Selected Letters Between Master Qi and Master Yuanyin

Contents

Preface

The First Letter

The Second Letter

The Third Letter

The Fourth Letter

The Fifth Letter

The Sixth Letter

The Seventh Letter

The Eighth Letter

The Ninth Letter

The Tenth Letter

The Eleventh Letter

The Twelfth Letter

The Thirteenth Letter

The Fourteenth Letter

The Fifteenth Letter

The Sixteenth Letter

Letter Seventeen

The Eighteenth Letter

The Nineteenth Letter

The Twentieth Letter

Letter Twenty-One

The Twenty-Second Letter

The Twenty-Third Letter

The Twenty-Fourth Letter

The Twenty-Fifth Letter

The Twenty-Sixth Letter

The Twenty-Seventh Letter

The Twenty-Eighth Letter

The Twenty-Ninth Letter

The Thirtieth Letter

The Thirty-First Letter

The Thirty-Second Letter

The Thirty-Third Letter

Letter Thirty-Four (Appendix)

The Thirty-Sixth Letter

Letter Thirty-Seven

Letter Thirty-Eight (Supplement)

The Thirty-Ninth Letter

The Fortieth Letter

The Forty-First Letter

Letter Forty-Two (Appendix)

The Forty-Third Letter (Supplement)

The Forty-Fourth Letter

The Forty-Fifth Letter

Letter Forty-Six (Appendix)

Letter Forty-Seven

The Forty-Eighth Letter

The Forty-Ninth Letter

Letter Fifty

Letter Fifty-One

The Fifty-Second Letter

Letter Fifty-Three (Appendix)

The Fifty-Fourth Letter

The Fifty-Fifth Letter

Letter Fifty-Six

Letter Fifty-Seven

Letter Fifty-Eight

The Fifty-Ninth Letter

The Sixtieth Letter

The Sixty-First Letter

The Sixty-Second Letter

The Sixty-Third Letter

Letter Sixty-Four

The Sixty-Fifth Letter (Appendix)

Letter Sixty-Six

The Sixty-Seventh Letter

The Sixty-Eighth Letter

Letter Sixty-Nine (Appendix)

The Seventieth Letter

The Seventy-First Letter

The Seventy-Second Letter (Appendix)

The Seventy-Third Letter

Letter Seventy-Four (Appendix)

The Seventy-Fifth Letter

Letter Seventy-Six (Appendix)

Letter Seventy-Seven

The Seventy-Eighth Letter

The Seventy-Ninth Letter

The Eightieth Letter

The Eighty-First Letter

The Eighty-Second Letter

The Eighty-Third Letter

The Eighty-Fourth Letter

The Eighty-Fifth Letter

The Eighty-Sixth Letter

The Eighty-Seventh Letter

The Eighty-Eighth Letter

The Eighty-Ninth Letter

The Ninetieth Letter

The Ninety-First Letter

The Ninety-Second Letter

Letter Ninety-Three (Appendix)

The Ninety-Fourth Letter

The Ninety-Fifth Letter

Letter Ninety-Six

Letter Ninety-Seven (Supplement)

Letter Ninety-Eight

The Ninety-Ninth Letter

The One Hundredth Letter

Letter 101

The 102nd Letter

The One Hundred and Third Letter

The 104th Letter

The One Hundred and Fifth Letter

The One Hundred and Sixth Letter

Appendix I: Master Yuanyin's Teachings on the Six Essential Points of Practice

Appendix Two: The Second Patriarch's Own Method of Practice

Appendix Three: The Second Patriarch's Teaching, Methods for Eliminating Habitual Tendencies

Appendix Four: The Second Patriarch's Teaching, "Verification of Practice on the Meditation Cushion"

Appendix V: The Second Patriarch's Instruction on Verification of Practice Off the Meditation Cushion

Appendix Six: A Letter Between Dharma Brother Jinming and Master Yuanyin

Preface

Preface

The letters collected in this book are selections from the correspondence between Qi Zhijun, a Heart Esotericism empowerment master, and Master Yuanyin, the third patriarch of Heart Esotericism. The letters trace the main stages of Teacher Qi Zhijun's journey from seeking the Heart Esotericism Dharma to realizing the Way. Master Yuanyin's guidance is evident at every stage. The proposed title, The Mind-

Seal Journey, thus subtly accords with the supreme esoteric meaning of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma: mind sealing mind.

This book is not for general circulation. We have preserved it because Teacher Qi's resolve in realizing the Way can inspire us to practice with courage and diligence, and because Master Yuanyin's teachings can guide us in practicing the Dharma until we reach the other shore. Reading it often will increase blessings and wisdom and fill one with Dharma joy.

Namo Gurubhya, Namo Buddhaya, Namo Dharmaya, Namo Sanghaya!

I pay homage to Namo Root Guru Acharya Yuanyin; I pay homage to all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, vajras, and Dharma protectors of the ten directions and three times; I pay homage to Teacher Qi and all Heart Esotericism Dharma-transmitting

teachers!

May I swiftly open wisdom and attain Buddhahood in this life, liberate sentient beings, and seek no other fruition!

Respectfully submitted by Xinru Xinding

Buddhist Era 2551, April 30

The First Letter

First Letter

Venerable Master Li,

These are several proposed formulations drafted by your disciple. I respectfully ask that you mark those that your disciple should accept and mail them back. Your disciple would be deeply grateful.

1. You have no affinity with this Dharma; there is no need to write again.

2. You have no affinity with this Dharma; you should be given a different practice.

3. You have no affinity with this Dharma; you should seek the Dharma from XXX. The address is XXXX.

4. The conditions are not yet ripe. After XXX days, come again to seek the Dharma.

5. You must study a certain practice before you can receive this Esoteric Dharma.

6. You must study for XX days before coming to receive the Dharma; after that time, no Dharma will be transmitted.

7. You may come to receive the Dharma at any time.

Qi Zhijun

XX XX, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] Was this the letter in which the teacher first sought the Dharma from Master Yuanyin? Was he not excessively deferential?!

[LVM] Yes, it was the first letter. Some of the letters were lost, but this first one was preserved.

The Second Letter

Second Letter

Benevolent Zhijun,

Your resolve to study the Buddhadharma is firm, and your earnestness in seeking the Dharma is deeply moving. In cultivating the Way, what is most important is to penetrate deeply into a single method, embrace it wholeheartedly, and persevere without letup; only then can one attain correspondence. You must never be swayed by every new thing you encounter, practicing one thing in the morning and changing it in the evening. Still less should you bow to every teacher you meet and practice every Dharma you encounter, greedily seeking many things while only tasting each superficially. Otherwise, even if Maitreya descends into the world, I fear there will be no day of accomplishment for you.

Given your capacity, it seems that you should practice the “channels, winds, and drops.” Once you have gained some realization, you may then advance to the practice of Dzogchen (Great Perfection); in that way, accomplishment will certainly come swiftly.

Since you have already taken Teacher Wang as your teacher, you should seek his instruction nearby. Why come all the way to Shanghai to seek another new teacher and start afresh? Although the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is excellent, it accords with the Chan school. Those who lack the capacity for Chan cultivation from past lives cannot resonate with it.

Because this Dharma is formless, unlike other esoteric practices that have forms on which one may rely, and because its meditation sessions are long and its mudrās difficult to form, most practitioners fear the difficulty and withdraw halfway through,

enduring hardship in vain and accomplishing nothing. This is truly lamentable. If you are single-minded in seeking the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, and do not fear hardship or difficulty, you may ask Teacher Xu Hengzhi to transmit it to you.

Teacher Xu lives at “No. ___, Lane ___, ___ Road, Shanghai.” Teacher Xu and I share the same Dharma lineage. His practice and power in the Way are both deeper and more advanced than mine. If you receive from him direct instruction in the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, he certainly will not mislead you.

Because I am old and my strength has declined, I long ago ceased transmitting the Dharma and accepting disciples. I deeply hope you will forgive what may disappoint you. The 50 yuan you remitted is being held by me for the time being. If you wish to study the Dharma with Teacher Xu and he is also willing to transmit it to you, I shall transfer this sum as an offering to him. Otherwise, as you stated in your letter, I shall use it to perform wholesome deeds for the Buddhist community and thereby create blessings for you. Please do not write again. I wish you fullness of Dharma joy.

Li Zhongding, with palms joined

March 6, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] The master’s writing is humble, appropriate, and sincere—a style that is truly rare. Moreover, according to the teachings of The Buddha-Heart Sutra, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma should universally embrace practitioners of all three capacities. Why, then, did Master Yuanyin say, “Those who lack the capacity for Chan cultivation from past lives cannot resonate with it”?

[LVM] Ah! A master gives teachings in accordance with the illness and prescribes medicine accordingly. In my letter, I had stated that I had already received the “four preliminary practices” from Master Wang Zhi. That is why the master said, “In cultivating the Way, what is most important is to penetrate deeply into a single method, embrace it wholeheartedly, and persevere without letup; only then can one attain correspondence.” Did you not just say that I was “perhaps overly deferential”? There was not the slightest Chan flavor in my letter, so the elder said, “Those who lack the capacity for Chan cultivation from past lives cannot resonate with it.”

The Third Letter

Third Letter

Benevolent Zhijun:

Master Wang Zhi is a great virtuous teacher of our time. Since you have received his guidance, your karmic affinity with the Buddha is by no means shallow, and your

blessings and virtues are boundless. If you rely on him to receive the opening-of-the-crown empowerment and Dharma transmission, you will surely attain complete accomplishment in the future. It therefore seems unnecessary for you to come again to Shanghai to seek another Dharma from afar. In this Dharma-ending age, sentient beings have inferior capacities. Cultivating the Pure Land practice and seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land are most suited to their capacities.

If you can let go of everything and diligently recite Amitābha Buddha's name, you may set all other dharma gates aside. Once reborn in the Western Pure Land and having personally seen Amitābha Buddha, you need not worry about failing to attain Buddhahood. Although the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is excellent, it does not lie outside the scope of the Pure Land; it likewise amounts to rebirth in the pure lands of the Buddhas.

If your heart remains attached to this Dharma and you cannot relinquish it, you may follow the introduction in my previous letter and seek instruction from Teacher Xu Hengzhi. If he is willing to transmit it, your wish will be fulfilled, and he will not disappoint you. For sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age, apart from rebirth in the Pure Land, no other profound and marvelous dharma gate can enable them to realize the fruition of sagehood and be liberated from birth and death within a single lifetime.

I hope you will not aim too high or chase after distant things; these are not empty words! Because I am advanced in years and bedridden with illness, I am unable to teach the Dharma or transmit it to you, and I fear that I might mislead you. After transmitting the Dharma, one must remain responsible for you to the very end; it is not like an ordinary refuge-taking and empowerment, after which the matter is finished. Therefore, I can no longer accept disciples. Though I cannot accept you, I hope you will deeply understand my humble feelings, forgive me, and not blame me. The 50 yuan you remitted—your second letter said it was an offering to me—I dare not accept. I am hereby returning the full amount through the post office; please check that you have received it. May you be filled with Dharma joy.

Li Zhongding

[Day and month unknown], 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] From the master's reply, it seems that several of the teacher's letters sent in between were lost.

[LVM] The preceding letter and this letter were both lost. In the preceding letter, I reported on having received the "four preliminary practices" from Master Wang Zhi; in this letter, I reported on my earlier practice of Buddha-recitation and Pure Land cultivation.

[Yongshou Tongzi] Why does he say that, in the Dharma-ending age, no one can realize fruition? And moreover, “none can”—that none can realize the fruition of sagehood? Then isn’t everything hopeless?

[LVM] Ha ha! Those words were all views I had expressed in my letter. In response to my viewpoint, the elder did not deprive me of this expedient means, so that I could settle my mind and cultivate the Pure Land practice.

The Fourth Letter

Fourth Letter

Dear Zhijun,

You have been so insistent, and have sent another 50 yuan, which makes me feel deeply uneasy. You may be like the Bodhisattva Akṣayamati, but I would all the more not dare compare myself to the great Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. I had intended to return this money to you, but feared that doing so might hurt your self-respect. Therefore, as you said in your letter, I can only use it on your behalf for a good deed within the Buddhist community, donating it to the Pujing Lotus Society at such-and-such a mountain for repairs to its main hall.

When someone from there comes, and I have obtained a receipt, I will send it to you. I am now bedridden with illness and truly cannot confer empowerment or transmit the Dharma to you. If the causes and conditions permit, once I have recovered and regained my strength, I will write separately to arrange a date and invite you to Shanghai to receive the Dharma, thus fulfilling your wish. No further reply. I wish you diligent practice without hindrance.

P.S. The stamps are enclosed for return.

Li Zhongding

March 30, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] Is the teacher an emanation of the Bodhisattva Akṣayamati, and is the master an emanation of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara?

[LVM] In my letter, I cited the example of the Buddha asking Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to accept an offering from Bodhisattva Akṣayamati, and used this example to request that the master accept the offering. That is why the master mentioned the two great bodhisattvas.

[Yongshou Tongzi] When the teacher wrote to the master, stamps were enclosed for the reply as well? Haha, they were returned.

[LVM] Yes. Later, when I wrote again, I enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the reply, so that the master could send it back directly. ^o^

The Fifth Letter

Fifth Letter

Dear Zhijun,

I have received the 50 yuan you sent and have donated it on your behalf toward the construction of the main hall of the Pujing Lotus Society on such-and-such Mountain. I enclose the relevant receipt. I am also returning the twenty-five 8-fen stamps you sent with your previous letter; please check the enclosure. In the future, please do not send me anything whatsoever. I do not accept anything.

My illness is now showing signs of improvement, but I still need quiet rest and recuperation. Once summer and autumn have passed and winter arrives, I hope to recover fully. If you are determined to practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, you may come to Shanghai in winter. If you have already begun studying and practicing the phowa practice under Master Wang Zhi, then concentrate exclusively on that practice and do not come to Shanghai to study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. What is important in cultivation is to penetrate deeply into one method; one must not mix practices. Once practices are mixed, one will ultimately accomplish nothing. I shall not say more. May you be filled with Dharma joy.

Enclosure: one receipt for a donation of 50 yuan.

Zhong Ding

May 3, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] The disciple's sincerity in studying the Dharma brought about an “improvement” in the master's health! He still had to wait until winter for empowerment, to see whether the master's resolve was as firm as a rock. It seems that receiving the Dharma was far too easy for people like us.

[LVM] In the past, I obtained the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate quite easily. I recited continuously and even reached the point where I did not forget the Buddha's name in my dreams, yet I still doubted whether I could be reborn in the Western Pure Land at the end of life. I dare not deceive myself. Only later did I realize that this was due to my own faculties: the Dharma gate was not suited to me.

Obtaining the “four preliminary practices” from Master Wang Zhi was not especially difficult either. When I tried them, I experienced quite a few responses, but this too

was due to my own faculties, and in the end I could not persevere. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma truly was not easy to obtain, but no matter how difficult or arduous it may be, I am willing to persist in practicing it. Perhaps this too is due to my own faculties.

The Sixth Letter

The Sixth Letter

Dear Zhijun,

Your vow to attain Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings in accordance with the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva fully demonstrates the wholesome roots you have planted in past lives and the depth of your aspiration. How could I be more gratified? The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the unsurpassed heart esotericism. Though it appears to be an esoteric practice, it is in fact a Chan practice: because it is formless, it directly realizes the mind-ground and is no different from Chan. Although the initial approach differs slightly, through the Buddha's blessings it is easier to enter realization than Chan investigation.

Yet one must still cultivate diligently; it cannot be attained easily. If, after receiving the transmission, you practice diligently and assiduously at all times and in all places, both on and off the meditation cushion, you will surely attain siddhi. After realization, you may be reborn in any of the Pure Lands of the ten directions according to your vows. In this respect, it also accords with the Pure Land school. When winter arrives, I shall write to invite you to Shanghai to receive the transmission. Wishing you health and happiness.

Zhongding

August 27, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] I very much want to read the teacher's outgoing letter.

[LVM] That has also been lost.

[Yongshou Tongzi] May I ask, Teacher, what is siddhi?

[LVM] Oh! In my outgoing letter, I had used terminology from Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. Before going to Guru Wang Zhi to request the Four Preliminary Practices, I had read some materials on Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism and unconsciously began using such terms. Whatever terms I used, the guru would use the same kind of terms so that I could understand. In fact, "attaining siddhi" simply means "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature." Those times cannot be compared with the

present. At that time, there were no materials on the Heart-of-Heart Dharma in circulation; even A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature was not in circulation.

The Seventh Letter

Letter Seven

Benevolent Zhijun,

What you say in your letter is quite correct. To speak only of mind or only of matter is to see only half the truth. Mind is originally matter, and matter is originally mind. Mind and matter are neither one nor two. Because they are not two, it is said, "Mind itself is Buddha"; because they are not one, it is said, "Neither matter nor mind." For if there were two, they would not be [nondual]. Moreover, mind is the greatest energy. Nothing whatsoever can arise apart from energy, and all things return and transform into energy.

Therefore, the sūtra says: "Nothing does not flow forth from this Dharma Realm; nothing does not return to this Dharma Realm." Once you understand this, continuously and closely safeguard this wondrous, luminous true mind. Do not let it be obscured by worldly toil or tainted by objects and circumstances. This is true practice. All Dharma gates—Buddha-recitation, mantra recitation, Chan investigation, and so forth—are simply means for attaining this "safeguarding of the true mind": not allowing deluded thoughts to wander.

Therefore, among the various Dharma gates, the Chan school is the swiftest and most direct, because it directly points to the mind and enables one to see one's nature and attain Buddhahood. Other Dharma gates require one to cross several more thresholds and are comparatively circuitous and slow.

If you can truly believe this, then the one who has come here to ask about the Dharma, who arouses great vows, and who intends to become a Buddha and liberate sentient beings—this is your true mind. That which shines from your face all day long, which raises your hands and moves your feet, is your Original Face.

Then you will have attained the other Dharma gates without practicing them. Why then plan to come to Shanghai to study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma? If you cannot yet believe it, the weather is now gradually turning cool, so you may first practice the "Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra Practice of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara" for a month and a half. Sit for one hour each morning and evening; two hours would be even better if you can manage it.

The mantra is: “Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ!” The mudrā is the Great Lotus Mudrā: join the palms, spread apart the index, middle, and ring fingers, while keeping the thumbs and little fingers touching, with the wrists also touching; this completes the mudrā. Hold the mudrā before the chest and cover it with a yellow cloth. Upon completing the practice, raise it above the crown of the head and release the mudrā. (This mudrā has three points of contact: the thumbs, the little fingers, and the two wrists. The other three fingers—the index, middle, and ring fingers—are spread apart in the form of a great lotus in bloom.) After practicing for a month and a half, come to Shanghai to study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. I shall not say more.

May you attain accomplishment!

Li Zhongding

A certain day in a certain month, 1989

Yongshou Tongzi I have often heard the teacher describe buddha-nature as “energy.” Here, is this merely a metaphor? Or does “energy” as understood in modern science mean what Buddhism calls “buddha-nature”?

LVM It is an analogy; it is not that they are identical.

Yongshou Tongzi The final paragraph may truly be called “direct pointing to the mind and seeing one’s nature to attain Buddhahood.”

LVM Yes! Look at this sentence: “Why then plan to come to Shanghai to study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?” Yet my deluded thoughts and attachments, accumulated since beginningless kalpas, are deeply ingrained, like the saying, “Three feet of ice does not melt in a single day.” Although I know that water is ice and ice is water, I still cannot flow. So I continue respectfully to seek the Dharma and honestly practice it.

The Eighth Letter

Eighth Letter

Lay Buddhist Zhijun,

That you can occasionally experience suchness and Buddha-nature, suddenly feeling light in body and at one with mind, with incomparable joy—although the experience does not last long and gradually fades away without your noticing—is no small matter. Without wholesome roots deeply planted in past lives, how could one attain this? The ancients' awakening to the Way was likewise like a spark struck from stone or a flash of lightning; they too could not maintain the state of awakening for long.

After awakening to the Way, one must also safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly over a long period before it can become an unbroken whole. Chan Master Zhaozhou said, “Apart from my two daily meals of gruel and rice, for forty years I did not let my mind be mixed with anything else. Only then did it become an unbroken whole.”

Chan Master Longya said: “In cultivating the Way, one must first attain awakening; it is like having once competed in a swift dragon-boat race. Though the old pavilion and idle fields remain, only after winning once may one finally rest.” (That is, although all sentient beings are originally Buddhas, one must eliminate habitual tendencies completely and perfectly realize the ultimate stage before one may lay down the task.)

Moreover, if you truly experience the wondrous nature of suchness, then all deluded thoughts are the true mind, for delusion cannot arise without the true. Waves are originally water; without water, how could waves arise? Those who understand this principle see water upon seeing waves and are not turned by the waves. Likewise, those awakened to the Way see their nature whenever they encounter any circumstance, appearance, or deluded thought, and are not led astray by circumstances, appearances, or deluded thoughts.

According to heart esotericism, the arising of a deluded thought is like drawing on water. A stroke leaves no trace even as it is made. Practitioners should recognize their original nature precisely where deluded thoughts arise. The Sixth Patriarch said, “A person who truly sees their nature, even when brandishing a sword in battle, is still seeing their nature!” This is the meaning. Finally, I will relate another koan to help you awaken clearly and resolve your doubts.

Once, Chan Master Zhenjing and his disciple were reading the Śūraṅgama Sūtra together. They came to where Śākyamuni Buddha said, “If I press my finger, the Ocean-Seal emits light.” The disciple asked the master, “What was Śākyamuni Buddha’s meaning?” The master replied, “Śākyamuni Buddha deserves thirty blows!” The disciple said, “What fault has the Buddha committed?” The master replied, “Why press the finger?!” The meaning is that the “Ocean-Seal”—the wondrous nature of suchness—emits light at all times, whether one presses a finger or not.

The disciple said, “Although that is so, whenever I stir a thought, deluded thoughts come flying in profusion!” The master shouted sternly, “Hey! That too is the Ocean-Seal emitting light!” At the shout, the disciple was greatly awakened and said, “Ah! For decades I have been missing it right here!” Look how direct and swift the ancients’ awakening to the Way was. Could they still be entangled by deluded thoughts or carried away by circumstances and appearances? This is because all circumstances and deluded thoughts are the true mind.

Amid all circumstances, appearances, and deluded thoughts, if one sees only the true mind, then one does not see circumstances, appearances, or deluded thoughts. Not seeing circumstances, appearances, or deluded thoughts does not mean that there are no circumstances, appearances, or deluded thoughts; rather, all of them are transformed into wondrous functioning. Can you realize this wondrously?

No need to reply. I wish you Dharma joy.

P.S. You need not send your next letter by registered mail.

Zhong Ding

September 30, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] In the instant of a lightning flash or spark struck from stone, one who can recognize the original nature is a person of wisdom. In fact, many people have experienced that moment when afflictions vanish, but they do not understand why. Is it because their wisdom is insufficient?

[LVM] Missing it is indeed regrettable, but grasping at it is also blindness! Missing it is like “a kite flying over Silla”; grasping at it is like “mistaking a donkey’s saddle-bridge for one’s father’s chin.”

[Yongshou Tongzi] The master asked, “Can you realize this wondrously?” May I ask how you replied to him at the time?

[LVM] Ha ha! To say that one can is to touch it; to say that one cannot is to turn one’s back on it. Without touching it or turning one’s back on it, how then should one open one’s mouth?

The Ninth Letter

Ninth Letter

Dear Zhijun,

What you said in your letter is quite correct. However, the pleasant sensation of “a light body and a dissolved mind” is only the appearance of partial liberation. It is but a passing traveler, not yet the principal character of complete liberation, in which the true mind is fully revealed. Therefore, it appears and disappears intermittently and cannot yet become continuous and undivided. Since you have such wholesome roots, if you further cultivate diligently and earn hardship, it will not be difficult for you to form an unbroken whole.

There is a great difference between “practice first and awaken afterward” and “awaken first and practice afterward.” For those who practice first and awaken afterward, their practice before awakening is blind practice; for those who awaken first and practice afterward, their practice after awakening is genuine practice.

To practice first and awaken afterward is like being in a dark room: one does not know where the filth lies, nor can one see how disorderly the things in the room are, and so has no way to begin cleaning and putting them in order. This is why it is blind practice. To awaken first and practice afterward is like turning on the electric light in the room: one sees where the disorder and filth are and can easily put things in order and sweep them away.

Moreover, although practice first and awakening afterward may seem to take more time, walking more strengthens one’s legs, and one is less likely to stumble. The awakening of those who awaken first and practice afterward is often superficial and unstable; when circumstances arise, it lacks strength, and they easily fall. Therefore, after awakening one must truly practice, diligently sweeping away old habitual tendencies. Only then can one perfectly realize bodhi and walk alongside the Buddhas of fruition. I have now moved to No. 26, Weinan Road, Yangshupu Road. Please send future letters directly there. November will soon arrive; when it is convenient for you, you may come to Shanghai to receive the Dharma. No reply is necessary.

With wishes for your well-being and diligent progress.

Zhongding

October 29, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] I think that those whose body and mind have completely dissolved into empty luminosity and who realize the mind and see their true nature, and those who directly recognize their original nature at the point where thought ceases, differ only in strength. The Master’s talk of “partial liberation” and “complete liberation” is also an expedient means.

[LVM] Ha ha! How could it be only that? Are not the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of scripture, the eighty-four thousand dharma gates, and cultivation through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas all likewise expedient means?

[Yongshou Tongzi] As the saying goes, misfortune and blessing are not fixed. According to the Master’s words, those who have not awakened need not be anxious either: sharpening the axe does not delay chopping firewood; “walking more strengthens one’s legs.” I have seen many people who, having gained only a slight

experiential understanding of mind-nature, become boundlessly frivolous and restless.

[LVM] Yes! If one can overcome frivolity and restlessness, arouse an enduring resolve, persevere without slackening, and penetrate deeply into a single dharma gate, how could attainment in this very life be difficult?

The Tenth Letter

The Tenth Letter

Worthy Zhijun,

In studying Buddhism, what is most important is for the mind to be focused, sincere, steadfast, and stable. Do not be excessively hasty, nor too slow. Your character is pure and genuine, and you have wholesome roots cultivated in past lives. If you practice single-mindedly, you will naturally attain accomplishment in time. The samaya precepts signify equality, vows, vigilance, not transgressing, and the removal of defilements and obscurations.

Since you have already made great vows and, at the empowerment, the defilements and obscurations were removed on your behalf, you should remain frequently vigilant and contemplative in daily life. If you attain fruition through practice, liberate sentient beings equally, and do not violate these vows, then you will attain the essence of the samaya precepts and truly uphold them. How could this be compared with merely bearing an empty name?! When beginning the practice, do not be overly hasty; arrange your practice schedule according to the time available.

If you have ample free time, you may practice two sessions; otherwise, one session a day is sufficient. If your legs become numb or painful during practice, you may move them slightly, but the mudrā must not be reversed or released. As for mantra recitation, the principle is not to stop. But if you enter samādhi and reach a point at which you can no longer recite, then let it cease naturally.

At the beginning, the signs of entering samādhi may be a state of haziness or dimness, as though falling asleep, yet with awareness; it is unlike unconscious sleep. At this time, do not rouse your spirits or deliberately begin reciting the mantra anew. Simply let yourself relax and follow the downward settling, and you will peacefully enter samādhi, with body and mind dissolving into emptiness. If you become alert and deliberately resume recitation, you will emerge from samādhi again.

But if you fall asleep without awareness, you must rouse yourself and recite the mantra aloud to dispel the demon of sleep. The distinction between these two states is subtle; I hope you will carefully discern it. As for the number of meditation

sessions, it need not be fixed: sometimes one session and sometimes two are both acceptable, but you must ensure that you sit at least one session each day. Do not skip sitting one day and make up for it by sitting twice the next day.

When sitting two sessions in one day (after completing the full course of the six mudrās), use the fourth mudrā in the first session and the second mudrā in the second session. If you add further sessions, add only the fourth mudrā, not the second. If any questions arise during practice, write to inquire at any time. The rest is beyond my ability. Wishing you unceasing progress.

Zhong Ding

November 8, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] This was the master's first reply after the teacher's empowerment, wasn't it? The empowerment should have taken place in early November 1989.

[LVM] Yes. In my letter, I mentioned asking the Elder for the Vajra samaya precepts, so the Elder referred to the samaya precepts in his reply.

[Yongshou Tongzi] The master places greater emphasis on the precepts of the mind.

[LVM] Ah! The Elder meant that one should not seek an empty name, but only actual attainment. He explicitly stated: “If you attain fruition through practice, liberate sentient beings equally, and do not violate these vows, then you will attain the essence of the samaya precepts and truly uphold them.”

The Eleventh Letter

The Eleventh Letter

Venerable Zhijun,

The passage of words that welled up during stillness is plausible yet mistaken. In the future, you must not indulge in idle imaginings, much less enter into any state or experience. Only then can you accord with the wondrous essence and open undefiled wisdom. The Pure Land Dharma gate is a teaching, not a school. Although Esoteric Buddhism may also be regarded as a school, one must consider what kind of esoteric teaching it is. Esoteric teachings are vast and varied and are collectively called Esoteric Buddhism; they are not called a school. Chan alone is called a school.

This is because zong means the center, the destination, and the true purport; it cannot be compared with expedient or sequential methods. As for the four preparatory stages, they are the second of the five stages established by the

Dharma Characteristics School. The first, the stage of provisions, is the stage of the three worthies. The second is this stage of preparation.

What is called “warmth” is the initial stage after passing through the three worthies, before the “sacred fire” has arisen. At the summit stage, one may advance or retreat, like being on a mountaintop from which one may go either up or down. When practice reaches this point, advancing leads to the stage of forbearance, whereas retreating may lead even to falling into the hells. At the stage of forbearance, one’s practice is firm: one advances but does not retreat. The highest worldly stage is the highest and foremost dharma among conditioned worldly dharmas.

These are the four wholesome roots that bridge the stage of the three worthies and the first bhūmi; therefore, they are designated the stage of preparation. Although the dharma of forbearance also has upper, middle, and lower grades, it does not, after all, resemble the stages of warmth and summit, in which one may fall into the three lower realms. The three stages that follow are: first, the stage of seeing the Way (realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature); second, the stage of cultivation (true cultivation after awakening); and third, the ultimate stage (attaining the fruit of Buddhahood).

Thus, upon seeing one’s true nature, one first ascends to the first bhūmi. One must still diligently cultivate, eradicate all habitual tendencies, and only then fully realize the fruit of Buddhahood. I hope you will strive! When meditating, you must especially avoid deliberately waiting to enter samādhi, awaken, experience sacred states, and so forth. Deliberate intention is deluded thought; once deluded thought arises, not only can one not awaken, one cannot even enter samādhi.

While in samādhi, one cannot be conscious of it; the moment one becomes conscious of it, one has again emerged from samādhi. Still less must one become attached to sacred states; attachment to states becomes demonic. Be careful! Be careful! If there is not enough time to sit for two sessions, for the second session you may use the “convenient mudrā”: place the right hand over the left hand, pinch the tip of the right middle finger with the right thumb, and rest them on the thigh. That completes it. Do not reply.

I wish you unremitting diligence.

Zhong Ding

November 29, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] What are the four preparatory stages? What kind of state is the “stage of forbearance”?

[LVM] I mentioned the four preparatory stages in my letter, and the Elder illuminated the matter for me through the teachings of the Dharma Characteristics School, enabling me to understand the breadth and profundity of Chinese Buddhism. The “stage of preparation” discussed here is not the Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist “four preliminary practices,” but the stage of preparation—the second of the five stages established by the Dharma Characteristics School.

These five stages are: the stage of provisions, the stage of preparation, the stage of seeing the Way, the stage of cultivation, and the ultimate stage. The first two are ordinary stages, and the latter three are sacred stages. The stage of preparation is further divided into four stages: warmth, summit, forbearance, and the highest worldly stage. The Elder has already explained the state of the stage of forbearance in the letter.

[Yongshou Tongzi] Seeing the Way, cultivating the Way, and realizing the Way—the sequence is clear; they are all old songs sung anew.

[LVM] Ha ha! One who does not sing off-key is the true adept.

The Twelfth Letter

Letter Twelve

Revered Teacher,

May you have little illness and few vexations, ever bathed in the joy of the Dharma. May you turn the wondrous Dharma wheel and liberate all sentient beings. [Worthy Zhijun: All your questions are answered beneath the relevant questions in your letter for ease of comparison. Also enclosed is a Dharma photograph of my late teacher.]

Record of Practice:

November 24: Fifth session of the second mudrā. I seemed drowsy. [If one is drowsy or hazy yet remains aware, the mudrā does not come apart, and the mantra continues without interruption, this is samādhi, not sleep. One may let oneself sink into it; do not disturb it.]

November 25: Sixth session of the second mudrā. My ring finger hurt again. [Pain is the elimination of karmic obstacles; when the obstacles are removed, wisdom opens.]

November 26: Seventh session of the second mudrā. My ring finger still hurt.

November 27: Eighth session of the second mudrā. The pain in my ring finger was not pronounced.

November 28: First session of the third mudrā. The ring finger, which protrudes between the index and middle fingers, would not bend. Once the mudrā was formed, the ring finger stood higher than the four fingers held level with the head. I recall that when I studied in Shanghai, my ring finger did not protrude above them. I tried to bend it downward, but could not form the mudrā that way. For the time being, I shall practice with it raised and await your instruction by letter. [The ring finger should be slightly bent and must not rise above the four fingers.]

November 29: Second session of the third mudrā. There was no pain in my fingers.

November 30: Third session of the third mudrā. I could not distinguish drowsiness from samādhi; thoughts seemed not to have ceased. [Do not discriminate. So long as the mantra does not stop and the mudrā does not come apart, it is samādhi. Initial samādhi resembles drowsiness, and subtle thoughts have not yet ceased.]

December 1: Fourth session of the third mudrā. During the session, I occasionally heard a “boom,” and the mudrā shook once without coming apart. Startled, I became alert and awake, so I resumed reciting the mantra. This had also occurred in several earlier sessions. [The moment you are startled and become alert, you emerge from samādhi. With time, you will no longer take notice of it and will abide peacefully in the state of samādhi.]

December 2: Fifth session of the third mudrā. I was unaware of the length of time and did not know whether I was drowsy or in samādhi. If it was drowsiness, I still retained awareness and felt as though in a dream or illusion, as though someone were moving about. If it was samādhi, thoughts had not yet ceased: they appeared and disappeared, while the mantra seemed to continue on its own outside my recitation; though my mouth stopped, my mind recited. Today was Sunday, so I was not as busy as usual.

After breakfast, I sat down to rest during some free time and fell into reverie. Before I knew it, noon had arrived; afterward, I did not know what exactly I had been thinking about. [Initial samādhi resembles drowsiness, but over time it becomes clear. In clear and subtle samādhi, there may suddenly be a falling away: inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world—all vanish into nothingness. When thoughts arise without abiding—that is, without lingering—this is no-thought. When one truly reaches non-abiding and subtle deluded thoughts cease, one realizes the true state of no-thought.]

December 4: Seventh session of the third mudrā. In the past, the alarm on my calculator would wake me, but today I did not awaken. By the time I became alert

and got up, it was already after 5:40. If I began the session at 6:00, I would have to continue until 8:00 and would be late for work. Even if I was late, I had to ensure two hours of practice; otherwise, it would be difficult to make up today's session. I ended up sitting until 8:12. Though late for work, I did not miss my practice.

Although I was late for work, it did not seriously affect my duties. In the future, I should use a twin-bell alarm clock to wake myself. That evening, I additionally practiced the "convenience mudrā" for a short while and felt warmth. The "convenience mudrā" mentioned in your letter is extremely similar to the "samādhi mudrā" in the practice manual. Are they the same or different? [They are the same, not different.

] In my ordinary reading, I range rather widely among sūtras and treatises. In stillness, I composed a passage of writing, perhaps as a natural sorting-out of scattered technical terms. Unknowingly, I had fallen into the aggregate of ideation without realizing it. Having received your compassionate letter of instruction, I no longer dare to indulge in idle imaginings. I vow to make an offering to my revered teacher's sacred image. Kneeling, I ask that you send me a photograph to fulfill my wish. [There is no need to make an offering. My teacher, Master Xiangliu, is now in Tuṣita; I am enclosing a Dharma photograph for you to make an offering to.]

December 5: Eighth session of the third mudrā. The practice manual says of the fourth mudrā, "One may also test it while seated in the full lotus posture." Therefore, I intend to sit in the lotus posture. [To sit in lotus means to cross the mind. If the mind truly does not move, one may test it even while lying down, much less while seated.] In the afternoon, after I had a bowel movement, I again felt the urge before dinner. I contracted the anus and held it in; there was a needle-like pain near the coccyx, and the urge to defecate disappeared.

I had previously read qigong books concerning the "microcosmic orbit," but I do not interpret this as an illness. I await your instruction by letter. [In practicing this Dharma, one must change one's belly—that is, have diarrhea, discharging all the old accumulated impurities. Then one's temperament becomes purified, and wisdom opens more readily. In the future, go to the toilet whenever you need to; do not hold it in.]

December 6: First session of the fourth mudrā. I was not drowsy and felt light and at ease.

December 7: Second session of the fourth mudrā. I became drowsy and fell asleep. The mudrā shook and startled me awake. It had not come apart, but had become distorted; I restored it, gathered my spirits, and resumed reciting the mantra. [Even if it had come apart, you could simply form it again.]

December 8: Third session of the fourth mudrā. I could not maintain the lotus posture to the end. When my full lotus came apart and the pain and numbness disappeared, I adopted a half-lotus posture, sometimes switching legs. I do not know whether this counts as restlessness. If it does, then I have been restless in every session. I await your instruction by letter. [If you cannot sit in full lotus, remain in half-lotus, lest excessive movement prevent you from entering samādhi and impair its efficacy—turning what is good into something bad.]

Disciple Qi Zhijun respectfully prostrates.

A day in December 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] I respectfully bow to the teacher. Like all disciples of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the teacher was also so vigilant and apprehensive when he first began practicing the Dharma.

[LVM] I am not of sharp faculties. If I were not so vigilant and apprehensive, there would be no hope for me in this life.

[Yongshou Tongzi] The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is truly remarkable: from the very beginning of practice, it is different. Experiences are mostly found in the initial stage; gradually, things instead become ordinary.

[LVM] There are also those who cling firmly to such extraordinary lights and images and refuse to become ordinary. Although they speak glibly of “ordinary mind is the Way,” they are always unwilling to be ordinary.

The Thirteenth Letter

Letter Thirteen

Dear Zhijun,

At the beginning of meditative stability, there is much dullness; with time, it becomes clear. This has already been said, so I will not repeat it. On the fifteenth day of the lunar month, undertake nine sessions of practice, but only after completing the six mudrās. The nine sessions are to be done in three rounds, each lasting six hours. The first: sit from midnight on the fourteenth until 6:00 a.m. The second: from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

The third: from 4:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. Leave two hours between each session for eating, walking meditation, and attending to bodily needs, but do not speak. During the session, do not loosen the mudrā; persist to the end. At first, one cannot

concentrate, because awareness arises quickly. Once one has practiced for a long time and becomes accustomed to it, it no longer seems strange.

My teacher's lay surname was Wang, his personal name was Xiangliu, and his Dharma name was Renzhi. He was from Haiyan and served as director of the Posts and Telecommunications Department of the Ministry of Communications. In Beijing, he practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma with my grandteacher, Dharma Master Dayu. He awakened during a seven-day retreat and, having received the heart-essence of my grandteacher, became a Dharma-transmission disciple.

In Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Ningbo, Wuxi, Suzhou, and other places, he established Mind-Seal Viharas and propagated heart esotericism; his disciples numbered no fewer than several tens of thousands. I have no photograph at present, so I have none to offer you. Furthermore, there are two kinds of not lying down: first, when sleepy, one remains seated and does not lie down to sleep; second, one has sufficient meditative stability and does not need sleep.

But one who truly possesses meditative stability does not cling even to the appearance of sitting. Read the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch and you will understand. When one's meditative strength is insufficient, it is still best to get enough sleep and then meditate. Otherwise, if one sits and dozes, it is of no use. It is also good to practice while seated on a train. There is no need to sit cross-legged; simply cover the mudrā with a hat.

No need to reply. I wish you unceasing progress.

Zhongding

December 28, 1989

[Yongshou Tongzi] I recall that the Second Patriarch said that one may undertake nine-session retreats only after completing seven-day retreats. The teacher seems to mean that, after a hundred meditation sessions, one may do so if one has sufficient strength.

[LVM] Oh! In short, one must neither slacken nor force oneself. The grandteacher spoke to those who force themselves, while the master spoke to those who are slack. Different approaches, same result.

The Fourteenth Letter

Fourteenth Letter

Revered Beneficent Teacher,

May you have fewer illnesses and fewer vexations, and may you constantly bathe in the joy of the Dharma. May you turn the wondrous Dharma wheel and liberate all sentient beings. In your letter, Teacher, you instructed that after completing the six mudrās, one should practice nine sessions on the fifteenth day of a full month. Are all three sets of nine sessions practiced with the fourth mudrā? [Yes, all are practiced with the fourth mudrā.] After completing the six mudrās, follow a seven-day cycle: on the first day practice the second mudrā, and on the remaining six days practice the fourth mudrā.

If the fifteenth day of a full month happens to fall on a day for practicing the second mudrā, how should this be handled? Practicing nine sessions is an accelerated method and may be undertaken only by those with a substantial foundation; it is not necessary to do so on every fifteenth day of a full month. If one's foundation is already firm and it happens to be a day for practicing the second mudrā, the second mudrā may be omitted.

Previously, Teacher, you wrote that after completing the six mudrās, if one sits for two sessions in a day, one should practice the fourth mudrā in the first session and the second mudrā in the second session; if one practices still more, one should add only the fourth mudrā, not the second. I take this to refer to the latter six days of the seven-day cycle. [Yes.]

If it happens to be the first day, when the second mudrā is to be practiced, should one still practice the fourth mudrā first when doing two sessions? [Practice the second mudrā first, then the fourth mudrā.] Please instruct me, Beneficent Teacher. My great-grandmaster's lay surname was Wang, his personal name was Xiangliu, and his Dharma name was Renzhi. He was a Dharma-transmission disciple of Dharma Master Dayu. I feared that I might have misread the characters, so I have written them again in this letter and ask Teacher to correct me. [They are correct.]

I kneel to request Teacher's Dharma name. Teacher's signature is abbreviated, and I do not recognize it; please enlighten me. [My name is Yuanyin, and yours is Zhiming.] Teacher does not presently have any photographs; I respectfully await one. When there is a photograph, please grant me one, so that my wish to make an offering may be fulfilled. I kneel and ask Teacher to grant this request. [There is no need to ask; when there is one, I shall send it.]

Practice Record:

December 22: First session of the six mudrās. I felt the aching and numbness of the full-lotus posture spread through my body, yet the sensation in my body was not aching or numbness, but became a pleasant feeling of unobstructed ease and lightness. This session seemed rather short, and I seemed to have entered samādhi. [When one enters samādhi, ease, lightness, and pleasantness arise naturally.]

December 23: Second session of the six mudrās. I was unable to sit in the full-lotus posture. I felt sleepy. [Sleep sufficiently before sitting; forcing yourself is of no benefit.]

December 24–29: Third through eighth sessions of the six mudrās. During these six days, although I was rather busy off the cushion and had to accommodate various matters, there was nevertheless a sense of continuity. I did not feel the days to be long; the six days passed in an instant. During these six sessions, I was able to extend my time in the full-lotus posture and felt quite well. [At all times and in all places, maintain contemplation; constantly gather the mind in samādhi, and the Way is therein.]

I was not deliberately indulging in idle speculation, but the following arose spontaneously: the "transcending" in "supramundane" does not mean abandoning or leaving behind, but "going beyond." "World" is time, and "between" is space. Rendered in modern language, "supramundane" means "transcending time and space," and "transcending time and space" means eliminating the dharma-self view."

Although my understanding of "transcending time and space" is only inferential knowledge, not direct realization, I feel that transcending time and space is not extraordinary, but an ordinary matter. Ordinary mind is the Way; the straightforward mind is the place of practice. [If you were truly able to transcend time and space and eliminate the dharma-self, you would have to wait until after the Vajra Path, at the stage of an equal-enlightenment bodhisattva. Otherwise, it is merely intellectual understanding. Even if you speak very cogently, it is of no practical use.]

December 30–January 4: First through sixth sessions of the first mudrā. As with the preceding six sessions, I felt quite well.

January 5: Seventh session of the first mudrā. Several tens of minutes before rising from the seat, my left ring finger hurt. I already know that pain eliminates obscurations; when obscurations are eliminated, wisdom opens.

January 6: Eighth session of the first mudrā. My ring finger did not hurt. Off the cushion, the following arose spontaneously: eliminating the dharma-self view is "transcending time and space," while eliminating the personal-self view is transcending oneself. Merely knowing the principle is inferential knowledge. If one wishes to attain direct realization, only realization itself can bring knowing. [As for eliminating the personal self, one must, after realizing the Way, advance ever higher until the seventh bhūmi, the Far-Going Ground, where innate attachment to self can finally be completely eliminated.]

Disciple Qi Zhijun bows in homage

January 6, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] Nine sessions have the power of a seven-day retreat; is that why it is called an accelerated method?

[LVM] Yes. But one must not force oneself.

[Yongshou Tongzi] Did Teacher also endure pain in practicing the full-lotus posture? How should disciples of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma regard the full-lotus posture?

[LVM] Although the full lotus is beneficial, there is no need to force it. Young women in particular should not force themselves into the full lotus. Also, regarding the elder's "signature abbreviation," it is actually the two characters Zhong Ding ( ) written together so that they look like a single character; that is why I did not recognize it.

The Fifteenth Letter

Letter Fifteen

Revered Beneficent Teacher,

May you have few illnesses and few troubles, and constantly bathe in the joy of the Dharma. May you turn the wondrous Dharma wheel and liberate all sentient beings. Your disciple has learned that your Dharma name is Yuanyin. There are also the four characters "your name, Zhiming." Is Zhiming the Dharma name that Master bestowed upon your disciple? Indeed.

Thanks to your instruction, your disciple now understands that only at the seventh bhūmi can a bodhisattva completely eliminate innate attachment to self; only then has one truly transcended the self. Only at the stage of an equal enlightenment bodhisattva can one eliminate attachment to dharmas; only then has one truly transcended time and space.

But is the temporary breaking through of innate attachment to self the state of selflessness that appears in samādhi? Can attachment to dharmas likewise be temporarily broken through? When, in practicing the Dharma and entering samādhi, one illuminates and breaks through body, mind, and world, as well as the dharma of practitioner and practice, both attachments to self and to dharmas are immediately broken through. Yet although awakening may be sudden, habitual tendencies remain deep and cannot be eliminated all at once. Thus the two attachments are only temporarily subdued, not eradicated. Only through true cultivation after awakening and continual progress from stage to stage can the two

attachments be completely eliminated.　I respectfully ask for your compassionate instruction.

Practice Record:

January 7–January 14: First through eighth sessions of the second mudrā. The occasional pain in my ring finger has become infrequent and brief. All eight sessions were relatively steady.

January 15: First session of the third mudrā. I practiced samādhi early in the morning. I traveled for work that morning; the journey was short, and I arrived the same day. As I was alone in a room, this would not affect my practice.

January 16–January 21: Second through seventh sessions of the third mudrā. My ring finger slipped out from between the index and middle fingers several times. After pushing it back, I continued the practice. I returned to He on the 21st.　As soon as you notice it, correct it.

January 22: Eighth session of the third mudrā. In all eight sessions of the third mudrā in this cycle, the ring finger was bent. After forming the mudrā, the ring finger barely protruded and was nowhere near as high as the four aligned fingers. The ring finger occasionally slipped out, probably because it protruded too little.　Quite right.

Having respectfully read What Is Learning Buddhism All About?, written by Teacher Xu Hengzhi, I learned that practicing the fourth mudrā can aid rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss; this is precisely your disciple's aspiration at the end of life.　The Buddha-Heart Sutra states this very clearly. Why did you have to read Teacher Xu's work before knowing it?　Page 55 says: "The Buddha-Heart Sutra says, 'If one upholds the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, one will swiftly realize acceptance of the unborn.'

Master Nona once praised this dharma gate as the unsurpassed Esoteric Vehicle. Yet opportunities to receive this Dharma are quite rare; this too may be because each person's causes and conditions differ!"　Those without merit and virtue cannot practice this Dharma.　The complete Buddhadharma is in China, and the complete Esoteric Vehicle is in Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. It is difficult to obtain a human body, difficult to be born in China, and difficult to hear the Buddhadharma.

Now I have obtained a human body; now I have been born in China; now I have heard the Buddhadharma. Not only have I "heard" it, but through your compassionate acceptance, I have received and uphold the unsurpassed Heart-of-Heart Dharma of the Esoteric Vehicle. Your disciple is like an exhausted traveler crossing a desert over a long distance: obstacles abound along the way, and conditions leading to retreat are everywhere.

Suddenly, a helicopter arrives to pick me up and lowers a rope ladder. Your disciple should naturally climb the ladder and hasten the journey. If I fear hardship and refuse to climb, I will surely lose this excellent opportunity to accelerate my progress. Your disciple shall diligently practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and never let this opportunity slip away.

Not for my own petty self, but so that sentient beings throughout empty space and the dharma realm may be liberated, your disciple shall diligently practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Very good. Such an aspiration is most commendable! Page 48 of Selected Articles says: “Master Nona’s stūpa containing his ashes … was kept intact in a cave by the Yunnan King, the Living Buddha Zhi.”

Your disciple asks Master: Did our great-grandmaster, Dharma Master Dayu, have a lineage relationship with the Living Buddha Nona? And what was his relationship with Zhuqing Monastery? He had no lineage relationship with the Living Buddha Nona. Of your disciple’s aspirations in this life, only “leaving home” remains unfulfilled; my aspiration at life’s end can be fulfilled only when my life comes to its end.

Your disciple’s endless vow is the most fundamental Great Vow; it must be diligently safeguarded throughout the boundless future, without allowing any violation of it. May you have an auspicious New Year, Master, filled with Dharma joy. The heart esotericism that we now practice was not transmitted by Master Nona. In Shanghai, Master Nona transmitted it only to Yuan Xilian; he did not transmit it widely.

He said that this Dharma was profound and that not everyone could practice it. In Tibet, one had to study Esoteric Buddhism for twenty or thirty years before it could be transmitted. Since this Dharma is a formless esoteric practice and close to Chan, those with inadequate foundations cannot practice it; therefore, it was not widely transmitted. Grandmaster Dharma Master Dayu originally practiced the Pure Land Dharma on Mount Lu and made a vow to practice the Pratyutpanna Samādhi.

To practice this samādhi, one must walk day and night without sitting or lying down. Ordinary people who practice for three or four days find their feet swollen and can continue no further. But our grandmaster’s resolve was fierce: he would rather die than stop. When his feet were too swollen for walking, he crawled on the ground; when he could no longer crawl, he rolled on the ground. Only death would make him cease.

Through this arduous cultivation, his deluded mind died away completely, and he entered deeply into great samādhi in utter stillness. He evoked the manifestation of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, who conferred empowerment upon him and transmitted the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. It was not easily obtained. Those with the affinity to encounter it later are truly not people of scant wholesome roots and merit

and virtue. Having obtained this Dharma yet failing to practice it diligently is truly to betray the profound kindness of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and patriarchs; nor could one face oneself or sentient beings. I hope that you will deeply exert yourself! I wish you unceasing progress and a happy, auspicious New Year.

Your disciple, Qi Zhijun, prostrates in reverence

January 22, 1990

Yongshou Tongzi Regarding the question of lineage, many people have voiced opinions. I believe that any Dharma capable of eliminating afflictions is the Buddha's authentic transmission; questions of form are secondary. What does Teacher think?

LVM You surely know the principle of the Four Reliances: "Rely on the Dharma, not on persons; rely on the meaning, not on words; rely on wisdom, not on consciousness; rely on definitive meaning, not on provisional meaning." In questions of lineage, the most important thing is the transmission of the "Dharma," for the key to ensuring that the wisdom-life of the Buddhadharma does not cease is the transmission of the Dharma. This is the substance.

The extension of lineage—its external manifestation—is the successor of a certain person. Quite a few people diligently pursue reliance on persons in the matter of "successors," while casting reliance on the Dharma behind them. This reverses the root and the branches. Of course, "people can promote the Way; the Way cannot promote people," so successors are indeed very important.

A successor is important because he embodies the Dharma: the Dharma has become personified in him. Thus there arose claims that "such-and-such a person is an emanation of a certain Buddha or bodhisattva." Once this is understood, when we sincerely call from the depths of our hearts, "Namo Fundamental Guru Acharya Yuanyin," we are relying on the Dharma, not on a person.

For we clearly know that the elder's body, speech, and mind embody the body, speech, and mind of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Although the ancient Buddhas passed away long ago, the body, speech, and mind of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are still vividly embodied in the elder.

We follow the elder in order to learn Buddhism, practice the Dharma, and seek liberation. Is this not plainly relying on the Dharma rather than relying on a person? Thus terms such as "living Buddha" naturally arise; this too is reliance on the Dharma, not reliance on a person. The most typical and ultimate example of "relying on the Dharma, not on persons" is the one hundredth case in One Hundred Cases on Realizing Essence and Activating Function.

Appendix: Case One Hundred

Everything depends on one's own effort. At this point, even Buddha is not established—how much less any person.

Suppose that today I were to fall into degradation, be falsely convicted of a crime, enter another non-Buddhist path, or do various disgraceful things that the world despises. Could you remain unmoved? Could you refrain from regret? Could you refrain from shame? When I die, could you regard it as no different from the death of a cow or the killing of a dog?

Some would be alarmed, and some would not. If among these three people there is one who is alarmed and two, A and B, who are not, what is the standing of each among the three? Try to say.

The Sixteenth Letter

Letter Sixteen

Revered Teacher,

May you have few illnesses and few vexations, and may you always be immersed in the joy of the Dharma. May you turn the wondrous Dharma wheel and liberate all sentient beings. Having respectfully read your letter and instructions, I am deeply moved. My grand-teacher's teacher, Dharma Master Dayu, practiced the Pratyutpanna Samādhi. He did what was difficult to do and endured what was difficult to endure, advancing with such courageous vigor that he quietly entered deep samādhi. He thereby evoked the manifestation of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, received empowerment and the Dharma, and obtained this unsurpassed Heart Esotericism.

This disciple has grave karmic obstacles and tenacious attachment to self, and could only be born in the Dharma-ending age, without the good fortune to hear Śākyamuni Buddha in person. Yet, though possessed of such meager blessings and shallow wisdom, I have fortunately received your compassionate acceptance, empowerment, and transmission of the Dharma. If this disciple does not practice diligently, I truly am "rotten wood that cannot be carved."

Since this disciple takes the Ten Great Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva as inexhaustible vows and diligently upholds them throughout the endless future, I should not become lax in the great Dharma personally transmitted by the Bodhisattva, but practice it diligently.

Kneeling, I thank you, Revered Teacher, for bestowing on this disciple the Dharma name "Zhiming." I have presumptuously composed the following couplet as a record and ask for your criticism:

Aspiring to transcend birth and death, though there is no birth and death to transcend;
According with the thirty-seven factors of awakening.
Striving to shatter the illusory self, falsely perceived amid illusory appearances;
Awakening is itself realizing nirvāṇa—how could there be a nirvāṇa to realize?
For now, silently attuning to the twenty-five modes of perfect enlightenment;
Diligently cultivating the unsurpassed wondrous practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

Horizontal inscription: Namo Amitābha Buddha

[Change a few characters: "Aspiring to transcend birth and death; when it is transcended, there is no birth and death to transcend. Awakening is realizing nirvāṇa; when realization is attained, how could there be a nirvāṇa to realize?"]

This disciple now knows that my grand teacher's Dharma name is Renzhi, and that your Dharma name is Yuanyin. On this occasion of the New Year festival, I offer the following two couplets:

The compassionate one, pitying all beings, entered the land of China;
The Dharma wheel ever turns.
Knowing and awakening to the mind,

Ascending to Tuṣita;
The Buddha's sun shines ever brighter.

The primordial source fully penetrated:
The ten realms do not arise from two thoughts.
Hearing penetrates perfectly:
The three baskets are wholly contained within one mind.

This disciple also has a question about mantra recitation and breathing. When I first began practicing, I would recite the mantra in one exhalation, then take another breath and recite it again. Later, I felt that reciting the mantra on the exhalation took a long time, whereas inhalation was forceful and brief. So I ceased attending to inhalation and exhalation and simply continued reciting.

[When reciting the mantra, there is no need to attend to the breath; let breathing proceed naturally.] Gather the ears to listen to the mantra and gather the mind to recite it. Without knowing when, it becomes a case of the mouth stopping while the mind recites; going a step further, there is no recitation. [One gradually enters samādhi.] When you become aware of it, resume reciting; repeat this again and

again. [When you become aware of it, again let the mind recite and the ears hear. Practice repeatedly in this way, and before long you will enter deep samādhi.

] This is not deliberate awareness. At times, without realizing it, I sink into drowsiness. Then I suddenly notice that the mudrā has become distorted, whereupon I correct it and resume reciting the mantra.

I do not know whether this condition is normal or abnormal. If it is abnormal, how should it be corrected? [If at such a time there is no awareness and the mudrā has loosened, then you have fallen asleep. If the mind remains aware and the mudrā has not loosened, then you have not fallen asleep; this is a normal phenomenon in the practice of ordinary people.

If you have fallen asleep, straighten your spine, open both eyes, and recite the mantra aloud to dispel the demon of sleep. If you have not fallen asleep, simply allow the samādhi to settle; do not disturb it.] After another ten sessions, I will have completed the six mudrās and will proceed to the seven-day cycle of the second and fourth mudrās. You once instructed this disciple that, if I do not attain samādhi very well, I should add practice of the third mudrā.

But I do not know where to add the third mudrā. Should I use the third mudrā in place of the fourth, or should I practice two sessions in one day? [If time is limited, use the third mudrā in place of the fourth. If time is ample, practice the third mudrā first and then the fourth, completing two consecutive sessions.

] If two sessions are required, which should come first, the third or the fourth mudrā? Or should additional days be added to the seven-day cycle? How should the third mudrā be added to the second mudrā on the first day? I respectfully ask for your instruction. [On the first day, add practice of the third mudrā after the second mudrā. You may also add several separate days of practice of the third mudrā outside the seven-day cycle.] To date, this disciple has encountered no demonic obstacles in practice.

[Very good!] You once instructed that, when demonic obstacles are numerous, one should add practice of the fifth mudrā. How should the fifth mudrā be added? [Add it before the fourth mudrā; you may also add several days of practice outside the seven-day cycle.] Practice record:
January 23–30: first through eighth sessions of the fourth mudrā. This disciple feels that, among the six mudrās, the fourth is easy to form.

Yet during the eight sessions it occasionally became distorted; upon noticing this, I corrected it and resumed reciting the mantra. [That is acceptable.] January 31–February 7: first through eighth sessions of the fifth mudrā. Forming the mudrā is no longer difficult; the index fingers readily touch the upper joints of the ring fingers.

Respectfully wishing you Dharma peace in the New Year. [I hope you practice well. May you attain accomplishment soon. Zhongding.]

Disciple Qi Zhijun, with reverence

February 7, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] It is said that, when demonic obstacles are numerous, one should add practice of the fifth mudrā. What counts as “numerous demonic obstacles”?

[LVM] Ha ha! You ask that too. In fact, neither Buddhas nor demons are apart from the mind; apart from mind, there is no dharma. Nearly everyone understands this principle, but when confronted with a concrete situation, they forget it completely. For example, when hearing people speak of “mental demons” and “celestial demons,” they become fearful of celestial demons, imagining that there is some “celestial demon” outside the mind that harms people.

Listen to what the Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “Know that empty space arises within your mind, like a small cloud appearing in the vast clear sky. How much more so the various worlds, which are within empty space!” The demon palace of the celestial demon is merely one corner of the world, and is therefore all the more not outside the mind.

“The nature of space may perish, but the mind of Śūraṅgama does not move.” So long as your mind is as firm as a rock, what can celestial demons do to you? As the Śūraṅgama Sūtra says, they are “like a knife cutting water, like wind blowing upon light”; they can do nothing to you. Yet beginners’ minds are not firm. If they encounter obstacles, then they should add practice of the fifth mudrā.

Letter Seventeen

Letter Seventeen

Revered and Gracious Teacher:

May you have fewer illnesses and afflictions and ever bathe in the joy of the Dharma. May you turn the wondrous Dharma wheel and liberate all sentient beings. Record of practice: February 8–15: the first through eighth sessions of the Sixth Mudrā. The Fourth Mudrā is the easiest to form, and the Sixth Mudrā the most difficult. The difficulty lies in making the nails of both ring fingers simultaneously touch the right thumb.

Even if I move the crossing point toward the fingertips, I can only make the two ring-finger nails touch the upper joint of the thumb and the two little-finger nails touch

the crease below the thumb joint. It is very difficult to make all four fingernails touch the crease at the upper thumb joint. [They need not all touch the crease at the upper joint.] With the two middle fingers held together and extended straight, then separated by about two fen, it is not too difficult to do as the Master instructed and place a small wad of cloth between them.

[It is best not to use a wad of cloth between the fingers.] February 16–22: the first week after one hundred sessions. From this day onward, each cycle consists of seven days. On Fridays I use the Second Mudrā, and on the other six days the Fourth Mudrā. Rising early each day and sitting for two hours has become a habit of life. I generally sit at about five o'clock and rise from the seat at seven.

The ticking of the alarm clock seems to be there and not there. If I do not attend to it, it seems that throughout the entire session I do not hear it. As soon as I think of the clock, however, its ticking becomes clearly audible. This disciple's practice of "initially entering the current of hearing and forgetting the object" is still inadequate. [During meditation, do not think of anything. You must let go of everything, and then you will naturally enter samādhi peacefully.

] The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Corresponding to the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī seems to be the titles of two sūtras: one is The Buddha-Heart Sutra, and the other is the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī Sūtra. The three characters pin yi tong, "also corresponding," mean that certain sections of The Buddha-Heart Sutra correspond to certain sections of the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī Sūtra.

