A Brief Explanation of Mahāmudrā

Writings of Master Yuanyin

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Preface

Ganges Mahāmudrā is a profound practice of Esoteric Buddhism. It is practice without practicing: to practice is itself non-practice. Here, the path of words is cut off and the workings of mind cease. Not a single thought arises, yet awareness remains perfectly clear; within this lucid, thought-free state, one investigates its true import. One then realizes that afflictions are themselves bodhi, deluded thoughts are themselves wondrous functioning, emptiness and existence are non-dual, essence and function are one suchness, and all dharmas are the Buddhadharma.

At the age of ninety-four, Master Yuanyin (Mr Li Zhongding) continued tirelessly to expound the Dharma and write books. Following The Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization, this is another major work. With repeated, earnest exhortations, he lays the teaching out fully and directly; the exposition is lively, lucid, and illuminating by analogy. It is truly a precious raft for liberating sentient beings and an essential key to Buddhahood. May all sincere readers of this book open the eye of wisdom, enter the gate of signlessness, bring forth great capacity and great functioning, and sustain boundless compassionate vows, so that Master Yuanyin's painstaking efforts will not have been in vain.

Respectfully prefaced by the junior student Xu Hengzhi, January 1999

Preface

Here I would like to speak to you about Mahāmudrā, the highest teaching of Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism is divided into nine successive vehicles, and this belongs to the highest, called Atiyoga in Tibetan: the perfectly complete practice of union through the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. We have all practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for a long time and should by now have gained some results.

Some have already broken through to the original ground and seen their true nature; others may have had their true nature reveal itself during meditation but failed to recognize it and let the moment pass. Today, therefore, I shall explain what Buddha-nature is and how it may be seen. Having seen it, how do we go further, bring forth its wondrous functioning, and perfect the fruit of Buddhahood?

This is to remind and encourage us all to advance together. Ganges Mahāmudrā is exactly the same as the Chan school. It too does not prescribe a particular method of practice, but teaches no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization, directly pointing to the mind for the realization of Buddhahood.

Yet this “no practice, no attainment, no realization” is the natural wisdom of true suchness itself. Only after we have actually realized this state can we speak meaningfully of no practice, no attainment, and no realization; it is not something to be repeated as empty talk. If one merely understands a few principles but has not reached the point where mind and circumstances are one, where favorable and adverse conditions no longer bind one, and where one is free and at ease in every direction, then talk of no practice, no attainment, and no realization is entirely meaningless. For this reason, I shall now discuss Ganges Mahāmudrā with you.

Mahāmudrā does not mean that there is a hand seal to use in practice. It is unlike our practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, which has six mudrās and one mantra and requires forming a mudrā and reciting the mantra. This is a Dharma gate of direct pointing: it directly tells us what the true mind is, how to develop wisdom, and how to bring forth wondrous functioning.

Thus this is a straightforward Dharma gate of direct pointing. It is very useful for those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma to hear it, because the Heart-of-Heart Dharma also directly realizes the mind-ground without proceeding through forms.

There are many kinds of Mahāmudrā, of which Ganges Mahāmudrā is the highest. It requires neither visualization nor practices involving qi, channels, bindus, or the yidam, nor does it require reciting a mantra. It points directly to seeing our true

nature and attaining Buddhahood. Thus it is the highest teaching: the One True Dharma Realm.

What is the One True Dharma Realm? It is the wondrous essence of our original nature, suchness, and the very basis of Buddhahood. Why is it called the Great Seal? Because our Buddha-nature is so vast that nothing lies outside it and so minute that nothing lies within it. As the saying goes, “The great image is formless; the great sound is scarcely heard.” The greatest appearance is the appearance of no appearance: that in which no appearance can be seen is the greatest appearance.

Our original nature is neither empty nor existent, neither blue nor yellow, neither large nor small; none of these descriptions applies. To describe it as any one thing misses the mark. Nothing can be compared to it, for it is formless and incomparable. It is immeasurably vast, filling all space and pervading the dharma realm, encompassing everything and lacking no dharma.

The hand is the mind, and the mind is the hand. This is the meaning of the saying “The hand responds to what the mind intends.” Without the mind, the hand could not move. “Seal” means that our mind and the Buddha’s mind seal one another: the Buddha’s mind is my mind, and my mind is the Buddha’s mind. Thus a sūtra says, “Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are no different,” and another saying states, “The thousands upon thousands of Buddhas share one essence.” This is what they mean.

Thus Mahāmudrā is our vast mind, our original nature. Everything arises from it, manifests through it, and changes through it. This is called Mahāmudrā. Ganges Mahāmudrā is so excellent and so profound that we shall now openly explain this precious Dharma to everyone.

Lecture One: An Explanation of the Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā—View, Meditation, and Conduct Integrated Within Mind

1. Mind, Buddha, and Sentient Beings Are Not Different

“You should know that the lineage masters and my own mind are not different.”

We Buddhist disciples should recognize that our mind—the Buddha-nature—is identical to that of the past masters. The term “past masters” is employed here to represent the Buddhas, as they have already entered nirvāṇa. The Dharma is now transmitted through these past masters. By using the past masters as symbols for the Buddhas, we see that the Buddhas and the past masters become one.

Since our mind is no different from that of the lineage masters, it is no different from the Buddha's mind. At this point some may wonder, "We are ordinary beings, whereas the Buddha is a sage. Ordinary beings and sages are different, so how can there be no difference?" They do not understand that the essence of our nature is neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, and is the same in ordinary beings and sages.

The Buddhas possess vast spiritual powers and boundless wondrous functions, whereas we do not, as the Buddhas' nature has been purified of all impurities and defilements. Our attachment to false appearances and delusions has tainted our true nature, akin to the sun obscured by dark clouds; its rays cannot shine, and thus its wondrous functions cannot manifest.

However, no matter how thick the clouds may be or how much they obscure our view, the sun remains, its radiance undiminished. When the clouds disperse, the sun shines forth with dazzling brilliance. This phenomenon shows that we can be as radiant as the Buddha if we cleanse ourselves of the filth and accumulated dirt, even if our minds are tainted by our attachment to appearances.

The saying, "In sages it does not increase; in ordinary beings it does not decrease," does not imply that we lose our luminous nature simply because we are ordinary beings. Rather, our deluded grasping and deeply ingrained habitual tendencies obscure our true nature and prevents our luminous essence from manifesting. The true essence remains unchanged.

Why do we say this? These words are very important, because we now wish to attain Buddhahood, end birth and death, leave saṃsāra, and liberate sentient beings. We must first know how to practice, and in practice the first requirement is a correct view.

What we call the view is the causal ground. At the outset, we must know what to practice with and how to practice; only then can we quickly reach fulfillment. Otherwise we take many detours. Thus we must first know that our original nature is the same as that of all Buddhas. To use it as the basis of cultivation and realization is like using rice to cook a meal: success is certain.

Once this is clear, we no longer doubt that we can attain Buddhahood through practice, and practice in this way brings swift results. Otherwise we think, "The Buddha is supreme and beyond our reach. We are all ordinary beings; how could we become Buddhas or attain accomplishment?" The moment doubt arises, we hesitate and fail to advance, and accomplishment becomes impossible.

Faith is the mother of success. To accomplish anything, we must first have sufficient faith; without it, nothing can be accomplished. For example, practitioners of the

Pure Land school must first have unwavering faith: “There truly is a Pure Land in the West. If I make the vow and recite the Buddha’s name, Amitābha Buddha will certainly receive and guide me to rebirth there at death.”

Then they must recite the Buddha’s name diligently to attain accomplishment at death. If their faith is shallow and uncertain—“Oh, my karmic obstacles are so heavy! Can I be reborn in the Western Pure Land? I am afraid not!”—this will not do. Doubt and indecision weaken their practice; unable to advance wholeheartedly, they cannot succeed.

Therefore, faith is of utmost importance. This principle extends to all aspects of life, including worldly matters. If I believe in my success, I will work diligently for it. Failure will not deter me. I will persist and eventually achieve my goals. Conversely, if I encounter setbacks and become disheartened, I risk losing my resolve and ultimately achieving nothing.

The opening sentence encourages us to have faith that our nature is no different from that of the Buddha. The lineage masters represent the Buddha, and like the Buddha, our nature is the same as that of the masters, thus aligning with the concept of Buddha-nature. Understanding the path is essential in spiritual practice; without proper understanding, we will inevitably go astray and take unnecessary detours.

If we can genuinely believe that our nature is identical to that of the Buddha, then as long as we practice—cultivating our essence, transforming our delusions, and restoring our Original Face rather than focusing on the physical body or seeking it externally—we will attain Buddhahood.

With such faith, we will not seek outside ourselves. Otherwise, seeking externally—looking for the Buddha here today and there tomorrow, or fixating on the physical body—will ultimately lead to emptiness. This is because we fail to recognize that our true nature is itself Buddha; instead of seeking it within, we waste our energy on external pursuits. To succeed in spiritual practice, we must turn our attention inward to our own original mind.

Awaken the master within us! Stop being deluded and stop dreaming. The appearances of the world are false, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water: they cannot be grasped. Do not be captivated by your wife, children, wealth, or position. All are fleeting, like a flower that blooms for a single night, and cannot be grasped. Thus the Lotus Sūtra says, “Only this one matter is real; the other two are not.”

The only reality is our One True Dharma Realm—our true nature. What is the Dharma Realm? The Dharma Realm embodies Dharma nature, also known as true

reality. Fa ( ) refers to all phenomena, while jie ( ) means their divisions. Together, they encompass all things, broadly categorized into ten groups: the Four Nobles and the Six Ordinary.

The Four Nobles are Buddhas, bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Arhats, while the Six Ordinary include the six realms of sentient beings—humans, gods, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. All are manifestations of this nature. Thus, not only do we humans share the same nature as the Buddhas, but even the sentient beings in the six realms are indistinguishable from the Buddhas' true mind. Unfortunately, they become lost in sensual pleasures, burdened by deep karmic obstacles, and do not recognize it.

Consequently, the Buddha, out of compassion, entered the world to awaken us. We must cease clinging to dreams. Like the Buddha, you should all strive to awaken quickly and escape the suffering of the cycle of birth and death. On the eighth night of the twelfth lunar month, when he beheld a bright star and attained enlightenment, the Buddha declared, "Wonderful! All sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtues of the Tathāgata. It is only due to delusion, attachment, and confusion that we fail to realize them."

This assertion demonstrates that we have not lost our Buddha-nature amidst the cycle of birth and death. If we awaken and relinquish our attachment to sensual pleasures, we can return to our true nature. The Ganges Mahāmudrā is profound, reminding us from the outset that the minds of all lineage masters are identical to our own, without distinction. We should not view them as unattainable.

Our mind is the same as that of all Buddhas, without any difference. With this certainty, we will have no doubt that we are Buddhas. We become ensnared in the cycle of birth and death because we are deluded, unaware, and attached to appearances.

Now that we have awakened, we understand appearances and release our attachment to them. Thus, we have restored our original nature. We present this significant statement at the outset, which constitutes the first requirement for becoming a Buddha. We will clarify this statement, explain how to become indistinguishable from the minds of all Buddhas, describe the process of restoring our original nature, and discuss ways to inspire wonderful applications. This statement serves as a general outline and holds enormous importance.

"View, meditation, conduct—all forms of practice are embraced by mind."

View, meditation, and conduct are the three secrets of Mahāmudrā, and the essentials of every Dharma gate. Why? Because the first requirement in practice is a correct view. Knowing, as explained above, that our mind is no different from the

minds of all Buddhas is called a correct understanding or correct view. Only with a correct view is the causal ground correct, and only with a correct causal ground can the fruition be correct.

Failing to establish a correct cause will result in straying down the wrong path, mistaking it for the right result, and ultimately failing to attain the true result. Hence, it is said, “If the cause is not correct, the result will be tortuous.” An incorrect cause will inevitably lead a practitioner down a wrong path and ultimately to failure. Therefore, this view is vital.

As ordinary individuals, we tend to perceive our physical bodies as our true selves, fostering a mortal attachment to them. We strive to maintain our bodies, eat well, dress well, and acquire lovely possessions—all for the sake of this body.

Observe all sentient beings; who is not preoccupied with their body? Day and night, they are busy seeking enjoyment through it. All the major and minor pursuits in this world revolve around the body, as people continuously strive to pamper and sustain it. In their quest for enjoyment, individuals often commit harmful and immoral acts. When they do not obtain what they desire, they may resort to stealing from others.

In the world, wars are fought to seize things: if you won’t give it to me, I will attack you and destroy your country, and all of it becomes mine. This kind of banditry is all for the enjoyment of the physical body.

Every crime in society is committed for the sake of the physical body: one wants to eat well and play well, and what can one do without money? So one kills, sets fires, and robs. In fact, having created a bad cause you will certainly receive a bad result! The law of cause and effect—plant melons and you get melons, plant beans and you get beans—never errs in the slightest! If you do evil in the causal stage, you will certainly receive evil retribution in the fruition.

Regrettably, many ordinary individuals are so consumed by their desires that they seek only immediate pleasure while disregarding future repercussions. If you contemplate committing murder, you will face legal punishment, potentially even execution; if you steal from someone, you will be sued and imprisoned.

Think about it: can you escape the consequences of doing evil? Alas, it is all delusion! Retribution in this life is not the end; terrible retribution in hell still lies ahead. How dreadful!

Some do not understand this principle: “You say there will be terrible retribution, but why do we see some bad people enjoying good fortune now, while some good people suffer? Cause and effect do not seem to correspond.” They do not

understand that cause and effect must be considered across past, present, and future lives.

Buddhist scriptures contain two sayings: “To know the causes of past lives, look at what is experienced in this life; to know the results in future lives, look at what is done in this life.” The good fortune someone enjoys now comes from good deeds in the past. Evil deeds committed now will bring evil retribution in the future. Not only that: present good fortune is also diminished, and the lifespan shortened.

When you see a good person suffering now, it is because they did wrong in the past and are now experiencing its painful results. Their present good deeds imperceptibly lessen that evil retribution. Much greater suffering would otherwise have been due, but it has already been reduced. These karmic results change in ways no one notices.

The Buddha-eye sees clearly. Thus it is said, “To know the causes of past lives, look at what is experienced in this life.” The Buddha-eye does not see as our ordinary eyes do: the Buddha sees everything we cannot. Thousands of years ago, when the Buddha lived, there were neither telescopes nor microscopes, yet he told us, “A person sees a cup of water; the Buddha sees countless tiny creatures.”

He could discern the multitude of insects in a glass of water with remarkable clarity, while humans remain unaware. Today, with our naked eyes, we see only one sun in this world; it is only through a telescope that we can observe stars that are hundreds of millions of light-years away. The universe contains other planets, suns, and stars, as well as living beings on those worlds.

However, the Buddha possessed this knowledge long ago and understood it fully. He taught us that there are numerous worlds in the universe—some inverted, others tilted, and so forth. There are also many suns, just as contemporary scientists suggest, without distinction. Consequently, the Buddha is a one who sees clearly, while humans remain confused. We should adhere to the Buddha’s teachings.

Our views must be accurate; inaccurate views can lead to “reckless and unrestrained suffering.” The Buddhist sūtras address both view-related delusions and thought-related delusions, which refer to misunderstandings stemming from incorrect knowledge and perspectives, as well as attachment to external objects. We have already explored the view of the body, which is the first of our view-related delusions.

The next is the view of extremes. We must acknowledge that the body cannot live forever. What happens after death? Some assert that existence ceases, representing a view of annihilation, while others claim that existence continues, suggesting a view of permanence. Clinging to either permanence or annihilation leads us to extremes,

and failing to transcend either viewpoint is referred to as an ‘extreme view.’ Additionally, some mistakenly believe that cause and effect do not exist.

This perspective can be profoundly harmful, as one may come to realize through future experiences of suffering, such as those in hell. Beyond future consequences, the immediate repercussions can be quite unpleasant; for example, engaging in wrongful actions may lead to execution or imprisonment. Is there an escape from such outcomes? Therefore, holding a wrong view is the most detrimental of all.

Moreover, we encounter views characterized by attachments to beliefs, as well as precepts and prohibitions commonly held by those deemed heterodox. Those who cling to their views adhere to false beliefs—specifically, they regard the previously mentioned three views as correct. In contrast, those attached to precepts and prohibitions mistakenly cling to a suffering body, submitting to various misguided precepts and austerities in the misguided hope of achieving rebirth in the blissful realms of humanity or the heavens after death. For instance, certain cults currently proclaim that the world is on the brink of ending, urging their followers to commit suicide and ascend to heaven, which can lead to tragic instances of mass suicide.

The five views mentioned—self-view, extreme view, wrong view, clinging to views, and clinging to precepts and prohibitions—are all erroneous perspectives. Invariably, the outcomes will be flawed without correct knowledge and understanding.

We recognize that the mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is the mind. When we cultivate our practice without seeking externally or fixating on the body, we attain correct knowledge and understanding. Chanting the Buddha’s name is, in essence, an expression of the mind; thus, to chant the mind is to chant the Buddha’s name. Our endeavor is to establish a mind that is straight and unyielding, free from attachments, and to eliminate greed, thereby restoring its innate essence. This process constitutes correct knowledge and understanding. Success can only be realized through such practice, which underscores the importance of possessing a correct understanding.

Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi noted that, “Due to differences in knowledge and understanding, practitioners achieve five distinct types of results.” First, those who practice with divergent ideas—seeking the Dharma outside the mind—while feeling content with the higher and disdainful of the lower, engage in the Chan of heretics. Second, those who have the correct belief in cause and effect, while feeling content with the higher and disdainful of the lower, are practicing Chan of ordinary people.

Third, those who recognize the partial truth of the emptiness of self are following the Chan of the Śrāvakayāna. Fourth, those who grasp the truth revealed by the emptiness of self and dharma are practicing the Chan of the Mahāyāna. Fifth, those

who realize that this mind is originally pure, free from troubles, and possessing non-leakage wisdom, and that this mind is Buddha, embody the highest Chan. This Chan is taught by Bodhidharma's disciples. From here, we discern the critical role of insight, or vision, in the practice process.

What is meditative concentration? Practitioners know that to attain Buddhahood and enlightenment, one must meditate and enter into meditative concentration to develop wisdom and fully realize Bodhi. However, there are many types of meditative concentration. The Chan of Tathāgata discusses the four jhanas and eight samādhis. Practitioners gradually ascend from the first jhana to the second, third, and finally the fourth jhana, which are the four jhanas.

The four formless heavens of meditative concentration include the boundless space realm, the boundless consciousness realm, the realm of nothingness, and finally the realm of neither perception nor non-perception. Together with the first four jhanas, this set makes eight types of meditative concentration. This category is the meditative concentration cultivated and realized through a gradual approach. The Chan of the patriarchs is different. Their Chan is a sudden practice, sudden enlightenment, and sudden realization.

They do not cultivate this kind of meditative concentration. Instead, through supreme wisdom they uncover their original nature, directly realize Buddha-nature, and bring the mind into close accord with samādhi. They say that a samādhi one enters and leaves is not great samādhi. True samādhi means remaining undeluded when encountering circumstances: whatever arises, the mind remains unwavering, neither misled nor confused. Only this is great samādhi.

It does not count as samādhi if one is stirred by beauty and becomes greedy at the sight of gold and silver, yet can enter absorption while sitting in meditation. Some people even think that sitting motionless for days and nights, or for many years, is great samādhi. This is mistaken. It is not great samādhi, but merely the attainment of the cessation of feeling and perception. Attachment to dharmas continues to operate in their manas consciousness. Because they do not apprehend the six external sense objects, they mistakenly suppose that consciousness has ceased.

Once they emerge from absorption, their reactions to circumstances are even stronger than before. Such an incomplete attainment is not great samādhi, so the Chan school does not advocate cultivating it. Let me give an example. In the past, the Sixth Patriarch encountered Chan Master Wolun, who said, "Wolun has a skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts. Facing circumstances, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day."

Wolun boasted about his profound meditation skills, saying that he could remain motionless all day long, unshaken by any state of mind, and his Bodhi wisdom grew

day by day. This meditative concentration may seem truly remarkable, but it is actually not. Why? If you remain motionless in meditative concentration, you are effectively dead. When we become Buddhas, we become living Buddhas, not dead Buddhas.

Buddhahood has vibrant, wondrous functioning; it does not mean sitting motionless and lifeless. Such sitting is therefore not right samādhi.

Right samādhi is not something one enters and leaves, yet it gives rise to wondrous functioning. If you cling to a "meditative attainment," sitting motionless and unable to function, what use is that samādhi? To rescue him from this, the Sixth Patriarch said, "Huineng has no skill." You have an ability; I have none.

Speaking of abilities, many practitioners today cling to them: "I have spiritual powers, so I have great abilities. You have no spiritual powers, so you have no abilities at all." They do not realize that by clinging to spiritual powers they have already fallen into a rut and become stuck there.

Whenever a cultivator clings to anything, the objects they cling to obscure the radiance of their true nature, preventing them from realizing their true nature and attaining Buddhahood. Therefore, even if you possess spiritual powers, you will fail to attain Buddhahood and may even become a demon. To attain Buddhahood, one must have an empty and pure mind, free from all attachments.

Thus the Sixth Patriarch said, "Huineng has no skill." "I, Huineng, have no skill" means: you have an ability; I have none.

Why did he say this? To claim a skill is already to have a point of attachment. Our true nature is utterly bare, not establishing a single dharma and unstained by a single speck of dust. The moment one says "I have something," one has already missed it. "Huineng has no skill" precisely points out where Wolun has become attached.

"I do not cut off a hundred thoughts." Why do I not eliminate all thoughts? Because I must bring forth wondrous functioning to liberate sentient beings. A Buddha is vibrant, with boundless wondrous functioning, not lifeless and motionless. When the Buddha appears in the world to teach the Dharma, he too uses thought. Without thought functioning, how could he speak and teach us? Hence, "I do not cut off a hundred thoughts."

No thoughts need to be destroyed, because we still need them to function! The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, "At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts," and immediately adds, "Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it."

If you extinguish deluded thoughts, mindfulness will disappear, and you will die. This phenomenon is because deluded thoughts originate from true nature, in the same way that waves originate from water. When the waves disappear, the water disappears.

If we extinguish deluded thoughts, we will turn into earth, wood, metal, or stone. Can we still attain enlightenment? Then you'll become a massive rock, a large piece of wood, or a large lump of mud. Therefore, don't be fooled by someone who enters samādhi for a week, a few months, a few years, or even a hundred or a thousand years. That's useless. To attain the Great Way, one must develop an understanding of the complete and sudden teaching, practice in accordance with reality, and train tirelessly amid actual circumstances, freeing oneself from the delusions and illusions of one's own mind. Only then can one's practice accord with the Way. Simply sitting still won't work; it's a dead state of mind, and it won't lead to enlightenment.

Let me present another case to illustrate this statement. Once upon a time, when Śākyamuni Buddha was alive, a woman sat beside him, having entered a state of samādhi. Mañjuśrī bodhisattva approached and observed her, wondering why she was so improper for entering a samādhi near Śākyamuni Buddha. She ought to have retreated well behind him.

Consequently, he snapped his fingers in front of her, hoping to rouse her from her samādhi. However, she remained motionless and did not respond. Observing her steadfastness, Mañjuśrī bodhisattva displayed his spiritual powers and lifted her up to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, but she still remained in samādhi. After this failed attempt, he cast her into the Eighteen Hells, yet still could not bring her out.

Śākyamuni Buddha said, "You cannot bring her out of samādhi. There is a bodhisattva below named Wangming who can." As soon as he finished speaking, Wangming Bodhisattva arrived from below. The Buddha said, "You have come at just the right time. Bring this woman out of samādhi." Wangming snapped his fingers before her, and she emerged.

This story can be perplexing. Mañjuśrī bodhisattva, the teacher of the seven Buddhas and their master, possesses great wisdom. Why, then, couldn't he bring the woman out of her samādhi? Wangming bodhisattva, being a bodhisattva from the region below, seems less likely to succeed with just a flick of his finger. This narrative should be examined for its deeper meaning. The woman's attachment to the form of samādhi was a grave mistake. As previously discussed, fixating on the form of samādhi is erroneous.

To attain Buddhahood, one must be free from attachments and actively engage in the profound practice of samādhi, rather than being fixated on it.

While the woman's dwelling in samādhi was misguided, we must also consider Mañjuśrī bodhisattva. He embodies great wisdom, which is often viewed positively. However, the wisdom we typically acknowledge is worldly intelligence and discernment, not the profound wisdom of prajñā. To achieve Buddhahood, one must eliminate this false wisdom.

You may possess intelligence and wisdom, but these can obstruct your path to enlightenment, representing the ignorance of knowledge that hinders your progress. When Confucius visited Laozi, he advised him to "Strike at your wisdom," which means to eliminate and overthrow cleverness and superficial intelligence. Enlightenment can only be achieved when the mind is empty and free from all attachments.

So we must not boast of our cleverness; playing at petty cleverness is a great obstacle. We should be greatly wise yet seem foolish, with a mind that does not waver and does not abide or cling anywhere; only then can we accomplish the great Way.

A still and unmoved mind, devoid of attachment, means being unlike a piece of wood or stone, which lacks awareness or understanding. Rather, it signifies being clear, lucid, and steadfast, without grasping or rejecting, love or aversion. Thus, we must recognize that right samādhi means not being deluded by circumstances, with no entering or leaving it, and is not merely a static, immobile state.

So why could the bodhisattva Wangming draw her out of her meditative concentration? Wangming aimed to dissolve her worldly wisdom and discernment. When she is liberated from knowledge and attachment, the profound wisdom of prajñā will emerge. Therefore, this narrative is metaphorical; it does not suggest that Mañjuśrī bodhisattva was incapable of bringing her out of her meditative concentration, nor does it imply that Wangming is superior to Mañjuśrī bodhisattva.

Therefore, if we wish to attain enlightenment, we must discard worldly wisdom and discernment, constantly endeavoring to keep our minds as empty and cleansed, unperturbed by internal thoughts and uninvolved by external distractions. Only through diligent practice, through continual reduction, can we achieve success.

The Sixth Patriarch said, "Who would have thought that our own nature is originally pure! Who would have thought that our own nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing! Who would have thought that our own nature is originally unshakable! Who would have thought that our own nature is originally complete! Who would have thought that our own nature can give rise to all dharmas!" Since our own nature fully possesses everything, is originally pure, and is no different from the Buddha, what could remain unaccomplished if our mind is truly empty and undefiled? Later, Dahui

Zonggao composed a verse on this koan of emerging from samādhi: “One can emerge; one cannot emerge. This is samādhi, but not true samādhi.”

If you concern yourself with entering and leaving samādhi, yours is not true samādhi but a lifeless samādhi. True samādhi has neither entrance nor exit: it is the same in activity and stillness. It is not merely sitting motionless, but has boundless wondrous functioning. Speaking and doing things do not take one out of samādhi. The mind abides nowhere, and even in activity no activity is apprehended.

If one fixates on the state of stillness, that is not true samādhi. Even the two great bodhisattvas, Wangming and Mañjuśrī, who were preoccupied with entering and exiting samādhi, inevitably strayed from their original state. Chan teaches, “If one is absent even for a moment, one is as a dead person.” To leave one’s original state is to lose one’s life.

Thus, the verse by Chan master Dahui Zonggao concludes with the words, “Wangming and Mañjuśrī both lost their entire lives.” These two magnificent bodhisattvas, along with Buddha and the woman, enacted a scene for us to learn how to practice. This step is crucial. In our practice, we must not seek a fixed state of samādhi but rather be active and unhindered.

Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, said, “Precisely when using the mind, precisely no mind is used; no-mind is precisely functioning; in constant functioning, precisely no mind.” This means that even while working or speaking, our mind remains unattached and steadily unmoving. It is not enough to sit still in concentration and then become disturbed when affairs arise. Only being equally at ease in stillness and activity is true samādhi.

What is practice? It encompasses all conduct, our actions, and our way of living. View, meditative concentration, and practice are essential for practitioners, forming the three core elements of the Ganges Mahāmudrā.

The term “view” refers to the correct understanding we must cultivate when we begin practicing; it helps us avoid detours and clarifies what we should do, how to practice, and what methods to employ for practice. Thus, view serves as the foundational cause for practice. When we discuss attaining Buddhahood, we refer to achieving it within the mind, rather than in the body. If the initial cause is flawed, the resulting outcome will be convoluted. It is understood that any practice fundamentally involves the practice of the mind.

Only when the mind is empty and pure, devoid of attachment, can we attain enlightenment. Hence, it is crucial to hold a correct view and select a practice that aligns with our individual aptitude. This process of practice constitutes practice.

Only by engaging in the Dharma in accordance with our circumstances and developing profound meditation and great wisdom can one realize Buddhahood. The Mahāmudrā expounds on significant Dharma that transcends practice, attainment, realization, contrivance, or distraction. It teaches us that the capacity to speak, act, know, and perceive embodies the Buddha. This understanding enables us to directly realize our true nature without the necessity of gradual practice.

There are various methods of practice: partial, complete, sudden, and gradual. The Ganges Mahāmudrā represents a direct approach that is both complete and sudden, facilitating the immediate realization of our true nature without the need for cultivating any particular method.

Whether or not we practice the Dharma, all our activities are encompassed and sustained by our true mind. This is why we say that all conduct and practice are encompassed by the mind: the mind contains and embraces them all. Thus the sūtra says, “Nothing fails to flow forth from this Dharma Realm, and nothing fails to return to this Dharma Realm.”

While the Ganges Mahāmudrā encourages us to perceive our nature in the present moment without employing any method, ingrained habits accumulated over many lifetimes cannot be eradicated immediately upon this realization. Consequently, it underscores the importance of consistent practice. After recognizing our true nature, we must persist in maintaining this awareness, eliminating old habits, entering a state of the unconditioned, and ultimately integrating these elements to achieve unity and harmony, free from obstruction.

2. The Right View of the Natural State

“To see is to know the One True Dharma Realm—the Tathāgatagarbha mind, naturally so—which manifests boundless defiled and pure dharmas and fully embodies the equality of the natural state.”

What, then, does it mean to ‘see’? It means awakening to the mind and seeing one’s true nature. To attain Buddhahood, we must first gain a clear view: we must recognize the One True Dharma Realm—the Tathāgatagarbha mind, naturally so—which shines through our six sense faculties. We must then diligently sustain and protect this recognition; only then can we fully realize Buddhahood. The One True Dharma Realm is our true mind and true nature.

‘One True’ means that this true nature alone is real, while everything else is illusory. The Dharma Realm comprises the ten Dharma realms—the four sages and the six classes of ordinary beings. Here, however, the One True Dharma Realm refers to the fundamental ground of all ten. In it there are neither sages nor ordinary beings, and it is therefore called the One True Dharma Realm.

Our true nature is neither ordinary nor sage; it is utterly bare and establishes not a single dharma. The Tathāgatagarbha mind is naturally so, without the least fabrication. As the saying goes, 'Buddha-nature is an innate reality'; it is not something produced through later contrivance. Fa'er ( ), "naturally so," means originally just as it is.

Tathāgatagarbha has two levels of meaning. First, for an ordinary being it is the Tathāgata 'concealed' (cáng) within: the Tathāgata's true nature lies hidden within. Second, after awakening it is a 'treasure-store' (zàng), replete with every wondrous function. Like a maṇi jewel that rains down treasures, it contains all wondrous functioning.

The tathāgatagarbha fully contains all wondrous functioning. Once this treasury opens, it is inexhaustible in its riches and boundless in use. Such a great treasure has always been with us, yet we do not know it. Is this not pitiful? Is it not a grievous injustice? The Lotus Sūtra tells of a maṇi jewel hidden in the pocket of a man's own garment. Unaware of it, he goes elsewhere to beg for food.

How utterly foolish!

Alas, this is the plight of beings in the six realms. To revolve in the six realms is to live as a beggar. Though originally supremely noble and wealthy, endowed with everything, one has fallen so far as to beg in the streets. Is this not a terrible injustice? The teaching now enables you to recognize and see your own original true nature, so that you need no longer suffer such an injustice. Mahāmudrā therefore tells us directly that not only human beings but all sentient beings are fully endowed with Tathāgata Buddha-nature. It is simply obscured by ignorance, attachment, deluded thoughts, inverted views, afflictions, and the like.

If we can refrain from clinging to outward appearances and bring all deluded thoughts and inverted views to an end, the luminosity of our Original Face will be restored and the great treasure we had lost will once again be in our hands.

This treasure is not outside us. Do not seek it elsewhere; it is shining through your own six sense faculties. Simply turn the light around and observe within. In the interval after one thought has ceased and before the next has arisen, look dispassionately: you will realize that you have always been Buddha.

Mahāmudrā is thus a direct-pointing Dharma Gate: it points us straight to our true nature. It does not require us first to investigate a critical phrase and arouse a sensation of doubt before awakening can occur. 'Seeing' here does not mean seeing something with the eyes, but personally recognizing it.

How, then, do we see the One True Dharma Realm? When you think neither good nor evil and no deluded thought arises, turn the light around and behold: when not a single thought is born, what is it that remains perfectly clear and aware, and is not insentient like wood or stone? You can test this for yourself at this very moment. When no thought arises, are you not still perfectly clear and aware? Are you insentient like wood or stone?

Clearly not. You hear distinctly and see clearly. Like a mirror reflecting objects, awareness shines lucidly, yet makes no discriminations: there is not the slightest love or hatred, grasping or rejecting. This clear, responsive knowing, free from discrimination, is our true nature—the One True Dharma Realm!

Thus, 'seeing' means knowing the One True Dharma Realm—the Tathāgatagarbha mind, naturally so. This is the treasure with which everyone is inherently endowed. It is nowhere else; it shines through each person's six sense faculties.

Yet sentient beings do not recognize it. They know only how to grasp outward appearances, thereby obscuring their own luminosity and falling into the six realms. Is this not lamentable? We need only turn the light around and look within. We will then recognize that this lucid knowing, perfectly clear when not a single thought arises, is our true nature: the source of Buddhahood and the fundamental ground from which all things and worlds arise. Hence the text says: 'It manifests boundless defiled and pure dharmas and fully embodies the equality of the natural state.'

Let us first discuss 'the boundless manifestation of defiled and pure dharmas'. All men and women, young and old, all mountains, rivers, the great earth, plants, trees, and forests are manifestations of this mind—our true mind. 'Defiled' refers to what is tainted and unwholesome; 'pure' refers to what is clean and wholesome.

Our Sahā world, for example, is an impure land, whereas the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is pure. Whether a land is pure or impure, what forms it and brings it forth? Both are formed and manifested by the One True Dharma Realm.

The Buddhist scriptures therefore say: 'Nothing fails to flow forth from this Dharma Realm, and nothing fails to return to this Dharma Realm.' We can thus see that the mountains, rivers, great earth, men, women, young and old before us are also manifestations of the One True Dharma Realm. Without it, how could there be mountains, rivers, the great earth, men, women, young and old? Some may now wonder: how can all these be manifestations of the One True Dharma Realm?

The explanation is a long one. Before mountains, rivers, and the great earth had formed, the ancient Chinese called the state of the cosmos 'primordial vastness' or 'chaos not yet opened'. Buddhist scriptures describe it as 'awareness is luminous

and emptiness obscure'. 'Awareness' is our intrinsic awareness. Every person and every sentient being possesses this capacity to know.

Its nature is a power—the innate capacity and function of awareness. There is nothing wrong with awareness itself. The trouble begins when we take this awareness to be an entity and affirm that we truly possess something that knows. This is called 'giving rise to luminosity upon awareness'. 'Luminosity' here means the clear conviction that one possesses awareness. It is to add knowing to knowing—a head upon a head—and this very luminosity becomes ignorance.

Awareness is originally luminous, and luminosity is originally awareness. But when luminosity is raised upon awareness, subject and object divide and stand opposed: believing there to be a self that can know, we assume there must be something for it to know. In that primordial state of obscured emptiness, the Earth had not yet formed and there was nothing to be found. Beings therefore stirred restlessly, searching for something to know.

Yet during the eon of emptiness there was nothing there: this is 'emptiness'. Because nothing could be found, all became confused and benighted: this is 'obscurity'. The more obscured and confused they became, the more they stirred. Movement at its extreme generated wind, and the great wheel of wind arose. It rubbed against the earth element among the seven great elements—earth, water, fire, wind, space, the sense faculties, and consciousness—inherently present in the One True Dharma Realm. The friction of earth and wind produced the fire element. Fire blazed upwards; the turbid sank and the clear rose. In this way, a world composed of earth, water, fire, wind, and space came into being. This is how the Earth on which we now live arose.

Thus, everything in this world—the Earth, trees, the sun, and the moon—is formed from the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. These four are constituents inherent in our true nature, comparable to what chemists call elements.

Consider the Earth: its crust is the earth element; the water above and below ground is the water element; the fire in its core, which erupts through volcanoes, is the fire element; and its ceaseless rotation on its axis and revolution around the sun are the wind element. The Earth is therefore composed entirely of these four great elements.

A great tree likewise does not depart from them. Its solid trunk is the earth element; its moisture is the water element; the combustibility of its wood is the fire element; and the movement by which it absorbs and circulates nourishment, together with its swaying in the wind, is the wind element. A tree, too, is thus composed of the four great elements.

The same is true of the human body. Skin, flesh, and bones are the earth element; blood and bodily fluids are the water element; the heart and the body's temperature of about 37°C are the fire element; and breathing, blood circulation, digestion, and all other ceaseless movement are the wind element. Everything, without exception, is therefore manifested by our true mind. This is what is meant by the 'boundless manifestation of defiled and pure dharmas'. All worlds, whether pure lands or impure lands, are manifestations of our mind.

The next phrase is: 'It fully embodies the equality of the natural state.' What does this mean? It means that pure lands and impure lands alike are manifestations of the true mind and are therefore equal—utterly equal.

We should not regard the impure land as a karmic result produced by sentient beings and the Pure Land as a result of the pure minds of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and then, because purity and impurity differ, conclude that they are unequal. We must also understand that all forms and appearances are illusory images. Whether good or bad, beautiful or ugly, none can be obtained; in this sense they are equal.

Although we have temporarily fallen into the condition of sentient beings, the One True Dharma Realm remains equal. Ignorance has for a time obscured the luminosity of our true nature, but its essence remains neither defiled nor pure, neither shaken nor changed. Its essence does not become tainted merely because its luminosity is hidden.

Suppose a pearl is buried in mud and its brilliance can no longer be seen. Has its brilliance been lost? No. Dig it out and wipe away the mud, and the pearl shines just as before. Its inherent brilliance is never lost because it is covered by dirt. Thus it is said that true nature does not increase in sages or decrease in ordinary beings; it is utterly equal.

Because we do not understand this equality, we grasp and reject, love and hate. We judge one thing good and pure and another impure and bad, yet both are manifestations of our true mind. One who has truly seen the Way therefore neither grasps nor rejects, neither loves nor hates.

When, through practice, we remove ignorance and bring all defilement, attachment, affliction, and inverted views to an end, the luminosity of our true nature is restored and the originally pure Dharma-body becomes manifest. The Pure Land is then present here and now. There is a Western Pure Land in principle and a Western Pure Land in phenomena. In principle, it is our own pure mind—the Mind-only Pure Land.

In phenomena, there is the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, ten thousand billion Buddha-lands beyond our world. Yet, distant though it may be, it is not cut off

from us, for our true mind fills all space and pervades the entire Dharma Realm. None of the pure lands in the ten directions lies outside our true mind. Everything depends upon whether your mind is pure.

If it is pure, the Pure Land is not separated from you but stands before you. If it is impure, separation inevitably arises, and the Pure Land is ten thousand billion Buddha-lands away. Our mind is fully endowed with everything, and all practices are encompassed within it.

A sūtra says: 'The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only.' Apart from mind, there is nothing at all. We said above that the deluded mind is difficult to extinguish. Why is this so? Because the deluded mind is itself a manifestation of the true mind. Without the true mind, how could there be a deluded mind? Without water, how could there be waves? The waves represent the deluded mind; the water represents the true mind. If the waves were eliminated, the water too would disappear. The deluded mind is therefore not something to be destroyed; it need only come to rest.

Hence it is said: when the restless mind comes to rest, it is true suchness. Every Dharma Gate simply teaches us to let the deluded mind rest. Do not seek to become a sage; just let the mind rest. Once the deluded mind has come to rest, that is enough.

Mahāmudrā is a direct-pointing Dharma Gate. It tells us that, to see the One True Dharma Realm, we must allow the deluded mind to rest. When not a single thought arises, turn the light around and behold the luminosity of true nature. This is your Original Face. Do not seek anything else strange or mysterious.

The moment there is seeking or attainment, there is attachment to appearances. Not only will you fail to realize the Way; you may well fall into demonic states. Why? Because our true nature is originally complete and lacks nothing. It is the Tathāgatagarbha, a treasure-store: once opened, its functions are inexhaustible, and nothing need be sought outside.

As soon as seeking arises, the mind is no longer empty and pure. Abiding in appearances, one falls prey to the demon of the aggregates. After seeing the Way, therefore, we must carefully sustain and protect this recognition and diligently remove our old habits of attachment. This is called cultivating the Way.

Why is it necessary? Seeing the Way means only that we have recognized our Original Face; beginningless habits of attachment have not yet been exhausted. Accumulated over beginningless eons of habitual clinging to appearances, they cannot suddenly be made entirely non-attached, pure, and free of contrivance.

Consider a dark room sealed for many years. When its doors and windows are opened, or a lamp is lit, the darkness vanishes and the room is filled with light. But the musty odor accumulated during those long years cannot disappear at once. Only prolonged airing, cleaning, and scrubbing will gradually remove it.

Or consider a foul night-soil bucket that has held excrement for many years. Even after it is emptied, the stench remains because it has penetrated the wood. Only prolonged soaking, washing, and scrubbing will gradually remove it.

In the same way, even if we suddenly see our Original Face, recognize our own true mind, and understand that all the countless phenomena before us are manifested by that true mind, it is still difficult to eliminate every habitual tendency at once and remain completely unattached and unmoved amid circumstances.

After awakening, therefore, one has reached only the stage of seeing the Way. One must still pass through the stage of cultivating the Way, training diligently amid circumstances until every habit of clinging to appearances and becoming entangled in objects is exhausted. Only then can Buddhahood be realized; at that point one enters the stage of realizing the Way.

When one first sees the Way, one is like a newborn infant, unable to walk, speak, or act. The infant must slowly grow into an adult before learning to speak, walk, work, and eventually become a person of great ability and stature. Thus, after seeing the Way, we must cultivate it before we can realize it.

Yet seeing the Way is the first and most important step. Without it, we do not know our Original Face or true mind. Doubt remains; we continue to seek outside ourselves and have no inner point of reliance. Inevitably confused and attached to appearances, we can never realize the Way.

A practitioner must therefore first see the true nature and understand what is genuine. Only then can one begin to sweep away illusory, deluded habits. It is like switching on a lamp in a room: once the dirt and rubbish can be seen, cleaning can begin.

If the lamp is not lit, the room remains pitch-dark. There is no way to know where to begin; even if one tries to clean, one will stumble about, battering and bruising oneself, and still fail to clean the room.

To realize the Way, therefore, we must first awaken to the Buddha's insight and know that the One True Dharma Realm is inherently present in every sentient being; it is not produced through cultivation. The Chan school says: 'The Way belongs to awakening, not to cultivation.' This is precisely the point. Once we genuinely understand it, our practice is on the right path.

As explained above, although truth may be suddenly realized, habits of clinging to appearances accumulated over many lives cannot be eliminated at once. Recognition must therefore be protected at every moment. As soon as a deluded thought arises, be aware of it; awareness dissolves it into emptiness, and do not abide even in emptiness. Only then can all be perfectly integrated and unobstructed. Practice matures from shallow to deep, from unfamiliar to familiar. When it is completely mature, even the act of maintaining it is forgotten; once forgotten, transformation becomes unhindered.

We must therefore begin with vigilant awareness and gradually advance to still illumination. Vigilant awareness means knowing as soon as a thought arises and not following it; this is an effortful function of practice. If you notice the mind moving but cannot let go because your samādhi is too weak to cut off the thought's continuation, you must quickly rely on the Buddha's empowering strength to sever it.

Those who practice Buddha-recitation should immediately raise the sacred name of Amitābha Buddha and settle the deluded mind upon it, so that the thought cannot continue. Those who recite mantras should immediately raise the mantra, thereby transforming the deluded thought. Those who practice Chan should continually attend to their critical phrase, and deluded thoughts will naturally cease to arise. If a deluded thought arises without your knowing it and you follow it, all is lost.

After seeing the Way, therefore, recognition must be protected continuously and without gaps. When this protection has fully matured, there is no longer anything to protect, and vigilant awareness advances into still illumination. 'Still' means unmoving: deliberate awareness is no longer employed, and even illumination is forgotten. Illumination functions naturally without attachment to illuminating. So long as there is an illumination to be maintained, there is still abiding and effortful functioning. When there is no deliberate illumination, yet nothing is left unillumined, one enters effortless non-contrivance. Its functioning is effortless, yet its efficacy is immense. Only here does one enter the stage of non-retrogression.

"Complete with the nature of natural equality" means that everything—good and bad, defiled and pure, long and short—is equal, equal, and equal again, without difference, because all sentient beings are Buddhas. Do not look down on animals such as oxen and horses; they too are Buddhas, and have fallen into the three lower realms only because of much evil and heavy karmic obstacles.

We should arouse great compassion and vow to liberate all sentient beings so that together we may reach the shore of awakening; only this accords with the Buddha's original intent in appearing in the world to liberate sentient beings.

Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva adorns the hell realms and liberates the beings there. Exercising vast Dharma power, he awakens them from their deluded dream and enables them to understand that their Buddha-nature has not diminished in the slightest despite their suffering. Only because they failed to awaken, clung to appearances, and created karma did they fall into hell and undergo torment.

If they swiftly awaken, repent, and restore the luminosity of their true nature, they can immediately rise above and be liberated. We can therefore see that a practitioner must first awaken to mind and see the true nature; only then can one avoid creating karma and undergoing its results. Without seeing true nature, practice is inevitably blind. Only after seeing it does genuine cultivation begin.

Once you truly see your nature, you will understand that the Western Pure Land and the impure land we inhabit are equal.

A sūtra says: 'When the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure.' When your mind is pure and undefiled, the Pure Land is present here and now. With a pure mind that neither grasps nor rejects, how could distinctions such as good and bad, beautiful and ugly remain? Once the mind discriminates, trouble begins: good and bad, beautiful and ugly arise, followed by love and hatred, grasping and rejecting; one then inevitably creates karma and undergoes its results.

We cultivate the Way in order to leave saṃsāra and transcend the three realms. We must therefore first correct our view, recognize the impartial mind inherent in everyone, and understand the equality of all phenomena. Only then can we begin to remove habitual tendencies and transform consciousness into wisdom.

To realize Buddhahood fully, practitioners must transform consciousness into wisdom. Consciousness here is discriminative knowing—the deluded mind by which ordinary beings cling to objects and create karma. Only through diligent practice can it be transformed into the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment and our aspiration fulfilled.

In this transformation, the sixth consciousness is first transformed into the wisdom of wondrous observation, and manas consciousness into the wisdom of equality. Only then can the first five consciousnesses be transformed into the wisdom of accomplishing activities, and ālaya consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom. Deluded consciousness cannot be transformed into the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment all at once. This is what the Sixth Patriarch means by saying, "The sixth and seventh are transformed at the causal stage; the first five and the eighth are perfected at fruition."

'Know that the lineage masters and my own mind are not different.' One who has seen the Way knows deeply that one's own mind is the Buddha-mind and the

Buddha-mind is one's own. One's mind is therefore not only no different from the minds of the lineage masters; it is also not separate from any phenomenon or circumstance. In such a state of mind, what remains to love or hate, grasp or reject? If discrimination persists—'This is beautiful, so I shall take it; that is ugly, so I shall cast it aside'—your mind still lacks equanimity, and you have not truly seen the Way.

We must therefore understand that the One True Dharma Realm is originally unborn and undying, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, and fully endowed with everything. In other words, we are originally Buddhas. So long as we are not deluded, do not follow deluded thoughts, and do not cling to objects or chase after things, we can retrace our steps home and restore our true nature.

The Ganges Mahāmudrā therefore tells us that there is nothing to fabricate through practice: true suchness and Buddha-nature are already complete within us. Simply turn the light around, cling to nothing, and be aware the instant a thought arises without following it. This is right practice and right conduct. Correct view, however, must come first. It is the Dharma practice at the causal stage: if the view at the cause is distorted, the result will be circuitous. Mahāmudrā therefore begins by teaching correct view.

Only after seeing the true nature can one remain continually in samādhi. Why? Because after awakening one knows deeply that all appearances are unobtainable—flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—and that there is nothing to grasp. True nature alone is real. One responds to circumstances and follows conditions, yet the mind remains unmoved. The Diamond Sūtra says: 'Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.' Only this is the living great samādhi of boundless wondrous functioning.

Practice of this kind is the genuine conduct of one who cultivates the Way. A practitioner's mind must therefore be impartial and unbiased, without distinctions of intimacy or distance in dealing with people and situations. If you still hold discriminatory views, you have not yet reached true equality.

View, Meditation, and Conduct are all encompassed by mind and fully present within it. In studying Buddhism, therefore, we should cultivate the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. This is like the birth of a crown prince: just as the emperor's own son will one day inherit the throne, one who cultivates this Dharma Gate will certainly attain Buddhahood.

Other Dharma Gates belong to peripheral ranks of merit. However accomplished one may become, one can at most be enfeoffed as a king or marquis; one cannot become the emperor—that is, attain Buddhahood. Modern qigong practitioners in particular cling to the physical body, working with the Microcosmic Orbit and

Macrocosmic Orbit, or even practicing sorcery and sleight of hand to show off and deceive the ignorant. They imagine themselves clever, but in truth they are merely playing with deluded consciousness. No matter how great your spiritual powers or how strong your body may be, the body will ultimately decay and cannot endure. Hence the Chan school says: 'Those on non-Buddhist paths who train the body will ultimately see it decay.'

In our practice, therefore, our view must be correct. We must know the fundamental basis of Buddhahood and cultivate it diligently; only then can we realize the true fruition. Master Hanshan wrote in Direct Pointing to the Heart Sūtra: 'The reason the cultivation of prajñā succeeds so swiftly is that everyone possesses this wondrous nature of true suchness.

The Buddhas realize it and manifest spiritual powers and wondrous functions; sentient beings are deluded about it and turn it into delusive thoughts and defiling toil. They use it every day without knowing it, remain ignorant of this original truth, and needlessly undergo hardship. How could this not be lamentable? If one can suddenly awaken to what has always been present, immediately turn the light around, and cultivate it single-mindedly, the emotional barrier binding one to birth and death will suddenly collapse. It is like a lamp dispelling the darkness of a room that has been dark for a thousand years; no other skillful means need be sought.' We can thus see that we need only awaken, cease being deluded by forms and appearances, continually turn the light around, and cultivate the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. Without resorting to other Dharma Gates, we will certainly attain Buddhahood.

3. The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate

The story of Huanglong and Lü Chunyang reminds me of the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. Lü Chunyang was a Daoist practitioner. Daoism emphasizes the cultivation of essence, energy, and spirit, gathering the powerful elixir to refine it into what is known as the golden elixir. This elixir transforms into an infant, becoming the indestructible yang spirit of the diamond. By the time he visited Huanglong, Lü had already achieved the ability to refine the elixir, allowing the yang spirit to leave his body.

After mastering the Daoist golden elixir, one can travel far and wide, seeking virtuous teachers in renowned mountains. One day, while passing by Huanglong Mountain, Lü noticed purple clouds enveloping the mountain. Sensing that a remarkable figure was present, he decided to pay a visit. He encountered Huanglong Chan Master delivering a lecture and blended in with the crowd to listen.

Huanglong, recognizing Master Lü, wished to draw him toward Buddhism and sternly declared, "I won't preach today. There is a Dharma thief here!" In response,

Lü Chunyang stepped forward and asked Huanglong, “The world is hidden in a grain of millet, and mountains and rivers are boiled in a half-liter cauldron.

What does this mean?” Huanglong pointed at him and declared, “This is a corpse-guarding ghost!” Lü Chunyang retorted, “What if I possess the elixir of immortality in my bag?” Huanglong replied, “Even after eighty thousand kalpas, it will perish in vain.”

Taken aback, Lü Chunyang then launched his flying sword at Huanglong. Huanglong flicked the sword away with his whisk, sending it crashing to the ground. Lü Chunyang immediately knelt and sought guidance. Huanglong then remarked, “If I do not inquire about boiling mountains and rivers in a half-liter cauldron, how can I comprehend the world hidden in a grain of millet?” In that moment, Lü Chunyang experienced sudden enlightenment.

What did he realize? He understood that the mind is without form. This formless mind serves as the root of Buddhahood and the foundation for attaining the Great Way. This formless energy, capable of manifesting the Yang Spirit, represents the eternal and indestructible Pure Buddha. In studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way, one must never cling to appearances. Appearances are merely shadows of the true mind and are destined to decay.

Following his sudden enlightenment, Lü Chunyang declared, “I have discarded my gourd and bag, smashed my zither, and from now on I will no longer refine gold from water. Ever since I encountered the Yellow Dragon, I have come to realize that I have misused my mind.” In alchemy, water represents mercury, a key ingredient.

Daoist alchemy focuses on the process of filling “Kan” with “Li.” Water, embodying Yin, corresponds to Kan, while gold, symbolizing Yang, represents Li. The harmonization of Yin and Yang through the filling of Li with Kan signifies the refinement of the golden elixir of the Yang Spirit. By stating, “From now on, I will no longer refine gold from water,” Lü Chunyang indicates that he has abandoned this practice, having recognized his true nature: the formless mind, the pure Buddha. This essence exists in its natural state, rather than being artificially cultivated. It is merely that sentient beings, lost in their external realities, fail to see it. Now that he has gained this understanding, he no longer clings to the external world.

When practicing, it is essential to first grasp the fundamental principles of Buddhahood. Without this understanding, one risks straying far from the path to enlightenment, making realization of the Way impossible. To illustrate this point, consider the analogy of cooking rice: one must have rice to cook. If one attempts to use mud and sand, no matter how long one cooks—be it days or even tens of thousands of years—rice will never emerge. Thus, understanding is paramount.

What, then, is the fundamental principle? It is our One True Dharma Realm (our original nature), which is not something extraneous. This principle is unrelated to qigong training or alchemy. Once we comprehend our original nature, we attain the right view. Upon realizing our original nature, our need for practice, attainment, or realization diminishes. However, if one's habitual tendencies remain unresolved and external encounters continue to influence them, the cycle of birth and death persists, necessitating further practice.

Why is this the case? Even after achieving Buddhahood, the state itself remains unattainable. Therefore, what more can one hope to attain? Consequently, there is no attainment. If there is no attainment, what can one achieve? Therefore, there is no realization. Without attainment or realization, one is already a Buddha, a state achieved apart from practice, which implies that practice itself becomes irrelevant. However, if habitual tendencies are unresolved, practice remains necessary.

How should one practice? Continuous observation and contemplation, without reliance on any specific method, are necessary. Thus, the practice of non-cultivation remains vital. Upon recognizing one's true nature, one realizes that all forms in the world are manifestations of One True Dharma Realm (one's true nature).

Hence, nature is form, and form is nature; they are fundamentally one and the same. This understanding is why we, as Buddhists, speak of the non-dual Dharma Gate. The Heart Sūtra states, "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form." These forms represent manifestations of our One True Dharma Realm, the essence of the wondrously existing true emptiness. It is correct to assert that form is empty and void because "form is emptiness." However, if one insists that form is entirely empty and void, this leads to a misguided interpretation of emptiness and annihilation. Therefore, we assert that all forms lack self-substance and self-nature; they are inherently empty, signifying that everything is ultimately unattainable.

There are several different kinds of emptiness. Generally speaking, these include relative emptiness, annihilationist emptiness, and analytical true emptiness.

For ordinary beings, emptiness is opposed to existence: when a thing is present, it exists; when absent, it is empty. Followers of non-Buddhist paths hold annihilationist emptiness, believing that after death everything ends and nothing remains. This is annihilationist emptiness. The two vehicles see analytical true emptiness, separating form and mind: form is material dharma, and mind is mental dharma. Consider the five aggregates: form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.

According to the Two Vehicles, form is material dharma, while feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness are regarded as mental dharmas, thus separating them. They maintain that in spiritual practice, the body is deemed useless and must be

discarded. However, this assertion is incorrect. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. All forms, including our bodies, reflect the true mind.

A mirror reflects an image; if it doesn't, it isn't a mirror. Our essence embodies wondrous presence and true emptiness. This wondrous presence encompasses all dharmas. It is not empty, allowing it to reflect the images of all things and perform remarkable functions.

If it does not reveal all aspects and significant functions, then it cannot be considered true emptiness. Therefore, the premise that form is emptiness and emptiness is form signifies that all forms are manifestations of the true mind (the true nature of emptiness), representing the accomplishments of the true mind.

The nature of true emptiness (the true mind) has no form or appearance and can be neither seen nor touched; it must be reflected and displayed through phenomena (form). Put this way it is more thorough, hence the saying "Phenomena are accomplished through principle, and principle is manifested through phenomena." "Phenomena are accomplished through principle" means that all things are accomplished from the essence of principle.

Where can this essence of principles—our formless and intangible One True Dharma Realm—be observed? This essence is evident in phenomena, which are manifested through various things; thus, the saying, "Principles are manifested through things." For example, if we aim to construct an airplane, we first create a blueprint. Subsequently, engineers direct the workers in the manufacturing process according to this blueprint. Upon successful construction, the airplane takes off. The aircraft, as a physical object, demonstrates the correctness of the design plan and drawings, allowing it to soar into the sky.

The airplane is a thing; when the thing with form is accomplished, it shows that the design and plans were correct, so the plane flies into the blue sky. If the designs, plans, data, and so on were incorrect, the plane could not get into the sky, or would fall from it.

These plans, drawings, and data constitute the principle, while the plane embodies the phenomenon. The plans, drawings, and data enable the construction of the plane, which then brings the principle to life. The successful construction of the plane validates that its design, drawings, and data are accurate; thus, the principle is manifested through the phenomenon. The airplane serves as a metaphor.

Our true mind is formless, and this formlessness is expressed through various entities. Today, we see mountains, rivers, earth, men, women, young and old, the sun, moon, stars, plants, trees, and forests, along with other ever-changing phenomena. All of these are manifestations of our One True Dharma Realm.

Therefore, the perception of form is synonymous with the perception of nature, as nature and form are inseparable.

The ancient masters proclaimed, “The verdant bamboos are all dharmakāya; the luxuriant yellow flowers are all Prajñā.”

Bamboo is recognized as an elegant plant. The poet Su Dongpo crafted a clever verse regarding it: “Without bamboo, one becomes vulgar.” A household devoid of bamboo would lack elegance; similarly, “Without meat, one becomes thin.” In the absence of meat, one would become emaciated. “If you wish to avoid being either vulgar or thin, stir-fry bamboo shoots with pork for every meal.”

This dish is delightful, striking a balance that is neither vulgar nor thin, thereby exemplifying the elegance of bamboo. Observing verdant bamboo represents our dharmakāya, while witnessing luxuriant yellow flowers signifies our Prajñā wisdom.

But why do we assert this? Principles are unveiled through phenomena! However, does this mean we are entirely defined by these elements? That is not the case! Why? In the past, the monk Dazhu remarked that if verdant bamboo embodies dharmakāya, then when we consume bamboo shoots, we are also partaking of this dharmakāya. For instance, if a bowl represents your dharmakāya, then breaking it would imply breaking the dharmakāya as well.

This reasoning is flawed! Therefore, is this statement accurate? How should we understand it? It must be viewed as “neither one nor two”—neither entirely one nor completely separate.

To assert “no one” implies that they are distinct. This notion suggests that our dharmakāya is formless, whereas tangible objects possess form. In terms of form, they are not identical. Nature is inseparable from form, and form cannot exist independently of nature. Based on this inseparability, they are not two; they are one.

A reflection in a mirror cannot be separated from the mirror. Can the shadow be removed? No, it cannot. If you cover the mirror with cloth, the pattern of the cloth is reflected, yet the shadow persists.

If you tilt the mirror to face the ground, objects beneath the surface are still reflected; if you angle it toward the sky, clouds, stars, the sun, and the moon are all reflected as well. Ultimately, there exists a shadow within the mirror. Thus, the mirror and shadow are identified with each other due to their inseparability. However, the shadow remains the shadow, and the mirror remains the mirror. Hence, in terms of form, one possesses it while the other is formless. They are not

one; thus, we refer to it as “neither one nor two.” This principle must be comprehended.

In the past, when Patriarch Dongshan was crossing a river, he bent down to roll up his trouser legs. At that moment, he saw his reflection in the water and experienced a sudden realization. He composed a verse with the profound line, “It (the reflection) is now me, and I am presently not it,” which exemplified his true enlightenment. “It is now me” signifies the reflection of myself in the water, while “I am not it” indicates that I differ from that reflection.

Why is it that he is me, and I am not him?

The myriad reflections in the world are all manifestations of our true mind. Thus, while these reflections represent my true nature, I am not them. This state can be described as different yet connected.

“Connected” implies that the dharmakāya manifests as part of these reflections; “different” means that these reflections are not me. Buddhist principles are both clear and profound. When we comprehend these concepts and the Buddha-nature, we will understand how to realize the essence and apply it in practice; otherwise, confusion will ensue.

Once, while reading a verse by Patriarch Dongshan, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao pondered, “If Patriarch Dongshan attained enlightenment, how could there still be an ‘it’ and a ‘me’?” Upon realizing true enlightenment for himself, he came to understand that both he and others are ultimately unattainable. This notion of unattainability suggests that appearances are illusory; all appearances persist and illustrate the remarkable function of our true mind. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify these matters.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says, “The nature of form is true emptiness; the nature of emptiness is true form.” This nature is the essence of true emptiness and wondrous presence: free of every attachment, unstained by a single speck of dust, and without the slightest form or appearance. To describe it as resembling any thing would miss the mark. This all-capable essence of true emptiness is the basis from which everything is formed and manifested.

This means that emptiness is not sheer nothingness; it is true emptiness and wondrous presence. All forms and appearances are manifestations of this nature of true emptiness and wondrous presence, functions of our own nature. Apart from our own nature, there are no forms or appearances. Thus, all forms and appearances are our own nature, and our own nature is all forms and appearances.

Our own nature is formless: it is true emptiness, present yet not substantially existent, not empty yet empty. Forms and appearances are wondrous presence: without substantial existence yet present, empty yet not empty. All forms and appearances are originally inseparable from true emptiness and wondrous presence. Yet people commonly cling to forms and appearances as substantially real, becoming so deeply ensnared that the attachment seems unbreakable.

Out of compassion for all living beings, the Buddha teaches us to recognize the truth, emphasizing, “Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form.” The phrase “not different” indicates that the two are the same.

Why is it said, “Form in its nature is true emptiness; emptiness in its nature is true form”? Because our nature is empty, forms can appear. If it were not empty, but already a substantial entity with form, it could not manifest appearances. Why? Take a simple example: only when this room is empty can we move in tables, large wardrobes, and so on.

Conversely, if this room is filled with things and has no empty space, nothing more can be moved in. Thus the essence of our nature must be true emptiness without form to manifest all forms and the countless varieties of wondrous appearances.

Precisely because our own nature is formless and cannot be seen with the eyes, it is also called the wondrous essence. It cannot be found anywhere inside or outside the body. Open the head and it is not there; dissect the body or cut open the heart and it is still not there. It is neither in the brain nor in the heart: utterly traceless, it cannot be grasped.

This means that nature has no trace or appearance and cannot be seen with the eyes.

Everything with form before our eyes can be seen by means of the “seeing nature,” but who can see this “seeing nature” itself? The first reason is that the eyes can see only things with form; the second is that the eyes can see only what is opposite them and cannot see what is not opposite them.

For example, can our eyes see our own eyes? Because an eye is not opposite itself, it cannot see itself. Self-nature is the absolute true mind and not something relative, so it cannot be seen by the eyes. If there were seeing, it would not be true seeing.

Self-Nature is entirely devoid of trace or form and exists beyond perception, embodying true emptiness. However, despite being classified as true emptiness, it possesses the capacity to respond to conditions and functions. When it encounters an object, it generates consciousness, allowing the distinction between this and that. Consequently, nature is wonderfully existent, not merely inert emptiness.

When the “seeing nature” discerns all forms through the eyes, those forms become manifest.

For example, when we observe someone, how do we recognize them as a person rather than something else? How can we determine if they are male or female or identify them as Zhang San or Li Si? It is solely through the discernment of consciousness that the form of a person is revealed. Because forms are manifested by the seeing nature, they are, in essence, self-nature itself.

Thus, the six natures of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing operate through the six sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—manifesting all forms that correspond to the six sense objects. Consequently, all forms and phenomena are manifestations of self-nature. Form cannot be separated from self-nature, nor can self-nature be separated from form. Without self-nature, there is no form; without form, there is no self-nature.

Some have asked whether “forms” or “sight” comes first when considering the concept of “seeing nature.” Let us analyze this. If sight precedes forms, then sight is fundamental, with forms following later.

However, without forms and sight, what can we perceive? How can we even discuss the act of “seeing”? The act of seeing depends on both form and sight, enabling us to distinguish one thing from another. If neither form nor sight existed, how could the phenomenon of “seeing” arise? Hence, the essence of “seeing nature” can only be realized through the interplay between form and sight.

On the other hand, if form comes first and sight follows, then form must be the primary aspect, with sight arising later.

Yet without seeing, how could form appear? If we have not seen something, how could we know what form or appearance it has? In other words, without the nature of seeing, how could form appear? If no one saw it, even though form were present, it would be as though absent and could not appear. Thus, nature and appearance cannot be separated.

The same is true not only of the nature of seeing, but also of the functions of the nature of hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing. Thus form and nature cannot be separated. The essence of nature is emptiness; how, then, could the essence of form differ from emptiness? Form and emptiness are therefore without distinction: form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form.

We often say that Buddhism is the non-dual Dharma Gate, and this is exactly what we mean: everything is non-dual. It is one and yet two, and two and yet one. You

may assert that it is one, yet it is also two; you may claim it is two, yet it is also one. They are fundamentally one and cannot be separated. If you insist on separating them, you will be misled.

We often use the example of water and waves. Water and waves are one because they both embody wetness. Water represents a static state, while waves represent a dynamic state. When the wind creates waves on the water, the state shifts from static to dynamic. Although they appear different, they remain one. Thus, the waves and the water are a single entity, yet they can also be considered two distinct aspects.

The same principle applies to a mirror and its reflection. Mirrors can reflect images regardless of shape or material. If a mirror could not reflect an image, it would not be a mirror. The mirror and its reflection are one. This is why it is referred to as the non-dual Dharma Gate.

As humans, from the moment we are born and begin to gain knowledge, we perceive all the images of our nature—the mountains, rivers, earth, universe, and all things—as real, grasping at shadows. We see and understand only the shadows, failing to realize they are manifestations of the mirror's light. We do not recognize this light.

If we could recognize this light, we would also recognize Buddha's nature. Why? This clarity arises from the fact that, while shadows come and go, arise, and perish, the light emanating from the mirror remains constant. The mirror reflects the appearance of a cat and the appearance of a dog. The shadows it manifests come and go, arise and perish, but the mirror's light remains unchanged.

Mountains, rivers, earth, and all other phenomena are likewise reflections of the Eternal Light. We often say, "The sea changes into mulberry fields." What is now the sea may become mulberry fields in the future; what was once mulberry fields may now be the sea. For instance, Yunnan in China was once the sea, but it has transformed into mountains and fields. Although these forms, like the shadows in the mirror mentioned earlier, are constantly changing, coming and going, arising and perishing, the mirror's light is akin to true nature; it is without birth or death and remains eternally still.

Without a mirror, no reflection can appear; without reflections, it would not be a mirror. In other words, nature is inseparable from form, and form is inseparable from nature. Thus, nature is form, and form is nature. This is Buddhism's dharma gate of nonduality. To penetrate this point is to realize the mind and see one's true nature.

Do not think that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is extraordinarily difficult and attainable only by sages. Practitioners are often daunted by this expression, believing it to be beyond their reach and impossible for people today. Whenever it is mentioned, they recoil in fear and dare not approach it.

They think that ordinary people like us cannot attain this state and that our only way forward is to rely on the Pure Land school, reciting the Buddha's name and seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Once there, after hearing the Buddha teach, we can realize the mind and see our true nature. For ordinary men and women of faith, this is indeed true.

For this is the Dharma-ending age: sentient beings have dull faculties and heavy obstacles, and it is indeed difficult to attain accomplishment through practice in this Sahā world. Yet the true Dharma is also present in the Dharma-ending age, and there are still people of superior capacity. We must not apply a single rule to everyone, elevating realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature to a realm reserved for sages and refusing to acknowledge it in ourselves.

In fact, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is not elsewhere. It is right before us, in the very capacity to see, hear, walk, and act. Turn the light inward for a moment and recognize that this luminous knowing is your own Buddha-nature: then the task of a lifetime's study and cultivation is fulfilled. All sentient beings can see and hear; thus all sentient beings are Buddhas. This all-capable wisdom-nature is no less in ordinary beings and no greater in sages.

Since all sentient beings can see and hear and possess the Tathāgata's wisdom-nature, we should no longer elevate realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature to a sacred realm beyond our reach.

Simply turn the light inward through these eight great functions, including seeing and hearing, and recognize who sees and who hears. Once you recognize it and affirm it without further doubt, continue safeguarding realization with close, unbroken care. Do not let it become tainted by sense objects; remain empty and aware at all times. As soon as a thought arises, see through it; as soon as the mind begins clinging to circumstances, turn it back. "Inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not move with circumstances." If you can do this, why fear that you cannot fully realize bodhi?

Our own nature is the formless essence of true emptiness. Nature is empty and non-abiding; forms too are empty and impossible to grasp. There is therefore no need to seek or fret over gain and loss. The Diamond Sūtra says, "If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata." Understanding the truth of nature and form as true emptiness keeps us from being swayed by material appearances. Be master of yourself, neither deceived nor controlled by the servants.

Abide in no circumstance and cling to nothing. Through continuous and seamless contemplation, we can enter realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

All phenomena are expressions of self-nature. Without self-nature, there are no phenomena, and none can be perceived. Only by 'seeing nature' can we discern forms. Since perceiving forms is equivalent to perceiving nature, and since forms express the nature that perceives them, we can conclude that form is nature and nature is form.

As nature is real and true, so too are the forms. The Lotus Sūtra asserts, "This Dharma abides in its Dharma position, and the worldly phenomena are permanent." This indicates that all worldly phenomena are manifestations of nature. Because nature is real, the phenomena are not false but rather enduring. This illustrates the idea that "nature is both empty and possesses true form." Thus, it is said: if one is true, all are true; if one is delusion, all are delusion.

Someone asks, "Is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss ultimately real or illusory?" It is neither real nor illusory; it is also both real and illusory, real and illusory at once. To distinguish real from illusory in this way is still discrimination by the deluded mind.

For the Western Pure Land is also a manifestation of Buddha-nature. From the perspective of appearances, whatever nature manifests belongs to that nature. Nature is true, and appearances are also true; therefore, the Western Pure Land can be considered real. However, when discussing the essence of nature, it is real, while appearances are merely shadows. The Diamond Sūtra states, "All appearances are delusion."

Since all appearances are deceptive shadows, one could also regard the Western Pure Land as false. Let us avoid falling into these illusory distinctions! By genuinely understanding the unity of nature and appearance, as well as the non-duality of form and emptiness, we can see that perceiving appearances is akin to perceiving nature. We recognize our true nature through all appearances.

Acknowledging nature necessitates recognizing appearance, which enables us to tap into our inherent qualities to create remarkable effects freely and spontaneously, ultimately leading to complete enlightenment. Buddha-nature is filled with boundless wonders. Thus, the Mahāmudrā asserts, "It infinitely manifests all dharmas, pure and impure, and possesses the Dharma-Such equality." Buddha-nature is all-encompassing; it can manifest both pure and impure states and aspects infinitely.

All these states and aspects are equal because our true mind is equal. Our mind is on par with that of all Buddhas. It is neither diminished by our mortal condition nor enhanced by the Buddha's attainment of sainthood. Instead, it remains equal.

Grasping this principle empowers us to control our minds, allowing our practice of the Dharma to remain free from confusion and bewilderment. If we do not understand this principle of the true mind, we will seek it outside ourselves, leading to constant doubt and restless minds that hinder us from genuinely benefiting from it.

We study Buddhism to gain genuine benefits. Thus, Buddhism serves to calm the mind and achieve real advantages, unlike other non-Buddhist paths that focus on acquisition. Many contemporary Buddhists aspire to develop spiritual powers and display them to others. Alas! This is a mistake. Cultivating the Dharma of non-attainment while harboring a desire to gain something is contrary to the true path.

From the outset of cultivation, one must grasp that nothing is truly attainable. Only our true mind—the Buddha-nature—is real. All other dharmas resemble dreams and illusions, ultimately unattainable. Once you restore the radiance of your Buddha-nature, spiritual powers will naturally manifest, and you will attain them without seeking.

However, when these powers do surface, one must avoid becoming attached. Attachment can lead to entrapment, making it difficult to extricate oneself.

If one fixates on something in their mind, the demon will exploit this opportunity. Rather than achieving Buddhahood, one risks becoming a demon. Exercise great vigilance! Our Buddhist practice fundamentally revolves around the concepts of no practice, no attainment, and no realization. Nevertheless, throughout this process of no practice, no attainment, and no realization, signs will invariably arise.

We have previously likened the initial awakening to that of a child, awaiting maturity before it can be effectively utilized. Each individual's foundation, practice method, and diligence determine the duration of this inherently gradual growth process. At the initial stage of enlightenment, one has only reached the periphery of dharmakāya, not its center. Thus, diligent practice in practical situations is essential for eliminating detrimental habits and ascending to Buddhahood.

4. The Three Mysteries and Three Essentials of Linji

In the doctrinal teachings, the journey from ordinary being to Buddha is said to require three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. The Chan school speaks differently. Patriarchal Chan is a complete and sudden dharma gate: it speaks of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization, rather than of meditative absorption and liberation. Even so, it is not entirely without stages. The Linji school therefore teaches the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials.

The Linji Chan Master stated, “There are three mysteries in one sentence and three essentials in one mystery.” These “Three Mysteries and Three Essentials” encapsulate the essence of his profound understanding. Due to his meticulous attention and personal experience, he articulated the practice clearly and thoroughly, progressing from the shallow to the deep and from the beginning to the end. He asserted, “In general, when reciting the Chan teachings, one sentence must contain the Three Mysteries, and one mystery must encompass the Three Essentials.”

Patriarch Linji gave three statements. By that calculation, three times three would make nine mysteries, and three essentials in each mystery would make twenty-seven essentials. But that is not the meaning. The three statements describe three levels. We must investigate them carefully to understand the subtle process of progressing from initial awakening to complete realization.

Yet throughout the ages, teachers in different places have disagreed about what these Three Mysteries and Three Essentials actually are, each insisting on their own interpretation and debating without resolution. Linji said, “A single statement contains the Three Mysteries.”

Before clarifying the Three Mysteries, we must first understand which statement this means. Without understanding that statement, how can we penetrate the Three Mysteries? Linji said, “Within this lump of red flesh is a True Person of No Rank—the very one who is now expounding and listening to the Dharma.”

This statement is crucial: it is the guiding principle of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. Only by understanding it and recognizing our Original Face—that is, the One True Dharma Realm—can we go on to discuss the mysteries and essentials, the process of practice. Otherwise, it is like discussing military strategy only on paper: empty talk is of no use.

Our Original Face, the One True Dharma Realm, has no cultivation, no realization, and no attainment. Recognizing this Original Face is only initial awakening. While habitual tendencies remain, we cannot yet free ourselves. We must still temper the mind through circumstances and advance further before we can walk hand in hand with the Buddhas and patriarchs. Linji therefore sets out this progression as the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. They describe three stages: first awakening and establishing the view; then safeguarding realization, tempering the mind through circumstances, and eliminating habitual tendencies; and finally bringing forth great capacity and functioning and fully realizing our true nature.

The first sentence contains a profound meaning: “Just watch the puppet show on the stage; the puppets are being pulled and controlled entirely by the person inside.”

This sentence signifies our initial realization of our true nature, our recognition of who we truly are. Our bodies can move, our hands can perform tasks, our feet can walk, our eyes can see, our ears can hear, and our mouths can speak. But what is that which functions through these activities? If we stopped breathing, would our bodies still function? Would they still move? That seems impossible. Therefore, what is it that is moving?

The puppets are being pulled and controlled entirely by the person inside. During a puppet show, we observe individuals pulling strings from below. Without them, the puppets cannot move. Therefore, who is the one manipulating the strings? The one pulling the strings represents our One True Dharma Realm, our true nature. Those who recognize this 'operator' have achieved initial awakening and come to understand our true essence.

Does recognizing our true nature lead to awakening? No! Linji stated that those who acknowledge this truth are unable to save themselves or escape the cycle of reincarnation. Since one's initial awakening resides at the dharmakāya, which is still akin to being a child, Pure Land Buddhists often criticize Chan Buddhism for this very reason. They claim Chan is inferior and assert that it cannot break the cycle of birth and death. Pure Land school, they argue, is superior and provides a safer path to the Western Pure Land. Chan Buddhists may still harbor lingering thoughts and struggle to break free from the cycle of the six realms of rebirth, birth, and death. This, indeed, holds some truth.

However, when we practice Chan or other schools, it is not sufficient to simply realize our original nature and perceive our true selves. We must also diligently maintain this consciousness, working to eliminate habitual tendencies. For instance, Chan speaks of herding cattle. The cattle are quite wild, so we must grip the nose rope firmly and hold the whip high. Should they become unruly, we may need to use the whip to correct them.

We must remain constantly mindful, focusing on the task at hand, overseeing it, and preventing ourselves from falling into delusion or being swayed by circumstances. Only through persistent effort and practice in maintaining this awareness can we eliminate detrimental habits and bring birth and death to an end.

How should we practice after awakening? This inquiry encompasses three essentials: the initial essential, the middle essential, and the ultimately essential.

What are the 'initial essential'? It is the recognition of our original nature. To recognize this nature, one must understand it fully and be willing to accept it. It is inadequate to merely listen to others and harbor doubts; such an attitude does not suffice. We must genuinely accept our true nature, free from doubt, and firmly

believe in its reality. This constitutes the initial essential. If one is torn between belief and doubt, it is of no value.

With a solid foundation, even if the Buddha appeared, one would remain steadfast. Such an undertaking is not simple. In this context, I recall the story of Official Yuxiu's encounter with Master Ziyu.

Official Yuxiu asked Master Ziyu, "What is Buddha?" The master called, "Official!" Yuxiu answered, "Yes!" Master Ziyu said, "This very thing is it; there is nothing else." This is Buddha: that which responds is Buddha, nothing else. "Oh!" The official understood and awakened.

However, Master Yaoshan, upon hearing this exchange, remarked, "Oh, such an agreement is troubling. Official Yuxiu has been buried by Master Ziyu."

When Official Yuxiu heard this, he thought, "Oh! Perhaps my awakening was not genuine. Why did he say that Mount Ziyu had buried me? Did I not awaken? Was I mistaken?" Doubt arose and his footing became unsteady. With one cast of his line, Chan Master Yaoshan had hooked him.

He hurried to Chan Master Yaoshan and asked, "Reverend Master, I hear you say that Mount Ziyu has buried me and that my awakening is mistaken. Please instruct me." Hearing this, Yaoshan laughed, thinking, "Your footing really is unsteady. One cast of my line, and here you are."

He said, "Very well. Ask, and I will answer." Official Yuxiu repeated his earlier question: "What is Buddha?" Unlike Master Ziyu, who had called him and then pointed directly after he answered, Yaoshan posed a question in return. Like Ziyu, he called, "Official!" Yuxiu answered, "Yes!" Yaoshan immediately asked, "What is it?" Yuxiu turned the light inward to see what it was. "Oh!" At that moment he awakened.

In reality, both methods are direct, but the techniques differ. One tells you directly, while the other asks you a question in return. Since you asked about Buddhahood, I must respond specifically to your question rather than addressing something unrelated.

When answering, I don't directly explain the Buddha-nature. Instead, I first call you out. Then, there are two ways to respond. One is to directly point out what you are responding to. For example, Master Ziyu said, "This is it; there is nothing else."

The other is Master Yaoshan's question, "What is it?"—a counter-question: "Who is responding to me?" Oh! This is Buddha! Thus, he attained awakening. It seems simple; it all depends on how firmly you stand. If you truly stand firm, then a direct answer will suffice.

For example, when Damei visited Mazu, he also asked Mazu what Buddhahood is. Mazu replied, “The mind is Buddha.” Your mind is Buddha. Damei attained awakening and immediately returned.

Mazu wanted to test his genuine awakening, so after a while, he sent an attendant to test Damei: “Tell Damei that Mazu’s teachings have changed. It’s no longer the mind-is-Buddha, but rather neither the mind nor the Buddha. See how he responds.” The attendant took the order and went to see Damei.

Seeing Mazu’s attendant arrive, Damei asked, “How is Mazu now?” The attendant replied, “Ah, Mazu is excellent!” Damei then asked, “How is Mazu’s Dharma?” The attendant replied, “Mazu’s Dharma is currently neither mind nor Buddha.” Damei said, “Hey! This old man is deceiving people. Let him be neither mind nor Buddha; I only care about the mind being Buddha. “ Observe his unwavering stance! Therefore, if we truly attain awakening, we will stand firmly without doubt. This gesture represents the initial awakening of the mind, which is the first essential concept presented in this sentence.

What is the ‘middle essential’? After attaining awakening, one should safeguard their true nature. Enlightenment does not conclude with a single realization; habitual tendencies continue to exist. Therefore, we must consistently protect it. As previously noted, those who chant the Buddha’s name do so immediately upon the arising of a thought; those who chant mantras focus singularly; those who meditate on Chan awaken simply, without striving for anything.

In Mahāmudrā, when your mind arises, you exclaim “Pah!”—a sudden, swift rebuke that dispels delusion. This phrase serves as the supreme pith instruction for ‘sustaining and protecting’ your true nature in Mahāmudrā. Thus, all practitioners must practice maintaining the awakened mind. Understanding how to sustain and protect the self-nature is the ‘middle essential.’

What is ‘ultimately essential’? We must continually protect our true nature. Protect it consistently… Once we have mastered it, we must not cling to it. Holding on to it can be considered a conditioned practice. Nevertheless, we must continue to progress, setting aside this “protection” and entering effortless functioning.

But after practicing this safeguarding for so long, it is not easy to let it go. We want to relinquish it yet cannot. This is the highest essential of the first statement.

This describes the course of practice. We must therefore understand that practice does not end with a single awakening. There is, of course, sudden awakening, sudden cultivation, and sudden realization, in which everything is completely resolved upon awakening. But this is the return of great bodhisattvas, not something ordinary beings can generally accomplish.

When great bodhisattvas return, they can awaken, cultivate, and realize suddenly, but they too practiced gradually in the past; they did not succeed all at once. We must understand the difficulties and practice diligently. That is why I repeatedly urge people to practice well. A single awakening is not the end: we must enter the proper position of the dharmakāya from its periphery, and then continue advancing higher and higher.

The second sentence, titled “Intention Mystery,” states, “The highest truth does not tolerate your questions and answers, and how can a skillful and expedient reply compare to directly cutting off delusions!”

Buddha-nature is formless and serves as the root of all dharmas. It can only be illuminated and understood through the light of wisdom, not through physical observation. One must recognize that all the myriad phenomena in the world are merely shadows manifested by our wonderful nature. Nature is form, and form is nature; they are one, and their applications are boundless.

While understanding these principles is significant, expressing them through forms and words diminishes their essence. It is essential to realize that all light and spiritual powers are absorbed in one’s own mind, without any abiding trace, without any dharma, without a thread, and without words to articulate them. Only then can one truly be wonderful. Thus, the sūtra states, “Whatever can be said or expressed is without real meaning.”

You must understand until understanding cannot be put into words, and be wondrous until wonder cannot be put into words; only then is it true wonder. So Linji says, “Wondrous understanding allows no questions from Wuzhu”: having realized this, even Wuzhu, the best of questioners, cannot open his mouth to ask. “Ouhe vying to bear the key to cutting off the stream”: ouhe means bubbles rising and joining one after another, referring to question and answer.

No matter how many questions and answers you offer, no matter how you speak of the profound and the wondrous, there is in the end a resolution; they are only bubbles. Because none of this is true and none of it is the real subject, they are likened to bubbles.

