Teachings on the Seven-Day Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma Retreat

Writings of Master Yuanyin

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Teachings on Seven-Day Retreats in the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma

Before Taking the Seat

Today, everyone has aroused the resolve to undertake a seven-day retreat using the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma. This is indeed a supreme and excellent convergence of causes and conditions. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is a profound Dharma gate of Esoteric Buddhism, belonging to the summit—the heart-essence portion—of The Nine Vehicles of Esoteric Buddhism.

It does not require one to circle about on the periphery through such practices as the four preliminary practices, preliminary practices, the generation stage, and the completion stage. Rather, it enters directly into the main practice: using mudrās and

mantras, relying on the Buddha's empowering force, opening one's intrinsic nature, and thoroughly seeing the true mind.

A seven-day retreat is an essential method for attaining realization within a fixed period. Each day, everyone sits for twelve hours, practicing three sessions of four hours each. In the first two sessions, practice the fourth mudrā; in the final session, practice the second mudrā. If your hands become painful during practice, you may also change to the fourth mudrā for the final two hours—that is, the eleventh and twelfth hours.

The fourth mudrā opens wisdom and enables one to realize the Way, while the second mudrā eliminates obstructions. Since our karmic obstacles and habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives are deeply entrenched, wisdom cannot unfold unless they are eliminated. On the seventh day, sit for eighteen hours, six hours per session, practicing only the fourth mudrā and no longer the second.

During the seven-day retreat, do not be anxious to enter samādhi, much less seek spiritual powers or awakening. For as soon as the mind seeks attainment, dark clouds arise and obscure the light of intrinsic nature; instead, one will neither enter samādhi nor awaken. When taking the seat, simply practice in accordance with the Dharma as you ordinarily meditate. If at times the mind is as chaotic as tangled hemp, you may recite the mantra aloud to calm the deluded mind.

When meditating, if you cough, keep the sound as low as possible and cover your mouth, so as not to disturb others. If numbness in your legs becomes unbearable, you may shift your position, though you should endure it as much as possible. Under no circumstances may the mudrā be released. When a thought arises, simply see it arise and do not follow it. If you fail to see the thought arise and only realize after following it for a long time, this is a major taboo in practice.

An ancient worthy said, “Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only that awareness comes too late.” Therefore, when thoughts arise, you must see them immediately and not follow them. It is also not good to suppress thoughts and prevent them from arising; simply let them arise without following their wandering. When entering samādhi, the mantra can no longer be recited. Do not deliberately try to bring it up; let it be, for the moment you raise it, you emerge from samādhi. Yet entering samādhi differs from falling asleep.

When asleep, the mudrā comes apart, the head droops, awareness is lost, and the mantra is no longer recited. At that point, straighten your back, open your eyes, bring up the mantra, and drive away the demon of sleep. In samādhi, however, the mudrā does not come apart, awareness remains, and the mantra disappears. At such a time, watch it like a cat catching a mouse: the instant a deluded thought stirs, pounce upon it. If no deluded thought arises, simply watch it firmly. Finally, the mind

that watches and the object watched suddenly fall away together, and the original nature opens.

If, during meditation, your heavy obstructions cause any discomfort, do not force yourself. You may rest for a while or sit for fewer hours. When the vital energy begins to move during meditation, many sensations may arise. Pay no attention to any of them; simply regard yourself as dead and concern yourself with nothing at all.

You are all originally Buddhas, but by pursuing external circumstances, you have become deluded about your intrinsic nature. So long as you let go of everything and do not cling, you can recover your original countenance. Therefore, cherish this opportunity, quiet deluded thoughts, and practice earnestly, in the hope of seeing your intrinsic nature. Go further by safeguarding it, tempering the mind through circumstances, thoroughly sweeping away the habitual tendencies accumulated through many lives and kalpas, and perfectly realizing bodhi. Only then will you not have failed this one journey through the human world in this life. May you all attain realization!

Day One

During a seven-day retreat, one does not speak, but if you have any questions, you may raise them.

Question: What should one do if the feet and legs hurt?

Answer: If your feet and legs ache, endure it as much as possible. But if the pain unsettles your mind and makes it scattered, you may adjust your position and move a little. If the mudrā causes pain in your hands, however, you may not release it. The remedy is to keep your mind fixed on the mantra and forget your hands; then the pain in your hands will cease.

The mudrā is like a wire connecting our own luminous energy with the light-energy of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Once the mudrā is released, the wire is severed; therefore, it must not be released. For mantra recitation, use the method of vajra recitation. Reciting mantras in this way harms neither vital energy nor blood. When, at a certain point, the lips no longer move, simply let them be.

At the beginning, concentrate your energy on mentally reciting and listening with the ears, but let the recitation relax somewhat. If from the outset you keep tensely watching the mantra recitation, it will not be easy to enter stillness. As for the proper balance between tension and relaxation, strictness and ease, you must feel it out and learn to manage it yourself. If too relaxed, you easily fall asleep; if too tense, you cannot easily enter stillness. It is like holding a sparrow in your hand: grip it too tightly and you will crush it to death; loosen your grip and it will fly away. You must

find the measure that is neither loose nor tight, but exactly right. Do not concern yourself with belching; do not suppress it. Let yourself pass gas as well, provided that you do not disturb others.

Question: What should one do if one does not know whether the mudrā has come apart?

Answer: Generally, if you do not fall asleep while meditating, the mudrā will not come apart. When the vital energy begins to move, it descends along both arms and clamps the mudrā tightly, so that it is formed very firmly. The movement of energy in our practice differs from qigong: in qigong, the energy moves in a single line, whereas ours spreads throughout in a mass, like a steaming pot. Only when you fall asleep does the mudrā loosen.

All appearances that manifest in meditative states arise because the six consciousnesses are not pure; they are reflections of the six consciousnesses, false and without inherent nature. The Diamond Sūtra says that all appearances are illusory. Therefore, in meditation, it is best for no appearances to arise; it is best to see nothing at all.

Seeing something is not good, for it indicates that the six consciousnesses are not yet pure and are still moving chaotically, thereby giving rise to appearances. Thus, no appearance is best. Our dharmakāya is originally without any form that can be seen. It is simply a great energy and great function, without visible form.

If one sees light, sees images of Buddhas, or even sees things beyond the wall, one may take this to be good and remain fixed there; that will not do. Some people see unpleasant states and become afraid, but this too is caused by their own deluded minds. In truly realizing intrinsic nature, there is not the slightest appearance. Some people feel themselves rising and ascending to heaven.

They then see the Jade Emperor. Can this happen? It can. The Jade Emperor is the ruler of the second heaven of the desire realm, where people's clothing resembles the costumes worn in traditional opera. This is both good and not good. It is good because it indicates that one has entered samādhi to a certain degree; it is not good because one may easily become attached to appearances and, through craving spiritual powers, enter demonic states. It is like finding a piece of gold while walking: it is good because you can buy things with it, but not good because it may bring trouble upon you.

Question: How should one contemplate?

Answer: Like a cat catching a mouse, watch the point at which thoughts arise; focus your whole attention on that point of arising. What is called attending to the huatou

is to watch that which is present before a single thought has stirred. When a thought arises, become aware of it immediately; once aware, turn it into emptiness. To turn it means not to heed a thought when it arises, or to turn it by using the mantra. Not following it is itself turning it.

Then the thought disappears. Do not abide even in emptiness, for as soon as there is abiding, you cannot thoroughly see the original mind. The first day of a seven-day retreat is relatively difficult, like a monkey accustomed to leaping about that is now confined. Do not worry. Continue the practice, and by the second and third days it will become easier, and you will experience the joy of the flavor of Chan.

As you continue sitting, things gradually dissolve into emptiness. You may feel that your legs are gone or that your head is gone; pay no attention to it all. Simply watch your thoughts. When watching reaches its utmost depth, deluded thoughts suddenly cease, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, and you directly see the original nature.

Question: What is this explosion?

Answer: An explosion manifests when practice reaches its proper maturity and suddenly breaks free in an instant, just as gunpowder explodes when it has been packed to saturation. Do not be afraid of this. Let me tell you of one fellow practitioner's experience as a reference.

A Dharma friend in Shaanxi, after entering stillness during meditation, found that his mind was like a great mirror in which everything appeared brightly illuminated before him. He thought this was awakening, but it was not. When the light shines upon you, there should be a sudden explosive breakthrough, with everything shattered without remainder. This is the explosion: the instant of breaking free. It is not some separate explosion, but the manifestation that, in a single illumination, body, mind, and world all dissolve into emptiness.

Question: Is it all right to recite the mantra with the mouth open?

Answer: When reciting the mantra, do not open your mouth; let the lips move slightly. We are not like Daoism, which speaks of refining essence into vital energy. Yet we also cannot be separated from refining essence into vital energy. The fire of the mind descends to the point within the womb; above it are the bladder and seminal vesicles. Like a brazier heating a kettle of water, the water is transformed by high temperature into vital energy. The energy rises to the crown of the head, becomes liquid, and may be swallowed, benefiting the body. In deep samādhi, breathing seems to cease: it does not pass through the nose but through all the pores and skin of the body.

We do not use such visualization methods. We use only the method of mentally reciting and listening with the ears: listen to the soundless sound of the mind reciting the mantra, and use the ear faculty to gather in the mind faculty, so that deluded thoughts no longer move. Our six sense faculties were originally one luminous essence divided into six functions in mutual combination; they are originally differentiated functions of one true mind. Using the most sensitive ear faculty to grasp the difficult-to-gather mind faculty is the easiest method for attaining realization in practice.

We often say, “Eight brothers, one of them foolish.” The foolish one is the eighth consciousness, because it receives everything without distinguishing good from bad, and thus contains a great many seeds; it is a fool, a dullard. “Among them, one is the cleverest” refers to the sixth consciousness, which is difficult to tame. “Five gatekeepers conduct business” refers to the first five consciousnesses facing external objects; the brain follows these five consciousnesses and gives rise to activity. “One travels back and forth carrying messages” refers to the seventh consciousness, which handles communication and specializes in transmitting messages back and forth.

How does one grasp the mind faculty? One uses the ear faculty to listen and thereby grasp it. After leaving the seat, one must contemplate. Contemplation means contemplating that which is present before a single thought arises—that which is clear and distinct. This is contemplating oneself. This self is not one's physical body, but one's true mind before a thought has arisen: the mind of numinous knowing.

Watching it is contemplating self-mastery: contemplate that which abides unmoving in the original ground. This is very important practice both on and off the meditation cushion. During a seven-day retreat, speaking is not permitted, also so that one may contemplate that spiritually aware mind—that is, practice continuously and seamlessly. Speaking easily makes one forget to maintain contemplation. By combining activity and stillness, one can attain meditative stability within a set period and achieve accomplishment within seven days.

In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the second and fourth mudrās are used most often; the second and fourth mudrās are also used during a seven-day retreat. The second mudrā can eliminate obscurations and can substitute for the Hundred-Syllable Mantra, so there is no need to recite the Hundred-Syllable Mantra again.

Question: During meditation, my arms become sore and painful and easily droop. What should I do?

Answer: Several fellow practitioners deal with this by hanging a broad strap around the neck, or placing a soft cushion on their legs and resting their hands on it briefly. The mudrā should be formed naturally and firmly; do not relax it. When you enter

samādhi, the qi will naturally hold the mudrā tightly together. The more you recite the mantra, the tighter it becomes, and it will not loosen. Once the mudrā has passed through its pain, it will no longer hurt. To transcend birth and death, leave the three realms, and attain great freedom, you must practice in accordance with the Dharma and advance diligently without ceasing.

Day Two

Nowadays, everyone regards realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as something extraordinarily lofty and thinks it extremely difficult. In fact, this is an erroneous view. Chan Master Linji said: "All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature; within this lump of red flesh is a True Person of No Rank." That is, in the mind of each one of us there is a true person.

Why is this true person said to be without rank? Because this true person pervades the whole of empty space and the dharma realm and is everywhere present. Why, then, is it also said to be within this lump of red flesh? Is that not contradictory? It is because we have an ignorant, deluded mind. On account of ignorance, we shrink this vast and boundless Buddha-nature and confine it to a particular place; only then does it seem to have an abode.

Even within the body of an insect there is Buddha-nature; if released, its Buddha-nature too is vast and boundless. Chan Master Linji's words tell us that within the mind of ignorance there is Buddha-nature. Linji went on to say: Where is this Buddha-nature? How do we see it? It is precisely that which hears the Dharma and that which teaches the Dharma.

It is that which can teach the Dharma and that which can hear the Dharma. Our physical bodies can neither speak nor hear. They are like robots: even if all the components are installed, without electricity they still cannot move.

Our physical bodies have the heart, liver, spleen, stomach, kidneys, the five viscera, and the six entrails. But what is the electricity? The capacity, function, and energy that enable us to move, speak, hear, walk, and work are the electricity; they are our inherently possessed Buddha-nature. So long as, amid activity and disturbance, we turn the light inward, let go, and diligently advance, we will certainly attain accomplishment.

Chan Master Linji explained this so clearly because he himself realized and awakened to it through cultivation. When he had first left home to become a monastic, he did not know it either.

When he first became a novice monk, the head-seat monk saw that he never went to ask about the Dharma and asked him, "Hey! Why do you not go to the monk,

Patriarch Huangbo, to ask about the Dharma?" Linji said, "What do you want me to ask?" The head-seat monk said, "You may ask: 'What is the essential meaning of the Buddhadharma?'" Linji therefore went to ask Huangbo, "What is the essential meaning of the Buddhadharma?" On hearing this, the patriarch said nothing, but with a smack struck him. Linji then withdrew.

The next day, the head-seat monk told him to go and ask again, and again he was struck with a stick. Thus, he asked three times and was struck three times. This koan tells students that Buddha-nature is not elsewhere: it shines forth directly before each person's face. At the point where a thought ceases, turn the light inward for a glance, and suddenly awakening is itself the answer. Do not seek by establishing appearances; this runs counter to realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Once there is any attachment, one will never see one's true nature and awaken.

What is called practice is removing one's clinging habitual tendencies and returning to what we originally are. We originally are Buddhas, so becoming a Buddha should not be difficult. One need only turn back and cease deluded thoughts; this is the Tathāgata.

As the saying goes, "The sea of suffering is boundless; turn back and there is the shore." Turn back to look at the point where your thoughts arise; watch them until not a single thought arises. What is this? At that moment, it is as if one suddenly awakens from a dream: "Oh! So this is it!" That sound of "Oh!" is like the "hu!" sound spoken of in the Chan school.

"Having worn out iron shoes in fruitless searching, one finds it without the least effort." You cannot find it anywhere, yet it is right before you and has never left. The more you seek it, the farther away it becomes. Do not seek; rest and look, and it is precisely this. The patriarchs of the past all turned the light inward in this way, awakened, and saw their true nature.

Today, having explained this formless true appearance of seeing one's nature, everyone will no longer become attached to appearances or pursue them. Therefore, while practicing the Dharma, do not seek to see anything or worry about anything. Whatever appearances may arise, pay them no heed. Last time, we spoke of the fellow practitioner who, while practicing, saw a large hairy hand covering his face.

Do not be afraid of any phenomena that occur during meditation; they are all false. Sometimes Dharma protectors test us to see whether we become attached to appearances. Therefore, do not fear frightening things either; they are all false appearances.

The wrathful forms manifested by Buddhas and bodhisattvas are all frightening, because they frighten demons. Demons are fierce, so I am fiercer than you. Thus there is a saying: “The heart of a bodhisattva, the face of a rākṣasa.” Do not be afraid when you see a wrathful form; it protects us. “All appearances are illusory.” At the realization of the Way, nothing whatsoever is seen; there is not the slightest thing.

At present, we must first open up and see our original nature, then eliminate our habitual tendencies. After those habitual tendencies have been eliminated, spiritual powers may manifest. The manifestation of spiritual powers is nothing remarkable; it is a peripheral matter. Awakening to the Way is the fundamental matter.

It is like a great tree: once its roots are alive, its branches and leaves above will certainly turn green and eventually flourish. But if the roots are not alive, then even if there are some green branches and leaves above, that greenness is false and useless; in the end they will wither.

