Chan Master Dadian’s Commentary on the Heart Sūtra

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Preface

As for the Heart Sūtra: before it has ever been raised, it is already perfectly clear—why should it need annotation? Yet when the World-Honored One appeared in the world, he manifested all manner of forms and expounded all manner of dharmas. By five kinds of transformative activity and five ways of formulating titles, he broadly opened the mysterious gateways and guided the various beings. During the fifth period, he expounded this supremely excellent great scripture of prajñā. By imperial command, Tripiṭaka Master Xuanzang of the Tang translated it, and it has circulated in this land.

In all its six hundred fascicles, it expounds emptiness in a single flavor and reveals dharmas through many gateways. Among them, the most concise and essential consists of fifty-four sentences, totaling 260 characters. Its language is very direct, yet for that very reason it becomes difficult to understand. Is it meant only for transmission to those who have attained the Way, while perhaps guiding beginners as well? If you can turn the light back upon yourself and thoroughly investigate seeing and hearing, first realize your true nature; then enter sudden awakening step by step. Thereafter there will be no obstruction, and in the end you will reach the final barrier. If this is not yet so, then listen to the final phrase!

Full Text

[Mahā] is a Sanskrit term, translated here as “great”; it is also said to mean “equal.”

Nothing in the world is greater than empty space. The Diamond Sūtra says: “Can the empty space to the south, west, north, the four intermediate directions, above, and below be measured by thought?” Subhūti replied, “No, World-Honored One.”

Therefore Guanxi said: “In the ten directions there are no walls; on the four sides there are no gates. The great Way has no boundary; empty space is hard to measure.”

Xuefeng said: “Look up and you do not see the sky; lower your head and you do not see the earth.” Though it is so vast, who knows that there is one thing still greater than this? Tell me, what is it? Do you recognize it? Though the great void is vast, it cannot contain its body; though the sun and moon are bright, they cannot compare with its light. Bodhidharma said: “When broad, it pervades the dharma realm; when narrow, it does not admit even a needle.”

Though the hermitage is small, it contains the dharma realm. Released, the great has no outside; gathered in, the small has no inside. Mountains are hidden in marshes, boats are hidden in ravines, and the whole world is hidden within the world. If you awaken here, the myriad forms in their profusion, sentient and insentient alike, are all of one body. Only then will you trust the saying: “Before the eyes, green mountains without a single tree; as far as the gaze reaches, green waters without a ripple.”

Its light shines brilliantly, illuminating the ten directions, like a thousand suns emitting great radiance. The ancients said: “The whole great earth is but one eye of a śramaṇa; the whole great earth is a Dharma-body King.” A sūtra says: “The eyes born of one’s parents see throughout the three-thousand worlds; extending the mark of the broad, long tongue, it covers the entire great trichiliocosm.” Is this not seeing?

Yunmen said: “A single staff turns into a dragon and swallows heaven and earth whole.” From where do the mountains, rivers, and great earth arise? If you understand each and every one of these here, that is enough. A mustard seed contains Mount Sumeru, and Mount Sumeru contains a mustard seed. Where the body is hidden, there are no traces; where there are no traces, do not hide the body. With spiritual powers one is at ease, appearing and disappearing freely. One may manifest a great body that fills the realm of empty space, or a small body, infinitesimal within the minute and subtle within the subtle. It is thrown before all of you, yet even when the drum is beaten to summon everyone, you do not see it!

Do you understand? The golden crow beneath the sea, the sun in the sky; the pupil in the eye, the person before you.

[Prajñā] is a Sanskrit term, translated here as “wisdom.”

Foolish and deluded people do not see their own nature. They commit coarse evils, act without wisdom, encounter the king’s law while alive, and fall into Avīci hell after death. If they can transform delusion into wisdom, act intelligently, possess great

merit and virtue, know causes and recognize effects, they will earn others' respect and not suffer poverty and hardship.

If someone reflects on past wrongs—busy day after day, unaware and unknowing, foolish and confused—and suddenly awakens, each thought concerns birth and death: where will one finally return? Great anguish arises: the suffering of separation from those one loves, the suffering of not obtaining what one seeks, and the suffering of being unable to let go. In dim obscurity, the road ahead is dark; consciousnesses scatter in disorder, with no home to which to return.

Clinging to grasses and trees, one suffers hunger, thirst, and distress. One's relatives cannot see one; one wanders desolately, suffering worry and sorrow. Or one is in hell, dying a thousand times and being reborn ten thousand times in a single day and night. Or one falls among animals and suffers hardship for a long time, with no one to rescue or aid one. After suffering through long kalpas, one may suddenly awaken and reflect day and night. Since beginningless kalpas, all the various sufferings previously planted have merely undergone impermanence.

Draw near to wise teachers, develop great wisdom, see your own original nature, and suddenly awaken to the unborn. Then the former delusion, wisdom, and merit and virtue all return to empty quiescence. Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning, the management of livelihood and occupations, and speech for governing the world all return to prajñā. Transform the ordinary into the noble; know for yourself that you will become a Buddha. This mind is Buddha, and one is born in the Land of Utmost Bliss. Let every thought be compassionate; always speak of prajñā and relieve all who suffer poverty and hardship.

Transform the great earth into gold and churn the Yangtze River into cream. All dharmas are none other than Buddhadharma. In the equal, true dharma realm, there are no sentient beings for the Buddha to liberate. Only then will you trust the saying: "There are no sentient beings to liberate, no three realms from which to escape, and no nirvāṇa to realize; it is originally complete." When a child of the Buddha abides in this ground, this is the Buddha's own enjoyment. Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, one is always within it. When one affirms this for oneself, one is decisively free of doubt. This Dharma is hard to believe, and this is a rare matter; only one who awakens knows.

Investigate further the final phrase; only then will you reach the firmly guarded pass. What is the final phrase?

Why wait until things have withered and fallen before first knowing emptiness?

[Pāra] is a Sanskrit term, translated here as "reaching the other shore."

The deluded are on this shore; the awakened are on the other shore. A sūtra says: “To cross a river, one needs a raft; once ashore, one needs no boat.” If one is deluded about one’s original nature, the three karmas are darkened and the six sense faculties are inwardly blind. One mistakenly takes the four elements and six sense faculties to be oneself. This is the inversion of sentient beings: taking a thief for one’s child. Deluded about their own original nature, they revolve through birth and death and remain on this shore. They emerge from one shell and enter another, turning about without awakening.

They change heads and faces and suffer through long kalpas without rest. But if a person returns from falsity to the source, exhausts principle and fully realizes nature, directly sees the Original Face, and suddenly awakens to the unborn, that person immediately ascends to the other shore. Once attained, it is attained forever; once awakened, one is awakened forever. One is no longer reborn, the round of rebirth ceases forever, and birth and death are cut off forever. One becomes an untrammeled person beyond things, freely following one’s nature, at peace and joyful. This is called “utmost bliss.”

What is utmost bliss?

Unless they are my own intimate disciples, who would be willing to walk this path within?

[Mita] is a Sanskrit term, translated here as “the ultimate standard.”

Mi means harmony, and ta means the many dharmas. The single word mi is likened to the great void, which can contain all dharmas; all dharmas are entirely within the great void. When the one nature of sentient beings is opened out, it too can contain the great void, and the great void can also merge with this nature. The great void is the essence, and the myriad dharmas are its function. Within the great void are the myriad forms in their profusion; sentient and insentient alike are all within it.

The Buddha-nature of sentient beings can likewise encompass the great void. Within the great void are eighty-four thousand Ganges-sand-like varieties of natures, all beyond description, and all contained within the one nature of sentient beings. The one nature is likened to mi: mi can make things equal and harmonious, joining them into one. The one nature is mi, and the many natures are ta; therefore it is called mita.

[Heart] The heart is the source of sentient beings. All dharmas return to the heart. The myriad dharmas are different names for the heart; divided, they become eighty-four thousand, and in their breadth they are inexhaustible. When the heart arises, all kinds of dharmas arise; when the heart ceases, all kinds of dharmas cease. Therefore it is said: “All the stars revolve around the north; all waters flow eastward.”

It is also said: “The one mind present before us inherently contains a thousand dharmas; whenever the mind is raised and a thought stirred, it possesses the great dhāraṇī.” The patriarchs of old transmitted mind to mind and sealed mind with mind. The five thousand and forty-eight scrolls, the eighty-four thousand dharma gates, and their many expedient means all flow forth from this single character. Even if Mount Sumeru were made into a brush and the ocean into ink, one still could not finish writing this one character.

Everyone possesses this one character, yet cannot see it for themselves; even when it is spoken of, they do not believe it. One must see it personally before one can believe. This is called the one-character dharma gate. Sentient beings do not believe that this mind is Buddha, so the Buddha employs many expedient means to point them toward seeing their own original nature. For those unable to see it, it must be pointed out clearly, one by one.

The teachings say: “The verdant bamboo is wholly suchness.” One must personally see suchness. “The luxuriant yellow flowers are nothing but prajñā.” One must personally see prajñā.

Jia Shan said: “Brightly, brightly, at the tips of the hundred grasses; brightly, brightly, the patriarchs’ intent.” One must personally see the patriarchs’ intent.

It is also said: “Before the eyes there is no dharma; the intent is right before the eyes.”

It is also said: “The Way is in tiles and pebbles; the Way is in urine and excrement; there is nowhere the Way is not.”

