Uncovering the Hidden Meaning of the Heart Sūtra

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Preface

With reverence, I reflect:

At the level of ultimate reality, there are no designations of “Buddha” or “sentient being”; only within the gate of cultivation do distinctions between ordinary beings and sages arise. The nature of mind is originally pure, yet afflictions and delusions proliferate because of grasping and attachment; delusive appearances are originally empty, and through awakened contemplation, true permanence transcends all opposites. In adapting to conditions without changing, the ascent and descent through the ten realms differ vastly; in remaining unchanged while adapting to conditions, the essence and function of the one mind are no different. Although all living beings inherently share this mind and this principle, thorough awakening and

realization belong only to the awakened. The multitude of sentient beings remain unenlightened because of their attachments and delusions; thus, for long kalpas, they revolve through the six realms, suffering beyond endurance.

Śākyamuni, the World-Honored One, Tamer of Beings in the Central Land, attained perfect awakening long ago, before kalpas as numerous as motes of dust. Abiding in the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light, beyond the three divisions of time, he constantly enjoys the four virtues. Out of compassion for the nine realms, he manifested birth and repeatedly displayed the eight aspects. In accordance with the one hundred and eight kinds of mind-nature within the nine realms, he expounded the wondrous Dharma of the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the teachings.

For those of great capacity, he directly revealed the One True Dharma Realm, enabling them to give rise to mind without abiding anywhere, until they severed delusion and realized truth. For those of lesser faculties, he explained in detail cause and effect across the past, present, and future, enabling them to pursue good and avoid misfortune as an expedient means of entering the Way. The sages of the Lesser Vehicle have extinguished their former karma, established the pure life, accomplished what had to be done, and abide in the city of nirvāṇa without undergoing further existence. Mahāyāna bodhisattvas possess deep and unwavering faith, earnest and unretreating vows, and tireless diligent practice; they cross the ocean of birth and death in order to liberate sentient beings extensively.

In the eastern land, the causes of blessing had come to fruition and the conditions for liberation had ripened. Therefore, the great teaching gradually spread eastward, and the patriarchs came from the West. The fifth fascicle of Calming and Contemplation states: “In primordial antiquity, when chaos still prevailed, it was not yet fitting for the Buddha to appear in the world. The capacities of those in the borderlands were not receptive to the Buddha’s arising. I sent three sages to transform that land of China; first, ritual propriety and righteousness were established, and only afterward could the scriptures of the Greater and Lesser Vehicles be believed. Since this was so in China, it was likewise so in the ten directions.”

The Scripture of Pure Dharma Practice says: “Moonlight Bodhisattva was known there as Yan Hui; Pure-Light Bodhisattva was known there as Zhongni; Kāśyapa Bodhisattva was known there as Laozi.” Zhongni was devoted to fulfilling the proper human relationships and carrying out his duties; Laozi, on the other hand, struck at worldly intellect. The bodhisattvas vow to liberate all sentient beings universally, while the Tathāgata washes their minds clean. First they cultivated moral and cultural refinement, opening the vast vision of the Mahāyāna; afterward they gathered beings into the ocean of perfect enlightenment, enabling all to realize the unborn directly. The World-Honored One taught and transformed all under heaven

through immeasurable skillful means, with consummate skill. Through immeasurable skillful means, he also transmitted and entrusted the teaching, enabling the multitude of beings in the latter age to attain realization.

The grandmaster, Acharya Dayu, manifested birth into the Li family of Wuhan during the late Qing dynasty. His mind-ground was endowed with deeply rooted wisdom from former lives. He read widely in the books of sages and worthies and, possessed of exceptional talent, became involved in political affairs. Witnessing the inhumanity of the warlords and the resulting devastation of living beings, he was overcome with grief and indignation and left the household life to enter the monastic order.

At Donglin on Mount Lu, he cultivated the Pure Land dharma gate and practiced the arduous Pratyutpanna Samādhi, risking his life to break through the delusive and bewildering realm within illusion. In samādhi, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appeared before him, transmitted six mudrās and one mantra to him, empowered him, and transmitted the Heart-of-Heart Dharma to him. Following the bodhisattva's instruction, he searched the Buddhist canon and indeed found the root tantra of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Through arduous cultivation of the esoteric practice, he attained accomplishment in seven years and established the Mind-Seal Dharma Gate.

To gather in sentient beings receptive to the teaching, he briefly manifested spiritual powers. By pointing directly to the true nature of suchness (tathatā), he swept away fascination with the abstruse and marvelous. His heart was vast and his Dharma gate profound: "The great void drinks in light and dissolves estrangement; echoes in a secluded valley speak of evening mist." Later, he left behind a poem and withdrew into seclusion; what became of him remains unknown to this day.

Acharya Renzhi, our teacher's teacher, was surnamed Wang, given name Zaiji, and style name Xianglu. He manifested birth into a scholarly family in Haiyan and was compassionate and generous at heart. He ranged widely through the sea of moral philosophy and literature, and devoutly believed in the Buddha Vehicle. At first, he broadly sought the essential meanings of the various schools, practiced Buddha-recitation, and investigated Chan, yet could not claim to have a firm grasp. Later, he followed Patriarch Dayu, practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, and suddenly awakened to realize the mind.

Having received the patriarch's innermost teaching, he deeply accorded with its unsurpassed esoteric intent. He founded Mind-Seal Vihara and guided the multitude of beings with karmic affinity. He fused Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism in one furnace, sweeping away the narrow and inferior views of sectarian divisions; he brought Chan, doctrinal study, and the discipline of the precepts into a single whole, revealing the Tathāgata-garbha mind inherently possessed by sentient beings. He

established the guiding tenets of the Mind-Seal school: prajñā as its principle, dhāraṇī as the practice method, and the Pure Land as its ultimate destination. When his teaching work in this life had fulfilled its karmic course, he entered parinirvāṇa in the 1950s. It was as though the eyes of humans and devas had lost their light, and the boat of prajñā had sunk.

Our revered teacher, Acharya Yuanyin, whose name was Zhongding, manifested birth into the Li family of Hefei, Anhui, early in the twentieth century. As a child, he studied the legacy teachings of Confucius and Mencius and investigated birth and death, yet felt at a loss. As a youth, he attended a modern school; the prajñā teachings he read seemed strangely familiar. Upon hearing the sound of a bell at Jiayou Chan Monastery, the clamor of the world suddenly vanished; at a single stroke of the wooden fish by an awakened eminent monk, arising and ceasing likewise fell away.

Having aroused the resolve to study Buddhism, he did not marry. Yet, in order to support his aged mother, he was unable to leave home and become a monastic. He paid homage to Venerable Xingci and studied Tiantai, continuously and attentively reciting the sacred name of Amitābha Buddha. He followed the lay practitioner Gunong in studying Consciousness-Only and conducted an in-depth study of the doctrinal essentials of the Tiantai teachings.

He drew near to the virtuous elder Yingci to study the Avataṃsaka Sūtra and investigate Chan. Suddenly, he felt his physical form vanish as a brilliant luminosity shone forth. Following Master Renzhi, he practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma in seated meditation and suddenly realized the state in which “empty space shatters and the great earth sinks level.” Protected by all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, he repeatedly experienced auspicious signs. He engaged Patriarch Dayu in questions and answers, and wondrous phrases flowed from him without cease. Upon receiving empowerment from a Vajra Acharya, he was honored with a place among the lineage teachers. In response to earnest invitations from practitioners in various places, he expounded the Buddha Vehicle.

Even in his nineties, the revered teacher vigorously advocated realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. He traveled throughout the country: east to Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning; west to Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan; south to Hunan, Guangdong, and Fujian; and north to Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai. Numerous overseas disciples from the United States, Germany, France, Japan, Canada, and beyond traveled far and wide to seek his guidance.

He spared no effort in proclaiming and propagating the Dharma on the Buddha’s behalf, forgetting himself in the work of spreading the Dharma. Nor did he shrink from criticism and suspicion when composing treatises, so that later students might

realize the mind. When A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature was published, it forcefully reminded the Buddhist community that awakening and realization are fundamental. When Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization was published, it showed disciples the great path of genuine cultivation, leaving an indelible impression.

Prajñā is the eye of cultivation; the entire Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions of the Buddha Dharma are contained within it. The Heart Sūtra is the essence of prajñā; a great collection of six hundred fascicles is fully encompassed therein. Bodhisattvas throughout the ten directions unfold the fundamental great teaching from this; all Buddhas of the three times reveal the unsurpassed Dharma wheel from this. The Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sūtra is the core of the Buddhist scriptures; hence it bears the name Heart Sūtra.

At the earnest request of others, the revered teacher explained the meaning of the sūtra. One listener aroused the resolve and recorded the teachings on cassette tapes. Students listened to the recordings and transcribed them; after the revered teacher reviewed them, they were edited into a book. This is how the present work, Uncovering the Hidden Meaning of the Heart Sūtra, came to be.

Respectfully written by the junior disciple Qi Zhijun, with cleansed hands

1997, the Dingchou year

Introduction

The Heart Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom

Translated by Tripiṭaka Master Xuanzang of the Tang dynasty by imperial decree

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, while practicing profound prajñāpāramitā, clearly saw that the five aggregates are all empty and crossed beyond all suffering and adversity. Śāriputra! Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form. So too are feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Śāriputra! All dharmas are marked by emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.

Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas; no eye realm, up to and including no mind-consciousness realm. There is no ignorance, nor the ending of ignorance; up to and including no old age and death, nor the ending of old age and death. There is no suffering, origination, cessation, or path; no wisdom and no attainment. Because

there is nothing to attain, bodhisattvas, relying on prajñāpāramitā, have no hindrances in the mind.

Because there are no hindrances, there is no fear. Far removed from inverted views and deluded imaginings, they ultimately attain nirvāṇa. All Buddhas of the three times, relying on prajñāpāramitā, attain unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening. Therefore know that prajñāpāramitā is the great spiritual mantra, the great illuminating mantra, the unsurpassed mantra, the unequaled mantra. It can remove all suffering; it is true and not false. Therefore, the mantra of prajñāpāramitā is spoken. It is spoken thus: Gate, gate, pāragate, pārasaṃgate, bodhisvāhā.

Introduction

Today happens to be the birthday of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Many listeners have asked me to explain the main meaning of the Heart Sūtra. This is indeed an unsurpassed and auspicious opportunity.

Before explaining the Heart Sūtra, let us first discuss its origins, the essential meaning it contains, and the true purport of the Buddhadharma and Buddhist sūtras. Once everyone has a correct understanding, we can explain the sūtra text in detail. Then it will be easier to understand the Heart Sūtra's true intent, truly grasp its supreme meaning, uphold the Heart Sūtra, and directly realize the Original Face.

I. The Buddha's Teaching: Suited to Capacities and in Accord with Principle

For forty-nine years the Buddha taught the Dharma, teaching what was complete and what was partial, what was sudden and what was gradual. He did no more than prescribe remedies according to the differing capacities and conditions of sentient beings. Sentient beings need the Buddhadharma; likewise, the Buddhadharma cannot be separated from sentient beings. Medicine is provided to cure illness; apart from illness, medicine has no value at all.

The Buddha taught in response to conditions wholly in order to treat the illnesses of sentient beings—the illnesses of the mind. Thus the Dharma he taught differed in each period. This is because sentient beings have different illnesses, and the medicines a physician uses to cure them should likewise differ. Therefore, the Buddha's instruction was suited to capacities and in accord with principle. During his forty-nine years of teaching, the Buddha taught in five periods.

(I) The Avataṃsaka Period

The first period of teaching was the Avataṃsaka period. It was like the rising sun first illuminating only the high mountains, such as Mount Sumeru. For the first three weeks after attaining the Way, the Buddha taught the great Dharma to great

bodhisattvas, expounding the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, turning the fundamental, unsurpassed Dharma wheel, and liberating great bodhisattvas.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra is the Buddha's most complete exposition in accord with intrinsic nature, and those suited to the Lesser Vehicle could not accept it. Therefore, great bodhisattvas of the doctrinal schools likened this first period of teaching to raw milk. Adults can consume raw milk, but children cannot. Because children's digestive powers are weak, drinking raw milk gives them diarrhea. Although milk is a precious thing that nourishes life, just as the Dharma taught by the Buddha nourishes our wisdom-life, those of lesser capacity cannot accept it, just as children get diarrhea from drinking raw milk.

(II) The Āgama Period

The second period of teaching was the Āgama period, likened to the sun illuminating somewhat lower mountains. Seeing that people of lesser capacity could not accept the Mahāyāna Dharma, the Buddha, in places such as Deer Park, spent twelve years teaching the Lesser Vehicle Āgama Sūtras to them. He expounded such doctrines as the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of dependent origination, liberating practitioners of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles.

In Chinese, "Āgama" is explained as "incomparable," meaning "beyond comparison." That is, no matter how precious any worldly thing may be, it cannot compare with the Buddhadharma. Why? Any worldly treasure can be used only temporarily and is illusory and insubstantial. The Buddhadharma, however, is the unsurpassed treasure.

When sentient beings hear and uphold it, and practice accordingly, they can transcend the cycle of birth and death. Therefore it is the supreme great treasure. Bodhisattvas of the doctrinal schools compare it to curds: raw milk is made into curds, which children can then eat without getting diarrhea.

(III) The Vaipulya Period

The third period of teaching was the Vaipulya period. Here, fang ( ) is explained as skillful means, uprightness, and vastness; deng ( ) as equality, evenness, and meditative equipoise. This means that the Buddha does not teach by giving people some inherently real dharma; rather, he prescribes remedies according to their ailments as a skillful means. Therefore, the Buddha taught eighty-four thousand dharma gates. All dharmas are equal; none is higher or lower.

Following the Āgama period, the Buddha spent eight years leading the lesser into the greater, teaching sūtras such as the Vimalakīrti Sūtra to bodhisattvas entering the Mahāyāna. At this time, it was like the sun shining upon a plateau, such as the

Qinghai-Tibet Plateau in China. The teaching at this stage was more advanced, likened to curds becoming butter—the kind used in Tibetan butter tea. This, however, was still “raw butter,” whose flavor was not yet fully developed.

(IV) The Prajñā Period

The fourth period of teaching was the prajñā period. Prajñā is a word in Sanskrit, an ancient Indian language. Its meaning is very rich. Chinese has no word that encompasses its broad meaning, so it is transliterated. The characters are Chinese, but the sound is Sanskrit.

When translating sūtra texts, Dharma Master Xuanzang established five categories of terms not to be translated, because translating them would not make their original meaning clear; they were therefore transliterated. 1. Terms not translated because they are secret. For example, dhāraṇī means mantra, or “total retention”: it encompasses all dharmas and retains immeasurable meanings. All dharmas are included within it, and it contains boundless and immeasurable meanings. Therefore, all mantras are not translated.

2. Terms not translated because they have multiple meanings. For example, Bhagavān has six meanings. We ordinarily understand Bhagavān to mean the Buddha, representing a name of the Buddha. 3. Terms not translated because they do not exist in this land. That is, we have no such words here, such as Jambudvīpa and kalaviṅka.

Kalaviṅka is a kind of bird mentioned in the Amitābha Sūtra; its call is exceptionally beautiful. 4. Terms not translated because of established usage: they have long been used and have become customary expressions. 5. Terms not translated out of reverence: they bear supremely solemn meanings, such as arhat and bodhi, and are left untranslated out of respect.

The meaning of prajñā is very broad. To explain it merely as wisdom or great wisdom does not exhaust its meaning; such renderings do not fully encompass or adequately express it, and so it is not translated. Of the Buddha’s forty-nine years of teaching, he spent twenty-two years teaching prajñā. There were eight great divisions, summarized in the Great Prajñā Sūtra, which comprises six hundred fascicles.

The Heart Sūtra is excerpted from the six hundred fascicles of the Great Prajñā Sūtra. It is concise yet comprehensive, containing only 260 characters. Though its wording is very brief, its principles are exceptionally complete and profound, and its content is extremely rich. It fully contains, without omission, the essential meaning of the six hundred fascicles of the Great Prajñā Sūtra. Therefore, the Heart Sūtra is the heart and essence of the Great Prajñā Sūtra.

Because Buddha-nature is formless and without characteristics, beyond expression and description, it cannot be named by a name or characterized by a form. Therefore, during the prajñā period, the teaching employed two provisional means and one true teaching: two skillful expedients and one true Dharma. “Provisional” means skillful expedient.

The two skillful expedients are these: one is to explain principles in accordance with sentient beings’ capacities; the other is to articulate the Buddha’s innate wisdom skillfully and freely—to use things that sentient beings can readily understand as analogies for what they cannot easily understand, thereby teaching through skillful expedient means.

“True” means teaching the true Dharma: the true Buddhadharma, the One Vehicle Dharma, directly pointing to our Buddha-nature, the true suchness (tathatā) of reality, and the principle of the emptiness of all dharmas. The Avataṃsaka period belongs to the true teaching; the Āgama and Vaipulya periods belong to the provisional teachings; and the Lotus and Nirvāṇa periods belong to the true teaching. Only in the prajñā period were provisional and true teachings both employed; thus the prajñā period of teaching served to continue what came before and open what came after.

Moreover, because prajñā is the heart and essence of the Buddhadharma and the guide to attaining Buddhahood, the Buddha never departed from prajñā throughout all five periods of his teaching. Thus the Dharma of prajñā connects both what came before and what came after. At this time it was like the sun rising high and shining broadly over plains and earth. The doctrinal schools compare it to “ripe butter”: this butter has changed from raw to ripe, and its flavor is better. This teaching was for great bodhisattvas.

(V) The Lotus and Nirvāṇa Period

The fifth period of teaching was the Lotus and Nirvāṇa period. At this time the Buddha’s Dharma activity was about to reach completion, like the sun setting behind the western mountains; the Buddha was about to enter parinirvāṇa. The doctrinal schools compare it to ghee. Ghee has the finest flavor among all milk products.

Why is it compared to the finest flavor of ghee? Because during his final eight years, the Buddha taught such Dharma as the Lotus Sūtra: purely true teaching, without provisional means. He taught no other Dharma and no provisional teaching, but only the One Vehicle Dharma. At the Lotus assembly, he taught the principle of the true characteristics of all dharmas, unifying the three vehicles in the one Buddha vehicle. Regardless of the capacities of those present, and without asking whether they could accept it, he expounded fully in accord with intrinsic nature, freely declaring his original intent and teaching the true Buddhadharma. Because the

Buddha was soon to enter parinirvāṇa, there was no time left; only by teaching the true Dharma could the Buddhadharma be brought to completion.

At that time, the Buddha pointed out: “All sentient beings are Buddhas.” People of lesser capacity did not believe it and could not accept it. “How can all sentient beings be Buddhas? We saints of the Lesser Vehicle have practiced austerities through who knows how many lives, and have attained only the fruition of arhatship.

Sentient beings have not yet realized bodhisattvahood, much less Buddhahood; how, then, can all sentient beings be Buddhas?” Therefore, they did not believe, and five thousand people immediately left the assembly. After the great Dharma assembly of the Lotus Sūtra, the Buddha expounded the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra for one day and one night between the twin sāla trees in the city of Kuśinagara, and then entered nirvāṇa.

II. All Dharmas Are Empty: Because There Is No Abiding in Marks and Nothing to Be Attained

In the Buddha’s teachings of the five periods, there was none that was not prescribed according to the capacities and conditions of sentient beings, like medicine suited to an illness. Thus, he taught in response to conditions and had no fixed Dharma. To prevent sentient beings from misunderstanding the Buddhadharma and becoming attached to the words, phrases, names, and marks in the sūtras, the Buddha said that during his forty-nine years in the world, he had not spoken a single word.

“I have not spoken a single word.” This indicates that the true reality of all dharmas is empty in its very nature, originally such in its own nature, and wholly unattainable. To have spoken not a single word is precisely the ultimate teaching of perfect completeness, the supreme utterance of Buddhahood. Let us now examine this carefully together:

(I) Why did the Buddha say that, although he taught the Dharma for forty-nine years, he had not spoken a single word?

(1) The sambhogakāya (reward body) and nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma. Any Dharma expressed in words is a provisional Dharma. The true reality of the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless. The one who truly teaches speaks no words.

The Buddha has three bodies: the dharmakāya (Dharma body), sambhogakāya (reward body), and nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body). The nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) is the responsive body manifested by the Buddha in accordance with the capacities and conditions of sentient beings. It is the physical,

fleshly body that all of us can see. When the nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) teaches the Dharma, it does so by speaking with the mouth, by writing sūtra texts, or by expressing the Dharma through language and writing. All these have marks.

The sambhogakāya (reward body) is the Buddha's body of wisdom and light. It consists of the merits of wisdom accumulated through the Buddha's cultivation at the causal stage: a magnificent sambhogakāya (reward body) of blessings and light, inconceivable in its splendor.

There are two kinds of sambhogakāya (reward body). One is the self-enjoyment sambhogakāya (reward body), the body in which the Buddha personally enjoys the Dharma bliss of inner realization. The other is the other-enjoyment sambhogakāya (reward body), the luminous sambhogakāya (reward body) that the Buddha compassionately manifests in order to draw bodhisattvas onward, such as the Buddha's sixteen-foot golden body described in the sūtras.

When bodhisattvas see that the Buddha possesses such an excellent luminous sambhogakāya (reward body), they arouse the resolve to attain a sambhogakāya (reward body) as excellent as the Buddha's. Thus they are encouraged and inspired to strive diligently onward. The sambhogakāya (reward body) does not teach the Dharma by speaking with the mouth, but by emitting light and manifesting auspicious signs. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra explains this clearly: a transformation Buddha appearing in the light above the Buddha's crown speaks mantras; the Buddha emits light by pressing a finger, illuminating the great bodhisattvas in the ten directions; and the great bodhisattvas in the ten directions likewise emit light to illuminate the Buddha, and so forth. Where there is light, there are marks; thus, the luminous body of wisdom also has marks.

The Diamond Sūtra says: "All appearances are illusory." Whatever is manifested through appearances is not real but false. Both the sambhogakāya (reward body) and nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) are bodies with marks; since they have marks, they are illusory manifestations. The Dharma taught by illusory bodies is naturally an illusory Dharma, not the true Dharma.

Sentient beings do not recognize their own original life-source. Deluded and confused, they become attached to appearances, create karma, and undergo retribution. Therefore, birth and death in saṃsāra are likewise not real, but empty and insubstantial. To teach illusory Dharma to illusory sentient beings is merely an expedient application. Thus, the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma; nor is the Dharma they teach the true Dharma.

The dharmakāya (Dharma body) is also called the body of intrinsic nature or the body of dharmatā. It is the Buddha's true body, taking the true Dharma as its

essence, and is the formless true reality. Since it is formless, it cannot be compared to anything, and thus there is no Dharma that can be spoken. Even if one exhausts every possible means, it cannot be expressed. Therefore, the true Dharma is taught through not speaking; having nothing to say is called true teaching. Hence, the Diamond Sūtra says: “The Dharma taught by the Tathāgata cannot be grasped, cannot be spoken of; it is neither Dharma nor non-Dharma.”

In former times, the Venerable Subhūti was sitting quietly in a mountain cave. The devas rained flowers as an offering and praised Subhūti for expounding prajñā well. Subhūti said, “I have never spoken a single word about prajñā. How can you praise me?” The Lord of the Devas replied, “Just so. The Venerable One has not spoken, and I have not heard. Not speaking and not hearing are the true teaching of prajñā.” This shows that true teaching of the Dharma is “the great sound is scarcely heard”: the greatest sound is soundless, beyond the hearing of ordinary people.

At this point, we should discuss what the three bodies—the nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body), sambhogakāya (reward body), and dharmakāya (Dharma body)—ultimately are. Most people believe that only a Buddha possesses these three bodies, and that we ordinary beings, far from being able to reach them, do not possess them.

They also believe that one must wait through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas and attain Buddhahood at the stage of fruition before the three bodies can be perfectly complete. In fact, even while we are ordinary beings, these three bodies are not lacking in the slightest.

Why is this so? The so-called pure dharmakāya (Dharma body) is the clear and distinct numinous knowing that, when not a single thought arises, is unlike wood or stone. It is formless and without marks, neither real nor unreal, neither coming nor going, neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing—the innate nature that everyone possesses. The so-called perfect sambhogakāya (reward body) is our wisdom.

This wisdom is light: the luminous body of wisdom that enables us to know how to do things, complete our work, and deal with others. The so-called countless transformation bodies are our functioning. We can explain principles, investigate science, make discoveries and inventions, and produce and manufacture all kinds of things.

Thus, all the things we create, establish, and produce are our nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body). Yet ordinary people do not understand this. They mistakenly take the physical body to be the self and regard things outside the body as belongings of the self. In truth, this physical body is not the true self; it is only the true self’s house and dwelling. It is not the master, but the servant.

The true self—that is, intrinsic nature—is the real master. All things and all forms and appearances in the world are manifestations of my nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body); they are all brought forth through my transformations and are all nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body). Therefore, as long as we can recognize our own intrinsic nature, we recognize the true Buddha inherently possessed within ourselves.

All sentient beings possess the innate Buddha-nature in full, without any lack; it is not that humans alone possess it while other kinds of beings do not. If you can awaken to and understand this, then the pure light of mind in a single thought—the empty aspect of the fundamental essence—is the dharmakāya (Dharma body) Buddha; the non-discriminating light of mind in a single thought—the lucidly manifest aspect of the fundamental essence—is the sambhogakāya (reward body) Buddha; and the non-differentiating light of mind in a single thought—wherein all appearances are transformations manifested by intrinsic nature—is the nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) Buddha.

If you can awaken to and understand this in such a way, cultivate diligently, temper yourself assiduously amid circumstances, eradicate the deluded habitual tendencies of attachment to appearances, and then liberate sentient beings, accumulate merit and virtue, and perfectly realize bodhi, this is true refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.

(2) Suchness (tathatā) and true reality cannot be expressed in words.

In the Chinese term zhenru ( ), zhen ( ) means genuine and not false, while ru ( ) means constant and unchanging. Suchness (tathatā) is the substance of all phenomena. Whether defiled or pure, its nature does not change; hence it is called suchness (tathatā). It is the Original Face of sentient beings: genuinely such and unmoving. It is also the wondrous true mind that all sentient beings employ in response to conditions, and is also called Buddha-nature, dharmatā, intrinsic nature, and so forth. The eighty-four thousand dharma gates taught by the Buddha are all states that he directly realized as originally thus. They were not invented by him, nor did they come into being only after he spoke of them. Thus, though he taught them, it is as though he had not taught them—not even a single word.

Buddha-nature is formless and without marks, and therefore cannot be named or described; it is beyond thoughts and separate from knowing. It cannot be reached through speech, and so it is called “the path of words is cut off.” Nor can it be attained by our thinking, reasoning, or imagination, and so it is called “the activity of mind is extinguished.” Words cannot reach it, and conceptual consciousness cannot attain it. It cannot be spoken; once spoken, it is no longer it. Therefore, “Raise the mind and you are already wrong; stir a thought and you have already gone astray.”

Only when the path of words is cut off and the activity of mind is extinguished can there be correspondence with it.

At the Buddha's final assembly on Vulture Peak, he held up a flower to show the assembly. He did not speak, but merely picked up a flower offered by devas and held it up before the great assembly. At that time many beings were present, both heavenly and human, and none knew what it meant—they were at a loss. Only the Venerable Kāśyapa responded with a knowing smile.

(The Venerable Mahākāśyapa understood inwardly, entered into accord with the Buddha's indication, and smiled slightly; mind met mind with the Buddha.) The Buddha immediately declared: "I possess the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the true reality of no-form, and the subtle Dharma gate: a special transmission outside the teachings, not established in words and letters. I entrust it to Mahākāśyapa." From this, the Chan school's Dharma gate was established. This is the perfect and sudden Dharma gate of direct pointing to the mind and realizing Buddhahood by seeing one's true nature; it is not the gradual meditative practice of the four dhyānas and eight samādhis. Therefore, it cannot be expressed in speech or established in writing.

(3) The Buddha's manifestation of nirvāṇa signifies that the true mind neither arises nor ceases, neither moves nor wavers, and that only by being free from speech can one realize true reality.

As long as we abide unmoving, are not turned by circumstances, do not cling to any appearances, and are free from all idle theorizing, true reality immediately appears before us.

After expounding the Nirvāṇa Sūtra for one day and one night, the Buddha entered nirvāṇa. The nirvāṇa spoken of in Buddhism does not simply mean that a person has died. More precisely, there are four kinds of nirvāṇa:

First, nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature: all sentient beings, whether birds, beasts, creeping creatures, or beings endowed with consciousness, possess Buddha-nature and the capacity for awakening. It neither arises nor ceases. Buddha-nature does not arise because there is a physical body, nor does it perish when the physical body is destroyed; it neither arises nor ceases.

Before your life took form, it was thus; after you were born, it was also thus; and even after death, it remains thus. It neither arises nor ceases, neither comes nor goes, neither moves nor wavers, neither defiled nor pure. This is nirvāṇa. It means quiescent cessation and ease, neither arising nor ceasing. So-called quiescent cessation does not mean death, but neither arising nor ceasing. So long as the mind neither arises nor ceases, quiescent cessation is present, and one realizes the

wondrous fruition of nirvāṇa. This is what we seek to realize through studying Buddhism and cultivating its practices.

Second, nirvāṇa with remainder: this is the fruition cultivated and realized by the sages of the Lesser Vehicle. Multitudinous sentient beings cling to a self. “Since there is this person called ‘I,’ I want enjoyment: good food, good drink, fine clothing, and a fine dwelling.” Insatiably greedy, they create karma and undergo its retribution. Moved by wholesome and unwholesome karma, their lifespans are limited and their bodily forms differentiated.

They may be reborn as humans, devas, asuras, hungry ghosts, animals, or beings in hell. They revolve endlessly in the six realms, unable to free themselves; hence this birth and death is segmented birth and death. The sages of the Lesser Vehicle generally maintain that there are dharmas to attain, a path to cultivate, birth and death to transcend, and nirvāṇa to realize. This is called attachment to dharmas.

When they sever the six sense faculties, attachment to self has already been extinguished and the “personal self” has been overcome. Neither good nor evil clings to them, and thus they can leave the cycle of the six realms and transcend segmented birth and death. Yet they enter into a great self, taking the four great elements of the dharmakāya (Dharma body) as self. Moreover, arhats cling to the Four Noble Truths of suffering, origination, cessation, and the path, while pratyekabuddhas cling to the teaching of the twelve links of dependent origination.

Their attachment to dharmas has not been overcome, so their thought cannot avoid transformations involving arising and ceasing, and they cannot abide securely in their inner state. As we cultivate the Way, we turn from delusion to awakening, progressing from ordinary beings to arhats and bodhisattvas. Each transformation of one’s inner state is precisely like one birth and death. This transformation of the mind, rather than a change of physical form, is transformational birth and death. The sages of the Lesser Vehicle still undergo transformational birth and death; since this remains, it is called nirvāṇa with remainder.

Third, nirvāṇa without remainder: segmented birth and death and transformational birth and death have both been transcended, and all causes of defiled karma have been completely purified. This is also called the “supernormal power of exhausted outflows.” This is nirvāṇa without remainder.

Fourth, nirvāṇa without any fixed abode: here there is a question. While we are alive, because we have a physical body, we must have some place on which to rely. We cannot help wondering, “Once breathing stops and the four elements disperse, where shall I settle?” Practitioners of the Pure Land school say, “We shall go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss; we shall be reborn in the West.

We shall rely on Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva to cultivate and realize further. We have somewhere to go. But you who practice the Chan school and Esoteric Buddhism—where will you go in the future?" This is a major question for Buddhists. If we can understand it clearly, the Buddhist scriptures will be comparatively easy to understand, for the Buddha taught the Dharma precisely in order to resolve this great matter of birth and death.

As stated before, intrinsic nature is neither arising nor ceasing. Therefore, birth has no real arising, and death has no real ceasing. The reason there is birth and death is entirely because our attachments make mischief. While alive, we falsely take everything to be truly existent: the human body, family, money, material possessions, fame, profit, status, and so forth. We seek after everything, greedily grasping and possessing it.

Thus we cling to external circumstances, and the mind turns with circumstances. There is acceptance and rejection, love and aversion, and all these things are planted in your eighth consciousness. This eighth consciousness, called the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), is the storehouse consciousness. All good and bad seeds, arising and ceasing as well as non-arising and non-ceasing, are stored in this warehouse.

Once a person dies, the physical body is ruined and the four elements disperse. This body can no longer be used; the house is broken down, and one must move. At that time, because of clinging to self, the intermediate-state body arises.

The intermediate-state body arises when the original physical body has decayed and the person has died, but the future body has not yet formed and rebirth in a womb has not yet occurred. During this intervening period, manas consciousness—attachment to self—clings to there being an "I" and therefore an "I-body." Thus, from mind there arises an illusory and ethereal body, called the intermediate-state body.

The human physical body is chiefly constituted by the earth element and is dense and turbid. The intermediate-state body is chiefly constituted by the wind element and is ethereal. Because it is not enveloped in a physical body, it possesses the five supernormal powers. Through the retribution of karma, and as moved by karmic force, corresponding favorable or unfavorable circumstances appear according to the wholesome and unwholesome karma created during life.

At this time, all the seeds in the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) surge forth. Because one's former attachments were strong, when one now sees circumstances and images, the mind is stirred by them, pursues them, and grasps them. One is then reborn in a corresponding one of the six realms. Therefore, if we trace birth and death to its fundamental cause, it is a single deluded thought: clinging to

phenomena, grasping at circumstances, and falling into the corresponding karmic fruition.

If we now train our own minds at every moment, knowing that all forms and all circumstances are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, mere deluded thoughts appearing before us, and if we neither pursue, crave, nor grasp them, then the mind becomes empty and pure. Once this physical body is damaged and the four elements disperse, when the sovereign mind of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) emerges, it can take command, not turn with circumstances, and not enter a womb.

Therefore, when we practice the Dharma and apply ourselves, we must make vigorous efforts while alive, remain highly vigilant, recognize that all forms are like dreams and illusions, neither grasping nor pursuing them, and directly realize bodhi. While alive, we are then carefree and at ease; after death, however illusory circumstances may manifest, there is no mind to be stirred. If this is so, one can radiate great light, brilliantly illuminating the ten directions, coming and going freely, and responding to conditions without any lack of ease. Only this accomplishment—the ability not to be controlled by circumstances or turned by karma—is genuine transcendence of birth and death. This is called "nirvāṇa without any fixed abode."

Thus, the Pure Land is not only in the West. East, south, west, north, the four intermediate directions, above and below—everywhere is a Buddha-land, everywhere is a Pure Land. We do not see this only because the light of our minds is not complete and cannot shine forth brilliantly. If our minds are empty and do not cling to appearances, their luminosity shines brilliantly, and the Pure Lands of the ten directions all appear at once.

In the palace of the king of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven hangs a canopy called Indra's Net, formed by strings of precious jewels. Each jewel emits light, illuminating and containing the others; they reflect one another without obstruction. It is like Buddhas, whose minds seal one another and whose lights illuminate one another without obstruction. The minds of us sentient beings are likewise.

So long as we can let go of everything, we attain great freedom. Then we shall no longer ask, "Where are we to go?" Having a body is like having an object; if there is an object, there must be a place to put it.

If one has realized thoroughly and ultimately, there is no thing at all. What place would one still seek in which to put or situate it? We already know that the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless and without appearance; it is not a thing. Why, then, would it need any dwelling place or location? As for the sambhogakāya (reward body), it is a great light treasury. Although this light has appearance, it abides nowhere.

As for the nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body), it is provisionally manifested in order to liberate sentient beings, and is used to liberate sentient beings with affinities. Wherever there are affinities, it goes there. Therefore, all places are perfectly integrated and without obstruction.

When the Buddha taught the Nirvāṇa Sūtra, he was showing the assembly that the Buddha had not entered nirvāṇa and become motionless. Though he seemed to have departed, he had not left sentient beings; he was still among the assembly, propagating the Dharma and benefiting beings. Those whose minds and eyes are pure can see the Buddha at all times and in all places. Those whose deluded minds are defiled cannot see the Buddha. Therefore, when we practice the Dharma, our minds must be peaceful and pure; only then can we see the Tathāgata at every moment.

The Diamond Sūtra says, “When the mind of faith is pure, the true mark arises.” Thus, the Buddha’s demonstration of the appearance of nirvāṇa for sentient beings to see is precisely a manifestation of the wondrous functioning of true mind. It teaches us not to cling to phenomena, not to turn with circumstances, and not to stir deludedly. If the deluded mind can indeed remain unmoved, the true mark appears before us.

True mind is originally neither arising nor ceasing, but this does not mean that it lies there dead and motionless. Neither arising nor ceasing is the nature of true mind, yet it is incomparably numinous and wondrous, able to give rise to myriad manifestations of wondrous functioning in response to conditions. Therefore, when we say that the mind should not move, we mean only that it should not move deludedly: it should not turn with objects and circumstances, grasp objects, or crave objects. We do not mean that it should not function.

When you need to do something or deal with a problem, and handle it appropriately so that it is brought to complete fulfillment, you must think and make plans; it will not do for the mind not to move. If the mind does not move, you cannot speak, nor can anything be accomplished.

Yet when we speak and act, although thoughts stir, we do not take them to heart. This is movement without movement; it is the true mind functioning in response to conditions. Therefore, to attain accomplishment in studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way, one must both function and maintain contemplation at all times, without turning with circumstances.

When speaking and handling affairs, it is as though one were not speaking or acting oneself, but as though others were speaking and acting. Afterward, it is as though one had never done it. Only this is true no-mind and true nirvāṇa. Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, put it well: “Precisely when one applies the

mind, there is precisely no mind that applies it; precisely when there is no mind, it functions; ever functioning, it is precisely absent."

This means that precisely when we give rise to a thought and apply the mind, there is no mind to be applied. In other words, our minds do not turn with objects and circumstances. Use them freely, yet use without using. This is the true mind functioning in response to conditions—the wondrous functioning of true mind!

When the Buddha was in the world teaching the Dharma, he often said that the Buddhadharma is free from all appearances, free from the appearance of words, free from the appearance of speech, and free from the appearance of mental conditions. This indicates that the Buddhadharma is a Dharma without any real dharma, a Dharma that does not cling to appearances. In the verse by which the Buddha transmitted the Dharma to Mahākāśyapa, he said: "The Dharma that is originally Dharma is without Dharma; the Dharma of no Dharma is also Dharma. Now, when transmitting the Dharma of no Dharma, when have dharmas ever been dharmas?"

"The Dharma that is originally Dharma is without Dharma" means that none of the methods for cultivating the mind is ultimately a fixed, substantial dharma. They are all provisionally established as medicine in response to illness and according to the recipient's capacity; thus, though provisionally present, they have no substantial existence. "The Dharma of no Dharma is also Dharma" means that although there is no Dharma, its provisional use is not absent.

For example, the world plainly exists, the body plainly exists, and clothing, food, dwelling, travel, and so forth are certainly not nonexistent; each can serve a purpose. Even to speak of no dharma is not to have departed from dharmas.

"Now, when transmitting the Dharma of no Dharma": because the Buddhadharma is medicine in response to illness, it is existent yet nonexistent, nonexistent yet existent. Thus, when this Dharma is now transmitted, "when have dharmas ever been dharmas?" Though one may speak of a thousand dharmas, ten thousand dharmas, and eighty-four thousand dharma gates, in the end not a single dharma can be obtained.

This clearly reveals to us the true mind of wondrous functioning: neither real nor unreal, neither identical with nor separate from, neither empty nor existent, neither existent nor empty. Thus, the scriptures are no more than a gateway to the Buddhadharma, a path for entering Buddhahood. To enter this gateway, one must first be guided by studying the scriptures. Yet one must never mistakenly take the scriptures to be actual dharmas and become attached to them. Let us now discuss the Buddhist scriptures.

(II) Buddhist scriptures are like fingers pointing at the moon; they provide the direction and path for studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way.

Earlier, we explained from the standpoint of doctrine that Buddha-nature is beyond speech and cannot be represented by forms. Yet if we were to dispense with the expression of language and writing, how could people understand and recognize Buddha-nature? How could they cultivate and realize fruition? Therefore, although there is ultimately nothing to be said, we neither abandon speech nor dispense with it. Relying on words makes it easier to understand the principles and meanings.

Words are merely expedient means for expressing the Dharma. Thus, for more than two thousand years, the Buddhist Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions of scripture have continued to circulate widely. Yet though there is teaching, there is still no teaching. Why? Because all dharmas are empty, devoid of self-nature, and unobtainable. Since one does not abide in appearances, one does not become attached.

Thus, all scriptural texts are merely fingers pointing at the moon. They indicate the moon, but are not the moon itself; they merely point out the direction and path for realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

Therefore, when listening to teachings or reading scriptures, we should see the moon and forget the finger, grasp the meaning and forget the words. We should understand the scriptures' true intent, absorb their essential meaning, and realize the realm beyond speech through what is expressed in speech. We should not cling to their terminology and phrasing or merely commit their words to memory, still less become attached to the subtleties of those terms and phrases and make them the sole object of study. Otherwise, we are simply pursuing academic learning rather than practicing the Buddha's teachings. What matters most in Buddhist practice is putting the teachings into action: following the principles and methods set out in the scriptures. Only then can we truly benefit from them.

Yet the principles of the Buddhist scriptures are profound. Those of great capacity can comprehend them at a glance and cultivate accordingly. For those of middling or lesser capacity, however, they are not easy to understand. They not only fail to recognize the moon, but do not even understand what is meant by a finger.

If they do not even understand the pointing finger, how can they follow the direction it indicates and see the moon? Therefore, one must first study the scriptures carefully and gain a thorough understanding before proceeding with cultivation.

For people today, however, studying Buddhist scriptures presents many obstacles. The scriptures are written in an ancient literary style, Classical Chinese; their grammar, sentence structure, and modes of expression differ considerably from modern grammar. The texts are all in traditional characters, whereas we now use

simplified characters. Moreover, some characters in the scriptures are now rarely used or no longer used, making them obscure and difficult to understand. The scriptures also contain specialized names, technical terms, and foreign expressions, among other things.

All these are obstacles for those who study and practice. Without careful explanation or annotation, ordinary people cannot easily understand the profound intent of the scriptures.

For this reason, bodhisattvas among the doctrinal schools have made extensive use of skillful means: they have annotated and explained the scriptures, or translated them into vernacular language, so that practitioners may first understand the finger pointing at the moon—what this pointing finger is and how it functions. Then, following the direction and path indicated by the finger, they can apply themselves to cultivation and practice, advancing without cease, until they see the bright moon and behold their own Buddha-nature.

At this point, we should first discuss several common errors in Dharma practice:

1. Many people misunderstand the merit described in the Buddhist scriptures. Reciting this scripture brings one kind of merit, and reciting that scripture another. Upon hearing or reading this, people become attached to the appearance of merit and keep themselves busy from morning to night, reciting one scripture and chanting another. Because they are rushing to complete a task, they recite rapidly, which can be very harmful to their vital energy.

As a result, not only do they fail to cultivate well, but they develop ailments and damage their health. This comes from misunderstanding merit. Merit does not lie in the black characters on white paper, but in our own minds.

When we recite scriptures and understand the principles taught by the Buddha and the methods of practice, then put those principles and methods into practice, we can pass from the state of ordinary beings into the realm of Buddhahood. This is great merit and virtue. If we merely chant and recite, without understanding the principles of the scriptures or knowing how to practice, and remain stuck at the level of ordinary beings without advancing, where could merit and virtue possibly come from?

Others may understand some principles but refuse to put them into practice or cultivate; they treat them only as objects of scholarly inquiry. This too is entirely useless. Wang Yangming said: “To know without acting is not truly to know; to act without knowing can lead to knowledge.” This shows the importance of practice.

Merely studying or chanting the scriptures without engaging in cultivation cannot be called merit and virtue at all. Next, we must properly understand the two characters gongde ( ), “merit and virtue.” Gong means accomplishment in an undertaking; it is a kind of power, the power to complete an undertaking. The Chinese are very particular in the way they form characters.

Gong ( ) in gongde ( ), “merit and virtue,” combines gong ( ), “work,” with li ( ), “strength.” It means the strength with which we carry out an undertaking, the strength to complete a task.

Is not our progress from ordinary beings to the perfect fruition of Buddhahood the completion of a great undertaking? Is it not the fulfillment of a rich and abundant achievement? If we merely chant and recite, when will we ever become Buddhas? The de in gongde means that virtue extends throughout the great thousandfold world. For example, when someone rebukes you by saying that you lack virtue, this means that you have done something bad that harms others for your own benefit.

We must liberate sentient beings, benefit them, and bring blessings to humankind. This is great virtue.

But if we have not realized Buddhahood, how can we liberate sentient beings? How can we benefit them? Suppose someone falls into a river and is about to drown. If you cannot swim and do not know lifesaving techniques, how can you enter the water to rescue that person? If you cannot save them, where is your virtue? Therefore, we must put into practice the principles taught in the Buddhist scriptures and cultivate courageously and diligently. Only then can we accomplish Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings.

First save yourself, then save others; first liberate yourself, then liberate others. Only after attaining liberation and rescue ourselves can we speak of rescuing and liberating others.

As we have said before, scriptures are medicine for curing illness. Therefore, never become attached to the appearance of merit in reciting scriptures. Still less should you recite a scripture once and mark a red dot, then, after reciting it a certain number of times, fill in a certain number of red dots, finally burn the paper, and record some supposed merit. Do not treat recited scriptures as deposit slips stored in a bank. We study Buddhism in order to transcend birth and death, not to talk about merit. Once one becomes attached to the appearance of merit, one falls into a fixed rut and cannot transcend birth and death.

2. Some people also think: since the Buddhadharma teaches that everything is empty, that we should not cling to anything, and that we should let go of everything,

then there is nothing at all to do. They regard Buddhism as passive. This is wrong. Buddhism is active: it is non-contrivance, yet leaves nothing undone.

What is meant by emptiness is to empty out your deluded mind, empty out your grasping mind, and eradicate your selfish mind. People in this world are caught in deluded thoughts and attachments, inverted and deluded without knowing it. Greed and anger both arise from ignorance. The absence of wisdom is called ignorance.

Because of this lack of wisdom, people do not know what is true and what is false. They often take delusion for truth and treat false appearances as truly existent. It is like dark clouds obscuring the sun and covering over the light. Thus they are insatiably greedy, pursue external objects, create karma and undergo karmic retribution, and suffer unjustly in the cycle of birth and death.

Worse still, they act recklessly and create all kinds of dark karma through killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, thereby bringing upon themselves the evil fruits of the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms. The Buddhadharma can liberate us from the ocean of suffering of birth and death and enable us to attain great freedom. We must therefore cultivate according to the truths taught in the Buddhist scriptures, remove our delusion and folly, deluded thoughts, and ignorance, and restore the true mind that is originally neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.

What is true? In fact, delusion itself is true. Delusion arises on the basis of the true: only because there is the true can delusion arise. If there were no true, how could delusion arise? For example, there must first be water; only when the wind blows can waves arise.

If there were no water, then however strongly the wind blew, where could waves arise? This true is nowhere else; it is right where delusion is. Truth and delusion are one and the same thing, just as waves are still water. Therefore, as soon as we turn the mind and do not cling to appearances, delusion becomes truth. Because we do not recognize our true nature, we are obscured by delusion and move delusively without cease.

Once one awakens to the one mind and lets the frantic mind rest, that is bodhi. Mind is originally without arising. Since it has no arising, how can there be a distinction between truth and delusion? It is only because we cling to dharma appearances, considering all the diverse appearances of the world to be existent, that we discriminate between good and ugly, true and false.

If you know that all appearances are empty and without self-nature, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—unreal, incapable of being grasped—and let them go completely, then at the point where thoughts cease you will directly

apprehend the true mind and return home by the very road you are on. There will no longer be any distinction between truth and delusion. Thus truth and delusion are merely provisional terms set up in temporary contrast; do not regard them as definitely real. If even truth does not exist, where could delusion be? When Buddhist scriptures speak of this true mind and deluded mind, many people become confused.

Chan Master Xuansha was a great master of the Chan school. He composed this verse: “Those who study the Way do not recognize the true, for they have always recognized only the consciousness-spirit. It is the root of birth and death throughout beginningless kalpas; foolish people call it the original person.” When this verse appeared, everyone was alarmed. The consciousness-spirit is what we call the soul; it is false and is the deluded mind. Suchness (tathatā) is Buddha-nature: real and unmoving.

Therefore, one must not take the consciousness-spirit for suchness (tathatā); you must distinguish them clearly. If you make a mistake, you will not be able to transcend birth and death. Thus disputes arose: how great, after all, is the difference between the consciousness-spirit and suchness (tathatā)? At this point, ordinary people generally no longer dare to inquire into the matter.

Suchness (tathatā) and consciousness seem far too different. Suchness (tathatā) is Buddha-nature; it neither arises nor ceases. Consciousness is false; it arises and ceases again and again. How could the two be mentioned in the same breath? Yet, to speak truthfully, consciousness is suchness (tathatā), and suchness (tathatā) is consciousness.

Just as explained earlier, water is waves. When water is blown by the wind or stirred by something else, it becomes waves; yet the waves themselves are water. Without water, how could waves arise? Apart from water, there are no waves.

The waves may be likened to consciousness: they are in motion, arising at one moment and ceasing at the next, marked by arising and ceasing. Water may be likened to Buddha-nature: it remains tranquil throughout, marked not by movement but by stillness. The two appear to be different things, but they are actually one, because both have wetness as their substance.

Now that we understand what Buddha-nature and consciousness, true mind and deluded mind, ultimately are, why should we not make use of consciousness and deluded mind, allowing them to function everywhere? If we were to sit there motionless like clay or wooden statues, what use would that be? There would be no free and unhindered functioning. Our ultimate aim is to become living Buddhas—free and unobstructed, endowed with boundless wondrous functioning, and broadly liberating sentient beings—not to die sitting there without moving.

If no wondrous functioning arises at all, what value would the Buddhadharma have? Therefore, practitioners must not mistakenly believe that it is good simply to sit there motionless. Some say, “This person’s practice is truly excellent: he sat for seven days and nights, ten days and nights, or even years, decades, or centuries.” This is not true Buddhadharma. It is withered-wood Chan: one has died and become earth, wood, metal, or stone.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra speaks of twelve classes of living beings. One such class consists of earth, wood, metal, and stone—such as mud, wood, stones, and metal ores. This happens when one does not know how to practice and thus mistakenly enters a wrong path. Therefore, in cultivating the Way, one must first understand the causal ground: if the causal ground is not right, the fruition will be distorted and circuitous.

When beginning practice, the greatest taboo is to suppress thoughts forcibly and compel them not to arise. Never suppose that not a single thought arises means suppressing thoughts so that they cannot arise. If one suppresses oneself into earth, wood, metal, or stone, one changes from sentient to insentient. One must understand that “not a single thought arises” does not mean having no thoughts at all; it means not following thoughts when they arise, allowing them to arise without abiding.

The Diamond Sūtra says: “One should give rise to this mind without abiding anywhere.” One must give rise to a non-abiding mind, a lucid and lively mind, a mind that neither grasps nor rejects. It does not mean not giving rise to mind.

Without giving rise to mind, how could wondrous functioning arise? Without wondrous functioning, how could there be the present world? How could there be a Pure Land or a Buddha realm? For example, the various adornments and beautiful realms of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss described in the Amitābha Sūtra are also manifestations of Amitābha Buddha’s true mind. When the Buddha teaches the Dharma, he too gives rise to mind. Therefore, we cannot say that entering the cessation of feeling and perception is right samādhi. It is not right samādhi; it is mistaken.

True Buddhadharma is active; it must give rise to great potential and great functioning. The principles taught in the Buddhist sūtras are all very correct. They are truths concerning life and the universe; they are science and a philosophy of life. They all teach us to strive positively upward, teaching us to “do no evil and practice all good,” and teaching us how to conduct ourselves and deal with the world.

All these have a positive effect on the development of contemporary society. As it is said, “The Buddhadharma is in the world and does not depart from awakening in the world. To seek bodhi apart from the world is like seeking a rabbit’s horn.” This

means that Buddhadharma does not depart from worldly dharmas, and worldly dharmas are themselves Buddhadharma. Thus, practice does not mean withdrawing from reality; rather, one must temper the mind through circumstances in the world and work on the mind-ground.

If one does not understand worldly affairs or handle them harmoniously and completely, how can one become a Buddha? Therefore, to cultivate the Way and attain Buddhahood, one must first clearly understand the principles of being a human being. If one does not even understand how to be a human being, and one's character is inadequate, how can one possess the character of a Buddha? Thus, Buddhadharma is by no means passive.

Mahāyāna Buddhadharma is active and non-contrived. All conditioned dharmas are illusory and unobtainable. The Diamond Sūtra says: "All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and lightning. Thus should they be contemplated."

Since all are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, and are unobtainable, what are you still clinging to and pursuing? Most people today are insatiably greedy. They contend for power and status, fame and wealth; they demand without end and possess without limit. Some even use every possible means to achieve private ends, committing acts that violate natural justice and human morality.

In fact, no matter how one exhausts a lifetime's energy seeking this and that, contending for this and that, in the end one still departs empty-handed and cannot take a single thing along. Instead, one undergoes karmic retribution for creating karma and suffers in rebirth within the six realms. Some Buddhist practitioners do not understand the true meaning of Buddhadharma. They merely burn incense and worship the Buddha, seeking the blessings of the human and deva realms.

They pray to Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless them with promotion and wealth, health and longevity, to avert calamities and difficulties for them, and to keep their descendants safe. They even smear Buddhadharma with all sorts of chaotic things from folk religion—praying to spirits, divination, magical arts, sorcery, and feudal superstition—thereby defiling Buddhadharma.

True Buddhadharma is selfless. It transforms people's selfish mentality of "for myself," teaching them to contribute their own abilities in service to sentient beings, seek the welfare of the public, and do more good deeds beneficial to humankind.

Buddhadharma teaches us that in all we do, the mind must be empty and non-abiding, functioning spontaneously in accordance with conditions. In dealing with people and things, speaking and acting, working, and handling problems, we must

not be turned by circumstances or take matters to heart, as though someone else were doing them.

After matters have been completed and circumstances have passed, the mind should be utterly empty and pure, containing nothing at all—like a bird flying through the sky and leaving no trace. But we must not become like a lifeless, motionless stone, allowing no thought to arise. To do things with such freedom and unobstructedness is the true meaning of Buddhism's non-contrivance and yet leaving nothing undone.

In the history of Buddhism in China and abroad, some great masters of old embodied the roles of scientist, physician, writer, philosopher, and more. Buddhadharma is vast and profound. It not only elucidates the true nature of the universe and human life, but also teaches the sciences of medicine and the practical arts.

The science of medicine means developing medicine in order to improve human health. The science of the practical arts means developing science and technology in order to improve people's standard of living. Thus, Buddhadharma plays a positive role in the development of human society, the development of science and technology, the improvement of human living standards, and the improvement of human qualities.

For this very reason, people of insight in developed countries in Europe and America, as well as Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and other places, have awakened to this fact and seek in Buddhism and traditional Eastern culture answers to the various difficult problems confronting society today. Thus, Buddhadharma is not passive but active.

3. There is a serious error in the way people apply themselves to Dharma practice: seeking spiritual powers. Of every hundred practitioners today, nearly all seek to develop spiritual powers in order to show themselves off and satisfy their desire for fame, gain, and support, or because they believe that without developing such powers one cannot be said to have realized the Way.

Many people link realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature with developing spiritual powers, taking the development of such powers as the criterion of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. They believe that if one has realized the mind and seen one's true nature, one should develop spiritual powers; if one has not developed great spiritual powers, then one has not realized the mind and seen one's true nature.

Clearly, they do not know what realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means. How, then, could they develop spiritual powers? What exactly is the

relationship between these two? These questions must be clearly understood. Failure to understand the principles involved will become a major obstacle to cultivating the Way. Not only will one fail in cultivating the Way, but one may even fall into demonic states. Therefore, today I will focus on this question.

In the past, King Vimatirāja, an Indian emperor, asked Venerable Bharati, an awakened bodhisattva, “What is Buddha?” The Venerable replied, “Seeing one’s true nature is Buddha.” King Vimatirāja asked, “Has the Master seen his true nature?” The Venerable replied, “I see Buddha-nature.” The king again asked, “Where is this nature?” The Venerable replied, “Nature is in its functioning.”

The king asked, “What functioning is this? I do not see it now.” The Venerable replied, “Its functioning is presently manifest, but Your Majesty does not see it.” The king asked, “Do I possess it?” The Venerable replied, “When Your Majesty functions, there is nothing that is not it; when Your Majesty does not function, its essence is also difficult to see.” The king again asked, “When it functions, in how many places does it appear?” The Venerable replied, “When it appears, it is present in eight ways.”

The king said, “Please explain these eight manifestations to me.” The Venerable spoke this verse: “In the womb, it is called the body; after birth, it is called a person; in the eyes, it is called seeing.” That is, during the ten months of gestation, a body is formed; after birth, one becomes a person. When a child is born, it opens its eyes to see things.

Everyone thinks that seeing things is the function of the eyes—that the eyeball serves as an optical lens and, according to the principles of optics, enables us to see. Yet they do not realize that what truly sees is not the eyeball, the eye faculty, but our nature that is capable of seeing.

If the eyes themselves could see, then when our breath fails and we die, why can we no longer see although the eyes remain? Thus, the visual function of the eyes is the functioning of nature. “In the ears, it is called hearing”: the ears’ ability to hear sounds is likewise not the function of the ear faculty, but the function of the nature of hearing. “At the nose, it discerns fragrances.”

That is, the nose’s ability to smell fragrances and odors is the functioning of the nature of smell. “At the tongue, it is called speaking”: all speech and discussion are the functioning of Buddha-nature. “In the hands, it is called grasping and lifting”: using our hands to hold things and work is also the functioning of Buddha-nature. “In the feet, it is called walking and running”: walking with our two feet is likewise the functioning of our Buddha-nature. In short, at all times and in all places, there is nothing that is not the functioning of nature.

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: “One who sees the true nature must see it at the very moment of speaking. If this is so, even when brandishing a sword and going into battle, one can see it.” On the battlefield, when life hangs by a breath, such a person still clearly and distinctly sees the true nature. For every function is a function of the true nature. On the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, the Buddha saw a bright star at night and realized his true nature.

What does it mean that he saw a bright star at night and realized his true nature? The stars are far more than 108,000 li away from us, yet the nature of seeing perceives them with complete clarity. This shows that the functioning of the true nature is vast and boundless, and that everything without exception is contained within our true nature. “Great, it has no exterior; small, it has no interior.”

This means that there is nothing in the world greater than the true nature: it is boundless and limitless. Nor is there anything smaller than the true nature: it is so small that there is no inner space within it. As it is said, “Released, it fills the six directions; gathered in, it withdraws and is hidden in the subtle.” The functioning of Buddha-nature is thus infinitely varied and manifold. To know that everything in the world is a function of the true nature is called seeing the true nature.

Therefore, Venerable Bharati concluded: “Pervadingly manifest, it encompasses worlds as numerous as grains of sand; gathered in, it is contained within a single mote of dust. Those who know recognize it as Buddha-nature; those who do not call it the vital spirit.” The first two lines describe the functioning of the true nature: great, it has no exterior; small, it has no interior; it encompasses all things.

The latter two lines mean this: those who understand know that all our functions are functions of the true nature. This is seeing the true nature, and one then receives its genuine benefit. But if you do not understand that this is seeing the true nature and instead remain attached to phenomenal appearances, you will be misled by deluded consciousness and fall among sentient beings in the six realms. If you mistake Buddha-nature for deluded consciousness, you will inevitably create karma and undergo karmic retribution, revolving through birth and death and unable to attain liberation. King Vimatirāja possessed excellent capacities. Upon hearing Venerable Bharati’s instruction, he immediately saw his true nature and realized the Way.

Today, after hearing the principles explained above, if you can awaken from them to what your intrinsic nature ultimately is, this is awakening! This is seeing the true nature! Do not think, “Oh! There is nothing especially remarkable about this—nothing mysterious or marvelous, nor have I manifested any spiritual powers—so I'm afraid this might not be it.” Such doubts only make you hesitate to acknowledge your own Buddha-nature.

Now let us discuss what spiritual powers are. Here, shen ( ) means that all things are manifestations of wondrous functioning arising from our all-capable Buddha-nature. Tong ( ) means being unobstructed and unhindered, freely pervading without impediment. When we ordinary sentient beings carry out our daily work, dress ourselves, and eat, with the mind abiding nowhere, this is spiritual power.

Conversely, when something happens and one becomes panic-stricken, anxiously concerned with gain and loss, sorrowful and distressed, suffering and uncomfortable, with obstacles everywhere—this is obstruction. If we know that all things are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, unobtainable and not to be grasped; if we know that the wondrous, luminous true mind is possessed by every sentient being; and if we simply function in accordance with conditions, wholly free of hindrance, then we receive inexhaustible benefit, and what was blocked becomes unblocked of itself.

Next, let us discuss the relationship between realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature and spiritual powers. There is a fundamental distinction between root and branch. In the course of practice, awakening and spiritual powers have an order of priority. Genuine practitioners who thoroughly understand the Buddhadharma take realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as the forerunner; only afterward can they develop spiritual powers.

For all spiritual powers are inherently possessed by Buddha-nature. They cannot manifest only because they are obscured by deeply ingrained habitual defilements. It is like sunlight obscured by dark clouds: once the clouds are dispersed, the sunlight immediately shines forth brilliantly. Only after realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature do we have the strength to eliminate our habitual tendencies.

These habitual tendencies are habits of clinging to appearances and pursuing circumstances that we have cultivated over many lives and kalpas. Moreover, because of the view of self, we insist that everything conform to our own opinions. Thus everyone has the five great evil habits of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. To eradicate at once these old habits formed over many lives and kalpas is no easy matter.

After realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one must diligently temper oneself amid circumstances and assiduously eliminate habitual tendencies. Once habitual tendencies have been entirely removed, the dark clouds disperse, luminosity naturally shines forth, and spiritual powers naturally manifest in full. Therefore, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature comes first, and the manifestation of spiritual powers comes afterward. Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the root; spiritual powers are the branches. Once the root is attained, there is no need to worry about the branches.

When one has truly seen the true nature, the root is complete. Nurture it, and branches and leaves will naturally grow, giving rise to great functioning. This is called true cultivation after awakening, nurturing the 'sacred embryo'. It has been the standard for practice since ancient times, and we must understand it clearly. If one practices without first realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, but vainly seeks spiritual powers, this reverses root and branch. Not only will such practice fail to reach completion; it also entails the danger of becoming possessed by demons.

When the Buddha was alive, an immortal with the five spiritual powers asked him, "World-Honored One, you have the six spiritual powers, while I have five. Which is the one power that I lack?" The Buddha called his name: "Immortal with the Five Spiritual Powers." He answered. The Buddha said, "That is the power you ask me about."

Here we should explain which power the immortal with the five spiritual powers lacked. It was the power of the exhaustion of outflows. What is the power of the exhaustion of outflows? An outflow is like a pot, bowl, or bottle: once it is broken, whatever it contains leaks out.

All worldly dharmas are conditioned dharmas with outflows. None endure permanently; all pass through arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing; formation, abiding, decay, and emptiness; arising and ceasing without end. "Exhaustion" means complete extinction—nothing remaining.

When discussing nirvāṇa with remainder earlier, we explained that we have two great attachments. One is attachment to self: clinging to there being a person called "I." The other is attachment to dharmas: believing that there are dharmas to attain, a path to cultivate, birth and death to transcend, and nirvāṇa to realize. Because of these two attachments, there are two kinds of birth and death. When one clings to the personal self, to there being a person called "I," there is segmented birth and death.

When one clings to the dharma-self, believing that there are dharmas to attain, there is transformational birth and death. If both attachments are completely eliminated, all afflictions disappear, and both kinds of birth and death are wholly exhausted. When "outflows" are extinguished, this is called the power of the exhaustion of outflows.

Why, then, can non-Buddhist paths not attain the power of the exhaustion of outflows? Because they do not know what Buddha-nature is and cling to dharmas, believing that there are dharmas to attain and seeking dharmas outside the mind. This is why they are called non-Buddhist paths. Since they seek dharmas outside the mind, their outflows are not exhausted, and so they cannot attain the power of the exhaustion of outflows.

Moreover, practitioners of non-Buddhist paths suppress their thoughts and forcibly enter samādhi, believing that spiritual powers can be attained only after entering samādhi. This is also their aim. Therefore, they may cultivate the five spiritual powers—the divine eye, divine ear, supernatural travel, knowledge of past lives, and knowledge of others' minds—but, because they ultimately lack the power of the exhaustion of outflows, their attainment is not final.

First, because these spiritual powers are gained through suppression, they may be lost after death in this life. Second, because of attachment to appearances, attachment to spiritual powers entails an even greater danger of becoming possessed by demons. Why is this so? We should know that Buddha and demon are not two separate things; they are two sides of one thing.

A Buddha is an awakened one who is free of every attachment, unstained by a single speck of dust, completely unattached, pure, and without attainment. The Heart Sūtra says, "Because there is nothing to attain." Therefore one can attain unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening. But non-Buddhist paths seek attainment; they seek spiritual powers. Where there is attainment, attachment to appearances is unavoidable. Therefore, this is not Buddha, but demon.

Buddha and demon are one matter. There is no Buddha apart from demon, nor demon apart from Buddha; it depends on whether you seek anything and whether there is anything to attain. Therefore, in our practice we must never cling to appearances. First transcend the personal self, then eliminate the dharma-self; nothing whatsoever can be attained. Only in this way can one completely transcend both segmented birth and death and transformational birth and death. Having attained the power of the exhaustion of outflows, the five spiritual powers will naturally all manifest. Finally, even if great spiritual powers manifest, one does not see any spiritual powers as attained; one remains without attainment. Only this is genuine realization of the Way!

III. The Fivefold Profound Meaning of the Heart Sūtra

Using the fivefold profound meaning to explain Mahāyāna sūtras was a method devised by Great Master Zhizhe of the Tiantai school. "Profound meaning" does not mean something so deep and mysterious as to be unfathomable. Rather, it draws out and elucidates, in five levels, the subtle and profound purport contained in a sūtra, making it easier for everyone to understand. Later commentators on the sūtras all took this as their model. The fivefold profound meaning consists of: explaining the name, revealing the essence, clarifying the principle, distinguishing the function, and classifying the teaching characteristics.

(I) Explaining the name: this means explaining the title of a sūtra. Every sūtra, like every person, has a name. Each name has a particular meaning. To clarify both the

literal meaning and the deeply contained import of a sūtra's title is called explaining the name. Buddhist sūtra titles fall into seven categories:

First, titles named after persons. These are named after the principal teacher of the sūtra. Examples include the Amitābha Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha and the Sūtra Spoken by Vimalakīrti. Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, and the lay practitioner Vimalakīrti are all personal names.

Second, titles named after dharmas. These take as their names the dharma characteristics taught by the Buddha, such as the Nirvāṇa Sūtra and the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra. Nirvāṇa and Mahāprajñāpāramitā are both dharmas taught by the Buddha.

Third, titles named after metaphors. These are named by metaphors that help people understand the meaning of the sūtra, such as the Brahmā Net Sūtra.

Indra's net, hanging in the palace of the great Brahmā king, is cylindrical in shape, like the banners now hung in Buddhist halls. A wish-fulfilling jewel is set in each mesh. Each jewel is bright as a mirror, reflecting the others; they interpenetrate layer upon layer without obstructing one another, majestic and noble beyond compare. Here the Brahmā net serves as a metaphor to reveal that the teachings of all Buddhas are endlessly interpenetrating, that dharmas are inexhaustible, that they adorn the dharmakāya (Dharma body), and that their light pervades everywhere without obstruction.

Fourth, titles named after both persons and dharmas. For example, the Prajñā Sūtra Spoken by the Buddha for the Benevolent Kings was spoken by the Buddha to sixteen kings, that is, human kings. The Buddha and the human kings are persons, while prajñā is a dharma; therefore, it is named after both persons and dharmas.

Fifth, titles named after dharmas and metaphors. For example, in the Heart Sūtra of Prajñāpāramitā, prajñāpāramitā is a dharma, while "heart" is a metaphor. Why is "heart" said to be a metaphor? We shall explain this in detail below.

Sixth, names based on a person and a metaphor, as in the Bodhisattva Garland Sūtra. The bodhisattva is the person, and the garland symbolizes adornment; hence it is named after a person and a metaphor.

Seventh, names based on a person, a dharma, and a metaphor, as in the Great Expansive Buddha's Flower Ornament Sūtra. Great Expansiveness is the dharma, Buddha is the person, and flower ornament is the metaphor. It compares the Buddha who realizes the principle of Great Expansiveness to one who, during the causal stage, cultivates the ten perfections and myriad practices, thereby adorning the merits of fruition.

Here, the word “great” in Great Expansiveness means greatness of essence: its intrinsic nature encompasses everything, and there is not a single thing outside it. “Expansive” and “vast” mean greatness of characteristics and function: the wondrous functioning revealed from intrinsic nature is all-pervasive and complete, lacking nothing and reaching everywhere. Since the measure of Buddha-nature equals empty space, it can contain Buddha lands as numerous as the sands of the Ganges.

That is, all Buddha lands, as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, are within Buddha-nature. We know that each Buddha land contains a three-thousand great-thousand world system. To explain this world system, one Mount Sumeru, together with one sun, one moon, and four great continents, constitutes one small world.

A thousand such small worlds are called a small thousand-world system; a thousand small thousand-world systems are called a middling thousand-world system; and a thousand middling thousand-world systems are called a great thousand-world system. Since one thousand is multiplied three times—that is, raised to the third power—it is called a three-thousand great-thousand world system. Every Buddha land is a three-thousand great-thousand world system.

The measure of the intrinsic nature that we realize through practice encompasses the Buddhas of the ten directions; Buddha lands as numerous as the sands of the Ganges are all within it. Tell me, is that not great? It truly could not be greater: this is greatness beyond which there is no outside.

Some people know only the five continents—Asia, the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Oceania—and suppose that this is the entire world, with nothing beyond it. This only shows that their mind-capacity is too small, that they see through a single tube, like frogs at the bottom of a well. In studying Buddhism, however, we must realize a mind-capacity that is vast and boundless, exhausting empty space and pervading the dharma realm.