We must first develop the power of the Way—that is, the power of exhausted outflows. Abide nowhere, and let all afflictions drain away. Only then are the five spiritual powers that manifest genuine and lasting. Spiritual powers that manifest without awakening to the Way are demons of the five aggregates, yin demons, mere shadows. For example, if one has not seen one’s true nature and one’s spirit departs, then after departing one again becomes attached to appearances and enters the realm of birth and death again.

In the past, someone was able to send out his spirit. After it left, he saw a fair, plump, voluptuous woman lying beneath a large banana tree. His mind stirred and became attached to the appearance, so he pounced on her. In fact, it was a white sow giving birth to piglets. Because he entered her, he too became a piglet. Only after later striking his head against a stone and dying did he return.

You see how dangerous this is. Therefore, only after the emotional views that cling to appearances have been completely eliminated, so that one is no longer attached to appearances or moved in mind, and after one has attained the power of the Way, may the five spiritual powers manifest; only then are they genuine spiritual powers. Otherwise, one will cause great disaster. We should not become attached to spiritual powers. Watch the point where thoughts arise until you reach the utmost point; then suddenly there is a break, and the mind that watches and the thought that is watched both cease entirely. One’s true nature will then clearly appear before one.

All right. If you have any questions, please raise them for discussion.

Question: Is it good to see light during meditation?

Answer: If you sense light during meditation, do not pay attention to it. There are two kinds of light: deluded light and true light. Light that appears before seeing one's true nature is deluded light; light that shines forth after seeing one's true nature is true light. Deluded light arises from attachment to appearances: one thinks one is emitting light, and delight naturally arises, so attachment to the appearance produces deluded light.

During meditation, we must not seek to see light or Buddhas; whatever we see, we pay it no heed. The light we now see is limited, only a small light. The true great light treasury illuminates the ten directions. One can see all Buddhas of the ten directions and three divisions of time; you are within all Buddhas, and all Buddhas are within you, mutually illuminating one another without obstruction.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says that Buddha-nature is like bright mirrors in the ten directions reflecting one another: each image is within the other's mirror, interpenetrating and recurring; I enter you and you enter me, layer upon layer without end. The light we now emit is still exceedingly faint, so there is no need to heed it. Go further: transform your own body into emptiness, transcend body, mind, and world, and radiate great light that illuminates the great thousandfold world—only then is there an entry point. The Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State says that the great radiating light is the mother light, and the light that recognizes it is the child light. When mother and child unite, their union is the realization of the Way. This is what it means.

Question: I keep seeing a black cat. What should I do?

Answer: Pay it no heed, and it will go away. If you become attached to it, it will be difficult to dispel. When someone in a household has died, the living may continually think of and remember that person, and then the deceased cannot leave. Do not deliberately fix your mind on it. Cats and dogs are the same: seeing them is a reflection of the six consciousnesses.

Suppose that during meditation qi rises, or your head feels as though it is bursting open. Do not be afraid; let it be. Even if you die, then die—do not pay attention to it. In fact, you will not die. But if you have not reached this point, do not try to induce it. The mind that seeks to induce it is unacceptable; as soon as you try to induce it, it will not come. If some part of the body feels swollen or painful, that is not illness. Illness is caused by karmic obstacles; the present swelling and pain occur because the qi has not yet passed through. Once it passes through, there will be no pain. As for whether qi rises or not, do not concern yourself with it. Let it take its natural course.

When qi rises in our practice, it does not travel along the back but through the central channel. Whether our bodies feel warmth, coolness, numbness, itching,

lightness, heaviness, smoothness, roughness, or the like, do not concern yourself with it. These are changes in qi and blood; there is nothing to worry about. Simply do not pay attention to them.

Question: What should I do if thoughts arise during meditation?

Answer: Our thoughts have four levels: coarse, subtle, very subtle, and extremely subtle. Subtle thoughts can be seen only when one has become still; without stillness, they cannot be seen. Attend carefully to the mantra. Only when listening to it quiets the mind can one see very subtle thoughts.

If you follow a thought, you may initially fail to be aware of it and notice it only after following it for a while. Once you notice it, immediately disregard it; when you do not attend to it, it disappears. After the subtle comes the extremely subtle; only by settling still further can you see it. The subtle continuous stream never remains still; it is always in motion.

The aggregate of consciousness: the most subtle thoughts are like fish beneath the water, moving so swiftly that one ordinarily cannot see them. Only at the very end can one see them. When we say, “Let go, let go,” we are speaking only of the coarse ones.

Letting go of family affairs and all other matters is only letting go of coarse delusions. Then come subtle delusions—the ideas in one’s mind. If the subtle delusions no longer move, the minute deluded thoughts can then be seen, down to the most minute, as one penetrates layer by layer. We have conducted experiments: when water flows too swiftly, its movement cannot be seen and it appears still.

Watching too much television can injure the eyes for this reason as well: the raster of the electronic signal flickers. If a screen were invented that moved twice as fast, it would appear motionless and would not harm the eyes.

When meditating, do not demand that you enter samādhi. Whether samādhi arises or not, simply disregard it. Thoughts that cling to appearances are especially bad. Let everything go. You are originally Buddha; do not seek it, and all will be well.

Question: Tuṣita Heaven is the fourth heaven of the desire realm. Does that mean it has not transcended the desire realm?

Answer: Tuṣita Heaven belongs to the desire realm, but its Inner Court is a Buddha Pure Land. It does not belong to the desire realm; it is a Pure Land beyond the realms. The outer court of Tuṣita Heaven is inferior. One temporarily abides and cultivates in the Inner Court in order to have the expedient means to liberate sentient beings.

Day Three

Time passes quickly, and three days have gone by. Each of you has discovered various experiences: some have seen light, some have forgotten their hands and feet, and some have experienced visions of Buddhas. Whatever experiences appear, do not cling to appearances or attend to them. The dharmakāya is formless; whatever has form that one sees is not the dharmakāya.

If you become attached to appearances, you will be obstructed and fall into demonic states. Seeing light is not seeing the dharmakāya—that is, seeing one's true nature. Take a pearl: it emits a radiance, but if one sees only the light and not the pearl, this cannot count as obtaining the precious jewel. Only upon seeing the substance that emits the light does it count as seeing one's true nature. Electricity is another example: it has function but no visible form. Thus Buddha-nature has no form that can be seen.

Long ago, Patriarch Gaofeng was practicing when, having only recently left home and not yet encountered an enlightened teacher's guidance, he merely followed the monastery steward in performing sūtra recitations and repentance rites each day. One day, after such a service, he was walking behind carrying a load on his shoulder. Heavy snow was falling, and as they passed a household, he heard someone inside say, "The sūtra-recitation ghost has come back!" He was greatly perplexed and asked his teacher whether there was anything else one could do after leaving home. His teacher replied that he did not know.

"Thirty li from here there is a Chan monastery called Baiyun. Go there and ask." He then went to Baiyun Chan Monastery. Chan Master Baiyun instructed him: "After leaving home, one must transcend birth and death and leave the three realms. Performing sūtra recitations and repentance rites cannot transcend birth and death. You must investigate Chan: what were you like before your parents gave you birth?" He investigated this for a long time but did not awaken.

Later, he also took Chan Master Xueyan Qin as his teacher. The Chan master asked him, "Who is it that drags this corpse?" When a person no longer draws breath, that is a corpse—so who is it that drags the corpse? In the past, Chan masters guided practitioners in this way, applying themselves to huatou investigation in order to see their true nature.

Layman Fu composed a poem: "Empty-handed, he grasps a hoe; walking on foot, he rides a water buffalo. A person crosses over a bridge; the bridge flows, but the water does not flow." This poem uses metaphor to explain the relationship between Buddha-nature and appearances, comparing the body to the buffalo and Buddha-nature to the person.

The “person” is Buddha-nature, and the “bridge” is the body. The body undergoes birth and death, whereas the “water”—Buddha-nature—does not. Thus the “bridge” is moving while the water does not move; the water’s not flowing symbolizes Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature neither arises nor ceases; it neither moves nor wavers, nor does it flow. Only then did Chan Master Gaofeng understand that what drags the corpse is precisely a person’s Buddha-nature.

Practice enables people to understand that the body is false and unobtainable, and that only the dharmakāya is real. How can one recognize it? It is the lucid, spiritual knowing at the point where not a single thought arises; the nature of that spiritual knowing is our Buddha-nature. Yet people can never quite grasp this or acknowledge it: “Where is it?” It is right where you are asking! (Someone interjected: “I know it is this, but I still cannot grasp it.”) Do not try to grasp it. It is right before you; it cannot escape. The true mind fills empty space and pervades the dharma realm; it is everywhere.

Day Four

There was once a Chan koan in which a disciple asked his master, “When the great thousandfold world is destroyed, is the dharmakāya destroyed as well?” The master replied, “The dharmakāya is destroyed as well.” Why did he answer this way? The great thousandfold world is manifested from dharma-nature, and dharma-nature neither arises nor ceases and cannot be destroyed; therefore the great thousandfold world cannot be destroyed either. If one says that the great thousandfold world is destroyed, would that not also be saying that the dharmakāya is destroyed?

Chan masters teach differently from others: they speak in reverse. They tell us that only the dharmakāya is indestructible and most precious; everything else is false, merely an accessory of the dharmakāya. If we disregard the master and pursue only those accessories, how grievously mistaken we are, toiling in vain as we revolve through the six realms.

Therefore, let everything go and do not cling. To seek only the fundamental thing—Buddha-nature—is correct. Yet sadly, many people do not understand. In the heavens, food need not be planted, bought, or cooked, yet there is excellent food to eat. Where does it come from? It comes from blessings. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is even more so: whatever one wishes to eat is available, without having to buy, wash, or cook it.

There, the lowest level is the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages. There are ordinary beings there who not only eat but also need to defecate. Yet it is unlike the human world, where a chamber pot is needed: when they need to

defecate, the ground naturally opens, and after they are finished, it closes again. It is entirely automatic. The heavenly realms are the same.

This shows that our Buddha-nature is inherently complete. Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch said, “How unexpected that intrinsic nature is originally complete in itself; how unexpected that intrinsic nature can give rise to all phenomena.” The Lotus Sūtra likewise says that pitiable people do not know they possess a great treasure, complete with everything, and yet go outside to beg.

How truly grievous! When people do this or that and earn money, are they not begging for food? Thus, now that we can understand this principle, let everything go: that itself is it. We are originally Buddhas and need not cultivate with such painful effort. Conversely, if we cannot let go and remain attached in our minds, even arduous cultivation is useless.

There was once a butcher’s apprentice who, upon hearing this teaching, laid down his butcher’s knife and said, “I too am one among a thousand Buddhas.” See how direct and unburdened this is: simply let go. People just refuse to let go. If they could let go, why would they need to meditate? Meditation is prescribed precisely because they cannot let go.

First sit in meditation for a while, dispel some deluded thoughts, and gradually come to understand that you are originally Buddha. Then you realize that meditation was superfluous—how mistaken, how mistaken! If you can truly let go completely, the mind will be fully sufficient and freely manifest transformations. Whatever you need will be available; what worries or afflictions could remain?

A monastic once telephoned me and said, “Teach me a way to become rich. I have no money; I am poor!” Consider how such a person could cultivate the Buddhadharma well. If you have attained the Way, you need not worry that no one will help you; everyone will come to help you. The ancient worthies also said, “Those who attain the Way receive much assistance; those who lose the Way receive little assistance.” The Way means moral virtue, and virtue also means obtaining. Thus, those with moral virtue can obtain everything; those who practice need not fear starving to death.

What does “letting go” mean? Letting go means non-abiding; it does not mean not working. Factory directors, professors, and general managers should continue doing their work, but after doing it, keep their minds empty and unattached. If Liao is promoted to section chief, he should simply do the work and accept the promotion; not abiding in the mind while doing so is letting go. Doing nothing at all, like an idler, is not letting go. Non-contrivance leaves nothing undone; one must not become inert in practice.

There was once a Buddhist practitioner whose teacher asked, “Can you remain master of yourself during the day?” “Yes.” “Can you remain master of yourself when you sleep at night and dream?” “Yes.” (Dreaming is a minor loss of consciousness, while death is a major loss of consciousness. To remain master of oneself in dreams is already very good.) Our practice is to remain master of ourselves amid circumstances and not be dragged along by them. But remaining master of oneself is still not enough. One must go a step further: even mastery must be dissolved into emptiness before there can be genuine benefit. The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are both functioning.

The three bodies of intrinsic nature: a single thought of pure mind, unmoving and unwavering, is the dharmakāya. Everyone has at least one second of pure mind, which is the Buddha-mind; sadly, people do not recognize it. This is the dharmakāya Buddha. The luminosity that can clearly illuminate everything is the sambhogakāya Buddha. Without luminosity, could one see things? One could not. All outer appearances are manifested and transformed by our dharmakāya; these are all our nirmāṇakāya. Our intrinsic nature fully possesses the three bodies, lacking nothing at all.

What we now cultivate is the dharmakāya Buddha; this is most important. The sambhogakāya at the fruition stage cannot be realized at present. For example, Sudhana made fifty-three visits and finally returned to Maitreya. Maitreya told him, “You have attained fundamental wisdom, but not differentiated wisdom.” Differentiated wisdom is the wisdom sambhogakāya brought about by merit accumulated over many lives—obtained through doing much meritorious work and many good deeds. Śākyamuni Buddha’s sambhogakāya is called Locana Buddha; his dharmakāya is Vairocana Buddha; and his nirmāṇakāya is Śākyamuni Buddha.

There are two kinds of sambhogakāya: the self-enjoyment sambhogakāya and the sambhogakāya for the enjoyment of others. The former is a great Buddha of light, visible to great bodhisattvas but not to lesser bodhisattvas. When Śākyamuni Buddha saw the majestic beauty of an ancient Buddha’s sambhogakāya, he aroused the resolve to attain it and practiced diligently day and night, becoming a Buddha seven kalpas ahead of schedule.

Once one understands this principle, non-abiding in everything is awakening, and the place where not a single thought arises is one’s own intrinsic nature. Yet one must not be impatient for awakening. When it truly opens, one will have a great cry: How grievous! How could a fine, naturally genuine Buddha revolve through the six realms and suffer?!

As for the manifestation-body Buddha, because even the subtlest deluded thoughts have been entirely eliminated through practice, it can transform in countless ways,

manifesting innumerable transformation bodies to liberate innumerable sentient beings. These are the three kāyas of dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya at the stage of fruition. When the three kāyas and four wisdoms are perfected, one becomes a Buddha at the stage of fruition.

In our practice, we must first awaken to this fundamental essence. Chan Master Longya said, “To study the Way, one must first have a basis for awakening.” Without awakening, practice is difficult. First, clearly understand what the dharmakāya is and how to realize it directly; then temper yourself amid circumstances and wear away habitual tendencies. Only then can spiritual powers develop.

“Initial awakening reaches only the edge of the dharmakāya.” It does not mean that, once one has awakened, everything is complete and finished. Habits accumulated over many lifetimes and kalpas still remain. One must be diligent and safeguard realization continuously and closely before one can truly realize the Way. Practice must proceed step by step, without end.

Broadly speaking, this may be divided into three stages: the initial barrier, the second barrier, and the final barrier. More finely divided, there are more than a dozen steps. The Weiyang school sets out ninety-six steps, whereas Patriarch Linji explained it more simply: the three mysteries and three essentials suffice, making nine steps in all.

The first step is to recognize our intrinsic nature. Then, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, safeguard it continuously and closely: do not stir the mind, and do not cling to appearances. Chan Master Zhenji said, “It is not that this old monk speaks of deluded thoughts; there is simply nothing to discuss.” Originally there is nothing at all, so what thought is there to stir? Therefore, see affairs as empty, and thoughts will naturally cease to move.

But because we are accustomed to stirring all the time, remaining unmoved feels difficult—like a monkey that always wants to leap about and cannot be tethered. Therefore, we must safeguard [the mind] rigorously and practice continuously and closely, watching over it at every moment. This does not mean looking ahead: to look ahead is to look at the defilements of external things, and then scattered thoughts will fly about. Rather, turn the gaze back and do not look outward.

