Essentials of the Pure Land Mind-Seal Dharma

Master Wang Xianglu

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I. Section on Definitive Meaning

The Pure Land is the ground of fruition that all disciples of the Buddha ultimately realize through practice. If one practices without realizing the Pure Land, it cannot be called accomplishment; hence the Western Pure Land belongs to the gate of accomplishment. All dharmas—whether dhyāna, the Esoteric Vehicle, Dharma Characteristics, precepts, or recitation of the name—are preparatory skillful means for cultivating pure karma, used to realize the Pure Land. When practice is accomplished, none of these dharmas has any further use.

Thus, the two words “Pure Land” designate the perfected virtue of the stage of fruition. This name does not denote a particular practice, and one cannot establish it as a separate gate and rank it as superior or inferior to other schools. Nor does it mean that only the West is pure and other directions defiled. Since every dharma returns to the Pure Land, the Pure Land is not another separate dharma; nor is it that only this dharma can lead one into purity while other dharmas cannot. Those who first established schools originally set out provisional methods suited to their times. Later followers began to rank the schools as superior or inferior. Some even mistakenly regard other schools as impure and become mutually opposed as fire and water. Could this have been the original aspiration of the patriarchs? Could it be the fundamental intent of the Pure Land?

“Pure” means ultimately pure; “land” means the ground of one’s original mind. Those born in the land of the West all possess the supreme virtue of purity in the mind-ground. I too must possess this pure mind before I can join those of outstanding virtue gathered in one place. The three—wholesome roots, merit and virtue, and causes and conditions—must all be fully present to come into accord with that land.

Now, if one stubbornly clings to a single gate as superior and says that dharmas are high or low, that is not the Pure Land. If one regards other schools with hostility as demonic or bizarre, one’s own mind has already entered the demonic and bizarre; that is not the Pure Land. Even without these two faults, if one covets the Pure Land Dharma gate because a Buddha comes to guide one at death, this still stems from the inferior tendency to crave convenience and dependence; that too is not the Pure Land. With such inverted views, what becomes of good roots and merit and virtue? Even if one has causes and conditions, one has already created obstacles for oneself. This self-deception arising from incorrect views is not accomplishment.

People of the highest, middling, and lowest capacities alike inherently possess the virtues of the Pure Land. Yet, regrettably, their power of vows differs; they have the essence but not its function. Hence the lament that they are neither sentient beings nor other than sentient beings.

Only because causes and conditions differ does realization and entry likewise vary. The Buddha established this Dharma gate so that beginners could plant seeds at the causal stage and first form an excellent affinity with the West; people of middling capacity, having prior causes from the past, could rely on it to realize and enter, making it a supporting condition for rebirth; and people of the highest capacity, whose fruition-ground is nearly complete, could attain accomplishment as soon as they were guided. Therefore it is said to universally embrace practitioners of all three capacities.

Moreover, the nine grades are not first divided into nine grades after rebirth; before rebirth there are already countless grades. How could one say that everyone can attain accomplishment in this very life? Now, the claim that rebirth is so easy was originally intended as an expedient means of guidance. Yet this overlooks the inferior tendencies of sentient beings: those whose resolve is not deeply earnest will ultimately refuse to practice diligently, even if further expedient methods are offered. Instead, because it is described as too easy, they take the Dharma lightly, and the resulting harms multiply.

These include: first, thinking it too easy and therefore failing to arouse an earnest resolve; second, believing that the Buddha can guide them, yet remaining confused at death, not blaming themselves but faulting the Dharma, doubting the Dharma and slandering the Buddha, thus falling into hell; third, genuine practitioners who,

after long practice, still lack assurance and consequently give rise to doubt and retreat; fourth, refusing the silver dais and insisting on awaiting the golden dais, whereby demons seize the opportunity through this greed; fifth, the sūtras say this is exceedingly difficult, yet it is instead said to be exceedingly easy, so those engaged in arduous practice will surely give rise to doubt and fear.

Any one of these is sufficient to obstruct faith, let alone so many! Therefore one must be careful in setting forth teachings. If one wishes to guide people skillfully, one need only first help them recognize the danger of suffering and arouse an earnest resolve. Why must one stubbornly uphold this principle as a fixed conclusion?

If one wishes to cultivate the Pure Land, one must first establish right faith. What is right faith? It is not merely believing that the West is the Pure Land, but believing that Buddha lands exist throughout the ten directions; the Amitābha Sūtra has already said this. This is the first point. Nor does right faith mean believing that the Pure Land refers only to that land; it also means recognizing the Pure Land of one's own intrinsic nature.

The Western Pure Land, moreover, is established by the intrinsic purity of all the superior good people. Sharing the same equal original ground, principle and phenomena interpenetrate, and all attain Buddhahood. This is the second point. One must believe that Buddha lands have no fixed definition: in the Sahā world and in the hells, distinctions yield defilement and purity, but as the Buddha sees them, there is not one that is not a Pure Land.

Sentient beings themselves give rise to illusory, impure minds and create karma. If they transform this through the power of wisdom, that very moment is the Pure Land. This is the third point. The Buddha neither comes nor goes; Amitābha is present everywhere. Practitioners obstruct their own minds and therefore do not see him. This is the fourth point. Those who understand this meaning have right faith. This is the Dharma difficult to believe; I have already discussed it in my earlier Essential Teachings on Amitābha.

The purpose of the Pure Land Dharma gate is first to purify one's intention. Thus one must cultivate one-pointedness of mind without distraction. Such one-pointedness of mind without distraction is the fruition attained after awakening, whereas Buddha-recitation through holding the name is a method of practice before realization. Buddha means awakening; Buddha-remembrance means that every thought abides in awakening. Whenever the mind has greed or anger, a single thought of awakening immediately turns it into purity.