No matter how many questions and answers you have, they are like bubbles gathering into a large mass, and such a response is incomparable to directly cutting off delusions. Thus, it is said, “A single step forward cannot be taught by a thousand sages.” Such an attitude cannot be articulated in words or comprehended through thought. One must relinquish everything, practice diligently, and truly attain this state. Only then can one illuminate and realize it in the light of wisdom. Therefore, it is said, “The highest truth does not tolerate your questions and answers, and how can a skillful and expedient reply compare to directly cutting off delusions!”

This is also divided into three essentials: the initial essential, the middle essential, and the highest essential. This classification indicates the progress of practice. The first, the highest essential, mentioned above, refers to the practice of maintaining and retaining the mind. Once you master it, you should let go, as holding on would become a burden. However, if your practice is not sufficiently strong, letting go at once will not be easy.

Thus, the preceding statement is identified as the “sentence mystery.” We speak of three mysteries: sentence mystery, intention mystery, and essence mystery. The sentence mystery represents the words, while the meaning conveys the main idea derived from the substance, which is the principal concept originating from the West. From the meaning arise the words, and from these words, we communicate and write, enabling us to educate others.

Hence, the first sentence, “Just watch the puppet show on the stage; the puppets are being pulled and controlled entirely by the person inside,” exemplifies the ‘sentence mystery.’ This mystery comprises three essentials. The second sentence: “The highest truth does not tolerate your questions and answers, and how can a skillful and expedient reply compare to directly cutting off delusions!” This ‘intention mystery’ is the meaning expressed by our luminous essence.

Only with intention can thoughts be transformed into words, which are infinitely varied; without intention, how can thoughts be expressed? Therefore, in a meeting, when someone inquiries about your thoughts, what does it signify? The act of expressing your thoughts through words encapsulates the profound meaning of the mind. What is the ‘Initial Essential’? As mentioned earlier, the first requirement is to let go of the “protecting” aspect, although this may still prove challenging. After a prolonged period of practice, you may eventually let go of it and cease to protect it.

Consequently, when you reach this stage in your practice and no longer feel the need to protect it, you experience a sense of lightness and happiness that surpasses that felt during the protection phase. When you were still protecting it, you bore a burden. Even after you have set down ninety-nine jin of a hundred-jin burden, one jin still remains! Thus, when you reach the point of no longer protecting it and genuinely enter a state of “non-contrivance,” you naturally feel lighter and happier. However, although you may have let go, delusions can occasionally resurface; therefore, your cultivation is not yet complete.

What about the ‘middle essential’? You have truly entered a state of “non-contrivance,” where Dharma cannot be obtained. At this point, there is nothing inside or outside, no length or shortness, no green or yellow—nothing at all. You have entered the correct state of “non-contrivance.”

Reaching this level of practice is both excellent and wonderful, akin to a bright Mid-Autumn moon shining overhead, impossible to push away or draw in. The moon symbolizes the attainment of this level of practice. Everyone possesses a luminous body; however, it remains invisible due to delusion and attachment. Once these false perceptions are cleared away and the delusions disappear, the light within is revealed. Therefore, when one reaches this middle state, one will naturally experience profound peace and bliss, with the light shining brightly.

When one reaches the highest level of the intention mystery, the concept of non-contrivance becomes unattainable. At the intermediate level, the idea of inaction still holds relevance. Thus, upon reaching the seventh bodhisattva stage, one must engage in non-contrivance while also ensuring it remains at the forefront of their consciousness. By the eighth bodhisattva stage, however, non-contrivance itself fades away, signifying an even greater advancement in one's practice.

Consequently, practice unfolds progressively, step by step. At this juncture, there is no longer a necessity for cultivation. But what is cultivation? Alas! It has all vanished. This cultivation of non-contrivance is deep and profound, as it entirely dissolves all remnants of cultivation and non-contrivance, erasing them completely.

One does not need to pursue spiritual powers or transformations; such phenomena arise naturally. When practice reaches this level, one comprehends the two mysteries and six essentials, enabling them to teach and enlighten both humans and deities. Therefore, Linji remarked, "This sentence encourages one to become a teacher of humans and gods." This stage represents the pinnacle of attainment.

Thus, practice encompasses various levels. It is not a straightforward journey leading directly to awakening. The outcome depends on the diligence of one's practice and the continual protection of the true nature until they are mastered. Once mastery is achieved, one lets go of it, thereby transforming and entering the realm of non-doing.

At this stage, have we reached the ultimate goal? Not yet. There still exists a profound essence within it, which states, "The three essential seals open with a narrow red dot, leaving no space for division between subject and object." This is the concluding statement. Originally, there was but one sentence: our single mind of nirvāṇa, the One True Dharma Realm. This singular Dharma realm transforms into three layers, subtly illustrating the progress of practice. This transformation serves to prevent us from losing sight of true nature and neglecting Buddha-nature, which could result in us failing to realize it. Therefore, this one sentence evolves into three.

The final sentence, " The three essential seals open with a narrow red dot, leaving no space for division between subject and object."

What is the red dot? The red dot represents our true mind. It is narrow, confined, and not expansive. This symbol indicates that, currently, your 'red dot' lacks breadth, its miraculous power is not yet fully developed, and it requires cultivation in three vital areas.

What are these three essentials? They are not the initial, middle, or ultimate essentials mentioned above, but the three essentials of body, speech, and mind. Similar to when we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we use our body, speech, and mind to empower the Three Secrets.

All Dharmas, whether worldly or spiritual, require the practice of body, speech, and mind. No matter what school you practice at or what you do, you cannot do without body, speech, and mind. When your practice reaches a certain level, your appearance and body will transform. Your body and mind will be dignified, setting an example for others.

Instead of drooping your brows and eyes or looking listless, you will be dignified and full of energy. Those who cultivate the Dharma must set an example, especially in all aspects of conduct, serving as role models for all. They cannot live like ordinary people; they must strictly observe the precepts and possess a dignified demeanor and the appearance of a great person.

Therefore, don't judge someone by their eloquence or high tone; look at the level of their conduct. If they converse without engaging in practice, that is detrimental; however, if they speak frequently but dedicate limited time to practice, that is even more problematic. Therefore, both professionals and regular people must act as they speak.

This is the dharma realm of nonobstruction between principle and phenomena. As practice progresses to the dharma realm of nonobstruction among phenomena, dignified conduct manifests everywhere and at every moment. "Meaning" here is the essential intent expressed from our essence: how to teach particular sentient beings in ways suited to them. This is what "meaning" refers to.

The mouth is where we speak and preach the Dharma, responding to situations as they arise. There is no fixed Dharma, but we must prescribe the right medicine for the right situation. This function may be new, but as we gain experience and become more adept at observing the aptitude of sentient beings, we will be able to discern the aptitude of all sentient beings and preach the Dharma accordingly. The third element is the trinity of body, speech, and mind.

Through this training, your 'vermilion dot,' or true mind seal, will be opened, thus activating its boundless and miraculous power. A seal (mudrā) is like an official's seal; it can handle anything. The seal here refers to our mind; our mind is the seal.

At this point, our mind will unleash its immense potential and power, enabling us to effectively manage any situation. This phrase is what Linji means: “The three essential seals open with a narrow red dot.”

“Leaving no space for division between subject and object.” This implies that regardless of what presents itself before me, I perceive it all without the need for contemplation or deliberation. Should we attain this level of practice, we can become teachers of the Buddhas and Patriarchs.

However, we are not the teachers of Amitābha Buddha or Śākyamuni Buddha—since they have already reached Buddhahood—but rather the educators of those who aspire to become Buddhas and patriarchs in the future, guiding them along the correct path, realizing the transcendent way, and ultimately achieving Buddhahood. This notion encapsulates what it means to be a teacher of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. In other words, if there are remarkable individuals aiming to become Buddhas and save sentient beings, you may serve as their role model. Therefore, do not err in this regard.

This statement also encompasses three essentials: the initial, intermediate, and ultimate. What constitutes the initial essentials? The above-mentioned ‘the ultimately essential of intention mystery,’ which possesses profound meaning, has already attained the state of annihilation and non-contrivance, achieving immense function without effort. What further practice remains to discuss? There is none.

Upon achieving this goal, a person returns to the original state, transitioning from the profound to the subtle. Everything is inherently profound and mysterious. However, upon reaching the state of bright illumination, akin to that of an eighth-level bodhisattva, one can unleash spiritual powers and wondrous functions. Only by refraining from fixation on these spiritual powers and manifestations can we transition from the state of wonder back to the plain and ordinary. If we dwell on them, we risk losing our way and becoming possessed by demons.

Therefore, we must not cling to anything in practice. Nothing can be attained; we must return to non-attainment. Thus the Heart Sūtra says, “Because there is nothing to attain, one attains anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi.” Only through non-attainment does one realize unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening. To hold that something has been attained would spoil the practice. Here, the wondrous gives way to the plain and ordinary: nothing is attainable, nothing is attainable—nothing whatsoever is attainable.

This state is not one of void; rather, it resembles the taste of water: plain, plain, plain. Within this plainness lies the ultimate flavor—an indescribable, supreme taste. This characterization serves merely as an analogy; no further explanation is given.

So what happens when one reaches the ‘middle essential’? Day and night, one exists in a state of daze, much like a fool, merely dressing and eating. Master Pang’s daughter noted, “Neither straightforward nor difficult. When hungry, eat; when worn out, sleep.” Their family discussed the ‘Three Barriers of Preaching.’ Master Pang addressed the first barrier: “Difficult, difficult, difficult; much like spreading sesame seeds on a tree.”

His wife commented on overcoming the second barrier: “ Easy, easy, easy; the meaning of the West is atop of all the grasses.” His daughter Lingzhao, reflected on the third barrier: “It’s neither difficult nor easy; eat when hungry, sleep when tired.” Thus, at the ‘middle essential,’ one simply dresses and eats.

Many consider these teachings unencouraging. Why can’t one possess spiritual powers? Have they devolved into foolishness or ignorance? As a result, upon hearing this, they hesitate to listen. What they yearn for most is to hear about spiritual powers, transformations, and the vastness of magical capabilities.

When they hear that it is only dressing and eating, they say, “Ah, there’s nothing at all! Like a fool or an idiot—how dull.” They find it lonely and tasteless. So only those of great wisdom can understand it: they know it thoroughly without doubting, and delight in it.

So practice must be done by a true great man; it is not something people of small wisdom can accomplish.

When our practice reaches the central essential of the Mystery in Essence, it has long since been plain, plain, plain, so plain that there is nothing to say. How then to put it? In fact it is neither conditioned nor unconditioned: in walking, standing, sitting, and lying, in activity and stillness, in all dealings and comings and goings, it is distinctly, solitarily luminous! Distinct, solitary luminosity is like a bright light shining overhead: pushing it away it will not go, pulling it it will not come, without the slightest trace of interruption.

As previously noted, upon reaching the stage of ‘the ultimately essential of intention mystery,’ it resembles the bright moon overhead; however, it may occasionally dim. Now, it becomes incredibly radiant, shifting from the moon’s glow to the sun’s brilliance, which is why we refer to it as the “bright sun overhead.”

And what is ultimately essential? Alas! It is even more challenging to articulate. Finding the right words is difficult. Upon seeing Mañjuśrī and Kāśyapa’s white sticks, the Buddha dismounted from his seat. All the great Chan masters of the past, when reaching this juncture, brushed off their robes and returned to their abbot’s quarters. At present, your bright sunshine has disappeared.

Once upon a time, a monk asked Master Caoshan, “What happens when the bright moon shines overhead?” This means, “What happens when the moon shines overhead?” This practice has already reached the state of “intention mystery,” but it hasn’t reached the state of “essence mystery.” To achieve “essence mystery” is like the moon transforming into the sun, becoming even brighter.

However, in the Buddhist tradition, only the moon is used to represent this, not the sun. What about this bright moon overhead? Caoshan replied, “You are still a man below the stairs.”

You are still below the stairs of the reception room. You have not ascended into the room and are still below the reception room, indicating that your practice is incomplete. But the monk, a man of integrity, did not let Caoshan go. He said, “Master, please lead me up the stairs.”

That is, please lend me a hand, pull me up, and guide me into the hall and inner room! Caoshan said, “We shall meet when the moon sets.” When the moon above your head has set and is gone, then we shall meet. At the culmination of this practice, all merges and even the appearance is forgotten; nothing remains. Is this annihilationist emptiness? As explained above, within tastelessness is the supreme flavor! It is not that luminosity has ceased to exist, but that one no longer notices, sees, or clings to it. All merges, appearances are forgotten, and no trace remains.

5. The Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā

When we first encounter light, it appears strikingly bright. However, as we become accustomed to it, we no longer perceive ourselves as being in the light. For instance, we exist within air. Do you feel the presence of air? No, you do not.

But if you were in a sealed room, you’d feel like you were dying. In that moment, you would long for fresh air, and only then would you recognize its presence. After living in the air for an extended period and becoming familiar with it, you cease to notice it.

The phrase “see you when the moon sets” suggests that you should not cling to the light. If you persist in holding on to it, you risk becoming ensnared in a repetitive cycle. Even the slightest attachment can hinder your path to Buddhahood. Thus, we advise against clinging to any spiritual powers or transformations. You should conduct yourself as if nothing exists, appearing entirely indifferent and uninspired.

It is not that the light or spiritual powers have vanished; rather, they exist beyond your awareness. For example, we all wear clothes and eat. Do you still regard these actions as remarkable? Wearing clothes and eating are so commonplace that they warrant little discussion, and most people disregard them. Upon reaching this stage

of practice and becoming profoundly familiar with the teachings, practitioners have united with the true nature and forgotten these concepts entirely, leaving no trace behind.

The same principle applies to those of us who study Buddhist tantra. At the culmination of our practice, our experience resembles the moon on the 30th night of the twelfth lunar month. Is there still a moon on the 30th night of the twelfth lunar month? At that juncture, you have forgotten everything, relinquishing any attachment to the light. You have truly attained the ultimate state. At this point, only the perfect, ever-abiding wisdom endures, luminous and clear. Everything else has vanished, leaving nothing whatsoever.

Perfect enlightenment is the absence of a duality of knower and known, free from relativity. We consider the existence of both a perceiver and a perceived object as detrimental. Only by reaching this level of Dharma practice can one truly attain mastery. At this stage, one can integrate all things in the great thousandfold world-system back into oneself; all these things become oneself. Therefore, Master Sengzhao stated, “Only sages can bring all things back to oneself.” Is it true that only sages can accomplish this? Yes. Who among ordinary people can achieve this? Who among ordinary individuals can comprehend that all things are one? Thus, it follows that only sages can do this.

Speaking of this, I recall a story. A monk asked Chan Master Dasui, “When the great thousandfold world-system disintegrates, will the dharmakāya disintegrate?” We know that the great thousandfold world-system has four stages: creation, abiding, disintegration, and emptiness. Ultimately, it will disintegrate.

Therefore, when the great thousandfold world-system disintegrates, will the dharmakāya disintegrate? The Buddha taught that the dharmakāya is a wonderful, ever-abiding, and unchanging entity that is unborn, undestroyed, unmoving, and constant. This raises the question: will the dharmakāya disintegrate when the great thousandfold world-system disintegrates?

If we respond immediately with “The dharmakāya is indestructible,” such a reply would be inappropriate because it fails to consider the questioner’s intention. Why is such an issue important? When answering, one must pay attention to the context of the speaker’s words and research their underlying meaning. This approach enables them to confront the pain and urgency of their inquiry. Engaging with the question in this manner is essential for listeners to reflect on their wandering thoughts and uncover their true nature. If this response does not resonate with their hearts, they cannot achieve enlightenment.

Do not reason with him; reasoning is useless at this point. The words of Chan are not reasoning; they are a two-edged blade, one edge to kill you and one to give you

life, so that you come alive out of death. That is why Dasui answered him, “The dharmakāya is destroyed too.

Oh! Isn’t this assertion completely contrary to what the Buddha taught? Could it be that he misspoke, thus misleading the world? Wouldn’t this lead to falling into the Vajra Hell? However, if this answer were truly incorrect, why would Monk Touziqing, a renowned Chan master, offer incense and pay homage, praising him as the reincarnation of an ancient Buddha?

It turns out that whatever exists in the so-called world, regardless of its nature, is a manifestation of the Buddha-nature (the dharmakāya) inherent in all sentient beings. Apart from the dharmakāya, there is nothing. Therefore, the Lotus Sūtra states, “This Dharma abides in its dharmakāya, and the phenomena of the world are ever-abiding.” This statement implies that the dharmakāya establishes all worldly phenomena. “This Dharma” refers to all things, while “the dharmakāya” represents the One True Dharma Realm (which is also our dharmakāya). “This Dharma abides in its dharmakāya” indicates that all worldly phenomena are manifestations of the dharmakāya, established by the dharmakāya. Therefore, the phenomena of the world are the dharmakāya, and the dharmakāya is the phenomena of the world.

We know that things are accomplished through principles, and principles are manifested in things. Principles and things are inseparable. Therefore, the sūtra states, “Nature and appearance are one; mind and state are one.” Worldly phenomena manifest our dharmakāya. Ancient sages remarked, “Amidst the myriad phenomena, the body alone emerges.” Since the dharmakāya is ever-abiding and indestructible, worldly phenomena are, by nature, also ever-abiding.

On the surface, worldly phenomena appear to be constantly changing and impermanent. How can they be considered ever-abiding? In reality, the essence of things is indestructible. They simply decay in one place and regenerate in another, moving to a new location.

Su Dongpo beautifully expressed this principle in his poem “Red Cliff”: “Do you also understand the water and the moon? They flow like this, always present; they wax and wane like that, remaining constant. If we view heaven and earth as changeable, they cannot last a moment; if we perceive them as unchanging, then they and I are ever-abiding.”

“Water flows endlessly. Even though it flows, it does not vanish after passing through; it continues its unending flow. The moon experiences cycles of waxing and waning. Nothing is lost when it wanes, and nothing is gained when it is full. Despite these cycles, the moon’s essence remains the same.

Dongpo Jushi used water and the moon to illustrate that the illusion of all things changes, while their true essence remains unchanged. He further explained that those with narrow minds, clinging to illusion, perceive the world as ever-changing and rapidly shifting. Meanwhile, those with clear minds and wisdom recognize the true nature of all things and all living beings, understanding that everything in heaven and earth is ever-abiding and unchanging.

Those who have truly attained enlightenment are at ease and free. Whether pointing horizontally or vertically, they discover profound truths; when speaking in other directions, they uncover nothing but marvels. This wonder is beyond words! Therefore, we must diligently practice and never become complacent. We can only achieve enlightenment and help all living beings in this life, and only then will we truly deserve it!

“ Only through the light of prajñā can one truly see their authentic self and gain the wisdom to discern.” [View]

The practice of the Dharma fundamentally relies on having a correct view. As previously noted, a righteous cause leads to a righteous outcome, whereas an unrighteous cause will inevitably result in a distorted outcome. The view serves as the foundation for cultivation; thus, it must be accurate. In the present Dharma-Ending Age, where beneficial and harmful practices coexist and evil dharma prevails, we practitioners must exercise discernment regarding both the Dharma and genuine masters to avoid deviating onto the wrong path.

As previously mentioned, the varying foundations and knowledge of different practitioners result in a range of perspectives. Some are generous and uninhibited, willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others, yet unwilling to learn Buddhism, believing that being upright and charitable makes them the most noble people in the world. This is the view of the human and heavenly vehicles.

Some are self-righteous, unconcerned about the life and death of others; as the saying goes, “Everyone should sweep the snow in front of their door, not worry about the frost on others’ roofs.” This is the partial view of emptiness in the Hīnayāna.

Some see the suffering of others as their own, and they diligently cultivate the Way to save them. This is the view of a Mahāyāna bodhisattva.

Others, steeped in Buddhist teachings, know that all sentient beings possess the same undefiled wisdom-nature as the Buddha, but fail to recognize it because they are deluded by external circumstances. Simply by turning the light inward, they can restore the luminosity of their true nature and bring forth wondrous functioning. This is the highest Buddha view.

Others seek external dharma and dwell on spiritual powers. This is the view of non-Buddhists...

In general, only those who act from deep compassion and selflessly sacrifice for others possess correct knowledge and insight; otherwise, their understanding is flawed. If you do not proceed with great compassion, regardless of the path you cultivate, you will either be biased toward emptiness or cling to spiritual powers. Without right samādhi of emptiness and compassion, you cannot achieve Buddhahood.

From this perspective, selecting the correct understanding and viewpoint for studying Buddhism requires careful discernment guided by the wisdom of prajñā.

Unfortunately, many contemporary Buddhists, unaware of the true path, are drawn to s powers, mistakenly believing these abilities represent the authentic Dharma. They engage in various practices and paths, oblivious to the fact that many of these , often labeled as Buddhist, are actually deviant and disconnected from the heart and mind. These so-called spiritual powers originate from demons, gods, monsters, and other spirits, rather than from genuine powers that arise from a pure heart and mind.

Pursuing such powers is not only futile but also poses the risk of demonic possession. Some fellow Buddhists, despite years of studying, should understand that true cultivation comes from the heart and mind—the fundamental path. However, their persistent greed and attachment to spiritual powers have led them astray, resulting in the abandonment of the true Dharma and making them unwitting accomplices of deceitful entities. Such behavior illustrates the unjust suffering that arises from a lack of prajñā wisdom and an incorrect understanding and perspective.

“That emptiness is inseparable from great compassion. Prajñā and Bodhi are united in their practice. Therefore, the fusion of emptiness and compassion is the right samādhi.” [Samādhi]

There is a fork in the road of cultivation that must be understood; otherwise, one will stray into the nirodha-samāpatti, or “cessation of perception and sensation,” that leans toward annihilationism. Some people, when practicing, regard suppressing thoughts and sitting motionless as their ultimate goal. Sitting in a stagnant pool, they transform into earth, wood, metal, and stone, falling into another cycle of desolate birth and death. Such an attitude is also a fault because it lacks great compassion and does not seek to liberate sentient beings.

As the verse of Chan Master Wolun in the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch states, “Wolun has a trick, able to cut off a hundred thoughts. My mind does not

arise when faced with circumstances, and my Bodhi grows day by day." This means that they are practicing the wrong way and cannot achieve enlightenment.

We must recognize that while our dharmakāya is empty and formless, it has boundless wondrous functions and is neither dead nor inert. If we suppress our true nature and prevent all thoughts from arising, we risk falling into a state of "cessation of perception and sensation," becoming unable to fully perceive the entirety of the Dharma realm. Emptiness, by its very nature, is not a lifeless or stubborn void; rather, it embraces all things. Consequently, it cultivates immense compassion, enabling various miraculous functions aimed at saving lives. The Dharma Realm comes into existence only when substance, form, and function are fully present. Without these elements, it remains motionless and inert, unable to achieve the perfect union of merit and wisdom necessary for attaining Buddhahood.

The cultivation of the Way requires the integration of both emptiness and compassion, which are essential.

Emptiness signifies wisdom—the understanding that everything is merely a projection of the mind, ultimately unattainable and ungraspable. It entails a complete letting go, resulting in a mind as empty as a washbasin. Compassion, on the other hand, embodies merit. From this compassionate heart, we nurture a strong aspiration to benefit all sentient beings by tirelessly and selflessly engaging in various good deeds, thus accumulating merit. Only then can we attain the perfect state of wisdom and merit, which is the state of Buddhahood. Conversely, cultivating wisdom without merit leads to the flawed karmic retribution of "the arhat's thin supply," while pursuing merit without wisdom results in the imperfect karmic outcome of "the elephant draped with garlands."

Our cultivation of the Way requires establishing a correct understanding and recognition of our true nature, which serves as the foundation for enlightenment. By engaging in the dual cultivation of emptiness and compassion and working diligently, we will soon uncover our true nature and personally experience our Buddha-nature. We will come to understand that every object is a manifestation of our true nature and that every moment and place embodies the wondrous operation of prajñā. Everything is interconnected, with each individual being part of the whole. Therefore, what distinctions exist between people, self, objects, and sentient beings?

If there is even the slightest attachment or the smallest gap, a person will inevitably be misled by either the facts or the old monk's words, leading to defeat in both their words and actions, as well as a loss of freedom.

A lay Buddhist visited Venerable Master Xuyun. Master Xuyun asked, "What kind of practice are you doing?" The lay Buddhist replied, "I observe my mind." Master

Xuyun asked, “Ah, have you found your mind?” The lay Buddhist was unable to answer. Master Xuyun said, “You still need to work harder!” Actually, the answer is quite simple. He asked, “Have you found your mind?” The answer was, “Yes, I have.”

This shouldn’t be the correct answer, because the true mind is formless and cannot be seen. Furthermore, the mind is completely free from the senses and impurities, shining independently without any observer or observed subject. However, engaging in a dialogue with a revered monk is akin to standing within a tiger’s mouth, awaiting its bite. Master Xuyun would certainly not let you go. He pressed the question, “You have found your mind; where is it?” You then extended his palm and said, “It’s all revealed.”

These words revealed your true mind. The true mind is not elsewhere; it shines before you constantly. What’s so difficult about the answer? An ancient sage said, “The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment; if it can be separated, it is not the Way.” The true mind is always in samādhi, without any ins and outs, because it is uninterrupted and cannot be separated.

If this samādhi has ins and outs, it is not true samādhi. A samādhi that is biased toward emptiness lacks great compassion and is certainly not true samādhi. Similarly, a samādhi that has ins and outs is not true. True samādhi includes both emptiness and activity.

What is true samādhi? It is the state of being unperturbed by circumstances. No matter what situation arises, one remains unmoved; just as the Confucian saying goes, “Mount Tai collapses before one, one’s expression remains unchanged; a deer rises to one’s left, one’s eyes remain unblinking.” Therefore, we must practice this attitude constantly, tempering ourselves amidst turmoil while walking, standing, sitting, lying down, and interacting with others. Don’t cultivate a samādhi that is biased toward emptiness and has ins and outs; cultivate a true samādhi that integrates emptiness and compassion. Practicing true samādhi is the key to cultivating the Way.

“Individuals who possess the right view and samādhi align themselves with the teachings of the Buddha and embody the qualities of Bodhisattvas. These individuals practice the altruistic six perfections and ten thousand beneficial practices, making them efficient practitioners.” [Action]

If we possess the right view and the samādhi necessary for cultivation, we will avoid straying from the correct path and find it easier to achieve success. Therefore, cultivation requires both the right view and samādhi. Without them, it is akin to trying to cook sand into rice—a futile endeavor that yields no enlightenment.

Those who embody the essence of all Buddhas possess right view and right samādhi; the sprouts of Bodhi that have emerged will flourish and attain Buddhahood. Right causes lead to right results, while wrong causes lead to wrong results. This pathway is the "Bodhisattva's path"—the correct path for Bodhisattva practice. Only by following this path can we practice the Bodhisattva way and ultimately attain Buddhahood.

Our Mahāyāna practice begins with the intention of benefiting others rather than ourselves. It can be likened to a lifeguard at a swimming pool. To save someone from drowning, the lifeguard must first learn to swim and master lifesaving techniques. If the lifeguard jumps in without first learning how to rescue someone, not only will the person in danger remain unsaved, but the rescuer will drown first.

Thus, we must study Mahāyāna Buddhism to assist sentient beings, not merely for our own sake. Simply seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land and achieving bliss is not our ultimate goal. Those aiming for rebirth in the Western Pure Land must also cultivate the Great Way there and subsequently return to aid sentient beings. This aligns with the aspirations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, in our study of Buddhism, we must never neglect the welfare of sentient beings.

To revisit the question, we cannot attain Buddhahood if we separate ourselves from sentient beings. Why? Your wisdom and merit cannot be complete without the presence of sentient beings.

Have we not spoken of eliminating four kinds of delusion: delusions of view, delusions of thought, dust-like delusions, and ignorance? Dust-like delusions are the subtle delusions that remain after delusions of view and thought. They are the seeds of subtle afflictions and habitual tendencies, as numerous as sand and as fine as dust. To eliminate and sweep them away, we must train ourselves in liberating sentient beings.

Why? The answer is because the habits and dispositions of sentient beings vary. To save them, you must set aside your own needs and follow others closely; only then can you guide them along the right path. To achieve this, you must first eliminate your own negative habits.

Otherwise, if your habits remain, arrogance and pride will remain, so how can you follow others? Therefore, one of the four means of attraction for bodhisattvas is the means of working together—following others. You can only draw sentient beings to you by working together.

Every sentient being has a different personality and temperament. Only by adapting to each and responding to their capacities can we exhaust our own subtle, subjective habitual tendencies, broaden our mind-capacity, eliminate dust-like

delusions, and perfect wisdom. Thus dust-like delusions must be brought to an end through liberating sentient beings. Wisdom cannot be perfected unless it is applied to that work.

What about merit and virtue? If you don't work for the public, how can you accumulate merit and virtue? You must serve the public; you must sacrifice for them! Śākyamuni Buddha, for example, sacrificed for the public more than once.

When sentient beings, burdened by common karma, suffered from famine and had no food to eat, Śākyamuni Buddha transformed himself into an enormous animal, descended from the sky, and fed everyone. After they were full, he then preached the Dharma.

This allowed everyone to receive both food and the Dharma, thereby helping them escape the suffering caused by famine and the cycle of birth and death. What a magnificent example of learning Buddhism and saving sentient beings! Since we are Buddhists, we must sacrifice for sentient beings and serve them in order to accumulate merit and virtue. The Buddha is the Honored One Perfect in Both Merit and Wisdom. To attain Buddhahood, one must possess wisdom, merit, and virtue.

Therefore, one can only attain Buddhahood by relying on sentient beings. Without sentient beings, one cannot attain Buddhahood at all. Without sentient beings, one can only become an arhat, with the Dharma view still uneliminated. Because habitual tendencies as numerous as grains of sand persist, wisdom remains imperfect, and merit and virtue are incomplete. Therefore, if you can become a Buddha, you must thank sentient beings. It is sentient beings who help you achieve enlightenment. You cannot change your negative habits, accumulate merit, or become a Buddha without the assistance of sentient beings. Therefore, it is said that "Only those who undertake all the altruistic practices of the six perfections and myriad deeds are practitioners of suitable spiritual capacity."

The six perfections and ten thousand practices are generosity, precepts, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. First, generosity. The term refers to giving to the public, including giving material goods, giving Dharma, and giving fearlessness. Secondly, one must observe the precepts. This procedure involves observing the Buddhist precepts, the most basic of which are the Five Precepts: not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery, not lying, and not drinking alcohol. The purpose of observing the precepts is to purify the mind. Third, patience.

Many people misunderstand patience, thinking that if someone insults or hits me, I should endure it and not move. This is not the right approach. If you continue to do this, you will become ill. What is patience? There is no insult, so there's no need to tolerate it. Forbearance involves tolerance and acceptance rather than mere endurance, which signifies true submission to one's authentic nature. The Diamond

Sūtra says, “There is no self, no person.” Without me, who would be the one to insult another?

In the absence of a person, who would be the one to insult me? Who insults whom? Who insults me? Both are unattainable and empty. If someone insults me, I accept it. Without self-awareness, their insults are akin to the wind passing through a tree; simply let it go. There is no person, no self, and nothing is attainable.

This is the dharma of non-birth! This dharma of non-birth truly acknowledges the truth of the great thousandfold world-system and life, understanding that the so-called universe is all illusion, with no birth or death at all! Everything is a manifestation of the wonderful functioning of our nature, all arising from causes and conditions. “Dharmas arising from causes and conditions are, I say, empty.”

In the emptiness, nothing is attainable, so how can there be birth? Without birth, how can there be death? If nothing exists, what is there to endure? Let me repeat, forbearance is not about endurance. Forbearance is acceptance, a true emptiness of the mind, true submission, and freedom from contention—this is the practice of forbearance! Fourth, diligence.

To save sentient beings, one must attain enlightenment. How can one save sentient beings without enlightenment? To attain enlightenment, one must be diligent. Unremitting diligence is for the sake of saving sentient beings, not for oneself. Fifth, meditation. Constantly cultivate meditation, remaining unwavering in the face of circumstances and not being carried away by delusions. Sixth, cultivate enormous wisdom.

Only with enormous wisdom can one skillfully and expediently save sentient beings according to varying opportunities. All these altruistic charitable deeds are the bodhisattva practices; otherwise, one is not a bodhisattva. The Ganges Mahāmudrā is the great tantric Dharma, and it does not discuss minor Dharmas, so we will get to the point right away.

6. Emphasis on Actual Practice

“If one can once again locate a quiet place, let go of all worldly concerns, and diligently cultivate with a single mind, one will be born into the original pure mind and will attain true liberation and attain wonderful enlightenment in this life.”

Those who diligently cultivate their practice recognize their true nature and can adapt to noisy environments, thereby fully benefiting from them. They do not require a specific method to cultivate; rather, they simply navigate the mundane world and refine their habits.

However, some individuals struggle to adapt due to weak foundations. What can they do? There is a solution: “If one can once again locate a quiet place, let go of all worldly concerns.” Finding a quiet place, such as a peaceful forest or a relatively serene home environment, is beneficial. However, once you have established a suitable space, you must relinquish all worldly concerns.

If you occupy a tranquil setting but your mind remains unsettled within it, all efforts become ultimately futile! Cultivation and enlightenment reside in the heart. If your mind is cluttered and filled with random thoughts, it is akin to being in a bustling city; thus, it cannot function effectively. To attain enlightenment, you must release all worldly concerns. Everything must be set aside when you sit down to cultivate. Only then can you commence your practice.

Therefore, I often advise everyone to behave as if they were dead while sitting, ignoring everything and not allowing random thoughts to intrude.

Don’t think about how to do this or that, or how to discipline your kids; it can be dangerous! We should not care about anything. The most distressing scenario is anxiously contemplating your children while seated: “Oh! Ah Mao, Ah Gou, it’s time. If you don’t get up now, you’ll be late. Hurry, get up!”

Alas! How can you maintain proper posture while multitasking in this manner, with your mind and energy scattered? I have witnessed this occurrence many times. I am not fabricating this; I have both heard and seen it with my own eyes! Alas! How can you meditate effectively under such conditions? Therefore, when we sit, we must disregard everything. Simply treat ourselves as if we were dead, free from the burden of numerous concerns.

I emphasize the point again: when sitting, let go of all worldly concerns and remain as still as if you were lifeless. Only by doing so can you truly benefit and achieve the right samādhi. Otherwise, how can you attain samādhi? You cannot! Thus, when practicing the Dharma, you must relinquish all worldly concerns.

If you find it difficult to let go, it is futile to remain in a quiet place, even if one is available. Your mind remains tumultuous, and being in a quiet environment is comparable to being on the busy Nanjing Road. Therefore, the essence of practicing the Dharma lies in truly letting go. Only through this release can you be single-minded and diligent.

If you can truly let go and practice wholeheartedly, no matter what method you use, you will immediately and noticeably resonate with your mind.

I often hear people say, “Oh! So-and-so progressed so quickly. He hardly did any sitting before realizing his Original Face! Why have I sat for so long without

experiencing that state?" Ha! His mind could let go and become pure, so he realized it quickly. Your mind cannot let go; it is in turmoil and cannot become pure. How could direct realization arise? Of course it cannot.

Thus the crucial point is not how long you practice, but whether your mind is pure and whether its grasping has truly died away. Frankly, if that grasping has really ceased, you can enter samādhi peacefully after only a short time sitting. Meditative ease, tranquility, and joy will naturally arise, and luminosity will naturally shine forth. If your mind is impure, how could a state of realization arise? Of course it cannot. In practice, therefore, do not measure only the time spent. What matters is whether the mind is pure and whether its grasping has died away. This is the key.

"If one can truly let go of all attachments and focus on diligent practice, they will be reborn in the original pure mind, attaining true liberation and perfect enlightenment in this life." The phrase "this life" specifically refers to the current lifetime, and Buddhist tantra emphasizes the importance of attaining Buddhahood within its very existence. Some interpretations also suggest that the body itself must realize Buddhahood, which lies at the heart of Buddhist tantra.

Previously, we discussed the concepts of Dzogchen and Great Perfect Wisdom, both of which highlight the body's potential to achieve enlightenment. Mahāmudrā serves as a precursor to Dzogchen, which is divided into two stages: Trekchö and Tögal. The first involves instant severance, while the second entails sudden transcendence.

Instant severance refers to the immediate cutting off of all afflictions, delusions, and attachments, allowing one's true nature to manifest clearly. Sudden transcendence signifies an immediate rise above the three realms, leading to Buddhahood.

This Mahāmudrā is the practice of Trekchö. It directly points out that we should not employ a particular method but immediately cut off deluded thoughts and see our true nature. Later the text also discusses union with the three emptinesses; we shall explain that when we come to it, not now. Thus Mahāmudrā is a profound esoteric practice that directly points us to realizing the Way.

If we can let go in this lifetime, we will achieve true liberation and reconnect with our original pure nature, which refers to our inherent, wonderful essence that is fundamentally pure and uncontaminated. Why do we perceive it as contaminated now? This phenomenon is because we become attached to appearances and worldly objects, getting lost in external distractions and remaining unaware of our true nature.

In the past, ancient practitioners had deep roots and light attachments. With the guidance of a teacher, they were able to grasp and accept the truth immediately, freeing themselves from confusion. They relinquished their attachment to the

external world, thereby preserving their true nature, dispelling delusions, and swiftly attaining enlightenment. In contrast, what about individuals today? Their roots are shallow, and their obstructions are considerable. No matter how diligently one attempts to explain, many still fail to understand and remain attached to external distractions, resulting in numerous detours on their path.

My master, Mr. Wang Xianglu, once said, “Those who practice Chan Buddhism spend thirty years without straying while investigating the huatou: ‘Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?’ Only then can they awaken to their inherent Buddha-nature. We who practice Tantra can awaken to our true nature in three years.” In terms of time, this takes only one-tenth as long as Chan practice and is already very swift.

Yet in terms of our intrinsic nature, even investigating Chan is unnecessary.

Whether three years or thirty years, it is all a needless detour! Because everyone is originally a Buddha, there is no need to practice Chan here or chant “ong bala…” Sitting in meditation can feel like putting on shackles, creating unnecessary trouble for oneself. Release all attachments, reclaim your inherent Buddha-nature, rest whenever you desire, and sit freely at your convenience—how truly marvelous, vibrant, and pure that is! As Layman Pang’s daughter, Lingzhao, said, “It’s neither difficult nor easy; eat when hungry, sleep when tired.”

Our true nature is so free and peaceful; why cut out flesh to patch a wound and creating unnecessary trouble for ourselves? However, we must understand that Lingzhao ( ) speaks of passing through the final, most difficult barrier. Achieving this goal is impossible without first overcoming the first two barriers mentioned by Pang Gong and Pang Po (and). Although we possess Buddha-nature, our deep-rooted habitual tendencies from countless lifetimes prevent us from truly benefiting from it without rigorous training and the elimination of these tendencies.

Therefore, we must practice Chan meditation and take a circuitous path to overcome the first two barriers. Pang Gong said, “Difficult, difficult, difficult; like spreading ten loads of sesame seeds on a tree.” Breaking through the first barrier is the most challenging. When we first begin our practice, our minds are filled with wandering thoughts, making it difficult to settle down and see our true nature—much like spreading sesame seeds on a tree.

Pang Po said, “Easy, easy, easy; the meaning of the West is atop all the grasses.” This quote describes breaking through the second barrier, where recognizing your true nature—your ‘Original Face’—becomes effortless through steady practice. Your Original Face rests upon everything. The phrase ‘atop all the grasses’ represents all existence. What stands above all phenomena? Nothing at all. Every single thing is empty and pure. Chan literature contains many koans like this.

In ancient times, the Chan Master Chuanzi studied with the Chan Master Yaoshan, along with Yunyan and Daowu, and verified their understanding. Upon leaving Yaoshan, he said to his two senior brothers, Yunyan and Daowu, “You should each establish your own region and establish the Yaoshan doctrine. I am a simple and unsophisticated person, content with the mountains and rivers, enjoying my pleasures. I cannot shoulder the responsibility of educating sentient beings.

If you know where I live in the future, and if you encounter a capable abbot, please point him out, and I will pass on my life’s knowledge to him in return for my master’s kindness.” So he arrived at the shore of Huating in Xiuzhou, sailed a small boat, ferried passersby, and lived his life as he pleased, awaiting the arrival of a disciple. Hence, he became known as “Boatman Monk.”

Once, Daowu was in Jingkou and encountered Jiashan preaching. A monk asked, “What is the dharmakāya?” Jiashan replied, “The dharmakāya is formless.” He then asked, “What is the Dharma Eye?” Jiashan replied, “The Dharma Eye is flawless.” Daowu couldn’t help but laugh. Jiashan then dismounted, bowed, and asked for his advice.

Look how serious the ancients were. Now, they would be beaten with sticks. He humbly asked Daowu, “Master, there must be something wrong with my answer just now, which made you laugh. Please kindly tell me where I said it wrong.” Daowu said, “I won’t tell you, but you can go to Huating to locate the Master Chuanzi.”

Jiashan asked, “What do you think of him?” Daowu said, “He has no roof over his head and no stump under his feet. If you go, you’d better change your clothes.”

Jiashan thereupon dismissed his congregation, changed into traveling attire, and journeyed to Huating to pay his respects to Chuanzi (the Boatman Monk). Upon seeing him, Chuanzi asked, “Abbot, which temple do you reside in?” Jiashan replied, “As for a temple, I do not reside in one. To reside is not to resemble [the true nature].” Chuanzi asked, “Not resembling—what does it resemble, then?” Jiashan said, “Before my eyes, there is nothing like it.”

Chuanzi asked, “Where did you learn this?” Jiashan said, “It is not something reached by ears or eyes.” Chuanzi remarked, “A single phrase that hits the mark becomes a tethering stake for a donkey for ten thousand eons.” He then asked, “The line drops a thousand feet, with its intent deep in the pool. Three inches off the hook—why do you not speak?” Just as Jiashan opened his mouth, whack! Chuanzi knocked him into the water with his pole.

Just as Jiashan climbed aboard, Chuanzi shouted, “Speak again!” Just as Jiashan was about to speak, he was knocked back into the water. At this moment, Jiashan suddenly realized something, and he nodded three times. The Chuanzi said, “Okay,

everything is ready; please come up!" Why? Currently, Jiashan's mind was empty; everything was empty and pure.

It was empty and pure, yet flexible. Rather, it was clear and bright, so he could only nod. Therefore, Pang Po said, "The meaning of the West is atop all the grasses." It's easy! Just let go of appearances and see! It's easy if you don't cling to appearances! So we say that seeing nature and realizing the Way is easy! Don't cling to appearances; don't cling to amazing spiritual powers!

However, I often hear people ask, "If this is enlightenment, why don't I develop amazing spiritual powers? Enlightenment should bring spiritual powers; those who lack them are not enlightened."

Alas! When practicing the Dharma, we must understand its order of priority. First, we must recognize our true nature, affirm it, and protect it. We must protect it meticulously until our skin (attachments) sheds cleanly, without dwelling on anything at all. Unwavering in any state, regardless of what arises, we will naturally radiate immense radiance.

This light will be like that of hundreds or thousands of suns, not just one or two. Consequently, we will gain access to divine vision, divine hearing, insight into others' minds and past lives, and spiritual powers. In fact, everyone inherently possesses this great radiance, as stated in the Amitābha Sūtra: "That Buddha's radiance is immeasurable, illuminating the ten directions, unobstructed."

The phrase "that Buddha" encompasses a very broad scope. Do not narrow it down by thinking that 'Buddha' refers only to Amitābha Buddha. Amitābha Buddha's immeasurable radiance illuminates the ten directions; the scope of "that Buddha" is not so limited. "That Buddha" refers to all sentient beings.

"That Buddha" signifies the Buddha, not our body. The body is not the Buddha. Do not make that mistake! Having a Buddha within your body is akin to having a person living in a house. That Buddha represents the public perception of enlightenment. The inherent radiance of all sentient beings is incomparable and boundless, illuminating the ten directions without obstruction. Do you not believe it? Try it yourself!

As you listen to this teaching on Ganges Mahāmudrā, recognize that the luminous knowing at the point where thought ceases is Buddha-nature. Only this is real; all other appearances are illusory, reflections of true nature. Let go of everything and wholeheartedly recite the Buddha's name, hold the mantra, and practice. When the mind is truly empty, great luminosity shines forth, and in this very life one can genuinely attain liberation and reach equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment.

Esoteric Buddhism teaches attaining Buddhahood in this very life and reaching the stages of equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment. Whether we reach those stages depends on how we practice.

If our practice is refined and intensive, close and continuous, we can achieve it in this very life; if our practice is not refined and intensive but lazy and slack, putting off today until tomorrow and tomorrow until the day after, then even if we put it off until Maitreya Buddha descends to be born, we will not realize the Way.

Even if we rely on the power of Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land, we must still work diligently. If you wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land but remain attached to the wealth, children, and status of the Sahā world, the ancients referred to the practice as "holding a stake and rowing an oar." How can you connect with Amitābha, become one with him, and be reborn in the Western Pure Land if you can't move?

Therefore, you must first let go of everything. How can you expect to achieve rebirth without letting go? National Master Yulin once stated, "Those who wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land cannot let go of their attachments and therefore cannot be reborn there."

If you are attached to the Sahā world and unable to let go, then do not recite the Amitābha Sūtra. Instead, recite the Medicine Buddha Sūtra and offer it to the Medicine Buddha! The Medicine Buddha has made lofty vows to bless people with success and fulfill their desires.

If you desire wealth, he will provide it; if you desire children, he will grant them; if you seek high official positions, he will bestow them upon you, fulfilling all your wishes. Upon fulfilling your personal desires, you will naturally cultivate bodhicitta, acknowledging that all you have gained is the blessing of the Buddha. The Dharma is truly incredible." When you express deep gratitude to the Buddha, you will resolve to study Buddhism and cultivate the Dharma to attain enlightenment. Therefore, chanting and offering to the Medicine Buddha hold great benefits!

If you truly wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, you must let go of everything. Cultivating while clinging to this Sahā world is counterproductive and ultimately futile.

However, merely saying "let go" without genuinely releasing attachments and practicing diligently—while desiring a rebirth in the Western Pure Land in a lazy and careless manner—is akin to wanting to reach the other shore without making the effort to row. Therefore, regardless of the method we choose, we must exert effort; relying solely on the Buddha's power to guide us will not suffice without our effort.

In fact, rebirth in the Western Pure Land is not only about chanting the Buddha's name; practices such as meditation, mantra recitation, or sūtra recitation, combined with sincere vows, can also lead to rebirth there. This is because Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, unlike ordinary beings in the Sahā world, do not limit their guidance to those who chant the Buddha's name. Instead, they offer boundless compassion, welcoming everyone and striving to save all.

At the moment of death, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas treat all sentient beings equally, radiating their light and inviting them to the Western Pure Land. However, sentient beings are often burdened by obstacles and they struggle to connect with one another. Some may even feel intimidated by the Buddha's intense light and flee, falling into the evil realms. How tragic! Relying solely on the Buddha's power for guidance, without putting in our effort, hinders rebirth in the Western Pure Land, as the Buddha cannot simply pull us there.

If he could, he would have lifted us all from our suffering long ago. So why do we continue to endure hardship in this world of five turbidities? The Buddha has three limitations: he cannot transform karma for others, he cannot achieve Buddhahood for others, and he cannot save sentient beings without a connection or affinity. If you wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land and attain enlightenment without effort, that is not possible. As the ancient sages once said, "You can't lead him by the arm; he must be willing to do it himself." Each of us must be willing to work diligently.

"But most importantly, make your body as still and as stable as Mount Sumeru, your mind as tranquil and clear, unaffected by external circumstances, allows for practice anywhere."

This emphasizes that among the three aspects of view, samādhi, and action, the most important is to keep the body as still and unshakeable as Mount Sumeru. If you can sit still, your mind is settled; if not, you can't sit still. If your mind is unsettled, like a monkey jumping around, you will certainly be unable to sit still.

When your mind is truly settled, your body will be as still and unshakeable as Mount Sumeru. This is the most important aspect of meditation. So we often ask: Can you remain still while meditating? Not yet! Then you need to pay attention. Practice slowly, and don't be impatient. As long as you sit with perseverance, you will gradually become still.

Therefore, we repeatedly emphasize that the hand seals must not be loosened! Only when your feet become truly numb and unbearable can you move slightly, but don't move too much. This procedure is for the new learners.

Gradually, keep your feet still until you sit down and don't move at all. It's easier to enter samādhi if you don't move at all. How can you enter samādhi if you move around while sitting? Therefore, those who chant the Buddha's name with their prayer beads in their hands will never achieve samādhi, no matter how hard they chant. They chant "Amitābha Buddha" with their mouths while counting the prayer beads with their hands. With such constant movement, no matter how much they chant, they can't enter samādhi.

Furthermore, if one chants the Buddha's name while simultaneously discussing the right and wrong of others, then one cannot attain the Samādhi of chanting the Buddha's name! Can one achieve rebirth in the Western Pure Land by chanting the Buddha's name in this manner? Too easy, isn't it? Therefore, Master Lianchi lamented, "Many chant the Buddha's name, but few are reborn in the Western Pure Land." Why is that? This is due to the lack of earnestness in their recitation. Although they chant the Buddha's name with their mouths, their minds wander, preventing them from attaining rebirth." Patriarch Hanshan also stated that reciting the name of Amitābha with a distracted mind is ineffective, regardless of how loudly one shouts.

"Making your mind tranquil and clear, unaffected by external circumstances, allows for practice anywhere." Keep the body as immovable as Mount Sumeru and the mind as tranquil and clear as a glass of pure water, free from any speck of sand or mud. Only then can one remain unaffected by external circumstances. When the mind is genuinely tranquil and clear, it cannot be shaken by external factors, enabling cultivation at any time and place.

Those who have truly attained great samādhi and possess a tranquil mind can practice even on Nanjing Road, a busy street; their minds stay unshaken amid the bustling traffic. However, beginners may struggle with this aspect and should seek a quiet place to practice.

Therefore, the advice is to find a relatively quiet environment, let go of all distractions, and engage in practice. Once you achieve this, you can practice anywhere at any time. Developing the skill to practice in any environment takes time and is not expected to happen immediately. For now, focus on letting go of your thoughts in a quiet setting. If you find it challenging to quiet your mind in peaceful surroundings, consider how much more difficult it may be in noisy environments.

No matter what method you practice, whether Chan, Buddhist tantra, or Pure Land school, you must let go of your mind.

How could one realize the Way without doing this? Never be like some Pure Land practitioners today who say, "I do not need this. I rely entirely on Amitābha Buddha's other-power to receive and guide me; I do not need self-power. I only need to recite

‘Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha’ for ten breaths, and Amitābha Buddha will pull me up to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.”

Alas! This assumption is a misunderstanding of the Ten Recitations method. The Ten Recitations method uses the breath to focus the mind. Take a breath and recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…” Then, take another breath, without letting your mind wander, and recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…” Continue in this way for ten breaths of recitation. This practice is a training exercise to focus the mind, eliminate attachment, and attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

They don’t realize that the Ten Recitations method is designed specifically for those busy with worldly affairs who don’t have time for meditation. Once the mind is focused and still, one must maintain and observe this state, practicing it in practical situations. Never lose your samādhi. Don’t forget it the moment you step out of the door. Therefore, we must strive diligently. Without it, rebirth in the Pure Land is difficult! You can’t achieve rebirth in the West simply by being careless and lazy!

“Even if such an outcome isn’t possible, if you single-mindedly direct your attention to these three gates, you shouldn’t be burdened by greed, anger, and ignorance. In future lives, you too can transform suffering into happiness.”

If a practitioner’s foundation is weak and they are unable to focus solely on the three doors of view, samādhi, and action, then they should not give rise to greed, hatred, and ignorance and thus commit all kinds of evil karma.

Greed, hatred, and ignorance are the three poisons, and all the evil karma we create stems from them. We can avoid evil and be happy with what we have when we are not greedy. However, if we are insatiable, constantly seeking more and better, our minds become impure, leading us to commit evil karma.

This insatiability can cause us to become fixated on taking what belongs to others. In our quest to achieve our goals, we may resort to any means necessary, including the never-ending pursuit of wealth and life itself. Anger manifests as resentment. When people or situations fail to meet our wishes or expectations, we become angry, which ultimately leads to afflictions.

Both greed and hatred arise from ignorance. Lacking wisdom, we often fail to recognize our true nature, perceiving only the shadows cast by false appearances. This deficiency in understanding is termed ignorance. Ignorance leads one to mistakenly believe that the world is solid and real, without realizing that worldly things are empty and unattainable, arising from conditions that lack inherent nature. Consequently, greed and anger emerge, with ignorance as their root. Without wisdom, ignorance prevails. Ignorance represents the absence of wisdom and light, resulting in darkness and despair.

The three poisons—greed, hatred, and ignorance—are particularly harmful. They represent the negative karma and toxic thoughts that dwell within our minds. The three harmful actions of the body consist of killing, stealing, and adultery. The detrimental actions of speech include slander, harsh words, frivolous chatter, and lying. Among the ten negative karmas, greed, hatred, and ignorance are the most serious, acting as the root causes of our suffering. If we can overcome these three, the other seven will become more manageable and will naturally transform. Therefore, if we cannot achieve focused samādhi on the three gates of view, samādhi, and action, as previously discussed, we must refrain from nurturing greed, hatred, and ignorance.

Greed, hatred, and ignorance are significant poisons and formidable obstacles to attaining Buddhahood. To transcend birth and death, achieve Buddhahood, and liberate all sentient beings, we must eradicate these poisons. If we fail to eliminate these three evils, we are destined for failure; attaining Buddhahood will be impossible.

However, if we dispel the three poisons—greed, hatred, and ignorance—even without single-minded samādhi on view, samādhi, and action, or the attainment of the Great Way, we can still transform suffering into happiness in future lives and avoid negative outcomes. The result means we will be reborn in the three beneficial realms rather than in the three malevolent realms.

Practitioners of Chan Buddhism must make a profound vow to preserve their human form, resolutely aiming to attain Buddhahood and save all sentient beings and to accomplish it. This deep commitment protects oneself, ensuring retention of the human body across lifetimes. Such a solid foundation allows for continued practice upon rebirth, with the potential to awaken to a thousand things upon hearing one. This dedication is a key advantage of practicing Chan Buddhism.

Mahāmudrā, similar to Chan, also emphasizes that even if one's mind is not fully devoted to the three gates, one should avoid generating greed, anger, and ignorance, as well as engaging in various negative karmas. By doing so, one can transform suffering into happiness in the next life and evade rebirth in the three lower realms.

7. Directly Pointing to the Reality of One's Own Mind

These three essential elements (View, Meditation, and Conduct) are crucial for eliminating delusion and serve as a method for directly pointing to the true nature of one's own mind.

The three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct are vital to cutting off delusion. Ordinary beings have delusions of view, delusions of thought, dust-like

delusions, and other delusions. Delusions of view mean lacking right understanding and right view and being misled by external appearances.

Many Buddhist practitioners today are confused in their views. They do not recognize what Buddha-nature is, and their footing is unsteady. For example, someone who has resolved to study Buddhism may hear that a non-Buddhist qigong practitioner has great spiritual powers and think, “Oh! I had better practice qigong instead!” They abandon the Buddhadharma and turn to a non-Buddhist path.

A real-life example illustrates this: on a certain mountain, a young monk serving as a deacon at a Buddhist academy became intrigued by a qigong master reputed to possess spiritual powers. He ultimately forsook Buddhism to pursue qigong, hoping to acquire special abilities through non-Buddhist practices. This person has fallen prey to the allure of spiritual powers. Our failure to approach the study of Buddhism earnestly, coupled with incorrect views, concentration, and practice, serves as the root cause of this confusion. Knowledge and understanding are paramount when practicing the Dharma and studying Buddhism. If our view and understanding are flawed, our practice will inevitably lead us down paths of confusion and distraction.

Confusion regarding view and understanding represents the greatest obstacle to spiritual practice. Consequently, to learn Buddhism, one must first correct one’s view and understanding, dispel confusion of view, and subsequently address confusion of thought. What constitutes confusion of thought? These are the thoughts that arise in response to circumstances, resulting in various attachments. The myriad forms of confusion we experience stem from incorrect view and understanding.

Only when our view and understanding are accurate, and the confusion of view is resolved, can we eliminate confusion of thought, thereby establishing a firm foundation and avoiding the paths of outsiders. Regardless of how remarkable your spiritual powers may be, if you lack the power of cessation and fail to recognize Buddha-nature, you will inevitably remain imprisoned in the cycle of birth and death. We follow the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, and only by recognizing Buddha-nature can we escape this cycle.

For instance, during the encounter between Patriarch Lü Chunyang and Patriarch Huanglong, Lü Chunyang had already achieved ‘Yang Spirit’; however, Huanglong remarked, “You are a corpse-guarding ghost.” In response, Lü Chunyang said, “Haha, I have the elixir of immortality in my bag.”

This elixir can be interpreted in two ways: as an external medicine, referring to the refined elixir in his possession, or as the body, described as a stinking skin bag, in which the elixir has been successfully refined. A successfully refined elixir is the elixir of immortality; thus, one should not cling to the body. Huanglong Patriarch stated,

“Even if you survive for eighty thousand eons, you will ultimately perish in emptiness.”

Even if one could live for eighty thousand great kalpas, one would still face dissolution and death. If you do not comprehend the essence of Buddha-nature, what value do your spiritual powers hold? You cling to appearances, mistaking this Yang Spirit for reality. In truth, this Yang Spirit is also an illusion, a dreamlike manifestation of the wondrous power of our true mind.

For example, both the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and the bodies manifested by Amitābha Buddha are his mind-born bodies. A mind-born body is not only a body: all circumstances and things are mind-born bodies. Thus the mountains, rivers, and great earth are our mind-born bodies too. We fail to recognize this and divide them off, identifying only this body as ourselves and excluding the mountains, rivers, and great earth.

The mountains, rivers, and great earth are composed of earth, water, fire, and wind, as are our bodies. Our Buddha-nature can be vast or minute: “so vast that nothing lies outside it, so minute that nothing lies within it”; “released, it fills the six directions; gathered, it withdraws into concealment.” Ignorance alone contracts it and confines it within your body, so that you do not recognize the mountains, rivers, and great earth as our mind-born bodies.

The mind-born body is also an illusion. Amitābha Buddha will eventually abdicate, leading to changes in the Western Pure Land. When Amitābha Buddha steps down, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will take the throne. The realm of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will not be referred to as the Western Pure Land; instead, it will be a different world, even more beautiful and majestic than Amitābha Buddha’s current realm.

Why is this the case? The answer lies in the fact that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the reincarnation of an ancient Buddha, has returned from the Pure Land to attain Buddhahood. This is merely a magic trick for you to observe; do not take it too seriously. If you do, you may fall into misunderstanding. If one thing is true, then everything is true; if one thing is false, then everything is false.

If you claim that this Saha world is false, then the Western Pure Land must also be false; conversely, if you assert that the Western Pure Land is true, then the Saha world is also true. In reality, it is neither entirely true nor false, but rather both true and false simultaneously. Your discriminating and deluded mind creates the act of distinguishing between true and false; in truth, there is no discrimination.

Therefore, once you grasp this principle, your mind will cease to dwell on appearances. If you fail to comprehend this principle, you will remain preoccupied

with appearances, perpetually distinguishing: the Western Pure Land is beautiful and real, while the Saha world is ugly and false. Ultimately, this perspective stems from a lack of correct understanding and the error of being misled by circumstances.

We ordinary people are often misled by our circumstances. Śākyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment after witnessing a bright star on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, proclaiming, “All sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtues of the Tathāgata.” Yet, why are they unaware of this? They are obscured by delusion, confusion, and attachment, which leave them in a state of unawareness and delusion. To attain enlightenment, we must sever the root of delusion.

This phase begins with cultivating correct view and understanding; such awareness is essential. Once we achieve this understanding, we must cultivate concentration, practicing consistently until our bodies are as immovable as Mount Sumeru and our minds are as still as water. We should deepen our meditations, unlock our wisdom, and realize our true nature.

After recognizing our true nature, we must diligently contemplate and maintain it, remaining unaffected by external circumstances and undisturbed by internal thoughts. We should avoid clinging to appearances or becoming trapped in external situations. By experiencing various circumstances and training our minds, we can eliminate habitual tendencies. Our true minds will then radiate brightness, illuminating all directions. All delusions, thoughts, and ideas will transform into the miraculous manifestations of Buddha-nature. This manifestation and function of our Buddha-nature occur everywhere and at every moment. Our actions, at all times and in all places, are meant for the benefit of others, not for ourselves. Such behavior represents the profound practice of Prajñā.

The three elements of View, Meditation, and Conduct constitute the three secrets of Mahāmudrā and are fundamental to all cultivation methods. They are essential for dispelling delusion and pointing directly to the true nature of one’s own mind.

The practice of Ganges Mahāmudrā functions as a direct pointing technique in the pursuit of total enlightenment. It guides us to perceive the wonderful, luminous essence—our true mind—in the present moment, uncultivated, unorganized, and undistracted, thereby achieving the fundamental reality of the Great Way.

In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we still form mudrās and recite the mantra single-mindedly. In Chan, we must arouse a great sense of doubt. In Buddha-recitation, we must gather in the six sense faculties and maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness before realizing the Way. On this account, every one of us must undergo cultivation and realization; these methods would seem less lofty and subtle than Mahāmudrā.

Mahāmudrā's fundamental teaching says there is nothing to cultivate; it simply points out our wondrously luminous true mind. Buddha-nature is neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, unmoving and unwavering, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. What could you cultivate? Buddha-nature is not distracted; what could you set in order? Thus it is "no cultivation, no adjustment, no distraction."

In this sense, all deliberate effort at cultivation is a roundabout route! Yet without practice, could one recognize that luminous knowing free from thought as one's own true nature and realize the Way? Mahāmudrā is the concluding practice of the White School; at the outset, one must still undergo arduous training before entering its realm of practice.

Therefore, to unlock our original nature, realize our true nature, and attain the Great Way, we must single-mindedly recite the Buddha's name, cultivate deep doubts, and diligently chant mantras without a moment's slackening! Although we are teaching Vajrayāna Mahāmudrā, we do not differentiate between sects but rather integrate Chan, Pure Land, and Buddhist tantra.

In fact, Mahāmudrā and Chan originate from the same source, both pointing directly to the mind's nature, enabling us to attain Buddhahood in the present moment without any detours. Despite numerous discussions, many individuals still do not fully grasp the concepts of "form" and "emptiness."

A question arose recently regarding whether this "emptiness" refers to the emptiness that exists beyond form. For example, do we only feel "emptiness" when we leave a house full of people and there is no form? No, the feeling indicates a lack of understanding regarding the meaning of form and emptiness! Thus, we must comprehend the principles of form and emptiness and grasp the teachings of Mahāmudrā. Only then can our practice proceed smoothly; otherwise, we risk going astray.

So, what exactly is form, and what is emptiness?

I've previously discussed the story of Chan Master Qin Batuo questioning Master Sheng Gong, and today I would like to revisit it. Master Sheng Gong was well-known throughout the nation at that time, earning the reputation of "When Sheng Gong preaches, even stubborn stones nod."

Qin Batuo visited him and asked, "Master, you are so old and still preaching. What sūtra are you teaching?" Master Sheng Gong replied, "I teach the Prajñā Sūtra." As we know, the six-hundred-volume Great Prajñā Sūtra specifically addresses the concepts of form and emptiness. Its abridged version is the Diamond Sūtra, which is further condensed into the Heart Sūtra. The Heart Sūtra states, "Form is not

different from emptiness, emptiness is not different from form, form is emptiness, emptiness is form," which clarifies the relationship between form and emptiness.

Chan Master Qin Batuo asked, "Oh! Then what is form?" Master Sheng Gong replied, "Form is called the gathering of many tiny particles." These tiny particles refer to "all the tiny particles in the three thousand great thousand worlds," as mentioned by the Buddha in the Diamond Sūtra when he spoke to Subhuti. This vast world consists of tiny particles.

Even the houses we see today are collections of these particles. Why? Bricks, wood, steel, and cement are all made up of dust particles. Aren't bricks just clay? They are created by moulding clay into blocks and firing them in a kiln. And wood? Wood comes from trees.

Where do trees originate? Trees grow from seeds that absorb nutrients from the soil, are exposed to sunlight, and gradually develop and gather. Trees are combinations formed by the gathering of many dust particles. Nothing exists independently; it lacks a self-sustaining essence and is simply "the gathering of many dust particles."

Chan Master Qin Batuo then asked, "What is emptiness?" Sheng Gong replied, "Emptiness is the absence of self-nature in the multitude of particles." This indicates that particles do not exist independently; rather, they are made up of other components.

Scientists now assert that all matter consists of chemical elements (for instance, water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen). These chemical elements are composed of atoms, which consist of nuclei and electrons, which in turn are made of even smaller elementary particles.

Yet, elementary particles are not truly "elementary" either; they are made of even smaller constituents, leading to the concept of "wave-particle duality"—being both waves and particles, and neither wave nor particle at the same time. Buddhist scriptures have long referred to "neighbouring void dust," which signifies the particles adjacent to the void.

You might interpret the phrase as follows: Before anything takes shape, there is nothing—emptiness; that is, "the gathering of particles is form, particles not yet gathered are emptiness." However, this definition does not capture the essence of "emptiness" in Buddhism.

Sheng Gong did not state, "The gathering of particles is form; the ungathering of particles is emptiness." He articulated it more precisely: "The multitude of particles has no self-nature; emptiness." Particles lack an inherent identity—no self-nature.

Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. This is not the emptiness of "nothingness." The emptiness associated with "nothingness" implies annihilation. The "emptiness" that Sheng Gong referred to is the emptiness of self-nature, which is our true nature. All forms are manifestations of our true nature. Our true nature is Buddha-nature, the foundation of all forms.

Why is it called "Buddha-nature" and not "Dharma-nature"? What's the difference?

Dharma-nature is the root of all dharmas. Everything, including our thoughts, is classified as dharma. In Buddhist scriptures, the scope of dharma is extensive. Everything, including our thoughts, arises from our bright and true spiritual nature, which serves as a miraculous manifestation of that essence. Our spiritual, bright, true nature is the foundation of all dharmas; thus, we refer to it as "dharma nature."

Buddha-nature represents the essence of Buddhahood. By eliminating delusion, eradicating ignorance, and restoring our original nature, we can fully realize the miraculous manifestations of our spiritual and bright true nature. We achieve Buddhahood by realizing the three bodies and the four wisdoms; we don't need to find another Buddha. Our spiritual, bright, true nature serves as the root of Buddhahood, which is why it is termed "Buddha-nature." Both "Buddha-nature" and "dharma nature" refer to the "One True Dharma Realm," which embodies our spiritual and bright true nature. Thus, this spiritual and bright, true nature is the origin of all Buddhas and the source of all dharmas.

"Form" is synonymous with "emptiness." All forms are manifestations of our luminous true mind. These forms represent our luminous true mind, which encompasses all forms. It is more important to understand these concepts than to abandon all forms for the void, as doing so reflects a misunderstanding of emptiness. Therefore, Sheng Gong stated, " The gathering of the multitude of particles is a form, and the absence of self-nature in many particles is emptiness," rather than claiming, "Before the gathering of many particles is emptiness."

Qin Batuo then asked further, "What about before the particles gather?" Sheng Gong had said that gathered particles are form. But is this form? He had not reached the root. In fact, form is our own nature, for without our own nature no form could manifest. Sheng Gong said, "Gathered particles are form."

But what about before the particles gather? What is there before they gather? Sheng Gong was at a loss and could not answer. Clearly, he had not fully penetrated form and emptiness. Yet answering this would be quite easy. Asked what it is before the particles gather, reply, "At midnight the sun is bright red!" Midnight is the third watch of the night.

At the third watch of the night, the sun shines bright red: “At midnight the sun is bright red.” There is another answer ready-made in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra: “Form in its nature is true emptiness.” “Form in its nature” is the form of our true mind, wondrous presence and true emptiness. This true emptiness is not insentient emptiness.

When we mention “the form of Buddha-nature,” does Buddha-nature actually possess form? Could this be a mistake? Exoteric teachings state that our “true mind of wondrous presence”—the Buddha-nature—lacks any form whatsoever. However, Buddhist tantra posits that subtle forms and colors do exist.

It is inaccurate to claim that the “Four Formless Heavens” (the formless realm) are entirely devoid of form, as subtle colors are indeed present. Thus, a slight distinction exists between esoteric and exoteric Buddhism. This form is not coarse; rather, it is fine, subtle, and extremely subtle. “The form of Buddha-nature is wondrous emptiness.” Why is it termed wondrous emptiness? Being omnipresent, it permeates the entire universe and the Dharma Realm. Therefore, Buddha-nature is synonymous with wondrous emptiness; wondrous emptiness and Buddha-nature are not two separate entities.

Sheng Gong did not fully grasp the significance of form and emptiness; however, he remarked, “The gathering of many particles is termed ‘form,’ and the absence of self-nature in these particles is termed ‘emptiness.’” This insight transcends our conventional understanding of “emptiness without form and appearance.”

He did not equate emptiness with nothingness; instead, he indicated that particles lack self-nature, similar to how a house lacks self-substance, being composed of materials like steel, cement, and bricks. A sofa chair also lacks self-substance, as it consists of springs, wood, leather, and other components.

Nothing possesses true substance. Thus, emptiness signifies the absence of self-nature, not the absence of form. Some argue that emptiness must be formless; otherwise, it cannot be considered emptiness. This perspective represents a misunderstanding. The emptiness we refer to embodies “wondrous presence and true emptiness.” Essentially, all appearances are manifestations of our inherent nature. Without this nature—our true, bright mind—there would be no mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, stars, men, women, young, or old. Everything that exists today is a manifestation of this true, bright mind.

Why is it important to explain this principle? The goal is to help everyone recognize that our physical form is our true mind. Do not search for the true mind separate from the physical form; you will not find it. Buddha-nature is said to possess boundless wonders because the forms it takes are infinitely varied and full of marvels.

Once we grasp this truth, we will no longer cling to or become attached to these forms, allowing them to manifest freely without obstruction. This awareness will facilitate our ability to perceive the true mind and achieve Buddhahood. If you do not know where your mind resides, your spiritual practice will have no foundation to rest upon.

For example, if you recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…” without recognizing where the Buddha’s name points, you are seeking a Buddha outside your mind—the Buddha of the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, ten trillion of Buddha-lands beyond this Sahā world—without knowing that your own mind is Buddha and Buddha is your own mind. The Buddha is not elsewhere; he is right within your mind, and there is no need to seek elsewhere. This is why Sheng Gong’s answer to Qin Batuo’s question about form and emptiness was not correct.

Chan Master Qin Batuo went on to ask Sheng Gong, “Besides the Prajñā Sūtra, what other sūtra do you teach?” Sheng Gong answered, “I also teach the Nirvāṇa Sūtra.” Qin asked, “What does nirvāṇa mean?” Sheng Gong replied, “Nie ( ) means ‘not arising’; pan ( ) means ‘not ceasing.’”

Qin asked, “Is neither arising nor ceasing nirvāṇa?” Sheng Gong answered, “Yes!” Qin said, “That is the Buddha’s nirvāṇa at the level of fruition.

Where is nirvāṇa at the causal level?” Unable to answer, Sheng Gong asked, “Does nirvāṇa have two meanings?” Nirvāṇa is all the same, is it not? How could it have two meanings? Seeing that Sheng Gong had not understood, Qin Batuo picked up a ruyi scepter and asked, “Do you see?” Sheng Gong replied, “I see.”

Qin asked, “What do you see?” Sheng Gong answered, “I see the Chan master holding a ruyi scepter.” Qin Batuo threw the scepter to the ground with a sharp smack and asked, “Do you still see?” “I see,” Sheng Gong replied. “What do you see?” Qin asked. “I see the scepter fall from the Chan master’s hand to the ground.”

Qin Batuo laughed. “Your understanding is no different from that of ordinary people. How have you become renowned throughout the world?” In other words: your understanding has not gone beyond the ordinary. Like everyone else, you cling to appearances and follow whatever is in my hand. (At this point, Master Yuanyin held up a book and asked, “What is this?” The audience answered, “A book—a Buddhist scripture.”

The Master laughed: “Oh! You are attached to it! Ha!”) Even when the object is thrown to the ground, you still follow circumstances. You do not know that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. How have you become so famous? What undeserved renown! With that, he turned and left.

Sheng Gong had many disciples who were puzzled. They wondered, “What is the reason for this? Did our master make a mistake?” Therefore, they approached Qin Batuo and asked, “Master, Master, how do you explain form and emptiness?” Qin Batuo replied, “Your master’s explanation cannot be considered wrong. He understands the meaning of form and emptiness in terms of the result, not the cause.”

A disciple asked, “What is form and emptiness at the causal level?” Chan Master Qin Batuo said, “Because one particle is empty, all particles are empty; because all particles are empty, one particle is empty. Within the emptiness of one particle there are no many particles; within the emptiness of many particles there is no one particle.” One particle is empty: a single speck of dust is fundamentally empty, without an essence of its own—that is, without self-nature. If one particle is empty, the other particles are of course empty too.

Extending this reasoning, all particles are empty. “Because all particles are empty, one particle is empty”: if all specks of dust are empty, one speck is empty too. “Because one particle is empty, there are no many particles”: if even one particle is empty, what many particles could there be? “Because all particles are empty, there is no one particle”: if all particles are empty, can a single particle still be found? His statement, “All particles are empty, one particle is empty; one particle is empty, all particles are empty,” means that nothing whatsoever can be grasped.

All forms are the wondrous functions of our true mind. Therefore, we must comprehend the concepts of form and emptiness. Once we genuinely grasp this idea, we can recognize our nature within the realm of existence without needing to transcend it. It’s akin to pointing to a tree and asking, “What is this?” To label it a tree is to accept it; to deny it is to detach from reality. What is this, precisely?

In other words, “It’s difficult to hide from the monk”—a single statement that disentangles both aspects reveals the inescapable spiritual knowledge, thus shedding it. Chan Buddhism employs the method of shedding, refusing to be confined by the realm of form. The essential question is whether you are attached to existence or emptiness. If you are not attached to either, you attain freedom in one sentence.

However, we cannot assert, “I am neither empty nor existent.” That remains a theoretical statement, and it would not suffice. We must articulate a phrase that embodies both emptiness and existence while implicitly suggesting both. Only then can we truly embody the profound meaning of the Way. To achieve this state, one must consistently contemplate and understand that all appearances are manifestations of one’s own nature, neither clinging to nor detaching from them.

This state is what the tradition refers to as “neither attached nor detached.” Only by understanding these concepts can one attain perfect harmony with both. Even worldly matters are inseparable from principles. It is said that matters are accomplished through principles—actions are executed according to the principle of emptiness; principles are revealed through matters—only when matters are accomplished can principles be unveiled. Without principles, nothing can be achieved, and without matters, principles cannot be expressed. Thus, it is stated that principles and matters are harmoniously integrated.

What is principle? Consider a scientist designing something to be built. First, formulas must be set out and the figures calculated. These formulas and figures are principle. By carrying out construction in accordance with them, the object is made.

For example, when building a house, we first draw plans showing how many floors it will have and what style it will be, then calculate how much reinforcing steel, cement, and other materials are needed. The workers follow the plans and build the house. If it is well built, this proves the plans—that is, the principle—correct. If it is poorly built, the plans and principle are wrong. Thus phenomena are accomplished through principle, and principle is revealed through phenomena.

Principles and things are inseparable; things embody principles, and principles manifest as things. Understanding this connection is valuable, as it encourages us to continually cultivate ourselves within this realm, refining our true mind. We must grasp the meanings of form and emptiness without interpreting them as mere voids of nothingness. This emptiness signifies a profound existence closely linked to our true and wonderful mind.

Where can we discover the true mind? In relation to phenomena, we should not detach ourselves from them; however, clinging to them is equally misguided. Such attachment is erroneous. In Chan Buddhism, two sayings illustrate this point: “The luxuriant yellow flowers are nothing but Prajñā, and the verdant bamboos are all dharmakāya.”

Master Dazhu remarked, “If verdant bamboos are dharmakāya, then eating bamboo shoots is equivalent to consuming dharmakāya!” Since bamboo grows from shoots, when we stir-fry and eat them, we partake in the dharmakāya. Thus, clinging to the dharmakāya or to phenomena is misguided. What about detachment? Abandoning them, leading to a void, is also erroneous.

Therefore, we should neither cling nor detach but instead perceive true nature through phenomena without fixation. Consequently, the Diamond Sūtra states, “One should give rise to the mind that abides nowhere.” We should not dwell on anything, allowing our wonderful true mind to be present at all times. ‘Giving rise’ refers to the

process of manifesting, from which our wonderful true mind will naturally emerge. Thus, we ought to remain detached and cultivate this true mind of detachment.

8. The significance of Dharma lies in its application within the appropriate context.

When we practice the Dharma—be it Pure Land school, Chan Buddhism, or Buddhist tantra—we must adhere to specific principles. For instance, when chanting the Buddha's name, is there a need to cultivate contemplation? What exactly is contemplation? It refers to Chan meditation, the practice of fostering concentration. When you chant the Buddha's name, you should listen attentively with both your mind and ears, quietly absorbing the sound of the chanting. Only in this way can you focus your mind and achieve a state of concentration. This kind of meditation is termed the contemplation of chanting the Buddha's name.

Chanting the Buddha's name is not akin to singing folk songs; you should not chant "Amitābha, Amitābha" while engaged in conversation with others. Such an approach is ineffective! You must cultivate the "contemplation of chanting the Buddha's name." Contemplation is integral to Chan practice. There are various types of Chan: ordinary Chan, Śrāvaka meditation, Mahāyāna meditation, the highest Chan, and the Chan of externalists.

Ordinary Chan and Śrāvaka meditation are defined by divergent views within the mind. What are divergent views? They are discriminatory perspectives that misunderstand the relationship between the mind and Dharma, or between emptiness and matter. They may involve focusing on appearances in pursuit of physical health, or the belief that mind-dharma and physical-dharma are distinct entities, or that cultivating Chan from a limited view of emptiness is valid.

Meditation on non-Buddhist paths likewise involves mistaken notions. It either falls into emptiness, tending toward annihilation, or clings to existence, fastening on the "yang spirit" or a "divine self." None of these is the genuine Chan Way. In practicing Chan, we must first understand the right cause and establish right view. We can then choose a genuine practice suited to our own capacities and avoid going astray.

To provide more clarity, we will now explore non-Buddhist meditation, Śrāvaka meditation, and Mahāyāna meditation. We refer to the act of admiring the Buddha's path while detached from the Sahā world as "a mind of admiration and aversion." In Pure Land school, this notion is highly esteemed. Merely chanting the name of Amitābha Buddha, while embodying both admiration and aversion, reflects the desire to attain the Western Pure Land and escape the Sahā world.

This "comprehensive admiration and aversion" is relevant to Chan practice. Anyone who admires what is higher while rejecting what is lower is engaging in ordinary Chan. They have yet to achieve sainthood and remain within the realm of ordinary

beings. Non-Buddhist meditation similarly admires the higher and shuns the lower; its practitioners aspire to become immortals and transcend this worldly existence. However, they fail to comprehend that immortals are, in essence, ordinary people, and that ordinary people are, fundamentally, immortals; Buddhas are ordinary beings, and ordinary beings are Buddhas, and they are all inherently one. Consequently, they admire the superior while despising the inferior and seek validation outside of their minds. They remain unaware that their true nature is authentic, and thus they are regarded as outsiders.

Those who cultivate the principles of the emptiness of self and the notion of partial truth are engaging in Śrāvaka meditation practice. They recognize that both the body and mind consist of four elements and five aggregates. The body is made up of earth, water, fire, and wind, while the mind includes thought, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness. Together, these physical and mental components are referred to as the five aggregates.

Śrāvaka meditators know that what is composed of the four elements and five aggregates is false and unreal. Unlike us ordinary beings, who cling to this body, take it to be ourselves, and strive to protect it—to dress well, eat well, live well, everything good—and so create karma and undergo retribution.

Small Vehicle sages know that the four elements and five aggregates are false and that this “personal self” (the body) is empty and unreal. But they have fallen into biased emptiness. What biased emptiness? They say: after I leave the cycle of the six realms, I will dwell in the Pure Land beyond the realms (the pure land beyond the desire, form, and formless realms) and abide there unmoving.

Their attachment to the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind as integral to their identity suggests that their “attachment to dharma” remains unresolved. They fail to recognize that all appearances are, in fact, magnificent manifestations of our true minds. Thus, while one may understand the emptiness of self, one may still lean toward the true mind, which is genuinely real and unblemished. One may overlook that “falsehood is true, and truth is falsehood; total falsehood is truth, and total truth is falsehood.”

Without falsehood, how can there be truth? Without truth, how can there be falsehood? Therefore, falsehood is truth, and truth is falsehood. The act of distinguishing between what is true and what is false is merely a delusion created by a discriminating mind. For example, the Western Pure Land is considered true, while the Sahā world is considered false. As a result, individuals are encouraged to reject the Sahā world and aspire to the Western Pure Land. This highlights the distinction between true and false.

Both the Western Pure Land and our Sahā world are real. Why is this the case? The Western Pure Land manifests the Buddha-nature of Amitābha Buddha and all virtuous beings; thus, it is a Pure Land that reflects a pure mind. In contrast, our Sahā world embodies the karmic obstacles faced by sentient beings, characterizing it by five turbidities.

But what exactly is this karmic obstacle mind—the ālaya consciousness? It is our Buddha-nature, our true mind. This eighth consciousness, known as the ālaya consciousness, is our true mind. Where would the ālaya consciousness come from if it were not the true mind? It is called the ālaya consciousness because it encompasses a blend of arising and ceasing, along with non-arising and non-ceasing. When we separate the aspects of arising and ceasing, what remains is the pure essence. Therefore, the ālaya consciousness is inseparable from this pure essence. Although it may be a defiled essence, it is still the true mind.

What is the true mind like? It is unmoving, both when pure and when polluted. It's like when we're asleep and dreaming: one moment startled, the next joyful, one moment an emperor, the next a beggar, yet our body remains motionless, lying motionless in bed.

Our true mind is unmoving. It is constant: never arising, perishing, coming, going, moving, remaining, defiled, or pure. It never moves. Everything is manifested by it; apart from it, nothing exists. Therefore, if you speak of truth, the Sahā world is also true; if you speak of falsehood, the Western Pure Land is also false.

Why? All appearances are delusions! Do not become attached to appearances.

What are appearances? They are reflections of the true mind, akin to images in a mirror. Do not confuse a shadow with a mirror! Avoid identifying with the shadows in your mind; they are merely reflections. Why should you consider them truthful? Discussions about truth and falsehood arise solely from the prejudices of our deluded minds. It is "neither true nor false, both true and false." Simply let go of your discriminating mind.

The saints of the Two Vehicles fail to grasp this truth and instead believe in an absolute truth, their own sainthood, and the falsehood of ordinary beings within the six realms of reincarnation. Consequently, this belief does not represent the highest level of Chan; it is merely the Chan of the Two Vehicles.

Those who cultivate their practice by realizing the truth revealed through the emptiness of both self and dharma are engaged in Mahāyāna meditation. We have previously examined ordinary Chan, externalist Chan, and Śrāvaka meditation. Mahāyāna meditation encourages an understanding that one cannot fully attain either the self or the dharma. As noted earlier, Hīnayāna sages, arhats, and

pratyekabuddhas recognize the emptiness of the self but do not fully grasp the emptiness of the dharma itself.

The dharma-self refers to the self that transcends the individual self. Beyond the self lie the four elements that constitute it. Additionally, beyond the self, one discovers the dharma body to cultivate, the Buddha's dharma to attain, nirvāṇa to realize, and the cycle of birth and death to resolve. Thus, the dharma itself is not empty. As we progress further, we reach a state where neither the self nor the dharma-self exists, and everything manifests from my wonderfully functioning true mind. This true mind, which exists in a marvelous way, is inherently empty and unattainable. However, recognizing the emptiness of both oneself and dharma does not signify the ultimate state; it is not the highest achievement.

What, then, is the best? The best, as we are currently discussing, is the realization that one's own nature is originally pure, free from afflictions, and inherently possesses undefiled wisdom. When one acknowledges that this mind is Buddha and combines this understanding with unwavering faith, one takes a significant step toward reaching the highest level of Chan.

This understanding includes the awareness that our mind is originally pure and untainted, free from afflictions, and endowed with the wisdom of no outflowing (where "outflowing" refers to the conditioned phenomena of thought and creation). The term "unflowing" indicates the absence of all creation, reflecting a natural state of being that is free from afflictions and inherently endowed with profound wisdom. Thus, this mind is the Buddha, indistinguishable from the Buddha. This insight represents the pinnacle of understanding.