It is also said: “The one intimate body appears amid every mote of dust.”

It is also said: “When you see form, you see mind.” Sentient beings see only form and do not see mind. Why do they not see it? Only because the knowing nature is darkened and the six sense faculties are inwardly blind; they are unaware and unknowing. If one can investigate to the end, keeping it in mind with every step and in every action, then, in a sudden collision or encounter, one directly sees it. This is called “seeing one’s nature.”

This nature cannot be known by intellect or recognized by consciousness. One must look left and right, turn one’s head and shift one’s gaze. Look for it before you, and suddenly it is behind you. Everywhere you meet it; it is now precisely I, yet I am not it. If you can understand in this way, only then will you accord with suchness. This nature has neither form nor appearance. Directly see it in non-seeing, and do not see it in direct seeing. To leave all appearances and see one’s own original nature is called the “wondrous Way.”

The Second Patriarch asked Bodhidharma, “I beg the Master to pacify my mind.” Bodhidharma said, “Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it for you.” The Second Patriarch said, “I have sought for the mind, but cannot find it.” Bodhidharma said, “I have already pacified your mind for you.” At this, the Second Patriarch greatly awakened and attained the Way of no-mind.

Do you understand? When the mind is empty, all pass the examination; ordinary beings and sages have always belonged to one family.

[Sūtra] Sūtra means a path; it is the path by which sentient beings cultivate themselves. Go straight ahead, toward the place ten thousand miles away where not a blade of grass grows. Be especially careful: when a thought is raised or the mind stirred right before you, you fall into hell.

Do you wish to recognize this sūtra? All five thousand and forty-eight scrolls come forth from this sūtra. Is it not recorded that a monk asked Yunmen, “What is a single scroll of sūtra for a student?” Yunmen replied, “Raise it up—what could be clearer?” Another asked, “What sūtra does a monk recite?” The monk said, “I recite the Vimalakīrti Sūtra.”

Yunmen said, “I am not asking which Vimalakīrti Sūtra you recite. What is it that recites?” If you understand here, the outgoing breath does not engage with the myriad conditions, and the incoming breath does not abide in the realms of the aggregates. You constantly turn such a sūtra, in hundreds of millions of scrolls. Everyone inherently possesses this one scroll of sūtra; from ancient times until now, sentient beings have failed to awaken to it, and thus have not been able to trust it.

Why is this so? This one scroll of sūtra has wandered through many kalpas, and one has been deluded and turned one’s back on it. Suddenly, someone awakens at a single word and only then trusts: this sūtra is not obtained from outside; one knows for oneself that it flows forth from within, its sound unceasing. “Silent when speaking, speaking when silent; the gate of great giving stands open, without obstruction.” Yet although this is so, one must not imitate a cat by copying its shape. Why? One must personally see this sūtra before it is attained.

[Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva] If you have faith in this, simply sit quietly. Sit until utmost stillness is reached. Whenever the mind is raised and a thought stirred, there is a True Person of No Rank, always within this lump of red flesh, coming and going. Here, directly see this bodhisattva, at leisure and at ease. In all lands of the ten directions, there is no realm in which this bodhisattva does not manifest. In a single instant, this bodhisattva pervades worlds as numerous as sand grains. Traveling throughout the ten directions, one does not see the Buddha’s tracks.

Never leaving this very place, it is always limpid and still; seek it, and you will know that it cannot be seen. Directly see it in non-seeing, and do not see it in direct seeing. If you see Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva here, this bodhisattva responds to things and manifests in accordance with forms, never lacking in the least. When you rise or sit, it is constantly with you; it rises with you and falls with you. It rejoices and laughs with you, cries and makes noise with you.

Do you understand? Only when you hear sound within the eyes do you begin to know.

[Practice] Practice means cultivation. To travel a thousand miles, one step is the beginning. Look into where this step arises. If you know where it arises, you know the root source of birth and death.

An ancient said, “Walk to where the waters end; sit and watch the clouds arise.” Have you not seen how Shishuang asked Shitou, “What is it like when thoughts keep arising without cease?” Shitou replied, “Bah! Who is it that gives rise to thoughts?” At these words, Shishuang was greatly awakened. Investigate in this way, never departing, thought after thought, from the present place. Whenever a thought is raised or stirred—whether in speech or samādhi—observe for yourself where it arises from.

An ancient said, “Why not hear with your own hearing?” Only then can one trust the saying, “Born from the Buddha’s mouth, spoken from the Buddha’s mouth.”

An ancient said, “If you wish to know where the Buddha has gone, it is simply this voice.”

Bao Gong said, “Those who have not yet understood, listen to one word: right now, who is moving the mouth?”

A sūtra says, “There is a world called Utmost Bliss. In that land is a Buddha named Amitābha, who is now teaching the Dharma.” Closely observe: every sound flows forth from oneself. With thoughts unceasing throughout the twelve periods of the day, constantly recite this sūtra. Call the Buddha once, and there is one response; the Original Face is utterly clear. If one can do this, it is called returning to the root and reverting to the source.

What is the source? Flowing water has its source in the ocean; the setting moon never leaves the sky.

[Depth] “Depth” means the place that penetrates to the bones and marrow.

An ancient said, “For the Way, diminish and diminish again.” Simply go and sit quietly; day and night turn the light back upon yourself. Illuminate until the skull is

exhausted and the five aggregates are penetrated at once, with not the slightest thing hanging on—like before one's parents gave one birth, as though one had been burned away, with even the undershirt next to one's skin removed. Turn back and seek within yourself: vast and open, without a self, one naturally arrives home.

An ancient said, "It is not that one does not wish to return home; the home is too poor to return to." The valley is secluded, deep, and remote; no one can reach it.

An ancient said, "Last year's poverty was not yet poverty; this year's poverty is true poverty. Last year's poverty left not even ground on which to stand an awl; this year's poverty does not even have an awl." If one can be like this, then one knows that "a tongueless person can speak, and a handless person can box."

[Prajñā] "Prajñā" is a Sanskrit word meaning "wisdom."

In dealing with people, one must have wisdom. Without wisdom, one knows only that affairs pass before one's eyes, unaware that old age is coming upon one's head. Do not doubt these words: non-Buddhists may be clever, but they lack wisdom. A person of great wisdom knows that where there is birth, there is death. One should sit and contemplate: Where does birth come from? Where does death go? If someone gives rise to this single thought, that person can draw near to a good teacher and discern the Dharma of birth and death. Otherwise, simply believe these words: "Nothing in this world can be taken away; only karma follows one."

An ancient said, "If one person returns from delusion to truth and returns to the source, all the empty space of the ten directions vanishes utterly." If you wish to understand the final move, carefully and coolly contemplate Longya's verse: "Those who study the Way must first learn poverty; only after learning poverty does the Way become intimate. One day, upon realizing the Way of poverty, one's use of the Way is still like that of a poor person." Awaken in this way: nothing in this world can be taken away; there is only this empty body, which is great peace and bliss.

Do you understand? When one lets go and arrives home, no one recognizes one; there is not a single thing left to offer before the honored hall.

[Pāra] This is Sanskrit, translated here as "reaching the other shore."

The deluded revolve in saṃsāra; the awakened bring saṃsāra to rest. If you wish to reach the other shore, you must give rise to wisdom yourself. It is like a person crossing a river: when the river is deep and difficult to cross, one must use many expedient means—bridges, boats, carts, rafts of wood, and bamboo rafts—arranging them to carry one across the deep river. Once one has crossed it, all those former expedient means are of no further use. Realizing one's nature and awakening to the Way are just the same.

Again, it is like a blind person seeking a physician. Because the road is far, the person cannot travel alone and must rely on someone to lead them, while also holding a staff. Without these two things, the person can never arrive. But once at the physician's place, when the physician opens the person's eyes, the person sees the light; the staff and the guide are then of no use. Suddenly awakening to the right road of nirvāṇa is just the same.

Before realizing one's nature and awakening to the Way, one must cultivate blessings. When blessings arrive, the mind becomes efficacious. One must rely on sitting in Chan, practicing the Way, reading the sacred teachings, and contemplating huatou and sayings, until one suddenly awakens. All the former various expedient means and conditioned dharmas are merely idle furnishings, left for later people to see. Those whose eyes are open, and those who have crossed the river, come and go freely. Having crossed once, they are forever across; having awakened once, they are forever awakened and never again become deluded.

Having caught the rabbit, forget the snare; having caught the fish, forget the fish trap; having grasped the meaning, forget the words. Become an untrammeled person beyond things. Throughout the twelve periods of the day, all sages, ghosts, and spirits have no way to see you. Even if all sages and worthies seek your traces, they cannot be found. This is one who has already reached the shore. Therefore it is called "pāra."

Do you understand? Having exhausted the profound subtlety and wonder, one walks the returning path beneath the moon.

[Mitā] This is Sanskrit for "boundless," also called "ultimate."

Therefore, the single character mi is likened to the great void, which can contain all dharmas. It is like many medicines with different flavors: when blended evenly with honey, they all return to one flavor. The empty nature of all Buddhas can likewise fill the dharma realm and encompass all things. The natures of different kinds of beings converge at the source and return to one. Recognize the one, and the myriad affairs are complete. What is the one? My Way is threaded through by one.

