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Questions on Pure Land Practice

学佛最要把理路分清，不得情见用事。失去了宗旨，迷人眼目，并误自己，至可痛惜。在三十年前，我也是个专重净土谤密谤禅的人，及今思之无谓之争，殊觉可笑。嗣感生死之可怖，分门立户之非计，屡劝同人急急改悔，莫误了自己大事。今者彼此年事日高，断断不可再误。特提出此问题，愿与海内明达一商榷也。	In studying Buddhism, it is most important to be clear about the principles and keep feelings and preconceptions from governing one's judgment. To lose sight of the central purpose is to mislead others and oneself; nothing could be more regrettable. Thirty years ago, I too was someone who stressed Pure Land alone and disparaged Esoteric Buddhism and Chan. Looking back on it now, I find such pointless disputes truly laughable. Later, sensing the terror of birth and death and seeing that sectarian divisions are no solution, I repeatedly urged my fellow practitioners to repent and reform without delay, lest they neglect the great matter of their own birth and death. Now that we are all advancing in years, we must absolutely not go astray again. I raise this question especially in the hope of discussing it with discerning people throughout the country.
佛在时，并无宗派之可说，惟因众生根器不同，随机应化，乃有种种法门。所谓归元不二，方便多门。究其实禅净密，总是一个归元。禅宗见性成佛，净土华开见佛，密宗即身成佛，都是自己明心见性的净业。	During the Buddha's lifetime, there was no talk of sects. Only because sentient beings differ in their capacities did he respond to them accordingly, giving rise to various dharma gates. As it is said, "Returning to the source is nondual, and skillful means offer many ways in." In truth, Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism all return to the same source. The Chan school realizes Buddhahood by seeing one's nature; in Pure Land practice one sees the Buddha when the lotus opens; and Esoteric Buddhism attains Buddhahood in this very body. All are pure practices through which one realizes the mind and sees one's true nature.
自己是主人，诸法是缘助，成就是因缘。非禅宗所悟得者与密宗有二，亦非密宗见性与净土华开有异也。三宗同一要悟无所得，同此真实，是法平等，无有高下，此法是指心法。同要证到菩提，有何纷争之可言？故分宗者，皆因地不正者也。	Mastery lies with oneself. The various methods provide supporting conditions, and attainment comes when causes and conditions come together. It is not that what is realized by the Chan school differs from Esoteric Buddhism, nor that the Esoteric school's seeing of one's nature differs from the opening of the lotus in Pure Land. The three traditions alike require awakening to the ungraspability of all things. They share this same

	reality: dharmas are equal, without superiority or inferiority. Here, dharma means the mind Dharma. All alike seek to realize bodhi; what dispute can there be? Thus, those who divide into sects all begin from an incorrect foundation.
“净土”二字，非西方所专有之名辞也。土为本性，净为本相，言此本来清净，徒为无明所覆而不觉，今修禅修密修净，都是净其土的功夫。经云：若人欲知佛境界，当净其意如虚空。	The two words “Pure Land” are not terms exclusive to the West. The land is one’s intrinsic nature, and purity is its original aspect. This means that it is originally pure, but is covered by ignorance and thus not recognized. Now, whether one practices Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, or Pure Land, all are practices for purifying this land. A sūtra says: “If one wishes to know the realm of the Buddha, one should purify one’s mind until it is like empty space.”
禅宗先要一番大死，死去了一切念，而不言断灭，非净土而何？密宗三密加持，见到本尊，本尊者，自己本具之最尊净土也。净宗华开见佛，以念佛法，如子忆母，净念相继，得三摩地，斯为第一。一者，自性净土也。	The Chan school first requires a great death: all thoughts die away, yet this is not annihilationist emptiness. What is this if not Pure Land? Through the empowerment of the three mysteries in Esoteric Buddhism, one sees the yidam. The yidam is the most exalted Pure Land inherently possessed within oneself. In the Pure Land school, when the lotus opens one sees the Buddha. Through the method of Buddha-recitation, like a child remembering its mother, uninterrupted pure mindfulness brings attainment of samādhi; this is foremost. It is, first of all, the Pure Land of one’s own nature.
华开是自己华开见佛，是见本性佛。功夫全由悟到无生中来，如是与阿弥陀佛相印，同入极乐境界，理西方与事西方自然配合，当下即往生矣。是以往生极乐，须得我极乐而后可往生。言须先净其土，而可往净土也。	When the lotus opens, it is one’s own lotus that opens, and the Buddha one sees is the Buddha of one’s intrinsic nature. The whole practice arises from awakening to the unborn. Thus one is in mutual accord with Amitābha Buddha and enters the realm of ultimate bliss. The Western Pure Land as principle and as manifested reality naturally correspond, and one is reborn there at once. Therefore, to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must first attain one’s own ultimate bliss. That is to say, one must first purify one’s own land before one can be reborn in the Pure Land.
诸佛菩萨无不升莲花座，表莲花是自心，成佛皆自心成就。西方是成就门，成就是果位，故以莲宗称喻，可见宗宗皆归净土，非专指一方矣。	All Buddhas and bodhisattvas ascend lotus seats. This signifies that the lotus is one’s own mind, and that Buddhahood is accomplished wholly through

