Treatise on Nourishing Life

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On the Way of Nourishing Life

The underlying cause of ill health is a mind unsettled all day by anxiety over gain and loss. Human energy is limited and should be apportioned appropriately: follow an eight-eight-eight schedule—eight hours of sleep, eight hours of work, and eight hours of rest. If this normal routine can be maintained, there is no reason for frequent illness.

Now, because of physical or financial circumstances, one may have no interest in one's eight hours of work, or the work may be so stressful and arduous that those eight hours feel like more than twelve. It then becomes hard to keep the mind settled; by day one worries excessively, by night one has many startling dreams, insomnia begins, appetite declines, constipation and excessive liver fire arise, and the lung qi fails to circulate. Thus various illnesses develop, while the body's vital qi is depleted day by day. Therefore, to restore health, one must first restore balance to one's thinking and bring the mind to a calm, collected state. Then the qi and blood throughout the body can naturally function soundly and fully. This is the aim of the restorative qigong practice described here.

Qi and blood can naturally circulate, but one must not deliberately try to make them circulate. One should remove whatever obstructs them, allowing circulation to proceed naturally. The obstruction is precisely the mischief caused by one's own

deluded and inverted thoughts. Therefore, in the method of quiet sitting, one first sets bodily concerns aside and suspends activity for an hour. The sitting posture will be explained separately. Once one is sitting steadily, one lets the breathing settle into an even rhythm, and then regulates the mind. This, however, is no simple matter.

To regulate the mind, one must first understand what it is. Only when one has gained some mastery of the mind can one use it to guide itself. Once the mind can guide itself, deluded thoughts will naturally cease.

Once people have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body, they have their instruments. The eye encounters form, the ear encounters sound, and so forth, thereby giving rise to an image. One then repeatedly discriminates over that image, setting image upon image and delusion upon delusion. This is called the discriminating mind—that is, the deluded mind. On its beneficial side, the progress of all human affairs in the universe has been built upon its activity.

On its harmful side, all afflictions and confused inversions, as well as every kind of evil deed that harms others without benefiting oneself, are also created by it. Therefore, the foremost thing for a person in this world is self-awareness. Those who are truly awakened certainly do not greedily, angrily, and confusedly act recklessly; nor do they lapse into passive annihilationism, becoming cold-blooded creatures who regard social undertakings as having nothing to do with them. In the end, this only harms themselves.

As for the deluded mind's effect upon the body, on its beneficial side it can harmonize qi and blood, prolonging life and extending one's years. On its harmful side, the mind can generate fire and the liver can stir wind. Fire overcomes metal, and the lungs are thereby injured. Thus those who overwork the mind have a deficient heart and excessive liver fire. Liver wood overcomes earth, so the spleen and stomach suffer, digestion is poor, nutrition is inadequate, and sleep at night is unsettled.

Earth in turn overcomes water, and so kidney water becomes greatly depleted. When water is insufficient, fire becomes still more exuberant. Since heart and kidneys are interconnected, the heart qi grows still weaker, and lung disease develops. The internal organs are mutually connected: when one moves, all move; when one is ill, all are ill. What disturbs them is the deluded mind. Therefore, treating illness lies in settling the mind; settling the mind lies in ceasing delusion; ceasing delusion lies in realizing the mind; realizing the mind is self-awareness. The benefit to health lies in quiet sitting.

Quiet sitting is a method for stilling the mind. When the mind is still, the spirit is at peace; when the spirit is at peace, qi is sufficient; when qi is sufficient, the blood is

abundant. When qi and blood flow freely, illness may be dispelled, deficiencies replenished, and what is already sufficient increased. Present illness may be removed and future illness prevented; this is its lesser benefit. Moreover, when the mind is still, the spirit is clear; when the spirit is clear, one is quick-witted. The still person's mind has many subtleties: one observes circumstances and discerns symptoms with exceptional agility; once one's understanding of principle is correct, one can foresee matters more fully; in turmoil one is unalarmed, and before circumstances one is undeluded. One can comprehend everything and naturally avoids the faults of subjective bias. Great capacity and great functioning are thereby opened.

There are various theories concerning the mind. Confucians speak of rectifying the mind; Daoists speak of purifying the mind; Song Confucians sought to place the mind within the bodily cavity. Guan Zhong said to preserve inwardly through stillness and outwardly through reverence. Mencius spoke of recovering the lost mind—but how is it to be recovered? If one says that mind is used to recover mind, then the mind has already gone astray; who, then, is to recover it?

If it has not gone astray, it is right before one's eyes, so why make this additional effort? And once the mind has been recovered, where, pray, should it be placed? The mind is unlike a material object that can come and go; it is only a matter of concealment and manifestation. In truth, it is merely an illusory image. Yet methods such as letting the mind go, recovering the mind, controlling the mind, and gathering in the mind are all products of the illusory mind—illusion added to illusion, ever multiplying—and are not ultimate.

To know the mind as it really is, one must understand that there are two kinds of mind: true mind and deluded mind. For example, the true mind is like water and the deluded mind like waves. Waves move because of the wind; when the wind stops, the waves cease, while the water itself does not move. Water and waves illustrate why it is misleading to insist on either separateness or identity.

Yet foolish people rigidly divide them into two, while the wise know them as one. Ultimately, however, they are neither one nor two. And to speak of neither one nor two is still the activity of the illusory mind, not the true mind. For the sake of explanation, let us call the still mind, before any thought arises, the true mind. It knows clearly and remains free of thought. This is the mind of no-mind. Once it has moved, the six consciousnesses make distinctions in a flurry of activity, giving rise to a host of views. This is the discriminating mind; it is the deluded mind.

Accordingly: first, that which gathers and gives rise to things is mind—meaning that when the eye and form come together, an illusory image arises. Second, grasping at conditions is mind—meaning that form itself does not come to entice me; I myself

grasp at it, thereby creating the discriminating mind. Zhu Xi said, “Do not be enticed by external things,” which seems to place blame on external things for enticing us; this is not a comprehensive account.

Third, fanciful imagining is mind: past habitual tendencies give rise to repeated fantasies, entering into the unreal and producing many ingenious views. Fourth, choosing and rejecting is mind: from individual distinctions arise views of dharmas and emotional views, right views and wrong views, even good views and evil views. Whenever one grasps at the idea that there is some principle to be found, that is the deluded mind. Even wishing to discard that deluded mind is itself the deluded mind. In short, seeking anything is delusion; yet seeking nothing is still delusion, for all are waves. What, then, is to be done?

What has been said above is still only principle, though it must be understood. If one wishes actually to accomplish the work of stilling the mind, one need only investigate at the gaps between thoughts.

Since people have minds, they cannot be without thoughts. Thoughts can only be stopped; they cannot be annihilated. After the previous thought has passed and before the next thought arrives, there is something lucidly clear, silent, and free of thought: this is the gap between thoughts. At precisely that time, not only does delusion cease, but there is no delusion to cease, no mind with which to mind, and no gap to be grasped.

