and wondrous existence, not a biased emptiness. Practitioners of the Two Vehicles do not understand this principle. They only empty the 'self of persons', meaning they only know that this physical body is unobtainable. While this allows them to end segmented birth and death, they turn around and cling to the reality of phenomena, believing that the 'self of phenomena' actually exists. Clinging to the 'self of phenomena' means misidentifying the four great elements (earth, water, fire, wind) within Buddha-nature as the self, believing that there is a concrete Dharma to practice, a Bodhi to attain, and a birth-and-death to end. Therefore, the Two Vehicles dwell in biased emptiness without knowing wondrous existence, becoming attached to the Dharma itself. This is what is known as 'biased empty wisdom'.

The third type is the heterodox view. It refers to those who cultivate spiritual practice while carrying heterodox misconceptions. These so-called misconceptions primarily manifest as clinging to eternalism or clinging to nihilism. Some claim that after a person dies, something must concretely remain—such as a primal dark principle that becomes inert like wood, devoid of awareness. That is incorrect. Others claim that nothing remains—that once you die, it is completely over. Thus, they argue endlessly. Concluding that things are 'eternal' means believing they exist forever; concluding that things are 'nihilistic' means believing they become entirely nonexistent. Therefore, the heterodox view consists of seeking the Dharma outside the mind and practicing while holding onto these skewed misconceptions.

The fourth type is the Bodhisattva view. This belongs to those who cultivate their spiritual practice based on a deep understanding of the law of cause and effect, as well as the principle of the 'twofold emptiness of self and phenomena'. This means recognizing that both the 'self of persons' and the 'self of phenomena' are unobtainable. As mentioned previously, the 'self of phenomena' refers to the most fundamental elements within our Buddha-nature—namely, the elemental seeds of earth, water, fire, and wind.

These seeds are just like rice seeds or wheat seeds, which grow into rice or wheat once planted. Our world and all existing things are generated by these four elemental seeds of earth, water, fire, and wind within Buddha-nature. However, if you tightly cling to these elemental seeds as a concrete real self, you are still harbouring attachment; the self of phenomena is not yet emptied, and you cannot attain the Way.

One must go a step further to realize the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena: knowing that not only are human bodies and all conventional phenomena unobtainable, but even the four elemental seeds of earth, water, fire, and wind within our Buddha-nature are entirely unobtainable. Only by doing so can one terminate both types of birth and death and attain the Way. The moment you attach to any form, a concrete thing becomes blocked in your mind, obscuring the light of your mind and preventing it from shining with perfect, radiant clarity. Therefore, even this must be completely emptied to truly attain Buddhahood. This is precisely the Bodhisattva view.

The fifth type is the Buddha view. If you can clearly understand that you yourself are a Buddha, and that all sentient beings are Buddhas—not just myself alone, but everyone is a Buddha—and you cultivate the Dharma with this understanding, that is the Buddha view.

In our study of Buddhism and practice of the Dharma, the very first priority is to establish this Buddha view: to recognize clearly that we all possess undefiled wisdom-nature as the Buddhas, which is inherently pure and originally free from defilements. This very mind is the Buddha; Buddhahood is not attained through cultivating some external method.

The only reason we suffer is that we do not understand this. We look at external things and mistake them for real, just like those holding the ordinary person's view, believing that everything outside exists in a solid, concrete way, and chasing after them with insatiable greed. If we understand that we all possess Buddha-nature, refuse to be deluded by external appearances, lay everything down, and return to our original nature, we attain Buddhahood.

Buddha is not something attained through cultivation; Buddha is originally complete and ever-present. This is why it is called the innately pure Buddha of our original nature—it has always been so. It is merely because we are deluded by external appearances that we have taken the wrong path. Grasping and coveting without satiety, we create karma and undergo its retributive effects, thereby falling into the cyclic existence of the six realms, with no end to birth and death.

The Buddha saw that we are to be pitied: although all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature, they are completely unaware of it. Living muddle-headedly, they create karma and undergo its retributive effects, needlessly enduring the bitter suffering of cyclic birth and death. It was precisely for this reason that the Buddha appeared in the world and manifested his physical form to preach the Dharma. He calls upon us all to wake up from the dream and stop clinging. If we can simply let go, we achieve Buddhahood; thus, it is incredibly fast and convenient, not an impossible hope. You must not harbour doubts, thinking: 'Oh, there is no hope for

me, my karmic obstacles are too heavy, I cannot become a Buddha.' That is an erroneous view. Therefore, the absolute priority is to ensure your view is correct.

Exoteric Buddhism teaches it this way, and Esoteric Buddhism teaches it this way as well. It also speaks of several different types of views.

The first is the ordinary person's view (mundane view). They believe that everything exists in a solid, concrete way, clinging to phenomena tightly without letting go or releasing their attachments.

The second is the heterodox view. Speculating on eternalism or nihilism is a form of attachment. Those who speculate on eternalism believe there is a concrete entity to be obtained, such as possessing a 'yang spirit' that will exist forever. What they fail to realize is that this yang spirit is actually generated by our seventh consciousness (the Manas consciousness); it is still an illusion and is not our natural Buddha-nature. Therefore, this yang spirit still has a limited lifespan.

