A Brief Explanation of the Song of Liberation

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The Liberation Song, composed by Master Dayu, is a song written in response to the original rhyme scheme of Chan Master Yongjia's Song of Realizing the Way. Very few of Master Dayu's writings have been recorded. Apart from the Liberation Song, there is only a farewell poem that he left behind when he withdrew into seclusion without taking leave. The Liberation Song is precious. It explains very clearly how we should apply ourselves in practice and how we realize the Way, and it is of great help in our cultivation.

"Chan Master Yongjia's Song of Realizing the Way has an ancient melody and a spiritual clarity; it contains much that is worthy of appreciation." Everyone may already have read Chan Master Yongjia's Song of Realizing the Way. It is excellent, presenting within it the profound essence of the entire Chan school. Its meaning is rich, but its tone is lofty and few can harmonize with it.

"Moreover, the annotations of Venerable Hongde also contain distinctive insights." Fearing that some readers might not understand it, Venerable Hongde wrote annotations to the Song of Realizing the Way, bringing out its profound meaning with considerable originality. "Now I have fused them in a single crucible, intermittently adding my own views, and composed the Liberation Song." This Liberation Song contains not only the elevated views of those two great masters, but also our Grandmaster Dayu's own realizations and understanding. Its meaning is therefore even richer, and it is of still greater help to our cultivation of the Way.

Joy after awakening—what is that joy like? Listen as I sing the Liberation Song.

In our ordinary conduct and speech, whenever we cling to appearances, we are dreaming. While dreaming, we think everything is real; but once we awaken, nothing remains, not even the slightest trace. After Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, or cultivation of the Way leads us to awakening, it is just like waking from sleep. We

understand that everything is empty, that there is nothing to seek and nothing to attain. Letting go of everything, we become free and at ease, with boundless peace and joy.

Therefore, in cultivating the Way, we must realize the mind and see our true nature. Once we see our intrinsic nature, we awaken to the fact that all things are empty in nature and arise through conditions: all things are produced by causes and conditions, have no inherent nature, and are all illusory appearances. Yet our intrinsic nature is the reality of wondrous presence and true emptiness, the root from which all things arise; all things are manifestations and transformations that it displays in accordance with conditions. Once we understand this principle, we know that all worldly appearances are illusory and cannot be grasped. No longer clinging to them, we become free and at ease. What, then, is this joy after awakening like? Listen while I sing it.

I will not let the ancients alone keep their lofty melody; why should I not offer a verse in harmony?

It is not only Chan Master Yongjia who can realize the Way. All of us can see our true nature and realize the Way, for we all possess the Tathāgata's Buddha-nature. What is it like after realizing the Way? We may as well write down the circumstances of awakening and compose a response to the Song of Realizing the Way written by Master Yongjia, so that everyone may see.

Originally, realizing the Way means that "at the summit of the Wondrous High Peak, speech and thought are cut off; there is nothing to say." Our Buddha-nature is absolute true emptiness, without appearance; there is nothing with which it can be compared, and nothing that can be said. Once it falls into verbal explanation, it is no longer that. This is called "the step beyond, which a thousand sages do not transmit": no Buddha can depict it or explain it for you to hear.

Yet, in order to provide skillful means for everyone and support later learners, why not speak a few words amid what cannot be spoken, describing the scenery after awakening by indirect suggestion and guiding everyone through the gate? Thus, beyond not speaking, there may also be speaking: we may tell everyone of the true mind we have realized and the joy we have attained.

There is originally no delusion, nor is there any truth; the two dharmas are originally empty and without inherent nature.

Buddha-nature is neither true nor false, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor shaking, neither defiled nor pure: it is the formless reality of true suchness. It is utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, a pure and naked wondrous

essence beyond the reach of speech and thought. Nothing of praise or disparagement can be added to it.

Yet in everyday life we are all immersed in discriminating dharmas, believing there to be truth and falsehood, arising and ceasing, and all kinds of other distinctions. We do not know that these are all relative discriminations and deluded thoughts without inherent nature. Things themselves contain no distinctions of true and false, right and wrong, long and short, beautiful and ugly; these are all discriminations falsely produced by our deluded minds.

What suits us is considered true, good, and beautiful; what does not suit us is considered false, evil, and ugly. For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and the Sahā world are not in themselves divided into true and false. Yet some people falsely make distinctions, saying that the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is true and the Sahā world is false. At first hearing, this may seem reasonable, because the West is a Buddha-land while this place is the land of ordinary beings.

But upon careful reflection, this does not seem right either, for both lands have appearances. The Diamond Sūtra says, “All appearances are illusory.” If the Sahā world is illusory, then the Western Land is also illusory: if one is false, all are false. Conversely, both lands flow forth from the One True Dharma Realm. If the Western Land is true, then the Sahā world is also true, for if one is true, all are true. Thus, true and false have no inherent existence; they are merely discriminations of our deluded minds, through which we create our own afflictions.

Therefore, in practicing the Dharma and studying the Way, we must let go of everything and not falsely create distinctions over names and appearances. We should simply apply ourselves single-mindedly. Whatever dharma gate we practice, attainment will then be easy. Otherwise, if we calculate over names and appearances and give rise to false distinctions, it will be difficult to reach the goal.

The purpose of studying Buddhism is to gain genuine benefit and eliminate all afflictions. If we spend all day dealing with greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, dividing things into true and false, our afflictions will be endless and it will be difficult to realize the Way.

Furthermore, we must know that our dharmakāya is wondrous presence and true emptiness. It is not inert emptiness, much less annihilationist emptiness. It can give rise to inexhaustible wondrous functioning, produce the myriad dharmas, and lacks nothing and can do everything. All things are illusory appearances that it manifests and transforms; they cannot be pursued or seized. Simply function in accordance with conditions: do not discard what is present, and do not forcefully seek what is absent. Then wondrous functioning will be unobstructed.

Without inherent nature or appearance, do not cling to emptiness: this is the Tathāgata's true reality.

In daily life, we should not linger over any matter, ceaselessly pursuing conditions and thereby giving rise to unending afflictions. When a matter comes, respond to it; when it passes, let it stop. Leave not the slightest trace in the mind. Only then do we accord with Dharma practice. All appearances are conditioned conjunctions, empty and unreal, and false appearances without inherent nature. Do not be deceived by them and cling to them, thereby obscuring the luminosity of your intrinsic nature.

What are called appearances are empty. They are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water: they may be seen but cannot be grasped. If we mistake them for reality and pursue them with all our strength, afflictions will inevitably arise. Human desires are inexhaustible, while what we undertake cannot possibly fulfill every wish. When we cannot obtain what we seek, afflictions arrive unbidden.

Therefore, the first thing to know in practicing the Dharma is that all dharmas are false appearances without inherent nature, and should not be pursued. "Do not cling to emptiness" means that although dharmas have no inherent nature, their illusory appearances are not nonexistent. This is not inert emptiness in which nothing exists; rather, they are empty, illusory appearances that cannot be obtained or grasped.

In practicing the Dharma, we must neither cling to existence nor incline toward emptiness by abandoning all things and falling into vacant nothingness, becoming like earth, wood, metal, or stone—a stagnant pool of dead water. That would be wrong.

It is like the great Greek philosopher Socrates. When his cultivation reached an extreme, he too knew that everything in this world was false, unreal, and unobtainable. But he inclined toward emptiness: he wanted nothing and discarded everything, even sleeping in a gutter by the roadside. Such partiality toward emptiness is also wrong.

We must know that although appearances are false and should not be clung to, they still have their uses. Clothing, for example, can protect us from cold and heat, and a house can shelter us from wind and rain. We should simply use them in accordance with conditions, neither clinging to existence nor to emptiness. When neither side is established, the middle also naturally disappears. This establishing of nothing is the meaning of the Middle Way.

Once we understand this, we neither cling to emptiness nor to existence. Instead, we respond to circumstances and engage with things, with inexhaustible wondrous functioning, doing all we can to benefit the public. Only then do we accord with the

true meaning of the perfectly integrated and unobstructed Mahāyāna Buddhism. Some criticize Buddhism for inclining toward emptiness, but they have misunderstood it.

The emptiness spoken of in Buddhism is not an emptiness in which nothing whatsoever exists. It means that all appearances are unobtainable and cannot be grasped; it does not mean that appearances and the world do not exist.

Is not the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss beautiful? Some people do not understand this and therefore think Buddhism is contradictory. The Diamond Sūtra speaks of emptiness, as though there were nothing at all; the Amitābha Sūtra speaks of existence—golden sand covers the ground, the four treasures surround it, there are pools of seven treasures and water with eight virtues, and everything is there.

They do not know that the emptiness spoken of by the Buddha is the perfectly integrated and unobstructed emptiness that is not empty, and the nonempty that is empty: wondrous presence and true emptiness. To speak of true emptiness is to say that our fundamental essence—Buddha-nature—has no appearance that can be seen. Yet it can manifest all appearances and give rise to all wondrous functioning, so it is not inert emptiness. To speak of wondrous presence is to say that although appearances exist, they do not truly exist; they are illusory appearances that function in accordance with conditions.

They are like reflections appearing in a mirror: visible, yet unobtainable. However miserably we struggle in the world, however we deceive and contend with one another, even if we acquire vast wealth, in the end we still leave empty-handed and cannot take anything with us. Yet the karma we have created goes with us.

This creation of karma and undergoing of karmic retribution is also neither empty nor existent. We cannot take material things with us: that is empty—not existent. But karma cannot be cast off and goes with us: that is existent—not empty. Therefore, in practicing the Dharma, we must not abide in either side. Only then do we accord with the true meaning of directly realizing the great Way. To realize the wondrous nature that is neither empty nor existent, empty yet existent, is precisely the Tathāgata's true reality.

All sentient beings possess this wondrous nature. Pitifully, we do not know it; we pursue external conditions, greedily seeking without satisfaction, lose ourselves, and vainly suffer the pain of birth-and-death in saṃsāra. Therefore, the Buddha appeared in the world to awaken us: do not keep dreaming. All appearances are shadows within our own minds. We can neither cling to existence nor, because appearances arise through conditions and lack inherent nature, incline toward emptiness. If everyone can awaken and give rise to all wondrous functioning in daily

life with perfect integration and without obstruction, they will naturally enter Buddhahood and directly realize the Tathāgata's true and wondrous nature.

See the true appearance: all dharmas are empty. In an instant of sudden awakening, the myriad dharmas are one.

"True appearance" refers to the real appearance that never decays, in contrast to illusory and false appearances. The real appearance has no appearance. To directly realize the true appearance that is without appearance is to realize the Way. All worldly appearances that have form are false, subject to decay, arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing; they do not endure for long.

Our Buddha-nature is never destroyed; it endures from time immemorial to the present. It is the appearance of the formless. To see this true reality, one must apply oneself, investigate Chan, recite the Buddha's name, or uphold a mantra. When one cultivates to one-pointedness of mind without distraction, so that there is no mind left to be mind, one's original nature opens forth and one sees one's intrinsic nature. This is awakening through direct realization of the true reality that is the appearance of the formless.

When one sees true reality, everything is empty. The myriad distinct appearances all vanish into nothing, and thus all dharmas are alike. The scope of dharmas is vast: they include not only the Buddha-Dharma and worldly dharmas, but also our thoughts and all things. These myriad distinct dharmas are all alike: none has any intrinsic nature; all are illusory images; all are empty.

When one sees one's nature and awakens, understanding all this, one no longer clings to false appearances and becomes one with the universe. Moreover, all appearances are manifestations of our One True Dharma Realm; the myriad dharmas share a single source. Thus Chan masters say, "The hells and heavenly palaces are neither the same nor different"—the Thirty-Three Heavens and the eighteen levels of hell are neither the same nor different.

All phenomena are consciousness-only, and the three realms are mind-only. Apart from Buddha-nature, there is nothing at all. As it is said, "There is nothing that does not flow forth from this Dharma Realm, and nothing that does not return to this Dharma Realm." Thus nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. Once one awakens to this principle, one enters the gate of nonduality in the snap of a finger. In practice, never divide things into separate categories or compare their merits and shortcomings.

Once its splendor can no longer be concealed, one meets it face to face, utterly bare.

After awakening to the Way, our joy is boundless. Knowing that everything is an illusory appearance manifested by our own mind, we no longer pursue it. Formerly, our clinging to appearances bound us and brought us troubles of our own making. Now we let go of everything; body and mind are empty and clear, light, peaceful, and joyful. Free and at ease, serene in activity and stillness alike, how could we not be beside ourselves with joy, our happiness without limit? Such a state and scene truly cannot be described; hence it is said, "What splendid grace cannot be painted!" This free and untrammeled splendor pervades empty space and fills the dharma realm, radiating great light that illuminates the great thousand-world system. How could it possibly be concealed?

