How to Practice Contemplation

Compiled from the Teachings of Three Generations of Patriarchs and Teacher Qi

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Preface

In recent years, it has often been seen that fellow practitioners new to heart esotericism do not know where to begin with contemplation after meditation. Therefore, fellow practitioner Youxin excerpted teachings from the patriarchs' collected writings on how to contemplate and compiled them into this book. This book is a further revision based on How to Contemplate, which fellow practitioner Wang Zhong of Qingdao excerpted and compiled in earlier years.

The excerpts are drawn from relevant teachings of the patriarchs of three generations and Teacher Qi Zhijun. Particular emphasis has been placed on the questions and answers concerning contemplation in the Questions and Answers collection of Master Yuanyin's Essential Points of Buddhist Practice and Realization series, in the hope of prescribing the appropriate remedy for students' particular difficulties. In addition, this book includes some of the patriarchs' teachings on definitive doctrine, in the hope of correcting students' narrowness in fundamental understanding and views. It also adds the patriarchs' teachings on how to deal with worldly affairs, to help students clarify what is fundamental and what is secondary as they apply themselves to practice and pursue the Way.

Therefore, the contents of this book cannot be fully read through in a short time. Fellow practitioners are advised not to seek speed in reading it, but rather to grasp it directly with a straightforward mind and never exhaust themselves in analysis. In this way, as one is gradually imbued through study and practice, and continues daily Heart-of-Heart Dharma meditation without interruption, prajñā insight and contemplation will naturally develop.

Moreover, this book has been compiled solely for students beginning the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. It may only serve provisionally as a medicine for the time being. The meaning of some excerpts may not be complete and may even risk being taken out of context. Whenever readers encounter something unclear, they should consult the patriarchs' original texts directly. They must never become rigidly attached to what they have read, much less reduce contemplation to an academic study of terms and concepts. If that were to happen, it would become this book's fault.

The completion of this book was made possible through the participation of fellow practitioners Liu Xufeng, Tian Jingren, Xie Guiming, Bi Chuyun, Yuan Rong, and others in excerpting, compiling, and proofreading. Comments and suggestions for verification and revision are welcome; please contact hongyanguo@163.com with criticism and corrections, so that any shortcomings may be remedied.

Guo Hongyan, respectfully submitted on behalf of the Home of the Mind-Seal Materials Compilation Group

August 26, 2019

Acharya Dayu



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Essential Instructions for Practice

In quiescence, illuminate; in illumination, be quiescent. By all means avoid exertion.

To become a Buddha or patriarch, there is no other secret.

Acharya Wang Xianglu



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I. Contemplating the Mind Is the Right Practice

The Complete Works of Lay Buddhist Wang Xianglu: A Brief Explanation of the Meaning of the Amitābha Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha

The Dharma gates are immeasurable, yet they do not go beyond two approaches: the primary and the auxiliary. The primary is called contemplating the mind: one turns back to question oneself and remains keenly alert in all one's actions. This is called practice—putting cultivation into action. The auxiliary is called employing methods: one relies on methods as supportive conditions to purify the mind. Once the mind is purified, there is nothing further to be employed.

Yet the causes and conditions of Dharma gates differ from one person to another, and what best suits the recipient must be valued. Some uphold the Buddha's name; some enter meditative absorption; some expound principle to dispel illusory appearances; some arouse the three awakenings; some use adverse people and circumstances as occasions for self-reflection. All these are methods of Buddha-remembrance. Even reading sūtras, paying homage to the Buddha, burning incense and making offerings, and cultivating every wholesome dharma are all Buddha-remembrance, for each thought accords with the Buddha's pure intent, and one does not for a moment lose aware contemplation.

The Complete Works of Lay Buddhist Wang Xianglu: Dharma Gates for Guiding People onto the Way

15. The method of contemplating the mind is the foremost key to entering the Buddha's way; all else is secondary. The preliminary methods used to lead one into contemplating the mind are like the finger pointing at the moon: the finger is ultimately not the moon, but merely a temporary expedient. As for the method of contemplating the mind, one must not rigidly cling to a fixed method; one should guide people according to their capacities.

The Complete Works of Lay Buddhist Wang Xianglu: The First Essential Determination in Learning Buddhism

12. Question: After leaving the meditation cushion, how should one practice in daily life?

Answer: Throughout the twenty-four hours of the day, applying the mind without distraction is true diligence. Applying the mind without distraction does not mean not using the mind. With regard to pointless and unbeneficial matters, one should remain constantly and keenly alert. Yet in one's dealings with others, one cannot avoid the various meaningless social obligations. Whenever engaging with any matter, however, always examine it with wisdom; clearly realize that all things are

empty in nature, respond according to conditions, and let the mind remain free of attachment. Then one will not be defiled.

II. Methods of Contemplation

The Complete Works of Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu: Method for Resting the True Mind and Quelling Delusion

I. Ten Gates for Resting the True Mind and Quelling Delusion

Chan Master Yuanzhina set forth ten gates for resting the true mind and quelling delusion; I shall now further elaborate their meaning.

First gate: awareness. This practice is of the utmost importance. From not yet awakened to thorough awakening, and from the first bhūmi to the tenth bhūmi, there is no matter and no moment in which one should not remain keenly aware. Not only must one be aware whenever a thought first arises; even in everyday dealings with people and affairs, and while responding to the myriad demands of life, one must remain aware from thought to thought that “to stir a thought is already to go astray.”

From thought to thought, abide nowhere: do not abide in delusion, nor in truth; do not abide in awareness, and still less abide in non-abiding. Continue in this way, continuously and seamlessly, for ten or twenty years, until it becomes continuous and undivided. At first, awareness is deliberate; then one advances to effortless awareness. Eventually, nothing is regarded as anything in particular, yet one has never departed from awareness. When the six sense faculties have nothing on which to rely, delusion likewise has nothing on which to rely, and one naturally enters a time of great rest.

Second gate: rest. This does not mean that, once at rest, one has nothing at all and becomes like a fool or a deaf person. Rather, as things arise, let them rest; as movement occurs, let it cease. Nor should one abide in rest, for rest too is a dharma, a state of mind. In this practice, one cannot be the least bit rigid: when resting, simply rest; when ceasing, simply cease. This state truly cannot be described. It is like an incense burner in a cold, desolate ancient temple. Yet even this cannot avoid attachment. If one does not fall into counteracting and suppressing, one enters dull emptiness and guarded quiescence, and one’s strength instead fails to unfold. These first two gates should be practiced in mutual adjustment; do not become fixed on either.

Third gate: letting the mind fall away while retaining objects. How can mind and objects be divided? To say, “Do not attend to external objects; simply quiet your own

mind," is already to posit a mind that can be quieted—how is that not an object? If one says there is no mind to be quieted, then originally there is no mind; but once one falls into verbal formulation, one again falls into objects. Moreover, wherever there is the contrast of letting one fall away and retaining the other, mind and objects are plainly still present; this is far from clean. Layman Pang said, "Simply be without mind toward the myriad things; what harm is there if the myriad things constantly surround you?" This is the non-abiding mind. Thus one may engage with the myriad things without being stained by them. This is the meaning of the third gate; students must not divide it into two separate parts.

Fourth gate: letting objects fall away while retaining the mind. Know that once one becomes attached to a dharma, its fault is the same as in the third gate. Mind and objects, inner and outer, are originally empty and quiescent. When facing objects, one need not contemplate them in order for them to become empty; they are originally empty. Contemplation is an initial method of counteraction, for through contemplation one establishes objects and establishes mind; it is not ultimate. Once one knows that they are originally empty, what harm is there in keeping company with the myriad dharmas and encountering all sense objects?

Yet this too is a stage that must be passed through in practice. At the outset, one cannot avoid swaying first one way and then another; after thorough awakening, one will naturally not fall to either side. As for the saying that the true mind shines alone, it does not mean that there is merely a true mind that shines alone. It means that, after directly seeing the true aspect of reality, one clearly and constantly sees that there is only one reality. The sūtra says, "Without knowing, yet aware and luminous." Because it is without knowing, neither objects nor mind are established; because it is luminous, it universally illumines with clarity. If even truth is not established, how much less can delusion be spoken of? Without being made to fall away, it falls away of itself; once this is understood, all is understood. There is no further need to establish the two views of letting fall away and retaining.

Fifth gate: letting both mind and objects fall away. This method is most perilous, for it is easy to fall into the pit of dead water. When people have no way forward, they often seek concentration but cannot attain it, or seek quiescence but cannot achieve it. Seeing this gate, they are bound to be overjoyed and imagine that they can attain realization simply by doing this. Long ago, Zhihuang sat rigidly for twenty years and fell precisely into this error. Had Xuance not led him to see the Sixth Patriarch, he could never have come alive again.

One does not know that "neither person nor ox is seen" means that one must die completely. In "this is precisely the time of bright moonlight," you must look at the two words "precisely this." When neither is seen, that is precisely the time of bright

moonlight. Come alive again, and investigate what the situation is like. This must not be overlooked; the entrance lies here.

Sixth gate: retaining objects and retaining mind. Do not understand the word "retaining" here as meaning "existing"; otherwise, when things fall away, you will take that to mean nonexistence.

You must know that retaining means temporarily not discarding illusory existence, while letting fall away means returning to the original state of empty quiescence. Though mind and objects do not reach one another, they are nevertheless interconnected. Each should abide in its own place: mind abides in its originally unborn position, and objects abide in their originally non-existent position. Yet, because both belong to illusory existence, each in turn abides in the position of illusory existence. Therefore, the Lotus Sūtra says, "Dharmas abide in the position of dharmas; the worldly aspect constantly abides."

The position of dharmas means that each has its own causes and conditions, while all share emptiness of nature as their fundamental position. Because one knows with certainty that their nature is empty, one may engage with them without being stained, nor fear that they will obstruct. This gate is best able to increase one's strength; only then can one proceed to the following four gates. This method is of the highest vehicle and most complete. Unless one truly recognizes it clearly, penetrates emptiness thoroughly, and awakens completely, one does not dare undertake it. Yet one must take great care not to become attached again to the word "retaining" and fall into dharma views. If one leans even slightly too heavily in this direction, one falls into existence and loses the meaning of retaining mind; that too is delusion.

The seventh and eighth gates—complete essence and complete function, inwardly and outwardly—are really one gate: the state in which attachment to self and things is forgotten. Essence and function are originally not separate, and nothing in the universe is apart from one's own intrinsic nature.

The ninth gate is essence itself as function, without any discrimination. When practice has become thoroughly mature, it becomes continuous and undivided.

The tenth gate is to penetrate beyond essence and function. Within the mind there is no longer any measure of inner and outer, essence and function; all is a single, clear, even way. This is the point at which there is nonobstruction among phenomena. This practice cannot involve the slightest contrivance, nor can it truly be called a practice; it comes about naturally.

The purpose of these ten gates is to use them to quell delusion. Unless one has reached a corresponding degree of strength, there is absolutely no way to begin.

Those whose causal ground is correct must begin with the mind-ground; they must never begin with the deluded mind. If one begins with the deluded mind, one will inevitably become ever more confused and, through repeated turning, become further deluded. These ten gates are also a method of removing the fuel from beneath the cauldron, allowing the deluded mind to dissolve naturally. Yet those who do not know how to remove the fuel can never leap out of the circle.

These ten gates are reluctantly and forcibly established. The moment one deliberately attends to them, one enters a trap from which it is not easy to escape. Therefore, the Chan school has no fixed dharma to show people; it merely teaches them to awaken and become aware for themselves. Thus it is said, “There is no dharma to tell people.” It is also said, “I do not understand the Buddha-Dharma.” The sūtra says, “One should not grasp dharmas, nor should one grasp non-dharmas.” It lies in flexible application. When one reaches great rest, what gate remains to be grasped?

As for entering the true school of Buddhism, there is only the gate of seeing one’s true nature. For those who have not seen their true nature, studying dharmas brings no benefit. Students must not mistakenly take the deluded mind to be nonexistent, but neither must they mistakenly take it to have real existence. Beginning students merely fear delusion; this is because they take it to exist. If one first sees one’s true nature, it will naturally be eliminated little by little. One must first examine closely what “delusion” ultimately is. When awareness is complete, delusion is exhausted; when dharmas are empty, views vanish.

Only the Buddha dwells in the Pure Land; this means that even bodhisattvas below the tenth bhūmi cannot avoid subtle delusions. The sūtra says, “Ignorance has no substantial entity.” It also says, “Mind has no form or shape; delusion has no location.” Before seeing one’s true nature, you naturally shrink back in fear everywhere. Once you understand, what is there to fear?

Earlier, when I asked you all to see which of these ten gates had an affinity with you, you had already taken the bait. No wonder you were again taken in by Zhina. You keep turning over within these ten gates, unable to get out of the circle. Today I again use the circle of words to delude people. Let those with courage enter the circle, then leap out of it. If someone asks me, “Since you want people to leap out of the circle, why establish this circle at all?” I can only laugh heartily and ask in return, “Where, at this very moment, are you standing?”

II. Essential Instructions

The Complete Works of Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu: Verse on Cutting Off Afflictions

Mind originally does not exist; how could afflictions arise?

But with this single turn, there is the essential instruction.

III. Clarifying Doubts Through Contemplation

· Once awareness arises, cut it off cleanly; do not let it trail on.

The Complete Works of Layman Wang Xianglu * Mind-Seal Recorded Sayings

If there is even the slightest fear, it is a most serious hindrance and a disgrace to one who cultivates the Way. What is important is to be aware of it at all times and not to regard it lightly. In applying yourself, there is nothing but gathering in the mind. Yet there must not be the slightest trailing remainder: the root of illness gives rise to transformations precisely through such trailing. Bear this carefully in mind.

What happens after a wholesome thought arises? What happens after an unwholesome thought arises? What happens after a sudden, sobering awareness? And what happens when one is quietly without thoughts? Once awareness arises, cut it off cleanly; do not let it trail on. If you continue to calculate and do not return to this original ground, then awareness itself becomes an illness. This is what is meant by trailing. If you do not cut it off right there, you carry it on again. This is a seed of birth and death. Have you ever experienced this for yourself?

· Avoid Losing Awareness and Contemplation

The Complete Works of Layman Wang Xianglu * Records of the Yihai Lectures (Section on Right Cultivation)

This is the greatest fault of practitioners. Those who have practiced for decades without gaining the slightest benefit suffer precisely from this fault. Practice is done at particular times, but its application is in daily life. The work of awareness and contemplation is the sole aim of practitioners and the only way to end suffering and realize the true.

Sentient beings suffer from inverted and troubled minds simply because they lack awareness. When external things come to entice them, whether circumstances are favorable or adverse, they are vainly swept along in the round of birth and death. But if, through the power of wisdom, they are aware and contemplate, recognizing such things as illusory, then inwardly and outwardly both are empty. They are not shaken or deluded; naturally, they give rise to neither joy nor anger, create no unwholesome causes, arouse no unwholesome conditions, and undergo no painful results. Awareness and contemplation are prior awakening at the causal stage. Awareness comes before an event, and is therefore called great wisdom-awakening.

Contemplation is the practice of resistance: when all circumstances arise, amid the contest between human and heavenly forces and the discernment of gain and loss, benefit and harm, one can decide whether to advance or withdraw, remaining unmoved and unshaken, with one's strength naturally becoming sufficient.

Therefore, at all times, in all places, and in all circumstances, one should remain alert and contemplative and should not forget it. Practitioners often regard periods of practice and ordinary daily life as two separate things, imagining that walking, standing, sitting, lying down, and dealing with people and matters in daily life are not practice. This is the first error.

Practitioners do not realize that awareness and contemplation are precisely the training of the mind in response to circumstances. Because they do not understand the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, they do not know how to apply the mind. This is the second error.

Practitioners speak of emptiness, yet the affairs they undertake remain not empty. Because they cannot maintain awareness and contemplation, they have no means to realize emptiness. This is the third error.

Practitioners do not realize that awareness and contemplation are the most essential method of practice: the more one trains, the better; and the more provocative the circumstances one encounters, the more one can test one's own strength in samādhi and wisdom. Yet they seek only karmic blessings, and so cannot receive great benefit or put them to great use. Forgetting this is forgetting the very reason for practice; it is to drift along without urgency. This is why there are many who understand the Way but few who practice it, and many who practice the Way but few who realize it.

· When One Knows Clearly but Lacks the Strength, There Are Two Methods

The Initial Resolve for Studying Buddhism

14. Question: When habitual tendencies arise in ordinary life, how should one restrain them?

Answer: When habitual tendencies arise, the only danger is failing to be aware of them. Once one is aware, there is none that will not turn and become empty. But when one encounters something extremely difficult to dispel, and knows it clearly but lacks the strength, there are two methods. The first is transference: swiftly shift this mind to something else, thereby transforming it. The second is to consider the result: reflect that every matter must have its result. If one continues to drift ever more deeply, advancing step by step, it will surely become impossible to contain. Then one will naturally awaken with alarm and stop.

IV. The Practice of Contemplation: Ten Stages of Awareness

Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu, “The Process of Cultivating the Heart-Center Esoteric Practice to Realize the Essence and Activate Its Function”

23. The foregoing points explain the true appearance of the nature of mind, as well as the methods of practice and of maintaining it constantly. Whenever awareness arises, habitual tendencies dissolve; yet the speed of this process differs from person to person. One is the object, and the other is awareness. There are ten stages in this process:

1. An object arises, but one is unaware of it;

2. An object arises, and awareness follows afterward, but arousing awareness requires great effort;

3. When an object arises, it is not difficult to arouse awareness;

4. When an object arises, awareness arises immediately, though there is a slight sequence between them;

5. Object and awareness arise simultaneously, but one sometimes forgets;

6. They arise simultaneously, and one can avoid forgetting;

7. Awareness precedes the object, though it sometimes comes afterward, or one may occasionally even return to the stage of forgetting;

8. Awareness remains constant and unmoving;

9. Awareness is not yet pure;

10. One is constantly quiescent and constantly aware; even awareness itself is non-abiding. This is when one’s strength is truly sufficient.

Acharya Yuanyin



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I. Selected Excerpts from Questions and Answers

(I) Questions and Answers on Doctrine

5. Question: What is no-thought?

Answer: No-thought does not mean suppressing thoughts so that none arise, thereby becoming like a dead person. It means that when thoughts arise, one does not follow them and does not linger on any thought. Although one does all kinds of things, one leaves not the slightest trace in the mind and has no attachment whatsoever.

6. Question: What does it mean to apply the mind without abiding?

Answer: The Buddhadharma is not negatively world-weary, but actively engaged in the world. Therefore, Buddhist disciples should take the lead among the public in undertaking all manner of demanding work and must not evade reality. While working, they should act in response to conditions, without retaining even the slightest appearance of merit in their minds. When there is not a single thing in the mind—when it is utterly empty, as though nothing had been done—this is applying the mind without abiding.

You now have deluded mind, deluded imaginings, and deluded thoughts. Quickly let them go; do not follow them. Eliminate them all, so that there is nothing further to leak out; this is called being undefiled. Therefore, let go of everything and do not cling to anything. When you realize the undefiled, the ten directions are perfectly bright, the Way and its powers are complete, and you accomplish the wondrous virtue of fearlessness.

11. Question: Is the practice of leaving no traces amid all kinds of circumstances the proper path of cultivation?

Answer: This practice of leaving no traces is precisely the proper path of cultivation. Yet within non-abiding, one must still fully manifest the wondrous functioning of great compassion and reveal immeasurable merit and virtue.

14. Question: What does it mean to arouse a sense of doubt?

Answer: It means making you die with no place to be buried.

15. Question: What does one awaken to?

Answer: Even all the Buddhas of the three times do not recognize it! Do you understand?

16. Question: What is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?

Answer: Its full name is “Heart Center and Yet Heart.” That is, it is the mind in which the false mind, the true mind, and both the true and false minds are all unobtainable; it is the realization of the wondrous mind.

In our practice, we must not discriminate. Consciousness should not run after the preceding five consciousnesses, nor should it turn with inner shadowy objects. Free from all dualities, the total reality manifests perfectly, and correct cognition is clear and distinct. This is the state of true direct perception.

30. Question: What does “the ultimate ground of dharmatā” mean? How does heart esotericism explain attainment in this very body?

Answer: “The ultimate ground of dharmatā” means cultivating to the very end, when not only is no dharma obtainable, but even so-called dharmatā is unobtainable; not only are spiritual powers unobtainable, but even a Buddha is unobtainable. Only then is there attainment in this very body.

38. Question: What is the essential secret of practice?

Answer: Do not cling to the miraculous or the mysterious. Recognize that this clear and distinct spiritual knowing, in which not a single thought arises, is your own original nature. With ordinary mind, handle all affairs, while not obtaining a single thread of anything.

39. Question: The principle is so simple when explained, yet when practicing it, why do we always lose our way?

Answer: The Buddhadharma is inherently this simple; there is nothing mysterious or complicated about it. But the habitual tendencies accumulated over many lifetimes cannot be removed in a single day. Since these tendencies were not accumulated in a single lifetime, eliminating them likewise requires a long period of diligent cultivation and training. Students need only remain aware at all times and diminish them again and again. Then, naturally, when the water reaches the channel, it will flow, and the day will come when the fruition-ground is fully realized.

40. Question: How can one attain realization swiftly?

Answer: All sentient beings are originally Buddhas. What further attainment do you seek? Seek nothing and cling to nothing; simply cease delusive thoughts and do not seek the true. Naturally, you will return home and sit securely.

45. Question: Before Master leaves the country, I would like to come with several fellow practitioners to pay our respects and receive your instruction. Would that be possible?

Answer: Complete non-abiding and carefree ease constitute the great spiritual functioning. The entire essence of the Buddhadharma is contained herein. Anything further that may be said is the speech of Māra. Have you not seen what Master Yunmen said: “This very seeing and hearing are not seeing and hearing; no other

sounds or forms can be presented to you." What more is there to say? Why make fruitless journeys back and forth and waste your energy? It is better to remain peacefully at home.

46. Question: If the mind does not move, will the brain become dull?

Answer: No. On the contrary, the mind responds more quickly. Non-movement of mind does not mean that mental functioning does not arise; it means simply not clinging to false appearances or being turned by them. We know that all phenomena are illusory. When the mind does not move and something happens, one responds immediately and becomes more sensitive. Too many deluded thoughts, on the other hand, make one dull. In doing things, we must skillfully employ right mindfulness; otherwise, how could anything be done? Yet while acting, the mind does not abide in appearances. One responds according to conditions, without stray thoughts, clearly and distinctly.

47. Question: At times I use knowledge acquired from sūtras to assess my own condition. Is this right?

Answer: It is useful. You may compare your own words and conduct with the principles in the sūtras and examine what you have done incorrectly. The purpose of morning and evening services in monasteries is to teach us how to conduct ourselves and how to practice. In reciting the evening service, one compares oneself with the sūtra text and examines whether one's conduct that day was correct. The morning service reminds one that one's conduct that day must accord with what the sūtras teach.

49. Question: How should one understand no-thought as the principle?

Answer: No means being free of all deluded thoughts and discriminations; thought means being mindful of suchness and awakened nature. To be mindful of suchness is to be mindful of one's original nature. When not a single thought arises, there is clear and distinct knowing; thought after thought remains on the original ground. Safeguard it and see one's true nature at every moment—this is genuine practice. Our practice is flexible and wonderfully skillful, not rigid.

59. Question: What is discipline?

Answer: Discipline restrains your mind from moving delusively, making it easier to enter samādhi. Therefore, the most important discipline is discipline of the mind. When the mind is unmoved by circumstances and remains undefiled and unattached amid all circumstances, this is the basis of all precepts. Then, from the wondrous unmoving mind, one gives rise to compassionate skillful means that

benefit sentient beings, embracing, aiding, and benefiting them everywhere. Only then can one possess fully the merit and virtue of all precepts.

69. Question: If one has not yet seen one's true nature, can one nevertheless function?

Answer: All functioning is the functioning of our Buddha-nature. Otherwise, how could we speak or hear? This is functioning! Not abiding in appearances while functioning is wondrous functioning. It does not mean sitting there motionless and not functioning. One must be flexible, do things conscientiously, and yet not cling to appearances. This is functioning.

79. Question: Is the stirring of a thought wondrous functioning?

Answer: Yes, every stirring of thought is wondrous functioning. More specifically, when a thought arises without abiding in appearances, it is wondrous functioning; when a thought arises and abides in appearances, it is deluded thinking. "Just when the mind is functioning, there is precisely no mind that functions; when no mind functions precisely, it is constantly functioning, yet precisely without anything." This is wondrous functioning. Just when the mind is functioning, there is no mind to be found that functions. One must "constantly function, yet precisely without anything": when thoughts arise without abiding in appearances, this is the ocean-seal emitting light.

83. Question: I believe that during meditation, one should follow Master's instruction to have the mind hear through the ears and add as many extra sessions as possible; after meditation, one should observe the mind. Knowing that walking, standing, sitting, lying down, Buddha-recitation, mantra recitation, and so forth are all performed by the intrinsic nature, one should allow the true mind to manifest continually as much as possible. Is this correct?

Answer: Yes, and no. It is correct in that you must diligently apply yourself to cultivation and must not be careless. It is incorrect in the phrase "allow the true mind to manifest continually as much as possible," because the true mind is never hidden; it shines from before your very face at every moment. Since you already know that all movements, actions, and functions are the wondrous functioning of the true mind, is it not constantly present already? Why speak of "allowing the true mind to manifest continually as much as possible"?

84. Question: After seeing one's true nature, is the most diligent practice to avoid forgetting the original nature at every moment?

Answer: No! The original nature cannot be lost. It is only that you cling to appearances and are deluded by circumstances, just as the sun does not appear

when obscured by dark clouds. Diligent practice consists only in continuous and seamless safeguarding. When practicing, be like a commander leading troops against the enemy, pressing forward without hesitation. When not practicing, let everything go and regard it as though nothing had happened. This is called true diligence.

85. Question: Not forgetting the original nature means practicing within awareness. While doing things, one knows that they are the wondrous functioning of the original nature; when there is nothing to do, spiritual knowing and awakened nature have not diminished. Will one then naturally accomplish the great Way in accordance with time and conditions?

Answer: No! The ancients said, “Simply exhaust ordinary feelings; have no separate holy understanding.” If you constantly cling to the nature of spiritual knowing, then you are abiding in something. One must not cling to any appearance, but function in accordance with conditions. Spiritual knowing and awakened nature must not be clung to either. To practice within awareness is an even greater mistake.

86. Question: To accord with one’s intrinsic nature at every moment is to accord with the master. If one practices according to the Dharma, the master and the Buddha are at one’s side. Is this understanding correct?

Answer: Yes!

87. Question: One must return to nothing obtainable; everything is ultimately unobtainable. Yet is not the state of empty openness with awareness still present? If this were swept away, would that not become annihilation?

Answer: It is not that this spiritual awareness should be swept away, but that one should not abide in it. Because one does not abide in it, there is neither an awareness that knows nor an object known; thus one returns to nothing obtainable. If there is a state of awareness to speak of, it is already not so. How can you still speak of empty openness?

88. Question: Although this formless essence of intrinsic nature has no appearance, can it nevertheless be experienced when there are no thoughts? Is that so?

Answer: No! It must not only be experienced when there are no thoughts; it must be experienced amid functioning and phenomenal affairs. For functioning and phenomena are both manifestations of intrinsic nature. Appearance is intrinsic nature, and intrinsic nature is appearance; they cannot be separated. If one experiences it only when there are no thoughts, would one not fall into a stagnant pool of dead water?

When thoughts arise without being followed, one has achieved a small measure of success and has mastery over taking rebirth. But this does not count as attaining the proper position of the dharmakāya. One must certainly sever the delusions of thought before attaining that position. Even after reaching the proper position of the dharmakāya, one must go further and leave that position behind; clinging to that position will not do. Chan practitioners say: “When the bright moon is directly overhead, one is still a man beneath the steps.” Only when one meets after the moon has set is the whole reality perfectly bright.

113. Question: Master Hanshan said, “Birth and death are day and night; water flows and flowers fade. Today I finally believe that the nostrils point downward.” Please explain.

Answer: It means that today one has understood the matter of one’s fundamental nature. Formerly, one was deluded by dreamlike and illusory matters—birth and death day and night, flowing water and falling flowers, and the like. How fortunate it is today to directly realize the Original Face. Without exerting the slightest effort, it is simply the natural scenery before one. The matter of one’s fundamental nature is originally just so; there is not the slightest thing extraordinary about it, nor is there any need to search and seek with effort. Therefore, one need only let go of everything. The more force one uses, the further one is from it; the more relaxed one is, the better.

Question 118: At times I empty myself naturally and have no thoughts, while my mind is very clear. At times I can also naturally empty myself while walking, but it disappears again in an instant and is unstable.

Answer: Naturally emptying yourself is very good. If it is absent, let it be absent; naturally do not abide in it. Otherwise, it becomes dead samādhi.

(II) Questions and Answers on Practice

Question 30: As I meditate, it gradually feels more ordinary, and my contemplation has become more continuous and seamless. Yet my habitual tendencies are strong, and I still lose myself at times. Should I increase my meditation sessions?

Answer: Increasing meditation strengthens samādhi; this is indeed an essential point for not being moved by circumstances.

Question 34: Since learning Buddhism, I have always enjoyed reading Buddhist scriptures. If I do not read them, I feel at a loss. Master, how should I remedy this?

Answer: You may recite mantras or practice Buddha-recitation, thereby nurturing the mind and one’s innate nature. Having nothing to do is precisely the manifestation of the true mind; the moment a sense of barren stillness arises, it is

deluded emotion. Reciting mantras and practicing Buddha-recitation are both ways of roaming in the Tathāgata's ocean of quiescence. Though you recite mantras or the Buddha's name, do not entertain the thought that you are reciting mantras or the Buddha's name. Whatever mantra you recite, whatever Buddha you invoke, is all acceptable.

Question 35: What place is good for practice?

Answer: People all like to run about—running here and there. If this place is not good, they go there; if that place is not good, they come here. It becomes a complete mess. In fact, every place is good; it is only your mind that is not good. When your mind is truly pure, every place is good.

Question 38: When encountering adverse conditions, should one avoid them or give them a try?

Answer: Avoiding them means that you are not yet skillful. You should deal with them according to your ability. In the past, my teacher, Mr. Xianglu, said: "To cultivate the supreme vehicle, worldly toils are provisions on the path; when adversaries all arrive together, they adorn this place of practice."

Question 40: I have practiced this Dharma for more than a year. Although I understand some things in principle, I have not yet directly realized the state in which body and mind fall away. Master, if one has not directly realized it, will one's power to remain unmoved when encountering circumstances be very weak? Is direct realization not very easy? If one wishes to directly realize it, does one mainly rely on meditation and practicing this Dharma?

Answer: Practice is not merely sitting meditation and practicing this Dharma. One must also temper oneself through phenomena and not be turned by circumstances; only then does one's practice gain strength. But if one's samādhi is insufficient for tempering oneself amid phenomena, one must meditate more to strengthen samādhi. This Dharma makes it easy to directly realize one's original nature.

Question 41: When disputes over right and wrong arise, should one explain or simply ignore them?

Answer: For one who is diligently practicing, there is no right or wrong.

Question 42: Sometimes, as I sit there, things that do not move appear to be moving. What is happening?

Answer: It is your mind that is moving.

Question 43: May one recite mantras in daily life?

Answer: Yes. You may recite while walking, and even while sleeping. Recite until you fall asleep. Once the recitation becomes familiar, you will be reciting mantras even in your dreams. You may even recite while using the toilet, but do not recite aloud.

Question 69: Because of my work, I can meditate only once each day. Is that all right?

Answer: It is enough to maintain contemplation after leaving the cushion. If you do not contemplate well, even two sessions are of no use. If you can maintain contemplation, you will certainly attain accomplishment.

Question 70: I feel that my practice keeps going in circles on the same spot and does not advance.

Answer: Do not be impatient. Once you become impatient, things go wrong. There is no advancing or declining; Buddha-nature is originally unmoving. Let go. Only ask about cultivation, not about harvest. The moment you have a demand, things go wrong; if you want to advance, you will instead be unable to advance.

Question 77: Although it is said that when the water arrives, the channel is formed, time waits for no one. Master, please instruct us how to practice diligently during the limited years that remain.

Answer: Temper yourself through circumstances: abide nowhere in all things, remain unbound by favorable or adverse circumstances, and be free and at ease in every direction. Then you will be free to come and go, master transformation, and be liberated from segmented birth and death. Otherwise, recite more of the Maitreya Mantra or the Great Rebirth Mantra, and you can be reborn in the Pure Land. What is there to worry about?

Question 81: Since returning from the seven-day retreat, my state of mind has become much more even. Yet I still cling to certain matters; my strength is not yet sufficient, and it is difficult to cut them off at once.

Answer: Life is like a dream; everything is flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water. What is there to cling to or be stained by?

Question 164: During the last seven-day retreat, the Master gave instructions that I understood very clearly in my heart. Other people see light or experience visions, but I have nothing at all. The Master said this was best. But I thought he was merely encouraging me; I still have not reached the level the Master described, where “having nothing at all is the best state.”

Answer: If you understand that the pure light of mind in a single thought is the dharmakāya Buddha, you are already a person of great wisdom. Not seeing light or

visions is indeed best; this is not merely encouragement. Since the dharmakāya is without characteristics and consists only of lucid knowing free from thoughts, having nothing at all is best.

Question 171: When I am not working, I can still observe my thoughts. But while working, my thoughts are like wild horses, beyond control. What should I do?

Answer: When working, if your mind becomes scattered, shout, “Stop!” Then pause for one minute before continuing your work. Whenever you forget to maintain awareness, shout, “Stop!” Stopping for a moment does not interfere with work. It is best to shout “Stop!” several dozen times each day. Once contemplation becomes familiar through use, that will be enough.

Question 172: Now I sometimes do not have a mind that deliberately contemplates as I did before. What is the reason for this?

Answer: Previously, your contemplation was somewhat unfamiliar, so you had to deliberately bring forth awareness. Now it has become somewhat familiar, so you no longer need to deliberately bring it forth. If you often forget, however, you still need to make some deliberate effort; you must regulate this skillfully. It is like our recitation of mantras: when unfamiliar, you must recite deliberately and clearly. Once familiar, if you are not deliberate, you become lax—you recite with your mouth, but not with your mind.

Once you become lax, it is not easy to enter samādhi. The physical body does not dissolve into emptiness, and the mantra becomes separated from your thoughts, so the thoughts wander on. Therefore, when reciting a mantra, listen to it clearly and gather in your thoughts. It does not matter if you recite more slowly; in time, they will naturally fall away. Do not give rise to the deluded thought, “I must dissolve into emptiness.” Then you will naturally enter samādhi.

Question 173: Sometimes, while meditating and maintaining contemplation, I have something to do, but there is a force that prevents me from moving, so I remain seated there.

Answer: This means that your contemplation has acquired a certain strength of samādhi. But when something needs to be done, you should still do it. You must be lively and flexible; you cannot remain fixed in dead samādhi, so that a single movement makes you leave samādhi. It is good to have less worldly sentiment, but things still need to be done.

Question 174: After leaving the cushion, I feel very light and at ease, scarcely aware of having a body. My eyesight has also improved, and I feel qi at the baihui point on the crown of my head rushing upward.

Answer: Do not concern yourself with any changes; let them take their natural course, and there will be no deviation. When practicing this Dharma, the physical body naturally undergoes changes, but you must not seek after them.

Question 178: After practicing this Dharma for a certain period, I repeatedly experience a feeling as if my heart were being cut by a knife, along with irritability and anxiety. How should I remedy this?

Answer: The seeds in the eight consciousnesses are stirring, which is why you have these sensations. Practice is not always smooth sailing. As long as you patiently pass through this difficult stage of surging waves, another village appears amid the darkening willows and brightening flowers. Also, when you feel distressed, recite mantras aloud; it will be easier to pass through this difficulty.

Question 179: In my practice, physical weakness and mental agitation often cause me to advance and retreat. Should I persist in adding meditation sessions?

Answer: This is unavoidable. Until one's practice reaches the unmoving ground, afflictive phenomena of advancing and retreating will always occur. This is because the seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness are stimulated and churned up by the fire of prajñā. When the seeds churn up, it is very uncomfortable. You feel that you have regressed: standing is not right, sitting is not right, and sleeping is not right.

At such times, you must hold fast, not be frightened, and break through. In fact, this is progress. You may add the third mudrā and recite the mantra aloud. But if you truly feel physically unable to bear it, you must relax somewhat and shorten your meditation time. Practice is like rowing a boat against the current: if you do not advance, you retreat. You must seize the time and practice diligently!

Question 180: In the few days before each menstrual period, I clearly feel that my mental strength is insufficient. Unlike usual, I cannot sustain contemplation and want to go out. This time I even wanted to speak of others' faults. I clearly knew that I should not behave this way, yet I could not control myself and was instead turned by external circumstances. I feel deeply ashamed and have failed my master's teachings.

Answer: This is a physiological response; it is nothing serious. Simply go outside for a walk and clear your mind. When women reach menopause, physiological reactions are particularly strong. Especially for diligent practitioners, whose karmic seeds churn up intensely, it becomes even harder to be self-mastering. Once this phase has passed, there will be no problem. In contemplation, the degree of effort must be appropriate; do not make it overly tight.

Question 184: Although I have added meditation sessions, my afflictions do not seem to have diminished much. Moreover, I often feel oppressed at heart, weary of others and resentful of myself. Is this because I have sat too long?

Answer: Meditation should be an enjoyment, without the slightest affliction. Yet you are so oppressed that you feel desperate; you have gone in the opposite direction. You should perhaps make some adjustment: go out to enjoy the mountains and waters, then return to meditation. Talking more with understanding friends and confiding in one another is also a good way to make an adjustment. The medicine should accord with the illness; there is no fixed Dharma.

In short, when meditating and practicing diligently, the mind should be calm, steady, and comfortable, without afflictions. Even if karmic seeds churn up and you feel unable to advance or retreat, reciting mantras aloud for a while will leave you safe and at ease. “Weary of others and resentful of yourself” occurs because the old habit of your narrow mind-capacity has surfaced. Quickly rebuke yourself and let go of all these improper bad habits.

Question 186: Once, over some trivial matter, I got into a quarrel with someone. At the time, I knew it was wrong, but I could not restrain myself. This was all the result of my narrow mind-capacity and concern for saving face. This, too, is a major taboo in practicing this Dharma. What should I do?

Answer: This is because your contemplation lacks strength. Everyone has the habitual tendency to care about saving face, but this is actually most foolish: for the sake of this nonexistent “face,” one drags oneself into birth and death. What should one do? Let it go at once.

Question 187: Should one not be too anxious about eliminating habitual tendencies? Anxiety itself is also a habitual tendency.

Answer: Correct! You must not be anxious. When your mind is empty, can there still be unwholesome behavior? To speak of counteracting them is already to fall into an inferior approach. When the mind stirs, simply say, “Pah!” and that is all.

Question 188: So long as one keeps the mind empty and pure at all times, and practices “when thoughts arise, do not follow them,” that is enough. In fact, there are no such things as “habitual tendencies,” are there?

Answer: Habitual tendencies consist in clinging to circumstances and being turned by them. If you can refrain from being turned by circumstances, habitual tendencies will naturally be eliminated.

Question 189: After realizing one’s original nature, the most difficult thing is eliminating habitual tendencies. I had always thought I could let go of fame and

profit, but when I heard that I could take the graduate-school entrance examination free of charge, my mind was stirred. For several days, whenever I sat in meditation, I was troubled by the thought, “Should I go or not?”

Answer: This is what is meant by “When one should decide but does not, one instead suffers confusion.” All states are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water; they cannot be grasped. We merely move freely within them, neither clinging to them nor rejecting them. It is fine not to do it as well; what is there that you cannot let go of? To study Buddhism, one must be free and at ease: sit when it is time to sit, walk when it is time to walk, without the slightest constraint. Only then is there nonobstruction.

Question 190: What should one do when one sometimes cannot help becoming angry?

Answer: When anger arises, recite a mantra. When thoughts arise, do not abide in them; when thoughts arise, do not cling to them.

Question 193: I am now practicing the Dharma, proceeding steadily and cautiously as my principle. After meditation, I pay attention to my diet and get sufficient rest, considering these supports for practice. Is this attachment to the body?

Answer: In practicing the Dharma, one should naturally take care of the physical body. As the saying goes, one borrows the provisional to cultivate the true. How could this be suspected of attachment to the body?

Question 194: This week I feel that my obstacles are especially heavy. I have been practicing the second mudrā every day and intend to continue for one or two weeks. Is that acceptable?

Answer: Yes. More importantly, you must understand what is meant by “heavy obstacles.” An obstacle is not some thing that you can take out and look at. Thus obstacles are illusory; it is still the mind—it is the mind’s attachment to appearances. The mind has still not died completely. When the mind has died completely, there is strength.

Therefore, Moon Treasury asked Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, “Knowing clearly that birth and death are fundamentally empty, why do I nevertheless undergo the cycle of birth and death?” Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva replied, “Because your strength is not yet sufficient.” Where does this strength come from? The key is that the mind must die completely. If one truly knows that everything in this world is false and empty, then one naturally has strength.

But if the mind is impure, has not died completely, and does not truly know that this intrinsic nature is neither defiled nor pure, neither arising nor ceasing, then it will

not do. Thus one's understanding at the level of principle is still insufficient. The Chan school says: only after a great death can there be a great life. If you have not died thoroughly, or are half dead and half alive, it will not do! Therefore, we absolutely must not cling to appearances!

Question 195: How should one safeguard it?

Answer: Awakening is not difficult, but safeguarding it is not easy. If you do not safeguard it, you will follow your thoughts; scattered thoughts will fly everywhere, and all kinds of disorderly things will arise. Therefore, you must safeguard it continuously and closely in order to eliminate your deluded habitual tendencies completely. But safeguarding awareness must not be rigid, much less grasping. Simply awaken once and draw yourself back—that is enough. This is "when thoughts arise, do not follow them."

External affairs are all flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, "When one knows they are empty flowers, there is no further turning in the round of rebirth." Dependent arising is empty in nature. Know that everything is false, and do not run after deluded thoughts. Let everything follow conditions: if causes and conditions are thus, then act accordingly. Carry on with all your affairs, yet do not let the mind stir in the slightest; do everything for sentient beings, while letting the mind cling to nothing.

If you can practice in this way at all times, then within a few years, "the skin will have wholly fallen away, leaving only the one reality exposed." You will be able to emit great light, and spiritual powers will manifest. Yet you must not cling to spiritual powers either. After recognizing your original nature, you have still not returned to the source. When you run after thoughts, you should be like a cowherd, using a whip to drive the ox.

Which patriarch did not practice in this way? When we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and it opens up, we see our intrinsic nature; this is no different from the moment when not a single thought arises and there is clear, distinct awareness. But you must directly realize it once: "Ah! Originally there is nothing at all, yet it is clearly and distinctly aware." Awakening is readily accessible, but it must be safeguarded continuously and closely. This is not a matter of one or two days.

After Chan Master Jiaoshan awakened under Chan Master Chuanzhi, he promptly went into the mountains and safeguarded it for eighteen years. After recognizing one's intrinsic nature, sitting in meditation differs from sitting without having recognized it. Once it is recognized, sitting in meditation is safeguarding it. When thoughts arise, do not attend to them. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, safeguard it at every moment; safeguard yourself from clinging to appearances.

Question 196: Practice the Dharma at ease while sitting in meditation; off the cushion, maintain continuous and seamless contemplation, allowing one's intrinsic nature to be present at all times. If one practices diligently in this way, then when the time and conditions arrive, there is no need to worry about not awakening. Is this understanding correct?

Answer: The understanding is correct.

Question 197: How does one practice the latter half of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?

Answer: Observe the point at which thoughts arise. Do not follow thoughts, and when differentiated circumstances appear before you, do not let them stir your mind. This is the Chan school's method of safeguarding one's intrinsic nature. If you practice in this way, you can also be liberated from birth and death.

Question 200: Does "when thoughts arise, do not follow them" mean suppressing thoughts?

Answer: No.

Question 201: When I first met the master, I felt that I was originally a Buddha. Thus, in the instant of a handclap, I understood that my intrinsic nature is originally empty. But after some time, afflictions arose again.

Answer: How lamentable. Recite a mantra aloud to redirect yourself.

Question 202: When thoughts arise, I unconsciously try to suppress them. Is that right?

Answer: You must not suppress thoughts. Let them function freely, but do not be turned by them and do not attend to them. This is called, "The green mountains themselves do not move; let the white clouds come and go." The problem is not that thoughts arise; the problem is running after thoughts. It is not a matter of suppressing thoughts so that none arise, but of not abiding in any thought. This alone is no-thought. As the Sixth Patriarch said, "No-thought means, amid thoughts, to be free from thought."

Inferential knowledge is knowing and involves discrimination, whereas direct knowledge is unmoving. This differs somewhat from a mirror reflecting objects. A mirror reflects objects without distinguishing good from bad, whereas we know good and bad, beauty and ugliness, yet the mind does not move. When practice reaches this point, it is sufficient. But one must see one's true nature; without seeing one's true nature, this cannot be achieved. Thus, it is very difficult to practice in a lively and natural way.