Dongshan said, "For twenty years I have tried to become continuous and undivided, yet could not." Upon reaching this point, one knows that the Buddhadharma is equal, without high or low; it returns to one essence. There is no Buddha to become and no sentient being to liberate. Contemplating as one body, it is therefore called "mitā."

[Time] "Time" means the time of right view, when there is not a single thing to see. There is also no past, future, or present; it is equal to empty space. Above, there is nothing to look up to; below, even oneself is cut off. The stage of perfect and sudden

awakening cannot be attained. Profound beyond profundity, without the slightest duality, all return together to one time.

[Seeing That the Five Aggregates Are All Empty] The “five aggregates” are form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Because of attachment to the physical body as a self, these five aggregates cause saṃsāric wandering through long kalpas. If, in this present human body, one relies on this for practice and constantly turns the light back upon oneself, one sees the five aggregates utterly purified and originally pure. Pure, naked, and bare, there is nothing to grasp. The four great elements and five aggregates—even their names—cannot be found. When the ancients reached this point, they called it the “Dharma of the emptiness of the aggregates.”

The King of the Western Heaven asked Venerable Siṃha, “What are you doing here?” The Venerable replied, “Here I empty the aggregates.” The king asked, “Have you attained the Dharma of emptying the aggregates?” The Venerable replied, “I have attained the Dharma of emptying the aggregates.” The king said, “May I have your head?” The Venerable replied, “This body is not mine. How much less so is the head!”

A monk asked Master Cen, “Two rats gnaw at a vine. How are they eliminated?” Cen said, “People nowadays must conceal their bodies.” The monk said, “How does one conceal one’s body?” He replied, “Does the person of the Way still see this servant girl?”

Dharma Master Zhao said, “To place one’s head before a white blade is like cutting the spring wind.”

Śāriputra saw a goddess and asked, “Why do you not transform your female body away?” The goddess replied, “For twelve years I have sought for a female body, but it cannot be found at all. What, then, would you have me transform?” When patriarchs reach this state, they all attain the Dharma of the emptiness of the aggregates.

Master Jingqing resided at a monastery for three years. The local earth deity wished to see the master’s face but could not do so.

Master Hongjue lived in a hermitage, and the celestial kitchen regularly sent him food. After he returned to his hermitage following a second visit to Dongshan, a deity brought food to the hermitage for three days but did not see its master. The hermitage master was only inside the hermitage—why was he not seen? Investigate!

All the patriarchs of old attained the Dharma of perfect and sudden awakening. Here, one penetrates each and every thorny barrier and passes through, revealing oneself alone amid the myriad forms. Only when one personally assents can one

truly arrive at this state. One naturally comes to rest and naturally lets go, like a speck of snow on a red-hot furnace.

After a long pause, he said: Do you understand? One sees only the six dragons vying and dancing; who knows that the cinnabar phoenix has entered the clouds?

[Liberating All Suffering and Adversity] If one has not realized the emptiness of the five aggregates, one still falls into the realm of birth and death. Having fallen into the realm of birth and death, one undergoes once more the suffering of saṃsāra.

Laozi said, “I have a great affliction because I have a body; having a body is itself suffering.”

A sūtra says, “The three realms have no safety; they are like a burning house.” They are filled with every kind of suffering and are greatly terrifying. If you wish to be free from suffering, you must directly turn back and illuminate yourself. Illuminate until the skull is exhausted and originally pure; you must personally see your Original Face.

Do you wish to see your Original Face? From ancient times to the present, it has never fallen away; plainly, it is before your eyes.

Do you understand? Raise your head: a kite flies past Silla.

[Śāriputra] “She” means to leave behind. “Lizi” means the master within what is left behind.

The four great elements and five aggregates make the body like a guesthouse, in which the master temporarily resides. Once the master departs, the house collapses and decays, but the lizi always remains.

Yaoshan said, “When skin and flesh have entirely fallen away, only one reality remains.” He also said, “Though the great thousandfold world is destroyed, this is not destroyed.”

Do you recognize this? Alone, it transcends the three realms and no longer clings to Sahā.

[Form Is Not Different from Emptiness] Observe objects with the mind: within objects there is emptiness. Seeing form, one sees emptiness; mind itself is emptiness.

The dharma nature of sentient beings is only right before one. In responding to things, it manifests forms: with what is long, it manifests a long form; with what is short, a short form. A square is square emptiness; a circle is round emptiness; white

is white emptiness; yellow is yellow emptiness; small is small emptiness; great is great emptiness; distant is distant emptiness; near is near emptiness. Turn back and observe yourself: this is form, and form is emptiness, manifesting all kinds of appearances. All kinds of appearances are transformations of emptiness, illusory forms. The empty body is the dharmakāya: “The awakened dharmakāya contains not a single thing; the original source and intrinsic nature are the naturally genuine Buddha.”

Bao Gong said, “Within the body of appearances is the body without appearances.”

Do you understand? Rain washes the tender pale-red peach blossoms; wind stirs the light-green willow strands.

[Emptiness Is Not Different from Form] Form and emptiness are one kind, but ordinary beings see them as two. All Buddhas and bodhisattvas constantly practice the wisdom of equality and do not give rise to discriminating appearances. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times are also empty; the twenty-eight patriarchs and six generations of patriarchs are also empty; the four noble realms and six ordinary realms are also empty. From all Buddhas above down to ants below, each and every one is originally altogether empty. It is only because sentient beings cling that they do not know this is emptiness.

Deluded about themselves, they pursue things and are carried along by things in continual flow, unable to return to the one. Capacities and views differ; thus there is form and emptiness, and they fall into the two views. If a person here thoroughly awakens to emptiness, body and mind are equal, inside and outside without remainder; seeing neither emptiness nor form and not being turned by things, the dharma realm is equal. How could there be two any longer?

Do you understand? Not seeing a single dharma is the Tathāgata; only then may one be called Avalokiteśvara.

[Form Is Emptiness] The eye is form and cannot see; only true emptiness can see. The ear is form and cannot hear; only true emptiness can hear. The nose is form and cannot smell; only true emptiness can smell. The tongue is form and cannot speak; only true emptiness can speak. The body is form and cannot feel touch; only true emptiness can feel touch. The feet are form and cannot walk; only true emptiness can walk.

The hand is form and cannot clench a fist; only true emptiness can clench a fist. Without eyes, it can see; without ears, it can hear; without a nose, it can smell; without a tongue, it can speak; without feet, it can walk; without hands, it can clench a fist. The mind faculty has a name but no form and divides into eighty-four thousand [aspects]. Seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing all return to the six

sense faculties, which interchange throughout the whole body in wondrous functioning and spiritual powers.

The ancients said: “The whole body is it; the entire body is it.” Understand that form is emptiness, emptiness is form, and form and emptiness are not different: this is the wondrous principle of true emptiness. Therefore it is said: “What may be called form is not true form; what may be called emptiness is not true emptiness.” All return to great emptiness, ultimate emptiness, emptiness of self-nature, emptiness of intrinsic nature, emptiness of emptiness, unobtainable emptiness … the twenty gateways of emptiness were never inherently existent.

Now tell me: when one reaches this point, what is it like? I often recall the third month in Jiangnan: where partridges call, a hundred flowers are fresh.

[Emptiness Is Form] The Buddhas and bodhisattvas see the worlds of the ten directions as a single realm of emptiness, equal and without duality. Sentient and insentient beings cling to appearances and discriminate, seeing all kinds of forms; they follow sounds and pursue forms, leave the womb and enter the womb, all without awareness. Sages do not see form or emptiness as existing. Within and without, there is no discrimination; they constantly abide in the mark of quiescent cessation. Luminosity shines and moves, pervading worlds as numerous as grains of sand. The very words “form” and “emptiness” cannot be established.

Do you understand? There is neither emptiness nor form: Budai Heshang encounters Shide.

Because there are eyes, one receives forms. Because there are forms, one receives perceptions. Because there are perceptions, one receives formations. Because there are formations, one receives consciousness. Because there is consciousness, there are the six sense faculties. Because there are the six sense faculties, there are the six sense objects. Because there are the six sense objects, there are the six consciousnesses. The six consciousnesses together constitute the eighteen realms.

Because there are the eighteen realms, there are the four great elements and the five aggregates. Because there are the four great elements and the five aggregates, the sixty-two views arise, and eighty-four thousand differentiated appearances arise. Following sounds and pursuing forms, one drifts through birth and death without end or rest. If you wish to cut off birth and death and bring cyclic rebirth to rest, simply illuminate and break through one faculty. Make the four great elements and five aggregates wholly pure; then, vast and open, there is no self. Immediately there is empty quiescence—directly take this up.

Yourself before the empty kalpa: quiescent yet ever illuminating, illuminating yet ever quiescent. In quiescence there is nothing to be quiescent; one sees only

emptiness. In emptiness there is nothing to be empty. The eighty-four thousand dusty toils and deluded thoughts all suddenly cease at once. At this time, persons too are empty, dharmas too are empty; the two aspects have always been the same.

Do you understand? One cannot remain in the stations of Buddhas and patriarchs; last night one still slept among the reed blossoms.

[Likewise] Since there is no self, the myriad dharmas are all nonexistent and return entirely to emptiness. This is called “the myriad dharmas return to the One,” without falling into the second view. At this point, the way of words is cut off and the activity of mind ceases. To stir a thought is already to go astray; to make arrangements is already wrong. Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti spoke together of nonduality. What is nonduality? Do not make the slightest move! Move, and you get thirty blows.