In the past, when the Taoist Patriarch Lü Chunyang met Chan Master Huanglong, Lü believed he had cultivated a yang spirit and would never die. To his surprise, Chan Master Huanglong told him: “Even if you endure for millions of eons, in the end, you will still fall into the great void.” At most, you may live much longer than ordinary people, but after a million eons, you will still return to nothingness.

Because whatever has a birth must have a death—without death, how could there be birth? This is dialectics; since it has already been born into existence, it must inevitably perish in the future. Our Buddha-nature, however, is inherently natural, unborn and undying. It was never born at any specific moment; therefore, we say that since time immemorial, it has always been exactly like this.

The third type is the Sravaka view, which is the Arhat view. That is to say, they speak of the principle of biased emptiness and fail to realize the wondrous existence of Buddha-nature.

The fourth is the Consciousness-Only view. What is Consciousness-Only? It is the Dharma Characteristics School (Faxiang School) of China. The Cheng Weishi Lun (Treatise on the Establishment of Consciousness-Only), brought back from India by Master Xuanzang after his pilgrimage for scriptures, is the most vital scriptural treatise of the Dharma-Character School. It teaches the Three Natures: first, the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment; second, the nature of dependence on others; and third, the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

What is the dependent nature? It means that all things and phenomena arise by depending on other factors. For example, this cup did not originally exist; it was

porcelain clay placed into a kiln and fired to become a cup. This table did not originally exist either; it was crafted from wood.

In Buddhist scriptures, this is called 'arising from causes and conditions' —meaning things are born from the convergence of relationships and conditions. This is why it is called the dependent nature. Looking from the perspective of the dependent nature, nothing possesses an independent, intrinsic self-entity; everything relies on other elements coming together. Since things fundamentally do not exist on their own, one stops attaching to forms, advances into the perfected nature, and beholds their original nature. Conversely, if you attach to forms, fail to recognize the illusion of dependent arising, and chase after these things believing they are substantially real, that is nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment.

This means universally and tightly clinging to things as real, which is sheer delusion. Therefore, the first state is a deluded view, while the second state is recognizing that all things fundamentally lack a solid reality and are illusory and unreal, thereby remaining unattached. Non-attachment is letting go; by letting go, one realizes their original nature—the perfected nature.

The fifth type is the Madhyamaka View, or Middle Way View. It teaches that all phenomena are originally devoid of inherent existence: this is true emptiness and wondrous existence, conditioned arising and emptiness. All things arise through the convergence of causes and conditions; in themselves, they possess no fixed essence.

The sixth type is the Innate View. This means that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, and all are Buddhas. Do not look down upon yourself, harbor feelings of inferiority, or think, 'I am just an ordinary unenlightened being, not a Buddha.' You must boldly take responsibility and declare: 'I am a Buddha.' Because you can shoulder this responsibility and know that you are a Buddha, your conduct must align with the level of a Buddha.

You must truly be able to lay everything down, allow the wondrous function to arise freely, and live with complete openness, ease, and spontaneous freedom. Therefore, our recognition that we are Buddhas must be continuously sustained by and aligned with wondrous conduct—wiping out all our past attachments and bad habits to fully restore our original nature. This is precisely our Great Wisdom.

The final type is the Great Perfection view (the Dzogchen perspective). The Great Perfection view dictates that all 'wondrous existence' is the manifestation of my own Buddha nature; nature is appearance, and appearance is nature—nature and appearance are non-dual. It is simultaneously empty and existing; existence is emptiness, and emptiness is existence—every form of existence is the manifestation of my wondrous nature.

Therefore, one does not see the nature outside of appearance, nor does one grasp appearance outside of the nature; all appearances are manifested by our wondrous nature. For example, when building a house, an engineer must first design the blueprints. While designing the blueprints, they must use their brain to think about how to construct it and calculate how much material is required; all of this must process through the brain.

But how is the brain's function activated in the first place? It relies entirely on our Buddha-nature to function. If a person's heart stops beating and they have died, but the brain remains physically undamaged, why can the brain no longer function? It is because Buddha-nature has departed from the body, so it ceases to operate.

This is just like an electric lamp: after the power grid and wiring are fully installed, if the electricity is not turned on, the lamp will not light up; it only shines once the electricity flows through it. Buddha-nature is equivalent to that electricity. All of these functions are the functions of Buddha-nature, and all appearances are created, manifested, and perceived by Buddha-nature.

Therefore, all appearances are myself, and I am all appearances—this is precisely the Great Perfection view. It is simultaneously existing and empty; it is neither empty nor existing, yet it is neither non-existing nor non-empty. If you say it is empty, there clearly exist the great trichiliocosm and its myriad phenomena; if you say it exists, all appearances are utterly unobtainable, being nothing more than reflections in a mirror.

For our Buddha-nature is itself the 'Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom', brilliantly illuminating the ten directions of the great cosmos. Consequently, where there is Buddha-nature, there are all appearances; these appearances are the wondrous function of our mind and the manifestation of our Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature itself has no physical form to be seen, yet it can manifest everything. Therefore, appearance is our original nature. This is the Great Perfection view.

Now, we must establish our view correctly and recognize that we are not a blank vacuum of nothingness. The Chan school states that we must know 'wondrous existence', which points to the fact that our Buddha-nature is inherently present. Although Buddha-nature has no physical form to be seen, it can initiate all wondrous functions and manifest all temporary, illusory appearances. Once we recognize that these illusory appearances are simply the reflections of our own nature, and we refuse to cling to them, our spiritual practice will progress rapidly.