"One meets it face to face, utterly bare" means that when one's practice reaches the point where deluded thoughts cease, both body and mind within and the outer world alike dissolve into emptiness, and one's true nature suddenly appears before one. It is like meeting one's own father face to face at a crossroads; the flavor of this experience truly cannot be described by brush or ink. After directly realizing one's intrinsic nature, one sees all things as one's own intrinsic nature, without distinctions of you, me, and others. The Diamond Sūtra says, "No mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span." This is precisely the principle.

I say decisively: the Buddha-mind seal—yet there are those unwilling to believe it as it truly is.

In teaching the Dharma, the Buddha gave provisional teachings and definitive teachings; there are sūtras of ultimate meaning and sūtras not of ultimate meaning; there is the Lesser Vehicle and the Great Vehicle. These are different teachings given for people of different capacities. If he spoke only of the truth and told things as they really are, some people would probably not believe it. Why? When the Buddha taught the Lotus Sūtra, five thousand bhikṣus who had realized arhatship left their seats.

They did not believe that all sentient beings possess wisdom and Buddha-nature. It is like my telling you now that the clear, aware knowing at the point where a thought ceases is your true suchness-nature. Would you be willing to believe it? Probably not.

Why not? Because you think that if this aware knowing were your true suchness-nature, then you would have seen your nature and awakened to the Way, and spiritual powers ought to arise. But spiritual powers have not arisen yet. Since they have not arisen, you think this cannot be it; therefore, you do not believe.

What you do not realize is that awakening to the Way and the arising of spiritual powers occur in sequence. Spiritual powers do not arise immediately upon initial

awakening, because habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives and eons are heavy. After awakening, one must diligently eliminate them amid circumstances; only when the old habits have been completely removed can spiritual powers arise. Moreover, what are called spiritual powers are present even now in putting on clothes and eating meals, for all these actions are the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature.

Apart from Buddha-nature, this body could not move; thus all of it is spiritual functioning. “I say decisively: the Buddha-mind seal” directly points you to the mind-seal through which you see Buddha-nature. Seal means that the Buddha’s mind and our minds correspond exactly, just like impressions made by the same seal; everyone’s mind-seal is the same. But sentient beings are pitiably deluded and heavily obstructed, unwilling to believe it. Therefore, they are taught to recite the Buddha’s name.

In fact, if you truly believe that this mind of aware knowing is Buddha and let go of everything, there is no need to recite the Buddha’s name. I am originally Buddha—neither defiled nor pure, with nothing to grasp and nothing to relinquish—so what Buddha is there still to recite? But sentient beings are unwilling to believe, so Śākyamuni Buddha had no choice but to devise a method and take a roundabout way, instructing us to recite the Buddha’s name. When recitation reaches the point where the sense faculties and their objects fall away, and subject and object both vanish, one directly sees that the Buddha’s mind-seal is the true Buddha and can then accept this without doubt.

Directly comprehend the root source at this very moment; pluck leaves and seek branches to guide people gradually.

Transcending birth and death is like felling a tree: one must strike at its root. Once the root has been cut, its branches and leaves may still be luxuriantly green for the moment, but before long they will wither and die. When we cultivate Mahāyāna Dharma, we must cultivate at the root and not at the branches and leaves.

For example, our Heart-of-Heart Dharma is cultivated directly at the eighth consciousness: one strikes at the root, turning the eighth consciousness around and directly realizing the original source. The Buddha-recitation Dharma gate, by contrast, is cultivated at the sixth consciousness, and thus differs somewhat. If one proceeds step by step, pruning branches and plucking leaves without cutting the root, the tree will still not die; indeed, it may sometimes grow even better.

Therefore, in cultivating the great Dharma, one must also strike at the root. Yet people’s capacities differ. Some require gradual methods, proceeding step by step and slowly guiding them into the Buddha’s teaching; others must be directly shown how to see their nature here and now. The reason capacities differ is that each

person's karma created in past lives, and the depth of the wholesome roots formed through closeness to the Buddha, differ.

But in cultivating the Buddha-Dharma, we should cultivate Mahāyāna Dharma, for only Mahāyāna Dharma accords with the Buddha's fundamental intent. The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate is the fundamental Dharma gate of Buddhism. The practices of the various schools differ in content, but none can depart from the mind-dharma. Any teaching that speaks apart from mind is no different from the teaching of māras.

Looking at students today, many are confused by spiritual powers and disdain the mind-dharma. They often enter mistaken paths without knowing it—truly a great pity! You must know that cultivating the Way means cultivating the mind. The sūtras say, "This mind is Buddha; this mind becomes Buddha." It is not spiritual powers that make one a Buddha. If one can grasp the root, apply oneself on the ground of mind, and eliminate all deluded habits, there is no need to worry that spiritual powers will not arise. Conversely, if one seeks spiritual powers and clings to them, not only will one be unable to become a Buddha, but one will be well on the way to becoming a māra. I hope you will reflect on these words again and again.

How many times born, how many times dead—thus it has ever been, from time immemorial to the present.

This does not refer to our dying and being reborn, then being reborn and dying again, in the six realms of rebirth. Rather, it refers to the course of Buddhist practice: "Great awakenings number eighteen or nineteen; minor awakenings are countless." In practicing the Dharma, we often seem suddenly to awaken to our intrinsic nature: the mind dies, no longer clinging to appearances. Yet it has not died sufficiently or thoroughly; when circumstances arise, the mind springs up again and wavers once more.

Therefore, there may be as many as eighteen or nineteen great awakenings; one does not simply return home and sit securely after a single awakening. The teacher of Chan Master Gaofeng, Patriarch Xueyan Qin, was likewise shaken by circumstances after awakening to the Way several times. Only when, at last, the bottom dropped out of the bucket completely did he reach the ultimate. Buddhist practice is not something completed in a single awakening. If it can be, one is a great bodhisattva who has returned to this world.

Therefore, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra speaks of two Dharma gates. One is sudden awakening and sudden realization: "In principle, awakening is sudden; with awakening, all is simultaneously extinguished." At the instant of awakening, all habitual tendencies from the past are completely eliminated and gone.

But such people are few. Therefore, it continues: “In phenomena, they are gradually removed; through successive stages, the causes are exhausted.” After awakening, one must train amid circumstances, gradually removing deep-rooted habitual tendencies step by step. This is directed to the capacities of the broad mass of ordinary people.

Thus there are “how many times born, how many times dead”: one awakens once, but not thoroughly; one is still shaken by circumstances. Then one practices more deeply and advances further, until one reaches thorough awakening.

When we open forth our original nature and directly see our intrinsic nature, we have only reached the first bhūmi. We must still ascend stage by stage: the second bhūmi, the third bhūmi, all the way to the tenth bhūmi. Beyond these are the stages of equal enlightenment, wondrous enlightenment, and perfect enlightenment. Only by passing through every level can one become a Buddha.

There are three ways of speaking about practice. One is sudden awakening, in which a single awakening completes everything. Another is true cultivation after awakening, gradually eliminating habitual tendencies. The third is: “Practice is no practice; no practice is practice.”

In fact, these three are one. After awakening to the Way, we understand that everything in the world is false and unobtainable, and that everyone is originally Buddha. What is there to cultivate? Therefore, Chan Master Weishan said that eliminating habitual tendencies is cultivation. Do not speak of practice or no practice: practice and no practice are both two-sided words. Patriarch Zhongfeng said that if a person still has habitual tendencies after awakening to the Way, then that person has not awakened to the Way.

This was because, at that time, some people had not awakened to the Way at all. They read two books, understood a few principles, heard several Chan sayings that only seemed plausible, and then thought themselves awakened. When they could not get past a difficult circumstance, they used habitual tendencies as a shield. Therefore, this was not permitted. It does not mean that habitual tendencies are not allowed to remain after awakening. This course has been so from ancient times to the present; hence it is said, “Thus it has ever been, from time immemorial to the present.”

There are many kinds of spirit-heads and ghost-faces; returning to the source leaves not a trace of them.

Nowadays there are many kinds of qigong and many paths, in a bewildering variety, but none of these is genuine Buddhism. Genuine Buddhism has nothing at all; it teaches people only to recognize their own original mind and see their own intrinsic

nature. Once one truly recognizes one's intrinsic nature, one returns home and sits securely, returning to the source. Today, all non-Buddhist and deviant teachings use spiritual powers to entice people and lead them astray.

If we become attached to spiritual powers, it is a grave error. Not only will we be unable to become Buddhas; we may instead become māras. Genuine Buddhism shatters people's deluded dreams. It is pure and non-contrived, abides nowhere, and is free, at ease, and incomparably peaceful and joyful. Even if spiritual powers arise, one does not cling to them in the slightest. When Patriarch Linji awakened to the Way, he said, "So it turns out that Huangbo's Buddha-Dharma has not much to it."

Everyone is originally Buddha; turning back is all that is needed. It is utterly ordinary, with nothing mysterious, strange, or profound about it! People today are restless in mind, shallow in roots, and heavy in obstructions. All are deluded by spiritual powers and do not trust themselves. For example, as I said above, the clear, aware knowing at the point where a thought ceases is each person's Original Face.

Are you willing to take this responsibility? Can you stand firm without doubt? I do not think that is very likely. Because you think there is something to be seen and spiritual powers to be attained, you take that to be seeing one's true nature. Do not be mistaken: Buddha-nature has nothing at all. It is utterly pure and naked, without a single thread, not establishing a single dharma, unstained by a single speck of dust.

But take note: having nothing at all is not annihilationist emptiness; it means not clinging to appearances. When practice enters the ground of non-contrivance, brilliant light shines forth and the five spiritual powers all manifest. Yet even if brilliant light shines forth, illuminating the ten directions, and the six spiritual powers all manifest, one must not cling to views of light or spiritual powers. Only then can one advance ever higher, until reaching the ultimate stage. Those who have truly arrived abide and cling to nothing whatever. As it is said, the end is the same as the beginning; the road itself is home, and home itself is the road. If there is birth and death to transcend or a Buddha to become, one has still not awakened from the great dream!

Study Exoteric Buddhism and cultivate Esoteric Buddhism: their expedient gateways differ, but they return to the same source.

"Study Exoteric Buddhism" means to practice through the dharma gates of Exoteric Buddhism—for example, by cultivating the Pure Land school, reciting the Buddha's name and chanting sūtras—in order to quell delusion, return to the true, thoroughly realize the true mind, and attain rebirth in the Pure Land. Exoteric Buddhism has

principles that can be explained, practices that can be cultivated, and doctrines that can be studied and explored.

“Cultivate Esoteric Buddhism” refers to actual practice: principles are no longer merely discussed. Through the methods of empowerment by the three mysteries, one practices earnestly. This is the esoteric practice that opens the hidden treasury. Yet before entering actual practice, one must still study the sūtras. Only after mastering the essential meaning of the great teachings of the three vehicles may one enter actual cultivation and direct realization.

Although the practices may appear different, these are merely expedient gateways adapted to the capacities of sentient beings; they are not the true Dharma. The sūtras say, “The expedient means are many, but the return to the source is not two,” and, “These dharmas are equal, without high or low.” Arrival at home is the same in every case. There is no need to establish divergent views based on schools and discriminate between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism.

Since traversing the path of nirvāṇa, I have understood that birth and death are originally empty.

In cultivating the Way, we must realize the fruition of nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa means neither arising nor ceasing; quiescent extinction is bliss, and one no longer undergoes the cycle of birth and death. There are four different kinds of nirvāṇa, hence the phrase “traversing the path of nirvāṇa.” The first is nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature: our Buddha-nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing.

The second is nirvāṇa with remainder. For arhats and pratyekabuddhas, the personal self is empty, but the dharma-self is not empty. They no longer return within the cycle of birth and death, yet a residue remains—the dharma-self is gone, and transformational birth and death are gone.

The third is nirvāṇa without remainder. The personal self is empty, the dharma-self is empty, and everything is truly empty and pure; not the slightest residue remains. Both segmented and transformational birth and death are completely ended, with nothing remaining.

The fourth is nirvāṇa of no fixed abode. True emptiness does not mean abiding somewhere motionless. Truly transcending birth and death means remaining amid birth and death: one may pass through the wombs of oxen and horses or run through the hells—there is nowhere one cannot go and no fixed abode. One may come and go throughout the six realms, yet without a view of coming, going, appearing, or disappearing; it is as though one abided in a Pure Land beyond the realms and had never moved. “Understanding that birth and death are originally empty” means that only then does one know that what is called birth and death

cannot be obtained. Buddha-nature endures of itself; even if one wishes to die, one cannot die. Where, then, could birth and death be found?

Walking is empty, sitting is empty; speaking, silence, movement, and stillness are all empty.

True emptiness does not mean sitting motionless with nothing at all. Rather, it means doing things while the mind abides nowhere. If, when doing things, you forget the source and run after circumstances, that is not emptiness. Therefore, for one who has truly realized the Way, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all alike; there is never a time that is not empty. Speaking and not speaking, moving and not moving, are all the same.