Do not concern yourself with how long it lasts. Simply maintain continuous and seamless contemplation, repeatedly becoming keenly aware in this way. This is neither unknowing like wood or stone nor chaotic like monkeys. While sitting in meditation, stray thoughts suddenly arise and fall away; I simply ignore them. The moment they are ignored, they simultaneously cease, and one again arrives at the gap between thoughts. Let them arise and cease ten thousand times; I simply remain thus. Nor should one construct theories or calculate right and wrong. Sit for one hour each day without interruption. If sitting becomes settled, do not rejoice; if the mind is confused while sitting, do not be troubled. In time, the power of emptiness naturally grows stronger, and its benefits naturally become apparent.

I. Daily Living

(1) Go to sleep early, no later than ten o’clock. Whenever one crosses into eleven o’clock, it is the time when yang arises, associated with the kidneys. Insomnia at this time necessarily depletes kidney water. Since heart and kidneys are interconnected, when water is depleted, fire becomes exuberant, and the spirit is most easily harmed. (2) When sleeping, it is best to think of nothing at all. Regulate the breath through the nose evenly, quietly listening to it yourself as it passes from coarse to fine, and from fine to extremely subtle, until it ceases.

Regard this body as if it were no object, or as sugar dissolving in water and vanishing without a trace; one will naturally fall asleep. (3) If thoughts arise and one cannot settle, do not toss and turn on the pillow while worrying. This is most exhausting to the spirit. Get up and sit for a while before sleeping again.

(4) At noon—namely, from eleven in the morning until one in the afternoon—yin arises, and this period is associated with the heart. If one cannot sleep at this time, one may sit quietly for fifteen minutes and close the eyes to nourish the spirit; then the heart qi will be strengthened. Anyone with heart disease should take particular note. If one attends to these two periods every day, primordial qi will grow stronger day by day, and there will be no palpitations, diarrhea, or frequent urination.

(5) In summer, rise early; in winter, rise late. Those living in the north should guard against cold qi; those in provinces such as Guangdong and Guangxi should, when rising early, guard against falling ill from mountain mists and noxious vapors. Do not lie on your back to sleep after eating. If rising early during the yin hour, from three to five in the morning, one must especially avoid pent-up anger; otherwise, the lungs will certainly be damaged and the liver injured. Please take careful note.

II. Quiet Sitting

There are many methods of quiet sitting, including those of the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions, as well as distinctions between Esoteric Buddhism and the Chan school. Here, a simple, easy, and reliable method of quiet sitting is selected to lay a foundation.

(1) It can also treat illness, but one need not sit only because one is ill. Even those without illness should practice quiet sitting, to prevent illness, treat illness, and nurture recovery from illness; all three methods are thereby complete, and one may benefit from them throughout life. Quiet sitting is more difficult for those with work, because they lack time. Yet forty minutes each day should be available. On the surface, it may seem unurgent, but all human undertakings have spirit as their foundation, and the decline, flourishing, strength, and weakness of the spirit depend entirely on whether the mind and spirit are calm, settled, and undisturbed. The single word “disorder” is enough to obstruct all work.

(2) Health, longevity, and moral character are also connected with the character and health of one’s descendants; they further concern the improvement of the human race and social welfare. Is this not of great importance? People are now busy with production and value material things. Yet they do not realize that this physical body is itself material. It must first be maintained. Health is the foremost concern in human life and deserves special attention.

Qigong therapy is now widespread. I have never had experience in this field; each method has its strengths, and they are not wholly without effect. Yet among those who practice exercises for moving qi, some seek quick results and may easily take a wrong path. This cannot be blamed on the method itself, but it is not something that can be broadly transmitted, and it is difficult to exercise caution at the outset.

We should first speak of illness. There are two methods of treatment: one relies on external means, such as medicine, acupuncture, and massage; the other relies on one's own strength, namely the method of quiet sitting. External means are suitable for acute illnesses; self-reliance is suitable for chronic illnesses. For illnesses that medicines and stones cannot cure, only the method of quiet sitting remains; its effect is steady and reliable. If the two methods are applied together, that is even better.

Essential Instructions for Nurturing Health

Living to one hundred is not difficult; what is difficult is maintaining the body. If one can maintain it, illness will be rare and longevity will come naturally. The methods of maintenance lie in everyday life. To keep a room clean, one must sweep it diligently every day and wash its utensils daily; then things will naturally last a long time. This body, too, is a thing.

A person may go three days without food, but not one day without water; or perhaps one day without water, but not even a moment without air. Therefore, the basis of human life is the free circulation of qi and blood. Stagnant qi can obstruct the blood; obstructed blood can form toxic accumulations, resulting in boils, scrofula, cancer, or tumors. All these arise because qi and blood do not circulate freely. Qi should flow smoothly, and blood should circulate unobstructed.

All illnesses begin with stagnant qi. When qi becomes congested within, the liver is the first to be harmed. The remedy lies in knowing how to dissolve and remove it. There are two essential methods for doing so: first, seek out the root. The root lies in the mind; when the mind is empty, everything resolves itself.

Why is the mind difficult to transform? Because one takes matters too seriously, clings too strongly to the view of self, has too little breadth of heart, and is too fixed in suspicion and jealousy. Therefore, to cultivate the body one must possess learning and moral character. It is difficult to demand perfection from ordinary people; one can only encourage them to yield, restrain themselves, and become less troubled. With fewer vexations, there will naturally be fewer illnesses. This is the fundamental method. Second, assist the process of dissolution by helping qi and blood to circulate. Beyond medicines and acupuncture, one may apply a simple technique: the massage method discussed here. It costs nothing, saves time, has no

harmful side effects, produces real results, requires no seeking elsewhere, and serves as prevention. It is not difficult to practice, but the following prerequisites are necessary:

First, perseverance: do not interrupt it for even a single day. After practicing for a hundred days, stopping will instead feel uncomfortable. It should become as habitual as eating every day.

Second, do not seek results too quickly. Impatience stirs up fire; fire intensifies qi, and the result is counterproductive.

Third, do not be greedy for too much. Greed brings a lack of perseverance and impatience, so that one labors without result. This method is meant for regular practice; moreover, the hundred illnesses arise from greed, so one must not be greedy again and thereby add to one's suffering from illness.

There are three major matters in cultivating the body: first, sleep; second, regular elimination; third, diet. All else—daily activities, clothing, and so forth—is supplementary. Of these three, sleep comes first. Yet when the stomach and appetite are unsettled, sleep at night will be restless; therefore, keeping the bowels regular comes second. If one's diet is unrestrained, with excessive hunger or overeating, the stomach and intestines will certainly be harmed, and nourishment will diminish day by day.

The primary aim of sleep is to calm the spirit, and calming the spirit depends on a peaceful mind. Sleep should accord with one's age. In adulthood, seven to eight hours at most is sufficient. Too much sleep clouds the mind and causes dizziness, red and swollen eyes, and weakness in the limbs. Children must sleep a full eight hours; even more than nine hours does no harm. For the elderly or the ill, at most six hours is enough. The following should be noted: first, do not stay up later than 10:30 at night; for the elderly, 8:00 is proper, and not later than 9:00. Second, while in bed, strictly avoid thinking over or calculating future matters. Third, do not use sleeping pills to induce sleep.

Methods for Preserving Health and Eliminating Illness

Human life holds immeasurable suffering and affliction; a hundred sufferings torment us at once, solely because we have not obtained a method for settling the mind. Even if every enjoyment is fulfilled, one's afflictions grow ever more intense. Because one's thinking has not been clarified and greed does not cease, there is never a time of satisfaction. The human body proceeds from illness to aging and death, never departing from this cause.