These are the seven categories of names for Buddhist scriptures. The first three are named after a person, a dharma, or a metaphor; each contains a single element and is therefore a simple name. The latter four are named after person and dharma, dharma and metaphor, person and metaphor, or person, dharma, and metaphor; each contains multiple elements and is therefore a composite name.

(II) Revealing the essence: This means revealing the essence of the present sūtra—that is, revealing its essential Dharma teaching. Where there is a name, there must be an actuality. Just as a person who has a name also has a form that shows what kind of person he is, so this is called revealing the essence.

(III) Clarifying the principle: This means making clear the central principle of the present sūtra. Every sūtra has its purpose and central principle; to distinguish and

clarify them is called clarifying the principle.

(IV) Distinguishing its function: This means discerning the function and application of the present sūtra—what effects and benefits it has.

(V) Classifying the teaching characteristics: As we have already explained, Great Master Zhizhe classified the Buddha's teachings into five periods. Determining when the present sūtra was taught and what teaching it expounds is called classifying its teaching characteristics.

These are the contents of the fivefold profound meanings. Let us now examine the fivefold profound meanings of the Heart Sūtra.

(I) Explaining the Name:

We have already discussed how The Heart Sūtra of Prajñāpāramitā is named after a dharma and a metaphor. We shall now explain the meaning of its title in detail.

Prajñā

As explained earlier, "prajñā" is a Sanskrit word with a broad meaning and profound implications. Translating it as wisdom or great wisdom does not fully convey its meaning. Because of its unsurpassed solemnity, its Sanskrit sound has been retained. If we describe prajñā as "thoroughly comprehending worldly and supramundane dharmas, and applying them harmoniously, without obstruction, and with perfect appropriateness," we can convey at least a little of its meaning. Put simply, prajñā is wondrous wisdom, or the true mind.

Wondrous wisdom is not the worldly intelligence and cleverness ordinarily spoken of, nor is it wisdom attained through the defiled dharmas cultivated by non-Buddhist paths. Rather, it is unsurpassed wondrous wisdom containing the sacred meaning of undefiled dharmas—the true great wisdom of the universe. It is great wisdom that appears foolish, knowing without anything known; it is the wondrous functioning of the true mind and ultimate reality.

Worldly intelligence and cleverness involve something known; they discriminate, and discrimination is the worst kind of deluded mind.

Knowing without anything known does not mean being like a fool or an idiot, nor like wood or stone, indifferent to everything. It means making no discriminations and no choices. Good and bad, long and short, right and wrong are still seen with clear, ever-present knowing; yet one neither loves nor grasps what is good, and neither hates nor rejects what is bad. For good and bad are nothing but distinctions made by your deluded mind; they are all like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and

shadows, utterly unobtainable. Why then be foolishly deluded by false appearances and carried along by external circumstances? This brings to mind a story.

Long ago, a Chan master traveled about visiting teachers and practicing Chan. One day it suddenly began to rain, and he took shelter in a butcher shop nearby. Before long, a customer came in and said to the proprietor, “Cut me a jin of good meat. I want only lean meat, no fat.” The proprietor said, “Certainly! With this one cut, it will all be lean meat.”

The customer left fully satisfied. After a while, another person came and said, “Proprietor, I would like a jin of fat meat for rendering oil, not lean meat.” The proprietor said, “Fine! Here is one cut of fat meat for you.” This man also left satisfied. Then another person came and said, “Proprietor, I want a jin of streaky pork, with both fat and lean meat.”

The proprietor said, “Fine, I will cut you a good piece with equal portions of fat and lean.” This customer too left satisfied. The proprietor said, “Look! Every piece of meat here is good meat.” When the Chan master heard this, he attained great awakening on the spot. Indeed, what part of this pork could be called good, and what part bad? It was entirely the minds of the meat buyers that were making distinctions.

This discriminating mind is itself a view produced by habitual tendencies developed over many years. If you have formed the habit of liking lean meat, you dislike fat meat and therefore call lean meat good and fat meat bad. Another person is accustomed to liking fat meat, and so considers lean meat bad and fat meat good. As people often say, “Some love radishes; others love greens.”

In fact, lean and fat meat, radishes and greens—things in themselves have no distinction of good or bad. The appearance of good and bad arises entirely from deluded views formed by people’s habits and preferences. If habitual tendencies are eliminated and deluded thoughts are gone, where could good and bad remain?

Someone may say, “Even if things are neither good nor bad, surely people cannot be said to be neither good nor bad. Some people act tyrannically and commit every kind of evil; others are honest and kind to others.” Yes, human conduct does indeed have distinctions of good and bad.

In this regard, the Buddhadharma fundamentally reveals the causes and origins of the differences among people’s bodies, destinies, environments, and so forth. It explains that all sentient beings arise and cease, circulating in the stream of life within the six realms of rebirth. The reason for the inequalities among all things, and for the great disparities of suffering and happiness, poverty and wealth, is that all follow the law of cause and effect.

“If you wish to know the causes of past lives, look at what you undergo in this life.” The environment and circumstances of this life—the results you experience—arise from causes created in past lives. “If you wish to know the results of future lives, look at what you do in this life.” What you do in this life brings about the karmic retribution you will undergo in future lives.

Although the interweaving of causes and results is exceedingly complex, it follows the same principle as “plant melons and reap melons; plant beans and reap beans”: one’s own causes bring one’s own results, and one reaps the consequences of one’s own actions, with perfect appropriateness and not the slightest error. Therefore, Buddhism advises people to commit no evil and to practice all good.

Benefiting others is benefiting oneself, and harming others is truly harming oneself. We should “accord with conditions to eliminate old karma, and never create new misfortunes.” Therefore, when we encounter a bad person, we should not loathe or despise that person, but should advise and educate them, enabling them to turn from evil to good and reform themselves.

If we always harbor the view that “this person is very bad” and exclude that person entirely, how can we transform them? Buddhism is positive and uplifting, and its foundation is that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature. In other words, all sentient beings can attain Buddhahood and are equal. Yet whether realization comes sooner or later, quickly or slowly, depends upon the time and conditions. Therefore, Buddhist practitioners must have great mind-capacity, be able to accommodate all kinds of sentient beings, and attain realization themselves while helping others do the same.

Prajñā is also divided into three kinds: literary prajñā, contemplative prajñā, and prajñā of ultimate reality.

Literary prajñā: using words and language to express the essential principles of the Buddhadharma, as in the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions of the scriptures, or in expounding sūtras and teaching the Dharma. As explained earlier, Buddha-nature is formless and without appearance, and cannot be depicted. Therefore, it cannot be spoken of: once it is spoken of, it is no longer it. Hence it is said, “The way of words is cut off; the sphere of mental activity is extinguished.”

Yet if not a word were spoken, how could beginners be guided through the gate? Thus, even where there is no speaking, one cannot help but expound some principles in order to guide beginners. Literary prajñā is therefore only an expedient for indicating the Dharma.

Through understanding and reflecting on words and language, practitioners come to understand the principles of the Buddhadharma; they then undertake

contemplative practice. This is the complete process of hearing, contemplating, and cultivating in Dharma practice. It should also be explained that the teachings and principles expressed in words and language are the heart-essence of the Buddha and his disciples. They enable later students to readily penetrate the wondrous principle of ultimate reality, undertake contemplative practice, see the essence of prajñā of ultimate reality, and give rise to the function of liberating sentient beings. They are the Dharma treasure of wondrous wisdom.

Contemplative prajñā: the wisdom developed through realizing ultimate reality by means of contemplation. It is the wisdom that contemplates all conditioned and unconditioned dharmas and finds them all unobtainable. For example, the Heart Sūtra begins by introducing "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva," whose Chinese name is Guanzizai Pusa ( ). Here, guan ( ) means contemplation. It is neither seeing with the physical eyes nor the function of the lump of flesh called the heart within the chest; neither is it a function of the brain and nerves, nor is it the use of the sixth consciousness to discriminate and visualize. Rather, it is the functioning of the formless, signless nature: concentrating the power of the mind to contemplate the Dharma one is cultivating.

The Pure Land school cultivates the Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation. When reciting the sacred name "Namo Amitābha Buddha," practitioners must gather and focus their eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind upon this Buddha-name, without allowing them to wander outward. The Buddha-name arises from the mind and comes forth through the mouth; only when the ears hear it clearly can one contain deluded thoughts and peacefully enter samādhi, thereby receiving the benefits of Buddha-recitation.

This method of Buddha-recitation, in which the mouth recites and the ears hear, is the finest method of contemplative Buddha-recitation. For hearing with the ears is hearing with the mind; when the mind contemplates the Buddha-name, deluded thoughts naturally do not arise. Master Yinguang said in Notes on Feeling Out Buddha-Recitation Samādhi: "As for the method of realizing samādhi, when reciting the Buddha's name, one must turn the recitation back upon itself in contemplation, focus exclusively on one object, and not allow the mind to wander outward.

In each thought, attend to the source of mind; with each moment of mind, accord with the Buddha's essence. Turn recitation back upon one's own recitation; turn contemplation back upon one's own contemplation. Recitation itself is contemplation; contemplation itself is recitation. One must make the whole of recitation itself contemplation, with no contemplation outside recitation; and the whole of contemplation itself recitation, with no recitation outside contemplation." Only then can one realize Buddha-recitation samādhi. Therefore, the Pure Land school cannot be separated from contemplation.

Now let us speak of the Chan school. The Chan school likewise cannot be separated from contemplation. In Chan, one investigates a huatou and arouses a sense of doubt, so that one's whole body and mind are focused on the doubt of the huatou. When this sense of doubt arises, it envelops the entire body: one walks without knowing one walks, sits without knowing one sits, and one's entire body and mind congeal into this mass of doubt. The Chan school compares this to swallowing a thorny chestnut burr, which can neither be spat out nor swallowed down. At the point where deluded thoughts are utterly extinguished, one must exert one's full spirit and energy; only then will good news arrive. This too is contemplation.

Let us now speak of Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric practice involves the empowerment of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind. In the mystery of body, one sits cross-legged with the hands forming mudrās and remaining still. In the mystery of speech, one continuously recites mantras without interruption and must not speak. The mystery of mind means that all thoughts and intentions are focused upon the mantra being recited. As in the Buddha-recitation described above, the mouth recites and the mind hears; recitation itself is contemplation, and contemplation itself is recitation. This too is contemplation. Esoteric Buddhism has many practices, including visualization practices and practices for visualizing the yidam, but these will not be discussed further here.

It may be said that no Dharma can be accomplished apart from contemplation. Beginning with "literary prajñā," one comprehends the meaning and principle of the scriptures and thereby gives rise to the function of contemplation, entering into "contemplative prajñā."

As one's contemplative practice deepens, one "clearly sees that the five aggregates are all empty" and realizes "prajñā of ultimate reality." This is directly realizing the Original Face, which is what we call realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature —directly seeing Buddha-nature. Therefore, contemplation is the only path for Buddhist practitioners to realize the Way; it is the key to whether cultivation can succeed and whether one can realize the mind and see one's true nature. The Heart Sūtra takes contemplative prajñā as its principle and is therefore a guide to Buddhahood.

Prajñā of ultimate reality: this is the Original Face of sentient beings and the dharmakāya (Dharma body) of the Tathāgata. It is also called the wondrously luminous true mind, Buddha-nature, dharma-nature, suchness (tathatā), nirvāṇa, the great ocean of perfect enlightenment, bodhi, and so forth. All appearances whatsoever are false and illusory; only this is true. It is the genuinely real, naturally authentic Buddha.

All of us, indeed all sentient beings, have possessed this from beginningless kalpas. Each and every one possesses it equally and completely: neither increasing nor decreasing, neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, eternally unchanging from ancient times to the present. This is the formless, signless nature, also called self-nature, dharma-nature, or Buddha-nature.

Then what is the mind of which we ordinarily speak? It is a kind of sensation illusorily produced when our faculties encounter their objects. When we discuss suffering, its origin, cessation, and the path below, we shall understand that the origin is the illusory mind produced through the coming together of faculties and objects. It is a shadow; it is unreal.

It is a reflection of the objective environment. When our six faculties—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—encounter their corresponding six objects—forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas—they give rise to eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mental consciousness. When the six faculties, six objects, and six consciousnesses come together, thoughts and ideas arise.

If there were no objective environment, there would be no mind at all. Therefore, mind does not exist separately and independently. Buddha Viśvabhū said, “The mind is originally unborn; it exists because of objects.” This expresses the same principle. Thus, the objective environment and external circumstances are the external causes for the arising of mind. What, then, is the internal cause? It is nature.

Nature is the root from which mind arises, the energy that gives rise to mind, and the source of mind. Without nature, the mind cannot arise in response to objects. It is like electricity: although it cannot be seen with the eyes, all illumination, motive power, and so forth function through it.

As we have already explained, the reason the eyes can see, the ears can hear, the nose can smell, the tongue can taste, the body can touch, and the mind can think is entirely the functioning of nature. The nature of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and so forth each possesses various capacities and can exercise various functions. Thus, mind arises from nature and only then can serve its purpose.

Nature is the essence, and mind is the function; nature is principle, and mind is phenomena. Nature truly and eternally abides, yet it is formless and signless; the scriptures sometimes also call it the “true mind.” Mind is illusory, yet it has forms and appearances. Sentient beings are often deluded by all kinds of false, composite appearances. Taking the false to be true, they cling to and pursue them without cease. Thus they are bound by all kinds of afflictions of ignorance, obscured by all kinds of karmic obstacles, unable to see the luminosity of their own nature, and

deprived of freedom. They fall into the cycle of rebirth in the six realms, revolving through birth and death without attaining liberation.

If everyone understands what nature is, what mind is, and what precisely their relationship is, then they will understand that both mind and things are illusory and unobtainable. They will therefore relinquish body, mind, and world, no longer pursuing or clinging to them. This is realizing the mind. As for seeing one's true nature: though nature is inherently present, it is formless, signless, soundless, and odorless. It cannot be heard by the ears or seen by the eyes; it cannot be known by knowing or cognized by consciousness. It can only be illumined by wisdom, wondrously contemplated, understood, and directly apprehended.

This shows that seeing one's true nature does not mean looking with the eyes, thinking with the brain, or, still less, discriminating and conjecturing with the sixth consciousness. Rather, it is the dharma eye of the mind-ground: intimate, profound experience and direct spiritual apprehension. The ancient worthies said, "The essence has no form or appearance; without function, it does not manifest. Nature has no shape or features; without mind, it is not made clear."

This means that to see one's true nature, one must begin with realizing the mind; apart from mind, there is no nature to be seen. Now that you understand that all our ordinary functions are functions of nature, and from this awaken to what nature ultimately is, with deep and unwavering faith, this is seeing one's true nature! This is awakening!

At the same time, what has been said above also shows that although mind is illusory and unreal, it is nevertheless extremely important. The statement, "The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only," fully demonstrates this.

The reason we human beings can move about, work, interact with others, create, invent, and so forth is entirely the functioning of nature, which accomplishes things through mind amid phenomena. If we are to study science and produce material wealth, enabling humanity's standard of living, science and technology, and social civilization continually to advance, we cannot do without the various thoughts and ideas that reflect the objective environment. That is, we cannot do without the deluded mind. Therefore, human affairs must not be abandoned. We should use this deluded mind to accomplish all worldly undertakings.

Worldly dharmas are so, and the Buddhadharma is so as well. The mind governs accomplishment in every school and every Dharma practice. The ten dharma realms comprise four noble realms and six ordinary realms. The four noble ones are Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and arhats; the six ordinary ones are devas, humans, asuras, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. All are

accomplished through this mind. To use it well is to become a Buddha; to use it poorly is to revolve in the six realms. If we study Buddhism and realize the Way, we must use this deluded mind well in order to attain realization.

The Prajñā Sūtras take the true mind as primary. The true mind is possessed by practitioners of the two vehicles and by bodhisattvas of the Tripiṭaka teaching. What are bodhisattvas of the Tripiṭaka teaching? Master Zhizhe of the Tiantai school classified the Buddha's teachings into four kinds: Tripiṭaka, Shared, Distinct, and Perfect teachings. Mahāyāna bodhisattvas who have just begun to practice are bodhisattvas of the Tripiṭaka teaching; at a further stage they are bodhisattvas of the Shared teaching; further still, bodhisattvas of the Distinct teaching; and the most complete are bodhisattvas of the Perfect teaching, ultimately culminating in the Buddha-mind.

Ordinary beings, by contrast, take the deluded mind as primary; the deluded mind is what ordinary beings possess. Thought after thought, they wander about, cling to external objects, have endless desires, and grasp without cease. Day and night, they are immersed in sorrow, suffering, and afflictions, creating karma and undergoing karmic retribution.

In fact, even while we revolve through the six realms and the cycle of birth and death, this true mind has never been separated from us by even an inch. It constantly shines before our very faces, but people do not know this. Wrapped in the shell of ignorance, they suffer pain and hardship in vain. Now, if we are to emerge from the cycle of rebirth in the six realms and realize Buddhahood, we must not only awaken in principle to the meanings explained above; in our ordinary daily lives and work, we must also know how to cultivate, undertake mind-ground practice, and exhaust the old habitual tendencies of clinging to situations and objects.

We must all be clear-headed and understand: the true mind is the master, and the deluded mind is the servant. The master employs the servant to do many things and accomplish undertakings.

Therefore, whenever we do anything in daily life, we must firmly grasp the relationship between master and servant. At every moment, we must recognize this master, recognize this true mind. Do not take the servant for the master and allow yourself to be used by the servant.

That is to say, whenever you do anything, do not let the mind become inverted. Do not cling to the external environment; do not be shaken by changes in external circumstances and allow thought after thought to wander outward. When you encounter good things, favorable circumstances, or compatible people, you rejoice in them, love them, and grasp after them. When you encounter bad things, adverse

circumstances, or incompatible people, you worry over them, hate them, and cast them aside.

This is mistaking the true for the false, clinging to the false as true, and reversing master and servant: the master is held in check by the servant. We must function in accordance with conditions. While at work, thoughts may move, but do not become attached to appearances; let the mind abide nowhere, as though someone else were doing the work. After it is done, it is as though nothing had been done. Only then does the true mind truly become the master.

To reach the state in which the true mind is the master, we must ordinarily cultivate contemplation of the mind-ground: at every moment observe this mind, transform this mind, and transform the deluded mind into the true mind. The Buddha's eighty-four thousand Dharma gates all cultivate this mind; all involve effort on the mind-ground. For example, the Pure Land school uses a single Buddha-name to transform our minds.

Those who do not understand think that Buddha-recitation in the Pure Land school means praying to a Buddha in the West to draw us there. They do not realize that Buddha-recitation uses the Buddha's name to awaken us from our deluded dream, purify our mind-ground, bring us into accord with the Pure Land, and thereby enable rebirth in the West. Master Lianchi explained this very clearly: Buddha-recitation is "each sound awakening the master."

Who is this master? It is our true mind. Since people cannot be without thoughts, the mind is constantly moving, ceaselessly turning with circumstances and objects; thus birth and death cannot be brought to an end. To transcend birth and death, we must transform it so that it does not move delusively. Therefore Śākyamuni Buddha taught us a skillful method: using Buddha-recitation to transform it.

Since the mind cannot serve two purposes at once, when one single-mindedly recites the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, one does not dwell on the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. When one attends to purity, one does not attend to defilement. Buddha-recitation begins at the point nearest to birth and death—within the mind—and transforms our deluded thoughts. What an ingenious, swift, and simple method this is!

The Chan school is likewise. In practicing Chan, one must arouse a sense of doubt. Investigate a huatou: once the sense of doubt arises, deluded thoughts no longer arise, for they are cut off by the sense of doubt. Only when not a single thought arises can one be in accord, open up the original nature, and clearly see Buddha-nature. If the sense of doubt does not arise and deluded thoughts keep moving without cease, one cannot awaken. Thus the Chan school, too, transforms this deluded mind.

Esoteric Buddhism is the same. Esoteric Buddhism involves the empowerment of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind. One orally upholds secret mantras; mantras are the secret language of all Buddhas, like a military password or command. When mantra recitation is in accord, no sense of self or other remains, and one's own body is itself Buddha. One forms mudrās with the hands. Mudrās are the mind-seals of all Buddhas; like a television antenna, they enable communication between our minds and the minds of all Buddhas.

Once a mudrā is formed, one receives the empowerment of inexhaustible Buddha-power, which can transform all the seeds of birth and death, rebirth, and even the evil realms, stored in the field of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) throughout measureless kalpas, into pure seeds. In this way, the deluded mind is transformed into the true mind. This is the empowerment of Buddha-power. The reason Esoteric Buddhism can be cultivated somewhat more quickly than other traditions is that it possesses the extraordinary empowerment of Buddha-power. For example, to reach a distant destination, traveling by automobile, train, or even airplane is far faster than walking there on one's own two feet.

In sum, every school and every Dharma gate within Buddhism is inseparable from transforming this mind—turning the deluded mind into the true mind—which is the practice of contemplation of the mind-ground. We have just spoken of this, and now speak of it again, emphasizing it repeatedly because it is very important. Constantly observe this mind. The moment a deluded thought arises, sharply awaken and turn it around; when the deluded mind comes to rest, that is bodhi.

In this way, we can return from delusion to truth and return to the source. Thus, the essential meaning of the Heart Sūtra is to enable us to understand what nature is and what mind is, so that we may directly realize the mind, see our true nature, and directly realize bodhi here and now. Therefore, the Heart Sūtra is a Dharma gate for attaining Buddhahood through sudden awakening. If we truly understand the Heart Sūtra and can genuinely practice in accordance with the principles it expounds, it is equivalent to upholding the entire Tripiṭaka and its twelve divisions of teachings.

Pāramitā

"Pāramitā" is a Sanskrit term transliterated into Chinese as boluomiduo ( ). Here, boluo ( ) is explained as "the other shore," mi ( ) as "to reach," and duo ( ) as "upon." Taken together, it means reaching the other shore. This is a metaphor: all sentient beings are troubled upon this shore of the bitter sea of birth and death, revolving through birth and death and suffering beyond endurance.

To cross the bitter sea of birth and death and realize the great Way, we must arouse the resolve to cultivate practice. This is called "entering the stream," the first-fruit arhat. Pratyekabuddhas arouse the resolve to practice the Dharma and to liberate

and bring themselves to completion; they too board the Dharma boat. As their practice advances diligently, they reach the “midstream,” the middle of the sea. With still greater diligence in practice, they reach the other shore; this is pāramitā. Yet reaching the other shore is not ultimate, for they still remain attached to the Dharma boat. Only by abandoning the Dharma boat and going ashore, reaching the shore beyond the other shore, is it ultimate.

To reach the shore beyond the other shore, we must rely on prajñā. We must use unsurpassed wondrous wisdom to illuminate and break through ignorance, our deluded thinking, and all worldly dharmas, supramundane dharmas, conditioned dharmas, and unconditioned dharmas. Only when all are found to be unobtainable can we leave the bitter sea of birth and death and reach the shore beyond the other shore. Otherwise, we have only entered the stream or reached the midstream.

Arhats and pratyekabuddhas have not yet eliminated attachment to dharmas. They remain on the Dharma boat and have not reached the shore beyond the other shore. The nirvāṇa they realize is nirvāṇa with remainder and is still not ultimate.

Only when one thoroughly understands worldly and supramundane dharmas, handles all affairs with perfect harmony, unobstructed ease, and exact appropriateness, free from bias, exhausts the two attachments to self and dharmas, and is liberated from the two forms of birth-and-death—segmented and transformational—can one be said to have reached the shore beyond the bitter sea of birth and death. Therefore, “pāramitā” may also be translated as “ultimate thorough realization”: one can carry out all deeds of self-cultivation and liberating others, and by means of this great practice cross from this shore of birth and death to the other shore of nirvāṇa.

Heart

When explaining prajñā, we already said that prajñā is the true mind. Why, then, does the Chinese character xin ( ), meaning “heart” or “mind,” appear after prajñā? Is this not like putting another head atop one’s head, an unnecessary redundancy? In fact, it is not, because the meanings of these two hearts are fundamentally different. The prajñā-heart refers to the formless, wondrously luminous true mind inherently possessed by all sentient beings.

Here, however, xin ( ), “heart,” is used as a metaphor for the status and importance of the Heart Sūtra within the Buddhadharma. Among the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna teachings of Buddhism, the Mahāyāna is ultimate and central.

As explained earlier, although the Hīnayāna teachings transcend the three realms, cut off the delusions of views and thought, and bring segmented birth and death to an end, attachment to dharmas is ultimately not eliminated. Thus transformational

birth and death has not ended, and the nirvāṇa realized is nirvāṇa with remainder, which is not ultimate; therefore, it is not “pāramitā.”

Only the Mahāyāna teachings also eliminate attachment to dharmas, bring the two forms of birth-and-death—segmented and transformational—to an end, cultivate the supernormal power of the exhaustion of outflows, realize nirvāṇa without remainder, and ultimately take Buddhahood as their culmination. This is “pāramitā.”

The Buddhadharma takes the Mahāyāna teachings as its center; the Mahāyāna teachings in turn take the Prajñā Dharma gate, the Great Prajñā Sūtra, as their center; and the Heart Sūtra is the core of all prajñā teachings and the main body of the Great Prajñā Sūtra.

The Great Prajñā Sūtra comprises six hundred fascicles, whereas the Heart Sūtra contains only 260 characters. Yet the concise and comprehensive Heart Sūtra is indeed the essence and soul of the Great Prajñā Sūtra, the very core of all prajñā teachings. Thus, “heart” is used here as a metaphor for the Heart Sūtra’s central position and central function within the Buddhadharma.

Because the heart is the most important and principal organ of the human body, its ruler, and located at the body’s center, “heart” is used as a metaphor for this sūtra as the main body and center of the Great Prajñā Sūtra, of all prajñā Dharma gates, of all mind-ground Dharma gates, and even of the entire Buddhadharma. It may be called the heart of the heart: the Heart Sūtra is the core of the core of the Buddhadharma. In our Esoteric Buddhism, there is also the Heart-of-Heart Dharma; this is precisely its meaning. There is no appearance to grasp; one sees one’s true nature directly.

Speaking of mind, it may seem that there is a distinction between true mind and deluded mind. Yet the deluded mind is precisely the true mind, and the true mind is precisely the deluded mind. Delusion arises from truth; without truth, delusion could not arise. It is like water and waves: without water, how could waves arise? Are waves not water? Therefore, the wholly true is deluded, and the wholly deluded is true.

When we cultivate practice to the point that inwardly body and mind, and outwardly the world, all dissolve into emptiness together, where can any trace of true or deluded remain? The countless phenomena are all my own body; grasses, trees, and forests are none other than my own mind. To seek a single thing outside the body is utterly impossible. Therefore, after seeing one’s true nature and realizing the Way, all deluded thoughts, imaginings, and states of mind become the wondrous functioning of the true mind.

The word “heart” here cannot be understood either as the deluded mind of ordinary beings or as the true mind. It is the very marrow of the true mind, the mind beyond true and deluded. Only by calling it the heart of the Heart-of-Heart can one accord with it to some small degree.

Sūtra

The Chinese term jing ( ) translates the Sanskrit sūtra. The choice of jing accords with the Chinese idea of “correspondence.” What does “correspondence” mean? It means being suited to capacities and in accord with principle. Being suited to capacities means meeting the capacities of sentient beings.

The Buddha teaches Dharma in response to the capacities of sentient beings: Mahāyāna teachings to those of great capacity, and Hīnayāna teachings to those of middling or lesser capacity. In accordance with the differing faculties and conditions of sentient beings, he skillfully prescribes medicine for their illnesses. Corresponding to principle means corresponding to the principle by which all Buddhas realize the Way and liberate sentient beings. The Buddha speaks to the utmost in accordance with intrinsic nature; the doctrines and principles he teaches accord with the intention of all Buddhas to liberate sentient beings.

That is to say, the Dharma taught by the present Buddha is the same as that taught by the Buddhas of the past. For example, the Lotus Sūtra says that whenever any Buddha appears in the world, that Buddha teaches the Lotus Sūtra. Thus, a sūtra corresponds above to the principles of all Buddhas and below to the capacities of sentient beings.

Jing ( ) also has the meaning of a road: a road by which ordinary beings become Buddhas, an indispensable path and a direct route for cultivating the Way. Once we comprehend and understand the principles taught by the Buddha, and can act and practice in accordance with them, we can realize the Way and become Buddhas.

Jing ( ) is also explained as “threading together”: it links the principles taught before and after. What was taught earlier and later—even across the Buddha’s teachings of the five periods, from the Avataṃsaka period to the Lotus and Nirvāṇa periods—forms a continuous whole. It also carries the meaning of carrying through: from ordinary being to Buddhahood, one proceeds through the teachings and principles expounded by the Buddha.

Jing ( ) is also explained as thread or cord. Thread signifies an unbroken continuity; cord signifies links joined one to another without interruption. This has two meanings. First, the Buddhist sūtras consist of passages and sentences in which the Buddha expounded the Dharma to sentient beings in accordance with their capacities; later, his disciples compiled them into texts and volumes, like maṇi jewels

strung together on a thread or cord. Second, although the Buddha entered parinirvāṇa more than two thousand years ago, the Buddhadharma has been transmitted from generation to generation through the continued transmission of the sūtras.

Jing ( ) also has the meanings of canon and norm. There are canons to rely upon and norms to follow; hence they are generally called classics and canons. The term refers to standards, rules, and norms for thought and conduct. In China, the books of sages are generally called jing, or classics, such as the Dao De Jing and the Book of Changes.

The Buddha is supreme among sages; therefore, all the teachings spoken by the Buddha bear the common Chinese designation jing ( ), rendered here as "sūtra." This is the generic name of Buddhist sūtras. "Generic" means shared in common. The Diamond Sūtra, Avataṃsaka Sūtra, Lotus Sūtra of the Wonderful Dharma, and Nirvāṇa Sūtra, for example, all contain the word "sūtra," which is their generic designation. The name preceding "sūtra," such as Diamond, Avataṃsaka, Wonderful Dharma Lotus, or Nirvāṇa, is the distinctive name that differentiates one sūtra from another. Every Buddhist sūtra has both a generic name and a distinctive name.

To sum up, in speaking the Heart Sūtra, the Buddha intends us sentient beings to understand that we inherently possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous qualities, the wondrous wisdom of contemplative prajñā, and the vast, complete, wondrously luminous true mind of reality as it is—signless in its true aspect. We must no longer remain deluded and seek the Dharma outside the mind. We must turn back from the mistaken path and honestly undertake the work of contemplating the mind-ground in accordance with the principles of the Heart Sūtra. This alone is the correct path for studying Buddhism and realizing the Way.

(II) Revealing the Essence

To reveal the essence is to disclose the most important principle underlying a sūtra. For example, if we wish to know and understand a person, we must first learn that person's name. We must then know what kind of person this actually is: male or female, old or young. Once we meet the person or see a photograph, it becomes clear at a glance.

What does this Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sūtra take as its essence? From "Śāriputra, all dharmas are marked by emptiness" through "no wisdom and no attainment," the sūtra sets forth passages that reveal the essence of the Prajñāpāramitā Heart Sūtra. In brief, this sūtra takes "all dharmas are marked by emptiness" as its essence. All dharmas refers to all things in the universe; "Marked by emptiness" means that they are devoid of intrinsic nature and cannot be grasped. This means that only the nature of mind is real, while the nature of mind is pure and undefiled, establishes

not a single dharma, and has no mark that can be obtained. We shall explain this in detail below.

(III) Clarifying the Principle

Clarifying the principle means discerning the central principle of this sūtra. Every sūtra has its own central principle. The Heart Sūtra says: “Because there is nothing to attain, bodhisattvas, relying on prajñāpāramitā, have no hindrances in the mind. Because there are no hindrances, there is no fear. Far removed from inverted views and deluded imaginings, they ultimately attain nirvāṇa.

All Buddhas of the three times, relying on prajñāpāramitā, attain unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening.” Therefore, the Heart Sūtra takes “no attainment” as its central principle. “No attainment” is not only the central principle of the Heart Sūtra; it is the central principle of Buddhism as a whole. It is precisely for this reason that Buddhism is the most thorough and ultimate teaching.

Buddhism establishes not a single dharma: there is no dharma to be obtained. Dharmas cannot be obtained, and neither can mind; there is nothing whatsoever to obtain—utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. If even the slightest thing remains, it is not ultimate. For this signless true aspect cannot admit the existence of even the tiniest thing.

It is like our eyes: they cannot tolerate anything, however minute, for otherwise they feel extremely uncomfortable. Even a speck of gold or a grain of diamond—however fine or precious it may be—cannot be tolerated in the eye and must be expelled.

If we are truly to realize this Buddha-nature that neither arises nor ceases, is neither defiled nor pure, neither comes nor goes, and neither increases nor decreases, we must let go of everything. Only with no attainment and nothing realized do we accord with the wondrous essence. Moreover, only no attainment is truly great attainment. When the mind is purified and thoroughly emptied, true nature can reveal itself and manifest its vast wondrous functioning. Therefore it is said that the Buddha’s power is boundless and its wondrous functioning inexhaustible. Conversely, if there is attainment, true nature is obscured by dark clouds and cannot manifest spiritual powers and wondrous functioning.

Attainment and no attainment are precisely the fundamental distinction between non-Buddhist paths and Buddhism. Buddhism has nothing whatsoever to attain; it does not seek dharmas outside the mind. There is no practice, no attainment, no realization, and not a single dharma is established. Non-Buddhist paths have dharmas to cultivate and spiritual powers to attain; they seek dharmas outside the mind and therefore are ultimately not complete. For example, Daoism takes the

emergence of the yang spirit as attainment. Since there is a yang spirit to attain—something substantial—it is ultimately not complete.

In the past, after Patriarch Lü Chunyang had attained success in Daoist cultivation, he traveled in all directions. Once, when he came to Mount Huanglong, he saw purple clouds forming a canopy over its summit. This was auspicious radiance, invisible to ordinary people and visible only to cultivators. Knowing that there was an accomplished adept on the mountain, he went up to pay a visit. There he saw a monastery.

At that time, the monastic serving as cantor was offering incense and inviting Patriarch Huanglong to come forth and teach the Dharma. Lü Chunyang hurried into the hall.

After Patriarch Huanglong ascended the Dharma seat, he sternly declared, “Beside the seat is one who steals the Dharma!” On hearing this, Lü Chunyang thought, “Oh! He is speaking of me. You are all monks, while I alone am a Daoist. I had come merely to hear what you had to say, but since you call me a thief of the Dharma, I need not stand on ceremony. Let us see how we measure up against each other.”

Because Lü Chunyang had already realized the yang spirit, which in Daoism was regarded as the highest state, his great skill gave him great boldness. He resolutely stepped out from among the monastics and asked, “Within a single grain of millet, a world is concealed; within a half-sheng pot, mountains and rivers are boiled.

What do you make of this?” Here, su ( ) refers to grain: a single grain is so small, while the world is so vast—how could it be contained within it? A cheng is a cooking pot that can hold only half a sheng of rice; it cannot even cook a full sheng, so how could mountains and great rivers be placed in it and boiled? Because Daoism emphasizes spiritual powers and transformations, he could enlarge a grain of rice to encompass the world, or shrink mountains and waters, enlarge the pot, and boil mountains and rivers in it. Lü Chunyang used this verse to test Patriarch Huanglong.

When the Patriarch heard this, he knew that Lü Chunyang had not yet realized the root, but had instead fallen into the peripheral matter of spiritual powers and remained deluded. Pointing at Lü Chunyang, he said, “This ghost guarding a corpse!” Lü Chunyang burst into laughter and replied, “Yet there is an elixir of immortality in my bag!” This statement has two meanings.

First, Daoists refine an external elixir: they gather medicinal substances, including cinnabar, set up a furnace and crucible, and refine an external elixir. By consuming it, they may attain longevity and preserve the physical body from decay. “In my bag” literally means inside one’s pouch.

The other meaning concerns accomplishment in the internal elixir. They refine essence, qi, and spirit; gather the great medicine and refine it into the great elixir, the so-called golden elixir; then transform it into an infant, the indestructible yang spirit. This “bag” is the foul skin-bag—that is, our physical body. Lü Chunyang believed that, having accomplished the yang spirit, he possessed an indestructible vajra body and was no longer a ghost guarding a corpse. Yet he did not know that the yang spirit is not ultimate.

What is the yang spirit? It is what Buddhism calls the mind-born body, a body produced by manas consciousness. It is still an illusory consciousness-spirit.

The six sense faculties of ordinary beings—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—constantly engage with the six external sense objects of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas, giving rise to the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. The afflictions of these five aggregates cover over manas consciousness, depriving it of freedom and preventing it from emerging. The more afflictions there are, the more deeply it is pressed down and tightly sealed. This manas consciousness is the basis of both defilement and purity.

This means that when you are defiled, it follows your defilement; when you are pure, it follows your purity. When the first six faculties are defiled by the six external sense objects and become attached to marks, the afflictions of the five aggregates arise in profusion and discrimination operates, so manas consciousness cannot be free or pure.

If we can awaken to the fact that all things are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—illusory and unobtainable—then, in letting go once, we let go of everything. When we are empty, pure, and undefiled, and all the pollution covering manas consciousness has been eliminated, manas consciousness gains freedom. Even if you do not want it to emerge, it will emerge naturally of itself.

But Daoism does not understand this fundamental principle. By means of forced visualization, it produces this mentally created yang spirit in samādhi; therefore, it is not ultimate. The Diamond Sūtra says, “All appearances are illusory.” Whatever has an appearance must arise and must cease; whatever is formed must decay. It can never remain forever indestructible. This is most dialectical.

Therefore, pointing at Patriarch Lü Chunyang, Patriarch Huanglong said, “Even if you endure for eighty thousand kalpas, you will ultimately fall into emptiness and perish.” This means that even if you live far longer than ordinary people, even for eighty thousand great kalpas, you will eventually be destroyed; it is impossible to remain forever indestructible.

For you have not yet seen the essence of the yang spirit—Buddha-nature—and are still manipulating the consciousness-spirit. Chan Master Xuansha said, “Those who cultivate the Way do not recognize the true, for they have always recognized only the consciousness-spirit. It is the root of birth and death throughout beginningless kalpas; foolish people call it the original person!” This “true” refers to Buddha-nature.

This means that cultivators have not seen their own root, have not seen intrinsic nature, this all-capable essence, but instead become attached to minor spiritual powers and manipulate the consciousness-spirit. Mistakenly believing that they have attained the root, they enter a wrong path and cannot transcend birth and death. As we explained earlier, intrinsic nature is likened to water, while the consciousness-spirit is likened to waves arising on water. Water is the root; waves are the branches.

Cultivators do not recognize the wet nature of water, but know only the movement of its waves. That is, they know the waves but not the water from which the waves arise; therefore, they are mistaken.

When Patriarch Chunyang heard this, he was deeply displeased: “How can it be that I still fall into emptiness and oblivion? I have clearly attained the yang-spirit and achieved an indestructible vajra body. How can you still say that I fall into emptiness and oblivion?” Patriarch Chunyang carried a precious sword on his back. Suddenly he drew it, and his flying sword struck at Huanglong.

Patriarch Huanglong burst into laughter. Casually picking up the whisk from the Buddha altar, he gave it a light flick: “Smack!” The sword fell to the ground. What does this mean? In Chinese, jian ( ), “sword,” and jian ( ), “view,” are homophones, signifying the falling of views. That is, Patriarch Chunyang’s views had been defeated. Patriarch Chunyang quickly withdrew, bowed in reverence to Patriarch Huanglong, and requested his instruction.

Patriarch Huanglong saw that his haughty manner had finally changed, and that he was now able to humble himself and let go. He therefore responded to his question with another question: “Leaving aside ‘Within a half-sheng pot, mountains and rivers are boiled,’ what is meant by ‘Within a single grain of millet, a world is concealed’?” At this prompting, Patriarch Chunyang awakened immediately.

Formerly, what Patriarch Chunyang had persistently sought in cultivating the Way was spiritual powers and the emergence of the yang-spirit. Now, after his “view had fallen” and his mind had become empty, he heard Patriarch Huanglong’s instruction and realized: all dharmas are unobtainable; all are manifestations of the formless nature and functions of that nature. Only nature is real; all else is false. Only then did Patriarch Chunyang truly realize the Way. He therefore composed this verse: “I cast aside the gourd and smash the qin; now I no longer crave the gold within

mercury. Since seeing Huanglong, I have at last realized that I formerly misused my mind."

Practitioners of the Way must know that nature is neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going; it is eternal. Its essence is neither great nor small, neither square nor round, neither long nor short, yet it can be great or small, square or round, long or short.

"Great, it has nothing outside it; small, it has nothing within it." "Released, it fills the six directions; withdrawn, it conceals itself in secrecy." Its transformations are unfathomable, and its wondrous functioning is boundless. The small is great, and the great is small; one is many, and many are one. Nothing else can compare with it.

The Lotus Sūtra says: "There is only the One Vehicle Dharma; there is neither a second nor a third." Nothing else is real; only this nature is real. A single hair-tip can turn the great Dharma wheel. Patriarch Chunyang realized that this nature is empty in its very essence.

Because it is empty, there is neither great nor small. How could the entire world not be contained within it? The world spoken of here does not refer merely to the major continents of this earth, but a great trichiliocosm—to the immeasurable and boundless worlds we discussed earlier.

"All is created by mind"; "the three realms are mind-only." Everything is within our mind, not outside it. Thus it is said: "Within a single grain of millet, a world is concealed." Once Patriarch Chunyang had been prompted by Patriarch Huanglong, how could he fail to see the true nature that he had inherently possessed? How could he fail to awaken?

As we have already explained, all Buddhist Dharma gates involve work upon the mind-ground; all begin with regulating the mind. The Pure Land school's method of Buddha-recitation uses the Buddha's name to hold the mind, so that the mind does not cling to appearances and enters emptiness and purity. The Chan school investigates the huatou and arouses a sense of doubt, cutting off the deluded mind so that it naturally becomes empty and pure.

The practices of Esoteric Buddhism use the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind to correspond with Buddhas and bodhisattvas and thereby transform the mind. All turn defilement into purity and delusion into truth, until the mind-ground becomes truly empty and pure. Then one naturally realizes the formless true reality and gains great freedom and great benefit. In our practice, we must understand this principle: see through and let go of worldly affairs, for nothing can be obtained.

Let go of everything, realize the original mind, and awaken to the Way. Going a step further, temper yourself amid circumstances, completely eliminate clinging and habitual tendencies, break through attachment to dharmas, and realize the “nostrils facing upward”; only then is the ultimate attained. If you cling to there being a dharma to practice or a fruition to attain, then there is neither freedom nor ultimate realization. Whatever is attained becomes a fetter; instead of freedom, one cannot obtain the real thing.

Moreover, having something to attain easily leads one into demonic states. Not only will one fail to realize the Way; one may instead enter demonic states. Therefore, “no attainment” is not only the central principle of the Heart Sūtra, but also the central principle of Buddhism as a whole.

(IV) Discerning Function

Discerning function means distinguishing the function and use of Buddhist scriptures. Every sūtra has its function. What, then, is the function of the Heart Sūtra? According to the doctrinal schools, it destroys the three obstacles: retribution obstacles, karmic obstacles, and afflictive obstacles. All the calamities and hardships we undergo in this life, and all the various forms of ignorance and affliction in our minds, are brought about by these three obstacles. Only by destroying the three obstacles can we cross over all suffering and adversity. Let us now explain these three obstacles in detail.

Retribution obstacles are further divided into two kinds: primary retribution and dependent retribution. What is primary retribution? It refers to our bodies. Human bodies may appear generally similar, all having heads, arms, legs, and so forth, but their features, physical forms, and bodily constitutions differ greatly.

Some have regular and attractive features and enjoy health and long life; others have ugly and unattractive features and are beset by illness. Some even die young, passing away before middle age, in youth or childhood. Why are there such differences? As we explained before: “If you wish to know the causes of past lives, look at what you receive in this life.”

The circumstances of this life and this body of karmic retribution are precisely the present fruits brought about by karma created in past lives. They are like a mirror: by looking at the karmic-retribution body of this life, one can know what causes were created in the past. If we did many good deeds in past lives, we receive in this life a healthy body, pleasing features, and a long lifespan. Conversely, if we committed evil deeds in past lives, then in this life our features will be ugly, our bodies weak, and our lives short.

What is dependent retribution? It is our living environment—clothing, food, housing, transportation, and the like—the conditions required for this body to live. Some live in comfortable and beautiful homes, with abundant clothing and food and convenient transportation; others live in crowded and crude dwellings, lack adequate clothing and food, and may even have clothes that do not cover their bodies and roofs that do not keep out the rain, suffering from hunger and cold.

Why are there such vast differences? These too are caused by the causes we created in past lives. Both primary and dependent retribution are karmic results received in accordance with causes created in past lives. Some people say, “Oh, my fate is so bitter! I shall always have this wretched fate.”

That is wrong. Cause and effect are not fixed and unchanging; they are changing at every moment. Causes bring about results, results create further causes, and causes again bring about results. Causes and results continue in an endless cycle; they are not fixed and immutable. The suffering and hardship we undergo in this life arise because the causes created in past lives were not good.

If in this life we create more good causes, do more good deeds, and perform more wholesome actions, cause and effect will change. Unwholesome results will be transformed; when circumstances turn favorable, we suffer less, and our living conditions and physical health will gradually change from bad to good. Conversely, if good causes were created in past lives, one’s blessings in this life will be great.

But if one does no good deeds, loafs about, lives idly until one’s resources are exhausted, or even commits evil deeds, then those blessings will diminish. Once one has exhausted one’s blessings, misfortunes will follow one after another. Therefore, when enjoying blessings in this life, one should cherish them, continue to create good causes, and do wholesome deeds and good deeds, so that one’s blessings may endure.

Next, let us discuss karmic obstacles. What are karmic obstacles? They are obstacles encountered in all the undertakings we pursue. Everyone, in any undertaking, inevitably encounters difficulties, resistance, and setbacks of one kind or another. Everyone living in society, including monastics, must do things.

Monastics must cultivate the Way, support the Way, propagate the Dharma, and benefit living beings. Lay practitioners must work. Thus, whatever you do, so long as it benefits the public, you should do it wholeheartedly and diligently, striving to handle it well and bring it to completion. This is goodness.

Conversely, if one handles matters perfunctorily and carelessly, fails to do them well, makes mistakes, or even acts to harm others for one’s own benefit, that is evil. Those in the human realm have done both good and evil deeds in past lives; good

and evil are mixed together. Because they possess all of greed, anger, and ignorance, though in lesser measure, their causes contain both good and evil. Thus, when they handle affairs, they inevitably encounter thorny problems. These are karmic obstacles.

Let us briefly explain the six realms of rebirth.

If greed, anger, and ignorance are all present in great measure—if one is insatiably greedy, resents others for having what one lacks, resents others when one is inferior to them, becomes enraged whenever things do not go as one wishes, and is deeply steeped in greed, anger, and ignorance—one falls into hell. If anger and ignorance are less, but greed is very strong, one enters the hungry-ghost realm, where the fire of greed spurts from the mouth and one cannot eat. If greed and anger are less, but ignorance is severe, one enters the animal realm. If greed and ignorance are less, but hatred is strong and one loves contention and fighting, one enters the asura realm. If one has only a small measure of greed but a great measure of goodness, one ascends to the deva realm.

Therefore, if we are to free ourselves from the continual birth-and-death of the six realms of rebirth, we must cultivate and extinguish the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. Then, in whatever we do and whatever circumstances we encounter, principle and phenomena will harmonize perfectly and without obstruction.

The third obstacle is the obstacle of afflictions. Because the preceding obstacles of retribution and karma exist, people inevitably encounter things that are unsatisfactory or do not go as they wish in conducting themselves and dealing with the world. Once they cannot have things as they wish, deluded thoughts fly about, wild thoughts arise, afflictions multiply, and their suffering becomes unbearable. This is the obstacle of afflictions.

There are six fundamental afflictive obstacles:

The first is greed: insatiably wanting this and that, wanting more even when one already has much, wanting better even when things are already good. There is no end to it; the abyss of desire can never be filled.

The second is anger: strong resentment and hatred, as we have just discussed.

The third is ignorance: both greed and anger arise from ignorance. Ignorance means stubborn delusion and failure to awaken, mistaking the true for the false and becoming attached to all the varied things of the world—fame, profit, wealth, possessions, sensual attractions, and so on—taking the false to be true and

pursuing them without end. When one cannot obtain them, one becomes angry, and desire knows no limit.

If we can understand that all things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, and are all unobtainable, then, as the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “Knowing them to be flowers in empty space, there is no more cyclic turning.” Once you know that everything in the world is like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—mere false appearances that do not truly exist—why pursue them? If you no longer pursue them, what afflictions of birth, death, and rebirth can remain? Thus, ignorance is the root from which greed and anger arise.

The fourth is pride: arrogant self-conceit. One always thinks that everything one does is right and good, regards oneself as superior to others, and looks down on people everywhere. Because of such self-conceit, one is no longer humble. Without humility, one cannot benefit; one cannot take in well-intentioned advice, accept others’ opinions, or make progress.

The fifth is doubt: uncertainty and disbelief. Doubt is the worst thing. We know that to realize the fruition of Buddhahood, one must cultivate correctly. If one wishes to succeed in cultivation and realization, the first and most important thing is faith. Without faith, there can be no talk of cultivation and realization at all. Of the three provisions of the Pure Land school, faith is the first. This is true not only of the Pure Land school, but of other schools as well.

Without faith, how can one speak of cultivation and realization? Disbelief gives rise to doubt, and once doubt arises, things are spoiled. One cannot devote one’s full effort to practice and therefore cannot realize the noble fruition.

Practitioners today often doubt the Dharma and doubt their teachers. Having learned a practice, they do not ask themselves whether they have practiced it steadily, spared no effort, and applied themselves with courageous diligence. After practicing only a few times, they begin to wonder, “Oh dear, is this practice efficacious or not? Does it really work? Why have I not had even the slightest response?” For example, after reciting the Buddha’s name for only a few days, they say,

“I have been reciting the Buddha’s name—why are deluded thoughts still arising in profusion?” Or, after only a few meditation sessions, they say, “Why have my deluded thoughts not diminished at all? On the contrary, why do they seem to increase the more I sit?” And so forth.

Let us make an analogy. Suppose you wish to dig for a treasure and know that gold is buried in a certain patch of ground. Yet after digging only a few chi, before you have dug deeply enough, you become impatient: “Oh dear, why have I not seen any

gold yet? Perhaps it is not here." So you change to another spot and dig again. But again you have not dug deeply enough and have not found the gold, so you move to yet another place.

Changing places and digging again and again, you abandon the work when it is just short of completion and never see the gold. This is because you lack faith and have not gone deeply into one thing with single-mindedness; therefore, you do not obtain the treasure. This is the fault of doubting the Dharma and doubting one's teacher.

People often entertain such suspicions: Does this teacher have realization? Is the Dharma transmitted by this teacher any good? Or they discuss how one teacher has already realized the mind and seen their true nature, while another has not, making arbitrary judgments. They do not realize that to judge a teacher, one must surpass that teacher.

If you yourself have not yet realized the mind and seen your true nature, do you know what realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is? You are still blind yourself, yet you take your ears for eyes: hearing what others say, you then speculate about and assess others. This is doubting one's teacher. Because you do not trust your teacher, you cannot follow the master wholeheartedly; you cannot devote your full effort to practicing the Dharma transmitted to you by the master, and so you realize nothing. Therefore, doubt is harmful and is one of the fundamental afflictions.

The sixth is wrong view: views that are not correct. Eternalism, annihilationist view, and denying cause and effect are all wrong views. Some people think that a person exists only while alive, and that once a person dies, everything is gone and annihilated.

Others do not know that developing spiritual powers and realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature are two different matters. They think that one can speak of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature only after attaining spiritual powers, and that without spiritual powers one has not realized one's true nature. Even when they have clearly attained the root and seen their true nature, they do not know it; thinking that they lack spiritual powers, they believe they have not seen their true nature. They not only mislead themselves but also lead others astray, and thus can never free themselves, life after life. These are all wrong views. The foregoing are the six fundamental afflictions among the affliction obstacles.

At this point, we must explain another matter. Some people misunderstand the meaning of "affliction," thinking that only poor people suffer from inadequate clothing and food, poor living and travel conditions, and the need to toil and labor under the pressure of making a living, and therefore remain in pain and affliction

without cease. They do not know that the afflictions of the rich surpass those of the poor.

Although the afflictions of the rich differ from those of the poor, and they do not worry about clothing, food, housing, or transportation, they have other worries and other sufferings. Recently, an incident occurred here. Let me tell it, so that everyone may know the different kind of affliction experienced by wealthy people.

During the Cultural Revolution, the funds, houses, and other property of some industrialists and merchants were confiscated or frozen. After the policies were rectified, these were returned to them. With so much money returned to them, they had become wealthy again and ought to have enjoyed themselves, felt content, and no longer suffered distress.

But in one such family, after more than one hundred thousand yuan and residential property had been returned, the father distributed them all among his children. Each of his three sons received several tens of thousands of yuan. The youngest child was a daughter, who would eventually marry out of the family, so she received only five thousand yuan.

The youngest daughter saw that each of her brothers had received several tens of thousands of yuan, while she had received only a small fraction, and she was deeply dissatisfied. Later, when the houses were apportioned, each of the three sons received a whole large room, complete with a bathroom and gas stove.

The youngest daughter received a small, dark room at the back of the building, which made her even more unhappy. The more she thought about it, the more distressed she became, and she wept sorrowfully. Seeing this, her father reprimanded her, which made her even angrier. At mealtime, because she had wept so bitterly, her breath became constricted and she began to sob convulsively. A sudden spasm made her hand jerk, and the bowl fell to the floor and shattered with a sharp crack.

When the father saw this, he said, “Ah! You are even smashing bowls to show me?” Slap, slap—he gave her two blows across the face. This made her feel even more wronged. Overwhelmed by grief, she hanged herself. When the father saw that his daughter had died, he was deeply saddened and blamed himself for handling matters improperly and causing this disaster. Depressed at heart, he too died not long afterward.

You see, was this not disaster brought about after becoming wealthy? Thus, wealthy and eminent people have their own afflictions, no fewer than those of the poor, and even more; no lighter than those of the poor, and even heavier. Once they have status and money, they become anxious about gain and loss.

They not only hope not to lose their present status and wealth, but also want more upon more and better upon better. The mental afflictions of mutual oppression and scheming against one another are then even harder to describe. Worse still, once they have status and money, their greed grows heavier and their desires stronger. Forgetting all restraint, they recklessly do whatever they please, indulge in dissipation, sexual excess, and gambling, and eventually end by losing their entire fortunes or being sent to prison. We need not say more about this.

Even devas have afflictions. How can that be? Do not devas enjoy blessings in the heavens? Yet when they have exhausted their blessings, they too must die. They are unlike people in this world, who grow old, whose hair and beards turn white, whose teeth fall out, and who finally die when their breath ceases. Devas all wear flower garlands on their heads, and these flowers gradually wither. Once the flowers have withered completely, the devas' lives come to an end.

Thus, when they see their flowers withering, they know that their time is short. Where will they go? They must still submit to the workings of karma. They too are greatly afflicted. None of the six realms is free from suffering.

In human life, there is more suffering than happiness. A novelist once said this: Life is a journey, and the rugged, uneven road is filled with deep pits of every kind of suffering. We humans have just leapt out of the first pit; before falling into the second, this intervening period is what we call happiness—a time when things are smooth and level.

When we fall into the second pit, we suffer again as before, meeting obstacles everywhere and struggling desperately to leap out of the pit. Once we escape, we feel relief for a while. After this intervening period, we again fall into an abyss of suffering. This is how people complete life's journey: with more suffering than happiness.

Some encounter more pits, and deeper ones, so that the suffering they endure becomes unbearably bitter. Generally speaking, the happiness of this intervening period is brief. Some fall into still deeper suffering before they have even tasted happiness. In the final analysis, human life is suffering.

The Buddha teaches all dharmas in order to enable people to leave suffering and attain happiness. If you can thoroughly understand the principles of the Heart Sūtra, the obstacles of retribution, karmic obstacles, and affliction obstacles will naturally be removed. Once the three obstacles are eliminated, all suffering and adversity will disappear, and one will leave suffering and attain happiness. This is the function of the Heart Sūtra.

(V) Classification of the Teachings

Earlier, we explained that among the Buddha's teachings of the five periods, the Heart Sūtra belongs to the fourth period of teaching: the prajñā period, or the period of ripe butter. In this period, two provisional means and one true teaching were used to expound the Dharma. We need not say more about this here.

The fivefold profound meaning of the Heart Sūtra has now been explained. Next, we shall briefly introduce its translator.

IV. Translator of the Sūtra

There are many translators of the Heart Sūtra, and seven translations exist. The version now most widely recited and circulated is the one translated by Dharma Master Xuanzang. It contains only 260 Chinese characters, yet its meaning is extremely rich and can encompass the teachings of the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the scriptures. Dharma Master Xuanzang was thoroughly versed in the three baskets of sūtras, vinaya, and treatises.

At that time, anyone versed in the three baskets was called a Tripiṭaka Dharma Master. Xuanzang was a person of the Tang dynasty and was therefore called the Tang Tripiṭaka. The sūtra basket consists of the Dharma taught by the Buddha, recorded and compiled by his disciples, and for the most part expounds meditative stability. The vinaya basket consists of the precepts taught by the Buddha, such as the precepts for bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, and bodhisattvas. The Brahmā Net Sūtra also belongs to the vinaya.

The Vinaya Piṭaka primarily expounds the discipline of precepts. The Abhidharma Piṭaka consists of the bodhisattvas' elucidations and developments of the Dharma taught by the Buddha. What the Buddha taught is called "sūtra"; what bodhisattvas expounded is called "treatise." Treatises primarily expound the discipline of wisdom.

Master Xuanzang's secular surname was Chen. When he left home as a youth, he already had great aspirations and declared, "In the long term, continue the Tathāgata's work; in the present, illuminate the teachings that have been handed down." This meant that, in the long view, he would perpetuate the Buddha's lineage and aspire to Buddhahood; in the immediate sense, he would spread and glorify the Tathāgata's teachings. After leaving home, he diligently studied the scriptures and traveled widely to visit renowned teachers.

Later, he discovered that the various teachers held differing views and that many questions concerning the scriptures remained unresolved. In order to seek the true meaning of the Buddhadharma, he vowed to travel to India, the sacred land of Buddhism, to study and obtain the scriptures. With vast and profound vows, extraordinary courage, and fearless resolve, Master Xuanzang endured countless hardships, crossed innumerable mountains and rivers, and journeyed more than

fifty thousand li before finally reaching his destination. Seventeen years later, he returned with 560 bundles of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna scriptures, comprising 650 works. Thereafter, Master Xuanzang devoted himself wholeheartedly to translating Buddhist scriptures.

The scale of the scripture-translation enterprise organized by Master Xuanzang was the grandest in history. It brought together eminent monastics and great practitioners from major monasteries throughout the country; its personnel were outstanding, its division of labor meticulous, and its approach to translation rigorous and conscientious. The sacred Tripiṭaka texts of sūtra, vinaya, and treatise that it translated were the most accurate, and the quantity of its translations was also the greatest in Chinese history. Master Xuanzang was a great master in the history of Buddhism worldwide and the founding patriarch of the Consciousness-Only school. His contributions to propagating the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings were immense!

In addition to serving as chief translator for the sūtras and treatises of the Dharma Characteristics School, Master Xuanzang devoted all his efforts in his later years to translating the six hundred fascicles of the Great Prajñā Sūtra, which took up half of all his translation work. This shows his thorough mastery and profound attainment in the study of prajñā. Moreover, his translation of the Heart Sūtra became widely circulated and popular.

Master Xuanzang was rigorous and conscientious in translating the scriptures—meticulous in every detail, ever seeking improvement, and accurate without error. Before his parinirvāṇa, he had a slight headache, which caused him to wonder.

“Oh! Could there perhaps be errors in the scriptures I translated?” He then made a vow: “If there are no errors in the scriptures I translated, then when I am cremated after my parinirvāṇa, my tongue should remain intact!” Later, Master Xuanzang entered parinirvāṇa. After his cremation, his tongue did indeed remain completely intact. This proved that the scriptures translated by Master Xuanzang were completely correct.

Master Xuanzang’s slight headache before death was due to past karma. In our lives over many past existences, the things we have done may have been good or bad; it is impossible for there to be no karmic result at all. When people become ill, it is the karmic result they now undergo for bad deeds committed in past lives. Ordinary beings generally cannot bear illness; its suffering is hard to endure.

But great patriarchs who have attained realization have the strength to bear it. When karmic retribution comes upon them, because their minds are empty, they need not undergo its suffering. Chan Master Zhenxie said: “This old monk has his own method for settling the mind; even if the eight sufferings assail me together, it

is no hindrance." This means that even if all eight kinds of suffering, including illness and other afflictions all came together to torment him, he would not fear them. Why? Because the mind is empty and does not receive them.

Among the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness, the second is the aggregate of feeling. It is the root of all afflictions and karmic obstacles. If, upon encountering forms and hearing sounds, we do not receive them, then no afflictions can arise.

How, then, can one refrain from receiving them? There is considerable scientific reasoning behind this. What we call pain is transmitted through local nerves to the cerebral cortex, where it is experienced. If the cerebral cortex does not receive it, one will not feel pain.

To prevent the cerebral cortex from receiving it, one must possess deep meditative stability: with the mind empty and non-abiding, one does not follow circumstances. Or one must focus one's thoughts and attention entirely on something else; only then can the transmission be interrupted and the suffering not received. For example, in Romance of the Three Kingdoms, after Guan Yu was struck by a poisoned arrow, Hua Tuo scraped his bone to remove the poison.

At the time, Guan Yu was playing a board game. He focused all his thoughts and attention entirely on the game, forgetting that he was undergoing surgery, so that his cerebral cortex did not receive the pain signals transmitted through the nerves. Thus, even after Hua Tuo had completely scraped away the poison and the operation was finished, he did not utter a sound. Hua Tuo could not help admiring him and called Guan Yu a divine man.

The present method of painless childbirth operates on the same principle. The mother is made to focus her thoughts entirely elsewhere; once her attention is shifted, the pain is also redirected. Her cerebral cortex does not receive the pain from her abdomen, and she therefore does not feel it. But ordinary people lack this skill. Their attention cannot be shifted and remains focused on the abdomen, so the suffering cannot be redirected. The cerebral cortex still receives it, refusing nothing; naturally, they still feel pain. Therefore, painless childbirth methods today have not been very effective.

When my master's master, Acharya Dayu, cultivated the Way on Mount Lu, he was always very diligent. Because conditions at that time were extremely poor, however, his body became very weak. After he came down from the mountain, his disciples invited a doctor to examine and treat him. The doctor discovered that his hemorrhoids were severe and had already ulcerated, and decided that surgery must be performed immediately. At that time, only general anesthesia was available; there was no local anesthesia.

But my master's master was too weak to endure general anesthesia. What could be done? He told the doctor, "Please go ahead with the operation; I can do without anesthesia." The doctor said, "How could you possibly do without anesthesia? The pain alone could kill you." "It does not matter. I shall recite the Buddha's name while you operate. If I say that it hurts, stop the operation."

"Then let us try it. In any case, your buttocks are already ulcerated beyond recognition. Even if the operation does not go well and must be abandoned halfway through, it will not matter." So the operation began. My master's master continually recited, "Namo Amitābha Buddha, Namo Amitābha Buddha . . ." Until the operation was over, he did not cry out in pain even once.

The doctor exclaimed in amazement, "Remarkable, remarkable! I have never seen such a patient." This is the skill of not receiving any feeling: one concentrates all one's thought and attention on this Buddha-name, and pain can do no harm. Pure Land practitioners all hope to be free of sickness and suffering at the time of death. Is this not an excellent example of being free of sickness and suffering?

Being free of sickness and suffering does not mean never becoming ill. It means that, even when one is ill, one is not afflicted by the illness. If you do not receive it, suffering is no longer suffering. The reason why retribution from past karma amounts to no retribution is precisely that one does not receive this suffering and is not afflicted by it. Though there is karmic retribution, it is as if there were none: retribution, yet no retribution. Master Xuanzang's headache was the manifestation of past karma at the time of death; but because he did not receive it, it was retribution, yet no retribution.

Speaking of karmic retribution, people say that mental karma is easy to eliminate and transform, whereas bodily karma is difficult to eliminate and transform. If we committed bad deeds in the past, we must still undergo bodily suffering. Even the Buddha manifested the appearance of a headache, because in a past life he had struck a fish on the head with a stick and therefore had to receive this retribution.

But the Buddha deliberately manifested the appearance of a headache in order to show that cause and effect do not fail, and to warn everyone not to do evil, for those who do evil must undergo karmic retribution. For those who have truly reached the ultimate, karmic retribution is like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water. When retribution comes upon them, it disintegrates and vanishes.

Why is this? Because all karma is like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a shadow; nothing real exists.

Since nothing real exists, if one does not receive any phenomena, what retribution could there still be to speak of? At the same time, there is no mark of self, no mark

of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span. Who, then, would undergo retribution? Subjectively, there is no person; objectively, there is no dharma.

When both person and dharma have vanished, what retribution could remain? Yet in terms of Buddha-nature, Buddha-nature is wondrous presence and true emptiness. It is neither annihilationist emptiness nor inert emptiness. It can manifest all appearances and give rise to various forms of wondrous functioning. Therefore, illusory appearances are not entirely absent; they still appear. Amid not undergoing retribution, there may still appear the aspect of undergoing retribution. Though retribution is undergone, in the case of great patriarchs the mind is empty and pure; all is like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, and thus it still amounts to not undergoing retribution.

After the Second Patriarch, Master Shenguang, received the Dharma, Patriarch Bodhidharma told him: “In this lifetime, you are to repay a debt of life and be beheaded. (After patriarchs realize the Way, they possess knowledge of past lives and know what was done in previous lives as well as future karmic retribution.) But because you uphold the true Dharma, and in order to prevent others from slandering the true Dharma on this account, you need not repay this retribution.”

The Second Patriarch’s mind was truly empty: neither person nor dharma could be obtained, and so this bodily retribution could be averted. For example, if one does not turn on a television or radio, electromagnetic waves may be traveling through the air, but they cannot be received. The principle is the same.

Although we may have done some wrong things in past lives, karmic force is searching for us. But if your mind is empty and there is not even a shadow, it cannot find you and has no way to do so. Fundamentally speaking, there is no mark of personal self and no mark of dharma-self; neither undergoing nor not undergoing retribution can be obtained. But one must carry the practice through to the ultimate to be like this. If one’s practice is not ultimate, then as soon as the mind moves, a shadow appears, and one will still undergo retribution.

Let us cite a koan: Chan Master Wuda of the Tang dynasty developed a human-faced sore on his knee. Later, he encountered a monk who scooped up water and washed it, whereupon it was healed. He therefore composed the Compassionate Water Repentance ritual.

How did this Chan master come to develop a human-faced sore? In a past life, the Chan master had been Yuan Ang. Chao Cuo and Yuan Ang were on bad terms. Before the emperor, Yuan Ang stirred up trouble and spoke ill of Chao Cuo, with the result that Chao Cuo was wrongfully beheaded. Chao Cuo harbored resentment and continually sought to find Yuan Ang and take revenge.

But Yuan Ang later became an eminent monk for ten successive lives, and Chao Cuo could not find him through all ten lives. Later, the emperor appointed him National Preceptor and bestowed upon him an agarwood table, a jade ruyi scepter, a purple-and-gold kāṣāya, a purple-and-gold alms bowl, and so forth. Even imperial commissioners greatly revered him. He became very pleased with himself: “People like me are now rare in the world.

Therefore, the emperor appointed me National Preceptor and bestowed so many things upon me.” Once his mind stirred, a shadow appeared. Chao Cuo found him and caused a human-faced sore to grow on his knee, demanding repayment of a life-debt. From this we can see that once one has done something wrong in a past life, karmic force searches everywhere for one; this is called karmic obstacles. If your mind is truly empty, with no shadow present, it cannot find you even if it searches. So-called karma is in fact all illusory and unreal. But if your mind stirs and a shadow is present, karmic force will seize hold of you, and you will have to repay the debt.

Perhaps someone may ask: if one’s meditative stability is deep, can one avoid karmic retribution? One can avoid it—but it is not certain that one will. As we have just said, whether one undergoes retribution or not depends on whether the mind has truly become empty and pure.

Since both retribution and repayment are unreal, why not use the unreal to reveal the true, act freely in samādhi, undergo retribution once, and thereby demonstrate freedom from retribution while remaining free to undergo it, and realize freedom from repayment while remaining free to make it? Therefore, Second Patriarch Master Shenguang said to Bodhidharma: “After I have transmitted the Dharma, it will not matter whether I repay it or not.” It is like a great millionaire repaying a small debt: it is as insignificant as a single hair from nine oxen, of no concern to him.

After Master Shenguang transmitted the Dharma to the Third Patriarch, he went to undergo retribution. As he was about to be beheaded, he said: “To place one’s head before a white blade is like cutting the spring wind.” Being beheaded was like slashing at the wind with a blade. There was not a single thing in his mind. How bold and unrestrained! This was truly the bearing of a great person whose mind had become utterly empty and pure.

A person whose mind is truly empty and pure does not rigidly guard a single unmoving point, nor does such a person do nothing at all. Rather, there is great potential and great functioning: non-contrivance, yet nothing is left undone. Those of us who practice the Dharma must cultivate this mind well, tempering the mind through circumstances at every moment and honestly applying ourselves to the work of the mind-ground. Only when we understand the principles and true intent

of the Heart Sūtra can we truly receive its ultimate meaning and uphold the Heart Sūtra. We will now begin to explain the main text of the Heart Sūtra.

Main Exposition of the Sūtra Text

Most sūtras begin with a “prefatory section” and end with a “circulation section.” The prefatory section is the opening of the sūtra: “Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was at such-and-such a place, together with a great assembly of bhikṣus, or a great assembly of bodhisattvas, numbering so many.” The circulation section is the conclusion of the sūtra: “Having heard what the Buddha had taught, the assembly was greatly delighted. They accepted it in faith and put it into practice, paid homage, and departed.”