Since we are Buddhas and indistinguishable from him, why do we fail to recognize this? If the mind is originally pure and free from afflictions, why do we currently experience countless afflictions and a lack of purity? The answer lies in ignorance! Due to this ignorance, we mistakenly perceive and become lost in external conditions, unwittingly following them and drifting along with our delusions.

Our lack of awareness and understanding leads us to generate karma and suffer its consequences, causing us to perpetually revolve in the six realms of rebirth. Therefore, I will diligently explain the truth to help you attain enlightenment.

All sentient beings possess this wonderful, illuminating true mind. When Śākyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment upon seeing a bright morning star on the eighth night of the twelfth lunar month, he exclaimed, "Wonderful, wonderful! All sentient beings on earth possess the wisdom and virtues of the Tathāgata." Why aren't they aware of this? It's because they are deceived by delusions and cling to afflictions, unaware of their own existence.

Therefore, our sūtras are meant to point us out of this maze, explaining the wonderful, luminous true mind we inherently possess. Buddha-nature is not elsewhere; it shines forth from us.

How does it emit light? Who is it that sees? Who hears? Who smells fragrance and stench with the nose? Who speaks with the tongue? Who knows sour, sweet, bitter, and spicy? Who touches external objects? Who walks? Who works? All of this is the wondrous functioning of our self-nature emitting light; we must recognize it! If we realize the Way right now, that is sudden awakening.

Our minds are inherently pure, free of afflictions, and endowed with the wisdom of the Tathāgata. This mind is the Buddha! There's no need to seek the Buddha outside. Understanding this principle and practicing it accordingly will lead to the highest level of Chan.

Without understanding this principle, one will practice blindly, taking detours, going in circles, and never finding a way out. Therefore, we must establish a correct foundation and grasp this principle. We must always remember that we are Buddhas; Buddhas are not found elsewhere.

You may ask, "Am I already Buddha? Why, then, do I not manifest spiritual powers? The Buddha has the three insights and six supernormal powers!" An ancient master said, "Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water, and rely on the warmth of the sun to melt it." This is a metaphor. In winter, the pond's water freezes into ice, but that ice is water! Shi ( ), "recognize," means to know.

"Recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water": understand that this frozen pond consists wholly of water (a metaphor for sentient beings being originally Buddhas). "Rely on the warmth of the sun to melt it": sunlight is needed to melt the ice. Only then can it serve for irrigation. Ice is solid and cannot flow (a metaphor for sentient beings lacking the three insights and six supernormal powers).

After the ice melts, the water can flow and irrigate the fields (a metaphor for the Buddha possessing the three insights and six supernormal powers). Next: "Awaken to the fact that the ordinary being is itself Buddha, and rely on the power of the Dharma for cultivation." To awaken to the ordinary being as Buddha means recognizing that this ordinary mind is the Buddha-mind. "Rely on the power of the Dharma for cultivation": zi ( ) means assistance or reliance.

What do we rely on for assistance? The power of the Buddhadharma, which we must draw on to support our practice. Although we have awakened, this is only awakening at the level of principle, an initial awakening. Habitual tendencies remain strong and cannot be ended at once. We must therefore rely on the Dharma to cultivate at every moment, using such methods as Buddha-recitation, forming mudrās, reciting

mantras, or attending to a huatou to arouse a sense of doubt. In this way, the deluded and defiled seeds in the field of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) are perfumed into pure seeds, and habitual tendencies are transformed into wondrous functioning.

After you comprehend the truth, it is essential to cultivate your practice using the power of the Dharma. Without such cultivation, true achievement remains elusive; it is futile. Such achievement is not merely a matter of stating an understanding; it requires action and commitment. Perhaps you now realize that everything is illusory; let go of all attachments and cling to nothing. Nevertheless, the moment you step outside for a stroll along the street, that realization may dissipate entirely.

Several friends have told me, “Alas!” Today, I visited the crematorium and was overcome with heartbreak. When a person ceases to breathe, they are reduced to ash, leaving nothing behind. What is left to cling to? No, no! This heart is dead and empty. Nevertheless, before you have gone far, the desire for everything returns; your habits are astonishing!” Consequently, we find ourselves discussing sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation. In truth, the concepts of sudden enlightenment and gradual cultivation are contradictory.

To practice gradually implies that one has not yet experienced sudden enlightenment, as the Prajñā Sūtra teaches. However, to exaggerate such experiences is unproductive; we lack the ability to do so. Thus, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra presents two types of Dharma: the sudden enlightenment of principles and the gradual cultivation of practical matters. Upon receiving an explanation of a principle, some may awaken instantly.

In that moment of awakening, all habits dissolve, becoming superfluous and entirely pure. Such individuals exist, but they are a rarity—a minuscule fraction of the population. They are of the highest caliber—the return of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. For those who are not reborn, achieving instant enlightenment is an impossibility.

Nevertheless, today’s sudden awakening results from the gradual practice accumulated in the past, built through persistent effort over time. Therefore, it may be relinquished with a single, sudden severance. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra asserts that while the principle is sudden enlightenment, practice is a gradual cultivation. This text explores two methodologies: the complete and sudden approach and the gradual method.

A tiny number of individuals of the highest caliber—those who have returned from another life—awaken instantly upon hearing the principle. In such moments of enlightenment, all habits are eradicated, and their spiritual powers and miraculous abilities are immediately unveiled. However, most people of average or lower caliber

must refine their practices following their awakening, gradually eliminating their ingrained habits before their powers can be effectively activated.

Now, let us merge these two methodologies into one, as we have come to understand: “The principle is sudden awakening, while practice is gradual cultivation.” Thus, we are practicing both sudden and gradual techniques together.

Why do we assert this? In the current Dharma-Ending Age, sentient beings possess dull roots and face heavy obstacles, rendering sudden enlightenment, sudden practice, and sudden realization unattainable. Consequently, we must integrate the two methods into a singular approach. After grasping the principles, it is essential to uphold them, diligently eradicate undesirable habits, and gradually cultivate the fruits of enlightenment.

Although the combination of sudden enlightenment and gradual practice may initially appear illogical, it corresponds with contemporary realities and can be effectively applied. This principle is challenging to convey clearly, so let us elucidate it with a story from the era of Śākyamuni Buddha.

Śākyamuni Buddha’s two disciples engaged in a discussion about a statement he had made. Each disciple presented their arguments, leading to a stalemate between them. They then asked the Buddha, “Buddha, which of our statements is in accordance with your meaning?” The Buddha responded, “Neither of your statements aligns with my meaning, yet both are applicable.” Why is this so? It is because they resonate with current realities! Thus, we must now discuss the concepts of sudden enlightenment and gradual practice.

How do we practice? Pure Land practitioners chant the Buddha’s name: “Amitābha, Amitābha.” This name sweeps away the impurities in our hearts, the habits within us, and our afflictions. As soon as afflictions arise, chant “Amitābha” loudly, transforming our mind into emptiness. Chan practitioners, on the other hand, focus continuously on the huatou (critical phrase).

As soon as affliction stirs, ask, “Who are you?” Strike it head-on: “Who is giving rise to this affliction? Who is it that is afflicted?” This head-on blow is attending to the huatou. In esoteric practice, as soon as affliction arises, recite the mantra to transform it. The methods differ, but the principle is the same.

Don’t say, “My Pure Land school is beneficial, but your Chan School is wrong; my Chan School is useful, but your Pure Land school is wrong; my Tantric School is beneficial, but your Chan and Pure Land Schools are all wrong.” Your group is dividing into different schools, and it indicates you haven’t fully grasped the truth.

If you truly grasp the truth and put it to beneficial use, you will say, 'Chan, Pure Land, and Buddhist tantra are all means.' While there are many paths to convenience, there is only one path to the origin. With the power of the Dharma, we diligently cultivate, sweeping away our detrimental habits and dissolving our afflictions. Then, "When ice melts, water flows and moistens, manifesting its power to irrigate and cleanse; when delusions cease, the mind becomes clear and luminous, revealing its natural ability to respond and illuminate." When the mind blossoms with clarity, spiritual powers emerge, and its wondrous uses are boundless. This is all achieved through practice. Can you say you don't practice? No! Therefore, practice is essential.

Someone asked: Where does the awareness of an awakened person go at death?

This is a significant question! After enlightenment, where does one go? Many people ponder this inquiry. Recently, a person from Hong Kong reached out to me, asking whether an enlightened individual should be aware of their destination after death —specifically, if they should know their place in the afterlife. The belief is that enlightenment requires knowing one's place.

Is this belief accurate? No! Why not? If you are genuinely enlightened, there is no birth or death, no coming or going. Therefore, where is there to go? I have previously stated that this exquisite true mind is characterized by a subtle essence, which corresponds to the void. What place exists within the void? If you seek a place, you are still caught in the cycle of coming and going, birth and death, indicating that you are not enlightened.

The individual who wrote to me did not grasp this principle, leading them to inquire about where they would go after death. This question is not solely theirs; it is a question that resonates with everyone. Therefore, today, I would like to revisit this issue by referencing a passage from Chan Master Guifeng. Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi stated:

All sentient beings, without exception, possess the nature of awakening—luminous, empty, and still—no different from the Buddha. But since beginningless kalpas they have never awakened, and have mistakenly clung to the body as the mark of self, giving rise to feelings of love and hate. Following feelings they create karma, following karma they undergo retribution, and in birth, aging, sickness, and death they revolve for long kalpas.

Yet the aware nature within the body has never undergone birth or death. It is like being driven about in a dream while the body itself rests at ease; like water becoming ice while its wet nature remains unchanged. Awakening to this nature is the dharmakāya, originally unborn: what support could it need? Numinously clear and unobscured, with clear, ever-present knowing, it comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Yet through deluded attachment over many lifetimes, habits become

second nature, and joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness continue in a subtle continuous stream.

Even with a sudden realization of the truth, eliminating these emotions can be challenging. Constant awareness is essential to reduce and diminish them, akin to the wind suddenly ceasing and the waves gradually calming. How can one cultivate for a lifetime and then achieve the same power and influence as the Buddhas? Instead, consider emptiness and tranquility as your true self; do not identify with the physical body. View spiritual awareness as your mind, and refrain from identifying with delusions. Should deluded thoughts arise, do not pursue them. At death, karma naturally cannot bind you.

Although there is an intermediate state, one is free to go where one wishes, taking a temporary abode in the heavens or the human realm at will. If thoughts of attraction and aversion have ceased, one no longer takes a body subject to segmented birth and death, and can naturally transform the short into the long and the coarse into the subtle and wondrous. If the subtle continuous stream ceases entirely and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains bright and clear, one manifests countless transformation bodies in response to beings' capacities, liberates sentient beings with whom one has affinity, and is called a Buddha.

Allow me to explain this passage by Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi:

"All living beings possess a nature of awareness that is bright, clear, empty, and tranquil, fundamentally no different from that of the Buddha." All sentient beings, not just us humans, but also ants, insects, flies, lions, monkeys, and so on, possess consciousness. Look at a mosquito. If you have blood, it will immediately fly over to bite you.

Or a fly—even if you are holding a piece of steamed cake, it will travel from a considerable distance to land on it. They possess consciousness. Humans are even more so. Consciousness is the ability to perceive. Do you know you're hungry? Do you know it's warm today? This is all consciousness!

"Bright, clear, empty, and tranquil" means being luminous and bright, lucid, and clear. It is both luminous and clear while remaining aware and unwavering. The word "bright" has two meanings: "empty," meaning nothing exists, and "tranquil," meaning unmoving, unwavering, neither coming nor going. "No different from that of the Buddha" means there is no difference between you and Śākyamuni Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, and all other Buddhas. There is no difference.

"Throughout the ages, people have failed to recognize this truth and have mistakenly identified their bodies as their true selves. This misidentification has led to the emergence of emotions such as love and hatred." This cycle has no beginning

and will never end; it repeats itself endlessly. The phrase “failed to recognize” suggests that we have long misunderstood our immense treasure.

The Lotus Sūtra uses an analogy: a person has a Mani pearl sewn into their garment, yet remains unaware of its presence. This Mani pearl bestows treasures upon you, ensuring that you never experience poverty. You possess everything you need; whatever you desire can be yours. However, you remain oblivious to this truth and go out to beg for food. Much like ourselves today, we wander through the six realms of reincarnation, moving between life and death in a state of begging.

We continue to overlook our immense treasure and have yet to awaken to it. The phrase “mistakenly identified their bodies as their true selves” indicates that, due to this delusion, we fail to recognize our true essence and instead mistake it for the false. This body, which is not me, is wrongly identified as me. The body is similar to the house we inhabit, with a person residing within. What defines this person? This person embodies our true, bright, and clear mind.

Without this understanding, we confuse the “house” with our identity, thinking, “This body is me!” Consequently, feelings of love and hatred arise. I like this; I dislike that. This person is friendly toward me; that person is hostile. Numerous discriminatory thoughts emerge, all of which are delusions. I embrace what I like and reject what I dislike. As a result, I create karma and face retribution.”

“In response to these emotions, individuals generate karma and subsequently face the consequences of their actions. The cycles of birth, aging, sickness, and death perpetuate through an endless series of rebirths.” Birth and death do not inherently exist; rather, they emerge from our feelings of love and hate, as well as the karma we generate in accordance with our hearts. If we want something but can’t get it, especially if it’s someone else’s, we may steal or kill, creating the karma of killing.

The act of creating karma leads to retribution, and we become subject to the cycle of the six realms. Positive karma results in heaven, while negative karma leads to hell. Birth, old age, sickness, and death: a continuous cycle of reincarnation. Alas! Originally, there was neither birth nor death; yet we have become ensnared in this cycle. We wander the six realms, experiencing rebirth and death, unable to escape.

“Yet the nature of awareness within the body has never been born or destroyed. It is driven about like a dream, yet the body is inherently at ease; like water turning to ice, its wetness remains unchanged.”

Although we cycle through the six realms of rebirth and death, our consciousness has never been born or destroyed. It does not arise with your birth, nor does it perish with your physical body. It does not suffer if you fall into hell, nor does it feel joy if you ascend to heaven. It is inherently eternal, empty, ethereal, and still.

In a dream, we are chased by evil men, terrified and running frantically, while our body remains peacefully in bed. It is also like water turning to ice, yet its wetness remains unchanged. This metaphor illustrates that, despite our cycles through the six realms of rebirth, our Buddha-nature remains unchanged.

“If one can awaken to this nature, it is the dharmakāya, originally unborn; how could it have anything to rely on?” If we can realize that this nature of awareness is the dharmakāya, and understand that our nature of awareness is the root of all things and has never been born or ceased, why would it still need a place to rely on? Once you have truly awakened, you need no support and no destination.

I recall a humorous story from a man in Wenzhou who claimed to have attained enlightenment. “We aren’t practicing the Pure Land method, seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss,” he responded when asked. We’re practicing Chan Buddhism. “Where do we go after we pass away?” he replied. “We can cling to anything, such as grass, trees, rocks, or even dead grass.” Anything is possible. “ Oh no! That implies becoming a spirit clinging to grass or trees.

How can this be? Clinging to grass or trees is akin to clinging to a physical body. There is a thousand-year-old Bodhi tree in Shanghai’s Fuxing Park, said to be incredibly spiritual, and many go to worship it. But it is actually a ghost, a spirit that has possessed it.

After death, clinging to grass or trees turns you into a ghost. What kind of enlightenment is this? It has nothing to do with the Way; it is all false. Our consciousness “is inherently unborn, so what does it need to cling to?” We should not rely on anything. Those who cling to grass or trees have never even caught a glimpse of true consciousness.

Once upon a time, there was a broken stove that had been abandoned for years. A spirit possessed it and appeared in a dream to a group of people, saying, “Come to this stove and offer sacrifices to me. I will grant you whatever you wish for.” Everyone exclaimed, “There’s a spirit in this stove! Go and offer sacrifices!” Many people traveled to present their offerings, and the spirit fulfilled their wishes.

Word spread quickly, and the stove’s popularity soared from one person to ten, then from ten to a hundred. A local Chan master, a disciple of Master Hui’an, noticed that the spirit inhabiting the stove was encouraging people to kill animals for sacrifices, creating negative karma. He therefore went to teach the Dharma to the spirit.

He approached the stove, tapped it with his staff, and asked, “Let me inquire: you are made of bricks, tiles, and clay. Where does your consciousness come from? Where does the spirit originate? Bricks, tiles, and clay have no consciousness or spirit. It is your mind that possesses consciousness. Why are you clinging to this

brick and clay stove?" The Chan master's words enlightened the spirit of the broken stove. "That's right! The spirit isn't in the bricks, tiles, and clay. The spirit resides in my mind! Let's rid ourselves of this broken stove!" That night, the spirit returned to thank the Chan master and ascended to heaven. From that point on, everyone referred to the Chan master as "the monk who broke the broken stove," forgetting his true name.

The Chan master also taught that we should not cling to the body. How can we attach ourselves to plants and trees? Therefore, we shouldn't rely on anything! We are originally unborn and have no reliance at all!

"Luminously aware and unobscured, with clear, ever-present knowing, it comes from nowhere and goes nowhere." When you truly realize the Way, there is clear, ever-present knowing and unobscured luminous awareness. Everywhere is myself; wherever there is affinity, I manifest. Thus it is called "non-abiding nirvāṇa."

There is no fixed place; manifestation is possible anywhere that there is affinity. Once awakening is complete, how could there still be a fixed location? To have a fixed location would mean one had not awakened. "Luminously aware and unobscured" means that not a trace of dullness remains. "Clear, ever-present knowing" means clear awareness. This knowing is uninterrupted; hence it is called "ever-present knowing."

It is of no use to know now and then lose that knowing a moment later. "It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere": if it has not come, how could it go? Coming implies going, and going implies coming. These are relative, and what is relative is illusory. It is the absolute true mind, so it has neither coming nor going, neither entering nor leaving.

9. Knowing Your Mind Truly

The following guides us on how to cultivate the Way diligently and thereby attain Buddhahood.

"However, through many lifetimes of false attachments, habits have become our nature, and emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness form a subtle continuous stream." What we are addressing now represents the highest level of Chan: "Your mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is your mind." If you can grasp this Dharma and maintain unwavering faith in it, then the roots of goodness you have cultivated are not merely the result of one, two, three, four, or five Buddhas. Instead, they are the outcome of the roots of goodness nurtured over countless lifetimes and eons.

However, over countless lifetimes, we've become accustomed to these things, clinging to external conditions as real, clinging to our bodies as ourselves. This habit has become ingrained.

"Oh, this body is me; it's the most precious thing. You can't touch it!" It's just a stinking dung bucket; what's so precious about it? During the Qing Dynasty, an emperor fell in love with a fragrant concubine. This concubine was from Xinjiang and was said to have a unique fragrance. What was that fragrance? It smelled like the stench of a fox! But the old emperor said it was a fragrance.

This incident shows that the beauty of all things has no fixed standard. What you like is good, and what you don't like is disliked. Or, once we've become accustomed to it, it's neither good nor bad. As the saying goes, "If you've been in an abalone shop for a long time, you don't smell the stench." Once a habit is formed, it's difficult to change. This is an irrefutable truth.

On hearing this, someone may think, "This body is me. Everyone thinks so. Yet you say the body is not me—who would believe you?" Alas! We have clung to external objects through countless lives and kalpas, until this deluded grasping has become second nature.

Thus, we develop our own perspectives on the world around us, judging and evaluating everything based on our likes and dislikes. We cling to what aligns with our hearts and discard what doesn't. Thus, we experience "emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness flow through us in subtle ways." Everyone experiences joy, anger, sorrow, happiness, fear, shock, and sadness. When things align with our moods, we are beaming; when they go against our hearts, we are furious. When we lose something, we are unhappy; when we gain something we like, we are delighted. All of this is the subtle continuous stream.

The subtle continuous stream is the unceasing movement of extremely subtle deluded thoughts.

The most fundamental delusions are the five universal mental factors: attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. These five universal mental factors are actually single thoughts, whether good or evil, that arise in the mind. They exist within ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) and constantly stir up all the seeds of good and evil stored there. They are extremely subtle, hence the term "the continuous flow of arising and ceasing."

"Continuous flow" is like an unceasing stream of water. This current is not like the raging waves of the ocean or the roaring waves of a river, but rather like the gentle flow of a quiet stream.

In fact, it flows very fast, so fast that its movement is invisible. Normally, you cannot see it and mistake it for stillness. Such an illusion is a subtle, extremely subtle delusion. We have previously discussed gross delusion, which is the delusion that arises in the mind in response to an object. If we see the mind as the object, we won't cling to it. Without attachment, gross delusions will not arise.

When we do not cling, gross deluded thoughts do not arise. Yet the seeds of subtle delusion remain. They are extremely subtle, and while they may appear to be still, they are actually still moving very fast. How can we sever the subtle continuous stream? Only by deeply entering the Vajrasattva Samādhi can we see and eliminate it. Anything short of Vajrasattva samādhi will not do. Therefore, we must deepen our meditation.

Those who recite the Buddha's name must attain the samādhi of Buddha-recitation; without it, the practice will not succeed. Those who practice Chan must develop a deep sense of doubt. Once this deep doubt arises, all thoughts are stilled, and the doubt envelops the entire body. When the right time and conditions align, "pop!" it explodes, allowing us to see our true nature.

It's the same for those who study Tantra. With the blessings of the three secrets of body, speech, and mind, we draw upon the Buddha's power to bless us and propel us forward. When the conditions are right, they explode, severing the subtle continuous stream! This subtle continuous stream is so subtle that you can't see it. You must practice concentration and gain clarity before you can see it.

For example, in a glass of turbid water, you can't see the mud and sand inside. Once it settles and the water above becomes clear, you can see the mud and sand below. When it's turbid and shaky, you can't see it. You must first achieve clarity before you can see the subtle continuous stream.

"Even with a sudden realization of the truth, eliminating these emotions can be challenging." We say that the mind is Buddha, and Buddha is the mind.

This is the truth, and even if you suddenly realize it, "Right, right! We are originally Buddhas. If we are not Buddhas, how can we speak? Can we still ask who is reciting the Buddha's name? If we are not Buddhas, how can we recite the Buddha's name? If we are not Buddhas, how can we write? If we are not Buddhas, how can we walk? Our body ceases to move when it stops breathing. Movement is a wonderful function of Buddha-nature.

The truth is suddenly realized and understood, but "these emotions are difficult to eradicate." Emotions, including love, are difficult to eradicate! Ancient sages said, "Reciting the Buddha's name as if falling in love, one would have attained

enlightenment long ago!" If we were reciting the Buddha's name as if it seemed like falling in love, we would have attained enlightenment long ago.

We ordinary people find it difficult to let go of love. Love encompasses a wide range of relationships, including the affection between men and women, the bond between mother and child, the partnership of husband and wife, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, and various hobbies, such as collecting antiques, stamp collecting, calligraphy, painting, gardening, and raising birds, among others. There are so many things that people cherish.

The most challenging bond for a woman to relinquish is that between mother and child. The experience of having a child is something she will always hold dear, never forgetting, and even in death, she may find it impossible to let go: "I can't bear to leave my child!" When an elderly lady, who regularly chanted the Buddha's name, was nearing death, we counselled her, "Let go and be reborn in the Western Pure Land." She responded, "No, I can't bear to leave my children and grandchildren!" It raises the question: how could such a misguided practitioner hope to be reborn in the Western Pure Land?

Ordinary people recognize that "eliminating these emotions can be challenging." Our emotions are extremely difficult to eliminate right away, so we must achieve sudden enlightenment and then gradually cultivate. Gradual cultivation following sudden enlightenment is the only feasible option, as it aligns with the current state of beings in our Sahā world.

Beware of boasting that sudden enlightenment, cultivation, and realization render further cultivation, attainment, and realization unnecessary. It's simple to say, but can you genuinely accomplish it? Bragging serves no purpose; true practice is essential. Even if you boast, Hell will still extend an invitation to you. Only through genuine achievement can Hell's invitation be revoked.

"Constant awareness is essential to reduce and diminish them, akin to the wind suddenly ceasing and the waves gradually calming." This practice necessitates prolonged awareness.

For example, those who practice Pure Land school recite the Buddha's name. Whenever a thought arises, quickly chant it loudly and aloud: "Amitābha, Amitābha, Amitābha..." This procedure dispels these delusions.

It's essential to eliminate these delusions! Reducing and diminishing means gradually ceasing these delusions. Reduce your habits, afflictions, and attachments day by day. Delusions can't be eliminated overnight, "like the wind suddenly ceasing and the waves gradually calming."

As soon as the wind blows, the waves rise, and even after the wind stops, the waves continue to surge, requiring only time to subside. Therefore, the ancients said, “The wind stops, the waves still surge; the truth appears, but delusion still invades.” “The truth appears,” meaning enlightenment is achieved, but “delusion still invades”—delusions persist, so they must be eliminated gradually.

“How can one cultivate for a lifetime and then achieve the same power and influence as the Buddhas?” It is unrealistic to expect that a lifetime of cultivation will result in immediately possessing the same three insights and six supernormal powers as the Buddhas. We must believe that our mind is the Buddha’s mind, even if we haven’t developed these traits yet.

At this juncture, I would like to address an important issue. I have heard individuals claim that severing the interval between the preceding and following thoughts is not enlightenment, asserting that true enlightenment necessitates forgetting both subject and object. In truth, they fail to comprehend what it means to sever these boundaries, nor do they recognize their true nature, yet they present themselves as having a strong foundation. They have not engaged with the teachings but speak without true understanding.

Once upon a time, Master Chengguan was delivering a lecture on the Avataṃsaka Sūtra to Empress Wu Zetian, an enlightened ruler. The opening verse you now read —“The sublime Dharma is profound and subtle, difficult to encounter in a hundred thousand eons.

I now see and hear it and am able to uphold it. I vow to understand the Tathāgata’s true meaning”—was composed by Empress Wu Zetian. It lauds the Avataṃsaka Sūtra and is now used as the opening verse of all sūtras. He explained to her, “When a single thought ceases to arise, the interval between the preceding and following thoughts are severed. The previous boundary corresponds to the previous thought; the next boundary corresponds to the next thought.

The prior and subsequent boundaries are snapped. The observing entity is the essence that observes all things and gives rise to all wondrous reactions—the original nature. Being bright and not attached to any form is the Buddha. His name is the Buddha! Observe how clearly he articulated it. Nevertheless, some individuals fail to understand, claiming that the cessation of past and future is not enlightenment. They do not grasp what this cessation entails, yet they presume to be knowledgeable teachers. Are they harming others? If you do not understand it yourself but mislead others, you may be destined for eternal damnation!

When we pause our thoughts and become lucid and aware, what is this experience?! If we forsake this awareness and continue to seek Buddha-nature in external places, we risk losing it altogether. Understand that lacking the three insights and six

supernormal powers does not prevent enlightenment or Buddhahood. Such awareness does not imply that our practice in this lifetime will necessarily grant us the same extraordinary powers and abilities as the Buddhas.

Initial enlightenment can be likened to a newborn baby. Although a baby does not possess adult capabilities—cannot work, walk, or eat independently, and requires care—you cannot deny its humanity. This initial enlightenment represents the Buddhahood of the causal stage. It is essential to remain constantly aware of this state and to protect it.

This involves diligently maintaining it and gradually diminishing our negative habits and afflictions day by day. In doing so, this "baby" will develop into an adult, equipped with all the powers and abilities. Once we comprehend our original nature, the diligent effort we put forth is referred to as true cultivation after enlightenment. Without this enlightenment, our practice is akin to blind striving. For instance, if one chants the Buddha's name without realizing its original nature, they are merely invoking the Buddha externally.

As practitioners who chant Amitābha Buddha, we must recognize that this chant serves to awaken our own inherent awareness, enabling us to remain conscious. Avoiding superficial appearances, resisting external circumstances, and letting go of worldly attachments are crucial. Only by adhering to these principles can we achieve success. This understanding is of utmost importance!

"Instead, consider emptiness and tranquility as your true self; do not identify with the physical body. View luminous knowing as your mind, and refrain from identifying with delusions." It is important to realize that this physical body—this flesh, this shell—is not our true self. Our genuine essence is found in emptiness and tranquility—unmoving and unshakeable, neither coming nor going, neither born nor destroyed..

This bodily shell gradually changes, from youth to old age and from old age to death. Do not identify with this fleshly body, this physical form: it is not you. Never, ever identify the physical body as yourself. Recognize empty quiescence as yourself.

Buddha-nature, empty and quiescent, neither coming nor going and neither moving nor shaking, is ourselves! "Take numinous knowing as your own mind; do not identify with deluded thoughts." What is a deluded thought? Any thought that abides in and clings to something. If a thought arises and the mind settles on and attaches to it, it is a deluded thought. Only a thought that arises without abiding or attachment is the wondrous functioning of the true mind.

This clear numinous knowing is the true mind; it is not lifeless. Sit motionless, forcibly suppressing thoughts until none arises, and you become like a great stone or block of wood. Clear numinous knowing, without attachment or grasping, love or

hatred, is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Abiding in something and discriminating are deluded feelings.

But one point must be clear: it is not that we cannot distinguish things; we distinguish without abiding. I know that this person is good and that person is bad. This does not mean failing to distinguish good from bad and becoming muddleheaded. Is a muddled mind the true mind? No. We must know good and bad, yet have no hatred or love, grasping or rejection.

We do not delight in good people and detest bad people. Nor do we abandon bad people. Why? We should teach them, have compassion for them, and help them change. This is the right approach, and this is what the true mind is like. Thus it is quite easy to distinguish the true mind from the deluded mind. At every moment, do not identify the deluded mind as yourself. Know that clear numinous knowing without abiding in appearances is the true mind. The slightest abiding creates a fixed rut and entangles us in appearances.

“Should deluded thoughts arise, do not follow any of them. At the end of life, karma will naturally be unable to bind you.” This concerns approaching death. What happens then? To gain mastery over taking rebirth at that time, we must regularly practice “not following deluded thoughts when they arise.”

We must immediately recognize and avoid following our delusions, even if they arise instantaneously without complete elimination. If the delusions are strong and we cannot stop them even after being aware of them, we should quickly recite the Buddha’s name, chant a mantra, or raise a topic, questioning where these false thoughts come from and dissolving them. If we only recognize them after we have followed them for a long time, it is too late.

The speed of awareness and elimination is a matter of effort. It is like the difference in brightness between candlelight and electric light. At first, it can illuminate, but it becomes less visible as it goes on. It takes a long time for us to recognize these false thoughts. The result is candlelight.

When we become proficient in the practice, we can see everything as soon as a thought arises, just like a strong light shining in front of us, making every pothole clearly visible. Walking at night, we won’t fall into pits or ditches. The result is electric light. This is the stage of constant stillness and illumination, constant stillness and illumination. There’s no need to deliberately illuminate; illumination comes naturally. The depth of effort involved here varies greatly.

When practicing, we must be constantly aware and diligent. If we only practice for one or two hours out of twenty-four and not the other twenty-two, that would be laziness, and it would be difficult to make progress. Therefore, we must constantly

practice and be aware in all four postures: walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. This is how we can make progress.

Furthermore, if a delusive thought arises, don't follow it. Don't just chase after a thought you think is beneficial. Someone might have a pleasant dream, and after waking, they can't let it go and keep contemplating it. Dreams are inherently delusions, so why cling to them? If you dream of being an emperor, are you really the emperor? If you dream of receiving a large ingot, are you really receiving it? If you cling to it, isn't that foolish? People are just that foolish!

Chan Master Guifeng earnestly taught that whenever a delusive thought arises, we must neither follow nor chase it. If we can truly master this non-attachment, then even at the moment of death, karma cannot bind us. To "bind" means to entangle or constrain. All sentient beings are currently driven by karma—those with virtuous karma ascend to the heavenly realms, while those with heavy negative karma descend into suffering. However, if you genuinely stop pursuing false thoughts, karma loses its grip on you, and you attain complete freedom.

"While in the intermediate state, one is free to go wherever one wishes, whether in heaven or on earth." Those who have truly attained enlightenment do not have an intermediate state (Bardo) body, nor do those reborn in the Western Pure Land. What is the intermediate state? It is the state between the destruction of the previous body and the rise of the next.

The intermediate state, the body in the netherworld between the destruction of the previous body and the rebirth into the next, is the intermediate state body. This intermediate state body is dominated by the wind element and therefore possesses the five spiritual powers. It possesses a limited number of five spiritual powers but lacks the power of cessation and the full range of powers possessed by the Buddha. The intermediate state body possesses a limited number of the five spiritual powers, including the power of divine movement.

It can reach any place with a connection to its parents, even thousands of miles away. It possesses divine vision, allowing it to see thousands of miles away. Those reborn in the Western Pure Land, having reached the West, do not have an intermediate state body.

Those reborn in hell also do not have an intermediate state body. How can one have an intermediate state body in hell? The other realms possess intermediate states. "While in the intermediate state, one is free to go wherever one wishes." If one truly ignores deluded thoughts, then karma cannot capture, bind, or hinder one. You have the freedom and ease to go wherever you desire. " One is free to go wherever one wishes, whether in heaven or on earth."

“In the heavens or the human realm, take an abode at will”: one may temporarily dwell in either. This is the most basic level of practice. Deluded thoughts have not yet been eliminated, but when they arise, I can refrain from following them. At this point, even though there is an intermediate state, one can remain free. If one follows deluded thoughts, however, that freedom is lost. Thus this is the minimum step, the lowest level of attainment.

“If thoughts of attraction and aversion have ceased, one no longer takes a body subject to segmented birth and death.” Ai ( ) means liking or fondness; wu ( ) means dislike or aversion. The mind of attraction and aversion is gone. One no longer accepts something because it seems good or rejects something because it seems bad.

Since everything is like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, why distinguish good from bad? What is there to love or hate? This must actually be put into practice. If you can do it while someone instructs you, but attraction and aversion return when no one is watching, that will not do. “Have ceased” means that these thoughts have come to an end. Once attraction and aversion are gone, one no longer undergoes segmented birth and death and has escaped saṃsāra. Attachment to dharmas, however, has not yet been eliminated.

“One can transform the short into the long, the coarse into the fine.” This statement highlights the potential for transformation. Such a person possesses the ability to change freely. The short can become long, and the ugly and coarse can be transformed into beautiful and refined. This individual can effect change, allowing even the six realms of reincarnation to become divine and extraordinary. Everything is capable of transformation.

Have you ever asked yourself, “What level of practice have I reached?” Feel free to observe and verify this for yourselves: First, when delusive thoughts arise, can you refrain from following them? If you can achieve this, you will attain total freedom wherever you go. Going a step further, if you can extinguish feelings of attraction and aversion—without fondness or dislike, viewing all things with absolute equality—then segmented birth and death will be eliminated, and you will gain the freedom of spiritual transformation.

Going further still: “If the subtle continuous stream ceases entirely and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains bright and clear, one manifests countless transformation bodies in response to beings’ capacities, liberates sentient beings with whom one has affinity, and is called a Buddha.” This is the highest vehicle.

Our practice aims to achieve the cessation of all subtle continuous streams, eradicate the seeds of subtle delusion, and thoroughly realize the state in which

“only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains bright and clear,” thereby attaining Buddhahood.

In this lifetime, we can overcome the initial barrier of perceiving our true nature and then continue to cultivate in the world, diligently eliminating undesirable habits and achieving freedom from both favorable and unfavorable circumstances while liberating ourselves from obstacles in all directions. After overcoming the secondary barrier, we can advance further, eliminate all subtle continuous streams, and radiate enormous light that illuminates the ten directions without obstruction. There is no need for spiritual powers; they will naturally come to you. Thus, one can manifest countless transformation bodies to save sentient beings with affinity. This is how Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appear in response to the needs of sentient beings.

There are three kinds of mind-born body: first, the mind-born body of the bliss and right absorption of samādhi; second, the mind-born body of awakening to the nature of dharmas; third, the mind-born body complete in all forms and functioning without deliberate effort. By sitting deeply absorbed in samādhi, one can bring forth the first kind. The mind faculty is manas consciousness, the seventh consciousness; the body it manifests is called a mind-born body.

It ranges from small to large, ultimately encompassing hundreds of thousands of billions of incarnations. With a complete variety and without conscious effort, mountains, rivers, earth, towers, and pavilions can all manifest and transform.

At what level of practice can subtle continuous streams be eliminated? “Subtle” denotes what is currently invisible to us. Only after practicing deeply and entering the Vajrasattva Samādhi can we perceive them: oh, so many subtle delusion seeds, all agitated.

Recognize this movement and let it cease. Yet if “not moving” still remains, that too will not do; do not retain even stillness. Break through it, and the domain of the consciousness aggregate is broken through. This is the last of the five aggregates; when it is broken through, accomplishment is attained. Thus our practice must be true cultivation after awakening. Yet how could we practice without awakening to the true mind and understanding the principle? Recognizing the true mind and understanding the principle are therefore most important—in other words, the mind-born body of awakening to the nature of dharmas is most important.

Today, I reiterated the concepts of form and emptiness and emphasized the necessity of recognizing the true mind (correct view). I also explored the question of where practitioners ultimately go at the time of death. It is essential to practice this skill constantly, a process referred to as “constant awareness, reducing, and diminishing.”

We should maintain awareness by acknowledging, “Oh, a thought has arisen.” Oh, I discover myself attached to appearances once more. Oh, a delusion has surfaced.” In such moments, we must quickly stop and refrain from following those thoughts. This practice is what we mean by reducing and diminishing.

We should refrain from speaking about achieving complete enlightenment, as that is no easy feat. How often do we hear individuals lament, “Oh, why do I still have so many thoughts?” The instant elimination of all thoughts is quite challenging, which is why we must be perpetually aware and committed to reducing and diminishing our mental clutter.

But how do we gauge our progress? We ought to reflect upon our past selves. How attached and troubled were we previously? If we discover ourselves less attached and more peaceful now, we have made progress. Recognizing our progress is beneficial, as it bolsters our confidence. During our cultivation, we might experience sensations of warmth in our bodies, and lights may manifest. These occurrences are positive signs; however, we must not pursue them. If we do so, we risk losing our Way. That would mean dwelling on these experiences, leading us back to deluded thoughts and feelings.

In our practice after awakening, we must let things take their natural course. Like flowing water, rushing past with a swoosh, swoosh, swoosh, we must never pause or cling. Do not run after external phenomena; do not flow along with delusive thoughts. Diminish and further diminish our false thoughts and habitual tendencies until they are eradicated completely; only then can we achieve the Great Way. This is the key secret to cultivation. Therefore, without recognizing the True Mind, cultivation is of no benefit; yet recognizing the True Mind without knowing this key secret, achievement remains impossible.

10. The Essentials of Pure Land Rebirth

When we recite the name of Amitābha Buddha, we awaken our minds—not to seek an Amitābha Buddha outside ourselves. When we vow to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, we become one with Amitābha Buddha, achieving both self-power and other-power.

We understand that the purpose of chanting the Buddha’s name is to use the holy name to remove defilements and afflictions from our hearts and to use the Buddha’s light to illuminate us and eliminate our karmic obstacles. If we vow to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, we will be born there. How do we accomplish this? We must sever the root of attachment. If we can do so, success is certain.

If you still cling to this world, even if you insist, “I have other power, I have other power, I have other power,” you ultimately will not be reborn in the Western Pure

Land. How can you possibly leave when you have not severed the root of attachment and remain attached to this Saha world? In reality, other-power is self-power, and self-power is other-power.

Self and others are inseparable, and separating them is a mistake. In our cultivation, we must practice dual cultivation, combining our efforts with the efforts of others. Relying solely on the efforts of others will not help us ascend and is therefore ineffective. If you cling to this Saha world and your delusions, outside forces can't help you. If Buddhas and Bodhisattvas could pull us up, they would have done so long ago.

How do Buddhas and Bodhisattvas lead us to the Western Pure Land? They illuminate us with light. Even if their light shines on you, you will not see it if your eyes are closed. What's the point? Therefore, Chan Master Yongming Yanshou said, "Our mind is like a basin of water, and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are like the moon in the sky."

Amitābha Buddha emits light to illuminate us. If our mind is as pure as clear water, the moon's reflection can appear; this is the meeting of response and Way, the union of other-power and self-power. If our mind-water is a basin of dirty water, it cannot reflect the moon.

It is not that the Buddha does not shine on you; the Buddha does not favor some over others—the Buddha shines universally, but your mind is very defiled. Hence the blind do not see the light, and dirty water does not show the moon's reflection. This is entirely our misunderstanding; it is not that the Buddha does not shine on us. So we must practice both: there is other-power, and there is also self-power.

For rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, let go of everything and recite wholeheartedly, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…," awakening your own mind. His mind is your own mind, and your mind is his mind. They become continuous and undivided, mind and Buddha in communion. At death, that Buddha appears before you.

Here "at the end of life" refers not only to approaching physical death, but also to the severing of the root of birth and death. What does this mean? It is when deluded feelings, deluded thoughts, and the deluded mind die away and are cut off. This too is "the end of life," for these deluded feelings, thoughts, and mind are the root of our birth and death.

Where, originally, are birth and death? Deluded feelings, thoughts, and mind cling to forms and appearances, create karma, and undergo its retribution, leading to illusory birth and death within the six realms. With one-pointed Buddha-recitation, when practice matures and the time and conditions are right, there is a sudden

snap: deluded feelings, thoughts, and mind are cut off, and this root of birth and death comes to an end.

“At the moment of death, Amitābha will appear before you.” “That Buddha” refers to the Buddha of our nature, Amitābha. Our true nature is Amitābha. “Appearing” signifies our true nature manifesting before us. This feeling is meant by “seeing the Buddha when the flower blooms and realizing the unborn.” When the flower of the heart blossoms and the Buddha of our nature becomes evident, the result is enlightenment.

“Realizing the unborn” indicates that enlightenment unveiled our original nature, which is neither born nor subject to destruction! This experience embodies the essence of the Pure Land school—the genuine Pure Land school! We must not place the burden of life and death entirely on Amitābha. It is wrong to call it ‘other power (external force),’ and one should admit that if Amitābha does not save me, the fault lies with me, not Him. Such assumptions are misguided.

How can you see the Buddha or the unborn if you haven’t severed your false attachments, deluded thoughts, and mistaken perceptions? Such behavior is solely your responsibility. How can you blame Amitābha?

Pure Land school is Chan Buddhism, and Chan Buddhism is Pure Land school. This is what great virtuous teachers of the past said: “Chan is the Chan of Pure Land school; Pure Land school is the Pure Land of Chan.” Chan is Pure Land school, and Pure Land school is Chan. It is impossible to separate or consider them as two distinct entities; they are in fact one and one.

For example, Master Yongming Yanshou was a Chan master. How did he become a great patriarch of the Pure Land school? Master Lianchi and Master Chewu were also Chan masters; how did they too become great Pure Land patriarchs? Chan and Pure Land have always breathed through the same nostril. Only later did people who failed to understand the principle forcibly divide them into Chan and Pure Land.

When we vow to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, our hearts must be sincere and free from doubt. Our vows must be earnest, not just lip service; they must be followed by genuine action. If our minds are distracted, we cannot be helped. If you never forget this—morning and evening, in displacement and adversity alike—you will soon realize the Way.

The same is true for Chan practitioners: we must constantly be aware, constantly guarding and caring for our huatou. The same is true for those of us who practice Esoteric Buddhism. I’ve repeatedly said that practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma shouldn’t depend solely on two hours of sitting. The most important thing is to observe when you get up from your seat. It’s even more important when you get up

from your seat. When you get up from your seat, practice mindfulness and observe whether your mind is empty. This procedure is the most important step.

I often hear people say, “Oh, I’m furious today! So-and-so is awful!” I’d like to ask you, are you a Buddhist? What are you upset about? If you’re a Buddhist, you shouldn’t become frustrated.

Everything is empty; there is no self, no other. Why become angry? If you still get angry, you haven’t learned Buddhism. You’re not constantly aware, and you haven’t experienced and trained your mind.

The more adverse the circumstances become, the more irritating the people and events are, which can help train you. Will you still become angry? If you still become angry, you haven’t trained. Without training, how can you achieve Buddhahood? Adversity is actually a beneficial state of mind. It trains you, testing whether you’ve awakened.

Don’t say adversity is detrimental. Whether it’s detrimental or not depends on whether you’ve awakened, on whether you can use it to train yourself. As Buddhists, whether practicing Chan, Pure Land school, or Esoteric Buddhism, we must constantly experience and train our minds. Without this, we will never achieve success.

Our wondrously luminous true mind is neither existent nor non-existent. When one claims it exists, it possesses no visible form and no audible sound. Conversely, if one asserts it does not exist, it is nonetheless active in every moment, whether in speech or silence, in movement or stillness, while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. Ancient sages have likened it to “salt in the ocean” or “glue in color.” Although it eludes direct perception, its essence is undeniably present.

Śākyamuni Buddha tells us that it is the great treasury of true emptiness and wondrous presence, wondrous presence and true emptiness. “True emptiness” differs from insentient emptiness and annihilationist emptiness: because it is wondrous presence, it is empty yet not empty. “Wondrous presence” differs from illusory existence or substantial existence: because it is true emptiness, it is existent yet not existent, not existent yet existent.

Next, in terms of appearance and function, it is also neither existent nor nonexistent, neither nonexistent nor existent. Say it does not exist, and forms of every kind stand clearly before us, with wondrous functioning as countless as the sands of the Ganges. Say it exists, and every form arises from causes and conditions, without an essence of its own; its activities are like the moon reflected in water and flowers in empty space, impossible to grasp. The Heart Sūtra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.”

This means that form and emptiness are nondual, neither existent nor nonexistent. All phenomena manifest from the wondrous essence of true emptiness, and that essence cannot exist separately from forms. It is like waves arising on water: apart from the waves, the water cannot be found. In practice, we must neither cling to forms as substantially real nor turn away from forms, rejecting existence and attaching to emptiness. Thus, whether seated in meditation or functioning after rising, we must neither grasp nor reject. Only then do we accord with the Middle Way and enter the great Way of true emptiness and wondrous presence.

Many of us still lack a clear understanding of the concepts of 'form' and 'emptiness.' To address this, I have expanded on these ideas, using the teachings of Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi as a guide. This work emphasizes the importance of recognizing the true mind and clarifies the ultimate destination for practitioners at the end of their lives. These insights will help us grasp the purpose of Mahāmudrā, avoid detours in our practice, and directly pursue the profound path of wonderful true emptiness.

Lecture Two: The View of Mahāmudrā—Recognizing the Dharmakāya

1. Clarifying Gross Delusions: Neither Grasping nor Indulging.

Let us now return to the Ganges Mahāmudrā. Earlier, we discussed that Mahāmudrā is a practical method that directly guides us toward realizing our true mind. Mahāmudrā represents the One True Dharma Realm, our true mind, and the essential being that is uncultivated, unrefined, and undistracted. However, to enter the realm of Mahāmudrā practice, one must initially undergo rigorous cultivation. Without practice, one cannot recognize this thoughtless spiritual awareness as one's true nature or achieve the Great Way. Why is this the case? Mahāmudrā asserts:

"However, gross deluded thoughts that follow circumstances obscure the original face of one's own mind."

What are these gross deluded thoughts that follow circumstances? Our thoughts emerge in response to external situations, clinging to them endlessly. We find ourselves caught in a cycle of seeing this, thinking about that, seeing that, and thinking about this, struggling to let go, which results in minds filled with chaotic and disorganized thoughts. These are what we refer to as gross deluded thoughts. They are like dark clouds obscuring the sun, hiding the true radiant nature of our mind. Therefore, they must be dispelled.

Without addressing these gross deluded thoughts, our practice cannot progress. Why? You are trapped in delusions and confusion while sitting here, contemplating various distractions. You are influenced by external circumstances and cling to them

indefinitely. This state hinders your ability to recognize the true nature of your mind. Remaining in this state is akin to wandering in the cycle of life and death! How can you commence your practice of cultivation, and how can you achieve profound success?

“Although it is pointed out directly, one remains unable to see it. Thus, it is essential to first dispel the gross delusion. Consequently, it is advised, ‘Initially, allow the mind to rest calmly, neither grasping nor indulging.’”

We have explained many times where the true mind is and what it looks like. If, despite these clear instructions, we still cannot perceive it, it indicates that our delusion is forceful. Therefore, we should focus on practicing to eliminate this gross delusion.

Just as enlightenment and the attainment of the Way occur in stages, so does practice. What should we prioritize? When we begin our practice, we must sever the gross delusion that clings to the environment. What are gross deluded thoughts? They are the delusions that arise from fixating on specific things and continuously grasping at our surroundings. In our practice, we must ignore these distractions and let go of everything, thereby eliminating gross deluded thoughts.

However, even after we have removed gross deluded thoughts, subtle delusions persist—these are the thoughts in our minds. Those who have engaged in practice understand that when we cease to focus on gross deluded thoughts, subtle thoughts may unconsciously arise. These are known as subtle delusions, and in the Dharma Characteristics School, this type of thinking is referred to as “intention.”

The Dharma Characteristics School teaches five universal mental factors possessed by everyone, by all sentient beings: attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. These are the most fundamental aspects of the deluded mind. Yi ( ), “mind,” here means the mind faculty.

It moves continually, like a fish swimming in deep water, and moves very fast. Its movement cannot be seen from the surface, but it flows without stopping. These are subtle and extremely subtle deluded thoughts.

The most extremely subtle deluded thoughts are also called the subtle continuous stream. At their subtlest, they appear perfectly still, like water flowing at great speed: it looks motionless but is actually moving extremely fast, beyond the perception of human eyes. Only by entering deeply into Vajrasattva samādhi can we see it. Thus, even after gross deluded thoughts cease, subtle, very subtle, and extremely subtle deluded thoughts remain. How much more is this so when, at the beginning of practice, we have merely made the body motionless!

How, then, can we perceive these extremely subtle delusions? Only by calming our minds and meditating—first clarifying the gross delusion—can we recognize the subtle and extremely subtle delusions. By doing so, we can eliminate these delusions and realize the true nature of our mind. Therefore, we must first eliminate the gross delusion.

How should we practice? Mahāmudrā instructs us, “At first, let the mind rest at ease, neither suppressing nor indulging.” At the outset, let the mind be completely at ease, without attachment, affliction, constraint, or bondage. Be open and unencumbered; let everything go. Confucian teaching says, “The noble person is open and at ease; the petty person is always anxious.”

The petty person dwells on advantage and disadvantage, gain and loss, turning them over endlessly in the mind. Fear of losing what has been gained, or failing to gain what is desired, keeps them anxious. The noble person is unconcerned with gain and loss and takes everything lightly, and is therefore open and at ease. We who practice the Dharma should be people of great integrity and resolve, all the more ready to let everything go and rest at ease without abiding anywhere.

Tan ( ) means level and straight, without a bend: the mind has no crookedness, and the straightforward mind is the place of awakening. Dang ( ) means sweeping everything away, leaving no attachment. Thus one is completely at ease and free. Mahāmudrā asks us to begin in this way.

If we cannot do this, if the mind clings to something and keeps revolving around it, we must apply the Dharma to remedy it. How? By “neither suppressing nor indulging.” Qin ( ) means seizing and pressing down; zong ( ) means letting run unchecked. We should neither hold thoughts down nor indulge them, but let them be naturally.

When we practice, if we suppress our thoughts and refuse to let them move at all, they will gradually wither away. However, we must also avoid letting thoughts arise unchecked, as such an approach would lead to indulgence, which is equally misguided. When thoughts do arise, we choose to ignore them. This practice embodies the principle of being “neither grasping nor indulging.”

In fact, all our practices are about cultivating the skill of “ignoring.” It is not that thoughts cease coming or arising. Even if they arise, ignore them, and they will naturally dissipate. Whether chanting the Buddha’s name, reciting mantras, or meditating on Chan, when thoughts arise, we should neither suppress nor indulge them.

Thoughts cannot be captured or suppressed; they will return, as the ancient sages said: “The wind stops, but the waves still surge.” When a thought arises, those who

chant the Buddha's name ignore it and instead focus on the Buddha's name. When a thought arises, those who meditate on Chan ignore it and instead focus on the topic. When a thought arises, those who practice Esoteric Buddhism ignore it and instead focus on the mantra.

By attending single-mindedly to the Buddha's name, a huatou, or the mantra, deluded thoughts will naturally be transformed. The point is not to prevent them from arising, nor is it to let them flow freely. Rather, we should transform them. This part is living, not dead. Last time, we mentioned the verse of Chan Master Wolun: "Wolun has a trick, which can cut off a hundred thoughts. When faced with circumstances, the mind does not arise, and Bodhi grows day by day." Suppressing thoughts is not effective and lacks vitality. The important thing is to avoid both suppression and indulgence—simply ignore them.

The presence of deluded thoughts is harmful, and suppressing them is inadequate. This is because deluded thoughts arise from the true mind, much like waves on water. If we suppress deluded thoughts, it is akin to eliminating the waves; consequently, the water disappears, leaving the true mind lifeless. The true mind is vibrant, capable of embodying all things, giving rise to all dharmas, and performing miraculous functions. If one suppresses deluded thoughts too completely, the true mind risks becoming as inert as wood, earth, metal, or stone, thereby losing its ability to perform miraculous functions.

Wood, earth, metal, and stone are among the twelve classes of living beings. At first glance, these inanimate elements appear to have no connection to us. This perception arises because we, alongside all other beings in the six realms of saṃsāra—the gods, humans, asuras, hungry ghosts, animals, and hell—are sentient beings, endowed with emotions and feelings.

While humans are sentient, wood, earth, metal, and stone are inert and motionless, seemingly disconnected from our existence. However, this is not the case. Despite their different forms, these twelve classes of living beings share the same true spiritual nature as manifestations of the One True Dharma Realm. They originate from the same source as we do and are not separate entities.

Buddha-nature is inherently real and true, possessing the capacity to arise from all dharmas and encompassing the spiritual faculties of wondrous uses. Nonetheless, by clinging to external appearances and becoming enveloped in ignorance—fixating on external circumstances, clinging to emotions, creating karma, and facing retribution—we obscure our true mind. This misunderstanding leads to a division of the one true nature into two aspects: inner and outer.

The inner truth pertains to our body and mind, while the outer truth encompasses the mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, stars, grass, trees, and forests—all of which

are external objects.

In reality, they are all part of ourselves! Due to ignorance, we confine a small portion of earth, water, fire, and wind within our bodies while perceiving the rest as external and separate from ourselves. This misunderstanding gives rise to the twelve classes of living beings. In truth, all sentient beings, whether living or non-sentient, share the same fundamental root. This aligns with the sūtra's assertion: "Sentient and non-sentient beings share the same perfect wisdom." Non-sentient beings are also a part of us!

This common perfect wisdom represents the wisdom of the Buddha—an all-encompassing understanding that includes the universally acknowledged Dharma of all Buddhas, as well as the causes and seeds of all sentient beings.

Individuals engaged in cultivation today often achieve a limited degree of spiritual development. At times, one may hear whispers about future events, including who will arrive and their appearances; this phenomenon is known as the ear-reporting spirit.

However, some may incorrectly assume they possess wisdom and spiritual powers that allow them to predict arrivals and future occurrences, leading to a sense of complacency: "Ah! How wonderful! I have foresight." Indeed, a transmitting ghost can influence this mindset, raising concerns. Prolonged interaction with such a spirit can result in exploitation and harm.

But what is the origin of this ghost? When this individual was alive, they formed cliques for personal gain, supported wrongdoers in legal matters, aided others in committing immoral acts, stole money, and even committed murder. These actions led to severe sins, resulting in their descent into hell and enduring suffering. After emerging from hell, their previous habits—forming cliques for personal gain and engaging in immoral deeds—remained intact and powerful. As a result, they can possess individuals and provide predictions about future events. These entities are referred to as transmitting ghosts, and they are anything but benevolent.

When practicing, do not assume you possess spiritual powers simply because someone claims you do. This assertion is misleading; it is a manifestation of a ghost! The sūtras describe various types of ghosts. For example, some individuals were greedy for wealth during their lifetimes, desiring money and gold in abundance. Due to their greed, they committed malevolent acts and were condemned to hell. Even after enduring their suffering, their greed persists, compelling them to covet everything they encounter. They regard plants and trees as valuable, believing them to belong to them.

Consequently, they attach themselves to these natural entities to exert their powers and create chaos. A legend speaks of a Bodhi tree in Shanghai's Fuxing Park, reputed to possess extraordinary power. People flock to it, praying and worshipping, convinced it can resolve all their problems. Its perceived effectiveness is attributed to the strange ghosts that attach themselves to plants and trees.

Additionally, there are lustful men and women. Since lust embodies the fire of desire, they are tormented by their cravings in hell. Once their suffering concludes, their frivolous lust allows them to take form when they encounter the wind, which they use as their body, and transform into female demons. There are also ghosts that depend on mountains and rivers for their existence. What type of ghosts are these? They are referred to as "wangliang," or evil-sighted ghosts.

These individuals held misguided views in their previous lives, marked by arrogance and self-righteousness. When others opposed them, they plotted and schemed to inflict harm, ultimately leading to their damnation.

After their suffering, their arrogance caused them to draw upon the essence of the sun and moon, seizing their light and inhabiting mountains and waters to display magical powers. This phenomenon is why certain locations are said to possess remarkable energy.

For instance, a recent rumor circulated about a water-splashing Guanyin statue in Hangzhou, located on Ziyang Mountain. At first glance, it appears to be an ordinary stone, but when water is poured over it, the image of Guanyin emerges, earning it the name Water-Splashing Guanyin. Rumors about the miraculous efficacy of this site spread, attracting visitors from afar who claimed that drinking its water could cure all ailments. In reality, these phenomena result from ghosts whose essence derives from the sun and moon.

All ghosts, gods, and even the elements of earth, wood, metal, and stone are manifestations of ourselves! This concept is referred to as "Sentient and non-sentient beings share the same perfect wisdom." Our Buddhist nature innately recognizes the seeds of all living beings and comprehends the perfect and complete Great prajñā.

II. The Dharma Taught by the Insentient

Last time, someone asked, "It's understandable that sentient beings can achieve perfect wisdom, but how can the insentient do the same?" How can the insentient like bricks, tiles, wood, and stone achieve perfect wisdom? How can they become Buddhas? Today, I'll explain these questions further. Bricks, tiles, wood, and stone are all our nature.

Who discovered them? Wasn't it our own spiritual light that illuminated them? Whose light is this? It is our Buddha-nature! Wherever the spiritual light of our Buddha-nature shines, all sentient and the insentient—mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, stars, men, women, young and old, birds, and beasts—are all reflections and manifestations of the Buddha-nature.

If you are a Buddha, then everything your spiritual light illuminates is a Buddha! For example, if I were the king of a country, everything in that land would belong to me. Similarly, if you were a Buddha, the light of your Buddha-nature would shine brightly in all directions, pervading the universe and filling the Dharma Realm. Everything is illuminated by the spiritual light of your Buddha-nature. Therefore, everything is a Buddha; every single one is a Buddha.

However, if we practice badly, fail to utilise the mind skillfully, and suppress our thoughts, we will become nothing more than dirt, wood, metal, and stone. Once upon a time, two people who were practicing meditation sat motionless beside a mountain. Grass grew on their heads and ears, transforming them into wood and stone. This transformation was the result of their practice of suppressing thoughts.

Therefore, everything we experience is a reflection of our Buddha-nature. All forms we see are Buddhas. Therefore, stools, chairs, tables, platforms, and so on are all Buddhas; nothing is not Buddha. Thus, it is said: "The luxuriant yellow flowers are nothing but Prajñā, and the verdant bamboos are all dharmakāya." Flowers and bamboo are all manifestations of Buddha-nature; they are all Buddhas! Understanding this question may appear challenging, but once you understand the principle, it becomes effortless. Allow me to share a story to discuss this issue.

In the past, Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie also struggled with this question. He went to consult Patriarch Weishan and asked, "I recently heard that Master Zhong of Nanyang gave a speech on the Dharma Taught by the Insentient Object. I have not yet thoroughly understood its details." Weishan asked, "Do you remember it?" Dongshan replied, "Yes." Weishan said, "Try to repeat it once." Dongshan then recounted the incident.

"A monk asked, 'What is the ancient Buddha's mind?' The National Master replied, 'They are walls and rubble.' The monk asked, 'Aren't walls and rubble inanimate?' (Walls and rubble are inanimate and have no awareness, while the Buddha is the Awakened One, all-knowing and all-powerful.

How could walls and rubble, insentient and devoid of awareness, be the ancient Buddha-mind? According to you, then, walls and rubble are not insentient? This was the monk's counter-question.) The National Master replied, "Yes." (These words contain a profound meaning. Sentient and insentient alike perfect all-knowing

wisdom. Only through discrimination does the distinction between sentient and insentient arise.

Without discrimination, all sounds and forms, mountains, rivers, the great earth, and even food, drink, and sexual relations are complete within mind-nature, without a single dharma to be attained. What sentient or insentient could there be? Because we regard dharmas as attainable, we then classify them, love and hate them, grasp and reject them. Thus afflictions proliferate and the cycle continues without end.

As mentioned earlier, our bodies are originally made up of the four elements, just like insentient beings. It is only because the true mind is wrapped in ignorance that it becomes a deluded mind, bound in this shell of the four elements, and we cling to it as our self that we have false knowledge.

Otherwise, would our bodies not be the same as walls and rubble? But the monk did not understand this, hence his following doubts.) The monk asked, “Can it also teach the Dharma?” (The Buddha teaches the Dharma to liberate sentient beings. Ancient Buddhas can teach the Dharma; since the insentient is the ancient Buddha-mind, it can of course teach the Dharma.

Like us ordinary beings, this monk always fell into what is seen and heard among sense objects, failing to see the nature that sees and hears.) The National Master replied, “It constantly teaches, teaches with blazing intensity, without interruption.”

(The insentient does not teach intermittently, speaking at one moment and silent at another. It teaches at every moment, its voice as mighty as a fiercely blazing fire, without pause. We are often attached to what is seen and heard, not knowing that teaching without speaking is true teaching. We think that hearing a sound is hearing, and hearing no sound is not hearing.

Hearing no sound is also hearing! You heard no sound! Therefore, remaining silent is the truest expression. Since the strongest sound is characterized by silence, the greatest sound can be understood as the absence of sound. Claiming to hear sound means being attached to it, not true hearing. Hearing transcends sound and silence.

Sound is transient, having a beginning and an end, which makes it false; in contrast, nature is continuous and unbroken, making it true. The monk asked, ‘Why don’t I hear?’ The National Master replied, ‘You yourself don’t hear, so you should not interfere with others’ hearing. You don’t hear because you’re unaware of your Buddha-nature, focused on perceivable sounds, and oblivious to the fact that true hearing is silence.

Look further: who hears the absence of sound? Who is it that hears no sound? You say you do not hear, yet it is shining through your ear faculty right now. Why do you

not recognize it? You hear the absence of sound—is that not hearing? Is hearing silence not true hearing? When a sound is heard, you follow it into discrimination and run after it.

When there is no sound and no discrimination, your hearing-nature is manifest: this is true hearing. Your own failure to hear cannot obstruct that which can hear! In this way the National Master rebukes, instructs, and reminds the monk.

When no sound is heard and hearing-nature is truly hearing, you say that you do not hear. You are failing to respond and understand, but hearing-nature remains vividly clear!) The monk asked, “What sort of person can hear it?” (Throughout the whole earth, not one person fails to hear.

Who does not hear? Who lacks hearing-nature? If we do not cling to sounds, whose hearing-nature is not shining clearly? It is a pity that we fail to catch sight of it ourselves!) The National Master replied, “All sages can hear it.” (Buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and other sages can hear it; ordinary beings cannot.

There is a flaw in this answer. Everyone is originally Buddha; the dharmakāya is formless, and neither ordinary being nor sage is established. What sage or nonsage could remain? Pressed hard by the monk, the National Master temporarily used these words to cover his eyes. But the monk saw through the device and questioned him further.

The monk asked, “Master, do you hear it?” (Can you yourself hear it? Since the National Master said that sages hear it, this question leaves him little room to answer. To say yes would be self-praise; to say no would mean he was neither a sage nor a teacher.) The National Master replied, “I do not hear it.” (He can only confess.)

The monk asked, “Since you do not hear it, how do you know the insentient can teach the Dharma?” (A good, forceful question! He turns the National Master’s own spear against him, leaving nowhere to escape.) The National Master replied, “Fortunately, I do not hear it. If I heard it, I would be equal to the sages, and you would not hear me teach the Dharma.”

(Fortunately, I do not hear it. If I heard it, I would be a sage, and you would not hear me teach. The monk’s question was difficult to evade, but the National Master was an accomplished Chan adept and could turn freely. “Fortunately, I do not hear it”—with this skillful turn he escaped the danger. Yet whatever is put into words has no ultimate meaning.

Originally there is no Dharma to teach and no one to hear it. If there were a Dharma to teach and someone to hear it, this would be attachment to the marks of a person and a self. Thus the National Master's statement "You would not hear me teach the Dharma" also disparages himself.) The monk pressed him: "Then sentient beings have no share in it."

(If so, sentient beings cannot hear the insentient teach the Dharma. Is there then no hope of realizing the Way?) The National Master replied, "I teach for sentient beings, not for sages." (The National Master changes tack.

The monk asked, 'What will happen to sentient beings after hearing what you have said?' (The monk stared at the Imperial Master closely: What will happen to sentient beings after hearing what you have said?)

The Imperial Master replied, 'They are no longer sentient beings.' (The Imperial Master took advantage of the situation to deflect the monk's sharp words. If sentient beings can hear the teachings of the insentient and adopt the hearing nature that is neither born nor destroyed, they will transcend the ordinary and become saints. That is why they are no longer sentient beings. The Diamond Sūtra says, "Sentient beings are not sentient beings according to the Tathāgata but are called sentient beings."

Sentient beings? Where are there sentient beings? All sentient beings are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; they are not truly existent. They are called sentient beings because they have not awakened. If they awaken at once, they are no longer sentient beings. Yet while they remain unawakened in the dream, they cannot be other than sentient beings; hence they are provisionally called sentient beings.

So wake up from the dream quickly! Someone once said, 'You say that everything is nothing?' For example, my ears were struck, and I am unable to perceive any sound; however, I continue to exist! The experience of my deafness is real and cannot be considered void. He is clinging to appearances and has not yet awakened! Wake up quickly! Don't dream anymore.

For example, if we are beaten or our heads are cut off in our sleep, but after waking up, we discover that we have not been beaten or killed, and our heads are still fine.

Your ears have been struck deaf, but this deafness is an illusory appearance, no more graspable than being beaten or killed in a dream. Do not cling to the dream: realize its emptiness and awaken quickly! After awakening, nothing remains. For example, after Lü Meng beheaded Guan Gong, Guan Gong cried out in pain, "Give me back my head! Give me back my head!"

When Master Zhizhe heard this, he went to liberate him. The master sat cross-legged, blocking Guan Gong's path. Guan Gong thought, "What a bold monk, daring to block my way! I will show him my power." Whoosh—a fierce wind arose, hurling sand and stones at him. Yet Master Zhizhe did not move in the slightest.

Guan Gong thought, "If you are not afraid of wind and flying sand, I will bring a mountain to frighten you." A great mountain then came crashing down, filling heaven and earth, but Master Zhizhe still did not move. Now Guan Gong was impressed: "This monk has genuine attainment!" He hurried forward and bowed at the master's feet.

Master Zhizhe then taught Guan Gong: "Here you are crying, 'Give me back my head! Give me back my head!'

Someone cuts off one head of yours and you demand its return. How many heads did you cut off in your lifetime? Can you give them back? Besides, though your head is gone, you lack nothing! Why? You have merely lost this illusory physical body. Your numinous knowing, your true mind, lacks nothing at all."

We have discussed considering emptiness as the essence rather than identifying the physical body as such; the void represents my true body, while the shell is merely a temporary house. Take spiritual knowledge as the heart, and do not identify false thoughts and delusions as the heart. False thoughts and delusions are not real; they are things that cling to the external world.

The nature of spiritual knowledge is the perception of cold, heat, pain, and itch. It is not fixed in form. This thing has no head, no tail, no name, and no words. In the past, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng asked the crowd, "I have an object with no head, no tail, no name, no words, no back, and no front. Do you recognize it?" Shenhui responded, "This represents the origin of all Buddhas and is referred to as Shenhui's Buddha-nature."

The Sixth Patriarch said, "I told you that it has no name or word, yet you call it the original Buddha-nature. You will be a disciple of knowledge and understanding, and in the future, you will wear straw on your head. The nature of spiritual knowledge—its original nature is formless and nameless. It is inappropriate to compare spiritual knowledge to an object. The mind will assign a name to spiritual knowledge, which is already a form of delusion.

Therefore, we should not recognize delusion as the mind but rather as the nature of spiritual knowledge.

Master Zhizhe shared this method with Guan Gong: If you feel a headache, it is because of the delusion of the mind. Your body is broken and no longer exists, so

what is there to hurt? When the mind is devoid of clutter, your true radiance will emerge, the Buddha-nature will illuminate, and no harm will befall you! The wise man directed his attention to Guan Gong. After being enlightened, he decided to become a Dharma protector of the Buddha's teachings.

Therefore, if sentient beings awaken from their dreams and embrace the nature of non-birth and non-death, they will transcend ordinary existence, become saints, and cease to be considered sentient beings. Therefore, I heard that once sentient beings hear the teachings from the insentient, they cease to be considered sentient beings.

The monk asked again: 'What scriptures do inanimates use to teach?' (I have never heard of inanimate things being able to teach. Is there any basis for this? Which scriptures support this idea? Did you make it up yourself? The monk kept clinging to the National Master. The National Master replied, 'Of course, this information is absent from the scriptures, and a gentleman should avoid discussing it.

Haven't you seen the Huayan Sūtra, which states, 'The world says, sentient beings say, all three times'? The Imperial Master then affirmed, "Of course you are right." If the inanimate's teachings are baseless and unscriptural, they're meaningless and ungentlemanly.

He then cited the scriptures, such as the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, which says, 'The world of the inanimate is teaching, sentient beings are teaching, and all of the three times are teaching.' This means that all dust particles and all lands are teaching the Dharma, and all sentient beings encompass everything. Whether it is the world of sentient beings or the world of inanimate beings, all are teaching the Dharma. Past, present, and future, all are teaching the Dharma!" This was the teaching of the Imperial Master Zhong of Nanyang to the monk. Chan Master Dongshan did not understand, so he told this story to the Patriarch Weishan.

After hearing this, Weishan said, "I have it here too, but I rarely meet such a person." This indicates that this type of the Dharma taught by the insentient is also present here. Only when one meets someone of equal aptitude can one truly connect with them, hence the saying, "Seldom meet such a person." Dongshan Liangjie sincerely requested clarification, saying, "I do not understand. Master, please enlighten me." Weishan raised his whisk and said, "Do you understand?"

This is the Dharma taught by the insentient. Do you understand? Inanimate teaching is silent, but it is a form of teaching. Just as flowers bloom and fall, this is the Dharma taught by the insentient. Flowers are inanimate. They bloom with enormous beauty, but soon they wither and fall. What Dharma is this? It is the Dharma of impermanence.

The river is “gurgling, gurgling.” Water flows without dwelling; it does not stop. It flows this way today and will flow the same way tomorrow, never ceasing. This flowing water teaches us that the appearance of all things changes, but their essence remains unchanged. Su Dongpo understood this principle when he said, “The passing of time is like this, yet it never departs.”

The flowing water is inanimate, yet it also teaches the Dharma. Therefore, the inanimate is constantly preaching. It preaches in ways you might not recognize. Therefore, when Weishan raised his whisk, he was asking who was raising it. One need not speak aloud to teach the Dharma; this very act of raising the whisk is itself teaching the Dharma.

Dongshan Liangjie still did not understand, so he said, “I do not understand.” He honestly admitted that he had not grasped it. In fact, this moment was the most intimate. For when you think you understand and have grasped it, conceptual views have entered, and you imagine there is a principle to obtain.

By contrast, when you do not understand, not a single thought arises. Immediately turn the light inward: what is this? Right then, you see your true nature. Unfortunately, Dongshan kept thinking there was some principle to grasp; he misunderstood and missed the opportunity. He then said, “Please explain, Master.” Weishan answered, “This mouth born of my parents can never explain it to you.”

This fleshly mouth born of parents can never explain it to you. Why? However much one says, words can never reach it. Language cannot express it, and thought cannot encompass it: “The path of words is cut off; the workings of mind cease.” To speak of it misses it; to claim conceptual knowledge of it is already mistaken.

Weishan suggests to Dongshan that true communication lies in non-speech, and genuine perception exists in non-hearing; this is the essence of the inanimate. Unfortunately, Dongshan remained oblivious and uncomprehending. People often cling to the six realms of the senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and dharma—relative to their experiences of perception. This attachment to what can be seen and heard makes the absence of sight and hearing seem impossible.

Nevertheless, do they not realize that the true nature of seeing and hearing—the perception of the unseen and unheard—is uninterrupted, devoid of continuity, and unchanging? Thus, Buddha-nature is also referred to as “suchness.” This illustrates how deeply entrenched people’s habits of delusion and attachment truly are.

Chan Master Weishan’s statement, “ The mouth given by my parents will never speak for you,” conveys a more profound meaning: each individual’s practice is personal, and one must realize their Buddha-nature. An ancient sage remarked, “ Knowledge gained through the senses is not a treasure kept within.” The act of

hearing through the ears serves as a door, as all six sense organs are oriented outward. The principles absorbed through hearing are not the true treasures found within oneself. Genuine understanding comes only through personal realization. Requesting me to explain these concepts to you is futile and may lead to future resentment.

This brings to mind Patriarch Xiangyan, who encountered a similar issue. Both Patriarch Xiangyan and Patriarch Weishan were disciples of Patriarch Baizhang.

Patriarch Xiangyan was deeply versed in the Buddhist scriptures. When someone asked him about the Dharma, he would often answer ten questions for one, thinking himself remarkable. He boasted, “My wisdom is as vast as the ocean!” However, during Baizhang’s lifetime, he failed to achieve enlightenment through Chan. After Baizhang’s passing, he had no choice but to seek Chan with his senior brother Weishan.

Weishan said to him, “Fellow disciple, I hear that when you were with our late master Baizhang, you could give ten answers to one question, and a hundred answers to ten.” He hastily replied, “I would not dare make such a claim.” Weishan said, “That is merely your cleverness, intellectual understanding, and conceptual thinking—the very root of birth and death. I have a question for you now; let me hear your answer.”

He asked casually, “What question?” But inwardly he thought, “I can answer any question. Humph!” Weishan replied, “I won’t ask you anything else. I will only ask you: what was your true nature before your parents gave birth to you? Please answer it in one sentence.” Upon hearing this, Master Xiangyan was completely bewildered.

He returned to his room and read through all the scriptures and treatises he had read, searching for a sentence to respond to. He found nothing. He sighed, “Painting cakes cannot satisfy hunger.” He repeatedly begged Weishan to reveal the answer. Weishan said, “If I tell you, you’ll curse me later. What I say is my realization; it’s none of your business.

You’d better go and contemplate it on your own!” Then Xiangyan burned all the books he had read, said goodbye to Weishan, and went to contemplate it on his own. He contemplated in the morning and in the evening, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down.

One day, while weeding in the field, he struck a stone with his hoe. He picked it up and threw it casually. It hit bamboo. With a “pop,” he suddenly woke up and revealed his true nature. He returned, bathed, burned incense, and paid homage to his senior

brother Weishan from afar, praising him, “Master, your kindness is beyond that of a parent. If you had explained it to me then, how could this be?”

Therefore, one must put in the effort himself. Therefore, Master Weishan said to Master Dongshan, “The mouth given by my parents will never speak for you. It’s useless to tell you. You must contemplate for yourself!” Master Dongshan Liangjie, unable to achieve enlightenment, felt his connection was lacking, so he asked, “Are there any other people who share my aspirations for the Way?” Weishan then instructed him to visit Master Yunyan.

Dongshan bid farewell to Weishan and proceeded directly to Yunyan. He recounted the story of the insentient preaching and then posed the question to Master Yunyan, “When the insentient preaches, who can hear it?” Master Yunyan responded, “The insentient can hear it.” Nanyang Zhongguo Master asserted that “all saints can hear,” while Chan Master Yunyan maintained that the insentient possess the ability to hear. In truth, a pure and empty mind embodies the essence of a saint.

Saints and ordinary people do not truly exist; nothing exists at all. Each being manifests a body of wondrous form, and a broad and long tongue proclaims the Dharma. Blazing and limitless, the insentient preach the Dharma in this manner. Therefore, how can we interpret “the insentient hear”? The phrase suggests that when one has entirely eradicated all attachments and is no longer constrained by sounds, colors, or worldly objects, one can then hear the Dharma conveyed by the insentient and come to realize their true nature.

The passage discusses two undesirable aspects of human nature: emotion and desire. If we can eliminate false emotions and love, then all will be well. Why is this the case? Emotion stems from love, and love is likened to water. By its very nature, water flows downwards and cannot ascend to the heavens; thus, it must be eliminated.

For instance, when we encounter something we enjoy eating, we tend to salivate. If a loved one is departing or traveling a long distance, tears may flow uncontrollably. The intensity of this emotion increases when a loved one passes away. This discussion specifically addresses the tears shed from sadness, while romantic love between individuals is not the focus here. All water is moist and naturally flows downwards.

Consequently, the term “emotion” in the context of love signifies sinking. If we aspire to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, we must ascend; sinking is futile. Therefore, we must wholly sever our attachment to love. Detachment from love is necessary for rebirth in the Western Pure Land; love becomes a detrimental force if we do not detach. Engaging in thoughtful reflection is preferable.

Thought is somewhat better. But this does not mean indulging in random thoughts; such thoughts still belong to emotional attachment. Random thoughts arise because of our emotions. For example, if we love someone, we may feel compelled to do whatever it takes to be with them. If that person is already in a relationship, we look for a way to get their partner out of the way and make that person our own.

Numerous plays and novels reflect this pattern; without such conflict, they would not exist as stories. Such behavior generates karma, which will inevitably have consequences. Random thoughts, indeed, are manifestations of love, and as such, they are unacceptable.

What is this thought? It means inwardly contemplating a method of practice—contemplating how one might transcend the realm of sentient beings to realize one's true nature, or perhaps envisioning the Western Pure Land with our minds oriented toward the West, diligently reciting the Buddha's name. This approach is preferable. Nevertheless, ultimately, both thought and emotion are fundamentally unacceptable.

Without emotion, how can there be thought? Conversely, without thought, how can there be emotion? Thus, emotion and thought are inseparable. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra elucidates that if we genuinely engage in secret visualization, the seven awarenesses may detach from our physical form or transform into imagined objects. This phenomenon is referred to as pure thought and flight, yet it is not entirely pure. When thought is truly pure, it ceases to exist.

If there is still a Buddha to recollect, purity is not yet complete. When purity is complete, nothing remains: this is the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. Yet in reciting the Buddha's name and seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land, we need not set our goal so high. Rebirth in the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages is enough.

Thus, when Buddha-recitation severs emotional attachment, "pure thought brings flight," and rebirth in the Western Pure Land is not difficult. In practice, think single-mindedly of the goodness of the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, Amitābha Buddha's luminosity, and how he receives and guides us. At the time of death and ascent, the sacred realm of the West naturally appears. Seeing Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, and the other bodhisattvas come to receive us, we ascend and are reborn in the West.

Pure thought alone facilitates flight; this is the manifestation of the sacred realm when the pure karma of reciting the Buddha's name matures alongside the merits of good roots. Currently, we speak primarily of the Pure Land in the West, yet the Śūraṅgama Sūtra also references ten Pure Lands, wherein rebirth is contingent upon circumstance, not solely within the Western Pure Land. The text indicates that

to be reborn in the Pure Land, one must entirely sever all attachments and delusions.

Accomplished practitioners are free of emotionally attached views; such attachment will not do. What is a bodhisattva? The Chinese pusa ( ) abbreviates the transcription putisaduo ( ) of Sanskrit bodhisattva, translated into Chinese as "an awakened sentient being." This means first awakening through all one's own emotionally attached views, not clinging to sounds, forms, or sense objects, and awakening to one's own nature. Only then can one help others awaken from deluded dreams, sweep away deluded feelings, and leave the sea of suffering together. Thus Chan Master Yunyan said, "The insentient can hear."

Dongshan pressed him, "Have you heard, Master?" Dongshan remained completely bewildered. Yunyan replied, "If I hear, you wouldn't have heard my teachings." His response was exactly the same as Master Zhong's. If I could hear, I wouldn't be teaching you.

Why? First, if I hear, I'm equal to all the saints. The saints' reward body and transformation body are not real, nor are they the ones who teach. The saints' true Dharma bodies are beyond speaking and hearing. If I hear, I'm enlightened, just like the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Neither the ordinary nor the saints can attain it. Both the ordinary and the saints are undisturbed. Everything is non-existent. How can you still listen to my teachings? Note! Nothingness is distinct from annihilation.

It's existence without dwelling, speaking without speaking. It's a flexible approach to expression. All actions are illusory. There is no Buddha. Even the word "Buddha" is a convenient, false name! If there were still Buddhas striving for enlightenment, then he wouldn't be the Buddha! Therefore, we shouldn't dwell on appearances. True enlightenment is nothing whatsoever.

Secondly, if I hear something, I feel like an inanimate being. Inanimate beings speak truly by being silent. So how can you listen to my Dharma today? Furthermore, if I hear anything, I become attached to sounds and distractions, focusing on external things. Without eliminating the view of the Dharma, how can I be a teacher? Therefore, I do not hear. Only to hear is to truly hear! This is to say, "without words," there is nothing to say.

You must understand the meaning beyond the words! You only understand the Dharma as something that can be spoken, the Dharma that can be spoken. The words you hear me say now are all spoken and unreal.

I am saying these phrases to you so that you can grasp the meaning beyond the words, understand the meaning beyond the words, and see the true speaking without speech and the true hearing without hearing. However, Dongshan still did

not understand and asked again, “Why can’t I hear?” He asked Yunyan, “I should hear the inanimate Dharma, so why can’t I hear it?”

He is still clinging to the world of sounds, sights, and dust. What’s the point of pursuing this? Why not turn your attention to hearing your own nature? It is shining right in your face! This condition refers to a natural form of hearing, one that occurs without conscious effort! The world is so clueless, so pitiful! Currently, Yunyan, like Weishan, raised his whisk.

If Dongshan had seized this opportunity and asked himself, “Who is seeing the whisk raised?” He would have immediately grasped the essence of the experience and achieved enlightenment. But unfortunately, he missed it again! Yunyan asked, “Do you still hear it?” Although the raised whisk made no sound, no words, it was a profound sound, truly and distinctly piercing, like thunder. Why? Because the soundless sound is the greatest sound; this is called the profound sound without sound.

We humans often cling to hearing, seeking to understand the world based on what is audible. However, if you truly wish to perceive the nature of the mind, you cannot hold onto it. Sound and silence are merely the arising and ceasing of sound, while our innate capacity for hearing radiates constantly before us, without interruption or continuity.

An ancient sage remarked, “After a storm, the peach blossoms on both banks are scattered everywhere; where can a horse’s hooves avoid the fallen petals?”

Picture a path lined with peach trees. Following a heavy storm, this path becomes covered with peach petals. As a horse traverses this path, how can its hooves avoid the scattered petals? This situation illustrates that Buddha-nature is always at work, omnipresent and omnipotent. How can one evade it? Therefore, do not differentiate between form and emptiness, or sound and silence.

When we cannot see light, we perceive darkness; perceiving darkness is still a form of seeing. When we cannot hear sound, we encounter silence; hearing silence is still a form of hearing. Does this phenomenon show that seeing and hearing are eternal?

Regrettably, Dongshan replied, “I don’t hear.” His fixation on sound led him to overlook it. It is akin to trying to flirt with a blind man; he missed what was right before him. What a pity! Even so, one might argue that it was fortunate he did not hear. Had he heard, he would have become fixated on appearances. Not hearing is true hearing.

In fact, true hearing occurs when one does not hear. Yunyan stated, “You don’t even hear me speaking the Dharma, so how can you hear an the insentient speaking the

Dharma?" I address you now, raising my whisk. Although there is no sound, there is still movement. If you cannot perceive or grasp the essence of speaking and movement beyond mere words or actions, how much more profound is the true essence of speaking and movement that transcends these forms? The world is so misguided, fixated on the sights and sounds of hearing and seeing, never once pausing to comprehend the true nature of seeing, hearing, speaking, and moving.

