Conversations on Learning Buddhism

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The True Spirit of the Buddhadharma

The joys and sorrows, sufferings and pleasures of human life are merely functions of the mind; all intentional action likewise proceeds from the mind. When the Buddha

liberates sentient beings, he merely seeks to awaken them, so that mind may illumine mind and they may understand how their lives come to be as they are.

Awakening is to see the illusory character of circumstances. Realization is to see that deluded thoughts in one's own mind arise through conditions. Outwardly, one is not beguiled by circumstances; inwardly, one is not carried along by deluded thought. One understands that one naturally possesses an autonomous and independent essential nature: though one may temporarily act deludedly in confusion, a moment of awakening brings one back to one's original nature. So-called joy and sorrow, suffering and pleasure, and all things whatsoever, are dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; one is no longer deceived by them. This is the great spirit of autonomy and independence. The Buddha does not claim that Buddhahood is a capacity belonging to himself alone; it is a capacity inherently possessed by all persons, whether worthy or foolish, great or small. Herein lies the true spirit of Buddhadharma.

In resolving this great question, the Buddha's guidance accounts for one or two parts in ten, and one's own effort for the remaining eight or nine. If one wishes to rely wholly upon the Buddha, or insists upon relying only upon oneself without depending on Buddhadharma, both are forms of great superstition; such a person is not a Buddhist disciple.

When the Buddha speaks of cause and effect, it is not that cause and effect came into being only with the Buddha. When he speaks of equality, it is not that equality came into being only with the Buddha. When he says that sentient beings and Buddhas are originally nondual, nonduality is equality. Sentient beings themselves are originally equal; they deliberately make themselves unequal.

As regards outward appearances, there are naturally all kinds of differences—great and small, high and low, beautiful and ugly. Where there are differences, there is inequality. Yet all appearances arise and perish through conditions, illusorily arising and illusorily falling away; all alike are unreal. This is equality. Therefore equality is real, while inequality is illusory. But people invariably cling to appearances, and over time this becomes a habit; thus they have long forgotten the truth of equality.

Only those who are awakened are not bound by this. They can form their own insight and infer this truth from principle: they realize that the essential nature of all sentient beings is nondual with their own. Why must I necessarily be good and right, while others must necessarily be bad and wrong? Those who do not understand this truth of equality first establish the Personal-self view: I must prosper; you need not prosper.

If I have money, I am wealthy; if you have none, you are poor. They do not understand that this is merely a question of money—what essential relation does it

have to the person? If I give my money to you, I become poor and you become wealthy; even if I do not give it to you, once I have spent it all, I too become poor. Money is originally an outward appearance, wholly unreliable. Yet the habit of anxious grasping and fearful loss has endured for so long that people seek to preserve it forever, forgetting the truths of cause and effect and equality. Hence contention proliferates, even to slaughter and plunder, and people suffer vainly all manner of pain. The true spirit of Buddhadharma is to shatter this deluded view.

Once a person has this deluded view, delusion follows upon delusion. The greater one's power, the greater the force of one's delusion; the more deluded people there are, the more groups of deluded people arise. Step by step, this develops to the utmost extreme of confusion, until people instead declare Buddhadharma to be superstition.

Everything in the world is an instruction shown to me. The myriad illusory changes in human affairs tell me of the many uncertainties of impermanence; they teach me not to cling obstinately. All evil karma in the world arises from self-attachment. The most anguished people under heaven are those who are stubbornly self-righteous: always insisting that they cannot be wrong, they remain deluded to the end and die without awakening.

To us, such a person truly suffers; he himself also suffers, suffering because he does not know his own suffering. Yet how can we ourselves be said truly to understand? As onlookers, we understand clearly; but when it is our own turn to be enticed by vanity, wealth, and profit, perhaps we too will be equally stubbornly self-righteous. Therefore the Buddha asks you to awaken thoroughly. Master Zhu spoke only of not being enticed by external things, without knowing what external things are: they are the delusions conditioned by one's own mind. Unless one begins with the mind, one will never fully attain the true spirit of Buddhadharma.

Buddhism and Buddhadharma are originally without distinction; what is taught is precisely the Dharma. Yet at present, what can be seen is only the outward form of Buddhism, while the truth of Buddhadharma remains unknown. Among the four assemblies of Buddhist disciples, the highest close their doors and cultivate themselves, taking no concern for society's sufferings; those in the middle delight in attracting attention and diligently perform meritorious deeds with form; the lowest commit licentious and evil acts, stopping at nothing.

Among those who study Buddhism, some are lifeless and dispirited, while others affect bizarre and grotesque manners. Society sees only its harm and not its benefit; how then can people be expected to embrace it in faith?

Now matters have gone a step further: even those who cultivate themselves can no longer keep their doors closed. They rush here and there, with still less leisure to

introduce the true spirit of Buddhadharma to society. Thus the distance grows ever greater and people's doubts ever deeper. This is the decline of Buddhism.

Although Buddhism has undergone many years of devastation, the latent force of the spirit of Buddhadharma has not merely remained undiminished; it has expanded day by day. Those who wish to investigate truth are increasingly numerous. This is a reaction to the anguish within human hearts, which has imperceptibly separated Buddhism from Buddhadharma.

Those possessing knowledge naturally do not prize the formal adornments of Buddhism, but respect the spiritual freedom of Buddhadharma. Meritorious deeds with form in Buddhadharma were originally expedient guidance for those first entering the gate.

At the root, the Buddha never clung to appearances, but sought to bring people to self-awakening. The most orthodox path benefits both oneself and others, transforming enemies into friends and allowing them to be naturally tamed. It enables each person to understand his own original face, to support great compassion with great wisdom, and to undertake the work of saving the world. First, greed must not be permitted. If one can refrain from grasping at appearances, the fashion of corruption will naturally cease.

Second, do not become angry. If one can regard others with equal compassion and understand the meaning of mutual aid, the habits of deceit, slaughter, and killing will naturally cease. Third, do not remain deluded. If one can elucidate truth, open great awakening and wisdom, and shatter superstition, then stubborn self-will and the conduct of inverted, deluded action will naturally diminish. In sum, people must be transformed of their own accord. Thus it is evident that there is no person without mind: mind itself is Buddha.

There is no mind without principle: principle itself is Dharma. The great function of Buddhadharma lies not in contending for the outward prestige of one's own Buddhism or disputing the merits and defects of other religions, but in enabling every person to awaken personally to truth and to learn the Buddha's egalitarian spirit of saving the world.

Salvation does not lie in the satisfaction of food, clothing, and shelter, but in everyone being able to enjoy food, clothing, and shelter equally. Food, clothing, and shelter sustain this body; this body sustains the great compassionate mind. One must undertake the work of benefiting sentient beings through great compassion—not become an arhat with scorched sprouts and spoiled seeds, but a bodhisattva in whom wisdom and compassion operate together. This accords precisely with the egalitarianism advocated in the present age. If there are those who are stubbornly self-righteous, they will naturally become abandoned by all; without being struck,

they will fall of themselves, serving as a great example and profound lesson for all under heaven. This is the true spirit of Buddhadharma.

Buddhadharma values practical action and values naturalness. First restrain oneself and acquire samadhi-power; from samadhi-power, the power of discernment grows, and physical strength naturally increases. These are the three powers of human life. Use these three powers to meet every undertaking in society, and one will naturally act with ample ease. Amid the tempestuous circumstances of today, without the sustaining power of mind, one will inevitably be swept about by external conditions.

Take those who engage in corruption: by their original nature, they do not wish to be corrupt. Yet because of environmental temptations, because they see no hope ahead and immediate fear is before their eyes, and because they themselves lack inner mastery, they are driven onto the path of corruption. Greed is an inferior propensity innate in everyone; corruption is a momentary deluded action. Once one person sets the example, others imitate it, and it becomes an openly prevalent disease. If this inferior propensity is to be transformed, people must first be brought to self-awareness. Once livelihood is secure, this tendency will naturally cease. This is the true spirit of Buddhadharma.

One person's greed can draw many others into greed. Taking greed as one's foundation, the gulf of desire naturally cannot be filled, and many people will inevitably be driven to have no food to eat. In reaction, what one has greedily acquired is fundamentally unreliable. Had one known early on the dangers of greedy gain, one would not have gone so deeply down the path of self-destruction.

The two Chinese characters (“peace and security”) mean that only when everyone is treated equally can I myself be secure. If even one person is treated unequally, there is a reaction, and this is one's own danger. I have often said that when the world has attained true peace and security, locks and safes will no longer be needed. Whenever these two things are needed, it means that the mind harbors suspicion and fear, and the terror of reaction exists on every side.

That reaction is precisely inequality: both mind and material circumstances are unequal. Yet the chief cause of inequality is greed. The chief cause of greed is still fear. The chief cause of fear is lack of awakening. Because of this lack of awakening, one does not clearly perceive principle and is unwilling to give.

In expounding all dharmas, the Buddha gives foremost importance to generosity. Generosity means relinquishment: not only should money and possessions be given away, but even my deluded views should be given away. Broaden your vision and do not cling stubbornly to inferior views. If everyone has food to eat, that is my supreme insurance and greatest peace and happiness. Therefore generosity is the greatest spirit of Buddhadharma.

Buddhadharma merely seeks to turn worldly affairs around. Set aside for a while what I cling to, and see what it is like. Regard as lowly what I regard as important, and see what it is like. Do not love what I love; relinquish what I grasp; do not marvel at what I marvel at. Then suffering ceases of itself, and in dealing with affairs one becomes flexible and consummately adept in every direction.

In Studying Buddhism, One Must Begin at the Root

In studying Buddhism, one must begin with the root; otherwise, it is all the karmic activity of non-Buddhist paths and demons, which only adds to birth and death. From the very outset, one must guard against this carefully. The responsibility rests entirely with the teacher, who must not mislead students merely because they are beginners. The root is the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. The value of the direct realization of Dharma in the Chan school lies in enabling students not to take a long and circuitous route, but to grasp it directly and awaken straightaway.

Sentient beings are originally Buddhas; through delusion they become sentient beings, and upon awakening they are again Buddhas. Thus, it is fundamentally very easy. Yet they are covered over by beginningless ignorance, like prodigal sons who wander abroad in madness and confusion. Without developing a weary distaste for this, they are unwilling to return home.

The varied teachings and guidance of the Buddhas and patriarchs are solely intended to lead people to awaken for themselves; thus they become teachings. Those who awaken upon hearing and return to the source are sudden; those who awaken only after long instruction and seek to return to the source are gradual. This is a matter of people's conditions and the sharpness or dullness of their faculties; in the Dharma itself, there is neither sudden nor gradual. Delusion lies in one's own mind, and awakening likewise lies in one's own mind. Becoming a Buddha or becoming an ordinary being also lies in one's own mind; entering birth and death and emerging from birth and death likewise lie in one's own mind. Apart from one's own mind, what is there to speak of? To discuss the school and expound teachings apart from one's own mind is like painting cakes to satisfy hunger: even after ten thousand years, one will not be full. Thus we know that the Mind-Ground Dharma is fundamental.

To study Buddhism is simply to cultivate the mental state of a Buddha. Once that state becomes concretely fixed, one enters the six realms; when it is open and numinous, one becomes a Buddha. All the words and sentences in sūtras and treatises merely seek to make your state of mind open and numinous without departing from anything, unattached to anything. As it is said: “If one wishes to know the Buddha's realm, one should purify one's mind like empty space. Leave behind

deluded thoughts and all grasping, and let the mind be unobstructed in whatever it turns toward."

Worldly people obstruct themselves everywhere; thus they enter birth and death without realizing it. How direct and concise are the four Chinese characters ("purify one's mind")! Why all these words, phrases, and theories? And tell me: whose mind is "one's mind"? Whose task is it to "purify" it? As a teacher, do not first try to purify the student's mind. If your own mind is not yet pure, how can you be fit to teach others?

Therefore, a teacher must first possess the qualifications of a teacher. Such qualifications mean being able to purify one's own mind. If the mind is restless and impure, one has no Dharma for guiding others; and if one's Dharma is impure, one's mind has not been purified. Whoever has a mind of gain and loss, a mind seeking fame, reputation, profit, and support, or a mind that discriminates among sectarian divisions, is not qualified to be a teacher.

Therefore, whether teacher or friend, when expounding or hearing the Dharma, do not seek understanding in words or Dharma gates; always bring your understanding back to the Mind-Ground Dharma. In everyday human affairs and worldly dharmas, all the more must you understand them in terms of the Way; never understand them merely as principles and theories. The Way is the realm of self-awakened noble wisdom. Principles and theories are the realm of the dualistic views of right and wrong, gain and loss, self and others, victory and defeat.

The moment one becomes involved in principles and theories, the mind becomes impure and confusion arises. Thus doctrinal teaching is a Dharma gate to which the Buddhas and patriarchs resort only when they have no alternative. The supreme vehicle of the Chan school is simply an axe-blow that opens the gate: strike everything clean and see directly. It does not discuss theories or wait for you to open your mouth; it gives you a blow with the staff at once. This is teaching through non-teaching.

The care devoted to the mind is exceedingly painstaking, yet the method is exceedingly simple. You are driven to the point where there is no thought left to purify and no mind left to make into mind, so that you may investigate again and bring forth your own originally empty, quiescent, and undefiled mind. Then, wherever the mind turns, everything is mind; everywhere there is no attachment, and thus everywhere there is no obstruction. But first you are made muddleheaded: seeking death amid life and life amid death, investigating in doubt and uncertainty, unable to advance or retreat.

Nor can you grasp it or let it go, like a dog looking at a pot of hot oil: it can neither lick it nor leave it alone. Only after undergoing such arduous effort does what is

attained become solid and enduring, never to be lost again. It is like wealth acquired through hardship: one treasures every bit of it and refuses to squander it. Only then can one withstand the habits of birth and death accumulated over countless ages. One must exert a figurative ten million jin of strength to turn them around; only then is one truly mature and never forgets or loses it anywhere. This is precisely the place of great compassion: it does nothing but compel you to understand from your own mind and investigate on the Way. This is the great principle beyond all principles.

Those who have traditionally taught Esoteric Buddhism have generally placed too much emphasis on ritual procedure and neglected the Mind-Ground Dharma. Those who investigate Chan die on a single huatou and neglect living investigation. Those who practice Buddha-recitation place too much emphasis on rebirth in the Western Pure Land and neglect to investigate what the West is and how rebirth may be attained. They do not know that all three methods are expedient means; their purpose lies entirely in practitioners' own efforts directed toward the mind-ground.

All three methods are Dharma gates for clearing away. If one does not clear away one's own mind, consciousness, and awareness, it is like using mind, consciousness, and awareness to add to mind, consciousness, and awareness. Mind, consciousness, and awareness are household thieves, not external thieves; they are the root of birth and death. Therefore Chan Master Yongjia said: “They diminish Dharma wealth and reduce merit and virtue; none of this fails to arise from mind, consciousness, and awareness.”

The Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years precisely because sentient beings suffer from this illness and pain and cannot attain liberation. Having no alternative, he gave three hundred assemblies of teachings entirely for this matter. Yet today practitioners bow and prostrate before the Buddha each day, weep in repentance before the Buddha, recite the Buddha's name for decades, and seek liberation from birth and death. Though they clearly know that mind, consciousness, and awareness are poisonous snakes and savage beasts, they instead refuse to heed the Buddha's teaching. Is this not absurd? Therefore, when the causal ground is not right, the fruition becomes tortuous. It is just like someone drowning at sea who is rescued by a boat, only to jump back into the sea as soon as he has boarded it.

Practitioners must firmly hold to this most ultimate Dharma gate and never let go before reaching the ultimate. First clear away mind, consciousness, and awareness, and see what it is like before a single thought arises. Without thinking of good or evil, at precisely this moment there is neither annihilation nor mindlessness. In the pure, open stillness there is a perfectly wondrous, luminous mind before you, universally illuminating the great thousandfold world, yet attached to no thing and

no view. It is like a mirror reflecting objects: when a Hu comes, a Hu appears; when a Han comes, a Han appears. Whether there are reflections or none, images or none, the mirror's substance does not waver.

The Mind-Ground Dharma has but one path; there is no second path. To recognize that it is one and not two, first take a mirror as an analogy. What is called a mirror is so called because it can reflect and illuminate. It can illuminate only because it has light; it is one—the substance of light.

When it illuminates, forms appear as reflections and images: some beautiful, some ugly; some bright, some obscure. At times there are reflections, at times none; there are all kinds of changes. Yet the light is only one, and the substance of the light does not change with the transformations of reflections and images. Therefore, recognize it as one. Moreover, these manifold changes are merely temporary illusory images, all arising from this one.

Thus the many are precisely the one, and the one is precisely the many. The many arise from the one and, when they cease, return to the one. The many have no fixed form, and the one likewise has no substantial characteristic. Therefore it is said: neither identical nor different. At birth, its place of coming cannot be seen; at cessation, its place of going cannot be seen. Yet there is something constant and unchanging, pervading the dharma realm.

Because it is unchanging, it is called unmoving; because it is unmoving, it is called undefiled; because it is undefiled, it is called pure; because it is lucidly aware, it is called the mark of pure awakening, also called bodhi. Ignorance and afflictions arise from this same ground, which is bodhi itself.

Therefore it is said that afflictions are precisely bodhi. If you insist on dividing them into two, I ask: where would you begin, and how could you divide them? The very thought of doing so is beginningless ignorance and affliction, all because of non-awakening.

Thus non-awakening arises from ignorance; ignorance arises from the discriminative calculation of dualistic views; the discriminative calculation of dualistic views arises from grasping at marks; and grasping at marks again arises from non-awakening. Therefore, do not first speak of ignorance, afflictions, deluded thoughts, karmic obstacles, and the like. First ask: what is this thing that can awaken, can be afflicted, can undergo birth and death, and can see its true nature? What is there in this thing to which one can firmly attach? Just look where ignorance, afflictions, deluded thoughts, and karmic obstacles adhere, and where they are attached. Search and search, and they are simply unobtainable.

Originally, they do not exist. Once you take them as real, they seem to exist, though they do not truly exist. You take dreams for reality and stubbornly refuse to acknowledge that they are false. Without cause, you illusorily establish birth and death and vainly undergo every suffering. You should know what a momentous matter awakening and becoming a Buddha truly are. Here one must speak of merit and virtue: those without merit and virtue are difficult to address, difficult to lead to faith, and difficult to enable to undertake this teaching. The foregoing is a direct and definitive explanation.

Although those of middling or lesser capacities cannot be spoken to of what is higher, for they will not believe it and will instead become even more remote, they must not be slighted or regarded as forever incapable of entering. One should guide them skillfully toward realization. At first, one says that ignorance, deluded thoughts, karmic obstacles, and afflictions truly exist; that these are the roots and substance of birth and death, fearful and terrible, and a great suffering indeed. If one does not urgently become liberated from them, suffering will have no end.

In this way, lead them to arouse the resolve with deep urgency, and let them wander in darkness, crashing about in every direction until they are battered and bloodied, their suffering and anguish reaching an extreme. Then open for them a skillful path. First, because their habitual disposition is such that, unless they take a long circuitous route, their minds will not give up and they will not submit. Second, because their Dharma obstacles from former lives are profound: having once misled others through Dharma, they must undergo this retribution in this life, and it is difficult for them to encounter a good spiritual friend.

Even if they encounter one, they do not recognize one; even if they recognize one, they have no conditions to associate with one; and in the end they do not believe or accept. Third, because of their own inferior views, they become doubtful and fearful upon hearing the Dharma, and adverse conditions further lead them away. Therefore they must themselves take the circuitous route; until the time is ripe, they cannot leap out of this pit of Dharma. Is this not lamentable? Yet those who genuinely arouse an urgent resolve will, sooner or later, attain accomplishment all the same.

Whether one awakens in a single day or after thirty years, what one awakens to is exactly equal. The strength after awakening depends on cultivation and refinement over the years; that is another matter. Therefore, in guiding others, the first essential is to know their capacities; there is no fixed Dharma. What was said earlier is the definitive teaching for those of the highest capacities. This is the reverse approach, offering expedient means to those of middling and lesser capacities. It is a non-definitive teaching, not a division of persons into high and low; their capacities differ. Thus there is no fixed Dharma. At the ultimate point, all return to one path.

Such expedient means are therefore called ultimate, yet even the ultimate is unobtainable.

Beginners in Buddhism Must Clearly Understand the Principles

A skilled physician, when consulting ancient prescriptions, naturally knows how to apply them flexibly; an inferior physician merely copies ancient prescriptions and knows only how to apply them rigidly. Thus, when studying the words and phrases of the sūtras and treatises, one must investigate them after awakening, lest one be misled. Yet it is not the sūtras and treatises that mislead one; one is misled by one's own views and opinions. You must know that this matter depends entirely on yourself. There is nothing extraordinary about it, no Dharma gate, no need to seek elsewhere, and no reliance on external help. Simply let go all at once of every object and circumstance of your own, until all is utterly clear and bare. At that moment, see what it is.

