Ripples in the Ocean of Chan

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Gaofeng: Where Is the Master?

Chan Master Gaofeng Miao first studied under Monk Duanqiao Lun, who instructed him to investigate the huatou (critical phrase): "Where does birth come from, and where does death go?" Thereupon he exerted himself day and night without slackening, neither sleeping nor resting. Later he studied under Monk Xueyan Qin. Qin asked, "Who is it that drags this corpse here for you?" Before the Master could answer, he was driven out with blows. Though this happened who knows how many times, the Master not only felt no resentment, but investigated and sought instruction with even greater sincerity.

(People today need not be beaten repeatedly; if someone merely speaks to them a little severely, they become dissatisfied and walk away. From this, one can see how earnest and sincere the ancients were in their practice! With such single-minded, wholehearted effort, how could one fail to awaken and realize the Way? Can we younger students fail to feel ashamed and stirred to vigorous practice?)

While investigating the huatou, the Master happened to recall in a dream the question raised in Duanqiao Lun's room: "The myriad dharmas return to the One; where does the One return?" A sense of doubt suddenly arose, and for three days and nights he did not close his eyes. (In investigating Chan, it is vital to arouse a sense of doubt. Once it arises, it envelops the whole body and congeals into a single mass; good news will soon arrive.)

One day, which happened to be the anniversary of Patriarch Bodhidharma's death, he went with the assembly to the Three Stupas to chant sūtras. He happened to look up and saw on the wall a portrait of Chan Master Wuzu Yan—successor to Chan Master Baiyun Duan of the Yangqi branch of the Linji school, and teacher of Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin. The inscription on the portrait read: "In a hundred years there are thirty-six thousand mornings; through all the changes, it is this fellow after all." He suddenly awakened and broke through the huatou of dragging a corpse.

After his awakening, he went to Nanming and again paid respects to Monk Qin. As soon as Qin saw him, he asked, "Who is it that drags this corpse here for you?" The Master immediately gave a shout! (After awakening, one's bearing is indeed extraordinary.) Qin raised his staff (to test him once more). The Master seized it and said, "Today you cannot strike me." (Truly, this one is worthy.) Qin said, "Why can I not strike you?" (Heavens, heavens—he has let him off one move.) The Master flicked his sleeves and left. (Fortunately, there was this move.)

The next day, Qin asked, "The myriad dharmas return to the One; where does the One return?" (The heart of a compassionate father to all under heaven.) The Master said, "A dog licks a hot oil cauldron." (You know well that you can neither advance nor retreat.) Qin said, "Where did you learn this empty affectation?" (Whom are you asking? It was you, Master, who put me through this.) The Master said, "I want precisely to make you doubt." (Having reason on his side, he yields to no one.) Qin let the matter drop. (What could he do with him? He could only swallow his anger in silence.) From then on, Gaofeng yielded to no one in Chan exchanges. (Above heaven and below heaven, I alone am honored.)

One day, Qin asked in the ordinary course of conversation, "Amid the bustle of daytime activity, can you still be your own master?" (Though the fishing line hangs a thousand feet, its intent is the golden fish; why make a sore by cutting into sound flesh?) The Master replied, "I can be my own master." (So I thought, so I thought—but it turns out, it turns out. Sure enough, he has lost his compass.)

Qin pressed on, asking, "Can you be your own master in dreams?" (To add frost to snow—another offense that cannot be tolerated!) The Master answered, "I can be my own master." (Still not fully awake; how deep is the mud beneath his heels!) Qin asked further, "When you are sound asleep, without dreams or thoughts, seeing or hearing, where is the master at that very moment?" (Let me ask you, Master.

No harm in giving him another blow! How could it be elsewhere?) The Master was speechless. (The ancient Buddha has long passed away; he has already exposed his defeat.) Qin instructed him: "From this day onward, I do not want you to study Buddha or study Dharma, nor to exhaust the ancient and modern. Just eat when hungry and sleep when tired. But when you awaken from sleep, rouse your spirit

and ask: During that sleep, where does the master abide?" (Do not deceive people; treat a living horse as though it were a dead one.)

The Master then resolved to investigate with determination. He vowed: "Even if I must spend my whole life as a monk sustained by gruel and rice, I shall certainly understand this matter clearly." (A true man indeed—what worthy man would be content to decay together with grass and trees?) One day, while taking a midday nap, a fellow monk lodging with him carelessly shoved his pillow onto the floor. At the sound of its thud, the Master attained great and thorough awakening. (Eight beats too late! Could this monk have been an embodiment of the Great Compassionate Bodhisattva?)

(Note: The remarks in parentheses are the author's comments.)

Having read this koan, in addition to sincerely venerating Patriarch Gaofeng's unwavering spirit of earnest investigation and his profound awakening, we may also gain the following precious insights:

First, if we truly wish to transcend saṃsāra and be liberated from birth and death, then in investigating Chan we must relinquish everything and wholeheartedly hold fast to a single huatou devoid of conceptual meaning. We must attend to it morning and evening, in displacement and adversity, investigating it diligently and steadfastly day and night. Only then can we break through to our original nature and directly realize ultimate reality.

It is absolutely not the case that understanding a few literary or doctrinal meanings, exchanging a couple of sharp Chan retorts, offering a few turning words, or writing a few verses with literary flair constitutes awakening. Still less is it awakening merely to be physically healthy, materially comfortable, relaxed, happy, peaceful, and at ease.

Second, in investigating Chan one must arouse a sense of doubt. Only when doubt arises can it cut off deluded thoughts and gather explosive force. Once the time and conditions mature, it is like gunpowder meeting a spark: it explodes at once, and one immediately opens the mysterious gate and breaks the lock of consciousness, directly seeing one's true reality. Otherwise, deluded thoughts continue without interruption, no explosive force can arise, and one merely wastes one's time. Thus the ancient worthies said, "Great doubt, great awakening; small doubt, small awakening; no doubt, no awakening." These are not empty words.

Third, those who engage in mere verbal Chan or literary display may, for a time, seem not entirely without Chan flavor. Yet this is only a temporary false appearance. Their minds are not truly emptied and open through and through; some thing always remains before them. Even if they reluctantly quiet their minds and sit in

meditation, some thing still faintly remains within. Their luminosity can never break through completely. How, then, could they dissolve body, mind, and world,

and directly realize their original nature? Since they have not directly realized their original nature, how could they quiet the monkey mind and horse-like will and attain calm, stable samādhi? Thus, once adverse circumstances arise, the peaceful and joyful state of mind of which they ordinarily speak disappears without a trace.

Such people cannot be their own masters in dreams; indeed, they cannot be their own masters even in the ordinary activities of daytime. Not only can they not remain calmly unmoved and wholly unaltered amid the less readily noticed favorable circumstances; when the more obvious adverse circumstances arise, they cannot avoid being carried along by them into anger and resentment. Especially when illness attacks, they are even more unable to resist it, groaning in pain and utterly helpless.

Chan Master Dahui Gao rebuked such Chan followers as being like medicinal mercury: when it meets fire, it immediately flies away. They have no genuine benefit from practice; how, then, could they be liberated from birth and death and leave saṃsāra? Therefore, he admonished us later students of Chan that we must investigate truly and practice earnestly, and must not seek tidings merely in words and doctrinal meanings.

Fourth, Chan Master Gaofeng's first two replies, "I can be my own master," truly showed fine practice. They are a model and example for us later students in our own cultivation. We study Buddhism and cultivate the Way in order to be our own masters at the brink of birth and death, rather than being dragged down by karmic obstacles and sinking into the sea of suffering.

To accomplish this, while alive we must first be our own masters amid the movements and activities of daily life, not being shifted by favorable or adverse conditions, nor turned about by the deluded emotions of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure. Only then can we be our own masters in dreams. If we cannot even accomplish this, how can we speak of liberation from birth and death? For the root of birth and death is that deluded thoughts do not cease and we cling to circumstances!

For practitioners at the present stage, it is already difficult to be one's own master during the day and not be drawn along by circumstances and conditions; how much more difficult is it to be one's own master in dreams? Dreams are a state of partial unconsciousness, whereas the dispersal of the four elements at death is a state of profound unconsciousness.

If one cannot be one's own master in partial unconsciousness, how can one be one's own master amid profound unconsciousness and be liberated from birth and death? Therefore, to cultivate the mind, realize the Way, and escape the cycle of birth and death, one must first be one's own master in dreams.

Yet however spirited and bold one may be, even if during the day one has neither attachment nor aversion amid favorable and adverse circumstances, in dreams one is often involuntarily seized by dream-demons and carried along by them. Now Chan Master Gaofeng could be his own master in dreams and was not drawn along by dream-demons. What extraordinary meditative power this was! Without undergoing several bouts of painfully earnest investigation, how could he have reached this point? It is truly not easy for one cultivating the mind to bring one's practice to such a stage. How could we fail to admire and praise him?

Looking instead at people practicing today, most are unwilling to investigate diligently and steadily with their feet firmly on the ground. Instead, they avoid what is weighty and choose what is easy, treating literary and doctrinal meanings as the Way, or seeking tidings from others' lips. After grasping a few similar-sounding principles, they write essays and verses, offer turning words, and imagine that they have thoroughly awakened and realized the Way.

In truth, this is merely feeding on others' leftover, spoiled food; it is not one's own concern, and at the brink of birth and death one cannot be one's own master in the slightest. Speech, writing, and verse must flow from the depths of one's own heart; only then can they encompass heaven and earth.

Some people, while practicing, occasionally experience a minor meditative state—for example, the physical body seeming to become immense or fly through space, the breath stopping and entering the state of embryonic breathing, or the manifestation of some spiritual power—and then believe they have realized the Way and become sages. In fact, these are merely illusory states appearing in meditative absorption and remain far removed from realization of the Way.

In meditative absorption, one must not become attached to any state whatsoever. Once one becomes attached, one stagnates and cannot advance. In particular, if certain spiritual powers manifest, one must not complacently rejoice and think that one has attained something. The moment complacency arises, not only can one not realize the Way, but one is very likely to enter demonic states. The fifty skandha-demons described in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra refer to such illusory processes: they are skandha-demons that obstruct the Way. Cultivators must never become attached to them, lest they mistakenly enter a wrong path and fall into the demonic way.

Some arrogant people cite the Heart Sūtra and the Diamond Sūtra, saying, "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form," and "All conditioned appearances are illusory."

Since all appearances are illusory, unreal, and unobtainable, then whether circumstances are favorable or adverse, beautiful or ugly, I need only respond without a clinging mind and not be carried away by them. Why investigate Chan or recite the Buddha's name? If there were Chan to investigate or a Buddha to recite, would that not be delusion added upon delusion? These words may not appear wrong, but once one encounters adverse circumstances or suffers an unexpected calamity, everything falls apart.

Others mistakenly believe that one awakening settles everything. Having initially broken through the fundamental inquiry, they think they have arrived home, and no longer diligently contemplate or temper the mind through circumstances. Thus their habitual tendencies remain unchanged; they become wild and arrogant and gain no genuine benefit. In the end, they fall into delusion after awakening and still drift along in birth and death. Is this not grievously unjust and painful?

Still others, misled by what they have heard from others, use spiritual powers to verify whether someone has awakened.

When one's practice gains strength and reaches just the right point, body, mind, and world suddenly dissolve into emptiness and shatter, while luminous awareness remains undimmed and utterly clear. Yet, because one does not behold any marvelous spiritual powers and does not know what this is, one mistakenly thinks it is not one's own original nature and hurriedly lets it slip by. Is that not regrettable? Having missed this critical opportunity and thereby delayed oneself, one then uses this to deny others. This is truly to bring calamity upon oneself and leave oneself beyond rescue. An ancient worthy once lamented: "Precisely because it is so intimate, realization comes all the more slowly!" How deeply regrettable!

Today, we have recorded this koan for everyone's reference in the hope that all may learn from it, know how to improve, strive upward, and attain genuine realization, so as not to waste their time and miss the opportunity of a lifetime.

Having studied and admired the protagonist's sincere devotion to the Way and profound power of practice in this koan, we should further discuss with everyone its subtle points and the crucial elements of pursuing the Way, so that all may thoroughly understand the import of the Chan school, trace it directly to its source, and not be misled by partial attainments along the way. Only then will we not disappoint the deep intention of the ancient worthies.

Patriarch Gaofeng's first two replies—"I can be master"—indeed reflect fine practice, beyond the reach of ordinary Chan practitioners. Yet, when examined closely from the Chan school's standpoint of sudden awakening, they inevitably fall short. Their subtler implications are briefly explained below:

The Chan school directly sees one's true nature, suddenly awakens, and becomes a Buddha; it is not a dharma gate of gradual cultivation in successive stages. Ancient worthies often said: "Even equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment are still merely fellows carrying sandals for it." If even equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment are not worth a glance, how much less are stages below them? Therefore, the Chan school permits no intermediate process and allows not the slightest trace of contrived practice.

Chan—the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa—is utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust: pure and naked, bare and open.

Since there is neither an objective realm of external objects nor a subjective person who sees and hears, who is there to be master of whom? After Chan Master Xueyan Qin could not probe through Gaofeng with his first two questions—"Who drags this dead corpse for you?" and "The myriad dharmas return to the One; where does the One return?"—he deliberately spoke in an ordinary manner to bait Gaofeng, to see whether he had already cut off all contrivance and reached the ground of effortless functioning.

But Gaofeng's footing was not yet secure; at the first lure, he took the bait and silently replied, "I can be master." Does this not establish a resting place, with subject and object standing in opposition? This does not accord with naked Chan. In the Chan school, such a reply is called "blunting the edge and wounding the hand; not cutting off completely." In this way, he bound his own hands and feet.

By the time he gave the same reply, "I can be master," a second time, he had tied himself up completely, unable to move. When the third question came—"When there are no dreams or thoughts, no seeing or hearing, where is the original person?"—he could only fall silent, dying beneath the words.

Later, when the time was ripe and his pillow fell to the ground, he broke free completely. Only then, as though awakening from a dream, did he realize that the original person was not elsewhere. Mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests—all are manifestations of the original person; birdsong and flowers' fragrance, orioles singing and swallows dancing—all are its wondrous functioning. What master or non-master could there be, and what doing or non-doing? Were not his earlier replies an utter mess?

Finally, I shall offer three further replies to Xueyan's questions, for the benefit of fellow practitioners and as a gift of introduction to Chan Master Gaofeng:

1. Question: Can you be master during the day?

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

2. Question: Can you be master 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 original person?

Answer: The great void drinks the light, dispelling long separation; the wind stirs pale-green willow strands, light and soft.

Expounding the Realization and Entry into the Buddha's Knowledge and Vision

The World-Honored One, compassionately observing that sentient beings inherently possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous qualities yet do not realize it, saw them deluded by sights and sounds, sinking in the six realms, with no prospect of release from suffering. He therefore appeared in the world and manifested himself to teach the Dharma, in order to awaken sentient beings from their deluded dream, realize this one quiescent mind, leave the sea of suffering, and reach the shore of awakening.