Do you understand? The hundred-tongued bird has not ceased its chatter on the branches; how could the phoenix consent to roost with it?

[Śāriputra] All outflows have been exhausted, and one has returned to quiescent cessation. Seeking to leave the three realms, one cannot be confined by heaven and earth. Far beyond the dharma realm, one is free and without further care. This is called “Śāriputra.” The preceding explanation is complete.

[The Mark of Emptiness of All Dharmas] All Buddhas throughout the ages speak solely of emptiness. But because sentient beings cannot directly take up the burden of emptiness, they establish a hundred skillful means and various provisional names, guiding sentient and insentient beings alike to return to empty quiescence. If your faith has not yet reached this, simply sit quietly and turn the light back upon yourself. See that the five aggregates truly possess nothing at all, and the personal self will naturally be empty. Once the personal self is empty, dharmas too are empty. When both person and dharmas are empty, one naturally rests and ceases.

The sūtra says: “My body was never inherently existent; how could hatred and attachment arise?” At this point, one naturally lets go. There is no Buddha to become, no birth and death to cut off, and no nirvāṇa to realize. This is the stage of perfect and sudden awakening, the ground of equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment. If there remains even the slightest thing to realize or cultivate, one falls into the realm of birth and death and sinks for kalpas without end. If one can be thoroughly without reliance or support, directly take up the empty kalpa: perfectly round and radiant.

Do you understand? There are neither persons nor Buddhas; in the ocean of worlds as vast as the great thousandfold cosmos, all sages and worthies are like flashes of lightning.

[Neither Arising nor Ceasing] “Neither arising nor ceasing” speaks entirely of principle and intrinsic nature. Arising and ceasing speak entirely of phenomenal appearances. This statement directly declares that sentient beings fully possess the dharmakāya. The nature of empty space extends from ancient times to the present: it has never arisen or ceased, does not change or move, neither goes nor comes, is neither old nor new, and is limpidly and ever quiescent. Let the four great elements and five aggregates arise and be provisionally established in vain; they have no connection whatever with one’s own dharmakāya. It blends with the light, yet is unstained by dust; alone it is honored throughout the three realms. This is the body of empty space, indestructible throughout long kalpas. The sūtra says: “How does one attain long life? The adamantine, indestructible body.”

Do you understand? Bamboo shadows sweep the stairs, yet the dust does not move; the moon passes through the sea, leaving no trace in the water.

[Neither Defiled nor Pure] This too says that sentient beings originally fully possess the dharmakāya. The dharmakāya of sentient beings is pure, without flaw, stain, or defilement; neither long nor short, neither square nor round, neither turbid nor pure. It cannot be destroyed, burned, or defiled. Like the world and like empty space, it is like a lotus unstained by water. The mind is pure, neither defiled nor pure, remaining so throughout long kalpas, like the moon in water.

Do you wish to see it? The Buddha’s face is like a pure full moon, and like a thousand suns emitting light.

[Neither Increasing nor Decreasing] The nature of empty space, the body extending through distant empty kalpas, cannot be increased, diminished, or destroyed. Among sages it does not increase; among ordinary beings it does not decrease. Thusness remains unmoving. Bodhisattvas of the highest vehicle believe this without doubt; people of middling and lesser capacities will surely find it strange when they hear it.

Do you understand? To call it a thing is already to miss it.

[Therefore, in Emptiness] It is originally pure. Strike empty space with a stick, and it feels no pain; cut empty space with a knife, and it is not severed; bind empty space with a rope, and it cannot be held; burn empty space with fire, and it does not catch fire; shoot empty space with an arrow, and it is not pierced; beat empty space with rain, and it is not wetted; pawn or sell empty space, and it is worth no money.

Do you understand? When one wishes to speak, words cannot reach it; Shandong and Hebei may be discussed at leisure.

[No Form, Feeling, Perception, Formation, or Consciousness] In the nature of empty space, place form within it and it does not receive form; place sound within it and it does not receive sound; place feeling within it and it does not receive feeling; place perception within it and it does not receive perception; place formation within it and it does not receive formation; place consciousness within it and it does not receive consciousness. The six realms, the four modes of birth, and all provisional names receive nothing at all; not even a mote of dust is established. In the principle of pure emptiness, there is ultimately no body. One walks like a bird's track and sits like vast empty space. Throughout the twelve periods of the day, even the Buddha-eye cannot see it.

Why can it not be seen? Brocaded fish are in the depths; the white egret knows not their trace.

[No Eye, Ear, Nose, Tongue, Body, or Mind] The existence of these six sense faculties is spoken of in accordance with sentient beings. The Buddhas, endowed with great compassion, manifest the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics, using illusion to extinguish illusion. What is not illusory does not perish. What does not perish is the dharmakāya that sentient beings originally fully possess. "The dharmakāya is not dharmakāya; this is called dharmakāya."

The dharmakāya has a name but no form. Do you wish to see the dharmakāya? In the eyes it is called seeing; in the ears, hearing; in the nose, smelling; in the tongue, speaking; in the hands, grasping; in the feet, moving and running. The whole body functions in its entirety; the whole body is dharmakāya. It is not the six sense faculties, the four great elements, or the five aggregates. As for seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing, be careful never to mistake them for it. The four great elements and six sense faculties—whatever has an appearance—is all illusory, entirely provisional names. To guide sentient beings, one must personally see the dharmakāya. If one attains direct vision of it, one turns from ordinary being to sage.

Have you not seen this? A monk asked Yunmen, "What is the pure dharmakāya?" Yunmen said, "A flower-and-herb fence." The monk said, "What if one goes on in this way?" Yunmen said, "A golden-maned lion." Xuedou praised it in verse: "Do not be muddled over the flower-and-herb fence; the star is on the scale but not on the weighing pan. 'What if one goes on in this way?'—how utterly uncalled for! A golden-maned lion: everyone, look!"

A monk asked Dalong, "The physical body decays. What is the firm and indestructible dharmakāya?" Dalong said, "Mountain flowers bloom like brocade; stream water is clear as indigo." The patriarchs pointed this out to sentient beings one by one. If you personally see your own dharmakāya, you will not undergo cyclic rebirth for ten thousand kalpas.

Do you wish to see the dharmakāya? What countenance is it? Raise your eyebrows and open your eyes to look. In the very interval of deliberation, a thousand mountains intervene.

[No Forms, Sounds, Smells, Tastes, Tangibles, or Dharmas] These six sense objects all arise from a single faculty. Simply let go of that one faculty and turn the light back: from where does it arise? If you recognize its point of arising, you will know the root from which it is born. Turn the light back upon the root body: it is not that I possess a body. Once the eighteen realms are absent, there is sudden purity. Contemplate the body as no body; contemplate dharmas in the same way. All return to empty quiescence.

Moreover, sit quietly and contemplate what you have done in the past and what you are doing now. Where are the many forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and dharmas placed? Since they possess nothing at all, they are like last night's dream. My mind is originally empty; offenses and blessings have no master. What is offense? What is blessing? Thoroughly contemplate that the mind is originally empty: this is called true repentance.

The Third Patriarch asked the Second Patriarch to repent of his offenses for him. The Second Patriarch said, "Bring me your offenses, and I will repent of them for you." The Third Patriarch said, "When I seek the offenses, they cannot be found." The Second Patriarch said, "Your repentance is complete." At this, the Third Patriarch greatly awakened.

Do you understand? Sitting face-to-face, they do not see one another; light and shadow shine upon the donkey's face. Sitting quietly, not a mote of dust remains; not even a thread passes through empty space.

[No Eye Realm up to No Mind-Consciousness Realm] These eighteen realms arise from clinging to the existence of an eye realm, thereby entangling the eighteen realms in all kinds of evil karma. Simply relinquish the eye faculty and turn back to investigate its falsity. The six sense faculties all return to decay and destruction; none possesses any reality. Quietly contemplate the four great elements: they have no real meaning. [One realizes] the nature of empty space, the body indestructible throughout long kalpas, limpidly and ever quiescent, with no cultivation or realization either.

The nāga is always in samādhi; there is never a time when it is not in samādhi. Without distraction or confusion, solitary luminosity shines alone, like the autumn moon. Perfectly round and radiant, it illuminates all heaven and earth, thoroughly shining through the ten directions; mountains, rivers, and the great earth cannot obstruct it. The numinous light shines alone, far transcending faculties and objects. Its essence reveals true permanence, unconfined by words and letters. The nature

of mind is unstained and originally complete; simply leave behind deluded conditions, and you are the thusness Buddha.

[No Ignorance] To instruct sentient beings: everyone has ignorance, which gives rise to many distinctions and a hundred kinds of afflictions. They constantly grasp at the six sense faculties, giving rise to the eighteen realms. The mind dwells amid the six emotions, like a bird caught in a net, creating every kind of evil karma like a moth rushing into a lamp. Leaving one shell and entering another, they turn about without awareness, wandering through kalpas; all this arises because of ignorance.

Because there is ignorance, ignorance conditions formations; formations condition consciousness; consciousness conditions name and form; name and form condition the six entrances; the six entrances condition contact; contact conditions feeling; feeling conditions craving; craving conditions grasping; grasping conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; and birth conditions aging and death. Sorrow, grief, suffering, and distress all begin with ignorance. If at this point one suddenly sees ignorance directly, subdues it, and makes it die—dying within death yet again—then all conditions cease together.

