Questions and Answers on Entering Buddhism and Understanding Its Essential Teaching

Master Wang Xianglu

Contents

Preface

Questions and Answers on Entering Buddhism and Understanding Its Essential Tenet

Preface

My teacher, the lay practitioner Wang Xianglu, gave lectures at the Mind-Seal Vihara in Tianjin for a total of seven years. He unfailingly inspired students according to their capacities, and many of us who studied under him grasped the essentials of realizing the mind. In recent years, the number of those taking refuge has increased daily, and, in addition to requesting instruction, they have raised many questions. Fellow practitioners have recorded the essential points and gathered them into one volume, containing material not included in the previously compiled Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935). The lay practitioner Zhang Pingsan of Tianjin has resolved to circulate it for the benefit of fellow practitioners and has asked me to write a preface.

In my humble view, the essential tenet of Mind-Seal concerns but one great matter. Sentient beings suffer distress, and no sorrow is greater than birth and death; no matter is more important than attaining Buddhahood. The key to attaining Buddhahood, moreover, lies in clarifying the essential tenet. I therefore requested that the Master first print this initial collection under the title Questions and Answers on Entering Buddhism and Understanding Its Essential Tenet, so that those who have newly aroused the resolve may enter the gate of Buddhism, and those who have already entered may find the way to clarify its essential tenet. One must first know whether what is called “Buddha” and what is called the “essential tenet” are ultimately one or two; then one will suddenly understand what is meant by entering and clarifying. That is all.

Alas! As the Buddhadharma declines, its remaining influence endures only in the three traditions of Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism. Because students are unable to clarify the essential tenet, they fear Chan as difficult and avoid it; they regard Pure Land as easy and thus take it lightly; and, as for Esoteric Buddhism, they regard it as mysterious and remain hesitant. Thus they dispute and disparage one another, each establishing its own sectarian boundary. Since the essential tenet is not clear, Buddhism indeed cannot be entered.

They do not know that Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism are all expedient methods prior to clarifying the essential tenet. When one returns to the source, all are relinquished; how then can there be distinctions of difficulty and ease, superiority and inferiority? Yet how could the circumstances of the times remain unchanged for long? The Dharma is precious because it adapts and transforms in accordance with those it encounters, and undertakings too arise in response to the times.

Over the past ten years, the world has undergone momentous changes. At a time when this teaching was nearly lost, an unexpected new force suddenly arose and, with one great stirring, revitalized the tradition. Able to unite the three traditions and open up prajñā, to bestow the Dharma's benefits fully and hasten attainment, it is none other than the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Is this not a convergence of causes and conditions?

Since our Acharya Dayu founded this tradition, Master Xianglu has carried on his work and helped the tradition flourish. He welcomes practitioners with a wide range of capacities for Chan and guides them toward the ultimate Pure Land. All of us fellow disciples have come to understand this together. We hope that everyone will rise up to promote it, so that the world's attached views that divide the Buddhadharma into sects may gradually melt away, like gold in a furnace. May all return together to the ocean of true nature and realize bodhi together. With this volume as a compassionate ferry, may we not disappoint Master Xianglu's compassionate heart in entering the world of dust to liberate all beings. This is my preface.

Preface respectfully written by Cai Zhongju of Jingjiang in the early spring of 1940, the gengchen year.

Questions and Answers on Entering Buddhism and Understanding Its Essential Tenet

Question: Why should people study Buddhism?

Answer: Because they seek to transcend birth and death, and because they should understand this great matter of causes and conditions. This is the central tenet, also called the true Dharma.

Question: How do people enter into birth and death?

Answer: Each person possesses Buddha-nature, originally pure and quiescent, without birth and death. But upon encountering objects, they give rise to deluded views, grasp at them without letting go, and drift and wander as they turn with the illusory mind. Thus they enter birth and death. Having long grown accustomed to this without awareness, they go out from one realm and enter another, coming and going within the six realms without cease; this is called the wheel of birth and death. The arising and ceasing of a single thought is itself a cycle of birth and death.

Question: How can one transcend birth and death?

Answer: The Chinese character liao ( ) has two meanings here. First, it means understanding: clearly comprehending that birth and death are originally unobtainable. This pertains to principle. Second, it means bringing them to an end: after realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one never again enters the six realms. This pertains to phenomena. Yet these two forms of transcendence merely cut off segmented birth and death. One has not ultimately gone beyond meaning, nor beyond dharmas, and thus has not gone beyond mind; ultimately, one still remains within birth and death. Only when one's cultivation is profound and one's power sufficient, when dharmas are purified and mind is empty, and when one has fully completed all that can be completed, does one neither grasp at nor reject birth and death. Then transformational birth and death is transcended, and birth and death is truly ended.

Question: Why can studying Buddhism enable one to transcend birth and death?

Answer: Were the Buddha not to appear in the world, people would never understand the meaning of birth and death, much less bring birth and death to an end. Therefore, his kindness is so profound that it is difficult to repay; even if one's body and bones were shattered to pieces, there would be no way to requite it. Moreover, the Buddha has provided various dharma gates for transcending birth and death, offering people expedient means too numerous to describe.

Question: Why does the Buddha have so many different dharma gates?

Answer: Because sentient beings have all manner of habitual dispositions. Just as there are many kinds of illness, there are also many kinds of medicines.

Question: Although the medicines are many, is there ultimately one essential principle?

Answer: Yes. The reason sentient beings enter birth and death lies in a single word: delusion. Because they do not recognize their Original Face before entering birth and death, they are deluded. Because they do not understand all causal stages and stages of fruition, they are deluded. If they can be freed from delusion, birth and death will naturally be transcended. This depends solely on enabling them to understand their own mind and see their own nature. As it is said, “Expedient means are many, but their ultimate principle is not two.” This is the highest truth, called the one essential principle.

Question: Apart from realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, are there any other dharma gates?

Answer: There is only this one gate. Apart from realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, all dharmas are not the Buddha’s true Dharma.

Question: Why are they not the Buddha’s true Dharma?

Answer: Buddha means awakening. If one does not understand the mind-ground and does not see the appearance of mind’s intrinsic nature, this is not called right awakening; therefore, it is not the true Dharma.

Question: Before realizing the mind, if one cultivates all manner of dharma gates—such as Buddha-recitation, expounding the sūtras, and upholding mantras—are these also called not the true Dharma?

Answer: Yes. To transcend birth and death and attain Buddhahood is the ultimate meaning; reaching the other shore is the essential principle. Practices such as Buddha-recitation are like sitting in a boat or riding a raft: they are expedient means before reaching the ultimate principle. When one approaches the other shore and leaps ashore on one’s own two feet, only then is it the true Buddhadharma. Once one has reached the shore, even the Buddhadharma no longer exists; all is utterly pure, with nothing remaining. This is what is called Buddha.

Question: Why is Buddhadharma divided into schools?

Answer: Buddhism was originally not divided into schools. The divisions were made later for people’s convenience, but they instead became the burden of sectarian boundaries. Take observance of precepts as the Vinaya school: originally, both the essence and forms of the precepts are complete. People of sharp faculties may awaken once and attain Buddhahood, but dull people cannot awaken through a single dharma, and must necessarily add the practices of other schools. Therefore, the Vinaya school returns to the essential principle through Vinaya; it does not take Vinaya alone as its essential principle.

Chan returns to the essential principle through the practice of dhyāna; it does not take Chan alone as its essential principle. Moreover, those who practice Chan do not fail to cultivate the precepts. The precepts also differ according to whether one is a beginner or a long-term practitioner, and according to depth and shallowness; the methods should likewise vary accordingly, not be discarded.

The Pure Land school likewise returns to the essential principle through Pure Land practice. Only after returning to the essential principle can one attain rebirth. Yet the Rebirth Mantra belongs to Esoteric Buddhism; fasting and precept observance belong to the Vinaya school; making vows belongs to the Mind school. One must still use the various schools as supports before practice can become firm and realization genuine. If one takes the Pure Land alone as one's essential principle, this is a narrow and inferior view: one will surely refuse to cultivate other schools as well, and will establish the inferior view of impurity and purity. Those nowadays who do not seek accomplishment through their own practice, but merely vow for rebirth while single-mindedly slandering other schools and setting up sectarian boundaries, have already departed from the meaning of Pure Land. They are not disciples of the Buddha and can never attain rebirth. Thus, dividing Buddhism into schools was not the Buddha's original intent.

Question: Then does dividing Buddhism into schools ultimately present any obstacle?

Answer: No obstacle arises, so long as one understands the essential principle. Dividing into schools facilitates single-minded practice and means entering deeply through one gate. It is acceptable if one does not deliberately establish sectarian boundaries. The purpose of division is that people's capacities differ and each is naturally drawn to particular methods; thus, an order of priority is established. But when one is about to reach the other shore, all return to the same essential principle, and one will no longer cling to a single dharma. It is like textbooks at university and secondary school: they naturally differ from those of elementary school. This does not mean that elementary school is inferior and university superior.

Question: Could you briefly indicate how the various schools return to the essential principle?

Answer: Yes. The various schools of Buddhism have two kinds: direct realization and gradual transition. They may be outlined as follows:

(I) In gradual transition, one first cultivates until the myriad dharmas return to the One, and then returns from the One to the essential principle.

A. The Dharma Characteristics School: it thoroughly sees through appearances and then returns to intrinsic nature.

B. The Vinaya school: it gathers the mind into oneness through precepts, then realizes the emptiness of dharmas and sees one's true nature.

C. Tiantai: one first cultivates until the threefold contemplation in one mind is accomplished, then sees one's true nature through contemplation of emptiness.

D. Pure Land: one first cultivates to one-pointedness of mind without distraction and realizes avaivartika. After attaining rebirth, one cultivates further until the lotus opens and one sees the Buddha.

E. Esoteric Buddhism: this refers to the various practices currently transmitted in the Eastern and Tibetan esoteric traditions. One first uses ritual forms and procedures to gather the mind into oneness, then further cultivates formless esoteric practice and directly realizes siddhi.

(II) In direct realization, one begins by seeking where the One returns, directly pointing to the mind-ground. This must be taught according to one's capacities and cannot be transmitted universally. Moreover, there are two kinds: relying on the Buddha's power and relying on one's own power.

F. The Chan school: without relying on written words, language, or other dharmas, one relies on one's own power and single-mindedly investigates and enters realization. Because it relies on one's own power, one cannot thoroughly resolve the matter without twenty or thirty years. Moreover, it is painful that worthy teachers are so few. With changing times and increasingly feeble capacities, no one dares to undertake it. Unable to avoid this, people seek transitional methods to resolve the matter for themselves and turn to other gates. This is most lamentable.

Yet the Buddhadharma will never perish, because Buddha-nature will never perish. Those who enter Buddhism today all possess causes and conditions from former lives, and there are naturally still people of sharp faculties. It is only because there are too few worthy teachers and too few to guide them that they have all been obscured. Now, at a time when the Chan school is in decline, an unexpected force has suddenly arisen, opening for those within the school a supreme expedient dharma gate. This is the causal condition for the appearance in the world of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma of formless esoteric practice.

This Dharma has been in the world for no more than ten years, having been put into practice in the seventeenth year of the Republic of China (1928). During these ten years, those who have directly realized the mind-ground and seen true reality are beyond number. Since all of them connect with the Chan school, people have

consequently called it Chan-Esoteric Buddhism. Though this name does not accord with the Dharma in name, the facts are as they are.

G. The Mind-Seal school, namely the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric practice: this relies on the Buddha's power and the empowerment of the three mysteries. It does not emphasize forms, but solely realizes the mind-ground. Because all its practices are methods specifically established by Acharya Dayu after his direct realization at Mount Lu, later practitioners who cultivate according to them can certainly realize entry within two or three years, without the hardship of seeking the Way for thirty years.

At first, people knew only that it was an esoteric practice; they did not understand how direct realization of the mind-ground accords with the Chan school. From the nineteenth year of the Republic (1930) onward, when the Master was about to retire from public life, he held nine prajñā Dharma assemblies and only then revealed his hidden intent to people. More than seventy thousand people had initially received the Dharma, yet no more than a hundred persevered without giving way to doubt or retreating midway; only forty attended the nine assemblies. Therefore, those who discuss its flavor without ever having tasted it will ultimately find its profundity difficult to understand. How could it be contested through words and tongues?

Question: Among the schools of Chinese Buddhism, which is the greatest?

Answer: Dharmas have no greater or lesser. In terms of numbers, the Pure Land school has the most adherents, yet those who truly attain rebirth are extremely few. The Chan school alone has the greatest latent strength. It is unique to China and has spread to such places as Japan and Taiwan, while India has none of it.

Those in China who cultivate dhyāna have traditionally not associated with the world. Yet the capacities of Chinese people are especially distinctive: old and young, men and women, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike all delight in the Diamond Sūtra, Heart Sūtra, Platform Sūtra, and Amitābha Sūtra. This shows the greatness of its latent influence.

People commonly regard the Amitābha Sūtra as a Pure Land sūtra, not realizing that it is an essential sūtra of the Chan school. Pure Land practitioners obtain only its first half and merely admire its supreme bliss; they are unable to penetrate the marvel of true reality. If one does not understand the essential principle, one will certainly be unable to attain its wondrous meaning. Those in our association, after cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and receiving its seal in the mind-ground, all delight in reciting this sūtra. It is also extremely difficult to explain, for it cannot be expressed through words and language. Our center began expounding this sūtra only in its fourth year, intending also to harmonize the various schools and avoid sectarian divisions. This is a general outline of the various schools.

Question: How should one begin the practice of entering Buddhism and understanding its essential tenet?

Answer: There is no fixed method. It must be determined according to the recipient's capacities. Before transmitting a practice, one must first examine the person and then confer the Dharma. Our center has printed a book, Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935). Though admittedly simple, it should not mislead people. It is divided into three sections—Inspiring Potential, Right Cultivation, and Verification of Realization—and serves as an expedient for beginners, while taking understanding the essential principle as the highest truth.

Question: Can everyone cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?

Answer: This cannot be determined in advance. Before cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, other methods may be transmitted to guide people.

Question: Why does Mind-Seal Vihara also draw upon such books as Chan recorded sayings?

Answer: It does not use them for practice, but only borrows them to assess the depth or shallowness of one's inner realization. Before one understands the mind-ground, one is not permitted to read them. This is not limited to these books: reading sūtras also comes later, for reading them too early remains useless.

Question: After cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, can one then transcend birth and death?

Answer: Whether one transcends birth and death depends on oneself, not on the Dharma. If one is not deeply earnest, no marvelous Dharma will be of any use. Even the Buddha can do nothing for such people. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma may not be suited to everyone; it depends on each person's causes and conditions.

Question: Why is the Chan school called the school of the essential principle?

Answer: Compared with other schools, the Chan school is exceedingly direct and simple. Since it has no doctrinal forms by which it may be named, it is therefore called the school of the essential principle. Yet one should understand that even the practice of Chan meditation has not itself returned to the source. The source is the true reality of perfect awakening in ultimate quiescence; it is empty, pure, and unstained, with no dharma remaining to be spoken of. Thus, to speak of Chan meditation is still not to have left dharmas behind, and therefore it is not the original reality. Hence, the Chan school uses the dharma of Chan meditation to return to the source; it is not that Chan itself is the source. Once one has returned to the source, even Chan no longer exists.

Question: Whatever method one practices, should one begin by clearing away habitual tendencies or by realizing the mind?

Answer: This question is of the utmost importance. People have argued over it endlessly without reaching a decision; this is precisely the crucial point. One should know that first clarifying the mind-ground and then eliminating habitual tendencies is an immutable conclusion through the ages. If the mind-ground is not clear, it is like entering a dark room without lighting a lamp: though one may wish to set all confusion in order, there is in fact no way to do so. Habitual tendencies are the ongoing movement of the illusory mind as it manifests; they are like a shaking lamp. Though its light flickers and dazzles, this ultimately does not hinder the flame.

Therefore, although people may be confused, this is only a momentary intoxication of delusion; the essential substance of their Buddha-nature is no different. Those who thoroughly realize nonduality can draw the firewood from beneath the cauldron. Rather than begin by working on habitual tendencies, they first apply themselves to awakening; with a single awakening, they return to the original nature. Otherwise, if one forcibly restrains habitual tendencies, one may see results for a time, but they will not be thoroughly cleared away. Before long, when the force of external circumstances grows strong, one will again be carried away by them. To speak of putting a dark room in order—is this not blind cultivation and blind training?

Question: What is meant by the methods through which the various schools return to the source?

Answer: The teachings and methods of each school are intended as expedient means. One must cultivate until dharmas are empty and return to the Original Face of the mind-ground; only then may this be called attainment. Take the precepts, for example. People merely know to take observance of the precepts as fundamental. This is a teaching expediently given to beginners. Ultimately, however, its meaning must be the emptiness of the precepts. For precepts restrain the mind. Once the mind is empty, subject and object are both forgotten, good and evil are wholly purified, and there is nothing left to restrain. This is called attaining the precepts, and is also called possessing the precepts in full. The other schools share the same principle.

Question: What is the meaning of Buddha-remembrance in the Pure Land school?

Answer: To take Buddha-remembrance simply as a direct means of rebirth in the West misses its meaning. Through Buddha-remembrance, one gathers the mind into oneness and purifies one’s own land; only then can one enter the ocean of Amitābha Buddha’s vows and join the assembly of superior good persons. For all sentient

beings born there must attain avaivartika, the stage of nonretrogression. This is called the immovable ground; one who has not realized the mind cannot be thus.

Therefore, Buddha-remembrance means changing the habitual thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance, and becoming accustomed to recollecting the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. To be constantly mindful of the Buddha is to never forget one's awakening-nature at any moment and never depart from one's original nature. This is called true Buddha-remembrance.

The ancients' Buddha-remembrance was unlike the chanting of modern people. The ancients never relaxed for a moment; they recollected the Buddha at every moment. Those whose minds remain undistracted throughout the entire day and night never forget their original nature wherever they are. This is not deliberately contrived; rather, through long familiarity and deep practice, it becomes continuous and undivided, manifesting spontaneously without their awareness. Moreover, the ancients' Buddha-remembrance lay only in the present utterance: whether one has been born, is now born, or will be born [in the Pure Land]. It was not like modern people, who seek it only at the time of death and regard warmth at the crown of the head as proof of a favorable rebirth. They place emphasis on the final moment but do not seek it in their ordinary daily lives—deceiving others and deceiving themselves. How lamentable!

Question: What is meant by rebirth while carrying karma?

Answer: To carry karma means that one's habitual tendencies have not yet been purified. Yet because one's power of vows is sufficient, one's practice steadfast, and one's mind gathered into oneness, one may attain rebirth. As for the three karmas, they have not yet been purified completely, and one therefore cannot become a Buddha. Even bodhisattvas still have habitual tendencies.

Question: What is meant by attaining Buddhahood in this very life in Esoteric Buddhism?

Answer: This means that, after realizing the mind, one manifests the dharmakāya (Dharma body) and sees true reality; this is called becoming a Buddha. It does not mean that habitual tendencies have also been completely purified. Only after realizing the dharmakāya is there a means to remove habitual tendencies; only then does one enter right cultivation. It does not mean that, in this very life, one's habitual tendencies are all entirely exhausted as well.

Question: I have often seen many diligent practitioners who have endured extraordinary ascetic practices for years, yet still find it difficult to attain the ultimate. In the end, they remain without any sure grasp. What is the reason for this?

Answer: There are several causes, and half the fault also lies with the teacher. First, the teacher lacks skillful means to recognize the student's capacity. Second, the teacher does not give a method suited to that capacity. Third, the teacher has not first attained thorough awakening and so can only follow old methods in teaching others, without knowing how to adapt. Fourth, the teacher cannot forestall the roots of students' faults. Fifth, the teacher's explanations of meaning are unclear, leading students into blind cultivation. Sixth, the teacher establishes sectarian boundaries. Seventh, the teacher forcibly distinguishes superior from inferior in pursuit of fame and recognition.

As for the ways students mislead themselves: first, they seek the Buddha but not themselves; second, they examine the teacher but not themselves; third, they are too dependent on others and always looking for shortcuts; fourth, they lack earnestness of heart and perseverance; fifth, they are impatient and full of doubt; sixth, they refuse to train the mind in human affairs; seventh, their capacity is too narrow and their blessings slight; eighth, they are arrogant and conceited, not humble, yet eager for rapid progress; ninth, their views of good and evil are too deeply entrenched; tenth, they do not understand their original nature. These are all ways of misleading others and oneself.

Question: What is meant by unclear explanation of meaning?

Answer: When first teaching the Dharma to people, one must thoroughly explain the meaning of the teachings, so that they will not fall into doubt and error midway. Terms such as samādhi, emptiness, Buddha, and nonexistence must not be given simplified explanations based merely on their surface meanings. Samādhi does not mean the unmoving stillness of wood or stone. Even amid activity, when the mind is not carried away or confused by circumstances, this is samādhi.

Emptiness does not mean existence or nonexistence. Rather, when all things are manifestly present, their substance has no inherent nature; originally they are empty and quiescent. Not abiding and not grasping is what is meant by emptiness. Buddha does not refer only to a Buddha; all awakening, all quiescence, and original true reality are called Buddha. The character wu ( ) here does not mean nonexistence as opposed to existence; it means not grasping. Unless such matters are repeatedly elucidated, students will certainly misunderstand them, leading people into blind cultivation. How could one not be fearful of this?

Question: Does the method of cultivation have definite stages?

Answer: Fundamentally, there are no stages, but they may provisionally be set forth as follows: first, clarify the root, taking realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as primary; second, remove habitual tendencies; third, remove residual

habits. In the initial stage of practice, one cannot do without relying on a method, though one's own effort is primary.

In the second stage, one trains the mind wholly amid human affairs. In the third stage, one becomes relaxed and free in the realm of mental activity, never forgetting from thought to thought, yet not grasping at the Dharma, lest one instead lose spontaneity. Again, first comes seeing the Way; next, cultivating the Way; next, understanding the Way; next, realizing the Way; next, applying the Way—that is, putting it to use; next comes emptying the Way, namely the emptiness of dharmas; and then comes forgetting the Way, which is the emptiness even of emptiness. Thus, at every moment one never departs from the Way, yet has no view of a Way. Then one attains great freedom.

Question: How can one truly accord with the fundamental intent of studying Buddhism?

Answer: It lies in the two words “free from delusion.” All sentient beings create karma through delusion; through karma they undergo suffering; and suffering in turn gives rise to delusion. Now, use wisdom to break through delusion and realize emptiness. Through emptiness one attains samādhi, and from samādhi wisdom arises. Thus these three wheels destroy those other three wheels.

Question: Where precisely lie the great potential and great function of studying Buddhism?

Answer: They lie in the three powers of samādhi, wisdom, and bodily strength. When the power of samādhi is strong, the mind naturally cannot be deluded; this is what is meant by being neither corrupted, cowed, nor swayed. When the power of wisdom is sufficient, one's insight is broad and far-reaching, and one clearly understands cause and effect, so one naturally does not enter evil. From these two, the body's strength naturally becomes great, and one is then capable of undertaking great affairs.

The rise and decline of any nation depend on its national spirit. This is the true strength of its people. When applied in the world, it brings benefit to the nation and blessings to its people; herein lies the great potential and great function of the Buddhadharma. Therefore, the Buddhadharma is not negative self-liberation. It calls for active engagement in the world. Those who sacrifice themselves for righteousness cannot do so without the spirit of great giving. Thus the Buddhadharma must take realizing the mind as its foremost principle. Alas, few people understand this. They regard it merely as seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land after death, as a negative means of self-liberation. The fault lies with people, not with any error in the Dharma. How unjust this is!

Question: If understanding principles is of no help to practical cultivation, while practical cultivation can succeed on its own and principles ultimately have no use, then may principles be discarded?

Answer: Understanding principles is what guides practical cultivation. A map is understanding principles, while walking the road is practical cultivation; the two do not obstruct one another. To read maps exclusively without walking is certainly unacceptable, but to ignore the map and walk blindly is also unacceptable. Moreover, principle is phenomena held within the mind—phenomena as they exist in the mind—while phenomena are principle expressed in circumstances—principle as it appears in circumstances. Principle and phenomena are nondual; neither impairs the other. People merely suffer from the disease of partial attachment, forcibly distinguishing superior from inferior, and thereby go far astray.

Question: What is the difference between Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and between bodhisattvas and vajras?

Answer: People are partial and attached, fond of making distinctions. They take Buddhas as highest, bodhisattvas as next, and vajras as lower still. They do not know that all sentient beings are Buddhas; all the more so are bodhisattvas. A bodhisattva is simply one whose practice and conduct are not yet complete. In fact, a bodhisattva who has realized the mind is already at the Buddha stage. A Buddha is the essential nature of quiescence and cessation, while bodhisattvas and vajras are the wondrous functioning of compassion.

