A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to the Mind

Master Yuanyin, Originally Published in Chan, Issue 2 (1990)

Contents

A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to the Mind

A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to the Mind

The Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma is practiced by relying on the compassionate blessings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is therefore easy to attain samādhi, open up one's original nature, and realize the true mind. By analogy, those who practice through their own efforts must rely entirely on their own two feet to travel, whereas practicing heart esotericism is like traveling by boat or vehicle, or even by airplane. It is thus swift and reliable, achieving twice the result with half the effort.

In order to help practitioners of heart esotericism realize the true mind and transcend the ordinary to enter sagehood more swiftly, my late teacher, Mr. Xianglu, composed a poem entitled "Inscription on Awakening to the Mind." It has forty lines, each of four characters, for a total of 160 characters. Though brief and concise, its principles are rich and profound. It fully sets forth both the true meaning of Buddhahood and the essential instructions for cultivating the mind.

It may truly be called an essential work, concise in language yet rich in meaning, and a rare modern commentary on awakening to the mind. If students, in addition to practicing the Dharma, recite it several times each day until they know it by heart, then over time, when touched by circumstances and conditions, they will spontaneously awaken and bring forth great capacity and great functioning from the true essence. In order to help later students understand its profound, implicit purport and more readily awaken to the mind, I shall offer a simple explanation line by line. I sincerely hope practitioners will cherish it and not take it lightly.

The Complete Text of "Inscription on Awakening to the Mind"

It is not a mind that exists; it is not a mind that does not exist. It is not non-seeing; it is not non-hearing.

Clearly aware and knowing, yet not attached to seeing or hearing; utterly without abiding—this is called no-mind.

If the mind has no abiding, on what can delusion depend to arise? Once delusion no longer stands, past obstacles dissolve of themselves.

Ask where the mind comes from: it arises because of objects. Yet objects, too, do not truly exist; they are likewise illusory appearances.

Its wondrous functioning is as countless as the sands of the Ganges, all arising from the conditioned mind. Where the conditioned mind ceases, one suddenly realizes the unborn.

The true aspect of the unborn cannot be seen with the eyes. Vast and obscure, it contains an essence within.

One who realizes it is said to see one's true nature. Therefore, seek nothing, and the mind naturally becomes peaceful and unified.

With no mind to be deluded, this is great samādhi. Those who attain great samādhi have neither movement nor stillness.

Without gain or loss, without joy or anger, one does not depart from the original ground, yet responds to the myriad circumstances.

Unchanging yet according with conditions, one is free of birth and death. The essential instruction for becoming a Buddha is no more than this.

A Simple Explanation

At the beginning, "Inscription on Awakening to the Mind" says: "It is not a mind that exists; it is not a mind that does not exist."

These two lines fully portray both the essence and wondrous functioning of the marvelously luminous true mind. The marvelously luminous true mind neither belongs to existence nor is it nonexistence. If you say that it exists, it has no form that can be seen and no sound that can be heard. If you say that it does not exist, then whether speaking or silent, moving or still, walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, there is nothing in which it is not functioning.

Ancient worthies compared it to "the taste of salt in the sea" and "the blue in a dye." Though it cannot be seen with the eyes, its substance is certainly not absent. Śākyamuni Buddha tells us that it is the great treasury of true emptiness and wondrous presence, of wondrous presence and true emptiness. What is called true emptiness differs from inert emptiness and annihilationist emptiness. Because it is

wondrous presence, it is empty yet not empty, and not empty yet empty. What is called wondrous presence differs from delusive existence and substantial existence. Because it is true emptiness, it exists yet does not exist, and does not exist yet exists.

Speaking next of its characteristics and functioning, it is likewise neither existent nor nonexistent, neither nonexistent nor existent. If you say that it does not exist, the myriad forms appear distinctly before you, and its wondrous functioning is as countless as the sands of the Ganges. If you say that it exists, all forms arise from causes and conditions and have no self-nature; the affairs and functions they produce are like the moon reflected in water or flowers in empty space, impossible to grasp.

The Heart Sūtra says: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” This means that form and emptiness are nondual, neither existent nor nonexistent. All forms are manifestations of the wondrous essence of true emptiness, while that wondrous essence cannot manifest its functioning apart from forms, nor does it exist separately from them.

It is like waves arising from water: water is waves, and waves are water. Apart from waves, water cannot be found; apart from water, waves cannot be found. In our practice, we must neither cling to forms as substantially real nor depart one-sidedly from forms, reject existence, and attach to emptiness. Therefore, whether cultivating samādhi on the meditation cushion or functioning after leaving it, we must neither grasp nor reject. Only then do we accord with the principle of the Middle Way and enter the great path of true emptiness and wondrous presence.

When practitioners cultivate the Dharma to the point that deluded thoughts dissolve away, the mind that recites and the mantra being held both fall away at once. Within, body and mind; without, the world—all perish together and vanish into nothing. One is utterly bare, without a single thread; vividly pure, unstained by a single speck of dust. Yet there remains clear and lucid awareness, unlike wood or stone.

What is this utterly bare, wholly empty and luminous presence? If it is not the marvelously luminous true mind of the very person before us—neither existent nor nonexistent—appearing vividly before us, then what is it? At such a time, neither form nor emptiness can reach it, and neither existence nor nonexistence can encompass it. When spoken of as nonexistent, it pervades the dharma realm; when spoken of as existent, not even the finest hair is established. The hundred schools of thought, all crafts and skills, even the Pure Lands of the Buddhas and sentient beings as countless as the sands of the Ganges—all are integrated within it.

The second line says: “It is not non-seeing; it is not non-hearing.”

This teaches us that we must not practice rigidly and lifelessly, but vivaciously temper the mind through circumstances. We should not close our eyes and refuse to see or block our ears and refuse to hear. We must see without seeing and hear without hearing; only then can we function flexibly and wondrously and realize the great Way.

I often see people who practice incorrectly: they close their eyes so as not to see things and block their ears so as not to hear sounds, thinking that in this way they can empty the mind and realize the Way. They do not realize that, although when their eyes are closed and ears blocked and the mind is not engaging with objects, they may make the mind seem dead and unmoving, once they open their eyes and unblock their ears, and the mind encounters objects, the deluded mind will again inevitably follow forms and sounds, ceaselessly moving about.

Eliminating objects in order to extinguish the mind is not true realization. Moreover, while the eyes are closed and ears blocked, the inner mind may still be secretly stirring. Furthermore, closing the eyes and blocking the ears entails a great danger: if practitioners use such a closed-off method and truly make the mind dead and unmoving, they will end up sitting behind a dark mountain, in dead water. Not only will they be unable to become Buddhas, but they may even degenerate into earth, wood, metal, or stone.

Therefore practitioners must be cautious. To truly ensure that the mind is not turned by circumstances, one must rely on tempering it amid circumstances. As the Chan school says: “Where one falls to the ground, there one must rise again.” To leave circumstances behind and pursue emptiness will ultimately prove an illusion.

The Diamond Sūtra says: “All appearances are illusory.” All forms and sounds arise from causes and conditions and have no substantial reality. No matter how beautiful the form before you or how exquisite the sounds filling your ears, they are no more than heat haze, flowers in empty space, or a mirage—temporary illusory appearances.