All outflows are exhausted and afflictions are forever cut off. Once the root has been removed, the three poisons naturally perish. All sentient beings do not recognize the arising of ignorance, this poisonous condition; burdened by it, they suffer throughout kalpas. Suddenly awaken for yourself to the point at which ignorance arises. Strike it three thousand times in the morning and eight hundred times at dusk, until it dies a great death once and for all; only afterward may it revive. It cannot deceive you.

A monk asked Touzi, “When one who has undergone the great death comes back to life, how is it?” Touzi said, “Night travel is not permitted; you must arrive by daylight.” Here one goes directly to the source, clearing away the mind-ground, and sees that there is no body. When the body is exhausted, ignorance is exhausted; when the defilements are wholly removed, the sins accumulated through dust-mote kalpas are suddenly eradicated, and the round of birth and death is suddenly cast off.

An ancient said, “In an instant, the karma of Avīci is extinguished, and one realizes that all dharmas are originally empty.” What is this original emptiness? “The real nature of ignorance is itself Buddha-nature; this illusory empty body is itself the dharmakāya.” When the dharmakāya awakens, there is not a single thing. If one clearly understands each of these, one turns from ordinary to sagehood and transforms ignorance into Buddhahood.

[And Also No Extinction of Ignorance] Where there is a body, there is ignorance; where there is ignorance, there are the three poisons. Because there are the three poisons, the three unwholesome karmas arise. The three karmas darken the mind;

turning away from awakening and joining with the dust of sensory objects, one neither awakens nor knows. If one can transform the three poisons into the three virtues and transform the six sense faculties into the six spiritual powers, then, by transforming each of these, one turns from ordinary to sagehood: ordinary beings are sages, and sages are ordinary beings.

If one cannot transform them, an ordinary being is turned by things. People use them every day without knowing; they remain busy all day, with no foundation on which to rely. If one can transform them, one gathers the myriad things back into oneself. Though busy all day, this does no harm. One eats all day without ever biting through a single grain of rice; one wears clothes all day without a single thread hanging upon one. One acts all day, yet has never acted.

When one can transform in this way, one intermingles freely with the realm of Māra; dwelling amid dust, one is unstained by dust; being amid desire, one is without desire. Body and mind are one suchness; within and without, nothing remains. One must become continuous and undivided with the empty kalpa itself, so that form and shadow do not remain, not the slightest thing is established, and the whole essence stands openly revealed. As soon as there is the slightest mote of dust, empty space is born throughout the realm, and one falls into birth and death. Simply turn the light back and contemplate yourself: no body can be found. Since my body is absent, ignorance too is absent.

The sūtra says, “Only when ignorance is forever cut off can the Buddha Way be accomplished.” Yet even this single word “Buddha” cannot be obtained; searching for even the root of the word, it too cannot be obtained.

An ancient said, “One who has not even enough ground on which to set an awl is called a person who has finished the matter, a person of the Way without mind.” “Do not say that no-mind is the Way; no-mind still stands separated by one barrier.” Tell me, what is that barrier?

Do you understand? A single white cloud stretches across the valley mouth; how many returning birds have lost their nests.

[And Thus No Aging and Death]

Once the extinction of ignorance is attained, there is no aging and death. The cultivation of all Buddhas reaches only the place where there is no body. Once the body is absent, how can birth and death exist? Not seeing a body is the Buddha’s seeing.

The sūtra says, “If there is no mark of self, mark of person, mark of sentient being, or mark of life span, one is a bodhisattva. If there are marks of self, person, sentient

being, or life span, one cannot be called a bodhisattva.” Sentient beings are inverted and deluded, deceived by the illusory scenes before their eyes. Their movements and shadows change; following things, they drift and turn. Because they cling to self and person, their deluded minds do not cease.

Through distant kalpas as numerous as dust motes, self and person have not been eliminated. Clinging to sounds and forms, one falls into birth and death; even counteracting what lies before one involves arising and ceasing. But for one who sees the nature, there is no dharma before one and no sentient being either. Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings—these three are without distinction: the equal, true Dharma Realm. The Buddha does not liberate sentient beings. Viewing all as one body, the myriad dharmas return to the One. Upon reaching this point, let birth be born, aging grow old, illness become ill, and death die. One who has returned home does not see birth and death, nor arising and ceasing.

An ancient said, “Not seeing a single dharma is the Tathāgata; only then may one be called Avalokiteśvara.” Heaven and hell, the six realms and four modes of birth—all are illusory transformations. For one who has awakened completely and thoroughly, they have no connection at all; naturally, the whole body is let go. “All conditioned phenomena are impermanent and all is empty: this is the Tathāgata’s great perfect enlightenment.”

Tell me: once one has died and been cremated, where does one go?

Do you understand? Beneath the shadowless tree, one whistles at the moon and chants to the wind. Before the seamless stūpa, one settles one’s body and establishes one’s life!

[And Also No Extinction of Aging and Death] Those who study the Way are like someone peeling a banana plant: stripping away one layer and then another, until everything has been stripped away and there is nowhere to begin. Returning to the source and reverting to the origin, they attain the emptiness of the five aggregates, as though unborn, as though burned away. At the place where emptiness is not emptiness, the entire body is forgotten; no trace remains. The whole body is hands and eyes, and not the slightest mote of dust is established. Even the name cannot be obtained. The twelve links of dependent origination, the six perfections and myriad practices, and the ascetic practices of the dhūta are all suddenly cast off. One becomes like withered wood, like dead ashes—someone who understands nothing whatsoever.

An ancient said, “It is not a matter of stilling the mind or eliminating deluded thoughts; it is simply that there is nothing to deliberate.” If one still speaks of birth, death, cause, effect, mind, or nature: “Mind is the faculty, dharmas are the dust; the two are like marks upon a mirror. Only when the marks and grime are entirely

removed does the light first appear." Only when mind and dharmas are both forgotten does one reach the ground where there is no birth and death. When both person and dharma are forgotten, what is there then?

Do you understand? At midnight, a wooden man puts on his boots and goes away; at dawn, a stone woman returns wearing a hat.

[No Suffering, Origination, Cessation, or Path] Those of the Lesser Vehicle strive diligently day and night, practicing the six perfections and myriad practices while seeking dharmas outside the mind. To escape the four noble truths, leave the three realms, and avoid rebirth—this is impossible. The Buddhas appear in the world for the great cause and condition; they do not use the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle to liberate the multitude of beings. Those of the Mahāyāna learn the Dharma of non-contrivance, sit upright contemplating true reality: "The many sins are like frost and dew; the sun of wisdom can dispel them."

In a quiet place, gather in the mind, sit upright and unmoving, and contemplate all dharmas as having nothing whatsoever. Turn the light back upon the four great elements: though there is a body, it is not the essence of awareness; being without marks is what reveals the true. Know for oneself the empty quiescence. Now, knowing this empty quiescence, one suddenly becomes utterly free and pure. This is effort without effort, indestructible through long kalpas, suchness unmoved, clear and ever quiescent. All dharmas, from the very beginning, have always been marked by quiescent cessation.

When the Buddha's disciples have completed the practice of the Way, they will become Buddhas in future lives. Adorned by the powers of samādhi and wisdom, there is neither delusion nor awakening, neither suffering nor medicine, neither origination nor cessation, neither path nor virtue, neither wisdom nor ignorance: "Originally there is not a single thing; the bright mirror is not a stand either." Upon reaching this point, cultivation and realization do not yield awakening, and defilement cannot be found. One directly transcends into the ground of the Tathāgata.

Do you wish to see the Tathāgata? Dense bamboo does not obstruct the flowing stream; high mountains cannot hinder white clouds from flying.

[No Wisdom and Also No Attainment] This line turns the light back upon oneself: it is always unobtainable, so how could there be attainment? There is neither person nor Buddha; it is not mind, not Buddha, not a thing. All sages and worthies are like lightning flashing past. At this point, it is like a thief entering an empty house: there is nothing to gain. Free from all kinds of views, with the whole body having nothing on which to depend, one's own nature is pure; truly, there is not a single dharma that can engage the mind.

“Originally, a dharma was entrusted; once it was entrusted, it was said that there was no dharma. Each must awaken for oneself; once awakened, there is no dharma that is not absent.” There is no gain or loss, no advancing or cultivating. Dīpaṅkara Buddha conferred no prediction through any dharma. The moment there is even the slightest sense in one’s breast of gain or loss—‘I can,’ ‘I understand,’ ‘I have awakened,’ ‘I have comprehended,’ ‘I am clever,’ ‘I have wisdom,’ ‘I possess the Way,’ ‘I possess virtue’—one is a person of overbearing pride. So long as the “I” is not eliminated, one follows birth and death. But one who is genuine is never like this; there is naturally a path of emergence.

What is the path of emergence? Yesterday someone came from Tiantai, then passed on toward Nanyue.

[Because There Is Nothing to Attain] When practitioners reach this point, they enter the stage of perfect and sudden teaching. Why do sentient beings wander? Unable to escape within a fixed time, it is only because they have never seen their nature. They are deficient in wisdom and cannot broadly know the immeasurable meanings of emptiness. Learning and intellectual understanding held in the breast mislead the original mind. What enters through the gate is not a family treasure. Sentient beings are harmed by this dry wisdom: they broadly peruse meanings and principles, poisoning the human mind. Stored within the breast, it becomes overbearing pride.

