Miscellaneous Discourses on Observing the Subtle

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Observing People

I. Observing People

Observing a person’s appearance is not as good as observing their vital energy. Those whose energy is clear and substantial are superior: clarity indicates nobility, and substance indicates longevity. A person’s character tells you more than their vital energy does. A person of steady and generous character will surely enjoy blessings in later life, even if they are slow-witted. A quick mind by itself offers no

assurance of a long life. Yet some are dull and deceitful. As for those who seem shallow at first but have depth of character, one should examine their conduct.

In ordinary circumstances, observe what a person likes. A craving for empty prestige betrays a lack of inner dignity, for the noble need not seek nobility; it is precisely because they are base that they seek it. The same applies to wealth. Craving it reveals a sense of want. Those who pursue profit and gain will surely delight in oppressing others and be jealous of talent. The greedy are necessarily narrow-minded, and those who are narrow-minded are necessarily short on blessings. Anyone who lavishes comforts on themselves while treating others poorly is not worth associating with.

In a very wealthy household, first look at how it treats relatives in need. If the family can treat them generously and stay close to them, that household will surely prosper; then consider how it treats its friends. In a middle-income household, first observe whether its children are courteous and able to apply themselves to their studies; if so, that household will surely prosper. In a poor household, first examine whether its members are diligent or lazy. If they are diligent, that household will surely prosper.

If people in a wealthy and eminent household have no arrogant air, people in a middle-class household have no dispirited air, and people in a poor household have no vulgar air, then, regardless of wealth or poverty, these are all signs of flourishing greatness and treasures of the nation.

Upon entering a person’s room, first look at the floor. Those who often fail to sweep it clean are surely lazy, and before long they will decline.

In a poor household, it does not matter if the children’s clothes are worn and old; but if they are not clean, the household is surely lazy.

Regardless of wealth or poverty, there are seven things most to be avoided in a household: first, not rising early; second, lacking manners; third, having no regular hours for sleeping and eating; fourth, keeping gambling implements; fifth, idleness; sixth, having no budget for income and expenses; seventh, borrowing money without repaying it. Yet all these faults arise from idleness.

1. When one does not rise early, all manner of illicit, evil, and secretive acts naturally arise.

2. Those who lack manners can never advance or associate with people of integrity, and will naturally decline.

3. Those who have no regular hours for sleeping and eating incur unnoticed waste and are also prone to illness.

4. Those who keep gambling implements will surely attract bad companions. Gambling also harms human feelings; men and women mingle indiscriminately; it harms wealth, virtue, time, and spirit, and is an invisible thief.

5. Idleness causes the spirit to become listless and sluggish, fosters habits of laziness, and leads one to do pointless things. Nothing is more destructive of one's aspirations.

6. Without a budget for income and expenses, one constantly entertains hopes regarding income while allowing expenditures to run without limit. Poverty naturally follows, and all the preceding evils arise from poverty and the loss of aspiration.

7. Borrowing money is not in itself a bad thing. People have a duty to assist one another financially, so there is nothing inherently wrong with it. But making a habit of not repaying debts is most dangerous. It is best not to borrow; if one does borrow, one must remain vigilant at all times.

One Hundred Parables

Illness

In ancient times, people often entered the Way and gained understanding through analogies. Yet there is no thing and no place through which one cannot awaken to the Way. I am now sixty-eight years old. Not only have my mental habits not been eliminated; my bodily habits have also remained stubbornly entrenched. From the age of seventeen or eighteen, I have suffered from rectal prolapse. Each occurrence would cause it to descend, and over the fifty years since then, by a count of years, months, and days, it must have occurred more than eighteen thousand times. One can imagine the burden of it.

At the chen hour on the sixth day of the first month of this guisi year, it suddenly flared up severely again. The hemorrhoidal swelling at the anus was as large as a pear. Mr. Pan Taofei, a specialist in Chinese medicine for hemorrhoids, treated it without surgery, using medicine to eradicate it gradually at the root. It was completely cured in only twenty-one days. I have heard that those treated by excision often suffer a recurrence because of uncleanness; in this case, there will be no further worry. Thus I realized that deeply ingrained habits cannot be removed without a firm resolve, and that finding a physician also depends on the right time and conditions.

I was confined by illness for a month, yet when I rose, I showed no appearance of sickness. Because I constantly maintained an optimistic attitude, I did not regard it as illness. Perhaps, according to past karma, I was meant to suffer the calamity of

imprisonment; then this illness may be compared to a one-month prison sentence. The term was exceedingly short, yet it settled many debts. Is this not a happy matter? As for the various filth and odors of the sickbed, as well as aches, sleeplessness, lack of freedom, and so forth, the essential thing was simply not to heed them, nor to hope for a speedy recovery.

What is hardest to obtain in a lifetime is leisure. Now, while ill, I was spared much social intercourse and was also freed from teaching the Dharma and creating karma of speech. This too was a happy matter. May all sick people in the world use this method to overcome every form of suffering caused by illness. Do not let this illness be in vain; through it, awaken to the Way. This is the meaning of what is called transforming afflictions into bodhi.

Oxhide Glue

When hard oxhide glue is dissolved in water, it may be soaked for a full day and night without seeming to soften. One cannot help becoming impatient, perhaps even thinking it ineffective, not knowing that when the time and conditions are ripe, it will dissolve of itself. One need only keep adding water. Our awakening to the Way is likewise. Oxhide glue is like our habitual tendencies: if it is kept all day in a dry, wind-swept place, it grows harder by the day, and even after millions upon millions of years it will not change.

Water is seeing one's true nature. Only after seeing one's true nature is there hope of dissolving and eliminating habitual tendencies. But one must not expect results overnight, nor should one doubt the foundation merely because results are not seen for a time, change one's mind upon seeing something different, and seek another path. Therefore, in ordinary times, one must never become anxiously doubtful or fearful over one's habitual tendencies. I simply remove the fuel from beneath the cauldron, first taking up the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. After seeing one's true nature, one must constantly attend to the original nature, neither relaxing nor becoming impatient. The day of dissolution will come naturally. Oxhide glue is an insentient thing; this is the insentient expounding the Dharma. But who hears it?

The Barber Mr. Zhu

When I was about ten years old, there was an elderly barber surnamed Zhu in my hometown. He cut the hair of four generations of my family. He showed no signs of aging and remained unchanged over a long time, because honor and disgrace, gain and loss, did not weigh upon his mind. I observed him for more than thirty years, and he was almost the same from day to day. This made me reflect that rise and decline in human life have no fixed definition: the higher one's aspirations, the more fiercely one's greed burns; the greater one's fame, the deeper one's suffering.

If one dwells in a high place, a fall will surely be severe. He remained lowly throughout the year, and his mind did not burn with greed. He never anticipated a fall; even if one came, it would be no more than falling from a carpet to the floor, causing no injury. I should learn from his quiet humility and withdrawal, though he continued to work every day without interruption.