In the Buddha-remembrance dharma gate, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva teaches us to maintain “uninterrupted pure mindfulness”; this is precisely what must be achieved. Therefore, the Pure Land school is a profound and lofty Dharma. When fully brought forth, it is exactly the same as the Chan school; it is not something that can be understood superficially. When we practice, we must always heed that “speaking, silence, movement, and stillness are all empty,” and not cling to appearances.

Before awakening, it is difficult to achieve this. Yet one must know to temper oneself in this way and strive to do it: in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, do not forget contemplation; do not follow thoughts or be moved by circumstances. If one can do this, awakening comes easily. After awakening, one further tempers the mind through circumstances and safeguards realization continuously and seamlessly; then speaking, silence, movement, and stillness can become continuous and undivided.

Even if a naked blade is held to one’s head, it is as though a sharp sword were cutting the spring breeze.

When practice has reached home, one is not afraid even if a knife is held over one’s head. Why? Because I do not die. Only the body is ruined—a shell of form; the dharmakāya is indestructible. After the Second Patriarch, Master Shenguang, realized the Way, Patriarch Bodhidharma told him: “You still have a debt of life to repay. But lest the true Dharma suffer slander, you may refrain from repaying it.”

A person who has truly realized the great Way is like this: if the debt must be repaid, it is repaid; if not, it need not be repaid. Why? Because the mind is empty and pure, not establishing a single dharma—what debt is there to repay? It is like a radio that has not been switched on: although radio waves are outside, it makes no sound. Thus, though there may be a debt, if the mind does not move, it is like an unopened radio. The creditor cannot find you, and the debt need not be repaid.

But if the mind is not empty, this will not do. Therefore Patriarch Nanquan said, “Teacher Wang’s practice lacks strength; ghosts and spirits catch sight of him.” Nanquan was reproaching himself for weakness in his practice: thoughts had arisen and stirred, and ghosts and spirits had seen him.

Take note! Not giving rise to thoughts does not mean that no thoughts arise. It means that when thoughts arise, one does not cling to them; non-abiding is called no-thought. Otherwise, how could one do anything without thoughts arising? No-thought means not clinging to appearances and not lingering. When each thought does not linger, that is no-thought. Lingering over something is deluded thought. Thus, thought within no-thought is right mindfulness.

The Second Patriarch’s mind had truly become empty. After transmitting the Dharma to the Third Patriarch, he went to repay his debt. For a great wealthy man, repaying a small debt is like one hair from nine oxen; it is of no consequence. Before he was killed, he said: “When my head meets the naked blade, it is as though the spring breeze were being cut.” In cultivating Buddhadharma, we must possess such heroic spirit if we are to fulfill the Buddha’s vows and conduct.

In cultivating Buddhadharma, one must be bold and spirited, open and magnanimous, knowing that everything is illusory, letting go without clinging, and fearing nothing, for birth and death do not originally exist. But being bold does not mean being recklessly daring—doing every harmful thing without fear. That would be disastrous.

Suddenly awakened to the wondrous source of mind, the shell of ignorance breaks open, and all is the same.

In an instant, one awakens: that by which I can speak and you can hear is the source of mind, Buddha-nature. Have no doubt whatever—seeing one’s true nature is right here in the present moment! This is a person of the highest caliber. If you seek it elsewhere, it is not so; nor can it be found by seeking. The moment you seek, a thought stirs; when a thought stirs, it is obscured by deluded thoughts, and instead you fail to see it.

Therefore, in the Chan school, blows and shouts are used in rapid succession: with a crack, someone strikes you or shouts at you, causing you to startle and freeze, severing your deluded thoughts and imaginings. At that moment, not a single thought arises; yet this is not unconsciousness like wood or stone. Rather, there is clear, distinct awareness. Who is this clear, distinct awareness? In that very moment, turn the light inward for a glance, and you directly see the true mind and intrinsic nature.

This is why the Chan school receives people so directly and swiftly. But those of middling and lesser capacities cannot accept it. “The shell of ignorance breaks open, and all is the same”: the shell of ignorance is our shell of form. To empty it is to empty this shell of form.

If it were not for ignorance and clinging to appearances, when your parents had intercourse, how would you have entered there? How would there be a you? As for “the shell breaking open,” no matter what Dharma one practices, when cultivation reaches the point at which this shell of form suddenly bursts open, the body and mind within and the world without all vanish together, and the quiescent, extinguished true nature naturally appears before one; then all are the same. Furthermore, even if body and mind dissolve into emptiness through practice, if emptiness still remains, or there is a dark empty void, that is beginningless ignorance. One must continue onward and break through this beginningless ignorance before one can see one’s true nature.

In dreams, the six destinies are plainly present; upon awakening, there are neither sages nor ordinary beings.

In dreams, everything is present, yet after awakening not the slightest trace remains. We too are now dreaming: cultivating Buddhadharma and becoming sages are all dream states.

In truth, everyone is a Buddha; there are no sages or ordinary beings. Yet because we are now deluded by external circumstances, cling to appearances, pursue them, create karma, and undergo retribution, we vainly suffer the cycle of birth and death within what is originally birthless and deathless. Thus there are the illusory appearances of the six realms: rising to the heavens through wholesome karma and falling into the hells through evil karma.

If one can awaken in the present moment and not be deluded by false appearances, it is just like awakening from a great dream. Where then are the images of the six realms? All mountains, rivers, the great earth, and the myriad phenomena are the One True Dharma Realm. All sentient beings possess the Tathāgata’s wisdom-nature; the four noble realms and six ordinary realms are all created by the discriminating deluded mind. Do not think that only sleeping is dreaming; clinging to appearances while awake is also dreaming. What I am now saying to you is dream-talk within a dream. What Buddhadharma is there to attain?

The root of afflictions is bodhi; since sin and blessing have no nature, where can they be sought?

That which can give rise to afflictions is the root of afflictions. When we ordinarily speak of “Buddha-nature,” we mean the basis for becoming a Buddha; “dharma-

nature" means the basis for bringing all things to accomplishment. This basis is our awareness-nature. Without this intrinsic nature, none of its functions could arise. Afflictions are like waves on water: without water, waves cannot form; only when water encounters wind do waves arise.

When we become angry today, it is our bodhi intrinsic nature functioning delusively. Therefore, bodhi intrinsic nature is the root of afflictions. The sūtras say, "Afflictions are themselves bodhi." This does not mean that by being afflicted all day long we attain bodhi; it means that the very basis from which afflictions arise is Buddha-nature.

If the waves are removed, the water is gone as well. Therefore, afflictions need not be eliminated; one need only let them subside, and bodhi is restored. "Since sin and blessing have no nature, where can they be sought?" Sin and blessing have no intrinsic nature. Undergoing punishment and enjoying blessings are both created by our deluded minds. Perform wholesome karma, create blessings, and receive blessed retribution; perform evil karma, create sins, and undergo painful retribution.

What one does, one undergoes; it is not ruled or directed by anyone else. Thus, the nature of sin and blessing is empty; they are created solely by the mind. Laozi said, "Misfortune is that upon which fortune depends; fortune is that within which misfortune lies concealed." There is no gate through which misfortune or fortune enters; people bring them upon themselves. This is simply the natural law of cause and effect: there is no need to seek it, nor is there anywhere to seek it. At all times and in all places, we should abide nowhere and simply do every good deed in accordance with conditions. Yet we should not deliberately do good deeds in pursuit of blessings, lest the mind fail to become empty and we become attached to blessings, unable to attain the great Way.

Free of self-imposed bondage, one is liberated; striding freely, one enters great repose.

In all that we do, we cling to appearances and seek to gain something; this is using a rope to bind ourselves. If you understand that fame, wealth, spouses, possessions, children, and rank are all as unattainable as flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, and let go of everything, then, as if awakening from a great dream, you will realize that you were never bound and will be liberated at once.

The Sixth Patriarch said: "When the preceding thought is deluded, one is an ordinary being; when the succeeding thought awakens, one is a Buddha." Once we cling to appearances, we are bound by them. Originally, there is only purity, free of defilement, and nothing at all. All afflictions and karmic obstacles are created by our own clinging to appearances. If you do not cling to appearances and create karma, then there is neither sin nor blessing.

Once you understand all this, you can be carefree and at ease, striding freely in great repose. One who has truly realized the Way can go anywhere. There is nothing to fear in passing through the womb of an ox or the belly of a horse, nor does it matter to go to hell; all these are transformations of our own intrinsic nature. What appearance is there to which one can cling? Awakening to the Way has depths and shallows. The koan of the wild fox spirit of five hundred years is an example of breaking attachment to appearances.

Someone asked him, “Does a great practitioner still fall under cause and effect?” He replied, “He does not fall under cause and effect.” Later, he reflected: “The Buddha said that cause and effect are never empty. Was I not wrong to say that one does not fall under cause and effect?” He became doubtful and, after his death, fell into the body of a fox. Having cultivated the Way for five hundred years, he was able to transform into human form because he possessed wholesome roots. Whenever Patriarch Baizhang taught the Dharma, he would come to hear it.

After the Dharma teaching, everyone dispersed. Seeing that he did not leave, Baizhang asked him, “Do you still have any questions?” He said, “I have a question to ask: Does a great practitioner still fall under cause and effect?” Baizhang answered, “He is not ignorant of cause and effect.” Upon hearing this, he suddenly awakened and was liberated.

He then asked the master, saying: “Tomorrow, on a great flat rock behind the mountain, there will be a black-furred fox. That is me. Please cremate me according to the rites for a deceased monastic.” Baizhang agreed to cremate him. In fact, “not being ignorant of cause and effect” and “not falling under cause and effect” differ by only the slightest degree. If the mind is empty and abides nowhere, one is free to come and go; even falling into the body of a fox does not matter. Yet to request cremation according to the rites for a deceased monastic still reveals a discriminatory view between oneself and other kinds of beings. He had not truly attained liberation, for a fox is itself a Buddha! What difference is there? Thus, awakening to the Way has depths and shallows.

Do not chase after conditions; do not cling. In accordance with conditions and your lot, simply eat and drink.

Above, we discussed realizing the essence; below, we discuss giving rise to its function. Sentient beings go astray through chasing after conditions and clinging: from A they pursue B, and from B they pursue C. From morning to night, they pursue conditions without cease. Their deluded thoughts are inverted, and they cling to phenomena without being able to let go. Thus, they fall from their originally excellent Buddha-nature into the state of sentient beings. Conversely, if one does

not chase after conditions or cling, but simply functions in accordance with conditions, that is enough.

“In accordance with conditions and your lot, simply eat and drink.” “According to your lot” means being content with one’s proper station. Each person occupies a different position because the causes each created in former lives differ; consequently, the results experienced in this life also differ. Conditions are likewise so: there are favorable conditions and adverse conditions. Therefore, do not compare yourself with others or pursue after them. In eating, clothing, and housing, live according to conditions, whether circumstances are abundant or frugal. If the causes created in a former life were good, one’s provisions in this life will be ample; if the causes created in a former life were poor, the results in this life will likewise be meager. Therefore, live according to conditions.

Unchanging, accord with conditions and act without obstruction; freely follow the mind in great peace and joy.

“Unchanging, accord with conditions” means acting in accordance with the conditions one has brought about, whether one is promoted or demoted. Though one’s career may change, intrinsic nature remains forever unchanged. This means that we should not waver while cultivating the Way. Gold, for example, may be fashioned into all kinds of jewelry and utensils. Although its forms change, its substance does not; it remains gold.

Although we act in accordance with conditions, our essential nature remains unchanged. “Act without obstruction” means doing whatever benefits the community, but never doing what harms it. One may do all things, but one must abide nowhere.

One must be able to rise or fall without being moved. There is no need for delight at being elevated in rank, nor sorrow or resentment at being demoted. Simply do one’s utmost for everyone, without any attachment; then there is no obstruction. “Freedom” means being unbound. Where there is bondage, there is no freedom.

Since everything is false and there is nothing to pursue, if one does not fret over gain and loss, one is free. “Following the mind” means doing as one wishes. Confucius said, “At seventy, I could follow my heart’s desires without overstepping the bounds.” Confucius too cultivated the Way. Confucianism and Daoism are great traditions indigenous to our country. At seventy, Confucius realized the great Way: whatever he did according to his wishes benefited everyone.

Not overstepping the bounds means not exceeding proper limits. To exceed them is wrong; harmful deeds must not be done. Because one does not overstep the bounds, one attains great peace and joy. When we do good deeds, we feel happy;

when we do bad deeds, we feel guilty and are reproached by our conscience. When bad people do bad deeds, their conscience awakens at the time of death, and they reproach themselves in distress. This is the meaning of the saying, “When a person is near death, their words are kind; when a bird is near death, its cry is mournful.” When we do good deeds, our hearts are joyful and at peace, and we have no shame before others.

Attain only the root; do not worry about the branches. Wondrous functioning moves freely and vividly in every direction.