Once you clearly understand this principle, and after the passage of time and arduous tempering through circumstances thousands upon thousands of times, the mind will naturally become tranquil and the spirit still; when circumstances arise, one will remain peacefully unmoved. Chan Master Dongshan, in his Verses on the Five Ranks of Ruler and Minister, praises the fourth rank, “Arrival within the Biased,” the stage of cultivating the Way: “Arrival within the biased: when two blades cross, there is no need to evade. A skilled hand is like a lotus in fire; a true man has aspirations that soar to heaven!” This teaches us to practice dynamically, tempering the mind through circumstances and not avoiding seeing and hearing, so as to open the way for great capacity and great functioning in the future.

The third line says: “Clearly aware and knowing, yet not attached to seeing or hearing!”

This follows the preceding two lines, “It is not non-seeing; it is not non-hearing,” and further explains how one should practice flexibly in order not to enter a mistaken path. We practice in order to become living Buddhas. Thus we cannot realize the Way merely by sitting motionless in dead stillness, sunk in emptiness and stagnant quiescence, sitting behind a dark mountain.

Yunmen said: “This very seeing and hearing are not seeing and hearing; no other sounds or forms can be presented to you!” He plainly and clearly tells us: Do you wish to see through to the true mind? Then seek it precisely where you now see forms and hear sounds.

Realize who it is that sees forms and hears sounds. Apart from this seeing of forms and hearing of sounds, there is nowhere to seek it. But if you become attached to seeing forms and hearing sounds, then you will be deluded by sounds and forms and will not see it either.

What flexible practice this is! How could one see the Way merely by sitting rigidly unmoving, neither seeing nor hearing? Another saying goes: “The profound, empty great Way is originally without attachment; when seeing forms and hearing sounds, there is no need to become deaf!” This shows that practice must be alive, not dead. Dead practice not only cannot realize the Way; it also risks falling into the paths of demons and non-Buddhists.

Therefore my late teacher told us that practice must be applied dynamically amid walking, standing, sitting, lying down, activity, stillness, leisure, and busyness. We must not be insensible like wood or stone, but should remain clearly aware. Yet, though clearly aware, we must not become attached to sounds and forms. In other words, we must see without seeing and hear without hearing, rather than neither seeing nor hearing. Only thus can there be flexible, wondrous functioning. Even while seated in meditation, right mindfulness must be bright and clear; one must not be blankly unaware and fall into dullness or an indeterminate state.

Master Yongjia said: “Alert and still is right; alert and wildly thinking is wrong. Still and alert is right; still and indeterminate is wrong.” This is precisely a commentary on “Clearly aware and knowing, yet not attached to seeing or hearing.”

The fourth line says: “Utterly without abiding—this is called no-mind.”

We ordinarily believe that no-mind means that not a single thought arises, and that when not a single thought arises, one is suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise.

Thus everyone applies the rigid practice of suppression, holding thoughts down and not allowing them to arise. They think that having no thoughts at all is good practice, and further believe that extending the time during which not a single thought arises, from short to long, is the highest advance in practice. They do not realize that if they continue this rigid practice, not only will they fail to become Buddhas, but they may well become earth, wood, metal, or stone. For a Buddha is a vividly alive great awakened one, a great person of wondrous functioning as countless as the sands of the Ganges. How could a Buddha be like a hard, lifeless lump of wood or stone, or a sculpted image without the slightest awareness?

If one does not temper oneself amid the diverse circumstances of differentiation, and instead merely suppresses thoughts so that they do not arise, with the mind abiding nowhere, what wondrous functioning can arise?

Have you not seen the koan of the Sixth Patriarch's rescue of Chan Master Wolun? At first, Wolun thought that suppressing thoughts so they would not arise was good practice, and therefore composed this verse: "Wolun has a skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts. When facing circumstances, the mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day." When the Sixth Patriarch saw it, he knew that Wolun had entered the mistaken path of dead water, and so rescued him with these words: "Huineng has no skill; he does not cut off a hundred thoughts. When facing circumstances, the mind often arises; how could bodhi grow?" Wolun recognized his error and corrected it; only then did he enter the Way.

Thus we know that no-mind does not mean suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise. Still less does it mean that progress consists in extending the duration of thought-free moments from short to long. The true practice of no-mind is to respond to conditions and engage with things while the mind abides nowhere; to manage the myriad affairs of daily life while the mind remains unstained. It is like drawing on water: the moment a stroke is made, the surface immediately closes again, leaving no trace at all. This is the truly excellent practice of no-mind.

The Diamond Sūtra says: "Give rise to this mind without abiding anywhere!" The character ying ( ) in "should abide nowhere" is often misunderstood as the ying meaning "should" or "ought to."

But this is not so. This ying is the ying in "responding to conditions and engaging with things." It teaches us that, in daily life, when dealing with all events and responding to all people, the mind should abide nowhere and remain utterly free from defilement. It does not merely tell us, at the level of principle, that we ought not to abide in attachment. If we can respond to conditions without abiding anywhere, then the agile true mind of countless wondrous functions will naturally appear at every moment, unobscured.

Thus, no-thought is alive: it responds to conditions without abiding in or being defiled by them. It is not the suppression of thoughts so that they do not arise, leaving one inert and motionless. So long as, when thoughts arise, we do not abide in them, do not cling to conditions, and do not linger—using them as needed and letting them cease when their function is fulfilled—this is no-thought.

In former times, a monk asked Zhaozhou, “What is no-thought?” Zhaozhou said, “Hitting a ball atop rushing water!” Later, Zhaozhou in turn asked Touzi, “What is the meaning of hitting a ball atop rushing water?” Touzi said, “Thought after thought does not linger!” Thus it is evident that when thoughts arise without abiding, this is no-thought; it is not only when not a single thought arises that there is no-thought.

Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, says in his “Song of No-Mind”: “Just when the mind is functioning, there is precisely no mind at work; when no mind is precisely at work, constant functioning is precisely absent!” That is, even when the mind is functioning, no mind can be seen to be functioning. This fully expresses the meaning and wondrous function of no-mind.

The fifth line: “If the mind abides nowhere, on what can delusion depend for its existence?”

Every practitioner dislikes the deluded mind and wants to eliminate and overthrow it. Yet they do not realize that delusion has never truly existed; it is merely the mischief of thought. All external circumstances are like the moon reflected in water: none truly exist. Sentient beings, in their ignorance, mistakenly take them to exist and cling to them without letting go; this then becomes delusion. If one awakens at once and sees through the illusory realm, delusion vanishes into nothing. It is like dreaming: while dreaming, one also takes it to be real, but upon awakening not even a trace remains.

This is because the true mind is like a mirror’s radiance, while all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas are like reflections appearing in that mirror.

Ordinary beings are ignorant and deluded. Turning away from the mirror’s radiance, they grasp at its reflections; they create karma, undergo retribution, and cannot transcend birth and death. Sages of the two vehicles, although they do not cling to the dusty realm of objects, turn away from the reflections and abide in the radiance. Because they still abide somewhere, this too becomes dharma-delusion; they have ended only segmented birth and death, not transformational birth and death. Students of the One Vehicle thoroughly realize both Buddhadharma and worldly dharmas: they neither identify with the mirror’s reflections nor separate themselves from them.