Because the Heart Sūtra was excerpted from the Great Prajñā Sūtra, both its prefatory section and circulation section were omitted; it does not follow the usual format of a sūtra. The Heart Sūtra begins directly with the main text, using the Buddha’s voice to proclaim: “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva . . .” Thus, from the outset, it directly points out the central outline of the Heart Sūtra.

I. Section on Dhāraṇī

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, while practicing profound prajñāpāramitā, clearly saw that the five aggregates are all empty and crossed beyond all suffering and adversity.

These opening four lines of the sūtra are the general outline of the Heart Sūtra. Following the example of Crown Prince Zhaoming, who divided the Diamond Sūtra into thirty-two sections, we may designate these four lines as the Section on Dhāraṇī—encompassing all dharmas and holding immeasurable meanings. All the principles of the Heart Sūtra, and indeed the principles of the entire Buddhadharma, are contained within these four lines.

The passages below expound, portray, and unfold the immeasurable meanings of these four lines. Moreover, the first line, “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva,” is the very core of these four lines. This single line alone encompasses the six hundred fascicles of the Great Prajñā Sūtra. Why is this so? Because guan ( ), the first character of the Chinese name Guanzizai ( ), means contemplation. As we have already explained, no practice can be separated from contemplation, nor can the scriptures of the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the canon be separated from contemplation. Thus, it encompasses all dharmas.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva (known in Chinese as Guanzizai Bodhisattva). The Buddha presents Guanzizai Bodhisattva as a model for us as practitioners, urging us to follow this bodhisattva's example. Why does this sūtra use the name "Guanzizai Bodhisattva" rather than "Guanshiyin Bodhisattva"? Are these two different bodhisattvas? No. Guanzizai Bodhisattva is none other than Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.

Guanzizai is named for the merits of fruition, whereas Guanshiyin, "Perceiver of the Sounds of the World," is named for the practice at the causal stage. In his early cultivation, Guanshiyin began with perfect penetration through the ear faculty. On an island in the sea, he listened to the sounds of the tide rising and falling, and investigated: Who is it that hears the sound? And who is it that does not hear the sound? This is the practice by which he listened to the sound of the ocean tide through the ear faculty and perfectly realized bodhi.

Speaking of the sound of the ocean tide, the entire Buddhadharma may be called the sound of the ocean tide. First, the Buddha teaches sentient beings in accordance with their causes and conditions and their capacities; the teaching may be profound or shallow, lofty or lowly, just as the ocean tide rises and falls. Second, the Buddhadharma is like the great ocean: vast and boundless, with magnificent waves that no force can withstand. At high tide, it has the thunderous force of a thousand bolts of lightning, terrifying those who hear it; at low tide, the winds and waves are calm, and not a sound is heard.

People often think that hearing sound is hearing, while the absence of sound is not hearing. In fact, when there is sound, you hear the sound; when there is no sound, you likewise hear—you hear the absence of sound.

If you did not hear it, how would you know that there was no sound? It is like our eyes: when we see an object, we say that we have seen. When a blind person cannot see objects, we say that he cannot see. In fact, it is not that he does not see; he still sees, but what he sees is darkness. To see darkness is also to see.

This is the functioning of our seeing-nature and hearing-nature; they are never destroyed. Whether there is light or no light, sound or no sound, pertains to the objects of form and sound, not to seeing-nature and hearing-nature. Objects arise and cease, but nature is neither arising nor ceasing, neither increasing nor decreasing. Our ability to see forms depends on our eye faculty—on the eyeball being intact and able to function.

If the eyeball is damaged, one may be unable to see objects of form, but seeing-nature remains. It is like an electric lightbulb: when its filament breaks, the bulb does not shine, but electricity is still present. One cannot say there is no electricity; only the bulb is broken. If it is replaced with a good bulb, it will shine again. Therefore, do not abide in appearances. Seeing light is seeing, and seeing darkness

is still seeing. Hearing sound is hearing, and hearing the absence of sound is still hearing.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva realized the Way through hearing by means of the ear faculty. When the ocean tide rises, the sound of the tide arises; when it falls, the sound of the tide ceases. The sound of the tide arises and ceases, but the intrinsic nature that hears neither arises nor ceases. Precisely because it does not cease, it hears both sound and the absence of sound. The hearing-nature that hears sounds is neither arising nor ceasing; it has endured constantly since time without beginning.

Turn hearing back to hear the self-nature; do not run after sounds. This is called turning the light inward, that is, contemplation. Through contemplation, investigate the sounds of the world: Who is it that hears sound? And who is it that does not hear sound? It is like the huatou investigated in the Chan school: "Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" Who, ultimately, is it? It is the self-nature, what we call Buddha-nature; its functioning is present everywhere.

As we have already explained, King Vimatirāja asked Venerable Bharati, "Where is the nature?" Venerable Bharati replied, "Nature is in its functioning. In the eye it is called seeing; in the ear, hearing; in the nose, discerning fragrance; on the tongue, speaking; in the hand, grasping and lifting; in the feet, walking and running." All these are wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature.

Thus, "Those who recognize it know it as Buddha-nature; those who do not recognize it call it the vital spirit." Seeing one's nature is not difficult; one simply awakens in the present moment. Ah! It turns out that all these functions are our lucid, aware nature! This is Buddha-nature! One must then safeguard this Buddha-nature, contemplate continuously, and eliminate habitual tendencies completely. Only then can one ultimately attain Buddhahood.

During his causal-stage practice, Avalokiteśvara (or Guanzizai) Bodhisattva realized the Way by turning hearing back to the self-nature and applying himself through the ear faculty, thereby perfectly accomplishing the unsurpassed Way. At the same time, he made great vows: whenever sentient beings suffer, upon hearing their cries of suffering he employs the appropriate dharma conditions to free them from their afflictions. This is what the world calls "hearing cries and relieving suffering." The name "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Who Perceives the Sounds of the World" derives from his contemplation of the sounds in this Sahā world.

The name "Guanzizai Bodhisattva" refers to the bodhisattva's fruition. As we have just explained, Guan ( ) means "contemplation"—contemplating all phenomena as functions of Buddha-nature. Once we clearly see Buddha-nature, this contemplation

continues from moment to moment. Zi ( ) means “self”—our own Original Face, our self-nature, our Buddha-nature.

When we understand that all functioning is Buddha-nature, recognize it, and are genuinely free of doubt, this is seeing one’s nature. It is our fundamental life-source, our own Original Face. As for zai ( ), after seeing one’s nature one is no longer deluded and knows that all things in the world are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—false and unobtainable.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, “Knowing them to be flowers in empty space, there is no more cyclic turning.” Only then does genuine practice begin. At every moment, continuously and closely safeguard this essential nature; at every moment, contemplate this original nature. Keep it steady in its original ground, unmoved and not swayed by objective circumstances, not drawn along by objects, and not turned by conditions. At every moment, nurture the ‘sacred embryo’ and diligently remove habitual tendencies. When habitual tendencies are exhausted, attachment to self and attachment to dharmas are also finished; segmented birth and death and transformational birth and death are likewise finished. Then one attains great freedom.

Practice after seeing one’s nature consists primarily in eliminating habitual tendencies. These habitual tendencies are chiefly the five hindrances, the five dark clouds that obscure the radiance of self-nature: wealth, sensual form, fame, food, and sleep.

Wealth means wanting to become rich, craving money without ever being satisfied. “People die for wealth, and birds perish for food.” “If one does not act for oneself, heaven and earth will destroy one.” On a small scale, this includes speculation, trickery, and greed for petty advantage. On a large scale, it includes corruption, bribery, profiteering, fraud, and deception—using every means without regard for the law and sacrificing the interests of others, the collective, or the nation to satisfy oneself.

Sensual form means all forms and appearances. It does not refer only to sexual attraction between men and women; it also includes all matters of food, clothing, daily life, indulgence in music, women, dogs, and horses, as well as dress and adornment.

Fame means liking reputation. When others flatter you and say pleasant things that gratify your ears, you feel delighted, happy and joyful, laughing aloud. But if they point out some fault or error of yours, say that some of your actions are wrong, that your way of speaking is inappropriate, or that your influence is harmful, you become displeased, unable to remain composed, angry, and bad-tempered. Many people who have already become famous are still like this. Worse still are those who seek

fame and reputation through hypocritical displays of virtue. All these are habitual tendencies.

Food means eating and drinking. One craves tasty dishes and delicacies. After eating enough pork, beef, and mutton, one wants seafood; after growing tired of poultry, one wants wild game. To satisfy one's palate and appetite, one does not hesitate to kill living beings, thereby creating karma and undergoing karmic retribution.

Sleep means sleep, though in fact it is a kind of stupor. If a person sleeps eight hours each day, one-third of the day is spent asleep. Some also take an afternoon nap, sleeping another two hours, for a total of ten hours. If a person lives to be one hundred, forty or fifty years will have been slept away. Therefore, sleep is also an obstacle.

However, practitioners who wish to remove the obstacle of sleep must not proceed forcefully or blindly. If your practice has not yet reached a sufficient level and your meditative stability is not yet deep, then going without sleep will leave your body unable to endure or sustain itself. In practice, as meditative stability grows, sleep should gradually be offset imperceptibly. This is called one increasing as the other decreases.

As meditative stability grows, one's vitality gradually becomes abundant, and sleep naturally decreases. Little by little, as meditative stability deepens, sleep becomes less and less; eventually, even while asleep, one remains in samādhi.

Speaking of this, let us give an example: Chan Master Daoxin, the Fourth Patriarch, guided Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong. Chan Master Niutou Farong practiced "not lying down," sitting on a stone bench at night rather than sleeping. Chan Master Daoxin, however, slept. At daybreak, Lanrong told Daoxin that he had slept very well the previous night, snoring thunderously and making so much noise that Lanrong could not even sit steadily.

Chan Master Daoxin replied, "And you say that I slept well? I did not sleep at all that night." Lanrong exclaimed, "Ah! You are telling a falsehood."

"Your snoring was so loud—how can you say you did not sleep?" Daoxin replied, "If I had been asleep, how could I have heard two fleas on your body fighting? One of them fell to the ground and broke both its legs, crying, 'It hurts! It hurts!' The noise kept me from sleeping."

Chan Master Niutou Farong said, "How could there be such a thing? I sat here and heard nothing, yet you were snoring away and still heard it?" Daoxin said, "If you do not believe me, look!" Sure enough, beneath the stone bench Lanrong picked up a

flea whose legs truly were broken. You see: one sat without sleeping, while the other lay there snoring soundly.

Yet someone who was asleep actually heard fleas fighting, heard a flea break its leg and cry out in pain, while someone who was not asleep heard nothing at all. Thus meditative attainment and sleep are not determined by outward appearances. Some people cling to outward appearances: they sit in meditation all night without sleeping and do not lie down. In fact, they are not without sleep; they sleep sitting up—they are still asleep.

Some people have excellent practice. Though they are lying there and outwardly appear to be asleep, they have entered deep meditative absorption and remain clearly aware; they can even hear fleas fighting. True practice is not a matter of looking impressive outwardly, but of whether the mind-ground is pure.

Therefore, in our practice we should not abide in appearances, but should truly apply ourselves to the mind-ground. We must clearly recognize that this all-capable essence that functions is Buddha-nature; it is our fundamental life-source, our true master.

It alone is real and not illusory, eternal and unchanging: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going. Everything else, including our own bodies, is illusory and unreal, wholly false. The body is like a house or a piece of furniture.

When it is in good condition, use it; once it breaks down, abandon it. Once we clearly distinguish the true from the false, we must protect this true and unfailing nature at every moment. Remain unmoved on this original ground; do not be deluded by circumstances, do not be shaken by circumstances, and be able to function in response to circumstances. This practice is contemplation.

We should constantly employ the practice of contemplation to eliminate our habitual tendency to abide in appearances—that is, the five hindrances mentioned above. Sleeping is a habitual tendency, and eating is also a habitual tendency. But habitual tendencies cannot be eliminated by force; they must be skillfully eliminated, by using expedient methods to redirect the mind, entering deeply into meditative states, and remaining constantly in samādhi.

Here I must remind everyone not to misunderstand and think that merely sitting motionlessly is samādhi, and thus desperately force themselves to sit in meditation. They do not realize that sitting motionlessly is dead samādhi. Dead samādhi has entering and leaving; that is, it has arising and ceasing. Where there is arising and ceasing, one cannot remain “constantly in samādhi.”

What is called “remaining constantly in samādhi” means not being deluded or shaken when encountering circumstances. This is great samādhi, with neither entering nor leaving. If one’s practice has not yet reached this stage, one must still contemplate at every moment, causing one’s intrinsic nature to abide on its original ground, not turning with thoughts or moving with circumstances. This is called “Guanzizai.”

When practice advances further and reaches complete maturity, even this guan ( ), or contemplation, is no longer needed and must be relinquished. A Chan master said, “Without awareness and contemplation, one is indeed in birth and death; with awareness and contemplation, one is also in birth and death.” If you are foolish and confused, drifting with circumstances and wandering about creating karma, then you are of course in birth and death.

Why are awareness and contemplation also birth and death? Because one is attached to dharma-views and dharma-functions; as long as dharmas remain, birth and death remain. Yet this birth and death is a further stage: transformational birth and death. Therefore, when practice reaches complete maturity, the dharma too must be relinquished. Even without contemplation, one can remain firmly unmoved on the original ground. This is zizai ( ), being at ease.

When practice advances still further, even the “zi” (self) is no longer needed. Intrinsic nature is naturally so from the beginning; there is no need constantly to attend to it. For example, there is no need continually to remind oneself of one’s own name; without such reminders, one will not forget it. At this point, even zi ( ), “self,” can be relinquished. There is no time or place in which Buddha-nature is absent; it is present everywhere and at every moment. This is “zai” (being).

Advancing still further, one finally arrives home: even “being” is no longer needed. There is no being, yet nowhere is it absent. Whatever meets the eye, whatever conditions one encounters, is nothing other than the manifestation of the true mind; every gesture and movement is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. Then one has become completely mature. This is how we must practice step by step, at every moment. Thus the three Chinese characters guan, zi, and zai ( ) in the name of Guanzizai (Avalokiteśvara) Bodhisattva are truly a model for practitioners in their application of practice.

Some people today cannot advance in their practice because there is a problem with their method of applying themselves.

First, when they practice, they do not know how to contemplate. Whether they recite the Buddha’s name, investigate Chan, or practice Esoteric Buddhism, they have words in their mouths but not in their minds. Their mouths recite, “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .,” while their minds are filled with racing deluded

thoughts. Their mouths mutter, “Who is it that recites the Buddha’s name? Who is it that recites the Buddha’s name? . . .,” but they cannot raise a sense of doubt in their minds. They continually recite the mantra, “Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ, Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ . . .,” but have only mouths and no minds; they cannot have the mind recite and the ears hear, while continually contemplating. This way of practicing will not do!

Second, when practicing the Dharma in seated meditation, they may have mind and mouth in accord and contemplate with attention. But after leaving the cushion, they are just like ordinary worldly people, drifting with circumstances, letting their minds run wild, and falling into confusion and distorted views as situations arise.

Failing to contemplate off the cushion is a serious error! No matter how earnestly you practice on the cushion, it is auxiliary practice rather than primary practice, supportive cultivation rather than true cultivation. True cultivation still depends on applying oneself off the cushion.

Why do I say this? Consider the time involved: how many sessions can you practice in one day? How many hours can you sit? Even if you can sit continuously for four hours, or perhaps six, that is still only a small proportion of the day—only one quarter.

If, during the other three quarters of the day, you let the wild horse run free, remain muddled, and cling to appearances, how can you attain accomplishment? As we have already explained, practicing the Dharma means transforming your mind: transforming your deluded mind into an awakened mind, and your false mind into the mind of Buddha. When you are on the cushion, you are not encountering external circumstances, and no one is testing you. This is the most convenient time.

Off the cushion, however, you encounter external circumstances, and this is when you are tested to see whether you can avoid being turned by them. Applying yourself off the cushion is true application. Practice on the cushion is like sharpening a knife: when the knife becomes dull, it must be sharpened. Off the cushion is using the knife: cutting things with it to see whether it is sharp and whether it can penetrate circumstances.

If you do not use it, how can you know whether the knife is sharp? How can you know whether your practice on the cushion has been effective? Only by using it and discovering that you still cannot penetrate circumstances can you say, “Ah! My knife is still not sharp; I must apply myself and sharpen it well again!” In this way, you can further spur yourself on in practice.

Our practice is for transcending birth and death and attaining Buddhahood. What is called birth and death is giving rise to mind through attachment to circumstances. If you become attached to circumstances and follow them along, there is birth and

death. If you remain unmoved before any circumstance and do not enter into it, there is no birth and death.

If you do not train amid circumstances, where else can you train? Training in a place where there is nothing at all will not do; you must train amid the situations of daily affairs. The four dharma realms taught in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra—nonobstruction of principle, nonobstruction of phenomena, nonobstruction of principle and phenomena, and nonobstruction among phenomena—are the four stages of practice.

Practice must reach its final stage—the dharma realm of nonobstruction among phenomena—where one can penetrate every circumstance and every affair without the slightest hindrance, before it can be called Buddhahood. Merely understanding a little principle, being able to speak of it in principle but unable to put it into practice in affairs, is empty boasting and has no effect. If one practices only on the cushion and does not temper oneself in the affairs encountered off the cushion, one cannot attain accomplishment.

If we truly know how to apply ourselves, we must train amid affairs. We must contemplate at every moment, contemplating our own fundamental life-source and remaining unmoved on the original ground. This is how practice must be undertaken at every moment. This is contemplating with freedom. Therefore, the three Chinese characters Guanzizai ( ), "contemplating with freedom," are the overarching principle of a thousand sūtras and ten thousand treatises.

Third, our first purpose in applying ourselves is to realize the mind and see our true nature. This has already been discussed, but it is repeated here: first, because it is extremely important; and second, because practitioners often do not understand it clearly. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize it again. Every function is the function of intrinsic nature, and this functioning itself is our Buddha-nature. Once we hear this, have unwavering faith in it, and truly affirm it without the slightest deviation, this is seeing one's true nature! It is not that there is some other nature to be seen apart from this. Seeing one's true nature is neither mysterious nor abstruse.

Some people always connect seeing one's true nature with manifesting spiritual powers. How lamentable! They truly do not know what intrinsic nature is. They do not understand it themselves, yet imagine that intrinsic nature is some other miraculous thing. This actual functioning is too ordinary and commonplace, so they do not regard it as intrinsic nature. They deceive themselves and then deceive others. This is called deceiving oneself and deceiving others.

They are deceived themselves and cause others to be deceived as well. When will such people ever emerge from this? When will they ever transcend birth and death? As we have already explained, the relationship between realizing the mind and

seeing one's true nature, and manifesting spiritual powers, is a relationship of sequence, and of root to branch.

First see one's true nature. After seeing it, one is no longer deluded, clearly distinguishes the true from the false, and knows that all things in the world are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—false and unobtainable. Contemplate at every moment and protect this sole true and unfailing intrinsic nature. Remain unmoved on the original ground and nurture the sacred embryo at every moment. When practice has reached the point that all habitual tendencies are exhausted, spiritual powers will be attained without being sought.

Therefore, if one obtains the root, there is no need to worry about the branches. Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is the root; it is the most crucial and important matter in Dharma practice. Some people mistakenly take manifesting spiritual powers as the criterion for realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, and therefore pursue spiritual powers. This is precisely putting the branches before the root. They do not know what the root is and pursue only the branches; this can never be right! Such people are those whom the Buddha called most pitiable. Therefore, when we practice and apply ourselves, our first task is to realize the mind and see our true nature; we must not vainly seek spiritual powers.

Furthermore, we must understand that intrinsic nature is not elsewhere; it is right here in the present. Do not seek it elsewhere. Since every function is the function of intrinsic nature, intrinsic nature continually shines forth at the gateways of each person's six sense faculties.

If, in the instant when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen, we turn the light inward and recognize that this numinous knowing free of thought is our Buddha-nature, then we directly see our own father right then and there. Why seek elsewhere? As the saying goes, "Having worn out iron shoes in fruitless search, one finds it without the least effort." If, having heard this teaching today, you can believe it deeply without doubt, that is indeed supreme good fortune! But if you still cannot settle your mind or have no true faith, then you must begin cultivating from the start. This concludes our explanation of the three Chinese characters guan, zi, and zai ( ).

In Chinese, pusa ( ) abbreviates putisaduo ( ), retaining two of its characters. Putisaduo is a Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit bodhisattva, meaning "awakened sentient being."

Sentient beings all have feelings and emotionally conditioned views. Feelings and such views are both private affections, not great affection. For example, parents all love their children, but they love only the children they themselves have borne;

ordinarily, they have little feeling for other people's children. Recently, such an incident occurred.

An attendant at a nursery disliked a child because he often cried, so she tied up his hands and feet and pressed a quilt over him. As a result, the child was smothered to death. Had he been her own child, could she have had the heart to do this? Thus, feelings and emotionally conditioned views are all private affections; they are all harmful things.

"Awakening" means enlightenment: one must awaken to and break through this private affection. When emotionally conditioned views have been eliminated and private affection has been broken through, it becomes "great affection." Private affection is emotional attachment; great affection is nonattachment. To awaken to and break through private affection is to be an "awakened sentient being"; this is a "bodhisattva." Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva regards all sentient beings in the world as his own children. With the same compassion that parents have for their children, he hears their cries and relieves their suffering.

In addition to self-awakening, bodhisattvas must awaken others—enabling others likewise to break through deluded emotional attachment. This is what the sūtras call the "Great Vehicle." Here, the Chinese character , translated as "vehicle," functions as a measure word and also carries the sense of something ridden. The Great Vehicle is like a bus, train, or airplane: it can carry many people.

After breaking through their own private affection, bodhisattvas go further and help others break through all the deluded attachments of the worldly realm, transcend the world, and jointly realize the great Way. The "Lesser Vehicle" is like a small conveyance, capable of carrying only one person. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, for example, wish only to liberate themselves and are unwilling to liberate others.

Yet when they realize the fourth fruit of arhatship or become pratyekabuddhas, they themselves become ashamed and remorseful, turn from the lesser to the greater, and arouse the resolve to liberate others. It is like working in an organization today while always being selfish and lazy, always hanging back when matters arise and refusing to exert oneself.

When you see others working diligently at the forefront and serving everyone, while you yourself do nothing, would you not feel ashamed and embarrassed? Therefore, when Lesser Vehicle practitioners reach the fourth fruit, they realize that something is amiss. They too learn from bodhisattvas and arouse the Great Vehicle resolve: not only liberating themselves, but liberating others as well.

Here we must emphasize that bodhisattvas and Great Vehicle practitioners, from the time they first arouse the resolve, do not act for themselves; they study the

Buddhadharma and cultivate the Way in order to liberate sentient beings. For example, when we see someone fall into the sea or a river, we may wholeheartedly wish to rescue them, but we ourselves may not know how to swim or how to save a drowning person.

Even if you jump into the water, you cannot rescue the drowning person, and you may not even be able to save yourself. Therefore, only after learning to swim and to perform water rescue can you save others. From the time they first arouse the resolve, bodhisattvas and Great Vehicle practitioners take the arousing of bodhicitta as their foremost task: they cultivate Great Vehicle teachings, practice the bodhisattva path, and take "awakening oneself and awakening others, liberating oneself and liberating others" as their guiding principle, rather than making self-liberation their goal. The term "bodhisattva" does not refer to Lesser Vehicle arhats or pratyekabuddhas. Heavenly beings, beings in the ghost realm, and non-Buddhist paths are even less relevant.

The five Chinese characters Guanzizai Pusa ( ), "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva," taken together, mean that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva cultivated the Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration through the Ear Faculty, turned hearing back to hear his own nature, realized his own hearing-nature as neither arising nor ceasing, understood that all dharmas do not depart from the fundamental mind, and attained the wondrous fruition of nirvāṇa.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra explains this process of cultivating the Way very clearly: first, "enter the stream and lose the object"; next, "when hearing is exhausted, do not abide; the faculty of awareness and its object are empty"; finally, "when emptiness and the object of emptiness are extinguished, and arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent extinction appears before one." In this way, one realizes great freedom. Great freedom means being liberated from the two forms of birth-and-death—segmented and transformational. These two forms of birth-and-death were already discussed earlier under "nirvāṇa with remainder," so we need not say more about them now.

The "contemplation" of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is contemplation perfected at the stage of fruition: wondrous contemplation without a subject that contemplates or an object contemplated; it is the contemplation of great freedom. That is, having been liberated from the two forms of birth-and-death, segmented and transformational, one truly attains great freedom.

Therefore, the Buddha uses the fruition-name "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva" to inspire and instruct us: if we wish truly to cultivate to Buddhahood, we must neither follow the Lesser Vehicle—śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas—nor emulate lesser bodhisattvas, the bodhisattvas of provisional teachings.

Bodhisattvas have many stages: bodhisattvas at the ten stages of faith, the ten stages of abiding, the ten stages of practice, the ten stages of dedication, the ten bhūmis, equal enlightenment bodhisattvas, wondrous enlightenment bodhisattvas, and so forth. There are so many levels of bodhisattvas, whereas Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is a great bodhisattva who has already attained the wondrous fruition. The Buddha wants us to learn from Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, constantly applying contemplative awareness and beginning our cultivation from there.

For this reason, we must first awaken to understanding. What must we understand? We must understand that the all-capable essence that gives rise to every function is our own intrinsic nature, and that all dharma appearances are manifestations of our intrinsic nature.

We must penetrate these dharma appearances and these functions to see our own essential nature. This is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. To realize the mind means to understand that the mind cannot be found and that it is the wondrous functioning of the dharma essence. To see one's true nature means to awaken to and firmly trust that intrinsic nature is the master of all wondrous functioning, the all-capable essence from which all dharma appearances arise.

Then, at every moment, we contemplate this wondrous essence, remain unmoved upon the original ground, and do not allow ourselves to be turned by objects and circumstances. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "In principle, awakening is sudden, and through awakening they are simultaneously eliminated; in actuality, they are not removed all at once, but are exhausted in due sequence." This describes the stages of practice in which, after awakening at the level of principle, one safeguards realization and removes habitual tendencies.

An ancient Chan master wrote a poem that expresses this very well: "The mind turns with the myriad things; where it turns is truly profound. Amid conditions, recognize your nature: no joy and no sorrow."

"The mind turns with the myriad things" means that our mind gives rise to all kinds of wondrous functioning in accordance with the myriad things; this is responding to conditions and engaging with things. When situations arise, we know how to resolve them; when work comes, we know how to complete it. We are not confused in the least. But everyone should take care not to misunderstand this line: it does not mean that the mind abides in anything.

"Where it turns is truly profound": profound here means serene and unmoving. Although the mind turns and thoughts arise to deal with all kinds of matters, inwardly it remains unmoved—the matter is not held in the mind. It is as though someone else, rather than oneself, were handling it. Confucius said: "Let the mind be at rest while the body labors."

This means that although the physical body is at work, the mind is not attached to it. This saying is extremely important. To truly accomplish it, one must engage in diligent contemplative awareness. Without such contemplation, the mind will turn with objects and circumstances and be drawn in and constrained by them. Our cultivation is to avoid being turned by objects and circumstances; on the contrary, we must turn them.

When we possess something, we should make use of it rather than be used by it. For example, if we have a cup, we use it to drink water; if we have a thermos, we use it to keep its contents warm. But we must not be turned by gaining or losing these things, or give rise to joy, attachment, worry, or vexation because of them. If we lack these things, we likewise should not exhaust our minds in chasing after and struggling to obtain them, much less harm others or break the law in order to acquire them. That would be to be used by things.

The Diamond Sūtra says: “Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.” It is not that the mind should not arise or that thoughts should not arise; how could wondrous functioning occur without the arising of mind? Rather, one should give rise to a mind of non-abiding, a mind that does not remain fixed on anything. Even as a thought arises, no thought is seen to arise; after it has arisen, it leaves no trace, like a bird crossing the vast sky.

Even while doing things and responding to conditions and engaging with objects, inwardly one abides nowhere, with no mind of anxious concern over gain and loss.

When one succeeds in doing something, one does not become smug with delight. One simply fulfilled one’s responsibility as one should; what is there to be proud of or boast about? When one fails, one does not become worried or vexed, for one was not careless, perfunctory, or merely going through the motions, but exerted all one’s strength. Thereafter, one need only correct one’s mistakes.

It is impossible for everything we do to proceed smoothly and reach perfect fulfillment; there will always be times of failure. When failure comes, do not become vexed or sorrowful. Carefully and patiently analyze the matter, discover the causes of failure, learn the lesson, correct the mistakes, and strive to succeed the next time. “Failure is the mother of success.” Keep the mind always open, upright, pure, and unstained: this is the essential meaning of “where it turns is truly profound.”

“Amid conditions, recognize your nature”—this sentence is very important. In all that we do, we must accord with conditions. When we accord with conditions, wondrous functioning arises; otherwise, all manner of afflictions will arise. For example, a highly capable person may temporarily be unable to obtain suitable work and thus be unable to use his abilities. At such a time, there is no need to complain against Heaven or blame others; one need only work diligently at one’s present duties.

Over time, everyone will naturally come to appreciate his abilities, and he will be transferred to work more suited to him, where he can use those abilities. But if he becomes afflicted because he is dissatisfied with his present work, dark clouds will obscure the light, and his true nature will be unable to manifest.

For example, one is happy and delighted when one is promoted at work, but sad and troubled when one is demoted. These are the views and attitudes of ordinary people. As Buddhist practitioners, we should not hold such views. In all things, we should accord with conditions, for both promotion and demotion are opportunities to serve the public; we must not consider personal benefit. Moreover, all things are illusory appearances and cannot be grasped. Only our nature is true and not false. Only by functioning in accord with conditions without attachment can we receive genuine benefit.

As has been repeatedly explained, our nature is not elsewhere; it is precisely where it functions in the present moment. It is neither hidden nor concealed, nor is there any barrier separating us from it. You lose sight of your true nature only because you pursue external objects. Ordinarily, when deluded thoughts fly about in profusion, you naturally do not recognize it; yet even at the critical instant when no thought arises, you often let it slip past.

When you are acting and functioning in accord with conditions, if you can turn the light inward for a glance and ask, “Who is it that gives rise to this wondrous functioning?” then, at that very moment, arouse your full vitality and seize hold of it in one stroke. Your inquiry and study will then be complete. For nature has neither intervals nor interruption, whereas affairs have intervals and thoughts arise and cease.

If a practitioner can turn back and take a look when the preceding thought has ceased and the succeeding thought has not yet arisen, what else could this be—which, though not a single thought arises, is clearly and distinctly aware—but the Buddha-nature of the person before you? Once one recognizes one’s original nature, ceases to cling to appearances, and functions in accord with conditions, the great matter is settled. This is what is meant by “recognizing one’s nature in accordance with conditions.”

When explaining the second line just now, we said that the mind abides nowhere. Everyone should understand that only when thoughts arise without abiding or lingering, and the mind does not follow preceding thoughts or external objects, can one speak of the practice of no-thought. If you can truly allow thoughts to arise without abiding in them, you can emit a great light.

Yet practitioners often abide as soon as a thought arises: they linger and circle endlessly around external objects, abiding in them. This is a major obstacle to

practice. What should be done? One must contemplate and illuminate at every moment, temper oneself amid circumstances, and give rise to all kinds of wondrous functioning in accord with conditions. Only by gradually eliminating the evil habit of abiding in circumstances and clinging to appearances can one enable one's original nature to remain unmoving in its original ground and ultimately attain Buddhahood.

The fourth line is "Neither joy nor sorrow." This means that if conditions are favorable and an undertaking is completed perfectly, we do not rejoice; if conditions are unsuitable and it is not done well, we do not grieve. For all affairs are illusory appearances, and fundamentally there is neither gain nor loss.

Moreover, whatever we do is done by functioning in accord with conditions, constantly according with sentient beings, and benefiting all people; it is not done for private gain. Furthermore, when we do something, we exert our utmost effort without the slightest carelessness. If we succeed, we do not claim the credit; if we fail, we have a clear conscience. Open and upright, we exercise great capacity and great functioning, neither rejoicing nor grieving, neither grasping nor rejecting.

When the practice of contemplation reaches this stage, contemplation itself is no longer necessary. One then ascends to a higher level, enters the functioning without effort, and reaches the ground of non-contrivance. At this time, true nature is present before one at every moment. The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: "One who has seen one's nature must see it directly upon hearing these words. If this is so, even when brandishing a sword and going into battle, one can see it."

When brandishing a sword and going into battle, with one's life hanging on a single breath, there is not the slightest panic; one merely clearly sees true nature at work. Even if one sacrifices one's life for one's country and dies for righteousness, it does not matter, for true nature is neither arising nor ceasing.

The sages of the Lesser Vehicle do not understand this point. They think, "Oh! Does this not mean entering the cycle of birth and death once again?" They do not realize that, to attain Buddhahood, one must enter the six realms to liberate sentient beings. If you do not enter birth and death, how can you liberate the sentient beings in the six realms? Moreover, in entering the six realms, there are in fact no six realms to enter. Bodily appearances arise and cease, but nature neither arises nor ceases.

Therefore, we need not be filled with scattered deluded thoughts and layered afflictions. We need only be open-hearted, let things unfold in accord with conditions, and be carefree and at ease. If we can practice according to these four lines of verse, we will gain great benefit and great freedom.

We must further emphasize this: after realizing one's Original Face through contemplation, one must constantly safeguard it. This is the practice known in the Chan school as "herding the ox": removing its wildness until it has been trained into complete gentleness and no longer strays about. Then one no longer watches over it, but lets it roam freely. The practice of safeguarding realization and letting it be has two stages: safeguarding means guarding, while letting be means allowing free functioning. Only after the practice of guarding has matured can one let it be. If the practice has not matured, one must still guard it and cannot yet let it go. We must understand clearly that safeguarding and letting be are two different matters.

In summary, the cultivation of Buddhism, regardless of school or dharma gate, cannot be separated from contemplation. It may be said that contemplation is the sole path for Buddhist practitioners to realize the Way, and the key to whether they can realize the mind and see their true nature, and whether their cultivation can succeed.

However, beginners often cannot understand contemplation and do not know where to begin. They commonly look at everything with their physical eyes and discriminate everything through deluded thought. As a result, they mistake delusion for truth, become deluded by circumstances, are carried along by circumstances, and fall into the stream of afflictions without freedom.

Through the practice of turning the faculty of hearing back upon itself, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva perceived that objects, self, and dharmas are all empty; awakened to the Original Face; directly realized the true reality; eradicated attachment to self and attachment to dharmas; and became liberated from the two forms of birth and death—segmented and transformational—thereby attaining great freedom.

Thus the Heart Sūtra says: "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, while practicing profound prajñāpāramitā, clearly saw that the five aggregates are all empty and crossed beyond all suffering and adversity." This method of entering contemplation through the ear faculty is a wondrous Dharma that is most readily successful in cultivating the Way.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha also says that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva began cultivation through the ear faculty, contemplated the nature of hearing, and thereby initiated the function of contemplative prajñā. This method of practice is the dharma gate most suited to the cultivation of sentient beings in our Sahā world. If we can understand the principles of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's method of practice and put them into effect accordingly, it is extremely easy to obtain results.

Therefore, when explaining the sūtra phrase "Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva," we discussed Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's method of cultivation and realization in some

detail, especially the practice of contemplation. If everyone can clearly understand the principles contained in the words “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva,” it is equivalent to understanding the Heart Sūtra’s true purport and genuinely receiving its supreme meaning. One may then uphold the Heart Sūtra and gain great benefit and great advantage.

Practicing profound prajñāpāramitā. Xing ( ), read here as hèn, is used here as a noun, meaning cultivated practice or spiritual attainment. Profound does not mean profound as opposed to shallow, for profundity and shallowness are relative, limited, bounded, and discriminated. Here, “profound” means exceedingly deep and vast; even profundity itself cannot be grasped, for the causal practice is all-encompassing and the fruition complete, with nothing obstructed.

“Practicing the profound” means that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s spiritual attainment is exceedingly deep and vast, complete and unobstructed.

“Prajñāpāramitā,” as explained when discussing the sūtra title, means that Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva activated the unsurpassed wondrous wisdom of prajñā possessed by all sentient beings, dispelled ignorance, and united the true wisdom that penetrates worldly and supramundane dharmas without obstruction with true principle. He eradicated attachment to self and attachment to dharmas, became liberated from segmented and transformational birth and death, reached the further shore beyond the bitter ocean of birth and death, and attained genuine great freedom.

Although the sages of the Lesser Vehicle possess wisdom, it is not ultimate great wisdom; their prajñā is incomplete. They are liberated only from segmented birth and death, not from transformational birth and death. Thus this cannot be called prajñāpāramitā.

At that time, clearly seeing that the five aggregates are all empty. Buddhist scriptures may be interpreted in different ways. The Heart Sūtra has always been read as: “While practicing profound prajñāpāramitā, [he] clearly saw that the five aggregates are all empty.” Why do I place the word “time” together with “clearly seeing that the five aggregates are all empty”? This requires a detailed explanation.

First, it speaks here of “time,” yet in reality there is no time; this is entirely skillful means. What is called “time” is actually constituted by the deluded thoughts of sentient beings. Past, present, future, an instant, countless kalpas, and so forth all arise through discrimination; without exception, they result from the restless movement of our thoughts.

From ancient times to the present, the Buddhadharma has never departed from the present thought and originally abides nowhere. When the mind moves,

discrimination gives rise to earlier and later times.

If the mind does not move, every moment is the same and there is no discrimination. What past, present, or future could there be? What boundary lines of time could there be? Scientists have proposed that if we could invent a spacecraft capable of traveling faster than light (at present, we can reach only supersonic speeds), events from tens of thousands of years ago could all appear before our eyes.

Yet this remains only a theory, far beyond the scientific community's reach. Current science and technology are still far from being able to accomplish such a thing. Yet our own intrinsic nature can exercise precisely this kind of wondrous functioning.

If not a single thought moves and deluded thoughts do not arise, then events that occurred thousands or tens of thousands of years ago, and even future events that have not yet occurred, will all be reflected before our eyes.

When Master Zhizhe, the founding patriarch of the Tiantai school, was reading the Lotus Sūtra and came to the chapter on the Medicine King, he entered the Lotus Samādhi. Scenes of the magnificent assembly in which Śākyamuni Buddha taught on Vulture Peak in former times unfolded before his eyes, as in a film or television program. Thus, if we can truly see through to our own Buddha-nature and dharma-nature, we will not cling to the appearances of all things we see, but will see only our intrinsic nature. One who truly sees one's nature makes no distinctions of time. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is, of course, included among such persons.

Second, the meaning of "practicing the profound" has already been introduced. Here, xing ( ) is understood as a noun, not a verb. Shi ( ), "time," begins the following phrase. The meaning of these four phrases is this: Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva completely realized the essence of nature, eradicated attachment to self and attachment to dharmas, became liberated from segmented and transformational birth and death, reached the further shore beyond the bitter ocean of birth and death, and attained spiritual realization that is exceedingly deep and vast, complete and unobstructed. At every moment, he clearly sees that the five aggregates are all empty. True emptiness displays wondrous functioning; the five aggregates all become wondrous functioning. At every moment, there is great freedom, and no suffering or adversity can be spoken of.

Third, if shi (, "time") is placed at the end of the preceding sentence, and xing ( ) in "practicing profound prajñāpāramitā" is taken as a verb, it is easy to create the mistaken impression that when one practices profound prajñāpāramitā, one can clearly see that the five aggregates are all empty; whereas when one does not practice profound prajñāpāramitā, one cannot clearly see that the five aggregates are all empty.

This raises another question: How long does one practice profound prajñāpāramitā? It is like some people asking, “How long does realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature take?” When we practice a Dharma method—for example, Chan, investigating a huatou—we investigate until we break through the fundamental inquiry and awaken.

This breaking through the fundamental inquiry is “when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen.” How long does this state in which not a single thought arises last? Five minutes? Ten minutes? Or longer? And what happens after awakening? Once a thought arises, is it not all over? In our practice, must we preserve and prolong this time of no-thought? These are all very important questions. Since we are discussing the word shi, “time,” today, it is necessary to explain this clearly.

First, I can tell you with certainty that all the foregoing views are mistaken. If we truly see our nature, then upon seeing it, we see it thoroughly; upon seeing it, we see it forever. We see our nature at all times and in all places. It is absolutely not the case that we see it at one time and not at another; nor is it the case that we see it while practicing on the meditation cushion but do not see it after leaving the cushion.

There is no such thing as first seeing one’s nature for a certain number of minutes, and then gradually preserving and extending that time of “no-thought.” This is simply a failure to understand what nature is and what it means to see one’s nature. It is mere random speculation, and it also reflects an erroneous understanding of “no-thought.”

So-called “no-thought” means that when thoughts arise, one does not abide in them or linger over them. It definitely does not mean having no thoughts for a certain number of minutes. That would be dead: suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise cannot give rise to wondrous functioning. Even if one succeeded in cultivating such suppression of thoughts, one could only become like wood or stone. This is not the true meaning of the Buddhadharma.

The Buddhadharma requires us to respond to conditions and function accordingly, to bring forth great capacity and great functioning, and to benefit all living beings. The Buddhadharma is active, not passive.

If not a single thought arises and one remains there motionless as if dead, can one still function to benefit living beings? Can one still work diligently and serve sentient beings? If one cannot function and is of no use, then the Buddhadharma has no value at all. Therefore, we must correctly understand and recognize the questions raised above.

Once we recognize the Buddha-nature, this Buddha-nature must respond to conditions and function accordingly. So long as we recognize it, do not cling to appearances, and have no selfish or distracting thoughts, we can bring forth great capacity and great functioning; we can act without contrivance and yet leave nothing undone; and we can realize the fruition of Buddhahood. Buddhahood is lively, empty, and numinous, not rigid and inflexible. This is the true Buddhadharma.

Huang Shangu was a great writer of the same era as Su Dongpo, accomplished in poetry, lyrics, calligraphy, and painting. When he investigated Chan, Chan Master Huaitang instructed him to investigate the huatou: “Do you, my disciples, think that I conceal anything from you? I conceal nothing from you.” Since Huang Shangu was a scholar and a Confucian, his teacher had him investigate these words of Confucius.

“Do you, my disciples, think that I conceal anything from you?” means: “You students! Do you think I have some secret? Is there anything that I, your teacher, conceal when I explain the Way to you?” “I conceal nothing from you” means that I am open and sincere with you, and our minds accord with one another. There is nothing concealed or kept secret.

Huang Shangu naturally understood the meaning of this passage by Confucius and offered many doctrinal explanations, but Huaitang would not approve any of them. Huang Shangu thought, “I am a Confucian scholar. Could it be that I do not even understand this principle? Is my teacher not deliberately making things difficult for me?” He felt very unhappy. Once, he went mountain walking with his teacher.

It was then the eighth lunar month, when osmanthus blossoms were in full bloom. A gust of wind carried their fragrance, and Huang Shangu could not help blurting out, “What a wonderful burst of osmanthus fragrance!” Osmanthus is the sweet-scented cassia flower.

His teacher immediately seized this opportunity—an instant that vanishes in a flash, a moment of utmost urgency—and pointed him to it, saying, “I conceal nothing from you!” Who is it that smells the osmanthus fragrance? Is anything hidden from you? Is there any barrier between it and you? “Ah!” Huang Shangu awakened to the Way on the spot. Only then did he understand his teacher’s painstaking intention. Deeply ashamed, he immediately bowed in homage to his teacher and offered his thanks.

Therefore, the “nature” in realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature is not elsewhere; it is right here and now, functioning at every moment. This nature is the same for everyone. It is neither covered nor hidden, and there is no separation from it. The crucial point is whether you awaken to it. If you truly awaken and see your nature, then upon seeing it once, you see it forever; you see it at every moment.

Perhaps someone may say, “Over many lives and kalpas, our karmic obstacles have become deep and heavy. Might they not obscure us again after we have seen our nature, so that at times we see it and at times we do not?” This view is unreasonable. The ancients said, “A lamp can illuminate a dark room of a thousand years.”

This means that although a room has been shut up and dark for a long time—a thousand years or even ten thousand years—once you turn on the switch, the electric light immediately shines. It does not gradually become bright, nor does it shine for a moment and then become dark again.

Thus, no matter how long the dark room has been closed up, it becomes brightly illuminated in an instant, and everything in it can be seen with complete clarity. Even if the light in the room is turned off again later, you will still know what objects are in the room and where they are placed.

Having undergone the suffering of birth and death through kalpas of rebirth, our karmic obstacles are certainly deep and heavy. But once we awaken, see our original nature, and see our own Buddha-nature, this nature functions within us at every moment. There is no time when we do not see it and no place where we do not see it. At every moment we see it thoroughly, and at every moment appearances manifest and function within the ocean of our nature.

Whether you are busily active or even at the juncture of life and death, you see it thoroughly. This is seeing once and seeing forever, seeing once and seeing thoroughly. Yet we must not cling to seeing. We may only allow appearances to manifest and function without clinging to appearances. If we cling to seeing, then that seeing is still problematic.

A Chan master once described the functioning of nature in this way: “After wind and rain, peach blossoms line both banks; where can horsehooves avoid the fallen red petals?” This means that after a great wind and rain have passed through the peach trees on both sides of the road, fallen peach blossoms cover the ground everywhere.

If one rides a horse through this place, where can one avoid the fallen red petals? The fallen red petals are the scattered fragments of peach blossoms on the ground.

Where could one step without treading on fragments of peach blossoms? This means that in our lives, everything is the functioning of nature, and every phenomenon is a manifestation of nature. You are within the ocean of nature—can you leave it? At every moment it radiates light at the gates of your six sense faculties, functions, and manifests.

Whether or not you recognize this nature, you have never been apart from it and cannot escape its functioning. Without this nature, you could not function at all. I could not expound the sūtras here, you could not listen, and indeed nothing whatsoever could be done.

Yet all the things we see and do are like dreams and illusions. Once one awakens from the dream, nothing at all can be obtained. “Seeing one’s nature” is also a provisional name. To speak of seeing one’s nature while dreaming is to speak within the dream. Once one has awakened, to speak further of “awakening” is superfluous. Therefore, do not cling to seeing.

We have given a relatively detailed explanation of the meaning of shi, “time,” in connection with realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. “Practicing profound prajñāpāramitā” follows the same principle. Prajñāpāramitā is the great samādhi with neither entering nor leaving. The great Śūraṅgama samādhi discussed in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra is prajñāpāramitā.

So-called great samādhi means that, whatever circumstances one encounters, one can remain unobstructed in the face of them at every moment, without giving rise to thoughts, stirring the mind, or becoming deluded. Great samādhi is lively, empty, and numinous; it is great capacity and great functioning, with neither entering nor leaving.

If at times one does not give rise to thoughts, stir the mind, or become deluded, but at other times one does give rise to thoughts, stir the mind, and become deluded; if one remains undeluded before certain circumstances but becomes deluded before others—then one’s samādhi has entering and leaving, and it cannot be called great samādhi.

Therefore, once practitioners of the Dharma gate of contemplation have brought their practice to maturity and completion, eliminated attachment to self and attachment to dharmas, become liberated from the two forms of birth and death—segmented and transformational—and reached the far shore beyond the bitter sea of birth and death, their realization becomes profoundly deep, vast, complete, and unobstructed. Having truly attained great freedom, they then, at every moment, “clearly see that the five aggregates are all empty.” The five aggregates constantly manifest wondrous functioning, and practitioners are thereby freed from all suffering and adversity. This is the meaning of placing shi, “time,” before “clearly see that the five aggregates are all empty.”

What are the “five aggregates”? “Five” means form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. “Aggregate” means accumulation. The five aggregates, or skandhas, are also called wuyin ( ) in Chinese. They refer to five kinds of deluded thinking and activity that accumulate without dispersing, like shadows that obscure

the light of our wisdom and prevent the great spiritual functioning of the unsurpassable wondrous wisdom originally inherent in us from being brought forth.

The aggregate of form among the five aggregates consists of all material phenomena. All things in the world have material appearances. Our five faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, as well as the five sense objects of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects, all belong to material phenomena. The other four aggregates—feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—belong to mental phenomena. Thus, the five aggregates comprise two kinds: material phenomena and mental phenomena.

However, mental dharmas are not separate from material dharmas. Why is this so? Mind consists of the thoughts and ideas that arise when we encounter objects. Worldly teachings call this "thought is the reflection of the objective environment"; Buddhist scriptures call it "the conditioned shadows of the six sense objects"—that is, thoughts and ideas that arise when the sense faculties and their objects come into contact and converge.

That is to say, mind originally has no independent existence. It neither exists in isolation nor functions independently. Rather, because of unawareness and the contamination of various material dharmas, all kinds of mental thoughts arise. Thus, mind is the shadow left behind by the six sense objects; in brief, xin ( ), "mind," is explained as "accumulation and arising." Therefore, material dharmas are mental dharmas, and mental dharmas are material dharmas.

What about us? We human beings all cling to our own bodies as "I." As soon as children begin to learn, they know that their bodies are "I." This is discriminative attachment to self. They already possess the aggregate of form, which is called "the aggregate of form already present"; it is coarse.

As children gradually grow up, the four aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness arise. These four aggregates have been present since birth and are called innate attachment to self. They pertain to mental activity and are subtle. Because we have these bodies, we need clothing, food, shelter, and transportation to sustain life and nourish them.

Therefore, upon encountering objects, the aggregate of feeling arises. Since we need clothing, food, shelter, and transportation, we receive and take them in. Feeling is further divided into painful feeling, pleasant feeling, and neutral feeling. Painful feeling occurs when one fails to attain one's ideals, fulfill one's wishes, or conform to one's habits, and therefore feels suffering.

Pleasant feeling occurs when one's demands and wishes are fulfilled and accord with one's habits, so that one feels joyful and happy. The ordinary feeling that is

neither painful nor pleasant is neutral feeling. These are the three categories of the aggregate of feeling.

After receiving the preceding objects, thoughts arise because of the need for enjoyment. Human desires are limitless; as the saying goes, “The abyss of desire is hard to fill.” Desire is as deep as the ocean, like a bottomless pit, and can never be filled. One constantly thinks of how to live more happily, how to enjoy oneself better, and so on, turning such thoughts over without cease. This is the aggregate of perception.

Thought alone will not do. How can anything be accomplished by thinking alone? One must rely on action. This is the aggregate of formations—that is, planning and carrying things out. Here, xing ( ), translated as “formations,” also means an uninterrupted flow and change. For while you put something into action, thought never stops; it continually turns around the matter at hand—an uninterrupted flow and change.

In the course of planning and carrying things out, one accumulates experience, which becomes knowledge. This is the aggregate of consciousness. For example, when a man sees a woman and is deeply drawn to her voice, appearance, smiles, manner, speech, and way of dealing with others, he inwardly receives that object. The same is true when a woman looks at a man.

Both parties think about how they might unite with one another and actively put this into action. Through continual contact and growing mutual understanding, they gradually gain experience; this experience in love then becomes knowledge.

Again, suppose one sees how a cassette recorder is used and receives the beautiful melodies of its music. One may then wish very much to buy one, think of ways to raise the money, and investigate its models and features: whether it has a single or double cassette deck, how many speakers it has, how to use it, how to record and play back, and the function of each button. Thus, knowledge concerning these matters arises. In short, whether in living or working, we sentient beings are troubled by the five aggregates at every moment.

This Sahā world of ours is also called the Sahā world of the five turbidities. What are the five turbidities? They are the turbidity of the kalpa, the turbidity of views, the turbidity of afflictions, the turbidity of sentient beings, and the turbidity of life. What does “turbidity” mean? Turbidity is spoken of in contrast to clarity; whatever is impure is turbid.

The turbidity of the kalpa is created by the aggregate of form. Because sentient beings in the Sahā world, especially in the Dharma-ending Age, are confused about the principle that “everything is created by mind,” they always cling to the

appearances of things. They thereby create karma and undergo karmic retribution, until disasters such as famine, epidemics, and warfare arise one after another. Living beings suffer devastation and cannot find peace; this becomes the turbidity of the kalpa.

The turbidity of views is created by the aggregate of feeling. Views and understanding are erroneous, the true path is not followed, divergent doctrines abound, and no consensus can be reached.

The turbidity of afflictions is created by the aggregate of perception. Craving enjoyment gives rise to desires accordingly; people think wildly, are burdened by layer upon layer of afflictions, resort to any means, become angry and contentious, and engage in falsehood and deception.

The turbidity of sentient beings is created by the aggregate of formations. Because of clinging to and pursuing form and feeling, mind and body become impure, and evils multiply. People disregard morality and fail to understand principle, so that families are disharmonious, society is unstable, and the nation lacks stability.

The turbidity of life is created by the aggregate of consciousness. People all cling to this physical body as themselves and wish for long life and to remain in this world forever. Followers of non-Buddhist paths seek to cultivate this fleshly body into an indestructible vajra body. Yet because of the view of a person and attachment to self, and because afflictions gather in profusion, mind and body become worn and haggard, and life is short. The Buddha said that people in former times lived for eighty-four thousand years and stood several zhang tall.

With every passing hundred years, life spans decrease by one year and height by one cun. Once human life spans fall to twenty thousand years, the world gradually becomes turbid and impure. By the Dharma-ending Age, it is unbearably turbid: people today live only seventy or eighty years and stand five or six chi tall. In the future, life spans will diminish to ten years, and people will be no more than one chi tall. We shall not discuss this further here.

In short, we should understand that this Sahā world of the five turbidities is entirely produced by the five aggregates. Like dark clouds, the five aggregates shroud our bodies and minds, causing us to be confused and unaware and to fall vainly into the wheel of suffering. They are precisely the root of our birth and death in the cycle of the six realms.

Zhao ( ), “to illuminate,” means the contemplation of the supreme, wondrous wisdom of prajñā. This wisdom that illuminates is neither the faculty of observation of the physical eye nor the deluded illumination arising from the functioning of the six consciousnesses. Jian ( ), “to see,” means the lucid realization and seeing of the

true mind, not the deluded seeing of conceptual consciousness. Here, zhao jian ( ), rendered as “clearly sees,” refers to the clear seeing of prajñā’s wondrous wisdom, free from discrimination and any sense of attainment. Because it is non-discriminating, true reality appears.

Yet true reality is without characteristics, and all dharmas are empty. Thus, there is not a single characteristic that can be seen, and yet one sees its characteristics. Because nothing is obtainable, the true prajñā wisdom that illuminates is empty, and the deluded realm of the five aggregates that is illuminated is likewise empty. The illuminator and the illuminated are both empty; hence it is said, “clearly sees that the five aggregates are all empty.” But one must not cling to emptiness, nor must one cling to illumination.

That is to say, emptiness itself cannot be obtained, and illuminating and seeing likewise cannot be obtained; this is what is meant by “all empty.” The word “all” carries great weight: it means not clinging to anything at all. To say that one illuminates through and empties the five aggregates means that the five aggregates are fundamentally unobtainable. We should not cling to them as truly existent or cling to these material appearances.

But this is not biased emptiness. If one clings to emptiness, one becomes a saint of the lesser vehicle. If one considers the five aggregates bad things that must all be emptied away, wondrous functioning cannot arise. Conversely, we should make use of the five aggregates in our service; then the five aggregates are good things. Whether we are doing things, cultivating the Way and attaining Buddhahood, or liberating sentient beings, we must make use of the five aggregates. For the Buddhadharma is the perfect teaching of neither emptiness nor existence, neither existence nor emptiness; it is not a one-sided teaching.

Having spoken of emptiness, what is emptiness? It may be divided into the following five kinds.

1. Inert empty space: this is the emptiness of existence and nonexistence as ordinarily understood. When something comes, there is existence; when it is absent, there is emptiness. This is relative emptiness.

2. Annihilationist emptiness: some people misunderstand and think that Buddhism is negative, that it empties everything away and leaves nothing at all. This is a narrow view held by followers of non-Buddhist paths and by some people in the world. They believe that a person exists while alive but ceases to exist upon death, and that emptiness means only the elimination of material appearances.

3. True emptiness through analysis of dharmas: this is cultivated by saints of the lesser vehicle. They analyze every thing and every event until, in the end, nothing

remains and all is empty. For example, they analyze the five aggregates until nothing remains and all is empty. This is biased emptiness, incapable of giving rise to any wondrous functioning. They regard form as form and emptiness as emptiness, as two separate things.

4. True emptiness of the dharmas themselves: this is cultivated by bodhisattvas at the initial gate of the Mahāyāna. Although they know that material appearances are empty in themselves, they do not know that material appearances are the manifestation of intrinsic nature. They separate nature from appearance and thus still abide in biased emptiness.

5. Wondrous presence and true emptiness: this is what Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches. Although emptiness is empty, wondrous functioning is not absent. Therefore it is said: existing yet not existing, empty yet not empty; wondrous presence is not existence, and true emptiness is not emptiness. This is called "wondrous presence and true emptiness."

Because this essential nature is an all-capable essence, though it is without characteristics, it can manifest characteristics and function in accordance with conditions— "functioning in accordance with conditions." Although the essential nature is without characteristics, it cannot be apart from characteristics; apart from them, there would be no wondrous functioning. (Essence, appearance, and function are the dharmakāya (Dharma body), sambhogakāya (reward body), and nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body). Essence is the dharmakāya (Dharma body), appearance is the sambhogakāya (reward body), and function is the nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body). The three are one entity.)

If there were no appearances, function could not arise; then how could one realize that this essence exists? Where do we see our intrinsic nature? We see it precisely where function is at work. Since it is function, there are naturally appearances; only where there are appearances can there be function. Therefore, it still does not depart from appearances.

Earlier, we discussed the relationship between water and waves. Water is waves, and waves are water; they are one entity, and waves and water cannot be separated. Yet the nature of water is wetness, while the nature of waves is movement, so they are not the same. Once one understands this principle, one will know that seeing one's intrinsic nature cannot be apart from appearances, yet one should not cling to appearances. This is called "neither identical nor separate."

This question is not easy to understand, so let us explain it with another example. A mirror has a smooth surface and, according to the principle of the reflection of light, can form images of objects. Whether it is an ancient bronze mirror or a modern

plate-glass mirror, so long as it is a mirror, it can reflect the forms of objects, and images will form within it.

If you place it face down on a table, the mirror will contain the image of the tabletop; if you place it on the ground, it will contain the image of the ground. If you place it face up toward the sky, blue skies, white clouds, stars, the moon, and so forth will appear in it. Even if you wrap it in cloth, the image of the cloth will be reflected in the mirror. And even if you place it in a pitch-black room without the slightest light, there will still be an image of darkness in the mirror.

It is impossible for a mirror to contain no image at all. If it could not form images and had no reflections, it could not be called a mirror. Buddha-nature is the same: its essence may be compared to a mirror. Since there is a mirror, it can manifest appearances. Yet adherents of the Lesser Vehicle have always failed to understand this point clearly.

They always think that a mirror should simply be a mirror and should not have reflections; if it has reflections, they think that is not good. Bodhisattvas at the initial gate of the Mahāyāna, however, think that the mirror is the mirror and the reflection is the reflection. They do not realize that mirror and reflection cannot be separated: the mirror is the reflection, and the reflection is the mirror.

Though inseparable, they are not the same thing, just as water and waves are not the same. Only this accords with the doctrines and principles of the Buddhadharma; this is “wondrous presence and true emptiness.” Only when one has truly and thoroughly understood this matter will one neither cling to reflections nor fail to understand that mirrors and reflections are inseparable.

Nature is seen in its functioning; essence, appearance, and function are an integrated unity. Thus, the emptiness spoken of in Buddhism—the emptiness in “seeing that the five aggregates are all empty”—is neither analytical emptiness nor the emptiness of dharmas themselves, still less stubborn voidness or annihilationist emptiness. It is wondrous presence and true emptiness!

What is meant by wondrous presence is that it is not substantial existence: wondrous presence is not existence, and true emptiness is not emptiness. This essential nature that can hear, see, taste, smell, move, and think has no appearance and seems to be absent, yet it truly exists; it is present. It is the basis of life, the energy that sustains life, and the motivating force within the body.

Without it, the mind could not arise in response to objects. Our ability to move and think is entirely due to its presence. It is the root, the true “presence.” Although it has no appearance, it is functioning everywhere and at all times. It is because this energy is present that it can function in accordance with conditions.

But functioning in accordance with conditions entails manifesting appearances. How could it function without manifesting appearances? For example, without the appearance of a body, how could one speak, work, and so on? Such appearances arise from nature and are the functioning of nature; they are neither fundamental nor ultimate. Therefore, do not cling to appearances. The Diamond Sūtra says: “If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata.”

This means that when we see appearances, we understand that they are all false appearances, while the essential nature that gives rise to them is real, unfailing, eternal, and indestructible. Only by seeing nature through all appearances—by seeing the formless, signless nature—does one see the Tathāgata. This is to see the essence through surface phenomena. To see the Tathāgata does not mean seeing some Buddha outside oneself; it means seeing the Buddha of our own intrinsic nature.

But ordinary beings in the world are deeply deluded and defiled. They do not understand this principle and often cling to the physical body of the five aggregates as a true self. They mistakenly take all sense objects—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas that are seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and thought—to be substantially real. Thus they give rise to the mistaken mental dharmas of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Consequently, they become stuck to circumstances, deluded by them, receive and experience them, give rise to confused thoughts, put them into action, and generate discriminating knowledge.

As explained earlier, these mental dharmas appear to be activities of mind. Yet what is called mind has no independent existence; it is an illusory image produced when the sense faculties encounter objects. In terms of this image, it is a mental dharma, yet it still does not depart from material dharmas. People in the world often cling to these material dharmas as substantially real, and so they pursue and greedily grasp at them.

Human desire is insatiably greedy, boundless and endless.

To satisfy their desires and achieve their aims, people often stop at nothing: offering and accepting bribes, cheating and swindling, even murdering for wealth, killing people and setting fires, embezzling funds and perverting the law. They commit every kind of perverse and unlawful evil deed, causing Buddha-nature—which is neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing—to become engulfed by layer upon layer of karmic obstacles. Thus, through creating karma and undergoing karmic retribution, they unjustly suffer the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, the five aggregates are the karmic impediments of cyclic rebirth in the six realms.

If we are to accomplish the Buddha's work, we must see through the five aggregates and clearly recognize our own nature. We must understand that these states are all manifestations of our own nature, all its wondrous functioning. If we make use of them without clinging to them, then the five aggregates are wondrous presence: they are good things, tools for practice, and provisions for attaining Buddhahood.

At this point, someone asks: Since the five aggregates are wondrous presence and are good things, why must we still contemplate through them and realize their emptiness? This is an excellent question. Not only ordinary beings fail to understand it; even adherents of the Lesser Vehicle do not understand it. They regard the five aggregates as bad things, as the source of suffering, and think it would be best if nothing existed at all. This is biased emptiness. Then how does the Buddhadharma's teaching of wondrous presence and true emptiness understand and see through the five aggregates? We shall now explain this in somewhat greater detail.

First is the aggregate of form: all material dharmas, that is, the appearances of external objects. Next are mental dharmas: our inverted deluded thoughts, that is, internal formless appearances. All these are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water; they are unobtainable. Why is this so? Because all such appearances and formless appearances lack intrinsic nature and lack any independent substance.

That is to say, there is fundamentally no such independently existing thing. For example, the clothes we wear are made of cloth, which is cut and sewn into garments. And cloth? Cotton seeds are buried in the soil, then, through the action of water, sunlight, air, fertilizer, and so forth, they grow, flower, and bear fruit. The harvested cotton is then spun into yarn and woven into cloth.

If they are synthetic-fiber products, various raw materials are brought together under certain conditions through various chemical reactions, then spun into filaments and made into various synthetic fabrics. This shows that clothes themselves have no independent substance and no intrinsic nature; they are produced by the coming together of other causes and conditions.

Cloth or synthetic-fiber products are the "cause," while tailors, sewing machines, scissors, rulers, and so forth are the "conditions." With causes and conditions, garments come into being. The same is true of clothing, and of every other thing. Our physical bodies are formed through the union of the father's sperm and the mother's blood.

Nothing in the world has an independent substance or intrinsic nature. Buddhism calls this "dependent arising and emptiness of nature." All things arise today through the coming together of causes and conditions, and in time they will certainly perish as causes and conditions disperse.

Where there is arising, there must be ceasing; where there is union, there must be separation. This is dialectical and does not change according to human subjective wishes; no one can do anything about it. Ancient poets once expressed the beautiful wish: “May flowers always bloom, the moon always be full, and people live long.” But through humanity’s long experience, it has been discovered that this is merely an empty wish.

Flowers ultimately cannot remain beautiful forever. However brilliantly they bloom, they will eventually wither. The moon also cannot always be full; it necessarily waxes and wanes. Nor can people live forever without aging. Even if one lives beyond a hundred years, one must still die.

Therefore, the ancients lamented: “Such things have been hard to make whole since ancient times!” This is because it is an objective law of the development of things. The development of human beings and all things follows the laws of arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing; and of formation, abiding, decay, and emptiness.

Foolish people do not understand this truth. Mistaking material objects for real, they take the false for the true, cling to them greedily, and pursue them without letting go. The wise see through this truth at a glance. They know that all things and material appearances in the world are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—false appearances without any real substance, fundamentally unobtainable. Therefore, they do not cling to material appearances and greedily pursue them without end.

Not clinging to or pursuing them is what is meant by seeing through them. In Buddhism, seeing through means recognizing the truth of the universe and life, and bringing one’s body, speech, and mind into accord with the laws governing the continual development of objective phenomena, rather than violating and obstructing that development through subjective and blind action. Thus Buddhism is scientific and fully embodies right faith! Yet people in the world do not understand this and mistakenly regard it as superstition. This is truly a great pity!

Once the aggregate of form has been seen through, the remaining four aggregates are consequently seen through as well. Why? Once one knows that all material appearances are false, unreal, and unobtainable, one will not become stuck to circumstances and deliberately receive them. Thus the aggregate of feeling is dissolved. Since one no longer receives these states, deluded thoughts no longer revolve.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “Knowing them to be flowers in empty space, there is no more cyclic turning.” This is precisely the principle being explained. It tells us to awaken and understand that all things are like flowers in

empty space and the moon in water: fundamentally nonexistent, they are false appearances arising from our own deluded thoughts and attachments.

As soon as we awaken and know that they are flowers in empty space and the moon in water, unobtainable, the mind naturally ceases to move. Then everything is let go, and one no longer gives rise to confused thoughts. Thus the aggregate of perception is dissolved.

Once there are no deluded thoughts, no incessantly shifting deluded notions, how could they be put into practice? Formations refer to our planning and action. Since we no longer think in this way or pursue present circumstances, how could we act deludedly or blindly? Once there is no action, the aggregate of formations is dissolved as well.

The aggregate of consciousness consists of deluded knowledge formed through the discriminations of the deluded mind. Since all things are originally mere false appearances, what is there to discriminate? Originally there is nothing, yet you make discriminations—is this not deluded thought and a deluded mind? Thus, this aggregate of consciousness is deluded consciousness, what we call the consciousness-spirit.

The consciousness-spirit is originally suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature. It becomes the consciousness-spirit only because suchness (tathatā) does not remain in its own nature, but falsely gives rise to discrimination in response to external objects and is ceaselessly stirred into disorder. It is like water: when agitated by wind, waves arise. Waves arise because of movement, yet their substance remains water. Thus it is said that calming the frenzied mind is bodhi. Bodhi is perfect awakening.

Now that we have illuminated and penetrated the aggregate of consciousness, we know that it is not inherently real, but arises only through deluded movement. This aggregate of consciousness is merely a false appearance. As soon as we awaken, we illuminate and penetrate it and turn it around. Once it is turned around, the aggregate of consciousness becomes our Original Face, just as waves become water when they subside. That is to say, once we awaken, we can illuminate and penetrate ignorance and thoroughly see our original, pristine Buddha-nature.

When ignorance is mentioned, people shrink from it in fear and sigh helplessly, believing it difficult to break through and thus assuming that they have no share in seeing their nature. To break through ignorance, one must clearly recognize what ignorance is. In fact, ignorance is not something that truly exists; it is only the deluded mind’s false attachment. If ignorance truly existed as something real, we would have to devise every possible means to break it.

Yet ignorance is not something that truly exists; it is merely deluded thought. To remove deluded thoughts does not mean forcibly suppressing or annihilating them, but turning them around. To turn them around is to awaken; awakening is non-abiding and freedom from entanglement. Then ignorance is illuminated and penetrated. Ignorance is one of the three delusions. Delusions are also called afflictions, outflows, defilements, and bonds. The three delusions are delusions of views and thought, dust-like delusions, and delusions of ignorance.

Delusions of views and thought are the delusions of ordinary beings. The delusions of views among them are delusions and errors in one's views, and there are five kinds: the view of a body, extreme views, attachment to views, attachment to precepts and prohibitions, and wrong views. Delusions of thought are delusions and errors in one's thinking—that is, giving rise to mind in response to objects—and they too are fivefold: greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt.

If practitioners of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles eliminate the two delusions of views and thought, they can attain arhatship and pratyekabuddhahood, leave the three realms, and take this as nirvāṇa. Dust-like delusions are the delusions of bodhisattvas; they obstruct the work of liberating and teaching beings. If bodhisattvas seeking to liberate sentient beings do not thoroughly understand the immeasurable and innumerable dharma gates, as numerous as dust and sand, they cannot complete the work of teaching sentient beings. Hence they are called dust-like delusions. The delusion of ignorance is fundamental ignorance; it can obscure the principle of the true reality of the Middle Way. When ignorance is completely eliminated, one becomes a Buddha.

Among these three delusions, the delusions of views and thought are coarse, dust-like delusions are intermediate, and delusions of ignorance are subtle; their natures differ from one another. In the doctrinal schools, practice proceeds in stages: first eliminate delusions of views, then delusions of thought, then dust-like delusions, and finally the subtle delusions of ignorance. This method of practice seeks the result from the cause.

It is like a great tree: beginning with the branches and leaves, one gradually works from the outside inward, and only at the end digs out the roots. In the Chan school, however, one first breaks through ignorance and cultivates from ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) to attain the formless dharmakāya (Dharma body); one then undertakes proper cultivation and diligently removes habitual tendencies. This method of practice seeks the cause from the result.