This is the unsurpassed, perfect, sudden Dharma gate. Therefore, with one utterance of Amitābha, one suddenly transcends the grave offenses of birth and

death accumulated over eight billion kalpas. Yet although turning toward awakening is indeed swift, turning back toward delusion is also easy. Sentient beings have only an occasional single thought, rather than thought after thought; with one thought of Buddha, they then turn back to thoughts of greed and anger. Only when every thought is in the Buddha does one become continuous and undivided, leaving greed and anger no means to arise. When this matures over a long time, it is called accomplishment.

Moreover, sentient beings are caught up in a succession of thoughts and lack the steadiness of a single thought of faith. Why is this so? Because their every thought concerns people, affairs, emotions, and views: if not greed, then anger; if not anger, then ignorance. Such thoughts are brought about by unwholesome causes in body, speech, and mind. If such thoughts continue without interruption, there can be no hope of ever escaping the causes and conditions of the Sahā world. One must be like a practitioner who has realized and verified: possessing a single pure thought of faith that never retreats, even though habitual tendencies continually arise, one never loses awareness and illumination. When one's strength is sufficient and one cannot be shaken, this is called one-pointedness of mind without distraction; only then can one correspond with the Buddha.

One-pointedness of mind without distraction is the ultimate standard of cultivation leading to the Pure Land of one's intrinsic nature. But how can this be achieved? There are immeasurable Dharma gates, yet in sum they do not go beyond two approaches: primary and auxiliary.

The primary approach is called observing the mind: turning back to question oneself and maintaining earnest, vigilant awareness in all one's actions. This is called practice—cultivating within conduct. The auxiliary approach is called adopting methods: borrowing dharmas as supporting conditions to purify the mind. When the mind is pure, they have no further use. Yet the causes and conditions of Dharma gates differ; one must value what suits the recipient. Some hold the Buddha's name, some enter dhyāna, some explain principle to dispel illusory appearances, some arouse the three contemplations, and some use adverse people and circumstances for self-examination. All these are methods of Buddha-remembrance.

Even reading sūtras, paying homage to the Buddha, burning incense, making offerings, and cultivating every wholesome dharma are all Buddha-remembrance. They consist simply in having every thought accord with the Buddha's mind and pure intention, without ever losing awareness and illumination. The holding of the name in the Amitābha Sūtra is one method among the Dharma gates of Buddha-remembrance; it is not a fixed method. If there were a fixed method, it would not be Buddhadharma.

Buddha-remembrance is not difficult; being steadfast and sincere is difficult. In recent times, laoshi (, “steadfast and sincere”) has been understood as “doing one’s proper duty,” but that does not exhaust its meaning. Here, lao ( ) means unmoving, and shi ( ) means genuine: let the mind remain constantly clear and tranquil, so that when external objects, thoughts, and other appearances arise, it is not swept away by them.

Whether for one day or seven days, if there is not a single day when one is otherwise, and one becomes continuous and undivided, then one ordinarily achieves one-pointedness of mind without distraction, and at death the mind will naturally not be confused. Buddha-remembrance is not difficult; eliminating habitual tendencies is difficult.

If one does not eliminate habitual tendencies, how can one realize and enter the ground of awakening, with every thought abiding in awakening? In setting forth this discussion, I know well that those who hear it will surely regard eliminating habitual tendencies as arduous, and instead see Buddha-remembrance as a fearful path, perhaps even denouncing it as demonic talk. Yet true practitioners will certainly not dismiss these words as absurd. They will surely transform their former dependent minds and their habitual craving for ease, reversing their former conduct.

In worldly dharmas, they must strive to be loyal to the nation, filial toward their parents, friendly toward brothers, harmonious with spouses, and trustworthy with friends; they must fulfill the human way completely, taking this as Buddha-remembrance. In supramundane dharmas, they must strive to arouse great compassion, liberate sentient beings, clarify the mind-ground, penetrate original nature, realize external circumstances as empty, and sweep away accumulated habits; they must return to realizing the Pure Land, taking this as Buddha-remembrance. For the world includes both worldly and supramundane affairs, but the mind has neither this nor that, coming nor going.

Not thinking evil is Buddha-remembrance; not thinking awakening is thinking delusion. This refers to the activity of the mind and has nothing to do with oral chanting. Yet people now mistakenly take holding the Buddha’s name to be Buddha-remembrance, thereby losing its essential intent and reducing it to singing the Buddha’s name. They further take quantity as superiority, bringing on illnesses such as shortness of breath and chest pain. People then become weary, doubtful, and discouraged, and after a long time fail to gain correspondence. This is the error of an incorrect causal ground; it is lamentable indeed.

The Buddha liberates sentient beings by enabling sentient beings to liberate themselves—liberating only their own sentient beings. These sentient beings are a general term for afflictions. Afflictions are the result, while biased attachment is the

cause; and the result of biased attachment, without one's realizing it, becomes its cause in turn.

Thus, the essential intent lies first in clarifying the mind. When the mind is clear, attachment is broken. The Buddha himself did not acknowledge having taught any Dharma during forty-nine years, and further said that whoever claims the Tathāgata taught any Dharma thereby slanders the Buddha. He feared that people would cling rigidly to dharmas without knowing how to adapt, and would instead suffer their harm. Thus we know that all dharmas taught by the Buddha were provisional expedients responsive to circumstances at a particular time, not fixed methods that could never be adapted. Therefore, a dharma is ultimately not final; nor is non-contrivance itself nirvāṇa. Only those who understand this meaning can correspond with the Pure Land.

The meaning of the Amitābha Sūtra is profound and far-reaching, truly inconceivable. First, it speaks of the excellence of the people: in this assembly are all great arhats and all bodhisattvas.

In the Land of Ultimate Bliss, all are non-retrogressing, together with all the superior good people who are one lifetime away from Buddhahood. Second, it speaks of the excellence of the land: it is adorned with the seven treasures, unlike worldly treasures. Third, it speaks of the excellence of the environment: when the gentle breeze stirs, all is the flowing proclamation of Dharma sounds. Fourth, it speaks of the excellence of its essence: its light is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction; its life span is immeasurable, unlike worldly life spans; even the names of the evil realms cannot be found there. Fifth, it speaks of the excellence of its function: with wondrous flowers one makes offerings to all Buddhas of the ten directions; one need only take meals and walk in meditation. In sum, there are no sufferings, only every joy; hence it is called Ultimate Bliss.