Question 203: Please instruct us on “when thoughts arise, do not follow them” and “no discrimination whatsoever.”

Answer: “When thoughts arise, do not follow them” does not mean becoming a fool who does not even know good from bad or right from wrong. It means knowing, yet not abiding or clinging. This is the first stage of practice. The second stage, “no discrimination whatsoever,” means being skilled at distinguishing the objective myriad dharmas while remaining unmoved in the highest truth. That is, one knows right and wrong, long and short, gain and loss, yet the mind remains unmoved, uninfluenced and unstained by anything whatsoever.

Question 204: When I maintain contemplation off the cushion, sometimes not a single thought arises. But after a while I forget, and once I forget, I follow deluded thoughts.

Answer: When not a single thought arises during proper contemplation, the numinous knowing that knows this absence of thought is intrinsic nature itself. If you forget after a while, quickly draw yourself back; do not be turned by thoughts.

Question 205: Ordinarily I know that I should not cling to appearances, but when something happens, I forget again.

Answer: What use is that?! It is because you understand only a little theory and have not genuinely cultivated it. You should quickly correct this: practice diligently, meditate more, and maintain continuous and seamless contemplation.

Question 206: Please speak about “contemplating at all times.”

Answer: We have an immense number of thoughts; in a single instant there are many thoughts. . . . Therefore, one must contemplate at all times. Contemplation means that the moment a thought stirs, you know it and do not attend to it. You must observe the point at which thoughts arise.

Question 207: Does “abiding in and safeguarding” mean that, amid encounters with people and circumstances, one continually accords with and confirms this lucid, quiescent condition of no-thought yet clear awareness, guarding and protecting it? Or does it mean that as soon as a thought arises, one swiftly turns the light inward, empties it, and accords with this emptiness?

Answer: Correct! When responding to conditions and engaging with things, there is only the single thought appropriate to the matter at hand, with no second thought. Once the task is done, leave no thought behind, as though it had never been done. This is the practice of non-abiding and non-attachment.

Question 208: When hearing a sound, I merely hear and ask, “Who is hearing the sound?” At times there seems to be a state nearly like no-thought—empty, yet aware—but it can be lost again. Should I take responsibility for the first? How should I take responsibility for it?

Answer: Asking “Who is hearing the sound?” is used before awakening. If you have already awakened and recognize that the one capable of hearing sounds is your own master, then there is no need to ask. Simply safeguard it without abiding in sound; that is enough. There is even less need to give rise to a thought of taking responsibility for it. To do so is to put another head on top of your head.

Question 209: When deluded thoughts are constantly flowing, I turn the light inward and contemplate the empty luminosity in the interval between “the previous thought has ceased” and “the next thought has not yet arisen.” Is this a good practice?

Answer: No. The point at which deluded thoughts cease is itself the empty luminosity of intrinsic nature; there is no need to raise another thought to contemplate it.

Question 210: Because work keeps me busy, my strength of contemplation is sometimes inadequate. I therefore use the Great Perfection method of “cutting off” thoughts several dozen times a day. In confused and inverted states, this seems to give me somewhat more self-mastery than before.

Answer: This simple Chan method is most suitable for busy people. If you can practice it several dozen times every day, then as the days pass and practice deepens, you will naturally become continuous and undivided without even noticing it, and return home to sit securely.

Question 211: The off-cushion method of “cutting off” thoughts is to shout “Stop!” when one is busy or when the mind is racing outward and scattered.

Answer: You need not necessarily shout “Stop!” Simply awaken, and that is enough.

Question 212: After getting up from meditation, I seldom forget to safeguard realization; it is the same whether I am working or resting. Sometimes, as soon as I think of Avalokiteśvara’s holy name or Amitābha’s holy name, the sound of Buddha-recitation automatically arises by my ears. The same even happens with popular songs. What should I do?

Answer: Pay no attention to any of these sounds by your ears; let them arise and cease on their own.

Question 213: Sometimes I do not notice a thought when it first arises, but only become aware of it at its tail end.

Answer: This means that awareness has come too late and your strength is insufficient. You must attend to the huatou: as soon as a thought arises, empty it out. If you notice it only after it has made a round, you are attending to the tail of the thought. Thus Chan practitioners say, “Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only late awareness.” The benefit of contemplation is that you know as soon as a thought arises. When circumstances arise, sometimes awareness precedes them and sometimes follows them. Favorable circumstances are not easily noticed, whereas adverse circumstances are easier to notice.

Question 214: The discussion of contemplation in The Dharma Gate of Proper Prajñā Contemplation requires one to begin contemplation from the region of the heart, without grasping or rejecting it, in order to prevent certain students from developing ailments such as high blood pressure by concentrating excessively in the head. Is this correct?

Answer: To contemplate the mind is to contemplate where thoughts arise and not follow them in their wandering. The instant a thought arises, be aware of it; once aware of it, it is empty. Do not fixate on the region of the heart or the head, nor on the dantian or beneath the feet. In mantra recitation, one simply has the mind recite and the ears hear; do not fixate on any location. The degree of tension or relaxation must be adjusted at all times; it must not be too tight or too loose.

Question 215: After getting up from meditation, one should contemplate with clear awareness. I should clearly know whatever thoughts arise in me—is that right?

Answer: You should know when a thought arises, but you must not run after it. Do not retain the thought in memory. As soon as a thought arises, be aware of it; once aware of it, it is empty, like drawing on water.

Question 216: How does one contemplate the mind?

Answer: Mind is simply thought. When a thought arises, dissolve it; do not run after it. At first, one dissolves deluded thoughts through mantra recitation; when you see a thought, it vanishes. When meditative strength has increased to a certain degree, thoughts dissolve on their own when they arise, without your needing to dissolve them, until there is quiescence that ever illuminates and illumination that is ever quiescent. Clear and distinct awareness is illumination; not moving is quiescence. When wondrous functioning arises, thoughts arise in responding to conditions and engaging with things; when there is no response to conditions, there are no thoughts. This is the finest Chan method. Contemplating the mind is the fundamental dharma gate of Buddhism.

Question 217: “Avalokiteśvara” means not clinging to any matter or thing, nor neglecting anything, but allowing everything to be entirely natural. Like geese passing through the vast sky without leaving a trace, one simply lives honestly in accordance with conditions. Is this understanding correct? In addition, my husband and I will begin a seven-day retreat on January 27.

Answer: Your understanding is entirely correct! Simply live honestly in accordance with conditions. As it is said, “In accordance with conditions, dissolve old karma; do not create new misfortunes.” It is also the ordinary mind of “When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep”—the mind of a carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance.

You and your husband are truly admirable! You have awakened at the level of principle, yet you do not abandon actual cultivation. In this bitterly cold season, you do not forget to apply yourselves in a seven-day retreat. In the future, you will surely realize the great Way and perfect bodhi.

Question 218: I still do not understand how to begin the practice of contemplation after getting up from meditation. It now seems that there are three ways of beginning contemplation. Please instruct me: (1) Directly contemplate deluded thoughts without grasping or rejecting them. (2) Contemplate where thoughts arise; as soon as a thought arises, be aware of it and do not follow it into discursive wandering. (3) Contemplate all things as being like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows—as impermanent and illusory things—and one should remain free of greedy attachment.

Answer: The first two appear to be two methods, but they are actually one. For if you can be aware the instant a thought arises, that is directly contemplating deluded thoughts; otherwise, you could not be aware the instant a thought arises. Not being turned by thoughts means not grasping them. When thoughts come, simply do not follow them; this does not mean suppressing them so that they do not arise, nor detesting them and casting them away. Therefore, these two are one method. The third is very good. In addition to dealing with deluded thoughts, one should contemplate circumstances in this way.

Question 219: If a disciple uses the third method above, does that accord with the master’s requirements?

Answer: If you contemplate only circumstances and not the thoughts in your mind, you will be carried along by thoughts. For even when deluded thoughts are not directed toward external circumstances, they still flow on without cease; as the saying goes, “A thief within the house is hard to guard against.” It is not the case that, when there are no external circumstances, not a single thought arises. Thus it is still useless. You must contemplate both.

Question 220: Someone says that allowing thoughts to remain nowhere is also a stage in practice. But according to the master's instruction, thoughts remaining nowhere is the great capacity and wondrous functioning of intrinsic nature. Please offer further guidance.

Answer: If there is still a thought of "thoughts remaining nowhere," it is not ultimate and must still be dissolved. The "thoughts remaining nowhere" of which I speak is functioning: they are empty in that very moment, and there is no need deliberately to dissolve them.

Question 221: In "illumination ever quiescent, quiescence ever illuminating," do thoughts ultimately arise or not?

Answer: Illumination is functioning; it is thoughts remaining nowhere. There is no thought that can be thought, no arising that can arise. Phenomena appear of themselves and naturally respond to conditions.

Question 222: Is this numinous knowing what we ordinarily safeguard?

Answer: Yes, safeguard this numinous knowing, not emptiness; do not guard and hold on to an empty state. When thoughts arise, do not pay attention to them. Not paying attention to them is numinous knowing.

Question 223: Must we also remain clearly aware while doing things?

Answer: Yes! When we recite a mantra, we hear it with complete clarity; that too is clear and distinct awareness. If the mantra is not clear, it is not so. It is not that there is some additional clear and distinct awareness apart from this. At a certain point, "Pop!"—there is a release. At the moment of release, there is still clear and distinct awareness, yet nothing at all remains; the one true nature appears before you.

Question 224: The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: "Good friends, there are also those who teach people to sit and watch the mind, contemplating stillness, without movement or arising, and to regard this as their practice. Deluded people do not understand and become attached to it, thereby going mad. There are many such people. To teach in this way is a great error." How are these two points not contradictory?

Answer: "Watching the mind and contemplating stillness, without movement or arising" means suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise; therefore it is a great error. What I now call contemplation means watching where deluded thoughts arise and not running after them; it does not mean suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise. Thus they are different and there is no contradiction.

Question 225: Ordinary practice is nothing other than extinguishing delusion and revealing the true. Yet the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” This seems to leave one with no way to hold oneself steady. Therefore, in ordinary contemplation and in quietly sitting to contemplate the mind, this disciple always feels that neither side is right. I cannot determine a specific method, and I fear both the arising of thoughts and the error of suppressing thoughts.

Answer: I tell you to contemplate the mind and not follow thoughts; this is precisely not giving rise to deluded thoughts. Ordinarily, do not deliberately generate thoughts or seek outwardly after conditions. Yet when deluded thoughts arise, do not cling to them either. As soon as a thought arises, be aware of it; neither pursue nor suppress it. Simply know clearly and distinctly, without generating discrimination. This is the method of practice meant by “yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.”

Question 226: After getting up from meditation, when the mind arises in response to circumstances and is turned by them, how should one practice?

Answer: After getting up from meditation, you must contemplate at all times. This is even more difficult, because people all run after circumstances. Just after getting up, there is still a meditative state, and you know to watch yourself and not act carelessly. But once you become involved in affairs, you forget contemplation and run after circumstances. You become as chaotic as when you were not meditating at all. This is not good.

Therefore, while sitting in meditation, we must wholeheartedly have the mind recite and the ears hear; after getting up, we must maintain continuous and seamless contemplation without forgetting it. Yet amid circumstances we also easily forget. Once we chat with a few friends or undertake some task, we immediately become confused. When thoughts arise, quickly draw them back and keep watch over yourself.

You must do this practice, otherwise you cannot enter the path. Later in the practice, once contemplation has become familiar, there is no need to contemplate any longer; further contemplation would merely be superfluous. Therefore, at the beginning one must “contemplate,” but later one should no longer “contemplate.” Only by forgetting the word “contemplate” can one advance, and the practice can rise ever higher.

Going a step further, even “forgetting” is no longer present. Then the practice passes from the conditioned into non-contrivance. Practice must gradually proceed from the conditioned into non-contrivance. Non-contrivance cannot be achieved all at

once. At the beginning, one must deliberately contemplate; that is, one consciously applies oneself to practice. Later, when one practices without a mind that is practicing, all practice disappears, and one advances a step further.

Question 227: Someone believes that the contemplation after getting up from meditation in the Heart-of-Heart Dharma has not been explained clearly, whereas the contemplation transmitted by Chan masters from Taiwan provides a way to begin. He maintains that contemplation means that all dharmas are equal and no discrimination arises. Whatever one does, one must be clear and overlook no detail. In contemplation, one understands immediately in that very moment; thoughts must remain nowhere. If there is any lingering, there is some lack of clarity, and that is deluded mind.

Answer: Has it truly not been explained clearly? If a person who is just beginning to contemplate the mind is clear about every external matter, that is contemplating circumstances, not contemplating the mind. One who contemplates the mind knows that circumstances are fundamentally empty and does not let the mind follow circumstances; knows that mind is fundamentally empty and does not abide in mind. When mind and circumstances are both empty, there are no thoughts in that very moment.

Even when there are no thoughts, do not cling to the absence of thoughts; and when thoughts arise, do not fall into the presence of thoughts. When both existence and nonexistence vanish, numinous awareness is present in that very moment. Yet the nature of this numinous awareness is neither mind nor circumstance; in its entirety, it is empty. At the very time of emptiness, however, it is also clear and distinct; in its entirety, it is provisional.

Emptiness and provisional existence are nondual, with no further discrimination, grasping, or rejection. At just this moment, proper contemplation is clearly present! Is it necessary, as this person says, to retain in one's mind the taste of food one has eaten, or to store the sexual pleasure of intercourse in one's mind and brain for a long time, in order for it to count as contemplation? If that is contemplation, it is merely the contemplation of Māra, a contemplation that leads to hell.

Moreover, to speak of this contemplation is already superfluous; it merely encumbers practitioners. Everyone is originally a Buddha. So long as one awakens, the state in which not a single thought arises and all is clear and distinct is each person's Buddha-nature. When a thought arises, that is wondrous functioning. There is no need to contemplate emptiness; this is true Chan practice.

This person tells everyone not to overlook a single detail. Is this "not giving rise to discrimination"? Is this not attachment to appearances? He says that one should savor the taste of food and sexual pleasure, and also experience the food's passage

through the mouth, throat, intestines, and stomach. Is this “immediate realization”? On the one hand, he says that one should not linger on thought after thought; on the other, he tells people to develop and extend sexual thoughts throughout every part of the body and into every aspect of daily life. Is he not slapping his own face? This is how the king of demons teaches Dharma: full of contradictions.

Recognizing one’s intrinsic nature is the first step; safeguarding it continuously is the second; leaving behind safeguarding is the third. Since safeguarding, too, is attachment, it is not easy to forget safeguarding. One must even forget forgetting. That is the fourth step.

Question 229: When one can remain in contemplation at all times, coarse deluded thoughts do not arise. When subtle deluded thoughts arise, should one refrain from following their flow and instead see them with complete clarity?

Answer: Contemplation is still superfluous. It may certainly be used when speaking of practice, but in the end there is no practice to be done.

Question 230: In sitting meditation and mantra recitation, one need not dissolve the body into emptiness. Simply recognize this clear and distinct aware nature; that is seeing one’s true nature.

Answer: This is only intellectual understanding, not direct realization.

Question 233: If one understands in principle that dependent arising is empty in nature and that form and emptiness are nondual, yet mind and circumstances have not dissolved into one another, has one seen one’s true nature?

Answer: One has not seen one’s true nature.

Question 235: When a person sees their true nature, must the sense faculties and their objects completely fall away? Must everything explode?

Answer: When the Heart-of-Heart Dharma has been practiced to a certain point, the sense faculties and their objects fall away. Yet this is not exactly the same for everyone; for some people, it does not occur as an explosion. In fact, the point where thought ceases is that very state. Only the strength differs; the intrinsic nature realized is the same. When there is no thought, body, mind, and world are all gone, yet awareness remains. This numinous knowing is one’s intrinsic nature. When one’s practice reaches maturity, one naturally arrives there.

Question 266: At times I visualize that my guru, my yidam, and I are one.

Answer: Do not abide in appearances.

Question 272: In ordinary circumstances, I basically do not stray from contemplation. At times, without deliberately contemplating, I am already within contemplation. Because I deeply know that all states are originally empty and quiescent, there is no need to eliminate them. Does this mean that I have entered the process of quiescent illumination?

Answer: Yes!

Question 273: I am now more courageous. I used to fear encountering difficulties, but now I do not. It is impossible to live in this world without difficulties.

Answer: Incorrect! What difficulties are there? Once there are difficulties, you are already mistaken. It is right to have no affair in the mind and no clinging mind in affairs.

Question 275: Off the cushion, I am much steadier than I was some days ago and can maintain it. At times, even the thought of safeguarding it is gone. Yet in adverse circumstances, there are still occasional times when I forget to safeguard it.

Answer: Practice is like this: there is progress and regression. When it has truly become fully mature, it will no longer be forgotten or lost.

Question 276: The stage of safeguarding is a process of removing habitual tendencies. When does one enter the stage of letting be?

Answer: You must wait until, amid circumstances, there is no straying at all—unconstrained by favorable or adverse conditions, free and at ease in every direction. When this is truly attained, there is no need to make a transition; you will naturally let things take their course in carefree ease.

Question 277: Off the cushion, my safeguarding is such that I occasionally still stray. Half a month ago, my child's face was burned. Even then, I did not lose my meditative stability and was still able to care for him properly. I feel that the more one is in adverse circumstances, the more wisdom can grow; the worse people treat me, the more they help me practice.

Answer: Correct! All adverse circumstances are favorable conditions that help you advance. But do not think in terms of adversity and favorability, nor regard people as good or bad. Simply respond in accord with what appears. Until practice has reached its ultimate stage, there will inevitably be times of straying. So long as you become aware as soon as it arises and do not drift along with it, forgetful and unable to return, there is no obstruction. With time, as practice grows, there will be no straying, and it will become continuous and undivided.

Question 281: The three members of our family get along very well, but at times I have the thought of leaving home. I feel that we spend all day busy making a living; it might be better to dedicate body and mind to Buddhism.

Answer: If you have such a thought, then your mind is not empty. How can you realize the Way? If the mind were truly empty, you would be busy all day without feeling busy. Your whole family is practicing; have you not already left home? What further leaving home is there? For all your talk, you are still very attached to appearances. How did Layman Pang and his whole family practice?!!!

(III) Matters Related to Practice

Question 19: Lately, I often feel that there is much suffering in the world, and work and other affairs are busy. Perhaps this is because I owed others in past lives. Yet my bodily obstructions have not been removed, and whenever I am troubled by illness and pain, I think of leaving home to cultivate the Way.

Answer: Having many affairs is precisely an opportunity to train yourself to transform and exhaust deluded habitual tendencies. If you truly respond to affairs without a clinging mind, you will never feel fatigued. Leaving home means leaving the confining nest of entanglement in deluded thoughts; it does not mean leaving one's family. If the mind is impure, then even after leaving one's family, there will be endless trouble in the monastery. If you can diligently practice this Dharma, you will certainly attain accomplishment in the future.

Question 21: Bodily pains are appearing one after another. How should I further break through these delusory illusions?

Answer: That which knows the pain is the master. The master that knows the pain is not itself in pain. Simply observe this illusory body that suffers pain, and there is no problem.

Question 26: If one lets go of everything and does not concern oneself with anything, including one's children, people will say that one is very selfish.

Answer: We must fulfill our responsibility to educate our children. Some children simply do not listen to their parents; what use is worrying? Affairs must be handled, but the mind should not cling to them, nor should one panic. "Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere." A lay practitioner from Ningbo was sitting in meditation and had entered samādhi very well. Someone ran in and told him, "Your child has fallen into the water!" He paid no attention. That was wrong. One must fulfill one's human responsibilities; otherwise, it will not do.

Question 31: There are scorpions, centipedes, and other venomous insects in the room. How should one deal with them?

Answer: Generally, if you leave them alone, they will not sting you.

Question 34: I beg my gracious teacher to give me a few words of instruction to serve as my personal maxim.

Answer: Let the mind be empty and non-abiding; let things take their course in carefree ease. Simply fulfill ordinary human duties; do not seek saintly understanding.

Question 35: From my inner thoughts to my outward conduct, whatever may be wrong, I hope that Master will criticize me severely. Otherwise, when will an ordinary being like me, with deep karmic obstacles and shallow wisdom, be able to directly realize bodhi?

Answer: Is bodhi right before you, yet you still do not recognize it? Who is asking this question? If it is not bodhi, what is it?!

Question 36: I hope to obtain a photograph of my guru, to serve as a favorable condition for one as foolish as myself.

Answer: Learning Buddhism and practicing are matters of the mind's activity; one must not seek on the basis of physical appearances. If you wish to contemplate an image, you may contemplate the great bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara or Amitābha Buddha.

Question 37: Can a clear-eyed spiritual teacher also have preferences? Is it true that, toward disciples with whom there is an especially strong affinity, the teacher will place great value on them, favor them, and bestow blessings upon them?

Answer: Amitābha Buddha! There should fundamentally be no partiality. All sentient beings equally possess Buddha-nature and are therefore equal and without distinction. Yet because their roots from former lives differ slightly, and their affinities from former lives also vary in depth, others may unconsciously perceive slight differences in how they are treated. This is all due to the inferior discriminating views of ordinary people; it is truly unavoidable.

In our practice of this Dharma, so long as the mind is empty and we do not distinguish between those close to us and those distant from us, the mind will be without hindrance, practice will readily advance, and accomplishment in the Way will be attained. Otherwise, disputes over self and others, right and wrong, will arise in abundance, bringing no benefit to practice and leaving no hope of realizing the Way.

Question 38: I heard a Dharma brother say that our being able to draw near to Master and receive the great Mind-Seal Dharma for practice is due to an extraordinary affinity: 2,500 years ago, we listened to the Dharma with Master in the

presence of the Venerable Buddha Wen and served the Buddha. Is this why we have this excellent affinity today?

Answer: Since you already know that you had an excellent affinity in past lives, why speak of any details? Is this not attachment to appearances? You must know that all things are empty and without self-nature. Why speak of the three divisions of time—past, present, and future—or of east, west, south, north, and center?!!!

Question 48: How should one deal with the various obstacles that arise in daily life?

Answer: These are all opportunities to temper your meditative stability, favorable conditions that train you to realize the Way. Do not be afraid. Everything is created by the mind; when the mind is empty, obstacles vanish. If the mind is attached to appearances, obstacles will never disappear. Stirring the mind creates karma, so whenever the mind stirs, repent. When the mind is empty and pure, all is well.

Question 49: How should those learning Buddhism establish good interpersonal relationships?

Answer: If you practice this Dharma and your mind is empty, how could your interpersonal relationships fail to go well? When interpersonal relationships do not go well, it is because one does not relinquish one's own attachments and is overly subjective.

Question 50: Before thorough awakening, how should one respond to conditions and interact with others?

Answer: Be non-abiding in all things, and do not let the mind turn with circumstances. That is all.

Question 51: Before thorough awakening, should one leave everything alone and wait until the powers of samādhi and wisdom are sufficient before responding to conditions and tempering the mind through circumstances?

Answer: Incorrect! You must now temper the mind through circumstances, increasing the powers of samādhi and wisdom in the process of tempering the mind.

(IV) Excerpts from Letters: "The Guru's Replies"

Guan means watching: use right mindfulness to watch deluded thoughts, becoming aware the moment a deluded thought arises and not running after it. Zhao is like the radiance of sunlight or a bright lamp: without the need to watch, it naturally illuminates everything, clear and distinct, without attachment to a single appearance.

You say that because you must go out, your practice is interrupted. This is because you regard practice as a fixed form, thinking that forming mudrās and reciting mantras while seated counts as practice, whereas walking and attending to affairs after leaving the seat do not. This is a great mistake! You must know that true practice lies in the daily activities of life off the meditation seat.

When responding to circumstances and dealing with people and things amid tension and busyness, though the body, hands, head, eyes, and so forth may all be occupied, the mind should not waver or turn with things. It should simply respond with clear, ever-present knowing, without gain or loss, anger or attachment. Only when the mind remains empty and open throughout the day is this true practice. If, even briefly, one loses awareness and something arises in the mind, that is an interruption; otherwise, it is not called an interruption.

When practice has become fully mature, one must further sweep away the traces of awakening and overturn all habitual patterns: no awakening, no attainment; no Buddha, no sentient beings. Nothing exists, yet wondrous functioning is inexhaustible; nothing is attained, yet spiritual powers are immeasurable. Only this is the vast, boundless, profoundly mysterious samādhi.

In our practice, we first begin by awakening to our own original mind and seeing our own intrinsic nature. Then we maintain continuous and seamless contemplation, allowing no trace of views of dharmas, things, or Buddha to remain in the mind. Empty and without reliance all day long, we dress and eat in accordance with conditions and wear away completely the habitual tendencies cultivated over countless kalpas. Then great light naturally shines forth, illuminating the worlds of the ten directions without remainder. There is then no need to practice any rainbow-body method. I advise you instead to follow the Chan school's method of practice; the progressive approach of awakening, safeguarding realization, and complete realization is more reliable.

You say that during practice you have no particular feelings and always feel calm and ordinary. This is the best feeling. For whenever there is some mysterious or marvelous state, it is all fantasy arising in your own mind. One should have no state whatsoever, and then, all at once, the inner body and mind and the outer world alike will dissolve into emptiness. At precisely that moment, spiritual awareness is clear and distinct: there is no knower and nothing known, no thinker and nothing thought. This is your Original Face.

You also say that your practice cannot become continuous and undivided. This is because your practice has not yet matured. So long as you continue tempering yourself without interruption amid all circumstances, it will naturally come to fruition before long. Your practice already has a considerable foundation. If you

continue cultivating diligently, I think that before long the bottom will drop out of the bucket. I hope you will conduct yourself well!

“The myriad things are originally at ease; only people trouble themselves!” It is also said, “Each dharma abides in its own dharma position; they do not interfere with one another!” All things originally do not disturb us. It is only because our deluded minds move chaotically, grasp at objects, and cling to appearances that afflictions multiply. When you watch television, if your mind is empty, you are not disturbed by what appears before you. At that time, your body and mind have no involvement with the television.

This is why I teach you to maintain awareness and contemplation at all times. Now that you know how to apply it, I am greatly gratified! You must further intensify your practice until it is the same at any time and in any place, and you are not disturbed by circumstances. Thereafter, even awareness and contemplation are unnecessary; the mind remains empty and cleansed, and even emptiness cannot be grasped. Only then may you let go.

What is called “the present moment” is the time when all deluded thoughts have ceased and there is clear, distinct awareness. This clear and distinct awareness is each person’s Buddha-nature.

Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you must attend to “the present moment” and not turn with thoughts or run after circumstances.

If you can contemplate continuously, safeguard what is original, and not wander with circumstances, this is true diligent practice. Conversely, even if you meditate and recite the Buddha’s name every day, if after leaving the seat you immediately forget the reason for doing so, allow deluded thoughts to stir chaotically, and drift with circumstances, that is only superficial practice and brings little actual benefit.

Do not cling to light. Simply empty the mind; when the mind is pure, light arises naturally. Since intrinsic nature is a body of light, the reason you now experience little light is that your mind is impure. If the mind truly clings to nothing and does not seek light, light will naturally shine forth greatly.

True samādhi is not being deluded when encountering circumstances. What use is a dead samādhi?

Forgetting is not a bad thing. Whatever we do is as if we had not done it. Why should we keep it constantly in mind? An ancient worthy said, “Though one eats all year long, one has never bitten a single grain of rice.” This teaches us that the mind must be empty and non-abiding.

At times one may become deluded, but if one diligently remains alert and continuously tempers oneself amid affairs and circumstances, one can dissolve such deluded states. As for what happens in the intermediate state, it depends entirely on the practice one has cultivated while alive. If you are not deluded now, you will also be able to remain self-mastering in the intermediate state; if you cannot remain self-mastering now, you will become confused in the intermediate state. At that time, you can only ask Dharma friends to help remind you and awaken you from the dream of delusion, so that liberation may be attained.

The practice of cultivators of the Way has, roughly speaking, three levels of depth:

(1) As soon as deluded thoughts arise, one becomes aware of them and does not follow them in their wandering to and fro. At the time of death, even if there is an intermediate state, one can remain at ease in whatever direction one turns. Those who are unaware need not be discussed.

(2) When, at any time and in any place, attachment and aversion have both ceased, one can transform freely.

(3) When joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure, and the subtle continuous stream have all ceased, one is in step with a fruition Buddha and is ultimately free.

You should examine for yourself which of these three states you presently occupy. Strive diligently forward, and you will naturally attain ultimate freedom.

Having read your letter, I am greatly gratified! While seated, you have encountered so many pleasant and unpleasant states, yet none has stirred your mind: you do not rejoice in the pleasant or reject the unpleasant. This is truly rare and commendable. What is still lacking is a single cry of “Ha!” It suddenly breaks with a snap and bursts apart with a bang: inner body and mind and outer world explode all at once. All appearances and non-appearances, existence and nonexistence, and even the non-attainment of nonexistence are all unobtainable; and unobtainability itself is also unobtainable. Then the Original Face stands vividly before you, and the work of a lifetime of study and practice is complete.

After leaving the seat, be just as you are while seated: respond to circumstances and deal with people and things without grasping or rejecting. While doing something, “in affairs, have no clinging mind”; when the matter is finished, “within mind, retain no affair.” An ancient worthy said, “Though one eats all year long, one has never bitten a single grain of rice; though one wears clothes all year long, one has never hung a single thread upon oneself.” This is what it means. If there is even slight lingering or attachment, you must see through it at once and not allow the mind to abide in it. This is the “ox-herding practice.” When the wild ox’s nature has died and there is nowhere left for it to run, even contemplation is unnecessary. Then, all day

long, it is simply: “When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep!”—the person of the Way with nothing to do.

There are three difficulties in practice: (1) recognizing one’s intrinsic nature and firmly holding to it is difficult; (2) after recognizing it, safeguarding realization without forgetting it is difficult—for after recognition, one must carefully protect it and diligently remove habitual tendencies; and (3) not rigidly clinging to safeguarding realization is difficult—practitioners often, because they diligently protect it, die in emptiness and cannot bring forth functioning. Therefore, while remaining non-abiding, one must also respond and function in accordance with conditions.

When deluded thoughts suddenly dissolve, only then does one understand form and emptiness.

If you wish to know the Original Face, seek it amid green mountains and white clouds.

The “Original Face” is nowhere else. Simply set the mind to rest and look: when not a single thought arises, when there is no mind that can be made into mind and no thought that can be made into thought, what is this state like? Is this not still your Original Face? This is the crucial moment, as fleeting as a spark. If it is allowed to slip away even slightly, it vanishes; if you pause to deliberate, you are deluded by its shadow.

In fact, this immediate state of no thought is the Original Face that everyone seeks to see. The problem is that people do not recognize it. Since it is neither mysterious nor extraordinary, they easily let it pass and instead seek elsewhere. Thus they squander their time and never see the Way. How lamentable!

If the power of practice is to advance ever upward, you must pay attention to the following:

(6) Maintaining awareness and contemplation at all times is most important. After leaving the seat, bring the meditative state experienced while seated into activity. Though responding to every matter, let the mind remain unmoved, as if someone else were doing it. Function in accordance with conditions without clinging. This is what the Diamond Sūtra says: “Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.” “Respond” means responding to the myriad conditions without abiding anywhere; then the quiescent and extinguished true mind vividly appears before you.

The bewildering circumstances of sound, form, wealth, profit, and the like change in dazzling profusion. They seem like countless armies of Māra surrounding people on

every side, so that they cannot help being moved and linger among them, forgetting to return.

But if one can recognize that all these objects and circumstances are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—unobtainable and not to be sought—then by letting go once, one lets go of everything. Without expending effort, one immediately returns home and sits securely, carefree and at ease, enjoying peace. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “Knowing them to be flowers in empty space, there is then no further turning in cyclic existence.” It also says: “Knowing illusion is itself liberation; no expedient means are required. Liberation from illusion is awakening; there are no gradual stages.”

What difficulty, then, is there in cultivating the Way? Thus Laywoman Pang said, “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West is atop every blade of grass!” Yet because accumulated habitual tendencies run deep, they cannot be ended all at once. Therefore, one must maintain continuous and seamless contemplation at all times and in all places, struggle against deluded habits of clinging to appearances, and eliminate the stream of consciousness driven by present karma before one can dwell securely. At the outset, one will inevitably lose awareness and become attached to circumstances and feelings.

But so long as you heighten your vigilance and continue the struggle without slackening, with the attitude of treading on thin ice, you will gradually become thoroughly proficient. Amid all circumstances, do not forget awareness and contemplation; then progress from awareness and contemplation to quiescent contemplation; and progress further until even the traces of quiescent contemplation are dissolved. There is then no question of contemplating or not contemplating, and all day long one is like a fool or an idiot, yet one’s benefit is inexhaustible. May you strive diligently!

Your letter says, “In principle I understand, but in affairs I often forget.” This is precisely the difficulty we encounter in studying Buddhism. Because attachment-based habits from many lives and kalpas run deep, they cannot be transformed all at once. Therefore, one must remain aware and diminish them again and again until practice becomes fully mature; this is not the work of a single day.

As for your statement, “I have a strong sense of career and easily give rise to discriminating thoughts in human affairs,” that is the ordinary person’s way of speaking. If one follows the Buddha’s teaching to “give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere,” a strong sense of undertaking is precisely a necessary condition for benefiting and bringing happiness to sentient beings. Without such a mind, one becomes negative and merely cultivates one’s own welfare. “Give rise to the mind” means precisely giving rise to this sense of undertaking. Yet one must give rise to

the mind without abiding; one must not abide in affairs and give rise to discriminating thoughts. A difference of a hair's breadth leads to a separation as vast as heaven and earth.

When habitual tendencies arise and you wish to turn them but cannot, you may use the power of mantras to transform them. Vigorously raise up the sacred mantra, and any stubborn deluded habit can dissolve into emptiness in an instant. Of course, the speed of transformation differs according to the depth of one's meditative stability. But there is no need to be discouraged or regretful. Simply struggle through it, and the day will naturally come when the water flows and the channel is formed.

In practicing the Dharma, the most appropriate condition is not to see any appearances at all. For all appearances whatsoever are false and illusory; if one clings to illusory appearances, there will never be a day of seeing one's true nature.

The purpose of studying and practicing the Buddhadharma is to transcend birth and death. Awakening—seeing one's true nature—is only the forerunner to transcending birth and death. The ancients said, "true cultivation after awakening," for only after awakening can one recognize the true and the false, thereby safeguard one's intrinsic nature, and avoid being deluded by false appearances. This is what the Chan school calls the practice of safeguarding realization, and what the doctrinal schools call "eliminating delusive thoughts." When delusive thoughts have been completely eliminated and one is not deluded by circumstances, birth and death are transcended. This is according to the Chan school. In the Pure Land school, it need not be so: if one's Buddha-recitation is solid, then at the end of life a Buddha will guide one to rebirth in the Western Pure Land, and birth and death will be transcended.

Practicing the Dharma without slackening, you have realized freedom amid favorable and adverse circumstances, moving freely in every direction. This is indeed cause for celebration! Practicing the Dharma and studying the Way are for the sake of transcending birth and death and going beyond saṃsāra. Birth and death arise precisely because, when encountering circumstances, the mind gives rise to attachment and clinging. If one can encounter circumstances without generating thoughts of love or anger, grasping or rejecting, then birth and death has nowhere to gain a foothold. What is called realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is recognizing that the mind is originally unborn and that one's nature is originally natural and genuine.

It is the fundamental, great energy from which all things arise—the clear, numinous knowing that is distinctly present at the point where thought ceases. All things are but its shadows. As long as we recognize this principle, then when we see

appearances, we do not attach to their false forms but know them to be manifestations of our nature; thus we directly see our true nature. Having seen one's nature, one must then be able to pass through affairs unobstructed and remain entirely unmoved when all circumstances arise before one. Only then is it genuine awakening. Now that you can remain neither delighted in favorable circumstances nor troubled by adverse ones, this is truly gratifying and worthy of congratulations!

"Though intimate at a distance, we grow estranged when near." We need only apply ourselves at all times. Though separated by thousands of miles, we can still meet face-to-face every day; conversely, though we see each other daily, we may still be separated by the ends of the earth.

After leaving the meditation cushion, contemplate the mind: concentrate the strength of the mind and observe the state before a single thought has arisen. As soon as a deluded thought arises, immediately recognize and dispel it. Simply watch it. After a long time, the right mindfulness that watches and the deluded thought being watched will both dissolve together, and you will directly see what is original.

Because this Dharma is easy to accomplish, only those fully endowed with wholesome roots, merit, and virtue can undertake it.

A year passes easily, and all is impermanent. Another year has been added to the cap of our age, while our illusory lives have been shortened by another span. To those caught up in change, this permits no rejoicing; but for us practitioners, it brings neither worry nor concern. Fundamentally, we have no birth and death. Emerging and disappearing in this world and other worlds is merely an illusory play.

According to heart esotericism, where a deluded thought arises is like drawing on water: the moment the stroke is made, no trace remains. At the arising of deluded thoughts, practitioners should become thoroughly familiar with what is original. The Fifth Patriarch said, "A person who truly sees their nature sees their nature even while wielding a sword in battle." This is precisely what he meant.

Finally, let me introduce another koan to help you awaken and resolve your doubts.

Long ago, Chan Master Zhenjing was reading the Śūraṅgama Sūtra with his disciples. When they came to the passage in which Śākyamuni Buddha said, "If I press a finger, the Sea-Seal emits light," a disciple asked, "What is Śākyamuni Buddha's meaning?" The master replied, "Śākyamuni Buddha deserves thirty blows!" The disciple said, "What fault has the Buddha committed?" The master replied, "What need is there to press a finger?" The meaning is that the Sea-Seal—suchness, Buddha-nature—shines at all times.

Whether or not one presses a finger, it still shines. The disciple said, “Even so, whenever I stir a thought, deluded thoughts fly about in profusion!” The master shouted sternly, “That too is the Sea-Seal emitting light!” At that shout, the disciple had a great awakening. He said, “Ah! I have missed this right here for decades!”

See how swiftly and directly the ancients awakened to the Way. Could they still be entangled by deluded thoughts or carried away by external appearances? Since all appearances and deluded thoughts are the true mind, amid all appearances and deluded thoughts one need only see the true mind, and appearances and deluded thoughts are no longer seen. Not seeing appearances and deluded thoughts does not mean that there are no appearances or deluded thoughts; rather, all appearances and deluded thoughts are transformed into wondrous functioning. Can you attain this subtle awakening?

As for your strong attachment to your children, it is a habitual tendency accumulated over many lives. You need only see through everything in the world: whether husband and wife or mother and child, all is but a spring dream. When the mind no longer clings, it vanishes into nothingness.

I have received your letter. What you say is quite correct: awakening and seeing one’s true nature means recognizing it in the instant when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen. Yet this is only recognition. You must still exert yourself in circumstances, grinding away until the old habitual tendencies of attaching to appearances and grasping at objects have been swept entirely clean. Whether circumstances are favorable or adverse, remain wholly unmoved; at all times and in all places, see only the nature and not appearances. Going further, even nature cannot be obtained. Only when you remain all day as though foolish and dull can you reach the ultimate.

What you say in your letter accords deeply with the subtlety of the Way, and I cannot help but rejoice upon reading it. Yet take great care not to misunderstand “ordinary mind is the Way.” “Ordinary mind” does not mean the ordinary mind by which we attach to appearances. It means level and not crooked, constant and not temporary. When ordinary beings see forms and hear sounds, they are constantly turned by circumstances and their minds give rise to waves; thus they are crooked rather than level.

Those newly entering the Way have not yet stabilized their practice: at times they are empty, and at times they are not; thus they are temporary rather than constant. Those who truly apply themselves contemplate continuously and examine themselves constantly, until their practice becomes wholly mature and appearances are forgotten in complete integration. There is neither a subject that contemplates nor an object contemplated; neither level nor crooked, neither temporary nor

constant. This is the true ordinary mind. From this ordinary mind, one accords with conditions in daily life, with everything remaining as before. One displays no traces of supernatural powers and does not cling to extraordinary, wondrous functions. As it is said, “Still the same person as before, yet no longer walking the same ground as before.” Then one has truly arrived home.

“Opening up in samādhi” means attaining samādhi through Dharma practice and thereby opening wisdom. Once it has opened, one directly realizes that everything is illusory and that there is nothing to grasp. Thus, in daily life, one is open and unconfined in accordance with circumstances, allowing things to function naturally, carefree, peaceful, and at ease.

The great worthies of old directly realized that this true mind is not elsewhere but is present in everyday activity and function. Therefore, they rose and rested with the community, blended their light with ordinary ways, and did not make themselves conspicuous. Nor did they seek the abstruse and extraordinary in order to praise themselves. This is why there is the famous saying, “Ordinary mind is the Way.”

Then what, ultimately, is the true sign of arrival? To remain undefiled amid favorable and adverse circumstances; to use the mind while having no mind to use; to have neither defilement nor purity; to be able to enter Buddhahood and also enter Māra —going against the current: this is the true sign of having arrived home. You must constantly use this as a measuring stick for yourself and truly accomplish every point. Do not be careless or readily let yourself off. Thus it is said, “Whether one has attained the Way or not, one knows for oneself.”

Never allow yourself to be shaken when you see others emit light, explode, or display certain spiritual powers. Do not seek the mysterious and extraordinary, thereby smearing filth upon your own pure, undefiled, luminous Buddha-nature. If you do so, not only will you ultimately fail to become a Buddha; you may instead be in danger of becoming a demon. Remember this! Remember this!

As attachment to self lessens, it is entirely natural that your view of affairs and circumstances undergoes great change. That you now feel less attachment even toward those dearest to you is great progress. Yet lessening attachment does not mean that you do not care for them. It means caring without attachment. To care without attachment is right conduct. I hope that you will strive to do so.

Having read your letter, I feel deeply gratified. In a short period of study and practice, you have gradually dispersed, like dark clouds blown away from dense to thin, the deepest and most harmful root of suffering in this human world—attachment to one’s children. Although it has not yet been entirely eliminated, for you, in the prime of youth, to cut off so resolutely this life-and-death root of ordinary beings is truly not easy and exceptionally precious!

If we are to attain accomplishment in practicing the Way, we should temper ourselves amid all kinds of complex circumstances, without being swayed by any state. Throughout the day and night, we should keep the mind empty and pure, as though freshly washed. The moment a thought arises, immediately recognize it with stern clarity. Still less should we be moved to sorrow by circumstances, becoming mournful and afflicted. If one studies in this way, then although ordinary emotional feelings may temporarily linger, one day circumstances will be empty and emotional attachment will perish, and the subtle mechanism and wondrous functioning will be fully revealed before one.

People differ in sharpness and dullness; dharmas have no higher or lower rank. Whether one reaches the ultimate depends entirely on whether the practitioner can let go completely, without the slightest attachment. If you are constantly calculating gains and losses and never forget fame and profit, then even the most sublime Dharma beyond all dharmas will not bring you to the ultimate. If you truly wish to reach the ultimate, there is no practice, no attainment, and no realization. If a certain gentleman still has a Dharma to hold onto, he too has not reached the ultimate.

In studying Buddhism, awakening of mind is paramount: at all times and in all places, thoroughly see one's own nature and do not allow oneself to be carried along by affairs, things, or circumstances. Such a person is like a prince at birth, certain in the future to become an emperor and attain Buddhahood. Those who cultivate through provisional dharmas all fall into the second or third rank, belonging to the peripheral ranks of merit and achievement. However great your spiritual powers may be, you can at most attain the rank of king or marquis; how could you ascend to become emperor?

Since all affairs, things, and circumstances are manifestations of the wondrous functioning of my numinous and subtle true mind, when the eyes see all things, see only the true nature and do not allow their images to disturb you. To contemplate in this way at all times is to truly apply oneself. When the practice becomes fully mature, contemplation itself falls away, and one returns home to sit securely.

If you do not understand this principle but fix your attention on the ranks of merit and achievement, then whatever Dharma you practice and however diligently and painfully you apply yourself, because you still retain a Dharma, you will inevitably have to bow your head and acknowledge another as sovereign in the future. What a needless injustice! How sad!

When your practice reaches the point where you can advance no further and retreat no further, that is precisely the time when good news arrives. Who is it that knows

how to advance yet cannot retreat? Turn back and look within at this very moment, and a hundred charms will arise!

The ancient worthies compared this state to “a dog licking an oil cauldron”: it wants to lick but cannot, and wants to abandon it but cannot; this is the time when neither advance nor retreat is possible. At such a time, simply let this urgent, agitated mind that does not know what to do come to rest, and look at it. Then dog and cauldron are both empty, advance and retreat vanish, and immediately the banners are lowered and the drums silenced: there is joyful, clear peace.

I hope you will diligently apply yourself, safeguarding what is original at all times and not allowing it to become stuck or defiled by objects and circumstances. Then it can become continuous and undivided. If you do not do this, even undertaking a seven-day retreat will be in vain.

Regarding “ordinary mind is the Way”: this very numinous knowing that knows cold and warmth, hunger and thirst is our Original Face. There is no need to seek it outwardly, and still less should one attach even slightly to anything miraculous. In ordinary daily life, rise and fall in accordance with conditions, without grasping or rejecting, anger or attachment. This is why the ancients said, “Putting on clothes and eating food are it!” But as soon as one attaches to circumstances and allows anything to remain, it again becomes, “The moment the mind is raised and a thought stirred, it is already wrong.”