Because we cling neither to emptiness nor to existence, we can attain the Way; thus, ensuring the view is correct is the absolute first priority. It is not about emptying things out until nothing remains, leaning into a dead emptiness, and discarding absolutely everything—that is another grave mistake.

In ancient Greece, the great philosopher Socrates investigated philosophy and also discovered that all things are unobtainable; thus, people of great wisdom all recognize that phenomenal appearances are empty and unobtainable. However, he fell into a biased emptiness and did not know wondrous existence, so he rejected all physical possessions.

He would sleep in open drainage ditches at night, having abandoned housing altogether, and carried nothing but a single cup tied to his belt to scoop water from the river to drink. One day, he saw a child playing outside who was scooping up water with both hands to drink. Upon seeing this, he realized, 'Oh, even the cup is unnecessary,' and he threw the cup away, using only his cupped hands to drink. That is far too biased toward emptiness.

Therefore, heterodox views consist of either speculating on eternalism or clinging to nihilism. Today, many Qigong practitioners cling to existence; they are attached to the presence of Qi, becoming stuck on form and eternalist views regarding Essence, Qi, and Spirit, completely unaware that these are merely temporary, illusory phenomena rather than the ultimate reality. Heterodox paths call Essence, Qi, and Spirit the 'Three Treasures,' but their fundamental source actually lies within our Buddha-nature. Without Buddha-nature, Essence, Qi, and Spirit could never arise; they are generated entirely by our Buddha-nature. Therefore, we must recognize the root.

In our study and practice of Buddhism, the very first priority is to establish our view correctly. Our Buddha-nature is neither empty nor existing. If you say it exists, it possesses no physical form to be grasped; if you say it is empty, it possesses a wondrous function that manifests all appearances and initiates all activities—it can speak, hear, work, and walk.

It is neither empty nor existing; it clings to neither side, nor does it establish a middle ground. If there are no two sides, there is no middle ground to speak of; a middle only exists when there are two sides. If you study Buddhism with this insight, you will naturally realize the perfect result and achieve Buddhahood. Therefore, the correct view is extraordinarily important.

Today, I am raising this point regarding the correct view once more with all of you, so that you may recognize the true perspective. Do not lean into a dead emptiness and believe that absolutely nothing exists. Even less should you cling to existence, believing that everything is solidly real, chasing after things with insatiable greed—that is even more incorrect.

Therefore, we neither lean toward emptiness nor cling to existence. In all affairs, we respond to conditions and apply the mind accordingly; whatever we have today, we accept and utilize to that extent, without comparing ourselves to others. Our

greatest mistake is comparing ourselves to others. People think, 'Ah, others have garden villas and I don't; I must find a way to get a garden villa.' Or, 'Others travel in luxury cars and I don't;

I must find a way to get one too.' When they cannot obtain these things through normal means, they do not hesitate to commit evil deeds, even resorting to murder and arson, thereby creating karma and undergoing retribution. If we understand this principle, we will follow conditions in all things—if it is there, it is there; if it is not, we do not forcefully seek it. Everything is a temporary, illusory appearance. Each person has his own karmic causes and conditions, because the deeds and karma created by each individual are not the same.

Just as people pursue different occupations and endeavours, the karma they create differs, and therefore the fruits they reap inevitably differ as well. Some people have high incomes, so their material enjoyment is slightly better; some people have low incomes, so their enjoyment is slightly lesser—it is impossible to equalize everyone. What is the reason? It is because the karma created in past lives was different.

The past life is the cause, and this life is the fruit. Because the causes created in the past were different, the fruits experienced in this life are also different. In this life, we work and create karma all over again; often, to satisfy our own desires, we bully others or tear them down just so we can climb higher, thereby doing evil deeds.

Therefore, in the course of one's activities and undertakings, there are times when one does good and times when one does wrong; human beings are a mixture of good and evil. If a being had no evil whatsoever, they would ascend to the heavens and would not be born in the human realm.

Within the Six Realms of Samsara, those with a mixture of good and evil enter the human realm; those with pure goodness and no evil ascend to the heavens; and those with pure evil—fully beset by greed, anger, and ignorance—descend into the hells. Those with particularly heavy anger enter the Asura realm; those with particularly heavy greed enter the Hungry Ghost realm; and those with particularly heavy ignorance enter the Animal realm. Everything is created solely by the mind; it is all of your own making, and you must bear your own consequences—it is not governed or dictated by anyone else.

To learn the Buddha Dharma and realize the Path is a great blessing and a great store of merit. Among the countless multitude of sentient beings, how many actually believe in Buddhism? Very few. The number of people who believein Buddhism is already small compared to those who do not; but among those who do claim to believe, how many truly believe and deeply understand the law of cause and effect? Fewer still.

Many who claim to believe in Buddhism merely burn incense, bow to statues, and pray for the Buddha's blessings to gain worldly rewards. This kind of belief cannot be considered true faith in Buddhism. True faith requires understanding that you yourself are a Buddha and that all sentient beings are Buddhas. Driven by this realization, one puts in the spiritual effort to completely wipe out the deluded mind, deluded thoughts, and deluded notions rooted in the attachment of greed, anger, and ignorance, thereby perfectly completing the Buddha Path.