Ultimate Bliss is without characteristics; this reveals the essence of vajra prajñā. Freedom from the four characteristics and four views of self and person, giving rise to mind without abiding, and thoroughly understanding the non-self of persons and dharmas reveal Amitābha's wondrous functioning. All culminate in realizing the Pure Land. The fundamental emphasis of the Amitābha Sūtra is self-cultivation: "one should make vows" is the first point of entry; holding the name is a supporting condition for rebirth; and one-pointedness of mind without distraction is the final mind-seal.

The Buddha neither comes nor goes. If the mind does not accord with the seal, then even if the Buddha stands before one's eyes, there is no meeting. What is this seal? It is simply this clear, tranquil Pure Land of mine. "Holding" means holding Amitābha's sacred name thought after thought without losing it, as a child

remembers its mother. Beginners must be encouraged by the two Chinese characters (“should”), as in “one should make vows.” But for a child and its mother, there is no distinction between should and should not; one should say that it is only natural. To say that it is naturally so means that this need not apply only toward Amitābha; toward all Buddhas of the ten directions, it is equally and naturally so. This is what is meant by giving rise to a single pure thought of faith.

The flavor of the Amitābha Sūtra is like tasting a sweet spring. To discern the flavor even in plain water, and distinguish spring water from ordinary water—this is to truly know flavor. If one knows only of the adornments of the seven treasures in the Western Land, yet does not recognize the adornment of merit and virtue; or understands merit and virtue but has not comprehended the meaning of attainment, then it is as distant as ten trillion Buddha lands. What the Sixth Patriarch said was intended to correct one-sided attachment; that people in the West have karmic offenses is not the meaning of the sūtra.

Yet there is no need to insist that those in the West are entirely free of karmic offenses, for some attain rebirth while carrying karma. Karma itself is an offense, as the ultimate has not yet been reached. The Western Land has not even the name of the lower realms, much less their actuality. Nevertheless, the karmic force of those newly reborn there has not yet been purified. They still possess seeds of wrongdoing, but lack the causes and conditions for these to develop into actual wrongdoing; this does not mean that they are absolutely free of karmic offenses. Therefore, after rebirth in the Western Land, they must still undertake further practice and cultivation.

Rebirth while carrying karma does not mean that people guilty of wrongdoing may be reborn there. It means that habitual tendencies remain, the seeds for wrongdoing have not yet been purified, yet the causes and conditions for rebirth have ripened. Once reborn, one is constantly in the company of all the supremely good people, and naturally, when the flower opens, one sees the Buddha. This Buddha refers to the Pure Land of one’s own nature. The flower is the flower of one’s own wisdom-mind, expressing in the strongest terms a thorough awakening to one’s intrinsic nature. If this Buddha still referred to Amitābha, then the Buddha who came to guide one at the time of rebirth would already have been seen; why wait until the flower opens?

Phrases in the Amitābha Sūtra such as “those already reborn, now being reborn, or to be reborn” mean that the mind yearns for it; rebirth need not necessarily occur after death. The sincerity of one’s aspiration during life is itself rebirth. Since mind neither comes nor goes—yet is not without coming and going—it goes according to one’s vows; there is no distinction between before death and after death.

The Sahā world of the five turbidities arises fundamentally from the turbidity of views. Yet having views does not necessarily mean turbidity; this is called the Buddha's knowledge and vision. Turbidity, however, never departs from views; hence it is called the turbidity of views. Where the turbidity of views is impure, it cannot be called a Pure Land.

The Esoteric Buddhist method of Buddha-recitation has, in brief, four meanings.

First, at the introductory level, Amitābha refers to the bhikṣu Dharmākara, who made forty-eight vows before the Buddha Lokeśvararāja and thereby brought about the present Land of Ultimate Bliss. Second, in its profound and secret sense, Amitābha means immeasurable life and immeasurable light. Third, in the secret within the secret, Amitābha is Vairocana; thus, the single gate and the universal gate are no different. Fourth, in the profound secret within the secret, Amitābha refers to inherent virtues.

These inherent virtues are possessed equally by all sentient beings. Because sentient beings have not realized the essential nature of Vairocana, they cannot give rise to the wondrous contemplation of Amitābha. For "A" ( ) is the dharmakāya, signifying original non-arising and non-ceasing; "mi" ( ) is the sambhogakāya, signifying one's own great freedom; and "tuo" ( ) is the nirmāṇakāya, signifying suchness, unmoving. That Buddha is called Amitābha because he possesses these supreme virtues and is honored for them. All sentient beings equally possess this Pure Land; how could they abandon and belittle themselves, content to remain in the inferior and lesser?

The meaning of the Pure Land has been fully explained above, so that practitioners may first understand it clearly for themselves. But how, then, should one cultivate and realize it? In recent times, the Pure Land gate has had the greatest number of students. Because it is convenient and reliable, it accords with the desire of sentient beings in the Sahā world for convenience and ease; consequently, its following has grown almost unnoticed.

I have often examined the reasons carefully. First, their faith and resolve are incomplete, and they regard themselves as too inferior. Second, because it is easy and requires little effort, their hearts lack earnest urgency. Third, their methods of practice are too disorderly, and results are very slow to appear. Fourth, when results are slow, the practice may seem tasteless; they act according to human sentiments and do not cultivate with true earnestness. Fifth, they do not understand the primary and auxiliary practices of the Pure Land, and act in an inverted manner, so that the deluded mind cannot be subdued. Thus Buddha-recitation and conduct in daily life are

cut into two separate matters and cannot function together. Sixth, most practitioners of the Pure Land enter its gate midway. They have not yet thoroughly understood the causal ground, follow what others say, and allow preconceived ideas to dominate them. Thus they establish sectarian boundaries and slander other traditions, though this is not the original intent of the teaching.