Flowers

Tomorrow is the second day of the second lunar month, the birthday of the hundred flowers. Amid their myriad purples and reds, each has its own nature; and what people enjoy in them also reveals their own nature. Refined and vulgar tastes differ. Those who love orchids and thoroughwort will surely not delight in jasmine and roses, for fragrant herbs and foul weeds differ in kind. The loftier the tune, the fewer those who join in. We who study Buddhism must likewise set our sights high from the outset. First impressions govern; only by taking the highest standards as our model can we avoid being easily led astray.

Horizontal Transcendence of the Three Realms

Those who cultivate the Pure Land speak of horizontal and direct exits, as in the analogy of an insect seeking to escape from within a bamboo stalk. To escape is to penetrate thoroughly and see one's true nature. Horizontal exit carries the sense of direct realization: there is only this one barrier, and once it is pierced through, that is all. Thus it is the same as the Chan school, for both begin cultivation from the eight consciousnesses and directly realize great perfect mirror wisdom.

What is there within the great perfect mirror? Those of the very highest wisdom can suddenly transcend and directly enter, passing through no stages and following no gradual sequence. That is why this analogy is used.

In Pure Land practice, one-pointed Buddha-recitation: the Buddha is the great perfect mirror. Temporarily assuming form, one returns to the formless. With the single phrase Amitābha, one sweeps away the myriad thoughts. How simple, direct, and precise this is! It is not merely horizontal transcendence: there is no barrier, nor is there coming or going. The mind is neither within nor without, nor in between. This itself is it—the perfectly wondrous, luminous mind, originally just so. Nor does one establish any measure of "perfect wondrousness." Without going out, one goes out of itself.

Thus the final phrase of Buddha-recitation is: "Who is reciting the Buddha?" Yet without passing through decades of Buddha-recitation amid murky confusion, it is not easy to attain the joy of sudden illumination. Even if one gains not the slightest illumination in this life, the roots of goodness have nevertheless been planted, wholesome affinities formed, and one has entered among the grades of rebirth.

Only when habitual tendencies remain unmoved must those reborn there continue to cultivate, see their true nature anew, and eliminate their habitual tendencies. This is what is called rebirth while carrying karma.

Therefore, what they call horizontal exit means only that, when conditions in the Western Pure Land have ripened, one may attain rebirth there. Its fruition differs from the Chan school's sudden transcendence through seeing one's true nature. At the point of beginning practice, the Chan school relies entirely on one's own power and is comparatively difficult; the Pure Land relies on the Buddha's power and, having methods to rely upon, is comparatively easier.

As for what is called direct exit, there are levels upon levels and barriers everywhere. This analogy applies to the doctrinal schools: the study of names and characteristics is inexhaustible when pursued to the end, principle outweighs phenomena, and thus the goal remains indefinitely remote. Elderly people should ultimately not be urged to enter into the study of names and characteristics. This is not to say that dharmas are higher or lower; for all dharmas are unobtainable and are all empty appearances. Therefore it is said, "These dharmas are equal; there is neither high nor low." What, then, is there to contend over?

Abiding

When a stone remains fixed, it obstructs the road; when water remains still, it putrefies; when air remains stagnant, it clogs; when blood remains stagnant, it becomes toxic. When the mind settles on something, views take shape. When it settles on those views, they harden into attachments. This is how a fixed sense of self takes root and how all manner of troubles arise; all karma proliferates from this. Each condition gives rise to the other, and human affairs become endlessly inverted. Therefore non-abiding is precious. There is no situation we cannot work through. What stops us is our fixation on a particular view.

Passing

Confucius gazed upon the water and sighed, saying, "What passes is like this!" In an instant, all passes away and never returns. The ancients cherished every inch of time because they cherished its passing. Let us observe a clock: not for an instant does it pause; it goes and does not return. Such is our lifespan, visibly shortening moment by moment, though we do not realize it. While ill, I read the Song of the Pipa. When I came to the line, "Autumn moons and spring breezes are casually spent," I closed the book and sighed. I reflected that sixty-eight years of my life have passed away. Alas! What passes is like this!

White Hair Is Not White Nature

The Third Indian Patriarch, Venerable Śāṇavāsa, asked his attendant Upagupta, “How old are you?” He replied, “Seventeen.” The venerable one said, “Is your body seventeen, or is your nature seventeen?” Upagupta replied, “Master, your hair has already turned white. Is it your hair that is white, or is your mind white?” The venerable one said, “Only my hair is white; my mind is not white.” Upagupta said, “My body is seventeen; my nature is not seventeen.” The venerable one knew that he was a vessel of Dharma. Three years later, he transmitted the Dharma to him, making him the Fourth Patriarch.

Afflictions Are a Treasure

If people had no afflictions, they would not recognize them as afflictions and seek freedom from them. They would then remain forever sunk in delusion, not knowing how to pull themselves out. It is like a person who falls to the ground and must rely on the ground to rise again; if one leaves the ground and seeks to rise, there is ultimately no way. The one who tied the bell must untie it. Afflictions are truly a supreme treasure.

Informal Talks on Afflictions

The two characters suffering and affliction should be understood differently: suffering arises from affliction; without affliction, there is no suffering. Affliction itself arises from mind. Because one has not realized that the mind is originally empty, one takes everything to be real. This is delusion, this is confusion, and karmic suffering follows accordingly.

What practitioners of the Way must most avoid is contention—contending for fame and profit—which is among the strongest bonds of birth and death. Do not contend for fame with those superior to you; do not contend for profit with those below you; and do not contend in abilities with those equal to you. Where there is contention, passionate self-assertion arises and disputes over right and wrong begin. Even worldly dharmas do not permit this; how much less can supramundane dharmas?

Investigation must be genuine investigation, and awakening must be true awakening. One must not rely merely on empty words, for they cannot overcome birth and death. Thus, by “real” one must personally see the true marks of reality; by “true” one must reach the ground of what is genuine and not false. Moreover, when the matter comes to that point, there is naturally a real test. Otherwise, claiming to have attained what one has not attained is a great delusion and the folly of deceiving oneself—nothing could be more serious.

So long as the mind that seeks reputation has not died, do not become a teacher of others. It is like a spark that has not been extinguished and may ignite at any time.

Yet eliminating views of dharmas is the most difficult of all. The chapter on Dharma offering in the Vimalakīrti Sūtra says: “No longer giving rise to views is the supreme offering of the Dharma.” This is the comprehensive holding of the immeasurable teachings spoken by the World-Honored One over forty-nine years.

Learn Until Old Age

The world is vast and the universe immense; yet what I have seen and heard does not amount even to a single grain among the sands of the Ganges. How, then, could I be arrogant? The older I grow, the more I feel the inadequacy of my learning and the insufficiency of my strength. I am now nearing seventy. Although I have the wish to benefit others, I regret that I lack effective methods for helping the world. As one grows old, one’s vigor declines. If unable to rise and act, perhaps one may sit and set things down in writing. Whether matters are great or small, if I have gained something from them, I wish to make it known to those of like mind. I shall therefore record, section by section, what I have seen and heard in my old age, not daring to neglect even a small good deed.