Those who can swim rely entirely on their own strength; they move freely and playfully in the water, and nothing hinders them. But those who cannot swim, once they fall into the water, merely clutch wildly in every direction and instead lose their lives, unable to raise their heads above the surface. Buddhist practitioners can awaken to this. Today, seeking Buddha, seeking Dharma, seeking teachers, seeking the words and phrases of the ancients, even seeking side-paths and non-Buddhist teachings—is this not wild grasping in the hope of finding a way out?

This matter is utterly immediate and ready at hand; it can be realized and seen everywhere before one's eyes. But as soon as one raises the mind or stirs a thought, it is no longer so. Once one has truly seen one's nature, however, one sees it at all times, even when thoughts arise and one is caught up in confused agitation. There is no longer any need to make the slightest deliberate effort to seek this seeing, for it shines forth clearly of itself. It is like one's own name: having become utterly familiar with it, one does not need to keep it in mind, yet one never forgets it.

Since it is so immediate and easy, why then is awakening and becoming a Buddha so difficult? It is because each person's causes and conditions differ. There are two reasons. First, one may not have been familiar with this path in previous lives, so one must begin afresh, which is comparatively difficult. Second, one's causes and conditions in this life may be unfavorable: one does not encounter a good spiritual friend to lead one by a direct path. Is that not a great pity?

It is like a metalworker who cannot distinguish steel from iron and thinks they are both merely black lumps. Rather than slightly melting the true refined steel and

forging it into implements, he puts it into the furnace together with crude iron, wasting time. What a pity. This, too, is due to the person's own Dharma obstructions from previous lives, by which he has misled himself, and for which he receives this retribution in the present life. Therefore, arousing great compassion is most essential. Whether one is teacher or student, distinguishing between oneself and others in this way falls short of great compassion, and in this life both will find it difficult to attain accomplishment.

For beginners, the first necessity is to distinguish the proper course of understanding: (1) Becoming a Buddha and seeing one's nature are not two separate matters. Apart from seeking and awakening on one's own, there is no second path. (2) Teachers, scriptures and treatises, and essential Dharma instructions are all merely external conditions that offer assistance, guiding one closer, and nothing more. One must not rely upon them and thereby mislead oneself.

(3) Seeing one's nature is one matter; removing habitual tendencies is another. Often, after seeing one's nature, one's habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated and one's strength remains insufficient. One again becomes confused and may even come to doubt the root itself. This must absolutely not happen. (4) After seeing one's nature, there is then a way to eliminate habitual tendencies. But do not begin by working on habitual tendencies; simply attend to the original nature.

Originally, there is no mind of which one can speak; upon what, then, could habitual tendencies depend? Do not anxiously seek results. When one's strength is sufficient, the channels naturally form as the water arrives. This is not a matter of a single day; with long accumulation, success will come naturally. One must not be impatient about this. Only on the path of seeing one's nature must one not relax before it has been seen. One must not suppose that emptiness itself is it, or that being without mind is it.

The ancients said, "Do not say that no-mind is the Way; no-mind is still separated by one barrier." One should earnestly investigate why this is so. (5) At the initial stage of seeing one's nature, do not concern yourself with whether it is principle or phenomena; simply regard it as a matter on the side of the dharmakāya. At this time, it is especially crucial not to relax. Just recognize the direction clearly and hold fast to this original ground. After a long time, when familiarity becomes complete, there will suddenly be thorough penetration: principle will naturally be complete, and phenomena will naturally be fulfilled. At the top of a hundred-foot pole, rise one more step; then another step reaches the top, and rising one more step, there is no step left to rise. Simply go straight up—see how that is.

For ordinary people, the loss of vitality is not a serious matter; the loss of their zest for life is perilous. Studying Buddhism is simply to attain a lively zest for life, like a spring whose source flows on without end. This cannot be explained to others.

A Concise Teaching on the Right Causes for Learning Buddhism

Learning Buddhism is simply a turning of a single thought: turn away from the mind attached to afflictions and return to the pure, empty mind of non-abiding. To be utterly still and abide nowhere is the realm of Buddhahood. Therefore, when the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure. This is the true Dharma.

One's mind-capacity should be great. Contemplate with the power of wisdom that all is originally empty, and one will not cling tenaciously. One will naturally yield to others. Outwardly, this may seem like suffering a loss, but one thereby perfects virtue and advances diligently in practice; fundamentally, one gains greatly. This is true giving, and it eliminates greed.

When the mind is impartial and all dharmas are seen as illusory, what gain or loss, success or failure is there? One naturally becomes broad-minded and does not calculate over such matters. Moreover, when the mind is even, the vital energy is harmonious; when the vital energy is harmonious, the blood circulates smoothly. There is less illness and vexation, and one may live longer. This is true forbearance, and it eliminates anger.

When the mind is free of attachment, one comprehends principle and phenomena, clearly discerns cause and effect, and needless worry and fear naturally do not arise. How, then, could one reap bitter fruit? This is moral discipline, and it eliminates ignorance.

When the mind is detached and one thoroughly sees the empty and quiescent aspect of one's original nature, returning to great emptiness, this is realizing the essence. When, in human affairs and relationships, one studies matters concretely, is wholehearted everywhere, and adapts skillfully in every circumstance, returning to perfect unobstructedness, this is realizing the function. With the empty and numinous measure of Buddhahood, one gives rise to the wondrous function of great compassion. One must not sink into emptiness and guard quiescence, becoming scorched sprouts and rotten seeds.

Be single-minded in the Dharma and go deeply into one gate. But understand that dharmas are merely provisional expedients for a time: one should not grasp the Dharma, nor should one grasp what is not Dharma. Return to seeing one's true nature, and one becomes a Buddha immediately. Do not fear ignorance. So long as

the mind can become empty and quiescent, ignorance is instantly transformed. Do not abide in ignorance; if awareness is lost even once, one drifts through birth and death and sinks for countless kalpas.

Until one realizes the mind and sees one's true nature, one does not know one's own ignorance. If one does not know where ignorance lies, there will never be a time to uproot it. Thus, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the first crucial key to becoming a Buddha. After realizing the mind, ignorance is instantly transformed in a single thought. Otherwise, one merely suppresses it; though one may practice for a thousand years, ignorance remains, no different from not having practiced at all.

Do not abandon yourself. Advance diligently and steadily, and you will surely succeed in the end. Do not be self-satisfied: debts accumulated over kalpas cannot be settled in a moment. Do not procrastinate, for old age is approaching. Do not be impatient: even an apprentice requires three years.

The fundamental aim is the Land of Ultimate Bliss; why need one torment oneself so? Diligence lies in earnest effort and freedom from negligence, not in harsh clothing and poor food.

Those who crave the power of others and have become habituated to dependence harbor within their minds the greedy wish to take shortcuts. Their minds are already inverted; how can they attain rebirth? Therefore, when every thought is pure, one is in accord with all Buddhas and may then receive their guidance. This itself is rebirth.

When reading sūtras, do not rigidly cling to the words. The Buddha spoke to people of his own time, and their causes and conditions differed. It is like an ancient prescription: it may be consulted, but one cannot take the medicine exactly as prescribed. Therefore it is said that there is no fixed Dharma.

Pure Land, Esoteric Buddhism, and the Chan school: all dharmas are equal, without superiority or inferiority. What is foremost is the practice suited to the recipient. Do not give rise to narrow views or make excessive distinctions. Such distinctions do not hinder others, but they create wrongdoing for oneself. And what is this wrongdoing? It is the illusory mind that prevents your liberation. The more firmly it has become established in ordinary life, the harder it will be to let go of at the time of death. You must undergo all kinds of suffering and anguish yourself; no one can undergo them in your place.

Beginners must avoid three kinds of mind: the mind that greedily seeks too much, the mind that craves novelty, and the mind that compares self and others. Those who have already learned Buddhism must avoid three kinds of mind: the mind that doubts the Dharma, the procrastinating mind, and the impatient mind. Those who

have practiced for a long time must avoid three kinds of mind: the self-satisfied mind, the mind that rigidly clings to methods, and the mind attached to merit and virtue. These are the most poisonous illnesses of the mind; the subtler the illness, the harder it is to eradicate.

Practice centers and dharma gates each have their own different standpoint. One must never force them to conform to one another. Like Chinese medicine and Western medicine, each has its merits. Why make distinctions and thereby bring error upon oneself?

If someone slanders the Dharma, do not argue with them. If you argue, their slander will only increase; this would be your own wrongdoing. Do not oppose them, but simply let them be pleased if possible. If that is not possible, merely let them be. Whoever gives rise to anger is not my disciple and is no different from one who slanders the Buddha and the sūtras; nor is such a person different from one who slanders himself.

To be willing to train the mind amid human affairs is to truly learn Buddhism; only then can one progress quickly in practice.

In benefiting oneself and benefiting others, one should be equally wholehearted. Yet one must not be overly zealous, lest it become an illness of greed and violate the principle that causes and conditions unfold naturally. The sūtras say that ordinary beings greedily cling to their affairs.

Chan practice relies entirely on one's own power. Unless one has the very highest capacities, it is difficult to attain accomplishment in this very life. The Pure Land school has a different guiding principle: it takes rebirth in the Western Pure Land as its ultimate standard. Yet unless one attains one-pointedness of mind without distraction, rebirth remains difficult. Esoteric Buddhism is one of the Buddha's final methods for liberating people. Through its mantras and mudrās, one relies on the Buddha's power; if one cultivates single-mindedly, accomplishment will certainly come quickly. Moreover, in this time when Māra is strong and the Way is weak, without relying on Esoteric Buddhism one cannot

eliminate past karma and transform it away. Therefore, Esoteric Buddhism is comparatively suited to present circumstances. Now begin with Esoteric Buddhism; after the Dharma body becomes manifest, open prajñā wisdom and unite with the Chan school. Only then can habitual tendencies be eliminated and great accomplishment attained. This does not conflict with the Pure Land school; if one makes vows for rebirth, one will have still greater assurance.

Our association guides people in learning Buddhism by first beginning with Esoteric Buddhism. However, its meditation method differs from other esoteric practices and

has a fixed procedure. After a suitable period of time, one can realize the essence, and then the wondrous function of prajñā is awakened. Therefore, one must study Chan writings, but not adopt their methods, lest one fall into the illnesses of Chan. Finally, one unifies with the Pure Lands of the ten directions. Fame, reputation, profit, and support are deep pits of birth and death; attachment to doctrinal views and emotional love are seeds of hell. If these are not eliminated, one is on a non-Buddhist path. There is no need to concern oneself with other people's affairs.

In sum, Buddha means emptiness and quiescence. If one does not depart from dharmas, one cannot become a Buddha. The sūtras say, "To depart from all appearances is called all Buddhas," and also, "All dharmas have the mark of emptiness." Therefore, none of the words on this page should be grasped. Only one who can understand them without abiding has the wondrous function of prajñā; otherwise, they are merely poison. At this Ullambana practice assembly, Buddhas and devas rejoice. Everyone seeks to eliminate calamities and prolong life; one should know that seeing one's true nature is longevity, and realizing the mind instantly eliminates calamities. There is no other method. May each of you cherish this well.

Essentials of Buddha-Recitation

Before practicing Buddha-remembrance, one must first have faith in the Buddha. One must possess four kinds of faith before this can be called faith in the Buddha. First, faith in Buddhas of fruition, such as our fundamental teacher Śākyamuni Buddha, Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha of the East, Amitābha Buddha of the West, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. Second, faith in one's own Buddha, namely Buddha-nature. Though one is now at the causal stage, one who can open wisdom and see one's nature is called a Buddha. Third, faith that all people—whether good or evil, friend or foe, worthy or foolish, noble or lowly—are each Buddhas.

Before awakening is made clear, it is like a gold mine that has not yet been opened: it cannot be used as gold, yet neither can it be said to contain no gold. The difference lies only between delusion and awakening. Fourth, faith that all beings of the four modes of birth and six realms alike possess Vairocana Buddha-nature. These four are neither prior nor subsequent, higher nor lower; they are one substance and equal. The vastness of this Buddhadharma, and what especially distinguishes it from other teachings, lies here. Next, let us explain the meaning of Buddha. Buddha means awakening. Awakening is mind.

Mind is the function of nature, and nature is the essence of mind. Only by realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature can one be called a Buddha. It does not mean that the physical body can turn into a Buddha. Next is Buddha-remembrance. Nian

means mental recollection: to recollect in one's mind without losing it is called Buddha-remembrance.

There are four kinds. First, initial recollection: concentrate in the mind on a Buddha of fruition, such as Amitābha Buddha; visualize his luminosity, compassion, purity, and magnificence; and take refuge in him, thereby strengthening one's vow for rebirth, like a child relying on its mother. Reciting with the mouth while practicing with the mind is the ordinary method of Buddha-recitation practiced today.

Second, esoteric recollection: contemplate that the Buddha and the Buddha's luminosity are nondual. Buddhas are alike in every direction, so one must not entertain discriminating thoughts. One's reverence, self-cultivation, seated meditation, esoteric practice, and every activity of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down are all Buddha-remembrance. Third, the esoteric within the esoteric: contemplate pure karma. One must first purify one's own land. The land is mind. To abandon the ten evil acts is precisely to practice the ten wholesome acts.

In every thought, observe the precepts and cultivate wholesome conduct. Then advance further and do not cling even to goodness; the roots of evil will naturally be cut off. When the mind is empty and the intent pure, this is called the adornment of merit and virtue. Because one knows this for oneself and does not seek others' recognition, it is called esoteric. Fourth, the profound esoteric within the esoteric: even the thought of recollection is absent; there is only one-pointedness of mind without distraction. One-pointedness of mind is the mind of direct present awareness that sees, hears, senses, and knows with utter clarity, free from defilement and abiding; it is the mind of no-mind.

This comes after samādhi and wisdom have combined their power, and after one has clarified the essence and comprehended its function. Then, in every thought, one does not depart from the Buddha, yet does not cling to the Buddha. It is like a fish in water: when has it ever thought of water at every moment, or ever been apart from water even briefly? It is also like one's own name: it has always been so; one need not deliberately remember it, yet one does not lose it, nor is there any question of whether it is or is not so.

With regard to these four gates, there is no need further to distinguish their relative depth, their modes of practice, or their principles. According to each person's causes, conditions, and faculties, one comes to know for oneself; nor is there any distinction among the forms of Chan, Pure Land, Esoteric Buddhism, or other dharmas. Only this is true Buddha-remembrance. If one relies on only a single gate, one becomes dependent; how then can one seek one-pointedness of mind without distraction? As for completely eliminating habitual tendencies, this is all the more not the work of a single lifetime.

Even if, in this life, one sees one's nature and becomes a Buddha, one must still use prajñā over many lives to clear away habitual tendencies before great function can arise. Therefore, those who study Buddhism yet first seek supernormal powers, or seek to see something, without applying effort to the mind, are not practicing Buddha-remembrance at all and may easily enter demonic states. Moreover, habitual tendencies are illusory images in the mind: with a single turn, they are empty. Do not welcome them or reject them; simply practice Buddha-remembrance, and at once one realizes pure emptiness. Then continue without interruption, and this is Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva's uninterrupted pure mindfulness—the foremost Dharma gate for attaining samādhi.

Essential Instructions for Practice

(I) Establishing the Guiding Purpose

1. The foremost purpose of studying Buddhism is to develop wisdom: to awaken oneself and others, liberate sentient beings far and wide, leave the sea of suffering, and transcend birth and death. Birth and death are further divided into two kinds: first, to end the cycle of segmented birth and death, no longer being swept into it; second, to end transformational birth and death, opening prajñā and clearly realizing that birth and death are fundamentally unobtainable, so that one is not subject to any suffering or adversity, worldly or supramundane.

2. What is called becoming a Buddha is achieving great wisdom, which in Sanskrit is prajñāpāramitā. Only through prajñā can one cross over to the other shore. Thus, developing wisdom is the sole gateway to Buddhahood; apart from this, there is no second method.

3. In studying Buddhism, what is precious is to seek and cultivate for oneself, dispel one's own suffering and afflictions, open one's own wisdom, and become a Buddha oneself. Seeking the Buddha is only like asking directions or consulting a physician; walking the road and taking the medicine still depend on oneself. Thus, textual research into Buddhism is merely like maps and prescriptions; it has nothing to do with curing one's actual illness. Those who study Buddhism learn to be no different from the Buddha: equally free from afflictions, pure, and at ease. It is not a matter of changing oneself into some sort of Buddha.

4. The purpose of studying Buddhism is to cut off all suffering and attain ultimate happiness. To attain ultimate happiness depends solely on developing wisdom; developing wisdom depends on samādhi; attaining samādhi depends on sitting; and sitting depends on a method. Once the guiding purpose and aim are established, one will not doubt or retreat midway. In this very life, accomplishment is certainly

possible. Whether one practices Pure Land, the Chan school, or Esoteric Buddhism, one must share this same guiding purpose and aim.

(II) Clarifying the Meaning of Cultivation

1. To clarify the original nature: originally, there is no need for cultivation. Yet because of an unjustified affliction, one falls ill. Restoring the original nature is what is called cultivation; otherwise, it is called construction, not repair.

2. Cultivating the mind differs from repairing an object. It should be called restoration, for it restores one to one's original nature. The repair of objects depends on others, whereas the restoration of mind depends upon one's own mind. Use the deluded mind to restore the deluded mind, until the mind can no longer be found and all is luminous and at ease.

3. Although cultivating the mind depends on methods, the teachings and methods are used only provisionally. Choosing, relinquishing, giving, and taking rest with oneself. Take realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as the essence, and bring forth all wondrous dharmas as the function.

4. Cultivation should emphasize practice. In all activities—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—there must never be a moment without vigilant awareness. Practice in the Buddha hall is called seated cultivation; seated cultivation occupies only a time, whereas cultivation is present at all times.

5. In cultivation, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the first gate. After seeing one's true nature, one opens the wondrous function of prajñā; only then can habitual tendencies be removed. This is the second gate. First one destroys ignorance, then one removes habitual tendencies. In the Chan and Esoteric schools, this means seeking the cause from the fruition; it is the only fundamental solution and differs from other schools.

6. Use prajñā to maintain vigilant awareness of oneself, and contemplate all things in the world as equal: this is a vast mind. Contemplate one's own fundamental essence as nondual with the Buddha: this is right cultivation.

7. Whatever school one follows, the Pure Land is its ultimate destination. One may recite Amitābha Buddha's name to purify one's land, or investigate Chan or cultivate Esoteric Buddhism to purify one's land. Only after realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature does one enter right cultivation. Otherwise, one labors without result and will ultimately regress. In the Pure Land school, the stage of nonretrogression is called avaivartika; in the Chan school, it is called breaking through the initial barrier in Chan inquiry; in Esoteric Buddhism, it is called realizing samādhi-siddhi.

(III) Seeking the True Dharma

1. Fundamentally, no Buddhist teaching is inherently false or true. Yet there can be no single method that is universally suitable and appropriate for everyone. Therefore, whether one practices Chan, Pure Land, or Esoteric Buddhism, suitability to the practitioner is foremost. If someone should practice Pure Land but is made to investigate Chan, that is poison. If someone should practice Esoteric Buddhism but is restricted to Pure Land practice, that too is poison. Therefore, the responsibility lies with the teacher, who must bear the karmic responsibility of Avīci hell.

The Buddha liberates sentient beings by removing attachment. If one further teaches them to become attached, preventing them from being lively and at ease, one can scarcely escape blame. It is like treating an illness: rigidly adhering to one method, believing it to be cautious and reliable, can through delay lead to a fatal mistake. This must be understood.

2. In seeking a teacher, one must not be swayed by personal feelings. If medicine does not suit the illness, one should change one's plan. If one has practiced Pure Land for many years without seeing results, one may practice Esoteric Buddhism. After realizing samādhi, if one turns back to practice Pure Land, one will certainly have assurance. Only recently have I myself come to have some confidence in practicing Pure Land, and therefore I dare offer this sincere advice.

(IV) Guarding Against Various Ills

1. Do not cultivate through self-mortification. Any practice that damages the body is not Buddhadharma. The Buddha takes great freedom as primary, ascending to ultimate bliss. If one wishes to undertake ascetic practices, why not enter hell to practice? One should understand that ascetic practice is meant to strengthen one's resolve, so that one does not turn back despite a hundred setbacks, and to guard against indulgence. Worldly people often regard poor clothing and food as suffering, not realizing that those without wisdom, whose minds are unrestrained and lack self-mastery, are the most suffering people in the world. Those who study Buddhism should begin by attaining samādhi and wisdom; there is no second method.

2. Do not take up practice out of resentment. The original intent of cultivation is liberation and freedom. If one cultivates out of resentment, the root of anger is difficult to uproot. Therefore, one should explain matters so that people may understand for themselves. Only by attaining samādhi, developing wisdom, and realizing emptiness can one enter the ground of joy.

3. Do not cultivate blindly. The fault of blind cultivation is exceedingly common in the world. Anyone who has not realized the mind and seen one's true nature is cultivating blindly. Therefore, the foremost essential of studying Buddhism is to

develop wisdom. Only after understanding clearly does one engage in right cultivation.

4. Do not cultivate by suppression. Many practitioners seek a deadened samādhi, forcibly suppressing deluded thoughts so that they do not arise. This has the drawbacks of causing one to become like dead ashes, earth, wood, metal, or stone; and the later reaction is even more dangerous. These are all illnesses of suppressive cultivation.