The three words “settling the mind” are easy enough to speak of, yet very difficult to put into practice. But if one is willing to practice, they need not necessarily be difficult. Since a person originally has no mind, there is no disorder; and where there is no disorder, what further “settling” is there to establish? This is the supreme vehicle Dharma. Those whose capacities are not exceptionally great cannot understand it. How can beginners accomplish it? They can only borrow some expedient method as a transition.

First, maintain the body in good condition. Those who are ill, please listen carefully to the method I explain below. This is not empty talk; it must be practiced, and practiced willingly. I shall first explain the principal conditions to be met before beginning this practice:

1. When practicing, do not attach the slightest intention to it. The greatest taboo in practice is seeking results or speed, setting a fixed date, and seeking particular meditative experiences as proof. Simply practice according to the method, as you ordinarily would. Do not calculate whether it is effective or ineffective, and do not concern yourself with whether you practice well or poorly. Results may appear next month or after a hundred days.

2. While practicing, there may be no visible effect at all; do not become doubtful. First of all, be patient. If bodily effects arise and you feel various kinds of comfort, do not become delighted and greedily overpractice. Know that such effects arise naturally and are normal, not extraordinary.

3. You must be persistent and not interrupt your practice. Follow the instructed method indoors, and ensure that the arrangements are thorough.

4. While practicing, an old illness may recur, or you may suddenly feel soreness or pain. This is a reaction that occurs when the internal blood and qi, formerly obstructed, begin to flow freely. Do not become doubtful and stop. If an externally contracted illness causes fever and makes it impossible to sit up, it is permissible to pause for a time.

5. During seated practice, the body may sometimes suddenly sway. Opening the eyes will stop it. Do not allow it to continue until it becomes a habit. It is not necessarily bad, but do not cling to it as a good sign. In short, the essential thing is not to attend to it. The moment you attend to it, you become attached; attachment becomes a demon—but not an external demon.

All illnesses arise from an imbalance of blood and qi—the so-called two disorders of obstructed blood and stagnant qi. Yet blood obstruction results from qi stagnation, which results from the agitation of mind and consciousness; thus normal balance is lost. Therefore, to regulate qi, one must first regulate the mind. At the initial stage,

however, the method of regulating the mind must still make use of qi: qi quiets the mind, and the mind regulates qi. The mind is the ruler that directs the body's entire organization, but it is also the chief culprit that agitates and sets its various parts boiling.

It can cause the higher nervous system to become tense and prevent the cerebral cortex from becoming calm, thereby giving rise to many chronic illnesses, such as nervous exhaustion, gastroptosis, gastric and duodenal ulcers, high and low blood pressure, phlegm and cough, irregular menstruation, constipation, arthritis, anemia, and so forth.

To restore the above illnesses to normal, one must first quiet the mind and regulate the qi, thereby restraining that state of tension and preventing it from exceeding its limits.

When the mind can regulate qi, breathing naturally ceases to be hurried, and the circulation of blood is properly regulated. Brain cells receive more oxygen and nourishment, promoting the functions by which the cerebral cortex directs the tissues of the internal organs. Thus the skeletal, muscular, circulatory, respiratory, digestive, excretory, reproductive, and nervous systems can all develop normally without being disturbed, and the various symptoms of illness naturally disappear without trace.

Physiologically, there are four innate capacities: first, the capacity for natural growth —for example, if the lungs are damaged or part of the stomach is removed, they naturally heal and grow sufficiently; second, the capacity to eliminate illness; third, the capacity to restrain habitual tendencies, such as the harmful habits of smoking, drinking, and anger; fourth, the capacity freely to seek longevity or a shortened life. But once these are disturbed, these innate capacities cannot develop. At first they become inadequate; next they are depleted; then they are maintained only with difficulty; and when they can no longer be maintained, one collapses. This is called chronic suicide.

The heart belongs to fire and the kidneys belong to water; heart and kidneys are interconnected. Fire should descend, and water should rise. When water and fire aid one another, vapor is generated within. The functions of the body's various parts can then bring about health. This may be observed from the tongue. Without moisture, the tongue lacks vitality; hence the Chinese character for "lively" combines the water radical with the character for "tongue." The tongue can report the depth and severity of various internal illnesses, by which life and death may be determined.

All bodily fluids, such as mucus, tears, sweat, and urine, are salty. Only saliva and froth in the mouth are bland. When the mouth lacks saliva, there is thirst; thirst is

illness, and water is used as medicine to treat it. When the stomach is empty, there is hunger. Hunger is illness, and food is used as medicine to treat it. This is because fiery qi rises while water fails to assist it; it is regulated in this way.

In the human body, the hard bones and flesh are earth; after death, they return and transform into soil. Blood, oils, and sweat are water; warmth is fire; and the qi that moves through breathing and circulation is wind. These are called the four great elements. When the four great elements are out of balance, illness results; imbalance means the loss of normality.

Self-Healing Methods for the Sick

The human body inherently possesses special capacities: the capacity to grow naturally, to eliminate illness naturally, to transform habitual patterns, and to sustain life and longevity.

Except where congenital physical incompleteness cannot be remedied, the constitution is too weak, the root of the illness is too deep, medical treatment has gone astray, or severe traumatic injury and excessive blood loss leave no time for treatment, anyone who understands the method of self-nurturance can certainly remain free of illness, prevent illness from arising, recover quickly from an incipient illness, and regain health after illness. Of this, human effort accounts for no more than one or two parts in ten, while one's own bodily capacities account for eight or nine. But three conditions must be attended to: first, prevention in ordinary times; second, self-mastery during illness; and third, convalescence after recovery.

Much illness, physical weakness, and short life are needless. First, they arise from poor prenatal education and improper care in childhood. Second, they arise from noticing illness too late. Third, they arise from having no method of convalescence. Fourth, they arise from indiscriminate doctors and medicines. Fifth, they arise from fearing death and becoming confused by many anxieties, which instead weakens one's vital energy. Sixth, they arise from impatience, whereby the spirit cannot rest. Seventh, they arise from being unable to restrain sexual desire and acting rashly, even to the point of death. All these disturb the body and prevent it from developing fully; they are called invisible injuries.

I will first discuss methods of convalescence after illness.

For many patients, medicine has already exhausted its means, and reliance on external help has become almost hopeless. This includes such conditions as pulmonary disease, neurasthenia, insomnia, high blood pressure, cardiac weakness, gastrointestinal disorders, early-stage stroke, excessive liver fire, kidney deficiency, and various blood-related ailments in women. For those repeatedly treated without

effect, if they can follow my method, there is at least a seventy- or eighty-percent prospect of improvement. The only fear is that people will not believe in it; or, having believed, will not patiently carry it out; or, having practiced it for only a short time, will seek results too eagerly and stop again.

When illness has reached the point at which it seems incurable, only then, when one has resigned oneself completely, will one be willing to listen and save oneself. My method may perhaps then prove effective. It must be practiced earnestly according to the following points:

1. Do not fear death. Be firmly convinced that this illness can not only be nursed back to health, but that the body can become exceptionally healthy and longevity assured. This is because one's body inherently possesses special capacities; it is not empty consolation.

2. Believe that, without medicine or reliance on any particular nourishing food, one certainly possesses within oneself a marvelous means to eliminate illness and prolong life.