It is like cutting down a great tree: first cut through its roots. Once the roots are severed, although the trunk, branches, and leaves may still be green and flourishing, they cannot live for long and will gradually wither. From this we can see that the

doctrinal schools and the Chan school have different standpoints; their views, teachings, and methods of practice therefore differ as well. The Chan school, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the Esoteric Dharma of Ganges Mahāmudrā, and the like all begin by breaking through ignorance and seeing one's nature, and afterward bring the fruit of Buddhahood to perfection.

Chan Master Yongjia said: "In dreams, the six destinies are plainly present; upon awakening, the great chiliocosm is utterly empty." Dreamers take their dreams to be real and do not know that they themselves are dreaming. Once they awaken from the dream, they suddenly realize that all the circumstances within it are illusory, false appearances. A single night is only a small dream; human life is truly a great dream. When one awakens, the dream vanishes.

Who first awakens from the great dream? Throughout my life, I myself have known! If a person awakens and realizes the realm of true reality, the Buddhist principle that life is like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, dew, or lightning immediately becomes apparent. Thus, when awakening occurs, ignorance is extinguished, and one thoroughly sees one's own Original Face. Breaking through ignorance is seeing one's nature! In my earlier explanations, I have discussed seeing one's nature many times from different perspectives. Why have I explained it in this way? Simply to emphasize the matter and remind all practitioners to take heed.

Although Buddhist sūtras and treatises are many and dharma gates are vast, their central tenet is one and their aim is the same: realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is truly the profound and far-reaching intent and essential core of the whole body of teachings delivered by the Buddha during his lifetime. It is the crucial key to transcending birth and death, the pivot for realizing the great Way, the guiding principle of all Buddhist schools, and the standard for Buddhist practitioners. If one does not cultivate in accordance with this guiding principle, one is not a Buddhist!

Yet as the Buddhadharma has declined in recent times, the Chan school—once a central pillar with lofty standards, magnificent vigor, an abundance of outstanding people, and a vast array of flourishing manifestations—has come to the point where it scarcely dares even to speak or write the words "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature," much less publicize them widely.

From south to north and east to west, wherever one travels, most people cling to the same rigid and lifeless huatou: "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" As a result, Chan practitioners investigate with bitter effort for decades without receiving any news, and regard seeing their nature as an exceedingly profound and unattainable matter. They are so frightened that they dare not seek it, much less promote and advocate it.

Therefore, Master Taixu said with boundless sorrow: “The descendants of the Chan school today transmit the Dharma merely through Dharma certificates; they do not transmit it after realizing the mind and seeing their true nature. The so-called descendants of the Linji school are all but blank sheets of paper. When have they ever awakened to the mind?!” Consequently, the Chan school has become desolate and neglected, and many people have changed schools to become followers of the Pure Land school.

Practitioners of the Pure Land school advocate horizontal transcendence and rebirth in the Western Pure Land while carrying karma. They believe that one need only have faith and vows, and Amitābha Buddha will naturally come to guide one, as though realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature were unnecessary. Yet they do not realize that the Pure Land method of Buddha-recitation requires that, while reciting the Buddha’s name, one “gather in the six sense faculties, maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness, enter samādhi—this is foremost.” To uphold the name single-mindedly for one day, or even for seven days, without distraction; “when the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to the unborn”—all these are equivalent expressions for realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.

Most practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism, moreover, tend toward the mysterious marvels of spiritual powers, displaying them to impress worldly people and satisfy their craving for fame, gain, and offerings. They do not value the work of realizing the essence, realizing the Way, and transcending birth and death, and have turned this excellent Esoteric Buddhism into something full of sinister and bizarre influences. The aim of Esoteric Buddhism—attaining Buddhahood in this very life or in this very body, namely realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature—has likewise long been cast beyond the clouds.

What is worse, heterodox and deviant paths are rampant today. Perverse influences cause mischief and hordes of demons dance wildly, borrowing the name of Buddhism to transmit teachings and bestow practices. They confuse the true with the false, toy with spiritual powers and magical techniques, burn incense and make prostrations, make vows and tell fortunes, beat instruments, recite, and sing, all for fame, gain, and offerings. Thus our Buddhism, once brilliant, sacred, and dignified, has been ruined by unworthy descendants into such a foul, smoky, and chaotic state.

How could this not fill one with anguish and indignation? Therefore, if we are to revive Buddhism, we must advocate realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. We must restore the Tathāgata’s true Dharma to practitioners. No matter which school or dharma gate you practice, if you truly wish to transcend birth and death and realize the great Way, you must not disregard, deny, or depart from realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. Rather, you must exert all your wisdom,

courage, and energy in striving to fulfill this great aim. You must never shrink back out of fear of difficulty. This is the first point I especially wish to emphasize.

Second, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is neither mysterious nor unattainable. As we have said many times before, intrinsic nature is right where its functioning occurs. We should understand that intrinsic nature is not concealed or hidden, nor is its functioning cut off. Our intrinsic nature is nowhere else; it is right here, at this very moment. At every moment, it is present within your functioning.

Patriarch Dahui Zonggao once instructed: precisely in the true emptiness when the preceding thought has ceased, the following thought has not yet arisen, and not a single thought has been born, one stands at a critical juncture. This opportunity vanishes in an instant. You must not pause and wait in thought; rather, at this moment, exert yourself, apply an extra measure of strength, and rouse yourself vigorously. If you stop even slightly at this point, you will be deluded by shadows.

Seize this most crucial moment. With a single turning of the light inward, awaken—this is our Original Face! Bite down firmly on it, recognize it with certainty, and cease to doubt: this is seeing one's nature. Ignorance is then broken through as well.

Thus, seeing one's nature is nothing strange, bizarre, mysterious, or unfathomable. Yet though ignorant people may receive every kind of instruction and guidance, because they do not see any extraordinary spiritual powers or mysterious marvels, they think it is not the real thing and refuse to acknowledge it. They then seek Dharma outside the mind in hopes of miraculous effects. Although those who teach the Dharma are deeply compassionate and wish everyone to see their nature immediately and attain Buddhahood, they cannot force a cow's head down to make it eat grass, nor can they undertake realization on another's behalf. Thus, having no alternative, they adapt to the times and alter their expedient methods.

Today, if practitioners, upon hearing this, can dispel the mists of delusion at this very moment and clearly see Buddha-nature, and if they take Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as their model, continuously safeguard realization amid their daily activities, settle their minds firmly and sincerely, and at all times contemplate this intrinsic nature—letting it remain unwavering on its original ground, not swayed by objective circumstances or drawn along by material objects—then, by constantly nurturing this 'sacred embryo', preserving the Way and nourishing intrinsic nature, and diligently removing habitual tendencies, they will ultimately realize the true fruit. This is precisely the wondrous purport of the Heart Sūtra.

An ancient worthy said: "When dust does not touch the mirror and wind does not stir the water, they respond without flaw and illuminate heaven and earth." This compares our intrinsic nature to a mirror and water.

This means that our Buddha-nature, which is neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, is utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. It is like a mirror with no dust upon it, or water that has not encountered wind and therefore has no waves: clear and bright, it can thoroughly illuminate heaven and earth without omission.

If one can thoroughly illuminate heaven and earth, does that not mean enjoying great freedom at every moment? And what is this moment? Thus it continues: “A crane stands amid the woods; an ape cries upon the ridge. The wind sweeps away broken clouds; the water strikes a long boat.” This is precisely a natural scene of carefree, untrammeled ease.

That is to say, the essence of intrinsic nature is lucid, and its function is all-capable: it can give rise to mind and function in response to circumstances. All the myriad things and events in the world arise when this intrinsic nature encounters circumstances. All the forms we see at every time and place are manifestations of intrinsic nature.

If, when responding to circumstances, engaging with things, and functioning, we understand that it is intrinsic nature that is functioning, then we see our nature at every moment and in every place, without being turned by external circumstances. Chan Master Xuansha said: “The true mind is your seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing; direct perception is the true mind.”

This means that, in relation to all things and natural phenomena, one should not add the discriminations of one’s subjective deluded mind. That is the true mind. Once there are discriminations of the subjective deluded mind, that is consciousness-spirit. The distinction between true mind and consciousness-spirit lies precisely here: “Discrimination is consciousness; non-discrimination is wisdom.” Wisdom is the true mind. Therefore, realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature is not something abstruse and unfathomable. What is there still to doubt?

Previously, we discussed why the five aggregates must be contemplated, penetrated, and realized as empty, as well as how to do so. Once the five aggregates have been contemplated, penetrated, and realized as empty, one returns to intrinsic nature. One will no longer be deluded by external circumstances or driven about by the five aggregates. Instead, one can make use of the five aggregates and bring their functions into effect.

Some people do not understand this. Once the five aggregates have been realized as empty, they ask, why make use of them any further? This is what the Buddhadharma calls true emptiness and wondrous presence. True emptiness is empty yet not empty, not empty yet empty; wondrous presence is existent yet not

existent, not existent yet existent. Here, one can neither take things as substantially real nor fall into biased emptiness.

Because what is not existent nevertheless appears, and what is empty is nevertheless not empty, provisional appearances are not absent. Men and women, young and old, birds and beasts, mountains and rivers, the earth, plants and forests, the sun, moon, and stars, wind, rain, thunder, and lightning—all things and natural phenomena—appear vividly before us and do indeed exist. Yet these existences have no independent substance; they are all manifestations of intrinsic nature. Therefore, they are wondrous presence.

Again, because what exists is not truly existent, and what is not empty is empty, provisional appearances may exist, but they have no substantial reality and therefore cannot be grasped. Since all are dharmas arising from causes and conditions and have no independent substance, this is called true emptiness. True emptiness differs from inert emptiness. Inert emptiness cannot manifest appearances or function in response to circumstances. Take empty space, for example: what function can it perform? It has no awareness at all.

Our Buddha-nature, however, differs from inert emptiness. Although its fundamental essence is formless and without attributes, it is numinous awareness, an all-capable essence. It can manifest appearances according to conditions, give rise to the myriad dharmas, and manifest all kinds of wondrous functioning. Precisely for this reason, it is a wondrous essence.

If it could not give rise to the myriad dharmas or function, how could it be called a wondrous essence? It is called wondrous precisely because this formless, attribute-free fundamental essence can manifest appearances and function. And precisely because it can manifest appearances and function, we can awaken to its wondrous essence through appearances. Let us give an example, and this will be easier to understand.

A wondrous essence is like the “principle” by which we accomplish everything; hence it is called the “essence of principle.” What is this principle? Suppose that, after many years of concentrated research, a scientist devises a formula. By calculating according to that formula, a concrete undertaking can be accomplished.

The scientific principle expressed by this formula is manifested through the undertaking that is accomplished. In other words, whether the principle reflected in the formula is correct can be demonstrated only through that undertaking.

If the undertaking cannot be completed or does not succeed, this shows that the formula is mistaken, that the principle does not accord with objective laws, and that it cannot stand. Conversely, success shows that the theory is correct.

“Principle” is formless and without attributes, whereas things possess form and attributes. Yet formless, attribute-free principle manifests through things that have form and attributes. Likewise, Buddha-nature is a formless, attribute-free wondrous essence, and it must manifest through tangible appearances and functions. Apart from appearances and functions, this essence of principle cannot be seen.

Therefore, it is said that “principle is revealed through phenomena”: through the appearances and functions of things, the essence of principle is revealed. “Phenomena are accomplished through principle” means that things can be accomplished only when this essence of principle is present. Without it, what one does cannot succeed.

Where, then, does intrinsic nature manifest? It manifests in things. To see things is to see the essence of principle called “nature.” Essence, appearance, and function are three yet one, one yet three: a threefold unity. For one who has only initially seen the nature, however, intrinsic nature cannot be seen with the eyes.

For intrinsic nature is formless and without attributes, without the slightest attachment and unstained by a single speck of dust. It cannot be seen; there is nothing to see. Once there is something seen, it is not true seeing. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing.” This means that when you see your nature, you do not see it with your eyes.

Since intrinsic nature is formless and without attributes, how could you possibly see it with your eyes? Whenever there is a seeing subject and an object seen, that seeing is not true seeing but deluded seeing. There is a mind that sees and an appearance that is seen. Subject and object stand in opposition; both are illusory, and so this is not true seeing. True seeing has nothing that is seen. Once there is something seen, it is not intrinsic nature. The Diamond Sūtra says: “If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata.” This is the principle being explained.

Yet one who has thoroughly seen intrinsic nature can also see it with the physical eyes. Why is this? Is this not self-contradictory? No. As we have already explained, all forms and appearances are manifestations of intrinsic nature.

Apart from intrinsic nature, there are no appearances; without the essence of principle, how could anything be accomplished? Since all forms and appearances are manifestations of intrinsic nature, appearance is intrinsic nature; thus, seeing appearances is seeing intrinsic nature. Therefore, when seeing appearances, do not be deluded by them or take them to be real. Rather, see through forms and appearances to their essence, see their essence of principle: this is seeing intrinsic nature.

Only this is truly and thoroughly seeing intrinsic nature. Consider the white clouds in the sky, especially autumn clouds, which change without limit. At one moment they resemble a gray dog; at the next, they become a lion; then they turn into mountains, rivers, and seas. Yet however varied their changing forms may be, their basic substance—the white clouds—remains unchanged.

When we recognize them as white clouds and are not deluded by their changing provisional appearances, without becoming attached to such provisional appearances as lions or dogs, this is seeing intrinsic nature. To recognize that intrinsic nature is oneself is awakening.

Conversely, if one does not recognize intrinsic nature but acknowledges only the provisional appearances of the external world and takes them as real, it is like failing to recognize white clouds and identifying only the gray dog. That is a mistake. Our Sahā world is called the Sahā world of the five turbidities because all sentient beings cling to external circumstances and appearances, unaware that these realms and phenomena are manifestations of intrinsic nature. Forgetting their original nature and becoming deluded by external appearances, they abandon their home and leave their dwelling to wander outside in birth and death. The fundamental reason is that they do not recognize their own intrinsic nature. This is one of life's great errors.

By the same token, if we clearly recognize that the five aggregates are manifestations of intrinsic nature, that they are not inherently real but are all provisional appearances, and that what is truly real is our intrinsic nature, then we will not be deluded by the five aggregates. Instead, we will be able to use them freely.

In this way, the five aggregates are beneficial things: they are the wondrous functioning of intrinsic nature and become tools and provisions for our cultivation, realization, and attainment of Buddhahood. Conversely, if we put the root and branch upside down, become deluded by the five aggregates, and misuse them, then the five aggregates become harmful things, turning into toxins and karmic obstacles that cause us to fall into the cycle of rebirth in the six realms.

This is like the emperor of a country or the head of a household. If they are astute and capable, the civil and military ministers, or the household servants, will obey their commands and assignments. Each will fulfill their proper responsibility and perform the work well, making the country stable, prosperous, and strong, or the household peaceful, harmonious, and happy.

Conversely, if the emperor or household head is muddleheaded and incompetent, not only will they be unable to direct their civil and military ministers or servants, but they will constantly be thrown into chaos by them. This is what happens when a

weak master is bullied, leading to the fall of the country and the breakup of the household.

Previously, we discussed the master-servant relationship between true mind and deluded mind. Now we are discussing the master-servant relationship between intrinsic nature and the five aggregates, and between true mind and consciousness-spirit. First, we must clearly recognize that Buddha-nature is the master. When the master is able to take command, consciousness-spirit can be put to use, as can the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Then consciousness-spirit and the five aggregates serve their proper purpose.

To accomplish any undertaking, we must make use of the five aggregates. We must apprehend, understand, and master objective laws, and then act in accordance with them. If our thoughts and actions accord with objective laws, the undertakings we pursue will succeed.

Whether we engage in scientific or medical research, or specifically manufacture some product, we will achieve success. Our level of science and technology, our standard of living, and the quality of human life will continually improve and flourish; the country will be prosperous and the people at peace. Nor will wars occur in the world, and people will live together peacefully. Thus, the five aggregates bring humanity beauty, brightness, auspiciousness, and peace. Therefore, no worldly undertaking or accomplishment can be separated from the wondrous functioning of the five aggregates.

Nor can our cultivation be separated from the five aggregates. The five aggregates are tools and provisions for cultivation and attainment of Buddhahood; how could one cultivate apart from them? Throughout the process of cultivation, we make use of the five aggregates at every moment and in every place. To cultivate, we must first learn about Buddhism by reading sūtras and other Buddhist texts and by listening to explanations of the sūtras and Dharma teachings.

The written words in the scriptures we read and the sounds of expounding the scriptures and teaching the Dharma that we hear are all material forms; this is the aggregate of form. After reading and hearing the scriptures, we receive their wondrous principles, have faith in them, accept them, and put them into practice; this is the aggregate of feeling.

After receiving them, we think, analyze, and study them with the mind, and come to understand the doctrines and principles of Buddhism: What is true? What is false? Why should we cultivate? How should we cultivate? This is the aggregate of perception. We then put them into practice. This is the cultivation in “hearing, contemplating, and cultivating”; cultivation means spiritual practice. This is the aggregate of formations.

Through practice and realization, wisdom unfolds, consciousness is transformed into wisdom, and one touches upon the aggregate of consciousness. Knowledge entails discrimination and attachment, whereas wisdom is free from discrimination and attachment. Therefore, not only can our practice not be separated from the five aggregates; we must also make use of the five aggregates in their functioning.

Once wisdom has unfolded and one has realized the Way through practice, one should not merely cling rigidly to prajñā and suchness (tathatā), but must bring forth wondrous functioning. To cling rigidly to suchness (tathatā) without allowing it to function is as useless as a clay or wooden image. Yet for suchness (tathatā) to function, it cannot be separated from the five aggregates and the consciousness-spirit. For intrinsic nature, or suchness (tathatā), is the essence of nature; it does not move.

For it to move and bring forth wondrous functioning, it needs many people to assist it: servants, attendants, and guests must all come to help. The five aggregates are the servants, the consciousness-spirit is the attendant, and all external circumstances are the guests. If suchness (tathatā) were separated from the five aggregates and the consciousness-spirit, it would have no value and no function.

Therefore, if we are to liberate sentient beings, gather and guide them, and accomplish the Buddha's work, we must still make use of the five aggregates. Moreover, once one has seen through the five aggregates and recognized one's intrinsic nature, the wondrous functioning of the five aggregates is fully revealed. To liberate sentient beings, we must come into contact with people of many different capacities, encounter their various habitual tendencies and afflictions, and then devise various methods and establish various dharma gates to guide them skillfully and expediently, thereby awakening their wisdom. All of this is the wondrous functioning of the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.

Furthermore, if we wish to cultivate and attain Buddhahood, we cannot be separated from sentient beings. Without sentient beings, it is fundamentally impossible to attain Buddhahood. Why is this so? As explained earlier, to attain realization on the path, one must eradicate the three delusions.

In the Chan school, one first eradicates ignorance—that is, realizes the mind and sees one's true nature—and then eradicates dust-like delusions. In the doctrinal schools, one first eradicates the delusions of views and thought, and then eradicates dust-like delusions. To eradicate dust-like delusions, one must rely on liberating sentient beings. So-called dust-like delusions are our deluded feelings and erroneous understandings, which are as numerous as dust and sand.

If we do not liberate sentient beings, we cannot remove these delusions. Sentient beings differ in capacity, understanding and views, afflictions, and habitual tendencies. To liberate sentient beings, we must accord with them constantly. If we cannot accord with sentient beings constantly, we cannot liberate them.

First: to accord with sentient beings constantly, one must possess great wisdom and make skillful use of the five aggregates. Only after understanding sentient beings' differing capacities, habitual tendencies, and afflictions can one penetrate the immeasurable dharma gates as numerous as dust and sand, teach and transform sentient beings harmoniously and without obstruction, and at the same time eradicate one's own dust-like delusions.

Second: because sentient beings' habitual tendencies and afflictions are divided into so many categories, when you liberate them, your own latent afflictions and habitual tendencies are also exposed. Because you are carried along by sentient beings, you come to realize: "Oh! I still have so many bad habits and afflictions!" Only then can you eliminate your habitual tendencies and afflictions completely and exhaust your delusions. Only in this way can dust-like delusions be fully extinguished.

Third: only when both merit and wisdom are complete can one attain Buddhahood. Liberating sentient beings accumulates merit and virtue. If you do nothing and accomplish nothing at all, where will your merit and virtue be found? For example, one receives an award for meritorious service only after achieving results through one's work. Likewise, liberating sentient beings accumulates merit and virtue; it is a provision for attaining Buddhahood.

"Seeing that the five aggregates are all empty" means that one should neither cling to "seeing" nor cling to "emptiness." Seeing cannot be obtained, nor can emptiness be obtained. "All appearances are illusory." "All dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I say, are empty."

If you do not cling to them, and can see through appearances to their essence and recognize your own Buddha-nature, then you can make skillful use of the five aggregates to bring forth wondrous functioning, attain Buddhahood, and liberate sentient beings. This is because of true emptiness and wondrous presence. If one does not understand the principles explained above, remains deluded and fails to awaken, mistakes the true for the false, and takes delusion to be reality, one will misuse and recklessly use the five aggregates, create karma and undergo karmic retribution, and revolve through birth and death in the six realms without any prospect of release.

Although the saints of the Lesser Vehicle—arhats and pratyekabuddhas—know that all material forms are unreal, illusory, and insubstantial, because they do not understand true emptiness and wondrous presence, the "emptiness" they recognize

is the analytical emptiness of dharmas. That is, they analyze all material forms until, in the end, nothing remains.

They divide a thing into two, two into four, four into eight, eight into sixteen, and so on. The divisions become increasingly minute until, in the end, nothing remains: it is empty. They mistakenly regard emptiness as emptiness and form as form, supposing that there is emptiness apart from form and form apart from emptiness, without recognizing that form and emptiness are one. The Heart Sūtra says that form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.

Form and emptiness are one and the same, but they regard form and emptiness as two separate things and cling one-sidedly to emptiness. Take a mirror as an example: they mistakenly believe that a mirror and its reflections are two different things—the mirror is the mirror, and the reflections are reflections. The first of the five aggregates is form. It is because there is form that one receives and apprehends.

Because of apprehension, one thinks about material forms. From perception come formations; all actions flow on without cease, and are then taken to be consciousness. Thus, form alone can represent the five aggregates. Since the five aggregates are bad things that drag us down and make us suffer the cycle of birth and death in the six realms, they think that they should simply be emptied out altogether.

Thus, they mistakenly believe that seeing one's true nature means seeing emptiness and having nothing whatsoever. They remain on the side of emptiness, unaware that the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are all manifestations of intrinsic nature and are all wondrous functioning. Therefore, the saints of the Lesser Vehicle have an incomplete realization of true nature. Although they too can bring prajñā-wisdom into function, it is not complete. Thus, it is not the genuine Buddhadharma. From this perspective, the saints of the Lesser Vehicle have not truly seen their nature.

Although bodhisattvas at the initial gate of the Mahāyāna know that material forms are empty in their very substance, and know that "emptiness" does not mean eliminating material forms, they still cling one-sidedly to emptiness. All material forms are formed through causes and conditions; originally they have no intrinsic nature, no independent substance, and cannot be obtained. For example, our physical bodies are originally unobtainable; this does not mean that they become empty only after we leave the body.

Why is this so? Because they do not know that material forms are manifestations of intrinsic nature and the wondrous functioning arising from intrinsic nature. Again taking a mirror as an example, reflections are manifested by the mirror. They regard

the mirror as real and the reflections as unreal, without knowing that reflections and mirror are fundamentally inseparable. What is called a mirror is so called precisely because it can manifest reflections.

If it could not manifest reflections, could it still be called a mirror? Therefore, the mirror and its reflections are inseparable. Because our intrinsic nature is true emptiness and wondrous presence, it must manifest appearances and bring forth functioning. If it could not manifest appearances and function, that would be obstinate emptiness or annihilationist emptiness.

Bodhisattvas at the initial gate of the Mahāyāna can understand only the true emptiness of dharmas in their very substance. They can understand only that all dharmas spoken of in Buddhism—including all material forms and the abstract contents we imagine—are empty in their very substance. But they do not know wondrous presence and true emptiness, nor do they know that the five aggregates are wondrous functioning; therefore, they still cling one-sidedly to emptiness.

They regard the five aggregates and the consciousness-spirit—the last of the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—as bad things. Chan Master Xuansha composed this verse: “Those who study the Way do not recognize the true, for they have always recognized only the consciousness-spirit. It is the root of birth and death throughout beginningless kalpas; foolish people call it the original person.”

When this verse appeared, everyone became frightened: “Oh! We must not make a mistake. These are all the consciousness-spirit! Intrinsic nature is not so easily seen!” Yet they did not know that the consciousness-spirit and intrinsic nature are one. Earlier, we gave the examples of mirror and reflection, and water and waves. The reflection is the consciousness-spirit, and the waves too are the consciousness-spirit.

Yet the waves themselves are water. If we recognize that waves arise from water, do not cling to the waves, and thereby see the water, then do not vast and surging waves bring forth even greater wondrous functioning? If there were only a pool of stagnant water, what grandeur or mystery would there be? Therefore, once we understand the relationship between water and waves, and between a mirror and its reflections, we understand clearly the relationship between appearances and intrinsic nature.

Water is waves, and waves are water; a mirror is not separate from its reflections, and reflections are not separate from the mirror; form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Through the movement of water—its waves—we recognize water in its very substance; through the appearance of reflections, we recognize the mirror in its very

substance; through all material forms, the five aggregates, the consciousness-spirit, and so forth, we recognize Buddha-nature.

Then, at all times and in all places, we see our true nature. This is making skillful use of the consciousness-spirit and the five aggregates to bring forth all kinds of wondrous functioning. Bodhisattvas at the initial gate of the Mahāyāna have not recognized this relationship and thus cannot make skillful use of the five aggregates to bring forth wondrous functioning. Therefore, they still cling one-sidedly to emptiness.

Only great bodhisattvas who have seen their true nature can truly, deeply, and thoroughly understand the principle of wondrous presence and true emptiness. Only they can accept and undertake it for themselves, and genuinely affirm the principle that nature and appearances are nondual—the nondual Dharma gate spoken of in Buddhism. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form; nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. Apart from nature, appearances cannot arise; apart from appearances, nature cannot be revealed.

Therefore, seeing appearances is seeing intrinsic nature. We can then make use of all material forms to accomplish the Buddha's work, adorn Buddha lands, and perfect the fruition of Buddhahood. It is like a mirror and its reflections: reflections are the mirror, and the mirror is its reflections; reflections do not depart from the mirror, and the mirror does not depart from its reflections. Apart from the mirror there are no reflections, and apart from reflections there is no mirror.

Neither clinging to existence nor leaning toward emptiness, one responds to conditions and functions accordingly in all things. Moreover, in all functioning, one neither identifies with nor separates from them; one neither rejoices nor contends, neither grasps nor rejects. Then one can move freely and at ease, open and unconfined in accordance with conditions, and attain great freedom. The wondrous purport of the Heart Sūtra is to have all of us take Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as our model, learn from Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, understand the principle that is true emptiness yet wondrous presence, practice profound prajñāpāramitā, and at that time see that the five aggregates are all empty.

Thus one is freed from all suffering and adversity. This is the effect of seeing that the five aggregates are all empty. Once the illusory nature of the five aggregates has been seen through, what suffering or adversity could remain? "To free" means to deliver from bondage. "All" means everything. So-called suffering consists in the feelings of our body and mind, and their unease. There are many kinds of suffering —eighteen, when explained in detail. Commonly, however, eight sufferings are taught: birth, aging, sickness, death, separation from what one loves, meeting with

what one hates, not obtaining what one seeks, and the blazing of the five aggregates.

As we have already explained, suffering and happiness have no fixed dividing line and no uniform standard. What is suffering, and what is happiness? All such judgments arise from deluded thoughts and views regarding bodily and mental feelings, based on the habitual tendencies each person has developed.

When something accords with one's habitual tendencies and satisfies one's desires, one considers it happiness. When it does not accord with one's habitual tendencies and does not satisfy one's desires, one considers it suffering. Thus, suffering and happiness are not truly real things.

For example, a moderately good home seems quite ordinary to a wealthy person. It brings neither contentment nor joy, because that person's living conditions are far better. But to a poor person, it may seem wonderful indeed.

Such a person would be overjoyed and, once moved in, would not want to leave. Again, someone engaged in intellectual or very easy work may feel exhausted and miserable if transferred to work in a factory, finding the physical labor unbearable.

But if the same work is given to an unemployed person, or to someone whose former work was even more arduous and difficult, that person may find it easy and pleasant. Thus, suffering and happiness have no fixed dividing line and no uniform standard; the key is whether something accords with one's individual habits. Yet the greatest suffering commonly felt by all is the suffering of birth and death: segmented birth and death and transformational birth and death. These two forms of birth and death have already been explained several times, so they will not be repeated here.

So-called adversity means the three calamities and eight disasters: adversity from warfare, bandits, water, fire, wind, hail, earthquakes, and the like. These adversities are karmic results experienced in this life from evil karma created in the past. Those who create karma individually undergo adversity individually; those who create karma collectively undergo adversity collectively. Such karma obstructs our study of Buddhism and cultivation of the Way. The greatest adversity lies in the afflictions of the five abiding grounds, which encompass all adversities. What are the afflictions of these five abiding grounds?

The first is the affliction of the "abiding ground of attachment to views" (also called the abiding ground of views). Attachment to views means that, upon seeing something, one develops fondness for it and wishes to possess it. An abiding ground means that it is deeply rooted and impossible to uproot. Because of this attachment to views, when you see something you like, you single-mindedly want to make it

your own. Others who see it likewise want to make it their own. You struggle and contend with one another; one side will inevitably fail to obtain it, and the suffering of not obtaining what one seeks arises. Therefore, the abiding ground of attachment to views is a fundamental and major affliction.

For practitioners, it is all right if the abiding ground of attachment to views is eliminated. Why? Because once it has been eliminated, one will not give rise to thoughts or stirrings of mind in response to any circumstance. One will not develop fondness or the desire to possess, nor will contention arise, and there will be no anxiety over gain and loss.

All afflictions arise from anxiety over gain and loss. Without gain and loss, and without such anxiety, how could afflictions remain? Without afflictions, the mind is empty, pure, and free. If one can be like this, one will certainly be reborn in the heavens after death, at least in a heaven of the desire realm.

Moreover, because one cultivated the Way in the human realm and has already eliminated the affliction of the abiding ground of attachment to views, one differs from ordinary heavenly beings even while in the heavens. When one's blessings in the desire realm heavens are exhausted, one descends again to the human realm, where the circumstances are very favorable. When one's human lifespan ends, one ascends to heaven again. Thus one ascends four times and descends four times, without ever falling to lower states.

After four ascents and four descents, one becomes one who is approaching the second fruition. This means that, although one has not yet attained second-fruit arhatship, one is progressing toward second-fruit arhatship. After ascending and descending twice more, making six times in all, one succeeds in becoming a second-fruit arhat.

The second fruition is the Once-Returner. Having to return to the human realm only once more, one will at least realize the third fruition—the Non-Returner—and will no longer need to come again to the human realm. Therefore, once we have eliminated the abiding ground of attachment to views, there is absolutely nothing to fear. Even if we are not reborn in the Western Pure Land, there is no cause for concern. Once this abiding ground has been eliminated, one can only advance upward and will not descend or fall.

When we apply ourselves to practice, we must remain vigilant at all times and in all circumstances, training ourselves not to give rise to thoughts or stirrings of mind in response to circumstances. In other words, we must maintain contemplation at every moment. We must understand that all circumstances are unobtainable, illusory, and unreal, and not cling to them. In all things, accord with conditions: if there is porridge, eat porridge; if there is rice, eat rice.

Whatever work I am assigned today, I simply do that work, openly and peacefully, without adding afflictions for myself. This is to face reality directly and see only the present moment. Once practice matures and the time and conditions arrive, the bottom of the bucket drops out, and one sees one's own Original Face.

Then undefiled seeds have been firmly planted in the field of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), and one will never again descend or fall. Even if one's habitual tendencies are exceedingly heavy, in the very worst case one will only ascend to heaven seven times and be born in the human realm seven times. After seven ascents and descents, the great matter is completely resolved. Therefore, in our practice, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is always of first importance. After seeing one's true nature, one no longer clings to appearances.

For intrinsic nature is empty nature; fundamentally, there is nothing at all to be obtained. On the basis of seeing one's true nature, diligently eliminate habitual tendencies, and one will ultimately attain the true fruition without entering a mistaken path. Conversely, if one has not seen one's true nature but first seeks to develop spiritual powers, then such blind cultivation and blind practice are not only useless but also risk entering demonic states. Once one enters demonic states, the consequences are unthinkable. A true cultivator of the Way would rather fail to realize the Way than enter demonic states. Therefore, in studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is primary and fundamental; this is exceedingly important.

The second is the affliction of the "abiding ground of attachment to the desire realm." This refers to the heavens of the desire realm, where one enjoys blessings far greater than those of the human realm. Yet clinging to enjoyment in the desire realm heavens remains an affliction, for one has not yet left the six realms of rebirth. Therefore, the abiding ground of attachment to desire must also be eliminated. Do not cling even to the desire realm heavens; they too are unobtainable. Then this affliction of the abiding ground of attachment to desire is gone.

The third is the affliction of the "abiding ground of attachment to the form realm." This refers to the form realm heavens, which are better than the desire realm heavens. Greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt belong to the afflictions of thought and are also called afflictions of delusion regarding phenomena. After realizing the Way, they can be completely eliminated only through repeated cultivation; hence they are also called cultivation-afflictions, or afflictions eliminated through cultivation. The afflictions of thought may be divided into eighty-one grades within the three realms.

What are these eighty-one grades? The human realm and the desire realm heavens have nine grades. The form realm has four dhyāna heavens, each with nine grades; four times nine makes thirty-six grades. Above them are the formless realm heavens—the four formless heavens—each likewise having nine grades, again making thirty-six. Thirty-six plus thirty-six equals seventy-two; adding the nine grades of the desire realm gives eighty-one grades.

If all eighty-one grades of afflictions of thought are eliminated, one leaves the three realms, and segmented birth and death is ended. Although the form realm heavens are excellent, one must still see through them as unobtainable. Then they cannot obstruct you, and you pass through them. Thus you eliminate the thirty-six grades of afflictions of thought in the form realm heavens and overcome the affliction of the abiding ground of attachment to form.

The fourth is the affliction of the "abiding ground of attachment to the formless realm" (also called the abiding ground of attachment to existence). This refers to the formless realm heavens—the heavens of emptiness. The heavens of emptiness have four levels, called the four formless heavens: the Heaven of Infinite Space, the Heaven of Infinite Consciousness, the Heaven of Nothingness, and the Heaven of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception. These formless realm heavens have no material appearances and consist entirely of appearances of emptiness.

When Hīnayāna sages hear that there is only emptiness and nothing at all, they become pleased and cling to this appearance of emptiness. If you do not cling to this appearance of emptiness, do not crave or become attached to the four formless heavens, eliminate all thirty-six grades of these afflictions of thought, and still see through them as unobtainable, then you overcome the affliction of the abiding ground of attachment to the formless. You can then leave the three realms, and segmented birth and death is ended.

The fifth is the affliction of the "abiding ground of ignorance." After the afflictions of views and thought have been eliminated, principle and phenomena still cannot interpenetrate without obstruction; dust-like delusions and delusions of ignorance remain. Although, after the four abiding grounds have been overcome, segmented birth and death has been transcended, transformational birth and death has not yet been transcended.

Only after ignorance has been overcome—that is, after the abiding ground of ignorance has also been overcome—can one be liberated from both forms of birth and death. Therefore, if all afflictions of the five abiding grounds are eliminated, all suffering and adversity are likewise overcome. One realizes the true great Way; in all things, one can function spontaneously in accordance with conditions and attain great freedom.

To summarize: “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, practicing profound prajñāpāramitā, at that time clearly saw that the five aggregates are all empty and crossed beyond all suffering and adversity” is the dhāraṇī of the entire Heart Sūtra—it encompasses all dharmas and upholds immeasurable meanings. Once this dhāraṇī is understood, the sutra text that follows can be understood with ease. This section has therefore been explained at greater length. To facilitate understanding, let us now give a brief summary.

The Heart Sūtra was excerpted from the six hundred fascicles of the Great Prajñā Sūtra. Thus, at the very beginning, without using a prefatory section, the Buddha directly calls the name of the great bodhisattva: “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.” This single sentence immediately brings out the general outline of the entire sutra. This one sentence encompasses the whole sutra.

The Buddha presents Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as the model and exemplar for our practice, so that we may all learn from Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and, through the profound and vast Dharma gate of contemplation, develop the wondrous wisdom of prajñā. This is the ultimate, thoroughgoing great wisdom that functions without hindrance in both worldly and supramundane affairs.

With the cultivation of such great wisdom, one illumines and breaks through the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness all at once. In fact, the five aggregates are empty of any inherent substance; they are illusory. Thus, in “clearly seeing that the five aggregates are all empty,” do not become attached to a view of dharmas; even this clear seeing must not be grasped. For clear seeing itself is a dharma.

Not only are clear seeing and contemplation empty; ultimately, even emptiness cannot be obtained. If there is an emptiness to grasp, then one has not thoroughly broken through. “Clearly seeing that the five aggregates are all empty” does not mean that merely emptying the five aggregates is enough. Even emptiness cannot be obtained; nothing at all can be obtained. Only this is called “all empty,” and only then can one speak of “clearly seeing that the five aggregates are all empty.”

Then one eradicates the afflictions of the five abiding grounds—attachment to views, attachment to the desire realm, attachment to the form realm, attachment to the formless realm, and ignorance—becomes liberated from the two forms of birth and death, segmented and transformational, and reaches the far shore beyond the bitter ocean of birth and death. Freely and spontaneously, spontaneous and free, one truly attains great ease.

Thus, the five Chinese characters Guanzizai Pusa ( ), “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva,” encompass the entire Dharma gate of contemplative cultivation. No practice can be separated from contemplation. It comprehends all dharmas and

retains immeasurable meanings. Therefore, it encompasses the entire sūtra and serves as the general outline of the first four lines of the sūtra text, the Section on Dhāraṇī.

Because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva attained great freedom, there is the following fruition: “Practicing profound prajñāpāramitā, at that time he clearly sees that the five aggregates are all empty and crosses beyond all suffering and adversity.” Likewise, without “practicing profound prajñāpāramitā,” one cannot “at that time clearly see that the five aggregates are all empty and cross beyond all suffering and adversity,” and thus cannot attain great freedom. Therefore, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is named after the fruition. From this, we can also see the interrelationship in the meaning of these four phrases, and the word “at that time” is precisely the crucial stroke that brings this inner relationship vividly to life.

Because true nature is utterly pure and naked, wholly bare, without the slightest covering, and ever present, those who truly see their nature make no distinctions of time. To see it once is to see it thoroughly; to see it once is to see it forever. They see it at all times and in all places. One who truly sees one’s nature sees it even while wielding a sword in battle.

Therefore, if we thoroughly see our own nature at the point where deluded thoughts cease, then in every place and at every moment, every gesture and movement, every word, laugh, rebuke, or scolding, is transformed into the wondrous functioning of our own nature. Mountains, rivers, the great earth, and the myriad phenomena are all manifestations of this intrinsic nature. This intrinsic nature is not annihilationist emptiness; rather, it is true emptiness with wondrous presence, complete with all things and able to manifest appearances and function in response to conditions. What the Heart Sūtra teaches us is to recognize this true nature of true emptiness and wondrous presence, and thereby fully realize the great Way.

The foregoing has briefly explained the essential meaning of the first section of the sūtra text—the Section on Dhāraṇī: “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, while practicing profound prajñāpāramitā, clearly saw that the five aggregates are all empty and crossed beyond all suffering and adversity.” Next, we shall discuss the second section—the Section on Form and Emptiness.

II. Form and Emptiness

Śāriputra! Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form. So too are feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.

Śāriputra. Some people misunderstand the Chinese name Shelizi ( ), which has three characters, thinking they refer to the relics produced when the Buddha entered parinirvāṇa and his golden body was cremated, or to the relics obtained from the cremation of a great spiritual teacher after entering parinirvāṇa. In fact, "Śāriputra" here does not have that meaning.

Here, Śāriputra is a personal name: he was one of the Buddha's disciples. Sheli ( ) is a Chinese transcription of the Sanskrit Śāri meaning an osprey; it was originally the name of Śāriputra's mother. In Indian custom, people were often named after their father or mother, or by combining the names of both parents. Śāriputra was named after his mother.

His mother was intelligent and quick-witted, with a fine figure and beautiful appearance, and was named after the osprey. There is such a legend in India: an osprey's eyesight is exceptionally keen. While flying in the air, it can clearly see fish swimming in the sea; then it swoops down and catches and eats them.

Because this woman was exceptionally intelligent, she was called Śāri, meaning "osprey." What about zi ( ) in Shelizi ( )? This is Chinese for "son": the name means "Śāri's son" and combines Sanskrit and Chinese. Some sūtras use Shelifu ( ), a Chinese transcription of Śāriputra. Here, fu ( ) represents the Sanskrit putra, meaning "son." Thus, both elements of Śāriputra are Sanskrit.

Śāriputra was one of the Buddha's foremost disciples and the foremost in wisdom among them. He had a maternal uncle named Mahākuṣṭhila, which in Chinese means "Great Knee," because his knees were very large. He practiced a non-Buddhist path and was gifted with unhindered eloquence. Śāriputra's mother often debated with her brother, but she always lost.

After she became pregnant with Śāriputra, however, her brother began to lose whenever they debated and could never defeat her. Mahākuṣṭhila then realized that his unborn nephew possessed extraordinary wisdom. Determined, he went away in search of the Way, but what he learned was still a non-Buddhist path.

When he returned after studying the Way and again went to debate Śāriputra's mother, his nephew had already left home to follow the Buddha. He was furious and went to debate the Buddha. The Buddha asked him, "What tenet do you uphold?" He replied, "I take accepting nothing whatsoever as my tenet."

The Buddha then asked, "Since you accept nothing whatsoever, do you accept this tenet of yours or not?" The Buddha's counterquestion made Mahākuṣṭhila feel defeated on both sides: if he said that he accepted it, he would himself violate his tenet of "accepting nothing whatsoever."

If he said that he did not accept it, then there could be no tenet of "accepting nothing whatsoever." Neither answer—"accept" or "do not accept"—would work; either way was wrong. Only then did Mahākuṣṭhila realize how lacking he was in wisdom and how vast the Buddha's wisdom was. He too then left home to follow the Buddha and cultivate the Way.

Śāriputra possessed the highest wisdom among the Buddha's disciples, while the Heart Sūtra is a condensed version of the six hundred fascicles of the Great Prajñā Sūtra. It chiefly expounds prajñā and develops the great wisdom of practitioners. Therefore, only by having Śāriputra appear in dialogue with the Buddha could its purport accord with that of this sūtra.

Each sūtra taught by the Buddha has its own distinctive purport, and each disciple who converses with the Buddha accords with that sūtra's purport. For example, the Diamond Sūtra teaches true emptiness: nothing whatsoever can be obtained.

To bring out the principle of wondrous presence and true emptiness, the Buddha asked Subhūti, "What do you think?" Since Subhūti was foremost among the Buddha's disciples in understanding emptiness, the Buddha called upon him, thereby according with the emptiness of vajra prajñā. Since Śāriputra was foremost in wisdom, when the Buddha reached an important point in teaching the Heart Sūtra, he called out, "Śāriputra! Listen carefully: form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form." Thus he revealed the principle that form and emptiness are nondual.

Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form. This passage is extremely important. It is the essential teaching and very essence of the Heart Sūtra. If we can truly understand this principle that form and emptiness are nondual, we will awaken. Therefore, we must discuss this principle repeatedly and without weariness.

Let us first discuss "form." Form refers to the six sense objects: forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. The six sense objects can further be divided into three kinds of form. The first is form that can be encountered and seen. "Can be encountered" means that it can stand before us and that we can come into contact with it. "Can be seen" means that our eyes can see it.

The first of the six sense objects—the object of form—refers to this kind of form: forms that have appearance. Such things as length and shortness, squareness and roundness, blue, yellow, red, and white, men and women, young and old, mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses and forests, food, clothing, and daily life can all be seen, touched, and sensed.

The second kind is form that can be encountered but not seen. The eyes cannot see it, yet it can be sensed and contacted. These are sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile objects.

Our eyes cannot see sounds, but the ear faculty can hear them and distinguish whether they are music, an automobile horn, speech, laughter, joking, anger, scolding, and so forth.

Our eyes cannot see pleasant or unpleasant odors, but our noses can distinguish them and can further distinguish what kind of fragrance it is: orchid, osmanthus, rose, and so on. The eyes cannot see or distinguish tastes such as sweet, sour, bitter, pungent, and salty, but the tongue can taste what they are.

Touch means contact. For example, cold and warmth, dryness and dampness, and so forth are felt through bodily contact. When the body contacts cold air, it feels cold; when it contacts hot air, it feels hot. Sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile objects belong to form that can be encountered but not seen.

The third kind is form that can neither be encountered nor seen. The eyes cannot see it, nor can it be contacted. This is “dharma.” Dharma here means the dharma object, one of the six sense objects: the residual images left behind after the preceding five objects—forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile objects—have passed away.

The forms seen by our eyes, the sounds heard by our ears, the odors perceived by our noses, the sweet, sour, bitter, and pungent tastes sampled by our tongues, and the external objects contacted by our bodies—all the impressions of these appearances fall into our sixth consciousness, that is, the brain, and become consciousness. This is the dharma object. This dharma object can neither be seen nor encountered.

From the foregoing, we can see that “form” includes the six sense objects of forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. Where do these six sense objects come from? As explained just now, they arise when the six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—take objects. The six sense objects, together with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body among the six faculties, are all form.

As for the mind faculty, it is the discriminating thought that arises in response to various conditions involving material forms. It is an appearance without form and seems to belong to mental dharmas rather than form dharmas. Yet once a thought stirs, an appearance arises; therefore, it too does not depart from form dharmas. Thus, “form” includes all appearances both outside and within our bodies, as well as the formless appearances of mental consciousness.

All these forms are not different from emptiness, because they all lack self-nature and are formed through the coming together of causes and conditions. Without a cause, nothing can come about; with a cause but without conditions, nothing can come about either. The emptiness spoken of in the Buddhist sūtras is “dharmas produced by causes and conditions”: they do not arise from themselves, from another, from both, or without a cause.

Not arising from itself means that with only a primary cause and without other conditions, no thing can arise. For example, when we grow cotton, if we have only the primary cause—the cotton seed—but lack other conditions such as soil, sunlight, water, and fertilizer, the cotton cannot grow. This is called not arising from itself.

Not arising from another means that even with other conditions, without the primary cause a thing still cannot arise. Although there may be sunlight, water, soil, fertilizer, and so forth, how could cotton grow if there were no cotton seed? This is called not arising from another. Not arising from both means that it does not arise merely from the conjunction of two sides.

If something arose from the combination of side A and side B, which side would be primary, A or B? Moreover, A and B themselves have no independent basis at all, so two sides cannot be established. For A too arises from causes and conditions, and B too arises from causes and conditions; causes and conditions are nested within causes and conditions, and there is fundamentally no independent basis. For example, a man and woman unite and a child is born.

Then which is primary, the man’s side or the woman’s side? If one says that the man’s side is primary, the man’s body has no independent basis. For this body is a provisional combination of the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and wind.

We often say, “The four great elements are all empty.” This means that we human beings are merely composites of earth, water, fire, and wind, without an independent basis. It is only because earth, water, fire, and wind temporarily come together through causes and conditions that a human being comes into being. When the causes and conditions disperse and the four great elements separate, the person dies. This is true of the man, and the woman is no exception; neither has an independent basis.

Everything in the world is like this: all is formed through causes and conditions. A child born from the union of a man and woman is likewise formed through causes and conditions. Therefore, it is said not to arise from both. Not arising without a cause means that if there is no primary cause, no internal cause, and no external conditions, things cannot be accomplished. There must be a primary cause, internal causes, and external conditions; only when all conditions come together can things arise. In other words, all things arise only after causes and conditions come

together. Since they arise through the conjunction of causes and conditions and have no inherent substance, they are empty in their very nature.

As for emptiness, we have already discussed it. Most ordinary beings regard “emptiness” as relative emptiness—that is, inert empty space or annihilationist emptiness. But the emptiness taught in the Buddhadharma is that form is empty in its very nature, because all dharmas lack self-nature. Yet even among practitioners, understandings of “emptiness” differ according to their capacities.

For example, arhats and pratyekabuddhas of the Lesser Vehicle analyze dharmas and regard them as empty, while bodhisattvas at the initial gateway of the Mahāyāna regard dharmas as empty in their very substance. Neither is ultimate. The “emptiness” spoken of by great bodhisattvas and Buddhas is the true emptiness of wondrous presence, in which emptiness and presence are one. We have just explained that all material forms arise from causes and conditions and have no self-nature; therefore, they are called empty—this is the emptiness of dependent arising. We shall now further explain the principle of wondrous presence and true emptiness.

Earlier, we explained that all the objects and circumstances of the world are material objects that can be encountered and seen, and thus stand clearly before our eyes.

Since they stand clearly before our eyes, can be seen, and can be touched, why are they said to be “empty”? Are they not truly “existent”? We say that all material forms can arise only through the functioning of our intrinsic nature; they are manifestations of the essential nature of our true emptiness and wondrous presence.

Consider all the things in the world: which of them is not brought about through the designs of our brains and the operations of our hands and feet? But whose function is it, ultimately, that enables the brain to conceive and the hands and feet to operate? For example, it is not the eye faculty itself that enables our eyes to see things and perceive material forms.

Modern scientists also say that the eyes cannot see objects; it is a function of the brain. If the brain’s optic nerves are damaged, the eyes cannot see. This is only half correct.

If it were entirely a function of the brain, then when we cannot draw another breath and die, why can we no longer see anything, even though the eyes and brain remain? Clearly, there is something within that is capable of seeing: this is Buddha-nature. The brain and eyes are like electrical wires and a light bulb. Even when they are fully installed, they still cannot shine without electricity.

Buddha-nature is like electricity: it is a great motive force, and only through its functioning can things be seen. This capacity for seeing is called the “nature of seeing”—the nature that is capable of seeing. Once a person dies, what we call Buddha-nature leaves this shell, this physical body.

Although the eyes and brain remain and are undamaged, that person can no longer see objects. Thus, the capacity to see is called the “nature of seeing”; the capacity to hear sounds, the “nature of hearing”; the capacity to smell pleasant and foul odors, the “nature of smelling”; and the capacity to taste sour, sweet, bitter, and pungent flavors, the “nature of tasting”; and so forth. This is called, “Originally one bright essence (Buddha-nature), divided into six harmonious combinations (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind).” Therefore, nothing can exist apart from intrinsic nature. Apart from intrinsic nature, there are no things at all, and nothing can be accomplished.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra explains this clearly: “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. It is utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust, without the slightest form or appearance; to say that it resembles any one thing is already wrong. This all-capable body of true emptiness is the basis for constructing and manifesting all material forms.

That is to say, this emptiness is not an emptiness in which nothing exists; it is the emptiness of true emptiness and wondrous presence. Since all material forms are manifestations of the essential nature of true emptiness and wondrous presence, and are functions of our intrinsic nature, there can be no material forms apart from intrinsic nature. Thus, all material forms are intrinsic nature, and intrinsic nature is all material forms.

Intrinsic nature is without form. It is true emptiness: existent yet not existent, and not empty yet empty. Material forms, on the other hand, are wondrous presence: not existent yet existent, empty yet not empty. Material forms and the true emptiness of wondrous presence are originally no different. Yet people in the world often cling to material forms as truly existent, becoming deluded in their minds and impossible to free from this attachment.

Out of compassion for sentient beings, the Buddha taught us to recognize the truth and emphatically declared: “Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form.” “Not different” means that there is no difference.

Why is it said that “the nature of form is true emptiness; the nature of emptiness is true form”? Because intrinsic nature is empty, it can manifest material forms. If intrinsic nature were not empty, if it had already become a concrete entity with color and form, it could not manifest the various forms. Why? To give a simple example:

only when this room is empty can tables, large cabinets, and other things be moved into it.

Conversely, if the room is piled full of things and there is no empty space, nothing else can be moved in. Thus, only because the essential nature is true emptiness and without form can it manifest all material forms and transform into wondrous forms of a thousand variations.

It is precisely because intrinsic nature is without form and cannot be seen by the eyes that it is also called the wondrous essence. It cannot be found anywhere, either within or outside the whole body. Open the skull, and it cannot be found; dissect the body, cut open the heart, and still it cannot be found. It is neither in the brain nor in the heart, leaving no trace and entirely unobtainable.

That is to say, intrinsic nature has no trace or appearance and cannot be seen by the eyes. Although all the formed objects before our eyes can be seen through the "nature of seeing," who can see this "nature of seeing" itself? First, the eyes can see only things that have form.

Second, the eyes can see only things that stand in relation to them; what does not stand in relation to the eyes cannot be seen. For example, can our eyes see themselves? Because they do not stand in relation to themselves, they cannot be seen. Intrinsic nature is the absolute true mind, not something relative; therefore, it cannot be seen by the eyes. If it could be seen, it would not be true seeing.

Intrinsic nature has no trace or appearance and cannot be seen by the eyes. Therefore, intrinsic nature is true emptiness. Yet although it is true emptiness, it can respond to conditions and function. That is, when it encounters an object, it can give rise to consciousness and distinguish this from that. Thus, intrinsic nature is also wondrous presence, not inert emptiness.

Only when the "nature of seeing" distinguishes all material forms through the eyes do those material forms appear.

For example, when we see a person, how do we know that it is a person rather than something else? How do we know whether the person is male or female, Zhang San or Li Si? This depends entirely on the discriminating activity of consciousness; only then can that person's form appear. Since material forms are manifested by the nature of seeing, material forms are intrinsic nature.

From this we can know that the six natures of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing function through the six sense faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, thereby manifesting all forms—that is, the six objects of sense. Therefore, all material forms and all phenomena are manifestations of

intrinsic nature. Form cannot be apart from intrinsic nature, nor can intrinsic nature be apart from form. Apart from intrinsic nature, there is no form; apart from form, there is no intrinsic nature.

Someone may ask: taking the “nature of seeing” as an example, which comes first—material form or seeing? Let us analyze this. If seeing comes first and material form afterward, then seeing should be prior and material form subsequent.

But without material form, what could you see? And how could it be called “seeing”? What is called seeing occurs only because there are material forms, through which one sees what this is and what that is. If there were no material forms, from where could the function of “seeing” arise? Therefore, only through material forms can the nature of seeing display its function of seeing.

Conversely, if form comes first and seeing afterward, then form should be prior and seeing subsequent.

Yet without seeing, how could form be manifested? If it has not been seen, how could one know that any material form exists? That is, without the “nature of seeing,” from where could this material form manifest? If no one sees it, then even if form exists, it is equivalent to not existing and cannot be manifested. Therefore, intrinsic nature and form cannot be separated.

This is so with the nature of seeing; it is also so with the functions of the other natures, such as hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing. Thus, form cannot be separated from intrinsic nature, nor intrinsic nature from form. We have already explained that the substance of intrinsic nature is emptiness. How, then, could the substance of form differ from emptiness? Therefore, form and emptiness are without any distinction: form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form.

We often say that Buddhism is the Dharma gate of nonduality. This is what it means: everything is nondual. It is one yet two, and two yet one. If you say it is one, it is also two; if you say it is two, it is also one. Since they are originally one body, they cannot be separated. If you insist on making distinctions, you will stray onto a mistaken path.

Earlier, we repeatedly used water and waves as an example. Water and waves are also one, because water and waves both take wetness as their substance. Water has the appearance of stillness, while waves have the appearance of movement. When wind causes waves to arise on the water, the appearance changes from stillness to movement. Though the appearance changes and they seem to be two different things, they are of one essence. Thus, they are one yet two, and two yet one.

The principle of a mirror and its reflections is the same. Whatever material it is made of and whatever form it takes, so long as it is a mirror, it can reflect images. If it cannot reflect images, it is not a mirror. Since a mirror cannot be apart from reflections and reflections cannot be apart from a mirror, the mirror is the reflection and the reflection is the mirror. This is called the Dharma gate of nonduality.

From the moment we are born and acquire awareness, we take all the images manifested by intrinsic nature—mountains, rivers, the great earth, and all things in the universe—to be truly existent, and chase after insubstantial appearances. That is, we see only the reflections and know only the reflections, without realizing that they are manifested by the mirror's light; we do not recognize this mirror-light.

If we can recognize this mirror-light, we recognize Buddha-nature. Why? Because reflections come and go, arise and cease, whereas the mirror-light is always present. When a cat comes, the mirror reflects a cat; when a dog comes, it reflects a dog. The reflected images come and go, arise and cease, but the mirror-light never changes.

All appearances of mountains, rivers, the great earth, and everything else are also shadows within the Eternal Quiescent Light. We often speak of "seas turning into mulberry fields": what is now a sea may later become mulberry fields; what was once mulberry fields may now have become a sea. For example, Yunnan in China was once a great sea, but has now become mountains and fields. Although these material appearances, like the reflections in the mirror just mentioned, are continually changing—coming and going, arising and ceasing—the mirror's light, like the essence of intrinsic nature, neither arises nor ceases and remains thus, unmoving.

Without a mirror, no reflection can appear; without reflections, it cannot be called a mirror. That is to say, intrinsic nature cannot be separated from material appearances, nor can material appearances be separated from intrinsic nature. Thus, intrinsic nature is form, and form is intrinsic nature. This principle is Buddhism's Dharma gate of nonduality. To penetrate this point is to realize the mind and see one's true nature.

Do not suppose that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is something extraordinarily difficult, attainable only by sages. Those who cultivate the Way are often intimidated by the four Chinese characters mingxin jianxing ( ), "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature." They regard it as too lofty to attain and beyond the capacity of modern people. Thus, whenever it is mentioned, they turn pale at the very thought of it and dare not approach it.

They think that ordinary people like ourselves cannot attain this state, and that the only way out is to rely on the Pure Land school, seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss through the Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation. They think

that only after reaching the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss and hearing the Buddha teach the Dharma can they realize the mind and see their true nature. In this present Sahā world, they believe, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is impossible.

For ordinary faithful men and women, this is indeed perfectly true. For we are now in the Dharma-ending age; sentient beings all have dull faculties and heavy obscurations, and cultivation in this Sahā world is truly not easy to accomplish.

Yet even in the Dharma-ending age there is true Dharma, and people of superior faculties have not disappeared. We must not make sweeping generalizations and treat everyone alike, placing "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature" in the lofty realm of sages and then not daring to undertake it ourselves.

Through the principles repeatedly explained above, one will understand that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is nowhere else: it is right before your eyes, precisely in your capacities to see, hear, act, and do. With a single inward glance, recognize this numinous knowing as your own Buddha-nature, and the task of a lifetime of cultivation and study is complete. All sentient beings can see and hear; therefore, all sentient beings are Buddhas.

This all-capable wisdom-nature is not diminished in ordinary beings and not increased in sages. Since all sentient beings can see and hear and possess the Tathāgata's wisdom-nature, do not again exalt realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature into the realm of sages and consider it beyond reach.

Simply turn the light inward upon these eight great functions, such as seeing and hearing. Recognize who it is that sees and who it is that hears. Once you see this and affirm it, give rise to no further doubt. Then continuously and closely safeguard it; do not let it be tainted by sensory objects, but keep it ever empty and numinous. Whenever a thought arises, immediately recognize and break through it; whenever you have just become attached to an object, immediately turn back. If inwardly you do not turn with thoughts and outwardly you do not move with circumstances, why fear that you cannot fully realize bodhi?

Intrinsic nature is the formless substance of true emptiness. Its nature is empty and non-abiding, and material appearances too are empty and unobtainable. Therefore, there is no need to seek after them or worry over gain and loss. The Diamond Sūtra says: "If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata." Once you understand the truth that intrinsic nature and form are true emptiness, you will not become caught up in sensory forms or be controlled or shaken by them. If you are your own master, rather than being deceived and controlled by servants; if you do not abide in any appearance or cling to anything, but continuously and

closely contemplate, you can enter the state of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

As we explained earlier, all appearances are manifestations of intrinsic nature. Without intrinsic nature, there would be no appearances, nor could any appearance be seen. It is because there is a "nature that sees" that material appearances can be seen. Since seeing appearances is seeing intrinsic nature, and appearances are manifestations of the "nature that sees," appearances are intrinsic nature, and intrinsic nature is appearances.

Since intrinsic nature is real and not illusory, material appearances too are real and not illusory. The Lotus Sūtra says: "Dharmas abide in their dharma positions; the worldly appearance is ever abiding." This means that all worldly appearances are manifestations of intrinsic nature. Since intrinsic nature is real, appearances too are not illusory and are ever abiding. Earlier, we said that the eyes can see only things with form, and only when they stand in relation to the eyes.

But intrinsic nature is formless and absolutely eternal; how, then, can one see it? Since all material appearances are manifestations of intrinsic nature, all material appearances are yourself, and you yourself are all material appearances. Outside form there is no mind; outside mind there is no form. Only by truly understanding this principle can one truly understand that seeing appearances is seeing intrinsic nature, and seeing intrinsic nature is seeing appearances. Thus Chan Master Dahui Zonggao once said that one must see the Way with the physical eyes for it to be genuine seeing of the Way. Seeing the Way merely with the dharma eye of the mind-ground is not genuine seeing of the Way. This is the reason.

Without intrinsic nature, the myriad things could not manifest. Conversely, without all material appearances, how could one see this formless intrinsic nature? All these material appearances are manifestations of your own intrinsic nature; they are all your own Buddhas in nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) form. Ordinarily, we always suppose that a nirmāṇakāya (manifestation body) is capable of transforming itself into countless different bodies and displaying extraordinary spiritual powers.

This is all due to not understanding the truth: all things and all material appearances are our manifestation bodies. Earlier, we gave the example of white clouds in the sky. Blown by the wind, they transform into the shapes of gray dogs, lions, great mountains, great rivers, and so forth.

Although they undergo a thousand transformations and assume every sort of form, their basic substance remains white clouds. Likewise, the world contains material appearances of countless forms and differences, yet all are manifestations of Buddha-nature and transformations of intrinsic nature. The doctrinal teachings say:

“The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only.” The myriad dharmas are all material appearances.

In Buddhism, “dharma” has a very broad meaning: it includes not only material appearances but also our thoughts. None of these can be separated from the functioning of consciousness; thus, all phenomena are consciousness-only. Consciousness is the wondrous functioning arising from intrinsic nature. Intrinsic nature is like water, and consciousness is like waves. Waves are water, and water is waves; both are wondrous functioning of intrinsic nature.

Where there is essence, there must be appearance and function; thus various material appearances can manifest and various functions can operate. By the same principle, without all appearances and functions, how would one know that there is an essence? Essence is principle, while appearance and function are phenomena. Phenomena manifest through principle, and principle is fulfilled through phenomena.

For example, the tape recorder before us was invented through people’s repeated thought, analysis, and research; through many experiments and continual improvements, they finally grasped the laws of objective things and created it. This is the wondrous functioning of consciousness arising from intrinsic nature. Hence the saying, ‘All dharmas are consciousness-only.’ Principle and phenomena are mutually dependent and wondrously inseparable.

Intrinsic nature and form, emptiness and form, are the same in principle. This is Buddhism’s Dharma gate of nonduality. Once you truly understand this truth, the physical eyes can see the Way. You will no longer be deluded by material appearances and will thereby change the old habit of clinging to objects and taking the false for the real. You will be able to see through false appearances to the underlying essence—the principle-substance of intrinsic nature. Only this is genuine awakening and thorough seeing of one’s true nature.

The great masters of old vividly compared the three stages by which practitioners fully realize bodhi to this: seeing mountains as mountains and water as water (ordinary beings; contemplation of the provisional); seeing mountains as not mountains and water as not water (the mind’s eye sees the Way; contemplation of emptiness); seeing mountains still as mountains and water still as water (thoroughly seeing intrinsic nature; contemplation of the Middle Way). This is the principle being explained.

The reason we have explained the Dharma gate of nonduality here repeatedly and without weariness is that it is extremely important: it is the essential point and quintessence of the Heart Sūtra. Only when you truly understand this principle can you enter the state of realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature.

Let us now discuss why the Buddha first said, “Form is not different from emptiness,” then continued, “Emptiness is not different from form,” and then went further to say, “Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form.” These statements differ not only in content but also in the persons they are intended to liberate. Their meaning is subtle and profound; each sentence goes deeper, and each level rises higher.

“Form is not different from emptiness” is spoken for ordinary beings. Ordinary beings cling to appearances and existence, taking all appearances to be truly real. Greedy and never satisfied, they are therefore told that form is not different from emptiness, so that they may awaken and understand not to cling to all material appearances. Even if you exhaust the effort of your whole life, employ every scheme, pursue and seek, in the end it is still empty. Instead, at death you undergo karmic retribution according to your karma and suffer vainly in saṃsāra. It is simply not worth it.

“Emptiness is not different from form” is spoken for the two vehicles. Those of the two vehicles cling to emptiness, believing that emptiness exists apart from form and form apart from emptiness; thus, they reject form and preserve emptiness. They believe that ordinary beings, because they cling to material appearances, are driven by things, troubled and made to suffer, create karma and undergo retribution, and therefore cannot transcend birth and death.

To transcend birth and death, they believe, one must leave behind this material bodily form, eliminate attachment to the personal self, break through existence, and abide in emptiness. Yet they do not realize that as long as there is an “emptiness” to abide in, there is still attachment to existence. Moreover, if they stubbornly cling to the side of emptiness, this emptiness becomes a nest and pit of birth and death.

Abiding beside this nest and pit, they may indeed end segmented birth and death and no longer enter the six realms of rebirth. But because they cling to emptiness, their dharma-self view has not been eliminated. They have not attained freedom, and transformational birth and death remains unresolved. Thus, they have not genuinely seen intrinsic nature, nor have they reached the ultimate Dharma. Therefore, the Buddha taught “emptiness is not different from form” to liberate them, enabling them to understand that emptiness and form are not different. They should not cling to emptiness and reject existence; thus they can eliminate attachment to dharmas and fully realize bodhi.

Although the phrase “not different” means that there is no difference and no duality, it still seems to imply that two things exist and are not one single entity. Therefore, the Buddha immediately declared decisively: “Form itself is emptiness; emptiness

itself is form." This was spoken to break the bodhisattvas' remaining dual view of form and emptiness.

Although bodhisattvas know that form and emptiness are not two, "not two" is, after all, still said by comparing two things; it is not yet an inseparable, undifferentiated whole. Therefore, in his urgent compassion, the Buddha further made clear, in order to break bodhisattvas' fault of clinging to a dual view: form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Form and emptiness are not two substances; there are not two kinds.

Form and emptiness are one substance; they are completely identical. Form and emptiness are the "One." Although they manifest in a thousand different forms, appearance is intrinsic nature, and intrinsic nature is appearance; form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.

The Buddha teaches us to recognize the truth: do not mistake appearance and intrinsic nature, form and emptiness, for two things that are merely broadly similar, and then pursue and seek after them, thereby straying onto a wrong path. When practitioners truly understand that form and emptiness are nondual, they will also understand that emptiness in Mahāyāna Buddhism is not inert emptiness or annihilationist emptiness, but wondrous presence within true emptiness.

Because intrinsic nature is empty and non-abiding, and is empty in itself, appearances too are illusory, unreal, and utterly unobtainable. Therefore, toward all forms and appearances, we must not cling and seek, anxiously worrying over gain and loss.

What is meant by "wondrous"? Mountains, rivers, the great earth, and the myriad phenomena—all forms and appearances without exception are manifestations of intrinsic nature. All forms and appearances are you yourself, and you yourself are all forms and appearances: "Everything is created by mind alone."

To make no distinctions and have no attachment regarding forms and appearances, to function in accordance with conditions, neither grasping nor rejecting—this is wondrous! Only when we truly understand the principle that form and emptiness are nondual can we see intrinsic nature upon seeing appearances, and thereby see our own intrinsic nature through all forms and appearances. Seeing intrinsic nature is seeing appearances; thus, from intrinsic nature wondrous functioning arises. Function freely and naturally, naturally and freely, luminous and at ease, and perfectly realize bodhi.

Some people do not understand this. They say that mountains, rivers, and the great earth belong to the "material world" and have no consciousness, so how could they possess Buddha-nature? Buddha-nature is conscious! What they do not know is that

mountains, rivers, and the great earth are originally the object aspect within our ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna).

The eight consciousnesses have four functions: the object aspect, perceiving aspect, self-verifying aspect, and verification of the self-verifying aspect. This is what the Dharma Characteristics School teaches. In fact, the Dharma Characteristics School and the School of Nature are one entity. The Buddha said: “The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only.” Thus, bodhisattvas who propagate the Dharma take “the three realms are mind-only” as the School of Nature and “all phenomena are consciousness-only” as the Dharma Characteristics School.

To return from appearances and function to the essence of intrinsic nature is called breaking through appearances and seeing intrinsic nature; this is the School of Nature. To give rise from the essence of intrinsic nature to appearances and function is the wondrous functioning of true emptiness; this is called great capacity and great function, and is the Dharma Characteristics School. The School of Nature and the Dharma Characteristics School are originally one entity: appearance is intrinsic nature, and intrinsic nature is appearance. We shall discuss later the object aspect, perceiving aspect, self-verifying aspect, and verification of the self-verifying aspect of the eight consciousnesses taught by the Dharma Characteristics School.

Earlier, we explained that the aggregate of form among the five aggregates discussed in the Heart Sūtra includes eleven form dharmas: the five faculties and the six sense objects. The other four aggregates—feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are mental dharmas. The aggregates of feeling and perception encompass the fifty-one mental factors. The aggregate of formations encompasses the twenty-four dharmas dissociated from mind. The aggregate of consciousness encompasses the eight mind-king dharmas; the eight mind-kings are the eight consciousnesses.

Thus, form and mind together encompass ninety-four dharmas, all of which are conditioned dharmas. Adding the six unconditioned dharmas, which are neither form nor mind, makes one hundred dharmas in all. These one hundred dharmas are the essential meaning of the Dharma Characteristics School’s Treatise on the Gateway to the Hundred Dharmas. Śākyamuni Buddha taught eighty-four thousand Dharma gates.

Maitreya Buddha cultivated through the “great element of consciousness.” After attaining realization, he condensed the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates into six hundred and sixty dharmas. Because the people of this Jambudvīpa have relatively limited capacity for understanding, especially in the Dharma-ending age, they found

the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates too complicated, difficult to understand, and difficult to remember clearly.