What is the root? It is our true mind. All things arise from mind, and cultivating the Way to become a Buddha likewise cannot be separated from this mind. Therefore, only cultivation from the mind-ground is the true cause for becoming a Buddha. Conversely, cultivating from the physical body, channels and energies, or spiritual powers is merely peripheral accomplishment and offers no prospect of Buddhahood. When we practice and directly realize our own intrinsic nature, we have attained the root.

Conversely, if one has not realized intrinsic nature but clings to manifesting spiritual powers, one will fall prey to demons. Since one has not attained the root, one cannot manifest spiritual powers. Even if such powers do arise, they are external and not genuine. If one clings to spiritual powers, the mind is neither empty nor pure; one cannot transcend birth and death and will still fall prey to demons. Spiritual powers are wondrous functions arising from mind; they are merely branches and leaves.

Our intrinsic nature inherently possesses spiritual powers. We cannot now bring them forth because attachment, afflictions, and inverted deluded thoughts obscure the luminosity of intrinsic nature. If deluded thoughts, inversion, and attachment are removed, these powers will naturally manifest. Therefore, settle your mind and practice the Dharma, eradicate the afflictions of the five desires, and first attain the power of the Way—the power of exhaustion of defilements.

Only afterward should the five spiritual powers manifest; then they are genuine spiritual powers. Non-Buddhists also possess the five kinds of spiritual powers: divine eye, divine ear, spiritual travel, knowledge of others’ minds, and knowledge of former lives. But they have not attained the power of exhaustion of defilements. Therefore, non-Buddhists cannot transcend birth and death or become Buddhas. All who cling to spiritual functions without knowing what intrinsic nature is are non-Buddhists. Thus, to manifest spiritual powers, one must first attain fundamental wisdom—the power of exhaustion of defilements. Only then is one on the right path. Once this power has been attained, there is no need to worry that the five spiritual powers will fail to manifest.

“Wondrous functioning moves freely and vividly in every direction.” After awakening to the Way, wondrous functions are boundless. With not the slightest attachment, one is unrestricted in favorable and adverse circumstances, free in every direction. Thus Yu Gong said: “For a lifetime, I have rowed an ancient boat; throughout the three realms, I may sleep as I please.” Once one has truly realized intrinsic nature, one may roam as one wishes through the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm, and lie down to sleep soundly.

Awakening to the Way is lively and dynamic; it is not remaining motionless like something dead. Yesterday at Lingyan Temple, someone asked, “Does no-thought mean remaining unmoving for two minutes, then five minutes, ten minutes, and finally extending this until one does not move for twenty-four hours?” No! Awakening to the Way should be lively and dynamic, responding to conditions and engaging with things while abiding nowhere. No-thought does not mean that not a single thought arises; it means not following thoughts when they arise and not abiding in things when they come. To remain completely motionless would make one a corpse—what use would that be?”

With a snap of the fingers, the gate of nonduality opens; ascend the hall and enter directly into the Tathāgata’s house.

Awakening to the Way occurs in an instant, at the point where a thought ceases. With a single inward glance, recognize it, and the great matter is finished. It is as swift as the spark struck from a stone or a flash of lightning. If one deliberately seeks to see it, that is not it. This wondrous essence cannot be conceived or sought. Seeking itself is a deluded thought, and it obscures intrinsic nature.

When practice reaches the proper point, the sense faculties and their objects suddenly fall away, and one directly sees intrinsic nature—all within the time it takes to snap one’s fingers. Once intrinsic nature is seen, every doubt melts away and disintegrates. What one had thought of day and night is right before one’s eyes! “Ascend the hall and enter directly into the Tathāgata’s house”: in that instant, one thoroughly sees intrinsic nature, enters the inner chamber, and becomes a Buddha.

Yet this is only Buddhahood at the causal stage, not Buddhahood at the fruition stage, so one must still practice diligently. Fundamental wisdom has been attained, but differentiated wisdom has not yet been attained. One must continue to train diligently, eliminate habitual tendencies, liberate sentient beings widely, and accumulate merit and virtue before realizing fruition-stage Buddhahood, in which wisdom and merit are both perfected.

The Chan tradition is understood, and the teachings are understood; like a round, radiant sun shining in a clear sky.

Zong means the center: seeing intrinsic nature is called zong. Teaching means instruction: the sūtras spoken by the Buddha are called teachings. To understand both the Chan tradition and the teachings means to comprehend and directly realize them all, in perfect harmony and without obstruction. A Chan master said: “To understand the Chan tradition but not the teachings is like being half-blind; to understand the teachings but not the Chan tradition is like being half-paralyzed.” Therefore, Buddhist practitioners must understand both the Chan tradition and the teachings.

“Like a round, radiant sun shining in a clear sky” means that when we awaken to the root, we are like a perfectly round great sun, sending forth radiant light that illumines everywhere and is present in every place. This does not mean that one sees a great sun when awakening to the Way; it is a metaphor for the boundless wondrous functioning of one who, after awakening, knows and understands all things.

When we truly awaken to the Way, there is nothing but numinous awareness. Yet after training, when habitual tendencies have been removed, one can shine with radiant light, illuminating the great thousandfold world, mutually interpenetrating without obstruction with all Buddhas in the ten directions, and directly realizing the Avataṃsaka realm. But this must not be sought through attachment to appearances.

The hundred thousand samādhis and immeasurable meanings are found only in ordinary daily life.

There are many kinds of samādhi: the samādhi of one practice, the samādhi of one mark, Buddha-remembrance samādhi, the Pratyutpanna samādhi, and so on. Samādhi has many names, and its wondrous meanings are inexhaustible. Where are these immeasurable wondrous meanings? They are right within our ordinary daily activities. For all immeasurable wondrous functions arise from our true mind; apart from the true mind, nothing can be obtained.

Thus, all wondrous meanings are found in the activities of daily life.

At this point, someone asked, “What is buddha-nature?” The master took a sip of water and said, “Do you understand?” Who is raising the cup? And who is drinking the water? Realize it from here—what great joy! Ordinary matters reveal the wondrous meaning of buddha-nature to you at every moment. As it is said, “The sound of wind and the songs of birds all proclaim dharmatā,” and “Every gesture and movement reveals the dharmakāya.” Sentient and insentient things are always expounding the Dharma and everywhere displaying wondrous meaning.

Therefore, amid ordinary daily activities, simply functioning vividly and freely without abiding is the most profound wondrous meaning. Do not seek some other mystery. Once you understand this, the very capacity by which we now see, speak, and hear is our buddha-nature. It shines from before our faces at every moment—what more is there to seek?

Awaken to the substance of mind: beings and Buddhas are the same; sentient and insentient share the same nostrils.

“Awaken to the substance of mind”: this substance capable of awareness is our root and our buddha-nature. “Beings and Buddhas are the same”: sentient beings and Buddhas are alike, without distinction. It is not that Buddhas have one measure more of luminosity or spiritual powers than we do, or that we have one measure less than Buddhas.

But why are we now different from Buddhas? Because the luminosity of our mind-substance is obscured by deluded thoughts and attachments, we cannot bring forth great spiritual functioning. Remove deluded thoughts and attachments, and we are no different.

How, then, are we to explain, “Sentient and insentient share the same nostrils”? We humans have feelings and awareness, whereas insentient things, such as this table, have no awareness. How can they share the same nostrils? It is because all worldly appearances are manifested by mind alone and transformed by consciousness alone; not a single thing is other than ourselves.

Do not suppose that we differ because we have awareness and can move while insentient objects cannot. In fact, when our breath no longer comes and the eight consciousnesses leave the body, this body, like this tabletop, can no longer move. At present, we are enveloped by ignorance and cling to the body as self, so only this body is functioning.

If we realize the Way, eradicate ignorance, open up, and restore our original wondrous functioning, then everywhere is the manifestation of transformations of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind. We will no longer hold the view of sentient and insentient. Thus, insentient and sentient share the same nostrils; they are all the same.

There is no bondage, no liberation, and no obstruction. When deluded, one obstructs oneself; when awakened, one is naturally open and free.

Originally, sentient beings and Buddhas are alike—free and at ease, without bondage or liberation. Yet sentient beings become deluded by external appearances, cling to them without letting go, and are trapped by things. Like

silkworms spinning cocoons to bind themselves, they cannot attain freedom. Originally, we need not have this body, but when our parents had intercourse, the stirring of desire caused us to enter it ourselves. Thus, we became firmly bound by this shell of form and lost our freedom.

After birth, we become still more attached to appearances. Dazzled by the five colors, we create karma in accordance with conditions, adding bondage upon bondage and remaining unable to end birth and death. If we can awaken at once and recognize that all forms are images manifested by our true mind and buddha-nature—unobtainable and not to be sought—then, by letting go completely, we awaken from the dream on the spot.

All sentient beings are originally pure and undefiled, without bondage or confinement; what need is there for liberation? “There is no bondage, no liberation, and no obstruction. When deluded, one obstructs oneself; when awakened, one is naturally open and free.” To know that buddha-nature pervades all places and is nowhere absent is to realize the Way. When deluded, we cling to appearances and obstruct ourselves. Once awakened and clear, we understand that all things are illusory images of the true mind, unobtainable. We no longer cling to appearances; spiritual functioning then appears, spiritual powers arise, and the great Way is realized.

It has no form or appearance, is supremely numinous and wondrous; how could one understand it without direct realization?

“It has no form or appearance” describes our intrinsic nature, our dharmakāya: it has no form whatsoever. Never seek to see one’s nature through appearances. It is pure, undefiled, soundless and colorless numinous awareness, with no form to be seen. “Supremely numinous and wondrous”: it can apprehend all things, manifest all appearances, and bring forth countless transformations.

After the Sixth Patriarch realized the Way, he said: “How unexpected that intrinsic nature is originally complete! How unexpected that intrinsic nature can give rise to all phenomena!” Some say that, when seeing their nature, they saw a great sun, a new moon, or a Buddha. That is not seeing one’s nature. The Diamond Sūtra says: “All appearances whatsoever are empty and false.” Anything with an appearance is unreal. Nature is the true substance, with no form to be seen.

Therefore, the sūtra says, “True reality is without characteristics.” The Śūraṅgama Sūtra further says: “When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing; seeing still stands apart from seeing, and seeing cannot reach it.” Therefore, both the one who sees and what is seen are not it. “How could one understand it without direct realization?” The state of seeing one’s nature cannot be described, for nothing compares with it, nothing can be said of it, and no thought can reach it.

Unless one reaches that state oneself, anything one says remains vague. Thus the Chan school says, “At the step beyond, even a thousand sages do not transmit it.” In truth, the point where thought ceases is that very thing. It has no appearance, much less anything miraculous or mysterious. It is simply the most ordinary mind!

It is not difficult to see reflections in a mirror, but how can one grasp the moon from the bottom of the water?

All appearances in the world are reflections in a mirror, for worldly appearances are transformations and manifestations of the true mind. As stated above, apart from the true mind, not a single thing exists. The true mind is the basis for the formation of all things, like a mirror; things are like reflections in the mirror. Although reflections can be seen, if one tries to grasp them, it is like scooping up the moon from water—one cannot seize it.

The lion roars and speaks fearlessly; hearing it, all the beasts are left tongue-tied.

The Buddha’s teaching is like a lion’s roar. The lion is king of the beasts; when it roars, all the beasts lower their heads and submit. “Speaking fearlessly” means that the Buddha speaks truth, speaks in accordance with reality, speaks what is actual, and does not speak deceptively. He does not fear anyone’s rebuttal, for no one can refute him.

This is because the Buddha teaches the true wondrous principle, perfectly integrated and unobstructed. It is not some shallow, limited teaching involving attachment and abiding, but the great Dharma of truth, valid everywhere. Thus, whoever hears it can only praise it and cannot arbitrarily offer a word of objection. Therefore, after non-Buddhists heard the Buddha teach, they did not dare debate him. Even if some bold and reckless non-Buddhists came to debate the Buddha, they ultimately departed in defeat. Because they all clung to appearances, their teachings were not the complete great Dharma. In the end, they still took refuge in the Buddha and bowed their heads to become his disciples.

When the fragrant elephant runs about, it loses its majesty; devas and dragons listen silently and are filled with joy.

The king of elephants is called the fragrant elephant. When crossing a river, the fragrant elephant need not struggle through the current; standing in the water, it can cut off all streams. If it ran about to evade the current, it would lose its majesty. This means that our buddha-nature is truth, towering and unmoving.

“Waves” refers to the endlessly changing deluded thoughts and inverted views. In studying the Buddhadharma, we must cut off these endlessly changing deluded thoughts and inverted views. Like the fragrant elephant crossing a river, we do not

run about—that is, we do not fear the arising of deluded thoughts, but cut off the rushing current. “Devas and dragons listen silently and are filled with joy”: when the devas, dragons, and the eight classes of beings hear the Buddha teach, they rejoice immeasurably. All praise and uphold the teaching, take refuge in the Buddha, and become Dharma protectors.