In samādhi, one is a Buddha; arising from samādhi to liberate widely the various beings, one is a bodhisattva. Amid all activities, one who realizes that there is no view of dharmas and is equally at ease in stillness and activity is a Buddha. One for whom subject and object have not yet been forgotten and the view of dharmas still remains is a bodhisattva. Again, one who liberates beings gently and harmoniously is a bodhisattva; one who liberates them fiercely and through adverse means is a vajra. Both are the compassion of the same bodhisattva. Again, one who propagates the Dharma is a bodhisattva, while one who protects the Dharma is a vajra; yet protection is also propagation. All are expedient means. If one understands expedient means, even māras can be transformed into Buddhas.

Question: Why is the power of māras so great?

Answer: Beginning practitioners do not distinguish the meaning of māra and Buddha, and so become like birds startled by the mere twang of a bowstring. One should know that māra too is Buddha. In this very thought, when there is inverted confusion and delusion, it is māra. Thus the Chinese character mo (, māra) combines ma (, hemp) with gui (, ghost): ghosts are as numerous as hemp, and one can know how great their confusion is. The deluded mind’s discrimination and

confusion are just like this. If this very thought is pure and unstained, with no grasping or abiding at all, then when inner māras cease, outer māras too vanish.

To cease means to return to one's own mind. Māra and Buddha share the same underlying nature within oneself, so their powers are equal and opposed. Once one recognizes the root, the armies of māra are naturally defeated, and the wisdom of the Buddha suddenly dawns. Even Mañjuśrī would find it difficult to debate its meaning. This is what is meant by the mind's transformation into prajñā; such is its wonder. Students should apply themselves on the side of Buddha and should not give rise to fear on the side of māra. Refusing to work on oneself and looking for faults in others is precisely the work of Māra.

Question: How should a person who has awakened be tested?

Answer: Awakening is awakening in the mind; it is the student's own affair. How can others measure it? Only those who have gone through it know the affairs of those who have gone through it. Those who have not awakened cannot assess the shallowness or depth of another's practice and conduct, or the degree of that person's realization.

Nowadays, those who falsely judge that one person has awakened and another has become a māra must first have become Buddhas themselves before they can do so. Or perhaps they have themselves been offspring of māras—why? An examiner in an examination hall must possess learning superior to that of the examinees; otherwise, false and confused judgments become great falsehoods. To speak merely for momentary pleasure is a minor fault, but if it thereby obstructs another's progress, the fault is great. This is frivolous speech among the karmas of speech.

Question: Why do those who have initially realized the Way often reveal habits of arrogance and conceit?

Answer: Arrogance is relying on what one possesses. This, too, cannot be measured by others. People merely see someone’s lack of deference and take it for arrogance. Yet when a master administers blows and shouts to a disciple, can this also be called arrogance? Among fellow disciples, if one acts straightforwardly and frankly points out another’s faults, can this likewise be called arrogance? It is simply because people are strict in criticizing others, and this has become habitual. They cannot accept frank words; they see only arrogance and do not understand the intention behind it.

Moreover, when one has first realized the Way, joy may naturally overflow, and one may unconsciously dance with delight. If the other person has not yet eliminated the root of jealousy, such a misunderstanding is to be expected. Furthermore, the harm

of arrogance lies in self-approval: one's learning then makes no progress. This harms oneself; it does not necessarily mislead others.

As for one who has realized the Way and has assumed the position of a teacher, if another can accept that person's reprimands, that is already no small blessing and affinity. One should be grateful beyond measure; how could one regard it as arrogance and conceit? Moreover, one who worries that others are arrogant and conceited must also be arrogant toward others. If we are stirred by another's arrogance and conceit, then our own birth and death are indeed frightening. How do we know that the other is not deliberately assuming such a manner to test us? Therefore, a noble person must reflect upon himself.

Question: Could you explain the meaning of rebirth?

Answer: A student should first know that what goes forth is only mind. The moment the vow is stirred, it is already accomplished. For example, when sitting quietly and contemplating the vast universe and its myriad worlds, there is nothing that is not contained within one's own breast. Thus the Western Pure Land is also within what I contain. All things are fully present within me; so what coming or going could there be?

Question: Those learning Buddhism often obstruct themselves. What is the most serious obstruction?

Answer: The two words "small capacity" are the greatest obstruction to the Way. Therefore, the Buddha placed giving first. Sentient beings know only how to cling to self; the stronger their attachment to self, the smaller their capacity. They cannot arouse a great resolve and shoulder responsibility: this is the first. They are alarmed at the sight of small matters and cannot bear great matters: this is the second. They like to contend with others for victory and stubbornly cling without letting go: this is the third. Their faculties are dull and unresponsive: this is the fourth.

Their views of good and evil are difficult to remove: this is the fifth. When taught the Dharma of equality and nonduality, they are incapable of accepting it: this is the sixth. Even when they give, they limit themselves to small, form-based giving; they are even less able to relinquish views of self in the truly great giving: this is the seventh. Unless this barrier is broken through, it is difficult to penetrate deeply into any learning. All those who become doubtful or obstructed midway do so because of these causes and conditions.

Question: Some say that everything should be reformed, and that Buddhism too should be reformed. Is this so?

Answer: No. The mind has neither new nor old; Buddhism is likewise so. It cannot be reformed; rather, one should speak of restoring what is original, because its original nature has already been lost. Only the methods should appropriately be adapted. One must never rigidly adhere to a single method. Since the times differ, causes and conditions also differ, and people's natures have become accustomed to restlessness. They will certainly not be willing to abide by a single method. Entering the gate of the formless is especially difficult. One should guide them through many methods, first giving rise to their interest; only afterward can one speak of the supreme vehicle.

Question: There are now two kinds of people: one restrained and rigid, the other lively and adaptable. Which of these two will attain Buddhahood first?

Answer: It is difficult to predict who will be first or last. Comparatively speaking, the restless person is more readily helped, for movement can be brought to stillness, and there are still methods for doing so. But to transform rigidity into liveliness is extremely difficult.

Question: How do good people compare with evil people?

Answer: There are differing degrees of goodness. Those who turn from evil to goodness are relatively easy to guide, because their faculties and dispositions are already lively. Evil, too, has differing degrees. Those who commit the five heinous offenses and ten evil acts are comparatively easier, because they already possess courage and discernment; they simply do not realize it. But those who are weak, opportunistic, hypocritical, and insincere are worse still than evil people; they are exceedingly difficult to help, for their illness is in the bones. It is like a person with a wasting disease, who is bound to die. The five heinous offenses and ten evil acts are like a fiery febrile illness: though dangerous, they can be cured. Yet if one does not seek treatment or take medicine, all is useless.

Question: Which people today tend to have the sharpest capacities for practice?

Answer: There are five kinds: first, those on non-Buddhist paths; second, young students; third, politicians; fourth, modern women; and fifth, people in the theatrical world. Among these, many have good faculties. Those on non-Buddhist paths are willing to endure hardship and cultivate diligently; young students are curious and courageous; politicians tend to be thoughtful; modern women do not hold rigid views concerning men and women; and performers are constantly acting onstage, so they can readily awaken to illusion. All can be shaped. Unfortunately, they are not easy to tame and guide. If they do not believe, that is all; but once they believe, they advance with great speed.

Question: Why do people who have studied Buddhism for the same number of years attain such different results?

Answer: One should not measure Buddhist study by years, but by lifetimes, for one has not planted wholesome roots merely with one Buddha or two Buddhas. In this lifetime, person A may have practiced for many years and cultivated deeply; but over many lifetimes, person B may surpass him. Therefore, later students must not be slighted. Knowing this, one should not be arrogant toward others.

Question: Can Europeans and Americans study Buddhism?

Answer: Why not? But very few can enter the formless Mahāyāna, because they place too much weight on worldly life and have excessively deep attachment to self. The French are comparatively different: they are rich in feeling, and their thought often delights in freedom and ease. Thus they have many poets and retain an abundance of ancient spirit. Their country also occupies the center of Europe, like the Yangtze River region in China. Their people are lively and deeply reflective in nature; therefore, they can study Buddhism.

Question: Buddhism is no more than essence and function. May I hear the meaning of function?

Answer: In speaking of essence, Buddhism is one; in speaking of function, it is immeasurable. The wondrous functioning of prajñā is inexhaustible. Therefore, the Buddha taught prajñā for nearly thirty years; layer upon layer, it is inexhaustible. There is scarcely a sūtra that does not teach prajñā, for function reveals essence. In the Heart Sūtra, bodhisattvas and Buddhas of the three times all rely on this. How then could sentient beings be apart from it? Yet if the mind-ground is not understood, prajñā does not open. In brief, for those learning Buddhism, this is the one matter; there is no other.

Question: The Buddha taught many sūtras and expounded many dharmas, yet both the Buddha and the patriarchs also said that not a single dharma was shown to anyone. Why?

Answer: Because all dharmas are originally empty, and they feared that students would grasp at them. Moreover, dharmas are provisional means. If one does not purify one’s dharmas, birth and death cannot be brought to an end.

Question: Although the wonder of the Chan school cannot be spoken of, can it nevertheless be expressed?

Answer: The wondrous has no form or appearance and cannot be directly pointed out and transmitted; therefore, it cannot be spoken of. To those who already know,

there is no need to speak of it; to those who do not know, speaking is of no use. Yet among those who have realized the same state, it can still be discussed.

The wonder of the Chan school lies in the single word “press.” One presses people to seek their own original, equal, and unmoving countenance. Those of sharp faculties find it as soon as they seek it; once they find it, they immediately take it up; once they take it up, they penetrate it completely without remainder. All appearances and all dharmas are, in their very substance, understood as empty and utterly purified. This is Buddhahood, with no hesitation or false modesty. The difficulty is that if one is not pressed, one does not seek, and if one does not seek, one does not see. Yet just when one is being pressed and seeking, one is already not in the original, equal, and unmoving countenance. It cannot be pressed too hard, nor too lightly; this is exceedingly difficult. Moreover, if one investigates in a dead way rather than a living way, then a person of dull faculties may fail to complete the inquiry even after thirty years.

Question: What is meant by complete faith?

Answer: To believe in the Buddha, to believe that one is oneself a Buddha, to believe that all sentient beings are Buddhas; to believe in the teacher, to believe in the Dharma, and to believe that all dharmas are empty—none of these is called complete faith. One must believe that one’s own Original Face is indeed just so; only then is it called complete faith. Then one will be willing to make one’s conduct and vows genuinely earnest and real.

Question: What is meant by cultivating the mind?

Answer: Only things that come into being and decay can be said to need “repair” (xiu,). Mind is not a thing; it has no impurity and no decay. How, then, can one speak of cultivating it? There are only delusion and awakening. Thus one can only speak of illuminating the mind. When the mind is illuminated, one’s true nature reveals itself and prajñā opens of itself. For those learning Buddhism, this is the one matter; there is no other.

Question: I certainly know that habitual tendencies are harmful, but although I clearly know this, I cannot eliminate them. This is a great human affliction. How can they be removed?

Answer: Habitual tendencies are defilements of the mind. When defilements arise in the mind, they must be removed from the mind. This need not be a cause for concern. One need only illuminate the mind and awaken awareness, using prajñā to sweep them away; then habitual tendencies naturally disappear. People today do not begin at the root. Therefore, although they may practice for many years, they ultimately have no way to deal with them. Their habitual tendencies merely cease

temporarily or are suppressed from arising; when conditions are encountered, they arise again. Students should know that illuminating the mind is the first crucial point. If one does not thoroughly resolve it in this life, then, should causes and conditions arise in a future life, one must still enter through this gate. In my earlier Annotated Elucidation of the Hidden Meaning of the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment, this principle is explained most fully and may be consulted.

Question: We know that Buddhas and sentient beings differ, but where precisely is the most essential point of difference?

Answer: Buddhas and sentient beings are not two in essence, but differ in function; they are not two in nature, but differ in mind; they are not two in consciousness, but differ in wisdom. If sentient beings can give rise to wondrous functioning in mind and transform consciousness into wisdom, they will be wholly nondual with Buddhas. It is only that their causes and conditions differ.

Question: When the mind is pure, the Buddha land is pure. How can the mind be purified?

Answer: One need only recognize what is original. The mind's impurity arises from impure views; views arise from attachment to self, and attachment becomes firm because of views. When views become habitual, thoughts of hatred and aversion naturally arise whenever something runs counter to one's own views. All kinds of afflictions arise, and the mind likewise lacks equanimity.

Purity means freedom from defilement. With such words as good and evil, one cannot avoid making distinctions, but one must never firmly grasp those distinctions. When an evil person commits evil, he is driven by circumstances; he was not originally bad. Once it becomes habitual, he regards it as natural. Yet his fundamental nature is, after all, free from impurity and decay. If I give rise to the function of wondrous contemplation and know that everything in the world is naturally thus, wisdom of equality will naturally open. For example,

my father, elder brothers, or younger members of my family may by nature be exceedingly gentle and compliant, yet on occasion drink too much and become wildly intoxicated and confused. While drunk, they may be utterly beyond reason; nevertheless, one cannot regard them as no longer being one's father or brothers, for when they sober up the next day, they fully return to their original state. People are severe in judging others and certainly will not contemplate them by analogy with fathers or brothers who are drunk. Obscured by attachment to self, they therefore find it difficult to open this wisdom of wondrous contemplation, and wisdom of equality does not arise. Seeking the root of this, it is still because the great perfect mirror wisdom of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) has not been attained. To speak of function without establishing essence, and to seek purity without

illuminating the mind—this is to invert cause and effect. How lamentable, how lamentable!

Question: What is the principle of cause and effect?

Answer: Cause and effect are an immutable law, as constant as heaven and earth. In every single matter of the world, one cannot depart from cause and effect at any step. Yet when people now speak of cause and effect, they speak only of karmic retribution, reducing its vast and immeasurable meaning to a petty and superficial principle. Is this not deeply lamentable?

Worldly affairs are tangled and people's minds are inverted. The result of war may be the deaths of tens of millions; its cause and effect may be called great, vast, hidden, and far-reaching. Yet having received such painful results, people still do not awaken. How deeply regrettable it is that cause and effect are not understood. Those who speak of cause and effect mention only the two words "karmic retribution." To seek to make people turn back by this is like trying to put out a cartload of burning firewood with a cup of water.

Moreover, those who speak of cause and effect mostly do not understand cause and effect. Those who hear what I say, even if they do not resent it, will certainly not agree with it in their hearts.

They do not know that to study Buddhism without beginning with realizing the mind is not to understand cause and effect; to seek to eliminate habitual tendencies without first seeking to open prajñā is not to understand cause and effect; to fail to realize that one is oneself a causal Buddha is not to understand cause and effect. Everything before one's eyes is cause and effect; it is plainly so, yet if I am carried away by circumstances, that is not understanding cause and effect. Attachment to self is the cause, and confusion the result. Those who do not resolutely eradicate the view of self all fail to understand

cause and effect. Those who neglect the suffering plainly before people's eyes and expect the unwary to believe in unseen future retribution have misunderstood cause and effect. No one who has not understood for themselves can enlighten another. Therefore, sentient beings do not understand cause and effect: ordinary beings fear results, the two vehicles fear causes, bodhisattvas are not confused about cause and effect, and Buddhas clearly understand cause and effect. If people do not understand cause and effect, how are they different from blind people? Students, take care not to treat cause and effect lightly.

Question: Earlier, you instructed us that many evil deeds in the world are committed by good people. I do not understand its meaning; please explain it again.

Answer: Matters such as good and evil are all established through views. When people firmly cling to a view, they do not relinquish the images in their minds. Over time, these naturally emerge, and they act accordingly. Because good people deeply detest evil deeds, the images of them are also deeply impressed and unforgettable.

For example, the various methods of cruel torture may not originally have been matters to which one gave attention, but they remain in the mind as a reaction to excessively intense good intentions. Once an opportunity arises, they emerge unconsciously. Add to this a mind that lacks equanimity and the difficulty of restraining anger in the moment, and excessive actions are bound to follow.

During the former Qing dynasty, a certain provincial governor hated evil and sought a good reputation. Within a single year, he killed more than ten thousand people, and countless were wrongfully accused. The people could not endure his cruelty. At the time, he never ceased wishing to be a good official. Little did he realize how grievous his wrongdoing was; in the end, he took his own life. Therefore, when the mind-ground is unclear, one's views are impure. Even goodness will inevitably, through repeated turns, enter into evil, because it has not been brought to ultimate completion.

Question: In the practice of Dharma, effort may be tight or relaxed, gathered in or let go. What does this mean?

Answer: Cultivation is simply training the mind and taming it, without departing from all human affairs. In applying the mind, one must sometimes be tight and sometimes relaxed. Tightness means strict vigilance, lest one become lax; relaxation means adaptability, lest one cling rigidly. Therefore, be strict with yourself and accommodating toward others. When applying a method, gather in the mind, and it is easier to advance diligently; when not applying it, let it go, and one can respond flexibly. This is what is meant by taming the mind: one seeks only to attain freedom.

Question: Why are worldly people so active by nature? Is this why those who study Buddhism seek samādhi?

Answer: On the surface, worldly people seem mostly active, but in fact they are often quite fixed in their ways. It is simply not concentration joined with wisdom, but rigid concentration. For example, everyone has a view of self to which they cling without relaxing from beginning to end, refusing even the slightest accommodation. If they were willing to be flexible, they would naturally yield, and there would be fewer disputes. World peace rests on this, and their suffering and afflictions would likewise diminish from this.

Question: Sound belongs to the ear, so why is it called contemplation? And what is the meaning of the sacred name Guanshiyin (, "One Who Contemplates the

Sounds of the World"), Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva?

Answer: Although seeing is the mind's seeing, it is not dependent on the eyes; hearing is the same. In the beginning, the Great Being awakened to the nature of hearing through the ear faculty and thereby realized the Way, hence the name. This is wisdom arising inwardly from the mind.

All sounds that are heard come from outside, enter the ear, and can then be heard; thus people suppose that the faculty of hearing belongs entirely to the ear. Yet when a thought arises in the mind, all waves of sound seem plainly present in the ear, though there is actually no external sound and nothing has entered the ear. Does this faculty of hearing lie in the mind or in the ear? Through this one awakens to the nature of mind and brings forth the wondrous function of contemplation; hence the name Guanyin.

From this arises the great compassion of universal identity with all beings: one knows that all sentient beings in the world are likewise so and all equally possess Buddha-nature. Hence the name Guanshiyin. The sentient beings of Jambudvīpa have the keenest ear faculty, and therefore have the deepest affinity with the Great Being. Moreover, Mount Potalaka lies directly south in the Indian Ocean; one cannot reach it without supernormal powers. It is not the present-day Putuo Island off the coast of eastern Zhejiang.

Question: Why are the four great bodhisattvas—Kṣitigarbha, Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, and Avalokiteśvara—distinguished as earth, water, fire, and wind?

Answer: Kṣitigarbha means one who realized the treasure of one's own mind-ground and thereby realized the Way; thus he corresponds to earth. This is realization of the Way through one's own awakening. Yet he did not forget his great vow to liberate sentient beings: "Until the hells are empty, I vow not to become a Buddha." In truth, he had long since become a Buddha. He spoke thus because he feared that people would know only self-cultivation, fail to arouse the great resolve, and be content to become arhats.

His great compassionate vow is Avalokiteśvara. Avalokiteśvara's compassion and gentleness are like water; all things depend upon water for life, and through the water of great compassion they receive benefit. Thus Avalokiteśvara corresponds to water. In chapter twelve of the Kṣitigarbha Sūtra, the Buddha says that Avalokiteśvara has a special affinity with people in the world. The meaning is to benefit oneself and others; though these are not two separate matters, the great bodhisattvas are one.

Yet this cannot be accomplished without cultivation. One must be diligent and courageous, like great firewood and a great fire, as in the conduct and vows of

Samantabhadra; thus Samantabhadra corresponds to fire. When this practice is accomplished, the rounded and wondrous functioning of prajñā is cool and lively like wind; thus Mañjuśrī corresponds to wind. When these four great bodhisattvas are united, one becomes a Buddha. The causes and conditions for becoming a Buddha never depart from these four dharmas. The quiescent essence is Buddha, while the numinous and wondrous function of prajñā is bodhisattva.

Question: What is the difference between wisdom and consciousness?

Answer: There is no difference. Wisdom is also consciousness, for without consciousness one cannot give rise to wisdom. Yet consciousness that is perfectly adaptive, skillful, and ultimate is called wisdom. Both belong to the illusory mind and ultimately do not exist. Therefore it is said, “no wisdom and no attainment,” because there is nothing to attain.

Question: What are supernormal powers?

Answer: Shen ( ) means wisdom, and tong ( ) means comprehension. When wisdom is sufficient to comprehend all things and one is not carried away by circumstances, this is called great supernormal power.

Question: Why does the Buddha possess the six supernormal powers?

Answer: Non-Buddhist paths may all possess the five supernormal powers, but they alone lack the power of the Way, because they lack wisdom. The Buddha, however, has accomplished samādhi and wisdom. He takes the six supernormal powers as the essence and the five supernormal powers as the function. Therefore, the five supernormal powers of Daoists are attained through cultivation and must eventually regress; the five supernormal powers in Buddhism are attained through realization, arising as function from the essence, and are an inexhaustible treasury.

Question: Does the Daoist aim consist exclusively in seeking bodily immortality?

Answer: Not entirely. The Daoist tradition has long been lost. Present-day Daoists have already lost the central aim of the Dao and retain only techniques, thereby moving ever farther from the Dao. Even the techniques for nourishing the body have not been fully obtained. The genuine Daoist tradition also lies in training the mind, but it reaches only the point where the myriad dharmas return to the One. Regrettably, it does not see its true nature and therefore cannot empty dharmas. If it advances one step further, it is nondual with Buddhism.

I previously wrote an article, “Origins of the Daoist Teachings,” for the future guidance of Daoist practitioners. Esoteric Buddhism also contains such techniques as liberating ghosts and treating illness. These pertain to function, not essence; in cultivation, one should first attain the essence. This is what Confucius meant by first

establishing oneself in what is fundamental. Therefore, to understand Buddhism is to understand the Dao; between them there cannot be the slightest division. Beginners are overly attached to sectarian views. At the mere mention of Daoism, they give rise to contempt. This is not the vast aspiration of Buddhadharma and cannot lead to Buddhahood.

Question: Should inner and outer paths not be distinguished?

Answer: In establishing a guiding principle for beginners, so that they do not enter mistaken paths and disrupt right cultivation, distinctions cannot originally be dispensed with. But once one understands the essence and comprehends its function, one should not retain such a view. Moreover, if one studies Buddhism without inwardly investigating the mind-ground and instead outwardly grasps at appearances, one has taken refuge in an outer path. After Patriarch Chunyang took refuge with Huanglong, he regretted the error of his former application of mind; though an adherent of an outer path, he became one of an inner path. Understanding this, what harm is there?

Question: How should the meaning of “pure yang” be understood?

Answer: It means precisely that the direct mind is the place of practice. Whenever the mind-ground is radiant and expansive, it is wholly bright yang. Once there is a view of self, one falls under the sway of yin demons. How then could one realize the Way?

Question: What is the meaning of the Greater and Lesser Vehicles?

Answer: The distinction between Greater and Lesser Vehicles is an expedient before the Dharma. Since beginners cannot receive it directly, they are guided by the Lesser Vehicle. Once the root has been understood, one should bring forth the wondrous functioning of prajñā; there is no longer any fixed dharma. The Lotus Sūtra says that there is only one vehicle, yet even this one vehicle cannot be obtained.

Question: How can someone be called a spiritual friend?

Answer: Shan (, “good”) means skillful, and zhi (, “knowing”) means knowing where a person’s root affliction lies and applying medicine to counteract it. One who liberates sentient beings through skillful means is called a spiritual friend. Such a person need not necessarily be learned; one whose apt word can inspire another is also a spiritual friend. Yet someone may be learned but lack the power of skillful and expedient means; such a person is not a spiritual friend. Confucius said, “When three people walk together, there must be one who can be my teacher.” Thus even an evil person can be my spiritual friend; it depends upon my own choice. But for

one blind in the eyes, colors may be present but cannot be seen, and this is ultimately useless. If one can see, one is oneself also a spiritual friend.

Question: Why can the Buddha not liberate those without affinity?

Answer: The word affinity is difficult indeed to explain. With those who lack affinity, one cannot impose even the slightest thing upon them. If one acts by force, there will certainly be many afflictions. When people vainly desire fame and profit but cannot obtain them, greed gives rise to anger; this too is seeking by force where there is no affinity. If a person cannot be liberated, yet a bodhisattva, out of an overzealous wish to help, presses ahead anyway, this too is not understanding causes and conditions.

One will inevitably retain subtle afflictions, for the attachment to views about dharmas has not been purified; therefore bodhisattvas are also called sentient beings. Moreover, affinity is a prior cause. If there were no prior cause, there would be no present affinity. If a person has servants, they may have served others in past lives. This need not necessarily be so, but one should possess a mind that regards people as equals; its merit and virtue are already inconceivable.