An ancient said, “As soon as there is the slightest trace, it is dust. A single speck in the eye, and throughout the realm empty space gives rise to blemishes.” If the speck is not removed, one can know the affairs of the world without leaving the door. Only when the speck has been completely removed does one know the person in the hut and not see the affairs outside the hut. One must investigate until one is equal to the empty kalpa, not falling into a second view, returning to the root and attaining the essential meaning. As soon as there is attainment, one clings to self and person; if self-conceit is not eliminated, one falls alive into hell.

Dharma Master Yunguang expounded so brilliantly that heavenly flowers fell in profusion, yet he did not change his greed and anger and fell into rebirth as a penned ox. In India, the Long-Clawed Brahmin expounded so well that Śakra, lord of the gods, and King Yama came to hear the Dharma. Though he was spared the sufferings of hell, he could not rise into the air. He went to see the Buddha and seek instruction; only upon hearing the Buddha did he awaken. If one wishes to transcend Buddhas and surpass patriarchs, one must be empty and quiescent in thought after thought. The world is illusory transformation; all adventitious defilements, the substance of vast empty space, sounds, and forms do not remain. One is like the world and like empty space—a person of the Way who has finished the matter, at ease and pure.

Do you wish to see a pure person of the Way? Because of me, you are able to bow to yourself; this patch-robed monk sees a ghost. Langzhou's mountains, Lizhou's waters.

[Bodhisattva] To realize the emptiness of persons is called "bodhi." To realize the emptiness of dharmas is called "sattva." To realize both persons and dharmas as empty is called wondrous awakening. Those of the Lesser Vehicle who attain the four fruits practice while clinging to marks, striving in ascetic practices, cultivating the undefiled, and cutting off dust-like delusions. When the fruition of their practice is complete, they attain the four fruits of arhatship. Like one who leaps alone, their spiritual powers are narrow and inferior; they fall within the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles and cannot respond to circumstances and benefit sentient beings.

Without seeing one's nature, one cannot become a Buddha through ten thousand kalpas. To enter the stage of perfect and sudden teaching, one must see one's nature. If one sees one's nature, then within the turning of a hand one transforms from ordinary to sagehood; through natural circumstances, one awakens to the Buddha's samādhi. With wisdom without a teacher and natural wisdom, one employs many skillful means to liberate all those lost in delusion and awakening, bringing them together to the other shore so that they no longer undergo rebirth. This is a special transmission outside the teachings: without the labor of a single inch of blade, one enters the unobstructed Dharma gate of perfect enlightenment.

What is the unobstructed Dharma gate? From here to India is more than a hundred thousand li.

[Because of Prajñāpāramitā] Through the explanations above of these six characters, one attains great wisdom, the most honored and supreme. Awakening to the prajñā of one's nature, nothing in heaven or on earth can equal it.

An ancient said, "A thousand days of studying wisdom do not equal one day of studying prajñā." Prajñā penetrates thoroughly; it is the great light treasury. It is like a person entering the sea: the farther one enters, the deeper it becomes. One opens to the Buddha's knowledge and vision, enters the Buddha's knowledge and vision, and awakens to the Buddha's knowledge and vision. One possesses great spiritual powers, various transformations, and many skillful means, manifesting different forms in response to circumstances. Adapting to circumstances to benefit beings, one guides the deluded multitude together to the other shore.

The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only. Essence and function operate together, merging completely and returning to the One. There are neither two nor three; there is only the One Vehicle Dharma. In movement and stillness, speech and conversation, every phrase is equal and does not fall into a

second. Viewing all as one body, this is the equal, true Dharma Realm. There are no sentient beings to liberate, so how could there be distinctions? With the whole body having nothing on which to depend and the fruition of practice complete, this is called “pāramitā.” Master Si has swallowed all the Buddhas of the three times in a single mouthful.

Do you understand? A broken mirror does not shine again; fallen flowers are hard to return to their branches.

[The Mind Is Without Hindrance] At this point, one awakens to the wondrous principle of true emptiness: vast and penetrating as empty space, pure in its original nature. The Tathāgata and all sentient beings are equally empty in nature. In all cultivation, there are truly no two; one transcends the states of obstruction and nonobstruction.

An ancient said: “The mind is one with the realm of empty space; it reveals the Dharma of empty space and realizes the sustaining of empty space.” There is neither is nor is-not: outer purity, inner purity, and purity both within and without; outer emptiness, inner emptiness, and emptiness both within and without. In its very substance, it is emptiness. Before heaven and earth existed, this emptiness already existed. There was something undifferentiated, born before heaven and earth. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth; the named is the mother of the myriad things. In the Great Beginning and Great Origin, the Great Subtlety and Great Ultimate: look for it and it cannot be seen; listen for it and it cannot be heard; grasp for it and it cannot be obtained. Meet it and its head cannot be seen; follow it and its rear cannot be seen. Even five eyes cannot discern its trace, and two kinds of hearing cannot hear its sound.

The Sixth Patriarch said: “I have one thing: above, it supports heaven; below, it supports earth. No one recognizes it. If you see it directly even once, you surpass the Buddhas and patriarchs. You leave the three realms and do not revolve in rebirth. One must personally acknowledge and trust it, be able to safeguard realization, attain the unobstructed Dharma, and be utterly free of doubt.”

Do you understand? A three-year-old child carries a flower drum; an eighty-year-old man rolls an embroidered ball.

[Without Hindrance] A sūtra says: “Why do you not see the place where I do not see? If you do not see the place where I do not see, it is naturally not a thing.” How can it be other than oneself? Realize the characteristics of all dharmas; bow before them as before empty space, relying on nothing and supported by nothing. It is like hundreds and thousands of lamps illuminating one room, their light spreading everywhere. All transformations and illusory realms present no hindrance here. Going east, there is no end; going west, there is no limit. Freely extending in all

directions, there is neither going nor coming. Illusory scenes cannot confine it; its original source and intrinsic nature are naturally genuine. Through long kalpas it is not destroyed. Its pure substance has neither coming nor going, neither change nor difference; therefore it is called the Tathāgata.

Do you wish to see the Tathāgata? To the south is Tiantai; to the north is Wutai.

[Therefore] The single word “therefore” is complete and ultimate. It cannot be spoken of, cannot be spoken of. Even when spoken, it cannot be expressed; because it cannot be expressed, it is called “therefore.” That is, there is no Dharma that can be spoken; this is called teaching the Dharma.

[Without Fear] Realize the emptiness of intrinsic nature, and east and west cannot be distinguished, north and south cannot be divided. One is not confined by brightness or darkness and does not make companions of the myriad dharmas. One comes and goes without companions, beyond the sight even of the Buddha-eye. Ever walking alone, ever proceeding alone, those who realize it travel together on the road to nirvāṇa. Looking up to heaven, there is no end; entering the earth, there is no limit. Mountains, rivers, stone walls, earth, water, fire, and wind—coming and going among them, there is no obstruction at all.

Without moving from the bodhimaṇḍa, in a single instant one travels throughout the dharma realm. With a turn of the palm, one goes a thousand li; on the return journey, one turns as though flying. Yin and yang cannot alter one. The four noble and six ordinary realms cannot bind one; a thousand sages can do nothing about it. Without attachment and without hindrance, it remains thus through long kalpas. This is called the freely self-mastering Great Awakened Golden Immortal. For ages it has transcended Buddhas and surpassed patriarchs, beyond all doubt. It is ultimate perfect enlightenment, pervading the ten directions.

Do you wish to see this person? The white-haired child’s wisdom still grows; in the dead of night, he crosses the vastness. He comes and goes spontaneously without interruption, needing neither boat nor float.

[Far from Inverted Deluded Thoughts] If you wish to be far from them, first cut off greed and desire and eliminate the thirst of attachment, for attachment is the root. When arousing the resolve for cultivation, first realize your true nature; attachment and desire will naturally cease. Sentient beings revolve in rebirth, their inversions never stopping. Since kalpas past, lacking faith in prajñā, they have wandered through birth and death. Even today, deluded by illusory circumstances, they cling to the five desires. Their karmic consciousness is vast and confused; day and night they remain inverted. Bound by this illusory body, their three karmas are darkened, and they neither awaken nor know. Suddenly realizing impermanence, they know this to

be a passing illusion. Thought after thought changes and perishes. With sudden awakening, they know that this body ultimately has no substance.

An ancient said: “The sage has no self and no fixed attachment; no necessity and no ego; no reliance and no support; no obscurity and no brightness; no name and no form; no strength and no weakness; no purity and no defilement; no establishment and no action; no arising and no ceasing; no abiding and no silence; no words and no speech; no thought and no deliberation.” Every path of language is cut off, and the activity of mind ceases. Truly, there is nothing to attain; attainment is non-attainment, yet the Way ever remains.

If one hears the Way in the morning, one may die content in the evening! Once dead and cremated, there is no hunger or thirst, no cold or heat, no rising or falling, no sleep or waking, no six sense faculties or nine apertures, no four hundred and four illnesses, no eighty-four thousand worms, and never again any inverted deluded thoughts. If one does not awaken in this way, then in the pure realm, as soon as a single thought turns toward Jambudvīpa, eight thousand years have already passed. Understanding occurs in an instant; failure to understand lasts kalpas as numerous as dust motes.