	one's own mind. The Western Pure Land represents the stage of fruition. The name "Lotus school" expresses this symbolically. From this it may be seen that every school returns to the Pure Land; it does not refer exclusively to one particular direction.
集团念佛，按引磬木鱼而念，此法始自远公，为初学者而设。后来用功人均从独自默念、用以摄六根归一心，先从万法归一做起，与禅宗衔接，再做一归何处功夫，口持心行，不偏废也。	Group Buddha-recitation, accompanied by the small handbell and wooden fish, began with Master Huiyuan and was established for beginners. Practitioners who take up sustained practice generally recite silently on their own, gathering the six sense faculties into one mind. They first begin with the practice of the myriad dharmas returning to the One, thereby connecting with the Chan school; then they undertake the practice of asking where the One returns. They recite the name and put the teaching into practice inwardly, neglecting neither.
其法与密宗又同，“南无阿弥陀佛”六字，系“南无阿弥达补大亚”八字之缩音，即是小往生咒第一句。世人讹音为“南无阿米多婆夜”，其实因各处方言不同而转误。	This method is also the same as that of Esoteric Buddhism. The six characters "Namo Amitābha Buddha" are a contracted pronunciation of the eight characters "Namo Amitābhadābu Dayā," and are the first line of the Short Rebirth Mantra. People have mistakenly pronounced it as "Namo Amituopo ye"; in fact, the error arose from differences among local dialects.
大势至念佛章，专重忆佛念佛，是重心行、以忆念之切，不觉出之于口。故执持名号，系二事同行，执为心执，持属口持，如是心口一如方可专一，手再结弥陀印，此名三密相印，斯得其全。	The chapter on Buddha-remembrance by Mahāsthāmaprāpta places special emphasis on remembering the Buddha and reciting the Buddha's name. It stresses practice of the mind: when remembrance becomes intense, it naturally issues from the mouth without one noticing. Thus, to hold fast to the name involves two practices proceeding together: holding fast belongs to the mind, while reciting belongs to the mouth. Only when mind and mouth are as one can one become single-minded. If one further forms the Amitābha mudrā with the hands, this is called the mutual sealing of the three mysteries, and the practice is complete.
今仅口持，耳闻钟磬或观胜境，口密而意不密矣。再用念珠记数，或学禅门走香或绕佛，身不密矣。三密既不	Nowadays people merely recite with the mouth, hear bells and chimes, or contemplate splendid scenes. The mystery of speech is present, but the