When the Buddha was a bodhisattva, there was never an affair or a moment in which he did not form affinities with people, and thus this splendid Buddha-land came to be. Therefore, to act for others is precisely to act for oneself. Foolish people refuse to form affinities with others, thinking it benefits themselves, without realizing that they are harming themselves. They are truly pitiable. Furthermore, human dealings are nothing but reciprocal. If one borrows a coin from another, one need only return a coin. But if one forms affinities with others and gives aid amid hardship, the repayment will certainly be tenfold or a hundredfold. Even if it is not repaid, a past affinity is thereby concluded, or the account is deferred to the future. Cause after cause, result after result—there is no retribution that does not come.

Question: Should worldly and supramundane dharmas be distinguished?

Answer: In terms of phenomena, they can certainly be distinguished; in terms of intrinsic nature, they cannot and should not be distinguished. Know that once the mind is stirred, one has already entered the world. If one accords with worldly affairs while the mind remains unattached and undefiled, this is called transcending the world.

Question: What is the principle of leaving home?

Answer: Because of afflictions, one may wish to leave home. A Mahāyāna practitioner does not regard children and family as home, but must take returning home as leaving home. To return home means to return to one’s originally pure and

undefiled moral nature. After realizing the mind, there are no obstructions; this is called returning home, and it is also called truly leaving home.

If one clings to purity and loathes worldly toil, one will never have a day of leaving home. The outward deportment is a means of honoring the Buddha's regulations and benefiting others expediently. Yet one must first understand the fundamental matter oneself and be capable of liberating others; it will not be too late then to manifest this deportment. If one's parents are still alive and one has not fulfilled one's filial duties as a child, the Buddha did not permit one to leave home, for among the Buddha's disciples there are no unfilial children. Even if one leaves home in body, one still fails in the duty of supporting one's parents and thereby goes against the Buddha. Moreover, one who truly realizes the mind will not have the mind stirred by noise or quiet. Once the mind is impartial and enters nonduality, such distinctions cease.

Question: Does the Buddha make distinctions?

Answer: Discrimination can be skillful or unskillful. One who discriminates skillfully is a Buddha. Yet, in the ultimate truth, the Buddha remains unmoved, for movement and stillness are one.

Question: When the Buddha went out to beg for food, is it true that some people would jokingly offer him fish or meat?

Answer: Some Hīnayāna sūtras may say so, but the Buddha would certainly accept it. The Buddha no longer has any thought of distinction between meat and vegetarian food; he sees it only as sustenance. Bodhisattvas differ slightly: they first bless the fish or meat with mantric power and then eat it. They likewise harbor no hatred or aversion toward the donor. Apart from this, one will surely give rise to resentment and arguments; that is merely keeping a vegetarian diet without necessarily cultivating a pure mind.

Question: Why must practitioners possess spiritual capacity?

Answer: In their fundamental nature, people's capacities are originally neither sharp nor dull. But because their causes and conditions differ, so do their habitual dispositions; thus there are distinctions of higher and lower. Farmers excel at farming, literary people at writing, soldiers at strategy, and craftsmen at machinery. Each has his own specialty; if placed in another's position, all would be of dull capacity. Among practitioners, those of the highest capacity are those whose mind-capacity is broad, whose perspective is lively, who are not easily disturbed or frightened by worldly affairs, and who are intelligent yet willing to be earnest and unpretentious.

Thus, selecting a practitioner is like selecting fine jade for an imperial seal. First, choose a large piece of excellent material; second, have it carved by a skilled artisan; third, polish it until smooth and lustrous; fourth, bury it in the earth to remove its fiery quality. Only then can it become a complete piece of material fit to be presented in the imperial court. Good roots are the excellence of the material; causes and conditions are encountering a skilled artisan and undergoing burial and excavation; being presented in the imperial court is merit and virtue. None of these three can be lacking, and one must possess them abundantly.

Question: What is most important in the relationship between teacher and disciple?

Answer: Conditions. A teacher in particular must understand conditions. When conditions have run their course, one must never force matters. If one does not recognize the occasion and acts against it, one will inevitably labor without gaining appreciation. Moreover, seekers of the Way must not stop with a single teacher. Sudhana visited fifty-three teachers; if one can return to the prajñā of one's own nature, those fifty-three are but one teacher. Yet this cannot be expected of beginners today.

The association of exemplary people is as light as water, for fear that conditions may come to an end. Only those who have transcended the world are not bound by this. The duration of conditions lies in principle, not in outward affairs. Affairs may be long or short, but principle is inexhaustible; worldly sentiment cannot limit it.

Question: What is meant by repaying the four benefactions above?

Answer: The four benefactions are: first, parents; second, the ruler; third, the Buddhas and devas; fourth, teachers and elders.

I believe there are four more. First, parents: like building a great house, they provide me with the ground, giving me the basic condition for first becoming human. Second, teachers and elders: the ancient sages and teachers, together with the teachers of heaven, first lay for me the eight foundations of filial piety, fraternal respect, loyalty, trustworthiness, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and shame. Third, Buddhas and bodhisattvas: because of this, the great edifice may be solemnly constructed. Fourth, sentient beings: all favorable and adverse circumstances are conditions for carving and polishing, upon which its completion depends.

These four benefactions are all equally difficult to repay. "Difficult" means that they cannot be repaid through worldly sentiment. Worldly sentiment is relative, and therefore varies in depth and comes to an end; these benefactions cannot be divided in this way. All my life I have most feared being in debt, yet this debt cannot be repaid. Though my body were shattered and my bones crushed, it would still be difficult to requite the lofty kindness of the Buddhas and teachers. Only propagating

the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings can do so. Furthermore, when ordinary people arouse the resolve to become Buddhas, the Buddhas and devas rejoice immeasurably, and they naturally receive unseen protection. Repaying the kindness of parents and sentient beings is also thereby accomplished.

Question: What is foremost, what is most important, and what is most advantageous in human life?

Answer: To attain Buddhahood is the highest, foremost, and rarest matter in human life; realizing the mind is the most important matter; and thoroughly understanding both worldly and supramundane dharmas is the most advantageous matter.

Question: What is the greatest suffering in human life?

Answer: The greatest suffering is an unsettled mind. All unrest arises from not being empty; when one is not empty, one does not know contentment. Whenever one seeks something, it necessarily arises from lack. Thus, seeking wealth is itself the appearance of poverty, and seeking rank is itself the appearance of lowliness. The Buddha seeks nothing at all, and so his merit, virtue, and nobility are beyond comparison.

People often suppose that the Buddha must reject wealth and rank, not realizing that although the Buddha does not seek them, neither does he reject them. He responds according to causes and conditions, and when they come, he does not refuse them. There were many emperors in ancient times, but only Yao and Shun were sages. Why? Because their virtue of mind was lofty beyond measure. Their ability to relinquish the empire lay precisely in the fact that, when they possessed it, they did not allow the empire to move their minds. They were unlike later people, anxious over gain and loss.

Question: Esoteric Buddhism takes the mutual support of samādhi and wisdom as fundamental. Does this mean that precepts need not be cultivated?

Answer: Of the three virtues of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, none can be lacking. Esoteric Buddhism places the greatest importance on precepts, but its manner of practice differs from that of other schools, for within samādhi and wisdom, precepts are already attained. Students should know that there are precepts at the causal stage, which keep the mind from being deluded and carried away, thereby naturally separating it from evil. There are also precepts at the stage of fruition, by which one reflects on past evil deeds and repents of them.

If samādhi is taken as the essence and wisdom as the function, and essence and function are one, the mind naturally becomes empty and quiescent. Being empty, it naturally abides in samādhi; from samādhi wisdom arises. When samādhi and

wisdom support one another, thoughts do not arise falsely, and there is no evil to guard against. This is the true precept.

While forming a mudrā, one refrains from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. This is observance of the bodily precepts. While reciting a mantra, one refrains from the four kinds of harmful speech. This is observance of the verbal precepts. When the mind does not give chase to deluded thoughts, thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance naturally cease; this is observance of the mental precepts. When the three karmic activities are cultivated together and have become pure, what evil can still appear? When evil does not exist, what use are precepts? This is the precept of non-precept and cultivation without cultivation, realized naturally and not visible to others. The Hīnayāna is partial to form and places weight on deportment; hence there are few who are genuine and many who are contrived.

Question: The method of Buddha-remembrance does not exclusively emphasize oral recitation, but how can it be brought to ultimate fulfillment?

Answer: Buddha-remembrance has several meanings. First, one orally recites the Buddha's name and knows in one's heart that there is a Buddha. Second, beginning from aspiration, reverence and praise naturally flow into oral recitation, and mind and mouth together extol the Buddha. Third, to understand Amitābha is to understand the perfection of the three kāyas; this represents the union of nature and appearances. Fourth, when one realizes the unborn essence and the function of luminosity, then in movement and stillness, speech and silence, there is nothing that is not Buddha. Only when all four are complete may it be called ultimate. If one knows only oral recitation, considers greater quantity superior, and does not practice accordingly in one's mind, that is chanting the Buddha's name, not Buddha-remembrance.

Question: What is meant by remembering without deliberately remembering, and what is meant by remembering without having to take it up anew?

Answer: Remembering without deliberately remembering means that one does not intentionally seek to recite with the mouth, yet the mind naturally remembers. To explain remembering without having to take it up anew: for one who has not realized samādhi, as soon as an external circumstance arises during remembrance, one is drawn away and the remembrance is interrupted. When one wishes to remember again, one must deliberately raise it up anew; only by sustaining it again can one remember.

One who has already realized samādhi, however, remains able to see, hear, sense, and know external circumstances as they arise during remembrance, yet is not drawn away and can continue the remembrance. Though oral recitation ceases, the mind has never shifted. No deliberate effort is needed to take it up anew. This is

continuous and unbroken; the time when it becomes continuous and undivided is not far off. Hence it is called remembering without having to take it up anew.

Question: Of Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism, which is difficult and which is easy to practice?

Answer: There is no distinction between difficult and easy. One should adapt to one's capacity and determine one's practice according to causes and conditions. Yet, if we must distinguish them, Esoteric Buddhism is comparatively easier, Chan comes next, and Pure Land is the most difficult. The simpler a method is, the less effective it is, and the more difficult attainment becomes.

On the surface, the Pure Land method merely plants good roots and is naturally easy. But if one seeks rebirth, one must attain the stage of nonretrogression. Only those who ordinarily maintain one-pointedness of mind without distraction will not be confused at the time of death. The one is cause, the other fruition; there has never been a case in which fruition could be achieved before its cause was complete.

If Pure Land is understood in its broad sense, it is the gate of attainment. Whatever school one follows, if one does not reach the Pure Land, it cannot be called attainment. Is this not difficult indeed? In the Amitābha Sūtra, the Buddha uses the word "difficult" five times, with faith the most difficult of all; from this one may know. Those who now call it easy do so in order to offer an expedient means of guidance. What I now expound is the definitive meaning, spoken for those of the highest vehicle; it is not an attempt to be different.

Question: Practitioners of the Chan school often seem wild and unrestrained, observing no precepts. Is this also based on samādhi and wisdom?

Answer: When Chan practitioners gather in their thoughts and contemplate the mind, they are precisely observing precepts. Precepts are the means for counteracting evil.

People commit evil for no more than two reasons: not knowing and delusion. Not knowing is like an infant who does not know that fire burns and grasps something hot. Delusion is knowing clearly that something should not be done, yet having one's mind seized by circumstances, so that one's own judgment is unstable and one cannot rely on oneself. Once one is awakened, there is certainly no reason to do it again. But minor faults are often taken lightly and emerge unknowingly. To counteract this, one observes precepts in order to restrain the mind.

The Chan school is a teaching of the highest vehicle, and naturally cannot be discussed on the same level as beginners. Once they have initially understood the

fundamental matter, they are like a child who has searched painfully for his mother for decades and suddenly finds her: overwhelmed with joy, he weeps, dances, and waves his arms. This is only natural, not a sickness. Moreover, Chan practitioners are constantly training the mind; at times their conduct cannot be fathomed by others, who therefore call them wild and unrestrained. They do not know that such practitioners have their own undeluded judgment. Students often fail to apply themselves and instead recklessly speculate about others' inner realization; hence this view arises.

Question: Some say that lay practitioners should not propagate the Dharma. What do they mean?

Answer: In preserving the Buddha's prescribed deportment, bhikṣus should indeed be given precedence and respect. But at the present time, bhikṣus and lay practitioners alike should feel shame, and there should be no more discriminatory disputes of this kind.

In the Buddha's teaching, Dharma is primary, not persons. The Buddha said: "When someone enters a dark and perilous path, another person guides the way with a lamp. One should not reject the guide because one deems the guide unworthy." The layman Vimalakīrti of ancient times, and the modern lay practitioners Yang Renshan and Wang Hongyuan, all propagated the Dharma. What doubt can there be? In the Hīnayāna, one cannot avoid preserving names and forms, and thus loses the truth. The decline of the true Dharma is founded precisely on this.

Take the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, for example. It is not that it is not transmitted to bhikṣus; rather, no one is willing to step forward and assume the responsibility. How can one simply stand by and ignore the matter? Moreover, very few bhikṣus investigate its most subtle and secret essentials. At present, no one with such experience has yet arisen to continue it. The elders of the various mountains are certainly worthy of respect for their virtue and reputation, but because their practices differ, their skillful means are still insufficient to awaken students to the secret essentials of this Dharma. One should uphold the principle that a worthy person does not yield responsibility to another, and not cling to such narrow views.

Question: To this day, the Buddhadharma has declined and everything has fallen into decay; this cannot be denied. Which school is in the greatest danger?

Answer: Only the Chan school is in the greatest danger. It is battered by wind and rain, like a candle guttering in the wind, because the times have changed. There are five dangers. First, within Buddhism itself there is mutual suspicion and slander; some nearly regard the Chan school alone as dispensable. Most regrettably, such words come from the mouths of Buddhists themselves. Second, there is a shortage

of qualified teachers, growing more acute by the day. In another ten or twenty years, only the outward shell of the school will remain.

Third, people find life difficult and cannot let go of everything. They may devote themselves to practice for twenty or thirty years, yet time waits for no one. Fourth, circumstances do not permit them to engage in rigidly fixed forms of practice and inquiry, while the government does not understand the importance of this Dharma and does not promote it. Without exceptional causes and conditions, it will ultimately be difficult to sustain. Fifth, those within the school do not know how to adapt their methods of guiding others even slightly. The worms within the lion's body devour the lion's own flesh—how lamentable!

Question: How can Buddhism become widespread?

Answer: Making it widespread is extremely difficult. In matters of education, society entrusts everything to schools and entirely abandons its own responsibility. It would be better, as in the countryside, to transmit teachings orally: fathers passing them to sons, and sons to grandsons. Simple and concise, they become unshakable; the national spirit lies latent therein.

Once social customs changed, the people's morality grew weaker by the day and the very foundations of the human mind were shaken. The rich became licentious, extravagant, and indolent; the middle class became mean and petty; ordinary people became deceitful and domineering. They could not distinguish what was weighty from what was trivial, right from wrong was inverted, status was determined by profit, and integrity and shame were lost. This is what most directly runs counter to Buddhism and is most deeply troubling.

You should know that all worldly education concerning human affairs is itself Buddhadharma. It depends upon government advocacy. At the very least, talent and virtue should be given equal weight in selecting people, and education should take precedence over political affairs. Politics was originally intended to supplement what education could not accomplish; education was not intended to assist politics.

If Buddhism is to become widespread, more Buddhist textbooks should be compiled. In all novels and films, the principle of cause and effect should be extensively elucidated, and materials that teach theft and licentiousness should be strictly prohibited. In this way, the foundations of Buddhism may be deeply planted, and over time people will naturally be assimilated. After this great world disorder, various reactions have appeared: military force cannot be relied upon, and might will ultimately not prevail over justice. Gradually, people will turn back and change course; then the Buddhadharma will naturally flourish and become widespread. Yet this also depends upon the advocacy of those who are committed to it.

Question: After people die, foil spirit money and similar offerings are burned. Some call this superstition, while others say it is useful. Which view should be chosen?

Answer: After death, a person's thoughts are primary. If such things exist in that person's consciousness and the person believes in them, then they are effective for that person. If the person did not believe in them during life, burning them is of no use whatsoever. But if the person believes them useful, that person will naturally desire and take them. Moreover, if after death the person enters the realm of ghosts and spirits, such things are often needed; otherwise, they are of no use.

In short, such practices arise entirely from the mutual greed for wealth held during life; fundamentally, they are superstition. Yet it is superstition during life, not superstition arising after death. Those whose understanding of principle is clear do not enter the ghost realm, nor do they delight in such illusory objects. As for the paper money used by the living, how does it differ from foil spirit money? At one moment it is usable; at another it is invalid. All turns according to the illusory mind. When one sees worthless banknotes, one should no longer ridicule foil spirit money.

Question: The Great Being hears sounds and relieves suffering, rescuing beings from their painful results. Why, then, are there still so many sufferings and afflictions in the world that do not receive such aid?

Answer: The teachings bestowed by Buddhas and bodhisattvas are meant to enable sentient beings to understand for themselves that the causes of suffering all arise from the mind. When the mind is clear, one is no longer deluded; evil karma is naturally eliminated, and painful results naturally cease. If people create their own karma, even the Buddha can do nothing about it.

As for hearing sounds and relieving suffering, this is the Great Being's compassionate power of vows. Yet a person must single-mindedly invoke the name and sincerely take refuge in order to resonate with it. At the very moment of single-mindedly invoking the name, one is wholly wholesome; a wholesome mind cannot resonate with evil deeds. Thus one can be spared suffering and hardship.

Moreover, when people suffer hardship, it is the result of past causes. If they cannot accept and endure it peacefully, but instead blame Heaven and resent others, they make difficulties still more difficult, add further evil karma, and turn present causes into future results. Then suffering has no end. Furthermore, hearing sounds and relieving suffering is a temporary power of skillful means. It can also cause those who see or hear of it to give rise to faith, take refuge in the Buddha, follow the Buddha's teaching, heed causes and cut off evil, return to the right path, and attain good results.

The reason there is so much suffering in the world today is that people ordinarily have too little faith and, when the moment comes, do not even give rise to thoughts of repentance. How could they resonate with the Buddha? It is not that they fail to receive the Great Being's compassionate aid.

Question: The sūtras speak of the four reliances and four non-reliances: rely on the Dharma, not on persons; rely on meaning, not on words; rely on wisdom, not on consciousness; rely on definitive meaning, not on nondefinitive meaning. Can this be regarded as a final conclusion?

Answer: Meaning is itself not fixed; a conclusion is therefore not meaning. Reliance and non-reliance alike belong to illusory dharmas.

To rely on the Dharma rather than persons is said with respect to teachers. In Buddhism, the Dharma is paramount. If what a person transmits is the Tathāgata's true Dharma, one should rely upon the Dharma and need not inquire into the person's character. Even if that person's conduct has shortcomings, this concerns the individual and has nothing to do with the true Dharma. One must not reject the Dharma because of the person and thereby mislead oneself.

To rely on meaning rather than words means that, when reading sūtras, one must not rigidly cling to the wording. Translations differ in style, copying may contain scribal errors, and the meanings of characters have changed from ancient times to the present. One should focus on the central meaning of the entire sūtra and comprehend it as a whole. Do not cling to a single phrase, character, sound, or sentence.

For example, in the Diamond Sūtra, the phrase reads: "Past-life karmic offenses will thereby be eliminated, and one shall attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi." Judging by the wording alone, the character dāng ( ) in "shall attain" may be read in the level tone, meaning "ought to." But when one penetrates the wondrous meaning of prajñā—where there are no appearances of time, before or after, coming or going—it is so at this very moment, and it should be read as dàng, with the departing tone. This is relying on meaning.

To rely on wisdom rather than consciousness means that worldly people drift with consciousness and vainly create much suffering and affliction. If they rely on wisdom, however, the wise are not deluded. The distinction between sages and ordinary beings lies precisely here. To rely on definitive meaning rather than nondefinitive meaning means that in Buddhadharma one values ultimate attainment. Nondefinitive teachings are skillful means, whereas definitive teachings are thoroughgoing. Once one knows which is ultimate, the distinction becomes self-evident.

These are the four meanings. Yet they are not definitive meanings either, but still belong to skillful discourse. I believe that, with regard to Dharma, one should also rely on persons: if one transmits a teaching to an unsuitable recipient, follows an unsuitable teacher, or rashly bestows it on someone whose faculties are unsuited, this is a mistake on both sides. This is the first point that must be understood comprehensively.

Sūtras certainly give priority to meaning, but words are meaning and meaning is words. It depends on one's living understanding, not on forcibly dividing words from meaning. If one penetrates, one penetrates everything; if one does not penetrate, then even the most complete and profound principle expressed in both wording and meaning will never be integrated. This is the second point that must be understood comprehensively.

Wisdom and consciousness are neither one nor two. Without consciousness, wisdom cannot arise. Foolish people do not understand this and divide them into two, seeking wisdom apart from consciousness. Where could they begin? From the Buddha's perspective, wisdom and consciousness are nondual and cannot be forcibly separated. This is the third point that must be understood comprehensively.

Definitive meaning is certainly ultimate, but even "ultimate" is only a provisional name and in the end cannot be obtained. To take skillful means as ultimate is to say that all dharmas are like illusions. Once one understands skillful means, one sees that no method is inherently suitable or unsuitable. In this way its meaning is complete. This itself is definitive meaning.

Nondefinitive meaning is meaning that has not been exhausted. Definitive meaning, though its meaning may be exhausted, is ultimately still unobtainable. When one reaches the unobtainable, there is no longer any so-called definitive or nondefinitive meaning. This is the fourth point that must be understood comprehensively. Worldly people rigidly cling to their own views and insist that the Buddha's teachings must never be altered or changed. They do not realize that the Buddha precisely wants sentient beings to transform and use things skillfully. Not only should they use things skillfully; they must not cling to them.

Even the Tathāgata's Dharma must not be clung to, much less my own teaching. In this way, the illness will naturally be cured. It is like a physician prescribing medicine to cure an illness: once the illness is gone, if the medicine remains, it becomes another illness; thus even the medicine must be discarded. The thoroughness and completeness with which this prevents abuses, and the vast compassion of its intent, are truly inconceivable. If one does not understand it well, one truly fails the Buddha's painstaking concern. Be careful!

Question: Good Buddhist books are widely printed and distributed free of charge by people who have aroused the resolve. Although such efforts at broadly transforming beings are undertaken, believers remain very few. Why?

Answer: The worldly contempt for Buddhadharma lies precisely in this problem. Worldly people focus exclusively on outward appearances. Booksellers charge several yuan or jiao for books that teach theft and licentiousness, yet books of such importance can be obtained without spending a cent; thus contempt naturally arises.

Now one must proceed in the opposite way. Anyone who has truly aroused the resolve will not begrudge this small expense. Because they have paid for it, they will not ignore it or casually discard it, but will instead read it attentively and be drawn ever more deeply into it. Moreover, books must not be too thick, lest people see them and become intimidated at once. Therefore, methods for liberating beings must also adapt to the times; there is no fixed Dharma.

Question: Why have Buddhist bhikṣus declined to this extent, and how can the situation be remedied?

Answer: Bhikṣus are unsurpassed persons and exemplars for humans and devas; how can they be lightly regarded? Critics attribute the fault to the bhikṣus themselves, and this cannot be denied. But those who uphold the Dharma should not simply sit and starve to death. Bhikṣus have scarcely enough time to save themselves from death; how could they have time to propagate the Dharma? Their conducting of sūtra and repentance services is a means of livelihood.

The government first treated Buddhism lightly and did not even protect its existing property. As for bhikṣus who guard such property, the best use it to restore stūpas and halls; those of middling conduct use it to maintain halls and quarters open to the monastic community and accommodate visiting monastics; those below this use it to meet social obligations and send gifts to patrons during festivals; and those still worse embezzle it to procure wine and meat. Thus they have declined to a truly distressing state.

If only those with influence could change these customs and correct these abuses, there might be some hope of remedy. This depends upon reforming social institutions. For example, when making offerings to bhikṣus and performing merit for the deceased, people should not seek the bustle of sūtra services, repentance rites, bells, and drums. Rather, they should value lectures and explanations of the sūtras, invite monastics to take the teaching seat, and make generous offerings. This benefits the deceased and enables bhikṣus to respect themselves. Bhikṣus who cannot read the sūtras or understand Buddhist principles will then naturally be eliminated, and true talent will emerge.

The government should first take the lead in promoting this, while strictly prohibiting monastic participation in such activities as funeral processions, so as to respect the dignity of monastics. The bhikṣu precepts especially require attention. The public must first understand what bhikṣus truly are and what it means to propagate the Buddhadharma: bhikṣus are not useless people, and Buddhism is not superstition. It benefits not only the deceased but also the living.