Since all images are formed by the mirror's radiance, the mirror is the image and the image is the mirror. Apart from the mirror there is no image, and apart from the image there is no mirror. Thus, one can neither turn away from the mirror and abide in the image nor need separate from the image in search of the mirror. Once one deeply knows that neither image nor mirror abides anywhere, the mind can be free of attachment and aversion, and circumstances can be free of grasping and rejection.

Therefore, students need not fear delusion. So long as they deeply accord with the profound meaning of the One Vehicle and neither grasp nor reject circumstances, neither rejoice nor become angry, delusion will naturally be eliminated.

Moreover, many students regard ignorance as difficult to destroy; some are as frightened by its very mention as by the sight of a tiger. Yet so-called "ignorance" is also not truly existent. It is merely the mischief of the deluded mind: clinging to sense objects, becoming deluded without awakening, and being given a provisional name. If practitioners can suddenly awaken with resolute clarity, the deluded realm will be shattered and ignorance will naturally dissolve.

It is like a lamp illuminating a dark room that has been dark for a thousand years: there is no need to dispel the darkness gradually over time. Thus, what is called ignorance or the deluded mind arises only because we do not awaken. If we can contemplate at all times and remain alert everywhere, making the mind clear, empty, open, and lucid, without abiding in attachment, then why fear that ignorance will not be shattered or that the deluded mind will not cease?

The sixth line: "Once delusion finds no footing, past karmic obstacles naturally dissolve."

The mind is originally spiritually responsive and unobstructed; obstacles arise only because it becomes deluded by circumstances and clings to appearances. So-called past karmic obstacles are the deluded habitual tendencies accumulated through creating karma while being confused by appearances over many lives and eons. These deluded obstacles obscure the luminosity of our original nature, preventing us from freely enjoying its function and bringing endless pain, hardship, and affliction.

Now that we know that all phenomenal appearances are originally empty, the mind retains no obstruction. Since karma itself does not truly exist, where could illusory obstacles lodge? Chan Master Damei said: "For one who has realized the Way, all karmic obstacles are like ice melting in hot water, or darkness vanishing before light: they have nowhere to remain." What are called obstacles are also merely provisional names and have no substantial entity. A sūtra says: "Sin arises from the mind; use that very mind to extinguish it!" It also says: "When the mind arises, all kinds of

obstacles arise; when the mind ceases, all kinds of obstacles cease!" If one directly enters no-mind, delusion has no place to stand. Once delusion finds no footing, past karmic obstacles naturally dissolve.

Some say, "Present karma is easy to eliminate, but fixed karma is hard to avoid; karmic activity of the mind is easy to remove, but karmic activity of the body is hard to extinguish." But this cannot be stated categorically. Did not Bodhidharma instruct Shenkuang, the Second Patriarch: "You will undergo retribution that takes your life. Yet, in order to prevent the true Dharma from being slandered, this debt may be forgiven you."

Another ancient worthy suffered a stroke that twisted his mouth. His attendant laughed and said, "Master, all day long you berate Buddhas and scold patriarchs. Today you are receiving your retribution."

The ancient worthy said, "You have attended me for decades, yet this is how you see me? You must know that all karmic obstacles, when they are upon a patriarch, are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water. Though retribution is repaid, it is as though it were not repaid; moreover, if it is to be repaid, it is repaid, and if it is not to be repaid, it is not repaid. Look—whether my mouth is crooked or not!" As he spoke, he slapped his mouth with his hand, and it immediately straightened. He then rebuked the attendant: "You beings who cling to appearances conceive of karmic obstacles within what is originally empty, and conceive of repayment within what requires no repayment. Therefore, karmic obstacles cannot be ended, and you suffer endless burdens."

From this we may know that all karmic obstacles depend on the mind. If the mind is truly empty, there is no such thing as an obstacle, much less a question of repayment or non-repayment. Precisely because there is neither repayment nor non-repayment, one need not cling to non-repayment as non-repayment; one may simply repay, while it is still as though there were no repayment.

A monk asked an ancient worthy, "What are karmic obstacles?" The worthy said, "Originally empty!" The monk further asked, "What is originally empty?" The worthy said, "Karmic obstacles!" Original emptiness is not inert emptiness or annihilationist emptiness; it means that all things and karmic obstacles, in their very nature, are originally empty and devoid of anything. Therefore, although the Second Patriarch, Master Shenkuang, received the First Patriarch's instruction, after transmitting the Dharma to the Third Patriarch he still went to repay the debt of having his life taken, without the least sign of distress. At the time of execution, he sang loudly: "When the head meets the white blade, it is like a spring breeze being cut!" What magnificent bearing! This is truly a grand model of complete realization.

The seventh line: “Ask where the mind comes from: it arises in dependence on circumstances.”

“The mind is originally unborn; it exists because of circumstances.” This is a famous saying of Vipashyin Buddha. Our mind—that is, thought—originally does not exist. In response to circumstances, images arise; when we cling to them without letting go, deluded thoughts arise. This is what is called mind.

This mind arises from the conjunction of the faculty—the mind—and the object—the environment. Hence it is called “the mind as the gathering and arising of conditions.” It is the shadow left behind by the six sense objects, wholly illusory and without any substantial entity.

The word “mind” in such scriptural statements as “all is created by mind” and “the three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only” refers to this illusory image-mind, which arises as a reflection of objective external circumstances. Thus it too is an external circumstance, an object; nor is it separate from matter. It must not be regarded as a subjective mind and treasured as a “true god” that rules the world.

In our cultivation, we must neither cling to the external realm of the myriad phenomena nor fail to eradicate this illusory, deluded mind. Only when the inner body and mind and the outer world all perish together does the wondrously luminous true mind appear. Conversely, if this illusory mind is taken to be a subjective entity, true nature is obscured and cannot be seen. Therefore, when we speak of the “mind” in “all is created by mind,” we treat it as an objective object to be eliminated; we do not mean that it is the ruler of all things. Buddhist practitioners must clearly understand this and not misconstrue it.

The eighth line: “Circumstances too do not truly exist; they likewise belong to illusory images!”

A sūtra says: “Mind is not mind in itself; because of circumstances, it is mind. Circumstances are not circumstances in themselves; because of mind, they are circumstances.” This makes entirely clear the mutually dependent relationship between mind and circumstances, and between circumstances and mind. Since mind exists in dependence on circumstances, circumstances likewise cannot exist independently apart from mind, for they arise from causes and conditions and have no self-nature.

Take reflections in a mirror. Though they may display countless differing forms, without the mirror’s radiance the reflections cannot appear. Circumstances are the same: without mind, no realm of circumstances can be formed. Even if there is beautiful scenery and an excellent setting, if there is no mind to receive and

appreciate them, their existence is no different from nonexistence. Circumstances are not circumstances in themselves; they do not themselves proclaim that they are beautiful and superb realms.