Therefore, our current genuine faith in Buddhism represents an immeasurable, boundless store of blessings and virtue—this is the only way to escape the Six Realms of Samsara. For everyone here today to come together to study Buddhism and cultivate the Way is an immense blessing. Thus, it is vital to guide everyone onto the correct path: which is to recognize that we are all Buddhas, all sentient beings are Buddhas, and as long as we simply let go, we can attain Buddhahood. This is of paramount importance.

Speaking of our practice, what we now transmit is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, a supreme teaching within Esoteric Buddhism. As we mentioned last time, Esoteric Buddhism presents a sequence of nine vehicles: three outer vehicles, three inner vehicles, and three secret vehicles.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma belongs to the highest level of the three secret vehicles —the final, unexcelled Great Perfection teaching with which it accords, corresponding to the Dzogchen of the Nyingma (Red) School. You may wonder: Dzogchen is the highest teaching of the Nyingma School, yet the Heart-of-Heart Dharma itself does not belong to the Nyingma Dzogchen tradition. How, then, can they correspond? Let us explain.

Nyingma Dzogchen has two parts. One is Trekchö ("cutting through"): the moment a deluded thought arises, cut it off at once, do not wander after it, and let the true mind appear. The other is Tögal ("direct crossing" or "leap-over"): through this practice one transcends the three realms and ends the round of birth and death. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma practices precisely this cutting through and direct crossing.

It is a formless esoteric method that uses one mantra and six mudrās to realize one's true nature directly, without cultivating visualized forms as a transition. Form-based methods require one first to establish a visualized form and then dissolve it into emptiness before realizing the original nature; this entails many detours and does not allow immediate cutting through and direct crossing.

Our true nature is formless; it cannot be seen, touched, or heard. Because people often find it impossible to know where to begin, Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism (Vajrayana) takes a more circuitous route. Practitioners must first complete the Four

Preliminary Practices (Ngöndro), such as performing great prostrations, and then engage in visualization practices. By generating a visualized form, they establish a starting point from which they can progress further to practice the Dharma for realizing true nature.

In the Dzogchen practice of Trekchö ("cutting through"), one must also initially cultivate the subtle winds, channels, and drops (Prana, Nadi, and Bindu). Practice begins with the winds, visualizing the subtle channels, namely the three channels and seven chakras. (The three channels are the central, left, and right channels; the seven chakras are the crown, brow, throat, heart, navel, dantian, and root chakras). Once these forms are successfully visualized, one then visualizes them as empty.

This is known as the preliminary practice for Dzogchen Trekchö, which serves as an expedient skillful means before the main practice.

Our method uses six mudrās and one mantra and requires no visualization of channels. Here and now, we gather the deluded mind entirely onto a single mantra. That is, when reciting, recite with the mind and listen with the ears. Recite the mantra with the mind, and listen clearly with the ears to the sound of your own recitation. This restrains the wandering thoughts of the mind faculty, stops deluded thoughts from moving, and enables one to enter deep samādhi immediately.

This practice is precisely Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration via the Ear Faculty. Among the six faculties of sentient beings in this Saha World, the ear faculty is the sharpest and most sensitive. For instance, while the eyes can see many things and look deep into the distance, they can be completely blocked by a single sheet of paper. The ears are different; even when separated by a great mountain, sounds can still be heard.

Furthermore, if a person is asleep, holding a piece of paper before their eyes will not wake them, but calling out to them will awaken them instantly. Therefore, the faculty of hearing is the most sensitive, and using it to practice is best.

The Surangama Sutra explains this very clearly. Twenty-five Great Masters (all great Bodhisattvas) presented their respective methods of cultivation. Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara stated that he entered realization through the faculty of hearing. In the end, the Buddha asked Manjushri Bodhisattva to select which sense faculty would be the most appropriate and fastest for the sentient beings of the Saha World to use in their practice. Manjushri Bodhisattva selected Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration via the Ear Faculty.

Because the faculty of hearing is the sharpest, we now use it to listen to the sound of our own mantra chanting, thereby holding the mind faculty steady so that the

sixth consciousness no longer moves. Practicing in this way is even more direct than the Great Perfection teaching, even more a direct ‘cutting through.’

Everyone should pay close attention: when practicing, you must recite with the mind and listen with the ears. You must practice in accordance with the proper method. Under no circumstances should the mouth recite the mantra while the mind is occupied with other things. Mere recitation without wholehearted attention is useless. The same applies to reciting the Buddha’s name. If one recites ‘Amitabha Buddha’ with the mouth while the mind remains scattered and filled with chaotic thoughts, the Buddha-name cannot truly take hold. In the future, one will not be able to ascend to the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, because the mind is too disturbed.

When the mind is not pure and calm, even if the Buddha appears before you, you will not perceive him. Master Yongming Yanshou—who was both a great patriarch of Chan Buddhism and also a great patriarch of the Pure Land tradition (he was a Dharma-descendant of the Fayan School and later devoted himself to the Pure Land path)—said: ‘If the mouth recites Amitabha while the mind is scattered, even shouting until the throat breaks is futile.’ Why did he say this?

He explained that the mind is like water. When the water of the mind becomes clear and still, it is like the calm water of a river reflecting the moon in the sky.

Amitabha is like the moon in the heavens, while our mind is like water. If the water is not still and clear, the moon’s reflection cannot appear. Likewise, if the mind is not pure and tranquil, Amitabha Buddha cannot manifest within your mind. Then you will not see Amitabha coming to receive you, and you will not attain rebirth in the Pure Land.