Your letter asks, “May I remain temporarily in this state and leave it only after my strength is sufficient?” Would that not become “allowing something to remain”? When the mind abides in something, it becomes deluded thought. To nourish deluded thoughts and hope to attain the Way is like cooking sand and hoping to make rice. How could that be possible?

At present, your strength is insufficient. You may diligently maintain contemplation, allowing nothing to become an object of abiding, and remain all day in quiet lucidity, lucid quietude. You must never become lax, abide in a state of comfort, and sink into an obscure realm of hidden delusion, ending in utter failure.

The capacity to awaken is the beginning of realizing the Way. If, following awakening at the level of principle, you truly strive to correct the deluded emotions that cling to objects and circumstances, applying yourself at all times and in all places to contemplation, then whenever a thought arises you immediately become aware of it. Do not merely work at this in words or writing. With time, you will be able to reach the state described in your letter: “When the discriminating mind comes to rest, the great Way appears before you.”

The Buddha taught all dharmas in order to liberate all minds. All dharmas are illusory; thus it is said that the Dharma itself is without any dharma. It is also said that all dharmas are equal, without high or low. Yet people today falsely give rise to discrimination, calling this good and that bad, delighting in this and loathing that. This is because their minds lack equanimity. Your place is naturally no exception.

Where there is aversion, there is delight; both are delusive appearances arising in opposition to one another. We should have neither delight nor aversion. Zhaozhou said, "I do not even like to hear the word 'Buddha.'" Yet he was still rebuked by the Chan worthies. How much more, then, should one not be averse to words?

You have not yet passed through the barrier of "leisurely ease." Regarding this, you need only know that attachment to leisurely ease is itself an illness, and refrain from clinging to it. Although you cannot eradicate it all at once, if you make an effort to work at it, it will naturally be exhausted over time. There is no need to hurry. If you do not recognize it as an illness and instead regard it as pure and wondrous, you will inwardly guard an obscure tranquility and fall into bewilderment.

Once, as Yaoshan was sitting on a rock, his teacher Shitou asked, "What are you doing?" Yaoshan replied, "I am doing nothing." Shitou said, "If you are doing nothing, are you not merely sitting idly?" Yaoshan replied, "Sitting idly is itself doing something." Shitou said, "Just so, just so." From this exchange between teacher and disciple, you can see that to fall into leisurely ease is already wrong.

"When external circumstances arise, my perceptions are keen; whenever a thought arises, I immediately become aware of it, but it is difficult to get rid of it." These words are self-contradictory. If you truly become aware of a thought as soon as it arises, what is there still to remove? The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: "Knowing illusion is itself liberation from it; liberation from illusion is itself awakening."

Since you are already aware when a deluded thought arises, that deluded thought dissolves invisibly; there is fundamentally nothing there, so what is there to remove? If you say that, although you know when a deluded thought arises, it still circles about in your mind and will not depart, then you have not truly become aware; you are still clinging to appearances. In that case, you must use the Chan hammer to strike dead this deluded mind that clings to objects. If you have found the right method through the word "forget," you may certainly use it.

When teaching, you should prepare your lessons. But do not cling. In dressing and eating, neither grasp nor reject; allow your original disposition to exhaust itself naturally—this is the great Way. When something out of the ordinary is encountered, awaken sharply and dissolve it. Such practice is not accomplished in a single step; it requires a thousand hammerings and a hundred refinements. You are

still young. So long as you strive toward this goal, the day will naturally come when conditions ripen. I hope you will make a good effort.

Your practice has reached the point of sinking into empty, dead stillness; when lecturing or writing, your mind no longer functions well either. These are signs that you are about to make a great leap forward. Do not be afraid. Do your utmost to work through it, and you will naturally attain the wondrous vista of “beyond the dark willows and bright flowers lies another village.”

II. Selected Excerpts from “A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One’s True Nature” and Other Writings

A Brief Biography of Master Yuanyin, the Third Patriarch of Heart Esotericism

On another day, while meditating, I saw an old woman seated serenely on a coiled-dragon chair, with an attendant boy standing beside her. She called to me, “Come, come! I have a scroll of the Heart Sūtra to transmit to you.” I replied, “This wordless Heart Sūtra is profound and inconceivable. How can you transmit it?” The old woman then rose from her seat, and I too bowed and withdrew.

A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One’s True Nature

If we can awaken alertly, then all sounds, forms, wealth, and profit are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water: they cannot be sought or obtained. If we then utterly let them go and abide nowhere, we can at once return to simplicity and authenticity, return home and sit securely, with no difficulty at all. As the proverb says, “Lay down the butcher's knife and become a Buddha on the spot.” So long as we are willing to let go, becoming a Buddha is also our rightful task, for we inherently possess these provisions.

Moreover, Buddhism is a great teaching for educating people to understand truth, abandon deluded views, turn from evil to good, leave what is deviant and return to what is right, and transform humanity. It is a wholesome Dharma that awakens people from their deluded dreams, frees them from grasping and selfishness, and enables them to serve the public and seek the welfare of all living beings to the utmost of their ability. More than this, it is a wondrous Dharma that enables sentient beings to abandon delusion and realize truth, lay down their burdens—the things to which the mind clings—and live with ease and joy, meaning and value, receiving genuine benefit.

The Diamond Sūtra says, “If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata.” If we can thoroughly investigate this principle, see true nature through appearances in daily life, and do not regard any circumstances or appearances as circumstances or appearances, then we immediately transcend all states of existence and roam freely beyond the three realms.

When one thoroughly awakens to the nature of mind, not establishing a single dharma, there are no Buddhas and no sentient beings. One may seem dazed and vacant all day, functioning spontaneously in accord with conditions; all of this is Buddha-work. As it is said, laughter and scolding, clearing the throat and swinging the arms, are all the sea-seal radiating light; putting on clothes and eating, carrying water and hauling firewood, are nothing but wondrous functions of spiritual powers. There is nothing to accept or reject, nothing on which to rely; therefore this is called returning to nothing to be attained.

The moment one attaches importance to something, it obstructs one’s own gate of awakening. Therefore, great masters of the school are skilled at helping people release their attachments and remove their bonds, causing students to lay down their heavy burdens and open the gate of awakening. When Mazu saw that someone had fallen into his earlier answer, “Mind itself is Buddha,” and a monk again asked, “What is Buddha?” he answered, “Neither mind nor Buddha!” Patriarch Linji feared that people would fall into the notion of “the True Person of No Rank within this lump of red flesh.”

Therefore, when a monk again asked, “What is the True Person of No Rank within this lump of red flesh?” Linji pushed the monk away and said, “What use is the True Person of No Rank—a dried shit-stick?” Again, in the second koan described in the fourth section, when Lingxun had an awakening upon hearing these words, he asked, “How does one safeguard realization?” Guizong said, “A single speck in the eye, and flowers in empty space fall everywhere.” These examples clearly show that true nature abides nowhere and does not establish a single thing. Therefore, if we are to thoroughly awaken to the true mind, we must neither cling to seeking Buddha nor cling to spiritual powers and occult marvels.

Zhaozhou said, “I do not like to hear even the word ‘Buddha.’”

Chan Master Zhenjue was reading the Śūraṅgama Sūtra with his attendant. When they came to the passage, “If I press my finger, the sea-seal radiates light,” the attendant asked, “What does this mean?” The master said, “That old fellow Śākyamuni deserves thirty blows!” The attendant said, “What fault has he committed, that he deserves thirty blows?” The master said, “Why press a finger?!” The attendant said, “But whenever a thought is raised, the dust-like toils arise first!” The master gave a great shout: “That too is the sea-seal radiating light!” The

attendant was greatly awakened and said, “Ah! For many years I thought that whenever a thought arose, it was a deluded thought of dusty toil. I did not know that it was originally the sea-seal radiating light!”

Everyone, look: how invigorating, clear, and direct are such instructions! Those who hear them may awaken at the very words; how could they not rejoice throughout their lives, with boundless delight? The difference between deluded thoughts and radiating light—that is, wondrous functioning—lies in whether one clings or does not cling amid daily activities, in responding to conditions and dealing with things.

If one clings, the sea-seal radiating light becomes deluded thoughts of dusty toil; if one does not cling, deluded thoughts of dusty toil are themselves the sea-seal radiating light. The Sixth Patriarch said, “If, at the point of turning, one does not linger in attachment, then amid the myriad activities one forever remains in nāga samādhi.” Master Hanshan explained: “To speak of transforming consciousness into wisdom, there is no other wondrous technique.”

“In the continual flow of thoughts in daily life, if one leaves emotional attachment and binds oneself to thoughts, wisdom becomes consciousness. But if, wherever each thought turns, the mind is free of attachment and does not establish the root of emotional clinging, consciousness becomes wisdom. Then, at all times, one constantly abides in the great nāga samādhi.” Master Hanshan also dreamed of ascending to Tuṣita, where Maitreya taught Consciousness-Only: “Discrimination is consciousness; non-discrimination is wisdom. Relying on consciousness brings defilement; relying on wisdom brings purity.”

“Defilement entails birth and death; purity has no Buddhas.” How concise and lucid these words are, like pouring sweet dew into a parched throat. How fortunate we are to hear them! If we do not now clear away the mist of delusion, clearly see Buddha-nature, and safeguard realization to completion in daily life, what is there still to doubt?

To think that great functioning is present only when spiritual powers are manifested is excessively attached to appearances and far too narrow.

You should know that what is called great potential and great functioning in the school refers to a way of conducting oneself in the world that is open-hearted, high-spirited, generous, ardent, bold, and exceptional; it means not being affected by any experience, not clinging when circumstances arise, and clearly recognizing the opportunity before it appears. As it is said, “Though Mount Tai collapses before one, one’s expression does not change; though deer spring up at one’s left, one’s eyes do not blink.” It does not mean manifesting or failing to manifest spiritual powers.

If we speak of spiritual powers, are putting on clothes and eating, invention and creation, not spiritual powers? If you say they are not, why did Layman Pang say, “Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning: carrying water and hauling firewood”? This shows that your disparagement of the ordinary functions of daily life as not being spiritual powers arises from your inferior tendency to cling to appearances, seek the miraculous, and delight in the occult. Put differently, your mind has never truly become empty and has never seen true nature; you still seek while attached to appearances. If you continue this way, then even if spiritual powers arise, they become a demonic path, because attachment has not been cut off.

Bodhidharma said: “When deluded, forms grasp consciousness; when awakened, consciousness grasps forms. If you attain the root, do not worry about the branches.” With direct pointing to see true nature, if one is genuinely convinced and free of doubt, one will surely let go completely, unite samādhi with wisdom, and in daily life become utterly settled and free of all clinging.

Even if deeply ingrained habitual defilements cannot be wholly purified at once, and particular circumstances still give rise to thoughts and impulses, as soon as the preceding thought arises, the following thought immediately recognizes it. One does not linger over it or become reluctant to leave it behind. With further continuous and meticulous polishing and unceasing tempering, one will surely reach the point where “the skin has entirely fallen away, and only one reality is revealed.” There is no need to worry that great spiritual powers will not manifest. Those who remain half-believing, half-doubting, hesitant and indecisive are another matter.

To summarize: when we are not thinking good and not thinking evil—when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen—there is empty quiescence without thought, yet it is not like wood or stone. Suddenly turn back and recognize this clear, numinous knowing as the Original Face. When there is neither confusion nor meditative stability, and one responds to conditions without the least clinging, this is realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.

If, in daily life, we see true nature through appearances and are not turned by appearances; if we recognize that all things and every appearance and function are manifestations of true nature and wondrous functions of mind; if we make use of things only for their benefit and are not used by things—this is realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. An ancient master said, “Pick up a blade of grass, and it is the sixteen-foot golden body.” This is a footnote to awakening; one must never imagine it to be something strange or occult.

For the strange and occult are themselves deluded thoughts. They not only obstruct one’s own gate of awakening and prevent realization of the mind and seeing of true nature, but also risk leading one onto a demonic path. Know that all spiritual powers

and occult marvels are founded upon realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. So long as, after awakening, one diligently removes the five hindrances—wealth, sensuality, fame, food, and sleep—and is not affected by any experience, then naturally, when the water arrives, the channel is formed, and all six supernormal powers will arise together. It is like the great roc, which flies tens of thousands of miles with a single flap of its wings, entirely by relying on a little force beneath its feet. If its feet do not first push off the ground, it has no way to take flight.

If this is not so—if, after this explanation, one still does not dare to settle the matter firmly or accept responsibility, yet wishes to realize the mind and see one's true nature—then it is better to practice Esoteric Buddhism and pass from Esoteric Buddhism into Chan; this is relatively less arduous and more reliable.

Therefore, after awakening, one must constantly observe and examine oneself and must not become careless. When a deluded thought suddenly arises, one may awaken sharply, or bring up Buddha-remembrance, until one reaches non-contrivance; only then is it ultimate.

It is also said: "When seeing forms and hearing sounds, simply be thus—that is, see forms and hear sounds as a bright mirror reflects things or as wind passes through trees, without producing any further thought. When putting on clothes and eating, simply be thus. When defecating and urinating, simply be thus. When dealing with people and things, simply be thus. Thus, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; in speaking or silence, joy or anger; at all times, in every instance, be just so. It is like an empty boat riding the waves, rising and falling with them, yet thought after thought does not abide; like flowing water winding around mountains, meeting curves and straight stretches, yet mind after mind is without knowing.

"Today, at ease and functioning spontaneously; tomorrow, functioning spontaneously and at ease. Following all conditions, without obstruction or hindrance; straightforward and without falsity, seeing and hearing ordinarily—then not a single speck becomes an opposing object, so what need is there for the effort of driving things away? Not a single thought gives rise to emotional attachment, so there is no need for the power of forgetting conditions."

But to speak with complete candor, all this is needless words that merely encumber sentient beings, unworthy of mention and an unnecessary elaboration. For all sentient beings are originally Buddhas; there is no need to cultivate or realize anything. Their wondrous functioning is originally boundless and their spiritual powers unobstructed. Simply function spontaneously in putting on clothes and eating, responding to conditions and dealing with things, without accepting or rejecting, attachment or seeking; then one is a Buddha such as one truly is.

Patriarch Linji said: “This solitary luminosity before your very eyes, without form or shape, clear as emptiness and continuously distinct, is a living Buddha and a living patriarch.” He also said: “The pure light of mind in a single thought is the dharmakāya Buddha; the non-discriminating light of mind in a single thought is the sambhogakāya Buddha; the non-differentiating light of mind in a single thought is the nirmāṇakāya Buddha.” He further said: “What I see is no different from Śākyamuni’s. In the many functions of every day, what is lacking? The spiritual radiance functioning through the six sense faculties never ceases—what else could it be but Buddha?”

Therefore, so long as our minds are empty at every moment, accepting and rejecting nothing in relation to all things and stirring no emotional thoughts, we may fully respond to conditions and deal with things without seeing a mind arising to respond. Once an affair is done, not even a trace of deliberate mental activity remains. Thus, one moves all day without ever having moved; throughout the day thoughts arise, yet not a single thought has arisen. Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, said in his Hymn of No-Mind: “Just when mind is employed, no mind is employed; when no mind is employed, it is precisely employed; constantly employed, it is precisely absent.” This is indeed the finest portrayal of no-mind.

Furthermore, the practice of no-thought does not mean gradually extending the interval of true emptiness without thought between the cessation of the preceding thought and the arising of the following thought, and calling that progress. For example, one may have no thought for only one minute today, then slowly extend it to five minutes, ten minutes, an hour, or even twenty-four hours, and call that success. You should know that no-thought is lively and dynamic; it is not rigid and inert like a block of wood or stone.

A monk asked Zhaozhou, “What is no-thought?” Zhaozhou said, “Striking a ball upon rushing water!” A later commentator said, “Thought after thought does not linger!” So-called no-thought does not mean that no single thought arises; rather, thoughts arise and cease as they arise, leaving not the slightest trace of abiding in appearances. Thus, as stated above, when thoughts arise in response to conditions, one does not see a thought arising. Since there is no arising, how could there be ceasing? With neither arising nor ceasing, it is called no-thought. When one is not responding to conditions or engaging with things, even though not a single thought arises, one is only as precarious as treading on a tiger’s tail or on spring ice: when conditions are encountered, thoughts immediately arise. It is not like the dead stillness and unconsciousness of wood or stone.

Therefore, if we temper ourselves deeply in ordinary life, so that the mind is like vast emptiness and does not fall into the snares of circumstances, remaining empty and non-abiding at all times and in all places, then our responses to situations will

naturally be swift and keen. Any saying or koan will reveal its point as soon as it meets our eyes.

In the mist, towers vanish; green overflows the stream crossing—Peach Blossom Spring is not apart from ordinary places!

Circumstances have neither good nor bad; distinctions lie in the mind. Let things take their course—do not erect the tree of views!

A bridge leaps like a long rainbow; fish convey letters of a foot's length. The scenery has always contained infinite variety!

Following conditions, let yourself be open and unconfined, drifting with the currents; gladly become spring mud to nourish the myriad flowers.

Having written this far, I could not help bursting into laughter. Suddenly, I heard someone say, "What are you laughing at? Are you not afraid that once you open your mouth, you will be unable to close it?" I gave a mighty shout: "Who has ever seen me open my mouth?" Precisely so:

Having spoken fully of the feelings of cloud, mountain, sea, and moon,

Yet the lips have never moved, nor has the mind stirred.

The jade rabbit conceives; the clam contains the moon;

The clay ox enters the sea; the wooden dragon chants!

Lectures on the Blue Cliff Record

Although the practice methods of our heart esotericism differ somewhat from those of the Chan school, the essential meaning of the Buddhadharma it teaches and the realization attained are exactly the same as in Chan. When practice reaches its end, there is no need to recite mantras, no need to visualize, and nothing at all to do. One simply remains broad and open, wholly present as one is, with an even mind; all distinctions naturally fade away. When cold, put on clothes; when hungry, eat.

Thus it is said that learning the Way is "difficult, difficult, difficult"—exceedingly difficult indeed! But is it really difficult? No. Why? Because we are originally Buddhas; it is not a matter of turning ordinary beings into Buddhas. So long as you are not deluded by false external circumstances, remain ever alert in mind, and let intention remain without grasping, you become a Buddha!

Do not cling to appearances. When you are free from the view of appearances, every affair and every thing is the great Way. What is difficult about that? Therefore, learning Buddhism and realizing the Way is not difficult. Do not be afraid, for we are

originally Buddhas! So long as you let go and do not cling to appearances, what else could this lucid, pure, spiritual radiance of a single thought be but Buddha? Thus Buddha-nature is not elsewhere; it is radiating light right before you all! Yet Layman Pang and his wife each said that it was difficult or easy, and thus still had something in which to abide; they had not reached the ultimate.

For our true wisdom does not establish a single dharma and is utterly bare. To call it difficult is wrong, and to call it easy is also wrong. Therefore, their daughter Pang Lingzhao said, “It is neither difficult nor easy: when hungry, eat; when sleepy, sleep!” This sweeps away the traces of difficulty and ease and returns to non-abiding. When you are hungry, eat; when sleepy, sleep. To let oneself be free and at ease, peacefully accepting and making use of what comes—this is the natural Buddha!

So long as, when eating, we do not conceive of ourselves as eating—though eating all day, we have not bitten a single grain of rice; and when sleeping, we do not conceive of ourselves as sleeping—though we may snore loudly, we remain lucidly aware and are not confused by delusive dreams. This is known only to oneself. Hence it is said, “Like one who drinks water, one knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm,” and “Whether one has realized the Way or not, one knows for oneself.”

When merit and fault are both obliterated and one is at ease everywhere, that is Buddha. If one is constrained everywhere and clings to appearances, one is seeking suffering for oneself and is not Buddha!

When practice reaches a certain point, it suddenly breaks with a snap and bursts apart with a bang. When one’s original nature opens, inwardly, body and mind, and outwardly, the world, all perish together without remainder. Where then are sages—Buddhas and bodhisattvas? And where are ordinary beings—Zhang San and Li Si? Though everything is absent, this is not like wood or stone; it is lucidly aware.

Who is it that knows this absence? It is the wondrously luminous true mind indicated by Patriarch Bodhidharma when he guided Emperor Wu of Liang to see the Way: “Vast emptiness, no holiness.” If we cling to appearances and retain within our minds views of sages and ordinary beings, we cannot see the Way. Only by relinquishing appearances and views can we see the Way.

At the very moment of opening, there is nothing seen, nothing heard, and nothing in which to abide: lucid and solitary brightness, with not a single thing present. This is the most crucial, hair-trigger moment! If practitioners fail to catch this moment and miss this experience, all their effort will have been in vain. Therefore, even if the divisions of before and after are cut off—that is, in the instant of true emptiness when the previous thought has ceased and the next has not yet arisen—this does not necessarily guarantee realization of one’s true nature.

Why? If at that time you do not recognize it and miss this moment, would not all your previous effort be lost? But if, at this very time, you seize it in one grasp… Ah, you ask what is to be grasped? Do you seize it with your hand? No. There is no hand here, nor is there any thing; what could there be to grasp? This "grasping" means that, at this hair-trigger moment which vanishes in an instant, the spiritual radiance flashes forth and one awakens in direct apprehension.

In the Chan school, this is called a "hu!" Turning oneself around and directly taking it up just as it is means recognizing one's intrinsic nature and awakening. Never suppose that there is some thing that has been captured or seized; that would be a mistaken understanding.

Because Buddhas and bodhisattvas bestow the aid of their great compassionate power, so long as one has deep, unwavering faith and attends to this morning and evening, remains devoted to it in ease and adversity, and advances without cease, the day will naturally come when the water flows and the channel is formed.

But if you remain here full of doubts and suspicions, wondering, "Can I do it? Will the Buddhas and bodhisattvas aid me? Perhaps my karmic obstacles are too heavy, and I will not succeed?" then things go wrong. Once doubt arises, one's strength is insufficient; practice becomes halting, and one cannot press forward courageously, struggle to the end, and complete this arduous and great task. So long as our faith is strong, we do not fear the distance, dangers, and obstacles of the road, and we throw our whole strength into advancing with vigor, we will certainly overcome all difficulties and realize the great Way!

On the one hand, sit in meditation to nurture samādhi; on the other, temper and cultivate yourself amid the affairs of daily life. Abide neither in emptiness nor in existence. Follow conditions in all things; undertake whatever work needs to be done, yet do it without clinging to doing it, with no mind of attachment or aversion. As the Chan school says, "Within mind, retain no affair; in affairs, have no clinging mind." One may be busy all day, yet have no affairs in the mind; having no affairs in the mind does not hinder one from being busy all day.

If, when doing things, you are carried away by the things themselves, that will not do. Quickly draw yourself back and let go; diligently maintain aware contemplation and refine your practice. If your power of self-awareness is insufficient, then sit in meditation more. Why? Because meditation cultivates the power of samādhi, enabling you to remain masterful and strong amid circumstances. If you do not meditate, your power of samādhi will be inadequate. When tempering yourself amid circumstances, you will become confused as soon as confusion arises, be dragged along by circumstances, and fall into delusion after awakening. This will not do; it is the most important critical point.

The Great Master Fu says in his Hymn on Transmitting the Mind: “Each night I hold the Buddha as I sleep; each morning we rise together. Rising and sitting, we are always together; in speech and silence, we dwell together. We are never separated by the slightest hair, like body and shadow.” See how clear and plain this is. Awaken from here, and you will be greatly fortunate. If you seek elsewhere, then even if you wait until Maitreya Buddha descends into the world, you will not find it.

This wondrously luminous true mind is originally bright and spiritually aware; it is not bright and spiritually aware through intentionally arousing thoughts. If there is even the slightest deliberate effort, it is wrong. It is like a bright mirror hung high, naturally shining clearly; it illuminates not through exertion or deliberate intention.

It is simply a matter of being natural and spontaneous, without expending the slightest effort, wholly present as one is, and functioning in accordance with conditions—neither abiding in or clinging to it, nor identifying with it. It does not mean forcibly killing off or obliterating this brightness and spiritual awareness. Moreover, no matter how hard you try to strike at it or grind it away, you cannot kill it or obliterate it. Indeed, the more you strike and grind, the brighter and more spiritually aware it becomes. Nor should you seek some principle apart from this brightness and spiritual awareness.

Finally, fearing that people might become attached to the patriarchs, rely upon them, fail to examine themselves or stand on their own, and cling there just as a divine turtle drags its tail and sweeps away its own tracks, Xuedou further offered an expedient means for people. Looking to his left and right, he asked, “Is there still a patriarch here?” He himself answered, “Yes!” Then he added, “Call him over to wash this old monk’s feet!” Why did Chan Master Xuedou so diminish the patriarch’s majestic radiance?

Because the wondrously luminous true mind is wisdom without a teacher, without reliance, without anything known, and without name or form. What can you call it? The moment you establish anything or attach to anything, you have already missed it.

We practitioners should draw a lesson from this koan. First, one must know that it exists and must protect it continuously and carefully; this is the initial good. Next, one must let it function freely and not guard it; this is the intermediate good. Finally, even the thought of deliberately not guarding the mind is gone; this is the final good. I hope you will all treasure this!

The explanation has been given, but Chan is not found in language and words. You must all penetrate beyond principles and doctrinal labels, directly realize your own mind, and only then will it do.

If the mind of a Chan practitioner can remain level and straightforward at all times, without crookedness, and respond continuously in every circumstance, then the radiance that manifests immediately and its free, wondrous functioning are themselves the Way. This is a passable way to put it, but it is not the orthodox teaching of the Chan school.

But where is this Way? Can it be realized through some method? Therefore, Zhaozhou further asked, “Can one still move toward it?” Nanquan replied, “The very intention to move toward it is already a deviation!” This means that if the mind entertains deliberation or has a direction toward which it moves, it has already turned away from the Way. How, then, can it realize the Way?

Regrettably, many who study Buddhism and practice its methods fall into deliberation and directed striving. When reading sutras or listening to Dharma teachings, they suppose there is some real dharma to obtain; when practicing diligently, they suppose there is some sacred realm to attain. Busily striving after such goals, they labor in vain. Is this not needless suffering? In truth, the Way is already complete and does not belong to cultivation or realization; moreover, everyone is nondual. It depends only on whether you are deluded by forms and appearances.

The great Way is vast and open, like empty space: not a single dharma is established, utterly bare, yet clear and distinct, with boundless wondrous functioning. To posit knowing is to put another head atop one’s head, utterly distorting one’s face; to posit not knowing is to become like wood or stone, unable to give rise to wondrous functioning. Speaking in terms of the school, it does not belong to knowing—for the public gate admits not even a needle; nor does it belong to not knowing—for the private passage accommodates carts and horses. Since neither knowing nor not knowing affords any foothold, what is there to say of Way or no Way, Buddha or no Buddha, right and wrong, gain and loss?

We who study Buddhism and cultivate the Dharma should likewise be so. Clarify the mind through principle, and reveal principle through the mind. Respond to conditions at all times and in all places with ordinary mind, and the Way will be found therein.

Those of us who study Buddhism must have great mind-capacity in order to remain unattached amid phenomena and enter the Way at ease. If one’s mind-capacity is narrow, one is constantly entangled with things, unable to let them go or empty them out, and thus fails to accord with the Way. A person’s mind-capacity has much to do with success or failure in cultivating the Way.

There are many people who have never cultivated any practice and do not even know to have faith in the Buddha. Yet they are naturally broad-minded and

generous, spirited and charitable; they commit no evils. When the time of death approaches, they too can know in advance that their time has come, arrange their affairs clearly, and depart with ease and composure.

Conversely, some people who have faith in the Buddha and cultivate the Dharma, when death approaches, not only cannot know in advance that their time has come, but instead weep bitterly in grief, unable to bear leaving.

Why is this? The former have broad mind-capacity: generous and open-hearted, able to take things up and let them go. Though they do not believe in the Buddha, they accord with the Way. Like still water giving rise to light, their minds are clear and wisdom arises, and thus they can know in advance that their time has come. The latter, however, have narrow mind-capacity, calculate over everything, and keep every matter in their hearts, unable to let it go. Although they have faith in the Buddha, recite the Buddha's name, observe vegetarianism, and sit in meditation, their minds are unclear and wisdom does not arise.

How then could they know in advance that their time has come and attain rebirth with ease? Those with narrow mind-capacity cannot even know in advance when death will come, much less realize the Way and become Buddhas! Thus it is said, "When heaven and earth grow narrow, sun, moon, and stars all go dark at once"—everything is finished.

When practitioners have narrow mind-capacity, they keep every matter in their hearts, where it remains firmly rooted and cannot be removed. No matter how one strikes or shouts at them, or tries to relieve their predicament, it is of no avail. For example, we say that karmic obstacles are originally empty. In the Chan hall, you seem to accept and acknowledge that "karmic obstacles are originally like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water; they are not truly existent," and your minds become relaxed. But when some people leave the Chan hall and encounter unpleasant circumstances, their minds inevitably become heavy again, and they feel that their karmic obstacles have become severe. This is because the mind that abides in appearances is too strong, and attachment is too heavy.

Those of us who study Buddhism should cling to nothing. When the mind is empty and non-abiding, mind-capacity becomes broad of itself without being sought; one realizes the mind and sees one's true nature of itself without seeking awakening. Only then can one undertake the great matter of the supreme vehicle.

Otherwise, one is always memorizing words and phrases, seeking the mysterious and marvelous, keeping matters in one's heart and unable to let them go. How could one then open the mysterious gateway and unlock the consciousness-lock, and see one's true nature? Therefore Patriarch Yuanwu Qin said that once your mind-capacity becomes narrow, even if patriarchs stood before you, striking and shouting

in rapid succession, it would be useless. Your attachments are too deep and your entanglements too excessive; even the patriarchs would be powerless.

Whatever school or Dharma we cultivate—whether Pure Land, Chan school, or Esoteric Buddhism—we must let everything go. If we do not let go, the Dharma cannot be cultivated to fruition.

Only by letting go of everything and applying oneself single-mindedly can one achieve anything. It is not something that can be attained through opportunism or clever shortcuts.

In the future, you need not ask others what state it is like when one opens the Original Face. Amitābha Buddha! This knowing awareness that is without knowing cannot be described; how could it be conveyed to you? Even if you encounter one with clear eyes, they can only approach it indirectly, setting off clouds to bring out the moon, using mind to seal mind. If your own mind is not yet clear, you will not understand even if it is explained. As the Chan school says: “When meeting a swordsman on the road, one must present a sword; do not offer a poem to one who is not a poet.”

If you say that you have seen something, then you have seen a ghost, not the Way. The Diamond Sūtra states this very clearly: “All appearances whatsoever are false and unreal.” Seeing Buddhas or lights is not it; whatever is seen is not true seeing. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra explains it still more clearly: “When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing; seeing still stands apart from seeing, and seeing cannot reach it.”

Whatever is seen is not it. Therefore, in the future do not inquire of others; instead, apply yourselves personally. Open the Original Face and directly realize and know for yourselves, so that you will not be deceived by others. After opening it, however, it is permissible to seek verification from one who has gone through it.

Before that, asking about others is most harmful: first, one looks at another’s experiences in order to judge whether that person has awakened, rashly making conclusions. Second, one falsely increases one’s views, imagining that awakening is some particular state and wishing to obtain some news of it oneself. Once this view arises, not only will one fail to obtain such news, but one will be unable even to enter samādhi.

For the single thought of seeking news is itself a deluded mind. With deluded thoughts arising in confusion, can one still enter samādhi? Third, when others have experiences, one thinks, “Why do I have none?” One becomes inwardly anxious and distressed, unable to sit at ease; or one resigns oneself to inferiority, makes no

effort to advance, grieves and sighs, and lacks strength in practice. Worse still, one may become jealous of others and slander them. That is even more undesirable.

Finally, Yuanwu Qin gave this instruction:

“To utter the word ‘Buddha’ is to drag through mud and water; to utter the word ‘Chan’ is to fill one’s face with shame.”

To utter the word Buddha is already a defilement, for it is a state in which not a single dharma is established and one is utterly bare. How could there be names such as Buddha or bodhisattva? Therefore, if one utters the word Buddha in the Chan hall, one must carry three loads of water to clean the hall. To utter the word Chan is likewise to be bound by Chan. The Original Face is clear, empty, vast, and thoroughly open, with neither gain nor loss; how could there be such idle names?

If you have attained something, if there is a Chan for you, then you ought to be full of shame. Why? Because you have not yet become truly empty and pure; there is still something before you, and you cannot accord with the Way. Those who have truly arrived home spend their days as if foolish and dull: no Buddha, no Chan, not even a no-Buddha or no-Chan—only eating when hungry and sleeping when tired.

If there remains a Buddha or Chan, you must sweep it clean. Only then are you a carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance. Since Buddha cannot be obtained and Chan does not exist, what then of past, present, and future, or east, south, west, and north? Once one has thoroughly awakened to emptiness and purity, time and space are both empty words.

Previously, we discussed a koan: one person said that having a Buddha while practicing the Way is most intimate, while another said that no Buddha is most intimate. In fact, both having a Buddha and having no Buddha are wrong; both remain attached to whether Buddha exists or not, and neither is free of a resting place. If you entertain the thought, “I cultivate Chan, realize the Way, open the Original Face, and see my true nature,” how ashamed and mortified you should be!

The Faith in Mind Inscription says: “The supreme Way is not difficult; it only rejects choosing and selecting. Do not love or hate, and it will be clear and open.”

This tells us plainly and without concealment that there is nothing difficult about realizing the supreme great Way. We need only refrain from discriminating and choosing in our daily activities, refrain from loving, hating, grasping, and rejecting, respond with a straightforward mind, and abide nowhere; then the great Way is right before us. Chan Master Zhaozhou regularly used these two lines to instruct the assembly and point them directly to seeing the Way.

From this, we can see that studying the Way is very direct and convenient; there is no difficulty. We need only courageously relinquish the empty fame and false profit of the world, abandon the habitual tendencies of craving illusory circumstances, and at once cast off this body and manifest what is inherently present. Since we are originally Buddhas, we have become ordinary beings only because we are deluded by forms and attached to worldly objects, thereby obscuring the luminosity and wondrous functioning of our true nature. Thus we need not exert ourselves to seek it, much less pursue it outwardly.

All sentient beings are originally Buddhas. Yet, suffering without knowing it, they pursue external objects, create karma and undergo karmic retribution, and vainly suffer birth and death in the cycle of the six realms. Is this not grievously unjust? If, in daily life, we neither choose nor discriminate, neither love nor hate, neither grasp nor reject, but let go of every craving and attachment, dress according to conditions, eat as circumstances allow, and keep the mind open and empty, pure and bare, without establishing a single dharma, then we are living Buddhas. Thus, cultivating the Way is not difficult.

Since cultivating the Way is so easy, why does everyone say that it is difficult? The difficulty lies in being unwilling to let go!

Therefore, the essential secret of our practice lies in letting go of everything and abiding nowhere. Thus Master Sengcan begins by saying: “The supreme Way is not difficult; it only rejects choosing and selecting.” If we keep these eight words in our hearts at every moment, remain vigilant everywhere, and do not engage in discrimination, grasping, or rejection, then realizing the Way will not be difficult.

Conversely, if we fear difficulty and do not advance, or seek mysterious and marvelous things elsewhere, difficulty is compounded by difficulty. Layman Pang said, “Hard, hard, hard—like spreading ten loads of sesame oil atop a tree!” This describes the difficulty of cultivating the Way without knowing the essential secret and without being willing to apply oneself courageously and wholeheartedly. Pang’s wife responded, “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the Patriarch’s coming from the West is upon the tips of a hundred grasses.” Every thing and every phenomenon is the wondrous functioning of the true mind, fully present and ready-made; it is there for the taking. It is exceedingly easy—what difficulty is there?

Cultivating the Way is making a revolution: revolutionizing one’s own life, not that of others. One must overthrow the life of attachment to material desires. Wang Yangming spoke of “investigating things to extend knowledge”; this means eliminating the selfishness of material desires and extending innate knowing—that is, bringing forth the true mind. The reason practitioners are unwilling to

revolutionize their own lives and instead shield their attached minds lies precisely in their inability to let go.

Can you preserve what you cling to and refuse to release? Everyone must die. If you do not let go now, you will still have to let go in the end. Rather than being unwilling to let go at the end but forced to do so, becoming a ghost guarding wealth, it is better to be wise and let go of everything now, becoming a person of the Way who has transcended birth and death.

Some utterly foolish people even place the objects they cherished in life inside their coffins. What use is that? Can they take them away? It merely invites petty thieves to covet the valuables and commit the disgraceful acts of digging up graves and robbing tombs. Such foolish conduct is truly both sad and laughable. We should now have wisdom and let go of everything early, enjoying ease and freedom. Why seek trouble for ourselves by clinging and refusing to let go, only to become wronged ghosts caught in the cycle of the six realms, unable to end birth and death?

Do not discriminate among or abide in any state, such as seeing light, seeing a Buddha, or seeming to have some object before you that cannot be pushed away or left behind. However fine such states may seem, they are all illusory appearances, always states of the skandhas; do not grasp at them. The true state is the state of no state. To settle upon a state of no state is still discrimination and attachment. One who has truly realized the Way has no state to attain and nothing to say.

For practitioners, indulging in clever tricks is an especially grave taboo. Once one does so, one cannot practice honestly and wholeheartedly, but instead wants to resort to tricks, seek shortcuts, and go through the motions. One may even claim attainment without having attained, and mistake what is not for what is, thereby ruining one's own bright prospects for realizing the Way. This is precisely the fault of practitioners who have worked diligently for many years yet cannot realize the Way.

Long ago, Confucius asked Laozi about the Way, and Laozi said, "Smash your cleverness!" Was he not likewise teaching Confucius to relinquish worldly knowledge and intellectual cleverness before he could enter the Way? Therefore, to enter the Way, one must certainly negate this notion of "understanding" and leave the mind utterly open and empty; only then can great prajñā wisdom arise. Those who have fully cultivated the mind do not contend with the world. All day long they seem foolish and dull; how could they engage in idle judgments? Thus the master said, "This old monk does not dwell in understanding."

This means that, at the beginning of practice, one must at all times and in all places contemplate one's own intrinsic nature, abiding in the original ground without shifting. As one's practice gradually matures, the contemplation is no longer needed, and one naturally remains unmoving in the original ground. Going a step further,

even the “self” is no longer needed: self and other merge into one, and the self naturally disappears. Finally, as practice deepens, the one is transformed into zero; there is nowhere one is not, yet nowhere one abides, and even “abiding” has no place to stand.

Reading koans is like looking into a mirror: one examines the level one’s practice has reached and whether it differs from that of the ancients. If there is any deviation, one can correct it in time. If one’s practice has not yet reached that point and one does not understand, that is of no consequence. One need only set one’s course aright according to the koan’s instruction and align oneself with the proper direction. When one’s practice eventually reaches that point, one will naturally accord with it and will not stray onto a wrong path.

(I) Realizing the Way is not difficult. One need only recognize that all objects and circumstances are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water: unobtainable and nothing to grasp. Leave the mind utterly open and empty, without the slightest attachment or abiding, and never indulge in love and hatred, grasping and rejecting.

(II) In practice, one must be able both to gather in and to release. In daily activity, one must apply this flexibly and not rigidly; constantly reflect upon oneself and turn the light inward in every situation.

(III) After seeing the Way, one must continuously and closely safeguard realization; do not let it fall into neglect. Yet even in this work of safeguarding realization, one must not abide anywhere. One cannot safeguard merely for the sake of safeguarding; one must be flexible, as though safeguarding yet not safeguarding. When safeguarding realization is fully mature, safeguarding is no longer present, nor is letting be perceived. When Lingxun visited Guizong after realizing the Way, he asked, “How should I safeguard realization?” Guizong said, “A single speck in the eye, and flowers in empty space fall everywhere.” This means that if there remains an idea of safeguarding realization, it is like a speck in the eye and is no longer right.

(IV) Although there is no knowing, this is not to fall into an unknowing stupor, dead and motionless. When the garden steward asked Liangshan, “What should one do when it is difficult to guard against the thief within one’s own house?” Liangshan said, “Recognizing it prevents resentment.” The steward further asked, “What about after recognizing it?” Liangshan said, “Demote it to the land of the unborn.” The steward asked again, “Could this be the place in which one settles one’s life?” Liangshan said, “Dead water does not harbor dragons.” If one dies there and remains unmoving, all is lost.

When practitioners have exhausted all calculating, they invariably return to simplicity and authenticity, wholly allowing things to be natural. Hence it is said: “At

the horizon, the sun rises and the moon sets; before the railing, the mountains are deep and the water cold." When the sun rises in the sky, the moon sets in the west; the deeper and loftier the mountains beyond the gate, the colder the water becomes.

Such scenes, wholly free of contrivance and entirely natural, are precisely the wondrous functioning without contrivance of practitioners whose minds are empty and non-abiding, who live and act in accordance with conditions. Yuanwu said, "How can practitioners attain stability? When wind comes, trees move; when waves come, boats rise. Spring brings growth, summer maturation, autumn harvest, and winter storage. With an even mind, all naturally comes to an end." Is this not simply allowing things to be natural, without any contrivance? When practitioners reach this point, whether you call heaven earth or earth heaven, every word is fitting; nothing is not so.

Meditation alone cannot completely eradicate habitual tendencies. One must temper oneself amid all kinds of favorable and adverse circumstances before they can be fully removed. Moreover, if one relies on sitting meditation alone and sits until the mind is dead, entering the samādhi of cessation, not only will one fail to become a Buddha, but one may instead become like earth, wood, metal, or stone.

Buddha means awakening. One must awaken to the fact that all things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows—utterly unobtainable. Awakening carries the sense of illumination; one must constantly contemplate with care and never be negligent. Our ordinary speaking, walking, and working are all functions of Buddha-nature. One must practice continuously and closely, contemplating and protecting it. One must not let the mind arise in pursuit of circumstances or abide in attachment.

When healthy, do not entertain thoughts of health; when ill, do not entertain thoughts of illness; when dressing, do not entertain thoughts of dressing; when eating, do not entertain thoughts of eating. If one practices this continuously and closely, leaving the mind empty, pure, open, and unconfined, how could one fear being unable to realize the Way?

In our practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the mantra continues without interruption during meditation sessions, and off the cushion we maintain continuous and close contemplation, attending to this mind from all sides and not allowing it to race outward. Therefore, all attain realization.

We who cultivate the Way should do likewise: at every moment, meet all circumstances with our fundamental matter, and do not become attached to states, appearances, or spiritual powers. Examine yourself from two ends to see whether your practice has progressed: when afflictions arise, and when joy arises.

When afflictions arise and the mind suffers greatly, can those who recite the Buddha's name refrain from forgetting it? Can Chan practitioners raise the huatou? Can we who practice heart esotericism still sit in accordance with the Dharma and maintain continuous, close contemplation? When happy events come—promotion, wealth, praise, or respect from others—we become overjoyed. At once we cannot recall the Buddha's name, cannot raise the huatou, and forget sitting meditation and contemplation. If we are turned by circumstances in this way, how can we realize the Way? Practitioners should remain unmoved by the eight worldly winds.

Of the eight worldly winds, four are favorable circumstances and four are adverse circumstances. Adverse circumstances are coarse, while favorable circumstances are subtle. The coarse are easier to notice, but the subtle are not easily dealt with. You should examine yourselves from these two ends.

Chan is Chan because it is original and free, following what is natural, utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. Whether there is a dharma, someone to guide others, or even a Buddha to be attained is irrelevant. Such "clever" people would be better off knowing a little less doctrine; the more doctrines they know, the more they hinder themselves.

It seems that such people have existed since ancient times, not only today. They do not genuinely investigate, do not give rise to a sense of doubt in Chan practice, and do not apply themselves; they merely indulge in deluded thoughts and discuss doctrines. Therefore Chan Master Yuanwu Qin said, "What has it to do with anything? Not even in the year of the donkey has it been dreamed of! You merely let the affairs of the ancients pass you by."

"Letting the affairs of the ancients pass you by" means falling into discriminating consciousness and missing the opportunity to realize the Way oneself through the causes and conditions presented by the ancients. At this point, some may inevitably ask, "Is Chan not found in everyday activity? Are not all functions the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature? How can you say they are not?" Yes, all daily activities are functions of Buddha-nature. But one must not take them as something real or abide in them. Once there is any abiding, it becomes a fixed rut and is no longer so.

To recognize one's original nature is only to reach the edge of the dharmakāya. One must urgently and continuously safeguard realization, contemplate at all times, refrain from following thoughts as they arise, and remain without attainment or seeking. Only by being vividly and singly clear throughout the day and night does one enter true abiding in the dharmakāya. One must go still further: even this single clarity must be unobtainable. Only by directly realizing the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya can one perfect the fruition of Buddhahood.

From this we can see that the great patriarchs who realized the Way were broad-minded, utterly bare, clean and pure, without the slightest obstruction or concern. It is like clouds dispersing from the vast sky, revealing a clear blue heaven, immeasurable light illuminating the lands of the ten directions. At such a time, throughout past and present and the ten directions above and below, one may move freely in every direction; at all times and places, all is equal and unobstructed. How could there be any separation between good and bad, right and wrong, being and nonbeing, correct and incorrect? If one even slightly inclines toward something or makes the least grasping or rejection, one becomes blocked and hindered.