If we can truly turn back at every moment to observe the place where thoughts arise, without following them, those who have not awakened can readily awaken, and those who have awakened can readily attain thorough awakening. Yet, because we have been accustomed to mental movement through many lifetimes and kalpas, it is difficult not to forget this at every moment. Therefore, we must heighten our vigilance. To hold fast at every moment is most important.

A person of genuine awakening has not a single affair: utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, and clinging to no appearance whatsoever. Truly accomplishing this is not easy. For example, when Patriarch Linji was nearing parinirvāṇa, he told his disciples: “All of you, do not lose my Treasury of the True Dharma Eye. Safeguard it at all times.”

Sansheng said, “Who would dare lose the Patriarch’s Treasury of the True Dharma Eye?” “Very well, then how will you teach the Dharma when guiding later generations?” Sansheng stepped forward and gave a shout. Patriarch Linji said, “Alas! I never imagined that my Treasury of the True Dharma Eye would perish beside this blind donkey.”

What does this mean? Was he praising him, scolding him, or rebuking him? This depends on whether or not you cling to appearances. Have you read the Mind Lamp Record by Elder Zhanyu? Zhanyu was a disciple of Sanfeng. He said, “If I had been present at the time, how would I have taught later generations? I would simply stand with my hands clasped; that would be my teaching.”

“That shout would not do.” Is this correct? In fact, it is mistaken. A single shout even drove back his master—so what need is there to speak of guiding later generations? There is no Dharma to expound and no one to liberate. If there is a Dharma to expound or someone to liberate, that is already an error.

Zhanyu further said that Sansheng’s shout was not good, and that it would have been better for him simply to stand with his hands clasped. Thus, not establishing a single dharma is very difficult. Patriarch Linji called him a blind donkey. Though this seemed to be a rebuke, it was actually praise: “If I possessed a Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, I myself would be clinging to an appearance.” The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye is also unobtainable; Buddha is unobtainable, and there is no demon either. Only when there is no attachment whatsoever can wondrous functioning be boundless.

In the Weiyang school, Yangshan was going to teach the Dharma to a judicial official —an official who handled legal cases, equivalent to a judge today. Yangshan asked him, “What office do you hold?” He replied, “Judicial official.” Yangshan raised his whisk and asked, “Can you adjudicate this?” The official could not answer.

Yangshan told a novice to take this question to Sansheng. Sansheng was recovering from illness and staying in the Hall of Longevity. Sansheng replied, “A matter has arisen.” Yangshan wanted to test him further, so he told the novice to ask Sansheng again, “What matter has arisen?” Sansheng replied, “A repeated offense will not be tolerated!” When Yangshan heard this, he deeply praised Sansheng for having attained the essential teaching of the Linji school. These are exemplary models of

the profound post-awakening safeguarding of realization and the attainment of flexible, wondrous functioning by great masters of old.

Safeguarding realization after awakening is necessary, but it must not become rigid. If it becomes rigid, that will not do either.

The Fifth Day

(Teaching the recitation of the Maitreya mantra) The first day of the first lunar month each year is the birthday of Maitreya Bodhisattva. Today is the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month. Tonight, before sitting in meditation, we may first recite the Maitreya mantra 108 times and invoke Maitreya Bodhisattva's blessings, so that our seven-day retreat may be brought to completion and we may see our true nature and realize the Way.

Today is the great New Year's Eve, the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month. We Buddhists have a saying: "When the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month arrives, how will you free yourself?" That is, the final day has arrived—how will you attain liberation? The circumstances of Master Yongjia's visit to the Sixth Patriarch may serve as an annotation to this question.

Master Yongjia was a greatly awakened monk. When he visited the Sixth Patriarch, he walked around the seat without bowing. The Sixth Patriarch shouted, "From what quarter comes this child of the Buddha, so arrogantly conceited?" Yongjia replied, "The matter of birth and death is great; impermanence is swift." The Sixth Patriarch said, "Why not realize the unborn and thereby comprehend that there is no swiftness?" Yongjia said, "The essence is itself unborn; fundamentally, there is no swiftness."

This means that, since the essence is unborn, it is also undying. Since there is neither birth nor death, what liberation or non-liberation could there be? Yet the Sixth Patriarch did not let him go at this point. Seemingly praising him, he said, "You have deeply attained the meaning of the unborn." In fact, he was setting a trap to see whether Yongjia would take the bait.

Yongjia was thoroughly awakened and would not cling to appearances. He instead asked, "How could the unborn have any meaning?" The Sixth Patriarch went further: "Without meaning, who is it that discriminates?" If there is not even any meaning, who is making distinctions? If there is no meaning, who is distinguishing the unborn? Conversely, if one knows the unborn, does that not mean that there is meaning? At this point, most people would indeed find it difficult to answer. But Yongjia had a way out and calmly said, "Discrimination, too, is not meaning!" That is, even though there is discrimination, there is no meaning.

A sūtra says: “Able to discriminate well among the characteristics of all dharmas, yet unmoved in the highest truth.” Though one discriminates, it does not enter the mind. This is inferential cognition together with direct cognition. Inferential cognition is discrimination; direct cognition is like a mirror reflecting things: long as long, short as short. This is to come alive again after death—the vibrant great functioning.

Buddhadharma is flexible, wondrous functioning; it is not a matter of becoming inert and motionless. In the past, an old woman supported a great monk for three years. One day, wishing to test whether he was a great master, she sent a young woman to bring him food and instructed her to embrace the monk upon arriving and ask him how he felt at that moment.

Afterward, the young woman reported to the old woman that the monk had said, “A withered tree leans against a cold cliff; through all three springs, there is no warmth.” The old woman was deeply disappointed and said, “Drive him out. He is a dead man, of no use.” This illustrates that one cannot merely sit in meditation and practice in a lifeless state, unable to function. One cannot realize the great Way in that manner.

One must be able to act. Realizing the great Way does not mean doing nothing. One can do every kind of thing; even while doing so, the mind does not move —“discrimination, too, is not meaning.” So what of the thirtieth day of the lunar year? It means that one may do everything, without letting it enter the mind. “The essence is itself unborn”: what is there to finish or understand, and what method need be employed? Our fundamental essence is neither arising nor ceasing; there is nothing to be brought to completion.

Therefore, when everyone is practicing, some see various appearances, some see light, and some see nothing at all. Those who see light should understand that the dharmakāya is itself the luminous essence, and that the light is emitted by their own Buddha-nature. To see one’s true nature through the light is awakening.

If one does not recognize the luminous essence but clings to the appearance of light, giving rise to deluded mind, one clings merely to a light-shadow. In the poem discussed yesterday: “Upon the lofty mountain peak, / A solitary moon shines on the cold spring. / There is no moon in the water; / The moon is in the blue sky.” Do not look at the moon’s reflection in the water; recognize the bright moon in the sky. There is no moon in the water; it is only a shadow.

The moon is nothing other than one’s own intrinsic nature. The blue sky represents the dharmakāya: empty, numinous, and non-abiding. One must recognize one’s intrinsic nature directly, at this very moment. Those who see various appearances should likewise know that all appearances are false, reflections of our six consciousnesses.

The seeing-nature that sees appearances is our intrinsic nature; the capacity to see appearances is our dharmakāya Buddha-nature. Do not cling to appearances, for to cling to them is mistaken. Seeing no appearances at all is best. The dharmakāya is without appearance, and having no appearance is the true appearance. Clear, numinous knowing that neither moves nor wavers is the true mind. The dharmakāya has no appearance of interruption; it is not present at one moment and absent the next.

It shines at the gates of the six sense faculties at every moment, without ever stopping. Even when one is asleep, it continues to shine and does not leave for a single instant. Once one recognizes this and eliminates habitual tendencies, one may go freely through the six realms. One need not necessarily ascend to heaven; even going to hell presents no obstruction. To liberate sentient beings extensively and adorn the hells is great merit and virtue, like Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva.

If one feels aversion toward entering the three lower realms and yearns for the Buddha's Pure Lands—the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Lapis Lazuli World, the Inner Court of Tuṣita, and so forth—this shows that the appearance of sentient beings has not yet been broken through and that one is still unfinished. Genuine practice should be unconstrained, free and at ease, natural and untrammeled: there should be nowhere one cannot go.

In the past, someone asked Patriarch Dongshan, "When there is great cold or great heat, where should one take refuge?" This was a metaphor for where one should go when great disasters or hardships arise. Patriarch Dongshan replied, "Take refuge where there is neither cold nor heat." The man asked, "What place is free of cold and heat?" Dongshan answered, "When it is hot, let the heat kill you; when it is cold, let the cold kill you."

This is the place free of cold and heat; its point is to explain nonattachment to appearances. When a certain teacher from Shaanxi was in Chengdu with my teacher's master, they heard that the People's Liberation Army was about to enter the city. He urged my teacher's master to flee, but my teacher's master said, "There is no need to flee. Let us remain here and cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma properly."

As it turned out, Chengdu was peacefully liberated, and nothing happened. Only then did that fellow practitioner regret that his mind had been unsettled and that he had been too attached to appearances. We also had a fellow disciple who, during the Japanese invasion of China, was in Hangzhou when the city fell. A Japanese soldier raised his sword to kill him. He thought, "In any case, I cannot escape. Moreover, a practitioner's dharmakāya is originally indestructible. I do not fear birth and death; if he is going to kill me, let him kill me."

He recited Amitābha Buddha and, wholly without fear, held out his head toward the blade. The soldier struck his head with the sword, but the blade bounced back and could not kill him. The Japanese soldier was terrified, threw down the sword, and ran away. This is a true story; we even saw that sword. Those who are truly liberated can come and go freely within the six realms.

In the past, someone asked Dasui, a disciple of Chan Master Weishan: “After your master entered parinirvāṇa, to which Pure Land did he go?” He replied, “My master did not go to an eastern or western Pure Land. Rather, he became an ox in the eastern household and a horse in the western household.” To others, would this not seem like insulting his master? In fact, he was praising him, extolling the profundity and vastness of his master’s realization, through which he could function even among different kinds of beings. At the end of life, this is liberation.

Today you are all undertaking a seven-day retreat. Once you realize the original nature and fundamental essence, you will be free and at ease. Now I will teach you the simplest method for letting go of everything: amid your daily work, call out, “Cut!” Think of nothing; simply attend to this clear, ever-present knowing.

You may cut off thought for a minute or half a minute, and then resume your work. Work for a while, then cut it off again. Practice gradually, doing this thirty or forty times a day. You can use this simple method of cutting off thoughts while walking or riding in a vehicle.

The first time I opened through was while sitting in meditation. My mother coughed once, and in that instant everything vanished; there was nothing at all, and the quiescent, extinguished original nature appeared. When we apply ourselves and open through, it need not happen while sitting. It may very well happen suddenly during sleep, at work, or while walking.

Therefore, you must constantly apply yourselves in contemplation and must not become lax. After awakening, you must safeguard it. Habitual tendencies are too deeply rooted; one awakening does not bring complete perfection at once.

Sound can affect practice in two ways. First, while one is meditating, a sudden sound may startle one out of samādhi. Second, when emptiness has reached precisely the right point, a sudden sound may help one open through the body-mind and the world, awakening one to the original nature. When the time and conditions are exactly ripe, this cannot be brought about by wholesome roots planted with merely one or two Buddhas. Do not be impatient in practice. It is not that practice leads to the unborn; it is originally unborn, originally thus. Simply let go. There is nothing to realize or attain; realizing no seeking and no attainment is itself the original attainment.

Safeguarding means not clinging to any experience whatsoever. Its essential point is: "Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not move with circumstances." At all times, safeguard this numinous knowing mind, empty, luminous, and non-abiding. Once safeguarding has become mature, let it function freely. Whether it goes east or west, it will not harm the crops. Then one reaches the state of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization.

Therefore, the more one lets go in practicing the Dharma, the better; the more anxious one becomes, the less it works. Some people wait for an explosion, but cannot bear to wait; the more they wait, the less it works. Moreover, each person's experience of opening through to awakening differs. For some, it is like something falling down: in a single release, it is done, without any explosion.

Each person's experiences in samādhi also differ. Some see light, some see Dharma protectors, some see themselves, and some see no appearances at all. They are all different. There are several Dharma protectors. Once one opens through, there is nothing at all.

Another example: while safeguarding realization, one fellow practitioner was taking off his shoes before sleep. Just as he pulled off a shoe, body and mind both disappeared, and the quiescent, extinguished original nature appeared before him. This is what happens when safeguarding has become mature. Before one has truly realized the Way, one may sometimes seem to leave the body and go somewhere. This is not a genuine departure from the body; it is still an image of the six consciousnesses.

After awakening, reciting mantras and practicing the six mudrās are all forms of safeguarding. It is also all right not to practice the six mudrās; contemplative safeguarding itself is practice. This is true cultivation. If you are attached to the blissful experiences of sitting meditation, then do not sit, for this is attachment to dharmas. The second dhyāna is joy, and the third dhyāna is bliss. When one sits well, one feels very blissful indeed.

But one must not abide in bliss. As soon as there is attachment, one enters the path of demons. Demons arise through attachment to appearances; demons also possess spiritual powers, and attachment to appearances turns one into a demon. There was a so-called Supreme Master Ching Hai who was like this; Hong Kong's Neiming magazine once exposed and criticized her. Many people in the world seek blessings, so demons exploit the opening. Moreover, seeking demons is much more immediately efficacious than seeking the Buddha, because all seeking is attachment to appearances and belongs to the retinue of demons.

Letting go is seeing one's true nature. If you can truly let go, then when there are no thoughts, you open through. If you have not opened through, thoughts have not yet

been completely relinquished; subtle thoughts still remain. If you regard yourself as dead, seeking nothing and attaining nothing, then you let go completely.

When one opens through, it feels as though nothing remains; the person is gone as well. “The great earth lies level and submerged; empty space is shattered to powder.” The world too is gone, and only this bright, clear, numinous knowing original nature remains. “The numinous light shines alone, far removed from faculties and objects”; one has left the dusty world behind. If one wishes to return, one can return with a single awareness; as soon as a thought stirs, one returns.

Initial awakening is like standing at the doorway and looking inside. One must still diligently remove habitual tendencies, enter the house, and take one’s proper place in the dharmakāya. Finally, one must leave even that position and go beyond the dharmakāya: even if great spiritual powers arise, one does not abide in them, but liberates sentient beings in accordance with conditions.

There was once a Chan master named Deng Yinfen. He said, “When you all enter parinirvāṇa, you sit in the full lotus posture and display auspicious signs. Is that not rather too attached to appearances? I will show you a posture of freedom.” Having said this, he stood on his head and departed serenely. Śākyamuni Buddha departed while lying down.

Sleep is also a good time for practice. Enter samādhi while sleeping, seeming to sleep yet not truly asleep. When one reaches just the right point, some movement or sound outside may help one open through. Thus walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all good occasions for practice. This is the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate: it is not bound by forms; applying oneself only in the mind is sufficient. It is not easy to hear the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate in this world. Without having extensively planted wholesome roots in past lives, one cannot hear it.

Śākyamuni Buddha said that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and can become Buddhas. But why do we not awaken? It is because our inverted deluded thoughts create mischief. We take external appearances to be real, yet regard the true Buddha-nature as false, even calling it superstition. This is because human minds cling to external appearances, and thus they are called inverted sentient beings. They continually circle around in deluded thoughts; even in dreams they keep circling.

Day Six

Today is already the sixth day, and tomorrow the retreat will be complete. You have all sat very well. It seems there will be no problem with tomorrow’s eighteen hours; I hope you can settle your minds even further. As completion approaches, people’s

minds begin to stir and become restless: they think of the retreat ending, of going home, and so forth.

The mind must not become restless. After the retreat is complete, you must continue applying yourselves. Let the mind settle into stillness and preserve this state; do not become restless. Then progress will come quickly.

Seeing one's true nature is actually very easy. Take Chan Master Wuzu Fayan, for example—the Chan master of Wuzu Mountain in Hubei, not Hongren, the Fifth Patriarch who was the Sixth Patriarch's teacher. He belonged to the Yangqi branch of the Linji school, and his disciples Yuanwu Keqin and his Dharma-grandson Dahui Zonggao were both Chan masters of great attainment.