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva taught us to "gather in the six sense faculties and sustain pure mindfulness in continuous succession." With the single sacred name of Amitābha, gather in the six faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—and recite "Amitābha Buddha" with clarity and stillness until the mind becomes one-pointed and undistracted; only then can one attain rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. We know that among the six faculties, the mind faculty is the most difficult to rein in. The moment you quiet down, deluded thoughts come rushing in.

Because the mind is accustomed to constant movement, you don't even notice its turbulence until you try to sit still. Sometimes your mind is totally chaotic, yet you remain unaware; it is only after sitting in stillness that these thoughts become easily visible. Why is this so? Because when water becomes clear and still, the mud and sand settle to the bottom and become visible. If the water is disturbed, the mud and sand cannot be seen. Likewise, once we sit quietly, we begin to see our deluded thoughts and inverted thinking clearly.

It is incredibly difficult to master the upside-down movements of deluded thoughts and prevent them from arising. This is exactly why we must employ the method of reciting with the mind and listening with the ears to firmly grasp and rein in the six faculties. By doing so, we cut off wandering thoughts, allow the body and mind to completely drop away, and our original Buddha-nature naturally manifests. Therefore, practicing strictly in accordance with the Dharma is exceptionally important; if your cultivation deviates from the proper method, you will not be able to realize your true nature.

Everyone has been practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for a long time now, so you ought to have achieved some level of accomplishment. Why is that? Because you are already a Buddha from the very beginning; as long as you are willing to let go, you can restore your original nature and realize the Way. Having practiced for so long, why is it still not working? It is simply because your practice has not been in accordance with the proper method.

The first type of person who fails to practice properly is the one who sits on and off, stopping and starting constantly. They sit for a bit today, but tomorrow they say they aren't feeling well or are too busy with work, and so they let their practice slide. Cultivating this way simply will not work. It is just like cooking rice: if you take it off the heat before it is fully cooked, let it cool down, and then try to cook it again before taking it off once more, the rice will turn out hard, ruined, and uncookable. Our Dharma practice and cultivation is exactly like rowing a boat against the current—if you do not exert continuous effort to push the boat forward, it will inevitably be swept downstream by the water. Therefore, practicing in an intermittent and broken manner yields no good results.

The second type of improper practice is failing to recite with the mind and listen with the ears. The ears are not actually listening; instead, while the mouth recites the mantra, the mind spins deluded thoughts: "How should I handle this matter? How should I resolve that issue?" This is not in accord with the Dharma. The deluded mind cannot be cut off; and if it cannot be cut off, how can you break through to your original nature? How can you see your true nature?

The third critical reason is the failure to maintain meditative awareness and contemplation after leaving the meditation cushion—simply forgetting all about it. On the cushion, one practices the Dharma with utmost diligence and sincerity, but once they step down, they immediately turn with every stray thought and run after external circumstances. This is exactly like giving a plant one day of sun followed by ten days of cold; consequently, it is very difficult to make any real progress in one's spiritual cultivation.

This is especially true in times like the present, where everyone plays the stock market, for instance, and their entire mind becomes consumed by it: 'Oh, is the stock I bought making money? Did the price go up? Did it drop? Did I lose my capital?' One spins in these upside-down, deluded thoughts instead of maintaining mindful awareness. True cultivation requires constant, moment-to-moment awareness. The very instant a thought arises, you must perceive it and refuse to run after it. You must clearly and vividly recognize that this very capacity to speak, to see, and to hear is your original nature, and you must remain completely unmoved by external environments for the practice to work. If these shortcomings are not corrected, you cannot realize the Way.

The ultimate purpose of practicing the Dharma is to break through to our original nature and see it directly. In our cultivation of Heart-of-Heart Dharma, as long as we practice strictly in accordance with the proper method, we can certainly do so quickly. In our practice, when we recite the mantra to the point where recitation becomes completely impossible, suddenly, the reciting mind and the recited mantra fall away together. Internally, the body and mind, and externally, the world, dissolve into emptiness together, and even the void itself is shattered.

Yet, this is not a state of total annihilation or dead emptiness; clear, vivid, thought-free luminous knowing remains, and that is precisely the manifestation of our true nature. After our true nature manifests, the accumulated habits and tendencies from many past lifetimes still remain, as they have not yet been completely eliminated. Therefore, in the Great Perfection (Dzogchen), one must still practice Tögal to protect and nurture this true nature, allowing deluded habits to gradually fade away while spiritual realization and experience grow. This is precisely what we call post-awakening preservation: one must carefully protect one's true nature.

When it comes to the Main Practice, one no longer speaks of "having a practice." Whether one is practicing or not practicing is merely a pair of extremes of dualistic speech; simply maintaining constant contemplation and awareness at all times to eradicate one's own habits is itself the path. However, the Great Perfection (Dzogchen) requires the contemplation of light to transform the physical body into a rainbow body, whereas our Formless Heart Esotericism practice follows the principles of the Chan school and does not cling to bodily appearances. Therefore, we do not emphasize whether one transforms into a rainbow body or not. If one clings to the idea of the body transforming into a rainbow body, they will instead be rebuked as "a mere wandering spirit within the universe," rendering them unable to attain the complete realization of the holy fruit.