For example: not thinking a single thought and merely sitting to settle the mind—one association once transmitted this method; this is the first, an indeterminate emptiness. Spending all day in meditation, forcibly restraining thoughts, and believing oneself to have attained samādhi—this is the second. Forcing oneself to endure humiliation without being able to contemplate emptiness, until illness develops over time—this is the third. Eating vegetarian food and observing precepts, not from one's fundamental vow but from being stirred by social pressure; being unable to persist, resenting others, and unable to keep the mind pure—this is the fourth.

Non-Buddhist practitioners rigidly cling to essence, energy, and spirit; when dying, they cannot disperse their cultivated power and may even become deranged—this is the fifth. All these may show effects for a time, but their harmful consequences emerge later. Recently, some have suffered abdominal distension to the point of death, or even committed suicide; these belong to this category. Having planted such causes, how could they seek the fruition of ultimate bliss? Is this not deeply pitiable?

5. Do not cultivate on a small scale. The purpose of cultivation is to become a Buddha. If one is content with something inferior and small, one is not fit for great things and can never succeed. Therefore, one should make great vows and undertake great conduct: to seek only to develop wisdom and become a Buddha in this very life is a great vow; to resolve to liberate all sentient beings through wisdom is great conduct.

6. Do not cultivate greedily. This means that one should not seek a teaching whenever one sees one, nor take as one's teacher every master one meets. Having obtained a true Dharma, one should enter deeply through a single gate. One must not be fickle, abandoning one path for another and changing one's practice morning and evening, thereby laboring in vain.

7. Exercise self-restraint. First, do not be arrogant or conceited. Second, do not become self-satisfied and self-righteous. Third, do not become vexed or resentful. Fourth, do not be impatient. Fifth, do not be indolent. Sixth, do not measure the inner states of others. Seventh, do not seek supernormal powers first. These are all

faults that necessarily arise during the period of practice. The deeper one's practice becomes, the more habitual tendencies emerge; one must guard against them. You may read my Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935) and examine it carefully.

(V) Diligently Upholding Eight Essentials

1. Cultivate comprehensively. This means that one's mind-capacity should be broad. Then, when one sees principles, one considers them comprehensively, and naturally has no view that one school is superior or inferior to another.

2. Cultivate earnestly. This means that if one is keenly and urgently alert, one's progress will naturally be swift, and one will certainly attain the ultimate in this very life.

3. Cultivate through vows. This means that the power of vows must be primary. One's vows should be upright, great, and practical. This itself is cultivation.

4. Cultivate with single-minded focus. This means that, having obtained a true Dharma, one should concentrate on it and enter deeply. Then one can naturally enter the universal gate through a single gate and attain completeness.

5. Cultivate flexibly. This means that single-minded focus differs from rigid and inflexible attachment. The mind should be lively; then one attains freedom. Moreover, the Buddha established various dharma gates, so one must not cling to a single one. There should be adaptations according to circumstances, although the guiding purpose itself does not change.

6. Cultivate in pairs. First, let oneself and the Buddha stand as a pair: in seeking the Buddha, one should also seek oneself. Second, in household practice, one should receive the support of one's companion. Third, in cultivating wisdom, one should also cultivate blessings; in making vows, one must also put them into practice. Fourth, those who keep a vegetarian diet should keep both the mouth and the mind pure, and should not see the faults of others. These are all forms of paired cultivation. Through them, one can become complete, and merit and virtue are more easily brought to fulfillment.

7. Cultivate genuinely. This means that one's practice must be real; only one knows for oneself whether one is cold or warm. One must not deceive oneself, and should therefore take actual practice as primary. Actual practice is the practice of the mind, not outward chanting and bowing.

8. Cultivate through nurturing. Once one has awakened to the mind-ground and gained something through cultivation, nurturing must be primary. The following example illustrates this:

A. Selecting the material. This means choosing jade that is fine and large. Buddha-nature is equal in all. Though people's capacities may differ temporarily, one's mind-capacity should be broad. Small jade cannot be enlarged, but the mind is not so: jade's substance cannot be changed, whereas the mind can be changed.

B. Carving and polishing. This means that fine material left unworked is truly regrettable. Yet one must find a skilled artisan; if a large piece of material is made into a small one, the fault lies with the teacher.

C. Grinding and burnishing. This means that without grinding and burnishing, jade will not become lustrous and smooth. Therefore, one must undergo all kinds of trials and tempering, taking every grievance, resentment, and adverse event as an aid to entering the Way. Yet the fire of one's temperament still remains.

D. Burying in earth. This means that without nurturing, one's strength will not be sufficient. Therefore, one must calm one's energies and gather them inwardly. This cannot be attained through study; it arises naturally only when one's practice has become deep. In short, at every moment do not let the mind become lax. Once emptiness and purity are reached, there is no attachment or defilement at all; even if one wished to raise afflictions, they could no longer arise.

(VI) Clarifying the Process

There is fundamentally no fixed method in the process of cultivation, yet its most essential points are as follows:

1. Seek and obtain a true Dharma—that is, a method rightly suited to one's own capacity. Whether Esoteric Buddhism, Chan, name-recitation, or visualization of forms, all serve only to purify the land of one's own intrinsic nature.

2. Practice in accordance with the Dharma. Along the way, one must never mix in one's own views; then samādhi will naturally be attained.

3. Develop prajñā. This means great wisdom, which arises from samādhi. The union of samādhi and wisdom is precept; this is called possessing the complete ten precepts.

4. Realize the mind and see one's true nature. Once the mind-ground is clear, one's original mind naturally becomes apparent. Form and emptiness are nondual; only then is one no longer subject to delusion.

5. Because the mind is no longer deluded, one can then remove habitual tendencies.

A. Emptying circumstances.

B. Emptying the mind. (The coarse level)

C. Emptying dharmas. (The subtle level)

D. Emptying emptiness. (The extremely subtle level) (The foregoing is the initial opening of the sixth supernormal power, the exhaustion of outflows; this is called the power of the Way and is said to be attaining the essence.)

6. The arising of the five supernormal powers is what is meant by their functioning. One must never seek them first; only after realizing the mind will they naturally unfold. If, upon obtaining a slight sign of realization, one becomes delighted, one turns into a demon. If one seeks these powers before attaining realization of the Way, they are called demonic powers, for non-Buddhist paths also possess the five powers.

(VII) Essential Instructions

I. Ordinary beings and Buddhas are not two in their fundamental essence. It is only because ordinary beings do not understand cause and effect that awakening comes later—awakening at the stage of fruition—and some remain unawakened from beginning to end. Once one awakens, one has reached the other shore. Thus one should use the one-character formula　(A). Whenever something arises in the mind, a thought has stirred at the causal stage. One should first rouse oneself with solemn vigilance: “If I create such a cause today, I will certainly receive such a result in the future.” Then, in fear, one will not enter into it. With long familiarity, one will not mistakenly enter into it. This syllable A is solemn vigilance; it is seeing clearly; it is transformation; it is emptiness; it is freedom from defilement; it is the Pure Land.

II. Regard this mind as though it were on a great thoroughfare: all manner of forms are clearly seen and heard, yet they pass without lingering and leave no defilement upon me. This is the realm of a Buddha.

III. When encountering anything, simply respond in accordance with conditions. Distinguish clearly between good and evil, yet do not give rise to a view of self. Constantly contend with your own temperament. Emotional attachment is self-love: transform it and loosen it. Views are attachment to self: release them and empty them. In time, one naturally becomes free and at ease.

IV. Distinguish what is weighty from what is light. Consider that, among all the greatest affairs in the world, however numerous, none outweighs a single death; yet ten million deaths do not outweigh a single act of practice; and ten million acts of practice do not outweigh a single awakening. With awakening, the mind is empty. This is the highest merit and virtue; no comparison can be made of what is weighty

or light, beneficial or harmful. Know that all sufferings arise solely from non-awakening, and that no bliss surpasses realizing the mind.

V. Do not forget. But what if at times one does forget, or, though one does not forget, lacks the strength to transform it? There are two methods: first, think in advance of the fearful consequences that may come in the future; second, recite a mantra. One can then immediately awaken and transform.

All worthy people who genuinely wish to apply themselves should not forget to practice each day. With every thought abiding in awakening, one abides with every thought in the Buddha. Practice at all times; illuminate at all times. Each day, read through these seven points once, and explain them once to others. Practice and illuminate; continue in this way for a year and a half without interruption. If you do not realize samādhi and see the true reality, then I am deluded and demonic. I also hope that you will dedicate the merit to all sentient beings, so that all may attain Buddhahood. This is the method for dispelling calamities and extending life.

Practice of the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra

Throughout our lives, we are often beset by illness and suffering, or by depression, sorrow, and distress, from which it is hard to free or console ourselves. Some people may even experience various terrors and confusions. All this is due to the mind's lack of peace. When the mind is at peace, meditative stability can give rise to wisdom. Once wisdom opens, one can then examine all worldly success and failure, advantage and dullness, right and wrong, gain and loss, wealth and poverty,

birth and death, coming and going, and see that all are empty illusions. If one further contemplates emptiness, no vexation or anger will arise; causes and results, past and future, will become perfectly clear; one's thoughts will not be biased; and all human sorrow will naturally vanish. Illness and pain will likewise naturally lessen and may even be healed.

The key to all this lies in the single word "mind." This Dharma is a method for cultivating the mind, a wondrous practice of Avalokiteśvara, the Great Being, for relieving suffering and rescuing those in distress. Those who practice it have something upon which their minds may rely: it can dispel illness, bring meditative stability, and increase wisdom; it is useful to society and beneficial to humanity. For Buddhist practitioners, it can lead to an understanding of the Buddhadharma and clarify the mind's intrinsic nature, enable liberation from the cycle of birth and death in future lives, plant immeasurable fields of merit, and help people fulfill their aspiration for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

This Dharma has already been transmitted to countless people. It is now explained clearly once again for the benefit of those with aspiration, so that those who have not yet aroused the resolve may do so; those who have aroused it may become diligent; and those who are diligent may cultivate and realize it. As for those who are ill, relying on Avalokiteśvara's power of great compassion, they may recover without medicine. Even those whose illness is already severe and whose life conditions are limited may plant fields of merit early, enabling them to escape the suffering of the evil

realms, perhaps even averting the worst. Those burdened by past karma involving ghosts, delusions, or malevolent influences may also be freed through this practice. There are also those who become ill because they practice seated meditation improperly—for example, damaging their vital energy through Buddha-recitation, rigidly sitting in the manner of non-Buddhist paths, wooden meditative absorption resulting in "abdominal distension," or madness and confusion. Only this Dharma can cure them.

In short, a human life of a hundred years passes in the flick of a finger. One must awaken and turn back early, lest it already be too late. Relying on this single vessel to cross the sea of suffering, one may not only benefit oneself but also liberate others.

(I) The Merits of the Mantra and Mudrā

Mantra: Om (ong), ma (ma), ni (ni), bei (bei), mei (mei), hum (hong).

This mantra is also called the Supreme Heart Mantra of Avalokiteśvara, the Great Being. Its benefits are as follows: (1) subduing demons, (2) curing illness, (3) avoiding calamities, (4) attaining all kinds of accomplishment, (5) removing obstacles, and (6) ascending to Buddhahood—that is, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

This mantra is the subtle original mind of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva himself attained Buddhahood through upholding this mantra and is called the Tathāgata of True Dharma Illumination. In recent millennia, the Tathāgata of True Dharma Illumination has manifested in the Sahā world to assist Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One, in liberating sentient beings. With a mother's loving kindness, he guides sentient beings, enabling them to leave suffering and attain happiness.

Its outward form is Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara, who has immeasurable manifestations, such as Green Tārā, White Parasol, Cundī, and Amoghapāśa. Its mantras are likewise innumerable and immeasurable, and collectively may be called the Great Compassion Mantra; none fails to issue from the Great Compassion Wish-Fulfilling Wheel. This mantra is also the heart of all mantras, and is therefore called

the Great Compassion Heart Mantra. It is the pure essence of the Mahāyāna and has only six syllables, making it convenient to uphold and recite. Those who uphold and recite this mantra are not distinguished by wealth or poverty, male or female, young or old; all can enable seven generations of ancestors to rise beyond and attain liberation. The Mahāyāna Ornamented Treasure King Sūtra specifically explains the merits of this mantra.

In Tibet, only the sound of the six-syllable mantra is transmitted; the mudrā is not lightly transmitted. In Tibetan pronunciation it is read as “Om ma ni ba mei hum”; in Mongolian, as “Om ma ni bei te mei hum.” Master Nona further added the syllable “she” after “hum,” without a mudrā, taking this to signify swift accomplishment. Acharya Dayu gave the correct pronunciation as “Om ma ni bei mei hum,” incorporating the advantage of the shorter Mongolian pronunciation for swift accomplishment, while also transmitting the Great Lotus Mudrā. This mudrā is the mudrā for invoking bodhisattvas. For anyone who both upholds the mantra and forms the mudrā, its efficacy is increased a hundredfold.

For attaining meditative stability and curing illness, the mudrā is especially indispensable.

The symbolic meaning of the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra may be explained in terms of the six realms of rebirth: “Om” represents the deva realm; “ma,” the asura realm; “ni,” the human realm; “ba,” the animal realm; “mei,” the ghost realm; and “hum,” the hell realm. By upholding and reciting this six-syllable mantra, one can cut off rebirth, leave the three realms, and realize the fruition of sainthood.

Its symbolism may also be explained in terms of the four noble stages: the syllable “Om” arises from the bodhisattva mind and enters the first stage of the ten faiths; through this one advances. The syllable “ma” enters the stage of the ten abodes; through this one advances. The syllable “ni” enters the stage of the ten practices and advances further. The syllable “ba” enters the stage of the ten dedications; “mei” enters the stage of the ten bhūmis; and “hum” enters the Vajrayāna and reaches the stage of great awakening. Thus, by reciting this six-syllable mantra, one can immediately transcend the ten bhūmis and attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment.

(II) Rules and Procedures for Practice

One must first request empowerment and transmission of the Dharma from a teacher before practicing. After receiving the Dharma, first become thoroughly familiar with the mantra through recitation, and then undertake seated practice.

Before taking one’s seat: (1) wash the hands; (2) prepare everything; (3) pay homage to the Buddha. There is no need to burn incense; in particular, avoid fragrant

incense that produces much smoke. It is suitable to practice while seated on a bed. If one is away from home or circumstances are inconvenient, one may simply make mental prostrations and light a little incense.

There are eight prohibitions when taking one's seat: (1) do not sit in a drafty place; (2) do not sit after eating a full meal—wait about an hour and a half after a meal; (3) do not relieve oneself immediately after leaving one's seat—wait at least ten minutes; (4) do not greedily sit for too long out of temporary enthusiasm, for this may later lead to regression. One session daily, or at most two sessions, of one to two hours each is appropriate; (5)

do not recite loudly, lest it damage the vital energy. Use vajra recitation: the lips move without sound, while one hears it oneself; (6) do not move the body excessively, for this will certainly cause back pain. Stretch slowly, and there is no need to hold the body overly erect; (7) do not seek visions of light or Buddhas; (8) when illusory appearances arise, do not grasp at them or give rise to doubt. Hearing subtle fragrances or wondrous sounds, for example, and becoming delighted by them can all cause illness.

Through its mudrā, this Dharma directly realizes the gate of the formless. It takes the spiritual mind as primary; there is no need to visualize light or letters. It differs from Tibetan esoteric practices.

There are three essentials of this practice:

First, while seated, the mudrā must not be released. This is the secret of body, and through it one refrains from the three evil bodily deeds of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.

Second, one must continually uphold the mantra orally and must not speak. This is the secret of speech, and through it one refrains from the four evil deeds of speech.

Third, let the mind be empty like that of a Buddha. One is oneself Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara, and contemplates all sentient beings as Buddhas intoxicated or ill: once they awaken, they are healed. They are of one substance and nondual. This is the secret of mind, and through it one refrains from the three evil mental deeds of greed, anger, and ignorance.

This Dharma fully contains the three teachings of precepts, meditative stability, and wisdom, and renders the three karmic activities pure.

For those who practice this Dharma, diligent effort in daily life is most essential. At all times, take heed of the following:

(1) One must not commit such evil deeds as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, or false speech. One must reform and remove habitual tendencies; otherwise, even studying the Dharma brings no benefit.

(2) One must not give rise to such wrong views as greed, anger, and ignorance. At all times seek to open wisdom; everywhere contemplate emptiness and learn generosity.

(3) One must not disparage other dharmas or those who have not practiced them. Regard all with equal compassion, and do not seek supernormal powers, fame, reputation, or material gain.

(4) Always recollect and revere the compassion of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and the Dharma-transmitting masters of successive generations. Respect your own Buddha-nature, knowing that everyone is originally capable of becoming a Buddha. Give rise to the vow to rescue and liberate sentient beings; this is the greatest offering.

(5) One should fulfill the human virtues of filial piety, fraternal respect, loyalty, and righteousness. Only by perfecting worldly dharmas and fully carrying out one's human responsibilities can one become a Buddha.

(6) Practitioners should enshrine an image of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara. If there is no image of Avalokiteśvara, another sublime image may be used. If one truly lacks the means, it is also permissible not to make an offering, for wherever there are sentient beings, there is Buddha.

(7) During practice, cover the mudrā with yellow cloth or another clean cloth. Do not playfully form the mudrā with non-practitioners or children. In reciting the mantra, accurate pronunciation is essential.

When practicing, scattered thoughts may arise in profusion, and one may feel that there are even more of them than usual. This is good; it is a sign of progress, not something bad. Do not doubt and stop. Simply ignore them and attend wholeheartedly to the mantra; the mind will naturally become tranquil and settled. Do not forcibly seek the absence of thought, especially at the beginning. Such an effort becomes suppression, and after a long time one becomes like wood or stone; this too is an illness. Thoughts should be allowed to arise, but one should neither cling to them nor follow them. It is like a broad open road: all kinds of carts, horses, and pedestrians do not cease coming and going; it is not that they are neither seen nor heard, but that they are neither retained nor allowed to abide. This is what is called no-thought.

(III) The Various Ways This Dharma Dispels Illness

This Dharma was not originally established for treating illness, but when the mind is settled, the vital energy is harmonious and the blood abundant, so all illnesses may naturally be resolved. Of these six syllables, “Om” removes all illnesses; “ma” removes heat disorders; “ni” removes disorders of vital energy; “ba” removes phlegm disorders; “mei” removes cold disorders; and “hum” removes gallbladder disorders. From this perspective, it is also suitable for the ill to practice it. It has relatively marked effects for insomnia, high blood pressure, brain disorders, liver and stomach disorders, cardiovascular disorders, palpitations, numbness, gynecological disorders, and other conditions. The following points should be noted:

(1) Whatever the illness, one should chiefly preserve the heart. The method may be divided into opening the source and restricting the outflow. Do not let the liver-fire stir; settle the mind and calm the spirit, so that the vital energy is harmonious and the blood abundant—this is called opening the source. Have fewer worries, and do not let vexation or anger arise, so that vital energy and blood are not depleted—this is called restricting the outflow.

If one can open the source and restrict the outflow, one will naturally live long. Practicing this Dharma daily will certainly calm the mind, pacify the vital energy, and increase the blood cells. Yet if, while sitting, the body feels unwell or old illnesses recur, this is the removal of deeply concealed roots of past illness and is beneficial; it differs from falling ill. After some time, one will naturally recover.

Never doubt and stop. Instead, make a great vow and recite: “I practice this Dharma to resolve all past karma. Though old illnesses may come, I rejoice in them, for their roots are thereby removed. May I bear the suffering of all under heaven who have the same illness. If I succeed in this practice, I vow to liberate all sentient beings universally, so that all may realize the mind and become Buddhas, forever cutting off every illness and suffering.” Make this great vow daily before taking your seat, and never forget it. Practice this Dharma for one hundred days, and extraordinary effects will surely be obtained; after one thousand days of practice, one will surely realize samādhi.

(2) After taking one’s seat, forget that one is ill. Do not think about the afflicted part of the body; otherwise, the vital energy and blood will congeal there, and the illness will be difficult to remove.

(3) After the session, the main point is to have less anger and irritation. Avoid eating onions and garlic, and avoid smelling strong fragrances, since these things easily stir the liver. Fish and meat should likewise be eaten sparingly, as they easily arouse desire; when the mind is filled with thoughts of desire, it is not in accord with the Dharma. In daily encounters, value forbearance above all. Reflect that these are all

the retribution of one's own karmic debts from the past, which should be borne and dispelled through practice, thereby turning misfortune into good fortune.

(4) In practicing this Dharma, there is no need to select a time, place, or direction; it is sufficient to be single-minded and reverent. Women may practice it every day without interruption. It is even more beneficial for the elderly. Those suffering from age-related pain in the lower back and legs will certainly recover if they practice according to the instructions; they will also be free of such illnesses as stroke and palpitations. First rely on the power of one's own devout practice, and then on the grace of the bodhisattvas' blessings; the blood and vital energy will naturally circulate more easily.