In the past, there were those who doubted and slandered Esoteric Buddhism, showing it in both their words and expressions. Then someone questioned them about the causes and conditions of the rebirth mantra and the Great Compassion Mantra. Ashamed, they awakened and no longer dared to slander it. This is an example of the same kind. Therefore, in cultivating and realizing the Pure Land, one should take the primary cause as foremost. There are also three kinds of practice. First are the Dharma causes at the causal ground: one begins through understanding, as in the various points discussed above, so that one comprehends the teaching as a whole and will not become doubtful and retreat midway.

Second are additional practices that provide supportive conditions, taking practical cultivation as their basis. For example, one should emphasize the method of reciting the name, while also practicing Chan meditation and, after leaving the meditation cushion, training in wondrous functioning amid human affairs. One may also adopt other Dharma gates as aids. Then realization through practice may come more quickly; in ordinary life one will not become lax or lament practicing for a single day and then abandoning it for ten. At the time of death, one may perhaps have a sure grasp, and attain accomplishment in this very life.

Third is complete fulfillment at the fruition ground, taking the verification of the mind-ground as primary. There are mutual verification and self-verification: mutual verification means examining one another’s gains and losses; self-verification means knowing for oneself, as one knows whether water is cold or warm. Outwardly, it is verified in phenomena; inwardly, it accords with principle; and through these it is confirmed in the mind.

These three kinds of practice must be transmitted face-to-face. A period should be set for a certain number of days; a small group of disciples should gather, choose a place to reside peacefully, and practice there. There will certainly be some point of actual realization. The former method of Buddha-recitation should appropriately be modified somewhat as follows: 1. Do not recite loudly. If there are many people, they may be divided into groups that recite in rotation; while one group recites, another group may listen.

2. It is unnecessary to use recitation beads throughout; one may form the Amitābha mudrā, which makes it easier to enter samādhi. 3. There is no need to circumambulate the Buddha while reciting. The practice of circumambulating the

Buddha is used in the Chan school after prolonged sitting to dispel drowsiness; here, it only increases distraction and is quite needless. Therefore, rather than reciting with a large assembly, it is better for a small number of people to recite together. The more people there are, the less benefit is gained.

II. Section on Reverence

— Constantly recollect and revere Amitābha Buddha of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, the two holy ones, and all the holy and worthy beings of the ocean-like assembly.

— Constantly recollect and revere Amitābha Buddha of the lands of ultimate bliss in the ten directions, together with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, the two holy ones.

— Constantly recollect and revere all Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten directions, as well as the adornments of all Buddha lands.

— Constantly recollect and revere Amitābha Buddha and the two holy ones in the Land of Ultimate Bliss of one's own nature.

— Constantly recollect and revere all practitioners in the worlds of the ten directions, that they may in due order attain Amitābha's immeasurable adornments of inherent virtue.

— Constantly recollect and revere the immeasurable sentient beings in the worlds of the ten directions, that all may attain the immeasurable adornments of the future Amitābha.

— Constantly recollect and revere all beings who create karma in ignorance, as well as my enemies and others of their kind, that all may attain the adornment of Amitābha equally present in their own nature. I now respectfully dedicate these merits to them, regarding them all with equal compassion and benefiting them with the water of the merit and virtue of great compassion.

III. Section on Wondrous Contemplation

— Contemplate Amitābha's name, written in Chinese with the three characters . It points to the inherent virtue of the Pure Land shared by all sentient beings, not the exclusive possession of that one Buddha. Contemplate how each person shares in this virtue.

— Contemplate the Western Pure Land: for those cultivating pure karma, it is the supreme shortcut. It wonderfully embraces practitioners of all three capacities. Those of lesser capacity first plant wholesome causes; those of middling capacity enter through this gate and will certainly attain rebirth after death, while in this life they may hope for accomplishment; those of superior capacity directly realize the wondrous truth of the unborn through it; and those of the highest capacity, upon hearing it once, accept it with faith and will attain unsurpassed enlightenment.

— Contemplate that wondrous functioning lies only in one's own mind. Those who cultivate the Pure Land often cling one-sidedly to phenomena, thereby forming rigid attachments; Chan meditators often cling one-sidedly to the principle of emptiness and neglect practical cultivation; practitioners of the Esoteric Vehicle often favor ritual forms and rely on ritual services. None is willing to integrate these approaches and realize entry. Fixed practices must be applied flexibly, while their living meaning must be investigated steadfastly. During formal cultivation, one must keep one's feet firmly on the ground; when not cultivating, one must let everything go at once. There is no fixed method; therefore, wondrous functioning lies in the mind.

— Contemplate the Pure Land as my own original land. Only when my land is pure can it accord with that land in the Way.

IV. Section on Pure Practice

— Pure conduct takes awareness as its foundation. Awareness makes one attentive to the causes one sets in motion. With that care, impure conduct naturally ceases.

— Pure conduct takes awareness as its foundation. When the mind is aware, do not deceive yourself or put on false appearances. Not putting on false appearances is true pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes equanimity of mind as its foundation. With equanimity, maintain a compassionate mind and do not kill; nor will one suffer from the fault of slighting or disparaging later students.

— Pure conduct takes freedom from anger as its foundation. When you see another's faults, regard them with equanimity and compassion. If you act out of hatred of evil, this is not skillful means and cannot be called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes humility as its foundation. Always reflect on your own faults and remain humble and respectful, like a bridge; this is called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes all-encompassing contemplation as its foundation. Always contemplate that among Buddhas there is no distinction of greater or lesser, of this or that, and no view of superiority or inferiority, high or low. Contemplate that all

sentient beings possess Buddha-nature: when I give rise to greed, anger, and ignorance, I kill my own Buddha; when I engage in killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, I kill another's Buddha. Such all-encompassing contemplation is called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes non-discrimination as its foundation. The adornments of both the Western Pure Land and the Sahā world arise from one's own mind. Defiled perceptions arise from oneself. Non-discrimination is called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes no-thought as its foundation. No-thought means being free from clinging and bondage. Let the mind always be empty and pure; when encountering circumstances, do not be deluded; when circumstances pass, do not retain them. Thus one attains great freedom. This is called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes actual practice as its foundation. If one merely says, "These bodhisattva practices are not something I can undertake," and does not establish aspirations to advance and diligently put them into practice, this cannot be called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes pure dharmas as its foundation. All dharmas have the characteristic of emptiness. In terms of their essence, they are originally neither arising nor ceasing; in terms of their function, nothing is set aside. When making use of them, one still takes up dharmas, while always remembering that all dharmas are originally illusory and employing them for wondrous functioning. Neither abandoning nor grasping—this is called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes flexible application as its foundation. For those who practice Buddha-remembrance, it is used to gather in the mind. When the mind has been gathered in to the point that it cannot be found, there is nothing left to gather in. This is called pure conduct.