Yet because sentient beings were heavily burdened by the defilements of affliction, he did not dare immediately reveal this numinous and wondrous one mind. Beginning with the Āgama assemblies, he first taught the ten wholesome actions of the human and deva realms, so that they might avoid falling into the three lower realms. Later he taught impermanence, the emptiness and suffering of all things, nonself, the Four Noble Truths, and the twelve links of dependent origination, enabling sentient beings provisionally to escape the three realms and strive to leave birth and death behind. He next taught prajñā, revealing true emptiness and wondrous presence, thereby breaking the two vehicles' attachment to biased emptiness.

After forty years, when the Buddha was about to enter nirvāṇa, he finally spoke exclusively of the true reality of all phenomena at the Lotus assembly, directly revealing the one mind in order to disclose the equal Buddha-nature: the three vehicles return to one, the five natures all enter, and all who possess mind can become Buddhas. Only then did he fully reveal the World-Honored One's original intent and fundamental purpose in liberating sentient beings.

The essence of this mind is inherently numinous and luminous, vast, penetrating, and all-pervading; wondrously integrated and serenely still, suchness itself without constraint. Ordinary beings and sages are of one character; sentient beings and Buddhas are equal. Yet when one is deluded about it, birth and death arise without

end; when one awakens to it, saṃsāra suddenly ceases. The essential point is to comprehend it spiritually beyond words, to let thought cease and allow the mind to penetrate. Therefore, Chan practitioners value arousing a sense of doubt, using it to cut off deluded feelings and vain thoughts, break through to their original nature, and directly realize their own nature.

But when beginning Chan investigation, one must first set the causal basis of practice aright—what one takes as one's practice and what one takes as one's ultimate destination. Once the guiding principle is clear and the essential tenet established, one may then empty what one has attained. The word Chan is an abbreviation of dhyāna, meaning quiet contemplation or meditative cultivation. Because practitioners differ in disposition and aspiration, their cultivation and realization also differ. According to Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi's Preface to the Source of Chan:

"The Chan gate has shallow and deep levels and markedly different stages. According to the differences in their causal practice and realized fruition, they may roughly be divided into five kinds:

1. Those who cultivate while holding heterodox views, delighting in what is above and rejecting what is below, practice non-Buddhist Chan.

2. Those who rightly believe in cause and effect but also cultivate with a mind of attraction and aversion practice ordinary beings' Chan.

3. Those who cultivate after realizing the partial truth of the emptiness of self practice Lesser Vehicle Chan.

4. Those who cultivate after realizing the true principle revealed by the emptiness of both self and dharmas practice Mahāyāna Chan. (These first four kinds all differ according to the four form dhyānas and four formless absorptions.)

5. If one suddenly realizes that one's own mind is originally pure, that afflictions have never existed, and that the undefiled nature of wisdom is inherently complete —this mind itself being Buddha, ultimately no different from Buddha—then cultivation based on this is Supreme Vehicle Chan. It is also called the samādhi of one practice and the samādhi of suchness (tathatā). This is the root of all samādhis. If one can cultivate it thought after thought, one will naturally and gradually attain hundreds and thousands of samādhis. This is the Chan transmitted successively in Bodhidharma's lineage."

From this it is clear that the Chan transmitted by the Chan school is the fifth kind. Therefore, before Chan practitioners investigate a huatou, they should first open the Buddha's knowledge and vision, understanding that they inherently possess the

Tathāgata's wisdom and are no different from the Buddha. Then, firmly taking up a huatou, they should investigate it diligently and steadfastly. With skillful guidance from an enlightened Chan master, they can break through to their original nature and awaken to and enter the Buddha's knowledge and vision.

What makes the Lotus Sūtra precious is its utterly undisguised direct revelation to us that all sentient beings inherently possess the same numinous, wondrous, complete, vast, and penetrating quiescent mind-essence as the Buddha. Cultivating on this basis, none fail to attain realization. Thus, the most crucial essence of this sūtra lies in opening, revealing, awakening to, and entering the Buddha's knowledge and vision. To urge students to apply themselves, guide practitioners toward awakening, and help later generations advance, the masters of every age have offered subtle yet lucid expositions and commentaries on this key to practice. Such discussions are indeed common in Chan records.

In the late Qing dynasty, Master Chishan of Chishan in Nanjing was a great master of the contemporary Linji school. His Dharma influence spread far and wide, and outstanding practitioners all gathered around him. Notable figures of the time, such as Yuexia and Chuquan, came together under him out of admiration to investigate with the master.

One day, the master ascended the Dharma seat and instructed the assembly: "The field for selecting Buddhas is open, and outstanding talents appear. Each of you, speak forth your true understanding. This is a field for selecting Buddhas, where pillars of the Dharma are forged; it is not a place for you to idle away your meals, sleep, and doze. Today I shall test you and see who among you is a hero in this matter, an outstanding talent of the Chan school."

"The essential meaning of the entire precious Lotus Sūtra lies in opening, revealing, awakening to, and entering the Buddha's knowledge and vision. As for its profound meaning, the patriarchs throughout the ages have each displayed their own insight, offering increasingly superb explanations and expositions. They are truly as splendid as flowers and brocade, too beautiful to take in. Having read them, everyone admires and praises them and benefits greatly. But they belong to the patriarchs; they are not your own. Parroting others' words and dwelling on words and phrases does not help one realize the Way. Today I want each of you to speak from your own understanding and see who possesses genuine knowledge and penetrating insight."

After Master Chishan had finished speaking, he drew a bamboo lot bearing a name from the lot container and called on him: "Chuquan—a Dharma ancestor of Chan Master Laiguo of Gaomin Monastery in Yangzhou—you speak first. What is 'opening'?" Chuquan was speechless. The master rebuked him: "What have you been

doing here all these days? To investigate Chan in this way is simply childish play, wasting your time. How could you ever emerge? Kneel and investigate!"

The master ordered the monastic disciplinarian to burn incense and strike the stillness board, instructing everyone to investigate together and saying that he would question them individually.

Before long, one incense stick had burned out, and the disciplinarian struck the board to end the sitting. The master again pressed Chuquan: "What is 'opening'?" Chuquan still could not answer. The master sighed: "If you investigate Chan like this, when will you ever be finished?" He then ordered him to continue investigating on his knees.

After two incense sticks had burned, Chuquan was still speechless. The master would not let up and rebuked him: "If you cannot bring forth 'opening' today, I shall make you kneel to death here!" He forced him to continue investigating on his knees. Poor Chuquan was frantic with anxiety. As he knelt there, his feet and knees aching, sweat droplets as large as soybeans continually fell.

Just as the third incense stick was about to burn out, the disciplinarian raised the board and struck it to end the sitting. At its sharp knock, Chuquan suddenly woke up and cried aloud: "I have it! I have brought forth 'opening'!" The master asked, "What is 'opening'?" Chuquan immediately replied, "It brings forth what inherently is." The master followed by asking, "And 'revealing'?" Chuquan said, "It reveals what fundamentally is not."

"What does 'awakening' mean?" "Awakening to the absence of both being and nonbeing." "And how does one 'enter'?" "Entering and emerging without obstruction." Upon hearing this, the master praised him: "Good! You have submitted this paper brilliantly. Unless I press you, you will not apply yourselves to practice. You drift idly about all day long—how could you ever be finished? Today, your kneeling through three incense sticks was not in vain."

In his delight, the master next called upon Yuexia—Yuexia being the Dharma son of the great Chan master Yekai of Tianning Monastery in Changzhou—and said: "Yuexia, try speaking: what are opening, revealing, awakening, and entering?" Without the slightest hesitation, Yuexia replied, "I shall borrow Brother Chu's four answers for my use."

The master said, "How will you borrow them?" Yuexia replied, " 'It brings forth what inherently is' is the Dharma realm of principle; 'it reveals what fundamentally is not' is the Dharma realm of phenomena; 'awakening to the absence of both being and nonbeing' is the Dharma realm of the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena; and 'entering and emerging without obstruction' is the Dharma realm of the

nonobstruction among phenomena." The master loudly praised him: "Good! You are a little better than Chuquan. This truly is a field for selecting Buddhas. Today, in one stroke, two Buddhas have been selected."

Indeed: "Without a bone-chilling cold, how could plum blossoms send forth their fragrance?" The worthies of old attained realization because they applied themselves without fearing hardship. We too must not disappoint ourselves. Only by diligently investigating and cultivating with unflagging vigor can we avoid allowing the ancients alone to claim excellence before us. I shall now compose a verse for each of the first and last characters of the four words "opening, revealing, awakening, and entering," as an offering to readers. I do not know whether they still accord with the intent of the Buddhas and patriarchs, but I offer them reluctantly as my examination paper.

(I)

Opening reveals the formless face; revealing manifests bodies in the ten realms.

Awakening remains incomplete amid delusion; even entering Māra is unobstructed!

(II)

Only when the flower of mind fully opens can one understand the revelation of the insentient.

Originally there is neither delusion nor awakening; how can consciousness and wisdom have entering or emerging?

Nonduality of Self and Phenomena

A monk asked Chan Master Dasui, a Dharma heir of Chan Master Guishan Lingyou: "When the great thousand-world system is destroyed, is the dharmakāya (Dharma body) destroyed or not?" Dasui said, "The dharmakāya too is destroyed." These words left people everywhere deeply perplexed. Yet when Chan Master Touzi Qing heard them, he burned incense and made prostrations, declaring that Dasui was an ancient Buddha appearing in the world.

The wondrous essence of the dharmakāya, suchness, is unborn and unceasing, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor wavering, neither changing nor altering—a wondrous essence ever fresh throughout the ages. How could it perish when the great thousand-world system is destroyed? These words are utterly at variance with what the Buddha taught. Could it be that he carelessly uttered false words, thereby confusing the world and inviting descent into the Vajra Hell? Yet if he

was truly mistaken, Touzi Qing was a great Chan master; why did he burn incense and make prostrations, praising him as an ancient Buddha reborn?

What is called the world is, in whatever form, a manifestation transformed by the Buddha-nature—the dharmakāya—of all sentient beings. Apart from the dharmakāya, nothing exists. The Lotus Sūtra says: “Dharmas abide in their dharma positions; the characteristics of the world are ever abiding.” This means that every phenomenon in the world is manifested and established in reliance on the dharmakāya. “Dharmas” means all things whatsoever, while “dharma positions” means the One True Dharma Realm. Thus, the characteristics of the world are the dharmakāya, and the dharmakāya is the characteristics of the world.

We know that principle is revealed through phenomena, and phenomena are constituted through principle; principle and phenomena cannot be separated. Since principle and phenomena are inseparable, the sūtras say: “Nature and appearance are nondual; mind and its objects are one entity.” Since mind—the dharmakāya—is ever abiding and indestructible, the characteristics of the world naturally abide forever as well.

From the surface appearance of the world, it seems that seas turn into mulberry fields and that everything changes in an instant, never enduring for long. Yet the essential substance of things does not truly perish. They merely cease here and arise there; they have only changed locations.

In his “Former Red Cliff Fu,” Su Dongpo said: “Do you also understand water and the moon? That which passes on is like this, yet it has never truly gone away; that which waxes and wanes is like that, yet in the end it neither increases nor decreases. Viewed from their changing aspect, heaven and earth cannot remain unchanged even for an instant; viewed from their unchanging aspect, things and I alike are inexhaustible.

”Using water and the moon as illustrations, he explained that the illusory appearances of all things change, whereas their essential substance has never changed. He further explained that those whose minds are not open and who cling to illusory appearances see the world as seas changing into mulberry fields, changing from moment to moment. But those of open and clear understanding recognize the one true substance shared by things and sentient beings, and thus know that everything between heaven and earth ever abides without change.

Dharma Master Sengzhao, in his Treatise on the Immutability of Things, likewise cited several examples and discussed in detail the truth that things do not undergo change. I will not enumerate them one by one; please consult the work yourselves.

The reason things neither change nor perish, when examined in actuality, is that the root which manifests and establishes them—the dharmakāya—is naturally unborn and unceasing, ever abiding throughout the ages.

Now the monk asked, “When the great thousand-world system is destroyed, is the dharmakāya also destroyed?” If the great thousand-world system were truly destroyed, would not the dharmakāya likewise be destroyed? The monk asked this because he did not understand the principle that things and self are nondual.

Dasui was a master of great stature. Rather than engaging in lengthy discussion or expounding Buddhist doctrine at length, he followed the course of the monk’s words, so that he might feel the pain and itch for himself and, where mental activity cannot proceed, suddenly turn back and catch a glimpse of his true nature. He therefore answered in accordance with the question: “The dharmakāya too is destroyed.”

This reply carried the weight of thunder. Everyone knows that the dharmakāya is unborn and unceasing, unchanging and unalterable; how, then, could one say that the dharmakāya too is destroyed? Was this the incoherent speech of a drunkard? But Dasui was a great master of his age—how could he speak this way? This sudden thunderclap shook away all the student’s usual conceptual interpretations and deluded thoughts. In that instant, swift as lightning, when not a single thought arose, if this monk had any real vitality, he would gain an insight here and return home to sit securely.

Chan masters answer questions through direct explanation, direct pointing, indirect prompting, contrary provocation, and other methods. Their purpose is simply to enable the questioner to recognize the opportunity upon hearing the words and awaken at the point where the words end. Thus, in accordance with each visitor’s capacity, they offer suitable instruction or fierce hammer-and-tongs in order to cut off the student’s attachments and bonds, so that the student may directly realize the original nature. This is what the Chan school calls great capacity and great function.

For example, Venerable Yanyang visited Zhaozhou and asked, “What is it like when one does not bring a single thing?” Zhaozhou said, “Put it down.” The Venerable said, “Since I have not brought a single thing, what is there to put down?” Zhaozhou said, “If you cannot put it down, carry it away.” The Venerable was greatly awakened upon hearing these words.

The words “carry it away” have often provoked debate. Some say that this is a method of contrary provocation: because you do not recognize your error, if you cannot put it down, he lets you carry it along, thereby causing you to reflect. If there is nothing, there is no need to carry anything; if you carry it along, there is still

something. He compels you to recognize what you cannot put down, so that you put it down and awaken. Others say that “carry it away” is a rebuking statement.

You ask, “What is it like when one does not bring a single thing?” Yet in your mind there is clearly still an idea of “not bringing a single thing.” This means that there is still an emptiness in your mind. If there is an emptiness, there is still abiding; you should put it down. One must not abide even in emptiness.

You insist, “What is there to put down?” and refuse to acknowledge it, so he pours a basin of foul water over you and rebukes you: “Carry it away!” This is like Yunji’s visit to Nanquan. Although Yunji had received repeated instruction, he did not awaken, and Nanquan rebuked him: “Go! You do not understand my words.” It was meant to make him feel the pain upon hearing the words, turn back, and recognize himself. Still others say that this is a method of direct pointing.

The original nature is empty and numinous, utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. “Not bringing a single thing” is precisely the time when the original nature manifests. This state, in which there is no mind to be minded and nothing to be put down, is precisely where a person finds the ground on which to stand and live. Thus Zhaozhou told him to carry it away—in other words, he instructed him not to yield to anyone and to undertake it directly. Therefore Venerable Yanyang was greatly awakened at once.