After practicing according to the instructions for a full hundred days, if there is an ill person at home, form the mudrā and recite the mantra 108 or 1,000 times, then add it to clean boiled water and have the patient drink it. It will prove effective in every case. If the patient can recite it as well, the result will be even better.

Dharma Gate of Guiding Beings to Rebirth

What is valued in a good spiritual friend is the ability to employ skillful means: to guide people onto the right path, to have a warm heart, and not to shrink from trouble. If one has not clarified the root oneself, then, though one may zealously help others, prajñā has not yet opened. One will still cling to views of self; nothing will be complete, and one will unknowingly mislead later students and create immeasurable karma. To obtain an evil result from a good cause is most senseless. I hope to tell my fellow practitioners that each should encourage and exert themselves. “Good” means skillful; one must never cling to a single dharma, insist that one’s own method is superior, or act to eliminate preconceived views. Then one’s observation will be complete.

To know means to know a person’s capacity and standing. One must first know one’s own position and strength before applying a teaching; one must especially avoid assuming that one knows.

To discern means to discern the occasion. If it is not the right person, not the actual circumstances, not the right dharma, not the right conditions, or not the right place, one must not act rashly. It benefits neither party, while great harm lies ahead; one must be especially careful.

(I) Self-Awakening

If one wishes to establish oneself, one should establish others; if one wishes to succeed, one should help others succeed. Those who would be teachers must first

awaken themselves.

1. Be aware of your own habitual tendencies. Warmhearted people are often blunt of speech and impatient by nature; this must be recognized. If one speaks too bluntly, others often cannot bear it. What is intended to draw them near instead drives them away; what is intended to hasten matters instead delays them. One must especially not press one's own family members harshly.

2. Ask whether what you have learned can be taught to others. If it can, there is no harm in trying. One must neither be overly bold nor overly timid. Anyone under thirty must never teach the Dharma to others. The Way must be sought for oneself, and one's resources must be cultivated by oneself. Be sincere and do not deceive; sincerity brings clarity. If what you have learned is insufficient, do not suppose that you know. Not knowing what one does not know causes no harm.

To mislead others through ignorance is the height of folly. Nor should one pretend to be an expert in other teachings. Above all, do not criticize their rightness or wrongness without knowing why they are as they are. This merely increases one's own dharma views, while the other party will inevitably develop resentment. This must absolutely not be done. In sum, there are four kinds of falsehood in teaching the Dharma: to speak when one should not speak is falsehood; to fail to speak when one may speak is also falsehood; to speak to a person to whom one should not speak is falsehood; and to fail to speak to a person to whom one may speak is also falsehood. When teaching, do not concern yourself with whether you speak well. Give rise only to great compassion, and make attending to the other person your priority.

3. Ask whether your desire for gain and your desire for fame can be restrained. The desire for fame is worse than the desire for gain. Those whose dharma views are deep have not extinguished their desire for fame, and they always consider themselves right. If they see someone disparage their teaching, their anger will surely blaze up, as fiercely as toward an enemy. This is no different from the ancient conflict between the Northern and Southern schools, and should serve as a warning.

Their original intention may have been to protect the Dharma, yet they do not realize that they have become offenders. Such people are most pitiable; thus one should not be overly on guard oneself. Know that disparaging them does them no harm, whereas we ourselves lose virtue and create karma of speech. Such bad habits arise from seeking momentary relief: it is like something lodged in the throat, and one feels uncomfortable unless it is let out.

4. Ask yourself what degree of faith and affinity you have with those who come to you. With those whose acquaintance is shallow, one must not speak deeply. The

difficulty lies in finding exactly the right measure. Yet one must not deliberately speak ambiguously and thereby mislead others.

5. When teaching the Dharma, do not deliberately seek to impress, nor let your words run like an unbridled wild horse that cannot be drawn back. This often makes people weary of listening and fall asleep, or leaves them with no thread to follow and unable to enter into the subject.

6. The greatest taboo in teaching the Dharma is failing to clear oneself up first. Clearly tell others not to take your words as a real dharma and cling to them rigidly, lest you increase their dharma views. Or what is taught may be wholly disorganized and fail to make matters clear; or the meaning may not be fully explained, with only half being said, causing later students to stop midway. Above all, do not speak too definitively. Know that the Dharma has no fixed dharma. One may thus cause people to die in a single dharma for decades and never turn around. If one's own standing is somewhat elevated, one must be especially cautious in speech. Because others have deep faith in one, their clinging to the teaching will likewise become firm. Guard carefully against the illness that may follow.

7. Do not explain the Dharma exhaustively. If a person has not yet truly applied themselves and gained something, one must not explain too early, lest this instead prevent them from going deeply into it.

8. In teaching the Dharma, it is important to give general instruction suited to the occasion; this differs greatly from speaking individually to a particular person. General instruction is difficult because one must take all sides into account; individual instruction is difficult because it must fit that person's capacity. First, they must be able to understand and take it in. Second, they must be willing to remain alert and put it into practice.

9. It is difficult to be willing to explain the Dharma in the most elementary and ordinary terms. Just as a university professor who is willing to teach young primary-school children must have patience and an even temper, so too must one not seek rapid attainment; that is not compassion.

10. If one's own causal ground is not right, it is difficult to set right the causal ground of students. This is why it is so difficult. People's failing lies in being fond of acting as teachers of others.

(II) Examination

11. There are immeasurable ways of guiding through the Dharma; this depends on skillful means. There is a stimulating method: some people will not set out on the path unless stirred to action. There is an indirect method: exhortation must not be

too blunt. There is an allusive method: one may use one matter to speak of A, so that B hears it and awakens to it themselves. In all, there is no fixed dharma; apply it according to the person's capacity.

12. When transmitting a practice, its formal dignities must not be omitted. This is not only for the recipient, but also for onlookers, so that they will not treat it lightly or disrespectfully.

13. The pronunciation of mantras should be accurate, and students must be made to recite them fluently. Mudrās should be transmitted personally, and students must be examined from time to time.

14. Instruct them firmly never to transmit it onward, thereby making its seriousness clear.

15. First transmit one mudrā. Do not transmit the second until they have completed the required sittings.

16. If students are lazy in sitting, they must be urged on. If they are too strenuous, then when the appropriate time comes they must be restrained somewhat; they must not be rushed.

17. In a group, do not single out any person for praise.

18. Strictly forbid them to greedily seek supernormal powers, visions of light, or visions of Buddhas. All such things are illusory manifestations produced by deluded mind, and must absolutely not be permitted. One may, however, ask about their dreams as a way to gauge how diligently they practice during the day.

19. When students have bodily illnesses, these often surface because of sitting meditation. This is good rather than bad. Encourage them not to doubt or fear it, but when the illness is acute, do not force them to sit excessively.

20. Explain the method of sitting and the necessary arrangements in full detail. Never shrink from trouble. To be careful at the causal stage is great compassion toward them.

21. When a student is practicing diligently and suddenly feels extreme unease because of past shortcomings in private conduct, the knots in the mind may be difficult to untangle. When they do not know what to do, have them write and report it; they need not give their name. Explain the matter thoroughly, and do not leave them in doubt. One may also employ form-based practices to repent before the Buddha, while repeatedly explaining the meaning of emptiness. This situation will occur during nine meditation sessions or a seven-day retreat. Once this barrier is broken through, progress will immediately be seen.

22. The nine meditation sessions may be done at home, but a seven-day retreat must involve several people, with no more than fifteen. The retreat guardian must personally supervise them. The number of sittings should be increased or decreased according to their physical health: from four sittings daily to five, with six as the maximum, or reduced to five. There is no fixed rule.

23. During a seven-day retreat, the retreat guardian must make solemn offerings to the Buddha, personally maintain a single mantra, make offerings to Venerable Skanda, and at times sit together with the participants.

24. During the first seven-day retreat, it is unnecessary to give instruction. Beginning with the second, speak for half an hour each evening. At most, conduct four such retreats; in fact, three are sufficient.

25. After the seven-day retreat, have them go out and travel. Do not sit for half a month. If they are unaffected by this, their attachment to the Dharma may be removed.

26. The Dharma gate for regular daily practice is truly of primary importance. To open their mind-ground, one may guide them through sayings and koans of the Chan school, with the aim of enabling them to awaken and enter.

27. They may be encouraged to attend Chan halls and seven-day Buddha-recitation retreats, first as a reference and later in order to achieve integration.

28. To assess a person's habitual tendencies and Buddhist affinity, one may ask for the year, month, day, and hour of birth and seek this in Yizhangjin. This book should be studied, and the time of birth in particular must be accurate.

(III) Admonitions

Do not fear criticism in undertaking this great and difficult task, and do not seek praise. Always take great compassion as the basis. Whenever a teaching is slandered or attacked, it is our own fault. In propagating and protecting the Dharma, one must be careful everywhere and not give offense to others, especially not to those whose dharma views are too deep. Few people in the world are broad-minded. Whatever the cause, fellow students must absolutely not argue with others; all such disputes are enough to lead others into misunderstanding. Slander then reaches the Dharma and implicates the teacher. Recalling past history, this is truly painful. Therefore, students should be carefully admonished.

1. If anyone disparages our Heart-of-Heart Dharma, do not argue at all. Wait until their anger has subsided and an appropriate opportunity arises, then speak briefly. If they cannot accept it, let them be.

2. Never discuss with others the relative superiority or inferiority of teachings, or the strengths and weaknesses of practice; nor should one make sarcastic remarks or flaunt one’s own strengths.

3. Among a large gathering, sit quietly in a corner of the room, attend to your own original nature, and do not engage in much discussion with others.

4. Do not argue over whether to eat meat or vegetarian food. This Dharma gate neither opposes vegetarianism nor permits deliberately eating meat. Killing must certainly be abstained from. Since ancient times, onions and garlic have been called pungent foods; fish and meat, flesh foods; vegetables and beans, vegetables; and adapting to conditions, vegetarian food. Those who discriminate between fine and coarse foods are indulgent in their minds; those who see the faults and evils of others are indulgent in their views. We seek to break our own attachments and views; the practice lies in knowing for ourselves what is correct, and there is no need to seek others’ recognition. Besides, when others attack us, how could their intention be confined to this one issue?

5. Do not associate with followers of non-Buddhist paths, but do not detest them either. Teach and transform them according to the occasion.

When Transmitting or Teaching the Dharma, Carefully Observe One’s Words and Conduct

Giving Dharma transmission and empowerment to others differs from expounding the Dharma to them; therefore, one must examine them carefully, just as a physician first recognizes the symptoms of an illness.

1. Examine the person's character. Those of a sincere and steadfast nature are best. See whether they are filial and harmonious within their family, whether they treat others generously, whether they are frugal in their own way of life, whether they display arrogance, whether their speech is well ordered, whether their bearing is grand and substantial, and whether they have the courage to undertake responsibilities.

2. Examine their circumstances of life. They should not be excessively impoverished, nor should they be wealthy; those of the middle class more readily enter the Way.

3. Examine their disposition. Those who are open and forthright are best; those who are uninhibited and unrestrained readily enter the Way. Those who are overly suspicious and desirous, excessively meticulous and given to deep deliberation, lavish in their personal habits and fond of adornment, fastidious about cleanliness, timid and fearful of affairs, or lacking in enthusiasm find it difficult to enter the Way.

As for those who are muddleheaded, lazy, extremely narrow-minded, fond of publicizing others' faults, coarse in their habits, or flattering yet arrogant, be especially careful not to transmit lightly to them.

4. Examine their appearance. Those whose bearing is lofty and expansive; whose gaze lacks a sharp glare; whose vital energy is gentle and compliant rather than coarse and frivolous; whose five features are proportionate in size; whose limbs are not withered or emaciated; whose fingers are slender, soft, and long; who can sit patiently without restlessness; whose ears are large; whose bones behind the ears are prominent; whose hairline is high; whose eyebrows do not hang low; whose teeth are not overly exposed; whose body is stout but whose neck is not short; who do not lift their toes high when walking; whose voice is clear and bright, yet has a deep underlying tone; whose nose is straight; whose clear vitality is contained beneath the skin; whose eyes have no red veins; and whose waist and back are substantial—all may enter the Way.

5. Examine their preferences. Those who, though inclined toward amusements, are not deeply tainted by them, and those whose nature is free and unrestrained without being fussy about minor details, will certainly be able to enter the Way. Also examine the kind of people with whom they ordinarily associate.

6. Examine their physical condition. Determine whether they are often ill and whether they have any hidden ailments or disabilities.

7. Examine whether they have leisure for practice.

Transmitting the Dharma

Before transmitting a teaching to someone, one must first observe whether that person is sincere and earnest, and whether there is an affinity of faith between us. Never act merely out of personal feeling, nor transmit it lightly or prematurely.

I. Ask what teachings they practiced in the past, whether they gained any understanding from them, and why they entered Buddhism.

II. Ask the purpose of their visit: whether they have come merely out of curiosity; whether they were introduced by someone else and are not acting from their own sincere aspiration; or whether they have come to inquire about the Dharma rather than to seek the Dharma. If they are still wavering, do not transmit it lightly.

III. Those who seek many teachings and take many teachers often lack firm faith. If they have practiced a previous teaching for a long time without gaining anything and are left anxious and at a loss, one should explain their doubts and guide them onward.

IV. Correct their cause, establish their aim, calm their spirit, and clear their vision. First cut off their views; then dispel their doubts. Do not dazzle their eyes and ears with the miraculous. In transmitting a teaching, the foremost consideration is that it suit their capacity; one must not rigidly cling to a single teaching.

V. Do not rush to transmit a teaching; first ensure that they have understood clearly. Do not expound meanings that are too lofty; they should be practical and substantial. Avoid too much display of technical terminology. First impart one part and see whether they are willing to practice it; then impart the second step, gradually leading them in. Never seek quick results, and still less make promises lightly.

VI. Do not coerce, nor accommodate them excessively. Do not refuse those who come, and do not pursue those who leave. When the time has not yet arrived, haste only drives it farther away.

VII. For those willing to set out on the path, encourage them, but do not press them too urgently. Observe them diligently, without fearing inconvenience, and do not force upon them what they find difficult.

VIII. In the case of older unmarried women, widows, or nuns, be especially cautious and do not lightly transmit this Dharma to them. Since anger and resentment may not yet have been eliminated, it is difficult for them to receive the great Dharma; they may fail to practice it properly and become ill.

IX. Among dancers, theatrical performers, and prisoners who have broken the law, there may be those of good capacity. Do not lightly neglect or discriminate against them.

X. Do not debate with those who lack the capacity for it, lest they slander the Dharma.

Empowerment for the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma

Whatever the teachings of the Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions, their fundamental concern is always to gather in the mind. Confucians merely seek fame and office; Buddhists merely seek blessings and rewards; Daoists merely cultivate vital essence and qi. None knows how to return to the source principle. Zong means loyalty, centeredness, and fully exhausting oneself; only after fully exhausting oneself can one serve others. The first task is to subdue one's own mind. As the saying goes, “When the mind is brought to one point, nothing cannot be accomplished.”

There are only three questions: What is mind? By what is it subdued? And how is it subdued? There are accordingly three answers: That which gathers and arises is mind; use mind to subdue mind; and subdue it in this way. In sum, one must apply the practice of “returning,” causing it to return to its original ground. Clearly see the originally pure nature, and the mind will naturally be subdued. Yet this is a matter of principle, not of actual practice. Everyone can speak of it, but no one is willing to do it.

People often suppose that understanding this principle is sufficient. They also say that one becomes accomplished at a touch from an enlightened teacher and needs no other method. How could it be so easy? The Buddha said that principle belongs to sudden awakening, while matters belong to gradual removal. Because habitual tendencies from many lives remain, those who awaken at the level of principle may exist, but those who directly realize are very few. Before and after awakening alike, one must undergo a grief as though bereaved of one's parents; the two obstacles of principle and phenomena must both be thoroughly cleared away. They must advance like two wheels; neither can be lacking. Principle supports practice, and practice verifies principle. Only when there is no obstruction in anything does one reach the stage beyond learning.

Intrinsic nature is indeed unmoving and unchanging, neither arising nor ceasing, and undefiled. Yet it can give rise to the myriad dharmas and bring forth all wondrous functions. This is called the functioning of mind: a momentary illusory image, what is meant by being unchanging yet able to accord with conditions.

Mind is originally like flowing water: free and unobstructed, with nothing it cannot do. Yet it must not become fixed. When water stops flowing, it becomes stagnant; when blood stops flowing, it becomes poisonous corruption. When mind becomes fixed on things, it becomes attached to delusion. It must abide nowhere and remain vividly alive, bringing forth all wondrous functions. This is the appearance of the One Mind, called the true mind. Because it flows from the essence of suchness, it is called true.

The One Mind is the mind that neither attaches nor abides. Though it gives rise to myriad transformations, its fundamental essence is never shaken. This is what is meant by according with conditions without changing. Now that the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is being transmitted, one must first understand its meaning. This Dharma aims to seal mind with mind, to seek the mind within mind, to investigate what its appearance truly is, and directly to see one's nature. This is called returning to the source principle; this is called fully exhausting oneself; this is called subduing the mind. One then brings forth the wondrous function of great compassion to benefit others. It is a teaching that truly possesses both essence and function, and one can

certainly see one's nature and attain Buddhahood in this very life. Therefore it is called the Jewel of the Buddha.

To realize and enter the true mind that neither attaches nor abides, and to see for oneself the appearance of one's intrinsic nature, fundamentally depends on one's own effort and personal seeking. But one's own strength is too weak, so one must rely on a Dharma. This Dharma was transmitted and taught by the Buddha, and therefore it is called Buddhadharma. Because this Dharma enables one to see one's nature and attain Buddhahood, it is called Buddhadharma. Because it flows forth from the Buddha Way of one's own nature, it is called Buddhadharma.

This Heart-of-Heart Dharma was personally transmitted to Acharya Dayu by Samantabhadra Bodhisattva while he was in samādhi. After undergoing ascetic practice on Mount Lu for seven years, he brought it into the world. As a Dharma, it exists in both Japan and Tibet; originally it is without distinction of East or West, present or past. Only the methods of practice and their functioning differ. It neither takes hold of form nor departs from form. Anyone may practice it. It is a Dharma for directly realizing the mind-ground and seeing one's nature within a set period.

It is indeed distinctive from Exoteric Buddhism, and it also differs in some respects from other esoteric teachings. To directly realize non-abiding—to abide neither in existence nor in emptiness, neither in the two extremes nor even in a middle way—requires the work of this Dharma. When one's own strength and the Buddha's strength combine, its efficacy becomes manifest. Its mantra and mudrā are the Buddha's strength. Diligent cultivation and living inquiry are one's own strength. To obtain the Dharma's function without being bound by the Dharma is also one's own strength.

As for mantras and mudrās, there is no meaning to explain and no principle to expound. Thus the mind does not race outward, and the body does not move vainly; one naturally does not cling to existence. If one speaks of clinging to emptiness, however, the hands form mudrās and the mouth recites mantras; there is at least something to be done, so one naturally does not fall into emptiness.

In this way, the mind is held on both sides and repeatedly regulated and subdued: from existence it turns to emptiness, and from emptiness it turns back to existence. Mind arises moment by moment and ceases moment by moment; it arises until nothing further can arise, and is swept away until nothing further can be swept away. After a thousand meditation sessions, the mind will have undergone a hundred thousand rounds of turning and cleansing. Faculties and objects alike entirely fall away. Pressed to that point, the true realm of quiescent light constantly appears before one. This may be called the ever-abiding true mind.

Moreover, through the power of mudrās and mantras, each dharma is coordinated with the body. When mantras are recited, a wheel of fire revolves. For every habitual tendency a person has, there is a kind of harmful insect; burned by this wheel of fire, it emerges from the intestines and stomach. As the mind is purified, old impurities within the abdomen are also purified. Thus the mind becomes peaceful, the spirit is replenished, the body becomes strong, and attaining samādhi naturally becomes easy.

During meditation sessions, it is used to nurture samādhi; off the meditation cushion, it naturally opens wisdom. Samādhi and wisdom support one another, and the precepts are contained within them. Moreover, in practicing any one Dharma, one ordinarily obtains only the function of that Dharma. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma alone is otherwise. Through one Dharma it encompasses eight teachings, which unfold into eighty-four thousand and are as countless as the sands of the Ganges. First, it directly realizes the Mind-Ground Dharma of the Tathāgata, using prajñā to sweep away habitual tendencies; this is the prajñā school.

Second, it is the empowerment of the three mysteries; this is Esoteric Buddhism. Third, because of the empowerment of the three mysteries, the three evils of body, speech, and mind are naturally restrained; this is the Vinaya school. Fourth, one is constantly gathered in samādhi and sees one's intrinsic nature while seated; this is the Chan school. Fifth, every thought is an appearance, swept away as it arises and thereby emptied; this is the Dharma Characteristics School. Sixth, one returns to utter purity, and the lotus flower of the mind opens; this is the Pure Land school.

Seventh, one realizes the boundless dharmakāya, pervading the dharma realm, with a body vast and immeasurable; this is the Huayan school. Eighth, after great penetration, wondrous functions are as countless as the sands of the Ganges, and one skillfully transforms conventional truth; this is the Lotus school of wondrous Dharma. Relying on one Dharma, all dharmas are included; emptying one mind, every mind is penetrated. Therefore it is called the Jewel of the Dharma.