Schools, too, may invite bhikṣus to give lectures. If there is mutual respect, the ways of the world and the human heart may naturally be greatly transformed. The difficulty is that, in recent decades, the government has had no leisure even for major social undertakings; any discussion of reform among bhikṣus would be laughed at as impractical and remote. Alas!

Question: What is courage that exceeds all limits?

Answer: It means taking the highest standard as one's model. People commonly begin diligently and end in indolence. Unless one exceeds one's limits, one will inevitably retreat midway, just as in a military offensive one must advance without looking back.

For beginners, earnestness and urgency are primary: one must only press forward and never retreat. Once the fundamental point has become clear, the more resolute the better. One's understanding must be thorough; not the slightest vagueness is permissible. It is like opening a door: it must be opened fully, with no indulgence. Yet once one has entered the proper path of practice, one should not be impatiently eager for quick results. Use perseverance to maintain constancy; when conditions are ripe, accomplishment will naturally come. These are the four key instructions: advance boldly, be resolute, persevere, and wait. Jing ( ) means single-mindedness; jin ( ) means not retreating. The gate of pāramitā is nothing more than this.

Question: From beginning practice to attainment, there are naturally stages. What, then, is the most difficult?

Answer: There are only two difficult points: the beginning and the end. At the beginning, one must first grasp one's original nature. It is like splitting bamboo: the first joint is the hardest to open. Not only must it be split open, but it must be split straight and not crooked. At the end, when one reaches the most subtle and minute level, things are easily confused together. A white egret and white snow cannot be distinguished at a glance, yet they are absolutely different.

Comparing these two, the beginning is still more difficult. For failure to break through the final barrier still arises from not having thoroughly recognized the root. Therefore, from first study until attainment, one must at every moment hold fast to the two Chinese characters (“originally”). If one's Original Face is unclear, every

kind of difficulty arises from this. It is like learning a Western language: if one is not familiar with the alphabet and pronunciation, the more one learns, the greater the difficulties become. Students often neglect what seems minute, not realizing that this single point is of the utmost importance.

Question: At what point in practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma may one serve as a teacher?

Answer: Finding a teacher is difficult; recognizing a teacher is even more difficult; and being a teacher is more difficult still. This is so in every school. If one lacks the necessary qualifications, one must on no account mislead others lightly. Most seats in hell are prepared for false teachers. A teacher need not deliberately be a false teacher to be one: if what one has learned is incomplete, if one cannot skillfully guide others, and if disciples who receive the teaching consequently go astray halfway into a wrong path, then that teacher is a false teacher.

If what is taught is entirely correct but the student does not listen and thereby misleads himself, the teacher is not at fault. The qualifications of a teacher are like provisions that one has first received and used oneself, and then gives to others. These qualifications are as follows: first, the fundamental ground of mind must be clearly understood, and one must thoroughly comprehend causes and effects without remainder. Second, one must clearly understand each major essential point of the Dharma and thoroughly discern its benefits and drawbacks.

Third, all dharmas are equal; one must absolutely not hold sectarian views. Fourth, one must not be moved by fame, reputation, gain, or support; freedom from concern for fame is especially important. Fifth, one must know that all things belong to causes and conditions, and not force anything in the slightest or act contrary to circumstances. Sixth, the mind must always be even; do not slight beginners while valuing those with influence and power.

Seventh, one must recognize a student's capacities; this is most essential. One must know which dharma gate should be taught to the person, for this is teaching suited to the recipient. One must examine the person's circumstances, appearance, blessings, and so forth; investigate what practices the person cultivated in the past, why they were not suitable, and the causes of any ailments; remove longstanding ailments; warn the person what difficulties or doubts may arise at particular stages of practice and cause regression; and observe the student's

disposition in order to explain things skillfully. One must observe the extent of the person's faith in oneself, whether the causes and conditions that brought the person to seek the Dharma are proper and earnest, and so forth. All these matters must be attended to one by one. Only one who can do this is fit to be a teacher.

Question: There is originally no fixed method for teaching the Dharma, but within this absence of fixed methods, can its essential points be shown?

Answer: Is there truly a fixed method for teaching the Dharma? No. Physicians have no fixed method for treating patients. The physician places emphasis on results, whereas the Dharma places emphasis on causes. Though there is no fixed method, there are roughly several kinds. Here is an outline:

First, there are two ways of teaching the Dharma: affirmative exposition and negative exposition. Affirmative exposition states something directly. For example, when a flavor is salty, one simply calls it salty. Negative exposition says that it is not bland; if it is not bland, then it is salty. Affirmative exposition enables direct understanding; negative exposition causes reflection. The aim is always clear and lucid understanding. This is the purpose of teaching the Dharma.

Second, the purpose of teaching the Dharma is compassion. Because of compassion, one should focus on whether the other person can understand, rather than calculating whether one's own exposition is refined or crude, elaborate or concise. Yet if one wishes the other person to awaken, one must first discern where the person fails to awaken and why. Begin by speaking at some distance from the topic, broadening the scope, opening the person's mind, and stimulating their spiritual responsiveness. Use various analogies, then return to the main subject. The listener will naturally enter into it; once interest is aroused, it will not be forgotten.

Third, teaching the Dharma is like a physician prescribing medicine: one must see clearly where the other's root illness lies, seize hold of it firmly, and not allow escape. Press forward layer by layer, questioning until there is no room for evasion. Even if complete understanding has not yet been attained, more than half the work is done.

Fourth, people of subtle and deep thought inevitably cling stubbornly to their own views and are often argumentative. If one accommodates and follows them, they will only become more tightly entangled, stray farther from the subject, and become harder to address. The deeper their attachment to views, the less their old views are removed and the more new arrogance arises; neither is beneficial. It is better not to engage them, but to wait for the right moment in their condition. When an opportunity appears, seize it firmly; do not let it go lightly, nor allow them to slip away. If question A has not been answered, do not permit them to introduce a new branch of discussion and turn to question B; then they will more readily comply.

Fifth, when someone asks about what is great, I first answer with what is small; when someone asks about purity, I instead ask about impurity. This is not deliberately to appear unusual, but only to awaken their ears and eyes.

Sixth, not answering a question is also an answer. Yet it is useful only when the person already understands half of it.

Seventh, there are several kinds of people to whom one should not lightly teach the Dharma: first, confused people; second, those who are mentally distracted; third, those of higher social position than oneself; fourth, those whose faith in oneself is not yet firm; fifth, those still intensely attached to another teaching; sixth, one should not speak exclusively with one person amid a large crowd; seventh, those whose level is too low for meaningful communication; eighth, young women; and ninth, bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs.

Eighth, for one skilled in teaching the Dharma, there is nowhere that is not Dharma teaching. The most difficult is teaching without speaking. If I teach without speaking and the other person does not understand, merely giving rise to doubt, what then? So-called teaching without speaking is the teaching of the Dharma in walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, laughing, and dealing with others. This is the highest vehicle of Dharma teaching. Yet those who do not understand can only doubt, fear, slander, and curse.

Ninth, among forms of Dharma teaching, teaching without speaking is the most difficult and easily invites slander. One must practice the pāramitā of patience. Moreover, one who teaches the Dharma of equality and nonduality cannot teach it merely with words. If others are willing to inquire with an open mind, they too can naturally enter into nonduality.

Tenth, pratyekabuddhas have always been moved by causes and conditions and awakened through circumstances; they are capable of hearing the Dharma of teaching without speaking.

Eleventh, if one teaches the Dharma while trying to please everyone and win praise, one's original intention is for oneself; then there is no need to teach the Dharma and liberate others. For if one attends to this, one will necessarily lose that. In the highest vehicle, the standpoints differ: I would rather guide one person to unsurpassed attainment than guide ten thousand to arhatship. Those who hear me say this will surely be shocked and aghast. Such people of inferior wisdom are not fit to be told of the nondual Dharma of the highest vehicle.

Therefore, in practicing the Dharma, faith is primary. One must not only trust the teacher's words, but also trust the teacher's conduct. This also depends on the teacher's confidence in himself. If, on examining himself, he finds that his conduct is sufficient to uphold this, he need not seek others' approval or disapproval.

In Chan koans, Mañjuśrī raises a sword against the Buddha; Nanquan cuts a cat in two; a bhikṣuṇī's hand is stroked before the assembly; and an old woman has her

maid probe a bhikṣu’s realization. In all such cases, the persons involved truly possessed the power of self-mastery, had completely entered equality and nonduality, and had forgotten subject and object. But if the other party cannot bear it, and for some small matter runs about in alarm and amazement, crying, “Demon!”—how can such a person be fit to discuss the Dharma, or to trust my teaching without speaking? Alas, alas!

Twelfth, if one who hears the Dharma can hear the Dharma of teaching without speaking, that person is not far from thorough awakening. If one can subtly observe the teacher's words and actions, consider them together, investigate them, and never relax vigilance for a moment, then the sealing of mind to mind between teacher and student is also not far away. Among fellow students, most treat the teacher as a protective talisman, a temporary consultant, a school instructor to be discarded after advancing to the next grade, or someone who helps devise solutions. Alas, how difficult it is to find a kindred spirit. Those who gain benefit from me often engage only in verbal discussion, practicing in fits and starts. No wonder their great capacity and great function are difficult to awaken.

Thirteenth, whatever worldly people regard as unequal is precisely the supramundane Dharma of equality. Apart from theory, how can the Dharma of equality be spoken of or manifested within actual circumstances?

Fourteenth, what is this? It is that which even a thousand sages do not recognize. If even a thousand sages do not recognize it, how could ordinary people recognize the subtle and wondrous great function that arises from it? Not recognizing its workings, they can only be startled, doubtful, fearful, flee in alarm, slander, and curse. Therefore, one who has truly awakened must at least have endured several occasions on which worldly people cursed him as a demon, or several occasions of flattery and praise, while remaining solemn and unmoved. Only then may one perhaps allow that he has entered the immovable ground.

Fifteenth, blows and shouts were expedient means used by the ancients for a particular time. If it is not the right person, not the right time, or one lacks the proper qualifications, they must never be used indiscriminately. Everything depends on suitability to the person's capacity.

Sixteenth, the capacity to endure slander is exceedingly difficult. First consider the matter, then consider the person. Abuse from petty people need not be taken seriously; contempt from persons of integrity is cause for concern. Yet persons of integrity will certainly reflect upon themselves, examining the cause for which they were criticized, determining where the fault truly lies, and investigating it carefully. This, too, is one's own Dharma teaching.

Seventeenth, when teaching the Dharma to others, never be concerned with oneself; otherwise, one is speaking of oneself, not teaching the Dharma. Empty all that one possesses, and do not cling in the least to views of self and others. Speak in accordance with one's nature and teach according to the person's capacity. Treat it as ordinary everyday conversation, honestly and sincerely. Have no mind of victory or defeat, and no mind of gain or loss. If it is understood, there is no need for joy; if one cannot persuade the person to turn around, there is no need for irritation.

If you instruct your children by this Dharma, none will fail to become worthy; if you treat friends by this Dharma, none will fail to be understanding. The most difficult thing is that it must suit the person, the occasion, and the circumstances. When it cannot be rushed, wait until next year to speak of it; when it cannot be delayed, seize the opportunity at once and do not let go. Though it may seem like play, everywhere is solemn adornment; though it may seem unintentional, everywhere is true reality. Let the mind be like drifting clouds and flowing water, and let words rise like solitary peaks. To grasp it is like grasping the bright moon over the sea or the trace of a bird in the sky. Why is this so? Because all dharmas are originally marked by emptiness, and because one does not grasp at appearances. Therefore it is called speaking thus.

18. When teaching the Dharma, the first necessity is boldness, with freedom from thoughts of gain and loss as the basis. Second, one must regard all else as empty and view oneself as equal to the Buddha, while looking upon those below as students in a class. The mind should be peaceful and still, and one’s bearing composed. Slowly survey the assembly, then begin to speak. First gather them through one’s presence; next stir their potential; then respond with words; and finally conclude in stillness.

To gather them through one’s presence means bringing the minds of the scores or hundreds above and below into one. When their minds are settled in one, their ears become keen and their eyes clear, and their potential opens of itself. I then guide and encourage them according to their potential, and only afterward speak, responding with words. When the words are finished, all is empty discourse; ultimately, there is empty stillness. It must not be grasped again so as to give rise to attachment to dharmas. Therefore this is called concluding in stillness: stopping at the ground of original empty stillness.

19. If one teaches the Dharma with thoughts of gain and loss, great potential will not arise; how, then, can great functioning appear before one? One need only be ordinary and natural, clearly recognize the root, remain attentive in every situation, and seek familiarity. When familiarity becomes complete, one’s functioning becomes broad; when it is broad, one naturally becomes great. Wherever one encounters circumstances, there is potential. Whether advancing or withdrawing, slow or swift,

nothing is impossible. There has never been anyone capable of great functioning whose great potential did not open. To be capable of great functioning is itself great potential; potential and functioning are two yet one. The difference lies only between limiting oneself and not limiting oneself. One limits oneself through habitual tendencies; this is because the views of self, subject, and object have not yet been forgotten.

20. When teaching the Dharma, one cannot avoid having certain reservations. For example, one may avoid political matters for fear of harming the times, or prominent persons may be present who will not accept direct speech, giving rise to many such concerns. These are of no benefit in practical matters and instead harm one's intention. One should prepare in advance and set them aside beforehand; then they will naturally have no bearing. In short, teaching the Dharma is of two kinds: teaching an assembly and teaching an individual. The appropriate potential differs in each case.

Question: What is the power of gathering?

Answer: This is difficult to put into words; you will know for yourself in the future. What is meant by gathering is the power to inspire and transform. It depends solely on the virtue of utmost sincerity—radiant, upright, candid, empty, and pure. It is not expressed in words, but lies in the cultivation of one's presence; it is not something of the moment, but of everyday life. Dignity arises from virtue, and the power to gather comes through samādhi. This is a natural power.

Question: What is the difference between the five powers and karmic force?

Answer: Both are called force because their essence is the same, but their functions differ, and therefore their names differ. Moreover, forces belong to different categories. Though they are of one family, they are distinguished as higher and lower. Yet the sūtras say, "These dharmas are equal, without higher or lower." When one returns to the original ground, there is naturally equality; being equal, how could there be higher or lower? In terms of function, distinctions are not absent; in terms of essence, they do not exist. Neither empty nor existent—this is true equality.

Furthermore, "equality upon equality" means that equality itself still remains within contrast; ultimately, even equality cannot be obtained. Hence, "equality upon equality." Here lies the exceedingly subtle point, and the point at which power is greatest. Do not pass over it carelessly. Moreover, power cannot be measured by quantity: the subtler it is, the greater its power. Thus the power of earth is inferior to the power of water; the power of water is inferior to the power of fire; the power of fire is inferior to the power of wind; the power of wind is inferior to the power of

mind; and the power of mind is inferior to the power of emptiness. This is why the power of gathering is difficult to measure.

Question: May practitioners read novels and similar books?

Answer: Those who cultivate the Chan school or the Heart-of-Heart Dharma should read the novel Journey to the West. It contains an allegorical account of the course of cultivation, exceedingly subtle and profound. In the summer of 1933, while staying in the south, I used this novel as a textbook for lectures and clarified the Mind-Ground Dharma. Those who heard it became quite interested. Unfortunately, the commentators did not understand the author's intention and thus failed his painstaking efforts.

Question: May practitioners drink alcohol?

Answer: Alcohol is included among the five precepts, but what is prohibited is selling alcohol, drinking to excess, or urging others to drink. If one drinks oneself without excess, there is no great obstacle. Bhikṣus differ from lay practitioners in this regard. Alcohol is not intrinsically evil: among the five precepts, killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech are the primary evils, while alcohol is a contributing condition. For those whose roots of evil have not been removed, they are like explosives stored within, and alcohol is the fuse: at a touch, they ignite. Therefore it is included among the precepts.

Selling alcohol, urging others to drink, and drinking to excess all foster conditions for evil, and therefore are included among the precepts. Bhikṣus serve as models for others and should naturally set an example for beginners; therefore alcohol is included among their precepts.

According to the Mind-Ground Dharma, drinking alcohol is not itself a transgression; rather, letting alcohol "drink you" is a transgression. What does it mean to drink alcohol? If I am the one drinking the alcohol, then drinking is permissible and not drinking is also permissible. I do not rejoice because it is present or become annoyed because it is absent. I am not bound by alcohol. This is drinking being under my control.

What does it mean for alcohol to drink one? Worldly people crave alcohol as though it were life itself; whenever they drink, they must become drunk. Their joy and anger turn with alcohol, and they cannot control how much they drink. Or they see others drinking and give rise to aversion. This is being controlled by alcohol. Here lies the distinction between sages and ordinary beings. Therefore, alcohol may be drunk, but need not be drunk; nor need one insist on not drinking it. Dharma has no fixed dharma, and one must not be rigidly attached. If one falls into the category of seeking a reputation and considers oneself superior, one has again broken the

precept against false speech. Thus, among the five precepts, the precept against false speech is the most difficult and subtle to uphold.

Question: Giving is the gateway to practice. If someone possesses millions in assets but, when disaster relief is needed, will not part with a single cent, how should this be contemplated in the Buddhadharma?

Answer: There is nothing remarkable about it, for each has his own causes and conditions. Those who possess wealth and assets have what is called worldly blessings; without causes and conditions, these cannot come about. Cause means that in past lives they were generously disposed, often gave others assistance and made offerings, and thus formed many affinities—just as a farmer first sows seed before cultivating a field.

Condition means that, life after life, they are born into wealthy families, where many conditions converge and enterprises are easily brought to success. In addition, they are able to preserve their wealth and manage it well. Thus those who possess millions in assets in this life have separate causes and conditions for becoming wealthy; this has nothing to do with other matters.

Disaster relief is another matter. Whether they are willing to form such an affinity is up to them. Even if they will not part with a single cent, one should not be surprised or condemn them. Still less should one believe that they must make donations. To punish them merely because they are wealthy—how does this differ in nature from a robber's extortion? This is profoundly unequal.

Therefore, those who solicit donations should give rise to an impartial mind and show the same respect to rich and poor alike. Those who are wealthy should understand that their prosperity in this life results from having sown seeds in past lives. If they wish to preserve wealth and honor for a long time, disaster relief in the present is an opportunity for them to sow seeds. Such a field of blessings is rare. Without waiting for solicitations and earnest appeals, they will make offerings of their own accord.

Nevertheless, dispositions differ. The poor are sometimes generous, while the wealthy may instead be extremely miserly. They are content with the wealth of a single lifetime, which ends with their own death. Such short-sightedness is truly pitiable.

There are also people who pride themselves on understanding Buddhist principles and say that, compared with Dharma giving, material giving is not worth even one part in hundreds of millions. "I should encourage people to recite the Buddha's name," they say, "and need not give even a cent." In this way they fulfill their wish not to part with a single cent. This invites the inverted retribution of lowly rebirth in

future lives. The Western Pure Land is a place requiring great roots of goodness, blessed virtues, and causes and conditions, a place complete with the three virtues. Such people are certainly unfit for rebirth there.

Moreover, Dharma giving does not depart from material giving, for material wealth itself is Dharma. The meaning of giving lies in the single word “relinquish.” Those able to relinquish the view of self are the most blessed people in the world. When encountering those who refuse to give, do not give rise to aversion, nor need you pity them; it only gives rise to affliction in yourself.

Question: Throughout your own life, how did you apply yourself to practice?

Answer: This differs according to each person’s causes and conditions. At first, I did not know it myself. From childhood I received family instruction and devoted myself to the two Chinese characters (“equality”). My late father, Mr. Xinfu, left office because he upheld what was right, while my late mother, Madam Jiang, treated others with kindness and harmony. Thus, from childhood, I had some understanding of the principle that poverty and wealth, nobility and lowliness, are nondual, though I did not know that this secretly accorded with the Buddhadharma. Later, although I passed through every walk of life, I always felt that none was ultimate.

When I encountered my refuge master, Venerable Xiaguang, I began to study Buddhism with deep earnestness, anxious that I might fall behind. Although I had not yet realized the mind-ground, I already knew that I could not limit myself to a single school. Later, when I attended Acharya Dayu and received the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma, I first understood the essential principles of the original mind-ground Dharma.

In the winter of 1930, I abandoned the method of seated meditation and devoted myself to training amid human affairs. In recent years, I have responded to circumstances as they arise, without seeking achievement or profit, and have only made daily progress in the power of emptiness. I often advise practitioners: to understand the root, investigate the essential point of mind; to remove habitual tendencies, train amid human affairs.

The point from which I have drawn strength throughout my life lies in a single saying of my teacher: “When empty, one is naturally settled.” Later I realized that the practice of emptiness requires applying oneself to the four “do nots” ( ) in the Analects. Do not fear habitual tendencies; fear only not understanding the original ground. Do not fear māras; fear only not being aware yourself. Do not fear that practice and realization are incomplete; fear only being unwilling to wait. Do not fear difficulty in entering nonduality; fear only that the mind lacks equanimity.

Let the mind constantly be empty; let one's bearing constantly be even; let one's intention constantly be detached. The five faculties and five powers are all undertaken where one does not force effort, and accomplished where one has no doubt. Whoever is willing to be empty, still, and luminously aware is not far from Buddhahood. If even the Dharma of empty, still, luminous awareness is emptied, that is Buddhahood itself. Such practice lies wholly in burying one's head and working hard for oneself; it cannot be seen by others. Therefore do not seek others' understanding, nor rashly judge others, saying, "This person has awakened; that person has entered the realm of māras." Such talk is no different from proclaiming that oneself has awakened and has not entered the realm of māras, and it is often laughed at by those with understanding.

Question: Why do practitioners sometimes turn back midway, or practice for a long time without benefit?

Answer: It is due to an error at the outset. Yet it is not exactly an error; rather, the order of where effort is applied has been reversed. Reciting sūtras, Buddha-recitation, seated meditation, and such practices are borrowed methods, like sowing seeds, irrigating, and weeding in farming. Before one understands where the ground lies, one merely relies on empty words and naturally has no interest. One has never truly begun to move forward, so there can be no question of turning back midway. Therefore, in guiding practitioners, one should take realizing the mind-ground as primary: first establish the guiding principle, then use the methods as supporting conditions.

Question: The Chan school and the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma both return to this same source; this is what is called the single gate of nirvāṇa. But may we hear how the Original Face is realized?

Answer: Those who do not begin with contemplating the mind will find it difficult to awaken to and see the Original Face. First contemplate: before a single thought arises, what is the scene? Next contemplate: at this very moment when I am able to contemplate, what is the scene? Then contemplate: when neither I nor this contemplation arises, what is the scene? Does even the slightest thought remain?

Now, when there is not the slightest thought, the mind is utterly empty and the breath is even and calm. At this time there are no thoughts discriminating good from evil. The slightest deliberate attention falls into indeterminate blankness. Such blankness is a form of presence, equivalent to having thoughts; for it leads into biased emptiness. The reaction from biased emptiness, if it does not fall into dullness, turns into restlessness, and confusion will arise again.

When not a single thought arises, all the varied forms before one's eyes are direct perception; seeing and hearing are perfectly clear. Quiet and still, it is neither good

nor evil, nor is it indeterminate blankness. It is neither dull nor asleep; open and vast, without thoughts. What exactly is this state? This is of the utmost importance.

At times, when circumstances arise and the mind is stirred, one responds to them as usual, distinguishing according to the matter at hand without being carried away. It is like a kite on a string: though it moves forward and back, left and right, there is another, fundamental hold upon it. It is also like going to market for pleasure: although one wanders about without fixed direction, one never forgets the familiar road home, yet does not deliberately think of home. Whether the journey is long or short, one comes and goes without obstruction. This is inferential discrimination, yet also a state of direct perception.

Having seen through the original nature, one is not deluded into views of self by favorable or adverse, still or active circumstances; nor does one deliberately indulge oneself on account of being able to remain undeluded. Not a moment passes without applying the mind, yet not a moment is there any deliberate application of mind. Innocently unaware, yet clearly aware and knowing; neither arising nor not arising; vast and unattached; still yet unbroken, aware yet without any object seen. It seems as though one's intention were firm and resolute, but if asked what that intention is, one does not know what to say.

It is like a martial artist who forgets that he possesses the strength of a thousand catties. This is to enter constant illumination through contemplation, and still illumination through constant illumination. This power turns freely beneath one's feet, yet one does not know where the power comes from.

Each day, activate contemplation. Beginners should do so at least dozens of times. The more earnest and urgent one is, the more often one does it, until it continues even in dreams. Over time, one naturally does not forget.

The power not to forget has two sources. First, it comes from repeated practice; it arises from wisdom. Second, it comes from having practiced much seated meditation before, perhaps without realizing that one is gaining strength at this time; it arises from samādhi. In fact, samādhi and wisdom are inseparable, not two things. Midway through practice, one repeatedly advances and retreats, one knows not how many times. At such times, one must not give rise to doubt, for impatience, competitiveness, suspiciousness, acquisitiveness, and all manner of habitual tendencies surge up and propel one into unawareness. These are the inner demons of the mind.