全，欲六根互摄，得三摩地，岂不甚难。故虽修数十年，仍无消息。	mystery of mind is absent. If they then use prayer beads to count, or imitate the Chan practice of walking meditation or circumambulating the Buddha, the mystery of body is absent as well. Since the three mysteries are incomplete, how can the six faculties mutually gather one another and attain samādhi without great difficulty? Therefore, though they may practice for decades, they still receive no news.
或有专心之至，有时亦得三昧境界，苦无人为之印证，功夫又无从再进，遂觉枯寂无味。而今年所请开示，与往年不异。	Some may become utterly concentrated and at times attain states of samādhi, but suffer because no one verifies their realization for them. Their practice then has no way to advance further, and they come to feel stuck in a barren stillness. Yet the instructions they seek this year are no different from those of previous years.
使学人一无门路可入，只好求见光见佛，不知幻心缘起，依幻立幻，忽见幻相，可以惊喜成颠，且其人之习气见解如故也。于贪　只是压制而非化除，一经波动，毫无定力，颠倒又如故也。	This leaves students with no gate through which to enter. They can only seek visions of light or Buddhas, not knowing that the deluded mind arises dependently. Relying on illusion, they establish further illusion; should an illusory appearance suddenly arise, they may be so startled and delighted as to become deranged. Yet their habitual tendencies and views remain as before. They merely suppress greed and anger rather than transform and eliminate them. Once they are stirred, they have no meditative stability at all, and their confusion is just as it was before.
于是弃而就密，或改入禅堂，愈弄愈不得法，再求诸教理经论，以为多闻多知，能讲能说，即可多一把握。不知更经他人赞叹礼拜，不觉陷入名闻利养坑中。雪上加霜，生死益固，此皆念佛不得法之误。	They then abandon this and turn to Esoteric Buddhism, or enter a Chan meditation hall instead. The more they meddle, the less they obtain the method. They then seek doctrinal teachings and sūtras and treatises, thinking that wide learning and much knowledge, along with the ability to lecture and speak, will give them greater assurance. They do not realize that, once others praise and pay homage to them, they may unconsciously fall into the pit of fame, reputation, and material gain. This adds frost to snow; birth and death become still more firmly entrenched. All this results from practicing Buddha-recitation without the proper method.

虽其人夙世法障深厚，要亦误之者，咎应有所归也。又修行人自不得法，不得不急于他求，乃至无师不拜，无法不求，日日求法，法法真意所在，是否当我之机不知也。	Although such people may have deep dharma obstacles from previous lives, those who mislead them must also bear responsibility. Moreover, when practitioners themselves fail to obtain the proper method, they cannot help urgently seeking elsewhere. They bow to every teacher and seek every method, pursuing Dharma day after day, without knowing where the true meaning of each dharma lies or whether it suits their own capacity.
处处求师，而且考师，以耳为目，而疑谤随起，自亦不知也。惶惶歧路，不知所可，或索性弃而勿修，或禅净兼修，或净密并行，脚踏两船，不知所届，不得已考证于死后，曰顶暖矣，决定生西矣。	They seek teachers everywhere and even assess the teachers, taking hearsay for firsthand knowledge. Doubt and disparagement then arise, though they themselves do not know it. Anxious and lost at the crossroads, they know not what to do. Some simply abandon practice altogether; some practice Chan and Pure Land together; some pursue Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism side by side. With a foot in two boats, they do not know where they will arrive. Unable to do otherwise, they seek proof after death, taking a warm crown as proof that the deceased has been reborn in the West.
又曰我一生多闻多念，纵不生西，此小功德，亦可勿入恶道，得此已足矣。渠知功夫全要在生前打脚跟，生前倘一无把鼻，死后庸有济乎。此我切身最大问题，何可坐视之乎?	They also say, “All my life I have heard much and recited much. Even if I am not reborn in the West, this small merit and virtue should at least keep me from falling into the evil realms. That is enough.” How do they know that the whole work lies in establishing one’s footing while alive? If, while alive, one has no firm grasp, how could it help after death? This is the greatest question of my own life. How can we stand by and watch?
近有人忽以西方究竟有无为问者，某大德谓西方是没有的。于是大兴疑谤，而来问于余。余不觉大笑曰：你何以不懂大德之慈悲而上其当耶？倘伊世故深，以人情讨好为务者，则亦曰佛说有的，谁敢云无。	Recently, someone suddenly asked whether the Western Land truly exists. A certain great teacher said that the Western Land does not exist. This stirred considerable doubt and criticism, so the person came to ask me about it. I could not help laughing and said, “Why do you not understand the great teacher’s compassion, but instead fall into his trap? If he were worldly and concerned with pleasing people, he would also say, ‘The Buddha said it exists; who would dare say it does not?’”
闻者必欣喜而去，不知伊不是这种人。既为大德，岂佛说弥陀经而亦未知。明明是对来问人下药，下文尚未深	Those who heard this would surely leave delighted, not realizing that he was not such a person. Since