Even so, Dharma alone cannot put itself into practice. It is also said that people can propagate the Way. First, one must have selfhood: I make great vows—may I attain Buddhahood, and may I enable all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. This is called great compassion; this is called an ordinary person of great resolve. When the Buddha expounded the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, he gave special emphasis to ordinary people of great resolve, saying that they surpass bodhisattvas because they can shoulder the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi.

With such a great resolve, one is a great vessel; possessing such a vessel, one can achieve great accomplishment. Therefore, unless one has true and urgent resolve, it cannot be done. One must pass through every sort of hardship without changing

one's mind or altering one's aspiration. Second, one needs a teacher, whose detailed guidance prevents doubt and retreat. Third, one needs a suitable Dharma that accords with one's capacity; then results will appear quickly. Fourth, one needs companions, with whom one may study and refine one another.

Fifth, one needs an environment. Whether favorable or adverse, all circumstances are causes and conditions that assist my progress on the Way. Therefore, from all Buddhas and bodhisattvas above to sentient beings in all evil realms below, all are my companions. They are all external spiritual friends, while I myself am an internal spiritual friend. To make this spiritually clear depends on the person. Therefore it is called the Jewel of the Saṅgha.

When these three meanings are understood, the causal ground is right, practice is right, and fruition is right. This is called the true Dharma. Buddhadharma has not perished, nor will there ever be a time when it perishes; this is called the Buddha's eternal abiding. If I now do not rely on the true Dharma, this becomes the latter age of the true Dharma, and cannot be called repaying the Buddha's kindness. I hope that each of you will strive diligently. Instructions concerning the procedures and prohibitions during meditation will be given separately. Do not violate the rules.

Let me now further explain what mind is. Mind is an illusory image in intrinsic nature that arises in dependence on circumstances. Mind and intrinsic nature are neither one nor two, like form and shadow. Although intrinsic nature is empty and quiescent, this does not mean annihilation. Although mind arises illusorily, it never departs from the essence. Before mind stirs, it is vividly clear and solitary; this is called the true mind. Once it stirs and follows circumstances in its wandering, it is called the deluded mind. But with a single awakening, it returns again to its original ground before stirring.

Thus awakening is the intervening process of return. Since awakening too is an image, to abide in awakening is not ultimate. The true mind and the deluded mind are the same essence and the same thing; both are merely provisional names. Since they are one thing, mind cannot be extinguished by mind. When an evil thought departs and a good thought comes, it may seem that good extinguishes evil; yet the evil thought rises again. This shows that thoughts can never finally be extinguished.

It is only a matter of replacement: replacing evil with good and delusion with awakening. Previously, thought after thought was in delusion; over time this became a powerful habit. Now, thought after thought is in awakening; over time this too becomes powerful. Because they are not opposites, it is not a matter of force. When this force becomes sufficient, that force naturally weakens. Yet even to speak of replacement is not correct, for replacement can be spoken of only when two things stand opposed to each other.

Here there is only one thing; what could replace what? One can only speak of turning, like a palm turning from front to back. There is merely the appearance of back-and-forth movement, not any substantial entity. Thus evil has never truly been evil, and good has never truly been good; they are still simply the suchness of the unmoving true mind.

But why does the mind wander and remain unaware? Because it clings to appearances and forgets its source. Originally there is one thing, yet one vainly divides it into master and servant. The Buddha said, “They are not sentient beings,” meaning that sentient beings have never lost their Buddha-nature and should be regarded as equals. The Buddha also said, “It is not that they are not sentient beings,” meaning that they share the Buddha’s essential nature and are called sentient beings because they are temporarily caught in delusion.

For example, toward a thief, view him with equality and compassion, yet one must kill him. This is the functioning of great compassion. Thus, for sentient beings to become Buddhas, there is only this single turning. Once one turns, there is no abiding; when there is no abiding, mind is empty. Though one realizes the appearance of emptiness, it is not annihilation; though one responds to the myriad existences, one does not lose one's original ground. This may be called truly holding fast to the Mean.

Yet this differs from Confucianism. There, something is maintained: one maintains the middle way. Here, even the middle way is emptied; only then is it called holding to the Mean. Practitioners must not fear the deluded mind; they should fear lack of awareness. Lack of awareness is the wandering flow of birth and death. When a thought arises, a single awakening means that awakening is no longer delusion.

The sūtra says, “Knowing illusion is itself liberation; no expedient means are required. Leaving illusion is itself awakening; there are no gradual stages.” These four sentences cut through gold and sever iron—how clean and forceful they are. Do not be afraid, nor grieve and repent in despair. Simply remain keenly aware. When awakening matures, the power of prajñā naturally grows strong. Not only can delusion not remain; even awakening cannot be clung to.

As for wholesome and unwholesome seeds, once they have entered the storehouse, they are exceedingly difficult to remove forever. Yet after great awakening, they naturally lose their power. It is not that one does not know them, nor that one forgets them; rather, even when conditions are met, they cannot manifest, and unwholesome karma naturally cannot be formed. This is the fundamental great precept. It may even be transformed into wondrous functioning to liberate evil sentient beings. In sum, to capture bandits, capture their chief.

Now, relying on this Dharma and entering deeply through one gate, one realizes and sees one's intrinsic nature as the original ground on which to settle one's life. One will never regress, and wisdom-functions will naturally arise. Opening prajñā, one sweeps away habitual tendencies. As the Mahāvairocana Sūtra says, upon reaching this stage, if one diligently cultivates for a short time, one can remove all obscurations, attain great supernormal powers, know what occurs in the minds and conduct of all sentient beings, and broadly liberate sentient beings.

For the fruition and attainments of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and its various benefits, consult The Buddha-Heart Sutra. For the present, first sit several hundred meditation sessions, and then speak of it. What has been said here is only to set your minds at ease for the time being. Wholeheartedly apply yourselves to actual practice: attend only to cultivation, not to harvest. Effort is never wasted; this is not empty talk. Take care.

Instructions for Meditation

“Seated meditation” means dispelling deluded thoughts and, while sitting, seeing one’s true nature; hence the name.

I. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma comprises six mudrās, which should be practiced in sequence. Each mudrā is practiced in two-hour sessions; after eight such sessions, the first mudrā is complete. One may then request the second mudrā. Each time, silently pray to all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and vajra protectors to uphold you, so that you may complete the six mudrās without stopping midway. The sixth mudrā is the most important; unless one’s merit and virtue are complete, it is not easy to undertake.

II. During practice: first, form the mudrā. For the entire two hours, under no circumstances may the mudrā be released. Second, maintain the mantra: do not let the mouth stop, and do not speak. There is no need to vocalize it, but the lips should move slightly. Third, do not allow the mind to race outward. If you become aware of deluded thoughts arising, immediately disregard them; do not suppress them, for that too is deluded mind. Do not follow them in their wandering, for that only adds delusion upon delusion.

Simply do not cling to or attend to anything. Do not resent the arising of deluded thoughts, nor rejoice when thoughts are absent; disregard everything alike. Whether you sit well or not, it is all progress. The benefit is not seen while sitting, but after leaving the cushion, when its inconceivable efficacy naturally manifests.

The first session of the first mudrā—that is, the very first time—is the first axe-blow in opening a mountain and has the greatest power. No matter what, you must sit for

the full two hours, or a few minutes longer. Therefore, until you are extremely familiar with the mantra, which takes three or four days, do not abruptly begin sitting, lest sitting cause you to anxiously try to recall it.

The first mudrā is the foremost of all mudrās—there are more than sixteen thousand mudrās formed with the two hands—the king of all mudrās and the mother of all dharmas. It is exceedingly important. If the hands become sore or painful, karmic obstacles are emerging; give rise to joy, for from then on the three lower realms will be forever cut off. One will certainly realize bodhi; hence it is called the Bodhicitta Mudrā. The first three mudrās are for realizing the essence, attaining samādhi, and uprooting the roots; they are the supreme dharma gate. The last three mudrās are for activating function, opening wisdom, and forever leaving the three lower realms; they are the supreme shortcut. Therefore, they must be treated with the utmost seriousness.

III. You may sit on a bed. When sitting, avoid having wind behind your back or cold air in front of you. In the cool weather of autumn and winter, cover your legs well. Do not sit after eating; wait two hours. Nor should you be too hungry; determine this for yourself. Never sit when angry or upset; wait until your emotions have calmed before sitting. Do not rise hurriedly after a session; first stretch your legs a little. Wait six or seven minutes before urinating or defecating; this may be done beforehand. After a seven-day retreat or nine-session retreat, avoid sexual activity. After an ordinary daily session, this is not prohibited, but there must be an interval of four hours. Do not sit when ill or after excessive fatigue.

IV. If your arms or legs ache while sitting, this indicates wind and is precisely the time when illness is leaving the body. So long as you endure until the pain is gone, the illness will be eliminated. Abdominal distension during a session, releasing breath, and passing gas are all good signs; never forcibly suppress them. Therefore, the seat should be six or seven cun high, though this is not fixed and should be determined by each person’s comfort.

Place the right leg over the left, crossing them beneath the cushion. Those able to sit in the half-lotus position for two hours may do so, but the rear of the seat must be raised; do not sit on a level seat. Those in the full-lotus position should use a level seat and should not raise its rear. If you cannot remain in the full-lotus position continuously for two hours, do not use it, since the mudrā cannot be released midway. Nor may you sit with your legs hanging down. For elderly or ill persons, old illnesses may often reappear because of sitting; this is good, not bad. Do not become doubtful and stop, nor greedily sit until you become overfatigued. Practice advances between haste and delay.

V. Equipment for sitting: (1) a piece of yellow cloth to cover the mudrā; (2) a timer or clock, set in advance; (3) a spittoon; (4) do not use fine incense, though it may be lit outside the door; (5) do not wear a hat; (6) keep the belt loose; (7) do not close the door; let people enter and leave freely. Ignore the noisy sounds of children, for they are just what you need to train the mind; (8) do not use a backrest.

VI. Do not raise the mudrā too high. Hold it level with the chest and slightly against the sides of the torso. At times, without noticing, you may lower it onto your legs; as soon as you notice, raise it again. Do not move the waist about. Stretching and lowering should be slow, and do not stretch it completely straight.

VII. On the cushion, train samādhi, for wisdom is within samādhi. Off the cushion, train wisdom, for samādhi is within wisdom. Only by refusing to relax at all times can one avoid practicing intensely for a while and then letting it grow cold. You should understand what it is like, while sitting, when the mind is silent and clear and not the slightest thought arises. This state is jointly brought forth through the mudrā and mantra on the cushion—the Buddha's power—and through cultivation—one's own power. Do not take it lightly.

Until the sense faculties and their objects fall away, one cannot realize this degree. You often let this state pass by unnoticed, and thus cannot hold it; this is because you yourself have not applied your mind with sufficient earnestness and urgency. Yet while sitting, you must not seek this state, for seeking it is already intentional mind. When waves arise on water, the water's luminous appearance can no longer be seen.

Therefore, one must bring about a break, pressing on until the six sense faculties separate from the six sense objects and the divisions of past and future are cut off. At the point of that break, gain an intimation within it, and you will naturally perceive the true reality. This is genuine practice, not intellectual understanding; it is an awakening-view that truly enters the Way, not a conceptual interpretation of principles. Having reached this point, do not slacken. Continually examine and experience it. When it becomes thoroughly familiar, it is like a child relying on its mother, or like one's own name, never forgotten. Practice proceeds from shallow to deep, and from deep to forgetting one's form. When dharma-views are entirely empty, it can become continuous and undivided.

VIII. Each time you maintain the mantra, it must become thoroughly familiar and rapid. Recite it slowly several times, with every syllable clear, to avoid glib recitation or omitting phrases.

IX. The various books that have been issued should be studied in sequence. However, do not read them before completing all six mudrās. Toward fellow practitioners, impart the teachings fully and do not conceal anything, though there is

also an appropriate order. This is an expedient method within great compassion. It also provides practice in teaching the Dharma, preparing one for liberating sentient beings in the future and increasing the power of wisdom.

An Explanation of Mind and Intrinsic Nature (I)

Nature and mind are neither one nor two; they are simply essence and function. Nature is the essence of mind, and mind is the function of nature. Essence and function are not different. Their meaning is precisely the same as that of the four statements on form and emptiness in the Heart Sūtra. Confucianism ultimately did not analyze the meanings of nature and mind, speaking only of mind; yet all its practices begin by working on the mind. Buddhism takes seeing one's true nature as its principle. The Chan school does not divide mind from nature, for essence and function are inseparable: when one realizes the mind, one can see one's true nature. Just as fire cannot be separated from its light, this prevents later generations from splitting them into two and producing many divergences.

Buddhists speak only of mind as illusory. Because mind arises and ceases, it cannot be grasped. This compels one to bring forth suchness, which is neither illusory nor ceasing, thereby revealing the ever-abiding nature that neither arises nor ceases. But how can the essence of nature be expressed? As it is said, "the path of words is cut off; the activity of mind comes to an end." Therefore, the Chan school thoroughly purifies mental thoughts, sweeping them entirely clean; this is Mahāprajñāpāramitā.

Confucianism emphasizes stillness, while Buddhism speaks of purity. Stillness means turning from disorder to stillness, excluding external objects in order to gather the mind into one. Because it involves a counterpart, it entails an antidotal treatment. Such treatment is like silt settling at the bottom of water: it contains an element of suppression. Although the surface appears clear, the silt has not ultimately gone away; when conditions arise, it may again be stirred up. Thus it is not ultimate.

Purity means being undefiled: letting the inner mind fall away and returning to emptiness. This has the sense of original nature, meaning that mind is originally unobtainable. Here, there is nothing to grasp; how could there be such defects as opposition and suppression? One need only fear becoming attached to biased emptiness and to purity, without reaching great emptiness. Then one still remains within dharmas; and if one does not depart from dharmas, there is still mind, which is likewise not the original nature.

When Confucianism speaks of mind, it places particular emphasis on the mind after it has already stirred: how to accord with Heavenly principle and eliminate human

desires. It restrains the illness before it manifests and also treats it after it has manifested. Its general purport is the same as that of the Buddhist Vinaya school.

Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, seeks first to see the mind before it stirs—the true mind. Thus, as soon as a thought or view arises, one encounters the staff or shout, so that one may cleanse it oneself, seeking not the slightest trace, while also not being permitted to fall into annihilation. Only then is the true form of suchness revealed. This is the foremost great matter of human life. Xiangshan's statement, "If one does not know that there is moral nature, how can there be what is called learning?" is precisely addressed, at the root, to those of the highest vehicle. Unless one has attained the essence, function has nothing on which to rest; one merely engages in empty talk about principles of learning.

Attachment to words has been a common failing since antiquity. There are also reasons why Confucianism inclines toward the function of mind while neglecting the essence of nature.

First, it wishes to proceed from the shallow to the deep, taking the alignment of the mind's function with the Way as something visible through which one may gradually enter. Second, it must attend closely to human affairs and daily life. Third, it fears falling into nihilism, and this approach is not easy to undertake. Fourth, it becomes attached to words. For example, the Doctrine of the Mean says: "What Heaven ordains is called nature; following nature is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called teaching." Since it emphasizes teaching, it unconsciously places undue emphasis on the Way.

Once emphasis is placed on cultivating the Way, what basis is there apart from mind? One then delves deeply into dharmas and cannot get out, not knowing that the Way is the function of mind and not the Way of the Great Learning. The Way of the Great Learning is the supreme virtue that cannot be spoken. One must depart from the function of mind in order to see the true Way, and only then return to the original nature ordained by Heaven. Therefore, one must understand the Way in order to see one's true nature, so that nature has a grounding; only then does one accord with the meaning that essence and function are one suchness.

If, after the second sentence, one added the phrase "understand the Way in order to see one's true nature," people would deeply understand the method by which function reveals essence, and would also know that the Way itself has vanished. To cultivate is to return; it is what is meant by overcoming oneself and returning to ritual propriety. The sages established their teaching on precisely this intention. But where does this return end? It ends in understanding the Way as the function of mind, in order to see the original nature. This is truly a most difficult method; one cannot speak of what is above to those below the middle level.

The dispute between Zhu Xi and Lu Xiangshan among the Song Confucians arose because each had his own insight; regrettably, later generations did not understand this. Once learning becomes entangled with temperament and contentiousness, one is an outsider to the gate. In a letter to Xiang Pingfu, Master Zhu said: “Zijing places much emphasis on honoring moral nature, while I myself find that I place much emphasis on inquiry and learning. We should discard our shortcomings, gather our strengths, and together bring both to fruition.”

The learning of nature and principle lies in investigating and awakening to one’s original nature. If one cannot investigate and attain it, one seeks guidance, and thus inquiry and learning arise. Such inquiry and learning alone are solid and not superficial. It is like asking the way when entering the mountains: if one encounters a woodcutter halfway up, one has at least reached the halfway point, unlike someone who has neither climbed the mountain nor even seen it.

Therefore, when Xiangshan was asked about it, he said, “If one does not know that there is moral nature, how can there be what is called inquiry and learning?” These words are correct. Yet what inquiry and learning is not an affair within one’s natural endowment? To seek inquiry and learning is precisely to seek knowledge that there is moral nature. The two masters truly need not be divided into two parts. Nevertheless, a beginner who does not rely on inquiry and learning will have no way in. One should understand that this is learning that leads one onward, not ultimate learning.

Once a person can be led onto the path of the highest vehicle, however, it seems inappropriate to pursue excessive inquiry and learning, lest it confuse his vision. This is Xiangshan’s position. Yet if one has fully seen moral nature, one has certainly obtained the essence; how can one fail to speak of function, thereby becoming passive or drifting into annihilation? Therefore, genuine investigation of things and extension of knowledge occur after moral nature has been understood. Only then does inquiry and learning have a basis, an essence, support, and roots.

Moreover, this practice can come about naturally, without the labor of much contentious debate and discussion. This is ultimate, proper learning. Even so, learning has no fixed definition and teaching has no fixed method; one must apply them according to the learner. First employ expedient means, then enter directly; or enter directly from the outset. Yet in the work of nurturing the Way after seeing one’s true nature, there are no two approaches; it depends only on a person’s diligence or indolence, sharpness or dullness, and causes and conditions. In sum, true learning takes an empty mind as primary, and an even mind as secondary. When Master Shao speaks of “the place where the one yang first stirs, the time before the myriad things arise,” he means that one must focus one’s attention there. Therein are moral nature, learning, and everything else.

The marvelous point of Confucian practice lies in the single word “return.” Within return is the sense of original nature: the original is pre-heavenly, while return is a return to the pre-heavenly. Sentient beings are obscured by acquired habitual tendencies and do not awaken to this. Yet human desires and Heavenly principle are two aspects, not two separate entities; they are merely opposite sides. Further, this return differs from repairing an object. An object’s repair has stages and steps; this has none.

With a moment of awareness, one returns to one’s original nature. Yet as soon as one becomes aware, one forgets again; thus it is a matter of familiarity and strength. Master Zhu said: “Whenever, amid daily life, one recognizes an illness and wishes to remove it, that very mind which wishes to remove it is the medicine capable of removing it. Little does one realize that, with that very wish to remove it, the illness is already absent.” This is direct and straightforward; there is no need to establish a further process of medicine, thereby giving later generations occasion for shameful disputation.

Someone asked whether the Song scholars’ method of gathering in the mind was like fastening a hoop around a monkey’s neck. I said: “That is guarding, not gathering in. Because they have not truly seen their nature, they suppose that the mind can run away. This directly takes mind as existent, and further divides it into the fleeing mind and the returning mind. Thought after thought discriminates; how can there be purity? This is because subject and object are established in opposition.”

What is meant by gathering in is neither separation nor attachment; it is awareness without the slightest deliberate effort. The Way is never absent even for a moment. Since it is not absent even for a moment, why fear that it will run away? One need only be clear and bright, like a mirror reflecting things: when a Hu comes, a Hu appears; when a Han comes, a Han appears. The luminous essence ultimately does not move. Nor should one pursue deluded thoughts, calculating whether they are right or wrong. If one has erred, one has erred: cut it off with a single stroke, and do not pursue it with regret. If a vase breaks, discard it; afterward, be more careful. There is truly nothing comparable to it, but compelled to make a comparison, one may say that it is like this.

The Doctrine of the Mean says: “Vast and deep; lofty and bright; enduring and lasting.” To what does this refer? The Heart Sūtra says: “This is the great spiritual mantra, the great bright mantra, the unsurpassed mantra, the unequaled mantra.” And to what does this refer?

It is easy to remove material desires, difficult to transform one’s temperament, and still more difficult to understand the root. This is what the Buddha called a Dharma difficult to believe. Therefore, one must see one’s true nature before clearly

understanding the function of the Way; only then does one have a practical method for removing material desires and transforming temperament. Earlier, I spoke of understanding the Way in order to see one's true nature, because that is the point at which one begins. Here, I speak of seeing one's true nature in order to understand the Way, because that is the fruition-stage fulfillment of its function. The Way and nature are not two things.