“Killing without blinking an eye” means killing your deluded emotions, killing your calculations of discriminating consciousness, and killing your grasping-and-rejecting mind. When these have all been killed and the deluded mind has died completely, it comes alive again, thereby saving the wisdom-life of your dharmakāya.

If we are truly willing to apply ourselves, it is enough that simple vegetables taste good and plain clothing keeps us warm; there is no need for excessive desires. If we keep ourselves busy seeking things externally, then when death arrives, we can take nothing with us. This is called “toiling over one’s spirit,” and it creates karma of birth and death. I urge you all: you are originally Buddhas. Contemplate at all times, do not attach to appearances, and recognize that both mind and circumstances are unobtainable. Only when intrinsic luminosity shines alone, far transcending sense faculties and their objects, can one be carefree and at ease—only then does one have a share in true freedom.

So long as our minds are empty and non-abiding, unchanging while according with conditions and according with conditions while remaining unchanged, whatever we take up at hand is wondrous functioning. We can both eliminate deluded thoughts and attachments (“killing people”) and bring forth all kinds of wondrous functions to benefit living beings. At the same time, we can serve as examples for others and guide them into the Way (“bringing people to life”). When killing people, we will never blunt the blade and injure our hand, leaving lingering ties; when bringing people to life, we will never fall into fixed patterns or spin endless tangled explanations. Why can this be so free and untrammeled, so adept at both taking away and giving? Because “the precious sword of spiritual sharpness is always manifest before us.”

All of you must practice courageously and diligently; do not be lax. If, having obtained a method of practice, you drift along idly and lazily, practicing today and stopping tomorrow, how can you realize the Way? The place of practice is a field for selecting Buddhas. If you do not apply yourself, you will not be selected. Strive diligently until you truly realize that the mind is empty and non-abiding; only then are you fit to be chosen.

What is meant by “letting go”? When there is nothing to let go of, that is genuine letting go and complete liberation. If there is still something to let go of, one has clearly not attained complete liberation and has not truly let go.

Discussing the koans of the ancients is not a matter of judging their rights and wrongs, strengths and weaknesses case by case. Rather, we use koans as a means to rectify the views of ourselves and others and to open the true eye of prajñā in the present moment.

Chan Master Zhaozhou once said: “When this old monk was traveling as a mendicant, apart from the mixed and distracted use of mind involved in the two daily meals of gruel and rice, there was no other use of mind. If it is not so, one is far, far away!” To have no mixed and distracted use of mind at all times and in all places is never to depart from one’s own nature. By safeguarding realization continuously and seamlessly in this way, nurturing the embryo of sagehood, one naturally attains the proper abiding of the dharmakāya. Then, from beyond the dharmakāya, immeasurable and boundless wondrous functions arise: where originally there are no dharmas, one expounds eighty-four thousand Dharma gates; where originally there are no sentient beings, one liberates immeasurable and boundless sentient beings.

We are the descendants of Śākyamuni Buddha, and we must be upright in conduct and upright in speech. Our words and actions are exceedingly important. At all times and in all places, we should be upright and selfless. Every word we speak should accord with the fundamental meaning of Buddha-nature; in all that we do, we should act without contrivance while leaving nothing undone. Open-hearted, honorable, genuine, and free from hypocrisy, we will then not be slandered by others.

Not only will we avoid bringing disgrace upon our ancestors, but we will also enable the unsurpassed great Dharma handed down by them to flourish. Nowadays, some people call themselves Buddhists but set a poor example, thereby inviting this unpleasant saying: “If you seek a black-hearted person, look among the vegetarians and followers of the Way.” What a grave offense! What disgrace they bring upon the Buddhas and patriarchs!

Whatever the patriarchs say, students cling to; this is because students’ habitual tendency to cling to the mind in response to circumstances is too deep. Can you “let go of one move” and directly realize it from beneath your heels, from what is nearest at hand? If you can directly realize it—heavens, heavens—it is just this! If you cannot directly realize it—heavens, heavens—how pitiable, how pitiable!

(The first two pieces were originally serialized in the magazine Chan, issues 1–4, 1992; the latter three were compiled in 1998.)

Awakening certainly does not consist merely in understanding some textual meanings and principles, delivering a few clever Chan responses, offering a few turning words, or composing a few verses with literary flair. Still less does it consist in being physically healthy, materially comfortable, and relaxed, cheerful, peaceful, and at ease.

Those Chan practitioners who speak mere verbal Chan and display literary flair may, for a time, appear not to lack a Chan flavor. Yet this is only a temporary false appearance. Their minds are not truly empty and open through and through; something always remains before their eyes. Even if they reluctantly calm their minds and sit in meditation, something still faintly remains in their minds. Their luminosity can never break through completely. How, then, can they dissolve body, mind, and world, and directly realize their

original nature? Since they have not directly realized their original nature, how can they still their monkey mind and horse-like thoughts and attain great samādhi in serene ease? Thus, once adverse circumstances arise, that peaceful and joyful state of mind of which they usually speak vanishes without a trace.

Some arrogant people cite the Heart Sūtra and the Diamond Sūtra, saying, “Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form”; “all appearances are illusory.”

Since all objects and appearances are illusory, unreal, and unobtainable, they say, then whether circumstances are favorable or adverse, beautiful or ugly, I need only respond to them without mind and not be drawn along by them. Why should I investigate Chan or recite the Buddha’s name? If there were Chan to investigate or a Buddha to recite, would that not be adding delusion upon delusion? These words may seem correct enough, but once they encounter adversity or suffer an unexpected mishap, everything comes to nothing.

Others mistakenly think that one awakening settles everything. Having initially broken through the fundamental matter, they believe they have arrived home and no longer diligently engage in contemplation or temper the mind through circumstances. As a result, their habitual tendencies remain as before; they become arrogant and conceited and gain no genuine benefit. In the end, they fall into delusion after awakening and continue to drift in birth and death. Is this not bitterly unjust?

Finally, I offer three further answers to Xueyan’s question, to share with fellow practitioners and also as a gift of introduction upon meeting Chan Master Gaofeng:

(1) Question: Can you be master of yourself during the day?

Answer: When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep.

(2) Question: Can you be master of yourself in dreams?

Answer: The morning sun rises; the moon embraces the mountains.

(3) Question: When there are no dreams or thoughts, no seeing or hearing, where is the master?

Answer: The great void drinks in the light, dispelling long separation; the wind stirs the pale-green willow threads lightly.

An ancient worthy praised the ever-abiding nature of worldly appearances in the Lotus Sūtra, saying:

“The worldly appearance ever abides; yellow orioles sing in green trees. Truly, it is most endearing: touch it, and it flies away!”

Our dharmakāya is just so splendid and carefree: nothing is lacking within it, and there is nothing it does not know. Yet this boundless, beautiful scenery cannot be portrayed. As Chan masters say, “What exquisite charm—it cannot be painted!”

Someone asked whether Buddhist practitioners should also practice qigong, apart from cultivating the Dharma, as a supplementary aid. I once composed a verse in response. It also addresses safeguarding realization after awakening, and I record it here:

The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate gives birth to kings; why borrow qigong to sharpen its brilliance?

Seeking dharmas outside the mind in hopes of gain only brings fruitless toil and emptiness.

When faculties and objects fall away, self-nature appears; safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly—do not lightly forget.

Stand firm without partiality; seek nothing, and the Way is ever true.

If one still harbors the intention to seek outwardly, the hope of gaining something, constantly speculating about what the dharmakāya really is, or trying to determine how the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya may be attained, then one is still playing with shadows. One has not truly awakened to the original nature and cannot be called a person of the Way.

There is no need to speculate or seek. Once you recognize what is inherently present, cease delusive thoughts and eliminate habitual tendencies. Never forget,

thought after thought, that this True Person is the Buddha and the patriarchs.

Master Hanshan said: “The reason prajñā brings accomplishment so swiftly is that everyone inherently possesses this intrinsic luminosity.” Master Guifeng said: “The true principle can be realized suddenly, but accumulated habits from many lives are difficult to remove at once. One must continually awaken to them and diminish them again and again before one can realize them completely.” Thus, realizing the Way is not difficult; what is difficult is not forgetting to safeguard realization after awakening. People today have more than enough cleverness but too little sincerity.

I have often seen people who have awakened to what is inherently present but, because their habitual tendencies are strong, are repeatedly carried off by circumstances. They drift with delusive thoughts without knowing to stop, so that their practice cannot advance. They end up half-ripe and half-unripe, or deluded after awakening—truly lamentable. Those who have not awakened need hardly be mentioned. But is it not unjust for those who have awakened not to return to the true in every thought and safeguard it strictly, allowing themselves instead to drift and sink?

In sum, provided that we do not fear hardship or the length of the road, correct our understanding, cultivate diligently, recognize that this spiritual knowing free of thoughts is our Original Face, safeguard it strictly, train unremittingly amid circumstances, and diligently eliminate delusive habits, then all things will return to ourselves and we will directly realize the perfect sacred fruition of the nonduality of things and self. This is by no means difficult.

As the proverb says, “Nothing in the world is difficult; one need only have the will.” Since no matter how difficult a task may be, anyone with the will to climb can accomplish it, then he is a worthy person and I too am a worthy person; if he can succeed, I too can succeed. What hardship is there to fear? Let us encourage one another in this.

This wordless teaching truly surpasses speech. Once, when Layman Fu was to lecture Emperor Wu of Liang on the Diamond Sūtra, he ascended the seat, struck the table once with his teaching ruler, then descended and returned to his quarters. Master Baozhi, standing nearby, said, “The layman’s exposition of the sūtra is complete.” Look how spirited, brilliant, and decisive this was! How could this vajra prajñā possibly be explained clearly through words?

Again, when Subhūti was seated in meditation in a cave, Śakra rained flowers upon him as an offering. Subhūti asked, “Who is raining flowers upon me?” Śakra replied, “I revere the venerable one for expounding prajñā so well, and therefore rain flowers as an offering.” Subhūti said, “I have never expounded the Dharma.” Śakra replied, “You have not spoken, and I have not heard.” This is the true essence of

prajñā! Thus, not speaking and not hearing are precisely true speaking and true hearing.

From this we can see that so-called spiritual powers are simply wondrous functioning without obstruction: not abiding in attachment to objects and circumstances, not being blocked or cut off by things, and responding to conditions without hindrance. This is a merit inherently possessed by everyone. It is altogether ordinary and nothing rare or miraculous, so there is no need to be startled or make a fuss over it, much less cling to it or pursue it.

Along the path of practice, besides the foregoing error of clinging to spiritual powers and seeking them, there are many common misunderstandings. I will briefly select several important ones below:

1. Valuing the extraordinary and mysterious while neglecting right view.

2. Clinging to dead emptiness, believing that emptiness and immobility are the Way, without recognizing that what functions ceaselessly all day long is the true nature.

This shows that those who merely abide in emptiness without recognizing the original nature possess only gold, not a precious jewel. To gain genuine benefit, one must, after recognizing the original nature, safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly and eliminate all old habits; only then can one gradually reach the profound. To remain constantly in emptiness can produce only a stagnant pool, like earth, wood, gold, or stone. This is an illness, not the Way. Therefore, those who truly realize the mind and see their true nature never constantly abide in dead emptiness.

3. Remaining constantly silent in samādhi, with not a single thought arising.

Ordinary people always suppose that one who realizes the mind and sees one's true nature must abide at every moment in silent emptiness without a single thought arising; otherwise, they think, it cannot be called awakening. In fact, to realize the nature of mind is itself the great dhāraṇī, capable of giving rise to every wondrous function and containing nothing lacking. If one guards an empty state in which not a single thought arises, unable to manifest it vividly in function, one is dead in the appearance of emptiness. Not only can one gain no genuine benefit, but one also has no way to see one's whole being through completely.

This Way must be utterly bare and wholly free; at ease in every direction, unrestricted in giving and taking; without a single thread, unstained by a single speck of dust. Stillness is possible, activity is possible; in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, nothing is impermissible and nothing is not permissible. Only this is true awakening.

4. Memorizing Buddhist scriptures and accumulating merit and virtue in the hope of awakening.

Many Buddhist practitioners, seeing that the Buddha says the merit and virtue of reciting sūtras are inconceivable, become attached to the appearance of merit and virtue. They value reciting many sūtras but do not investigate their profound meaning. They suppose that the more they recite, the greater the merit and virtue; indeed, that if they can recite them backward and forward from memory, the merit and virtue will be even more inconceivable, and that by accumulating such merit and virtue they can awaken. They do not realize that reciting in this way without understanding the meaning is merely like a parrot imitating speech. How can it open the mind and directly reveal Buddha-nature?

5. Valuing quick and clever Chan responses while neglecting actual practice.

People nowadays all assume that an awakened person must respond with quick and clever Chan repartee; if the response to an occasion is slightly slow, they conclude that the person has certainly not realized the Way. In fact, just as spiritual powers may not manifest after awakening until habitual tendencies have been eliminated, this is not a fixed criterion for judging whether a person of the Way has awakened.

In sum, what is most important in cultivating the Way is a pure and correct view and wholehearted, genuine investigation. We must not harbor even the slightest wishful hope, take shortcuts and stray into side paths, or pursue spiritual powers and mistakenly enter demonic ways. Still less should we heed false words that confuse our original nature, block the gate to self-awakening, and squander our time in vain, thereby missing an entire lifetime.

Thus, every word and action, every movement and gesture, is the wondrous functioning of our true mind. We remain amid this wondrous functioning all day long without knowing it, and instead seek it elsewhere. Is this not the height of foolishness? A great master of the Chan school once said, “Sitting beside a basket of food, countless people starve to death.” How lamentable!

To go a step further, if, at the crucial moment of asking about and hearing the Dharma, the mind has something on which it abides and wisdom is obstructed, then even if a clear-eyed Chan master gives intimate instruction, how can one seize that fleeting instant, silently accord with the subtle words, and clearly see one’s true nature? Thus, hearing through the ears is not spiritual power, yet neither is it not spiritual power; it is not not spiritual power, yet one does not become attached to spiritual powers. This is true spiritual power.

If we can do as described above—letting go completely, turning the light inward at all times in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and cultivating in a single

thought—then breaking through the emotional barrier of birth and death, releasing great radiance, and manifesting great spiritual powers will not be difficult. As it is said:

The insentient proclaiming the Dharma is nothing remarkable;

Hearing sound through the eyes is not extraordinary either.

Putting on clothes and eating are ordinary affairs;

They are all my wondrous functioning—do not doubt it.

Neither speaking nor hearing is grasped at;

Following conditions and letting things take their course, one naturally finds what is fitting.

If one can awaken to the fact that all sounds, forms, wealth, and gain are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, with nothing worth pursuing, and resolutely relinquish them without the slightest attachment, then there is no need to practice any method: at once one may return to one's original reality and sit securely at home.

Chan Master Guanghui Lian, in addressing the assembly, said: The Buddhadharma was originally without complication. All the sages of the past merely contrived strange things, speaking subtle, marvelous, and abstruse words that confused people's minds. Later, they taught people to investigate huatou, thereby further multiplying complications, oppressing the good and making them base, and burying their descendants. Then there were the likes of Yunmen, Zhaozhou, and Deshan, who remained utterly unenlightened and suffered injustice all their lives.

Here this old monk is not like that. Even if old Śākyamuni himself appeared, I would demote him to another world and send him down a road with no exit. Why? To prevent him from ruining my descendants. This is how this old monk speaks—how do you all understand it? If you understand it here, would that not be delightful? I will have you cast off your clothes and become carefree monks. If you do not understand, next year there will be new branches again, disturbing the spring breeze without end.

How thoroughly and decisively this saying speaks! Where is there any room for our deliberation or contrived effort? All we need do is remain content with our station, live in accordance with conditions, and not vainly raise thoughts or produce extraneous intellectual understanding—thinking that we must escape birth and death, cultivate practice and realize the Way, become Buddhas endowed with wisdom, eloquence, and spiritual powers, or establish a Buddha-land and Pure

Land. Right here and now is a bright and clear universe, a peaceful world. Without expending any effort, we may recover our innate Buddha-nature, sit securely at home, and joyfully enjoy peace.

Zhenjing Wen said: “The Buddhadharma is supremely subtle and without duality. If one simply knows one’s own mind as it truly is, one is ultimately a Buddha from the very beginning.” A verse says: “Buddha-nature is an innate matter; who says there is some other teacher? In putting on clothes and eating, in clearing one’s throat and swinging one’s arms, there is only the functioning of one’s own mind. When has it ever stirred what one conceives? Sentient beings are all equal, yet in daily life they themselves generate much doubt.” It is also said: “Do not set the mind to calculation: each and every thing is innate, each and every thing is clear and wondrous. Thus, being deluded about one’s own mind, one is a sentient being; awakening to one’s own mind, one becomes a Buddha.”

Foguo said: “Simply step back. The more you step back, the clearer it becomes; the less you understand, the more strength there is. As soon as a stray thought arises or a calculating mind is born, cut it off abruptly and do not let it continue. Then wisdom becomes completely clear; each step is firmly planted, and one naturally attains great liberation.”

Yunmen said: “Why have you all come here for no reason? This old monk merely eats and defecates—what else is there to do?!” He also said: “Students do not trust their own minds, do not awaken to their own minds, and do not obtain the clear and wondrous enjoyment of their own minds, or the peace, happiness, and liberation of their own minds. Outside the mind, they falsely posit Chan and the Way, establish strange and special things, and deludedly give rise to acceptance and rejection. Even if they cultivate, they fall into the realms of non-Buddhist paths, the two vehicles, Chan quiescence, and annihilationist views.”

But to return to the point: after recognizing this incomparably precious Buddha-nature, one must not become reckless and indulgent, imagining that there is nothing to do once one has reached home. One must protect it rigorously and nurture it properly, so that inwardly one does not drift with deluded thoughts and outwardly one is not carried away by objects and circumstances. Day by day and month by month, one gradually reaches fulfillment and can then truly benefit from it. Otherwise, if one is wildly unrestrained and lets oneself drift, nothing will come of it. Not only will birth and death remain as before, but one may mistake what has not been attained for attainment and sink into the lower realms. How can one fail to be cautious?

As for safeguarding realization, it is not inherently difficult. It is simply that, having long been accustomed to agitation, we are easily carried away by deluded thoughts

and external circumstances and forget to safeguard realization. Often, only after drifting for many turns with deluded thoughts and being swept along by circumstances for a long time do we suddenly awaken. Hence, practice cannot become continuous and undivided. The difficulty of safeguarding realization lies in not forgetting it at every moment.

An ancient worthy said: “Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only that awareness comes too late.” This is certainly no empty saying. If we can heighten our vigilance and concentrate the power of the mind on watching the point at which thoughts arise, without following them as they flow on; if, when any object appears before us, we do not cling to or become defiled by it, then within three to five years we can become continuous and undivided.

Furthermore, the practice of “safeguarding and letting be” consists of two stages, progressing from shallow to deep; they are not the same. “Safeguarding” means protecting, while “letting be” means allowing free functioning. In practice, one first begins with protection, just as an infant must be properly cared for after birth so that it does not die prematurely.

When the conditioned practice of protection has been brought to completion, and in the activities of daily life there is no longer any drifting away, one can enter the practice of “letting be.” Let things function freely: sit when it is time to sit and walk when it is time to walk, without any constraint. Only then can one enter the proper state of non-contrivance.

Going still further, one completely dissolves even the traces of non-contrivance. There is no question of non-contrivance or not non-contrivance. All day long one seems foolish and dull: when hungry, one eats; when sleepy, one sleeps. Only then does one truly benefit from it. But if, in practicing “safeguarding,” one applies oneself too tensely and holds too tightly, then after a long time one becomes dull as a wooden chicken, dead and unable to adapt. That is not right either.

Therefore, there are three difficulties in practice: first, recognizing the original nature, establishing a firm footing, and having no doubts; second, after recognizing the original nature, continuously and closely safeguarding realization without forgetting it; third, not protecting in a deadened way, but letting things function freely and vividly. Once these three have been passed, you alone will be honored in heaven and on earth!

Whenever the ancients moved or became still, whatever they happened to see or hear, they understood it in terms of the Way; therefore, they progressed rapidly. If we too, morning and evening, in wandering and adversity alike, diligently and steadfastly apply ourselves to contemplation, would we not likewise progress swiftly? It is only regrettable that Buddhists nowadays are lax and indolent. They do

not practice with earnest intensity, but spend all day pursuing spiritual powers and dabbling in mysteries, rather than applying themselves to the mind-ground. Thus, they squander their time and delay their future progress. How regrettable!

Speaking of capacities and functions, every movement and action is nothing other than great capacity and great function. One need only accord with the season and conditions, with the mind wholly without distortion or obstruction. This is what is meant by freedom in every direction, with neither restraint in gathering in nor in releasing. Green bamboo and yellow flowers are all subtle mysteries; enlivening and killing, granting and taking away—none is other than wondrous functioning.

To activate great capacity and great function, one need only, after recognizing the original nature, safeguard it continuously and closely, and diligently temper one's functioning amid affairs and circumstances. Remove every attachment, doubt, obstruction, and deluded habit such as greed and anger. When one's functioning has become thoroughly mature, one naturally enters the realm of great capacity and great function. Do not be intimidated by the word "great" and imagine something lofty and mysterious. All capacities and functions are wholly present before us: one need only be free of obstruction and doubt at the moment of encounter. Once doubt or obstruction arises, they fly away.

After recognizing the original nature, in our practice we need only attend at all times to safeguarding the original reality without forgetting it. When safeguarding becomes fully mature, do not cling to safeguarding without letting go; instead, let it function naturally. Even the most subtle deluded thoughts are then seen clearly, and one does not follow them as they flow on. In the end, all traces dissolve and are forgotten, and spiritual powers and wondrous functioning arise. One observes the capacities of beings as clearly as the lines on one's palm and applies appropriate wondrous functions as easily as taking something from a bag. There is no need to seek elsewhere or strain oneself over this in anxious agitation all day long.

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Discussing the Key Issues in Rebirth in the Western Pure Land

Fellow practitioners, let me ask you: if we truly possess the faith and vows described above, would we still keep calculating over and be unable to let go of the food and sexual relations, spouses, wealth, children, salary, reputation, status, and so forth of the Sahā world? Once we have let go of all these circumstances, which are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, what deluded thoughts could still entangle and confuse us? With no deluded thoughts to confuse us, then when we recite the Buddha's name, we will be as

Master Lianchi said above: as though personally before Amitābha, too busy being reverent, sincere, and earnest for any deluded thoughts to stir in disorder. Does this not attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction without deliberately seeking it?

In other words, so long as in our daily activities we respond in accordance with conditions, are not deluded by the false appearances of things, do not become inwardly attached or inwardly shaken—remaining quietly alert and alertly quiet, turning all things without being turned by things, making use of all times without being turned by time—this is seeing one's true nature.

From this perspective, the lofty state of one-pointedness of mind at the level of principle is our innate capacity; it is by no means impossible to attain. If we can realize one-pointedness of mind at the level of principle, our minds will be pure and undefiled, naturally corresponding with the Western Pure Land. Moreover, all Buddhas are originally of one body, and so we can become continuous and undivided with Amitābha; consequently, we can attain rebirth in the highest grade in the Pure Land.

Someone may say: "Easy to say, difficult to do." The reply is: Once we clearly recognize the essential principle, we need only make a firm resolve to struggle against our deluded habits, relying on a single Buddha-name as our weapon. Whenever a deluded habit stirs and we begin to cling to an external circumstance, immediately raise the great name and drive it back. Raise it again and again, drive it back again and again, day after day and year after year—need we fear that this cannot be accomplished? Moreover, for those of good capacity, there is no need for repeated vigilant awareness: as soon as they hear it raised, they immediately return home and sit securely.

Furthermore, one who has truly realized no practice, no attainment, and no realization does not speak of no practice, no attainment, and no realization. Once one speaks of no practice, no attainment, and no realization, is one not sitting precisely within practice, attainment, and realization?

Some have already seen their true nature, yet their accumulated habitual tendencies remain. They must employ continuous and seamless safeguarding realization, gradually eliminate these habitual tendencies, partially break through ignorance, and fully realize the dharmakāya. This kind of safeguarding realization is cultivation without cultivation.

This is because they do not rely on any dharma gate for cultivation, nor do they hope to gain or achieve anything. In daily life, they simply maintain a vigilant awareness: whenever a thought arises, a single awakening renders it empty; nor do they abide in that emptiness. They let things function spontaneously, at ease and

freely enjoying what arises. Eventually, there is neither awakening nor non-awakening, neither emptiness nor non-emptiness, neither freedom nor non-freedom. All day long they seem foolish and dull, with neither gain nor loss; only then have they reached home and completed the task. This kind of practice is what the Śūraṅgama Sūtra calls “gradual cultivation in phenomena, whereby the causes are exhausted in sequence.” Most practitioners today belong to this kind of sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation.

If the mind harbors fear, one will certainly lack the strength to act; and if one acts without strength, nothing can succeed. Therefore, steadfast confidence is the foremost essential. Success depends on human effort: as long as you first understand the principles clearly, find the key, and then press straight ahead without ever retreating, there is nothing you cannot accomplish.

Compassion to benefit beings fills the universe; before the brushstroke begins, the characters have not yet taken form.

Where there is Dharma to speak, one falls to the side of phenomena; where there is no Dharma to speak, clouds stretch ten thousand miles.

How pitiable are those seekers who probe the mysteries: in their dreams, their discussions of Buddhist affairs never cease.

One-pointedness of mind without distraction is no difficult matter; in every thought, Amitābha is clear in every word.

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Rebirth through Eliminating Karma and Rebirth while Carrying Karma

Many people who recite the Buddha’s name fall into becoming ghosts who guard their wealth because they covet gold, silver, and treasures; or become ghosts who guard the home because they are attached to their wives and children; or become corpse-guarding ghosts because they are attached to the physical body and captivated by the fine and splendid grave goods buried with it; and so forth. The ancient worthies said: “To hold fast to a post while rowing the oars—there is no way this can work!” That is to say, if we wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land but still cling to the Sahā world, it is like holding on to a post on the shore while rowing. No matter how much strength one exerts, the boat cannot move forward. How, then, could one be reborn in the West?

As long as we see through all the sounds, forms, wealth, profit, wives, possessions, children, and rank of this Sahā world, recognizing them all as dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows—unobtainable and therefore not to be pursued or coveted—and instead wholeheartedly and diligently apply ourselves to Buddha-recitation by

the method of “the mind recites and the ear hears,” then even the gravest karma will not be difficult to eliminate in the realm of no-thingness.

One may ask, “Why is it so easy?” Because karma arises from the mind; it does not come from elsewhere. Now, our every mind-moment is undivided, and every thought is on the Buddha. Buddha is mind, and mind is Buddha; the whole mind is Buddha, and the whole Buddha is mind. Where, then, could karma find a foothold?

(Published in Selected Writings of Guanghua)

A Brief Explanation of the Song of Liberation

Therefore, in practicing the Dharma and studying the Way, we must let go of everything and not give rise to deluded discriminations concerning names and forms. We need only apply ourselves single-mindedly. Whatever dharma gate we practice, attainment will then be easy. Otherwise, if we cling to names and forms and give rise to deluded distinctions, it will be difficult to reach the goal.

All things are illusory appearances manifested through change. There is nothing to pursue or grasp. Simply make use of things in accordance with conditions: do not discard what is present, and do not forcefully seek what is absent. Then wondrous functioning will be unobstructed.

In daily life, do not remain attached to any matter, endlessly pursuing conditions and thereby allowing afflictions to continue without cease. When an event comes, respond to it; when it has passed, let it stop. Leave not the slightest trace in the mind. Only then will one accord with Dharma practice.

Having understood this, we neither cling to emptiness nor cling to existence. Instead, we respond to conditions and engage with things, exercising inexhaustible wondrous functioning and doing all we can to benefit the community. Only this accords with the true meaning of the perfectly integrated and unobstructed Mahāyāna Buddhism. Some criticize Buddhism for inclining toward emptiness, but they misunderstand it. The emptiness spoken of in Buddhism is not an emptiness in which nothing whatsoever exists; rather, it means that all appearances are unobtainable and cannot be grasped. It does not mean that there are no appearances or no world. Is not the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss exceedingly beautiful?

All appearances are shadows within our own minds. We can neither cling to existence nor, because all appearances arise dependently and lack inherent nature, fall into biased emptiness. If everyone can awaken to this and exercise all manner of wondrous functions in daily life with perfect integration and without obstruction,

they will naturally enter Buddhahood and directly realize the Tathāgata's true and wondrous nature.

Therefore, nature is precisely appearance, and appearance is precisely nature. Once one realizes this principle, one enters deeply into the gate of nonduality in the snap of a finger. In practice, never divide things into categories or contend over their merits and shortcomings.

Once the scene can no longer be concealed, it stands naked before one face-to-face.

After realizing the Way, our joy is boundless. Knowing that everything is but an illusory image manifested by our own mind, we no longer pursue it. Formerly, clinging to appearances bound us, and we sought our own afflictions. Now, having let everything go, body and mind are empty and clear, light, peaceful, and joyful; free and untrammeled, serene in movement and stillness. How could our delight not be beyond all bounds, our happiness without limit? This state and scene truly cannot be described; hence it is said, "What a splendid scene that no painting can capture!" Such an untrammeled scene pervades empty space and fills the dharma realm. Its light shines forth brilliantly, illuminating the great thousandfold world. How could it possibly be concealed?

"It stands naked before one face-to-face" means that when one's practice reaches the point where deluded thoughts cease, the inner body and mind and the outer world all dissolve into emptiness together, and true nature flashes forth before one. It is like meeting one's own dear father face-to-face at a crossroads; the flavor of it cannot truly be described by brush or ink.

When we practice the Dharma, we often seem suddenly to awaken to our own nature. The mind dies to appearances and no longer clings to them. Yet it has not died thoroughly enough or completely enough; when encountering circumstances, the mind arises again and is shaken once more. Thus there may be as many as eighteen or nineteen great awakenings; one does not return home and sit securely after a single awakening. This was also true of Chan Master Gaofeng's teacher, Patriarch Xueyan Qin: after awakening to the Way several times, he was again shaken amid circumstances. Only when, at last, the bottom of the bucket completely fell away did he reach the ultimate. Buddhist practice is not something completed through a single awakening. If it could be, one would be a great bodhisattva returning to the world.

One who has truly arrived home abides nowhere and clings to nothing whatsoever. 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 still birth and death to transcend or a Buddha to become, one has not yet awakened from the great dream.

Buddha-nature inherently endures forever. Even if one wished to destroy it, it could not be destroyed. Where, then, could there be any birth and death?

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, calling that emptiness. Rather, it means doing things while the mind abides nowhere. If, in doing things, one forgets the source and follows circumstances, then that is not emptiness. Therefore, one who has truly realized the Way is the same in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; there is never a time that is not empty. Speaking and not speaking, moving and not moving, are all the same.

When practicing the Dharma, we must always bear in mind that "speaking, silence, movement, and stillness are all empty," and we must not cling to appearances. Before awakening, this is difficult to accomplish. Yet we should know to temper ourselves in this way and strive to do it: in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, never forget continuous contemplation; do not follow thoughts or be moved by circumstances. If one can do this, awakening will come more easily. After awakening, one further tempers the mind through circumstances and continuously safeguards realization; then speaking, silence, movement, and stillness can become continuous and undivided.

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 and abides nowhere; this is called no-thought. Otherwise, how could one do anything if no thoughts arose? No-thought means not clinging to appearances and not lingering anywhere. When thought after thought does not linger, this is no-thought. Lingering upon thoughts makes them deluded thoughts. Therefore, thought within no-thought is right mindfulness.

The Second Patriarch's mind was truly empty. After transmitting the Dharma to the Third Patriarch, he went to repay his karmic debts. When a great millionaire repays a small debt, it is like a single hair from nine oxen and causes no concern. Before being killed, he said, "As my head meets the white blade, it is as though a spring breeze were cutting it." In practicing the Buddhadharma, we must have this kind of heroic spirit if we are to fulfill the Buddha's practices and vows.

In practicing the Buddhadharma, one must be bold and strong in spirit, magnanimous and open-hearted, knowing that everything is false, letting go without clinging, and fearing nothing, since there is fundamentally no birth and death. But being bold does not mean being recklessly daring and unafraid to commit every evil deed. That would be disastrous.

Moreover, even if body and mind have dissolved into emptiness through practice, if emptiness still remains, or if 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.

We too are now dreaming: practicing the Buddhadharma and becoming saints are all dreamlike states. In truth, everyone is Buddha; there are no saints and ordinary beings. But because we are now deluded by external objects, cling to appearances and pursue them, we create karma and undergo retribution. We vainly suffer the cycle of birth and death within what is fundamentally unborn and undying. Thus arise the illusory appearances of the six realms: one is born in heaven through creating wholesome karma, and falls into hell through doing evil.

If one can awaken in this very moment and not be deluded by false appearances, it is like awakening from a great dream. Where could there be images of the six realms? All mountains, rivers, lands, 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 suppose that only sleeping is dreaming: when awake, clinging to appearances is also dreaming. What I am now saying to you about the Dharma is dream-talk within a dream. What Buddhadharma is there to attain?

At all times and in all places, we should abide nowhere and cling to nothing, simply doing every good deed in accordance with conditions and allowing things to function spontaneously. Yet we should not deliberately do good deeds in pursuit of karmic blessings, lest the mind fail to become empty and we fall into attachment to blessings, unable to accomplish the great Way.

Once freed from binding oneself without a rope, one strides about grandly in great repose.

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

The Sixth Patriarch said, "The preceding thought is deluded, and one is an ordinary being; the following thought is awakened, and one is Buddha." Once we cling to appearances, we are bound by them. Originally, there is purity without 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 about freely and resting completely. 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 is there anything to mind in going to hell. These are all transformations of our intrinsic nature. What appearances could there be to which one might cling?

The downfall of us sentient beings lies in our seeking after conditions and clinging: we pursue A from A to B, then from B to C, pursuing conditions without cease from morning to night. Our deluded thoughts are inverted, and we cling to phenomenal appearances, unable to let them go. Thus we fall from our originally excellent Buddha-nature into the state of sentient beings. Conversely, do not seek after conditions or cling; simply function in accordance with conditions.

“Follow conditions, follow your lot, follow your food and drink.” “Following your lot” means being content with one’s proper station. Each person occupies a different position because the causes created in previous lives differ; therefore, 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 chase after things. In eating, clothing, and housing, live according to conditions, whether abundance or frugality. If one created good causes in a previous life, one’s provisions in this life will be ample; if one created poor causes in a previous life, the results in this life will be scant. Therefore, live according to conditions.

If you deliberately seek to see it, then it is not so. This wondrous essence cannot be conceived or sought. Seeking itself is a deluded thought, and it covers over one’s intrinsic nature.

In fact, the point where thought ceases is precisely that very thing. It has no appearances, much less anything miraculous or mysterious. It is simply the most ordinary mind!

Therefore, we must recognize the right path and not mistake the wrong one for it, thinking that having no thoughts means dying there without moving. When a thought arises, know it; do not follow it or linger in it—this is no-thought. No-birth means that, though birth continues endlessly, there is no abiding; it does not mean cutting off one’s lineage.

In studying the Buddhadharma, we must cut off the ever-changing, inverted deluded thoughts. Like an elephant crossing a river, do not rush about—do not fear the arising of thoughts, but cut through the rushing current.

A great person grasps the sword of wisdom: the edge of prajñā is a vajra flame.

In studying the Buddhadharma, we must possess the bearing of a great person—generous and unrestrained—if we are to accord with the Buddha. We must not be petty, reluctant to let go of this or discard that, clinging tightly to everything; then the Buddhadharma will be difficult to practice.

All things are false, so why not let them go? To "grasp the sword of wisdom" means to awaken great wisdom, recognize that all things are false, and use it to cut off all afflictions. All afflictions are sought out by oneself and arise from clinging to appearances. Originally there is nothing there, but one forcibly clings to appearances and pursues them, only to waste one's energy in vain. To study the Buddhadharma is to awaken wisdom, know that nothing is there, and refrain from clinging; then all afflictions are naturally cut off.

The vast void drinks in the light, dissolving all distinctions of intimacy and distance; echoes in the secluded valley speak of the evening mist.

These two lines use scenery to portray the breadth of our hearts and the beauty of our intrinsic nature. "The vast void drinks in the light" means that all radiance and all appearances are contained within the great empty space. "Dissolving distinctions of intimacy and distance" means that there is no distinction between closeness and estrangement. Qi means accord; kuo means distance.

This means that the great empty space does not distinguish intimacy from estrangement because of the various appearances within it. Likewise, we should not distinguish who is friend and who is enemy, but treat all people with equality, equality, and still more equality. If someone speaks ill of us, we should carefully reflect: "Do I truly have this fault?" If we do, we should repent and correct it.

If we do not have this fault, we should encourage ourselves not to commit it in the future. Therefore, a great person rejoices on hearing of his faults and never harbors resentment toward others. We must not bear a grudge merely because, though we do not have this fault, someone slanders or wrongs us.

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

Our wondrous functioning may seem right or seem wrong: at times we act in accordance with 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 and not let people see that he was a great bodhisattva.

He often did things that ordinary people found displeasing. He did not seek fame or reputation, nor did he act for the sake of his own good name; whatever benefited

sentient beings, he did. This power and function that may seem right or wrong cannot be recognized by people, nor can even the heavenly way measure it. Such is the profundity of our wondrous functioning.

That is to say, we merely study the sūtras and treatises without practicing in accordance with them, yet sit there discriminating over whether others have awakened. This is of no use to ourselves.

Thus it is said that every place is a pure place of practice. When we first begin practicing a Dharma, a quiet place is certainly preferable. But if no suitable place is available, do not distinguish between a noisy place and a quiet one; it is better to keep the mind empty. Do not cling to noise or quietness.

That is to say, our true mind is originally unmoving, originally not establishing a single dharma, and originally pure and undefiled. No matter how noisy the external world may be, it has nothing to do with me. I freely sport in the human world, carefree and at ease, with nothing to hold onto.

(December 1996)

A Brief Explanation of the Inscription on Awakening to Mind

I often see people who practice incorrectly: they close their eyes so as not to see things and stop their ears so as not to hear sounds, thinking that in this way they can refine the mind into emptiness and realize the Way. They do not realize that, although by closing their eyes and stopping their ears, when the mind does not encounter objects, they may make the mind dead and unmoving, once they open their eyes and unblock their ears, and the mind encounters objects, the deluded mind will inevitably again follow forms and sounds, moving without cease.

Eliminating objects in order to extinguish the mind is not true realization. Moreover, even when one closes the eyes and stops the ears, the inner mind may still be stirring secretly. In addition, closing the eyes and stopping the ears entails a grave fault: if a student uses this practice of shutting off and truly makes the mind dead and unmoving, that person will end up sitting behind a dark mountain in dead water. Not only will they be unable to become a Buddha; they may even degenerate into earth, wood, metal, or stone.

Therefore, students must be cautious. To truly ensure that the mind is not turned by circumstances, one must rely on training amid circumstances. As it is said in the Chan school: “If you fall down on the ground, you must get up again on the ground.” Leaving circumstances behind to seek emptiness will ultimately become a mere illusion.

All forms and sounds arise from causes and conditions and have no substantial reality. No matter whether beautiful forms stand before you or exquisite sounds fill your ears, they are no more than heat haze, flowers in empty space, and a mirage—temporary false appearances. Once you clearly understand this principle, then with the passage of time and through the arduous training of encountering circumstances thousands upon thousands of times, the mind will naturally become peaceful and the spirit calm, remaining serenely unmoved when circumstances arise.

Chan Master Dongshan, in his "Verse on the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister," praises the fourth rank, the stage of cultivation called "Arrival within the Partial," saying: "Arrival within the partial: when two blades cross, there is no need to avoid them. A skilled hand is like a lotus amid fire; a true person has aspirations soaring to the heavens!" This teaches us to practice dynamically, tempering the mind through circumstances without avoiding sights and sounds, thereby opening the way for great potential and great function in the future.

Therefore, our late master told us that practice must be applied dynamically in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; amid movement and stillness, leisure and busyness. We must not be insensate like wood or stone, but clearly and distinctly aware; yet, though clearly and distinctly aware, we must not cling to forms and sounds. In other words, we must see without there being anything seen, and hear without there being anything heard—not fail to see or hear. Only then can there be nimble, wondrous functioning.

Thus, no-mind does not mean suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise, much less extending a time of no-thought from short to long and calling this progress. The true practice of no-mind is to respond to conditions and engage with things while the mind abides nowhere; to manage countless affairs each day while the mind remains unstained. The inner mind is like painting on water: as soon as a stroke is made, the water immediately rejoins, leaving no trace at all. This is the truly excellent practice of no-mind.

The Diamond Sūtra says: "One should give rise to that mind without abiding anywhere." The character ying in "should abide nowhere" is often mistakenly understood as the ying meaning "should" or "ought to."

But this is not so. This ying is the ying in "responding to conditions and engaging with things." It teaches us that, in daily life, when dealing with all affairs and responding to all people, the mind should abide nowhere, utterly free from defilement. It is not merely telling us, at the level of principle, that we should or ought to abide nowhere. If we can respond to conditions without abiding, then the

nimble true mind of the wondrous functions as numerous as the sands of the Ganges will naturally appear before us at all times, unobscured.

Therefore, no-thought is alive: it responds to conditions without abiding or becoming defiled. It does not mean suppressing thoughts so that they cannot arise, and dying there without moving. Whenever thoughts arise, if we do not abide in them, seek after conditions, or linger in them, and they cease as soon as they function, this is no-thought.

A monk asked Zhaozhou, “What is no-thought?” Zhaozhou said, “Batting a ball on swift water!” Later, Zhaozhou asked Touzi in return, “What is the meaning of batting a ball on swift water?” Touzi said, “Thought after thought does not linger!” This shows that when thoughts arise without abiding, that is no-thought; it is not that no-thought exists only when not a single thought arises. Moreover, Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, says in his “Verse on No-Mind”: “At the very moment the mind is employed, no mind is employed; no mind is employed at the very moment it is employed, and constant employment is precisely absent!” That is, at the very moment the mind is functioning, one does not see any mind arising to function. This fully expresses the purport and wondrous function of no-mind.

In our practice, we must neither cling to the external environment of the myriad phenomena nor fail to exhaust this illusory deluded mind. As it is said, the body and mind within, and the world without, all perish together; only then does the wondrously luminous true mind appear. Conversely, if we take this illusory mind to be a subjective entity, true nature is submerged and cannot be seen. Therefore, the “mind” in our statement, “Everything is created by mind,” is treated as an objective object to be eliminated; it does not mean that mind is the ruler of all things. I ask all Buddhist practitioners to understand this clearly and not misunderstand it.

As stated above, in our practice we must not rigidly suppress thoughts so that they do not arise and thereby extinguish the deluded mind. We may only turn it about dynamically: when thoughts arise, do not heed them, and do not allow seeking after conditions to continue. The reason is that, in the future, great potential and great function must still make use of this deluded mind. If this deluded mind is suppressed to death, the true mind will have no means of giving rise to wondrous functioning.

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

Therefore, practitioners must directly realize the true suchness that is neither arising nor ceasing. They must not use any expedient to eliminate the deluded mind, but only apply the practice of “stilling” to quiet the deluded mind that grasps at objects and conditions. Just as, where waves subside, there is water, the wondrous, luminous true mind suddenly appears before them.

If students truly know that all external objects are like heat haze and flowers in empty space, without any substantial reality, they will not grasp after them or give rise to deluded thoughts. Then the spirit is tranquil and wisdom clear; the spiritual light shines alone; the innermost mind is bright and pure, like a mirror reflecting things, neither taking nor rejecting, neither loving nor hating. Though everything is distinctly clear, not a single thought arises; though not a single thought arises, everything is distinctly clear. At that very moment, one directly realizes the unborn true reality. There is no need to exert any clumsy effort beyond quieting the mind.

We need only follow the method described above: quiet the frenzied mind, do not cling to preceding objects, do not extinguish right mindfulness, and do not seek anything strange or mysterious. Then, amid clear knowing, not a single thought can be found. Although not a single thought can be found, there is clear knowing, without falling into dullness or unknowing.

This is the “true essence” of which the preceding section speaks in the words, “Vast and dim, yet within it there is an essence”; it is also the great Way described by Master Yongjia as “still yet aware, aware yet still.” When students seize the opportunity—at this critical instant of clarity without thought—and grasp it in one stroke, this is called seeing one’s true nature. If they pause even slightly to deliberate, they are again deluded by its shadow. If they abandon this and seek elsewhere, or suspect that there is some other mystery, it will be utterly unattainable.