Arranging flowers in a vase may seem a small matter, yet the flowers soon wither. I have heard florists say that the water in a vase should be only about an inch deep and should never be too abundant. Do not let water touch the flowers themselves, nor should they lean against other objects, lest they absorb moisture. Change the water every two days. I tried this, and it worked exceedingly well: the flowers did not wilt for many days. Before placing peonies and Chinese peonies in a vase, scorch the cut ends over a flame, then put them in water; they will then open more readily. Some say that adding a piece of charcoal to the water is especially effective.

To keep the walls around a courtyard from collapsing over time, clear away the grass at their bases once a year; it is best to remove the roots. Trees should be planted well away from the walls and deeply rooted.

If the hands or feet are scalded by water or fire, immediately dissolve alkali in water and apply it as a dressing. Do not use too much water; the pain will stop at once.

Of the hundred ailments of the human body, internal wheezing and external ringworm are the most difficult to treat. Asthma is especially distressing. I recently obtained a prescription: remove the seeds from six jin of winter squash, add four jin of malt sugar and the juice of half a jin of old ginger, and boil the three ingredients together into a paste. Beginning on the Start of Winter, take one tablespoon daily, mixed with boiling water. Mild cases may be cured in a single winter; severe cases show results after three winters.

Black wood ear fungus is several times more potent than white wood ear fungus. After an illness, eat two qian daily, stewed until soft; consuming one jin produces remarkable results. An elderly lay practitioner named Zheng took it for more than ten years and is still healthy at the age of eighty-six. Young people suffering from seminal emission, however, should not eat too much of it.

Whenever anger becomes uncontrollable, immediately direct your attention to the soles of your feet, causing the fire to descend. Then there will be no danger of a stroke, because the blood will not rush into the brain.

The Dharma of Seeing One's True Nature

We see all things with the eyes, but why do the eyes not see themselves? To see one's own eyes, one can only close one's eyes and reflect. But what is this seeing? It is provisionally called imagining or thinking; this is the mind.

But why is there a mind? The mind is like an image. Yet how can it reflect and illuminate? This image is the result of what is illuminated; where is its cause? And what is this cause that is able to illuminate?

Capacity and power are two different things: capacity is the essence of innate ability, while power is its function as expressed. That image is the power of mind; then what is this innate ability?

External appearances can certainly be seen, and the inner appearances—the images within the mind—can also be perceived by the mind. Only the true form of this imageless innate ability can neither be seen with the eyes nor heard with the ears. Seeing it with the mind is not like ordinary seeing; yet apart from the mind it cannot be seen. One must also relinquish seeing itself; only then can one see. This is wondrous spiritual seeing, yet it has always been so and is nothing extraordinary.

Hygiene Practices for Older Adults

Caring for the body and nourishing life are in fact two different matters; compared side by side, they differ as widely as heaven and earth. Caring for the body concerns comfort in one's daily routines, whereas nourishing life concerns spiritual ease. The result of caring for the body is health, yet one may still be unable to withstand stimulation and thus easily fall ill. The result of nourishing life is peace of mind; one can overcome every circumstance and remain at ease.

Caring for the body relies on the protective power of external conditions, but such protection is sometimes exhausted. Nourishing life relies on one's own power of resistance, which can cope with endlessly arising circumstances. Caring for the body

depends on money and external assistance; nourishing life relies solely on the inner cultivation of one's own mind. For those seeking longevity, caring only for the body without nourishing life is ultimately useless. If one can nourish life while also caring for the body, there is far greater security.

To contend with the demon of illness, everyone must have two kinds of resources: money and energy. Caring for the body requires both; nourishing life requires only one. Those who care for the body are often fearful of illness, whereas those who nourish life scarcely know illness. Young people should place greater emphasis on caring for the body; middle-aged people should attend to nourishing life; and older people should give equal weight to both.

Caring for the body concerns oneself alone, while nourishing life extends that care to all living beings. Those able to care for the body may not truly nourish life, but those able to nourish life truly care for the body. Caring for the body serves one's immediate needs. Nourishing life offers lasting protection.

Methods of nourishing life: young people should engage in much physical labor, be diligent rather than lazy, and refrain from bad companions, erotic books, and novels. Middle-aged people should curb greed, desire, vanity, and drinking; each day they should have orderly work and brief periods of rest. Older people should be detached from fame, profit, gain, and loss; they should meditate at fixed times and walk five li each day.

1. Eat less. Avoid three things: heavily fishy and greasy foods, raw and cold foods, and hard foods. Do not eat hurriedly. After eating, use both hands to rub the two sides of the ribs and abdomen—the regions of the liver and stomach—three hundred times each session, gradually increasing from fifty rubs to three hundred. Then use the backs of both fists to rub the two lumbar hollows two hundred times, three times daily. This can strengthen the sinews and bones, aid digestion, dispel liver fire, cleanse the intestines and stomach, strengthen the waist and kidneys, and free the lung qi. At this time, concentrate solely on the rubbing, without letting the mind attend to anything else. Naturally, the mind returns to its original ground and fire returns to its source; within an hour, this can strengthen the heart.

2. Walk more. Walk slowly for fifteen minutes, gradually increasing to half an hour. In windy or rainy weather, walk indoors or practice taijiquan instead.

3. Sleep at regular times. Older people do not sleep for long; they should on no account turn over in bed and brood, thereby exhausting the spirit. If unable to sleep, get up to read or write, then sleep again for a while at dawn or in the afternoon. When sleeping, men should lie on the right side, with the left side uppermost; women should lie on the left side, with the right side uppermost, so as not to press upon the heart.

4. Worry less. When one is detached from gain and loss, one's vital blood is naturally not depleted.

5. Take more joy. Follow one's dispositions, accept one's lot, and naturally delight in life.

6. Sit more. One should sit quietly for an hour each day. Never focus on bodily points and cultivate qi, lest qi become obstructed and the blood stagnate. It is best to recite the Buddha's name silently or hold a mantra, so that the mind has something on which to rest; one will surely attain longevity.

7. Forget old age. Never keep the word "old" constantly in mind. Continue to regard yourself as middle-aged. Whenever the mind is disturbed, qi is weakened; weakness of mind and qi is the root of aging.

Anyone who understands how to nourish life will surely attain longevity. There are five stages. The first is prenatal cultivation: while dwelling in the mother's womb, one should have a strong maternal body, be naturally well endowed, and not suffer physical injury. One should not undergo a difficult birth. This is the root of one's innate endowment. The second is the nursing period: food and drink should be properly regulated, with little illness or suffering. The third is childhood, during the proper period of development: do not masturbate, do not associate with bad companions, and do not read improper books.

One should be adequately nourished and diligent rather than lazy. The fourth stage is adulthood: avoid alcohol, sexual indulgence, and gambling; be less greedy for vanity; do not contend with others over pride or petty disputes; and regularly study philosophical principles. This is the cultivation of one's acquired endowment. As for old age, one may draw upon a lifetime of experience and take present circumstances into account in establishing one's own regimen of rest and recuperation; there is no fixed method. I offer my own experience here for the benefit of all, so that everyone may attain longevity. Since each person's circumstances differ, one may select what is suitable; there is no need to follow it all exactly.