The word Buddha must not be interpreted rigidly; it should be understood as seeing one's true nature. In the West there was Śākyamuni Buddha, the foremost one in the West to see his true nature. If such persons exist in the East or elsewhere, they too are Buddhas. Yet none saw true nature as thoroughly as Śākyamuni Buddha; therefore he is called the World-Honored One.

Before Śākyamuni Buddha, there were also those awakened to seeing the emptiness of true nature. They simply did not dare explain it, but named it by figurative meanings: "bright virtue," "soundless and odorless," "the highest good," and "the Limitless." Yet there was still no method for realizing it. What they saw may not have differed from the Buddha's, but they lacked direct realization. They were what are called pratyekabuddhas of the East.

The Buddha, however, indicated it wholly through methods, seeking nothing more than for people to see the luminous essence of their original nature and to bring forth the free function of illusory mind. He said: "Its essence is silent; its appearance is pure; its form is boundless; its flavor is ease; its function is as countless as the sands of the Ganges. It cannot be expressed or spoken of, and it is not annihilation." This is provisionally called Buddha.

One mind and one thought are different. One mind is the initial mind, the mind before it stirs, the mind of direct perception—that is, the mind of clear awareness without discrimination. A single thought means that mind has stirred; thus a person has two minds, which is called thought. If, amid thought after thought, one makes inferential judgments yet neither clings nor abides, this too is the initial mind of direct perception. Therefore, clinging in every thought is birth and death; freedom from defilement in every thought is nirvāṇa. The distinction between sages and ordinary beings lies only in this.

Master Wang Yangming's teaching that knowledge and action advance together is the meaning that principle and phenomena are nondual. Principle is affairs within the mind; phenomena are principles outside the mind. I further divide knowing into three kinds: understanding through concepts, knowing through practice, and knowing through realization. This is the meaning of mutual cultivation and arising, and of the inner and outer, root and branch, forming one continuous whole.

He also said: “The more knowledge one has, the more it serves to carry out evil; the broader one’s learning and observation, the more they serve to indulge one’s disputation; the richer one’s rhetoric, the more it serves to adorn one’s falsity. Alas, how lamentable! Fortunately, Heavenly principle within the human mind can never wholly be effaced, and the brightness of innate knowing remains the same throughout all ages.” How painfully he spoke!

If we now investigate the cause of this illness to its end, it lies in learners failing first to begin at the root by understanding essence, and merely striving to attain function, thereby making two mistakes. If essence is not understood, how can function be attained?

When essence is not understood, one’s aspirations are narrow and small; one seeks only gain and profit, with a mind anxious over gain and loss. If one’s aim is profit and rank, what is there that one will not do, and what is there that one will not dare to do? Human desires flow unchecked, while the flourishing of science serves precisely to pursue fame and gain; at its extreme, it becomes international aggression and killing. Yet it is not knowledge itself that misleads people; people mislead themselves. The error lies in reversing root and branch, while the whole world sees nothing strange in it. Is this not lamentable?

When there is no point from which to begin investigating Chan, and no way to hold the mind steady, Confucianism devised the word “sincerity.” Sincerity brings illumination, and illumination brings sincerity. To be sincere and thereby illumined is to return from function to essence; having returned to essence, one is illumined and sincere, and this is true sincerity. Sincerity then has a basis, and one’s sincerity will not regress. This is indeed a marvelous method.

Yet the word sincerity is difficult to put into practice, so they devised the word reverence, diligently guarding it. For this reason, Song Confucians did not favor the doctrine of sudden awakening, fearing that one might tread upon emptiness and fall into voidness. They also said: “Practice must arise from preservation and nourishment; it cannot be sought by groping in empty space.”

They do not realize that, if the root has not yet been clarified, what is there to preserve and nourish? It is no more than guarding. What is there to revere? One reveres advancement in affairs and reveres heavenly principle; this too is no more than guarding. To speak of guarding is to posit its opposite, not guarding; in the end, it remains a battle between good and evil, and between the human and heavenly realms. How difficult it is to seek sincerity! And in seeking illumination, there is even less to hold on to.

They also say that sincerity leads to illumination and illumination to sincerity. This is an understanding, not a method, and ultimately leaves people with nowhere to

begin. Chan practitioners investigate and awaken from samādhi, while Confucians advocate quiet sitting; these are methods. At the outset, one must first calm the wild mind and coarse energies. Beginning there, one first cultivates sincerity; when sincerity reaches its utmost, illumination naturally appears. Yet some practice for decades without any effect. The reason is that they seek something.

Where there is seeking, there is an "I" that seeks, and so conflict between self and other begins again. How, then, can samādhi be attained? The mind's numinous nature cannot be likened to any object: it cannot be guarded, cannot be let loose, cannot fall into biased emptiness; fools cannot learn it, and clever people cannot contrive to obtain it. One error is rigid clinging, the other superficial glibness. There is a method, yet no way to apply it; it is truly distressing.

Yet without undergoing such distress, one can never attain illumination. Without true sincerity, one cannot attain true illumination. In the present age, livelihood is so difficult, circumstances so adverse, perseverance so hard to sustain, and people of aspiration so few that both Confucianism and Buddhism naturally decline. This too is brought about by causes, conditions, and the times. Thus, having no alternative, people turn to what is secondary, taking merely elementary practice to be the supreme vehicle.

Confucians merely discuss principles and engage in disputes, considering this practice. Chan practitioners merely speak empty talk of Chan; bhikshus who can observe monastic rules proclaim themselves eminent monks, while scholars who can write well are publicly called lofty gentlemen. Their horizons grow lower each day—how can this not mislead people? Nevertheless, Master Wang Yangming said: "Heavenly principle in the human mind can never be wholly extinguished." He also said: "Only now, in studying Buddhism, do I understand how to be a Confucian."

The Buddhist gate has its own methods; what it lacks are people of aspiration and benevolence. People of aspiration liberate themselves, while benevolent people liberate others. Only one who possesses the great vow to liberate others may be called a person of aspiration, for self and other are nondual. One should first liberate oneself in order to liberate others. Of methods for self-liberation, none is more wondrous than Chan; but Chan is difficult to practice, as stated above. The best course is first to enter Chan through Esoteric Buddhism, then to activate its function through Chan and respond to the world.

Esoteric Buddhist practice wonderfully combines distress with liveliness, without the defects of biased emptiness or attachment to existence. Within it, one can attain sincerity. This method is solely the Heart-of-Heart Dharma; yet to make it spiritually alive and luminous depends upon the individual. It is not that there is no method;

but what can be done when people are unwilling to endure hardship? This is why I lament that there are too few people of aspiration.

Guanzi said: “Do not be vexed, do not be confused; harmony will then arise of itself. When one can be upright and still, one can then become settled. Hold to the One without losing it, and one can govern the myriad things. Therefore, nothing stops anger better than poetry; nothing dispels sorrow better than music; nothing moderates joy better than ritual propriety; nothing preserves ritual better than reverence; nothing preserves reverence better than stillness. Inwardly still and outwardly reverent, one can return to one’s nature, and the nature will become greatly settled.”

This passage embodies the great learning of Guanzi’s lifetime. It not only initiated the various teachings of Song Confucianism, but also became the source of later Daoism. Regrettably, Daoists today cannot read his book, because they misunderstand its meaning. Their misunderstanding lies in one word: in “hold to the One without losing it,” what does this One refer to? It refers to uprightness. To stop at the One is to be upright. This One is the master of the mind.

Guanzi said: “Within the mind there is another mind.” The mind within the mind is the master of the mind, that is, the fundamental essence of intrinsic nature. This essence is empty, pure, and free of admixture—without vexation or confusion, it is harmony at its utmost. A person’s original mind is fundamentally like this; but with movement, vexation and disturbance arise, and the various maladies of greed and anger begin. If one can hold to the One without losing it, this is called maintaining one’s constant position.

The ruler is the mind; to govern the myriad things means that, in encountering all circumstances, the mind retains its mastery. The subsequent words, “inwardly still and outwardly reverent,” reveal the appearance of original nature; hence, one returns to one’s nature and attains great stability. Great stability means not being deluded or shaken. All this is practice concerning the mind. Yet later people forcibly applied it to practices involving vital essence, energy, and spirit, taking guarding an aperture or guarding the elixir field as the sole gateway for holding to the One, thereby misleading all sentient beings.

This is also a misunderstanding of the two Chinese characters (“inward stillness”), and its harmful effects have a long history. Let us discuss it briefly. The ancient practice of inward stillness was guarded ever more diligently. Yet when people sit quietly, they often instead become aware of the mind’s turmoil. This is originally the first step of stillness: when water can reveal its bottom, its surface has become clear.

Because they find no secure place for the mind’s turmoil to settle, they imperceptibly turn to suppression. They do not realize that there is only one

principle and method for thoughts: whenever one becomes aware of them, let them go and do not attend to them. To think of controlling them is to add mind upon mind, merely increasing the turmoil. Moreover, this practice of holding to the One requires nimble and lively spiritual responsiveness, lest one fall into the ailment of rigid guarding and dead attachment.

Moreover, they form the notion that the mind is quiet within, and thus confine it within the physical body. After a long time, when stillness reaches its extreme, they perceive the circulation of blood and vital energy, rising and sinking within. At that time they feel greatly at ease, and believe that this can cure illness and prolong life. Thus arise methods of refining essence into energy and refining energy into spirit. As practice deepens, they may gather essence into form, and the yang spirit may emerge from the crown of the head—while the practices of inwardly collecting the mind in stability and of outward reverence are long forgotten.

Instead, they take essence, energy, and spirit as the Way, as mind, and as the unsurpassed wondrous Dharma. When their minds lack mastery and the yang spirit travels far out, they may encounter minor supernormal powers. Yet, not knowing that upon meeting an illusory realm the mind may become confused or frightened, they may be unable to return to the body and become deranged. The harmful consequences of this are beyond description. Moreover, because the foundational work cannot be achieved naturally, once greed for attainment enters, further obstructions arise, even leading to death from abdominal distension.

Before the mind stirs, essence is true essence; once it stirs, it becomes turbid essence. When the mind attaches to the elixir field, energy follows it, and turbid essence congeals in one place. If it does not transform, it swells and forms knots; if it is poorly transformed, essence leaks away and one dies. This is entirely a dangerous physical practice. What does it have to do with the Way? This is truly lamentable.

Yet, examining their original intention, they did not begin without wishing to seek inward stillness and samādhi. They merely went astray through greed for longevity and immortality, or for minor supernormal powers. This is why they are called non-Buddhist paths. I call them “false Daoism, true practice,” for their efforts are genuinely earnest and sincere. They are unlike those in the Buddhist gate who do not investigate the mind-ground, but devote themselves exclusively to names and appearances; their practice lacks heartfelt urgency, while they profit only from eloquent debate. This is “true Buddhism, false practice.” I have not even time enough to reproach myself—how could I mock those of non-Buddhist paths?

Essence, energy, and spirit naturally circulate according to their own regular course. Only infants can allow this to occur naturally, for their excellence lies in being without contrivance of mind. In the world, only two kinds of people differ from this.

The first consists of those burdened by many doubts and complicated human affairs, who anxiously calculate gains and losses and live in fear. Their minds habitually race outward in disorder, causing essence, energy, and spirit to depart from their proper course, beyond their ability to govern. Thus they suffer many illnesses and troubles and have short lives.

The second consists of practitioners of non-Buddhist paths, who drive their minds so that essence, energy, and spirit are forcibly made to follow their course. They thereby lose what is natural, and these may easily congeal and fail to disperse, producing the illnesses described above. Therefore, one should take an infant as one's teacher and remain daily as though without contrivance of mind. When there is no contrivance of mind, blood and vital energy naturally follow their course and circulate throughout the body. Nourish them abundantly, and their functioning will be firm and keen; wisdom will naturally arise from samādhi. The method of longevity lies precisely herein.

Once there is greedy grasping, the causal ground is already improper. To cultivate the body without cultivating the mind is itself improper. As for cleverly inventing many names and deliberately displaying marvels, people consider themselves careful in their practice, not realizing that they are instead harming others. The Daoist Tianyinzi said: "When speech turns to the strange and fantastic, it only causes people to cling in delusion, with no way to return to the root." How profound these words are!

Among Daoist schools, only the Longmen school is orthodox. In its use of qigong, it generally does not deliberately focus on it. The mind is the elixir field: it is present as though absent. This method also exists in Esoteric Buddhism, but one rests the mind there only briefly for an instant, then immediately relinquishes it and does not guard it. The mind gathers itself and the spirit settles itself. When mind and spirit are settled, essence and energy are secure, and one naturally remains free from illness and lives to an advanced age. The only difficulty is sustaining it consistently, for it is easy to forget.

Esoteric practice is devoted solely to training the mind, not to training the body. Those who do not understand Esoteric Buddhism often suspect that it is no different from non-Buddhist paths, not realizing that they are as far apart as heaven and abyss. Esoteric Buddhism does have a qigong method, the Great Seal practice, but it is not lightly transmitted. Unless one has exceptional capacity, it may lead one to mislead oneself and others.

Daoists took only part of its meaning rather than the whole, erred through attachment to existence, and added all manner of forced correspondences. It is not without reason that worldly people ridicule this as superstition. Someone may ask:

which is harder, transforming a stubborn person or correcting a person with perverse views? I say that transforming a stubborn person is ten times harder. Since people often do not believe this, I elaborate on Mengzi's saying: "The people of antiquity were difficult to transform, while people today are easy to transform, because the ancient people were simple by nature, whereas people today are deceitful."

Simplicity is stillness; deceit is flow. Uprightness is like earth, while deceit is like water. Water can be channeled to flow east or west, but can earth be channeled east or west? Though these words were spoken because of Emperor Yizong of Tang's foolishness, they are indeed sound. In Buddhism, discussions of those of the highest capacities often select unconventional talents; yet one must also observe whether a person possesses merit and virtue, which in turn depends on whether that person's innate disposition is substantial and generous. Therefore, those of limited capacity who possess worldly cleverness find it difficult to enter the Way.

Laozi said: "Those who know others are wise; those who know themselves are clear." But what is it that one knows? Knowing is the light of wisdom. Seeing others' good qualities enables one to feel shame; seeing one's own faults is enough to bring remorse. Bodhisattvas do not see the faults of others; this means that there are no objects in their minds. If one can truly have no objects in one's mind, then what personal self, good and evil, shame, or remorse could be spoken of? When the root is unobtainable, this is great illumination. This is what is meant by acting without contrivance, treating affairs without contrivance, and savoring without contrivance. Yet all day long one has never departed from acting, abandoned affairs, or ceased to know flavors.

Laozi said: "As a thing, the Dao is only elusive and indistinct. Indistinct and elusive—within it there are images. Elusive and indistinct—within it there are things. Deep and obscure—within it there is essence. Its essence is most true; within it there is trustworthiness. From ancient times to the present, its name has never departed." This passage precisely expresses that the formless essence of intrinsic nature has existed eternally and never changes.

This cannot be seen with the eyes; only in elusiveness and indistinctness can it be perceived with the mind. This image is an image without form or appearance. Essence is the indestructible vajra body; it is truly trustworthy and grounded, not the annihilationist claim that nothing exists. Within it are as many wondrous functions as grains of sand in the Ganges. Thus it cannot simply be called the essence of nature, but is named the Dao. Within the Dao, no excellence is lacking; therefore it is said to survey the multitude of beauties. "Beauties" means excellences: like iron, whose uses and transformations are immeasurably varied, with nothing lacking in

excellence. Yet all depend on its hard nature. Its hardness cannot itself be seen; it has no form or appearance. It is simply true essence.

An Explanation of Mind and Intrinsic Nature (II)

To see one's true nature, one must first realize the mind. Nature is the essence of mind, and mind is the function of nature. Essence and function are not two; these are merely names. Nature has no form or shape; it is constant and unchanging, neither arising nor ceasing. It cannot be seen with the eyes and is therefore called true reality. Mind is illusory existence: it arises in dependence on objects, seeming to arise and cease, yet in truth it does not arise. It is therefore called the illusory mind.

Mind issues from nature and, when it ceases, returns to nature. When it moves, one does not see whence it comes; when it rests, one does not know whither it goes. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. To speak of realizing the mind is to understand that this illusion only seems to come and go, and that it is illusory. To speak of seeing one's nature means to recognize that true reality certainly exists, though it can only be personally realized and cannot be shown to others.

True reality is not an appearance among appearances. When the mind rests, it is seen, just as clear, still water reveals itself when waves subside. One who can see one's nature is thereby equal to all Buddhas. Continually seeing this essential nature, one is not deluded by external objects or confined by internal views, but stands free from all appearances. When the mind clings to nothing, this dharma nature pervades the dharma realm and encompasses all things; therefore it is called the ocean of nature.

All people alike possess this; there is no distinction between sages and ordinary beings. Yet because of the difference between delusion and awakening, they seem to be two. Upon awakening, one sees one's nature everywhere; even amid confusion and disorder, one remains clearly aware. Mind is right amid circumstances: free from delusion, confusion, inversion, and suffering. Great capacity and great function issue from ultimate nature. Thus there is no affair to which one cannot respond, no place that is not the Way, no thing by which one can be deluded, and no circumstance that is not empty. Such a person is supremely free and at ease.

Mind is that which presides within and encompasses the myriad things. Mind is like soil: hidden within the body, it can transform and bring forth the myriad dharmas; hence it is called the dharma-nature body. The successive minds of sentient beings continue without interruption, like an endless chain, each moment of mind linked to the next. Therefore deluded thoughts continue without cease, illusorily forming birth and death and giving rise to the six realms.

Yet the character 心 (mind) clearly indicates that nothing can be added above it: seeing and hearing are perfectly clear, and it is vast and empty, with nothing at all. This is the mind in its proper form, and it is therefore called the true mind. When the Chan school makes no distinction between mind and nature, it refers precisely to this tranquil mind as nature; they cannot be separated. If one adds even a single left-falling stroke, it becomes 必 (must).

When mind is grasped through appearances, it becomes thought; when a blade is added above mind, it becomes endurance; when mind is enslaved by form, it becomes anger; when mind joins with "as," it becomes forgiveness; when minds are joined together, they become constancy; when mind clings to the past, it becomes regret; when one exhausts oneself for one's own sake, it becomes loyalty; when one is shut behind a door, it becomes melancholy; when one is uneasy above and below, it becomes apprehension. Though the transformations are countless, all are additions imposed upon mind. They are not mind in its proper state, but delusion and illusory shadows.

Yet worldly people alone point to this illusory and deluded thing and call it "my mind." As the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, "The shadow-images of the six sense objects are taken as the characteristics of one's own mind." This is the root of birth-and-death and inversion; it is also the basis upon which the arising, ceasing, and transformations of the countless beings, persons, and affairs in worlds as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are established. Even the Buddhas' and bodhisattvas' liberation and transformation of sentient beings are like the chaotic arising and ceasing of flowers in empty space. How could they have a substantial reality? Yet one must not speak of annihilation.

Although countless transformations may arise within mind, do not let the original ground of mind shift. Good adds nothing to it, and evil takes nothing away from it. This immovable reality is provisionally called bodhi. Bodhi is without appearances, yet it is true and not false; therefore it is called true reality. This is the nature that neither arises nor ceases. Now, seeing the mind to which nothing has been added, one finds a mind utterly open and without attachment. This is the mind of no-mind: there is no mind that can be made into an object of mind, and the unmoving nature is seen.

Even transformational bodhisattvas and sentient beings cannot be entirely without thoughts. With every thought, sentient beings cling, turn from one thing to another, and become entangled; they cannot be their own masters. Externally they are seized by circumstances, and internally they are subject to the delusions of views. Encountering existence, they cling to existence; hearing of emptiness, they cling to emptiness. Even practitioners seeking the Way and turning toward the Buddha give

rise to obstacles within themselves. This is the condition of those who have not seen their nature and remain sunk in the round of birth and death.

The Buddha has mind, yet does not abide in views; is without thought, yet does not abide in emptiness. Not only is delusion not established, awakening too is not established. Still and ever-illuminating, empty, wondrous, complete, and spiritually responsive, the Buddha does not regard the presence of thought as a fault, nor the absence of thought as superior. The great gate of liberation cannot be known by intellect or recognized by consciousness; how then could it be expressed in words and language? Yet it is not something possessed by the Buddha alone and unattainable by sentient beings.

Sentient beings do not understand birth and death, do not fear birth and death, and do not seek a way out from within it; willingly they sink themselves. This is deeply pitiable. Sentient beings are nothing but delusion. Because of delusion, birth and death are established, and they vainly undergo all kinds of suffering. They do not know that the one who enters birth and death is this illusory mind, and that the one who emerges from birth and death is also this illusory mind.

Realizing the mind is the Dharma for transcending birth and death. The wise awaken suddenly: upon seeing the single character 心 (mind), they can enter realization. The dull must cultivate and realize, necessarily relying on the Dharma to progress gradually. Yet, fundamentally, there is truly no distinction of stages between sudden and gradual. One must, however, feel birth and death as an urgent matter and directly recognize this; if one gives rise to the mind to seek the Way, one has already gone far astray.

Everything discussed above is merely an understanding based on words. Even if one awakens suddenly through such conditions, it is not thorough and cannot be relied upon. When external circumstances arise, one will again be carried away by them. One must engage in rigorous investigation, with real practice, in order to seek a way out.