— Pure conduct takes no purity as its foundation. No purity means not clinging to purity, for to establish purity is to establish defilement. When these two views stand opposed, it cannot be called purity. Just as the hand was originally not defiled, and defilement is only temporary, so too, the mind has no inherent existence; illusory appearances are established because of circumstances. When nothing at all can be obtained and there is no practice to be practiced, one enters the Pure Land.

V. Section on Recitation Practice

Pure karma takes each thought-moment as its basis, and the Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation should be divided as follows:

A. Holding the Name: Hold fast to and take refuge in the sacred name of Amitābha Buddha, saying, “Namo Amitābha Buddha.” Namo represents the self who takes refuge, and Amitābha is the Buddha in whom refuge is taken. Thus, self and Buddha unite as one; this is called holding the Name. When the mind holds to the Buddha’s name, it does not hold to worldly affairs; all confusion and afflictions are naturally removed, and all suffering and adversity are thereby crossed over.

B. Visualization: Contemplate the compassion and freedom of Amitābha Buddha and the bodhisattvas, and contemplate the various adornments of the Western Pure Land. When the mind contemplates that realm, it does not contemplate worldly affairs, and all confusion and afflictions naturally dissolve.

C. Longing for Joy: Long for and aspire to the various ultimate joys of that land. When the mind longs for that realm, it no longer longs for all the incomplete joys of the world. The preceding method was called holding the Name; this one is called mindfulness in the mind. To keep the mind on this method rather than others—only then is it called Buddha-remembrance.

D. Fearing Suffering: Suffering and joy are inherently interdependent. Longing for that joy, one consequently fears this suffering; fearing it, one urgently seeks liberation from it, and the aspiration for rebirth then becomes earnest. If one recites the Buddha’s name while seeking worldly blessings, it is like burning incense in a toilet: although the fragrance pervades everywhere, it does not leave the stench behind. How can this be called purity? Yet seeking wealth and obtaining wealth, or seeking children and obtaining children, serves to lead beginners into the Buddha Way; it is not the ultimate supramundane Dharma. If one truly practices Buddha-remembrance, every thought-moment abides in awakening; such inferior views will certainly not arise.

E. Cultivation: This method has approximately ten guidelines:

1. Concentrate single-mindedly on this six-character mantra.

2. Do not recite aloud. Move the lips slightly and use vajra recitation.

3. Form the Amitābha meditation mudrā with the hands.

4. Regard oneself as pure and nondual with the Buddha.

5. Do not use prayer beads; instead, measure by time, taking one hour as one session.

6. Pay no attention to any external affairs. Should thoughts arise, do not try to drive them away; simply attend to your own recitation. Let go of distractions and gather

the mind back to recitation. After several hundred or thousand repetitions, one will naturally settle into the practice and enter samādhi.

7. Use the intensive method, taking forty-eight days as one period and practicing no more than ten sessions each day. Gradually increase from seven sessions to ten; at times, one may reduce them to eight or nine sessions. Averaging twenty thousand recitations a day, one will complete more than four hundred sessions and reach about one million recitations. With the mind wholly focused on this, one will naturally enter and realize samādhi.

8. Use the gradual method, practicing one session each day. This can also calm the mind and nurture one's nature. Those with worldly responsibilities need not be overly ambitious.

9. Make vows and seek awakening; do not seek other things. With awakening, one will naturally cease to long for worldly pleasures and seek liberation instead, so that the aspiration for rebirth will naturally become earnest. Even if one has no affinity with the Western Pure Land, one will surely be reborn in the Buddha-land of another world. Otherwise, one will remain forever sunk in the Sahā world of the five turbidities.

10. Detailed rules for cultivation: This is a method of entry for beginning Buddhist practitioners. First gather in the wild mind and rein in this unbridled horse. It is like a child holding a sharp blade: one exchanges it for candy, but this still cannot be called ultimate. Again, if the child's hand has become sticky with candy, it must be wiped clean until it is pure and empty. Therefore, the instructions are set forth below:

1. Choose a quiet room and gather about five or six fellow practitioners. Set a period of forty-eight days. The room temperature should not be too high. For all arrangements, consult the Heart-of-Heart Dharma practice instructions in Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935).

2. Practice only one session each day, each session lasting one hour. During a seven-day retreat, begin with six or seven sessions daily and gradually increase to ten sessions, making ten hours in all. When the weather is warm, rise at 2:30 each morning and sit at 3:00. One may sit for two consecutive sessions, then rest for fifteen or thirty minutes after every two sessions; the schedule may be determined as one sees fit.

3. Form the Amitābha mudrā: place both palms facing upward, with the four fingers of the right hand resting flat upon the four fingers of the left hand, and the tips of the two thumbs facing each other. This is also called the meditation mudrā of the Buddhas of the ten directions. While sitting, never release the mudrā. This is the first essential instruction. (Body mystery)

4. When sitting, either the full or half lotus posture may be used. If one is elderly and one's legs are too stiff to sit in lotus posture, one may conveniently sit with the legs crossed. However, the back of the seat must be higher than the front, with the legs lower down. The eyes should preferably be closed; opening them occasionally to look at the time does no harm.