If this disciple's understanding of the title is incorrect, please instruct me, Master. [The Heart-of-Heart mantra is identical with the eighth mantra of the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī; hence it is said to "also correspond."] According to the seven ways of naming by person, dharma, and metaphor, "Buddha-heart" is a dharma, and "Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī" is also a dharma; both sūtras are named solely by dharma.

If Buddha is taken as the person and heart as the dharma, then The Buddha-Heart Sutra is named by person and dharma. Which is correct? [The latter is correct, but these are Tiantai school teachings and have little to do with the Mind school. Moreover, its theory of the five periods of teaching has many inadequacies.] Bodhiruci translated sūtras by imperial edict, presumably in the fifth century, when Emperor Xuanwu invited him to translate them.

This is all that this disciple knows. Was the Dharma Master's lifetime, and Emperor Xuanwu, during the Liang dynasty? [It was not the Liang but the Tang dynasty. Details of the Dharma Master's life are unknown; we know only that he translated many sūtras.] At the end of the upper volume: "At that time, having heard this

Dharma, the assembly rejoiced, faithfully accepted it, bowed to the Buddha, and withdrew." This has already reached the dissemination section.

[The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Corresponding to the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī ends here.] At the beginning of the lower volume it says, "At that time, Ānanda was among the great assembly." I do not know how this connects. [The lower volume separately expounds the Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī, and thus says that "the dharma differs." Together, they belong to the Heart-of-Heart Mind-Seal Dharma, and are therefore separately arranged as upper and lower volumes.] The note at the end of the upper volume reads: "Buddha-Heart Heart-of-Heart Sūtra, Upper Volume."

The title of the lower volume reads: "Buddha-Heart Heart-of-Heart Mind-Seal Section, Middle Volume, Lower Dharma, Separate Dharma." The note at the end of the lower volume reads: "The Buddha's Teaching of the Heart-of-Heart Sūtra, Lower Volume." Is this one sūtra with multiple titles, or are selections from several sūtras combined into one? I respectfully request your instruction, gracious Teacher. May you ever bathe in the joy of the Dharma! [Although this Dharma was taught by Śākyamuni Buddha, its yidam is the Wish-Fulfilling Bodhisattva, who is in turn an emanation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Therefore, in Esoteric Buddhism, offering to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva alone can represent all Buddhas.]

Your disciple, Qi Zhijun, bows in reverence

February 22, 1990

[Youth Yongshou] The Master says that the Tiantai school's doctrine of the five periods of teaching has some inadequacies. Precisely where are its inadequacies?

[LVM] Let us take one example. To which period of teaching does the Sutra in Forty-Two Sections belong? You may know clearly that it is a Hīnayāna sūtra and should belong to the Āgama period.

Now consider this chapter of the Sutra in Forty-Two Sections:

"The Buddha said: Feeding one hundred evil people is not equal to feeding one good person; feeding one thousand good people is not equal to feeding one person who upholds the five precepts; feeding ten thousand people who uphold the five precepts is not equal to feeding one srotāpanna; feeding one million srotāpannas is not equal to feeding one sakadāgāmin; feeding ten million sakadāgāmins is not equal to feeding one anāgāmin; feeding one hundred million anāgāmins is not equal to feeding one arhat; feeding one billion arhats is not equal to feeding one pratyekabuddha; feeding ten billion pratyekabuddhas is not equal to feeding all the Buddhas of the three times; feeding one hundred billion Buddhas of the three times is not equal to feeding one who is without thought, without abiding, without

practice, and without realization." This chapter does not mention bodhisattvas and is plainly a Hīnayāna sūtra.

Yet surely the final phrase, "one who is without thought, without abiding, without practice, and without realization," which transcends Buddhas and patriarchs, is not a teaching spoken during the Āgama period! Therefore, although the Tiantai school's doctrine of the "five periods of teaching" is quite reasonable, highly expedient, and very commendable, and has been universally praised by eminent masters both ancient and modern, one cannot state it too absolutely. Though its merits outweigh its flaws, it still has some inadequacies.

[Youth Yongshou] I feel that once students of the Mind-Seal school have read the upper volume of The Buddha-Heart Sutra, they basically understand how to practice the Dharma. The lower volume speaks much of spiritual powers. When it is circulated, might only the upper volume be printed?

[LVM] Over the long centuries in which the Buddhist canon took shape, some sūtras were inevitably lost, while others were of course recovered. Once recovered, they inevitably had some slight deficiencies. Where there are deficiencies, remedial measures are needed. There is a somewhat literary term, "compilation"; in fact, this is a method of remedying deficiencies.

The upper and lower volumes of The Buddha-Heart Sutra clearly bear traces of having been compiled by people of old. Even so, they have after all been included in the Buddhist canon and have become one whole. If only the upper volume were circulated, would that not revive the sense of incompleteness?

The Eighteenth Letter

Letter Eighteen

Revered Beneficent Teacher,

May you have few illnesses and few afflictions, and may you always be immersed in the joy of the Dharma. May you turn the wondrous Dharma wheel and liberate all sentient beings. February 23–March 1: second phase. March 2–March 8: third phase. These two phases felt better than usual. Previously, my chief problem was drowsiness. During these two phases, instances of loosening or reversing the mudrā were exceedingly rare, and I no longer suddenly awoke from dozing off.

I still emerge from samādhi very easily, however, and it is difficult to maintain the meditative state for long. During the first half-hour after taking my seat, the meditative state still appears often; afterward, I emerge and reenter, reenter and emerge. Mantra recitation is indeed an excellent means of dispelling deluded

thoughts. Whenever deluded thoughts arise, if I persist with the mantra, the thoughts soon grow faint and samādhi arises, gradually becoming continuous and seamless. At present, however, this “continuous and seamless” state is still a dim blur, and no light has yet appeared.

[Do not seek light. When one first enters samādhi, it does not last long. Later, you will gradually enter a better state, one of joy and luminosity.] While practicing, I once considered doing two sessions a day, but lacked the time, so I sometimes used the “convenience mudrā.” Up to now, I have done one session daily, always in the morning, two hours each session, without ever shortening it.

I have received, through your letter, your instructions on adding a daily session, adding the third mudrā, adding the fifth mudrā, and practicing nine sessions on the fifteenth day of a long month. When circumstances permit, I shall increase my practice in accordance with your instructions. This disciple would also like to request instruction on the method of a seven-day retreat. Please offer your guidance, Master. [During a seven-day retreat, sit for six sessions each day.

Schedule: for the first session, begin sitting at midnight and rise at 4:00 a.m.; for the second, begin at 6:00 a.m. and rise at 10:00 a.m.; for the third, begin at noon and rise at 4:00 p.m. This totals twelve hours of sitting. During the two hours between sessions, eat, rest, and practice walking meditation.

On the final day, complete the practice with nine sessions.] The Buddha-Heart Sutra: “Thus have I heard: at one time, the Buddha dwelt on the summit of Vajra Mountain in the land of Juyemi, surveying the ten directions, all of which were like the color of fire.” This sentence encompasses the accomplishment of faith, the accomplishment of hearing, the accomplishment of time, the accomplishment of the teacher, and the accomplishment of place. Yet the phrase “surveying the ten directions” does not seem to constitute the accomplishment of the assembly.

This disciple believes that, at this point in the sūtra, the introductory section has ended and the main exposition begins. With the end of the introductory section, only five of the six accomplishments of the introductory sequence are present. “The ten directions, all like the color of fire” signifies the blazing fires of karma and the appearance of falling into degradation; it also signifies the blazing fires of desire and the appearance of sinking into delusion.

If beings in all ten directions are sinking and falling, where are the assemblies that practice and protect the Dharma? Therefore, this disciple believes that this sentence is not the “accomplishment of the assembly” among the six accomplishments of the introductory sequence. The summit of Vajra Mountain in the land of Juyemi is probably not in the human realm, while the ten directions that are “all like the color

of fire" also include the human realm. [This foreshadows the appearance of sentient beings sinking in the Dharma-ending age.

Sentient beings sink, but Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not included in this.] "At that time, the Tathāgata heaved a long sigh. … The devas, immortals, demons, and other beings fled in terror, with nowhere to go." In this chapter, the World-Honored One sighs in contemplation; the ten realms are shaken; the Buddhas are deeply contemplating; and the bodhisattvas abide with minds unmoved. The vajras are unsettled in their seats, and the Dharma-protecting deities flee in terror, with nowhere to go.

There was every sign that a storm was about to break, which reminded this disciple of Christianity's teaching of the "end of the world" and the widely circulated contemporary claim that "humanity would perish in July 1999." [This claim is incorrect; the destruction of the earth would take many years.] And so it proved to be.

one need only look at how sentient beings deceive one another and desperately pursue high consumption, while resources are nearly exhausted and the population is exploding, to see that this collective karma is bound to brew a disaster. This disciple has only the wish to liberate sentient beings, yet is helpless in the face of the revolving flow of collective karma. Although I know that "one who has not yet crossed over oneself, yet first seeks to ferry others across, gives rise to the bodhisattva resolve,"

without the ability, how can I liberate sentient beings? I should diligently cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, attain accomplishment soon, and save sentient beings. [Precisely!] Collective karma is shared by the masses, while individual karma is borne by each person. Collective karma and individual karma should likewise be nondual; it is only that this disciple's karmic obstacles are heavy, wisdom shallow, and attachment to self difficult to break. I respectfully beg for the beneficent teacher's guidance. [So long as you have this great vow, you will surely attain accomplishment in the future.]

Disciple Qi Zhijun, reverently prostrating

March 8, 1990

[Young Tongzi of Yongshou] Although this is the Dharma-ending age, and our karmic obstacles are heavy and wisdom shallow, with the Heart-of-Heart Dharma to rely on, we need have no worries. Teacher, you need not be so modest either; the master has already given you a prediction.

[LVM] Ha ha! You actually used the term “prediction,” without fearing that it might startle people. It would be better to use the word “encouragement.” Ordinary mind is the Way; a straight mind is the place of practice. In truth, if everyone makes this great vow, everyone can attain accomplishment. But what can be done when so many are unwilling?

The Nineteenth Letter

Letter Nineteen

Revered Benefactor and Teacher,

May you have little illness and few troubles, ever bathed in the joy of the Dharma. May you turn the wondrous Dharma wheel and liberate all sentient beings. [No need for formalities.] March 9–15: fourth seven-day retreat. March 16–22: fifth seven-day retreat. Overall, these two retreats were better than the previous ones, though not as good as the two before them; drowsiness occasionally reappeared.

Does progress follow a cycle? For example, one advances ten feet, retreats five, then advances another ten feet and retreats another five. I seem to have sensed such a cycle. Is this normal? Please instruct me. [Until one's practice has reached the point of complete fulfillment, one cannot avoid advancing and retreating; it is not all smooth sailing.

This is because: 1. The day's work and experiences often affect one's meditative state. 2. The rising and sinking of the seeds in the eighth consciousness affect the power of samādhi even more. Thus, one repeatedly retreats and advances. There is no particular cycle to it. So long as you hold the helm steady and press forward with vigor, you will naturally reach the other shore safely.]

In your letter, Master, you instructed me in the method of undertaking a seven-day retreat with six meditation sessions daily. Are all six sessions practiced with the Four Mudrās? [No. Practice the Four Mudrās in the first two sessions and the Second Mudrā in the final session.] For example, if one undertakes three seven-day retreats in succession, one practices six sessions daily for the first twenty days and nine sessions only on the final day—is that correct? [Correct!] Are all nine sessions practiced with the Four Mudrās? [Correct!] When the fifteenth day of a long lunar month is encountered, does one practice nine sessions with the same schedule? [Correct!]

In The Buddha-Heart Sutra, from “At that time there were ten Vajragarbha Bodhisattvas” to “They saw the Tathāgata’s mind pervading all sentient beings,” this section says that the World-Honored One abides in samādhi and that the

bodhisattvas see the Tathāgata's mind pervading all sentient beings. This disciple has two questions for you, Master:

1. Are the ten Vajragarbha Bodhisattvas ten bodhisattvas, or is there one bodhisattva named "Ten Vajragarbha"? [Vajragarbha Bodhisattva is Vajrasattva—that is, an inner retinue member of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. There are very many Vajra Kings; the ten Vajragarbha Bodhisattvas here refer to the ten principal bodhisattvas among them.]

2. Earlier it says "samādhi of loving-kindness," and later "samādhi of loving-kindness and compassion." Could this be a one-character error made during photocopying and engraving? "They saw the Tathāgata's mind pervading all sentient beings" should be what the bodhisattvas see with their wisdom eyes.

Sentient beings inherently possess the Buddha-nature of suchness and naturally accord with the Tathāgata's mind. Yet because of deluded thoughts and attachments, they cannot realize it. Because of karma, they undergo retribution, rising and sinking again and again, endlessly through life after life. Thus the Tathāgata sighs: "Surveying sentient beings universally, none are without deviation from the path." [There is no error.

Loving-kindness and compassion arise because, out of loving-kindness, one cherishes sentient beings; seeing that they are about to suffer the sinking and drowning of the final kalpa, one feels compassion for them.] When the Tathāgata enters the samādhi of loving-kindness and compassion, his mind pervades all sentient beings; this is precisely where he rescues and gathers them in.

How does he rescue them? How does he gather them in? This leads to the next section, from "At that time the Tathāgata arose from samādhi" to "Only the Tathāgata's Heart-of-Heart can reach it; the rest cannot." This section identifies the method of rescue and gathering. The cause of "the utter drowning of sentient beings" is that they "do not understand my Dharma, do not know my mind, do not reach my ultimate boundary, and are held by Māra."

How can they be rescued? Bodhisattvas cannot gather them in; vajra power cannot gather them in; nor can the transformations of the devas. Only the Tathāgata's Heart-of-Heart can rescue and gather them in. This shows the great strength of collective karmic force: it yields neither to gentle nor forceful means, and spiritual powers cannot overcome it. It also shows the supreme power of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Its profundity is then introduced below with the words, "Why is this so?" [Just so, just so!]

Disciple Qi Zhijun respectfully bows

March 22, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] Although Buddha-nature neither advances nor retreats, beginning practitioners often feel that they advance and retreat. How can one realize that there is neither advance nor retreat?

[LVM] Originally, there is neither advance nor retreat; it is only deluded attachment that posits advance and retreat. When deluded attachment weakens, we provisionally call it advance; when deluded attachment strengthens, we provisionally call it retreat.

The Twentieth Letter

Letter Twenty

Respected Master,

I wish you well, Master, and pray that sentient beings may be more easily liberated. March 23–29: six sessions. March 30–April 5: seven sessions. During these two periods, I would at times notice an undercurrent of deluded thoughts. After oral recitation has ceased and the mind continues reciting, one should abide in a state of samādhi, if only briefly. Yet suddenly one finds thoughts flowing on.

If it is called mental activity, it seems more like some storyline continuing; if it is called a meditative state, no concrete images seem to appear. [This undercurrent of deluded thoughts is what Consciousness-Only calls “attention” among the five universal mental factors—intention, contact, feeling, ideation, and volition. The eighth consciousness is fundamentally a lucid entity and is itself neither good nor evil.

Together with the first five consciousnesses, it is the lucid functioning of the eight consciousnesses, responding through the five faculties to illuminate objects; all are direct perception and are likewise neither good nor evil. The sixth and seventh consciousnesses belong precisely to the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness. The seventh is false; therefore the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra says: “The seventh consciousness does not transmigrate and is not the cause of birth and death.”

The sixth consciousness originally belongs to wisdom’s illumination. Now, while in delusion, it may discriminate well, but it depends on conditions and is likewise neither good nor evil. Without these five universal mental factors, not a single thought arises; wisdom-light is complete, direct perception is manifest and clear—this is called great samādhi (great samādhi does not mean lying motionless as

though dead), and the six sense faculties function spontaneously and without contrivance.

Yet the storehouse of the eighth consciousness contains seeds of wholesome and unwholesome karmic habits accumulated over countless kalpas. Internally perfumed and stirred into activity, they cause thoughts to arise without one noticing, like fish beneath the water that churn up waves and surface of themselves. This is "attention." It merely alerts the mind and causes it to arise, regardless of good or evil; it is the beginning of mental activity and the stirring of thoughts in this life.

Since sentient beings have never been apart from thoughts since beginningless time, Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, and esoteric practice now block consciousness from operating; that is, they do not allow attention to arise.

You need only continue cultivating diligently. The moment a thought arises, become aware of it and do not let it continue; use the power of the mantra to illuminate and shatter it. In time, when the powers of samādhi and wisdom are sufficient, there will naturally be a sudden explosion: inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world; and even empty space—all shatter together. Then all seeds of karmic habits vanish without remainder, and one directly realizes what was said above: "wisdom-light shines everywhere, and the six sense faculties function spontaneously and without contrivance."

] After noticing this, I resume holding the mantra, but before long it happens again. These thoughts seem latent and are even harder to dispel than mental activity. Since there is awareness, it is not a dream; yet like a dream, it is involuntary.

Is this what you referred to in your letter as "the rising and sinking of the seeds of the eighth consciousness"? The Municipal Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference convened, and registration was on April 2. Since my schedule was relaxed, I added a second-seal session that afternoon. This was the first time I had practiced two sessions in one day.

The Buddha-Heart Sutra says: "Why is this so? Because it enables all māras to give rise to great compassion; … and even all worlds of the past, present, and future—whether possessing supernormal powers or not, wisdom or not, virtue or not—are all entrusted to it." After "Why is this so?" eighteen instances of "because" are introduced; these are the eighteen powers and functions of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

"Past, present, and future" is time, and "all worlds" is space; the powers and functions of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma transcend time and space. "At that time, having heard this teaching, all in the assembly wished to hear and receive it. … For

this reason, it is called Heart-of-Heart." In this chapter, the Heart-of-Heart gives rise to a joyful light brighter than a thousand suns.

Bodhisattva Shide asked about its causes and conditions. The World-Honored One instructed that this light cannot be measured, weighed, or praised, nor can it be confirmed. These "three impossibilities and one absence" directly accord with the self-nature of suchness, which cannot be known through measurement, cannot be known through names, and cannot be understood in terms of rank or status. Even an awakening in the Chan school still requires confirmation. Here there is no confirmation, and the state of awakening is higher.

To explain this "absence of confirmation," six further instances of "because" are introduced after "Why is this so?" From this we may know: the Buddhas have no confirmation, for confirmation is not ultimate. The Buddhas have nothing attained, for attainment is not complete. No appearances are seen, for seeing entails attachment. The faculties are not abandoned, for abandoning them is obstinate emptiness. Māras find no advantage, for finding advantage is the deviant path.

The paths of the Māra kings must be blocked; if they are not blocked, one will inevitably enter the realm of māras. Of the eighteen powers and functions above, the first is "because it enables all māras to give rise to great compassion." Causing māras to give rise to compassion is precisely "blocking the paths of all Māra kings"; this is certainly not encompassed by the compassion of bodhisattvas, vajra power, or the transformations of devas. It is because of all the foregoing causes and conditions that it is called Heart-of-Heart. Sentient beings are not yet exhausted, and they are held within the grasp of māras. If one abandons the Heart-of-Heart, there is no way to liberate them. Only now do I understand these causes and conditions.

Disciple Qi Zhijun respectfully bows.

April 5, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] "The Buddhas offer no seal of approval, for such confirmation is not ultimate"—what does this mean? It seems to me that the methods of verification in the other schools can all be connected with heart esotericism, yet they are not entirely the same.

[LVM] This means that one is "originally a Buddha." It is not that one becomes a Buddha through practice, much less that one receives confirmation and is thereby made a Buddha. Practice merely removes [and destroys deluded thoughts and attachments]; confirmation merely tells you how thoroughly you have already removed them.

[Yongshou Tongzi] “Causing māras to give rise to compassion” is both a method and an outcome of subduing māras, is it not? Between subduing māras with “a compassionate mind” and subduing māras through Buddhas and bodhisattvas manifesting “wrathful forms,” which is superior and which inferior?

[LVM] “Wrathful forms” also inwardly conceal “a compassionate mind.” Use whichever is appropriate to the occasion. Using it correctly is superior; using it incorrectly is inferior.

Letter Twenty-One

Letter Twenty-One

Revered Master,

I wish you well, Master, and may sentient beings be easy to liberate. Having respectfully read your letter, my doubts have suddenly vanished. It turns out that such relative concepts as good and evil, beauty and ugliness, truth and delusion, awakening and confusion—along with our persistent discriminations, delight in what is above and aversion to what is below, and tenacious attachment to self—are all the mischief of the seventh consciousness.

If all these are cast aside, then the “I” that knows and the “world” that is known, the “I” that transforms and the “world” that is transformed, are neither two nor different; they are wholly complete as one. “Knowing” and “transforming” are likewise originally nondual, because the first five consciousnesses have already accorded with the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done.

[Correct! All discrimination belongs to the sixth consciousness, but it is not constant. The seventh, manas, constantly examines and deliberates, impelling and transmitting; it is the root of consciousness.] Here you speak only of nonduality, not of oneness. If one establishes oneness and excludes duality, one still falls into relativity.

Establish neither one nor two; establish neither both one and two nor neither one nor two; indeed, do not establish a single dharma. Only by transcending the four propositions and cutting off the hundred negations can one accord with the true aspect of suchness. Because the seventh consciousness makes mischief, attachment to self is tenacious and discrimination persistent; thus true reality cannot appear before one. [You are able to integrate and comprehend this thoroughly, which is truly gratifying! In the future, will it not be your aspiration, Zhijun, to shoulder the household affairs of the Tathāgata?] “Buddha” and “mind” are likewise nondual.

“Buddha-heart” is precisely the Heart-of-Heart, and the Dharma taught in The Buddha-Heart Sutra is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

April 6–April 12: eighth period. April 13–April 19: ninth period. On the first sitting of the ninth period (April 13), I rose relatively early and was able to practice two sessions. From nearly 3:00 to 5:00, I practiced the second mudrā; from 5:00 to 7:00, I practiced the fourth mudrā. This was the second time I practiced two sessions in a single day.

At the end of the second mudrā, I raised [my hands] above my crown and dedicated the merit. At the beginning of the fourth mudrā, I did not again recite the Four Refuges, invite the Dharma protectors, or make supplications; rather, I directly formed the fourth mudrā and continued sitting. At the end of the fourth mudrā, I again raised [my hands] above my crown and dedicated the merit. I do not know whether this way of linking the sessions is permissible. [It is.]

The Buddha-Heart Sutra explains the circumstances that gave the Heart-of-Heart Dharma its name, setting forth approximately eighteen “reasons” in relation to worldly dharmas. Thereafter, the assembly entreated the World-Honored One to teach the Dharma. Before expounding the six mudrās and one mantra, he first explained the ten kinds of upholding for cultivating and realizing Buddhahood.

Master’s marginal note: “The ten kinds of upholding for cultivating and realizing Buddhahood are of the utmost importance. Without these ten upholdings, one can never become a Buddha! Those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma must first give rise to these ten great vows!” This disciple makes this vow: Throughout the endless future, I shall faithfully accept and uphold these ten kinds of upholding, keeping them in mind and never forgetting them! [Excellent! With such strong and great vow-power, why fear that the Buddha Way will not be accomplished?] “The first is to uphold the mind: be unobstructed in regard to dharmas, give rise to faith in the Buddha, remain even-minded toward mind, give rise to loving-kindness toward sentient beings, and be unattached to forms.”

“Be unobstructed in regard to dharmas” accords with the great perfect mirror wisdom, into which the eighth consciousness is transformed; “remain even-minded toward mind” accords with the wisdom of equality, into which the seventh consciousness is transformed; “be unattached to forms” accords with the wondrous observing wisdom, into which the sixth consciousness is transformed; and “give rise to faith in the Buddha and loving-kindness toward sentient beings” accords with the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done, into which the first five consciousnesses are transformed.

[Just so! Just so!] The first upholding already accords with transforming the eight consciousnesses into the four wisdoms. Then, by gathering the four wisdoms into

the three kāyas, one attains accomplishment. Additionally, this disciple still remembers the Master's Dharma portrait. The Master had already agreed to send one when available; I do not know whether one is available now. This disciple still does not know of the Master's deeds in spreading the Dharma. I do not know whether this request exceeds the proper bounds, and respectfully ask the Master for correction. If it does not exceed the proper bounds, this disciple would like to know the causes and conditions of the Master's Dharma work. [There is nothing! Since not a single dharma is established, there is nothing to tell!]

Disciple Qi Zhijun, with reverence

April 19, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] The seventh consciousness is the root of the sixth consciousness, and the eighth consciousness is the root of the seventh consciousness. This is how the Consciousness-Only school explains it; early Buddhism, however, speaks only of consciousness. Thus, the consciousness spoken of in early Buddhism should include the sixth, seventh, and eighth consciousnesses. The various classifications were all devised as expedient means of understanding.

[LVM] "In accordance with the minds of sentient beings, responding according to what they are able to know."

[Yongshou Tongzi] Originally, he said he would provide a photograph. Why has it now become "not a single dharma is established"? Does this mean that the guru is going back on his word?

[LVM] He has not gone back on his word. What was sent was a Dharma portrait of Grandmaster Wang Xianglu.

The Twenty-Second Letter

Letter Twenty-Two

Revered and Gracious Teacher,

I wish you well, Master, and pray that sentient beings may be easily liberated. Last year, before this disciple had received the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, you wrote: "If you truly have faith, then this very one who has come to inquire about the Dharma, who has made great vows, and who intends to attain Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings—this is your true mind. That which radiates light all day from your face, and which raises your hands and moves your feet—this is your Original Face."

“Then there is no need to cultivate any other dharma gate. Why, then, do you propose coming to Shanghai to study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?” At the time, this disciple was attached to the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and did not dare to accept this directly. Though deeply shaken and seemingly awakened to something, I still did not dare to reply to you at once.

Later, I once mocked myself with a verse by the great lay practitioner Xia Lianju: “Every sentence sounds empty when spoken; every step is there when taken. The man who covers his ears while stealing a bell—empty space laughs until its mouth splits open.”

[Wonderful!] Later still, as I continued practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, I suddenly found a reply here: “Whatever is spoken is not the true meaning; neither empty nor existent, it does not hinder practice. Empty space laughing until it splits open is the true realm; why not cover one’s ears and strike the doorbell?”

[If it is the true realm, why do you still not dare to say “steal”?] To shoulder the Tathāgata’s family enterprise is the proper duty of a child of the Buddha. Why not accept it directly? Yet, since I have not thoroughly awakened and the true suchness and reality of all appearances have not fully manifested before me, how dare I hold ambrosia in a crude vessel? The Chan school says, “Without relying on cultivation and realization, it is so right here and now.” Is there not an analogy here: “A golden vessel can hold ambrosia, whereas a crude vessel cannot.”

Yet, at the level of microscopic structure, what difference is there between the basic particles composing molecules of gold and those composing molecules of clay? The basic particles are originally identical, but their structural arrangements differ; therefore, one is gold and the other clay.

“Without relying on cultivation and realization” means not changing the basic particles themselves (which cannot be changed within the scope of chemistry); “yet one must still diligently advance” means that the arrangement and structure must be changed. On examining myself, I am still struggling in the process of “carrying mud and alloying it”; I have not yet become gold. Therefore, I still do not dare to accept it directly. [This is precisely, “Defilement cannot be admitted, yet cultivation and realization are not absent.”]

You wrote: “When not a single dharma is established, there is nothing that can be offered.” This disciple thinks that if even non-establishment is not established, then instruction need not be hindered. “Not a single dharma is established” and “the myriad dharmas are all manifest” are originally nondual. Therefore, I again ask you to instruct me on the causes and conditions governing the course of the Dharma. I do not cling to the finger pointing at the moon; my aim is to see the moon by means

of the finger. Thus this finger, too, is like a pagoda ten thousand fathoms high, rising straight into the clouds. [By all means, do not talk of dreams within a dream!]

April 20–April 26: tenth period. April 27–May 3: eleventh period. During these two periods there seemed to be much drowsiness, yet the mudrā did not disperse.

[Still lacking a little!] The undercurrent of deluded thoughts remains. Is "not paying attention to them" the best method? [Yes!] During the second sitting of the eleventh period, I rose early and practiced two sittings; in these two sittings, I performed the first four mudrās before the latter two. Yet during the fourth sitting of the eleventh period, I again rose too late. I did not practice early in the morning, but sat down after eight o'clock and rose after ten. [What was the state within the sitting? Did it suddenly burst open, and did the bottom of the bucket fall away?]

In The Buddha-Heart Sutra, among the ten upholdings for cultivating and realizing the Buddha ground, the second is: "Keep the precepts without deficiency; always gather the mind in samādhi; cultivate refraining from false speech; gladly give to sentient beings; eliminate pride and arrogance." Here, the Dharma text writes "false speech" as "forgotten speech"; is this a printing error? [Yes!] "Gladly give to sentient beings" overcomes stinginess and greed, while "eliminate pride and arrogance" overcomes anger.

This second upholding encompasses "cultivating the three trainings of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, and eliminating the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance." Does "cultivate refraining from false speech" actually encompass the two branches of "eliminating ignorance and opening wisdom"? [Greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt—the five—are delusions of thought and are very difficult to eliminate. Therefore, one must always gather the mind in samādhi in order to eliminate them. Cultivating refraining from false speech can also encompass the two branches of eliminating ignorance and opening wisdom.]

Because of ignorance, one does not recognize that all things arise from conditions and lack inherent nature, but grasps them as truly existent. Therefore, through false speech, one deceives oneself and others, creates karma, and undergoes karmic retribution.] "Third: do not commit evil. Cultivate the precept against killing; do not eat harmful food; take care not to praise yourself; do not see the faults of others."

If "cultivate the precept against killing" and "do not eat harmful food" are read together, does "harmful food" refer to meat? [Harmful food does not refer only to meat; spoiled and poisonous foods are included as well. In addition, eating at improper times is also harmful food.] "Take care not to praise yourself" means "eliminate pride," and "do not see the faults of others" means "eliminate arrogance." This accords with the "eliminate pride and arrogance" of the second upholding. I ask

you, Master, to instruct me. [Have you obtained the key? Where is it? Take it out and let us see!]

Your disciple, Qi Zhijun, bows in reverence

May 3, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] At first, when the teacher did not speak of stealing, was it perhaps like Chan Master Niutou Farong's not daring to sit on the character for "Buddha" written by Chan Master Daoxin?

[LVM] Yes. This still remains!

[Yongshou Tongzi] The teacher's analogy of chemical structure is very vivid. With cultivation and sudden awakening, could there not be a genetic mutation?

[LVM] "Genetic mutation" is only an analogy. One must not seek to attach some kind of "gene" to Buddha-nature.

The Twenty-Third Letter

Letter Twenty-Three

Your disciple prostrates with the five parts of the body touching the ground and respectfully bows at the Master's seat:

The key of mind opens the lock of mind. The key has long been in hand, but the stubborn lock is too rusty; even today, it has not yet been opened. [In fact, the key has never been in hand! If it truly were in hand, one would no longer see the rust on the lock. Not only would one not see the rust on the lock; even the key itself would vanish without a trace.

If you still rely on a key to open a rusty lock, it will also be difficult! I record here a koan to help you open the "lock of consciousness at the mysterious gate" in your mind.

While Chan Master Dongming Qian and two disciples were reading the Śūraṅgama Sūtra together, they came to where Śākyamuni Buddha said, "If I press my finger, the ocean-seal emits light!" A disciple asked, "What is Śākyamuni Buddha's meaning?" The master said, "Śākyamuni Buddha deserves thirty blows!" The disciple asked, "What fault has Śākyamuni Buddha committed?" The master said, "Why press a finger?" The disciple said, "But when a thought temporarily arises, the mind becomes confused and loses

itself!" The master gave a mighty shout and said, "That too is the ocean-seal emitting light!" The disciple attained great awakening at these words and said, "Ah! For decades I have missed it right here!" See how swiftly and lightly this rusty lock is opened! All sentient beings are originally Buddhas, but they are wrapped and obscured by the locks of deluded thoughts, attachments, and afflictions, without knowing it. Those who cultivate the Way also fall into dead samādhi and thoughtlessness, failing to realize that every movement, action, and word is the wondrous functioning of true nature. Thus, they sit beside a rice bin and cry that they are hungry—how could this not be lamentable?] Murky currents surge as one steers a solitary boat; to turn back to the shore, one must raise the sail.

Advancing one step in haste, one retreats nine; lax in the precepts, one avoids two and falls into three. Speaking of dreams within a dream is still a dream; seeking roundness within the complete circle only obscures its completeness. [Since one already knows it is originally complete, what rusty lock remains to be opened?] Cast aside the oars and rudder and leap overboard; bodhi and afflictions are disposed of together. Your disciple has the bad habit of smoking. Recently, the amount smoked has greatly decreased, though I have not yet stopped altogether.

If I did not feel uncomfortable as soon as I smoked, I fear that even this "great decrease" would not have been possible. [Since you feel uncomfortable, why smoke at all?] Smoking is not a bodily necessity. There is no feeling of comfort after smoking; it is merely a habit.

[A habit is something one must struggle against! Without firm resolve, how can one change?] Your disciple deeply understands the harm of eating meat, yet what I eat each day is not merely "vegetables cooked alongside meat." I do not wish to eat meat, but my family has not yet been influenced by Buddhism. I often feel ashamed because of this.

[Since you do not wish to eat meat, why not eat vegetables cooked alongside meat? You yourself should first take the lead and set an example.] Recently, karmic obstacles have appeared. For no reason, I gave rise to irritable emotions; anger flared up, and I even cursed someone once. Although it has now subsided, when I think back on it, I still find it pitiable and sad. Mr. Gengyun said, "Serenity is the direct realization of the Dharma.

" When anger flares, serenity has vanished without a trace. Although it is far from affecting my practice, during meditation I often experience drowsiness and distraction. [Once an offense has been committed, it must not be committed again!] During meditation, there has not yet been a sudden breakthrough, like an explosion or the bottom dropping out of a bucket, but outside meditation there are sensations.

[A breakthrough cannot be sought! The Heart-of-Heart Dharma has this advantage: what one does not attain during meditation, one often attains after meditation or in dreams!] After this bout of anger subsided, I have continually felt as though something were crawling upward along my spine from behind, stopping at my upper back, seeming to move yet not moving. This is only a sensation outside meditation and has continued for the past two days. [As for all sensations, let them follow their natural course; neither abide in nor cling to them. Then the crown of the head will naturally open, and the spirit will roam freely.]

May 4–May 10: twelfth period. May 11–May 17: thirteenth period. On the evening of the 9th, I went to Beijing. That night, from midnight to 2:00 a.m., I practiced one session of the fourth mudrā on the train. As my shirt was nearly yellow, I used it to cover my hands. On the 11th, again from midnight until after 2:00 a.m., I practiced one session of the second mudrā at the hostel.

Before the practice, several fellow travelers in the room were chatting and could not sleep. Only after my practice did they go to sleep. [Should not those who cultivate the great Way be like this?!] On the 12th: they were still chatting on the night of the 11th, but I fell asleep and did not awaken until 6:00 a.m.; then I sat from 6:00 until after 8:00. Although they got up and washed, no one disturbed me. On the 12th, I took a night train and arrived home at noon on the 13th. From 2:00 until after 4:00 that afternoon, I practiced one session of the fourth mudrā. After the 14th, I resumed my regular practice schedule of 5:00 to 7:00 every morning.

In the Buddha-Heart Sutra, among the ten observances for cultivating the Buddha-ground, the fourth is: “Toward all who seek the Dharma, do not give rise to ridicule or disdain; toward all Buddhist teachings, shield and protect against faults and evils; among teachers and monastics, regard them as one’s parents.” “Toward all Buddhist teachings, shield and protect against faults and evils” is wholehearted refuge in the Buddha. “Toward all who seek the Dharma, do not give rise to ridicule or disdain” is wholehearted refuge in the Dharma.

“Among teachers and monastics, regard them as one’s parents” is wholehearted refuge in the guru and refuge in the saṅgha. This fourth observance encompasses the four refuges: refuge in the Vajra Master, refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma, and refuge in the Saṅgha. Namo Gurubhya, Namo Buddhaya, Namo Dharmaya, Namo Sanghaya.

Disciple Qi Zhijun respectfully bows

May 17, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] I bow to Teacher and to Master Yuanyin. Teacher directly shows students the process of eliminating subtle habitual tendencies in clothing, food,

shelter, and daily conduct, thereby enabling us also to arouse the resolve to eradicate our habitual tendencies.

[LVM] Oh! That was a report to the Master, not a “direct showing to students.” I have many faults. When I am with you all, they often do not show themselves, just as one is always unwilling to give others one’s broken and worthless things.

[Yongshou Tongzi] “The Heart-of-Heart Dharma has this advantage: what one does not attain during meditation, one often attains after meditation or in dreams!” I truly regret that some abandon it halfway.

[LVM] Those who abandon it halfway may also have other reasons. For example, their resolve may not be genuine: they seek marvels and mysteries, but when there are no marvels or mysteries halfway through, they abandon it.

The Twenty-Fourth Letter

Letter Twenty-Four

Revered Master,

I wish you well, Master, and pray that sentient beings may be more readily liberated. During this period I made two successive business trips, first to Dengzhou in Henan and then to Panjin in Liaoning. When I returned from Dengzhou, your letter had not yet arrived, but I received issue 2 of Chan magazine. I repeatedly read your brief explanation of “Inscription on Awakening to the Mind” and felt that I had much to say to you. When I returned from Panjin, I was at last able to read your letter. After reading it, however, I found myself unable to say another word; everything I had intended to write to you had simply vanished without a trace.

1. The wondrously luminous true mind is manifested at the very moment a thought is raised or stirred. Without the true mind, deluded thoughts could not arise.

[Correct! Since the raising and stirring of thoughts is a manifestation of the wondrously luminous true mind, why speak of deluded thoughts at all? To speak again of deluded thoughts would be to regress three thousand leagues! What are called deluded thoughts are merely the result of deluded people who neither recognize nor awaken to this, who take appearances for real and abide in ceaseless grasping and attachment. Once one has recognized and awakened to it, abiding nowhere at all times, every raising and stirring of thought is the wondrous functioning of the true mind.

There is only the slightest difference between “deluded thoughts” and “wondrous functioning,” yet the difference is as vast as that between heaven and earth!]

Ordinarily, however, I cling only to deluded thoughts. Like forgetting water when seeing waves, or forgetting the sun when obtaining light, I thus forget the true mind. [It is not that you forget it; rather, you do not recognize the true mind.] On several occasions, this disciple has grasped hold of the true mind, but regrettably lost it again before long. [Where did you lose it? When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing!] Yet I feel that seeing it again will not be difficult.

2. Smoking and eating meat must be given up. I feel that it is difficult to stop smoking through my own strength alone, and I hope that Master will bless me. [Smoke when you wish to smoke, and stop when you wish to stop—only then are you a true man!]

3. Although I have not confused "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature" with spiritual powers, I have taken the appearance of a selfless meditative state as a sign of "realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature." Since this meditative state has not yet appeared, although on several occasions I grasped the water that gives rise to waves, and in moments of radiant clarity clearly saw the sun, I did not dare to acknowledge it and easily let it slip by.

Then I thought how ridiculous this was: I clearly knew that only after awakening can one truly practice, and that meditative states are attained through cultivation. How, then, could they be taken as signs of awakening? [When practice reaches a certain level, there will indeed come a sudden release, as though the bottom of a bucket has fallen out: inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world—all vanish together, and the true mind blazes forth before one.

Only then does one directly realize one's original nature. Only then does one have the strength to gather the myriad things back into oneself rather than being turned by circumstances. Even so, one must still cultivate diligently and eliminate all old habitual tendencies before one has truly arrived home. Never be content with a little attainment, becoming arrogant and self-conceited, without seeking to advance ever higher; otherwise, one may remain stuck in the same place and miss an entire lifetime.]

4. Whether the "explosion" occurs during meditation, off the cushion, or in a dream, I shall no longer concern myself with it. I shall simply sit day after day, forming the mudrā and reciting the mantra. Its benefits are beyond description and permeate daily life. Although anger has at times flared up, inwardly I have remained clearly aware. Although afflictions occasionally arise, they dissolve without trace in an instant. All this is the power of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. [Just so, just so!]

5. Although I made two business trips, sometimes practicing on the train and sometimes in hotels, I practiced one session every day and never neglected it. I have now returned and have settled down somewhat. Before long, I must also travel to

Kaifeng; once I return from Kaifeng, my business-travel assignments will be basically complete. [Could you go to Baoji, Shaanxi? There is an ancient Tang-dynasty temple there—Longxing Temple. It is said to be quiet and secluded, at the foot of the Zhongnan Mountains, and to have been an ancient Esoteric Buddhist practice center. Some people are now undertaking to restore and rebuild it, but I do not know whether this is true.]

May 18–May 24: fourteen sessions. May 25–May 31: fifteen sessions. June 1–June 7: sixteen sessions. At the earliest, from 12:30 to 2:30 a.m.; at the latest, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., varying according to the circumstances.

In my previous letter, I reported to you on my practice on trains and in lodging houses. You commented: "Should one who cultivates the great Way not be like this?!" I do not know whether you approved or disapproved; please instruct me, Master. [Those who cultivate the Way should keep the Way in mind at all times and in all places, and must not neglect it for a single day. By "Should one not be like this?" I meant that one should practice so diligently and tirelessly.]

The Buddha-Heart Sutra speaks of the ten observances of the Buddha-ground in cultivation. The fifth states: "If you put the teachings of vows into practice, take care not to lose them. Regard rich and poor alike with an equal mind. You must keep worldly truth in mind and accord with all people." "If you put the teachings of vows into practice, take care not to lose them" means "thought after thought continues without interruption; in the karma of body, speech, and mind, there is no weariness."

"Regard rich and poor alike with an equal mind" means "without asking whether they are pure or impure, whether kṣatriyas of noble lineage or chandālas, practice compassion equally toward all, without choosing between high and low, and arouse the resolve to bring to fulfillment the immeasurable merits of all sentient beings." "You must keep worldly truth in mind and accord with all people" means: "The Buddha-Dharma is in the world and does not depart from awakening within the world. To seek bodhi apart from the world is like looking for a rabbit's horn." [Just so, just so!]

In addition, your brief explanation of "Inscription on Awakening to the Mind" mentions an article, "A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature." I have not found it in Chan, Dharma Voice, Shanghai Buddhism, Guangdong Buddhist Newsletter, or Taizhou Buddhist Newsletter. Where was your article "A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature" published? Please let me know, Master; this disciple longs for it as one thirsting for water.

[I did not submit this article for publication in a periodical. I did not submit "Inscription on Awakening to the Mind" either; I do not know who took it upon

themselves to publish it. As for “A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One’s True Nature,” it is being reprinted in many places, but it has not been proofread and contains quite a few errors. Wait until next time, and I will ask someone to find a copy and send it to you. Tomorrow I am going to Hangzhou for the summer at the invitation of fellow practitioners there, and I plan to return to Shanghai around October.]

Your disciple, Qi Zhijun, prostrates

June 5, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] “Smoke when you wish to smoke, and stop when you wish to stop—only then are you a true man!” Those who are attached to rigid rules will surely have much slanderous criticism to offer upon hearing this.

[LVM] Ha ha! In fact, I am one of those rigid people. Had the elder not repeatedly struck and shouted at me, I still do not know what I would be like now. I fear that I would either be mentally deranged or suffering from senile dementia…. From the depths of my heart: Homage to my root guru, Acharya Yuanyin!

[Yongshou Tongzi] I had thought that my own practice was already arduous enough. I never imagined that, when the teacher was practicing, even “A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One’s True Nature” had not yet been published. He may truly be called one of the pioneering trailblazers. In less than ten years, we have already arrived at an Internet age of information overload. It is truly moving to reflect on this.

[LVM] At that time, materials were extremely scarce. The only Mind-Seal material I regularly read was a mimeographed copy of The Buddha-Heart Sutra, bestowed by the elder. It was nothing like today, when information is abundant both online and offline. There is now no need for extensive explanation, for materials of explanation already fill volume after volume. In the past, one could rely only on oral explanation; the elder was very weary, yet he had no choice but to explain. Now that materials are abundant, there is no need for us to tire ourselves as the elder did. What virtue or ability do people like us possess that we should enjoy such blessings!

The Twenty-Fifth Letter

Letter Twenty-Five

Respected Master,

It is now October, and I assume that you have already returned to Shanghai from Hangzhou. [Benevolent Zhijun: I should have returned to Shanghai earlier, but my

fellow practitioners repeatedly urged me to stay, so I did not return until today, November 24. I was unable to reply to your letter promptly; I hope you will understand.] For four months I have not received the Master's instruction. This disciple has much to say, yet does not know where to begin. [Everything is contained in what need not be said.]

1. Practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. During this period, I have not missed a single day of practice. In between, I added several sessions of the third mudrā, and I am now practicing the second mudrā on Tuesdays.

Spiritual powers must not be sought, but are they a sign of awakening? That is, is awakening always accompanied by the appearance of spiritual powers? If so, I have not yet awakened, because I have not developed such powers. If not, I seem already to have awakened, because I have experienced the serenity of not being carried away by circumstances.

It is not that one does not know greed; rather, at the very moment one knows greed, one also knows to let it go and is not tainted by it. It is not that anger does not arise; rather, at the very moment anger arises, one knows meditative stability, and anger too is a wave of one's intrinsic nature. It is not that one is without ignorance; rather, when one knows and recognizes ignorance, that very substance is numinous knowing. It is wisdom-light.

It is neither the presence of thoughts nor the absence of thoughts. When thoughts are present, intrinsic nature shines clearly, and the thought is empty at the very moment it arises. When thoughts are absent, intrinsic nature is silent and can give rise to all phenomena. In the very emptiness of the present thought, all phenomena are lucidly still; all phenomena arise when there is silent non-abiding. It is not that “silence is intrinsic nature and all phenomena are deluded thoughts.” Intrinsic nature does not exist independently apart from deluded thoughts; deluded thoughts themselves are intrinsic nature.

If one leaves deluded thoughts behind to seek intrinsic nature, intrinsic nature cannot be found. What is this intrinsic nature? It truly cannot be spoken of or explained. [The sūtra says: “There is no need to seek the true; one need only cease deluded thoughts.”] This intrinsic nature completely encompasses everything worldly and supramundane, without remainder; one cannot find the slightest thing standing in opposition to intrinsic nature. [Exactly so.

] After saying so much, I feel that I still have not made it clear. Having spoken is equivalent to not having spoken; perhaps it simply cannot be spoken. If it cannot be spoken, why speak of it at all? I wish to ask the Master to verify it. [Your capacity for prajñā is strong!] [You were wrong before you even opened your mouth!] [Spiritual

powers are not the criterion of awakening; they are merely subsidiary wondrous functions that develop after one has awakened to the fundamental.

Awakening is realization of the essence; spiritual powers are subsidiary functions. Once you have realized the essence, so long as you safeguard it constantly in all daily activities and do not let it wander and become tainted, spiritual powers will naturally develop in no more than three to five years.

The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: “When a bodhisattva abides in this”—that is, abides in the great wisdom of awakening, having realized the wondrous essence—“and diligently eliminates the five hindrances”—wealth, sensuality, fame, food, and sleep—“before long, the five powers all arise.” Therefore, the Chan school says: “So long as you attain the root, do not worry about the branches!” Once you awaken to the wondrous essence, you will naturally not be turned by circumstances, and spiritual powers will come looking for you.

But after attaining such powers, you must not abide in them; remain as if you had not attained them. Only then can you advance ever higher and perfectly realize Buddhahood. It is excellent that you can recognize a thought the moment it arises! “Deluded thoughts” and “wondrous functioning” differ: discriminating while attached to circumstances is “deluded thought”; being non-discriminating without abiding in circumstances is “wondrous functioning.”

Deluded thoughts are like waves on water. Waves certainly cannot exist apart from water, but water may remain unmoved by the wind and thus produce no waves. Accordingly, intrinsic nature can exist independently apart from deluded thoughts. Therefore, when one realizes intrinsic nature, not only do deluded thoughts fail to arise, but all states, including empty space, are shattered completely and without remainder. Only then has one truly entered the original nature.]

2. Concerning Longxing Temple on Mount Zhongnan. This summer, I was invited to Tianjin to attend a research conference on Tibetan Esoteric qigong. I searched everywhere for people from Shaanxi, yet not one knew anything about Longxing Temple. By chance I met a nineteen-year-old man surnamed Zhang from Kaifeng, Henan, who happened to have a connection with Longxing Temple.

Mr. Zhang is an Esoteric Buddhist practitioner who has developed powers. His guru is a certain living Buddha, and he demonstrated extraordinary abilities at the conference. [These are Esoteric Buddhist techniques, not spiritual powers. Do not misunderstand. Genuine spiritual powers arise only after one has first attained the power of the Way—that is, the power of exhaustion of outflows—and then developed the five spiritual powers. That is the proper path.

A person who truly possesses spiritual powers will never show them off before a crowd. On the contrary, those who flaunt them before others all follow deviant paths.] According to Mr. Zhang, Longxing Temple lies on the western foothills of Mount Zhongnan. Only its ruins now remain, but there is still one successor, who is exceedingly difficult to meet. Some precious Dharma texts also remain.

There were once three overseas travelers who resolved to donate all their travel funds to rebuild the temple. Mr. Zhang did his utmost to bring this about, but the local government did not agree, and the project was never completed. Mr. Zhang said that they could only erect a stele at the site of Longxing Temple to indicate that it was the site of an ancient temple. Mr. Zhang agreed that I could participate in erecting the stele. [Incorrect! Longxing Temple still exists and is habitable. Dharma Master Guangsheng and several bhikshus are practicing there. This shows that Mr. Zhang has not truly developed powers.]

3. My father's illness—cancer leading to paralysis. The cancer pain began last autumn, as intermittent pain in his upper right lung. I urged him to stay at Hebi and receive qigong treatment, but he did not believe in it and left Hebi for home. After that, I went to Beijing on a business trip. When I returned home from Tianjin, I had already received a telegram saying, “Father critically ill.” My father had been admitted to the Third People's Hospital of Anyang.

I hurried to Anyang. My father had already been diagnosed with advanced lung cancer, which had metastasized to the fourth vertebra and blocked the nerves, causing paralysis. At that time, his condition was critical; even two injections of Dolantin a day could barely relieve the pain. I searched everywhere for other treatments.

For Beijing “Yunzhi Anticancer Powder,” my second younger brother set off at midnight and brought it back the following evening. For “Yanghua 851 Liquid,” he likewise left in half a day and bought it the next day. It truly felt as though “I merely moved my lips while my younger brother wore out his legs.”

First, I went to the outpatient clinic of a qigong master surnamed Tian. Tian had a disciple with celestial eye, and I asked her to examine my father through clairvoyance. Her diagnosis was entirely consistent with that of the hospital, and she said that it could not be cured. Later, I learned of another qigong master surnamed Wang. After Wang first emitted qi, the pain ceased, and thereafter my father's condition stabilized.

[All qigong practitioners with extraordinary abilities have spirits, ghosts, or demons behind them as their support; these are not genuine abilities.] During this period, we also carried out other treatments, including at times having rural spirit-mediums drive away evil. [You practice the true Dharma, yet you also believe in spirit-

mediums. This shows that deviant dharmas are easily accepted, whereas the true Dharma is difficult to believe in.

Alas!] I first went to Taiping Xingguo Temple in Mei County to request blessings through the Mantra for the Extinction of Offenses. Later, I went to Ancient Guanyin Temple in Kaifeng to perform a Buddhist rite for averting calamities and asked the masters there to recite the Medicine Buddha Sūtra for three days. I also took refuge in the Three Jewels on my father's behalf, with his knowledge.

My father is now staying in a hospital in our hometown. My brothers and I take turns caring for him. The first miracle has already appeared: the advanced cancer has been brought under control. I hope to find another treatment and bring about a second miracle—that the paralyzed patient may stand again.

[Had you known earlier that the lamp was fire, the rice would have been cooked long ago! You need not seek others afar. Simply sit in the third mudrā once each day. Each time, place a packet of tea leaves or the tumor medicine you purchased in the palm of the mudrā, recite the mantra for two hours, and ask the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Dharma protectors to bless your father. Then decoct the tea leaves or medicine in water and give it to your father, and his illness will be cured. Divide the medicinal liquid into three or four doses each time.]

4. My wife's letter to you. At first, she practiced qigong because of illness and had no faith in Buddhism. Later, she gradually developed faith. When I went to Ancient Guanyin Temple in Kaifeng to perform the Buddhist rite, she went with me and also took refuge in the Three Jewels. She is now practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra practice of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara. I am enclosing her letter to you.

Your disciple, Zhiming, bows in reverence

October 8, 1990

[Youth Yongshou] Does the teacher now have spiritual powers?

[LVM] You too have spiritual powers. To be born with a precious human body is shen; to dress and eat is tong.

[Youth Yongshou] Many Buddhist practitioners embarked on the path of proper cultivation through qigong. In my humble view, qigong, which arose in the late 1980s, made its greatest contribution by causing a slight ripple in a cultural atmosphere long dominated by materialism, thereby providing those with the requisite affinities an opportunity to study Buddhism and cultivate the Way.

[LVM] Qigong and Buddhadharma are, after all, not the same thing. The circumstance that led me to attend the Tibetan Esoteric Qigong Research

Conference in Tianjin was not a matter of going there to study qigong; it arose through another great master of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism—Elder Yuan Hongshou of Hebei.

Elder Yuan and I had also exchanged letters several times. He suggested that I use the occasion of the Tibetan Esoteric Qigong Research Conference to receive empowerment into Tibetan Esoteric tantric teachings. On the way to Tianjin, I passed through Hebei and had intended to find Elder Yuan at the address on the envelope and receive his instruction in person. To my surprise, only Elder Yuan's daughter, Yuan Lingna, answered the door; Elder Yuan had already passed into parinirvāṇa.

At the Tianjin conference, I met Mr. Zhang. We were both from Henan and stayed in adjoining rooms. Mr. Zhang claimed that if one drank water he had blessed with mantras, even someone who had never practiced martial arts would involuntarily perform a set of boxing movements. I said, “I have never practiced martial arts; let me try.”

He poured some boiling water into a vegetable dish and muttered a mantra. When he had finished, the water was no longer very hot and could be drunk. I drank it, but nothing happened for a long while. Then someone suddenly tapped me and motioned for me to go outside with him, so the two of us left Mr. Zhang's room.

It was at night. The room was brightly lit, but it was dark outside, so I could not see clearly who he was.

He told me, “You two are not following the same path. He practices qigong, while you are cultivating the bodhisattva stage. What are you getting mixed up with him for?” I was very surprised and thought, How could he know about Mr. Zhang's circumstances, and how could he know about mine as well? I wanted to ask him clearly. Before I could open my mouth, he spoke first.

He said, “Don’t ask so many questions. Just continue your own practice, and do not get involved with him.” After saying this, he left (and I never saw him again). So I returned to my room. Everyone else in the room had gone next door to watch the excitement. With no one to disturb me, it was a good opportunity to add an additional session (I had already completed that day’s session in the morning).

More than two hours later, I rose from meditation, and the commotion next door was still going on. I went next door again to have a look. There were many people there. When they saw me arrive, they said, “Your arms had already begun to rise just now [although I felt that I had not moved], but someone called you away. Now try again.” Of course, I did not try again. . . . This shows that qigong and the Buddhadharma are ultimately not the same thing.

The Twenty-Sixth Letter

Letter Twenty-Six

Virtuous Xiuzhi,

Your return from the qigong world to the Buddhist path shows that you possess deep wholesome roots; this is most gratifying. Your method of practice is entirely correct. There is no need to be afraid—simply continue sitting as before. As for the feeling of fear that arises when you recite the Buddha's name, it is a product of your own mind; it is not a punishment from the Buddhas or bodhisattvas.

The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are most compassionate. They only liberate all sentient beings and bestow blessings upon all sentient beings. No matter how you may distance yourself from them, rebuke them, or insult them, they will still watch over and cherish you with the same kindness; they will never blame you. Continue your practice with peace of mind. Do not be burdened by worries, lest your progress in practice be unable to advance swiftly.

There is nothing wrong with the experiences you have during practice. Simply let things take their natural course: do not rejoice at what is good, nor grieve over what is bad. Then you will not go astray. Moreover, you have a good husband to guide and correct you from the side, so you have even less reason to be afraid. Just practice courageously and diligently. It is very good to sit in practice with the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra; you may also add recitation of Amitābha Buddha in the mornings and evenings. There is no conflict in this.

For they are all Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Western Pure Land; through reciting their names and making vows, one may be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. When you are able to sit steadily for two hours, I will then confer empowerment upon you to practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. I will not say more. I wish you smooth and diligent progress!

Zhongding

×× November 24

[Yongshou Tongzi] Is this the master's reply to the teacher's wife, Wei Xiuzhi?

[LVM] Yes.

[Yongshou Tongzi] “No matter how you may distance yourself from them, rebuke them, or insult them, they will still watch over and cherish you with the same

kindness; they will never blame you.” Thus, on the one hand, the Buddha is a source of reliance for Buddhists; on the other, he is also their model and goal of study.

[LVM] Yes! The compassion of bodhisattvas and the awe-inspiring majesty of vajra beings are both skillful means for liberating sentient beings. There is no fixed Dharma; whether to extend compassion or apply sternness depends on the other person's faculties.

The Twenty-Seventh Letter

Twenty-Seventh Letter

Respectfully prostrating to the revered Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

1. Since “everything is conveyed without words,” it follows that “before one opens one’s mouth, one is already wrong.” To avoid being wrong, one simply must not open one’s mouth. This disciple understands it thus: if one can recognize one’s error, then “right” is also contained therein. [So long as “right” remains, error is contained therein as well.

] The Master has taught: “Intrinsic nature can exist independently, apart from deluded thoughts,” and “all states, including empty space, are shattered all at once, leaving nothing behind.” This disciple feels that this is attained from deep samādhi. As I have not yet attained such deep samādhi, I can only understand it conceptually and have not yet realized it directly. [Water apart from its waves does not cease to be water.

Chan Master Dongshan’s verse on awakening says: “It is now precisely me, yet I am not now it!” This verse expresses the same meaning. Practice diligently, and naturally “the great earth sinks level and empty space shatters”!] For now, where deluded thoughts arise, I will recognize true suchness, safeguard realization of intrinsic nature by not clinging to illusory states, and sit in meditation every day.

Just keep sitting, without worrying whether samādhi is attained or not, whether there is an explosion or not, or whether awakening occurs or not. When the melon ripens, the stem naturally falls off; when the waves subside and the water becomes clear, suchness apart from deluded thoughts will naturally appear before one. [You have grasped the essential instructions for practice very well.] At that time, if I wished to report to the Master, it would still be “before one opens one’s mouth, one is already wrong.” Even if it is wrong, one must still open one’s mouth. How can one know one’s error without opening one’s mouth? And if one does not know one’s

error, where could right come from? [Open your mouth freely, yet you have never opened your mouth. What right or wrong could there be?]

2. Having received the Master's instruction concerning Longxing Temple on Mount Zhongnan, I find a longing for it naturally arising. Longxing Temple may be the place where this disciple is to settle in this lifetime. [The substance is like empty space. Does empty space have a place to settle?] I shall first go and pay homage at the temple, though I may not necessarily be able to find it.

Quite a few disciples of Dharma Master Benxue who attended the Tianjin Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism gathering are on Mount Zhongnan, yet they did not even know of Longxing Temple. It is even more difficult for outsiders to know of it.

Whom should I ask for directions? [One who has truly awakened to the Way has no destination even in returning; having no destination is itself returning. Everywhere is a return; every place is a return, yet there is nowhere to return to. What Longxing Temple are you looking for?] I do not know whether Longxing Temple receives mail, nor do I know whether the Master and Dharma Master Guangsheng correspond by letter. If the Master could point out a clear path, many of this disciple's doubts could be dispelled. [We corresponded by letter in earlier days; now I do not know where he is. I have heard that he is in Baoji, Shaanxi.]

3. "Had I known earlier that the lamp was fire, I would have realized that the rice was already cooked." My foolishness is apparent from this. I have practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for more than a year, yet I still used qigong to treat my father's illness. How lamentable. [To treat your father's illness, it would be best each time to practice the third mudrā for three sessions of six hours each, divide the tea leaves into three portions, decoct them, and have him drink the liquid.] Having received the Master's instruction on treating illness, I prostrate to you on my father's behalf in deepest thanks. [I dare not accept this.]

4. After my wife, Xiuzhi, read your letter, she was filled with great joy. She has written another letter, which I am enclosing now.

Your disciple, Zhiming, prostrates

December 6, 1990

[Youth Yongshou] "Safeguard realization of intrinsic nature by not clinging to illusory states" is already the language of one who has passed through this, but one still cannot be wholly settled and at ease. Hence the talk of "empty space shattering and the great earth becoming level dust"—is that correct?

[LVM] People are not all alike; therefore, there is no fixed Dharma. For some people, with a "snap," as though an explosive had gone off, body, mind, and world vanish

without a trace—utterly clear, yet with not a single thing there. Others suddenly understand: “Oh! So that is how it is!” The differences between them are many. The Diamond Sūtra says: “All sages and noble ones differ through the unconditioned dharma.”

The Twenty-Eighth Letter

Letter Twenty-Eight

Elder Sister Xiuzhi:

Your courage in reforming yourself, letting go of everything, and resolving to study Buddhism is truly a rare and precious matter. It is also the result of the deep roots of goodness you planted in past lives. This is most gratifying and worthy of congratulations! It is very good that you can sit for two hours at a stretch. You may receive empowerment to practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

Since you are in Henan, there is no need for you to travel all the way to Shanghai. Fortunately, your husband, Zhijun, has received the Dharma and practiced it for quite some time, and he can assist me in transmitting the empowerment remotely. Thus, on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month (the day of the Buddha’s enlightenment), at nine o’clock in the morning, make offerings and prostrate before the Buddha at home. I will perform the empowerment ceremony for you in Shanghai. Zhijun should visualize that he is I. Holding the offering of purified water, he should recite the mantra, sprinkle water three times on the crown aperture for you, and teach you to form the bodhicitta mudrā, recite the mantra, and practice the method. In this way, you will be spared the hardship of traveling back and forth. The empowerment mantra is as follows: (omitted).

Zhongding

[Year] [Month] [Day]

[Yongshou Tongzi] The master calls Teacher Wei “Elder Sister Xiuzhi”—has the matter of seniority been mixed up?