What is meant by rigorous investigation is simply to strike down every thought. For example, in Buddha-recitation, recite until there is no one able to recite and nothing recited. Not only do deluded thoughts fail to arise; even the thought of the Buddha is not established. This is entering realization through the method of Buddha-recitation.

In investigating Chan, investigate morning and evening. Investigate until one reaches a place of utter meaninglessness, as though surrounded on all sides by walls of bronze and iron. Then one may suddenly gain an initial insight. Yet without ten or twenty years, one’s roots will not become firm. When one truly has nothing to attain,

a breakthrough occurs in response to conditions, and one suddenly awakens as from a dream. This is entering realization through the method of Chan meditation.

In our school, one specializes in cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, beginning with the six mudrās and completing a thousand meditation sessions. Or one undertakes a seven-day retreat, practicing six sessions daily for twelve hours, for three or four consecutive seven-day periods. Or, once in a long month, one practices nine sessions for eighteen hours, advancing intensely for a full day and night, once or twice each year. Then one will naturally realize samādhi and directly see true reality. This is entering realization through Esoteric Buddhism.

All dharmas are equal; there is neither higher nor lower. It lies in the person, not in the dharma; in oneself, not in the teacher. What is meant by living investigation is that, after leaving the meditation cushion, one does not forget one's original nature in any thought. As soon as a view arises, cut it off with the precious vajra king sword. When not even the finest speck of dust is established, then in every place and at every time, one's Original Face will clearly reveal itself.

Thus, function arises from essence. One can encounter a Buddha without being carried away, read a sūtra without becoming bound by the teaching, attend to worldly affairs without being misled by emotional attachment, and consider principles without being confused by discriminating consciousness. These two practices advance together like two wheels: on the meditation cushion, realize the essence; off the cushion, bring forth the function. Once the root has been attained, even though habitual tendencies arise, a moment of clear awareness melts them like snow in a blazing furnace. In time, practice grows strong enough that emptiness and stillness are already present before one deliberately brings awareness to bear. This is the proper path of entry.

If one first seeks to gain something, vainly hopes for supernormal powers, willingly accepts an inferior and limited position and dares not assume responsibility, or merely understands texts and takes this for realization, arrogantly exalting oneself, then one adds birth and death upon birth and death. This is because one's causal ground is improper and one has not understood the meaning of becoming a Buddha. Whenever there is something sought, the mind has not died; when the mind has not died, one's nature is not seen; when one's nature is not seen, the essence cannot be great and the function cannot be vast. Seeking one's own advantage only leads to self-deception. Whenever anything is added to mind, its essence is already obscured, and there is no hope of ever emerging. All fellow practitioners who wish to transcend birth and death should give this their full attention in the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate.

Inscription:

It is not mind, nor is it no-mind.

It is not non-seeing, nor is it non-hearing.

Clearly aware and knowing, it does not cling to seeing or hearing.

Utterly open and without abiding: this is called no-mind.

If mind does not abide, on what can delusion depend?

Once delusion is not established, past obstructions naturally dissolve.

Ask whence mind comes: it arises because of circumstances.

Circumstances too do not truly exist; both are illusory shadows.

The wondrous functions, countless as the sands of the Ganges, are all conditioned mind.

Where conditioned mind ceases [Note], one suddenly realizes the unborn.

The unborn true reality cannot be seen with the eyes.

Vast and dim, profound and obscure—within it there is an essence.

One who realizes it is said to see one's nature.

Therefore, seek nothing, and the mind naturally becomes peaceful and unified.

With no mind to be deluded, this is great samādhi.

One who attains great samādhi is neither in motion nor stillness.

There is neither gain nor loss, neither joy nor anger.

Without shifting from the original ground, one responds to the myriad situations.

Unchanging yet according with conditions: this is freedom from birth and death.

The essential secret of becoming a Buddha is no more than this.

[Note]: "Mind" means the cooperation of other-power and self-power, pressing one until the sense faculties and their objects fall away and the divisions of past and future are cut off. At the point of severance, one receives a message. Having reached this stage, do not relax. Continually verify it for yourself. When it becomes utterly mature, it is like the mutual dependence of mother and child, or like one's own name, which is never forgotten.

The practice of heart esotericism can directly reveal one's nature. I hope that benevolent readers will read these forty lines several times each day and know them thoroughly by heart. Over time, when conditions are encountered, realization will naturally break forth, and from the true essence one will gain great capacity and great function.

Samādhi: sam means correct, and ādhi means receiving. Correct receiving is correct meditative stability.

Three Discussions During Illness

(I) The Mind

From ancient times to the present, countless sentient beings have never recognized what the mind is, much less known their own true nature. Instead, they take the functions of consciousness to be the mind itself. They do not realize that there is a bright pearl whose light illuminates everything. Seeing only blue, yellow, red, and white, they take these to be the mind, forgetting the pearl itself. Consequently, consciousness always remains within opposition and relativity.

All human affairs—right and wrong, suffering and joy, success and failure—are contrivances created in empty space. Through fantasy, illusions are made into facts, and thus beings undergo all kinds of illusory suffering in the six realms. They compete with one another, taking illusory perceptions as victory, until the consequences become unmanageable. This is the original cause of sentient beings' suffering. Therefore, the Buddha teaches sentient beings to understand the dharmas of suffering and happiness: everyone has their own mind.

Though no one sees it, one's own mind is true reality: it has no appearance that can be seen. The precious pearl of worldly people is obscured by the five lights; all speak only of the lights and not of their own pearl. It is not that there is no pearl. True reality is without appearance; why, then, call it real? Because arising and ceasing are all illusory, whereas that which neither arises nor ceases is real—though "real" itself is only a provisional name. This is the sole difference between Buddhas and sentient beings.

Bodhisattvas can truly know their own minds, though not as fully as Buddhas, whose realization is perfectly integrated, vast, and great. Thus, to know one's own mind is already to transcend the ordinary; truly to know one's own mind is to see one's nature. When one truly knows one's own mind, this is called thoroughly seeing one's nature, and one is nondual with the Buddha. Though one still has the body of an ordinary being, one can no longer be called an ordinary being. Yet if one's discriminatory views have not been removed, one is still not other than an ordinary

being. Therefore, the fundamental task at the outset must be realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

Even if one cannot attain complete realization in this life, if one's causal ground is correct, the Buddha-mind is already complete within. Though one remains in the three realms, there will surely come a day of emergence. If you wish to see the bright pearl, do not become attached to the five-colored lights. If you wish to know your own mind, do not be deceived by mind and consciousness. Just let mind and consciousness look: look to the left, look to the right—what are they? But as soon as you attach to the slightest distinction of right and wrong, it disappears again. A sūtra says: "If one wishes to know the realm of the Buddha, one should purify one's mind until it is like empty space." The treasure is already at hand, ready to be picked up, yet one does not dare take it. Thus, life after life, one remains a sentient being, sinking in the sea of suffering. Is this not lamentable and pitiable?

(II) Do Not Be Superficial in Practice

In practice, never be superficial. You must keep your feet firmly on the ground—indeed, tread three feet into the earth. Those who study Buddhism today merely skim the surface, not knowing how to begin at the most basic level. Of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and letting go, letting go is the most difficult. Yet unless one empties oneself, one cannot let go. Giving away gold, silver, wealth, and treasures is lower giving; giving all teachings and principles is middle giving. Encountering circumstances without delusion, with everything clear and at peace, is higher giving.

Not falling within the dharma realm is the supreme giving. When there is nothing further to give, there is true selflessness. The perfectly luminous and vast light of one's nature is right before one's eyes and lacks nothing whatsoever. All worldly constructs are no more than three measures: first, inference; second, non-valid cognition; third, direct perception. Yet in true reality, there is no measure to speak of. To cling even to a small measure is attachment; thus the nature of the dharma realm is lost.

The nature of the dharma realm is the original ground. It is like water without waves. As soon as the six sense faculties stir, it is obscured by clouds; it is like water giving rise to waves. The light of mind can no longer be seen. Therefore, one must apply oneself with real diligence.

At every thought, exhaust mind and consciousness. But how can mind and consciousness be cut off? Simply keep the great matter of birth and death—the most important matter of human life—before your eyes, as parents care for their sick child without relaxing for a moment. Then all other matters will loosen their hold, and there will be a place to apply your effort. When seeing one's nature has

matured, subject and object are both forgotten, and mother and child are both injured.

When even attachment to this Dharma-view is gone, this is called a bodhisattva of the Dharma-Cloud Ground: transcending everything, perfectly luminous and vast, with no inside or outside. The merit and virtue of letting go are inconceivable. For anyone willing to let go, lower giving can reduce the suffering of illness and preserve one's life. Middle giving gives rise to the conduct of a great person. Great giving enables one to become a Buddha or patriarch. Give immediately, and when the mind is empty, you attain the highest rank.

As it is said, "In the snap of a finger, a million gates are perfectly accomplished." A great person has the spirit of a king and can shoulder this responsibility. This is the person spoken of in the Diamond Sūtra as bearing the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi. Having written this much, you should go and investigate: What does it mean to become a Buddha? Even if you gave a hundred answers, none would be right. Let go instead.

(III) Empowerment

1. Empowerment through Embracing and Receiving: This is the highest level of practice. One who has not seen one's nature cannot transmit it to others. It has neither form nor appearance and takes impartial great compassion as its basis. If one's own mind is not empty, it is difficult to discern another person's capacity.

2. Empowerment for Establishing Affinity: The recipient's capacity is primary. The difficulty lies in the two sides being properly matched—whether the karmic affinity between oneself and the other person is compatible. Guide people according to their capacities, whether gently or sternly, but always with a pleasant countenance.

In sum, all dharma gates take the emptiness of one's own mind as their original ground and great compassion as their expedient means. Emptiness of mind enables one to encompass and receive all; great compassion makes perfect adaptability possible. One must still proceed carefully at every step. Do not aim too high, nor expect too much of others; yet neither should one dismiss someone as foolish and refuse to accept them. Clever people often stop practicing halfway through. Never make promises lightly and thereby mislead someone for life. Other dharma gates are difficult to introduce. Much depends on one's own experience; one must be adept at discerning capacities, take firm steps, and then fly through empty space. Its subtlety is beyond words.

3. Empowerment through Teaching the Dharma: Adapt and turn according to conditions.

4. Empowerment through Bestowing a Practice: Esoteric Buddhism places importance on ritual deportment. All ritual procedures should be solemnly observed, and offerings made to the Dharma protectors. Most important, everything must accord with the root practice; practices from other traditions must not be introduced. Therefore, solemn and dignified ritual deportment is emphasized.

5. Empowerment through Transmitting the Dharma: One must first remove the other person's shortcomings and assess their moral conduct, blessings, and age. One may become a teacher only after the age of thirty-six.

One must also consider how they speak, their deportment, and their appearance. Their six sense faculties must be complete. Every aspect must be taken into account. Test their understanding to ensure that they will not mislead others. They must also humbly accept instruction, utterly destroy the desire for fame, refrain from seeking fame and profit, and avoid arrogance. Since their position surpasses that of exemplary teachers of humans and devas, this must not be taken lightly. Moreover, in Esoteric Buddhist Dharma-transmission empowerment, a person's blessings are primary: one must determine whether they can bear it. They may often fall ill midway, so continual attention is necessary.

How to Transcend Birth and Death

A. The Meaning of Birth and Death

Confucius said, "If one does not yet understand life, how can one understand death?" The meaning of death and birth is indeed profound. No one in the world fails to delight in life and fear death; yet if one does not first understand birth, how can one know death? Birth and death are fundamentally one matter: where there is birth, there is death. To understand birth is to understand death; to understand birth and death is to be free of fear, and the root of life's greatest suffering then begins to be cut off.

To transcend birth and death, one must first understand what birth is and what death is. Birth is an appearance of continuity. What is meant by continuity? It is the continued mutual arising of things; it does not arise out of nothing. For example, a tree produces seeds, and the seeds produce trees; fathers transmit to sons, and sons transmit to grandsons.

First, it does not arise from itself. Second, it does not arise from another. Third, neither can it be said to arise jointly; if it arises jointly, who, in the end, is the master? Fourth, it does not arise without cause. Birth is a false and illusory dharma; therefore, death too is an illusory dharma. This illusory appearance of my birth is

constantly deteriorating. When its deterioration can no longer be remedied or sustained, it is provisionally called death.

Therefore, it does not die by itself, does not die through another, does not die jointly, and does not die without cause. Death is an appearance of deterioration. One birth and one death are like the illusory arising and passing of a dream: temporarily they seem real, but ultimately they are false. Thus, those who study Buddhism do not acknowledge birth and death as real; they regard them only as flowers in empty space.

Ordinary people generally take the words birth and death to mean the arising and perishing of the physical body. They do not know that the arising and ceasing of a single thought is also birth and death, and that the coming and going of a single matter is also birth and death. A person's rebirth originally arises from a single thought, and at death it ceases when causes and conditions are exhausted. When essence, vitality, and spirit can no longer be sustained, one lets go of a thought and slips away. Thus, a birth and a death depend entirely on the sovereignty of this single thought: they are simply the arising and ceasing of the illusory mind.

Birth and death revolve without end. A sūtra says: "Birth after birth, death after death, like a spinning wheel of fire"—all are induced by the delusion and karma of sentient beings. At the beginning of a person's birth, one arises because of the root of attachment, joining with the roots of attachment of one's parents. A sūtra says that life is established through sexual desire; thus, one whose attachment leans toward the father becomes female, while one whose attachment leans toward the mother becomes male. When the consciousnesses and spirits of the parents are compassionate, serene, and clear-minded, they generally give birth to intelligent children.

When they are confused, evil, deviant, and deluded, they generally give birth to inferior children. Among those who come together, their dispositions may be pure or impure, and their aspirations high or low; all correspond and accord with one another, bringing about the result naturally. There has never been a case in which an evil cause produced a good result. Evil people constantly harbor evil thoughts; therefore, their descendants are also often wicked and inferior, because their seeds are inferior. Yet at times they may plant wholesome causes and obtain wholesome results.

Good people, too, may sometimes have bad children, for three reasons. First, their minds may temporarily be clouded or intoxicated, and the children they produce may likewise lack goodness. Second, karmic debts from past lives may not yet have been repaid. Third, their ordinary education may be poor; consequently, they may

also have no good children, and society suffers harm from them. This is creating karma, and karma is divided into wholesome and unwholesome.

When a person dies, karmic retribution is exhausted and transformation occurs. In Sanskrit this is called mutuo: life ends, warmth disperses, and consciousness departs. When these three factors come together, death results. Lifespan is the power of vows present at one's first birth. No one comes into birth without relying on vows; when the power of vows is strong, the causal seeds are substantial and one's vital force endures, and thus one enjoys a long life. Yet an untimely death in mid-course can also shorten one's lifespan. When the four great elements of earth, water, wind, and fire fall out of balance, warmth diminishes and becomes faint, then gathers and disperses. The mind then loses its master, consciousness can no longer remain united, and it leaves the physical body. Thus death results.

Birth and death are fundamentally of two kinds. The first is segmented birth and death: birth and death, coming and going, with the physical body passing through successive phases and appearances of deterioration. The second is transformational birth and death: changes in thoughts and mental states, without the metabolism of a physical form or variation in the length of a lifespan. It is the transition between delusion and awakening, the karmic fruition of undefiled karma, and the birth and death of arhats and those above them.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas have two bodies. The first is the dharmakāya, realized in the principle-body. The second is the birth-body, assumed in order to liberate sentient beings. Thus, they enter birth and death, taking birth in the womb of parents. A physical body manifested at a particular time through supernormal power is called birth. Though this body resembles segmented birth and death, it differs from that of ordinary beings: ordinary beings are drawn along by karmic force and emotional attachment, whereas these beings engage in the play of supernormal powers; the former are passive, the latter active. Therefore, it is also called a responsive transformation body.

From birth to death, one does not depart from the four characteristics of arising, abiding, change, and cessation. Arising is the formation of conditions; abiding is temporary dwelling; change is deterioration and transformation; cessation is death. These are also the four characteristics of all conditioned dharmas.

The rebirth of birth and death in the six realms, leaving the three realms, and rebirth in the Western Pure Land all involve the distinction between segmented and transformational birth and death; yet all alike belong to the circulation of the illusory mind. To be born in the Sahā world is certainly illusory, but to go to the Western Pure Land is also illusory. Only those reborn in the Sahā world enter it confusedly and blindly, unaware of its illusory nature and thus undergoing illusion.

Those reborn in a Buddha-land are freely born through their vows: they clearly know it is illusory, yet cultivate what is true. One is before realizing the mind, the other after first seeing one's true nature; one is in confusion, the other after samādhi; one is passive and without mastery, the other has mastery and strong vows; one has not severed desire and attachment, the other has severed desire and attachment. Yet longing for the Western Pure Land is also attachment—only attachment to the Dharma, not attachment to desire.

If attachment to desire is impure, one cannot leave the six realms. If attachment to the Dharma is impure, one does not realize bodhi. Because attachment to the Dharma is impure, there are distinctions among the nine grades and the borderland. Transformational birth and death still remain, so this cannot be called complete liberation. For to transcend birth and death is to awaken fully and become a Buddha. Therefore, if worldly desire and attachment have not been purified, one absolutely cannot be reborn in the West and enter the gate of attainment. Why? Because fundamental wisdom has not yet been attained, and the eight consciousnesses have not yet been transformed into great perfect mirror wisdom.

Birth and death follow each other like a shadow and do not go beyond the dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination. Ignorance is the father and attachment the mother; together they bring about this delusive karma, and suffering continues until old age and death. From old age and death, the twelve links turn again. Conditions are endless, birth and death are endless, and suffering too is endless. But how does one know how to enter birth and death, and how can one transcend birth and death? It is through awakening. How does one become awakened? By opening prajñā-wisdom. How does one open prajñā? Through cultivation. And what is the ultimate point of cultivation? Realizing the mind. For those who enter and leave birth and death are simply those who have not realized this illusory mind.

B. The Meaning of the Unborn

Everything in the world is originally without self-nature. To be without self-nature means to have no fixed definition, no independent subject, and no independent existence. For example, for flowers and trees to grow, seeds, soil, irrigation, human labor, and sunlight must come together; without their conjunction, they do not arise, and if any one is lacking, they cannot be formed. Which of these is independently self-governing, and what single thing can be identified as a flower or tree? The same is true of all things, and of human life as well.

Birth cannot be called truly existent birth, nor can death be called truly existent death, for both are conjunctions of conditions. For birth, a father without a mother, a mother without a father, or parents without oneself—none of these will do. For death, a body without illness, or a body with illness that does not lead to death—

none of these will do. Since there is ultimately no birth, there is ultimately no death. Since the appearance of continuity is itself illusory, the appearance of deterioration is also illusory. This is called originally neither arising nor ceasing; it is called the unborn.

When the illusory mind arises, it depends on objects; when objects disappear, the mind becomes empty. If the objects have disappeared but the illusory mind remains, then the illusory mind is fabricating things, clinging in emptiness to past illusory objects. Thus, the arising of the illusory mind does not arise from another or from itself. Its arising does not know where it arises; this is called the unborn.

The cessation of the illusory mind occurs because the preceding object disappears, and because thoughts flow onward. For example, when one is thinking of an elder brother, there is an elder brother in the illusory mind. Suddenly one thinks of a friend, and the illusory mind changes into that friend. While thinking of the friend, the illusory mind of the elder brother has already ceased. But where has that cessation gone? If it has gone, it must have a direction; if it has gone somewhere, it must have a place. Neither can be found. Thus, the cessation of the illusory mind does not cease through another or through itself. Its cessation does not reveal where it ceases; this is called non-cessation. Because it is unborn, it does not cease. This is called the unborn, and also called the forbearance of the unborn dharmas.

A person’s illusory body turns according to the mind, and the illusory mind is its master. Since the master itself is illusory, that which is attached to the illusion is even more illusory. Therefore, the birth and death of the formless illusory mind certainly cannot be found, and the birth and death of the formed illusory body likewise cannot be found.

Neither the illusory mind nor the illusory body can be grasped. Both still appear provisionally, and on that basis we speak of birth and death. Ordinary beings, however, cling to illusion as real and to emptiness as existent. They believe that birth and death definitely exist, take the illusory arising and passing of mind and body to be substantially real, and instead regard the true nature, which is constant and unchanging, as void and nonexistent.

There is no other reason for this: they take seeing and hearing as real, follow circumstances as they flow, enter birth and death without awakening to it, and lack the wisdom to turn it around. After the World-Honored One arose from samādhi, he extensively liberated beings for forty-nine years precisely for this reason. Therefore, if people wish to understand the meaning of the unborn, direct realization is indispensable; it cannot be understood and awakened to through a few words of writing.

C. The Meaning of Deathlessness

Since the unborn has already been discussed, one should no longer speak of there being death. The illusory body has appearances of arising and ceasing, so it is provisionally said to die. Yet in its fundamental essence, the nature of the Tathāgata-garbha is utterly without birth and death. What is called transformation is also only an expedient expression. For the present, setting aside the Tathāgata-garbha and speaking only of the arising and ceasing of the illusory body: once it is made clear that the arising and ceasing of the illusory body are all established by the illusory mind, the meaning of deathlessness emerges.