Use only the single word perseverance. If you feel that this view of the Dharma is still a view of self, it is best not to heed it; simply continue as before. Then you will naturally enter the state in which a single awareness is emptiness. There is no need

for awareness upon awareness, and even awareness itself will be forgotten. Thus your strength advances another level.

Because of the two views, practitioners give rise to craving and grasping. Birth and death all arise from unawareness; those who are unaware do not recognize where their craving and grasping lie. When the mind conditions itself upon circumstances, mind arises and dharmas arise. All control depends entirely upon whether a single thought is aware or unaware. Yet the minds of worldly people are outwardly seized by circumstances and inwardly deluded by views. They worry all day long, not knowing their own Original Face or the unattached and undefiled state before a thought has stirred. Entering birth and death, leaving birth and death, attaining freedom and liberation—all depend entirely upon the awareness of this single thought. This is the cause and condition for the method of contemplating the mind.

A practitioner need only let the mad mind come to rest, and in an instant it is already clear and empty like a Buddha. Yet if one does not know this, it cannot be called awareness. Thus sentient beings are deluded, bodhisattvas are aware, bodhisattvas' awareness is not constant, whereas a Buddha is constantly aware. How can one attain constant awareness? First understand the original appearance of the mind's intrinsic nature; then use the method of contemplation, cultivate the habit of not forgetting, and become continuous and undivided. That is all.

As for those of the very highest and sharpest capacity, upon hearing it they suddenly enter realization. With a single thought clarified, they immediately take it up with unwavering certainty. They also know that this very thing is present everywhere and in every place: it is not increased by the purity of external circumstances or diminished by their disturbance. The Sixth Patriarch said, “A person who has seen their nature sees it even when brandishing a sword in battle.”

Therefore, circumstances have neither movement nor stillness, and mind has neither delusion nor awakening. What shines clearly is like the sky with its cloudy and clear weather, while the sun and moon neither increase nor diminish.

Thus, one with the eye of wisdom is never for a moment outside the Way. The Way never departs from us even for an instant; it merely appears or remains hidden. Right now, when one recites “Namo Amitābha Buddha” until subject and object are both empty, unattached and undefiled—if this is not it, what is? Right now, when one holds a mantra until all is still and absent, while seeing and hearing remain perfectly clear—if this is not it, what is? Right now, upon first waking in the morning, seeing and hearing are perfectly clear.

When not a single thought has yet stirred—what is called the qi of early morning—if this is not it, what is? A person of sharp faculties recognizes it as soon as they awaken, grasps it firmly, and never, ever forgets it. Once one recognizes the original

nature, there is nowhere that is not this; nowhere that this is not seen. This is constant awareness without delusion.

For beginners, one must begin with the word fierce: like sending troops to attack the enemy, one can only advance, without turning back. In fierce advance, one may move left or right or straight ahead, but one must not retreat, for the gate has not yet been entered. Next employ the word resolute. Upon initially clarifying the root, one must recognize it thoroughly and clearly, as a door must be opened wide enough. Then penetrate deeply through a single gate, proceeding straight ahead without veering left or right.

Next employ the word constancy: continuous and unbroken, nine parts tight and one part relaxed. Like a martial artist, one must possess a vajra pestle and train with it until mastery is complete—morning in this, evening in this, and in adversity or haste in this. At this point one may advance, retreat, and move left or right. Next employ the word waiting: wait for the time, and it will naturally mature. One must not be impatient here. After five years, one attains the word steadiness; protected in the mindfulness of all Buddhas, one will not lose it over time.

The depth or shallowness of your practice depends on examining your own habitual tendencies. If they have not been removed, it is because you ordinarily do not apply the mind. Thus the wisdom of equality of the seventh consciousness has not opened; this is because the wondrous observing wisdom of the sixth consciousness has not been activated. That the sixth consciousness does not function with wondrous wisdom is ultimately because the great perfect mirror wisdom of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) has not been realized. The foundational strength has not yet become full, and so its function is slight.

A practitioner who truly applies themselves with earnest urgency will certainly have no leisure to dwell on others' faults and become startled or afraid. If even small matters seem strange and frightening, what will happen when great matters arise? When the mind is not liberated, one is in hell at that very moment. Mañjuśrī, upon merely giving rise to a view of Buddha, entered the Iron Enclosure Hell; there is only the slightest interval between them.

Question: Practitioners fear habitual tendencies most of all. How should one practice in order to remove them?

Answer: Practice is itself for the removal of habitual tendencies. Apart from removing them, there is no practice to be done. Hold firmly to this single question: How is it right now? When the mind now encounters circumstances, can you maintain your footing at the root? If external circumstances are powerful, how strong is your own power of emptiness? What are all worldly dharmas originally? In their very substance, both sides are empty. Habitual tendencies should be

transformed, not suppressed; shifted, not retained; rendered powerless through transformation, not set aside. Like ice in springtime, they melt away completely. Habitual tendencies are a force: when that force is used there, it cannot be used here.

Removing habitual tendencies always comes after realizing the mind. If the mind is not clear, one cannot even see one's own habitual tendencies and has nowhere to begin. After realizing the mind, simply cultivate diligently and do not become lax; they will naturally be removed without one's awareness. It is like a wheel turning left and right: as this side goes down, that side goes up. One does not know when one's strength has increased, nor when one's habitual tendencies have disappeared.

Worldly people are inverted: accustomed to confusion, they make confusion into another habit, like debts accumulating without their knowing it. Practitioners delight in purity, but this delight itself is a habit. Habit is added to habit; thus the two views of activity and stillness are held fast and not relinquished, becoming yet another habit—again, debts accumulating without repayment. In sum, the Buddha takes ultimate awakening as the meaning. As soon as the mind gives rise to a thought, whether good or evil, it is deluded. Yet people cannot be without thoughts. Whether good or evil, thoughts are deluded when they are not recognized. With awareness, even evil can be transformed into good and then into emptiness; without awareness, even good enters inferential understanding and turns into evil.

Question: After one has realized the mind-ground, what is the method for removing habitual tendencies?

Answer: Habitual tendencies are accumulated habits of ordinary life that arise naturally and without awareness. When they were first formed, they too passed from effort into spontaneity, from unfamiliarity into familiarity; becoming familiar beyond conscious notice, they became habits. Moreover, they are not formed by one habit alone: many other habitual tendencies and causes and conditions converge, support them, and bring them to maturity.

For example, in the act of theft, there is not only the habit of stealing; greed, boldness, competitiveness, and vengefulness all converge through conditions and help make it habitual.

Now, in changing and removing it, various good conditions and good habits also provide support. In refraining from killing, for example, the wish for merit and virtue, fear of karmic consequences, concern for face and a desire to outdo others, and the inclination toward goodness all converge through conditions and help bring it to maturity.

Therefore, after realizing the mind, the root is already clear and supporting strength increases day by day. If habitual tendencies are not easily removed, it is because the seeds of other habitual tendencies are both mixed and numerous, and thus the resistance is strengthened.

Here we should examine carefully: it is not that the fundamental habitual tendency is difficult to remove, but that supporting tendencies remain unremoved, making it seem difficult. For example, if one suddenly gives rise to fearful doubt concerning the Dharma, knows it but does not dare decide firmly, this tendency is due to the latent habit of the dual view of good and evil within; and the old habit of lacking equanimity lies hidden behind it, sufficiently supporting one's present timidity.

Investigating still more closely, the so-called old habitual tendencies—such as haste for quick results, concern over gain and loss, fear of being deceived, and fear of impairing one's diligence—all arise together without awareness. In sum, they arise only from views of self. This is what people are least willing to give away; this is also what they are unwilling to let go of; and this is precisely what we now wish to take up for investigation.

If at this time one can be like a great elephant crossing a river, cutting off all currents and not being bound by any dharma, what is it that remains unbound? Therefore, after awakening there are only two methods for applying the mind. First, investigate the cause within the cause and the habit within the habit, leaving no room for personal indulgence. Endure it in order to deal with it; break it through with emptiness. Without self, doubt is broken; without duality, there is equality. This is the necessary method of counteraction.

Second, let go in this way and do not establish illusions again. Knowing illusion, depart from it. Have neither delight nor vexation, neither remorse nor any further searching after it. At that very moment, all is still. One must decide resolutely, without the slightest hesitation. Otherwise, one advances and retreats, doubts and decides, and remains irresolute. This may be called not having clarified the root, or it may be called regression.

Yet once there has been realization, there is no regression; there is only a pause in progress. Seeking rapid results makes one slower; seeking greater clarity makes one more confused. At such a time there is only one method: rely upon someone you trust—whether teacher or friend—to help you decide again. This can restore you and, in a single turning, increase your foundational strength without measure.

If one even doubts one’s teacher and Dharma friends, there is no need to continue applying oneself, for once these two methods are abandoned, the more one practices, the more doubts arise; the more one clings, the less one can transform. One will remain there for life. Yet even here a glimmer of possibility still remains.

One need only humbly set aside one's attachments, temporarily lay aside altogether one's views that doubt people and one's slightest doubts about the Dharma, and investigate anew from one's original nature, asking oneself:

Even if this were so, would it truly hinder the fundamental essence? Can I see through the notion of time in one stroke? Have I truly entered nonduality, and am I able to be impartial? If one calms the mind and investigates in this way, there will surely come another day of sudden clarity. But if one still clings to one's own views, the harm one does oneself is great and has nothing to do with others. Consider it: are not your timidity, competitiveness, and emotionally conditioned views concerning human affairs what obstruct you? The Buddha said, "Turn back, and there is the shore." This is precisely that shore.

A three-year-old child sees a ten-year-old child walking very fast and laments that he cannot equal him. This is simply because his strength is insufficient. How could he doubt his own way of walking and think there is some other path he should adopt? This is the self-deception of craving speed and loving victory. What more need be said?

Regardless of antiquity or modernity, East or West, male or female, people's mind and intrinsic nature are not two. Regardless of whether the Dharma is Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, or Pure Land, awakening is one. Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land are methods employed before awakening, all used to regulate the mind. When the mind is brought under control in one-pointedness and one awakens to the original nature, none of the functions of any method is to be grasped. It is not that awakening through Chan differs from Esoteric Buddhism, or that Esoteric Buddhism differs from Pure Land; only the teachings expounded and their standpoints differ. The skillful means by which teachers guide those of differing capacities also differ. Why entertain so many doubts?

People's habitual tendencies are of two kinds: present habits and habits carried over from previous lives.

Present habits are those acquired and imbibed in one's present life. Thus officials have an official's manner, merchants a merchant's manner, children of wealthy families an air of privilege, poor people an air of impoverishment, practitioners an air of merit and virtue, some women an air of cosmetics and perfume, military personnel a martial bearing, country people a rustic air, the elderly an air of old age, and physicians an air of medicines. All these are acquired in one's present life.

But an official manner coupled with greed, a merchant's manner coupled with wildness, an air of privilege coupled with much suspicion and jealousy, or an impoverished air coupled with isolation and desolation—these are habitual defilements brought from past lives. The method for removing such habits lies solely

in self-awareness. Recognize that bad habits are habits, but good habits too are habits. To be able to relinquish good habits is called truly relinquishing habits. Here there must not be the least politeness or personal sentiment; the slightest trace of either means indulgence and a lack of resoluteness. From habitual tendencies there develops a most deeply rooted disposition. There are approximately six such dispositions, the most difficult of all habitual tendencies to remove:

First is small-mindedness, the most subtle and deeply entrenched habitual tendency within greed. Being small-minded about wealth is still relatively easy to remedy, but being small-minded about learning is especially difficult. From this arise jealousy, competitiveness, anger, and suspicion of others, all prompted by comparing oneself with others. What one refuses to undertake is likewise rooted in the habitual tendency of small-mindedness.

Second is timidity. When one's mind-capacity is small, one's courage is also small. A constricted mind, a well-bound mind, a river-bound mind, a suspicious mind, and a shrinking mind all arise through comparing oneself with others.

Third is complacency: one does not seek to advance. One thinks, "What I have gained is already enough"; this too arises from small-mindedness. Thus, even those accustomed to goodness are unwilling to relinquish the conditioned merit and virtue they have created. Though they clearly know that attaining Buddhahood is the greatest undertaking, they have no intention of seeking it. They do not understand that one may be content with wealth, but here there can be no satisfaction. How can one stop and fail to advance? If one regards oneself as satisfied, then arrogance, conservatism, and contempt for others arise through comparing oneself with others. Such people are what are called scorched sprouts and rotten seeds.

Fourth is despondency in old age. Old age need not bring despondency, but one may consider oneself hopeless in this life and unconsciously become dispirited. Or one may have created an undertaking through the hardships of a lifetime and be unwilling to forget it. Thus one's complacency, timidity, concern for face, and attachment to merit and virtue remain unforgotten thought after thought. Their root ultimately lies in small-mindedness, and one's blessings also grow scant. Such a condition is beyond remedy.

Fifth is preconception. One takes preconceived views as primary; they are so firmly fixed that they cannot be broken, and nothing else can enter. One considers this firmness of meditative stability, while complacency and timidity again arise from the root of small-mindedness.

Sixth are conventional views. In daily life, such people think only of satisfying worldly needs for clothing, food, and shelter. Upon hearing this Way, they may either disdain to investigate it, fear that others will ridicule them as backward and thereby

disrupt their lives, and so keep their distance from it; or they may join others in slandering it in order to appear fashionable. Here too small-mindedness is the root, while fear of being deceived, arrogance, self-righteousness, suspicion, and anger all arise through comparing oneself with others.

Whether they have practiced or not, these six kinds of people cannot be set upon the path; realizing the mind is ever more remote from them. Even if they have already realized the mind, unless they resolutely cut away the root illness of small-mindedness, there is absolutely no way to begin removing their habitual tendencies. For merely obtaining a single willing assent is already exceedingly difficult. In the end they enter the path of the two vehicles. Therefore the practice expressed by the two Chinese characters (“giving”) is difficult beyond difficulty. Without relinquishing attachment and desire, one cannot become a bodhisattva.

Without relinquishing one’s view of Buddha, one cannot become a Buddha. This is the highest-level habitual attachment—the attachment to Buddha. Even great virtuous ones are not exempt from it. If I were to urge them thus, those who do not understand would surely revile me as a mad, insolent demon. What can be done?

In general, a small-minded person must first have something to which he clings, and the anxiety of gaining is its overall cause. Anxiety over gaining naturally becomes anxiety over losing: before gaining, one fears not gaining; after gaining, one fears losing. But what precisely is the thing about which one worries? There must be an objective, and this is one’s object.

When one clings to an object inwardly, it becomes a view; this is one’s mind and one’s dharma. If one can turn around and empty it, the force of one’s clinging relaxes. One is not deluded by it and therefore does not waver; naturally, one expands. Thus what is small becomes great. With prolonged practice, rawness becomes maturity, difficulty becomes ease, and forced effort becomes natural. This is the essential instruction for counteracting it.

Before Buddhist practitioners have realized the root, they must most avoid mixing worldly emotional views with Buddhist principles. To realize the fundamental essence is to transcend the world. If we assess it through emotional views, the more we study it, the more confused we become. Once one has gained some understanding of the original nature and wishes resolutely to remove habitual tendencies, one must most avoid separating oneself from worldly dharmas. For apart from worldly dharmas, there are no resources for training one’s habits. Among Buddhists in the world, many are one person in the Buddha hall and a distinctly different person outside it. Because they are attached to worldly emotions and place great weight on clothing and food, they practice only sporadically; they will never

have an opportunity to eliminate habitual tendencies. These are those who have tipped eastward.

Others crave the flavor of Chan and dislike worldly bustle. Either they fear worldly defilement, or they refuse to leave Buddhist Dharma. Gradually, negative thoughts arise, attachment to self through views of Dharma increases, and they forcibly suppress or evade worldly habits. They do not know that the roots lie within, and thus opportunities to remove habitual tendencies are also few. Though they are better than the former, they are those who have tipped westward.

These two kinds of people have the same illness: both may be called preservers of habitual tendencies. Neither has yet aroused wondrous contemplation or entered nonduality. One deeply regrets that their strength is not yet sufficient and that the fundamental wisdom of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) is not yet complete. The former are pitiable and easy to save; the latter are regrettable and difficult to draw back. Though one earnestly exhorts them, they do not listen. Is this because the affinity has run its course? No, it is because the causes and conditions have not yet arrived.

The simplest and most direct method for removing habitual tendencies is, as stated above, to let go in this way. This includes several points:

1. Let go means simply to let go; do not retain the slightest attachment or reluctance to relinquish.

2. Do not cling to the present letting go as right and the earlier failure to let go as wrong. If remorse arises from this, then one again clings to the marks of time, gain and loss, and the opposition of right and wrong. This must never be done.

A few years ago, I repeatedly warned practitioners that they should be like one- or two-year-old children learning to walk, with no contrived thoughts in mind. They need only attend to it morning and evening; when the time naturally comes, they will be able to walk, jump, and run. At the outset, they do not forget how to take a step merely because they cannot yet jump. Why? Because after realizing the mind, one never again loses it; because it is originally neither arising nor ceasing. The difficulty is simply that the time has not yet come; worrying in vain or giving rise to further doubt only causes delay.

3. Just when one is letting go, human affairs may suddenly come to disturb one. Do not give rise to aversion. I still respond in accordance with conditions and take things up as before. Do not again oppose the two views of letting go and taking up, thereby increasing views of right and wrong. Letting go concerns the mind; taking up concerns affairs. Whether one lets go or not has nothing to do with the affairs themselves. Though I respond to everything, I do not let success, failure, gain, or loss

weigh upon my mind. If the mind does not wander off, that itself is letting go. Thus it is so in activity, and it is so in stillness. This is true letting go. The process may be illustrated by the following three cases:

(1) Before realizing the mind, one may wish desperately to remove habitual tendencies, but it can be said that there is no way to do so. If the door has not been opened and the things are inside the room, one can never carry them out; one merely moves them about, which cannot be called removal.

(2) At the time of initial realization of the mind, the door has opened, and one can begin moving out habitual tendencies. But if one does not yet know how to move them, and the objects are large, one still lacks the strength to carry them out. At this time doubts arise most easily: one often mistakenly thinks the door has not yet opened and again becomes hesitant and withdrawn.

(3) After thorough awakening, one has had many moments of vigilant awareness, and one's strength has also increased. One need only fear a lack of constancy and action. Know that the door can never close again, and habitual tendencies will naturally disappear without trace. Things that one formerly believed absolutely impossible to move, matters one thought this life offered no hope of accomplishing, unexpectedly become possible. But until the time has come, this is impossible. The anguish of this stage cannot be conveyed to others,

nor can one first make others trust it. There is only one method: compare yourself with how you were before—compare the present with half a year ago, this year with last year, and after realization of the mind with before realization. Then you may gain confirmation and rest assured. Yet this necessarily depends on whether one's courage and capacity to undertake are great, and whether one applies oneself diligently or not, loosely or not, flexibly or not, skillfully or not. This lies with oneself, not with the teacher; nor is it the teacher's fault. Once one aspect has been indicated, it need not be repeated.

Applying oneself to remove habitual tendencies is one's own affair, not another's. Never measure others and thereby mislead yourself. Realizing the root is one matter, and removing habitual tendencies is another; they must not be treated as one matter, as though the persistence of habitual tendencies proved that one has not realized the root. If an evil person has already resolved to reform, repent, and turn toward goodness, though habitual tendencies remain, he can no longer be called an evil person. Again, if a

person fond of gambling has recognized the need to reform decisively, though he has not forgotten the ways of gambling, one cannot again accuse him of gambling. Again, when one reaches an unfamiliar place and the route is already clear, one will

not lose the way; if one occasionally loses one's bearings, it must not be taken to mean that one does not know the route.

As stated above, one must resolutely remove habitual tendencies by beginning with worldly dharmas; therefore Confucian learning must be studied. The saying that Buddhist Dharma has no personal sentiment is directed toward oneself, not toward others. It means removing one's own faults, not discarding moral obligations. If one fails to fulfill one's human responsibilities and leaves the world to seek bodhi, one will certainly not enter the gate of the Sixth Patriarch.

Question: Students often lack the courage to let go, and doubts suddenly arise midway through their practice. What teaching can help them attain liberation?

Answer: The reason doubts suddenly arise midway is that they hold on too tightly and do not understand the principle of letting go. Thus, they are unwilling to let go, do not dare to let go, and do not know how to let go. They even think it a pity to let go. But what is meant by letting go is not the same as the untrained person's neglecting the mind, deliberately indulging it, letting it run naturally, and applying no discipline. Rather, when one suddenly loses awareness and wanders in unawareness, one should become keenly aware. Once aware, simply let the mind be, and nothing is amiss. There is no need to give rise again to views of regret, pity, resentment, and the like. This is called letting go. For as soon as any of these arise, one has again fallen into the opposition of dualistic views and has not yet attained equanimity.

Further observe: when one becomes keenly aware in the present moment, both the temporary wandering and that moment of awareness are empty at once. Is there, after all, any obstruction? Turn back and look to the original nature, and one knows that there is no obstruction. Why, then, add regret and thereby further increase the disease of Dharma?

With such a turn, the entire mental sphere becomes lively and flexible, free of obstruction and fear. Views of gain and loss are forgotten, and one naturally returns to the original nature. It is like a kite on a string: it has a line to hold it, but one temporarily suspects that the string has broken, not knowing that it has never broken and that there has ultimately been no obstruction. What obstructs one is fundamentally failing to understand: one's grasping is rigid grasping, and one's letting go is wild abandon. From beginning to end, one never leaves the confrontation of dualistic views; thus, one knows neither what to do nor where to turn, and at every step one feels insecure.

Moreover, the growth of strength depends on already having some strength. This method must be attended to when one's practice has become profound. If one has the strength to let go, one has the strength to advance; it is not the same as the

confused and reckless indulgence of those who let themselves go. This depends entirely on one's own experience in practice: examine one's habitual tendencies and subdue them. One must not harbor hopes, impatience, competitiveness, or the like. Practice in this way for at least three years, until there is neither tightening nor letting go, one's strength is sufficient and one's energy complete. Then one enters into non-observation, yet never for an instant departs from observation; one need not deliberately rouse oneself to awareness, but in stillness one constantly illuminates and remains aware.

At this point, letting go yet not letting go means never letting go at all. Alas, it is difficult to put into words. Such use of the mind depends entirely on oneself; how could another possibly fathom it?

Those who do not practice know only letting go and not tightening. Beginning practitioners know only tightening, yet do not know how to tighten; they still remain in letting go. When one first realizes the Way and enters the stage of right cultivation, one knows only tightening and not letting go. Therefore, one lacks liveliness and finds it difficult to attain perfect adaptability. Moreover, speaking of letting go to those who have not awakened, or whose awakening is not thorough, will certainly give rise to doubts; indeed, it may become something that cannot be spoken of, for fear that they will misuse it.

Therefore, for students, faith is paramount. When a student deeply trusts that an experienced practitioner will not mislead them, has thoroughly awakened to original nature, and has practiced deeply and earnestly, yet is beginning to feel constrained and stifled, this method may be used to prompt the student and open their capacity. It must not be applied too early or without clarity; try it under these conditions. One must understand that this letting go is not worldly recklessness. It is broadening the scope of wondrous contemplation so that its understanding becomes complete. When properly applied, one's spiritual capacity opens broadly and clearly, and one's strength increases beyond measure. This principle is in fact difficult to believe; this is why there is so much doubt and slander in this school.

In my experience of the past ten years, it is ultimately easier to move from reckless abandon into restraint than from restraint into complete release. But those who misunderstand the meaning of letting go—whose fault is that?

Question: What is the intent of the Chan school's Dharma?

Answer: Chan is the wondrous method of using deluded thoughts to eliminate deluded thoughts and returning to the Original Face when no thoughts arise. Everyone fully possesses Buddha-nature and possesses the fundamental principle in full, yet does not know it. At times, when the frenzied mind suddenly ceases for an instant, or in the fresh vital energy of early morning, the Original Face often reveals

itself, but people do not recognize it. Failing to recognize it, they cannot return to the source. Thus, one employs the method of using mind to regulate mind: the myriad thoughts return to one, and the one returns to emptiness, enabling one to recognize one's Original Face when no thoughts arise. Therefore, it is called returning to the source.

To return to the source through a single phrase of Amitābha is the Pure Land school. To return to the source through the empowerment of the three mysteries is Esoteric Buddhism. The three methods differ, but returning to the source is one. What is this one? Nothing but the Original Face when no thoughts arise.

Of the three methods just mentioned, Chan is the most difficult, for it relies entirely on one's own power. Its Dharma is received from a patriarch and is suited to those of the highest and sharpest faculties. At a minimum it takes seven years, and often twenty or thirty years. In today's circumstances, it is truly difficult to practice, and it is especially unsuitable for lay practitioners, whose obstacles of livelihood are heavy.