An ancient worthy said, “When one has no seeking, one’s character is naturally lofty.” Whatever a person seeks is precisely a reflection of clinging to objects and appearances. If the mind is truly empty and does not perceive a single thing, what is there to seek? Someone may say, “I do not seek other things; I seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land and Buddhahood.” The answer is: Originally you are Buddha; there is no need to seek. If you seek, you will not see. As stated above, quieting the frenzied mind is bodhi itself. One need only quiet it; there is no need to seek. Great Master Fu said, “Night after night I sleep embracing the Buddha; morning after morning I rise together with it.” It continually shines at the gateways of your six sense faculties, lacking not the slightest bit. What is there still to seek?

If we can truly achieve no seeking and no attainment, then the mind, without seeking tranquility, becomes tranquil of itself; without desiring oneness, it becomes

one of itself. When practice reaches this point, one may return home and sit securely, a carefree person of the Way beyond learning and contrivance, passing one's days in ease and freedom.

Great samādhi has no entering or leaving. It means not being deluded by any circumstance, responding and functioning in accordance with conditions while abiding nowhere; it is not lifelessly sitting motionless and entering into some state. Confucian tradition also describes this principle: "Though Mount Tai collapses before one, one's expression does not change; though deer suddenly rise to one's left, one's eyes do not blink."

For sitting lifelessly without moving merely suppresses thoughts from arising and extinguishes feeling and perception; it is not true realization. Even if you remain in such absorption for a million eons, once that period has passed, thoughts arise again; you cling to appearances, create karma, and undergo karmic retribution. Thus, even if one attains the four formless absorptions and is born in the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception, one still falls within saṃsāra and cannot transcend birth and death. The ancients compared this lifeless absorption to placing a stone on grass: once the stone is removed, the grass grows again. It is therefore not ultimate. When Nanyue polished a brick to guide Mazu, he was rescuing him from this lifeless absorption.

Practitioners of Mahāyāna Buddhism do not adopt this kind of lifeless absorption, for it is not ultimate and does not yield genuine benefit.

It is thus clear that attaining samādhi does not lie in lifelessly sitting without moving, still less in the length of time one sits that way. One must temper the mind through circumstances, remain undeluded when encountering objects, and give rise to great responsive functioning without attachment. Only this is true samādhi.

Lines Sixteen through Eighteen: "One who has attained great samādhi is neither active nor still, neither gaining nor losing, neither joyful nor angry; remaining unmoved in the original ground, one responds to the myriad occasions."

As stated above, attaining great samādhi means that the mind is not deluded; it does not mean lifelessly sitting without moving. Here, we shall further describe the manner of remaining undeluded amid circumstances. Practitioners can often remain settled in stillness, yet become unsettled in activity; they can remain settled while seated, yet become unsettled once they leave the cushion. Some are joyful when they gain and distressed when they lose; when matters accord with their wishes, they rejoice, and when they go against their feelings, they become angry.

Those who can remain unmoving only while abiding in stillness, but give rise to thoughts when confronting circumstances, thus dividing things into two, have not

attained true samādhi.

Those who have truly attained great samādhi are equally at ease in stillness and activity, the same in leisure and busyness. In regard to phenomena, they have no thoughts of success or failure, gain or loss, nor any intention of love, anger, grasping, or rejecting. In their minds, they have neither the emotions of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure nor the defilements of seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing. Their minds are as empty and clean as if washed; lively and spontaneous, they accord with conditions and respond appropriately. They will never be settled only in pure mountain forests and confused upon entering bustling cities; nor will they lose awareness when encountering events and thereby shift from their original ground.

Great samādhi therefore transcends the outward forms of things and wanders freely beyond emotional defilements. It is not swayed by any event or circumstance and brings genuine benefit; it is not like wearing a cangue and shackles, binding one's hands and feet, and remaining lifelessly motionless.

When, in our daily activities, we train until we can respond to things and engage conditions without the mind becoming stained or abiding anywhere, this is not shifting from the original ground. This original ground is the position of the One Vehicle Dharma Realm; it is also the Buddha-ground. The Lotus Sūtra says: "This Dharma abides in the Dharma-position; the worldly appearances remain ever abiding."

Simply put, when doing anything, do not entertain the thought that you are doing it; when speaking a sentence, do not entertain the thought that you are speaking; when the myriad appearances manifest, do not entertain the thought that they are manifesting. In this way, although you act, you have never acted; although you speak, you have never spoken; although things appear, they have never appeared. Yet this does not mean not acting, not speaking, or not appearing. This is not shifting from the original ground; this is responding to the myriad occasions; this is also the ever-abiding of worldly appearances.

Those who truly transcend birth and death find no dharma to attain and remain unchanged while according with conditions. Though they may rise and sink amid the six realms, they see no difference between birth and death, or between the realms of existence. Though they transform their bodily forms in accordance with conditions and liberate all sentient beings, their original ground does not change, and they see not a single sentient being liberated. Long ago, a monk asked Chan Master Dasui, "After your venerable teacher entered parinirvāṇa, where was he reborn?" Dasui replied, "My teacher became a horse in the eastern household and an ox in the western household!"

Finally, there is one important matter that students must know. Some young people believe that they can cultivate the Way only when body and mind are at ease and their surroundings are quiet. Thus, they repeatedly fail to seize the opportunity and cultivate diligently, merely waiting for favorable times and fine circumstances to arrive.

They do not realize that ordinary beings have heavy obstacles and endless affairs. As the saying goes, “Before the donkey’s business is gone, the horse’s business has arrived.” When will there ever be a time of leisure and freedom from affairs? As for a place, there is even less need to choose one with care. What is important in learning Buddhism is to work on the mind-ground, not to sit lifelessly in mountain forests. Much has already been said: only when the mind does not become stained upon encountering circumstances is there genuine practice.

To remain unstained by circumstances, how can one train the mind without practicing amid the dusty world of circumstances? If one sits lifelessly in mountain forests, how can one develop an unmoving mind? One need only recognize that all objects of form, sound, and so forth are images manifested by one’s own true mind, like images in a mirror manifested by its light, and refrain from grasping them. At the same time, the true mind apart from these objects cannot be found. Just as the mirror image is the mirror’s light, and the mirror’s light does not depart from the mirror image, there is likewise nothing to reject.

Continually contemplate and train in this way: the mind becomes empty and the intent at ease, spontaneous and free, without seeking or attainment. This is the natural Buddha. Why wait for favorable circumstances and auspicious times to arrive? I urge you all: while you are young and capable, seize the opportunity and strive diligently. Do not squander your time and lose the opportunity while sitting idly by, only to grow old and grieve in vain. Take care!

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Dharmakāya, Sambhogakāya, and Nirmāṇakāya

In our practice, we must neither falsely cling to the four great elements as a self nor abide in Buddha-nature. Once there is any abiding, one falls into a fixed pattern. Therefore, one who has truly become a Buddha does not retain even a shadow of Buddhahood. If you say, “I have become a Buddha,” then you have not become a Buddha; you have become a demon. For you still have a foothold, still have something in your breast, and have not yet emptied everything. Our dharmakāya is like empty space: utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust, with neither the appearance of time nor the appearance of space. Therefore, in our practice we must cut off everything and absolutely must not have the slightest attachment or abiding.

Therefore, it is often said, “One who remains on the hundred-foot pole, though having entered, has not yet attained the true.” Even when sitting atop the pole, one still has a foothold. Thus one must “advance one further step from the hundred-foot pole, and one’s whole body appears throughout the ten directions.” The worlds of the ten directions are all your body; when even the foothold is removed, the dharma-self is eliminated. Having reached this point, you are great wisdom of perfect enlightenment and can manifest countless transformation bodies. This is how we practice.

I urge everyone to begin practice at once. Do not become lax and indulge in play, clinging to sounds, forms, wealth, and profit while disregarding this great treasury. Do not betray yourselves and come into this world for nothing, like entering a mountain of treasures and returning empty-handed. That would be too regrettable, too unworthy, too unjust. I hope you will all take care.

(Lecture given in Hangzhou on November 12, 1990.)

The Bridge Flows, but the Water Does Not Flow

The first sentence of the Heart Sūtra, “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva,” is not a general designation for some bodhisattva. It teaches us how to practice: contemplate freedom—continually contemplate your own intrinsic nature, and do not stray from the original ground. If you cannot sit steadily when you take your seat, and after leaving the cushion do not gather in the mind and maintain contemplation, but let deluded thoughts wander freely, then you are adrift. You will have missed your whole life.

This teaches us, after realizing the Way, to remain free and at ease amid favorable and adverse circumstances in our daily work. It does not mean being happy and laughing when circumstances are favorable, then becoming afflicted and angry when they are adverse. One must reach the point where favorable is fine and adverse is fine; one is free and at ease amid both, calmly content, untroubled and carefree, allowing everything to come to its natural end. Only then is one a carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance.

Having reached this point, there is no longer even any need to sit; one is peacefully free of concerns. Confucius said, “At seventy, I followed my heart’s desires without transgressing the bounds.” This means that whatever one wishes to do, one will not exceed the bounds of proper conduct. For the mind has become empty, no longer clings to appearances, and will no longer commit immoral acts.

Someone asked me, “If through sitting I make my mind empty, may I then kill people and commit arson?” Such a question is so childish as to be laughable. If you kill people and commit arson, is your mind empty? Why would you kill people and

commit arson, if not because you cling to appearances—seeking to steal goods or rob others of wealth? This is precisely clinging to existence, so how can you speak of an empty mind? If your mind is truly empty, compassion and wisdom will function together.

You will feel compassion for sentient beings who do not understand true reality, cling to deluded emotions, create karma and undergo retribution every day, and vainly suffer the pain of birth-and-death in saṃsāra. You will seek every means to liberate them. How could you then commit acts that violate Heaven and harm others?

When we speak of tong, it means unobstructed penetration. As soon as deluded thoughts arise, there are obstructions everywhere. Without deluded thoughts, one is naturally unobstructed.

But you must not suppress thoughts so that they do not arise; suppression is ineffective. It is like using a stone to press down grass: once the stone is removed, the grass grows again.

Even if you were to suppress them to death, you would become like earth, wood, metal, or stone—unable to function wondrously. How could you become a Buddha then? Therefore, use a living method of transformation: when a thought arises, recognize it and transform it. If deluded thoughts are particularly strong, recite the Buddha's name or hold a mantra, turning the mind toward the Buddhadharma; then the deluded thoughts will be transformed away.

If a thought arises and you do not recognize it, but follow it along, that is incorrect. Thus the ancient worthies said: "Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only that awareness comes too late." Let thoughts come as they please. When you come, I transform you away. I do not let you remain, nor do I follow you. If you produce a hundred thoughts, I have a hundred and one transformations. In the end, I still prevail. I surpass you; quantitative change becomes qualitative change!

"Om bala bala . . ." This mantra quickly clears away habitual tendencies. When you are about to lose your temper, recite the mantra aloud to extinguish your anger. In cultivating the Way, we must constantly accord with sentient beings; we are not asking others to conform to our wishes. It is easy to accord with sentient beings once, but difficult to do so over a long time. Thus, doing one good deed is easy, but doing it continuously is difficult. Yet as children of the Buddha, we must train this power of perseverance!

(Lecture given in Hangzhou on November 14, 1990)

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma: Integrating Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism

In our practice, we must leave no trace of stagnation, remaining free and at ease. Though responding to endlessly changing work and affairs, we should be like someone with nothing at all to do, without the slightest emotional stirring. Only this is great capacity and great function, and only this accords with the essential principle of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It certainly does not mean sitting rigidly without moving, guarding empty quiescence, and thereby attaining the great Way.

I hope that after hearing this, everyone will first know "what is"—that is, understand that the Person of No Rank who hears the Dharma is one's own original Buddha-nature, and cease seeking outside oneself. Second, protect this "True Person of No Rank" continuously and closely in its empty luminosity and non-abiding. Whenever a thought arises, immediately recognize and remove it; neither abide in circumstances nor guard emptiness. Third, do not protect it rigidly. Just as a child, when grown, should be allowed freedom and not held back, so one should sit when sitting is called for and walk when walking is called for, without constraint, free and at ease. Only then can one obtain genuine benefit. It is precisely this:

Attached to existence, one does not understand emptiness and obscures the original master.

Abiding in neither emptiness nor existence—this is great spiritual power.

Abiding in emptiness without knowing existence, one is amid dead water and dark mountains.

If one understands this meaning, one faces west while looking east.

(Lecture given in Hangzhou on February 27, 1994)

Learning Buddhism Is Not Difficult: Simply Contemplate with Ease

We should not seek outside ourselves; simply let go. Do not seek the true; merely cease deluded thoughts. Do not seek! You are originally a Buddha—what Buddha is there still to seek? To rest the deluded mind is bodhi.

When we first contemplate ourselves, we merely understand the principle, but the mind still cannot be held and runs after circumstances. We need to practice, keeping watch over it and observing whether this intrinsic nature remains in its original ground. Once the practice has become mature, we need not even observe. Observation is a function requiring effort; we must further enter the function that requires no effort.

In the unconditioned dharma, nothing is obtainable, and even observation is unnecessary. But take note: only when practice has reached this stage may one dispense with observation. If your practice has not reached this point and you

abandon observation, you will drift astray. Some say that practicing at all times is abiding. At the beginning, abiding is necessary. If you do not abide in practice, you will run after circumstances.

The Heart Sūtra speaks of “contemplating with ease” in order to tell us to practice: observe whether we ourselves remain unmoved in the original ground. “Ease” means that this intrinsic nature of mine is present at all times. But ordinarily we are not present; we run after circumstances. Patriarch Yuanwu Qin said: “If one is absent for a single moment, one is no different from a dead person.” One is then a walking corpse. We must be “present” at all times.

Once being “present” has become mature, even the “self” need not remain; where there is a “self,” there is still contrivance. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it. Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing; in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality.”

We understand the principle, but throughout countless kalpas we have turned round and round in the six realms of rebirth. Our habitual tendencies are deep and our attachments very strong; they cannot be removed at once. We must remain aware at every moment, tempering ourselves amid circumstances and diminishing them again and again.

Therefore, the late Master Xianglu said that after one thousand meditation sessions, one need not sit anymore. This means that one should not become attached to the Dharma. For the Dharma too is unobtainable; it is borrowed for temporary use. Do not misunderstand this point. The actual work of practice is done off the meditation cushion. Sitting is like sharpening a knife to make it keen; after leaving the cushion, use the knife and see whether it is sharp—can it cut through this clinging affection?

In cultivation and practice, we must cut off these emotional attachments and views, observing continuously. My intrinsic nature is utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, with nothing to which it can cling. There is nothing to cling to in this body either. No one can escape birth, aging, illness, and death, much less any external possession. Therefore, we must have great wisdom. Once we understand, we naturally let all this go. If we can let go and not cling, we realize the Way, and the light will increase day by day.

Never seek the miraculous or become attached to abstruse subtleties. Know that the ordinary mind in which not a single thread is obtainable is the wondrous essence by which we realize the Way.

Therefore, at the time of initial awakening, one must protect it strictly. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, one must not relax even slightly. Yet one must not grasp too tightly either. If the grasp is too tight, the breath becomes stifled and the head swells, like the strings of an instrument: too tight, and they break; too loose, and they make no sound. One must skillfully adjust the proper balance between slackness and tightness—relax a little when too tight, and tighten a little when too loose.

It is not easy to protect it continuously, because our habit of attachment is strong. Once we become caught up in affairs, we forget and return to our old ways. At such times, we must grasp it: whenever we forget, quickly draw ourselves back. Once safeguarding realization has truly become mature, safeguarding is no longer necessary.

But at this stage, it is again not easy to leave safeguarding behind and forget it, because once safeguarding has become mature, it amounts to replacing one habitual tendency with another. The former habit of attachment to things is replaced by the habit of attachment to the Dharma. One must pass through a further period before one can leave safeguarding behind.

Advancing another step, when one can truly leave safeguarding behind, there remains the notion that there is no need to safeguard. The stages of this practice are very subtle: one must also remove this leaving behind of safeguarding, forgetting everything completely. At this point, one abides in the original ground of non-contrivance. Then spiritual powers arrive of themselves, without being sought.

Because the obscurations above have been removed, the functions of intrinsic nature unfold, and spiritual powers naturally arise. Only then are they spiritual powers manifested from intrinsic nature. Those that rely on a dharma, or on a mantra, and at an even lower level, those that rely on ghosts, deities, spirits, and the like, are all dependent powers, not spiritual powers manifested from intrinsic nature.

When one truly reaches this state of non-contrivance, even non-contrivance is unobtainable; there is no such thing as non-contrivance. “A carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance.” Great wisdom seems like foolishness, like an idiot or a simpleton. But people are fond of cleverness. Worldly intelligence and cleverness are cleverness attached to appearances, not true intelligence. Even when practice makes one seem like an idiot or simpleton, one has not yet truly reached home.

One must advance further, until all distinctions merge and are forgotten, light shines forth greatly and illuminates the great thousand-world system. All Buddhas enter my body, and I enter the bodies of all Buddhas. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra compares this to

ten mirrors, mutually reflecting and containing one another without obstruction. Yet even at this stage, the practice has not reached its end. At the very end, there is no Dharma to speak of and nothing left to say.

Let me tell a koan. A monk asked Caoshan, “What is it like when the bright moon is directly overhead?” Caoshan replied, “You are still a fellow below the steps!” The monk said, “I ask the Master to receive me onto the steps.” Caoshan replied, “We shall meet when the moon sets.” How can one meet when the moon has set? All distinctions merge and are forgotten—one forgets the very reason why. When practice reaches this point, it is like our being in the air all day long without knowing it is air. At that time, there is no way to open one’s mouth. With a cry of “Hey!” he flicked his sleeve and returned to the abbot’s quarters.

The Chan school also says that one must not wait for awakening with a deliberate mind. In applying ourselves, we must not pursue anything intentionally, but should be as ordinary and unoccupied as though there were nothing to do.

When we truly apply ourselves in cultivation, we must do so wholeheartedly. Fundamentally, nothing at all is obtainable: we come empty and go empty. Rather than being forced to let go at the moment of death, it is better to develop wisdom now and let go early. Then we may realize the Way and be liberated from birth and death.

Now we know where to begin: observe continuously, watching where thoughts arise. When a thought comes, raise the mantra or raise the Buddha’s name, and the thought will be transformed away. To watch over it is to practice through observation. Do not relax, and you will make progress.

To what extent have you progressed? Test yourself: Am I still attached to appearances? Is there still something in my mind? When favorable and wholesome circumstances arise, do I still like them and become disturbed? When adverse and unpleasant circumstances arise, do I still become afflicted? One must remain unmoved by the eight worldly winds. If one is still moved, it will not do. We easily notice adverse circumstances, but when circumstances are favorable and we are happy, it is difficult to notice.

Therefore, in practice we must maintain continuous and seamless contemplation—uninterrupted, close, and never lax—remaining attentive at all times. Those huatou and koans test whether your mind is empty at all times, empty and luminous without abiding.

Learning the Buddhadharma is the undertaking of a great person: one must be magnanimous and unrestrained, daring to make sacrifices. Those of narrow mind find it very difficult to accord with Buddhism, whereas the magnanimous and

unrestrained readily enter the Way. All worldly dharmas are Buddhadharma. We must remain vigilant and aware at every moment, willing to sacrifice everything.

We must train amid circumstances. Most important is first to understand ourselves: understand that all is the wondrous functioning of mind, without abiding. Then it does not matter whether one leaves home or not. We must train amid circumstances, abiding nowhere at all times, and understand that what can function is our own Buddha-nature. Begin observing here; it is not necessary to sit in meditation.

Being able to contemplate is the point of entry. If, amid circumstances, you cannot sustain contemplation but instead follow after circumstances, with no meditative stability at all, you still need to make time to sit in meditation. Most important, however, is first to understand yourself. Just as the great golden-winged garuḍa can fly hundreds of thousands of miles with a single beat of its wings, it relies on a little force beneath its feet to fly so far. If its feet do not push off the ground, it cannot rise into the air.

Do not underestimate recognizing your true nature. If you can recognize this point and have unwavering faith in it, then your feet have already touched the ground, and one day you will surely soar ten thousand miles like the garuḍa. Patriarch Linji taught us to recognize that “within this lump of red flesh there is a True Person of No Rank; it is the one now speaking the Dharma and hearing the Dharma.” This capacity by which we can hear and speak is our true nature. Have unwavering faith in this, hold fast to this point, and practice right here.

In all activity and functioning, the mind should remain empty, just as it is in meditation: empty, pure, and non-abiding. Be in this in the morning and in the evening; dwell in it whether at ease or in adversity. It should always be so, without any difference. Only then is there true continuity. True continuity is to be equally at ease in stillness and activity.

(Lecture given at Santai Mountain, Hangzhou, March 3, 1994)

Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration through the Ear Faculty

(II) Contemplation is turning the light inward: looking within the mind rather than outward. Contemplate the point at which not a single thought arises—the place before a thought has emerged. When a thought arises, see it; do not heed it or drift along with it. This step is most crucial. If thoughts arise and you do not see them, that will not do.

After directly realizing your true nature, contemplate and safeguard it in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. “Outwardly, do not be drawn by circumstances;

inwardly, do not turn with thoughts" is the best method of safeguarding. When a thought arises, do not abide in it or follow it in wandering; this is no-thought. It does not mean suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise, nor does it mean extending the time in which not a single thought arises and calling that no-thought.

(III) In daily dealings with people and things, one must "in affairs, have no clinging mind; within mind, retain no affair." That is, while doing something, do not give rise to a second thought. Have neither a mind of gain and loss nor thoughts of praise and blame, success and failure. After the matter is done, let there be no attachment in the mind, as though it had never been done. This does not mean avoiding affairs and remaining rigidly confined in a box of having nothing to do.

(IV) After directly realizing your true nature, all deluded mind, deluded thoughts, and deluded notions become the wondrous functioning of the true mind. The distinction between wondrous functioning and deluded activity lies between "abiding" and "non-abiding." When there is abiding, wondrous functioning turns into deluded activity; when there is non-abiding, deluded activity is gathered into wondrous functioning.

(VI) If you can diligently temper yourself amid circumstances, continuing the practice without interruption in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, then in three to five years it will surely become continuous and undivided. Without seeking spiritual powers, spiritual powers will arise of themselves.

(VII) Seeking nothing and attaining nothing, able to enter Buddhahood and able to enter the realm of demons—this is truly arriving home. Practitioners often become attached to spiritual powers, believing that unless such powers arise, they have not seen their true nature. This is a grave mistake. You must know that if you can stand firmly without being deluded by the seductive words of demons and spirits, and remain carefree and at ease at all times and in all places, receiving genuine benefit, that is the greatest spiritual power.

(VIII) The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate is the birth of a royal prince. If you practice on the mind-ground, you will certainly become a Buddha in the future. All other excellent dharma gates that involve form are merely positions of merit on the periphery. Even if great spiritual powers arise through them, one can only render service and receive rewards, bowing one's head in submission; one cannot become a Buddha.

(Lecture given in Shenzhen, December 1994)

Instructions Given During the Empowerment for the Heart-of-Heart Dharma

Therefore, each of us must assess ourselves and see whether the mind remains completely unmoved when encountering circumstances. If deluded thoughts still rise and fall in daily life, that will not do; if, amid circumstances, you become attached to them, that is even worse. Only when the mind is empty and clean as if washed clean at all times and in all places, able to function in accordance with conditions without attachment—true emptiness and wondrous presence, wondrous presence and true emptiness—can this be called genuine awakening.

Apart from sitting in meditation, the most important thing is to practice in daily life. Constantly watch yourself: as soon as a thought arises, see it and do not follow it. If a thought arises and you fail to see it, only realizing it and becoming aware after you have followed it for quite a while, that will not do.

Let all matters come as they may; my mind does not move. This is true accordance, not forcibly suppressing them so that they do not move. Forcibly suppressing them so that they do not move will not do. You should respond to all kinds of affairs, accord with every condition, and make no distinction between good and bad: do not rejoice in what is good or loathe what is bad. Only then can our minds become calm and reach the state of equanimity and non-contrivance.

This Dharma is not easily obtained. I earnestly ask everyone to practice well, persist in meditation and contemplation, and never take it lightly. More important still is practice off the cushion; it is not enough to sit for two hours and then let a wild horse run loose and act recklessly. You must continue to remember contemplation at all times in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Only then can you accord with the great Way.

First: let go of everything and be utterly resolute. What use is there in clinging to worldly things and being unable to let them go? Everything in this world is formed through causes and conditions and has no substantial reality. Like passing clouds and smoke before the eyes, it is empty and unreal: it cannot be obtained and cannot be taken away.

Even your own bodies are provisionally existent; they cannot be retained and are unobtainable. What need be said, then, of things outside the body? To take things as real and clutch them tightly is foolishness, unworthy of a wise person's smile. Studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way is the undertaking of great wisdom and great insight, not something that people of limited capacity and little wisdom can accomplish. To realize the Way, the first requirement is to see through everything.

Fifth: contemplate off the meditation cushion, continuously and seamlessly. Extend the meditative stability cultivated in sitting into the activities of everyday life. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, quietly apply it yourself; contemplate

continuously and seamlessly, abiding nowhere. Do not allow circumstances to pull you along, nor drift with deluded thoughts.

Sixth: have a vast mind-capacity and embrace everything. A practitioner's mind-capacity must not be narrow; one should be broad-minded and generous enough to embrace everything. Even if others treat me poorly, I should treat them still better, without the slightest notion of love or aversion, delight or dislike. Do all good deeds according to conditions and to the extent of your ability. Be carefree and at ease at all times and in all places, with neither a mind of gain and loss nor thoughts of praise and blame, success and failure. This is the greatest spiritual power.

(Lecture given in Shanghai, August 1993)

Instructions for a Seven-Day Retreat of the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma

Question: How should one contemplate?

Answer: Like a cat catching a mouse, watch the place where a thought arises; focus your whole attention on that point of arising. What is called attending to the huatou is to watch before a single thought has moved. When a thought comes, immediately become aware of it; upon awareness, turn it into emptiness. "Turning" means that when you see a thought has come, you do not heed it; or you turn it by using a mantra. Not following it is turning. Then the thought is gone, and you do not abide even in emptiness. Once there is any abiding, you cannot thoroughly see the original mind.

After leaving the cushion, you must contemplate. Contemplation means contemplating that which is before a single thought is born—that clear and distinct awareness. This is contemplating yourself. This self is not your physical body, but your true mind: the true mind before a thought arises, the mind of luminous knowing.

Watching it is contemplating with ease: contemplate that which abides unmoving in the original ground. This is an important practice both on and off the cushion. During the seven-day retreat, speaking is not permitted so that you may contemplate that mind of luminous knowing. This is to practice continuously and closely; when you talk, it is easy to forget contemplation. When stillness and activity are combined, you can attain meditative stability within the prescribed period and achieve realization within seven days.

What does "letting go" mean? Letting go means non-abiding; it does not mean not working. Factory directors, professors, and general managers should continue doing their work, but after it is done, the mind remains empty and does not cling. If Xiao Liao is promoted to section chief, let him do the work and accept the promotion; so

long as his mind does not abide while he works, that is letting go. Doing no work at all, like an idler, is not letting go. Non-contrivance leaves nothing undone; in practice, one must not be rigid and dull.

Long ago, there was a Buddhist practitioner. His teacher asked him, “Can you remain in command during the day?” “Yes.” “Can you remain in command while sleeping at night and dreaming?” “Yes.” (Dreaming is a minor state of confusion; death is a major state of confusion. To remain in command in a dream is already very good.) Our practice is to remain in command amid circumstances, without being dragged about by them. Yet remaining in command is still not enough; one must go a step further, until even being in command dissolves into emptiness. Only then does one receive genuine benefit.

You must be able to do things. Accomplishing the great Way does not mean doing nothing. You can do every kind of thing; do them freely, yet let the mind remain unmoved—“discrimination, too, is not mind.” So what is the matter with New Year’s Eve? It simply means that you may do all things, but do not take them into your mind. “The essence is unborn”: what is there to resolve, and what method is needed? Our fundamental essence is neither arising nor ceasing; there is nothing that needs to be resolved.

It is best not to see any appearances. The dharmakāya is formless, and formlessness is true appearance. Luminous knowing, clear and distinct, unmoving and unshaken, is the true mind. The dharmakāya has no appearance of interruption; it is not present at one moment and absent the next. It constantly emits light at the gateways of the six sense faculties and has never ceased. Even when a person is asleep, it still emits light and does not depart for a single moment.

Once you recognize this point and exhaust habitual tendencies, you may go wherever you wish within the six realms. You need not necessarily ascend to heaven; even going to hell presents no obstruction. To liberate sentient beings extensively and adorn the hells is great merit and virtue, as with Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva. If you feel aversion to entering the three lower realms and long for Buddha pure lands—the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Lapis Lazuli World, the Inner Court of Tuṣita, and so forth—this shows that your mark of sentient beings has not been shattered and that you are still unfinished. True practice is to be unfettered, free and at ease, carefree and natural, with nowhere one cannot go.

Now I will teach you the simplest method for letting go of everything. In the midst of daily work, call out, “Cut!” Think of nothing at all; simply attend to this clear and distinct awareness. You may cut off thought for one minute or half a minute, then resume your work. After working for a while, cut off thought again. Practice

gradually, doing this thirty or forty times a day. You can use this simple method of cutting off thoughts while walking or riding in a vehicle.

Safeguarding means not becoming attached to any state whatsoever. Its essential point is: “Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not move with circumstances.” At all times safeguard this numinously knowing mind, empty, lucid, and non-abiding. Once safeguarding has matured, let it function freely. Let it go east or west; it will not transgress. This is to reach the state of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization. Therefore, the more one lets go in practicing the Dharma, the better; the more anxious one is, the less it works.

Therefore, one can practice in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. This is the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate: it is not confined by forms; one need only work on the mind. It is not easy in this world to hear the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. Without having extensively planted wholesome roots in past lives, one cannot hear it.

Let me repeat this: the most important point in contemplation is not to run after thoughts. Watch them arise, but do not follow them. An ancient worthy said: “Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only awakening too late.” Everyone practicing the Way fears deluded thoughts and tries every possible means to sweep them away. In fact, there is no need to fear them. The moment a deluded thought arises, become aware of it and do not follow it; then it will naturally dissolve.

The monastery steward asked Liangshan, “What should one do when it is difficult to guard against a thief in the house?” Liangshan said, “Recognize it, and there will be no grievance.” Once you recognize it, the thief will not steal the family wealth, and there will be no cause for grievance. The thief in the house arises constantly. If you are not aware of it and do not recognize it, it will naturally steal away all your household wealth—the wealth of Dharma. When the deluded mind dissolves and thoughts no longer arise, then naturally, “The skin falls away entirely; only the one reality is revealed.”

Now I will tell you a koan of the most profound Buddhadharma. Long ago, there was a monk named Lingxun, who asked his master, Guizong, “What is Buddha?” Guizong said, “I am afraid you will not believe me if I tell you.” Lingxun said, “Master, you speak truthfully. How could I dare not believe?”

Guizong said, “Then I will tell you: you are Buddha!” Lingxun awakened greatly on the spot and then asked, “How should realization be safeguarded?” Guizong said, “A single speck in the eye, and flowers in empty space fall everywhere.” This means that once one recognizes that one is originally Buddha, Buddha is free of all attachment. If there is safeguarding realization, it is like having a speck in the eye; if one abides in attachment, then it is no longer so.

After Lingxun's great awakening, he took leave of his master, saying, "Tomorrow I shall return home." The master said, "After you have packed your luggage tomorrow, come see me again. I will speak to you of the most profound Buddhadharma." The next day, after Lingxun had packed his bundle, he asked his master to teach him the profound Buddhadharma. The master said, "The cold is severe; take good care of yourself on the journey."

This means that all ordinary daily functioning is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. One must not abide in anything: one must neither hold fast and remain unmoving nor move while abiding in something. After awakening, if one does not hold fast, one functions freely; if one holds fast, one dies there. Ultimately, even the thought of deliberately not guarding the mind is gone. Only then is it the most profound Buddhadharma. This is ordinary mind and ordinary affairs.

This koan teaches us that true Buddhadharma lies precisely in flexible and wondrous functioning—in ease and freedom, without being constrained by reputation. Wherever there is constraint, there is obstruction; that is not the true meaning of Buddhadharma.

Speaking of the Pure Land, it is not only rebirth in the Western Pure Land that constitutes the Pure Land. So long as you let go of everything, seek nothing in an empty and open mind, and find nothing attainable, this is the Pure Land; this is the Inner Court of Tuṣita. In every circumstance, follow conditions and remain at ease, letting things unfold freely. Do whatever is appropriate. If your fortune is better, live a little better; if it is poorer, live a little more poorly. It does not matter. If you are unattached to all things, you are a Buddha or bodhisattva.

After completing this seven-day retreat, what have you attained?

Let me answer for everyone: one who has attained nothing!

The retreat is over!

(Delivered in Guangzhou, January 25–February 2, 1995)

The First Essential for Buddhist Practitioners Is Right View

The first type of person who practices improperly sits for a while and then stops, stops and then sits again. Today they sit; tomorrow they say that their body feels unwell or that they are too busy, and so they delay their practice. Practice like this will not do. It is like cooking rice: before it is done, you take it off the heat, let it cool, cook it again, and then take it off again. The rice will become hard and undercooked. In studying the Dharma and cultivating practice, we are like a boat moving against the current: if we do not exert ourselves to pole the boat forward, the current will carry it downstream. Therefore, intermittent practice is no good.

The third important reason is that people do not maintain contemplation after leaving the meditation cushion; they forget it. They practice the Dharma diligently while seated, but after getting up they turn with deluded thoughts and run after circumstances. This is like exposing something to the sun for one day and leaving it in the cold for ten; thus it is very difficult for their practice to advance.

Especially in the present time, when everyone is trading stocks, their minds are all on stocks: "Oh, has the stock I bought made money? Has it risen? Has it fallen? Have I lost money?" They indulge in confused and inverted deluded thinking and do not maintain contemplation. In applying oneself, one must maintain contemplation at all times. The moment a thought arises, see it; do not run after it. Clearly know that what can speak, see, and hear is one's own true nature. Only by not being turned by circumstances will it do. If these faults are not corrected, one cannot realize the Way.

Some people misunderstand this. They think that clearly seeing a thought is enough. This is completely wrong! Clearly abiding in that thought is delusion added upon delusion; it is not one's true nature. Only when thoughts cease and there is clear, lucid knowing is it one's true nature. Merely seeing a thought arise is beside the point. If, on seeing a thought arise, you become attached to its appearance, you are an ordinary being, taking that thought to be real; then you have gone down the wrong path. When you see a thought arise, do not run after it; cut off that thought. Do not get this wrong!

Therefore, there is nothing to be complacent about. Nothing whatsoever is attainable; attaining nothing is true Buddhahood. When one truly becomes a Buddha, even Buddha is unattainable. This is the meaning of what Chan Master Zhaozhou said: "I do not like to hear even the word 'Buddha.'" Therefore, do not constantly abide in the thought, "I am Buddha."

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment states very clearly: "Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing; in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality." The realm of delusion is mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests. These things have been accumulated from our deluded thoughts; this is because we do not understand the functioning of true nature. But after understanding, these states are all manifestations of our Buddha-nature, transformations of our dharmakāya. Yet one must not have a mind that knows this, abiding in the thought of becoming a Buddha. One must no longer give rise to thoughts of true or false, empty or real.

Everyone should go deeply into one method and apply yourselves well. When practicing the Dharma, you must have the mind recite and the ears hear. After leaving the meditation cushion, you must maintain contemplation at all times in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and eliminate your own deluded habitual

tendencies. Attachment to appearances is an error; never become attached to appearances. Take care!

(Delivered in Hangzhou, March 27, 1995)

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

Once you understand that the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are all inherently complete within mind, do not abide in appearances at any time. All things are shadows manifested by the great perfect mirror wisdom of my dharmakāya. Then the mind does not move, does not grasp appearances, and seeks nothing. By practicing in this way, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt gradually disappear.

Therefore, to be liberated from birth and death and leave the cycle of rebirth, the mind must be utterly open and abide nowhere. Know that all transformations are manifestations of the functioning of one's own Buddha-nature. Seeking nothing, grasping nothing, and being at ease and free—this is great accomplishment, great freedom, and great spiritual powers.

If one pursues or seeks anything, afflictions still remain in the mind. Even if all five supernormal powers were to manifest, it would not be accomplishment. Therefore, in studying Buddhism, we learn to be at ease and free. In this society, follow conditions in all things, do your utmost to serve the public, be able to rise or step down, seek nothing, and grasp nothing.

Only when one is truly at ease and free is this the true meaning of Mahāyāna Buddhism; only then does it count as accomplishment. If, while alive, we can truly remain unattached in every circumstance, without the slightest mind of attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejection, then when the last day of life arrives, we will naturally remain unattached to circumstances and be carefree and at ease, with no birth and death to transcend.

Now, in practicing the Dharma, we must understand this principle: the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are all complete within one mind. Do not seek after anything; do not seek any spiritual powers. Let go of everything, and then you will be at ease and free. Being at ease and free, attached to nothing—if life is like this, death is likewise. You may go wherever you wish, entirely under your own mastery. Then have you not transcended birth and death?

Speaking of safeguarding realization, first there is safeguarding, then letting be. First, safeguard: when thoughts arise, do not follow them or run after them; when circumstances arise, do not let them turn you. Once this has matured, relinquish safeguarding and proceed to let it function freely. Let go and move freely in emptiness, allowing it to act on its own. There is neither restraint nor attachment. It

is like what Confucius said: “At seventy, I could follow my heart’s desires without overstepping the bounds.” One can do anything, enter Buddhahood or enter māra.

After leaving the meditation cushion, you must observe the mind! You must maintain contemplation at every moment, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; you must not forget. Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts: when a thought arises, become aware of it; once aware, it is empty. If a thought arises and you do not know it or see it, but follow the thought without realizing that there is still a thought, then it is too late. When a thought arises, know it immediately and turn it away at once.

Outwardly, do not be pulled along by circumstances. No change in external circumstances can move me. Know that all these are false appearances, shadows of one’s own true nature, and do not run after them. Practice in this way, and within three to five years you can enter the great Way.

Therefore, this is how one should practice; there is nothing mysterious about it. Keep your words few and simple. When Chan Master Linji awakened, he said, “It turns out that Buddhadharma is not much at all.” There is nothing to it: it is right here in the present moment, realized in the present moment. Therefore, without leaving the present moment, we practice at every moment.

To study Buddhadharma is to be at ease and free. If one still remains troubled and sorrowful from morning to night, that is not Buddhadharma and is not in accord with Buddhadharma. As we say, “Whether clothing and food are abundant or meager, live according to conditions.” Follow conditions in all things. If they are good, live well; if they are bad, live through them as they are. It does not matter; they are all false appearances.

If you laugh heartily when circumstances are favorable, but become sorrowful and afflicted when they are unfavorable, what Buddhism are you studying? Is not everything unattainable? Is not everything like a dream? Why, then, does your mind still move?

Someone asked, “Have I awakened?” Ask yourself whether you have awakened: “Am I still infatuated with experiences? Am I still attached to appearances?” If, when experiences arise, you are still infatuated with them, then you have not awakened. Awakening means waking up and no longer dreaming.

In dreams, everything is present. Pleasant experiences make one exceedingly happy, while unpleasant experiences bring unbearable distress; some people even wake up crying or shouting. But after waking, there is not the slightest trace of them. If you still become afflicted when encountering circumstances, then you have not awakened. To remain unelated in favorable circumstances and untroubled and

unangered in adverse circumstances—that is correct. Only then can one truly eliminate greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. If one has not realized the mind and seen one's true nature, there can be no question of eliminating greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt; not even a little can be eliminated. To eliminate greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, one must realize one's true nature!

If those attachments to appearances have not all been removed and the mind is constantly wavering, yet you seek spiritual powers, you are going directly against the Way. This is attachment added to attachment, and greed, anger, and ignorance added to greed, anger, and ignorance. How could you possibly have your wishes fulfilled?! You must let go of everything.

How can birth and death be transcended? By not attaching to circumstances, not following thoughts, and not clinging to any experiences at all—only then can one transcend birth and death. Seeking spiritual powers is not ultimate and cannot enable one to transcend birth and death.

In studying the Buddhadharma, we must firmly recognize the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate: "Only this is real; the other two are not real." To cultivate apart from the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate and seek dharmas outside the mind is a non-Buddhist path. Accomplishment does not mean displaying spiritual powers; it means that the mind is empty and non-abiding, open and at ease, free and unrestrained. To remain unconstrained in favorable and adverse circumstances, free and at ease—this is the greatest spiritual power.

(A talk given in Hangzhou on June 17, 1995)

III. Selections from Secrets of the Heart Sūtra

So long as we abide unmoving, are not turned by circumstances, do not cling to any appearances, and are free from all idle theories, ultimate reality will immediately appear before us.

If we now train our own minds at every moment and understand that all forms and all circumstances are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, all being manifestations of deluded thoughts; if we neither pursue, crave, nor grasp them, and the mind becomes empty and pure, then when this physical body is destroyed and the four elements disperse, the eighth consciousness, the mind-king, will be able to take charge as soon as it emerges, without being turned by circumstances or entering a womb.

Therefore, when we cultivate a practice, we must redouble our efforts while alive, remain highly vigilant, recognize that all forms are like dreams and illusions, neither

grasping nor pursuing them, and directly realize bodhi. While alive, we will be carefree and at ease; after death, however the illusory realm may manifest, there will be no mind to stir. In this way, we can radiate great light, brilliantly illuminate the ten directions, come and go freely, and respond to conditions and sentient beings without any lack of ease.

When speaking and acting, it should be as though one were not speaking or acting oneself, but as though someone else were speaking and acting. Afterward, it should be as though nothing had been done. Only this is true mindlessness and true nirvāṇa. Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, put it well: “Just when the mind is put to use, there is precisely no mind to use; when no mind is used, it is precisely in use; in constant use, it is precisely absent.”

This means that just when we give rise to a thought and use the mind, there is nevertheless no mind to use. That is, our minds do not turn along with objects and circumstances: they may function fully, yet do not function. This is the true mind responding to conditions and functioning; it is the wondrous functioning of the true mind.

Cultivation does not mean withdrawing from reality. Rather, we must temper the mind amid worldly circumstances and work on the mind-ground. If one does not understand worldly affairs or handle them harmoniously, how can one become a Buddha? Therefore, to cultivate the Way and attain Buddhahood, one must first understand the principles of being a human being. If one cannot even understand those principles and lacks adequate character, how can one possess the character of a Buddha? Thus, the Buddhadharma is not negative or passive.

True Buddhadharma is selflessness. It transforms people's selfish mentality of “for myself,” so that they contribute their own abilities in service to sentient beings, seek the welfare of the public, and do more good and beneficial deeds for humanity.

The Buddhadharma teaches us that in doing all things, we must keep the mind empty and non-abiding, allowing it to function naturally in accordance with conditions. In dealing with people and matters, speaking and acting, working, and resolving problems, we must not be turned by circumstances or take things to heart, but act as though someone else were doing it.

After a matter has been handled and the circumstances have passed, the mind should be utterly empty and pure, with nothing remaining in it—like a bird flying through the sky without leaving a trace. Yet one must not allow not a single thought to arise and remain motionless there like a stone. To do things with such freedom and without obstruction is the true meaning of Buddhism's non-contrivance and yet leaving nothing undone.

It may be said that no dharma can be accomplished apart from contemplation. Beginning with “prajñā of words,” one understands the meaning and principles of the scriptures and thereby gives rise to contemplative practice, entering “contemplative prajñā.”

As one's contemplative practice deepens, one “sees that the five aggregates are all empty” and realizes “prajñā of ultimate reality.” This is directly realizing the Original Face—that is, what we call realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature: personally seeing Buddha-nature. Thus, contemplation is the sole path for Buddhist practitioners to realize the Way; it is the key to whether cultivation succeeds and whether one realizes the mind and sees one’s true nature.

That is to say, whenever you do anything, do not let the mind become inverted. Do not cling to external circumstances, do not be shaken by their changes, and do not let each thought wander outward. When favorable events or circumstances arise, or when you meet people congenial to you, you delight in them, love them, and grasp after them. When unfavorable events or adverse circumstances arise, or when you encounter uncongenial people, you worry about them, hate them, and reject them.

This is mistaking the true for the false, taking the false to be true, and reversing master and servant: the master is constrained by the servant. We must function in accordance with conditions. While working, thoughts may move, but do not cling to appearances; let the mind abide nowhere, as though someone else were doing it. Afterward, it is as though nothing had been done. Only then does the true mind truly become the master.

To attain the state in which the true mind is master, one must ordinarily practice contemplation on the mind-ground: contemplate this mind at every moment, transform this mind, and turn the deluded mind into the true mind. Buddhism's eighty-four thousand dharma gates are all practices of this mind, all work on the mind-ground.

In short, none of the Buddhist schools or dharma gates can be separated from transforming this mind, turning the deluded mind into the true mind—that is, practicing contemplation on the mind-ground. We have just discussed this and are discussing it again, emphasizing it repeatedly because it is so important. Contemplate this mind at every moment. When a deluded thought arises, awaken sharply and turn it around; cease the deluded mind, and that is bodhi. In this way, we can return from delusion to truth and return to the source.