Therefore, out of compassion, Maitreya Buddha selected the important points from the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates, organized and summarized them, and condensed them into six hundred and sixty dharmas. The Indian bodhisattva Asaṅga entered the “Inner Court of Maitreya” in Tuṣita Heaven during meditative absorption and heard Maitreya Buddha expound the six hundred and sixty dharmas in the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra. He then condensed and summarized them into one hundred dharmas.

Because these two bodhisattvas successively did the work of simplifying what was complex and making what was difficult easy, we later students are able to understand and readily enter through faith. Maitreya Bodhisattva and Asaṅga Bodhisattva truly possess boundless compassion and immeasurable merit and virtue. Otherwise, with the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates being so complicated, how could we understand them clearly, much less faithfully accept and put them into practice?

The Heart Sūtra contains only two hundred and sixty characters. Its words are concise and its meaning comprehensive, yet its principles are exceedingly rich. It encompasses Asaṅga’s one hundred dharmas, Maitreya Bodhisattva’s six hundred and sixty dharmas, and even all eighty-four thousand Dharma gates taught by Śākyamuni Buddha.

It may truly be said that “a mustard seed contains Mount Sumeru”! That is to say, the five aggregates taught in the Heart Sūtra can encompass the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates. The eleven form dharmas discussed under the aggregate of form alone are already so complete and so vast.

We human beings are deeply attached to form dharmas because they have visible appearances that can be perceived and encountered. Therefore, form is discussed first, so that we may heighten our vigilance and awaken clearly and profoundly to the fact that forms and appearances are originally no different from true emptiness. Thus it is said, “Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form.”

This truth arises from the illumination of wondrous wisdom. The profound prajñā practice cultivated by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is thoroughgoing wondrous wisdom. This wondrous wisdom is the unconditioned dharma of suchness (tathatā), likened to the light of a mirror. If we use mirror-light and reflections as an analogy, then the ninety-four form and mental dharmas are the reflections, while the six unconditioned dharmas are the mirror-light.

The “six kinds of unconditioned dharmas” are unconditioned space, unconditioned cessation through discernment, unconditioned cessation not through discernment, unconditioned immovability, unconditioned cessation of feeling and perception, and unconditioned suchness (tathatā). Among these, unconditioned suchness (tathatā) is nirvāṇa. Unconditioned wondrous wisdom can illuminate and contemplate the arising of the five aggregates, and further illuminate them as empty; thus it can “clearly see that the five aggregates are all empty.”

If we do not study and practice, how can we clearly comprehend the true reality of suchness (tathatā) and not be deluded by false consciousness? Apart from wondrous wisdom, we cannot illuminate the aggregate of form as empty, much less thereby bring about the result of “crossing beyond all suffering and adversity.” The aggregate of form may seem difficult to break through, because it includes as many as eleven dharmas.

In fact, we do not break through them one by one. As long as we know that everything is originally empty and without anything whatsoever, and do not calculate and discriminate, vainly generate opinions, or indulge in wild thoughts, then even though form exists, it is wondrous form that is non-abiding—“wondrous presence within true emptiness.” This is precisely “form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.”

Since the aggregate of form is so illusory and unreal, empty in itself, and yet also a manifestation of the nature of wondrous presence within true emptiness, the other four aggregates are no exception. Therefore, the text immediately continues:

“So too are feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.” Although the four aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are mental dharmas and formless appearances, they are no different from form dharmas, which have appearances. They too are illusory and unreal; they too are manifestations of the true mind. Once the aggregate of form is broken through, the four aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are broken through along with it. As the saying goes, when one dharma is broken through, all dharmas are broken through.

From this, we can infer the rest: feeling is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from feeling. Feeling is emptiness; emptiness is feeling. Perception is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from perception. Perception is emptiness; emptiness is perception. Formations are not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from formations. Formations are emptiness; emptiness is formations. Consciousness is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from consciousness. Consciousness is emptiness; emptiness is consciousness. Therefore it is said, “So too are feeling, perception, formations, and

consciousness." The five aggregates are the general categories; understanding one allows us to infer the rest. Since the dharmas of the five aggregates are thus, all other dharmas are likewise so. This is the meaning of this sūtra passage.

If someone asks, "What does it mean that form is emptiness?" we answer, "A stone shatters the moon reflected in a deep pool; graceful willow branches slowly sway in the wind." If they then ask, "How is emptiness form?" we tell them, "Zhang is tall, Wang is short, and Li is red-faced; peaches are sweet, mei ( ) fruit is sour, and plums are astringent."

Have you understood? If not, let us discuss once more the one hundred dharmas mentioned above. Earlier, we spoke only of their number, not their content; now we may continue the discussion. Because you do not understand the answer just given, the content of these one hundred dharmas becomes very important. Moreover, through explaining the principles of form and emptiness in the Heart Sūtra, everyone will also come to understand the one hundred dharmas of the Dharma Characteristics School. This too is a very good thing.

Among the one hundred dharmas, the first category is "mind dharmas," known as the "eight great mind-kings." The first six great mind-kings are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind that we have already discussed. These six minds give rise to six consciousnesses.

The eye can see forms and appearances; this is called eye consciousness. The ear can hear sounds; this is called ear consciousness. The consciousnesses arising when the other four faculties—the nose, tongue, body, and mind—encounter the four sense objects of odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas are the consciousnesses of nose, tongue, body, and mind. The remaining two mind-kings are manas consciousness and ālaya consciousness.

The seventh consciousness is manas consciousness, which means "attachment to self." The Dharma Characteristics School calls it the "basis of defilement and purity"; its special function is transmitting and conveying. The Dharma Characteristics School has a familiar saying: "Eight brothers, one of them foolish; among them one is the cleverest; five conduct business before the gate, and one carries messages back and forth." The one who carries messages back and forth is this seventh consciousness.

Of these, "foolish one" is the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). It is the storehouse consciousness: without asking whether something is good or bad, it stores everything transmitted to it by manas consciousness. The five that conduct business before the gate are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. These five brothers deal exclusively with external objects and handle affairs.

“Among them one is the cleverest” is the sixth consciousness, or mental consciousness. Its power is strongest; all matters rely on this sixth consciousness to discriminate, accept, and reject. If the sixth consciousness does not stir, then when the eye encounters an object, it is like a mirror reflecting things: it is direct perception.

Direct perception means this: if an object is long, you see it as long; if another object is short, you see it as short. You add not the slightest discrimination of beauty or ugliness, good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, right or wrong, and so forth. If the sixth consciousness begins to operate together with the five consciousnesses, then all sorts of complications arise—wholesome and unwholesome, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, gain and loss, and so on.

Therefore, all good and evil are created by the sixth consciousness (mental consciousness). Manas consciousness depends on the purity or defilement of the sixth consciousness: when the sixth consciousness is pure, it is pure; when the sixth consciousness is defiled, it is defiled. It merely conveys information to the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), without selecting or discriminating. The ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) receives the information conveyed by manas consciousness and, without distinguishing good from bad, simply stores it away. Thus, it is the most deluded. These eight consciousnesses—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, manas, and ālaya—are called the eight great mind kings.

The functions of ālaya consciousness are divided into four aspects: first, the perceiving aspect; second, the object aspect; third, the self-verifying aspect; and fourth, the verification of the self-verifying aspect.

The verification of the self-verifying aspect is suchness (tathatā): the one and only true mind, which is also Buddha-nature.

The self-verifying aspect is Buddha-nature that remains deluded because beginningless ignorance has not yet been shattered. Since it is Buddha-nature, although it is deluded, it can ultimately realize the Way. It verifies and functions through itself; hence it is called the self-verifying aspect.

The object aspect arises because suchness (tathatā) does not abide in its own nature. Deluded movement gives rise to self-doubt, obscuring the originally perfect and luminous wisdom-light of intrinsic nature. Consequently, the inherently formless suchness (tathatā) becomes the deluded appearances of empty space and the four great elements; these deluded appearances of empty space and the four great elements in turn become mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, and stars, grasses, trees, and forests.

Therefore, mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, and the like may appear to be the material world, yet they are all manifestations of the object aspect of our ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna).

Because of ignorance, we lose our intrinsic nature. Buddha-nature becomes enveloped by ignorance and enters this bodily shell. We then cling to this small portion of the four great elements as a self, recognizing only this body as "I," as our own self, without realizing that all things are ourselves. The external material world —mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, forests, and so forth—is all manifested by the four great elements of our dharmakāya (Dharma body) nature. All of it is ourselves; all of it is the object aspect of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna).

We regard all the many external objects formed of earth, water, fire, and wind as things outside the body, unrelated to ourselves. We recognize only the physical body as self, not knowing that empty quiescence is self. We turn our original wisdom-light into the deluded seeing that sees objects. Is this not a grievous wrong? If you practice diligently, shatter ignorance, return to simplicity and authenticity, and recognize your Original Face, only then will you know that your intrinsic nature pervades the entirety of empty space and the dharma realm: every object and circumstance is the domain of your mind king.

Buddha-nature is formless and can be great or small: when great, nothing lies outside it; when small, nothing lies within it. Mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, and stars are so vast, yet they are not outside our intrinsic nature. All are manifested by our perfectly luminous true nature and belong to the object aspect of intrinsic nature. Since they are within our intrinsic nature, if they are not ourselves, then who are they? Since they are manifested by Buddha-nature, the material world of mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, and forests is also Buddha!

The so-called perceiving aspect is our capacity to see things. But if, upon seeing things, we cling to them, it becomes deluded seeing. For example, when we see that Zhang is tall and Li is short, and abide in the notions that Zhang is tall and Li is short, unwilling to let them go, this is deluded seeing. This deluded seeing is the perceiving aspect.

Although this is deluded seeing, and we are deluded about suchness (tathatā) and have lost sight of our intrinsic nature, Buddha-nature is not diminished. So long as we practice diligently, we can realize the essence for ourselves; this is called the self-verifying aspect. The verification of the self-verifying aspect is the recovery of our original state and the realization of suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature. These are the four aspects of the eight consciousnesses.

Above, we briefly introduced the “mind dharmas.” Next, let us discuss the “mental factors.” Mental factors are also called mind-attendants. They are the attendants employed by the mind kings, like the servants and retainers of a wealthy household. There are fifty-one mental factors, divided into six classes.

First are the universal mental factors. “Universal” means operating at all times and in all places: they pervade every time and place and apply to every capacity. These universal mental factors comprise five dharmas: attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition.

If these five universal mental factors were not causing mischief, we would originally remain utterly unmoving: innately numinous, bright, and perfectly interfused; innately complete in wisdom-light; innately unborn and undying. Our five faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are originally the lucid essence of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna). Suchness (tathatā), or Buddha-nature, illuminates these five faculties and enables their wondrous functioning of clear perception.

This is like a mirror reflecting objects: it illuminates clearly without discriminating beauty from ugliness or good from bad. This is the true mind of direct perception, the ever-quiescent wisdom-light of intrinsic nature. The problem lies in these five universal mental factors, for these five dharmas are the initial motives for all good and evil. Through their activity, the mind arises upon encountering objects, discriminates between acceptance and rejection, creates karma, and undergoes retribution. Thus we fall into the cycle of birth and death and suffer without end.

Manas consciousness clings to the perceiving aspect of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) as self. On the basis of what the eyes see, the sounds the ears hear, the scents the nose smells, the flavors the tongue tastes, and the sensations the body feels, it clings thought after thought, giving rise to the four fundamental afflictions of self-delusion, view of self, self-conceit, and self-love.

In fact, manas consciousness arises in dependence on the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna); it merely occupies an empty position. Since it simply follows the sixth consciousness as it shifts between defilement and purity, it clings to and protects the self. It takes the perceiving aspect of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) as itself and thus constantly and carefully deliberates, grasping it as self and remaining deluded and inverted. Therefore, the foundation of practice is to break attachment to self and transform manas consciousness into the wisdom of equality.

Some people misunderstand this and consider manas consciousness a pure consciousness. In fact, it is not; it is a defiled consciousness. If the five universal mental factors were not causing mischief, the sixth consciousness too would be the clear illumination of wisdom-light.

Although the sixth consciousness can discriminate good from bad and beauty from ugliness, it does not itself turn toward external objects. It merely awaits conditions: only after encountering some circumstance does it discriminate; when it does not encounter circumstances, it does not discriminate. Thus, it is itself neither good nor evil. The problem lies in the five universal mental factors. Under the control of attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition, the sixth consciousness becomes attached to appearances. Attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition are formless; they appear to be nonexistent, yet they are in fact a single thought. A single thought is often the root from which every evil karma is created.

There is an ancient Chan koan: a disciple asked his master, “What is a single thought?” The master replied, “Unawareness becomes a mountain!” This is what it means. Without the five universal mental factors, the sixth consciousness would inherently be complete in wisdom-light and lucid in direct perception. Such completeness of wisdom-light and lucidity of direct perception are great samādhi.

Do not suppose that samādhi means being fixed and motionless like wood or stone. That is dead samādhi, not great samādhi. When we are perfectly clear and are not deluded or shaken by circumstances, that is great samādhi. Since it is great samādhi, our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind can function spontaneously and freely, without obstruction.

However, because our ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) contains all the seeds of good and evil accumulated throughout innumerable kalpas, and because these seeds are stored in the field of the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), they often exert their influence and stir us so that, without our knowing it, a thought arises. This is the first of the five universal mental factors—“attention.”

Here, yi ( ), “attention,” refers to consciousness. It is like a fish diving to the bottom of the water and darting about without cease; the waves then churn unceasingly along with it. Thus it is also called zuoyi ( ), “directed attention.” Zuo ( ) means making or creating. It is active at every moment, making trouble out of nothing, whether the thought is good or evil, and causing the mind continually to give rise to thoughts. Directed attention is the beginning of the arising and stirring of mind.

Since beginningless time, sentient beings have never been apart from thoughts. This is because directed attention creates disturbance and functions, and because the seeds of our habitual tendencies stir within the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), drawing the mind toward objects and causing it to turn toward and adhere to circumstances. Therefore, the problem lies in directed attention.

If there were no directed attention, wisdom-light would shine brightly and direct perception would be lucid. Therefore, the most important point in practice is to cut off this attention so that directed attention does not operate. Buddha-recitation in

the Pure Land school, investigating huatou in the Chan school, the empowerment of the three mysteries in Esoteric Buddhism, and so forth all aim to cut off this attention. If this attention neither stirs nor arises, then even when we encounter circumstances and conditions, we will not be deluded or shaken. Therefore, the most important point in practice is to cut off this attention so that it does not operate.

“Contact” means coming into contact with external objects. Once directed attention has occurred and the mind has stirred, it draws the mind toward an object, leading the mind to a circumstance and causing the two to adhere together. Objects are also divided into two kinds. One is the inner object: seeds, called habitual tendencies, which condition the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) from within. The other is the external object, manifested as an object through the causes and conditions of ignorance.

When the sixth consciousness takes hold of these seeds, they manifest in activity. For example, someone may be fond of sensual pleasures and worldly amusements. This habitual tendency stirs within the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) and influences and activates it, causing the person unknowingly to long constantly for such pleasures (the internal objects of mind). Once that person encounters these pleasures in the external world (external objects), he cannot avoid acting and following after them. This is what is meant by “manifest activity.”

Thus, his mind becomes stuck to those circumstances, lingering in them and unwilling to let go. These external circumstances that have already arisen then in turn touch his mind, coming into contact with it and adhering to it. This is called “contact.”

“Feeling” means accepting and receiving. Once this deluded object appears, he accepts and receives the object and its conditions; unable to control himself, he cannot bear to leave it. He then becomes stirred by the circumstance, follows it as it turns, clings to it without letting go, and adds many names and concepts to it. This is “perception.” As mental perception continues without cease and cannot be relinquished once it has arisen, the current of thought flows on unceasingly, producing present activity and creating all kinds of wholesome and unwholesome karma. Therefore, “volition” means continual flowing on, driving the mind to create karma.

When these five universal mental factors are all present, they become the aspect that binds together good and evil. Yet this aspect is extremely subtle, not something that can be seen through contemplation using the power of samādhi. Therefore, it is called the continuous flow of arising and ceasing.

What is called the continuous flow is like water flowing without end. Yet this flow is not like the stormy waves of the sea, nor like the surging billows of rivers; it is like a quiet little stream, flowing ever so subtly and gently. In fact, it moves very swiftly—so swiftly that its movement is no longer apparent. You cannot see it and therefore suppose that it is motionless.

In fact, "the continuous flow of arising and ceasing" is a single thought of good or evil arising in the mind. It is merely a thought; it has not yet become action or created karma. It has only just begun to stir. Precisely for this reason, it is the critical moment in the struggle between conscience and desire, and also the critical moment for our practice.

If we are to transcend birth and death, we must cut off this continuous flow of arising and ceasing; we must sever this single thought. Even when the mind has already been stirred by circumstances and is about to create karma, if one's conscience awakens, one recognizes that it conflicts with morality, and one immediately turns the mind around, stops the evil thought, and refrains from creating karma, then this single deluded thought is extinguished and the karma cannot be created.

Therefore, to practice on the mind-ground means being able immediately to stop and eliminate this single thought. If we can constantly cut ourselves off from this single thought, we will recover the ever-abiding true mind. In our cultivation and practice, we must constantly gather the mind into the Dharma method we are practicing.

For example, in the Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation, one must use the Buddha's name to gather in the six sense faculties so that they do not move. One must not recite with the mouth while the mind is absent and scattered. From this we may know that Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva's teaching that, in Buddha-recitation, one must "gather in the six sense faculties and maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness" is an utterly certain and unalterable maxim.

The reason those who investigate Chan must arouse a sense of doubt is to gather in the mind so that no thought arises. Those who practice Esoteric Buddhism seek the correspondence of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind also in order to cut off this subtle single thought. Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna says: "The realm free from thought can only be realized through direct correspondence." This expresses the same principle. Once we understand this clearly in principle, we must follow these definite teachings and instructions, practice diligently and vigorously, and only then can we realize the Way.

Above, we introduced the five universal mental factors among the fifty-one mental factors. We shall now discuss the second category of mental factors: the five object-

specific mental factors. “Particular object” means attachment to a particular object: the object upon which each mental state depends—that is, a mind attached to good or evil and thus proceeding to create karma. Once one reaches the stage of particular objects, it cannot be stopped, and karma will be created. The object-specific mental factors are divided into five: desire, understanding, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

“Desire” means our desires. Because everyone is attached to this physical body, all hope to enjoy pleasure; this is desire for pleasure. When we encounter circumstances that we like and cherish, we strongly wish to enter into those circumstances and do something. This is the mind that is about to create karma.

For example, when someone who loves wealth sees an excellent opportunity to make money, the desire to become wealthy arises. To become wealthy, one must necessarily engage in action. If one does not act, how can wealth come into one’s hands? Therefore, this “desire” is a mind determined to act. Next comes “understanding,” meaning comprehension and firm conviction.

For example, one understands what circumstances and environment will enable one to become wealthy, and how one must act; otherwise, failure is inevitable. That is, once one understands which circumstances are advantageous and how affairs must be handled in order to succeed, one resolves firmly to act. It is then impossible to make that person stop. This is “understanding.”

“Mindfulness” means never forgetting, firmly retaining the lessons of success and failure. “Concentration” means single-mindedness. It does not mean the meditative stability of entering samādhi in practice, nor the “concentration” in “precepts, concentration, and wisdom”. Rather, it means focusing on the objects of one’s affairs, clinging to them without letting go, and single-mindedly pursuing one’s endeavors that bind one to birth and death. This is called concentration.

“Wisdom” here means cleverness and shrewdness; it is not the prajñā wisdom of the Buddhadharma. Prajñā wisdom thoroughly comprehends both worldly and supramundane dharmas, harmonizes with everything without obstruction, and is ultimate wisdom. Rather, this refers to what the world calls worldly intelligence and cleverness: being fully clear and without doubt about an undertaking one considers feasible, and thereby accumulating experience—knowing how a certain matter must be handled in order to succeed and how it will fail otherwise. This is called wisdom. These are the functions of the five object-specific mental factors.

Without the five object-specific mental factors, even if there are good or evil thoughts involving the previously discussed attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition, they will not become actual deeds. These five particular-object factors are needed not only to accomplish all wholesome and unwholesome worldly

undertakings; supramundane cultivation also requires these five factors in order to succeed.

When we practice the Dharma, wishing to realize the great Way, transcend birth and death, and liberate sentient beings together from the sea of suffering—is this not "desire"? Because we wish to realize the Way, we must first understand the meanings of the sūtras spoken by the Buddha. Next, we must clearly discern the path of practice: how to practice successfully, how to achieve twice the result with half the effort, and how to avoid taking needless detours. This is "understanding."

"Mindfulness" means that in practicing the Way, one must never forget it from thought to thought and must devote one's whole body and mind to the work of the Way. Whatever Dharma method one practices, one must be occupied with it in the morning and the evening, through displacement and adversity, practicing without forgetting it from thought to thought. Only then can one attain accomplishment.

Do those who practice Buddha-recitation not say that throughout the twelve two-hour periods one must uphold the Buddha's name and never slacken even slightly? The so-called twelve two-hour periods are the twenty-four hours of the day. One must constantly place the Buddha's name in the deluded mind, uphold it without forgetting it from thought to thought, and practice with such wholehearted resolve. Only then can one transform the deluded mind into the mind of Buddha.

Buddha-recitation is practice on the mind-ground; it begins at the point most intimately connected with birth and death, and therefore is most readily accomplished. Every undertaking, and even the ten Dharma realms, is created by mind alone. Creating the evil karma of greed, anger, and ignorance leads one to fall into the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. Conversely, mindfulness of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha enables one to become a Buddha. Therefore, one must practice the Dharma without forgetting it from thought to thought in order to attain accomplishment.

As for "concentration" and "wisdom," the aim of our Buddhist study and cultivation is to open great wisdom and realize the Way.

To open wisdom, one must first attain concentration. If one has not attained concentration, one becomes confused when encountering circumstances, is drawn along by them, and one's intrinsic nature is obscured. How, then, can wisdom be opened? But to attain concentration, one must first recognize that all sounds, forms, wealth, and profit are illusory and unreal, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—things that cannot be grasped or obtained. Only then can one relinquish them and attain concentration. In order to relinquish illusory circumstances, one therefore needs the precepts.

The precepts are the mother of concentration, and wisdom arises from concentration. The three trainings of precepts, concentration, and wisdom are Buddhism's foundational and essential principles and cannot be dispensed with. The five object-specific mental factors may appear to be undesirable things, sources of creating wholesome and unwholesome karma. As was said earlier in discussing the five aggregates, although they are the basis for creating karma of birth and death, if we use them well, we can employ them to accomplish the Buddha Way and liberate sentient beings.

The third category of mental factors is the wholesome mental factors, which are provisions for our cultivation and realization of the Way. There are eleven in all: faith, moral shame, moral dread, non-greed, non-anger, non-ignorance, diligence, pliancy, non-negligence, equanimity, and non-harming.

"Faith" means belief; it is the mother of success in all undertakings. This is especially so in practicing the Way, where faith is of primary importance. If one's faith is not steadfast, there is no hope of success; therefore, it comes first.

We ordinarily use the Chinese terms can ( ), "moral shame," and kui ( ), "moral dread," together. For example, we may say that someone has made a mistake yet feels no shame or embarrassment. In fact, the two terms have distinct meanings. "Moral shame" concerns oneself: one feels ashamed and deeply reproached by one's conscience, and thus consciously refrains from doing wrong. "Moral dread" concerns others: one feels ashamed before them and feels one has wronged them, as though one owed them a debt that is difficult to repay. One feels guilty and uneasy, and therefore dares not do wrong.

Next come "non-greed, non-anger, and non-ignorance." We know that the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance are the chief causes of rebirth in the six realms and the roots of all faults and calamities. Conversely, non-greed, non-anger, and non-ignorance are wholesome. Not only can everyone thereby become a sage or worthy person, but practitioners of the Way can also realize the great Way.

Every intention to act is prompted by greed. It arises because we see desirable and pleasurable circumstances, give rise to greedy thoughts, and always want to seize them for ourselves. We then resort to every means, even creating such evil karma as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Thus greed does the greatest harm and is the chief offender. Without greed, one would not create karma, and all evil karma would cease.

Thus, "non-greed" is naturally wholesome. Anger means a mind of resentment. It arises when matters do not accord with one's own wishes or mind, when others are better than oneself, when one cannot obtain what one greedily seeks, and so forth. Once this mind arises, anger does not cease and afflictions do not end. Not only will

one fail in practicing the Way, but one will also become isolated and without help in human relations.

If one has “non-anger,” is humble and self-critical in every situation, and is open-minded and receptive, how could one fail to realize the Way? The roots of greed and anger lie in ignorance. The multitude of sentient beings pursue external objects, thereby obscuring their original reality. They do not recognize that worldly dharmas are empty, suffering, and impermanent, but mistakenly take them to be truly existent. They seek and grasp without end, are carried along by karma, and thus develop greed. When they seek but cannot obtain, anger arises, and they falsely create evil karma.

If one has “non-ignorance,” opens the great wisdom of prajñā, and knows that all is empty, unobtainable, and ungraspable, what is there left to crave? Without greed, from where could anger arise? Therefore, ignorance is the root of the three poisons.

“Diligence” means making unremitting effort and striving earnestly. Whatever one does, if one does not undertake it with diligent effort, one will not succeed.

For example, when we visited the gymnastics training hall last time, we saw firsthand how the young gymnasts trained. In order to meet the required standards of physical training, several young athletes held handstands while beads of sweat as large as soybeans continuously dripped down. Their physical strength had reached its limit—beyond what ordinary people could endure—yet they still clenched their teeth and continued their arduous training.

Such a sight was truly deeply moving.

If this is so even with worldly dharmas, how much more so when we study Buddhism and cultivate the Dharma in order to transcend birth and death and accomplish the great undertaking of the true, everlasting Way, unchanging throughout past and present. Our aim is to attain Buddhahood. With such a grand goal, how could we fail to cultivate diligently through every hardship? We should exert ourselves and advance even more than worldly people: if they apply ten parts of effort, we should apply a hundred.

Those who practice Buddha-recitation must still be diligent without letup throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. Those who practice Chan or Esoteric Buddhism must exert themselves with redoubled diligence; otherwise, they will accomplish nothing in an entire lifetime. Even if they have awakened, they must still remain diligent without letup.

Why? Because the habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives and kalpas have not yet been entirely eliminated. Only when these habitual tendencies have been

completely removed and the merit and virtue of liberating sentient beings have been brought to perfection can one fully accomplish the fruition of Buddhahood. Moreover, if one does not continually encourage and spur oneself on, but instead becomes lax and indolent, one may still become deluded after awakening. Thus, the slightest slackening prevents perfect accomplishment. Diligence and industriousness are the good medicine for the maladies of laxity, indolence, and the like. From this we know that diligence and industriousness are the foundation of realizing the Way and are extremely important.

“Pliancy” means lightness, ease, and freedom. If we can leave behind the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance, it will be as though we have laid down a burden of a thousand jin: relieved of a heavy load, body and mind become light and joyful. Thus, those who cultivate Buddhism are light and at ease in body and mind, carefree and free. If you still do not feel such lightness and ease in body and mind, it may be said that you have not yet even set out on the path.

This is because your mind still clings to worldly dharmas and worldly appearances. You cannot lay down the heavy burden you carry and are unwilling to relinquish it; therefore, you cannot attain the sense of freedom that comes with lightness and ease of body and mind. You must then sternly rebuke yourself, spur yourself on, and strive diligently. Only when everything is let go can one bear the heavy responsibility of the Tathāgata’s household.

“Non-negligence.” Negligence means indulging one’s bodily, verbal, and mental conduct without restraint or scruple, subject to no constraints whatsoever. Negligence is indolence, complacency, and the source of disasters that ruin one’s undertakings; it is also what the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance depend upon.

Laxity inevitably means idly craving pleasurable circumstances without seeking to improve oneself, wasting one’s limited energy and time on sensual pleasures and amusements, and coming into this world as a human being only to leave without any achievement or accomplishment. Would one not regret this for eternity? “Non-negligence” means preventing indolence and stagnation, urging everyone to apply themselves diligently and without letup, and to press courageously forward. Only then is there hope of realizing the Way.

“Equanimity” here means letting go. Only by letting go of greed, anger, and ignorance, making the mind impartial and upright, and clinging to nothing can we enter the Way. If our minds abide in something and cling to it without letting go, how can the deluded mind turn pure, and how can it become impartial and upright? Thus, each moment of letting go is a moment of entering the Way.

When we relinquish all illusory and unreal worldly fame, profit, power, status, glory, and wealth, each thought can enter the Way. It is like walking: if one does not let go of the preceding step, but remains standing still, can the next step follow? Can one advance in this way? Therefore, in cultivating the Way one must practice relinquishment, courageously and fearlessly give, and abide nowhere. Only then can the deluded mind become still and pure, free of dullness and restlessness; only then can samādhi and wisdom be held in equal balance and the great Way realized.

Conversely, if one clings to worldly dharmas, the deluded mind will inevitably, like the aggregate of formations among the five aggregates, shift and flow unceasingly from thought to thought.

In that case, one who cultivates the Way will either be dull and drowsy or restless and agitated. How could samādhi and wisdom then be held in equal balance, or great wisdom be opened? Restlessness means that thoughts of wild speculation continue without pause; dullness means dozing off and sinking into sleep. These are all caused by deluded thoughts stimulated by the evil habits of the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. We must practice relinquishment. This means not only relinquishing external possessions; even our own body and mind must be relinquished. Only then can we truly enter the Way.

The practice of relinquishment also has stages. The initial stage is to relinquish worldly dharmas and abide nowhere. Yet the old habits of attachment accumulated over immeasurable kalpas are difficult to remove. Although one may wish to cut them off forcefully, they cannot be severed in a day. One must struggle with them over a long period before they can gradually be eliminated. Because this practice requires effort, it is called functioning with effort.

As the practice gradually becomes refined and pure, one relinquishes until not a single thought arises, and the view that abides in worldly dharmas has been eliminated. One must then go further and relinquish even the Buddhadharma. If the view of dharmas still remains and one clings to the Buddhadharma without letting go, this is still not ultimate. Thus, what is called “relinquishment” requires that worldly and supramundane dharmas alike be relinquished; only then is it ultimate.

When one’s practice reaches the point where even the Buddhadharma has been relinquished and cannot be grasped, one moves from functioning with effort into effortless, spontaneous functioning. Effortless functioning is great functioning, and thus one naturally accords with the Way. Everyone who cultivates the Way must pass through these stages; no one can immediately arrive at spontaneous, effortless functioning. At the outset, all cultivators of the Way relinquish through effort.

One must be willing to relinquish; otherwise, one cannot enter the Way. Those who practice the Pure Land school must be willing to relinquish in order to attain rebirth.

If they are unwilling to relinquish the Sahā world and still cling to it, how can they attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss? An ancient worthy said, “In a single thought of Buddha-recitation, aspiration and aversion are both complete.” Aspiration means aspiring for the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss; aversion means seeking to leave the Sahā world, and leaving it means relinquishing it. This is so in Pure Land practice, and it is so in studying and practicing every Buddhist school and every dharma gate: all require relinquishment.

At the same time, one must practice relinquishment skillfully and expediently. When deluded thoughts arise, do not dislike them, suppress them, or fear them. Instead, do not attend to them, do not follow them, and do not run after them; transform them into emptiness, and one will naturally enter samādhi with lightness and ease.

If one suppresses thoughts so that they do not arise, it is like holding down grass with a stone: once the stone is removed, the grass grows again. This is ultimately not the true Dharma. Moreover, one will inevitably fall into an unindeterminate state, becoming like wood or stone, without awareness, and will ultimately be unable to attain Buddhahood. Therefore, relinquishment is not blind, reckless action; one must practice skillfully. Those who practice Buddha-recitation need only raise up the Buddha’s name; those who investigate Chan need only raise up the huatou (critical phrase); those who practice Esoteric Buddhism need only raise up the mantra. Deluded thoughts will then naturally disappear. This is the wondrous method of relinquishment.

“Non-harming” means compassionately caring for and benefiting sentient beings without being troubled by them. It specifically counteracts our anger and hatred. If we have no hatred, we will not harm others; at the same time, we subtly nourish our own wisdom-life and imperceptibly eliminate our own karmic obstacles. Therefore, this is goodness for oneself.

Buddhism has a major precept against killing. Refraining from killing subtly nurtures one’s own capacity for wisdom, much as Confucianism advocates benevolence and righteousness. Here we have given only a general introduction to these eleven wholesome dharmas.

There are only eleven wholesome dharmas, but what of unwholesome dharmas? There are six “root afflictions” and twenty subsidiary afflictions, making a total of twenty-six. This shows that sentient beings in the world do little good and commit much evil. How can this fail to draw a deep sigh of lament?

Unwholesome dharmas are also called dharmas of affliction. Let us first discuss the “root afflictions,” the fourth category of mental factors. Root afflictions are the roots of the major subsidiary afflictions, the intermediate subsidiary afflictions, and the

minor subsidiary afflictions. There are six in all: greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and wrong views.

These six afflictions are the roots of the two attachments—to the personal self and the dharma-self—and also the roots of segmented birth and death and transformational birth and death. All the branches and leaves of the major, intermediate, and minor subsidiary afflictions arise from them. The three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance have already been discussed repeatedly, so they need not be discussed at length here. The three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance are the worst things: they are the chief culprits that harm the dharmakāya (Dharma body) and cut off wisdom-life. Therefore, they are placed first.

Next come pride, doubt, and wrong views. These three afflictions are fundamental obstacles to the Way. Why is this so? Let us begin with pride. “Pride” means arrogance and conceit. Because pride considers oneself supremely good and supremely lofty, how could there be no self? Of course, there is a self.

Once there is a “self,” it obstructs no-self; it is an obstacle to no-self. The Diamond Sūtra says: “If a bodhisattva has the mark of self, the mark of a person, the mark of sentient beings, or the mark of a life span, that one is not a bodhisattva.” Only when the four marks of self, person, sentient beings, and life span have all disappeared and been completely destroyed can one cut off attachment to the personal self, then destroy attachment to dharmas and cut off the dharma-self. Only when self and phenomena are both empty can one transcend the two forms of birth and death. Yet pride clings to the existence of a self and obstructs no-self. How then can birth and death be transcended?

“Doubt” means lack of faith and therefore obstructs right faith. All wholesome dharmas, worldly and supramundane alike, take faith as their foremost basis. Only when faith is firm can one fear no hardship or suffering, press courageously forward, have strength in undertaking things, and achieve success.

All sentient beings vainly undergo the sufferings of birth and death within the six realms of rebirth. To leave this ocean of suffering, there is no other path than to believe in the Buddhadharma and cultivate the Way sincerely. Therefore, the essential formula of Pure Land practice is faith, vows, and practice. One must first have true and earnest faith before one can make vows and cultivate practice.

When faith is firm, one’s vows can be profound, expansive, and great; one’s practice can be diligent and industrious; and one can attain accomplishment. Every other school likewise takes faith as foremost.

If one doubts and does not believe, thinking that one exists while alive but ceases to exist at death, one mistakes the false for the true, chases after and grasps illusory

fame, profit, power, status, glory, and wealth, and creates karma and undergoes karmic retribution. Thus doubt does great harm. People always think that after death there is nothing, not realizing that there is also nothing while one is alive.

For all things in the world arise from causes and conditions and are dependently arisen. They have no inherent substance and are originally empty. What is called existence is merely an illusory appearance, not real existence.

If one clings to it as truly existent, is that not delusion? Some also ask, “If, when a person dies, there is a consciousness-spirit that leaves the body, who has ever seen it?” If only what the eyes can see exists, and what they cannot see does not exist, then there are very many material things in this world that the eyes cannot see. Can you say that they do not exist? For example, X-rays, ultraviolet rays, infrared rays, molecules,

atoms, neutrons, protons, electrons, and so forth—through scientific experiments, people have gradually observed and demonstrated that these truly exist. Can anyone still deny their existence and say that they do not exist? Therefore, we cannot deny something's objective existence simply because our eyes cannot see it.

We must further understand that all activity, all functions, and all phenomena arise from the true mind—Buddha-nature—which your eyes cannot see. Without Buddha-nature, our bodies would be like wooden puppets. How then could we speak of doing anything at all? Therefore, we must have unwavering faith that the Buddhadharma is scientific.

If we follow its methods, put them into practice, and cultivate accordingly, we will obtain verification. Through Buddha-recitation, one realizes the samādhi of Buddha-recitation; through investigating Chan, one reaches awakening; through esoteric practice, one realizes formless siddhi. Then one can personally verify this true nature, which is formless yet boundless in its wondrous functioning. Therefore, faith is foremost among all wholesome qualities and the mother of success.

Conversely, if you doubt and do not believe, will you still be willing to do it? Even if you force yourself to do it, you will be full of misgivings, timid and hesitant, and without strength. You certainly will not be able to muster the strength of your whole life and devote yourself to it wholeheartedly. The result will inevitably be failure, and in studying the Way you will accomplish nothing. Thus, “doubt” is an unwholesome dharma and causes great harm.

“Wrong view” is the evil view that denies cause and effect. The ten afflictions called “envoys” in the Lotus Sūtra are the five thought-afflictions and the five view-afflictions. The five thought-afflictions are the fundamental afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. The five view-afflictions are the fundamental

affliction of wrong view, which is further divided into self-view, extreme views, wrong views, attachment to views, and attachment to rules and prohibitions.

Thought-afflictions are also called the five dull envoys, while view-afflictions are also called the five sharp envoys. “Dull” means difficult to cut off and remove: greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt are habitual obstructions that are not easily eliminated. One must continuously temper the mind through circumstances before one can remain unmoved when encountering circumstances and gradually eliminate them completely. “Sharp” means easy to eliminate.

The five view-afflictions concern views and understandings; they can be assessed by right wisdom and are therefore easily corrected and removed. “Envoys” means that these ten afflictions can cause sentient beings to drift in the sea of suffering, unable to return home; hence they are called envoys. Confused by these ten afflictions, sentient beings create karma and undergo retribution, endlessly revolving in birth and death. Therefore, cultivation requires cutting off these six fundamental afflictions.

Because wrong view can obstruct right view, its harm is especially grave. Therefore, it is necessary for us to explain these five view-afflictions briefly. Self-view is attachment to the physical body as the self, as something truly existent. Because this habitual tendency is deeply rooted, after death one still clings to this body, provisionally composed of the four elements, and thus there arises the intermediate-state body.

The intermediate-state body becomes attached to objects and enters the womb again. Thus the cycle of birth and death cannot end; all this is due to attachment to self-view. Extreme views are evil views that incline to one side. With respect to the two extremes of existence and nonexistence, one either clings to existence or clings to nonexistence, always falling to one side.

For example, one says that there is existence while alive but that there is nothing after death (annihilationist view); or that after death people remain people, while horses, cattle, and sheep remain horses, cattle, and sheep (eternalism). Such views all incline to one side. Wrong views are views that are perverse rather than correct, such as slandering the principle of cause and effect. Attachment to views means taking the three wrong views mentioned above to be ultimate and supreme truth. Attachment to rules and prohibitions means practicing or observing irrational precepts or deviant disciplines cultivated by non-Buddhists, such as smearing oneself with ashes or fasting.

Although followers of the two vehicles have cut off greed, anger, and ignorance, they still have pride, doubt, and wrong view. They know only the emptiness of the personal self, not the emptiness of the dharma-self; they know only that the false

self of “personal self” is absent, but do not know the true self of “eternity, bliss, self, and purity.” They believe that there are dharmas to cultivate and birth and death to transcend; these are instances of “wrong view.”

Thinking that they have ended segmented birth and death, left the three realms, and attained a noble fruition, while the multitude of sentient beings remain suffering ordinary beings—this is “pride.” When the Buddha expounded the Lotus Sūtra, five thousand people left their seats; this was “doubt.” Thus, followers of the two vehicles have not yet cut off the three fundamental afflictions of pride, doubt, and wrong view. Non-Buddhists are even less capable; their wrong views are deeper, and their cultivation makes it difficult to realize the true mind. All this is the fault of fundamental afflictions causing mischief. Therefore, if one wishes to succeed in cultivation, one must cut off these six fundamental afflictions.

Next, let us discuss the fifth category of mental factors, namely “secondary afflictions.” “Secondary” means that these afflictions arise in dependence on the fundamental afflictions: they follow the mind and arise along with it. They are therefore also called “branch afflictions” or “attendant delusions.” Secondary afflictions are further divided into three kinds: minor, intermediate, and major.

The designations minor, intermediate, and major are determined by the following conditions: (1) each arises independently; (2) it is unwholesome; and (3) they arise together at the same time. When all three conditions are present, they are major secondary afflictions. If only the latter two are present, they are intermediate secondary afflictions. If only the first is present, they are minor secondary afflictions.

There are ten minor secondary afflictions: anger, resentment, vexation, concealment, deceit, flattery, arrogance, harm, jealousy, and stinginess. These afflictions are coarse and forceful, and each arises separately. They do not arise in a chain, with one arising because of another, and so forth; each arises independently. Hence they are called minor secondary afflictions. Their meanings can be understood from the words themselves.

“Anger” means rage and fury. “Resentment” is the arising of anger when things do not accord with one's wishes. “Vexation” means angry irritation. “Concealment” means obscuring clarity: one becomes agitated and unsettled, and consequently confused and dim; the light of wisdom is covered over, and one acts blindly and erratically. “Deceit” means lying and cheating others. “Flattery” means fawning and ingratiating oneself.

“Arrogance” means pride, haughtiness, insolence, and self-indulgence. “Harm” means injuring and cruelly harming. “Jealousy” means envy. “Stinginess” means miserliness. There are two intermediate secondary afflictions: lack of shame and lack of conscience. Because every unwholesome state of mind arises from them,

and all afflictions follow in their wake, they are called intermediate secondary afflictions.

If one has a sense of shame and moral conscience, one will not do bad things and will have few afflictions. Conversely, if we lack both, our actions will inevitably harm others and ourselves and draw criticism from others, leaving us overwhelmed byafflictions. There are eight major secondary afflictions: lack of faith, indolence, heedlessness, torpor, restlessness, loss of right mindfulness, incorrect knowing, and distraction.

They are induced by the intermediate secondary afflictions of lack of shame and lack of conscience. Since they arise together at the same time, unlike the minor afflictions, which arise separately, they are called major secondary afflictions. “Lack of faith” means not believing or having no faith. “Indolence” means being lax and lazy, without perseverance or effort. “Heedlessness” means allowing body and mind to indulge freely in idleness. “Torpor” means mental confusion and lack of clarity.

“Restlessness” means wild thinking and an unceasing stream of deluded thoughts. “Loss of right mindfulness” means losing correct conviction. “Incorrect knowing” means incorrect understanding. “Distraction” means being scattered and confused. These twenty minor, intermediate, and major secondary afflictions, together with the six fundamental afflictions, constitute the dharmas of affliction. Being contrary to wholesome dharmas, they are unwholesome dharmas.

The sixth category of mental factors is “indeterminate dharmas.” “Indeterminate” means that they are not necessarily wholesome, nor necessarily unwholesome. They may be wholesome or unwholesome, or neither wholesome nor unwholesome; hence they are called indeterminate. This category comprises four factors: remorse, sleep, investigation, and analysis. Why is “remorse” indeterminate? For example, when someone who has done evil reforms through repentance, that person becomes good.

Once evil conduct is repented of and corrected, it becomes wholesome conduct. Repenting of wrongdoing and turning toward goodness has always been praised by people. This is even more so in Buddhadharma: only by striving positively upward can one have the great spirit of “Lay down the butcher's knife and become a Buddha on the spot.” But if one has done good deeds for the welfare of the public and later regrets them because one's own interests have suffered, then stops doing good deeds, that is bad. Such remorse becomes unwholesome conduct. Therefore, remorse has two aspects and is indeterminate.

“Sleep” is sleep, an important activity by which people restore their energy and relieve fatigue. Everyone needs it; no one can do without it. The same is true for those who study Buddhism and cultivate the Way. If one does not get enough sleep,

one's spirits decline. When practicing, one becomes drowsy, and one's cultivation lacks strength. From this, we can see that sleep is wholesome.

But if one sleeps too much, body and mind become muddled. Therefore, those who are greedy for sleep have foggy minds and darkened hearts; they do things without energy, sluggishly and listlessly. Then sleep becomes a serious habitual obstruction.

As explained earlier, the reason our minds do not radiate light or manifest spiritual powers is that there are five obscurations, and sleep is one of them. Moreover, sleep brings dreams; when the mind is muddled, it obstructs contemplation. Similarly, when one is sitting in meditation and practicing contemplation, if one falls into torpor and sleep, what is there to contemplate? Thus sleep is also unwholesome.

However, if one's practice is effective, vigorous, and continuous, then when sleeping one is as if in samādhi—seemingly asleep yet not asleep, seemingly drowsy yet not drowsy. When the right time and conditions arrive, suddenly, with a sound, like cold ashes popping beans, one's original nature opens up; then sleep is again a wholesome dharma. Since we have come to this point, let us tell a koan that may help everyone understand this issue clearly and thereby intensify their practice.

Chan Master Sanfeng, a disciple of Chan Master Miyun Yuanwu of Tiantong Monastery, was given seventy taels of silver by devoted believers to support him during a retreat for cultivation. But after entering retreat, he would become torpid and drowsy as soon as he sat down to meditate.

At first, he forced himself to endure, holding his eyes wide open and refusing to close them, struggling not to sleep. His head and face became badly swollen, yet he still could not persist. His torpor was severe, and he could not make progress in his practice.

Later, he simply let himself sleep. He slept for seven days, and after sleeping his fill, he sat again in meditation. His practice immediately became effective. Suddenly, hearing bamboo split outside the window with a crack, he awakened to his original nature and realized enlightenment. Therefore, he admonished practitioners in his Chan record: “To practice Chan diligently, one must get sufficient sleep.”

If one does not lie down or sleep, one lacks sufficient energy and gains no benefit from practicing Chan. Therefore, sleep is also one of the important matters for beginning practitioners. How we regulate body and mind through sleep while cultivating the Way should be adjusted appropriately according to each person’s physical condition and progress in practice.

If the body is healthy and energy abundant, or if one applies oneself well in practice, has sufficient meditative stability, and strong wisdom, one may reduce sleep.

Otherwise, sleep a little more. In short, do not force yourself to reduce sleep; the main thing is to cultivate meditative stability. When meditative stability is sufficient, sleep will naturally decrease. When one truly realizes the great samādhi without entering or emerging, then one may sleep soundly; even in sleep, one remains constantly in samādhi.

Another example is when the Fourth Patriarch, Chan Master Daoxin, liberated Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong. Chan Master Lanrong did not sleep; he sat in meditation on a stone bench throughout the night. The Fourth Patriarch, however, slept as usual, his thunderous snores resounding. Yet although the Fourth Patriarch slept, he was more alert than Niutou Lanrong, who had not slept.

The Fourth Patriarch heard two fleas on Chan Master Lanrong's body fighting. One fell down, broke its leg, and cried out in pain on the ground. Yet the Niutou Chan Master was wholly unaware of it. Thus, sleep and the power of samādhi do not lie in outward appearances. Sleep may be good or bad, neither good nor bad; it depends on how suitably we arrange it.

What are called "investigation" and "analysis" mean assessing, planning, deliberating, and considering matters. "Investigation" means searching out all aspects related to a problem and considering them. "Analysis" means closely inspecting whether the matter under consideration has been thought through thoroughly and whether there are any gaps.

"Investigation" is broad and preliminary: to think through each matter in a general way is "investigation." "Analysis" enters into detail, further working out and resolving matters in a thorough and concrete way. Whether the matters being considered and resolved are good or bad determines whether these two mental factors, investigation and analysis, are wholesome or unwholesome. Therefore, they are indeterminate dharmas.

We have now briefly introduced the six categories of mental factors.

The five universal mental factors, five object-specific mental factors, eleven wholesome mental factors, six root afflictions, twenty subsidiary afflictions, and four indeterminate mental factors total fifty-one mental factors. What are mental factors? They are dharmas held by the mind-king. The eight mind dharmas are the mind-kings of the eight consciousnesses, comparable to masters.

Mental factors belong to consciousness. They are comparable to servants, serving the mind-king and carrying out its affairs. Thus, they are also called the branches of mind, traces of mind, and paths of mind—the avenues along which the mind operates. Some sūtras also call them adventitious defilements, defiled mind, afflictions, and so forth.

The mind-kings of the eight consciousnesses are the intrinsic nature of consciousness and do not create karma. It is the mental factors that create karma. Afflictions are functions arising when mental factors disturb the intrinsic nature. An ancient worthy said: “Originally there is nothing in the world; mediocre people only trouble themselves.” The mind is originally pure and has no affairs at all; it is entirely because mental factors disturb and create havoc.

It is like casting a little sand and soil into clear water: the water immediately becomes turbid, and this turbidity is affliction. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “It is like settling turbid water in a vessel kept still. When it remains deeply still and unmoving, the sand and soil settle by themselves, and clear water appears. This is called the initial subduing of the afflictions of adventitious defilements. When the mud is removed and only pure water remains, this is called the permanent severance of fundamental ignorance.”

If practitioners suppress their own thoughts and do not allow deluded thoughts to arise, then even if they attain dhyāna and samādhi, they have not truly eliminated afflictions. It is like sand and soil settling to the bottom: although clear water appears, this is not fundamental purity. As soon as it is slightly stirred or churned, the water again becomes turbid, and afflictions again arise.

Only when the mud and sand are removed can the water become thoroughly clear, and only then can the mind become truly pure. Cultivation in this way alone may be called genuine practice. We already know that all things are fundamentally empty and without inherent existence; they arise only because our deluded thoughts and attachments accumulate, like flowers in empty space, which have no real existence at all. If we neither cling to nor pursue them, we will not undergo karmic retribution.

When deluded thoughts stir, it is because the mental factor of attention among the universal mental factors agitates the mind, and because accumulated habits from many lives and kalpas surge up. Understanding this, when deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them. The moment they arise, become aware; the moment awareness arises, they are empty. Or, as soon as they arise, bring forth the Buddha’s name or an esoteric mantra, illuminating and dissolving the deluded thoughts into emptiness without allowing them to linger. Then the mind will naturally become pure.

Practicing in this way prevents the suppression of deluded thoughts. This is the thorough method for clearing away the mud and sand and eliminating afflictions; this alone is genuine practice. Having understood the essential key to practice, we must apply ourselves skillfully and maintain contemplation at all times. The three Chinese characters in “Guanzizai” ( ) in this Heart Sūtra teach us to contemplate our Original Face at every moment and remain unwavering on the original ground. This is the most important dharma gate for attaining Buddhahood.

The Dharma Characteristics School expounds so many characteristics of dharmas in order to teach people to see through false appearances and thereby wondrously awaken to the true mind that is inherently present. It is not telling us to enumerate technical terms exhaustively, like entering the sea to count its grains of sand. Nor is it telling us to pursue systematic knowledge and increase conceptual views. Many people who now study the Dharma Characteristics School become trapped in the circle of technical terms and cannot get out; this loses the school's essential purpose.

Above, we discussed the eight great mind-kings and the fifty-one mental factors. These fifty-one mental factors all arise from the eight great mind-kings. Although there is a distinction between mind-kings and mental factors, they all belong to the perceiving aspect of the eight consciousnesses. Next, we shall discuss the object aspect. The object aspect has eleven form dharmas: the five faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, together with the six sense objects of forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas—eleven form dharmas in all.

Ordinary people always assume that this material world is insentient, external to the body, and does not belong to ourselves. They do not realize that all form dharmas are inseparable from our intrinsic nature.

If true nature were not enveloped by ignorance and contained within this bodily cavity composed of the four great elements, then our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body would be no different from the earth, wood, metal, and stone outside: they could not perform the functions of seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing. Their present functioning depends entirely on the capacity of true nature. The external mountains, rivers, earth, grasses, trees, and forests are likewise composed of the four great elements. But because ignorance envelops the true mind, we cling to a small portion of the four great elements as our own body and abandon the greater portion as the external world. This gives rise to the mistaken perception described above.

At this point, we may cite a passage from the Śūraṅgama Sūtra as confirmation: "Deluded confusion gives rise to empty space; relying on empty space, the world is established. Thought congeals into lands, and awareness becomes sentient beings." These words clearly tell us that the originally perfect, luminous true mind is transformed into ālaya consciousness solely because ignorance stirs deludedly.

This transformation is like a perfectly sound person becoming muddled after drinking too much alcohol. The person has not changed, but is temporarily confused; in acting, he exceeds ordinary bounds and makes mistakes.

Originally, there is luminous true emptiness, but it becomes inert emptiness. Deluded stirring within inert emptiness causes the pure four great elements to

congeal into the false forms of earth, water, fire, and wind. Hence it is said: “Deluded confusion gives rise to empty space; relying on empty space, the world is established.” This world is a land formed by the congealing of deluded thoughts. Because it has become the false forms of the four great elements, the inherent light of wisdom is transformed into false perception.

False perception is perception involving a perceiver and what is perceived; it is relative perception. It then transforms the various false forms into objects that are perceived. Once false perception has persisted for a long time, attachment leads one to grasp a small portion of the four great elements as oneself. Thus, this false perception becomes enveloped by the false forms of earth, water, fire, and wind, becoming one’s body.

The four great elements are originally insentient. Whether the four great elements of our bodies or those of mountains, rivers, earth, wood, and stone, they are equally without awareness. Because false perception clings to this body as oneself, it is regarded as sentient. In other words, the body, provisionally compounded from the four great elements, is considered sentient only because false perception clings to this small portion of the four great elements as one’s own.

The true mind is originally immeasurable and boundless, exhausting empty space and pervading the dharma realm. Yet because of ignorance, it becomes enclosed and fixed. It is like water, which originally flows, but when it freezes becomes obstructed and motionless. When the true mind is enclosed by ignorance and enters the four great elements, it becomes mind: form is mixed with deluded thought, and thought-images become the body. This is a sentient being of the five aggregates. Hence it is said: “Thought congeals into lands, and awareness becomes sentient beings.” This awareness is not the awareness of self-awakening, but deluded awareness. When the five aggregates combine, sentient beings come to be.

Since we know that this physical body of the four great elements is the same as the external mountains, rivers, and earth, we need only dissolve the deluded mind into emptiness and return to the true mind. Then we can pervade every place and truly realize that all dharmas are ourselves. When Master Shenggong expounded the Dharma, even insentient stones nodded; this is also what the sūtras call “sentient and insentient alike completely perfect the wisdom of all-knowledge.”

Therefore, the inner five faculties and the outer six sense objects are all the object aspect of ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna); not one of them is other than oneself.

Just consider: who possesses such wealth? Now that we have heard the Buddhadharma, if we still do not apply ourselves diligently, would we not disappoint the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and ourselves? Therefore, whether one investigates Chan, recites the Buddha’s name, or practices Esoteric Buddhism, to attain

accomplishment one must inwardly relinquish body and mind and outwardly remove the world. Only then can one eliminate the object aspect and the perceiving aspect, returning to the source and restoring the original.

Conversely, if one clings to body, mind, and world, birth and death will never be ended. When practitioners apply themselves well, this illusory false body will inevitably dissolve completely. Thus, the Chan school often says: “When deluded thoughts are exhausted, the illusory body dissolves.” When deluded thoughts are gone, this illusory body too is gone. When the illusory body and mind no longer remain, this shadow-like world disappears along with them.

Therefore, when one sees one’s true nature, empty space shatters and the great earth sinks away; nothing whatsoever can be obtained. Yet within this unobtainability, it is not annihilationist emptiness: there is clear, numinous knowing. This clear, numinous knowing has neither a knower nor anything known. A sūtra says, “Prajñā is without knowing.” This non-knowing is true knowing that knows everything; it is our Original Face.

The foregoing concerned the eleven form dharmas. The Dharma Characteristics School also recognizes twenty-four “non-associated dharmas.” Non-associated dharmas are divisions of mind dharmas, mental-factor dharmas, and form dharmas; that is, dharmas that are not associated or shared with mind, mental factors, form, and the like. They are therefore also called “mind-non-associated conditioned dharmas.”

Because they are attached neither to good nor to evil, they differ from dharmas such as mind, mental factors, and form.

The non-associated dharmas comprise twenty-four kinds: acquisition, life faculty, sameness of sentient beings, the nature of ordinary beings, the absorption of non-perception, the absorption of cessation, retribution of non-perception, collections of names, collections of phrases, collections of letters, arising, abiding, aging, impermanence, continuation, fixed distinction, association, rapidity, sequence, time, direction, number, harmony, and disharmony. The meanings of these twenty-four terms can be understood from their names, and they have little bearing on actual practice, so I shall not discuss them at length here. Too much discussion may hinder your practice; perhaps some people would become entangled in terminology and be unable to get out.

When discussing the sūtra passage earlier, we mentioned the five aggregates. Within the five aggregates, the form aggregate encompasses the eleven form dharmas; the aggregates of feeling and perception encompass the fifty-one mental-factor dharmas; the formations aggregate encompasses the twenty-four non-associated

dharmas; and the consciousness aggregate encompasses the eight mind dharmas. Together, these make ninety-four dharmas, called “conditioned dharmas.”

What are called conditioned dharmas are the dharmas of sentient beings’ birth and death. They are what deluded consciousness depends upon and involve fabrication; that is, they are worldly dharmas. The remaining six of the hundred dharmas are unconditioned dharmas: unconditioned space, unconditioned cessation through discernment, unconditioned cessation not through discernment, unconditioned immovability, unconditioned cessation of feeling and perception, and unconditioned suchness (tathatā). Unlike the ninety-four conditioned dharmas discussed above, these six are the true nature of the four categories of mind dharmas, mental-factor dharmas, form dharmas, and non-associated dharmas. They are supramundane dharmas and are therefore called “unconditioned dharmas.”

Although these six unconditioned dharmas are said to be supramundane dharmas, they are not entirely Mahāyāna dharmas; they also extend to the dharmas of Hīnayāna sages. We shall briefly introduce them below.

“Unconditioned space” uses space as a metaphor for the emptiness of our One True Dharma Realm. Suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature are as boundless as space, free from deluded thoughts and defilements. Although they manifest every appearance and give rise to all manner of wondrous functioning, they abide in nothing at all. Like space, they do nothing, and hence are called unconditioned space. In actuality, this unconditioned state refers to entering, through diligent cultivation, the realm of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization, thereby fully perfecting the spiritual functioning of the One True Dharma Realm.

“Unconditioned cessation through discernment” means selecting an appropriate dharma gate through undefiled wisdom, cutting off various obstacles and extinguishing various defilements, thereby realizing the truth and entering bodhi. This is the method of gradual cutting off and gradual realization used by bodhisattvas of the provisional teachings. In the doctrinal schools it is called, “Ignorance is destroyed portion by portion, and the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is realized portion by portion.” It is unlike the complete cutting off and complete realization of bodhisattvas of the perfect and sudden Mahāyāna teachings.

“Unconditioned cessation not through discernment” means that bodhisattvas of the true teachings do not select a particular method to cut off ignorance in stages, but contemplate reality as it is. They contemplate that dharmatā is originally quiescent, originally unconditioned, and originally just so. Dharmatā does not become unconditioned only after one chooses a particular dharma gate and cultivates it.

Thus, unconditioned cessation not through discernment is completely opposite to the unconditioned cessation through discernment discussed above. Unconditioned

cessation through discernment requires selecting a particular Buddhist teaching for cultivation and realization, cutting off the various obstacles and defilements, and only then realizing the unconditioned. Unconditioned cessation not through discernment recognizes that dharmatā is originally just so, inherently quiescent, and originally unconditioned. It does not require selecting a particular dharma gate for cultivation and realization; hence it is called "unconditioned cessation not through discernment."

"Unconditioned immovability" refers to the state reached when one's practice has gone beyond the third dhyāna heaven and entered the fourth dhyāna heaven. Joy, pleasure, and the like no longer disturb body and mind, and the three disasters of water, wind, and fire cannot harm one. Hence it is called unconditioned immovability. This is nirvāṇa with remainder, as realized by Hīnayāna sages.

"Unconditioned cessation of feeling and perception" is the sphere of nothingness among the four formless heavens. Feeling and perception do not operate, and it corresponds to the absorption of cessation; it is not the Mahāyāna samādhi of neither emerging nor entering. Hence it is called unconditioned cessation of feeling and perception. Both this and unconditioned immovability are states realized by practitioners of the two vehicles.

"Unconditioned suchness (tathatā)" is the principle-body of sentient beings, our Buddha-nature. Originally neither true nor false, unchanging and immutable, it is naturally so; hence it is called suchness (tathatā). According to the Dharma Characteristics School, to realize this wondrous essence of suchness (tathatā) one must cultivate the three contemplations. The first is the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment of ordinary beings.

Ordinary beings cling to and pursue external objects, lose sight of what is original, take the false for the true, want everything, and attach to everything. This is therefore pervasive discrimination and attachment. The second is the nature of dependence on others. Through cultivation of contemplation, one realizes that all things lack a self-nature, are entirely compounded from causes and conditions, and exist in dependence on other things.

For example, a straw rope has no independent essence; it exists in dependence on straw. The rope cannot be obtained. Therefore, by emptying all appearances, one realizes one's intrinsic nature. The third is the nature of absolute reality and perfection, namely suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature. These three contemplations are the practical method of the Dharma Characteristics School. By contemplating the emptiness of the nature of dependence on others and thereby ending pervasive discrimination and attachment, one realizes the nature of absolute

reality and perfection. This one-mind threefold contemplation is also an excellent method.

The Chan school begins cultivation from ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna) and directly points you to recognize the essence of suchness (tathatā): the innate awareness within ālaya consciousness, namely original awakening, which is the gate of suchness (tathatā) spoken of in Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna. Once one has recognized the essence of suchness (tathatā), one has not yet realized the one mind—the pure dharmakāya (Dharma body). One must still continuously and seamlessly safeguard realization and eliminate all deluded habitual tendencies before one can fully realize bodhi.

The Dharma Characteristics School classifies all conditioned and unconditioned dharmas, whether defiled or undefiled, within the “hundred dharmas,” thereby comprehending all things in the universe.

Among them, the ninety-four dharmas contained in the four categories of mind dharmas, mental-factor dharmas, form dharmas, and mind-non-associated conditioned dharmas are the “personal self” and “dharma-self” to which ordinary beings cling. The six unconditioned dharmas are the “personal self” and “dharma-self” to which practitioners of the two vehicles and bodhisattvas cling. Though both are the two attachments to self and dharmas, there are coarse and subtle forms.

The coarse forms are the discriminative attachments to self and dharmas; the subtle forms are the innate attachments to self and dharmas. These two kinds of attachment begin with ordinary beings and continue through non-Buddhist paths and the two vehicles, through the three worthy stages and ten noble stages, until they are finally purified in an equal enlightenment bodhisattva. Because ordinary beings cling to the body, falsely compounded from the five aggregates and four great elements, as a self, they undergo segmented birth and death. Non-Buddhists grasp at a “yang spirit” or “divine self,” while practitioners of the two vehicles cling to a “principle-self.” Therefore, until the seventh-bhūmi (stage) bodhisattva, one has not escaped the innate attachment to self and still suffers transformational birth and death.

“Attachment to dharmas” means attachment to dharmas taken as belonging to oneself. Ordinary beings mistakenly believe that their bodies and thoughts are truly real, and that this world of body and mind truly exists. The five faculties within the body are called the “direct retribution,” while the six sense objects outside the body, along with clothing, food, housing, travel, and the like, are called the “dependent retribution.” This is ordinary beings’ attachment to dharmas. What non-Buddhists cling to is an imagined nirvāṇa.

What practitioners of the two vehicles cling to is biased emptiness nirvāṇa. What bodhisattvas cling to is realization of suchness (tathatā), believing that suchness (tathatā) can be realized. Thus, although practitioners of the two vehicles and bodhisattvas have cultivated and realized something, they still oppose delusion to awakening and remain within arising and ceasing. Even an eighth-bhūmi (stage) bodhisattva, having realized equal suchness (tathatā), still has attachment, called subtle attachment to dharmas.

All this is simply "attachment"; it is all "dharma," because there is "something attained" and "something realized." The Heart Sūtra says, "Because there is no attainment." Only this is the ultimate dharma. When arising and ceasing disappear and the sentiments of ordinary beings and sages are exhausted, the functioning of the one mind is revealed.

At the very end, when nothing at all remains, the Chan school calls it being "utterly bare." Only then does one "return home and sit securely." Only by completely breaking through the two attachments to the personal self and dharma-self can the one mind manifest; this is called Buddhahood. Buddhist theoretical analysis is extremely precise, and its methods of practice are many and profound.

However, we must not merely discriminate among terms, become attached to terminology, and memorize names and expressions. That only takes us farther from the Way, and leads everyone to more discrimination and debate. We must understand that "appearance is precisely nature, and nature is precisely appearance; appearance is nature, and nature is appearance." Only when one understands that nature and appearance are nondual has one truly grasped the essential point of the Buddhadharma.

Having heard what was explained above, some practitioners may say, "Such subtle Buddhadharma is also very profound. It seems difficult to succeed in practice. When will we ever attain complete accomplishment?" Do not think this way. Let me offer a koan for your consideration.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "You and sentient beings are likewise so: the precious awakened true mind is complete in each and every one. When I press a finger, the ocean-seal emits light; when you briefly stir your mind, the dusts and toils first arise."

Once, Chan Master Dongming Qian of Tanzhou and the practitioner Zhong of Zhenru Hermitage were reading the Śūraṅgama Sūtra together. When they came to the passage, "When I press a finger, the ocean-seal emits light," Zhong asked, "When I press a finger, the ocean-seal emits light—what is the Buddha's meaning?" Chan Master Qian said, "That old Śākyamuni deserves twenty blows with the staff!" Zhong asked, "Why so?" The master shouted, "Why press a finger?"

(Why press a finger? Is it only when a finger is pressed that light shines, and does no light shine when it is not pressed? This shining is not merely the Buddha displaying spiritual powers, emitting great light, and shaking the worlds of the ten directions; nor is there some separate treasure called the ocean-seal. Rather, the ocean-seal is used as a metaphor for our intrinsic nature and for the One True Dharma Realm.

This One True Dharma Realm emits light at every moment. It is absolutely not the case that it emits light and the existence of one's true nature becomes apparent only when some movement occurs. When there is no movement, intrinsic nature has not disappeared; it too is emitting light. Our Buddha-nature is always emitting light from the face of each person, without ever ceasing. There is never a moment when true nature withdraws.

All our speech and actions are the wondrous functioning of the One True Dharma Realm; this too is the ocean-seal emitting light. Even when we do not see, hear, or act, its wondrous functioning has not been lost; it is still emitting light. This is because it is serenely unmoving, neither arising nor ceasing.

The practitioner Zhong then asked, "The moment you stir the mind, the toil and dust of worldly afflictions arise first. What then?" (Although Buddha-nature is constantly radiating light, as soon as a thought stirs, the luminosity of one's original nature is obscured and cannot be seen. How is this to be explained?) Chan Master Qian gave a fierce shout: "That too is the Ocean-Seal radiating light!" Everyone, take note: this statement is extremely important. Do not suppose that whenever thoughts arise or one makes some movement, these are worldly afflictions and deluded thoughts that obscure the light of mind.

That is to take a passage out of context, sever it from the sūtra, and misunderstand it. Does not the sūtra plainly say, "The precious awakened true mind is complete and perfect in each and every one"? You should know that speech, conduct, and activity are precisely the wondrous functioning of suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature. We have explained this many times before. Long ago, King Vimatirāja asked Venerable Bharati, "Where is the nature?" The venerable replied, "The nature is in its functioning."

The king asked, "What functioning is that?" The venerable replied, "In the womb, it is the body; in the world, it is a person. In the eyes, it is called seeing; in the ears, hearing; in the nose, discerning fragrances; on the tongue, speaking; in the hands, grasping and lifting; and in the feet, walking and running." Therefore, all deportment and activity are the wondrous functioning and manifestation of our true mind. Do not regard them as deluded thoughts and deluded movement.

Chan Master Wolun once composed a verse: "Wolun has a special skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts. When encountering circumstances, the mind does not arise;

bodhi grows day by day." After hearing this verse, the Sixth Patriarch said that the verse did not yet reflect a true understanding of the Buddhadharma. If one practiced according to this verse, one would sink into lifeless stillness. To believe that it is good practice when the mind does not arise in response to circumstances is mistaken.

You should know that we cultivate the Way and attain Buddhahood in order to become living Buddhas. We certainly do not die where we sit and become metal, wood, earth, or stone. What kind of Buddhahood would that be? Such a state cannot function or liberate sentient beings; it has no value at all. Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch also composed a verse: "Huineng has no special skills; he does not cut off a hundred thoughts.

In response to circumstances, the mind repeatedly arises—how could bodhi grow?" "Huineng has no special skills" is said in response to the claim of having special skills. So-called special skills mean having some attainment in practice: the mind abides somewhere, is not open and empty, and becomes attached to its practice. This is attachment to dharmas, and it will not do; one must cast off this view of practice. Only from the eighth bhūmi onward does one enter the functioning of effortlessness; only then is there great functioning.

Below the eighth bhūmi, all functioning is effortful. "He does not cut off a hundred thoughts": thoughts are the consciousness-spirit. We have said before that whenever consciousness-spirit is mentioned, everyone becomes frightened. The consciousness-spirit is originally a bad thing, the root of birth and death; but after we recognize our original nature, consciousness-spirit becomes wondrous functioning.

The consciousness-spirit is a servant working for its master, while suchness (tathatā) is like the master. Whatever the master directs it to do, consciousness-spirit does; only then is wondrous functioning seen to be boundless. Therefore, there is no need to cut off thoughts. If they are cut off, functioning cannot arise. The true mind and consciousness-spirit are like water and waves: remove the waves, and the water too is gone.

Only when the true mind gives rise to thoughts can it respond to conditions, engage with things, and function in accordance with conditions; only then can its wondrousness be boundless. If thoughts were cut off, one would be like a block of wood or stone. What use would that be? Hence, "he does not cut off a hundred thoughts."