In instructing students, he said: "There is a short love poem that you scholars read which closely resembles a Chan teaching. It says: 'Repeatedly calling Little Jade is not for any particular reason; it is only to make her beloved recognize her voice.'"

Yuanwu was standing nearby and, after hearing this, was greatly puzzled. As he came out of the Chan hall, a large rooster happened to crow from its perch. He was immediately stirred to awakening and blurted out, "Is this not sound?" He then awakened to who it was that hears sound, and thereby attained awakening. Thus one can awaken everywhere; awakening and seeing one's true nature are truly not difficult.

Today each of you spoke of the experiences you saw. Such experiences are all false appearances, all illusory; do not follow after them. Whether they are forms or lights, do not follow them. You must turn the light back and ask: Who is it that sees? Through appearances, recognize the nature, thoroughly recognizing that the one who manifests appearances, the one who sees appearances, and the one who knows appearances are all functions of my own true mind, my original nature.

To awaken from this is to see one's true nature; it is awakening! Conversely, attachment to appearances is mistaken. We have discussed this issue all along, yet some people are still attached to appearances. Hanshan wrote: "High upon the mountain peak, / A solitary moon shines on a cold spring. / Yet there is no moon in the water; / The moon is in the blue sky." He tells us to recognize that the moon is in the blue sky; the moon in the water is merely its reflection.

The moon one sees is only a reflection. Where is the blue sky? It is within Buddha-nature. The moon one sees is manifested by the Buddha of one's own intrinsic nature, and it is also seen by one's own seeing nature. One must see the seeing nature and merge the moon one sees with oneself as one body: the moon is oneself, and oneself is the moon.

How are they merged? It is not by going over to merge with it. Rather, recognize that this moon is manifested by one's own mind: the moon is mind, and mind is moon. One does not seek the moon outside the mind, nor seek the mind outside the moon. When they merge into one, one sees one's true nature.

Thereafter, whatever one sees, one is no longer attached to appearances. These things are all manifested by my own nature; they are myself. Therefore, Chan practitioners say: "Verdant bamboo is all prajñā; luxuriant yellow flowers are nothing but intrinsic nature."

To see bamboo and flowers is to see oneself; there is nothing separate from oneself outside. In this way, one sees one's true nature at every moment. There is never a time when one does not see appearances, and never a time when one does not see one's true nature. Nature and appearance are nondual: nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. Therefore, the Buddhadharma is called the Dharma gate of nonduality. There are not two different things; then one will not run into obstacles.

If one is attached to appearances, one becomes distressed whenever one cannot obtain something, and one runs into obstacles. Seeing one's true nature means no attainment and no seeking; body and mind then become at ease. One can live contentedly in poverty and delight in the Way, for there is no distinction between poverty and wealth. Without the Way, even one who possesses vast wealth is poor; with the Way, one is not poor.

When one breath does not come again, not a penny of one's vast fortune can be taken along; one still goes naked and bare. Yet the truly great treasure—the Way—has been deeply buried within the five aggregates. Enveloped by the aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, it cannot be obtained. If one pushes aside the five aggregates and retrieves this great treasure, one is infinitely rich, fully endowed with everything—a great millionaire.

Therefore, understand that appearances are false; only nature is real. Appearance and nature are like a mirror and its images: without a mirror there are no images, and without images there is no mirror. A mirror necessarily reflects images; if it does not reflect images, it is not a mirror.

Our true mind likewise necessarily manifests appearances. The Diamond Sūtra teaches that our fundamental essence has no appearance whatsoever: it is true emptiness, utterly free of appearances. The Amitābha Sūtra speaks of the majestic adornment of all kinds of wondrous appearances; this is the wondrous functioning arising from the true mind's manifestation of appearances. If it manifests no appearances, it is not the true mind.

Appearances are precisely mind; therefore, one sees one's nature at every moment and need not seek it elsewhere. To understand this is to see one's nature. So do not become attached to appearances—light, Buddhas, or visions: none can be grasped. Through them, recognize the fundamental essence. To recognize the fundamental essence of the true mind is to see one's nature. If you do not recognize the true mind, then even if you manifest great spiritual powers, you still remain deluded and blind and cannot ultimately realize the Way.

To unite them as one is to recognize that mind can give rise to every wondrous function, can emit light, and so forth. What cannot emit light is not the essence of mind. Light is mind, and mind is light. To unite the two as one is genuine awakening: one understands and is no longer attached to appearances. Do not seek appearances outside mind or seek mind outside appearances; there is no need to seek at all.

Therefore, Fifth Patriarch Yan asked his disciple, "Our school has a saying: 'Even those at the stages of Equal Enlightenment and Wondrous Enlightenment—great bodhisattvas beyond the ten bhūmis—still carry its straw sandals for it.' Who is it?" The disciple replied, "Bearded Zhang the Third, dark-faced Li the Fourth." It is buddha-nature.

If one asks where buddha-nature is, it is in bearded Zhang the Third and dark-faced Li the Fourth; that is, it is everywhere, not somewhere else.

At all times and in all places, every thing that appears is a manifestation of our buddha-nature; it is precisely where buddha-nature is. Why then become attached to any appearance? Why seek everywhere? Why pursue this practice or that exercise? All dharmas are expedient means; there is no real dharma. No dharma gate equals the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, which is like the birth of a prince.

The so-called birth of a prince means being born as the crown prince in an emperor's family, not as the son of a prince or high minister. When this crown prince grows up, he will certainly inherit the throne; that is, he will become a Buddha. To pursue other dharma gates is merely to circle around on the periphery. Without realizing the mind-ground and understanding what buddha-nature is, one can never realize the Way.

Chan Master Gaofeng's teacher asked him, "Can you be your own master during the day?" "I can." "When you are asleep and dreaming at night, can you be your own master?" "I can." What profound practice this is! It is not something ordinary people can accomplish. Yet it is still inadequate, because it is relative: who is master of whom? It is not the absolute true mind.

He then asked, “When there are no dreams and no thoughts, where is the master?” He could not answer. This showed that he had not yet recognized the master; he was practicing while circling about outside. No matter how much he might manifest spiritual powers and the like, it was still of no use. For this reason, he continued investigating for another three years.

One day, as he was taking a nap, a monk blundered into him and knocked his pillow to the ground. He suddenly awakened and finally broke through, recognizing the master: when there are no dreams and no thoughts, is this not precisely the master emitting light? At the point where not a single thought arises, that which is distinctly and clearly aware is one’s own master. Having recognized this, one need only safeguard it continuously and closely.

Esoteric Buddhism has innumerable practices. One practice can open the brahma aperture; another can confer the heavenly eye, the heavenly ear, and other supernormal powers. Yet even if these are opened or attained, one is still on the periphery, still circling around, and cannot become a Buddha because one has not recognized the master. This is only a position of meritorious accomplishment; one cannot become the emperor—that is, become a Buddha. Instead, one may become attached to appearances and be liable to become a demon.

In short, recognizing buddha-nature is not difficult; above all, do not become attached to appearances. Intrinsic nature possesses such great wondrous functioning and such immense radiance, illuminating the ten directions without obstruction. The Amitābha Sūtra states this very clearly: “That Buddha’s light is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction.”

The words “that Buddha” refer to our true mind. It has such great luminosity, so do not become attached to minor lights. We have reached the sixth day of this retreat, and all of you have gained quite a bit. Today I will give you further guidance, enabling you to leap directly into the ground of the Tathāgata, surpassing the stages of Equal Enlightenment and Wondrous Enlightenment. This retreat has gone very well. Many people have awakened and seen their nature—very good, very good.

When we practice, we must form mudrās. Mudrās are like antennas, enabling us to communicate with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. But upon reaching that stage, even people are gone and everything dissolves into emptiness. What mudrās? What Buddhas and bodhisattvas? They have all been cast beyond Mount Sumeru. When there is nothing at all, that is correct; if there is something, that is wrong.

Some among you say, “When I form mudrās, something loosens my fingers for me.” In fact, nothing is interfering with you; it is simply your own qi becoming active. When there is no “I,” where could there be an “other”? Without “I,” “other” cannot stand. You must recognize this clearly, or you will become possessed by demons.

Some people think, “Others see light, Buddhas, and states of experience. Why do I see nothing? Is it because I have not practiced well enough?” No! Having no states of experience is the best state of experience. When delusive states are absent and there is nothing at all, distinct and clear awareness is best. The true mind is just so; the fundamental essence is just so. All those other things are merely functioning.

In this seven-day retreat, our primary aim is to recognize the fundamental essence. Once the root is obtained, there is no need to worry about the branches. After the fundamental essence is attained, matters of the branches will naturally arise, including the emission of light and the manifestation of great spiritual powers. Tomorrow you will sit nine sessions, and it will be very beneficial. Nine sessions are excellent. Even ordinarily, without undertaking a seven-day retreat, simply sitting nine sessions for eighteen hours is extremely beneficial. Tomorrow, once you are seated, I will explain the most profound Buddhadharma to you.

Day Seven

When sitting nine sessions, all of you should form the fourth mudrā throughout; do not form the second mudrā. There will be three periods of six hours each. After returning home, you must safeguard it at all times; do not let the wild horse run loose. Safeguard it continuously and closely: remain clearly aware of your thoughts, watch them, and do not follow them as they run. That is safeguarding.

Let me tell you a story. Long ago, an old thief taught his son how to steal. The two went together to a wealthy household to rob it. As it happened, the household was preparing for a wedding and had placed all the dowry in chests.

After they slipped inside, they heard someone approaching. The father told his son to hide in a wardrobe; then he locked it from outside and made some noise. When the household discovered him and came to seize him, he broke through a wall and escaped home by himself. The son, terribly anxious inside the wardrobe, made a sound. The household heard it and cried, “There is a rat!” The son quickly thought of a way and imitated a rat’s squeaking. The family called to a maid, “Quick, open the chest! There is a rat in the wardrobe; it will gnaw through the wedding garments.”

As the maid came with a lit candle to open the wardrobe, the son suddenly blew out the candle, sprang out, and fled into the courtyard. The household chased after him, shouting, “Catch the thief!” The son again thought quickly. Seeing a well in the courtyard, he picked up a stone and threw it into the well, then took off one shoe and placed it beside the well.

When the household reached the well, they all thought the thief had jumped into it and stopped chasing him. The son was then able to escape home. When the father saw that his son had returned safely, before his son could complain, he said, “You

may now become a thief. A thief must be quick-witted and able to adapt to circumstances at any moment."

Practice is the same. You must not rigidly abide by a method; you must apply it flexibly, develop great wisdom, and adapt to circumstances, just as the son did in escaping. Do not study one method and abide in that one method; that is of no use. Only after recognizing one's intrinsic nature and applying it flexibly can one become a Buddha.

Whatever practice one studies, if one does not realize the mind-ground, then even supernormal powers are of no use. Once the root is obtained, there is no need to worry that spiritual powers will not manifest. Spiritual powers are inherently complete, but because one does not recognize them, deluded thoughts, inversion, and attachment conceal them. If this is reversed, the light shines through. There is no difficulty in studying Buddhism; the reason people fail to learn well is that they burrow into appearances.

Master Xuyun said, "Nowadays, people in our country no longer place much value on the orthodox Chan school. Instead, they turn around and study Tibetan esoteric practices because those practices have spiritual powers. They have all got it wrong." Yes, many people who study Esoteric Buddhism seek spiritual powers rather than seeing their nature, liberation, and freedom from birth and death. We must not engage in such deviant and heterodox paths.

Let me say this again: the most important point in contemplation is not to follow thoughts as they run. Watch them arise, but do not follow them. An ancient master said, "Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only that awareness comes too late." Everyone practicing the Way fears deluded thoughts and tries every means to sweep them away. In fact, do not fear them. The moment a deluded thought arises, become aware of it and do not follow it; then it will naturally dissolve.

The monastery steward asked Liangshan, "What should one do when the household thief is hard to guard against?" Liangshan replied, "Recognize it, and you will not be wronged." Once you recognize it, the thief will not steal away the wealth of your household, and you will not suffer an unjust loss.

The household thief arises constantly. If you are unaware of it and do not recognize it, it will naturally steal away all your household wealth—the wealth of the Dharma. When the deluded mind dissolves and thoughts no longer arise, then naturally "the skin falls away completely, and only the one reality is revealed."

When seeing one's nature, it is better to speak of falling away. If one speaks of an explosion, many people will misunderstand. When qi rises to the crown of the head, they may think they are about to explode, clutch their heads, and fear that their

heads will burst and they will die. In fact, they will not die. When qi reaches the crown and opens the central channel, sticky water may emerge from the crown, seeping out through the brahma aperture at the center of the head; this will be the place from which the primordial spirit emerges in the future. One must not become attached to this state and seek it. To seek it is wrong; not only will one fail to attain this fine state, one may even risk becoming possessed by demons.

Now I will tell you a koan concerning the most profound Buddhadharma. Long ago, there was a monk named Lingxun, who asked his master, Guizong, “What is Buddha?” Guizong said, “I can tell you, but I fear you will not believe it.” Lingxun replied, “My master speaks truthfully. How could I dare not believe you?”

Guizong said, “Then I will tell you: you are Buddha!” Lingxun was greatly awakened on the spot and asked further, “How should I safeguard this realization?” Guizong said, “A single speck in the eye, and flowers in empty space fall everywhere.” This means that once one recognizes that one is originally Buddha, one sees that Buddha is utterly without attachment. If one tries to safeguard it, it is like having a speck in the eye; if there is any abiding attachment, it is no longer so.

After Lingxun’s great awakening, he took leave of his master, saying, “I will return tomorrow.” His master said, “After you have packed your luggage tomorrow, come to see me again. I will tell you the most profound Buddhadharma.” The next day, after Lingxun had packed his belongings, he asked his master to expound the profound Buddhadharma. The master said, “The cold is setting in; take good care on the road.”

This means that all the functions of daily life are the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. One must not abide in anything: one can neither hold fast and remain unmoving nor move while abiding in something. After awakening, not holding fast to it allows it to function freely; holding fast to it leaves one dead there. In the end, one does not even abide in not abiding, and there is no thought of not abiding. Only this is the most profound Buddhadharma. This is ordinary mind and ordinary affairs!

Today is the final day. You must sit nine sessions; this is when it is easiest to gain strength and see results. When you recite the mantra until you can no longer recite it—not because you do not want to recite it—you are truly on the right path. Not wanting to recite is still no good; that is laziness. There is a great difference between “being able” and “wanting,” so everyone must take note! Nanyue replied to the Sixth Patriarch, “Defilement is not permitted, yet cultivation and realization are not absent.”

To realize the Way, one must still cultivate diligently and train arduously. As the saying goes, “Without a bone-chilling cold, how can plum blossoms send forth their

fragrance?" Today, by diligently undertaking this seven-day retreat, we seek to realize and see the true mind. During this retreat, everyone has gained, to a greater or lesser degree, some genuine benefit. This is cause for celebration, and our arduous efforts have not been in vain.

Meditation is the most basic practice. Genuine spiritual powers also depend on meditation; without deep entry into dhyāna, spiritual powers cannot manifest. Speaking of spiritual powers, however, speaking, working, walking, and so forth are all spiritual powers. Layman Pang said, "Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning: carrying water and hauling firewood." Daily life is all genuine wondrous functioning. But one must not abide in spiritual powers; to abide in them is to invite demonic obstruction.

Ending the Seven-Day Retreat

This seven-day retreat comes to a successful conclusion today. Everyone has made considerable progress, and their understanding has greatly improved. In fact, our seventh consciousness originally has no need to be "struck," because the self of originally non-abiding wondrous functioning is the wisdom of equality. The Diamond Sūtra says, "There is no mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span."

The True Person is originally without marks. Because we seek outwardly and cling to external circumstances, we become deluded about what is original. We mistakenly take this body to be "self," and so we must make an effort. Through seven days of meditation, we strike away these deluded attachments and return to what is original. Since there is fundamentally no self and nothing to strike, this retreat likewise has neither an opening nor a closing period.