Others compare the fragrant elephant to an arhat, who ordinarily prides himself greatly on his own realization but, upon hearing the supreme One Vehicle Dharma, is immediately defeated and loses his majesty. They compare devas and dragons to bodhisattvas who have reached the bhūmis, who use the supreme Vehicle Dharma to confirm the state of their own inner realization and feel incomparable joy and intimacy. This explanation is also very good.

But I think it is more fitting, especially for practitioners today, to compare both the fragrant elephant and devas and dragons to great Chan masters. First, the Chan school has always used dragons and elephants as metaphors for great spiritual teachers. Second, deviant teachings are now prevalent, and many people abandon the true to follow the false. We may say that Chan practitioners who cultivate the true Dharma cannot withstand the allure of deviant teachings, and through their running about—that is, following the deviant—they lose their majesty. True great teachers—the devas and dragons—rejoice on hearing the true Dharma and are not swayed by deviant teachings.

Lion cubs are followed by the multitude; at three years old, they can already roar mightily.

The offspring of a great lion is a lion cub. Though young, it can only be followed by the other beasts, who do not dare pass in front of it. A person who has initially realized the Way has not yet realized Buddhahood at the fruition stage, and is like a lion cub. Those who cultivate non-Buddhist paths likewise cannot surpass one who has initially realized the Way.

This is because one who has initially realized the Way has realized the root, whereas those on non-Buddhist paths have not; therefore, they cannot compare. “At three years old, they can already roar mightily”: though a lion cub is young, it already possesses the lion’s fundamental nature and can roar like the lion king, subduing the beasts. So too with one who has initially realized the Way. Because the principle he realizes is no different from that realized by a Buddha at the fruition stage, his teaching represents the Buddha’s teaching. He need not fear harassment or debate from non-Buddhists.

If a jackal pursues the Dharma King, a hundred thousand demons merely open their mouths in vain.

The lion symbolizes the Dharma King. A jackal resembles a lion and may seem able to impersonate one, but when it opens its mouth to cry out, it lacks the lion's majesty and reveals itself. It cannot subdue the beasts. Nowadays, many so-called qigong practices and ways claim to be Buddhadharma, but they are actually non-Buddhist paths impersonating Buddhadharma. They are all "demons." Their teachings use spiritual powers to entice people and lead them astray; they are deviant teachings, not true Dharma, and are of no use.

Who is without thoughts? Who is without birth? Do not mistake a mirror's reflection for the real thing.

Ordinary beings certainly have thoughts and undergo birth and death. But after we realize the Way, what then? Does not a single thought arise? Everyone takes this line to mean that, after realizing the Way, of course there are no thoughts and no thoughts arise.

Then that is mistaken! No-thought does not mean that not a single thought arises. When thoughts arise as though they had not arisen, that is called no-thought; thoughts arise without abiding or lingering—this is non-arising. Did Master Huineng not say, "Do not cut off the hundred thoughts," and "When encountering objects, the mind's thoughts arise repeatedly"? "Do not cut off the hundred thoughts" still means there are thoughts; "when encountering objects, the mind's thoughts arise repeatedly" still means thoughts must arise.

Therefore, we must recognize the right path and not mistake the wrong path for it, thinking that one should have no thoughts and remain there motionless like a corpse. "Whoever has no-thought has non-arising": when a thought arises, know it; do not follow it or linger on it—this is no-thought. Non-arising means that arising continues without end, yet there is no abiding; it does not mean cutting off one's lineage and calling that non-arising.

Long ago, Layman Pang said: "A son who does not marry, a daughter who does not wed; the whole family sits together in perfect harmony, all speaking of non-arising." His family had four members: himself, his wife, one son, and one daughter. The son did not marry, and the daughter did not wed. All four realized the Way—something exceedingly rare.

Later, a great monk composed a responding verse: "No son to marry, no daughter to wed; the assembly sits together in perfect harmony—why speak of non-arising?" A monk has neither wife nor children, so he has no son to marry and no daughter to wed. Yet he has an assembly; there is more than one monk in a monastery. Everyone practices the Dharma harmoniously together. With nothing to say, why speak of non-arising? Both verses are very well put.

One speaks of non-arising; the other asks, “Why speak of non-arising?” Each displays a marvelous skill, marvelous to the finest point. Yet non-arising does not mean that not arising is non-arising; there is no harm in continual arising being non-arising. We may also compose another verse: “A son may marry, a daughter may wed; generation after generation of children and grandchildren—this is speaking of non-arising.”

A son may marry, and a daughter may wed. When sons and daughters marry, sons have grandsons, and grandsons have great-grandsons: children and grandchildren, arising without end, yet one remains inwardly unmoved. This is non-arising! It is the boundless wondrous functioning of the true mind. Non-arising does not mean dying there without moving.

Arising without end is non-arising! Only this reveals the perfect interpenetration of Buddhadharma, in which nothing is to be gained. Do not look at only one side and suppose that non-arising means that no one may move and no one may marry, and that marriage is therefore a mistake. It has nothing to do with that. One may marry, but one must not become attached to sexual desire between men and women. If one becomes attached to sexual desire, one is mistaken, and birth and death become endless.

After marrying and raising a son, if one no longer abides in sexual desire, there is no problem. This is wondrous functioning. Non-arising does not mean dying there without moving. “Do not mistake the reflection in the mirror for what is real.” This ceaseless arising, these children and grandchildren, are all reflections in a mirror. Do not take them as real. If you become attached to appearances, that is a mistake.

It is truly not easy to accomplish this: one must both give rise to life and remain in non-arising. Unless one gives rise to great functioning after awakening, one cannot hope to do so. Some people may be all right while forcibly suppressing thoughts in pursuit of non-arising, but once they come near sexual attraction, it becomes disastrous: they become attached to it, and then cannot be free of birth and death. This requires special attention.

If one takes annihilation as ultimate, how is one different from adherents of heterodox and misguided views?

Buddhism is neither empty nor existent, both empty and existent, and empty precisely as existent. It is not annihilationist emptiness, in which not a single thing exists. Annihilationist emptiness is a misguided view. We must understand that emptiness is not the emptiness of having nothing whatsoever; it is the emptiness of being unobtainable and beyond grasping. It is also the emptiness that manifests appearances and functions in accordance with conditions without abiding in them. If one misunderstands and believes that everything is nonexistent, that is an

annihilationist view and a grave error. Those who hold this view follow a non-Buddhist path: they believe that one exists while alive but ceases to exist at death. That is a heterodox and misguided view.

A great person wields the sword of wisdom—the edge of prajñā, the flame of vajra.

In studying Buddhadharma, we must possess the bearing of a great person—generous and unrestrained—before we can accord with the Buddha. We must not be petty, unwilling to let go of this or cast aside that, clutching everything tightly. In that way, Buddhadharma is difficult to practice.

All things are illusory, so why not let them go? To "wield the sword of wisdom" is to develop great wisdom, recognize that everything is illusory, and use this wisdom to cut through all afflictions. All afflictions are sought out by oneself; they arise from attachment to appearances. Originally there was nothing, yet one stubbornly clings to appearances and pursues them, exhausting one's energy to no avail.

To study Buddhadharma is to develop wisdom: knowing that nothing can be grasped and not clinging to anything, one naturally cuts through all afflictions. In the Pure Land gate, the sacred name "Amitābha Buddha" is the vajra king's precious sword, cutting through everything. All emotions, all loves, and all attachments find nowhere to stand; thus, with the mind empty and non-abiding, one can be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Conversely, if one clings lovingly to this Sahā world, one will certainly be unable to depart when death approaches. Bound fast by emotional attachment and love, one cannot be reborn in the West.

"A great person wields the sword of wisdom." What is this sword of wisdom? It is the Dharma of prajñā, the great wisdom of both the worldly and supramundane. Only with it can one remain unstained by material desires, realize the Way, and perfectly realize Buddhahood.

At every moment, we must act through wisdom. Whether practicing Pure Land, investigating Chan, or practicing Esoteric Buddhism, we take the development of prajñā as our principle. Only by uncovering our inherent wisdom can we realize the Way. Before realization, we must use the vajra king's precious sword of "Amitābha Buddha" or a mantra to cut through all attachments. This sharp edge of prajñā is like a great vajra flame that nothing can resist and nothing can withstand; it can burn away every stubborn old habitual tendency without remainder.

It not only destroys the minds of non-Buddhists, but also shatters the views of evil māras.

The wondrous functioning of prajñā-wisdom can not only destroy the minds of those on non-Buddhist paths; even the teachings of evil māras cannot find a

foothold. A non-Buddhist path seeks Dharma outside the mind, not knowing that one's intrinsic nature is Buddha, and supposes that something exists outside the mind. Such paths claim that there is a yang spirit outside the mind, but in fact this is transformed from our seventh consciousness; it is not the true mind.

Therefore, upon realizing the great wisdom of prajñā, one understands that nothing can be grasped, and the non-Buddhist mind is destroyed. Patriarch Lü Chunyang, for example, originally practiced Daoism. Later, when he met Patriarch Huanglong and recognized the wondrous wisdom of prajñā and vajra, he took refuge in Buddhism, and his non-Buddhist path was thereby overcome.

Evil māras are worse than non-Buddhist paths. Those on non-Buddhist paths still incline their minds toward the true Dharma; they simply do not know that the true mind is Buddha and seek Dharma outside the mind. The minds of evil māras are even more misguided. They claim that there is no cause and effect and no rebirth in the six realms; they may even employ deceptive tricks and magic to lure people into the pit of māras, using evil teachings to harm them.

Now, in this Dharma-ending age, evil teachings proliferate in every variety. Whatever kind of society or way they claim to be, they are all evil teachings. We must practice the true Dharma: at every moment, we must not depart from practice on the mind-ground. "To depart from mind by a single word is already to speak like a māra." To expound or practice Dharma apart from our true mind is not Buddhadharma. Buddhadharma teaches us to transform consciousness into wisdom, to make the transformation on the mind-ground. Thus, in Buddha-recitation, we transform the deluded mind into the Buddha-mind. Once we recognize the true Dharma, those teachings of evil māras can no longer find a foothold.

The Dharma thunder resounds, the Dharma drum is struck; the sea surges and Mount Sumeru dances.

When we expound the true Dharma, it is like thunder sounding in the heavens, striking terror into every false teacher. Especially when we uncover our original nature and see our true nature, all the palaces of māras tremble. This is no small matter: this person has realized the great Way. The māra king, his children, and his descendants all run about in circles, so anxious that they can hardly survive.

Through Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, or Esoteric practice, we uncover our original nature. After seeing our true nature, no non-Buddhist path or māra teaching can deceive or entice us; they have no ground on which to stand.

"The sea surges and Mount Sumeru dances." Because practicing Buddhadharma is a momentous undertaking that shakes heaven and earth, not a trivial matter, even the

sea rises in waves, and Mount Sumeru—the greatest mountain in the world—begins to dance.

When we truly see the great Way, the sea dries up and Mount Sumeru collapses. Why? Because, unstained by a single dharma or a single speck of dust, everything is gone. Conversely, everything is the wondrous functioning of our true mind; all phenomenal appearances are manifestations of the dharmakāya; everything, absolutely everything, is ourselves. Apart from us, there is nothing. When we uncover our original nature and see our true nature, we enter the Ground of Joy. Filled with Dharma joy, all appearances change: all become smiling and radiant, suffused with joy. This is called "the sea surges and Mount Sumeru dances."

Within the tip of a hair, heaven and earth are settled; in the great thousand worlds, there is not an inch of earth.

"The tip of a hair" refers to something as small as a single hair or body hair, while heaven and earth refer to a world or universe so vast. This means that the entire vast world is contained within the tip of one of our hairs. Why? Because our intrinsic nature can be great or small; our dharmakāya is so vast that nothing lies outside it, and so minute that nothing lies within it.

Released, it fills the six directions and pervades heaven and earth; withdrawn, it hides in the secret, and not even the tip of a hair remains. This describes the wondrous functioning of our Buddha-nature: free and at ease. Everything is oneself; within the tip of a hair, the great Dharma wheel turns. The great thousand worlds are the Buddha's worlds, and each Buddha-world consists of three thousand great thousand worlds.

Since the great thousand worlds are so vast, why is there not even a bit of earth? Because mind itself is earth, and earth itself is mind. A Chan master said: "If one recognizes the mind, the great earth contains not an inch of soil."

Once one realizes one's true nature, everything returns to intrinsic nature. Where, outside the mind, could there still be any earth? Therefore, the final stage of practice is called "the ultimate Dharma realm": there is no dharma at all, no spiritual powers at all, and no Buddha at all. If there is even the slightest attainment or the most minute thing remaining, one has not yet reached the final completion.