Since mind and circumstances arise in mutual opposition, and without one the other does not exist, both circumstances and mind are not real; clearly, both are illusory images. Perhaps someone may say: all the scenery in the Sahā world is the karmic result brought about by our collective karma. It is false rather than real, and thus may be called an illusory image. But the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is a true realm brought about when Amitābha Buddha's causes and conditions ripened and his fruition was fulfilled—through his diligent cultivation over many lives and eons, his creation of blessings for the multitude of sentient beings, and his accumulation of merit and virtue. It would seem improper to call it an illusory image.

This point indeed requires careful discussion. Many people now cultivate the Pure Land practice. Unless they clearly understand the true nature of the Pure Land and what it ultimately is, it will be difficult for their practice to gain strength, much less for them to deeply realize the Buddha-recitation samādhi and attain rebirth in the highest grade.

First, in terms of appearances, Sahā is the evil result of the five turbidities brought about by karmic obstacles and the karma created by sentient beings, whereas Ultimate Bliss is the pure realm brought about by Amitābha's fulfilled vows and perfected virtues. Thus, one is foul, turbid, and ugly, while the other is beautiful and majestic; they differ greatly. Yet lands arise from mind: apart from mind there is no land, and apart from land there is no mind. Mind is land, and land is mind. Therefore, a sūtra says: "If you wish to purify your land, first purify your mind!" and "As the mind is purified, so the Buddha-land is purified!" This teaches us to recognize what the Pure Land is, so that we may know how to begin cultivation and realize it, rather than vainly grasping at external appearances and straying onto a wrong path.

Since there is no mind outside the land and no land outside the mind, and mind and land are inseparable, while the One True Dharma Realm—the true mind—does not increase in sages or diminish in ordinary beings, the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss flows forth from the pure and wondrous true mind. How, then, could the defiled land of Sahā be found apart from pure Buddha-nature? Therefore, although Ultimate Bliss is pure and Sahā is defiled, both are images appearing within the true mind, like reflections appearing within a mirror's radiance. Though their forms differ and there is a distinction between purity and defilement, both are like the moon in water, wholly unobtainable. One must never mistakenly suppose that the moon-image of Ultimate Bliss can be grasped merely because it is pure.

Next, speaking in terms of what is real and what is false, the Diamond Sūtra says: “All appearances are illusory.” As stated above, appearances are like reflections in a mirror: they cannot truly be grasped. Thus, they are false rather than real; their reality or falsity is absolutely not determined by whether they are pure or defiled, beautiful or ugly. Therefore, although the Land of Ultimate Bliss is wholly good and beautiful, it too is an illusory appearance.

Furthermore, to call something real or false is entirely the error of us ordinary beings, who cling to appearances, establish names, and impose deluded distinctions. So-called reality and falsity exist only in contrast to one another; apart from one, the other cannot be found. Thus, both are merely provisional names. Since reality and falsity arise in dependence on one another, when one speaks of the real, the false is already contained within it; when one speaks of the false, the real is likewise contained within it. As the proverb says, “When the false is taken for the real, the real too becomes false.” To fabricate reality and falsity where neither exists —is this not the self-inflicted vexation of ordinary people?

Again, because a mirror must reveal reflections, where there is true mind there are not no illusory appearances; without appearances, there would be no way to reveal the true mind. Therefore, the Amitābha Sūtra sets forth the adornments of the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Because reflections do not leave the mirror, where there are illusory appearances there are not no true mind; without true mind, there would be no basis for illusory appearances to arise. Therefore, the Diamond Sūtra reveals the wondrous essence: not establishing a single dharma.

Since intrinsic nature and appearances do not part from one another, but are as intimately related as water and waves, seeing appearances is seeing intrinsic nature. Since there is not a single thing that can be taken as real, it is said that the wholly false is precisely the real. Seeing intrinsic nature does not negate appearances, but perfects the wondrous functioning of distinctions; therefore, it is said that the wholly real is precisely the false. Real and false, false and real—these are entirely the mischief of our deluded minds. In truth, the numinous and wondrous true mind establishes not a single thing. What reality or falsity could there be to speak of?

Thus, if one says that the Land of Ultimate Bliss is real, then the Sahā world is also real; if one calls the Sahā world false, then the Land of Ultimate Bliss is likewise false. Therefore, both the pure and defiled lands flow forth from the One True Dharma Realm. One must never deny the numinous nature of ordinary beings entangled in bondage, deluded about the true mind, and undergoing karmic retribution for actions they have created, claiming that the karmic appearances of the defiled land they manifest do not flow forth from the true mind of Buddha-nature.

Moreover, the Land of Ultimate Bliss has distinctions of four lands and nine grades of rebirth. In the lowest, the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages, there are various wondrous and adorned appearances. Yet in the Land of Expedient Means with Residue and the Land of True Reward and Adornment, the higher the land, the purer, subtler, and more refined its appearances become. At the highest level, the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light is still purer, more wondrous, subtle, and luminous, and not a single appearance is established. Although not a single appearance is established, it does not lie outside the three lands mentioned above.

Therefore, those who practice while clinging to appearances can attain only rebirth in the lower grades; only those who empty appearances and see their true nature can be reborn in the higher grades. For this reason, those who truly practice Pure Land do not cling to appearances, yet do not discard them. They simply let go of everything, sit upright and properly, with sincere and reverent hearts uphold the Buddha's name, using their breaths as counting beads. Day and night, throughout the six periods, they recite continuously and seamlessly. If they persist for a long time without slackening, they will naturally attain the samādhi of Buddha-remembrance. By then, even before death and rebirth in the Western Pure Land, they will already have secured a lotus seat in the higher grades.

The ninth line: "The wondrous functions, as countless as the sands of the Ganges, are all mind conditioned by objects."

As stated above, in doing the practice, we must not rigidly suppress thoughts so that they do not arise, in an attempt to extinguish the deluded mind completely. We need only turn it around flexibly: when thoughts arise, do not heed them, and do not allow object-seeking attachment to continue. The reason is that in the future we must give rise to great capacities and great functions, and we will still rely on this deluded mind. If this deluded mind is suppressed to death, the true mind will have no way to give rise to wondrous functioning.

For example, water gives rise to waves because of wind. If the waves were entirely removed, the water too would be gone. After saying, "At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts," the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment immediately adds: "Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it." This teaches us to use a living practice in order to open forth the future wondrous functioning of prajñā.

In the daily activities of us ordinary beings, as well as in every act of creation and invention, there is nothing that is not a wondrous function of this "deluded mind." Without it, we would be like fools and simpletons, unable to accomplish any undertaking. At the level of ordinary beings, it is already at work; when one later becomes a worthy or a sage, the vast spiritual powers that arise likewise cannot be

separated from it. Yet at the level of ordinary beings, because there is attachment and abiding, it is called the deluded mind or consciousness-spirit; at the level of sages and worthies, when all clinging bonds have been removed, it is simply called prajñā or numinous knowing.

I once asked someone, “How far apart are consciousness-spirit and suchness?” Those who heard this were greatly startled, saying that suchness and consciousness-spirit—one being true mind and the other deluded consciousness—could hardly be mentioned in the same breath. They further cited a verse by Chan Master Xuansha as proof: “Those who study the Way do not recognize the true; they have always recognized only the consciousness-spirit. The root of birth and death throughout measureless kalpas, fools call the Original Person!” On hearing this, I could not help bursting into laughter.