[LVM] Ha ha! Then I shall call you “Elder Sister Yongshou.” This time, the seniority has not been mixed up, has it?

[Yongshou Tongzi] So the teacher’s earliest empowerments for others were originally based on the master’s instructions for remote empowerment.

[LVM] Yes. Later, I no longer performed remote empowerments. I asked the elder for the empowerment ritual procedure, and he said, “Don’t you already know it?” I

said, “That is the procedure for remote empowerment.” The elder said, “That is the procedure for empowerment. It was only because you had reservations that I called it remote empowerment.”

The Twenty-Ninth Letter

Letter Twenty-Nine

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

1. Right and wrong are relative dharmas. Once one falls into duality, it is no longer the true suchness of reality. Whatever has characteristics is illusory; only the characteristic of no characteristics is true reality. Yet this “absence of characteristics” is not opposed to “having characteristics.” [If there is an absence of characteristics, it is still a characteristic. How can it not be opposed?] True reality likewise does not fall into existence or nonexistence.

[In true reality, even the absence of characteristics is absent; even nonexistence is absent! Alas! Once one falls into verbal formulation, it becomes a fixed pattern! Therefore, at the very end, lineage masters remain silent and brush their sleeves as they return to their quarters.] Because one contemplates the impermanence of mind, one speaks of the permanence of intrinsic nature. If one understands the nondual Dharma, intrinsic nature too is impermanent. Permanence and impermanence are relative dharmas. The intrinsic nature of suchness does not fall into the four propositions. So too with bliss, self, and purity.

Originally there was no earth—what could be leveled or submerged? Empty space contains not a single thing—what could be crushed to powder? [The Dharma that is originally Dharma is not Dharma; the Dharma of no Dharma is also Dharma. Now, when entrusting the Dharma of no Dharma, when have dharmas ever been dharmas?] Ah, may I preserve and entrust myself to this numinous light of a single thought—no! This too is attachment to dharmas.

—Ah, once I become involved in right and wrong, I again fall into duality. Habitual tendencies are so stubborn; how can they be overcome without being worn away?! [The spiritual turtle drags its tail away: though its tracks are gone, new tracks appear where it was dragged. What is to be done? Have you not seen how, after awakening upon seeing peach blossoms, Lingyun said, “Once Lingyun saw them, he never saw them again; on every red and white branch, no flowers adhere.” Upon awakening, simply let it rest. Not abiding or clinging again—that is all.]

2. My wife has borrowed a camera and is preparing to photograph the Master's Dharma image when she goes to Shanghai to receive the teaching. I have never used a camera and still need to learn. I also plan to find a small tape recorder to take to Shanghai to record the Master's mantra recitation. Since the empowerment is being conferred remotely, there is no need for a camera or recorder. Nevertheless, this disciple still longs for the Master's Dharma image.

Otherwise, when this disciple sees the Master again, I fear I may not even recognize him. [You speak of no characteristics; why then are you attached to characteristics? Someone has now taken a photograph of me. I can send it to you with my next letter. There is no need for you to travel all the long way to Shanghai.] I would also like to report to the Master that the blessing power of the mantra is inconceivable.

At the Tianjin Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism gathering, when I first heard a recording of the Hundred-Syllable Mantra, I could not help trembling all over, with hot tears filling my eyes. It felt as though an iron band had been fastened around my head, and it took several days to subside. [Do you understand yet? This is the aggregate of feeling among the five aggregates causing mischief; fundamentally, it is still the stirring of the mind. You should see through the five aggregates. Then you will realize the great Way and no longer be moved.]

3. I plan to make an offering to the Master, but I fear that, as last time, the Master will send it back, thus wasting postage. I truly do not know what to do. This time, please do not send it back, all right? If the Master agrees, I will send it at once. [I do not accept offerings. Please do not send it again. When you have thoroughly awakened, then I will gladly accept your offerings!]

4. To treat my father's illness, I need to sit three sessions consecutively. I can only do so at night, and I wonder whether it matters if this extends past midnight. Is that all right? [Yes. Continue this until his illness is completely cured.]

Disciple Zhìming, with prostrations

December 22, 1990

[Yongshou Tongzi] Upon hearing the Hundred-Syllable Mantra, he had a responsive experience. Others would regard this as a proper meditative experience and retain attachment to it, but the Heart-of-Heart Dharma teaches that one should not abide even in goodness, but directly enter the state in which both self and dharmas are forgotten.

[LVM] The three sayings of heart esotericism are: "Prajñā as its principle. Dhāraṇī as its method. The Pure Land as its ultimate destination." If one can directly enter the first saying, then even the six mudrās and one mantra—the dhāraṇī—become

superfluous, much less anything else. It is simply that I have never seen anyone so swift and decisive. I once asked the Elder, saying that I had never seen such a person. The Elder said, “You have never seen one?” (I was just waiting to hear what came next, wanting to know who could be so swift and decisive, when the Elder continued:) “Neither have I.”

[Yongshou Tongzi] The Elder had already promised to “gladly accept your offerings.” How did the teacher later make offerings to the Elder?

[LVM] You have seen it all: has he not offered even body, speech, and mind to the guru?

The Thirtieth Letter

Letter Thirty (Supplement)

Respected Master,

Greetings! I wish you everlasting health and longevity.

The day before yesterday, I received your letter. I understand that at nine o’clock on the morning of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month (the Buddha’s Enlightenment Day), you will perform a remote empowerment ceremony for me in Shanghai. I am immensely joyful. I am profoundly grateful that, in this life, your disciple can receive your instruction. I will certainly strive diligently. Recently, I have been practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra every day.

When I practice for nearly half an hour, my fingers become numb, as though the blood vessels in my arms were about to swell and burst—from my head, through my shoulders and both arms, all the way to my fingers. At times, the numbness is accompanied by pain. Perhaps this is due to my own karmic obstacles. This is because qi and blood are not flowing freely; in other words, the obstruction is serious.

But this is nothing to worry about. Continue sitting, and once the qi and blood flow freely, it will pass. When your fingers become painfully numb, slightly relax both hands and rub them together; that will remedy it. In addition, I have an idea, though I do not know whether it is correct. When reciting the mantra aloud, I always want to use my awareness or ears to hear the sound, thereby gathering in my scattered mind.

You may use your ears to listen to the inner sound of your own mantra recitation, thereby gathering in deluded thoughts. At the same time, can I use this method to forget some of my pain? While practicing, my head swells, and though I want to

forget it, I cannot. I do not know whether this idea is feasible. Please instruct me, Master. Place your attention on the sound of the mantra, and you will forget the swelling in your head. If the swelling becomes unbearable, recite the mantra aloud, and it will cease.

Xiu Zhi, in prostration

December 22, 1990 [sic]

 Yongshou Tongzi The Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra opens the channels and blood vessels and heals illnesses. I have seen many cases in which it has been effective. The benefits of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, however, are manifested even more in profound changes in one's psychology and temperament.

 LVM It is far more than psychology and temperament; in fact, it brings a radical transformation of human nature and an elevation of character. Yet medicine cannot cure a terminal illness, and the Buddha liberates only those with affinity. As for results, they also vary from person to person.

The Thirty-First Letter

Letter Thirty-One

Reverently bowing in homage to the Venerable Master:

I bow in homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

The Master has brushed aside his sleeves and returned to the abbot's quarters; Chan is fundamentally a meeting of minds and needs no words. Once one knows that empty space contains not a single thing, there is no need repeatedly to use water and waves as a metaphor. [The literary brilliance is already manifest.] The essential points of the Master's On Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature were rendered into modern language by Hu Liao under the title "The Establishment of the Pure Land School" and published in Taizhou Buddhist Bulletin.

[The article "A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature" is already in the vernacular. If it were further translated into modern language, I fear it would become an elementary school composition.] Although I have seen only a glimpse, I now understand the essential meaning of "at the time of death." When "that Buddha appears before one," one directly beholds immeasurable light and immeasurable life. That one is I, and I am that one; the marks of self, person, and life span then vanish without remainder.

Just as Xinlian longed for Master Fazhao, so I long for the original text of A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature. Longing is longing; whether or not it is attachment to marks, I do not speak falsely. When the eight consciousnesses are transformed into the four wisdoms, the sixth consciousness is transformed first. Discriminating without attachment is wondrous observing wisdom.

[Precisely so! "A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature" has been revised and supplemented, and disciples in Wenzhou have submitted it to the magazine Chan for publication. Since you already subscribe to Chan, I will not send it to you again.] The same issue of Taizhou Buddhist Bulletin also carried news of the conferral of precepts at Linji Temple in Hebei. I have resolved to go and receive the bodhisattva precepts, and respectfully report this to the Master.

During the precept-conferral period, the schedule is tightly packed, and I may not be able to find time for the daily two-hour practice session. What should I do? I shall wait for the Master's instructions by letter before contacting Linji Temple. [During the conferral of precepts, it is not as though there is no time at all for practice. Recently I have heard that some Buddhist disciples receiving precepts do not observe the monastic rules, but behave in complete disorder; it is most unseemly.

Alas! If you have no time to practice, it does no harm to pause for a day or two.] Because of talk about a "Chan Studies Research Class," Master Yuanche lamented the decline of the Dharma gate and submitted sixteen verses to Guangdong Buddhism under the title "An Evening Talk at Nanhua."

Moved by this, I followed his rhymes and composed the following eight verses:
Those who practice Chan transcend words and marks;
In the very thought, free of thought, they abide in suchness.
Scholars cling to principles and establish theories,
Seeking, pondering, speculating, and calculating.

Those who study Chan extinguish self and abandon arrogance,
Gradually entering genuine realization and actual awakening.
Chan scholarship, clinging, becomes another mark,
And again falls into the common run of books.

Investigate with one mind what lies beyond;
The marks of self, person, and life span are all removed.
Investigate until serene and without thought;
Then even investigation itself is gone.

Research gives rise to the deluded discriminations of mind,
As dharma objects and consciousness busily revolve.
Should adverse conditions ripen,
One's views may collapse, and one falls deluded into the three lower realms.

The ancients provide precedents for warning;
They may serve as lamps for later ages.
One mistaken word, "fall,"
And one falls among wild foxes for five hundred lifetimes.

Although this is the degenerate age,
How dare later students be careless?
Even if sudden realization cannot be attained,
The precepts can still free us from bondage.

Whether fine gold or stubborn iron,
Cast into the great smelting furnace;
So long as one is earnest about birth and death,
When conditions ripen, one can become a worthy person.

Do not speak of Chan scholarship or studying Chan;
Cast aside investigation and research.
A thousand thoughts, ten thousand thoughts, a single thought:
Namo Amitābha Buddha.

[These verses are not without merit, but for now diligent practice is what matters. Do not savor and play with verse, thereby delaying the time of your own awakening.] My father has long been ill, and his bedsore is quite large; I was alarmed when I saw it. The dressing is changed every other day, so the doctor has given a verbal warning that his condition is critical.

I do not let this move me in word or action. Each day I practice tea-sitting, sincerely praying for the Buddha's blessing. When his karma is exhausted, my father should recover. [A large bedsore is dangerous. It must be treated with good medicine and must not be neglected, lest something unforeseen occur. First wash it with tea infusion, then apply the medicine.] The Master has kindly sent phonetic annotations for three mantras. I shall learn them thoroughly, so that in due course I may commune responsively with the Master and complete the remote empowerment and Dharma transmission.

[The mantras must be recited fluently before they can be used with ease.] I ought to make an offering to my beneficent Master, but the Master will not accept it. What should I do? If I were to say, "Not accepting does not hinder accepting," and simply

send it anyway, what then if the Master again spent money to send it back? [I have no need of offerings at present. Please do not concern yourself with this matter.]

Disciple Zhiming bows in homage

January 3, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] Teacher, what does “the literary brilliance is already manifest” mean?

[LVM] Oh! In the elder’s handwriting, it reads “the literary brilliance is already manifest.”

The Thirty-Second Letter

Letter Thirty-Two (Supplement)

Dear Master,

May sentient beings in this world be easily liberated. I was overjoyed to read your letter, Master. Even my spouse rejoiced that my blessings are so great. Now I only regret my own ignorance: why could I not have formed an affinity with you, Master, much earlier, instead of taking so many detours and wasting so much time?

Your letter included a photograph of the Grandmaster, which we have enshrined on our simple Buddhist altar. We only hope that your photograph, Master, will arrive soon, so that we may make offerings to it every day. We are truly so far apart. When will we be able to see you in person and attend upon you? In your letter, Master, you instructed me that I may use my ears to listen to the sound of the mantra as mentally recited, thereby gathering in wandering thoughts.

This sound as mentally recited—is it the sound we often speak of as imagined by the mind, rather than a sound produced by the mouth? [Yes! It is the mind observing the sound of the mantra. The mouth does not move even slightly. If it falls into silent recitation, it consumes blood; therefore, the mouth should initially move slightly. When wandering thoughts no longer arise, enter samādhi, and it will naturally cease moving; only then is it correct!] Then, since it is mentally recited, the mouth may move or may remain still.

You may recite aloud or silently. [Correct!] I know very, very little about Buddhist theory and teachings. Will this create obstacles to practice? [The less you know, the better!] When practicing while ill, how many sessions a day would be appropriate or ideal? [It depends on your physical condition. Do not force yourself; you should practice at least one session.]

Xiuzhi bows in reverence

[Yongshou Tongzi] “The less one knows of Buddhist theory, the better”—what a truly startling statement!

[LVM] The elder taught according to the illness and prescribed the medicine accordingly; he taught different Dharma to different people, in accordance with their capacities.

The Thirty-Third Letter

Letter Thirty-Three

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

I timed my mantra recitation during practice: it is about nine recitations per minute. Is that too fast? [No, it is not too fast. Ten recitations per minute are possible.] In our previous correspondence, Master promised to mail me a photograph, but it did not arrive this time. I had intended, once the remote transmission was complete, to express my thanks to Master by using Master’s photograph; at present I have only a photograph of my great-grandmaster.

This disciple longs for Master’s photograph and kneels to request that Master send one. [To reverently make offerings to your grandmaster’s photograph is already to repay the profound kindness of the Dharma milk. Why must you also have my photograph? I am sending one now, but there is no need to make offerings to it; it is only to put your mind at ease.] My father has been confined to his sickbed for more than half a year. Not only are bedsores a grave danger, but public opinion around us is also extremely unfavorable.

The doctors find it very strange that a patient with advanced cancer is still alive, mentally clear, and no longer in pain. They do not believe that there are other treatments, and they do not even believe in qigong.

Although their hospital has no qigong department, the attending physician took the CT scans and medical records to seek out specialists at other hospitals in Anyang. All found it strange and could only recommend conservative treatment. At present, they merely change the dressings on his bedsores and provide no other treatment. Thus, they have verbally advised us that his condition is critical.

My stepmother has long been overworked and is in low spirits; she complains about the “sitting tea” therapy. Gradually, all my brothers have become very “busy,” and only my second younger brother remains regularly at my father’s bedside. The Sixth Patriarch said, “Without thinking of good or evil, at this very moment, what is Venerable Ming’s original face?” I know that worrying over my father’s illness is not thinking evil.

Yet thinking good likewise obstructs the Way. To let it go decisively is indeed not easy. [Your honored father’s illness has reached this stage, and I fear recovery will be difficult. Prolonging his days causes suffering to both the sick person and the caregivers. It would be better to send him early to rebirth in the Western Pure Land, so that neither is harmed. No one can avoid the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death; everyone must go. Why painfully insist on keeping him here?

I now transmit a mantra for rebirth. Recite it over water 108 times, have your honored father drink it, and pray for Amitābha Buddha to guide him to rebirth. Your honored father will then be able to leave suffering and attain happiness. The mantra text is omitted. Each day, recite it over water 108 times and give it to your honored father to drink. He will become very comfortable, and his breath will gradually grow faint as he peacefully relinquishes this life. When he is about to depart, recite the mantra into his ear again and blow upon it, sending him to rebirth.]

This disciple, Zhiming, prostrates.

January 19, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] Teacher, what mantra was it that the Elder transmitted to you?

[LVM] Oh! That mantra is the “Ear-Blowing Mantra for Rebirth.”

Letter Thirty-Four (Appendix)

Letter Thirty-Four (Supplement)

Respected Master,

May sentient beings in this world be easy to liberate, and may compassion fill the human realm. Today is the ninth day of the twelfth lunar month. Yesterday, I was fortunate to receive the Master's compassionate empowerment. At about nine o'clock, I suddenly felt the hot blood coursing throughout my entire body. Following the empowerment instructions written by the Master, I knelt and bowed in the Buddha hall, visualizing the Master, until the empowerment was complete and my wish fulfilled. I sincerely bow in gratitude for the Master's compassion.

I shall diligently cultivate and practice arduously, and shall not fail the Master's teachings. I ought to attend upon you, venerable Master, but the distance is too great. I am therefore sending 50 yuan, hoping that the Master will fulfill this disciple's small wish to make an offering. [Do not send money.]

During practice, when I recite inwardly and listen with my ears, I often cannot recall how the mantra is recited. Sometimes, just as I intend to listen to the mantra, I no longer know how the rest of it is recited; at other times, I forget it while reciting. When I practice in a good environment, there are also very few deluded thoughts—basically, no distracting thoughts at all. But when the mantra ceases, there is a certain sensation in my head.

Is this because there is a small diseased mass in my head? When the above situations arise, how should I handle them? I respectfully request the Master's instruction. [When recitation reaches no-thought, do not deliberately raise the recitation again; simply let it settle into samādhi. When samādhi reaches a certain degree, there will suddenly be an explosive breakthrough: body, mind, and world will all be blasted into emptiness, and your intrinsic nature will manifest.]

When I previously practiced qigong, I used visualization, directing it toward the diseased area within my body. I remember that during one practice session, while I was visualizing, the diseased area suddenly jolted. Not knowing what to do, I immediately ended the practice. Later, the illness was basically cured. At that time, when I kept my attention on the diseased area, my thoughts were very pure, with virtually no distracting thoughts at all. If this happens again, what should I do? I respectfully request the Master's instruction. [Once the illness is cured, do not continue to keep your attention on the diseased area. Continue instead with inward recitation and listening with the ears; applying yourself to practice is what matters.]

Xiuzhi bows in reverence

January 24, 1991

The Thirty-Sixth Letter

Letter Thirty-Six

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

My father passed away on the morning of the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month, and the funeral began on the nineteenth. An elderly monastic came uninvited and recited prayers for his liberation before the coffin. With palms joined, I

knelt for a long time; when the recitation was finished, I prostrated in thanks. The Dharma teacher is over eighty years old, and his Dharma name is Jingyang. The temple where he had lived, Leiyin Temple, was built during the Song dynasty. Having endured many vicissitudes, it was nevertheless destroyed sometime in the 1950s.

The Dharma teacher now lives in a nearby village. Later, I went to thank him and asked about his daily life. I learned that, although he is a member of the Henan Buddhist Association, there is still no definite news concerning the restoration of the temple. Fortunately, he remains in good health, and devotees also see to his needs, which gives us some measure of reassurance. Excellent indeed. Amitābha Buddha!

Gazing upon the Venerable Master's color photograph, I feel a deep sense of closeness. The Master looks even more radiant than before. If I were to see the Master again without this photograph, I fear I truly would not recognize him. I have respectfully enshrined it. Neither monastic nor layperson, yet eating and lodging; filled with learning, yet knowing neither honor nor disgrace! Ah! Who are you?
This is an inscription I composed for my own portrait.

Please also provide the pronunciation for the mantra for assisting rebirth, Master, although it was not used this time. This disciple will not misuse this method, unless driven to the very end of all resources. May sentient beings be spared the suffering of illness and death, be guided by the Buddha, and be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Xiuming asks for the Master's instruction: After entering samādhi, may one take up the mantra again? If one can enter samādhi from the very beginning, may one refrain from reciting the mantra from the outset? If one can indeed enter samādhi at the very beginning, there is no need even to sit in meditation.

If one is always in samādhi, the mind does not adhere to circumstances, the mind faculty does not cling to things, and one responds to situations without the slightest obstruction, then one is a living Buddha—what Dharma would there still be to practice? Although the state of "suddenly erupting, with body, mind, and world all exploding into emptiness" has not yet appeared, Xiuming feels afraid. How should she address this? With such a feeling present, what samādhi can one speak of? If one has attained great samādhi, even if Mount Tai were to collapse before one, one's expression would not change.

Now, before anything has happened, she is already afraid; one can thus know how confused she is! Fear is fear of death. Tell her that no sentient being dies; it is only the physical shell that continually changes. What is there to fear?! Xiuming further asks the Master: Must one prostrate every day? One should prostrate.

Zhiming no longer takes medicine. Instead, he placed all the medicine that had remained unfinished in his palm and prayed for the compassionate blessings of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, vajras, and Dharma protectors of the ten directions and three periods of time, so that his father's medicine might be given universally to sentient beings throughout the dharma realm. If anyone seeks medicine when ill in the future, I will give it to them. I do not know whether this accords with the Dharma. It is permissible.

As they continue to cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, may Zhiming practice in step with Xiuming? That is, rather than undertaking a seven-day cycle himself, may Zhiming complete the six mudrās together with Xiuming and then undertake the seven-day cycle together? Please instruct us, Venerable Master. There is no reason why not.

Your disciples, Zhiming and Xiuming, prostrate respectfully

February 7, 1991

Youth Yongshou Why are some people afraid when they first glimpse emptiness, while others rejoice?

LVM Fear arises from eternalism or an annihilationist view. Rejoicing comes from fundamentally breaking through these views.

Youth Yongshou "Neither monastic nor layperson," and thus subject to slander; "yet eating and lodging," for the Way is ordinary; "filled with learning," and thus worthy of being a teacher; "knowing neither honor nor disgrace"—this youth prostrates!

LVM Mañjuśrī rides a lion, Samantabhadra rides an elephant, and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva manifests in a female form carrying a fish basket. Why, then, are they not subject to slander?

Letter Thirty-Seven

Letter Thirty-Seven

With reverence, I bow to the Venerable Master:

I bow to the Buddha, I bow to the Dharma, and I bow to the Saṅgha.

Neither monastic nor lay, Avalokiteśvara; eating and lodging with this physical body. Full of learning, yet gathering in no-thought; unaware of honor and disgrace, yet knowing the truth.

Ah! This is my master! [Once exposed, it cannot stand!] Master taught Xiuming: “No sentient being ever dies; only the physical shell continually changes. Why be afraid?” This brought Zhiming to recall two short passages, copied below, for which I seek the Master’s blow and shout.

January 26, 1991: So-called “realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, transcending birth and death” is all mere empty talk.

In truth, how can the mind be realized? How can one’s nature be seen? Were it not for greed for life and fear of death, how would one cling to such empty talk? [A clear-eyed person falls into a well!] February 13, 1991: “Realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, transcending birth and death” is not wrong; call this position A. “How can the mind be realized? How can one’s nature be seen?” is not wrong; call this position B. Neither position A nor position B is wrong; the error lies in attachment.

Both position A and position B may be understood, but neither may be clung to. Bah! There appears again the word “understand.” Once it falls into words, it becomes delusion. What can be done? What can be done? [Right: thirty blows; wrong: thirty blows; neither right nor wrong: another thirty blows. How, then, can one avoid being struck?] During the forty-nine days after my father’s passing, I resolved to recite the Kṣitigarbha Sūtra forty-nine times and the Diamond Sūtra several times, in order to deliver his intermediate-state body and enable rebirth in the Western Pure Land. [Is this not what a son ought to do?] [I shall be going to Hangzhou within the next few days and will return to Shanghai after March 5.]

Your disciple, Zhiming, bows in reverence

February 26, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] Ha ha! The teacher has received quite a few blows. How will he turn the tables today?

[LVM] Turn the tables? Then I’ll strike you—would that do?

Letter Thirty-Eight (Supplement)

Letter Thirty-Eight (Supplement)

Dear Revered Teacher,

May sentient beings in this world be easily liberated. Having respectfully read Master's reply, I feel that it expresses what is in this disciple's heart. Though I fear death, I fear the torment of illness even more. When will I be able to transcend the

cycle of birth and death? I wish to attain Buddhahood swiftly, and I wish even more that all sentient beings in this world may attain Buddhahood soon.

[If you fear both death and illness, how can you enter samādhi with this word “fear”? How can you free yourself from this sick body? And how, still more, can you realize the Way?] Not long ago, I dragged my sick body to work, and after returning home I still had to attend to the household affairs. Zhijun is not adept at these matters, so I often feel distressed about them. What distresses me even more is that I do not know where to apply effort in practice.

[One who practices does not refrain from doing things; rather, one does them with all one's strength, yet after doing them, it is as though they had not been done—one does not hold them in mind at all. This is where to begin applying effort in practice.] Now, whenever I sit in meditation, my attention easily becomes concentrated in my head. This can continue for quite a long time, and it is not uncomfortable.

But after getting off the cushion, I feel very uncomfortable, as though the breath-energy of my entire body were flowing backward. Please instruct me on how to correct this condition. [Concentrating the attention in one place is not a bad thing, but it must not be too tight. One should attend to it as though attending and not attending; only then will there be no harmful consequences.

In practicing the Dharma, the place where there is illness is precisely the root of the illness; it must emerge. But do not be afraid: once the root of the illness is pulled out, the illness will be cured.] What is the difference between entering stillness and entering samādhi? [When stillness deepens, it is samādhi.] What is the difference between focusing exclusively on a single object and attachment? Please instruct me. [Restraining the mind in one place is gathering in the mind to enter samādhi. Attachment is deluded thought.

The term “focusing exclusively on a single object” is not correct. “Restraining the mind in one place” and attachment are vastly different. Attachment means keeping every matter in one's mind, revolving around it without end and being unable to remove it.] When I sit in the early morning each day, I use an alarm clock to time my practice. But sometimes I practice a few minutes more or a few minutes less. How should I make up for it? [There is no need to make it up.

Just be attentive in the future.] I have a very bad habit. I am willing to sit and recite mantras, but unwilling to bow to the Buddha every day. This is my arrogant mind at work. I think that mantra recitation and bowing to the Buddha have the same purpose. Burning incense and bowing to the Buddha every day is too troublesome. Is this way of thinking correct? [It is utterly incorrect! You should correct this arrogant mind and must not grow weary of it.]

Issue 1 of the magazine Chan for 1991 has arrived. We are now respectfully reading Master's article “Realizing the Mind and Seeing One’s True Nature.” This issue also contains an article signed by the lay practitioner Song Zhiming. These are all precious treasures for which we have long yearned. Are lay practitioner Song Zhiming and we fellow Dharma brothers and sisters? [Yes! In the future, if you have questions, simply ask Zhijun; there is no need to write and inquire.]

This disciple, Xiuming, bows in homage

March 1, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] Regarding seeing one’s true nature and bowing to the Buddha, I am reminded of an experienced practitioner. Whenever he saw ordinary people bowing to the Buddha at a temple, he would explain to them the Dharma of seeing one’s true nature, saying that bowing to the Buddha was attachment. As a result, the temple master had him thrown out.

[LVM] Ha ha! This experienced practitioner certainly had not yet broken through his critical phrase. Otherwise, how could he have done something so foolish?

[Yongshou Tongzi] “If you fear both death and illness, how can you enter samādhi with this word ‘fear’? How can you free yourself from this sick body? And how, still more, can you realize the Way?” Here lies the secret to liberation and realization of the Way, longevity, and health. Unfortunately, most people would consider it self-contradictory.

[LVM] Oh! Even without hearing such teaching, the “most people” you speak of are often unable to extricate themselves from their own contradictions.

The Thirty-Ninth Letter

Letter Thirty-Nine

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

Homage to the Buddha, homage to the Dharma, homage to the Saṅgha.

Through the Venerable Master’s compassionate acceptance, this disciple has practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for nearly two years. One day, just after taking my seat, I saw a shimmering golden radiance, brighter than the sun and moon, with red clouds filling the sky. It seemed to be the smiling image of Maitreya Buddha. Once this state appeared, it never appeared again. [This benevolent person shows signs of entering the Way and attaining realization; this too is a good thing.

Yet all appearances are illusory and must not be clung to. Let everything go; when body, mind, and world dissolve into emptiness, the Buddha of one's intrinsic nature will truly reveal itself.] This disciple can clearly see that Xiuming's character has undergone a qualitative change. Both physically and psychologically, he is greatly different from before. The efficacy of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is inconceivable. [It truly has the power to transform one utterly!]

In the past, whenever I saw the Master's annotations on the right side of a letter, even if they were only a few words, I felt that my heart had something on which to rely. [Teaching the Dharma in Hangzhou was exhausting, without any rest. Depleted in qi and chilled by the cold, I suffered qi pain throughout my body. I returned to Shanghai only at the beginning of this month and must recuperate for a long time, remaining indoors and declining many invitations. There is truly nothing that can be done about it.

] I have not seen a letter from the Master for the past half-year, and I cannot describe how I feel. Is it expectation? Confusion? A sense of loss? Hesitation? Perhaps it is none of these. It is just like a small child parted from its parents, at a loss as to what to do.

[Take heed! When emotion arises, wisdom is obstructed!] If the Master goes to Hangzhou again, would you please let me know the Hangzhou address? Not long ago, this disciple lamented that there were no disciples of the Three Jewels in Hebi; now there are already more than a hundred. Moreover, we discovered an old temple standing unoccupied. We once invited monastics to stay temporarily for several days, and the Dharma listeners held them in great esteem.

If monastics are invited to reside there permanently, approval from the administrative leadership is required. I originally had no wish to involve myself in such matters, yet I still cannot help allowing circumstances to stir my mind. This shows that my practice is not yet deep and that I lack strength in safeguarding realization. To wish to put it to great use would be impossible. [Fortunately, you know this yourself. Quickly intensify your safeguarding of realization and do not become lax; then the day will come when matters naturally reach fruition.

Otherwise, even if the principles are clearly understood, if one is incapable in actual circumstances, it is all in vain.] There is now an Engineer Liu at my factory, a disciple of the Three Jewels, who has practiced the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra practice of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara for more than half a year. At first he experienced many states, but he did not cling to them, and now he no longer sees any states at all. He has resolved to receive and uphold the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. I am enclosing the letter he wrote and ask the Venerable Master compassionately to accept him.

Respectfully wishing you peace in the Dharma.

Disciples Zhiming and Xiuming, with reverent prostrations

October 29, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] The Heart-of-Heart Dharma truly has the effect of transforming one utterly, especially through a seven-day retreat, where it is most evident. Unfortunately, many people do not believe it.

[LVM] You are very capable of sitting in meditation and have long had the elegant nickname “professional meditator.” Did your transformation come about through a seven-day retreat?

[Yongshou Tongzi] Even those of great accomplishment manifest signs of illness. Why not use the Heart-of-Heart Dharma to transform them?

[LVM] The Jinsu Tathāgata said: “Because sentient beings are ill, I too am ill.”

The Fortieth Letter

Letter Forty

Benevolent Zhijun,

I have duly received both your letter and the remittance. Su Dongpo said: “The moon waxes and wanes; people experience sorrow and joy, parting and reunion. Since ancient times, it has been difficult for all things to be complete.” How true this is.

No banquet under heaven lasts forever. Where there is union, there must be separation; where there is birth, there must be death. These are natural phenomena, and there is nothing to be done about them. Yet all these are illusory appearances, not reality. In essence, there is neither arising nor ceasing, neither union nor separation, neither movement nor wavering. There is truly no need to feel heartache over illusory appearances or sorrow over dreams and illusions.

On the contrary, one should rejoice in directly realizing one’s original reality, and delight in being freed from the sea of suffering. “When emotion arises, wisdom is obscured” is an unbreakable truth: it is impossible for emotion to arise without wisdom being obscured. Emotion is the water of attachment, and water naturally flows downward; how could it fail to obstruct true wisdom? Thus Buddhas and bodhisattvas are without emotional attachment. This is great love: great love is without emotional attachment.

The 300 yuan you sent truly makes me feel unworthy to accept it. I ought to return it, but I fear that doing so would hurt your sincere enthusiasm. I shall reluctantly accept it and, when an opportunity arises, use it for a good deed to create blessings on your behalf. My health is still good, and I can take care of myself. It is not that I cannot move or need someone to support me. Please set your mind at ease.

Praying to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for their blessings to extend my life is an act of sincere but misguided filial devotion. How could you accept such a thing? Moreover, the Buddhist disciples and I well understand that the original reality of neither arising nor ceasing is immeasurable life; why would we need to borrow strength from elsewhere? Nevertheless, I am deeply grateful for your sincere heart of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Please promptly abandon this undertaking, and do not add to my karmic obstacles.

Although I said that I would "soon return," I still have many years to remain in this world; I am not leaving immediately. As for transmitting the Dharma, there are Xu Hengzhi in Shanghai, Shen Zengfu in Hangzhou, Song Zhiming in Wenzhou, and Guangsheng in Shaanxi. All of them can, on my behalf, guide those who come after. Therefore, I may enter retreat to cultivate and recuperate, without attending to worldly affairs. I shall write no more. I wish you unceasing diligence.

Zhong Ding

November 18, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] I would like to ask the teacher: what practice should one cultivate in order to lend one's lifespan to the master?

[LVM] My letter to the elder was lost. In that letter, I was asking the elder precisely for such a practice. I voluntarily wished to dedicate my lifespan to the elder, so that he might remain longer in this world and benefit and bring happiness to sentient beings. No one taught me such a practice, so I took it upon myself to recite the Long-Life Mantra daily and dedicate the merit as follows: "I dedicate all merit and blessings in their entirety to my venerable teacher, Acharya Yuanyin. May my venerable teacher, Acharya Yuanyin, enjoy health and physical well-being, remain long in this world, nurture later students, and liberate vast numbers of sentient beings."

The Forty-First Letter

Letter Forty-One

I respectfully prostrate to the Venerable Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, I pay homage to the Dharma, and I pay homage to the Saṅgha.

Both the Venerable Master's letter and Master Xu's letter say that the Venerable Master's health is still good. This disciple's earnest concern is somewhat relieved. I have been thinking that there must be quite a few people who know where the Venerable Master lives, so his residence cannot be quiet. The Venerable Master must receive visitors by speaking with them, and too much talking is not conducive to quiet recuperation.

Why does the Venerable Master not come to Hebi for a short stay? If you permit it, this disciple will first find a suitable place to stay and then come to welcome you. [Thank you very much for your concern; I am deeply grateful. I am presently in a silent retreat and do not receive visitors, so it is indeed quiet and there is no need to move elsewhere for recuperation.

Thank you!] Once or twice, during meditation, Xiuming has noticed that the mudrā changed into an unfamiliar form, as though it were some other mudrā. I could only release it and form it again. Is this all right? [When a mudrā occasionally changes shape, there is no need to correct it if you have not noticed it. Once you notice it, simply correct it and continue practicing; it is of no consequence.] Senior Dharma brother Li Juncai seems to have had some awakening regarding mind and intrinsic nature. I am enclosing his letter for the Venerable Master's amusement during recuperation. [Since there is no mind to be awakened, whence could boredom arise?!]

Your disciples, Zhiming and Xiuming, respectfully prostrate

December 3, 1991

Letter Forty-Two (Appendix)

Letter Forty-Two (Appendix)

With reverence, I pay homage to Master Yuanyin:

I wish Master good health.

It has been a long time since I last received a letter from Master, but this disciple’s heart still hangs over Shanghai. Every morning, Xiuming practices a Heart-of-Heart Dharma session. I only regret that my wisdom is too shallow and my meditative stability insufficient; I have never entered great samādhi. I now have several questions to ask Master. Some time ago, I felt quite energetic and needed very little sleep each day.

One evening, while paying homage to the Buddha, I suddenly felt the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to be extraordinarily close. After a while, I could no longer find that beautiful sense of joy. At that time, my illness was completely cured; even the usual feeling of swelling and pain in my head had entirely disappeared. Now I have returned to my former condition and am especially drowsy. I beg Master for instruction.

[This was a passing guest—a temporary manifestation of a meditative state, gone in an instant. Redouble your practice, enter deeply into dhyāna, and personally see the host; then the great matter will be concluded. When meditative stability is sufficient and your spirits are refreshed, drowsiness will naturally disappear.] During meditation, a coolness often appears at the crown of my head and gradually moves downward; sometimes I even feel very cold.

Is this a stage that must be passed through? [This is a change in the qi and blood. Do not concern yourself with it; simply recite the mantra single-mindedly and dissolve body and mind into emptiness, and you will enter deeply into the inner sanctum.] Enclosed with this letter is a letter from a fellow practitioner and good friend. His secular name is ***, and he is a seventeen-year-old high-school student. Since junior high school, he has studied Daoist teachings.

He has now aroused the resolve to study Buddhism, but he has some questions that must be put to Master. I have troubled Master. [This young man has quite good capacities. Have your spouse answer his questions. Note: In the future, do not bring me other people's questions. Even if you do, I will not answer them.] May Master soon recover, and may all sentient beings soon be liberated.

This disciple, Xiuming Zhiming, pays homage

December 23, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] "In the future, do not bring me other people's questions. Even if you do, I will not answer them." The master intends to place greater responsibilities on the shoulders of the core younger and middle-aged practitioners.

[LVM] I know full well how far I fall short of the Elder, and therefore pray that he may remain long in this world. Guiding practitioners concerns others' Dharma body and wisdom-life; it is no small matter. One must possess the power of blessing, the power to embrace and guide, affinity, and the power to inspire. Even after the Elder entered parinirvāṇa, he still possesses extremely strong power to bless and embrace beings—far beyond anything we can attain. This is why, even now, when I confer empowerment on practitioners, I do so on the Elder's behalf.

[Yongshou Tongzi] Changes in the qi and blood are truly most varied and strange. Some proceed from above downward, some from below upward, and some involve no sensation at all—yet people become anxious instead.

[LVM] Ha ha! One is anxious when there are changes, and anxious when there are none. The simplest way to put your mind at ease is to leave the changes alone. Matters of qi and blood differ from person to person. Heart esotericism has none of the preliminary or additional practices for cultivating channels and energies, so why concern oneself with them? Not attending to them does not mean that they exist, nor does it mean that they do not exist; rather, whether they are present or absent, do not attend to them.

The Forty-Third Letter (Supplement)

Forty-Third Letter (Appendix)

Reverently prostrate to Master Yuanyin:

Entering the world: seemingly real, seemingly illusory; seemingly illusory, seemingly real; both real and illusory; both illusory and real. [What sort of mere verbal Chan is this, and where did you learn it? Though it may seem so, it is not so! Say a word on neither real nor illusory!] I truly do not know who, after all, is the master and who is myself.

[Stay awake! Do not mistake the fixed pole star!] Who, after all, was I in a former life, and who, after all, am I in this life? Are they not both unobtainable? Since they are unobtainable, why seek them? [Without enduring a bone-chilling cold, how can the plum blossoms yield their fragrance?] Yet if one does not seek, what else is one to do? If the Buddhadharma is attained through not seeking, then is not this not seeking itself a form of seeking? [Within the unobtainable there is true attainment. Look apart from former and present lives: who, after all, are you? Do not be muddleheaded!]

On the morning of the thirty-first at year's end, after reading Mr. Geng Yun's fine article in the magazine Chan, I recited more than two fascicles of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra for the first time and entered a state in which thoughts arose in continuous succession, yet not a single thought arose. My meditative strength was insufficient, so what had formed was destroyed. Since antiquity, formation and destruction have occurred in the space of a single thought; this is not something to regret.

[Your thief's loot has already been exposed—what do you mean by "not a single thought arises"?! This is where you are plying your trade: sitting behind a dark mountain, do you take the place where not a single thought arises to be samādhi?

You were wrong from the start. Even if you have the intelligence to understand some theory, without actual cultivation and without directly realizing your original nature, your meditative strength will naturally be inadequate. When circumstances arise, you will be unable to make genuine use of it. How then can you transcend birth and death?] How is it that one can converse and laugh freely, with a mind like the bright moon? [Even if the mind is like the bright moon, what formation or destruction is there?]

Once, when discussing Chan, I said to a friend, “If two monks chant together, which one shouts first?” Seeing my friend distressed and unable to understand, I then understood Linji’s meaning. [Do not speak in your sleep! What does it mean? Speak quickly!] Linji specialized in using words to deceive the world’s rare great fools; the pains he took with his mind could not have been greater. [Do you take it as deception? Then you are making sentient beings take poison.]

Later, I too devised a provocative Chan saying: “Clouds are in the blue sky; water is in the water bottle. Where is the water bottle?” I answered myself: “The water bottle is outside the water.” “If water is poured onto the ground, where is the water bottle?” “It is precisely where you said it was.” [Blindly making up provocative Chan sayings is no slight offense! I spare you thirty blows of the stick, to avert calamity for you!] This can only count as half a sentence of verbal Chan.

[Even one word is one too many!] For there remains attachment to responding naturally to changing circumstances and being serene and at ease. [At least you still possess self-knowledge—fortunately!] This must also be removed, until ignorance is thoroughly shattered. [Where are all these entanglements?] Perhaps this is the original intent behind Chan masters throughout the ages placing such emphasis on emptiness.

[Do not slander the patriarchs!] Yet at that time I became even more cautious, deeply fearing that one day I might go and never return.

[You still have this fear? If there is going, there must be returning!] So I secretly calculated: “If not a single breath abides, how can I study and take university entrance examinations? [Only after studying can one put it to use!] How can I enter the Mahāyāna path of bodhicitta to liberate others? [How could it be thus?!] What will happen afterward? [Follow conditions to bring benefit to sentient beings and ferry them across the sea of suffering!] How can I apply it unobstructedly in daily life? [When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep!] How can I gain everyone’s respect and approval?” [The mind of fame and profit still remains! You deserve a spanking!] In the past, I only spoke and did not act.

[Wrong!] But today I have given rise to a great mind of repentance. [To recognize one’s fault and correct it is the mark of a noble person.] I know that my karmic

offenses are grave. Please forgive the great disrespect in my former letter. [There is still respect and disdain!] Although karma is empty and formed through causes and conditions, it causes people to become deluded by causes and conditions and thus again becomes existent.

[It is enough to remain ever vigilant and alert!] As for the Dharma transmitted by all Buddhas, I shall do what is difficult to do and endure what is difficult to endure. I shall arouse a profound resolve for the Way and vow to swiftly attain the unsurpassed Buddha Way. [Your heroic resolve and lofty aspiration are commendable!] The Buddha Way does not exist; this is what is called the Buddha Way. Even unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening has no dharma that can be attained; yet precisely because no dharma exists, the myriad dharmas are established.

[You attain it so within the unobtainable!] May I ask why one specifically recites the Buddha's name rather than "bench, bench"? [Because the Buddha has the power to receive and embrace us!] I think this is an expedient dharma gate and truly cannot be emptied; to empty it would risk falling into wild Chan. [Emptiness does not mean that there is simply nothing; it means that nothing can be obtained.]

Again, the emptiness of true emptiness means that intrinsic nature is without form, sound, or taste and cannot be seen, heard, or smelled; therefore it is called empty. Yet it can be experienced amid activity and function, for at every time and in every place it is at work and functioning. Thus it is called empty, yet not empty; not empty, yet empty—the true emptiness. It is not the emptiness of annihilation. Thus, though not empty, it encompasses all dharmas.

Yet I do not know which school suits this disciple, through which dharma I may attain realization, or what wholesome affinities I possess that might enable me to realize it in one lifetime and never regress.

Having encountered a great spiritual friend, I earnestly beg for your compassionate instruction—have pity on me! Have pity on me! I cannot keep back my tears! [Your capacity is most suited to investigating Chan. In Xi'an there is Wolong Monastery; you may go there to study Chan at close hand!] I do not clearly understand the various schools of Esoteric Buddhism, Chan, Pure Land, Tiantai, and so forth, and do not dare speak rashly.

Esoteric Buddhism has always proclaimed attainment of Buddhahood in this very body, and Guru Padmasambhava in particular is highly revered. Yet it has spread only in Tibet. Which, ultimately, is quicker: it or the Chan school? [Among all dharma gates, Chan is the quickest. All other dharma gates require passing through several thresholds, whereas Chan has no gate to pass through; its speed is therefore

evident. Chinese culture has many bold and unrestrained people, who are especially suited to Chan practice.]

[Tibetan culture was at a lower level, and its foundation in prajñā was weaker still. It therefore had to employ form-based methods as a transitional measure. Thus, before practicing the Dharma, one often has to spend more than ten years on the four preliminary practices. This is too circuitous and slow and cannot suit the bold and elegant inclinations of people of middling and superior capacities; hence Esoteric Buddhism did not flourish in China.] Now, concerning affinities.

All Buddhas truly wish sentient beings to become Buddhas. If a Buddha appeared before every person to teach the Dharma, would that not be very quick? Why, then, are sentient beings suffering even more at present? [This is because sentient beings' obscurations are heavy.] The teachings speak of transformations in response to affinities.

Are these affinities natural laws? [Yes!] Are not all Buddhas themselves this absolute truth? [Is there still something to which you can cling?] What connection does this have with the Daoist teaching that the Way follows what is natural? [What Buddhism and Daoism teach have much in common, but Daoism ultimately cannot empty everything and still retains a slight attachment to dharmas. Therefore it is not ultimate, though this does not mean that its teachings are not worth adopting.]

However much the master says there is nothing to say, I myself take the master to be saying something. However much the master says there is something to say, I myself take the master to be saying nothing. [The moment you recognize something, you are blind!] The master shouted sternly, "Who sees me open my mouth?" I shouted at the master, "By whom has your mouth been seen?" [Could it be that you little monkey saw it? Bah! Do not mistake a donkey's saddle for your father's chin!]

After reading, "After a night of falling flowers, all the flowing waters in the city are fragrant," I suddenly thought of a line: Flowers naturally fall where flowers bloom. What an ordinary Chan flavor! [It is fortunate that you have this move! But take care not to put it into words! Yet what can be done when medicinal mercury meets fire and immediately flies away?!] Buddha-recitation indeed has an entry point and can lead to a state of no-self. [Do not sully the Buddha! If there is a state, how can you speak of no-self?!] The photograph was taken when I was in the fifth or sixth grade of elementary school; no recent photographs remain.

Disciple **, January 2, 1992

[Yongshou Tongzi] This ** is the middle-school student *** of that time, is he not? The letter is written in a loose and unrestrained manner, truly possessing the style of Zhuang Zhou. Is this itself the capacity of a superior practitioner?

[LVM] Yes. This is an unrestrained bearing with a Chan flavor. What others do well is precisely where we fall short; even now I do not possess such an unrestrained bearing.

The Forty-Fourth Letter

Letter Forty-Four

Zhijun:

I have read through the letter from *** that you forwarded. This young fellow is bold and intelligent; he is promising material for Chan practice. Tell him to go nearby to Wolong Monastery in Xi'an and devote himself to investigating Chan. He need not study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, because he already has a foundation in investigating Chan from past lives, and among all dharma gates, investigating Chan is the most direct and swift.

With only three to five years of effort, he should be able to break through completely. If this young fellow is truly willing to apply himself to investigation, he must not simply rely on saying a few wild words that seem plausible but are not, and then consider the matter finished. Moreover, even after awakening, he must diligently work to eliminate his old habitual tendencies; it is not the case that one awakens once and then rests. From now on, urge him on more often, and do not let him come looking for me again.

After I reviewed the copy of Lectures on the Blue Cliff Record that I previously sent you, I found many errors, reversals, and omissions. These have now been corrected, and it has been sent to the magazine Chan for publication. You may make the corrections according to that publication. May you advance diligently without ceasing. In the new year, may I see a new face!

Zhong Ding, January 12, 1992

[Yongshou Tongzi] The heavy responsibility of urging on that young fellow at Wolong has thus been handed over to the teacher. Ha ha. I wonder how the teacher later urged him on?

[LVM] Oh! He is a student; he should first complete his studies before discussing anything else.

[Yongshou Tongzi] Did Lectures on the Blue Cliff Record already exist at that time?

[LVM] They were the first two articles, compiled by Song Zhiming of Wenzhou. The tapes of the Elder's lectures on the Blue Cliff Record were originally recorded in

Wenzhou.

The Forty-Fifth Letter

Letter Forty-Five

Reverently prostrating before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

Green waters have no cares of their own, yet the wind wrinkles their faces. Blue mountains are not inherently old, yet snow makes their heads white. [If one has no cares, one need not fear a wrinkled face; if one is not old, why worry about a white head?] I know that the Venerable Master should not speak much during this period of quiet recuperation, but would writing affect your health? Would reviewing disciples' letters affect your health? [To offer this body and mind to dust-mote lands —this is called repaying the Buddha's grace.]

Since practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, this disciple feels that both mind and body have undergone a qualitative transformation. [Very good!] Is that profound and tranquil state of mind what is called "right absorption"? [When encountering circumstances, you must also remain tranquil yet clearly aware; only then can it be called right absorption. Furthermore, so long as there remains a right absorption that is clearly aware yet tranquil, it is not yet right absorption.]

Yet I have not thus far experienced "empty space shattering to powder and the great earth sinking level."

I suddenly thought of undertaking a seven-day retreat. Apart from having sufficient Dharma companions, financial resources, and a suitable place, must one also have an enlightened teacher present? You have gone to Hangzhou twice; is there a place there for undertaking a seven-day retreat? [A seven-day retreat is indeed a good method. It does no great harm if an enlightened teacher is not present, provided that, when any experiences arise, you do not pay attention to them; and when a breakthrough occurs, do not become tense. Once you realize your original nature, have it verified for you.]

[Schedule for a seven-day retreat: the first session (midnight to 4:00 a.m.), the second session (6:00 to 10:00 a.m.), and the third session (noon to 4:00 p.m.). Use the remaining time for meals and rest. Sleep at 6:00 p.m., and practice again as usual the next day. During the retreat, practice the Fourth Mudrā in the first two sessions and the Second Mudrā in the final session. On the last day, practice nine sessions, all using the Fourth Mudrā. The nine-session schedule is: midnight to 6:00 a.m., 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., and 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.]

Is Master Guangsheng still in Shaanxi? Please let me know his mailing address. Recently, Wu ×× has had an urgent wish to leave home. One day, he did not go to school, but knelt before the Buddha at my home, reciting the Buddha's name and sūtras. I advised him to consider devoting himself exclusively to practice only after graduating from high school.

I think that if he has the karmic affinity to leave home, he may seek instruction from Master Guangsheng; if he does not have this affinity, he may seek instruction from Master Xu. If, by then, the Venerable Master's health has improved, might you accept him as a disciple? His capacity is far better than mine; at his age, my deluded mind was still fiercely aflame. Master Guangsheng has no fixed residence and cannot yet receive you.

That boy Wu ×× has excellent capacity. For the time being, he should not practice this Dharma. After completing university, if his family does not object, he may leave home and study Chan; there is no need for him to study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. His capacity is best suited to Chan contemplation. In no more than a few years, he may open up to his original nature. If he does not encounter an enlightened teacher, it will not be too late for him to study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Chan school practice especially requires the constant guidance of an enlightened teacher.

The circumstances of awakening differ from person to person. Yet there is no exception to "it suddenly breaks with a snap, bursts apart with a bang, and with a pop, empty space shatters to powder and the great earth sinks level." Without such an experience, it cannot be regarded as awakening. Even if one has had such an experience, it must be verified by an enlightened teacher; without verification, one falls into the naturalistic non-Buddhist path.

Is this disciple's view correct? [Yes. But once the doctrinal principles are clearly understood, if you constantly and closely safeguard them and do not turn with circumstances, then when the time and conditions arrive, you too can suddenly break through completely. Some people experience it as though a curtain were falling, and body and mind dissolve away; for others, contact with external events triggers their own breakthrough; and so forth. Each is different.]

The Venerable Master's A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature has finished its serialization in Chan. Having reverently read it, this disciple composed the following poem in response: "Words can hardly express the feeling of compassion; / It spreads widely through the human world, giving rise to great practice. / Students, because of the pointing finger, should see the moon; / Do not casually lapse into white-haired lamentation." [When you meet a swordsman on the road, you must present your sword; do not offer poetry to one who is not a poet.]

[Since this child Wu ×× is so urgently intent on escaping birth and death, I shall offer him an expedient means and see whether he can awaken through it. If he can, then all Chan contemplation, Dharma practice, study, and work will be superfluous words.]

In his previous letter, he posed a question to stump his companion: “When two monks shout at the same time, who shouted first?” It left that companion speechless and unable to respond. From this, he arrived at the notion that Patriarch Linji’s questions are all “deceptions intended to make people fall into a trap.” This is an utterly mistaken understanding.

His question appears to be a Chan-flavored huatou without any rational basis. Although an awakened person would not find it difficult to answer, it offers no path of entry; it is not a huatou in which every word has a definite basis in the Chan tradition, and thus it is not worth adopting. I shall now alter it slightly for him, and it will become a living huatou with the potential to trigger awakening. Let us see whether he can awaken through it.

Question: When two monks shout at the same time, who is the guest and who is the host? When pressed by this question, his discriminating consciousness ceases to think and deluded thoughts no longer move. Then, with a single inward glance: who is this lucid, solitary radiance that is without thought and without thinking? If he vigorously concentrates, he may at once awaken as though from a great dream; guest and host will stand out distinctly, rather than being merely a string of deceptive nonsense. If not, he must still work painfully through Chan contemplation before he has any chance of breaking through!]

Your disciples, Zhiming and Xiuming, prostrate in reverence

Second day of the twelfth lunar month, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] Patriarchs have no sectarian prejudices or selfish rivalries. When they see someone with the capacity for Chan, they recommend that person for Chan contemplation; they would never rigidly confine themselves to the single Dharma gate of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

[LVM] Yes! Did not the Elder say: “To offer this body and mind to dust-mote lands—this is called repaying the Buddha’s grace”?

[Yongshou Tongzi] I, too, once thought that Chan masters were all deceivers. Wu, my Dharma brother, asked a question that elicited this teaching from the master. It turns out that Chan sayings, though seemingly free and unrestrained, have a definite basis in every word; they differ from the earlier “observing capacities and contesting teachings.”

[LVM] Ha ha! You changed “tease” to “contest”; the meaning is entirely different.

Letter Forty-Six (Appendix)

Letter Forty-Six (Appendix)

Reverently I bow to Master Yuanyin:

The Master's instruction has made this disciple like a great gourd ladle: unable to advance and unable to withdraw, wishing to speak but without words. Turning the light inward, there is not even a place to illuminate.

[When you can neither advance nor retreat, who is it that is pressed until unable to breathe? This is a critical moment. If, at this point, you can turn the light inward for but a glance, the bottom of the bucket will at once fall out! But if you pause and stand waiting to think, you will be deluded by its shadow.]

This is the most crucial condition for awakening to the Way; it is no child's play and must not be passed over lightly! When I see that there is precisely no mind, the resolve to leave home still presents no obstacle; otherwise, could I now still be writing to the Master? I hope to study all dharmas extensively and liberate all beings. Now that I have entered the Buddha Way, I need not grope about but can tread directly upon the swift path to bodhi. Thus, the earlier I leave home, the more time I shall have. Having heard the Master's guidance, I wish to hasten there, but I do not know on what road or lane in Xi'an Wolong Monastery is located, its postal code, which master I should rely upon, the method of investigating Chan, or when it would be best to go.

[Go straight there! Do you understand? If not, once you arrive in Xi'an, simply ask and you will know. If that does not work, wait until I inquire and then tell you. But there is no need for that either; you may write to ask Zhao XX.]

His address: XXXXX] Their method of investigating Chan is to investigate the phrase, “Who is reciting the Buddha's name?” Moreover, delaying further brings no benefit. I feel that if I leave home now, I may be able to propagate the Dharma for several more years in the future. If I wait until I have completed university, it will be indefinitely delayed, and the time will be too late. [Those studying the Way should possess profound cultural cultivation, thereby laying a foundation for broadly receiving the fourfold assembly of disciples in the future.

Otherwise, it will be difficult to reach highly educated intellectuals, and this will also affect one's own cultivation and realization.] [Those studying the Way must possess a far-reaching and deep resolve; they must not be impatient for immediate results. Given your present educational level, you still appear to have a long way to go. If you

do not seize this opportunity to study diligently, it will be difficult to achieve the highest attainments in the future.

] Yet my family opposes my association with Buddhism even more strongly. They keep watch over me on every side, leaving me scarcely half a second of leisure; otherwise, I would now seek the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Since I have entered the Buddha's gate, my elder brother can care for my parents' livelihood, so I need not worry. I have been tainted by many worldly evils, far beyond what I was in my youth. For the Master to call me a pillar of the Dharma is too great an honor for me.

[To know one's faults and correct them—there is no goodness greater than this!] If I reach Xi'an, I still wish to receive empowerment from you, Master Yuanyin, and receive the Heart-of-Heart Dharma from Master Guangsheng: first, so that I may later add a branch to the Dharma lineage; second, so that I may cultivate Chan and esoteric practice together, bringing samādhi and wisdom into play together, and perhaps see the “new person” more quickly. [I have long since retired and no longer transmit the Dharma. If you wish to study heart esotericism, you may study with Teacher Xu Hengzhi.

Heart esotericism is Chan, and Chan is heart esotericism; there is no difference between them. To speak of dual cultivation is the language of an outsider. In the Dharma-ending age, practitioners have inferior capacities. Having no alternative, we use esoteric mantras to borrow the Buddha's empowering force, eliminate karmic obstacles, and enable them to open to their original nature sooner. It is not that there is some Chan apart from esoteric practice.]

Talks on Experiences; Questions and Answers—

First question: In the past, when the Tathāgata Śākyamuni was about to enter extinction, all his great disciples, who were great arhats, wept like rain, as if they had lost their parents. Were they sentient or insentient? [The great arhats had not yet exhausted their feelings. Yet the Buddhadharma does not depart from worldly dharmas. Worldly people feel deep affection for parents, teachers, and friends; when they must part from them, they cannot but suffer emotionally and shed tears. This is ordinary human feeling.

Therefore, the Buddha's disciples likewise do not transcend ordinary human feeling. When the Buddha entered cessation, sorrow arose within them and they wept like rain. There was no need for them to remain utterly unmoved in order to display their secluded eccentricity. Moreover, one who has truly attained realization can weep and laugh freely: when it is time to laugh, one laughs; when it is time to weep, one weeps. It is not that one cannot move in the least.] A verse in praise of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva says: “Within the unconditioned mind, the mind of compassion arises.”

Once compassion arises, there is nothing to which it can cling—how strange, how strange! Is this sentience or insentience? [Insentience is great feeling, and great feeling is insentience! How could it be the insentience of wood and stone?] The Buddhas and bodhisattvas liberate boundless sentient beings, yet according to the Diamond Sūtra, bodhisattvas do not truly regard sentient beings as sentient beings.

But what force enables bodhisattvas to liberate sentient beings through the unconditioned? I have never seen a bodhisattva who does not liberate sentient beings. Is it an acquired habit? [One who does not liberate sentient beings is not a bodhisattva. How could this be an acquired habit?!] [Every blade of grass and every tree is a manifestation of buddha-nature, accomplished by intrinsic nature; how much more so all sentient beings? Therefore, Buddhas and bodhisattvas regard all sentient beings as Buddhas and do not conceive of them as sentient beings.

Yet because of ignorance, attachment, delusive thoughts, and the creation of karma, they are not not sentient beings. Therefore, Buddhas and bodhisattvas pity all sentient beings, who are dazed and do not recognize that they themselves are supremely noble, genuine Buddhas endowed with unsurpassed spiritual powers. Thus, they give rise to unconditioned great compassion, manifest in the world to teach the Dharma, and awaken beings from their deluded dreams. They provisionally speak of liberating sentient beings, but in truth there is no liberation.]

After awakening, when not a single thought clings, it is like the reflection of geese on a cold pond. Yet even after hundreds of billions of years, after immeasurable billions of kalpas, one truly does not forget; otherwise, one never attained the Way. [It is not that one remembers without forgetting, but that one responds after being stirred.] For example, after seeing an electric lamp, one sees a cabinet and still knows that one has previously seen the lamp. [It is not that one does not know; one simply does not abide. If one firmly remembers it, then one is attached.

] Is it that immediately after awakening, as well as before awakening, one is clear and still, forgetting things as soon as one sees them, rather than being distinctly lucid? If, while cultivating, one is not distinctly lucid and does not turn toward the opposite side, is it then impossible to attain the Way? [Clear and still is originally just so. It is not that it is so only immediately after awakening and before awakening, after which one may disorderly give rise to thoughts and remember all kinds of things.

In fact, before awakening, one cannot be thus. As for being forgetful, that is a stage in the course of practice; afterward, this ailment is absent. But note that it is also not a matter of firmly remembering all things without forgetting; rather, one is clear and still, responding according to whatever is encountered.]

Second question: Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva made a most profound vow. Though it commands admiration, is it not somewhat foolish? [Alas! The very reason Buddhas and bodhisattvas can become Buddhas and bodhisattvas is this very foolish resolve.

If you lack this foolish resolve, you had better not study Buddhism!] If, because of this vow-power, he could not become a Buddha and use a Buddha's wisdom to liberate still more sentient beings, would that not fail to accord with the Way? Is that so? [With such vow-power, why fear that one cannot become a Buddha?] If Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva had not made this vow, why would he not become a Buddha, but remain a bodhisattva? [Cultivating a practice and awakening to the Way yields only fundamental wisdom. One must also vow to liberate sentient beings extensively, so as to fulfill differentiated wisdom, also called subsequent wisdom; only then can one perfectly realize Buddhahood.

Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva has already become a Buddha. First, because his vow is so great, he does not remain in the Buddha position, but manifests the body of a bodhisattva to liberate sentient beings extensively. Second, he thereby sets an example for later students, urging and encouraging practitioners not to imitate the Lesser Vehicle by taking their own liberation as sufficient.] If someone were to say, “I shall enable Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva to become a Buddha and undertake his vow in his stead.”

Could Kṣitigarbha become a Buddha? [Do not talk such wild nonsense!] Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva became a Buddha in one body and should then remain a Buddha forever. Why can one body become three Buddhas? Could it later become four Buddhas, five Buddhas, or immeasurable Buddhas? [One is all, and all are one. Why distinguish three, four, five, or six?] How does this differ from ultimate Buddhahood? [If you discriminate, even the Western Pure Land becomes an impure land!] When I say, “

When I say,” these words, there is no thought in my mind; yet how do these words come forth? [Speech is the voice of the mind. If the mind does not move in thought, how could speech arise? Before the thought in the mind moves, speech does not move. What, then, do you know? What is this knowing that is without knowing?! If you know this, you know its source!] To seek intrinsic nature—is this not a thought? [Seeking is itself not seeing!] If all

is delusive thought, then cultivating the Way is also a deluded thought. To cultivate the Way without a mind to cultivate the Way—is that not strange? [The mind that cultivates the Way is originally also delusive thought. But before awakening, one still needs to draw on it as a temporary spur to practice, practicing diligently in order to realize the great Way of no cultivation.] In fact, I too have experienced cultivating the Way by responding to things without mind.