Dying and being born, turning and turning without awakening, they sleep through a long dream without waking. For myriad kalpas, inversion continues without end. Inverted and confused, they die and are born again, are born and die again; waking from one dream, they enter another. Like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, they circulate through the world, speaking of dreams within dreams, with no end in sight. If someone breaks through completely and penetrates beyond, they are forever freed from inversion, and dreams and illusions are suddenly cut off.

But tell me, where do they go? A thousand sages seek their traces and cannot find them; their whole body is hidden within the great void.

[Ultimate Nirvāṇa] Examine this body in reverse: originally, these four great elements did not exist. Deluded about oneself and pursuing things, one takes a thief for one’s son, mistakenly regarding the four great elements and six sense faculties as oneself. Since beginningless time, all sentient beings have falsely imagined and clung to self, person, sentient being, and life span. They take up the four inversions, remain unaware, and cannot be liberated.

Suddenly awakening, one never departs from the present thought, day or night. One becomes self-aware and self-illuminating, illuminating the five aggregates until, from dust-mote kalpas onward, they are seen to have been originally nonexistent. Vastly open, all is suddenly empty. There truly is no mark of self, just as with the nature of perfect enlightenment. Originally there is neither bodhi nor nirvāṇa, neither

becoming a Buddha nor not becoming a Buddha. An ancient said: “If one realizes that there is no self or person, one wanders freely beyond the six sense objects.”

“Ultimate” means exhaustion. When dharmas are exhausted, one is utterly open and without self; the myriad conditions suddenly cease, leaving nothing within or without, clear and ever quiescent. “When arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent extinction is bliss.” Let the whole body go; leave behind the four propositions and cut off the hundred negations. Knowing and views become non-knowing and non-seeing. This is nirvāṇa; hence it is called “nirvāṇa.”

What is nirvāṇa? At arm’s length, one does not see the master’s face.

[The Buddhas of the Three Times] Past, future, and present. In the past Adornment Kalpa there were one thousand Buddhas. There are three thousand Buddhas of the three times, and also Buddhas throughout limitless kalpas—unspeakably many, unspeakably many. Their number cannot be exhausted. Simply sit quietly and contemplate that past, present, and future are all of one substance, like empty space.

It is not a differentiated characteristic, not its own characteristic, and not another’s characteristic; it is neither without characteristics nor grasped as a characteristic. It is not this shore, not the other shore, and not midstream. Contemplate the body as quiescent extinction, never annihilated. If a person suddenly awakens to this and directly takes it up, the far-reaching empty kalpas are all contained in the present moment. When light moves and the earth shakes, self and dharmas are both forgotten. One does not see past, future, or present. Reaching the ultimate ground of exhaustion and inexhaustibility, this is emptiness of emptiness. Self, no-self, and self-self are all unobtainable; emptiness and form too are absent, and the three times are naturally empty. It is not that consciousness is extinguished into emptiness; the nature of consciousness is itself empty. The former limit and latter limit are empty; therefore the middle limit too is empty, yet one does not fall into emptiness.

Do you wish to see the Buddhas of the three times? Zhenzhou radishes are still manageable, but Qingzhou cloth shirts are even more vexing.

[Therefore, Relying on Prajñāpāramitā] This phrase is the mother of the Buddhas of the three times; from it flow the Buddhas of the ten directions. Relying on this phrase in cultivation, one perfects the fruition of practice and attains unsurpassed perfect awakening. Cultivating apart from this phrase, even through many kalpas and with diligent hardship, one may hope to realize the Way, but this belongs to the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle and falls within the sphere of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and solitary realizers. Conditioned dharmas can never accomplish all the noble fruits.

One must always be diligent, yet so long as one retains a sense of personal ability, one should rely on the Dharma of prajñāpāramitā. To attain anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi is not to attain anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi; this is called anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. There is no practice beyond this; it is the supreme and ultimate standard, the unsurpassed, right, and true fruition. This alone is the one great matter; the other two are not true—the perfect and sudden supreme vehicle. If one seeks another practice outside this, one cannot go beyond this Dharma. This is a special transmission outside the teachings. When the World-Honored One finally held up a flower and Mahākāśyapa smiled, the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye was entrusted to Mahākāśyapa.

This Dharma directly sees one's own nature and admits of no prediction of Buddhahood. The position of perfect and sudden awakening stands alone as the Dharma standard. One consults a good spiritual friend and relies on the teacher's instructions; when conditions are ripe, one accords with awakening to perfect and sudden realization. The teaching allows no personal favoritism. If there is a deliberating mind that transmits and receives, it is the dharma of non-Buddhist paths. Entrusting, transmitting, gaining, losing, teaching, and receiving are all heterodox views of non-Buddhist paths, the root of birth and death.

The Buddhas of the three times and the six generations of patriarchs cultivated and realized for themselves. In our school there are no verbal formulations, nor is there a single dharma given to anyone. If there were a dharma to bestow as a prediction, it could not be called Śākyamuni. If you have been misled by others' teachings, you must quickly spit them out. In general, whatever one does for others must flow forth from oneself. The priceless treasure functions without exhaustion; benefiting beings and responding to their capacities, one is never miserly. Those of superior capacity hear once and awaken a thousand times, possessing great dhāraṇī. Those of middling and lesser capacity hear much yet believe little. This Dharma, difficult to believe, is a rare matter.

Do you understand? Beneath the moon, trees cast no shadows; at noon, the third watch of the night is struck.

[Attaining Anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi] This is Sanskrit: "a" means without; "anuttara" means higher; "samyak" means right; and "sambodhi" means true awakening. It is called unsurpassed right truth, and is also called attaining perfect awakening. These four words must be directly seen; only after seeing the Way does one cultivate the Way. The five thousand and forty-eight volumes expound these four words, yet can never exhaust them.

The Buddhas of the past could not exhaust it even in speaking of it. All the worthy and noble ones, and the Buddhas of the three times, rely on these four words;

through cultivation and realization, all return to the noble fruits. The Buddhas of the three times, from their first arousal of the resolve, sought these four words and each attained the fruition, perfectly accomplishing equal and wondrous enlightenment. If sentient beings of the latter age cultivate according to this Dharma of prajñāpāramitā and samyak-saṃbodhi, they will awaken suddenly and openly, directly see unsurpassed right truth, know for themselves that they will become Buddhas, and directly transcend the noble fruits.

Do you wish to see unsurpassed right truth? Mountains, rivers, and the great earth wholly reveal the Dharma King's body.

[Therefore Know Prajñāpāramitā] The Buddhas of the past, compassionate toward sentient beings, employed a hundred kinds of wisdom and skillful means, benefiting beings according to their capacities. Clay shrines and molded images, yellow scrolls and red rollers, all language, teachings of cause and teachings of fruition—all employ provisional names to guide sentient beings. Heavens and hells, the ranks of Buddhas, the three worthy and ten noble stages, pratyekabuddhas and śrāvakas, the four noble and six ordinary realms—all are guides arranged in sequence. Suddenly awakening and seeing one's own intrinsic nature, one surpasses the ranks of the Buddhas and directly enters the perfectly sudden stage of the Tathāgata, where no name is established. If one does not see one's nature and instead seeks outwardly, one will never succeed.

Awakening may have its year, month, day, and hour—through what event was this matter illuminated? Those who study the Way must first have awakening. If not, then apart from written words, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, they must urgently investigate for themselves. Once they suddenly awaken, fellow cultivators and fellow students cultivate and awaken together, realize and verify together, accord together and share the Way together; all good and noble persons return to one place. But if one merely studies intellectual understanding and runs about seeking from others, each clings to the heterodox views of non-Buddhist paths. Their paths through birth and death differ, and they undergo retribution according to karma; they cannot speak together.

Have you not seen Subhūti? He cultivated for kalpas as numerous as dust motes, yet until he came before Śākyamuni's assembly, he had attained only an understanding of emptiness. At the first Vaipulya assembly, when the Diamond Sūtra asked about the "four-line verse," he suddenly awakened completely. With tears and sobs, he lamented: "With the wisdom-eye I had before, I had never heard this sūtra." The Buddhas of the three times all emerge from this sūtra. What is this sūtra?

Do you wish to recognize this sūtra? To the west, Aparagodānīya; to the north, Uttarakuru.

[It Is the Great Spiritual Mantra] This mantra is also the mind-mantra fully possessed by sentient beings, and also the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate of sentient beings. Having obtained this Dharma gate, one possesses great spiritual powers: restraining what is deviant and establishing what is right, transforming the great earth into gold, and churning the Yangtze River into clarified butter. Upon the tip of a single hair, one manifests jeweled Buddha lands; within a single mote of dust, one turns the great Dharma wheel. Taken up freely at hand, it can kill people and bring people to life. When this spiritual mantra gives rise to a thought or stirs a thought, non-Buddhist paths are terrified to the core. When one turns back to the truth and returns to the source, the palaces of Māra tremble. It is the Tathāgata's secret spiritual mantra!

Do you wish to know this mantra? Spiritual powers and wondrous functioning: carrying water and hauling firewood.

[It Is the Great Bright Mantra] The mind's intrinsic luminosity manifests! This mantra illuminates heaven and earth, blazing through the cosmos. It pervades and covers the three-thousand great-thousand world system; its light shines everywhere, universally illuminating the ten directions and encompassing the dharma realm. The great light treasury surpasses the sun and moon; there is nowhere it does not illuminate. This is the great bright mantra.