5. During this one hour, never release the mudrā. Do not stop reciting, but do not make any sound; the lips must move slightly. This is called vajra recitation, and it is the easiest way to attain samādhi. It does not cause such problems as obstructed breath or chest pain. Moreover, while sitting, never stop the mantra. This is the second essential instruction. (Speech mystery)

6. Focus single-mindedly on the practice, with the intention of becoming empty and open, and regard yourself as a Buddha. This is the third essential instruction. When a myriad thoughts arise in confusion, as soon as you become aware of them, turn back and attend to Buddha-recitation. Let go of distractions and gather the mind back; let the distractions dissolve as the mind turns. When, in an instant, the divisions of past and future are cut off, this is the state of pure emptiness; this is the Buddha's realm. (Mind mystery)

7. Through the empowerment of the three mysteries, over time one passes from distraction into samādhi, and from awareness into emptiness. While sitting, be utterly resolute and disregard everything. Even if various bodily changes arise, do not rejoice; do not become doubtful, fearful, or angry. Nor is it necessary to practice visualization, for the mudrā is already present.

Visualization is established as a preliminary means for gathering in the mind, using it to bring the myriad dharmas back to one. But if one exerts oneself too intensely and, when visualization is accomplished, does not know how to adapt, it may instead become rigid attachment and even lead to madness through fixation. When the body and hands become numb, as though absent, and the mind is empty and still, as though without knowing, continue the secret recitation in the mouth without stopping, and keep the mudrā formed without releasing it. At times one may mistakenly recite another mantra and seem to have fallen asleep, but this is not actually so. These are signs of samādhi appearing; there is no need for alarm or doubt. And when the mind is scattered and confused, do not be afraid; simply do not attend to it, and before long it will naturally become free and at ease.

VI. Section on Functioning

Zi. Clarifying the purport: this clarifies the purport of bringing forth function. By "bringing forth function" is meant bringing forth the wonder of Buddha-

remembrance, thereby receiving its benefit for oneself. Thus, Buddha-remembrance need not necessarily take place in a Buddha hall.

Chou. Clarifying function: this explains where it is to be applied. Why do people practice Buddha-remembrance? To cut off afflictions. Afflictions do not inherently exist; because of unawareness, people vainly give rise to delusion. When delusion is shattered, afflictions naturally cease. Therefore, amid the ordinary affairs of life, one must not be apart from awareness even for a moment; this is precisely not being apart from the Buddha even for a moment. Such Buddha-remembrance means being pure in every thought and at every moment. It is present everywhere, without viewing things as this or that. One who is free and at ease in all circumstances is Buddha.

Yin. Nonduality: “nonduality” clarifies that I and the Buddha are nondual. Before the Buddha cultivated, he was no different from me; the Buddha, too, became a Buddha through cultivation. Now that he has become a Buddha, he is called a fruition Buddha. I now cultivate at the causal stage and will naturally attain the fruition of Buddhahood in the future; therefore, this is called the causal mind. In essence, they are nondual. Sentient beings are likewise. Nonduality also clarifies that bodhi and afflictions are nondual.

Worldly people do not understand the essential nature of becoming a Buddha. Accustomed to discrimination and calculation, they divide it into two separate matters. They do not know that delusion and awakening are the same thing: even when one is deluded, Buddha-nature has not been lost. Nonduality also means contemplating all words and sounds as none other than the true reality. If one sees Buddha everywhere, then everywhere is Buddha-remembrance. When one attains Buddha-remembrance at every moment and it becomes continuous and undivided, Buddha-remembrance continues of itself, even without recitation. This is to attain the wonder of bringing forth function.

Mao. Mutual respect: I respect the Buddha, and the Buddha also respects me; the Buddha regards beings without discrimination. When I respect people as Buddhas, they also respect me as a Buddha. People and I are originally no different in Buddha-nature. To respect one another and regard oneself as a disciple—this is true Buddha-remembrance. Moreover, this applies not only when facing Buddhas or people; even when facing all sentient beings, and indeed all things, one should show the same respect.

The respect spoken of here does not necessarily mean bowing in worship or taking refuge. It means respecting the fact that all share the same Buddha-nature, whose essence is itself empty and quiescent. The Buddha is thus, I am thus, and all sentient beings are thus. Then there is nowhere that is not Buddha-remembrance. (If one

begins from this point, could thoughts of killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct still arise?)

Chen. Bringing into accord: bring all people and affairs into accord with the Buddha, and one will constantly awaken to one's own habitual tendencies and earnestly correct them. Over time, this becomes habitual, and one does not lose awareness in any thought. This is truly the supreme dharma gate of Buddha-remembrance.

Si. Great body: to realize the great body means that all Buddha lands are included within the ocean of one's own nature, with nothing excluded. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is simply one Buddha land within the ocean of my own nature. Thus, there can no longer be distinctions of this and that, coming and going. Therefore, what is called rebirth is not that the body comes or goes; it means realizing purity and discovering the inherent virtue one shares with Amitābha Buddha.

Wu. Rebirth: rebirth is the aspiration of the mind. First, take the West as one's destination; next, understand the West as encompassing the ten directions; then realize it within one's own nature. Further, unite principle with phenomena: the West truly has a Buddha land, and phenomena are not discarded because of principle. This is integrated into the perfect meaning of neither real nor unreal. Thus, one goes without going; rebirth involves no ultimately real birth. Since no birth is ultimately real, it nevertheless does no harm to posit coming and going in order to strengthen one's practice and vows.

Wei. Cultivating and realizing samādhi: samādhi is not to be judged in stillness; it should be examined amid activity. What is samādhi? It means "right reception": not being swayed by anything. When circumstances arise, remain undeluded and do not let joy or anger take hold. This is how right concentration is attained. Therefore, samādhi is also called right concentration, meaning that the mind has no defiled attachment. At its ultimate point, it is one-pointedness of mind without distraction. We are too familiar with emotional views in worldly affairs and too estranged from the Buddha Way. We must practice daily until we become thoroughly proficient, constantly keeping this mind in the ground of awareness. Each day, contemplate at least ten times. By contemplation is meant beginning with self-questioning and inward reflection, as follows:

1. Ask yourself: If the person I love most were to fall ill or die, could I sever my attachment? When my mind is stirred, could I steady and contain it? Could I dissolve and transform my grief and thoughts? Further reflect: although this is only hypothetical, if such an event actually occurred before my eyes, what would I do? If there is anything I cannot do, then I must undertake additional practice with diligence.