This nature is the original Buddha! They mistakenly believe that a lack of sound means one cannot hear and a lack of light, shadows, or forms means one cannot see. Do they not realize that the nature of seeing and hearing constantly shines before us, unobstructed and uninterrupted? Even in the absence of sound or hearing, and without form or sight, you can still see and hear. For if you hear the soundless, you still hear, and if you see the formless, you still see. How can one claim that there is no sight or hearing?

Dongshan then asked, "What scriptures should be used to teach the insentient to preach the Dharma?" This inquiry was similar to the monk's question to the Imperial Master in the previous case. Chan Master Yunyan replied, "Haven't you seen the Amitābha Sūtra say that waterfowl and trees all chant the Buddha's name and the Dharma?"

Currently, Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie suddenly experienced a moment of enlightenment. He had finally transcended sound and reached the state of silence. He had finally grasped the concept and realized its significance. He blurted out a verse: "How marvelous, how marvelous! The insentient' preaching is inconceivable. If you listen with your ears, you will never understand. Only by hearing with your eyes can you understand." How marvelous, how marvelous!

That the insentient can preach the Dharma is truly indescribable, incredible, and beyond imagination! Can the insentient preach the Dharma? Yes! If you listen with your ears, you cannot understand, because the insentient' preaching is soundless. Only by listening with your eyes can you grasp its profound mystery.

The eyes cannot hear sound, yet soundlessness is precisely wondrous sound. We can thus see that Chan Master Dongshan understood sound, and from sound he understood silence, but he had not yet understood that silence is sound and sound is silence, and he had not yet reached the ultimate truth.

There are many other cases of enlightenment through sound. Here's another example: In the past, Chan Master Yuanwuqin served as an attendant to Chan Master Wuzu Yan, accompanying him in his Chan studies.

One day, a scholar decided to visit the Fifth Patriarch Yan. The Fifth Patriarch Yan said to the visitor, "As for questions about self-nature and the dharmakāya, did you

ever read ‘Xiao Yan’ (Poetry of Little Love) in your youth? There are two lines in the poem that are very similar to this: ‘Calling Xiaoyu frequently is for no reason, as long as my lover recognizes my voice.’” The meaning is, she kept calling out, “Xiaoyu!

Xiaoyu!” Xiaoyu was a maid. Why was the young lady calling her? Nothing. So why did she call out? She wanted her lover to hear the calls and know she was there. She was intentionally sending a message to him, because he would recognize her voice and, upon hearing the call, would know she was there. This text is a poem used to explain Chan.

Using this poem, we can ask the following question: Who is making these calls? And who hears them? Isn’t all this the function of self-nature? Isn’t it all a manifestation of the true nature? The Fifth Patriarch, Chan Master Yan, quoted this erotic poem, which holds profound meaning.

Originally, all forms and sounds are meaningless, empty illusions, and unattainable, echoing the first line, “Originally, there is nothing.” However, everything is the function of self-nature, the manifestation of the true nature, echoing the second line, “Recognize the sound.” This poem aims to inspire us all to recognize our true nature.

Yuan Wuqin, who heard this nearby, was instantly enlightened. A rooster loudly crowed from the fence as he left the abbot’s room. Upon hearing this, Yuan Wuqin experienced a sudden enlightenment. He suddenly realized, recalling the “sound” in the words of the Fifth Patriarch Yan, “As long as the donor recognizes the sound.” Isn’t this sound? The sound is the manifestation of self-nature. All shadows are inseparable from the mirror; without the mirror, how can there be a shadow? Everything is the function of the true nature, the manifestation of the true nature.

Based on the explanations of several koans, we should not confuse hearing sound with the eyes with possessing an extraordinary faculty. Many of us cultivators simply crave spiritual powers, often mistakenly believing that the ears can see words, the eyes can hear sounds, and that only by using the six senses together to develop spiritual powers can we hear the teachings of the inanimate.

They do not realize that the insentient teaches without speaking. It is not some subtle sound that can be heard only when you stop listening with the ears and looking with the eyes.

Hearing sound with the eyes is not an extraordinary power. Chan Master Dongshan’s words “Only when you hear sound with the eyes will you know” tell us not to abide in the ear faculty. Rather, where no sound is heard, where deluded thoughts do not arise, and where a scene stirs a response, turn the light inward and

recognize inwardly this numinous true mind in which not a single thought arises yet awareness remains perfectly clear.

By recognizing our true nature and understanding that everything is the function and manifestation of the true mind, we can understand that “the inanimate is the sentient, and the sentient is the inanimate.”

Mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, stars, walls, and rubble are all ours! Why? Aren’t mountains, rivers, and the earth situated within the void? Can they transcend the void? No. Our true mind is like the void; as vast as the void, so is our true mind.

Our true mind pervades the void and the entire Dharma Realm. The ten Dharma Realms are within my mind, and everything in the void is within my mind. Therefore, the mountains, rivers, and the earth are no longer outside my mind. The Zuo Zhuan states, “All under heaven is the king’s land; all the people on the earth’s shores are his subjects.”

I am a Buddha, and they are also Buddhas—all are Buddhas! Therefore, “the inanimate is the sentient, and the sentient is the inanimate”! Furthermore, the inanimate are earth, water, fire, and wind! For example, the earth is composed of the four elements. The earth rotates on its axis and revolves in its orbit; this movement is called wind. The earth has a crust, which is solid and represents the earth element. There is water both on the surface and beneath the earth, representing the water element. The core of the earth is a fiery, molten-like substance, with volcanic eruptions frequently occurring on the surface, representing the fire element.

Earth, water, fire, and wind are all present; the earth is composed of these four great elements. Zhong ( ) denotes that which gives rise to things, so the four great elements can give rise to all things. Our Buddha-nature contains seven great elements—earth, water, fire, wind, space, sense faculties, and consciousness—hence the term “seven great elements.”

All things in the world arise from these seven great elements, and “sentient and insentient beings alike possess the same perfect seed wisdom.” Therefore, insentient beings are sentient beings, and sentient beings are insentient beings. Regardless of whether they are sentient or insentient, they are all ourselves. Since we are all ourselves, what distinction remains between sentient and insentient beings? Understanding this principle will reveal that a table is also a Buddha, a chair is also a Buddha, a brick is also a Buddha, a tile is also a Buddha—everything is a Buddha. All sentient and insentient beings are Buddhas!

Through these koans we have discussed how the insentient is the sentient, and how “sentient and insentient alike perfect all-encompassing wisdom.” Yet many people

still do not fully understand. We therefore need to explain further why, and in what respects, the sentient and the insentient are the same. Let us summarize as follows:

Firstly, all insentient things are manifestations of the wondrous, luminous true mind. The true mind, identified as the Buddha's mind, implies that the inanimate can also be viewed as animate. Contrary to our typical understanding, the true mind is not obscured by ignorance nor confined to the dimensions of a physical body.

Through dedicated practice aimed at revealing this mind, one discovers its pervasive nature throughout the entire universe and the Dharma Realm. Just as the universe is vast, so too is the true mind. Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun stated, "The true mind is like an ancient mirror. As vast and wide as the universe, so is the ancient mirror."

Why compare it to an ancient mirror? "Ancient" means it did not first appear in this lifetime: our true mind has existed since beginningless time. Why a mirror? Because a mirror reflects all things and all appearances can manifest within it. Our true mind is likewise: it brightly illumines the great universe and pervades worlds as countless as sands, without obstruction.

"Worlds as countless as sands" means limitless worlds, as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges. There are a great many worlds in space. Science has now proved that extraterrestrial beings exist, and there is more than one star like our sun. The further science advances, the more it proves the Buddha's words true and unfailing.

Our true mind is like space: all worlds are within our mind. If the worlds are within our mind, are insentient things not within it too? A house we build is insentient. It stands on the earth, and the earth is in space. Is the house not therefore in space? Thus all insentient things are within my mind! Because they are within our mind, we say that our numinous true mind fully contains all things.

All things are within my true mind, and the true mind is the Buddha-mind. If all things are not Buddha, what are they? Thus there is no difference between sentient and insentient. Why must we understand this? Because understanding the insentient as the sentient enlarges our mind-capacity to embrace all things, so that we no longer cling to appearances or grasp at them. Practice then progresses more easily. We must therefore clearly and correctly understand that the insentient is the sentient. This is the first point.

Second, all insentient things are composed of the four great elements, which are the elemental seeds of the true mind. The earth, for example, is insentient and consists of earth, water, fire, and wind. A great tree is likewise composed of these four and is insentient; neither has emotional attachment.

Is the earth's rotation and revolution not the wind element? Is the hardness of its crust not the earth element? Are oceans above ground and groundwater below not the water element? There is fire within the earth, released when volcanoes erupt—is this not the fire element? Thus all is earth, water, fire, and wind.

A tree is the same. Is its constant swaying not the wind element? Its trunk is the earth element. Strip off the bark and water comes out: the water element. The tree contains the nature of fire and can burn: is this not the fire element? Thus it is composed of the four great elements. Earth, water, fire, and wind are basic elements of our Buddha-nature, the four great elements.

These qualities act as seeds that give rise to various forms, such as rice seeds and wheat seeds. Planting a rice seed yields rice, while planting a wheat seed produces wheat. Thus, seeds symbolize the potential to create and grow. Consequently, our Buddha-nature is omnipotent. Everything is created by it, everything is invented by it, and everything is manifested by it. Therefore, everything embodies our Buddha-nature! Don't perceive them as external entities. They are all part of ourselves!

Third point: Who discovered insentient things? Who created them? Without our Buddha-nature, they cannot be discovered. How can we know a flower exists if we don't look at the tree? So who sees the flower? Is it the eyes? The eyes do not see the flower.

Modern scientists understand that seeing is not the function of the eyes but of the brain. If the brain isn't functioning, the eyes can't function, and we can't see. However, scientists only know that the brain enables the six senses to function but fail to understand that the brain itself cannot function.

Brain nerves are like electrical networks; to function, they need energy (electricity). Without this energy (electricity), the brain has no power and cannot function. Just like a light bulb, the brain won't function without electricity.

What is energy? Energy is our Buddha-nature. Without Buddha-nature, the brain, even though it exists, cannot function. Therefore, every word, action, and movement we make are the wonderful manifestations of Buddha-nature. Without Buddha-nature, we cannot function. Therefore, our ability to see insentient things is a manifestation of Buddha-nature, and insentient things are also the result of Buddha-nature.

Why? For example, let's say we think, "How do I plant this flower? How do I cultivate it?" So we study flower-growing techniques and carefully nurture it, and the flower blooms abundantly. Isn't this the function of our Buddha-nature? If a person's Buddha-nature were gone, their body would be like stone. Would their brain still

function? Would their hands and feet still move? Would they still be able to cultivate flowers? Who built the house? It was built by humans.

If engineers, craftsmen, and masons were separated from their Buddha-nature, would their brains still function, and would their hands and feet still move, designing and constructing the house? Therefore, all insentient things are manifestations of our Buddha-nature, created by it. Therefore, without Buddha-nature, there would be no insentient things. Without Buddha-nature, would insentient things still exist? Absolutely not.

Therefore, insentient things are sentient beings, which also have Buddha-nature. Inanimate objects can be compared to reflections in a mirror, while the mirror itself symbolizes our true Buddha-nature. Our true Buddha-nature is the great perfect mirror wisdom, which shines brightly in all directions without obstruction, revealing and seeing everything in the ten directions.

A mirror reflecting objects is merely a metaphor, and it does not adequately describe the great perfect mirror wisdom. Seeing these things before us, or light appearing before our eyes, is this the great perfect mirror wisdom? No, not at all. This is not the case at all! A physical mirror reflects an image, while the mind's mirror reflects all appearances. A reflection cannot be separated from the mirror. Can a reflection be separated from the mirror? Without the mirror, the shadow disappears.

A shadow cannot be separated from the mirror, and a form cannot be separated from the mind. Without the mind, the form has nowhere to manifest. Without a shadow, there is no mirror. Similarly, without form, the true mind cannot manifest. The true mind has no visible form; it must be revealed by phenomena. Therefore, the true mind can create all things, and in return, all things reveal the true mind. Mind and form are so subtle. Therefore, mind is form, form is mind, shadow is mirror, and mirror is shadow. Thus, the inanimate is sentient. This is the third point.

Fourth point: Insentient beings inherently possess Buddha-nature. Due to ignorance and a lack of awareness, we mistakenly identify a small portion of the four elements as our body, discarding the vast majority and believing them to be external. This leads to the delusion of distinguishing between sentient and insentient beings.

As discussed in the examples above, all insentient beings are originally manifestations of Buddha-nature. It is simply due to ignorance that sentient beings unconsciously regard a small portion of the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind) as their physical bodies while discarding over 90 percent and believing it to be external.

This creates a distinction between sentient and insentient beings. In reality, everything is part of ourselves, and this misunderstanding arises from ignorance. Therefore, if we diligently practice and break through this ignorance, we can realize that mountains, rivers, earth, plants, and forests all are ours.

When I see myself as the master, you and everything around me become mere shadows of my mind; conversely, when you see yourself as the master, everything else is merely a reflection of your mind. There is a saying: each sentient being possesses the entire Dharma Realm. But what is the entire Dharma Realm? It is the One True Dharma Realm, which is also the true mind. When everything is complete, without a single missing element, it is referred to as the whole. What constitutes the whole?

All sentient beings possess it, and it is perfectly acceptable for each individual to do so. You are yourself, I am myself, he is himself, Zhang San is Zhang San, and Li Si is Li Si. What do we possess? We possess the whole Dharma Realm, meaning that everyone possesses the true mind, with not a single element missing.

For instance, when you see me in your mirror and I see you in mine, we each absorb the other without obstruction. Or consider a room filled with multiple lights, where the light from each source blends with that of the others, each absorbing the other without rejection. From here, we can see that sentient beings and insentient things are ultimately one, but due to our ignorance and lack of awareness, we mistakenly differentiate between them. Once ignorance is transcended, we can truly appreciate the wondrous power of the true mind and no longer perceive the inanimate as external.

Fifth, insentient things include earth, wood, metal, and stone. If we practice poorly and crush deluded thoughts into lifelessness, we become insentient, like earth, wood, metal, and stone. These belong to one of the twelve classes of living beings (the Diamond Sūtra speaks of ten classes, whereas the Śūraṅgama Sūtra speaks of twelve).

Some assert that the six realms of saṃsāra consist solely of sentient beings and have no relation to insentient things. In reality, if a person practices poorly or engages in unorthodox methods, suppressing thoughts can lead to their transformation into inanimate forms like earth, wood, metal, and stone. Therefore, should we consider sentient beings as potentially inanimate?

Once we understand that the mountains, rivers, great earth, men and women, young and old, sentient and insentient, all manifest our Buddha-nature and are ourselves, practice should be empty, alert, and non-abiding, neither suppressing nor indulging. Not suppressing means not forcing deluded thoughts into immobility until

we become like earth, wood, metal, or stone. Not indulging means not letting them arise unchecked and carry us through birth and death.

Neither suppress deluded thoughts nor follow them. Let them come; I pay them no heed. Deluded thoughts are not absent: they are there. Do you expect thoughts formed over countless lifetimes and eons to vanish as soon as you begin practice? That is far from easy; it cannot be done. Thus in practice we first end gross deluded thoughts—those that arise when the mind responds to circumstances.

How do we eliminate gross delusion? We must recognize that external circumstances are unattainable; they are merely reflections of our true nature. Our true mind acts as a mirror, while everything else is just a shadow. We should focus on the mirror, not the shadow. By releasing our attachment to the shadow, our true mind remains still, preventing the emergence of false thoughts and bringing an end to gross delusion. If we do not cease gross delusion, our meditation will be ineffective.

For example, how can you sit still in meditation if you are preoccupied with thoughts of your child? How can you concentrate if your mind dwells on money, shopping, finding bargains, or judging others? You will not be able to meditate effectively.

Gross delusion must be eliminated. Ignore the shadows in your mind; you can't grasp the shadow in the mirror. Some might argue, "I can't grasp the shadow in the mirror, but I can grasp the things that manifest. Look, I've grasped this pen."

Alas! You're dreaming; that's merely a dream! In dreams, you may believe you grasp things—you enjoy delicious food, chat happily with delightful friends, and experience panic and fear upon encountering your enemies. But when you wake up, nothing remains. We are currently in a dream. Don't cling to appearances; you can't grasp anything.

When a single breath fails to return, nothing can be taken along. Instead of delaying and having to relinquish later, why not release now and save yourself some effort? To awaken (to enlightenment), you must practice.

Those who recite the Buddha's name or mantras must focus wholeheartedly, severing deluded thoughts until body, mind, and world all dissolve into emptiness and only the clear true mind is manifest. Then, as when awakening from a dream, everything seen and gained in the dream is empty and gone. What is left to grasp? Present appearances are therefore only reflections; they must not be sought.

Thus it is necessary to explain this clearly now, so that you understand why the sentient is the insentient. Stop deluded discrimination; let go, let go. The insentient is the sentient, and the sentient is the insentient: what appearance is left to cling to?

If you truly let go completely, it becomes easy to enter samādhi when you sit to practice. Once coarse deluded thoughts have ceased, subtler ones may still intrude. Do not fear them or suppress them; simply pay them no attention. At the point where deluded thoughts cease, the true mind manifests. “Once arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent cessation manifests.” This is nirvāṇa.

Neither arising nor ceasing is nirvāṇa; continual arising and ceasing is the deluded mind. When all deluded thoughts and feelings have ceased, this Buddha-nature, neither arising nor ceasing, manifests.

Why can you not settle into seated practice? Examine yourself: where is the mind still clinging, and why does it cling there? Let go at once! Everything is a reflection in the mind. Why cling to it? It is unobtainable, illusory, and empty. Let it go! If you truly do so, whether reciting the Buddha’s name or holding a mantra, subject and object both fall away, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, and Buddha-nature naturally manifests in awakening.

Whether you see the nature or not, don’t ask others; experience it for yourself. The ultimate joy of enlightenment is like a mute’s dream; it cannot be expressed to others, yet it is understood within the heart.

I have consistently addressed the question of form and formlessness, striving to explain it clearly and thoroughly. My goal is to cultivate a correct understanding, which is the essence of Mahāmudrā, beginning with the principle of comprehension. Understanding is at the heart of Buddhism. With the correct understanding, one can recognize Buddha-nature, and only then can one begin to cultivate it. Without grasping Buddha’s nature, one is destined to practice it blindly. Therefore, Mahāmudrā does not provide a hand seal or mantra for us to cultivate. Instead, it starts with the principle of understanding, refining our comprehension and recognizing Buddha-nature.

In summary, I believe everyone understands why insentient things are not separate from the sentient and why all insentient things are regarded as Buddhas. This includes the idea that “sentient and inanimate beings share the same perfect wisdom.”

If you truly grasp this principle, you won’t feel shocked or confused when someone asks, “What is Buddha?” Simply mention one thing. Heaven and earth, the sun and moon, windows, blooming flowers, and shading willows—all of these insentient things are Buddhas! Focus on one at a time, and they all reveal profound truths. How simple!

The previous discussion focuses on the Dharma of inanimate beings. How do inanimate beings teach the Dharma? We have discussed a principle: Dharma that

can be expressed in words or heard in sound is not the true Dharma. The true Dharma is inexpressible. “It cannot be expressed in words, nor can it be measured by thought.” That is, it cannot be expressed in words or conceived in thought. Dharma that can be expressed in words is not the true Dharma.

Although we cannot hear the Dharma preached by the insentient, it is preaching the Dharma right now, because “the greatest sound is faint.” Teaching without speaking is true teaching; hearing without hearing is true hearing; hearing a sound is not the true Dharma. So it is said, “If you listen with the ears you will never understand; only when you hear sound with the eyes can you know it.”

You may wonder: if we cannot hear any sound, how can it be said that the insentient are preaching the Dharma? Because the truly wondrous, profound meaning cannot be expressed in words; it can only be grasped by the mind and known by the spirit.

If one abides in words, one will not reach the true meaning, hence “If you listen with the ears you will never understand”: do not abide in sound! The wondrous meaning cannot be heard; “only when you hear sound with the eyes can you know it.” Why? The Dharma preached by the insentient is a subtle, spiritual state in which the mind opens and understands, arising when a scene stirs feeling and the heart comprehends—hearing without hearing.

When practicing meditation to the point of no speech and no hearing, where no false thoughts arise, one can be moved by the scene and grasp its profound meaning. Dongshan posed the question, “Can you hear the Dharma of the inanimate?” to his two teachers. Both teachers gave the same answer: “If I hear, you wouldn’t be hearing my Dharma.”

This means that true hearing is nothing. Hearing would cause attachment to form; which disqualifies me from preaching and teaching you. This meaning was discussed last time, and we can expand on it.

The true dharmakāya of all Buddhas is without speech and hearing. The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not true Buddhas; they have speech and hearing. Therefore, “the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not true Buddhas, nor are they the ones who preach.” If they have speech and hearing, is it still acceptable to be attached to speech? As just mentioned, if I could hear, I would be one with all Buddhas; I would be all Buddhas. The true dharmakāya of all Buddhas is without speech, so I would not be able to preach here. If I could preach, I would be different from all Buddhas, and this is another meaning.

We ordinary people are constantly attached to appearances. Whatever our eyes see, whatever our ears hear, we use our perceptions to discern good from evil, beautiful from ugly. Those who have truly realized their true nature remain unattached, even

when surrounded by sights and sounds. If we dwell on sounds and colors, we become ordinary people.

Therefore, if I hear, I cannot teach you the Dharma. If I hear, I am attached to appearances. If I am attached to appearances, am I still qualified to teach you the Dharma? No. Below, I will summarize the implications of the patriarch's words:

First, if I hear, I become attached to the sounds, dwelling on them. The subject and the object are in opposition, and the view of the Dharma has not been eliminated. I am not a person of the Way and therefore unqualified to teach the Dharma.

Second, if I hear, I am like an insentient thing. Inanimate objects consider silence to be true speech, a speech beyond words. Therefore, you will not be able to hear my Dharma.

Third, if I hear, I am like all sages. However, the reward and emanation bodies of sages are not true, nor are they the ones preaching the Dharma. The true Dharma bodies of sages are without speech and hearing. My explanation to you now is merely a convenient guide.

3. The Five Lords and Ministers of the Caodong School

We teach these principles to help you understand that form and sound are unattainable. We must constantly purify and maintain our true minds. Without maintaining our true mind, we cannot attain enlightenment. To maintain our true mind, we must first acquire correct knowledge and understanding that allows us to see its true nature. Why is such an exercise necessary? We can verify this with Chan.

Some may ask, "The Ganges Mahāmudrā we teach is Tantric, so how can we verify it with the Chan cases in the Five Lamps Collection?" This is possible because the principles of Esoteric Buddhism are indistinguishable from those of Chan and Pure Land Teaching. Generally speaking, all Buddhist schools, while differing in name and form, share the same ultimate truth.

Therefore, Pure Land Teaching is Esoteric Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism is Chan, and Chan is Pure Land Teaching. They are all ways to reach enlightenment, as taught by the Buddha; the tools differ, but the result is the same.

The Ganges Mahāmudrā is the highest level of Tantric secret teachings, so closely related to Chan Buddhism that it must be verified with Chan principles. Of the five Chan schools, the Caodong School's teachings are most consistent with Esoteric Buddhism. The Caodong School teaches five levels of ruler and minister, five positions, allowing us to transcend ordinary human knowledge and understanding and awaken to the Buddha's knowledge and insight.

Achieving the Buddha's knowledge and insight is the stage of seeing the Way, which progresses to the stage of cultivating the Way. After cultivating the truth, practitioners reach the stage of realizing it, ultimately achieving Buddhahood. These five positions have three successive stages: seeing the Way, cultivating it, and realizing it. This procedure is similar to the teachings of Mahāmudrā, which begins with the stage of seeing the Way.

How does the Caodong school see the Way? It speaks of the central position and the partial position: the central position represents essence, emptiness, and principle; the partial position represents function, form, and phenomena.

The first position: "The Relative within the Absolute. Before the bright moon at midnight, do not be surprised when we meet without knowing each other, still vaguely remembering the old resentment." — This is the position of an ordinary person. An ordinary person is like the moonless night "before the bright moon at midnight," a pitch-black night.

Why? Because they do not know what Buddha-nature is, only recognizing external appearances veiled by ignorance, their minds are shrouded in darkness. "Do not be surprised when we meet without knowing each other." We are all constantly within Buddha-nature, constantly encountering it, yet we do not recognize it.

In our daily lives, how could we move without the Buddha-nature at work? For instance, when we rise in the morning, cleanse our face, brush our teeth, go shopping, commute to work, and perform our job—who is performing these actions? Who is this? We might as well ask ourselves the same question as the Chan Buddhist question, "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?"

If it is not our true nature, then whose is it? If it is our true nature, why do we not recognize each other when we meet? Do not complain that our true nature is difficult to recognize; it is actually due to our attachment to appearances, ignorance, and lack of wisdom! Ignorance is the darkness of night. In the endless darkness, how can we truly recognize each other? "Still vaguely remembering the old resentment." "Vaguely" means not obvious.

Our usual habits of attachment subtly operate by focusing solely on external greed, pursuit, and attachment, while we remain unwilling to introspect and recognize who is truly moving and at work. If we can introspect and reflect, "Who is this?" Then we will recognize it.

Therefore, being in the middle of the primary position means that we are originally in the primary position of the principle and Buddha-nature, but unconsciously, we fall into a biased position, and from this biased position, we become attached to phenomena. The right position is the principle; the biased position is the form. The

right position is emptiness; the biased position is existence. Emptiness and existence, principle and matter, and substance and form are all relative. It is the primary position within the biased position, and we become attached to it. The five major schools of Chan Buddhism have different methods of engaging people. The principles taught by the Caodong school are easier to understand. This viewpoint is the first position—the ordinary person position, which does not recognize Buddha-nature.

The second position is “The Absolute within the Relative: The old woman gazed into the mirror as dawn broke; all she saw was her reflection. Do not let the reflection confuse you.” — This moment is the stage where one begins to perceive the truth. This state is the stage of manifesting true nature in daily life. That is, even when dressing and eating, one constantly realizes that this is one’s Buddha-nature at work. This step is seeing the truth, the stage of seeing the truth. It used to be completely dark, but now it is illuminated with light.

“As dawn breaks” means dawn and daybreak are approaching, and sunlight is appearing. “Old woman” is a wonderful statement. What does “old woman” mean? “Old woman” refers to white hair. As daybreak approaches, the sky turns white. “Gazed into the mirror” means looking in a mirror. A mirror is bright, a metaphor for light.

The old woman gazed into the mirror as dawn broke, daybreak broke, and light appeared. A diligent practitioner uses this morning light and sees their true nature. Therefore, it is said, “The old woman gazed into the mirror as dawn broke.” “Clearly, there is no other truth before her face.”

The reflection in the mirror is now visible. The reflection in the mirror is now clear, distinct, and face-to-face. You and your reflection in a mirror are face-to-face. The mirror’s reflection is you, and you are the mirror. Besides this shadow, is there anything else real? Beyond this shadow, there is nothing else. Therefore, it is said, “Clearly, there is no truth before your eyes.”

For example, Lingyun, opening the door and seeing a field of blooming peach blossoms, suddenly realized, “Oh! It’s not my nature that’s manifesting this appearance, so who is it? Without my nature, how could I see these peach blossoms? Conversely, if there were no peach blossoms or this shadow, how could my nature be reflected? Thus, with a single glance, he realized that there was no truth before his eyes; he had seen his true nature! Master Dongshan experienced enlightenment when he saw his reflection while crossing a river.

At that time, he asked about the doctrine of the insentient, and his master explained it to him. Although he had awakened, he didn’t fully understand it and still had some doubts.

One day, as he was crossing a river, he lowered his head to roll up his trousers and saw his reflection in the water. “Oh!” Suddenly, he experienced a realization and composed a verse: “Be careful not to seek outside of yourself!” If you seek outside of yourself, you will be “far away from yourself.” Now I walk alone, and I hear their voices everywhere. They are now me, and I am not them. Only by understanding them in this way can I comprehend the unchanging nature.”

What does this verse mean? “Beware of seeking in others.” When practicing Dharma and learning the Way, we should seek internally. Only by recognizing it within ourselves can we truly understand it. For example, those of us who chant the name of Amitābha Buddha pray to the Buddha of the Western Pure Land, “Come and pull me, come and pull me.”

This behavior of seeking help from others is misguided. Therefore, Master Lianchi said that chanting the Buddha’s name is “awakening the protagonist with each sound.”

Chanting the Buddha’s name awakens our protagonist. Don’t be comatose, don’t fall asleep, don’t be attached to appearances, be awake! All phenomena are reflections in our mind; don’t be attached to appearances! Our consciousness is the Buddha-nature; it is Amitābha Buddha! Seeking in others is seeking outside of ourselves.

Praying to Amitābha Buddha to pull you in is a mistake. Amitābha Buddha is compassionate and accepting, saving everyone. However, he does not pull you in; rather, he shines his light upon you, guiding you. Simply reach that light, and you will be done. Expecting Amitābha Buddha to pull you in will not work.

Therefore, Chan Master Yongming Shou said, “When a practitioner’s pure karma matures, their mind is pure, and they are in harmony with the Buddha, they will see the Buddha appear before them and lead them to rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Although the Buddha appears before them, he does not actually come or go. The moon, while present in numerous rivers and streams, is not a part of them. The mind is like water. If the mind is impure, it is like turbid water, without a reflection.

Therefore, for those whose minds are confused and disordered, even though the Buddha shines his light to lead them, it is like a blind person unable to see the sun.”

The Buddha is like the moon in the sky. Our mind reciting the Buddha’s name is like the water. If the water is pure, the moon’s reflection will appear in it, and the Buddha’s image will appear in your mind. If your mind reciting the Buddha’s name is impure, the moon will still shine upon you, but your mind is like turbid sewage, and the moon’s reflection will not appear. Amitābha Buddha will disappear.

Therefore, “be careful not to seek outside of yourself”! If you seek outside of yourself, you will be “far away from yourself.” Seeking beyond your mind will distance you significantly from the Buddha-nature.

The Buddha-nature is not elsewhere; it is shining right in front of you! Who is seeing things? Who is hearing sounds? Who is smelling perfumes and odors? Who is speaking? Who is moving? If this isn’t my Buddha-nature, what is it? Why are you seeking it in others? “I now walk alone.” Now, regardless of when or where I am, I neither cling to nor abandon external things. I am “alone”—absolutely, without duality or relativity.

The absolute true mind exists in a state of “aloneness,” being completely independent and devoid of any attachments or relative concepts. For example, Emperor Wu of Liang asked, “What is the first meaning of the Noble Truth?” Bodhidharma replied, “It is the vastness, without any saints.” Emperor Wu asked again, “Who is facing me?” Bodhidharma replied, “I don’t know.”

Why not? Relative things involve your knowledge of me and my knowledge of you; I am simply one person—the absolute true mind. It is absolute, so who knows who? The absolute true mind, whether it is known or not, is a multifaceted entity.

If we can do this, we will “encounter it everywhere.” This absolutely true mind will manifest everywhere and at all times, allowing us to continuously see the true nature of our being. “They are now me”—it is the shadow. Mountains, rivers, earth, sun, moon, stars, and so on—all things are my shadows, all my manifestations.

But, “I am not them.” My dharmakāya is formless. Although shadows are my manifestations, I am not the shadow. In other words, although all these forms are me, I am not them, because the dharmakāya is formless. Even if you remove all forms, since they are not me, it benefits me nothing.

Therefore, do not dwell on appearances. All forms are unattainable, so no dharma can exist. “Only by understanding them in this way can I comprehend the unchanging nature.” A cultivator should understand this way. Only then can the true mind be permanent, able to resonate with its unchanging nature, unaffected by any circumstances or objects.

My true mind is inseparable from everywhere, like a shadow following the body. Therefore, we should never look outside of ourselves. Chanting the Buddha’s name means chanting our mind. Chanting Amitābha Buddha awakens our mind, freeing us from attachment to appearances.”

The old woman gazed into the mirror as dawn broke; all she saw was her reflection. Do not let the reflection confuse you. “This is you! Without it, you can no longer see

your true nature; it's unseen! Therefore, we repeatedly teach you that this true mind and self-awareness is me. Without it, there is nothing.

If you think that something without the five spiritual powers—divine sight, divine hearing, knowledge of past lives, knowledge of others' minds, and teleportation—is not the true mind and awareness, then you are mistaken.

Although you have been taught and recognized this wonderful and luminous essence—the true mind and awareness—you still have many habits of delusion and attachment from countless lifetimes. If you haven't eliminated them, how can you suddenly develop these abilities? It's like a mirror covered in a thick layer of dust; how can it reflect objects? You must wipe it until it shines, and then it can reflect clearly.

But first, you must obtain the mirror. If you don't have the mirror, what's the point of wiping and polishing? Therefore, you must first be taught to recognize the wonderful and luminous essence, then diligently eliminate these habits and restore your original brightness. Then, you can harness various spiritual powers, follow the noble path, and acquire all spiritual powers.

Therefore, Chan Master Guifeng said, "Recognize the ice pond and make the water whole (complete delusion and become the truth); use the yang energy to melt it; realize the ordinary people and become the Buddha; and use the power of the Dharma to cultivate" (cultivation can only be done after enlightenment). When the ice melts, the water will flow smoothly, and the effect of irrigation and cleansing will be revealed; when delusion is eliminated, the mind will be clear (clear away delusion and remove impurities), and the function of radiant light will appear (illuminate all things, illuminate the universe). Spiritual powers and transformations in matters are not achieved in a day but are gradually discovered through cultivation."

The first step in studying Buddhism and practicing the Dharma is to understand our true nature. We must affirm that that which speaks and acts is our true mind, standing firm and without doubt. We should carefully protect, develop, and nurture this essence to attain the fruit of sagehood. The Mahāmudrā teaches that we must first acknowledge our Buddha-nature before we can begin our practice.

Without certainty about this, we have no way to begin, and our practice cannot succeed. As Patriarch Dongshan put it so well, "Plainly before your very face—there is no other reality." If we leave this reflection to look elsewhere, there is nothing to be found. Buddha-nature is our capacity to perceive: to know cold and warmth, cloudy and clear weather, fullness and hunger, pain and itching. You must safeguard it at every moment.

The final sentence, “Do not let the reflection confuse you,” means that you should stop being lost and stop chasing after form. Mistaking one’s head for a reflection is an example given by the Buddha in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra.

The Buddha tells of a man in Sravasti who performed the play Rādhātu. One day, he looked in a mirror and saw only a disguised face, his true self missing. Mistaking it for a demon, he was so frightened that he ran around outside, searching for his head. But his head was still on his shoulders; it hadn’t been lost.

This metaphor serves as a warning, cautioning us not to lose ourselves in appearances and mistake our reflection for our true selves. It’s like mistaking a shadow. You constantly misjudge a shadow, but that shadow is actually an illusion. Why mistake the false for the true? Women are most attached to their children, constantly worrying about them.

What about men? Young men love their girlfriends, while older men love their money. Confucius said it well: “In youth, when the qi and blood are not yet settled, one should be cautious about lust… When one grows old, when the qi and blood are weakened, one should be wary of greed for wealth, lest you ruin your lifelong reputation.” These are all manifestations of greed for shadows! Stop misjudging; let it go. “Do not let the reflection confuse you.” This means, amidst countless false appearances—deviant ones—recognize the true mind—the righteous one—and don’t be misled by shadows. This is the second position, which is slightly central—the position of seeing the truth.

The third position states, “Coming from within the Absolute: within nothingness lies a path out of the dust and mundane world. While one may avoid violating the taboos of the present emperor, it is still better than the previous dynasty’s tongue-chopping genius. “ This step represents the cultivation stage. We previously discussed the stage of seeing the truth. “Right” refers to the correct position, which embodies the essence of the principle. Acting from this essence, tempering oneself through action, and eliminating detrimental habits is the core focus.

“Within absence lies a path beyond the dust.” We say that all is absent and all is empty, but this absence and emptiness is not annihilationist emptiness or absolute nothingness. It is the essence of principle in which we attach to no appearance. If you can remain empty and unattached at every moment, following this path will take you beyond the three realms and out of saṃsāra.

In fact, the emptiness we maintain at every moment is not emptiness opposed to existence or annihilationist emptiness. Do not fear falling into emptiness. An ancient saying goes, “Empty, empty, empty—in emptiness accomplishment is found. Once the root is cultivated, why fear snow and wind?”

When the mind is truly pure and empty, Buddha-nature manifests, illuminating a path that enables us to transcend the dust and mundanity of the Three Realms.

We sentient beings are ensnared in the dust of desire, form, and formless realms, endlessly revolving through the six realms of reincarnation. If we consistently maintain our footing, clearly recognize our intrinsic nature, and protect it, then even when thoughts arise, we can awaken and eliminate them, leaving the Three Realms and the sea of suffering to achieve the Great Way.

For instance, when those of us who chant the Buddha's name experience distracting thoughts, we simply chant, "Amitābha Buddha." This practice severs those distractions, attachments, and troubles. When you're frustrated, chant "Amitābha Buddha" immediately. If that proves insufficient, recite it aloud, and the repetition will dispel your difficulties.

If you do not practice in this way, you will run after circumstances, with deluded thoughts flying endlessly. How could you realize the Way? First recognize your Original Face: the appearance of the formless, the all-capable essence that gives rise to wondrous functioning. Safeguard it at every moment and train yourself amid all favorable and adverse circumstances; only then can you attain liberation. This is the crucial point. Hence the saying, "Within nothingness is a path out of the dust."

"If you can avoid violating the present sovereign's taboo, you surpass even the brilliance of the man whose tongue was cut out in a former age." This puts it even better. What is a taboo? Naming requires avoiding certain names. For example, if the emperor's name contains zheng ( ), you may not use that character in your own name. You must observe the taboo and not share the emperor's name.

Similarly, your father's or grandfather's names contain the character " ," so you can't use it in your name. You must avoid taboos and refrain from having the same name as your elders. The phrase "avoid violating the taboos of the present emperor," referring to the current emperor, serves as a metaphor for our Buddha-nature, which emphasizes the importance of not violating it.

Take, for instance, my fist as an example. If you refer to it as a fist, you are offending its true nature. It's a fist, but if you don't call it a fist, you violate it. Offending it is wrong, and violating it is also wrong. To avoid offending, it means that even if you truly practice and recognize your Buddha-nature, you can't constantly say, "This is my Buddha-nature."

Nor will it do to abide in Buddha-nature. Even if practice reaches the point where the sense of being aware has fallen away, do not abide there. Thus it is said: "As long as there is still 'awareness' and 'illumination,' there is still birth and death, and no liberation. To abide in a state of sagehood is still conditioned and cannot be

ultimate." Ordinary beings, of course, lack awakened awareness and illumination; they spend their days in a daze, as if dreaming.

Lao Tzu once said, "The world is clear-headed; only I am dull." If everyone in the world is dull and drowsy, how can we claim that anyone is clear-headed? The so-called "clearheaded" refers to being clever and seeking fame and fortune, while the "dumbness" Lao Tzu refers to is the ultimate practice, where enormous wisdom appears foolish without any attachment.

Thus in practice we must recognize our original nature, yet not abide in it as though something had been attained. This is "not violating the present sovereign's taboo." The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, "At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it. Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing; in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality." Only at this point is practice ultimate.

Therefore, in the end, even Buddhahood cannot be attained. This unattainability means one has actually attained Buddhahood. This is because Buddhahood is also a provisional designation, and there is not a single trace of attainment. If you hold that there is a Buddha to be attained, you have not yet attained Buddhahood. As the master of Chan Master Dongshan said in the previous story, "If I hear the teachings of the inanimate, I will be equal to all saints."

Being equal to the saints means having a Buddha within me. Having a Buddha is no longer the true Buddha. Therefore, even if one's views are equal to those of the Buddha, there are still obstacles to Buddhahood. Therefore, only when one loses even the Buddha's knowledge and views, when everything is pure and clear, can one be truly pure. Therefore, it is said, "Avoid violating the taboos of the present emperor; it is still better than the previous dynasty's tongue-chopping genius."

There is an anecdote here: once upon a time, there was a man whose name I have forgotten. He was incredibly wise. When the emperor and a treacherous minister cut off his tongue, he used the blood from it to write. Our enlightenment is far superior to the tongue-chopping genius. The talents of tongue-chopping represent only worldly wisdom and eloquence, which are forms of lesser wisdom, whereas prajñā embodies immense wisdom. This course is about practicing cultivation—the third position.

The fourth position is "Arrival at the Integration": "When two blades cross, there is no need to evade them. An adept is like a lotus in fire, naturally possessed of an aspiration that soars to the heavens." Some say that the name should not be jian zhong zhi ( ), and that its appearance in Dongshan Liangjie's account is probably a misprint: it should be pian zhong zhi ( ). I think this explanation is correct.

“Arrival at the Integration” signifies the merging of principles and affairs. The third position, “Come from the Center,” emphasizes working from the correct principle. The fourth position should build on this idea, suggesting that in daily life, one can attain unimpeded control of both principle and affairs. Thus, “Mergence of Deviation and Center” is a more accurate description. It conveys that in undertaking tasks continuously, one remains in the proper position, achieving seamless control over both principles and affairs, unafraid of adversities and worries, and capable of utilizing them effectively. This phase also represents a stage of cultivation.

“When two blades clash, there’s no need to avoid them.” In battle, when swords and spears are flying, there’s no need to fear or hide. This phrase is a metaphor for not being afraid or troubled in the face of adversity. For example, if you have a disobedient son at home, you shouldn’t worry. Oh! Your goal is all unattainable.

Oh! None of this can be grasped, none of it can be grasped. If he is disobedient, so be it; you will just spend more money. Go ahead and spend it, because I owe you a debt, and repaying a debt is only natural. It makes no difference, and I am not troubled.

When two blades clash, there’s no need to avoid them.” When adversity strikes, can you avoid it? You can’t, so there’s no need to avoid them. Speaking of avoiding them, I recall a story: A disciple asked the Chan Master Dongshan, “When cold and heat arrive, how can we avoid them?” Dongshan replied, “Go to a place where there’s neither cold nor heat.”

The disciple asked again, “What is that place where there’s neither cold nor heat?” Dongshan responded, “In cold weather, you will succumb to the cold; in hot weather, you will perish from the heat.” What does this expression mean? It means to focus on the present condition, whether warm or cold. If you dwell on feelings of cold or heat, it can lead to discriminatory thoughts and cause afflictions to arise.

What should we do when faced with adversity? There are two lines of poetry that beautifully put it: “Blowing the cauldrons of boiling water and the charcoal in the furnace, I command them to calm down; trees of swords and mountains of knives, I will shout to destroy them.” Whether it is boiling water, charcoal in a furnace, swords, or a mountain of knives, my heart remains unafraid. With a single blow, I quench them; with a single roar, I destroy them. Adversity, however it may come, remains unmoved, and it quenches them.

Remember, it’s not about attempting to evade adversity or eradicating worries; it’s about relinquishing our hearts, accepting that nothing is attainable, and embracing fearlessness. If you intend to kill me, then proceed and meet the blade with my head, as if slicing through a gentle spring breeze; my heart remains steadfast and unmoved. I do not shy away from adversity, regardless of how it arrives, as

illustrated by the saying, “When two blades clash, there’s no need to avoid them.” My heart remains unwavering and unfazed, as in “I command them to calm down; I will shout to destroy them.”

“Arrival at the Integration” discusses the stage of cultivation. Cultivating the Way means constantly training ourselves in the face of adversity, remaining calm and undeterred, and being able to withstand the test. Only then can we truly achieve the fruit of practice. Thus, “A skilled practitioner is like a lotus in the fire, possessing a soaring aspiration.” A truly skilled practitioner is one who has mastered martial arts. They are not lotus flowers blooming in a pond, but lotus flowers blooming in the fire. Therefore, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao said that lay Buddhists are twenty times more powerful than monks.

Chan Master Dahui Zonggao, a remarkable Chan master, said, “The three great lay Buddhist masters, such as Yang Wengong, Li Wenhe, and Zhang Wujin, are able to strike through the enemy (delusion), and their strength is twenty times greater than that of a monk like me.” These three were lay Buddhists who had attained enlightenment at the time.

Why did Chan Master Dahui say this? This condition is due to our strong habits, which include attachments to the discriminating self and dharma, as well as an innate attachment to both. Even if we unlock our original nature and personally realize Buddha-nature, we still have these two innate attachments. The third verse in the Dhamma-nature Consciousness Verse states, “Even when the initial aspiration is aroused in the joyful state, the innate attachments remain entangled and dormant.”

Diligent training after enlightenment and eradicating innate attachments to craving through worldly matters are necessary to reach the ultimate state. A monk possesses only a bottle and a bowl as daily necessities, and he is free from many enemies who hinder his path. Focusing single-mindedly on this matter, a layperson, on the other hand, “sees nothing but the spirits that hinder the path wherever they open and close their eyes.”

“A monk ‘strikes in from outside,’ while a layperson ‘strikes out from inside.’” What are “inside” and “outside” here? What does “inside” mean, and what does “outside” mean? They refer to “worldly dust and dirt.” Worldly dust and dirt are comparable to “a great fire” because they represent the causes and conditions that hinder one’s spiritual path.

A monk, unencumbered by family and relatives, is like being outside a massive fire, like a white lotus in a pond. A layperson, immersed in worldly dust and dirt, is like being inside a massive fire. If one can attain enlightenment, they will be like a red

lotus in the flames. Chan Master Dahui said, “Those who strike from outside are weak; those who strike from inside are strong.”

All the sages and saints of the past achieved enlightenment through immense hardship, suffering, and toil, and by withstanding all kinds of trials and tribulations. If one fears hardship and fatigue and cannot withstand the trials and tribulations of adversity, then enlightenment is impossible.

Our master, Śākyamuni Buddha, also endured countless hardships and trials, ultimately sitting under the Bodhi tree and making a profound vow: “I will not rise from my seat until I attain the Great Way!” He attained enlightenment on the eighth night of the twelfth lunar month, upon seeing a bright star.

In his previous life, Śākyamuni Buddha remained unmoved even when King Kali cut his body into pieces. What a magnificent aspiration! He set an example for us: this kind of arduous and extraordinary patience is required for success in the practice of the Way.

When it comes to tempering the body and mind, there’s actually no need to deliberately seek hardship. We often observe ourselves facing various adversities. In real life, we often face challenges that contradict our desires.

Disasters plague the world today. Competition arises between people, and right and wrong become rampant. Add to that the karmic obstacles of all living beings, and every family has its troubles. Some people still don’t understand suffering. This is the essence of “suffering.” Fortunately, we now know how to cultivate the Way. We must stand firm, unmoved by these fleeting illusions, fearless of hardship, and forge ahead courageously. We vow not to give up until we achieve enlightenment. Therefore, “a skilled practitioner is like a lotus in the fire”!

“Possessing a soaring aspiration.” A true man possesses lofty aspirations, is fearless of hardships and difficulties, and is unyielding to setbacks and failure. Cultivating the Way requires a true man’s spirit, capable of generous generosity, unconcerned with trivial matters, unafraid of adversity and undelighted in prosperity, pursuing one’s own path and forging ahead courageously. Without true manliness, success is elusive.

The Buddha Śākyamuni spoke of the Pure Land school because he feared we might be timid and cowardly, afraid of the long journey and afraid to practice. He offered a pleasant resting place: a paradise in the West. At the end of life, Amitābha Buddha will lead you there. Go with confidence; fear not! Therefore, Buddhism is the best, possessing everything. There are methods for the timid and for the courageous.

In reality, Chan Buddhism is not dangerous. All you need to do is make a profound vow: “I must attain Buddhahood and save all sentient beings, and I will not give up until I succeed!” With this powerful vow upheld, you will never lose your human body, and when you emerge again, you will attain enlightenment. Honestly, fearing hardship makes it difficult to attain Buddhahood, as your habits cannot be tempered.

Don’t think you can attain enlightenment in the Western Pure Land by simply enjoying the comforts without practicing. It’s not that straightforward! The sūtra says that the sounds of water, birds, and wind in the Western Pure Land are all “Dharma sounds.” What kind of Dharma sounds are they? These are sounds that preach suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and non-self.

It simply means telling us not to cling to this beautiful world, indulging in pleasure without making any effort. This world, too, is illusory, and attachment is suffering. All appearances are impermanent, nothing to grasp, nothing to linger on. We must let go, let go, and let go again.

The sūtra also says to “eat and walk.” Some mistakenly believe that in the Western Pure Land, after eating, there’s nothing to do—just walk around and have fun. This misconception is a complete mistake! “Eat and walk” should be read as “return to feed.” This means that after practicing and eating Dharma food, one should “walk around” in the ten directions, feeding sentient beings with Dharma food, thus saving them.

By saving sentient beings and tempering one’s own habits, one can achieve enlightenment. Otherwise, enlightenment is impossible. To attain enlightenment, we must cultivate our energy and accumulate merit for the sake of saving sentient beings, thus achieving Buddhahood.

Why? This phenomenon is due to the unique habits that sentient beings possess. To save them, you must sacrifice yourself and follow others; to follow them, you must first eliminate your own undesirable habits. Only then can you consistently follow others. Therefore, among Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s Ten Great Vows, there is “constantly following sentient beings.”

This feat is difficult to achieve! To truly achieve this, to eliminate one’s own negative habits, one can sever “dust and sand delusion,” broaden one’s mind, and naturally attain vast spiritual powers. Therefore, cultivating the Way requires the courage of a true man—“a self-assured ambition to soar to the heavens.” This term refers to training in practical situations, which is still a stage of cultivation. We must diligently hone our skills to achieve the state of “unobstructed understanding of principle and practice.”

The final position, “Integration Attained,” brings the primary and subsidiary positions closer together, merging them into one. In Master Dongshan’s “Ode to the Five Positions of Ruler and Minister,” the ruler represents the center position, and the minister represents the deviate position. This merging of the ruler and minister leads to the phrase “Integration Attained,” which includes lines of poetry: “Integration Attained: Who dares respond when one falls into neither existence nor non-existence? Everyone strives to escape the ordinary flow; In the end, we return to sit in the charcoal.”

What does “Who dares respond when one falls into neither existence nor non-existence?” mean? We’ve discussed this point before: Saying our Buddha-nature exists or does not exist is wrong. We ordinary people simply cling to the concept of Buddha-nature, believing that existence is linked to existence and that non-existence is linked to non-existence, while taking it all for granted. In reality, Buddha-nature transcends both existence and non-existence and is unattainable.

In fact, Buddha-nature is neither existent nor nonexistent, neither not-existent nor not-nonexistent: none of these can be grasped. It is originally just so! Say it exists, and no form can be found; say it does not exist, and it brings forth wondrous functioning. Is this not neither existent nor nonexistent? The same is true of phenomena.

Take a teacup, for example. It has no essence of its own: the cup does not exist independently. Clay is molded into shape and fired in a kiln. Yet say it does not exist, and its form is clearly there, usable for drinking water or tea. Is this not neither existent nor nonexistent? Both the essence of Buddha-nature and all worldly phenomena are neither existent nor nonexistent.

“Who dares respond when one falls into neither existence nor non-existence?” When reciting poetry or composing music, I sing a line, you join in, and this technique is called singing in harmony. Who dares to join in? At this point, it’s difficult to identify the right words. To say it exists is wrong, and to say it does not exist is also wrong. Therefore, we can only remain silent.

At the Nirvāṇa Assembly, Śākyamuni Buddha said, “If you say I have attained nirvāṇa, you are not my disciple; if you say I have not attained nirvāṇa, you are not my disciple either.” Everyone, do you think the Buddha attained nirvāṇa? What does it mean to be considered a disciple of the Buddha? “Neither existence nor non-existence” (someone in the audience interjects).

That’s not right. To say it is neither existence nor non-existence is also wrong; you’re still stuck in the concept of “neither existence nor non-existence.” So how do we explain it? What path transcends existence, non-existence, and abstract concepts? “Mirages are so colorful, and neon lights after rain are especially beautiful.”

“Everyone strives to escape the ordinary flow.” The term “ordinary flow” refers to ordinary beings who continuously wander in the sea of birth and death within the six realms of saṃsāra. To escape the ordinary flow means to attain freedom from birth and death, thus breaking free from the cycle of saṃsāra. Those of us gathered here today aspire to become Buddhas and ultimately escape this cycle of birth and death.

“In the end, we return to sit in the charcoal.” The phrase “in the end” suggests returning to our origin.

Before we practiced the Dharma, our afflictions and attachments obscured the brightness of our innate nature. Through diligent practice, we gradually regained that brightness. But how could we ultimately return to sitting in the dark charcoal? Is this statement incorrect? It is not! The ultimate goal of Tantric practice is this: when one has mastered the skill, one is like the moon on the 30th day of the twelfth lunar month.

On the last night of the twelfth lunar month, can you still see the moon? There is a witty folk saying about defaulting on a debt: “Pay back when there’s a moon on the 30th day of the twelfth lunar month.”

Why does the final stage of cultivation resemble the moon on the thirtieth of the twelfth month? Because when practice reaches the point of great radiance and the great emergence of spiritual powers, it is still not the ultimate stage. One must bring everything back to one’s own mind, leaving not a single dharma, not a thread, not a speck of dust; only then is it the completion, so it is represented by the position of complete darkness.

Furthermore, at the ultimate level of cultivation, there is no birth and death from which to be liberated. Buddha-nature inherently transcends birth and death, and the six realms are all part of the Tathāgata’s ocean of nirvāṇa. Thus, one can enter and exit freely without obstacles. After passing the final barrier, the cycle of the six realms represents liberation from birth and death, and liberation from birth and death embodies the cycle of the six realms. Birth, death, and nirvāṇa are all unattainable.

“ In the end, we return to sit in the charcoal “ means that the end is equal to the beginning. Truly reaching the ultimate state is akin to having no cultivation at all. Buddha-nature is a vast, round form, without beginning or end. However, do not misunderstand that achieving Buddhahood means returning to a state of vexation. The Buddha’s realm is where afflictions are unattainable, Bodhi is unattainable, sentient beings are unattainable, and Buddhahood is unattainable. Nothing is to be taken; nothing is to be abandoned. Sentient beings develop thoughts based on

circumstances, grasping and attaching to them with delusion. How can these be the same?

The phrase “Integration Attained” signifies an ultimate stage in the journey toward attaining the Way. However, it raises a question: how can one reach this ultimate stage without first recognizing the Way? Achieving the stage of seeing the Way is crucial, as one cannot progress to the ultimate stage without it. Consequently, the Ganges Mahāmudrā begins by emphasizing the importance of seeing the Way.

Two lay practitioners asked me about the Five Positions of Ruler and Minister today, so I am comparing their content and sequence with Ganges Mahāmudrā. The sequence is: the relative within the absolute, the absolute within the relative, coming from within the absolute, arrival at integration, and integration attained. The first two are stages of seeing the Way, the next two are stages of cultivating the Way, and the last is the stage of realizing the Way. As in Ganges Mahāmudrā, seeing the Way must come first—that is, realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, or “seeing the fundamental principle.” This is very important.

Many people still struggle to grasp the concept that “sentient and insentient beings share the same perfect wisdom,” so we will elaborate further. Throughout this extended discussion, I have remained anchored to the core principle of Mahāmudrā: “no matter how phenomena change, their true nature remains the same.”

4. Relinquishing Attachment to Emptiness, Bliss, and Clarity

Earlier we discussed “neither suppressing nor indulging” in practice. We must neither press down deluded thoughts and prevent their arising, becoming like earth, wood, metal, or stone, nor indulge them and let them run wildly, wandering through birth and death. Let us now continue:

“To be free from delusions means liberation from them, enabling the mind’s nature to exist in non-attachment, which represents wisdom and enlightenment.”

If we can be free from delusions, not only while we sit and practice the Dharma but also at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, this is the mind’s nature: abiding in non-contrivance, revealing our Original Face. At all times and in all places, without attachment to form, the mind does not dwell on even the slightest shadow. This condition is called non-contrivance. It doesn’t mean doing nothing; if there is something to do, do it.

Eating all day without biting a single grain of rice; dressing all day without getting caught by a single thread. Such a condition is called a non-abiding mind. The non-abiding mind is our natural, intrinsic nature. However, when we first see our nature, the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers has not yet manifested; this is called

the plain dharmakāya. It's like buying a piece of plain cloth without any pattern or color.

The mind that can abide in non-contrivance represents the plain dharmakāya, which embodies wisdom and enlightenment. Some say that this pure dharmakāya lacks spiritual powers and shines only slightly.

This is because you cling to a dwelling place, specifically to the idea of "dwelling in non-contrivance," rather than truly dwelling nowhere. This is the delusion that obscures your true nature! Once you eliminate delusion and are unattached to form, wisdom and light can manifest. You shouldn't harbor any thoughts or desires to seek it, for it is inherently luminous.

For example, a pearl has light, but a layer of mud obscures it, preventing the light from appearing. Once the mud is removed, the light naturally emanates. Is there any need to seek it again? Therefore, don't seek anything. Simply eliminate delusion, and wisdom and light will naturally manifest.

" If one practices with an contrivance mindset as the Way, one will fail to realize the true essence."

Conversely, if we practice with contrivance and dwell on something in our minds, we create a barrier that makes achieving enlightenment difficult.

"Contrived" means seeking something. To take seeking as the Way is deluded mind and abiding, far removed from the empty, numinous, non-abiding true mind. This can never bring awakening to the Original Face. Without understanding the true mind or recognizing original nature, practice is blind. To expect realization of the Way in this manner is like cooking sand in the hope of making rice: it is impossible.

For instance, those who engage in Pure Land school often pray to Amitābha Buddha in the West, exclaiming, "Come and pull me up, come and pull me up!" This mindset reflects a focus on contrivance, making it more challenging to resonate with Amitābha Buddha.

Lacking an understanding of both the mind and the Buddha, practitioners separate the two, pursuing something external rather than cultivating a pure mind. Without such purity, rebirth in the Western Pure Land remains unattainable.

Many Buddhists today, particularly from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and among overseas Chinese, approach the Dharma with the primary question, "Is there a way to make money through business?" Their intent is not liberation from the cycle of birth and death but rather financial gain. Similarly, many practitioners in mainland China seek spiritual powers. This emphasis on intention results in an inability to

comprehend their true essence, attain enlightenment, or grasp their authentic nature.

Those who practice this way cannot awaken to the original ground; they cannot realize and see their Original Face. Their use of mind is wrong: they still cling to appearances and seek something. The mind must be washed empty and pure, wanting nothing and clinging to nothing. Only cultivation without contrivance accords with original truth. The moment seeking arises, one goes against the Way and cannot realize it.

Desiring spiritual powers is even more misguided. Seeking such powers can lead to confusion, as the devil may masquerade as a Buddha, causing misinterpretation. Mistaking the devil, who has taken on the guise of a Buddha, for the genuine Buddha can overwhelm the mind. The devil will exploit this confusion, potentially transforming one into a demon. Even the true Buddha may find it challenging to rescue someone in such a state.

Therefore, those who practice “contrivance” as the “Way” will “never realize the true essence.” They will remain unenlightened and unable to recognize their Buddha-nature. If one dwells on something, how can they hope to attain the Way? Such fixation may lead to becoming a demon.

Therefore, when we practice the Dharma, we must recognize our fundamental nature and pursue nothing. We must know that we are originally Buddhas. Simply eliminate our delusions and avoid seeking anything. The moment we seek, we will become demons. Demons possess spiritual powers. They know when your mind is agitated and will come. Therefore, as soon as the inner demon stirs, external demons arrive.

What is an inner demon? Abiding in anything is an inner demon. As soon as the mind clings to appearances, external demons seize the opening. If the mind does not cling and remains unmoving, they have no way in. Should a demon appear, I pay it no attention: “All appearances are illusory.” If a Buddha appears, cut through that appearance; if a demon appears, cut through that too. Nothing can be grasped, so how could it enter? Do not fear demons; they are manifested by mind. If your mind is not deluded in this way, no external demon can enter, however great its powers.

When studying Buddhism and practicing the Dharma, it is essential to establish a solid foundation. We must first clarify that our luminous true mind, which is always aware, is the Buddha. There is no Buddha beyond this understanding. Our ever-aware true mind is fundamentally the same as the thousands of Buddhas. Even if other Buddha images present themselves to us, we should disregard them.

Recognizing that all appearances are delusions and unattainable, we understand that our wonderful and bright mind is the true Buddha. To attain the Great Way and avoid demons, we must refrain from materialism. If our minds are not pure and we focus on material possessions while seeking, we will inevitably attract demons and become like them, thereby distancing ourselves from the Way. Consequently, Mahāmudrā stresses that practitioners who adopt “contrivance” as their “Way” will “never realize the true essence” or achieve the Great Way.

“This represents the wisdom that emerges organically from one’s own mind. However, while beginners may desire to dwell in this original source, their experience is often limited to an attachment to Bliss, clarity, and the state of no thought.”

This luminous wisdom, beyond conceptual knowing, is not something acquired from the outside; rather, it is an inherent quality of the mind.

Even though beginners may fervently wish to let their minds settle into their pure, original essence, they often find this process impossible. This difficulty arises from a lack of understanding of their true nature and their attachment to conditioned practices. They continue to cultivate states of emptiness, bliss, and clarity. Do these states exist? Yes.

Take bliss, for example. When practice reaches the bliss of the third dhyāna, no worldly happiness can compare with it. Yet do not cling to it. Though it is present, regard it as though absent, without attachment.

Clinging to bliss, luminosity, or no-thought is disastrous, especially clinging to no-thought, because such no-thought is lifeless. Sitting motionless without a single thought turns you into earth, wood, metal, or stone: you have crushed your own mind into lifelessness.

Attachment to bliss brings the māra of joy; attachment to luminosity brings the māra of luminosity; attachment to no-thought brings the māra of emptiness. The luminosity of our original nature is great luminosity. Though it brightly illumines the ten directions without obstruction, it does not call itself luminous or abide in the appearance of luminosity.

If you abide in the appearance of luminosity, it obscures the boundless numinous functioning of your wondrous essence. Thus you must not abide in luminosity. For this reason, in seated meditation we do not permit attachment to seeing lights or Buddhas. As long as light remains an object to be seen, the practice is not yet complete. This does not mean you may not see it at all; it means you must not cling to it. See it as though you had not seen it.

Why? The light that first appears is faint. The slightest movement of thought makes it disappear. If you neither heed it nor stir when it appears, it grows ever greater; the moment you heed it and a thought moves, the light is obscured. Thus, practicing with ulterior aims leads, at best, to abiding in bliss, luminosity, and no-thought. At worst, you become possessed by māras, because your seeking gives them an opening. Do not practice with ulterior aims!

“One should let go of attachment to these meditative states and allow the mind to settle suddenly; only then will the naked, clear, and original nature of self-nature emerge.”

When practicing, we should aim to eliminate the previously mentioned states of samādhi, such as emptiness, bliss, and clarity. Why? These states are merely shadows of the fundamental state of samādhi. The true essence of one’s nature has yet to be revealed. This progression in state is simply a ‘shadow of truth’ in comparison to that of a beginner.

Remember, practice is not the same as enlightenment! For example, Chan Master Gaofeng’s master asked him, “Can you still be in control during the vastness of daytime?” A practitioner must be in control of all states of mind in daily life, unrestrained and unmoved by them. Only then can they achieve a modicum of samādhi and connect with their essence.

Therefore, his master asked him, in his daily life, if he could see through all states of mind—neither joy nor happiness, neither sorrow nor suffering, neither emptiness nor purity—and remain unperturbed by them. Could he maintain control? Chan Master Gaofeng replied, “I am in control.”

The master then inquired, “Can you maintain control while you dream?” When you are asleep and dreaming, you know it is a dream and remain unperturbed. You are not afraid of anything that comes your way. You are not afraid of a tiger; it is fake. You are not afraid of an enemy; it is fake. You would rather not be rich; everything is fake. The alternative is being in control during your dreams.

Being in control during your dreams is ten times more powerful than being in control during the day. This advantage is because when we are awake, we are merely confused; when we are asleep, our unawareness is deeper. If, even then, you clearly know that what appears is an illusory dream and your mind remains unwavering, that is immense strength.

To die in control, we must first control our dreams. This is because dying is a major unconsciousness, while sleeping is a minor unconsciousness. If you lack control during minor unconsciousness, you will have even less during major

unconsciousness. Chan Master Gaofeng, a master of outstanding practice and ability, replied, “I am in control.”

Chan Master Gaofeng responded twice, “I am in control.” This ability is an exceptional practice that serves as a model for those of us who follow in his footsteps. We study Buddhism and cultivate the Way to master the realm of birth and death, unburdened by the pull of karma and the descent into the sea of suffering.

To achieve this, we must first practice being masters of our daily lives, unaffected by favorable or unfavorable circumstances, and unmoved by the delusions of joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness. Do not rejoice in favorable circumstances or grieve in adverse ones. Everything is like flowers in empty space or illusory images—unattainable and ungraspable. Only then can we become masters of our dreams. If we cannot even attain this, how can we discuss transcending birth and death? The root cause of birth and death lies in the constant flow of delusions and our clinging to external circumstances.

There was a lay Buddhist in Ningbo who was meditating when someone suddenly reported that her son had fallen into the water. She sat there motionless. Someone scolded her, saying, “How can you be so heartless? Your own flesh and blood is submerged, and you make no effort to rescue him.” Despite the outcry, she remained unmoved and continued her practice.

Her meditative stability was good, but to stand by and let someone die was not good; it was cruel. What should she have done? She should still have saved the person, while keeping her mind unmoved. After saving someone, it should be as though she had not done so, rather than remaining seated without moving. That said, her level of practice was already quite good. In her place, we would long since have panicked.

A fire broke out in a family’s home. The mother, remembering her child was still inside, panicked and rushed in. She extended her hand toward what she believed to be her child; however, upon emerging, she realized, to her horror, that she had grabbed a pillow instead. Overcome by shock, she fainted, and tragically, the child had perished in the flames. This tale illustrates how a completely panicked mind can lead to disastrous outcomes.

Therefore, whether you waver in this state of mind is a significant test and an integral part of your practice. In his daily life, Chan Master Gaofeng remained steadfast in his control, regardless of the circumstances. His discipline was even more impressive because he could maintain control in his dreams.

Seeing that his practice was indeed good, the master tested his awakening further: “When there is neither dream nor thought, where is the master within?” Gaofeng was taken aback. With no dream and no thought, where was the master? He pondered it but could not answer. His teacher told him to investigate.

(Master Yuanyin said, “Answer on behalf of Patriarch Gaofeng: when there is neither dream nor thought, where is the master within?” Everyone was silent. He said, “Shall I try answering for you?” Then he shouted forcefully, “Clearly here!”) Patriarch Gaofeng investigated further and later awakened. After awakening, he entered a sealed retreat at Lion Cliff on Mount Tianmu.

Thus attainment in practice and awakening to true nature are distinct! If, while practicing, we can relinquish meditative states such as bliss, luminosity, and no-thought, then at the point where subject and object both fall away, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, and the continuity of past and future is cut off, there is a sudden crash. Body and mind within, the world without, and even empty space shatter and vanish together. One suddenly rests, unmoving.

At this point, although nothing remains and one rests unmoving, this is not like wood or stone: luminous knowing is perfectly clear. Our “naked, thoroughly clear original nature” manifests.

Therefore, whichever school we practice, we must reach the point where subject and object both fall away, and mind and phenomena both fall away. With a sudden crash, “the great earth sinks away and empty space shatters.” Only then can our original nature, devoid of everything yet perfectly clear, manifest. For example, in Buddha-recitation we use the single name “Amitābha Buddha…” to gather in the six sense faculties, collecting the eyes and ears,

nose, tongue, body, and mind together. When recitation truly becomes unified and there is no mind to grasp and no thought to recite, both the recitation and the Buddha as its object fall away. With a sudden crash, one directly sees the true Buddha and is born in the Buddha-land.

It is the same for us who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Reciting the Buddha-Heart Mantra, “Om bo-la bo-la…,” we gather in the six sense faculties, reciting with the mind and hearing with the ears, without letting attention wander outward. When the time and conditions are ripe—“Crack!”—the reciting subject and the recited object suddenly fall away, and the thoroughly clear, non-abiding original nature manifests vividly and unmistakably.

We must practice diligently; otherwise, we will not access our original nature or recognize our true essence. Merely discussing theories is akin to drawing cakes to satisfy hunger; it serves no purpose. We must maintain control over our daily lives. If

you cannot manage yourself in the face of challenges, you become like mercury in a potion, which will explode upon contact with fire, unable to endure life and death.

Cultivate and uncover your true nature. When you awaken from a dream, you recognize that everything is a dream. What is the value of being emotionally affected? All grudges, grievances, and distinctions of right and wrong vanish. This process is referred to as simultaneous enlightenment and dissolution. Everything is a dream. Without enlightenment, you cling to it as if it were real. Once awakened, it's like hot water melting ice, and all karma dissipates. This phrase is often expressed as "When you realize, your karma is inherently empty!" Therefore, we must engage in practice. If we do not, how will the conditions for enlightenment manifest? How can we reveal our true nature?

Someone asked me how long it takes to practice. It depends on how diligently you practice. If it's sporadic, it won't work. If we practice diligently, we can consistently meditate both today and tomorrow. After sitting down, we constantly remember to observe and not let the state distract us. In just three to five years, we will fully realize our true nature.

Why do we say that we need to practice a thousand sessions of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma? This means that three years of diligent practice will suffice. If you don't work diligently, practicing on and off, pausing intermittently, then you will not attain realization in three to five years—not even in thirty to fifty years.

Some people ask, "What should we do after completing a thousand meditation sessions?" This question has been addressed many times, so I will reiterate: A thousand sessions signify that this Heart-of-Heart Dharma relies on the blessings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The practice is exceptional. If you practice diligently for three years, you will unlock and see your original nature. However, if you approach the method with procrastination, sporadic effort, and a sluggish attitude, you will not see your true nature after a thousand sessions—not even after three or five thousand.

Others wonder, "Does this mean you can stop practicing after a thousand sessions?" We discussed previously that even if you possess superior capacity and achieve sudden enlightenment, the habits accumulated over many lifetimes cannot be eliminated all at once. You must continually contemplate and cultivate yourself in various situations, working to reduce and eventually eliminate these habits. Practicing after enlightenment involves the practice of "no practice" as true practice. This means you should engage in practice while avoiding clinging to meditation, getting lost in pleasure, or developing attachment to the Dharma.

Conversely, if your samādhi is lacking and your vision is unclear, you need to refine your meditation practice to strengthen your focus and overcome this critical barrier.

If your samādhi is sufficient, you need only remain alert and vigilant, without exerting excessive effort. This approach is extremely effortless. Instead of focusing on cultivating this Dharma, accumulating merit, or becoming overwhelmed by its appearance, one can become excessively busy.

Regardless of whether one has attained enlightenment, focusing on the appearance of the Dharma is a waste of energy, a source of trouble, and serves no purpose. Therefore, the less effort one puts into practice, the better; the easier it is, the better; the more effort one expends, the worse it becomes.

5. Instantly Severing Delusions and Reveal your True Nature.

“Shout ‘Pei!’ quickly to immediately stop the flow of deluded thoughts.”

Whenever deluded thoughts arise, quickly shout “Pei.” This is the key to cutting off deluded thought in Mahāmudrā. Those who chant the Buddha’s name don’t need this method; simply focus on it and chant “Amitābha Buddha.” Other practitioners, when deluded thoughts arise, quickly shout “Pei,” instantly alerting them. Suddenly, the deluded thought’s flow ceases.

For example, if we contemplate getting rich, we shout, “Pei, what kind of wealth? A daydream!” effectively cuts off the deluded thought. However, if the deluded thought is powerful—indicating that greed is strong—and repeatedly shouting “Pei” fails to eliminate it, then you should chant a mantra. This approach draws upon the Buddha’s power to dispel the deluded thought.

“ By extinguishing gross deluded thought and focusing on samādhi, one becomes free from all attachments to dharmas. The true nature becomes apparent, revealing the unwavering wisdom of the mind.”

We must let gross deluded mental activity subside. Mind and mental factors comprise the eight principal consciousnesses and fifty-one mental factors. The most troublesome of the mental factors are the five universal mental factors: attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition.

“Intention” serves as the root of the mind, possessing such restless power that it never ceases. Do not assume it pauses during sleep; it continues to generate dreams without interruption. Only in the final stage of Vajrasattva Samādhi can it be stilled. It is essential to quell the gross deluded thought of the mind that arises in response to external circumstances; only then can one maintain a state of samādhi without distraction.

If one can cultivate the Dharma without generating thoughts in response to external stimuli, considerable skill has been achieved. In reaction to external circumstances,

humans continuously generate deluded thought, clinging to them and moving from one thought to another without cessation.

If one can cease this clinging mind, they can peacefully enter samādhi, liberated from all deluded thoughts and attachments to illusory realms. Our true nature will then be revealed completely, shining brightly before us, thereby unlocking the profound wisdom of prajñā, which transcends birth and death, existence and non-existence, and is characterized by emptiness, ethereality, and stillness.

This lesson indicates that the first step in our practice is to eliminate the gross deluded thought arising from our thoughts in response to external circumstances. Moreover, by relinquishing attachment and allowing our minds to settle, our true nature will be distinctly and starkly revealed. In turn, this process will reveal the unwavering, luminous wisdom of our true essence.

Thus, the Buddha's teachings are deeply profound. They guide us to discern the truth and to avoid falling prey to deceptive appearances. Delusive appearances can mislead us, trapping us in the cycle of the six realms of rebirth. We can transcend, attain significant spiritual powers, and reap profound benefits by letting go of these illusions and recognizing our true mind.

Therefore, if we genuinely wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, we cannot simply chant the Buddha's name or recite a few verses from the sūtra. We must wield Amitābha Buddha's sword of wisdom to cut through our attachment to the deceptive appearances of the Sahā world; only then can we achieve rebirth there.

The phrase "One can ascend with pure thoughts" refers to what we often call initial samādhi. This indicates that even if the Buddha were to appear before us, we should focus solely on chanting "Amitābha, Amitābha..." without distraction. The statement "Only this thought is Buddha; my entire thought is Buddha; Buddha is my entire thought; the entire Buddha is thought, and the entire thought is Buddha" emphasizes the necessity of focused meditation on the Buddha for attaining rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

However, if your mind is filled with distractions, simply chanting "Amitābha Buddha" a few times, whether with focus or not, will prove ineffective. Some may wonder why chanting sūtras is necessary alongside the practice of chanting the Buddha's name. The purpose of chanting sūtras is to come closer to the truth. Buddhist scriptures indicate that to reach the highest level of rebirth, one must read and recite Mahāyāna sūtras. Why? Reading and reciting them brings understanding of the principle.

Understand that all is originally Buddha, and sentient beings are Buddha. We are merely deluded and attached to appearances, forgetting our own nature. Do not be

deluded or abide in appearances; do not cling to merit and virtue. Merit and virtue are our own mind, the mother of great accomplishment; the completion of that accomplishment is Buddhahood. Whether we revolve through the six realms or are reborn in the Western Pure Land is brought about by the mind.

The essence of all virtue originates from the mind; thus, “Nothing fails to flow forth from this Dharma Realm, and nothing fails to return to this Dharma Realm.” Consequently, the mind serves as the root, the foundation of all dharmas. I frequently encourage everyone to read and recite Mahāyāna sūtras to grasp this principle.

The Pure Land teachings discussed here belong to the Mahāyāna tradition and align with Chan Buddhist principles. Pure Land school is a Mahāyāna teaching that is inclusive of all three types of practitioners, catering to those of varying capacities and sharing a unified mindset. The Pure Land embodies the mind, and the mind embodies the Pure Land.

The Amitābha Sūtra states, “From this west, across ten thousand billion Buddha-lands, there is a world called the Pure Land.” This reference to ten thousand billion Buddha-lands symbolizes the ten perfections and countless practices essential for cultivating the mind—through acts of generosity, adherence to precepts, patience, diligence, meditation, wisdom, method, vows, power, and intelligence—all of which ultimately lead to immense wisdom. When the mind is free from attachment, one has traversed these ten thousand billion Buddha-lands and reached the West.

Therefore, it is said that the Western Pure Land is not far away—it is right before your eyes. To put it simply: when your mind abides nowhere and all things are empty, your mind is the Buddha, and the Buddha is your mind. Here is the Western Pure Land, and the Western Pure Land is here; you are reborn in the Western Pure Land right in this very moment. Do not wait until after death; be reborn in the Western Pure Land while you are still alive—this is true rebirth in the Western Pure Land. If you cannot be reborn in the Western Pure Land while alive, hoping for it only after death will likely prove difficult.

“One exists in a realm of wisdom that transcends words and thoughts, thoroughly understanding the boundaries of birth and death, existence and non-existence, and moving beyond verbal and semantic discrimination. This course centers on the dharmakāya wisdom, the practice of yoga, and seeing one’s true nature.”

This means we must understand that relative perceptions of birth and death, existence and non-existence, and similar concepts are false. We must abandon these extreme views and transcend the relative realms of language and the mind. By doing so, we will naturally rest in the inherent nature of immense wisdom, which lies beyond words and thought.

“Thoroughly comprehend” means to understand clearly and completely. To leave the extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence, is to leave all such one-sided views. These views are relative, deluded knowing and seeing, as illusory as a mirage and inconsistent with the Middle Way. That is why they are called extreme views.

Yet at every moment and everywhere, we live buried in relative, deluded circumstances, distinguishing good from bad, right from wrong, long from short. We have never left the extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence. For example, believing that a person exists while alive but becomes nothing at all after death is an extreme view.

If one can recognize that all that exists relatively is merely a deceptive shadow and refrain from pursuing it, then, at the moment deluded thought ceases, one can access the inherent, absolute true mind. This true mind, referred to as Buddha-nature, transcends notions of existence and non-existence, length and shortness, birth and destruction, good and evil, and beauty and ugliness. It embodies nothingness, which is indescribable in words, impossible to explain through thought, and fundamentally non-existent. This state signifies the condition of “moving beyond verbal and semantic discrimination.”

The realm of verbal and semantic discrimination refers to the realm of linguistic and conscious discrimination. This means that when we speak, our brains are constantly engaged, resulting in constant discrimination between right and wrong, good and bad, long and short, and the emergence of relative views.

For example, some people talk as they recite: “Amitābha Buddha, how bad my daughter-in-law is! Amitābha Buddha, how good my daughter is!” This is the realm of discrimination through language and thought. How could that do? If this were enough for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, a great many people would be reborn there.

We must cut off deluded attachments and extreme views, abiding in nothing, and single-mindedly recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…” The whole mind is Buddha; Buddha is my mind, and my mind is Buddha. Only when mind and Buddha are in communion and become continuous and undivided can we be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

We must therefore transcend the realm of verbal and semantic discrimination, understanding that these states are false and unattainable. Instead of following them or letting them sway us, we must repeatedly let go of everything. For example, a Brahmin offered mandārava flowers to the Buddha with both hands. The Buddha instructed him, “Let it go.” The Brahmin lowered the flower in one hand. The Buddha said again, “Let it go.”

The Brahmin also put down the flower in his other hand. The Buddha said again, “Let it go.” The Brahmin was puzzled and quickly asked the Buddha, “I’ve already let go of the flowers in both hands. If there’s nothing left, what else should I let go of?” The Buddha said, “I’m asking you to let go of the six external dusts, the six internal consciousnesses, and the six internal sense organs. Let go of everything.”

This meant that everything, inside and out, shone brightly, and nothing could be obtained. Upon hearing this, the Brahmin attained enlightenment. Therefore, to transcend the realm of verbal and semantic discrimination, let go of everything, let go again, let everything shine, and naturally dwell in the realm of wisdom beyond words and thoughts.

Being beyond words and thoughts refers to transcending both language and conceptual thinking. The realm of wisdom that lies beyond these boundaries encompasses the profound insight inherent in one’s true nature. By moving beyond verbal and semantic distinctions, one can naturally access this vast wisdom and reap endless benefits.

It can be quite challenging to achieve a practice that feels consistently natural and effortless, free from any deliberate effort. Everyone approaches practice with some level of intention! In the first through seventh bodhisattva stages, our practice remains guided by intention. However, in the eighth through tenth bodhisattva stages, we practice without intention. For most people, reaching a state of effortless practice all at once is not straightforward. Therefore, it is important to progress gradually, moving from intentional practice to a practice that is devoid of intention.

What does “ intentional practice” mean? It means being constantly aware, mindful, and self-conscious. As soon as a thought arises, immediately remind yourself, “Hey, don’t move! I see you.”

If you’re not aware, you won’t be able to recognize it, and you might even find yourself chasing your thoughts for a long time without realizing it! Therefore, when we are constantly aware and mindful, we are practicing with deliberate effort. When we become familiar with it, we no longer need deliberately to arouse awareness. It will naturally illuminate, without wavering. It will be still and illuminated, illuminated and still. This is practice without deliberate effort. In the end, neither stillness nor illumination is anything that can be grasped. That is the true destination.

Only through consistent practice can we transition from ‘intentional’ practice to ‘inaction’ practice. Achieving the ultimate goal cannot happen in a single step.

How do we practice this? We must continuously cultivate awareness and dwell in the expansive, radiant wisdom found in the realm beyond speech and thought. As Chan

teachings convey, “It cannot be expressed in words, nor can it be measured by thought.”

When our mind is tranquil, it shines forth and responds with remarkable clarity. Conversely, if our mind is restless, preoccupied, or troubled, its responses become sluggish. This sluggishness arises from distractions posed by external circumstances, which obscure the mind’s inherent brilliance and hinder its capacity to illuminate. Consequently, our responses lack vitality.

However, if we can consistently reside in this realm of wisdom—free from the confines of words and thoughts—everything will become clear and distinct. In this state, spiritual powers will naturally arise. Without this practice, how can one expect to attain spiritual powers? They remain out of reach.

Ordinary individuals often engage in constant calculations, judgments, and anxieties regarding gains and losses, which obstruct their path to peace and freedom. We practice the Way to relinquish deluded thought, eliminate attachment, and restore the brilliance of our original nature, thus unlocking immense potential. Our Buddha-nature resembles the sun: its brightness is limitless, yet it is veiled by deluded thought and attachment, preventing it from shining forth and exercising its profound power.

Just as the sun shines forth when dark clouds disperse, once deluded thoughts and attachments are relinquished, spiritual powers and wondrous functioning arise without being sought. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says, “A bodhisattva who abides in this and cultivates it, without prolonged arduous effort, attains the samādhi that removes all obscurations. Having attained it, one abides on an equal footing with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, develops the five spiritual powers, and gains the dhāraṇī of immeasurable speech and sound.”

Bodhisattvas who cultivate in this way focus on how they cultivate by “abiding in the realm of wisdom, free from words and thoughts.” In this state, they diligently work to eliminate old habits, eventually developing the five spiritual powers and achieving unimpeded eloquence. These five powers include divine sight, divine hearing, divine mind-reading, divine knowledge of past lives, and teleportation.

Buddhas, on the other hand, possess six spiritual powers; in addition to the five, they have the power of cessation of defilements, which completely purifies all deluded thoughts, attachments, discriminations, and afflictions.

This attribute leads to the “realm of wisdom, free from words and thoughts.” Our practice begins by attaining the power of cessation of defilements and subsequently abiding in this realm. This state is also known as “Dharmakāya wisdom,” “the practice of yoga,” and “seeing one’s true nature.” The dharmakāya is formless yet

filled with form; it does not increase in the Buddha nor decrease in sentient beings. Dharmakāya wisdom represents profound wisdom that transcends all relative and worldly understandings. The term “yoga” signifies correspondence. But what does “correspondence” mean? It refers to an individual’s connection with the dharmakāya Buddha, which is also described as “seeing one’s true nature.”

Understanding that relative views of birth and death, existence and non-existence, and other similar concepts are fundamentally deluded thoughts, one can abandon extreme views. By transcending the limitations of language and thought, one naturally dwells in the inexpressible, thoughtless, and inherently complete wisdom of self-nature, which refers to the wisdom of dharmakāya nature.

In practicing the Dharma and realizing the Way, there are five great wisdoms: great perfect mirror wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the wisdom of wondrous observation, the wisdom of accomplishing activities, and the wisdom of the essential nature of the dharma realm. In Ganges Mahāmudrā, the last is called the wisdom of the essential nature of the dharmakāya. It is the comprehensive wisdom of all modes, transforming ālaya consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom.

Great perfect mirror wisdom is perfected last. The Sixth Patriarch said, “The sixth and seventh are transformed at the causal stage; the first five and the eighth are transformed at fruition.” This means that in cultivating the Way, we first work on the sixth consciousness and manas consciousness, because the sixth is the most powerful and constantly discriminates and stirs everywhere.