述，而问者先起情见。不肯虚心下气，一究其所以然，虽是名医，亦不屑再下第二帖药也。	he was a great teacher, how could he not know that the Buddha taught the Amitābha Sūtra? Clearly, he prescribed medicine in response to the person who came to ask. Before he had fully explained the matter, the questioner had already formed emotional views. Unwilling to humble himself and investigate the reason thoroughly, he left even a renowned physician unwilling to prescribe a second dose of medicine.
须知佛法在了生死，了生死在破其见浊，你来意一心执为有，有则依赖心起，乃以无破有见，欲其深深一参究也。倘来人不信为有者，是偏执于无见，乃以有破之，而西方之有无暂勿论也。	You must know that the Buddhadharma concerns transcending birth and death, and that transcending birth and death depends on breaking through the turbidity of views. Your intention is to cling single-mindedly to existence. Once existence is affirmed, a dependent mind arises; therefore, he uses nonexistence to break your view of existence, wishing you to investigate it deeply. If a visitor did not believe in existence and was instead attached to the view of nonexistence, he would use existence to break that view. For the moment, do not debate whether the Western Land exists or does not exist.
某大德尚未毕其辞，而来人不明其意，先不受教，白费了伊一片婆心，深负其慈悲矣。后复问余：到底西方有没有？余云：我直说了，你必不信。我先问你，凡所有相，皆是虚妄，你信不信？云：佛说如是，如何不信。	Before that great teacher had finished speaking, the visitor failed to understand his meaning and refused the teaching at once. The teacher's whole compassionate intention was wasted, and his compassion was deeply betrayed. Later, the person again asked me, "After all, does the Western Land exist?" I said, "If I tell you directly, you certainly will not believe it. Let me first ask you: 'All that has form is illusory.' Do you believe this?" He replied, "The Buddha said so; how could I not believe it?"
余云：佛说凡所有相，皆是虚妄，只是说虚妄，不曾说没有，是有而虚妄耳，此意你信不信。曰：信。余云：西方本来没有，是阿弥陀佛，欲令法音宣流，从四十八方便愿力中，变化成就。	I said, "When the Buddha said that all that has form is illusory, he said only that it is illusory; he did not say that it does not exist. It exists, but is illusory. Do you believe this meaning?" He said, "I do." I said, "The Western Land originally does not exist. Amitābha Buddha, wishing the sound of Dharma to spread abroad, brought it forth through the transformative accomplishment of his forty-eight skillful vows."
正如今日小小一座谈会，一切正有不可言无，但彼此一切皆是缘会，既因缘生，即不可得，故不可言有，以毕	It is just like a small gathering today: everything is plainly present, and one cannot say that it does not

竟性空非实，只假有耳。倘你真能悟到性空道理，即是华开见佛，自在往生，管他有与没有。	exist. Yet everything among us comes together through conditions; because it arises from causes and conditions, it cannot be grasped. Therefore, one cannot call it existent. Its ultimate nature is empty and unreal; it is only provisionally existent. If you can truly awaken to the principle of emptiness of nature, that is seeing the Buddha when the lotus opens and attaining rebirth freely. Why concern yourself with whether it exists or does not exist?
你如取相而说，西方实实有，但是幻有：你如就性分说，彼此尽属性空，连你自己这个幻身亦没有，但世人一闻没有，便狐疑不信，甚至狂乱矣。黄檗禅师云：“法本不有，莫作无见，法本不无，莫作有见，有之于无，尽是情见。”所以念佛第一义，在息机忘见，是修净土的正路。所以理路要分清。	If you speak in terms of appearances, the Western Land is indeed present, in the way an illusion is present. If you speak in terms of intrinsic nature, both it and we are wholly empty in nature; even this illusory body of your own does not exist. But when ordinary people hear that it does not exist, they become suspicious and unbelieving, even frantic. Chan Master Huangbo said: “Dharmas are fundamentally not existent; do not form a view of nonexistence. Dharmas are fundamentally not nonexistent; do not form a view of existence. Judgments about existence and nonexistence are all conditioned views.” Therefore, the foremost principle of Buddha-recitation is to cease contrivance and forget views. This is the right path for practicing Pure Land. Thus, the principles must be clearly distinguished.
又有人问：据公所说，全要靠自己念佛开悟力量，然则不关佛之接引矣。余曰：否，此乃双方合力成就法也。要你念到不持而念，由化境而入清净，方可与佛相接，先以法引，次以事接。	Someone else asked, “According to what you say, everything depends on one’s own power to recite the Buddha’s name and awaken. Does this mean that it has nothing to do with the Buddha’s guidance?” I said, “No. This is a method accomplished through the combined strength of both sides. You must recite until recitation continues without deliberate holding, passing from the realm of transformation into purity; only then can you connect with the Buddha. First you are guided by Dharma, and then you are received through manifestation.”
譬如一人落井，迫切求出，井上有人悬绳救之，井中人尤须先自捆扎牢固，与井上人相接，斯可接引出险。今一味靠井上人而自不着力，岂不可笑。须知井上时时有人，悬绳亦是现成，乃起种种妄想，不自努力，徒问井上之人有无，不其惑矣。	It is like a person who has fallen into a well and urgently seeks to get out. Someone above lowers a rope to rescue him, but the person in the well must first tie himself securely and connect with the person above; only then can he be pulled out of danger. If he relies solely on the person above