[If you truly have no mind, what Way is there still to cultivate?! Do not mistake a fixed benchmark for the matter itself, taking the rolling torrent of delusive thoughts for no mind. Moreover, do not say that no mind itself is the Way; no mind still leaves one barrier to pass.] A divine dragon in blue waters should be nothing but a heap of my foul-smelling farts! If we speak of host and guest, then cut off your head! [What use is wild nonsense? Clearly return host and guest to me!] [In the future, if you have questions, ask Qi Zhijun!]

Disciple Miaowu, on the seventeenth day of the twelfth lunar month, 1991

[Yongshou Tongzi] Is this the manner in which the master manifests tireless instruction of others? If every disciple asked questions like this, and the master answered them each time in this way, the old Chan master would truly be exhausted to death.

[LVM] Do you still remember the koan, “Touzi struck as soon as he heard a sound”?

[Yongshou Tongzi] The phrase “when it is time to laugh, one laughs; when it is time to weep, one weeps” is an annotation on being at ease and free in accordance with conditions. For a long time, I thought that after studying Buddhism one would become expressionless and dull-witted. Looking back on it now, it is utterly laughable.

[LVM] That too is a scene along a practitioner's path.

Letter Forty-Seven

Letter Forty-Seven

With reverence, I bow to the Venerable Master:

I bow to the Buddha, I bow to the Dharma, and I bow to the Saṅgha.

If one has no worries, one need not fear a wrinkled face; if one does not age, why worry about a white head? Recently, I have indeed begun to feel a faint sense of “anxiety.” Since one thousand sessions require only three years, and I have practiced for more than two years, I have yet to break open my original nature. [Diligent practice cannot rely solely on two hours of seated meditation. At all times, keep the mind empty and non-abiding, and you will naturally accord with it. Practice must not be interrupted even when traveling on business.]

] In fact, this “anxiety” is attachment; it is precisely an obstacle to realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. [You have identified the root of the illness.] During the Venerable Master’s retreat for recuperation, three people actually sent letters to the

Venerable Master through me, disturbing his peace and quiet. I am truly ashamed. Liu ×× seems to have become a wild Chan practitioner and now declares that he will devote himself to the Pure Land.

[Excellent, excellent! If only he can behold Amitābha, why worry that he will not awaken?] I fear that "without vows, one becomes a companion of demons; without precepts, one becomes absurd." [You worry too much about this!] Brother Li has already written a letter to Master Xu requesting instruction in the Dharma and is preparing to go to Shanghai.

Wu ×× has the sharpest faculties, but what can be done if his conditions have not yet matured? In truth, if he could recognize his own original nature upon hearing the Venerable Master's words, the bonds of family would be empty in their very substance. He once asked me about the saying, "When two monks chant together, which is host and which is guest?" But I feared that a direct answer would obstruct his gate to awakening, so I said nothing. [This young man needs to apply himself diligently for some time before he can get anywhere.

He absolutely must not take a little cleverness, or some sharp-turn phrases and Chan terminology picked up secondhand, to be realization of the Way. Still less should he seek news from the lips of others!] There are two further koans in the Venerable Master's A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature. This disciple will try to answer them. The first: Xuefeng said, "To speak of this matter is like an ancient mirror: when a Hu comes, a Hu appears; when a Han comes, a Han appears."

Xuansha said, "What if the mirror itself should come?" Answer: "Break the mirror and come to meet it." Asked, "Once the mirror is broken, how can one see?" This disciple answered, "Just then one sees that all phenomena are empty." Or one might say, "It is just like lightning vanishing in empty space!" [Not there yet! Say more!]

The second: An old master said, "This old monk has a garment bestowed by his mother at birth and needs no winter clothes."

Asked, "What garment did you wear before your mother gave birth to you?" This disciple answered, "I neither wear a cangue nor bear shackles!" [The lid and the box do not fit!] Xiuming once asked Zhiming, "Suchness and intrinsic nature are neither within, nor without, nor in between. Where, ultimately, are they?" Zhiming wished to answer, "They are within, without, and in between. [You are caught in it!] From moment to moment, they never leave the present place!" [Somewhat better!] But he did not say it aloud. Xiuming is still investigating. Ah, this disciple has started talking nonsense again. I respectfully request the Venerable Master's criticism.

Your disciples, Zhiming and Xiuming, bow in reverence

February 6, 1992

[Yongshou Tongzi] Before and after one thousand sessions is a hurdle; it seems that no one is without “anxiety.” It is unlike the time of two or three hundred sessions, when changes in experience were numerous and each day brought something new. My state of mind then was that I could not bear simply to pass my life in such ordinariness.

[LVM] Ordinary mind is the Way; a straightforward mind is the place of practice. The minds of sentient beings are not ordinary, because they have added an extra lump of “greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt.”

[Yongshou Tongzi] Watching the exchanges of Chan repartee between teachers and masters, I am reminded of a Chan master’s words: “For ten thousand ages, the moon in the emerald pool illumines the empty realm; only after dredging again and again does one come to know.”

[LVM] “I laugh at myself for having drawn patterns in those years—how many times red, how many times black. Now I take leave of my master and return home in old age; why care whether I have attained anything in this life?”

The Forty-Eighth Letter

Forty-Eighth Letter

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

My tentative answers to the koans are as follows:—How do you see when a mirror is shattered? Just as “empty space is pulverized and the great earth sinks into stillness.” [Any seeing is not it.]—What clothes did you wear before your mother gave birth to you? Utterly bare! [The box and lid do not fit.]—When two monks shout at once, who is host and who is guest? Even if ten thousand monks shouted together, host and guest would remain distinctly apparent.

[Setting aside their distinctness, who, after all, is host and who is guest? This concerns the Four Guest-and-Host Relationships of the Linji school. You must distinguish host and guest precisely and genuinely; you cannot pass the test by casually uttering a single sentence.] Lately, I have been somewhat dazed. It seems to me that realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature requires that “empty space be pulverized and the great earth sink into stillness.” Yet one cannot pursue such a state, for pursuing it becomes an obstacle.

This leaves one unable either to advance or to retreat. If, at the point of being unable to advance or retreat, one turns the light inward and makes a vigorous effort, one may suddenly open to one's original nature. Yet this "opening" should itself be "empty space pulverized and the great earth sunk into stillness." Going round and round, I have arrived here again.

Is this attachment? On what does diligent practice rest? "Neither placing one's hopes upon it nor abandoning one's efforts"—that is diligent practice! [Before reaching home, one must adhere to the Dharma and cultivate it, asking only that one plow the field and not hoping for a harvest. When one has plowed the field to completion, the harvest will naturally be abundant.

] Then, if there is not even hope, how can faith arise? [Faith lies in practice!] At one moment I feel that everything is right; at another, I feel that everything is wrong. Thus I have become somewhat dazed. [You are not yet dazed. Only when, walking, you do not know that you are walking, and sitting, you do not know that you are sitting, are you in accord with the Way.] Apart from one daily meditation session, I have less than two hours of free time each day in which I can sit and practice the mudrā.

Must one recite the mantra when practicing the mudrā? Formerly, when I practiced the mudrā, I did not recite the mantra. I do not know whether this accords with the Dharma. [No. You should recite the mantra and wait for it to dissolve away naturally. Body, mind, and world will likewise dissolve into emptiness.] Some days ago, the steward of Jingju Temple asked me to invite a monk to serve as abbot. I proposed inviting a certain Dharma master and have already written to the Venerable Master, enclosing a copy of the temple inscription.

Has the Venerable Master forwarded it to that Dharma master? If this Dharma master cannot come, could the Venerable Master recommend another monastic? [This temple has no income. This Dharma master has no living expenses either; how could he serve as abbot?] Respectfully wishing the Venerable Master a speedy recovery! [In short, when meditating, one must let go of everything and seek nothing, like a completely dead person; then one will naturally accord with it. At other times, observe still more: when thoughts arise, do not follow them, and do not be turned by circumstances. Then your practice will naturally advance by leaps and bounds.]

Your disciple, Zhiming Xiuming, prostrates

Twenty-ninth day of the first lunar month, Buddhist Era 2536

[Yongshou Tongzi] "Faith lies in practice"—does this mean the Mind-Seal school's "practice-based teaching method"?

[LVM] The Mind-Seal school does not fear the arising of doubts; it fears only failure to engage in actual cultivation in accordance with the Dharma. If one truly practices, then over time one's doubts will naturally cease. When doubt has ceased, faith is present within it. This is why the Elder said, "Faith lies in practice."

[Yongshou Tongzi] Only by letting go of everything, "like a completely dead person," does one accord with seeing one's true nature. People today are restless and impetuous. Often, after practicing for a short while, they become fiercely energetic, yet when circumstances arise, they fall into complete confusion. This disciple believes that, at such a time, no remedy surpasses undergoing a bout of chills and fever. Only then can one recognize where one's own problems lie. Please give instruction, Teacher.

[LVM] Ha ha! Is a bout of chills and fever really so powerful? Actually, the "practicing for a short while" that you mention is not necessarily the same for everyone. Some genuinely practice in accordance with the Dharma, while others do not, yet falsely claim that they do. Consequently, the results are greatly different.

The Forty-Ninth Letter

Forty-Ninth Letter

With reverence, I prostrate to the revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

If Dharma Master So-and-so comes, there will be no problem with living expenses. The local temple owners do not make their livelihood from the temple and do not often go there. If monastics can be invited to come, they will provide food and lodging. We disciples will also, on our own part, consider the four kinds of offerings and the round-trip travel expenses.

[Since you wish to make offerings, worthy people will naturally come to reside there. But Dharma Master So-and-so does not yet have such blessings and virtues to receive these offerings—what can be done, what can be done!] In fact, it need not be only the Dharma Master who comes. If he can bring two or three people with him, there will likewise be no problem with living expenses.

Before last year, an elderly man lived at the temple and cultivated ten or twenty mu of land. The threshing and grain-drying ground was right in front of the temple. He has returned home and will not come back to the temple; the wheat now growing in the fields was still planted by him. In addition, there are many small, uncultivated plots of ownerless land near the temple.

This place is remote, and its customs and way of life are entirely different from those of towns and cities. There will also be people willing to help cultivate the land. The enclosed drawing of Weiquan Mountain Jingju Temple was made by Brother Li. He, Engineer Liu, Engineer Lü, and others all hope that Dharma Master So-and-so can be invited to come.

For monastics such as Dharma Master So-and-so, who have already realized the mind and seen their true nature and are capable of transmitting the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, are indeed rare at present. [This painting of the mountain temple is very lifelike. Layman Li has great talent for painting.

Unfortunately, Dharma Master So-and-so lacks the blessings to come and enjoy this. He is now in retreat and not receiving visitors. It would be better for you to invite someone else. If you cannot find anyone, I can introduce two lay practitioners to you.

] Zhimei asks the revered Master: When sitting, what mantra should one recite while holding the mudrā? Is it the Heart-of-Heart mantra, or is there another mantra? Is it in accordance with the Dharma to recite “Amitābha Buddha”? [While forming the mudrā, recite the Heart-of-Heart mantra; one may also recite Amitābha Buddha.] Xiumei asks the revered Master: Rather than during seated practice, may one silently recite the Heart-of-Heart mantra throughout daily activities—walking, standing, sitting, and lying down? [During daily activity, one may recite the Heart-of-Heart mantra or the “Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī.”]

Disciples Zhimei and Xiumei respectfully prostrate

Eighteenth day of the second month, Buddhist Era 2536

Letter Fifty

Letter Fifty

Respectful prostrations to the revered Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

At the request of Senior Brother Li, Dharma Uncle Xu Hengzhi has arranged to confer remote empowerment on April 30. His letter states that he will accept disciples on your behalf; I am to visualize in Hebi, assist Dharma Uncle with the remote empowerment, and transmit the Dharma on your behalf. That is merely his modest wording. I instructed him to have you assist with the empowerment. Henceforth, please do not truly regard them as students accepted on my behalf.

I have already written to Dharma Uncle Xu, seeking a more detailed explanation. What is Dharma Uncle Xu's Dharma name? Please let me know, revered Master. I do not know his Dharma name either. Recently, I received a reply from Senior Brother Zhao mentioning the address and postal code of a certain Dharma Master. No one from Jingju Temple has come to inquire recently. When he does come, I shall still inform him according to the revered Master's letter.

In my previous letter, I said that two or three lay practitioners could be introduced to Jingju Temple to take charge of it, but I omitted one important point: if these lay practitioners find that they can practice the Dharma at Jingju Temple with peace of mind, they should immediately shave their heads and leave home to become monastics, reside at and serve as abbots of that temple, and not return to Shanghai.

They plan to come to your area in July to look around. I wonder what your view is. Also, how is Miaowu? Why have we heard nothing from him? After The Buddha-Heart Sutra discusses the “twelve kinds of mind,” it immediately speaks of the “Dhāraṇī Following the Mind”: Om mani dali hum phata. Please provide the pronunciation, revered Master. ********** (mantra pronunciation)

Your disciples, Zhiming and Xiuming, respectfully prostrate.

Twelfth day of the third month, Buddhist Era 2536

Yongshou Tongzi Senior Brother Li was the second person empowered by the teacher, was he not? Mind, Buddha, and guru are without distinction. The teacher must surely have profound realization of this; could you speak about it?

LVM Oh! During that period, several people had conditions for liberation that had ripened. I gave them the contact addresses of the Elder and Elder Xu, so that they could inquire about and seek the Dharma themselves. At that time, it was not like today. Information is abundant now, but there was virtually none then. Receiving letters from the Elder and Elder Xu was like finding a priceless treasure, and everyone wanted to read them.

The fellow practitioners of that time had basically all read the letters published here. Transportation was not nearly as convenient then as it is now, yet they all wished to go to Shanghai to seek the Dharma. It was the Elder and Elder Xu who did not want them to undergo the hardship of traveling back and forth, and this was how the idea of holding remote empowerment arose.

Letter Fifty-One

Letter Fifty-One

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

Yesterday I received the Venerable Master's letter, and today I went to visit Mr. Cai, the manager of Jingju Temple. He is not a Buddhist and somewhat fails to distinguish between spirits and Buddhas. His family has served the temple for generations.

Although he has little formal education, he can read simple Buddhist books. The monastics of Baofeng Temple in Hebi once gave him Buddhist books, and he was deeply moved after reading them. This may be the stirring of good roots. He promised to give me a definite reply on Saturday. [You have gone to a great deal of trouble over this.]

[After hearing about the situation, the man from Shanghai no longer wishes to come to your area and plans to enter monastic life in Wenzhou

Thank you for looking into this!] Miaowu has differed from ordinary people since his early years. Before studying Buddhism, he became engrossed in qigong and was therefore driven out of his home. As his mother saw him off at the roadside, the two embraced and wept bitterly. At that very moment, someone rode past on a bicycle, fell over, and scattered his belongings; Miaowu immediately helped him pick them up.

I once rode along the road with him. There was a stone in the middle of the road, and he got off his bicycle to move it away. At the time, I felt ashamed that I had seen it without taking notice. Without question, this man's good roots from past lives are deeply planted; he will surely become a pillar of the Dharma in the future. [Good things often meet with obstacles. Miaowu will find a way forward, so there is no need to worry about him.] Yet the timing and conditions run contrary to human wishes.

Miaowu has always excelled in his studies, but recently his grades have fallen sharply, until he received failing marks in two subjects. His parents are very worried and will not allow him to pursue Buddhist studies any further. Since then, his actions have been restricted by his family at every turn. Miaowu had considered secretly leaving home, but I told him that this was a serious matter, not child's play.

If I do not help you, I obstruct your gateway to awakening; if I help you, I disrupt your family. Make up your own mind before speaking of it again. He himself was indecisive and consulted his parents, which is why his movements were restricted. He is still very young and should study diligently, laying a solid foundation for his future career.

Afterward, I encouraged him to work hard at his humanities studies and strive to enter a Buddhist studies program. Once he has the ability to support himself, the road ahead will be easier. At present, he is rather depressed, and it is not something that can be remedied through persuasion in a short time. What concerns him is that he has caused us trouble, and he feels very sorry about it.

Dharma brother Zhao has also written in reply about the situation at a certain temple: its monastic discipline is quite good; it is a public monastery open to the four quarters, not a hereditary temple, and it does not accept disciples. One must first leave home and receive the precepts elsewhere before residing at that temple to practice Chan. This information is currently of no use to Miaowu. May the dragon trapped in the field take flight when conditions ripen.

A certain temple rigidly adheres to old rules, knowing only how to investigate a single rigid huatou mechanically, with no expedient means to guide people. This is deeply regrettable. Zhao is obstinately attached to spiritual powers, has fallen ill all over, and to this day remains immersed in suffering. Recently I received a mailing from Taiwan: the Foundation for the Cultivation of Chan Studies sent me issue 17 of Chinese Chan Studies.

There was a cartoon: a large mirror, with a person reflected within it; the person outside the mirror was drawn with just a few strokes and was quite different from the one within. This brought to mind that the physical body composed of the four elements and the deluded mind that is a shadow of conditions are like the person in the mirror, yet we cling to them as self. How confused we are. To break through this confusion, we must practice the Dharma. Yet practicing the Dharma is no more than the person in the mirror sitting in meditation.

To break through confusion lies not in practicing the Dharma, but in a single awakening! We sentient beings are originally Buddhas; only because we pursue circumstances and cling to things do we lose our intrinsic nature. Thus, from birth onward, deluded thoughts and inverted views have caused us to wander without cease. To bring them gradually to rest now is indeed not easy. For this reason, Buddhas and patriarchs skillfully devised all kinds of dharma gates, wishing people to cease delusion and return to the true—not so that they might take dharmas as truly existent and become attached to them.

At that moment, this suddenly arose: “When the mirror is broken, how does one see?” I immediately felt my mind and spirit tremble. A state of mind that was humorous, playful, and comforting suddenly appeared. I felt my whole body become warm and melting, rarified, higher, and larger, and I could not help laughing aloud—laughing with such ease and contentment.

After long investigation without understanding, the answer now burst from my mouth: “There is still awareness!” “When two monks shout together, who is host and who is guest?” Does the host look at the host? Does the host look at the guest? Does the guest look at the host? Does the guest look at the guest? It seems that none is right, yet it also seems that all are right.

I replied, “It greatly resembles the guest overwhelming the host!” Unfortunately, this state of mind soon vanished. Although I also thought of safeguarding realization, I found no point at which to exert myself. This is probably a “passing guest.” Though it is a “guest,” from now on this disciple will no longer fall into an annihilationist view. I submit this to the Venerable Master and respectfully await your judgment.

The weather has gradually grown warmer. The Venerable Master’s health has improved considerably, has it not? Among all dharma gates, the patriarchs’ Chan huatou, which has no discursive meaning, is the most direct and decisive. Since there is no conceptual path by which to think or discuss it, in an instant it cuts off the countless deluded thoughts you have had since birth, so that mind, intellect, and consciousness can find no way forward.

Precisely when mind, intellect, and consciousness can find no way forward—when not a single thought arises—is the time when your Original Face reveals itself, when you meet face-to-face with the Tathāgatas of the ten directions, and when the true aspect is without characteristics. If at this point you can catch a glimpse with a single glance, would that not be the greatest joy of your life? Yet students often harbor an expectation of some mysterious and miraculous state; though they reach this point, they fail to awaken. Is that not deeply unjust? You have practiced the Dharma for a long time;

surely there have been times when deluded thoughts were suddenly cut off and not a single thought arose. For example, when “When the mirror is broken, how does one see?” arose in you and you immediately felt your mind and spirit tremble—were there still deluded thoughts then? Take a close look right there: this is your Original Face, and the great matter is finished! Why entertain thoughts of further Dharma practice? Do not repeat the mistake of ordinary people who become attached to spiritual powers, imagining that without a miraculous discovery it is not the Original Face.

You should know that those are the wondrous fruits of diligently removing habitual tendencies after awakening; they are not spiritual powers that manifest as soon as one awakens. At this time, you must neither miss this crucial opportunity for awakening nor suppose that a single awakening is enough. You must constantly contemplate and closely safeguard it—when a thought arises, immediately be aware

of it and do not follow it in wandering; amid all favorable and adverse circumstances, do not be moved by them.

If you practice in this way, within three to five years the skin will fall away completely, leaving only the one reality exposed. “When the mirror is broken, there is still awareness.” The principle is indeed so, but the wording is inappropriate. For if there is something that “still is,” there is a place to abide; it is not a clean and complete eradication. At that point, merely brush off your sleeves and return to the abbot’s quarters; that would be somewhat closer.

When two monks shout together, who is host and who is guest? It appears truly difficult, but if you look closely at the Original Face, it is quite easy. Since the Original Face—unmoving and unshakable, neither arising nor ceasing—is the host, while movement and shaking, arising and ceasing in their functioning, are the guest, the two monks are hosts before they shout and guests after they shout. Thus it is plainly evident.

Your disciple, Zhiming Xiuming, prostrates.

Twenty-fourth day of the third month, Buddhist Era 2536

[Yongshou Tongzi] Spiritual powers are the “wondrous fruits of diligently removing habitual tendencies.” That is to say, the extraordinary is hidden within the ordinary. This is very different from worldly ways of thinking, and it is also what makes the Buddhadharma difficult to learn.

[LVM] Spiritual powers are inherently complete; they are not obtained from outside, nor are they obtained through practice. One need only remove obscurations. “Diligently removing” is practice, and “habitual tendencies” are obscurations. It is like an ancient mirror of a thousand years: when its grime is gone, its brightness naturally appears.

[Yongshou Tongzi] After practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for two years, “surely there have been times when deluded thoughts were suddenly cut off and not a single thought arose.” That is, all who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma have opportunities to see their nature and realize the Way. It is only that the manifestations of “the sudden cessation of deluded thoughts” differ enormously. Among them, “explosion” is the most remarkable, because it is obvious and comparatively easy to experience and recognize. ^_^

[LVM] Ha ha! Even if this most remarkable sudden manifestation appears, if one becomes attached to the appearance of “explosion,” one will mistake a donkey’s saddle bridge for one’s father’s chin. At precisely such a time, if one does not

entertain a holy conception, it is a good state; if one interprets it as holy, one immediately falls prey to a host of demons.

The Fifty-Second Letter

The Fifty-Second Letter

Reverently prostrating before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

Today is Saturday. As promised, the head of Jingju Temple came to my home, and after a while Brother Li also arrived. According to the temple head, not only do the elderly residents of the temple welcome visitors from Shanghai, but even the village brigade cadres welcome them. This matter was made clear in my previous letter, so I shall not discuss it further now.

Brother Li received remote empowerment from Master Xu two days ago, and I have informed him of the practice of heart esotericism. His hands are large and his fingers thick, so forming the mudrās seems difficult for him, especially the third mudrā. I, too, initially found the third mudrā difficult to form, but Brother Li does not fear hardship and persists in the practice. Mr. Li has remitted one hundred yuan and also reports some very good news. This is indeed cause for celebration.

I will not accept the remittance. I have already written to tell him to reclaim it from the original post office after two months. The very good news is in fact a state of insight in which subject and object are both forgotten. But it occurred only once and cannot subsequently be sustained; it was merely like “a blind turtle passing through a hole in wood—an occasional chance encounter,” and does not count.

He must continue to apply himself. Only when it can be present at all times, and when he can penetrate through actual circumstances so that neither favorable nor adverse conditions can move him, will he have truly arrived home. Studying theory is solely to establish faith. Receiving the teaching and practicing it is solely to set out in practice for the sake of awakening. Once practice has arisen and conceptual understanding has ceased, there is no need to expend further mental energy on names and forms.

Even so, I still enjoy discussing Buddhist books and Chan sayings. If someone, through understanding awakening, falls into “nonduality,” I speak of “not one.” If someone misunderstands “realizing the Way” and clings tenaciously to “stages,” I explain “nonduality” and “no-self.” Xiuming once wished to distinguish in detail the terms and concepts in the Venerable Master’s writings.

I said: Terms and concepts may only be understood, not clung to. If you cling to them rigidly, I will dismantle them all. Once they have all been dismantled, the Venerable Master will be very pleased. Have you not seen the Venerable Master clearly write, “Who has ever seen me open my mouth?” I ask the Venerable Master for confirmation. The understanding is not mistaken, but habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated. Have you not seen old Zhaozhou say, “The single word ‘Buddha’—I do not like to hear it!”

Your disciples, Zhiming and Xiuming, respectfully prostrate.

30 March, Buddhist Era 2536

Letter Fifty-Three (Appendix)

Letter Fifty-Three (Supplement)

Respectful prostrations to Master Yuanyin:

I wish you good health! Perhaps in a few months I will ask Master Heng to confer empowerment and transmit the Dharma instruction to me. I do not know what instructions you may have regarding this. [Your resolve to practice the Dharma is certainly very good, but do you have time to sit in meditation and practice? Does your family permit it? All this must be carefully considered; do not act on a momentary impulse.]

In my view, you are still very young. You should study diligently; once your learning has become well-rounded, it will not be too late to practice the Dharma.] Recently, I have gained some insight into the Buddhadharma. At times, external sounds and forms cease at the gateways of the six sense faculties, but what is the path upward from there? [When, amid activity, the gateways of the six sense faculties are pure and unstained by sounds and forms, this is the path upward.]

[If you can remain thus for a long time, uphold it without losing it, luminosity will naturally arise and spiritual powers will naturally come.] Yet it is never wholly serene and at ease; subtle dullness and distraction remain, and my meditative stability is not extensive. [Through innumerable kalpas and lives, you have become accustomed to turbulence and attachment to appearances. How could these be eliminated all at once? Therefore, after understanding the principle, you must practice the Dharma diligently.] You once said, “After thirty years, do not say that you once saw this old fool.”

My present experience is somewhat close to neither seeing nor not seeing: letting go over a precipice and leaving matters to come or go. [The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: “When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing; seeing still departs from

seeing, and seeing cannot reach it." True seeing is without seeing; if there is seeing, it is not true seeing.] Yet in encounters with external things and in daily life, I cannot be thus in every instance.

[If you could be thus in every aspect of daily life, what Dharma would there be left to practice? Because you cannot, you must make a diligent effort.] As for what I am presently studying, since I have not studied the scriptures of the Tripiṭaka, my faith is insufficient and doubt persists. [At this time you cannot be free of doubt because you have not yet directly seen the true mind.]

Now, after you exert yourself and empty out body, mind, world, and space, only then will you ascend to a bhūmi free of doubt (only at the tenth bhūmi is one free of doubt). Mere general reading of the scriptures cannot bring one to the stage of freedom from doubt.]

A disciple asks, "What is the Buddha-Tathāgata nature?" When I seek directly at that very moment, if I touch upon it, it is not it; if I do not touch upon it, I cannot manage. How should I answer? [For this sort of reply, it is entirely acceptable to point to any object or utter any phrase. For example, raise one finger, or say, "It is not apart from the place of your question." For there is nothing that is not the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature.]

[If you wish to make someone give rise to doubt, then say something meaningless, such as, "East Mountain walks on the water!" This cuts off their deluded thoughts, so that with a single inward glance they see their own nature.] If the Buddha and I are neither one nor different, then if not different, the Buddha is I. Sentient beings are what the illusory self sees; they are mad flowers in empty space and should return to insentience. The Buddhas are only within my mind; a single deluded thought gives rise to them.

If sentient beings also possess the true nature of bodhi, then this true nature must not be complete, for there are still two; if they are not one, they are different. As for that Tathāgata, I surely cannot know it.

From this, one may know that the Tathāgata of true nature is apart from all appearances and ultimately has nothing whatever. Yet my doubt on this point is as follows: if, while dwelling in the world, there is nothing within the mind and truly nothing is obtained, this is called the Buddhas; [Correct!] if I too am thus, with my mind not tied to things, all things being myself, then I am true emptiness and wondrous presence. Everything in the world, in its true constancy, is originally likewise, neither arising nor ceasing.

[Appearance is nature, and nature and appearance are nondual. Yet one must not cling to appearances; thus it is said, "Neither identical nor separate." Since

appearance is function and nature is essence, and essence is unchanging, true, and constant while appearances undergo myriad transformations, they are said not to be identical. Since function arises from essence and function reveals essence, they are said not to be separate.]

I ask you, compassionate and wise one: who can verify this for me? If this suchness-nature can be verified, is this suchness-nature that person's true nature, or my true nature? When I ponder this in my mind, it is truly unobtainable. [I am you, and you are that other. Therefore, the Diamond Sūtra says: there is no mark of person, no mark of self, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span. This is what is meant by minds sealing one another. The dharmakāya, a thousand Buddhas, and ten thousand Buddhas share one body, without duality or distinction; but their sambhogakāyas and nirmāṇakāyas are individual. Thus Śākyamuni is not Amitābha, and Miaowu is not Zhijun.]

Disciple Miaowu respectfully prostrates

Morning of May 1, 1992

[Yongshou Tongzi] "If, while dwelling in the world, there is nothing within the mind and truly nothing is obtained, this is called the Buddhas." It seems that becoming a Buddha is not difficult. But on reflection, if one can be without attainment in every matter, that too seems not easy.

[LVM] Because we are originally Buddhas, but cannot realize this because of deluded thoughts and attachments, becoming a Buddha is of course not difficult. Yet there are far too many "things" within the mind, accumulated over far too long a time; removing them is exceedingly difficult! The twelve divisions of the Tripiṭaka, the eighty-four thousand Dharma gates, and practice through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas are all for the sake of removing them. Tell me, is that not difficult?

[Yongshou Tongzi] Are Tongzi and LVM one or different?

[LVM] Wait until you have shattered the appearance of Tongzi; then I will tell you!

The Fifty-Fourth Letter

Letter Fifty-Four

Reverently prostrate before the honored Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

The Master teaches: "To break through confusion lies not in practicing a method, but in a single awakening!" Is this "single awakening" accompanied by "a sudden snap

and violent break, empty space shattering, and the earth sinking level”? The Master also teaches: “When the Original Face is revealed, when one meets face-to-face with the Tathāgatas of the ten directions, when the true reality of no characteristics is present—if one can catch a single glimpse of this, how could one not rejoice for the rest of one’s life?” Does this “single glimpse”

—does it come accompanied by “a sudden snap and violent break, empty space shattering, and the earth sinking level”? [Alas! You must be Mr. Liang Shanbo reborn —so honest that it is almost pitiable! Does a “single awakening” still need to be accompanied by some “sudden snap and violent break”? For example, when you awaken from a dream, all dream scenes vanish at once. What “sudden snap and violent break” is there? Have you not seen the passage on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s realization of the Way in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra: “Awareness and that of which it is aware are empty; awareness of emptiness is perfected to the utmost; that which is empty and emptiness both cease.

At this point, there is neither “awareness” nor “emptiness,” so what “sudden snap and violent break” could there be? The phrase “a sudden snap and violent break” merely describes the instant when thoughts cease.

How can you insist that there must be an actual “snap”? Moreover, the circumstances that arise when different people break through are not all identical. I explained this to you in my last letter, so why are you still clinging so tightly to this “sudden snap and violent break”?] This disciple does not dare seek supernormal powers or mysterious marvels. I know that if the outflows have not yet been exhausted and the five supernormal powers arise first, they can increase attachment to self and arrogance, becoming conditions that obstruct the Way.

Nevertheless, the state of “a sudden snap and violent break” cannot fail to occur; otherwise, it does not count as realization. Even if one has awakened, it is only awakening at the level of principle, not realization awakening. Is my understanding correct? “When deluded thoughts are abruptly cut off and not a single thought arises”—I have encountered this more than once, both on and off the meditation cushion.

[When not a single thought arises, one is not wood or stone. What is this?] I simply did not perceive any “violent break,” and so I did not dare recognize it as such. [Realize it here, and that is awakening. Clearly, you have never awakened, because you have been obscured by “violent break.”] I only felt that this was the power of samādhi, not realization of the essence.

If I were to take this as true, would I not fall into “sitting behind a dark mountain”? So-called safeguarding realization is something after awakening (after realization awakening, not after awakening at the level of principle). [Safeguarding realization is

not divided into before and after awakening. Safeguard before awakening, and you may awaken sooner. Safeguard after awakening, and you may more quickly end deluded habitual tendencies.] Before realization awakening, diligently practicing and upholding the Dharma does not count as attachment.

If one says this is attachment, then one falls into "letting oneself drift," which is a seed of birth-and-death. Is that correct? "When the mirror is broken, awareness still remains." Because something "remains," there is a place to fall upon; it has not been cleanly eradicated. But if, "when the mirror is broken, no awareness remains, and it is cleanly eradicated," would that not again fall into annihilation? [Your attachment is far too heavy.

The passage above from Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's realization of the Way plainly says, "Awareness and that of which it is aware are empty." Yet you still insist that there is an awareness remaining. When will you ever realize the Way? Be bold and let go; see whether it is annihilation or not!] It is neither existent nor nonexistent. There is indeed no place to set brush to paper; one can only brush off one's sleeves and return to the abbot's quarters.

Yet where there is no place to set brush to paper is precisely where the brush should be set. Is this very statement not written down? [You still want to set brush to paper—truly, tacking a dog's tail onto a sable coat!] "Before the two monks shout, they are hosts; after they shout, they are guests." Since the "shout" too has characteristics, attachment to characteristics is delusion.

Yet what were the two monks doing before they shouted? Had they raised their eyebrows or blinked their eyes? Had they lifted their hands or moved their feet? [What is it that you want to do?] "Raising the eyebrows and even moving the feet" also have characteristics. How can these be the "host"? If raising the eyebrows and moving the feet are said to be the function of suchness, then the shout too is the function of suchness; host and guest would then arise simultaneously. How could there be before and after? [These are all strokes that fall into two and three; they are all guests, not the host.

[Even function is the guest; before function is employed is the host.] If the monk illustrates the essence of suchness—the true reality of no characteristics—and the shout illustrates the function of suchness—which can give rise to the myriad dharmas—would these not likewise be host and guest simultaneously? [Utterly and completely wrong!!!] I respectfully request the Master's stick and shout. Tomorrow is Śākyamuni Buddha's birthday. I wish the Master peace in the Dharma! [In May, I shall go to Wenzhou for the summer retreat.]

Disciples Zhiming and Xiuming respectfully bow

Buddhist Era 2536, seventh day of the fourth month

[Yongshou Tongzi] Liang Shanbo transformed into a butterfly, and Wei Sheng embraced a pillar. Though there is some foolish sincerity in them, those who study Buddhism must not lack this kind of honest earnestness.

[LVM] Haha! Nowadays, I often see myself in many letters.

The Fifty-Fifth Letter

Letter Fifty-Five

With reverence, I prostrate before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

When a bird passes, pinch the nose and it hurts; when the stick comes, all doubt and speculation cease. Shanbo, too, once saw her, but he remained attached to Zhu Yingtai. In this life, this disciple will no longer become attached to Zhu Yingtai, lest I remain bound and entangled life after life.

[Amitābha Buddha! You truly are a “dulu drill” from Qin times: no matter how one calls, you will not turn your head!] I and all sentient beings are drowning in this sea of suffering. Without realizing the original nature, how can we escape? It is originally complete and present; in the instant one turns back, one is already on the other shore.

Yet my faculties are poor and inferior, and my habitual defilements are deeply rooted. Thus I have been born in this Dharma-ending age. Without undergoing a thorough cleansing and tempering, how could I directly see the original reality? Why can none of the Buddha’s disciples recognize it right at hand? It is only because they vaguely harbor within themselves the notion of some wondrous and extraordinary state. Thus, though it shines before their very faces, they do not recognize it; instead, they seek it afar through practice, taking winding paths and vainly wasting their time. How truly regrettable!

The worthies of old likewise sighed here: “Precisely because it is so immediate, recognition comes all the more slowly!” How lamentable indeed! Fortunately, through the Venerable Master’s compassionate acceptance, I have received heart esotericism. This disciple shall cultivate diligently, drilling wood to make fire. Upon seeing smoke, I will not rejoice, but must drill all the more urgently, until ashes and smoke have entirely vanished; only then will the great matter be settled.

For the present, I shall simply cultivate during meditation sessions and safeguard realization off the cushion. Having already seen the ox, I will not let it be lost. Whether for two or three years, or for a hundred or a thousand sessions, I shall learn Shanbo's honesty and simply keep sitting, cutting off all doubts and speculation. When it is time to turn back, the Venerable Master will naturally provide guidance; this disciple will only learn to be a living dead person. I myself find it amusing: as soon as the Venerable Master mentioned Wenzhou, this disciple thought of Senior Brother Song.

This faculty of "association" is truly amusing; it is still far from being a "living dead person." I have already found Senior Brother Song's address here. [On this occasion, I shall stay briefly in Wenzhou, secretly residing at Yandang Mountain and not communicating with fellow practitioners in Wenzhou. Therefore, Song So-and-so will not know of it either. There is no use in your writing to him.] Respectfully wishing the Venerable Master well for the summer!

Disciple Zhimin Xiuming prostrates

Nineteenth day of the fourth month, Buddhist Era 2536

[Youth Yongshou] "Why can none of the Buddha's disciples recognize it right at hand? It is only because they vaguely harbor within themselves the notion of some wondrous and extraordinary state." Hehe—there are very many who share this same ailment!

[LVM] Was it not just said that this is difficult and easy? Even this single mote of dust cannot be removed for a long time, let alone the deeply rooted accumulated habits of immeasurable kalpas! It is not that they cannot be removed, but that one is unwilling to remove them. If one is willing, what do immeasurable kalpas matter? At this very moment, there is no great thousandfold world!

Letter Fifty-Six

Letter Fifty-Six

Reverently bowing in homage to the Venerable Master:

I bow in homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

The disciple asks himself: "Is there, dimly present within my mind, some wondrous and extraordinary realm?" It cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. [Hey! Why speak of existence or nonexistence? Poor fellow—you are caught up in it without knowing it!] To revolve through the six realms is like being in a dream. Once the dream awakens, the six realms are all insubstantial.

Because one seeks to “awaken from the dream,” it cannot be said not to exist. Yet “awakening from the dream” is merely waking up from sleep: one has neither three heads nor six arms. What is so wondrous or extraordinary about it? Thus it cannot be said to exist.

[Why seek it? Who is it that speaks of dreaming and waking? It shines before your very face all day long; when has it ever entered a dream?] “Realize it at what is close at hand”: cut through the tangled mess with a swift sword; understand it immediately and become a Buddha on the spot. “Seek it in the distance”: one must undergo three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. A single asaṃkhyeya is already immeasurably vast, so the time of fulfillment is remote indeed.

[Sitting beside the rice basket, countless people starve to death!] Practicing the Dharma is like Yajñadatta’s loss of his head, or like riding a donkey while looking for a donkey. Realize it nearby, and attain it immediately. But which one is nearby? My own answer: What is it that you doubt is not it?! This is much like asking for Chang’an while standing in Hanyuan Hall! It is also the sort of thing Ma Su, the “white-browed” one, would do.

What is it? Is it saṃsāra or liberation? [Take care not to say it!] I suddenly recalled the saying in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra about “seeing the Ganges when young and seeing the Ganges when old.” This is the very thing that “shines before one’s face all day long.” [The ancient Buddha has long passed away!] The disciple has long known it, though “known” is not quite the right word.

The disciple has long grasped it, though “grasped” is even less exact. [If that is truly so, why still speak of right and wrong, delusion and awakening, good and evil?!] In any case, the disciple understands that it is “intrinsic nature,” the “great, fine, natural Buddha.” It is functioning at every moment. Without it, not only would liberation be unobtainable, even saṃsāra would be unobtainable.

Raising the eyebrows and blinking the eyes are its functioning; lifting the hands and moving the feet are likewise its functioning. It belongs neither to good nor to evil, yet good and evil are both its manifestations. It belongs neither to delusion nor to awakening, yet delusion and awakening are both its present manifestations. [Once it falls into verbal formulation, it is already no longer it.]

The disciple has long “recognized” it, although the word “recognized” is not exact. Is this realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature? [It resembles it, but it is not it! Once there is something called realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, it is already no longer it.] [I shall now cite two examples of ancient masters’ practice after awakening, for you to take as models.]

First, Mazu replied to his master, saying: “Since the disorder, for thirty years I have not lacked salt and sauce.” Second, Zhaozhou said: “Apart from my two daily meals of gruel and rice, for forty years I have not mixed in any other use of mind.”

Look at these two great masters. Both were great patriarchs of the Chan school. After realizing the Way, one spent thirty years and the other forty years cultivating the practice of safeguarding realization; only then did they thoroughly penetrate and perfectly realize bodhi. How much more, then, should we do so? If you do not diligently safeguard realization in this respect, what are you prattling on about and asking here and there?! Someone may ask, “Having awakened to this nature, why can one not immediately be the same as all Buddhas, endowed with wisdom, eloquence, spiritual powers, and such wondrous qualities?” The answer is: One who has initially awakened to this nature is like a child; one must wait for that child to grow up before being able to handle human affairs.

After clearly seeing the true mind, if one safeguards realization continuously and seamlessly, habitual tendencies gradually dissolve and wisdom gradually expands. The habitual tendencies to which one has been attached since beginningless time require five, ten, or even twenty or thirty years of diligent training before they can be entirely eliminated. The ancient worthies’ saying that one gradually reaches profound subtleties does not deceive us. Those who possess these qualities immediately must be Buddhas or patriarchs returned to the world: with one awakening, they awaken thoroughly. How can this be generalized?

Disciple Zhiming bows in homage

Buddhist Era 2536, second day of the sixth month

[Novice Yongshou] Realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature is a mighty big tree that entangles many people.

[LVM] [Sitting beside the rice basket, countless people starve to death!]

[Novice Yongshou] I ask the teacher once more: How should one safeguard realization in order to take the most direct path?

[LVM] [Once it falls into verbal formulation, it is already no longer it.]

Letter Fifty-Seven

Letter Fifty-Seven

Respectful prostrations to the Revered Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

Summer has passed and autumn has come; the Mid-Autumn Festival is approaching, and the Revered Master may already have returned to Shanghai. I once dreamed that, amid a large gathering, I approached the Revered Master and spoke with him. The Revered Master kindly said many things to me, yet I cannot remember a single word. What remains now is only the feeling of kindness and, beyond that, an inexpressible sense of bewilderment.

[The vast Taihu Lake spans thirty-six thousand qing; the moon in the heart of its waves is utterly silent. Alas for those who seek the mystery: they discuss the affairs of dreams within their dreams!] In the end, this dream too has awakened.

I thought: When will the great dream of human life awaken? What benefit is there in speaking of dreams within a dream? To cling to awakening from the dream is itself to become deluded by the dream! I thought that, after awakening, with a backward glance, when was there ever a dream, and when was there ever an awakening? The dream itself is true; awakening itself is false. The words “true” and “false” have no meaning whatsoever.

Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly, yet did not know whether the butterfly had transformed into Zhuangzi or Zhuangzi into a butterfly. This seems to be a place where nothing can be grasped.

Then I thought: Why grasp at all? What is there to grasp? Does this one who grasps truly need something to grasp? If there is such a need, one has fallen into “craving conditions grasping”; if there is no need, why grasp? Suddenly I felt that this “not grasping” too is “craving conditions grasping”: loving ease, one grasps at “not grasping”! Ah! With a single thought of awakening, grasping is all right, and not grasping

is all right; with a single thought of delusion, grasping is not all right, and not grasping is not all right! Looking back, the Revered Master once recorded ninety blows for me (three sets of thirty blows). I wish to savor carefully the taste of these blows. Is it as Linji said, like being brushed by a willow branch? [Do not speak of profound principles and wondrous doctrines; you must realize them in actual circumstances before it can be said that you have attained them.

Now, when all circumstances appear before you, can you still remain unmoved by them, like a wooden man gazing at flowers and birds? If not, you must become aware the instant a thought arises; with each awareness, empty it. Do not abide even in emptiness, but remain clearly aware and unattached. If you apply yourself in this way, you will naturally transcend the three realms and manifest great wondrous functions.

] This morning, during meditation, that state of mind—clear, still, and silent—appeared again. I wanted to "seize it in one grasp," and this state of mind vanished again. I clearly know that this "seizing it in one grasp" must not involve stirring the mind or giving rise to thoughts, but I am accustomed to using discursive thought and find it very difficult to correct this. [Realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is not something rare. In this school, it only reaches the stage of faith.

After awakening, one must safeguard realization continuously and closely. Throughout the day and night, neither cling to existence nor fall into emptiness; remain distinctly and singly luminous, seeking nothing and attaining nothing; be equally at ease in stillness and activity, and become continuous and undivided. Only then does one reach the "stage of forbearance." One must go still further: even this distinctly single luminosity must become unobtainable. Only when one is like a fool or an idiot all day long is the task complete. It is not the case that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means one has arrived home and has nothing further to do.

] Suddenly I felt as though struck on the head: Why must I "seize it in one grasp"? Do I truly need the thing to be "seized in one grasp"? It is chattering incessantly in my mind—where else need I go to seize it? Oh dear, I feel as though I am about to go mad! This disciple reflects: my fear of death is slight, but my fear of suffering is far greater than my fear of death.

This "fear of suffering" alone is habitual tendency; it is not something that is "naturally so." On careful reflection, are not suffering and pleasure both feelings? It is true that this disciple "fears suffering," but I do not seek pleasure. Of all the various thoughts arising in me from moment to moment, which one is not derived from this "fear of suffering"? The suchness of intrinsic nature contains nothing and does not undergo suffering or pleasure.

Who, then, is this one who "fears suffering"? Or rather, what thing is it? If one says that fearing suffering is an obstruction, in itself it is precisely "suchness"; if one says it is not an obstruction, why does it still chatter on incessantly? This "blow to the head" was not that I truly felt a "bang" and pain. I did not even feel anything like "being brushed by a willow branch."

Yet it was still "one blow." Although I cannot count them clearly, of the "ninety blows" recorded by the Revered Master, eighty-nine blows remain.

[If you ask what it is to realize the mind and see one's true nature: at this very moment, when not a single thought arises, look—what is it? Is it not your own Original Face? In truth, there is no difficulty in doing the work, nor is there any particularly wondrous method. Only do not seek the true, and do not cling to profundity and wonder. Simply let your mind rest and look. When the mind has

rested, when there is no mind that can be minded and no thought that can be thought, what is that state like? This is a critical moment; if you let it slip even slightly, it vanishes! What is called realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is precisely the directly present state in which the preceding and following thoughts have ceased and one is transcendent and unattached. This is the place in which you settle your mind and establish your life.

Do not regard this point as ordinary! Still less should you neglect it and miss it because it contains nothing especially mysterious or extraordinary! After recognizing it, you must protect it closely and continuously, so that it may always remain thus. All meditative power, wisdom-power, spiritual powers, and wondrous functions are activated from this very point.

Because students' habitual tendencies from countless lives and eons are deep, they often cling to the marvelous and mysterious. When they encounter the point at which deluded thoughts cease, they find nothing marvelous about it and neglect it, thereby missing it. Even if someone points it out to them and they acknowledge this stretch of "ordinary scenery," the moment a different circumstance appears, they forget and lose it again, and their effort fails just when success is at hand.

Therefore, there are three difficulties in the work: first, one must begin with single-mindedness, and it is truly difficult to recognize and firmly hold to the point where preceding and following thoughts cease; second, it is difficult to safeguard realization closely and continuously without forgetting or losing it; third, at the end, it is difficult to forget it and dissolve it into lively spontaneity. For although one may recognize it, hold to it firmly, and safeguard it closely and continuously, the moment one deliberately attends to it, one falls into the measuring of subject and object, and that is not it either.

The work must become continuous and undivided. It necessarily requires a thousand hammerings and ten thousand temperings, so that it becomes thoroughly mature without rigid attachment. Yet this matter fails because it is easy to forget and lose it; difficult to become fully mature, difficult to be honest and steadfast, and difficult to be flexible. Thus, among hundreds of millions who cultivate the Way, scarcely one or two attain accomplishment. Zhijun, take this admonition to heart! One cannot succeed merely by uttering a few clever phrases or composing a couple of poems!!]

Respectfully wishing the Revered Master well for the Mid-Autumn Festival!

Disciple Zhimin, with prostrations

August 31, 1992

[Young Yongshou] I thank the teacher for making these letters public, allowing sentient beings such as ourselves to know that the inner course of practice and realization is largely similar. There is no need to elevate the realm of sages beyond reach.

[LVM] The inner course is largely similar—there are not two paths in returning to the source; outward appearances differ in countless ways—there are many skillful means.

[Young Yongshou] “The work must become continuous and undivided. It necessarily requires a thousand hammerings and ten thousand temperings, so that it becomes thoroughly mature without rigid attachment. Yet this matter fails because it is easy to forget and lose it; difficult to become fully mature, difficult to be honest and steadfast, and difficult to be flexible. Thus, among hundreds of millions who cultivate the Way, scarcely one or two attain accomplishment.” So, striving does not work, yet muddling along will not do either. It truly tests one’s patience.

[LVM] Therefore, one must put practice into action, bring conceptual understanding to an end, arouse a lasting resolve, persevere without cease, and go deeply into a single Dharma gate.

Letter Fifty-Eight

Letter Fifty-Eight

With reverence, I prostrate before the Revered Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

Not long ago, during meditation, this disciple seemed to sense someone flying sideways, striking the wall with his head and dying. At the same time, I seemed to feel qi spurting from the baihui point at the crown of my head. The sound was loud—neither bell nor drum—seeming to burst forth with resonance, like an echo in an empty valley or chords played directly. The sensation was utterly clear and distinct.

Before this, during one session, as I formed the mudrā, I caught the yellow cloth covering my hands and the clothing over my chest inside the edge of my palms. When I pulled them free, there followed a clear sound like a bell, with a loud lingering resonance. I already knew that I should not involve myself in any mysteries, so I paid it no attention.

[Meditative states and appearances are endlessly variable; none should be grasped or clung to. You must sit until bells and drums alike fall silent, until inwardly body and mind and outwardly the world together vanish without trace, while luminous

awareness remains undimmed.] For a long time, this disciple has sensed that which “radiates light” at the gateways of the six sense faculties; it is even easier to sense during meditation.

[Though you know it, you do not put it into practice, nor do you dare to affirm it without doubt—this is useless! Since you cannot abide at the stage of faith, you cannot safeguard realization and advance ever higher. You must be thus at all times; it is not only during meditation that it becomes clear and easy to sense. Nor is making it clear itself what is meant by “catching” and “seizing”; rather, it is recognizing it without doubt, knowing it clearly, and taking a firm stand—this is what is meant by “catching” and “seizing.”

] It cannot be caught or seized. When one becomes quiet, it is very clear; but if one tries to grasp it, there is nowhere to find it. To make it clear is “catching” it; that is “seizing” it. This is what the Revered Master explained in the letter. Yet formerly, this disciple thought that it too was not ultimate, but merely a shadow of the eighth consciousness. [Wrong. At this point you have only reached the threshold of the dharmakāya; this surely is not the esoteric intent.

But it is not a shadow of the eighth consciousness!] One must break it open before it counts as seeing one’s true nature; hence the doubts expressed in several earlier letters. [Do not cling to an explosion merely because you have heard of one. You must know that not everyone is the same!] To affirm that it has always been there and exists forever is self-affirmation; to make it present before one is to seize it in a single grasp; to make it regularly present is safeguarding realization.

[This is all dream talk!] This disciple stumbled at the hurdle of “self-affirmation.” You see, one must posit “being” and “existing forever” before one can affirm oneself. Once one is involved with “being” and “existence,” how can one still find even its shadow? I have unearthed a great attachment, difficult to detect, deep within my mind: “eternity.”

The concept of “eternity” has deep roots and has led me seriously astray. Before entering Buddhism, I first encountered the Bible and popular publications such as the magazine Tianfeng, and came to know of the “eternity” of heaven.

Later, after encountering Buddhist teachings and Buddhist books, I learned that such “eternity” is relative, while the eternity of quiescent cessation alone is absolute; thus I entered Buddhism. At the time, this was not altogether wrong. Yet clinging to eternity and refusing to let it go became an obstacle to progress on the Way, and only now have I discovered this.

[It is not too late if you can turn back!] In fact, whatever can be felt is not eternal—it is not the permanence of “permanence, bliss, self, and purity.” Only the source from

which sensations arise is permanent. Even the “it” just mentioned is not ultimate.

[If “it” too is not ultimate, then apart from “it,” where is the ultimate?] To say that this is awakening is likewise an expedient means. Therefore, one needs to safeguard realization, and then move from safeguarding realization to letting go—not trying to experience it.

[Originally, it is a provisional name. It is not deluded in itself, so how can awakening be posited? Why, then, must one safeguard realization? Because the habitual tendencies of many lives are deeply entrenched and cannot be resolved by a single awakening. One must temper oneself through circumstances and wear away the habitual tendency to abide in appearances. When abiding does not abide, and non-abiding too does not abide, only then may one let go.

] Light does not illuminate itself, and sound does not hear itself; so how can the mind be made clear, and how can one see one’s nature? Regarding the original portion of true light itself, one cannot find “delusion”; how, then, can there be “awakening”? [What are you saying! Is this not clarity? Is this not awakening?] When this disciple mistakenly clung to “eternity,” I thought that if I could recall previous lives, I could prove that eternity—but I did not therefore cultivate

“the supernormal power of knowing previous lives.” This came from the power of faith: faith that the Revered Master’s words are without error, and faith in the power of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. If I could observe future lives with the divine eye, I could likewise prove that eternity—but I did not therefore cultivate “the supernormal power of the divine eye”; this too came from the power of faith.

The Revered Master once said, “Faith lies in practice.” How true these words are! [So long as you are constantly aware and discerning, do not follow thoughts when they arise, remain unstained when circumstances come, and enter deeply into samādhi, the six supernormal powers will naturally all manifest. But do not seek them or cling to them; once there is any gain, you are bound for Māra!!] In fact, even if one could penetrate previous and future lives, what one saw would not be suchness. It would still be the fading traces

of the six sense objects; what one saw would still be delusive. When would one ever have seen the true? [What is it that is able to see this? Is it a shadow? You must examine this carefully!] Once one falls into attachment, if one does not become entangled with Māra, what other path is there? This is probably why the Revered Master repeatedly warns against clinging to spiritual powers. This disciple now seems to have reached the end of a broad road.

[The ten-thousand-mile journey has only taken its first step!] A sheer cliff blocks the way. It cannot be flown over or bypassed; one must pass through the cliff and be

released onto the other shore. This disciple is utterly at a loss.

[What sheer cliff is blocking the way? It is your own mind that is not empty: you have pursuits and gains!] If someone said this to me, I would unhesitatingly cite the phrase: “Precisely because it is so intimate, recognition is delayed!” Yet this device does not work on myself. Why is this? [For now, you should still meditate much more. (Take note: this nourishes the Way.) Enter deeply into samādhi, abide nowhere in anything, live in accordance with conditions, and let things function naturally and freely; only then will you gain genuine benefit.

As samādhi deepens, great changes will arise in both mind and body, even to the point of great spiritual powers. But you must never grasp at them; once there is any gain, you will enter Māra!][This is expedient Dharma spoken for your sake; do not assume that you must certainly proceed in this way. If you can go beyond the ocean of samādhi, there is no need to do so: simply eat when hungry and sleep when tired.]

Your disciple, Zhiming, prostrates

October 5, 1992

[Youth Yongshou] Who, indeed, can go beyond the ocean of samādhi?

[LVM] Is it not one who simply “eats when hungry and sleeps when tired”? That is, one of whom the Sutra in Forty-Two Sections speaks as having “no thought, no abiding, no cultivation, and no realization.”

The Fifty-Ninth Letter

Letter Fifty-Nine

Reverently prostrating before the Honored Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

For the present, the Honored Master has shown this disciple the method of nurturing the Way: meditate more. You further pointed out: “If you can go beyond the ocean of meditative absorption, there is no need to do this.” This is not a matter for the present; it is preparation for your future. This disciple can now understand the Master’s painstaking concern. “Nurturing the Way” includes: living in accord with circumstances and remaining free and at ease as things naturally unfold.

“Transcending Chan” includes: eating when hungry and sleeping when tired. These are all expressions of non-abiding. Once one has gone beyond the ocean of meditative absorption and eliminated attachment to a single dharma, there is no need even to sit in meditation (though, of course, there is no need not to sit either); then one can abide nowhere. If one cannot transcend it, one must meditate much and enter deeply into meditative absorption before the mind can become empty and non-abiding.

Such sayings as “Being able to sit is not Chan” and “Do not cut off the hundred thoughts” are all meant to spur students to transcend this “ocean of meditative absorption” at once. One must truly attain a state in which one is not deluded by circumstances, seeks nothing, and gains nothing; merely saying a few clever phrases does not suffice. Without meditating and entering samādhi, one can never transform body and mind.

This disciple does not know whether he can transcend the ocean of meditative absorption, and feels that his meditative strength is still far too weak. This statement is incorrect. Whether one has any real attainment is something that, “like a person drinking water, one knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm.” Last year I saw lights and Buddhas; this year I emitted breath and heard sounds. All of this occurred at the Nantianmen Grain Depot in Gushi County.

Is this attainment? This is seeing ghosts while alive! I have been there only twice, each time for no more than ten days or so. At home and elsewhere, I have never had such clear apparitional transformations.

Could this still be related to the place? I already explained this to you last time. You should bring body, mind, and world all to emptiness—and not obtain even emptiness—before there is even slight accord. How can you still cling to lights, Buddhas, and emitted breath? You must know that externally appearing lights and Buddhas have nothing to do with you. Even if you yourself emit light, before seeing your true nature it is still delusive light.

Only after everything has dissolved into emptiness, habitual tendencies have vanished, and the pure dharmakāya emits great radiance is it true light. If you remain attached, and further distinguish good and bad places, how can you realize bodhi? You must know that places are neither good nor bad; what differs is whether the human mind is tranquil. When your mind is empty, Sahā is the Land of Ultimate Bliss; conversely, even the Land of Ultimate Bliss is Sahā.

For the present, this disciple need only hold firmly to this “non-abiding.” “Living in accord with circumstances and remaining free and at ease as things naturally unfold,” and “eating when hungry and sleeping when tired,” are simply other names for “non-abiding.”

Meditating is always better than creating karma. Especially now, this disciple's sleeping time has greatly decreased; it is already quite easy to practice for one session each night from the latter part of the night until morning. Why stop meditating because of "transcending Chan"? Moreover, even if one goes beyond the ocean of meditative absorption, this does not exclude meditation; one simply no longer clings to meditating.

Look: is not the person who promoted "Sitting quietly is not Chan" still sitting at Nanhua Temple? There is more harm than benefit in saying such clever phrases! The Honored Master commented: "What precipitous cliff is blocking your Way? It is simply that your mind is not empty; you have pursuits and attainments!" This medicine is precisely suited to this disciple's illness! There is an "awakening" in my mind: on the one hand I ponder

"Light does not illuminate itself; sound does not hear itself. How can the mind be made clear, and how can one's nature be seen?"; on the other hand I look here for "that awakening." How could the mind possibly become empty? Pursuing this "awakening," hoping to realize that capacity which can awaken, I thereby lost everything completely. What is there to awaken to? One awakens to emptiness and dependent arising.

It is not that intrinsic nature cannot be seen; rather, after awakening, one eradicates the traces of awakening, and thus says that mind and nature cannot be made clear or seen. If you cling to the idea that mind and nature cannot be made clear or seen, you will be deceived by it and become a muddleheaded fool.

Fortunately, amid this bewilderment in which everything was lost, afflictions did not arise again. Instead, I suddenly grasped "its" tail: what is seen is the object aspect of the eighth consciousness, while that which sees is the perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness.

What sort of state is this, that you speak such words! This capacity that is capable of seeing is certainly not the one that sees; this capacity that is capable of seeing is "it." Ah! Even when afflictions arise, it has never left for a single step. Whether explained horizontally, vertically, or through tangled vines of words, all are meant to find it; yet in fact it has never departed. How should one put this? This truly is "the grievance of the Buddhas of the three times." Keep silent all day—who would say that you had become a fool?!

Your disciple, Zhiming, prostrates.

Yongshou Tongzi This disciple understands that only at the very instant when all attachments are relinquished can body, mind, and world completely dissolve into emptiness. Therefore, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma emphasizes emptying body and

mind and realizing what it means that “rest is bodhi”; it has incorporated the secret of liberation into the practice of seated meditation.

LVM Everyone knows the principles, but alas, most are unwilling to put them into practice!

The Sixtieth Letter

The Sixtieth Letter

With reverence, I prostrate to the Venerable Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

Recently, this disciple made a business trip to Guangzhou and, taking the opportunity, paid pilgrimage visits to Guangxiao Temple and the Temple of the Six Banyan Trees.

[Why did you not go to Nanhua Temple to pay homage to the Sixth Patriarch?] Before leaving for Guangzhou, I received from a Dharma brother in Shanghai twenty copies of the rare Dharma text Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State. I also received a letter from this Dharma brother, stating clearly that he was sending them at your instruction. [This book is a secret Dharma treasure of Esoteric Buddhism through which one may obtain the dharmakāya without practice.

But do not, merely because it says “obtain it without practice,” abandon cultivation. That would be a grave mistake. This is only a means of reassuring you and providing a remedy for your concern that you may not attain realization in this very life. If you truly wish to attain great accomplishment, you must still make every effort to cultivate meditative stability, diligently contemplate emptiness, and eliminate old habitual tendencies; only then can you fully realize the three kāyas and four wisdoms.

Chan awakening merely marks one’s ascent to the first bhūmi; the road ahead is still long. If you do not devote yourself single-mindedly to intensive cultivation, how can you advance ever higher?!] Before departing, I asked Xiuming to reply to this Dharma brother and to send you 100 yuan as a small contribution toward your propagation of the Dharma. Upon returning from Guangzhou to He, I found that the Venerable Master’s letter had already arrived. After reading it reverently, I absorbed it deeply into my heart.