"In response to circumstances, the mind repeatedly arises." If thoughts and intentions did not arise, how could there be functioning? For example, when we expound the Dharma, we too must give rise to thoughts and intentions. Nor can

those listening to the Dharma refrain from giving rise to thoughts and intentions. Yet if thoughts and intentions arise without attachment to appearances, it is as though they had not arisen.

At the very moment thoughts arise, one does not see that there are words to be spoken or principles to be grasped. This is called not arising yet arising, and arising yet not arising, returning to empty quiescence. When true nature gives rise to wondrous functioning, there is direct perception even amid inferential cognition, and discrimination without discriminating. It is certainly not a matter of knowing nothing at all, being dead and motionless; rather, it is clear and lucid, with boundless wondrous functioning.

Thus, “in response to circumstances, the mind repeatedly arises” is precisely the time of functioning. “How could bodhi grow?” Bodhi is the wondrously luminous true mind: neither increasing nor decreasing, neither arising nor ceasing. Even upon attaining Buddhahood, not a fraction is added. How, then, could it grow? Having heard this verse, Chan Master Wolun thoroughly repented and entered realization of the great Way.

When Chan Master Qian told the practitioner Zhong, “That too is the Ocean-Seal radiating light,” he was telling us that, when responding to conditions and engaging with things, this is precisely where the true mind functions wondrously—this is the Ocean-Seal radiating light. Do not assume that giving rise to thoughts and intentions necessarily means falling into worldly afflictions. So long as thoughts arise and cease as they arise, without abiding or lingering, and at the very moment they arise one does not see a mind that can arise, this is the wondrous functioning of suchness (tathatā).

If one takes not giving rise to thoughts and intentions to be the great Way, one is mistaken. Sitting behind a dark mountain, one cannot realize the Way. We must be able to function in accordance with conditions and engage with things in response to conditions. We may do every kind of thing; this is precisely our great capacity and great functioning. This is called “non-contrivance, yet nothing is left undone.”

We have just mentioned that breaking through the five aggregates may seem difficult. This is because they encompass one hundred dharmas; the form aggregate alone includes eleven form dharmas. But once the principle is thoroughly understood, breaking through them is very easy.

If one recognizes that all these material appearances are illusory and unreal, all unobtainable, and therefore does not cling to them, make discriminative calculations about them, or indulge in arbitrary commentary, then all form dharmas and all activity are wondrous functioning. Therefore, the Heart Sūtra says, “Form is

not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form."

We must not only recognize that form has no independent essence, but exists through the coming together of causes and conditions; that the very substance of form is emptiness; and that form and emptiness are two yet one, one yet two. We must further recognize that this emptiness is true emptiness with wondrous presence—our true nature—not an emptiness in which nothing exists. All these material appearances are manifested and produced by our true nature; they are all shadows of our own nature, all our transformation bodies. What, then, is there to discriminate or cling to? In this way, one can empty the form dharmas and break through the form aggregate.

By analogy, once the form aggregate is broken through, the remaining four aggregates—feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are likewise broken through one after another, because they too are illusory, unobtainable images. Since material appearances are unobtainable, what is there to feel? Without feeling, how can perception arise? In sequence, formations and consciousness likewise do not exist.

Thus, once one is broken through, all are broken through; all are completely seen through, without remainder. Therefore, the Heart Sūtra says, "So too are feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness." The four aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are mind dharmas. They include the fifty-one mental factors encompassed by the aggregates of feeling and perception, the twenty-four nonassociated dharmas encompassed by the aggregate of formations, and the eight mind-king dharmas encompassed by the aggregate of consciousness, making a total of eighty-three mind dharmas.

The five aggregates are the comprehensive dharmas, encompassing and constituting all dharmas as a whole. Since the form aggregate is manifested by empty nature, the four aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness follow the same principle. That is, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are also functions manifested by the wondrous nature of true emptiness. True emptiness is feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness; feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are true emptiness. All is gathered back into one's own mind; not even a trace of any other dharma exists. Once one is broken through, all are broken through; the eighty-three mind dharmas too are extinguished without remainder.

III. Original Nature Section

Śāriputra! All dharmas are marked by emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.

This section reveals the wondrous essence; that is, it sets forth the main substance of the Heart Sūtra. The main substance of the Heart Sūtra is “all dharmas are marked by emptiness.” All dharmas have only names and no substantial reality. They are all manifestations of our true mind’s wondrous functioning; they are all shadows within true nature—the great perfect mirror wisdom. Therefore, nothing whatsoever can be obtained or sought.

Since it is emptiness, there is naturally neither arising nor ceasing. Since there is neither arising nor ceasing, what defilement or purity, increase or decrease, could there be? “All dharmas are marked by emptiness”—the five aggregates are, in their very nature, the characteristic of true emptiness. Here, the Chinese character xiang ( ) should be understood in the sense of “meaning”: all dharmas are empty and devoid of anything whatsoever. The five aggregates encompass all dharmas; since the five aggregates are empty, all dharmas are unquestionably, in their very nature, true emptiness. This does not mean that, apart from all dharmas, there is some separate characteristic of emptiness. All dharmas are emptiness, and emptiness is all dharmas.

Ordinary beings, in their views, always take each dharma to have its own form and thus cling to it as truly existent. Because everything has a form—a cup has the form of a cup, clothing has the form of clothing, and a house has the form of a house—they assume that all these things truly exist. In fact, these forms are all constituted by the empty nature of true emptiness.

What are called the “substance of emptiness” and “empty nature” are our Buddha-nature. Because it is wondrous presence and true emptiness, rather than inert emptiness, it can manifest forms in response to conditions. Although it manifests forms in response to conditions, all dharmas are unobtainable. Though forms appear, they are false appearances; do not cling to them. This is why it is called the substance of emptiness and empty nature: in its very substance it is empty, not real.

To keep his disciples from deludedly clinging to the arising and ceasing, increase and decrease, defilement and purity of worldly dharmas as truly existent, the Buddha further made it clear that all dharmas are entirely the character of true emptiness, with no arising or ceasing, increase or decrease, defilement or purity to speak of. Thus he said: “Śāriputra! All dharmas are marked by emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.”

Moreover, arising and ceasing, defilement and purity, increase and decrease are all pairs of opposites. Whatever is relative exists through dependence on others; therefore, it is neither eternal nor real. Only what is absolute is eternal and real.

Buddha-nature is absolute; therefore, it is eternal and genuinely real. There can be no arising or ceasing, defilement or purity, increase or decrease in Buddha-nature.

When the Buddha taught the Vaipulya Sūtras, he said: “Neither arising nor ceasing, neither eternal nor annihilated, neither one nor different, neither coming nor going.” Yet, in terms of the ordinary person’s usual deluded attachments and thoughts, there is no one who does not believe in arising and ceasing. They think that the birth and death of human beings, the spring growth and autumn withering of plants and trees, and such sights are all plainly before their eyes. How, then, can one say that there is neither arising nor ceasing? They do not realize that this is entirely caused by the biased mind of deluded thought and attachment.

Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva says in the chapter “Examination of Going and Coming” in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā: “What has already gone does not go; what has not yet gone also does not go. Apart from what has already gone and what has not yet gone, what is going does not go either.” By the same reasoning, we may explain “non-arising”: “What has already arisen does not arise; what has not yet arisen also does not arise. Apart from what has already arisen and what has not yet arisen, what is arising does not arise either.”

What does this mean? For example, spring grass may already have grown one chi high. Since the grass has already arisen, it is called spring grass, but it cannot be called arising. In other words, once the grass has grown, the process of arising has already vanished and no longer exists. What arising, then, is there to discuss? Therefore, “what has already arisen does not arise.”

Originally, this grass might grow two chi high, but now it has grown only one chi; one further chi has not yet arisen. Since it has not yet arisen, no appearance of arising has manifested, and it likewise cannot be called arising. Hence, “what has not yet arisen also does not arise.”

By this reasoning, since grass that has already arisen cannot be called arising, and grass that has not yet arisen also cannot be called arising, the appearance of arising is elusive and unobtainable. Leaving aside what has already arisen and what has not yet arisen, let us speak only of “the time of arising.” But once one has left aside what has already arisen and what has not yet arisen—“apart from what has already arisen and what has not yet arisen”—what “time of arising” can there be to speak of? Thus, “what is arising does not arise either.” Therefore, arising is wholly unobtainable. This is the principle of non-arising.

Earlier, we explained that arising and ceasing are opposites. In the same way, we may use this verse to explain non-ceasing: “What has already ceased does not cease; what has not yet ceased also does not cease. Apart from what has already ceased and what has not yet ceased, what is ceasing does not cease either.” Once we

understand the principle of neither arising nor ceasing, we can infer the rest from this and dispel all other relative concepts.

The Buddha clearly tells us that whatever exists relatively is empty, elusive, and unreal. We should not pursue or grasp it and waste our efforts in vain. “The sea of suffering is boundless; turn back, and there is the shore.” The Buddha teaches us to return when we recognize that we have lost our way, to return to what is original, and to sit securely at home. So long as we can turn back, it will not be difficult to realize the great Way.

Nevertheless, some will inevitably still cling to annihilation and eternity, sameness and difference, coming and going, and give rise to doubts. Let us now briefly explain annihilation and eternity, sameness and difference, coming and going.

If everything were eternal, why do people today not see the people of ancient times? This is sufficient proof that things are not eternal. If everything were annihilated, how could people today eat grain from ancient times? The grain and rice people now eat come from seeds handed down by the ancients; this is sufficient proof that things are not annihilated.

“One” means a single thing, while “different” means many things. Neither one nor different means neither a single thing nor many things. “One” also means sameness, while “different” means distinction. “Not one” means that there is nothing in the world that is not formed through the aggregation of many things.

Take our bodies: they are composed of skin, flesh, bones, nerves, heart, liver, lungs, spleen, stomach, kidneys, and so forth. This is sufficient proof that they are not one.

Because the five viscera and six bowels each perform their own functions, this part differs from that part: the heart is the heart and the liver is the liver. They are not one, and each is different. Thus, the body is formed by the aggregation of many organs. Yet to say that it is many would also be incorrect, for the body is a single whole. The many organs combine to form one person, not many persons.

This is “not different.” The fundamental substance is one; what distinction can there be? Thus, we may say that many are one and one is many; one and many do not obstruct one another. The Buddhadharma is so perfectly integrated and penetrating that it truly cannot be compared with other religions; this alone gives some indication of it.

Now consider “neither coming nor going.” If we speak of “coming,” from where do people come? If they do not come, how can there be people? If we speak of “going,” where will people go? If they do not go, how can people disappear? This is a mysterious problem that philosophers today seek to solve but are unable to solve.

Only through studying Buddhism, practicing, and realizing can one know that coming and going are illusory deluded thoughts. The fundamental substance of all sentient beings—suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature—neither comes nor goes, neither arises nor ceases. All things in the world are false and illusory; none are other than products of our deluded thoughts, discriminations, attachments, and inverted views. Thus there come to be arising and ceasing, eternity and annihilation, sameness and difference, coming and going.

Just now, from our explanation of neither arising nor ceasing, we extended the discussion to the wondrous principles of neither eternal nor annihilated, neither different nor one, neither coming nor going. We should know that all relative phenomena are illusory; only the true mind is absolutely real.

All that is relative is produced by the deluded mind; it is all illusory false appearance, arising from our discriminating calculations and deluded attachments. Therefore, it is called the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment. We must overthrow this pervasive discrimination and attachment, recognize the nature of dependence on others, and recognize that phenomena with forms have no self-substance but arise through the coming together of causes and conditions.

Only by recognizing the nature of dependence on others can one realize the wisdom of the awakened one and realize the nature of absolute reality and perfection. Then one will intimately and deeply feel that all things in the world are manifested and brought about by our true nature, that they neither arise nor cease and inherently involve neither gain nor loss. One will no longer pursue external objects or grasp greedily without satisfaction, but will return home and sit securely.

In the Tang dynasty there was a lay practitioner named Pang Yun. All four members of his family fully realized the great Way. He composed an interesting verse: “Having a son, he does not marry; having a daughter, she does not wed. The whole family gathers round, speaking of non-arising.” Because everyone in the family had succeeded in practice and realization, they disdained such worldly matters as weddings. The son did not marry, the daughter did not wed, and the whole family gathered together to speak of non-arising. How delightful this is! The entire family had realized the forbearance of the non-arising of dharmas.

Chan Master Dahui Zonggao (Miaoxi) of the Song dynasty wrote a letter instructing the lay practitioner Luo Kuairan. It contains the following passage:

Long ago, Layman Pang said: “Having a son, he does not marry; having a daughter, she does not wed. The whole family gathers round, speaking of non-arising.” Later, during the Yuanfeng era, there was a scholar-official known as Layman Wuwei, surnamed Yang, personal name Jie, style name Cigong. He had studied with elders of former generations and had attained genuine benefit in the Chan school.

He once composed a verse in reply to Layman Pang's: "A grown son must marry; a grown daughter must wed. Why seek such idle leisure as to speak further of non-arising?" These two common fellows took that single field belonging to the ten-direction saṅgha, without having its title sealed and registered by the authorities, and each divided its boundaries, proclaiming, "I know it," while continually claiming supremacy where there is no Buddha. At that time there was also one who was dissatisfied, Chan Master Haiyin Xin, who was then residing at Dinghui in Suzhou. On seeing Layman Wuwei's verse, he too composed a verse: "I have no son to marry, nor daughter to wed. When tired, I simply sleep—why bother about talk of non-arising?"

These three old men spoke these three verses. Lay Practitioner Kuairan is stuck when his eyes are open, stuck when his eyes are closed, and stuck even when they are neither open nor closed. Miaoxi sees this and looks on coolly.

Your understanding is not without merit. But ultimately, where has Lay Practitioner Kuairan arrived: with his eyes open, with his eyes closed, or with them neither open nor closed? If he has arrived with his eyes open, he falls within Layman Pang's circle; if with his eyes closed, within Yang Wuwei's circle; if with them neither open nor closed, within Chan Master Haiyin's circle.

On seeing these words, Kuairan will surely say, "None of these." But if it is none of these, he falls again within Miaoxi's circle. It is easy to get out of the circles of the three elders, but difficult to get out of Miaoxi's circle. In the end, how will Kuairan get out? Wait until I have returned to Yanping and married off my daughter; then, in due course, I will explain it to you.

I therefore recalled a verse by an ancient worthy and wrote it after this, hoping that Kuairan would not hide away halfway along the road. This, too, comes from my earnest, solicitous concern. The verse says: "Learning the Way is like drilling for fire: when smoke appears, one must not stop. Wait until golden sparks appear; only upon returning home does one reach the end." There is another question to ask: "Where, after all, is Kuairan's home to which he returns?" If you penetrate this question, marriage for sons and daughters is all contained within it. If you have not recognized home, then karmic consciousness remains vast and confused, and you wander entirely outside! Nor can Miaoxi be blamed for this.

The wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature is boundless: each may display their own abilities and adapt to circumstances. Let us not allow the ancients alone to excel. We may as well add another verse to meet the ancient one: "If there is a son, he too marries; if there is a daughter, she too weds. Children beget grandchildren upon grandchildren—this is what is meant by speaking of the unborn."

As we said before, non-contrivance while leaving nothing undone does not mean being unable to do things. So long as the mind does not cling, anything beneficial to the public may be done. Hence, “If there is a son, he too marries; if there is a daughter, she too weds.” After marriage, there will be children, and the children will in turn raise grandchildren. Children and grandchildren continue without end.

This unceasing succession of children and grandchildren is the unborn; it is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. For the unborn does not mean a lifeless non-arising. If one takes the unborn to mean lying dead and motionless, that is the teaching of the Lesser Vehicle: nirvāṇa with remainder, without having resolved transformational birth and death. You should know that the unborn is the capacity for flexible functioning without attachment.

Though one emerges and disappears amid the six realms, undergoing birth after birth without end, one does not see any birth as truly existent: birth yet no birth. Though circumstances change, the mind does not change. Only then can one resolve transformational birth and death. Thus Buddhahood entails layer upon layer of wondrous functioning, free and unobstructed. To range over the ocean of the Tathāgata’s quiescence and, in the samādhi of play, never grow weary—this is true forbearance of the unborn dharmas.

The sūtra’s statement that there is neither defilement nor purity, neither increase nor decrease, is a true and unfailing principle. This is because the essence of prajñā is originally just so. Buddha-nature has no appearance to be found and cannot be named or characterized; it is the empty characteristic of all dharmas. The appearances of defilement and purity to which people cling are all based on discriminations between filth and cleanliness. Yet they do not realize that these arise from the deluded mind’s confused attachment, each relying only on subjective discrimination. If you cling to something as filthy, it becomes filthy; if you cling to it as clean, it becomes clean. In truth, no fixed appearance can be obtained.

For example, a mountain path is rugged and uneven. If a traveler is careless and falls, getting cow dung on his hand, he washes it off and considers his hand clean again. But if a handkerchief is smeared with cow dung, then even after washing it, one still feels that it is unclean and simply throws it away.

But the hand is part of the body and cannot be thrown away; to discard it, one could only cut it off. Therefore, after washing it, one considers it clean and acceptable. One can be discarded and is not valuable, so only by throwing it away does one feel clean; the other cannot be discarded, so after washing it one can only deem it clean and let the matter rest. Then can filth and cleanliness have any fixed appearances that can be obtained?

Consider another example. A countryman comes to Shanghai and sees an enamel pail with a lid and colorful designs. Finding it quite attractive, he buys one to hold food. In fact, Shanghainese use such enamel pails as chamber pots, but he does not know this. For half a year, he uses it with an easy mind to hold everything he eats and drinks.

One day, he invites guests and again uses this enamel pail to serve food. One guest is from Shanghai and, upon seeing it, says, “Oh dear! How can you use a chamber pot to serve food to people?!” Everyone is startled when they hear this and can no longer eat. The gathering ends unhappily.

From then on, the countryman can no longer use the enamel pail to hold food as easily as before. He always feels somewhat upset and troubled by it.

Everyone may wish to consider this: what difference is there between a chamber pot and other vessels for food and drink? Whether in material, pattern, or design, they differ very little. It is only because people are accustomed to using it as a chamber pot that it is called a chamber pot.

A new chamber pot has not held excrement, so why must it be called a chamber pot? Why should it not be used to hold food? Thus, all this mischief is created by people’s clinging minds. Once the clinging mind regards it as a chamber pot, it can no longer hold food. Even if it is new, it seems unclean, like a filthy object that cannot be associated with food.

From this we can see that so-called defilement and purity are both products of our minds of pervasive discrimination and attachment. In fact, things themselves possess neither defilement nor purity. It is all the deluded mind making mischief, entirely our deluded mind discriminating whether something is defiled or pure.

Consider yet another example. Soy sauce is brewed from soybeans and wheat. During the brewing process, it must first ferment, and maggots often appear during fermentation. When people buy soy sauce, prepare various delicious dishes, and relish them, they do not think of the fact that the soy sauce in the dish once contained maggots; they take it to be quite clean.

But if they saw the process of making soy sauce with their own eyes, and saw maggots continually wriggling about in it, would they still have any appetite to eat it? Going a step further, are maggots in the end clean or filthy? People consider maggots filthy because they continually wriggle about in foul-smelling, filthy, and dirty latrines, and so they regard the maggots as dirty as well.

In fact, maggots turn over and over in the latrine, continually wriggling about and enjoying themselves. They do not regard excrement as foul or dirty; on the contrary,

they take it to be clean. Living in it, they are contented and delighted.

Beings in the heavenly realms see our human world as impure, while fourth-fruit arhats see heavenly beings as impure, just as we see the maggots in a latrine. Thus, views of defilement and purity truly have no fixed boundary. What is defilement? What is purity? Neither has a fixed definition. Therefore, no defilement or purity can be obtained. When our minds are defiled, circumstances likewise become defiled; when our minds are pure, circumstances naturally become pure. Defilement and purity both result from people's ignorance of truth, the deluded mind's discriminations, and inverted attachments.

Those who practice the Pure Land path can accord with the Pure Land only when their minds are pure. Suppose, however, that they cling only to outward forms—eating vegetarian food, refusing even to touch a pot that has held meat or chopsticks used for meat, and declining to buy food prepared outside—and assume that this alone constitutes purity.

If their greed remains strong, if they want the best of this and more of that, and if they cannot let go of attachment to family and children, how can their minds be pure? If the mind is impure, it cannot accord with the Pure Land. "Mind itself is the land, and the land itself is mind; as one's mind becomes pure, so the Buddha-land becomes pure." This is an incontrovertible truth.

Therefore, those who truly cultivate the Pure Land path use a single Buddha-name to wash away the filth in their minds and sweep away clinging and deluded thoughts. They should deeply understand: "All appearances are illusory." If one clings to nothing at all and the mind becomes pure, one is born in the Pure Land at that very moment. There is no need to wait until death to be born in the Pure Land.

If one cannot be born in the Pure Land in this present life and must wait until after death, one's assurance of rebirth in the Pure Land is slight. If we truly wish to be born in the Pure Land, we must be born in the Pure Land in this very life: the mind must always be pure and unstained, utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, able to let go completely of money, children, and family.

Even in Buddha-recitation, when one finally reaches the point at which neither the mind that recites nor the Buddha who is recited can be obtained, one enters deeply into Buddha-recitation samādhi. Only then can one say that one has complete assurance of rebirth in the Pure Land. We must understand deeply that defilement and purity are entirely the mind. When the mind is defiled, there is defilement; when the mind is pure, there is purity. Therefore, we should concentrate wholeheartedly on using the Buddha-name to sweep away deluded thoughts and habitual tendencies, clinging to nothing and being stained by nothing. Even the Buddha cannot be obtained. This is the true Pure Land.

Let us next discuss increase and decrease. Increase and decrease likewise have no original ground, for increase contains decrease and decrease contains increase. For example, the ninety days of summer are hot weather. Once thirty days have passed, one may say that the hot season has advanced by thirty days, or one may say that the hot season has diminished by thirty days.

The saying, “In the increase of the merciless years, there is decrease,” means that an increase in age is a decrease in the life that remains. For example, if someone is seventy years old and is destined to live ninety years, twenty years of life remain. Each year that person lives thereafter appears to add one year, but in fact reduces the remaining lifespan by one year. Thus, increase contains decrease, and decrease contains increase.

Moreover, Buddha-nature does not increase among sages or decrease among ordinary beings. It does not increase because one becomes a Buddha, nor decrease because one becomes a sentient being. Buddha-nature is so vast that there is nothing beyond it and so minute that there is nothing within it; it can be great or small. Expanding to fill all space, it does not increase by a fraction; shrinking to gnats, ants, and bacteria, it does not decrease by a fraction. The sūtra says: “Seated within a mote of dust, one turns the great Dharma wheel.”

How wondrous and boundless Buddha-nature is! Someone may ask, “You say there is neither increase nor decrease, but why is the population now so much greater than before? Where did all these people come from?” Such a person does not understand that this is due to rebirth in the six realms. Consider how many species of animals on earth are nearing extinction or have already become extinct. Animals are continually decreasing.

If we scoop up a spoonful of tiny aquatic creatures used as fish food, we can see tens of thousands of lives within it. The vast multitude of sentient beings revolve through the six realms, turning back and forth: at one time human, at another animal, at another born in heaven, at another entering hell, with no fixed term. From the appearance at a particular time, one kind of living being seems to increase and another seems to decrease. But the true Buddha-nature has neither increased nor decreased; it merely appears that there is increase or decrease when viewed through the illusory appearances of different species.

In short, neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing—these are the principle of the Middle Way. Seeing that worldly people invert things and cling to dharmas with appearances as truly existent, the Buddha tirelessly analyzes for us the truth that there is no arising or ceasing, no defilement or purity, and no increase or decrease. He urges everyone to cast off deluded attachments and return to their original true nature.

The Buddha expounded the entire treasury of teachings over forty-nine years; its essential point goes no further than this. If we truly understand the meaning of the sūtras, the deluded thoughts of the five aggregates will be empty in their very substance. The five aggregates encompass all dharmas; once the five aggregates are empty, there is not a single dharma that is not empty. Since all dharmas are empty, what arising or ceasing, defilement or purity, increase or decrease can there be to speak of?

We have already discussed this above; let us repeat it here to draw practitioners' attention to it. In the phrase "all dharmas are marked by emptiness," the Chinese character xiang ( ) should be understood in the sense of "meaning," not as form or appearance.

If it is interpreted as form or appearance, the meaning is ruined, for then all dharmas would still have an empty appearance! How could all the material things we see be empty through and through? You should know that this appearance is still an illusory appearance, not to be grasped and not obtainable; therefore it is called empty. As we have said before, what is called emptiness is first of all produced through causes and conditions.

All dharmas lack a self-substance and intrinsic nature; this is "dependent arising and intrinsic emptiness." Going further, all these dharmas, whether material dharmas or mental dharmas, are the wondrously existent true nature of our own true emptiness. They are manifested and brought about by our intrinsic nature; they are the transformation bodies of all beings. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "The true mind is not within, not without, and not in between."

It is everywhere. Originally, the true mind is immeasurable and boundless. There is nothing it does not encompass and nothing it does not contain. It pervades every place and everything. Yet it is now sealed off by ignorance and submerged in the four great elements, becoming the deluded mind and conscious awareness. Thus we take this small portion of the four great elements to be our body.

In this way, we turn luminous true emptiness into inert emptiness. Within that inert emptiness, the deluded material forms of the four great elements are brought about, and the originally present wisdom-light is transformed into deluded perception. Once the true mind is sealed off by ignorance, it changes from vast to small: it can no longer pervade every place and everything, but can only pervade this body. This body has awareness, while the rest can no longer be known.

Thus the deluded mind comes to have a location: it is within our body. Everything becomes small, and mind-capacity becomes small as well. It is like flowing water, which originally moves freely without obstruction; once it freezes into ice, it can no longer flow but becomes solidified. Only when ice melts into water can it flow.

Therefore, only when we break through these deluded thoughts and attachments and destroy ignorance is the seal upon the true mind broken. Then the true mind is restored, and it pervades every place and everything.

There is a most wonderful Chan koan. A certain spirit clung to the notion of self and attached itself to a dilapidated stove that was about to collapse. Taking the stove as its body, it made the stove manifest spiritual powers. Many villagers then worshiped it, made offerings to it, and sought its help, hoping that it would resolve their many difficult problems.

Greedy for the villagers' offerings and fond of bloody food, this spirit complied with their requests and displayed great spiritual powers. Before long, word spread from one person to ten and from ten to a hundred, and the villagers all slaughtered cattle and sheep to make offerings to the broken stove.

A Chan master, a disciple of National Teacher Huian, happened to pass through this place. Seeing how foolish the villagers were and how blazing the attached spirit's desires had become—going so far as to kill living beings and take lives—he found it utterly intolerable. Great compassion naturally arose in him, and he resolved to liberate the spirit attached to the stove.

He picked up his Chan staff, struck the stove three times, and said: "This stove is merely formed of mud and tiles. Where does its sacredness come from? Where does its numinous power arise? How can you have living beings slaughtered and cooked like this?" His meaning was to warn the spirit: originally, you pervade every place and possess boundless wondrous functioning, yet you cling to this broken stove made of mud, water, bricks, and tiles. Bound by earth, receiving the villagers' offerings, and killing living beings and taking lives, you may seem to be enjoying yourself, but in truth you are creating karma and will certainly undergo endless retribution in the future.

By asking, "Where could a spirit arise?" he was awakening it to the fact that spirit is not in this stove of bricks, tiles, and mud, but is found in your Buddha-nature. Since you are not now burdened by a physical body, quickly turn the light inward and recognize your Buddha-nature. Then you will pervade every place, be free and at ease, and encounter no hindrance anywhere. The Chan master struck the stove three more times, and it immediately collapsed.

The spirit appeared, bowed in reverence to the Chan master, and said in gratitude: "I was originally the stove god of this shrine and had long undergone karmic retribution. Today, through the master's teaching of the unborn Dharma, I have been freed from this place and reborn in heaven. I have come especially to offer thanks." For this reason, the Chan master came to be known as the "Venerable Stove-Breaking and Falling."

All spirits can attach themselves to plants, trees, bricks, and tiles and manifest spiritual powers. This is like our deluded mind being enclosed within the fleshly body: it can pervade only this body and cannot pervade other places.

Because we cling to this body as "I," yet do not know that everything outside the body is also "I," how ignorant and deluded we are! An ancient worthy said: "The verdant bamboo is wholly the dharmakāya (Dharma body); the luxuriant yellow flowers are nothing but prajñā." This means that at all times and in all places, everything is the manifestation and wondrous functioning of our intrinsic nature.

"Amid the myriad appearances, the one body alone is revealed": mountains, rivers, the great earth—all are the Dharma King's body. Buddha-nature is everywhere, at all times, and in every place. Yet because of our deluded thoughts and attachments, we do not know that Buddha-nature pervades every place; we know only this fleshly body. Thus, "being everywhere" becomes "having a particular location."

We reduce Buddha-nature, which pervades all times, all places, and all things, to something so small that it can pervade only this fleshly body. Is that not a great pity? Therefore, the Buddha awakens his disciples by saying, "These are the empty characteristics of all dharmas." That is to say, all dharmas are unobtainable and empty; do not cling to any of them.

Yet not establishing a single dharma does not mean nihilistic annihilation. Since all dharmas are manifested by intrinsic nature, apart from intrinsic nature there are no dharmas.

Since all material dharmas have no self-substance and are manifested by intrinsic nature, all views of right and wrong, good and bad, discrimination, and so forth are provisionally established by the illusory mind; all are empty. Yet intrinsic nature is not annihilated: it can manifest appearances and function in response to conditions. Therefore, nothing is rejected. We must not abide in biased emptiness and discard existence, but must enter into neither emptiness nor existence, emptiness itself and existence itself. For apart from material form, emptiness cannot be revealed; apart from phenomena, principle cannot be revealed; apart from emptiness, material form cannot be established; apart from essence, appearances cannot be established. To enter nonduality in this way is called great awakening.

Take the meanings of good and evil, for example. Ordinary beings do not know that good and evil both arise from the mind's discriminations. Non-Buddhists know good and evil and sternly oppose one to the other. Those of the two vehicles yearn too intensely for good and take the avoidance of all evil as ultimate. Bodhisattvas comprehend the wondrous functioning of good and evil and employ various skillful means. A Buddha is neither good nor evil; the two minds are originally empty. In

accordance with circumstances, the Buddha manifests the form of a bodhisattva and employs various skillful means to liberate sentient beings.

These five distinctions mean the following: ordinary beings do not know that there is originally no fixed boundary between good and evil. They do not know that all good and all evil are discriminations of their own mind, and they do not know their own mind. Non-Buddhists know the mind but do not see its basis. Those of the two vehicles awaken to the original mind, but not thoroughly; therefore, none of these is called awakening. Bodhisattvas realize the mind, yet their awakening is incomplete. The Buddha's great awakening is perfectly fulfilled. In truth, although these five levels differ, they share one essence and one nature, without duality or distinction.

Consider also our journey along the path. When walking, ordinary beings go deep into a dangerous road without realizing it. Non-Buddhists know it is a dangerous road and should not be entered, but proceed crosswise along it. Those of the two vehicles know it is a dangerous road and should not be entered, so they stop and remain there without moving. Bodhisattvas turn around and walk back, leaving the dangerous road. The Buddha clearly understands that it is neither safe nor dangerous; though entering the dangerous road, the Buddha remains unhindered.

For all that is called perilous, evil, or level is merely discrimination by the mind.

Again, suppose one falls into a great pit. Ordinary beings are in the pit yet do not know it is dangerous, because they do not know that there is another world outside it. Non-Buddhists know that there is another world outside the pit, but cannot get out because their teaching is not ultimate. Those of the two vehicles sit at the edge of the pit, neither ascending nor descending, stubbornly remaining still. Bodhisattvas have already left the pit, but deliberately enter it to liberate sentient beings; yet the notion of leaving and entering the pit has not been extinguished. The Buddha jumps out and jumps in, unhindered in either direction, coming and going freely. The pit itself is forgotten, and there is no further notion of entering or leaving.

Safety and danger are both relative. As for these false appearances, so long as the mind does not arise, one is not affected by circumstances and can act without hindrance. Therefore, to be liberated from birth and death, the mind must become empty. When it is empty to the point that all is equal and nothing can be obtained, there is no longer any distinction between inside and outside the pit.

For the sake of expedient teaching, the Buddha first instructs us to rest the deluded mind and stop coarse evils, giving our minds a sphere upon which to rely. Once we conform to this, he then instructs us to awaken to intrinsic nature and understand that all things are manifestations of intrinsic nature. Apart from intrinsic nature there are no things; things are intrinsic nature itself.

Although intrinsic nature has no form or appearance, it fills all space and can therefore give rise to the myriad dharmas. It is pure and equal, unmoving and unchanging, and fully endowed with wondrous functioning. Thus, without awakening, one cannot enter true cultivation. Before awakening, all practice is blind cultivation. Without realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one merely circles around the periphery. Only after recognizing the true mind and awakening does one know where one's faults lie, where to apply effort in practice, and how to further remove habitual tendencies and enter true cultivation.

It is like arranging articles and clearing away rubbish in a dark room. How could you begin the work? If you proceed in darkness, you cannot see the things before you and therefore cannot arrange the articles or clear away the rubbish.

Even if you sweep with all your strength, you grope and stumble in the dark, running into walls everywhere. Not only will you waste your energy and labor without result, but you may strike your head and bleed, causing an accident. Therefore, you must first turn on the electric light or open the doors and windows so that there is light in the room; only then can you begin the work.

Our practice is the same. Once the lamp of the mind is lit and there is light, darkness is dispelled. This is destroying ignorance and awakening. Arranging the articles and sweeping away the rubbish are like removing habitual tendencies. Thus, practice also has an order: first realize the mind and see one's true nature; then begin removing habitual tendencies and enter true cultivation.

Dispelling ignorance is not an impossibly difficult task. If we can suddenly awaken and realize that all appearances are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—beyond seeking and beyond attainment—then, in letting go of one thing, we let go of everything. A single awakening can dispel it! Earlier, we discussed the Chan koan of Huang Shangu visiting the great Chan master Huitang.

Huitang used the fragrance of osmanthus blossoms to give an apt instruction: "I have concealed nothing from you!" Shangu then suddenly broke through ignorance and awakened greatly at those very words. This koan shows that our Buddha-nature is always radiating light. We must not fail it, nor miss it before our very eyes without recognizing it. As long as we let everything go, a single moment of awareness can bring awakening and the seeing of our true nature.

Ignorance is not truly some existent thing, nor is it as difficult to dispel as people imagine. Ignorance is merely deluded attachment and deluded views, a temporary dimness and darkness; thus, one awakening can dispel it. It is like a room dark for a thousand years: one lamp can illuminate it.

As for the dispute between “first eliminating habitual tendencies and then dispelling ignorance” and “first dispelling ignorance and then eliminating habitual tendencies,” it arises from the different approaches to practice taken by the doctrinal schools and the Chan school. The Chan school begins its practice with the ālaya consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna), first breaking through fundamental ignorance, seeing one’s true nature and awakening, and then turning back to eliminate habitual tendencies.

It is like felling a tree: first cut off its root. Although the branches and leaves above may still be green and not yet dead, once the root has died, they will soon wither as well. The doctrinal schools begin with the six consciousnesses and therefore first eliminate habitual tendencies. The Buddha’s teachings are skillful, comprehensive, and harmonious; there is no fixed dharma. One must not cling rigidly to an unchanging approach.

Next, regarding arising and ceasing: ordinary beings view them in terms of appearances. When a baby emerges crying from its mother’s womb, they take this to be birth; when it grows old, becomes ill, and dies, they take this to be cessation. In fact, before the baby was born, intrinsic nature already existed; it did not arise because the baby came into the world.

When a person grows old and dies, intrinsic nature remains; it has not ceased. Although the illusory appearance of the physical body is gone, intrinsic nature has always remained. Therefore, it is neither arising nor ceasing.

Since it neither arises nor ceases, how could there be defilement or purity, increase or decrease? What are called arising and ceasing, defilement and purity, increase and decrease are all discriminations of our deluded mind. As stated earlier, they are all “the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment.”

Although this intrinsic nature has revolved without beginning or end through the six realms, its luminosity has not thereby diminished. It is merely wrapped in deluded habits, deluded thoughts, deluded attachments, and deluded views, and so cannot bring forth its vast wondrous functioning. This is like a pearl wrapped in mud: the pearl’s own radiance has not disappeared.

Once the mud on the outside is removed, its inherent luminosity is revealed. Thus, among ordinary beings it is not defiled, and among sages it is not pure; it has always been so. All sentient beings equally possess this inherent nature that is neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.

When all sentient beings become Buddhas, the realm of Buddhas does not increase by a fraction, nor does the realm of sentient beings decrease by a fraction. Since everyone is originally a Buddha, the realm of sentient beings is the realm of sages, and the realm of sages is the realm of sentient beings. The only reason we have

views of sentient beings and views of Buddhas is that the discriminations of our deluded views have not yet fallen away.

If we cultivate the Way to perfect completion, there will be no view of Buddhas or sentient beings at all. This is what is meant by “the final is equal to the initial” and “still the same person as before.” Even if one displays great spiritual powers and transformations without obstruction, not the slightest trace remains. Only this is truly to float upon the Tathāgata’s sea of quiescence and attain great freedom.

Intrinsic nature and mind cannot forcibly be divided into two, nor can they be regarded as one. It is like a mirror, which is intrinsic nature: when the mirror confronts external objects, images appear, and these images are mind. The images are not nonexistent, but they cannot be taken as real. If the external objects are gone, the images also disappear; these images are illusory.

The mind of illusory images is sometimes bright, sometimes dark, sometimes deluded, and sometimes liberated; therefore it is called ignorance. Since brightness and darkness, delusion and liberation are all discriminations of our deluded mind, they are all illusory. Since they are illusory, the knower of these illusions, being relative to them, is also illusory. Thus, none of them can be attained.

The illusory images in a mirror, whether beautiful or ugly, neither obstruct nor affect the mirror, because the reflecting substance does not move. Likewise, whether a person’s body and mind are sagely or ordinary, beautiful or ugly, good or evil, ignorant or awakened, none of these obstructs or has any real relation to intrinsic nature. Therefore, the Heart Sūtra says: “Neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.”

Defilements of mind differ from defilements of the body. To remove bodily defilements requires various methods of washing, and different kinds of dirt require different methods. It is not so with mental defilements. Mental defilements are formless; to remove them, one need only turn the mind and immediately let go.

For example, when thoughts of greed, anger, or ignorance arise, suddenly bring forth a thought of the Buddha. With this single awakening, greed, anger, and ignorance vanish without trace, and one is immediately purified. Although they depart quickly, they also return quickly: in the blink of an eye, another thought of greed, anger, or ignorance arises. This is the force of deluded habits.

But we should not become worried or afraid because of this. As long as we recognize them clearly, do not grasp at them, and persistently cut them off, no deluded mind can stain intrinsic nature. At first, because our strength is insufficient, there are times when we cannot attend to them and our contemplation lacks force. But as long as we understand this clearly at the root and persist in doing it without

slackening over a long period, the power of transformation will naturally arise. Therefore, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is truly the first key to studying Buddhism; it is of utmost importance.

In the past, a husband and wife sought help from Master Nona. They felt that their habitual tendency toward sexual desire was too strong, and they asked the master for blessings, hoping to eliminate their lustful thoughts quickly. The master smiled and said, "There is no such dharma in the unsurpassed Esoteric Vehicle. If you wish to eliminate the habitual tendencies of sexual desire, you must first realize the mind-ground.

After realizing the root and developing prajñā, habitual tendencies will naturally be swept away completely." The master's words were both skillful and apt. Since Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism was transmitted into China, some people have always clung to spiritual powers and wondrous functioning, believing that by relying on the Buddha's power they can eliminate everything or obtain everything. They do not understand that studying Buddhism is not seeking the Buddha.

Studying Buddhism is seeking oneself, because the Buddha cannot transform karma on our behalf. The Buddha can only tell us the method; not everything depends on the Buddha. Once we understand the principles of the Heart Sūtra, we must eliminate our own habitual tendencies and transform our own afflictions; no one can do these things in our place. There are many reasons why people today do not gain strength from studying Buddhism. Broadly speaking, they are no more than the following:

First, seeking the Dharma outside the mind. Whenever something happens, they seek the Buddha, seek the Dharma, and seek the saṅgha, not realizing that all outward seeking belongs to a dependent mentality. To study Buddhism, one must study for oneself, cultivate for oneself, and realize for oneself.

Second, mistakenly believing that seeking the Buddha can eliminate one's offenses and karmic obstacles and bring blessings, while one still deludedly clings to circumstances as real and greedily seeks without letting go, so that afflictions remain as before. They do not realize that studying Buddhism means following the Buddha's teachings to clear away one's own delusion and error, clearly see intrinsic nature, and escape the rut of afflictions. It is not a matter of seeking the Buddha to eliminate one's karmic offenses and obtain blessings.

Third, when first beginning practice, not understanding the ultimate purpose of studying Buddhism and lacking a correct resolve. When the causal ground is not right, one inevitably falls into blind conformity. We should know that the first necessity in studying Buddhism is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

Fourth, relying on others. Wishing to complete cultivation of the Way quickly, people single-mindedly seek the highest and most unsurpassed dharma and the best teacher. They then give rise to discriminating views that compare superior and inferior, and to many views that lead to sectarian disputes, which continually linger in their minds. Especially when they cannot decide what to choose, they practice one dharma a little and then go off to practice another, unable to enter deeply into a single gate and cultivate it exclusively. The result is often that they retrace their steps or take the wrong road, wasting their time and accomplishing nothing.

Fifth, after wasting time and seeing no progress in their practice for a long period, they begin to doubt people and slander the Dharma, or they regress and cease practicing, giving up halfway.

Sixth, greedily accumulating dharmas, believing that more is better and attempting to take up everything at once, without being able to enter deeply into a single gate. The result is fruitless labor.

Seventh, rushing about all day in external pursuit and not knowing to investigate their own mind earnestly and urgently. When they happen to think of it or have some spare time, they practice a little in the Buddha hall: reciting the Buddha's name, sitting in meditation, or practicing Chan. Practicing intermittently, like drying something in the sun for one day and leaving it in the cold for ten, they never gain any benefit. Some even treat practice as a pastime, as something of no real consequence. In the end, it remains entirely irrelevant to them, and they accomplish nothing.

Eighth, not understanding the meaning of "there is no fixed dharma." Each dharma has its own standpoint and cannot forcibly be made the same as another. Without following the rules, people give rise to their own dharma views and arbitrarily alter and tamper with the teachings, so that their cultivation is not in accordance with the Dharma and they cannot attain accomplishment.

Ninth, taking cultivation of goodness as the ultimate aim of studying Buddhism, without knowing its ultimate and definitive meaning. They believe that rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Utmost Bliss is the only accomplishment of studying Buddhism, yet they do not understand what rebirth truly means. Consequently, they reach the middle of the path and can proceed no further.

Tenth, even when they encounter a good spiritual teacher, they take hearing as seeing; though they encounter the teacher, they do not recognize him and miss him face-to-face.

Eleventh, delighting in speculating falsely about others' states and thereby generating further delusion themselves. For example, they say that one person has

awakened and another has not. Yet they do not understand that, to distinguish whether others have awakened, one must first awaken oneself. If you have not awakened yourself, how can you determine whether another has awakened? Repeating whatever others say and making arbitrary guesses is truly meaningless; on the contrary, it leaves one's own mind impure.

Twelfth, because of arrogance and conceit, becoming suspicious of and jealous toward others, and being ashamed to ask questions. When they do not understand something, they are unwilling or embarrassed to ask; moreover, they may slight beginners, not realizing that they are themselves obstructing their own path.

Thirteenth, allowing preconceived ideas to dominate. They do not understand the Dharma's comprehensive adaptability and transformations, and when true nature manifests before them, they do not dare to acknowledge and assume it.

Fourteenth, mistakenly taking ignorance as real, considering afflictions difficult to eliminate, believing that bodhi belongs to Buddhas alone and that people such as ourselves have no share in it in this life. Thus, they do not dare to undertake the Tathāgata's family legacy or practice and realize it earnestly.

Fifteenth, when habitual tendencies arise amid walking, standing, sitting, lying down, dealings with others, and all sorts of circumstances, one is not aware of them in the least, but lets them wander and recur at will, never turning back to examine one's own mind. The result is often that, although one studies Buddhism and cultivates the Way, one derives no real benefit from it.

If practitioners can truly understand all the foregoing shortcomings, cultivate earnestly and diligently, and, when encountering circumstances, give rise to no mind of attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejecting—knowing that these are all wondrous functioning and manifestations of their own nature—and can see through appearances to their essence, this is seeing one's true nature. Then, through the training of eliminating habitual tendencies, one nourishes the 'sacred embryo' and enables it to flourish; thus one can fully realize bodhi.

If, when encountering circumstances, the mind remains attached, or if one clings to thought after thought, one cannot claim to have seen one's true nature.

You must know that arrogant self-importance—claiming realization when one has not realized, and claiming attainment when one has not attained—leads one to hell and to evil retribution. Whether one practices Buddha-recitation, practices Chan, or cultivates Esoteric Buddhism, deluded thoughts must dissolve, so that inwardly body and mind, and outwardly the world, all vanish and become unobtainable. Even the shattering of empty space is unobtainable, and even unobtainability itself is

unobtainable. Only then is there realization. After realization, one has strength in the face of circumstances and will not be shaken by the myriad external objects.

Otherwise, it is like speaking of food without being fed: when circumstances arise, one immediately loses one's footing and gains no true benefit. Therefore, we must constantly ask ourselves: Is the mind still attached when encountering circumstances? Have we truly recognized our original nature? If we are swayed by deluded thoughts when encountering circumstances, giving rise to attachment, aversion, grasping, and rejecting, then we cannot transcend birth and death. We must feel deep shame and remorse, exert ourselves strenuously, and cultivate well.

Each person should choose a dharma gate that is most suited to them and with which they feel the greatest affinity, then specialize in it deeply and persistently. One must never cultivate haphazardly, changing from one thing to another and acting inconsistently. For example, if one wishes rebirth in the Pure Land, one must make the mind pure in order to accord with the Pure Land. If the mind is impure and cannot accord with the Pure Land, one cannot be assured of rebirth.

Someone asks: Master Ouyi once said, "Whether one attains rebirth depends entirely on the presence or absence of faith and vows." Does this mean that, so long as we possess both faith and vows, we can be reborn in the West? Conversely, even if one recites the Buddha's name until attaining one-pointedness of mind without distraction, one still cannot be reborn in the Pure Land?

Why did he not say that rebirth requires Buddha-recitation with one-pointedness of mind without distraction? This is an excellent question. There are now far too many people who misunderstand the Buddha-recitation dharma gate. They believe that if they recite the Buddha's name absentmindedly and carelessly, then, no matter what, the Buddha ought to receive them at the time of death and guide them to rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, in accordance with their wishes.

If the Buddha does not come to receive them, they think it is the Buddha's fault for not acting as they wished. They do not realize that Master Ouyi gave two corresponding statements: "Whether one attains rebirth depends entirely on the presence or absence of faith and vows; the grade of one's rebirth depends entirely on the depth or shallowness of sustaining the name." They must not be taken out of context and separated. Moreover, the Master said this specifically in response to Chan practitioners of his time, who regarded Buddha-recitation only as a means of entering samādhi. They used Buddha-recitation to gather in the mind and enter meditative absorption; they did not wish for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Everyone knows that faith, vows, and practice are the three essential elements for rebirth in the West. Like the three legs of a tripod, none can be lacking. Why must

one possess deep faith and earnest vows in order to be reborn in the West? Because in doing anything, one must first believe that it is true and real, and firmly believe that one can succeed, before one is willing to make the effort.

Only by proceeding without fear of hardship and toil, and by enduring labor patiently, can one succeed. If one has even slight doubts or insufficient confidence, one will hesitate to proceed and retreat in fear of difficulty; then one cannot succeed.

We recite the Buddha's name in order to be free from suffering and attain happiness. If we do not believe that there is a Western Pure Land, nor wish to go there, how could we be willing to recite the Buddha's name? Even if we do so reluctantly, we cannot be reborn there. If you do not wish to go, how can you go? If Buddha-recitation practitioners lack genuine faith and firm vows, they certainly will not recite the Buddha's name wholeheartedly.

Therefore, faith and vows must serve as the guide. Only then can one undertake practice—that is, Buddha-recitation—with resolute, earnest, and unflagging diligence; only then can one realize the samādhi of Buddha-recitation and attain rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. But this does not mean that, once one has faith and vows, it makes no difference whether one practices.

Consider this: without putting them into practice, how can one show that one's faith and vows are complete? Faith and vows guide conduct, while conduct embodies faith and vows. Without faith and vows, practice is impossible; without practice, there is no way to manifest one's faith and vows. Therefore, none of faith, vows, and practice can be lacking.

For example, suppose we wish to go somewhere but take no action at all: we neither buy a train, bus, ship, or airplane ticket, nor intend to travel by bicycle or on foot, but merely think about it. On what day will we reach our destination as wished? Therefore, only through practice can faith and vows be fulfilled; otherwise, they are merely empty thoughts.

Let us also discuss the claim that "as long as one has faith and vows, even distracted Buddha-recitation can lead to rebirth in the West." Some people think: I already believe in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, in Amitābha Buddha, and that if I recite the Buddha's name, the Buddha will certainly receive me and guide me to rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. I also wish to go there.

Then it should be enough for me to recite the Buddha's name casually and with a scattered mind. There is no need to make things hard for myself by reciting wholeheartedly until I attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction. Why should I? I do not seek a middle grade, much less a higher grade; I seek only rebirth

in the lowest grade of the lowest class. So long as I can be reborn in the West, that is enough.

For if one can be reborn in the West, one will naturally attain Buddhahood after one more life. What great good fortune and merit that would be! It requires no great effort and is so convenient. Yet Master Ouyi's faith and vows in relation to Buddha-recitation are profound faith and earnest vows, called "deep faith and earnest vows." These four Chinese characters, (“deep faith and earnest vows”), require careful attention. Let us briefly discuss here the ancient worthies' explanations of faith and vows.

What is faith? How does one have deep faith? It is to believe that "mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are not different from one another":

First, one must believe that awakened nature is nondual. We sentient beings are future Buddhas, Buddhas at the causal stage; Amitābha is an already accomplished Buddha, a Buddha at the stage of fruition. Though the causal and fruition stages differ, awakened nature is nondual.

Second, one must believe that Buddha-mind is nondual. We sentient beings are Buddhas in principle and Buddhas in name; Amitābha is the ultimate Buddha. Although their positions differ as vastly as heaven and abyss, Buddha-mind is nondual.

Third, one must believe that mind-nature is nondual. Although we sentient beings are heavily burdened by karmic obstacles and have long dwelt in the abyss of suffering, we are sentient beings within Amitābha's mind. Amitābha Buddha, replete with the majestic adornments of myriad virtues, though beyond ten trillion Buddha-lands, is still the Buddha within our own minds. Since mind-nature is nondual, there is naturally responsive communion. If we cultivate arduously, we will surely evoke and accord with the Buddha's compassion.

It is like a magnet attracting iron: there can be no separation. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "The Tathāgatas of the ten directions pity sentient beings as a mother remembers her child. If the child runs away, what use is the mother's remembrance? But if the child remembers the mother as the mother remembers the child, then through life after life mother and child will not be separated or distant. If the minds of sentient beings"—this mind is very important—"remember the Buddha and recite the Buddha, then in the present and in the future they will certainly see the Buddha and will not be far from the Buddha." Thus, when reciting the Buddha's name, the mind must remember the Buddha and recite the Buddha. One must never recite verbally with a scattered mind while the mind does not remember the Buddha. Therefore, one-pointedness of mind without distraction is very important.

Only when such faith remains unchanged from beginning to end, never changing no matter what gain or loss one encounters, can it be called true faith. True faith has three aspects. First, one believes that Amitābha Buddha receives sentient beings who recite the Buddha's name and guides them to rebirth in the West; this is absolutely true.

Second, one believes that if one upholds Amitābha's name for one day, or even up to seven days, with one-pointedness of mind without distraction, one will attain rebirth. (Note: this means one day or up to seven days of one-pointedness of mind without distraction; it does not mean that casually reciting with the mouth while the mind is absent is enough. The Buddha spoke so decisively; we must practice in accordance with the teaching and must not alter it at will.)

Third, one believes that the Buddha-recitation dharma gate transmitted by Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva and the successive patriarchs of the Pure Land school is entirely free of falsehood. We should rely upon it, practice courageously and diligently, and realize the samādhi of Buddha-recitation.

To summarize, faith does not mean merely believing that the Western Land is a magnificent Buddha-land. Nor does it mean merely believing that the Sahā world is suffering while the West is blissful, and that the Land of Ultimate Bliss truly exists. One must also deeply believe that one's own nature is Amitābha, that one can inherently become a Buddha in the same way, and that all sentient beings can become Buddhas; the only difference is between delusion and awakening.

The pure and majestic Buddha-land of the West is the Pure Land of phenomena; the purity of my own nature is the Pure Land of principle. Mind pervades every place; every place is the West, and the ten directions are no different from the West. Thus, in our Buddha-reciting mind, wisdom becomes samādhi, illuminating yet ever quiescent: this is the Buddha inherently present in one's own mind. From samādhi wisdom arises, quiescent yet ever illuminating: this is the Dharma inherently present in one's own mind. Samādhi and wisdom interpenetrate, and quiescence and illumination are nondual: this is the Saṅgha inherently present in one's own mind. This is faith in Buddha, faith in Dharma, and faith in Saṅgha. Only this can be called deep faith.

Next, let us discuss how one may have earnest vows. The great worthies of old said: First, at all times (note: this means at all times, not that one is thus at one time and not at another, still less that one is thus when happy but otherwise when things do not go as one wishes.

At all times, one must remain the same), one must detest the suffering of birth, death, and afflictions in the Sahā world, admire the bliss of bodhi and nirvāṇa in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, and strive for rebirth.

One must genuinely make vows, follow the Pure Land dharma gate transmitted by the Buddha, cultivate courageously and diligently, diligently remove habitual defilements, and constantly experience ease and well-being in body and mind; then one enjoys the Land of Ultimate Bliss in this very life. (These words are very important: it is the Land of Ultimate Bliss in this very life, not only rebirth after one dies.) Next, one must resolve to attain unsurpassed awakening, perfect bodhi, and make offerings to all Buddhas.

Further, one must arouse the vast mind to liberate all sentient beings, vowing not to attain Buddhahood while the realm of sentient beings is not empty. In whatever one does, whether good or evil, one should dedicate wholesome deeds toward rebirth in the Pure Land; for evil deeds, one should repent and vow for rebirth in the Pure Land, without any other intention.

It is also said: When the mind of Buddha-recitation reaches one-pointedness of mind without distraction (note: one-pointedness of mind without distraction must not be deliberately pursued; the more one seeks it, the farther away it becomes), one is able to let go of everything. One-pointedness of mind without distraction is the pure vow; vowing not to rest until one is reborn in the Western Pure Land is the enduring vow; attaining unsurpassed awakening and broadly liberating sentient beings is the great vow … Only such a mind of vows may be called truly earnest in its vows.

Consider this, everyone: if we arouse the faith and vows described above, could we still keep calculating over and clinging to, unable to let go of the food, sex, wives, wealth, children, emoluments, reputation, status, and so forth of the Sahā world? Once we can let go of all these circumstances and conditions, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, what deluded thoughts and afflictions could still linger in our hearts and keep us from practicing?

What other things, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, could confuse and disturb our minds? Once there are no deluded thoughts to disturb us, then when we recite the Buddha's name, we will certainly, as stated above, attain one-pointedness of mind without seeking it. Therefore, Master Ouyi said: "With deep faith and earnest vows, even scattered-minded Buddha-recitation can lead to rebirth."

We should take note of the word "even": it underscores the importance of faith and vows. Its meaning is that if one truly has deep faith and earnest vows, and recites the Buddha's name as though saving one's head from being on fire, one need not fear that one's effort is insufficient or that one will fail to attain one-pointedness of mind. At such a time, even if you wanted to give rise to deluded thoughts, it would be impossible.

From this, we can see that the word “even” is hypothetical; it does not truly mean that one should recite the Buddha’s name with a scattered mind. He also said to those without faith and vows: “If you have no faith and vows, or if your faith and vows are not genuine and earnest, then even if your Buddha-recitation is so concentrated that wind cannot penetrate it and rain cannot soak it, you still cannot attain rebirth. Conversely, if your faith and vows are genuine and earnest, even scattered-minded Buddha-recitation can lead to rebirth.”

The word “even” is a comparative word of encouragement. We must not misunderstand it and suppose that we may recite the Buddha’s name carelessly and lazily. If, while your mouth recites Amitābha Buddha of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, your mind still clings to the wives, wealth, children, emoluments, and so forth of the Sahā world, can you then be reborn in the Western Pure Land easily and just as you please?!

Someone may ask: Although a person burdened by deep karmic obstacles possesses deep faith and earnest vows, deluded thoughts and habitual tendencies cannot immediately be cleared away, and deluded thoughts inevitably intrude again and again during Buddha-recitation. The ancient worthies said: “Though the wind has stopped, the waves still surge; though principle is revealed, thoughts still intrude.”

Although these deluded thoughts are subtle, they are still thoughts. Should they therefore be called a scattered mind? The answer is: Do not follow deluded thoughts or form attachments to them. As soon as a thought arises, become aware of it; neither loathe nor fear it, nor suppress it. Simply bring forth the Buddha-recitation, and the deluded thought immediately dissolves, returning again to purity. Such practice—illuminating whatever arises and dispelling it through illumination—cannot be called scattered-minded Buddha-recitation.

Chan Master Guifeng said: “Whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Then, when the end of life comes, karma will naturally be unable to bind you. Even if there is an intermediate state, you will be free to go wherever you wish, taking refuge at will in heaven or among humans.” Because karma cannot bind one, one can also attain rebirth as one wishes.

In fact, the claim of “scattered-minded Buddha-recitation” has gained currency because many people are lazy and afraid to apply themselves. They wish to rely entirely on Amitābha Buddha’s power for rebirth in the Western Pure Land, and therefore promote this claim.

If scattered-minded Buddha-recitation could truly bring rebirth in the West, why did Master Hanshan say, “If the mouth recites Amitābha while the mind is scattered,

shouting until one's throat breaks is still futile"? This shows that Buddha-recitation truly requires one-pointed concentration and must never be scattered.

Some people become frightened upon hearing "one-pointedness of mind without distraction," believing that it is very difficult to attain. They therefore promote the notion of "scattered-minded Buddha-recitation" and do not dare advocate one-pointedness of mind without distraction. In fact, there is nothing difficult about it. So long as one recites with wholehearted concentration, one will certainly reach this state.

When one first begins to apply oneself, the mind is always scattered and difficult to settle. But as one's Buddha-recitation deepens and improves, day by day the Buddha-recitation presses out and eliminates deluded thoughts; the scattered mind will inevitably and gradually become "one-pointed" and "undistracted." Thus there is no need to worry or be afraid, much less stop because one fears the difficulty. So long as deep faith and earnest vows lead the way, there is no fear that one will fail to apply oneself diligently, nor that the scattered mind will fail to become one-pointed. These three key words—faith, vows, and practice—are not only of utmost importance in the Pure Land school; other schools likewise cannot do without faith, vows, and practice.

Having read the Heart Sūtra, we deeply trust the Buddha's true words, vow to liberate all from suffering and adversity, and practice profound prajñāpāramitā. We awaken to the fact that "all dharmas are marked by emptiness," recognizing that all forms and all mental dharmas arise from causes and conditions, are entirely without self-nature, are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, and cannot be obtained. They are all manifestations of intrinsic nature, true emptiness yet wondrous presence. Then we can always see intrinsic nature through forms, and naturally become non-abiding in all things, unbound by favorable or adverse circumstances, unhindered in every direction, liberated and at ease.

In our practice, we must possess self-awareness. We ought to reflect on ourselves constantly: Do we truly recognize that all things are empty in nature and arise through conditions, that they are all manifestations of intrinsic nature, and that seeing things is seeing intrinsic nature, without being swayed by things? If this is truly so, and principle and phenomena are unobstructed, then we have genuinely seen our true nature.

If one has understood and awakened to this in principle, and personally accepts responsibility for it, then the clear and distinct numinous knowing at the point where a thought ceases is one's own fundamental life-source. Yet when confronting circumstances, one cannot avoid being shaken, and in actual affairs one is still

unable to accomplish this. There is no need to be afraid or to doubt that the truth one has realized is mistaken.

You should know that this is because past habitual tendencies are deeply rooted: one's strength is not yet sufficient, and one cannot immediately sweep away the remaining tendencies, so some agitation still remains.

So long as you temper yourself more in actual circumstances, remain constantly vigilant and aware, and continually struggle with habitual tendencies, your practice will naturally increase over time. You will gradually eradicate habitual tendencies, reach complete maturity, and finally realize the supreme fruition of bodhi. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "In principle, awakening is sudden, and through awakening they are simultaneously eliminated.

In actuality, they are not removed all at once, but are exhausted gradually in sequence." When we unite principle and practice in our cultivation, then so long as we recognize principle deeply and see it thoroughly, we can exert ourselves in actual affairs.

If one does not see through it clearly, does not have genuine faith, still has doubts, does not thoroughly recognize and cannot firmly settle the principle and substance of true nature, and still clings to things, then one must not vaguely and indiscriminately claim attainment without having attained or realization without having realized, and thereby recklessly invite disaster. One must intensify one's seated practice—whether reciting the Buddha's name, practicing Chan or Esoteric Buddhism—and put the deluded mind to death before there is an entry point. This must be clearly understood; there can be no vagueness about it!

If we can truly see intrinsic nature through appearances, then we can see through all things and recognize that everything without exception is oneself, a manifestation of intrinsic nature. Since intrinsic nature neither arises nor ceases, all objects and circumstances likewise neither arise nor cease. Therefore, the Lotus Sūtra says: "All dharmas abide in their dharma positions; the characteristics of the world are ever abiding."

Once this is understood, even though there are phenomenal appearances, what arising and ceasing, defilement and purity, increase and decrease can be spoken of? Therefore, the Heart Sūtra says: "All dharmas are marked by emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing." If one clings to appearances and does not see intrinsic nature, one goes against the Way; with the mind of pervasive discrimination and attachment, one will regard all things as subject to arising and ceasing, defilement and purity, increase and decrease, and thus be unable to escape the cycle of rebirth in the six realms.

IV. Section on Dharma Function

Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, no feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas; no eye realm, up to and including no mind-consciousness realm. There is no ignorance, nor the ending of ignorance; up to and including no old age and death, nor the ending of old age and death. There is no suffering, origination, cessation, or path; no wisdom and no attainment, for there is nothing to attain.

Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness. Out of great loving-kindness and great compassion, the Buddha wished to remind us not to cling to appearances, lest we suffer the pain of rebirth in the six realms. He therefore admonished us, saying: “Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness.” This sentence continues from the preceding passage and is an emphatic statement.

The Buddha feared that the disciples at the Dharma assembly, as well as disciples of later generations, might still not understand the unity of material dharmas and mental dharmas, of appearances with form and appearances without form. He therefore emphasized once more that, in wondrous presence and true emptiness, no appearance of form can be spoken of. Since the material dharmas of appearances with form do not exist, the mental dharmas of appearances without form have no basis on which to arise and likewise do not exist. This is reasoning from one instance to the rest. Once one point is understood, the others follow without saying; there is no need to explain each one in detail.

“No feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness”: the five aggregates encompass all dharmas. Since “all dharmas are marked by emptiness” and not a single dharma can be obtained, the five aggregates naturally do not exist either. These dharmas of the five aggregates as a whole are not the essence but function. They are harmful things that cover the luminosity of our true nature. Yet, conversely, they are also wondrous functioning.

Ordinary beings, sages of the two vehicles, bodhisattvas, and even all Buddhas cannot do without the wondrous functioning of the five aggregates. Wondrous functioning and deluded action are separated only by a hair’s breadth. Wondrous functioning responds to conditions without abiding, whereas deluded action clings to appearances and stagnates. Ordinary beings give rise to mind wherever they encounter objects and ceaselessly grasp at conditions; thus, they turn wondrous functioning instead into deluded mind, deluded thoughts, deluded action, and deluded conduct. We have already discussed this in the earlier explanation of the five aggregates.

Further below, the Buddha again admonishes us:

No eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas. The Heart Sūtra is a teaching of the One Vehicle; it teaches us the direct path to Buddhahood. To become a Buddha, one must eradicate all the ordinary person's clinging and bad habits, eliminate the selfishness of material desire, and only then advance ever higher. This is like carrying out a revolution: one first begins at the lowest level, then advances and expands step by step, in order to bring the work to complete fulfillment.

Therefore, the Buddha first begins by transforming the life of ordinary beings, emptying the dharmas of the ordinary person's "twelve bases" (the six sense faculties and six sense objects), and admonishes us: "No eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind [the six sense faculties]; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas [the six sense objects]."

This scriptural sentence continues from the preceding sentence, "Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness," which in turn is an emphatic continuation of "all dharmas are marked by emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing."

Since all dharmas are marked by emptiness, without arising or ceasing, defilement or purity, increase or decrease, and since the dharmas of the five aggregates do not exist, the dharmas of the twelve bases naturally disappear along with them. Of the six sense faculties—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—those capable of producing are called "faculties." Faculties can produce branches and leaves: the eye faculty can produce eye consciousness, the ear faculty can produce ear consciousness, and so on, up to the mind faculty, which can produce consciousness.

Among the six sense faculties, the five faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are physiological organs possessed by the body. They are composed of matter and have form; they are therefore material faculties. The mind faculty belongs to the operations of thought and spirit, has no form, and is therefore a mental faculty. Material faculties are also called "floating-dust faculties," while the mental faculty is also called the "faculty of ultimate meaning."

Since the body is a provisional combination of the four great elements, empty and devoid of anything whatsoever, how could the six sense faculties exist? The body, including these five physiological faculties, is formed through the union of the parents' essence and blood. It exists through the convergence of causes and conditions; what arises through conditions is empty in nature, without self-nature or substantial reality, like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, or a shadow—utterly unobtainable. Hence it is said, "No eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind." "No"

means “empty”: that is, all six sense faculties are empty. Emptying the floating-dust faculties and the faculty of ultimate meaning enables one to break attachment to self and realize the principle of the emptiness of self.

“No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas” means that the six sense objects are all empty. Sense objects are also called “objects of experience”; they can defile the mind’s nature, like dust, so that one’s Original Face is covered by the six sense objects and cannot appear. Though the myriad dharmas are many, they are all manifested through the four great elements. This includes the insentient material world, such as mountains, rivers, earth, the sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, and forests.

It also includes the sentient world of living beings, such as human beings, birds, and beasts. In summary, these are no more than the six sense objects of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas.

The object of form is any object in the sentient and material worlds, manifested by the four great elements and encountered by the eye faculty, whose substance is appearance; the object of sound is any object in the sentient and material worlds, manifested by the four great elements and encountered by the ear faculty, whose substance is sound; the object of smell is any object in the sentient and material worlds, manifested by the four great elements and encountered by the nose faculty, whose substance is odors; and the object of taste

is an object encountered by the tongue faculty. It is an object in the sentient and material worlds, manifested by the four great elements, whose substance is the various tastes. The object of touch is an object in the sentient and material worlds, manifested by the four great elements and encountered by the body faculty, whose substance is tactile sensation. The object of dharmas is the residual image left behind and stored in the ground of mind when, as each of the five faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body encounters an object, the mind faculty follows by discriminating it.

The object of dharmas encompasses everything in the world that has form and appearance, as well as everything that is formless and without appearance. For example, although the objects of form once seen by the eyes, sounds once heard by the ears, tastes once sampled by the tongue, and the other objects of the five sense objects have long since passed, they can still arise in the mind as memories; or, upon encountering them again, one can immediately distinguish them.

The retention of these memories is called the object of dharmas. It is what the mind conceives and is the cause of the arising of thoughts. When the five faculties encounter objects, they often draw them into the mind faculty, where discrimination arises; the mind faculty has the function of discriminating. For example, when the

eye faculty encounters form, there is an appearance of form because of the corresponding discrimination of the six faculties. Because the ear discriminates, there is an appearance of sound.

Because the tongue discriminates, there is an appearance of taste, and so forth. Whenever any one faculty arises, the mind faculty simultaneously responds by discriminating; from this arise forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. If, when the five faculties encounter objects, the mind faculty does not discriminate, one may look without seeing, listen without hearing, and eat without knowing the taste. Then there are no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas.

It is like a mirror reflecting objects: when objects depart, the mirror is empty; when objects come, the mirror reflects them. This means that when the first five faculties encounter objects, the mind faculty does not follow by discriminating. This is direct perception rather than inferential perception. If one does not cling to or abide in the illusory appearances encountered by the five faculties, this is the realm without appearance. In this way, one empties the floating-dust faculties and enters the wondrous functioning of the faculty of ultimate meaning, thereby giving rise to the prajñā contemplation of wisdom. Moreover, if even the six sense faculties just discussed are empty, how could there be six sense objects? Hence, there are no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas.

No eye realm, up to and including no mind-consciousness realm. Since the six sense faculties and six sense objects are empty, the six consciousnesses are also empty and devoid of anything whatsoever.

As we have already explained, eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, and mental consciousness—the six consciousnesses—belong to mental dharmas. For them to arise, they must rely inwardly on a faculty and harmonize outwardly with a sense object. When faculty and object meet, they discriminate the image received; from this conjunction consciousness arises. Consciousness cannot arise from either side in isolation.

For example, a faculty or sense object alone, or the first five faculties encountering the five sense objects without discrimination, does not constitute consciousness. Maitreya Bodhisattva said: “Discrimination is consciousness; non-discrimination is wisdom.” When the eye faculty encounters the object of form, eye consciousness arises; this is called the eye-consciousness realm. The same applies to the others. The six sense faculties, six sense objects, and six consciousnesses are collectively called the “eighteen realms.”

Like the six sense faculties and six sense objects, the six consciousnesses all arise through the convergence of many conditions. What arises through conditions is empty in nature; none is ultimate reality. All are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; all are illusory images within the light of our true nature, images of mind-light. They are all shadows, arising and ceasing, impermanent, and in their very substance empty and devoid of anything whatsoever. This is why the sūtra says "no."