We are originally Buddha, therefore realizing our true nature is not difficult. Now we can directly use Chan koans to explain to everyone what the true nature is and point directly to immediate realization of it. Chan Buddhism directly points people to the

realization of their true nature; originally there was no need to investigate any huatou.

For example, you might ask the master, ‘What is Buddha?’ The master may point directly and say, ‘Who else but the one right before you, conversing clearly at this very moment, is Buddha?’ Or he may simply tell you, ‘You yourself are Buddha!’ Or he may call out to you, and when you respond, say, ‘Just this is it!’ and so forth. When Bodhidharma came from India, he taught direct pointing to the human mind so that one could see one’s nature and become Buddha. There was originally no special ‘method of effort’ involved.

Later, however, because people’s capacities became duller, they did not dare—or were unwilling—to truly accept such direct pointing, thinking there was nothing remarkable about it. Therefore, the patriarchs changed the method into investigating huatou (critical phrase), which developed after the Song dynasty. In investigating a huatou (critical phrase), one arouses a sense of doubt and uses it to block and cut off deluded thoughts, thereby breaking through to one's original nature. But this adds another gate to pass through and takes a somewhat roundabout route.

In the form-based schools of Esoteric Buddhism, it is only at the very end that they directly point out what the inherent nature is. This is called "Disclosing and Instructing on the Realization of the Core Principle". To "realize the core principle" simply means to make us understand our own inherent nature—it is exactly "seeing into one's nature," meaning that they directly point it out for you to see into your nature. Therefore, the highest and most profound Esoteric Buddhism is precisely Chan; Chan is the Unsurpassed Esotericism, the highest level of Esoteric Dharma. Chan and Esotericism are no different.

It is a mistake to look at Esotericism and Chan as two different things; Chan is Esotericism, and Esotericism is Chan. At the very beginning, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma teaches: “Take Chan as the essence and Esoteric practice as the function.” That is, one makes provisional use of mantras and mudras, relying on the Buddha’s empowering blessing to break through to one's original nature and personally realize the inherent nature. Once you have realized the inherent nature, take the Pure Land as the ultimate destination—returning to the One True Dharma Realm, the Eternal Quiescent Light Pure Land.

The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss consists of four lands: the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages, the Land of Expedient Means with Residue, the Land of True Reward and Adornment, and the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. The Land of Eternal Quiescent Light means that the entire expanse of empty space

and the Dharma Realm is itself Pure Land; there is no fixed location and no distinction of east, south, west, or north—it is all Pure Land.

Because our Dharmakāya is itself the One True Dharma Realm, it pervades empty space and the Dharma Realm without division into places and without defilement or purity. If there were something called purity, it would not be ultimate; without defilement, how could purity be established? It is therefore unstained by a speck of dust, utterly unencumbered, and establishes not a single dharma. Thus, unless one reaches this Pure Land, realization is not ultimate; one must realize that the ten directions are all Pure Land.

Last time we also pointed this out directly to everyone: this Buddha-nature is not somewhere else. It is precisely the thought-free luminous knowing at the very place where a single thought ceases. When all delusive thoughts are laid down and not a single one arises, it is not that you are devoid of knowing; rather, there is still a vivid and distinct clarity. This utterly clear and vivid knowing is precisely our Buddha-nature. Therefore, recognizing one's nature is not difficult.

Do not sit there playing guessing games: "Oh, I have awakened to the Way, I saw yellow, red, or green things." That has absolutely nothing to do with it; that is just seeing ghosts! To see one’s true nature is to see without anything being seen—there’s absolutely nothing there.

For instance, if all of you cut off your thoughts right now and think of absolutely nothing, all phenomena will still remain within your field of vision. Yet, you do not cling to any particular object or any particular person. Although there may be many people and many objects present, there is seeing without anything being seen—you do not conceptually identify who is Zhang San and who is Li Si, what this is or what that is. This thought-free luminous knowing possesses the capacity for seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing, is precisely our inherent nature.

If I see Zhang San, Li Si, a teacup, or an umbrella, then that is a problem — that is attachment to appearances. The sūtra says, "When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing." If there is something you perceive as an object, then it is not true seeing. Therefore, "seeing cannot reach it," and "seeing must be free from seeing." Only when you leave behind your own subject-object seeing do you realize true seeing.

That seeing in which nothing is grasped as seen is precisely your Buddha-nature. Thus, to see appearances without clinging to appearances—to see without fixing on an object—is true seeing. This is why awakening to the mind and seeing one's true nature is not difficult. Some people boast: “My Buddhadharma is excellent. Come study with me, and in six months—no, not even six days, not even six hours—I will make you realize your nature.” In reality, realizing your nature doesn’t even take a

single minute; you can be guided to understand and see your true nature right this very moment.

However, people often lack the courage to accept it when it's right in front of them. They think, "Is this really it? Probably not. If this is truly my inherent nature, why haven't I developed spiritual powers?" Everyone is obstructed and deluded by the idea of spiritual powers.

In fact, they do not understand what spiritual powers really are. We speak, and others hear us—is this not already a spiritual power? If it were not for this wondrous spiritual functioning, the body could neither hear nor speak. The body is like a robot: without electricity, it cannot move. Your ability to speak and hear at this very moment is the wondrous functioning of the Buddha-nature.