When the sixth consciousness ceases its deluded thought and refrains from transmitting it to the manas consciousness, the manas consciousness will undergo transformation. This manas consciousness acts as the transmitter, receiving messages from the sixth consciousness and relaying them to the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna).

When the sixth consciousness and manas consciousness are transformed at the causal stage into the wisdom of wondrous observation and the wisdom of equality, ālaya consciousness and the first five consciousnesses follow. With no deluded seeds left to store and no interference from the sixth consciousness, they are transformed into great perfect mirror wisdom and the wisdom of accomplishing activities, respectively.

Thus, in terms of eliminating habitual tendencies through practice amid actual circumstances, transforming consciousness begins with the sixth consciousness; ālaya consciousness must be transformed later. It is impossible to transform ālaya consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom all at once. By working on the sixth consciousness at every moment, deluded thoughts cease to stir and we no longer follow circumstances.

Recollecting the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha transmits pure and holy seeds to the manas consciousness, which then passes them to the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), converting defiled seeds into pure seeds and enabling rebirth in the Western Pure Land, thereby transcending birth and death.

Among the eight consciousnesses, the seventh is particularly detrimental, as it constantly examines and reflects on the self-image, reinforcing the notion of "I" versus "others." It is filled with arrogance and pride, viewing itself as the master, claiming everything as "mine," and exhibiting insatiable greed. Therefore, practicing the Dharma and participating in a seven-day meditation retreat serve as processes to subdue the seventh consciousness.

In truth, all beings are equal, prompting the question: where is the "I"? However, because people's egos are so strong, they often look down on others, believing themselves to be superior. This mindset fosters inequality in interpersonal relationships. Once the manas consciousness is transformed, distinctions of self and others, right and wrong, and gain and loss dissolve; everything becomes the same, and all dharmas are equal and indistinguishable.

Although we study Buddhism, inequality remains inevitable until our seventh consciousness is transformed. For example, Pure Land practitioners assert that Pure Land school is the best, deeming other methods inferior. Chan practitioners claim that Chan is supreme, viewing all other practices as lesser. Tantric practitioners argue that Tantra is the most complete, considering other methods inadequate.

Alas! Insisting that one's own way is right and others' ways are wrong comes from not having genuinely realized the wisdom of equality: the mind lacks equanimity. In fact, all dharma gates are alike in being tools and means, not the goal. Our goal is Buddhahood.

If you and I succeed with different methods, are we both achieving the same end? Hence the saying, "Many methods lead to the same origin." All Dharmas are essentially equal, encapsulated in the phrase, "All Dharmas are equal; there is no high or low." The root of this inequality lies in the manas consciousness.

Once we transform this consciousness, we can achieve true equality, where all distinctions of right and wrong and self and others become equal; all oppositions dissolve into equality. Recognizing this equality enables us to fully realize the Great Way. Transforming the sixth consciousness into wonderful observing wisdom shifts our perception from confused judgments of right and wrong and gain and loss to a wisdom that allows for perfect understanding of all things and the ability to handle them appropriately.

For example, it knows how best to carry out a task, how to assign someone appropriately, and how to transform an evil person into a good one, turning an ordinary being into a sage. The wisdom of wondrous observation is lucid and unwavering: direct perception is also inferential cognition, and inferential cognition is also direct perception.

Direct perception reveals things without discrimination, while comparison assesses whether something is good or bad, long or short, or true or false. Attaining this wisdom enables one to discern right from wrong and gain from loss without attachment or aversion, approaching all matters with equanimity and clarity. Such awareness represents the function of great wisdom. Transforming the first five consciousnesses leads to the wisdom of accomplishing activities. The eyes perceive forms, the ears hear sounds, the nose detects fragrances, the tongue tastes flavors, and the body experiences sensations; all of these are manifestations of the wisdom of accomplishing activities.

Our ability to think, work, create, and invent—that is, the four great wisdoms discussed earlier—depends on the functioning of the wisdom of the essential nature of the dharma realm. In Mahāmudrā, this is called the wisdom of the essential nature of the dharmakāya; it is fundamental wisdom. In "the fundamental view of yoga," "view" means understanding and insight, while "yoga" means correspondence: mind in accord with Dharma.

Mahāmudrā calls attention to this continual correspondence, suggesting that ordinary individuals can connect with the Buddha and that the mind can align with the void. This process is akin to the act of imprinting the void, water, and clay. Such ongoing correspondence is what characterizes yoga. The Yoga view of truth reflects the knowledge and perception that consistently resonate with one's original nature.

6. Without Recognizing One's Self-Nature, Practice Is of No Benefit

"If one practices without recognizing this, they have not yet detached themselves from the activities of the mind and conditioned perspectives. This behavior disconnects them from the path of self-nature and Dzogchen, hindering the attainment of the 'uncultivated wheel of radiance.'"

If one does not recognize one's own wondrous mind, lacks correct view and understanding, does not know how to cultivate from Buddha-nature, and instead clings to external forms, seeking fulfillment outside oneself, then one remains attached to the activities of the deceptive mind. This situation reflects a conditioned and deviant view, which is unrelated to the 'path of self-nature Dzogchen.' Consequently, one will not attain the 'uncultivated wheel of radiance.'

The term ‘self-nature, Dzogchen’ refers to the inherent and complete Buddha-nature, which cannot be acquired through external means or derived from practice. The uncultivated wheel of radiance represents the inherent, boundless radiance of Buddha-nature, illuminating all directions, embodying wondrous functions, and capable of countless transformations. This wheel of radiance is not cultivated; it is intrinsic to the mind.

Therefore, it is said, ‘The path is not a matter of cultivation, but of enlightenment.’ Enlightenment signifies awakening, understanding, and entering the true mind, which involves returning to one’s true nature. This implies that during practice, at the moment of ceasing thought, with a single “Huo” sound, one realizes one’s true nature.

Is cultivation necessary after achieving enlightenment? Yes! The attachments to self and dharma, which have persisted since time immemorial, continue to exist and hinder the development of our immense divine powers. These attachments must be eliminated to realize our true source fully. Therefore, how do we cultivate? The process depends on the severity of individual habits, necessitating different methods. However, the best practice is to cultivate without cultivation, using mindfulness.

The Mahāmudrā method is that, when a deluded thought arises, one shouts “Pah!” to cut it off and thereby protect the true mind. But we can also use other methods, such as Buddha-recitation or mantra recitation. When a deluded thought arises, recite “Amitābha Buddha” or a mantra, do not follow the deluded thought but transform it, and one likewise protects the true mind.

Or, when a deluded thought arises, one wakes up with a start, everything turns to emptiness, and the deluded thought subsides. So to attain the “Wheel of Luminosity without Cultivation,” one must first clearly realize this wondrous, luminous true mind. If one does not understand what the true mind is, one cannot attain it.

If one hasn’t confirmed the View, practice alone won’t lead to a state in which recognition can be sustained and protected. Therefore, confirming the View is paramount.”

The view refers to right knowledge and right view. It is through the influence of right knowledge and right view that one recognizes one’s true nature.

“Practice alone won’t lead to a state in which recognition can be sustained and protected” if one doesn’t know their true self. Even if one diligently cultivates, one will not attain the “wheel of radiance without practice.” Because one lacks a “state of self-consciousness,” one does not know what to protect. In other words, if one is

unsure of the right knowledge and right view, fails to recognize one's true nature, is unsteady, and remains in doubt, then what can one maintain?

For instance, if we have a child, we must protect him from falling, starving, and getting cold. We must provide meticulous care and raise him until he grows up. If you do not even have a child, who can you protect?

Sustaining and protecting recognition is a two-stage practice: protecting first and then allowing it to function freely. Just like with a child, you first need to protect them. Once they grow up, you can let them go, letting them be independent and self-reliant, doing things and working on their own, without having to worry about them.

Protecting and allowing it to function freely may seem like just two words, but practicing these abilities requires quite a journey! To practice protecting and allowing it to function freely, you must first see your true nature. Without seeing your true nature, what is there to preserve? So what is your true nature? We've discussed this concept extensively above: the nature that can see and hear right now. Recognize it, don't doubt it, and protect it well.

How do you protect it? "It is not without seeing or hearing"; rather, one is "clearly aware and knowing, yet not attached to seeing or hearing." In daily life, it's about seeing and hearing without distinguishing between good and bad, beauty and ugliness, and without feeling love, hate, choice, or rejection.

Although you see and hear, your mind is free of anything—"completely empty and without dwelling." This concept is "protecting." Once preservation matures, you no longer need to protect it. Let it go. You can go anywhere, do anything, without dwelling on anything. This is the state of unhindered freedom and unfettered ease.

Regarding "no hindrance in everything," Chan Master Zhenjing Kewen has a verse that goes like this: "No hindrance in everything, at ease and content. Holding a pig's head, reciting the pure precepts, just out of the brothel, with a debt to pay, at the crossroads, untying the cloth bag."

Holding a pig's head, gnawing on the meat while reciting the precepts: Do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery… I'm a vegetarian. I just got out of the brothel, hahahaha! "Just out" means being kicked out. A brothel is a brothel. The madam kicked him out of the brothel after he spent all the money there.

He ran up debts from drinking. The tavern came to collect, but he was too poor to pay. He was so slovenly and down and out, yet he was free and carefree. Some might ask, "Holding a pig's head, reciting the pure precepts… isn't that breaking the precepts?" No! He never ate meat; he was a vegetarian.

Why? His mind was empty, free from attachment. He ate meat and vegetables without regard to taste. Being free from attachments, likes and dislikes, or from discriminating between the two, is the true vegetarian diet. Conversely, some people, though vegetarian, obsess over taste: “This dish tastes delightful and delicious; that dish tastes unpleasant and unpalatable!” Being extremely picky, in this case, is the equivalent of not being a vegetarian. If our minds are truly pure and empty, then eating is the same as not eating at all, even if we hold a pig’s head in our hands.

If you let go of things without reaching this level of realization, you risk being “shot into hell like an arrow!” Your mind is not truly empty and pure; therefore, karma will cling to you, entangle you, and refuse to let you go.

Consider this example: There was once a Chan master who had a fondness for eating beef. He proclaimed, “Eat or don’t eat!” But was his mind empty and pure? No! He merely spoke these words while his heart remained burdened. As a result, karma clung to him, demanding he repay his debts. The Chan master could not breathe and was reborn as a cow, destined to repay those debts.

One day, a farmer brought the cow out and encountered Chan Master Bao Zhigong. Zhigong looked at the cow and remarked, “Oh! Isn’t that Chan Master So-and-so? Didn’t you say, ‘Eat or don’t eat’? You should not assume the role of a cow; how can you possibly settle your debts in that form?” The cow then burst into tears and ran off to its demise.

Thus, if you have not genuinely attained the state of emptiness and purity, and you boast empty words, you will face dire consequences. We must be resolute in our pursuit of the Great Way. We should express ourselves in accordance with our level of realization and avoid reckless actions! To achieve the state of “no hindrance in all things,” one must first attain a pure understanding and clearly perceive the true mind. Furthermore, one must eliminate delusion and embrace non-contrivance.

Cultivating with an attachment to form or with intention obstructs the attainment of “no hindrance in all things.”

Some individuals, with impure and cluttered minds, foolishly seek spiritual powers. This pursuit is perilous! Not only will they fail to achieve Buddhahood, but they may also become demons. If you desire spiritual powers, demons may manifest in your mind, presenting themselves as a Buddha. You may confuse them for the real Buddha and let demons take root in your heart. The demon king will then extend his influence, persuading you to preach and guide a host of demonic followers. The problem all stems from attachment to form. Therefore, we must avoid such attachments and refrain from cultivating with intention.

“Confirming the View is paramount.” This statement is essential. To see the truth requires an understanding of one’s true nature. The Ganges Mahāmudrā prominently emphasizes this principle, and the Caodong School’s “Five Levels of Lord and Minister” also reinforces this idea. In the Linji School, the “Three Mysteries and Three Essentials” instruct that the first essential in “Mystery in Sentences” is to know one’s own mind and recognize one’s own nature, further underscoring this important concept.

“Later, you can verify the wisdom of self-abiding. The answer is abiding in one’s own true nature. It is not sought from others; it has always existed. (This is the first step.)

First, you must realize your true nature before you can manifest the “wisdom of self-abiding.” After realizing this, maintain your true nature, diligently practice, and eliminate delusions. If, in all circumstances, favorable or unfavorable, your mind can remain as still as still water, without any distraction, then all kinds of spiritual powers and miraculous abilities will naturally arise without seeking.

“Abiding in one’s own true nature” means that it is inherent in the mind and naturally emanates from it. “Not sought from others” means that it is not acquired through practice, nor is it bestowed upon us by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, nor is it manifested through the possession of ghosts or spirits. “It has always existed” means it was not created.

Someone may ask, “You say it was always there, so why don’t I have it now?” You haven’t yet eliminated all your delusions and habits! First, you must recognize Buddha-nature and realize that this ability to see and hear is your true nature. Then, protect it at all times, without attachment to appearances or being drawn to external conditions. When the protection is perfected and the mind is truly empty and pure, spiritual powers will naturally manifest.

Unless one “abides in one’s own true nature,” they are irrelevant. Once one stops breathing, all abilities are gone, and one does not know where they have gone.

Doing unacceptable things can lead to hell—very dangerous! In Shanghai, there are several people who were so-called “possessed spiritual powers.” As they neared death, the spirits that possessed them left them. Not only did they lose their spiritual powers, but they also suffered extreme physical pain and mental guilt, deeply condemned by their consciences. They could only cry out, “Pain! Suffering!” and fell into the three lower realms. We who practice the correct Dharma should take these events as a warning!

Lecture Three: Mahāmudrā Samādhi—Familiarizing Oneself with the Dharmakāya

1. Afflictions Are Bodhi

“Allow your mind to flow freely and naturally, like a river, undulating with thoughts without grasping or repressing anything. In doing so, you will come to understand the true nature of the dharmakāya.”

When practicing, we should let our minds be like a river, bending and twisting with the flow. We should not dwell on any subjective attachments but let everything flow freely and at will, without egoistic views or obstructions. At all times, we should be like flowing water, flowing peacefully and freely. This is how we should practice.

We ordinary people are burdened with selfishness and delusions, demanding everything to conform to our wishes. We want it this way; it must be that way. Otherwise, we become troubled. Consequently, our karma is deep, and we cannot see the truth.

As we diligently cultivate the truth, we must change this habit of attachment and be able to adapt to circumstances, bending and twisting as needed. We must be flexible. For example, at work, we can be promoted or demoted, regardless of our circumstances. We should not be elated by promotions or upset by demotions.

Because everything we do is to serve the people, not ourselves, we must be able to rise and fall. As Buddhists, we know that all material gain is like Illusory reflections and fleeting dreams, unattainable and unattainable. Our minds are always empty and free of worries, so we are open to discussion, able to shoulder any task selflessly, and forge ahead courageously.

If everyone acts in this selfless way, society will be peaceful, the nation will prosper, and the country will be strong. Therefore, we should vigorously promote studying Buddhism as it greatly benefits the world and its people.

When we engage in activities, we should not be concerned about success or failure; instead, we should offer our all. It is important to maintain balance in both success and failure. We ought to reflect on our experiences, learn from our mistakes, and continue to work diligently. By fostering an open and honest mindset, free from bias and selfishness, we can naturally come to understand the true nature of the dharmakāya.

Additionally, one should not feel as though “the light of the mind is obscured by dark clouds” when a thought arises, nor should one feel compelled to “eliminate” it when the deluded thought fades away. The concepts of ‘leaving’ and ‘arising’ only add layers of delusion, as they involve clinging to something and hinder the path to liberation. Mahāmudrā teaches the importance of acting without doing, remaining unaffected by external influences, and allowing things to flow freely. This continuous

practice is more advanced and challenging to attain. If you find yourself unable to reach this level, you should develop other practices that we will explore later.

Therefore, we must always do this: ignore thoughts when they arise; don't suppress or indulge them. Let them flow freely, responding to all circumstances without dwelling on them. This attitude reflects the true nature of our dharmakāya. Our Dharma nature is inherently like this; it can respond to whatever happens, addressing all situations without attachment. It reacts incredibly quickly, even faster than the speed of light.

Ordinary people tend to react slowly due to their many delusions, much like the sun obscured by dark clouds, unable to radiate its light and thereby diminishing its potency. The manifestation of spiritual powers occurs when delusions are eliminated and the mind's potential is fully unleashed. All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, which inherently holds infinite spiritual powers and miraculous capabilities.

If we can embrace the unintentional nature of flowing water, allowing it to move freely—as the saying goes, "The falling flowers are full of affection, but the flowing water has no intention"—we can flow without obstruction. This practice can ultimately restore the true essence of our dharmakāya and unlock our inherent spiritual powers. The dharmakāya is not a state of complete stillness or rigid ignorance. It is vibrant and dynamic, arising and functioning according to conditions, with boundless, wondrous applications. The concept of "no thought" signifies the ability to remain detached from thoughts as they arise. Emptiness is existence, and existence is emptiness!

Talking about emptiness and existence is essential to Buddhist practice. One can only progress rapidly by fully understanding the relationship between these two concepts. Practitioners often assert that everything is empty and that one should not cling to existence. However, ordinary individuals tend to cling to existence, perceiving emptiness and existence as irreconcilable opposites.

This divergence arises from differing interpretations of "emptiness" and "existence." While ordinary people view emptiness as nothingness, Buddhism interprets it as the absence of substance coupled with false appearances. Thus, it states, "form is emptiness," indicating that emptiness includes attachment to false appearances. Our understanding of emptiness differs from the conventional notion of nothingness; rather, it represents an emptiness that clings to these false appearances.

By emptiness we do not mean the sheer nothingness imagined by ordinary beings, but freedom from abiding in illusory appearances. It is the emptiness in which "emptiness is existence, existence is emptiness, and emptiness and existence are

nondual." No-thought therefore does not mean that not a single thought arises; it means not following or abiding in thoughts when they arise. This principle must be clearly understood. Buddha-nature is true emptiness, yet this does not mean that it does not manifest: functioning necessarily entails manifestation.

If it were entirely empty and lacking form, it would cease to represent true nature. This is because the existence of mind requires the existence of form. The mind and form are inseparable; the mind is form, and form is the mind. Previously, I explained that a mirror must have a reflection; without one, it cannot be considered a mirror. Thus, Buddha-nature must be capable of manifesting form. Without form, it cannot be identified as Buddha-nature; without its miraculous function, Buddha-nature would become a lifeless, dull emptiness. However, Buddha-nature is not dull emptiness; it is vibrant and clear, capable of manifesting all miraculous functions and forms. Therefore, "the myriad phenomena are perfect within the mind."

At this point, let me tell you a story. There's a Jinshan Temple in Zhenjiang, and within the temple lies a magical treasure that protects the temple. This treasure is Su Dongpo's jade belt, made of square jade pieces strung together with gold thread. How did this jade belt end up at Jinshan Temple? It turns out that Su Dongpo and the abbot of Jinshan Temple, Chan Master Foyin, were close friends.

Su Dongpo was a brilliant poet and a devoted Buddhist practitioner. He prided himself on having reached the level of being unmoved by the eight winds (praise, ridicule, defamation, honor, gain, loss, suffering, and pleasure). Master Foyin, wanting to test his realization, intentionally provoked him: "Su Dongpo's poetry isn't worth a single fart." Furious, Su Dongpo immediately crossed the river to confront the master. Foyin laughed and said, "You claimed to be unmoved by the eight worldly winds, yet a single fart blew you all the way across the river!"

Once, Su Dongpo visited Master Foyin at Jinshan Temple. The master was leading the group in meditation in the meditation hall. It was during the quiet time, and outsiders were not allowed to enter. Su Dongpo, knowing this rule, sat in the guest hall, waiting for Chan Master Foyin to emerge. After his first stick of incense had finished, he added another, so he came out very late.

Su Dongpo waited for a long time, growing increasingly impatient. When the incense was finished and the meditation session was over, Chan Master Foyin emerged: "Ah! Master Su, please sit down, please sit down." Su Dongpo replied, "Hey, you're asking me to sit down! I'm going to sit on your bald donkey's head!" They were close friends, telling jokes and calling the Chan Master a "bald donkey."

Upon hearing this, the Chan master said, "Oh, you want to sit on my head? Yes, everything is acceptable. I have a question for you. If you can answer it, I'll offer you my head as a seat. If you can't, take off your jade belt and make it our treasure."

Su Dongpo laughed heartily, “Whatever your question, I can give ten answers to a single question. I have many wonderful answers and a wide range of interpretations.”

Chan Master Foyin said, “Okay, let me ask you, the four elements are empty, and the five aggregates are non-existent, so where do you sit?” He meant, “You want to sit on my head? My body is made up of the four elements and the five aggregates, empty and void. How can you sit?” Su Dongpo thought, “The four elements are empty, the five aggregates are non-existent, and everything is non-existent. Then I’m empty; where can I sit? I can’t sit in the void…” He agonized over it, weighing options back and forth, but simply couldn’t find an answer.

Chan Master Foyin took the opportunity to call the young monk, “Come, take off his jade belt. He can’t answer.” So Su Dongpo’s jade belt remained at Jinshan Temple as a treasure. This poem is the koan of emptiness and existence, existence and emptiness.

In fact, this question is not difficult to answer. Emptiness is not inert emptiness, and existence is not substantial existence. Emptiness does not obstruct existence, nor does existence obstruct emptiness. Emptiness is existence, and existence is emptiness; mind is appearance, and appearance is mind. One might therefore answer, “True emptiness does not obstruct wondrous presence; I will sit right on top of that illusory appearance of yours!” Or simply sit down on a chair and say, “Sitting like this!” Or raise a finger and say, “Right here!” Or raise a finger and ask, “Where does one sit?” Such answers come readily to hand, without having to think them up.

A lecturer on the Diamond Sūtra was asked, “If there is no mark of person or self, who speaks and who hears?” This question appears challenging. Without a person or self, speaking and hearing are impossible. How can we still preach and listen to the sūtra? In fact, the Diamond Sūtra aims to break through appearances to reveal true nature; it does not advocate for inert emptiness. While phenomena may be absent, Buddha-nature remains.

The answer is: “It only speaks of no appearance, not of no person.” Our Buddha-nature is wonderfully existent, yet simultaneously embodies true emptiness. If everyone can grasp the principles of emptiness and existence and maintain this understanding diligently—without clinging to appearances or falling into the trap of emptiness—then we can achieve complete enlightenment. Otherwise, if we hold on to the appearances we encounter, we will discover ourselves uneasy. How can we ever attain enlightenment?

There are many such cases in the Buddhist tradition. During the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty, a prime minister invited the elders of various sects to a grand meeting. This meant that without reservations, everyone expressed their

views, directly and openly presenting their true nature and realizing the wonderful way.

A lecturer on the Avataṃsaka Sūtra said, “According to our school, it takes three great eons to attain Buddhahood. But the Chan school says that one can achieve Buddhahood with just a stick and a shout. This assertion is completely inconsistent with the Buddha’s teachings.

Now, I would like to ask all the outstanding Chan masters present here: if you can penetrate the five teachings of the Huayan School with just a shout, I admit that you can achieve Buddhahood with just a stick and a shout. If you cannot penetrate the five teachings, then you are the devil’s teaching.

Could one of you please come forward and speak?” The Huayan School divides Buddhism into five teachings: the Hīnayāna, the Mahāyāna Initial Teaching, the Mahāyāna Final Teaching, the Mahāyāna Sudden Teaching, and the Mahāyāna Complete Teaching. Teaching progresses from shallow to deep, and practice progresses step by step. Among the outstanding Chan masters who attended the meeting at that time was Master Yuanwu Keqin, who was over eighty years old and was the teacher of Master Dahui Zonggao.

He glanced at the young Chan Master Jing Yin Cheng, who was in his forties. Chan Master Jing Yin Cheng understood what he meant, so he stood up and said to the abbot of Huayan, “Your question is not difficult to answer. The renowned masters here need not explain it to you. Let me, the young elder, explain it to you.

Let us first define the doctrines of the Five Teachings: The Hīnayāna teaches that there is existence, there is a way to be achieved, there is nirvāṇa to be realized, and there is life and death to be ended; the Mahāyāna teaches emptiness at the beginning; the Mahāyāna teaches that it is neither empty nor existent, neither empty nor existent; the Mahāyāna sudden teaching teaches that it is both empty and existent; the Mahāyāna perfect teaching teaches that it is neither empty nor existent, neither existent nor empty, and it is harmonious and unobstructed.

Is that what you mean?” The abbot of Huayan said, “Yes!” Chan Master Jing Yin Cheng shouted and asked the crowd, “Did you hear it?” The crowd said, “Yes!” Cheng said, “Yes, that means it is in existence! It has penetrated the Hīnayāna.”

Emperor Huizong was sitting among the crowd in a green robe and a small hat. He instructed the prime minister to remain silent and pay close attention to the words spoken. After a while, the sound disappeared. Cheng asked again: “Do you still hear the sound now?” Everyone said, “No!” Cheng said, “No, that is emptiness. This point is beyond the initial teaching.”

He also said, “If something existed but is now gone, it is nonexistence; if nothing exists now but something did, it is absence.” Is this both emptiness and existence? This is beyond the final teaching.

Furthermore, if there is no existence right now, what is emptiness talking about? If there is no emptiness now, what is there about existence just presently? When we say existence, emptiness exists; when we say emptiness, existence exists in emptiness. Isn’t this both emptiness and existence? This is beyond the sudden teaching. What about the Mahāyāna perfect teaching? I shout without purpose, remaining unattached to the act of shouting.

Never be attached to appearances at any time or place. Eat without biting a single grain of rice; wear without catching a single thread of silk. Even if you’re busy at work, it’s as if you haven’t worked at all.

This is the essence of the Diamond Sūtra’s verse, “One should dwell on nothing and give rise to the mind.” When speaking of existence, not a single particle remains; when speaking of emptiness, it pervades the universe of sand. Unattached to both existence and emptiness, there is perfect harmony and no obstruction. This teaching represents the highest Mahāyāna perfection, specifically the highest realm described in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra—the realm of unobstructed dharma. This ideal is also the essence of Chan.

Upon hearing this, the crowd was unwavering in conviction and praise, and Emperor Huizong nodded profusely. Buddhism is truly the most sublime religion and the best philosophy of life. If we can believe in and practice it, what worries remain about success or failure? The Ganges Mahāmudrā teaches the highest level of Buddhist teachings. Since we are so fortunate to have heard this lesson, we should follow it and always let our minds flow freely, unattached. Only then can we realize the true nature of the dharmakāya.

“When thoughts arise, recognize them as the dynamic expression of wisdom—this remains true both during mindful observation and at all times. Thus, whether one is negligent without practice or diligent in accumulating cultivation, the true nature of reality neither increases nor decreases.”

When thoughts arise in the mind, one should recognize them as the dynamic expression of wisdom—the wonderful manifestation of true nature. This is true not only during mindful contemplation, but at all times. Therefore, when you are negligent and do not practice, true nature does not decrease; when you practice diligently, true nature does not increase. True nature itself neither increases nor decreases.

Many of us who study Buddhism and practice cultivation often try to suppress our thoughts, thinking that sitting without a single thought for ten days, a half-month, or even ten or eight years is beneficial practice. Little do we realize that this kind of practice of dead samādhi will not yield true benefits and will prevent us from transcending the Three Realms. It only suppresses thoughts temporarily; once they are stirred, delusion arises, even more intensely than before.

Even if we don't stir, what's the point of sitting there dead? If we remain dead in samādhi for too long, we will become nothing more than wood, earth, or stone. To truly cultivate, we must actively practice in the world. We must recognize that the arising of thoughts is the miraculous function of our original nature. By not clinging to appearances, our wisdom will grow day by day. Our practice aims to become a living Buddha, not a dead Buddha. We must perform various miraculous functions to benefit sentient beings. Only then will our practice be meaningful. We shouldn't just sit there motionless; wouldn't that be like a clay Buddha?

As mentioned earlier, once we perceive our true nature, we must still diligently dissolve our worldly habits. Mindful observation is the best way to clear away these subtle tendencies. In fact, this awareness is the wondrous expression of our inherent Buddha-nature! This capacity is not active solely during formal contemplation, but in every single moment—whether you are sightseeing, visiting family and friends, or watching plays and dances. All of it is its miraculous manifestation.

It is not that you cannot watch a play; just do not let the play take you over or its plot carry you away.

While watching, you might experience a flurry of emotions such as joy, hatred, sorrow, and happiness as the play unfolds. Even afterward, you may discover it difficult to forget, constantly dwelling on the plot and contemplating how one character is so good and another so bad. This is what it means to be "watched by the play." How can such behavior be tolerated? Watching a play can also be a way to cultivate your mind, to see if it can be influenced.

If you can achieve the state of "like a wooden figure watching flowers and birds," you've achieved outstanding skill. But this doesn't mean you're unaware of the good and evil characters in the play or the plot itself. If you knew nothing, wouldn't that be like a stagnant pool? Understanding the plot does not imply discrimination, rejection, or emotional attachment to it.

See without seeing, and without seeing, see, without the slightest abiding. "The affairs of this world are nothing but a play." We cannot let go of this or that, but all of it is as illusory as a play! When a single breath fails to return, the play is over. Why cling to it?

When we practice diligently, the dharmakāya does not increase in the slightest; when we are lax, it does not decrease in the slightest. In other words, becoming a Buddha does not increase it, and being a sentient being does not decrease it; ascending to heaven does not increase it, and descending to hell does not decrease it.

It neither arises nor ceases, neither comes nor goes, and remains unchanged throughout all ages. In America there is a “living Buddha” named Lu Sheng-yen who says, “When we practice, Buddha-nature (the heavenly mind) rises to heaven, while the bad, evil mind descends below the earth.”

One rises and the other descends, splitting one true mind in two—what a terrible mistake! Some Buddhist masters, in their lectures, say, “If we do undesirable things, the false mind that did them goes to hell, while the true mind ascends to heaven.” This procedure also separates the true and false mind into two.

They don’t realize that the true mind (Buddha-nature) and the false mind are originally one. The false mind is the true mind, and the true mind is the false mind.

For example, water, which represents the true mind, gives rise to waves, which represent the deluded mind. The waves are water, and the water is waves. How could there be two? Someone asks, “If there are not two, why do people speak of three hun and seven po? Does that not make ten?” If that were really so, would one person not become ten people? No. Hun ( ) belongs to yang: luminous, selfless, upright energy. Po ( ) belongs to yin: dark, defiled, unwholesome thoughts.

The phrase “three souls and seven spirits” indicates that a person’s light component consists of only three parts, whereas the dark and shameful elements consist of seven parts. It doesn’t mean a person is divided into ten parts. If we can expel all seven parts of dark, evil thoughts and transform them completely into light, we will achieve enlightenment.

For example, Patriarch Lü Chunyang is called “Pure Yang” because the po spirit has been dissolved, all darkness transformed into light, and the path of immortality attained. Thus the true mind and deluded mind are not two separate things. If you descend into hell, the true mind goes with you, yet its luminosity is not diminished or defiled, and it does not suffer.

It is like a pearl wrapped in mud: its luminosity is not diminished. If you ascend to heaven, it does not become happy, nor does its luminosity increase. At every moment, our true nature is neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going, unmoving and unwavering, neither arising nor ceasing.

“ Recognizing the true nature of greed, hatred, afflictions, and feelings of pain and pleasure as inherent in the dharmakāya enables one to realize its wondrous function.”

The dharmakāya’s natural and wondrous functioning causes our feelings of greed, hatred, affliction, pain, and pleasure. Without the dharmakāya, these feelings would not arise. Nevertheless, these shifting emotions—sometimes joyful, sometimes sad and troubled—are the result of the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion.

Disappointment arises when things go wrong, hatred arises when things go wrong, sorrow and resentment arise when desires are not fulfilled, and joy and happiness arise when desires are satisfied. These feelings are empty and devoid of self-nature; they are all delusions arising from circumstances. As the saying goes, “All dharmas are originally at rest; only man stirs them up.” This is all due to fundamental ignorance.

Practitioners fear ignorance, believing it harms us and keeps us trapped in the cycle of reincarnation in the six realms! If it were not with us, we would have attained Buddhahood long ago! But don’t be afraid. Ignorance is not real; it is merely a delusion, an illusion. With a single awakening, we can illuminate it.

Because it is unreal, knocking it with an object will not destroy it. As long as we realize that greed, hatred, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt are all delusive feelings arising from our attachment to external things, all are delusions of ignorance. These feelings are inherently empty and void. “Dharma” means “it is simply so, not intentionally created.”

Once we understand this subtle principle, all suffering, pleasure, and afflictions are released in a moment of awareness. As the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “Know illusion, and one is free of it, without resorting to skillful means; freedom from illusion is awakening, without gradual stages.” We often speak of “heavy karmic obstacles.” What are karmic obstacles? They are your attachment to appearances.

If you do not cling to external forms, no distress can touch you, and where then could karmic obstacles come from? All experiences of suffering or pleasure are just like dreaming in our sleep: in the dream, nightmares and wonderful dreams feel completely real, but the moment you awaken, nothing remains. Therefore, if we can forcefully awaken, let go of everything, and refrain from clinging to forms, we will immediately attain the wonderful manifestation of the Dharma-body. Tapping into this manifestation is not difficult—it simply requires us to remain constantly aware and perpetually unattached to forms.

Some people say, “Oh! Chan and Buddhist tantra are difficult, while chanting the Buddha’s name and seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land is easier!” Actually,

they're mistaken. Chanting the Buddha's name, practicing Chan, and studying Buddhist tantra are all the same; there's no difference in difficulty. It's just a matter of choosing a method that suits each individual's aptitude.

Chanting the Buddha's name involves using it to cleanse the defilements of one's mind, awakening oneself through recitation. Master Lianchi said that chanting the Buddha's name is "awakening the master with each sound."

This means reverently reciting the sacred name, sound after sound, to awaken our own nature. Do not abide in appearances or cling to circumstances. Thus we directly see Buddha-nature and can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss at death. Chan practice is the same: constantly attend to the huatou and observe where deluded thoughts arise.

When a thought arises, ask it, "Where do you come from?" Strike it directly. This false thought originally didn't exist; it was a false illusion; with a blow, it vanishes. This, like chanting the Buddha's name, is intended to eliminate delusion and thus directly realize one's true nature. But some argue otherwise.

They claim that chanting the Buddha's name will lead Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva, Mahāsthāmaprāpta bodhisattva, and the other bodhisattvas in the Lotus Pond Assembly to rebirth in the Western Pure Land and transcend the Three Realms, whereas practicing Chan meditation cannot. In fact, they are mistaken. Guidance and transcendence do exist, but it doesn't mean dragging you there.

Chan Master Yongming Shou explained it clearly: the Buddha is like the moon in the sky, and the mind is like a basin of water. Only when the mind is pure can the moon's reflection be seen. Even if the moon (the Buddha) shines on you, you can't be reborn in the Western Pure Land if your mind is impure.

Master Hanshan said that for Buddha-recitation to be effective, you must sever the root of attachment at its base—only then is there hope of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land. This root of attachment refers to ignorant, illusory emotional entanglement, which forms the ultimate foundation of samsaric rebirth. If you do not sever it, the mind remains like muddy, turbulent water, and the moon's reflection cannot shine through.

The Buddha will guide you, but you remain unaware of it, akin to a blind individual being unable to see the sun. Furthermore, when individuals practice Chan diligently and achieve a pure mind, they attain what is known as the Pure Land. This is because the mind is the land, and the land is the mind. The Buddha said, "To purify the land, first purify the mind. As the mind becomes pure, the Buddha's land becomes pure."

Only when the mind is pure can the Buddha's land be pure. At this point, Amitābha Buddha will compassionately lead you to the Western Pure Land if you vow to reincarnate there. Amitābha Buddha differs from us ordinary people, who experience both love and hate. If you have a beneficial connection with me, I will lead you; if you don't, I will ignore you.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas practice unconditional compassion and do not have such inferior views. If you don't have a connection with me, I will establish one with you and compassionately lead you. According to Buddhist tantra, regardless of whether you chant the Buddha's name or practice other methods, Amitābha Buddha will shine his light upon you at the moment of death, guiding you to the Western Pure Land. This Buddha also enlightens and guides non-practitioners and wrongdoers.

However, these evildoers face significant karmic obstacles that prevent them from seeing the Buddha's light; when they do perceive its intensity, they become frightened and flee, lacking the good fortune necessary for rebirth in the Western Pure Land. The Amitābha Sūtra states, "One cannot be reborn in that land without advantageous roots, blessings, and karmic conditions."

Positive roots, blessings, and karmic conditions are all indispensable. To be reborn in the Western Pure Land, one must possess beneficial roots, blessings, and karmic conditions; one cannot simply recite "Amitābha" a few times.

With all the bodhisattvas present, we must sincerely strive to calm our deluded minds in order to attain enlightenment! Mahāmudrā addresses the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. The One True Dharma Realm—the pure land of Vairocana—is synonymous with the Mahāmudrā. The Western Pure Land exists within this Mahāmudrā, not outside of it.

The Western Pure Land's "Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages" is on the thirteenth level described here in Mahāmudrā; the "Land of True Reward and Adornment" is on the twentieth level of the Flower Treasury World. Our Sahā world is also on the thirteenth level, alongside the Western Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages. The Buddha said, "Westward from here, beyond ten trillion Buddha-lands, there is a world called Ultimate Bliss."

In other words, westward from here lies the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages in the World of Ultimate Bliss. With unwavering faith, wholesome conduct, and vows and dedication of merit toward rebirth there, we can all go. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas will not turn us away. It is not that one cannot go there without reciting Amitābha Buddha's sacred name.

Some say, "I recite the Buddha's name so little; perhaps I cannot go." That is not right. Rebirth in the Western Pure Land does not depend on the number of

recitations. This is not a commercial transaction; it depends on the quality of the recitation, the sincerity of the heart, and the purity of the mind. If the mind is truly pure, even a single thought at death can bring rebirth in the West.

If we truly reflect that all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and mental objects are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—unseekable and unattainable—and let go of everything, we can recite "Amitābha Buddha" once with a pure, undefiled mind. This single pure thought can accord with the Buddha and bring rebirth in the West. There need not be tens, hundreds, or thousands upon thousands of recitations. What matters is whether, at death, the mind is undivided and right mindfulness is clear.

At death, to be free of delusion, with the mind unscattered and right mindfulness clear, is the strength of deeply attained samādhi of Buddha-recitation. Reaching this level depends on the diligent work of eliminating deluded habitual tendencies that we accumulate through practice now.

Thus, we must consistently practice letting go to keep our minds pure and untainted. Only then can we be assured of rebirth in the Western Pure Land. This embodies the wonderful function of the dharmakāya! We integrate Chan, Pure Land, and Buddhist tantra because they are fundamentally one. Do not separate Buddhist tantra, Chan, and Pure Land school; they originated as one Buddhist tradition!

2. Abiding Naturally in Non-cultivation

"If one fails to grasp the natural spontaneity, one may become distracted by illusions and descend into ordinary ignorance. Therefore, we should always remain in the state of natural abiding, without any cultivation."

Our actions, at all times and in all places, are wondrous functions of our true mind, reflecting our essence. We should naturally align with various causes and conditions, striving to benefit the masses; this is known as "natural spontaneity."

Without understanding this principle, we may become attached to external circumstances, endlessly pursuing our desires and allowing our deluded thoughts to take over. The outcome may result in the forfeiture of our intrinsic Buddha-nature, relegating us to the condition of an ordinary, misled person. We practice Dharma to realize our true nature and attain the Way, free from attachment.

If we seek spiritual powers or something to gain, or ask Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless us with office and wealth, we go against Buddhist practice. We need only function naturally at every moment without abiding, superimposing no further knowing on any realm of deluded thoughts, yet not becoming like wood or stone. Respond clearly to each occasion and its conditions: this is Buddha-activity.

As explained earlier, do not identify this physical body as yourself; take empty quiescence as your essence. Do not identify with deluded thoughts; take numinous knowing as your mind. Practicing the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate is like using rice to cook a meal: it will certainly become cooked rice. To practice otherwise is like trying to cook rice from sand; however much effort you make, it will never become rice.

Once we understand that this pure, undefiled, clearly knowing mind is Buddha, we no longer cling to appearances. We naturally serve others, training ourselves amid actual affairs and circumstances, exhausting deluded habitual tendencies and fully realizing Buddhahood. Otherwise, deluded thoughts inevitably proliferate, we sink into ordinary ignorance, and birth and death remain unresolved.

We, as ordinary individuals, have been conditioned to cling to appearances for countless lifetimes, making it impossible to transform overnight. Not only do we selectively choose our diets and daily routines, but we also continuously modify our spiritual practices. One says, “The Pure Land school is good and reliable; the Chan school is dangerous and unreliable.” Another says, “Esoteric Buddhism is good.”

Someone else says, “Esoteric Buddhism is no good either; it is full of sinister influences.” Oh, this is good and that is bad—all like blind people feeling an elephant, making arbitrary distinctions and talking nonsense.

They fail to understand that the Buddha’s Dharma is equal, universal, and consistent. Different methods are taught to align with each person’s unique aptitude, a process referred to as “matching the disease to the medicine.” Just as in eating, if you prefer sweet foods, choose sweet options; if you favor sour foods, opt for those instead.

If someone who enjoys sour food insists that sweet food is hazardous, while another who prefers sweet food claims that sour food is hazardous, and if a person who chants the Buddha’s name asserts that Chan Buddhism is dangerous (which it is not), while a Chan practitioner states that Buddhist tantra has a demonic aura (which it does not), all these statements reflect personal biases and arbitrary judgments. Not only do they create trouble for themselves, but they also inadvertently commit the sin of slandering the Dharma.

Practice whichever sect resonates with you. Avoid criticizing other sects; all sects are fundamentally the same. If you claim that practicing Chan is difficult, then practicing other sects is also challenging. Conversely, if you assert that chanting the Buddha’s name is easy, then practicing other sects is also easy.

Lay Buddhist Pang said, “It’s so difficult, like spreading ten loads of sesame oil on a tree.”

This statement refers to the difficulty that beginners face when they don't understand the secrets of practice, like "sticking a fish onto a slippery bamboo pole." The fish's scales are sticky and slippery, so trying to lift it onto that slippery bamboo pole is no simple task! But once revealed, it becomes clear that this ability to speak, act, cry, and laugh is our true nature. It shines before our eyes day and night, completely unconcealed. There's no need to seek or pray; simply let go of everything.

As the saying goes, 'Searching far and wide to no avail, only to find it without any effort.' Thus, Granny Pang chimed in, 'Easy, easy, easy—the intent of the Patriarch coming from the West is right on the tips of the hundred grasses.' It is not difficult, not difficult at all; realizing Chan and awakening to the Way is exceedingly easy.

'On the tips of the hundred grasses' means on top of any and all things. The implication of 'on top' is to perceive without clinging to forms—do not look downward while attached to phenomena. This capacity to perceive objects while remaining detached from forms is precisely the wonderful functioning of one's Self-Nature! Isn't that straightforward? Therefore, when practicing, we should not divide ourselves into different sects or schools, judging a task as difficult or easy. Simply recognize the true mind, free from attachment and lucid and distinct, at every moment. Avoid identifying with its unattainable shadow.

Although the principle may be clear at this point, the habit of dwelling on attachments, which has been developed over many lifetimes, will still persist. Chan Master Guifeng said, "Many lifetimes of false attachments become ingrained in our nature, and joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness flow through us in subtle ways. Even when we suddenly grasp the truth, it can be challenging to completely eradicate these emotions. We must constantly be aware and constantly reduce them." Therefore, we must be constantly aware, and as soon as a thought arises, we must immediately eliminate it.

If a false thought is strong and cannot be immediately transformed, chant the Buddha's name or mantra to transform it. The Buddha's name and mantra serve as a sword of wisdom, used to sever the false mind and emotions associated with attachments, and they possess infinite power. As long as we sincerely recite, we will receive the blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and thus, attaining enlightenment will be easy.

Likewise, anyone of any school who makes the vow can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. We often say that the scope of Buddha-recitation is wide: it is not only reciting one line of "Amitābha Buddha" that counts; reciting sūtras is also Buddha-recitation, doing good without attachment to marks is also Buddha-recitation, and being alert and aware is also Buddha-recitation.

Why? Because “Buddha” means awareness; if you are never deluded and dedicate this to rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, is that not Buddha-recitation? The Pure Land school says that to be born in the highest grade of the highest level one must “read and recite the Mahāyāna.” Why read and recite the Mahāyāna? To make you understand the principle! To make you understand where phenomena such as birth and death come from and how one can end birth and death.

Only when you understand these principles, let the deluded mind become completely empty, and abide nowhere can you attain rebirth in the highest grade of the highest level. If you cling stubbornly to appearances, thinking this world is bad and wanting to enjoy blessings in the West, you have gone wrong. Even if you can go there, it will be only the lowest grade of the lowest level. Because your mind is not empty and pure, you can be born only in the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages, not in the Land of Expedient Means with Residue or the Land of True Reward and Adornment.

What is Chan? It is the inherently free and pure mind, what the Chan school calls the “Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa.” Is this wondrous mind of nirvāṇa not the Pure Land? Is it not also the secret treasury of Esoteric Buddhism? Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism appear to be three schools, but in fact they are of one essence.

Esoteric Buddhism has many methods for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, such as phowa, the Great Amitābha practice, and the transference-of-consciousness practice; all lead to rebirth in the Western Land. Reciting Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s name likewise brings rebirth in the West, because Avalokiteśvara is in the West and also emits light to illuminate you and receive you into the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

The reason there are nine grades of rebirth lies in whether one clings to marks or not! If you understand that mind is the land and the land is mind, that birth is non-birth and non-birth is birth, without abiding in any mark at all, then within non-birth one may well be reborn. Such rebirth is wondrous functioning! Non-birth does not mean being dead and motionless: ceaseless arising is non-arising, and non-arising is ceaseless arising—this is to attain the wondrous truth of non-birth.

“Therefore, we should always remain in the state of natural abiding, without any cultivation.” The term “without any cultivation” signifies that “the practice of no cultivation is the true practice.” Mahāmudrā represents the highest form of tantric practice, which does not necessitate chanting mantras, forming mudrās, or employing any specific methods. Everything is left to nature, free from attachment. This approach embodies natural abiding. Chan Buddhism similarly emphasizes practice after enlightenment, devoid of cultivation or countermeasures.

Countermeasures are specific methods devised to eliminate deluded thought, tailored to each individual's tendencies. For example, those with strong sensory desires practice the contemplation of bodily impurity or the white bone meditation, while those inclined to constant talking engage in silent retreats. These are targeted, practical methods designed to quiet delusion and return to truth.

Mahāmudrā does not use such remedies. It tells us that all forms are manifestations of self-nature, the wondrous functioning of the true mind; to be non-abiding at all times is the great practice of practicing without cultivating. For one who recites the Buddha's name, when a thought arises, one awareness and it is empty—this is Buddha-recitation; it is not necessary to recite "Amitābha Buddha" for it to count as Buddha-recitation.

But practice must suit one's own capacity and must not be confined to one form. There are several ways of reciting: awareness the moment a thought arises is reality-mark Buddha-recitation; contemplating oneself as Amitābha Buddha is contemplation Buddha-recitation; contemplating the Buddha's marks and characteristics is visualization Buddha-recitation; never leaving the single phrase "Amitābha Buddha" is name-holding Buddha-recitation.

When practicing, it is crucial to select a method that resonates with one's habits to achieve optimal results with minimal effort. If achieving the state of emptiness upon awakening proves challenging, one should chant the Buddha's name. If silent recitation is insufficient and thoughts continue to stray, then chant "Amitābha Buddha…" aloud. It is essential to sever wandering thoughts and cultivate a state of no-thought.

Understanding this principle significantly influences the effectiveness of chanting the Buddha's name.

Without comprehending the Buddha's true nature, we may cling to form and obsess over Amitābha Buddha in the Western Pure Land. Recognizing the Buddha's true nature enables us to utilize Amitābha's sacred name to cleanse the impurities within our hearts, transform our attachments and deluded thoughts, and ultimately realize the same pure Buddha-nature as Amitābha. Given the varied methods of practice, the quality of one's future rebirth in the Western Pure Land will also differ. This practice of detaching from appearances is referred to as " natural abiding, without any cultivation," while abiding without abiding is termed natural abiding.

The Chan master taught, "Where the Buddha is, do not linger; where there is no Buddha, pass quickly."

This teaching suggests that one should not cling to either existence or emptiness. Existence, non-existence, and a middle ground are all unattainable. This principle

embodies the Middle Way, reflecting the Tiantai School's three contemplations of the one mind: emptiness, falsehood, and the middle. Therefore, appearances are illusory manifestations.

If the true nature could not manifest these illusory appearances and functions, it would resemble a stagnant pool of water. What value would Buddha's nature hold then? We practice diligently to eliminate the deluded habits of clinging to illusory appearances, not to sit there motionless. If we can awaken and refrain from dwelling on appearances or clinging to the Dharma, we will be on the right path, entering "natural abiding without cultivation."

" At all times, only by recognizing the true nature indicated by direct pointing can we encompass everything."

Regardless of time and place, the correct view is attained only through direct knowledge of true nature, leading to the understanding that our mind is the One True Dharma Realm. This realm encompasses everything and all phenomena. Every appearance arises as a manifestation of the mind's wondrous function. Therefore, do not cling to appearances.

You will always recognize your true self if you disregard your state of mind, regardless of whether it aligns with your heart or not. The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch states, "Those who have seen their true nature must see it immediately after hearing it. If they do, even when they are on the battlefield, they will see it." Entering battle with a mind preoccupied with life and death is unacceptable.

It matters not if I am killed; "to face the blade with my head is akin to cutting through a gentle spring breeze." Haha! If I will be killed, then so be it. Even if we sever this physical body, our true mind remains constant and indestructible. This is the understanding of those who have realized their true nature.

Once upon a time, the Chan Master Yuangui of Songyue was at a banquet when he saw an emperor, accompanied by a large entourage, standing before him in a stately manner.

The emperor, displeased that the Chan master did not rise to greet him, asked, "Do you recognize me?" The Chan Master replied, "I consider Buddhas and all living beings equal. How could I possibly look upon you differently?" The emperor replied, "I am a mountain god. I hold the power of life and death. I can offer life or death to people. How can you look upon me with such ordinary eyes?"

The Chan Master laughed and said, "I am inherently unborn. How could you cause an unborn person to die? In my view, the body and the void are one, and you and I

are one. Could you harm the void or yourself? Even if you could, my true mind is eternal.

You can only harm my body, not my true mind! You have not yet attained this true consciousness; therefore, how can you claim the ability to grant me life or death? The mountain god was stunned: “Oh, I’ve never heard of such a thing. Is there such a thing as an immortal true mind?” The Chan master continued, “For example, if you are now a powerful god, you were once a human! It’s because you were upright, righteous, and did many good deeds that you have become a great god with the power over life and death.

But who is the God of the Mountain? Your human body is gone; it’s your consciousness that is the God of the Mountain. Your consciousness is different from our Buddha-nature, just a tiny difference. What is the difference? When ignorance exists, Buddha-nature becomes consciousness. When ignorance is eliminated, consciousness returns to Buddha-nature.

Even if ignorance remains, Buddha-nature remains constant, for it neither increases nor decreases. Who is the God of the Mountain now? It is this unborn and indestructible Buddha-nature, and you are completely unaware of it!” After the Chan master’s teachings, the god awakened from his dream and immediately took Master Yuangui as his teacher, converting to Buddhism.

And what about those gods that appear in plants and trees? They are ghosts! In his lifetime, he was insatiable in greed, committed sins, and was sent to hell. After serving his sentence in hell, he was released. Because his greed persisted, he would attach himself to any plants he encountered, and these plants would become magical. Such an act was truly the work of a greedy ghost, not a deity.

Deities are mighty ghost kings, possessing greater spiritual powers than other ghosts, and they are all attached to appearances. Therefore, at all times, we must prioritize recognizing the true mind as indicated by the “ recognizing the true nature indicated by direct pointing “ doctrine. We possess a mind as vast as the void, which encompasses all things within our nature.

To restore our true nature, we must begin now, letting go of everything and constantly recognizing our Buddha-nature, without dwelling on appearances. If we become attached, we should recite the Buddha’s name and chant mantras. Ideally, we should awaken to emptiness. Understanding this principle in our practice, whether in Pure Land school, Chan, or Vajrayāna Buddhism, will lead to rapid success. Cultivating without understanding this principle will make it difficult to achieve true fruition.

“Do not apply remedies to subdue each arising and falling deluded thought.”

Here, we're talking about subduing and controlling deluded thought, not focusing on each one individually. Instead, we must work on the root causes of false thoughts.

Ordinary people have many false thoughts! Some are intensely lustful, some are greedy for money, and some are obsessed with fame. Everyone's false thoughts and habits are different. If we address each deluded thought individually, attempting to use one deluded thought to control another will only exacerbate the problem. By addressing the root cause of deluded thought, we can permanently eradicate it and reclaim our peace of mind.

The teachings also offer methods for controlling these thoughts. For example, the "generosity" of the "Six Perfections" is a key method for overcoming our narrow-mindedness and stinginess. Similarly, the Five Precepts (against killing, stealing, adultery, lying, and drinking) are methods for controlling the restless thoughts of our minds. The more than 200 precepts for monks are all about keeping the mind still. Therefore, the greatest precepts are those of the mind.

The moment the mind stirs, it is a violation; it doesn't wait until the action is taken. Once upon a time, a disciple asked his master, "Master, what does it mean to break the precepts?" The master replied, "When the woman next door washes her face and you hear the sound of her hairpins, rings, and jewelry, that is breaking the precepts." Why does hearing these sounds constitute breaking the precepts? Hearing these sounds can lead to attachment to them. Hairpins, rings, and jewelry are women's ornaments, and when you become attached to them, you develop other thoughts.

Mahāmudrā practices begin from the root, without addressing every deluded thought individually. After realizing one's true nature, it is essential to constantly protect it, preventing the mind from becoming attached to external objects and continually illuminating emptiness. With the true mind, one embraces all phenomena. All things, the myriad, are expressions of the wonderful, luminous true mind.

The mind serves as the root. If one remains unmoved by circumstances and disregards them, achieving enlightenment within this very being becomes attainable. Conversely, if one focuses on the minutiae, addressing each deluded thought separately, the process becomes burdensome and exceedingly difficult. The essence of Mahāmudrā is to disregard countermeasures. However, if this approach does not resonate with one's aptitude, one may also engage in countermeasures, such as practice the contemplation of bodily impurity or the white bone meditation, to counteract strong lustful thoughts. The choice of practice depends on individual circumstances.

3. The Union of the Mother and Child Luminosities

“Delusions and afflictions are all manifestations of the wisdom of the dharmakāya.”

Delusions and afflictions are both manifestations of the inherent wisdom of the dharmakāya. The dharmakāya is formless, yet no form lies outside it. Its formlessness refers to its inherent nature, which lacks a concrete, visible shape. However, the myriad phenomena and forms that exist are all expressions of the dharmakāya. Nothing with form exists outside of it.

Deluded thoughts and afflictions have appearances, so they are certainly not outside the dharmakāya. Where do deluded thoughts and afflictions originate? They arise from Dharma nature, the root of all dharmas. Buddha-nature serves as the foundation of Buddhahood. Although Dharma Nature and Buddha-nature may appear distinct, they are, in fact, the same, and neither is separate from the dharmakāya.

Original awakening is the awakened nature inherently complete in everyone, the luminous true mind that each person originally possesses. This true mind has the potential to generate vast wisdom, perform various wonderful functions, and manifest in countless forms. Thus, deluded thoughts and afflictions alike are wondrous functions of the essence of the dharmakāya.

The dharmakāya is the root; without it, deluded thoughts and afflictions could not exist. Waves symbolize the turbulent state of water, which is the root from which they arise. Similarly, a reflection appears only with a mirror, which serves as the root, while the ability to reflect is its wonderful function. The dharmakāya is the source of deluded thoughts and afflictions, which are expressions of its innate wisdom. Without the dharmakāya, there would be no place for deluded thoughts and afflictions.

“ The nature of deluded thoughts and afflictions represents the true radiant essence of dharmakāya.”

The inherent nature of deluded thoughts and afflictions reveals the true and unerring manifestation of the dharmakāya’s luminous essence. The dharmakāya itself is immeasurably radiant, often referred to as a “great storehouse of luminosity.”

In practice, some individuals perceive various colors of light—red, yellow, blue, green, and others. When engaging in Dzogchen Tögal, one must observe this light. Initially, the bright spot that appears is white, but as one continues to focus, it can transform into multi-colored displays, revealing five, six, or even seven colors.

This bright point is first white; looking further it turns colored—five colors, six colors, seven colors all appear. This is our own intrinsic light, evoked by sunlight, moonlight,

lamplight, and so on.

This principle is akin to modern laser technology, where a ruby is placed in a laser and illuminated by intense light from a pulsed xenon lamp. The intense light excites the ruby, causing it to emit its unique frequency of light. It is often said that the eyes are windows to the soul.

In Tantric theory, the eighth consciousness, known as ālaya consciousness, resides in the pericardium, with two vessels connecting the pericardium to the eyes from behind. During the esoteric practice of contemplating light, external light enters through the eyes, stimulating the inherent Dharma light within our minds. This principle is parallel to laser technology, underscoring the scientific nature of Esoteric Buddhism.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, the five internal organs are interconnected through meridians, with each finger corresponding to a specific organ. The practice of making mudrās organizes the positions of these organs, while chanting mantras stimulates the flow of qi through sound.

Mantras are not arbitrary; they embody symbols that originate from the minds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas during meditation. By sincerely chanting these mantras, you align yourself with the symbols expressed by these enlightened beings, creating a connection that allows you to receive their blessings. This process reflects the scientific principle of “resonance,” suggesting that Tantra can be interpreted through a scientific lens rather than being dismissed as superstition.

The Ganges Mahāmudrā, which we are currently exploring, embodies a “practice without practice,” promoting a spontaneous and natural flow at all times and in all places. This approach facilitates a deeper connection with the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who themselves embody spontaneity and naturalness.

We must first recognize our own true mind and understand that everything, including deluded thoughts and afflictions, is the wondrous functioning it manifests. This is “seeing the fundamental principle,” discussed earlier, and what the Chan school calls “realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.” Then safeguard it at every time and place, without clinging to appearances.

When safeguarding is perfected, the Way is realized. This teaching is direct and refreshing, not a method of treating each problem separately. Cultivation without cultivation is true cultivation, which is why Mahāmudrā is called the supreme vehicle of practice. Do not fear deluded thoughts or afflictions: they are wondrous functioning arising from the dharmakāya.

Simply let deluded thoughts and afflictions settle. “When the frenzied mind subsides, that itself is bodhi”; they need not be removed. Just as removing the waves would leave no water, would removing deluded thoughts and afflictions not remove the dharmakāya as well? Yet how could the dharmakāya be removed? We merely let deluded thoughts and afflictions settle, rather than remove them.

Do not think deluded thoughts and afflictions are bad: they are precisely the manifestation of the true mind, the expression of spiritual powers and wondrous functioning. Ganges Mahāmudrā asks us to recognize this subtle principle and, in all our work, avoid clinging to appearances, transforming the deluded mind and deluded thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the true mind.

“Knowing this is called the luminosity abiding in the ground.”

Knowing this principle is called the “luminosity abiding in the ground.” To abide means to remain still.

If you can know that deluded thoughts and afflictions are all the wondrous functioning of the fundamental essence, and can let them rest without moving, that is acting without clinging or abiding, responding as conditions arise; such “knowing” is the light of “abiding in the fundamental essence” emitted by the dharmakāya! “Abiding” has the sense of settling peacefully, that is, standing firm on one’s heels, which in Chan is called “heels touching the ground.”

“Abiding” means to “settle,” which means to stand firmly on your feet. In Chan Buddhism, this sensation is called “heels touching the ground.”

To stand firmly on your feet means recognizing that the true mind is the origin of the false mind and no longer searching elsewhere. Why would you still beg a master to open your crown chakra and teach you the Dharma? Can a master open your crown chakra and lead you to enlightenment? Honestly, there is no such thing! If a master could open your crown chakra and lead you to enlightenment, the compassionate Buddha would have opened everyone’s crown chakra long ago, enabling everyone to achieve enlightenment. How could there still be so many ordinary people? Saying you can open your crown chakra is merely a symbolic comfort to ease your mind, to make you feel content and stable, and to facilitate your progress in the Dharma.

Once we understand this principle, we can diligently practice and open our crowns without relying on others. Recognize that our true mind is not elsewhere. The source of false thoughts and afflictions is our true mind. Constantly protect it and do not follow false thoughts.

If you feel distracted, quickly recite the Buddha's name or chant a mantra to dispel the false thoughts. This introspection is a wonderful way to protect your true mind. When practicing, look inward, not outward. There are so many things in the world: delicious food, lovely clothes, fun things... These are all shadows, unattainable. If you follow them, you're doomed.

We need to stay motionless, keeping our feet firmly grounded. Eliminate the old habit of attachment to appearances, and naturally, radiant light will emerge. In fact, we are always radiating light. The moment a thought arises, we radiate light, but the result is false light. The false mind emits false light; the true mind emits true light. What is false light? Attachment to appearances leads to false thoughts, and false light also has its own radiance.

Scientists in the former Soviet Union invented a machine that can photograph the light emitted by the human body. The resulting aura is reportedly seven or eight centimetres thick. False light is limited, but true light is infinite. If we can constantly protect this inherent true light, it will grow ever larger, illuminating the Buddha lands in all ten directions, unobstructed.

This is the great storehouse of light that is inherent in our own minds. We should abide in this way. This term refers to a state of non-dwelling. It is not about dwelling on anything but about keeping your mind steady, unwavering, and free from doubt.

" The luminous path of initial enlightenment refers to familiarity with one's luminous self-nature."

The previous section discussed original illumination (original awareness), where delusive thoughts and mental afflictions are themselves the manifestations of original illumination. Now, we turn to initial illumination (initial awakening). What is initial illumination? It is the illumination of "directly pointing to self-nature." Directly pointing out to you: that state of mind which is free of a single arising thought, yet vividly and brilliantly aware—this very mind of luminous knowing—is the Buddha-nature, the One True Dharma Realm, and the Mahāmudrā.

Recognizing it in this way is seeing the ultimate view, and this is initial illumination. However, having been attached to appearances throughout countless eons, "generating mind in response to objects" is a familiar path for us, whereas "sweeping away attachments to abide nowhere" remains deeply unfamiliar. We must go through the process of "turning the familiar into the unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar into the familiar." This is what is known as the process of "nourishing/protecting" the realization, which is also the process of "contemplative awareness".

"Becoming familiar with its own character is called the luminosity of initial awakening on the path." Familiarity means maturity: not maturity in attachment to

appearances, but maturity in contemplation and in realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Constantly not abiding in appearances, without the slightest doubt—this is called "becoming familiar with its own character."

Suppose, after hearing this, we are uncertain: "Is this Buddha-nature? Is this the basis of Buddhahood? Probably not! If it were, great spiritual powers should manifest. Why do I have none?" It is because you are not yet familiar with it. If we have not the slightest doubt and can attend to it at all times, this is the luminosity of initial awakening on the path.

This is true practice. It need not take any particular outward form, whether seated meditation, Buddha-recitation, or mantra recitation. When a deluded thought arises, see it without following or heeding it. It immediately becomes empty, utterly impossible to grasp.

This action applies whether we are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. Though it may not be visible, we are always practicing. This technique is the mental practice known as the "initial enlightenment of the path."

Why is it called "luminosity"? The term "luminous" refers to the ability to perceive a thought as it arises. Without this luminosity, how could we discern it? Some individuals might say, "I don't recite the Buddha's name well. I've been chanting for a long time, yet I still have many distracting thoughts."

In my view, you are chanting quite well. When distracting thoughts arise and you can see them, this is the initial enlightenment! Delusions are akin to dust swirling in a room; without light, they remain unseen.

However, when a ray of sunlight filters in, the extent of the dust becomes apparent! Therefore, recognizing deluded thoughts while meditating or chanting the Buddha's name is a positive development, not a negative one. This marks the beginning of enlightenment. The subsequent step is to refrain from following deluded thoughts, to ignore them, and to focus entirely on chanting the Buddha's name or reciting the mantra. With your mind and ears attuned, deluded thoughts will naturally diminish. This is the "luminous path of the initial enlightenment."

"To spontaneously abide in this non-conceptual nature, where the intrinsic characteristics of the Luminosity of the Ground and the Luminosity of the Path unite, is what is called the 'Meeting of the Mother and Child Luminosities' (where Original Illumination is the Mother, and Initial Illumination is the Child)."

Delusive thoughts and mental afflictions are Original Illumination; recognizing the ultimate view and practicing the Path are Initial Illumination. Original Illumination is the "Luminosity of the Essence," while Initial Illumination is the "Luminosity of the

Path." Regarding the intrinsic characteristics of these "two luminosities of Essence and Path"—although their outward expressions differ, they are essentially one and non-conceptual in their true nature.

Spontaneously abiding in this non-conceptual essence where both luminosities are unified is precisely what is called the "Meeting of the Mother and Child Luminosities"! The Mother is Original Illumination, and the Child is Initial Illumination. Their meeting is the merging of original awareness with initial awakening, uniting the two lights into one. This is the very principle behind the Bardo Thodol (liberation through hearing in the intermediate state). "Bardo" refers to the intermediate state of existence.

After a person dies, there is a state of swoon or unconsciousness lasting three and a half to four days. Following this, the bardo body arises—resembling a three-year-old child—going through seven cycles of death and rebirth over forty-nine days, during which various phenomena manifest.

This state of "swoon" is a deep coma where delusive thoughts cease because the physical body's four elements (earth, water, fire, and air) dissolve, causing the senses to lose their function of grasping external objects. As delusive thoughts cease, the luminosity of self-nature shines forth. However, this light is called the "Clear Light of Death," appearing twice within those three to four days.

Each appearance lasts only briefly—about the time it takes to eat a meal—before vanishing instantly. The Clear Light of Death is also the light of self-nature. If one can recognize and seize it at the exact moment it shines, full awakening is achieved immediately. The Clear Light of Death is the Mother Luminosity; being aware of it is the Child Luminosity.

Recognizing it in that moment is the Meeting of Mother and Child, and merging with it immediately grants the instant realization of the sambhogakāya Buddha. This is the first stage of Bardo deliverance: the Bardo of the Moment of Death. If one fails to recognize it in time, the opportunity is lost.

The bardo body then arises and projects various karmic manifestations: good deeds bring peaceful visions, while bad deeds bring terrifying ones. Simultaneously, during the first fourteen days, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas emit intense colored lights and appear in yab-yum (consort) form to guide the deceased.

If one is not terrified by the intense light, free from wild conceptual thoughts, and merges with the light immediately, rebirth in a Buddha Pure Land is achieved.

On the fourth day of the bardo, Amitābha Buddha of the Western Pure Land emits intense red light, appearing in union with Pandaravasini (the White-Robed Mother).

If one remains free of discrimination, shock, or fear, and resolutely merges with it, one is immediately reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

This fourteen-day period of guidance by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is the second stage: the Bardo of Dharmatā. Immediately following this is the third stage: the Bardo of Rebecoming/Transmigration. This is explained in detail in the Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo, so I will not elaborate further here.

When we meditate and practice, being able to perceive our delusive thoughts is a good sign. Do not doubt yourself—continue to practice with diligence. When your cultivation matures, suddenly—pah!—everything breaks open, and the Child Luminosity and Mother Luminosity merge into one, revealing the great Treasury of Luminous Light! That is the attainment of the Way. It is the same for practitioners of Chanting the Buddha's name (Pure Land practice).

By maintaining the Buddha's name constantly in every moment and place, when the cultivation matures over time, both the mind that chants and the Buddha that is chanted drop away simultaneously. There is no longer a person who chants, nor a Buddha being chanted, yet everything remains brilliantly clear and vividly aware. This, too, is the merging of Child and Mother—the "Meeting of the Mother and Child Luminosities"!

"Never forgetting the inherent, luminous self-nature you have recognized, the most essential point is to remain entirely free from any rejection, establishment, acceptance, or discarding regarding the delusive thoughts and mental afflictions arising from the mind's activity."

Please keep in mind the "inherent luminous self-nature that you have recognized." What is the inherent luminous self-nature that you have recognized? Our ability to illuminate all things is the wondrous function of the dharmakāya.

We illuminate things without succumbing to their influence, and we acknowledge that this capacity to perceive is our inherent essence. Thus, we see our nature in appearance—through appearance, we see our true nature. This procedure is called recognizing your self-nature. Recognizing your self-nature is the wondrous function of the dharmakāya, the radiant form of the dharmakāya itself. This radiant form is formless and is called the "innate luminous self-nature."

This class is not seeing with the eyes or hearing with the ears. Earlier, we discussed the inanimate object's teaching: "If you listen with your ears, you will never understand. Only by hearing sounds with your eyes can you understand." That refers to hearing sounds with your eyes. Now, we are seeing luminous nature with our ears.

How do the eyes hear? How do the ears see? The ability to illuminate all things and hear all sounds is our true nature. Apart from our true nature, nothing exists. If we can understand this concept, we will perceive the radiance that reflects the true nature of the teachings. Can this radiance be seen with the eyes? That's why we say we see with the ears. Is this seen? It's tacit understanding, experience, comprehension, and spiritual understanding.

Because everything is illusory and cannot be grasped or discarded, we should avoid thoughts of rejection, establishment, acceptance, or discarding the delusive thoughts and mental afflictions that arise in our minds and actions. We must ignore them and harbor no thoughts. Only then can we align ourselves with the profoundness of the Way. Blocking implies concealment, while abandoning implies disengagement; both are forms of suppression.

Establishing something suggests adhering to it. For instance, if you lose money in business and feelings of affliction arise, you might think, "I'm a Buddhist practitioner. I shouldn't be feeling this way. Why am I still afflicted? This situation is unacceptable!" The more you dwell on it, the more regretful and troubled you become. This type of thinking is a form of suppression.

Alternatively, if you believe you can remain unmoved by success or failure, you might think you have strong concentration: "unmoved by the eight winds, sitting upright on the purple lotus." This state seems wonderful, but it is still an establishment.

We should practice in this manner: whether in motion or stillness, in favorable or unfavorable circumstances, whether at ease or in discomfort, or experiencing mental afflictions—none of these states are attainable and should be left untouched. We should not assign significance to suppressing, rejecting, achieving, establishing, taking, or letting go. When delusive thoughts or mental afflictions arise, simply observe them without chasing or ignoring them.

Allow them to arise and pass away while remaining alert and aware. As stated, if you cultivate to the point of having no attachment or aversion, you will not be reborn into the six realms of rebirth.

The most important aspects are "never forgetting" and "remain entirely free". Remember "the inherent luminous self-nature you have recognized," and preventing thoughts of "rejection, establishment, acceptance, or discarding " is essential! We must not forget that our ability to see, know, speak, and act is the remarkable function of our nature. We should remain constantly familiar with it.

When delusive thoughts and mental afflictions arise, do not suppress them; do not follow them. There is no blocking, no establishing, no love or hate, no choice or

rejection. Everything is unattainable. Be open and calm, ordinary and unremarkable, with a peaceful mind, completely oblivious to the world. Let the winds and clouds change, and I will neither be happy nor sad. My mind will always be empty, my spirit will always be calm, and my thoughts will always be indifferent. We must practice this discipline at all times and in all places. This practice applies to all sects.

4. Repeatedly Relinquishing Experiences of Bliss, Luminosity, and No-thought

“ By consistently maintaining this state, those who possess the power of bliss, luminosity, and no-thought that obscure their true nature will eventually have this outer shell removed. Only then can their true nature be revealed nakedly, and this is when wisdom shines forth from within.”

As mentioned above, if you cultivate the state of neither forgetting nor arising over time, you will experience states such as “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity.” These are the initial stages of enlightenment, triggered by your skill. Bliss is happiness, luminosity is brightness, and the absence of thought is the emptiness of the mind. The state of “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” emerges.

The mind is empty and pure, filled with an incomparable lightness and peace. It’s as if the body has vanished, and the lightness is like the lifting of a heavy burden.

One feels incomparable joy and happiness, a hundred times greater than “rain after a long drought, meeting an old friend in a foreign land, a wedding night, or passing the imperial examinations.” Such happiness is incomparable to any worldly happiness (among the four dhyānas and eight meditative absorptions, this joy arises in the third dhyāna and subsides only upon reaching the fourth).

The light of the mind is revealed, luminous and penetrating, like a bright moon shining overhead, bathing you in light both waking and dreaming. Are “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” wonderful? That’s all well and advantageous, but if you dwell on it, harboring thoughts like, “Great! I’m achieving emptiness and purity, I’m experiencing happiness, I’m radiating light,” then it’s detrimental. It will obscure your original nature.

What is this original face of the ground? It is our own nature, emphasized repeatedly above! Attaching to the appearances of emptiness, bliss, and luminosity is like wrapping our nature in a shell. How could we then see it? Peel off that shell; do not abide in emptiness, bliss, and luminosity.

I have repeatedly warned you: when practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, you’re not allowed to see light or the Buddha. You may perceive them, but do not attach to appearances! Self-nature is neither bright nor dark; labeling it as either is an error.

As we've discussed, reaching the ultimate stage of practice—like the moon on the last night of the lunar year—means the light disappears.

Yet this state is not mere darkness. It is like a fish in water or a person in air, unaware of the element surrounding them, or like lingering in a room of orchids until you no longer notice the fragrance. By neither clinging nor pushing away, you merge with appearances and transcend them. When I say 'not allowed,' I mean you must not dwell on what appears." Dwelling on appearances leads to "establishment" and "grasping," both of which are delusions and attachments.

Only by eliminating these delusions and attachments can one fully realize true nature.

The same is true at the advanced stages of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration through the Ear Faculty: "Awareness and what is apprehended become empty; when the emptying of awareness is perfectly complete, that which empties and what is emptied cease." When awareness and its object have been emptied to perfection, both the subject and object of emptying disappear; even emptiness is no longer present. Only then, "once arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent cessation manifests."

Subjective emptiness and objective emptiness are subject to arising and ceasing, just as subjective bliss and objective bliss, or subjective luminosity and objective luminosity, are likewise subject to arising and ceasing. When all these phenomena of arising and ceasing completely subside, the unarising and unceasing Great Nirvāṇa of 'tranquil extinction' brightly manifests before you. 'Tranquil' means still yet constantly luminous, and this luminosity functions in response to countless conditions. 'Extinction' means luminous yet constantly still, and this stillness is unmoving suchness. Unmoving suchness is called 'Thus' (Ru), while functioning in response to countless conditions is called 'Come' (Lai). How could the realm of 'Tathāgata' (Rulai, the Thus-Come One) ever be compared to mere ordinary 'emptiness, bliss, and luminosity'? This is true Buddhahood.

The outer covering of "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" must be peeled off so that the true nature of the self can be revealed. "This is when wisdom shines forth from within." The consequence is the light of wisdom that emanates from the Self. The result is true brightness, capable of illuminating all directions without obstruction. The brightness of "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" is limited and cannot illuminate all directions.

"Therefore, one should frequently eliminate bliss and luminosity, saying, It is said: 'The surging and torrenting of a spring is wonderful.'"

Thus, one should constantly eliminate this “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity.” Chan practice is similar. For example, a monk asked Caoshan, “What about when the bright moon is overhead?” It’s akin to a luminous moon illuminating the night sky; my heart is filled with radiance. Do you believe my efforts are sufficiently advantageous? What does this situation look like? Master Caoshan responded, “The skill is still not adequate enough.” Even now, one’s practice remains at the base of the stairs, not yet reaching the inner chamber. There’s still a long way to go!

The monk said, “Master, please lead me up the stairs.” Master, please have mercy and lead me up the stairs so that I can enter the inner chamber. Caoshan said, “We’ll meet when the moon sets.” I’ll see you again after the moon sets. Master Yuanyin asked the crowd, “How will we meet when the moon sets? How will we meet after the moon sets?” Everyone was silent for a long time. The master said, “Stop! Stop! Don’t contemplate it. I’m leaving now!”

“The surging and torrenting of a spring is wonderful.” A spring surges along the mountain slopes with powerful waves and a mighty force. This torrent is difficult to contain. This metaphor refers to the subtle wisdom that emerges when one reaches a certain level of practice, like a surging and torrenting spring, unstoppable.

Master Hanshan was a gifted poet, skilled in writing, but he practiced so much that he completely forgot all about poetry. Someone asked him to compose a poem, but he couldn’t come up with a single line. Later, someone asked him to recite some Tang Dynasty poetry, and upon reciting it, the lines immediately flowed.

There is no need for contemplation whatsoever; it resembles a mountain stream—relentless and unstoppable. Master Hanshan knew this was not right. He couldn’t let literary thoughts obscure his Buddha-nature, so he resolutely severed this mysterious “surging and torrenting spring.” These are all superficial coverings that obscure the true essence. “If you don’t cut them when you should, you’ll suffer the consequences.” They must be shed decisively.

When experiences of bliss, luminosity, and the power of worldly joy or pleasure arise, forcefully recall the seed syllable ‘P’ (Phat/Pha)—representing skillful means that gathers and integrates—and the seed syllable ‘Ei’—representing prajñā wisdom that cuts through. Drop them forcefully from above to shatter the outer shell of attachment to spiritual attainment. (The combination of these two Tibetan letters forms ‘Pei’, rendered phonetically as ‘Phaṭ’ or ‘Phei’.)

When experiences of bliss and luminosity arise, along with feelings of worldly joy or delight, forcefully shout ‘Phat!’ (‘Pei!’). Drop this ‘Phat!’ forcefully from above to shatter the outer shell of attachment to spiritual attainments like ‘emptiness, bliss, and luminosity,’ allowing your self-nature to brightly manifest. The Tibetan letter ‘P’

(pronounced Pha) signifies the capacity of skillful means (upāya) to gather and integrate.

Here, ‘gather’ means to contain and encompass; the letter ‘P’ possesses the nature of skillful means, which encompasses all profound meanings. The Tibetan letter ‘ei’ (pronounced Eh) signifies the power of prajñā wisdom to cut through. ‘Cut through’ means to sever and eliminate; the syllable ‘Pei’ (Phaṭ) possesses the nature of prajñā wisdom to eliminate all obstacles. Pronounced ‘Phat!’ (‘Pei!’), it encompasses all profound meanings while severing every obstruction. This is precisely why this ‘Phat!’ is so extraordinary.”

5. Practicing the “Great Cultivation of Non-cultivation”

“One who can at all times maintain the vital core of transcending and severing key spiritual experiences, fully realizing the unutterable self-nature, experiences no difference between meditative absorption and post-meditation practice, nor any distinction between formal sitting and non-sitting practice.”

Just as mentioned above, one must at all times preserve and effortlessly sustain this ‘vital core of transcending and severing key spiritual experiences, and this unutterable self-nature.

’Spiritual experiences’ refers to using meditative experiences to gauge your progress —constantly evaluating how well or to what degree you have practiced, asking yourself: ‘Has emptiness, bliss, or luminosity appeared yet?’ If a hint of it appears, you get overjoyed and your mind becomes stuck on it.

Others who haven’t experienced emptiness, bliss, luminosity, or spiritual powers constantly obsess over these things, using them to evaluate themselves: “Why haven’t I received any realization? Why haven’t I developed spiritual powers? Is it because I’m not good enough, or is this practice ineffective?” When these fixations block your mind, let alone attaining Enlightenment, even the states of emptiness, bliss, and luminosity themselves will be obstructed and fail to manifest.

As we discussed earlier, emptiness, bliss, and luminosity naturally arise during practice, sitting meditation, and the process of sustaining your self-nature. But even if they appear, you must shatter them with a forceful ‘Pei!’ and move beyond them. If you don’t experience them, you have one less obstacle—isn’t that even better? For those who genuinely practice the Dharma, emptiness, bliss, and luminosity will naturally unfold during the process.

You simply must not seek them out; let them unfold naturally without dwelling on them, and they will pose no hindrance. ‘Transcending and severing spiritual experiences’ means letting go of and cutting off these evaluative benchmarks. ‘Vital

core' refers to the essential key point. Transcending the urge to use meditative sensations like 'emptiness, bliss, and luminosity' to gauge your progress—this is the key to attaining Enlightenment and the essential point of spiritual practice.

Our own nature is the dharmakāya: it has no form, yet no form is excluded. It cannot be expressed in words or reached through thought. However you describe it, it has no appearance to describe; however you think of it, there is no thing to think about. Words cannot express it and thought cannot reach it. This is called "the path of speech cut off, the road of mental activity ended."

A sūtra says, "Only this one matter is real; the other two are not." Anything with form that can be spoken of or reached by thought is illusory, unreal, and utterly impossible to grasp. Only our own nature, where "the path of speech is cut off and the road of mental activity ended," is truly real. It is called ultimate reality: the "single seal of ultimate reality" of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

We should always remember the key to "transcending and severing key spiritual experiences." We should not use sensations such as "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" to test our enlightenment. We should always freely exercise this "ineffable true nature," embracing it without attachment. This maintenance must never be abandoned for a moment. To understand thoroughly means to be lucid and insightful.

When a practitioner maintains samādhi in this way until their true nature becomes fully lucid and clear, and "familiarity turns into unfamiliarity, and unfamiliarity turns into familiarity," they attain "perfect enlightenment." At this point, practicing entering and exiting samādhi feels the same, and practicing sitting and standing feels the same.

Great samādhi encompasses all aspects. If the mind settles while entering samādhi but wanders after emerging, it is neither outstanding nor true samādhi.

True profound samādhi is characterized by constant samādhi, whether in the tranquility of a meditation hall, the bustle of a busy city, while meditating and entering samādhi, or while occupied with work; the practice remains the same. True practice is effortless; effortless action is true practice.

In the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we not only form a mudrā and recite the mantra while seated; after rising, we must maintain contemplation without a second's lapse. I told you long ago that contemplation is the primary practice and seated meditation is the supporting practice, yet many still neglect contemplation. Let me emphasize again: contemplation is the primary practice and must not be neglected! It is precisely the safeguarding realization just discussed. On the seat, the mudrā and mantra gather in the mind from both sides; off the seat, continuous and seamless

contemplation likewise gathers it in. There is no difference in cultivation between practice on and off the seat!

“This represents the profound practice of no practice; it embodies the wisdom of self-abiding equality and pervasiveness. Much like the river-like yoga, it flows seamlessly, maintaining its focus.”

The practice of Ganges Mahāmudrā embodies the profound concept of “the practice of no practice.” True practice lacks the appearance of practice. It may seem that one is not practicing, but in reality, one is always engaged in practice. This is the essence of the great practice of no practice, as one is continually observing and safeguarding one’s own spirit.

Having no external appearance or pretension of practice is called ‘No Practice’; finding nothing at all to be gained—not even ‘emptiness, bliss, or luminosity’—is called ‘No Attainment’; and realizing that you are fundamentally a Buddha, where you need only extinguish illusory attachments without adding anything extra, since you inherently possess all wondrous function, is called ‘No Realization’.

This is the so-called ‘No Practice, No Attainment, and No Realization.’ No Practice means that which is fundamentally unarising and unceasing. No Attainment means that which is fundamentally empty and tranquil. No Realization means that you are inherently a Buddha from the very beginning. This is the ‘Wisdom of Naturally Abiding in Universal Equality.’ ‘Equal’ (děng) means impartial; ‘Universal’ (biàn) means pervasive. That is, to naturally abide in the great wisdom that is equal and all-pervasive throughout everything.

Universal equality means that at all times, in all places, and among all people, everything is equal. There is no ‘others are high and I am low,’ nor ‘I am high and others are low,’ nor ‘my Dharma is superior and your Dharma is inferior.’ People simply love conflict and hold tightly to their own opinions, believing that whatever they say is the ultimate truth while slanderously judging others, standing on their own egoic position to argue right and wrong, good and bad.

To give an example: there is a type of automatic umbrella that is very convenient to use, but it isn’t durable and breaks after a short while; people call it a ‘short-lived umbrella.’ In the eyes of consumers in our country, this umbrella is bad because we value durability and long-lasting quality.

But in the eyes of some foreigners, this umbrella is wonderful! It’s easy to use, cheap, and cost-effective—you just use it for a bit and throw it away. Because we aren’t used to throwing things away, we label the umbrella as bad; because they are used to a disposable culture, they label it as good.

In reality, an umbrella is just an umbrella. The umbrella itself has no inherent 'goodness' or 'badness'—calling it good or bad is entirely the conceptual discrimination of people's illusory minds. As the saying goes: 'All things are naturally at ease; only fools disturb themselves.' If the 'Wisdom of Naturally Abiding in Universal Equality' brightly manifests before you and you no longer give rise to a mind of discrimination, grasping, or rejection, then you will be able to hear the 'short-lived umbrella preaching the Dharma.'