A person's possession of an illusory body is like an electric lamp having a bulb. What is extinguished is the bulb, not the electricity. Replace it with a new bulb and it shines again; it is not the bulb itself that shines, but the electricity, which has always existed, shining again. Thus, bulbs may constantly break and be replaced, but electricity never ultimately decays or ceases. This is only a provisional analogy, however, for electricity too arises and ceases.

But the nature of the Tathāgata-garbha exists eternally, life after life. To think that death is annihilation is the most inferior view. It denies cause and effect, right and wrong, and becomes an extreme view, an annihilationist view. Those who are negative may then commit suicide and abandon human responsibilities. If one need not love one's own body, one may also need not love others, and there will be nothing one will not do. Inferior people may boldly commit wrongs, settle for becoming petty persons, harm society, and indulge in perversion, leaving good people with no opportunity to be good. What kind of world would remain? This is the greatest superstition, despised by humankind.

When people first die, their spiritual nature often remains active, sometimes frightening or startling others. In fact, there is nothing to fear or find strange. This is because they are in the intermediate state, with the soul still drifting and unsettled. This soul goes according to conditions and joins with conditions it encounters, thereby entering rebirth. That which enters rebirth is precisely what neither ceases nor dies.

That which neither ceases nor dies is the numinous platform of wisdom-nature. Then what is it that dies? My illusory body is like clothing attached to the body. Clothes may become worn out because they change. All things proceed from formation to decay, from birth to cessation, and must pass through a number of transformations and deteriorations. That which remains unchanged from beginning to end is that which remains unceased from beginning to end.

Take the knowing nature of my own awareness: when I was three, I tasted flavors and knew sweetness from sourness. Now that I am eighty or ninety years old, this capacity for taste has still not aged or changed. The same is true of seeing forms and

hearing sounds. Again, if a person's limbs become diseased and are amputated, the body may be mutilated, but the knowing nature is never diminished. Some children, at the age of three or four, can recall past events and do not forget books read in former lives. This too is clear proof that it neither perishes nor dies.

A person's illusory body truly does not last as long as a photograph. From my present age of fifty, I cannot recover the self I was at forty or thirty; indeed, I cannot even recover the self I was yesterday. Yet my image from my youth remains intact. Thus, the lifespan of my illusory body is not even equal to that of an illusory image. Since this illusory body is so unreliable, there is no need to grieve at death. What is tragic is only that we squander the time before us, fail to study in time so as to understand the ultimate nature of mind, and drift through an entire life in mediocrity.

D. Section on Definitive Meaning

Liao has two meanings. First, it means understanding, which pertains to principle. Second, it means liberation, which pertains to phenomena. Principle and phenomena are nondual: when one is fully realized, all are fully realized.

By understanding, I mean first understanding that birth and death are merely provisional names and fundamentally unobtainable. When the meanings explained above are clearly understood, craving, attachment, and clinging naturally cease. Then life's most difficult problem, and death, its greatest terror, are thoroughly resolved. Is this not a great delight? Yet to understand principle without penetrating phenomena remains of no benefit; therefore, liberation from birth and death is paramount.

By liberation, I mean actual realization through cultivation: realizing and knowing that birth and death are unobtainable. Only then has one truly transcended birth and death. This will now be explained separately as follows:

To transcend birth and death does not mean that there is no birth and death. The two vehicles regard not entering the cycle of birth and death in the six realms as ultimate, but do not know that this is not ultimate. Birth and death are like a person's illusory coming and going. Ordinary beings, drawn along by emotional views, drift in the ocean of birth and death and cannot extricate themselves; therefore, they must be freed from it. The practitioners of the two vehicles withdraw from this ocean and die into nirvāṇa with remainder. Delighting in their own purity, they undertake no further activity and do not liberate sentient beings. Like scorched sprouts and rotten seeds, they sink into annihilation. This too is an ocean of birth and death; it is likewise not liberation.

Bodhisattvas neither yearn for ultimate bliss nor weary of the Sahā world. Moved by urgent great compassion, they therefore enter birth and death. Their minds are not constrained by emotional views; though entering it, they remain unstained. They appear not to have transcended it, yet in fact have done so. These are the ones who truly transcend birth and death.

What we must first determine is that birth and death are the circulation of illusory mind. To awaken to this illusory mind is liberation; not to awaken to it is birth and death. Since the unawakened seek awakening, cultivation is necessary. When cultivation reaches awakening, one becomes a bodhisattva. Going a step further, awakening too is the circulation of illusory mind, and thus awakening too is birth and death. One must realize that even awakening is unobtainable; this is called great awakening. When cultivation reaches great awakening, one becomes a Buddha.

Therefore, to transcend birth and death does not mean merely leaving the Sahā world and going to the West. Rather, it means not being bound by emotional views, and coming and going without obstruction between the Sahā world and the Western Pure Land. This is true liberation. The Western Pure Land is like a university division: after being reborn there, one must still study. Only upon studying until realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, when the lotus opens and one sees the Buddha, and thoroughly realizing the meanings explained above, does one transcend birth and death.

To transcend birth and death, one must realize it within birth and death itself. To be freed from all afflictions and habitual tendencies, one must begin with those habitual tendencies themselves. Avoiding or suppressing them is ultimately of no benefit. One must first realize the mind; only then can one struggle with habitual tendencies. The more one gains realization amid suffering and hardship, the more dependable it is.

A hundred years of austere cultivation in the mountains and forests are not equal to a single awakening amid afflictions. If one cultivates and trains in a genuine manner, one lifetime in the Sahā world surpasses ten periods of time in those heavens or Buddha lands. A sūtra says: "The bodhisattvas of this land have firm great compassion for all sentient beings; in one lifetime, the benefit they bring to sentient beings exceeds the practice performed in that land over hundreds of thousands of kalpas." But this refers specifically to those who have initially awakened to the Way and are able to contend with worldly habits.

If sentient beings who create karma have not fundamentally awakened, yet wish to act in this way, it is like trying to rescue someone from a well and thereby killing oneself as well. Though they speak of transcending birth and death, they instead make birth and death more firmly established. Therefore, going to the Western Pure

Land is comparatively secure and expedient. Yet sentient beings again become attached to the word “expedient,” giving rise to acquisitiveness. They think rebirth in the West is easy, and in the end achieve nothing. This is most lamentable.

Rebirth in the Western Pure Land is originally only the first step in transcending birth and death. Yet how can one be reborn there? One must also have strong vows and remove the coarse forms of emotional attachment and views. The subtle forms of emotional attachment and views are addressed through the power of great-compassion vows and the Buddha’s guidance. Drawing strength from both sides, one barely succeeds. It is by no means the case that one need make no effort and can simply be reborn through assistance in recitation at the time of death.

In sum, the greater one’s wisdom and strength, the farther one is from birth and death. But unless one first understands this principle, one’s strength will have no point from which to begin. What I have said here is merely to assist you all in your initial practice.

1. First clarify the mind-ground, accurately know the character of your own mind, and thoroughly understand why birth and death occur.

2. Strive to contend with emotional views and remove every obstacle to rebirth. Whenever any word or action of ours departs from awakening, we cannot be reborn there.

3. Associate regularly with spiritual friends and cultivate the right Dharma. The right Dharma is the practice suited to that particular person’s capacity. Those practicing according to the Esoteric teachings should especially emphasize the first point, for without it they cannot realize the mind.

4. If one also receives the various supportive conditions discussed in Section E below, one may perhaps have a small measure of assurance of rebirth. Moreover, there are seven things that people do not themselves know: (1) when they enter dreams; (2) when they become intoxicated; (3) when they become confused and forgetful; (4) when they mistakenly enter a wrong path; (5) when thoughts stir; (6) when they will die; and (7) when they enter the womb. The cause of all this is simply lack of awakening. Because of this lack of awakening, people enter birth and death without knowing it. If one truly wishes to transcend birth and death, one should first seek awakening.

E. Conditions at Death

1. There are six kinds of death: (1) death at the end of one’s lifespan. Among tens of millions, perhaps not one attains this. Only when the entire body is free of illness, and one withers like a flower without injury, can it be called death at the end of

one's lifespan. (2) Death when one's blessings are exhausted—that is, when one's karmic recompense is complete. This generally includes those who indulged in excessive luxury during life and die in poverty and hardship. (3) Untimely death, including death before one's time and inequitable death. (4) Death with a wholesome mind.

This includes those in whom wholesome thoughts arise at death, those with few concerns and attachments, and those who attain right mindfulness at the end of life. (5) Death with an unwholesome mind: giving rise to anger, becoming deranged and frantic, or dying in pain. (6) Death with an indeterminate mind: for example, suddenly collapsing from exhaustion and dying without initially knowing that one is ill.

2. There are nine kinds of indeterminate untimely death, brought about by oneself and not fixed karma: (1) overeating; (2) accidentally eating unsuitable food; (3) not adapting to local customs, climate, and water; (4) becoming ill again after recovering from illness; (5) forcibly holding back urination and defecation; (6) not observing the precepts; (7) associating with bad companions; (8) failing to avoid what can be avoided, such as a charging horse, a mad dog, or a drunken person.

(9) Traveling at an improper time, such as traveling at night and encountering dangerous roads. There are also nine further kinds: (1) falling ill without a physician or medicine; (2) execution under state law; (3) having one's vital energy taken by spirits; (4) being burned by fire; (5) drowning; (6) being harmed by wild beasts; (7) falling from a mountain cliff; (8) poison, sorcery, or curses; and (9) being afflicted by hunger and thirst.

3. The process of dying: first earth deteriorates, then water enters decline, then fire is extinguished, and finally wind disperses. This will be briefly described below. It is not an invention of my own, but what I received from my teacher when practicing Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism twenty years ago. I respectfully make it public for my fellow practitioners.

(1) Anyone who practices will necessarily have forebodings in advance: perhaps dreaming that one has lost one's head, dreaming of riding a donkey or horse backward, or having various nightmares—each according to one's own perceptions. When ill, one's mind may suddenly become scattered and lose its support; one may suddenly see images of Buddhas or bodhisattvas; one may dream of being summoned by another world; or, while ill, one may feel unable to endure any longer. If one then covers both ears with one's hands and alternately opens and closes them, and hears no rumbling sound in the ears, this too is a sign that one will soon leave the world. But highly suspicious people may hear what I have said, continually entertain fantasies, and consequently dream such dreams; these are not signs of

death. If they thereby mislead themselves, it is not my fault. Be most cautious, most cautious.

(2) As death approaches, the four elements separate, manifesting in inner and outer signs. Zi: when earth dissolves into water. (Outer sign) The limbs are heavy as mountains; the tongue curls and the mouth becomes dull, so that even a thousand or ten thousand words cannot be spoken. (Inner sign) It is like waves moving with the wind, drifting and unsettled, or like grass blown by the wind. Chou: when water dissolves into fire. (Outer sign) The tip of the tongue becomes dry.

Smoke seems to arise in the throat and mouth, and both cheeks turn red. (Inner sign) It is like smoke in a fire. Yin: when fire dissolves into wind. (Outer sign) The limbs gradually grow cold, and the body feels powerless. (Inner sign) It is like the tiny flame of a lamp, drifting to and fro. Mao: when wind dissolves into mind. (Outer sign) The breath goes out but does not come in. (Inner sign) It is like a lamp with a faint remaining light, steady and unmoving.

Chen: at this point, one who has cultivated the mind sees this lamp become a lunar disc. Karmic seeds from beginningless time all appear before one; this is called seeing, and seeing is karmic power. If one has practiced in ordinary life and realized one's true nature, one can use the power of wisdom's illumination: as one illumines them, they become empty. One then naturally transforms the lunar disc into a solar disc, with red light shining through all things—this is also the time of turning the light inward and reflecting back.

If one further illumines its emptiness with wisdom, then in an instant this luminosity becomes darkness; this is called cessation. After this cessation has lasted for some time—at this point one leaves this place and connects with another—dawn gradually arises, as when the sky has just brightened; it gradually becomes like the rising sun, then like noon at mid-heaven, and the light opens fully. This refers to those who, in an instant, are reborn in heaven or another Buddha land.

Those who do not cultivate, whenever they reach the end of life, have no mastery that can transform the faint light arising when wind enters mind into a lunar disc. They therefore drift with karmic power, and birth and death have no end. Si: for those who have realized the mind and seen their true nature, when wind is extinguished and enters mind at death, it is as though their spirit roams the worlds, entirely without attachment; they need not undergo this further process.

In sum, all is illusory. Do not seek the various states described above. Should one fail to attain them, one will instead increase one's doubts and suffer harm. Whenever any state appears, whether good or bad, know that it is illusory. Even if a Buddha comes to guide one, remain utterly calm and regard it as natural. Once

acquisitiveness arises, a demonic view arises, for acquisitiveness immediately produces feverish affliction; it is not the ground of coolness.

4. When the true spirit departs, it does so through approximately six places:

(1) If warmth departs through the crown of the head, there is no birth in the intermediate state, and one becomes a sage. But this must be accompanied by other auspicious signs, such as an unusual fragrance, dying while seated in meditation, or passing away while speaking and smiling. One who can teach the Dharma while dying certainly becomes a sage; otherwise, one cannot state this with certainty.

(2) If it departs through the eyes, its radiance greatly increases; or, if the pupils have not dispersed by the second day after death, there is no birth in the intermediate state, and one is reborn in heaven. But there must be an unusual fragrance; otherwise, one is merely reborn among the higher levels of the human realm.

(3) Those who depart through the heart enter the human realm. Their love and desire have not yet been severed, and they have an intermediate state, though it is very brief—at most forty-nine days, or perhaps one hundred days. With assistance, they may then be reborn in a higher realm.

(4) Those who depart through the abdomen enter the realm of hungry ghosts and have an intermediate state. If their vital spirit is fierce and violently arrogant, they enter the realm of demons.

(5) Those who depart through the knees enter the animal realm. At death they will certainly be restless and toss about, or they may first manifest immediate retribution, such as the cries of birds or beasts. This is so for those whose karmic retribution for killing has been grave in ordinary life.

(6) Those who depart through the soles of the feet or the lower body enter hell. Their appearance will certainly be terrifying and repulsive, or blood and foul-smelling discharge may flow from their mouth and nose. They have no intermediate state; their entire body suddenly becomes cold and rigid.

5. The colors at death may be distinguished as follows: (1) a fresh flower-like color is the sign of the heavenly realms; (2) a gentle and kindly color is the sign of the human realm; (3) yellow tinged with suffering is the sign of hungry ghosts; (4) a bluish color with distorted features is the sign of animals; (5) a bluish color with a fierce and evil appearance is the sign of demons; (6) blackness, foul odor, and bleeding are the signs of hell.

In sum, what matters at death depends entirely on the strength developed in ordinary life: first, an empty mind; second, freedom from fear; third, joy. It is like an

official receiving a promotion: one should rejoice, not grieve. To exchange this old and decrepit body for a new and vigorous one—is that not wonderful? Moreover, coming and going are unobstructed, and there is originally no suffering. What is painful is merely the views and attachments of the moment. This is the method for counteracting them.

When a person is approaching death, first, maintain right mindfulness and seek only liberation; do not give rise to attachment. Yet when the four elements disperse, the breath will inevitably become disordered. One should then use all one's strength to gather the breath at the dantian, concentrating one's mind and breath into a single point, like a white light. This is the power of samādhi.

Then draw it upward with effort, raising it to the heart. Exert all one's strength at the heart, then lift it further upward, past the throat, directly to the crown of the head. Direct all one's strength at the crown; allow it only to rise straight upward, never to recede downward.

As it rises from below to the crown, if the drawing-in produces a sound along the way, the crown aperture will open of itself. My primordial spirit then expansively pervades the dharma realm. There is no longer a body, no longer a mind; all hindrances due to offenses and all karmic obstacles naturally vanish.

At this time, neither subject nor object of death or birth remains. There is no Buddha, nor any one who comes to guide one onward. The whole of empty space is myself; I myself am Buddha. Like a speck of cloud in the vast sky, one is free and unobstructed. Then all bodily suffering ceases, and without noticing it, one leaves the Sahā world and reaches the Land of Bliss. This is the simplest and most esoteric method. Without cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, one cannot have this power to gather and draw upward.

Practitioners should know that this is an expedient method at the time of death for those whose power of samādhi is insufficient. Those whose power of samādhi is ample need not trouble themselves with it. Since this is still a clumsy method, borrowed for temporary use, it is not ultimate. In ordinary times, under no circumstances should one experiment with it playfully: at best, it may cause serious illness; at worst, immediate death.

If one rashly tries it, experiences pain instead, and gives rise to doubt or slander, one will become a sinner; this will not be my fault. Only practitioners may know this method. Keep it ready for the critical moment, and use it only when one has definitely known the time of one's own death. As for knowing one's own death, those of deep attainment know as early as six months beforehand; otherwise, they know half a month beforehand. One may then make plans in advance and prepare to take up a new post. Furthermore, do not casually teach this method to others,

lest non-Buddhists misuse it to mislead people and you yourself incur retribution in hell. I urge this most earnestly, most earnestly.

F. Assisting at the Time of Death

1. At the time of death, the chief aim is to support the person's right mindfulness. But one must never make the person feel aversion. For example, loudly reciting the Buddha's name from morning to night may instead cause aversion and be of little benefit. Various methods must be used as supports.

2. Observe the person's usual practice, conduct, occupations, and various habitual tendencies, and teach and guide them according to their capacities.

3. Observe which faculty is keenest. In anyone with kidney disease, the eyes lose sight first and the ears lose hearing first. Assist through the nose faculty: let the person smell a distinctive fragrance, thereby arousing thoughts of taking refuge in the Buddha.

4. Observe which people and matters the person has most dearly cherished in ordinary life, and explain the Dharma point by point in order to release these attachments and sever thoughts of love and attachment.

5. Those at the person's side must not weep or wail.

6. When explaining the Dharma, first wear a smile and behave as though nothing were amiss. The teaching should be concise, essential, and practical.

7. Recall the person's various merits and virtues during life, assure them that they will certainly be reborn in a good realm, and arouse a joyful mind.

8. In an emergency, pay special attention to the following points, and do not panic first yourself. (1) Have the person focus on the space between the eyebrows, instructing them: “If you rise upward from here, you will certainly be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.” This must be told to them repeatedly. This method is commonly used at all times by the Good Society, and has therefore become a malady; people do not know that it may be used only at a single moment. Yet this is precisely the moment when it should be used. For practitioners, one may urgently tell them of the preceding method.

(2) Tell them: “When you hear my voice, the Buddha's name, or the sound of mantras, the Buddha's light will arrive. You will then be able to see the Buddha and may follow the light away.” Use the Great Compassion Heart Mantra, or the Great Compassion Mantra, the Light Mantra, the Mantra for Rebirth Blown into the Ear, as well as the mantra of the bodhisattva in whom the person has ordinarily had faith, and the sacred name of Amitābha.

Moreover, while reciting mantras, the ritual performer should resolve in mind that the person will certainly depart swiftly; relying on the power of the mantras, that person's liberation will likewise be swift. (3) Tell them: “All the sinful karma of your past lives has now been completely eliminated. This is not through your own power, but through the power of the sacred mantras.” This serves to strengthen their faith. (4) If there are relics, place them in the person's mouth, but only after food and drink have been discontinued; never do so too early.

(5) Burn a subtle and exquisite incense; it is even better if the person does not see it. The incense must not be too strong. (6) The room should be quiet. If there are people whom the person dislikes, they must not be allowed to appear at this time. (7) If the person shows an intention to sit up, slowly assist them to rise; do not prematurely assume that they are dying, lest this harm their spirit. (8) Together, slowly recite the Buddha's name; do not recite loudly, for gentleness is paramount. Reciting amid weeping is especially to be avoided; it would be better not to recite at all. If one can gently strike a chime, its bright sound can lead the person to take refuge in the Buddha and arouse wholesome thoughts. The sound must not be too loud.

9. After death, do not move the body. If the person dies seated and cannot remain so for long, wait at least twenty minutes before slowly laying the body down again. (This refers to lay practitioners.) The back of the neck must be raised with a cushion so that the body is entirely comfortable.

10. The family must wait seven hours before beginning to weep aloud.

11. The body should be encoffined early and the funeral should be simple. First cover the face with a dhāraṇī-sūtra cloth; the Light Mantra is the best choice.

12. If, after death, a jade-like column hangs down, there is no need to wipe it away. Cover it with a warm towel to make it retract upward. It is white and shaped like mucus, emerging from both nostrils. This occurs in those who cultivated the Way during life. Yet it may also occur in those who cultivated in past lives. My ninth son, Xiaolong, died at the age of four; jade-like columns hung from both nostrils, and fragrance filled the room. This was evidence of rebirth in heaven, though it is not especially remarkable. At death, clarity of mind and the severing of all attachments are always foremost. With such liberation, even if one is not reborn in the Western Pure Land, one will certainly not enter the evil realms. Upon encountering causes and conditions again, one will surely ascend to the heavenly realms. This concludes a brief explanation of birth and death.