As this disciple is approaching the completion of three years of practice, a slight impatience had arisen, and it showed itself rather clearly in these recent letters to the Venerable Master. Without sparing yourself, you alternated the stick and the shout, sweeping away all of this disciple's improper feelings at once. This disciple now smiles in understanding and has decisively cast aside this attachment to dharmas. Henceforth, I need only meditate every day, observe the mind at every moment, and live in accordance with conditions.

[The Pure Land school criticizes the Chan school because Chan practitioners of later generations are content with too little. Having awakened to a small measure of principle, they boast and talk extravagantly, without engaging in genuine cultivation. When they encounter circumstances, they cannot get through them; consequently, their delusions of thought remain uneliminated, and they cannot transcend birth and death. The ancients were not like this.

Once they received instruction and recognized their original nature, they safeguarded their realization continuously and closely, diligently removed habitual defilements, and constantly maintained meditative stability. Thus, within three or five years, or ten or more years, even twenty or thirty years, they could become continuous and undivided, realize the eighth bhūmi or beyond, and deeply attain the wondrous functioning of non-contrivance.] [After realizing the Way, the Sixth Patriarch also concealed himself among a band of hunters for more than ten years, engaging in the work of safeguarding realization.

People today are arrogant, believing that once awakened, everything is finished and no further practice is needed. Or they pursue spiritual powers and enter a deviant path, so that the Way of Chan has declined—a truly lamentable state of affairs.] [In truth, recognizing one's intrinsic nature is not difficult; it is only that students deceive themselves. If, when not a single thought arises, one turns back for a glance —what is this?—one immediately sees it for oneself.

Just as it is said: "Only when mind and circumstances suddenly dissolve does one understand form and emptiness. If you wish to recognize your Original Face, it is amid green mountains and white clouds." "Rocks shatter and heaven is startled as a lone crane flies; in the pitch-black night, a rooster crows at the fifth watch. Since spending three nights at Empty Mulberry, I have no longer seen right and wrong among humankind." These lines from The Travels of Lao Can may well be taken as encouragement for oneself.

As for this disciple's undue impatience, another poem from The Travels of Lao Can aptly portrays it: "Ziyang's responsive verse accompanies Cui Xu's chant; like a thunderclap qin, it echoes through empty mountains. In an instant, before the marks of self and others are removed, heavenly flowers cling thickly to the clouds

that protect the body." [Being in the sea, do not seek water; walking amid mountain ridges, do not seek mountains. The calls of orioles and the speech of swallows are all alike; do not ask about the first three or the last three.] I recently had some business cards printed, and my name was printed as "Zhijun" ("govern a prefecture"). That is fine too. [One can govern only one small prefecture—such limited breadth of mind!]

Your disciple, Zhiming, prostrates.

November 7, 1992

[Yongshou Tongzi] Ha ha! Since governing a prefecture is considered too small, the Elder must want the teacher to govern several Buddha lands.

[LVM] My work unit had the business cards printed while I was away on a business trip. By the time I returned, they had already been printed and could not be changed. The point was my remark, "That is fine too"; the Elder was responding to that remark.

The Sixty-First Letter

Letter Sixty-One

With reverence, I prostrate before the revered Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

The Master places even greater importance on the disciple's progress on the Way than the disciple does. From between the lines of the Master's letters, this disciple has seen this earnest hope. This disciple feels that "with one awakening, one directly ascends to the first bhūmi" is already exceedingly difficult to attain; whether someone of this disciple's capacity can realize even this stage remains a question. Yet the Master says, "Chan awakening only amounts to ascending to the first bhūmi; the road ahead is still long."

By way of analogy, this disciple feels incapable even of governing a commandery or a county; yet the Master believes that such an outlook is too narrow in scope. [If one is not a kindred spirit, straining one's ears is futile!] I am reminded of the wondrous parable in the Lotus Sūtra: a son flees from his father. At first, he is merely asked to remove dung; only when his disposition has gradually matured can he shoulder the Tathāgata family's enterprise.

The so-called "raw" and "mature" refer to habitual tendencies. If one were suddenly to recognize one's own intrinsic worth, there would originally be no need for the

process of “removing dung.” Yet theory is theory after all. Whether one can truly shoulder the Tathāgata family’s enterprise can be known only through realization. Whether one has realized it or not, one must not deceive oneself, much less deceive others.

At present, this disciple does not know whether realization has been attained. This very “not knowing” is the best possible proof that it has not been attained. A Chan master said: “If, having awakened, one does not cultivate the Pure Land, I guarantee, my friend, that one has not awakened!” This shows that the Chan school does not disparage the Pure Land school, for to do so would be tantamount to denying itself. Likewise, the Pure Land school should not disparage Chan, for that too would amount to denying the Pure Land.

Of course, among present-day Pure Land practitioners, the proportion capable of entering the nine grades of the lotus dais may not be very large. But that is another matter, and one cannot therefore say that the Pure Land school is deficient. According to the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, the Sixth Patriarch had also presided over a Dharma seat before his “ten years among hunters.” In the end, however, he withdrew into seclusion to safeguard realization for ten years.

This shows that to propagate the Dharma and liberate sentient beings, one must truly realize it; only upon realization does one possess great power in function. Thus later came the verse: “The body is like a bodhi tree; the mind like a bright mirror stand. Urge people diligently to wipe it, lest dust arise everywhere. These were originally Shenxiu’s words; reversed and turned about, they became the waters of Caoxi, surging through the nine reaches of heaven.” Without the Sixth Patriarch of that time, there would be no Chan school today.

How could such a great matter of causes and conditions be handled in a muddled, half-hearted way? Thus the Buddha’s grace is difficult to repay. If this disciple has not truly realized it, then even if this body were shattered into motes of dust, it would still be difficult to repay the Buddha’s grace and the Master’s grace by even a hair’s breadth. [Alas! How pitiful! Pressing a cow’s head down to make it eat grass brings harm and no benefit; reciting Amitābha and being reborn in the Western Pure Land may bring merit.]

Disciple Zhiming prostrates in reverence

November 23, 1992

[Yongshou Tongzi] prostrates before the teacher and before Master Yuanyin, who, for the sake of our study and practice of the Buddha Dharma, did not hesitate to manifest such seemingly rambling discourse.

[LVM] Because there is a “realizing the Way” in my mind, no amount of calling can make me turn back.

The Sixty-Second Letter

Letter Sixty-Two

Respectfully prostrating before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

This disciple has practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for more than one thousand sessions over a period of more than three years, and naturally encounters this question: “Have you realized the mind and seen your true nature?” [Let go of everything; sit in meditation with utter resolve, and only then speak of emptying body, mind, and world!] This disciple answers: “If I say, ‘I have realized the mind and seen my true nature,’ that proves precisely that I have not realized the mind and seen my true nature. If I say, ‘I have not realized the mind and seen my true nature,’ then at that very moment I am slandering the Dharma. Like one who drinks water and knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm, one truly cannot open one’s mouth.”

[At midnight last night, the moon reached the window!] Of course, this is addressed to those who have already practiced, or who have resolved to practice, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

Disciple Zhiming prostrates.

[Youth Yongshou] For students who still have a sense of doubt and deluded thoughts, the expedient means of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is simply to “let go of everything and empty body and mind,” is it not?

[LVM] For those who meditate and practice earnestly, they know this from the very beginning. Yet they have grown accustomed to clinging to appearances through measureless kalpas. Even when that segment of true light of their original nature is already clearly present before them, because it cannot be grasped or obtained, they still want to grope about for something among appearances.

Even when they clearly know that this which is lucidly present is the World-Honored One’s hidden intent, what Kāśyapa no longer conceals, and the meaning of Patriarch Bodhidharma’s coming from the West, they still want to reach a final conclusion through concepts. At such a time, true patriarchs with clear eyes would never put so-called “verification” into words; once it is put into words, it becomes “a guest

seeing a guest." When the Elder speaks here of "At midnight last night, the moon reached the window," he is already being compassionate beyond measure.

The Sixty-Third Letter

The Sixty-Third Letter

I respectfully prostrate before the honored Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

As I was walking to tutor students at the Television University, I still had some time, so I walked slowly. Suddenly, I felt that I was immersed in an unbroken stream of thoughts. Ah, how heavy these thoughts were! Who was thinking?! Turning the light inward, I suddenly discovered that a self was vividly present.

Ah! Contemplating freedom, contemplating freedom—indeed, it is oneself contemplating freedom! It was like meeting one's own father at a crossroads: so intimate, so light and easy! Whether one lets go or does not let go, sits in meditation or does not sit in meditation, empties things out or does not empty them out—all were utterly irrelevant at that moment. "At midnight last night, the moon shone through the window"—this perfectly describes it.

When I first read the Master's letter and saw the inscription beneath the enso: "At midnight last night, the moon shone through the window!" I once wished to "saw apart the scale weight." After this experience, only then did I recognize the Master's wordlessness within words. Any explanation would betray the original meaning. [To recognize the original nature is only to reach the threshold of the dharmakāya. One must still carefully safeguard and sustain it, constantly contemplate, not follow thoughts when they arise, and seek and obtain nothing. Only when, throughout the twenty-four hours, there is clear and solitary luminosity can one enter the true abiding of the dharmakāya. Yet one must go further still: even this solitary luminosity must not be grasped. Only through direct realization of the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya can one fully accomplish Buddhahood. I hope that you will practice this well.]

Disciple Zhiming respectfully prostrates

December 22, 1992

[Yongshou Tongzi] Teacher, let me try to analyze the meaning of this letter: only by forgetting words and cutting off discursive thought, neither striving nor seeking, can one have some measure of accord with seeing one's true nature.

[LVM] In fact, my faculties are dull. Only after completing more than a thousand meditation sessions, when there was no difference in the state of my mind on and off the cushion, did I feel how intimate that portion of true light—already long present—really was. At that time, such things as “forgetting words and cutting off discursive thought,” “neither striving nor seeking,” “seeing one’s true nature,” and “accord,” even the Tripiṭaka, the twelve divisions of the teachings, the three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas, and the eighty-four thousand dharma gates—all became mere footnotes to it. Pick up a blade of grass, and it is indeed a sixteen-foot golden body; pick up a sixteen-foot golden body, and it is indeed a blade of grass…

Letter Sixty-Four

Sixty-Fourth Letter

With reverence, I prostrate before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

Namo to Patriarch Renzhi of Tuṣita Heaven. Namo to the Venerable Master Yuanyin, manifested in the human realm. The disciple kneels before the Master and thanks the Venerable Master for confirming his realization.

1. How many people rise with this and retire with this, searching day and night in order to see their original nature. Some attain it only after decades; still more never attain it in their entire lives.

[Alas, they have all been deceived by themselves!] How fortunate this disciple is to have been able to “recognize the original”! This depends entirely on the power of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Yet when “the moon shone through the window at midnight last night,” it had nothing whatever to do with the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

At that time, such concepts as whether the present moment and eternity are eternal, or whether one is awakened, had no connection with it at all. There was only clear and distinct existence—the self, vividly and unmistakably present. Only afterward did this disciple come to understand, for at that time even whether there was knowing or not knowing had no meaning whatsoever. [What existence or nonexistence is there? Still less is there a self that is vividly and unmistakably present!]

2. Only now does this disciple understand that what is called “empty space shattering and the great earth sinking away” is a manifestation arising when samādhi reaches its utmost. The physical body may thereby become more perfected, but this still cannot be called seeing one’s true nature (though, if one does

not miss the present moment, one may also realize the essence). [What manifestation are you speaking of? It is dissolution! Is there still a physical body?

If there is a physical body, then it is not so.] What this disciple lacks is precisely the power of samādhi. If such a state should arise in the future, or should give rise to spiritual powers, this disciple will certainly not lose the original nature and be carried along by the state. At that time, by turning the light inward, it should become even clearer and more distinct. [What state is there? When thoughts arise, do not heed them; when affairs have passed, do not retain them; upon seeing forms, do not abide in them; upon hearing sounds, do not cling to them. Then, at every moment, one sees one's true nature! This is also safeguarding realization!]

3. This disciple repeatedly loses the moon before the window and deliberately seeks it, yet cannot find it, although he clearly knows that it is the very source of seeking. [It is neither gained nor lost.] The Venerable Master instructed this disciple to "safeguard realization continuously and contemplate at every moment." This disciple already understands the meaning of "contemplation," but is there another method of safeguarding realization suited to this disciple's capacities? This disciple's method is simply to continue practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma without interruption. [You should practice more to increase the power of samādhi, so that the state of transformation into emptiness may appear before you at every moment!]

4. The Venerable Master instructed this disciple: "When thoughts arise, do not follow them; attain nothing and seek nothing." This disciple deeply understands its meaning. "Suppressing," "blocking," and "resisting" cannot overcome thoughts. Only "contemplation" is like pouring hot water over snow: in an instant there is purity. When they arise again, contemplate them again; this is quite effective. Thoughts fear the source from which they arise: once one traces them back to their source, they collapse without being attacked.

[It is not a matter of contemplating them again when they arise, but of illuminating them clearly at every moment. It is like a cat catching mice: crouching beside the hole and watching the mouse's movements, it pounces the instant the mouse moves; it does not wait until the mouse has moved and then go looking for it.]

5. This disciple is still unable to remain vividly and singly luminous throughout the day and night. He is always tracing thoughts back to their source—where, then, is single luminosity? During this period, it seems that he has regressed. For a long time he rarely dreamed, but now his dreams have become vivid again. In the past, he would recite the Buddha's name in dreams and dream that the Buddha saved him; now his dreams concern only events from before he was twenty years old. [Because deluded thoughts have not ceased.]

6. “Even single luminosity cannot be obtained; personally realize the reward and transformation bodies.” This disciple understands this only in theory and has not personally realized it, so he dares not speak rashly. That must be something that comes after one is able to remain vividly and singly luminous throughout the day and night.

7. This disciple has kept all the Venerable Master’s recent letters confidential. Not even Xiuming has been allowed to see them. This disciple feels that realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature can be presented only to a great spiritual friend; if it is spread among ordinary students, it may benefit neither party.

Is this appropriate? [Yes!] What this disciple formerly said—“If one says it is so, then at that very moment it is not; if one says it is not so, then one slanders the Dharma”—was merely a way of fending off questioners. At that time, this disciple had not yet recognized the original; it merely resembled it, but was not it. [Correct!] [Even if the physical body changes, or even emits great light or develops spiritual powers, one must not entertain views of body, light, or powers. The moment one does, one falls into demonic views! Be cautious, be cautious!!]

Disciple Zhiming prostrates in reverence

January 5, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] This letter may be called a “chapter on confirmation of realization.” The guru was indeed quite concerned, going to such lengths to explain, unprompted, the great principle that one must not cling to spiritual powers or views of the physical body.

[LVM] In fact, the Elder Master had long ago explained these principles, but students “have all been deceived by themselves.” The Elder Master cultivated throughout his life, personally received instruction from many great spiritual friends of the doctrinal schools, the Chan school, and Esoteric Buddhism, and personally realized inconceivable states. He used the essence of what he had gained throughout his life to instruct us. Even if we shattered this body into motes of dust, it would still be difficult to repay even a ten-thousandth part of the guru’s profound kindness.

The Sixty-Fifth Letter (Appendix)

Letter Sixty-Five (Appendix)

I respectfully prostrate before Master Yuanyin:

Does the Master still have any Buddhadharma? If so, please show me. [You mischievous fellow! The inexhaustible meaning has been laid out in full—can you

still see it?! Be careful: if you see it, you will go blind!] Wishing you good health! [May you be radiant and at ease! May each year be better than the last!]

Disciple Miaowu, January 10, 1993

Letter Sixty-Six

Sixty-Sixth Letter

With reverent prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

The Venerable Master taught: “What is there that exists or does not exist? Still more, what clearly and distinctly existing ‘I’ is there?” The point is to sweep away the traces of awakening; it shares the same intent as “When one seeks delusion, it cannot be found—where, then, can one seek awakening?” As for safeguarding realization, this disciple is still unable to remain “like a cat catching mice” at every moment. This “cat” is still rather lazy: it watches for a while, falls asleep, and watches again upon waking.

This disciple must remain alert in training the cat and learn from the ancients how to herd the ox. This disciple practices the Dharma in order to liberate sentient beings, not for personal liberation. This disciple makes this vow: if it is not for the sake of liberating sentient beings, may I never attain the Way; if it truly is for the sake of liberating sentient beings, may I attain the Way at once. Through the power of this vow, appearances of body, light, and supernormal powers are all far removed from my mind.

I wish to report one matter to the Venerable Master: this year I repeatedly received letters from Taiwan, until one bore the note: “Please write upon receipt.”

It turned out that, years ago, I had written an article, “Serenity Is Transcending the Self,” and mailed it to the editorial office of the Chan magazine in Hebei. After passing through various hands, it had been published in issue 11 of Taiwan’s Chinese Chan Studies. Issue 19 of Chinese Chan Studies also carried the first letter I had sent to Taiwan.

A month ago, Mr. Luo confirmed that I had “awakened to principle to a point beyond doubt.” Recently, I sent Mr. Luo a letter describing my experience of awakening. His letter arrived only a few days ago and included a photocopy of Mr. Geng Yun’s reply to him. The photocopy says: “Having read your letter of the fifth and its enclosure, I am most pleased.”

“Mr. Qi has long possessed roots of wisdom, and his right view is crystal clear; that he has attained such an exceptional state is truly rare. … Mr. Qi has directly realized this state; even in Taiwan, this is seldom seen. It differs vastly from those who deceive themselves and others by taking intellectual understanding to be realization. … Please write to congratulate him, and encourage him neither to contend nor to seek, but to arouse a long-range resolve. In time, a Buddha will surely emerge in Henan.”

Another note said: “Tell Mr. Qi to relax and refrain from discussing this matter. In Buddhadharma, simply practicing without speaking is quickest; once one speaks, it leaks away.” This disciple reflects that the Venerable Master’s style is lofty and rigorous, ardent and magnanimous, directly pointing to the source of mind, like a stern father; while Mr. Geng Yun’s “Anxiang Chan” is gentle and subtle, like a spring breeze brushing one’s face, softening one’s state of mind, like a compassionate mother.

How fortunate this disciple is to receive the kindness of both father and mother! Thus, after finishing this letter, I shall begin writing to Mr. Geng Yun. May the Venerable Master be serene in every moment of the Spring Festival! [Having read your letter, I am greatly gratified. Someone has come forward to confirm that you have already realized the Way, thus avoiding the suspicion of “Wang Po selling melons and praising her own wares.” But I am still not at ease.

There are now several questions for you to answer, to see whether you have truly realized the Way. First, Mr. Li wrote that Chan Master Xueyan asked: “When there are neither dreams nor thoughts, where is the true person?” He could not answer.

Try answering: where is the true person? Second, he also said: “When things arise, I lack strength and am often turned by circumstances; even in dreams at night, I am often unable to be my own master.”

Examine your own mind: when things arise—especially at moments of gain and loss, benefit and harm—can you avoid being turned by circumstances, with the true person clearly present? Can you be your own master in dreams at night? Third, in the Chan koan of Deshan Carrying His Bowl, the disciple Yantou did not approve of his teacher Deshan, saying, “This venerable Deshan does not understand the final statement.”

Question: Is the teacher inferior to the disciple? What is the final statement? What meaning was conveyed in secret? Why was it conveyed secretly rather than openly? These questions: if there is the slightest lack of clarity, or anything you cannot do, then do not yet speak of realizing the Way. If I were to indulge you and say, “You are a Buddha of Henan,” then when King Yama summons you away in the future, you

will curse me! You must know that merely being able to say a couple of superficially similar phrases is of no use! Be very careful!]

Disciple Zhiming, with reverent prostrations

January 20, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] May your great resolve be firm and your person genuine; you should indeed be of the highest capacity. Teacher, there is no need for further modesty. Reading this letter, I am also deeply impressed by the guru's conscientiousness and sense of responsibility.

[LVM] First, one should "avoid the suspicion of 'Wang Po selling melons and praising her own wares,'" which was the Elder's first injunction. Second, one should heed, "If I say, 'You are a Buddha,' you will curse me," which was the Elder's second injunction.

I have not only studied Anxiang Chan, but have also encountered many great teachers of Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism, and have received affirmation more than once. Yet the one who impressed me most deeply was still the Elder.

You must know that, at the time, what I most needed was to have the farmer's ox driven away and the hungry person's food taken away. Although I then strongly demanded an ox and food, those were all habitual tendencies! The Elder was a great master of decisive action, resolutely "shattering the dream at the third watch and shouting through the delusion of nine lives." The Elder not only took away my own ox and my own food, but also took away what others had given me. Homage to the root guru, Great Acharya Yuanyin! Homage to the root guru, Great Acharya Yuanyin!

The Sixty-Seventh Letter

The Sixty-Seventh Letter

With reverence, I bow in homage to the Venerable Master:

I bow in homage to the Buddha, I bow in homage to the Dharma, and I bow in homage to the Saṅgha.

Tentative answers to the master's questions: 1. When there are no dreams and no thoughts, where is the master of oneself? Answer: What is this master of oneself but a dried shit-stick! [Do not talk nonsense! You had better discuss it properly with Mr. Li.] 2. At a moment of gain or loss, benefit or harm, can one remain unmoved by circumstances, with the master of oneself clearly present? Answer: At such a moment, one can remain unmoved by circumstances, but one must turn the light back upon oneself.

“The object is objectified by the subject, and the subject is enabled by the object.” When the master of oneself is clearly present, there is neither benefit nor harm, neither object nor subject; whether one is turned or not turned are both superfluous words.

Can one be master of oneself in dreams at night? Answer: Life itself is like a dream, so first seek where the master of the great dream of life is. Without a master, how could there be this great dream of life? Yet if you find it, it is no longer it! How much less a nighttime dream?! [If this is called realizing the Way, Old Yama will not let you off!] 3. The Chan koan of Deshan carrying his bowl.

Is the master inferior to the disciple? Answer: At the moment of the “final word,” how could master and disciple stand in opposition? Still less is there any question of superiority or inferiority! What is the final word? Answer: The final word is the moment when all oppositions are eliminated and one truly enters the Dharma gate of nonduality. When the master thus opens the disciple’s mind, whatever he says, does, or shows is the final word.

[I do not grant that you understand it!] What meaning does “secretly reveal its meaning” reveal? Answer: The disciple once said: “The patriarch came from the west, but the meaning did not come from the west; the meaning lies in one’s own mind. Where could one seek the meaning of the patriarch’s coming from the west?” What is secretly revealed is precisely this “meaning of the patriarch’s coming from the west.”

[A fellow caught between donkey and horse!] Why reveal it secretly rather than openly? Brief answer: Because the secrecy lies on your side. A rambling answer: First, it cannot be openly revealed; at this point, “the path of words is cut off, and the activity of mind ceases.” Second, open revelation is not conducive to safeguarding realization; it can easily cause the practitioner to misunderstand and to give rise to great self-conceit (claiming attainment when one has not attained, and realization when one has not realized).

Third, once it is revealed, it becomes clear. If it is secret, with neither words nor demonstration, how can it be revealed? If it is kept secret and not revealed, the fault lies with the master; if it is revealed but not understood, the fault lies with the disciple (whose faculties are too dull to receive it). Moreover, when the Fifth Patriarch transmitted the robe and bowl to the Sixth Patriarch and instructed him to flee south to avoid harm, this too was a secret revelation. [You have not even dreamt of the final word!] [One dream babble after another!] [Only after you have been struck once by cold and fever will you know that you have never dreamt of the Buddhadharma!] [You utter one or two phrases that sound similar and then take

yourself to have realized the Way—truly, you are one who will be tethered to a donkey post for ten thousand ages!]

Disciple Zhiming bows in homage

February 2, 1993

[Youth Yongshou] What comes after verification? Ha ha—this set of letters would thoroughly bewilder tens of millions of people!

[LVM] Almost every young person today can say the sorts of things I answered in the letter. Do you know what frame of mind I am in when I hear such words? Look at the old master's replies and you will understand. ^o^

[Youth Yongshou] My guess is that the patriarch's questions were intended to make the student's realization deeper and broader, rather than to test how the student would answer. Looking at all that is encompassed by the old master's three questions, whatever answer the student gave in such a state, he could only be on the receiving end of stick and shout. Yet the old master's questions were precisely instruction, and the student's answers were precisely investigation. Thus they were not without their benefit.

[LVM] "Whatever answer he gave?" That is not necessarily so. There are many answers to these three questions:

1. When there are no dreams and no thoughts, where is the master of oneself? Answer: I do not deceive myself. (This is mild.) A full-grown adult, and you utter such words! (This is forceful.)

2. At a moment of gain or loss, benefit or harm, can one remain unmoved by circumstances, with the master of oneself clearly present? Answer: I will not enter this protective association. (This is mild.) Better topple the flagpole before the gate! (This is forceful.)

3. The Chan koan of Deshan carrying his bowl. Is the master inferior to the disciple? Answer: An enlightened master produces an outstanding disciple. (This is mild.) I am inferior to you! (This is forceful.)

The Sixty-Eighth Letter

Letter Sixty-Eight

Respectful prostrations to the Revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

In previous letters, the Revered Master repeatedly instructed us that the process of cultivating the Way comprises three stages: 1. awakening; 2. safeguarding realization; and 3. letting be. For the time being, this disciple calls it a "three-stage progression." Of course, the Revered Master has also said that for patriarchs or bodhisattvas who return, a single awakening is sufficient.

Yet Zhaozhou, known as an "ancient Buddha," still safeguarded his realization for forty years—how much more so for others? This disciple is engaged in stage 2, yet remains entangled with the Revered Master over stage 1. Why is this so? It is because I seek the Revered Master's verification and fear falling into the error of a naturalistic non-Buddhist path.

The verification spoken of here does not refer to after stage 3, but to stage 1. This disciple feels that, after awakening, one must receive the Revered Master's verification that it is correct; only then can one safely safeguard realization. This disciple also knows that, even after verification, there is still "nothing attained."

Just as the Diamond Sūtra says in Chapter Seventeen, "Ultimately, There Is No Self": "Subhūti, what do you think? When the Tathāgata was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, did he attain any dharma called unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening?" "No, World-Honored One. As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has taught, when the Buddha was with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, there was no dharma by which he attained unsurpassed, perfect, complete awakening." The Buddha said, "Just so, just so."

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch also records, in Chapter Seven, "Encounters and Conditions," a dialogue between Chan Master Xuangué and Chan Master Xuancé: "I awakened to the Buddha-mind's essential teaching through the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, but no one has verified it for me." Xuancé said, "Before Vīraṇā Buddha, this is possible; after Vīraṇā Buddha, anyone who awakens on his own without a teacher is entirely a naturalistic non-Buddhist." Chan Master Xuangué paid homage to the Sixth Patriarch and was then called "the Enlightened One of One Night."

Therefore, I request the Revered Master's verification. Of course, even if the Revered Master verifies stage 1, this disciple may still follow the three steps below: fail to succeed in safeguarding realization in this life, because habitual tendencies are heavy and karmic obstacles deep; fail at the end of life to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, because I specialize in Chan and Esoteric Buddhism while being lax in Buddha-recitation; and fail to attain liberation even in the intermediate

state at the time of death and the intermediate state of Dharmatā, because my mental strength is insufficient and I am carried along by karma.

If so, how could old Lord Yama let me off?! As this disciple understands it, Gengyun's verification was also only of stage 1, and certainly not stage 3. That is all. Yet without the Revered Master's verification of stage 1, this disciple still cannot dispel doubt and still fears planting the cause of becoming a naturalistic non-Buddhist. The Revered Master once compared initial awakening to a newborn infant.

Now this infant is ill—suffering from the sickness of doubt—and refuses to nurse. The infant doubts that he has human form and fears that he may be a piglet. The mother says, "You have human form; you are not a piglet." But the infant's sickness of doubt has not been eliminated; he insists that the father must further confirm that he has human form before his doubts can cease. I ask the Revered Master for verification: if it is stage 1, say that it is stage 1; if it is not stage 1, say that it is not stage 1.

[You are completely wrong. What is this talk of 1, 2, and 3? Truly realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means being able to transcend birth and death. Otherwise, what is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature worth—a dried shit-stick! By your reasoning, only upon reaching stage 3 could one be said to have realized the mind and seen one's true nature; otherwise, it is useless.

People nowadays merely understand a little doctrine and can utter a few glib, superficially similar phrases, and then they think they have awakened and realized the mind and seen their true nature. This is a grave error. Gengyun's fault lies precisely here. In truth, you have never genuinely realized the Way. If I too indulged you and praised you as having already realized the Way, would I not be harming you? It is better to sit in meditation honestly, enter deeply into samādhi, empty out body and mind, and thoroughly see the true mind.]

Your disciple, Zhiming, respectfully prostrates

February 15, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] I have observed the Elder's pattern in instructing students: at the beginning, he generally praises the worthy ones and commends the goodness and depth of their faculties; then he becomes somewhat stricter, though he still often offers direct pointing and encouragement. After students have gained some experience, he repeatedly rebukes them, helping them sweep away the traces of awakening and guarding against their becoming satisfied with too little. Later, cold mockery and sarcasm emerge as well—ha ha, it only gets worse and worse.

[LVM] Under the stick come filial children; indulgence breeds defiance. The wondrous functioning of the Revered Master's teaching method is truly unsurpassed! Yet, although his shouts are like rushing thunder and his blows fall like raindrops, it is best if those who benefit from them experience them as though willow branches were brushing against them.

[Yongshou Tongzi] In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, arousing the resolve is very important. When people take detours midway, the cause can often be found in an improper resolve or a mixed resolve. Therefore, after a thousand meditation sessions, one should firmly remember this saying of the master and use it as a standard for self-examination, lest one fall into wild Chan and conceptual understanding: "Truly realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means being able to transcend birth and death. Otherwise, what is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature worth—a dried shit-stick!"

[LVM] An improper resolve is difficult to remedy; one can only painfully let go, and this too is the helplessness of the teacher's way. A mixed resolve can still be salvaged, but only after "making the master sweat all over and stripping a layer of skin from the disciple."

Letter Sixty-Nine (Appendix)

Letter Sixty-Nine (Appendix)

With reverence, I prostrate before Master Yuanyin:

I wish to apply to Fudan University in Shanghai, or another university in Shanghai, to pursue Buddhist studies. I do not know whether my revered teacher would approve. [You plan to apply to a university in Shanghai—very good! However, Shanghai's universities have only philosophy departments, not Buddhist studies programs.]

All phenomena are originally empty; why do practitioners obstruct themselves? I am ashamed! [Because their deeply ingrained habits of attachment make them unable to let go!] In this vast dusty world, sentient beings drift and turn with their karma. Awakening is in the present moment; this very substance is Buddha. Yet the power of awakening is difficult to arouse! [Deluded by sights and sounds, their power of awakening is insufficient; therefore, they must diligently meditate and enter deeply into dhyāna.] How can the Buddhadharma ever be apart from oneself? I earnestly beg Master to elucidate its meaning.

[Regarding this question, Great Master Fu has a verse that may serve as an annotation for you: "Night after night, I sleep embracing Buddha; morning after morning, I rise with him. In rising and sitting, he is always with me; in speech and

silence, we dwell together. Not the slightest hair's breadth separates us, like the body and its shadow. If you wish to know where Buddha is, he is simply in this very voice."]

This shows that mind and body are one, without the slightest separation. The Buddhadharma is inherently never apart from oneself, yet sentient beings are deluded by sights and sounds without knowing it themselves—how lamentable! Thus, a practitioner of the Way need only remain vigilantly aware at all times and not become tainted by sights and sounds; then one may enter the Way. I have recently thought that, if conditions permit me personally to hear my compassionate teacher's voice, how fortunate that would be! [I too hope to live with you often and help you realize the Way.] I universally dedicate this merit: may all sentient beings who hear these Dharma words immediately accomplish the path of bodhi. Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ!

Disciple Miaowu

February 6, 1993

[Youth Yongshou] I have no other questions. I ask only: How will Teacher help us youths realize the Way?

[LVM] Ha ha! Why do you not ask, "How will I help you fail to realize the Way?"

The Seventieth Letter

Letter Seventy

With reverence, I prostrate before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

The Master's shout is like rushing thunder, his staff like lightning. He presses and tempers us, revealing the point according to the occasion. For this disciple, it is like drinking ghee or hearing an alarm bell; the knots of doubt in my mind vanish in an instant. My teacher is truly a great teacher of this age. How fortunate I am to have encountered my gracious teacher and, in this Dharma-ending age, encountered the true Dharma. This is the greatest joy of my life.

[Do not slander what I regard as good!] Linji said: "There may be a student who, responding to a state of purity, presents himself before a good spiritual friend. The good spiritual friend recognizes it as merely a state, takes hold of it, and throws it into a pit. The student says, 'What an excellent good spiritual friend!' The teacher

then says, ‘Bah! You do not know good from bad.’ The student then bows. This is called the host observing the host.”

Of course, if “the student is stripped away and refuses to yield even unto death, this is the host observing the guest.” Here, “refuses to yield even unto death” means attachment. Nonattachment is the host; attachment is the guest. At the instant of seeing one’s nature, where can attachment or nonattachment be found? After that instant, one repeatedly compares and measures, takes it to be real, and establishes this state.

It is just as though dark clouds gathered again, obscuring the light of heaven; one reenters the deluded path, truly pitiable. Fortunately, relying on my teacher, at the critical moment, through the combined use of staff and shout, he awakened me from my deluded dream. To have encountered my teacher is this disciple’s great good fortune. Linji also said: “Virtuous ones! Do not recognize the robe. The robe cannot move; people wear the robe.

There is a robe of purity, a robe of the unborn, a robe of bodhi, a robe of nirvāṇa; there is the patriarchs’ robe and the Buddha’s robe. Virtuous ones! Whatever consists of names, words, and phrases is all transformation of the robe. It is stirred up from the ocean of energy at the navel cakra; the teeth strike together, forming phrases and meanings. Clearly, it is an illusion. Virtuous ones! Outwardly, it produces the karma of sounds and speech; inwardly, it manifests mental factors. Wherever there is thought and ideation, it is all the robe.

Do you then take the robe that he wears to be true understanding? Even through kalpas as numerous as dust motes, it is only mastery of the robe. Circling through the three realms, revolving in birth and death, is not as good as having nothing to do. Meeting one another without recognizing one another, speaking together without knowing one another’s names.” This disciple deeply accords with its meaning. [To understand these things is still only conceptual understanding.

I ask you: 1. How do you experience the place where neither Māra nor Buddha can reach? 2. Have you already reached the state in which “the morning sun has risen and the moon of night is no longer seen”? Speak truthfully! Until you have reached this state, do not casually claim to have awakened!] This disciple truly feels that the suchness of intrinsic nature is ever present: “Without intention, who makes distinctions?” “Even distinction is not intention.”

[Since it is ever present, why do “afflictions arise”?] Yet the habitual tendencies have not been exhausted; that too is a fact. When encountering circumstances, the mind arises; most often, “even distinction is not intention.” When deluded thoughts arise, I can notice them in time; when afflictions arise, I can also see through them. [By the

time you see through them, you are already far too late!] “All dharmas arise through causes and conditions; when conditions are exhausted, dharmas likewise cease.”

If there were no suchness of intrinsic nature, how could all dharmas arise from “conditions” alone? “When the sentient come, they plant seeds; on the ground of causes, fruits arise in turn. The insentient are without arising; what is without nature is likewise without arising.” For a corpse looking at the sun, moon, and stars, the rivers and mountains, the great earth, there is no question of existence or nonexistence. That which drags the corpse along is intrinsic nature.

Whether or not to drag this corpse along is something this disciple still cannot master; but I will no longer be dragged along by the corpse. Before the body leaves circumstances, the mind has already left them. The body is inherently illusory; the mind is real. The nonduality of body and mind lies beyond words. This is only a provisional way of putting it.

[Since you know they are nondual, why do you still speak of illusion and reality?] [Zhijun: Your reply makes my eyes swim; it is like entering a dense fog, unable to distinguish east from west. I advise you to engage properly in actual practice, rather than speaking these glib and flashy words. When you have truly realized that “the morning sun has risen and the moon of night is no longer seen,” then write again with your questions.]

Disciple Zhiming prostrates

February 27, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] What state is meant by “the morning sun does not rise and the moon of night is not seen”?

[LVM] It is what was said above: “How can I help you not to realize the Way?”

The Seventy-First Letter

Seventy-First Letter

Worthy Zhimin:

I have written you several replies that disappointed you, and you must feel somewhat unhappy about them. But because I truly want you, in this very life, to be liberated from birth and death and no longer entangled in the cycle of rebirth through the six realms, I cannot indulge you. When you gain a little news or awaken to a few principles, if I praise you as having already awakened to the Way, that would not only be of no benefit to you but would instead harm you.

Nowadays, some who cultivate the Way either go astray over spiritual powers or fall into doctrinal principles. Having manifested a few spiritual functions or understood a little of Chan verse or a few incisive exchanges, they think they have reached home and realized the Way. They do not realize that these are all workings of the discriminating consciousness, manipulations of psychic essence, not the wondrous functioning of the true mind.

Thus, when the last day of the twelfth lunar month arrives, they are still in a flurry of confusion, unable to be free and at ease at the brink of birth and death.

Mr. Gengyun, in his Collection on Serenity, considers a serene, relaxed, and cheerful state of mind to be realization of the great Way. Yet even people who do not cultivate the Way, if they are naturally open-hearted and generous, can attain such a state. Does that mean they have all awakened to the Way? Therefore, this still must be verified through actual circumstances.

First, one must have both body and mind inwardly, and the world outwardly, dissolve into emptiness all at once; even emptiness must be shattered. Only when there is clear, luminous knowing is this direct realization of the dharmakāya. One must further take this as a foundation, diligently eliminate habitual tendencies, transform the physical body, and realize the luminous sambhogakāya. Then one must attain mastery of transformation, manifest innumerable bodies, realize the nirmāṇakāya, and perfect the three kāyas and four wisdoms. Only then has one truly realized the Way.

It is absolutely not the case that, having understood a few principles, one may boast and beat one's own drum, thinking one has realized the Way, and then use this to certify others. That is to plunge into hell like an arrow! I have tested you several times, but none of your replies reached the essential point. Therefore, I absolutely cannot go against my conscience and say that you have indeed awakened to the Way. I can only encourage you to apply yourself diligently once again.

If you do not believe me, then go study with Mr. Gengyun, and do not ask me further. Whenever you have spare time, please apply yourself diligently. Do not waste time coming to Shanghai to see me. Although a thousand li separate us in distance, there is not the slightest barrier between us in spirit; therefore, there is no need for you to come to Shanghai—we are already meeting face-to-face. This summer I may go to Mount Jing for the summer, but no final decision has yet been made.

I have no family. I do indeed live alone and have never married; how could I have children? Therefore, my residence, furniture, and so forth are only temporarily lent to me by students. I myself possess nothing at all, so do not make unfounded speculations. Do not reply. Wishing you health and auspiciousness.

Zhongding

March 26, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] Seeing that the elder had sent him away to study the Way with Mr. Gengyun, I wonder how the teacher felt at the time.

[LVM] The letter I sent to the elder has already been lost. In it, I reported one matter to him: I had accepted an invitation to go to Tianjin to meet representatives of Anxiang Chan. This meeting took place before Elder Feng Liren passed away, and it was a decisive meeting. Because I was unwilling to abandon the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the subsequent matter involving Elder Feng arose. By the time I read this letter from the elder, I had already returned from Tianjin. At that time, there was only one sentence in my heart: “Homage to my root guru, Acharya Yuanyin!”

The Seventy-Second Letter (Appendix)

Seventy-Second Letter (with an Appendix)

I respectfully prostrate to my benevolent teacher, Master Yuanyin:

Through the grace of Master Xu, I received the practice of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara and the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra. However, I have not received empowerment; Master Xu expediently permitted me to practice it. This practice was publicly revealed by my teacher, Master Xiangliu, who conferred preliminary empowerment broadly for the sake of sentient beings. Those who encounter it thereafter may practice according to the practice text and need not each receive empowerment individually. I now feel that my practice is not very effective and wish to request empowerment from Master Xu.

Whether your practice is effective depends on whether you can let go of everything, and whether, when you sit in meditation, the mind recites and the ears hear. If you accomplish these two things, your progress will be swift; otherwise, empowerment will also be of no use. Dharma brother Qi Zhijun instructed me to request empowerment from my benevolent teacher, and I too gladly wish to do so.

Yet Master Xu personally transmitted this Dharma to me, and now I again seek empowerment from my benevolent teacher. Would this be an act of betraying my teacher? The Buddhadharma must not be treated lightly, so I ask. If you want empowerment, first request it from Master Xu. If he does not permit it, I shall perform it for you. Buddhism says: “Take no-mind as mind; take non-action as action.”

Although one may suddenly comprehend the truth, joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, the subtle continuous stream, and habitual tendencies accumulated over countless lives and kalpas have become second nature; they cannot be suddenly removed all at once. One must remain continually aware, diminishing them again and again. As when the wind suddenly ceases and the waves gradually subside, one will slowly begin to accord with it. My mind now harbors fear and manifests unease. To be honest, I dare not kneel on the ground for a long time at school, for fear that the teachers will reprimand me.

What is there to fear? Nothing can be obtained. All appearances are "flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water." When you seek nothing, your mind is naturally at ease: there is no fear, and you are far removed from inverted dreams. At all times, simply observe where thoughts arise and do not follow them. No one can know what you are doing; why fear teachers? Still less need you kneel on the ground and plead.

The Buddhadharma follows the Middle Way. This is fundamentally a peripheral matter, yet if one lacks this courage, one has long since departed from the Middle Way! What is called being able to do what is difficult to do and endure what is difficult to endure means that action still requires even greater courage. I am incapable of it.

How does the Master assess this? What great courage is needed? So long as you are willing to sacrifice and seek no gain, there is nowhere you will not prosper! Now I feel the anxieties of sentient beings; it is truly lamentable. Take sentient beings as your circumstances and turn the light back upon yourself. Then your practice will feel doubly empowered, and you will advance tirelessly.

I know that my karmic obstacles are deep, and that I can scarcely preserve myself. Yet I am determined to make a bold effort, to recover the Original Face, so that awakening may together reveal the original wisdom-light.

Awaken oneself and awaken others; liberate oneself and liberate others—how could a Mahāyāna child of the Buddha not be thus? The college entrance examination is drawing near. When I think of taking it, how can I not feel anxious? If you have prepared sufficiently in ordinary times, what is there to be anxious about? If I respond to it with a settled mind, I fear that poor examination results may prevent me from going to Shanghai to hear my benevolent teacher's instruction in person. Let everything follow conditions and unfold naturally; do not carry burdens, and you will be peaceful and at ease.

"In the boundless seas of worlds, self and other are not separated even by the tip of a hair." You and I are together at every moment, like a body and its shadow. Do

you yet know this?! Because I neglect the very essence of mind and pursue external objects, afflictions arise, yet I am unable to break through them.

You need only awaken to this numinous knowing mind, which is the Original Face, and guard it closely at all times, not allowing it to cling to circumstances and be defiled. When the time is ripe, the bottom of the bucket will naturally fall away; the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment will shine forth clearly, and the six supernormal powers will all manifest. I should bear in mind that in this very life I must attain Buddhahood. May what should manifest now manifest. My original awakened nature—may the Master's staff and shout spur me to a fierce awakening.

Your original awakened nature shines at the gateways of your six sense faculties at every moment. Even while asleep, it has never been hidden in the slightest. In the past, you sought outwardly and did not turn the light back upon yourself. I respectfully wish you Dharma well-being! Note: Take emptiness as the essence; do not identify with the physical body. Take numinous knowing as mind; do not identify with deluded thoughts. Remain aware in this way at all times. Once conditions naturally mature, you will return home and sit securely. Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra

Disciple Miaowu

March 5, 1993

Young Yongshou "Take sentient beings as your circumstances and turn the light back upon yourself. Then your practice will feel doubly empowered, and you will advance tirelessly." Is this not precisely the key to activating function after realizing the essence, and to accomplishing the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya?

LVM Is there not a saying: "Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire"?

The Seventy-Third Letter

Letter Seventy-Three

Respectful prostrations to the Revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

Had I known earlier that the Revered Master was living alone, I should long ago have resolved to invite you to Hebi. Xiuming and I have discussed the matter and agree

that, provided the Revered Master is willing to come, you may do so at any time. You may also write first, and I will go to Shanghai to receive you.

[Thank you for your warmhearted sincerity. I ought to come as conditions permit and join you all in exploring the mystery of the unborn; but I have long been accustomed to living alone and at ease, and am unaccustomed to sharing quarters with others. I can only disappoint your warm expectations.] There are four people in my household: my uncle is seventy-nine and still in good health; my aunt has already passed away.

There are Xiuming and me, as well as a young boy in the sixth grade of elementary school. This disciple is still burdened with family obligations, whereas the Revered Master has relinquished everything completely—truly, "neither monastic nor lay, yet eating and lodging." Gazing reverently upon the Revered Master's Dharma photograph, I see the body radiant with light—a luminous reward body. How could such an auspicious sign come to be? My housing is relatively spacious: four rooms and a living room, about fifty square meters in all.

If the Revered Master would graciously visit, it would be a blessing not only for this disciple. The blessings of the Chan friends in Hebi have matured, and the causes of wholesome virtue are complete; only then can they move the Revered Master to come to Hebi. In addition, I wish to report something to my master: I formerly enjoyed reading Chan writings, and before encountering the Revered Master's articles, I especially liked the writings of Mr. Song and Mr. Gengyun.

I once wrote an article, "Serenity Is Transcending the Self," strongly imbued with the flavor of wild Chan. I sent it to the Hebei Chan periodical, and it was eventually published in Taiwan's Zhonghua Chanxue. I reported this matter to the Revered Master in an earlier letter. [Such is the working of your karmic affinities.]

Recently, the editor-in-chief, Mr. Luo, of Zhonghua Chanxue wrote to say: "In issue 21 of Zhonghua Chanxue, your letter and your teacher's verification have been excerpted and published, in order to guide and encourage later students and provide them with an example. I hope you will regard this with an ordinary mind and not be hindered by the scenery along the way. You should strive diligently onward and directly realize the original landscape of the fundamental ground of reality that awaits you." [This is indeed right view and a conscientious heart; it must not be regarded lightly.]

It indeed caused a great stir. Although this disciple is confident of being able to respond calmly while remaining non-abiding, I must report it to the Revered Master and ask you to grasp the overall direction and bless this disciple's mind with the power of your mind.

“A newborn calf does not fear a tiger; only after growing horns does it begin to fear wolves.” To prevent this disciple from losing the way, and for the liberation of sentient beings, I beg the Revered Master to give compassionate instruction. [You must never awaken a little wisdom, understand a few principles, utter a couple of Chan phrases, or occasionally experience some state of emptiness, and then suppose that you have fully awakened. That is the path to entering the madness-demon.

You must know that one who has truly awakened has neither gain nor loss; in any state, there is neither joy nor attachment. It is certainly not a matter of still having afflictions that need to be seen through and broken. This arising and breaking is birth and death—how could it be called awakening?! Even speaking more leniently, one has only reached the threshold of the dharmakāya; birth and death have not yet been transcended.

] Over the past four years, besides practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma in daily meditation, this disciple has indeed observed the mind at all times, intentionally keeping the mind serene from second to second in order to dissolve the bad habit of anger. Mr. Gengyun said, “One day, a Buddha will appear in Henan.” This disciple understands it to mean that “one day” is not now. In the future, seventy million Buddhas in Henan will attain accomplishment.

What this disciple seeks is to bring matters to an end in this very life; this makes it all the more necessary to be neither contentious nor seeking, and to arouse a long-range resolve. [Awakening is only Buddhahood at the causal stage; it is still one hundred and eight thousand miles from the fruition stage.] This disciple used to be weak and often ill. Since practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, over the past four years I have had only a few mild colds, which have basically healed without medicine.

However, for a long time there has been a small tumor, the size of a soybean, on the outer side of my left thigh. It neither hurt nor itched. Recently it has begun to ache faintly, and I discovered that it has grown larger. It has not yet exceeded the size of an egg, but it shows signs of ulceration. Let it be; once it has ulcerated completely, it will improve. This disciple especially does not wish to deal with hospitals; having it removed surgically might instead truly impair my mobility. [This illness must be treated and must not be taken lightly. Since it has grown from small to large and shows signs of ulceration, treatment should be sought as early as possible; do not delay.]

May the Revered Master enjoy Dharma well-being!

Disciple Zhiming, with prostrations

April 2, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] Is this the meaning? On the one hand, seeing one's nature after a thousand meditation sessions reaches only the threshold of the dharmakāya and provides a point of entry; this is said as encouragement. On the other hand, if one still wavers when encountering circumstances, then the so-called seeing of one's nature after a thousand sessions is merely a semblance of seeing one's nature. From the perspective of one who has never gained a point of entry, seeing one's nature after a thousand sessions is extremely important and worthy of celebration; from the perspective of one who has realized the Way, calling it seeing one's nature is really a consolation prize.

[LVM] Ha ha! You have actually understood it from such an angle. The Elder said this in response to such a situation: "You must never awaken a little wisdom, understand a few principles, utter a couple of Chan phrases, or occasionally experience some state of emptiness, and then suppose that you have fully awakened. That is the path to entering the madness-demon."

The Elder described awakening in this way: "One who has truly awakened has neither gain nor loss; in any state, there is neither joy nor attachment. It is certainly not a matter of still having afflictions that need to be seen through and broken. This arising and breaking is birth and death—how could it be called awakening?!" As for your statement that "seeing one's nature after a thousand sessions reaches only the threshold of the dharmakāya," the Elder has already said that this is "speaking more leniently."

After speaking more leniently, he goes on to say: "Awakening is only Buddhahood at the causal stage; it is still one hundred and eight thousand miles from the fruition stage." Since you know that this is only speaking more leniently, there is no need to consider any so-called "consolation prize."

Letter Seventy-Four (Appendix)

Letter Seventy-Four (Supplement)

I respectfully prostrate before Master Yuanyin:

My mind is now in unbearable turmoil; I truly feel the peril of this degenerate age! [You are a student in the prime of your studies. Why should your mind be in such turmoil? So long as you seek nothing, sincerely let it remain open and empty, let your thoughts be calm and light, and, whenever a deluded thought arises, see it without following it—then there will be no disorder.] The Master has painstakingly told me several times where the mind-nature lies, yet I still cannot realize it.

[Precisely because it is so intimate, realization comes all the more slowly.] If I cannot awaken and enter into the Dharma, then the conditions for withdrawing from and forgetting the Buddhadharma are plainly present. [Even if you do not awaken for a time, you will not lose it, for it is unmoving, unshakable, unborn, and undying.] Master Xu believes that empowerment is unnecessary. [Indeed, empowerment is not necessarily required.] Yet I know how difficult it is to encounter the Dharma.

Moreover, my own strength is weak; how can I fail to rely on the power of the lineage? Therefore, I shall persist in requesting it. [You are still a young person—has your strength already declined? You are too pessimistic. Quickly rouse yourself. First apply yourself diligently to your studies; in your spare time, sit in meditation and practice the Dharma, conserve and nurture your energy, and increase your capacity for insight in your studies. After you graduate, you may then devote yourself specifically to Dharma practice; it will not be too late.

If you insist on receiving empowerment now, we may set a date for the eighth day of the fourth lunar month and, through Qi Zhijun, confer remote empowerment upon you.] Until one is utterly bare, one can scarcely avoid being carried along by it. Buddhism today often advocates accommodating worldly ways; this truly has the intention of propagating the Dharma, yet it may also have the intention of propagating what is not Dharma.

Without vajra wisdom, and without reaching the point where not a single thread can be obtained or relinquished, how can one speak of accommodating the world in order to liberate sentient beings? [Your sincerity is commendable. But do not be impatient. So long as you persevere in struggling against the habitual tendencies to which you are attached, a day will surely come when ice melts, snow dissolves, delusions are exhausted, and the mind becomes unobstructed. What is to be feared is only that your resolve may lack firmness and that you may shift with every new thing you encounter; then it will be perilous indeed.] [When mind and circumstances suddenly dissolve, only then does one understand form and emptiness. If you wish to recognize your Original Face, it is amid green mountains and white clouds.]

May compassionate light shine universally.

Disciple Miaowu

April 19, 1993

The Seventy-Fifth Letter

Letter Seventy-Five

Respectful prostrations to the revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

A few days ago, I received the revered Master's reply and learned that you might possibly come to Hebi. Several Chan friends were all exceedingly delighted. These past few days, we have been seeking suitable lodgings for you, and we now have some prospects: two houses are available. My thought is to make the first our primary choice and keep the second in reserve. It all depends on your wishes.

[Thank you for your profound kindness and friendship in seeking lodging for me; it truly makes me feel that I would be impolite to decline. But I am advanced in years and cannot help but travel afar. I am only a sojourner in this dusty world for a few more years and will soon depart; why should I trouble all of you fellow practitioners? I can only say with regret that I must disappoint your high expectations.]

If the blessings of the people here have matured and the revered Master would graciously visit Hebi, we disciples can go to Shanghai to welcome you. [Hebi is indeed a blessed place. With such eminent masters as yourselves to support it, it will surely shine brilliantly in the future!] If you decide to go to Mount Jing, please send me the detailed address in a letter. I will certainly go to Mount Jing to find you.

[After I arrive at Mount Jing, I shall write to inform you of the details.] Your heartfelt injunctions, revered Master, have been fully received by this disciple. “With one arising and one breaking, there is birth and death.” Thus, birth and death right here are contained within the unborn; without the unborn, how could there be this “birth and death”? This “birth and death” is not apart from the unborn.

Ordinary beings who do not understand call it birth and death; sages who thoroughly understand see nothing but the unborn. [The maiden Yue asked Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, “Knowing clearly that birth is itself unborn, why are we nevertheless swept along by the stream of birth and death?” Mañjuśrī said, “Their strength is not yet sufficient!” Thus we know that, although principle may be suddenly understood, deluded habits cannot be eradicated all at once.”

To go a step further: when principle is truly awakened to, phenomena naturally accord with it, for principle and phenomena cannot be separated. If phenomena cannot yet accord with it, this is clear proof that principle has not been truly awakened to; one must not casually gloss over it.] In my previous letter, I wrote at some length about a minor illness, which caused the revered Master concern. I finally went to see a doctor, who recommended hospitalization, intravenous treatment, and surgery.

I accepted only bandaging and medicine, and it has now scabbed over and healed. I believe that old karma has been eliminated and a latent serious illness removed—a

grave offense has received a light retribution. I should respond to the blessings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas with gratitude. [As old habits are eliminated and the demon of illness recedes, this is a cause for joy and congratulations!] I respectfully wish the revered Master well in the Dharma! I sincerely hope that you will be able to visit Hebi. [I have promised Miaowu that I will confer remote empowerment for her at nine o'clock in the morning on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month. At that time, please preside over it, so as to fulfill her wish.]

Your disciple, Zhiming, respectfully prostrates

April 24, 1993

[Youth Yongshou] From these two letters, one can see the attitude of Mind-Seal disciples toward illness.

[LVM] When one is ill, one should see a doctor. Yet students of the Dharma often panic when illness strikes and forget entirely the principle of the three periods of cause and effect. Although they may ordinarily explain the principle of cause and effect over the three periods to others, and speak eloquently of "all phenomena being empty," none of it proves useful at such a time. "In speech, every phrase is empty; in action, everything is real. Like one who covers his ears while stealing a bell, he makes empty space laugh its mouth open"—this aptly portrays such people. This is still far inferior to "Since it has come, be at ease with it."

Letter Seventy-Six (Appendix)

Letter Seventy-Six (Appendix)

With reverence, I prostrate before Elder Master Yuanyin:

If one truly maintains this one mind and proceeds straight ahead, without concern for gain or loss, delusion or awakening, but simply continues in a wild and uninhibited manner, wholly without attachment—does this constitute the path of conduct for a Mahāyāna Buddhist disciple? Looking at Buddhist disciples today, most carry on their affairs amid birth and death, unwilling to let go at once and accord with suchness. At root, this failing is due to an impure causal ground and an insincere attitude.

[It is because they well understand that "the cycle of rebirth in the six realms is itself transcendence of birth and death" that they dare to act so recklessly. How lamentable!] I now hope that, at this crucial point, Master will offer a decisive pronouncement. This would truly open the true eye and fully reveal the secret intent—a blessing for sentient beings.

["Pu!"] Regarding the empowerment, before I had even earnestly requested it three times, Master had already granted it. How fortunate I am to receive the blessing of your compassionate light! On the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, I shall do my utmost to go to Shanghai; this too is simply following conditions. [There is no need for you to come to Shanghai. I shall perform a remote empowerment for you; it is no different from coming to Shanghai in person to receive the empowerment.]

Before receiving the empowerment, I made this vow: "Sentient beings and I are intrinsically nondual. When one person receives an empowerment, all receive it. Through this merit and virtue, may it extend universally to all. May we sentient beings attain Buddhahood." [Excellent! Amitābha Buddha!] Namo to my gracious teacher, Elder Master Yuanyin, the Root Refuge Vajra Ācārya. Namo to all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, vajra Dharma protectors, and deities throughout the ten directions and three times of the entire vajra dharma realm. May I swiftly open wisdom and attain Buddhahood, liberate sentient beings, and seek no other fruition.

Miaowu, disciple of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma

May 3, 1993

Letter Seventy-Seven

Letter Seventy-Seven

With reverence, I bow to the Venerable Master:

I bow to the Buddha, I bow to the Dharma, and I bow to the Saṅgha.

Why are the people here so lacking in blessings? We have not even been able to bring about the Venerable Master's coming to Hebi for a stay. Last year, the matter of Jingju Temple did not succeed because the conditions were not yet ripe. They went to Wenzhou, and the Venerable Master also went to Wenzhou for the summer.

If the conditions ripen, might the Venerable Master not also come to Hebi for the summer? Now the conditions at Jingju Temple have ripened. I hear that the village leaders are quite eager to invite someone to preside over it and are willing to allocate land for the temple to cultivate. Yet it remains an empty temple, with only sparse incense offerings.

[With you supporting Henan, it will surely shine brilliantly in the future. How can you say that you lack blessings? Recently, I wrote to a certain Dharma Master, asking him to come to Hebi and join you in spreading heart esotericism. He will very likely come this time. His correspondence address is: (omitted).] The Venerable Master has

already decided to spend the summer at Jing Mountain, and this disciple has likewise decided to go there to pay respects to the Venerable Master.

Fortunately, the Venerable Master has graciously permitted this: after going to Jing Mountain, you will write and give me the detailed address. This has set my mind at ease. [There has now been a temporary change of plan: I shall not go to Jing Mountain, but to Qingdao instead. A film director has invited me.] Although this disciple is not one of those who "hear much yet believe little," I am certainly not one of the "superior persons" for whom "one decisive realization settles everything."

"Though principle may be awakened to suddenly, deluded habits are eliminated in accord with awakening; in phenomena, however, they are gradually removed, and their causes are exhausted step by step." The word "gradually" requires very careful attention.

If liberation can be attained in this life, then even if one is "still traveling on foot at eighty," it is a fortunate thing, and the word "gradually" is precious. But if liberation cannot be attained in this life and one must again wander through birth and death, revolving in the six realms, when will one encounter the Venerable Master again? Then the word "gradually" is frightening! [This word "gradually" is not absolute. If principle is truly awakened to suddenly, all deluded habits are likewise eliminated in accord with awakening.

The problem is that the awakening to principle is not genuine awakening, but only an approximate awakening—an awakening at the level of principle. Hence it is weak and powerless: when circumstances arise, one cannot accord with them, and one must instead have the causes exhausted step by step.] "Not seeing a single dharma is the Tathāgata; this is called Avalokiteśvara. When one understands, karmic obstacles are originally empty; when one does not understand, one must repay old karmic debts."

[These two statements concern different approaches: one is the gate of sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization; the other is a gradual approach. Do not confuse them.] This disciple reflects: if there are karmic obstacles that can be eliminated and grave illnesses that can be removed, then everything remains dualistic—how can this be ultimate? When circumstances arise, I know that "suffering loss is a blessing" and can "yield to others first." [This has already fallen into deluded thought.

] Yet, deep within, an indescribable feeling continually arises, and I am not peaceful and at ease. [This is delusion added upon delusion.] What does the "accordance" of which the Venerable Master speaks mean? [It means according with principle.] Does being able to "yield to others first" count as accordance? Does being "not peaceful

and at ease" count as "nonaccordance"? [As long as there is a deluded thought, it is nonaccordance.

Even having peaceful ease is also a deluded thought.] What this disciple formerly called "contemplative awareness" actually meant observing and seeing through this feeling. Is this feeling a thought? I feel that it does not seem to be a thought. What is a feeling that is not a thought? I beseech the Venerable Master to compassionately instruct me. [If this feeling is not a thought, what is it? Having an act of "observing" is also a deluded thought.

Yet there is no need to suppress these thoughts. Simply let them come without following them or attending to them; let them come and go without leaving a trace. This is no-thought. There is no need to rigidly remain there without moving.] I have read the Venerable Master's reply to Miaowu and already know about the empowerment on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, but I did not know that it would be at nine o'clock in the morning. [Do not miss nine o'clock in the morning.

] However, Miaowu is determined to go to Shanghai, and I cannot dissuade him. [I have already written back, telling him not to come to Shanghai. Now he cannot come in any case, because I shall leave for Qingdao on the fifteenth of this month. If he comes to Shanghai on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, I shall no longer be at home.] His family opposes his learning Buddhism, and he lacks the strength to overcome this obstacle and resolutely leave home.

[I also know well that his parents oppose this. This is only natural and nothing surprising. Moreover, leaving home and practicing cultivation is not easy nowadays; it is better for him to practice quietly as a layperson.] Now he intends to go to Shanghai, but this disciple does not even dare to subsidize his travel expenses, fearing that his parents will make a great disturbance over it and implicate the Venerable Master. [Indeed. It is better to forgo a good deed than to cause trouble!]

Your disciple, Zhiming, bows in reverence.

May 5, 1993

[Youth Yongshou] So-called thoughts sometimes manifest as ideas and sometimes as emotions. At times they take form; at other times they are like gossamer threads.

[LVM] Whatever form it takes, I simply do not run after it or allow it to sway me! "Master!" "Yes." "Stay awake! In the days to come, do not let others deceive you!" But how many people have you seen who truly cannot be deceived?

[Youth Yongshou] I too lingered for a long time over this "indescribable feeling." If I watched my thoughts, I felt somewhat oppressed; if I ignored them, I feared losing my way and falling into confusion.