Do you wish to know this mantra? There is no need to await the moon before digging a pond; once the pond is complete, the moon comes of itself.

[It Is the Unsurpassed Mantra] This mantra is supreme; none surpasses it. It is the king of all mantras. This mantra is foremost. Even if other spiritual mantras are placed above this mantra, they can never equal it. All myriad dharmas issue from the mind-mantra. Nothing can transcend it; thus, it is the unsurpassed mantra.

Do you wish to see this mantra? A bamboo-root whip beneath Mount Staff Grove.

[It Is the Unequaled Mantra] This mantra is boundless and incomparable. How much less can any other mantras, when compared with this mind-mantra, ever equal it. This mantra is rare in the world. To speak of this mantra, which is difficult to believe, one must personally see this mantra. Each person must acknowledge it for themselves. It cannot be spoken of, cannot be spoken of.

Do you wish to see this mantra? Three pounds of flax; a two-legged camel conceals the Northern Dipper.

[It Can Remove All Suffering] The Buddha, in his compassionate concern for sentient beings who have fallen into the Sahā world, wander through kalpa after kalpa, and suffer without end, employs various skillful means to rescue and liberate sentient

beings, leading them all to return to the Land of Ultimate Bliss. The World-Honored One himself lamented: “In past kalpas, I once assumed great bodies; my accumulated bones were like Mount Sumeru, and the milk I drank from my mother was like the waters of the great ocean—not to mention the bodies of every kind.”

The Buddha, in his great compassion, appeared in the world to rescue the bewildered multitudes and lead them all out of the burning house. Yet sentient beings cling greedily to the five desires and have no prospect of escape. If someone truly believes that Bodhidharma came from the West to point directly to the mind and enable people to see their nature and become Buddhas, keeps this constantly in mind, and suddenly sees their nature, they will know for themselves that they are to become a Buddha: this mind is Buddha. They will seek to leave the burning house, forever escape rebirth in saṃsāra, and no longer undergo birth.

Trusting in oneself, one goes on without turning back, awaiting only Maitreya’s descent into the world; then, according to circumstances, one benefits beings, manifests various forms, employs various skillful means, and transforms and liberates the multitudes. The sages of old endured diligent hardship for a long time before they could see their own original nature. Thought after thought, everywhere, one encounters it. Tell me: in the end, where does one go?

Do you understand? Everywhere one encounters the road home; at every moment one returns to one’s native place. Throughout past and present, this has become an evident fact. Why wait for further deliberation?

[True and Not False] All Buddhas speak this spiritual mantra to liberate sentient beings; it is true and not false. It is not inconsistent speech or deceptive speech: “Realize the true characteristic, where there is neither self nor dharmas, and in an instant extinguish the karma of Avīci.” “All appearances are illusory.” Only this appearance of no appearance is the true appearance. Though the great thousandfold world system should utterly perish, this appearance does not perish. Why does it not perish? Because it is one with the great thousandfold world system. The master of perishing and not perishing is originally present. If you wish to know the deathless person within this hermitage, how could it be apart from this very bag of skin? The bag of skin will certainly perish, but this master will not perish. An ancient said: “Ancient bones all crumble and scatter, but one thing remains ever numinous.”

The sūtra says: “I have a priceless maṇi jewel tied within my garment. Investigating day and night, I suddenly see the maṇi jewel.” People do not recognize that they have personally received it within the treasury of the Tathāgata. Yet even so, seeing the Way is easy, while guarding the Way is difficult.

Do you wish to see this jewel? In the morning, watch the clouds drift in sheets; at dusk, hear the water murmuring.

[Therefore He Spoke the Prajñāpāramitā Mantra] This sentence concludes the preceding various skillful means. All words return to one; endowed with the great dhāraṇī, they return together to the Dharma of one mind.

The sūtra says: “One should contemplate the nature of the dharma realm: all is made by mind alone.” The deluded call it emotional consciousness and undergo rebirth in saṃsāra after death. The awakened know it as the secret spiritual mantra and attain the Dharma of the unborn. The Tathāgata has secret words; Kāśyapa has the secret treasury. If one awakens to this spiritual mantra and single-mindedly receives and upholds it, one’s merit and practice will be fulfilled. Constantly uphold this mantra, and ghosts and spirits will stay far away; the devas will listen in stillness and always rejoice.

Do you wish to see this mantra? It is not outside, not inside, not in between, nor within or without. Tell me, where is it?

Do you understand? Shang da ren, qiu yi ji—listen closely, listen closely!

[Then He Spoke the Mantra, Saying] The four “gate”s are repeated, protecting those who uphold the sūtra and never leaving their side. Whether recited forward or backward, these four “gate”s bring fulfillment to every worldly aspiration.

Do you understand? After rain, the moss is moist; when spring arrives, the grass grows of itself.

[Gate, Gate] Turn the light back upon yourself, and suddenly emptiness is realized; within emptiness, there is further emptiness. When emptiness itself is no longer seen, all conditioned relations suddenly cease. All good and evil done in the past, together with the illusory five aggregates, are swept clean away. The toil of worldly dust and deluded thoughts are all suddenly removed, leaving not the slightest thread hanging in vast empty space. The first “gate” means the emptiness of persons. The second “gate” means the emptiness of dharmas. Persons and dharmas are both empty, and the two emptinesses are entirely forgotten. Therefore it is said, “Gate, gate.”

Do you understand? There is no need to hang up a stone mirror; when day breaks, all becomes clear of itself.

[Pāragate] One arrives at emptiness in which there is nothing that can be called empty; birth and death are forever cut off, and one arrives together at the other shore, never again to undergo birth. Therefore it is said, “Pāragate.”

Do you understand? When the moon rises above the central peak, it must still pass over other mountains.

[Pārasaṃgate] This is the pure realm of all Buddhas. The toil and defilement of the five desires cannot stain it. One mingles freely in Māra's realm, walks among beings of other kinds, where dragons and snakes are intermingled and ordinary beings and sages dwell together. Whether proceeding against the current or with the current, even sages cannot fathom it. Returning to the root and source, one attains the essential purport. Therefore it is said, "Pārasaṃgate."

Do you understand? Since the clay ox fought its way into the sea, no trace of it has been seen to this day.

[Bodhi Svāhā] "Bodhi" is the beginning; "svāhā" is the end.

Arouse bodhicitta and practice courageously; devote yourself to the Way day and night, undertake ascetic practices, diligently cultivate hardship, and gradually advance in cultivation without ever regressing. After long upholding diligent hardship, one suddenly awakens to the Way and realizes that intrinsic nature is empty: this is bodhi. Transcending the three realms, there is nothing to be understood and nothing to be attained; all is utterly pure. In the realm of ultimate bliss, wholesome teachings are spoken without end. Therefore it is said, "Svāhā."

Having read to this point, may you suddenly awaken with an open and expansive mind! Tears may flow in sorrowful weeping, for extreme joy turns into sorrow. If you can be thus, then, wishing to repay the Buddha's kindness, widely print and distribute this text, thereby continuing the Buddha's wisdom-life. If you do not awaken and fail to encounter one who understands, it is futile merely to speak of the year's cold.

There is one final sentence that I dare not impart: "The mandarin ducks are embroidered for you to see, but the golden needle is not passed on to another."

Complete Text of Chan Master Dadian's Commentary on the Heart Sūtra

Appendix: Chan Master Dadian (732–824), whose lay surname was Chen and whose Dharma name was Baotong, was originally from Yingchuan, Henan.

Near the end of the Kaiyuan era of the Tang dynasty, Dadian was born in Chaozhou (present-day Chaoyang). From childhood, he aspired to the life of clouds and forests. During the Dali era, together with Yaoshan Weiyan, a native of Xinfeng, he went to Xiyan, west of Chaoyang City, and took Master Huizhao as his teacher. Not long afterward, he and his Dharma brother Weiyan traveled to Mount Heng in Nanyue, paid respects to Master Shitou, and awakened to the Chan essential point.

At the beginning of the Zhenyuan era, he went to reside in Chan retreat at Waterfall Cliff on Luofu Mountain in Longchuan. In the fifth year of Zhenyuan under Emperor Dezong of the Tang (789), Dadian moved to Chaoyang and led disciples including Shanjue, Xuanying, and Zhigao in opening up White Ox Cliff on Dong Mountain in Chaoyang County.

Later, as more and more people came from near and far to seek discipleship, White Ox Cliff proved too shallow and narrow to accommodate the numerous followers. Thus, in the seventh year of Zhenyuan (791), he built Lingshan Monastery below Youling, 25 kilometers from the seat of Chaoyang County. There he propagated the Chan tradition of Caoxi's sixth generation, had more than a thousand disciples, and called himself Monk Dadian.

In the fourth year of Changqing (824), Dadian passed away. His stūpa stands to the left of Lingshan Monastery.

Dadian's writings include An Exposition of the Meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sūtra and An Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra. He also personally copied 1,500 scrolls of the Diamond Sūtra, as well as thirty copies each of the Lotus Sūtra and the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, which he stored in the mountains. An Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra and his personally copied sūtras no longer survive. Only An Explanation of the Meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sūtra remains, in an edition of the Japanese Supplementary Buddhist Canon and a facsimile edition published by the Commercial Press.