We previously discussed the concept of the "inanimate preaching of the Dharma." How can an inanimate being preach the Dharma? If you cannot hear the inanimate being delivering this message, it is because ignorance has obscured your true mind, leaving your discriminating mind intact. Consequently, your awareness may only pervade your body. If you strike your head, it causes pain; similarly, if you strike your foot, it also results in pain.

However, if you strike this chair, you will not feel anything. By breaking through ignorance, eliminating the habit of reacting to objects, and sweeping away the mind of discrimination and choice, your awareness will encompass all things. Your mind will become as vast as the void, with nothing existing outside of it. At that point, you will span the ten directions and the three periods of time, knowing everything.

The sun, moon, stars, the vast universe, mountains, rivers, the great earth, flowers, birds, insects, and fish—all things, sentient and insentient, are within your mind. Like the jewels of Indra's net, their lights reflect one another, each jewel perfectly interpenetrating the others. Others are within your mind, and you are within theirs; you are within me, and I am within you. Bring forth any one, and it is the whole.

Similar to a modern "laser hologram," any tiny part contains information about the entire image. The outcome is "equal pervasiveness." If you desire this, you must begin your practice. How should you practice? "Much like the river-like yoga, it flows seamlessly, maintaining its focus."

Yoga is synonymous with correspondence. A river can serve as an illustration of the concept of yoga, mirroring its surroundings in a similar manner. Look at the river: if the channel is curved, it flows in a curved manner; if the channel is straight, it flows straight. It corresponds to its environment in every direction; it can be straight or curved.

Our true mind is inherently like a river, adapting to all circumstances. As we have already said, "Delusions and afflictions are all manifestations of the wisdom of the dharmakāya, the innate enlightenment." The dharmakāya is our true mind, our true nature.

It is eternally neither coming nor going, neither defiled nor pure, and neither increasing nor decreasing. It is always perfect. This essence is the root of all things. When we practice, we should begin from the root and, like a river, correspond to all circumstances, without success or failure, without love or hate, or discrimination.

Do things exactly as they should be done, with meticulous care and thoroughness, leaving no trace in your mind. This way, wisdom and skill emerge effortlessly, and you're busy but not chaotic, varied but not disorganized, and achieving remarkable efficiency. If you're burdened with expectations and fears beforehand, carrying the burden of your thoughts, you won't be able to do things with ease. And if you become complacent afterward, or frustrated and upset over failure, "the wind of joy blows down the Bodhi tree, and the fire of anger burns down the forest of merit." That's no longer yoga.

We should be like a river, bending when it bends and straightening when it straightens, unconcerned by the wind and the waves. Laughter, anger, and scolding are all wonderful manifestations of Buddha-nature, so it's okay to express your anger.

Why? If you're too submissive, he'll think you're weak and vulnerable, his desires will intensify, and he'll want to harm many people all at once. How can that be? At this point, you need to have the "heart of a bodhisattva, the face of a demon"—get angry and teach him a lesson, even beating him up, to make him change his ways. The remedy is education! Therefore, we Buddhists can't always be soft and weak, getting angry whenever we see something unacceptable.

Is it genuine anger? Anger is just a superficial outward display, a means of education; it doesn't indicate a loss of control or the arising of resentment.

Once upon a time, there was a gardener (someone who managed a vegetable garden, growing vegetables for the temple) under the tutelage of the Chan Master Yuanguan at Liangshan. He asked Liangshan, "What should we do when we're faced with a thief in our house?" The thief in our house is a metaphor for delusive thoughts. Following delusive thoughts obscures the light of our true nature, like the "thief" of delusive thoughts stealing our Dharma treasures.

What should we do when delusive thoughts arise? Liangshan said, "Recognize it, and it's not wrong." If you recognize it as a delusion and don't follow it, you're right.

If you follow it (by clinging to or suppressing it), your practice is in vain; wouldn't that be wrong? But the gardener was an enlightened being. He wasn't content to simply converse and listen. He wanted a direct, face-to-face demonstration, held fast to the crucial point, and kept pressing the question.

After several questions and answers, he suddenly asked, “What if a sudden torrent of water overturns a mountain?” A sudden loss of temper is like a flash flood, sweeping away mountains. What should we do? Liangshan Chan Master stepped down from his throne and grabbed the gardener. “Master, don’t let the corner of my robe become wet!” Not even the corner of the robe should become wet, a metaphor for keeping the mind still. Even if you get angry, you must stay calm!

At this point, “it flows seamlessly, maintaining its focus.” There is neither samādhi nor disorder; neither samādhi nor disorder is attainable. This is a state of equality and unity.

You say, “I have entered samādhi!” But you still have samādhi. With samādhi, there must be disorder, because samādhi is the opposite of disorder. Without disorder, what is samādhi? Truth must have falsehood; goodness must have evil; beauty must have ugliness. If there is no “falsehood, evil, and ugliness,” what is the point of talking about “truth, goodness, and beauty”? Our mind must be truly equal, without disorder or samādhi, without correction or distraction. Only by practicing can we achieve this level of skill.

The verse states, “Never practiced, never left behind, yet never leave behind the meaning of no practice.”

This verse can be divided into three sections: 1. Never practiced; 2. Never left behind; 3. Never leave behind the meaning of no practice.

“Never practiced” is the great cultivation of noncultivation just discussed: not the slightest correction, yet not a moment of distraction.

This does not mean doing no practice. Practice must still be done, hence “never departed”: one has not departed from practice. Yet one must not abide in practicing; practice is as though no practice had been done. This is “nor departing from the meaning of noncultivation.” Practice, without giving rise to the view that one is practicing. Neither practicing nor departing can be grasped.

Cultivation is akin to crossing a river in a boat. While the boat is still in the current, you cannot leave it. If you attempt to leave now, won’t the current—symbolizing life and death—overwhelm you? Once the boat reaches the other side, you must disembark. You must leave to arrive at the shore of nirvāṇa, where there is no birth or death. When one truly masters spiritual practice, one transcends both practice and abandonment; there is neither this shore nor that shore; the six realms and Buddhahood become irrelevant; birth, death, liberation, and nirvāṇa are all transcended.

“No birth and death to be liberated” signifies true liberation from birth and death, while “no nirvāṇa to be attained” represents the genuine attainment of nirvāṇa. Such freedom cannot be realized through words alone; it is through experience that one comes to understand it. “One drinks the water, knowing whether it is hot or cold,” as the saying goes.

“On this fundamental path of Dzogchen of one’s own nature, there are those whose accomplishment is like the sign (gaining understanding of the complete teaching to its full measure), or who attain liberation in an instant. All of this is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya manifested by the essence of the great freedom of form and mind. There is neither one who cultivates nor anything cultivated.”

There are several practices within Dzogchen, the most important of which are Trekchö and Tögal. Trekchö, meaning “immediate severance,” involves cutting off delusions, false thoughts, and unhelpful habits. Tögal, or “sudden transcendence,” refers to the instant transcendence of the suffering associated with birth and death. The practice order is to first engage in Trekchö and then move on to Tögal.

The initial step focuses on immediate severance, which entails recognizing one’s true nature. Understanding one’s true nature is akin to grasping the root of existence. The Ganges Mahāmudrā consistently teaches us to perceive our true nature. Thus, Mahāmudrā serves as both the forerunner and foundation of Dzogchen. We can also say that Mahāmudrā is Dzogchen, which is why the former is referred to as “the fundamental path of Dzogchen of one’s own nature.”

There is a sign on the Buddha’s chest. Originally, this sign was not read as wan ( ). Because it represents adornment with myriad virtues, purity, and freedom from defilement, people came to read it as wan, “myriad.” Adornment with myriad virtues, purity, and freedom from defilement is “gaining understanding of the complete teaching to its full measure.” The sign turns to the right, as written.

Some believe that if the swastika on a Buddha’s chest turns right, he is a true Buddha; conversely, if it turns left, he is a false Buddha. This is how they distinguish a true Buddha from a false one. However, if a demon king can also manifest the appearance of a Buddha, how can one tell the difference? Others argue that if the swastika on a Buddha’s chest radiates light and brings a sense of coolness to people’s hearts, he is a true Buddha; if it instead brings heat and annoyance, he is a false Buddha.

This focus on appearances misses the underlying essence of the matter. We assert that the true Buddha is formless; those who possess form are not true Buddhas. This is because “the reward body and the transformation body are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who preaches the Dharma.” The reward body displays a luminous appearance, while the transformation body takes on a physical form.

The Diamond Sūtra states, “If one sees me with form and seeks me with sound, he is following an evil path and cannot see the Tathāgata.”

Although the Buddha’s transformation body exhibits thirty-two marks and eighty minor characteristics, it is still regarded as a false body. If one identifies with this false body, they cannot perceive the Tathāgata. The Dharma body is the true Buddha, and it is formless. Both the reward body and the transformation body are forms; thus, they cannot be the true Buddha. Ultimately, what is deemed false may be true, and what is considered true may be false; both falsehood and truth intertwine.

Without the dharmakāya, how can the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya manifest? Can the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya exist without the dharmakāya? Just as waves cannot emerge without water and reflections cannot appear without a mirror, the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya cannot manifest without the dharmakāya.

Where is the dharmakāya? The dharmakāya exists within the myriad phenomena before us. Without the dharmakāya, these phenomena cannot manifest. We perceive nature through appearances; nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. The distinction between true and false arises from our own deluded perceptions. The dharmakāya is formless yet encompasses all forms, illustrating its paradoxical nature. Achieving the swastika symbol signifies attaining the splendor of all phenomena, purity, and untaintedness. Such an accomplishment is to “attain the full understanding of the perfect Dharma.”

“Or attaining liberation in an instant”: whether practicing Buddha-recitation, Chan, or esoteric practice, we should practice at all times and places, without a moment’s lapse. Walking, sitting, sleeping, eating, and working are all the same. After sustained practice matures, an occasion and its conditions come together, and—“Snap!”—the bond suddenly breaks.

The delusion of clinging to form is cultivated over many lifetimes. It is because of this mindset that we exist in the six realms of rebirth. It binds you like a rope, preventing your Buddha-nature from manifesting.

Your current diligent practice is likened to wearing down a rope until it thins to the point of breaking. This state is called “attaining instant liberation.” If you don’t diligently practice, you won’t attain instant liberation. The moment of instant liberation doesn’t necessarily occur while you are sitting.

I’ve repeatedly told you that practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma doesn’t necessarily require opening your true nature while sitting. It can happen while walking, dreaming, or even working. Abruptly, there will be no body or mind present, nor any external world—only a “pop!” and everything will unfold.

But you must practice diligently! Inconsistent practice—like practicing a bit today and stopping tomorrow, fishing for three days then ditching the net for two, or practicing while sitting but letting your mind run wild otherwise—is ineffective. You fail because you haven't eroded the rope of delusion and attachment sufficiently for it to break. We should constantly practice, abiding by the "fundamental path of Dzogchen of one's own nature." When your practice matures, you will "attain instant liberation."

"This is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, manifested by the great separation from form and mind." When it appears like a swastika " ," or one is suddenly liberated, this is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, and this wondrous functioning is manifested through the great separation from form and mind. "Form" refers to the physical body, our shell; "mind" refers to the deluded mind of false thinking and attachment.

Our mind always dwells in this physical shell and clings to it as "I"; this is "identity view," which heads the five afflictive views. "Delusion" means confusion, so this physical shell is a "shell of ignorance." The great separation of form and mind means no longer clinging to this shell as oneself. Once the "shell of ignorance" is broken, the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya appears.

Many of us who study Buddhism pursue spiritual powers. Seeking spiritual powers is extremely undesirable. Once you seek them, you cannot "attain the full understanding of the perfect Dharma" or "attain instant liberation." In other words, seeking spiritual powers hinders seeing your true nature. Seeing your true nature is the root; if you grasp it, there's no need to worry about the end.

Simply rest in your true nature, continuously cultivate it, and consistently reduce your delusions and habits on a daily basis. Then, spiritual powers will naturally manifest. Such power isn't something you seek. Spiritual powers you seek are useless. Anything you seek is conditioned and unreliable. Some claim to have spiritual powers and the ability to predict the future.

In reality, these are "dependent powers," relying on an "ear-reporting spirit." What is an ear-reporting spirit? It's the "spiritual ghost" we discussed earlier! Because of their deep greed and great sins in past lives, they fell into hell and suffered great pain.

After suffering their punishment and leaving hell, their greedy habits linger, and they are reborn as hungry ghosts, often attaching themselves to humans and sucking their essence and blood. If one's mind is empty and unattached, it cannot cling to anything. Pursuing spiritual powers will only lead to their exploitation.

Ghosts possess "ghostly powers." If they possess you, they will whisper in your ear: something will happen tomorrow, and it will. If you mistakenly believe you possess

spiritual powers, you have fallen victim to deception. In reality, these powers have nothing to do with spiritual powers. Ignore them; do not rely on them. Relying on them will entangle you and prevent you from achieving enlightenment.

We should not seek spiritual powers. Instead, we must diligently cultivate ourselves at all times and in all places, regardless of the circumstances. Through persistent practice, one can suddenly unveil their true nature, causing both the subject and the object to disappear. The roots and dust of attachment will fall away, leading to instantaneous liberation. This detachment signifies “the great separation of form and mind from the body.” With both the subject and object absent, there is no one to cultivate and no method to follow.

At this point, it becomes clear that “there is neither a single entity nor anything else that needs to be cultivated.” Buddha-nature is inherently perfect and all-encompassing, with miraculous capabilities that are limitless and can manifest all things. If we continue to practice diligently, we may one day break free and reach the state of “neither a single entity nor anything else that needs to be cultivated.” In that moment, all spiritual powers will arise naturally without the need to seek them. We must maintain a strong mind, persevere, keep our minds empty and unattached, and return everything to our true nature. Only then will we achieve complete success.

VI. Methods of Meditative Stabilisation for Ordinary Practitioners of Lesser Capacity on the Gradual Path

“If ordinary individual with inferior roots has not yet attained firmness, they may fall into delusions and be swayed by external forces. It is essential to abandon distractions and diligently cultivate a solid samādhi of meditation. Otherwise, even with long practice, no spiritual experience will emerge.”

Lacking firmness signifies an unstable mind and an inability to persevere. The previously discussed practice method—great practice without practice—is intended for individuals with superior roots. These individuals possess a solid foundation that enables them to follow the teachings of Mahāmudrā and earnestly cultivate upward effort. This process is essential for attaining firmness.

Conversely, those who cannot persevere and strive diligently have not yet reached this state of firmness.

Individuals lacking firmness often exhibit laxity and procrastination, consistently finding excuses to avoid practice: they might feel unwell, have a cold or cough, be overwhelmed with tasks, or find their surroundings too noisy or chaotic. In essence, they postpone their practice, saying they will do it tomorrow.

This cycle continues, leading to the question, “Tomorrow after tomorrow, how many tomorrows will there be?” When, then, will they achieve success in their practice? Such individuals are “swayed by external forces,” following their delusions and drifting with their environment. They are categorized as “ordinary people of inferior roots, gradually reaching the path of enlightenment.” Their roots are considered inferior, making them suited for the gradual path of cultivation over three incalculable eons. In this lifetime, they may only accumulate various positive roots, but attaining enlightenment remains a challenging endeavor.

However, those who have not yet attained firm samādhi may still hope to achieve enlightenment in this lifetime. “One must abandon bustling and distracting places and diligently cultivate a complete and solid samādhi of meditation.” Unaffected by internal wanderings and unmoved by external circumstances, one must develop a strong and unwavering samādhi. This samādhi is referred to as “solid samādhi of meditation.”

It is essential to leave behind chaotic environments, as they can distract the mind. One should seek out a peaceful and quiet location to diligently cultivate the necessary samādhi. If one persists in this practice, there remains hope for attaining enlightenment in this lifetime. Otherwise, “even with long practice, no spiritual experience will emerge.”

In a bustling city, the distractions of external circumstances can disrupt one’s focus. If one is unwilling to step away from the chaos to cultivate samādhi in a tranquil environment, then even prolonged practice of a particular method may not yield any spiritual experience. The spiritual experience mentioned here pertains to the “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” we discussed earlier.

Did we not say to cast off “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity,” and cry “Pah!” to break through their outer shell? Yes. That is to enable direct realization of the fundamental view. We must not cling to these experiences, still less suppose that attaining them means realizing the Way.

This does not mean that emptiness, bliss, and luminosity are bad. They are good, but even good experiences are better left ungrasped. If one seeks or clings to them, one cannot fully realize the “fundamental path of the Great Perfection of self-nature.” That is why we do not discuss them in detail. Yet since we have raised the subject of experiences on the path, let us briefly explain the gradual approach:

There are eight stages of meditation practice: gross abiding, subtle abiding, desire realm samādhi, pre-attainment samādhi, first dhyāna, second dhyāna, third dhyāna, and fourth dhyāna. “Spiritual experience” serves as the verification of the stage you have reached. When you chant the Buddha’s name and maintain focus without

letting your mind wander, you enter the state of “gross abiding,” where gross delusion is suppressed.

In this state, the mind becomes grounded and unmoving, achieving oneness with the Buddha’s name. Outside the mind, there is no Buddha; outside the Buddha, there is no mind. This condition leads to the state of “subtle dwelling,” which further suppresses subtle delusion. At this point, the mind becomes suddenly clear and bright, with the sensation of the body floating in the air like a cloud or shadow, as if it has left the seat. This form of meditation is referred to as “desire realm samādhi.”

The “three realms” consist of the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. Entities such as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, and the six heavens are part of the desire realm. Higher up, the first, second, third, and fourth dhyanas belong to the form realm. Above these is the realm of space, which is divided into four levels: the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, and the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception.

After reaching the “desire realm samādhi,” if one continues to practice and the physical world suddenly dissolves into emptiness, this experience is known as “pre-attainment samādhi.” This indicates that one has transcended the desire realm samādhi realm but has not yet entered the Form Samādhi realm, or the First Jhana. With further practice, one can no longer perceive the body and mind within, nor the world outside, thereby achieving the First Jhana. The First Jhana comprises “eight contacts and ten merits.”

The “Eight Contacts” include “movement, itching, lightness, heaviness, coldness, warmth, smoothness, and roughness.” Although the body may feel absent, these eight sensations manifest. They may not occur simultaneously, but they are these eight sensations.

“Movement” is a floating sensation surpassing worldly revelry; “itching” is an exhilarating sensation surpassing worldly sensual pleasure. In short, all eight contacts are very comfortable and joyful experiences. Joy and bliss arise from seclusion from desire, so the first dhyāna is called the “ground of joy and bliss born of seclusion.”

The ten qualities are emptiness, luminosity, concentration, wisdom, a wholesome mind, pliancy, joy, bliss, liberation, and attunement. They already include emptiness, bliss, and luminosity. Concentration is freedom from distraction; wisdom is freedom from ignorance; joy is freedom from sorrow. Together with a wholesome mind, pliancy, liberation, and attunement, these are excellent states, hence the “ten qualities.”

Only by relinquishing the experiences of the first dhyāna's eight contacts and ten qualities can one enter the second dhyāna, called the "ground of joy and bliss born of concentration." Joy and bliss arise in concentration. Only by relinquishing the second dhyāna's joy can one enter the third, called the "ground of wondrous bliss apart from joy," with a subtle bliss beyond joy. Only by relinquishing all such experiences can one enter the fourth, called the "ground of purity through equanimity and mindfulness." Here there is purity and equality; experiences of emptiness, bliss, luminosity, and the like are all absent.

We practice Mahāyāna Chan, or Sudden Chan, rather than the gradual Chan previously mentioned. While we do not explicitly discuss these practices, we nonetheless incorporate them into our routine. Regardless of the states we encounter, we choose to overlook them, trusting that these feelings are transient. We aim to perceive true nature, and we disregard these fleeting experiences.

Ignoring them does not imply their non-existence; these processes are present but ephemeral. The Ganges Mahāmudrā, a component of Mahāyāna Buddhism, asserts that "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" are merely superficial layers. This outer shell must be peeled away to reveal true nature. For ordinary individuals on the lower path of gradual enlightenment, minds remain unstable, perpetually swayed by external influences.

For instance, a beautiful young woman may captivate a lustful person's mind, while delicious food can preoccupy a glutton's thoughts. Such individuals allow their minds to drift aimlessly, both in and out of meditation. Consequently, even the notions of emptiness, bliss, and luminosity elude them, as they fail to directly grasp the true nature of perception. Thus, it is said that for these individuals, "even with long practice, no spiritual experience will emerge."

"Thus undertake retreat practice to prevent habitual tendencies from readily defiling one's conduct. One can then integrate the wisdom verifying realization on one's own ground in fundamental samādhi (the wisdom verifying the power of the path) with differentiated wisdom (or wisdom gained after emerging from samādhi)."

By distancing oneself from the distractions of daily life and seeking a tranquil space for retreat and practice, one can safeguard their practice from the influence of habitual behaviors. Practice includes both rituals and acts of meditation.

For instance, when engaging with the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, failing to observe proper posture while seated and allowing the mind to be distracted by external circumstances detracts from the practice. Similarly, if one does not recite the mantra while sitting and lets the mind wander with random thoughts, it undermines the rituals. The term "habit" suggests that a behavior can gradually become a natural

state. The common habit of ordinary individuals is their attachment to external circumstances and their persistent clinging to appearances.

For example, when someone who is infatuated with wealth sees an opportunity to accumulate riches, their heart races, and they find it difficult to sleep. Master Pang once noted, “Too much money disturbs the mind.” When one possesses excessive wealth, the mind becomes unsettled; hence, he casts his fortune into the river. His only desire was to uncover his true nature, unencumbered by the gold, silver, and treasures that hindered his cultivation. This man represents the essence of a true cultivator, and he ultimately achieved remarkable accomplishments. Are there still such individuals today? They are rare, though a few probably exist.

Ordinary practitioners of lower capacity on the gradual path easily let habitual tendencies defile their conduct. If they undertake retreat practice, “they can integrate the wisdom verifying realization on their own ground in fundamental samādhi (the wisdom verifying the power of the path) with differentiated wisdom (or wisdom gained after emerging from samādhi).” This wisdom verifying realization in fundamental samādhi is fundamental wisdom.

The integration of fundamental wisdom and differentiated wisdom is the “meeting of mother and child luminosities” discussed earlier. Thus even ordinary practitioners of lower capacity on the gradual path can attain accomplishment in this lifetime if they undertake retreat practice. The text adds a parenthetical explanation after “the wisdom verifying realization on their own ground in fundamental samādhi”: the wisdom verifying the power of the path.

Verification means testing and confirming. What is confirmed? A practitioner naturally confirms the power of the path: this is the wisdom that verifies that power. With what do you verify it? What else but numinous knowing, in which not a single thought arises yet awareness is perfectly clear? This is the “nature” in realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature! This is fundamental wisdom. “Differentiated wisdom” also has a note: “or wisdom gained after emerging from samādhi.” Here chu ( ), “emerging,” means transcending—transcending both concentration and nonconcentration. This is wondrous functioning! Differentiated wisdom is precisely wondrous functioning.

“Although engaging in retreat practice offers protection, it ultimately relies on the practice of abiding in the essential nature of the fundamental samādhi.”

Retreats require support, which can be classified into two categories: external and internal. External supporters take care of your food and daily needs. When you are practicing in a retreat room, you may be unable to leave to buy groceries or prepare meals, making external support essential. Internal supporters, on the other hand,

guide your practice, helping you navigate potential obstacles while directing you toward the Great Way.

Despite this support, retreat practice fundamentally relies on the practice of a fundamental state of samādhi. Fundamental state of samādhi refers to self-nature, which is inherently constant. However, deluded ignorance has persisted throughout time, leading us to develop thoughts in reaction to our circumstances. This ignorance causes us to become trapped within the six realms of existence.

The only way to resolve this dilemma is to engage in diligent practice that enables you to break through ignorance rather than relying on others.

If it were possible for others, such as the gatekeepers, to achieve enlightenment for us, Śākyamuni Buddha and Amitābha Buddha would have already saved humanity. The continued existence of so many ordinary individuals indicate otherwise. Reaching the Western Pure Land is not a simple task. Amitābha Buddha cannot bring you there without your active participation. To be reborn there, you must recite the Buddha's name and sever your attachments.

Master Yin Guang noted that rebirth in the West requires "the Saha world seal to be broken and the Pure Land text to be established." If you remain attached to material possessions, such as gold, silver, and treasures, or if you cling to your family, it is evident that the "Saha world seal" remains unbroken. How, then, can you expect to be reborn in the West?

Therefore, even when practicing in seclusion, one cannot rely on a protector. One must still rely on one's own hard work to unlock the fundamental wisdom inherent within oneself and then integrate it with differentiated wisdom in order to attain enlightenment.

"However, if one does not know how to nourish differentiated wisdom and align it with daily conduct, then relying solely on antidotes will fail to overcome external circumstances, leading one to be dragged by illusory conditions into the obstructions of ordinary ignorance."

Differentiated wisdom is spoken of in relation to fundamental wisdom. Gaining fundamental wisdom is "seeing the fundamental principle"—realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Thereafter, we must train amid circumstances to bring forth vast wondrous functioning. Differentiated wisdom is precisely wondrous functioning.

Cultivating differentiated wisdom entails continuously nurturing and sustaining fundamental wisdom over an extended period, consistently refining it in practical situations, safeguarding the true mind, and manifesting immeasurable and

miraculous results. Practice encompasses our conduct (Code of Conduct) and rituals.

For example, in the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, maintaining contemplation off the seat, without following thoughts or being carried away by circumstances, is conduct. Sitting for at least two hours daily, without releasing the mudrā or interrupting the mantra, is the prescribed procedure. Antidotes, discussed earlier, include contemplating impurity when sexual desire is strong or undertaking retreat to cultivate concentration when distraction is strong.

If one does not understand how to cultivate differentiated wisdom and integrate it with their conduct and practice but instead relies solely on countermeasures for cultivation, such efforts will be futile and ineffective against external circumstances. Why is this the case? Because “without recognizing one’s true nature, studying the Dharma is useless.”

Relying solely on countermeasures can lead to mental distress and foster attachment to superficial appearances. This approach not only fails to mitigate the influence of external factors (such as one’s environment) but also entangles individuals in internal factors (like delusions), leading to what is known as the “obstructions of ordinary ignorance.” The ignorance characteristic of ordinary people —specifically the ignorance of “greed, anger, and delusion”—hinders the path to enlightenment; thus, it is referred to as the “ the obstructions of ordinary ignorance.”

7. Thoroughly Understanding the dharmakāya and Sustaining Recognition in Alert Stillness

“Therefore, it is particularly important to constantly cultivate and deeply understand the subsequently Attained Wisdom.”

Therefore, it is essential to continually cultivate and deeply understand differentiated wisdom, maintaining and refining it within awareness. How, then, can we consistently cultivate and fully integrate this wisdom?

“The only method is to remain the insight of inherently stable dharmakāya, free from the distinctions of “subject and object,” “right and wrong,” while naturally and spontaneously maintain a state of conscious stillness and tranquility. This is the Shamatha and Vipashyana of Non-conceptual Wisdom, the intrinsic nature of effortless, co-emergent, natural reality, and the core essence of all practice, and the key to all practices.”

Recognizing the inherent stability of the dharmakāya, which is fundamentally unmoving and unwavering, is essential. This understanding is referred to as “the insight of inherently stable dharmakāya.” With this perspective, concepts such as

“cultivator,” “dharma to be cultivated,” and ideas of right or wrong become irrelevant. It flows freely and remains undisturbed, tranquil yet deeply settled. The supreme way is formless, and the self-nature remains calm and still; the dharmakāya stays unmoving and embodies immense samādhi, unaffected by belief or practice.

How, then, do we sustain and thoroughly penetrate differentiated wisdom over time? There is no other method: simply do not abandon the “insight into the dharmakāya of fundamental samādhi.” At every moment, remain naturally resting in your true nature and temper yourself amidst daily affairs and circumstances. Do not attach to phenomena; do not harbor dualistic discriminations such as “subject and object, right and wrong.” This is what is most critical.

People are always full of deluded thoughts, discriminating about everything: this is good and that is bad, this is right and that is wrong, this is true and that is false—discriminating without end.

If at every moment you leave behind distinctions such as subject and object, right and wrong, neither abiding in appearances nor clinging to circumstances, nothing can be attained—and even nonattainment cannot be attained. Then original nature shines clearly before you at all times, and you never leave “the view of the dharmakāya in fundamental samādhi.” “There is not much to the Buddhadharma”: it sounds simple, but merely hearing and understanding it is not enough. It must be put into practice.

Only by practicing this way at every moment can it be put into practice. We must “function naturally and safeguard realization in alertness and quiescence.” Quiescence means that not a single thought arises; it implies stillness, which is concentration. Alertness means clear awareness; it implies contemplation, which is wisdom.

Safeguarding the “luminous knowing in which not a single thought arises, yet awareness is perfectly clear” is the mutual integration of samādhi and wisdom: samādhi contains wisdom, and wisdom contains samādhi. Wisdom without samādhi is unrestrained wisdom; samādhi without wisdom is lifeless absorption. Thus ordinary beings of lower capacity on the gradual path cannot rely on retreat and meditative stability alone. After leaving retreat, they must also train amid circumstances, nurturing realization over time and thoroughly realizing differentiated wisdom.

“Naturally and effortlessly” means following conditions; “abiding in quietude-with-vividness” means remaining unmoving. Following conditions while remaining unmoving, remaining unmoving while following conditions: whether acquiring vast wealth or becoming penniless, it matters not. If there is porridge, eat porridge; if

there is rice, eat rice—without giving rise to mind-states of discrimination, grasping, rejecting, or clinging.

An ancient master said, “Alert and quiescent is right; alert and full of deluded thoughts is wrong. Quiescent and alert is right; quiescent and blank is wrong.” This is a superb pith instruction for “safeguarding and nurturing over time, thoroughly penetrating differentiated wisdom.” It not only places concentration within wisdom and wisdom within concentration, but also prevents lifeless absorption and unrestrained, ungrounded wisdom.

“This is the calm abiding and insight of nondiscriminating wisdom, the own-character of the uncontrived, coemergent, naturally so, and the heart essence of all practice.” Calm abiding and insight here do not mean the Tiantai school’s Great Calming and Contemplation or some other method. They mean “the calm abiding and insight of nondiscriminating wisdom”—calm abiding and insight practiced through wisdom free from discrimination.

Quiescence is calm abiding, and alertness is insight. Calm abiding is concentration; insight is wisdom. “Uncontrived” means open and free of fabrication; “coemergent” means the myriad appearances; “naturally so” means originally just as it is. These three expressions vividly bring out the formless ultimate reality of the dharmakāya.

“The heart essence of all practice” means the core of every Dharma gate. No practice is separate from alertness and quiescence, from concentration and wisdom supporting one another, or from calm abiding and insight. In Buddha-recitation, attending to the Buddha-name without giving rise to other thoughts is calm abiding; hearing every word clearly and distinctly is insight.

In Chan practice, a sense of doubt enveloping the whole body leaves no room for deluded thoughts to arise: this is calm abiding. Bringing up a huatou with vivid clarity is insight. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the same: forming the mudrā and reciting the mantra gather in body and mind, which is calm abiding; reciting with the mind and hearing with the ears, every sound clear and distinct, is insight. Mahāmudrā teaches us to “function naturally and safeguard realization in alertness and quiescence.” Quiescence is calm abiding; alertness is insight.

In the late Ming dynasty, Chan Master Miyun Yuanwu presided as abbot over Tiantong Temple in Ningbo. At that time, many thatched huts surrounded Tiantong Temple, housing monks who practiced dedicated, intensive Chan meditation. During the Winter Solstice one year, Master Miyun instructed his attendant to bring cotton-padded winter robes to the monks living in the huts. One elderly monk in a hut said to the attendant: “This old monk possesses a robe given by my mother at birth; I have no need for winter clothing.”

The attendant reported these words back to Master Miyun. Master Miyun remarked: “This monk seems to have had an insight, but I fear it may not be genuine. Probe further beneath his words.” He ordered the attendant to return and ask: “Before your mother gave birth to you, what robe did you wear?” The elderly monk was struck dumb and could not answer. Master Miyun then advised him to investigate this koan: “Before your mother gave birth to you, what robe did you wear?”

Three years later, the elderly monk passed away without having broken through the huatou or uttering a single turning word. Upon his cremation, countless śarīra (sacred relics) were found. Many people marvelled with praise: “With so many relics, this senior monk must have been a supreme practitioner!” Master Miyun said: “Ten bushels of relics do not match a single turning word. Let the rest of you try to answer on his behalf.”

Not only were those who praised the relics unable to answer, but not a single one of the five hundred monks residing at Tiantong Temple could provide a response. Chan Master Miyun Yuanwu sighed: “Practitioners as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, yet not one has awakened.” Their inability to answer stemmed from failing to penetrate the “intrinsic nature of effortless, co-emergent, natural reality.” Had they realized this true reality, an answer would have sprung forth without a moment’s calculation.

One might answer him: “No sooner have the tender peach and plum blossoms faded than fresh chrysanthemum and pear blossoms open.” The delicate blossoms of peaches and plums have just faded, and fresh chrysanthemum and pear blossoms are already opening in sequence. What does this mean? It directly reveals the “intrinsic nature of effortless, co-emergent, natural reality.”

We previously discussed the inanimate preaching the Dharma, as well as the phrase “All things return to the One; where does the One return?” Where does the One return? At all times and in all places, it never departs from the dharmakāya; at all times and in all places, it never departs from the self-nature.

These plants and flowers are inanimate, yet the inanimate can preach the Dharma—none of this ever departs from my dharmakāya! The self-nature remains unmoving as such, yet manifests infinite transformations. Being unmoving as such is called the dharmakāya; infinite transformation is called the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya—these Three Bodies are fundamentally One Body.

Some people always believe that only multiplying into numerous human bodies constitutes a manifestation (Nirmāṇakāya). They fail to realize that the endless, myriad phenomena of the universe are all our manifestations.

The sun, moon, stars, rivers, mountains, great earth, chickens, ducks, dogs, cats, tables, stools, daily eating and living, men, women, young, and old—all are the "intrinsic nature of effortless, co-emergent, natural reality." All flow forth from the One True Dharma Realm; all are our manifestation bodies.

It is only because of your wild thoughts, attachments, and deliberate discriminations that you groundlessly create the "notion of a self, notion of a person, notion of a sentient being, and notion of a life-span"—thereby burying a magnificent, naturally pristine Buddha within the six realms, conjuring the illusions of sixfold saṃsāra where none exists, and manifesting a boundless ocean of suffering out of thin air. Now, if you only resolve with burning determination to practice diligently and shed the habitual patterns of attachment and discrimination accumulated over beginningless eons, you can achieve realization right now, liberated right where you stand.

" Those who, with a discriminating mind, enter into the web of action, will never find liberation."

Some people use suprtnatural powers as the standard for enlightenment, believing that only with them can one achieve action. They constantly speculate: So-and-so has spiritual powers, so who-and-who doesn't? Do you possess them yourself? If you don't, how can you tell whether others do? More importantly, spiritual powers cannot be the standard for liberation.

Ghosts and spirits all have spiritual powers, but are they all liberated? If they are, why do we still perform Buddhist rituals to liberate them? Seeking spiritual powers can be a trap, similar to becoming entangled in a web of actions. Once caught in a discriminating mind, there will be no escape.

Reciting the Buddha's name is also to protect our inherently luminous self and to eliminate the discriminating mind. If you speculate about how many times you should recite the Buddha's name, you might wonder whether three hundred times a day is too little or if reciting for only a year is sufficient for rebirth in the Western Pure Land. These are all discriminating minds.

The key to successful recitation lies in its quality. Master Hanshan once stated that reciting the name of Amitābha Buddha with a distracted mind is ineffective, regardless of how loudly one shouts. If the quality is poor, no matter how many times one recites, it will be useless. Discrimination must be eliminated. Discrimination is the worst. With discrimination, one falls into the web of action and cannot attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

Reciting the Buddha's name leads to rebirth in the Western Pure Land. Although one is born, there is no birth; although one is gone, there is no going. This is the law of

inaction, which is all-encompassing. Without going, there is still going; without being born, there is still being born. Therefore, the Pure Land school's great patriarch said, "If one is born, then one is born; if one is gone, then there is no going." Birth and death, coming and going, are all manifestations of discrimination. Buddhism is a law of inaction; discrimination should be eliminated.

Reciting the Buddha's name requires deep faith, earnest aspiration, and diligent practice; discrimination is unnecessary. Furthermore, one should avoid competing for superiority or slandering other methods. Such behavior is a stronger form of discrimination, not only trapping one in the web of action and preventing liberation but also incurring the sin of slandering the Dharma.

"This represents the naked wisdom of the dharmakāya's inherent dwelling, the awakened mind that is never lost. We must resolutely protect and maintain continuity." (This is the second secret meaning.)

The Shamatha and Vipashyana of Non-conceptual Wisdom mentioned above are the wisdom of the dharmakāya's inherent, unattached dwelling. It comes neither from without nor from man; it is entirely the inherent merit revealed by one's own nature, unobscured and exposed from the beginning. Therefore, it is called the "naked wisdom of the dharmakāya's inherent dwelling."

If one diligently practices this non-discriminating cessation and contemplation, constantly nurturing this "naked wisdom of the dharmakāya's inherent dwelling," all great spiritual powers will naturally be attained without seeking. However, if one pursues spiritual powers, they will become entangled in the web of activity, rendering them incapable of achieving liberation or even manifesting them. If the discriminating mind pursuing spiritual powers is possessed by spirits, ghosts, or demons, the consequences will be even more disastrous.

This "naked wisdom of the dharmakāya's inherent dwelling" refers to "the clear and distinct luminous knowing without a single thought." It embodies the awakened mind, originally free from both delusion and enlightenment.

This wisdom illuminates the entry and exit of the ten realms, revealing that all phenomena are inherently pure, devoid of delusion or enlightenment. The sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, earth, men, women, young and old—everything possesses Buddha-nature and is naturally pure. This essence is simply the way things are, without delusion or enlightenment. Consequently, it is known as "the awakened mind that is never lost."

Awareness is inherently free from delusion, and enlightenment does not exist as a separate entity. Entering the Buddha realm does not increase one's status, nor does

passing through hell decrease it. However, ignorance and false attachment obscure Buddha-nature, which is then mistakenly labeled as “delusion.”

By diligently cultivating the Way, breaking through ignorance, engaging in practical matters, and eliminating the habit of generating thoughts and false attachments to circumstances, one can restore their original innocence, often referred to as “enlightenment.” Both “delusion” and “enlightenment” are provisional names. Once ignorance is transcended, both delusion and enlightenment become unattainable concepts.

Buddha-nature does not belong to delusion or awakening. Even when wrapped in ignorance, the luminosity of original nature remains, neither increasing nor decreasing in the slightest. “In learning, one increases daily; in cultivating the Way, one decreases daily.” What practitioners must diminish is only ignorance and habitual tendencies. Innate Buddha-nature has never been deluded or awakened, nor has it increased or decreased.

Failure in practice means that we have not safeguarded this innate Buddha-nature well. Thus it is said, “You must resolutely safeguard it without interruption.” This is extremely important. “Resolutely” means arousing a great vow and making a firm resolve. “Safeguard” means not following thoughts or being carried away by circumstances: walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, never leave this, never leave your own nature even for a second. “Without interruption” means maintaining continuity at every moment.

If we practice sporadically, fishing for three days, drying the net for two days, and taking one step forward and two steps back, without maintaining continuity, we will not be able to attain enlightenment. For example, if we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, if we only sit for two hours each day, we still have twenty-two hours.

If we let the wild horses run free for twenty-two hours and cultivate concentration for only two, practice occupies less than a tenth of the day. How could we realize the Way? If we practice today and stop tomorrow, it is even less possible. Thus we say, “Contemplation is the primary practice; seated meditation is the supporting practice.”

Contemplation means neither following thoughts nor being carried away by circumstances, so that we never leave our own nature even for a second. This is continuous safeguarding! Pure Land practice is the same. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva teaches Buddha-recitation: “Gather in the six sense faculties and maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness.”

“Uninterrupted” means continuous. “Pure mindfulness” means Buddha-recitation has matured until the reciting mind and the Buddha being recited fall away together.

With neither subject nor object, neither purity nor defilement, innate Buddha-nature manifests clearly. Only this deserves to be called “pure mindfulness.”

Some mistakenly think that continuously reciting “Namo Amitābha Buddha” is uninterrupted pure mindfulness. It is far from it! Remember: “With the mouth reciting Amitābha while the mind is scattered, even shouting until the throat is torn is all in vain.” The Pure Land school’s requirements are very high, not low.

Some lazy people avoid making the effort, reciting the Buddha’s name carelessly and insincerely, which is the same as not reciting at all, yet they dream of rebirth in the Western Pure Land. If rebirth fails, it is the fault of Amitābha Buddha. He also teaches others that single-minded samādhi is not necessary. Alas, he has misunderstood such a powerful Pure Land sect that spans the three periods of time, extends across the ten directions, embraces all three types of people, and accepts both the wise and the dull in this way. It is truly heartbreaking.

“We must resolutely protect and maintain continuity,” which is the essence of the Second Secret. So what is the essence of the First Secret? It’s the “view principle” discussed earlier. Mahāmudrā is the One True Dharma Realm, and the One True Dharma Realm is our innate Buddha-nature. It is omnipotent, and all things, including the myriad phenomena, are its manifestations.

One must first see one’s true nature before safeguarding it. If one has not seen innate Buddha-nature, what is there to safeguard? In brief, first realize the mind and see one’s true nature; then safeguard realization with close, unbroken care. These are the meanings of the First and Second Secret Essentials.

Lecture Four: The Practice of Mahāmudrā Does Not Depart from the Dharmakāya

1. Understanding the Importance of “Wisdom of the Essence of Liberation”

Concentration is vital for attaining ultimate practice. Without the wisdom of the essence of liberation, an individual who merely participates in restful practices cannot rise above the realms of form and formlessness. This limitation occurs because one cannot manage the emergence of greed, hatred, and the ongoing flow of all karma.

The key to ultimate practice refers to an essential aspect of it. The term “ Concentration “ in “view, concentration, and practice” signifies this vital aspect. Liberating wisdom encompasses the previously discussed view and protection. The power of wisdom of the essence of liberation relates to the ability to generate infinite and miraculous outcomes from an understanding of essential nature, a

concept referred to in Chan Buddhism as ‘great potential’ and ‘great function.’ In this context, “restful practices” denotes the act of calming the mind and thoughts.

The practice of rest involves the suppression of thoughts—akin to the skill of “moving a stone to suppress grass.” Solely engaging in the practice of rest indicates remaining at the stage of thought suppression.

We have previously discussed the three realms: desire, form, and formlessness. The “form and formless realms” mentioned here correspond to the “four meditation heavens” (the form realm) and the “four formless heavens” (the formless realm). This discussion suggests that, although cultivating concentration or withdrawing into seclusion to enhance it is a critical practice, simply resting the mind and stopping thought without recognizing how to utilize it still constitutes a form of worldly meditation. While it transcends the desire realm, it has not yet surpassed the form realm or the formless realm; thus, it remains within the heavenly realm of the six realms.

Why is this? The limitation arises because one cannot manage the emergence of greed, hatred, and the ongoing flow of all karma. While a person can relax their mind and calm their thoughts, greed and hatred can only be temporarily suppressed; the conditions for their emergence remain. Yuan ( ) means conditions. “The dependent arising of greed and hatred” means the conditions under which greed and hatred arise.

Why can’t resting the mind and calming thoughts effectively control the conditions of greed and hatred? The answer lies in individuals’ failure to recognize their true nature, compounded by their habitual responses to circumstances. When external situations arise, they often relinquish control and succumb to these influences. For instance, if a beautiful woman appears, one might attempt to manage their lust by visualizing her as a bare skeleton, or as skin enclosing pus and blood. This is one method of counteraction.

At a fundamental level, all appearances are deluded thoughts; they are merely shadows of the true mind. When the true mind is present, the distinctions of man or woman dissolve. The clear presence of the true mind, unaffected by circumstances, embodies the power of the path of wisdom of the essence of liberation. Without this power, individuals become confused and easily swayed by external conditions. Delusion leads to karma, and karma results in retribution.

Through delusion one creates karma; through karma one undergoes its results. Causes become results and results become causes, revolving infinitely through the Six Realms of Rebirth with no end in sight—this is what is meant by “flow of all karma.” While abiding in a state of concentration where the mind rests and thoughts cease can temporarily suppress greed and hatred, it cannot control their

emergence. In Chan Buddhism, this situation is illustrated by the saying, “Cold water soaking a stone; stagnant water cannot contain a dragon.” When concentration dissipates, old habits resurface, causing greed and hatred to intensify, similar to a stone pressing down on grass—when the stone is removed, the grass grows. Ultimately, the flow of all karma remains beyond control.

“Because one has not attained the power of a resolute mind, one develops greed and attachment when favorable conditions arise for pleasant and desirable things, and anger and resentment when unfavorable conditions arise, just as one develops thoughts of suffering when sickness and pain arise.”

Lacking a resolute mind signifies an inability to recognize one’s true nature. When a person becomes aware of their true nature and understands that all things are merely illusions and shadows of the true mind, they will maintain certainty, remain unaffected by external circumstances, and detach from superficial appearances. Thus, it is crucial for us to genuinely realize our true nature.

Mahāmudrā guides us in recognizing this true nature and emphasizes the importance of diligently protecting and cultivating it within our environment, ultimately leading to its realization through sustained practice. To achieve this, we must empty our physical and mental worlds to truly perceive our nature. Only then can we access the “power of the resolute mind.” Without consistent practice, this power remains elusive.

One might feel empowered while attending a lecture, but that sense of strength can evaporate the moment one steps outside. What benefit does that provide? We must commit ourselves to diligent cultivation.

I will introduce two methods for this cultivation. The first involves listening to the teachings and recognizing our true nature while continuously safeguarding it; we must redirect our focus whenever distracting thoughts arise and refrain from following them. This practice should be maintained over an extended period.

The second method is to engage in a specific practice, whether it involves chanting the Buddha’s name, meditating, or practicing Heart-of-Heart Dharma. It is essential to cultivate this practice not only during seated meditation but also throughout daily life. Continuously observe and uphold this practice for it to be effective. Otherwise, one may still feel tempted by attractive things and experience frustration and resentment when faced with unfavorable circumstances. This is what is meant by “developing greed and attachment when favorable conditions arise for pleasant and desirable things, and developing anger and resentment when unfavorable conditions arise.”

“Just as one develops thoughts of suffering when sickness and pain arise.” Let’s take a few examples of illness to illustrate how ancient sages handled it. Master Mazu Daoyi was a remarkable Chan master, known as “Master Ma.” He taught over a hundred disciples who achieved enlightenment and traveled extensively to teach the world.

In his later years, Master Ma fell ill. The head monk went to ask, “How are you these days, Master?” Master Ma replied, “Sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha.” What does this symbol mean? The sun-face represents daytime, a metaphor for health; the moon-face represents nighttime, a metaphor for illness. “Buddha” means “awakening.”

Awareness is present both during the day and at night, just as it is in both health and illness. Though only six words, these words succinctly and clearly capture Master Ma’s “power of the resolute mind.” Master Ciming Chuyuan of the Song Dynasty was also a remarkable Chan master. In his later years, he suddenly suffered a stroke, leaving his mouth crooked.

His attendants stamped their feet in anxiety. “What can we do? You’ve always rebuked the Buddha and the ancestors, and now you’re like this!” What could they do? You usually scold the Buddha and curse the Patriarchs, and now you are getting your retribution. Chan Master Ciming said, “Don’t worry. I will straighten it for you.”

As he said this, he used his hand to straighten his mouth, and the crooked mouth immediately became normal. Illness is also a karmic obstacle. “If it is resolved, the karmic obstacle is originally empty. If it is not resolved, you must repay the old debt.” The karmic debts were placed on the great patriarch of the Way; he could either bear them or not. He can choose to accept it or not.

The body is like a house. It will eventually break down. If you can live in it, live in it. If you can’t live in it, just offer it up. If it breaks down, you are still attached to it, and then you will suffer. This suffering is what you asked for. When Chan Master Chongyun Zhihui passed away, he wrote a verse for everyone to see: “I have a house that my parents built for me.

I’ve resided in it for eighty years, but I’ve recently sensed damage. I planned to move it elsewhere, but it involves hatred and love. When it is destroyed, there will be no obstacles between us. After writing it, he passed away in a cross-legged position.

This isn’t always the case. Here’s another example: When Master Cuiyan Kezhen was about to enter Nirvāṇa, he manifested an extremely painful illness, tossing and turning on a mat on the ground.

His attendant cried, “You’ve always cursed the Buddha and the patriarchs, so now you have become like this!” Master Cuiyan stared at the attendant for a moment and scolded him, “Do you also hold such a view?” Then Master Cuiyan sat cross-legged and had the attendant burn incense.

As soon as the incense began to rise, the master passed away. If Master Cuiyan was certain of his imminent death, why did he display such an agonizing illness? He was teaching through his body: suffering is liberation, afflictions are Bodhi, and birth and death are Nirvāṇa. How could he ever have “thought of suffering from illness”?

If you “develop thoughts of suffering when sickness and pain arise,” the situation becomes dire, and the illness will torment you vigorously. If your mind disregards the pain and instead thinks, “It’s okay if you’re in pain; it doesn’t matter,” you will not feel the pain.

For example, when practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, if a finger hurts while making a mudrā, don’t think of it. Focus your attention on the mantra, and forget about it, and the pain will subside. However, you suddenly realize, “My hand no longer hurts,” and the pain promptly returns. Therefore, the feeling of pain is ultimately a matter of whether the brain accepts it or not.

As long as our mind is empty and unattached, illness will heal, and even pain won’t feel painful. The Pure Land school states, “At the time of death, the body is free from illness and suffering, the mind is clear, and the thoughts are focused.” Freedom from physical suffering means being untroubled by illness, even if it is present.

If, when sick, you can forget about the illness and simply chant the Buddha’s name, “Amitābha, Amitābha, Amitābha…” Focusing your attention on the Buddha’s name and not feeling the pain, then you are free from physical suffering. If your mind is distracted, occupied with illness and pain, “Ouch, ouch!” then the pain will be unbearable.

If you diligently practice and have deep mastery of the Dharma, then there’s no such thing as illness or pain. If the mind can transform things, it is the Tathāgata. If you truly achieve an empty and unattached mind, you can transform illness, just like Master Ciming, who, with a flick of his hand, instantly restored his mouth, which had been twisted by a stroke, to normal. Even with a lesser level of practice, you can still avoid suffering from illness.

Therefore, we must always keep our minds empty and pure. If our minds are not empty and pure, we will be tormented by illness at the end of our lives, suffering and distress, and our hearts will be restless. I have seen many Pure Land practitioners who, on their deathbeds, are urged by others: “You must exert yourself in reciting the Buddha’s name now—this is the critical moment! You are about to be

reborn in the Western Pure Land. The key moment has arrived, quickly recite the Buddha's name!"

Do you know what they say? They reply, "Oh! How can I recite the Buddha's name now? I am in unbearable pain, dying of agony, I can't recite anymore!" They simply refuse to recite, because their minds are completely scattered. Our effort in reciting the Buddha's name now is precisely to prepare for that single final instant at the end of life. If you can keep your mind unscattered on your deathbed and continuously recite, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…," then your rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is absolutely assured. So, everyone, practice diligently! Examples like this are all too common.

"Everything that arises is a manifestation of the function of the Self-Nature. Thus, understanding the wisdom of the essence of liberation is of paramount importance."

As just mentioned, we should avoid "greed and attachment when favorable conditions arise for pleasant and desirable things, and anger and resentment when unfavorable conditions arise, just as one develops thoughts of suffering when sickness and pain arise." Why shouldn't we think this way? This is because "everything that arises is a manifestation of the function of the Self-Nature." Instead, understand that favorable circumstances aren't inherently beneficial, adverse conditions aren't inherently undesirable, health isn't inherently beneficial, and illness isn't inherently undesirable.

Where do adverse and frustrating circumstances, and even illness and pain, come from? They are all manifestations of self-nature. Without self-nature, how could these circumstances exist? Awaken sharply and recognize that these circumstances, and even the anger itself, are manifestations of self-nature. Anger then naturally subsides. Self-nature itself is neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going, unmoving and unwavering.

Without the Bodhi Self-Nature, even afflictions would not exist, just as there would be no waves without water. It is precisely because the waves themselves are water that it is said that "afflictions are Bodhi." When we cultivate the Way, we must constantly be vigilant. As soon as afflictions arise, we must awaken to them. Once awakened, we return to our original state, naturally becoming clear and present. Afflictions are immediately dispelled. This is the wisdom of the essence of liberation.

"Thus, understanding the wisdom of the essence of liberation is of paramount importance." Therefore, understanding the wisdom of the essence of liberation is vital. Recognize the spiritual knowing mind, not the deluded thoughts; recognize the essence of emptiness, not the physical body. As soon as deluded thoughts arise, we must be immediately vigilant. The spiritual knowing mind will appear, and the deluded thoughts will immediately dissolve. We must not identify the physical body

with ourselves. Clinging to this physical shell will lead to trouble. The physical body is like a house; it is not “me,” but merely a temporary residence. We must constantly cultivate this way.

2. Methods for Eliminating Delusions: Never Departing from the dharmakāya

“If one does not understand the origin and end of thoughts, all deluded thoughts that arise can lead to karmic causes of saṃsāra. Therefore, let all thoughts, whether coarse or subtle, arise and vanish naturally, while skillfully protecting one’s true nature. This involves restraining thoughts from wandering unchecked and avoiding their use to combat other thoughts. Instead, we should contemplate on our natural essence, observing thoughts to ensure they remain discontinuous, similar to drawing a picture in water that disappears as it is formed.”

The key to the arising and ceasing of thoughts is understanding the crucial factors that influence their emergence and disappearance. What is this key point? “The green mountains remain motionless; the white clouds come and go as they please.” The green mountains represent self-nature, and the white clouds represent deluded thoughts. The self-nature is unmoving and unwavering, while deluded thoughts arise and cease. Although thoughts arise and cease, “recognize them, and they will not be wronged!” Recognizing them means grasping the key to the arising and ceasing of thoughts.

If one doesn’t recognize them or is unaware of the emergence of deluded thoughts, one has failed to grasp the key to the arising and ceasing of thoughts. If one doesn’t understand the key to arising and ceasing, the deluded thoughts that leak out are karmic causes of saṃsāra.

In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we emphasize that “contemplation is the primary practice; seated meditation is the supporting practice,” to highlight contemplation’s role. When a deluded thought arises, see it, become alert at once, and pay it no heed. If we do not see it, we have plainly followed it: this is “leakage.” These leaking deluded thoughts are all karmic causes of rebirth in the six realms.

Following thoughts inevitably means being carried away by circumstances. Attachment to circumstances creates karma; karma brings retribution, and so rebirth in the six realms continues without end. It is like a hole in a bucket: all the water of our own nature’s wondrous functioning leaks away, and we fall into the condition of ordinary beings in the six realms. This fall is the karmic result; leakage is the karmic cause.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” The first half teaches us not to leak or let deluded thoughts pass unnoticed: alert awareness

prevents their arising. Lest we misunderstand and practice a lifeless samādhi by suppressing thoughts, the second half immediately follows: “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.”

Don’t try to eliminate all deluded thoughts. Why? This effort is necessary to enable boundless miraculous functions and save countless sentient beings! If the true mind can take charge, then every word, every gesture, every thought, and every thought are all miraculous functions of the self-nature.

The Immortal of Five Transcendental Powers asked the Buddha, ‘What is that remaining power?’ He possessed five powers, while the Buddha possessed six—what was that single remaining power? The Buddha called out to him by name: ‘Immortal of Five Powers!’ He responded. The Buddha said, ‘As for that remaining power, ask me.’ This call and response, this question and answer, vividly and naturally reveals the subtle manifestation of the self-nature.

This is ‘that remaining power’—the Power of Extinction of Outflows. ‘Extinction of outflows’ means that not a single drop leaks out; all leakage and delusion have been completely eradicated. Therefore, even though the true mind resembles a fool, and immense wisdom appears foolish, if it does not generate thoughts, how can it enable boundless miraculous functions? If the waves were extinguished, wouldn’t it become a stagnant pool? Therefore, “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.”

If we recognize our true mind and let it take control, our deluded thoughts will be a marvelous manifestation. If we do not recognize our true mind and let deluded thoughts take control, we will leak and become the karmic cause of saṃsāra. This is the “essence of arising and ceasing.” Using the metaphor of green mountains and white clouds, we can extol this “essence of arising and ceasing”: “White clouds cover the green mountains, yet the green mountains remain; the green mountains are green mountains, unhindered by the white clouds.”

“ Therefore, let all thoughts, whether coarse or subtle, arise and vanish naturally, while skillfully protecting one’s true nature.” There are coarse and fine false thoughts. What is the difference between coarse and fine false thoughts? Coarse false thoughts arise in response to external circumstances. We feel joy in favorable circumstances and sorrow in unfavorable ones, unconsciously following them.

We must first sever these coarse false thoughts, realizing that all external conditions are illusory, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, which are unattainable. The Diamond Sūtra says, “All conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and lightning, they should be viewed in this way.” Here, ying ( ), rendered as “should,” also has the sense of responding and adapting to circumstances.

We must respond to and cope with all external conditions, whether they are favorable or unfavorable, while also observing them as unattainable, similar to dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, morning dew, and lightning. By constantly observing in this way, we will eventually become unaffected by external conditions, essentially severing these coarse false thoughts.

However, even after this, “habits” still exist. Habitual tendencies are seeds of habit in the field of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). Even if you don’t contemplate them, they will spontaneously emerge. This process is called “Seeds that have been turned up.” This type of deluded thought is subtler than the “gross deluded thought” mentioned earlier, but it is not yet subtle deluded thought. During meditation, it’s easier to notice the stirring of seeds. We should still ignore them, thus entering a peaceful state of Meditation. Only what is noticed within samādhi is the subtle deluded thought, surging like a hidden underwater current. Without deep meditation, subtle deluded thought is completely invisible.

Regardless of whether a deluded thought is gross or subtle, the instruction remains: “Let all thoughts arise and vanish naturally, while skillfully protecting one’s true nature.” When a deluded thought arises, it is essential to be aware of it and to awaken alertly to it. Ignore it; do not follow it, and it will naturally dissolve into nothingness. This process is described as “arising and ceasing dissolve into emptiness.” Through your awakening, thoughts become empty and cease.

If you remain unaware or unmindful, deluded thoughts will continuously stir, perpetuating themselves without interruption and potentially leading to karmic rebirth. “Skillfully protecting one’s true nature” involves careful guarding and correction. What should you guard? What should you correct? Protect the true mind, which is bright and detached, and correct the ever-changing deluded thoughts.

When you notice a deluded thought, it is crucial to be alert immediately and “let all thoughts arise and vanish naturally.” Do not delay your awareness. Some individuals recognize when a deluded thought arises but hesitate to stop, thinking, “Let me contemplate it for a while; let me meditate on it first, and then I’ll become aware.”

However, if you already acknowledge it as a deluded thought, why do you continue to contemplate it? Isn’t this practice exceedingly foolish? Your mind is merely following the current of deluded thoughts! Such behavior is to be avoided. You must become alert quickly and allow your thoughts to arise and pass away without attachment. We must consistently safeguard our true mind by understanding it clearly and continuously, without dwelling on or clinging to it. This approach leads to “skillfully protecting one’s true nature.”

“This involves restraining thoughts from wandering unchecked and avoiding their use to combat other thoughts.” When we allow our thoughts to roam freely, they

become uncontrollable, leading to an incessant stream of thought. Like a raging fire, it burns ever more fiercely.

Letting thoughts blaze on and continue without stopping is “indulging them until they blaze.” We must not “indulge them until they blaze”; we must quickly transform them.

How can we achieve this? There are two methods. The first is to reflect on the consequences of allowing “thoughts from wandering unchecked.” The results would be disastrous! They would serve as the karmic cause of the six realms of rebirth, resulting in unbearable suffering. We must quickly awaken to a clear and distinct state of mind, allowing our true nature to manifest.

If the power of false thoughts is strong and awakening cannot transform them, we can use the second method: recite the Buddha’s name or chant a mantra to replace the false thoughts with thoughts of the Buddha and righteous mindfulness. Both methods involve “not allowing thoughts from wandering unchecked,” but we must absolutely avoid “combating thoughts with other thoughts.”

What does it mean to combat thoughts with other thoughts? Generating a deluded thought to suppress the original one—thinking, “Oh, this thought is a delusion, bad bad, stop it quickly”—is called “ combating thoughts with other thoughts.” Why is this approach problematic?

It leads to two outcomes: Fails to suppress the delusion: The original thought remains uncurbed, resulting in a continuous “flow of stray thoughts.” Creates a deadened mind: Even if you succeed temporarily by crushing the thought, it is like “placing a heavy stone on top of grass—as soon as the stone is removed, the grass grows right back.” Once suppressed to death, the mind becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone—devoid of life.

This form of “dead Meditation” is temporary. Even if you can maintain Meditation for hundreds or thousands of years, once it fades, the false thoughts will return, potentially with greater intensity. The cycle of the six realms of rebirth will persist, hindering your progress toward the ultimate state. Therefore, we must transform our thoughts rather than control or suppress them. We transform them by turning them around through sudden awakening. When our strength is insufficient, we can chant mantras or recite the Buddha’s name.

“Simply remain inseparable from the natural essence and contemplate them, so that thoughts do not continue, like drawing on water: as each line is drawn, it disappears.” The natural essence is our innate Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is neither arising nor ceasing, unmoving and unwavering, neither coming nor going,

neither increasing nor decreasing. Contemplation here is the sharp awakening to awareness just described.

With a resolute awakening, we return to our natural essence. We must always remain connected to our natural essence. When distracting thoughts arise, we must be alert and prevent them from continuing. If we are unaware of them, then it will be no use.

Thus contemplation has two meanings: first, knowing when a deluded thought arises; second, becoming sharply alert. A metaphor is “a cat catching a mouse”: deluded thoughts are the mice. Have the cat’s vigilance, detecting the mouse as soon as it shows its head. In the Chan school this is called “attending to the huatou.” Attending means watching it carefully.

This “watchful attention” is right mindfulness, and it must be maintained throughout our practice. Right mindfulness is like a guard at the gate of a government office, blocking any unauthorized entry. Right mindfulness is the wonderful function of Buddha-nature. If we lose right mindfulness, we will either be unable to perceive the fluttering of distracting thoughts, or we will become so absorbed in our practice that we become nothing more than wood, metal, or stone. These are the two diverging paths in our practice. Therefore, Chan Buddhism requires us to raise doubts, Pure Land school requires us to hold the Buddha’s name, Esoteric Buddhism requires us to chant mantras and make mudrās, and Mahāmudrā requires us to “contemplate on our natural essence.”

What is the purpose of contemplation? The purpose of contemplation is “to discontinue” it. This means preventing the continuation of false thoughts and severing them. Therefore, we say that the function of chanting the Buddha’s name is to sever false thoughts. The Buddha’s holy name is like a sword of wisdom. “Amitābha, Amitābha…” The presence of the Buddha’s name naturally and invisibly severs false thoughts.

If one recites the Buddha’s name while deluded thoughts run wild, this is not truly Buddha-recitation. One must practice cessation and contemplation: recite in the mind and hear the recitation clearly. Reciting the Buddha’s name without the arising of false thoughts is cessation; hearing the Buddha’s name with clarity and awareness is contemplation. The goal of any Buddhist practice is to discontinue the repetition of false thoughts. “Similar to drawing a picture in water that disappears as it is formed.” The process of false thoughts arising and disappearing resembles drawing a picture on the surface of water; as you draw, the image vanishes without leaving a trace, and both the arising and disappearing occur simultaneously.

“Although false thoughts may fade away on their own, they remain impure. Merely recognizing these false thoughts does not effectively stop the flow of confused

karma."

Even though false thoughts cease to arise and naturally disappear, they are not yet pure. Some people may be confused: if false thoughts are extinguished, shouldn't that indicate purity? Why is it not considered purity? Merely recognizing false thoughts does not cut off the flow of confused and disturbed karma.

Recognizing the true mind is necessary; it is not enough to focus solely on false thoughts. Only by recognizing the true mind can one sever the flow of confused and disturbed karma. Confusion and disturbance occur when one encounters something that triggers agitation in the mind.

For instance, seeing gold ingots might provoke a desire to become rich, while encountering beauty can ignite lust, consuming one's thoughts and body. These reactions are all deluded thoughts. Although you may recognize these thoughts as shadows—false and unattainable—you struggle to cut them off. Why is this so? It is because you merely know the states of deluded thought, without recognizing the true mind.

Without knowledge of what the true mind is, you lack the necessary power. When faced with various stimuli, your mind remains agitated, preventing you from cutting off the flow of confused and disturbed karma. Ordinary individuals like us have lost touch with our true nature, mistaking material possessions for our identities, pursuing these objects, creating karma, and facing the consequences—much like a continuous stream. Past karma is akin to seeds sown in the field of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). How can we sever this connection? Only by realizing the true mind and cutting off the root of karmic entanglement can this stream be ended. Therefore, to cut off the flow of confused karma, one must realize the true mind. Simply knowing that deluded thoughts cease of themselves is insufficient.

"While acknowledging the self-extinguishing nature of false thoughts, one should also recognize the wisdom that comes from self-knowing awareness, leading to a natural state of abiding."

"Wisdom that comes from self-knowing awareness" pertains to the fundamental consciousness known as the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), which transitions from deluded thought to enlightenment. When the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) undergoes transformation, it becomes "Amala Consciousness," or pure consciousness. This transformation embodies the concept of "transforming consciousness into wisdom," evolving the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) into great perfect mirror wisdom.

Manifesting the wisdom of self-knowing awareness involves perceiving this great perfect mirror wisdom, which signifies a clear reflection of one's true nature and an

unobstructed spiritual mind, free from all thoughts. This method is the only means to sever the flow of confused karma. Although “the evident wisdom that comes from self-knowing awareness” is straightforward, we often struggle to comprehend or recognize it.

“Recognizing and clearly seeing the wisdom-nature of self-knowing” is called “seizing it in one grasp” in the Chan school, “When the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to the unborn” in the Pure Land school, and “entering siddhi” in the esoteric school.

We must strive to recognize the wisdom of self-knowing awareness while realizing how false thoughts naturally extinguish themselves. Once those false thoughts subside, we must acknowledge the true mind—our inherent Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature embodies wisdom—its very essence. Since all practices, spiritual powers, and wondrous capacities stem from this wisdom, it is aptly called “wisdom.”

Merely knowing that deluded thoughts arise and cease, without recognizing the true mind, cannot cut off the karmic stream of delusion. We must recognize the true mind and further understand that the deluded mind arises from it. When the deluded mind ceases, what is this in which not a single thought arises, yet there is clear, ever-present knowing? This is precisely the true mind, precisely “great perfect mirror wisdom.” At the point where deluded thoughts cease, recognize and directly experience the true mind.

If we fail to grasp this, we risk “missing it right in front of us” and, in turn, fail to see our true nature. “Seeing our true nature” equates to true understanding. It is vital to comprehend that the false mind is unattainable and that the true mind performs wondrous functions.

When the false mind ceases, we can immediately “seize” the true mind—not in a physical sense, as the true mind is formless and invisible. To assert that it resembles an object is a misunderstanding. Instead, it requires experiencing, recognizing, and affirming it. Recognizing the true mind, especially when deluded thought settles, is of utmost importance.

I have often reminded you: What occurs in this moment of “the cessation of past and future,” when the previous thought has ended and the next has yet to emerge? We should currently focus intensely on recognizing the true mind, affirming it, and believing in it with unwavering faith. Once we acknowledge the true mind, we let go of attachment to form, allowing all deluded thoughts to transform into remarkable insights.

The true mind is formless. Anything that has form is an illusion, a mere shadow, and ultimately unattainable. Recognizing this truth allows us to release our attachment

to things with form. Only then can we gain the strength to let go, abandon these forms, and refrain from dwelling on them. If we fail to recognize the true, we will constantly be deceived by the false.

As the saying goes, “When the false is made true, the true becomes false.” Our inability to discern the true leads us to accept the false, resulting in the metaphorical idea of “taking the thief as our father,” which buries our true mind. This understanding is crucial. We must discover the origins of false thoughts. What exactly are false thoughts? They are not inherently harmful; rather, they represent the remarkable function of our true mind.

We should not fear false thoughts. Instead, we must recognize their true nature, avoid following them, refrain from clinging to conditions, and detach from appearances. We should remain aware of thoughts as they arise and cut them off immediately. When a thought is cut off, the “wisdom of self-knowing awareness” emerges. The concept of “no thought” does not necessarily imply the complete absence of thoughts.

If no thoughts arise at all, we risk becoming as unresponsive as wood, earth, metal, or stone. This state is one of annihilation and blank unawareness, rather than a true “no thought.” “No-thought” means that thoughts arise without abiding.

A monk once asked Zhaozhou, “Does a newborn baby still possess the six senses?” A newborn is unaware, does not react to external stimuli, and has no random thoughts. Therefore, does a baby possess the six senses of “eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind”? The speaker uses the baby as a metaphor to explore the meaning of “without thought.” Zhaozhou responded, “Playing ball in fast-flowing water.”

The monk then inquired of Touzi, “What does it mean to play ball in fast-flowing water?” Touzi replied, “Every thought does not stay.” Can a ball remain in fast-flowing water? It will be swept away in an instant. The phrase “not staying” aligns with “without dwelling.” Thus, having thoughts without dwelling on them equates to “without thought,” suggesting a more profound meaning than merely having no thoughts at all.

We have repeatedly pointed out that the perfectly clear knowing at the point where thought ceases is our luminous knowing mind—the true mind, suchness, and Buddha-nature. Buddha-remembrance means remembering this Buddha. “Buddha” means awakening; to remember the Buddha is to remain awake in every thought. This is its true meaning. Without understanding it, reciting in a daze amounts to not remembering the Buddha at all.

My master (Venerable Wang Xianglu) once said that if one chants Buddha’s name for many years without experiencing any miraculous effect or power, one should

quickly switch to practicing Esoteric Buddhism. Once one has achieved synchronicity and attained samādhi through Tantric practice, one can return to chanting Buddha's name and understand its purpose. Therefore, for us Buddhists, it is crucial to recognize the source of false thoughts and, when they cease, to recognize the true mind.

After recognizing the true mind, "one naturally abides." This state of abiding without dwelling is referred to as " a natural state of abiding." In this condition, one exists peacefully, calmly, alertly, and tranquilly—tranquilly and alertly, no longer shaken by external circumstances or troubled by deluded thoughts. It is through this approach that one can truly achieve success in Buddhist practice; otherwise, one misapplies their effort.

Some individuals assert, "I've already recited X number of sūtras, and I need to recite X number more to fulfill a vow!" Engaging in such activities resembles being in a deep dream; it does not reflect true effort or authentic Buddhist practice. To genuinely study Buddhism, one must recognize the inherently unattached, wonderfully bright true mind, which maintains a state of constant awakening and detachment in all situations. Only then can one hope to attain Buddhahood. What is the purpose of reciting the names of countless Buddhas, reciting numerous sūtras, making red dots, burning them, and fulfilling vows? Can one attain Buddhahood while clinging to superficial appearances in this way? No.

"Where deluded thoughts cease, purity is immediately found; this is more important. (Merely recognizing deluded thoughts does not cut off delusion.)"

Where deluded thoughts are extinguished, the inherently pure true mind immediately appears. Isn't the water pure when the waves subside? Recognizing this true mind is even more important. (Merely recognizing false thoughts without recognizing the true mind cannot cut off the flow of confused karma.) We've already covered this phenomenon extensively.

"Thoughts arise and disappear simultaneously, akin to a picture on water: instantly formed and instantly gone, all inherently pure." Arising and extinguishing on their own, endlessly continuous, without interruption—until effortless non-action is attained."

As soon as a thought arises, it doesn't linger in the mind; it instantly disappears, leaving no trace. This is called "Thoughts arise and disappear simultaneously." This procedure is very similar to drawing a picture on water. When a thought arises, it's like drawing a stroke on the water (the water of the mind); when the thought disappears, it's like the picture on the water, leaving no trace.

Therefore, it's said, "As soon as it's drawn, it disappears; everything is inherently pure." The Buddha said, "For forty-nine years I have lived in the world; I have never spoken a single word." This means that as soon as you draw, it disappears; once you've spoken, it's as if you hadn't said anything. Chan Buddhism says, "All day long, you eat, yet you never bite a grain of rice; all year long, you wear clothes, yet you never become caught by a single thread of yarn." This means you eat and wear clothes without dwelling on it or making calculations about it afterward. Only with such a pure and empty mind can you achieve enlightenment.

"Arising and extinguishing on their own, endlessly continuous, without interruption —until effortless non-action is attained." The moment a stray thought arises, it naturally dissolves. This is precisely what was mentioned earlier: "The green mountain originally does not move; let the white clouds come and go as they please." My 'green mountain' (the True Mind) remains unmoving, allowing the white clouds (deluded thoughts) to freely come and go. Though they come and go, once they pass, they leave no trace—this is called "arising and extinguishing on their own."

The phrase " endlessly continuous, without interruption " refers to the concept of practicing. The challenge of practicing lies in this very aspect. " Endlessly continuous " implies persistence over a long duration; " without interruption " indicates an uninterrupted focus. Together, " endlessly continuous, without interruption " signifies the need for prolonged practice without breaks. This uninterrupted approach is essential for effective practice.

If we can adhere to this method, success within three to five years is achievable. I believe that three to five years is already a substantial commitment. My master, Venerable Wang Xianglu, once stated, "I guarantee success in one and a half years. If you don't succeed, come and ask me." I consider this assertion to be accurate! By practicing "in a continuous and uninterrupted manner," we can undoubtedly achieve our goals. The challenge, however, is our tendency to practice inconsistently, akin to "fishing for three days and drying the net for two days."

This passage is crucial. I'll repeat it again: When deluded thought ceases, the pure, clear, and distinct presence is the true nature of self. Nothing else exists.

Don't doubt, "Isn't this belief true? If it were, why wouldn't I have spiritual powers?" If you think this way, you're in trouble; you've fallen prey to the demon of spiritual powers.

Don't you want to see spiritual powers? I'll show you now: I'm speaking here; isn't that a spiritual power? You're listening here; isn't that a spiritual power? You're walking here; isn't that a spiritual power? These are all spiritual powers, the wondrous functions of the true nature of self. The true nature of self is divine, and

without obstruction, it is supernatural. When the mind is free from attachment, spiritual powers naturally arise.

However, our current spiritual powers are minor. As long as we diligently and continuously protect the true nature of self, we will eventually develop enormous spiritual powers. The future discovery of enormous spiritual powers depends on this one point today: on recognizing the true mind.

Currently, when we recognize our true mind, it's like a newly born baby, unable to function like an adult. Therefore, we must protect it. When it grows up, it will be able to function like an adult.

Adults are like Buddhas, and we are now like children. We pray to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for protection, and we also protect ourselves. Practicing with both other-power and self-power is called "nurturing the sacred embryo." Carefully nurturing it over a long period of time will allow it to grow. When it grows up, it will be able to function like a Buddha.

What will happen if you don't protect it? The child will die young, the little baby dying before it reaches adulthood. If you doubt my words and insist that they are false while seeking alternative methods, the child will die young.

If you protect it, it will grow, become a Buddha, and develop great spiritual powers. Understanding the subject is crucial! My master (Venerable Wang Xianglu) often says, "The Garuda can soar thousands of miles with one wing, all thanks to the strength of its feet." If the Garuda doesn't touch the ground with its feet, it can't fly.

Have you ever seen a villager catching an eagle? A narrow ditch, narrower than an eagle's body, was dug. A few newly hatched chicks were placed in the ditch, chirping. The eagle, with its sharp eyes, circled in the sky. "Hey! There are chicks below!" It swooped down to catch them.

Unable to get in, it became stuck in the ditch. It tried to reach in, but its claws couldn't touch the ground, so it fell. Its wings flapped, but it couldn't fly. The villagers caught the eagle. Why couldn't it fly? The eagle was unable to fly because its heels were not touching the ground. Now, recognizing our true mind is like having our heels touching the ground. Otherwise, it couldn't fly and it couldn't perform its boundless and miraculous functions.

If we truly practice continuously without interruption, we will realize the essence of natural spontaneity and attain "effortless non-action." Embracing this natural flow, we experience true freedom and peace. The reason we humans have troubles is that we can't let things flow freely. We have too many demands. We want to become rich, be promoted, and have successful children. There are endless demands.

But if you haven't practiced generosity before, how can you become rich? If you haven't served the public before, how can you be promoted? Unable to obtain what we desire, we suffer endlessly. If we acknowledge our true nature and understand that nothing is achievable, we can embrace the natural course of events, leading to freedom and tranquility.

What's the point of wanting those things? Furthermore, even if we manage to acquire those things, we will continue to exist without any possessions, entering the world with nothing and departing with nothing. And the karma you create to achieve your goals, using whatever means necessary, will follow you and cannot be driven away. It will eventually pay off. Awaken quickly! Practice diligently! You can only achieve freedom and ease in this manner.

3. Relying on Deluded Thoughts to Cultivate the dharmakāya

"Therefore, when illusory thoughts arise, let them arise freely (as the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment states: 'yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it'). One should realize that all that arises is nothing other than the operation of the Way within the original, inherently pure nature. When practice reaches this state, there is not the slightest attachment or obstruction; all stray thoughts become the subtle functions of the Way, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. For non-thought is thought, and thought is non-thought; thinking yet not thinking, not thinking yet thinking."

When a deluded thought arises, simply let it arise; do not suppress it. This does not mean indulging it, for indulgence is ceaseless grasping at conditions. To "let them arise freely" is to remain entirely free from grasping. The parenthetical quotation from the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment—"yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it"—has already been discussed.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment gives four consecutive instructions: "At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it. Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing; in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality." These four describe coarse, subtle, very subtle, and extremely subtle stages of practice.

The first instruction is the coarse level: at no time should one give rise to deluded thoughts or grasp at external objects. This is the preliminary practice. The second is subtler: why should deluded thoughts not be extinguished? As explained earlier, they must be allowed to function wondrously; they must not be suppressed into lifelessness. Yet one must neither follow nor indulge them. Maintaining this balance requires subtler practice.

The third instruction is: “Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing.” What does it mean to abide in a realm of delusion? It means remaining where delusion is neither suppressed nor indulged. In fact, the sun, moon, and stars; mountains, rivers, and the earth; self and others, sentient beings, flowers, birds, fish, and insects—all are realms of delusion, accumulated through deluded thinking.

Without accumulated deluded thinking, there would be none of these realms of you and me. Because we do not recognize our true suchness-nature, ignorance stirs, we chase after appearances, and as a result these appearances are stirred up.

We then continue to mistake the false for the real, grasping and clinging. Through delusion we create karma, and through karma we undergo its results: from where the six realms were originally absent, we bring forth rebirth in the six realms; from where suffering was originally absent, we bring forth a boundless sea of suffering.

Your mind is coarse and cannot perceive subtle states; subtle practice is required. How is it done? “Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing”: while neither suppressing deluded thoughts into lifelessness nor indulging them, superimpose no further knowing.

Everything with form is a realm of delusion, yet it is also a manifestation of the true mind. The realm of delusion is none other than the true mind, and the true mind is none other than the realm of delusion. Without the true mind, how could a realm of delusion arise? Just as there can be no waves without water and no reflection without a mirror, so one should make no distinctions of acceptance or rejection concerning this realm. This is the meaning of “do not superimpose any further knowing.”

The fourth step is “in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality.” Our mind is always caught in opposites such as existence and nonexistence, truth and falsehood. In fact, this is all the discriminating mind at work. All talk of existence, nonexistence, truth, and falsehood is conceptual elaboration.

To say it exists is “slander by superimposition.” It is simply as it is; adding “existence” is plainly placing a head upon a head, superimposing something without cause. This is tantamount to slandering it.

To say it does not exist is “slander by denial.” It is originally impossible to grasp; why deny anything? To add “nonexistence” is precisely slander by denial. To say it both exists and does not exist is “slander by contradiction,” self-contradiction. To say it neither exists nor does not exist is “slander through conceptual elaboration.”

Existence, non-existence, both existent and non-existent, neither existent nor non-existent—all four phrases are slanders! The same applies to relative concepts like truth and falsehood—they are all like this. Only by realizing the true nature of reality can one transcend all these relative distinctions. Even the slightest action leads to falling into the relative distinctions of existence and non-existence, truth and falsehood, which are extremely subtle.

“One is free from all views and conceptual elaborations”—don’t try to tell truth from lies. Truth is falsehood, and falsehood is truth; it is both truth and falsehood, both falsehood and truth, neither truth nor falsehood, neither falsehood nor truth, both truth and falsehood, and both falsehood and truth. For example, if we cultivate Pure Land school and say that the Western Pure Land is true and our Sahā world is false, then we are mistaken.

If the Western Pure Land is true, then our world is also true; if the Sahā world is false, then the Western Pure Land is also false. Why do we say this? This is due to the fact that everything originates from the One True Dharma Realm, stems from the True Suchness of Self-Nature, and forms waves within the Great Perfect Enlightenment Ocean. It is said, “Nothing fails to flow forth from this Dharma Realm, and nothing fails to return to this Dharma Realm.”

This Dharma Realm is the Great Perfect Enlightenment Ocean. The Western Pure Land is a Pure Land because it is the result of Amitābha Buddha’s vows and the pure minds of all the glorious Bodhisattvas; our Sahā world is a defiled land because it is manifested by our attachment to external circumstances and the creation of karma.

Attachment to external circumstances and the creation of karma are also the wondrous functions of the True Mind! From the perspective of the True Mind, everything is true; from the perspective of its shadows, everything is false. “All phenomena are illusory,” and even the Western Pure Land is a reflection of the true mind! Once you recognize the wondrous nature of the true mind, you are absolutely certain of being reborn in the Western Pure Land. “Mind is land, and land is mind.

As the mind is pure, so is the Buddha-land.” “Rebirth in the Pure Land” is actually rebirth within my own mind, which is effortless and requires no coming or going. Therefore, the Great Patriarch said, “Those who are born are born, and those who go do not truly go.”

“One should realize that all that arises is nothing other than the operation of the Way within the original, inherently pure nature.” We must understand that all our actions, thoughts, and perceptions are expressions of the Way within our original, pure nature.” This original, pure nature represents our true self-nature. The practices of the Way are the actions involved in cultivating this Way; these actions

reflect the wondrous function of our true self-nature. We should recognize that everything that arises is the wondrous function of our true self-nature.

“When practice reaches this state, there is not the slightest attachment or obstruction; all stray thoughts become the subtle functions of the Way, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.” What does this level of practice signify? This level of practice signifies a clear realization that everything that arises is a manifestation of the original pure nature. When practice reaches this point, there is no attachment.

Clinging to the deluded mind and its illusory thoughts is termed “ attachment,” while stagnation on the path of supreme truth is referred to as “ obstruction.” Without attachment, one ceases to dwell on appearances and no longer discriminates or chooses, allowing the mind to become naturally empty. In the absence of obstruction, there is no stagnation, and one will inevitably progress rapidly along the path of cultivation. Consequently, every thought that arises will reflect the subtle functions of the Way, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.

The Ganges, a large river in India, has very fine sand, leading one to imagine the sheer number of grains present. In Buddhist scriptures, the phrase “Ganges sand” is often employed to illustrate vast quantities. The wondrous uses of this infinite number of grains refer to limitless possibilities. As previously noted, the practice of the Way involves cultivating it. It is common to assert, “Master So-and-so has profound spiritual practice,” indicating a deep foundation in cultivation.

Thus, the term “spiritual practice” also pertains to this foundational aspect of cultivation. At this stage, even the slightest attachment vanishes, transforming delusion into spiritual practice, which is capable of immeasurable and boundless miraculous benefits.

“For non-thought is thought, and thought is non-thought; thinking yet not thinking, not thinking yet thinking.” Would it not be better to have no illusory thoughts at all? Why, then, was it just said that illusory thoughts become countless wondrous functions and forms of conduct on the Way? It is because non-thought is thought, and thought is non-thought; thinking yet not thinking, not thinking yet thinking.

The earlier discussion of the four statements from the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment already examined such dualities as existence and non-existence, truth and falsity, so there is no need to repeat at length the explanation of “no-thought is thought” through to “not thinking yet thinking.” I trust that you can apply this understanding to the other cases and understand them correctly.