Beginning Buddhist Practice

For all who are beginning to study Buddhism, it is like a carpenter felling timber: the larger the timber taken, the better; if it is even an inch too small, it loses several feet of usefulness. Therefore, one should aim for the highest and first establish what is great. Those who enter through the doctrinal teachings are often imperceptibly confined by them and find it extremely difficult to develop further later on. Those who enter through the school must have an enlightened teacher assess their

capacities, or they too may easily go astray. Yet their potential will not be small; in the end, they will surely become vessels of great capacity.

It is like building a house: no matter how many rooms it has, one first sets aside ten mu of land. A mansion of a thousand rooms can then be built upon it; this is not a matter to be measured by time. When causes, conditions, and the proper time converge, it comes about naturally; those who help bring it about are also close at hand—this is what is meant by the assistance of conditions. From then on, the two carts advance together, each taking the whip first; those who strive may yet surpass those who came before. The foremost blessing in human life lies in the word leisure; without leisure, one has no share in it. I therefore offer the following few words:

I. First consider your own age. You have enjoyed, eaten, and used things; everything in the world is really no more than this. What is valuable in this great matter is first to grow detached from worldly ties—not to sever them, but not to let the mind become bound to them.

When external things no longer govern the mind, it is Buddha. In every circumstance, neither leave them behind nor become attached to them. Continue all human affairs and interactions as before; this is also going about one's affairs with a mind free of attachment. Living this way is itself Buddhist practice, wherever one may be. But this is understanding in principle, not realization through direct experience; when the understanding is put to the test, it offers no firm footing. One must therefore rely on a method as an assisting condition. (This passage emphasizes daily practice; above all, it must be applied flexibly.)

II. A method responds to the needs of the moment; once it has served its purpose, it should be set aside, just as medicine is discarded once a sick person has recovered. But bitter medicine benefits illness. While taking it, do not judge it by age. There are those more than ten years older than I who are still taking medicine. Without enduring a spell of bone-piercing cold, how can one attain the fragrance that fills the nostrils?

The true purpose of sitting meditation is to cultivate perseverance and patience. Whatever thoughts arise, whether good or evil, once you become aware of them, do not attend to them. After doing this tens of thousands of times, the practice of non-abiding will naturally become well trained. Once you have cast off attachment in this way, then when matters arise in daily life, remain non-abiding in the same manner—morning in this, evening in this, in all situations and adversities likewise in this. Do not practice intensely for a day and then neglect it for ten; do not chop and change. Resolve to attain a mind without hindrance: this is ultimate nirvāṇa.

Thus, the practice of sitting meditation is tested and verified in the mind-ground and mental states of daily life. The mind-ground and mental states, in turn, are tested

and verified in one's everyday dealings, words, and actions. Practice while sitting is precisely for daily life; practice in daily life is precisely for the unceasing blessing of the endless future. The Buddha is called the World-Honored One. What is honored in this title? It is the ability to enable all people in the world each to honor what they themselves revere, so that all alike become world-honored ones.

Yet people today instead fail to honor what they should honor, and honor only the insubstantial, arising-and-ceasing, meaningless concerns of clothing, food, and shelter, toiling away their entire lives. Alas! This year's laughter and joy return again next year; autumn moons and spring breezes are idly passed. Is this not sorrowful? Bai Juyi wrote "The Song of the Pipa" from feelings stirred within him; this was his karmic affinity for entering Buddhism.

All Things Necessarily Have Causes and Conditions

In all matters there are causes and conditions. The flourishing and decline of the Dharma do not lie in outward appearances; they depend on responding to people's capacities and to the times, as circumstances may bring about.

In short, all worldly affairs consist entirely of the coming together of conditions. Because conditions come together, they are impermanent; because they are impermanent, they are illusory; and because they are illusory, there is no need to take them as real. How could the Buddhadharma itself not also be illusory and delusive? Only when illusion is exhausted does true emptiness become manifest. So long as anything remains unexhausted, even by a hair's breadth, it is separated by a thousand mountains and ten thousand waters; yet in the end it is no more than a hair's breadth before one's eyes.

Everything is fully present—worthy of being treasured or withheld, beyond comparison. Sentient beings are unaware of it; practitioners of the two vehicles guard it; bodhisattvas realize it; and Buddhas thoroughly understand it. They know that it has always been thus. Without practice, this matter is not seen; yet even through practice, it is not seen. Before awakening, people generally seek to obtain something to be seen, not realizing that in so doing they establish a seer. Once subject and object are established, one turns and turns, yet does not see.

Yet one cannot do without exertion; nor does merely abiding in emptiness suffice. First dispel deluded thoughts—but this too is not really dispelling them. It is simply to abruptly cease all conditions, abide nowhere directly, and recognize that it has always been thus.

This original nature neither increases nor diminishes, changes nor decays, according to whether deluded thoughts are many or few. It seems to be obstructed, yet is in

fact unobstructed. Since it is unobstructed, what, then, are deluded thoughts—that is, ignorance? Are they not manifestations within the true nature? If one knows them and uses them, they become wondrous functioning; if one does not know them and follows them, they become karmic consciousness, vast and boundless, with no end in sight.

You should ask yourselves: First, do you still fear ignorance? Second, do you still follow ignorance? Third, are ignorance and suchness one or two? Fourth, at all times and in all places, whether in activity or stillness, do you constantly see it close at hand? If you can truly do this, you may simply let go.

The Chinese expression bu fangxin, meaning 'being unable to set one's mind at ease,' names a habit that causes more trouble than anything else. The same habit causes trouble in how we relate to others, ourselves, the Dharma, and our circumstances. Wherever there is opposition, the hundred ailments all arise. At the place where you cannot put your mind at ease, simply let the mind and the matter be; see what happens. In the end, it is no more than this. Ultimately, the very obstruction one seeks cannot be found. In such summer heat, what difference is there between temperatures above one hundred degrees and a cool setting of sixty degrees? If you pass the summer in this way, would it not be comfortable?

Buddhist Practice Requires Wisdom

In studying Buddhism, one must have intelligence in order to apply skillful effort. Often, the more rigidly one exerts oneself, the farther away one gets. It is better to be like someone who makes no such effort and suddenly encounters the right opportunity: upon seeing, one sees. But what is it that one sees? Before seeing it, people often insist on seeking it, not knowing that the more they seek, the less they see.

For example, suppose there were originally no such person in the world, yet you tried to imagine that person's appearance and age. How could you possibly succeed? This is a face that originally has no face. To trust this completely requires the greatest wisdom and the greatest courage; otherwise, one would never dare to take it up.

You have all sat in meditation many times. Have you seen this self that has no face? Do you suppose that your present body is your self? Do you take your thoughts and knowledge to be your mind? Apart from these two, what else could you take to be yourself? The ancients said that only upon seeing this true face does one find the place where, life after life, one may settle oneself and establish one's life.

Otherwise, one merely chases wind and shadows; one can never take wind and shadows to be oneself. This thing is right before your eyes, yet to seek it is like riding an ox while looking for an ox. Since this thing is already before your eyes, simply see it for yourself. What use is there in asking the Buddha or me, consulting the words of the sūtras, or relying on every sort of theory? Whenever fellow practitioners meet and gather, do not let the occasion pass in vain and squander your precious time.