[LVM] Neither watch them nor be afraid. You need only remain constantly alert: do not run after them and do not allow them to sway you. What is there to fear? Fear shows that there is still an obstruction! “Because there is no obstruction, there is no fear; one is far removed from inverted, delusive thoughts and ultimately reaches nirvāṇa.” If you cannot yet do this, constantly remind yourself to learn to do it. Being willing to learn to do it is the principal practice of heart esotericism—contemplative awareness.

The Seventy-Eighth Letter

Letter Seventy-Eight

With reverence, I prostrate to my Dharma uncle:

I prostrate to the Buddha, I prostrate to the Dharma, and I prostrate to the Saṅgha.

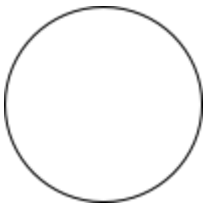
[Benevolent Yufeng: Please forward this to Master Yuanyin. I earnestly hope you will do so. Hengzhi, August 24, 1993.] Before the Venerable Master left for Qingdao, this disciple frequently sought his guidance, and he responded to every letter. As I was then at a juncture when I needed to turn myself around, the Master’s blows and shouts came in swift succession, startling me from my deluded dream.

After the Venerable Master went to Qingdao, I condensed my feelings into a verse, which I was no longer able to present to him in person at once. I now copy this verse —“Five Movements of Esoteric Mind Cultivation”—into this letter and ask my Dharma uncle to forward it to the Venerable Master. If you have the address where the Venerable Master is residing, or any clue to it, I shall go and pay my respects. Summer is gradually passing; has the Venerable Master returned to Shanghai? Please reply.

First: From beginningless time, deluded about the true nature, / I could not escape the wheel of suffering. / Fortuitously encountering the true Dharma, / I went to Shanghai to bow before the Venerable Master. / Through empowerment, I received his compassionate acceptance; / Sitting in meditation, I cultivated the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. / From then on, relying on the power of esoteric practice, / I planted lotus causes amid the fire.

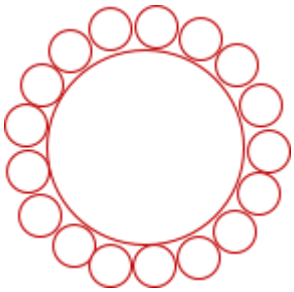
Second: Awakening at midnight last night, / I saw the bright moon shine upon the window. / The marks of self, person, beings, and lifespan / Were erased in an instant with a single stroke. / Clearly contemplate Avalokiteśvara; / One should rest in the present moment. / To stir a thought and form a holy interpretation / Is to abandon the ocean and mistake floating foam for it.

Third: My Master's great hands and eyes, / His blows and shouts, came at just the right time. / He drove away the plowman's ox, / And snatched the hungry man's food. / He shattered the dream at midnight, / And scolded apart the delusion of nine lives. / At the cliff's edge, one must let go; / Do not cling to the rock atop the peak.



Fourth:

Fifth:



[Neither emptiness nor provisional existence is established; even the middle is absent. / Transformed into spring mud, it protects the multitude!]

Zhongding, August 1993.]

[Please forward this letter to Zhijun!]

Disciple Zhiming prostrates

August 13, 1993

[Youth Yongshou] Ha ha, congratulations, Teacher! You have finally advanced from a fresh flower to a pool of rotten mud.

[LVM] Ha ha! Flowers originally grow out of rotten mud.

[Youth Yongshou] What are the small circles outside the large circle in the fifth section?

[LVM] The large circle below the fourth section was drawn by me. Below the fifth section is a blank space; there is nothing there. The Elder did not draw the circle in the blank space below the fifth section, but beside it: "The hundred grasses are not the meaning of the patriarch's coming from the West; the meaning of the patriarch's

coming from the West is atop the hundred grasses.” There are many small circles outside the large circle drawn by the Elder. What are they? Let everyone offer their various views; you tell us first what you think.

[Youth Yongshou] Was this letter written to Elder Xu? And the annotations to the “Five Movements” below are in the guru’s handwriting.

[LVM] Oh! Hadn’t Elder Xu already asked Le Yufeng to pass it on to the Elder? After the Elder annotated it, he asked someone to mail it to me.

The Seventy-Ninth Letter

Letter Seventy-Nine

With reverence, I prostrate before the Revered Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

“Unobstructed in every direction, unbound by favorable or adverse circumstances” requires complete freedom from hindrance. “Because there is no hindrance, there is no fear; one is far removed from inverted views and dreamlike thoughts, and ultimately attains nirvāṇa.” The Revered Master has told this disciple that the practice of Tögal must be cultivated exclusively. When asked whether this disciple could leave work and enter retreat for exclusive practice, this disciple replied that “the causes and conditions are not yet ripe,” plainly revealing blazing hindrances.

Although this disciple knows this clearly, he still cannot resolutely set out on the path. This shows that “his strength is not yet sufficient.” This disciple once asked the Revered Master about “empowerment to transmit the teachings.” If any Dharma brother receives such empowerment, this disciple will do his utmost to support him and respect him as he respects the Revered Master. If he is at the stage of the “ten-year hunter’s team,” he will need even more support.

This disciple has made this resolve so that the wisdom-life of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma lineage may not be cut off, and so that the lamp of transmission in the Mind-Seal school may have successors. Should this come about, I hope the Revered Master will inform this disciple promptly. [At present, candidates are still being selected; no decision has yet been made. Such a person must possess both ability and virtue, must thoroughly awaken to the source of mind, and must be deeply versed in doctrine. This is not a responsibility that someone of little merit and virtue can undertake.]

When this disciple sits in the full lotus posture, he cannot endure it for long; his legs often cause interference. May I ask whether the Revered Master has any method for

“training the legs”? There is a four-line verse; I ask the Revered Master to evaluate it: “Upon realizing the mind, delusions cannot be obtained. [When true realization is attained, delusion is itself true; truth is itself delusion; neither truth nor delusion can be obtained.] Seeing one’s nature, this alone is real. [The true is that which is not seen, yet there is nothing it does not see.] Awakening is a dharma produced by causes and conditions. [This line contains the gravest error. In awakening, not a single dharma is established—what causes and conditions could there be? Still less could there be any dharma that is produced?!] One realizes the Way when karma is exhausted and emotional attachment emptied. [The last line is somewhat better.] [When writing verses of this kind, it is best to state the ultimate truth directly rather than recounting a process.]

May the Revered Master please write out the “Fundamental True Mantra of Maitreya Bodhisattva” so that I may compare it with the recording and study it. Thereafter, this disciple will recite it forty-nine times daily as a regular practice. [Mantra omitted.] I also ask that you write out the Medicine Buddha mantra. [Mantra omitted.] Is the Revered Master experiencing little illness and affliction, and practicing at ease? When liberating sentient beings, are they readily liberated? Does this not tire the Revered Master?

This disciple, Zhiming, prostrates.

September 19, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] Questions concerning Dharma-lineage transmission have always been highly sensitive and much disputed. How should a student approach this matter in a manner that is proper and within one’s place?

[LVM] If others are sensitive about it, pay them no heed; if others dispute it, do not get involved. Regarding Dharma-lineage transmission, while the Elder was alive he said, “Do not establish a successor; one who has the Way will naturally propagate it.” The words “Do not establish a successor” sweep away all sensitivity and dispute. The Elder truly was a great master of broad vision! The words “one who has the Way will naturally propagate it” clearly mean “rely on the Dharma, not on persons.” Students have their own discernment: rely on the Dharma, not on persons. This is both proper and within one’s place.

LVM If others are sensitive about something, do not concern yourself with it; if others dispute it, do not get involved. Regarding the transmission of the Dharma lineage, the Elder once said while he was alive, “Appoint no successor; where there is the Way, it will spread of itself.” The words “appoint no successor” sweep away all sensitivity and controversy. The Elder truly was a master of great stature! The words “where there is the Way, it will spread of itself” clearly mean “rely on the Dharma,

not on persons." Practitioners have their own discernment. Relying on the Dharma rather than on persons is both appropriate and within one's proper bounds.

The Eightieth Letter

Letter Eighty

Respectful prostrations to the Revered Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

"Possessing both ability and virtue, thoroughly awakened to the source of mind, and deeply versed in the teachings and doctrine"—having read the Revered Master's criteria for selection, I am even more confident in protecting the Dharma. If one does not meet such criteria, it is wrong to offer protection, yet also wrong not to offer it: to protect would strengthen wrong views, while not to protect would defy the Master's instructions and violate one's original vow.

Indeed, to doubt the person chosen by the Master is to doubt the Master; one who doubts the Master must bear the bitter fruit oneself. When the Revered Master stated these criteria for selection, my doubts were immediately dispelled. "Because there is no hindrance, there is no fear"—how could one still wish for "inverted dreamlike thoughts"?! Homage to Master Yuanyin, the human-world emanation—the disciple's root guru.

I have not yet selected such a person. What should be done? After returning to He from Shanghai, I received more than one letter from Li of Tongbai, mentioning that "Master So-and-so" had transmitted to him the "first-stage practice" of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, and that this "Master So-and-so" claimed to be your disciple.

I advised Li to contact you directly. I do not know whether the Revered Master is aware of this "Master So-and-so." Yes, So-and-so studied the Dharma with me, but learned only the ritual procedures and did not receive the essential point. You may guide this Comrade Li locally; there is no need for him to contact me. In my previous letter, the Revered Master did not answer my question about a method for working on the legs. I do not know whether this matter is too insignificant to mention.

My quiet meditative state is often disturbed by my legs. Busyness is my retribution obstacle; when I wish to be still for a while, my legs disturb me again. This is why I asked. If you want your legs not to hurt, you need only sit in meditation more and intensify your exercise. Regarding the four-line verse, the Revered Master's single remark struck the mark: what I wrote was indeed only the "process."

If one were to state the ultimate reality directly: “Existence is precisely nonexistence; nonexistence is precisely existence”; “one is all, and all is one”—having said this is no different from having said nothing. One can only say, “Words and speech are cut off; it is neither past, present, nor future.” This way of speaking truly muddles Buddha-nature and generalizes suchness. One who has genuinely seen one’s true nature should be able to explain each point clearly.

Here is an example: How laughable that I once drew out models and rules, turning red time and again, then black time and again; now, having taken leave of my master and returned home in old age, why care whether I attained anything or not? Disciple went once more with Guo to Jingju Temple on Weiquan Mountain. Guo had previously received remote empowerment from Master Xu and is now continuously practicing heart esotericism.

An elderly man now looks after this temple. Having met him, I find that he is not a deceitful or evil person, but an honest one. The local people hope that someone will reside at and preside over the temple. Because it is remote and quiet, the temple has nearly become a place without human traces, and the old caretaker is not often at the temple.

Not far from the temple is a village called “Anzigou” (Nunnery Gully). It was formerly the site of a nunnery, and is indeed neither too near nor too far from the temple, quite in keeping with ancient regulations. Only two households now remain in the village. The old temple caretaker lives in Anzigou and farms; he also keeps bedding at the temple.

A small stream before the temple has run dry only twice in nearly twenty years. It curves past the front of the temple from southeast to northwest. Across the stream, to the south and west, stand two mountains; to the east and north of the temple stretches a ridge. After crossing the stream, at the foot of the western mountain, there is a pool of natural spring water. Even at the time of greatest water shortage, it can yield eighteen shoulder-loads of water in a day.

If no one draws water, the spring does not well up, but merely trickles down in a thin stream. The temple’s monastics once drank this water. There have long been no monastics in the temple, and the bottom of the spring should also be cleared of silt. The locality is relatively poor and hopes to restore the temple, but lacks funds. “Whoever builds the temple has the right of control”—this has almost become an unwritten rule.

In view of this situation, I discussed matters with the local people. We would first repair the main hall; my fellow disciples and I would obtain more than ten thousand bricks, while the timber and stone of the original hall can still be used. Cai and his wife would be responsible for organizing the workers and carrying out the

construction. When I formed the aspiration to repair the temple, I originally intended to create a practice center for fellow practitioners of heart esotericism.

We will first raise ten thousand bricks, thereby establishing an affinity with this temple. What follows awaits the Revered Master's decision—namely, for the Revered Master to select someone to reside at this temple. If someone comes, we disciples will accelerate our fundraising and strive to complete it soon; if no one comes, there is no harm in proceeding leisurely and quietly awaiting the ripening of conditions.

The temple also has more than ten rooms fit for habitation. They are tiled-roof houses: though simple, they are sturdy. A few occasionally leak in the rain, but they are very easy to repair. There is no need to worry about "rain leaks." Since you have this aspiration, even if no one comes now, someone will surely come in the not-too-distant future.

Li, Bai, Fu, and other disciples of heart esotericism have all formed this aspiration; Guo initiated it, because Guo has long-standing affinities with Cai. I ask the Master to copy out the Medicine Master Lapis Lazuli Light King Buddha Mantra again. When the Revered Master was in Shanghai, you expounded this mantra to us disciples without being asked; it must have a wondrous use. Medicine Master Lapis Lazuli Light King Buddha Mantra: omitted. I have just returned from Beijing today and received your letter, so I hastened to reply. Before long I must go to Nanjing again; if you write again, it will take many days before I can reply.

Your disciple Zhiming and others prostrate in homage

October 4, 1993

Yongshou Tongzi The disciple is pleased to recount the process of cultivating the mind, simply because "At sunrise, the river flowers are redder than fire; in spring, the river water is as green as blue. How could one fail to remember Jiangnan?"

LVM "How laughable that I once drew out models and rules, turning red time and again, then black time and again; now, having taken leave of my master and returned home in old age, why care whether I attained anything or not?"

The Eighty-First Letter

Letter Eighty-One

With reverence, I bow to you, Revered Master:

I bow to the Buddha, I bow to the Dharma, and I bow to the Saṅgha.

Revered Master, when you say, “No such person has yet been chosen,” it means that the time and conditions have not yet matured. Once one has been chosen, please let me know by letter. This disciple’s vow to protect the Dharma will not waver. [Wait until I have examined the matter carefully before deciding.] Having read the four-line verse you cited, this disciple “understands it completely.” I, too, have a four-line verse to present to you.

Regarding this disciple’s forced description, “muddled Buddha-nature, generalized suchness,” the verse cited by the Revered Master is a “direct pointing,” while the following verse by this disciple is a “staff blow and shout”:

When habitual tendencies manifest, they are not under one’s control;
Without severing them, talk of transcending the mundane is empty.
Painting wind in the forest without painting the trees—
Where else can one seek the essential spirit?

[The manifestation of habitual tendencies is entirely due to the “person”; without severing them, empty talk falls into the mundane realm.

Without trees in the forest, there can be no painting of wind;
Please seek the essential spirit beneath the brush.]

“Painting wind in the forest without painting the trees” is precisely this disciple’s habitual tendency, worthy of being called “attachment to dharmas”: I always want to define the “Dharma body” directly and rigorously.

This is not natural science, so why seek a “rigorous meaning”? Perhaps natural scientists share this same ailment: when seeing one’s true nature, they insist on seeing a concrete entity—whether “true emptiness,” “waves,” “fields,” or the like—and thereby turn still farther away.

[To see things as substantial is indeed a grave illness. When I ask you, “Who is it that recites the Buddha’s name?” I am teaching you to knock down that “who.” If you see a “who,” you are far from the Way.] The construction of Jingju Temple is proceeding step by step. I have just received a telephone call from Brother Bai; he is arranging for the transport of bricks. Those who will reside at the temple are to be selected by the Master. When conditions mature, they will surely come; we disciples wait quietly.

[Very good!] Recently, Revered Master, you have been traveling from Beijing to Nanjing, busy with Dharma affairs, while this disciple has repeatedly disturbed you with letters. I am truly ashamed.

If the Revered Master is responding to an invitation somewhere, please let me know that person’s postal code, address, and name. I will use three envelopes: the outer

one addressed to them, with a sealed envelope addressed to you inside; I will ask them to fill in the postal code and address. I will also enclose a return envelope in the letter to the Revered Master.

In this way, if the Master has not yet left that place, the person can present the letter directly to you. If the Revered Master has already left, then even if you have not returned to Shanghai, he can forward the letter to you. Would this be acceptable? [These are all temporary arrangements. I come and go and soon return; if I reside somewhere for an extended period, I will notify you of the address.] I had just spoken of being ashamed; now I ought to be even more ashamed.

A son cannot leave his mother; this, too, is unavoidable. Homage to Samantabhadra Bodhisattva of Great Conduct! Homage to Patriarch Dayu, the First Patriarch! Homage to Master Renzhi, the Second Patriarch! Homage to Master Yuanyin, the Third Patriarch and Revered Master! [I am unworthily listed among the ranks of masters—how shameful!] Is the Revered Master enjoying ease, with few illnesses and few troubles? Are the sentient beings who should be liberated easy to liberate? Do they not cause the Revered Master weariness? [Thank you for having so many calling cards printed; they are truly unnecessary.]

This disciple, Zhiming, bows in reverence.

October 30, 1993

[Youth Yongshou] When one is precise, you call it seeing things as substantial; when one is general, you call it muddled. What, then, is to be done?

[LVM] To be substantial is to touch; to be muddled is to turn away. Without touching or turning away, please say one phrase!

The Eighty-Second Letter

Letter Eighty-Two

Respectfully paying homage to the Revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the saṅgha.

I again went on a business trip to the Nantianmen Grain Depot in Gushi County. Upon returning, I saw the Revered Master's written instruction: "What enters from outside is not one's family treasure!" I have been to Nantianmen three times.

The first time, during meditation, I saw a Buddha—Maitreya seated, his golden form shimmering, his light surpassing that of the sun and moon and reddening the

horizon. The second time, during meditation, the sound of bells rang out clearly, their lingering tones curling away. “I thought it had been forgotten, but there it was all along.”

The third time—this time—I experienced what the Revered Master described: “With a snap, like an explosive suddenly detonating.” Yet I did not have the feeling that “the body and mind within, the outer world, and even empty space all fall away at once, shatter, and vanish into nothing; even the absence of anything vanishes.” “It has not yet exploded.”

“The body, mind, and world are still present; the force of the explosion has not yet reached maturity.” Before the explosion, I did not sense any “being” or “nonbeing” either. There was only a clear, crisp “snap!” in the area of my utterly empty head. Nothing remarkable—very ordinary. This did not occur during meditation, but while I was lying on my back, dozing. “It may occur while walking, sitting, standing, or lying down.”

Mr. Li has finally received remote empowerment in accordance with the Dharma, and I rejoice for him. I received another letter from him asking about dietary restrictions and other prohibitions. I replied chiefly in terms of “empty mind,” saying that prohibitions—such as not eating meat—are merely means for clearing away deluded habits.

If one’s habitual tendencies are deep-rooted, one should firmly observe the prohibitions. If one accords with the empty mind, the prohibitions too become empty. Being is nonbeing, and nonbeing is being! If my reply was mistaken, I shall write again to correct it after receiving the Revered Master’s letter. “One should observe dietary restrictions: one should neither eat meat nor pungent foods. This was personally proclaimed by the Buddha. How can it be answered with the vague phrase ‘empty mind’?”

People often fail to observe the precepts, using “empty mind” as an excuse or “not fussing over trivial details” as a pretext for evasion. Such people are truly adversaries of the Buddha. “The manifestation of habitual tendencies is entirely due to ‘the person.’” The Revered Master placed quotation marks around the word “person”; I take this to mean attachment to self—clinging to self as a person.

If one can know that the self is not a person, nor is it not a person, how could habitual tendencies find any foothold? “Where habitual tendencies remain, there is no genuine awakening!” “Without cutting them off, empty talk falls into the dust of the mundane world.”

If habitual tendencies have not been severed, then however much one may talk emptily of prajñā, to say nothing of birth and death, when adverse circumstances

arise one will be at a loss. This is precisely because “one’s strength is not yet sufficient.” How could one avoid falling into saṃsāra? “It is not that one’s strength is insufficient; rather, one has only an intellectual understanding at the level of words, and therefore gains no strength from it.” “In the forest, apart from the trees, there is no painting of wind.”

Dense and luxuriant, all things grow in abundance—yet what substantial wind can be found? “Where there is such a profusion of things, the wind is within it.” “Seek the vital spirit beneath the brush.” It is present right here and now, so why put another head on top of one’s head and deliberately seek it? The more earnestly one races after it, the farther away it becomes! “Just so, just so.”

On this business trip, I had no choice but to travel at night. For no apparent reason, a young man grabbed hold of me and punched me in the face. I was neither flustered nor afraid, but dealt with it calmly, and thus avoided being robbed. What good fortune! What good fortune! “Amitābha Buddha! This too was a debt from your past.” The bricks for Jingju Temple have all been delivered. After the snow, I shall meet with the local leaders to settle the first, second, third, and so on. “Let everything proceed according to conditions.”

Your disciple, Zhiming, pays homage

November 20, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] The opening sentence, “What enters through the gate is not one’s family treasure,” seems rather abrupt. I do not know what the master means.

[LVM] Is it not plainly referring to the phrase “the Revered Master’s written instruction”? A family treasure is one’s own treasure, not something obtained from outside. A family treasure does not enter through the gate—it is not learned, but inherently possessed.

The Eighty-Third Letter

Letter Eighty-Three

Respectful prostrations to the Revered Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

Speaking of dietary prohibitions, this disciple is not entirely pure either. I ordinarily never eat meat and also avoid the five pungent roots—though at times I cannot avoid them. Nowadays, meat is everywhere and the five pungent roots are found everywhere. I often travel on business, and sometimes vegetarian food is

inconvenient; so I simply treat it as though it were not meat and eat something indiscriminately. [Do not speak words of sorrow to one who is sorrowful; once sorrow is spoken of, it overwhelms one with grief.

] Yet in my heart I understand: if, in the name of “not fussing over minor details,” one satisfies one's cravings, this is precisely a major matter! Where there is desire, the mind is not yet empty; no harm could be greater! From Mr. Li's letter, I learned that he is attached to fixed forms. Therefore, when he asked about “taboos,” I answered in terms of mental attitude, hoping that he might soon accord with true permanence. [This person's understanding of principle and purport is still incomplete; he cannot be answered too briefly.

] This disciple has seen some practitioners who, because of dietary prohibitions, avoid certain pots and bowls, thereby creating tension with their families. I then tell them that the Sixth Patriarch ate only the vegetables alongside the meat, and did not avoid the soup or the pot. I feared that Mr. Li might also fall into this, and so answered him thus. Not a drop of alcohol may be touched, because alcohol is not food and is not needed to sustain the physical body.

Once, in my capacity as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, I went on an inspection tour at the county level. Even when the county Party secretary and county magistrate offered me drinks, I did not touch a drop. There were vegetarian dishes at the banquet, and meat did not touch my lips either. By stating that I was a Buddhist who had received the Five Precepts, it was very easy to decline.

There is a young man surnamed Wang in Hebi who practiced qigong for many years. After a traffic accident, he sought the practice of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara and the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, and has now practiced it for some time. He wishes to receive empowerment, but fears that he cannot sit for two hours, so he seeks only empowerment for the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, hoping to receive the Buddha's blessing. He may recently have written to the Revered Master; I ask the Revered Master to guide him as expediently appropriate.

[Practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra does not require empowerment. When he can sit for two hours, remotely confer empowerment upon him and transmit the Heart-of-Heart Dharma; he need not come to Shanghai. Have Little Wang's letter forwarded by you.] He already knows that the unsurpassed Buddhadharma and qigong cannot be mentioned in the same breath. He has a foundation in Chan and values direct realization over theory. He plans to go to Shanghai next year to request empowerment in person. Is the Revered Master seldom ill and seldom troubled? Are you practicing peacefully and at ease? Are

sentient beings who ought to be liberated readily receptive? Have we caused the Revered Master fatigue?

Disciple Zhiming, with prostrations

December 17, 1993

[Yongshou Tongzi] Does this mean that, for those who have yet to grasp the underlying meaning, one must not rashly use the principles of prajñā to guide them? One must also explain the specific methods in detail, lest reckless people cling to emptiness.

[LVM] Yes! Have you not heard: “To expound the profound Dharma to sentient beings who are not fit vessels is a bodhisattva's error”?

The Eighty-Fourth Letter

Letter Eighty-Four

Respectful prostrations to the honored Master: I pay homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

Li, Guo, Bai, Fu, and I—five disciples in all—made a trip to Jingju Temple. At a normal cycling pace, the uphill journey there took less than two hours, and the downhill return took a little over an hour. On this visit, we met with the local leader, Village Head Cai, and discussed such matters as inviting monastics to reside there and serve as abbot.

Village Head Cai was very straightforward and expressed his support for this matter. He said that if approval procedures were needed in the future, he would naturally handle the paperwork. He humorously said: “The village is now raising funds to dig a well. You are doing a good deed by restoring the temple, and I am also doing a good deed by doing this.”

It is not difficult to see that, in the past, he went to great lengths to secure funding for opening up the mountain and building roads. Now that they are digging a well, there is likewise a funding problem. The villagers of Zhangjiagou simply cannot resolve it on their own.

If the honored Master has someone to recommend in the near future, then while considering food and lodging, we will also take into account contributing something toward the cost of digging the well, in the hope of fostering good relations. You, too, have exhausted yourselves in your efforts to propagate the True Dharma. Buddhas and bodhisattvas will invisibly bless and protect you.

However, at present no one from the south is willing to come to your area. Are there people where you are who would be willing to leave home? If not, you can only wait patiently for the right conditions. In the end, someone will certainly come. Because you have made a sincere resolve, Buddhas and bodhisattvas will send someone. If the honored Master has a suitable candidate to reside at the temple, please inform us by letter, so that we may make preparations in advance.

If there is temporarily no one, we should slow our pace. If we are to undertake this, let us establish a temple grounded in clear and sound views. If it were to become a place of practice for non-Buddhist paths that merely attach themselves to Buddhism, or even for shamans and spirit-mediums, it would be better not to do it at all. May the people of this region possess the causes for liberation, and may their conditions for wholesome virtue ripen.

The misty rain of Mount Lu, the tidal bore of Zhejiang: before arriving, one harbors endless regret; once there, it is simply nothing else—the misty rain of Mount Lu, the tidal bore of Zhejiang.

Speaking of the ultimate, how could there be sentient beings to liberate? Ha ha!
Have you liberated yourself? How would you make a tongueless person speak? Try saying something! What you have copied from books or heard from others does not count. It must flow forth from your own heart; only then may you submit your paper. If your answer does not address the question, do not submit it.

Furthermore, China is now vast in territory and diverse in language groups. There must be a group of people capable of transmitting the Dharma before heart esotericism can bestow its blessings upon a broad body of students. Perhaps the honored Master's expedient means of remote empowerment is undertaken for this reason as well. I will assist with remote empowerment; even if I am not qualified, I will make every effort to carry it out.

Such bold aspiration is indeed worthy of praise! There is a saying that the “Fourfold Alternatives” brought about the demise of the Fayan school. What does the honored Master think? Please instruct me. The Fourfold Alternatives were not composed by Chan Master Yongming Yanshou; they were forged by later generations. How could they have brought about the demise of the Fayan school? What utter nonsense.

Disciple Zhiming, with prostrations, December 17, 1993

Yongshou Tongzi Cultivating liberation and propagating the Dharma for the benefit of sentient beings are the initial aspiration of every student of Buddhism,

and one should not shrink from this rightful duty. Yet some disciples have gone astray: they set aside cultivation and liberation and seek only to propagate the Dharma and benefit sentient beings. As a result, they fail to grasp the essentials and neglect both.

LVM If one truly does not shrink from one's rightful duty, that is of course very good. What I have seen, however, is people who neither take up what is rightfully theirs to do nor yield. That is not refusing to shrink from one's rightful duty; it is actually “firmness in struggle.” Now you can understand why I went into seclusion in 1998, can't you? At the same time, you can understand why the Elder “did not establish a successor,” can't you?

The Eighty-Fifth Letter

The Eighty-Fifth Letter

With reverence, I bow to the Venerable Master: I bow to the Buddha, I bow to the Dharma, and I bow to the Saṅgha.

As for the matter of Jingju Temple, we need only wait patiently for the right conditions. I now answer the Venerable Master's questions as follows: “Have you liberated yourself?” When I seek this “self,” it cannot be found; where, then, is there to go to liberate it? [If it is not you who wrote this letter, who is it?] When I observe the “self,” it is utterly clear and distinct; where, then, need I seek liberation? [Observing the self as clear and distinct, yet it is clearly not liberated.]

“How can one make a tongueless person understand speech?” Even making a “person with a tongue” understand speech has baffled the great worthies throughout the ages. [What sort of words are these? The vast Chan records still remain!] How much more so a “tongueless person”? Very difficult? Very difficult? [Would that not make one a mute sheep monk? Say more!]

I composed a couplet to express my present state of mind: “Having only just passed through the Chan barrier, [This barrier is not easy to pass,] I nevertheless pity the withering lotus leaves. Who presides over the Buddhist affairs of dream and illusion? [Do not expound principles to me!] I shall include it in my travel notes for now; when the lotus flowers bloom, I shall return to the water-moon bodhimaṇḍala.”

[So he turns out to be a novice with no master!] [Poor fellow—when will the lotus flower bloom? Three lifetimes and sixty kalpas!] May the Venerable Master have little illness and little affliction. Are you practicing in peace and ease? Though you are to liberate sentient beings, is it easy to receive liberation? Will this not cause the Venerable Master fatigue? [There is no need to ask.]

Disciple Zhiming respectfully bows. January 1, 1994

[Youth Yongshou] How did you pass through the Chan barrier?

[LVM] For one who has passed the barrier, there is no barrier to pass. If a “Chan barrier” remains as a ridge in your mind, you cannot pass through it!

The Eighty-Sixth Letter

Eighty-Sixth Letter

Respectful prostrations to the Revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

In reply to the questions indicated in the Revered Master’s letter: “If the one writing this letter is not you, who is it?” Answer: “If the one writing the letter is I, then the one not writing the letter is also I. Where is there that is not I?” Another answer: “I shall not imitate the First Patriarch’s answer, ‘I do not know.’” Another answer: “When have I ever written a letter?” “Contemplate yourself: clearly and distinctly aware, yet the distinction has not been transcended.”

Answer: “Only this clear and distinct awareness is present; where can ‘transcended’ and ‘not transcended’ be established?” “How can a tongueless person speak?” Answer: “Why require someone to speak?” Again: “The vast collections of recorded sayings are all not speech.” “This barrier is not easy to pass.”

Answer: “Standing, one is straight; lying down, one is horizontal. What is so difficult about passing this barrier?” “So it turns out that you are a novice monk without a master!” Answer: “A novice monk is simply a novice monk. If one seeks out a master, would that not make two novice monks?!” “Poor fellow, when will the lotus blossom? Three lives and sixty kalpas!” Answer: “In the snap of a finger, three lives and sixty kalpas pass; when seated at the seat of awakening, the lotus blossoms!” [These are all conceptual interpretations and cannot be submitted as an answer paper.”

“Patriarchal Chan does not permit you to understand it!”] Precisely so:

In the vast wilderness beneath the primordial sky of the universe,
A mighty, righteous energy pervades all within.
As chaos first opened, mind and consciousness arose;
In China’s early transformation came Laozi, Confucius, and Yan Hui.

The great teaching gradually spread eastward, enduring through past and present;
The Patriarch came from the west, nurturing sages and worthies.
Suddenly hearing that originally not a single thing exists,
Following the pointing finger, one gazes at the sky: the moon is perfectly round.

I ask whether the Revered Master has few illnesses and few troubles, and whether you are practicing at ease. Since you must liberate sentient beings, is it easy for them to receive liberation? Might this not cause the Revered Master fatigue?

Disciple Zhiming, with reverent prostrations

January 10, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] “Conceptual interpretations fill page after page, and words flow on and on; with a brocaded heart and an embroidered mouth, one treats it all as easy. Neither abiding in being nor nonbeing, he says he does not understand Patriarchal Chan.” What is Patriarchal Chan? It is not that you do not understand; it is simply that it has not yet become intimate.

[LVM] What is Patriarchal Chan? In any case, empty talk of Chan such as that in my letter is not Patriarchal Chan. How is Patriarchal Chan understood? Not understanding is most intimate!

The Eighty-Seventh Letter

Letter Eighty-Seven

Reverently bowing in homage to the Venerable Master:

I bow to the Buddha, bow to the Dharma, and bow to the Saṅgha.

The Venerable Master wrote fifteen words of instruction: “It is all conceptual understanding; you cannot hand in your paper. Patriarch Chan does not permit you to comprehend it!” The disciple closed the book and said to himself: “Conceptual understanding has not departed even half a step from the one mind; why insist on comprehending that Patriarch Chan?!”

[Heavens! Heavens!!! How pitiful! How pitiful!!! You cannot even understand a ready-made koan—how then will you teach others?] On the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, Jiayou Chan Monastery on Jinshan Mountain in Hebi was approved for opening as a site for Buddhist activities. At the invitation of others, this disciple and his companions went to participate in a Dharma assembly for making offerings to the Buddha.

After the assembly, Mr. Fu, Mr. Bai, Mr. Li, and this disciple—a group of four—went on to visit another ancient monastery, Qingyan Chan Monastery. This monastery was not far from Mr. Fu's home, and young Fu had long wished to pay it a visit. As it was the day of the Buddha's awakening, the visit came about just in time. The main hall of Qingyan Monastery faces south. In its center stands an image of the Buddha, with the Eighteen Arhats on either side, each in a different posture.

The east side hall is the Garan Hall, containing an image of Guan Yu; the west side hall is the Patriarchs' Hall, containing an image of a monk, whom the local people call Yang Wulang.

When we arrived, the monastery gate happened to be open, and we encountered several people burning incense. Only after asking around did we learn that the gate of this monastery was usually locked and that it remained quiet all day. By chance, a family from Nanshan Village was holding a wedding that day and had come to the monastery to burn incense, so someone had come to open the gate. The keys were kept by Mr. Qin and his wife of Nanshan Village. We spoke with Mr. Qin in the monastery for a long time.

Qin is an honest man. The land surrounding the monastery is contracted farmland belonging to his family, and he pays 100 yuan annually. In the rear courtyard are five tiled rooms, inscribed with the four words "Pure and Quiet Chan Hall." It truly is a ready-made, excellent practice center! Transportation is much more convenient than to Jingju Monastery on Weiquan Mountain: cars can drive right up to the gate, and a river winds around the monastery.

Mr. Qin said that building this road and restoring this monastery had involved many twists and turns. We praised him, saying: "Mr. Qin's merit and virtue are immeasurable!"

The thousand-year-old Qingyan Monastery, ravaged over time, had fallen into decline.
After the calamity, it revives, its vitality now apparent—
Who knows who will reside within it?

Would the Venerable Master be willing to spend next summer here? After coming, the Venerable Master could observe the causes and conditions and see whether it would be possible to reside here permanently. We disciples feel that this monastery is already habitable and requires no major construction. Yet its gate is now often locked, awaiting its master's arrival.

If the Venerable Master has such an intention, we disciples will first form an affinity with Mr. Qin. This affinity should readily mature and seems only a matter of lifting a hand; it would be easier than at Jingju Monastery. [I am going to Hangzhou and will

not come to Henan.] Jingju Monastery lies northwest of the city, while Qingyan Monastery lies directly south of it. The former is farther away and the latter nearer; as for water resources, Qingyan is superior.

Mr. Li painted a landscape of Qingyan Monastery. It is quite lifelike, especially the three large trees, which seem vividly alive. I am mailing this painting with the letter today for the Venerable Master's reference.

[Mr. Li's painting is indeed very good, and the feng shui of this place is also excellent. It is regrettable that people from the south are unwilling to come—why?] A disciple is simply a disciple; how could he comprehend Patriarch Chan? Worldly toils have nowhere to go in themselves, so why seek out the mysterious?

Why awaken the master of the house? Why give rise to a thought to investigate? This, too, is not it; even if it is, it is futile! As for "How can one make a person without a tongue understand speech?" this disciple had long had an answer, but feared offending the Venerable Master and therefore gave another reply. Since I have already fallen into conceptual understanding, I shall boldly state it directly: "If the Venerable Master can make a person without ears speak, then this disciple can make a person without a tongue understand speech." [His voice is like thunder, yet how pitiful that the deaf cannot hear it.]

Disciple Zhiming, reverently bowing

January 21, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] Teacher, I have composed another poem:

"In those years, we strove together to investigate Chan;
The practice center stood amid drifting clouds and flowing waters.
Where are Hebi's relatives and friends now?
On Weiquan Mountain, the monastery is like smoke."

[LVM] Now the sound of a bell rings out from Weiquan Mountain. I hear that the bell was designed by Beijing's Big Bell Temple.

[Yongshou Tongzi] "His voice is like thunder, yet how pitiful that the deaf cannot hear it." The guru's response was too quick; the teacher cannot yet recover his losses.

[LVM] Ha ha! It does not matter if you cannot recover your losses; someday I shall recover them from all of you.

The Eighty-Eighth Letter

Eighty-Eighth Letter

Reverently prostrating before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

The day before Lunar New Year's Eve, Master So-and-so and Master So-and-so came to Hebi at the Master's instruction. We disciples were at once filled with Dharma joy. At last, the Master had sent someone! This was more than the maturation of favorable conditions for Hebi; it gave hope that a Mind-Seal practice center could be established for fellow practitioners of heart esotericism from across the country. I had originally planned to settle Master So-and-so in my home and take him to the temple after the holiday.

Master So-and-so strictly observes the precepts and felt that it was not appropriate to reside for long in a lay household. Later, we learned that he also strictly observes the precept against eating after noon and the precept against handling money. His rigorous observance of the precepts could not but inspire our deep respect. During the Spring Festival, people followed the customary practice of leaving the city to visit their families, making it difficult for fellow practitioners of heart esotericism to gather. This kept Li So-and-so very busy.

On Lunar New Year's Eve, we went to the temple. On the first and second days of the new year, it snowed. Master So-and-so had already formed many good affinities with the faithful devotees around Jingju Temple and had surveyed the mountain terrain. On the third day, we brought Master So-and-so back to the city. The local people were reluctant to part with him and asked me to urge him to return to the temple soon. On the fourth day, we surveyed Qingyan Temple; the people of Qingyan hoped that the Master would reside there.

On the fifth day, we escorted the Dharma master back to Jingju Temple. Your resolve to establish a Mind-Seal practice center is truly an immense merit and virtue, and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas will also praise it. Master So-and-so has the affinity to reside in the mountains and propagate the Dharma; this too is due to causes and conditions. An extraordinary flower will bloom in the Central Plains, and there are high hopes for greatly flourishing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

The regulations you enclosed are very appropriate. However, all seven of you have jobs; would it not be too difficult to maintain this indefinitely? I think it would be better to mobilize the faithful devotees around the mountain temple to support and protect it together.

Mind-Seal practice centers are also being established in Xi'an, Hanzhong, and other places in Shaanxi. In the future, as circumstances change, the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma will flourish not only in the southeast but also in the southwest. Non-Buddhist paths flourish in Hebi, while the Buddhadharma is in decline.

Master So-and-so was so warmly welcomed by the mountain residents of both Weiquan and Qingyan that he has set a precedent. The transformative influence of the Venerable Master and Master So-and-so is inconceivable! Guo So-and-so donated 100 yuan for the needs of this temporary arrangement, which prompted my idea of establishing a “Mind-Seal Practice Center Fund.” Li So-and-so, Wang So-and-so, Bai So-and-so, and others also contributed funds.

To support and protect the Mind-Seal practice center, continue the Buddha's wisdom-life, propagate the true Dharma, and liberate sentient beings, we disciples have drawn up the “Regulations for Hebi Fellow Practitioners Supporting and Protecting the Practice Center.” They are enclosed for the Venerable Master's additions, deletions, and revisions. Enclosure: Regulations (omitted). When Master So-and-so first arrived in Hebi, he went through several twists and turns before finding the factory. The factory's debts exceed its assets, and I no longer go to work there.

After still more difficulty, he finally found my home. For this reason, I have enclosed several business cards. If anyone else comes in the future, they can go directly to my home by following the address and need not make such an effort. The cards were printed on waste paper; please look at the other side. Master So-and-so has written a letter to the Venerable Master, which is enclosed. May the Venerable Master enjoy peace and well-being during the Spring Festival!

Zhijun and all benevolent friends: Happy New Year! The matters proposed by So-and-so concerning the reconstruction of the mountain gate and the arrangement of the halls must be discussed with knowledgeable local people. Only after a consensus has been reached may they be carried out gradually; do not be hasty. Where utmost sincerity is present, even metal and stone can be opened. People will naturally come forward to help; there will not be a lack of financial resources when the time comes.

Establishing a practice center is certainly an important matter, but do not, on its account, forget to safeguard your original nature. Unless habitual tendencies are eliminated, the Way will be difficult to accomplish; you must at all times turn the light inward. Cultivate and permeate with a single thought, illuminating until there is nothing left to illuminate; when even that which cannot be illuminated is absent, and one remains all day as though foolish and dull, then one is a carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance. May you all strive diligently. The regulations

are returned herewith. Please tell Master So-and-so to apply himself diligently and not disappoint everyone's care and high expectations!

Disciples Xiuming and Zhiming respectfully prostrate

February 14, 1994

The Eighty-Ninth Letter

Letter Eighty-Nine

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

Among those in Hebi who practice the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra and the Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara practice in seated meditation, there are several who are quite accomplished. The young man Wang and this Ms. Shi are among the most outstanding. Wang has the capacity for Chan, and his questions are direct. For example, he asks: “Why realize the mind and see one’s true nature?” [“To emerge from the deluded dream, not cling to illusory existence, and restore one’s original nature.”

] He further asks: “After awakening, can one begin practice and thereby transcend birth and death?” [“Birth and death exist in a dream; after awakening, birth and death are inherently empty. Why speak of transcending birth and death?”] He practices earnestly and recently wished to meet the Venerable Master in person to request empowerment and Dharma transmission. [“There is no need to travel all the way to Shanghai; he may receive the Dharma nearby in Hanzhong, Shaanxi.”] Ms. Shi formerly practiced the Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation by invoking the name.

[“The Pure Land Dharma gate is profound, wondrous, and reliable. Diligently recite the Buddha’s name, be reborn in the Western Pure Land, and all will be fulfilled. Why set up a new stove and change to another practice?”] She is entangled in the trivial affairs of her household, and her earnest wish to liberate sentient beings has caused disharmony in her family relationships. Her afflictions have multiplied, affecting her Buddha-recitation. [“Her household affairs keep her busy, leaving her no time for seated meditation; this practice is not suitable for her.

] I advised her to practice the Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara practice in seated meditation with the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, and the results have been very good. This disciple has several times wished to introduce her to a more advanced gate, but it has not yet been quite suitable. Alas! “Attachment” is indeed very difficult to remove! She has written you a letter, which I enclose with this one.

Your disciple, Zhiming, prostrates in homage.

March 2, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] I remember that, at the beginning, I too practiced Buddha-recitation. I felt that it was easy to gain a response through Buddha-recitation, but I never felt quite grounded, and whenever something happened, I would become unsettled. Later, through the power of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, I came to understand how to apply effort off the meditation cushion. At the time, I thought that perhaps this was because the Heart-of-Heart practice requires two hours daily for three years, making both its intensity and duration sufficient, while also emphasizing the conduct of the mind; thus it is easier to gain strength from it.

[LVM] This is discussed clearly and specifically in the teachings of the patriarchs, especially in the teachings of Master Wang.

The Ninetieth Letter

Letter Ninety

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

Part of the proposed construction plans for Jingju Temple on Weiquan Mountain is attached on the following page for the Venerable Master's review. We are only awaiting funds before beginning construction. Attached: planning drawings (omitted). This layman Shi has practiced qigong and has experience in seated meditation. He has now resolved to seek the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and respectfully requests that the Venerable Master confer remote empowerment upon him. May the Venerable Master compassionately accept him.

[Since Layman Shi does not fear hardship and sincerely seeks the Dharma, remote empowerment may be conferred upon him at 8:00 a.m. on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, the Buddha's Birthday. All the rituals shall remain as before. Hereafter, when others seek the Dharma, you may transmit it to them; there will be no need for me to confer remote empowerment again. The plans for the expansion of Jingju Temple are very good, but the project is immense and beyond our present financial means. It must be considered over the long term.

] The outer rear door of the Vairocana Hall can be opened, but the inner one cannot. When the master enters the hall, he makes a counterclockwise circumambulation; when the abbot enters the hall, he circumambulates clockwise. The master occupies two levels: the upper level is the master's private esoteric altar, accessible only

through the master's bedroom. The lower level contains the master's bedroom and an outer room.

Disciples Zhiming and others respectfully prostrate

A day in March 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] So long as they cultivate the practice sincerely, many practitioners of middling or lesser capacities can accord with the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

[LVM] In fact, one's innate capacity is not fixed. When a single thought accords, one is of the highest capacity.

The Ninety-First Letter

Ninety-First Letter

Respectful prostrations to the Revered Master:

I prostrate in reverence to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

Master So-and-so's first letter to you received a reply long ago. Not long afterward, he wrote you a second letter but has not yet received a reply. This second letter was again sent to Dharma Brother Shen in Hangzhou. [I have not encountered him.] Since Master So-and-so arrived, the Buddhadharma, which had originally been declining in the area, has shown signs of revival.

Mountain villagers around the temple have come forward in large numbers to protect the Dharma, and some are even willing to leave home and become monastics under Master So-and-so. Here as well, the number of people coming to visit and ask about the Dharma is increasing by the day, and among them are quite a few discerning individuals. Wang So-and-so reprinted several dozen copies of a practice manual for the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra and left them with this disciple. Recently, all of them were requested, and Wang has brought several dozen more.

Everyone in Hebi agrees that Master So-and-so has brought your power of compassionate guidance to Hebi. Jingju Temple has a Hall of the Fire God, which Master So-and-so proposes to relocate. After sounding out local opinion, it seems that this will require some effort. [If the Hall of the Fire God is situated to one side, it causes no harm. Without the villagers' consent, one must not act rashly.

] The tenth day of the second lunar month was formerly the date of an old temple fair, but in recent years it had lapsed because no one stepped forward to organize it.

After Master So-and-so arrived, organizers emerged from several local villages and put on operas for three days. Master So-and-so did not watch or listen to the singing and dancing, yet the organizers said, “We had intended to take the lead for you, but we did not expect the Master would not listen to opera.”

[The villagers’ enthusiasm is commendable, but this is not appropriate for a practitioner of the Way. The villagers do not understand the true Dharma; they know only to revere gods and make offerings to ghosts, and therefore consider performing opera as an offering to the gods to be of great importance. Master So-and-so should speak with the villagers in detail and guide them, rather than simply refusing and leaving it at that, thereby hurting their self-respect.] May this extraordinary blossom of the Central Plains soon come into full bloom; I earnestly request the Revered Master’s compassionate blessings.

Disciple Zhiming and others prostrate in reverence

A day in April 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] In building a Dharma center, the most painful thing is the social courtesies and dealings with all kinds of people. Such worries are taxing indeed; Teacher and Dharma brothers, you have worked hard!

[LVM] It is like children piling earth to build a walled city or stopping a carriage to debate the sun; it may be counted as an early stage of training.

The Ninety-Second Letter

Letter Ninety-Two

Reverent prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I prostrate to the Buddha, prostrate to the Dharma, and prostrate to the Saṅgha.

I received the Elder's reply, in which you instructed me concerning what I already knew. I shall notify Mr. Shi that, on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, he is to properly receive remote empowerment. I shall follow your instructions, transmit the Dharma on your behalf, and then write to report to you. This is how matters will proceed after the eighth day of the fourth lunar month. I previously received a letter from Dharma Brother Song, stating that you would be going to Lingyan. Mr. Li and Mr. Guo have not yet met you in person, and they have resolved to go to Lingyan to pay their respects.

[Teaching the Dharma has left me tired and weak, so I need a little rest. I will have to cancel the trip to Lingyan.] Please seek out several more monastics who practice

heart esotericism and who are resolved to undertake great practice, ascetic practice, and the practice of forbearance, and ask them to accompany the others to Hebi.

First, Dharma Master X plans to go to Nanhua Temple to receive the full precepts. After receiving them, he will return to Hebi, which will take approximately one or two months. When additional monastics arrive, the temple will no longer be left empty. Second, the conditions are now ripe for Qingyan Temple to become a Mind-Seal school practice center, and it may also be occupied. Bao X, whose Dharma name is X, set out for Nanhua this month on the nineteenth to receive ordination.

Has Dharma Master X, since leaving home, still never received the precepts? Since the conditions at Qingyan Temple are now ripe, when someone comes, I can instruct them to reside there. There has been considerable progress concerning Jingju Temple: local village leaders have visited the temple to discuss relocating the Fire God Temple. This is no longer an obstacle; only funding is needed. Because the locality is poor, it lacks the means to relocate it.

There is a Teacher Zhao in the area who is enthusiastic about helping to establish the practice center. He has been persuading the township leaders, who wish to visit Dharma Master X and have said that they intend to raise some funds in the township to help build the temple. Regarding the matter of the Fire God Temple, I already wrote to inform Dharma Master X last time, instructing him not to act rashly. You have presumably seen this; it presents no problem.

Dharma Master X's temporary residence permit and the procedures for opening the temple are also being processed. Many people are helping with the procedures for opening Jingju Temple. Mr. Guo is drafting the application, which directly proposes the name “Mind-Seal school practice center.” Dharma Master X has already sent out many letters soliciting donations and is awaiting replies.

Your letter instructs that the project is immense and beyond what our present financial resources can bear, and that it must be considered over the long term. We disciples believe that, even if the Hall of Vairocana is initially built with only one story, the master's residence should nevertheless be completed first. Do not build the residence first; build the main hall first. My health is now poor, and I cannot come to Henan. As for the master's residence, you may wait and build it for yourselves to live in.

That would be your exclusive residence, and before it is built, you would need to come and perform a purification and consecration ceremony. Mr. Li has an unused room that is very quiet. Dharma Master X and the rest of us have sat in meditation there for several days without disturbance from the outside world. It could serve as temporary lodging for you when you come to perform the purification and consecration.

Your disciple Zhiming and others respectfully prostrate.

April 15, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] Jingju Temple in Hebi, an officially recognized Mind-Seal school practice center, seemed to flourish most during the years when I practiced there, from 1995 to 1997. In those days, Dharma brothers and sisters from Beijing often went there for seven-day retreats, receiving the teacher's guidance and much care from the Dharma brothers and sisters in Hebi. I am truly very grateful.

[LVM] “All dharmas arise from causes and conditions; when conditions are exhausted, dharmas return to cessation. My teacher, the great śramaṇa, always speaks in this way.”

Letter Ninety-Three (Appendix)

Letter Ninety-Three (Supplement)

I bow in reverence to the honored Master:

Birth and death have nothing whatsoever to do with it. Such is the original nature: at every moment it shines forth at the gates of the six sense faculties. Alas, people of our time simply do not know this. After three years, I have merely come to understand this clearly. From now on, I shall no longer have doubts. I respectfully request the honored Master’s confirmation. [Benevolent Xiuming: Your cultivation of the mind has not been in vain. To recognize your own original mind and sit securely at home—how could one not rejoice! But you must never be satisfied with a little. You need to safeguard it continuously and closely, diligently tempering yourself amid the circumstances of daily life, until the attachments and habitual tendencies accumulated over countless kalpas and lives are exhausted. Only then can you attain the state of perfection.]

Disciple Xiuming

Evening of April 15, 1994

The Ninety-Fourth Letter

Letter Ninety-Four

Reverent prostrations to the revered Master:

Three days ago, we sent a letter to the revered Master. Today, So-and-so suddenly arrived in Hebi, so we immediately wrote this further letter to the revered Master. 1.

There is presently no Heart Esotericism practice center in Tongbai, yet some twenty or thirty people have received remote empowerment for the Heart-of-Heart Dharma —of course, remote empowerment from the revered Master.

According to the revered Master's explanations in previous letters, Dharma brother Li So-and-so received remote empowerment from the revered Master; as for the other twenty or thirty people, we disciples do not yet know. Is this correct? [Yes. Later, I gave remote empowerment to all these people.] 2. Dharma Master So-and-so proposes to print 2,000 copies of The Buddha-Heart Sutra. It is said that distribution will be limited to disciples of Heart Esotericism, and it has not yet gone to print.

Is this appropriate? [The Buddha-Heart Sutra has already been reprinted in great numbers by people practicing qigong and has become openly circulated; there is no longer anything secret about it. If he wishes to print it, let him do so.] 3. The two practice centers in Hebi introduced So-and-so to a certain master, who was willing to try residing at Qingyan Temple.

Who would have expected such a drastic change in circumstances? The qigong station had already signed a contract with the village to use Qingyan Temple as a place for practicing qigong! A few days ago, Qingyan Temple was still urging us, asking why the monastic teacher had not yet arrived. How could such a change occur in so short a time? We have no choice but to arrange for So-and-so to live with So-and-so at Jingju Temple, but this disciple is again worried about whether the two can live together.

[Since Qingyan Temple has been occupied by qigong practitioners, if So-and-so is to reside in Hebi, he can only live with So-and-so. There should be no problem with monastics living together in one temple. "Saṅgha" originally refers to harmonious practice together. If the person in charge of Qingyan Temple can recognize that a temple should be inhabited by monastics who propagate the Dharma, cancel the contract with the qigong practitioners, and allow So-and-so to reside there, that would be best. In all matters, act according to causes and conditions; nothing can be forced.]

Disciples Zhiming and others respectfully prostrate

April 21, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] This truly is the Dharma-ending age: qigong practitioners have usurped the hosts' role. Some temples must also pay taxes to the state; if they are used for spiritual cultivation, the financial burden is extremely heavy. We have no choice but to use our own dormitories as practice centers.

[LVM] At that time, among the more than one hundred local temples where incense offerings were maintained, there may have been only two or three Buddhist practice centers. Nearly all the temples were occupied by shamans and spirit mediums. In fact, this too is normal: a true practice center can exist only in the heart of one who genuinely practices.

The Ninety-Fifth Letter

Letter Ninety-Five

With reverence, I pay homage to the Venerable Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, I pay homage to the Dharma, and I pay homage to the Saṅgha.

The Venerable Master mentioned in his letter that The Buddha-Heart Sutra has already been printed in large quantities by the qigong community. This deeply troubles me. First, it is said that in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and elsewhere, Dharma texts of the Unsurpassed Esoteric Vehicle can be bought in ordinary bookstores. In this way, their power to gather and focus the mind will be greatly diminished, and practitioners will find attainment even more difficult.

Second, it has also conveniently created information through which some people may enter Buddhism from qigong. [Even if they read the Dharma text, without personal transmission they cannot form the mudrās; and even if they form them, they do not know what constitutes realization of the essence, much less how to put it into function.] Here in Hebi, The Buddha-Heart Sutra is still kept secret.

This applies not only to the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Even for the Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara practice of the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, I must assess a person's faculties and capacities before introducing it. Of course, if someone actively seeks the Dharma, I will never begrudge the Dharma or withhold transmission. The sixth of the ten modes of upholding in The Buddha-Heart Sutra says: “When someone makes a request, give immediately in accordance with your heart; be careful not to assess whether their faculties are superior, middling, or inferior.

”Once someone makes a request, I no longer assess their faculties and capacities. [It should indeed be so.] The conditions at Qingyan Temple have also changed unusually; when the conditions again ripen, it may still become a Mind-Seal practice center.

[So-and-so cannot now go to Qingyan and is temporarily staying at Jingju Temple. Will this pose any obstacle?] Jingju Temple has a relatively extensive plan, with a complex of buildings around the temple: Jingju Nunnery, Jingju Grove, Jingju Hall (a

place for female lay practitioners to cultivate), Jingju Cave, Guanyin Cave, a pagoda courtyard, and so on.

This is only one conception, but not an empty fantasy; all have ancient sites or existing structures as their foundation. [Do not think too far ahead; see what the time and conditions bring.

] Because the abbot of So-and-so Temple has enlisted the help of the director of the suburban Religious Affairs Bureau and is trying by every means to draw Master So-and-so to So-and-so Temple to make money for him, the director of the Religious Affairs Bureau strongly advocated that Master So-and-so reside at So-and-so Temple while the procedures for opening Jingju Temple were being handled.

[Is So-and-so Temple the So-and-so Temple in Zhenjiang? I do not think so. That So-and-so Temple is a major Chan practice center, and it has no shortage of capable people; they would not ask Dharma Master So-and-so to make money for them.

What is Dharma Master So-and-so's state of mind? Is he willing to go? In your previous letter you said that he was going to Nanhua Temple to receive the precepts. Has he still not gone?] There is a Teacher Zhao in the area around Jingju Temple. After running about in many ways, he unexpectedly moved city officials to meet with Master So-and-so. Yet what they discussed was mostly religious philosophy, science, and the like; Darwin, Einstein, information theory, and everything else were brought up. Dharma Master So-and-so answered fluently and showed considerable eloquence.

At parting, one official said, “I hope you can persuade me!” [This shows that Dharma Master So-and-so has not yet persuaded him. You should lend him a hand and persuade him from the side.] These officials will make an effort to help Master So-and-so reside at Jingju Temple. I secretly rejoice: this is no small affinity. Although the temple has not yet taken shape, it already shows signs of broad propagation.

[Nothing should be forced. If there are conditions, it will come to fruition; if there are no conditions, it will not. This is simply something beyond our control.] Near Jingju Temple there is also a Mr. Si, who is willing to observe the temple rules and accompany Master So-and-so in residing at the temple. He can readily do such work as gathering firewood, carrying water, and cooking. Although he has little formal education, his wholesome roots are quite deep.

[For this person's resolve to protect the Way, he is truly a great-resolve bodhisattva. I too deeply admire him. Tell So-and-so to treat him well and not slight him.] He too has been running about to arrange the procedures for Master So-and-so to reside at Jingju Temple. [As long as one can reside peacefully, practice the Dharma, and

propagate the Way, why seek official opening? Opening only brings more trouble; it is not necessarily a good thing.

] Some matters appear to be resistance but are in fact a driving force; how can one cling rigidly to them? “I myself have no mind toward the myriad things; why should it matter if the myriad things constantly surround me?” Good things are often hard-won. Once leaders at every level basically know of this matter, the opening procedures should then be completed in one stroke. [May it be as you say.]

Disciple Zhiming pays homage

May 1, 1994

[Youth Yongshou] To practice the bodhisattva path is to be willing to undertake concrete work. Such quiet and ordinary people are those whom “I too deeply admire.”

[LVM] At that time, these matters could only count as early training; they did not yet amount to practicing the bodhisattva path. At most, they could barely be considered “learning to arouse the bodhisattva resolve.” Those who truly practice the bodhisattva path accord with sentient beings’ minds and respond according to what they know and are capable of; naturally, they assess the time and circumstances and no longer act impractically.

[Youth Yongshou] Establishing a practice center can only follow conditions; this truly is something beyond one’s control. In fact, is anything one undertakes not like this? It is only because one is somewhat unwilling to accept it that one takes more detours.

[LVM] With this “unwillingness,” affairs arise! You have read quite a few Chan books, so you are surely not unfamiliar with the term “residing in the mountains.” When people of old attained an entry point and entered a state beyond doubt, they would go to remote mountains, where few people ventured, to continually nurture the sacred embryo. If the Dharma conditions ripened, dragons and devas would naturally bring them forth; before long, a grass hut deep in the mountains would become a magnificent practice center. Look at today’s Buddhist sacred sites and famous scenic places: are not most of them in the mountains? It is only that transportation is much more convenient now, unlike in ancient times, when travel was so difficult.

Letter Ninety-Six

Ninety-Sixth Letter

Reverent prostrations to the Revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

This disciple has also observed that a certain teacher's understanding is not yet wholly correct. Sure enough, he left Jingju Temple that very day. This disciple offered him a train ticket, and he returned to Nanyang the following day. The procedures for opening Jingju Temple encountered resistance from a certain temple and the suburban Religious Affairs Bureau.

Beginning today, the Mind-Seal disciples in Hebi have switched to practicing the Sixth Mudrā, praying to "swiftly open wisdom and attain Buddhahood, and swiftly establish a practice center." May the Buddhas and bodhisattvas secretly bestow their blessings upon us. The Revered Master mentioned in his letter that "giving Dharma teachings is tiring, and my physical strength is poor." We disciples are deeply concerned. There are not many Mind-Seal disciples in Hebi, so the Revered Master would not need to give teachings if he came here.

Li has also finished putting his house in order. The Mind-Seal disciples in Hebi invite the Revered Master to come here for quiet rest and recuperation; there will be no disturbances whatsoever. No one will frequently disturb the Revered Master, and it is convenient here for sitting meditation and walking meditation. Once we receive the Revered Master's reply, the disciples in Hebi will go to Nanjing to welcome him.

[On the 14th of this month, I shall leave Nanjing for Changzhou. I do not yet know the address there, so do not send anything further to Nanjing.][Zhijun: As I explained in my last letter, I am old and cannot undertake long journeys; it is impossible for me to come to Henan.

All of you should apply yourselves diligently, united in purpose and virtue, encouraging one another, advancing tirelessly, supporting those who come after you, and propagating the Dharma according to circumstances. Do not let this life be lived in vain; that is enough. There is no need for me to come to Henan. Establishing a practice center must also accord with the right season and conditions; you must not act rashly according to subjective wishes. It is enough if Jingju Temple can provide a settled place for cultivating the practice; it need not necessarily be opened. Why exhaust yourselves pursuing this?]

Disciples Zhijun, Zhiming, and others

April 29, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] How many times have you used the wondrous function of the Sixth Mudrā? What results did it have?

[LVM] The results were excellent! Before long, we received the official approval for “Jingju Temple, the Buddhist Mind-Seal school practice center in Hebi City, Henan Province.” Only later did I realize that the Sixth Mudrā should not be used lightly. Even if it resolves the immediate problem, if the Dharma conditions are not yet mature, many troubles will arise later.

Letter Ninety-Seven (Supplement)

Letter Ninety-Seven (Supplement)

I respectfully prostrate before the Venerable Master:

During my practice, Xiuming once made this vow: “May I suffer on behalf of all sentient beings; may I bear the burden for all sentient beings who are ill; may I eliminate all the sorrows and suffering of sentient beings.” Perhaps this is because I entered the Way through suffering. I am still afflicted by illness, just as I was before practicing the Dharma, and I do not know how to regard this matter.