3. From today onward, I resolve not to disturb this sick body of mine any further. I will not think about what kind of illness it is, nor concern myself with whether it is improving or worsening. I will simply be a person with nothing to do.

4. In ordinary life, one must work with vigor. When a worker uses a machine and that machine breaks down today, the worker must also exert effort to repair it. During this period of repair, do not think about work, nor regret the loss of time and work. Concentrate wholeheartedly; otherwise, the delay will only be prolonged.

The preceding four points are effective only if one commits to them wholeheartedly. They must be remembered with the utmost care.

5. The method of self-treatment is one's own method of quiet recuperation.

Set aside a time each day, preferably in the morning, when the indoor air is fresh, the temperature is suitable, and there are no disturbances from people or loud sounds. The patient should lie peacefully on the bed and let go of body and mind together. Let the whole body seem to melt away; do not use the slightest bit of strength, as though there were no body at all.

Let the breathing proceed naturally. Do not allow the mind to exert even a little force; as soon as a thought arises, force is being used. Yet one cannot ultimately remain without thoughts. One need only lightly keep the soles of the feet in mind, without exertion. Do not draw the breath downward, and do not focus imaginatively on the dantian. The eyes need not necessarily be closed. It is as though only these

two soles of my feet belong to me and all the rest does not. Nor should one concern oneself with how much time has passed.

If one falls asleep, let oneself sleep. Upon waking, continue in the same way and do not think about the illness.

Think that, at this time, I am producing fresh blood and replenishing my vital energy —this is the most important work. Let the functions of this body operate naturally, but do not attend to them. Whether slight coldness or warmth arises in the body, do not mind it. Only the soles of the feet are mine. At first, the breath is coarse; gradually it becomes fine, then increasingly subtle, then becomes breath, and then a faint breath. At that point, do not inquire further.

Practice in this way for as long or as short a time as you wish; completing seven rounds in succession counts as one treatment. After three or four days of practice, gradually relax even the method of attending to the soles of the feet. Whether consciously or unconsciously, do not exert any further effort. Beginners often cannot keep the mind steady and must use a slight degree of deliberate discipline. At times, when the heart is pounding, simply thinking of the soles of the feet will stop it.

If this is tried for twenty-one days, the effects will surely become quite apparent, and one's complexion and strength will certainly change. Practice briefly for twenty-one days, or practice at length for one hundred days; thereafter, practice once or twice each day. If done upon first waking, it can preserve and prolong life. As for the state of the illness, one will perceive and discern it for oneself.

6. An explanation of the rationale for self-treatment. The word "normal" is the standard of human health. An infant a few months old has a body that is naturally normal. If feeding is properly regulated, warmth and cold are appropriate, and this normal condition is maintained, development will be especially rapid. The frequent swelling and stretching of an infant's limbs, sinews, and bones is clear evidence of this.

This is because one does not disturb the infant, allowing the body to develop its functions naturally. But if it becomes overheated, the infant's body, being one of pure yang, cannot bear it. Once the pores open, the infant easily catches a cold or develops bronchitis; this is a disturbance.

Again, if the infant is overfed, indigestion results. Or if it receives an internal cold stimulus—for example, when a nursing mother has been exposed to a cold wind and her qi has not yet recovered, yet she hastily breastfeeds—the child may have stomach pain and diarrhea. Other frightful shocks are likewise disturbances. By the

time children are under fifteen years old, human affairs gradually become more complicated, and such disturbances become comparatively more numerous.

Yet they do not go beyond overeating, uneven exposure to cold and warmth, excessive exertion, and the like. People become ill for these reasons, and after illness, imbalance can develop into serious disease.

By adulthood, the seven emotions and six desires arise, and there is nowhere that they do not disturb the body's functions. Accumulated over time, the body can no longer sustain itself and becomes ill. Mental and physical strength cannot meet environmental demands. In the early stage, when vitality remains strong, one does not notice it; one is secretly worn away until the condition gradually reaches a grave stage, when treatment is already too late.

One must take advantage of the time when the body has not yet completely collapsed, give it timely support and let it recover in its own way, without disrupting the process.

Consider this: for many years, day and night, the mind and spirit have not rested for a single moment, causing the body continually to lose its normal state. Never, as in the case of an infant a few months old, has there been even a moment of natural rest in which it could develop. How, then, could people avoid illness? And once ill, how could they avoid death? Because the mind and spirit are continually held in tension, worry and rumination harm the spleen, and digestion is consequently impaired. Nutrient intake then sharply declines.

When the intestines and stomach are out of harmony, sleep at night is unsettled; hence insomnia and various nervous disorders are common. When liver fire is excessive, kidney water is depleted; consequently, heart and lower-back ailments follow one after another. When resistance is weak, external pathogenic influences easily enter; hence bronchitis is common. When the intestines and stomach are obstructed and lung qi cannot circulate, pulmonary disease will certainly result. Those with depleted kidney water will necessarily have strong sexual desire.

Thus, in present-day society, although childbirth is increasingly frequent, healthy children are inevitably few. This body is worn and injured in every way, and when all kinds of environmental conditions are added, illness can only increase and suffering cannot diminish. Apart from this method of self-rescue, there is no other method. Now that one has the opportunity to nurture one's illness, one must not waste any more time.

Formerly, you kept your mind continually raised and alert. Today I urge you temporarily to set everything down and settle the mind beneath the soles of the feet, at the Yongquan point. This draws water upward and fire downward. Why do I

not advocate concentrating the mind on the dantian? Because it is easy to draw the qi into it and thereby cause illness instead.

If one lightly guides the attention toward the soles of the feet, it will naturally not fix upon the dantian, yet it will not be separated from the dantian. This is effective and free from harm. Still, one must not attend to it too intently, for those greedy for results may impatiently seek quick success and thereby spoil the practice. Let the whole body have freedom to regulate itself; do not disturb it, and results will surely come quickly. I have often used this method to treat my own illnesses and suffering, and it has proved effective. Therefore I sincerely offer it as a small aid to all who are ill.

In short, the first requirement for a patient is peaceful vital energy of mind. One should understand one's surroundings and reflect on the suffering of other patients, who do not have the rest and recuperation that I have. One should constantly arouse such an impartial mind. This is an immense store of blessing, and the illness will improve all the more quickly.

Methods for Regulating the Breath and Gathering the Mind

First, the sitting posture: You may sit on a bed or inside a tent. Raise the cushion five inches; for heavier persons, seven or eight inches may be suitable. Let comfort be the measure. Cross the legs, with the right leg over the left. Place both palms upward, with the right hand resting on the left. Keep the waist upright, but do not stretch it excessively. Do not move about; if you must move, do so extremely slowly. Close the eyes naturally, but do not look about in different directions. Rest the tongue against the upper palate.

Second, the breathing: Gently close the mouth and let the breath pass naturally in and out through the nose. It will go from coarse to fine, from fine to subtle, and from subtle to gradually becoming still. Do not be impatient or forcibly suppress it to make it calm. The length of inhalation and exhalation should be entirely natural.

Third, methods of gathering in the mind. There are three:

A. Gathering in the mind while sitting. If thoughts are scattered and numerous, listen to the breathing, so that the mind has something to do and does not run outward. When the mind runs outward, distraction arises and gives rise to inverted views; when the mind is fixed inward, it easily becomes attached and falls into stagnation. Let it follow the rising and falling of the breath, as though present and as though empty, allowing no attachment. Yet if, after a long time, one again falls into dull obscurity, the mind is not properly regulated.