2. Ask yourself: What habitual tendency is hardest for me to change in ordinary life? If things do not satisfy my wishes, can I prevent anger from arising in response? If there is anything I cannot do, then I must undertake additional practice with diligence. Such additional practice means struggling with oneself and resolutely eliminating one's habitual tendencies, proceeding from unfamiliarity to familiarity and from effortfulness to naturalness. This is true pure karma.

3. Ask yourself: Toward the person I ordinarily dislike most, can I henceforth feel less resentment and ill will? Reflect that before ill feeling arose between us, we too once had affection for one another. Think also of that person's good qualities, and further consider the causes of the ill feeling: both sides have their faults. Gradually achieve equality between enemies and loved ones.

4. Ask yourself: Can the object I love most remain forever? If I were to give it away—this refers to something for which attachment has not yet been relinquished, not something discarded after one has come to dislike it—could I remain unmoved? Could I give rise to wisdom-contemplation and transform my deluded attachment?

5. Ask yourself: If what I hope for goes against my wishes, if something fails just as it is about to succeed, or if it is seized by someone stronger, what becomes of my meditative stability? If I merely force it down, it will instead become an illness. It must be dissolved and transformed, by explaining it through wisdom.

6. Ask yourself: The world's disorder is like tangled hemp, and things that go against one's wishes are eight or nine out of ten. Day and night, all I hope for are auspicious things such as peace and success. If adverse events come before me, can I accept them? Can I resolve them through contemplating emptiness?

7. Ask yourself: When hostile circumstances arise, can I yield? Can I reflect upon my own faults and wrongdoing? Even if I have committed no fault or wrongdoing, the very mind of hostility is itself a fault and wrongdoing. Yet where matters concerning the larger situation and the interests of the community are concerned, failing to contend when one should contend becomes passivity and is also a fault and wrongdoing. Can I respond through an all-inclusive and unobstructed contemplation?

8. Ask yourself: Has my thought of great compassion and benefiting others diminished? When an unwholesome thought arises, can I investigate its cause? If I guard against it beforehand at the moment its cause arises, I will not lose awareness. The method of prevention begins by entering through the emptiness of circumstances. When circumstances are empty, the mind naturally becomes empty, and conflicts with others do not arise. This is giving.

All such practices are methods of bringing forth function. Questioning oneself is the wondrous function of contemplation. Use the mind that contemplates to break through the circumstances contemplated. When this matures over time and one's strength is sufficient, one does not deliberately apply effort, and not the slightest view remains within. This is called "forgetting ( ) both subject and object," not "annihilating ( ) both"; annihilation would fall into annihilationism. Forgetting means nonattachment, a state of freedom and ease, though it is still a subtle habitual tendency. Advance further until even wholesome habits are empty. Be empty without attachment to emptiness; then luminosity is ever quiescent, and one attains great freedom. This is the Mind-Seal Dharma of the Pure Land.

The foregoing are methods of counteraction: turning from evil to good and replacing evil habits with wholesome habits. They still do not depart from dharmas. Therefore, one should rest the mind so that it is constantly quiescent. Here, cultivating dhyāna and samādhi is an auxiliary condition. Originally, when Buddha-remembrance reaches the point of remembering without deliberately maintaining remembrance and of one-pointedness of mind without distraction, that is dhyāna and samādhi. When the mind remains continuously attentive, wholly free of entanglement and defilement, that is the Pure Land.

Now, even one who cultivates dhyāna and samādhi does not depart from dharmas. Dhyāna and samādhi rely entirely on one's own strength. Those of superior capacity directly realize it immediately. The Platform Sūtra says: "Simply use this mind; directly realize Buddhahood." At first, observing mind with mind does not depart from the Mind-Ground Dharma and brings forth all wondrous functions. "Directly realize" means that even the mind that observes is let go of; only then is it seeing one's nature and becoming a Buddha.

Those of middling capacity may rely on the Tiantai method of the three contemplations, entering through emptiness, provisional existence, and the middle: using emptiness to break through existence, using provisional existence to break through delusion, and entering the middle way as a transitional means. Upon reaching the middle way, a dharma still remains; one must advance further until the middle way itself is not established, the three contemplations are all relinquished, and one enters the ultimate. Those of lesser capacity cannot be entirely without support; apart from dharmas, they have no further resources. Therefore, they must use other methods as auxiliary conditions.

All dharma gates consist of no more than primary and auxiliary approaches. Contemplating the mind is the primary practice, while all other methods are auxiliary. If the mind cannot be held steady, one should rely on the Buddha's power and use other methods as aids. In Esoteric Buddhism, mudrās and mantras are the Buddha's power; recitation and mindfulness are one's own power. The six-character

invocation (“Homage to Amitābha Buddha”) is a modified pronunciation of . When the latter is recited fluently and quickly, it contracts into the six-character form.

Because it includes a mudrā, it belongs to one form of Esoteric Buddhism. Prayer beads were later used to keep count, but this instead caused the function of the mystery of body to be lost and led to a misunderstanding of the mystery of mind; nor can one become single-minded. If body, speech, and mind are not esoteric, how can this be called yoga? Thus, one may chant for years without gaining any real benefit. This is not the fault of the Dharma, but because the practitioner’s cultivation does not accord with it.

Moreover, the various dharma gates each have their causes and conditions. At one time there are capacities suited to that time, and at one time there are methods suited to that time. If this method suits the recipient, then that method does not accord with them. Therefore, there is absolutely no one method to which one can cling permanently. This is why the Pure Land dharma gate must be adapted.