Each of these three explanations has its own rationale, and none yields to the others; each has its own merits. Truly, one drop of ink becomes dragons in three places. Yet in my humble view, whether it is contrary provocation, rebuke, or direct pointing, one who understands may wield it freely in every direction and find each a wondrous truth. But if one grasps at “not bringing a single thing” and retains an experience of emptiness, one has missed the mark by far.

In answering this monk’s question, Dasui wished him to reflect, on the basis of what he already understood as ordinary truth, upon the principle and phenomena that he had not yet understood. For all Buddhist practitioners know that the Buddha taught that the dharmakāya ever abides and is indestructible. Now, hearing the statement that “the dharmakāya too is destroyed,” which contradicts the Buddha’s teaching, how could he accept it? Thus he was forced to give rise to doubt.

When he could neither advance nor withdraw, the cold ashes suddenly burst like beans in a firecracker, and he abruptly realized that the worlds of the ten directions were his own entire body, and that the worlds of the ten directions were his own luminosity. The great thousand-world system and the dharmakāya have always been one body and have never been apart. If the great thousand-world system were destroyed, would not the dharmakāya also be destroyed? Yet the dharmakāya abides throughout the ages and never decays; therefore the great thousand-world

system too is not destroyed. In this way, the monk realized the truth from the reverse side. With one statement, Dasui enabled him to awaken to the true meaning of the Lotus Sūtra. Dasui was truly a lion's cub; his means of receiving people were so subtle that one cannot but admire and praise him deeply.

An ancient worthy praised the Lotus Sūtra's teaching that the characteristics of the world are ever abiding:

"The characteristics of the world are ever abiding; / A yellow oriole sings amid green trees. / How pitiable indeed— / At the slightest movement, it flies away!"

Our dharmakāya is so splendid and free: nothing is absent from it, and there is nothing it does not know. Yet this boundless, beautiful scene cannot be portrayed. As Chan masters say, "What a fine scene—impossible to paint!" This great Chan master, with only the plain words "a yellow oriole sings amid green trees," fully sketched this endlessly graceful and beautiful spring landscape. Truly, it is a stroke that paints the dragon's eyes.

Having cultivated the Dharma and recognized this infinitely beautiful scene, we must be skilled in safeguarding realization after our initial glimpse of the original nature. At all times and in all places, contemplate continuously: outwardly, do not be drawn away by circumstances; inwardly, do not be tainted by seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing. Remain empty, pure, and non-abiding at all times. Never become frivolous and arrogant, imagining that you have arrived home and finished the matter.

You must know that an initial glimpse of the original nature is like a newborn infant: it cannot yet stand independently or function freely. One must temper oneself amid circumstances, diligently remove old habitual tendencies, and nurture the sacred embryo; only when it has matured can it function. Otherwise, through arrogance and indulgence, it will perish while still in swaddling clothes. Therefore, after "a yellow oriole sings amid green trees," the verse continues: "How pitiable indeed—at the slightest movement, it flies away!" If you do not protect it properly and instead act wildly and recklessly, then even though you have initially seen the original nature, you will become deluded after awakening.

Someone asked whether Buddhist practitioners, in addition to cultivating the Dharma, also need to practice qigong as an aid. I once composed a verse that also addresses safeguarding realization after awakening. I record it here:

The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate gives birth to the sovereign; why borrow qigong to sharpen its edge?

Seeking Dharma outside the mind in hopes of gaining something brings only futile toil and ends in emptiness.

When faculties and objects fall away, intrinsic nature appears; do not lightly forget continuous and seamless safeguarding realization.

Stand firm without deviation; seeking nothing at all, the Way is truly ever abiding.

Dasui's answer to this monk was meant to make him turn inward and investigate to the end, thereby awakening to the principle that things and self are nondual. If the master had not thoroughly awakened to the unity of nature and appearance, how could he have followed the course of the monk's words and so lightly enabled him to know his home upon hearing them? This is why Touzi burned incense and made prostrations, calling him an ancient Buddha reborn.

If Chan masters have not yet reached the level at which things and self are nondual, they can scarcely avoid making themselves ridiculous when they speak.

Here is an example:

Long ago, the Chan practitioner Feng Jichuan saw a painting of a skull on the wall of Mingyue Hermitage. He inscribed a verse beside it:

"The corpse is here; where is the person? / Thus I know that the numinous spirit does not dwell in this bag of skin."

From this verse, we can see that he understood only the ordinary principle that the physical body is not the true self, while the numinous spirit is the true self. The numinous spirit is ever abiding and imperishable; it can come and go freely apart from the fleshly body and is not constrained by it. Therefore he said, "Thus I know that the numinous spirit does not dwell in this bag of skin." He had not yet awakened to the secret that things and self are nondual, and that nature and appearance are one entity. When Chan Master Dahui Gao came to the hermitage and saw it, he did not approve, and composed another verse:

"This very physical frame is the person himself; / The numinous spirit is the bag of skin, and the bag of skin is the numinous spirit."

Those who have truly awakened know deeply that one is all and all is one, with no distinction between self and other and no separation between things and self. Therefore, the Chan school often says, "Take up a blade of grass and make it a sixteen-foot golden body." This is precisely the meaning.

The very same case, when explained by one who has realized the Way, presents an altogether different scene. Once, while the Minister Pei Xiu was attending Chan Master Huangbo, he saw a portrait of Master Bodhidharma on the wall and asked, "The portrait is here, but where is the person now?" The master called, "Pei Xiu." Pei answered. The master said, "He is not elsewhere." Pei immediately had an

awakening. How joyous it is to awaken under the guidance of a clear-eyed master! This is why, in practicing Chan, the instruction of an enlightened teacher is so highly valued.

From this we may know that realizing the Way is realizing the nonduality of things and oneself. If one still harbors the intention of seeking outwardly, hopes to gain something, and constantly speculates about what the dharmakāya is like or how the sambhogakāya (reward body) and nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) may be obtained, one is still playing with shadows. One has not truly awakened to one's original nature and cannot be called a person of the Way.

Have you not seen what Patriarch Linji said? "The pure light of mind in a single thought is the dharmakāya Buddha within your own house. The non-discriminating light of mind in a single thought is the sambhogakāya Buddha within your own house. The non-differentiating light of mind in a single thought is the nirmāṇakāya Buddha within your own house." In the doctrinal schools, these three bodies are regarded as the ultimate standard. But from the viewpoint of this mountain monk, it is not so: these three bodies are merely names, and also three kinds of dependent luminosity; all are but light and shadows.

Virtuous ones, you should recognize that the "person" who plays with shadows is the source of all Buddhas. Once you recognize this person, every place is your homeward resting place. Thus, the three bodies are inherently complete in everyone: purity free from defilement is the dharmakāya; radiant illumination is the sambhogakāya; the manifestation of things without attachment is the nirmāṇakāya. There is no need to speculate or seek after them. Once you recognize what is originally present, cease deluded thoughts and remove habitual tendencies. If, thought after thought, you do not forget this True Person, you are Buddha and patriarch.

Master Hanshan said, "The reason prajñā brings results so swiftly is that everyone inherently possesses this light of mind." Master Guifeng said, "True principle may be realized suddenly, but the accumulated habits of many lifetimes are difficult to eradicate all at once. One must constantly remain aware, diminishing them again and again, before one can attain complete realization." Thus, realizing the Way is not difficult; what is difficult is not forgetting it after awakening and safeguarding realization. People today have more than enough cleverness but not enough sincerity.

I have often seen people who have awakened to what is originally present. Because their habitual tendencies are strong, they are often carried away by circumstances and drift along with deluded thoughts without knowing to stop. Consequently, their practice cannot advance, and they end up half-ripe and half-green, or lost in

confusion after awakening. This is truly lamentable. Those who have not awakened need hardly be mentioned; but is it not a great injustice when those who have awakened do not know to return to the true reality thought after thought, to protect it closely and carefully, and instead allow themselves to drift and sink?

If, after awakening, we can attend to this True Person of No Rank without forgetting it in each thought—as the Amitābha Sūtra teaches one to recite the Buddha with single-minded concentration—and if for one day, two days, or even seven days we continuously protect our original reality without forgetting it, wisdom will increase day by day. How much more so after one or two years: it will surely become continuous and undivided.

In sum, so long as we do not fear hardship or the long road ahead, but set our understanding straight, cultivate diligently, and recognize that this numinous knowing free from thoughts is our Original Face, then carefully protect it, temper ourselves tirelessly amid circumstances, and diligently remove deluded habits, all things will return to ourselves. To directly realize the perfect sacred fruition of the nonduality of things and oneself is by no means difficult.

A proverb says: “Nothing in the world is difficult; one need only fear the lack of a determined person.” Since, whatever the difficulty, anyone determined to strive can accomplish it, they are capable persons, and so am I; they can accomplish it, and so can I. What adversity is there to fear? I offer this as mutual encouragement to you all.

Only Upon Hearing Sound Through the Eye Faculty Does One Begin to Know

After Patriarch Dongshan Liangjie awakened to the Dharma spoken by the insentient, he composed this verse: “How wondrous, how wondrous! The insentient speaking the Dharma is inconceivable. If one listens with the ears, one will ultimately find it hard to understand; only when one hears sound at the eye does one come to know.” This was the joyful cry that flowed forth when he realized the subtlety of speaking without speaking and opened the true eye.

In its original nature, this Way is an infinitely graceful and extraordinary affair that admits of no words and no expression. Once it falls into verbal explanation, it becomes a fixed formula and is no longer the Original Face. Thus the ancient worthies often said, “If you ask about this matter, the mouth born of one’s parents will never tell it to you.” Or they said, “To understand this Way, one must realize it where ‘the path of words is cut off and the road of mental activity comes to an end.’” Or again, “The step beyond has not been transmitted by a thousand sages.” In short,

this Way is a supreme truth that cannot be conveyed in words but can only be inwardly understood.

Strictly speaking, not only can the great matter of transcending the world and realizing the Way not be communicated in words; even worldly matters often become inexpressible when they reach a subtle point and can only be grasped intuitively. “At such a moment, silence surpasses sound” describes precisely this subtle state.

In expounding the Dharma and giving instruction, one can only approach it indirectly, using clouds to set off the moon, and offer a slight indication of its traces. One cannot fully portray the true mind for others to see. Since nothing can compare with it, to call it any one thing is already wrong; there is simply no way to speak of it.

Otherwise, why say, “The step beyond has not been transmitted by a thousand sages”? Could it be that those who study Buddhism and cultivate the Way also keep secrets, like worldly people guarding a family remedy and refusing to pass it on until it is lost? If that were really so, Śākyamuni Buddha would have had no need to descend from Tuṣita Heaven, manifest in the world, and teach the Dharma. Yet at this crucial point, although one wishes to guide others, there is nothing that can be expressed. What then is to be done? The patriarchs had a marvelously lively device: they would flick their sleeves and return to the abbot’s quarters, revealing a faint glimpse of the scene, so that outstanding people whose minds resonate with it might awaken from this.

This teaching without sound truly surpasses teaching with sound. 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 ruler, then descended and returned to his quarters. Master Baozhi, standing nearby, said, “The layman’s exposition of the sūtra is complete.” See how spiritually acute and direct this was! How could vajra prajñā possibly be explained clearly through words?

Again, when Subhūti was seated in meditation in a cave, Śakra scattered flowers as an offering. Subhūti asked, “Who is scattering flowers for me?” Śakra replied, “I revere the Venerable One for expounding prajñā so well, and therefore scatter flowers as an offering.” Subhūti said, “I have never spoken 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.

After reading this verse’s line, “only when one hears sound at the eye does one come to know,” students often mistakenly think that one must first develop spiritual powers in order to hear at the eye. They imagine it to be like people today who practice qigong and claim extraordinary abilities: their ears can read characters and

their eyes can hear sounds; only when the six faculties can be used interchangeably can they hear the Dharma spoken by the insentient. They do not realize that the insentient speaking the Dharma means speaking without speaking. It is not that there is some subtle sound which one can hear only after one no longer listens with the ears and can instead hear with the eyes.

This speaking of the Dharma by the insentient is a subtle and wondrous spiritual state in which wisdom arises upon encountering circumstances, one inwardly understands, and one hears without hearing. There is no need to wait until spiritual powers have developed before hearing its Dharma sound.

For example, when we see flowers blooming with incomparable splendor in the morning and withering by evening, we understand the impermanence of human affairs. When we see the moon wax and wane, though the moon itself neither gains nor loses anything, we reflect that although the provisional appearances of human bodies and all things arise, cease, and disappear, their fundamental nature neither comes nor goes, increases nor diminishes. Likewise, worldly sayings based on noticing the small signs and knowing what they indicate—such as “When Chu becomes damp, rain will come; when the moon has a halo, wind will come”—do not require spiritual powers before they can be known.

Yet from another perspective, our ability to awaken feeling upon encountering circumstances and infer many things from one example is itself a wondrous functioning of spiritual power. Every raising of a hand, every movement of a foot—even dressing, eating, defecating, and urinating—is the spiritual functioning of one’s own nature. Apart from intrinsic nature, this world would have no vitality; nothing could move at all. Thus Layman Pang said, “Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning: carrying water and hauling firewood.” Is this not a clear portrayal of how all actions, thoughts, and words are spiritual powers and wondrous functioning?

From this, we can see that so-called spiritual powers are simply unobstructed spiritual functioning: not clinging to objects and circumstances, not being blocked or cut off by things, and functioning freely in accord with conditions. This is a merit inherently possessed by everyone. It is an utterly ordinary matter, nothing rare or miraculous; there is no need to be startled by it, much less to cling to it or pursue it.

Of course, through diligent and arduous training, one may remove the obscurations of material desire and bring forth extraordinary spiritual functioning, even hearing subtle sounds that ordinary people cannot hear.

For example, Bodhidharma heard ants walking as though they were thunder. When Chan Master Daoxin was guiding Niutou Farong, although Daoxin slept and snored like thunder, he heard two white lice on Chan Master Niutou Farong’s body fighting.

One fell to the ground, broke its leg, and cried out in pain; yet Farong, who was not lying down and had not slept, heard nothing.

Such spiritual powers may seem rare and alluring, but they are abilities inherently possessed by everyone, not something acquired by seeking outside oneself. We need only cease delusion and return to the true. After recognizing our intrinsic nature, we must safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly: do not follow thoughts, do not drift with circumstances, exhaust the outflows of afflictions, and restore the brightness of intrinsic nature. Then the six supernormal powers can all manifest. If one has not awakened to one's original true nature and seeks outwardly, one merely wastes one's mental effort and can never obtain them. Even if one does obtain them, clinging to appearances and abiding in circumstances makes them aggregate-demons; not only will one fail to become a sage, but one will instead be liable to become possessed by demons.