Buddha-nature is all-capable, and so it is called ‘miraculous’ (shen); it is all-inclusive and lacking in nothing, and so it is called 'unobstructed' (tong). The Buddha-nature is capable of everything and reaches everywhere without obstruction. But the moment you cling to appearances, you become obstructed. If you fixate on looking at this cup, you miss everything else—and so you are no longer unobstructed. If you don't cling, there are no roadblocks; everything falls within your field of vision, and you are perfectly penetrating and unobstructed.

Thus, every wondrous function is a spiritual power. Layman Pang said, “Carrying water and hauling firewood are spiritual powers and wondrous functions.” People are constantly amidst these marvellous powers without realizing it. They imagine that spiritual powers mean being able to do what others cannot do—what a tragic misunderstanding!

In reality, the Three Clear Insights and Six Spiritual Powers are not difficult either. Why? Because practitioners first realize their nature, then gradually eliminate their old habitual tendencies, and only afterward attain these powers. The great Chan masters said: “Once the root is attained, there is no need to worry about the branches.” When you first awaken to the Way, you have understood the principle, but you cannot yet pass freely through the realm of concrete events.

At this stage, you cannot yet liberate yourself, because the habitual tendencies accumulated over countless lifetimes still remain and obscure the wondrous functioning of the original nature. Only when these habitual tendencies are removed can spiritual powers naturally manifest. This corresponds to what the Great Perfection teachings call the "main practice." Therefore, after realizing one's true nature, one must continue to practice diligently, moment after moment cutting off wandering thoughts and protecting the realization. All appearances are unattainable; do not abide in or cling to anything. When the conditions mature, complete realization of the noble fruition will naturally follow.

Do not think for a moment that this initial awakening is useless; your future manifestation of great spiritual powers and attainment of the Great Way depend entirely upon this very initial awakening. If you do not understand this true nature, you will have no place to begin your genuine practice. You must recognize this inherent nature and protect it so that you can cultivate effectively; this is why it is called "true cultivation after awakening."

Protecting this realization is just like caring for a newborn baby; when an infant is first born, they cannot perform any functions, and they must rely on an adult to protect them. However, you cannot claim that the baby is not a human being simply because they cannot perform any functions yet. They are human beings; you just need to protect them until they grow up. Therefore, this single point of awakening to the Way is what matters most; everyone must avoid taking it lightly. Maintain seamless protection, and the very moment a thought arises, cut it off immediately.

Some people have completely misunderstood this, believing that simply seeing a thought clearly is enough—this is a grave mistake! To clearly see and then dwell upon a thought is to add delusion on top of delusion; it is not your inherent nature. Only that which remains utterly clear and vivid at the exact point where thoughts are cut off is the inherent nature.

Merely seeing a thought arise has nothing to do with it; if you see a thought arise and then attach to it, you are just an ordinary being. By treating that thought as real, you have strayed onto a mistaken path. When you see a thought arise, you must refuse to run after it and cut it off instead—you must never get this wrong! When doing the work of protection, the more seamless and continuous your protection is, the better.

All forms and appearances are merely shadows manifested by our true nature; in other words, they are our transformation body (Nirmāṇakāya). Everything is a transformation and expression of our true mind; all things are our transformation body.

We seek to accomplish the three bodies of the Buddha—the Dharma Body, Reward Body, and Manifestation Body. Right now, at the very place where a thought is cut off and yet there is clear and vivid awareness, that is our Dharma Body (Dharmakāya). The luminous clarity that shines upon all things is our Reward Body (Saṃbhogakāya). And all things, being but shadows manifested by our Buddha-nature—when we neither cling to them nor pursue them—that is our Manifestation Body (Nirmāṇakāya).

The Dharma Body, Reward Body, and Manifestation Body are all fully present. Is this not Buddhahood realized here and now?! Therefore, becoming a Buddha is not difficult. Do not say that Buddhahood is something remote and hard to attain.

Everyone is already Buddha; everyone can realize it at this very moment. The three bodies can all be perfected instantly and completely. Do not push Buddhahood so far away that it appears unattainable, nor imagine the path to be so complex and difficult.

It is mistaken to cling to an inferior mentality, thinking, “We are merely ordinary beings, while becoming sages and patriarchs belongs only to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.” One must personally acknowledge and take responsibility for this truth: I am Buddha; all sentient beings are Buddha; there is no being that is not Buddha. At all times remain without abiding anywhere, and thereby perfect the dignity and character of Buddhahood within ourselves.

Since you are a Buddha, act with the character of a Buddha: a Buddha dwells on nothing and clings to absolutely nothing. One may carry out all activities freely, for our Buddha-nature is capable of manifesting every wondrous function and can do all things. Yet in doing everything, there is no attachment and nothing gained. Thus, becoming Buddha means realizing a state in which there is absolutely nothing to attain. Do not recklessly chase after spiritual powers.

To think that possessing spiritual powers makes you a Buddha is completely wrong! Chasing after spiritual powers will not only fail to grant them to you, but may instead cause you to fall into demonic deviation. Buddha and demon are just like two sides of the same hand: being perfectly clear and unattached to forms right here is Buddha; becoming attached to forms right there is a demon.

The moment you delight in yourself and proclaim, 'Oh, I've become a Buddha, I have spiritual powers now,' you haven't become a Buddha—you've become a demon. Because spiritual powers are inherently possessed by everyone; they are not unique to you, they are exactly the same for all. What is there to marvel at or boast about? Therefore, there is no room for self-congratulation. When everything is recognized as ungraspable and nothing is attained, only then do you truly become a Buddha.