I said: “Do you recognize the Original Person? If you do not recognize it, suchness becomes consciousness-spirit; if you do recognize it, consciousness-spirit is suchness. How could there be any difference between them?” As stated above, waves are originally water, and water does not leave waves. If one leaves the waves to seek water, where could water be found? Moreover, water that does not rise in waves is merely dead water; how could it be magnificent and vast? If suchness did not make use of consciousness-spirit, it too would be like a foolish child, with no way to function.

Xuansha’s verse does not say that consciousness-spirit is bad. The crux of the matter is whether one recognizes the Original Person. If one recognizes it, consciousness-spirit is directed by its master and accomplishes every magnificent and far-reaching wondrous function. If one does not recognize it, then an evil servant overmasters the master and rebels into disorder.

The tenth line: “Where object-conditioned mind ceases, one suddenly realizes the unborn.”

A sūtra says: “When the frantic mind comes to rest, that itself is bodhi.” This principle is like the examples of reflections and mirrors, water and waves, given above. Reflections and waves cannot be separated from mirrors and water; likewise, the deluded mind cannot be separated from bodhi, perfect awakening. Precisely because it cannot be separated, if the deluded mind were removed, there would be no perfect awakening.

Therefore, practitioners who wish to directly realize the true, such nature that neither arises nor ceases must not use any method to eliminate the deluded mind. They need only apply the practice embodied in the single word “cease,” bringing to rest the deluded mind that clings to objects. Just as where waves cease there is water, the wondrous, luminous true mind suddenly appears before them.

If practitioners truly know that all external objects are like a shimmering mirage or flowers in empty space, without any substantial reality, they will not cling to them or give rise to deluded thoughts. Then the spirit is tranquil and wisdom clear; intrinsic luminosity shines alone, and the inner mind is bright and pure. Like a mirror reflecting objects, it neither grasps nor rejects, neither loves nor hates. Though clear and distinct, not a single thought arises; though not a single thought arises, it remains clear and distinct. In that very moment, one directly realizes the unborn reality. There is no need to exert any clumsy effort beyond bringing the mind to rest.

All dharma gates, whether Buddha-recitation, mantra recitation, or Chan investigation, are no more than tools and methods for the practice of “ceasing.” They teach you, through Buddha-recitation, mantra recitation, or Chan investigation, to bring the frantic mind to rest, thereby opening what is original and clearly seeing the true mind. They are not for obtaining some strange or mysterious thing from Buddha-recitation, mantra recitation, or Chan investigation.

Ancient worthies said: “There is no place in the Buddhadharma for you to apply your mind.” They also said: “Putting on clothes and eating food are themselves it; raise the mind and stir a thought, and you have already gone astray.” Since all sentient beings inherently possess Buddha-nature, it is not acquired from outside. There is no need to seek or grasp it, and therefore no need to exert effort. On the contrary, if one strives to pursue it externally or asks for it from others, the more one seeks, the farther away it becomes; the more forcefully one tries to obtain it, the less one can attain it.

Thus, the Buddhadharma is the greatest undertaking of effortless effort; it is unlike worldly dharmas, which require painstaking planning and anxious contrivance before they can be attained. Laozi said: “In pursuing the Way, one diminishes day by day.” If practitioners can truly let go completely of everything they understand, know, and possess, then where the frantic mind ceases, they will suddenly realize the unborn. As the proverb says, “One may wear out iron shoes searching everywhere, only to find it without the slightest effort.” This is indeed well founded.

The eleventh and twelfth lines: “The unborn reality cannot be seen with the eyes; deep and obscure, within it there is essence.”

This wondrous nature of suchness—neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing—is the equal and true reality, vast without outside and minute without inside. The Diamond Sūtra says: “All appearances are illusory.” All appearances that have form arise from causes and conditions, have no intrinsic substance, and are therefore unreal and illusory. The appearance of reality is the great, pure, and wondrous appearance of no appearance.

Because this great appearance is formless, it cannot be seen by the eyes. But when one's practice reaches the point where the bottom drops out of the bucket and subject and object both fall away, the dharma eye of the mind-ground can see the Way. Yet this "seeing" is not seeing with the eyes; it means view, understanding, experiential realization, and awakening.

Although it is deep and obscure, with no appearance to see and no scent to smell, it is not annihilation or inert emptiness. Rather, it possesses "true essence" and a "wondrous essence." In other words, this "true essence and wondrous essence" is numinous knowing free from thought. When your practice reaches the point at which sense faculties and their objects fall away, and self and phenomena are both forgotten, you will naturally, when the time is ripe, suddenly awaken and verify that this pure, naked, utterly exposed, numinous and luminous true essence is your original fundamental nature.

Having realized this wondrous nature, one then looks back and sees that, because reflections do not leave the mirror, the vast array of appearances seen by the eyes, heard by the ears, and touched by the body are none other than manifestations of it —this true essence. None is other than its wondrous functioning; none is other than its annotation. When practitioners reach this stage, they hear the Way at all times and see intrinsic nature everywhere. The Sixth Patriarch said: "A person who truly sees intrinsic nature sees intrinsic nature even while wielding a blade on the battlefield!" Dahui said: "One who has thoroughly awakened can see the Way even with the physical eyes!" In a single statement, this fully expresses the wondrous principle that intrinsic nature and appearances are nondual.

The thirteenth line: "One who realizes and awakens to this is called one who sees intrinsic nature."

Modern practitioners all regard the expression "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature" as an exalted matter belonging to sages and worthies, beyond the reach of us ordinary beings.

To transcend birth and death, they think they can only recite Amitābha Buddha thought after thought and seek rebirth in the West. They do not realize that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is not difficult, much less beyond reach. (I have explained the principles involved in great detail in the essay "A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature," so I will not repeat them here.)

We need only follow the method described above: bring the frantic mind to rest, do not cling to preceding objects, do not extinguish right mindfulness, and do not seek anything strange or mysterious. Then, amid clear and distinct awareness, not a single thought can be found; though not a single thought can be found, awareness remains clear and distinct, without falling into dullness or blank indeterminacy.

This is the “true essence” in the phrase from the preceding section, “deep and obscure, within it there is essence.” It is also the great Way that Master Yongjia described as “silent yet lucid, lucid yet silent.” Practitioners should seize the moment: at this critical instant of clarity without thought, seize it in a single grasp—this is called seeing intrinsic nature. If you pause even slightly to wait and think, you will again be deluded by its shadow; if you abandon this and seek elsewhere, or suspect that there is some other mystery, it will be impossible to find.

Chan Master Dongshan, in his “Ode on the Five Ranks of Ruler and Minister,” chants of the stage of seeing the Way, “the upright within the partial”: “Within the partial is the upright: a woman who has lost the dawn encounters an ancient mirror. Face to face, it is clearly no other reality; do not again mistake the head and recognize only its reflection!” This admonishes us that, at a critical moment, we must exert ourselves vigorously, grasp the meaning inwardly, and not miss the good opportunity. If this is truly understood, how difficult can realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature be?