Chan Master Yangshan said, "I now tell you clearly: do not try to patch things together. Simply cultivate truthfully within the ocean of your own nature. Do not seek the three insights and six supernormal powers. Why not? These are peripheral matters at the end of sagehood. For now, you need only recognize the mind and realize intrinsic nature. Once you attain the root, you need not worry about the branches; in time, they will naturally be complete. If you have not attained the root, and merely imitate others according to your feelings and seek outwardly, you still cannot obtain them; and even if you obtain them, they will not be genuine." These words are indeed correct—golden and jade-like counsel for those who pursue the Way.

I have often seen people who considered themselves to possess spiritual powers, only to find before long that their so-called powers had disappeared without anyone knowing where. What they had been able to see could no longer be seen; what they had been able to hear, or know beforehand, could no longer be heard or known. Some obtain spiritual powers through an esoteric practice intended to bring them into use, but because their minds are not empty, they are terrified upon suddenly seeing some frightening form, lose their wits, and develop mental illness.

Some foresee that a certain calamity will occur, become physically and mentally unsettled and psychologically disturbed, fall seriously ill, and at the moment of death know nothing at all. In confusion, they follow the stream of karma into the lower realms. Others are possessed by ghosts, spirits, or elemental beings and develop so-called spiritual powers, treating people's illnesses, practicing feng shui, telling fortunes, and so on. Before long, they become mentally deranged and perish miserably.

I do not say these things to frighten everyone. I have seen too many such cases and cannot bear to let later students enter wrong paths, fail in cultivation, and instead bring calamity upon themselves. Therefore I call out loudly in the hope that everyone will cultivate the Way sincerely and not seek spiritual powers.

To develop spiritual powers, one must first realize the mind and see one's true nature, then diligently temper oneself amid daily activities until deluded habits are completely eliminated. One must first realize the supernormal power of exhausted outflows, and only then bring forth the five spiritual powers. Only these are spiritual powers genuinely realized and inherently possessed by one's own nature; only these never disappear, but endure unchanged throughout all ages. This is the correct path of practice taught in the Mahāvairocana Sūtra. Students must not let these words slip casually past their lips.

In the course of practice, besides the foregoing warning not to cling to or seek spiritual powers, there are many other common misunderstandings. The most important are briefly set forth below:

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

People today who study Buddhism often merely follow inverted views and do not value right view; therefore, few attain realization. Chan Master Dahui Gao said, "If a student asks, 'What is Buddha?' and one answers, 'Mind itself is Buddha,' he regards it as ordinary and pays it no attention. But when he asks, 'What is Buddha?' and one says, 'A lantern climbs the wall to Mount Tiantai,' he calls it 'extraordinary.'"

Is this not following inverted views? From this, we can see that even the ancients had already begun the tendency of valuing the extraordinary and mysterious. No wonder people today pursue the mysterious still more avidly. If you tell them to sit upright in Chan meditation or recite the Buddha's name, they consider it dry and tasteless, without anything mysterious, and do not practice. But if you teach them a method for developing the divine eye, mind-reading, or the like, they gladly comply and eagerly accept it.

They do not realize that these are merely dependent powers—illusory techniques that lead people astray and cannot liberate them from birth and death. To practice them is to waste time to no real benefit; if things go badly, one may even create karma and undergo karmic retribution. Yet people today flock to them, fearing only that they will fail to receive the transmission. This is the grave illness of entering a wrong path without knowing it, treating ordinary right view as dung, blocking one's own gate of awakening, and thus being unable to enter the Buddha's knowledge and vision.

II. Clinging to dead emptiness, taking emptiness and immobility to be the Way, and failing to recognize that the true nature is what functions ceaselessly every day.

There is no need to speak of those who make no effort in practice. Those who genuinely exert themselves often cling to the appearance of emptiness, taking emptiness and immobility to be the Way. They do not know that this Way places primary importance on recognizing what is original: not clinging to appearances, not being turned by circumstances, and yet functioning with lively vitality. Only then does one gain true benefit.

For example, Yunzi visited Nanquan and asked, “People do not recognize the wish-fulfilling jewel, yet personally receive it within the treasury of the Tathāgata. What is the treasury of the Tathāgata?” Nanquan said, “That which comes and goes with you.” (That is, the place where deluded thoughts continually come and go.) Yunzi said, “What of that which does not come and go?” (He meant emptiness and immobility.) Nanquan said, “That too is it.”

Yunzi then asked, “What is the jewel?” (This question struck the mark.) Nanquan called out, “Yunzi!” Yunzi answered. (One must look closely here: who is it that answers?) But he did not recognize it. (What a pity—this fellow let it slip by in utter confusion.) Nanquan rebuked him, “Go! You do not understand my words!”

From this we can see that one who merely abides in emptiness without recognizing what is original has only gold, not the precious jewel. To gain true benefit, one must, after recognizing what is original, safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly and eliminate all old habits; only then can one gradually reach the profound and subtle. To dwell constantly in emptiness can only make one into a stagnant pool, like earth, wood, metal, or stone. This is an illness, not the Way. Therefore, one who has truly realized the mind and seen one’s true nature never constantly abides in dead emptiness.

III. Letting not a single thought arise and remaining constantly silent in samādhi.

Ordinary people always suppose that one who has realized the mind and seen one’s true nature must abide at every moment in a state where not a single thought arises, silently dwelling in emptiness; otherwise, they say, it cannot be called awakening. In fact, realizing the nature of mind is itself the great dhāraṇī: it can give rise to every wondrous function and lacks nothing. If one rigidly preserves an empty state in which not a single thought arises, yet cannot manifest it in vivid functioning, one dies in the appearance of emptiness. Not only can one gain no genuine benefit from it, but one also has no way to see one’s whole being through completely.

Long ago, Chan Master Hui once visited Nanquan. A monk asked, “What was it like after you had seen Nanquan?” Hui remained silent. The monk further asked, “What

was it like before you had seen Nanquan?" Hui replied, "There cannot be anything else besides this." From these words, we can see that Chan Master Hui was attached to silent emptiness.

Therefore Chan Master Xuansha said of him: "One who sits atop a hundred-foot pole may have entered, yet this is not genuine. Advance another step from the top of the hundred-foot pole, and one's whole body appears throughout the ten directions." This Way must be utterly bare and free, at ease in every direction, unrestrained in giving and taking; without a single thread, unstained by a single speck of dust; capable in stillness and capable in movement; with nothing unacceptable in walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. Only then is it true awakening.

IV. Memorizing Buddhist Scriptures and Accumulating Merit and Virtue in the Hope of Awakening

Many Buddhist practitioners, seeing the Buddha say that the merit and virtue of reciting sūtras are inconceivable, become attached to the appearance of merit and regard reciting many sūtras as paramount, without investigating their profound meaning. They think that the more they recite, the greater their merit and virtue; that if they can recite them backward and forward, their merit and virtue will become all the 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 human speech. How could it open the heart and enable one to see Buddha-nature directly?

Chan Master Dayu Zhi heard of a monk who recited one hundred copies of the Diamond Sūtra each day. He had his attendant invite him over and asked, "I have heard that you recite one hundred copies of the Diamond Sūtra daily. Is this so?" The monk replied, "Yes." Zhi asked, "Have you ever investigated the meaning of the sūtra?" The monk replied, "No."

Zhi said, "You need only recite one copy each day and investigate the Buddha's intent. If you awaken upon a single sentence, it is like drinking one drop of seawater: you will then know the taste of all the hundred rivers." The monk followed his instruction. One day, as he recited the passage, "One should know thus, see thus, believe and understand thus, without giving rise to dharma appearances," he suddenly attained insight. This shows that when reciting sūtras, one must investigate the Buddha's intent before there is an entryway. Merely craving merit and virtue, believing that more is always better, only plants wholesome causes and cultivates fields of blessings; it does not yield the merit and virtue of genuinely attaining Buddhahood.

V. Valuing Quick-Witted Responses While Neglecting Genuine Practice

People nowadays all suppose that one who has awakened must respond with quick and incisive Chan repartee; if one's response is even slightly slow, they assume that one has certainly not realized the Way. In fact, this is like one who has awakened but whose spiritual powers have not yet manifested and must await the removal of habitual tendencies: it is not a fixed criterion for judging whether a practitioner has awakened. Chief Seat Yuan of Baofeng was a person of the Way, yet he was slow and dull in responding. Hong Juefan called him "Yuan Five-Dou." This was because, whenever he opened his mouth to answer, one had to wait until five dou of rice had finished cooking before he could offer a turning word.

Dahui Gao said: "A practitioner need not possess quick Chan repartee in order to be awakened. Long ago, Chan Master Zhi of Yungai had a clear Dharma eye. When the prefect entered the mountains and rested at the Pavilion for Discussing Emptiness, he asked, 'What is this Pavilion for Discussing Emptiness?' Zhi replied, 'It is simply a Pavilion for Discussing Emptiness.' The prefect was displeased and instead put the question to Chan Master Ben. Ben replied, 'The pavilion itself expounds the Dharma; why use the mouth to discuss emptiness?' The prefect was then delighted and transferred Ben to reside at Yungai. If we speak of the Way, Ben was far inferior to Zhi. Thus we know that genuine matters cannot be judged by Chan repartee." This shows that those who speak smoothly are not necessarily practitioners who have truly awakened.

In short, in cultivating the Way, what is important is to have a pure and correct understanding and to investigate earnestly with wholehearted sincerity. One must not harbor even the slightest hope of luck, take shortcuts and mistakenly enter side paths, or pursue spiritual powers and mistakenly fall into the demonic way. Still less should one heed false words that confuse one's true nature, block the gate to one's own awakening, and squander one's time in vain, thereby missing an entire lifetime.

With regard to insentient things expounding the Dharma, one must indeed hear sound at the eye faculty in order to know it. Even in the wordless direct pointing of great Chan masters, students have never been able to do without hearing sound at the eye faculty. For example, Tianlong raised a finger, and Juzhi understood one-finger Chan; Longtan blew out the candle, and Deshan awakened; Bird's Nest blew a hair, and his attendant received the essential meaning.

Is this not no different from awakening because of the teaching that insentient things are without sound? What are called sentient and insentient, sound and silence, are merely distinctions made by our deluded feelings. Because of ignorance, we grasp the four great elements of the physical body as the self, discard everything else as the material world, and classify it as insentient. Yet we do not realize that mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests—none is other than ourselves.

If one's practice gains strength and deluded feelings melt away, then body and mind within, and the world without, all perish together. The true mind then pervades everywhere; where could there still be a distinction between sentient and insentient, or between sound and silence? Speaking in worldly terms, once we relinquish karmic retribution and leave the physical body, does this bodily shell not become insentient, just like wood and stone? Therefore, so long as we do not cling deludedly to distinctions, sentient and insentient merge into one body, while sound and silence become one whole, without any division between this and that.

The sūtras say, "Sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of all modes." This is precisely what is meant. Since sentient and insentient, sound and silence, are no longer distinct, neither does any distinction remain between hearing with the eye and hearing with the ear. Once this point is understood, hearing sound at the eye faculty involves nothing miraculous at all; one certainly need not first develop spiritual powers in order to know it.

Speaking of spiritual powers, hearing sound at the ear faculty is not entirely unrelated to spiritual powers either, for the ear's ability to hear sound is wholly a function of the true mind. Apart from the true mind, nothing can be heard. Modern scientists have also understood something of the principle that it is not the ears that hear. They say that the eyes cannot see and the ears cannot hear; our ability to see and hear is entirely a function of the brain.

Once the brain becomes ill, the eyes cannot see and the ears cannot hear. In attributing the functions of seeing and hearing to the brain, they have advanced a step beyond ordinary people, but this is still not entirely correct.

For the nerves of the brain are only like an electrical grid: to function, they still require an electrical current. If the current does not flow, even a densely spread grid cannot function. This current is our true mind. Thus, every word and action, every movement and gesture, is a wondrous function of the true mind. We remain amid wondrous functioning all day long without knowing it, and instead seek wondrous functioning elsewhere. Is this not the height of folly? Great masters of the Chan school have often said, "Sitting beside a basket of food, countless people starve to death." How lamentable!

To go a step further, at the crucial moment of asking about and hearing the Dharma, if the mind abides anywhere and wisdom is obstructed, then even with the intimate instruction of a clear-eyed Chan master, how can one seize that fleeting instant, silently accord with the subtle words, and clearly see one's true nature? Therefore, hearing with the ear is not spiritual power, yet neither is it not spiritual power; it is not without spiritual power, yet one does not become attached to spiritual powers. This is genuine spiritual power.

But because this kind of genuine spiritual power is something everyone can accomplish, people instead regard it as ordinary and not at all remarkable. As for what ordinary people cannot do, they regard it as miraculous because it is rare and strange, and cling to it as spiritual power. In fact, everyone possesses it; it simply cannot manifest because it is obstructed by deluded feelings and covered over by the five desires. If, as explained above, we can let go completely, turn the light inward at all times in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and cultivate through the permeation of each thought, then shattering the emotional barrier of birth and death, emitting great light, and manifesting great spiritual powers will not be difficult. As it is said:

That insentient things expound the Dharma admits of no dispute;

That the eye faculty hears sound is nothing strange.

Putting on clothes and eating are ordinary matters;

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

Do not cling to no teaching or to hearing;

Responding to conditions and functioning freely, one naturally finds what is fitting.

Direct Pointing and Investigating Huatou

When Bodhidharma came from the West, he transmitted the Buddha's mind-seal, pointing directly to the human mind so that one might see one's nature and become a Buddha. There was no talk of investigating a huatou. Chan is the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye—the pristine Buddha-nature inherently possessed by everyone. It is not acquired through practice and need not be sought or attained. Only because people become deluded by sights and sounds, forget their original true nature, create karma, and undergo retribution do they sink into the six realms.

If one can awaken to the fact that all sights, sounds, wealth, and profit are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, with nothing to pursue; if one resolutely lets them go and clings to nothing, then there is no need to practice any method. One can immediately return to one's original true nature and sit securely at home. Therefore, the patriarchs of old directly instructed students, enabling them to awaken upon hearing their words. They did not needlessly burden students by making them take a roundabout path of investigating a huatou and wasting their time.

For example, if asked, “What is Buddha?” they would reply, “Mind itself is Buddha.” Or they might ask, “As we converse face to face, what else could this be but Buddha?” Or they might say, “If I tell you, I fear you will not believe me.” When the student, sincerely apprehensive, replied, “If the venerable monk speaks truly, how would this student dare not believe?” they would answer, “You yourself are it.” Or they might call to a student and, when he responded, instruct him: “This very thing is it; there is nothing else.” Or they might turn the question back: “What is it?” thereby causing the student to reflect and awaken.

After Śākyamuni Buddha held up a flower and Kāśyapa smiled in response, thereby sealing mind to mind and inaugurating this majestic, unparalleled school of special transmission outside the teachings, all the sayings and verses by which the patriarchs and sages of the Chan school, from that time down through before the Tang and Song dynasties, instructed students directly and nakedly pointed to their true mind. They never taught people to practice investigating a huatou.