When you feel dull and obscure, rouse your spirits, remain clearly and distinctly aware, and listen slowly to the breathing, without giving rise to any deluded thoughts of good or evil. But if, without your noticing, deluded thoughts arise again, simply ignore them. Thus steadfastly endure until the sitting period is over; then lie down for a while. Begin with forty-five minutes and gradually increase to one hour.

Each time you rise from sitting, do not be hasty. Rock the body a few times, then gradually uncross the hands and feet one by one. Rub the face and head, front and back, several dozen times with the palms. Then get up and walk about, or lie down quietly for a while. Sit once each day as a regular practice, without interruption. Each sitting should begin at forty-five minutes and gradually increase to one hour.

B. Gathering in the mind while sleeping. Each night, once you are settled in bed and the temperature is suitable, men should preferably lie on the right side, with the left shoulder uppermost; women should preferably lie on the left side, with the right shoulder uppermost. This need not be fixed, however. If pain prevents lying on either side, simply let it be so. Bend the legs slightly, and breathe as described above. Once the breath has become even, attend to and supervise the body, allowing no part of it to exert even the slightest force. This is the sole requirement.

If there is thinking, hearing, or sensing, this is already exerting force. Even moving an arm or a finger is exerting force. Slightly coarse breathing is also exerting force.

Regard yourself as a dead person, unable to move in any way. Also regard yourself as a grain of sugar placed in water, dissolving and dispersing into nothing. Before long, the breathing naturally becomes even; it seems no longer to pass in and out through the mouth and nose, but movement occurs throughout the body's eighty-four thousand pores, which open and close. At this time there is no self, no body, no breath, and no mind; naturally, the mind returns to its original ground.

This is what is called “leading the fire back to its source,” also known as “the harmonious union of water and fire.” It is the essential formula for treating all illnesses, and unlike medicines, it has no side effects or lingering harm. This method is not limited by duration; even a few minutes bring many benefits. Whenever you fall asleep, do not concern yourself with it; let it happen naturally. If you awaken in the middle of the night and cannot sleep, do not force yourself to sleep. You may try this again once or twice. If you still cannot sleep, get up and rest a little before sleeping again. Avoid tossing and turning, indulging in confused thoughts, or dwelling on hunger and thirst, thereby developing such ailments as insomnia and dizziness.

C. Gathering in the mind during daytime dealings with others. The greatest taboo in life is confusion. When the mind is confused, it can disrupt affairs outwardly and disturb the vital energy inwardly, causing it to lose its normal state. Anger, fear, joy,

anxiety, dullness, and doubt are all confusion, and are the roots of many illnesses and a short life. One should not allow confusion of mind merely while recovering from illness; even in ordinary daily life, one must avoid it.

Twelve Rubbing Exercises for Strengthening the Body

The methods of the Dharma are immeasurable, and there is no fixed method. Here, for the time being, I have selected twelve that are simple and easy to practice: simplicity makes regular practice possible, and ease saves time. Those recovering from a long illness, or who are physically weak, need not perform all twelve at first; increase them gradually, step by step. Yet some must never be omitted, while some need not be used by women. Notes are provided below the explanations; please assess each one for yourself.

First, perseverance is essential: do not discontinue for even a single day. Second, do not be greedy for doing too much, lest the circulation of blood and qi become imbalanced. Third, do not seek quick results. The more gradual the improvement, the firmer the foundation, and the fewer the harmful side effects. Those who act hastily often die young; those who are steady and secure generally live long.

1. Rub the crown of the head to strengthen kidney qi. On rising in the morning, first sit upright. With the left hand, firmly hold the external kidney sac without loosening the grip; close the mouth and bring the teeth together. With the palm of the right hand, rub the crown of the head thirty-six times, without haste. Then switch hands: firmly hold the external kidney sac with the right hand and rub the crown thirty-six times with the left. Then relax and expel turbid qi in three breaths. This method is suitable only for men.

2. Move the neck to eliminate wasting injury. Sit upright with both legs stretched straight out and both hands resting on the knees. Keep the waist straight and the head erect. Do not turn the body. Turn the head and neck to look back over the left side, then over the right side, seven times each, turning only as far as the neck can go. With each turn, stretch the heels slightly, without exerting too much force. Then move the head and neck backward and forward, up and down, as though bowing, also seven times. This can stretch and straighten the twenty-four joints of sinew and bone from the head and neck to the heels, allowing the blood and qi throughout the body to flow freely.

3. Move the eyes to remove redness and films from the eyes and dispel heart-fire. Sit upright with the eyes closed. Rotate the head and neck in circles, without moving the body or waist. Turn left thirty-six times and right thirty-six times, letting the eyes

follow the circular movement in both directions, as though looking around in circles. Then sit upright again, suddenly open both eyes wide, look downward, and at the same time expel turbid qi in seven breaths.

4. Rub the centers of the soles to lead fire back to its source. Rub each sole two hundred and forty times; in cool weather, three hundred and twenty times is appropriate. At the same time, keep the mouth closed and rest the tongue against the roots of the lower teeth, without exerting force. Saliva will naturally arise in the mouth; then gather it and swallow it. Guide it by intention to below the navel, swallowing with effort, until a gurgling sound arises in the throat. Pause briefly, then swallow again, about three mouthfuls in all. This method is most important, especially for women and for those with yin deficiency and evening fever. Those whose palms and soles are scorching hot but do not sweat should use this method regularly; with time, it will surely be effective.

5. Press the Zusanli acupoints. These points are below the knees on the outer sides of the lower legs. To locate the right point, place the palm of the right hand on the right knee; where the tip of the ring finger reaches, probe with the fingertips of the left hand and press into the right Zusanli point. The place that feels distinctly sore is the point. Place the left hand on the left knee and locate the point in the same way. Keep the fingernails trimmed smooth. Press each point one hundred times. This can open the triple burner, strengthen the spleen and stomach, and lead fire back to its source. It is as important as rubbing the centers of the soles and may be done several times a day.

6. Rub the waist to strengthen the kidneys. This may be done either sitting or standing upright. Make fists with both hands and press the backs of the fists against the lumbar hollows. Do not use excessive force. Over a single layer of clothing, rub in circles or rub straight up and down, for a total of two hundred strokes. Beginners should rest after every fifty strokes. If sweating occurs, press the backs of the fists firmly against the lumbar hollows and knead with force as well. Each person must discover this for themselves.

7. Reach with both hands toward the feet. Sit upright and bend at the waist. Stretch both arms straight out and lower the fingertips toward the tops of the feet. Keep the legs as straight as possible so that the leg tendons are stretched. Elderly people should proceed slowly; stop when the fingertips can reach no farther. Do not hurry, nor be greedy for more. For elderly people, the sixth method is preferable, or it may be practiced together with this one according to one’s strength. If practiced slowly and consistently, it will be beneficial.