The second is the Pure Land school. About one-third depends on the Buddha's power and two-thirds on one's own power; moreover, the goal of the Western Pure Land stands clearly before one. At its utmost, however, it is no more than the myriad dharmas returning to one; it cannot directly realize the source of mind and return to quiescent extinction. One must attain the immovable ground in this very life before rebirth is possible, and then, after another five hundred years, see the Buddha when the lotus opens. This is comparatively secure, yet by no means can it be accomplished by persons of inferior wisdom.

Why is this so? Since the Western Pure Land is regarded as the gate of attainment, how many achieve fruition in this very life? Moreover, judging by present methods of practice, rebirth is also exceedingly difficult; one can only plant many wholesome roots for future lives.

The third is Esoteric Buddhism. This does not refer to form-based esoteric practice, but to the highest fourth gate of suchness in the esoteric division: the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. This esoteric practice does not rely on forms, yet neither is it separate from forms. Two-thirds depends on the Buddha's power and one-third on one's own power. Within a short period, it can certainly enable practitioners to realize their Original Face when no thoughts arise.

Yet this too cannot be undertaken by persons of inferior wisdom. One must possess the capacities of the Chan school, receive instruction, and be inspired according to one's capacity; with a single prompting, one opens. It naturally accords with Chan and Pure Land. Thus, it is most suitable for lay practitioners. Its practice must be transmitted face to face, for each person's conditions differ, and the Dharma accordingly differs as well.

Now let us first discuss the practice of the Chan school. Anyone practicing Chan today must possess several qualifications: first, one must have past-life roots in Chan; second, one must be able to let go of everything, prepare to devote ten years to practice, avoid worldly defilements, and first leave home to become a monastic.

Third, one must be willing to endure hardship, broad-minded and able to relinquish, lively without being frivolous or impetuous, steadfast without being obstinate, and open and untrammeled in spirit. One must not hold deeply to views of good and evil; having passed through the vicissitudes of worldly affairs, one must not be moved by worldly honors. One's appearance must be either substantial and blessed or lean, with refinement evident in one's bearing. One must not be too advanced in age; in youth, one should have had unconstrained talent; in middle age, aspirations to transcend the world; and in old age, be free of illness and not regard oneself as old. Nor should one be deeply immersed in, and rigidly attached to, doctrinal learning or letters. These are the highest qualifications.

As for the teacher one follows, this is difficult to speak of. Yet the teacher, too, must possess several qualifications: first, the ability to discern a student's capacity; second, the ability not to be constrained by methods; third, the ability to gain the student's trust; and fourth, sufficient standing and experience.

As for the mutual relationship of teacher and student: first comes affinity. When the affinity has run its course, it cannot be forced. Second comes mutual trust. A teacher must trustingly discern the degree of a student's capacity before transmitting the teaching; this is most difficult. If one encounters someone unable to bear it and transmits too much, that person may instead give rise to doubt and disbelief. When both sides meet with resistance, this all belongs to emotional views within worldly dharmas. The profound principle involved cannot readily be explained to those who do not understand it.

Therefore, I shall not discuss it in detail. As for the student's relation to the teacher, there must be the utmost reverence and trust; the greater the reverence and trust, the greater the benefit. In beginning Chan practice, do not first read Recorded Sayings and similar books. A failed painting of a tiger may end up looking like a dog. Such books are for post-awakening investigation and verification, and for comparing one's strength; they cannot be relied upon to bring about awakening.

In seated Chan practice, one initially collects the mind. Since the mind is difficult to unify, one borrows a single huatou (critical phrase). This method came into use from the Song period onward. Such a huatou is a method for opening beginners' potential; it is borrowed as a guide, but its meaning lies beyond the phrase itself. It is not that this single phrase contains some especially wondrous dharma gate. Foolish

people do not understand this and deliberately seek investigation within the phrase itself, thereby becoming ever more deeply lost.

In seated Chan practice, because one relies exclusively on one's own power, all effort lies with oneself. It must be neither too heavy nor too light. If it is too heavy, one becomes attached; with deliberate attachment, the mind races afar and becomes scattered and confused. If it is too light, one lets go; by abandoning the effort, one becomes weary and sinks into torpor. The meditation stick is used to rouse practitioners from drowsiness, yet when the mind is racing and scattered, there is no way to discipline it. Therefore, raising the huatou is primary.

In seated Chan practice, rigidly guarding and investigating obstructs one's responsive capacity. Therefore, walking meditation, or zouxiang ( ), is required to regulate the practice.

Walk with the utmost urgency and speed, leaving no interval for deluded thoughts to arise. When one can go no faster, a strike of the board stops one in one's tracks. In that instant, not a single thought attaches; the state of pure emptiness and profound stillness appears like the brief blooming of an udumbara flower. Those of the highest faculties can seize it at once: "Ah! So it is you!" Having recognized it, they no longer forget or lose it, and continue investigating and investigating. Only then do they awaken that movement and stillness, concealment and manifestation, have fundamentally no arising or ceasing,

no coming or going. Before awakening, it was never lost; now that one has awakened, nothing has newly been gained. It lies only in whether one recognizes it or not. Even so, how could this be easily spoken of? If the time and conditions have not yet arrived, then even if one is told directly and clearly, one will not believe it. Why? Because one's blessings are slight and one does not dare to accept responsibility for it. Thus, one must first undergo much apparently fruitless hardship before one can assume even a small measure of responsibility.

That teachers in this school do not lightly grant confirmation is an act of compassion. They fear that, once confirmation is granted, demons of delight may take advantage, or that the student may become arrogant toward others, or consider themselves satisfied and cease progressing. Thus, they dare not grant it. Yet its meaning is not exhausted by this. To grant confirmation is to confirm that one has recognized the road home, that the direction is not mistaken, and that one may proceed accordingly; it is not to confirm that one has already arrived home. If a teacher were to confirm that one had already reached home, it would be no different from urging one not to continue walking. That would be the teacher's fault, deserving immediate descent into hell. If a student misunderstands the

confirmation, gives rise to Dharma obstacles, and ceases to practice, that is self-deception; whom else can one blame?

After breaking through in investigation, the time has come to begin genuine practice. At this point, Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land are all irrelevant. One should devote attention to the wondrous functioning of the mind-ground, using its power to verify the essence in return. Thus, the more diligently one removes habitual tendencies, the greater the power of the essence becomes. Students often take their initial illumination of the fundamental ground to mean that the great matter is finished. Alas! How is this different from a poor son burdened with debts who, through arduous labor, obtains a mine and becomes immensely wealthy, yet merely guards it without using it and does not repay his debts, thereby remaining a poor son? How could that be acceptable?

After breaking through in investigation, one must apply greater effort to attending to habitual tendencies. Habitual tendencies are precisely deluded thoughts. When deluded thoughts are not recognized, they become habits. At first, one restrains and suppresses them; next, transforms and removes them; next, observes and empties them; next, awakens to them and transforms them; and finally, neither observes nor empties them, and they vanish of themselves. Practice thus day after day, gradually verifying in return what one has awakened to and recognized, until there is not the slightest room for doubt. Then one's strength naturally increases. When free, one may also sit for a while, helping the mind remain constantly gathered in samādhi. There is no need to become attached to sitting, like grinding a brick in hopes of making a mirror.

If students do not thoroughly recognize the fundamental ground—here I say only that it is not thoroughly recognized, not that the fundamental ground itself has also been lost—then they will necessarily have the following doubts and errors:

First, when habitual tendencies arise, one cannot resist them and instead doubts that one's awakening was genuine. One may suppose there is some other dharma gate and, seeing something different, change one's mind, abandoning A for B. Yet if one applies the mind in this way, one only multiplies confusion and misleads oneself; before long, one will surely abandon B for C.

Second, when the habitual tendency of impatience arises, one may even become vexed and simply cease practicing altogether.

Third, one's inferior tendency toward excessive doubt arises, and one mistakenly thinks that the Lesser Vehicle is more down-to-earth. One then abandons this for that, resumes worshiping the Buddha and observing a vegetarian diet, and goes back the way one came. Not knowing that the more timid one becomes, the less one

can let go, one fails to eliminate bad habits while good habits arise anew; they become mixed together and cannot be purified. This is called reversed cultivation.

These are the afflictions that people of limited capacity and scant blessings must undergo. If, after making this mistake, they do not turn back, it will surely take another lifetime—how lamentable! Yet for those who are thus because their fundamental understanding is not thorough, their original nature is ultimately not lost; they merely stop midway and cannot advance, which is regrettable. Practitioners must not conclude that a person who has these three kinds of doubtful errors has not realized the mind.

Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the work of becoming a sage. Only those at the stage of worthy ones possess such blessings and virtue. If one pays no heed at all to the principles of proper conduct or to human relationships and worldly affairs, one is not even the equal of an ordinary person. How, then, could one hope to dwell at the stage of worthy ones and become a sage?

The degree of one's strength depends on whether one's recognition of the original nature is thorough; the depth of one's practice depends on how readily one maintains awareness of that nature.

Before awakening, devote oneself to fundamental wisdom, realize ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), the eighth consciousness, and attain the great perfect mirror wisdom. After awakening, devote one's utmost efforts to differentiated wisdom, subtly contemplate the sixth consciousness, and attain equality.

The strength of the sixth and seventh consciousnesses derives from the power of fundamental wisdom. The equality of the seventh consciousness results from the subtle contemplation initiated by the sixth consciousness. Where strength is insufficient, subtle contemplation has not become equal; ultimately, this is because attachment to self remains firm. It is all because the time has not yet arrived, practice has not matured, and contemplation has not become complete. If one abandons this and claims that there is some other Mind-Ground Dharma, that is a demonic view, not the Buddha-Dharma.

Question: What is the essential meaning of the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma?

Answer: "Know your own mind as it truly is" is a principal passage in the Mahāvairocana Sūtra of the Esoteric division. Briefly explained, it means realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is also the fourth gate of suchness in the Esoteric division, a wondrous Dharma for directly realizing the field of mind, unequaled by the other three divisions of Esoteric Buddhism.

Alongside the Red and Yellow schools, there is also the White school, which directly realizes the pure consciousness, identified here as the ninth consciousness and the wisdom of the essential nature of the Dharma realm. From the essence of suchness it activates the function of prajñā; therefore, it accords with the Chan school. It is not transmitted to unsuitable persons, for esoteric realization lies in the mind, and misapplication causes harm. Esoteric Buddhism guards this very strictly. It is almost like Exoteric Buddhists in China, who dare not discuss Chan and regard it as dangerous: both are cases of abandoning food for fear of choking.

In the Chan school, the features of mind and intrinsic nature are attained by subduing the deluded mind and investigating it: using the illusory mind to control the illusory mind. This is extremely difficult to grasp. Thus, after years of investigation, one may make no progress at all. If one grips too tightly, one becomes rigid and dead; the resulting abuse is merely reading the huatou. If one relaxes, the mind wanders off, leaving no point at which to begin. After prolonged investigation one becomes fatigued, falls into drowsiness and sleep, or falls into indeterminate blankness or biased emptiness; one's spiritual responsiveness then becomes less lively. This is why relying on one's own strength is so exceedingly difficult. Unless one has the very highest faculties and can leave aside the huatou to enter directly by another route, it cannot be done.

The Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma is otherwise. The reason I have been unwilling to speak of it early is precisely that I fear students practicing Esoteric Buddhism may, because of my words, give rise to conceptual views and consequently fail to attain samādhi. Therefore, I did not speak of it. Only those who have practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for more than one hundred sessions, and who, because of my words, are willing to practice it again, may be shown this. Its value lies in self-awakening; to reveal it early would bring them no benefit. This is the esoteric secret within Mind-Seal Esotericism. I shall now select and set forth the distinctive features of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma:

(1) The Chan school begins by arousing doubt and investigating. Once one's recognition of the original mind is thorough, there is nothing left to doubt. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma, however, disregards everything else and simply practices in accordance with the Dharma. Even persons of dull faculties, after three hundred sessions of practice, will all attain samādhi; after one thousand sessions, they need not practice it further. Since the essential capacity is already present, if they are guided to the Dharma and willingly apply their minds, none will fail to gain an entry. Therefore, while sitting, one is not permitted to arouse doubt or investigate, nor to mix in other practices that would divide one's strength. Samādhi is thereby attained more quickly. This is the fundamental difference.

(2) The Chan school has only the gate of the mystery of mind; Pure Land has only the gate of the mystery of speech. This Dharma, however, employs the empowerment of the three mysteries, requires longer periods of practice, and seeks realization within a fixed time.

(3) The Vinaya school is an entry-level dharma gate for beginners: from precepts to samādhi and then wisdom. This Dharma cultivates the three teachings of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom together. Forming a mudrā is the mystery of body and guards against killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Reciting a mantra is the mystery of speech and guards against the four evils of verbal karma. Letting the mind remain unstained, clear, and pure is the mystery of mind and guards against the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. Thus precepts are contained within Esoteric practice. Because the substance of the precepts is complete, samādhi is readily attained; there has never been anyone able to observe precepts and attain samādhi without wisdom arising.

(4) The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is nothing other than giving rise to wisdom through samādhi. Yet it is difficult to bring the mind under unified control. Here, through the three mysteries, and through precepts, it is naturally restrained. Therefore, one is not permitted to engage in thought or deliberation. Once samādhi has been attained and the student has left the cushion, the teacher uses prajñā to draw out the student's capacity, and then teaches the student to begin investigating, using the signs of samādhi attained while seated as confirmation and applying them to investigation. Thus, awakening is very easily elicited.

(5) The Chan school fears that the mind may run outward. Here, the three mysteries work together: one cannot fail to settle, and will not fail to settle.

(6) The Chan school fears drowsiness. Here, drowsiness does not occur, because there are mantra and mudrā.

(7) The Chan school fears falling into indeterminate emptiness. Here, because mantra and mudrā are present, the latent seeds are constantly brought to the surface. Though thoughts may at times arise in profusion, they can cease in an instant and leave no trace.

(8) When the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is cultivated deeply, one suddenly enters quiescent cessation, yet does not fall into annihilatory cessation. The mantra has not stopped, the mudrā has not dispersed, seeing and hearing remain clear, while the mind is tranquil and still. Thus there is no drawback of leaning toward either lightness or heaviness.

(9) Because the Chan school employs excessively forceful control, its vital energy is not easily regulated, and one must practice walking meditation to remedy this. Here,

even if one sits for twelve hours a day, there is no disorder of imbalance; yet one may sit for no more than four periods of seven days. Persons of the highest faculties who undertake three periods of seven days of ascetic practice will all attain samādhi. The reason excessive sitting is not permitted is that one may become greedily attached to the pleasure of quiescent cessation and thereby make the faculty of wisdom unresponsive.

(10) After sitting for a long time in the Chan school, persons of inferior wisdom often cling rigidly until they become deranged. Here, excessive sitting causes no illness; at most, one may fail to put one's realization into function. As for those whose prajñā has first opened, they may unavoidably become arrogant. But both traditions have this fault; it has nothing to do with the Dharma and is the person's own failing.

(11) After one practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma has attained samādhi, the teacher must use Dharma methods to awaken that person's prajñā and must draw upon such books as the recorded sayings of the Chan school. At this point, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is no longer directly relevant: one may sit or not sit. Sitting more will increase one's strength, but excessive sitting is not permitted; one thousand sessions is the limit.

(12) The Heart-of-Heart Dharma includes the Pure Land gate. For the first step of its realization is avaivartika, translated as the immovable ground. Only by practicing this Dharma can one hope for rebirth in the Western Pure Land. With the addition of the power of vows, one's practice becomes complete. The fourth mudrā of this Dharma is itself a gate of attainment, offering the hope of rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. The Buddha taught it thus; how could one doubt it?

I too was initially guilty of slighting the Pure Land dharma gate. Only now do I believe that I am fit to practice Pure Land. Who knows me? Only I myself. Thus, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma combines and cultivates the methods of the Vinaya, Chan, Esoteric, and Pure Land schools, for every school takes Mind-Seal as its core principle.

First directly realize the Lotus-Treasury Dharma Realm as the essence; then bring forth the lotus of the wondrous Dharma as the function; employ prajñā to comprehend and integrate worldly dharmas; penetrate the Buddha-mind, with no clinging to either dharmas or self. Its principle is supremely subtle, its function exceedingly vast, and its standpoint differs from that of all the other schools. This is the Buddha's final Dharma, pervading and universally perfuming the Dharma realm like fragrance. Though each person understands it differently, all receive the same perfuming. How could those of inferior wisdom fathom it superficially?

Question: What is the essential meaning of the Pure Land school?

Answer: The methods of Pure Land practice have already been explained in detail in the book Essentials of the Pure Land Mind-Seal Dharma, so I shall not repeat them here. What I wish to add is as follows:

Without understanding the mind-ground, one can never know the subtle wonder of the Pure Land Dharma. Regrettably, those who practice Pure Land today all practice improperly; therefore, it is difficult for them to understand its profundity.

Those who propagate Pure Land Dharma today can only be said to advocate Buddha-recitation; they cannot be said to propagate the Pure Land Dharma. For they have not explained to practitioners what the Pure Land is, what Ultimate Bliss is, or how one attains rebirth there. Since they are careless at the causal stage, what can be expected at the stage of fruition is evident.

The Pure Land is the Western gate of attainment. By "attainment" is meant directly realizing the essence of great perfect mirror wisdom and activating the wondrous observing function of the sixth consciousness. Because of this subtle contemplation, one need not insist on abandoning appearances; one departs from appearances precisely amid appearances. Thus the Amitābha Sūtra contains many wondrous adornments of form and concludes with the accomplishment of such meritorious adornments. Practice in that land begins with the five faculties and five powers; the preceding categories of practice are not used. Its realm of meaning may thereby be known. Moreover, it deliberately leads from forms into formlessness. Only those whose mind-eye has been opened can comprehend and integrate this.

Immeasurable light is its essence; illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction is its function.

Illumination is the great function of subtle contemplative wisdom. Wherever Dharma sounds flow forth, they naturally transform in accord with each person's mental realm. Thus Amitābha Buddha's broad, long, wondrous tongue covers the great thousandfold world, while the broad, long tongues of the Buddhas of the ten directions serve to reveal this in return, wishing sentient beings to seek it in their own conduct of mind, believe and enter it, and praise it. Moreover, the three Chinese characters (Amitābha) signify the perfection of the three bodies. This expresses the union of intrinsic nature and appearances, namely the mutual penetration of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) and the sixth and seventh consciousnesses, and the activation of differentiated wisdom from fundamental wisdom. Therefore it is said: entering through one gate, one enters all gates.

Amitābha is the Buddha: this represents the essence. Avalokiteśvara represents wondrous functioning that reaches into the subtlest detail; through the great strength of Mahāsthāmaprāpta, one reaches the universal gate: this represents the function. Yet they remain two and one.

Those who directly realize the Pure Land do so only after attaining meditative concentration. Therefore, great masters of old, such as Hanshan and Master Lianchi, all turned from Chan to Pure Land; they did not deliberately divide the schools. For without directly realizing the wisdom of the essential nature of the Dharma realm through the Chan school, one cannot awaken to the subtle wonder of the Pure Land. Moreover, because it is not easy for lay practitioners to practice the Chan school, this dharma gate was especially opened as an expedient means.

Master Huiyuan of Jin also advocated Pure Land as an expedient for lay practitioners. Why? At that time the world was in turmoil, and warfare was everywhere. The commanders of both sides all revered Master Huiyuan and respectively prohibited their soldiers from entering his territory. Thus an area extending several dozen li was preserved. Countless people took refuge with Master Huiyuan to escape calamity, much as people today flee to foreign concessions.

Master Huiyuan therefore taught them the most simple method of Buddha-recitation. The flourishing of the Pure Land school truly arose from this, for it was originally an expedient means by which lay practitioners could plant wholesome roots. Thus, it is acceptable for lay practitioners to cultivate this expedient method. Bhikṣus, however, occupy a different position: how could they fail to begin with Chan meditation and contemplation of mind? If they too covet this convenience, it is unacceptable. At the very least, they should cultivate Chan and Pure Land together, along with ascetic practices. Yet, lacking clothing and food and without the provisions needed for practice, they are compelled to perform scripture-recitation, repentance rites, and the Flaming Mouth ritual to sustain themselves. Whose fault is this?

The sūtras are already difficult to explain, but the Amitābha Sūtra is more difficult still. This sūtra lies wholly in its realm of meaning and experience. Its descriptions of wondrous appearances and adornments can neither be stated too literally nor treated too lightly; and phrases such as “the Dharma sounds flow forth” likewise cannot be expressed in words.

Therefore, only in its third year did our association begin also to propagate the Pure Land Dharma. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma serves as the initial foundation for entering Esoteric Buddhism: it awakens prajñā, employs the Chan school to train one’s capacity, and further clarifies how to sweep away habitual tendencies so that wisdom can function fully. One then returns to realize the Pure Land, thereby comprehending the intent of the universal gate. Such practices as mantra-recitation serve as auxiliaries. What follows concerning contemplation of mind and the removal of habitual tendencies refers to matters after one has realized the mind, transcending Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land.

At this point, the Dharma is no longer the issue; everything depends on one's own mind. Yet there are some who refuse to take responsibility for reaching the shore. They obstinately cling to the boat and still argue over whether it is fast or slow, whether one teaching is higher or lower. They generate their own emotional views—what can I do about them?

Question: What is the relationship between the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma and the teachings of the Buddha?

Answer: The Buddhadharma is the Dharma of mind. Because worldly people do not know the mind-ground and thus remain submerged in saṃsāra for so long, the Buddha arose from samādhi, remained in the world for eighty years, and taught the Dharma for forty-nine years. He did so for this one great cause and condition. No great undertaking in the world can compare with it; therefore it is called a great matter.

All that exists in the universe takes human beings as central, and human beings are called the most spiritually endowed of all things. This spiritual endowment is simply Buddha-nature. Before it manifests, it is called nature; once it stirs, it is called mind. Mind and nature are thus the ancestors of all things. During those forty-nine years, the Buddha devoted nearly thirty years specifically to teaching the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. Nor was this so only for him: all the immeasurable Buddhas of the past, opening immeasurable bodhimaṇḍas, likewise taught this Mind-Ground Dharma.

The various schools and teachings—Vinaya, Dharma Characteristics, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism—likewise guide people to the mind-ground in order to awaken prajñā. Their scope may indeed be called vast. When one follows the various schools to their ultimate point, where views are purified, dharmas are empty, and words fall short, this is called the Chan school. The teachings of Pure Land, Esoteric Buddhism, precepts, and Dharma Characteristics are expedient means that gradually guide beginning practitioners into the mind-ground. Chan alone points directly and verifies directly, enabling people to see and seek for themselves.

Sitting meditation and walking meditation are also merely preliminary expedients. Unless one has the very highest capacity, one cannot awaken suddenly. Great masters of old often underwent ascetic practice for twenty or thirty years before recognizing their original ground and perhaps being able to cease meditation inquiry. Such is its difficulty. Sentient beings of recent times have scant blessings and heavy obstacles; livelihood grows harder by the day. They cannot free themselves from family obligations, leave their fetters behind, abandon everything, and devote themselves deeply to a single gate. Moreover, worldly people do not understand how intimately and importantly this undertaking concerns society and

the nation, but dismiss it as superstition. Those above do not promote it, while those below further suppress it. Monks must fend for their own livelihood, and Buddhism declines. How pitiful this is!

If Buddhists do not understand the mind-ground, the Buddhadharma will decline—this too is frightening. For various reasons, worldly people's faith in Buddhism has plummeted. Its extinction is nearly at hand.

Moreover, what enables Buddhism to survive today is that the true Dharma has not yet perished. If there were no Chan school and no understanding of the essential point of mind, and people merely pursued other schools, favoring formal rituals and procedures, then its spirit would already be lost: though the form remained, it would in reality have perished. This is most alarming.

In another ten or twenty years, the great masters of the various monasteries will all have grown old and departed. No one will arise to succeed them, and the Dharma of the mind-ground will perish with them. How much more grievous and frightening that would be! If so, what Dharma could preserve this Mind-Ground Dharma, make it convenient for students to seek instruction and practice, not interfere with their livelihood, and enable them directly to realize the mind-ground within the short span of two or three years? In this extraordinary conjunction of great causes and conditions, there is truly protection at work in the unseen. This is why, in the seventeenth year of the Republic (1928), the Formless Siddhi Dharma of the Heart-of-Heart, the highest division of Esoteric Buddhism, emerged in response to the times.