If practitioners truly wish to attain accomplishment quickly, there are two methods of adaptation: first, the method of name-recitation should be adjusted; second, other methods must be borrowed and employed. Apart from Esoteric Buddhism, there is nothing that can be borrowed as a resource. Practices such as the Great Dharma of Amitābha, the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra practice, the longevity-mantra practice, and even the Heart-of-Heart Dharma may all be adopted as auxiliary conditions.

Once accomplishment is attained, no dharma may be grasped, nor may anything be spoken of. Such is the power of skillful means. The lay practitioner Li Xiaoyuan once told others: “Chinese Buddhism is declining. Its problem is not a lack of dharma gates, but only a lack of people who truly practice. There are already more methods of practice in Chinese Buddhism than one could ever undertake; every method can lead to the cultivation and realization of samādhi. Why crave many methods, travel afar to other places, and vainly add to names and forms?” How profound these words are! (Layman Li now resides in Beiping and has deeply penetrated the essential teachings of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism. He is one of the great spiritual friends of our time and should certainly be approached.)

Since the Pure Land is the name for the perfectly accomplished virtue at the fruition stage, its methods of cultivation and realization should be administered according to each person’s capacity. For those who should enter the Pure Land through dhyāna and samādhi, teach them through dhyāna and samādhi; for those who should enter the Pure Land through name-recitation, teach them through name-recitation; for

those who should enter the Pure Land through the five precepts, the six perfections, and similar methods, teach them through the five precepts and such methods.

Though the various dharmas differ, diligence is essential in each; and in each, one must ultimately return to dhyāna and samādhi and open prajñā. When prajñā opens, the mind naturally becomes clear and one's nature naturally appears. Only then may one speak of eliminating habitual tendencies. To whatever degree habitual tendencies are eliminated, to that degree one realizes entry into the Pure Land; when habitual tendencies are wholly swept away, the Pure Land is perfectly accomplished.

If impurities remain but the power of one's vows is sufficient for rebirth, one may be reborn in the West while carrying karma. After rebirth in the West, one again cultivates and realizes until entering perfect purity. Therefore, in the Sahā world there are bodhisattvas of pure conduct, while in the West there are ordinary beings reborn while carrying karma. Are they not both lands where ordinary beings and sages dwell together? The difference is that the Sahā world has the evil realms, whereas the West does not; the West has many sages, though the Sahā world also has them.

Only in the Sahā world are afflictions so abundant: those of lesser capacity are tainted by evil, while those of greater capacity are bound by emotional attachment, and all ultimately sink into saṃsāra. Therefore, the Buddha pointed out the Western Pure Land: once one is reborn there, one can no longer regress. This is why people of this world regard the Western Pure Land as secure ground and must make vows for rebirth there.

Yet if one merely has the vow but no practice, or if one's practice does not accord with the Dharma, then the causes and conditions are incomplete. In the Sahā world of the five turbidities, it is exceedingly difficult to realize anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. Hence it is said that one cannot be reborn in that land with scant wholesome roots, merit and virtue, and causes and conditions. Therefore, although Dharma gates are immeasurable, the various supporting conditions are truly indispensable.

Now people rely solely on the practice of holding the name, yet their minds are distracted and their practice lacks continuity. They cannot penetrate deeply into a single Dharma gate; instead, they take rigid adherence to the method for single-mindedness and non-retrogression, each setting up a separate camp and claiming, "Mine is superior; the others are inferior" . . . Such views are impure and already belong to hell; they remain millions upon millions of miles from the Pure Land.

Moreover, they do not know to reform with deep and earnest repentance. Once one's final day arrives, all the sublime realms of the Western Pure Land are wholly obscured by afflictions and sensual desire. The power of that Buddha's guidance

cannot overcome the pull of one's own karmic power, and rebirth becomes difficult indeed! Yet people commonly hold rebirth to be easy, saying that one may attain it even through ten recitations. Why, then, do I alone insist that rebirth is difficult? Even in the Amitābha Sūtra, the World-Honored One repeatedly emphasizes the word "difficult."

They do not understand that difficulty and ease are both discriminations; the Dharma itself is neither difficult nor easy. Sentient beings' causes and conditions differ. For one to whom it is easy, even ten recitations are still an unnecessary effort; a single thought is enough. For one to whom it is difficult, one remains sunk in saṃsāra for kalpa after kalpa, and the hells are still not empty to this day. Those who have not practiced go astray through sensual desire; those who have practiced again go astray through attachment to Dharma views. All deceive themselves.

To mislead oneself and then mislead others—this is also the fault of teachers. They have compassion but lack skillful means; they seek the result but do not establish the proper cause. Once fixed views have been formed, the Pure Land grows ever more distant. At the utmost, one attains only the defiled fruition of the human and deva realms. It is acceptable to say that one plants sublime causes for future rebirth in the Western Pure Land, but it is not acceptable to say that one will certainly attain rebirth in this very life. Those who arouse the resolve to be reborn in the West must be cautious indeed!

Someone may further ask: "The sūtras say that even those who have committed the five heinous offenses and ten evil acts may recite the Buddha's name at death and attain rebirth. Yet you alone say that rebirth is extremely difficult; does this not contradict the meaning of the sūtras?" They do not understand that rebirth requires the maturation of previous causes and conditions. When those conditions ripen, even a person guilty of the five heinous offenses and ten evil acts will at that moment let everything go all at once.

At the very moment of letting everything go at once, such a person can no longer be called one guilty of the five heinous offenses and ten evil acts. Otherwise, you may as well wait until your deathbed to recite the Buddha's name, and need not diligently cultivate now. The Buddha spoke in this way as a skillful means to encourage earnest practitioners: even if one formerly committed the five heinous offenses and ten evil acts, a single awakening and sudden realization of emptiness of nature bring liberation for myriad kalpas. This does not mean that everyone possesses such blessings and favorable conditions.

If one does not understand this principle, reciting the Buddha's name on the one hand while doing evil on the other, how could it be of any help? Those who raise such questions are rigidly attached to their views. They merely cling to the words of

the sūtras without understanding their meaning. How lamentable that this vast, perfect, and all-embracing Dharma of the Pure Land should be misconstrued through narrow and inferior views.

(End)