To reach the other shore, we must rely on prajñā: use unsurpassed wondrous wisdom to illuminate and dispel ignorance, our deluded thinking mind, and all worldly dharmas, supramundane dharmas, conditioned dharmas, and

unconditioned dharmas. Only when all are seen to be unobtainable can we leave the bitter ocean of birth and death and reach the other shore.

In our practice, we must understand this principle, see through worldly affairs, and recognize that all things are unobtainable. Let go of everything, directly realize the original resolve, and awaken to the Way. Going further, temper the mind amid circumstances, exhaust habitual tendencies of attachment, break through attachment to dharmas, and realize the upward-pointing nostril; only then can one attain the ultimate.

If you cling to there being a dharma to cultivate or a fruition to attain, you will not be at ease and will not reach the ultimate. For whatever is gained becomes a bondage, leaving one less free and unable to attain what is truly real. Moreover, having something to gain easily leads one into demonic states; not only will one fail to realize the Way, but one may instead fall into demonic states. Therefore, “nothing to attain” is not only the central principle of the Heart Sūtra, but also the central principle of Buddhism as a whole.

Therefore, in cultivation we should not abide in appearances, but truly work on the mind-ground. We must clearly recognize that this all-capable entity that can function is Buddha-nature; it is our fundamental life-source and our true master.

Only it is real and not false, eternal and unchanging: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going. Everything else, including our own bodies, is illusory and unreal, all false. The body is like a house or a piece of furniture.

Use it when it is in good condition; once it is damaged, discard it. Once we have clearly distinguished truth from falsehood, we must protect this nature that is real and not false at every moment, remain unmoved on this original ground, neither become deluded nor shaken when encountering circumstances, and be able to function in response to them. This practice is contemplation.

We continually practice contemplation to remove our habitual tendency to abide in appearances, namely the five obscurations mentioned above. Sleeping is a habitual tendency, and eating is also a habitual tendency. Yet habitual tendencies cannot be eliminated by force; they must be removed skillfully, by using expedient means to redirect the mind, entering deeply into meditative stability, and constantly gathering the mind in samādhi.

Here I wish to remind everyone not to misunderstand and suppose that sitting motionlessly is samādhi, and thus desperately force yourselves to sit in meditation. You do not realize that sitting motionlessly is dead samādhi. Dead samādhi has

entering and leaving; that is, it has arising and ceasing. With arising and ceasing, one cannot be “constantly gathered.”

What is meant by “constantly gathered in samādhi” is not becoming deluded or shaken when encountering circumstances. This is great samādhi without entering or leaving. If one's practice has not yet reached this point, one must still contemplate at every moment, allowing one’s intrinsic nature to abide on its original ground, not turning with thoughts or moving with circumstances. This is called “contemplating freedom.”

When the practice advances further and becomes fully mature, even this “contemplation” is no longer needed and must be relinquished. A Chan master once said: “Without awareness and contemplation is indeed birth and death; with awareness and contemplation is also birth and death.” If you are confused and muddled, move with circumstances, wander about, and create karma, that is of course birth and death.

Why are awareness and contemplation also birth and death? Because one still clings to views and functions of dharmas; as long as dharmas remain, birth and death remain. Yet this birth and death is a further stage: transformational birth and death. Therefore, once practice is fully mature, the dharma must also be relinquished. Even without contemplation, one can remain firmly unmoved on the original ground. This is “freedom.”

When the practice advances further, even the “self” is no longer needed. Intrinsic nature is naturally genuine and originally so; there is no need to attend to it constantly. For example, there is no need continually to remind oneself of one’s own name; without reminders, one will not forget it. At this point, even the self is no longer needed. Buddha-nature is present at all times and in all places; it is everywhere and always present. This is “abiding.”

Going further still, when one has finally arrived home, even “abiding” is no longer needed: there is no abiding and no non-abiding. Whatever meets the eye and whatever conditions one encounters are nothing but manifestations of the true mind; every gesture and movement is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. Then one is completely mature. This is how we must practice step by step, at every moment. Thus, the three words “contemplating freedom” in Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's name are truly a model for practitioners in their practice.

When practicing and sitting in meditation, one may unite mind and mouth and use the mind in contemplation. But after leaving the meditation cushion, one becomes just like an ordinary worldly person, wandering with circumstances, letting the wild horse run loose, and becoming utterly confused amid circumstances.

Failing to contemplate off the meditation cushion is a grave mistake. However earnestly you practice on the cushion, it is supplementary practice rather than the primary practice, auxiliary cultivation rather than true cultivation. True cultivation still depends on practice off the cushion.

Why is this so? Consider the time involved: how many meditation sessions can you practice in a day? How many hours? Even if you can sit continuously for four hours, or perhaps a little more—say, six hours—that is still far too small a proportion of the day, only one quarter. If during the other three quarters you let the wild horse run loose, remain muddled, and cling to appearances, how can you attain realization?

Off the meditation cushion, one comes into contact with external circumstances; this is the time when one is tested, to see whether one can avoid being turned by circumstances. Practice off the cushion is true practice. Practice on the cushion is like sharpening a knife: when the knife has become dull, one sharpens it. Practice off the cushion is using the knife: one must cut things with it and see whether it is sharp and whether it can cut through circumstances.

If you do not use it, how can you know whether this knife is sharp or not? How can you know whether the practice you do on the meditation cushion is effective or not? Only when you use it and discover that you still cannot penetrate a situation can you say, “Ah! This knife of mine is still not sharp; I must apply myself and sharpen it well!” Only then can it further spur you on in your practice.

Our practice is for the sake of transcending birth and death and attaining Buddhahood. What is meant by birth and death? It is giving rise to thoughts through attachment to circumstances. If you become attached to circumstances and follow them along, there is birth and death. If, before any circumstance whatsoever, you remain unmoved and do not enter into that circumstance, there is no birth and death.

If you do not temper yourself amid circumstances, where else can you temper yourself? It will not do to train where there is nothing at all; you must train amid phenomena and circumstances. The four Dharma realms taught in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra—“the nonobstruction of principle, the nonobstruction of phenomena, the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena, and the nonobstruction among phenomena”—are the four stages of practice.

Practice must be carried through to its final stage—the Dharma realm of the nonobstruction among phenomena. Only when one can penetrate every circumstance and every affair, without the slightest hindrance, can one be said to have attained Buddhahood. Merely understanding a little principle, being able to speak of it in principle but unable to put it into practice, is empty boasting and has no effect whatsoever. If one practices only on the meditation cushion and does not

temper oneself amid circumstances after getting up from it, one cannot attain accomplishment.

If we truly know how to practice, we must train amid circumstances. We must maintain contemplation at every moment, contemplating the fundamental source of our own life and remaining unmoved on the original ground. This is how practice must be done at every moment. This is contemplating freely. Thus, the three words "contemplating freely" are the overarching principle of thousands of sūtras and treatises.

An eminent master of the ancient Chan school wrote a poem that expresses this well: "The mind turns with the myriad things; where it turns is truly profound and tranquil. Following conditions, recognize your nature; neither rejoice nor grieve."

"The mind turns with the myriad things" means that our minds give rise to all kinds of wondrous functioning in response to the myriad things. This is responding to conditions and engaging with things. When matters arise, we know how to resolve them; when work comes, we know how to complete it. Within, we understand clearly and are not confused in the least. But everyone must take care not to misunderstand this phrase: it does not mean that the mind abides in anything.

"Where it turns is truly profound and tranquil": tranquil means quiet and unmoving. Although it turns, and although thoughts arise in order to deal with all kinds of affairs, inwardly it remains unmoved—the matter is not retained in the mind. It is as though someone else, rather than oneself, were dealing with it. Confucius said, "The mind is unburdened while the body labors." This means that although the physical body is at work, the mind does not become attached to it. This saying is extremely important. To accomplish it truly, one must engage in diligent contemplation.

The Diamond Sūtra says, "Give rise to this mind without abiding anywhere." It is not that the mind does not arise or that thoughts do not arise. If wondrous functioning is to occur, how could the mind not arise? Rather, one must give rise to a mind of non-abiding—a mind that does not linger on any thing. Even as a thought arises, no thought is seen that can arise; after it has arisen, it is like a bird crossing the vast sky, leaving not the slightest trace. Although one is doing things, although one responds to conditions and engages with things, inwardly one abides nowhere and has no mind of gain or loss.

Furthermore, when we have done our utmost in carrying out a task, without the slightest carelessness, we claim no credit for success and feel no shame in our hearts at failure. Open and unreserved, we employ great capacity and great function, neither rejoicing nor grieving, neither grasping nor rejecting. When the practice of contemplation has reached this point, contemplation itself is no longer needed. One then ascends another level, enters the functioning of non-effort, and

reaches the ground of non-contrivance. At this time, true nature is present before one at every moment.

Today, if students, upon hearing this, can immediately disperse the mist of delusion and clearly see Buddha-nature, and can take Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as their model—continuously and carefully safeguarding realization in daily life, settling their minds steadily and sincerely, and constantly contemplating this intrinsic nature, allowing it to remain unmoved on its original ground, not swayed by objective conditions or drawn along by objects and circumstances; constantly nurturing the sacred embryo, upholding the Way and nourishing their nature, and diligently removing habitual tendencies—then they will ultimately realize the true fruition. This is precisely the profound purport of the Heart Sūtra.

That is to say, one must maintain contemplation at every moment. One must understand that all circumstances are unobtainable, illusory, and unreal, and must not become attached to them. In all things, follow conditions: if there is porridge, eat porridge; if there is rice, eat rice. Whatever work I am assigned today, I simply do that work, openly and without concern, and do not add troubles for myself. This is to face reality directly and see only the present moment. Once practice matures and the time and conditions arrive, the bottom of the bucket drops out, and one sees one's own Original Face.

Even if this mind has already been stirred by circumstances and is about to create karma, if one's conscience suddenly awakens, one recognizes that it conflicts with morality, immediately changes one's mind, stops the evil thought, and does not create karma, then this single deluded thought is extinguished and the karma cannot be created. Therefore, in working on the mind-ground, we must be able to stop and cut off this single thought immediately.

If we can continually cut ourselves off from this single thought, we will recover the ever-abiding true mind. In cultivating practice, we must continually gather this mind into the Dharma we are practicing.

Because this practice requires exertion, it is called functioning with effort. As one's practice gradually becomes refined and pure, and one relinquishes until not a single thought arises, the view that abides in worldly dharmas is eliminated. One must then go further and relinquish even the Buddha Dharma. If a view of dharmas still remains and one clings to the Buddha Dharma without relinquishing it, that is still not ultimate.

Therefore, so-called "practice of relinquishment" requires relinquishing worldly dharmas and supramundane dharmas alike; only then is it ultimate. When practice reaches the point at which even the Buddha Dharma has been relinquished and is unobtainable, one passes from functioning with effort into the effortless functioning

of spontaneous naturalness. Effortless functioning is great functioning; thus one naturally accords with the Way.

As for breaking through ignorance, it is not as difficult as climbing to the heavens. If we can suddenly awaken and realize that all appearances are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—unseekable and unobtainable—then, in letting go once, we let go of everything. With this single awakening, ignorance can be eliminated!

When thoughts of greed, anger, or ignorance are arising, if we suddenly bring forth mindfulness of the Buddha, then with this single awakening greed, anger, and ignorance vanish into nothing, and we are pure at once. Though they depart quickly, they also return quickly: in the blink of an eye, another thought of greed, anger, or ignorance arises. This is the power of deluded habitual tendencies.

But we should not become worried or afraid because of this. As long as we recognize them clearly, do not grasp at them, and persistently cut them off, none of these deluded thoughts will contaminate our intrinsic nature. At first, because our strength is insufficient, we sometimes fail to attend to them, and our contemplation lacks power. But if we understand this clearly at its root and persist in doing it without slackening over a long time, the power of transformation will naturally arise. Therefore, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is truly the first key to studying Buddhism; it is of the utmost importance.

Therefore, we must constantly ask ourselves: when encountering circumstances, is the mind still clinging? Have we truly recognized what is original? If, when encountering circumstances, we are swayed by deluded thoughts and give rise to minds of love and hatred, grasping and rejection, then we cannot transcend birth and death. We must feel deep shame and remorse, apply ourselves vigorously, and practice well.

All appearances are illusory and provisional appearances, useful only for a time; they are all unobtainable, so do not become attached to them. Do not hold them in mind in the slightest or abide in them at all. Use things without being used by things; turn things without being turned by things. Then one will attain great freedom amid all affairs and conditions. One who has truly realized the Way simply eats when hungry and sleeps when tired; there is nothing at all to be concerned about.

Those who genuinely study Buddhism and practice do not seek the Buddha; they seek themselves, continually sweeping away and removing their own habitual tendencies. Because we have habitual tendencies of attachment to forms and appearances, whenever we encounter circumstances, we become attached to appearances. We must struggle against ourselves at every moment and reform

ourselves. For this reason, we are not superstitious; ours is genuine faith grounded in wisdom.

IV. Selected Excerpts from An Elementary Explanation of Mahāmudrā

Therefore, if we are to realize the Way, we must rid ourselves of worldly cleverness and discriminating intelligence. At all times let the mind be as empty and clean as if freshly washed: inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not be drawn by circumstances. Only through diligent tempering and repeated relinquishment can we attain realization.

All dharma gates merely teach us to let the deluded mind come to rest. Do not grasp at sainthood; simply let the mind rest. When the deluded mind comes to rest, that is enough.

The mind of one who cultivates the Way must be impartial and without bias, showing no distinction of closeness or distance in dealing with people and circumstances. If you still perceive such distinctions, you have not yet reached the realm of true equanimity.

From this we can see that, so long as we awaken and are not deluded by forms and appearances, turn the light inward at all times, and cultivate through the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate without relying on other dharma gates, we will certainly become Buddhas in the future.

There is nothing to attain and nothing to verify. You are originally a Buddha; you do not become one through cultivation, so there is no cultivation. Yet because your habitual tendencies have not been eliminated, you still need to cultivate. How should you cultivate? Cultivation without cultivation means contemplating at all times, without using any particular method to cultivate. Thus, this cultivation without cultivation is still necessary.

In the teachings of Mahāmudrā, this means that the instant your mind stirs, you cry, “Peh!” and give it a shout directly in its face, shouting away the deluded thought. This is the supreme oral instruction of Mahāmudrā for the practice of safeguarding realization.

What, then, is the supreme essential point? Ah—it cannot be spoken of. At this point, it is difficult to open one’s mouth and find words. When the World-Honored One saw Mañjuśrī and Kāśyapa strike the gavel, he descended from his seat; since ancient times, great Chan masters have simply brushed off their robes and returned to the

abbot's quarters at this point. For by then, even the radiant sunlight of your own awareness is gone.

Do not be deluded when confronting circumstances. Whatever circumstance appears before you, remain as the Confucians say: "Though Mount Tai collapses before one, one's expression does not change; though a deer leaps up at one's left, one's eyes do not blink." Do not move in the slightest. Therefore, in cultivating the practice, we must train ourselves in this way at every moment—tempering ourselves amid turmoil and exercising ourselves in walking, standing, sitting, lying down, and all human interactions. Do not cultivate the biased emptiness of a samādhi from which one enters and emerges; cultivate the right samādhi in which emptiness and compassion are harmoniously integrated. Cultivating right samādhi is the essential point of practicing the Way.

Let go of everything and return to the original true Buddha of your intrinsic nature. Sleep when you wish to sleep, sit when you wish to sit—how wonderful to be lively, natural, and genuine!

Although we possess the Tathāgata's Buddha-nature, the habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives are deeply rooted. Without arduous tempering, these tendencies cannot be eliminated, and we cannot obtain genuine benefit. Therefore, we must still investigate Chan and sit in meditation, taking a seemingly roundabout path in order to pass through the first two gates.

What should Chan practitioners do? Attend to the huatou at all times. As soon as an affliction stirs, ask, "Who are you?" Then strike directly at it: "Who has stirred up this affliction? Who is it that stirs up affliction?" To strike it with this blow is to attend to the huatou.

When afflictions arise, practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism immediately recite a mantra to transform them.

If our deluded thoughts have not yet been completely eliminated, another deluded thought may arise in an instant. We must immediately become aware of it and not follow it. If the deluded thought is strong and awareness cannot cut it off, promptly recite the Buddha's name, recite a mantra, or raise the huatou and ask where this deluded thought comes from, thereby dissolving it. If you do not realize that you have followed a deluded thought until you have gone a long way with it, then it is too late.

The speed of awareness and the rapidity with which thoughts are eliminated depend on the strength of one's practice. It is like the difference in brightness between candlelight and electric light. At first, one can illuminate things, but later

cannot see very clearly; one realizes only after a deluded thought has persisted for a long time. That is candlelight.

Once practice has become thoroughly proficient, one can perceive a thought the moment it arises. Like a powerful electric light shining before one, it reveals every hollow and uneven place with perfect clarity, so that one will not fall into pits and ravines while walking at night. This is electric light. One has then reached the stage of being quiescent yet ever illuminating, illuminating yet ever quiescent. Do not intentionally try to illuminate; illumination occurs naturally. The depth of practice here varies greatly.

In our practice, we must remain aware at all times and apply ourselves continuously and closely. If, in the twenty-four hours of a day, you practice for only one or two hours and do not practice for the other twenty-two, you are far too lax, and it will be difficult for your practice to progress. Therefore, amid the four deportments of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, we must practice and remain aware at all times. Then our practice will advance.

Furthermore, whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them. Do not think that a certain deluded thought is good and then follow it. Some people have a pleasant dream and, after waking, cannot bear to let it go but continue thinking about it. Dreams are inherently false, so why cling to them? If you became an emperor in a dream, are you truly an emperor? If you obtained great ingots of gold in a dream, did you truly obtain them? Is it not foolish to cling to them?

Therefore, whether practicing samādhi while on the meditation cushion or functioning after leaving the cushion, one must grasp at nothing and reject nothing. Only then can one accord with the principle of the Middle Way and enter the great path of true emptiness and wondrous presence.

How should one practice? Mahāmudrā instructs us thus: “At the outset, let the mind rest openly and at ease, neither grasping nor letting go.” When beginning the practice, first let the mind be thoroughly open and at ease. Do not abide anywhere; have no afflictions, no constraint, and no bondage. Be open and unreserved, and let everything go. Confucianism says: “The gentleman is open and at ease; the petty man is forever anxious.”

“The noble person is open and at ease; the petty person is constantly anxious.” The petty person keeps calculating gain and loss, advantage and disadvantage, turning them over in the mind. Worried about gain and loss, such a person is therefore constantly anxious. The noble person is not troubled by gain or loss and regards everything as of no consequence, and thus is open and at ease. We who cultivate the Dharma are great noble persons and true persons of resolve; all the more

should we be open and unreserved, letting everything go and resting naturally without abiding.

To be open means to be level and straight, without bends or curves. When the mind has no crookedness, the straight mind itself is the place of practice. To be unreserved means to sweep everything away completely, abiding nowhere. Thus one is naturally at ease and free. Mahāmudrā teaches us first to proceed in this way.

If we cannot do this, if the mind clings to something and keeps turning without cease, then we must apply the Dharma as an antidote. How? By neither grasping nor indulging. To grasp means to seize and hold it down; to indulge means to let it run free. We should neither seize it nor indulge it, but allow it to be natural.

When practicing, if we grip our thoughts too tightly and do not dare let them move at all, we will gradually become deadened. Yet neither should we allow thoughts to arise unchecked, for then we fall into indulgence, which is also wrong. When thoughts come, simply do not heed them. This is neither grasping nor indulging. In fact, to cultivate all dharma gates is to train in the practice of not heeding thoughts.

Thoughts do not fail to come or arise. Let them come; let them arise. If you do not heed them, they will naturally dissolve. Whether reciting the Buddha's name, reciting mantras, or investigating Chan, when thoughts arise, neither grasp nor indulge them. In truth, thoughts cannot be seized or suppressed; they will come. As the ancient masters said, "Though the wind has ceased, the waves still surge."

When thoughts arise, those who recite the Buddha's name should not heed them, but raise the Buddha's name; Chan practitioners should not heed them, but raise the huatou; Esoteric practitioners should not heed them, but raise the mantra. Attend single-mindedly to the Buddha's name, the huatou, or the mantra, and deluded thoughts will naturally be transformed.

With respect to thoughts, one should neither prevent them from arising nor let them run unchecked, but transform them. This is alive, not dead. Last time, I mentioned Chan Master Wolun's verse: "Wolun has a skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts; when confronting circumstances, his mind does not arise, and bodhi grows day by day." That is suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise; it is dead and will not do. One must neither grasp nor indulge them—that is, one must not heed them.

It is certainly not good when deluded thoughts arise, but if you suppress them to death, then all is finished. Deluded thoughts arise from the true mind, just as waves arise from water. If you suppress deluded thoughts to death, it is like eliminating the waves and thereby eliminating the water as well; the true mind will no longer be alive. We know that the true mind is lively and vital: it can contain all things, give rise

to all phenomena, and manifest wondrous functioning. If you truly suppress deluded thoughts to death, the true mind becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone, unable to manifest wondrous functioning.

Why are you unable to sit well in practice? You must reflect on yourself: What is your mind still clinging to? Why do you still cling to it? Quickly let it go! Everything is but a reflection within your own mind. Why cling to it? It cannot be grasped; it is false and empty. Let it go!

Even when one's practice has reached the point where awareness itself has disappeared, do not abide in that state. Hence it is said: "To have awareness and illumination is still birth and death, not liberation; to abide in a noble state is also conditioned, not ultimate." Ordinary beings, of course, are without awareness or illumination; all day long they are muddled and confused, as if dreaming. Laozi once said: "The people of the world are clear and discerning; I alone am muddled."

"People of the world are all keen and discriminating; I alone am muddled." How can people in the world be called keen and discriminating if they are all muddled? What is meant by being keen and discriminating is cleverly seeking fame and profit. What Laozi means by being muddled is that practice has reached its ultimate point: great wisdom appears foolish, and there is no abiding whatsoever. Therefore, in practice one must recognize one's intrinsic nature, yet not abide in it or suppose that one has attained anything. This is what is meant by "not touching the present moment."

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: "At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it. Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing; in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality." Only when practice reaches this point is it ultimate. Therefore, in the end even a Buddha cannot be attained. This does not mean that one does not become a Buddha; it means that one is precisely becoming a Buddha. For Buddha, too, is only a provisional name, and not a single trace can be grasped. If you think there is a Buddha to be attained, then you have not yet become a Buddha.

A disciple once asked Chan Master Dongshan, "When cold and heat arrive, how may one avoid them?" Chan Master Dongshan replied, "Go to the place where there is neither cold nor heat."

The disciple then asked, "What is the place where there is neither cold nor heat?" Dongshan said, "When it is cold, let the cold kill you, venerable one; when it is hot, let the heat kill you, venerable one!" What does this mean? When it is warm, do not conceive of warmth; when it is cold, do not conceive of cold. If you conceive of cold and warmth, discriminating thought arises, and afflictions appear before you.

What should one do when adverse circumstances arise? Two lines of poetry put it well: “Make the boiling cauldrons and burning coals cease with a breath; command the sword-trees and knife-mountains to collapse with a shout.” Boiling cauldrons and burning coals, sword-trees and knife-mountains—my mind does not fear them. With one breath, I extinguish them; with one great shout, I destroy them. Let adverse circumstances come as they may: if my mind does not move, they are extinguished.

Take note: it is not that, when adversity comes, I think of how to avoid it, nor is it a matter of how to eliminate afflictions. Rather, we must let go in our minds. Nothing matters; nothing can be obtained; there is nothing to fear. If you want to kill me, then come and kill me. “I offer my head to the white blade as though it were cutting through a spring breeze.” My mind does not move. Let adversity come as it will; I do not avoid it—this is “when two blades cross, there is no need to evade them.” If my mind does not waver and is unafraid, this is what is meant by “blow, and it is stilled; shout, and it is crushed.”

To cultivate the Way, one must possess the spirit of a great person: able to practice great generosity, unconcerned with trifles, unafraid when adversity comes, and not delighted when favorable circumstances arise. One goes one's own way and presses forward courageously. Without the spirit of a great person, it is difficult to succeed in cultivation.

If we can leave behind deluded thoughts—not only while practicing on the meditation cushion, but at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—this is abiding in one's own mind-nature through non-contrivance. This is the manifestation of the Original Face. At all times and in all places, do not cling to appearances; let the mind abide in not even a trace. This is called non-contrivance. It does not mean doing nothing; when there are things to do, simply do them. All day one eats, yet has never bitten into a single grain of rice; all day one wears clothes, yet has never had a single thread hanging upon one. This is called the non-abiding mind. The non-abiding mind is our innate nature.

Therefore, do not seek anything. Simply remove deluded thoughts, and the light of wisdom will naturally appear.

Thus, when we practice a Dharma, we must recognize the root. We must seek nothing and know that we are originally Buddhas; we need only eliminate our deluded emotional attachments. Do not seek anything. Once there is seeking, one becomes demonic. Demons possess spiritual powers: they know when your mind stirs, and then they come. Thus, when an inner demon stirs, outer demons arrive.

What is an inner demon? Any abiding is an inner demon. Once the mind clings to appearances, outer demons seize the opportunity to enter. If the mind does not

cling to appearances and does not stir, outer demons can find no entrance. When demons come, I pay them no heed: “All appearances are false and unreal.” If a Buddha comes, cut down the Buddha; if a demon comes, cut down the demon. Nothing can be obtained—how could they enter? Do not fear demons. Demons are manifestations of the mind. If your mind is not demonic, then no matter how great the powers of outer demons may be, they cannot enter.

We must be able to take charge amid our daily activities. If, whenever something happens, you cannot manage and cannot take charge, then you are like mercury: when it meets fire, it immediately flies away. You cannot withstand birth and death. Practice diligently, open up the original nature, and awaken from the dream. Once you know that everything is a dream-state, why stir the mind? All kindness and resentment, right and wrong, vanish away. This is called “awakening and thereby simultaneously dissolving them.”

All things are dream-states. Before awakening, one clings to them as truly existent; upon awakening, they melt away like ice in hot soup, and all karmic obstacles become empty. This is what is commonly meant by, “Once understood, karmic obstacles are originally empty.” Therefore, one must practice. Without practice, how could the time and conditions for awakening ever arrive? How could one open up the original nature?

Whether or not you have awakened, practicing at the level of Dharma characteristics is merely a waste of energy and self-inflicted trouble; it can lead nowhere. Therefore, the more effortless one's practice, the better; the more relaxed, the better. The more effortful it is, the worse.

When a deluded thought arises, quickly cry, “Peh!” This is the essential instruction of Mahāmudrā for cutting off deluded thoughts. Those who recite the Buddha's name need not use this method. They need only raise up the Buddha-remembrance and recite Amitābha Buddha once. When other practitioners have a deluded thought arise, they should quickly cry, “Peh!” Immediately they become sharply alert, and with a snap the stream of deluded thinking is cut off.

For example, if we think of becoming wealthy, we say, “Peh! What wealth? Daydreaming!” In this way, the deluded thought is cut off. If the force of deluded thoughts is strong—that is, if greed is heavy—and one cry of “Peh!” cannot cut it off, then one must recite a mantra and rely on the Buddha's power to eliminate it.

We must understand clearly that relative views such as arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence, are false. We must also leave behind these extreme views and transcend the realm of oppositions created by the discriminations of language and the mind faculty. Then we will naturally abide in the original self-

nature of luminous great wisdom, where no words can be spoken and no thoughts can stir.

In our practice, we should let the mind be like a river: when it bends, it bends. Have no subjective attachment of your own; let everything follow conditions naturally, without a view of self and without obstruction. At all times, be like flowing water, passing on calmly and freely. This is how one should practice.

We ordinary beings are burdened with selfish concerns and manifold deluded thoughts. We want everything to accord with our own wishes: “I want it this way, so it must be this way; otherwise I become distressed.” Thus our karmic obstacles are deep and heavy, and we cannot see the Way.

Now that we are applying ourselves to cultivating the Way, we must change these habitual deluded attachments. We must be able to accord with conditions and circumstances: bend when it is time to bend, yield when it is time to yield, and not stubbornly cling to our own views. For example, in our work, whether we are promoted or demoted should make no difference. We should not rejoice at promotion or become upset at demotion.

Because everything is done in service to the people, not for oneself, one must be able to rise or step down. Having studied Buddhism, we know that all fame, sensual pleasures, wealth, and profit are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water: they cannot be sought or obtained. The mind remains ever empty and quiescent, without afflictions. Thus every issue can be discussed, every task can be assumed selflessly, and one can carry it forward courageously.

If everyone acted in this selfless way for the sake of others, society would be peaceful, the nation would flourish, and the country would be prosperous and strong. Thus, learning Buddhism greatly benefits social mores and the human heart and truly ought to be vigorously promoted.

When we do something, we should not concern ourselves with success or failure. We should simply exert our utmost efforts. Do not rejoice at success or be troubled by failure; sum up experience, correct errors, and continue working with renewed effort. If our thoughts can be open and straightforward, without crookedness or selfishness, unmoving and unwavering, we will naturally realize the Original Face of the dharmakāya.

Likewise, when a thought arises, do not entertain the idea that “the light of mind has been obscured by dark clouds”; nor, when deluded thoughts subside, entertain the idea of “eliminating” them. For as soon as the thought of “leaving” or “getting out” arises, delusion is added upon delusion. There is still attachment, and liberation cannot be attained.

Therefore, we must always be like this: when thoughts come, do not heed them, suppress them, or follow them. Let everything proceed naturally in accord with conditions; respond to the myriad circumstances without abiding. This is the inherent characteristic of our dharmakāya.

So long as we can be as unintentional as flowing water, letting things take their natural course—as the saying goes, “Falling flowers have intention; flowing water has none”—and at all times function naturally and freely in this way, we can restore the inherent characteristic of the dharmakāya and manifest great spiritual powers. The inherent characteristic of the dharmakāya does not mean that not a single thought arises, or that one is rigidly unaware of everything. It is alive and vital, functioning in accord with conditions, with boundless wondrous functioning. So-called no-thought does not mean that no thought whatsoever arises; when thoughts arise without abiding, that is called no-thought. Emptiness is precisely presence, and presence is precisely emptiness.

It is not that you cannot watch a play; simply do not let the play watch you, or let its plot carry you away.

While watching, one repeatedly gives rise to joy, anger, sorrow, and delight along with the play's separations and reunions, joys and sorrows. Afterward, one cannot forget it and continues to brood over it; one's mind keeps turning with the plot: this person is so good, that person so bad. This is called being watched by the play. How can that do? Watching a play can also be used as practice for training the mind: see whether the mind can be moved by it.

If one can reach the state of “like a wooden person watching flowers and birds,” that is good practice. But this does not mean being unaware of who is good or bad in the play, or being unaware of its plot. If one knew nothing at all, would one not become a pool of stagnant water? It is not unawareness; it is not discriminating and choosing, nor being moved by the play's plot.

Watching without watching; not watching, yet watching—without the slightest abiding. “Human affairs are nothing but a play.” We cannot let go of this and cannot let go of that, yet in truth all this is as unreal as a play. When a single breath does not return, this performance is over. Why cling to it?

Therefore, if we can awaken sharply, let everything go, and not cling to appearances, we will attain the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. The wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya is not difficult: we need only remain alert at all times and never abide in appearances.

All you bodhisattvas, we must truly practice diligently. Only by completely quieting the deluded mind can we realize the Way.

Chan Master Guifeng said: “Through many lives, deluded attachments have become habitual and formed into one's nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and delight flow on in subtle continuous streams. Though true principle may be suddenly realized, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once. One must constantly be aware of them, diminishing them again and again.” Therefore, we must observe ourselves at all times. As soon as a thought arises, immediately recognize and dispel it. If the force of deluded thoughts is strong and cannot be transformed at once, recite the Buddha's name or a mantra to transform them.

The Buddha's name and mantras are wisdom swords, used to cut through the deluded mind and emotional thoughts that cling to appearances. Their power is inexhaustible. So long as we recite them sincerely, we will surely receive the blessings of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, realizing the Way is not difficult.

We practice in order to eliminate completely the deluded habits of clinging to illusory appearances, not to sit there rigidly without moving. If we can awaken, never abide in appearances, and do not cling even to Dharma practice, then we are on the right path and have entered the “natural abiding of non-practice.”

To tame and counteract deluded thoughts, one must not work on each individual rise and fall of deluded thought; one must practice at the general root from which deluded thoughts arise. Ordinary beings have many deluded thoughts. Some are intensely desirous of sex, some intensely greedy for wealth, and some intensely desirous of fame. Each person's habitual tendencies of deluded thought differ. If one counters them one by one, using delusion to treat delusion, the delusion only becomes worse. If one works at the point where the deluded mind stirs, then one stroke settles a hundred matters, and one may return home and sit securely.

Recognize that the point at which the deluded mind arises is true mind itself, and do not seek elsewhere. Then you will stand firmly on your feet.

Why still seek a master to open the crown of your head and transmit a Dharma to you? Can a master open your crown and make you realize the Way? Frankly speaking, there is no such thing. If a master could open your crown and make you realize the Way, then the Buddha, being so compassionate, would long ago have opened everyone's crown and enabled everyone to realize the Way. Why would there still be so many ordinary beings? Saying that they will open your crown is merely a symbolic consolation, meant to make you feel pleased and settled, so that you may enter the Way more easily.

Having understood this principle, we must exert ourselves in practice and open our own crown, without relying on others. Clearly recognize that the true mind is nowhere else: the very place from which deluded thoughts and afflictions arise is

our true mind. Protect it at all times, and do not be carried away by deluded thoughts.

As soon as thoughts begin to wander, quickly recite the Buddha's name or quickly uphold a mantra, transforming the deluded thoughts away. This turning the light inward is a wonderful method for protecting the true mind. In practice, look inward, not outward. There are too many things outside: delicious food, fine clothing, pleasurable amusements. … All these are merely shadows, utterly unobtainable. If you follow them, you are finished. You must remain settled and unmoved, stand firm, and exhaust the old habit of clinging to appearances. Then great luminosity will naturally shine forth.

If we have no doubts at all and can care for this at every moment, this is the light of initial awakening in practicing the Way. This is genuine practice. It need not have any particular form, nor need it take the form of sitting meditation, Buddha-recitation, or mantra recitation. Rather, whenever a deluded thought arises, see it. Do not run after it or pay it any heed; it immediately turns empty and is utterly unobtainable. Be so in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Others may not see you practicing, but in fact you are practicing at all times and in all places. This is practice of the mind-ground, called "the light of initial awakening in practicing the Way."

With respect to deluded thoughts and afflictions arising amid circumstances and functions, do not give rise to a mind that covers them over, drives them away, establishes them, grasps them, or abandons them. Since all things are illusory shadows, there is nothing to grasp or reject. Do not heed them, and do not give rise to any thought at all; only then does one accord with the subtle wonder of the Way. To cover is to conceal; to drive away is to expel. Both covering and driving away are forms of suppression.

To establish them means to follow along with them. For example, suppose you lose capital in business and affliction arises. Then you think, "I am a Buddhist practitioner; I should not be so afflicted. Why have I become afflicted again? This is wrong, wrong!" The more you think about it, the more remorseful you become, and the more you stir up affliction. This is covering and driving away.

Again, suppose you are already able not to be moved by the success or failure of affairs. You think your meditative stability is strong: "The eight worldly winds cannot move me; I sit upright upon a purple-golden lotus." This state seems very good. That is establishing.

This is how we should practice: whether in movement or stillness, favorable or adverse circumstances, ease or affliction, all are utterly unobtainable; do not take any of them to heart. Even covering, driving away, establishing, setting up, grasping, and abandoning—do not take any of these to heart. When deluded thoughts and

afflictions come, neither follow them nor heed them. Let them arise and cease; simply awaken sharply.

When deluded thoughts and afflictions come, do not suppress them and do not follow them. Have no covering or driving away, no establishing; have no love or hatred, grasping or rejection. Everything is utterly unobtainable. Be open and at ease, ordinary and natural, with an even mind; they will quietly exhaust themselves. Let winds and clouds shift in countless ways; I myself have neither joy nor sorrow. Let the mind remain empty, the breath even, and the intention light. We must practice in this way at all times and in all places. This practice is useful in every school.

In former times, Master Hanshan was highly gifted in literary composition and excelled at poetry and lyrics. He practiced to the point that he completely forgot all poetry and lyrics. When someone asked him to write a poem, he could not produce a single line. Later, someone brought him several Tang poems and asked him to chant them. As soon as he chanted Tang poetry, verses immediately sprang forth.

There was no need to think at all; it was like a mountain torrent bursting forth—once it began, it could not be stopped. Master Hanshan knew that this was not right: he could not allow literary inspiration to obscure Buddha-nature. So he resolutely cut off, with a sharp "snap," this subtle marvel that was like "spring water surging in a rushing current." These are all outer husks capable of obscuring the "original face." "If what should be cut off is not cut off, one will instead suffer its disorder." They should decisively be stripped away.

When the functions of bliss and luminosity arise, or when such phenomena as worldly happiness and pleasure arise, forcefully recite, "Peh!" Bring this "Peh!" down sharply from above, thereby breaking through the outer husk of attachment to the powers of "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity," so that intrinsic nature may appear brightly before you.

We should be like a river: if it bends, let it bend; if it runs straight, let it run straight. When wind comes and waves rise, it does not matter. Joy, laughter, anger, and scolding are all wondrous functions of Buddha-nature. It does no harm to lose one's temper once in a while.

Why? If you are overly accommodating, others may think you are weak and easy to bully; their desires will grow all the stronger, and they may suddenly harm many people. How could that be acceptable? At such a time, one needs "the heart of a bodhisattva and the face of a rākṣasa": become angry and give them a stern lesson, even give them a beating, so that they quickly turn back. This is education. Therefore, Buddhist practitioners cannot always be weak and timid. When encountering wrongdoing, become angry when anger is called for.

But is this truly anger? Anger is only an outward appearance, a means of educating people. It is not a loss of inner control, nor is it the arising of a mind of hatred.

In former times, there was a garden steward under Chan Master Liangshan Yuan'guan. A garden steward manages the vegetable garden, growing vegetables for the community. He asked Liangshan, "What should one do when the household thief is hard to guard against?" The household thief is a metaphor for deluded thoughts. If one follows deluded thoughts, the luminosity of intrinsic nature is obscured; it is as though this "household thief" of deluded thought has stolen one's Dharma treasure.

When deluded thoughts come, what should one do? Liangshan said, "To recognize it is not to be wronged." If you can see it, recognize that it is a deluded thought, and simply do not follow it, then you are not wronged.

If you follow it—clinging to it or suppressing it are both forms of following it—then your practice has been in vain. Is that not a shame? But the garden steward was an awakened person. He would not merely say this and hear it spoken; he wanted to present it face-to-face, grasp the crucial point, and not let go of the huatou.

After several questions and answers, he suddenly asked, "What if a torrent suddenly overturns mountains?" What should one do if a great temper suddenly erupts, like a mountain flood that washes down whole peaks? Chan Master Liangshan descended from the Dharma seat and seized the garden steward, saying, "Ācārya, do not let the corner of this old monk's robe get wet!" Even the corner of the robe must not be wetted; this symbolizes an unmoving mind. In other words, even if you lose your temper, you must hold the mind steady and not let it move in the slightest.

"Natural, effortless functioning" means following conditions; "safeguarding and letting be within lucid quiescence" means remaining unchanged. Follow conditions without changing; remain unchanged while following conditions. Whether one gains a great fortune or becomes utterly poor, it makes no difference. If there is porridge, eat porridge; if there is rice, eat rice. Do not give rise to discriminating, grasping, rejecting, or seeking thoughts.

An ancient worthy said: "Lucid and quiescent is right; lucid but given to deluded thoughts is not. Quiescent and lucid is right; quiescent but blank and unknowing is not." This is the supreme oral instruction for "long-term nurturing and thorough realization of differentiated wisdom." Not only does it contain meditative stability within wisdom and wisdom within meditative stability; it also prevents deadened absorption and wild wisdom.

Failure in practice comes from not properly safeguarding this pristine Buddha-nature. Thus it is said, "One must resolutely safeguard continuity." This is extremely important. Resolutely means making great vows and forming a firm determination.

Safeguarding means not being carried away by thoughts or moved by circumstances; in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, never depart from this, not even for a second—from moment to moment, never depart from intrinsic nature. Continuity means that it must not be interrupted at any time.

If you practice intermittently—fishing for three days and drying the nets for two, advancing one step and retreating two—you cannot maintain unbroken continuity and therefore cannot realize the Way. For example, if we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for only one session a day, that is merely two hours, leaving another twenty-two hours.

If you let a wild horse run free for twenty-two hours and cultivate meditative stability for only two, then the time devoted to practice is not even one-tenth of the whole. How could you realize the Way? Still less can you realize the Way if you practice today and stop tomorrow. Therefore, we say that contemplation is the primary practice, while sitting meditation is an auxiliary practice. Contemplation means not being carried away by thoughts or moved by circumstances, so that intrinsic nature is never absent even for a second. This is precisely to safeguard continuity.

One must not "give rise to greed and attachment in pleasant and favorable circumstances, hatred in adverse and obstructive circumstances, or thoughts of painful feeling in response to illness and pain." Why should one not think in this way? Because "whatever arises is the manifestation of the functioning of intrinsic nature." Do not think that pleasant and favorable circumstances are good, adverse and obstructive circumstances bad, health good, and illness bad.

Where do these adverse and obstructive circumstances, even illness and pain, which we call bad, come from? They are all manifestations of intrinsic nature. Without intrinsic nature, how could there be such circumstances and conditions? We must awaken sharply and know that these circumstances and conditions, even the mind of hatred, are manifestations of intrinsic nature. Then hatred will naturally not arise.

In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we emphasize that "contemplation is the primary practice, while sitting meditation is an auxiliary practice," in order to highlight the function of contemplation. When a deluded thought comes, see it; immediately awaken sharply and do not heed the thought. If you do not see it, you are clearly following the deluded thought. This is "leakage." These leaking deluded thoughts are karmic causes for rebirth in the six realms. If you follow thoughts, you will inevitably be turned by circumstances. Once you cling to circumstances, you create karma; having created karma, you undergo karmic retribution, and thus rebirth in the six realms has no end in sight.

Whether deluded thoughts are coarse or subtle, "one must let their arising and ceasing vanish along with them, while carefully safeguarding practice." When

deluded thoughts arise, you must notice them; then awaken sharply, neither heed them nor follow them. They will naturally dissolve without trace. This is called "letting arising and ceasing vanish along with them": as you awaken, thoughts arising and ceasing dissolve into emptiness.

If you do not notice them or do not awaken sharply, deluded thoughts keep moving without cease; thought after thought continues without interruption, and they become karmic causes of rebirth. "Carefully safeguarding practice" means properly protecting and correcting. What is to be protected? What is to be corrected? Protect the spiritually luminous, non-abiding true mind, and correct the ceaselessly shifting deluded thoughts.

When you notice a deluded thought, immediately awaken sharply; immediately let its arising and ceasing vanish along with it. Do not follow it for some distance before awakening sharply. Some people know when a deluded thought has arisen, but they cannot bear to stop. They say, "Let me consider it a little longer. Let me think it through first, and then I will awaken sharply."

Since you already know that these are deluded thoughts, why continue thinking them? Is that not the height of ignorance? It is plainly being carried along by deluded thoughts! Do not act this way. Promptly awaken with resolute clarity, so that arising and ceasing vanish as they occur. At all times, safeguard our true mind: clear, ever-present knowing, with no abiding and no sticking or clinging. This is "skillful safeguarding practice."

"That is, neither indulging them and allowing them to blaze nor using thought to control thought." To indulge means to let loose a wild horse—to run along after one's thoughts. Allowing them to blaze means letting thoughts burn fiercely without ceasing: from Zhang San one thinks of Li Si, and from Li Si of Zhao Wu … drifting on without end. It is like a great fire: the more it burns, the more fiercely it blazes.

Letting thoughts continue fiercely without interruption is "indulging them and allowing them to blaze." We must not indulge them and allow them to blaze; we must promptly transform them.

How should they be transformed? There are two methods. First, consider for yourself: what will be the consequence of indulging them and allowing them to blaze? It will be unthinkably dreadful! These are karmic causes of rebirth in the six realms, and the suffering is unbearable. Promptly awaken with resolute clarity, allowing intrinsic nature to appear brightly before you.

If the force of deluded thoughts is strong and resolute awakening cannot transform them, use the second method: promptly recite the Buddha's name or a mantra, replacing deluded thoughts with Buddha-remembrance or right mindfulness. Both

methods are ways of not indulging thoughts and allowing them to blaze. But under no circumstances should one “use thought to control thought.”

What does it mean to use thought to control thought? One gives rise to a deluded thought to suppress the original deluded thought: “Oh, this thought is deluded. It is bad, bad—quickly, do not let it move.” This is using thought to control thought. Why is this not good? It has two possible results.

First, one may be unable to suppress the deluded thought, thereby producing precisely the “drifting flow of deluded thoughts.” Second, even if one can control it temporarily and suppress the thought to death, it is like “pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows again.” After thoughts have been suppressed to death, one becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone—dead.