As the Venerable Baozhi said: “This Way is originally complete and present. There is no need to seek or learn it, and no place for you to exert your mind; it is simply this present breath.” He also said in the final two lines of the Song of the Twelve Hours: “Let those who have not understood hear one word: who is it that moves the mouth right now?” How intimate, clear, and direct this is.

Mahāsattva Shanhui said: “There is a thing prior to heaven and earth; formless, it is fundamentally still and vast. It can be the master of all things, yet does not wither with the four seasons.” He also pointed directly, saying: “Night after night, you embrace the Buddha in sleep; morning after morning, you rise together. In rising and sitting, you are always together; in speech and silence, you dwell together. Not a hairbreadth apart, you are like body and shadow. If you wish to know where the Buddha abides, it is simply this very voice.”

In the Mahāsattva’s Inscription on the Mind-King, it is further said: “It definitely exists, yet its form cannot be seen. It dwells within the body, enters and exits through the face, responds to things and follows forms; it is neither past, present, nor future.” How frank, intimate, and exhilarating this is. The Mahāsattva’s compassionate concern was indeed most earnest.

Huisi of Nanyue said: “The source of the Way is not far away; the ocean of nature is not distant. Seek only within yourself; do not search elsewhere. If you seek, you will not obtain it; even if you obtain something, it is not genuine.” He also said: “With sudden awakening to the source of mind, the treasure-house opens; hidden or manifest, its numinous efficacy reveals the true aspect. Even if it fills empty space completely, when one looks, not even the appearance of a mote of dust is seen.

How marvelous is this thing, beyond all comparison: from its mouth bright pearls pour forth, gleaming brilliantly."

He also said: "Heaven cannot cover it, and earth cannot support it. It neither comes nor goes and has no obstruction; it is neither long nor short, neither blue nor yellow; it is neither within nor without nor in between. Transcending all, surpassing all, it is as mysterious as the great void; when it points to things and transmits mind, people do not understand." The ancients pointed directly and transmitted mind; their compassionate concern may truly be called earnest. Yet people do not understand—how lamentable.

Budai Heshang said: "This very mind, mind, mind is Buddha, the most numinous thing in the worlds of the ten directions. Its wondrous functions extend in all directions—how pitiable that living beings fail to see it! Nothing is more real than mind." He also said: "I have a Buddha-body that people of the world do not recognize. It is neither molded nor adorned, neither carved nor engraved. It has not a drop of clay nor a trace of paint. An artist cannot paint it, and a thief cannot steal it. Its form and appearance are naturally so; its purity does not require polishing. Though it is one body, it manifests countless transformation bodies." This verse is so forthright and clear that one understands it immediately, without doubt. What need then is there to investigate any huatou?

Patriarchal Chan is just this direct and straightforward: it enables people to awaken greatly upon hearing the words, without having to take a winding, circuitous path of practice. Yet this Dharma gate of directly revealing one's nature, in which there is neither practice, realization, nor attainment, is not confined to the Chan school. Even the profound esoteric teaching of Atiyoga is no exception.

They instruct students: "You should know that the Buddha, the lineage masters, and your own mind are not different"; "all conduct of view, meditation, and action is encompassed within mind"; "all dharmas, defiled and pure alike, are fully present within the immediately manifest, undefiled, empty, luminous, and open wisdom of direct realization—original awakening or original nature"; and "there is no need to laboriously cultivate discriminating wisdom as an entrance. Simply awaken to the fact that all the various appearances before you are transformations of your own true mind; take hold of nothing and seek nothing, and you will transcend laborious cultivation and cause and effect."

These teachings are no different from the sayings of Chan masters: they likewise teach one to recognize one's own original mind and see one's own intrinsic nature immediately. Yet practitioners cannot begin by practicing this Dharma. They must start with the four preliminary practices, gradually enter the generation stage, practice form-based esoteric practice, and then gradually proceed to the completion

stage. Only after emptying the forms can they slowly come into accord with this Dharma.

Who knows how many years may be delayed in the process? How could it be as direct, swift, and satisfying as the Chan school? Therefore, among all methods of cultivation, Chan is the simplest, most rapid, and most perfectly sudden Dharma gate. Having obtained it, we truly do not know through cultivation in what past lives we have acquired such vast blessings and roots of goodness!

But after the Tang and Song dynasties, people's minds gradually deteriorated and their capacities became weaker. They did not cherish the true principles and supreme words of direct pointing, but instead prized obscure and extraordinary sayings and eccentric expressions. Thinking straightforward words unremarkable, they did not reverently uphold and follow them, continuously safeguard realization through them, nurture the sacred embryo, and thereby perfect the true fruition of bodhi. Instead, through disparaging them, they fell into the six realms with no prospect of release.

It is like pampered sons of wealthy families who, because their inherited estate was not earned through their own arduous efforts, do not know to cherish it. They squander it without restraint and ultimately become starving beggars. Out of pity for them, the patriarchs therefore adapted to circumstances and changed direct pointing into the investigation of huatou.

They placed in the student's mind a saying without conceptual meaning or rational pathway, like swallowing a chestnut-burr: one could neither spit it out nor swallow it, neither advance nor give up. Thus a great sense of doubt would arise. After arduous investigation and deep inquiry, when one no longer knows oneself to be walking while walking or sitting while sitting, one suddenly encounters it—like seeing one's own father at a crossroads—and directly realizes the original nature.

Only then does one know that Buddhahood is originally complete and present, and that all strenuous seeking is like riding a donkey while looking for a donkey—labor spent in vain, an intolerable injustice! Yet without undergoing this arduous investigation, how could one see the original true nature? The patriarchs' intentions were also most painstaking.

In investigating a huatou, one must indeed arouse a great sense of doubt. Only then can one cut off deluded thoughts, break through ignorance, and directly see one's original true nature. Otherwise it has no effect; even if one investigates until the year of the donkey, there will be no way to awaken. This is what is meant by: great doubt, great awakening; small doubt, small awakening; no doubt, no awakening. But a person of keen ability need not expend so much effort, endure so much hardship, or spend so many years in investigation.

When a patriarch's irrational huatou is flung directly in one's face, and one has no reasoning to offer, no words with which to reply, and no mind with which to form a thought, one need only turn the light inward for a glance: all these thoughts are empty, yet there is one clearly not empty that knows their emptiness. What is this? One can then awaken greatly.

The patriarchs' huatou, devoid of conceptual meaning and rational pathway, are not intended to force you to give a reasoned answer. Rather, when there is nothing to say and not a single thought arises, they require you to reflect: who is it that does not know? If one asks a master, "What is Buddha?" and he replies, "The eastern mountain walks on water," or says, "A lantern climbs the wall to Mount Tiantai,"

this leaves you utterly baffled and forces words and thought to come to an end. At that moment, although no thought can arise, you are not insentient like wood or stone. At this critical instant, simply turn the light inward for a glance: "Who is this?" Then the work of investigating Chan is complete.

Those unable to awaken in this way may investigate a huatou and arouse a sense of doubt; after many years of single-minded and arduous inquiry, they can indeed attain great and thorough awakening. Yet this still requires the appropriate hammering and forging of a clear-eyed master, timely and suitable guidance, and a precisely placed indication at the crucial moment before realization can be perfected. If one blindly investigates and practices like someone building a cart behind closed doors, awakening is very difficult. If one cannot raise the sense of doubt and merely recites the huatou, there is even less hope.

By modern times, most fellow Chan practitioners have been unable to arouse a sense of doubt. When investigating "Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" they do not exert themselves in investigating "who," but verbally recite, "Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" This forfeits the function of investigation, so that even after many years of effort they cannot awaken. Is not the present decline of the Chan school due not only to the scarcity of capable people and the lack of those with genuine awakening to transmit and promote it, but also to its having degenerated into "Dharma relatives transmitting the Dharma"?

Reciting "Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" is inferior to reciting Amitābha Buddha. For in reciting Amitābha Buddha, one receives the Buddha's empowering support and may thereby attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land. If one recites "Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" one neither arouses doubt and awakens nor receives the Buddha's empowering support for rebirth in the West. Apart from planting a small wholesome cause, I fear there is no other gain.

Since modern Chan practitioners can neither arouse a sense of doubt nor, owing to their work, spend twenty or thirty years in arduous investigation, it may be better to

emulate the ancient method of directly revealing students' intrinsic nature, opening up their own nature for those who come to investigate. Let them continuously safeguard realization after awakening and diligently remove habitual tendencies until they reach completion. This may be a more effective way to cultivate many capable people and revive the sacred teaching.

When one speaks of directly revealing students' intrinsic nature, one is certain to encounter opposition and criticism from various quarters. Because they have long practiced investigating a huatou in order to see their nature, they always believe that an awakening attained without their own arduous investigation is not seeing one's nature.

As the saying goes, "What enters through a door is not a family treasure." Whatever comes from books or is conveyed through another's instruction is considered useless; one must truly investigate and realize it for oneself, breaking through for oneself, before it is genuine awakening and has real power. This is correct: one must indeed do the work oneself, until deluded thoughts dissolve and both body and mind within, and the world without, simultaneously vanish; only then is it direct realization. But Chan practitioners at the present stage cannot arouse doubt; investigating a huatou is ineffective, and they cannot break through to their original nature or see intrinsic nature. It is only because of the circumstances and conditions of the time that we are compelled to adapt the ancient method for present use.

As for Buddha-nature and the true mind, one who realizes them through direct pointing and a single inward turning is in fact no different from one who realizes them after ten years of arduous investigation, or from one who realizes them through practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and receiving the Buddha's empowering support. There is only a slight difference in the strength of their functioning.

Those who attain realization through a single moment of turning the light inward have the weakest strength: when circumstances arise, they are ineffective, are constantly pulled along by situations, and cannot be their own masters. Those who attain realization only after ten years of arduous investigation have the greatest strength. Because they have taken many wrong turns, their legs have gained strength and endurance; when circumstances arise, they can apply themselves with complete freedom and do not stray. Yet if those of weaker strength do not take a little attainment as sufficient, but remain constantly vigilant and diligently train amid walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and in the activities of daily life, gradually eliminating the attachments and deluded habits accumulated over vast kalpas and many lifetimes, they too can advance ever higher and reach perfect accomplishment. This has always been the standard by which the ancient worthies instructed and guided later generations.

Regarding investigation of the huatou, the ancient worthies were not without criticism. Chan Master Guanghui Lian, in addressing the assembly, said: The Buddhadharma is originally without affairs. The holy ones of the past have all contrived strange things, speaking subtle, marvelous, and abstruse words that confuse people's minds. Later they taught people to investigate the huatou, which was even more an unnecessary complication, suppressing the worthy and elevating the lowly, and burying their descendants.

Moreover, such figures as Yunmen, Zhaozhou, and Deshan stubbornly refused to awaken and suffered wrongs throughout their lives. This old monk is not like that. Even if old Śākyamuni himself were to appear, I would banish him to another world and send him down a dead end. Why? To prevent him from ruining my descendants. Since this old monk has spoken thus, how do you all understand it? If you understand it here, would that not be a joyous delight? I would have you cast off your garments and become carefree patch-robed monks. If you do not understand, next year there will again be new branches, and the spring breeze's disturbance will never cease.

How penetrating and thorough, how utterly decisive, this discourse is! Where is there any room for our deliberation or contrived effort? We need only remain content with our proper place, live in accord with conditions, and not needlessly raise the mind and stir thoughts, creating extraneous complications by wildly generating intellectual understanding—seeking to transcend birth and death, cultivate practice and realize the Way, become Buddhas endowed with wisdom, eloquence, and spiritual powers, or establish Buddha lands and Pure Lands. Right here is a bright and open heaven and earth, a peaceful and tranquil world. Without expending any effort, we may recover our natural Buddha-nature, return home and sit securely, and peacefully enjoy our ease.

From this we can see that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature does not require investigation of the huatou. Even in the Tang and Song dynasties, many great patriarchs gave concise and essential direct instructions. A few examples follow:

Chan Master Yongming Shou said: From ancient times, Buddhas and patriarchs have transmitted mind to mind, without giving anyone a single dharma. They only teach you to grasp firmly the precious vajra king's sword and cut off all that is known, seen, heard, sensed, and realized. When only this utterly bare, naked, unstained by a single speck of dust, without a single thread remains, the great matter is completely settled. He also composed this verse: An illusory man questions a master of illusions; an empty valley answers with the sound of a spring. If you wish to understand the purport of our school, a clay ox walks upon the water.

Zhenjing Wen said: The Buddhadharma is supremely wondrous and without duality. If one simply knows one's own mind as it truly is, one is ultimately originally a Buddha. He composed this verse: Buddha-nature is a natural affair; who says there is another teacher? When putting on clothes and eating meals, when clearing the throat or swinging the arms, it is only the functioning of one's own mind—when has deliberate thought ever been involved? Sentient beings are all equal, yet in daily life they themselves give rise to much doubt. He also said: Do not set the mind to calculation. Each and every thing is naturally genuine, each and every thing clear and wondrous. Thus, when one is deluded about one's own mind, one is a sentient being; when one awakens to one's own mind, one becomes a Buddha.

Buddha-Fruit said: Simply retreat a step. The more you retreat, the brighter it becomes; the more you do not understand, the more strength there is. As soon as a divergent thought arises or an intention of mind is born, decisively cut it off, preventing its continuation. Then wisdom becomes clear and penetrating; with every step you tread solid ground and naturally attain great liberation.

Yunmen said: Why have you all come here for no reason? This old monk merely eats and relieves himself—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 benefit of their own minds or the peace and liberation of their own minds. Outside the mind, they falsely posit a Chan Way, establish strange and extraordinary things, and mistakenly give rise to acceptance and rejection. Even if they cultivate practice, they fall into the realms of non-Buddhist paths, the two vehicles, Chan quiescence, and annihilationist views.

Dahui Gao said: The ultimate principle forgets words, yet people of the time do not understand it. They forcibly practice other methods, taking them to be efficacious, without knowing that their own nature is a wondrous gate of great liberation, fully endowed with every wondrous function and never lacking in the slightest from ancient times to the present. It is like the sun: it shines on all, near and far; though it reaches every color, it does not merge with any of them. Its numinous lamp is wondrously bright and does not depend on cultivation.

Because they do not understand, they grasp at material appearances. It is merely like pressing on one's eyes and falsely seeing flowers in empty space; they tire themselves out in vain. If they can turn the light inward, there is no second person: in every raising of the hands and every action, there is nothing that is not the true aspect.

People often say that their faculties are dull. Try turning the light inward and see: is that which knows the faculties to be dull itself dull or not? He also instructed Wang Yanzhang: If you give rise to self-deprecation, saying that your faculties are poor and

seeking some point of entry elsewhere, it is precisely like asking, while standing in the Hanyuan Hall, where Chang'an is.

Who is it that is presently investigating? Who is it that knows the faculties to be poor? Who is it that seeks a point of entry? Miaoxi does not avoid the karmic offense of speech, but plainly reveals this to the layman: there is only Wang Yanzhang, and no second one. Since there is only one Wang Yanzhang, where could one obtain another who investigates, knows his faculties to be poor, or seeks a point of entry? Know that these are all Wang Yanzhang's shadows and have nothing to do with Wang Yanzhang himself.