All of you, discuss this among yourselves. Do not concern yourselves with other people's rights and wrongs, strengths and weaknesses. It is like looking down from a tall building at the varied scenes on the street: it is not that one neither sees nor hears them, but one cannot manage them, and managing them would be of no use. This mind should simply remain thus empty—not intentional mind, not mindlessness. At just this moment, what is it? Use your mind everywhere and in every circumstance; use this mind of no-mind.

Mind is the main point: when things come, respond accordingly; when affairs arise, bring them to completion. In every instant, return to your own original ground. You are now upstairs in Gui Ren; tell me, what is Gui Ren, and what does it mean that all under heaven returns to benevolence? Studying Buddhism is not a road of advancing forward, but a road of turning back. This point must be clearly recognized. Yet people of wisdom consider even turning back too troublesome. They say: "Turning back is already too far away. It has always been right before our eyes; it is not something to be found by coming and going."

As for the foregoing points, each of you should investigate them for yourself: how many levels have you seen, and how far has your practice advanced? There is no need for false modesty. Layman Zhongding should first explain each point to the assembly, after which all may discuss them together. Do not distinguish superior from inferior, for that only increases emotional attachments and views—entanglements that cannot be cut off and birth and death from which one cannot escape.

Dharma Language

From an unwarranted thought, one falsely establishes an illusory body.

Is not this coming and going simply making trouble?

When worldly conditions have come to an end, what is there to cling to?

Relying on the fire of prajñā, return to pure emptiness.

All things cease and perish; only the Great King of Vows remains,

freely present throughout the ten directions, moving yet unmoved.

It is precisely this:

Flowers bloom and fall, yet spring ever remains;

clouds depart and return, while the eye is naturally clear.

The Thoughts of Buddhist Practitioners

Those who study Buddhism are called Buddha's children. They have two tasks: one is to close the door and cultivate themselves; the other is to open the door and engage with the world. Self-cultivation is inner realization; engaging with the world is outer training. Together, these are called cultivation. The Buddhadharma must be put to great use; one must not shut oneself away and seek only one's own liberation. Anyone who seeks liberation only for themselves is like scorched sprouts and rotten seeds—a person of no promise, incapable of benefiting sentient beings through great compassion, and therefore not sanctioned by the Buddha.

Therefore, the minimum requirement for a Buddhist practitioner is compassion. One must arouse a mind of great compassion before one can attain accomplishment. When the mind is vast, one's undertakings likewise become vast. It is like a vessel: the larger the vessel, the more it can contain. If one tries to hold seawater in a cup, the extent of one's accomplishment is readily imaginable.

Apart from all the human affairs and dharma gates of this world, there is no Buddhadharma. The Buddhadharma functions amid human affairs. Only by fully carrying out the human way is one practicing the Buddhadharma. The power of human thought is unsurpassed: it can make one a Buddha or a sage, good or evil; it can create heaven or hell, materialism or idealism, creation or destruction, peace or conflict. Every kind of action is created by the mind.

To study Buddhism is to cultivate a greatly awakened mind, nondual with the Buddha. It does not mean that one's physical body changes into a Buddha; it means that one's mind-capacity and inner state become the same as the Buddha's. If this mind is base and cruel, one is no different from ghosts and beasts. If it is luminous and free, one belongs among humans and devas. It is complete freedom and self-reliance, without relying on external powers or seeking outside oneself. Since we have become human beings, we must fulfill the human way.

Having studied Buddhism, a person should accomplish the Buddha Way. Everywhere, one must transform one's thinking, discard the old, and renew oneself. This is the fundamental inner revolution of one's intrinsic nature. This revolutionary work continues until Buddhahood is attained. Before one has attained great

awakening and can universally benefit the masses, it cannot be called the completion of this revolution.

Therefore, one's vows must be great, one's aspirations lofty, one's causal ground correct, one's faith firm, one's practice constant, one's view complete, and one's inner state empty. For this reason, the thinking of Buddhist practitioners is difficult to bring into tune with that of ordinary people. Whoever does not break through worldly and base views, and does not possess the righteous spirit of great fearlessness, cannot be called a Buddha's child.

Disciples of the Buddha work for the benefit of themselves and all others, without self or other, without national boundaries, without racial distinctions, and without divisions among religions—all are one body and equal. Therefore, their thinking is likewise vast and impartial. Yet their way of acting proceeds from near to far, from small to great, from unfamiliarity to proficiency, from the incomplete to the complete, beginning with the root. There is no fixed method to be taken as the sole principle; all are inseparable from the mind of great compassion. A disciple's outlook can be tested in the way they handle everyday relationships and affairs. Let us first set this forth.

There are two lines in the Buddhist sūtras: "Dharmas abide in their dharma positions; the worldly appearances remain ever-present." Because all the varied forms of the world each have their own natural dharma position, abiding constantly and unmoved, this is the ever-abiding dharma of worldly appearances.

Thus, I need not be turned or shaken by them. For example, aloeswood and sandalwood are naturally fragrant; that is their dharma position. Fishy filth is naturally foul-smelling; that is its dharma position. If I want what is fragrant to become foul, and what is foul to become fragrant, my thinking is confused, and I give rise to afflictions and inverted views on my own. Again, one who steals is a thief; that person has that dharma position, or else could not be called a thief.

For the government to punish according to the law or reform such a person is the government's dharma position. For an enemy to invade is the enemy's dharma position. To resist with justice, even to use arms and kill them, without indulgently sparing them in the name of compassion, is my dharma position. One should do whatever is appropriate; then one's thinking is correct. If one insists on complying with them, wishing to act contrary to this course, one's thinking is confused and one has departed from the standpoint of one's dharma position.

The Buddhadharma seeks to make every person's thinking complete and unobstructed: first awaken to one's original nature, then understand worldly dharmas, so that society may become one body, equal, intimate, and loving. This is the dharma position of the Buddhadharma. For each of us to fulfill our own way is

the dharma position of humans and devas. To do evil and harm others is the dharma position of demons and ghosts. To be foolish, deluded, and muddled is the dharma position of beasts.

It can thus be seen that good and evil each have their own dharma position. Why must I forcibly oppose them and arbitrarily give rise to views of self, thereby increasing afflictions?

Therefore, regarding everything—right and wrong alike—I cannot fail to understand. When matters arise, I must still deal with them reasonably and appropriately as usual. My mind is clearly aware, while my inner state is empty. Knowing what is good, I need not be surprised; knowing what is evil, I need not become angry. In matters such as killing or theft, one need only ask whether they are reasonable and appropriate. If, after examination and judgment, killing is warranted, then one kills; yet one pities the person and does not take credit. One pities their ignorance, their unfavorable causes and conditions, and their misfortune in becoming a thief.

Killing is my dharma position; I must fulfill my duty, while inwardly seeming as though nothing has happened. This is the Buddha's way of thinking. Conversely, if I myself were temporarily confused and unfortunately became a thief, falling into the net of the law, then this is what I ought to undergo. Whether execution or imprisonment, I should accept it and repent, without blaming Heaven or other people. Knowing clearly that this is the ever-abiding dharma position, why should I be troubled or disturbed? All are one body and equal: this is the thinking of a Buddha's child.