Buddhadharma is wondrous functioning in freedom: abiding nowhere. One can enter Buddhahood and one can enter māra; one can do anything, so long as it benefits others and the mind is empty and non-abiding. Merely being able to enter Buddhahood but not māra will not do either. Entering māra does not mean becoming a demon king; it means being unconstrained and free to move in all directions.

Here is a koan for everyone. During the Southern Song, there was a Grand Commandant Zhang who greatly admired the lofty conduct of the venerable Chan Master Huayan and invited him to his home to make offerings to him. For the sake of guiding sentient beings, the Chan master ought to face the public and could not accept the offerings of only one household. Yet although he repeatedly declined, permission was not granted. When the grand commandant's daughter came to ask about the Dharma, he summoned her to come close and kissed her on the face. The daughter wept as she complained to her father. Her father became angry and drove

the Chan master away. The master was then able to leave the residence, live in the mountains, receive the wider public, and fulfill his original intention.

This koan teaches us that genuine Buddhadharma lies precisely in flexible, wondrous functioning—in freedom and ease, without concern for reputation. Any constraint becomes an obstruction and is not the true meaning of Buddhadharma.

Speaking of the Pure Land, it is not only rebirth in the Western Pure Land that is the Pure Land. So long as you let go of everything, seek nothing in an open and empty mind, and find nothing that can be obtained, this is the Pure Land; this is the Inner Court of Tuṣita. In all things, be free and at ease in accordance with conditions, allowing spontaneous functioning and moving at ease. Live well when circumstances are favorable, and live a little less well when circumstances are unfavorable—it does not matter. If you cling to nothing in any matter, you are a Buddha or bodhisattva.

After seven days of retreat, what have you gained?

I will answer for everyone in one sentence: you have gained one who has gained nothing!

Ending the Seven-Day Retreat!

Before Taking the Meditation Seat

Today, everyone has aroused the resolve to undertake a seven-day retreat using the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma. This is truly a supremely excellent convergence of causes and conditions. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is a very profound Dharma gate of Esoteric Buddhism. It belongs to the pinnacle—the heart-essence section—of The Nine Vehicles of Esoteric Buddhism.

It does not require one to circle around the outer preliminaries, such as the four preliminary practices, preliminary practices, the generation stage, and the completion stage. Rather, it enters directly into the main practice, using mudrās and mantras and relying on the Buddha’s empowering blessing to open one’s intrinsic nature and thoroughly see the true mind.

A seven-day retreat is an essential method for attaining realization within a fixed period. Each day, everyone sits for twelve hours, practicing three sessions of four hours each. In the first two sessions, practice the Fourth Mudrā; in the final session, practice the Second Mudrā. If your hands become painful during practice, you may also switch to the Fourth Mudrā during the final two hours—that is, the eleventh and twelfth hours.

The Fourth Mudrā opens wisdom and enables one to realize the Way, while the Second Mudrā eliminates obstacles. Since our karmic obstacles and habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives are deep and heavy, wisdom cannot be developed unless they are eliminated. On the seventh day, sit for eighteen hours, with each session lasting six hours. Practice only the Fourth Mudrā, and no longer practice the Second Mudrā.

During the seven-day retreat, do not be anxious to enter samādhi, much less seek spiritual powers or awakening. For as soon as there is a mind that seeks attainment, dark clouds arise and obscure the luminosity of one's intrinsic nature; instead, one neither enters samādhi nor awakens. When you sit, simply practice according to the Dharma as you ordinarily do in meditation. If your mind is sometimes as confused as tangled hemp, you may recite the mantra aloud to calm the deluded mind.

If you cough while meditating, keep the sound as low as possible and cover your mouth so as not to disturb others. If numbness in your legs becomes unbearable, you may shift them, but endure as much as possible. Under no circumstances may the mudrā be released. Whenever a thought arises, see it arise and simply do not follow it. If you fail to see the thought arising and realize only after following it for a long while, this is a great taboo in practice.

An ancient worthy said, "Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only late awareness." Therefore, whenever a thought comes, you must immediately see it and not follow it. Nor is it good to suppress a thought and prevent it from arising; simply let it arise without following it as it wanders. When you enter samādhi and can no longer recite the mantra, do not deliberately raise it up again; let it be. The moment you raise it, you leave samādhi. But entering samādhi is different from falling asleep.

When asleep, the mudrā comes apart, the head droops, awareness is lost, and the mantra is no longer recited. At such times, straighten your back, open your eyes, bring up the mantra, and drive away the demon of sleep. When entering samādhi, however, the mudrā does not come apart, awareness remains, and the mantra is gone. At that time, watch it as a cat watches for a mouse: the instant a deluded thought stirs, pounce upon it. When deluded thoughts do not arise, simply watch it firmly. Watch to the very end, and suddenly the mind that watches and the object watched both fall away together; then one's original nature opens.

If, during meditation, you experience any discomfort because your obstacles are heavy, do not force yourself. You may rest for a while or sit for fewer hours. During meditation, the movement of vital energy may give rise to many sensations; pay no attention to any of them. Simply regard yourself as dead and do not concern yourself with anything at all.

All of you are originally Buddhas. It is only because you pursue external circumstances that you become deluded about your intrinsic nature. As long as you let go of everything and do not cling, you can recover your Original Face. Therefore, cherish this opportunity: quiet your deluded thoughts and practice earnestly, in the hope of seeing your intrinsic nature. Go a step further by safeguarding that intrinsic nature, tempering the mind through circumstances, and completely clearing away the habitual tendencies accumulated over countless lives and kalpas. Only then will you fully realize bodhi and not have come into this human world in vain. May you all attain accomplishment!

Day One

During this seven-day retreat, no talking is permitted, but you may raise any questions you have.

Question: What should one do if the feet and legs hurt?

Answer: If your feet and legs are sore and painful, endure it as much as you can. But if the pain unsettles your mind and makes it scattered, you may shift and move a little. If the hands hurt while forming the mudrā, however, you must not break the mudrā. The remedy is to keep your mind fixed on the mantra and forget about your hands; then they will no longer hurt.

The mudrā is like a wire connecting our own luminous energy with the light-energy of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Once the mudrā is broken, the connection is severed; therefore, it must not be broken. For mantra recitation, use the method of vajra recitation. Reciting mantras in this way neither harms the vital energy nor the blood. When, after a certain point, the lips no longer move, simply let them be.

At first, concentrate your energy: recite mentally and listen with the ear. Let each recitation relax somewhat. If, from the very beginning, you keep tensely fixated on reciting the mantra, it will not be easy to enter stillness. As for the proper balance between tension and relaxation, strictness and ease, you must feel it out and master it yourself. If you are too relaxed, you will easily fall asleep; if you are too tense, it will be difficult to enter stillness. It is like holding a sparrow in your hand: grip it too tightly and you will crush it to death; loosen your grip and it will fly away. You must find the proper measure—neither too loose nor too tight. Do not concern yourself with belching or try to suppress it. If you need to pass gas, let it happen; just take care not to disturb others.

Question: What should one do if one does not know whether the mudrā has come apart?

Answer: Generally, so long as you do not fall asleep while meditating, the mudrā will not come apart. When the vital energy begins to move, it descends along both arms and tightly holds the mudrā in place, so that the mudrā becomes firmly joined. (When we practice this Dharma, the movement of vital energy differs from that in qigong: in qigong, the energy moves in a single line, whereas ours moves as an expanse, like a steamer.) It loosens only when one falls asleep.

All meditative appearances arise because the six consciousnesses are impure; they are reflections of the six consciousnesses, false and without inherent nature. The Diamond Sūtra says that all appearances are illusory. Therefore, it is best to have no appearances during meditation; best of all is to see nothing whatsoever.

Seeing something is not good, for it shows that the six consciousnesses have not been purified and are still in restless motion; thus appearances arise. Therefore, being without appearances is best. Our dharmakāya is originally without any appearance that can be seen. It is simply a great energy and great function, without visible appearance.

If you can see light, images of Buddhas, or even things beyond the wall, and take this to be good, abiding there without moving on, that will not do. Some people see unpleasant states and become afraid; this too is caused by their own deluded minds. To truly realize one's inherent nature is to have not the slightest appearance. Some feel themselves rising, as though they had ascended to heaven.

They may see the Jade Emperor. Can he be seen? Yes, he can. The Jade Emperor is the ruler of the second heaven of the desire realm, where people's clothing resembles the costumes worn in traditional opera. This is both good and not good. It is good because it shows that one has entered samādhi to a certain degree; it is not good because one can easily become attached to appearances and, through craving spiritual powers, enter demonic states. It is like finding a piece of gold while walking: it is good because you can buy some things with it, but it is also not good because it may lead you into trouble.

Question: How should one contemplate?

Answer: Like a cat catching a mouse, watch the point at which a thought arises; focus your entire attention upon that point of arising. What is called attending to the huatou is to look at what precedes the stirring of a single thought. When a thought comes, immediately become aware of it; once aware, turn it into emptiness. To turn means that, when a thought comes, you do not pay attention to it; or you turn it by using the mantra. Not following it is what is meant by turning.

Then the thought disappears. Do not abide even in emptiness, for once there is any abiding, you cannot thoroughly see the original mind. The first day of a seven-day

retreat is relatively difficult. It is like a monkey accustomed to jumping about that is now shut up and consequently feels uncomfortable. Do not worry. Continue the practice, and on the second and third days it will improve; you will then experience the joy of Chan.

As you continue sitting, things gradually dissolve into emptiness. You may feel that your feet are gone or that your head is gone. Do not concern yourself with any of this; simply watch the thoughts. When you watch to the utmost depth, deluded thoughts suddenly cease, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, and you directly see your original nature.

Question: What is the meaning of an explosion?

Answer: An explosion is the sudden manifestation, at the crucial point of practice, of the instant when one abruptly breaks free. It is like gunpowder exploding when it has been filled to capacity. Do not be afraid of this. Let me tell you of a fellow practitioner's experience as a reference.

A Dharma friend in Shaanxi was meditating. After entering stillness, his mind became like a great mirror, clearly illuminating everything before him, and he thought that this was awakening. In fact, it was not awakening. When the light shines upon you, there should be a sudden bursting open, a complete shattering without remainder. This is the explosion—the very instant of breaking free. It is not that there is some separate explosion; rather, it is the manifestation of body, mind, and world all dissolving into emptiness upon that single illumination.

Question: Is it good to recite mantras with the mouth open?

Answer: Do not open your mouth when reciting mantras; let the lips move slightly. We are not like Daoists, who speak of refining essence into vital energy. Yet we too cannot do without refining essence into vital energy. The fire of the mind descends to the point in the womb region, above which are the bladder and seminal vesicles. Like a brazier heating a kettle of water, the water turns into vapor under high heat. The vapor rises to the crown of the head, turns into water, and may be swallowed; this benefits the body. In deep samādhi, the breath seems to cease. It does not pass through the nose, but through the pores and skin of the entire body.

We do not use those methods of visualization. We use only the method of mental recitation and listening with the ear: listen to the soundless sound of the mind reciting the mantra, and use the ear to gather in the mind faculty, so that deluded thoughts no longer move. Our six sense faculties were originally one luminous awareness divided into six interconnected functions; they are originally differentiated functions of a single true mind. Using the most sensitive ear faculty to

grasp the difficult-to-gather mind faculty is the method in practice most readily conducive to attainment.

We commonly say, “Eight brothers, one of them foolish.” The foolish one is the eighth consciousness, because it takes in everything without distinguishing good from bad, and thus contains a great many seeds; it is a fool, a simpleton. “One among them is the cleverest” refers to the sixth consciousness, which is difficult to tame. “Five gatekeepers conduct business” refers to the first five consciousnesses engaging with external objects; the brain follows these five consciousnesses and gives rise to activity. “One goes back and forth carrying messages” refers to the seventh consciousness, which manages communication and specializes in transmitting messages back and forth.

How do we grasp the mind faculty? We grasp it by listening with the ear faculty. After leaving the cushion, one must contemplate. Contemplation means contemplating that which is before a single thought has arisen—that clear, distinct awareness, which is to contemplate oneself. This self is not one’s physical body, but one’s true mind before a single thought has arisen—the mind of numinous knowing.

To watch it is to contemplate with sovereign ease: contemplate that which abides unmoving in the original ground. This is an important practice both on and off the meditation cushion. Talking is not permitted during the seven-day retreat because one must contemplate that mind of numinous knowing, practicing continuously and seamlessly; talking easily causes one to forget contemplation. By integrating activity and stillness, one can attain samādhi within the allotted period and achieve realization within seven days.

In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the second and fourth mudrās are used most often; they are also used during the seven-day retreat. The second mudrā can eliminate obscurations and can substitute for the Hundred-Syllable Mantra, so there is no need to recite the Hundred-Syllable Mantra separately.

Question: While sitting in meditation, my arms become sore and painful and easily fall down. What should I do?

Answer: Several Dharma brothers do this: they hang a broad strap around the neck, or place a soft pillow on the lap and rest their hands upon it briefly. The mudrā should naturally form tightly; do not loosen it. Once you enter samādhi, the vital energy naturally holds the mudrā firmly together. The more you recite the mantra, the tighter it becomes, and it will not come apart. Once the pain in the mudrā has passed, it will no longer hurt. To be liberated from birth and death, leave the three realms, and attain great freedom, you must practice in accordance with the Dharma and diligently progress without interruption.

Day Two

Nowadays, people regard realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as something unimaginably lofty and exceedingly difficult. In fact, this is a mistaken view. Master Linji said, "All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature; within this lump of red flesh is a True Person of No Rank." That is to say, within the mind of each one of us there is a true person.

Why does this true person have no rank? Because this true person pervades the whole of empty space and the dharma realm and is present everywhere. Then why is it said to be within this lump of red flesh? Is that not a contradiction? It is because we have the deluded mind of ignorance. On account of ignorance, we shrink this vast and boundless Buddha-nature, confining it to a fixed place; thus, it comes to have an abode.

Even within the body of an insect there is Buddha-nature. If it is released, this Buddha-nature too is vast and boundless. Master Linji's words are meant to let us know that Buddha-nature is present within the mind of ignorance. Master Linji went on to say: Where is this Buddha-nature? How can we see it? It is precisely that which hears the Dharma and that which speaks the Dharma.

That which can speak the Dharma and that which can hear it are precisely it. Our physical bodies cannot speak or hear. They are like robots: even if all their components are installed, without electricity they still cannot move.

Our physical bodies have hearts, livers, spleens, stomachs, kidneys, the five viscera, and the six bowels. But what is electricity? The capacity, function, and energy that enable us to move, speak, hear, walk, and work are electricity. They are our inherently present Buddha-nature. So long as, amid movement and disturbance, we turn the light inward, let go, and diligently cultivate, we will certainly attain accomplishment.

Master Linji explained this so clearly because he himself realized it through cultivation and practice. When he had just become a monastic, he too did not know it.

When he first became a young monk, the head-seat monk noticed that he never went to inquire about the Dharma and asked him, "Hey! Why do you not go to the monk, Patriarch Huangbo, to ask about the Dharma?" Linji replied, "What do you want me to ask?" The head-seat monk said, "You may ask, 'What is the fundamental meaning of the Buddhadharma?'" Linji therefore went to ask Huangbo, "What is the fundamental meaning of the Buddhadharma?" Having heard this, the patriarch said nothing, but struck him with a slap. Linji then withdrew.

The next day, the head-seat monk told him to go and ask again, and once more he was struck. Thus, he asked three times and was struck three times. This koan tells students that Buddha-nature is not elsewhere; it shines forth directly before one's face. At the point where a thought ceases, turn the light inward for a single glance, and suddenly awaken—that is it. Do not seek it by establishing appearances. That runs contrary to realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Once there is any attachment, one will never see one's true nature and awaken.

What is called practice is simply removing human attachment and habitual tendencies and returning to our original nature. We are originally Buddhas, so becoming Buddhas should not be difficult. Simply turn back and cease deluded thoughts, and you are the Tathāgata.

As the saying goes, "The sea of suffering is boundless; turn back, and there is the shore." Turn back and look at the point where your thoughts arise. Watch them continuously until not a single thought arises. What is this? At that moment, it is like suddenly awakening from a dream: "Oh! So this is it!" This sound, "Oh!" is like the "hu" sound spoken of in the Chan school.