If one truly is Wang Yanzhang, one's faculties certainly cannot be poor, nor will one seek a point of entry. One need only trust that the master of one's own house is not inferior; there is no need for so much striving and bustle. Miaoxi's concern is already as earnest as that of an old grandmother, yet a further note must be added: the person is Wang Yanzhang; the one who believes that his faculties are poor and seeks a point of entry is the believing aspect. While you are investigating the huatou, reflect back: is the one who investigates Wang Yanzhang or not? Here there is no room for even a hair's breadth. If you pause to think and let the mind come to rest, you will be deluded by the shadow.

Such frankness and sincerity, such compassionate direct instructions enabling people to see their nature immediately, are too numerous to count in the Chan records. On the one hand, the great patriarchs were indeed as earnest as old grandmothers, holding nothing back in their wish that people might leave the sea of suffering together and jointly realize the true eternal. On the other hand, this also shows that awakening to the mind and realizing the Way does not require investigation of the huatou.

We need only, under a teacher's clear instruction, awaken suddenly and realize with profound and unwavering faith that this which gives rise to functioning is our own Original Face. There is nothing mysterious or extraordinary about it. We need only safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly amid walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, struggle against our own deluded habits of attachment to appearances, and gradually eliminate them. Then we can reach the profound and mysterious.

If one doubts that this method of direct pointing and clear instruction will not give students sufficient strength upon awakening, another approach may be used. When a student asks a question, fling back at him an answer that has no rational avenue, forcing him into a state where he has no reply and no argument to make; then point him toward a single inward glance, through which he directly realizes the original. For example, if asked, "What is Buddha?" answer: "Face west and look east."

Upon hearing this, the student will certainly be startled, unable to find any reasoning to follow and not knowing what to do. Then ask: “Who is it that has no words to answer?” He will surely be even more unable to respond. Ask further: “Is this one whose eyes move emptily, who wishes to speak but cannot, who wishes to stop but cannot, your own Original Face?” At this point the student will certainly have an awakening. If he still does not understand, instruct him further: “If you wish to see Buddha-nature directly, comprehend this ‘not understanding’; there is nothing else!” I think that after such detailed instruction, if one still does not understand, one is probably not a person of our Way.

This dharma gate of directly pointing to the nature and realizing the Way is a magnificent mind Dharma that transcends all at once and enters directly. It is like being born a prince, requiring no external merit. Thus there is no need to practice dhyāna or any form-based method of cultivation: a prince born to the throne will certainly inherit the kingship. All conditioned practices of dhyāna and cultivation, however excellent their attainment, are merely outer ministers rewarded for their services; they can never become king.

Therefore the Sixth Patriarch said: “Speak only of seeing one’s nature, not of dhyāna, samādhi, or liberation.” If we can confirm, without the slightest doubt, that this numinous knowing of nonknowing is our true mind and Buddha-nature, it is truly an extraordinary great cause and condition. Those without merit and virtue cannot bear it!

But to return to the point: after confirming this incomparably noble Buddha-nature, one must not behave absurdly and indulgently, imagining that one has arrived home and has nothing further to do. It must be rigorously protected and properly nurtured, so that inwardly one does not wander with deluded thoughts and outwardly one is not swept along by objects and circumstances. As the days and months pass, one gradually reaches perfection and only then obtains genuine benefit. Otherwise, if one is arrogant and unrestrained and lets oneself stray, one will accomplish nothing. Not only will birth and death remain as before, but by claiming attainment without having attained, one will also sink into evil destinies. How can one fail to be cautious?

As for safeguarding realization, it is not inherently difficult. The problem is simply that we are accustomed to distraction in ordinary life and are easily pulled along by deluded thoughts and external circumstances, forgetting to safeguard realization. Often we have wandered with deluded thoughts through many turns and been carried along by circumstances for a long time before suddenly awakening to this fact. Consequently, the practice cannot become continuous and undivided. The difficulty of safeguarding realization lies in never forgetting it at every moment.

The ancient worthies said: “Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only late awareness.” These are by no means empty words. If we can heighten our vigilance and concentrate the power of the mind to watch closely where thoughts arise, without following their flow, and if, when any object comes before us, we do not cling to or become stained 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 the shallow to the deep; they are not the same. “Safeguarding” means protecting; “letting be” means allowing free functioning. One begins practice with protection, just as an infant must be properly cared for after birth lest it die prematurely.

Only when the conditioned practice of protection has been brought to perfection, so that there is no straying amid the activities of daily life, can one enter the practice of “letting be.” Allow yourself to act freely: sit when you wish to sit, walk when you wish to walk, without the slightest constraint. Only then can one enter the proper stage of non-contrivance.

Going still further, thoroughly dissolve even the traces of non-contrivance, so that there is no longer any question of non-contrivance or its absence. All day long, be as if foolish or dull: eat when hungry and sleep when tired. Only then does one obtain genuine benefit. But if, when practicing “safeguarding,” one applies oneself too intensely and holds too tightly, then after a long time becomes dull as a wooden chicken, dead and unable to transform, this too is not right.

Therefore, there are three difficulties in practice: first, it is difficult to recognize the original nature, establish a firm footing, and be free of all doubt; second, after recognizing the original nature, it is difficult never to forget continuous and seamless safeguarding realization; third, it is difficult not to die in protection, but to let go with lively freedom. Having passed these three, you alone are honored in heaven and on earth!

Someone may ask: “Chan Master Dahui Gao criticized the quiet sitting and contemplation of mind taught in various places as the heretical Chan of silent illumination.”

Now you teach people, after directly pointing to their nature and seeing it, to maintain continuous and seamless contemplation and protect the true mind. Does this not fall into the category of the heretical Chan of silent illumination?” The reply is: Dahui criticized the various places as practicing the heretical Chan of silent illumination because they did not know that there is [the true nature]—they did not recognize their intrinsic nature—and merely sat vacantly there, laboring in vain.

Moreover, there was the danger of falling into dead water and a blank, unresponsive state; therefore, he criticized it as heretical Chan.

First, we must all recognize our intrinsic nature and then safeguard it continuously and seamlessly. This is not an empty safeguarding; it is safeguarding grounded in self-mastery and awareness of wondrous presence. It is like nurturing a child after one has had one, not empty safeguarding when there is no child. This is utterly different from the perverse Chan censured by Dahui and must not be confused with it. Recognizing one's own original mind and seeing one's own intrinsic nature are so important on the path of practice that this all the more highlights the importance and pivotal role of direct pointing.

Since direct pointing and seeing one's nature are so important, the great patriarchs' ability to open students to their own nature, enabling them to awaken immediately and avoid taking many roundabout detours, is truly an immeasurable merit and virtue.

Among the great patriarchs of the Five Houses of Chan, there has never been any lack of those who could directly reveal the true mind to students with complete clarity and leave them free of doubt. Yet none spoke more directly and incisively, enabling people to realize the Way as soon as they heard, than Patriarch Linji.

Not only did he explain with utter clarity what the Buddha-nature of the person before us is and where this nature is to be found; he also disclosed without reservation, through the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials, how to practice safeguarding realization after awakening and the course by which practice advances. Unlike other schools, which swallow back the crucial words that have already reached their lips, leaving people doubtful and at a loss, this is perhaps why the other schools have now fallen silent while the Linji lineage alone continues.

Patriarch Linji instructed his students: "What makes me no different from all Buddhas is that I recognize this person who speaks the Dharma and this person who hears the Dharma. This person relies on nothing; this person is the mother of all Buddhas, and all Buddhas emerge from this." He also said: "Raise your eyebrows, straighten your spine, and reveal this majestic person who speaks the Dharma and hears the Dharma: that is a living Buddha, a living patriarch."

He also said: "Within this lump of red flesh is a True Person of No Rank, who constantly comes and goes through the gateways of people's faces." He also said: "Do you wish to recognize this True Person of No Rank? It is precisely the one who is now speaking the Dharma and hearing the Dharma." He also said: "People should seek genuine understanding, not excellence; excellence will come of itself."

What is meant by genuine understanding? Your physical body of the four elements cannot speak or hear the Dharma; your spleen, stomach, liver, and gallbladder cannot speak or hear the Dharma; empty space and material objects cannot speak or hear the Dharma. What, then, can speak and hear the Dharma? It is the vividly present, solitary luminosity before you, without form or feature, that speaks and hears the Dharma. If you see in this way, you become no different from the Buddhas and patriarchs.

He also said: “Do you wish to recognize the Buddhas and patriarchs? It is simply that which can hear the Dharma. If your faith does not reach this and you seek outwardly, then whatever you obtain will all be written words and nominal appearances; in the end, you will never attain the meaning of the living Buddha and living patriarch.”

He also said: “In this mountain monk’s view, there is no difference from the World-Honored One. In your manifold daily activities, what is lacking? The spiritual radiance functioning through the six sense faculties has never ceased. If you can see in this way, you are a person with nothing to do for your entire life.” He also said: “If you wish to gain freedom in birth and death, coming and going, recognize right now the person who hears the Dharma: formless, without characteristics, abiding nowhere, lively and responsive in all kinds of functions and activities. Yet it has no fixed place; the more you seek it, the farther away it becomes, and the more you pursue it, the more you go astray. This is called the secret.” …

Patriarch Linji saw truly and spoke with great earnestness. His repeated and insistent exhortations to students concerning “the person who speaks the Dharma and hears the Dharma” are too numerous to count. He always sought to make people have immediate faith and thoroughly recognize it, so that they could bring the great matter to completion. If we later students can indeed recognize the beginnings of our intrinsic nature here, and safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly amid walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, without the slightest doubt, thereby exhausting deluded habitual tendencies and fully realizing bodhi, then we shall not betray Master Linji’s sincere original intent in teaching people.

As for the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials, they were even more Master Linji’s deepest intention. Because his practice was meticulous and he had personally traversed the path, he explained them clearly and thoroughly. He said that whenever one expounds the essential vehicle, a single phrase must contain the Three Mysteries, and each gate of mystery must contain the Three Essentials. We must investigate the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials carefully in order to understand the profundity by which one gradually reaches perfection from initial awakening.

Yet throughout the ages, opinions have differed as to what precisely the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials are. Each party has clung to its own view, and the disputes have never ceased.

For example, the ancient Pagoda Master, Hong Juefan, Zhang Wujin, and others offered differing explanations. Some said that they were like the sound of a poison drum: one blow, and with death all is finished. Some said that they cut off the multitude of streams, standing like a sheer wall ten thousand fathoms high, so that the thieving mind completely dies and one awakens to the original. Others compared them to such things as a banner of cool quiescent cessation. Only the Pagoda Master rejected these views, saying that since Master Linji spoke of three mysteries, one should give him three mysteries; how could they be summed up in a single phrase?

He therefore collected sayings to elucidate the Three Mysteries, but in doing so omitted several Essentials, leaving an impression of fragmentation. At a time when opinions were so diverse and no consensus could be reached, Chan Master Fenyang Zhao summed them up in a verse: “The Three Mysteries and Three Essentials are hard to distinguish; when one attains the meaning and forgets words, the Way is easily approached. One phrase clearly encompasses the myriad forms: chrysanthemums are fresh in the ninth month of autumn.”

He was a fifth-generation descendant of Master Linji. Since he said they were hard to distinguish, who would dare distinguish them further? Thus the import of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials was sealed away on a high shelf, and no one dared raise the subject again.

Then, in the early Qing, Chan Master Sanfeng, Dharma heir of Chan Master Miyun Wu of Tiantong, came forth and asked his teacher about the precise meaning of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials of the founding patriarch of their school. Master Wu answered with Fenyang Zhao’s verse. But Sanfeng would not accept this and asked his teacher to indicate clearly which three were the Three Mysteries. Moreover, if each mystery had three essentials, then the three mysteries should have nine essentials; what, then, were those nine essentials? One could not simply say vaguely that the matter was hard to distinguish and leave it at that.

This led to discord between teacher and disciple and, further, to contention. The Yongzheng Emperor of the Qing regarded it as insubordination, prohibited the circulation of Sanfeng’s Recorded Sayings, and had his books burned. Consequently, we can no longer consult how this master expounded the profound import of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. This is truly a great regret. With no remedy for this, I respectfully select from the discussions of earlier worthies on the Three

Mysteries and Three Essentials those suitable as models of practice for modern people, and briefly record them below.

Master Linji said, “One phrase contains the Three Mysteries.” Before clarifying the Three Mysteries, we must first understand which phrase this is. If we do not understand this phrase, how can we penetrate the Three Mysteries? This phrase is the one stated above: “Within this lump of red flesh is a True Person of No Rank; it is precisely the one who is now speaking the Dharma and hearing the Dharma.” This phrase is of the utmost importance; it is the general outline of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. Only after understanding this phrase and recognizing the Original Face can we go on to discuss the Mysteries and Essentials—the process of practice. Otherwise, it is like discussing warfare on paper: empty talk is of no benefit.

The True Person of No Rank who speaks and hears the Dharma is the original, naturally genuine person of the Way, uncreated, requiring no cultivation to be accomplished, and relying on nothing. What now speaks and hears the Dharma is not the physical body of the four elements, but each person’s vividly present, solitary luminosity without form or appearance—the “spiritually luminous wondrous awareness.” To awaken to this “wondrous awareness” is only initial awakening. Since habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated, one cannot save oneself; one must temper the mind through circumstances and advance ever higher before one can walk hand in hand with the Buddhas and patriarchs. Thus Master Linji divided this course of gradual advance into the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials.

On the basis of this True Person of No Rank who speaks and hears the Dharma, the Three Mysteries are distinguished according to the differing capacities of individuals and the depth of their awakening. What are these Three Mysteries? First is the Mystery within Essence; second, the Mystery within Meaning; third, the Mystery within the Phrase. From the wondrous essence realized, the great intent arises; from that intent, wondrous function arises and is brought forth as words and phrases. For each mystery, Master Linji gave one saying. To make them easier for readers to understand and enter into, I shall present these three sayings in reverse order, beginning with the third, the Mystery within the Phrase, and explain them briefly from the shallow to the profound.

I. The Mystery within the Phrase: “Look at the puppets performing on the stage; every pull and movement depends entirely on the person within.”

This means that when we watch a puppet show, the wooden figures can move only because someone inside pulls the strings. It teaches us thereby to understand that our ability to speak and act is entirely the functioning of Buddha-nature. Apart from Buddha-nature, this physical body is like wood and cannot move. This points us toward awakening to the original.

But this is only initial awakening, and clinging habitual tendencies still remain; therefore, at this point one cannot save oneself. Yet after awakening, so long as one is not lax, does not become complacent, and diligently undertakes the practice of safeguarding realization continuously and seamlessly, one can eliminate all habitual tendencies and bring birth and death to an end. Accordingly, the stages of advancement in practice are here divided into Three Essentials:

First Essential: At initial awakening, one becomes free from all appearances and recognizes the original reality. This is the first stage of the Mystery within the Phrase.