Such “dead samādhi” is temporary. Even if you can remain in samādhi for hundreds or thousands of years, once the power of samādhi wanes, deluded thoughts will return, and with even greater force. Rebirth in the six realms will continue as before; this is still not ultimate. Therefore, we do not use thought to control thought or suppress thoughts to death. We transform them, turning them around through a resolute awakening. When our strength is insufficient, we recite mantras or the Buddha’s name.

Thus, “contemplation” has two meanings: first, when deluded thoughts arise, you must know it; second, you must awaken with resolute clarity. There is an analogy called “a cat catching mice,” in which deluded thoughts are compared to mice. One must have a cat’s alertness: the instant a mouse shows its head, it is immediately detected. In the Chan school, this is called “watching over the huatou”; watching over means keeping watch on it.

This thought of “keeping watch” is right mindfulness. In practice, right mindfulness must not be lost. Right mindfulness is like a constable at the gate of a government office, blocking idle and unrelated people from entering. Right mindfulness is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. If right mindfulness is lost, then either one fails to notice the flurry of deluded thoughts or one practices dead samādhi and becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone. These are two diverging paths in practice. Therefore, the Chan school calls for raising a sense of doubt; the Pure Land school calls for upholding the Buddha’s name; Esoteric Buddhism calls for mantra recitation and forming mudrās; and Mahāmudrā teaches us to “contemplate without departing from the natural basis itself.”

What is the purpose of contemplation? “To prevent continuity.” That is, not allowing deluded thoughts to continue, but cutting them off. Thus, we say that the function of Buddha-recitation is to cut off deluded thoughts. The Buddha’s sacred name is a sword of wisdom: “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha …” When Buddha-

remembrance is present, it naturally cuts off deluded thoughts without leaving a trace.

If one recites the Buddha's name while deluded thoughts run wildly at the same time, that is not Buddha-recitation. During Buddha-recitation, there must be both calming and contemplation; the mind recites the Buddha's name and the ears hear it. When the mind recites the Buddha's name and deluded thoughts do not arise, that is calming. When the ears hear the Buddha's name with clear and distinct awareness, that is contemplation. The purpose of every Buddhist practice is to prevent deluded thoughts from continuing. "It is like drawing pictures in water: as one draws, they disappear." Let the arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts be like drawing on the surface of water: as they arise, they disappear, leaving not the slightest trace. Their arising and ceasing vanish as they occur.

Do not fear deluded thoughts. So long as you do not run after them, recognize their Original Face, do not cling to circumstances, do not abide in circumstances, and do not attach to appearances. At every moment, awaken when a thought arises and cut it off when it arises. At the point where a thought ceases, "the wisdom-nature of self-knowing" will appear brightly before you. So-called "no-thought" does not necessarily mean that not a single thought arises.

If not a single thought arose, one would become like earth, wood, metal, or stone. That is annihilationism and an indeterminate state, not no-thought. No-thought means that when thoughts arise, one does not abide in them.

A monastic asked Zhaozhou, "Does a newborn child possess the six consciousnesses or not?" A newborn infant knows nothing and surely does not give rise to thoughts in response to circumstances, with deluded imaginings flying about. Does an infant possess the six consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind? In fact, the infant serves as an analogy in asking what "no-thought" is. Zhaozhou replied, "A ball struck on swift water."

The monastic further asked Touzi, "What is the meaning of 'a ball struck on swift water'?" Touzi replied, "Thought after thought does not linger." If one strikes a ball on swiftly flowing water, can the ball remain still? In an instant it is swept away. "Not lingering" means non-abiding. Thus, when thoughts arise without abiding, that is no-thought; no-thought does not mean having no thoughts at all.

As soon as a thought arises, do not let it lodge in the mind; it immediately ceases of itself, leaving no trace. This is called "the arising and ceasing of a thought occurring simultaneously." It closely resembles drawing pictures on water: as soon as a thought arises, it is as though we have drawn a stroke across water—the water of the mind. When the thought ceases of itself, it is as though the image drawn on water has left no trace.

Thus it is said, “Drawn and gone at once; originally, all is pure.” The Buddha said, “During my forty-nine years in the world, I have not spoken a single word.” This means that as soon as something is drawn, it disappears; once it has been spoken, it is as if it had never been spoken. The Chan school says, “All day long one eats, yet has never bitten a single grain of rice; all year long one wears clothes, yet has never had a single thread hanging upon one.” This does not mean not eating or not wearing clothes. Once one has eaten or worn them, that is all; one does not discriminate or calculate over them. Only when the mind is empty and pure in this way can one realize the Way.

Do not fear deluded thoughts. When deluded thoughts subside, that is the true mind. If deluded thoughts arise, let them be like pictures drawn on water: as they are drawn, they disappear. Do not let them linger or become objects of attachment. Immediately awaken with resolute clarity, so that arising and ceasing vanish as they occur. The Pure Land school raises the Buddha’s name, the Chan school raises a sense of doubt, and Esoteric Buddhism recites mantras and forms mudrās—all for the sake of transforming deluded thoughts and safeguarding the true mind.

If you proceed in this continuous and seamless way, you will certainly attain realization within only a few years of practice. What is to be feared is that we are unwilling to practice in this way, unwilling to safeguard [the mind] continuously and seamlessly. Instead, we let deluded thoughts fly about and indulge them, allowing them to blaze like a great fire. If we indulge them and allow them to blaze, we cannot attain realization.

Therefore, once you recognize that the intrinsic nature of deluded thoughts is originally empty, do not fear them. They are the wondrous functioning of the true mind; this itself is practice of the Way. The purpose of Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, and Esoteric practice is to cut off deluded thoughts and not drift along after them. Without “leaking deluded thoughts,” the “karmic causes of cyclic rebirth” are cut off.

When deluded thoughts arise, those just beginning practice merely recognize their various appearances, and the appearances of deluded thoughts immediately disappear, as when one encounters someone one has known before. Yet after this familiar person has gone away, an image remains in the mind. Although the deluded thought has disappeared, its image still remains.

Next, as one’s practice improves somewhat, deluded thoughts will surely arise and cease by themselves, like a snake that has tied itself in a knot and can untie it itself—the clinging mind has loosened. At the final stage of practice, “deluded thoughts disappear imperceptibly, without benefit or harm.” It is not that the arising of

deluded thoughts is harmful, nor that their cessation is beneficial. Rather, without benefit or harm, they naturally disappear imperceptibly.

No matter how deluded thoughts arise, I know that they are the wondrous functioning of the true mind and therefore do not abide in them. They naturally disappear, and I no longer discriminate over deluded thoughts. Some practitioners enjoy making distinctions: “Ah, my deluded thoughts have not arisen—how beneficial! My practice has improved.” Or, “Oh no, my deluded thoughts have arisen again—how harmful! I have regressed again.”

In fact, deluded thoughts originally have no intrinsic nature and are neither good nor bad. So long as we practice earnestly, we will eventually cease to give rise to the discriminating mind of “benefit and harm,” and deluded thoughts will disappear at any time. “It is like a thief entering an empty room”: there is nothing to steal. “This is the most essential and wondrous method for freeing oneself from deluded thoughts.”

For “deluded thoughts and afflictions are all aspects of the original awakened wisdom of the dharmakāya.” Just as there can be no waves without water, how could there be afflictions and deluded thoughts without the true mind? When afflictions and deluded thoughts arise, that is also the manifestation of the dharmakāya. Everyone should understand that this statement is extremely important. When afflictions proliferate and deluded thoughts disturb the mind, immediately recognize that this is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya; afflictions and deluded thoughts will then collapse and melt away at once.

No matter how great the fire of your afflictions or how high the waves of your deluded thoughts, simply turn the light inward and recite, “Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.” Ah! This is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Those afflictions and deluded thoughts will immediately subside. This is the key—the most important key.

The Diamond Sūtra says, “One should give rise to this mind without abiding anywhere.” “Should” means to accord with; “without abiding” means not sticking or clinging. Accord with all conditions without sticking or clinging, and give rise to a numinous, wondrous mind of non-abiding. This is “effortless cultivation and correction.”

Bodhisattvas below the eighth bhūmi all engage in deliberate cultivation and correction. For example, we teach everyone to watch over the original nature at every moment; such watching over is deliberate cultivation and correction. Yet you cannot refrain from watching over it, because habitual tendencies are strong. Once you forget, you again abide in appearances and circumstances and run after deluded thoughts.

Therefore, you must attend to contemplation at every moment. This is the method of transforming deliberate cultivation into effortless cultivation. Only bodhisattvas above the eighth bhūmi can engage in “effortless cultivation and correction, functioning spontaneously.” Cultivation and correction means not being scattered, but having right mindfulness bright and clear at every moment—clear and distinctly aware, alert in stillness and still in alertness.

For those without contrivance, even the mind that contemplates is gone. Only then is there “effortless cultivation and rectification.” Everyone, take note: this does not mean that you must achieve it immediately. You must proceed from cultivation with effort to effortless cultivation. When practicing with effort, do not suppose that this is enough, or imagine that you have already practiced successfully.

We must advance, advance, and advance still further. The eighth, ninth, and tenth bhūmis do not count as the end; even Equal Enlightenment and Wondrous Enlightenment do not count. Only ultimate enlightenment—the complete fruition of Buddhahood—brings the work to completion. Therefore, you must diligently apply yourselves to practice. Only when the practice reaches its culmination can it function spontaneously. You must begin with “cultivation with effort”; otherwise, how can you reach the level of “effortless cultivation and rectification”? You must recognize the true mind where deluded thoughts cease and protect it at all times. This is the most important point.

We must remain alert at all times and in all places, and not be deluded by circumstances. At all times and in all places, we must remove defilements and obstacles, getting rid of our contaminated habits. If, after suffering even a slight setback, you lose heart and say, “Oh, this is too painful! My hands hurt, my feet are numb—I will not practice anymore, I will not practice anymore.”

“I feel stifled and miserable. It is better to be carefree and lax; let us go see a show, or chat with friends.” While watching and chatting, without realizing it, you enter the three lower realms. If you truly wish to transcend birth and death, you must make great vows. You must not fear hardship, but diligently apply yourselves in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Relying only on two, three, or four hours of seated meditation is not enough. You must remain alert at every moment, not be deluded by circumstances, and protect your pure intrinsic nature. This is “properly upholding samaya.”

In effortless practice, “regarding the mind is most essential”; observing the mind is of utmost importance. We have previously explained that observing the mind means vigilantly watching where thoughts arise. When a thought comes, ask where it comes from; when a thought subsides, ask where it goes.

Observing the mind is contemplation: observe it and keep it in view. Then thoughts will not arise and cease in disorder, flowing on without interruption. If you do not contemplate, deluded thoughts fly about and reflections proliferate by the thousands, yet you become accustomed to this and do not realize that your mind is in disorder. How can that do? Therefore, you must remain alert and watch over it carefully. You must clearly distinguish the true mind from the deluded mind.

The mind of contemplation is still the deluded mind, for it too involves stirring the mind and giving rise to thoughts. Without the true mind, this deluded mind could not arise; the deluded mind arises from the true mind and is its wondrous functioning. While it is functioning—that is, while you are observing the mind—do not discriminate between whether it is the true mind or the deluded mind.

When practice reaches the point at which the deluded mind no longer moves, the mind that observes and the thought that is observed will both fall away at once. Then "subject and object are both gone": the observing mind and the observed thought are both absent. Without contemplation, subject and object cannot both vanish and cannot fall away. Therefore, you must contemplate.

"Simply remain at ease and unrestrained, allowing the body to abide." This means allowing the body to abide peacefully and openly, without any hindrance or obstruction; it does not mean being tense and busy. The Heart Sūtra says: "Because there is no hindrance, there is no fear; far removed from inverted views and deluded dreams, one ultimately attains nirvāṇa." Where there is hindrance, there will be fear and inverted views and deluded dreams.

Without hindrance, the mind is empty and the heart is broad and open. Thus it is said, "The noble-minded are open and at ease; petty people are ever anxious." Petty people worry about gain and loss and are constantly so distressed that they cannot get through the day; the noble-minded are broad-hearted, peaceful, and at ease. Everyone, take note: allowing the body to abide peacefully and openly is cultivation of the body. If your mind is always preoccupied with gain and loss, then this is not in accord with it.

When you are peaceful and open, allowing the body to abide, with no afflictions or concerns in your mind, always calm, even-tempered, relaxed, and joyful, your body will become healthy and you will rarely fall ill. Only by abiding in the world in this way can you diligently cultivate the Dharma. This is cultivation of the body.

"From the crown of the head to the soles of the feet, be empty like a bamboo tube." This means that from the top of the head to the feet, one is empty like a bamboo tube: the entire body and mind are empty, with not a single thing in them. Place a bamboo tube on the water, and it drifts with the current; when it meets a bend, it turns. Whether high or low, sinking or floating, it does not concern itself. If a wave

knocks it under, it immediately rises again, sinking and floating in accord with conditions. Those who have attained accomplishment in practice are like this: “At ease with conditions, they drift and float freely, becoming spring mud that protects the multitude of blossoms.”

“Immediately realize the path of unsurpassed perfect enlightenment”: one immediately realizes the supreme path of perfect enlightenment—unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment. At this time, you will know that talk of birth and death, discussion of nirvāṇa, and distinctions between thorough and not thorough, ultimate and not ultimate—all are mere speculative discourse! At this time, you can teach the Dharma in person and, for sentient beings with whom you have affinities, “cause them all to enter nirvāṇa without remainder and thereby liberate them.”

V. Selected Excerpts from Guide to the Pure Land

Since mind itself is the land, and the land is itself mind, so long as your mind is pure, unstained by a single thing, and your afflictions are entirely exhausted, this very moment is the Western Pure Land; there is no need to seek rebirth after death.

To go a step further, “when the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha” does not mean that one can see the Buddha only after being born in the Western Pure Land and having one’s lotus blossom open. Rather, it means that when we now apply ourselves to Buddha-recitation, until deluded thoughts cease, the Buddha’s name fades away, and both subject and object vanish, the flower of the mind naturally opens, and we directly see our own Buddha-nature.

Thus, it is evident that intrinsic nature is empty and pure: everything is nonexistent, and all material appearances are empty illusions. We need only respond to conditions and make use of them without attachment; then nothing obstructs us, and we can be free and at ease.

So long as we truly recognize that this Sahā world is a world of suffering, that all material appearances are illusions, without any reality, unattainable and not to be sought, we will let go of everything, leaving no stain or concern. With the mind made completely empty, we will naturally attain rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss at the time of death.

Another common fault among those who apply themselves to practice is not knowing that worldly dharmas are precisely Buddhadharma, and Buddhadharma is precisely worldly dharmas. They often grow weary of work, delight in entering deep mountains to cultivate emptiness, or sit motionless on the meditation cushion all day.

They do not realize that if they continue sitting in this way, it is merely dead-tree Chan, incapable of flexible application. At best, they may in the future attain arhatship; if things go badly, they may easily fall into an indeterminate state, becoming like dead water. They can neither attain Buddhahood nor be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Therefore, when we apply ourselves to Buddha-recitation, we must understand that all worldly dharmas are Buddhadharma. Simply do your utmost without attachment: that is Buddhadharma. Washing rice and cooking, doing laundry and starching clothes—these are Buddha-recitation. Working, writing, designing, and conceiving ideas are nothing other than Buddha-recitation.

VI. Selected Excerpts from the Essential Explanation of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra

So long as we let go of everything and the mind abides nowhere, everywhere is a Pure Land. If there is abiding, it becomes an impure land.

Studying Buddhism does not mean refraining from doing things. Rather, when doing things, one should accord with causes and conditions and not cling to phenomenal appearances, as though nothing had been done. Thus Śākyamuni Buddha said, “For forty-nine years I have taught the Dharma without ever having spoken a single word.” Did Śākyamuni Buddha not teach the Dharma? In fact, everyone knows that the Buddha taught the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the teachings. Why, then, did he say that he had not spoken a single word? This is “give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.”

The Buddha tells us that the essential nature of all things is empty. This does not mean that all things lack appearances. On the contrary, these very appearances are the wondrous functioning of suchness and Buddha-nature. Therefore, cultivation should not fall into inert emptiness. One should still conscientiously do what needs to be done; one simply must not cling to it.

Those whose practice is well developed possess inexhaustible wisdom. Their minds are open and expansive, utterly pure and bare. In doing anything, they abide nowhere; they function flexibly and wondrously, at ease and unrestrained. This is great samādhi. Great samādhi has no entering or leaving. Therefore, practitioners must not suppress thoughts so that they do not arise.

When a thought arises, those who recite the Buddha’s name take up the Buddha’s name: “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” In this way, they redirect deluded thoughts. When Chan practitioners raise the question, “What is this?” it is like a blow directly to the head, and the thought vanishes. Therefore, practitioners must clearly recognize their true nature. When a thought arises, simply do not heed it.

Because the true mind is such that “to call it a thing is already wrong,” no matter how one speaks of it or describes it, one cannot express it. What, then, should one do? So long as we can bring the deluded mind to rest, we can realize it. If practitioners do not grasp this key point, then each thought of practice becomes each thought of creating birth and death, and they will never be liberated. Practitioners must understand this principle and put it into practice steadily and concretely. By letting all conditions rest, one can realize the great Way.

At all times, be empty, quiescent, and aware, yet do not abide in that empty, quiescent awareness. If one abides in empty, quiescent awareness, there is still abiding, and it is still the deluded mind. For one still retains the thought of empty, quiescent awareness. In the Chan school, this is called “falling into sainthood.” To fall into a holy state is still to remain within birth and death. We say that one must return to nothing obtainable: nothing whatsoever can be obtained.

Returning to nothing obtainable is precisely the great attainment. Thus, this true mind does not require all of you to exert great effort. You need only turn the light inward, and it is present right here and now. Yet you must have the blessings to dare to affirm, “Oh! This is the true mind.” To have no doubt at all is the wholesome roots and merit and virtue cultivated through many lives and kalpas.

If we wish to directly realize this essential nature, we must relinquish all craving and seeking and abide in no image or appearance. Whether we recite the Buddha’s name, investigate Chan, or practice Esoteric Buddhism, we gradually free ourselves from deluded thoughts and attachment. When the mind becomes as broad as empty space, and then suddenly breaks through even that empty space, we directly realize the essential nature and directly see the Original Face. This is seeing the Way.

Going a step further, these adventitious defilements of ceaseless change, constant coming and going, and segmented birth and death are, in their very nature, the wondrous suchness-nature of the Tathāgata-garbha. The Tathāgata-garbha neither arises nor ceases. Not arising does not mean being dead and inert; ceaseless arising is precisely non-arising. Because it does not arise, it also does not cease. To recognize this is the forbearance of the unborn dharmas. When the mind does not abide in circumstances and wondrous functioning arises fully, one thoroughly transcends transformational birth and death.

As was just said, to transcend transformational birth and death, there is no harm in manifestation of birth within non-arising, and no harm in coming and going within neither coming nor going. Thus, the Tathāgata comes without coming, and comes yet does not come. Why say that there is no coming? Because one recognizes the master within. Though there is coming and going, it remains unmoving. We must not cling to past objects or external circumstances; past objects and external

circumstances are guests. Cultivating the Way means recognizing the master within, recognizing the true mind. Once we let go of such things as past objects and external circumstances, realization is accomplished.

We should understand how foolish it is to cling to appearances. From now on, let go of the myriad sense-objects and accord with the circumstances, knowing that they are all adventitious defilements. We recognize that the true master is unborn and undying. Nor need we fear when habitual tendencies of clinging to appearances arise. The only way is safeguarding realization: we must struggle against habitual tendencies.

Practice is in fact a revolution. It is not a revolution against others, but against oneself. We must first overturn the life of ordinary beings, who cling to existence, and cast it off. Then we must overturn the life of the two vehicles, for falling into emptiness or biased emptiness is also incorrect; even emptiness must be cast off. Then we must overturn the life of bodhisattvas, for bodhisattvas still retain dharma views.

What are dharma views? For example: “I have acquired merit and virtue by liberating sentient beings; I can leave the cycle of birth and death; I can realize the Way . . .” These are all dharma views. This is how the work of practice is done: advance courageously, directly pursue the supreme vehicle, and continue in this way for a long time; then one realizes the Way.

If our suchness and Buddha-nature were not numinously aware, we would become like dull-witted fools, bricks, stones, and roof tiles, unable to function in accordance with conditions. Therefore, the aggregate of form is originally our suchness and Buddha-nature. We must learn to see nature through appearances. If, upon seeing appearances, we cling to them, they become false and delusive. Thus, we repeatedly say not to follow appearances, meaning that everyone should not cling to appearances.

Realizing the Way is right here and now! To let go completely, unstained by a single speck of dust and untainted by the slightest trace—this is it.

Therefore, we say that a single awakening is not the end of everything. One must still do the work of practice: train oneself not to cling to appearances, so that the mind may truly become empty and pure. When the mind is empty and pure, it can perform great functions.

If the mind clings to appearances and follows thoughts, immediately awaken sharply: “What appearance am I clinging to? That is the deluded mind; I must not cling to appearances!” In this way, struggle against deluded thoughts. After thousands upon thousands of such struggles, one progresses from being unaware

when a thought arises, to being aware when a thought arises; from being aware but unable to turn it, to turning it as soon as one becomes aware.

This process of tempering the mind is like refining steel. First, ore is smelted into molten iron; this is like seeing one's nature. But the molten iron just taken from the furnace is only pig iron, containing many impurities. It must undergo further repeated hammering and refining before crude iron can be made into fine steel. This is like post-awakening preservation. Once crude iron has been refined into high-quality steel, it can be stored for use at any time. This illustrates that, when one's practice has become thoroughly mature, one can be at ease in accordance with conditions and function freely at any time.

Our practice is to break through deluded thoughts, sweep everything clean, and not let anything remain clinging and circling in the mind.

If we transform delusion into awakening, we do not see that anything has diminished in the world of sentient beings, nor do we see that anything has increased in the world of Buddhas. We do not see sentient beings becoming Buddhas, because sentient beings are originally Buddhas. Thus, there is no attainment to be attained, no cultivation, no gaining, and no realization. If one clings to there being something attained, that is a dharma obstacle: one is obstructed by dharma views.

The reason we do not discard delusive appearances is that delusion is precisely truth, and appearances are precisely nature. There is no Buddha to be attained, nor is there anything to be gained. We need only remove the mind that clings in delusion. Thus, there is no cultivation, no gaining, and no realization. If we can cease clinging and know that all this consists of delusive appearances, we can function in accordance with conditions and feel joy everywhere. Right here and now, we are born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss; we need not wait until death to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

In doing the work of practice, we must exert ourselves here: recognize that all sounds and forms are illusory appearances, functions arising from intrinsic nature, and do not cling to them. See only the nature itself and do not acknowledge delusive appearances. If we work at this at every moment, accomplishment comes easily. But if you forget this nature itself and merely follow appearances, discriminating that one sound is pleasant and another unpleasant, then you are following the dust of sounds and thereby clinging to appearances.

After recognizing suchness and Buddha-nature, we must completely break through all inverted deluded thoughts and understand that all appearances are illusory and have no independent essence. Only then can we be liberated from birth and death and transcend saṃsāra.

In our ordinary practice, we must understand the word “awakening.” We must understand that the Way belongs to awakening, not to cultivation. What is cultivation? It is correct to call it restoration: restoring our Original Face. If it were originally absent and one produced something from nothing through cultivation, that would be wrong. That would be a nature arising from causes and conditions, a dharma produced by causes and conditions.

Therefore, the Way is wondrous awakening. After awakening, one must be able to bear it and then protect it through practice at every moment. After safeguarding it for a period, one may then let it function freely, release one’s grasp, and empty the mind; then one attains genuine benefit.

Therefore, we must not cling to appearances anywhere; we should see our nature. Śākyamuni Buddha, with painstaking compassion, broke through these attachments for us one point at a time. With each point he broke through, one faculty was released. In this way, all six sense faculties are freed, and all eighteen realms are broken through. You then have nothing to which you can cling. Would this not mean that, at every moment, you see your nature?

Would that not mean that everyone has become a Buddha? The Śūraṅgama Sūtra is wondrous precisely in this: there is no need for you to laboriously perform morning and evening services, investigate Chan, recite the Buddha’s name, or practice Esoteric Buddhism; still less is there any need to cultivate conditioned merit. You need only let go of everything, because you see your nature at every moment! How relaxed this practice is! How unrestrained!

How effortless! Therefore, studying and practicing the Buddhadharma is a matter of great ease and freedom. There is no need to be so constrained. If one insists on expending a great deal of effort, that is mistaken; it is merely fruitless toil.

In the past, you did not understand this principle and practiced while clinging to appearances, thinking that you had to perform so much merit and virtue and recite the Buddha’s name so many times before attaining accomplishment. It was like carrying a thousand-jin burden on your shoulders. Now that you understand the principle and know that your own mind is originally Buddha, that luminous, aware nature is naturally complete from the beginning, requiring neither contrivance nor artificial cultivation, the thousand-jin burden is cast down all at once. How light, relaxed, and joyful that is!

Some people attach importance only to outward forms and do not know how to practice from the ground of mind. For example, they believe that faith in Buddhism requires vegetarianism, so they not only refrain from eating meat but will not even use a wok or spatula that has been used to cook meat; they insist on buying new

ones. Outwardly, they seem to observe the precepts very well, but are they truly so fresh, free, and untroubled within?

What is called practice is simply the restoration of one's Original Face. It does not mean that one must perform some prescribed daily practice or use some method to accumulate a little merit and virtue; it means only restoring one's Original Face.

If you truly know how to practice, then even when you are tired and lie down to sleep, you are still sitting in meditation. If you do not know how to practice, then even though you are sitting there, you are only dozing off. Once we truly understand, we cannot become attached to such forms. After Patriarch Linji awakened, his teacher Huangbo came one day to inspect the monks' quarters. Linji had been lying down asleep; when he saw his teacher arrive, he still lay back down and slept, while the others were sitting in meditation. Seeing this, Huangbo said, "You people are putting on an appearance here. You cannot compare even with Linji when he is asleep and knows how to practice."

Therefore, practice lies in the mind, not in outward appearance. Only practice after realizing the Way is true cultivation, and true cultivation means eliminating one's own habitual tendencies. After awakening, one knows what nature is and what appearances are, and knows that all phenomena are one's own functioning. Only then can one practice in accordance with reality and principle. If you have not awakened, then whatever dharma you practice is blind cultivation and aimless training.

We should feel ashamed and truly arouse the resolve to practice. Begin with ourselves: first reform our own lives, reforming the life of greed, anger, ignorance, and ordinary beings; then reform the life of attachment to the views of the two vehicles; then reform the life of a bodhisattva. We must utterly break through ignorance and let it vanish completely. Finally, we must even reform the life of a Buddha. When one truly becomes a Buddha, not even a Buddha can be obtained. If you still have some notion or view of a Buddha that can be obtained, then you cannot become a Buddha. Therefore, we must practice earnestly.

Seeing one's true nature does not mean that the great matter is completely finished. One must still visit spiritual friends and have one's understanding confirmed, to see whether one's view has thoroughly penetrated and become free. Like the old master Zhaozhou: after awakening, he still traveled everywhere to visit teachers. "Zhaozhou still went on pilgrimage at eighty, solely because his mind was not yet fully at peace." Although the mind had awakened, it was not yet utterly at peace and free of concerns; some subtle things still remained.

After recognizing this numinous knowing, we must put it to good use and not remain there motionlessly guarding it. To remain there motionlessly guarding it is

called, in the Chan school, falling into sainthood—that is, falling into a fixed mold. This is still birth and death; it is called being unable to transcend birth and death. Those who truly transcend birth and death are within birth and death yet find no birth and death to transcend. Though they undergo birth after birth and death after death, though they emerge and sink amid the six realms, no birth and death can be obtained. Only this is truly transcending birth and death.

One who has truly realized the Way neither falls into existence nor grasps at emptiness, neither falls into birth and death nor grasps at nirvāṇa. Not grasping at nirvāṇa means that, after realizing the Way, one does not merely sit there dead still, enjoying oneself and doing nothing. Rather, one continues to do things and to undertake all kinds of work to liberate sentient beings. Though one does many things, the mind abides nowhere; this is called “acting without mind.” So long as I act without mind, I may do all things. After they are done, no trace or hindrance remains in the mind.

So long as one does not cling to forms and appearances, and the mind is empty and non-abiding, then in that very moment all illusion is itself reality. But if one clings to sensory objects, becomes deluded by appearances, and pursues things, then all reality itself becomes illusion. Delusion and awakening differ only by this much. Thus, practice means practicing just this one thing; it is not cultivating some other thing in addition.

Because we cannot free ourselves from appearances at every time and in every place, practice need not take place in deep mountains or hidden forests. Without being tempered by all kinds of circumstances, you cannot leave appearances behind. You may seem outwardly free and at ease, but when something happens, you still cannot get past it. To accomplish practice amid the bustling marketplace is true realization of the Way.

Only when the mind remains unmoved before all kinds of favorable and adverse circumstances can one truly understand. But then again, to remain unmoved by external circumstances and unshaken by this dazzling world requires great strength and great meditative stability.

At the beginning, we do not possess such strength, so it is better first to practice for a time in a quiet place. But we cannot remain hidden in peaceful surroundings forever. If a circumstance arises and your mind is still stirred, that will not do. It is not enough merely to penetrate through in a quiet place; one must penetrate through amid the bustling marketplace. Only then is there true understanding.

You must not merely see it for a single moment; you must remain thus at all times. When responding to circumstances and engaging with things, you may do all kinds of things, yet there is no thing to engage and no circumstance to which to respond.

Only when this true mind and intrinsic nature does not waver in the slightest can one be said to have some measure of accord.

Our wondrously luminous true essence neither comes nor goes, neither moves nor wavers. However circumstances may arise, I simply respond in accordance with conditions. There is not a single thing to grasp, nor a single thing to discard; nothing whatsoever can be obtained. Then one naturally no longer becomes attached to appearances. To live in this lively and untrammeled way is wondrous functioning present before one.

If you do not realize the dharmakāya, then whatever you practice is Buddhist activity within a dream. Therefore, no matter which gate one begins with, one must practice at the level of intrinsic nature. Cultivating this mind-nature is true practice and the proper path to Buddhahood. Everything else is peripheral work and has nothing to do with the dharmakāya.

In fact, once you have truly realized the Way, there is neither suffering nor happiness.

For suffering and happiness are both discriminations made by our minds. Where there is happiness, there must be suffering; without suffering, where would happiness come from? If your mind is empty, then all appearances are also empty, and there is no longer any question of suffering or happiness. Thus we say that in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, even happiness cannot be obtained; if there were happiness, it could not be called ultimate bliss. When your mind is truly empty, even if you enter hell, you will not feel suffering. Not only does Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva not suffer in hell; even Devadatta, in hell, enjoys himself as though he were in the bliss of the third dhyāna heaven.

We repeatedly say that you should not become attached to karma. Simply apply yourself in accordance with conditions, and all karmic obstacles will naturally vanish. Since we have spoken of conditions, each person’s conditions differ. There are loves, hatreds, emotional entanglements, and enmities, as well as gatherings, partings, and separations. If you cling to these as truly existent, karma arises here. This net in which people mutually entangle one another is called karmic conditions.

So long as, in all matters, you accord with conditions, without a clinging mind toward affairs and without affairs abiding in the mind, not only are such conditions unobtainable, but karma itself is fundamentally unobtainable. If you are attached to nothing at all, then the mind is truly empty and pure: unstained by a single speck of dust, luminously transparent and free, with its numinous light shining alone, utterly free of the sense faculties and their objects. Though you do not seek spiritual powers, spiritual powers will naturally manifest.

VII. Selected Excerpts from The Secret Manual of Attainment in the Intermediate State

In sum, all things are impermanent and nothing can be grasped. Therefore, to study Buddhism is to contemplate impermanence. This means letting go of everything and not clinging, for there is fundamentally nothing lasting or real.

We must contemplate emptiness: nothing whatsoever can be obtained, and there is not even an “I.” If there is no self, where could humiliation be? Without a self, who is there to receive this insult? To contemplate in this way is as the Diamond Sūtra says: “No mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of lifespan.”

Without person or self, whence could humiliation arise? If there is no humiliation, what need is there for forbearance? Forbearance where there is nothing to forbear is great forbearance. Since nothing truly exists, all forms are compounded from causes and conditions. “All dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I say, are emptiness.” Things have no existence in themselves; they arise only when causes and conditions converge. Therefore, do not cling to appearances any longer. When you do not cling to appearances, your mind becomes empty; when the mind is empty, humiliation too is absent.

Therefore, in our practice we must be diligently persevering, morning and evening, in exile and adversity alike. At every moment, maintain contemplation: as soon as a thought arises, see it and do not follow it. If we can truly practice with such unremitting diligence, then within three to five years we can break through and see our own true nature.

Merely sitting in meditation for two hours does not count. After rising from the cushion, one must maintain contemplation at all times; when thoughts arise, do not follow them. I guarantee that within three to five years you will see your true nature. If you practice diligently in this way and do not attain realization, come and scold me! Yet these are not my words; they were spoken by the great patriarchs. They have been verified through practice.

There are three kinds of experiential realization in practicing the Dharma and transcending birth and death.

The first is when we can truly refrain from following thoughts as they arise. The moment a thought arises, it dissolves without the slightest pause, like drawing on water: as soon as one makes a stroke, the water closes over it. No image remains, not a trace. Like a bird passing through the vast sky, it leaves no track. Then one can

be free at the brink of birth and death, able to go wherever one wishes without being governed by karmic force; this is mastery over taking rebirth.

The second is when, in the two states mentioned earlier—the favorable and the unfavorable—we remain completely ordinary and undisturbed. Our minds no longer delight in what is good or become afflicted by what is bad. Then segmented birth and death is brought to an end.

The third is the cessation of the subtle continuous stream: everything dissolves into emptiness, and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment manifests before us. Then one can manifest hundreds of thousands of millions of transformation bodies and liberate hundreds of thousands of millions of sentient beings. This is the true verification attained by all practitioners who cultivate the Dharma and realize the Way.

Heart esotericism uses six mudrās and one mantra to open up the original nature. It then employs the Chan school's method of safeguarding realization, diligently eliminating habitual tendencies, constantly observing the mind, and remaining aware in every circumstance, thus following the same track as Chan. Once contemplation is fully mature and one realizes quiescence that ever illuminates, and illumination that is ever quiescent, one may sit securely at home and no longer needs awareness or contemplation. This is the true final assurance in all practice.

This kind of practice is easy to speak about, but to accomplish it truly still requires some effort. Without making some effort, you cannot accomplish it. If one understands only the principle but cannot put it into practice in actual circumstances, it is of no use.

The dharma realm of the nonobstruction among phenomena means that nothing whatsoever presents an obstacle: one can go anywhere. Yet one must go a step further and not even establish the mental state of the nonobstruction among phenomena. Only then is one a true Chan practitioner, one who has truly realized the mind and seen one's true nature. This is the foundation for resolving the problem of birth and death, and the key to attaining Buddhahood.

As long as one can let go of everything, there will be no obstruction in anything; that is Buddhahood. The Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, explained this very clearly: when the preceding thought clings to appearances and is deluded, one is an ordinary being; when the subsequent thought awakens, one is a Buddha. It is that quick. No elaborate practice is needed; one need only awaken, let go of everything, and not cling to appearances.

As long as we cultivate the mind and do not cling to appearances at all times and in all places, we will certainly attain realization.

Therefore, we must constantly temper ourselves amid circumstances. No matter how correct one's principles may be, they are useless if one fails as soon as something happens. Chan Master Dahui Gao rebuked such people: "Like medicinal liquid mercury, it flies off when it meets fire." Someone who merely talks about principles is like mercury: as soon as it meets fire, it vaporizes. That will not do. Therefore, we must constantly urge and temper ourselves. Whenever we are about to cling to appearances, we should immediately let go, return to the original nature, and return to nothing obtainable.

Why have we not attained Buddhahood while alive, despite our practice? Frankly, it is because we ourselves are still unwilling to practice diligently and unwilling to let go of everything. Greed, anger, and ignorance remain very strong. If we truly are willing to let go, there is no one who cannot succeed. "Lay down the butcher's knife and become a Buddha on the spot." So long as one is willing to let go, one is a Buddha immediately, because we are originally Buddhas.

When we awaken, we understand that true reality is without appearances: it is clear, lucid spiritual knowing. It is a great energy that encompasses everything. All appearances are false and unobtainable. We must wear away our habitual tendencies amid circumstances. Whenever we are about to cling to appearances, immediately awaken with vigilance. The Chan school calls this "herding the ox": grasp the ox's reins tightly and hold the whip high; whenever it is about to cling to appearances, strike it. Practicing in this way will certainly lead to realization.

Because all things are false appearances and unobtainable. Do not think that what is present is real; the present too is a false appearance and equally unobtainable. Those whose practice is well developed know that when the mind becomes empty and pure, the great earth sinks level and empty space shatters to dust—where, then, is this world? Everything is gone. Therefore I say that there is fundamentally no hell; it depends on whether you can awaken.

To realize the nirmāṇakāya, one must temper oneself amid circumstances, never forgetting contemplation for a moment and diligently eliminating habitual tendencies. When one understands that all things are false, that they are all within our wondrous, luminous mind and are unobtainable, one will no longer lose one's temper or contend angrily with others.

Therefore, true accomplishment requires constantly training oneself in actual circumstances and having no selfishness. Wang Yangming once said that "investigating things and extending knowledge" means eliminating emotional attachments to material desires and removing the view of self. The view of self is the worst: one always thinks oneself right and everyone else wrong, taking oneself as

the center. Family discord likewise arises for this reason. If the view of self is removed, the family will be harmonious, and all dharmas will flow freely.

In our practice, we must begin with the sixth consciousness. We must constantly observe the sixth consciousness and prevent it from stirring. When circumstances appear, do not heed them. They are all false, so what is there to cling to? Simply live in accordance with conditions.

On the other hand, it will not do to practice in a rigid, lifeless way. Our practice must also be lively and alive. Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch said, “When encountering circumstances, the mental factors of the mind arise” and “do not cut off the hundred thoughts.” This is what he meant.

In our practice, we should “inwardly, not be carried along by the flow of deluded thoughts; outwardly, not be turned by the circumstances of affairs.” That is, regarding any matter, do not keep calculating it over and over in the mind; regarding any circumstance, do not abide in it. Let everything pass without leaving a trace. If we practice in this way, we will certainly attain realization. Thus, the first great difficulty in practice is not forgetting contemplation, and the second is not rigidly clinging to it. Rigid clinging is like dead water that does not harbor dragons; one must be lively and alive. If we truly realize great mirror wisdom and no longer abide in appearances, we can radiate great light that illuminates everything without exception.

Selected Teachings on Contemplation from Teacher Qi Zhijun’s Essence of the Mind Altar

I. Heart Esotericism: Contemplation Off the Meditation Cushion

(I) Off-cushion contemplation is the primary practice

132. In practicing heart esotericism, meditation is an auxiliary practice; off-cushion contemplation is the primary practice.

Question: Teacher, how should I practice off the cushion? By reading the scriptures and reciting mantras?

Answer: In practicing heart esotericism, meditation is an auxiliary practice; off-cushion contemplation is the primary practice.

(II) Methods of Contemplation

133. How does one begin to maintain aware contemplation?

Answer: Although the term “aware contemplation” is the same, the various schools emphasize different aspects of practice. What matters in cultivation is to go deeply into one method. Whatever Dharma you practice, the safest course is to consult a wise teacher in that tradition. If you mix in practices from other schools, then sometimes “ghee turns into poison.”

For example, “uphold the name exclusively, without mixing in other practices” and “recite the Buddha’s name once, then carry three loads of water” cannot be practiced together indiscriminately. If the mind is distracted by other pursuits, one may be unable to go deeply into a single method. Yet when the patriarchs observed the capacities and conditions of sentient beings, what they did was more than mere integration. Therefore, when you have only just set out, you should urgently go deeply into one method; once you can discern capacities and teach accordingly, integration presents no problem.

134. One May First Recite a Mantra

Question: It seems that the Elder said it was also permissible to recite mantras after getting off the cushion, but he did not explain further.

Answer: Ah! Off-cushion contemplation is the primary practice. If you are not yet able to contemplate, then of course you may first recite a mantra.

Question: Only after meditating did I gradually come to understand how important contemplation truly is.

Answer: Therefore, the primary practice off the cushion is not mantra recitation.

Question: Mantra recitation can dispel deluded thoughts. Is it especially effective for dull people?

Answer: Deluded thoughts are bodhi. Why try to dispel them?

Question: Yes. Not attending to them is bodhi.

Answer: If you are not harmed by them, they will surely serve your use.

Question: Yes, I understand the principle.

Answer: Cast aside this principle. What do you see?

Question: This!

Answer: Then, in one stark awakening, will “this” appear before you?

Question: Perfectly bright and clearly illuminating!

Answer: Since you already know what contemplation is, do not continue reciting mantras off the cushion.

135. Do Not Attend to It

A: How should one contemplate?

Answer: Do not attend to it!

B: This junior student wishes to ask: if one does not attend to it, does that mean letting it run wild like an untethered horse?

Answer: “Do not attend to it” was said in response to his particular condition at the time. He was continuously thinking about the label “contemplation.” “Do not attend to it!” immediately cut off the continuity of his thoughts.

Question: During meditation, there are many thoughts. What should I do?

Answer: Do not heed them! Pay no attention to any thoughts; attend only to the mantra.

Question: If the mind is not settled on one point, might it…?

Answer: I tell you to attend only to the mantra precisely in order to counter your attempt to fix the mind on a thought.

136. Do Not Heed It; Watch Where Thoughts Arise; Be Aware as Soon as a Thought Arises; Cut It Off; “Peh!”; Stop…

Question: Teacher Qi, may I ask about the relationship between “be aware as soon as a thought arises” and “Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not move with circumstances”?

Answer: They are one matter, expressed in two ways. As long as you put them into practice, you will know that they are indeed the very same thing. If you do not practice, counting sand by the sea is of no benefit.

Question: Regarding immediate no-mind and not heeding thoughts: immediate no-mind belongs to the unconditioned Dharma, while not heeding thoughts belongs to

conditioned dharmas.

Answer: To those who already know that there is no dharma outside mind but do not understand that “mind, too, is unobtainable,” one says: “Immediately, no-mind!” To those who follow deluded thoughts without realizing it, or who even use their own ideas to speculate about Buddhist terms, one says: “Do not heed these things!”

If one is not addressing either of these two kinds of people, it is better to forget these two expressions.

Question: Hello, Teacher. May I ask whether “peh!” and “do not heed it” are really the same, with no difference in level?

Answer: Not only these two—even “where a thought arises” is the same. All are meant to prevent one from following deluded thoughts. The questioner's state of mind differs, and so the verbal teaching differs.

Question: The Blue Cliff Record relates: A monk asked Zhaozhou, “The ultimate Way is not difficult; it only rejects choosing and rejecting. As soon as there are words, there is choosing and rejecting. How, then, does the Master guide people?” Zhaozhou said, “Why do you not quote the saying in full?” The monk said, “I can only recite it up to here.” Zhaozhou said, “It is simply this: ‘The ultimate Way is not difficult; it only rejects choosing and rejecting.’” Reading this, I suddenly thought of something the teacher once said: “Stop! This is contemplation.” Ha ha!

Answer: Actually, nothing ever stopped; it was only that deluded conceptualization stopped in that very moment. For example, an actor rehearsing a television drama becomes immersed in the role, even to the point of forgetting himself. Suddenly, the director shouts, “Stop!” What will happen to the actor?

(III) Do Not Misunderstand Contemplation

137. Contemplation Means Letting Go of Deluded Thoughts and Attachments

Question: Hello, Teacher. Recently, worldly affairs have been disturbing me. I feel somewhat vexed and my mind is in turmoil.

Answer: White clouds drift across green mountains, yet the green mountains remain as they are. Green mountains are simply green mountains—how could white clouds obstruct them?

Question: As for practice, I will no longer concern myself with whether I am progressing. From now on, I will simply follow the steps. Previously, I took quietness as the standard of progress.

Answer: In fact, there is only one standard—letting go of deluded thoughts and attachments.

Question: In ordinary life, when deluded thoughts arise, I use a bright moment of awakening to dissolve them into emptiness.

Answer: Exactly so.

Question: But when this single awareness remains alone, it is sometimes aware of what is seen, sometimes aware of what is heard, and sometimes aware of what is felt. How should this awareness be placed? That is, when deluded thoughts arise, this awareness can notice them and dissolve them into emptiness; but after the deluded thoughts have gone, how should this awareness be let go?

Answer: Why add an unnecessary embellishment?

138. It Is Not Suppressing Thoughts

Question: What is the difference between cutting off thoughts and suppressing thoughts? Could you give an analogy?

Answer: Let us compare deluded attachments and deluded thoughts to weeds. To prevent them from growing, some people place a stone over them to weigh them down—this illustrates suppressing thoughts—while others uproot the weeds entirely—this illustrates cutting off thoughts.