Things change after enduring for a long time, and through change they become open and workable. In the present age, everything is being reformed to meet the demands of the time. The Buddhadharma has long been obscured, and it too should have a day of renewed radiance. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma has arisen suddenly as a distinct force within Buddhism, reforming itself in accord with the times. This Dharma takes formlessness as its principle, and its direct verification secretly accords with the Chan school. It therefore differs from the form-based Esoteric Buddhism of the initial stages. Because it does not emphasize ritual forms, people consequently regard it as an incomplete Esoteric Dharma. They do not understand that, when eating sugarcane, I take its juice and discard its dregs. Others insist on forms in order to regard the sugarcane as complete. It is difficult to discuss the ultimate with those attached to names and appearances.

Thus, in form, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is Esoteric Buddhism, and with respect to the three mysteries it fully possesses them. At the ultimate level, however, it is without name or form and converges with the Chan school. It is the Heart-of-Heart that succeeds Chan and prevents its interruption. The greatness of its efficacy and

the weight of its significance cannot be known by those who have not personally cultivated and realized it. I do not wish to contend today over relative merits. Yet twenty years from now, when the Chan school is on the verge of extinction, the Mind-Ground Dharma will survive through this Dharma, and the Buddhadharma will ultimately not perish. Would that not be a magnificent event?

My teacher, Master Dayu, endured untold hardships and cultivated for seven years. In samādhi, he received empowerment from Samantabhadra Bodhisattva and opened this dharma gate. Perhaps this is where the great conjunction of causes and conditions lies.

Again, after the great flood of July in the jimao year of the Republic (1939), worldly affairs grew worse by the day, and world war broke out once more. Everything was tossed amid wind and rain; how much more so the Buddhadharma. I feared this and could not sleep at night. Yet I rejoiced that the Dharma lineage could still be hoped to endure, and this greatly consoled me. Fearing that worldly people might not understand these causes and conditions, I respectfully speak these truthful words to inform them. May they not, because of personal affairs, impair the great Dharma. They must make the greater whole their priority; then the merit and virtue of protecting the Dharma will surpass an offering of the seven treasures filling three thousand worlds.

Question: The Buddhadharma bears upon whether the world is well governed or chaotic, yet people often do not believe this. Is there any skillful means to remedy the situation?

Answer: First, people must understand benefit and harm, as well as cause and effect. Everyone living in society is concerned with the way of conducting oneself in the world; no one should fail to study Buddhism. To study Buddhism is to know oneself, to understand one’s outlook on life, and to understand why human beings are as they are. Put simply, it is to understand the principles of being a human being. This is loyalty.

Apply this principle in one’s dealings with others, fully understand all their states of mind, and only then can one fulfill one’s duty toward them. This is consideration for others. One concerns oneself; the other concerns others. Then all human relationships and undertakings in society can reach perfection. It is evident that the Buddhadharma is the most essential learning and the greatest undertaking of human life; it is not negative self-interest. Negative self-interest is precisely what the Buddha would never permit, for the Buddhadharma saves the world and saves minds.

The reason society is fearful and unsettled is that evil people create disorder. Evil people arise because of the pressures of livelihood, and there are four causes for

those pressures: first, wastefulness; second, extravagant social customs and the high price of all goods; third, laziness, deceit, and habitual dependence; fourth, the lack in society of people with noble ideals and a genuine sense of right and wrong, so that people are driven by vanity.

These four arise further because people lack the wisdom needed for self-mastery. At the outset, people do not wish to do evil, but they are driven by their circumstances. Thus, superior people become passive; middling people drift with the current; and inferior people recklessly venture into danger.

Everything in society depends upon mutual aid. Whoever acquires something without giving an equivalent value, thereby taking what belongs to others, is no different from a robber. From that point on, society can have no day of peace or justice. Thus, whether poor or rich, all share the same fear and the same mutual suspicion. Never has the inequality of suffering and happiness been greater than it is today. Men and women, high and low alike, have all lost mastery of their minds: seeking only profit, they become shameless and will stop at nothing. Over time this becomes habitual, their audacity grows ever greater, and they take it as natural. Is this not utterly terrifying? If it is not remedied now, when will we wait to remedy it?

Human life fundamentally has two kinds of undertaking. The first is earning a livelihood: clothing, food, housing, and transportation are its primary concerns, and none can be lacking. The second is sustaining one's life. To sustain oneself, one must first possess the virtues by which one can sustain oneself. If the nation is not preserved, what becomes of the family? What becomes of one's own person? This is why those who benefit the nation sustain their lives.

In one's exchanges with others in society, one has only honest and diligent work to offer. If one is not trustworthy, others will reject one, and one's path of livelihood will become increasingly narrow. This is why faithfulness and righteousness sustain one's life.

Family happiness is the consolation of human life after its hard work. If people are mutually suspicious, if husband and wife are not harmonious, and if, in old age, one's children are unfilial, where is life's joy? If one does not become ill from toil, one will die from grief and indignation. This is why peace of mind sustains one's life.

People of recent times rush about in their pursuits concerned only with earning a livelihood, not with sustaining life. Even when they enjoy abundant food and fine clothing, many still cannot restrain their greed and desire, cannot preserve their integrity in old age, and die needlessly with a bad name. As for the rest, there is no family without illness, suffering, and resentment. Outwardly pressed by the terrors of human affairs and inwardly pressed by domestic vexations, they ultimately die young and in vain.

Those below this condition may suffer from disappointed love, oppressive debts, or all kinds of indescribable misery. All this is created by not understanding cause and effect, not comprehending benefit and harm, and losing self-mastery in confusion. Frightening indeed, frightening indeed! Most frightening of all is to spend one's days in a den of terror without knowing it. This is what is meant by lacking the wisdom needed for self-mastery.

Everything before our eyes is entirely one cause and one effect. If one does not understand cause and effect, one's suffering will never come to an end. Therefore, the farther one's vision reaches, the more thorough one's vigilance becomes, and the less suffering there will be in the future. The Buddhadharma is the most wondrous method for human life to prevent future suffering. The Buddhadharma takes realization of mind as primary. When the mind is clear, one's understanding is broad and far-reaching and one's precautions are thorough. One then creates none of the suspicions, resentments, bitterness, poison, and harm that arise from mutual mistrust, and blessings naturally arrive. In all such matters, one should calmly and patiently offer guidance according to circumstances, without impatience. This is skillful expedient means.

Question: Can studying Buddhism relieve economic pressure?

Answer: Economic pressure means being oppressed despite having economic means. Worldly people take poverty to be economic pressure and thus regard having no money as its meaning. They do not know that the pressure of having money is even more painful.

Those who have money live every day amid the fearful toil of managing and preserving it, until they can neither sleep nor eat peacefully. In every word and action, they have worries. The realities of old age, illness, and suffering grow imperceptibly day by day; dangers may arise everywhere, and they must be on guard at every turn. Their oppression reaches an extreme. If one had no wealth to manage and no resources to dispense, perhaps one would not suffer such pressure.

As for the pressure of having no money, it is called hardship; it is only a temporary suffering. Everyone in the world undergoes hardship, yet everyone gets through it; one does not necessarily die from such pressure. As for starving to death or dying of hardship, there are other causes: namely, laziness and a lack of trustworthiness. One first cuts oneself off from society and has no way out; this is real poverty. Thus, one cuts oneself off and abandons oneself; it is not economic pressure that forces one. But if one has money and does not manage it well, and is insatiably greedy, that is real poverty.

Therefore, hardship does not necessarily lead to death, whereas poverty makes death unavoidable; their meanings must be distinguished. Moreover, the traditional

Chinese character 窮 (qióng, “poverty”) consists of 穴, “cave,” and 身, “bent body”: the body is bent and dwells in a cave, showing that there is no way out. Thus, poverty does not mean merely having or lacking possessions; it means having no way out. If one lacks wisdom, there is no way out in anything. The poor are indeed impoverished, but the rich too may be impoverished.

To study Buddhism is nothing other than to seek the opening of wisdom. This is precisely how one relieves the suffering of economic pressure: by not being deluded by all the illusory things of the world, one naturally has no suffering from pressure. Moreover, pressure is something one creates and undergoes oneself; one generates one’s own panic. It does not truly come from others. If one understands the causal ground, how could one have such a painful result?

Question: Earlier you said that no force surpasses the force of mind. But when the mental force of those with dull faculties is compared with that of those with sharp faculties, how can there be no difference? What is the reason for this?

Answer: It is simply a difference in causes and conditions. Take the same arm: when it is bitten by a mosquito, the sensation is exactly the same. Yet in one case the arm is bare, and in the other it is covered by a sleeve; naturally, the speed of sensation differs. It is not that the sensation itself differs, but that the causes and conditions differ according to whether there is a sleeve or no sleeve.

The sharpness or dullness of one’s faculties is likewise due to this. Moreover, the speed of mental force is beyond comparison. Nothing in the world is swifter than light or electricity, yet the mind is swifter still. In a single kṣaṇa, the difference between sage and ordinary person is as vast as heaven and abyss, beyond measure by distance. One thought of emptiness is Buddhahood; one deluded thought is thievery. It is always this one thought. Becoming a Buddha and falling into hell occur with precisely the same swiftness.

Suppose that a person has a thousand thoughts each day. Among these thousand thoughts, who knows how many are Buddha and how many belong to the six realms? People are bodhisattvas for only a minute and Buddhas for only a second. They are troubled by their inability to make the practice continuous and undivided, with every thought on the Buddha. Since mental force cannot attend to everything at once, when it attends to this, it loses that. It is regrettable to direct useful thoughts toward useless things.

Question: May I hear the meaning of the two characters zong and jiao, “religion”?

Answer: Zong (宗) means the one fundamental principle to which one returns; jiao (教) means teaching people to return to that principle. Only Confucianism and Buddhism teach people to seek that principle within themselves; other religions differ in this.

They insist that people adhere to their teachings, revealing them to followers but keeping them secret from others. Yet this was not the original intention of the sages of the various religions. It was later adherents, limited by narrow views, who imposed such restrictions upon themselves. This is deeply regrettable. Religion is a tool for gathering in the mind; its level reflects the capacities and dispositions of different peoples, and its flourishing or decay also follows political conditions and national fortunes.

Eastern peoples are by nature fond of courtesy and deference, lofty in spirit, and inclined toward ideals. They can readily absorb any religion, yet it is difficult for a religion to satisfy them. Whatever does not accord with their spiritual ideal, they readily disdain and reject. Thus, although the teachings of Huang and Lao are exceedingly profound and subtle, because they do not reach ultimate completion, they still could not satisfy them. Therefore, Mahāyāna Buddhism arose in India but flourished in China, and the Chan school is uniquely possessed by the East. Later, it divided into branches and schools, each establishing its own gate and competing over superiority and inferiority; it had long since lost the original intent of Chan. This is something genuine disciples of the Buddha disdain to dispute and cannot bear even to speak of.

Western peoples are by nature fond of competition and advancement, firm and strong in spirit, and attentive to facts. Religion is difficult for them to absorb, and therefore inconceivably profound principles are mistakenly regarded as superstition. Yet if they do not believe, that is one matter; once they believe, they are not easily shaken.

Moreover, because they are busy earning a living through clothing, food, and shelter, even when they believe in religion, their purpose is to seek blessings or to pursue scholarly research. They therefore cannot penetrate deeply. Even in protecting religion, they attend only to progress in missionary and organizational affairs; as for doctrine, they generally do not seek thorough and profound inquiry. Thus, responses to points of difficulty concerning the Bible often fail fully to satisfy the questioner’s intent. This is the general reason for the decline of Western religion in modern times.

Among Eastern religions, Chan is the highest standard. Yet its latent force need not reside in monasteries; it resides among people who have never studied Buddhism. When they do not believe, they slander the Buddha and revile monastics; once they believe, they suddenly enter the supreme vehicle. It is regrettable that qualified teachers are few, and that those of fine capacity encounter adverse causes and conditions, even mistakenly entering demonic or bizarre paths. Yet their capacity for the supreme vehicle does not regress. Once they awaken and enter, their spirit

cannot be confined within one age; they stand forth as truly great persons. How could they be measured by other schools, branches, or religions?

Thus, although the outward forms of Eastern Buddhism decline daily, the Buddhist movement is especially vigorous. Although environmental pressures increase daily, the tendency toward Buddhism grows ever stronger. It is certain that outstanding people will emerge amid hardship and adversity. Why? Matters of hardship necessarily require the strength of samādhi, and there the strength or weakness of one's faculties is revealed. This is what is meant by: "A strong wind reveals the strength of the grass."

Therefore, the more a country suffers and the more difficult its undertakings, the more its people of ability are tempered and the stronger their samādhi becomes. Thus, the power of the Buddhadharma lies hidden here.

Those who can make good use of the Buddhadharma will surely apply their power of samādhi to human affairs. A country will produce talented people in succession; nothing will be impossible to accomplish, and there will be no difficult task under heaven. The success or failure of any undertaking depends on nothing more than the ability to endure and the willingness to sacrifice. These two qualities must be sought in the power of samādhi found in the Buddhadharma; there is no second method. Moreover, the evolution of humankind must also be founded upon benevolence, reverence, broad-mindedness, and resolute perseverance. We Eastern people already possess these unsurpassed qualifications. Take care not to indulge yourselves and abandon yourselves, nor again call the Buddhadharma superstition.

Question: You have often said that there is a one-character precept. What is this one-character precept?

Answer: Precepts are restraints upon the mind. The one-character precept is a ( ). A is the first of the fifty Sanskrit letters and signifies that all things are originally unborn. When the Chinese character is used as an interjection, it is pronounced with a long, level tone; it conveys the image of sudden clarity and direct awakening to the original suchness. Pronounced with a departing tone, it conveys remorse and self-reproach, together with the resolute intention to renounce and abstain.

If pronounced in the shǎng (rising) tone, then whenever one encounters something, one first becomes alert and watchful; in an instant, the supreme principle of cause and effect becomes completely clear, and one thereby departs from deluded paths and evil ways. Further, let go of everything: there is immediate empty quiescence, and one enters illusion-like samādhi. Once the mind is empty and quiescent, evil too does not exist; what precept is there left to speak of? Hence it is called the one-character precept.

If one realizes the wondrous truth of the unborn, then the three virtues of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom are all fully present. With long practice, this becomes natural; at all times, in every matter and place, one does not lose this awareness. This is the most simple, essential, and fitting dharma gate. The difference between sages and ordinary beings lies only in whether awareness comes earlier or later: those aware at the causal ground are sages; those aware at the ground of fruition are worthy ones; those who are unaware are sentient beings. This one-character precept is precisely the wondrous function of awareness at the causal ground.

Question: Students often delight in seeking supernormal powers. You say that they should not be sought, but will naturally be realized. I have not yet understood this principle; please give further instruction.

Answer: What is it that can be wondrous? What is it that is penetrated? You do not yet understand what this capacity for wonder is, and therefore you encounter hindrances everywhere. Once there are hindrances, how can there be penetration? Thus, one must not first seek supernormal powers. One must first thoroughly understand the principle. In all human affairs, one must be adaptable everywhere; even in following one's own views, one must not be rigidly attached. "Overcome oneself and return to propriety" means returning to one's original beginning; then naturally all under heaven returns to benevolence. This is the Confucian teaching on supernormal powers. It is called the power of the Way. There are further distinctions among supernormal powers, demonic powers, and dependent powers. Consult Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935) and you will understand.

Question: May I hear the essential instructions for cultivating the mind?

Answer: Practitioners should understand four points. First, do not fear inversion; fear only lack of awareness, for with awareness, the whole matter is resolved at once. Second, do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only delayed awareness. Third, do not fear lack of awareness; fear only that awareness is not constant, lest it be forgotten and lost. Fourth, do not fear that it is not constant; fear grasping at awareness, because awareness too is an illusory dharma. The mind then remains unempty, has not yet reached the ultimate, and cannot be called right awakening.

Therefore, at the beginning of practice, take clarifying the root as primary; in proper cultivation, take repeatedly bringing the mind to awareness as essential. In brief, inner cultivation takes realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as its aim. Recognize the appearance of the illusory mind, and thoroughly penetrate this fundamental wisdom, which penetrates ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), the eighth consciousness. Outer cultivation takes perfect contemplation as its aim: merge all circumstances into nonduality, so that the mind is without fear and remains equal. This is differentiated wisdom, which penetrates the sixth and

seventh consciousnesses. Fundamental wisdom is attained through realization and depends on practice methods; differentiated wisdom is acquired through training and depends on human affairs. The essential instructions go no further than this, yet the myriad transformations depend upon one's own awakening of mind and cannot be transmitted.

Question: How should the two characters di yu, "hell," be explained?

Answer: Di ( ) means firmness; yu ( ) means confinement. If people can relinquish stubborn fixation and attachment to self, hell naturally becomes empty. For all who enter hell, the first condition is a single attachment to fixation. This is the root of ignorance. Because they do not clearly perceive principle and do not understand cause and effect, whenever they act they incur blame, yet do not realize that their habits are evil. Over time, greed grows ever fiercer; when what they greed for cannot be obtained, anger arises. The evil causes of the three karmic activities become increasingly intense, and without realizing it they enter hell. Yet this too is the result of accumulated habits over ordinary days; it is not caused in a single morning or evening.

As long as one does not rigidly cling to self, but trains this mind to become lively and responsive, one who quickly shifts a thought can quickly turn toward goodness and quickly leave hell.

In sum, worldly people take hell to be hell, whereas Buddhas and bodhisattvas take everything that is not ultimate to be hell. For even if one does not enter hell today, one still cannot avoid it in the future; therefore, they do not accept it.

Question: What is meant by the nonduality of form and emptiness?

Answer: This meaning is very profound; those who have not realized it do not know it. To the statements, "form is not different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form, form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form," add the following four statements: "form does not depart from emptiness, emptiness does not depart from form, form and emptiness are nondual, and it is at once emptiness and form." I shall now establish the contrasting meanings of form and emptiness in order to explain them.

(1) All the myriad forms of the world—whether things, circumstances, affairs, principles, or even every view within the mind—belong to form; and all the myriad forms of the world—whether things, circumstances, affairs, principles, or even every view within the mind—belong to emptiness.

(2) Form does not inherently exist; it exists through the coming together of causes and conditions, and is therefore known to be empty. Emptiness is not inherently

established; emptiness is seen because of form, and thus emptiness is revealed through form.

(3) The essential nature of form is emptiness, and emptiness necessarily depends upon form.

(4) Form does not depart from emptiness, and emptiness does not depart from form.

(5) Form itself is illusion, and illusion itself is form.

(6) At the very time there is form, it is already emptiness; at the very time one speaks of emptiness, what is not form?

(7) Form is an illusory appearance, as when one says “stone”; emptiness is an illusory meaning, as when one says “hard.”

(8) Form can be seen and is seen by the eye; emptiness cannot be seen and is understood at the level of principle.

(9) Form is form; therefore it is illusory. Emptiness, too, is form; therefore it too is illusory.

(10) Form is inherently empty, and emptiness too is empty.

(11) Form is form-and-emptiness on the side of fruition; emptiness is form-and-emptiness on the side of cause.

(12) Because they are equal, it is said that they are not different; because they are nondual, it is said that they are precisely the same.

(13) To see form as empty is to trace from fruition back to cause; to understand form through emptiness is to reach fruition from cause.

(14) From this, we know that all things are illusory, and that all minds and views are also illusory.

(15) From this, we understand that all phenomena are inherently illusory, and that all principles and dharmas are likewise illusory.

(16) From this, we awaken to the fact that what is realized is illusory, and that the one who realizes is also illusory.

(17) Having emptied form, one should also empty emptiness.

(18) Having emptied emptiness, there is then that which is not empty. To comprehend the meaning of emptiness and nonemptiness is to enter the dharma gate of nonduality.

To move freely in the nonduality of form and emptiness, without defilement or admixture, is called freedom. If the mind is truly free, what foothold can suffering have? Thus, one whose mind has gained freedom and who practices prajñā deeply is a bodhisattva; one whose mind is inherently free, ever quiescent and ever illuminating, without deliberate effort, is a Buddha.

This meaning was originally taught for eighth-bhūmi bodhisattvas who, through wondrous contemplation, realized the Tathāgata-garbha of emptiness and nonemptiness and manifested the samādhi of equality. Once this insight is thoroughly understood, all worldly affairs, all principles, all things, all circumstances, all selves, and all dharmas are not worth half a penny. One willingly lets them go, seeing no value in attending to any of them. Then, in regard to all wholesome and unwholesome dharmas, one naturally feels neither alarm, fear, nor dread. This is exceedingly rare.

Question: Students often give rise to worries about the future, fearing that they may not attain realization in this life. What method can dispel this doubt?

Answer: There is no need to fear this. So long as you apply yourself single-mindedly and earnestly, there is none who will fail to attain realization within three years. Empty worry is of no benefit. You need not ask what the future will be like; simply ask yourself what you are like now. Before beginning study, people commonly commit the fault of laziness, being unwilling to endure hardship. Once they have gained something through practice, they commit the fault of waiting, saying, “Let us proceed slowly for now.” This too is a root of laziness.

When practice reaches the midpoint, they commit the fault of doubt. At this time it is easiest to stop, fearing that one has been deceived. If practice brings some realization, and one is told its reason, or assured that there is some correspondence, one then commits the further fault of fear. In all kinds of ways one procrastinates and indulges oneself. Alas! Human life passes like a white colt glimpsed through a crack. How long will you wait?

Question: What is meant here by “guest influences” (keqi,)?

Answer: Everyone inevitably has two “guests”—two kinds of “guest influence.” Because the mind loses its mastery, delusion and confusion grow all the more intense. The first kind is being carried away by circumstances: following circumstances into joy, anger, sorrow, or delight, one forgets one’s own mastery and

enters the position of a guest. In serious cases, one is bound as a slave, and suffering and adversity arise. Therefore, one must rely on one's own discernment.

Yet if one relies on one's own discernment, one again clings to self and is covered over by emotional and conceptual views, unable to attain liberation. One thus again occupies the position of a guest, and delusion and suffering arise. This is called the two guests. The former is attachment to self; the latter is attachment to dharmas. One is enslaved by both; they differ only in coarseness and subtlety. Therefore, developing wisdom is the foremost matter: use wisdom to empty circumstances, and then use wisdom to empty wisdom itself. When the power of samādhi is strong and discernment far-reaching, the force of attachment to self becomes slight, and the afflictions of adventitious defilements naturally vanish without trace.

When people encounter hardship, what they undergo may be the same, and the harm may also be the same, yet what they suffer is different, because one can contemplate emptiness while the other clings only to existence. One who contemplates emptiness, though suffering great loss, responds to it calmly and is not shaken. Why? Because before the loss occurs, such a person has already anticipated it; thoughts of gain and loss have long grown faint.

But one who clings to existence has a narrow outlook and a strong concern for gain and loss. At the slightest harm, such a person cannot bear the suffering. Even if repeatedly and earnestly instructed in ordinary times, they remain dark and unaware; until genuine suffering arrives, they do not awaken. Yet this is only a momentary feeling: their greed and anger are ultimately not extinguished. They still let these "guest influences" rule, and there are none among them who do not die of illness brought on by worry and grief.

Therefore, do not pursue thoughts of past events, do not speculate about future events, and do not abide in present events. The past is like a dream, the future like clouds—how can they be grasped? As for what is before one's eyes, it flashes and vanishes like lightning; even if one wishes to abide in it, it cannot be obtained. Therefore, seeing and hearing must not be cut off. Simply remain quietly serene and open and expansive, bound by nothing, acting when called upon and withdrawing when set aside. Mastery rests with oneself; this is the realm of the Buddha.

Question: Practitioners of the Way should not crave wealth and rank. Is this teaching ultimate?

Answer: It does not mean that one must abandon wealth and rank; one simply should not be attached to them. Wealth and rank are dharmas arising from a person's causes and conditions. One who truly practices the Way must be able to handle wealth and rank well. Worldly people crave wealth and rank; those of the two vehicles detest them; bodhisattvas do not reject them, and may also seek them, but

acquire them through skillful means for the benefit of others. For a Buddha, nothing is unacceptable; wealth, rank, poverty, and lowliness are all the same. Therefore, only a Buddha can truly enjoy great wealth and rank. Fourth Brother Jiliang said: “Only a fortunate person can endure hardship; one who cannot endure hardship today will be unable to enjoy blessings in later years.”

Question: Why must learning Buddhism take arousing the great resolve as its primary concern?

Answer: In expounding the entire Avataṃsaka Sūtra, the Buddha especially values the phrase “ordinary beings of great resolve,” for becoming a Buddha depends above all on being a vessel for the Dharma. Zengzi said: “A scholar cannot but be broad-minded and resolute, for the burden is heavy and the way is far.”

This shows that one’s capacity must be broad and open, and one’s will firm and resolute. Yet resolve can easily approach narrow attachment, while breadth, though expansive, may lack standards. Only by balancing the two can one bear a heavy burden and reach far. Zengzi took “until death, and only then cease” as what is meant by “far.” But what, after all, is that which is broad-minded and resolute? Even in death, it is not obscured.