Middle Essential: Having recognized the original reality, habitual tendencies still remain. One must therefore safeguard it continuously and seamlessly and must not relax even slightly.

Highest Essential: When one safeguards oneself by oneself, there are still imagined images and shadows. One wishes to leave them behind, but one's strength is insufficient and one still cannot forget them. At this time, however strictly one safeguards, one cannot forget appearances. Therefore Master Linji said that one cannot save oneself.

II. The Mystery within Meaning: "How could wondrous understanding allow Asaṅga's question? How could bubbles and foam bear the capacity to cut off the streams!"

The wondrous principle of this Way is so difficult to comprehend that it cannot be understood through words. This is its true wonder. Since it is so wondrous that it cannot be verbally understood, is it not mistaken to raise a thought and ask about it? Even one as skilled at questioning as Bodhisattva Asaṅga could find no words here. For in the gate of the unconditioned, one has already awakened at the outset to the capacity that cuts off the streams—namely, recognizing the original and entering the rightful position—so that all streams, that is, deluded thoughts, are cut off.

Bubbles and foam are masses formed as bubbles arise and vanish in water. However many hundreds of millions of verbal questions and answers, like masses of bubbles and foam, there may be, how could they bear the great capacity and function of cutting off the multitude of streams? This means that however many questions and answers there may be, they ultimately entail interpretation. How could they equal the wondrous understanding that admits no interpretation, in which everything is set down at once, without question or answer, cutting off the multitude of streams in that very moment and sitting upright to realize the unconditioned? Here too, the progress of practice is divided into Three Essentials:

First Essential: Continuing from the Highest Essential of the Mystery within the Phrase, because the practice of safeguarding realization has become continuous

and seamless, one can leave behind imagined images and shadows. Yet there still remains the thought of leaving them behind.

Middle Essential: Practice becomes still more continuous and seamless, and one forgets even the word “leave,” thereby entering the rightful position of the unconditioned. Body and mind become light and at ease, and the experience is incomparable. At first, the intention of turning the light inward is prominent; now that turning is transformed into quiescent illumination. One sits composed in non-contrivance, simply a person of the Way with nothing to do.

Highest Essential: At this point, there is no longer anything called practice. It is practice without striving, yet its efficacy is immense. Even non-contrivance itself leaves no trace, and there is no longer anything called non-contrivance. At this point one does not seek spiritual powers and transformations, yet spiritual powers come of themselves. Having clearly understood the two Mysteries and Six Essentials, one can teach devas and humans. Therefore Master Linji said: “Whoever realizes this phrase can become a teacher of devas and humans.”

III. The Mystery within Essence: “When the seal of the Three Essentials is opened, the cinnabar point is narrow; before deliberation is allowed, host and guest are distinguished.”

These Three Essentials are not the lower, middle, and higher Three Essentials discussed above; rather, they are the three essentials of body, speech, and mind. The Three Essentials discussed above concern returning to the source and restoring the original, whereby one’s own great matter is brought to completion. These Three Essentials concern the seal that opens the mind-ground—the red dot—giving rise to hundreds of thousands of dhāraṇīs, establishing gateways of transformation, and activating the wondrous functioning of liberating sentient beings.

For the sake of liberating sentient beings, the body outwardly manifests dignified bearing; speech responds appropriately to circumstances; and mind brings wisdom and compassion into joint operation. Using this as the seal, one opens and develops the mind-ground, vast and boundless. In all discernment, granting and withholding, provisional and real, illumination and function, host and guest, there is no need for deliberation: everything is naturally clear and distinct. (Let me ask: if two monks from the eastern and western halls emerge at the same time and each gives a shout, can you still distinguish who is host and who is guest?) Here, too, there are Three Essentials:

The lower essential: when practice reaches its most wondrous point, the wondrous cannot long display its own wonder and returns to plainness. This plainness comes only after practice has reached its utmost wonder and then returned to plainness; it is not the plainness idly proclaimed by one who has never experienced the profound

essentials within. Plain as water: water is tasteless. One is like a fool, without recognition or knowledge, simply putting on clothes and eating .

The middle essential: our fundamental essence has always been thus, and now is again thus; nothing has been added. This principle truly cannot be exhausted by the word “wondrous”; only the word “plain” is fitting. Yet when people enter into plainness, they feel lonely and desolate and flee from it. Only the wise can dwell there peacefully and delight in it. Though plainness is tasteless, within that tastelessness is a supreme flavor.

Originally, it is not form, not emptiness, not one, not many, not ordinary, not holy, not circumstances, not things, not conditioned, not unconditioned, and not even “not.” Yet amid walking, standing, sitting, and lying down; amid activity and stillness, social exchanges and comings and goings, it is distinctly and solitarily luminous, like a bright moon overhead. It cannot be pushed away or drawn near, and there is never the slightest appearance of continuity, cessation, or residual trace.

The higher essential: at this point it is difficult to open one’s mouth or find words. When Mañjuśrī and Mahākāśyapa had completed the ceremonial announcement with the gavel, the World-Honored One descended from his seat. Since ancient times, Chan worthies have, upon reaching this point, simply brushed off their robes and returned to the abbot’s quarters. Only Chan Master Caoshan had a saying that may clarify this higher essential. A monk asked Caoshan, “What is it like when the bright moon is overhead?” Caoshan said, “You are still a fellow below the steps.” The monk said, “Please, Master, lead me up the steps.”

Caoshan said, “We shall meet when the moon sets.” Readers, when the moon has set, is it not simply a pitch-black mass, with no light to be seen? No. This is when practice has reached its ultimate point: all distinctions are thoroughly assimilated and forgotten, leaving no trace at all—just as we live amid the air yet forget that it is air. At such a time, if someone came forward and asked, “How shall we meet after the moon has set?” I would bow to him and withdraw.

Thus, when our practice reaches the ultimate ground, there is not even the slightest residual trace. If one still clings to spiritual powers and transformations, one has missed it by far. Therefore Master Linji said that at this stage one may become the teacher of Buddhas and patriarchs.

After Fenyang Zhaozhao said, “The matter is difficult to distinguish,” later generations generally did not dare to distinguish the actual content of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials—the mind teaching through which Master Linji directly pointed people toward seeing their nature and realizing the Way. They merely uttered such vague generalities as “a mud pellet,” or gave a shout to cover the matter over.

Speaking of shouts: if one has truly penetrated the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials and reached the ultimate ground, such a shout not only accords with the highest point of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials—"When the seal of the Three Essentials opens, the red dot is narrow"—even the Buddhas of the three times would be shouted back by it. But if one gives a vague, undiscerning "shout," then Zhang San and Li Si alike can shout. What is such a shout worth? A dog-turd stick!

The staff and shout have broad and subtle functions in the Chan school. Deshan's staff and Linji's shout are exemplary styles of the Chan tradition that have resounded through past and present. Who knows how many bold and outstanding persons have thereby opened their true eyes, returned home, and sat securely! Their subtle efficacy is evidently beyond the power of words to express. Let me offer a case concerning a "shout" to the assembly, so that we may glimpse something of its subtlety:

During the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song, a grand councillor of the court invited elders from the various mountains to his home to hold an unrestricted assembly. The great Chan master Yuanwu Keqin was present, and Emperor Huizong also attended in plain clothes to rejoice in the occasion.

During the gathering, a Huayan lecturer asked, "In our doctrinal school, it is taught that Buddhahood requires three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas, whereas the Chan school says that one can realize the Way with a single blow or shout. This greatly contradicts what the Buddha taught and cannot but give rise to doubt. Now that great masters of the Chan school are here, if a single shout can penetrate the Five Teachings of the Xianshou tradition, everyone will be convinced that the staff and shout truly have this efficacy. But if it cannot penetrate the Five Teachings, then the claim that staff and shout can enable people to realize the Way is no different from the words of Māra. I respectfully request the great masters of the Chan school to instruct us ignorant ones."

Yuanwu looked toward Chan Master Cheng of Jingyin. Cheng understood his meaning and addressed the assembly: "This question is very simple and does not merit an answer from the senior elders. Let this junior elder try to answer it. To penetrate the Five Teachings, we must first clarify the doctrines of the Five Teachings, lest there be confusion when the shout is given:

1. The Hīnayāna teaching: it clings to existence, taking as its meaning that there are dharmas to cultivate, birth and death to end, and nirvāṇa to realize.

2. The initial teaching of the Mahāyāna: this is the Dharma realm of principle, of true emptiness beyond all marks, esteeming not establishing a single dharma and being unstained by a single speck of dust.

3. The final teaching of the Mahāyāna: it takes neither emptiness nor existence as its meaning. Neither emptiness nor existence is retained; this is the Dharma realm of phenomena in which one abides in neither emptiness nor existence.

4. The sudden teaching of the Mahāyāna: it takes emptiness itself being existence and existence itself being emptiness as its meaning. Emptiness does not obstruct existence, and existence does not obstruct emptiness; this is the Dharma realm in which principle and phenomena interpenetrate through the joint operation of emptiness and existence.

5. The perfect teaching of the Mahāyāna: its purport is neither existence yet not emptiness, nor emptiness yet not existence, but perfect interpenetration without obstruction. This is the Dharma realm of the nonobstruction among phenomena, the very marrow of the minds of Buddhas and patriarchs."

After setting these forth, Cheng asked the lecturer, "Are the meanings and purports of the Five Teachings as I have stated?" The lecturer replied, "They are, they are." Cheng then gave a great shout and asked the assembly, "Did you hear it?" The assembly replied, "We heard it." Cheng said, "Then there is 'existence,' and thus one can penetrate the Hīnayāna teaching."

After a long while, when the sound had faded, Cheng asked the assembly, "Do you still hear it?" The assembly replied, "We do not hear it." Cheng said, "Then there is 'emptiness,' and one can penetrate the initial teaching of the Mahāyāna." Cheng continued: "There is now no sound, while there was sound just now; thus it is not emptiness. Though there was sound just now, there is none now; thus it is not existence. This neither-existence-nor-emptiness penetrates the final teaching of the Mahāyāna."

"Further, we now speak of emptiness because there was sound just now; had there been no sound just now, there would be no basis for speaking of emptiness now. Thus, when emptiness is spoken of, existence is present within emptiness. By the same token, we speak of existence because of emptiness; without emptiness, of what could one speak as existence? Thus, when existence is spoken of, emptiness is present within existence. They are mutually relative and mutually completing. This is emptiness itself being existence and existence itself being emptiness, and it penetrates the sudden teaching of the Mahāyāna."

"Now, as for the perfect teaching of the Mahāyāna—neither existence yet not emptiness, nor emptiness yet not existence—I do not use my single shout merely as a single shout. In doing all things, there is neither coming nor going, neither attachment nor defilement."

“All day long I eat, yet have never bitten a single grain of rice; all day long I wear clothes, yet have never had a single thread hang upon me. Without stirring body or mind, I respond daily to the myriad conditions; seated upright in non-contrivance, wondrous functioning is as countless as the sands of the Ganges. When speaking of nonexistence, I pervade worlds as numerous as sand grains; when speaking of existence, not even the finest hair is established. The hundred schools of thought and the hundred crafts and skills are all thus. This is the purport of the perfect teaching of the Mahāyāna: perfect interpenetration without obstruction.” After hearing this, the whole assembly was convinced and full of praise. Emperor Huizong, who was seated among them, nodded repeatedly as well.

This koan teaches us that every gesture and movement, every word and deed, is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. So long as, after recognizing it, we do not forget to safeguard realization, but temper ourselves in circumstances at all times and in all places and eliminate our old habitual tendencies, we can bring forth great dynamic and great functioning, perfectly realize bodhi, and need not investigate huatou devoid of meaningful flavor.

But those whose habitual tendencies are deep and whose attachments are firm may recognize the one who speaks Dharma and hears Dharma, yet lack sufficient meditative stability to see where deluded thoughts arise and thus have no way to begin safeguarding it. When external objects confront them, they are even less able to transform them. They may therefore choose a dharma gate suited to their own dispositions, such as counting the breath, Buddha-recitation, investigating a huatou, or cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. With the addition of seated meditation to strengthen meditative stability, they may then be able, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, not to forget to safeguard realization and ultimately accomplish perfect and thorough realization.

Great Functioning of Great Capacity

The original purpose of studying Buddhism is to gain its true benefit: to be free and at ease, to bring forth great dynamic and great functioning, and to benefit all beings. It is not to seek spiritual powers and occult marvels in order to show off. Still less is it to sit rigidly behind a dark mountain, abiding constantly in the cessation of feeling and perception, motionless like wood or stone.

When great dynamic and great functioning are mentioned, people often think of spiritual powers and occult marvels, not realizing that great dynamic and great functioning lie in the ordinary.

Not only do beginning Buddhist students today fail to understand this; even Longtan Chongxin, attendant to Chan Master Tianhuang Daowu in former times, did not

understand this potential and function. Resenting that the Chan master had not explained the essential Dharma to him, he intended to take leave and go elsewhere. He said to the master, “Formerly, I have not received the Master’s compassionate instruction in the essentials of the Dharma, and now I intend to bid farewell and go elsewhere.”

The master said, “When I want tea, you bring me tea to drink; when I want food, you bring me food to eat. Is this not Buddhadharma?” The attendant suddenly awakened: drinking tea and eating food, bringing tea and fetching food—these are the functioning of the Buddha-nature in us all. Thus, to understand the great dynamic and great functioning of Buddhadharma is to find it precisely in the most ordinary social exchanges, conversation, and laughter.

When I want tea and you bring tea, that is great potential; when you bring the tea and I receive and drink it, that is great function. Likewise, when you bring food and I receive and eat it, along with all other daily activities, these are great dynamic and great functioning. The true Buddhadharma lies in ordinary daily life. If I want tea and you bring food, or I want food and you bring tea, everything is in disorder. Not only would this not be the Buddhadharma of great dynamic and great functioning; it would not even accord with worldly ways.

Among Chan masters, Master Mazu was most acclaimed as a great master of great dynamic and great functioning. We may glimpse this from the skillful guidance exchanged between him and Baizhang, master and disciple.

One day, while Baizhang was attending Mazu on a mountain excursion, Mazu saw a flock of wild geese flying by. Pointing upward, he asked Baizhang, “What are those?” Baizhang looked up and replied, “Wild geese.”

(What a pity—he missed it right before his eyes.) Seeing that Baizhang saw the finger but not the moon, and was attached to the external circumstance, Mazu waited until the geese had flown past and asked again, “Where have they gone?” Baizhang looked up, saw no geese, and replied, “They have flown away.” (He was still not awake.)

Seeing that Baizhang remained attached to circumstances and fixated in mind, failing to understand the potential at work, mistaking the fixed star for the point, and not recognizing its function, Mazu employed another skillful means. He twisted Baizhang’s nostril and asked, “And yet you say they have flown away!” Baizhang cried out in pain and thereupon realized Mazu’s potential and function.