It is regrettable that practitioners in the Dharma-ending age have dull faculties and heavy habitual tendencies. Many are preoccupied with spiritual powers; when they do not see anything miraculous or mysterious at such a time, they mistakenly think it is not the truth and hurriedly pass it by. The ancient worthies often sighed: “Precisely because it is so intimate, realization comes all the more slowly.” This is deeply lamentable!

After a practitioner first sees their true nature, the matter is not thereby finished. They must still maintain contemplation at all times, temper the mind through circumstances, diligently polish it, and eliminate habitual tendencies before they can be liberated from birth and death. Otherwise, when encountering circumstances, the mind arises; deluded thoughts continue to surge and stir. This is called becoming deluded after awakening, and birth and death remain unresolved.

Therefore, after awakening, the ancient worthies often undertook the practice of herding the ox, safeguarding realization continuously and closely until it reached full maturity. It cannot be concluded with a single awakening. Although there are occasionally those who awaken suddenly, cultivate suddenly, and realize suddenly, and who need not undertake the work of safeguarding realization, they are few in number and must not be treated as the general rule.

After Chan Master Dongshan’s stage of seeing the Way, “the upright within the partial,” he further chanted of the stage of cultivation, “the arrival within the partial.” That is, he taught us that, after seeing the Way, we must not be satisfied with a little. We must further temper the mind through circumstances, eliminate all deluded habits, and advance ever higher until reaching the ultimate.

Regarding this, the Chan school speaks of three barriers. First, one breaks through one's fundamental investigation and clearly sees one's true nature: this is breaking through the first barrier—cutting off the streams of all thought. Second, one safeguards it closely and nurtures the sacred embryo, attaining freedom and nonobstruction amid all circumstances and conditions, until one no longer needs to safeguard it and yet does not go astray in the least: this is breaking through the second barrier—encompassing heaven and earth. Third, one acts freely, with nothing that is not so. One can enter Buddhahood and can also enter māra. As it is said, "The road itself is home, and home itself is the road": this is breaking through the final, firmly closed barrier—going with the flow.

The fourteenth line: "Therefore, without seeking, the mind naturally becomes peaceful and unified."

An ancient worthy said: "When a person has no seeking, their character is naturally elevated!" Whatever a person seeks is precisely a sign of clinging to circumstances and attachment to appearances. If the mind is truly empty and sees not a single thing, what is there to seek? Someone may say: "I do not seek other things; I seek rebirth in the West and Buddhahood." The reply is: "You are originally a Buddha; there is no need to seek. If you seek, you do not see." As said above, to cease the frantic mind is itself bodhi. One need only cease; there is no need to seek. Lay Master Fu said: "Every night I embrace the Buddha in sleep; every morning I rise together with him." It constantly shines at the gateways of your six sense faculties, lacking not the slightest bit. What, then, is there to seek?

As for seeking rebirth in the West, one need only practice one-pointed Buddha-recitation. Apart from Buddha-recitation, there should be no other thought. As it is said, the whole Buddha is mind, and the whole mind is Buddha; when mind and Buddha are in communion and become continuous and undivided, one will certainly be reborn in the Pure Land.

Since Amitābha is the Buddha of one's own mind, and the Pure Land is the Land of Ultimate Bliss inherently possessed by one's own mind, Buddha-recitation awakens the Amitābha of one's own mind, and rebirth is in the Pure Land inherently possessed by one's own mind. What need is there to seek? For one who practices Buddha-recitation, the essential thing is to attain one-pointedness. One-pointedness is no-mind; since there is no mind, what is there to seek? If one deliberately recites a Buddha outside the mind and seeks rebirth in a land outside the mind, one is far from the Way! Further, upon attaining Buddha-remembrance

samādhi, one sees no distinction among mind, Buddha, and sentient beings, nor any difference between east and west. Though birth is manifested, there is ultimately no birth; though birthless, it excludes no manifestation of birth. What need, then, is

there to seek rebirth? Moreover, when seeking reaches its utmost, there is no seeking; therefore, those who engage in seeking, when they carry it to its ultimate, still return to no seeking and no grasping. Rebirth in the West does not depart from faith, vows, and practice. Since practice encompasses faith and vows, if one can diligently and unremittingly practice one-pointed Buddha-recitation, faith and vows are present within it.

If we can truly attain no seeking and no gaining, the mind, without seeking peace, naturally becomes peaceful; without desiring oneness, it naturally becomes one. When practice reaches this point, one may sit securely at home, a carefree person of the Way beyond learning and contrivance, passing one's days in ease and freedom.

The fifteenth line: "When there is no mind that can be deluded, this is great samādhi."

With regard to attaining samādhi, everyone assumes that there is a distinction between entering and emerging from samādhi. Sitting here without moving, thinking, eating, or urinating is called entering samādhi; once one moves or speaks, it is called emerging from samādhi. In fact, this misunderstands the meaning of samādhi. For sitting here without moving is dead samādhi, not great samādhi. Great samādhi has no entering or leaving.

It is to remain undeluded by any circumstance, to function in accordance with conditions without abiding anywhere; it is not dead sitting without movement and entering into some state. Confucianism also described this principle: "Even if Mount Tai collapses before one, one's expression does not change; even if a herd of deer rises to one's left, one's eyes do not blink."

For dead sitting without movement merely suppresses thoughts so that they do not arise, and extinguishing feeling and perception is not true resolution. Even if you remain in samādhi for a million kalpas, once that period has passed, thoughts again arise, you cling to appearances, create karma, and undergo retribution. Thus, even if one attains the four formless dhyānas and is born in the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception, one still falls into saṃsāra and cannot resolve birth and death. The ancient worthies compared this dead samādhi to using a stone to press down grass: when the stone is removed, the grass grows again. It is therefore not ultimate. When Nanyue polished a brick to guide Mazu, he was rescuing him from dead samādhi.

Those who cultivate Mahāyāna Buddhadharma do not take up this kind of dead samādhi, because it is not ultimate and affords no genuine benefit. In the past, Emperor Wu of Liang went hunting and found an old dullard who had been in samādhi for five hundred years. Greatly astonished and admiring, he wished to

compare his attainments with those of Chan Master Zhigong. He therefore ordered palace women to bathe naked with the two men.

At first, the old dullard could still see and hear normally. Then he closed his eyes and could not move; later, he had no choice but to push the palace women away and flee. By contrast, Zhigong spoke and laughed as usual, unperturbed and unalarmed. Without the power of living samādhi, how could he have attained this? Thus, attaining samādhi does not lie in dead sitting without movement, much less in the length of time spent in such dead sitting. One must temper the mind through circumstances, remain undeluded when encountering them, and give rise to great responsive functioning without any attachment; only then is it true samādhi.

Further, the story of Chan Master Zhihuang's entry into the Way in the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, together with the Chan koan of the woman in samādhi, offers clear proof of the truth that samādhi has no entering or leaving. Students need not doubt it.

Lines sixteen through eighteen: "Those who attain great samādhi have neither movement nor stillness, neither gain nor loss, neither joy nor anger. Without shifting from their original ground, they respond to the myriad occasions."