Before reaching the ultimate stage, people may see light, see Buddhas, or manifest spiritual powers. Because they have not yet reached the ultimate, they cannot avoid attachment to appearances. Such people also like to display themselves before others, saying, "I have spiritual powers!" In fact, this is not spiritual power; it is merely a little wondrous functioning appearing, or perhaps possession by ghosts or

spirits. True great spiritual powers are non-attachment, freedom and ease, and the exhaustion of all outflows. That alone is great spiritual power.

Let them slander; let them defame. If they set fire to the sky, they only weary themselves.

To study the Buddha Dharma, one must have the capacity to accommodate others. There are many Buddhist dharma gates, each different from the others. Before one understands the subtle differences among these dharma gates, one cannot avoid slandering others. For example, practitioners of the Pure Land school often disparage Esoteric Buddhism, yet they themselves cannot do without esoteric practices.

In addition to reciting "Amitābha Buddha," they also recite the Great Compassion Mantra, the Śūraṅgama Mantra, the Ten Lesser Mantras, the Rebirth Mantra, and so forth. Are these not esoteric practices? Yet they turn around and say that Esoteric Buddhism is no good. Is this not slandering themselves? Pitifully, they commit grave karmic offenses without even realizing it, while still feeling smug about themselves! When Dharma Master Hongyi first became a monastic, he too did not understand what Esoteric Buddhism was about. He also said that the Esoteric school was bewilderingly diverse and confusing, and therefore no good.

Later, after reading the teachings of Esoteric Buddhism, he came to admire them deeply. Esoteric Buddhism, he realized, was so complete and perfect. He therefore repented and wrote an essay of repentance, warning later generations not to slander Esoteric Buddhism if they did not understand it. Not understanding means not understanding; do not pretend to understand and show off your abilities, lest ignorance lead you to commit offenses. Speak well of what is good in your own practice, but do not speak ill of others.

Each person practices their own dharma. Let others slander as they will; there is no need for doubt, fear, or affliction. So long as one practices the true Dharma, others' groundless slanders are merely "trying to burn the sky with fire, only exhausting themselves." Such people are like those who take a torch to burn the sky. Can they burn it? They only weary and trouble themselves for nothing. What use is that?

What I hear is but wind in empty space—how could it hinder profound great samādhi!

If someone slanders the Buddha Dharma, after hearing it, let it pass like the wind. Do not pay attention to it. For if you argue with them, it will only provoke them to slander more. When they gradually come to understand for themselves, they will regret it. The foolish and slanderous words they speak do no harm and cause no obstruction to the samādhi we cultivate and realize.

Samādhi means right concentration and right receptivity. Not receiving any sensations is right receptivity. One accepts nothing at all: not only does one refuse to accept any slander or be moved by it, but one is also unmoved by all praise and commendation. Only this is genuine right concentration and right receptivity.

All sounds are the true aspect; harsh sounds and kind words are no different.

All sounds are sense objects; therefore, good and evil are no different. Some of the sounds we hear are praise and pleasing words, while others are harsh words of slander. Yet malicious speech and kind words are no different: they are all sound-objects, mere guests, and of no great importance. We must recognize who it is that speaks and who it is that hears sounds.

Only when we recognize the host have we not practiced in vain. Our faculty of hearing, our intrinsic nature, is neither good nor bad and has no appearance of interruption or continuity. Yet ordinary beings all follow sound-objects: when someone curses me, I become enraged; when someone flatters me, I feel delighted. This is being turned by sound-objects, being carried away by circumstances, and being deceived. We must turn circumstances rather than be turned by them.

Everyone should know that sound-objects themselves are neither good nor bad. It is only our deluded minds, falsely giving rise to discrimination, that produce views of good and bad. For example, a Suzhou visitor cursed a fellow villager from the Northeast, saying, “Tang wu shou!” The fellow villager did not understand the Suzhou dialect and merely laughed heartily when he heard it.

Later, someone told him: “That is a vicious curse. It says that you are such a bad person that, if you die by the roadside, not even a charitable burial hall will come to collect your corpse.” The fellow villager flew into a rage upon hearing this and fought with the Suzhou man. This shows that it was all the mischief of the deluded mind. Therefore, in practicing the Dharma, we must see our true nature at every moment and not allow the deluded mind to raise its head. Only then can we be liberated from birth and death and realize the great Way.

Do not distinguish enemies from kin because of slander or praise; only then do you accord with the equal aspect of the original mind.

Do not distinguish someone as a friend because they praise me, or as an enemy because they slander me. We should not divide people into enemies and kin, but regard all equally; everyone is Buddha. This is the spirit of a great person. Do not have the spirit of a petty woman: “This person cursed me. Remember him; when I have the chance, I will take revenge on him.”

That would be disastrous; then one could not become a Buddha. The mind-capacity required to become a Buddha must be as vast as empty space, able to contain all things. When we do not distinguish enemies from kin, only then do we accord with the equal aspect of the original mind. Our minds are equal—why? Because mind is without form, and because everyone is Buddha; therefore, all are equal.

But as soon as there is form, there is no equality: there are distinctions such as male form and female form, good form and bad form, and so forth. Amitābha Buddha is equal, equal, and equal again. He does not guide us merely because we recite the Buddha's name, while refusing to guide us if we do not, thereby making distinctions between enemies and kin. That is the conjecturing mind of ordinary beings, not the mind of the Buddha.

The Buddha's mind is equal. Not only does he come to save and liberate you if you believe in and practice the Buddha Dharma; even if you do not believe in or practice the Buddha Dharma, he still arouses unconditional great compassion and guides you just the same. Therefore, we must use the Buddha's mind to transform our deluded minds, rather than use our ordinary beings' minds to speculate about the Buddha's mind.

Praise adds nothing; slander takes nothing away. A bird's trace in empty space is inscribed upon the cloudy sky.

Our Buddha-nature neither increases nor decreases. It does not increase because someone praises me, nor does it decrease because someone slanders me. Even if one has not awakened to the Way and remains at the level of an ordinary being, its luminosity is not diminished in the least; even if one has realized the Way, its luminosity does not increase in the least. In practicing the Dharma and studying the Way, we must not cling to appearances. Whether hearing praise or slander, let it be like a bird flying through empty space, leaving no trace in the mind. Then our minds will be equal, and realization of the Way will come more easily.

Vast emptiness drinks in the light, dissolving all distance; echoes in a secluded valley speak amid the evening smoke.

These two lines use scenery to portray the vastness of our hearts and the wondrous beauty of our intrinsic nature. “Vast emptiness drinks in the light” means that all radiance and all appearances are contained within the vast sky of emptiness. “Dissolving all distance” means that there is no distinction between intimacy and estrangement. Qi means affinity; kuo means distance.

This means that vast empty space does not distinguish intimacy from estrangement because of the many different appearances within it. Likewise, we should not distinguish who is a friend and who is an enemy, but treat everyone with equality

upon equality upon equality. If someone speaks ill of us, we should carefully reflect: “Do I have this fault?” If we do, we should repent and correct it.

If we do not have this fault, then we should encourage ourselves not to commit it in the future. Thus a great person is glad to hear of their faults and never harbors resentment toward others. We must not bear hatred in our hearts merely because, though we do not have this fault, someone maligns or wrongs us.

Nowadays, Buddhist followers in many temples often cannot tolerate one another. All this arises because they cling to views of self, lack an equal mind, and thus give rise to disputes. Yet since all are studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way, everyone should be open-hearted, cling to nothing, and live together harmoniously. If some matter has not been handled properly or opinions differ, people may sit down and discuss it, then proceed in the correct direction.

Do not cling to views of self, taking oneself as right and everyone else as wrong, refusing to tolerate one another, thereby causing disputes and damaging Buddhism. Since everyone practices the Buddha Dharma, all are the Buddha's disciples and children, members of one family. How can there still be distinctions between enemies and kin? We must quickly correct this. Only through unity can we revitalize the sacred teaching.

“Echoes in a secluded valley” refers to a deep mountain valley without human habitation, where the air returns the sound of your speech exactly as it was. It conveys a state that is still, pure, secluded, profound, and as empty and clean as if washed. “Speaking amid the evening smoke” refers to going out for recreation and, as the sun sets in the evening, seeing cooking smoke rise from villages everywhere: it is time to return home.

This line uses scenery to say that in practicing the Dharma we should return to our original home—the home of the dharma realm—and not be delayed midway because of disagreements. Once we return to our original home, there will be no differing opinions or conflicts. These two lines were also used by Yugong to describe the breadth of his own heart.

When Yugong descended from the mountain to propagate the Dharma, the public did not know what kind of dharma gate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma was. No one came to receive the Dharma from him, and he could not fulfill his vow to spread the Dharma. He therefore displayed a small spiritual power. This aroused the dissatisfaction of Master Taixu and Master Yinguang, who made some mild critical remarks. But for the sake of propagating the Dharma, Yugong endured humiliation and heavy burdens without responding.

Later, after transmitting the Dharma to his late teacher, Mr. Xianglu, he withdrew into seclusion. The phrase in the song, “Vast emptiness drinks in the light, dissolving all distance,” means that he harbored no resentment toward the two masters. There was another misunderstanding when he withdrew into seclusion. At that time, war had broken out among the Beiyang warlords, who pressured Yugong to display spiritual powers for their military campaign. Yugong refused and escaped in disguise. Those who did not know the circumstances mistakenly believed that his spiritual powers had failed and that he had therefore gone into seclusion. Was this not unjust?

In silence there is speech; in speech there is silence. The gate of great giving stands open, without congestion or obstruction.

“In silence there is speech; in speech there is silence” means that when speaking, one does not cling to appearances, and thus it is as though one had not spoken; and when one has not spoken, that itself is speech. Why? Because Buddha-nature is formless and lies beyond the reach of words and thought; there is nothing to say. Thus, speaking and hearing are not true speaking and true hearing; no speaking and no hearing are true speaking and true hearing.

Moreover, it is not only speech with sound that constitutes teaching the Dharma. Gesturing is also teaching the Dharma; a cough is also teaching the Dharma; striking you once or scolding you once is also teaching the Dharma. As the proverb says, “At this moment, silence surpasses sound.” The Amitābha Sūtra says that the sounds of wind and birds are all proclamations of the Dharma sound. Thus, speaking aloud is not necessarily teaching the Dharma.

“The gate of great giving stands open, without congestion or obstruction” means that in practicing the Buddha Dharma one must give everything away, be utterly bare, and remain unstained by a single speck of dust. One cannot retain even a single thing; one cannot even retain the Buddha Dharma. One must reach the point where even the Buddha Dharma is unobtainable. This is called “the gate of great giving stands open.” Yong means congestion; se means blockage.

When everything has been given away, what obstruction can remain? Open in all directions, with winds coming from every side; nothing comes or goes, and the heart is broad and open—only then can one realize the great Way. Therefore, in cultivating the Way, one must throw open the gate of giving, give away and empty out everything, until the bottom drops out of the bucket. Only then can one contain all things and perfectly realize Buddhahood. If someone says something contrary to your own view and you find it grating, becoming unhappy within, that is no good.

Someone asked me what school I expound. I am a guest of Mahāprajñā.

What Patriarch Dayu transmitted was the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. At first, no one knew what kind of Dharma this was, so some would ask, “What school do you belong to? Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism?” In truth, there is no school at all. The Buddhadharma teaches people to recognize the root, not to cling to external appearances, and to recover their original nature.

When the Buddha was alive, he did not divide teachings into schools or establish sects; he simply taught according to each person’s capacity. Schools were established only later. “I am a guest of Mahāprajñā”: mahā means great, and prajñā means wisdom. So long as you realize Mahāprajñā, all schools are contained within it. Thus, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma encompasses the ten major schools of Chinese Buddhism; there is not one school that it does not include.

For example, in the Dharma Characteristics School, to relinquish appearances and see one’s true nature is precisely its teaching. In the Huayan school, one perfectly realizes the ten directions: the Buddhas of the ten directions are within my mind, and I am within the minds of the Buddhas of the ten directions; they interpenetrate one another without obstruction. Thus, all schools are contained within it.

In the past I spoke; now I am too lazy to speak. The mountains, rivers, and great earth are the broad, long tongue.

In earlier times, Patriarch Dayu also taught the Dharma constantly, widely liberating sentient beings north and south of the great river. Later, he entrusted the Dharma to his disciple Wang Xianglu to continue teaching it. Therefore, when he composed this Song of Liberation, he no longer taught the Dharma. Although he said, “now I am too lazy to speak,” this did not mean that the Dharma was not being taught. The mountains, rivers, and great earth are all teaching the Dharma. They teach it without pause, at every moment. Thus, some people awaken upon seeing flowing water.