The thinking of Buddha's children is fundamentally directed toward eliminating their own three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. Greed is insatiable acquisitiveness. When what one greedily seeks cannot be obtained and things do not go as one wishes, anger arises. Anger is hatred. All evils arise from greed and anger; one creates karma and undergoes karmic retribution, suffering wrongfully—this is ignorance. Ignorance is delusion. From delusion, greed and anger arise again; they generate one another in an endless cycle. Luminous thinking is thereby obscured, and vast wisdom is poisoned. Therefore, transforming one's thinking is the most important work in attaining Buddhahood. As for the means of transforming it thoroughly, that belongs to self-cultivation behind closed doors and will be discussed later.

Worldly thinking merely clings to existence and does not know the emptiness of conditions. Practitioners, on the other hand, may cling one-sidedly to emptiness and despise existence. Neither is the Middle Way. The thinking of Buddha's children knows with certainty that all things are illusory existence, yet does not discard existence. It also knows that all things are originally empty, yet does not fall into

biased emptiness. To abide in neither of the two extremes of emptiness and existence is true emptiness and great samādhi. Such thinking transcends worldly things, and its inner state is unlike that of others. Worldly people often find it strange, not knowing that it is in fact ordinary, containing an indestructible truth.

The thinking of Buddha's children cannot be displayed for others to see; it can only be inferred from human affairs. Yet worldly people inevitably regard it as strange.

Because their thinking differs from that of ordinary people, it possesses unpredictable adaptability, the function of skillful means in accordance with conditions, indestructible truth, and wondrous methods that may be contrary or compliant. These may first cause others to slander and revile them, and later lead those people to awakening. They value practice and do not esteem empty talk. Their inner state surpasses that of ordinary people. Whoever cannot relinquish fame, profit, and respect holds a base view that is not the thinking of a Buddha's child. Therefore, their thinking is right, not deviant.

Most remarkable of all, Buddha's children fundamentally do not acknowledge thought as truly existent; it is merely the conditioned shadow cast when the mind temporarily stirs. Yet, since one is in the human world, one must fulfill worldly functions and must not fall into annihilationism or passivity. Thus, although one knows it is illusory, one must use that illusion to accomplish the work of great compassion.

Therefore, in all worldly affairs, one knows that they are empty without falling into biased emptiness; one simply does not cling to existence. To cling to existence is to establish a view of self. All the inequities of worldly affairs arise from the opposition of one person's self-view to another's. Each refuses to make sacrifices and clings to their own opinion; thus truth is obscured, people become confused, and others are led astray in their wisdom-life. One also loses the mind of great compassion and is no longer a Buddha's child.

In speaking of function, the thinking of Buddha's children gives weight both to materialism and to idealism. Once the function has been exercised, circumstances vanish and mind is empty; then there is no longer any so-called materialism or idealism. This is the impartial thinking of Buddha's children. As for their fundamental refusal to acknowledge thought as truly existent, its meaning is exceedingly profound. Since it belongs to the gate of inner cultivation, it cannot be understood in a few words, and will not be explained for now. Let us offer several examples from human affairs to illustrate the thinking of Buddha's children, for the reference of the wider public:

1. Soliciting donations. In worldly views, one must choose the wealthy and ask them to donate more, while ignoring those without money. Buddha's children do not act

this way. They take equality as the primary principle: everyone has a share in the merit and virtue of public benefit, and no one should be despised or cast aside for being poor. All should be invited to donate equally. If someone is unwilling, they should not be forced, so that they too may have an opportunity to create merit and virtue.

As for those with means, they too should be left to act as they wish; they must not be compelled by power or influence. Their freedom should be respected, for this is not in the nature of a fine. Whether their possessions were acquired properly is another question and irrelevant to this matter. Even if they will not part with a single hair, one should neither resent nor hate them. This is the thinking of a Buddha's child.

Conversely, when someone solicits a donation from me, if I have money, then for the public good I should pledge as much as I can. But I must never ostentatiously display wealth and pride before the public, thereby making others uncomfortable. If I lack the means to contribute, I should not regard it as shameful, but politely decline on the spot. This is what is meant by proceeding in a straightforward way; it is the thinking of a Buddha's child.

2. Toward those who possess power, status, or wealth. One should not follow worldly custom by currying favor with the powerful, nor should one deliberately keep one's distance to avoid suspicion. With a sincere and straightforward heart, one should regard them with complete equanimity, without the slightest jealousy. Wealth and rank are merely temporary circumstances in a person's life: when one encounters a spring breeze, there is warmth; when one encounters frost and ice, there is cold. Each has its own causes and conditions. What is there to envy?

It is also like putting on makeup and appearing on stage: in front of the stage one may be adorned as beautiful or ugly, but on returning backstage, one returns to one's Original Face. Therefore, one must never slight the poor, but respect them equally. If one's own status is humble, one likewise should not belittle oneself or suspect others of looking down on one. Contempt is a base worldly view; self-respect is respect for oneself. A disciple of the Buddha learns to regard everyone impartially.

3. Toward fame and profit. Worldly people take empty reputation as an honor; Buddha's children value the correspondence of name and reality. If they do not correspond, it is theft—so where is fame or profit? As for monetary gain, worldly people rejoice in gains beyond their due; Buddha's children regard this as shameful, because their conscience is uneasy. Worldly people regard fame and profit as splendid embroidered garments. When a major ceremony is held, however, if one deserves to receive an honor, one should accept it, neither ashamed nor artificially

refusing it; otherwise, one merely becomes false. This is the thinking of a Buddha's child.

4. Toward those enjoying success. Worldly people commonly have two attitudes: jealousy and flattery. Buddha's children instead give rise to compassion, thinking of how painful it will be when such people later fall from favor. They always hope that they will awaken and not crave empty glory. This is the great compassionate thinking of a Buddha's child.

5. Toward the children of others. Buddha's children understand that they cannot love all equally in the same way, but should regard all with impartiality, seeing others' children as nondual with their own. They should also regard every elderly person who could have given birth to them as their parent, everyone to whom they could have given birth as their child, and all others as brothers and sisters. When such people encounter difficulties, if I am able to help, I should do all I can to assist them. Yet there must also be proper limits; assistance must not be indiscriminate.

Buddhist Practitioners of the Past Twenty Years

Over the past twenty years, Buddhist practitioners have become very different from those of earlier times. All recognize that there is a higher matter to pursue, and quite a few are genuinely willing to apply themselves. They all wish to realize the mind-ground, transcend birth and death, and attain an ultimate resolution. They also know that they cannot rely entirely on seeking help from the Buddha, depending wholly on the Dharma, or relying wholly on a teacher, but must seek a way out for themselves.

This is a great advance in Buddhism. Especially among the younger generation, there are those who, with their innate ardor and diligent perseverance, wish to uphold the Buddhadharma, dispel the inferior view that "Buddhism is superstition," and apply the true Buddhadharma broadly in society. This is precisely the manifestation of great compassion and truly a fortunate development.