Those who place stones over weeds seek not to see the weeds—they think that the absence of arising thoughts is no-thought. Even if they succeed in cultivation, it is useless. Look at the vast Gobi Desert: not a blade of grass is seen there, yet it still belongs to conditioned dharmas. It is merely that, for the moment, when conditions are exhausted, the dharma also ceases; chiefly, the external condition is absent—there is no water. Once sweet rain falls from the sky, grass will grow by itself without your planting it—when conditions are encountered, it arises. Even if no conditions are encountered, where there is neither grass nor sprouts, there is only dead stillness; it cannot give rise to boundless wondrous functioning.

Those who cut off the roots of the weeds know the roots upon seeing the weeds. After cutting off the roots, they set the weeds out to dry. They do not fear seeing weeds—when thoughts arise, that itself is no-thought. Once dried, the weeds can even be used as firewood; they can be put to good use—deluded thoughts are bodhi. Because there are no stones, grain can be planted, and wondrous functioning can arise.

139. It Is Not the Absence of Thoughts

Question: For example, when I am now using the internet, I need to think in order to do things. How should I cut off thoughts at such a time?

Answer: If you suppress thoughts so that none arise, then you will be unable to use the internet.

Question: Teacher, I often have times when not a single thought arises. How should I practice then?

Answer: Ha ha! I would not ask you to prolong the time during which "not a single thought arises." When thoughts arise, that itself is no-thought; that is true no-thought.

140. What Is Cut Off Are Deluded Thoughts

Question: When work is busy, I use the word "cut off"; when I am at leisure at home, I recite mantras. Yet I have found that I often become forgetful, to the point of having nothing to do, and often make mistakes at work.

Answer: "Cut off" means cutting off the deluded thoughts that belong to greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and wrong views; it does not mean cutting off your work. It is not that you cut off thoughts when affairs are busy, but that you cut them off when deluded thoughts are flying about.

Question: My work involves making decisions. I do not know whether thinking about my work also counts as "deluded thoughts."

Answer: Thinking about work does not belong to greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, or wrong views, so of course it is not deluded thought.

Question: When practitioners ordinarily safeguard the true mind, will this affect their work?

Answer: No. If it affects your work, then you have misunderstood this "safeguarding" of the true mind. Not following deluded thoughts is safeguarding the true mind. If you can avoid following deluded thoughts, you will even improve your efficiency at work.

Question: How should one handle the relationship between being conscientious at work and non-attachment?

Answer: Being conscientious at work is not attachment. What we do not cling to are greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and wrong views. Work is not greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, or wrong views.

Question: Does deluded thinking, once it becomes solidified, become the material world?

Answer: Ha ha! You are very good at thinking.

Question: Oh, then should I not think? Is that still incorrect?

Answer: Oh! It is not that you should not think; it is that you should not cling to thinking.

141. It Is Not Watching Thoughts

A: Teacher, in contemplation I use right mindfulness: I watch my thoughts. When a thought arises, I ignore it and keep watch over what does not move.

Answer: Who told you to “watch your thoughts”?

B: Teacher, please answer my question.

The Elder says in A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One’s True Nature: “When practicing no-thought, progress does not mean gradually extending the interval of true emptiness and no-thought between the cessation of the preceding thought and the arising of the following thought. For example, no-thought today may last only one minute, then gradually be extended to five minutes, ten minutes, or even one hour or twenty-four hours, and be considered success.”

“You should know that no-thought is lively and dynamic; it is not stiff and inert like a block of wood or stone. A monk asked Zhaozhou, ‘What is no-thought?’ Zhaozhou said, ‘Hitting a ball on swift water!’ A later commentator said, ‘Thought after thought does not linger!’ So-called no-thought does not mean that not a single thought arises. Rather, thoughts cease as soon as they arise, without the slightest trace of abiding in appearances.”

Does the “true emptiness between the cessation of the preceding thought and the arising of the following thought” here refer to “the point at which a thought arises”? It says that “no-thought is lively and dynamic.” How can contemplation that “watches the point at which thoughts arise” be lively and dynamic?

Answer: Then let us begin with this notion of “watching thoughts.”

The expression “watching thoughts” may derive from the Tiantai school’s “three thousand realms in a single thought”: when a thought arises in samādhi, one contemplates how that thought fully contains the three thousand dharmas. This is the practice of the Mahāśamatha-Vipaśyanā. Nowadays, even the Tiantai school

itself can no longer practice the Mahāśamatha-Vipaśyanā. Instead, it follows Tiantai in doctrine while practicing Amitābha Buddha-recitation.

People today are filled with rampant discursive thoughts. If they force an association with “watching thoughts,” first, they are not in samādhi; second, they lack the wisdom to perceive the three thousand dharmas as fully present. Thus, watching thoughts simply becomes a continuous stream of deluded thoughts and has nothing whatever to do with the Tiantai school’s Mahāśamatha-Vipaśyanā.

The expression “watching thoughts” may also derive from the Chan school’s “investigating huatou.” To investigate huatou, one must arouse a sense of doubt and focus one’s whole body and mind on a single huatou that carries no ordinary meaning. After a long, long time, there is suddenly a falling away, and one’s original radiant light clearly manifests before one. This is called “breaking through the investigation.” Nowadays, few in the Chan school persist unremittingly in investigating huatou. Most of what Chan teachers speak about is doctrinal teaching; still more is introductory instruction.

People today cannot arouse a sense of doubt. If they reinterpret “investigating huatou” as “watching thoughts,” they do a grave injustice to Dahui and falsely accuse the Chan school!

Yet there are quite a few who tirelessly delight in “watching thoughts” and call daydreaming practice. When such people came to the Elder with questions, he guided them, according to their dispositions, to “watch the point at which thoughts arise,” intending thereby to free them from the continuous stream of deluded thoughts. This serves the same purpose as “ignore it.”

To those whose continuous stream of deluded thoughts was somewhat looser, the Elder directly said, “Ignore it.” To those for whom such continuity had become habitual, he told them to look at the point of arising, thereby redirecting their fixed patterns of thought. This was simply teaching according to the person and prescribing medicine according to the illness. Why should later people stir up disputes for no reason?

142. Do Not Seek Sensation

Question: Now, even when I rest, I no longer have that clear and distinct feeling I had at the time; it is only a vague semblance. What should I do?

Answer: Resting is bodhi. Feeling belongs to the aggregate of sensation. Guishan said to Yangshan (Huiji), “Disciple Ji, do not enter the realm of the aggregates!”

Question: When there is nothing to do, may I let the mind be pure, with not a single thought arising, and remain blankly in that state for a while, experiencing the

feeling?

Answer: Ha ha! The moment you seek a feeling, you have missed it.

Question: After cutting off my deluded thoughts, during this relative blank interval I experience my own existence. I experience that which is capable of feeling as myself.

Answer: How is this “after cutting off deluded thoughts”? Look: “I experience my own existence; I experience that which is capable of feeling as myself.” Have deluded thoughts been cut off? In fact, you have merely changed the content of your deluded thoughts.

143. Do Not Exert Yourself in Contemplation

Question: In daily life, how can I bring forth contemplation? Why does it always feel so strenuous? Because it feels troublesome, once I become lazy, I neither contemplate nor observe. Is there any skillful means?

Answer: Do not run after deluded thoughts. That requires no effort.

Question: I feel that when deluded thoughts arise, one awakening is enough; if one exerts effort, it is no longer awakening. This is not something that can be done through effort, is it?

Answer: Exactly! “In quiescence, illuminate; in illumination, be quiescent. Above all, avoid exerting effort.”

Question: Greetings, Teacher. While watching a DVD of Master Yuanyin’s Dharma teachings, I heard this passage: “Master Hanshan said that when we recite the Buddha’s name or uphold mantras, we should be like someone pushing a heavily laden cart up a mountain.” Earlier, I also read Patriarch Dayu’s essential instruction for practice: “In quiescence, illuminate; in illumination, be quiescent. Above all, avoid exerting effort.” The two seem contradictory regarding whether, or how, one should exert effort. What exactly do these two passages mean?

Answer: Master Hanshan was speaking of Buddha-recitation, while Acharya Dayu was speaking of contemplation. Nor are these the only two methods: skillful means have many doors, even eighty-four thousand dharma gates. How could they all be required to conform to a single pattern? For example, how could one force the Pure Land school’s “diligent Buddha-recitation” and the Chan school’s “at one recitation of the Buddha’s name, carry three loads of water” into a single mold? Sentient beings’ afflictions, like illnesses—the eighty-four thousand afflictions—each differ; the Buddhadharma, like medicine—the eighty-four thousand dharma gates—also differs in each case.

Question: In actually upholding mantras, forming mudrās, and engaging in contemplation, what should one do for it to accord with the Dharma?

Answer: If you are learning Master Hanshan's Buddha-recitation, then exert yourself in pressing forward continuously. If you are practicing heart esotericism contemplation, then above all avoid exerting effort.

144. If You Follow It, That Is Saṃsāra; If It Follows You, That Is Wondrous Functioning

Question: If the teacher had not stopped my entanglement with consciousness in the chat room—what one Dharma brother called "entangling Chan"—I would have continued on that night journey. To correct my past shortcomings, I have made a resolution: "Do not indulge in deluded thoughts!" I will not make it a motto, but a life-and-death reminder, pressing it against my forehead every day.

Answer: There is nothing wrong with your way of thinking, but you must not let it lead you along.

If it is not the master, and you are the master, then it will become your sharpest weapon. If your thinking surpasses that of others, your weapon will be sharper than theirs. But if it leads you along, it will harm your dharmakāya and wisdom-life. The saying "the blade wounds the hand that wields it" is a metaphor for this. Be able to distinguish well the characteristics of all dharmas, yet remain unmoved in the ultimate truth.

Question: If I do not recognize it as a deluded thought, should I still not follow it?

Answer: If you follow it, that is saṃsāra; if it follows you, that is wondrous functioning. If it follows you, it is not a deluded thought.

Question: May this be understood to mean that, if I myself am master of whether to follow or not follow it, it is not a deluded thought?

Answer: If you can truly be master, and it is put to your use, is that not wondrous functioning?

Question: I would like to ask Teacher Qi: after awakening, when functioning is brought forth, or when one continually and seamlessly contemplates while dealing with people and circumstances off the meditation cushion, one still uses these thoughts to carry out affairs. What is the difference between freely bringing forth functioning and wandering along in attachment to deluded thoughts?

Answer: Have you not already stated the difference yourself?

Question: What is the boundary between thoughts that are attached and those that are unattached?

Answer: Is “boundary” attachment, or nonattachment?

Question: How can one discern this for oneself?

Answer: Now you know what it means to be carried along by thoughts, do you not?

Question: When a thought arises and I then act upon it, how can I know whether it is an appropriate thought that should arise or a deluded thought arising falsely?

Answer: Have you not heard, “All day long one eats, yet does not bite down on a single grain of rice”? When has any thought ever arisen? And when has one ever undertaken any action?

Question: I work as a news editor. When doing work such as editing copy that requires highly concentrated thought, how should I engage in contemplation?

Answer: Coarse deluded thoughts are greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. Thought-intensive work does not belong to deluded thinking.

Question: When I am doing mental work, how should I use my mind?

Answer: Concentrate on writing the document, with no distracting concerns, and you have not departed from observing the mind. But if, while writing the document, your mind is distracted and you then give rise to another thought of “observing the mind,” that is not called observing the mind.

Question: When working, may I recite a mantra? Would that be dividing the mind between two tasks and therefore be counterproductive?

Answer: If you divide the mind between two tasks, it is not good. If the mind has no distracting concerns, that itself is the unsurpassed great esoteric mantra.

Question: When doing things, such as reading or watching television, how should one engage in contemplation?

Answer: When doing something, the activity is an object; when reading, the book is an object; when watching television, the television is an object. Contemplation means not being carried along by thoughts and not being moved by circumstances. “Not being moved by circumstances” does not mean not doing things, not reading, or not watching television. It simply means not letting these objects lead you by the nose.

Question: When I am reading with full concentration, am I being carried along by thoughts?

Answer: No. Failing to concentrate fully is what it means to be carried along by thoughts.

145. If the Mind Is Free of Delusion, Diligence Has No End

Question: I have practiced this Dharma for more than a year, nearly two years, but I still have not learned to sit meditation properly.

Answer: After more than a year, nearly two years, this should have been an excellent opportunity to uncover what is original. Unfortunately, you have used mantra recitation and attending to sounds in place of contemplation. The main practice has been lost; relying only on sitting meditation as an auxiliary practice does not have this power.

Question: After reading your post, this later student broke out in a sweat all over. I have taken such a long, roundabout path! These past two days, I have had fewer demands while sitting, and my keen awareness in daily life has also become more relaxed.

Answer: “If the mind can remain free of delusion, there is no limit to diligent practice.”

(IV) The Three Steps of Contemplation in Heart Esotericism

146. The Three Steps

Question: I have practiced the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra for some time, going deeply into this one method. When deluded thoughts arise in daily life, I immediately turn to the mantra.

Answer: When deluded thoughts arise, do not heed them. This is called contemplation and is known as the principal practice.

Question: But sometimes I feel that the more I turn to it, the more chaotic things become.

Answer: Deluded thoughts are chaotic to begin with. If you turn toward them again, will that not make them even more chaotic?

Question: What should one do, then?

Answer: Then let me spin out a little more entanglement—the three steps of contemplation:

First: Do not turn with thoughts; do not be moved by circumstances.

In practicing heart esotericism, contemplation is the principal practice, while the six mudrās and one mantra are auxiliary practices. “Do not turn with thoughts; do not be moved by circumstances” is contemplation. This does not mean using the true mind to observe deluded thoughts; there is neither an observer nor an object observed. Contemplation without observing is true contemplation.

To be truly able not to turn with thoughts or be moved by circumstances is itself the state of fruition. Since one cannot yet do so but learns to do so, it is called “cultivating from the fruition stage.” We are accustomed to deluded thoughts and attachments; they are familiar. Not turning with thoughts or being moved by circumstances is not yet habitual; it is unfamiliar. Continue in this way for a long time: what is familiar becomes unfamiliar, and what is unfamiliar becomes familiar. There will surely come a moment when everything falls away; then, like beans popping in cold ashes, it will brightly appear before you.

Second: With a solemn awakening, it brightly appears before you.

After things have fallen away, the habitual tendencies of deluded attachment may still remain. When these habits strike back, they are like dark clouds obscuring the sun, and one urgently needs “a solemn awakening, and it brightly appears before you.” What is it that appears before you? It is the lively knowing free from thought, about which people on this forum have expressed so many differing views. However one may speak of it, horizontally or vertically, one cannot put it into words. It is free from thought; it does not fall within language or transgress into discursive thinking.

It is numinously lucid, unlike wood or stone. It is neither light and shadow nor a concept. The way of words is cut off, and the path of mental activity ceases; only through realization can it be known. There is no name for it, but we reluctantly call it “lively knowing free from thought.” When lively knowing free from thought appears before you, that itself is not turning with thoughts and not being moved by circumstances.

Last: One is originally Buddha—what is there to contemplate?

This alone is true contemplation. The first and second are both learning contemplation. After this, even lively knowing free from thought cannot be obtained, and awakening to one’s true nature becomes mere leftover words. If you say that such a person has seen their true nature, they may say: “Seeing itself is nature—what further nature is there to see?” If you say that these words establish a “seeing,” the person will not argue with you.

For he spoke that sentence in response to your words; he spoke it for your sake. For himself, there is not even “seeing.” At most, he may reply with something like, “This old monk has lost half the case today.” Those who can take the piercing word are rarely encountered; those who mark their boats to seek a lost sword are many. How could one avoid “losing half the case”?

147. The three steps were explained only in response to a question; they should not be fixed in words.

Question: How should one apply oneself before and after seeing one’s true nature?

Answer: If you have truly experienced the nature of lively knowing free from thought, then whenever you notice a thought arising, look into where it arises, and it will brightly appear before you.

This is called “with a solemn awakening, it brightly appears before you.” “A solemn awakening” and “looking into where it arises” are actually the same thing. At the outset, learning contemplation means “not turning with thoughts and not being moved by circumstances.” Of course, you must first be able to notice that you are turning with thoughts. If you cannot even notice that you are running after thoughts, then you must first recite the mantra off the meditation cushion. None of the foregoing is true contemplation. True contemplation is: “One is originally Buddha—what is there to contemplate?”

Question: Does the place where a thought arises itself have any location? The bright moon shines high.

Answer: If that is so, contemplation is this: whenever you stray, have a solemn awakening and let it brightly appear before you.

Question: Let us meet when the moon sets …

Answer: Then contemplation is: “One is originally Buddha—what is there to contemplate?”

Question: This saying, “One is originally Buddha—what is there to contemplate?” is the speech of one who has arrived home. To those who have arrived home, it may seem like idle talk, but those who have not arrived home can easily be poisoned by it.

Answer: Since you have not yet arrived home, simply learn not to turn with thoughts and not to be moved by circumstances.

The questions are as follows: (What follows is Teacher Qi’s response, given in sections—editor’s note.)

Question: In your earlier post on the three steps of contemplation, concerning “not turning with thoughts and not being moved by circumstances,” there is no need to change this into “do not turn with thoughts; do not be moved by circumstances,” is there?

Answer: It would be best to forget all these words and put them into practice.

Question: “Not turning with thoughts” is a general method, is it not? More specifically, there are many ways to begin: the “pei!” of Mahāmudrā, Chan investigation of a huatou, Buddha-recitation, and what we call “not heeding them.” These are all expedient methods for entering the gate, are they not?

Answer: Correct. These are all methods of not turning with thoughts.

Question: “With a solemn awakening, it brightly appears before you”—is this the same dharma gate, expressed differently from the “method of disengagement” and “looking into where a thought arises”? At this level, one should adopt it only after seeing one’s true nature, should one not? Without seeing one’s true nature, one naturally would not know what it is for it to brightly appear before one.

Answer: Correct. They are different expressions for the same matter. Rather than saying, “Without seeing one’s true nature, one naturally would not know what it is for it to brightly appear before one,” it would be better to say, “If it truly brightly appears before one, this is called seeing one’s true nature.”

Question: Can the three steps of contemplation be compared to “Avalokiteśvara,” “contemplation,” and contemplation without observing? Are the second and third steps respectively quiescence illuminating and illumination quiescent?

Answer: Indeed, idle names fill the five lakes.

Question: The three steps are not necessarily a process through which everyone must now pass, like stages in practicing a method. Is that so?

Answer: The three steps were explained only in response to a question. Use them if they are useful, but do not fix them in words.

Question: As for impressions, it is not called carrying manure in, but only carrying manure out.

Answer: Ha ha! It is precisely carrying manure in.

148. How Does One Cross Between the Three Steps?

Question: How does one cross from the second to the third step of the three steps of heart esotericism?

Answer: There is no crossing. If there were a crossing, one could not reach the third step.

Question: Is it simply a matter of continuing with this one awakening and disregarding everything else?

Answer: That is one way of putting it.

Question: Teacher, there should be no boundary, should there?

Answer: If you say there is one, then the third step is not thorough. If you say there is none, then why speak of a second and a third?

Question: It is like the three barriers, is it not?

Answer: Oh, do not cling to such theories.

Question: It seems that the first and second steps occur simultaneously.

Answer: All three occur simultaneously.

Question: Three? What is the other one?

Answer: The other is, “One is originally Buddha—what is there to contemplate?”

Question: If they occur simultaneously, why did you divide them into two stages?

Answer: When there is “a solemn awakening, and it brightly appears before you,” one naturally does not turn with thoughts or become moved by circumstances.

149. Not Turning with Thoughts; Not Being Moved by Circumstances

(1) A Correct Understanding of “Not Turning with Thoughts; Not Being Moved by Circumstances”

Question: Teacher Qi once expressed the idea that using the Heart-of-Heart Dharma to realize the mind and see one’s true nature is like using an ox-cleaver to kill a chicken. I know that the power of the threefold esoteric empowerment of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is tremendous and that it is indeed relatively easy through it to open up to one’s original nature. But after realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, the principal practice is contemplation off the meditation cushion. How, then, is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma’s special power manifested? Please clarify this, Teacher Qi.

Answer: Rather than speak of “special power,” it would be better to speak of “directness.”

Directness means directly measuring oneself against those who have realized fruition. Though one has not yet completely severed delusion and karma, one directly learns from those who have done so, just as a child learns to do what adults do.

Leaving aside “with a solemn awakening, it brightly appears before you” and “one is originally Buddha—what is there to contemplate?”, this very “not turning with thoughts and not being moved by circumstances” is already the state of fruition.

Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi said: “There is no sentient being who does not possess the nature of awakening: numinously lucid and empty-quiescent, it is no different from that of the Buddha. Yet, from beginningless kalpas onward, they have never realized it. Deludedly attaching to the body as a mark of self, they give rise to feelings such as love and aversion. Following these feelings, they create karma; following karma, they undergo retribution. Birth, old age, sickness, and death: they revolve through saṃsāra for long kalpas.

“Yet the nature of awakening within the body has never undergone birth and death. It is like being driven and commanded in a dream while the body itself lies peacefully at rest; it is like water becoming ice while its wet nature remains unchanged. If one can awaken to this nature, this is the dharmakāya, originally unborn—what could it depend upon? Numinous and never obscured, clear and ever-present knowing, it comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Yet through deluded attachments over many lives, habits have become second nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure flow on in a subtle continuous stream.

“Although the truth may be suddenly comprehended, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once. One must constantly be aware of them and diminish them again and again, like waves gradually subsiding after the wind suddenly ceases. How could the practice cultivated in one lifetime immediately equal the powers and functions of all Buddhas? One need only take empty quiescence as one’s own essence and not identify with the physical body; take lively knowing as one’s own mind and not identify with deluded thoughts. Whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Then, even at the time of death, karma will naturally be unable to bind one.

“Though there is an intermediate state, one may proceed freely wherever one wishes, taking rebirth in the heavens or human realm as one pleases. If thoughts of love and aversion have already fallen away, one will no longer receive a segmented body and will naturally be able to transform the short into the long and the coarse into the wondrous. If the subtle continuous stream is entirely quiescent, and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains brightly present, then one can

manifest countless transformation bodies in response to circumstances, liberating sentient beings with whom one has affinities. This is called Buddha."

The Chan master described three stages after awakening: (1) Whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them. Even at the time of death, karma will naturally be unable to bind one. Though there is an intermediate state, one is free to go wherever one wishes, taking one's abode in heaven or the human realm as one pleases. (2) Once thoughts of love and aversion have vanished, one no longer receives a body subject to segmented birth and death, and can naturally transform the short into the long and the coarse into the sublime. (3) Once the subtle continuous stream and all else have become quiescent, and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains brilliantly present, one can manifest countless transformation bodies in response to circumstances, liberating sentient beings with whom one has affinities. This is called Buddhahood.

The latter two stages are above the eighth bhūmi. Let us not discuss them for now, but only the first stage. If one can truly "take empty quiescence as one's own essence and not identify with the physical body; take luminous knowing as one's own mind and not identify with deluded thoughts. Whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them," then karma is already "unable to bind" one. When karma cannot bind one, one has broken the vicious cycle of rebirth in the six realms and escaped saṃsāra. Is this not realizing the Way?

Therefore, when we say, "Do not turn with thoughts; do not be moved by circumstances," we are not demanding that you accomplish this at once. Rather, you should learn to do it; it is the direction of your effort, called right practice. Once you can do it, you will realize the Way. See how direct this is! There is no need to be drawn along by the hook of desire; go straight toward the fruition. Should not a great person be like this?

(2) The Skill Lies in "Not Paying Attention"

Question: I feel that my previous contemplation was inaccurate. It does not mean observing the point in the brain from which a thought arises—that would be putting a head on top of one's head. Rather, when a thought comes, regardless of where it comes from, see it and say, "Do not pay attention to it." It breaks off at once. Immediately, let go completely; everything is clear and distinct, and the mind is lucid and unmistakable. After a while, another thought comes, and again one gives a shout: "Do not pay attention to it." This is contemplation, is it not? Please correct me, Teacher.

Answer: Observing where a thought arises is not putting a head on top of one's head. But what you originally described was not its point of arising: "Off the cushion, observe the thoughts in the brain." A thought is not the same as its point of arising.

Question: Teacher, I mean that when I previously observed thoughts, I focused on my head, watching a particular point and taking it to be the point of arising. When a thought arose, I became aware of it.

Answer: That is even more beside the point. That is why I said: replace “Observe!” with “Do not pay attention to it!”

Question: May there henceforth be no more vexatious and delusive talk on this forum unrelated to practice.

Answer: Regarding vexatious and delusive talk unrelated to practice, the best method is this: do not pay attention to him—do not respond to his posts.

Question: What should one do when white waves surge to the heavens?

Answer: Throw them into the land of the unborn!

Question: What must one do in order to hold fast?

Answer: Do not do anything in order to hold fast.

Question: Only while sitting in meditation do I discover that they surge and billow like tempestuous waves.

Answer: Even after the wind stops, the waves still surge! Do not pay attention to them! Do not run after them!

Question: What is the difference between mere verbal Chan, wild Chan, and genuine Chan?

Answer: Ha ha! When you throw “mere verbal Chan, wild Chan, genuine Chan . . .” all into the Eastern Ocean, you will understand.

150. A Stern Awakening; Luminous Presence

Question: A stern awakening is easy enough to do, but I do not experience luminous presence. Does luminous presence come only after an explosive breakthrough?

Answer: If that is how it is, then even after an explosion there will be no luminous presence.

Question: I feel that “luminous” creates further complications. The term can easily mislead people into thinking that there is some kind of light. In fact, I think it is simply this: not a single thought arises, yet all is clear and distinct.

Answer: Ha ha! You do not say “luminous,” yet you have come up with “clear and distinct.”

Question: I merely say it with my mouth; when the time comes, it is not actually in my mind. But now I also understand what you mean by “luminous.”

Answer: “Originally a Buddha—what is there to contemplate?” This is true luminous presence.

Question: “A stern awakening; luminous presence.” I have two understandings of this and have accordingly adopted two methods. In everyday life, I simply do whatever I need to do, have a stern awakening, and then let go after becoming aware; after a while, I become aware again.

In this way, I repeatedly train in the number of stern awakenings. This method emphasizes frequency, not sustained duration. The other method is luminous presence, followed by striving to maintain this state without being stained by a single thing. This trains sustained duration. At present, I think that only by continuing with the latter method can one become continuous and undivided. So I maintain a high degree of vigilance and have recently been training in this way.

Answer: For you, both methods are very good; the second is better. But not everyone is like this. Let me ask you something: does practicing this way affect your work?

Question: I often use the first method when doing work that requires thought. I usually use the second when walking, sitting idly, or at leisure, when I do not need to think. The second has somewhat greater force, and on the cushion I also do my utmost to practice in this way. Off the cushion, I can occasionally practice this way while working as well, but it feels as though the work is not being done by myself; everything is hazy. Usually I cannot do it, as it affects my work, which shows that my strength is still insufficient. Since this is correct, I shall persist in practicing this way from now on.

Answer: It should be that this not only does not affect your work, but imperceptibly improves your efficiency, because there are fewer deluded thoughts while you work. As the saying goes, “When the mind is focused on one point, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished.”

151. Originally a Buddha—What Is There to Contemplate?

A: What is the key to contemplation? How can one see deluded thoughts arising?

B: There are two steps. As the elder said, the mind does not turn with circumstances, because all appearances of circumstances are unreal; one must

leave appearances and circumstances behind. Then break through the one who thinks and the one who contemplates. When a thought arises, do not abide in it; the thought itself is empty. There is no self in circumstances; circumstances themselves are empty.

Answer: There is also a third step—sweep away the traces of the first two steps.

B: The third step is to genuinely arouse the compassionate mind of bodhicitta.

Answer: This still belongs to the second step: “When a thought arises, do not abide in it; the thought itself is empty. There is no self in circumstances; circumstances themselves are empty.”

Only at the third step can it be like this:

“All this pedantic talk! The nostrils of a patch-robed monk face downward. If you do not believe it, ask Sister Wang from the eastern village!” (This is from the Chan school.)

“Feeding the Buddhas of the three times, countless as a thousand million, is not as good as feeding one who is without thought, without abiding, without practice, and without realization.” (This is from the doctrinal school.)

Question: Regarding “Originally a Buddha—what is there to contemplate?”, a certain Dharma brother has been criticizing this question for a long time. Unless he directly realizes it, he will forever remain trapped in his own consciousness and conceptual understanding. This Dharma brother received Heart-of-Heart Dharma empowerment in the 1990s, yet has still not completed one thousand meditation sessions. If someone can persuade him, I hope that he will stay away from the internet, let go of everything, practice in accordance with the Dharma, and directly realize his original nature as soon as possible.

Answer: Among the Four Reliances is: “Rely on definitive meaning, not on nondefinitive meaning.” What the elder said—“Originally a Buddha—what is there to contemplate?”—is definitive meaning.

Nondefinitive meaning must also be taught: “prescribe medicine according to the illness,” and “in accordance with the minds of sentient beings, respond according to their capacity to understand.” An ancient worthy said, “Sitting amid the grass atop a solitary peak.” Atop a solitary peak is definitive meaning; sitting amid the grass is nondefinitive meaning. Take Deshan: if he had not been “sitting amid the grass,” how could Yantou have been prompted to say, “He does not understand the final phrase”?

Yet Deshan was, after all, a person “atop a solitary peak,” and this also prompted Yantou to say, “It is fortunate that the old fellow at the head of the hall understands the final phrase.” Yantou had no other trick to play; in his urgency, he added the tail end, “He has only three years left to live,” thereby provoking much chatter among later generations who cling to spiritual powers, such as prediction. But in terms of predictive ability, who could surpass the devas? Yet have the devas attained liberation? Are they not still within the cycle of rebirth in the six realms?

To give another example: the elder both said, “the nature of luminous knowing in which not a single thought arises, yet all is clear and distinct,” and said, “What luminous knowing or nonluminous knowing is there?” The latter statement is definitive meaning.

Question: Teacher, I would like to ask about “Originally a Buddha—what is there to contemplate?” 1. Does this step mean abandoning contemplation and already transcending it, even going beyond quiescent illumination and illuminating quiescence? 2. To reach this stage, must one first become thoroughly proficient in constant contemplation before this higher step is involved? If one is still unskilled in contemplation, is it impossible to pass directly beyond it and reach this stage? 3. Is this step the stage of an eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva?

Answer: Yuanwu said: “Unless one reaches the nonobstruction among phenomena, one is fundamentally unqualified to speak of Chan.”

(What follows is Teacher Qi’s answer, divided into sections—editor’s note.)

Question 1: Does this step mean abandoning contemplation and already transcending it, even going beyond quiescent illumination and illuminating quiescence?

Answer: In fact, this is not a “step”; there is not even abandoning or transcending.

Question 2: To reach this stage, must one first become thoroughly proficient in constant contemplation before this higher step is involved? If one is still unskilled in contemplation, is it impossible to pass directly beyond it and reach this stage?

Answer: Here there are no stages, nor is there any arriving.

Question 3: Is this step the stage of an eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva?

Answer: What bhūmi or no bhūmi is there?

Have you not seen: “A carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance, does not eliminate deluded thoughts or seek the true . . .”

II. Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature

(I) Originally complete and present—what further nature is there to see?

152. Direct Pointing

Question: How can I eliminate the bad habit of clinging to appearances and achieve "engaging with circumstances and things while remaining unattached in affairs"? I have practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for nearly two hundred sessions, yet I have had no special sensations or experiences. Is this in accordance with the Dharma? The only progress I can feel is that my mind-capacity has broadened somewhat and my concern with gain and loss has lessened. But sexual desire remains as before. How should I practice???

Answer: In this very instant, cast aside all this speculation and see what it is!

Question: Teacher, please be compassionate: strike down the three minds and shout ignorance away completely.

Answer: The three minds are unobtainable, so how could one strike them? "The actual nature of ignorance is itself Buddha-nature"—how could it be shouted away completely?

Question: When one has come to the end of the road, is there still a place where willows darken and flowers brighten?

Answer: You are still asking about a place where willows darken and flowers brighten. Where are you now?

158. Always Feeling Uneasy at Heart

Question: I always feel uneasy at heart.

Answer: In the Chan school, this is called "one's heels not touching the ground." In fact, you are caught in doubt.

Question: That is so. But now I am unwilling to practice earnestly!

Answer: Ha ha! If you were truly settled, whether you practiced or did not practice would both be superfluous words.

Question: I am always afraid of losing it, though in fact, when I am afraid, I have already lost it.

Answer: Recognizing this means you are not being wronged. Clouds have arisen; it is not that the sky has been lost. Even if the earth were ruined, the sky would not be

lost.

Question: The more I fear losing the sky, the larger the clouds become.

Answer: Ha ha! Then contemplation is like a great wind that blows the clouds away.

Question: I make it so that there is no wind, no clouds, no earth, and no sky.

Answer: ^o^

Question: White clouds fill the green mountains, yet the green mountains remain!

Answer: Green mountains are simply green mountains. How could white clouds obstruct them?

Question: This line is also good: “Though bamboo grows dense, it does not hinder the water from flowing through; though mountains stand high, they do not obstruct the white clouds from flying.”

Answer: ^o^

Question: Teacher, I feel unsettled for no apparent reason. How did you deal with this problem in the beginning?

Answer: I also asked the elder. He stared at me for quite some time, then slowly said, “Then you will just have to endure it for a while first.”

Question: Teacher, what exactly is the cause of this?

Answer: It is due to the subtler aspects of view-delusions. You have not yet completely severed view-delusions.

B: His experience seems much like mine. I now feel this very deeply; I should be close to awakening, shouldn’t I? I have finally found it. … I keep circling around here. At first I do not notice it, but once I do, I still keep exerting myself and cannot set my mind at ease.

Answer: I also spoke frankly: Having read your post, I deeply feel that you are straightforward, because I was just like you! Fortunately, the elder’s unsparing blows, shouts, and negations helped me. That is why I say: “Even if this body were shattered into motes of dust, I could hardly repay one ten-thousandth of the elder’s profound kindness!”

Question: Last time in the chat room, I asked you: Since I firmly believe that I inherently possess the Tathāgata’s Buddha-nature, why must I still directly realize it once more? Is it in order to “believe more firmly”? I always feel that even if I

understand it in principle, I must still “prove” it, because I have never experienced an explosion or the sensation of the bottom dropping out of a bucket. Thus I always feel uneasy, and when I sit, I always want to enter samādhi, hoping to open to what is original within five hundred sessions.

Answer: Given your situation, even if you had experienced an explosion and the bottom dropping out of a bucket, you would still feel uneasy at heart.

Question: Now I feel that this is indeed superfluous. It is like trying to prove to oneself that one is a human being! In fact, whether one receives a stamp of certification or not makes no difference. Only those who do not firmly believe seek to prove it to themselves.

Answer: Only those who feel unsettled at heart need a “stamp of certification.” In fact, even after receiving such a stamp, they will still feel unsettled.

Question: Now I feel that seeing one’s nature, explosions, and the like are all superfluous matters.

Answer: A clear-eyed person falling into a well!

Question: Hee hee, I nearly wronged all the heroes under heaven. Teacher, you saved people in time.

Answer: Master Xuedou said: “What an injustice! It bears telling! Clear-eyed patch-robed monks, do not take this lightly.”

160. The Seal Without a Seal

(1) Can one use mind-to-mind sealing to confirm the experience of the first barrier?

Question: Can one use mind-to-mind sealing to confirm the experience of the first barrier?

Answer: Let me put it plainly: If there are still traces of the three barriers, then you have not even broken through the first barrier.

(2) If I feel that I have awakened, what should I do next?

A: If I feel that I have awakened, what should I do next?

Answer: There is no need for “what comes next.” Right here and now, even “awakening” is unobtainable.

(3) After seeing one’s nature, must one still meditate?

Answer: As long as this notion of “after seeing one’s nature” remains, one must still engage in contemplation and meditation.

(4) Seeing itself is the nature—what further nature is there to see!

Question: Seeing one’s nature is merely a consolation prize. I have heard that Teacher Qi has a habitual saying: “I have never confirmed that anyone has seen their nature and awakened.”

Answer: Yes, I have never confirmed that anyone has seen their nature and awakened. If there is still a nature to be seen or an awakening to be attained, then one has not even reached the vicinity of the dharmakāya.

Seeing itself is the nature—what further nature is there to see!

If it is called original, how can one speak of opening or closing?

(II) Eliminating Habitual Tendencies and Safeguarding Realization

161. On Safeguarding Realization

Question: Is it necessary to carefully safeguard the thought of true suchness and intrinsic nature, so that one sees it in every thought and it is not covered over by deluded thoughts?

Answer: This is called safeguarding realization.

Question: In Master Yuanyin’s lectures, he says that after awakening one must safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly, yet one must not suppress thoughts. What is the criterion for safeguarding realization continuously and seamlessly without suppressing thoughts? How does one know whether one is doing so without suppressing them?

Answer: Safeguarding realization means maintaining freedom from deluded attachment; suppressing thoughts means forcing thoughts to die out. You need only relinquish deluded attachments; there is no need to suppress thoughts.

Question: Could you put it this way, Teacher: rather than say “safeguard,” which gives people the sense that there is something to safeguard, would it not be more appropriate to say “remain ever vigilant”? What is “safeguarding”? It is simply “remaining ever vigilant”!

Answer: Yes! “Vigilance” is more fitting.

Question: It would be better if everyone used “vigilance” and not “safeguarding.” Originally, I relied all along on vigilance, but later the word bao, “safeguard,” in

“safeguarding realization” confused me for nearly half a year. I searched everywhere for a way to “safeguard.” I feel that the term “contemplation” has the same problem.

Answer: There is nothing wrong with “safeguard” either—it means maintaining vigilance.

Question: Bao means “maintain”? I had always thought it meant “protect.” I was tormented by this polysemous word for half a year!

Answer: “Protect” is also correct: protect this vigilant mind.

162. Eliminating Habitual Tendencies

(1) Habitual Tendencies

Question: Once intrinsic nature appears, one first realizes that mind, mentation, and consciousness are truly unreal and delusive, without any real substance. Yet their momentum does not seem to diminish. Is this the inertia of cyclic continuation?

Answer: This is called habitual tendencies.

Question: How strange! Not wandering—uncomfortable! Wandering—troubled at heart!

Answer: You see your karmic habits now, don’t you? There is no karma outside the mind, and no mind outside karma.

Question: Teacher Qi, what is the difference between attachment and habitual tendencies?

Answer: Having become accustomed to attachment, it is called habitual tendencies.

(2) How does one eliminate habitual tendencies?

Answer: Through continuous and seamless contemplation, habitual tendencies may wonderfully disappear all at once.

(3) For those who, upon a single awakening, are finished with it, there are no habitual tendencies to eliminate either.

Question: After practicing any Dharma—including the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, Pure Land, or the Chan school—and attaining awakening at the level of principle or directly realizing what is original, all that remains is to sweep away habitual tendencies, “diminishing and diminishing until there is nothing left.” One then becomes rounded and unobstructed in daily life. Is that right??

Answer: To say “practicing any Dharma” is somewhat rash. For example, the practice of Phowa is not like this. Again, before attaining Buddha-recitation samādhi, Pure Land practice emphasizes only rebirth in the Western Pure Land; it does not concern itself with such matters as “awakening” or “what is original.”

The Chan school and heart esotericism teach it this way. However, for those of the highest capacity and keenest intelligence, who are finished with it upon a single awakening, there are no habitual tendencies to eliminate either.

Question: Apart from Śākyamuni Buddha’s manifestation, it seems that historically there has been no one who was finished with it upon a single awakening. Is that so? I think that the Sixth Patriarch’s great awakening with the Fifth Patriarch was only at the level of principle.

Answer: There was. In the Chan lamp records, there was a butcher named Guang'e who was like this.

Question: After we awaken, we must still diligently eliminate habitual tendencies; only when they have been completely eliminated is the matter finally finished. When Śākyamuni Buddha realized the mind and saw his true nature beneath the bodhi tree, had he already eliminated his habitual tendencies completely? Why was his gradual course of practice different from ours? Why is there such a difference?

Answer: Take a 3,000-meter race, for example. Śākyamuni Buddha has already reached the finish line, while we are still halfway there.

163. Turning Up Karmic Seeds

(1) What Are Karmic Seeds?

Question: In the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, what do “seeds” refer to?

Answer: They refer to the karmic seeds latent in the eighth consciousness. Each seed is a karmic retribution. These seeds were planted by one’s own past actions, and when they sprout, it is like repaying debts. Only by bringing them forth and dissolving them can one be liberated. Otherwise, it is like having creditors constantly pursuing you for payment—how could you be free?

(2) Turning Up Karmic Seeds Is Much Like Menopause

Question: I once practiced qigong. After sitting in Heart Esotericism meditation, qi rises upward. Is this what is meant by turning up karmic seeds?

Answer: No. Turning up karmic seeds chiefly manifests as unaccountable agitation, much like menopause. It passes quickly, lasting no more than a few days at most.

Question: After it passes, one seems extraordinarily calm. I mean after turning up karmic seeds.

Answer: Of course. It comes in waves, until it is gone altogether.

Question: When it arises, one truly experiences every kind of feeling. Only after it has passed does it seem unreal. It seems that the more chaotic it feels, the more one must persevere through it in order to develop strength; otherwise, all one's effort is wasted.

Answer: Well said! It was never real in the first place; one is simply accustomed to mistaking the false for the real.

164. The Difference Between Turning Up Karmic Seeds and Eliminating Habitual Tendencies

Question: What should one do when seeds of habitual tendencies are turned up?

Answer: Eliminating habitual tendencies and turning up karmic seeds are two different matters:

1. Eliminating habitual tendencies: After practitioners of Heart Esotericism see their original nature through practice (equivalent to breaking through the first barrier in the Chan school), their ingrained habitual defilements remain deep. When circumstances arise, they are still unable to take mastery and always chase after circumstances, thereby obscuring their original nature.

At such times, one must urgently awaken with solemn clarity, allowing one's original nature to come forth. Do not chase after circumstances. Whatever favorable or adverse circumstances may arise, let your mind remain unmoved (for a period, this is how it must be). This is eliminating habitual tendencies. This is called "contemplation" (contemplate in this way for a period). It is the main practice of Heart Esotericism; seated practice with the six mudrās and one mantra is an auxiliary practice. Thus, eliminating habitual tendencies is very important. When practice gradually matures over time, one suddenly discovers that habitual tendencies are originally unobtainable. Only then are they truly eliminated!

2. Turning up karmic seeds: As seated practice deepens, karmic seeds in the field of the eighth consciousness are turned up, giving rise to unaccountable afflictions similar to menopause. One must urgently disregard them (this too is a stage of contemplation). They arise for several days, then there are several days of calm; then they arise again, and calm again, each time becoming weaker and weaker. In an instant, one's original nature opens, and one enters the above stage of eliminating habitual tendencies.

(III) Wondrous Functioning

166. Non-Contrivance, Yet Nothing Is Left Undone

Question: This is how I strive to practice: before doing something, I seek nothing and follow conditions; while doing it, I concentrate and do my utmost; afterward, I am neither pleased nor upset by the result. Please judge whether the above is right or wrong.

(The following is answered in sections.—Editor's note)

Question: Before doing something, I seek nothing and follow conditions.

Answer: That is truly following conditions.

Question: Living out one's days this way also saves effort.

Answer: There are no days to get through, and no effort to save. That is truly saving effort.

Question: While doing something, I concentrate and do my utmost.

Answer: Once you exert the effort of "concentrating your energy," you cannot do your utmost. When one is truly doing, there is no doing.

Question: Yes, yes. It is like forcing oneself to eat and struggling against oneself.

Answer: An ancient Chan master said, "All day long I eat, yet I have not bitten a single grain of rice."

Question: Afterward, I am neither pleased nor upset by the result.

Answer: "Do not move with circumstances," you see.

Question: This is the standard for testing one's attainment, is it not?

Answer: To fabricate a standard for no reason is to create an affair!

Question: Please judge whether the above is right or wrong.

Answer: Here there is neither right nor wrong.

Question: After the teacher has cleared away the land mines, he still has to fill in the holes. The traces of your footsteps in the grass remain.

Answer: "Who sees me open my mouth?"

Question: During the May Day holiday, I attended an expedient seven-day retreat. My mind seems to have had some awakening, so I casually composed a verse. I hope the teacher will not laugh at it: “I searched everywhere—inwardly, outwardly, and in between—yet saw intrinsic nature amid appearances. How does one become a Buddha or patriarch? By sleeping and eating every day.”

Answer: I rejoice in it: “Sought inwardly, outwardly, and in between, it cannot be found; with appearances or without appearances, it is all sheer nonsense! Who needs to become a Buddha or patriarch? Sleep when tired; eat when hungry.”

Question: The first verse of Chan Master Puming’s Oxherding Pictures: “Only after long days and deep practice does one begin to turn one’s head; the frenzied force of the mind gradually becomes tame and pliant. Yet the mountain boy is not willing to trust it completely, and still keeps it tethered with a reed rope.”

Answer: A response in the same rhyme: “Having run into a wall, one knows to turn one’s head; the mind’s resolve becomes pliant enough to wind around one’s fingers. Even if those with discerning eyes grant no full approval, where it must be tethered, tether it still.”

Question: Teacher, you say that one is “a carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance.” Then why write such a long Song of Realizing the Way?

Answer: If one is truly beyond learning, then there is no non-learning; if one is truly non-contriving, then there is no non-doing.