“Ah, so water flows according to the terrain without abiding anywhere. Though the water keeps flowing, it has never truly flowed, and yet it flows on without ceasing.” This means that, in practicing the Dharma, thoughts may arise in accordance with conditions, but one need only remain without abiding or stagnation. Though birth and death continually change and perish, intrinsic nature neither arises nor ceases; it abides from time immemorial. The mountains, rivers, great earth, and the myriad forms of the world are all manifestations of our intrinsic nature. Apart from mind, there are no things. Thus Su Dongpo wrote: “The stream itself is the broad, long tongue; the mountain hues are none other than the Dharma-nature body.” There is good reason for this.

Whether right or wrong, people do not recognize it; whether proceeding against or with the current, even heaven cannot fathom it!

Our wondrous functioning may seem right or wrong: at times we act in accord with ordinary human sentiments, and at times against them. So long as it benefits others, we do not concern ourselves with our own reputation. Ji Gong is a clear example. He wished to conceal himself, so that people would not recognize him as a great bodhisattva.

He often did things that ordinary people found objectionable. He did not seek fame or reputation, nor did he consider his own good name. So long as something benefited sentient beings, he did it. This functioning that may seem right or wrong is not recognized by people, and even the heavenly order cannot measure it. Such is the profundity of our wondrous functioning.

Ever walking alone, ever treading alone, the straw sandals beneath his feet are fierce as tigers.

Practitioners of the Way often walk and travel alone, coming and going by themselves rather than with the crowd. Why? Because “the melody of white snow in spring is lofty, and few can join in.” “The straw sandals beneath his feet are fierce as tigers”: wearing straw sandals while walking is the natural appearance of a monastic. “Fierce as tigers” means mighty and imposing like a tiger, frightening away all jackals, wolves, foxes, and dogs, and subduing every sort of demon and non-Buddhist path. It signifies that practitioners of the Way cling to nothing and are free of all hindrance. When the great earth levels and sinks away and empty space shatters, this is the incomparable functioning of one who is true to their original nature.

Lifting his foot, he shatters the vajra ground; unaware, he treads through the road by which he came.

The ground is indestructible like vajra, yet merely lifting one’s foot shatters it. Why? Because the great earth has leveled and sunk away, and empty space has shattered; all are gone. When we visited the mountains that day, we said: “Raise a hand and trace the tracks of birds in flight; take a step and tread through the sound of running water.”

A bird flies through the sky, and with one’s raised hand one draws its traces in the air. Taking a step, one even treads through the rushing sound of flowing water. This portrays the conduct of one who has realized the Way. When the mind clings to no appearances whatsoever, one realizes this state. It is the same when we recite the Buddha’s name until we reach this point.

“Unaware, he treads through the road by which he came”: coming means being born, and going means dying. When the road of coming and going, of birth and death, is cut off, birth and death cease. Birth and death are our deluded thinking.

Deluded thoughts exist only through clinging to appearances; after realizing the Way, they are transformed into wondrous functioning.

Thus, thoughts do not disappear altogether; they still exist. So long as one does not cling to appearances, they are wondrous functioning; if one clings to appearances, they are deluded thoughts. Even the slightest difference will not do. Therefore, take note: after realizing the Way, thoughts have not vanished; they remain, but at that time they are wondrous functioning, for consciousness has been transformed into wisdom. Ordinary beings cling to appearances and to existence; this is the root of deluded thought and birth and death. After realizing the Way, it is cut off.

Madman, wordless scripture, babbling at random without ever exhausting it.

I am now here speaking like a mad fool. Our true mind is a wordless scripture; the true scripture has no words. Scriptures with words are all false scriptures, because any scripture with words has something to say, and wherever there is something to say, there are things it cannot say.

Our intrinsic nature cannot be depicted or described. Whatever is spoken merely approaches it indirectly, speaking around its edges without reaching the reality itself. Therefore, the true scripture has no words. “Babbling at random without ever exhausting it”: all definitive and provisional teachings, all worldly and supramundane dharmas, cannot be fully expressed, however one may speak of them. Why? Originally there is nothing to say; whatever is said cannot exhaust their true meaning.

The golden crow beneath the sea, the sun in the sky; the child within the eye, the person before one’s eyes.

This points us toward seeing our true nature. The “golden crow” refers to the sun; the “golden crow beneath the sea” refers to the sun setting below the horizon. When it rises into the sky, it is the sun. The “child within the eye” is the pupil, and it is you yourself. This tells us where true nature is: it is right before our eyes; it is that which enables you to see and hear. Without it, there would be no pupil. Therefore, whenever you see an appearance, you should at that very moment see your true nature.

Awakening is enough; no further effort is required. Things and self both vanish, and mind and objects are empty.

“Awakening is enough”: once awakened, the great earth levels and sinks away, and everything disappears. “No further effort is required”: there is no need to undertake any more practice. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “Knowing illusion, one is immediately free from it; no expedient means are needed. Free from illusion, one is

awakened; nor are there stages." In practice, one need only know that all things are illusory and refrain from clinging to them; then one realizes the Way immediately.

Therefore, we say that the Way belongs to awakening, not to cultivation. "Things and self both vanish, and mind and objects are empty": where there is self, there are things; where there are things, there is self. They arise in mutual dependence. If there is no self, where can things be? If there are no things, where can self be? Thus, when mind is empty, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, things and self both vanish, and intrinsic nature appears before one. When we recite the Buddha's name until the mind that recites and the Buddha-name that is recited both fall away at once, mind and objects are emptied, and we realize and see the great Way.

Lotus blossoms, each stem supporting the night moon; sweet osmanthus, each leaf fanning fragrant breezes.

This speaks of the insentient teaching the Dharma. "Lotus blossoms" are lotuses, the flowers that represent Buddha-nature. Lotuses have the virtue of emerging from mud unstained; this signifies that although we live in this world of suffering and defilement, our true mind remains undefiled. "Each stem" indicates that the leaves have not yet emerged from the water.

The "night moon" shines forth brilliantly only at night. This means that before we have emerged from worldly toil, the true mind is still undefiled and luminous. After emerging from worldly toil, it shines forth with great radiance. All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature; Buddha-nature is not diminished by even a fraction in sentient beings.

"Sweet osmanthus, each leaf fanning fragrant breezes": sweet osmanthus is the cassia flower, and every petal is fragrant. Our true nature is like the cassia flower: all can fan fragrant breezes, and its wondrous functioning is inexhaustible. Yet we do not recognize it. Deluded by circumstances, we chase after external objects, cling to appearances, create karma, and suffer greatly. Therefore, we must turn back as early as possible and sincerely cultivate the Buddhadharma.

There are those who search through sūtras and treatises, seeking understanding all year long but never putting it into practice.

Some intellectuals know the benefits of the Buddhadharma and therefore study sūtras and treatises. Sūtras are the Buddha's instructions on practice, while treatises expound the realizations and theories of bodhisattvas. Yet they spend all day merely studying technical classifications and discussing doctrines without practicing. Some followers of the Dharma Characteristics School in particular devote themselves solely to Buddhist studies and do not engage in practice; this seems to be of no use.

“To know but not act is not truly to know.” This is Wang Yangming’s incontrovertible truth.

Distinguishing names and appearances, how could they ever stop? Counting sand upon entering the sea, they toil in vain.

This refers to those intellectuals who discuss and discriminate endlessly among the eighty-four thousand dharma gates, yet do not practice. It is as useless as entering the sea to count grains of sand. There are immeasurably many grains of sand in the sea; can they be counted? One merely exhausts oneself to no purpose.

In the Buddha’s day, he repeatedly admonished us: counting another’s treasures brings no share to oneself.

When the Buddha was alive, he told us that we must make our own diligent effort and not count other people’s treasures. That is, if we merely study sūtras and treatises without practicing in accordance with them, while discriminating over whether others have awakened, it is of no use to us.

Always stumbling, one’s progress is unsuccessful; one can hardly avoid falling vainly into the pit of words.

If one’s steps are unsteady and one does not press forward bravely, but circles about—practicing one method for a while, then another, moving on and then returning—one merely wastes energy to no purpose. “One can hardly avoid falling vainly into the pit of words” means that if one merely pursues study, composes poetry and prose, and does not practice earnestly, one will fall into the pit of words and bury oneself there.

Thus, some people not only fail to cultivate properly themselves, but also do evil: using textual criticism to scrutinize the Buddhist scriptures, they claim that the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna, and so forth are forgeries. They have fallen into a pit and are harming others, yet do not know it themselves. Is this not utterly foolish?

Foolish too, and dull-witted too—they take mirages over the sea to be real.

Are such people not profoundly foolish? What use is there in counting others’ treasures? A mirage over the sea is an illusory appearance produced when sunlight shines upon mist above the ocean, yet they take it to be real.

Mistaking the finger for the moon, they exert themselves in vain; amid the faculties, objects, and dharmas, they grope about blindly.

A finger points to the moon in order to show someone the moon. But if he does not see the moon and sees only the finger, he has gone wrong. Clinging to the marks of words and letters, he fails to see the moon to which the finger points—his intrinsic nature. Thus, amid the faculties, objects, and dharmas—that is, mind and its objects—he blindly speculates about thoughts and sense objects, mistaking lights, images of Buddhas, and the like for his intrinsic nature. In fact, this is beyond the reach of words and thought; one must truly investigate and genuinely cultivate in order to realize it.

Mind is the faculty; objects are the dust. The two are like marks upon a mirror.

Mind is the faculty, and circumstances are defiling dust. These two are like stains and dust upon the mirror of our dharmakāya; both must be swept away. Only when the sense faculties and their objects fall away can one realize the Way. In our practice, we must bring about the falling away of faculties and objects; otherwise, it is difficult to see one's intrinsic nature.

When all stains and grime are cleared away, the light first appears; when both mind and objects vanish, one's nature is then true.

When the dust and grime on the mirror have all been cleared away, its light shines forth. This means that when we practice correctly and the faculties and their objects suddenly fall away, the intrinsic luminosity of mind appears. When "both mind and objects vanish," the deluded mind that recites mantras or invokes the Buddha, together with the mantra being recited and the Buddha-name being invoked, all fall away; then one sees one's intrinsic nature. Therefore, do not cling to practice, thinking that there is a mantra to recite or a Buddha-name to invoke and grasping them tightly. One must recite until subject and object both fall away; only then can one see one's true nature.

Right and wrong, yes and no: a deviation of a hair's breadth leads to an error of a thousand miles.

Do not concern yourself with right and wrong, gain and loss. There is no fixed conclusion regarding all such right and wrong, because people's views, preferences, and dispositions differ, as do times and interests; thus differing views of what is right and what is wrong arise, and there is no fixed right or wrong.

"A deviation of a hair's breadth leads to an error of a thousand miles": if the point of departure is off by even a little, the distance grows very great as one proceeds. A difference of a hair's breadth makes heaven and earth far apart. Therefore, in cultivating the Way, we must recognize the right path and cultivate on the mind-ground, rather than cultivate appearances. The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate truly

gives birth to a royal prince: like the emperor's crown prince, one will certainly become a Buddha in the future.

All other dharma gates are merely peripheral merits. At most, one may be enfeoffed as a king or marquis; one cannot become the emperor—that is, one cannot become a Buddha. Do not cling to spiritual powers or follow deviant teachings. You must understand the right causes for realizing the Way, grasp the principles, and press forward with vigor. We have pointed this out again and again; do not miss it.

If it is right, the Dragon Girl at once becomes a Buddha; if it is wrong, Good Star loses his human body.

There are two allusions here. The first is "the Dragon Girl at once becomes a Buddha." It means that if one follows the correct path of practice, one can, like the Dragon Girl offering her jewel, become a Buddha immediately. The story of the Dragon Girl offering her jewel is told in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra. Becoming a Buddha is not difficult: so long as we let go completely, we can at once become Buddhas. "If it is wrong, Good Star loses his human body" is the second allusion. It means that although one's Buddha-nature was originally quite sound, if one's causal ground is improper and one strays onto a wrong path, one will ultimately fail even to obtain a human body and will fall into the animal realm.

With deviant dispositions and mistaken understanding, one fails to comprehend the Tathāgata's intent regarding intrinsic nature.

"Disposition" means a person's spiritual capacity, of which there are many kinds: Mahāyāna views, views of the two vehicles, ordinary persons' views, heterodox views, deviant-path views, and so forth. If one's disposition is not right and one's understanding is also mistaken, one cannot comprehend the Tathāgata's true intent, practice the true Dharma, realize the great bodhi path, and liberate sentient beings extensively.

The ascetic practices of the two vehicles are not ultimate; the bodily refinements of non-Buddhist paths must ultimately perish.

"The ascetic practices of the two vehicles are not ultimate": the cultivation of the path of the arhats and pratyekabuddhas is not ultimate. Why? Because attachment to dharmas has not yet vanished, and transformational birth and death has not yet been brought to an end. This is called nirvana with remainder, and it is not ultimate. As for "the bodily refinements of non-Buddhist paths," many people now practice qigong, thinking that it can keep their bodies forever from decaying and enable them to live forever without aging. This is impossible.