After meditation, I have dedicated the merit of my sitting practice to the sentient beings most karmically connected with my illness. I have no way to resolve this matter, and the disciples in Hebi are in the same situation. I ask the Venerable Master to compassionately instruct us.

[Since Xiuming vowed to suffer on behalf of sentient beings and bear their illnesses, how could you not be afflicted by illness? This vow was not made in play. Once you have made a vow, you must bear it. Therefore, vows must not be made lightly; you must weigh whether you have the capacity to bear them. Now that matters have come to this point, quickly repent before the Buddha of your rashness, then practice the Dharma well. That should almost suffice.]

The disciple joins palms.

April 29, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] I recall that Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism includes a practice of vowing to bear illness on behalf of sentient beings. Why is this not permitted in the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?

[LVM] It is not that this is forbidden. Rather, if one lacks the capacity to bear it, making such a vow is of no use. One must not, in a moment of impulse, lightly make unrealistic and empty vows.

Letter Ninety-Eight

Letter Ninety-Eight

I respectfully bow in homage to the honored Master:

I bow in homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the saṅgha.

On the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, as scheduled, I conferred remote empowerment on Mr. Shi. His son-in-law, Mr. Li, has already received empowerment from the honored Master in person. The two of them request that the honored Master bestow Dharma names upon them. [Mr. Shi: Hengming; Mr. Li: Zhenming.] When I henceforth transmit the Dharma on the Master's behalf, what ritual procedure should I follow for empowerment? What mantras should be used? What character should be used for Dharma names? Should this character be placed before or after the name? Please instruct me, honored Master.

[Simply proceed according to the ritual procedure and mantras that so-and-so wrote out for you. For the Dharma name, choose any character that you consider most satisfactory; it may be placed either before or after the name.] A young man surnamed Zhang has been practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra in meditation for many days and seeks to receive the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. I have postponed it until June 19, intending to allow time to wait for the honored Master's instruction on the above four questions before holding the ceremony.

[Very good; June 19 will be fine.][I returned to Shanghai this morning. Upon seeing your letters, I replied to you at once; it is probably not too late. Dharma Master So-and-so wrote, saying that it would be best if some monastic brothers could reside at Jingju Temple for retreat and practice.

Once there are many people, will there be no problem supplying meals? You are not great financiers, but merely wage earners. How could you have so much money to support the assembly? As for repairing the temple, that too can only be done gradually and slowly. You must not press ahead rashly as you please, for your footing is not yet secure and you have no wealthy patrons to support you. How can you proceed so recklessly?!]

Disciple Zhiming respectfully bows in homage

June 4, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] No wonder so many Dharma brothers vow to become big bosses—it turns out that it is in order to build Dharma centers! Ha ha.

[LVM] I am afraid that this is not purely the case for most people. How about putting it this way: No wonder so many Dharma brothers vow to build Dharma centers—it turns out that it is in order to become big bosses! Ha ha!

The Ninety-Ninth Letter

Letter Ninety-Nine

With reverence, I prostrate before the revered Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

So-and-so Shi has the Dharma name Hengming, and so-and-so Li has the Dharma name Zhenming. In the future, when transmitting the Dharma on the teacher's behalf, in accordance with the ritual procedures and mantras written by Master Xu, may a single character, "Xin" (Mind), be used in Dharma names? Since realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature follow in sequence, "Xin" is proposed for use first; would this be appropriate? [Entirely appropriate.

] This young man surnamed Zhang, who plans to receive the Dharma on June 19, runs a restaurant in a street-front room below my apartment. He has been practicing the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra for more than a month. [Running a restaurant entails killing living beings and taking life.

Is it not remarkable that he can practice the Way and gain some entry into it? What is to be done from now on? Is he to go on killing as before?] On the afternoon of September 6, he first read your teaching on the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials, but did not understand it very well. He then read A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature, yet still did not understand. As he gazed intently at the wall, he saw it move like rippling water.

Suddenly, there was a "bang," and he felt as though a bucket had fallen away. [This, too, is due to past affinities. But he has not yet reached the stage at which "even the skin has completely fallen away." He must still temper himself well through circumstances; only when his habitual tendencies have been exhausted can the golden wind reveal itself in its entirety.] Half a year ago, while sitting in meditation, he experienced an explosion: light and sound arose together, and he became frightened and got down from his seat.

This time he was not frightened. After leaving his seat, he read A Brief Discussion of Realizing the Mind and Seeing One's True Nature again and understood it all; his reasoning seemed to flow freely. A torrent of Chan sayings even welled up in his mind.

[His reasoning does not flow freely; this is evident from the words he wrote.] Xiuming asked him, "Have you obtained the key?" He replied, "What does it matter whether there is a door or not? What need is there for a key?" [All this is merely

discursive reasoning and does not accord with Chan dynamic. Chan dynamic must have “a meaning beyond the words,” and must also meet the other’s response; it cannot depart from theory.

] Xiuzhi cited the koan, “If I press my finger, the Ocean-Seal emits light.” He replied, “There is no need to press the finger.” I did not engage him in Chan repartee. I learned that he already knew what it means to “lose it” and what it means to “not lose it”—he called it “clear, ever-present knowing.” I instructed him to safeguard it and not lose it, and not to attach importance to the Chan sayings that welled up.

[If he becomes attached to this, everything is finished.] If his state of mind is quite good, he may gradually read some Buddhist sūtras, such as the Heart Sūtra, Diamond Sūtra, Śūraṅgama Sūtra, and Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment. He had not previously read these sūtras.

[Must one wait until one’s state of mind is quite good before reading sūtras? If one has truly realized the Way, can there still be times when one’s state of mind is not good?] This person has exceptionally sharp faculties! Upon hearing the Dharma, he practiced; upon practicing, he gained realization.

[There are many who have received a little news; do not grant approval lightly!] If more Dharma brothers come to stay with you, revered Master, please do not worry about providing food. Here, I let matters take their course and have not found it difficult. Those who donate funds or bring clothing, food, and necessities are more than one or two, and their number is increasing day by day. [This, too, is due to Dharma affinities.

] The temple-renovation plan written by Master So-and-so is only meant to satisfy the higher authorities; its actual progress must await the maturation of conditions. So long as one stands firm and remains unmoved by the eight worldly winds, can conditions fail to ripen? [Not entirely so; it depends on the person’s karmic blessings.] What concerns me is that Master So-and-so himself may be unable to remain permanently in residence, though in fact this concern is superfluous.

[Yes, this person indeed cannot remain permanently in residence.] A certain Dharma brother in Hainan has called long-distance many times and has resolved to persuade wealthy businesspeople to contribute funds to protect the Dharma. [Who is this person?] I have an excellent impression of this Dharma brother. I feel that his understanding is pure and correct, his practice diligent, his attachments few, and his mind-capacity broad. His future potential is immeasurable. I do not see much deluded thought in him.

[You know only one side, not the other.] Does the revered Master’s remark refer to something else? Over the past several years, I have discovered this pattern: money

comes when it is needed, and does not come when it is not needed. There is truly no need to worry about it. [Do you possess such spiritual powers?]

Disciple Zhiming prostrates.

June 12, 1994

[Youth Yongshou] What does “grant approval lightly” mean? Is it not acceptable to offer encouragement?

[LVM] That depends on the person. For some people, encouragement is not impossible. But for most people at present, one must not become a supporting condition for the growth of their great self-importance.

[Youth Yongshou] “Though a thousand pieces of gold are scattered, they will come again”—Li Bai had this spiritual power. It seems not to be a spiritual power, but karmic blessings.

[LVM] I recall that some Chan master said, “Karmic blessings are something one cannot obtain by seeking, yet cannot avoid by refusing.” But people today are nearly crazed in their earnest pursuit of them, so they can only experience that they cannot be obtained by seeking, and cannot experience that they cannot be avoided by refusing—because they have never once “refused” them.

The One Hundredth Letter

One Hundredth Letter

With reverence, I bow to the Venerable Master:

I bow to the Buddha, I bow to the Dharma, and I bow to the Saṅgha.

This Mr. Zhang, who once suddenly broke free, was by nature disinclined to eat meat. His restaurant used meat purchased from the market; he did not slaughter animals himself. The restaurant has now closed, and he has returned to his hometown to work at his father's factory. He ran the restaurant for less than a year; before that, he dealt in industrial supplies at a mine.

[Follow conditions to eliminate old karma; do not create new misdeeds. How could one who cultivates the great Way behave in this manner?] Brother A in Hainan received the Heart-of-Heart Dharma from Brother B together with a certain Dharma master, before that Dharma master became a monastic. According to him, three people in Haikou have received the Heart-of-Heart Dharma; the other two are Mr. C and Mr. D.

All three have interrupted their practice. Brother A has called long-distance many times. He now accepts the advice to begin again from the start and is determined not to interrupt his practice any longer. [To recognize one's error and correct it is the greatest good.] I have exchanged two letters with Mr. D. He seems to lack faith and is close to wild Chan. [If one is self-righteous, arrogant, and conceited, then one is beyond remedy.

The elderly man surnamed Kang, who had been living in the temple, no longer lives there. Near the temple is a village called “Anzi Valley.” A certain housewife is related to the elderly Mr. Kang, and the villagers have voiced considerable criticism of the two of them meeting at the temple they borrowed. This is why I said that he “does not have much popular support.”

[To use a pure monastery as a place for secret trysts is to plant the seed of future retribution on a red-hot copper bed. How could one not fear this?!] At present, both a certain teacher and Brother E live in caves and observe silence. Brother E stays in the large cave, while the teacher stays in the small one. During the daytime, the teacher returns to the temple to attend to a few matters.

The two of them have now decided to lift their silence from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Their respective periods of silence are each planned for one hundred days. I once said that one person must not observe silence. [Why?] What I meant by “come when needed; do not come when not needed” does not rely on spiritual powers, but on this kind of feeling. I also cited actual events that had occurred.

When a lack of money was about to delay matters, funds would suddenly arrive—for example, someone would ask me to provide technical services. I mentioned this to Xiuming in order to free her from the worry that “human life does not reach a hundred years, yet people are always concerned about a thousand years hence.” What I have said above concerns matters of daily life. Matters at a practice center are the same. [This must not be taken as a model.

Mr. Bai of Hebi once held a seven-day retreat in the large cave where Brother E lives, and now plans to hold another one. Xiuming also plans to go. I advised Xiuming to cut her long hair short, dress entirely in men's clothes, and go honestly to undertake the seven-day retreat looking like a tomboy. [Summer is truly not suitable for a seven-day retreat.] Brother E, Bai, and Wei will practice in the same place, which will also make it easier to care for one another.

Xiuming also wishes to ask about the rules for a seven-day retreat, the altar setting, and related matters. May the Venerable Master offer instruction. [The ritual rules and altar setting may be elaborate or simple. In short, if one has plenty of money, one may make many offerings; if one has little money, it is also acceptable not to make offerings. But one must be utterly resolute, like one who is already dead,

before one can accord with the practice. If emotional attachments and views are not forgotten, and household affairs continue to weigh on one's mind, then even if one sits in meditation all day, there will be no result.

After getting off the cushion, one must neither talk nor doze, but should circumambulate the Buddha in walking meditation. It is best if someone gives Dharma instruction, pointing out the crucial key to awakening and the essential points for further progress after awakening.] [Set out for Qingdao at once; do not write again.]

Disciple Zhiming bows in reverence

June 23, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] Does “arrogant and conceited” refer to a certain Dharma brother? How should it be corrected? Please offer instruction, Teacher.

[LVM] I suggest concealing the surnames in the letter and using Brother A and Brother B instead. As for how to correct it, that cannot be discussed at present, because a necessary prerequisite is lacking. This indispensable prerequisite is that he himself resolve to correct it. Do you see that prerequisite now?

[Yongshou Tongzi] “If emotional attachments and views are not forgotten, and household affairs continue to weigh on one's mind, then even if one sits in meditation all day, there will be no result.” Alas!

[LVM] This refers to undertaking a seven-day retreat. In ancient times, when people undertook a seven-day Chan retreat, they requested leave for life and death—that is, they informed their teacher that, in entering the retreat, they would risk death itself in order to resolve this great matter. Without such unyielding perseverance, and without undergoing several rounds of dying and coming back to life, how could this be easily attained? Nowadays, one often hears people complain that this hurts or that itches and then ask for some blessing or another. If that is the case, it would be better to make the Pure Land one's ultimate destination as early as possible.

Letter 101

Letter 101

Respectful prostrations to the Venerable Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

My previous letter had just been sent when, at this afternoon's regular meeting of the Hebi Mind-Seal fellow practitioners, we again discussed the matter of the Elder coming to Hebi. During our last trip to Nanjing, we learned that the Elder was busy proofreading. Has the proofreading been completed? In Nanjing, the Elder mentioned going to Qingdao to escape the summer heat; we do not know whether this trip can be made. If he does not go to Qingdao, the disciples in Hebi still hope that the Venerable Master will come to Hebi. Please indicate this clearly in your reply.

After receiving your letter, we can send someone to Shanghai to receive you. Recently, Fellow Practitioners A and B in Xi'an, as well as Person C in Hainan, have all telephoned to ask whether they may come to Hebi for a seven-day retreat. We have welcomed them and have made preparations to support them. In addition, Person A said that, if conditions ripen, he will resign from his work and devote himself wholeheartedly to practice. We respectfully request the Venerable Master's instructions.

[Greetings to all fellow practitioners! On July 1, I went to Qingdao. The climate there was cool and quite suitable for spending the summer, but there were many people and much business, and I could not attend to everyone. So I hurriedly returned to Shanghai on the 22nd. Although Shanghai is rather hot, air conditioning has been installed, and since no one knew that I had returned to Shanghai, it has been comfortable and quiet after all.

My physical condition is indeed poor now, and I urgently need quiet rest, so I will not be coming to Hebi. Person A's wish to leave home is merely an impulse of the moment; there is no need to concern yourselves about him. As for their wish to undertake a seven-day retreat, the weather is very hot now, so this is not the right time. We can discuss it again in winter. At present, a certain master in Hanzhong has established a Mind-Seal practice center that can accommodate forty or fifty people. It is closer for them to go there—except for those from Hainan.]

Disciples: Zhiming and others, with prostrations

June 25, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] In the Dharma-ending age, leaving home to practice also has its difficulties. If one leaves home on an impulse, I fear the difficulties will be even greater.

[LVM] Oh! The Elder spoke according to the person; he was not making a blanket statement. Have you heard of Lay Practitioner Erbao? In the future, we must take care not to discuss the merits or drawbacks of leaving home, much less evaluate

monastic teachers. When matters of this kind arise, put “I pay homage to the Saṅgha” first, and there will be no problem.

The 102nd Letter

The 102nd Letter

With reverence, I prostrate before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

Last year, Mr. Fu went to Shanghai with companions and personally received empowerment from the Master. His understanding and views are sound, and he practices earnestly; as a result, his wife, Ms. Yuan, has also aroused the aspiration for the Way. After practicing the “Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara Practice” for some time, Yuan requested to receive the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. On the third day of the sixth lunar month, the birthday of Wei Tuo Bodhisattva, this disciple conferred empowerment and transmitted the Dharma to her on the Master’s behalf.

She requested a Dharma name, and this disciple bestowed upon her, on the Master’s behalf, the two characters “Xinming” [Mind Illumination]. In names bestowed by the Master, the final character is ming (“illumination”); when accepting disciples on the Master’s behalf, the first character is xin (“mind”). Those named “X-ming” and “Xin-X” are all disciples of the Master and Dharma siblings to one another. Therefore, this disciple bestowed the name “Xinming” on the first person on the Master’s behalf.

Mr. Fu still has no Dharma name. He once wrote to request one from the Venerable Master but did not receive one, so I bestowed on him the name “Mingxin” [Illuminated Mind]. Thus, the husband and wife are named “Mingxin” and “Xinming,” respectively. I do not know whether this is appropriate. A name is merely a designation; any name will do. Why be so particular about it?

Do you not see the saying, “Idle names have always filled the five lakes”? The recording was transferred by Dharma Brother Li from Xi’an. The mantra you recite is not entirely the same as the one written by Master Xu, so I ask the Venerable Master to write out the complete procedure. This disciple should make every possible effort to remain consistent with the Venerable Master. The mantra written by Master Xu was also transmitted by me; there can be no difference.

On the nineteenth day of the sixth month—that is, tomorrow—four more people will receive the Dharma. Their names are omitted. May all go smoothly for you! Director

Zhang of the Hebi Municipal Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee has entrusted us with preparing to establish a Buddhist Association for the city.

His intention is, first, that the spirit of relevant state policies should be conveyed to Buddhists through the Buddhist Association; and second, that the Association should handle certain external affairs. We consider this a favorable condition through which to promote heart esotericism, and so we did not decline.

[What does this mean? Organizing a Buddhist Association to serve the public is an obligation that Buddhists should fulfill. Why say that you did not decline because it could promote heart esotericism? Would you decline if heart esotericism were not being promoted? And why speak of "using" it?] We propose inviting you to accept a title—"Teaching Acharya" of the Hebi Buddhist Association. This would not affect your ordinary activities and would impose no obligations whatsoever.

A Buddhist Association is a lay organization of Buddhist believers, not a place for practicing a Dharma. Why would it need a "Teaching Acharya"? This title makes no sense. While the Venerable Master's physical health is indeed poor, Hebi would be an ideal place for a quiet stay. It is well suited for rest, and we guarantee that you would not be disturbed. If you remain in Shanghai for long, people will inevitably learn of it. If the Master would not decline to come to Hebi, we will immediately go to Shanghai to receive you. My health is currently poor, and I cannot travel far.

Your disciple, Zhiming, prostrates.

July 26, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] Ha ha. Although a Buddhist Association is not a place for spiritual practice, it is a place to train the mind and serve the public. Is there not some contradiction in what the Guru has said?

[LVM] There is no contradiction at all. You are a teacher, so let me offer an analogy: the Ministry of Education is not a place where one studies school subjects, but a place that guides and administers schools.

The One Hundred and Third Letter

Letter 103

With reverence, I prostrate before the Venerable Master:

I prostrate before the Buddha, prostrate before the Dharma, and prostrate before the Saṅgha.

What Master Xu wrote differs somewhat from what you chanted on the recording—not only in pronunciation. I again ask the Venerable Master to write out the complete ritual procedure. [Do not trouble yourself further; simply follow what I have said. After I transmitted this ritual procedure to Master Xu, I fear that he may not have become fully familiar with it, and thus there are slight discrepancies. There is no need to dwell on this.]

The statement that Hebi has "flourishing non-Buddhist paths and declining Buddhadharma" reflects the present reality. To counteract this poison, as The Buddha-Heart Sutra says: "Only the Tathāgata's Heart-of-Heart can reach it; nothing else can."

If we cannot propagate heart esotericism and merely obtain the name of a Buddhist Association, then, if we are unable to transform matters further, what benefit is there in doing it? In letting go of worldly names and appearances, this disciple has worked hard until now and has only slightly attained accord between principle and phenomena.

If we plunge headlong into a Buddhist Association that has a name but no substance, becoming entangled among lay practitioners who likewise have a name but no substance, and busy ourselves "coordinating" for the sake of their illusory reputations and petty gains, how would that compare with creating the conditions for dedicated practice, transforming this physical body, and, after attaining "the three kāyas and four wisdoms, the five eyes and six supernormal powers," then transforming them? At present, the district Buddhist Association can be established because it is led mainly by fellow practitioners of heart esotericism; therefore, it can be undertaken.

The Venerable Master asked me, "Do you mean that unless you can propagate heart esotericism, you intend to decline and not do it?" That is indeed what I had in mind. If I am mistaken, I will correct my thinking. [To propagate the Buddhadharma, respond to capacities and accord with conditions. In transmitting the teaching, one must not be confined to a single pattern. So long as it is Buddhadharma, it may be undertaken.]

If you truly wish to realize the three kāyas and four wisdoms, you must temper yourself amid every circumstance. Only then can you advance from fundamental wisdom to differentiated wisdom. This cannot be realized by rigidly clinging to one place or one dharma.

This disciple and others have drafted a Preliminary Proposal for Establishing the Hebi District Buddhist Association, which has been written up and submitted to Director Zhang of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. It includes provisions respectfully inviting you to serve as "Acharya for Transmitting the Teachings" and inviting Mr.

Song as an “Advisor.” Director Zhang knows you and Dharma Brother Song. He has visited Jingju Temple and spoken with a certain master there.

He said that he had read Buddhist books and remembered Dharma Brother Song’s articles.

There are various titles that may be established within the Buddhist Association, and state agencies do not interfere much. If the title “Acharya for Transmitting the Teachings” is unacceptable, could we respectfully invite you to serve as “Honorary President”? What do you think? Especially while the Venerable Master’s physical health is not good, you should not remain in Shanghai. There would indeed be fewer disturbances in Hebi, and we can guarantee this.

Purchase a sleeper ticket in Shanghai and get off directly at Tangyin. Take a taxi from No. 26 Weinan Road to Shanghai Railway Station, then arrange a private car from Tangyin Station to the residence in Hebi. Would it be possible for you to come to Hebi to recuperate in this way? [You truly wish me to come to Hebi, and your sincerity is deeply moving. But I genuinely cannot make the trip, and therefore I have declined repeatedly. When my health improves, we can discuss it again. If you insist that I serve as an “Honorary President,” I can only bow my head and accept.]

This disciple, Zhiming, and the others prostrate in reverence.

August 5, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] In what circumstances does “going deeply into a single Dharma gate” and “not being confined to a single dharma” apply?

[LVM] Here the Elder means that all dharmas are equal. One must accord with sentient beings’ capacities and must not rigidly cling to a single dharma without considering their capacities.

The 104th Letter

Letter 104

Respectful prostrations to the revered Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, pay homage to the Dharma, and pay homage to the Saṅgha.

We were filled with Dharma joy when the revered Master agreed to serve as honorary president. Senior Brother Song also agreed to serve as adviser and proposed establishing a “Heart Esotericism Research Center.” We shall do our utmost to bring this about.

We ask Senior Brother Song to preside over this “center,” and respectfully invite you to serve as its “teaching acharya.” We hope the revered Master will graciously not decline. [If you establish a Buddhist association to promote the Buddhadharma, and work in unity and mutual cooperation with the various schools, advancing together, that is the true purpose of revitalizing the sacred teaching and liberating sentient beings.

By all means, do not divide into separate factions by establishing some Heart Esotericism Research Center, thereby parting ways with other schools and giving rise to disputes. It would be a great blessing if you avoided such divisions.] After reading the revered Master’s letter of instruction on “not being confined to a single pattern,” a certain state of mind has arisen again. This state of mind has appeared many times before.

Whenever I receive the revered Master’s instruction, I always experience a kind of “delay”—at the time, I cannot understand it immediately, and must wait until later before I can comprehend it fully.

As I reread the revered Master’s previous letters of instruction (which I have gradually bound into six volumes), I now understand the earlier teachings completely. Yet at the time, the state of mind described above also arose, and I did not thoroughly understand; in my replies, I said things entirely beside the point. Now, when I read the revered Master’s teachings, they seem to well forth from my own mind; when I read my replies, they seem utterly laughable.

For example, the revered Master once cited: “How laughable that in former years I painted by a model; now red, now black, again and again. Today, having taken leave of my master, I return home in old age—why care whether I gained anything in those years?” Yet I replied at the time with another four-line verse wholly beside the point, claiming that I “understood completely” the four lines cited by the revered Master. Was that not childish and laughable? Now, when I reread the four lines cited by the revered Master, they seem to well forth from my own mind.

Had I been able to do so then, how many needless detours I might have avoided. This state of mind has arisen again; that is to say, there will again be a delay. Why must there again be a delay? Perhaps because I am too strongly attached to “exclusive practice” and to the idea that “only by transforming the physical body does one gain the power to propagate the Dharma.” Perhaps, too, my understanding of “liberating sentient beings” and “propagating the Dharma” is biased.

It is probably because I place too much weight on “the unchanging” and too little on “adapting to conditions.” [It is gratifying and commendable that you can review the old and thereby learn the new, progressing upward. Only when students are open-

minded, accept instruction, neither self-satisfied nor arrogant toward others, can they benefit.

To transform the physical body, one must at all times let the mind be empty and non-abiding, pass through non-contrivance without abiding in non-contrivance, and advance beyond the dharmakāya. Only then can transformation occur; it cannot be obtained through seeking.

To open to the original is only to reach the side of the dharmakāya. One must diligently temper oneself amid all circumstances, wearing away old habitual tendencies; one must not rejoice in favorable circumstances or grieve in adverse ones, and be wholly free of feelings of attachment and aversion. Only then does one enter the proper position of the dharmakāya. One must further advance beyond this, until even the absence of attachment and aversion is unobtainable. No Buddha, no sentient beings; even no-thingness itself is unobtainable—only then does one advance beyond the dharmakāya.

At that time, without seeking to transform the physical body, the physical body transforms of itself. Such practice cannot be attained merely by sitting in meditation; it must be developed through activity and through liberating sentient beings. I hope you will conduct yourself well.] As for the empowerment ritual procedure, I shall not trouble you further.

Indeed, it is not only as I mentioned in my previous letter: even during the revered Master's empowerment, I still do not know into what mantra those continuous and powerful "hum, hum" were elevated. Senior Brothers Guo and Wang plan to leave for Shanghai next Wednesday, so that they may arrive in time for the sacred birthday of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva on the thirteenth and receive the Master's empowerment on that auspicious day. On hearing this, Mr. Yuan also wishes to go.

By the time the three of them arrive in Shanghai, this letter may also have arrived. I have asked them to request instruction in the method of forming the "Eight Mudrās of Wish-Fulfillment." If they perform it in accordance with the Dharma, the revered Master may transmit it to them; if not, I shall request it when I meet the revered Master in person. [Why do Guo and Wang not request empowerment from you locally, but instead come to Shanghai? This is all due to attachment to appearances. Sentient beings' attachment to appearances may indeed be called profound. How lamentable!] Respectfully I ask the revered Master: Are your illnesses and troubles few? Are you at ease? Is it easy to liberate sentient beings and for them to be liberated? May this not cause the revered Master fatigue!

Your disciple, Zhiming, bows in homage

August 13, 1994

[Yongshou Tongzi] Teacher, I too want to be “open-minded, accept instruction, neither self-satisfied nor arrogant toward others”! I too want to benefit!

[LVM] Ha ha! Other than yourself, who could prevent you from doing that? In fact, it is not only you: everyone obstructs themselves. The six great hindrances—greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and wrong views—are all within one’s own mind. Many people seek to eliminate karmic obstacles, yet do not begin with their own minds. Does that not mean that the more they seek, the farther away they get?

The One Hundred and Fifth Letter

Letter 105

Revered Elder Master, in your compassion:

Yesterday, this humble disciple wrote a letter seeking your instruction. At present, I am truly troubled and confused. Therefore, this morning I came to the temple to seek divination from the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. My mind is vexed, and I do not wish to remain here, yet I cannot decide where to go; thoughts of gain and loss are always on my mind. The divination said that in August I may set out for Bailin Temple or the Northeast. But after going, obstacles in my relations with others will make things unfavorable.

It also said that the prospects for future practice are only ordinary, whereas returning to lay life would be advantageous. There is an affinity for this, and it will occur seven years hence. Not long after I left home last year, I met a certain teacher who said that I “might break the precepts.” These words occasionally arise in my mind, and I suppose he must have had some reason for saying them. At the time, this foolish disciple said that I would rather return to lay life than break the precepts.

All this seems to indicate that the outlook is indeed unfavorable, so my foremost wish is not to break the precepts and fall into evil retribution. To realize one’s original nature and transcend birth and death is not something that can be accomplished merely by wishing for it. I beg the Venerable Master to compassionately guide this humble disciple, so that I may ultimately fulfill my aspiration. At present I am confused; my practice cannot advance, and my mind cannot settle. Alas, how difficult practice is! Bad habits are hard to eradicate.

[Zhijun: Do not pass this letter on to so-and-so. I have already replied to him in another letter. Since his worldly passions are stirring and he is thinking of returning to lay life and going elsewhere, there is no benefit in reluctantly trying to keep him. Let him be free to stay or leave.

Studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way are by no means trivial matters; only a magnanimous and resolute person can undertake them. How could a person of limited capacity bear such a responsibility? So-and-so's ordinary mind has not yet died away. Without undergoing great hardship, how can he awaken? This departure will not only fail to go as he wishes, but will also bring him the sufferings of instability and hardship. Such are the consequences that deluded people bring upon themselves! How lamentable!] [What you fear is that, when people leave, the temple will be empty.

That is of no consequence. Do you not have several capable people? Simply send one person to reside at the temple. Moreover, in propagating the Dharma, when there is affinity, one guides sentient beings; when there is no affinity, one attends to one's own liberation. It does not depend on whether Buddhist activities flourish or not. Why brood over this? When Buddhist disciples with affinity come to take refuge, I will introduce them to you to reside at the temple. Very well—put everything down and let so-and-so be free to stay or leave. He simply lacks the good fortune to benefit from being here.]

So-and-so joins palms and bows in homage

Second day of the seventh lunar month, 1994

[Young Disciple Yongshou] Looking back on those days, I do not know how many times my habitual tendencies flared up. I too was like this—so pitiable. More than one Dharma brother has lamented: "Helplessly, the flowers fall away."

[LVM] One premise must be observed: before publishing another person's letters, you must obtain that person's consent. Do not rashly infringe upon another's right to privacy! It was already inappropriate to post them in the Inner Court. If the manuscripts are to be compiled, all letters written by other people must be deleted!

The One Hundred and Sixth Letter

The 106th Letter

Reverently paying homage to the Venerable Master:

I pay homage to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

Master So-and-so has settled down again and will not leave. He has now come to the city to attend to the formalities for Jingju Temple and is staying at my home. The temple's old buildings could not withstand the rainy season and have begun leaking everywhere. Repairs are now under way, but it is too late to mend the fold after the sheep are lost. The cave where Fellow Disciple Huang was staying was far too damp,

so he has moved back to the temple, where there are still places that do not leak and where he can sleep.

Once the buildings are repaired, these problems will no longer exist. Fellow Disciples Guo, Wang, and Yuan returned to He and spoke of the Venerable Master's raising the koan of Yantou's refusal to approve of Deshan. The Venerable Master had also mentioned this koan in a letter before. At that time, this disciple did not know the circumstances of the koan, and my reply was utterly confused.

I have now found this koan again in Records Pointing to the Moon, under the entry for "Chan Master Yantou Quan#," and have copied it into this letter, adding a few brief comments to supplement my earlier remarks: Xuefeng was serving as head cook under Deshan. One day, when the meal was late, Deshan carried his bowl down from the Dharma Hall.

As Xuefeng was airing the rice cloth, he saw Deshan and said, "The bell has not rung and the drum has not sounded. Where are you going with your bowl?" Deshan then returned to the abbot's quarters. Xuefeng reported this to his master. Do not seek any "final phrase" here! The master said, "That great Deshan has not yet understood the final phrase." — "There is no silver buried here." The stolen goods have already been exposed. Another saying goes: "Beating the grass startles the snake."

The final phrase is not for you to understand. When Deshan heard of this, he had his attendant summon the master and asked, "You do not approve of this old monk, do you?" — "A'er next door has never stolen anything." Another saying goes: "The stolen goods have already appeared." Do not speak recklessly. "Does the master still have this in him?" — This old fellow is rather clever after all.

Another saying goes: "Helping a thief dispose of stolen goods!" Another saying goes: "To know one's error and correct it—no virtue is greater." The master privately revealed its meaning to him, and Deshan then let the matter rest. The next day, when he ascended the seat, he was indeed unlike his usual self. — If even a single thread remains hanging, it cannot be called liberation. When that single thread suddenly breaks, one is no longer the same. Another saying goes: "All sages are distinguished by means of the unconditioned dharma."

When the master reached the front of the monks' hall, he clapped his hands and laughed loudly: "How fortunate that the old fellow at the head of the hall understands the final phrase. Thereafter, no one in the world will be able to do anything to him. Even so, he will live only three more years." Deshan indeed passed away three years later. Dahui of Jing Mountain composed this verse: "With one strike of the poison drum, all who hear it perish; those within it know nothing at all. An eighty-year-old man enters the examination hall—this truly is no child's play."

A disciple need not be inferior to his master; it is not that the disciple is inferior to the master, but that the master is inferior to the disciple. Another saying goes: “A dragon gives birth to a dragon, a phoenix gives birth to a phoenix, and when mice are born, they know how to dig holes.” Yantou’s method of luring people into a trap was precisely what he had learned from Deshan; now he returned it to his teacher, and it proved quite effective. Dahui’s added comment has the marvelous effect of putting the finishing touch on a painted dragon.

This disciple, too, was once “among them and wholly unaware”! Though the explanation is ingenious, box and lid do not fit. Though heavenly flowers rain down in profusion, it still does not accord with the patriarchs’ intent. When the master privately revealed its meaning, what meaning did he ultimately reveal? Give one sentence in answer to the question. Koans were originally meant to select outstanding persons—how could they permit children’s play? Only by responding beyond words to the occasion at hand can one be fit to dispense the treasure of the Dharma at will.

Guo So-and-so had long ago received remote empowerment from Master Xu. Wang So-and-so also received remote empowerment from Master Xu not long ago. Yuan So-and-so was accepted as a disciple by this disciple on the Master’s behalf; his Dharma name is “Xinming.” The three of them were eager to see the Venerable Master, and so made the journey to Shanghai.

Your disciple, Zhiming, bows in homage

August 22, 1994

Yongshou Tongzi If there is some secret meaning to reveal, why speak of a final phrase at all? One has already fallen into what precedes the final phrase. Is that not so, Teacher?

LVM Do not seek any “final phrase” here! The stolen goods have already been exposed. The final phrase is not for you to understand. Do not speak

recklessly. By all means avoid expounding doctrine here! “When the master privately revealed its meaning, what meaning did he ultimately reveal?”—“Do not ask Zeng Shen about Zeng Xi; filial sons have always avoided uttering their fathers’ names.”

Appendix I: Master Yuanyin’s Teachings on the Six Essential Points of Practice

Appendix I: The Elder Master's Instructions: “Six Essential Points of Practice”

First: Let go of everything and practice with utter resolve. What use is there in clinging to worldly things and being unable to let them go? All things in this world arise through causes and conditions; they have no substantial reality. Like clouds and smoke passing before the eyes, they are empty and unreal: they cannot be obtained or taken away.

Even your own bodies are only provisionally existent; they cannot be retained and are unobtainable. One can readily understand, then, what is true of things outside the body. Thus, taking things to be real and clinging tightly to them is foolishness not worthy of a discerning person's smile. Studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way is the work of great wisdom for great persons, not something that those of limited capacity and wisdom can undertake.

To realize the Way, one must first see through everything. Only by sitting in meditation with utter resolve can one enter samādhi and awaken. If, while sitting, you think this and think that, with deluded thoughts flying about in confusion, then all is lost. You must let go of everything and be like a dead person.

Second: In sitting meditation and mantra recitation, let the mind recite and the ears listen. This is the essential instruction for cultivating heart esotericism, and it is of great importance for entering samādhi and awakening. Therefore, I repeatedly remind you all to put it into practice without the slightest compromise. People are accustomed to stirring deluded thoughts. Unless you listen single-mindedly to the inner sound of mantra recitation and gather in the mind faculty, deluded thoughts cannot cease. If deluded thoughts do not cease, how can one enter samādhi or awaken? Therefore, the mind must recite and the ears must listen: recite each word from the mind, and hear it distinctly with the ears. Only then can you gather in the mind faculty, prevent deluded thoughts from arising, and gradually enter samādhi.

Third: The moment a thought arises, be aware of it; neither suppress nor follow it. When a thought comes, you must be able to see it. If you cannot see it, you will follow it along. Once you follow thoughts, deluded thoughts will fly about in profusion, and you will be unable to enter samādhi. Therefore, the moment a thought arises, be aware of it. Neither wander after it nor suppress it and make it not arise. Simply disregard it, bring forth right mindfulness, and recite the mantra one-pointedly. Deluded thoughts will naturally dissolve, and you will peacefully enter samādhi.

Fourth: Sit at regular times, neither hurriedly nor sluggishly. Sit in meditation at regular times each day. Once this becomes a habit, it will be easier to enter samādhi. It is best to meditate in the morning, and better still at dawn. When sitting, do not be impatient to enter samādhi. Calmly take your seat with ordinary mind, and recite the mantra composedly, neither hurriedly nor sluggishly. Do not seek to enter samādhi

or awaken, much less vainly seek spiritual powers. A single thought of seeking samādhi, awakening, or the manifestation of spiritual powers is itself a deluded mind. Once this mind arises, it obstructs the gate to one's own awakening. Not only will one fail to awaken, but one will also be unable to enter samādhi.

Fifth: After rising from meditation, maintain continuous and seamless contemplation. Extend the settled practice of meditation into the activities of daily life. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, quietly apply it for yourself. Maintain continuous and seamless contemplation, abiding nowhere: neither let circumstances pull you along nor wander after deluded thoughts.

Sixth: Have a vast mind-capacity and accommodate everything. A practitioner of the Way must not have a narrow mind-capacity, but should be magnanimous and accommodate everything. Even if others treat me poorly, I should treat them still better, without the slightest notions of attachment or aversion, delight or dislike. According to circumstances and one's means, perform every good deed. At all times and in all places, be untroubled and at ease, without a mind of gain and loss or thoughts of praise and blame, success and failure. This is the greatest spiritual power.

Remember these six points and cultivate accordingly. You will certainly uncover your original nature and directly realize Buddha-nature. Fulfill these six points without the slightest slackening, and you are assured of fully realizing bodhi and attaining great accomplishment.

Appendix Two: The Second Patriarch’s Own Method of Practice

Appendix II: The Second Patriarch’s Own Method of Practice

Question: How did you yourself apply yourself in practice throughout your life?

Answer: This differs according to one’s causes and conditions; at first, I myself did not know. From childhood I received my family’s instruction and applied myself to the two words “equanimity.” My late father, Mr. Xinfu, left office because he upheld what was right; my late mother, Madam Jiang, was compassionate and gentle in her dealings with others. Thus, from childhood I had some understanding of the principle that poverty and wealth, high and low, are nondual, though I did not know that this secretly accorded with the Buddhadharma. Later, although I passed through all walks of life, I ultimately felt that none of them was ultimate.

When I later encountered my refuge master, Venerable Xiaguang, I began to study Buddhism with deep earnestness, anxiously fearing that I would not have time

enough. Although I had not yet realized the mind-ground, I already knew that I could not confine myself to a single school. Then, while attending upon Acharya Dayu and receiving the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, I first understood the essential teaching of the original mind-ground.

In the winter of the nineteenth year (1930), I abandoned the method of seated meditation and devoted myself to tempering myself through human affairs. In recent years, I have responded to circumstances as they arise, seeking neither achievement nor profit; my capacity for emptiness has simply advanced day by day. I often advise practitioners: to understand the root, investigate the essential point of mind; to eliminate habitual tendencies, temper yourself through human affairs.

The source of strength throughout my life came from a single saying of my teacher Dayu: “When empty, one naturally settles.” I then realized that the practice of emptiness lies in applying oneself to the four “do nots” in the Analects: Do not fear habitual tendencies; fear only failing to recognize the original nature. Do not fear māras; fear only failing to be aware yourself. Do not fear that practice and realization are incomplete; fear only being unwilling to wait. Do not fear that nonduality is difficult to enter; fear only that the mind lacks equanimity.”

Let the mind always be empty, the vital energy always be even, and the intent always be light. The five faculties and five powers are wholly assumed where no effort is applied, and accomplished where there is no doubt. Those willing to abide in empty, quiescent illumination are not far from Buddhahood; if even the method of empty, quiescent illumination is emptied, that is Buddhahood itself. Such practice depends wholly upon burying one’s head and working diligently for oneself; it cannot be seen by others. Therefore, do not seek others’ understanding, nor recklessly speculate about others, saying, “This person has awakened; that person has fallen into māra.” Is this not tantamount to proclaiming that one has oneself awakened and not fallen into māra? Those who understand will often laugh at it.”

Appendix Three: The Second Patriarch’s Teaching, Methods for Eliminating Habitual Tendencies

Appendix Three: Teachings of the Second Patriarch: Methods for Eliminating Habitual Tendencies

Question: Practitioners fear habitual tendencies most of all. Not knowing how to apply themselves in practice, how can they eliminate them?

Answer: Practice is undertaken precisely to eliminate habitual tendencies. Apart from eliminating them, there is no practice to undertake. You need only hold firmly to this one point: as things are right now, when the mind encounters circumstances,

can you stand firm at the root? If external circumstances are strong, what becomes of my strength of emptiness? What are all worldly dharmas originally like? In their very presence, both sides are empty. Habitual tendencies should be transformed away, not suppressed; shifted, not retained; rendered powerless, not set aside. Like ice in the spring sun, they melt away completely. For habitual tendencies are a force: when that force is directed there, it cannot reach here.

Eliminating habitual tendencies always comes after realizing the mind. If the mind has not been realized, one does not see one's own habitual tendencies and has nowhere to begin. After realizing the mind, one need only cultivate diligently without slackening; they will naturally disappear without one noticing. It is like a wheel turning left and right: what goes down here rises there. One does not know when one's strength has increased, nor when one's habitual tendencies have disappeared.

Worldly people are inverted: accustomed to confusion, they make confusion itself into a habit, like debts accumulating unnoticed. Practitioners delight in purity, yet this delight is itself a habit. Habit is added to habit, and thus the two views of movement and stillness are firmly grasped and not relinquished; this too becomes a habit, like debts accumulating without repayment. In short, the Buddha is defined by ultimate awakening. As soon as the mind gives rise to a thought, whether good or evil, it is deluded. Yet people cannot be without thoughts. Whether good or evil, a thought is deluded when one is unaware of it. With awareness, even evil can be turned into good and then into emptiness; without awareness, even good enters into discriminative comparison and turns into evil.

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

Answer: Habitual tendencies are accumulations formed in daily life that arise naturally and without awareness. When a habit first forms, it too proceeds from effort to naturalness, from unfamiliarity to familiarity; once it becomes familiar without one's noticing, it becomes a habit. Moreover, it is not formed by only one habit: many other habitual tendencies and causes and conditions converge to assist and bring about its formation, and their operation further hastens it.

Take theft, for example. It is not merely the single habit of stealing; the desire for gain, boldness, competitiveness, and vengefulness all converge through conditions and help it become ingrained.

When one now reforms and eliminates it, there are likewise various favorable conditions and good habits to assist. In refraining from killing, for instance, the wish for merit and virtue, fear of karmic cause and effect, concern for one's reputation, and the inclination toward goodness all converge through conditions and assist its maturation.

Therefore, after realizing the mind, the root has already been clarified, and supportive strength increases day by day. If habitual tendencies are not easily eliminated, it is because the seeds of other habitual tendencies are both mixed and numerous, thereby increasing the resistance.

Here we should examine carefully: it is not that the primary habitual tendency is difficult to eliminate, but that the supporting force of other habitual tendencies has not been removed, and this is what makes it seem difficult. For example, if we suddenly develop doubt and fear regarding the Dharma, knowing it clearly yet not daring to decide, this habitual tendency arises because other tendencies—the dualistic view of good and evil—lie latent within, while the old habit of lacking equanimity lies hidden behind them, sufficient to reinforce our present timidity.

Examine still more closely: what are called old habitual tendencies—the desire for quick results, concern with gain and loss, fear of being deceived, and fear of hindering one's diligent practice—all arise together without awareness. In short, they arise solely from the view of self. This is precisely what people are least willing to give away, least willing to let go of, and yet what they now wish to investigate.

If, at such a time, one can be like a fragrant elephant crossing a river, cutting off all currents and remaining unbound by any dharma, who is that? Therefore, after awakening there are only two ways to apply the mind. First, investigate the cause within the cause and the habit within the habit, leaving not the slightest room for human sentiment. Endure it in emptiness and break through it with emptiness. Without self, doubt is shattered; without duality, there is equanimity. This is the necessary method of counteraction.

Second, let go in this way: do not establish further illusions. Knowing illusion, immediately depart from it. Have neither delight nor vexation, neither regret nor any further searching. Be immediately still and silent. This must be resolved decisively, without the slightest hesitation. Otherwise, one advances and retreats, now doubting and now deciding, wavering without resolution. One may call this a failure to have clarified the root, or one may call it regression.

Yet once the mind has been realized, there is no regression; there is only a halt in progress. Seeking quick results makes one slower; seeking greater clarity makes one more confused. At such a time there is only one method: rely on someone you trust —whether teacher or friend—to make the decision once again. This can restore one's course and, through a single turning, increase one's inner strength immeasurably.

If one even doubts one's teachers and friends, there is no need to continue applying oneself, for abandoning these two methods only produces more doubt the more one practices, and the more one clings without transformation. One may remain

there for one's entire life. Even so, there is still a glimmer of possibility: simply let go humbly of attachment, temporarily lay aside together one's view of doubting people and one's doubts about the Dharma, and investigate the original nature anew, asking oneself:

Even if this is so, does it ultimately obstruct the fundamental essence? Can one break through the marks of time? Have I truly entered nonduality and become capable of equanimity? If one stills the mind and investigates in this way, there will surely come another day of sudden openness and clarity. But if one continues to establish the view of self, the harm done to oneself is great and has nothing to do with others. Consider this: are not your timidity, competitiveness, and emotionally conditioned views concerning people and affairs creating your own obstruction? The Buddha said, "Turning back is the shore." This is precisely that shore.

A three-year-old child sees a ten-year-old older boy walking very quickly and sighs that he cannot match him. His strength is insufficient; how could he doubt that there is some other way of walking by which he could change this? This is the self-deception of the desire for quick results and competitiveness. What more need be said?

Regardless of time, place, gender, or nationality, people's mind and intrinsic nature are not two. Whether the teaching is Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, or Pure Land, awakening is one. Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land are methods used before awakening, all employed to regulate the mind. When the mind is gathered into one and one awakens and enters the original nature, none of the functions of any methods remains to be grasped. It is not that Chan awakening differs from Esoteric awakening, or that Esoteric awakening differs from Pure Land awakening. Only the teachings expounded and their points of departure differ; the skillful means by which teachers guide students of differing capacities also differ. Why, then, so much doubt?

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

Present habits are those acquired and imbibed in one's present life. Officials have an official air; merchants, a commercial air; children of wealthy families, an air of privilege; poor people, an air of poverty; practitioners, an air of merit and virtue; some women, a cosmetic air; soldiers, a martial air; country people, a rustic air; the elderly, an aged air; doctors, a medicinal air. All these are acquired in this present life.

Yet an official air accompanied by greed, a commercial air accompanied by wild abandon, an air of privilege accompanied by much suspicion and jealousy, or an air of poverty accompanied by loneliness and desolation—these are habitual influences

carried over from past lives. The method for eliminating habits lies solely in self-awareness. Know that bad habits are indeed habits, but good habits are also habits. To be able to eliminate good habits is called truly eliminating habits. Here there can be not the slightest politeness or human sentiment; the least trace of either is merely procrastination and lack of resolve. Habitual tendencies form one's most deeply entrenched disposition. Broadly speaking, there are six such dispositions, the most difficult of all habitual tendencies to eliminate:

First is narrow-mindedness, the most subtle and firmly rooted habitual tendency within greed. Narrowness concerning wealth is still relatively easy to remedy, but narrowness concerning learning is especially difficult. From it arise jealousy, competitiveness, anger, and suspicion of others, all following upon discriminative comparison. The unwillingness to assume responsibility also has its root in the habit of narrow-mindedness.

Second is timidity. When one's mind-capacity is small, one's courage is also small. The mind that clings to rules, the narrow mind, the restricted mind, the suspicious mind, and the shrinking mind all arise from discriminative comparison.

Third is contentment: not seeking to advance, regarding the attainment of one's hoped-for original mind as sufficient. This too arises from narrow-mindedness. Thus, those accustomed to goodness are unwilling to relinquish even the conditioned merit and virtue they have created. Though they clearly know that becoming a Buddha is the greatest undertaking, they have no intention of seeking it. One may be content with wealth, but in this matter there is no such thing as enough. How can one stop and fail to advance? If one takes it as sufficient, then arrogance, conservatism, and contempt for others all arise from discriminative comparison. Such people are called scorched sprouts and rotten seeds.

Fourth is senile dejection. The elderly need not necessarily be dejected, yet one may consider this life hopeless and, without noticing, become dispirited. Or one may have established an undertaking over the course of a lifetime through hardship and be unwilling to forget it. Thus thoughts of contentment, timidity, concern for reputation, and merit and virtue are never forgotten. Their root is ultimately narrow-mindedness, and one's blessings consequently grow thin. Such a condition is beyond remedy.

Fifth is preconceived opinion. One takes prior views as primary, holding them so firmly that they cannot be broken, and nothing else can enter. One considers this firmness of meditative stability, yet the mind of contentment and timidity again arise from narrow-mindedness.

Sixth is worldly views. Such people ordinarily think only of satisfying worldly needs for clothing, food, and shelter. On hearing of this Way, they may disdain to

investigate it, or fear others will ridicule them as old-fashioned and disrupt their livelihood, and so keep far away from it. Or they follow others in slandering it, considering this fashionable. Here too narrow-mindedness is the root, while fear of being deceived, arrogance, self-righteousness, doubt, and anger all arise from discriminative comparison.

Whether they have practiced or not, these six kinds of people cannot be set upon the path; they remain ever farther from realizing the mind. Even if they have realized the mind, unless the root affliction of narrow-mindedness is cut away decisively, there is absolutely no way to begin eliminating habitual tendencies. For merely obtaining a single willingness is already immensely difficult. In the end, they enter the path of the two vehicles. Therefore, the two words “giving” are difficult beyond difficulty: without relinquishing attachment and desire, one cannot become a bodhisattva;

without relinquishing the view of Buddha, one cannot become a Buddha. This is the highest of all Buddhist habitual tendencies. Even great virtuous masters are not free from it. If I were to urge this upon them, those who do not understand would surely curse me as a crazed, arrogant demon. What can be done?

Generally, those who are narrow-minded must first have something to which they cling, and the anxiety of gain is their underlying cause. Anxiety over gain naturally becomes anxiety over loss: before gaining, one worries about gaining; once gained, one worries about losing. But what exactly is the thing over which one worries? There must be an objective; this is the object of one’s mind.

When the object is grasped inwardly, it becomes a view; it becomes one’s mind and one’s dharma. If one can turn it around and empty it, the force of clinging relaxes. One is no longer deluded by it, does not waver, and naturally becomes more expansive. Thus, from small one becomes great. Through long practice, unfamiliarity becomes familiarity, difficulty becomes ease, and effort becomes naturalness. This is the essential formula for counteracting habitual tendencies.

Before Buddhist practitioners have realized the fundamental ground, their greatest taboo is to confuse worldly feelings and views with Buddhist principles. For realization of the true essence lies in transcending the world; if we gauge it by our feelings and views, the more we study, the more confused we become. Yet once one has gained some understanding of one’s original nature and wishes to eradicate habitual tendencies, the greatest taboo is to separate oneself from worldly dharmas. For apart from worldly dharmas, there are no circumstances in which to train. Among worldly Buddhists, many are plainly two different people inside and outside the Buddha hall. Because they are deeply attached to worldly concerns and place

great weight on clothing and food, practicing only intermittently, they will never have an opportunity to eliminate their habitual tendencies. This is to tilt eastward.

Then there are those who crave the pleasures of Chan and dislike worldly clamor. Either they fear worldly defilement or refuse to leave the Buddhadharma. Gradually, negative thoughts arise, attachment to self based on views of dharma grows heavier, and they forcibly suppress or evade their worldly habits. They do not realize that the roots lie within, and thus opportunities to eliminate habitual tendencies are few. Although they are superior to the former, this is to tilt westward.

These two kinds of people suffer from the same illness: both may be said to retain their habitual tendencies. Neither has aroused wondrous contemplation and entered nonduality. I deeply lament that their strength is not yet sufficient and that the fundamental wisdom of the eight consciousnesses has not yet been perfected. The former are pitiable and easy to save; the latter are regrettable and difficult to turn back. Though one may exhort them earnestly, they will not listen. How could their conditions be ripe? It is simply that the causes and conditions have not yet arrived.

The simplest and most direct method for eliminating habitual tendencies is, as stated above, to let go in this manner. This may be divided into several points:

1. Letting go means simply letting go; do not retain even the slightest attachment or reluctance to let go.

2. Do not cling to the thought that letting go now is right, while not having let go before was wrong. If remorse arises from this, you are again clinging to the marks of time, gain and loss, and the opposition of right and wrong. This must never be done.

Several years ago, I repeatedly cautioned students that they should be like one- or two-year-old children learning to walk. Without preoccupying their minds, they need only attend to it morning and evening; in due course, they will naturally be able to walk, jump, and run. At first, they do not forget how to take a step merely because they cannot yet jump. Why? Once the mind has been realized, it is never again lost. Since it is originally neither arising nor ceasing, one need only fear that the time has not yet come. Do not fret in vain or give rise to further doubt, thereby causing delay instead.

3. Just as you are letting go, matters and people may suddenly come to disturb you. Do not give rise to aversion. Continue to respond according to conditions and take up what must be done as before. Do not again oppose the two views of letting go and taking up, thereby increasing views of right and wrong. With the mind that lets go, take up affairs. Whether one lets go or does not let go does not concern the affairs themselves. Although I respond to everything, I do not allow success, failure,

gain, or loss to linger in my mind; my mind does not wander away. This is letting go. Thus it is the same in activity as in stillness; this is true letting go. The process may be illustrated by the following three examples:

(1) Before realizing the mind, one may speak of painfully eliminating habitual tendencies, but there is virtually no way to do so. Before the door is open, the things inside the house cannot ultimately be moved out; they can only be shifted about. This cannot be called elimination.

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

(3) After thorough awakening, there have been many instances of vivid realization, and one's strength has also increased. One need only fear a lack of constancy and effort. Know that once the door has opened, it can never close again; habitual tendencies will naturally disappear without trace. Things that once seemed utterly impossible to move, and that in this lifetime seemed beyond all hope, will unexpectedly become possible. But before the time has come, this cannot happen. The bitterness at this stage cannot be conveyed to others,

nor can one first inspire others' confidence in it. There is only one method: compare yourself with the past—compare the present with half a year ago, this year with last year, and the time after realization with the time before realization. Then you may gain verification and set your mind at ease. Yet this necessarily depends on the extent of your courage and capacity to take responsibility, and on whether your practice is diligent or lax, rigid or flexible, subtle or not. This lies with oneself; it is not the teacher's responsibility, nor is it the teacher's fault. For once one corner has been raised, it is not raised again.

Working to eliminate habitual tendencies is one's own affair, not another person's. Never weigh others against yourself and thereby mislead yourself. Realizing the fundamental ground is one matter; eliminating habitual tendencies is another. Nor should they be spoken of as one, so that because habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated, one concludes that the fundamental ground has not been realized. It is like an evil person who has already aroused the resolve to reform, repent, and turn toward goodness, though habitual tendencies still remain: that person can no longer be called evil. Again, consider this:

A person may be fond of gambling and already know to reform thoroughly, yet still not have forgotten the ways of gambling; one cannot again accuse that person of gambling. Or it is like arriving in an unfamiliar place: once the route is clear, one will

not lose the way; if one occasionally takes a wrong turn, this must not be regarded as not knowing the route.

As stated above, to eliminate habitual tendencies thoroughly, one must begin with worldly dharmas. Therefore, the study of Confucian learning cannot be neglected. The saying that “the Buddhadharma has no human sentiment” applies to oneself, not to others; it means eliminating one’s own faults, not abandoning moral obligations. If one fails to fulfill one’s human responsibilities and leaves the world to seek bodhi, one certainly cannot enter through the gate of the Sixth Patriarch.

Appendix Four: The Second Patriarch’s Teaching, “Verification of Practice on the Meditation Cushion”

Appendix IV: The Second Patriarch’s Instructions on “Verification of Practice on the Meditation Cushion”

While seated in meditation, there is originally nothing to verify. The moment one seeks verification, the mind is divided again. Whatever states may arise—favorable or adverse, visions of light or of Buddhas—all are illusory appearances. Never cling to them. At such times, remember: “Whatever has form is illusory” (this thought, too, is illusory; but when it is useful, there is no need to insist on its being illusory). Do not delight in such states and welcome them, nor dislike them and drive them away. The wonder lies in the two words “do not attend to.” Simply by not attending to them, one gains practical benefit; one no longer wanders, and this itself is verification.

Those who cultivate visualizations in Japanese or Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism originally use a single visualization to dispel the myriad thoughts. Accomplishing the visualization is only the first step in gathering the mind into unity; one must never mistakenly cling to it as true. It is like a body covered with sores and ulcerated all around: through the power of medicine, they contract into a single boil, concentrating the poison in one place. Its foul poison is precisely nondual. One must neither cling to it nor abandon it, but eradicate it at the root; only then is there true purity.

Practitioners in recent times often rejoice when their visualizations are accomplished and then become arrogantly self-important. Some even take seeing a moon disc as realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. They do not know that this is merely an initial expedient, still far from the main point. If one recognizes it as illusory, one should promptly let it go and enter for oneself into the realm of pure emptiness.

What distinguishes the Heart-of-Heart Dharma from other teachings lies fundamentally in not grasping at appearances. Yet people cannot be without thoughts; to be without thoughts is to fall into annihilationist emptiness. Where there are thoughts, there cannot fail to be appearances. When one sits until scattered thoughts fly about and all kinds of fantasies appear before one's eyes, if one gives rise to the thought of disliking and cutting them off, that too is an appearance. One need only not attend to them. Not attending to them means letting them be; whether they come or go, do not concern yourself with them.

Not delighting in them and welcoming them is not grasping; not disliking them and driving them away is not abandoning them. Neither grasping nor abandoning is truly not grasping at appearances. Thus one knows that the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the unsurpassed dharma gate, supreme among teachings, which the Tathāgata taught for those of the highest vehicle. When, during meditation, one suddenly feels heat, cold, or the like in the body, these are changes in the circulation of blood and vital energy. Because each person's physical constitution differs, such states are inevitable in the transition from movement to stillness and are nothing strange. They are relatively beneficial rather than harmful, but they do not last; after a long time, they disappear. Do not delight in them or seek after them.

If, while seated in meditation, you feel oppressed and impatient, this is fundamental ignorance stirring within. You need only be composed, resolute, and enduring, and struggle against habitual tendencies. After hundreds or thousands of surges and descents, it is like a boat traveling on the sea: now wild winds and huge waves arise, now the waters are calm and smooth. The boat has no mind, and its master has no fear. Respond calmly, without the least confusion; be strong in resolve, lower your head, and endure. Before you know it, you will have reached the other shore. Only thus does one attain right samādhi. The frivolous and restless habits accumulated since beginningless time are thereby transformed. Thus, after sitting for a long time, one no longer feels oppressed; not feeling oppressed is verification of progress in samādhi.

When, during meditation, the mind is especially confused and disorderly, this too is verification of progress, for the seeds of ignorance are all rising up together. Treat them in the same way: do not attend to them; respond calmly and let them take their natural course. Likewise, when external circumstances are disruptive, or children are crying and making noise, if you remain unshaken in dealing with them, this is verification of progress in the power of samādhi. Therefore, those who cultivate great samādhi and great wisdom do not long for mountain forests or prefer quiet places; they train in the state in which movement and stillness are nondual. This is what those who turn the light inward and maintain awareness should contemplate.

After sitting for several hundred meditation sessions, one may instead feel that one's power of samādhi is far inferior to what it was before. This is verification of great progress. It is like someone first tasting spicy food: at first, the spiciness is unbearable, but after a long time one no longer notices it. When one no longer notices it, fearlessness has precisely been accomplished; therefore, this is verification.

When scattered thoughts arise in profusion during meditation, coming and going, arising and subsiding, this is verification that the clinging mind has weakened and its force has relaxed. It is also verification that one turns thoughts quickly, and that the power of awareness is strong. Sentient beings' accumulated habits are simply restlessness. If one can sit for two hours without feeling oppressed and can exercise self-control, this is verification of initial samādhi.

When samādhi is attained, the fingers naturally cease to ache. One continues reciting the mantra aloud without stopping, while seeing and hearing remain clear and ever-present. Although clear and ever-present, do not let them draw you away or carry you along with circumstances. This is samādhi. At times, one may seem to become dazed or fall asleep, yet the mouth continues reciting the mantra without pause and the hands remain in the mudrā without loosening. This is right samādhi, not drowsy sleep.

Sometimes one may sit for an hour before entering samādhi; sometimes one enters it in a few minutes; sometimes the mind is extremely vexed and agitated. All of these are equally signs of progress. There is no need to force distinctions of superiority or inferiority. Being able to let things take their natural course is precisely the power of right samādhi. Only after a long time does one pass from the empty state that is somewhat hazy and dim into clear, pure emptiness (that is, although no appearances are seen and no sounds are heard, everything is distinctly clear). Then body and mind suddenly vanish, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, empty space shatters to dust, and the great earth levels and sinks away. The true reality of no appearance then manifests before one.

At times one may not necessarily be settled while sitting, yet be very settled when not sitting; or one may be the same whether sitting or not sitting. One is then not far from becoming continuous and undivided. With such states, never compare or speculate while on the meditation cushion, for this only makes the mind unsettled. Simply do not attend to them, and do not mislead yourself.

Appendix V: The Second Patriarch's Instruction on Verification of Practice Off the Meditation Cushion

Appendix Five: Teachings of the Second Patriarch, “Verification of Practice Off the Meditation Cushion”

Verification off the meditation cushion is nothing other than tempering the mind through circumstances. Circumstances differ as favorable or adverse; to respond to them in accordance with conditions, one can rely only on prajñā. Prajñā, rendered in Chinese as “great wisdom,” is the great wisdom that thoroughly comprehends the worldly and supramundane dharmas as perfectly interpenetrating and nondual. Respond to illusory circumstances with the illusory mind, which cannot be grasped. Know clearly that they are illusory, yet respond to them; do not take the real, nor reject the illusory. It is neither play nor not play. To enter the samādhi of free play is called the manifestation of great functioning. The meanings of these terms are briefly explained below.

What does it mean for samādhi and wisdom to support one another? The visible sign of the power of samādhi lies in its functioning after one rises from the meditation cushion. Functioning is itself the opening of wisdom; being able to recognize one’s progress is likewise the opening of wisdom. Wisdom reveals samādhi, and samādhi supports wisdom. This is called the mutual support of samādhi and wisdom.