"Wear out iron shoes searching everywhere, yet find it without the least effort." You cannot find it anywhere, but in fact it is right before you and has never left you. The more you seek it, the farther away it becomes. Do not seek; rest and look, and that is it. The patriarchs of the past all turned the light inward in this way and awakened to see their true nature.

Now that the formless true appearance of seeing one's true nature has been explained, you will no longer cling to appearances or pursue them. Therefore, while practicing the Dharma, do not seek to see anything or worry about anything. Whatever appearances may arise, pay them no heed. Last time, we spoke of a fellow practitioner who, while practicing, saw a large hairy hand covering his face.

Do not be afraid of any phenomena that occur during meditation; they are all false. At times, Dharma protectors are testing us to see whether we cling to appearances. Therefore, even if something frightening appears, do not be afraid; it is all a false appearance.

The wrathful forms manifested by Buddhas and bodhisattvas are all fearsome, because they are meant to frighten demons. Demons are fierce, so I must be fiercer still. Hence the saying, "The heart of a bodhisattva, the face of a rākṣasa." Do not be afraid when you see a wrathful form; it protects us. "All appearances whatsoever are false." When one realizes the Way, nothing at all is seen; there is not the slightest thing.

First, we must open up to our original nature and see our true nature. Then we must eliminate our habitual tendencies. Once those tendencies have been eliminated, spiritual powers may arise. The arising of spiritual powers is nothing remarkable; it is a peripheral matter. Realizing the Way is fundamental.

It is like a great tree: when its roots are alive, its branches and leaves above will surely turn green and become luxuriant. But if the roots are not alive, then even if there are some green branches and leaves above, that greenery is only superficial and useless; in the end, it will still wither.

We must first develop the power of the Way—that is, the supernormal power of the exhaustion of outflows. When we abide nowhere and all afflictions have been completely exhausted, only then are the five spiritual powers that arise genuine and lasting. Spiritual powers that arise before realizing the Way are demons of the five aggregates, demons of the skandhas—mere shadows. For example, if one has not seen one's true nature and one's spirit leaves the body, one may again cling to appearances after going out and return to the realm of birth and death.

In the past, there was someone capable of sending his spirit forth. After it left, he saw a fair, plump, well-rounded woman lying beneath a large banana tree. His mind stirred and he clung to the appearance, so he pounced upon her. In fact, it was a white sow giving birth to piglets. Because he entered her, he too became a piglet. Only after he smashed his head against a stone and died did he return.

You see how dangerous this is. Therefore, only after the emotional views that cling to appearances have been completely eliminated, so that one no longer clings to appearances or lets the mind be stirred, may one attain the power of the Way and then develop the five spiritual powers. Only then are they genuine spiritual powers; otherwise, one will cause great trouble. We should not be attached to spiritual powers. Watch the point where thoughts arise; watch to the utmost limit, and suddenly there is a break. The mind that watches and the thought being watched both cease entirely, and one's true nature shines brightly before one.

All right. If anyone has questions, please raise them for discussion.

Day Three

Time passed quickly, and the three days have come to an end. Each of you has had various experiences: some have seen light; some have forgotten their hands and feet; some have experienced visions of the Buddha; and so forth. Whatever experience appears, do not become attached to appearances or pay it any heed. The Dharma body is formless; whatever has form is not the Dharma body.

If you become attached to appearances, you will be obstructed by them and may fall into demonic states. Seeing light is not seeing the Dharma body—that is, seeing one's true nature. Take a pearl, for example: it gives off a radiance, but if one sees only the light and not the pearl, one cannot claim to have obtained the precious jewel. One must see the substance that emits the light before it counts as seeing one's true nature. Electricity is another example: it has function but no visible form. Thus, Buddha-nature has no form that can be seen.

In the past, Patriarch Gaofeng was engaged in practice. When he had just left home, he had not yet encountered an enlightened teacher to instruct him. Each day, he merely followed the monastery steward in performing sūtra recitations and repentance rites. One day, after the rites were over, he was carrying a load and walking behind. Snow was falling heavily. As he passed a house, he heard someone inside say, "The ghost who performs sūtra rites has come back!" He was greatly perplexed and asked his teacher, "After leaving home, is there anything else one can do?" The teacher replied, "I do not know about anything else."

"Thirty li from here, there is a Chan monastery called Baiyun. Go there and ask." So he went to Baiyun Chan Monastery to inquire. Chan Master Baiyun instructed him: "After leaving home, one must transcend birth and death and leave the three realms. Performing sūtra recitations and repentance rites cannot transcend birth and death. You must investigate Chan. Investigate what you were like before your parents gave birth to you." He investigated this for a long time but did not awaken.

Later, he became a disciple of Chan Master Xueyan Qin. The master asked him, "Who is it that drags around this dead corpse?" When a person no longer draws breath, it is a dead corpse. Who is it that drags this dead corpse around? In the past, Chan masters guided practitioners in their practice in this way, investigating a huatou and seeing their true nature.

Layman Fu wrote a poem: "Empty-handed, I hold a hoe; walking, I ride a water buffalo. A person crosses a bridge; the bridge flows, but the water does not." This poem uses metaphors to explain the relationship between Buddha-nature and appearances, comparing the body to a buffalo and Buddha-nature to a person.

The "person" is Buddha-nature, and the "bridge" is the body. The body undergoes birth and death, whereas the "water"—Buddha-nature—does not undergo birth and death. Thus, the "bridge" moves while the water does not; the water's not flowing symbolizes Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature neither arises nor ceases, neither moves nor wavers, and does not flow. Only then did Chan Master Gaofeng understand that the one who drags the dead corpse is precisely a person's Buddha-nature.

Practice enables one to understand that the body is illusory and unobtainable, and that only the Dharma body is real. How can one recognize it? It is the numinous

awareness that is clear and distinct at the point where not a single thought arises; the nature of that awareness is our Buddha-nature. Yet people can never quite grasp this point or accept it: “Where is it?” It is right where you ask! (Someone interjects: “I know that it is this, but I simply cannot grasp it.”) Do not try to grasp it. It is right before you; it cannot escape. The true mind fills the whole of space, pervades the dharma realm, and is present everywhere.

Day Four

There was once a koan in which a disciple asked his master, “When the great thousandfold world is destroyed, is the dharmakāya destroyed as well?” The master replied, “The dharmakāya is destroyed as well.” Why did he answer this way? The great thousandfold world is manifested from dharmatā. Dharmatā neither arises nor ceases and cannot be destroyed; therefore, the great thousandfold world cannot be destroyed either. If one says that the great thousandfold world is destroyed, does this not mean that the dharmakāya is destroyed as well?

Chan masters teach differently from others: they speak in reverse. He was telling us that only the dharmakāya is indestructible and most precious; everything else is false and merely an appendage of the dharmakāya. It is truly a pity that we disregard the master of the house and pursue only those appendages, toiling in vain as we revolve through the six realms.

Therefore, let go of everything and do not grasp at anything. Seek only the fundamental thing—Buddha-nature—and that is right. Sadly, many people do not understand. Food in heaven need not be grown, bought, or cooked, yet there are excellent things to eat. Where do they come from? This is the result of blessings. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is even more so: whatever one wishes to eat requires no buying, washing, or cooking.

The lowest level there is the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages. There are ordinary beings there who not only eat but must also relieve themselves. Yet it differs from the human world: there is no need to set out a chamber pot. When they need to relieve themselves, the ground naturally opens; when they are finished, it closes again. It is entirely automatic. The heavenly realms are the same.

This shows that our Buddha-nature is inherently complete. Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch said, “How unexpected that the self-nature is originally complete in itself! How unexpected that the self-nature can give rise to the myriad dharmas!” The Lotus Sūtra likewise says: Poor people do not know that they possess a great treasure, complete with everything, and instead go outside to beg.

What a pity! When people do this or that to earn money, are they not begging? Since we can now understand this principle, let go of everything: that very moment is it. We are originally Buddhas and need not cultivate with such painful effort. Conversely, if we cannot let go and remain attached in our minds, even arduous cultivation is useless.

There was once a butcher's apprentice who, having heard this teaching, laid down his butcher's knife and said, "I too am among the thousand Buddhas." See how free and direct that was: simply let go. People just refuse to let go. If one can let go, why sit in meditation at all? One sits in meditation precisely because one cannot let go.

First, sit for a while to dispel deluded thoughts. Gradually one comes to understand that one has always been a Buddha, and that sitting in meditation was, after all, superfluous—what a pity, what a pity! If one can truly let go until everything is empty, the mind is fully replete and can manifest freely. Whatever one needs is present; what worries or afflictions could remain?

A monastic once telephoned me and said, "Teach me a method for becoming wealthy. I have no money now; I am poor." Just consider: how can one cultivate the Buddhadharma properly in this way? If you have attained the Way, you need not worry that no one will help you; everyone will come to help you. The ancient worthies also said, "Those who attain the Way receive much help; those who lose the Way receive little help." Here, the Way means moral virtue, and virtue also means attainment. Thus, those with moral virtue can attain everything. In cultivation, one need not fear starving to death.

What does "letting go" mean? It means non-abiding; it does not mean refusing to work. A factory director, professor, or general manager continues to perform the work, but after doing it, keeps the mind empty and does not cling. If Xiao Liao is promoted to section chief, he should simply do the work and accept the promotion; while doing so, not abiding in it in his mind is letting go. Doing nothing at all, like an idler, is not called letting go. Non-contrivance leaves nothing undone; in cultivation, one must not become rigid and dull.

There was once a Buddhist practitioner whose master asked him, "Can you remain master of yourself during the day?" "Yes." "Can you remain master of yourself when sleeping at night and dreaming?" "Yes." (Dreaming is a minor state of unconsciousness; death is a major state of unconsciousness. To remain master of oneself in dreams is already very good.) Our cultivation is meant to enable us to remain master of ourselves amid circumstances and not be dragged about by them. Yet even remaining master of oneself is not enough. One must go a step further and empty out even the notion of being master, only then attaining genuine benefit. The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are both manifestations of functioning.

The three kāyas of self-nature are as follows: a single thought of pure mind, unmoving and unwavering, is the dharmakāya. Everyone has at least one second of pure mind, which is Buddha-mind; regrettably, people do not recognize it. This is the dharmakāya Buddha. The luminosity that can illuminate everything is the sambhogakāya Buddha. Without luminosity, could one see things? One could not. All outward appearances are manifested and transformed by our dharmakāya; these are all our nirmāṇakāya. Our self-nature fully possesses the three kāyas, without the slightest lack.

What we cultivate now is the dharmakāya Buddha, and this is most important. The sambhogakāya at the fruition stage is not something we can realize now. For example, after Sudhana's fifty-three visits, he finally returned to Maitreya, who told him, "You have attained fundamental wisdom, but not differentiated wisdom." Differentiated wisdom is the wisdom sambhogakāya brought about by merit and virtue accumulated over many lives. It is attained by performing many meritorious deeds and good actions. Śākyamuni Buddha's sambhogakāya is called Vairocana Buddha, his dharmakāya is called Mahāvairocana Buddha, and his nirmāṇakāya is Śākyamuni Buddha.

There are two sambhogakāyas: the self-enjoyment sambhogakāya and the sambhogakāya for the enjoyment of others. The former is the great luminous Buddha. Great bodhisattvas can see it, but lesser bodhisattvas cannot. When Śākyamuni Buddha saw the majestic beauty of an ancient Buddha's sambhogakāya, he aroused the resolve to attain it. He cultivated diligently day and night and became a Buddha seven kalpas ahead of time.

Once this principle is understood, total non-abiding is awakening; the place where not a single thought arises is my own intrinsic nature. Nor should one rush to awaken. When genuine awakening opens, one may weep bitterly: What a pity! How could a fine, innocent Buddha have revolved through the six realms and suffered so?

As for the nirmāṇakāya Buddha, when cultivation has reached the point that even the most subtle deluded thoughts have been completely cut off, none remain. One can then transform in a thousand ways, manifest countless transformation bodies, and liberate countless sentient beings. These are the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya at the fruition stage. When the three kāyas and four wisdoms are perfected, one becomes a Buddha at the fruition stage.

In cultivation, we must first awaken to this fundamental essence. Chan Master Longya said, "Those who study the Way must first have a basis for awakening." Without awakening, cultivation is difficult. First clearly understand what the dharmakāya is and how to directly realize it; then temper yourself through

circumstances, grinding away habitual tendencies until they are exhausted. Only then can spiritual powers arise.

“Initial awakening reaches only the edge of the dharmakāya.” It is not that everything is well and complete once one awakens. There still remain habitual tendencies accumulated through many lives and kalpas. One must cultivate diligently and safeguard realization continuously and closely before one can truly realize the Way. Cultivation must proceed step by step, without end.

Broadly speaking, this may be divided into three stages: the initial barrier, the further barrier, and the final barrier. In finer detail, there are no fewer than a dozen steps. The Weiyang school divides the path into ninety-six steps. Patriarch Linji explained it more simply: the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials suffice, making nine steps in all.

The first step is to recognize our intrinsic nature. Then, amid walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, safeguard it continuously and closely. Do not allow the mind to stir, and do not become attached to appearances. Chan Master Nantai said, “It is not a matter of stilling the mind and eliminating deluded thoughts; it is simply that there is nothing to discuss.” Originally there is nothing at all, so what thoughts are there to stir? Therefore, regard all things as empty, and thoughts will naturally cease to move.

But because we are accustomed to movement, remaining unmoved feels difficult. Like a monkey, we always want to leap about and cannot be tethered. Therefore, we must safeguard closely and make our practice continuous and seamless, watching it at every moment. This does not mean looking forward: to look forward is to look at the assorted defilements of external things, and scattered thoughts will fly about. Instead, turn the gaze back; do not look outward.

If we can truly turn the gaze back at every moment to the place where thoughts arise and do not follow them, those who have not awakened can readily awaken, and those who have awakened can readily awaken thoroughly. Yet, having grown accustomed to movement through many lives and kalpas, it is difficult not to forget at every moment. Therefore, we must heighten our vigilance. To hold fast at every moment is of utmost importance.

A person who has truly awakened has no affairs at all: utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, and attached to no appearance whatsoever. To accomplish this truly is very difficult. For example, when Patriarch Linji was about to enter parinirvāṇa, he said to his disciples, “None of you must lose my Treasury of the True Dharma Eye. You must safeguard it at every moment.”

Sansheng said, “Who would dare lose the patriarch’s Treasury of the True Dharma Eye?” Linji replied, “Very well. How will you teach the Dharma in order to guide later generations?” Sansheng stepped forward and gave a shout. Patriarch Linji said, “Alas! I never expected that my Treasury of the True Dharma Eye would perish beside this blind donkey.”

What does this mean? Was he praising him? Scolding him? Or rebuking and reproaching him? This depends on whether you are attached to appearances. Have you read Record of the Mind Lamp by Elder Zhanyu? Zhanyu was Sanfeng’s disciple. He said, “If I had been present at the time, how would I have taught the Dharma to later generations? I would simply stand with my palms joined; that itself would be teaching the Dharma.”

“That shout would not do.” Is this correct? In fact, it is wrong. With one shout, he even drove back his own master; what more is there to say about guiding later generations? There is no dharma to teach and no one to liberate. If there is a dharma to teach or someone to liberate, that is already an error.

Zhanyu also said that Sansheng’s shout was not good and that his own standing with palms joined was better. Thus, not establishing a single dharma is very difficult. Patriarch Linji called him a blind donkey. Though this appears to be a scolding, it was actually praise: “If I possessed a Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, then even I myself would be attached to appearances.” The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye is also unobtainable; Buddha is unobtainable as well, and there is no demon either. Only when there is no attachment whatsoever can wondrous functioning be boundless.

Yangshan of the Weiyang school wished to teach the Dharma to a judicial officer—a magistrate who handled legal cases. Yangshan asked him, “What office do you hold?” He replied, “Judicial officer.” Yangshan raised his whisk and asked, “Can you judge this?” The officer could not answer.