8. Hook the fingers and move with force to treat wind-pain in the arms and legs. Stand upright with the feet apart. At the same time, curl the middle and ring fingers

of both hands into the palms, and press their backs with the thumbs. Then hook the index fingers together and the little fingers together, as in an exercise. Pull forcefully left and right, keeping the mouth closed and the mind calm, for a total of thirty-six repetitions. Keep the waist straight and still, and place the feet slightly one before the other to avoid falling. Those with aching arms should make an effort to practice this. In time, leg pain will also be cured. It is especially useful for elderly people, as it strengthens the sinews and bones and fortifies the spleen and stomach.

9. Rub the upper part of the head to calm the liver, clear the brain, brighten the eyes, and regulate qi. Rub the rims of both ears sixty times, the left and right sides of the back of the head sixty times each, and the face thirty-six times. Rub the left and right sides where the throat meets the neck sixty times. Those with bronchitis should practice this daily without interruption.

10. Rub the upper and lower sides of the ribcage to strengthen the liver and stomach. This may be done after meals. Rub beneath both sides of the ribcage, on either side of the hip bones, one hundred to three hundred times. Do not do this after overeating; when full, do not rub the abdomen. Before going to sleep, rub the lower abdomen two or three hundred times, covering the entire area below the navel. There is no fixed number; stop when sleep comes.

11. Tap the teeth together thirty-six times to strengthen them. This may be done after performing the second exercise. Moreover, whenever urinating, be sure to clench the teeth so that kidney qi does not leak away. Children, both boys and girls, should be taught to do this daily. If they do not forget it over time, they will benefit from it throughout their lives.

12. Rub both lower legs. Rub each leg one hundred and twenty times on the front and back. This may be done after pressing the Zusanli acupoints. Use both hands simultaneously, rubbing up and down.

How to Encourage a Vegetarian Diet

A vegetable diet is certainly proper; there is no issue in that. Its purpose is a compassionate mind that refrains from killing. Because human habits in society are so varied, people must be guided and persuaded. When the Buddha was in the world, he imposed precepts only upon monastics of his own community; he did not establish prohibitions for the general public, but only offered guidance. For if people are forcibly forbidden to kill, killing only increases. One must first address the question of the mind.

Anyone with a compassionate heart will naturally be unwilling to kill living beings. One with great compassion feels pity for those who kill and can skillfully guide and

transform them, without clinging to a view of one's own merit and thereby setting oneself against the world. This is related to the level of culture. In ancient times, people did not kill cattle or sheep without cause; even when slaughtering them, they did so with solemnity, hoping only to reduce the karma of killing. Therefore, this matter must be resolved from its root. Let us discuss it point by point as follows.

I. Eating is a desire. Because of desire, the tongue faculty makes many distinctions, and thus the five flavors are established. Because of the five flavors, craving for gain further arises; the desire for food grows ever more intense, and increasingly strange forms of experimental slaughter appear, creating immense karma of killing in the world. Those who are killed are indeed pitiable, but those who kill are even more to be pitied. It is like owing usurious debts and being forever entangled in them—utterly pointless. Yet for decades society has regarded this as natural. Is this not upside down?

II. Since eating is a desire, it follows that whether one eats vegetables, pungent foods, meat and fish, or vegetarian food, none of these ought to be pursued. Yet because of craving, people have physical bodies; the body is a material thing, and to sustain it, one must provide it with nutrition and attend to hygiene. Life is to be preserved. Once one speaks of preserving life, there can be no question of gratifying the palate or craving comfort on the tongue.

One should consider what is suitable for the stomach and intestines, so that life may be sustained for a long time. Yet people have another bad habit: lavish banquets given by the wealthy, with as many as ten courses at a single table. By the end, even the tongue no longer tastes anything; it is merely a spectacle. Such wealth causes still more slaughter, which is utterly meaningless.

For example, at a thousand-person banquet in the Northern Song, each person was served a bowl of duck-tongue soup, with three tongues in each bowl—thus the lives of three thousand ducks. Before long, Jin troops entered Bianliang and massacred people on a vast scale, just as chickens and ducks are slaughtered. Even without speaking of karmic retribution, those capable of such cruelty had long since lost their humanity and were no different from beasts; thus it was no pity that they received the retribution of being killed. To extend the desire for food beyond the four kinds of food and the five flavors is absurd and laughable.

III. Pungent foods refer to onions and garlic; meat foods refer to fish and flesh; vegetable foods refer to vegetables and fruit; and sù, here rendered 'vegetarian,' means eating in accord with circumstances. A vegetarian does not discriminate between fine and coarse, pleasant and unpleasant, pungent foods, meat foods, and vegetable foods. The purity one observes in eating should also be present in one's mind, outlook, and intentions. This is what it means to eat vegetarian food. Eating is

for preserving life; therefore, among vegetables, anything detrimental to hygiene should not be eaten either.

I have seen people die after eating oil-fried rice dumplings; therefore, one should be cautious of four things: raw, cold, hard, and greasy foods. Pungent foods can intensify anger, and meat and fish can intensify sexual desire. Excessive anger harms the liver, excessive sexual desire harms the kidneys, and overeating harms the spleen and stomach. When the liver and kidneys are harmed, the heart and lungs are affected, and illness follows. In this way, one violates the original purpose of eating.

IV. Worry and brooding injure the spleen; anger injures the liver; toil and anxious thought injure the spirit. If one is troubled by afflictions all day long, then even if a vegetable diet provides nutrition, one will still be liable to illness and early death. This shows the value of vegetarianism of mind. We should not only protect our bodies; we should protect our lives even more.

The benevolent will surely enjoy long life. A compassionate mind that does not kill is true vegetarianism. It fosters in society an atmosphere of harmony, benevolence, equality, and kindness. This is the transformation of thought and the building of peace. Yet the accumulated habits of thousands of years are deeply entrenched and must be reformed boldly and decisively. At the time of reform and renewal, eliminating evil requires struggle. But when an age enters a period of construction, vegetarianism too becomes one of the important undertakings for the advancement of society. Those with influence should take care to advocate it, joining together to build this dignified, splendid, and peaceful world.

V. Eating is one matter, and killing living beings is another. Killing is absolutely impermissible, yet it is not easy to eliminate killing entirely. To refrain from killing, one must first refrain from generating life. Because people seek through craving to multiply living beings, there is much killing. If one can refrain from generating life, one can reduce killing; this is the fundamental precept.

The Buddha spoke of the five kinds of pure meat: meat not seen, not heard, and not killed for oneself; meat from an animal already dead; and remnants eaten by birds or beasts. These are called the five kinds of pure meat. This is simply a way of restraining the mind’s cruelty, of avoiding the grave while allowing the light.

Yet in Mongolia, Tibet, the northwest, and other places, people cannot avoid eating meat because of environmental conditions. Before killing, however, they first bless it through the power of mantras. This too is only to guard against one’s own intention to kill and not sever the great compassionate mind. In central China food is abundant, so even a complete prohibition on killing would have no effect on people’s livelihood. Yet when slaughter is prohibited for even one or two days, there

is a great backlash. This matter is indeed difficult to resolve perfectly; without effective regulation combined with skillful guidance, it cannot be remedied even in the slightest.

VI. Food is one of the five desires. The five desires are wealth, sex, food, fame, and sleep. When one is greedily pursuing a particular desire, one clings to that one and can cast aside all the rest. In society, desire must be prevented from becoming greed in an unrestrained manner; balance is most valuable. Great wealth and extreme poverty can both lead people into evil.