What does it mean to realize samādhi? Samādhi, rendered in Chinese as “right concentration,” does not mean being unmoving like wood or stone, without seeing or hearing. Rather, it means seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing without being carried away, confused, or swayed. When one first begins to practice, one may experience the states described above; or, when practicing for a long time, four or five hours may suddenly seem to have passed in an instant. This is not drowsiness or losing track of time, but right concentration. Again, one may fix one’s eyes on a single place while at the same time hearing and responding orally, handling each matter without error; the eyes do not move from what they are observing. This is called the simultaneous mutual functioning of the six sense faculties, and is evidence of having attained samādhi.

What is no-thought? Thoughts cannot be cut off, nor can they be extinguished. When mind and circumstances meet, there is inevitably comparative discrimination. In ordinary beings, such discrimination wanders and roams; this is the activity of consciousness, called discrimination at the level of consciousness. Sages discriminate without abiding or attaching; they use wisdom to transform consciousness, and this is called discrimination at the level of wisdom. If one discriminates yet does not discriminate, it still belongs to direct perception; because one’s strength is sufficient, it is also called perfected direct perception. Thus, thoughts arise without attachment, like a mirror reflecting things: forms appear according to the things before it, yet the mirror retains no images, nor does it fail to

reflect. This is called no-thought. (Deluded thoughts may be cut off, but need not be extinguished. Discrimination at the level of wisdom is also no-thought.)

What is seeing the true reality? Know that all appearances are illusory, yet do not discard the illusory. Knowing illusion is itself freedom from it; freedom from illusion is awakening. Yet awakening too is illusory. Thus mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sense faculties, the body, and the material world are all like this. To see this single appearance of illusion is the true reality. The sūtras say: “True reality is precisely nonappearance”; it is not some separate appearance.

All Mahāyāna sūtras take true reality as their proper substance. Our present thought has never been apart from all appearances. Discursive thought, discrimination, language, and words are established on the basis of falsity. One must therefore be free from appearances within appearances: in being identical with them, there is no nonexistence; in being free from them, there is no existence. Out of necessity, this is provisionally called true reality. Those who understand this meaning are said to see the true reality.

What does it mean to break through ignorance? To know that this is ignorance is itself to break through it. To know how ignorance arises dependently is itself to break through it. To know that all is illusory and not be carried away by it is itself to break through it. Not giving rise to views of hatred and attachment is itself to break through it. Fully realizing that all is unattainable is itself to break through it. To know that ignorance has never inherently existed, and is not like a substantial entity that can be seen, heard, or grasped, is itself to break through it. To know that ignorance originally arises from the nature of perfect enlightenment, and that comparative discrimination is only provisionally posited to reveal the true and the false, is itself to break through it. But for one who has not realized samādhi and seen the true reality, this is not true knowing and cannot be called genuine breakthrough.

What are habitual tendencies? Habitual tendencies are accumulated habits—the familiar patterns of ordinary life. Once one has clearly understood the mind-ground, ignorance may be broken through, but one’s strength is not yet sufficient and one’s power of resistance is weak; one is still carried away by circumstances. This is called habitual tendencies. Sometimes, even when ignorance has not been broken through, habitual tendencies may lessen for a time, but this results only from suppression. It is like water becoming clear when mud settles to the bottom: the root has not been removed, and once agitation occurs, the turbidity becomes even worse than before. For those who have broken through ignorance, although habitual tendencies remain, they are vastly different from what they were in the past, and progress is seen daily. There are roughly several signs:

1. Afflictions arise readily but are readily transformed; what once lasted long can be shortened.

2. Former habits and preferences suddenly change.

3. Fear naturally diminishes, and concerns over gain and loss gradually fade.

4. When encountering something startling or frightening, or something improper or unreasonable, one no longer clings as firmly to one's former discriminations.

5. The power of emptiness gradually increases; consequently, one sees cause and effect more clearly and gains stronger discernment when dealing with matters.

6. One is peacefully joyful each day and often feels light and at ease, without knowing why this is so.

7. Interests change from time to time: what was indifferent may become keen, and what was fervent may become cold. Yet in all cases there is a transcendent state of mind, unlike either passivity or activism.

8. One's disposition grows more even day by day. Toward people and things once most dearly loved, or matters and people once most detested, one feels a loosening, gradually approaching equality between enemies and loved ones.

9. The body becomes increasingly healthy and vigorous; one is less easily angered, and one's complexion becomes radiant.

10. One's memory differs from before. In inconsequential matters, one may seem forgetful, but in matters requiring focused attention, one alone feels especially sharp.

What is nonduality? Fully realize that all is originally empty. Whether self and others, good and evil, right and wrong, long and short, good and bad, gain and loss—all arise through the coming together of conditions and are illusory. Though one knows distinctions, one does not abide in the two aspects. This is called entering nonduality, and is also called non-discriminating wisdom.

What is great perfect mirror wisdom? After realizing samādhi, seeing the true reality, breaking through ignorance, and realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one can already give rise to function from essence, enter the gate of nonduality, and have samādhi and wisdom support one another. Direct perception is then perfected, the root has been attained, and the great matter has been clarified. Wisdom is like a round mirror, pervading the dharma realm; hence the name. It is also called fundamental wisdom and non-discriminating wisdom, terms that emphasize realization of its essence.

What is the wondrous functioning of prajñā? In learning the Buddha Dharma, there are no more than two crucial points. First, without eyes, one cannot see. Second, when the sun shines brightly, one sees the various forms and colors. Ordinary people are stained by accumulated habits and have long dwelt in ignorance. Before realizing the mind, they are like those in a dark room, where things are in disorder and confusion. They wish to put the room in order, but have no eyes and see nothing at all. Even if they expend great effort, everything remains confused, and their labor is wasted.

Only by first opening the eye of wisdom and breaking through ignorance—like first switching on an electric light and seeing the various forms and colors—can one then put each item in order without wasting effort.

Although these two crucial points occur in an instant, in reality they require an asaṃkhyeya kalpa. Therefore, even after ignorance has been broken through, habitual tendencies remain; though the electric light has been switched on, the room remains in disorder. One must use prajñā to sweep away habitual tendencies. This is just like arranging the various objects: each is different and requires a different response. Thus there are skillful means and wondrous functions as countless as the sands of the Ganges; how could there be any fixed method? This wondrous functioning emerges from the fundamental wisdom of prajñā. From the essence of fundamental wisdom arises the function of differentiated wisdom. This is called the manifestation of great functioning.

What is spontaneous functioning? Spontaneous functioning means remaining unchanged while according with conditions. Let things take their natural course, never retreating. It is like ice and snow on a mountaintop: when warmed by the sun, they melt into springs and waterfalls and enter mountain gullies and small streams, where they may still bend, turn, and pool. Only upon flowing into a great river do they roll ever eastward, eventually entering the sea. This means that only those who are neither confused nor retreating may be spontaneously at ease. Yet some indulge themselves without restraint and suppose themselves unobstructed. They do not know that these three words, “suppose themselves,” are the great obstruction itself. To claim attainment before attaining it is to commit a great falsehood.

If practitioners possess verification in each of the foregoing respects, they may assess themselves in all kinds of human affairs and circumstances. The extent of their own strength may likewise be verified thereby. If it is present, do not rejoice; if absent, do not grieve. Since there is fundamentally no arising or ceasing, and Buddha-nature is never lost, realization differs only in being sooner or later. Human birth is hard to obtain; one should complete the matter early in this very life, lest one fall again. There is no other secret: at every moment apply the mind and bring

forth the wondrous functioning of prajñā. The Mind-Seal method for encountering circumstances is now briefly set forth as follows:

1. Verification in Relations with People

In relation to people, there are no more than two paths: liking and disliking. The sages said, “Rare indeed under heaven is one who recognizes the faults of those they like and the good qualities of those they dislike.” Everyone has a person they love most dearly and a person they detest most intensely. One is an object of my attachment; the other, an object of my anger. Both attachment and anger belong to the self. Because one loves oneself, one clings to these two views. Now that one practices, one should break through these discriminating views, reflect inwardly, and ask oneself the following:

(1) With regard to the person I love most dearly, can I reduce my thoughts of attachment? At first, one does not know that attachment itself is an affliction; this is called the suffering of attachment and desire. One even considers it joyful and clings to it firmly. A mother, for example, fears only that her child may not live long, and worries all day without realizing her suffering. Later, one knows that attachment is a great affliction, yet cannot break through it.

Next, one contemplates impermanence and emptiness, determining that separation must ultimately occur. There is fundamentally no joy or sorrow to speak of. Yet ideals do not accord with reality, and one is ultimately unable to break through it. Only the Dharma view can break through it: when principle and phenomena are unified and this is realized amid circumstances, so that the mind is no longer stirred, then this suffering of attachment and desire has truly been severed. This may be accepted as verification.

(2) With regard to the person I detest most intensely, can I reduce my hatred and aversion? Proceed step by step in the same way as above. For example: first, can I refrain from dwelling on their former wrongs? Second, can I forgive them? And can I forgive them without forcing myself to do so? Third, can I appreciate their strengths? Fourth, can I arouse the resolve to liberate them? Fifth, if they again harm me, can I remain unmoved? If so, emotional and discriminatory views have loosened, and this may be accepted as verification.

(3) Suppose that a person I love and a person I dislike are both before me, and each entrusts me with a matter. Can I treat them equally? Can I refrain from feigning equality in order to gain a reputation?

(4) When dealing with beauty, the eminent and powerful, worldly enemies, violent people, shameless petty people, or followers of non-Buddhist paths, can my state of mind remain at ease? This is genuine practice. Examine it carefully as verification.

2. Verification in Relation to Things

Everyone has objects they love most dearly—preferences or customary habits. All take pleasure in what accords with their wishes and suffering in what runs contrary to them. Their pleasures and sufferings bind the mind.

To break through these two, one must rely only on the illumination of wisdom. Its function should be applied precisely while one is attached. Reflect instead that everything in the world is impermanent, and that what I love and delight in cannot ultimately be relied upon. Before long, there will be two kinds of separation. First, it may leave me: when it decays or is lost, suffering and distress will inevitably arise. Second, I may leave it: when I die or am separated from it, suffering and distress will likewise inevitably arise.

Knowing that it is ultimately impermanent, one should dispel thoughts of attachment from the very moment attachment arises. The mind’s firm hold will naturally loosen, and the flame of greedy acquisition will naturally be restrained.

Yet knowing that it cannot be relied on for long, one may suddenly give rise to a biased view. It is like someone who loves a bottle: because the attachment is so strong, they devise every possible way to preserve it. This gives rise to two kinds of attachment. The first is dead attachment, as when, after someone dies, objects they loved are buried with them. The second is stubborn emptiness: rigidly clinging to emptiness, one destroys the object at the height of one's attachment so that it will not remain. Such a person has not truly severed attachment. Knowing that it is difficult to keep and fearing that another may obtain it, one destroys it oneself first. These are all biased views: one clings and holds fast, while the other tends toward annihilation. Both are deluded.

The wise do not blame things; rather, they observe the mind. Clearly knowing impermanence, they think: “It exists today, and I may still enjoy it.” Because of the illumination of wisdom, they enjoy it without attachment. Without attachment, there is no bondage; this is called non-abiding. Thus, when they gain something, they do not abide in joy; when they lose something, they do not abide in suffering. Having relinquished both being and nonbeing, this is called according with liberation. Now, when I encounter such circumstances, whether favorable or adverse, can I respond naturally? Even if not naturally, how strong is my resistance? This is what should be reflected upon and verified.

III. Verification When Facing Adverse Circumstances

When people are in adverse circumstances, they experience all kinds of unease, which are entirely sufferings produced by conceptual comparison. Poverty, for example, is originally suffering, yet after one has become accustomed to it over a

long time, one no longer feels it as suffering. This suffering arises when favorable conditions turn adverse. All such suffering belongs to self-generated deluded views. Broadly speaking, there are three obstacles: first, comparisons concerning one's reputation or face; second, discomfort with one's daily living conditions; and third, fear of the future. The more one makes comparisons, the more worries one has. The only means of overcoming this suffering is samādhi and wisdom. Through the power of samādhi and wisdom, one sees that such adversity results from a reaction to favorable circumstances: favorable circumstances are the cause, the reaction is adversity, and adversity is the result.

First, clarify the cause. See that what I cling to as favorable was never inherently existent; it is empty because it depends on conditions. What suffering or happiness, then, can there be to speak of? What obstructs us is precisely the three obstacles listed above. Circumstances cannot obstruct me; it is only my own mind that obstructs itself.

Now let us break through the notion of face. Face is nothing but vanity. Worldly people do not recognize truth and falsehood or distinguish right from wrong. They do not consider evil deeds a loss of face, yet they consider poverty a loss of face. This is precisely the great delusion, great inversion, and great stupidity of the foolish people of this world.

Yet concern for face is itself a preference and a natural human feeling. The problem is failing to distinguish right from wrong. Seduced by vanity, people act perversely; they do not know benefit from harm or distinguish what is weighty from what is trivial. They seek only temporary satisfaction in food, clothing, and shelter, taking it for glory. They do not hesitate to sacrifice everything, and from small matters to great ones, killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and falsehood are brought about under compulsion. This is why the world is never at peace.

The turning point between order and disorder lies in causes that are slight but have great results. If one does not go along with those who wallow in filth, one must take care not to be distressed over vain reputation and face. An ancient said: “Better to be cursed by petty people than despised by noble ones.” Such are the relative weight of gain and loss.

With this illumination of wisdom, one can naturally become free and unobstructed by the notion of face. Deluded hopes, greedy grasping, and evil thoughts and actions outside the proper bounds will likewise cease. Moreover, peace of mind does not necessarily depend on seeking bodily comfort. Whether one is comfortable or uncomfortable in daily life also changes with the mind. As for peaceful and secure living, one should certainly make every effort to arrange it, but one should not forcefully demand that it be attained.

Just do not be greedily acquisitive. When the mind is settled, the spirit is peaceful and vital energy flourishes; circumstances and opportunities will naturally come together, and fear of the future will naturally dissolve. The future belongs to the future; I can wait until it arrives before speaking of it. There is no need to become anxious beforehand. In short, the stronger one's wisdom, the more spaciously one can respond. This can in turn verify the depth or shallowness of one's practice and serve as an inward confirmation in one's own mind.

IV. Verification When Facing Favorable Circumstances

Sentient beings are called sentient beings because they do not understand cause and effect. Because they do not understand it, they fall into causes without recognizing them in advance; they are bound by results and do not know how to free themselves. They repeatedly create causes and receive layer upon layer of results, so that suffering becomes beyond all telling.

Practitioners aspire to leave suffering behind and seek liberation. Liberation means letting go. What worldly people are least willing to relinquish is present happiness and comfort. If they seek wealth and obtain it, they cling to it as happiness; how could they let it go? Favorable circumstances do not refer only to a comfortable external situation. Even one's own attachment to dharmas that one considers correct is an extremely firm favorable circumstance. If one can decisively relinquish it and realize it as empty, one is not far from the Way. The most difficult things to break through amid favorable circumstances are:

(1) A pension earned through hardship and difficulty in one's old age.

(2) Rich and tasty foods one enjoys.

(3) Public praise and praise offered to one's face.

(4) The merit and virtue one has performed.

(5) Affection and delight between men and women; this is the root of birth and death.

(6) An immovable view of self, or a view biased toward emptiness.

(7) The excellent states that practitioners believe they have attained.

Of the foregoing items, only realization of emptiness can break through the first through fifth; only emptying emptiness can break through the sixth; and only the power of the Unempty Lasso can break through the seventh. To realize emptiness means to realize that all things are empty, thereby breaking through attachment to

existence. Emptying emptiness means emptying that which has been taken as empty, for even awakening is an illusion and is not yet ultimate.

The Unempty Lasso means realizing and knowing that all is originally empty, without dividing emptiness from existence, without clinging to either extreme, and without establishing a middle way; it is entering the unobstructed, nondual state. Only one of great strength can reach this. Further, if one uses these favorable circumstances to reflect back upon oneself, they become adverse circumstances. Thus one knows that favorable and adverse are nondual. Emptiness of persons is easy; emptiness of dharmas is difficult. Understanding in principle is easy; realization in actual experience is difficult.

What is difficult is reversing accumulated habits. Practitioners should not become timid merely because they call something difficult. The course of practice does not go beyond two dharmas: first, arousing the resolve. Once one has aroused the resolve, entry into the Way is not far off. Second, awakening. Once one has awakened, the root is clearly understood and one will not retreat again.

Therefore, after arousing the resolve, only by seeking awakening does one have a practical means; after awakening, only by removing habitual tendencies does one have a practical means. Having a means is itself accomplishment; it is merely a question of time.

It is like being in a dark room and never seeing what is inside. Though one feels about by touch, it is of no use. Once the electric lamp is switched on, one sees all kinds of things. Even if it is switched off again and darkness returns, one never forgets what one has seen. This is non-retrogression.

Thus it is said that upon first arousing the resolve, one immediately becomes a Buddha. Yet this is not what is said to those of weak wisdom and dull faculties. This is where learning the Buddhadharma is difficult; this is also why it is not easy to believe, and why people are unwilling to undertake it. As for their unwillingness to undertake it, this is certainly due to insufficient samādhi and wisdom, but also because their merit and virtue are too shallow. It is difficult for them to encounter the instruction of a good spiritual friend, and thus there is ultimately no way for faith to be aroused.

Training the mind in circumstances is divided into the two paths of favorable and adverse conditions. This is the two states of hatred and love in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment. They arise dependently from the view of self and thus divide into the eight worldly winds: gain and loss, defamation and praise, acclaim and ridicule, suffering and pleasure. Practitioners in the world train only half of these. They pay close attention to their habitual tendencies amid the four adverse conditions of loss, defamation, ridicule, and suffering, yet often neglect the four favorable conditions of

gain, praise, acclaim, and pleasure. Why? Because the fundamental greed for self-benefit has not been removed, and they further cling to the view of austere practice; thus they have not fully understood its meaning.

V. Verification When Arousing Compassion

The three meanings of compassion, great compassion, and bodhicitta are often confused and left undifferentiated by worldly people. Compassion still does not depart from self-love. It places undue weight on the result and loses sight of the causal ground because its view is limited. It is like the benevolence of a woman—indulgent, overly fond affection.

Great compassion, by contrast, places the utmost weight on the causal ground. It thoroughly understands what comes before and after, and penetrates cause and effect. It does not arouse compassion merely because of a partial suffering at present. If A kills B, an ordinarily compassionate person pities B and hates A. One of great compassion pities A as well as B, and further considers C: knowing that the retribution for killing circulates without end, one also fears that C may imitate it. This is called great loving-kindness and great compassion.

If one directly realizes the true reality and perfectly penetrates nonduality, one knows that suffering and happiness are both unobtainable: there is no doer and no recipient. Realizing the state of pure emptiness is called the great bodhicitta. It is not like the worldly notion that bodhicitta is compassion, as though there were truly some object that could be aroused.

Therefore, to arouse bodhicitta means to give rise to the resolve to realize the pure emptiness of true reality. The essence of this bodhicitta is unmoving. Although all appearances of good and evil illusorily arise and illusorily cease, the awakened essence is not moved in the slightest.

Foolish people do not know this. Obscured by emotional views and ignorance, they cannot realize it. Practitioners should turn the light back upon themselves: when they see situations of suffering, what scope of mind do they bring forth, and how do its movements appear? The greater one's mind-capacity, the less one's clinging mind must be. To abide is to enter conceptual comparison, and direct perception cannot then be complete. Non-abiding is freedom from defilement. To be without abiding and without defilement in all circumstances—even in the minds that seek to transcend birth and death and realize nirvāṇa—is the mark of true bodhicitta. Therefore it is said: rely on great compassion to arouse bodhicitta.

VI. Verification in Play

In the teachings of the two vehicles, one cannot depart from dharmas. Once dharmas are established, the dual views of right and wrong, good and evil are difficult to remove, and one is bound by dharmas.

The Mahāyāna does not cling to dharmas, nor does it discard dharmas. Since all dharmas are Buddhadharma—neither dharma nor non-dharma—it enters accordance with nonduality. Nothing is established; therefore dharmas can be transformed into wondrous functioning. The verse by which the Buddha transmitted the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye says: “Dharmas originally are not dharmas; what is not dharma is also dharma. Now, when transmitting the time of no dharma, when have dharmas ever been dharmas?”

Yet how have they ever not been dharmas? Practitioners of recent times seldom understand skillful means. They often divide proper practice and play into two separate matters, considering one absolutely good and the other absolutely evil; thus people regard them as heaven and hell.

They do not know that circumstances are neither good nor evil. Bondage makes everything evil; liberation makes everything good. Yet even liberation is not established, and good and evil are likewise without bondage. This is called the supreme good, which is true liberation. One should examine the mind, not blame circumstances. There is no fixed dharma; medicine is prescribed according to the illness. The medicine I use is originally administered to suit a particular illness; it is not something that everyone can take indiscriminately.

People often boast that they are empty, yet they dare not test themselves against their usual preferences and accumulated habits. This can only be called guarding oneself. To reject and avoid defilement does not yet warrant calling it true emptiness. When one's practice advances, one must test oneself again, thereby verifying the strength of one's own capacity. Ask yourself what you can do, and do accordingly; if it is so, then it is so.

For example, someone may be unable to endure wind because of illness and therefore seek medical treatment. If they never encounter wind, how can they test whether they have recovered? Only after again facing wind and frost without the least fear can one truly be said to have regained robust health.

People today, because they have choked, give up eating; because of medicine, they refuse to treat illness. This is certainly lack of understanding. Yet when one’s practice has not reached maturity, to insist that it must necessarily be so and to let it run unchecked is likewise lack of understanding. This state depends, first, on the guidance of teacher and disciple, and second, on one’s own awareness. Outsiders need not trouble themselves with misplaced compassion. But if they indiscriminately condemn it all, acting from emotional prejudice and making

reckless judgments of right and wrong, it is like a physician cutting open and treating a grave illness while others, merely seeing the blood and unable to bear it, indulge in sentimental pity. How could that be the original intent of great compassion in liberating sentient beings?

(This section was originally intended for those engaged in cultivation and realization; it is not a method of practice for beginners.)

As for verification through playful activities, one should first practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. After completing the six mudrās and completing one hundred sessions of practice, one may, amid ordinary social dealings, use such occasions to test one's own meditative stability. Moreover, if one delights in states of dry quiescence and before long drifts into annihilationism or develops thoughts of weariness with the world, one should use this as a remedy. There is no fixed rule here; it should be discussed with those who understand and is difficult to explain to ordinary people.

The sutras say, "Do not be startled, do not be frightened, do not be afraid." One should train oneself in this. A bhikshu who observes proper deportment naturally has no such opportunities. In the past, the Second Patriarch entered the samādhi of free play; but if later generations imitate him, it becomes an illness. In my humble view, it is permissible only for one who has the aspirations of Yi Yin.

A person's genuine disposition often reveals itself in play and gambling. To be able to let go of what one loves most is true liberation; to turn what is intense into what is mild is true progress; to be free of alarm and fear is true equanimity; to look on as though seeing nothing is truly to realize emptiness. One must simply seek a living, vital freedom.

VII. Verification When the Mind Has Nothing to Which It Clings

When the mind has nothing to which it is attached, there are two kinds: having nothing on which to rely, and non-abiding. Having nothing on which to rely is like drifting about without a master: the mind has nowhere to rest, and because there is nothing to do, one does not know what to do in any direction and suffers from a sense of emptiness and tastelessness. This refers to masterless novices who have not undergone cultivation.

Non-abiding means that the mind is free from binding defilements and nothing is impossible. Essence and function are suchness, yet unmoving. It is like a bird flying through space: one cannot say that it leaves no trace, nor can one definitively point to a trace as existing; nor can one rigidly insist that there is none. It transcends all this in utter freedom and ease. This refers to those who have already attained realization.

But this is again different. When practitioners reach the middle of the path, they may stand between these two conditions and at times also feel masterless, not knowing what to do. When the reaction sets in, they will inevitably resent Heaven and blame others, grow weary of the Dharma, and hate themselves. At such a time they are most easily shaken and confused. If someone tells them that a certain method is especially swift and effective, or that a certain teacher's realization is profound and that he would make a worthy teacher, they unconsciously shift with human feelings and follow that person, not realizing that there is no teacher they will not bow to,

and no method they will not seek. Although seeking too many things is greedy, it is not necessarily a great harm. The problem is that the mind has no master and seeks results too urgently. In the end, one understands every method but accomplishes nothing; in ordinary times afflictions remain as before, and at death one is equally flustered. This is truly a grave illness.

Therefore, at such a time one should remain alert and constantly examine oneself; one must not become lax. Moreover, the first step toward laziness is non-attachment. This shows that one's resolve is not earnest enough, or that one considers oneself right and lets oneself go; this too is drifting. Yet spontaneous functioning and drifting may seem alike while being different. In the first case, the great matter has been settled and practice has become an unbroken whole, and awareness is maintained naturally in every situation. One is not moved by circumstances and remains unchanged in accordance with conditions; thus spontaneous functioning is possible. In the other case, the fundamental matter has not been clarified; one is turned by circumstances and has no mastery over oneself, and this is called drifting. In such matters arrogance easily arises, and practitioners must constantly remain vigilant.

VIII. Verification Concerning the Dharma One Practices

If the mind has even the slightest attachment, that is birth and death. It is like a warehouse storing cotton, wood, gasoline, and other inflammable materials: if fireworks are set off within it, there is no way it will not burn. This is naturally dangerous. Yet if even a single spark falls into it, after some time the whole place will burn alike; one must not arbitrarily distinguish the two as major and minor matters. It is also like getting sand in one's eyes, which causes obscuration; whether it is powder, pearls, or fragments of jade, what difference is there in the obscuration?

Practitioners are like people washing soiled clothes: they use soap to remove the dirt, but the soap too is a contaminant; they use water to wash away the soap, but the water too is impure. Only when the soap is gone and the water has dried can it be called truly clean.

Now we use the Buddhadharma to gather in the mind. Before one has gone beyond deliberate effort, one naturally cannot discard the Dharma. But if one rigidly clings to it as real, how is that different from removing dirt without removing the soap, or removing soap without removing the water? Would that not be delusion? Therefore, although nothing need be discarded, one must not cling to anything.

The mind contains the three poisons, like setting off fireworks and burning oneself. But as soon as there is even a Buddha-view, a tiny spark of fire has fallen in. The Buddha himself teaches the Dharma to set the fire, and the Buddha also teaches the Dharma to put out the fire. He fears precisely that later people will not understand and will only keep setting fires without extinguishing them. Thus, to truly repay the Buddha's kindness, one should remember that the Buddha has no Dharma to teach, and that I too have no Dharma to practice. It is also like washing clothes to remove dirt: dirt is not absent, yet cleanliness too is not established. Wash as one may, ultimately a completely pure emptiness cannot be obtained. To let go at this most subtle and minute point is great freedom.

IX. Verification Concerning Views of Winning and Losing

The mentality of winning and losing is the emotional prejudice of sentient beings. It depends on the object of contention: one arbitrarily divides it into victory and inferiority, not knowing that both are the same habitual tendency—and among habitual tendencies, one of the hardest to remove.

During diligent practice, one may borrow it a little as encouragement; but at the stage of verification it must not be present. If one establishes self and others, one is already wrong. Those who have always loved victory are sure to be arrogant toward others; those arrogant toward others must cling to self, and their minds lack equanimity. This is the most deeply rooted basis of birth and death and must be removed without delay.

A person of genuine accomplishment cannot be displayed through words or measured by conduct. Whether acting contrary to convention or in accord with it, such a person is unfathomable even to ghosts and spirits: transcendent beyond things, yet not apart from human feeling. In responding to those who come, such a person may deliberately show a losing side—first, to test their desire for victory; second, to spare them vexation and suffering; and further, to awaken their sense of doubt for investigation. Such people are thereby invisibly encompassed. If they can awaken to this themselves, they will then leap out of this circle; otherwise, they will sink in hell for a long time. The Kṣitigarbha Sūtra speaks of a hell of much contention; it is established by just such people.

X. Verification Concerning the Process of Cultivation and Realization

After completing two or three hundred sessions of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, one's inner state naturally becomes open and bright. By five or six hundred sessions, one experiences increasing daily peace and joy. Since people's capacities differ, their verifications also differ somewhat. Let us briefly discuss what may be realized; there is no need to distinguish whose is superior or inferior.

(1) One may suddenly attain ease and joy, a comfort truly beyond description, and repeatedly wish to regain it. But this seems only to be quiet ease: one has attained the essence but has not yet brought forth its function.

(2) One may suddenly see that this mind is vast and inconceivable, and gain ever clearer insight into the causal ground and fruition of matters. One is gradually entering the state of ease born of great compassion; function has already arisen.

(3) One's joy gradually feels plain and light; there is no sense of having gained something extraordinary and no sense of accomplishment. Instead, one enters a state of emptiness and undifferentiated wholeness, with the true essence filling within. One is gradually entering the state of ease of quiescent cessation.

(4) After passing through these three kinds of ease, one will inevitably undergo countless reactions. Even long-accumulated habitual tendencies may all emerge at once. This is because one's previous effort was suppressive. Those who do not understand call it regression; in fact, the work of carrying things out is in full progress, and old accumulated grime is being swept out of the house. This is beneficial, not harmful. If one again cherishes it and keeps it, that is a grave mistake.

(5) One may suddenly become fond of playing with words and composing verse, or of arguing extensively with others. These are all seeds among the old accumulated grime. If they are somewhat better, once they have been carried out, there is no need to cherish them again.

(6) One may suddenly pass through a period of weeping bitterly. There are two conditions: first, fear of birth and death, or fear that one may not make it in this lifetime; second, weeping without expecting it, perhaps from overwhelming joy. Though they differ slightly, these too are merely seeds that have surfaced and are thereby finished.

(7) One may suddenly see that mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters, and may see all sorts of faults in other people, believing that only this Dharma is right. This is precisely when one has entered deeply but has not yet turned around. If one then undergoes another reversal, wisdom-light of equanimity arises and one enters the nondual state.

(8) One may suddenly develop a waiting mind, thinking that after a long time one will naturally attain realization. Such a habit comes entirely from laxity and from a lack of earnest resolve.

(9) One may suddenly lose faith in oneself. This is because, at the causal stage, one did not dare to take responsibility and one's power of resolve was weak; hence this doubt arises.

(10) One may suddenly become eloquent and pour forth words without end, yet before long realize for oneself that what one formerly said was wrong. This is because one's power of wisdom is not yet sufficient and one's perspective is not comprehensive, so it lacks complete clarity. Nevertheless, from this point forward one makes daily progress.

(11) One may feel that each month brings its own progress and each day its own difference, without knowing why this is so.

(12) Fear naturally becomes less likely to arise, because concern with gain and loss has faded.

(13) As for the speed of the power of contemplation: mind and circumstances stand in relation to one another. Without contemplation, there is no transformation; without transformation, there is no emptiness. This power gradually increases in the following order:

(1) One first encounters circumstances and then contemplates them, but must exert all one's strength to arouse this contemplation.

(2) On encountering circumstances, one contemplates them. Although contemplation comes afterward, one need not exert effort to arouse it.

(3) On encountering circumstances, one immediately knows to contemplate them. There is a slight before and after, but one has not yet gone beyond knowing.

(4) On encountering circumstances, one immediately contemplates them; both arise simultaneously.

(5) Contemplation comes first, while circumstances seem to come afterward; yet at times it is forgotten.

(6) Circumstances follow the mind's contemplation; contemplation is always first, though one still attends to the contemplation itself. (The foregoing belong to the stage of deliberate effort.)

(7) One does not know that there is contemplation, yet has not departed from contemplation. One clearly knows that circumstances exist, but originally there is no obstruction.

(8) Ever quiescent, ever illuminating.

Practitioners should ask themselves at which level they abide.

(14) One may suddenly become arrogant, look down on later students, or glare angrily at people who are obstinate and unwilling to change. One may also play with words and compose verse. All these are seeds of habitual tendencies from past lives. Whoever one may be, one must pass through this process. People in the world call it crazy Chan. If one can again clean it out with earnestness, one will naturally reach complete purity. Although this Chan illness has arisen, it is already no easy matter; compared with those who have received no indication at all, the difference is greater than that between heaven and earth.

(15) On attaining a favorable state, one may immediately form various views. These views are naturally loftier than one's former views, so one delights in them and preserves them, unwilling to relinquish them. In worldly terms, these are fixed preconceptions; in the Buddhadharma, they are what one knows. Clinging to what one knows and not seeking ultimate realization, one thereby obstructs the Way. This is a stage that must be passed through, and also a verification when one's practice is halfway advanced. If it is not broken through, it turns into a grave illness.

XI. Verification When Reading Sutras and Treatises

Before opening one's eyes, when reading the sūtras one is often misled by their wording. Less than a hundred years after the Buddha's passing, errors had already entered the scriptures. Ānanda was then old. Seeing a young novice misread a passage, he corrected him, but the novice would not listen. It was already so then; how much more so today, and how much more so among those who rigidly cling to textual criticism.

Therefore, if one values wording over meaning, inevitably not a single sūtra will remain readable. Take the Heart Sūtra's 260 characters: "no attainment" and "attainment" are taken as contradictory by those who do not understand their meaning. In the final age, the extinction of the Buddha-Dharma will surely begin with textual criticism and proliferating disputes, leaving later generations with no way to begin. I can state this with certainty. Those with merit and virtue will instead be made into offenders—how lamentable!

One should read the sūtras from a position of detachment: first understand the purport of the sūtra, then grasp its principles. Do not let the purport be obscured by

principles, nor let the principles be constrained by words; that is, do not let one's own mind be bound by sūtras and treatises. When the Buddha taught the Dharma, it was like a physician prescribing medicine for an illness: it was to cure another's illness, not necessarily spoken for me. One may draw upon it for reference, but should not take it over directly for one's own use. Dead words should be given living interpretations. Thus it is said that the Tathāgata has nothing to teach.

There are two ways of reading the sūtras: before one has practiced and after one has practiced; the inner horizon is different in each case. When reading the sūtras, one should investigate what seems incomprehensible. The Diamond Sūtra says, "All Buddhas and the Dharma arise from this sūtra." What sūtra is this? If they arise from the Diamond Sūtra, then from where does the Diamond Sūtra arise? Again, the sūtra says, "Know that this person is the Tathāgata." At such points, can you decisively cut through and take it up for yourself? This can verify the extent of one's strength.

If later people alter the Dharma taught by the Buddha, they will fall into hell; this must be understood. Yet what the Buddha taught is the meaning of the sūtras, not merely their wording. The wording may not fully express it, but to harm its meaning is unacceptable; this too must be understood. Whether one falls into hell depends on whether one has altered its meaning. Still, in later times there are too few who truly cultivate and realize, so it is better to retain the old wording. Unless one truly has strength, do not initiate such changes, for fear that blind followers, unable to gain anything through textual criticism, will simply sever wording and meaning alike, leaving only disconnected fragments. That would be a grave error.

12. Verification Concerning Habitual Defilements

There is nothing else to learning the Buddha-Dharma: one merely changes habitual tendencies and transforms one's temperament. When the dispositions conditioned by one's mental states become habitual, they are called one's temperament; ordinary people call them one's original nature. A proverb says, "Rivers and mountains may change, but one's nature is hard to alter." This strongly expresses how difficult habitual tendencies are to remove, yet it is not true.

Original nature has never been contaminated. It cannot be ruined by defilement, nor can it be accomplished by nondefilement. It is like a drunk person, who is not in the slightest different from when sober; there is only a single inversion. Yet because of that inversion, the person has not lost his human nature. Once he sobers up, he is wholly intact. If one seeks the drunkenness and inversion, they cannot be found at all. From beginning to end, there is neither accomplishment nor ruin.

Therefore know that in the world there is ultimately not a single deluded person: each and every one is a Buddha, each and every one is awakened. Yet present drunkenness and inversion do exist. But since there is ultimately neither corruption

nor admixture, these temporarily present habitual tendencies are merely called illusory existence. Within this illusory existence, we provisionally posit degrees of depth and superficiality, provisionally name good and evil, and provisionally distinguish what is easy to change from what is hard to remove. Everything is originally illusory, while awakened nature remains unmoved. It is sufficient, then, to make verification within these illusory appearances.

The habitual tendencies easiest to remove lie in being straightforward and open: straightforwardness is free of crookedness, and openness is free of entanglement.

Those who are straightforward and open will find it easier to attain Buddhahood, because their clinging minds are looser. Attachment to self is the root of birth and death. Those attached to self necessarily love themselves; those who love themselves necessarily insist on themselves; those who insist on themselves necessarily seek perfection; those who seek perfection necessarily make comparisons; those who make comparisons necessarily worry excessively; excessive worry necessarily brings much doubt; much doubt necessarily brings calculation; calculation necessarily becomes subtle and crooked; subtle crookedness necessarily brings lack of clarity; lack of clarity necessarily brings timidity.

Timidity brings entanglement; entanglement brings rigid clinging; rigid clinging makes one hard to turn; those hard to turn are not liberated. Step by step, one sinks deeper, and habitual defilements grow ever thicker. During life, one is unwilling to give away or loosen attachment to any thing, affair, or view. At death one enters the evil realms; through self-love and self-clinging, one makes it difficult for oneself to emerge.

But why do people have all these faults? It is simply the error of failing to understand principle. Failure to understand arises from not distinguishing true from false; failure to distinguish arises from being unable to empty all that one possesses; inability to empty arises from lacking wisdom; lacking wisdom arises from lacking samādhi; lacking samādhi arises from lacking the Dharma; lacking the Dharma arises from lacking fortunate conditions; lacking fortunate conditions arises from insisting on oneself as right, refusing to open one’s mind and be receptive, and keeping far from good spiritual friends. In the end, one sinks into ruin.

If one cultivates without attending to one’s own habitual tendencies, it is equivalent to never having practiced. Unless one removes fundamental ignorance, there is no way to deal with habitual tendencies, and one can never attain Buddhahood. If you wish to verify for yourself whether your practice is swift or slow, simply ask whether your temperament is straightforward and open or crooked and entangled. If you reflect on this even once, you should shudder without feeling cold. A sūtra says that a woman must transform into a man before attaining Buddhahood. This refers to

human temperament: it must turn from yin to yang, from crookedness to straightforwardness. “The straight mind is the place of practice.” Straightness is the empty mind free from defilement; it has nothing to do with male or female. Therefore the sūtras say that the Buddha-Dharma is neither male nor female, not that it is without men and women.

13. Verification in the Face of Extraordinary and Sudden Events

The sūtras say, “not startled, not terrified, not afraid,” or “faith that does not recoil,” or “those in whom pure faith arises in a single thought.” Such expressions can all test the depth or shallowness of a practitioner’s emotional views. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have clung to self. Outwardly, they grasp coarse objects; from the mark of self, discriminations falsely arise, and thus there are the marks of self, person, sentient being, and life span. Inwardly, they realize subtle mental states; from the view of self, pervasive discrimination falsely arises, and thus there are the views of self, person, sentient being, and life span.

Circumstances are not themselves favorable or adverse. Only when something exceeds the expectations of one’s self-view do doubt and fear arise; at their extreme, they yield the result of inversion and madness. Tracing this to its beginning, there is the cause of hesitation, doubt, and disbelief. In truth, all these are emotional views within the mark of self—illusory and unreal—which are nourished and developed in turn. This is what the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment calls “nourishing this ignorance,” without realizing that one is nourishing it until it grows great.

Emotion is self-love, and view is attachment to self. Although illness arises from these, it is also removed through these. Whoever regards strange events as strange has simply seen too little and cannot transform. If one regards them as ordinary, or understands them as nondual, one’s doubt dissolves of itself. Yet one who dissolves this doubt still relies on view: the former view is consciousness, while the latter view transforms into wisdom. First use wisdom to break consciousness, then use wisdom to shatter wisdom itself.

Use illusion to extinguish illusion, until there is nothing to extinguish; only then is this called the ultimate meaning of no wisdom and no attainment. Going further, even meaning is not established; “ultimate” is itself only a provisional name. When I do not cling to self, the strange is not seen as strange. Could this be so without great samādhi, free from delusion? I shall now reveal the hidden origins of the mind that is startled and fearful in the face of events, in order to instruct you.

In sum, breaking this habit of comparison is also nothing other than a matter of view. First is not attending to it: with awakening foremost, one knows it is originally illusory and naturally does not attend to it; this is the power of direct perception.

Second is using view to break view: as one uses a sword to cut things, and then uses the sword to cut the sword. This relies on purposeful effort as a skillful expedient. Let me give two matters for investigation:

1. Customs

This refers to conventional views, which are among the hardest things to break because the few cannot prevail against the many. Those who reform customs necessarily seek forcefully to destroy them. This is not called breaking them; it is merely called changing customs, replacing one custom with another. First use wisdom to dispel their delusion and confusion, but do not oppose them. Where no ultimate conclusion can be reached, provisionally establish what brings security to the majority and preserve it as an expedient; that itself is the ultimate. As for oneself, one never fails to know clearly, does not drift up and down with convention, and sees all circumstances as naturally thus, with nothing extraordinary to speak of. Then one enters the ground of pure awakening.

2. Unexpected Events

Whenever one encounters an unexpected event, it is not a question of whether the event is major or minor. Because one does not recognize impermanence, clings to things as truly existent, and fails to distinguish true from false, one is shaken by it. Moreover, when something is unforeseen, hearing of it suddenly readily gives rise to alarm and fear. Those with wisdom do not wait for the event's result; already at the causal stage they thoroughly understand that it is certainly impermanent in the end and wholly belongs to arising and ceasing.

For example, when children are born, one knows they are lovable, and as parents one naturally hopes that they will grow up and live long. But each has their own causes and conditions and their own span of life. At the feast celebrating a newborn, when relatives and friends offer congratulations, the future scenes of illness, death, and funeral rites are already determined. What harm is there in this? People are thus, and things are thus. If one constantly maintains this wise contemplation and enters the gate of nonduality, all future suffering can be given away.

One can relinquish it. The wonder of the Buddha-Dharma is like receiving a vaccination: it first removes future fear, so that one is prepared in advance. Thus, when one suddenly hears of such things, there is no fear. This saves at the causal stage and is naturally more complete than worldly methods, which save only at the stage of results.

Sentient beings have immeasurable habitual tendencies, said to number as many as eighty-four thousand forms. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra reduces them to sixty, saying that there are sixty types of mind, each possessing sixty characteristics. I shall

simplify them still further and explain them as follows. Practitioners should use these to examine themselves: Which type of mind is strongest in me? This is the deepest manifestation of my illness. What remedy should I apply? Then habitual tendencies will naturally be removed, and fundamental wisdom will grow ever stronger. The concise explanations follow:

1. Greed

This means grasping at whatever object one encounters, thereby defiling the pure mind. Yet it must manifest outwardly in some form, just as seeing smoke reveals the presence of fire. The root of greed lies within and obstructs every entry into the Way. Greed for wealth, fame, and profit—even greed for the flavor of the Dharma—is all illness. Emptying everything is the remedy.

2. Nongreed

This is contrary to the preceding state of mind. It is the practice of not being greedy without wisdom. For example, when one is properly applying oneself to cultivation, one may nevertheless become negatively attached to biased emptiness and fail to be greedy; one does not arouse the great resolve, but seeks only a little satisfaction; or one does not strive diligently; or one falls into annihilation. The former is excessive grasping, this is excessive relinquishing. Both are illnesses. The remedy is neither grasping nor relinquishing, but arousing the great resolve and taking it up.

3. Anger

This is anger and resentment arising when one's greedy desires are not fulfilled. Loving-kindness is the remedy.

4. Loving-Kindness

This is contrary to anger, but it is merely the benevolence of a sentimental woman and obstructs entry into the great Way. The remedy is to understand cause and effect, seek the ultimate, and take up the matter on a grand scale.

5. Delusion

Whenever one encounters something to be done but cannot distinguish it with a wise mind, there are many confusions. Developing prajñā is the remedy.

6. Intellectual Cleverness

This is the petty cleverness of the world, making twisted discriminations—this is superior, that is inferior—and taking oneself to be right. One does not realize how

extremely limited one's own knowledge and views are: the light of a firefly cannot set Mount Sumeru ablaze. The remedy is to be humble and not self-important.

7. Doubt

This arises when one is overly calculating about one's own benefits, harms, gains, and losses, unwilling to suffer even the slightest disadvantage. In handling affairs, one hesitates and cannot decide, losing one's bearings in advancing and retreating. The remedy is a spirit of self-sacrifice and courage.

8. Rash Decisiveness

This means deciding too quickly, without distinguishing the deviant from the proper, and thereby mishandling affairs. The remedy is to examine matters through wise contemplation and not give undue weight to personal feelings.

9. A Darkened Mind

To say that one need not doubt a matter, yet still remain hesitant and unable to decide—this is somewhat like the seventh type of mind. The former is subtle; this is coarse. The former goes too far; this does not go far enough. Counteract it with the illumination of wisdom.

Ten. The Mind That Seeks Complete Clarity

This means seeking to understand everything completely; yet excessive scrutiny is a fault. One does not know that worldly affairs are inherently impermanent and can hardly be expected to reach perfection. Counteract this by not demanding perfection.

Eleven. The Accumulating Mind

This means obtaining one excellent teaching and accumulating everything in it, while rejecting all other teachings. For example, those who delight in Esoteric Buddhism may think that apart from it there is no other Dharma; Pure Land practitioners may do the same. Thus begins the gradual opening of sectarian disputes. Counteract this with an impartial and expansive mind.

Twelve. The Contentious Mind

This means enjoying arguments over right and wrong, even arguing what is crooked into being straight, without realizing that disputation itself is contrary to the truth. Counteract it with non-contention.

Thirteen. The Quarrelsome Mind

This is inward self-contention. For example, after reflecting and arriving at an understanding, one might leave it at that, but instead one invents further objections and gives rise to thought after thought. Counteract this by taking as one's model Ji Wenzi's practice of considering a matter three times before acting.

Fourteen. The Mind of Non-Contention

This means abandoning both right and wrong, and thereby ending up with no standpoint at all, unable to distinguish good from evil. Counteract it with clear discernment and prompt decision.

Fifteen. The Heavenly Mind

This means having habitual tendencies toward spontaneity, wishing for everything to accord with one's desires and demands. Like the pleasurable karmic rewards in the heavenly realms, which arise naturally without exertion, one now expects practice likewise to occur naturally, without diligent effort. This can obstruct bodhi. One should understand that nothing comes about naturally: causes must be planted before results can be obtained. Counteract it by not craving to save effort.

Sixteen. The Asura Mind

This means that although a person knows the benefits of liberation, they are accustomed to the karmic results of birth and death, sink into them, and do not press forward. Counteract this by contemplating the impermanence, suffering, and emptiness of the world.

Seventeen. The Dragon Mind

Greed for wealth, goods, and sensual pleasures is like that of a dragon. Counteract it with contentment.

Eighteen. The Human Mind

It sharply distinguishes favors from resentments and is extremely exacting in repaying favors and requiting grievances; everywhere it establishes self and other. Counteract it by directing oneself toward the great Way.

Nineteen. The Female Mind

This is a mind of many desires. Counteract it with contemplation of impurity.

Twenty. The Self-Directed Mind

This means seeking for everything to accord with one's wishes and fully satisfy one's desires. Contemplate that dharmas have no inherent nature and come together

through causes and conditions; how could everything possibly conform to one's wishes? Use this as the countermeasure.

Twenty-One. The Merchant's Mind

This means analyzing too minutely and planning too comprehensively, which inevitably results in muddle and entanglement and becomes a serious illness. Counteract it by cultivating swift wisdom.

Twenty-Two. The Farmer's Mind

Like a farmer cultivating the fields, one seeks to know every detail before exerting effort. Those who study the Dharma likewise first wish to hear extensively and only afterward seek the Dharma. Present-day students of the Dharma Characteristics School merely hear and understand doctrinal principles, while neglecting practical cultivation; they labor without result. One should consider a poisoned arrow lodged in the body: it urgently needs treatment, and one should not ask countless questions before removing the arrow. Therefore, cultivate sharp wisdom as the countermeasure.

Twenty-Three. The River Mind

This means being like river water, dependent on its two banks or drifting without stability, with the mind not focused on one point. Counteract it by concentrating the mind on a single object.

Twenty-Four. The Pond Mind

This means that people greedily seek fame and profit without ever being satisfied. Like water gathering in a pond, they take in everything without exception. The same is true in studying the Dharma: greed for too much prevents one from becoming proficient in any one thing. Counteract it with few desires.

Twenty-Five. The Well Mind

This means thinking in ever deeper and more abstruse ways, always wishing to be unfathomable to others. Counteract it with straightforwardness, clarity, and ease of understanding.

Twenty-Six. The Guarding Mind

Worldly people guard their possessions, bodies, and lives like a turtle drawing in its head. This is a habitual tendency of the śrāvakas and cannot bear the great Dharma. Counteract it with broad compassion that universally benefits all people.

Twenty-Seven. The Miserly Mind

This means doing everything for oneself; even in wholesome dharmas, one likes to hoard them secretly rather than share them with others. Counteract it by remembering that all things are impermanent and that benefiting others is benefiting oneself.

Twenty-Eight. The Cat Mind

This means lying in wait to catch birds and beasts, holding one's breath and waiting for an opportunity rather than diligently advancing at once, and acting only when circumstances are favorable. In the Dharma, it means retaining teachings without practicing them, hoping to wait for favorable conditions. Receiving kindness without remembering to repay it is also a cat mind. Counteract it by practicing promptly upon hearing the Dharma and constantly remembering others' kindness.

Twenty-Nine. The Dog Mind

This means being pleased and satisfied with attaining only a little. Because of meager merit and conditions, one's aspirations are inferior. For instance, having obtained a small portion of wholesome Dharma, one thinks practice need not be pursued to the end and does not seek what is higher and more excellent. This too is a śrāvaka habit. Counteract it by making the mind as vast as the ocean.

Thirty. The Garuḍa Mind

This bird constantly relies on its two wings to establish its power. Such a person delights in forming factions and building influence, taking these as support, and thus has little inclination to advance alone. Counteract it with independence: like the lion king, do not rely on companions or assistance.

Thirty-One. The Mouse Mind

Such a person enjoys petty acts of destruction, doing unreasonable and useless things. When they see something being accomplished, they like to create gaps and obstruct or ruin it. Counteract this with a broad and luminous mind.

Thirty-Two. The Chanting Mind

One enjoys using elegant literary phrases as Dharma giving but cannot inwardly realize innate wisdom. One merely learns the superficialities and gains no true benefit. Counteract this by seeking practical substance.

Thirty-Three. The Dancing Mind

One delights in spiritual powers and transformations, displaying all kinds of unprecedented phenomena. This can obstruct the pure mind and is called an illness.

Counteract it by not craving minor worldly signs of efficacy.

Thirty-Four. The Drum-Beating Mind

One arouses the resolve to warn sentient beings, but one's zeal is too urgent; pursuing small benefits obstructs the causes and conditions for great matters. This too is an illness. Counteract it by seeking the ultimate Dharma to liberate sentient beings.

Thirty-Five. The House Mind

This means using a house for protection, thereby keeping far from all evils. It is the same as the guarding mind. Counteract it by benefiting others.

Thirty-Six. The Lion Mind

One practices everything without the slightest timidity, like the lion king, regarding nothing in the world as difficult. Counteract this by recognizing that there is neither superiority nor inferiority, that all are equal, and by wishing all sentient beings to excel universally.

Thirty-Seven. The Owl Mind

This is the owl, which thrives in the darkness of night. Those who favor dwelling in quiet places, shutting themselves away to practice in secret, approach this disposition. Counteract it by remembering that light and darkness are nondual, stillness and noise are not different, and by not giving rise to dualistic views.

Thirty-Eight. The Bird Mind

This means constantly entertaining fearful thoughts. Even toward friendly people, one harbors suspicion, fear, and distrust. Counteract it by cultivating a settled and fearless mind.

Thirty-Nine. The Rākṣasa Mind

In the midst of a wholesome act, an unwholesome thought suddenly arises. For example, building a stūpa or temple is a great merit, but one suddenly fears harming small insects or troubling the donors and so stops. Counteract it by weighing the benefits and distinguishing what is weighty from what is light.

Forty. The Thorn Mind

This means that doing harmful deeds everywhere becomes one's disposition, causing much injury and obstruction and making those nearby uneasy. It is also like

making a gift and then giving rise to regret afterward. Counteract it by repenting and eliminating it without delay.

Forty-One. The Cave Mind

This means seeking arts of longevity, immortality, and freedom from aging, while waiting to meet the Buddhas of the future, like dragons and asuras hidden deep beneath the sea in profound caves. Counteract it by swiftly hearing the Dharma and realizing the Way in this life, rather than lingering uselessly.

Forty-Two. The Wind Mind

This means seeking every Dharma without exception and planting wholesome roots everywhere, like wind that reaches every place. But one does not realize that a stony field bears no crops, and so seeds are wasted in vain. Counteract it by choosing well and not craving too much.

Forty-Three. The Water Mind

Like water washing things, one seeks to expose their filth and remove it. In practice, one becomes attached one-sidedly to purity, which instead obstructs the pure mind. Counteract this by contemplating true reality: from the beginning there is no defilement; dualistic views arise from oneself, and that very seeing is defilement.

Forty-Four. The Fire Mind

The temperament is impatient like fire, excessively fierce and violent. One seeks the Dharma and wants attainment in an instant, thereby causing much ruin and harm. Counteract it with the water of gentleness and kindness.

Forty-Five. The Mud Mind

This is utter ignorance, like mud, and its nature is also like mire. Counteract it by seeking a good spiritual friend, who can skillfully open and develop one's understanding.

Forty-Six. The Color-Receiving Mind

Like plain silk, it takes on color as soon as it encounters it; according to the dye, it shows red or purple, having no mastery of its own. When it encounters evil matters, it likewise follows along and enters into them. Counteract it by maintaining autonomy and not being turned by others.

Forty-Seven. The Plank Mind

Like a plank in water, it bears things according to its capacity; once that limit is exceeded, it cannot support them and eventually capsizes and casts them off. A practitioner exclusively cultivates one Dharma, knows nothing of others, and admires no other wholesome practices; from this point, they make no further progress. Counteract it by arousing a vast mind and learning bodhisattva conduct.

Forty-Eight. The Deluded Mind

This is inversion and confusion, as when one wishes to go west but turns east, because the mind is scattered and distracted. Counteract it by focusing the mind single-mindedly and being careful, composed, and peaceful.

Forty-Nine. The Poison-Drinking Mind

Like dying from poison, one gives rise neither to wholesome nor unwholesome thoughts, but is numb and indifferent, drifting along with circumstances. Counteract it by arousing great compassion and all wholesome qualities, and by abandoning the annihilationist view.

Fifty. The Silk-Rope Mind

One falls into the annihilationist view, and the mind is no longer lively, as though bound by a silk rope. This is a most serious obstacle. Counteract it by arousing right wisdom and cutting off this wrong view.

Fifty-One. The Shackled Mind

With both feet in shackles, one cannot advance. Those who enjoy sitting quietly and cultivating a dead samādhi are likewise constrained by the Dharma itself. Counteract it by remaining lively and vibrant everywhere, so that stillness and disturbance are without separation.

Fifty-Two. The Cloud Mind

This means being constantly full of worries and thoughts, like the man of Qi who worried that the sky would fall. Counteract it by practicing equanimity and leaving behind worldly sorrow and joy.

Fifty-Three. The Field Mind

Like a good field that is weeded of wild growth and filth until it is completely clean, such a person delights in adorning the body and insists that it be bright, clean, and splendid. Reflect that this is a useless pursuit; cultivate the field of blessings in the mind as its remedy.

Fifty-Four: The Salt Mind

Just as salt is salty by nature and becomes still saltier the deeper it penetrates, so this person's thoughts penetrate ever more deeply, one turn after another. Know that such probing has no end and cannot be settled by conjecture; make a prompt decision as the remedy.

Fifty-Five: The Razor Mind

They think that shaving off the beard and hair is itself called leaving home, so what more is there to seek? This mind is most harmful, for it also shaves away the roots of goodness, so that they cannot grow again. Monastics of recent times consider themselves already endowed with the marks and deportment of the precepts, and thus to be a jewel of the saṅgha. They no longer seek the precepts of the mind, but become merit-field monastics. Lay practitioners, too, do not distinguish the genuine from the false: they revere monastics but not the Jewel, thereby fostering their arrogance and leading them astray. Shave away the poison of ignorance and practice genuinely leaving home as the remedy.

Fifty-Six: The Mount Meru Mind

This mind is arrogant and self-important; it does not even respect teachers, monastics, or parents. Filial devotion and humility should be its remedy.

Fifty-Seven: The Ocean Mind

Like the ocean, which contains everything, it claims every excellent matter for itself, believing that no one can compare with it. Mount Meru strives to be high; this mind strives to be vast. Humility should be its remedy.

Fifty-Eight: The Hole Mind

Like a vessel with a hole, it becomes a leaking vessel and is unfit for use. At first, such a person arouses the resolve and receives the precepts, complete and without deficiency; before long, however, breaches in the Dharma gradually arise. Like a broken vessel, it cannot retain the water of Dharma. Persevering from beginning to end should be its remedy.

Fifty-Nine: The Rebirth Mind

The meaning of this mind has not been fully explained. Presumably, people cultivate entirely in order to dedicate the merit toward future rebirth and seek its fruition, without distinguishing good from evil or black from white. One should cultivate only wholesome dharmas as the remedy.

Sixty: The Monkey Mind

This mind is the general characteristic of the sixty kinds of mind, referring in the strongest terms to the various forms of grasping at conditions: it is as unsettled as a monkey mind. This one mind is absent from the Sanskrit original. Realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, seeking samādhi and opening wisdom, should be its remedy.

The foregoing sixty kinds of mind are all matters of habitual tendencies and are sufficient to obstruct the Way; hence they are also called obscurations. To remove these obscurations, one must first realize the mind. Only after realizing the mind does one have a place to begin working on the various turbid views. Yet after realizing the mind, habitual tendencies still remain and must then be eliminated. Practitioners must not cling one-sidedly and suppose that, once they have realized the mind, the matter is finished; there still remains something like mourning one's dead parents. Others, too, must not cling one-sidedly and conclude that a person has not realized the mind simply because that person's habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated. Only the person themselves knows this through direct realization, or fellow practitioners who share the same view and practice can recognize its ultimate extent.

The sixty kinds of mind are as described above; practitioners may use them to verify themselves.

Appendix Six: A Letter Between Dharma Brother Jinming and Master Yuanyin

Appendix Six: A Letter Between Dharma Brother Jinming and Master Yuanyin

Revered Master, may you kindly examine this:

I respectfully wish you Dharma peace and auspiciousness!

1. In the instructions given off the meditation cushion—“watch where mental thoughts arise; when a thought arises, see it, but do not follow it,” and “do not suppress it or drive it away”—what does “where mental thoughts arise” refer to? It refers to the place before a mental thought has arisen. Thus, the moment a thought arises, you see it. Otherwise, as soon as the thought arises, you do not see it; only after following it for some time do you see it, and by then it is too late.

But watching does not mean rigidly suppressing it. Rather, attend to it lightly, as if there and as if not there; only then will there be no drawbacks. This is only a temporary expedient, not something to be done constantly. Once you have become familiar with watching and deluded thoughts have receded, do not watch any longer; to watch then is superfluous.

2. If the place where deluded thoughts arise refers precisely to this empty yet lucid placeless place, it is also the place on which deluded thoughts depend in arising. Does this mean that one watches this placeless place and, when thoughts come, pays them no heed, continuing simply to watch? Master, is this correct? At first, one should watch in this way. But after a long time, there is no need to do so; one must relax and let even the watching dissolve away.

3. How does one practice "when thoughts arise, do not follow them"? Which of the following two modes of contemplation is better?

a. Continuously watch the placeless place from which mental thoughts arise; when thoughts come, pay them no heed.

b. Directly turn the light inward and contemplate the present thought; that is, directly watch the deluded thought as it passes through the mind word by word, like a mirror reflecting things, yet without deliberately focusing on "watching." Is this what is meant by "when a thought arises, one must know it"? Simply put, when thoughts come, pay them no heed. It is like passersby coming and going on the street: neither party pays attention to the other, and they naturally flow by without obstruction. This does not mean stopping them and forbidding them to pass. Watching means not paying them heed; it does not mean staring fixedly at them.

4. Whenever I directly turn the light back to contemplate the placeless place from which thoughts arise, the thoughts can no longer be seen. Directly there is something seemingly empty yet luminous; that is, although there are no thoughts, awareness remains, for one still knows the sounds outside and the forms before one's eyes, though without paying them much attention. Is this the same placeless place as the empty, numinous interval between "the previous thought has ceased and the next thought has not yet arisen"? Their appearance is similar, but their quality differs. Since you are not paying much attention, thoughts still remain. When deluded thoughts have completely disappeared, body, mind, world, and empty space all vanish.

5. If one has already recognized that the empty numinosity seen between "the previous thought has ceased and the next thought has not yet arisen" is our eternally enduring and unchanging intrinsic nature, is there then no need to use the foregoing method of contemplation—"watch where mental thoughts arise, and when thoughts arise, do not follow them"? Should one instead safeguard it by not clinging to appearances amid circumstances and not following thoughts? Or should one still use the former method of contemplation? You must still use it, because habitual tendencies remain. Since you have not yet severed the subtle continuous stream of deluded thoughts, you must maintain continuous and seamless

contemplation. Only after eliminating this subtle continuous stream can you rest securely in your original home.

6. Does “clear and distinct” mean that although there are no thoughts, awareness does not cease; and although awareness does not cease, there are no thoughts?
Correct!

7. This disciple’s beginningless deluded attachments are deeply rooted. Although I understand the principle of “not clinging to appearances,” I still do not feel at ease. When deluded thoughts are flowing, I often turn the light inward again to contemplate the empty luminosity between “the previous thought has ceased and the next thought has not yet arisen.” Is this correct? Am I again abiding in attachment to this? What is the correct way to proceed? Incorrect! Where deluded thought ceases is itself the empty luminosity of intrinsic nature; there is no need to give rise to another thought in order to contemplate it.

Disciple Jinming bows in reverence nine times.

September 18, 1996