Yangshan told a novice to take this question to Sansheng. Sansheng was recuperating in the Hall of Prolonged Life. He replied, “An affair has arisen.” Yangshan wished to examine him further, so he told the novice to ask Sansheng again, “What affair has arisen?” Sansheng replied, “A repeated offense cannot be tolerated!” When Yangshan heard this, he deeply praised Sansheng for having attained the essential teaching of the Linji school. These are exemplary models of the ancient great worthies, whose post-awakening safeguarding was profound and who attained flexible, wondrous functioning.

Safeguarding realization after awakening is necessary, but one must not safeguard it rigidly; rigidity will not do either.

The Fifth Day

(Teaching the recitation of the Maitreya Mantra) The first day of the first lunar month each year is the birthday of Maitreya Bodhisattva. Today is the thirtieth day of the year. During tonight's meditation session, you may first recite the Maitreya Mantra 108 times, invoking Maitreya Bodhisattva's blessings so that we may bring this seven-day retreat to a perfect completion and realize our true nature and the Way.

Today is the great New Year's Eve, the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month. We Buddhists have a saying: "When the thirtieth day of the twelfth month arrives, how will you free yourself?" That is, today is already the final day—how will you attain liberation? The circumstances in which Master Yongjia visited the Sixth Patriarch may serve as an annotation to this question.

Master Yongjia was a great monk who had awakened. When he visited the Sixth Patriarch, he circled the platform without bowing. The Sixth Patriarch shouted, "From what quarter does this son of the Buddha come, so arrogantly proud and self-conceited?" Yongjia replied, "The matter of birth and death is grave; impermanence is swift." The Sixth Patriarch said, "Why not realize the unborn, and thereby comprehend that there is no swiftness?" Yongjia said, "Realization itself is unborn; fundamentally, there is no swiftness."

This means that, since the essential nature is unborn, it is also undying. Since there is neither birth nor death, what liberation or non-liberation could there be? At this point, the Sixth Patriarch still did not let him go. Seemingly praising him, he said, "You have deeply grasped the meaning of the unborn." In fact, he was setting a trap to see whether Yongjia would take the bait.

Yongjia was one who had awakened thoroughly and would not cling to appearances. He therefore asked in return, "How could the unborn have any meaning?" The Sixth Patriarch pressed further: "If there is no meaning, who then makes distinctions?" If there is not even meaning, who is making distinctions? If there is no meaning, who distinguishes the unborn? Conversely, if one knows the unborn, does that not mean there is an idea? Ordinary people would indeed find it difficult to answer at this point, but Yongjia had a way out. Unhurriedly, he said, "Distinguishing, too, is not meaning!" That is, even though distinctions are made, there is no idea.

A sūtra says: "One can skillfully distinguish the characteristics of all dharmas, yet remain unmoved in the ultimate truth." Though one distinguishes, nothing enters the mind. This is inferential knowledge together with direct knowledge. Inferential knowledge means distinguishing; direct knowledge is like a mirror reflecting things:

what is long appears long, and what is short appears short. This is revival after death—the lively and vigorous great functioning.

The Buddhadharma is flexible, wondrous functioning; it is not something dead and motionless. In former times, an old woman supported a great monk for three years. One day, wishing to test whether he was truly a great virtuous one, she sent a young girl to bring him food. She instructed her to embrace the monk when she arrived and ask him how he felt at that moment.

Afterward, the girl reported to the old woman that the monk had said, “A withered tree leans against a cold cliff; through all three months of spring, there is no warm breath.” The old woman was greatly disappointed and said, “Drive him out. He is a dead man and of no use.” This illustrates that it will not do to remain dead and inert in seated meditation and cultivation, unable to bring forth functioning; one cannot realize the great Way in that manner.

One must be able to act. Realizing the great Way does not mean doing nothing. One can do every kind of thing; although one does them, the mind does not move—“distinguishing, too, is not meaning.” So how does one gain liberation on the thirtieth day of the year? Simply do all things without letting them enter the mind. “Realization itself is unborn”: what is there to comprehend or not comprehend, and what method need be applied? Our fundamental essence is neither arising nor ceasing; there is nothing to be comprehended.

Therefore, when you practice, some of you may see various appearances, some may see light, and some may see nothing at all. Those who see light should understand that my dharmakāya is itself the luminous essence; light is emitted by my Buddha-nature. To see one’s true nature through that light is awakening.

If one does not recognize the luminous essence but clings to the appearance of light and gives rise to deluded thoughts, one is clinging to a light-shadow. Yesterday we spoke of the poem: “High upon the mountain peak, a lone moon shines upon a cold spring. Yet there is no moon in the water; the moon is in the blue sky.” Do not look at the moon’s reflection in the water; recognize the bright moon in the sky. There is no moon in the water—it is only a shadow.

The moon is nothing other than one’s own intrinsic nature. The blue sky represents the dharmakāya: empty, numinous, and non-abiding. One must recognize one’s intrinsic nature directly, at this very moment. Those who see all kinds of appearances should likewise know that all appearances are false; they are all reflections of our six consciousnesses.

The seeing nature that can perceive appearances is our intrinsic nature. The capacity to see appearances is the Buddha-nature of our dharmakāya. Do not cling to

appearances; to cling to them is mistaken. It is best not to see any appearance at all. The dharmakāya is formless, and formlessness is true appearance. Clear, ever-present knowing, unmoving and unshaken, is the true mind. The dharmakāya has no appearance of interruption; it is not present one moment and absent the next.

It shines continually at the gateways of the six sense faculties and has never ceased. Even when a person is asleep, it still shines and does not leave for a single instant. Once you recognize this and exhaust your habitual tendencies, you may go wherever you wish within the six realms. You need not necessarily ascend to heaven; even going to hell presents no obstacle. To liberate sentient beings extensively and adorn the hells is great merit and virtue, like Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva.

If one feels aversion toward entering the three lower realms and longs for a Buddha's Pure Land—the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Lapis Lazuli World, the Inner Court of Tuṣita, and so forth—this shows that one has not broken through the appearance of sentient beings and has not yet completed the matter. Genuine practice means being unrestrained, free and at ease, natural and unconfined, able to go anywhere.

Long ago, someone asked Patriarch Dongshan, "When great cold or great heat comes, where should one take refuge?" This was a metaphor for where one should go when great calamities and hardships arise. Patriarch Dongshan replied, "Take refuge where there is neither cold nor heat." The person asked, "What place is free from cold and heat?" Dongshan replied, "When it is hot, let the heat kill you; when it is cold, let the cold kill you."

This is the place free from cold and heat; its point is not to cling to appearances. When a certain teacher from Shaanxi was with my master's teacher in Chengdu, they heard that the People's Liberation Army was about to enter the city. He urged my master's teacher to flee, but my master's teacher said, "There is no need to flee. Stay here and cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma well."

As it turned out, Chengdu was peacefully liberated, and nothing happened. Only then did that teacher regret that his mind had been unstable and that he had clung too much to appearances. We also had a fellow disciple. During the Japanese invasion of China, when Hangzhou fell, a Japanese soldier raised a sword to kill him. He thought that escape was impossible anyway, and that the dharmakāya of a practitioner is originally indestructible. Unafraid of birth and death, he thought: if he is going to kill me, then let him kill me.

He recited Amitābha Buddha and, wholly without fear, stretched his head toward the sword. The soldier struck his head with the sword, but it bounced back and could not kill him. At the sight, the Japanese soldier was terrified, threw down the

sword, and ran away. This is a true story; we even saw that sword. One who has truly transcended birth and death can come and go unobstructed within the six realms.

Someone asked Changsha, a disciple of Chan Master Nanquan: “After your master entered parinirvāṇa, to which Pure Land did he go?” He replied, “My master did not go to an eastern or western Pure Land. In the eastern household he becomes an ox; in the western household he becomes a horse.” To others, this might seem to insult his master. In fact, he was praising him, extolling the profundity and vastness of his master’s practice: he could function even among different kinds of beings. This is how one gains liberation on the thirtieth day of the twelfth month.

As you undertake this seven-day retreat today, once you realize your intrinsic nature and fundamental essence, you will be free and at ease. I will now teach you the simplest method for letting go of everything. In the midst of daily work, call out, “Stop!” Think of nothing, and simply attend to this clear and distinct knowing.

You may stop for one minute or half a minute, and then resume your work. After working for a while, stop again. Practice gradually, stopping thirty or forty times a day. While walking or riding in a vehicle, you can use this simple method of stopping thoughts.

The first time I broke open was during seated meditation. My mother coughed once, and at that very moment everything vanished; there was nothing at all, and the quiescent and extinguished intrinsic nature appeared. When our practice breaks open, it need not happen during meditation. It may very well occur in sleep, while working, or suddenly while walking, when everything falls away.

Therefore, you must practice contemplation at all times and must not be lax. After awakening, you must safeguard it. Habitual tendencies are too deep and heavy; a single awakening does not make everything thoroughly complete.

Sounds can affect practice in two ways. First, while one is meditating, a sudden sound may startle one out of samādhi. Second, when emptiness has reached just the right point, a sudden sound may help open the body, mind, and world, so that one awakens and sees one’s intrinsic nature. When the time and conditions have ripened, this truly cannot be brought about merely by wholesome roots planted with one or two Buddhas. Do not be anxious in practice. It is not that one cultivates in order to become unborn; one is originally unborn—this is how it has always been. Simply let go. There is nothing to realize or obtain; realization is realizing no seeking and no obtaining, which is one’s original attainment.

Safeguarding means not sticking to any state whatsoever. Its essential point is: “Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not move with circumstances.”

At all times safeguard this mind of clear knowing, empty, numinous, and non-abiding. Once safeguarding has matured, let it function freely. Let it go east or west, and it will not harm the crops. Then one has reached the state of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization.

Thus, the more you let go in practicing the Dharma, the better; the more anxious you become, the less it will work. Some people wait for an explosion, yet they cannot wait; the more they wait, the less it works. Moreover, the circumstances in which each person awakens and breaks open differ. For some, it is as though something simply falls away: with one release, it is over, with no explosion at all.

Each person's experiences in samādhi also differ. Some see light, some see Dharma protectors, some see themselves, and some see no scenes at all; they are all different. There are several Dharma protectors. Once everything falls away, there is nothing at all.

Here is another example. While safeguarding, one fellow practitioner was taking off his shoes before sleep. The moment he pulled off a shoe, body and mind both disappeared, and the quiescent and extinguished intrinsic nature appeared before him. This is what happens when safeguarding has matured. Before one has truly realized the Way, one may sometimes seem to leave the body and go somewhere, but this is not a genuine out-of-body experience; it is still an image of the six consciousnesses.

After awakening, reciting mantras, practicing the six mudrās, and so forth are all forms of safeguarding. It is also all right not to practice the six mudrās; contemplative safeguarding itself is practice, and this is genuine practice. If you cling to pleasurable states during meditation, then do not meditate, for that is attachment to dharmas. The second dhyāna is joy, and the third dhyāna is bliss. When one sits well, there can be great pleasure indeed.

But one must not abide in pleasure. As soon as there is attachment, one enters the path of māras. Māras are formed through attachment to appearances; māras, too, possess spiritual powers. Attachment to appearances makes one a māra. There was a so-called Supreme Master Ching Hai, for example; the Hong Kong magazine Inner Illumination once exposed and criticized her. Many people in the world seek karmic blessings, and māras take advantage of such openings. Seeking māras is also far more immediately efficacious than seeking the Buddha, because all seeking is attachment to appearances and makes one a retainer of māras.

Letting go is seeing one's true nature. If you can truly let go and no thoughts remain, you are free; if you are not free, then some thoughts have not yet been completely relinquished, and subtle thoughts still remain. If you regard yourself as dead, seeking nothing and gaining nothing, then you have let go.

When you are free, it feels as though nothing remains; even the person is gone: “The great earth lies level and submerged; empty space is shattered to dust.” The world, too, is gone. Only this lucid, ever-knowing intrinsic nature remains. “The numinous light shines alone, far beyond the sense faculties and their objects”: one has left the dusty world behind. If you wish to return, a single awakening brings you back; the moment a thought stirs, you have returned.

Initial awakening is like merely looking about from the doorway. One must still diligently eliminate habitual tendencies, enter the house, and take one’s proper place in the dharmakāya. Finally, one must leave that position and go beyond the dharmakāya: even if great spiritual powers arise, one does not abide in them, but liberates sentient beings in accordance with conditions.

In former times there was a Chan master named Deng Yinfeng. He said, “When all of you approach parinirvāṇa, you sit in the full lotus posture and display an auspicious sign before departing. Is that not overly attached to appearances? I will show you a sign of freedom.” Having spoken, he stood on his head and departed with ease. Śākyamuni Buddha departed while lying down.

Sleep, too, is a good time for practice. Enter samādhi while sleeping—seemingly asleep yet not asleep. When you have reached the crucial point, some movement or sound outside may help open you up. Thus walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all suitable for practice. This is the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate: it is not bound by forms; applying oneself to practice in the mind is sufficient. It is not easy to hear the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate in this world. Without having extensively planted wholesome roots in past lives, one cannot hear it.

Śākyamuni Buddha said that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and can all become Buddhas. But why do we not awaken? It is because our inverted deluded thoughts are causing mischief: we take external appearances to be real, while treating the true Buddha-nature as false, even calling it superstition. This is because the human mind clings to external appearances; hence such people are called inverted sentient beings. They keep circling around in deluded thoughts—even in dreams, they keep circling around.

Day Six

Today is already the sixth day; tomorrow the retreat will be complete. Everyone has been sitting very well. It seems there will be no problem with tomorrow’s eighteen hours. I hope you can settle the mind still further. As the retreat nears completion, people’s minds begin to stir and grow restless: they think of the retreat ending, of going home, and so on.

The mind must not grow restless. After the retreat is complete, you must continue your practice. Keep the mind calm and preserve this state. Do not let it grow restless, and your progress will be swift.

Seeing one's true nature is actually quite easy. Take Chan Master Wuzu Yan, for example—the Chan master of Wuzu Mountain in Hubei, not Hongren, the Fifth Patriarch and teacher of the Sixth Patriarch. He belonged to the Yangqi branch of the Linji school. His disciple Yuanwu Qin and Dharma-grandson Dahui Gao were both Chan masters of very high accomplishment.

He instructed his students: "There is a little erotic poem that you scholars read which closely resembles an instruction of the Chan school. It says: 'Again and again she calls for Xiaoyu, though there is really nothing to do; she only wants her beloved to recognize her voice.'"

Yuanwu was standing nearby and listening. After hearing this, he was greatly puzzled. As he left the Chan hall, a large rooster happened to crow from its perch. At once, the mysterious pivot was triggered, and he blurted out, "Is this not a sound?" He then awakened to who it was that heard the sound, and attained awakening. Thus, awakening can occur anywhere. To awaken and see one's true nature is truly not difficult.

Today each of you spoke of the states you have seen. Such states are all false appearances, all illusory. Do not follow after them. Whether they are appearances or lights, do not follow them. Instead, turn the light back and ask: Who is it that sees? Through appearances, recognize true nature. Thoroughly understand that the one manifesting appearances, the one seeing them, and the one recognizing them are all functions of my own true mind and intrinsic nature.

To awaken here is to see one's true nature; it is awakening! Conversely, to become attached to appearances is mistaken. We have spoken of this matter continually, yet some people still become attached to appearances. Hanshan's poem says: "High upon the mountain peak, / A lone moon shines on a cold spring. / Yet there is no moon in the water; / The moon is in the blue sky." It tells us to recognize that the moon is in the blue sky; the moon in the water is merely its reflection.

The moon one sees is only a reflection. Where is the blue sky? It is within Buddha-nature. The moon that is seen is manifested by the Buddha of one's own intrinsic nature, and it is also seen by one's own seeing of true nature. To see one's true nature, one must merge the moon one sees with oneself into a single whole: the moon is oneself, and oneself is the moon.

How are they merged? It is not by going over and joining oneself to it, but by recognizing that this moon is manifested by one's own mind. The moon is mind, and

mind is the moon. One does not seek the moon outside the mind, nor seek the mind outside the moon. When they merge into one, one sees one's true nature.