Above, it was said that attaining great samādhi means that the mind is free from delusion; it does not mean dead sitting without movement. Here, the conduct of one who remains undeluded in the face of circumstances is described further. Practitioners can often remain settled in stillness but become unsettled amid activity; they can remain settled on the cushion but become unsettled once they rise from it. Some rejoice when they gain and become troubled when they lose; when things accord with their wishes, they are pleased, and when circumstances go against them, they become angry.

Those who can abide without movement only in stillness, but whose minds arise when confronting circumstances, thereby splitting themselves into two, do not possess true samādhi.

Those who truly attain great samādhi are equally at ease in stillness and activity, and the same whether idle or busy. In affairs, they have no mind of success or failure, gain or loss; nor do they entertain intentions of love or anger, grasping or rejecting. In mind, they have no feelings of joy, anger, sorrow, or pleasure, and still less the defilement of seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing. Their minds are empty and cleanly washed; lively and vital, they accord naturally with conditions, responding to circumstances and functioning accordingly. They never become settled in pure mountain forests only to become confused in bustling cities; nor do they lose their illumination when events arise and thereby shift from their original ground.

Thus, great samādhi transcends the surface of things and roams freely beyond emotional defilements. It is not swayed by any circumstance and affords genuine benefit. It is not like wearing a cangue and chains, binding one's hands and feet, and remaining there motionless in death.

When, in our daily activities, we train ourselves to respond to things and engage circumstances with minds free from clinging and attachment, this is not shifting from the original ground. This original ground is the position of the One Vehicle Dharma Realm; it is also the Buddha-ground. The Lotus Sūtra says: "Dharmas abide in their dharma positions; the appearances of the world are ever-abiding."

Simply put, it means doing all things without entertaining the thought that one is doing things; speaking a sentence without entertaining the thought that one is speaking; and manifesting the myriad forms without entertaining the thought that one is manifesting.

Thus, although one does, one has never done; although one speaks, one has never spoken; although one manifests, one has never manifested. Yet this does not mean not doing, not speaking, or not manifesting. This is not shifting from the original ground; this is responding to the myriad occasions; and this is the ever-abiding nature of worldly appearances.

(Concerning the principle that worldly appearances are ever-abiding, let us briefly explain further: 1. All phenomenal appearances arise from the true mind; this is called abiding in dharma positions. Since the true mind is ever-abiding, phenomenal appearances are likewise ever-abiding. 2. Phenomenal appearances undergo change, as in the transformation of seas into mulberry fields, yet their continuity is unbroken and they are not annihilated. Water and the moon may flow away or wax and wane, yet there is ultimately no cessation of the flow or increase and decrease.

3. All phenomenal appearances are illusory and unborn, and therefore do not cease.) The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: "The ten periods of time, past and present, beginning and end, do not depart from the present thought; boundless oceans of worlds, self and other, are not separated by the tip of a hair." The appearances of time and space all arise through the arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts and through discrimination. If not a single thought arises, one vertically transcends the three divisions of time and horizontally pervades the ten directions of empty space.

No matter how remote an event of the past may be, it is all vividly present before one. When Great Master Zhizhe recited the Lotus Sūtra to the chapter on the Bodhisattva Medicine King, he entered the preliminary stage of Lotus Samādhi and directly realized the assembly at Vulture Peak, still solemnly present and not yet dispersed. This is irrefutable proof that worldly appearances are ever-abiding.

The nineteenth line: “Unchanging while according with conditions: this is freedom from birth and death.”

As everyone knows, studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way are undertaken in order to resolve birth and death. But how can birth and death truly be transcended? I fear that not every Buddhist practitioner knows the answer. What is called birth and death has two forms: segmented birth and death, and transformational birth and death. Segmented birth and death is the cycle of rebirth in the six realms, and this is relatively easy to understand.

Transformational birth and death is a further, formless birth and death beyond the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. It is a dharma-obstruction resulting from practice that is not ultimate, and so ordinary people find it more difficult to understand.

Let us now explain it briefly. Although śrāvakas and other sages of the Lesser Vehicle have eliminated the two delusions of views and thoughts, and no longer undergo the suffering of the cycle of segmented birth and death, they incline toward the principle of emptiness. They believe that there is a dharma to cultivate, a Way to realize, birth and death to resolve, and nirvāṇa to attain. Attached to the pure lands beyond the three realms, which are induced by the supporting conditions of the cognitive hindrances on which they rely, they abide in dharmas and do not think of transforming themselves in accordance with conditions in order to liberate sentient beings. Their deluded cognitive hindrances are not exhausted. This is a form of birth and death arising from attachment to dharmas—the birth and death of what is unborn.

To resolve this birth and death, one must first know that practicing dharmas is only like taking medicine and must not be clung to without letting go. Next, one must clearly understand that birth and death, nirvāṇa, and the like are flowers in empty space: there is no birth and death to resolve, no nirvāṇa to attain, not a single dharma is established, and there is no wisdom and no attainment. Then, one must further awaken to the fact that one should give rise to great responsive functioning, transform in accordance with conditions, and liberate sentient beings widely while the original ground remains unchanged, rather than abiding motionlessly in dharmas.

The Heart Sūtra teaches us first to empty the deluded attachments of ordinary beings to the sense faculties, sense objects, and consciousnesses; next, to empty the dharma-attachment of the śrāvakas to the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of dependent origination; and finally, to empty the bodhisattvas’ attachment to wisdom. Only then can one give rise to great potential and function, return to the state of nothing to be attained, and realize anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi.

Those who have truly transcended birth and death have no dharma to attain and therefore remain unchanged while according with conditions. Though they may rise and sink amid the six realms, they see no distinction between birth and death or among the different realms. Though they transform their bodily forms in accordance with conditions and liberate all sentient beings, their original ground remains unchanged, and they see no sentient being as having been liberated. Long ago, a monk asked Chan Master Dasui, “Where was your venerable teacher reborn after his passing?” Dasui replied, “My teacher becomes a horse in an eastern household and an ox in a western household!” The monk praised him for having thoroughly awakened and brought the matter to completion: not establishing a single dharma, he accords with conditions and proceeds among the different classes of beings, while the fundamental essence does not shift in the slightest.

In Chan Master Dongshan’s Verses on the Five Ranks of Lord and Vassal, the final verse on “Arrival within Both” says: “Without involving existence or nonexistence, who would dare respond? Everyone wishes to rise above the ordinary current, yet after weighing it all, one returns to sit amid the embers!” This verse praises this final rank. One who has truly transcended birth and death takes non-attainment as true attainment; true attainment does not mean leaving the six realms and abiding in the Pure Land. Thus, nirvāṇa without remainder means that there is no nirvāṇa to be realized: it is nirvāṇa with no place in which to abide.

Unchanged while according with conditions: from essence arises function. According with conditions while unchanged: function is gathered back into essence. Essence and function are thusness itself—without abiding or defilement, without movement or difference. This is truly to transcend birth and death.

The twentieth and final sentence concludes: “The essential key to becoming a Buddha is nothing more than this.”