Yet the maladies associated with the Dharma are difficult to eliminate. At the outset, practitioners suffer from lacking the ability to make their own discernment; they blindly turn with conditions, and no one examines whether their capacities are great or small.

Whichever gate they enter, they practice whatever Dharma belongs to it, allowing their first exposure to become decisive. Often, great material is cut down into small material: this is the first pity. Or the gate they enter may indeed suit their capacity, so that they could have gone deeply into a single gate; yet their causal ground is improper, or they practice incorrectly, and thus waste their time in vain: this is the

second pity. Or their capacities may be exceptionally sharp, and what they perceive may truly surpass that of others, so that nothing before them can satisfy their expectations.

They then become arrogant, content with a little attainment: this is the third pity. Or, having practiced and gained a slight experience, they delight in it and consider themselves right; or they become doubtful and dare not advance further, with no one to resolve their doubts. Still others, having first entered a sacred state but lacking firm roots, are immediately affirmed by their teachers and become inwardly complacent, thereby stopping short: this is the fourth pity. Or some begin practice with an improper causal ground, vainly hoping for spiritual powers;

thus they enter a wrong path: this is the fifth pity. Some have already gained an initial clarity of the fundamental ground, and there is no error in what they practice; yet, because their habitual tendencies have not been eliminated, they begin to doubt their previous practice and turn to another Dharma in search of a shortcut, not knowing that this only leads them astray: this is the sixth pity. Although the foregoing are stages that practitioners must undergo, if they are not resolved early, one error will inevitably lead to another until matters become irretrievable.

How can we look on passively without seeking verification? With this little understanding of mine, I shall first offer the following explanation. When, in the future, practitioners gain attainments that exceed what I know, I ask them to supplement and correct it, without making distinctions of higher and lower.

As for the maladies associated with the Dharma, the primary responsibility lies with teachers. So long as those who transmit the Dharma and those who receive it have not gone beyond attachment to Dharma, they cannot avoid such maladies. Both sides should proceed with the utmost caution and should rectify their causal ground in order to prevent later consequences. In instructing others about the causal ground, the responsibility of transmitting the Dharma is of greatest importance.

For the wisdom-life of many in the future will issue from this single root. One error can spread into error after error; compassion may instead become wrongdoing. This is truly frightening. Those who transmit the Dharma, being teachers of others, are models for humans and devas. They must never lack great compassion, harbor thoughts of fame and gain, or cling to biased views. Without great compassion, distinctions between gates and the two views of self and dharmas will naturally arise.

If there are thoughts of fame and gain, then jealousy, arrogance, greed, anger, and other such states of mind will naturally arise as well. If there is a biased and obstinate mind, students will suffer even more. One may rigidly cling to a single Dharma without knowing how to adapt; yet not everyone is an ordinary being

attached to dharmas. Therefore, one must first be vigilant with oneself. The trouble with people lies in their liking to be teachers of others, for the responsibility is too weighty.

As for students, they must first understand the practice that lays the right foundation. We should first ask ourselves: What is the purpose of our present practice? Is it to attain the true fruition? But to attain true fruition, one must first have the right cause. What, then, are cause and fruition? What is this cycle through which I have wandered from life to life, and what is this birth and death I now experience?

Is it not our deluded mind that creates mischief, causing us to undergo worldly toil in vain, to be born and to die? If we still revolve within birth and death today, will we not turn downward again, without end? It is because I fear this that I practice today, seeking fundamental liberation. Yet today's cause is tomorrow's fruition. If today's causal ground is again improper, then it would be better not to practice at all.

Since we know that the illness lies in the mind, we must prescribe medicine according to the illness. We must urgently begin with the Dharma of the mind-ground itself; this is the right path.

If one seeks the Buddha and the Dharma while revolving among outward appearances, is that not seeking outwardly, like driving south while intending to go north, and entering a non-Buddhist path once more? Therefore, whether one's faculties are dull or sharp, and whether the Dharma is Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, Pure Land, precepts, the Dharma Characteristics School, or calming and contemplation, all must begin with the Dharma of the mind-ground. This is the most important question of all.

Unless one first understands this oneself, rectifies one's causal ground, and arouses the resolve through fear of suffering, one will certainly not practice with deep urgency. If one merely delights in marvelous Dharma gates and lofty theories, this gives rise to a second mind of grasping, increasing birth and death. Is this not error added upon error? Therefore, when beginning, one must be like splitting bamboo: one cannot go crooked by even the slightest fraction. If the first stroke of the axe is straight, it will be straight to the end without deviation. This must be the first decisive principle. The teaching must suit every person; one must rely on the person rather than on the Dharma, apply it according to the recipient's capacity, and ensure that students take the direct path. Do not vaunt oneself so highly that others cannot approach. This too is great compassion.

The greatest taboo for students is to belittle themselves, first forming the notion that they are incapable; how then can they seek thorough realization? Therefore, one must not regard oneself as having dull faculties and suppose that one cannot

advance deeply in this life, thereby disappointing the Buddha's compassionate expectations. Yet neither should one regard oneself as having sharp faculties, gain a little superficial understanding, think that there is nothing more to it, and thereby give rise to arrogance and mislead oneself.

Consider Ānanda: throughout his life he heard much and was exceedingly intelligent and quick-witted, yet after the Buddha's nirvāṇa he still could not enter the gate. Only after encountering Mahākāśyapa, the First Patriarch, did he awaken. Thus sharpness and dullness are temporary conditions in a person's life. Unless one resolves the matter from the fundamental ground of one's intrinsic nature, even if one practices until the end of the kalpa, nothing will be accomplished.

You must know that all dharmas lead to a single destination. The essential thing is that your vision be correct and that you do not take the wrong road; do not ask whether it is fast or slow. If the direction is wrong, it is like shooting an arrow without a target: one merely wanders blindly. What use is it to walk quickly? Indeed, the faster one goes, the farther away one becomes. It is better to see the route clearly; even if one walks slowly, every step will be effective.

There is no fixed Dharma; skillful means are what matter. Foolish people cling rigidly, while wise people understand how to adapt. Dharmas have no self-nature; because they change through impermanence, they have no fixed definition. Present conditions are not uniform: people differ in sharpness and dullness, time may be long or short, capacities may ripen early or late, practice may be shallow or deep, preferences may agree or differ, physical strength may be strong or weak, and dispositions may be diligent or indolent. Therefore, in dealing with every person and every Dharma, one should apply them according to conditions and adapt them to the other person's situation. This is the functioning of great compassion.

Meditation practice may roughly be divided into four kinds. First, there are Chan practitioners, who sit in order to let go of body and mind and investigate their original nature. Second, there are Daoist practitioners, who sit to cultivate essence, qi, and spirit. Third, there are those who sit to perform a daily practice, such as Pure Land practitioners reciting the Buddha's name or Esoteric practitioners performing their practices. Fourth, there are those who sit because they are weary of disturbance and enjoy quiet. All these are collectively called seated meditation. Though their purposes differ, they all seek meditative stability.