Even if the physical body were to live for a thousand years, it would still have to die; hence, it “must ultimately perish.” Practitioners of Daoism also emphasize refining the physical body, calling it the joint cultivation of nature and life. Yet the life of this physical body cannot be immortal and ageless. Look at the Daoist elders: how many have remained permanently in their physical bodies? Have they not all passed away?

In truth, nature is life, and life is nature. Nature is in fact the root of all things; it endures from ancient times to the present, forever abiding and never decaying. This alone is true immortality. Therefore, by practicing the Buddhadharma and realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, one obtains the wondrous secret of immortality.

Inconceivable is the power of liberation: even the earth of worlds as numerous as the Ganges sands cannot bear it.

“Liberation” means understanding that nothing can be obtained, ceasing to seek vainly and bind oneself, and thereby naturally attaining liberation. The power of such liberation is unimaginably great and inconceivable; even the earth supporting worlds as numerous as the Ganges sands cannot bear it. Why? The Buddhas of the three times can swallow them all in a single mouthful—how much less these trifling worlds!

Mahāprajñāpāramitā, profound prajñāpāramitā.

These two lines praise the greatness of prajñāpāramitā. Prajñā is great wisdom, the compassionate vessel. Pāramitā means crossing the bitter sea of birth and death to reach the other shore. Only by relying on the compassionate vessel of prajñā can one cross the bitter sea of birth and death and reach the other shore. Thus, prajñā is the mother of accomplishment, the support upon which one relies to realize the Way and attain Buddhahood, and the pillar that upholds all Buddhism.

Without prajñā, nothing can be accomplished; without prajñā, there is nothing at all. How great is prajñāpāramitā! Therefore, we must never forget prajñāpāramitā for even a moment. Relying on its power, we may cross layer upon layer of demonic obstacles and reach the other shore—what good fortune this is!

The perfect and sudden teaching shows no human sentiment: turn around and trample down the city of nirvāṇa.

The great perfect and sudden teaching does not speak of worldly human sentiments. Since the dharmakāya is without marks, utterly bare, and does not establish a single dharma, even the slightest thing remaining would make it other than what it is. Therefore, the Mahāyāna teaching cuts directly to the point and severs everything; it shows no human sentiment. If one speaks of human sentiment,

one cannot cut off everything completely and personally see the dharmakāya. “Turn around and trample down the city of nirvāṇa” means that we are now attached to appearances and are ordinary beings; if we turn around and cease clinging to appearances, we become Buddhas and reach the other shore. To “trample down the city of nirvāṇa” means abiding nowhere at all: even nirvāṇa cannot be obtained.

From the other side of King Vīnadhi to the present day—what splendid grace cannot be painted!

King Vīnadhi refers to our dharmakāya. “Vīnadhi” means that the great sound is scarcely heard, yet encompasses all. “That side” refers to the time before the world was formed; after the world arose, it became “this side,” the near shore.

Therefore, if we are to recover our intrinsic nature, we must reach the other side of King Vīnadhi and realize the point at which all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas have vanished.

Enveloped by ignorance, we create the karma of birth and death and have fallen into our present condition. Fortunately, we recognize our errors, hear the Dharma, and cultivate the Way. We must therefore practice diligently and conscientiously, hoping to restore the luminosity of our intrinsic nature, cross the bitter sea of birth and death, and reach that other side, so that this life will not have been lived in vain. Once our original nature is opened and we personally see it, our ease, freedom, joy, and serenity are beyond compare. This state cannot be described. As it is said, “the path of mental activity is cut off, and the way of words is ended.” Only when one personally realizes that stage does one know.

Skillful means open the gate; lotus flowers born in fire never perish.

All our Buddhist practices are gates of skillful means. Originally there is no dharma, which is why it is said, “The dharma that is originally dharma is without dharma.” “Opening skillfully” means teaching according to the recipient’s capacity: this school opens this gate, that school opens that gate, but all have one aim. The Pure Land school opens a skillful gate: through Buddha-recitation, it transforms the ordinary mind into the Buddha-mind, enabling one to be reborn in the Pure Land and realize the Way.

But if our Buddha-recitation lacks strength, we may also practice another dharma in the hope of swift accomplishment; we need not cling rigidly to one method. Conversely, if one does not succeed in Esoteric Buddhism, one may practice the Pure Land method. “Lotus flowers born in fire never perish” means that lotuses growing amid fire can withstand testing.

This Sahā world of the five turbidities is exceedingly afflicted; every family has its own difficult scripture to recite. If, amid afflictions, one can train oneself until the mind is empty and pure, free from attachment, and realizes one's intrinsic nature, one's strength becomes inconceivably great. Chan Master Dahui Gao said that such a person possesses twenty times the strength of a monastic practitioner and can remain irreversible through life after life, right up to the fruition ground of Buddhahood, without perishing.

Yongshi committed grave offenses yet awakened to the unborn; having long since become a Buddha, he encountered no obstacles.

"Yongshi" means that to study Buddhism one must possess great wisdom and great courage; therefore, the main hall of a monastery is called the Hall of the Great Hero. "Committing grave offenses" refers to violations of the precepts, which may be light or grave. If we violate the precepts, we must have the great courage to reflect upon our errors, repent, and refrain from repeating them. Here, "grave" has two interpretations: it may mean grave, or repeated. To commit an offense again after having committed it once is called "repeatedly committing an offense."

People today have poor spiritual foundations and may commit offenses repeatedly. Therefore, if one commits an offense a second time, one must be especially careful and vigilant. One must not merely think, "Oh no! I have broken the precepts; this is terrible." One must courageously correct oneself and absolutely must not do it again and again; otherwise, one will never be able to turn oneself around throughout future lives.

In "awakening to the unborn," the word "awakening" is extremely important. If you awaken, those offenses become insignificant, because after awakening the mind is empty. Errors committed in the past are like things done in a dream: now that you have awakened, they were never actually done, and so they are settled. If you do not awaken, the mind cannot become empty, and those karmic obstacles will continue to fasten upon you. Thus, when one has resolved them, they are empty; when one has not resolved them, one must repay past karmic debts.

"Having long ago become a Buddha, unobstructed": when one bestows light, the mind is empty, and there is non-abiding, one becomes a Buddha. Furthermore, in ancient India there was a bhikshu named Yongshi. Because he had violated the four fundamental great precepts, his mind was unsettled, and he sought repentance to remove his offenses. Later he met a venerable one, who taught him to investigate the root of his transgression. In the end, he discovered that the nature of sin is originally empty and utterly unobtainable. He suddenly awakened, saw his own original nature, and realized the great Way.

Everywhere is an araṇya: no clamor, no quiet, no attachment.

“Araṇya” means a monastery, a tranquil place and an excellent site for cultivating the Way. Ordinary practitioners all hope to find a quiet place in which to practice. But if the mind is not quiet, even having such a place is of no help. Since cultivating the Way takes the mind as primary, when the mind is quiet, even the noisiest place presents no hindrance. Thus, every place may be called a tranquil place.

When we first begin practicing, a quiet place is certainly preferable. But if no suitable place is available, do not discriminate that one place is noisy and another quiet. It is better to keep the mind empty. Do not become attached to noise or quiet.

Serenely dwelling in seclusion in the Uncovered Hall, one freely roams the human world.

“Serenely” means that the mind is peaceful and joyful, empty of every single thing. The “Uncovered Hall” is a hall without anything covering it; it is our true mind, not some other place called the Uncovered Hall. That is to say, our true mind is originally unmoving, originally not establishing a single dharma, originally pure and unstained. No matter how noisy the external world may be, it has nothing to do with me. I freely roam the human world, at ease and untroubled, with nothing to weigh upon me.

The river moon shines; the pine wind blows. Where else is there any action to seek?

“The river moon shines; the pine wind blows” uses scenery to depict the mind. On a tranquil night, the moon hangs in the sky and shines upon the river. The river water is clear, and the moon’s reflection within it is fresh and bright. Our Buddha-recitation and mantra recitation are the same: when we recite until the mind is like clear water, the Buddha shines upon the mind like the moon. “The pine wind blows” means that the wind passes through the pine needles, carrying a pure fragrance.

This is an analogy for when the mind has become pure: no matter how much disturbance there is, the mind remains pure and free of affliction. At this point, the mind is empty and washed clean; there is no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization. What action could there still be? Thus, whether we recite the Buddha’s name and awaken to the Way or investigate Chan and awaken to the Way, it is the same.

The ages of past and present pass like a flash of lightning; the ocean of three thousand kṣetras is but a single reed.

Time passes very quickly, as quickly as a sweep of a whisk or a flash of lightning. Our world appears to have existed for hundreds of millions of years, yet it is no more than a flash of lightning. Therefore, there is nothing to which one can cling; every world is likewise unobtainable. The three thousand great thousand worlds are like

an ocean of kṣetras, innumerable beyond measure, yet they too are no more obtainable than a single reed.

In the sandalwood grove there are no other trees; dense and deep, it is the dwelling place of lions.

“The sandalwood grove” means sandalwood trees. “No other trees” means that not even a blade of miscellaneous grass is found there. It means that the minds of ourselves and all people are Buddha-nature, free from defilement and admixture, originally fragrant and pure. We need only awaken and not cling to worldly dust and toil; then we can restore our original nature and dwell peacefully in the dense and secluded sandalwood grove.

In a quiet realm, I roam alone through the forest; beasts and birds have all gone far away.

One comes and goes alone in this great forest of quiet surroundings. This signifies that the mind is empty and non-abiding, not keeping company with the myriad things but coming and going alone. Since the absolute true mind has nothing relative to it, it is pure and unstained, and is called “coming and going alone.” Where there are relative things, there are self and others, right and wrong; then there is no purity. But when the mind is truly pure, even upon entering a bustling marketplace, it is like being in a secluded forest. “Beasts and birds have all gone far away” means that deluded, inverted thoughts and every defiling thing have disappeared.

Mind and objects are clear, illumination is unhindered; vast and crystalline, it pervades the dharma realm.

When all deluded thoughts in the mind have vanished, it brightly illuminates the great thousand worlds without any obstruction, just as the Amitābha Sūtra says: “That Buddha’s light is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction.” Our intrinsic nature is likewise. “Vast” means boundless empty space; “crystalline” means incomparably bright, without a speck of dust. The “dharma realm” is the ten dharma realms—the four noble realms and six ordinary realms—all illuminated without omission.

Amid the appearing and vanishing of the myriad forms, one perfect luminosity has neither within nor without.

“Amid the appearing and vanishing of the myriad forms” means that the mountains, rivers, earth, food and daily activities, and the countless diverse circumstances of life appear and disappear within our minds. Yet the absolute true mind perfectly illuminates all things, without inside or outside. Since every phenomenon is its

manifestation and transformation, and all vanish in an instant and are illusory, its perfect illumination has neither within nor without.

The sun may grow cold, the moon may grow hot, but how could wrong views destroy the true teaching?

Even if the sun could become cold and the moon hot, wrong views could not destroy the truth.

The power of emptiness, without sinews, is immeasurably great; how could a mantis block the ruts of a cart?

There is nothing at all to provide support—this is what is meant by "without sinews." If there were support, then there would be sinews and bones. The power of emptiness, without sinews or bones and without a single thing, is the greatest power. The power of wind exceeds that of water and fire. In the future, when these four dhyāna heavens are destroyed, fire burns the first dhyāna heaven, water floods the second, and wind blows apart the third.

The power of emptiness without sinews is the power of our own minds, and it is even greater than these forces. "How could a mantis block the ruts of a cart?" A mantis's legs are like knives, but can it stop a cartwheel? It cannot. Once the cart rolls forward, it crushes the mantis to death.

Speak as it truly is; hear as it truly is. Before the mouth has opened, the response is already complete.

True speaking is no speaking, and true hearing is no hearing. Before the mouth opens, all has already been said; what is spoken now is superfluous.

The Buddhas of the three times join in singing this refrain; throughout the future without end, it is inexhaustible.

The Song of Enlightenment was composed by Chan Master Yongjia, while the Song of Liberation was sung in response by Patriarch Dayu, following Yongjia Chan Master's original rhyme. Throughout the future without end, the Buddhas of the three times sing this song in response without exhaustion. For this song is the voice of mind, and mind endures through all antiquity without ever coming to an end; therefore, the song too is endlessly sung in response. Moreover, the Buddhas of the three times speak without speaking, and without speaking they speak. Thus, the sound of wind, the cries of birds, mountain collapses, and ocean roars are all responsive singing of this song. Throughout the future without end, worlds are infinite, and this song too is inexhaustible.

When the song ended, he burst into laughter. The respondent shouted, “Are you not afraid that, once you open your mouth, you will be unable to close it?” Tell me, everyone: why exactly is this madman laughing so heartily?

Our Dharma Master Dayu laughed heartily in this way. Tell me, everyone: why exactly?

A mouth born of one’s parents will never tell you! What a pity—you end up in a complete muddle!