One leads to cruelty, the other to covetousness and meanness. Only a moderate standard of living, which allows enjoyment without excess, is also conducive to contentment. It is like the temperate weather of spring and autumn: neither overly frugal nor overly extravagant, and acts such as killing naturally diminish. Therefore, to enjoy fine food, one must first be hungry; when hungry, even coarse grain tastes sweet.

Thus it is not a matter of eating meat or vegetables at all; it is wholly a matter of hunger and fullness. It should be studied calmly and guided through skillful means. In general, those from wealthy households seldom experience hunger, while hunger chiefly arises from physical labor. Those who labor in their work easily become hungry; when hungry, they do not choose between pungent foods, meat and fish, or vegetables. Then they are truly vegetarian.

VII. To eat vegetables while seeking exquisite delicacies is not vegetarianism. This is a matter above the throat: one seeks only what pleases the palate, without considering the body's well-being. The first requirement in eating is to eat only after becoming hungry, and one should chew thoroughly and mix the food well with saliva, which aids digestion in the stomach. When one chews carefully, the bodily fluids become more refined and the blood clean and pure; illness will naturally be less frequent.

Therefore, after exposure to wind and frost, one should not eat abruptly; after excessive exertion, one should not eat abruptly; when the mind is confused, one should not eat hurriedly; when upset or angry, one should not eat hurriedly; before sleep, one should not eat too much or drink too much alcohol; when not hungry, one should not snack indiscriminately; and when excessively hungry, one must not eat quickly. Observe these seven rules, and there will surely be no stomach ailments. Illness enters through the mouth and can become a lifelong burden. Be cautious.

VIII. Those who eat meat and fish easily overeat. Knowing they are already full, they cannot bear to put aside unusual flavors, and they must accompany them with

alcohol. Alcohol confuses one's nature, and misfortune comes out of the mouth; it benefits neither body nor mind.

IX. Evil develops through habit, and habit develops through repetition. Repeatedly killing living beings and seeing blood eventually becomes habitual, and before one knows it, one becomes accustomed to killing people. Thus social corruption is easy and civilization difficult; decline is easy and upward progress difficult. Those who plan for the nation must not dismiss this as a minor matter and neglect it.

X. To seek vegetable food that is invariably refined and abundant, with inevitable likes and dislikes, is not vegetarianism. In short, pungent foods, meat and fish, and vegetables are methods of feeding the mouth, whereas vegetarianism is a method of feeding the mind. This is why vegetarianism is difficult, and these distinctions must all be understood. The way of vegetarianism has broad meaning. (1) Vegetarianism carries the sense of practicing in accordance with conditions: responding to every circumstance, with the mind free of bias and attachment. This is vegetarianism.

What is called vegetarianism is to act fittingly amid wealth and honor when one is wealthy and honored. (2) Vegetarianism means applying it according to each person's position and circumstances; laypeople and monastics do not practice it in the same way. When lamas eat meat in Tibet and Qinghai but eat vegetables on coming to Shanghai, that is vegetarianism. To eat whatever is offered, without forcing others into difficulty, is vegetarianism. (3) If I eat vegetables, I simply eat vegetables without regarding it as my own merit; that is vegetarianism.

If others eat meat and fish, there is no need to give rise to anger and hatred. Offer guidance when they are receptive and avoid forcing it on them. This is vegetarianism. (4) Follow a plant-based diet if you can. But if one still craves meat and fish, yet deliberately eats vegetables to advertise one's superiority, forcing oneself to suppress those cravings will make the diet impossible to sustain; this is not vegetarianism. Furthermore, vegetarianism means purity: the mind free of delusion. In learning the Buddha's teachings, one learns only purity; let one's intention be like empty space. If the mind holds dualistic views of meat and vegetarian food, this is not vegetarianism.

XI. When bamboo and trees are cut down, they have no clinging nature and therefore do not know retaliation. Birds and beasts, all endowed with sentience, have a clinging nature; when killed, they know to flee and resist—how much more so human beings. Whenever animals are killed, they are surely unwilling, and repayment is only natural. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says that when people eat sheep, the sheep in turn eat people. In this world, the mutual repayment of enmity and resentment has no end.

Originally, this fleshly body of mine is no different from an object; it could be borrowed back and forth. Those who fear repaying debts need not incur them. Now, if I kill an animal and eat its flesh, I add a further debt of life to the eating of meat. There can be no principle by which it will not be repaid; it is only a matter of time. Therefore, the precept against killing comes first.

One need not crave a momentary pleasure of the palate and thereby leave endless harm behind. Thus eating meat and fish is entirely different from killing living beings to eat their flesh. Things such as ham and salted fish now have no living beings in them and involve no karmic retribution for killing; they are merely foodstuffs and therefore bring no retribution. Critics will surely insist that I am again advocating meat-eating; how would I dare evade such blame? They also say, “If you do not eat it, people will not kill it.” This principle is certainly correct.

But this is a ready-made saying that everyone has repeated for thousands of years. What effect has it had? We should calmly study the matter, without first striking a lofty pose, boasting that we can already be vegetarians or imagining that we can refrain from killing living beings.

Today, in eating one vegetarian meal and drinking one cup of water, strictly speaking, how many microorganisms have already been killed? Therefore, one can only avoid the grave while allowing the light, taking not seeing blood as the standard, merely to check one’s intention and action of killing.

Food differs among the six realms. In the heavenly realm, there is food of thought; in the realm of māras, food of vital essence, energy, and blood; in the animal realm, food in portions, because material things have tangible portions; in the realm of ghosts, food of offerings, where one takes in the heat of food and is satisfied by smelling it; in the hell realm, there is no food; only in the human realm is there food of desire, needed according to the transformations of one’s desires, which become habitual over time. Originally, human beings could go without food: when energy is abundant, one does not feel hungry, and this is also called food of energy. Yet because of craving, it becomes portioned food—meat, vegetables, and finally everything whatsoever. Therefore, whatever food one eats, one should give rise to a sense of shame and remorse.

The preceding eleven points explain why we should refrain from killing living beings and encourage a plant-based diet. Yet deeply ingrained habits cannot be changed all at once; so guide people with particular tact and avoid antagonizing them. Let us discuss this further.

I. One must not be hasty in advising people to refrain from killing. To desire quick results is to achieve nothing and instead lose the opportunity. If you cannot hold them back, you must not press them urgently either. If you hate evil as though it

were an enemy, what need is there to do so? One should transform them through human feeling and draw close to them; above all, one must not oppose them. This is not something to be forced. Opposition verges on acting from personal emotion, may instead provoke their anger, and can lead to still more killing. First advise them to kill less, and then gradually urge them to refrain from killing. First encourage them to eat vegetarian food for half their meals; in time they will naturally comply. Then advise them to eat only already-prepared meat, and they may eventually refrain entirely from killing.

II. There must also be a method in guiding people toward vegetarian food. First, explain the principles of health: vegetarian food enables one to sleep peacefully at night, keeps the stomach and intestines clean, and naturally results in fewer illnesses and a longer life. People generally fear illness and death; this too is one skillful means. Second, do not eat unless hungry, and strictly avoid indiscriminate eating. Third, eat inferior food first and better food afterward. Fourth, have them often reflect on the condition of those who eat grass roots and tree bark. Once compassion arises, they will naturally be unable to swallow their food.