But this "no" does not mean the "nonexistence" opposed to existence that ordinary beings perceive. It is not barren emptiness, still less the annihilationist emptiness grasped by non-Buddhist paths. Nor is it the true emptiness reached through analytical contemplation of dharmas by the Lesser Vehicle, or the true emptiness of dharmas realized by bodhisattvas. Rather, it is the essential nature of the Buddhas' wondrous presence and true emptiness. This wondrous essence of true emptiness —free of every attachment and not establishing a single dharma—is not possessed by Buddhas alone; ordinary beings equally possess it in full. Alas, ordinary beings mistakenly take these eighteen realms to be real and obstinately cling to them as truly existing dharmas, causing this wondrous essence to remain unmanifest. How tragic and lamentable!

"No eye realm, up to and including no mind-consciousness realm." This is an abbreviated expression; the eighteen realms are not stated one by one. "Realm" means a boundary. No eye realm means no boundary of eye consciousness. The inner six sense faculties and outer six sense objects give rise to the six consciousnesses when faculty and object meet: three sets of six make eighteen, hence the name eighteen realms.

Originally there are no boundaries; boundaries arise solely because of clinging to appearances. "Originally one essential luminosity is divided into six harmonizing functions." In fact, all are functions of one numinous and luminous true nature; they can be used interchangeably and have no boundaries.

But because ordinary beings cling to appearances, the eye faculty confines intrinsic nature to seeing, so that it can only see, not hear; the ear faculty confines intrinsic nature to hearing, so that it can only hear, not see. Thus, they divide one great treasure as a whole into separate domains, and boundaries arise.

If we understand this truth, eliminate the deluded mind, cling to nothing, abide in no appearances, and give rise to no discrimination, we can restore the luminosity of our true nature. Once the functions of our true nature have been restored, we can break through these boundaries and the six sense faculties can function interchangeably. Nowadays, some people with extraordinary abilities can recognize writing with their ears—that is, they can see—and can hear with their eyes. This is the principle involved.

Therefore, although there appear to be boundaries and distinct functions, in essence they are like a hundred rivers branching into streams yet all returning to a single source. If one can clearly understand that “what appears to exist is empty,” then all dharmas are the true mark of true emptiness. Without boundaries there is no bondage; without bondage one suddenly transcends the eighteen realms.

Therefore, in our cultivation, we do not necessarily have to proceed from the Lesser Vehicle to the Mahāyāna, ascending gradually level by level. As long as we can realize that “all dharmas are marked by emptiness,” realize our true nature, and recognize that the eighteen realms are all manifestations of that true nature, we can enter the sacred from the ordinary, give rise to wondrous functioning in accordance with conditions, and freely attain Buddhahood. This is why sages of the Lesser Vehicle do not equal ordinary beings of great capacity.

The Buddha says in the Heart Sūtra: “There are no such eighteen realms.” Yet ordinary beings will not acknowledge or accept this, no matter what. Because they all cling to the physical body as the self, they have the seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing of the six faculties, such as the eye and ear. Where there is that which sees, there is what is seen; hence there are the corresponding six sense objects, such as forms and sounds. When faculties and objects confront one another, there arise the six consciousnesses, such as eye consciousness and ear consciousness.

Ordinary beings all cling to these eighteen realms as truly existing dharmas. Thus, deluded about the true and clinging to the false, they are bound and perplexed by the eighteen realms. With the eye, they see brightness and darkness, beauty and ugliness; with the ear, they hear movement and stillness, noise and clamor; with the nose, they perceive fragrance and stench, and whether it is clear or blocked; with the tongue, they taste sourness, sweetness, bitterness, and pungency; with the body, they feel cold and warmth, smoothness and roughness; with the mind, they distinguish love and hate, acceptance and rejection.

They are bound by these eighteen realms in earning a living, rising and resting, eating and drinking, and so forth. Throughout the day and night, they are either attached to forms through the eye or attached to sounds through the ear; either attached to fragrances through the nose or attached to flavors through the tongue. At every moment, they make discriminations in consciousness without cease. From morning to night, they busily labor amid sense objects like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, and both body and mind are bound and burdened by worldly toil. Not only are they never peaceful and free during the day; even in dreams at night, they are often alarmed and distressed without respite by illusory fame and profit.

Since people living in the world cling to false appearances, take them to be truly existent, and mistake the false for the true, there is no one who does not covet desirable objects. Whatever sense objects they like, they seek to possess. To obtain them, action is unavoidable. And in acting, it is absolutely impossible not to create karma.

For example, those who crave wealth or sensual pleasures often resort to any means to obtain them, even committing the most heinous deeds. Once their breathing stops and they fall into a sleep from which they never awaken, they cannot take away a single thing that they had constantly thought of and could not bear to part with. In the end, they depart empty-handed.

Is this not a nightmare in which one toils all one's life and gains nothing at all? Yet there is one thing that cannot be cast off: the wholesome or unwholesome karma one has created. It follows you closely and will not let you leave empty-handed; however much you may wish to discard it, you cannot. An ancient worthy said: "Nothing can be taken with us; only our karma follows us."

According to the differing degrees of each person's greed, anger, and ignorance—the three poisons—and the amount of wholesome and unwholesome karma they have created, they undergo the karmic results of rebirth in the six realms. Those in whom greed, anger, and ignorance predominate, and who possess all three poisons, fall into hell.

Those in whom greed predominates are reborn in the realm of hungry ghosts. Hungry ghosts have enormous bellies, but their throats are as thin as wheat stalks; moreover, fire issues from their mouths, so they cannot eat. This is caused by craving. Those in whom ignorance predominates are reborn in the animal realm. Animals are not as intelligent as humans; they are ignorant. Those in whom anger predominates are reborn in the realm of asuras. Asuras have great anger, delight in fighting, and flare up at the slightest provocation.

Those with lesser degrees of greed, anger, and ignorance are reborn in the human realm, which likewise contains all three poisons. Those with a lesser degree of greed are reborn in the heavenly realms. Thus, Buddha-nature, originally so excellent—neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing—is unjustly bound and dragged by these deluded karmas into the six realms of rebirth to undergo suffering.

Out of compassion, the Buddha manifested in the human world and taught us the Heart Sūtra, instructing us not to cling to the various deluded minds of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. He enables us to understand that all these are illusory images, utterly unobtainable, and manifestations of our own nature. He enables us to awaken thoroughly and become Buddhas at once.

If we nevertheless remain stubbornly deluded, cling to appearances and make distinctions, lose sight of our original nature, and follow the flow of sense objects, then when the eye sees forms, we obstinately distinguish brightness from darkness and beauty from ugliness, and the “seeing-nature” consequently becomes obscured; when the ear hears sounds, we obstinately distinguish good sounds from bad, and the “hearing-nature” is lost amid the sounds; when the nose smells odors, we obstinately distinguish fragrance from stench, openness from blockage,

and the faculty of smelling likewise becomes obscured; when the tongue tastes flavors, we obstinately distinguish sourness, sweetness, bitterness, and pungency, and the “tasting-nature” is thereby lost; when the body contacts objects, we obstinately distinguish pain, itchiness, aching, and numbness, and the “awareness-nature” follows along with them. All this comes from not understanding the wondrous functioning of our original nature, giving rise to false discriminations, and following the flow of circumstances. Thus we lose sight of our original nature and sink into the bitter sea of birth and death.

As stated above, the eighteen realms are the collective name for the six faculties, six sense objects, and six consciousnesses. To explain them separately and in detail would require much space and could easily confuse people. We may instead offer a general explanation of the eye faculty alone, which may serve as an example for the rest. The eye faculty is distinguished as the gross physical faculty and the subtle sensory faculty.

The material faculty is the visible physiological organ of the human body—the eye. The superior faculty is further divided into the “perceiving aspect” and the “object aspect.” The perceiving aspect is the function of seeing and illuminating objects; it apprehends the object aspect that it itself has transformed.

For example, the eye can see things. This capacity for seeing is the perceiving aspect of the superior faculty. It is formless and without appearance; it is what is called the seeing-nature—the nature that is able to see. The object aspect is the external realm transformed and manifested by consciousness, namely the realm appearing within the mind. When the mind arises, its appearances emerge before it; these are the objects that we see.

The reason our eyes can see things is that the seeing-nature—the capacity for seeing—of the superior faculty functions through the material faculty, the eyes. Through the object aspect, there appear all manner of forms and appearances: mountains, rivers, and lands; light and darkness; long and short, square and round; blue, yellow, red, and white.

Yet because we do not understand this truth, from this single act of “seeing” we become deluded and cling to these appearances as truly existent. “Have you seen

it?" is an everyday expression, but it contains a profound meaning: it reveals ordinary beings' inferior propensity to cling to appearances. The Chinese phrase jian zhao ( ), "have seen," also plays on zhuo ( ), "to become attached": as soon as they see, they cling.

Once they see an object, they become attached to it and cannot break free; birth and death begin from this. When one sees the lights of countless homes shining brilliantly at night, this is an appearance of light. If all the lights go out together and the land is pitch-black, this is an appearance of darkness. Thus, brightness and darkness arise and cease. All forms and appearances—mountains, rivers, lands, and everything else—arise and cease. Once people cling to these arising-and-ceasing appearances, their deluded minds likewise arise and cease without stop, and so they cannot escape birth and death.

Earlier, we often used a mirror and its reflections as an analogy. Once a mirror has been made, it can reflect objects; mountains, rivers, lands, and all the myriad forms can reveal their images in its light. The fault of ordinary beings lies in taking the reflections to be truly existent while knowing nothing at all of the mirror's light.

How could they know that reflections may be seen but cannot be grasped, that they change in an instant, and that they are entirely dharmas of arising and ceasing? Only the mirror's light is the wondrous substance that is truly constant and unchanging. That is to say, whatever arises and ceases is worldly toil, whereas self-nature is without interruption, without coming or going. From this we may know that the nature which is able to see exists eternally.

There is a saying in the Chan school: "Clearly, it is always before one's face; yet when we meet it, we do not recognize it." This means that ordinary beings do not recognize at all the nature that constantly shines forth at the gateways of the six faculties.

They use it every day to see objects, yet become attached to external objects and make distinctions: "What is this? What is that?" They do not know what it is that is able to see. It is like recognizing only the reflections while failing to recognize the mirror's light. Time flies like an arrow; even if one lives beyond a hundred years, it passes in the blink of an eye.

Although beings in the heavenly realms live far longer than humans, they too cannot escape death. While alive, the eye faculty can see objects; after death, the eyes remain, but their function is entirely lost. The only thing that abides permanently and does not perish is the "seeing-nature"—the nature that is able to see.

The great trouble of human beings lies in their ignorance. Once the eye sees an appearance, they are drawn along by it, lose sight of the "seeing-nature," and

unknowingly create karma and undergo karmic retribution. They do not realize that what sees objects is not the eye but the nature; the eye is merely an instrument used by that nature. Just as an electric lamp emits light because its power comes from electricity, not from the bulb itself.

If one can thoroughly awaken to this nature that is able to see and recognize that its fundamental essence is empty and without substantial form, then deluded thoughts immediately vanish, one realizes the mind and sees one's true nature, and liberation is attained at once. The difference between ordinary beings and sages lies entirely in whether they recognize their own original nature. Such is the seeing-nature; the hearing-nature, smelling-nature, tasting-nature, awareness-nature, and knowing-nature are no different. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "When one faculty returns to its source, all six faculties are liberated." From this discussion of the eye faculty, the rest may be inferred.

The Buddha cautioned us: "No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas; no eye realm, up to and including no mind-consciousness realm." He thereby enables us to understand that all things with form and appearance, all that are made and conditioned, are illusory images—empty appearances that cannot be grasped.

He teaches us to awaken, not to cling to appearances, and to let go of everything, so that we may restore the originally pure and undefiled luminosity of our self-nature. To transform from ordinary beings into sages, we must thoroughly see through these eighteen realms. If we understand this principle, then we will comprehend every dharma, and the profound meanings of all Mahāyāna sūtras will be resolved with ease. Now that we study Buddhism and understand this important principle, we should promptly begin cultivation and put what we learn into practice. To learn without practicing is the same as not having learned.

Śākyamuni Buddha had long since attained Buddhahood, yet in order to liberate sentient beings universally, he manifested as the crown prince of King Śuddhodana. At nineteen, he left home; he practiced austerities in the Snow Mountains for six years; and at thirty, beneath the bodhi tree, he awakened to the Way upon seeing the morning star at night.

When the World-Honored One looked up and saw a great star appear in the east, in a single instant he realized that it is not the eyes that see, but the seeing-nature that reaches everywhere without limit. He immediately awakened and realized Buddhahood. "All sentient beings are the same as I; why can they not realize the Way? It is because they are obscured by deluded thoughts and attachments." Therefore he exclaimed: "How wondrous! All sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata, but because of deluded thoughts and

attachments, they cannot realize them." Because ordinary beings do not recognize their original nature, they are manipulated by the reflections of the six sense objects. Ignorantly clinging without knowing it, they are truly pitiable.

Having understood the principle of the absence of the eighteen realms, we should not look outward in our cultivation and study, nor should we cling to external objects. Rather, we should constantly turn the light inward and attend to our own original nature. What is it that is able to see, hear, smell, taste, feel, and know? Once we recognize this true master, it is like encountering one's own father at a crossroads.

The creator of all that exists in the universe is none other than ourselves—our true mind, the dharmakāya (Dharma body)—not some God or heavenly deity. Mountains and rivers, the great earth, sun, moon, and stars, grasses, trees, and forests, men and women, young and old, even eating, drinking, and everyday life: all, without exception, are functions of self-nature and manifestations of true nature.

Although this protagonist is an all-capable entity that manifests forms in response to conditions, producing phenomena of a thousand differences and ten thousand variations, it is itself empty in nature and without form. Precisely because it is empty in nature and without form, it can take shape in response to things and function according to conditions. Otherwise, it could not give rise to the myriad dharmas or manifest forms and functions. A mirror, for example, can reflect images precisely because there is nothing in it.

Otherwise, how could it manifest as a non-Han when one appears, or as a Han when one appears? Take a room as another example: if it were not empty but filled with things, how could anything else be moved into it? Thus, precisely because its nature is empty, it can manifest everything.

Only when we cultivate the practice and realize true nature do we understand the truth stated in the Diamond Sūtra: "All appearances are illusory." Only then do we understand the principle taught in this sūtra: "No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas; no eye realm, up to and including no mind-consciousness realm."

When we can see intrinsic nature through phenomena, we know that the eighteen realms of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind, and so forth have never truly existed. They are all wondrous functioning of the true mind, temporarily manifested in response to conditions. If we cling to circumstances and grasp at appearances, we fail to see that which sees and see only that which is seen. Then we cannot empty out the eighteen realms of faculties, objects, and consciousnesses.

Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie, founding patriarch of the Caodong school, left home at an early age. While reading the Heart Sūtra with his teacher, he came to the words, “No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind.” He suddenly touched his face and asked, “I plainly have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Why does the Heart Sūtra say that there are none?” His teacher was startled and had no answer.

Like us ordinary beings, his teacher clung to appearances and circumstances, seeing only what was seen and failing to understand that which sees; thus he still did not understand the meaning of the sūtra. Ashamed that he was unable to teach him, he said, “I cannot answer your question and cannot be your teacher. I will direct you to Wuxie Mountain, where you should pay homage to Chan Master Lingmo and ask him to guide you.”

Dongshan then followed Chan Master Lingmo in the practice of Chan. At the age of twenty-one, he began traveling in search of instruction. The first master he visited was Chan Master Nanquan, a leading disciple of Mazu. When Chan Master Liangjie arrived at Nanquan’s place, it happened to be the anniversary of Mazu’s death. To commemorate his teacher, Nanquan wished to hold a vegetarian offering.

Nanquan asked the assembly, “Tomorrow we will hold a vegetarian offering for Mazu. I wonder whether Mazu will come.” Pay close attention here to the word “come.” Buddha-nature is neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going. Once there is coming or going, one falls into illusory appearances rather than true reality. It was extremely important that Chan Master Nanquan spoke in this way: attend to the present moment.

After the question was raised, no one could answer, for either “coming” or “not coming” would be wrong; both fall into the two sides. When Chan masters speak in this way, they mean to leave no place to settle. It is a double-edged sword: one edge kills, the other brings to life. There can be no point of attachment; once there is one, it is no longer so. At this point Chan Master Liangjie stepped out from the assembly and said to Patriarch Nanquan, “When there is a companion, he will come.”

Everything in the world is governed by duality and relativity. Because of this duality, all is false. There is small only because there is large, and bad only because there is good. Without large, how could there be small? Without good, how could there be bad? Therefore, whatever is relative arises and ceases, and is false. Only what is absolute is true.

Coming and going are both marks of arising and ceasing. The absolute true mind neither comes nor goes; it neither arises nor ceases. Thus Dongshan said, “When there is a companion, he will come.” On hearing this, Nanquan said that although this young man was still inexperienced, he had great potential for refinement.

This meant that although Dongshan was still young, only in his twenties, and though no one in the assembly could utter a word, he had stepped forward and spoken. His answer was not yet thorough, for it still involved the duality of coming and going, but with refinement he could become a great vessel. After Liangjie heard Chan Master Nanquan's words, however, he replied that the venerable monk should not treat Liangjie as lowly.

That is, he meant: I am originally a promising adult, not a lowly servant. In other words, intrinsic nature is originally Buddha; there is no distinction between true and false.

Since there is neither true nor false, and things are originally thus and originally Buddha, what is there to cultivate or realize? From Chan Master Liangjie's statement, we can see that he had already awakened to the natural innocence of intrinsic nature, which does not depend on cultivation or realization.

Yet this was not ultimate. He had not turned himself around or thoroughly awakened to the fact that the five aggregates comprise all material and mental dharmas; that form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are wondrous presence and true emptiness; and that all faculties, objects, and consciousnesses are wondrous functioning of the true mind. Liangjie knew only that the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless and without appearance, but did not know that having appearance is itself having no appearance. Therefore, his realization was neither complete nor ultimate.

Later, Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie went to study with Chan Master Guishan. He said, "I recently heard that National Teacher Nanyang Zhong spoke of 'the insentient expounding the Dharma,' but I have not fathomed its subtle meaning." "The insentient" means the material world—bricks, tiles, mountains, rivers, and the great earth. "Not fathomed its subtle meaning" means that he did not understand its profound and mysterious purport.

He therefore asked Chan Master Guishan to explain the Dharma to him. Guishan said, "Ācārya, do you still remember this koan of the insentient expounding the Dharma?" Ācārya here means "monk." Chan Master Guishan's words were not innocuous either. If you were a person of accomplishment, you would give a great shout: "Ācārya!" But Chan Master Liangjie did not understand why, and immediately replied, "I remember."

This had already made something definite of it: it had become a memory, something held onto. Chan Master Guishan continued, "Recite the koan for me." Chan Master Liangjie then related the koan. It is as follows.

A monk asked National Teacher Nanyang Zhong, “What is the mind of the ancient Buddha?” The National Teacher replied, “Walls and tiles.” The monk said, “Are not walls and tiles insentient?” He meant that walls and tiles have no awareness, so how could they be the mind of the ancient Buddha? The National Teacher replied, “They are.” These words contain a profound and wondrous meaning.

For sentient and insentient beings alike fully realize the wisdom of all aspects. It is only because of discrimination that distinctions between sentient and insentient arise.

If there is no discrimination, then all sounds and forms, mountains and rivers, the great earth, eating and drinking, men and women, all are complete within mind-nature. Not a single dharma can be obtained, so what sentient or insentient beings could there be? Because we take dharmas as obtainable, we then classify them into categories, love or hate them, grasp or reject them, and thereby afflictions arise in profusion and cyclic wandering never ceases.

As explained earlier, our bodies are originally temporary composites of the four great elements and are no different from insentient things. Only because the true mind is enveloped by ignorance and turns into deluded mind, dwelling within this shell compounded of the four great elements and clinging to it as oneself, does deluded knowing arise. Otherwise, would our bodies not be just like walls and tiles?

But the monk did not understand this principle and asked doubtfully, “Can the insentient also expound the Dharma?” Since Buddhas expound the Dharma to liberate living beings, and ancient Buddhas can expound the Dharma, then if the insentient are the mind of the ancient Buddha, they should naturally also be able to expound the Dharma. Like us ordinary beings, this monk always fell upon what is seen and heard among the objects of the senses, without seeing the nature that sees and hears.

The National Teacher said, “They constantly expound it, fervently expound it, without interruption.” The insentient do not expound the Dharma only intermittently, speaking at one time and not at another. Naturally, at every moment, they are always expounding it; and what they expound is not merely a little, but immeasurable and boundless. We are often attached to what is heard and seen, without knowing that non-speaking is true speaking.

When a sound is heard, one says it is heard; when no sound is heard, one says that nothing is heard. Yet not hearing a sound is also hearing: you hear the absence of sound. Thus non-speaking is true speaking. Because great sound is scarcely audible, the greatest sound is soundless. To say there is sound that can be heard is not true hearing, for you are attached to what is heard. The nature of hearing lies neither in

sound nor in silence. Sound arises and ceases, and therefore is false; nature has no break, and therefore is true.

The monk again asked, “Why can I not hear the insentient expounding the Dharma?” The National Teacher replied, “You yourself do not hear, but that does not hinder those who hear.” You yourself do not hear because you obscure Buddha-nature and cling to audible sound, not knowing that non-hearing is true hearing.

Looking further, who is it that hears non-hearing? Who hears the absence of sound? You say that you do not hear, yet it is radiating light through your ear faculty—why do you not know this? You hear silence; is that not hearing? Is hearing silence not precisely hearing? When you hear a sound, you begin to discriminate along with it and are carried away by the sound.

But when there is silence and no discrimination, that is precisely when your nature of hearing is present; therefore it is true hearing. You yourself do not hear, but you cannot obstruct that which is able to hear. This rebukes and scolds him, but also instructs and reminds him. At the moment when there is no sound to hear and the nature of hearing is truly hearing, you nevertheless say that you do not hear. It is only that you yourself are not alert and do not understand, while the nature of hearing remains perfectly clear.

The monk continued to ask, “Who can hear the insentient expounding the Dharma?” In truth, there is not a single person in the whole earth who does not hear. Who does not hear? Who lacks the nature of hearing? So long as you do not cling to sounds, whose nature of hearing is not luminously present? It is only that you yourself do not cast your gaze there. The National Teacher said, “All sages hear it.”

This meant that sages can hear it, whereas you ordinary beings cannot. Yet the National Teacher’s statement has a flaw, for everyone is originally Buddha; the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is without form, and no distinction between ordinary beings and sages can be established. So how could there be any sage or non-sage? The National Teacher was pressed hard by the monk’s questioning and temporarily used these words to throw him off.

The monk pressed him further: “Does Your Reverence hear?” Can you yourself hear it? Since the National Preceptor had said, “All the sages are able to hear it,” the monk challenged him on that very point. Did not this question leave the National Preceptor unable to answer? If he said that he heard it, he would be praising himself; if he said that he did not hear it, then he would not be a sage or a National Preceptor.

The National Preceptor said, “I do not hear.” Pressed into a corner, he could only confess. The monk immediately asked again, “Since Your Reverence does not hear it,

how do you know that insentient things can expound the Dharma?" This was an excellent and forceful question: using the National Preceptor's own weapon to strike back at him, it left him no room to evade. The National Preceptor replied, "Fortunately, I do not hear.

If I heard, I would be on a par with all the sages, and you would not hear me expounding the Dharma." Fortunately, I cannot hear it. If I could hear it, I would be a sage, and you would not hear me expounding the Dharma to you. The monk's question was inherently difficult to answer, but the National Preceptor had a way to turn himself around. His move—"Fortunately, I do not hear"—was very ingenious. Such a response is the Chan masters' way of returning an echo and redirecting the force, like the practice of pushing hands in taijiquan, where one can aptly transform the opponent's force.

Whenever there is speech, there is no real meaning. Speech and hearing merely serve to bring out this no-speaking and no-hearing. No-speaking and no-hearing are true speaking and true hearing; therefore, speaking and hearing are not true speaking and true hearing. The National Preceptor's statement, "you would not hear me expounding the Dharma," is also self-contradictory. Why? Fundamentally, there is no Dharma to expound, nor is there anyone to hear the Dharma. If there were still a Dharma to expound and someone to hear it, that would be attachment to the marks of person and self.

Layman Pang of the Tang dynasty once heard a lecturer-monk expounding the Diamond Sūtra. When the lecturer reached the words, "no mark of self, no mark of person," Layman Pang asked him, "Lecturer! If there is neither self nor person, who is speaking, and who is listening?" If there is no mark of self and no mark of person, then who expounds the Dharma and who hears the Dharma? As it is said: no-speaking and no-hearing are true speaking and true hearing.

Although the lecturer-monk could expound the Diamond Sūtra, he had merely memorized doctrinal formulations and could not put their principles into actual practice. At this point he could not penetrate through, and had no reply at all. Layman Pang said, "Though I am a layman, I have a modest understanding of the direction of practice."

The lecturer-monk said, "Then what is the layman's understanding?" Layman Pang recited a verse: "Without self, and again without person, / How could there be intimacy or estrangement? / I urge you, do not make the rounds of lecture seats; / It is better to seek the truth directly. / The vajra nature of prajñā / Externally excludes even a speck of dust. / What I hear and accept in faith / Is all set forth in provisional names." Self, hearing, and even faithful acceptance are all provisional names. Only in no-self does the true self become manifest; only in no-hearing is there true hearing.

On hearing this verse, the lecturer-monk joyfully looked up and sighed in admiration.

When the National Preceptor said, “Fortunately, I do not hear. If I heard, I would be on a par with all the sages, and you would not hear me expounding the Dharma,” the monk said, “If that is so, then sentient beings have no share in it.” If so, sentient beings would be unable to hear insentient things expounding the Dharma. The National Preceptor turned the thrust of the discussion and said, “I speak for sentient beings, not for all the sages.”

The monk asked, “What happens after sentient beings hear it?” What will happen after sentient beings hear you expound it? The National Preceptor replied, “They are then no longer sentient beings!” If sentient beings can hear insentient things expounding the Dharma and apprehend this hearing-nature that neither arises nor ceases, they transcend the ordinary and enter the sagehood; hence, “they are then no longer sentient beings.”

Finally, the monk changed the subject and asked, “Insentient things expound the Dharma—on what scripture or teaching is this based?” From what sūtra does the teaching that insentient things expound the Dharma derive? What evidence or basis does it have? The National Preceptor said, “Certainly. Words not supported by the scriptures are not what a gentleman should discuss. Have you not seen the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, which says: ‘Lands speak, sentient beings speak, and all things throughout the three times speak.’”

What you say is certainly correct. If the assertion that “insentient things expound the Dharma” had no basis in the scriptures, it would have no meaning at all and would not be the speech of a gentleman. The National Preceptor then cited the scripture. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: “Lands speak, sentient beings speak, and all things throughout the three times speak.” Every particle of dust and every mote of earth expounds the Dharma; seated within a minute particle of dust, one turns the great Dharma wheel. Both the sentient world and the insentient material world expound the Dharma—this is what is meant by “all things speak.” Here the koan of insentient things expounding the Dharma comes to an end.

After Chan Master Guishan heard Liangjie recount the koan of “insentient things expounding the Dharma,” he said, “I have it here as well, but rarely encounter the right person.” I too have this kind of insentient expounding of the Dharma here. One must encounter someone of considerable capacity before one can respond appropriately and be in accord; thus he said, “rarely encounter the right person.” Liangjie said, “I do not understand. I beg the Master for instruction.”

Chan Master Guishan raised upright the whisk he ordinarily used and asked Liangjie, “Do you understand?” This is insentient things expounding the Dharma—can you

comprehend it? Liangjie said, “I do not understand.” Liangjie honestly admitted that he did not understand or comprehend it. In fact, this was the most intimate moment.

For if you understand it or comprehend it, that is a discriminating view, and there is some principle to be grasped. Conversely, when you do not understand, it is precisely the moment when not a single thought arises. Immediately turn the light inward: what is this? In that very moment, you see your true nature. Unfortunately, Liangjie always assumed that some principle remained to be understood. He misunderstood the meaning, and the opportunity was lost.

Liangjie continued, “Please explain it, Reverend.” Guishan said, “The mouth born of one’s parents can never explain it to you.” This fleshly mouth, born of one’s parents, can never tell it to you. Why? No matter how much one says, it can never be said.

It cannot be reached by speech or thought: “the path of words is cut off, and the activity of mind is extinguished.” Once spoken, it misses the mark; once known, it is no longer it. Here Guishan was hinting to Liangjie that no-speaking is true speaking and no-hearing is true hearing—this is insentient things expounding the Dharma. Regrettably, Liangjie was still muddled and did not understand.

People often cling to the realms of the six sense objects—forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas—that correspond to seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing. That is, they cling to what is seen and heard, and thus take no-seeing and no-hearing to be nothing at all. They do not realize that the true nature capable of seeing and hearing, though itself without anything seen or heard, has never been interrupted, bears no trace of continuity, and is thusness, unmoving. Therefore Buddha-nature is also called “suchness.” This shows how dense and deeply rooted people’s habitual tendencies of deluded thinking and attachment are.

Liangjie and Patriarch Guishan exchanged many words, but Guishan felt that their affinities did not accord. Liangjie therefore asked, “Are there any others who sought the Way at the same time as you, Master?” In other words, are there other elder masters who practiced Chan and awakened to the Way at the same time as you? Guishan said, “From here, go to Liling. You County and Shishi are connected; there is a man of the Way at Yunyan. If you can push aside the grasses and look to the wind, he will surely be someone you hold in great esteem.”

From here to Liling in Hunan Province, between You County and Shishi, there is a place called Yunyan, where there was a Chan master named Yunyan. Chan Master Yunyan awakened under Yaoshan and was Yaoshan’s disciple. Yaoshan was a disciple of Shitou Xiqian. (The physical body of Chan Master Shitou Xiqian did not decay and is now enshrined in Japan.)

Guishan instructed Liangjie to seek out Chan Master Yunyan. He told him that Yunyan lived in a place unknown to others, secluded amid luxuriant deep grasses. If you bring forth a great resolve, push aside the deep grass, and behold the elder's bearing—"pushing aside the grasses and looking to the wind"—then your opportunity has arrived, and you will certainly revere him. Liangjie took leave of Guishan and went directly to Yunyan.

After Liangjie met Chan Master Yunyan, he recounted once more the preceding koan of insentient things expounding the Dharma. He then asked, "Who can hear insentient things expounding the Dharma?" Yunyan said, "Insentient things can hear it." National Preceptor Zhong had said that all sages can hear it, but Yunyan said that insentient things can hear it. In fact, purity and an empty mind are sagehood.

Neither sage nor ordinary being is established; when everything is absent, each and every thing manifests a wondrous form-body and extends a broad, long tongue to proclaim the sound of the Dharma. Blazing without end, it speaks here endlessly and without limit. This is how insentient things expound the Dharma. Liangjie then asked, "Does Your Reverence hear it?" Even now, Liangjie remained muddled.

Yunyan said, "If I heard it, you would not hear me expounding the Dharma." This was exactly the same as National Preceptor Zhong's reply. For if there is something heard, one is attached to the realm of sense objects; how could one then be a teacher of others? Therefore I do not hear. No-hearing is true hearing. This is also "no verbal expression"—there are no words to speak.

You must thoroughly comprehend the meaning beyond the words. You understand only Dharma that has language and can be spoken. The words you now hear me speak are verbal expressions, but they are not the reality.

I now speak to you in this way so that you may comprehend the meaning beyond the words, understand what lies beyond the words, and thereby clearly see the true speaking of no-speaking and the true hearing of no-hearing. But Liangjie still did not understand, and continued to ask, "Why can I not hear it?" He was still attached to the sensory realm of sounds and forms. What meaning is there in pursuing it like this? Why can he not turn hearing back to hear his own nature?

It is shining right before your face! Is this not your naturally hearing—the hearing of no-hearing? People in the world are all so muddled; how pitiful! At this point, Yunyan, like Guishan, raised his whisk.

If Liangjie had seized this opportunity and asked himself, "Who is it that sees this raised whisk?"—and exerted himself vigorously right there—he would have awakened immediately. Regrettably, the opportunity was again missed. Yunyan asked, "Do you hear it still?" Though the raised whisk made no sound and spoke no

words, the great sound is scarcely heard; it was utterly clear, like thunder resounding in one's ears. Why? Because the sound within soundlessness is the greatest sound. This is what is called "the great sound is scarcely heard."

We people often cling to audible sound and seek understanding where there is sound to hear. But if you are truly to see your true nature, you cannot cling to the place where sound can be heard. Sound and silence are merely the arising and ceasing of sounds, whereas our hearing-nature constantly shines before us at every moment. It has no intervals and no breaks.

Therefore, an ancient worthy said: "After wind and rain, peach blossoms carpet both banks; where can the horse's hooves avoid the fallen red petals?" We have already cited this verse. Peach trees line both sides of a narrow path, and after a heavy wind and rain, peach petals cover the path everywhere.

When one rides a horse through this place, how can its hooves avoid the petals strewn everywhere and not tread upon them? This means that Buddha-nature is functioning everywhere and at all times; there is no time when it is absent and no place where it is not present. Can you avoid it? Therefore, do not discriminate between form and formlessness, sound and silence. When we do not see light, we see darkness; seeing darkness is still seeing. When we do not hear sound, we hear silence; hearing silence is still hearing. Is this not evidence that the nature of seeing and the nature of hearing neither arise nor cease?

Regrettably, Liangjie replied, "I do not hear." He was attached to sound: because he did not hear a sound, he thought that he did not hear. It was like making alluring eyes at a blind man—he missed it right before him. What a pity! Yet we must also say that it was fortunate that he did not hear. Had there been hearing, he would again have become attached to appearances. Not hearing is true hearing.

Yunyan said, "When I expound the Dharma to you, you still do not hear; how much less would you hear the insentient expounding the Dharma?" When I expound the Dharma to you in this way, raising the whisk—even though there is no sound, there is still a movement—and you neither hear nor comprehend it, how much less would you comprehend the true speaking and true movement that are without speech and without movement? Worldly people are all this foolish: attached within the deluded karma of forms and sounds that they see and hear, they have never turned the light inward even for a glance, thereby recognizing the nature that can see, hear, speak, and move.

This nature is the original true Buddha! People even mistakenly take not hearing a sound to mean no hearing, and not seeing light, shadows, or forms to mean no seeing. They do not realize that this nature of seeing and hearing continually shines forth before them, never obscured and never interrupted. Even when there is no

sound to hear and no form to see, there is still seeing and still hearing. For hearing silence is still hearing, and seeing formlessness is still seeing. How, then, can one speak of no seeing and no hearing?

Liangjie then asked, “On what scriptural teaching is the insentient expounding the Dharma based?” This was the same question as in the preceding koan. Chan Master Yunyan replied, “Have you not seen what the Amitābha Sūtra says: ‘The waters, birds, and forests all recite the Buddha and recite the Dharma.’”

At this point, Chan Master Liangjie suddenly had some awakening. At last, through sound he entered into soundlessness. He had finally understood and awakened, and he spontaneously uttered this verse: “How wondrous! How wondrous! The insentient preaching the Dharma is beyond comprehension. If you try to hear it with your ears, you will never understand; Only when you hear sounds through your eyes will you truly know.”

How marvelous, how marvelous! The insentient expounding the Dharma is truly ineffable and inconceivable, utterly beyond imagination. If you listen with your ears, you cannot understand, because the insentient expounding the Dharma has no sound. Only by listening with the eyes can you grasp its subtle wonder. The eyes cannot hear sound, yet no sound is precisely the wondrous sound.

From this we can see that Chan Master Liangjie understood sound and, through sound, understood soundlessness. Yet he had not understood that soundlessness is sound and sound is soundlessness; he had not yet reached complete and ultimate realization.

There are many other koans of awakening to the Way through sound. Let us give another example. In former times, Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin served as an attendant in the assembly of Wuzu Fayan and followed Chan Master Wuzu Fayan in studying Chan.

One day, a scholar came to consult Wuzu Fayan. Wuzu said to him, “If you ask about intrinsic nature and the dharmakāya (Dharma body), did you read the ‘Little Yan Poem’ in your youth? Two lines in it are very similar to this: ‘She repeatedly calls Xiaoyu, though she needs nothing; she only wants her beloved to recognize her voice.’”

This means that repeatedly calling, “Xiaoyu! Xiaoyu!” is not really for any particular purpose. The true intention is simply to let her lover hear the call and know that she is there. In other words, she deliberately sends her lover a message, for he recognizes her voice; upon hearing her call, he knows that she is there.

Let us use this poem to ask in return: Who gives rise to this calling voice? And who hears it? Are these not all functions of intrinsic nature? Are they not all manifestations of the true nature? Wuzu Fayan's citation of this Little Yan Poem contains a profound meaning.

Originally, all forms and all sounds have no inherent significance. They are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, all unobtainable; this accords with the first line, "originally for no matter at all." Yet everything is the functioning of intrinsic nature and the manifestation of the true nature; this accords with the second line, "recognize her voice." Its purpose is to inspire us all to recognize our own Original Face.

Yuanwu Keqin heard these words from nearby and immediately had an awakening. As he came out of the abbot's room, a large rooster happened to let out a long "cock-a-doodle-doo" from atop the fence.

As soon as Yuanwu Keqin heard it, his spiritual faculty was suddenly stirred. Encountering the word "voice" in Wuzu Fayan's saying, "only to let her beloved recognize her voice," he suddenly attained great awakening. Is this not sound? This is the manifestation of intrinsic nature. Apart from intrinsic nature, what else is there? As we explained earlier, no shadow can be apart from a mirror. Once apart from the mirror, where could there be a shadow? Everything without exception is the functioning and manifestation of the true nature.

Although Chan Master Liangjie had some awakening, it was not yet complete. He again asked Chan Master Yunyan, "Does this humble person still have residual habitual tendencies that have not been exhausted?" In other words: Do I still have many habitual tendencies that have not yet been eliminated? Yunyan countered, "What have you ever done?" That is, what is it that you are clinging to? Liangjie said, "I do not even engage in the noble truths."

This is non-contrivance: not attached to anything at all, not even attached to the noble truths; attached to nothing, and not even attached to nonattachment. Yunyan went on to ask, "Do you still feel joy?" Liangjie replied, "Joy is not absent. It is like finding a bright pearl atop a heap of sweepings from a latrine." This describes the feeling of awakening: the joy is like finding a bright pearl in a dung heap. To have joy is attachment to dharmas. This is a residual habitual tendency: joy still remains. When intention is not exhausted, emotional attachment is not emptied, and there is something gained, it is not thorough awakening.

Later, Chan Master Liangjie took leave of Chan Master Yunyan. At their parting, he again asked, "After you have passed away, if someone suddenly asks, 'Can you still portray your teacher's true likeness?' how should I answer?" "True likeness" means a portrait; the teacher's true likeness means the master's portrait.

Literally, “portray your teacher’s true likeness” means to see the master’s portrait. Here it refers to receiving the master’s true transmission and being as thoroughly free as the master. The question means: After you, Master, enter parinirvāṇa, if someone asks me whether I can still see my teacher, how should I reply? Yunyan remained silent for a long while. Then he said, “Just this is it.”

This means: Tell the questioner, “Just this!” Everyone, what is this “this” of which Chan Master Yunyan spoke? This with which I answer you is precisely this for which you ask! The things you see, the sounds you hear, the smells you smell, and so forth —none is other than this. But after hearing this, Liangjie pondered over it; he had not yet understood its meaning.

Chan Master Yunyan then said, “Acharya Jie, in taking up this matter, you must be exceedingly careful and thorough.” This matter refers to awakening and seeing one’s true nature. Liangjie, in taking up such a great matter as awakening and seeing your true nature, you must be prudent and meticulous; you must not be so careless. At that point, Chan Master Liangjie still had doubts. Therefore, he had not yet reached the ultimate.

Later, while crossing a river, Chan Master Liangjie lowered his head to roll up his trouser legs and saw his own reflection in the water. Only then did he suddenly attain great awakening. At this point he understood the meaning of Patriarch Yunyan’s words, “Just this is it.” Previously, he had understood only that the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless, utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. Yet he did not know that all forms are the self-nature itself. He had understood only that soundlessness is sound, and that emptiness is presence. He had not yet understood that all sounds are soundless, and that presence is emptiness. Upon seeing his reflection in the water, Chan Master Liangjie attained great awakening and immediately composed this verse:

“Do not seek it from others; it will then be far removed from you.

I now go on alone, yet everywhere I encounter it.

It now is precisely I, yet I am not precisely it.

One must understand in this way in order to accord with suchness.”

What does this verse mean? “Do not seek it from others” means that in cultivating the Dharma and studying the Way, we should not seek outwardly or seek from others. What others explain is not it; seeking the Buddha or seeking the Dharma is even less so. One must seek inwardly, seek oneself. Only awakening for oneself is genuine.

If you search outwardly and seek externally, then “it will be far removed from you”: you will be separated from intrinsic nature by a vast distance.

“I now go on alone” means that now, wherever I go and at whatever time, I neither grasp nor reject external things. Everything is “alone,” absolute; there is no longer any duality or relativity.

If this is possible, then “everywhere I encounter it”: at all places and times, this absolute true mind can manifest, and at all places and times one can see the true nature of suchness (tathatā). “It now is precisely I”: it refers to the reflection. Mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, and all things without exception are my reflections; all are my manifestations.

Yet “I am not precisely it”: this dharmakāya (Dharma body) of mine is formless. Although all reflections are my manifestations, I am not the reflections. That is, although none of all these forms is other than I, I am not all these forms, because the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless. Even if you were to remove all these forms, since none of them is I, I would suffer no loss.

Therefore, do not become attached to appearances. All appearances are unobtainable; not establishing a single dharma is correct. “One must understand in this way in order to accord with suchness” means that practitioners should understand in this manner. Only then can the true mind abide constantly and accord with suchness that is unmoving, without being swayed by any circumstance or object.

For this reason, an ancient worthy said: “The verdant bamboo is wholly the dharmakāya (Dharma body); the lush yellow flowers are nothing but prajñā.” What in the universe is not the dharmakāya (Dharma body)? All are the functioning and manifestation of the dharmakāya (Dharma body). This is what Chan Master Yunyan called “just this.” Chan masters often say, “To pick up a single blade of grass is the golden body one zhang and six chi tall.” This is the principle behind it.

But here one must be exceedingly careful. One must not be vague and indiscriminate, nor cling to material appearances as the dharmakāya (Dharma body), thereby creating karma in confusion and bringing endless suffering upon oneself. Chan Master Dazhu Huihai says in The Essential Gateway to Entering the Way Through Sudden Awakening: “Deluded people do not know that the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless and manifests forms in response to things. Thus they call the verdant bamboo wholly the dharmakāya (Dharma body), and the lush yellow flowers nothing but prajñā.

If yellow flowers are prajñā, then prajñā is no different from insentient things. If green bamboo is the dharmakāya (Dharma body), then the dharmakāya (Dharma

body) is no different from grass and trees. When people eat bamboo shoots, they ought to be eating the dharmakāya (Dharma body) as well."

Does this passage not overturn the principle stated above—that nature is appearance, appearance is nature, and nature and appearance are nondual? No, it does not. Venerable Dazhu feared that we might take the wrong thing as our point of reference: upon hearing that all things in the universe are manifestations of the dharmakāya (Dharma body), we might become attached to material appearances and take the reflections appearing in a mirror to be real.

This is like the Chan saying: "Mistaking a donkey's saddle bridge for one's father's chin." Since mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, and forests are all intrinsic nature, and intrinsic nature is true and not false, enduring from ancient times to the present, one may then take these material appearances to be truly existent, clinging to them and grasping at them without end. Would this not mean creating karma and undergoing its retribution, remaining forever submerged in birth and death, with no end in sight? Therefore, blows and shouts must be applied to shatter this deluded dream, so that one may recognize that true reality is without appearance and see the wondrous functioning of one's intrinsic nature.

Although the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless, it is not a dead emptiness. It is wondrous presence within true emptiness; it exists objectively. Therefore, it can give rise to all phenomena, manifest forms in response to things, and function according to conditions. It is like a mirror and its reflections: because of the mirror's radiance, all reflections can appear. And because the mirror and its reflections are inseparable, one says that the mirror is the reflection and the reflection is the mirror.

Yet reflections are ultimately unobtainable. One must never cling to them as truly existent, taking them as real and mistakenly believing that they are, in truth, the mirror itself. When it is said that "the reflection is the mirror," this merely conveys their inseparability. Since without a mirror there can be no reflection, and without a reflection there can be no mirror, it is said that seeing a reflection is seeing the mirror. The dharmakāya (Dharma body) and material appearances are likewise.

Material appearances are indeed manifested by the dharmakāya (Dharma body), but they have no independent substance and no intrinsic nature. They are all formed through causes and conditions and, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, are unobtainable. They must not be grasped as truly existent, much less taken in all actuality to be the dharmakāya (Dharma body). All material appearances are merely the wondrous functioning manifested by the dharmakāya (Dharma body).

The doctrinal teachings call the relationship between material appearances and the dharmakāya (Dharma body) “neither identical nor separate.” “Not identical” means that material appearances are merely illusory reflections, not the true dharmakāya (Dharma body). “Not separate” means that apart from appearances there is no intrinsic nature, and apart from objects there is no mind—just as without reflections there is no mirror, and without waves there is no water. “Neither identical nor separate” is intended to explain the relationship between mind-nature and material appearances.

Our true nature is a perfectly wondrous spiritual awareness that is neither existent nor empty, neither empty nor existent. It clings neither to existence nor to emptiness, neither to emptiness nor to existence. When spoken of as empty, it fills all space and pervades the dharma realm; when spoken of as existent, it is utterly bare, with not the slightest thing established.

Only if one can apply and understand it in this way is one slightly in accord with the central principle of true emptiness and wondrous presence. Going further, not only are reflections unobtainable and not to be clung to; the mirror itself—our dharmakāya (Dharma body)—must not be clung to either. For once there is attachment, there is partiality. Once there is partiality, there must be contrivance. In the Chan school, this is called “falling into sainthood.” For if you cling to the dharmakāya (Dharma body), that is attachment to dharmas, and it is not ultimate.

Let us cite another koan as proof. Once, Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun addressed the assembly, saying: “To understand this matter is like an ancient mirror set upon its stand: when a Hu person comes, a Hu person appears; when a Han person comes, a Han person appears.” What does this mean? It means that our dharmakāya (Dharma body), our true nature, is like an ancient mirror.

Why compare it to an ancient mirror? Because this dharmakāya (Dharma body) has existed since beginningless time; it did not begin today, and thus is called ancient. Moreover, because its light is immeasurable, illuminating the ten directions without obstruction, it is compared to a mirror. This ancient mirror manifests forms in response to things.

Whatever size the object it reflects, a reflection of that size appears; whatever kind of person it reflects, a corresponding form appears—when a Hu person comes, a Hu person appears; when a Han person comes, a Han person appears. Chan Master Yicun instructed everyone that our dharmakāya (Dharma body) is such a wondrous essence and has such wondrous functioning.

At that point, his disciple Chan Master Xuansha stepped forward and asked, “What if a bright mirror itself comes?” That is, if one who has awakened and seen one’s true nature comes, how does the mirror manifest? Chan Master Xuefeng said, “Hu and

Han both disappear." This means that all appearances vanish and recede. Chan Master Xuansha said, "Old Master, your heels have not yet left the ground."

Why? Although everything has disappeared, the mirror still remains. Moreover, the disappearance of everything is not a blank nothingness; it contains layer upon layer of wondrous functioning and layer upon layer of the flavor of prajñā. Therefore, the reply "Hu and Han both disappear" is still not ultimate. Later, an old master commented, "Break the mirror, then come and meet me." This means that the dharmakāya (Dharma body), too, must not be clung to; it too must dissolve into emptiness, leaving nothing to grasp.

Chan Master Dongshan said, "yet I am not precisely it," thereby wiping away the reflections of all dharma appearances. Empty space is shattered, the great earth sinks level, and everything is extinguished and disappears into nothingness. Not only that: even I—the dharmakāya (Dharma body)—is not established.

Not only is the dharmakāya (Dharma body) not established; even non-establishment is not established. This is what is meant by "not dharma, not non-dharma." Only this is great awakening; only this is ultimate. This koan is so profound. We practitioners must awaken, understand, and realize in this way. The Heart Sūtra expounds this very deeply. If we can truly penetrate the Heart Sūtra, we will thoroughly understand the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the Buddhist canon without doubt.

Some people may find the koan above, and the saying "It now is precisely I, yet I am not precisely it," difficult to comprehend. The Chan school teaches no self and no person, just as the Diamond Sūtra says: no mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span.

Yet here there is both "it" and "I." What kind of Chan is this? Thus it seems obscure and difficult to understand. Before Chan Master Dahui Zonggao awakened, he served as an attendant under Zhantang. On reading this verse, he too gave rise to doubt: "There is an 'it,' and there is an 'I'—what kind of Chan is this?" So he went to ask Zhantang. The elder Zhantang said, "Recite it again."

Just as Chan Master Dahui Zonggao was about to recite this koan, Chan Master Zhantang seized him and pushed him out, saying, "Even when you recite it, you still do not understand." Chan Master Zhantang's true intention was not for Dahui Zonggao to recount the entire course of the koan, nor was he teaching him to keep thinking of all these words. Rather, before he recited it, when not a single thought had arisen, what was that? Once one understands this true mind and vigorously applies oneself here, that is seeing one's true nature.

The wondrous functioning of koans in the Chan school is to teach you, when doubt arises, to turn the light inward and see what is original. This is realizing the Way; this

is seeing one's true nature. There is nothing mysterious about it. Do not suppose that seeing one's true nature means seeing some thing. If you think there is something to be seen, that is not it.

For the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless; it is numinous knowing. If there is a thing to grasp, that is not it. Conversely, although the dharmakāya (Dharma body) is formless, it is true emptiness and wondrous presence, an all-capable essence: it can accomplish all affairs, give rise to all phenomena, function in response to conditions, and respond to conditions in engaging with things. Thus, it is not separate from all appearances.

As we said earlier, after we ourselves have seen and realized this dharmakāya (Dharma body) of suchness (tathatā), it is as though we have become the master. Then we may make use of consciousness-spirit, directing it at our command, using it to benefit living beings and to deal with people and circumstances, among other things. We may use consciousness-spirit to do all things.

If there were only suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature, like a mirror reflecting objects while remaining thus and unmoving, how could any affairs be accomplished? Therefore, after the mirror reflects objects, distinguishing the reflections is the work of consciousness-spirit.

When we study and practice Buddhism, all of us must see our true nature; when you come to hear the Dharma, this too makes use of consciousness-spirit. The master directs this servant to do its work. Thus, after recognizing true nature, one does not rigidly cling to it in a lifeless way, but gives rise to inexhaustible wondrous functioning, alive and vibrant. Once you recognize the master, you can make use of the servant, and the servant is then not separate from the master.

In this way, everywhere is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Once one has truly recognized true nature, all material appearances and all things may be directed and used by you, without the slightest emotional attachment to things. Not clinging to appearances is precisely the arising of wondrous functioning; this is called great capacity and great functioning. The Diamond Sūtra reveals that not a single thing is established, that one is utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. The Amitābha Sūtra reveals wondrous appearances and adornment.

This means that from the essence of true emptiness wondrous functioning can arise, and that this wondrous functioning is boundless. Therefore, wondrous appearances are true emptiness, and true emptiness is wondrous appearances; adornment is formlessness, and formlessness is adornment. Wondrous appearance and adornment are true emptiness and formlessness.

To summarize, the passage in the Heart Sūtra that says, “No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind; no forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, or dharmas; no eye realm, up to and including no mind-consciousness realm” refutes the views of ordinary beings. The Buddha’s compassion is profound. He hopes that ordinary beings may awaken from the deluded error of clinging to the eighteen realms as truly existent, recognize that the six sense faculties, six sense objects, and six consciousnesses—the eighteen realms—are fundamentally empty and nonexistent, and understand that all are functions of intrinsic nature. Thus they awaken to what is original and see their true nature directly. This is the Buddha’s compassionate deliverance of ordinary beings from deluded attachment.

Next, the Heart Sūtra says:

“There is no ignorance, nor the ending of ignorance; up to and including no old age and death, nor the ending of old age and death.” This is to liberate the pratyekabuddhas. Pratyekabuddhas awaken to the Way through the twelve links of dependent origination. This passage refutes their attachment to the dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination. The dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination also falls within the overall framework of the five aggregates. Since the five aggregates are empty, the dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination cannot be regarded as truly real either.

Among the four teachings distinguished by the Tiantai school—Tripiṭaka, Shared, Distinct, and Perfect—the sages of the middle vehicle in the Tripiṭaka teaching are pratyekabuddhas; the Great Vehicle consists of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, while the Lesser Vehicle consists of śrāvakas, that is, arhats. When the Buddha was in the world, he expounded the dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination for the pratyekabuddha vehicle. When pratyekabuddha sages see flowers bloom and fade, they awaken to the Way.

Because flowers do not remain beautiful forever, the moon is not forever full, and human life is not long-lasting, all are exceedingly brief and cannot remain so for long; therefore, none can be obtained. They awaken through dharmas arising from causes and conditions, and are thus called pratyekabuddhas. Yet they can only be liberated from segmented birth and death; they cannot yet be liberated from transformational birth and death, nor have they reached the Buddha’s state.

When the Buddha taught the prajñā sūtras, including the Heart Sūtra, it was to guide sages of the middle and lesser vehicles away from the lesser and toward the greater. The Buddha extensively expounded the principle of prajñā’s wisdom of emptiness, explaining to them that the dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination previously taught is all revealed by true emptiness and cannot be grasped as truly existent. If it is grasped as truly existent, that is attachment to dharmas; then one

cannot be liberated from transformational birth and death or attain Buddhahood. One must not abide in any appearance; nothing whatsoever can be obtained. In this way, he swept away their attachments, enabling them to awaken thoroughly and realize Buddhahood.

As we mentioned earlier, ordinary beings of superior capacities and keen wisdom can become Buddhas immediately once they awaken to the empty characteristics of all dharmas. When the mind abides nowhere, the true mind remains ever luminous. Once the mind has something on which to abide, desire clouds discernment; this is called "when emotional attachments arise, wisdom is blocked." When views based on emotional attachment and clinging arise, wisdom is covered over and cut off, and one can never be free and at ease.

Because the mind is deluded by objects and circumstances, grasps at appearances, and becomes attached, it suffers from worries over gain and loss and from countless afflictions. Those who are not free and at ease are so because their minds are turned by things. We now understand that, in the phrase "all dharmas are marked by emptiness," the Chinese character xiang ( ) means "meaning"—that is, the meaning that all dharmas are empty.

All appearances are illusory and provisional appearances, useful only temporarily; none can be obtained, so do not cling to them. Do not hold them in mind at all, and do not abide in them in the least. Use things without being used by them; turn things without being turned by them. Then, amid all affairs and conditions, one will attain great freedom and ease. One who has truly realized the Way simply eats when hungry and sleeps when tired, with not a single concern.

In former times, an ancient worthy instructed an assembly. He said, "Simply putting on clothes and eating is it; the moment you stir the mind or give rise to a thought, you miss it."

Someone asked, "Who does not know how to put on clothes and eat? Why, then, are we still not liberated?" This is because, when ordinary beings dress, they are always excessively particular: perhaps they are dissatisfied with the fabric, perhaps the pattern is unattractive, perhaps the style is unsuitable, and so forth. Thus, all sorts of afflictions arise in their minds.

Eating is the same: they are endlessly particular, liking this and loathing that, always entangled by objects and conditions, and their minds can never be free and at ease. For this reason, they are called sentient beings. This is what is meant by "when emotional attachments arise, wisdom is blocked." Conversely, it is good when "wisdom arises and emotional attachments are blocked."

We possess the great wisdom of prajñā and know that all dharmas cannot be obtained. If the mind does not hold to thoughts and responds to things according to conditions, neither grasping nor contriving, what thoughts could remain? If we can truly accord with conditions, then when conditions arise today and we are put in a position, we take up that position; when conditions end tomorrow and we are removed from it, we step down immediately. If we do not calculate or contend inwardly in the least—not rejoicing when we rise or grieving when we fall—then we attain great freedom and ease and gain true benefit.

The most important thing in learning Buddhism is applying it in the midst of affairs. If one merely burns incense and bows to the Buddha, asking the Buddha to grant something, that is not truly believing in the Buddha; rather, one is troubled by gods and Buddhas. To believe in the Buddha is to trust that our own Buddha of intrinsic nature is no different from the ancient Buddhas of the past. Then we can let go of everything and seek within ourselves.

Because we know that all activity is the functioning of Buddha-nature, we must make use of this Buddha-nature and apply it in the midst of affairs. Whether dealing with people and things or undertaking any task, simply do what must be done without clinging to appearances.

When we work, we should use all our skills to serve sentient beings and benefit them, without clinging to appearances in the least. Do not rejoice at success or grieve at failure. Having already done our utmost, we have not been careless or merely perfunctory. At the same time, because we have no selfish motives and do our utmost for everyone, we will handle all matters in the family and society appropriately. Only such application in the midst of affairs is genuine Buddhist practice; only then do we gain true benefit and attain great freedom and ease.

Nowadays, many people in society think that learning Buddhism is superstition, but in fact they themselves are superstitious. They are infatuated with the forms and appearances of the world. Though it is clear that all worldly dharmas are empty characteristics and utterly unobtainable, they take them to be truly obtainable and pursue them without end, thereby creating karma and undergoing karmic retribution. Thus, they themselves are truly deluded.

In addition, we must recognize that some Buddhists are indeed superstitious, because they do not understand the true meaning of Buddhism. Instead, they burn incense, bow to the Buddha, and beg the Buddha for blessings in the human and deva realms. They seek dharma outside the mind, mistake the false for the true, and grasp delusion as reality. Thus, they are called superstitious.

A practitioner who truly studies Buddhism does not seek the Buddha but seeks within themselves, continually sweeping away and eliminating their habitual

tendencies. Because we have habitual tendencies of clinging to forms and appearances, we grasp at appearances whenever we encounter affairs and conditions. We must struggle with ourselves at every moment and revolutionize ourselves. For this reason, we are not superstitious; we possess genuine wisdom-faith.

Once ordinary beings understand the empty characteristics of all dharmas, they can become Buddhas immediately—how much more so sages of the middle vehicle! If sages of the middle vehicle can understand that the dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination is fundamentally unobtainable, they too become Buddhas. As its name suggests, a pratyekabuddha is one who awakens by observing causes and conditions. Causes and conditions may be distinguished as supportive conditions and grasping conditions. Supportive conditions are conditions that assist; grasping conditions are conditions to which one clings.

Supportive conditions mean that people are not originally muddled, but that a certain condition happens to arise and assists their self-delusion. What conditions are these? They are ignorance conditioning formations, formations conditioning consciousness, consciousness conditioning name-and-form, name-and-form conditioning the six sense bases, the six sense bases conditioning contact, contact conditioning feeling, feeling conditioning craving, craving conditioning grasping, grasping conditioning becoming, becoming conditioning birth, and birth conditioning old age and death.

These twelve links of dependent origination thus become twelve kinds of supportive conditions, helping people enter delusion and obscurity. They encompass a series of causes and effects—giving rise to delusion, creating karma, and receiving birth—throughout the past, present, and future three divisions of time, revolving again and again without end. We shall now explain these twelve links of dependent origination one by one:

Ignorance means what ordinary people call muddleheadedness: not understanding the truth. Through the supportive condition of muddleheadedness, deluded activity arises; ignorance assists our deluded activity. We engage in deluded activity because of ignorance, and so it is called “ignorance conditions formations.” Ignorance is not something truly existent. It is mistaken awareness, delusion, and afflictions such as greed, anger, and ignorance. How do we break through it? Once we awaken, ignorance is broken. If we do not understand the truth, deluded activity arises; this is “ignorance conditions formations.”

Formations are deluded activity, the creation of various karmas. Because there is also the supportive condition of deluded activity, there arises recognition—that is, discrimination and identification. If something is good, one likes it and wants to

obtain it; if something is bad, one dislikes it and does not want it. Through the assistance of deluded activity, discriminating deluded consciousness arises in us; therefore it is called “formations condition consciousness.”

Consciousness is the mind that discriminates, distinguishes, and identifies; it is muddled and erroneous cognition. In past lives, because we were muddled and did not understand the truth, we engaged in deluded activity. Activity creates karma, and creating karma brings karmic retribution. When the intermediate-state body enters the womb, it chooses, through discrimination and according to karma created in past lives, parents with whom it has affinities and enters their womb.

Whatever kind of karmic consciousness one has gives rise to a corresponding embryo; therefore it is called “consciousness conditions name-and-form.” The destination of the intermediate-state body is governed by karmic conditions and follows karma created in the past. If you did many good deeds and accumulated much wholesome karma in the past, you will see a bright place and encounter parents with whom you have affinities and whose circumstances and conditions are favorable.

Conversely, because of conditions arising from unwholesome karma, one can see only dark and unfavorable places and be reborn into impoverished families, or even in the three lower realms. If a person has committed much unwholesome karma, the intermediate-state body cannot see bright places; all it sees are various terrifying scenes.

For example, hailstones may fall and strike them, yakṣas may pursue them, tigers and wolves may seek to devour them, and so on. Terrified, they flee in panic and enter an unfavorable place, taking rebirth in a family living in harsh conditions and dire poverty. Moreover, because they have much unwholesome karma, deep karmic obstacles, and darkened minds, they can see only dim, obscure light—the light of the three lower realms.

They think that these dim lights accord with their minds, so they run there and are reborn in the three lower realms. To be liberated from segmented birth and death, we must, during practice, remain unmoved on seeing every circumstance, not be drawn in by circumstances, and not give rise to the delusions of attachment. Once one’s practice is truly reliable, then even upon reaching the intermediate-state realm, one’s mind will remain unmoved on seeing any circumstance.

Even when you see a man and woman having sexual intercourse, your mind will remain unmoved, and you will not enter the womb. People are reborn in a human womb because, while in the intermediate-state body, they see parents with whom they have affinities and their minds are stirred. As a third party, they join the parents

who are having intercourse. When the man ejaculates, they are carried into the woman’s uterus. This is entering and dwelling in the womb: they have entered it.

Name-and-form: this is when one has just entered the womb and arrived in the uterus. At this point, only the aggregate of form is present; the other four aggregates —feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are as yet only names. What is this name-and-form? It is a globule of pus-like fluid, like the pus in a sore, formed when male and female reproductive fluids combine. Since it has no other name, it is called “name-and-form.”

With name-and-form as the supporting condition, the embryonic form gradually develops, and the six sense faculties likewise gradually mature; this is called “name-and-form conditions the six sense bases.” Seven-day rites are performed after a person dies because the intermediate-state body undergoes one birth-and-death and one transformation every seven days. The same is true after conception: there is a transformation every seven days. At first it is like a mass of fluid, then gradually like a pustule, then gradually develops into a sac, then into an embryonic form, then gradually develops a head and four limbs. Before the six sense faculties are complete, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and other faculties gradually develop, followed by hair, nails, and so forth.

Six sense bases: these are the six capacities of mind—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing. Within the embryonic sac, a person's eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind faculties have all developed and can perform the various functions of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing. When the faculties encounter their objects, these six capacities arise; this is the six sense bases. With the six sense bases as supporting conditions, “contact” then arises.

Contact: what does it mean? It means that the six sense faculties come into contact with the six sense objects. When gestation is complete and birth is about to take place, the newborn first enters the world and begins to come into contact with the external environment.

Name-and-form and the six sense bases are present in the embryonic sac, whereas “contact” occurs after birth. The temperature in the mother's womb differs greatly from that of the external environment. Thus, as soon as a baby emerges from the womb and comes into contact with the outside air, its whole body feels as though it were being pricked by needles. The pain is like that of a living horse being skinned. Therefore, no newborn enters this world smiling; all arrive crying.

We often speak of the sufferings of birth, aging, illness, and death. Birth truly is suffering: the fetus is forcibly squeezed out between the mother's pelvic bones, like between two great mountains. Not only does the infant suffer; the mother also

suffers excruciating pain. In cases of malposition, difficult labor, or severe hemorrhaging, there may even be danger to her life.

Yet human beings are such wretched creatures: they can endure this suffering, but once it has passed, they forget it. Asked to leave this world, they are still reluctant to part from it and still find it pleasant and happy. Thus this Sahā world derives its name from being “endurable.” Contact with the external environment gives rise to feelings such as suffering and pleasure; this is called “contact conditions feeling.”

Feeling means receiving, experiencing, and accepting. As soon as a child begins to develop understanding, there is feeling: the eye experiences forms, the ear experiences sounds, the nose experiences smells, the tongue experiences tastes, the body experiences tactile objects, and the mind experiences dharmas. When the six sense faculties encounter the six sense objects, feelings of form, sound, smell, taste, and so forth arise. From consciousness entering the womb through karmic consciousness onward, consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense bases, contact, and feeling are the five painful results received in this present life from the causes of ignorance and formations created in past lives. From feeling arises craving; therefore it is called “feeling conditions craving.”

Craving means the arising of desire for objects. Once the mind gives rise to greedy craving, one will certainly try to obtain the object and make it one's own; this is “craving conditions grasping.” Earlier, we said that a condition is something that assists. Thus, craving assists you in obtaining the object of your desire.

Grasping means pursuing and acting. Where there is pursuit, there is attainment. Because there is attainment, it is called “grasping conditions becoming.” Since you wish to obtain something, this pursuing mind helps you acquire and possess it.

Becoming means that karma has already been formed. “Becoming” is obtaining through pursuit; because of pursuit, one performs actions that create karma.

For example, in table tennis or volleyball, if one wishes to win medals and achieve outstanding results, how can one acquire superb skill, firm perseverance, and sound psychological qualities without undergoing rigorous regular training—such as basic physical training, high-volume training, overload training, and combat-style training? If we cultivate with something to gain in mind, that too is creating karma.

Doing anything creates karma; it is only that karma differs as wholesome or unwholesome. Here we must emphasize that seeking and attaining are both worldly affairs. If, in studying Buddhism, we seek something or attain something, then it has gone wrong. If there is something attained, one has not become a Buddha but has instead become a demon.

The Heart Sūtra says, “because there is no attainment.” Only by being utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust can one become a Buddha. Ordinary people take delusion for reality, cling to false appearances, and regard them as truly existent; therefore they seek attainment. Because there is seeking and attainment, they create karma and undergo karmic retribution. Thus craving, grasping, and becoming are the three causes created by people in their present lives.

Creating karma now is creating causes, and in the future one must undergo the results. Karmic results do not perish; they necessarily condition birth in a future life and the future painful results of birth and death. Because there is attainment, birth and death must inevitably continue to revolve, and one cannot be liberated from birth and death. Thus “becoming” means having birth and death; this is called “becoming conditions birth.”

Birth means receiving, as a result of causes created in the present life, the five-aggregate body of a future life. Where there is birth, there must certainly be aging and death. These are relative and dialectically connected; therefore it is called “birth conditions aging and death.”

Aging and death mean that the body of a future life will again gradually grow old and die. When people grow old, they inevitably experience sorrow, suffering, grief, and distress. When someone is dying, family members weep and wail, unable to bear the departure of their loved one. The dying person also weeps and wails, reluctant to leave relatives and family, reluctant to relinquish everything they possess, and reluctant to leave this Sahā world.

When people grow old and approach death, when there is parting in life and separation in death, who is not troubled by sorrow, grief, suffering, and distress? Because our attachments are so deep, we are unwilling to die at once and all hope to live a little longer. Thus people are indeed ignorant! They do not know that their Buddha-nature neither arises nor ceases with a person's birth and death.

That is to say, this Buddha-nature does not come into being only because a little child has been born, nor does conscious awareness disappear when a person dies. When a person dies, only this skin-bag has broken down. It is like a house that has become uninhabitable: one simply moves house and changes to another room.

Therefore, do not cling to this body as real, and thus become attached to this world and refuse to leave it. In particular, those reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss should go calmly and joyfully. This Sahā world is a world of the five turbidities, a place of suffering and affliction, whereas the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is a radiant world of utmost happiness.

Why would one not gladly leave a place of suffering and affliction for a place of happiness and light? Thus, in a person of genuine cultivation, deluded thoughts are relatively slight, and they do not fear death. Moreover, when people die, they undergo immense suffering, for at that time the four great elements are about to disperse.

When the earth element disperses, it feels as though a great mountain were pressing down on the body; when the water element disperses, it feels as though the whole body were immersed in water, damp and cold; when the fire element disperses, it feels as though one were being burned by fire, and the body becomes unbearably hot; when the wind element disperses, it is like a great wind sweeping away the earth from a mountain, stripping it off layer by layer. This is called “the wind knife dismembering the body,” and this suffering is the most severe.

Finally, when the last breath does not return and the wind element has completely dispersed, one can no longer breathe. At that point, it is like a living turtle being pulled from its shell: the suffering is so bitter and grievous that nothing can exceed it. Therefore, every person approaching death groans and cries out in agony, undergoing suffering of every kind.

The Buddha's teaching of the twelve links of dependent origination, also called the twelve branches of the teaching of the pratyekabuddha vehicle, reveals the fundamental reason why all sentient beings undergo unceasing rebirth in the six realms—being born and dying, dying and being born, arising and ceasing in an endless, beginningless cycle. It is because they follow the law of cause and effect. In terms of life, there are the three periods of past, present, and future.

The three periods may be regarded as a long span of time. On a shorter scale, the past, present, and future within a single life—even yesterday, today, and tomorrow—all follow this law of cause and effect.

Viewed in terms of causal relationships, the two past causes of “ignorance” and “formations” produce the five present results of “consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense bases, contact, and feeling.” The three present causes of “craving, grasping, and becoming” produce the two future results of “birth and aging-and-death.”

That is, causes created in the past form the results experienced in the present; causes created in the present will in turn form future results. Causes produce results, and results become causes; one creates and receives them oneself.

The twelve links of dependent origination may also be summarized as the three paths of delusion, karma, and suffering. Ignorance, craving, and grasping are the three afflictions, and afflictions constitute the path of delusion. The two links of

formations and becoming belong to the path of karma. The seven links of consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, birth, and aging-and-death constitute the path of suffering. Delusion gives rise to karma, and karma brings painful results.