Briefly: non-thought is thought because right mindfulness is present—the lucid, distinct knowing that is utterly clear. Thought is non-thought because erroneous thought is absent—the kind of thought that fixates and obstructs. Thinking yet not

thinking is like “a ball tossed upon swiftly flowing water”: thought after thought passes without lingering. Not thinking yet thinking means that “when deluded thoughts cease, purity is immediately present.”

Compare the four instructions in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: “No-thought is thought” corresponds to “at all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts” (there is a thought of “not giving rise to deluded thoughts”). “Thought is no-thought” corresponds to “yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” “Thinking yet not thinking” corresponds to “dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing.” “Not thinking yet thinking” corresponds to “in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality” (not discriminating, grasping, or rejecting is pure right mindfulness).

Layman Pang of the Tang dynasty composed a verse: “I have a son, yet he does not marry; I have a daughter, yet she does not wed. The whole family gathers together and speaks of the unborn.”

Layman Yang Jie of the Song dynasty, not yielding to his predecessor, answered with a verse: “A grown son must marry; a grown daughter must wed. Where is the idle time to go on speaking of the unborn?” Seeing these two verses, Chan Master Haiyin Xin also responded: “I have no son to marry, no daughter to wed. When tired, I simply sleep. Why bother with talk of the unborn?”

Seeing these three ancients, I too composed a response: “If there is a son, let him marry; if there is a daughter, let her wed. Children and grandchildren, generation after generation: this is speaking of the unborn.” Everyone, can you find the slightest trace of attachment in these four verses? If you ask, “Their positions differ: should sons and daughters marry or not?” you are caught in the words. “To interpret meaning by the literal words wrongs the Buddhas of the three times!” We can only “hang our mouths on the wall” and remain silent.

“When a thought is just arising, if one sees no thought that can arise, that is called non-thought. It is not, as ordinary people imagine, that the non-arising of any single thought is called non-thought.”

So-called “non-thought” does not mean that not a single thought arises; rather, even as thoughts arise, there is no abiding attachment and no lingering stay. The “non-thought” of “not a single thought arising” as imagined by ordinary people is actually suppressing thoughts so they cannot rise. They think having zero thoughts is good practice.

In reality, sitting dead like that will not help one attain the Way—at best, it just turns a person into a piece of wood, stone, earth, or metal! Have you not seen the famous Chan case of the Sixth Patriarch rescuing Monk Wolun? Wolun initially thought

suppressing thoughts was great cultivation, so he wrote a verse: “Wolun has a trick up his sleeve: He can sever a hundred thoughts. Faced with objects, his mind does not arise; Bodhi grows day by day.”

Seeing that he had walked into a dead end, the Sixth Patriarch rescued him with a counter-verse: “Huineng has no tricks up his sleeve: He does not sever a hundred thoughts. Faced with objects, his mind arises again and again; How could Bodhi possibly grow?” Arising of mind is precisely non-arising of mind; movement of thought is precisely non-movement of thought—the Sixth Patriarch had no fixation! “Faced with objects, his mind arises again and again” is simply the unfolding of subtle function. If the mind never arose and thoughts never moved, one would be sitting there dead—what subtle function could be expressed? How could one teach the Dharma to others? One couldn’t.

Bodhi is the original nature: it is unarising and unceasing, untainted and unpurified, neither increasing nor decreasing. In ordinary beings, it does not decrease—even in hell, it is not depleted; in sages and saints, it does not increase—even upon achieving Buddhahood, it is no greater. In ancient times, someone asked a great Chan master, “What is it like after enlightenment?” The master replied, “Not increased by a single fraction.” The person asked, “What about before enlightenment?” The master replied, “Not decreased by a single fraction.” Therefore, Wolun was mistaken when he said, “Bodhi grows day by day.”

“By relying on illusory thoughts to cultivate the dharmakāya, all illusory thoughts that manifest are transformed into the subtle enjoyment of self-nature. Even the coarse manifestations of the five poisons and stray thoughts can be endowed with the luminous power of self-liberation, so that clarity and emptiness become pure enjoyment.”

Relying on the arising and ceasing of stray thoughts to cultivate the dharmakāya means that when a stray thought arises, you immediately awaken to it, recognize it, and refrain from chasing after it—rather than forcefully suppressing it into stillness. You must remain constantly aware and introspective at all times, without following the stray thought wherever it leads. If you follow stray thoughts and cling to external circumstances, that will not do.

This is why the Pure Land school emphasizes constant Buddha-recitation. It is not so you can be greedy for high numbers or attached to the appearance of merit; it is to keep you awake, so you can recognize and protect your dharmakāya. In our spiritual practice, we must work directly on stray thoughts—there is no alternative. Whether you practice Buddha-recitation, chant mantras, or investigate Chan, the sole purpose is to regulate and transform these stray thoughts.

Thus, ‘relying on stray thoughts to cultivate the dharmakāya’ means putting in the work right on the thoughts themselves—cutting them off so they do not continue in an unbroken chain. All Buddhadharma exists to cultivate the dharmakāya, and all of it operates directly on stray thoughts. Do not treat Buddha-recitation as a search for form-based merit; that is a mistake. As Master Lianchi said: ‘Every single invocation calls forth the Master.’ Reciting the Buddha’s name is simply waking up your inner Master—it is meant to bring you to enlightenment.

If we know how to practice amid deluded thoughts and rely on them to cultivate the dharmakāya, “all arising deluded thoughts are brought into accord as the wondrous benefit of our own nature. Even the coarse thoughts manifested by the five poisons can be endowed with the luminous power of self-liberation, so that luminosity and emptiness become benefit.”

Thus all arising deluded thoughts are brought into accord as the subtle benefit manifested by our own nature. Even the coarse thoughts manifested by the “five poisons” of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness can be endowed with the power and luminosity of self-liberation, entering a state of luminous, numinous emptiness. In other words, the poison of the five aggregates can be transformed into the wondrous benefit of our own nature, becoming tools for cultivation and realization and provisions for Buddhahood.

If we regulate our minds and avoid dwelling on appearances, situations, or afflictions, we will reap significant benefits. These benefits are subtle sensations that are deeply rewarding. While enjoying these benefits is wonderful, greed for them can be detrimental.

If we prioritize eating well, dressing well, dating, dancing, watching movies, and living a life of neon lights and lavish debauchery, and then resort to crime when we lack these conditions to achieve these pleasures, we are acting out of greed for enjoyment.

If we maintain an empty and unattached mind—being at peace and at ease without chasing external conditions—then even having only porridge to eat or living in a shabby thatched hut is acceptable. With an open mind, peace of mind, contentment, and ease in the flow of circumstances, we experience true benefits.

Know how to practice amid deluded thoughts and bring our own nature into accord, and wondrous benefit naturally follows: “With an even mind, all distinctions dissolve of themselves.” An even mind has not the slightest crookedness; it is straightforward and candid. “Dissolve of themselves” means that the mind is open and empty, without the slightest affliction.

How wonderful this is! Thus Buddhist practice brings great benefit and opens great wisdom. It is not seeking something; seeking spoils it. Seeking blessings or spiritual powers is not Buddhist practice; seeking wealth or office is even less so.

Everything in this realm is delusion, akin to empty flowers or moons reflected in water; ultimately, it is nothing! Thus, we must continuously recognize our true mind and cultivate the dharmakāya, even in the presence of illusory thoughts. We should not let these stray thoughts obscure our true mind. By acknowledging illusory thoughts as valuable functions of our true mind and avoiding fixation on appearances, we will attain genuine benefits and evade worries.

Conversely, if we do not learn how to cultivate the dharmakāya amid our illusory thoughts, we will be plagued by endless worries and insatiable desires. Once you have a hundred, you want a thousand; with a thousand, you want ten thousand; with ten thousand, you want millions and billions. There will never be a moment of satisfaction, and your pain and suffering will have no end.

“All illusory thoughts are but subtle functions arising from the fully pervaded and unimpeded realm of self-nature.”

This further explains the dependent arising of illusory thoughts. Although illusory thoughts arise from the true mind, they cannot arise without objective conditions. Such conditions constitute “the fully pervaded and unimpeded realm of self-nature.” As repeatedly explained, the sun, moon, and stars; mountains, rivers, and the earth; self and others, sentient beings, flowers, birds, insects, and fish—all are manifested by self-nature.

Why, then, do ordinary beings encounter such different circumstances? Because of the nature of their karma. Not recognizing self-nature, they become deluded; through delusion they create karma, and through karma they undergo its retribution. Collective karma manifests mountains, rivers, and the great earth, while individual karma manifests the twelve classes of living beings. The circumstances manifested differ according to their wholesome and unwholesome causes.

All these different circumstances are apprehended and understood within self-nature. They have no substantial essence and are illusory and unreal. From the standpoint of self-nature, both cause and effect are contained within it, and self-nature transcends cause and effect. All these circumstances are the “realm fully pervaded by self-nature,” what is called the object aspect of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna).

The perceiving aspect of ālaya consciousness in turn discriminates between, accepts, and rejects its object aspect. This discrimination and selection are what we call “deluded thoughts.” It is the same ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna): in

delusion it is the eighth consciousness; in awakening it is the tathāgatagarbha mind. Thus, if we “rely on deluded thoughts to cultivate the dharmakāya,” returning from delusion to awakening, then “all deluded thoughts are wondrous functioning arising within the realm fully pervaded by self-nature.” Deluded thoughts are the wondrous functioning of the true mind!

“Safeguard it with a mind free from acceptance and rejection, for the arising and ceasing of illusory thoughts can never pass beyond the sovereign realm of the dharmakāya’s wondrous functioning.”

As the name implies, “illusory thoughts” are false and unreal. They make judgments and choices based on inaccurate external conditions, which makes those judgments and choices equally false and unreal. Despite their illusory nature, these thoughts demonstrate the remarkable function of the true mind. Once we recognize the true mind, we must diligently “protect and uphold it.

“ Protecting involves safeguarding, while upholding focuses on maintenance. Ensuring its protection and sustaining its role as “master” is why the true mind is often referred to as the “master.” How can we protect it? We must “safeguard it with a mind free from acceptance and rejection.” This means refraining from accepting or rejecting external conditions.

We should avoid discrimination based on any external factor: “This thing is beneficial; I must take it. That thing is detrimental; I must discard it.” It is crucial to steer clear of love or aversion, grasping or rejection. Eliminating these attachments is essential for the protection of the true mind. Our inability to attain liberation arises from love, aversion, grasping, and rejection. For example, one might think, “Oh! This gold is so appealing! I must take it!” or “This place is terrible! I must flee from it at once.”

This brings to mind a modern-day Chan encounter. A Dharma teacher in Hangzhou said: “Many people lecture on the Diamond Sūtra, but I can silence them with a single question.

The sūtra speaks of no mark of a person, no mark of a self, no mark of purity, and no mark of impurity. Here is a pile of excrement. If you are free from marks, eat it!” This does not merely challenge those who lecture on the Diamond Sūtra; it challenges the meaning of the sūtra itself. Yet the question is easily answered: “Please bring it here in your mouth.”

Since you want me to eat it, kindly carry it over in your mouth. That is the courteous reply. Less courteously, one might shout: “Hey! This Dharma teacher has been buried beneath a pile of excrement!” The moment he saw it, he became attached to its appearance, as though buried beneath it. This is all the work of the discriminating

mind with its love and aversion, acceptance and rejection. Not giving rise to such a mind in relation to external objects is precisely how the true mind is safeguarded.

Why is it important to protect our true mind in this manner? “Because the arising and ceasing of illusory thoughts can never pass beyond the sovereign realm of the dharmakāya’s wondrous functioning.” The emergence and dissolution of false thoughts naturally fall within these “kingly wondrous functions”. The dharmakāya’s wondrous function is all-encompassing, which is why it is referred to as “King.”. Therefore, even though false thoughts may arise and dissipate, I safeguard my true mind as long as I do not follow, become attached to, or react to them.

“Although illusory thoughts bear the forms of ignorance, their own nature has never departed from the purity of the wisdom dharmakāya.”

The Heart Sūtra says, “Illuminating and seeing that the five aggregates are all empty.” The five aggregates, also called the five skandhas, are “form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness.” The aggregate of form belongs to form-dharmas, and form-dharmas have marks: men, women, old and young, mountains, rivers, the great earth, grass and trees are all forms. Feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness are mind-dharmas, and mind-dharmas have no marks.

What is it that we grasp? We cling to the illusory images of material phenomena—essentially, we are grasping at material forms. When deluded thoughts arise, the mind reflects the shadows of these material forms, leading to the observation that deluded thoughts possess the “form of ignorance.”

In truth, the mind and material are interconnected; without the true mind, the concept of duality in dharmas cannot exist. Yet, because of ignorance, the mind’s movements manifest as mere shadows of materiality; hence, the term “manifests as ignorance.” These forms are equally illusory and unattainable. If one can “rely on illusory thoughts to cultivate the dharmakāya,” then “if one knows how to cultivate the dharmakāya by focusing on illusory thoughts, all thoughts that arise will be transformed to reflect the wonderful experience of one’s true nature.” Why can deluded thoughts be transformed into such experiences? Because “their true essence resides within the purity of the wisdom of the dharmakāya.”

Here, “self-nature” means a thing’s own nature or characteristics. The inherent nature of delusion is false and unreal. It can also be stated that delusion lacks self-nature, much like “flowers in the sky”—akin to perceiving flowers in the sky.

This condition occurs because there is an issue with our vision, akin to having a cataract, which causes us to see flowers in the sky; in reality, there are no flowers in the sky. The cataract symbolizes the mind’s delusion and attachment, while seeing

flowers in the sky represents the confusion of mistaking the unreal for the real, leading to persistent grasping.

This process not only leads to confusion in the void—where true reality is not perceived—but also creates an inability to recognize the source of genuine flowers, failing to understand that delusion and illusion are significant functions of the true mind. Ignorance and delusion are like “flowers in the sky,” lacking substance and being illusory.

But why do they manifest? We manifest ignorance and delusion because we possess our bright and clear true mind! The true mind resembles the ocean, while delusion is akin to waves. Without the ocean, there are no waves. Without the true mind, how can delusion emerge? The true mind embodies the wisdom of dharmakāya, which is inherently pure. Consequently, the inherent nature of delusion does not transcend the “purity of the wisdom of dharmakāya.”

The Song of Realization says, “The true nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature; the illusory, empty body is the dharmakāya.” The true nature of ignorance is suchness and Buddha-nature; this illusory body, originally empty, is the wisdom dharmakāya. The illusory body and mind do not lie outside the pure wisdom dharmakāya. This is true reality, the One True Dharma Realm.

“Thus, within the illumination of vast and uninterrupted luminosity, the nature of illusory thought is originally empty.”

What is “the illumination of vast and uninterrupted luminosity “? It refers to our wisdom, known as dharmakāya. The dharmakāya is incomparably vast, eternally present, and infinitely radiant. The “Amitābha Sūtra” states, “That Buddha’s light is immeasurable, illuminating the ten directions, unobstructed. Therefore, he is called Amitābha.” Amitābha signifies infinite light and infinite life.

Infinite light symbolizes the vastness of space, while infinite life represents the continuity of time. Amitābha embodies “vast and uninterrupted luminosity.” Whether we engage in chanting Buddha’s name, meditating, or practicing tantra, we are nurturing our minds. When the mind becomes empty and pure, it will radiate light.

Why isn’t it radiating light now? It is obscured by ignorance, much like a pearl buried in mud—its light is hidden. However, even if it seems lost, it still exists! In reality, the light has not departed from us. In our daily activities—working, writing, creating, and inventing—we continue to express this light, showcasing the wondrous functions of the dharmakāya, though these potentials remain underutilized. Within the brilliance of this “vast and uninterrupted luminosity,” the fundamental nature of all deluded thoughts is originally empty and silent.

Do not fear stray thoughts; when they subside, the true mind is revealed. When a deluded thought arises, let it vanish as it is drawn, like a picture traced upon water. Do not let it linger and do not grasp it. Immediately awaken with keen awareness, allowing its arising and ceasing to dissolve into non-existence. The Pure Land school invokes the Buddha's name, the Chan school arouses the sensation of doubt, and the esoteric school maintains mudrās and mantras—all to transform stray thoughts and safeguard the true mind.

If one practices continuously and closely in this way, accomplishment will certainly come within a few years. The danger is that we are unwilling to practice or safeguard the mind so continuously, but instead allow deluded thoughts to fly about and indulge them until they blaze like a great fire. Then accomplishment is impossible!

Simply recognize that the nature of illusory thought is originally empty and do not fear it: it is the wondrous function of the true mind and itself becomes conduct on the Way. Reciting the Buddha's name, investigating Chan, and practicing the esoteric teachings all serve to cut through stray thoughts so that we do not wander after them. When there are no "leaking deluded thoughts," the karmic causes of saṃsāra are severed.

"Through prolonged familiarization and sustained practice in this way, illusory thoughts regulate themselves as they arise; movement and stillness are no longer divided, and one attains indestructible abiding."

Morning and evening, wandering and adrift, diligently practicing at all times without distraction—this is what we call "prolonged familiarization and sustained practice." "Practice" refers to actively applying what you learn; "sustained" implies maintaining this practice over an extended period. When one engages in diligent practice in this manner, "deluded thoughts will naturally arise and be regulated, with no distinction between movement and stillness, leading to a state of non-destruction."

Illusory thoughts regulate themselves as they arise " means you don't need to suppress them; they'll fade on their own. Our practice resembles herding cattle. Initially, we must consistently discipline them. Once we have tamed them, we no longer need to exert control; they will follow our lead. At that point, we will think only when we choose to.

Thoughts emerge because they are utilized. Engaging with them prevents them from surfacing, signifying failure in our practice. Ordinary individuals struggle to control their thoughts, which arise spontaneously from the mind and regardless of intention; this is why they are labeled as "illusory thoughts." Such behavior in a practitioner suggests inadequate practice. We must rectify our understanding and commit to diligent effort.

“Movement and stillness are no longer divided “ means that all states—meditating, working, moving, or resting—are equal. If I ask you to think, you do so; if I request that you refrain from thinking, you comply. Movement and stillness are interchangeable.

Even while a thought is arising, no place from which it arises can be found. This is what it means that, at every moment, there is no thought that can arise. It does not mean remaining like a stagnant pool with no thoughts at all; it means simply not abiding in thoughts. At this point one attains “indestructible abiding,” which cannot decay. Our physical body will decay and die; when its conditions are exhausted, the four elements separate. The dharmakāya, however, is indestructible.

Mahāmudrā instructs us to cultivate our minds directly. There is no need to adopt any other methods; simply focus on this direct cultivation. Continuously observe and contemplate, akin to drawing a picture on water, without fixation on anything. By cultivating in this manner over time, you will naturally subdue delusion, leading to the fruition of the path and the achievement of the state of non-destruction. Therefore, the practices of the highest tantras of Vajrayāna closely resemble those of Chan. Chan also teaches us to cultivate in a way that does not involve the act of cultivating. Thus, the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate is essential.

“At the culmination of this practice, thoughts of joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety still appear just as they do in ordinary beings. Yet one does not, as ordinary beings do, grasp their formation and dissolution as truly existent, accumulate streams of karmic activity, and become swept away by the power of desire.”

At the culmination of this practice, we reach the pinnacle of our contemplation and practice.

At this point, individuals experience the same feelings of joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety as ordinary people; they feel worry when undesirable things happen, joy when pleasant things occur, and still have doubts while engaging in activities (but they never doubt the teacher, the Dharma, or the fundamental principles). These joys, sorrows, and doubts are all illusory thoughts, just like those of ordinary people.

Unlike ordinary individuals, those who practice at this level detach from the reality of what they enjoy, worry about, and doubt. Although they may experience the illusory thoughts of joy, sorrow, and doubt, they do not cling to them stubbornly. They understand that “all appearances are illusory” and do not believe in any substantial creation or destruction.

Ordinary beings take deluded circumstances as real, remaining uneasy and preoccupied, turning them over in the mind day and night. Afflictions, afflictions! An

ordinary person's whole life passes in deluded thoughts and afflictions. How painful this is! This is delusion.

Delusion leads to karma, and karma leads to retribution. This cycle results in "accumulating various karmic actions driven by the force of greed." Ordinary people are not in control of themselves but are carried away by this force.

Those who truly practice and "exert themselves fully" may also experience "feelings of joy, sorrow, and doubt," but these thoughts pass quickly, unaffected by greed. They do not dwell on them or calculate over them day and night; this is what sets them apart. When something sorrowful happens, it is not that they do not weep; when something joyful happens, it is not that they do not laugh.

They shed tears of sadness and laugh in moments of joy, but a sob or a laugh quickly passes, and their hearts remain at peace. Those who are "at the culmination of this practice" are alive and human; they laugh when joyful and cry when sad. At this level of practice, joy, laughter, anger, and scolding are all Dharma, all spiritual attainments!

IV. Essential Points in the Practice of Mahāmudrā and Possible Deviations

"When a thought arises, first recognize its illusory nature; its appearance then vanishes like meeting an old acquaintance. Next, the illusory thought will naturally dissolve on its own, like a snake untying its own knot. Finally, illusory thoughts fade away harmlessly and without benefit, like a thief entering an empty room. This is the most crucial and subtle secret of liberation."

When a thought arises, one initially practices cultivation by simply recognizing its various appearances, which then disappear immediately, similar to meeting someone you once knew. However, after the familiar person leaves, their shadow lingers in the mind. Although the thought has vanished, its shadow remains.

Next, when practice improves, deluded thoughts naturally arise and cease by themselves, like a snake's knot untying itself: attachment has loosened. At the culmination of practice, "deluded thoughts disappear without benefit or harm." Their arising is not harmful, nor is their ceasing beneficial. With neither benefit nor harm, they naturally disappear.

Let deluded thoughts arise. I know they are the wondrous functioning of the true mind, so I do not abide in them. They naturally cease, without my discriminating about them. Some practitioners like to discriminate: "Ah, my deluded thoughts have stopped! That is beneficial; my practice has improved. Oh no, they have arisen again! That is harmful; I have regressed."

In fact, delusions have no inherent nature and are neither beneficial nor detrimental. As long as we practice diligently, we will eventually stop discriminating between “beneficial” and “harmful,” and delusions will disappear at any moment. Like a thief entering an empty room, “There’s nothing to steal.” This is the most crucial and wonderful method for resolving delusions.” This procedure is the most important and wonderful method for liberating delusions.

Because this is the “most crucial and subtle secret of liberation,” I will revisit these three levels of practice. When delusions arise, the first step is to recognize them and refrain from following them. Doing so will cause the delusions to dissipate. However, the initial power of recognizing these delusions is often inadequate. Although the delusions may have disappeared, their images can linger in our minds.

It’s akin to encountering an old acquaintance. Even after their departure, our thoughts race: I haven’t seen this person in years. What were they like back then? What are they like now? While the person may be gone, their image remains. This persistence of their image, even after the delusions have vanished, stems from a lack of sufficient strength.

Secondly, we become more knowledgeable about illusory thoughts, recognizing that they will ultimately fade away on their own. This enhances our resilience more than it did in the past. However, the deceptive nature of illusory thoughts tends to linger for a time before they dissipate, similar to a snake untying a knot. Although snakes do not naturally tie themselves in knots, once one is created, it will eventually untie itself. At this stage in our practice, even after the departure of “old acquaintances,” our minds are no longer troubled. We have made further progress compared to our previous state.

Illusory thoughts are neither beneficial nor harmful, and their emergence and disappearance are unrelated to us. Our true mind is unshakable; it remains unchanged regardless of the presence or absence of illusory thoughts. Our true mind does not increase or decrease. Therefore, illusory thoughts can arise and disappear freely.

Grasping this concept is crucial, and attaining this state is both profound and valuable. When a delusional thought lingers in our minds, preventing us from letting it go, it reflects our insufficient strength.

Many people experience this: after waking from a dream, they ponder its content and feel compelled to share it with others. If we can reach a state where we recognize it as a dream, let it go, and allow no trace of it to linger in our minds, we will possess power. This state is akin to meeting an old acquaintance, a snake freeing itself from entanglement, or a thief discovering an empty room. These analogies illustrate the varying levels of our perspective on delusions and the power

we have to dispel them. Reflect on what level you can achieve in eliminating delusions.

“Practice without underlying understanding is equivalent to being in the realm of meditative absorption.”

One may know how to practice and how not to follow illusory thoughts, yet fail to understand that “all illusory thoughts are wondrous functions arising within the realm fully pervaded and illumined by self-nature.” This is called knowing how to practice without underlying understanding. If one practices the Path without knowing or recognizing the true mind, one’s attainment is no different from meditative absorption in the heavens. Even if one practices diligently to the utmost and develops profound concentration, one will be reborn only in the first, second, third, or fourth dhyāna heaven and will still not have transcended the form realm. Far from attaining liberation, one will not even have reached the formless realm.

“If practice lacks the essential, subtle understanding of the Dharma, even if the mind can abide steadfastly in meditative absorption, it will still fall into the meditative states of the higher realms.”

Without practice in these subtle essentials of self-liberation, one “knows how to cultivate but not how to liberate.” Even if the mind abides firmly in meditative concentration, motionless in deep absorption, it may remain so for one, two, or three years, or even one, two, or countless millions of eons.

One still “falls into the meditative concentrations of the higher realms”: at most, the concentrations of the four dhyāna heavens or four formless heavens. These are still within the form and formless realms, within the three realms; they are not liberation. Without recognizing the true mind, one cannot leave the three realms and is no different from followers of non-Buddhist paths. Why can they not leave the three realms? Because they do not know what the true mind is.

Followers of non-Buddhist paths cling to the yang spirit, regarding it as real and indestructible. The yang spirit is what Buddhism calls the mind-born body, a body born of manas consciousness (the mind faculty). It is still an illusory reflection.

The Diamond Sūtra states, “All appearances are delusion.” All things that have form, including the yang spirit, are false. It cannot transcend the Three Realms and is not the ultimate reality. Only by recognizing the true nature of the self and diligently protecting it can one achieve the Great Way.

We have repeatedly urged you to safeguard the Dharma essence of suchness. Maintain clear, ever-present knowing, abiding nowhere at any moment, and safeguard it with close, unbroken care. Over time, you will naturally realize the great

Way; accomplishment is certain. Recognizing the true mind is like obtaining uncooked rice. Cook it over a fire, and it becomes cooked rice.

“Burning with fire” signifies the need to constantly protect the mind, preventing distracting thoughts from intruding, avoiding attachment, and maintaining an empty and unattached mindset. In this manner, attaining Buddhahood is assured. This type of meditation is essential. Even with deep focus and prolonged samādhi, one cannot reach the Great Way without this cultivation.

Many people today admire concentration: “Oh, this monk is incredibly skilled; he’s been in samādhi for a week.” “Oh, no, no!” “That monk is even better; he’s been in samādhi for three months.” We must correct this belief: No! That is merely dead samādhi; it absolutely cannot lead to the Great Way! True samādhi involves remaining unconfused by the environment and detached at all times.

If one can be in samādhi while sitting but not when standing, how can that be effective? It cannot. Thus, if one fails to recognize the true nature of the Dharma and practices blindly, one will miss the Great Way. One must recognize the true mind and practice to protect it in order to achieve the Great Way. This is a vital principle that all of us Buddhists must grasp.

“If one is content merely to understand where illusory thoughts arise and abide, one is no different from those of inferior capacity who are wild and confused.”

Some people undertake spiritual practice and feel satisfied merely after identifying where delusive thoughts arise and abide. They say, “Oh, I see now. I know where delusive thoughts arise and where they stay. Where do they arise from? They arise from external conditions—delusive thoughts are simply the reflection of those conditions. Where do they abide? They abide right on those conditions.”

Indeed, delusive thoughts do arise from external conditions; without conditions, there are no delusive thoughts. As Buddha Vipaśyin taught, “The mind is inherently unarisen, taking birth only due to conditions.” However, where do these conditions themselves come from? If one is content simply knowing the origin and abiding place of delusive thoughts, “that is no different from being inferior, mad, and deluded.”

The Buddha Dharma is a supreme and subtle teaching: concentrated without madness, wise without delusion. Inferior madness and delusion are not the Buddha Dharma. “Those who settle for merely knowing the origin and abiding place of delusive thoughts” possess the lowest spiritual capacity. What use is there in merely knowing where delusive thoughts arise and abide? One must recognize and realize the true Tathātā (Suchness) Dharma-body, practice directly from this fundamental reality, and constantly maintain contemplative awareness in every moment and

place to achieve the Way. To dream of attaining enlightenment while only knowing the arising and abiding of delusive thoughts is like boiling sand to make rice—it will never become rice even after millions of eons.

“Or, if one leans one-sidedly toward emptiness, seeking the seal of the dharmakāya through intellectual speculation and concept-building, then when encountering adverse circumstances, their practice will fail to free them from the bondage of external conditions, and instead, their own faults will manifest.”

Those who are satisfied with merely understanding the emergence and persistence of illusory thoughts possess inferior aptitude, as they cling to objects, perceiving them as real. However, “ incline one-sidedly toward emptiness” is also unacceptable! Clinging to existence is misguided, as is surrendering oneself to emptiness. Why is this the case?

Our dharmakāya is neither empty nor existent; it encompasses emptiness and existence, transcending both. To assert that it exists is incorrect, just as claiming it is empty is equally erroneous. “Seeking the seal of the dharmakāya”—the term “seal” denotes confirmation, and “agreement” bolsters this understanding. To seek the seal of the dharmakāya is to seek confirmation and alignment with it. If you favor emptiness and are not in sync with the dharmakāya, how can you truly agree with it? Thus, the only appropriate term for this activity is “contemplation.” The dharmakāya cannot be the object of contemplation; once it is brought into contemplation, it strays from its true nature. All forms of contemplation, whether they cling to emptiness or existence, are fundamentally incompatible with the dharmakāya.

“But when encountering adverse conditions, one’s practice cannot release one from bondage to the realm, and instead one’s own faults appear.” When these people who have fallen into biased emptiness meet adverse conditions, the practice they have done cannot release them from the bondage of those realms, and they are bound by them.

Those who lean toward emptiness cannot escape their bondage when faced with adversity. His notion of “emptiness” is merely a thought; when circumstances change, it ceases to be empty. This “emptiness” implies a certain sense of void. Doesn’t this term also signify “existence”? Once upon a time, a senior citizen in Pudong, Shanghai, remarked, “You speak of emptiness, emptiness, but how can there still be mountains, rivers, earth, men, women, and children?” He interpreted “emptiness” as “nothing at all,” which contrasts with our understanding of emptiness.

When we discuss emptiness, we refer to the emptiness of appearances. We shouldn’t dwell on appearances; rather, emptiness is defined as the unattainable. “All appearances are delusion,” yet we do not cling to them. Appearances still exist.

Without them, how can they serve a purpose? If this house doesn't exist, how can we shelter from the wind and rain? If this stool doesn't exist, how can we sit comfortably? Dharmas arising from causes and conditions are, I say, empty. Emptiness, devoid of self-substance or inherent nature, signifies that appearance is present.

Contemplating "emptiness" is useless; when encountering a state of mind, one cannot achieve emptiness. Our true nature is neither empty nor existent; it is both empty and existent. Existence is emptiness, and emptiness is existence. The very essence of "existence" is unattainable; its essence is true emptiness. Clinging to emptiness without recognizing one's true nature will lead to powerlessness and inability to penetrate the state of mind.

If one recognizes one's true nature, all states of mind are merely the subtle manifestations of it, like a reflection in a mirror or ripples on water. Seeing the mirror and the water will prevent one from being misled by reflections and ripples, and all states of mind will naturally be easily emptied. If one does not recognize one's true nature, then emptiness is impossible. Our first priority is to understand the true nature of the Dharma; this is paramount. Therefore, understanding one's mind and seeing one's nature is fundamental. Regardless of one's practice, understanding one's mind and seeing one's nature is fundamental. Without understanding one's mind and seeing one's nature, one will not succeed.

Understanding merely the emergence and persistence of illusory thoughts, or focusing on emptiness without recognizing one's true nature, hinders liberation from the constraints of the mind, especially in adverse conditions. This approach often highlights one's shortcomings. When confronted with difficulties, ordinary people, unaware of true emptiness, succumb to doubts. They may express their frustration by saying, "This should be empty!"

But why can't it be empty? It still exists! This dilemma leads them to conclude that the Buddhist teaching of emptiness is flawed.

A similar situation occurs with celestial beings in the Four Formless Heavens. They cultivate to the point of experiencing emptiness, yet when the kalpa of emptiness concludes, they emerge from this state. Upon witnessing the external world, they become suspicious: "They say it's empty, so why does existence persist? The Buddha's teachings are misleading; he must be a liar!" Their attachment to appearances results in karma, which in turn brings retribution.

Slandering the Dharma can lead to hell, illustrating what it means to "manifest one's own faults. "Thus, it is indispensable to understand the true meaning of the Dharma and the nature of Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is neither strictly empty nor existent; it embodies both qualities. If one clings to emptiness and pursues it

without recognizing their true nature, they will ultimately fail, resulting in negative karma and adverse consequences.

5. As Deluded Thoughts Cease Primordial Purity Is Revealed

“Cessation through arising, self-cessation, and cessation through samādhi are all the ceasing of deluded thoughts themselves; as deluded thoughts cease, primordial purity is revealed.”

Deluded thoughts can cease just as they can arise. There are three forms of cessation: “cessation through arising,” “self-cessation,” and “cessation through samādhi.” In the first, the arising of a later deluded thought ends the preceding one. In the second, the thought ceases by itself. In the third, one enters samādhi through practice, bringing deluded thoughts to an end.

These ways of ending deluded thoughts differ in speed and strength. Whatever method is used, it is the deluded thoughts themselves that cease; hence, “all are the ceasing of deluded thoughts themselves.” In fact, deluded thoughts are illusory and unobtainable, so there is no real question of their ceasing or not ceasing. Not abiding in them is regarded as their cessation.

After deluded thoughts cease, there is “primordial purity as deluded thoughts cease”: with their cessation, the originally pure dharmakāya of suchness is revealed. A sūtra says, “Let the frenzied mind subside: this itself is bodhi.” How does the deluded mind arise? “Mind is originally unborn; it comes into being because of circumstances,” as Viśvabhū Buddha clearly states. The deluded mind depends on circumstances; without external circumstances, there is no deluded mind.

Yet circumstances, like mind, are illusory and unobtainable. “Mind is not mind of itself; because of circumstances, it is mind. Circumstances are not circumstances of themselves; because of mind, they are circumstances.” Mind and circumstances arise in relation to each other; without either, the other does not exist. Thus my late teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, said, “Circumstances too have no existence; both belong to illusory appearances.”

If you recognize that all external conditions are akin to dreams and empty flowers, lacking substance, and do not cling to them or entertain false thoughts, your mind will remain calm and clear. Your spiritual light will shine independently, and your true mind will be pure and clear, resembling a mirror that reflects objects. Without attachment or aversion, devoid of love or hate, you will be fully aware and distinct, with not a single thought arising. In this state, you will directly realize the true dharmakāya, and there will be no need for cumbersome efforts beyond calming the mind.

If you genuinely understand the true dharmakāya, illusory thoughts will reveal their own wondrous function, and delusion will be purified. You understand that waves are water, so you need not wait for them to subside. This metaphor encapsulates the profound meaning of " the nature of delusion is intrinsically pure."

The key point here is to recognize illusory thoughts without fear. These thoughts are a remarkable function of the true mind. By refraining from following them, we can sever our attachment and embrace the original purity inherent in illusory thoughts. By observing their rise and fall, we can connect with the fundamentally pure dharmakāya. The dharmakāya is inherently pure; it does not become tainted merely due to illusory thoughts. By avoiding engagement with these thoughts, remaining unaffected by them, and consistently nurturing the dharmakāya, we will inevitably attain the Great Way and achieve Buddhahood.

"This cessation of structural grasping is the single paramount essential for self-liberation via direct perception."

Previously, we discussed that the nature of delusion is intrinsically pure. Where do illusory thoughts arise? They arise in response to circumstances. If there were no circumstances, there would be no thoughts. Although illusory thoughts arise in response to delusional circumstances, our true mind remains untainted and pure.

We have used the analogy of a pearl. Even if a pearl is covered in mud, it remains pure and radiant; the mud does not stain or darken it. After removing the mud, the pearl remains as bright as ever. Therefore, simply recognize the true mind and don't be afraid of illusory thoughts.

Eliminating the incorrect understanding of illusory thoughts, untangling the fear of illusory thoughts, and thus recognizing the true mind is called the state of cessation and understanding." "This cessation of structural grasping is the single paramount essential for self-liberation via direct perception." Direct perception is to reveal everything without discrimination, like a mirror reflecting an object.

When it reflects a round object, it sees the round aspect; when it reflects a square object, it sees the square aspect. A mirror is indifferent to a thousand ounces of gold or a pile of manure. This type of vision is direct perception. Direct perception follows the appearance of objective objects, without any false mental discrimination. If one distinguishes between good and bad, long and short, and beautiful and ugly, then it is comparative perception.

When we cultivate the path to liberation, we transform the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) into great perfect mirror wisdom that illuminates the ten directions. All myriad phenomena arise within our true mind, without the slightest love or aversion, grasping or rejection. This is what we call "liberated direct perception."

Although it employs a mirror as a metaphor, it is not entirely analogous to one. A mirror reflects images based on objective circumstances, which is similar to our perception.

However, a mirror lacks discernment and awareness. We possess perception, understanding of right and wrong, length and shortness, and gain and loss, yet we are free from attachment, aversion, discrimination, or rejection. As the sūtra states, “We are well able to discern the various aspects of dharma, unmoved by the ultimate truth.” When we discern without allowing these thoughts to enter our minds, we achieve direct perception and inference.

If we relied solely on direct perception, we would forfeit our ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, and length and shortness. How could that be feasible? To practice diligently, we must consistently apply our direct perception and true mind for inference.

Inference is often referred to as delusion. Thus, we must grasp the principle expressed by the Buddha in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” Utilize these thoughts when necessary; effective use represents a skillful application. This notion encapsulates the profound significance of the “cessation of structural grasping.” This phase of cessation and understanding illustrates liberated direct perception, which is the “single paramount essential” and the only aspect that genuinely matters.

Recognizing the true mind is of paramount importance. Where is the true mind? It shines before everyone.

Where is this light? I see things, hear sounds, smell fragrances and odors, and know all kinds of states. This is the light! Some people simply eliminate delusions. But after the delusions are extinguished, when the true mind appears, they do not recognize it and instead continue to practice the art of stilling thoughts.

This practice, over time, dies and loses its vibrant and wonderful function because they do not recognize the true mind. As we have discussed before, merely stilling delusions without understanding the true nature is useless. Recognizing one’s true nature when delusions cease is the only important thing.

“It is also the unique essential subtlety of the supreme Dharma gate of Dzogchen of self-nature.”

Although Dzogchen has specific methods of practice, the subject here is the “Dzogchen of self-nature.” Self-nature is originally perfect and complete, pervading all space and the entire Dharma realm. However vast space may be, self-nature is

equally vast; all worlds of the ten directions and all sentient beings are complete within it.

Pure Land, Vajrayāna, Chan, Yogācāra, Tiantai, Huayan, and every other tradition are inseparable from this wondrously luminous true mind. “Nothing fails to flow forth from this Dharma Realm, and nothing fails to return to this Dharma Realm.” This is the One True Dharma Realm, the wondrously luminous true mind.

The Ganges Mahāmudrā is a supreme Dharma gate that enters directly into Dzogchen of self-nature. It is distinctive and unsurpassed, not shared with other approaches. It is the highest vehicle within the esoteric teachings, presented differently from the lower vehicles.

The highest esoteric teaching and Chan speak with a single voice. Pure Land teaching, by contrast, emphasizes single-minded recollection of the Buddha and rebirth in the Western Pure Land, where one continues to practice in the presence of Buddhas and bodhisattvas until reaching non-retrogression—avaivartika.

After reaching the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one continues practicing beside Buddhas and bodhisattvas and realizes the stage of nonretrogression, avaivartika. This has its own subtle benefits, and ultimately one still returns to the One True Dharma Realm. We shall not discuss it further here. Every Dharma gate has its own subtle benefits and responds to particular capacities; all ultimately return to the One True Dharma Realm.

Ganges Mahāmudrā, however, enters directly without detours, unlike other practices. This is “the unique essential subtlety of the supreme Dharma gate of Dzogchen of one’s own nature.” Yao ( ) means the essential point, and miao ( ) means subtlety. “Unique essential subtlety” means its distinctive essential point and subtle excellence, different from those of other Dharma gates.

“When this essential subtlety is present, whatever afflictions or illusory thoughts arise are all revealed as the dharmakāya.”

With this key merit, one recognizes the profound power of the true mind. This merit indicates that “ whatever afflictions or illusory thoughts arise are all revealed as the dharmakāya.” Any defilement—be it illness, heartbreak, or career failure—will reveal itself as the dharmakāya when such defilements and delusions occur.

This is because “delusions and afflictions are all manifestations of the inherent wisdom of the dharmakāya.” Just as there are no waves without water, how can afflictions and delusions exist without the true mind? When these afflictions and delusions arise, they represent the manifestation of the dharmakāya.

It is crucial for everyone to grasp this concept: when afflictions and delusions emerge, one should immediately recognize them as the wondrous function of the dharmakāya, leading to their swift dissolution. Once you understand the dharmakāya, the temptation of delusions will no longer ensnare you. Conversely, without this understanding, you may observe yourself following these delusions, resulting in endless suffering and, in some cases, even suicidal thoughts. Some individuals who have experienced heartbreak become so overwhelmed by their pain that they consider suicide, feeling unable to continue living. They lack an understanding of the dharmakāya and fail to see that delusions and afflictions are, in fact, the wondrous function of the true mind.

The "Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara" states: "If one who upholds the name of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara enters a great fire, the fire will not burn that person, owing to this bodhisattva's awe-inspiring spiritual power. If swept away by a great flood, upon invoking the bodhisattva's name one will immediately reach shallow water."

No matter how fierce the fire of affliction or how high the waves of illusory thought, simply turn the light around and invoke "Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva." Ah! These are originally the wondrous functions of the true mind. The afflictions and illusory thoughts immediately subside. This is the key—the most important key.

Many people study Buddhism for years without knowing it because they neither recognize the true mind nor know where it is. Unable to find it, they seek it in the Western Pure Land, immeasurably far away. Yet the true mind is shining directly before you. Mahāmudrā is excellent because it tells us directly what the true mind is.

Only through merit and ripened conditions can you hear this great Dharma. Having heard it, do not fail yourself. Safeguard the true mind at all times, knowing that wherever illusory thought arises is precisely a wondrous function of the true mind; recognize the true mind through illusory thought itself. Practice in this way for one year, two years, or three to five years—how could the Way not be attained?

Success is certain. As mentioned previously, my teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, said: "Practice need not take two or three years; success will come in a year and a half. If it does not, come and ask me." But if we refuse to practice and continually follow our habitual tendencies, how could we succeed?

"Illusory thoughts all become wisdom; adverse conditions become companions on the Path; and afflictions become conduct on the Path."

When one possesses this unique essential subtlety of the supreme Dharma gate of Dzogchen of self-nature, "illusory thoughts all become wisdom." At the very moment

when illusory thoughts and afflictions proliferate, make a keen inward turn: “Ah! This is the wondrous function of the dharmakāya.” To make this turn is great wisdom.

One directly perceives circumstances and then exercises discriminative understanding without becoming attached to, entangled in, or established upon them. Wisdom does not mean failing to know good from bad or right from wrong. If, after discriminating, one accepts and rejects, becomes bound to circumstances, follows them, and suffers unbearably, this is illusory thought. Illusory thought is itself wisdom; the crucial point is whether one recognizes it.

Thus, “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” When the dharmakāya of Suchness is master, illusory thoughts become its servants. The master directing the servants in their tasks is wisdom of accomplishing activities. When the true mind is master, the first five consciousnesses—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—are transformed into wisdom of accomplishing activities. The true mind directs them: see what this is, hear what sound this is, smell whether it is fragrant or foul, taste whether it is sour or sweet. Seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing all become wondrous functions of the true mind: illusory thoughts all become wisdom.

“Adverse conditions become companions on the Path.” Everyone delights in the Western Pure Land, where every condition is favorable and nothing is contrary to one’s wishes. The ground of gold, ponds of seven treasures, water possessing eight virtues, waterfowl and jeweled trees, the sounds of wind and birds—all proclaim the Dharma. Everything is wholesome, and there are no enemies.

This differs from our world of the five turbidities, where afflictions and adversaries abound.

At work, one person treads on your foot and another kicks your leg. At home, you think one way while your partner thinks another; you act one way while your partner does the opposite, and the household is filled with quarrels. Yet these adverse conditions are companions that help you attain the Way, warning you not to abide in circumstances.

Recognizing their suffering gives rise to renunciation: “This world is so full of suffering; let me quickly transcend it!” How is suffering transcended? By recognizing the true mind and not following circumstances. Otherwise, one clings to this world, finds it agreeable and comfortable, and has no wish to study Buddhism or practice the Dharma.

Then the Way cannot be attained. I once met a wealthy overseas Chinese living in France whose warehouse was linked directly to the railway. He believed in Buddhism, performed many good deeds, and made offerings to monasteries

whenever he returned to China. I told him: “You believe in Buddhism and are willing to give. It would be better still to practice the Dharma yourself.

Good deeds and generosity cultivate virtue and merit, but do not by themselves bring attainment of the Way. You must also cultivate wisdom. Only by cultivating merit and wisdom together can you attain it.” He replied: “No, no. I am too comfortable and happy; I need not endure hardship in practice.” Immersed in his blessings and content with his circumstances, he had no wish to practice. If this can happen to human beings, how much more readily to heavenly beings?

When one meets adverse conditions, suffers greatly, and feels the pain of it, one should arouse the great resolve to transcend suffering and immediately practice the Buddhadharma. Thus it is said that “adverse conditions become companions on the Path.”

They help temper you amid circumstances and reveal whether your mind still abides in them. If the mind is truly empty, favorable and adverse conditions are alike, and following or not following is no issue. One of the ten great vows of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is “constantly to accord with sentient beings.”

You like spicy food? Fine, I’ll eat spicy food with you. You like sweets? Fine, I’ll eat sweets with you. You want to play ball? Fine, I’ll play ball with you. You want to dance? Fine, I’ll dance with you. You want to believe in Jesus? Fine, I’ll go along and believe in Jesus. It’s all the same to me.

None of this is a problem, because it tempers the true mind. With nothing to attain, everything is the wondrous function of the true mind. According with you is also such a function, enabling me to draw you toward the Dharma. This is called “conduct in accord with others,” one of the four means of embracing.

Many practitioners are unwilling to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Why? Because the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is a favorable condition, and the time needed to realize the Way there is too long. One day in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss equals a great kalpa here. How many days are in a great kalpa? Too many to count.

A great kalpa comprises four intermediate kalpas, each containing twenty minor kalpas. In one minor kalpa, the human lifespan declines from 84,000 years to ten years at the rate of one year per century, then increases again at the same rate. One cycle of decrease and increase constitutes a minor kalpa.

Eighty such minor eons make one great eon. How many days is that? A single day in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss equals that entire span here.

Moreover, conditions there are favorable: everything accords with your wishes. Whatever house you wish to live in is there, whatever clothes you want are available, and whatever you wish to use is at hand. Thus habitual tendencies are not easily exhausted, and realizing the Way takes longer.

Thus many bodhisattvas of great resolve say: “You may go to the Western Pure Land; I shall temper the true mind here in the Sahā world, amid adverse conditions.” This is the precious spirit of a bodhisattva with great resolve: “A true person has an aspiration soaring to heaven and does not seek Brahmā’s heaven or a Pure Land.”

Yet such resolve must withstand tempering. If one cannot withstand it and is led away by Māra, becoming one of Māra’s followers, all is lost. If one lacks this capacity, it is safer to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. The Dharma has no fixed formula; it depends upon each person’s capacity and resolve. Therefore, when adverse circumstances arise in practice, do not lose heart: they are companions assisting your attainment of the Way.

A fellow disciple of mine had a Christian wife who brought him to church. He said, “Very well, I shall go with you.” After hearing the pastor’s sermon, he said to her, “I accompanied you to hear the pastor; will you also come with me to a monastery and hear a great Buddhist teacher expound the Dharma?” She replied: “No, no! That is the devil.

You may not go either. Let us go home.” So he went home with her. This appeared to be an adverse condition, but he was unafraid: “You cannot wear me down. I shall accord with you; my mind is empty, carefree, and at ease.” Their marriage therefore remained harmonious.

She asked, “Are you saying I am the devil?” He replied, “No. I say you are wonderful—you are a great bodhisattva.” She said, “I am not a great bodhisattva; I am the Lord, God.” He immediately answered, “Very well! You are the Lord, God.”

Such circumstances are all companions that temper the mind in emptiness. A verse says: “Within emptiness, true accomplishment is realized. When your roots are deeply established, neither freezing snow nor howling winds can shake you.” Once your foundation is secure, external storms lose their power. Embrace adversity as a vital companion on the Path—challenging conditions refine your practice and serve as fuel for growth.

“Afflictions become conduct on the Path.” Speaking of spiritual attainment, some say that Lady White Snake had five hundred years of cultivation while Fahai had a thousand. These are merely legends; there was never any Lady White Snake.

If we know how to make use of afflictions, awakening amid them to the fact that "this is a wondrous function of my true mind," then afflictions help us attain the Way and themselves become conduct on the Path. The greater the afflictions one can withstand, the greater one's attainment. If the mind becomes empty through such tempering, its strength grows, maturing within the fierce fire of affliction. This is "a lotus born in fire, never destroyed"—remarkable practice indeed. A lotus growing in water cannot withstand fire, but a lotus born in fire possesses true vitality.

"Abiding in purity without abandoning saṃsāra."

Saṃsāra is the cycle of rebirth through the six realms: gods, human beings, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. To penetrate birth and death completely does not necessarily mean leaving the six realms. If one merely abides in a pure realm beyond the desire, form, and formless realms, this is the attainment of a śrāvaka arhat.

To attain Buddhahood, one must embody the great resolve of a bodhisattva, liberating beings throughout the six realms without abandoning saṃsāra.

After a Chan master passed away, someone asked his disciple: "In which Pure Land was your teacher reborn—the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Realm of Pure Lapis Lazuli, or the inner court of Tuṣita?" The disciple replied: "My teacher went neither east nor west."

"Then where did he go?" "To be an ox in the eastern household and a horse in the western household."

The questioner exclaimed: "You are insulting your teacher!" The disciple laughed and said, "Haha! Heavens above, heavens above! What a grave misunderstanding!" The meaning behind his response is this: I am praising my master, yet you accuse me of insulting him—what an incredible misunderstanding! His master possessed deep spiritual accomplishment and complete mastery, daring to "work as an ox in the east and a horse in the west," moving among non-human realms to fulfill his vows —"dwelling in ultimate purity without abandoning saṃsāra." Do you have that kind of spiritual mastery? It was meant as high praise, yet the inquirer completely missed the point. Thus, his cry of "Heavens above, heavens above!" carries profound depth and subtlety.

Chan Master Zhaozhou, known as the "Ancient Buddha of Zhaozhou," spoke with exquisite subtlety. His words were as soft as a ball of cotton, yet one could not squeeze them: a needle was hidden within, ready to prick the hand. On one occasion he went to Mount Tiantai to meet Amitābha Buddha—that is, Chan Master Fenggan, regarded as an emanation of Amitābha.

Fenggan's companions Hanshan and Shide were regarded as emanations of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra. Rain had just fallen when Zhaozhou reached Mount Tiantai, and many ox-hoof prints were visible on the ground. He saw a boy, Hanshan, riding an ox and playing a flute.

The boy asked: "Venerable, do you still recognize an ox?" To answer "I do" would be to fall into his trap, revealing attachment to objects. Chan Master Danxia Tianran once similarly asked a visiting monk: "Where have you come from?" "From below the mountain."

"Have you eaten?" "I have." Danxia said: "Did the person who gave you food possess the eye?"—meaning that the donor had misjudged and supported a worldling still bound to objects. Zhaozhou was a consummate master and would not be caught.

When Hanshan asked whether he recognized an ox, Zhaozhou replied: "I do not know." This echoes Bodhidharma's answer to Emperor Wu of Liang. When the emperor asked, "Who is standing before me?" Bodhidharma replied, "I do not know."

Did Patriarch Bodhidharma not even recognize himself? Did Chan Master Zhaozhou not even recognize a cow? That is not the point! Focusing on either recognition or nonrecognition is mistaken.

Bodhidharma's answer "I don't know" was aimed at the "who" in the question, and Zhaozhou's answer "I don't know" was aimed at the "ox" in the question. The two answers follow the same track: both sweep away all sticking and transcend all subject–object duality, not abiding in "who" and not abiding in "ox," and lay out the naked, clean, luminous true mind in its entirety.

Hanshan then pointed to the hoofprints and said: "These are the five hundred arhats roaming the mountain." Zhaozhou asked: "If they are arhats, why did they become oxen?" Hanshan cried: "Heavens above!"—meaning, "Your discriminating mind is very strong."

All sentient beings are Buddhas, all possessing the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous marks, and yet you still distinguish an arhat from an ox by their footprints! "Heavens, heavens!" covered Zhaozhou. But Zhaozhou was after all a master of great stature, skilled at turning where there is no way to turn, like tai chi push-hands, redirecting overwhelming force with a light touch, and so he burst out laughing.

Hanshan asked: "What are you doing?" Zhaozhou replied: "Heavens above!"—exposing that Hanshan's question still posited a "something." Hanshan praised him: "This fellow truly has the bearing of a great man!" He possessed the responsiveness of a true person and the bearing of one liberated.

The Chan tradition instructs us to see our nature at all times, within every activity, without following circumstances. Chan Master Yongjia said: “Walking is Chan, sitting is Chan; In speech or silence, movement or stillness, the true essence rests at ease.” In Chan, every place is Chan and every moment reveals the source; thus it is said, “Every day is a good day.” This is to “abide in purity without abandoning saṃsāra.” When the essence is pure, every place is the place of awakening. What appearance of saṃsāra could still be found?

6. Uncontrived practice

“Liberated from the fetters of purity and impurity, practicing effortless cultivation and acting spontaneously.”

Endlessly discriminating between defilement and purity leads to being bound and ensnared by the concepts of ‘stained’ and ‘pure.’ Liberating oneself from these entanglements is what is meant by ‘liberation from the fetters of purity and impurity.’

The Diamond Sūtra states: ‘One should give rise to a mind that is unattached to anything.’ ‘Should’ implies following conditions seamlessly; ‘unattached’ means free from clinging—engaging with all conditions without attachment, thus giving rise to a wondrous, unattached mind.

This is ‘effortless practice.’ Bodhisattvas prior to the Eighth Stage (Bhūmi) engage in intentional, effortful practice. For instance, when we instruct everyone to constantly maintain awareness of the original nature, this maintenance is effortful practice. Yet without it, progress is impossible due to strong habitual tendencies; the moment awareness slips, one attaches to forms and conditions again, carried away by delusive thoughts.

Therefore, one must maintain constant mindfulness—this is the method for transitioning from effortful to effortless practice. Only Bodhisattvas of the Eighth Stage and above can achieve ‘effortless practice and act spontaneously.’ Practicing correctly means remaining free from distraction, keeping right mindfulness constantly luminous, clear, vivid, and serene.

’Effortless’ means that even the conscious mind of watching or observing is gone; only then is it true ‘effortless practice.’ Please take note: you are not expected to achieve this immediately, but rather to progress from effortful to effortless cultivation. While engaged in effortful practice, do not assume you have arrived or perfected your cultivation.

We must make progress upon progress: the Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Stages are not the end, nor are Equal Enlightenment and Sublime Enlightenment; only Ultimate

Enlightenment—the complete realization of Buddhahood—is the final resolution. Thus, one must apply dedicated effort, for only when effort reaches its culmination can one act spontaneously. One must start with 'effortful practice'; without it, how could one ever reach 'effortless practice'? That requires recognizing the true mind where delusive thoughts cease, and constantly safeguarding it—this is most vital.

"Without the spiritual power of such liberative insight, even if one possesses the highest view and the most profound practice, it will bring no real benefit to the mind."

'Liberative insight' means recognizing the dharmakāya (the Truth Body / essential nature of reality). If one merely engages in mechanical practice or speaks eloquently of doctrine without recognizing the dharmakāya, one lacks 'the spiritual power of such liberative insight.' Without this power, 'even if one possesses the highest view and the most profound practice, it will bring no real benefit to the mind.' 'The highest view' refers to possessing vast intellectual understanding and speaking eloquently on doctrine.

'Profound practice' refers to exceptional meditation mastery and entering deep absorption (samādhi). If one fails to recognize the dharmakāya, possessing these alone is insufficient. Chan Master Xiangyan was originally a disciple of Master Baizhang. He was remarkably brilliant, fluent in scriptures, commentaries, and Chan expressions, answering ten questions for every one asked; yet he lacked the spiritual power of liberative insight, as he had not recognized the dharmakāya.

After Master Baizhang passed away, Xiangyan went to study under his senior fellow disciple, Master Weishan. Seeing Xiangyan arrive, Master Weishan said to him: 'I hear that when you were with our late master Baizhang, you answered ten for every one question, and a hundred for every ten. This is your clever sharpness, intellectual understanding, and conceptual thinking—the very root of birth and death.

Try saying a single word about your nature before your parents gave birth to you!' Xiangyan was stunned into silence, completely at a loss. He searched through scripture and consulted writings he had studied, yet could not find a single word in reply. He sighed to himself, 'Painted cakes cannot satisfy hunger,' and repeatedly begged Master Weishan to reveal the answer to him. Master Weishan replied: 'If I were to tell you, you would curse me later. What I say is mine; it will never belong to you.'

Therefore, if one lacks the spiritual power of liberative insight, it brings no real benefit to the cultivation of the mind. Master Xiangyan thereupon burned all the writings he had collected over the years and said in frustration: 'In this lifetime, I shall study the Buddha-Dharma no more. I will simply be a wandering mendicant monk who eats porridge and rice, sparing myself further mental strain.'

He tearfully took leave of Chan Master Weishan and settled in an abandoned ancient temple, a former residence of National Master Nanyang Huizhong, farming to support himself. By burning his writings and giving up Buddhist study, he swept away the “highest view”; by living as a simple monk sustained by porridge and rice, sparing his mind further toil, he cast aside “the most profound practice.”

Yet he never forgot the phrase (huàtóu), ‘What was your face before your parents gave birth to you?’ anywhere or at any time. The Chan practice of investigating the huàtóu was vigorously championed by Master Dahui Zonggao during the Song Dynasty, after which it swept through the Chan monasteries. Master Xiangyan was a man of the Tang Dynasty, an era when Chan predominantly relied on direct pointing and the investigation of huàtóu was not yet widely practiced; thus, Master Xiangyan could be said to have pioneered the nascent form of huàtóu investigation.

He investigated it whether walking or sitting, or while out tilling the fields—truly embodying the saying, ‘In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, never depart from this.’ He not only discarded worldly fame and gain to enter the monastic path, but also swept away all conceptual notions of ‘enlightenment’ and ‘attaining the Way,’ unifying his mind in a single state. Carrying on in this manner over time, good news was bound to arrive.

One day, while clearing land to farm, his hoe struck a piece of broken tile. He picked it up and tossed it aside, and it happened to strike a stalk of bamboo at the edge of the field. The sharp ‘clack!’ jolted him awake from the great dream of birth and death, instantly opening his original nature. Ah! So that is how it is! In Chan, this is known as ‘breaking through the obstacle’ (pò cān)—breaking through the huàtóu under investigation.

So, what was the original face before one’s parents were born? Master Xiangyan left it unsaid. Fortunately, he did not reveal it; otherwise, ‘before your parents were born’ could no longer serve as a huàtóu to investigate. With a ready-made answer available, the genuine sense of doubt (yíqíng) could never be raised.”

“By the Song Dynasty, championed by Master Dahui, investigating the huàtóu grew immensely popular. A certain monk also investigated the huàtóu ‘What was your face before your parents gave birth to you?’

Unlike Master Xiangyan, however, he did not burn his writings, abandon study, or live as a simple mendicant monk to spare himself mental strain. Because he failed to thoroughly sweep away high-flown intellectual views and profound meditative practices, he could not avoid straining his mind and drove himself too hard in his practice.

Over time, he grew mentally unhinged, muttering to himself continuously and sleeping out on street corners and in alleyways. Yet, through it all, he never forgot 'the Original Face prior to parents giving birth' anywhere or at any time. One day, he came upon two brothers fighting, and their uncle stepped in to mediate.

The uncle scolded them: 'When your father was alive, he was a man who had a mianmu (a face / prestige) …' Having 'a face' meant possessing prestige and standing. The moment the monk heard the word mianmu ('face'), he stood dazed and pushed his way into the surrounding crowd, desperate to find this 'face.'

The uncle went on rebuking his two nephews: 'Yet here you are fighting—how does that look? What a complete lack of mianmu ('losing face / disgraceful behavior')!' The instant the monk heard 'lacking a face,' space smashed into powder and the solid earth sank away. True Reality brilliantly manifested right before him, and he broke through the obstacle into enlightenment! From that point on, he was no longer mad or unhinged, wandering in perfect ease and freedom.

'Lacking a face' is precisely the formless True Reality—the Buddha-nature (svabhāva) itself! If one merely knows the theory of formlessness without seeing one's original nature, it remains ungrounded in actual reality; though your words be so eloquent that flowers rain from the sky and golden lotuses spring from the earth, it is of no avail. It must be realized deep within the ground of the mind—clearly seeing one's own nature—before one can pass freely through all varieties of external conditions."

After Master Xiangyan broke through and achieved enlightenment, he bathed, burned incense, and bowed toward Master Weishan from afar, saying: 'Venerable Master, your great compassion surpasses that of my own parents. Had you explained it to me back then, how could today's awakening ever have happened!' He then composed a verse (gāthā): 'With a single strike, all that was known is forgotten, No longer relying on deliberate practice. In every posture, I uphold the ancient path, Never falling into the trap of silent stagnation. Leaving no trace anywhere I go, Dignified and free beyond sound and form.

Those across all lands who have attained the Way All declare this to be the supreme capacity.' When this verse reached Master Weishan, he said to his foremost disciple, Master Yangshan: 'This brother has thoroughly penetrated.' Yet Yangshan replied: 'This could merely be a literary composition forged from conceptual thinking and mental cleverness. Wait until I test him myself.' He intended to examine Xiangyan in person.

Upon meeting Xiangyan, Yangshan said: 'The Venerable Master praised you for illuminating the Great Matter. Try expressing it to me.' Xiangyan recited his previous verse. Yangshan remarked: 'This is produced from memory and past intellectual habits. If you possess genuine awakening, speak another verse.' Xiangyan composed

another verse: ‘My poverty last year was not yet true poverty; My poverty this year is true poverty at last.

In last year’s poverty, I still had a spot of land to stick an awl; In this year’s poverty, even the awl is gone.’ Yangshan replied: ‘I grant that you understand the Tathāgata Chan, but you have not yet even dreamed of Patriarch Chan.’ Master Xiangyan then composed a third verse: ‘I have an essential dynamic, Revealed in the twinkling of an eye. If one fails to understand it, Call the novice monk again.’ Upon hearing this, Yangshan was overjoyed and reported to Master Weishan: ‘How delightful that Brother Xian has understood Patriarch

Chan!’ Master Xiangyan’s Dharma name was Zhixian, which is why Yangshan addressed him as ‘Brother Xian.’ He originally studied Chan under Master Baizhang, but after being galvanized into awakening under Master Weishan, he became Master Weishan’s disciple. We must not digress too far here, so I will leave this public case (gōng’ān) unexplained for all of you to penetrate on your own.

Though there are many people gathered here today listening to this lecture, without ‘the spiritual power of liberative insight,’ they may not stand on solid ground. Soon as they hear someone say, ‘My Dharma is so wonderful, so subtle, so supreme,’ they slip right over to it, seeking to learn ‘the highest view.’

As soon as they hear someone say, ‘My Dharma is so powerful, it can manifest such grand spiritual powers (siddhis),’ they immediately run after it, seeking to learn ‘profound practice.’ They do not realize that the True Mind is the ultimate foundation! ‘Without the spiritual power of such liberative insight, even if one possesses the highest view and the most profound practice, it will bring no real benefit to the mind.’

Your theories cannot withstand the cycle of birth and death, and your spiritual powers do not constitute liberation. If you do not recognize the foundation, it is all of no use. If you have not attained the power of exhausting the outflows, then even if you manifest the five spiritual powers, they are merely demonic powers. Not only will they fail to liberate you, but there is also the risk of falling into demonic paths. This is precisely because ‘without the spiritual power of liberative insight... it brings no real benefit to the mind!’

“If the power of afflictions has not diminished, this is not the true Path.”

Why is this power of realization so important? Without it, one does not recognize the formless true mind; then “if the power of afflictions has not diminished, this is not the true Path.” If afflictions still dominate the mind, one has not entered the great Path of genuine liberation. In studying Buddhism, we must recognize the root and acquire this power of realization. Only this is the true Path. We must not follow

heterodox or demonic teachings, for they lead to becoming followers of Māra, not to Buddhahood.

“If one obtains this subtle key of thoughts arising and ceasing by themselves, then even without any supreme insight to uphold the Dharma or supporting conditions for profound cultivation, one’s own nature will certainly be liberated from the bondage of the two attachments.”

We can allow delusion to emerge and fade on its own, as it is inherently unattainable. In the moment of “arising and ceasing,” understanding that “the nature of delusion is intrinsically pure” enables us to introspect and grasp the true mind.

This recognition leads us to attain the “remarkable key to self-arising and self-ceasing.” During meditation, refrain from fixating on thoughts that arise. Instead, simply chant the mantra and permit the thoughts to arise and disappear naturally. Attempting to suppress them by telling yourself, “Don’t arise, don’t arise,” can result in tightness in your chest and feelings of nervousness, sadness, and discomfort. This is why many people experience tightness in their chests—they are too anxious.

Allowing your thoughts to come and go fosters relaxation and rejuvenation. Over time, this practice will help you achieve concentration. As your chanting deepens, you will gradually enter a state of concentration, from which wisdom will emerge. This process applies both during meditation and in everyday life. It’s akin to being at the bustling intersection of Nanjing Road and Tibet Road in Shanghai, where people and cars move in and out.

They have nothing to do with you; if you do not pull them in, they pass. When a thought arises, let it arise; it arises and ceases by itself, does not last long, and naturally ceases. But if a thought comes and you do not know it, that is bad.

You are plainly running after deluded thoughts without knowing it, plainly clinging and abiding—how is that still practice! So it is very important to see the thought, not run after it, and let it arise and cease by itself. “If one gains this essential key of self-arising and self-ceasing, even without the support of a supreme view, the upholding of Dharma, or profound practice, one’s own nature can surely be liberated from the bonds of the two attachments.”

“Upholding the Dharma through the highest view” refers to the “highest view” mentioned in the preceding sentence. “Relying on the conditions of the most profound practice” refers to “the most profound practice.” Having a highest view to uphold or a profound practice to rely on is unreliable. The most important thing is “the power of the path in self-liberation”—the “subtle essential of self-arising and self-ceasing.”

The preceding sentence says that without this subtle essential, even a high view and profound practice do not bring liberation. This sentence says that with it, liberation is possible even without a high view or profound practice. The two statements emphasize the importance of "the power of the path in self-liberation" from its negative and positive sides.

In fact, only attaining this subtle essential deserves to be called the highest view, and only possessing this power of the path is truly profound practice. The height and depth of the view and practice mentioned earlier are relative and bound to appearances. Attaining this subtle essential and possessing this power of the path is height and depth that transcends relativity, is free of appearances, and is absolute.

"One's own nature will certainly be liberated from the bondage of the two attachments." "Two attachments" means clinging to two extremes, and can be explained in many ways: attachment to good and bad, existence and nonexistence, right and wrong, emptiness and existence, as well as attachment to a personal self and a dharma-self. There are many such pairs, all inclining toward two extremes. "Attachment to a personal self" means identifying this body or this thought as oneself.

"This is me. I am in charge. None of you may resist; you must follow me, carry out my opinions, and submit to my will." Pride and arrogance all arise. Practitioners of the two vehicles, arhats and pratyekabuddhas, have eliminated attachment to a personal self, but still have attachment to a dharma-self: a Dharma to practice and a Way to realize.

The emptiness tradition of Mahāyāna presents profound and subtle reasoning, but if one clings to emptiness, it becomes attachment to emptiness. Yogācāra teaches existence in an equally profound and subtle way, but attachment to its formulations becomes attachment to existence.

Through beginningless lives we have become accustomed to these extremes and are deeply bound by them. Yet if one possesses the subtle key of self-arising and self-ceasing and the corresponding power of realization, these attachments cannot bind one for long; liberation from them is certain.

"Upon reaching the Golden Isle, no other kind of stone can be found."

Golden Isle—a place composed entirely of pure gold. Does such a place truly exist? Not only does it exist, but there are places far better still! The Western Pure Land is even better than the Golden Isle. In the Western Pure Land, finding a single stone is impossible. The towers and pavilions are not made of stone or bricks; they are composed of seven precious stones, incredibly solid and radiant with light.

If you reach the “Golden Island”—a place of pure gold—you will not be able to discover a single stone that is not gold. “You will not be able to locate any other stone.” This metaphor means that if we have grasped the profound essence of arising and ceasing and possessed the power of the Way to resolve the Dharma, it is like reaching the Golden Isle, where there is nothing but gold. It is as if only liberation exists. Therefore, we can only attain liberation, nothing else, and we are certain to attain enlightenment.

“Whatever moving or still illusory thoughts arise are none other than the ever-present state of genuine samādhi.”

This statement means whatever illusory thoughts arise, whether they are dynamic or static, they can only be the present state of true concentration; they are no longer delusions. Just as “ upon reaching the Golden Isle, no other kind of stone can be found.” Here, only the true state of concentration is found, and no delusions can be found. Why can illusory thoughts be transformed into genuine samādhi? It is because one has grasped the profound key to arising and ceasing and possesses the ability to recognize the dharmakāya.

You may ask, “Deluded thoughts are all moving; can there be still deluded thoughts?” Yes. Seeking stillness is also a deluded thought. Pursuing absorption alone, insisting on remaining in it for several eons, abiding in concentration and regarding a state of concentration as something to attain—this is still deluded thought. Thus we say not to anticipate entering absorption when sitting in meditation.

Seeking absorption as soon as you sit down is precisely “still deluded thought.” Once such a thought arises, the sitting will not go well. Enter naturally, without worrying whether there is concentration. Keep reciting the mantra, one recitation following another, and absorption will arise naturally. Again, knowing that your circumstances and conditions do not permit it, yet insisting on finding a secluded place to practice, is also “still deluded thought.” “Moving deluded thoughts” are even more numerous: wanting this and wanting that are all moving deluded thoughts.

Although moving and still illusory thoughts are many, all are the ever-present state of genuine samādhi. Let thoughts arise and cease without attending to them; continually recognize the true mind and the Original Face, and do not follow delusion. This naturally is liberation and samādhi.

Samādhi does not mean sitting motionless in a lifeless state; it means remaining undeluded amid circumstances. Whatever appears, the mind is unmoved. This is the great samādhi without entering or leaving.

Consider a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl. What is the body? Bones and a foul-smelling skin-bag. Why become captivated and follow after it? This is plainly the work of sexual desire: “A sixteen-year-old beauty, her body soft as cream; At her waist she bears a sword that cuts down ordinary men. Though no severed heads are seen to fall, in secret she drains their marrow dry.”

Sexual desire is the root of birth and death! Everyone, without ending sexual desire, rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is impossible. Someone says, “But sexual relations between spouses are proper!” Ha! Calling marital relations proper is merely a provisional teaching suited to your habits. Knowing that spouses cannot immediately end their sexual desire, it permits marital relations with the intention of preventing sexual misconduct.

Ultimately, even marital sexual relations must cease! Why? Rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss requires ending sexual desire. If it continues, there is no purity. Without accord with the Pure Land, how could one be reborn there? Sexual desire is the worst: even if spiritual powers have manifested, they vanish as soon as desire arises.

After Chan Master Yunmen had been a king for three lifetimes, all his spiritual powers were gone. In previous lives as a king, with the three palaces, six courts, and seventy-two consorts, he had too many women and lost all his powers. In India there was also a great arhat who could fly bodily. A king invited him to the palace to receive offerings, and he flew straight in.

The king honored the great arhat and asked a consort to offer him wine. She was very beautiful, and at the sight of her his mind stirred. In that single moment his spiritual powers disappeared, and he could not fly back. There are many such examples. Thus the mind of sexual desire must not be stirred!

“If one then seeks the ignorance and delusion that once confused self-nature, they are utterly unfindable.”

After recognizing self-nature, sustain and safeguard that recognition continuously in every place. In time, the Way is attained. If one then looks back for the ignorance and delusion that once confused self-nature, they can no longer be found. Some ask whether, after recognizing Buddha-nature and attaining Buddhahood, one might again become deluded. There is no need to worry.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “It is like refining gold ore: the gold does not come into being because of the refining. Though it was gold from the beginning, refinement brings it to completion. Once it has become pure gold, it never again becomes ore.” Gold was present in the ore from the beginning; refining did not create it.

This is a metaphor: sentient beings inherently have Buddha-nature; it is not that they originally lacked it and acquired it through practice. Yet although it is restoring the gold originally in the ore, it is in the end accomplished by means of smelting —"though it is originally gold, it is accomplished only through smelting."

In the same way, beings possess the wisdom of original awakening but, because of deluded attachment, also manifest ignorance and afflictions. Through practice, the wisdom of initial awakening arises and unites with original awakening, breaking ignorance and affliction so that inherent Buddha-nature is fully revealed. Once true gold is formed, it never becomes ore again; once the Way is attained, delusion never returns.

Lecture Five: Conclusion—Naturally Genuine Reality Is the True Mahāmudrā

1. The Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā Form a Unified Whole

"The three essentials of view, concentration, and practice are the innermost intent of the Buddhas of the three times and the pinnacle of all vehicles; hence they are called the mother of all Buddhas."

As explained earlier, "view" means understanding that the One True Dharma Realm —the naturally present mind of the tathāgatagarbha—manifests the countless pure and impure dharmas and is endowed with the naturally present meaning of equality. Only this view of the fundamental principle constitutes right understanding and right view. "Concentration" is not lifeless absorption but living samādhi; thus, only the union of emptiness and compassion is right meditation.

"Practice" means neither being carried along inwardly by illusory thoughts nor being moved outwardly by circumstances. One lets the mind flow like a river, abiding naturally and spontaneously, and sustains it alert yet still. This alone is right practice. These are the three essentials. To say that they are "the innermost intent of the Buddhas of the three times" means the Buddhas of the past, present, and future.

Their innermost intent is self-nature and suchness, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the One True Dharma Realm, the wondrous luminous true mind, the true aspect of suchness, the mind of the tathāgatagarbha, the great ocean of perfect awakening, suchness itself, bodhi, the dharmakāya, Buddha-nature, dhāraṇī, the Great Buddha-Crown, the master, the bottomless bowl, the stringless lute, the inexhaustible lamp, the rootless tree, the hair-splitting sword, the unconditioned realm, the maṇi jewel, the lock without a key, and even the clay ox, wooden horse, mind-source, mind-seal, mind-mirror, mind-moon, and mind-jewel.

Though the names are many, their meaning is one. The word “innermost” indicates that this is formless, inexpressible, beyond all dharmas that can be spoken, and not an object of language. It does not mean that it is deliberately kept secret. Though inexpressible, it is the very core. This is the Mahāyāna’s “seal of the one reality,” the standard by which Mahāyāna teaching is recognized. Any teaching that departs from this principle or fails to reach it is not Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The Great Collection Sūtra says: “In the Dharma-ending age, myriad millions will practice, yet scarcely one will attain the Way. Only by relying on recollection of the Buddha can one cross beyond birth and death.” The Chinese character nian ( ), “recollection,” combines jin ( ), “now,” and xin ( ), “mind”: it is this present thought of mind. “Buddha” means awakening—our true nature of suchness and the seal of the one reality.

The practice of the three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct keeps thought after thought in awakening, never apart from the seal of the one reality. This is precisely “recollection of the Buddha through the true aspect.” The Sūtra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life teaches sixteen contemplations. Practicing them is also recollection of the Buddha and is called “recollection through visualization”; no contemplation departs from the wondrous luminous true mind.

Gazing upon the sacred and majestic form of Amitābha Buddha in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, giving rise to wholehearted faith and joyful aspiration, and wishing for rebirth there is also recollection of the Buddha. This is called “recollection through contemplation of the form,” and likewise never departs from the wondrous luminous true mind.

Holding fast to Amitābha Buddha’s sacred name, with the mind recollecting and the ears listening, gathers in the agitated mind and transforms illusory thoughts into thoughts of the Buddha. Sustaining “Namo Amitābha Buddha” from beginning to end is called “recollection through holding the name.” How could holding the name ever depart even half a step from the true mind? If the mouth recites but the mind does not practice, it is not recollection of the Buddha.

Master Hanshan said: “With the mouth reciting Amitābha while the mind is scattered, even shouting until the throat is torn is all in vain.” In the Dharma-ending age, those who wish to cross beyond birth and death must rely on the various methods of Buddha-recollection that “gather in the six sense faculties and maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness.” Mahāmudrā is the most direct of all: it is precisely recollection of the Buddha through the true aspect, and precisely the innermost intent of the Buddhas of the three times.

“The pinnacle of all vehicles.” Vajrayāna classifies the Buddha’s teachings into nine successive vehicles: the three outer vehicles, the three inner vehicles, and the three

secret vehicles. Mahāmudrā of the Ganges and Dzogchen both belong to the highest level. Thus, the three essentials of view, concentration, and practice are called the pinnacle of all vehicles, like the very summit of a pagoda. “Hence they are called the mother of all Buddhas”: they are the mother of all Buddhas throughout the ten directions and the three times. All Buddhas appear in the world through this Dharma, and all dharmas issue from it.

“The foregoing three essentials comprise the view, concentration, practice and fruition of Dzogchen of self-nature. Within the state in which self-nature is thoroughly realized, these four are gathered into a single whole. This is the most essential point of practice and also the key to concentration and practice as one.”

The “view, concentration, practice and fruition of Dzogchen of self-nature” are the four stages in its cultivation. The foregoing three essentials are the right view, right concentration, and right practice already discussed. They are the innermost intent of the Buddhas of the three times—our own true nature of suchness. The purpose of cultivating Dzogchen of self-nature is to awaken to the mind, see one’s nature, and realize the fruit of Buddhahood.

Without right view there can be no right meditation; without right meditation there can be no right conduct—so how could there be right fruition? A sūtra says: “When the cause is not upright, the fruition will be distorted.” Only through right view, right meditation, and right conduct can one realize the Buddha-nature of suchness and ultimately attain Buddhahood. Hence the three essentials of view, concentration, and practice comprise the view, concentration, practice and fruition of Dzogchen of self-nature.

The “four” are the four stages of cultivation: first establishing the right view of liberation; then cultivating meditation to gather in and subdue the distracted mind; once the mind is settled, tempering oneself amid circumstances through the six pāramitās and myriad practices; and finally realizing the fruit of Buddhahood. The “state in which self-nature is thoroughly realized” is the state of Dzogchen of self-nature. Within it, view, concentration, practice and fruition are gathered into one and become an indivisible whole. This is the most essential point of cultivation—its crucial heart and key.

“It is also the key to concentration and practice as one.” Practice is concentration and concentration is practice; the two cannot be separated. Nor can view, concentration, and practice be separated: all three must merge into one. Only when the view is correct can one understand the great samādhi without entering or leaving and avoid falling into lifeless absorption. Only then does one know how to cultivate effortless conduct, avoid detours, proceed directly toward suchness, and ultimately attain Buddhahood.

“The very moment one realizes the naked nature of wisdom, one gains the view of the wisdom of self-nature.”

The naked nature of wisdom is our Buddha-nature: utterly exposed and pristine, formless and without characteristics, numinously luminous and still, with nothing concealing it. Buddha-nature is great wisdom—the great wisdom that knows all and is capable of all. The very moment one realizes this naked nature of wisdom, one “gains the view of the wisdom of self-nature.”

This means recognizing self-nature, entering the great perfect mirror wisdom, and seeing the fundamental principle—in other words, awakening to the mind and seeing one’s nature. Having seen this principle, one no longer seeks outwardly, searches for Dharma outside the mind, or falls into non-Buddhist paths. However extraordinary the display of spiritual powers elsewhere may be, one remains wholly unmoved, with one’s footing firmly established. Without realizing this point, one’s footing is unsteady and one will inevitably waver.

Long ago, a hermitage master lived at the foot of Mount Nanquan. Someone told him, “Master Nanquan has recently appeared in the world. Why do you not go and pay your respects?” In other words, Nanquan had begun teaching the Dharma and guiding beings—why not go and see him? The hermitage master replied, “Not only Nanquan—even if a thousand Buddhas appeared, I would not go.”

He meant that he had recognized the original and stood firmly grounded, free from wavering. When Chan Master Nanquan heard of this, he sent his disciple, Chan Master Zhaozhou, to test whether the man was truly grounded. Zhaozhou went and bowed to him, but the hermitage master paid no attention and remained motionless on his meditation platform.

Zhaozhou walked from west to east and then from east to west, but still the master ignored him. His footing seemed firm: “Even if a living Buddha appeared, I would pay no heed. I have clearly recognized my own Original Face—naked, pristine, without a single thing.

Having awakened, what more is there to seek? I am free and at ease; this freedom itself is great spiritual power.” Take careful note: freedom and ease are themselves great spiritual power, not some strange or extraordinary display. Finding no opening, Zhaozhou suddenly tore down the hermitage curtain with a clatter and declared, “The grass-bandit has suffered a great defeat!”

He was saying: “You dare not speak; you are no true man but merely a petty thief, thoroughly defeated.” The master still ignored him, so Zhaozhou could only return to the mountain in defeat. He reported to his teacher that the hermitage master

possessed genuine attainment and remained unmoved whatever Zhaozhou did. Nanquan said, “I have always had my doubts about that fellow.”

He had long wondered whether the man was truly grounded. Since Zhaozhou had failed to expose him, Nanquan would test him himself. The next day Nanquan went to the hermitage with a novice monk, taking a flask of tea and three cups. On arriving, Nanquan cast them to the ground and said, “Yesterday’s, yesterday’s!”

The hermitage master asked, “What about yesterday?” He was implying: “Yesterday I remained unmoved and your disciple was completely at a loss—what does that show?” At once the fox’s tail was exposed: why should there still be some “what” to be shown? Nanquan slapped the novice on the back and said, “You tricked me into coming! You tricked me into coming!” Then he swept his sleeves aside and departed. He had seen through the master: something still remained; his mind had moved, his footing was not yet firm, and he still had far to go.

In cultivation, we must establish firm footing. Whatever qigong or spectacular spiritual powers others may display, if theirs is a non-Buddhist path, we do not follow. We cultivate the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, recognize self-nature, and will ultimately realize the noble fruit. Those who do not know self-nature can never realize that fruit.

We previously discussed the case of Patriarch Lü Chunyang. Although he had perfected the yang spirit, Patriarch Huanglong called him “a ghost guarding a corpse.” Lü replied, “But within this bag I have the medicine of immortality.”

The “bag” means the body: “You call me a ghost guarding a corpse, yet within the corpse I guard—this bag—is the medicine of immortality!” This medicine was the cultivated “golden elixir,” the yang spirit. Huanglong said: “Though you pass through eighty thousand kalpas, in the end you will still fall into empty extinction.” He would still come to nothing, merely living longer than others.

The yang spirit is a body manifested by manas consciousness, the seventh consciousness. It is called a mind-born body and is illusory and unreal. Without recognizing the true mind, one still falls into empty oblivion. Recognizing the true mind brings freedom and ease, without the slightest attachment to appearances. First attain the spiritual power of the exhaustion of the outflows—the power of the Way. This alone is genuine spiritual power and the root. Once this is attained, there is no fear that the other five spiritual powers will not follow: gain the root, and there is no need to worry about the branches. This point is extremely important; please pay attention. Thus, at the very moment one realizes the naked nature of wisdom, one gains the view of the wisdom of self-nature.

“Although view and concentration are explained separately, in essence they are one.”

Although view and concentration are discussed separately, they are not two but one. “View” means recognizing the Original Face. Only with right understanding and right view does one know what the great samādhi without entering or leaving is and thereby attain right meditation. Conversely, only through right concentration does right understanding and right view arise.