III. Our purpose in encouraging people to eat vegetarian food is simply to lead them into Buddhism and reduce the calamity of killing. Such counsel is originally most compassionate, but its results need not be obtained at once, and one must weigh the relative benefit and harm. Most people who come to study Buddhism are afflicted by illness. Upon hearing of vegetarian food, many become fearful and withdraw. It therefore seems inappropriate to reject them further by being overly strict. This is the first consideration.

Those who do not believe in Buddhism are often unable to eat vegetarian food, and as soon as they hear of it, they develop aversion. This has a considerable effect on those who take refuge in Buddhism. I have personally heard many people say, “Esoteric Buddhism is accommodating; it does not necessarily require one to be vegetarian.” Although such people do not understand the principles of Esoteric Buddhism, this nevertheless reveals one aspect of social attitudes. This is the second consideration.

Moreover, Buddhist practitioners generally find it difficult to sever abruptly the roots of affection among blood relatives. Because they themselves eat vegetarian food, they also forcefully wish their family members to plant the same wholesome roots. This leads to quarrels and harms their feelings. Where their position is not strong enough, family members secretly resent Buddhism, giving rise to slander of the Dharma and the saṅgha; the harm is great. Where their position is strong enough, those whom they urge often deliberately kill still more; the harm is equally grave. This is the third consideration.

Again, when someone has not been vegetarian for long and relatives and friends have not yet been widely informed, they may attend a banquet where abundant delicacies have been prepared. As there are few guests, the host is especially pleased by their arrival; yet they insist on vegetarian food, forcing the host to prepare additional vegetables. Afterward, resentful remarks arise and become entangled with the Buddhadharma. This is the fourth consideration.

Because of the question of vegetarian food, many people proceed to slander Esoteric Buddhism. They do not understand that esoteric practice is esoteric practice and has nothing to do with eating meat. Lamas have their own standpoint and their own ritual applications. When Esoteric Buddhism performs the great Dharma of subduing demons, blood offerings are required.

Esoteric Dharma is a distinctive teaching. During the War of Resistance, Master Nona practiced in Chongqing and slaughtered cattle as offerings, saying that from that day onward the Japanese invaders would not dare enter the territory. At the time, people doubted and slandered him, but it later proved so. If judged according to doctrinal principles or assessed through the eyes of ordinary people, he would seem unable to escape blame. This is the fifth consideration.

In my past experience, anyone who observes precepts and eats vegetarian food by means of repressive effort will inevitably undergo a great eruption of karmic seeds before death. In my native district there was the bhikṣuṇī Master Guangding. She left home at twenty to become a nun, observed the precepts very strictly, recited the Buddha's name for fifty years, and contemplated a set of Oxherding Pictures for nearly thirty years. She was already seventy when I met her.

When she heard me explain the meaning of the Oxherding Pictures, she was suddenly overjoyed. Before the Buddha, she bowed and sought refuge in Yugong in order to practice Esoteric Buddhism. After more than eight hundred meditation sessions, she fell ill. At that time I wished to go north, so I told the attendants around her: "When your teacher is near death, she will certainly scold people and demand meat. Do not be concerned. Let her vent her anger, but serve her extremely fine vegetarian food and tell her that it is meat."

"Before long, she will certainly feel deep regret. Then tell her again of my prior instructions, and she will surely be relieved. Once this barrier has been passed, this illness will not recur." Later, things indeed happened this way, and she still passed away seated, with palms joined and reciting the Buddha's name. There have been countless other cases of such eruptions of karmic seeds. This is the sixth consideration.

IV. Hunger may be genuine or false. When hunger becomes unbearable, it is genuine hunger. If, upon seeing dishes of food, one immediately thinks of eating, that is false

hunger. If one cannot let go upon seeing fine dishes and unusual flavors, that is the desire to eat. The desire to eat readily becomes an illness, and those who eat meat often find it difficult to restrain.

Regarding this question, we must first discard our preconceived views. We should be strict with ourselves and forgiving toward others. Yet we must also constantly discipline ourselves: we must not cling to vegetarian food as our own merit, nor cling to meat-eating as the wrongdoing of others. I once followed a vegetarian diet for six years. Yet by the standard I am describing, I fell short. At home I was constantly irritable and angry.

Throughout those six years, not a day passed without my tongue being vegetarian while my mind craved meat: my eyes craved meat and my mouth ate vegetarian food, and afflictions never ceased. I therefore resumed eating meat and began training anew. Sometimes I ate richly, sometimes poorly, sometimes blandly, or merely two bowls of plain rice; and I placed fine dishes before myself, forcibly using them to break through these two views. I knew full well that resuming meat-eating would bring condemnation, yet I deliberately sought condemnation in order to break this mind that clung to merit.

Among the five desires, the most difficult to overcome is the desire for reputation; sexual desire comes next, then wealth, and then food and sleep. So long as the mind of reputation does not die, there is no way to enter the Way. This too is a method of training the vegetarianism of the mind. Yet after practicing it for many years, I still found it difficult to trust myself. Only then did I realize that such counteractive methods were not the ultimate solution: as long as this mind remained, the two views had not finally fallen away.

I reflected especially that the foundation of Buddhist practice does not lie here. Habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives cannot truly be uprooted without genuine investigation and inquiry, beginning from seeing one's true nature, until the sense faculties and their objects fall away. Only after another ten years was I able to see fine food without craving it. Views of meat and vegetarian food, views of merit, the mind that craves reputation, and the mind that delights—perhaps I could no longer abide in them. Within, I felt particularly free and at ease. This is what I call vegetarianism of the mind.

I know full well that this discussion will now receive every kind of criticism, but I follow my own course and dare not be hypocritical.

I recall that eight years ago, a fellow student came specially to rebuke me over this matter. I smiled and thanked him, saying, "Each person has his own reasoning. That you have come especially out of concern for me is truly worthy of thanks. Yet there is another person who cares for me even more deeply than you do. Do you know

who that is?" He asked who it was. I pointed to myself and said, "It is Wang so-and-so."

"Although you have not studied Buddhism for long, you truly do not know how to cherish yourself. I deliberately seek people's slander and abuse; you should consider what price is involved in this. How could one who uses esoteric practice for private convenience fail to know cause and effect?" He remained silent. Two years later, he came again and told me, "I have now had no choice but to resume eating meat."

I smiled and said, "You were never truly vegetarian in the first place, so why should it matter? I hope that fellow practitioners who have doubts about this question will neither insist that my words are correct nor argue excessively with others and disturb their minds. You should arouse great compassion, begin with the work of seeing your own true nature, and diligently eliminate habitual tendencies. The practice of vegetarian food can then be attained naturally. This is what Confucius meant by first establishing oneself in what is fundamental."

Yet from beginning to end, I do not wish others to kill living beings, and I also advocate refraining from taking life, for more births mean more killing. Those who have fallen into the animal realm have long since planted the causes for the retribution of being killed and cannot escape karmic force. If they are not killed by humans, they will be maimed by creatures of their own kind or of other kinds. One need only not kill them oneself, thereby forming evil affinities. There was once a place for releasing living beings at Dachang in Shanghai, where animals of every kind were kept; during the War of Resistance, soldiers killed them all, and not one remained. Such is the fearful power of karma. Is there any great matter in human life more important than transcending birth and death? I hope fellow practitioners will quickly attend to this great matter and take care not to engage in excessive disputation.