While undergoing suffering, one again gives rise to delusion; from delusion one again creates karma; and from creating karma one again undergoes suffering. Beyond the future there is still further future: the cycle repeats endlessly, as one revolves without end through birth and death in the six realms. If one does not arouse the resolve to cultivate, one will forever revolve without liberation amid this tangled web of delusion, karma, and suffering, within the beginningless and endless stream of life in which causes and results continually produce one another. The mutual coordination and continuous succession of these twelve links of dependent origination is called “the gate of contemplation in the forward order of cyclic continuation.”

In teaching the twelve links of dependent origination, the Buddha also tells us that the primary source of the revolving cycle of birth and death is ignorance. We have just contemplated these twelve links in the forward order and learned that all sentient beings revolve endlessly through the six realms in dependence on them; this is therefore called “the gate of contemplation in the forward order of cyclic continuation.” But merely knowing about cyclic continuation, without understanding the method of liberation, is still of no use.

This requires contemplating the twelve links of dependent origination in reverse order, which is called “the gate of reverse contemplation leading to cessation.” Practitioners of the pratyekabuddha vehicle contemplate the twelve links in reverse and understand that ignorance is the root of birth and death.

They then arouse the resolve to cultivate the Way and escape suffering, practicing the twelve links of dependent origination and thereby attaining the fruition of a pratyekabuddha, that is, the fruition of a pratyekabuddha awakened through conditions. Thus they are liberated from segmented birth and death and from the cycle of birth and death in the six realms. Ignorance means confusion and afflictions; it must first be eliminated. When ignorance ceases, formations cease—that is, one no longer acts delusively.

When formations cease, consciousness ceases, and the discriminating mind is no more. Without deluded action, one creates no karma and therefore receives no result. One no longer stirs consciousness in search of karmically connected parents in whom to be reborn; thus name-and-form ceases. Since there is no rebirth in a womb, how could the six sense faculties develop? Therefore, the six sense bases

cease. When the six sense bases cease, contact ceases. If no fetus is born, there can be no contact with sense objects.

When contact ceases, feeling ceases. Since there is no physical body, how could there be feeling? To receive no feelings whatsoever is correct receptivity and correct samādhi. Without feeling, there is no craving. Without love or aversion, there is no grasping or rejecting; thus craving ceases and clinging ceases.

Without clinging, there is no becoming. Therefore, when "clinging" ceases, "becoming" ceases. Without craving and clinging, one does not create defiled karma; that is, one does not create karma and undergo retribution, nor does one enter a womb in a future life. Thus "birth" ceases. Without birth, there is no aging and death. Without birth, how can one speak of aging and death? Consequently, sorrow, grief, suffering, anguish, separation from the living, and parting from the dead are also absent.

From this we know that when ignorance ceases, the other eleven links, beginning with formations, all cease. Without delusion, there is no karma; without karma, there is no suffering. Practitioners of the pratyekabuddha vehicle cultivate this Dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination, destroy ignorance, attain the fruition of a pratyekabuddha, and thereby become liberated from segmented birth and death.

The Heart Sūtra says, "All dharmas are marked by emptiness." The Dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination is likewise an illusory manifestation that has appeared since beginningless time; in its nature it is empty and originally nonexistent. As we have already explained, ignorance is not some concrete thing. Ignorance is empty in itself; it does not truly exist.

Since it does not exist, how could it be destroyed? In fact, there is no ignorance to destroy; with a single awakening, it is finished. Thus, "no ignorance" means that there is no solid, real ignorance awaiting your destruction. Ignorance is empty in itself, so do not take it as truly existent. With a single awakening, ignorance is gone.

Since there is no ignorance, why speak of completely destroying it? Without ignorance, there is no destruction; so what could "the end of ignorance" mean? Therefore, "nor the ending of ignorance" means that even "the complete destruction of ignorance" is absent. The following two Chinese characters, naizhi ( ), "up to and including," indicate extension and omission, like the earlier phrase "up to and including no mind-consciousness realm."

From ignorance to old age and death, there are twelve links of dependent origination. The ten intervening links are omitted and passed over; the same applies to those ten links. "No old age and death, nor the ending of old age and death": all

dharmas are marked by emptiness, and fundamentally there is no old age and death. Since there is no old age and death, what could its “ending” mean? In this way, both the forward contemplation of arising and continuation and the reverse contemplation of cessation in the Dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination are dismantled; nothing can be obtained.

The Heart Sūtra is a Mahāyāna dharma gate. “No ignorance, nor the ending of ignorance, up to no aging and death, nor the ending of aging and death” is intended to dismantle the attachment to dharmas of the pratyekabuddha vehicle. It points out that the Dharma of the twelve links of dependent origination that they cultivate is empty, fundamentally nonexistent, and wholly unobtainable, thereby teaching them to turn from the lesser vehicle toward the great vehicle.

All dharmas are empty. The Buddhadharma cannot be obtained, nor can one cling to the nature of mind; nothing can be obtained. Just as the Diamond Sūtra says: “Know that my teaching of Dharma is like a raft.” Dharma is a boat or raft for crossing a river. When we have crossed the bitter sea of birth and death and are about to reach the shore, we must not be reluctant to leave the ferryboat. Thus it says, “Know that my teaching of Dharma is like a raft. Even Dharma should be relinquished, how much more so what is not Dharma?” Even the dharmas for cultivating the Way and attaining Buddhahood must be relinquished, let alone all the empty and illusory worldly dharmas, which must all the more be relinquished.

At the same time, we should know that attaining Buddhahood does not necessarily require passing through the middle vehicle of the pratyekabuddhas or the lesser vehicle of the arhats. As long as we ordinary beings awaken and realize that all dharmas, being marked by emptiness, are unobtainable, and that everything is a manifestation of our own mind-nature and a functioning of true nature, that is enough.

When one confirms that all things in the universe are empty appearances that cannot be grasped, one does not cling to appearances or grasp at dharmas. One does not cling even to the nature of mind; true mind and true nature are likewise unobtainable. Then, in that very moment, one becomes a Buddha.

What is meant by becoming a Buddha? It means not clinging to appearances in the slightest, functioning in accordance with conditions: eating when hungry, dressing when cold, and sleeping when tired. There is not the least desirous mind or seeking mind. Everywhere one acts to accommodate others and benefit sentient beings, without considering oneself. This is to make use of things in accordance with conditions; this is freedom. Such freedom is Buddhahood.

It does not mean that one is a Buddha only when spiritual powers arise, enabling endless transformations, miraculous displays, and supernormal functioning. We

must abide nowhere and accord with conditions in everything. If we can truly cling to no single dharma, and if the mind is truly empty in this way, then even if you do not seek spiritual powers, they will come to you. Yet although you attain spiritual powers, you do not cling to them and remain just like an ordinary person. Only when not a single dharma is established is it the true Buddhadharma.

Let us continue with the sūtra text:

“No suffering, origination, cessation, or path.” Suffering, origination, cessation, and path are the Dharma gate of the four truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of origination, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path. They are also called the Four Noble Truths. Truth means real and non-illusory—that is to say, 'ultimate truth'.

When we began discussing the “five periods of teaching,” we explained that when the Buddha first realized the Way beneath the bodhi tree, he proclaimed the Mahāyāna Buddhadharma of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra. At that time, those of shallow capacities could not understand it. The Buddha therefore taught, respectively for practitioners of the three vehicles—śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas—the doctrines of the four truths, the twelve links of dependent origination, the six perfections, and so forth.

Those who hear the Dharma sound of the four truths taught by the Buddha, transcend the ordinary and enter sagehood, awaken to the Way, and attain the fruition of arhatship are called “śrāvakas,” or “arhats.” This is the śrāvaka vehicle, or arhat vehicle, whose saints belong to the lesser vehicle. The Dharma of the four truths includes two sets of cause and effect. The first is worldly cause and effect: the truths of suffering and origination. The truth of suffering is the worldly result, while the truth of origination is the worldly cause.

The second is supramundane cause and effect: the truths of cessation and the path. The truth of cessation is the supramundane result, while the truth of the path is the supramundane cause. If one understands the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, one can recognize suffering and cut off its origin, aspire to cessation and cultivate the path, thereby becoming liberated from segmented birth and death, transcending the three realms, and attaining the blissful fruition of the nirvāṇa of cessation. Let us now explain this in detail.

Why is the truth of suffering called a worldly result? Because it encompasses all the painful results of birth and death experienced by all sentient beings within the three realms, and these are summarized as three kinds of suffering: the suffering of pain, the suffering of pleasure, and the suffering of conditioned existence. The suffering of pain refers to the agony endured when body and mind are devastated, when suffering is added to suffering, misfortune piles upon misfortune, pain becomes unbearable, and one feels that life itself is unbearable.

For example, the suffering experienced in the three lower realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals is called the suffering of pain. The suffering of pleasure is the pain felt after pleasurable circumstances are lost. Pleasure is not eternal; when pleasure disintegrates, suffering arises. Hence it is called the suffering of pleasure, also known as the suffering of change. For example, devas are far happier and more comfortable than human beings in our world, and their lives are much longer, but they eventually come to an end and still undergo the suffering of birth and death.

After death, according to the quality of their actions and the amount of wholesome and unwholesome karma they have created, they must still descend to undergo suffering. This is the suffering of pleasure. The suffering of conditioned existence means that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent and flow on without rest. There may be no pronounced sense of pain or pleasure, yet they change at every moment and cannot become settled; because they are impermanent, they are suffering.

The desire realm contains all three kinds of suffering. The form realm has the suffering of pleasure and the suffering of conditioned existence, while the formless realm has only the suffering of conditioned existence. Now that we know there is so much suffering within the three realms, and that the human world contains all three kinds of suffering, where does suffering come from? It is all created by mind alone; we make it ourselves and undergo it ourselves. In other words, it comes from the truth of origination.

Why is the truth of origination called a worldly cause? Originally, we have no mind; it is gathering that becomes mind: “Mind originally does not arise; it exists because of objects.” That is, because objects such as forms and sounds are present, we receive their images through the various conditions of objects, produce cognition, distinguish sameness and difference, give rise to love and aversion, grasping and rejecting, and generate all kinds of thoughts and notions.

These various minds arise through combination with the environment; they do not arise one-sidedly, independently, or in isolation. This is the first point. Second, origination means the gathering of all afflictions, delusions, and karma within the three realms. Because of afflictive delusion, one creates all kinds of karma, all of which one makes and undergoes oneself. By creating the causal condition of “origination,” one brings about the painful result of birth and death. This is therefore called the truth of origination, the source of worldly causes.

The truth of cessation is a supramundane result. Why? Cessation means quiescence and complete elimination. In quiescent non-contrivance, one can transcend the world. Such beings see clearly that the roots of suffering are all brought about by

themselves. They aspire to transcend the three realms and attain the blissful fruition of quiescence that is neither arising nor ceasing. Therefore, they seek only their own liberation: “When arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescence is bliss.” They attain the fruition of arhatship, eliminate all afflictions and karmic power, and thereby free themselves from the birth-and-death cycle of the six realms. This is the truth of cessation. Yet it is nirvāṇa with remainder, because transformational birth and death has not yet been ended.

The truth of the path is a supramundane cause. Why is this so? Because they aspire to the blissful fruition of quiescence, they recognize “suffering” and cut off “origination,” aspire to “cessation” and cultivate the “path.” That is, they set about cultivating the path in order to cut off and eliminate the causal condition of “origination.”

Once we know that all states are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, wholly unobtainable, we no longer become attached or greedy for them. Mind and objects do not combine. Without gathering, the causal condition of origination is cut off. For example, when we ordinarily recite the Buddha’s name, it is in order to eliminate this causal condition of origination.

As soon as a thought arises, the invocation “Amitābha Buddha” cuts it off, thereby severing this causal condition of origination. Chan school investigation of huatou is the same: when the sense of doubt arises, deluded thoughts do not proceed, and the causal condition of origination is cut off. With a single shout or blow, deluded thoughts are immediately severed, and this causal condition of origination is interrupted.

The cultivation of Esoteric Buddhism is the same. Through the empowerment of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind, the mind is gathered into the Dharma being cultivated, thereby cutting off all worldly forms and deluded thoughts. Therefore, since one aspires to the blissful fruition beyond the world, one must cut off the worldly causal condition of origination and begin cultivating the path. This is the cause of realizing the Way.

In summary, the two truths of suffering and its origin, as taught by the Buddha, tell us the source of suffering; this is the worldly relation of cause and effect. The Buddha not only explained worldly cause and effect, enabling us to know whence suffering comes; more importantly, he explained supramundane cause and effect—the method for liberation from suffering. The two truths of cessation and the path teach that one must cultivate the path and eliminate the origin in order to attain quiescence and be freed from suffering.

Therefore, the Four Noble Truths may be summarized as: know suffering and eliminate its origin; aspire to cessation and cultivate the path. The Buddha's teaching

of the Four Truths and the teaching of the twelve links of dependent origination express the same principle: they reveal the source of all the afflictions and sufferings of birth and death undergone by sentient beings in the three realms and six realms —namely, the worldly causal relationship of delusion, karma, and suffering. More importantly, they explain that the means of liberation from all suffering is to cultivate the path.

From this we can see that, in order to liberate sentient beings of different capacities who have the requisite affinities, the Buddha expressed the same principle through different teachings. This is the Buddha's compassion: in response to differing capacities, he bestowed differing teachings, using eighty-four thousand dharma gates to liberate eighty-four thousand kinds of sentient beings.

When the Buddha first taught the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, the capacities of the śrāvakas were relatively dull, and they could not accept this Mahāyāna dharma gate. The Buddha therefore expounded the dharma gate of the Four Truths in three ways, calling this the “three turnings of the Dharma wheel.”

The so-called Dharma wheel means that the Dharma taught by the Buddha does not remain fixed with one person or in one place. It is passed from person to person, expounded and circulated, transmitted generation after generation and proclaimed from place to place. Buddhism originated in India, spread to China, and then to Japan and other Asian countries; it has now been propagated to Europe, America, and elsewhere, indeed throughout the world.

It is like a wheel, turning without cease. What does “turning” mean? It means that the Buddha's teaching enables sentient beings to turn suffering into happiness, turn from what is deviant and return to what is right, turn from evil toward good, turn afflictions into bodhi, and turn birth and death into nirvāṇa. What are the three turnings? The first is the turning of demonstration, the second the turning of exhortation, and the third the turning of verification. Let us now discuss these three turnings separately.

The first is the turning of demonstration. The Buddha informed practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle of the nature of suffering. He said that suffering is oppressive. Since people living in the world must sustain their bodies in order to survive, they require clothing, food, shelter, and transportation. To satisfy these needs, they spend all day pursuing them, rushing about everywhere, busily toiling and working hard.

Thus people are compelled to suffer; their bodies and minds are forced to bear all kinds of pressures from every direction. Hence suffering is said to be oppressive. There are eight kinds of suffering, as explained earlier. They are mentioned here only briefly: the four sufferings of birth, aging, illness, and death that arise from our bodies; and the suffering of separation from those we love, encountering those we

hate, not obtaining what we seek, and the blazing of the five aggregates, all brought about through karma. Together these are called the eight sufferings.

Tracing the cause further, where does suffering come from? It is all brought about by oneself: through one's own delusion and karma, one brings about the fruition of suffering. Thus, origination has the nature of bringing about results.

How is it brought about? When we previously discussed the one hundred dharmas, we introduced the six fundamental afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and wrong views; the ten minor subsidiary afflictions of anger, resentment, vexation, concealment, deceit, flattery, arrogance, harm, jealousy, and stinginess; the two intermediate subsidiary afflictions of lack of shame and lack of conscience; and the eight major subsidiary afflictions of lack of faith, indolence, heedlessness, torpor, restlessness, loss of right mindfulness, incorrect knowing, and distraction. This makes twenty-six afflictions in all. These are the causes from which suffering arises. Because of these twenty-six causes of suffering, the eight fruits of suffering described above are brought about.

In short, because our suchness (tathatā) does not abide in its own nature, ignorance falsely arises and obscures our true mind. As a result, the true wisdom originally present becomes deluded seeing and deluded knowing. We grasp a small portion of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—as our own physical basis, and the great trouble of human beings lies precisely in having a body.

It is because we have this body that we become attached to it. Where there is an “I,” there is what is “mine.” Once there is this body, we must sustain it, and thus require clothing, food, shelter, and transportation, continually seeking and possessing. Moreover, human greed knows no limits and is never satisfied.

Regarding the larger portion of earth, water, fire, and wind outside the body—the material world that serves as our external environment—we give rise to all kinds of deluded thoughts, thereby creating karma and undergoing karmic retribution. Thus, all fruits of suffering are brought about by ourselves; they are not caused by deities, King Yama, demons, or ghosts.

If we have opened wisdom and understand that this body has no fundamental reality, that it is fundamentally illusory and exists entirely because our deluded thoughts fabricate and grasp at objects,

then, if even the body does not truly exist, where can birth, aging, illness, and death be found? If we know that the body is merely a house in which we temporarily dwell, and not the true master—the true master being our suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature—then we will not cling to this body and prize it too highly. Nor will our

desires become boundless and continually intensify, demanding this and seeking that without end.

As we live in this world, we then simply accord with conditions in all things. For all things are false and utterly unobtainable. Moreover, our need for such living conditions as clothing, food, shelter, and transportation is also merely habitual tendencies—habits formed over a long time—not something absolutely indispensable.

For example, someone accustomed to living in a garden villa will feel unaccustomed if he suddenly has to live in a thatched hut. But one who has long lived in a thatched hut may find it quite good and feel no discomfort. Thus, it is a matter of habit. In studying Buddhism, we must understand this fundamental point: everything is a function of our intrinsic nature.

“The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only.” Everything is created by my own mind. Once we recognize this root, we let everything go, empty this mind, and accord with conditions in all things. Able to rise and able to fall, we are then at ease. Thus, to study Buddhism is to eliminate these causes of origin. If we can do so, we will no longer bring about the fruits of suffering.

Suffering is oppressive, and the origination has the nature of bringing about. What, then, is cessation? Cessation has the nature of being realizable. Nirvāṇa can be realized; it is not merely empty talk. It can indeed truly be attained, and thus has the nature of being realizable. If people wish to leave suffering behind, they must aspire to the bliss of quiescent cessation. Therefore, arhats seek only their own liberation; this is the Lesser Vehicle.

But after truly attaining the fourth fruit of arhatship, one will certainly turn from the lesser to the greater. Seeing that great bodhisattvas emerge and submerge amid the six realms, practicing the bodhisattva path to liberate sentient beings, while one remains motionless in the city of nirvāṇa and cares only for one's own liberation—how could one not feel ashamed? One will certainly turn from the lesser to the greater and also liberate sentient beings, no longer seeking only one's own liberation.

After truly attaining the fruit of arhatship, one eliminates the four afflictions previously discussed: the ground of abiding in attachment to views, the ground of abiding in attachment to desire, the ground of abiding in attachment to form, and the ground of abiding in attachment to the formless. Yet the fifth affliction—the ground of abiding in ignorance—has not been eliminated. Thus one still falls into emptiness and abides in quiescence. Since transformational birth and death has not yet been eliminated, this is nirvāṇa with remainder, not ultimate nirvāṇa.

What is the path? The path has the nature of being cultivable. People in the world all delight in happiness and dislike suffering. Therefore, if one wishes to leave the three realms, be liberated from the painful fruition of the cycle of segmented birth and death, leave suffering and attain happiness, and realize the blissful fruition of quiescent cessation, one must arouse the resolve to cultivate the thirty-seven factors of awakening and cultivate precepts, samādhi, and wisdom. The basic practice begins with cultivating the precepts.

Use the precepts to eliminate the poison of greed: commit no evil and practice every good. From precepts arises samādhi; use samādhi to overcome the poison of anger. From samādhi wisdom arises; use wisdom to overcome the poison of ignorance. Then one can eliminate the afflictions of views and thoughts and eradicate delusion and karma. Without the causes of delusion and karma, one will not bring about the fruit of suffering in birth and death. The śrāvaka sages of the Lesser Vehicle take this as the path. “Path” means that which leads through; it is the provisions that lead to the state of nirvāṇa.

The thirty-seven factors of awakening are: the four establishments of mindfulness, the four right exertions, the four bases of spiritual power, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, and the Noble Eightfold Path—thirty-seven in all. We shall now give a brief explanation of these thirty-seven factors of awakening, beginning with the four establishments of mindfulness.

Before cultivating the four establishments of mindfulness, sages of the Lesser Vehicle must first cultivate the five methods for calming the mind. These contemplations cause five kinds of faults to cease in the mind and can still the practitioner's distracted mind. This is called “samādhi,” meaning cessation and concentration. It is the initial entry into the path for practitioners of the Śrāvaka Vehicle, and the first of the three worthy stages of the Lesser Vehicle. There are five contemplations:

1. Contemplation of impurity: observe that all bodily bases and material environments are impure. Regard all states and all things as having the aspect of impurity; see men and women alike as white bones and skeletons, thereby stopping the mind of desire. Those with strong greed may cultivate this contemplation.

2. Contemplation of compassion: observe that all sentient beings are suffering and pitiable, thereby stopping anger. Those with much anger may cultivate this contemplation.

3. Contemplation of causes and conditions: observe that all dharmas arise from causes and conditions, and that the twelve links of dependent origination continue through the three times, with prior causes and later effects clearly distinguishable,

thereby stopping ignorance. Those deeply afflicted by ignorance may cultivate this contemplation.

4. Contemplation through analysis of elements: distinguish all dharmas into the six elements or eighteen realms. This is a method for stopping the view of self. Those with a strong view of self may cultivate this contemplation.

5. Contemplation of counting the breath: observe the inhalation and exhalation of the breath, count the breaths, and gather the mind upon the breath, so that mind and breath depend upon one another. In this way one stops the scattered mind. Those with much distraction may cultivate this contemplation.

Some combine the contemplation of causes and conditions with the contemplation through analysis of elements, since the two are similar. Others add contemplation of the Buddha: observing the Buddha's auspicious marks and excellent characteristics, and the majestic adornment of his merit and virtue, thereby eliminating all afflictions. Those with heavy karmic obstacles may cultivate this contemplation.

In the “four establishments of mindfulness,” mindfulness is the wisdom that contemplates, while establishment is the object contemplated. To contemplate an object with wisdom is an establishment of mindfulness. This is a practice of wisdom that gives rise to the practitioner's wisdom of contemplation; it is called “śamatha.” There are four establishments of mindfulness:

First, establishment of mindfulness of the body: contemplate the body as impure. This is the same as the earlier contemplation of impurity. Within and without the human body, filth abounds and there is no place of purity; therefore, contemplate the body as impure.

Second, establishment of mindfulness of feeling: contemplate feeling as suffering. Feeling is the sensation of pleasure or pain, the mind's experience in response to objects. When mind and object join together, the fruit of suffering follows. Since there is no real happiness in the world, contemplate feeling as suffering.

Third, contemplation of mind: contemplate the impermanence of mind. Since mental thoughts change continuously from instant to instant, arising and ceasing without end, and never remain abiding, contemplate mind as impermanent.

Fourth, contemplation of dharmas: contemplate dharmas as without self. Since all dharmas lack an independent, self-existent nature, do not become attached to dharmas; therefore, contemplate dharmas as without self.

The four contemplations of the four establishments of mindfulness all take wisdom as their basis. Because the truth of suffering in human beings has four aspects—body, feeling, mind, and dharmas—one contemplates body, feeling, mind, and

dharmas as “impure, suffering, impermanent, and without self.” Through the power of wisdom-based contemplation, mindfulness abides in the objects contemplated—body, feeling, mind, and dharmas. That is, one settles the mind upon the Dharma path, making it upright rather than deviant.

“Four Right Exertions” means single-mindedly and diligently cultivating these four dharmas. They are also called the “Four Right Abandonments,” meaning that they can eliminate laziness; or the “Four Right Victories,” because among the means of encouraging body, speech, and mind, these are supreme. Because one resolves firmly in the mind and puts them into practice decisively, they are also called the “Four Intentional Abandonments.” The content of these four dharmas is as follows:

First, diligently strive to eliminate unwholesomeness that has already arisen.

Second, diligently strive to prevent unwholesomeness that has not yet arisen from arising.

Third, diligently strive to bring forth wholesomeness that has not yet arisen.

Fourth, diligently strive to increase wholesomeness that has already arisen.

The Four Right Exertions mean persevering diligently and cultivating earnestly. They encourage practitioners in these four respects, enabling them to eliminate evil and cultivate good through body, speech, and mind. In cultivating the Way, we must begin with body, speech, and mind; no dharma is separate from body, speech, and mind. Since the Four Right Exertions are supreme in this regard, they are also called the Four Right Victories.

“Four Bases of Accomplishment”: As we have just explained, the four establishments of mindfulness cultivate wisdom—“true wisdom.” The Four Right Exertions cultivate “right diligence.” Although wisdom and diligence increase, practitioners may still be unable to fulfill their wishes because their power of meditative stability is weak. Therefore, they must cultivate these four forms of right concentration, the Four Bases of Accomplishment.

By using these four powers of concentration to gather in the mind, one brings concentration and wisdom into balance, gains an abundance of spiritual powers, and fulfills all one’s aspirations. Hence they are called the “Four Bases of Accomplishment,” and also the “Four Spiritual Bases.” “Accomplishment as desired” refers to the power of accomplishing whatever one wishes among the six spiritual powers, which arises from concentration. “Base” means that on which one relies. For example, our bodies stand by relying on the feet.

Thus, the spiritual powers of accomplishing whatever one wishes among the six spiritual powers arises in reliance upon these four concentrations. Moreover,

because cultivating concentration can give rise to the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers, one can do everything as one wishes: wherever one wishes to go, one can go. They are therefore also called the “Spiritual Bases.” In the stages of our cultivation of the Way, the ten faiths, ten abodes, ten practices, and ten dedications are called the stage of provisions; this is followed by the stage of preparation. These four concentrations are named in relation to that stage of preparation.

First, the spiritual base of desire: through the desire to cultivate at the stage of preparation, concentration arises. That is, when you wish to attain the concentration of this spiritual base, the power of desire gives rise to concentration.

Second, the spiritual base of diligence: diligently cultivate this concentration at the stage of preparation. Through vigorous, assiduous, and unremitting effort, the power of diligence gives rise to concentration.

Third, the spiritual base of mind: at the stage of preparation, concentrate single-mindedly. Through the power of right mindfulness, concentration arises.

Fourth, the spiritual base of contemplation: at the stage of preparation, observe principle—that is, contemplate. Do not allow the mind to become lax or scattered. Through the power of contemplation, concentration arises.

Although there are many dharmas at the stage of preparation, these four are the most beneficial and supreme; therefore, they are called the Four Bases of Accomplishment.

“Five Faculties”: “Faculty” means that which gives rise to and increases. For example, grasses and trees grow through their roots. The Five Faculties are the faculty of faith, the faculty of diligence, the faculty of mindfulness, the faculty of concentration, and the faculty of wisdom. All dharmas begin with faith.

The “faculty of faith” is faith in the Three Jewels and in the Dharma of the Four Noble Truths. When the faculty of faith is firm, one can diligently cultivate. The “faculty of diligence,” also called the faculty of effort, is vigorous and courageous cultivation of the Dharma. The “faculty of mindfulness” is never forgetting the true Dharma from thought to thought. The “faculty of concentration” causes the mind to rest on a single object without becoming scattered. The “faculty of wisdom” develops wisdom and enables one to recognize truth. These Five Faculties are the basis for generating all wholesome dharmas. When the Five Faculties are firm, they can give rise to the Five Powers.

“Five Powers”: “Power” means function. When the Five Faculties increase, they cannot be damaged by afflictions and acquire the power to counteract the five

hindrances. They are the power of faith, the power of diligence, the power of mindfulness, the power of concentration, and the power of wisdom.

The “power of faith”: when the faculty of faith increases, it can destroy all wrong beliefs. The “power of diligence”: when the faculty of diligence increases, it can destroy bodily laziness. The “power of mindfulness”: when the faculty of mindfulness increases, it can destroy all wrong thoughts. For example, when we recollect the Buddha at every moment, it is to eliminate the wrong thoughts of the three poisons —greed, anger, and ignorance. The “power of concentration”: when the faculty of concentration increases, it can destroy all confused thoughts; once one has the power of concentration, one will no longer indulge in wild thoughts. The “power of wisdom”: when the faculty of wisdom increases, it can destroy all delusions in the three realms, including the afflictions of views and thoughts within the three realms.

“Seven Factors of Awakening”: awakening means realization and awareness. This Dharma can bring concentration and wisdom into balance. Awakening is not singular; there are seven kinds of awakening dharmas, and hence they are called factors or divisions: the Seven Factors of Awakening, or the Seven Divisions of Awakening. Moreover, because the Seven Factors of Awakening are seven forms of awakening manifested through the Five Faculties and Five Powers, and because cultivating this Dharma can lead to the right path of bodhi, they are also called the “Seven Factors of Bodhi.” They are: the factor of awakening of discernment of dharmas, the factor of awakening of diligence, the factor of awakening of joy, the factor of awakening of ease, the factor of awakening of mindfulness, the factor of awakening of concentration, and the factor of awakening of equanimity.

First, the factor of awakening of discernment of dharmas: use wisdom to select the dharma to be cultivated. Whenever practitioners begin to cultivate the Way, they must first select a suitable dharma. This has two meanings: first, use wisdom to distinguish whether a dharma gate is genuine or false, choosing what is right and rejecting what is deviant; second, choose a dharma gate suited to one’s own capacities, for this makes attainment easier. It is like a sick person: if the medicine suits the illness, the illness will be cured; if it does not suit the illness, it will not be cured.

Second, the factor of awakening of diligence: once one has selected a suitable dharma gate, one must earnestly put the true Dharma into practice with a courageous mind, diligently and without slackening. Interruption, practicing at times and stopping at others, or applying oneself one day and neglecting it for ten, will not do.

Third, the factor of awakening of joy: when the mind attains wholesome dharmas, joy arises; one is filled with Dharma joy and delights in cultivating the Dharma.

Fourth, the factor of awakening of ease: when one cultivates the Dharma properly, one can eliminate the coarse and heavy afflictions of body and mind, thereby attaining ease and peace.

Fifth, the factor of awakening of mindfulness: at every moment, contemplate concentration and wisdom without forgetting them, so that they remain balanced.

Sixth, the factor of awakening of concentration: cause the mind to rest on a single object, without becoming scattered.

Seventh, the factor of awakening of equanimity: relinquish all false dharmas and abide in nothing whatsoever. Our intrinsic nature extends throughout empty space and the dharma realm and fully possesses immeasurable, boundless wondrous functioning. What more could we need? We need nothing at all. An ancient Chan master said, “There is not a single thing that can engage the mind.” Relinquish everything; let go of everything.

Among the seven factors of awakening described above, if a practitioner’s mind is agitated, use the three factors of awakening of ease, equanimity, and concentration to gather it in. If the mind is sunk and dull, use the three factors of awakening of discernment of dharmas, diligence, and joy to arouse it. There are three factors each for concentration and wisdom; use whichever one is appropriate, and stop once benefit is obtained. The factor of awakening of mindfulness constantly keeps concentration and wisdom in mind and applies to both, bringing concentration and wisdom into balance. Choose among the other six factors according to the practitioner’s needs, as explained above.

“Noble Eightfold Path”: This Dharma is the road leading to nirvāṇa, and is therefore called a path. Because this path is free from bias and deviance, it is called the right path. It is the path cultivated by noble ones and can lead to the fruition of arhatship; hence it is also called the noble path. It consists of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right diligence, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These are called the Noble Eightfold Path, or the Eightfold Noble Path.

First, right view: after seeing the principle of the Four Noble Truths—suffering, its origin, cessation, and the path—one has correct understanding and views. Its basis is undefiled wisdom.

Second, right thought: after seeing the principle of the Four Noble Truths, one can think correctly, enabling true wisdom to increase. Its basis is the undefiled mind.

Third, right speech: cultivate verbal karma with true wisdom, and do not utter any speech contrary to principle. The Confucians say, “Do not speak what is contrary to

propriety.” Its basis is undefiled discipline.

Fourth, right action: with true wisdom, eliminate all wrong bodily karma and all improper conduct, and instead perform pure bodily karma and proper conduct. Its basis is undefiled discipline.

Fifth, right livelihood: purify the three karmas of body, speech, and mind; live in accordance with the true Dharma; pursue a proper occupation; and abandon wrong occupations. Its basis is undefiled discipline. If, for the sake of fame and profit, one seeks material support for an extravagant life, this is called wrong livelihood. There are five kinds: (1) displaying unusual appearances deceptively before ordinary people in order to obtain gain and support.

(2) Proclaiming one’s own merits in order to obtain gain and support. (3) Divining fortune and misfortune, reading faces, and telling fortunes in order to obtain gain and support. (4) Making grand and boastful claims, putting on an imposing manner, exaggerating, deceiving and intimidating people in order to obtain gain and support. (5) Speaking of benefits one has obtained in order to delude and stir people’s minds, seeking gain and support.

Sixth, right diligence: apply true wisdom and diligently cultivate the path to nirvāṇa. Nothing in the world is difficult; one need only have resolve. Its basis is undefiled diligence.

Seventh, right mindfulness: with true wisdom, recollect the right path and be free of wrong thoughts. Its basis is undefiled mindfulness.

Eighth, right concentration: with true wisdom, enter undefiled and pure dhyāna and concentration. Its basis is undefiled concentration. This concentration is the great concentration without entering or leaving: wherever and whenever one encounters circumstances, the mind does not move and does not become confused.

In the Noble Eightfold Path, the right path is primary; as a whole, it is undefiled and is the practice of the stage of seeing the Way. The Seven Factors of Awakening are the practices of the stage of cultivating the Way. Therefore, the Seven Factors of Awakening and the Noble Eightfold Path belong to the stages of practice.

The foregoing are the thirty-seven factors of the path, which are teachings of the Lesser Vehicle. Their basic practices are the three trainings of discipline, concentration, and wisdom. Discipline destroys greed, concentration destroys anger, and wisdom destroys ignorance. When the afflictions of views and thoughts are completely eliminated and delusion and karma are destroyed, there is no longer any fruit of suffering in birth and death to be experienced. One then leaves the three realms and attains the bliss of the truth of cessation, nirvāṇa. Thus, “the path can be

cultivated." This is the first turning of the Buddha's Dharma wheel—the turning of demonstration.

The second turning is the turning of exhortation: it encourages people to cultivate the Way. The Buddha said that suffering is oppressive in nature; you should understand this. For if one does not feel suffering, one will not be willing to cultivate the Way. Only when one understands the immeasurable sufferings of the cycle of birth and death does one seek liberation and become willing to cultivate the Way. You should understand that origination has the nature of bringing about results: through the causes of origination one creates oneself, one brings about the painful results of birth and death that one must oneself undergo.

Therefore, you should cultivate the Way! The Way is capable of being cultivated: when all the causes of origination in the form of afflictions are eliminated, there will be no bitter fruits of birth and death, and one can realize the nirvāṇa that neither arises nor ceases. Cessation is capable of realization; you should realize it! This is the Buddha's compassionate turning of exhortation.

The third turning is the turning of verification, in which the Buddha bore witness through the experience of his own personal cultivation and realization. The Buddha said, "I have already undergone the various sufferings of human life. I have already known the truth. My life experience can serve as testimony. I have already cut off origination. Because I cultivated the Way, I eliminated all the causes of origination in the form of afflictions. Therefore, I have brought birth and death to an end and realized the truth of cessation, nirvāṇa."

Through the Buddha's three turnings of the Dharma wheel in expounding the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, śrāvakas of the Lesser Vehicle came to know suffering, eliminate origination, yearn for cessation, cultivate the Way, and realize the Way. Suffering, origination, cessation, and the path constitute the dharma realm of śrāvakas (arhats). By hearing the Buddha expound the teaching of the Four Noble Truths through the three turnings of the Dharma wheel, śrāvakas awakened to the Way and realized nirvāṇa.

If, afterward, one still clings to the teaching of the Four Noble Truths—suffering, origination, cessation, and the path—one can only be liberated from segmented birth and death and escape the cycle of birth and death in the three realms; one cannot bring transformational birth and death to an end. Because attachment to dharmas remains, one can attain only nirvāṇa with remainder, which is ultimately not final nirvāṇa.

For this reason, in order to eliminate the śrāvakas' attachment to dharmas—the notions that suffering exists to be abandoned, origination exists to be eliminated, a path exists to be cultivated, and nirvāṇa exists to be realized—the Buddha clearly

taught in the Mahāyāna prajñā Heart Sūtra, “no suffering, origination, cessation, or path.” He wished them to understand that birth and death and nirvāṇa are also like flowers in empty space, illusorily present; in ultimate reality, they are originally nonexistent.

The very nature of all self-natures is emptiness: neither arising nor ceasing. How could there be any nirvāṇa to attain? The dharma of the five aggregates is the mother of all dharmas; we have already discussed this. The dharma of the five aggregates is empty in itself. When the mother is empty, the children too do not exist! Thus, the teaching of the Four Noble Truths is itself also empty. Therefore, there is no suffering to be left behind, no origination to be eliminated, no cessation to be realized, and no path to be cultivated—that is, “no suffering, origination, cessation, or path.”

True emptiness reveals wondrous presence: birth and death are nirvāṇa, suffering is liberation, and afflictions are bodhi. Through this teaching of “no suffering, origination, cessation, or path,” the Buddha enabled śrāvakas to turn from the Lesser to the Greater Vehicle, understand the Mahāyāna principle of true emptiness and wondrous presence, and refrain from clinging, abiding, or attaching to anything. In this way, they truly attain great freedom and final nirvāṇa.

“No wisdom and no attainment.” No wisdom means that there is no wisdom of prajñā to be realized. No attainment means that there is no Buddha to become and no fruit of bodhi to attain. The Buddha spoke in this way in order to eliminate bodhisattvas’ attachment to dharmas.

Bodhisattvas cultivate the myriad practices of the six perfections: they use giving to overcome stinginess, upholding the precepts to overcome defilement, forbearance to overcome anger, diligence to overcome laziness, meditative stability to overcome distraction, and wisdom to overcome ignorance.

Because they cultivate these dharmas, they become firmly attached to them, believing that there are dharmas to cultivate, prajñā wisdom to attain, sentient beings to liberate, and Buddhahood to realize. Inevitably, images of these six pāramitās remain in their minds. Their minds of attachment to existence have not been forgotten, and thus they retain attachment to dharmas and subtle views of dharmas. Their minds are not empty and pure, so they cannot attain final nirvāṇa. The Buddha said, “No wisdom and no attainment,” thereby clearly showing bodhisattvas that even the wisdom of the six perfections is not ultimate wisdom, and that the fruition attained through it is not the ultimate fruit of Buddhahood.

A monastic asked Chan Master Dazhu Huihai, “What is the karma of birth and death?” Dazhu replied, “Seeking great nirvāṇa is the karma of birth and death. Rejecting impurity and grasping at purity is the karma of birth and death. Having

attainment and realization is the karma of birth and death. Failing to transcend the gate of antidotal practices is the karma of birth and death." This is what the Amitābha Sūtra calls the "turbidity of views": it is defilement, which confuses practitioners. Originally, seeking great nirvāṇa is meant to bring liberation and Buddhahood; yet, because one's understanding is incorrect and one gives rise to a mind of grasping and rejecting, it instead becomes karma of birth and death. Is that not regrettable?

Moreover, both wisdom and lack of wisdom are functions of the illusory mind. Both are empty in nature and are merely provisional names. Originally, not a single dharma can be attained; to force a division into two—is that not ignorance? In the past, the World-Honored One received a prediction of future Buddhahood from Dīpaṃkara Buddha, foretelling unsurpassed bodhi. Yet the World-Honored One did not take this as something sacred, for he knew that all things are empty in nature and without reality; not the slightest dharma can be attained. It is merely provisionally called bodhi.

Therefore, only when bodhisattvas reach the point of "no self in dharmas" can their hindrances be considered completely eliminated. For this reason, within the empty characteristics of all dharmas, emptiness of all dharmas is taken as the dharma body.

The dharmas of the six perfections, as well as the eighteen realms, the twelve links of dependent origination, the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, and the aggregate of all dharmas—the dharma of the five aggregates—all are like reflections in a mirror's light, utterly unattainable. Therefore, they are called "nonexistent," or "empty." This emptiness is not inert emptiness or annihilationist emptiness; it is wondrous presence and true emptiness.

It is like a mirror's light: all reflections arise in dependence on that light, yet one cannot cling to the mirror's light as truly existent. This means that within the true emptiness of ultimate reality, although one practices the six perfections, one has no view of practicing the six perfections and clings to not a single dharma. Not clinging to the existence of six perfections to practice is "no wisdom"; having no mind that seeks the fruit of attainment, and no Buddha to become, is "no attainment." Through this great and thorough awakening, the afflictions of the five abiding grounds are completely eliminated, and the two forms of birth and death perish forever.

"Because there is nothing to attain." We have already explained that this Heart Sūtra takes "nothing to attain" as its principle. This sentence, "because there is nothing to attain," is meant to make you understand the central purpose of this sūtra; it is also a sentence summarizing all that has been said above.

Here the Buddha further indicates that the five aggregates, the eighteen realms, the twelve links of dependent origination, the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, the six pāramitās, wisdom, attainment, and so forth are all originally empty, and that in truth there is nothing to attain. Then the Dharma function of prajñā naturally manifests: one neither inclines toward emptiness nor clings to existence. Whatever one takes up at hand becomes a wondrous truth, and inexhaustible wondrous functioning appears wherever the mind reaches.

V. Section on Attaining the Fruit

Bodhisattvas, relying on prajñāpāramitā, have no hindrances in the mind. Because there are no hindrances, there is no fear. Far removed from inverted views and deluded imaginings, they ultimately attain nirvāṇa. All Buddhas of the three times, relying on prajñāpāramitā, attain unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening.

Bodhisattva: “bodhisattva” is a transliteration from Sanskrit. Bodhi is translated in meaning as “awakening,” and sattva as “sentient being”; together, they mean “awakened sentient being.” This means awakening to the fact that nothing in the world can be obtained. Because of our deluded thoughts and attachments, we mistakenly take everything in the world to be truly existent, and thus falsely create karma of suffering.

In our practice, we must awaken to and break through this false notion of a “sentient being,” thereby restoring our own awakened essence. At the same time, we must awaken to and break through the views and attachments of others. This is what is meant by “awakening oneself and awakening others”: together ascending to the far shore of nirvāṇa, which neither arises nor ceases. Hence the term “awakened sentient being.” In Chinese, putisaduo ( ) is shortened to pusa ( ).

“Bodhisattva” is also translated as one who is courageous and vigorous in practice, and capable of shouldering the Tathāgata’s family enterprise. Therefore, the bodhisattvas referred to here—pusa ( ), or putisaduo ( )—are not bodhisattvas of the provisional vehicles; nor are they bodhisattvas of the ten faiths, ten abodes, ten practices, ten dedications, and so forth; nor are they bodhisattvas of the Tripiṭaka teaching or the Shared teaching. Rather, they are mind-realizing bodhisattvas who have already entered the Buddha stage.

These great bodhisattvas use the vajra prajñā of their own nature to illuminate and break through everything. They have realized that the five aggregates, eighteen realms, and so forth mentioned above are utterly unobtainable. Having crossed beyond to the other shore, they directly realize the benefit of “having no hindrances in the mind.” Thus they are also called “awakened beings” or “great beings.” For

example, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, as we commonly call him, is also known as Avalokiteśvara the Great Being and the White-Robed Great Being.

We should understand that practice is not undertaken for fame or profit. Fame and profit are poisons of birth and death. So long as the mind of fame and profit has not died, there will never be a day of liberation. Therefore, one's causal ground in practice must be correct. One must apply oneself and exert effort in one's own nature, investigating and realizing sincerely and honestly, rather than seeking after spiritual powers, peculiarities, or mysterious and subtle utterances.

For such things are merely branches and leaves, not the root. If the root is unclear, then no matter how luxuriant and flourishing the branches and leaves may be, they are neither dependable nor stable. It is like building a hundred-zhang tower on a sandy beach: if the foundation is insecure, it collapses as soon as the wind blows. If one does not understand what Buddha-nature is or the function of prajñā, then however mysterious and subtle one's words may be, or however many spiritual powers one may possess, one still cannot escape birth and death.

Relying on prajñāpāramitā: prajñāpāramitā was already explained when the title of the sūtra was discussed above, so it will not be repeated here point by point. Bodhisattvas rely on the supreme wondrous wisdom of prajñā to illuminate and break through ignorance and every deluded thought. They realize that worldly dharmas and supramundane dharmas, conditioned dharmas and unconditioned dharmas—indeed, all dharmas—are empty in their very being, and thus they neither cling to nor grasp at any state.

Since not a single dharma can be obtained, not a single dharma can bind them. They have already reached the far shore beyond the bitter sea of birth and death and can fully accomplish all endeavors of self-cultivation and benefiting others.

From this we can see that even great bodhisattvas cannot do without prajñā—how much less can we? Apart from prajñā, what other method could enable us to attain true fruition? Therefore, prajñāpāramitā is the foundation of attaining Buddhahood.

Later in the Heart Sūtra, the Buddha further makes this clear for everyone: "All Buddhas of the three times, relying on prajñāpāramitā, attain unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening." Therefore, only those willing to follow this path are truly wise, and they can certainly attain realization in this very life. Conversely, those who race about seeking externally, pray to gods and worship Buddhas, hoping that a Buddha or bodhisattva will pull them up to heaven or transform their karma and make them Buddhas on their behalf, are followers of non-Buddhist paths, are demons, and will never have a day of attaining Buddhahood.

The mind is free from hindrances: hindrances means impediment. Here, “mind” refers to the mind of wondrous presence and true emptiness: a mind wholly free of concern and hindrance, the greatly liberated mind of the emptiness of self and phenomena, quiescence, and ease.

Alas, ordinary beings fail to abide in the intrinsic nature of suchness (tathatā); at the rise of a single deluded thought, ignorance arises. Mistakenly perceiving that there is a distinct, knowing awareness, they separate awareness from clarity and clarity from awareness, causing the true mind to be enveloped by fundamental ignorance. Pursuing external objects, grasping at them, and discriminating among them, the mind is bound by circumstances. At all times and in all places, they live amid concerns and hindrances, creating karma and undergoing retribution, revolving through the six realms without end. The sages of the two vehicles, relying on attachment to dharmas, also have hindrances in the mind and therefore cannot be free and at ease.

Today, fortunately, having heard the Buddha teach the Dharma, we turn back upon realizing that we have lost our way. With the vajra prajñā of our own nature, we illuminate and break through all worldly and supramundane dharmas, seeing them all as dreamlike illusions and flowers in empty space, with not a single dharma to be obtained. Yet the true mind is not an inert emptiness; it is the wondrous presence that exists objectively. It can take form in response to things, encompass all phenomena, and give rise to all kinds of wondrous functioning.

Moreover, because wondrous presence is not truly existent, though it encompasses all phenomena, it cannot be obtained. Therefore, one cannot cling to it. Because one does not cling, one clearly realizes that nothing can be obtained; this is true emptiness. Since the mind itself has no substantial existence, where could concerns and hindrances depend? With no basis on which to depend, where could suffering and distress gain a foothold? Hence it is said, “crossed beyond all suffering and adversity.”

Earlier, in discussing the fivefold profound meaning of the Heart Sūtra, we mentioned in the section “Discerning Function” that the Buddha taught the Heart Sūtra as a means of eliminating the three obstacles. The three obstacles are retribution obstacles, karmic obstacles, and obstacles of afflictions. Thus, having no hindrances in the mind is the function of eliminating retribution obstacles.

Retribution obstacles are further divided into dependent retribution and primary retribution. These matters were explained in detail above and will not be repeated here. To eliminate these two forms of retribution does not require some other method; one simply uses the vajra prajñā of one’s own nature to illuminate and break through them. With the utterly complete and supreme wondrous wisdom of

prajñā, one illuminates and breaks through the worldly and the supramundane, realizing that not a single dharma can be obtained.

Then dependent and primary retribution are removed. Once these two forms of retribution have been eliminated, the inward concerns over clothing, food, dwelling, travel, and the like that arise in dependence on dependent retribution, as well as the concerns over bodily hindrances that arise in dependence on primary retribution, naturally disappear without remainder. Therefore, the Heart Sūtra says: "Bodhisattvas, relying on prajñāpāramitā, have no hindrances in the mind."

Because there are no hindrances, there is no fear. This sentence functions to eliminate karmic obstacles among the three obstacles. Since there are no hindrances in the mind, there is naturally no sorrow, grief, or alarm. Whenever there is fear, there must be a mind of gain and loss. This mind of gain and loss exists because there is an "I," and this "I" is precisely the disposition that leads to birth and death in the six realms.

When we apply ourselves in practice, it is sometimes necessary to undertake a seven-day retreat: that is, to use the Buddhadharma to destroy attachment to self—manas consciousness. If we can realize the emptiness of self and phenomena, then there will be no views of person, self, sentient being, or life span. Once the personal self and dharma-self are empty, hindrances have nothing to which they can adhere. With no hindrances, how could there be fear? Hence it is said: "Because there are no hindrances, there is no fear."

Fear means dread, apprehension, alarm, and terror; it arises from hindrances. Ordinary beings are continually entangled in hindrances at all times and in all places. What they have not obtained, they single-mindedly seek to obtain; what they have already obtained, they fear losing. They worry about gain and loss and live in anxiety and fear. Even bodhisattvas practicing in the world—novice bodhisattvas—are no different in this respect. Because they have not completely eradicated delusion, they still have hindrances and fears. Fears vary in degree and kind, but can be summarized as five kinds:

1. Fear of not making a living: for the sake of clothing, food, dwelling, and travel, worldly people rush about busily all day, constantly worried and fearful about their livelihood. When novice bodhisattvas practice the six perfections to liberate sentient beings, they fear that doing so will affect their own livelihood. Thus they are full of misgivings, looking ahead and behind, worrying about gain and loss, and cannot wholeheartedly exert themselves or act without fearing the sacrifice of everything they have.

2. Fear of a bad reputation: worldly people and practitioners alike fear being slandered without cause, acquiring a bad name, or being cursed. Yet when we do

something, even a very good deed, if sentient beings do not understand it and instead believe that we have done something bad, we will still face criticism.

Our mind-capacity should be broad. So long as our conscience is clear, we should be able to endure sentient beings' misunderstandings, rather than becoming fearful, aggrieved, or distressed. Acharya Dayu's Song of Liberation says: "The great void drinks in light and dissolves estrangement; echoes in a secluded valley speak of evening mist." Only such a vast breadth of heart will do.

3. Fear of death: ordinary people generally cling to this Sahā world, craving life and fearing death. Practitioners who have not severed attachment to self likewise cannot relinquish their lives. Only ordinary beings of great resolve and bodhisattvas who have aroused great bodhicitta and practice the bodhisattva path can forget themselves for the Dharma and relinquish their bodies for the Dharma. If they do not fear even death, what is there that they cannot relinquish?

4. Fear of the evil realms: practitioners fear the extreme suffering of the evil realms. Their attachment to dharmas is very heavy, and they are unable to counter it with the nondual Madhyamaka of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

5. Fear of the authority and virtue of the assembly: fearing that they have faults, they shrink back and do not dare to assume responsibility. Only selflessness makes one fearless. One must dare to shoulder the Tathāgata's family enterprise, liberate oneself and others, and practice the bodhisattva path.

Great bodhisattvas use the vajra prajñā of their own nature to illuminate and break through the two forms of birth and death, segmented and transformational. When they return to the world, it is through the vow of great compassion to liberate sentient beings. This is called: "The power of great compassionate vows abandons not a single person." Naturally, they have no fear. Once there is no fear, karmic obstacles too disappear without remainder.

Far removed from inverted views and deluded imaginings: "far removed" here does not mean distant in space, but means leaving and abandoning forever. Inversion means the opposite or the upside-down: failing to distinguish truth from falsehood and, deluded about the true, taking the false to be real. It is taking the impermanent as permanent, suffering as happiness, non-self as self, and the impure as pure. To invert principle and phenomena is called inversion.

Such inversions arise in dependence on the fundamental affliction of ignorance. All the afflictions of sentient beings arise because they lack the wondrous wisdom of prajñā; that is, they arise from inverted views and deluded imaginings. Nothing in the world is inherently truly existent, but because of inverted views and deluded imaginings, people believe that it truly exists.

Consequently, they greedily love, grasp, and pursue things without relinquishing them. Thus they create illusory karma and undergo illusory birth and death, emerging and sinking through the six realms, suffering every kind of illusory pain without recognizing it. It is like a great dream from which one cannot awaken through the long night. To be far removed from inverted views and deluded imaginings is to awaken to and break through the obstacle of afflictions among the three obstacles—that is, to eliminate the obstacles of delusion, ignorance, and afflictions.

Among the ten dharma realms, apart from the Buddha realm, the other nine are all called sentient beings, and each has its inverted dreams and delusions: human beings dream of wealth, rank, fame, and profit; devas dream of ease and happiness; asuras dream of rivalry and victory; beings in the hell realms dream of suffering and punishment; hungry ghosts dream of enduring hunger and starvation; animals dream of toiling and bearing hardship; śrāvakas dream of nirvāṇa with remainder; pratyekabuddhas dream of seeking their own liberation alone; and bodhisattvas dream of seeking the Buddha Way above, liberating sentient beings below, and ultimately attaining Buddhahood.

What of the Buddha? The great dream has already been awakened from; ultimately, there is no dream. Therefore, to attain the Buddha's realm, one must first relinquish “attainment.” “Because there is nothing to attain,” one can open the Buddha's knowledge and insight, become free from inverted views and deluded imaginings, and become greatly awakened.

Those of us who study Buddhism and cultivate practice, if we wish to have no confused dreams at night, must see through all worldly things as being like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows: all are false appearances and cannot be obtained. The Diamond Sūtra says: “All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and also like lightning. One should contemplate them thus.”

Therefore, we should not greedily cherish or pursue them. Food, clothing, daily living, and the like should simply be enjoyed in accordance with conditions, without the slightest greed, attachment, or lingering affection. Only then can the mind be open, at ease, and free. If during the day there are no wild and confused thoughts, and the mind is empty and free of views, calm and pure, then at night there will naturally be no confused dreams. When cultivation reaches such a state, it is like having a thousand hands and a thousand eyes, perfectly illuminating the ten directions without any deficiency. How could there be room for inverted dreams and delusions? Once all inverted dreams and delusions have been left behind, one reaches the realm of ultimate nirvāṇa: “When arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent extinction is bliss.”

Ultimate nirvāṇa. Only when the three obscurations have been completely removed is there ultimate nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa is also called perfect quiescence. The Chinese characters nie ( ) and pan ( ) are explained here as “non-arising” and “non-ceasing,” respectively; possessing all virtues is called perfect, while eliminating all obscurations is called quiescence. Nirvāṇa and perfect quiescence both convey the meanings of non-arising, non-ceasing, completeness, and purity. Ultimate nirvāṇa is the most complete and unsurpassed nirvāṇa.

There are four kinds of nirvāṇa: nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature, nirvāṇa with remainder, nirvāṇa without remainder, and nirvāṇa without abiding. These four kinds of nirvāṇa have already been introduced in the introduction. To realize nirvāṇa is to realize the suchness (tathatā) and Buddha-nature that one inherently possesses and does not obtain from outside; therefore, it is called “non-attainment.”

Nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature is the cause by which sentient beings become Buddhas; that is, all sentient beings can become Buddhas. Moreover, because the Buddha-nature possessed by sentient beings is neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, all sentient beings are equal and without distinction. Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings—the three are without difference. Because it is inherently possessed by one's own mind, it is called nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature.

Nirvāṇa with remainder is realized by those of the two vehicles. Although they have realized the fruit of arhatship and have severed the afflictions of segmented birth and death, they still possess a result-body of beginningless deluded karma; that is, they still possess an illusory body, undergo the karmic results of illusory existence, and remain bound by dharmas. Therefore, it is not ultimate.

In nirvāṇa without remainder, even the illusory body is no more. This is what is meant by: “My birth has ended, the holy life has been established, what had to be done has been done, and I know that there will be no further becoming.” Nirvāṇa without abiding is the ultimate nirvāṇa. It does not abide in birth and death, nor does it abide in nirvāṇa; it is ultimate through abiding nowhere at all.

Nirvāṇa is spoken of in relation to birth and death. Since birth and death are originally nonexistent, where could there be a nirvāṇa to realize? Birth and death and nirvāṇa are merely provisional names. Because those of the two vehicles have the obstruction of knowledge, they do not understand the principle that birth and death and nirvāṇa are without difference; thus, they loathe birth and death and delight in nirvāṇa.

The Buddha has perfected the fruition and virtues of a bodhisattva. The three obscurations are all purified, and the three virtues are fully revealed: the virtue of the dharmakāya (Dharma body)—the all-capable substance of Buddha-nature; the

virtue of prajñā—the accomplishment of all undertakings; and the virtue of liberation—endless enjoyment. There is no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization: this is ultimate nirvāṇa. Because of great compassion, the Buddha manifests in the world and, in accordance with conditions, liberates innumerable sentient beings, yet in truth there is not a single sentient being to be liberated. Therefore, nirvāṇa without abiding is the ultimate great nirvāṇa: eternally abiding, quiescent yet ever-illuminating, illuminating yet ever-quiescent, perfectly luminous in quiescent illumination.

All Buddhas of the three times attain unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening by relying on prajñāpāramitā. Śākyamuni Buddha, Bhaiṣajyaguru Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, and the like are Buddhas at the stage of fruition, while all of us sentient beings are Buddhas at the causal stage. Whether one has already become a Buddha or has not yet become a Buddha, all are of one substance, equal and without distinction. Therefore, we must neither abandon ourselves nor look down on others.

All may take prajñā as the sole, nondual dharma gate of practice. It is not only bodhisattvas who, by relying on prajñāpāramitā, realize nirvāṇa; all Buddhas of the ten directions and three times likewise cannot depart from prajñā in accomplishing the wisdom and virtue of fruition. Here it is again repeatedly told to everyone that the Buddhas too rely on prajñāpāramitā to become Buddhas; apart from this, there is no other path to Buddhahood. All great wisdom arises from intrinsic nature.

Here, “attainment” is the attainment of non-attainment. To attain the attainment of non-attainment, one must first have no sense of anything to attain in the mind; only then can one attain one's Original Face, namely Buddha-nature. At that point, there is no person, no self, no sentient being, and no life span; even nonexistence is absent. There is clear, ever-present knowing, without falling into annihilation. Though serenely unmoving, it responds to stimuli and functions without obstruction, with wondrous activity as countless as the sands of the Ganges. This is the Buddha's fruition and virtue.

Anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi is a Sanskrit term. Anuttara means “unsurpassed”; samyak means “rightly equal”; and saṃbodhi means “right awakening.” Together, they mean “unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening.”

“Unsurpassed” is in contrast to the still-surpassable state of bodhisattvas; “perfectly equal” is in contrast to the inequality of the two vehicles, namely partial realization of truth; and “right awakening” is in contrast to the erroneous knowledge and awareness of non-Buddhist paths, as well as the benighted unawareness of ordinary beings. Unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening is the ocean of the Tathāgata's wondrous awakening-fruition.

Consider this: even the Buddha cannot realize the Way apart from the dharma gate of prajñā. How could sentient beings be exceptions? How could they seek another path? If they seek another path, would that not be inversion? Therefore, all who do not seek within themselves but seek elsewhere have an improper causal ground and truly mislead themselves. The above stage of fruition and virtue is one in which all hindrances have been entirely eliminated. Only this is ultimate nirvāṇa; there is no other dharma to attain.

The foregoing is the first half of the Heart Sūtra, which exclusively explains that this dharma is not substantial. The second half, conversely, explains that this dharma is not unreal. The Diamond Sūtra says, “This dharma is neither substantial nor unreal.” This means that one should neither cling to substantiality nor incline toward emptiness, but practice the Middle Way without falling into either extreme. This is true prajñā wisdom. Going a step further, if mind itself is not existent, on what could dharma depend? If dharma is not existent, then there can be no further talk of its being neither substantial nor unreal. Thus it is said: “Nirvāṇa and birth and death are alike flowers in empty space!”

VI. Section on Realization and Knowledge

Therefore know that prajñāpāramitā is the great spiritual mantra, the great illuminating mantra, the unsurpassed mantra, the unequaled mantra. It can remove all suffering; it is true and not false.

Here it is necessary to clarify the wondrous functioning of the word “know.” The “know” in “therefore know that prajñāpāramitā” is clear, lucid awareness, expressing the realm experienced after awakening. Here it may seem to turn toward existence, but one should understand that this “knowing,” too, is a dharma; it too arises from conditions and is empty in nature, and is merely a temporary function of dharma. In truth, it knows yet is without knowing; it exists yet is not existent; it arises yet does not arise.

Therefore, without understanding the principle of the unborn, one cannot realize the true meaning of the Buddha-nature of true emptiness. Earlier, the word “emptiness” was spoken of as the essence of prajñā; now, the word “knowing” is spoken of as the function of prajñā. Because the wondrous functioning of prajñā’s wisdom and virtue cannot be described or expressed in words, it is said that “the path of words is cut off, and the sphere of mental activity is extinguished.” There can only be intuitive apprehension and a mutual accord of minds. This is precisely when one knows for oneself whether something is cold or warm.

“It is the great spiritual mantra, the great illuminating mantra, the unsurpassed mantra, the unequaled mantra.” This praises the extraordinary wisdom, virtue, and

wondrous functioning of prajñā. Since these can no longer be expressed in any worldly language, the four mantras, endowed with immeasurable spiritual power, are used to convey the meaning of the Dharma. This is why prajñāpāramitā is now said to be a mantra. A mantra is a secret meaning.

That which is decisively so, true and not false, is called a mantra; it is as solemn as a military command. It is called great because it encompasses everything; spiritual because nothing is beyond its reach; illuminating because nothing lies beyond its illumination; unsurpassed because nothing can be added to it; and unequaled because nothing can be compared or equated with it.

Emptiness is not biased toward emptiness, and existence is not truly existent. Within the quiescent and non-abiding essence, it can give rise to manifestations of wondrous functioning as numerous as the sands of the Ganges; hence it is said that it "can remove all suffering." This suffering consists of the causal suffering of the afflictions of the five abiding grounds and the resultant suffering of the two forms of birth and death. "True and not false" means that prajñā has such extraordinary wondrous functioning: it is real and not deceptive speech.

Through prajñāpāramitā, one attains anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi; this is real and without falsity. Consider this: who in the world is free from hindrances and suffering? And who, then, can do without the Buddhadharma? How could the Buddhadharma ever be superstition?

The essence and function spoken of in the foregoing scripture can be known only through direct realization; they cannot be known merely by understanding the words. Therefore, practitioners must apply themselves on the basis of their own intrinsic nature, genuinely investigate and thoroughly inquire. The scripture is merely a finger pointing to the moon, borrowed only for verification.

In sum, penetration of mind is the greatest spiritual power. If the mind is not empty, it cannot penetrate; without penetration, it cannot illuminate; without illumination, all wisdom is covered by ignorance and cannot manifest. The Heart Sūtra explains precisely this: when the mind reaches the realm of true emptiness, unsurpassed and extraordinary power naturally arises. When the mind is truly empty, it is not merely that its existing suffering and distress are removed; rather, all suffering and distress have nothing on which to depend ("crossed beyond all suffering and adversity"). Fundamentally, there is no suffering or distress at all—so what need is there to remove it?

From the beginning of the main text of the Heart Sūtra to this sentence, all has been explained explicitly. What follows is the esoteric explanation of the Heart Sūtra.

VII. Esoteric Section

Therefore, the mantra of prajñāpāramitā is spoken. It is spoken thus: Gate, gate, pāragate, pārasaṃgate, bodhisvāhā.

This passage is an esoteric exposition, that is, the secret aspect. It is a practice in which the mind makes no distinctions, a practice beyond conception. Buddhist scriptures have an explicit aspect and a secret aspect. The scriptural text is a mantra set forth explicitly, while the mantra is scriptural text set forth esoterically. The meaning of the scriptural text is the explicit aspect; the mantra in the scripture is the secret aspect. The explicit aspect can be spoken of and explained, making its meaning and content clear.

The secret aspect, however, cannot be explained, for once it falls into verbal formulation, discrimination and conceptual thought arise. This instead adds knowledge and views, detracts from the original intent of the Buddha's teaching, and throws practitioners' minds into confusion. Therefore, mantras are generally not explained. Yet this sūtra is for benefiting oneself and others; ultimately, it cannot be separated from sentient beings or from the fundamental vow of great compassion. Therefore, let us briefly explain a few points about the mantra:

Gate, gate … cross over, cross over.

Pāragate … cross over toward the other shore.

Pārasaṃgate … everyone together crosses over toward the other shore.

Bodhisvāhā … swiftly realize bodhi.

The so-called secret aspect consists of the secret language of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the mind Dharma of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Only when one's three karmic activities are pure can one accord with it. One can know it only for oneself, yet cannot put it into words. At this point, the explanation of the scriptural text is complete.

Let us now offer a brief summary to conclude this explanation of the Heart Sūtra.

Summary

The Buddha taught the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the scriptures; in sum, they all teach the mind. This Heart Sūtra is the essence of the various teachings on the mind. Generally speaking, people have seven minds, yet they are deluded and unaware of them. The first six are the minds of ordinary beings—the minds that revolve through the six realms of rebirth, ceaselessly flowing on each day.

Now there is the mind of the heavenly realm, now the mind of the human realm, now the mind of the asura realm, and again the minds of the three lower realms. Without self-mastery, they cling to objects and wander without cease. Those of lesser capacity do not know what the mind is. Those of middling capacity know only the distinction between good and evil minds. Those of superior capacity know of the seventh mind—the transcendent mind.

This seventh mind is the mind of true emptiness and wondrous presence, the unsurpassed mind, the non-abiding mind, the pure and untrammeled mind. Unless it is realized through cultivation, one will not know that it exists. Even those of the two vehicles and bodhisattvas of the provisional vehicles do not know it. The minds of sentient beings engage with all manner of objects, yet they will not turn toward prajñā. Therefore, they do not know this seventh mind. If this mind can be clearly understood, one becomes a Buddha on the spot.

On this shore, sentient beings have the first six minds. Crossing to the other shore means realizing the seventh mind: the mind of wondrous presence and true emptiness. It is the empty and luminous mind, wholly free of hindrance and inexhaustible in wondrous functioning. Yet if people do not begin with the first six minds, they cannot realize this seventh mind. Therefore, one must penetrate afflictions and break open hindrances before one can become a Buddha. It is like someone who has fallen into a mud pit and must climb out of that very mud pit in order to be saved. Thus, worldly dharmas are precisely the provisions for supramundane dharmas.

To eliminate afflictions, one must know what afflictions ultimately are. Afflictions are precisely one's own first six minds. If you can quiet all six of them, so that the mind is empty and non-abiding, then afflictions will eliminate themselves even without being eliminated. The seventh mind—the mind of no-mind—will be seen of itself without seeking to see it. This is called seeing one's true nature.

Yet those who have cultivated the Way throughout the ages have often regarded worldly dharmas too lightly, thinking them unworthy of attention and supposing that supramundane dharmas mean keeping away from worldly dharmas. Thus, in their daily activities, they do not train the mind amid human affairs and pay no heed at all to the principles of proper human conduct. They do not realize that filial piety and fraternal respect are the foundation of being human, while loyalty and trustworthiness are its application; all are the basis for fulfilling the human way.

If one cannot even accomplish these, one's foundation as a human being is not secure. If one's human character is still inadequate, how can one become a Buddha, whose perfection is greater still? Therefore, fulfilling the human way is precisely the provision for becoming a Buddha. To become a Buddha, one must first fulfill the

human way. If one's character is not yet adequate, becoming a Buddha is fundamentally impossible.

As the Sixth Patriarch said: "Buddhadharma is in the world and awakening is not apart from the world. To seek bodhi apart from the world is just like seeking horns on a rabbit." Therefore, to accomplish Mahāyāna Buddhadharma, one must first place great importance on the foundations of being human. Only when the foundation is secure can one proceed directly all the way through, without losing the Way or straying onto a mistaken path midway. Consider this: when the dharmas of the five aggregates have all been exhausted and are empty, and the root has been severed, what could attachment to fame and profit still adhere to?

Therefore, I urge people of the world: when reading the sūtras, practice according to the principles they teach; it is not enough merely to recite them a few times and consider the matter finished. Only through right faith and right cultivation can one attain the right fruition. The first step is to seek a dharma gate for realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Once you have obtained the teaching, go deeply into that single gate. Never be fickle, pursuing this today and that tomorrow, and cultivating blindly.

Once you see the true reality of prajñā, wisdom naturally opens. The second step is true cultivation after awakening: diligently eliminate habitual tendencies. Once prajñā has been opened, one has a way to temper oneself amid human affairs, sweeping away the defilements of habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives. At this point, prajñā-wisdom advances without regression, until Buddhahood is attained. Yet in this life, one may only become a Buddha through seeing one's true nature; to eliminate all habitual tendencies and consummate the Buddhahood of fruition may require many lifetimes. Without diligent effort, it will be delayed still further. Nevertheless, after seeing one's true nature, one will never regress throughout life after life.

The Heart Sūtra is literary prajñā; it points out the methods by which we practice. Once we understand the practice, we must diligently engage in contemplative practice throughout the twenty-four hours of the day. This is contemplative prajñā. Once prajñā has been awakened, one sees one's intrinsic nature and wisdom opens; this is prajñā of ultimate reality. This is the sole path of return to the source, by which ignorance is forever severed and one is liberated from birth and death.

Although this sūtra contains only 260 characters, it is sufficient to sweep away emptiness and clear away existence, and to directly realize bodhi. Bodhisattvas and all Buddhas of the three times cannot attain accomplishment apart from it. Although this sūtra has been translated seven times, the principles of its text are truly the nondual dharma gate: it gathers the myriad dharmas into the One, then breaks the

One in order to return to the source. Truly, there is no mind to practice and no sūtra to expound.

Śākyamuni Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years, yet did not utter a single word. This precisely points out the principle that all things are empty by nature. Therefore, practitioners should understand it through the Way of their own intrinsic nature and should not cling to verbal formulations. Only when the mind has been emptied can one accord with the Heart Sūtra. This is called “Mind-Seal.”

The exposition of the Heart Sūtra is complete.