The thirty-eight sentences above have fully set forth all the mysteries and essential keys to becoming a Buddha. Perhaps some may say that these words are quite ordinary and reveal nothing unusual or profound.

Could becoming a Buddha really be such an unremarkable matter? Is it not said that Buddhahood entails boundless Dharma power and vast spiritual powers? Yet nothing here has been said about spiritual powers or mysterious wonders! What people do not realize is that the Buddhadharma has nothing inherently extraordinary about it, nor may it be understood merely as a matter of doctrine. Do not create trouble where there is none. We need only let the mind abide nowhere, live our days in accordance with conditions, and become a person of the Way with nothing to do.

To become a fruition Buddha fully endowed with the six supernormal powers, one must first awaken to one's intrinsic nature at the causal stage. After clearly seeing one's true nature, one must diligently eliminate habitual tendencies and gradually break through ignorance; only then can spiritual powers manifest. One cannot immediately realize a fruition Buddha endowed with the three kāyas and with all six supernormal powers simultaneously manifest.

Concerning awakening to one's intrinsic nature, some people take spiritual powers as the criterion. They think that only when spiritual powers have manifested has one realized the mind and seen one's true nature; otherwise, one has not seen one's true nature. This is all the bad habit of ordinary beings who cling to existence and are attached to the marvelous. Those who cling to this bad habit not only mislead themselves but also mislead others. For so-called true nature is not elsewhere; it shines forth at the very gateways of one's own six sense faculties.

As it is said in the Chan school: "The child in the eye is the person before one's eyes; the golden crow beneath the sea is the sun in the sky." Not recognizing it themselves, they do not know to nurture it until it matures into Buddhahood. Instead, they reproach those who recognize it as being wrong and tell them not to acknowledge it. Is this not both lamentable and laughable?

Speaking in terms of spiritual powers, every raising of a hand, every step, every word, every smile, every spitting or cough is a wondrous function of spiritual power. As Layman Pang said, "Spiritual powers and wondrous functions: carrying water and hauling firewood!" In these movements, words, coughs, spitting, and actions, what is not the true mind exercising its wondrous function? Can a dead person's hands, feet, mouth, and tongue speak, smile, or perform actions? Though people dwell in this spiritual functioning all day without knowing it, they instead seek spiritual powers elsewhere. Is this not what the Chan school calls "Sitting beside a rice bin while countless people starve to death"?

Moreover, to cling to the existence of spiritual powers is to hold that there is a dharma to be attained; this is dharma-attachment. In the future, not only will one fail to become a Buddha, but one may instead have a share in becoming a demon! You must understand that in so-called spiritual powers, the wondrous functioning of the true mind is shen, while unobstructed functioning, without abiding attachment or hindrance, is tong. They must not be understood in terms of miraculous or mysterious marvels. Once one entertains thoughts of the miraculous and extraordinary, poison enters the mind, obstructing one's own gate of awakening, and one will have no prospect of realizing the Way.

Among practitioners today, fifty out of every hundred are deludedly attached to miraculous and mysterious marvels. All are busy performing tricks to deceive the

eye and displaying minor spiritual powers, delighting in themselves and imagining these to be signs of realizing the Way. They do not realize that this is merely trafficking in spirits and souls! It is precisely the activity of the discriminating consciousness condemned by Xuansha: “Practitioners of the Way do not recognize the true; only because from the beginning they recognize the spirit.” When have such people ever even dreamed of Buddhadharma? These ignorant people squander the energy of their entire lives on insignificant branches and leaves, without attending to proper cultivation.

Once the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month arrives, those so-called spiritual powers disappear to no one knows where, and they muddle along in a daze to report to Old Yama. Moreover, because they flaunted marvels and advertised their abilities during life, clung to appearances, and created karma, they must also undergo grievous evil retribution.

These foolish fellows neither set themselves on the right track nor cultivate the fundamental Dharma, yet they still use spiritual powers to test and assess others.

How could they know that learning Buddhism is a matter of one’s own cultivation and awakening? Whether others have awakened is no concern of yours. If another person has awakened, you cannot realize the Way because of it; if another has not awakened, you lose nothing. Why must you test them? Furthermore, if you wish to assess others, you must first possess insight surpassing theirs. If you use spiritual powers to assess people, you have already fallen behind. For the foundation of awakening lies in not being deluded when encountering circumstances, not in whether spiritual powers manifest. If confusion arises when you encounter circumstances, then no matter what great spiritual powers you may manifest, they bring no true benefit and cannot enable you to transcend birth and death.

Those whose foundation is not yet clear cannot remain undefiled when they encounter circumstances. Even if they gain powers through practice, or through dependence on others—spirits, ghosts, or essences—because they cling to circumstances and abide in appearances, their afflictions remain unchanged and they cannot attain freedom. Conversely, those who are not deluded when encountering circumstances have minds as empty and clean as if freshly washed, without the slightest adhesion. Though spiritual powers have not yet manifested for a time, before long all five powers will naturally manifest together.

To be undeluded when encountering circumstances is itself the power of the exhaustion of outflows. Once the root is secure, there is no need to worry that the branches and leaves will not flourish. Therefore, we should constantly examine and test ourselves: when we encounter circumstances, are we truly unmoved? If we have not yet become stable and still waver, but can progress from much movement to

less movement and then to no movement, this is the highest advancement and a sign of realizing the Way.

Do not focus on spiritual powers and mistakenly suppose that the manifestation of such powers is awakening to the Way. Still less should you test others by your own subjective states, lest deluded thoughts proliferate and you lose your own resolve for the Way. At the same time, even if spiritual powers manifest, do not use them. Since there is neither abiding nor attainment, they must not be displayed to others.

Finally, there is another important matter that students must understand. Some young people think that they can practice the Way only when body and mind are unoccupied and their surroundings quiet and secluded. Therefore, they repeatedly fail to seize the moment and cultivate diligently, sitting instead and waiting for favorable times and ideal circumstances to arrive.

They do not realize that ordinary beings have heavy obstacles and endless affairs. As the saying goes, “Before the donkey’s business is gone, the horse’s business arrives.” When will there ever be a time of leisure with nothing to do? As for location, there is even less need to trouble oneself over choosing one. In learning Buddhism, what matters is applying effort on the mind-ground, not sitting rigidly in mountain forests. Much has been said above: only when the mind does not cling or become defiled by circumstances is there true practice.

To remain undefiled by circumstances, how can one cultivate an unmoving mind by avoiding the world of sense objects and sitting rigidly in mountain forests? One need only recognize that all sense objects—forms, sounds, and the rest—are images manifested by one’s own true mind, like images appearing in a mirror’s light, and thus cannot be grasped or clung to. At the same time, the true mind cannot be found apart from sense objects, just as mirror images are none other than the mirror’s light, and the mirror’s light does not leave the images. Therefore, there is nothing to reject either.

Contemplate and train in this way at all times. With mind empty and spirit at ease, let things take their natural course in freedom, seeking nothing and attaining nothing: this is the natural Buddha. Why wait for some ideal circumstance or favorable time to arrive? I urge everyone: while you are young and capable, seize the opportunity and strive diligently. Do not idly waste your time and miss this good opportunity, only to let your youthful head turn white and grieve in vain! Take care!