When you truly become a Buddha, even "Buddha" itself cannot be attained. This is what Master Zhaozhou meant by, "The very word 'Buddha' is one I do not delight in hearing." Therefore, do not constantly abide in the thought, "I am a Buddha." The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment states this clearly: ‘Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing And in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality’

The realm of illusory thoughts refers to the mountains, rivers, the great earth, and the dense forests of grass and trees—these things are precisely what our illusory thoughts have accumulated into, which happens because we fail to understand the active function of our true nature. Once we understand, these realms are all manifestations of Buddha-nature and transformations of the Dharma Body. Yet we

must never give rise to a "knowing mind" or dwell in the thought of having attained Buddhahood. Still less should one give rise to thoughts that divide reality into true and false, real and unreal.

Therefore, after awakening, all delusive thoughts, delusive notions and the deluded mind itself are transformed entirely into the wondrous functioning of our Buddha-nature. Let me give you another annotation today: the wandering mind, illusory thoughts, and deluded notions—clinging to forms is exactly what makes them 'illusory.' Conversely, if you do not cling to forms, every single thought is the wondrous functioning of our Buddha-nature;

every single thought is the wondrous functioning that accomplishes all things—they are entirely the wondrous functioning of our Buddha-nature. For Buddha-nature to give rise to its wondrous functioning, one cannot just sit there, guarding it and remaining motionless. That is merely hiding behind the black mountain, sitting inside a ghost cave—you cannot achieve Buddhahood that way; even if you sit there for tens of millions of years, you will never achieve Buddhahood.

This is because one remains lifelessly fixed there in immobility, completely ignorant of what a Buddha truly is. The Buddha is precisely this: manifesting boundless, wondrous functions right now without clinging to any appearances. It is capable of speaking, explaining, executing, and performing all manners of work, entirely without dwelling or attachment. It is dynamically alive, a vibrantly awake, luminous, and wondrous true mind—this is the true Buddha. Therefore, everyone must pay close attention and be skillful at discerning what a true Buddha is, so that you do not follow heterodox or deviant paths.

Nowadays, demonic and heretical paths are widespread—they are everywhere, actively deceiving people, which makes it very difficult for someone to tell them apart at first glance. However, discerning the truth is actually not that difficult. You can listen to their words and observe their actions to see if their speech and behaviour align. If they say one thing but do another, it is fundamentally the teaching of a demon.

Furthermore, some people commit evil acts, give them a pleasant-sounding name, and then say, “I am using this to temper your discriminating mind and your attachments.” To do wrong oneself and yet claim to be training others—this is nothing but shameless, self-deceiving talk that deceives others as well. Therefore, we must carefully examine whether a person's conduct is upright and proper. We should not merely listen to their wild claims and accept them as the truth.

Everyone must understand that the purpose of our Dharma practice is to recover our true nature and personally realize our inherent nature. After personally realizing this inherent nature, we must maintain continuous cultivation amidst daily

situations and circumstances at every single moment, in order to eradicate our deluded habits.

Under no circumstances should you seek the Dharma outside of the mind, nor should you focus your attention on subtle winds, channels, or visions of light. You must know that our inherent nature is the Great Treasury of Radiant Light. It is not a matter of merely catching a glimpse of some red, white, or black light. It is a grand radiance that luminously illuminates all ten directions—a great light through which the pure lands of the ten directions simultaneously manifest. This is not something you can attain right now.

At present, your primary requirement is to achieve awakening and realize your true nature. That is to say, you must understand that the state where a single thought is cut off, yet remains thoroughly and vividly aware, is the Buddha-nature. It is not that the arising of thought is Buddha-nature. Nor is it merely witnessing the arising of thought that is Buddha-nature. Rather, when you see a thought arise and do not follow it, then at the point where the thought is cut off, what remains clearly and luminously aware is the Buddha-nature. This point must not be misunderstood.

Furthermore, thoughts that are free from attachment to appearances are the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature, whereas thoughts that cling to appearances become delusive thinking and create karma. This distinction must be clearly understood and not confused. Today I have explained plainly and without ambiguity what it means to see the nature and realize Buddhahood, what constitutes delusive thinking, and what constitutes wondrous function. I have pointed these out clearly so that you will not stray onto a mistaken path.

Once you possess a reliable way of orthodox teaching versus demonic delusion, you will be less likely to go astray or be deceived by others. Otherwise, even if someone were teaching a demonic path, you would not recognize it as such. I hope you all practice diligently. The Pure Land teaching is also excellent. To single-mindedly recite the Buddha's name and be reborn in the Pure Land is a very good path. Better still is to awaken to your nature and realize Buddhahood here and now, while also making the vow to be reborn in the Pure Land, thereby attaining the highest grade of rebirth.

Therefore, practice deeply in one path. Do not drift from teaching to teaching, for such wandering brings little result. Commit yourselves wholeheartedly to a single practice and cultivate diligently. While practicing, you must absolutely recite with the mind and listen with the ears. Upon leaving the meditation seat, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, maintain constant awareness and contemplation, and gradually eradicate your habitual delusive tendencies. The moment you become

attached to appearances, you have gone wrong. Never cling to appearances. Take care!