Mazu had pointed east while asking about west in order to teach him to recognize who it was that raised a hand and pointed to an object, and thus to return home by the very path. It was not that Mazu himself did not recognize wild geese. By pressing

him further at the point of pain—had they flown away or not?—Baizhang came to know that the nature which knows pain and itch neither moves nor wavers, neither comes nor goes, and has neither past nor future. Thus he awakened through pain.

One day, as Baizhang stood in attendance upon Mazu, Mazu looked at a whisk hanging from the corner of the bed. Baizhang asked, “Use it as it is, or use it apart from this?” After his initial awakening, Baizhang had understood that one should accord with what is present when it is present and depart when departure is called for; thus he tested Mazu with this question. The ancients, in every movement and stillness, whenever their eyes met an object or their ears encountered a sound, understood it in the Way. Therefore, they progressed with remarkable speed.

If we too were thus engaged with it morning and evening, in displacement and adversity alike, diligently and steadfastly applying ourselves to contemplation, would we not also progress swiftly? Alas, Buddhist students nowadays are lax and indolent. They do not practice with earnest intensity, but spend all day pursuing spiritual powers and manipulating mysteries. They do not work upon the mind-ground, and thus waste their time and delay their progress. Is this not regrettable?

Seeing that Baizhang had followed the thread of his words and come to a resting place without bringing the matter to completion, Mazu challenged him directly: “How, in the future, will you open your mouth to teach the Dharma and guide later generations?” Baizhang then took down the whisk from the bedpost and held it up before Mazu. (This was indeed a natural, marvelous gesture: a wondrous indication that spoke without speaking, though it still had a resting place.)

Seeing that he was still following the verbal thread and attached to “as it is,” Mazu turned Baizhang’s own spear against him: “Use it as it is, or use it apart from this?” Baizhang then hung the whisk back on the bedpost. To ordinary people, this move appears exquisitely subtle: once the whisk is hung up, there is no attachment at all—clear, fresh, and clean—and nothing more can be said. Yet he had not escaped Mazu’s verbal thread, but had become attached to “apart from.” Mazu then gave a thunderous shout. Baizhang was startled on the spot and was deaf for three days.

Dear readers, was Baizhang deaf for three days because Mazu had truly deafened him, so that he could hear no sound at all? Did he not hear the wind and birdsong, the crowing of roosters and barking of dogs? When people spoke to him, did he see only their lips move without hearing their voices? No.

With that shout, his views of “as it is” and “apart from” were cut off. He was utterly bare and open: inwardly unled by seeing, hearing, feeling, or knowing; outwardly unstained by any form; yet not fallen into emptiness. Reality was directly present.

Poor fellow! The great treasury that he had not seen throughout countless kalpas and lives was suddenly seen through completely. Unable either to relinquish it or to advance beyond it, he remained dazed and stupefied, absorbed in it for three days before finally letting go. Although he had this time awakened thoroughly, his being deaf for three days still suggests a process of gradual progression. Fenzhou heard this and said, “Once awakened, that is all. Why speak of being deaf for three days?”

Shimen said, “Without being deaf for three days, how could one awaken?” Fenzhou heard this and said, “What I say is half a month ahead of Shimen.” This was surely no empty claim. Later, Huangbo came to seek instruction from Mazu, only to find that Mazu had already passed away. Baizhang then recounted to Huangbo the circumstances of his awakening. On hearing it, Huangbo stuck out his tongue and highly praised Mazu: “He truly possessed great dynamic and great functioning!” On hearing this, Baizhang awakened still more deeply and praised him warmly: “You truly have insight surpassing your teacher!” These were Baizhang’s sincere words.

Speaking of the dynamic and its functioning, every movement and every action is nothing but great dynamic and great functioning, provided one accords with the right time and conditions, is wholly without inner distortion, and clings to nothing. This is what is called freedom in all directions, unhindered in gathering in and letting go. Green bamboo and yellow flowers are all profound mysteries; enlivening and killing, granting and taking away, are all wondrous functions. The great masters of the Chan school, once they realize to the end, all possess this great dynamic and great functioning.

For example, Nanquan cut a cat in two, and Guizong killed a snake. Both possessed the free means of enlivening and killing. Yet when people encounter such koans, they often cannot penetrate them and naturally raise doubts: does cutting a cat or killing a snake not violate the precept against killing? How could a great practitioner commit acts that destroy life and harm living beings? Surely it was not factual; perhaps it was only an allegory, expressing the killing of deluded thoughts in one’s own mind—such as greed, anger, and quarrelsome contention.

Around 1956, an eminent lay elder surnamed Hu lectured on the Record of Pointing at the Moon at Jing’an Monastery in Shanghai. When he came to this koan of Nanquan cutting the cat, he told the audience, “Please do not understand this as an actual cutting of a cat. It is only an allegory. As Layman Pang said: ‘To protect life, one must use killing; only when killing is exhausted can one be at peace.’

“This means killing the attachments and deluded habits of greed, anger, and ignorance within one’s own mind.” This is also correct, but it depends on the level of the practitioner’s work. If one’s practice is truly profound and one reaches the point where enlivening and killing occur simultaneously, then killing is enlivening and

enlivening is killing. Not only is there no distinction between enlivening and killing; there is not even a trace of making such a distinction. In that case, it need not be merely allegorical but may have been an actual event.

Among those present was an experienced practitioner who would not accept Elder Hu's explanation. Rising to his feet, he said, "That is only your own realization; it was not Teacher Wang's original intent. Teacher Wang had no view of killing and enlivening. Though he cut, it was still enlivening; there is no reason it could not have been an actual event." Elder Hu would not yield, and the two began to dispute. Just when neither side would give way, some experienced practitioner—no one knew who—gave a cat's cry. Everyone who heard it suddenly awakened, and the dispute ceased.

As for this koan of cutting the cat, Nanquan's original intention was not to cut the cat. He only wanted someone from either hall to come forward and speak a Mind-Seal phrase that would reveal the mind-ground. Yet no one understood his intention and no one could speak the phrase that would save the cat. Once Nanquan had spoken, he immediately drew his blade and killed it.

Perhaps there were capable practitioners in the two halls who wanted to see how Nanquan would carry out his next move and therefore declined to step forward and say a word to save the cat. We cannot know for sure. Later, when Zhaozhou returned, Nanquan told him what had happened. Zhaozhou took off his sandals, placed them on his head, and walked out. Nanquan praised him, saying, "Had you been here, you could have saved the cat."

Let us now briefly indicate the hidden meaning. Those who explain this commonly say that Zhaozhou recognized who it was that cut the cat, and that the one who put the sandals on his head was likewise that same one. Yet the actions of the ancients —their every gesture, movement, word, and deed—all had their source; they were not merely explaining who wore sandals on his head. Recognizing who wore the sandals on his head is only awakening. To bring forth great dynamic and great functioning is the final matter.

Shoes are worn on the feet; to place them on one's head is surely to act upside down and contrary to convention. The two halls quarreled over the cat, and this was indeed upside down. Teacher Wang killed the cat because of this. Those who understood would not comment, but would those who did not understand not slander the Dharma and damage the wheel of true Dharma? That too was contrary to convention. By walking out with the sandals on his head, Zhaozhou not only swept the monastics of both halls into this matter but caught Teacher Wang in the same net as well.

Teacher Wang was certainly no weakling. Although Zhaozhou came forth, Nanquan still did not let him off. He spoke words that sounded like praise: “Had you been here, you could have saved the cat.” These words seem commendatory, but their intent is not benign. They are like a needle hidden in cotton: one cannot grasp it, for as soon as one grasps it, it pricks the hand. Once, while Guishan and Yangshan were walking in the mountains, Guishan sat on a rock. A bird flew over, carrying a red fruit, and offered it before the rock. Yangshan said, “Such is our master’s awe-inspiring virtue that even birds know to make offerings.” Guishan said, “You, too, do not lack a share in it.” Do you good friends recognize what lies within this?

Speaking of this, I am reminded of a modern koan.

During the War of Resistance, Chan Master Xuyun lived in seclusion in Chongqing. Devotees in Chengdu wished to invite him to visit, and they asked Yuan Huanxian, the teacher of Nan Huaijin, to extend the invitation. When Yuan arrived in Chongqing and met Elder Xuyun, after exchanging greetings he asked, “Chan practitioners in Chengdu hold three different views: first, after awakening one must engage in true cultivation; second, once awakened, that is all, and no further cultivation is necessary; third, cultivation is itself non-cultivation, and non-cultivation is itself cultivation.”

“May I ask, Master, which of these three views is most correct?” This question appears ordinary, but it was actually a question by which a master tests a guest: it was like throwing handcuffs and shackles before him to see whether he would take the bait and put them on himself. Xuyun was a master of the present age and did not fall for it. He replied, “All crows under heaven are equally black.” After that, the two spoke of other matters and did not cross swords again.

Master Yuan wrote to the lay practitioner Jia Titao in Chengdu, recounting the whole matter from beginning to end. At that time, Acharya Dayu was also living in seclusion in Chengdu. After reading the letter, he said, “Master Yuan asked well, and Master Xu answered wonderfully. But his blade did not cut deeply enough—what a pity!” Jia asked, “How did his blade fail to cut deeply enough?” Master Dayu said, “He let Yuan off.”

Jia pressed further, “How should he have answered so as not to let him off?” Master Dayu said, “He should have answered: ‘Which kind are you?’” This was using the man’s own weapon to stab him in return. From this we can see that the questions and answers of Chan masters are truly far from ordinary; there is much at work within them, and they are no child’s play.

Again, at a tea gathering attended by Chan Master Zhenjing, Chan Master Foyin, and others, Foyin arrived late. Chan Master Zhenjing asked, “Why are you late?” Foyin replied, “Because my straw sandals had to pass through Zhenjing’s belly.” Chan

Master Zhenjing said, “I swallowed them.” Foyin said, “But you cannot spit them out.” Chan Master Zhenjing said, “If I cannot spit them out, I will shit you out.” When Chan masters cross swords, their exchanges are extraordinary; advance and retreat depend entirely on the depth of their skill in responding to circumstances.

To awaken great dynamic and great functioninging, one must first recognize the Original Face; otherwise, there can be no talk of great dynamic and great functioninging. Recognizing the Original Face is not difficult, for intrinsic nature is not elsewhere—it fills what is immediately before us. Yet people do not recognize it and let it slip by, because whenever they hear the word “nature,” they think of something lofty, profound, and mysterious.

They do not realize that this very one, able to see and hear, speak and act, is the original person. If one leaves this to seek elsewhere, the more one searches, the farther away it becomes; the more one looks, the less one sees. When two people face one another, their four eyes meeting, directly point out: Who is it that sees? One can then transcend at once and enter directly, with no difficulty at all.

Chan Master Zhenjing composed this verse: “Everyone possesses a naturally genuine Buddha, yet none knows its wondrous functioning in all directions. Today I clearly point it out equally to all: when slaying a snake or raising the whisk, who else is there?” How direct, forthright, and exhilarating this instruction is!

Chan masters, with a grandmother’s solicitous care, reveal the true mind to students without the slightest concealment, so that everyone need not generate any sense of doubt, but may awaken immediately without effort and thereby bring forth their dynamic and functioning. How joyful this is! Esoteric Buddhism is no different.

The essential instructions taught by the Heart Essence of Atiyoga, the most profound teaching of Esoteric Buddhism, are wholly consistent with the Chan school. They likewise directly reveal the school’s essential principle, enabling students to recognize the numinous and wondrous true mind at once and to comprehend the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya.

The Three Statements That Strike the Vital Point of Dzogchen (Great Perfection) say: “Pure, thought-free, clear, and distinct is the dharmakāya; bright and lucid illumination is the sambhogakāya; regarding all dharmas and appearances as illusory transformations, responding to conditions in their application without any attachment, is the nirmāṇakāya.” This accords with what Patriarch Linji 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.

Intrinsic nature perfectly embodies the three kāyas; there is no need to seek them outside oneself. They are exactly alike. Thus one Karmapa said, “The highest Esoteric Dharma is Chan, and Chan is the most profound Esoteric Dharma.” This is indeed a true and not false statement. Unfortunately, many Buddhists today do not understand this principle and make mistaken distinctions: Chan practitioners regard Esoteric Buddhism as a non-Buddhist path, while Esoteric practitioners cling to spiritual powers and reject Chan. They make them as incompatible as ice and charcoal in the same furnace. This all results from failing to understand the true essence of the various schools and traditions.

If we wish to awaken great dynamic and great functioninging, we need only, after recognizing the Original Face, protect it continuously and closely, diligently temper the mind and put it to use amid affairs and circumstances, and remove all attachments, doubts, hindrances, and deluded habits such as greed and anger. Once this use becomes fully mature, we will naturally enter the realm of great dynamic and great functioninging. Never be intimidated by the word “great” and imagine something lofty, profound, and mysterious. All potential and functioning are right before us: when responding to circumstances, simply be free of hindrance and doubt. The moment doubt or hindrance arises, they fly away.

Consider the koan of Baizhang’s wild fox. When a monk asked, “Does a person of great cultivation still fall under cause and effect?” he answered, “He does not fall under cause and effect.” There was originally no serious error in this, but he generated doubt himself and fell into the body of a fox. Poor fellow—five hundred years later, he was still not fully awake. Fortunately, Baizhang compassionately resolved his doubt, saying, “He does not obscure cause and effect.” Only then did he let go of this knot of doubt, become released, and pass away.

“Does not fall” and “does not obscure” differ by a single character, yet their implications differ as vastly as life and death, heaven and abyss. From the standpoint of one who has realized the Way, however, there is truly not the slightest distinction.

Buddha-nature is naturally genuine, utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, and not establishing a single dharma. Where could causes and effects attach? If there is death, then there is nothing at all; whence could life arise? Is there still room here for right and wrong, or correctness and error? It was most fortunate that this wild fox awakened through “does not obscure,” but had he awakened through “does not fall,” it would have been still more vast and untrammeled. Yet, before passing away, he still asked Baizhang to perform funeral rites for a deceased monk and cremate him—this was further attachment. Baizhang, in complying with his request, likewise could not avoid becoming thoroughly entangled, falling into cause and effect.

After recognizing the Original Face, in our practice we need only remain constantly attentive, protecting the original reality without forgetting it. When this safeguarding becomes fully mature, we do not rigidly guard it without letting go, but allow it to function naturally. Even the most extremely subtle deluded thoughts are then seen clearly, and we do not drift along with them. Finally, everything becomes thoroughly integrated and mutually forgotten, and spiritual powers and wondrous functioning arise. We observe the capacities of all beings as clearly as the lines on our palm and apply fitting wondrous functions as easily as taking something from a bag. There is no need to seek nearby or far away, or to strain over this in anxious unrest all day long.

But this kind of practice varies from person to person. For some, it manifests before them in this very body; for others, it can manifest only after they have cast off this fleshly shell. Everyone need only apply themselves with a peaceful mind, eliminate deluded habits, and not seek spiritual powers or mysterious wonders. In time, they will certainly awaken spiritual powers and attain great dynamic and great functioninging. Otherwise, realization of the Way will be beyond hope.