Of all worldly learning, apart from developing wisdom and realizing the mind, everything else is arising and ceasing and lacks reality. To spend useful time and mental energy on useless things is deeply regrettable. The Diamond Sūtra uses the vast space of the ten directions as an analogy to explain the character hong (, “broad”); when the body is cut to pieces, yet one does not forget the vow to endure humiliation and liberate sentient beings, this explains the character yi (, “resolute”). Thus, becoming a Buddha also takes breadth and resolve as its foundation.

Question: Does Buddhism’s teaching that all is mind conflict with science’s materialism?

Answer: Science too is brought about by mind, so there is not the slightest conflict. People are obscured by material desires; this is not the fault of things, but their own delusion. Since science has flourished, Buddhist learning has become ever more radiant; the two have the marvelous effect of complementing one another.

Modern Western science has advanced to an admirable degree, but regrettably it has been misused for destruction and harm. It says that all things contain electrons, and that the intervals between electrons are all space. If they were reduced and the space removed, the electrons could be brought together, causing something as enormous as a camel to shrink into the tiniest size and pass through the eye of a needle. This is already gradually approaching the principle of the unobstructed dharma realm. Thus, it is not impossible for Mount Sumeru to fit within a mustard

seed. Yet this is used here as an analogy for mind, whereas science speaks of physical principles. When science develops further in the future, it will surely make Buddhist wisdom still clearer. Those who cling to views of self may then cease doing so.

Question: Buddhists speak only of mind and intrinsic nature, whereas Confucians speak of the ethereal and corporeal souls. What is the meaning of this?

Answer: The ethereal and corporeal souls are transformations of mind. The physical body is arising and ceasing, impermanent, whereas intrinsic nature is constant and unchanging. When a person dies, intrinsic nature departs and drifts outside. That which floats freely and unconfined is called the ethereal soul; it too becomes aware when encountering circumstances. If it becomes attached to something, it is called the corporeal soul. In truth, both are mind. The ethereal soul tends to rise, and the corporeal soul tends to descend, but they are not two things.

Moreover, the ethereal soul belongs to the master and is called the spirit-soul; it must have somewhere to which it returns. The corporeal soul readily becomes attached, and attachment then seizes the ethereal soul. For those who lack cultivation and self-mastery during life, their ethereal and corporeal souls already drift unsettled, just as after death, causing great fear and suffering.

If one dies an unnatural death, or is unwilling to die young, the corporeal soul descends and becomes a fierce ghost. It may attach itself to a spirit tablet, cling to a corpse, possess another person, or depend upon plants and trees, and may indeed produce movements and transformations. Immediately after death its power is strong, but over time it withers and weakens. New ghosts are large, and old ghosts small; this is the principle. Non-Buddhist paths speak of three ethereal souls and seven corporeal souls, but this is merely a forced correspondence with the three natures and seven emotions; it is not ultimate.

Question: What are called the three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas?

Answer: Asaṃkhyeya means an inexpressibly great number. It may be one lifetime, or a hundred or a thousand lifetimes; there is no fixed definition. Those studying and practicing Buddhism often do not know what it is that practices or what practice is for. If one knows for oneself that it is mind that practices, one has transcended the first asaṃkhyeya kalpa. If one practices and realizes that mind is unobtainable, one has transcended the second asaṃkhyeya kalpa.

Advancing further, when habitual tendencies have been swept clean, one is neither empty nor existent, and clings neither to the middle nor the extremes, one has transcended the third asaṃkhyeya kalpa. Again, to empty external circumstances is the first asaṃkhyeya kalpa; to empty the inner mind is the second asaṃkhyeya

kalpa; and to empty the residual habits of form and mind, so that practice is complete, is called transcending the third asaṃkhyeya kalpa.

Worldly people casually say that one must pass through three great kalpas, but if asked from what time these are counted, they do not know. The Buddha clearly said that one has not planted wholesome roots with only one or two Buddhas; clearly, the counting began long ago. How then can it be discussed merely in terms of beginning study in this present life? Nor can a kalpa be fixed as long or short. It is like traveling a road: the road need not be divided into far and near, but travelers differ in slowness, swiftness, and order of arrival. Asaṃkhyeya means many; its duration varies with causes and conditions and cannot be fixed as any particular length of time.

Question: How can one find a place to rest and a foundation for life?

Answer: Find that in which you can rest and establish your life, and you will have found that secure foundation.

Question: How can one attain purity of the dharma eye?

Answer: This means purifying one's seeing. Purity does not mean cutting it off, but simply not becoming attached. Students should know that seeing belongs to mind; when mind is empty, seeing is pure. Buddha-nature is not existent, so do not form a view of emptiness. Buddha-nature is not nonexistent, so do not form a view of existence. If one says it is neither empty nor existent, do not form a dharma-view of that either. But what then is to be done? Know thus and see thus: do not cling to the subject or the object, and the dharma eye is pure.

Question: Fellow practitioners often enjoy ranking themselves as higher or lower. This is certainly a fault, but without doing so, there seems to be nothing by which to observe and learn from one another, and one may also lapse into neglect. Judging by the principle of not yielding when righteousness is at stake, there should also be some comparison. What, ultimately, is appropriate?

Answer: There is originally nothing wrong with ranking higher and lower in order to observe and learn from one another. But people tend to be narrow-minded, and such comparisons easily give rise to resentment and grievance; these must be avoided at all costs. Practice lies entirely with oneself; do not concern yourself with others. What matters is that one's dharma eye is correct and one's causal ground is correct. Speed or slowness, superiority or inferiority, are merely temporary causes and conditions and need not be calculated. Moreover, capacities differ and cannot be compared. So long as all proceed westward in the same direction and do not take the wrong road, what harm is there in arriving sooner or later? Those who have not broken through the mark of time first cling to a self, and thus this fault arises. When

I formerly practiced the Dharma, I vowed that all my elder Dharma brothers would attain realization before I did; I too feared having such an inferior view.

Question: May the combined Pure Land, Chan, and Esoteric practice of Mind-Seal Vihara, together with its ritual procedures, be made public?

Answer: The Buddhadharma is impartial; why should it not be? Yet few have faith enough to enter it, and preconceived views are many. People may not necessarily be willing to practice in accordance with the Dharma. The instructions are therefore given below:

1. First pay homage to the Buddha with three prostrations, and make offerings of incense and flowers in the prescribed manner.

2. In the hall, designate a seat of honor and have the others sit around it, seated cross-legged as in a Chan hall. Do not sit after a full meal or in a drafty place.

3. The leader recites the Amitābha Sūtra once, while the others quiet their minds and listen silently.

4. When the sūtra recitation is finished, the leader lights incense and places it in the burner, strikes the wooden fish three times, and enters stillness.

5. The assembly simultaneously forms the Amitābha mudrā and recites the sacred name Namo Amitābha Buddha.

A. Vajra recitation: make no sound with the mouth, though the lips move; recite continuously without releasing the mudrā, and keep the mind free of deliberate contrivance.

B. Do not engage in visualization, seek extraordinary states, pursue external objects, or rigidly guard a fixed state of samādhi. When a myriad thoughts arise in confusion, use only the single phrase “Amitābha Buddha” to sweep them away completely, sweeping away whatever comes, and letting what is swept away become empty.

C. When reciting, be neither hurried nor slow. Do not hold the breath, count repetitions, cling to the one who recites, or grasp at what is recited.

D. At times, when one seems neither asleep nor awake, the mouth may continue reciting while one suddenly recites other sūtras or mantras. Upon becoming aware of this, simply correct it; there is no need for remorse. This is a state in which signs of samādhi appear in stillness, but it must not be mistakenly grasped as something valid.

E. Seeing light or Buddhas, hearing loud sounds, or seeing images of being guided onward are all illusory appearances. Never grasp at them. Anyone who formerly recited the Buddha's name while greedily seeking such guidance already has these illusory images in the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna); when stillness becomes profound, they emerge. They are not sacred states, so do not grasp at them under any circumstances. Regard them as empty and pay them no heed; this is the primary meaning. As it is said, "When one does not make a fuss over the strange, the strange vanishes of itself."

F. When the legs become sore, you may change their position, but do not move or sway the body. Before taking your seat, first urinate and wash your hands.

G. If the qi in the abdomen moves and makes sounds, simply let it do so. Do not suppress it and obstruct its flow.

6. When one stick of incense has burned out, the leader first begins reciting the Buddha's name aloud, slowly, for ten or more recitations, gradually increasing the volume from soft to loud. Then strike the wooden fish three times. Without rising from their seats, the assembly then begins self-inquiry, asking themselves, "Who is it that is now reciting the Buddha's name?" Do this for about ten minutes.

7. The leader gives a brief explanation of the essential meaning of the Pure Land and the principle of combining the three practices of Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism. When the talk is finished, all recite the dedication together and then leave their seats.

8. For a seven-day retreat, give instruction only once. Use six sticks of incense (four in the morning and two in the afternoon), eight sticks (five in the morning and three in the afternoon), or ten sticks (seven in the morning and three in the afternoon), as appropriate. There is no evening service, only one sūtra is recited, and at the end the Rebirth Mantra is recited twenty-one times, nothing more.

9. In this practice, a group of four or more may be called a saṅgha. (Even bhikṣus require four or more to constitute a saṅgha; the same applies to lay practitioners, who thereby form a group.) If such a society is formed and practices devoutly, sitting for three sticks of incense daily, each of about one hour, then after following these rules for one year, there will be none who do not attain samādhi.

10. This practice is superior to the older method. Its differences are as follows:

A. Because the recitation is not voiced, the mind becomes unified. By using the method of empowerment through the three mysteries, it is easy to attain samādhi; wisdom arises from samādhi and is also readily awakened.

B. It does not strain the qi, nor is there the disturbance of people interfering chaotically with one another.

C. It avoids the drawback of dullness and drowsiness in the Chan school's dry sitting.

D. There is no need for either walking meditation or circumambulation of the Buddha; one naturally enters a state of no-thought.

E. From the outset, its aim is first to realize samādhi, attain avaivartika, and accomplish the Pure Lands of the ten directions; the Western Pure Land is naturally included within this. At this point, the addition of the power of vows makes one still more steadfast. Therefore it is called the method of rebirth on the spot.

F. Visualization is not adopted at the outset because combining the three mysteries in practice readily brings samādhi. This method combines the three practices of Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism, and is derived from the Heart-of-Heart Dharma of Esoteric Buddhism. It is the most excellent and wondrous Dharma. Many have already realized it; if you try it, there will certainly be remarkable results.

G. For recorded teachings and instructions, consult the books published by this association, so that they may accord with this practice.

Question: The sūtras say that sentient beings are originally Buddhas, but I truly have doubts about this. Please explain.

Answer: Here one must attend to the two Chinese characters ("originally"). Sentient beings are sentient beings because of the deluded stirring of a single thought, whose root cause is ignorance. Speaking of what is original: before a single thought arises, and at the very moment a thought is let go, both ends are still, empty, and pure—limpid and unmoving, nondual with the Buddha. Yet although they are still and limpid, one never understands why this is so; therefore one remains a sentient being. One is a sentient being for but a second. Apart from these two ends, where else could one see a realm of Buddhahood?

Question: The sūtras say that, without relying on expedient means, one can immediately awaken to the Tathāgata's ground. How should this principle ultimately be understood?

Answer: This means that it is so right here and now. In terms of the fundamental essence, sentient beings inherently possess Buddha-nature without the slightest deficiency. As soon as one becomes aware, wisdom opens; once one lets go, the realm of Buddhahood appears before one. There is no need to labor further in contrived action. If one becomes even slightly contrived, one again loses what is original. This is the most essential and simple dharma gate for eliminating habitual

tendencies after realizing the mind. “Without relying on expedient means” means there is no need to use other methods of counteraction; simply letting go is enough.

Question: How can one remain unalarmed and unafraid when encountering circumstances? Is it through realizing emptiness, or is there another dharma gate?

Answer: Those who become alarmed and afraid when encountering circumstances already have thoughts of gain and loss. They rejoice in what accords with themselves and become vexed by what goes against them. Alarm and fear are the beginning of vexation and the first stirrings of inverted views. If one’s power to realize emptiness is strong in ordinary times, then nothing is alarming or frightening, and no countermeasure will be needed when the moment comes. Therefore, effort should be made in ordinary times, with awareness as the primary concern. If one cannot be aware, then even if one is not alarmed or afraid at that moment, one will inevitably later return to alarm, fear, and inverted views. If one can awaken, then even if one’s strength is not yet sufficient and there is temporary alarm or fear, there is ultimately no doubt about the main point.

Question: What non-Buddhist paths cultivate is naturally different from the true Dharma, but how may they be guided to liberation? Since I neither accommodate nor constantly comply with them, and they do not believe in the true Dharma, is there any expedient method?

Answer: To liberate followers of non-Buddhist paths, one must first draw near to them on their own ground. Without entering the tiger’s den, how can one catch its cub? But one must not be afraid of their abuse and scolding. Only by following one’s own course and not seeking fame or recognition can one liberate them.

Because genuinely compassionate people are few among Buddhist groups, they either slander others or fear being slandered. They would rather rigidly preserve the rules and have no dealings with others, or deliberately display their orthodoxy and keep people firmly at arm’s length. After such rejection, followers of non-Buddhist paths become still less willing to receive instruction with an open mind. Their sectarian views grow deeper, and they grow increasingly hostile to one another. How, then, can they be liberated?

Moreover, if a teacher has no access at all to what non-Buddhist paths study, and cannot first refute them and win their confidence, how can that teacher guide them into what is superior? For bodhisattvas, working alongside others is the most difficult task. Those without genuine compassion are unwilling to enter the pit of fire themselves. The words “constantly comply” have no fixed definition in the Dharma. When causes and conditions mature, I shall wear a Daoist cap and robe and travel upstream, visiting Qingcheng Mountain, or perhaps staying for a time at Shangqing Palace on Laoshan Mountain near Qingdao.

Question: Does the meaning of constantly complying with sentient beings also mean constantly complying with the misconduct of one's children or disciples?

Answer: "Constantly complying" is not to be understood according to the literal words, as though compliance alone were always right. If one constantly complies with the wrongdoing of one's children or disciples, that is indulgence; it harms them rather than loves them. A bodhisattva should give children great love, not petty love. Guiding them through opposition and guiding them through compliance are equally compassion. If children or disciples cannot be guided except through opposition, then guiding them through opposition is also constant compliance. To use compliant guidance where it should not be used is called inversion, not constant compliance. What bodhisattvas do cannot be fathomed by ordinary people. One need only seek what lies within oneself; what concern is it of outsiders?

Question: What is primary in Esoteric Buddhism practice?

Answer: Faith is primary. Therefore there are five forms of faith:

First, faith that the Great Sun Mind-King pervades all places, and that everywhere is none other than Mahāvairocana Tathāgata. Yet foolish people invariably think that he is other than themselves. They do not know that the Great Sun King refers precisely to Buddha-nature, which neither I nor sentient beings lack, and which pervades all without exception. Thus the two gates of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism alike begin their cultivation from the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna).

Second, faith that no dharma is separate from the three meanings of essence, characteristics, and function; yet one must know that these three meanings are merely provisional names.

Third, faith that all things are formed from none other than the six great elements: earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness. Yet one must know that all things are inseparable from the six great elements and have no self-nature.

Fourth, faith that one will definitely attain Buddhahood in this very life. Yet one must know that attaining Buddhahood is awakening in an instant. When the causal ground becomes clear and open, "this very life" means this present life; it means that in this life one can certainly awaken suddenly and completely.

Fifth, faith that mind and matter are one, and that all sentient beings alike accomplish the Buddha Way. These are called the five forms of faith. Yet in Esoteric Buddhism, faith in the teacher is especially vital. Together with the preceding five gates, it is the same deep and unwavering faith; therefore one can remain single-minded without retreat, and realization is also easy.

Question: What are the four maṇḍalas of Esoteric Buddhism?

Answer: This is an abbreviation for the four kinds of maṇḍala. First is the great maṇḍala, referring to all sentient beings in the ten dharma realms. Second is the samaya maṇḍala, referring to all implements and insentient things, all of which are inseparable from Buddha-nature and equal. Third is the dharma maṇḍala, namely all sounds, visible forms, written words, and other dharmas of sentient and insentient beings, by which the meanings of things are expressed. Fourth is the karma maṇḍala, namely the movements of all activities. When these four are integrated and brought together, “maṇḍala” means a complete and perfect circle.

Question: What is empowerment through the three mysteries?

Answer: It is to transform the three karmas of body, speech, and mind so that they become empty and pure. Forming mudrās with the hands is the mystery of body; reciting mantras is the mystery of speech; bringing the mind into yogic accord and realizing bodhi through contemplation is the mystery of mind. By combining these three dharmas, one realizes the mind of secret adornment; this is the Buddha ground. This is the meaning of the three mysteries. In this usage, yoga means the three mysteries. “Secret” means what one knows for oneself; “adornment” means the pure virtue of fruition. In Esoteric Buddhism it is called secret adornment; in Chan it is called returning to the source. What is precious is one’s own awareness; it cannot be fathomed by others.

Question: How should the meaning of anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi be explained?

Answer: The character a ( ) is explained through four readings. First, its short-vowel form signifies bodhicitta and stands at the head of all letters. Second, its long-vowel form signifies practice: through the yoga of the four wisdom seals, one practices swiftly and expediently enters the correct cause of bodhi. Third, in the departing tone, it signifies equal enlightenment. Fourth, in the entering tone, it signifies nirvāṇa. By eliminating the two obstacles—afflictive and cognitive— one attains the four kinds of nirvāṇa: first, nirvāṇa of intrinsically pure nature; second, nirvāṇa with remainder; third, nirvāṇa without remainder; and fourth, non-abiding nirvāṇa. Altogether, it indicates only that birth is unobtainable and that one realizes the forbearance of non-arising.

The character nou ( ) signifies that no comparison for any dharma can be found; the Tathāgata’s myriad virtues are difficult to compare with anything.

The character duo ( ) signifies that the suchness of all dharmas is unobtainable; one realizes the suchness of original awakening.

The character luo ( ) signifies that all dharmas are pure and free of defilement, for the fire of wisdom burns deluded attachments and the toils of dust completely away.

The character san ( ) signifies that all dharmas and all truths are unobtainable, for in contemplating truth as it is, the nature and appearances of all dharmas are equal.

The character miao ( ) signifies that all dharmas are without self and are unobtainable.

The character san ( ) has the same meaning as above, but it also signifies entering into the present manifestation of descending, soaking rain—the gate of prajñāpāramitā—because, upon awakening to all dharmas, their equal nature is unobtainable.

The characters (bodhi) signify that all dharmas are without bondage.

If one knows that bodhicitta has been accomplished within one's own body, that the three times are equal and like empty space, and that one is free from all preceding appearances, then one knows that the minds of all sentient beings and the minds of all Buddhas are equally pure. One gives rise to great compassion based on shared identity and employs various skillful means to enable all sentient beings to leave the realms of suffering. This is the meaning of the word. In relation to bodhisattvas, Buddha means unsurpassed; in relation to the two vehicles, rightly equal; and in relation to ordinary beings, right awakening. In brief, it simply means becoming a Buddha.

Question: Why is Esoteric Buddhism also called the True Word school, and what does this mean?

Answer: Esoteric Buddhism is also called the True Word school because "true words" are the secret speech of its teacher, Mahāvairocana Tathāgata, the dharmakāya Buddha. Secret speech is the speech of the mind. This speech reveals the wondrous truth of the true reality of all dharmas. It is also called dhāraṇī, illumination (ming,), spiritual mantra, or secret designation.

Dhāraṇī means comprehensive retention. Illumination means the wheel of the Tathāgata's wisdom-light; upholding it can extinguish ignorance. A spiritual mantra can reveal the inconceivable six supernormal powers and five supernormal powers; thus, just as devas have mantras of sovereign delight, one recitation brings immediate attainment. A secret designation is not shared with others; only members of one's own circle can understand it, like secret military orders on campaign.

Because of the empowerment of the three mysteries, it is also called the Yoga school, indicating its ritual practice. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: "This Dharma accords with sentient beings and teaches the doctrine of true words according to their capacities."

The Vajraśekhara Sūtra calls it the secret and profound teaching of all Tathāgatas, a dharma gate for cultivating and realizing the sacred wisdom of self-awakening. Thus it differs from the intent of the two vehicles within Exoteric Buddhism, which realize the empty principle of the unconditioned. Practitioners should undertake the practical cultivation that is the true meaning of Esoteric Buddhism in order to realize the empty principle of the perfect teaching of Exoteric Buddhism; then both are attained. Furthermore, the teacher of the True Word school is Vairocana Tathāgata. All Tathāgatas manifest from this Tathāgata. Ever in the mind-palace of the secret Dharma realm, this Tathāgata expounds the gate of the three mysteries personally realized, liberates all members of the retinue, and exercises the functions of great compassion without interruption throughout the three times.

Question: Mencius said, “I am skilled at nourishing my vast, flowing qi.” What is this vast, flowing qi?

Answer: This was Mencius’s proudest and most self-assured statement of his life. Confucius, however, would not have spoken so directly. Those who did not understand Mencius therefore called him arrogant. Yet at that time there truly was no second person like him, nor did Mencius consider himself second to anyone.

At first, I too thought that he had not sufficiently nourished his qi and therefore made this statement. Later, I saw his words: “All things are complete within me.” This single statement truly shows that his realization of the Way had reached the utmost integration; no one incapable of truly nourishing vast, flowing qi could say it. Vast, flowing qi is precisely the essential nature that pervades the Dharma realm. Since this essential nature fills the Dharma realm, all things are encompassed within me, and nothing is lacking. This shows both the greatness of his realization and the power that fills the true essence within. To nourish it is to preserve this vast, flowing qi and not lose it. He was honored as the Second Sage, and he was indeed worthy of the title.

Question: Can the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism be united?

Answer: The Dharma has three gates, but my mind is one. If their meanings can be integrated, the Way will be greatly expanded. In my view, the Buddhist Way should be taken as the core principle and the Confucian Way as the teaching; the Daoist Way is fundamentally in accord with Confucianism. Present-day Daoism is technique rather than the Way, yet it need not be discarded; its techniques may be put to use. Buddhism is complete in both essence and function: attaining one, one can penetrate the myriad; entering one gate, one reaches the universal gate. Beginners, however, should distinguish them clearly, lest they become confused and lack a guiding principle. Once awakening has occurred, they should be integrated; this too

accords with the meaning of the many gates of skillful means. The Buddha said that all dharmas are Buddhadharma. Those who cling stubbornly cannot be spoken to about the Way.

Question: How can one subdue demons?

Answer: The method of subduing demons lies first in understanding what “demon” means. The Chinese character mo ( ) combines ma (, “hemp”) and gui (, “ghost”), referring to a gloomy ghost that can make the mind as tangled as hemp. This shows that demons arise from the mind. If one’s mind is empty, demons have no opportunity to take advantage.

When the Buddha entered the samādhi of loving-kindness, demons withdrew of themselves. Samādhi is the right concentration of accepting nothing. When mind encounters an object, something is accepted; once one accepts a demon, one then speaks of subduing it. But when the one who can subdue is already empty, where can the demon to be subdued be? This is the highest method of subduing demons. Likewise, everyone knows that the Great Compassion Mantra can subdue demons. If so, it could simply be called a demon-subduing mantra; why is it instead called a mantra of great compassion?

One must understand that when the mind is capable of great compassion, the thought of equality based on shared identity naturally arises. Once there is equality, both demon and self are empty and quiescent, and there is no longer any view of self and other, victory and defeat, gain and loss. Demons then withdraw of themselves. Even if the mind cannot yet be greatly compassionate and equal, once compassion and pity arise, it is as with a father and son: the son receives the father’s kindness and naturally bows down. This too is subduing. If one opposes it, one creates a confrontation and first places oneself in the position of an enemy. How could a demon’s mind be willing to submit? Therefore, anyone who entertains the notion of subduing demons has already stirred up demonic thoughts and has become a demon oneself. How, then, could one subdue it?

Question: What position do the spiritual realms of Confucius and Laozi occupy in Buddhism?

Answer: Confucius and Laozi were Buddhas who came earlier in the East; within Buddhism, they would be pratyekabuddhas. Though they had not heard the Buddhadharma, their spiritual realms accorded with Buddhism. Laozi told Confucius: “Fast and purify yourself; cleanse your spirit; strike down your knowledge. The Way is difficult to express; in ancient writings it is the same as you.” These are truly words of awakening to the Way, especially the phrase “strike down your knowledge.”

Nevertheless, this still belongs to the stage of deliberate application, for this knowledge still belongs to worldly knowledge and therefore must be struck down. If one speaks of Buddha-wisdom, what is unobtainable is precisely it, and the one capable of striking down is also it. The Buddha certainly does not adopt worldly knowledge, yet neither does he discard worldly knowledge. The matter lies in clear awakening, not in striking it down. As for Confucius's saying, "No speculation, no insistence, no rigidity, no self," it too is wondrous beyond compare.