Thereafter, whatever one sees, one no longer becomes attached to appearances. These things are all manifested by my own nature; they are myself. Therefore, Chan practitioners say: "The verdant bamboo is wholly prajñā; the luxuriant yellow flowers are none other than intrinsic nature."

To see bamboo and flowers is to see oneself; there is nothing separate from oneself outside. In this way, one sees one's true nature at every moment. There is never a moment when one does not see appearances, and never a moment when one does not see true nature. Nature and appearance are nondual: nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. Therefore, Buddhadharma is called the dharma gate of nonduality. There are not two different things. In this way, one will no longer run into a wall.

If one becomes attached to appearances, one suffers whenever one cannot obtain something; one runs into a wall. Seeing one's true nature means nothing to obtain and nothing to seek. Then body and mind are at ease. One can live contentedly in poverty and delight in the Way, for there is no distinction between poverty and wealth. Without the Way, even one who possesses great wealth is poor; with the Way, one is not poor.

When one breath does not return, not a bit of great wealth can be taken along; one still departs utterly bare. Yet the truly great treasure—the Way—has been deeply buried within the five aggregates. It lies wrapped in the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, and thus cannot be obtained. If one clears away the five aggregates and takes hold of this great treasure, one possesses inexhaustible wealth; one has everything and becomes a truly rich person.

Therefore, understand that appearances are false; only true nature is real. Appearance and nature are like a mirror and its reflections. Without a mirror, there can be no reflections; without reflections, there can be no mirror. A mirror necessarily reflects images; that which does not reflect images is not a mirror.

Our true mind likewise necessarily manifests appearances. The Diamond Sūtra speaks of our fundamental essence as having no appearance at all: true emptiness, utterly free of appearances. The Amitābha Sūtra speaks of the majestic adornment of all kinds of wondrous appearances; these are the wondrous functioning that arises when the true mind manifests appearances. If it did not manifest appearances, it would not be the true mind.

Appearance is mind. Therefore, one sees one's true nature at every moment and need not seek it outside. To understand this is to see one's true nature. So never become attached to appearances: lights, Buddhas, scenes—all are unobtainable. Through them, recognize the fundamental essence. To recognize the fundamental essence of the true mind is to see one's true nature. If you do not recognize the true mind, then even if you develop great spiritual powers, you still remain deluded and blind and cannot ultimately realize the Way.

To merge into one means recognizing that the mind can give rise to every kind of wondrous functioning, can emit light, and so forth. That which cannot emit light is not the essence of mind. Light is mind, and mind is light. When the two merge into one, that is genuine awakening: one understands and no longer becomes attached to appearances. There is no need to seek appearances outside the mind or seek the mind outside appearances.

Therefore, Wuzu Yan asked his disciples: "Our school has a saying: 'Even bodhisattvas of Equal Enlightenment and Wondrous Enlightenment'—great bodhisattvas beyond the ten bhūmis—'still carry its straw sandals. Who is it?'" A disciple replied, "Bearded Zhang the Third; dark-faced Li the Fourth." It refers to Buddha-nature.

If one asks where Buddha-nature is, it is in Bearded Zhang the Third and dark-faced Li the Fourth; that is, it is everywhere and nowhere else.

At all times and in all places, every phenomenon that appears is manifested by our Buddha-nature; it is precisely where Buddha-nature is. Why still become attached to appearances? Why seek elsewhere? Why pursue this method or that practice? All dharmas are expedient means; there is no fixed dharma. Nothing compares with the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate: it is the birth of a royal prince.

The so-called birth of a royal prince means being born as the crown prince in an emperor's household, not as the son of a prince or high minister. When this crown prince grows up, he will certainly inherit the throne; that is, he will become a Buddha. Those who pursue other dharma gates merely circle around the periphery. Without realizing the mind-ground and understanding what Buddha-nature is, one can never realize the Way.

The teacher of Chan Master Gaofeng asked him, "Can you be master of yourself during the day?" "I can." "Can you be master of yourself in dreams while sleeping at night?" "I can." What extraordinary practice! It is not something ordinary people can accomplish. Yet it was still not enough, because this is relative: who is master of whom? It is not the absolute true mind.

He asked again, “When there are no dreams and no thoughts, where is the master?” He could not answer. This showed that he had not yet recognized the master. He was practicing by circling around outside. No matter whether he developed spiritual powers or anything else, it would still not do. For this reason, he continued investigating for another three years.

One day, while taking a nap, a monk blundered into him and knocked his pillow to the floor. He suddenly awakened. Only then did he break through and recognize the master: when there are no dreams and no thoughts, is not the master precisely emitting light? At the point where not a single thought arises, that which is clear and distinctly aware is one’s own master. Once one recognizes this, one need only safeguard it continuously and closely.

The methods of Esoteric Buddhism are innumerable. One method can open the Brahmā aperture; another can enable one to attain divine eye and divine ear powers, and so on. Yet even if these are opened or attained, one is still on the periphery, still circling around, and cannot become a Buddha, because one has not recognized the master. These are merely positions of meritorious achievement; one cannot become the emperor—that is, one cannot become a Buddha. Instead, one may become attached to appearances and be headed toward becoming a demon.

In short, recognizing Buddha-nature is not difficult. Never become attached to appearances. Intrinsic nature itself has such vast wondrous functioning and such immense radiance, illuminating the ten directions without obstruction. The Amitābha Sūtra states this very clearly: “That Buddha’s light is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction.”

The words “that Buddha” refer to our true mind. It possesses such immense luminosity, so do not become attached to small lights. We are now at the sixth day of this seven-day retreat, and all of you have gained quite a bit. Today I will give you further guidance, enabling you to leap directly into the Tathāgata’s ground and surpass Equal Enlightenment and Wondrous Enlightenment. This retreat has gone very well. Many people have awakened and seen their true nature. Very good, very good.

When we practice, we form mudrās. Mudrās are like antennas, enabling our information to communicate with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. But when one reaches that stage, there are no people at all; everything has dissolved into emptiness. What mudrās? What Buddhas and bodhisattvas? They have all been cast beyond Mount Sumeru. When there is nothing at all, that is right; if there is something, that is wrong.

Some among you say, “When I form a mudrā, something makes my fingers loosen.” In fact, nothing is troubling you; it is simply your own qi becoming active. If there is

no “I,” where could there be an “other”? Without an “I,” an “other” has no footing. You must recognize this clearly; otherwise, you may become possessed by demons.

Some people think, “Others see lights, Buddhas, and visionary states. Why do I not see anything? Does this mean that my practice is not good enough?” No! Having no states is the best state. When there are no deluded states, nothing at all, and yet there is clear and distinct awareness, that is best. The true mind is just thus; the fundamental essence is just thus. All the rest is merely functioning that arises from it.

In this seven-day retreat, our primary aim is to recognize the fundamental essence. Once the root is obtained, there is no need to worry about the branches: after the fundamental essence is attained, matters of the branches naturally arise, even the emission of light and the development of great spiritual powers. Tomorrow you will sit nine sessions, and it will be very effective. Nine sessions are excellent. Even ordinarily, without undertaking a seven-day retreat, simply sitting nine sessions for eighteen hours is extremely effective. Tomorrow, once you are seated, I will explain the most profound Buddhadharma to you.

The Seventh Day

During the nine sessions, use the fourth mudrā throughout; do not form the second mudrā. There are three six-hour periods. After returning home, safeguard [your realization] at all times. Do not let it run wild like an untamed horse. Safeguard it continuously and closely: remain clearly aware of your thoughts, watch them, and do not follow them. That is safeguarding.

Let me tell you a story. Long ago, an old thief taught his son to steal. The two went together to a wealthy household to steal something. As it happened, the family was preparing for a wedding and had placed the dowry in chests.

After they slipped in, they heard someone approaching. The father told his son to hide in a wardrobe, then locked it from the outside and made some noise. When the household discovered him and tried to seize him, he broke through a wall and escaped home by himself. His son, frantic inside the wardrobe, made a sound. When the family heard it, they cried, “There is a mouse!” The son quickly thought of a way out and imitated a mouse. The household called for a maidservant: “Quick, open the chest! There is a mouse in the wardrobe; it may chew through the wedding garments.”

As the maidservant came with a candle to open the wardrobe, the son suddenly blew out the candle, sprang out, and fled into the courtyard. The family chased after him, shouting, “Catch the thief!” Again, the son quickly thought of a way out. Seeing a

well in the courtyard, he picked up a stone and threw it into the well, then took off one shoe and placed it beside the well.

When the family reached the well, they all assumed that the thief had thrown himself into it and stopped pursuing him. Only then was the son able to escape home. When the father saw that his son had returned safely, he spoke before his son could complain: “You may now become a thief. To be a thief, you must be quick-witted and able to adapt to circumstances at any moment.”

Practice is the same. Do not rigidly abide by a method; you must apply it flexibly, develop great wisdom, and adapt to circumstances, just as the son did when escaping. Do not merely learn some method and then abide by that method; that is of no use. Only after recognizing one’s true nature can one apply it flexibly and attain Buddhahood.

Whatever method one studies, if one does not realize the mind-ground, even possessing spiritual powers is of no use. Once one has attained the root, there is no need to worry that spiritual powers will not manifest. Spiritual powers are inherently complete, but because we do not recognize this, our deluded thoughts, inverted views, and attachments cover them over. If the reverse is done, luminosity shines through. Learning Buddhism is not difficult; the reason people fail to learn it well is that they become absorbed in appearances.

Chan Master Xuyun said: “Nowadays, people in our country pay little attention to the authentic Chan school. Instead, they turn around and study Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, because it has spiritual powers. They have it all wrong.” Indeed, many who study Esoteric Buddhism seek spiritual powers rather than seeing their true nature, seeking liberation, and transcending birth and death. We must not engage in such deviant paths and misguided ways.

Let me say this once more: the most important point of contemplation is not to follow thoughts. Watch them arise, but do not go along with them. The ancient worthies said, “Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only the lateness of awareness.” Everyone practicing the Way fears deluded thoughts and tries every possible means to sweep them away. In fact, there is no need to fear them. The moment a deluded thought arises, become aware of it and do not follow it; then it will naturally dissolve.

The monastery steward asked Liangshan, “What should one do when it is difficult to guard against the thief within one’s own house?” Liangshan said, “Recognize it, and you will not be wronged.” Once you recognize it, the thief will not steal away the wealth of your house, and you will not suffer loss.

The thief within the house arises at every moment. If you are unaware of it and do not recognize it, it will naturally steal away all your household wealth—the wealth of Dharma. When the deluded mind has dissolved and thoughts no longer arise, then naturally "the skin falls away completely, and only the one reality is revealed."

When seeing one's true nature, it is better to speak of "falling away." If one speaks of an explosion, many people may misunderstand. When the qi rises to the crown of the head, they may think they are about to explode, clutch their heads, and fear that their heads will burst and they will die. In fact, they will not die. When the qi reaches the crown and the central channel opens, sticky water may emerge from the crown, seeping from the Brahmā aperture at the center of the head. This is where the primordial spirit will emerge in the future. One must not cling to appearances and seek such a state. Seeking it is already mistaken; not only will one fail to attain this fine state, but one may also risk demonic disturbance.

Now I will tell you a Chan koan containing the most profound Buddhadharma. Long ago, there was a monk named Lingxun, who asked his teacher Guizong, "What is Buddha?" Guizong said, "I can tell you, but I fear you will not believe it." Lingxun replied, "How could I dare not believe my teacher's truthful words?"

Guizong said, "Then I will tell you: you are Buddha!" Lingxun awakened greatly on the spot and further asked how he should safeguard this realization. Guizong said, "A single speck in the eye, and flowers in empty space fall everywhere." This means that once one recognizes that one is originally Buddha, Buddha is free from all attachment. If there is safeguarding, it is like having a speck in the eye; if there is any abiding attachment, it is no longer so.

After Lingxun's great awakening, he took leave of his teacher, saying, "Tomorrow I shall return home." His teacher said, "After you have packed your luggage tomorrow, come see me again. I will tell you the most profound Buddhadharma." The next day, after Lingxun had packed his bundle, he asked his teacher to instruct him in the profound Buddhadharma. The teacher said, "The cold is setting in; conduct yourself well on the road."

This means that all ordinary daily functioning is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. One must not abide anywhere: one must neither hold fast and remain unmoving, nor move while abiding in something. After awakening, if one does not hold fast, one can apply it livingly; if one holds fast, one becomes stuck there. Finally, one does not even abide in not abiding, and there is no thought of deliberately not abiding. This is the most profound Buddhadharma. It is simply ordinary mind and ordinary affairs.

Today is the final day. You must sit nine sessions; this is when it is easiest to gain strength and see results. Recite the mantra until you can no longer recite it—not

because you do not want to recite it. Only then are you truly on the path. Not wanting to recite is still no good; that is laziness. There is a great difference between “being able” and “wanting,” and everyone must take note of it. Nanyue replied to the Sixth Patriarch: “Defilement is not attained, yet cultivation and realization are not absent.”

To realize the Way, one must still cultivate diligently and train arduously. As the proverb says, “Without a bone-chilling cold, how can plum blossoms send forth their fragrance?” Today, our diligent seven-day retreat is for directly realizing the true mind. During this retreat, each of you has received, to a greater or lesser extent, some genuine benefit. This is cause for celebration, and our strenuous practice has not been in vain.

Seated meditation is the most basic method of practice. The actual manifestation of spiritual powers also depends on seated meditation; without deep entry into dhyāna, spiritual powers cannot manifest. Speaking of spiritual powers, however, talking, working, walking, and so forth are all spiritual powers. Layman Pang said, “Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning: carrying water and hauling firewood.” Daily life is itself true wondrous functioning. But one must not abide in spiritual powers; to abide in them is to risk demonic disturbance.

Concluding the Seven-Day Retreat

This seven-day retreat has come to a successful conclusion today. Everyone has achieved a great deal, and your understanding has greatly improved. In fact, there was originally no need to “strike” at our seventh consciousness, for the self that functions wondrously without attachment is the wisdom of equality. The Diamond Sūtra says: “No mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span.”

The true person is originally without marks. Yet because we seek outwardly and cling to external objects, we become deluded about what is original. Mistakenly taking the body to be “self,” we must therefore apply effort and, through seven days of sitting meditation, strike away these deluded feelings and return to the original. Since there is originally no self and nothing needs to be struck, this retreat has neither an opening nor a closing period.

Buddhadharma is wondrous functioning in freedom: abiding nowhere in all things. One can enter Buddhahood and one can enter Māra; one can do anything, so long as it benefits others and the mind remains empty and non-abiding. It will not do merely to be able to enter Buddhahood but not Māra. Entering Māra does not mean becoming a demon king; it signifies being unconstrained and freely at ease in every direction.

Here is a koan for everyone. During the Southern Song dynasty, there was a Grand Commandant Zhang, who greatly admired the lofty conduct of Chan Master Lao Huayan and invited him to his home to make offerings to him. For the sake of transforming sentient beings, however, the Chan master should face the wider assembly and could not accept the offerings of only one household. Yet although he repeatedly declined, permission was not granted. When the Grand Commandant's daughter came to ask about the Dharma, the master summoned her to come near and kissed her on the cheek. The girl tearfully complained to her father; her father became angry and expelled the Chan master. The master was thus able to leave the residence, dwell in the mountains, receive large assemblies, and fulfill his original intention.

This koan shows us that true Buddhadharma lies precisely in flexible and wondrous functioning—in being free and untrammeled, without concern for reputation. Any constraint becomes an obstruction and is not the true meaning of Buddhadharma.

Speaking of the Pure Land, it is not only rebirth in the Western Pure Land that is the Pure Land. So long as you let go of everything, seek nothing in your heart's utter emptiness, and find nothing obtainable, that is the Pure Land; that is the Inner Court of Tuṣita. Freely at ease with all conditions, let things unfold naturally and live unconfined. Let things be as they are: if your fortune is good, life will be somewhat better; if it is poor, life will be somewhat worse. It does not matter. If you do not cling to anything, you are a Buddha or bodhisattva.

After seven days of retreat, what have you gained?

Let me answer for everyone: you have gained one who gains nothing!

The retreat is over!