Neither view nor concentration ever departs from self-nature; both flow from it. In essence they are truly one and the same. Not only are view and concentration “one in essence”; view, concentration, and practice are likewise one, and none ever departs from our wondrous luminous true mind.

2. Mahāmudrā Is the Essence of the Nine Vehicles

“Those who cultivate in this way the unerring essential path of the primordially pure Dzogchen of self-nature truly stand at the summit of the nine vehicles.”

The “Dzogchen of self-nature” has already been explained. “Primordially pure” means that self-nature is originally perfect and originally pure. The “unerring essential path” is the faultless and supremely important path of cultivation.

How is this path of the primordially pure Dzogchen of self-nature to be practiced? Precisely through the three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct described above. First recognize the essence, and then cultivate from the essence.

Recognize that deluded thoughts and afflictions are themselves its wondrous functioning. Neither follow nor suppress them; let them arise and cease by themselves, their arising and ceasing dissolving into non-existence. Simply recognize the essence and gather everything back into it. This is how one practices the unerring essential path. To depart from it is to go astray.

Many qigong practitioners take a wrong turn and fall into deviations; naturally, they have lost the essential path. Some Chan practitioners also go wrong because they do not know the correct method. Pursuing lifeless absorption, they become like wood or stone; this too is a departure from the essential path.

Some Pure Land practitioners likewise practice incorrectly. They treat Buddha-recitation as coins or banknotes, and the Buddha’s name as spirit-money to be burned and deposited in King Yama’s treasury for withdrawal after death. What kind of Pure Land teaching is that? Many held such beliefs in the past, and not a few still do today. This is a grave error. The Pure Land school teaches rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Who told you to go to King Yama? Is that not turning the teaching upside down? All these are departures from the essential path.

Those who practice this unerring essential path “truly stand at the summit of the nine vehicles.” When discussing “the pinnacle of all vehicles,” we noted that Vajrayāna classifies the Buddha’s teachings into nine successive vehicles: the three outer, three inner, and three secret vehicles.

Let us now briefly explain them. The three outer vehicles are the Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna. They include the Four Noble Truths, the twelve links of dependent origination, the six pāramitās, and the myriad practices cultivated by arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas; broadly speaking, they are the exoteric teachings. The three inner vehicles are Kriyā Tantra, Caryā Tantra, and Yoga Tantra.

Kriyā Tantra, also called Action Tantra, includes practices of increase, pacification, magnetisation, and subjugation. These function in accord with the wishes of sentient beings and are skillful means that “first draw them in with what they desire, and then lead them into the Buddha’s wisdom”; they are not ultimate. Caryā Tantra aims to end birth and death and leave the sea of suffering; with it, genuine cultivation begins.

Starting with visualization, one works with the winds, channels, and vital essences, as in the practice of phowa. “Yoga” means union or correspondence. In Yoga Tantra, phenomena accord with principle, words accord with conduct, one accords above with the Buddhas and below with sentient beings. From this open three further levels, the three secret vehicles: Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga.

Mahāyoga means union with Dzogchen: visualized winds, channels, and other conditioned forms are dissolved into emptiness so as to accord with the formless dharmakāya. Anuyoga means union with unsurpassed perfection: taking the expanse and wisdom as the gateway, it further dissolves all appearances into the one true aspect.

Atiyoga means union with incomparable perfection and further unifies the three vehicles as the single Great Secret Mantra Vehicle. Thus, “those who cultivate the unerring essential path of the primordially pure Dzogchen of self-nature truly stand at the summit of the nine vehicles.” This is the supreme vehicle. In the Great Secret Mantra there is no mantra to recite; in Mahāmudrā there is no mudrā to form. At this point, “Nothing fails to flow forth from this Dharma Realm, and nothing fails to return to this Dharma Realm.” Hence it is called the summit.

“The paths of all the other vehicles follow after it, serving as the scaffolding and companions of this essential path.”

Since this unerring essential path is the summit of the nine vehicles and the supreme vehicle, the paths of the remaining eight vehicles merely follow after it as

its scaffolding and companions. Their various Dharma methods are simply attendants, scaffolding, and companions to this essential path.

A platform is merely a stairway by which we climb to the highest story. A frame is like temporary scaffolding erected when building a house. A “companion” merely assists and accompanies; it is not the principal practice.

To attain the Way one must cultivate this unerring essential path; all other teachings merely serve as its scaffolding and companions. Without cultivating this Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, one cannot attain the Way.

How could one do so without recognizing the true mind? If one does not understand that deluded thoughts arising from the true mind are precisely its wondrous functioning, and that deluded thoughts are the aspect of the true mind’s wisdom of original awakening, but merely suppresses thought so that it does not arise, then even if every thought is crushed, one still cannot attain the Way. Understand what illusory thought is; do not fear it. Let it arise and cease by itself, its arising and ceasing dissolving into non-existence, and do not follow it. How relaxed and joyful this is! The chest is no longer oppressed and the head no longer swollen. Persevere, and in time one will certainly realize the Great Way.

“When one sees the luminous aspect of the prajñā of primordially pure self-nature, the functioning of prajñā born of concentration blazes ever more intensely, like the torrent of a summer waterfall.”

“Primordially pure” means originally pure. The “luminous aspect of the prajñā of self-nature” is the luminosity manifested by self-nature—the great wisdom of prajñā. This luminosity is not confined to visible brightness encountered in meditation. Here “luminosity” does not necessarily mean visible brightness.

Every wondrous function is luminosity. When the mind turns and knows how a matter should be handled or how a person should be received, that too is luminosity. One need not literally see light: all wondrous functioning is the luminous aspect of wisdom.

When one sees the wisdom-luminosity arising from the primordially pure Buddha-nature of suchness, “the functioning of prajñā born of concentration blazes ever more intensely”: the wondrous wisdom arising from right meditation functions on an ever broader scale. “Blazing” means flourishing like a fiercely burning flame.

Spiritual powers may even arise of themselves without being sought. As explained earlier, after recognizing the dharmakāya, one must protect that recognition and continue the practice at every moment—neither following illusory thoughts nor being carried away by circumstances. This is concentration. Remaining gathered in

concentration at all times and in all places, one eventually gives rise to wisdom, whose functioning becomes ever more expansive, “like the torrent of a summer waterfall.” In summer, melting ice and snow and abundant rainfall provide a plentiful water supply, so waterfalls pour forth endlessly with tremendous force. This illustrates the inexhaustible wondrous functioning of prajñā-wisdom.

“From the fundamental abiding of emptiness, great compassion arises and enters boundless compassionate concern; this too occurs naturally.”

The Dharma-nature and Buddha-nature are empty in essence and are therefore called emptiness. Everything is endowed with emptiness and is unobtainable; this is called “the emptiness of nature.” Its nature is empty—the very nature of true emptiness. This emptiness has always been unmoving and unwavering, unborn and unceasing, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing. This is called its fundamental abiding.

“From the fundamental abiding of emptiness, great compassion arises”: one cannot be concerned only with ending one’s own birth and death, but must also rescue the vast multitude of sentient beings. To “enter boundless compassionate concern” means that compassion has no boundary and is infinitely vast. The compassion of ordinary beings is narrow. For whom do they feel compassion?

For their own children: “My son, my darling—how precious!” As for another’s child, they let matters take their course. They support their own parents, but pay no heed to anyone else’s. Such compassion is exceedingly limited. Boundless compassionate concern means feeling compassion for beings in every direction throughout the worlds of the ten directions and vowing to liberate them all.

“This too occurs naturally.” Once cultivation is accomplished, one naturally enters boundless compassion and great compassion wells up spontaneously. Some say that arhats lack great compassion, but this is not truly so. Before attaining the fourth fruit, they may not yet possess it; once the fourth fruit is attained, great compassion will naturally arise.

When first setting out, they view the three realms as a prison and birth and death as an enemy. Some Pure Land practitioners today similarly say, “Once I reach the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, I shall never return, for this world is too full of suffering and affliction.”

Yet if they are truly reborn there, they will still return. Why? On hearing the Buddhas and bodhisattvas proclaim the great Dharma at the lotus-pool assembly, they will feel ashamed. To attain the Way, one must liberate beings; without liberating beings, the Way cannot be attained. They too will “enter boundless compassionate concern; this occurs naturally.”

An arhat who has attained the fourth fruit sees the Buddhas and bodhisattvas liberating beings throughout the six destinies and thinks: “How could I remain seated here doing nothing?” It would be embarrassing—like sitting idle at one’s workplace while everyone else labours. Thus, “unconditioned great loving-kindness and great compassion for those of the same essence” naturally wells up. This is called “turning from the Lesser Vehicle toward the Great.” That turning too occurs naturally.

“When the essential path of the union of emptiness and great compassion is directly realized, ocean-like conduct manifests its functions one by one, like the sun and its rays.”

When emptiness is truly realized, the partial affections of ordinary beings fall away. Such affection attends only to one’s own spouse and children and disregards others. Once the mind is empty, the great wisdom of prajñā appears in radiant clarity, and ordinary partiality vanishes completely. What seems dispassionate is in fact the deepest affection, and great compassion naturally arises.

This is the union of emptiness and great compassion, the essential path—the key to cultivating and attaining the Way. “Directly realized” means clearly present. When this essential path becomes vividly present, “ocean-like conduct manifests its functions one by one.” The ocean receives hundreds and thousands of rivers, each with its own function.

The Yangtze and Yellow Rivers have many tributaries, and each small stream likewise serves a different purpose: here boats travel and goods are carried; there fields are irrigated and rice produced; elsewhere fish and prawns abound.

This illustrates how, after realizing emptiness and giving rise to all-pervading compassion, we liberate beings within the six destinies and manifest different wondrous forms of conduct at every time and place. “Like the sun and its rays”: the two are inseparable.

With the sun there is light, and you can see things; without the sun you are in darkness and cannot see them. Emptiness and great compassion are as inseparable as the sun and its light. With the sun there is light; without the sun, where could light come from? The sun represents emptiness, and the light represents great compassion: the two are intimately united and inseparable.

“Working in concert with the accumulation of merit in this way, one extensively undertakes conduct that benefits others, thereby bringing the true view to completion and serving as a companion to undefiled tranquil bliss.”

To realize emptiness is to possess wisdom; to give rise to great compassion is to possess merit. Merit comes from widely liberating and serving sentient beings. Wisdom alone cannot bring Buddhahood if merit is absent or its accumulation incomplete. A Buddha is “the Honored One Perfect in Both,” complete in wisdom and merit.

We must therefore cultivate merit and wisdom together. If we cultivate only wisdom and emptiness, neglect merit, and do nothing for sentient beings, our merit remains incomplete and the fruit of Buddhahood cannot be perfected. Arhats initially form a limited aspiration, seeking only their own liberation rather than liberating and serving beings. Their wisdom is complete but their merit is not, so they cannot attain Buddhahood and must eventually “turn from the Lesser Vehicle toward the Great.”

“Working in concert with the accumulation of merit in this way”: an accumulation is like capital and provisions for the road—indispensable resources for attaining the Way. We must therefore arouse a vast resolve and bodhicitta, and cultivate merit and wisdom together, in order to perfect the fruit of Buddhahood.

Great bodhisattvas first arouse the aspiration to liberate all beings: “I study Buddhism not for myself, but for sentient beings.” Suppose beings are drowning in the ocean and I wish to save them, but cannot swim and know no lifesaving method—how could I help? Cultivating for my own liberation is like first learning to swim and to save lives.

Once skilled, I can rescue others. Liberating oneself is only the means; liberating beings is the aim. To study Buddhism for sentient beings rather than oneself is the resolve of a great-minded bodhisattva. If one’s resolve is small and one seeks only one’s own escape from birth and death, one can attain only the fruit of arhatship and cannot be called a bodhisattva. This is the distinction between a Mahāyāna bodhisattva and a saint of the Lesser Vehicle.

The wisdom of realized emptiness must work together with the accumulation of merit gained through liberating beings, so that one “extensively undertakes conduct that benefits others.” “Extensively” means doing much, not little. Conduct that benefits others comprises deeds beneficial to sentient beings, and these should be undertaken abundantly. Doing one good deed is easy; continuing for a long time is difficult, and doing so every day without interruption is harder still.

The same is true of mindful observation: to observe for a moment is easy, but never to forget it is difficult. Yet nothing in the world is difficult for one who applies the mind. If you can maintain mindful observation continuously for seven days without forgetting it at any moment, subsequent practice will no longer be difficult.

The Amitābha Sūtra says: “For one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days, with the mind single and undisturbed—when that person’s life comes to an end, Amitābha Buddha and the assembly of noble ones will appear before them.” If one can remain unforgetful throughout seven days, forgetting will thereafter be less likely.

Extensively undertaking conduct that benefits others means persistently doing many things beneficial to beings over a long period, willingly sacrificing oneself to help others, “thereby bringing the true view to completion and serving as a companion to undefiled tranquil bliss.” Such altruistic conduct completes and fulfils in reality the fundamental principle one has seen.

Let us explain “tranquil bliss.” Only when even bliss is unobtainable is it tranquil bliss. If bliss remains, the state is flawed, for pleasure and pain are opposites: wherever there is pleasure, pain is implicit within it. When bliss itself is unobtainable, how could suffering remain? The Land of Ultimate Bliss is bliss at its utmost—where even bliss is unobtainable.

The same applies to worldly meditative absorption: the second dhyāna is joy and the third is bliss; in the fourth dhyāna, the “ground of purity through equanimity and mindfulness,” even bliss is unobtainable and purity prevails. “Undefiled tranquil bliss” is tranquil bliss that has never been stained. It is precisely the wondrous luminous true mind, the One True Dharma Realm, and the great ocean of perfect awakening.

Conduct that extensively benefits others serves as its companion: great compassion accompanies emptiness, and the six pāramitās and myriad practices accompany prajñā-wisdom. Much has been said about applying oneself to open wisdom, but wisdom alone is not enough; one must also extensively benefit others and cultivate merit. There are many forms of altruistic conduct, which need not be detailed here. We should help sentient beings to the utmost of our ability—giving money if we have money, strength if we have strength. Even speaking a kind word that helps another is good.

3. A Summary of the Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā

“The three essentials are as follows: First, know the nature of your own mind. By observing illusory thoughts—how they arise in succession and engage with sensory objects—perceive the mind’s original nature and recognize the dharmakāya as your true essence. (This is the View.)”

The three essentials are view, concentration, and practice. This passage explains view.

To know the nature of one's own mind is to know the characteristic of the true mind. Does the true mind have any characteristics? It is formless and is therefore called emptiness. To know the characteristics of one's own mind is to understand that the concepts of "self," "person," "sentient being," and "life span" have no fundamental existence; everything is utterly unobtainable, free of abiding, and all dharmas are empty. At the same time, one must know that the true mind possesses boundless wondrous functioning: illusory thoughts and afflictions are all wondrous functions arising from it.

Observe the original characteristics of your own mind by relying on "by observing illusory thoughts—how they arise in succession and engage with sensory objects." Where do illusory thoughts come from? They arise in dependence upon objects. Their manifestation in response to external objects is their dependent arising. Observe the intrinsic character of your own mind on the basis of this arising.

Deluded thoughts exist because of circumstances. But if there were circumstances alone and no true mind, they could not arise. Circumstances are like wind, the true mind like water, and deluded thoughts like waves. Without water, wind alone cannot raise waves. Thoughts arising in dependence on circumstances can arise only because the true mind is present. Thus by examining their dependent arising, we can observe the intrinsic character of our own mind.

Seeing the waves is also seeing the water, and in this way one "recognizes the intrinsic character of the dharmakāya." Our true mind—the dharmakāya—is originally formless, yet when an object appears, the true mind engages with it and illusory thought arises. Through the arising of thought, one can infer the true mind and recognize the formless intrinsic character of the dharmakāya. Eyeballs alone cannot see.

Through the wondrous functioning of our nature, vision arises using the eyes as its instrument, and only then can things be seen. If the formless dharmakāya did not give rise to vision, one would look without seeing.

When illness brings severe pain in the foot and one cries, "Oh, it hurts terribly!" that too is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Using the nervous system as its instrument, the formless dharmakāya gives rise to tactile sensation, enabling one to feel pain. Otherwise, how would one know that the foot was injured? Without the true mind, one would neither feel nor cry out in pain.

Recognizing the true mind through the dependent arising of illusory thoughts is called "view." Mahāmudrā of the Ganges repeatedly teaches this Mahāmudrā view, and I have explained it again and again. If you still do not understand, that will not do. In fact, the problem is not that you cannot understand, but that doubt remains. This is the Mahāyāna's "seal of the one reality." Please doubt no longer.

“Integrate delusive thoughts as the dynamic expression of the dharmakāya, becoming thoroughly familiar with the dharmakāya. (This is Concentration.)”

The “concentration” discussed here does not mean sitting rigidly without moving. How, then, does one concentrate? By “integrate delusive thoughts as the dynamic expression of the dharmakāya, becoming thoroughly familiar with the dharmakāya.” Illusory thoughts and the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya are merged as one: the wondrous functioning is illusory thought, and illusory thought is the wondrous functioning, without the slightest difference. Consider again the analogy of waves and water.

Not only are waves entirely water after they subside; even while they have not subsided, they are entirely water. Why, at the beginning, do we speak of allowing the waves to settle? Because stillness is then present and easier to recognize. Once it has been recognized, the appearance of stillness must also be broken through before the work is complete.

Sentient beings are accustomed to clinging to appearances. The mental pathway that recognizes form is familiar, while that which realizes the formless is unfamiliar. So a process of “making the unfamiliar familiar and the familiar unfamiliar” is needed; all eighty-four thousand dharma gates are this process. Mahāmudrā is the most direct, pointing straight to “fusing deluded thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya.”

If you can accept this directly, that is “one thought transcends three asaṃkhyeya kalpas”: you immediately “become intimate with the dharmakāya,” and this is truly the great samādhi with no going out and no entering.

At this point you no longer fear deluded thoughts. Let them arise: they are all wondrous functions of the dharmakāya. Simply pay them no heed, without abiding in objects or clinging to them. Maintain observation in this way at all times and places, and gradually you will become thoroughly familiar with the dharmakāya. You may ask, “Why are you still describing a process of cultivation? Such observation is not direct familiarity with the dharmakāya.”

Correct—but because you have not directly recognized it as your own nature, I have no choice but to speak this way. If you truly accepted it without doubt, what would remain to observe? Take great care in acknowledging this matter for yourself: the genuine cannot be made false and the false cannot be made genuine. “Like one who drinks water and knows for oneself whether it is warm or cold,” you know most clearly in your own heart.

If you cannot yet accept it without doubt, you must maintain observation at every moment while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Speaking is wondrous

functioning; working is wondrous functioning. Regard everything in this way. Once fully familiar, you will recognize only the dharmakāya and no longer recognize external objects. This is called realizing the Great Way; at that time even observation is no longer needed.

“At the cessation of thought, remain firm and settled. Let thoughts have no continuity, and do not forget the view of the dharmakāya. (This is Practice.)”

The first and last clauses of this passage explain practice. The practice of Mahāmudrā of the Ganges never departs from the wondrous luminous true mind and is practice of the supreme vehicle. A shallow reading can easily misconstrue it, so let us analyze the passage on two levels.

The first level is: “At the cessation of thought, remain firm and settled.” “At the cessation of thought” means at the break between thoughts, when illusory thought has come to rest. To “remain firm and settled” means that the mind is unwavering and peacefully enters samādhi. “All thoughts have no continuity, and never forget the view of the dharmakāya.”

No continuity of thought means that not a single thought obtainable; this is calm abiding. Not forgetting the view of the dharmakāya means lucid clarity; this is observing. You can readily hear that this interpretation describes seated meditation, entering samādhi, and the practice of calming and insight.

Having heard so much about Mahāmudrā of the Ganges, you may say, “This does not seem to be the conduct it advocates, yet is that not what the passage says?” In fact, that is not its meaning. It is merely a crude literal reading—the surface meaning. “To interpret the meaning by clinging to the words wrongs the Buddhas of the three times.” Let us now go a level deeper and explain the inner meaning.

At the second level, “At the cessation of thought, remain firm and settled” does not mean that the cessation of thought is a state in which no thought arises. Since “illusory thoughts and afflictions are all aspects of the dharmakāya’s wisdom of original awakening,” if one turns the light around in a single thought and recognizes the dharmakāya, illusory thought is no longer deluded. Recognizing the dharmakāya rather than illusory thought is “the cessation of thought.”

To remain firm and settled in this means firmly and unwaveringly recognizing the dharmakāya on the basis of this understanding. This is the great samādhi without entering or leaving.

“All thoughts have no continuity, and never forget the view of the dharmakāya.” If one forgets that illusory thoughts and afflictions are aspects of the dharmakāya’s wisdom of original awakening, illusory thoughts once again become deluded:

thought regains continuity and the dharmakāya is forgotten. If one remains alert at all times and places and firmly recognizes the dharmakāya, the very thought is no-thought: thoughts have no continuity, and the view of the dharmakāya is not forgotten.

The first sentence concerns the “cessation of thought”—recognizing the dharmakāya, seeing the fundamental principle, and awakening to the mind and seeing one’s nature. If one can remain firm and settled, the matter is resolved once and for all. If that firmness has not yet been attained, the second sentence applies: it describes the close, continuous conduct of sustaining observation.

The Diamond Sūtra says, “Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.” Here, the initial Chinese character ying ( ) refers to responding to affairs, objects, and the myriad circumstances of life. As people come and guests go, we must respond appropriately, and thoughts inevitably arise. Yet this is the wondrous functioning of our nature; simply do not abide in the thoughts or follow them. Even as a thought arises, no thought that truly arises can be found. This is being firm and settled.

It does not mean remaining rigidly motionless without a single thought. We employ thoughts to receive people and handle daily affairs, but do not follow them. The true mind remains free from abiding and following, unmoved and unwavering. “Thoughts have no continuity” means not allowing deluded thoughts to link together in ceaseless grasping.

One thought leads from Zhang San to Li Si, from Li Si to Zhao Wu, and from Zhao Wu to Wang Liu, and so on. If thoughts fly about without end, things have gone wrong. At that moment, awaken sharply and pay them no heed; the chain is cut. Yesterday someone asked me about Chan investigation. He liked investigating “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” but could never arouse the sensation of doubt.

I told him that Chan investigation requires arousing the sensation of doubt; if it cannot be aroused, the method will not work. One may then adopt another method. When a thought arises, ask where it comes from—not attending to the thought, but tracing it to its source. When it subsides, ask where it goes—not holding it in place, but watching where it ceases.

This is like a cat catching a mouse. The cat waits at the mouse-hole and pounces the instant the mouse appears. The mouse represents illusory thought; remain alert like the cat, and the moment thought shows its head, investigate its source. When it subsides, watch where it ceases. This is a Chan method, and its purpose is likewise to prevent continuity of thought.

Through sustained practice, continuity of thought changes from familiar to unfamiliar, while non-continuity changes from unfamiliar to familiar. When the

practice matures and a catalytic circumstance is encountered, the observing mind and the observed thought dissolve in an instant. With a sudden breakthrough, subject and object both vanish, the faculties and their objects fall away, and one realizes the Great Way.

The phrase “never forget the view of the dharmakāya” still describes active cultivation: remaining alert everywhere and never forgetting the dharmakāya. It is the conduct among view, concentration, and practice, and remains at the stage of practice. At the sudden realization of the Great Way, even the view of the dharmakāya is unobtainable.

Long ago, a monk skilled in expounding the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra was asked by Chan Master Dongshan, “What kind of words are ‘not knowable by wisdom and not cognizable by consciousness’?” He replied, “Words praising the dharmakāya.” Dongshan said, “Calling it the dharmakāya has already praised it.”

Calling it the dharmakāya has already praised it. Adding that it cannot be known by wisdom or cognized by consciousness merely places another head upon one’s head. This is the speech of one who has arrived home. Dongshan often taught students to “walk the bird path,” a narrow and secluded trail.

A monk asked, “Master, you often teach students to walk the bird path. What is the bird path?” Dongshan replied, “One meets not a single person.” A broad highway teems with traffic and people; walking it symbolizes the proliferation of distracting and illusory thoughts. The bird path is a narrow, remote track seldom traveled; walking it symbolizes a mind still as water, without a single thought.

The monk asked, “How does one walk it?” Dongshan said, “You must go without selfishness beneath your feet.” The bird path refers to the mind’s course, while going without selfishness means that the mind-ground is selfless. When the mind is selfless, heaven and earth are vast. Why do illusory thoughts proliferate and attachments persist? They all arise from personal self-interest. With a selfless mind, illusory thought is nowhere to be found.

The monk asked, “Is walking the bird path itself the Original Face?” Dongshan countered, “Ācārya, why are you inverted?” “Where am I inverted?” the monk asked. Dongshan replied, “If you are not inverted, why do you mistake the servant for the master?” The Original Face is the master; walking the bird path is merely a method of cultivation, a wondrous function and servant rather than the master.

To take the bird path as the Original Face is to mistake the servant for the master. The monk then asked, “What is the Original Face?” Dongshan answered, “Do not walk the bird path.” When speaking of the Original Face, even the bird path is relinquished.

Thus, “At the cessation of thought, remain firm and settled. Let thoughts have no continuity, and do not forget the view of the dharmakāya” describes only a method of conduct. Strictly speaking, it is not ultimate; it is not the Original Face but still “walking the bird path,” still being on the way. When the practice matures and the original suddenly opens, even the view of the dharmakāya is unobtainable. Then one no longer walks the bird path—and fundamentally, no bird path was ever walked.

4. The Most Essential Point of Mahāmudrā

“Let the mind attend to the eyes, and the eyes attend to space: this is the most essential of all essential points. (Consult the practice of Yangti.)”

“Let the mind attend to the eyes, and the eyes attend to space.” In practice, the mind must remain alert, watching the eyes—what is called the “mind’s eye.” In his later years Bai Juyi wrote, “How may the mind’s eye be delivered? By the single phrase ‘Amitābha.” The eyes attend to space: the mind’s eye contemplates emptiness. Everything is emptied and found to be unobtainable.

Whatever is seen leaves no trace in the mind, as though unseen. Seeing yet seeing nothing does not mean closing the eyes; hearing yet hearing nothing does not mean plugging the ears. “It is not that one does not see or hear; one knows with lucid clarity, yet does not cling to sights or sounds.” Practice in this way and one will certainly realize the Great Way.

This is “the most essential of all essential points,” the heart of every essential instruction. Dharma practice requires a key, and this is the foremost of all keys. It may be studied with reference to Yangti, a lineage within Vajrayāna. Its meaning is that all dharmas are indivisible and the beings of the five destinies all possess pure bodies.

The pure body is the dharmakāya: the bodies of gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings are all the pure dharmakāya. As Chan Master Yongjia says in the Song of Realizing the Way: “The true nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature; This illusory, empty body is the dharmakāya.” These are the words of one who has arrived home. At the level of Highest Yoga Tantra, Vajrayāna follows the same track as Chan; hence Chan is called the “Great Esoteric School.”

“Unless it is the Mahāmudrā of the fourth empowerment in the Secret Mantra Vehicle, it cannot be called Mahāmudrā.”

This concerns Vajrayāna rules governing empowerment. Let us briefly explain its origin. Empowerment was an ancient Indian custom. When a crown prince ascended

the throne, an empowerment ceremony was performed. Water from the four great oceans was mixed with jewels, fragrances, and precious substances.

Riding an elephant, the officiant poured the water over the prince's head along the elephant's tusk. The ceremony blessed the king with happiness, health, and longevity, and the realm with peace, prosperity, strength, and abundant harvests. Empowerment was an auspicious symbol. Śākyamuni Buddha accorded with the capacities and customs of sentient beings and likewise conferred empowerment upon the assembly.

The ritual was thus transmitted within Buddhism and became especially important in Vajrayāna. But what is the "fourth empowerment" mentioned here? Vajrayāna speaks of four empowerments and five bodily sites, explained below:

The first is the empowerment of light: light is radiated upon the crown of the Dharma disciple.

The second is the nectar empowerment: nectar-water is poured upon the Dharma disciple's crown.

The third is the seed empowerment: a seed-syllable mantra is visualized entering the practitioner's heart.

The fourth is the mudrā empowerment: a mudrā is formed with the hands, conferring blessing upon five sites of the practitioner's body.

These five sites correspond to the Buddhas of the five directions; hence the fourth empowerment is also called the "empowerment of the Buddhas of the five directions."

First, the center: Vairocana Tathāgata (in some scriptures, Amitābha Tathāgata), representing the wisdom of the dharma-realm's nature, at the practitioner's forehead.

Second, the south: Ratnasambhava Tathāgata, representing the wisdom of equality, at the practitioner's right shoulder.

Third, the north: Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata, representing wisdom of accomplishing activities, at the practitioner's left shoulder.

Fourth, the east: Akṣobhya Tathāgata, the Imperturbable Tathāgata, representing great perfect mirror wisdom, at the practitioner's heart.

Fifth, the west: Amitābha Tathāgata (in some scriptures, Vairocana Tathāgata), representing the wisdom of wondrous observation, at the practitioner's throat.

The ceremony of empowerment by the Buddhas of the five directions confers blessing at the practitioner's forehead, right shoulder, left shoulder, heart, and throat; this is called the "fourth empowerment." Vajrayāna stipulates that only after receiving this empowerment has one received the Mahāmudrā teaching; without it, the practice is not counted as Mahāmudrā.

In truth, however, such a human ceremony is merely an outward form. Genuine empowerment occurs when one reaches the stage of a equal enlightenment bodhisattva and receives empowerment from the Buddhas of the ten directions. India is the birthplace of Buddhism, and Indian kings underwent empowerment when succeeding to the throne. Śākyamuni Buddha used the same form to empower the assembly, and the ritual was subsequently transmitted within Vajrayāna. Today, students likewise receive empowerment when Vajrayāna teachings are conferred.

"Genuine reality as it naturally is—this is the true Mahāmudrā. Neither cultivated, adjusted, nor distracted, it is the supreme Dharma-gate."

Only the Buddha-nature of suchness can be called "genuine," and is therefore termed the true aspect. The true aspect is without characteristics, yet there is no characteristic it fails to manifest. "As it naturally is" means that it has always been so. Our Buddha-nature is originally this genuine and has nothing to do with cultivation. It is originally of boundless luminosity and inexhaustible wondrous functioning.

When obscured by ignorance, it manifests as an ordinary being—and this too is wondrous functioning. Genuine and unfalse, naturally so: "this is the true Mahāmudrā." Mahāmudrā is the One True Dharma Realm, our wondrous luminous true mind. This is the genuine Mahāmudrā.

The fourth empowerment is only an outward form and is not necessarily the true Mahāmudrā; forming a hand mudrā or performing a practice is not necessarily the true Mahāmudrā either. The true Mahāmudrā is our true mind. It needs no cultivation and has fundamentally never been adjusted or distracted.

Only what is distracted requires adjustment; since it is not distracted, what is there to adjust? "Neither cultivated, adjusted, nor distracted, it is the supreme Dharma-gate." This is the teaching of the supreme vehicle. Its method is to recognize the true mind here and now; only this is genuinely to receive Mahāmudrā.

Recognize the true mind immediately, protect it, and do not let it follow external circumstances. This is the supreme Dharma-gate of Vajrayāna, and Chan is the same. A Chan student once asked his teacher, "What is Buddha?" The teacher said, "If I tell you, I fear you will not believe me."

The disciple replied, “Master, you speak truthfully. How would I dare disbelieve you?” The teacher said, “If you believe it, you are Buddha.” The disciple awakened on the spot: “Ah, so that is how it is!” Having assumed responsibility for this, he sustained the recognition continuously and within a few years realized the Great Way. He succeeded because he could accept it directly and then sustain it closely and continuously.

The supreme Vajrayāna teaching speaks just as Chan does: the awareness that now knows cold and heat, pain and itching is your true mind. Simply protect it at all times. Know that every circumstance is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, and recognize the true mind through circumstances. The true mind is like a mirror and circumstances like reflections. Recognize the mirror, not the reflections. To practice in this way is the Mahāmudrā of the supreme vehicle, the most complete Dharma-gate and the swiftest path to Buddhahood.

“Emptiness, bliss, and clarity—clarity is also called wisdom. Since emptiness is no-thought, these are also called bliss, clarity, and no-thought.”

When discussing signs of progress on the Path, we explained emptiness, bliss, and clarity—the three experiences that naturally arise in the course of cultivation. Clarity does not necessarily mean visible light; it is the disclosure of the mind’s luminosity and is therefore also called wisdom. When illusory thought is absent yet knowing remains lucid, and the mind is empty and immaculate, this is the experience of emptiness.

“Emptiness is no-thought, so these are also called bliss, clarity, and no-thought.” Bliss is pliancy, ease, and joy, incomparable to any worldly pleasure. Clarity is the wondrous luminosity of the true mind. When the luminosity of Buddha-nature shines forth and prajñā-wisdom is revealed, one is necessarily open, upright, free, and at ease. No-thought does not necessarily mean that no thought whatsoever arises. Thoughts may arise, but one does not abide in them; empty in their very essence, this is called no-thought.

Much was said about signs of progress on the Path earlier, so no more need be added here.

“Do not arouse a mind that seeks cultivation or adjustment, yet remain entirely free from distraction, and thereby guard your own mind. Thus, without abiding or engaging in conditions, and functioning spontaneously without departing from the luminous, pure essence of your own mind, one is like a person holding a bright lamp that dispels darkness. This is skillfully guarding samaya.”

“Do not arouse a mind that seeks cultivation or adjustment” refers to what was just called “neither cultivated nor adjusted”; “remain entirely free from distraction” refers

to “not distracted.” Neither cultivated, adjusted, nor distracted—this is the supreme Dharma-gate. One uses it “to guard one’s own mind,” the wondrous luminous true mind.

This true mind is the wisdom of original awakening. It is originally formless, non-abiding, and unmoving; it pervades space and fills the Dharma realm, and has never been distracted. Whether one ascends to heaven or descends into hell, it remains constant and unchanged. Therefore, when sustaining the recognition and guarding one’s own mind, do not arouse any intention to counteract, accept, reject, or adjust. At all times and places, let everything go and remain open, empty, and non-abiding; only then does one accord with the true mind and realize the Great Way.

“Without abiding” means free from attachment; “without engaging in conditions” means free from grasping at conditions; “functioning spontaneously” means according naturally with circumstances. Everything arises through causes and conditions, but do not let the mind be moved by what arises. Be as circumstances require and change as they change, without imposing personal opinions; accord with every condition.

If you insist on your own way, demand this or that, or comply only reluctantly, it will not work. To remain without abiding or engaging in conditions, functioning spontaneously, is not to depart from the luminous, pure essence of one’s own mind—that is, self-nature. To “depart” means to violate or deviate from it.

Self-nature is originally unmoving, yet you waver; originally neither coming nor going, yet you come and go without rest; originally unborn and unceasing, yet you continually arise and cease.

This is to depart from the luminous, pure essence of your own mind. Self-nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing; yet you waver, come and go, and arise and cease without end. This does not accord with it. We must accord with our nature at every moment—without abiding or engaging in conditions, functioning spontaneously, and nowhere departing from the luminous, pure essence of our own mind.

If we can do so, it is “like holding a bright lamp that dispels darkness”: all before us becomes luminous. We need not fear an uneven road or traveling by night. To avoid falling into a deep pit, darkness must be dispelled.

Otherwise, how would one know that a pit lies ahead? Thus, do not let the mind be moved by circumstances. “When the old frontier man’s horse was lost, who could know it was not a blessing?” and “Misfortune is where good fortune rests; good

fortune is where misfortune hides." A promising opportunity for wealth may stir the mind, yet it may ultimately harm you.

If wealth attracts kidnappers who hold you for ransom, has fortune not become calamity? The Tang-dynasty layman Pang Yun sank his immense fortune in the Xiang River, saying, "Much gold disorders the mind." Great wealth agitates the mind, arouses envy, and leaves one no peace.

It is a source of trouble; let it go. If we recognize only the wondrous luminous true mind, do not follow circumstances, and are not deluded by money or sensual beauty, Buddha-nature remains ever present and the mind undisturbed. Rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss likewise requires the mind to be single and undisturbed; when the mind is confused, rebirth there is impossible.

At all times and places, we should remain without abiding or engaging in conditions, functioning spontaneously and never departing from the pure essence of self-nature, like one holding a bright lamp that dispels darkness. If we can do this, "we skillfully guard samaya." What is samaya? It means equality, vow, and non-transgression.

Equality means that Buddhas and all sentient beings are equal: the luminous, pure essence of their minds is identical, without higher or lower. Originally there is no sea of suffering; only through beings' deluded grasping and appropriation does a boundless sea of suffering appear. Vow means arousing a great vow to liberate everyone from that sea.

Learn from Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha: "Until the hells are empty, I vow not to attain Buddhahood." Learn from Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who constantly accords with sentient beings and accompanies them throughout the six destinies. Non-transgression has already been explained.

Remain alert at every moment, do not be deluded by circumstances, and continually remove defilements and habitual stains. If the slightest setback makes you retreat—"This is too painful; my hands ache and my legs are numb. I shall stop practicing.

My heart feels oppressed; it would be easier to relax, watch a show, or chat with friends"—then, while watching and chatting, you may unknowingly fall into the three lower destinies. To end birth and death, one must arouse a great vow, not fear hardship, and practice diligently while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Two, three, or four hours of seated meditation alone are insufficient. Remain constantly alert, do not be deluded by circumstances, and protect the pure nature. This is "skillfully guarding samaya."

“If discrimination and attachment remain, how could this be merely a violation of samaya?”

Conversely, if discrimination continues without end and attachment is not relinquished, how could this be merely a violation of samaya? Such activity plants the seeds of rebirth in the six destinies and even the seeds of hell. Discrimination and attachment are plainly the restless movement of the deluded mind, unwilling to release personal self-interest.

How could cultivation of this kind accord with the vast and open Great Way? Take careful note: non-discrimination certainly does not mean inability to distinguish good from bad. What must cease is discrimination without end—thought following thought, with no ability to apply the brake. When functioning is required, good and evil remain distinct and right and wrong perfectly clear; once the function is complete, there is no clinging, love or hatred, acceptance or rejection, and no trace is left.

This is direct perception functioning as inference and inference as direct perception; it is not discriminative attachment. One knows perfectly well what is good and bad, yet does not favor good people and detest bad ones. We hope that those who do wrong will become good and that those who are good will progress still further.

Long ago, a monk in a saṅgha repeatedly stole, violating the precept against taking what was not given. The monastery manager intended to expel him. The monk wept bitterly and begged to repent, but because this was not his first offense, the manager refused and insisted that he leave.

The abbot, however, wished to keep him and offer one more opportunity to reform. The manager and several upright practitioners told the abbot, “If you keep him, all of us will leave.” The abbot replied, “Even if every one of you goes, I shall keep him.” The manager said, “We may leave, but let us be clear.

If you keep him rather than us, do you mean that not one among us is good, that none is the equal of a monk who breaks the precepts?” The abbot answered, “I keep him rather than you precisely because every one of you is better than he. Wherever you go, you can continue to cultivate.

If he leaves, who will receive him? What future will he have but further degeneration?” These words deeply moved everyone, and none departed. The offending monk was moved even more profoundly. From then on, he devoted himself to reform: he not only ceased stealing but cultivated diligently and later attained realization.

Thus, non-discrimination certainly does not mean confusing black and white or failing to distinguish right from wrong. It means unconditioned great loving-kindness and great compassion for those of the same essence, free from choosing through love and hatred for personal gain. This is direct perception functioning as inference and inference as direct perception. Although direct perception itself does not discriminate, inference still knows what is wholesome and unwholesome.

Buddha-nature possesses awareness and is not like wood or stone, yet discrimination and attachment must not arise. If they do, this is not merely a violation of samaya but the seed of the six destinies and even of hell. The consequences of discrimination and attachment are endless.

“Only one who forever abandons discrimination and attachment and gives rise to the mind without abiding anywhere can thoroughly see the true meaning of every teaching in the Tripiṭaka, without remainder.”

As just explained, failure to relinquish discrimination and attachment not only violates samaya but brings endless future harm. We must therefore “forever abandon discrimination and attachment.” Even if your family possesses ten thousand fortunes, you cannot cling to them. Can you preserve them? No, for you must eventually die and cannot carry away a single coin; you will depart empty-handed.

In the end, everything must be relinquished, willingly or not. Why not be wise and relinquish it now, gaining great wisdom and genuine benefit? Even before death, you may be unable to keep what lies before your eyes. Śākyamuni Buddha said that wealth is “shared by five parties.”

It belongs not to you alone, but to water, fire, thieves, rulers, and relatives. Flood may wash it away, fire consume it, thieves steal it, rulers confiscate it, or relatives contend for it. What part is truly yours? When any of these five comes to claim it, you must let go whether you wish to or not.

Be wise, then, and cease discriminating and clinging. We must “forever abandon discrimination and attachment and give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.” To remain free from discrimination and attachment at all times and places is to abandon them forever. For the mind not to crave and the attention not to stick is to abide nowhere. This does not mean that the mind becomes dead ashes; its lively wondrous functioning appears freely—this is to “give rise to the mind.”

If this is genuinely so, one “can thoroughly see the true meaning of every teaching in the Tripiṭaka, without remainder.” If at all times and places we truly abide nowhere and give rise to the numinously luminous, lively true mind with its wondrous

functioning, we can see the truth of the Buddha-Dharma completely and penetrate it without remainder.

If instead we engage in lifeless practice— "a withered tree leaning against a cold cliff, without warmth through three winters"—at best we may realize arhatship, yet remain within transformational birth and death. Why? Because an arhat abides motionless in a pure land beyond the three realms, as though dead; this is another level of birth and death. Ordinary beings undergo segmented birth and death, while arhats undergo transformational birth and death.

We must therefore give rise to the non-abiding mind and its boundless wondrous functioning. The Diamond Sūtra says, "Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere." The Sixth Patriarch awakened through these words. In response to Shenxiu's verse— "The body is the bodhi tree; the mind is like a bright mirror-stand. Polish it diligently at all times; do not let it gather dust."

The Sixth Patriarch composed: "Bodhi originally has no tree; the bright mirror also has no stand. Originally there is not a single thing; where could dust alight?" Shenxiu clung to existence, while the Sixth Patriarch's verse inclined toward emptiness. One spoke of existence and the other of emptiness; both were one-sided. Thus, the Fifth Patriarch said that he too "had not yet seen the nature."

Some believe this was said only to prevent Shenxiu's supporters from harming Huineng, but it was not a pretence. Otherwise, why would the Fifth Patriarch summon Huineng to his room at the third watch for further instruction? When he expounded the Diamond Sūtra as far as "Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere," Huineng awakened completely upon hearing the words.

He understood that self-nature is originally lively and functioning, not an empty nothingness lying rigid and inert. In wonder he exclaimed: "Who could have expected self-nature to be originally pure? Who could have expected self-nature to be originally unborn and unceasing? Who could have expected self-nature to be originally complete in itself? Who could have expected self-nature to be originally unmoving? Who could have expected self-nature to produce the myriad dharmas?"

Five times he cried, "Who could have expected?"—and came fully alive. Before this, Huineng's understanding had inclined toward emptiness and remained lifeless. "Originally there is not a single thing—where could dust alight?" reaches the extreme of emptiness but is still not ultimate. Seeing that he was excellent material, the Fifth Patriarch struck the rice-hulling mortar three times with his staff and departed, signalling Huineng to enter his room at the third watch. There he expounded the Diamond Sūtra and brought him to complete awakening.

We should therefore avoid lifeless practice and undertake living practice, manifesting wondrous functioning at every moment. “He now is precisely I”: all appearances are my reflections and wondrous functioning. Yet “I now am not he”: one must not cling even to wondrous functioning. We need not fear sentient beings or demonic obstacles; all are wondrous functioning, not mere nothingness.

Some say that the Diamond Sūtra teaches a blank emptiness in which nothing exists. This is mistaken. It teaches boundless wondrous functioning and reveals the true mind. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss exists; it is indeed such a beautiful realm, with ground of gold, lotus pools of seven treasures, water endowed with eight virtues, and the sounds of wind and birds proclaiming the Dharma.

Of course it truly exists—how could it not? Yet this is wondrous presence, not substantial existence. It was not originally present, but is transformed through the vows of Amitābha Buddha and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the lotus-pool assembly. Stagnant emptiness is wrong, and substantial existence is also wrong. True emptiness is wondrous presence: empty yet not empty, existent yet not existent; not empty yet empty, not existent yet existent.

To understand in this way is to “forever abandon discrimination and attachment,” “give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere,” and “thoroughly see the true meaning of every teaching in the Tripiṭaka, without remainder.” The vast and boundless teachings of the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions become entirely clear in one’s own mind. Every one of them depicts the true mind. Once the true mind is understood, the truth has been grasped.

You are then a member of the household, no longer an outsider. Naturally, everything in your own home is clear at a glance, with nothing left out. In the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions of scripture, no passage remains doubtful or obscure, and none is beyond explanation. Everything is known, with nothing left over.

“In effortless cultivation, observing the mind is the foremost essential.”

“Effortless cultivation” is effortless conduct. Using the mind to cultivate the mind is effortful conduct: an intention to practice and a mind that undertakes the practice remain. Effortful conduct is the initial stage and gradually gives way to effortless conduct, or effortless cultivation. In this effortless cultivation, “observing the mind is the foremost essential.”

As explained earlier, observing the mind means alertly watching the place from which thought arises. When a thought comes, ask where it comes from; when it subsides, ask where it goes. To observe the mind is to illuminate and watch it. In this way, thoughts do not arise and cease chaotically or flow on without end.

Without observation, illusory thoughts fly about and a thousand concerns crowd the mind; yet you become accustomed to the confusion and no longer notice it. How could that be acceptable? Remain alert and watch carefully. You must understand the true and deluded minds. The observing mind is still deluded mind, for it too involves the arising of thought.

Without the true mind, however, this deluded mind could not arise: it arises from the true mind and is its wondrous functioning. While actively observing the mind, do not discriminate between true and deluded mind.

When the deluded mind becomes still, both the observing mind and the observed thought fall away at once: subject and object both vanish. Without observation, they cannot both vanish and one cannot break free; observation is therefore essential.

Buddha-recitation is likewise observation and a practice of calming and insight. "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…" The practitioner's attention is gathered by the Buddha's name and ceases to move; this is calming. Reciting oneself and listening oneself, hearing every syllable with lucid clarity, is insight. Even without making a sound, inwardly reciting Amitābha Buddha and hearing the name distinctly is illumination.

Attending to the Buddha's name without mixing in other thoughts is calming; perceiving it clearly and distinctly is insight. Observing the mind does not mean observing the physical heart, but observing thoughts of mind. Our practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is also observation of mind. On the cushion, one recites the mantra with the mind and hears it with the ears, every syllable distinct and the hearing lucidly clear. Off the cushion, one observes alertly where thought arises, like a cat watching a mouse. The instant a thought arises, it is seen; one neither turns with thought nor is carried away by circumstances. Knowing the moment thought arises is what Chan calls "recognizing it." Once recognized, it can no longer wrong you.

Some say, "I am fine when I do not recite the Buddha's name; there are no illusory thoughts. The moment I begin reciting, everything goes wrong—illusory thoughts become innumerable." Has Buddha-recitation caused the problem? No. Before reciting, the mind was already in great confusion; you simply failed to notice. Following thought and circumstance, you continually revolved through the six destinies.

Now that you recite the Buddha's name, the mind has quietened and you can see illusory thoughts and the cause of saṃsāra. This is excellent. It is like a small opening in a room through which a shaft of sunlight enters: within that light, motes of dust can be seen dancing, whereas outside it they remain invisible.

Dust is in fact everywhere; sunlight merely reveals it. Seeing thought is therefore good—the first appearance of wisdom's light. To expect all thought to stop at once is like expecting to reach heaven in a single step. How could it happen so quickly? This is a common failing among students: everyone wants immediate success and instant Buddhahood, but it is not so easy.

Nor is it truly difficult. Once the method is understood, practice it today, tomorrow, and the day after; with several years of work, success is certain. There is no such thing as succeeding instantly or in a single day.

Among practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, some find even two hours of sitting each day unbearable. After forcing themselves for several days, they cannot persevere. Their failure lies in lacking constancy. They then switch to distracted Buddha-recitation: the mouth repeats "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…" while illusory thoughts race through the mind. Can that be effective? It is equivalent to not reciting at all; it will not do.

5. View, Meditation, Conduct, and Fruition

"Only by transcending all extreme views, attachments, and conceptual imputations does one become the genuine king of views." (View)

Everyone holds extreme views. What are they? Clinging to existence or non-existence creates the two extremes of existence and non-existence; clinging to good or bad creates the extremes of good and bad. Long and short, right and wrong, gain and loss, emptiness and existence—there are many such extremes. Wherever there is relativity, there are two sides, and both constitute extreme views: the dualistic views of ordinary beings.

What is attachment? Fixating on something, unable to let it go or free oneself, is attachment. What is pervasive discrimination? Calculating and discriminating about everything, unable to relinquish anything and wanting it all. This is what the Dharma Characteristics School calls "the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment." Every ordinary being in the six realms of rebirth behaves in this way; none is free from such calculation.

Some say they want neither this nor that, but do not believe them—they really want everything. "Fish is what I desire; bear's paw is also what I desire." They want both. If they say there is one thing they do not want, it is merely because they know the two "cannot both be obtained."

In truth, neither can be obtained. Alas, the mind imputes and clings to everything. We practitioners must put all this down—everything without exception. Failing to let go will not do. To let go is to transcend. Only by transcending all extreme views,

attachments, and conceptual imputations does one become the genuine king of views. This alone is right understanding and right view.

Why? Because only this accords with our original nature. “View” means recognizing our original nature, our Original Face. Without seeing in this way, how could one recognize it? All extreme views, attachments, and conceptual imputations must be completely relinquished, left behind, and transcended. Only this is the genuine king of views.

“In cultivation, one must remain wholly undistracted from the luminous essence of one’s own mind; only this is the genuine king of cultivation.” (Cultivation)

The three essentials are view, concentration, and practice. We have just discussed view; now we turn to concentration. Concentration is cultivation: “One must remain wholly undistracted from the luminous essence of one’s own mind; only this is the genuine king of cultivation.” The luminous essence of one’s own mind is our original nature. Because it is of boundless luminosity and inexhaustible wisdom, it is called the luminous essence; luminosity belongs to the essence itself.

One must remain entirely undistracted, never allowing external circumstances to entice one away from self-nature. Following circumstances and indulging in random thought is distraction. At every moment, see the original nature clearly and sustain it without losing it. This alone is the genuine king of cultivation.

We are all accustomed to running after circumstances. Only after following them an immense distance do we realize, “Oh! How have I followed illusory thought so far? I must draw back!” By then it already seems too late. Chan has a saying: “Do not fear the arising of thought; fear only delayed awareness.” It tells us to remain constantly alert and observant, never turning with illusory thought. If we recognize it only after following it far and for a long time, that will not do.

Let thought arise; the instant it appears, I see it. Seeing it, I pay it no heed and illuminate it through. To illuminate it through is to remain wholly undistracted. This is the genuine king of cultivation.

“In practice, one must abide in the luminous essence of one’s own mind, without contrivance or seeking; only this is the genuine king of practice.” (Practice)

Practice means putting the teaching into conduct. How should one conduct? “One must abide in the luminous essence of one’s own mind, without contrivance or seeking; only this is the genuine king of practice.” Once again, the luminous essence of one’s own mind is mentioned. One must abide in this essence of boundless luminosity and inexhaustible wisdom, “without contrivance or seeking.” Without

contrivance means not acting artificially, but allowing everything to unfold spontaneously in accord with conditions.

Some people do not practice a Dharma according to its instructions but, thinking themselves clever, add something of their own. This is deliberate contrivance. Without seeking means pursuing nothing. Do not seek spiritual powers or meditative absorption. The more you seek absorption, the less you can enter it; the more you seek spiritual powers, the less they manifest.

Seeking gives rise to illusory thought and obscures the mind's luminosity. One must therefore remain without contrivance or seeking; only this is the genuine king of practice. Without practicing in this way, even great effort cannot bring realization. If one does not know the luminous essence of one's own mind, practice is like trying to cook rice from sand and can never succeed.

First understand what this luminous essence is, and then protect it. Whether one recollects the Buddha, recites a mantra, or maintains observation, the purpose is to protect the luminous essence of one's own mind. This is the indispensable prerequisite. Practicing in this way will certainly bear fruit; hence it is called the king of practice. Without knowing the luminous essence, one merely cultivates blindly, circling about outside and never reaching the center. Ultimately, the Way cannot be realized.

"As for the path of fruition: one must be without hope or seeking and abide nowhere with regard to noble and ordinary, high and low, nirvāṇa and birth-and-death. Truly supreme, one remains unchanged while according with conditions and accords with conditions while remaining unchanged; ever illuminating in stillness and ever still in illumination, one is equal to all Buddhas. Only this is fruition." (Fruition)

Mahāmudrā of the Ganges continually emphasizes the three essentials of view, concentration, and practice—for one purpose: to attain Noble Fruition. View, concentration, and practice are the means; attaining the noble fruition is the aim. "As for the path of fruition"—what counts as attaining it? One "must be without hope or seeking with regard to noble and ordinary, high and low, nirvāṇa and birth-and-death."

Noble and ordinary, high and low, nirvāṇa and birth-and-death are all discriminations of the deluded mind. We are originally Buddhas and have never departed from the Great Way.

Our essence is neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. "Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are no different from one another." What noble or ordinary, high or low, birth-and-death or nirvāṇa could there be? At the ultimate point, these oppositions do not exist; what remains to

seek? Once the essence is truly realized, there is neither sage nor ordinary being: both are of one essence, the originally luminous self-nature.

If there is neither sage nor ordinary being, how could there be high and low? There is neither "I above and you below" nor "you above and I below"; pride and arrogance are absent, everyone is equal in suchness, and high and low are fundamentally unobtainable.

"Nir" means not arising and "vāṇa" means not ceasing. Since the essence has never arisen or ceased, what nirvāṇa could be spoken of? If there is no nirvāṇa, what birth and death could there be? Birth and death have never fundamentally existed; to speak further of ending them would be redundant. Since nothing is fundamentally obtainable, what is there to pursue? Hence one is "without hope or seeking."

To "abide nowhere": genuine nirvāṇa is non-abiding nirvāṇa. We previously discussed four kinds. First is nirvāṇa of self-nature. Self-nature is our true mind, originally neither arising nor ceasing and originally nirvāṇa. Second is nirvāṇa with remainder, realized by saints of the Lesser Vehicle, in whom transformational birth and death remains unresolved; hence "with remainder."

Third is nirvāṇa without remainder, in which transformational birth and death is also ended and nothing remains. In the Lesser Vehicle teaching, this is the nirvāṇa realized by a Buddha. Fourth is non-abiding nirvāṇa. Even "Buddha" is unobtainable; only this is genuine nirvāṇa, as expressed in the words, "Birth-and-death and nirvāṇa are equally flowers in the sky."

At this point anything may appear and one may be anywhere—nothing excluded, nowhere absent. "Formerly the true was itself delusion; now every delusion is true. Upon returning to the original nature, not a single dharma is new." Abiding nowhere—not even in nirvāṇa—one can abide everywhere.

We asked earlier: after passing into perfect stillness, where is one reborn—the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Realm of Pure Lapis Lazuli, or Inner Court of Tuṣita? "One should abide nowhere." To fix upon any abode is mistaken. A Buddha is fundamentally formless, accords with all conditions, constantly accommodates sentient beings, and moves together with them. Wherever affinities exist, the Buddha goes to liberate beings, without any fixed abode.

Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha does not seek rebirth in a Pure Land but liberates beings in hell: "Until the hells are empty, I vow not to attain Buddhahood." Do you think Kṣitigarbha has not attained Buddhahood? Do you think he is absent from the Pure Land? Hell is originally empty; Kṣitigarbha attained Buddhahood long ago and is always and everywhere within the Pure Land. Sentient beings perceive hell because

they possess a hell-mind—a mind in which greed, hatred, and delusion blaze intensely. Kṣitigarbha has no hell-mind; everywhere is Pure Land.

To “abide nowhere” is the truly supreme principle of “remaining unchanged while according with conditions, and according with conditions while remaining unchanged.” To remain unchanged while according with conditions is to accord with the conditions of all sentient beings. If beings are in heaven, I go to heaven; if they are in hell, I go to hell. Whether ascending to heaven or entering hell, the original nature does not change.

In heaven it neither increases nor becomes a degree purer; in hell it neither diminishes nor becomes a degree more defiled. Gold, for example, may be fashioned according to conditions into a ring, necklace, or bracelet. Its form changes, but its essence does not: gold remains gold. Conversely, although the essence of gold is unchanged, its appearance can change according to conditions.

This is wondrous functioning; the true mind possesses inexhaustible wondrous functioning. Remaining unchanged while according with conditions describes the essence; according with conditions while remaining unchanged describes its functioning. “Ever illuminating in stillness and ever still in illumination”: stillness means serenely unmoving—the essence is serenely unmoving. Illumination means illuminating and knowing the myriad dharmas, which is wondrous functioning.

This too explains essence and function. We previously discussed awareness and observation: one must remain awake and alert at every moment and not follow circumstances. Eventually, even deliberate awareness must be relinquished; while a deliberate awareness remains, contrivance remains. Only absence of contrivance is called the unconditioned. When practice matures, there is no need to raise awareness intentionally; awareness functions naturally.

Not deliberately raising it is stillness; naturally remaining aware is illumination. This is “ever illuminating in stillness.” “Ever still in illumination” means that although wondrous functioning arises, the essence remains unmoved in suchness. Only at this point has one arrived home. If deliberate awareness remains, one has not yet arrived. Yet this cannot be achieved all at once; one must first pass through the stage of raising awareness.

Be aware, aware, and aware again until it becomes completely familiar—like a person living in air and forgetting that air is present. “Like entering a room of fragrant orchids and, after dwelling there long, no longer noticing their fragrance”: one merges with it and forgets it.

Like all Buddhas, one remains unchanged while according with conditions and accords with conditions while remaining unchanged; like all Buddhas, one is ever

illuminating in stillness and ever still in illumination. This is equality with all Buddhas. “Only when one is equal to all Buddhas is there fruition.” Only this counts as realizing the fruit. When beginning practice, first know what the original nature is.

Having recognized it, frequently observe the mind and maintain alert awareness. Practicing in this way leads to the fruit of Buddhahood. Without observation or application, how could fruition be realized? One cannot reach heaven in a single step; no one is born already a Buddha, for beginningless ignorance remains and clinging to appearances persists.

As soon as an infant becomes aware, it regards the body as important and displays considerable selfishness. It will not give away what it has and cries when something is taken. This is due to ignorance. To attain the fruit of the Way, therefore, one must begin by opening right understanding and right view.

First, with a sudden breakthrough, the original opens: “Ah! This is my self-nature.” Second, one applies oneself at every time and place to protect it. Third comes realization of the fruit. If you genuinely recognize self-nature today and then recollect the Buddha, you will certainly gain great benefit. Buddha-recollection will then differ from before.

Previously, not knowing what “recollection” meant, you sought only toward the west. Now you understand: every repetition of the Buddha’s name is recollection of my self-nature and purification of my own mind. “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha…” sweeps away the mind’s defilements and uproots its attachments and afflictions. Only then does Buddha-recollection bring genuine benefit. Establishing right understanding and right view is therefore crucial; view comes first. Only when view is correct can right meditation arise, and only then is one’s Dharma practice right conduct.

6. The Necessity of Cultivation

“Non-thought does not mean blank mindlessness (which is primal ignorance).”

‘Non-thought’ does not mean blank mindlessness. What is the latter? It is to be like wood or stone, without a single thought—the so-called “mindless voidness.” This is the attainment of cessation in which feeling and perception are extinguished: no information from the external world is received and all mental activity ceases.

Blank emptiness is “beginningless ignorance”; it is not a good thing, and you should not take it as a good thing. Some people pursue this thing and worship it.

Some seek and revere it: “How excellent that person’s practice is—he can remain in absorption without moving for a week!” “That person’s is even better—he has not moved for a month!” “That one has been sitting for three years!” All this is mindless

voidness. Even if one remained absorbed for eighty-four thousand kalpas, at most one would attain the absorption of neither perception nor non-perception. It would still be a worldly meditative absorption within the six destinies, not liberation.

To attain Buddhahood is to become a living Buddha, manifesting lively and responsive wondrous functioning—not to sit there as though dead. What use is motionless, lifeless sitting?

During the Tang dynasty, Master Xuanzang traveled to India in search of Buddhist scriptures. Near the Himalayas he saw a canopy of purple clouds over a mountain and knew that someone must be cultivating there. The party began to search.

A cave had long been hidden by fallen trees and overgrown grass. After searching for some time, someone noticed what appeared to be an opening and began to dig. It proved to be a cave, with a man seated inside. Xuanzang's disciples said, "He is dead—his body is cold, nothing but skin over bones."

Xuanzang touched the man's chest and found a trace of warmth, showing that he was not dead and that the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) had not departed. The ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) is also called the "consciousness of warmth and longevity"; warmth at the chest showed that life remained. Xuanzang struck a small handbell, and the practitioner emerged from absorption. Opening his eyes, he exclaimed, "Ah! The Buddha has come to teach me the Dharma!"

He had sat there awaiting Śākyamuni Buddha's appearance, so on seeing Xuanzang he believed the Buddha had come to guide and liberate him. Xuanzang said, "I am not Śākyamuni Buddha. The Buddha passed into parinirvāṇa long ago."

Śākyamuni Buddha appeared around the time of King Zhao of Zhou, whereas Xuanzang lived under Emperor Taizong of Tang; a very long time had passed. The practitioner wept: "Alas, I have missed my opportunity! I waited for Śākyamuni Buddha to appear and liberate me, never imagining that he had already passed into parinirvāṇa."

Xuanzang told him, "Do not weep. Śākyamuni Buddha's Dharma remains. I am traveling to the Buddha's land to obtain the authentic scriptures and shall return to China to spread the Buddha-Dharma widely.

This body of yours, after sitting for more than a thousand years—not merely three or five—can no longer be used. Take another body. Be reborn in China at once. By the time you grow up, I should have returned. Choose a household with lofty buildings and glazed roof-tiles, not a humble dwelling."

So this practitioner went to take rebirth, born into the household of Yuchi Gong as a little prince (Yuchi Gong's nephew). This practitioner had entered samādhi for more

than a thousand years; surely his practice must have been very good? No! This cessation-of-feeling-and-perception samādhi is useless; it is like pressing grass down with a stone: when the stone is removed the grass grows back, even more vigorously.

As the young man matured, he clung to appearances, indulged in sexual misconduct, and caused grave trouble. He was confined in the imperial ancestral temple and faced execution. Because Yuchi Gong was a meritorious minister whose family had been enfeoffed, a nobleman had first to be confined in the ancestral temple before execution. He could escape death by becoming a monk, so he agreed to ordination.

Yet he insisted on bringing women, musicians, fine food, and amusements—three great cartloads in all. People mockingly called him the “Three-Cart Monk.” Later Xuanzang awakened him to his previous life. He suddenly came to his senses and relinquished all three carts. He became Master Kuiji, Xuanzang’s foremost disciple, who later attained greatly and became the second patriarch of the Faxiang school.

We must therefore cultivate in a lively, responsive way; sitting as though dead is useless. Genuine samādhi means remaining undeluded in the face of circumstances. Whatever happens, the mind is not confused; however great the sensual temptation, it remains unmoved; no amount of wealth can stir it. This is genuine samādhi.

If the mind moves when faced with circumstances and one merely suppresses it afterwards, that is not genuine samādhi; a mind of arising and ceasing remains. Why must a stream-enterer still undergo seven births in heaven and seven in the human realm? Because arising and ceasing remain in the mind. When thought arises, becoming alert and immediately extinguishing it is still the activity of an arising-and-ceasing mind. While arising and ceasing remain, there may still be seven returns among gods and humans. Our cultivation must be sincere—guarding the true mind without fail across every moment and place. Non-thought is far from mindless voidness; grasping this principle is of paramount importance.

“It is even more distinct from that of non-Buddhist practitioners and ordinary beings.”

It is even more distinct from the no-thought of non-Buddhist practitioners and ordinary beings. To seek Dharma outside the mind is to follow a non-Buddhist path. Non-Buddhist practitioners also speak of no-thought, but theirs is lifeless. Qigong practiced by ordinary people likewise never leaves attachment, though it too speaks of no-thought. Their no-thought is even further from genuine no-thought.

They cling to qi—wondering where it has moved: now to the baihui point, now to the dantian, now to the yongquan point; tracing the greater and lesser celestial circuits, and so forth. Can any of this be called no-thought? The no-thought discussed here is entirely different from that of non-Buddhist practitioners and ordinary beings and has nothing to do with such practices.

“From non-awakening, initial awakening arises. Initial awakening is the child-luminosity born of original awakening, and it merges with the mother-luminosity.”

All of us cultivate “from non-awakening to initial awakening.” Formerly unawakened, we enter the Way, cultivate, and begin to awaken. I am teaching the Dharma now in the hope that you will begin to awaken. The wisdom-light emitted by initial awakening is “the child-luminosity born of original awakening.” Original awakening is our Buddha-nature.

Original awakening is the mother-luminosity, and initial awakening is the child-luminosity. The child-luminosity is born from the mother-luminosity, as a son is born of his mother. To say that it “merges with the mother-luminosity” means that initial awakening merges with original awakening. When child and mother unite, the Way is realized; if they do not unite, it cannot be realized.

Contemplate at every moment without clinging to external circumstances. This is the process of bringing initial awakening into accord with original awakening. When they become one, it is the union of child and mother. In our practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, for example, the fourth mudrā is the “Tathāgata-Mother Mudrā.” The mother gives birth to the child; child and mother unite, and the great Way is realized.

The Pure Land school teaches the same: “The Tathāgatas of the ten directions compassionately remember sentient beings as a mother remembers her child. If the child runs away, of what use is the mother’s remembrance? If the child remembers the mother as the mother remembers the child, mother and child will not be far apart through successive lives.” These are the words of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva. When we recollect the Buddha, the Buddha is the mother and we are the children; the Buddha is always guiding and receiving us.

If the child remembers the mother as the mother remembers the child, the two unite and the Way is swiftly realized. The Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions all breathe through the same nostril. Grasp this overarching principle and genuinely understand it, and every scripture in the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions can be penetrated. Fail to grasp it and, by tearing passages from their context, one fragments the teachings and does not know which way to turn. Seeing one’s original nature at every moment is therefore most important.

“Although the fundamental view has been established, realization still cannot be attained without cultivation.”

Although we have established the fundamental view, gained right understanding and right view, clearly understood the original nature, and know that only by cultivating on the basis of this nature can the Way be realized, this does not mean that cultivation is unnecessary. Can the Way be realized without cultivating it? No. Hence, realization “cannot be attained without cultivation.”

“Gold-bearing sand possesses the nature of gold, but is not yet gold; it must undergo refining and smelting.”

Gold-bearing sand is sand containing gold—gold ore. It “possesses the nature of gold”: by nature it contains gold and has its quality. Yet it “is not yet gold.” Although gold is present, it is not pure gold, for sand and other impurities remain mixed with it.

It “must undergo refining and smelting”: only through smelting, which removes the sand and other impurities, can pure gold emerge.

This illustrates that although all sentient beings—the gold-bearing sand—possess the Tathāgata’s wisdom and virtuous qualities and are fully endowed with Buddha-nature—the nature of gold—they still have ignorance, illusory thoughts, and attachment and are not Buddhas at the stage of fruition. In other words, though sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, they are not yet Buddhas; gold-bearing sand is not yet gold.

A process of cultivation and refinement is indispensable. Only by suddenly breaking through ignorance and then exhausting delusive thought and attachment can Buddhahood be attained. The passage uses the refining of gold ore to emphasize the necessity of cultivation. How should one cultivate? The following text explains.

7. The Three Gates of Cultivation

“The three gates of cultivation. Cultivation of the body: leave behind every contrived activity, including useless worldly affairs and other supramundane practices. Simply let the body abide at ease, open, and relaxed.”

The three gates of cultivation are cultivation of body, speech, and mind. Vajrayāna speaks of the blessing of the three mysteries—body, speech, and mind—and these three gates likewise refer to body, speech, and mind. The first is “cultivation of the body,” a method of cultivation based on this flesh-and-blood body.

To “leave behind every contrived activity” means abandoning all manner of contrivance, including “useless worldly affairs.” Playing mahjong, for example, serves

no useful purpose and squanders precious time.

Probably not a few among you enjoy mahjong, using “three players need a fourth” as an excuse to form a table every day and fight several rounds. That will not do. Useless affairs should not be pursued. Refraining from useless worldly affairs is itself cultivation—cultivation of the body.

“And other supramundane practices”: there are many methods of supramundane cultivation, but practicing one today and another tomorrow will not work. Enter deeply into a single gate, uphold one Dharma, and practice it to the end. If Zhang San says today that one method is good, you take it up; tomorrow Li Si praises another, so you switch.

Such inconstancy brings no result even if every method is a wondrous supramundane Dharma, because the mind is not one-pointed and cannot correspond with the teaching. Moreover, many methods are of no benefit. A mantra said to bore a hole in a blade, for example, contributes nothing to liberation. You see that it can bore a hole in a blade and become delighted: “Excellent—I shall practice this!” But what use is it?

I once heard a monk recount the circumstances that led him to ordain. Before becoming a monk, he practiced martial arts, learning boxing and swordsmanship from his maternal uncle. One day, near the Sichuan border, he saw two young Tibetan lamas smoking opium.

Disapproving, he intervened: “You are monastics—why are you smoking opium?” One replied, “Never mind our opium; we possess magical methods.” “What methods?” he asked. Seeing the blade at his side, the lama said, “Strike me with your blade. Once I recite a mantra, you will be unable to cut me.”

Intrigued, he asked, “Does such a method really exist?” “Of course. Try it if you doubt me—but first let me finish the opium.” After a while the lama said, “Come, I shall recite the mantra; strike.” The martial artist dared not truly cut him. The blade was sharp, and severing a hand would be disastrous, so he struck with its back.

He struck with the back of the blade, and the blade sprang back. “How did you make my blade rebound?” he exclaimed. The lama said, “Even if you strike with the edge, I am not afraid.” “Truly?” “Of course.” “If I cut you, I take no responsibility.” “No need. Go ahead.”

This time he really struck with the cutting edge, but the blade sprang back again. Convinced, he thought, “The Buddha-Dharma is remarkable—even better than my martial arts.” This encounter prompted him to study Buddhism. Yet it was actually a useless method and there was no point in learning it.

“Simply let the body abide at ease, open, and relaxed.” Let the body settle comfortably and spaciously, entirely free from impediment rather than tense and hurried. The Heart Sūtra says: “Because there is no impediment, there is no fear. Far removed from inverted, dreamlike thinking, one ultimately realizes nirvāṇa.” Impediment gives rise to fear and inverted dreams.

Without impediment, the mind is empty and the heart broad and open. Thus, “The noble person is broad and at ease; the petty person is constantly anxious.” The petty person worries endlessly over gain and loss, whereas the noble person is open-hearted, relaxed, and free. Take note: allowing the body to abide at ease, open, and relaxed is cultivation of the body. A mind continually troubled by gain and loss does not correspond with it.

Settle the body comfortably and spaciously, free from affliction and concern, always peaceful, relaxed, and joyful. The body will then remain healthy and illness will arise less readily. Only by dwelling in the world in this way can one apply oneself to the Dharma. This is cultivation of the body.

“Cultivation of speech: cease useless worldly talk and useless mantra recitation; remain quiet as an empty valley.”

The second of the three gates is cultivation of speech: cultivation concerned with words and conversation.

Joking, flattering someone, disparaging something, and similar worldly chatter are of no benefit to cultivating the path of liberation; all are useless worldly speech. Arguing over the rights and wrongs or merits and faults of people and affairs is even more clearly conceptual proliferation. Within the so-called Black tradition of Tibetan esotericism, many mantras do not cultivate liberation but are intended to control or harm others; these are useless recitations.

Do not speak or recite such things. “Cease useless worldly talk and useless mantra recitation.” In studying the Buddha-Dharma and cultivating liberation, enter deeply into one gate and do not meddle blindly with other things. Do not engage in useless worldly speech or recite useless mantras and liturgies.

We should observe the “three reductions”: few affairs in the mind, few words in the mouth, and little food in the belly. People have a bad habit: once their work is finished and they have leisure, they talk endlessly about Zhang San, Li Si, and Wang Ermazi. That will not do for one cultivating liberation.

Is it not better to remain quietly silent? “Remain quiet as an empty valley”: speak little and let the mind be peaceful, like a deep and secluded valley. “An echo in the secluded valley speaks through the evening mist.” If you ask a question, I answer

fully and patiently; when no question is present, I do not think or discriminate, but leave the mind vast and empty— “The great void drinks in the light, dissolving all estrangement.”

“Cultivation of mind: leave behind conceptual proliferation, deliberation, comparison, and mental imagining. Even visualization and deliberate mental activity should cease. (Precisely when using the mind, precisely no mind is used.)”

The third of the three gates is cultivation of mind, concerned with thought and consciousness.

What use is it to fill the mind with elaborate empty theories unrelated to liberation and refuse to let them go? Analyzing and inferring them is “conceptual proliferation”; thinking about and evaluating them is “deliberation.” One should “leave behind conceptual proliferation, deliberation, comparison, and mental imagining.” Let the mind remain empty and pure, far from proliferation and deliberation, and also far from comparative thinking.

Why compare everything? Who is better, you or I? Who is taller, you or I? Such an intention is inherently unequal and is precisely deluded discrimination. Comparative mental imagining must especially be abandoned.

“Even visualization and deliberate mental activity should cease.” Visualization is a method of cultivation, as mentioned earlier. To imagine an object remains effortful cultivation. In “Buddha-recollection through visualization,” for example, one visualizes Amitābha Buddha above one’s head or oneself as Amitābha Buddha. Every visualization is deliberate: it intentionally activates thought and consciousness.

Even such visualization and deliberate mental activity should cease. Simply maintain careful observation. The instant thought arises, see it; once seen, pay it no heed and do not follow it. Visualization is a gradual method. After it succeeds, one must apply oneself further to dissolve the visualized appearance before seeing the original nature.

My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, used this analogy: suppose a large sore covers the body. Medicine is applied and the sore contracts again and again until only a tiny opening, even a single point, remains. Everywhere else has healed; only that point is left. This represents successful visualization.

Yet the point is still a sore. Unless it is removed, the illness may recur. One must therefore go further and dissolve the visualized appearance. Only then is the matter resolved once and for all and the dharmakāya genuinely entered. If the appearance is not dissolved, the original nature cannot manifest. Visualization therefore requires crossing one additional threshold.

Every form-based esoteric practice must cross this threshold and ultimately dissolve the appearance. How is this done? One may enlarge it further and further until it becomes boundless and disappears; conversely, one may shrink it further and further until nothing remains.

By expansion or contraction, the appearance is dissolved. Once it is gone, the original nature is seen—but an additional threshold has been crossed. Mahāmudrā is the most direct Mahāyāna Mind-Ground Dharma Gate and dispenses with these stages. Thus, “Even visualization and deliberate mental activity should cease.” Mahāmudrā does not follow this road or cross these successive thresholds. The instant a thought arises, see it; having seen it, pay it no heed and simply protect the true mind.

The words in parentheses are taken from a verse by Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, and serve as a note on cultivation of mind. His verse is excellent and often quoted, usually in four lines: “Precisely when using the mind, precisely no mind is used. No-mind is precisely functioning; in constant functioning, precisely no mind.”

The complete verse has eight lines: “Precisely when using the mind, precisely no mind is used. Circuitous talk of names and forms is wearisome; Direct speech is free from complexity and burden. No-mind is precisely functioning; in constant functioning, precisely no mind. Now I speak of the place of no-mind: It is no different from having mind.” In the very act of applying the mind in cultivation, no thought that can be found arises: this is “Precisely when using the mind, precisely no mind is used.”

To speak at length and indirectly about Buddhist names and forms is laborious; to point directly to the mind-source without superfluous words is neither complex nor burdensome. This is “Circuitous talk of names and forms is wearisome; direct speech is free from complexity and burden.”

The Great Way is formless and the true mind without characteristics, yet it functions at every moment and place. Although every event and thing is its wondrous functioning, the mind itself is nowhere to be found. This is “No-mind is precisely functioning; in constant functioning, precisely no mind.” Yet when we now point directly to this “no-mind” and speak of it, it becomes no different from “having mind.” Thus: “Now I speak of the place of no-mind: it is no different from having mind.”

8. Directly Realizing the Path of Supreme Perfect Awakening

“From crown to feet, empty like a bamboo tube; the mind equal to space, utterly transcending all discrimination; free from dullness, agitation, and mindless voidness,

and brought to equality, balance, alertness, and stillness. Numinously luminous, without acceptance, rejection, or attachment, abide in the originally wondrous, luminous, and pure essence. This is Mahāmudrā samādhi."

"From crown to feet, empty like a bamboo tube" means that from the top of the head to the soles of the feet, one is empty like a hollow bamboo tube. Body and mind are empty, without a single thing. Place a bamboo tube on water and it drifts with the current, turning wherever the current bends. Rising and falling, sinking and floating, it pays no heed. A wave pushes it under and it immediately rises again, sinking and floating according to conditions. An accomplished practitioner is just so: "Open and free in accord with conditions, let sinking and floating be; Become Spring mud that nurtures the myriad flowers."

"The mind equal to space, utterly transcending all discrimination." The heart must be as vast as space, making no distinction between beautiful and ugly and able to contain everything. All things appear within space. A great building may be erected, but space never says it cannot contain it. Demolish the building and space does not become broader; enlarge it and space does not grow narrow.

Aeroplanes fly through it without concern. Dark clouds mass, lightning flashes, and thunder rolls, yet space never alters its expression. It remains unaffected. Our true mind has always been like space, never moving. Now that we recognize it, the mind should be equal to space and transcend all discrimination. Whatever happens, I remain untroubled.

Space contains all things, and so can I. The worlds of the ten directions are within space and also within my mind. Non-abiding nirvāṇa can go anywhere and is not confined to one place. Let the heart be as immense, broad, non-abiding, and unattached as space.

Space is not devoid of things, yet nothing obstructs it. To "utterly transcend all discrimination" is to go beyond and cut off every thought of discriminating, accepting, and rejecting. These are all illusory thoughts and must be severed.

"Free from dullness, agitation, and mindless voidness, and brought to equality, balance, alertness, and stillness." To be free means to leave them behind. "Dullness" is torpor and drowsiness. "The lazy ox finds many occasions to sleep once it takes the road": before setting out it seems wakeful, but the moment it starts, it dozes. Some people are fine until they sit in meditation; then they sink into torpor and begin snoring.

"Agitation" is restlessness and proliferating deluded thought—the mind leaping about while the body sits. Practice of this kind will never do. We must be free from dullness and agitation, yet must not fall into mindless voidness. In that state even

right mindfulness is absent and one becomes like wood or stone. This too will not do. Knowing must remain lucid and right mindfulness vividly present. We often speak of observing the mind: keep it under observation, do not fall into blank neutrality, and retain right mindfulness.

“Equality” means evenness, and “balance” means sustaining evenly. Alertness is insight and wisdom; stillness is calming and samādhi. “Samādhi and wisdom held in equal balance” means that stillness and alertness are even, neither higher nor lower. It is not more alertness and less stillness, nor more stillness and less alertness, but equal measure and balanced sustaining. One is lucidly clear yet serenely unmoving; serenely unmoving yet lucidly clear. Samādhi and wisdom are one: wisdom within samādhi and samādhi within wisdom. Only because they are one can they be held in equal balance.

“Numinously luminous, without acceptance, rejection, or attachment.” The true mind is numinously luminous: “The solitary spiritual light shines forth, far beyond faculties and their objects.” Its spiritual light is still yet illuminating, lucidly clear, without accepting or rejecting and still less attaching. It is responsive, keen, and impossible to seize, like trying to catch a gourd floating on water: grasp it from the left and it turns left; grasp it from the right and it turns right; it can never be caught. Earlier it was compared to being “empty like a bamboo tube.” A bamboo tube, like a gourd, floats upon the water, numinously responsive and impossible to seize. Only without acceptance, rejection, or attachment can one be numinously luminous. All accepting, rejecting, and clinging must be thoroughly relinquished.

“Abide in the originally wondrous, luminous, and pure essence. This is Mahāmudrā samādhi.” Where does one abide? In the originally wondrous, luminous, and pure essence. The true mind is originally of boundless wondrous functioning, boundless luminosity, and unstained purity; this is its essential nature. To abide in the essence of the true mind is precisely to abide nowhere.

Since that essence is formless, how could one abide in it? Abiding through non-abiding—this is Mahāmudrā samādhi. People often speak of Mahāmudrā today. What is it? The essence of the true mind is Mahāmudrā. Is that clear? Do not ask again how to form the Mahāmudrā with the hands—left or right. The essence of the true mind is Mahāmudrā. Boundless in wondrous functioning and luminosity, pure and unstained, abiding through non-abiding: this is Mahāmudrā samādhi.

“Practicing constantly in this way, suddenly, in a single instant, it is like a lamp being lit in a dark room: luminosity opens forth in radiant clarity.”

We have just discussed the three gates of cultivating body, speech, and mind. By “practicing constantly in this way,” at some moment one suddenly breaks through with brilliant clarity. “Suddenly, in a single instant, it is like a lamp being lit in a dark

room: luminosity opens forth in radiant clarity." In an instant, like a lamp suddenly lit in darkness, the mind's luminosity is disclosed and everything opens in radiant clarity.

What has happened? Awakening has occurred; the bottom has fallen out of the bucket and the original has opened. The great treasury of luminosity has opened, the mind's light illuminates heaven and earth, and the worlds of the ten directions are perfectly contained within the mind. Before this point, even an insight counts only as "a narrow opening in the mind"—a single ray of light that is not yet sufficient.

At this point it is like an immense explosion: with a tremendous crash, space is shattered, the great earth levels away, and person, self, and world vanish without remainder. When will this occur? No one knows. When the time and conditions ripen, it suddenly breaks open. There is no fixed place.

Must it happen at home or during seated meditation? Not necessarily. It may occur on the road, in a public place, or in a dream. When practice matures and conditions ripen, it manifests naturally— "when the water arrives, the channel is formed."

Once water surges in, the channel naturally fulfils its function; without water, it cannot be said to be complete. Simply continue practicing in this way, and when the conditions ripen, the breakthrough suddenly comes. "Suddenly" is crucial: no particular time is appointed.

If a time were fixed, you would wait for it, yet one must not "set the mind to await awakening." Waiting ruins the matter; with a mind of expectation, awakening will never come.

Practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma should take note: do not count your sittings. Do not keep saying, "I have completed several hundred; how many remain before I reach a thousand?" Stop counting and let it go. Counting creates expectation and must be abandoned. The breakthrough erupts suddenly; once practice matures, it occurs naturally.

Do not wait in expectation; keep practicing diligently! When I speak of a "crash," do not imagine hearing thunder. It is not that. It describes an experience: you feel a "crash," but others cannot hear it. The most important thing is to practice well. If you practice, it comes naturally; if you do not, it will not come. Expecting and waiting for it also prevents its arrival.

"The self-nature of nirvāṇa—the wisdom-luminosity of innate original awakening—manifests completely in its entirety, and one directly realizes the Path of unsurpassed perfect awakening."

What is “the self-nature of nirvāṇa”? It is self-nature, originally neither arising nor ceasing.

“The wisdom-luminosity of innate original awakening.” “Innate” means arising together with our life. “Original awakening” means awakened from the very beginning, not beginning to awaken at some particular time. The wisdom-luminosity of innate original awakening is the luminosity of wisdom inherently complete within our own mind and present from the outset.

“Manifests completely in its entirety” means appearing wholly, without the slightest concealment—in other words, personally realizing and seeing it. I now speak and you listen; the teaching enters through the faculty of hearing. Yet “what enters through the gate is not a treasure of one’s own household.” You must realize this point yourself: with a sudden breakthrough, the original opens and is personally verified. Only that counts.

To “directly realize the Path of unsurpassed perfect awakening” means immediately realizing the supreme Great Way of right awakening—unsurpassed complete perfect awakening. At that time you will know that all talk of birth and death, nirvāṇa, thoroughness or incompleteness, ultimacy or non-ultimacy is conceptual proliferation. Then you can embody the Dharma and teach from personal realization, enabling sentient beings with whom you have affinities “all to enter nirvāṇa without remainder and be liberated.”

Everyone, apply yourselves! Advance diligently! Practice with all your strength and continue moving forward!