Although their cross-legged sitting is the same, their methods differ. Yet all fail to understand the meaning of seated meditation. “To strike” means to strike away deluded thoughts; “to sit” means to sit and see one's intrinsic nature. Those who sit cross-legged practice this work while seated. After rising from the seat, amid the four modes of deportment—even while dressing, eating, carrying water, or hauling

firewood—there should be no time when they do not continue this investigation. This is practicing the same work off the cushion.

But those whose minds are restless and whose manner is unrestrained should first regulate the body and restrain the mind, using seated posture as a support for practice. Sitting serves as an aid within the wider practice.

Chan practitioners especially are not permitted to crave the enjoyment of quiet or cling to the Dharma. They may mistakenly suppose that rigidly maintaining the appearance of meditative stability can increase their meditative strength. Cases such as Zhihuang, who claimed to have attained proper absorption and lived in a hut, sitting for twenty years, or Niutou Farong, who sat quietly observing the mind, are not the right path. Thus when Mazu sat in hopes of becoming a Buddha, Nanyue ground a brick to make a mirror in order to mock him. He feared precisely that this malady would arise.

Therefore, after the Sixth Patriarch, masters such as Heze placed great importance on awakening to and seeing one's intrinsic nature. They carefully guarded against karmic consciousness like a thief: whenever awareness was lost, they would twist the nose until it hurt. They did not place primary importance on sitting, yet neither did they discard it, for sitting merely settles the body; while seated, one must still investigate and maintain vigilant awareness at every moment. Fearing that practitioners might become drowsy while seated, they would repeatedly supervise them, taking turns to make the rounds with incense, or have them walk. The more they walked, the more they might become confused, so they did not permit thoughts to arise.

When they reached the proper point in walking, they would suddenly stop. Precisely at that time, the state of empty quiescence is most likely to appear. Masters often gave a response according to the occasion and would shout, “Look! What is it?” This shows that they did not endorse the practice of merely sitting rigidly.

As for the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, it belongs to the esoteric division and has its own rules. It seeks the continuous empowerment of the three mysteries and therefore differs from other Vajrayāna practices. While seated, one is not permitted to visualize lights or forms; during the period of practice, the mudrā must not be released, the mantra must not cease, and thoughts that arise must not be attended to. Let them surge, rise, and fall as they will. Through the strength of forbearance, one develops perseverance. After countless instances of not attending to them, they come like shadows in the wind and vanish like lightning and sparks. One becomes accustomed to non-abiding, and the originally empty and quiescent state is brought forth. One sits in order to perform the practice; the practice itself is what matters, not sitting alone.

Therefore, after practicing a thousand sessions, one need not continue sitting. During the first two or three hundred sessions, let there be darkness and confusion as they may; do not count success or heed experiences. After rising from the seat, practitioners are taught to apply themselves, transferring the work done on the cushion into ordinary life: when thoughts come, do not attend to them; when images pass, do not retain them. This is what is meant by sitting in meditation everywhere.

If one is willing to apply oneself off the cushion, the benefit is even greater. Then, drawing upon doctrinal teaching for guidance and methods of Chan meditation for verification, one directly enters the Dharma of the mind-ground and opens the gate of prajñā. Those who do not understand call the Heart-of-Heart Dharma “Chan-Esoteric Buddhism,” but in fact it proceeds through Esoteric Buddhism to penetrate Chan. The practice off the cushion lies entirely in being tempered through human affairs and investigating the mind-ground; its aim returns to the great ocean of quiescent extinction.

At this point, one can only be said to have set out on the path; the work is still at an early stage. One must now intensify one's effort and need no longer rely on sitting. I fear that people may misunderstand the ancients as not advocating seated meditation and thus abandon it entirely; moreover, after leaving the cushion, they may be unwilling to apply themselves, become content with a little attainment, and look down on everything else.

Therefore, practitioners of other methods should not boast that they have penetrated Chan. My present use of records from the Chan school as reference is merely to polish away my habitual tendency toward views about the Dharma. It is not to contend over relative strengths and weaknesses for a single day. So long as the mind that seeks a reputation has not died, I still dare not affirm that one has seen one's true nature. Be cautious, be cautious. Do not fail the compassionate labor of this foolish old man, who practiced austerities on Mount Lu for eight years and spent more than twenty years after descending the mountain propagating the Dharma. Thus you may repay even a fraction of that kindness.

The Dharma Gate of Buddha-Recitation

An elementary method of Buddha-remembrance: seeking only one’s own liberation in this life and rebirth in the Western Pure Land as a place of safety; ordinarily yearning for the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and detesting Sahā. Such practitioners of Buddha-remembrance have an entrenched view of self and have not understood the great matter of birth and death. They do not value their own minds but instead emphasize external objects. The result is merely the planting of various wholesome roots; whether they will be reborn in the West in this life is still

uncertain. They do not know that the Land of Ultimate Bliss is within their own minds, but rely on the bliss of the West as bliss. This is name-recitation, not true Buddha-remembrance.

A more advanced form of Buddha-remembrance: first detesting Sahā and not coveting worldly glory, seeking only rebirth in the West and taking it as one's destination. Such practitioners understand nothing at all of the meaning of the sūtras or the principles of the Pure Land, but know only to recite the Buddha's name often, intending to seek the Buddha's guidance. With deep faith and no doubt, and with a resolute and earnest mind in ordinary times, they will have no second thought at the time of death and can be reborn there. Such rebirth has grades of higher and lower attainment.

Buddha:

1. Remembering the Western Buddha with form: planting wholesome roots (elementary and preliminary)

2. Remembering the Buddha who is nondual with the Buddhas of the ten directions and the Western Buddha (deeper and more advanced)

3. Remembering that the nature of oneself, all sentient beings, and the Buddhas of the ten directions is nondual (ultimate reality)

4. Remembering the emptiness of intrinsic nature as Buddha: Buddha-remembrance in which every thought returns to emptiness (ultimate)

The most ultimate and complete method of Buddha-remembrance:

Clarifying the meaning of Buddha: Buddha is originally without form and without name; indeed, there is no meaning that can be spoken of. The forms, names, and meanings that are spoken of are provisionally expressed, out of necessity, for those who have not understood the meaning of Buddha, so that they may understand this principle, return to the emptiness of intrinsic nature, and not be deluded by circumstances. Therefore, having every thought return to emptiness is the true intent of Buddha-remembrance.

To return to emptiness is not to cling to form, yet neither to discard form; it is to know its intrinsic emptiness, yet not to cling to emptiness. As soon as we give rise to a thought, we either cling to existence or fall into biased emptiness. Biased emptiness is equivalent to clinging to existence; this is not the Buddha's original form and cannot be called Buddha-remembrance. Strictly speaking, if one's mind clings to the majestic form of Amitābha or to the sublime realm of the West, one thereby sets up in opposition the image of Sahā as defiled and evil, and the image of

sentient beings as deluded and inverted. One has already departed 108,000 li from the Buddha.

For every thought to return to emptiness is for every thought to return to purity. “Thought after thought” means one thought following another without interruption. To maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness, one must remember in this way. To gather in the six sense faculties means that the six faculties are gathered together and function as one.