	while making no effort himself, would that not be laughable? Know that there is always someone above the well and that the rope is already there. Yet one gives rise to all kinds of deluded thoughts, makes no effort oneself, and merely asks whether there is anyone above the well. Is that not delusion?
诸法本是空相，难易原无定论，凡法之易者，易入而难信，净土是也。十念即可往生，宁非易之又易，因其太易而轻之，遂不痛切，有佛接引，依赖心起，遂生待心，临终请人助念，平时更不必着急，是极易而转为极难，又谁之过欤?	All dharmas are originally empty appearances, and there is no fixed rule as to difficulty or ease. Methods that are easy are easy to enter but difficult to trust; the Pure Land is one such method. One may be reborn through as few as ten recitations—could anything be easier? But because it is too easy, people take it lightly and do not become deeply earnest. Thinking that the Buddha will guide them, they grow dependent and put off practicing. At death, they ask others to assist their recitation, and in ordinary times feel no need for urgency. What is extremely easy is thus turned into what is extremely difficult. Whose fault is that?
西方为成就门，不是儿戏事，不努力，万不可成，尤须有般若力，精进如香象渡河，截断众流，方得成就。	The Western Land is a gate of attainment, not a child's game. Without effort, attainment is absolutely impossible. One especially needs the power of prajñā and must be diligent like a great elephant crossing a river, cutting off all currents, before attainment can be achieved.
凡经首以舍利弗领众，菩萨以文殊法王子为首，正表此经由小乘般若，引入大乘般若，而阿逸多为弥勒，言须破一切相以归性，下二菩萨表此法须精进如香象渡河也。	At the beginning of the sūtra, Śāriputra leads the assembly, while Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, heads the bodhisattvas. This precisely signifies that the sūtra leads from the prajñā of the Lesser Vehicle into the prajñā of the Great Vehicle. Ajita is Maitreya, signifying that one must break through all appearances and return to intrinsic nature. The following two bodhisattvas signify that this Dharma requires diligence like a great elephant crossing a river.
于十二部中，此经为自说部，以诸二乘偏执于空而不自知，佛遂说有以救之，曰从是过西方有世界，有阿弥陀佛。	Among the twelve divisions of scripture, this sūtra belongs to the category of teachings spoken by the Buddha of his own accord. The śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas did not realize they had become attached to a one-sided view of emptiness. To free them from that attachment, the Buddha spoke of

	what exists, saying: “Westward from here there is a world where Amitābha Buddha dwells.”
今现在说法，我见是利，并以有相庄严，如七宝庄严，八功德水，黄金为地，莲华诸胜，渐渐脱卸到音声微妙上，全是性分中流出。	He is now teaching the Dharma. I see this as beneficial. Moreover, the adornments of form—such as the seven treasures, the water of eight virtues, the ground of gold, and the splendors of lotuses—are gradually shed until one reaches the subtle wonder of sound. All flow forth from intrinsic nature.
于是点到寿命无量之体，与光明无量，照十方国无所障碍之用，而人物之胜，不可称量，再三劝人发愿，且指示以方法，倘执持名号心中念念不忘弥陀，既肯专心于念佛念法念僧，自不暇于念贪念　念痴。	It then points to the essence of immeasurable life and the function of immeasurable light, which illuminates the lands of the ten directions without obstruction. The excellence of its people cannot be measured or described. Again and again, it urges people to make vows and also indicates the method: if one upholds the name and never forgets Amitābha in thought after thought, and is willing to concentrate on mindfulness of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, one will naturally have no leisure to entertain thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance.
平时心不颠倒，临命终时，自有把握。一心者，无心也，惟此一真心也。真心者，无心心也，非另有一心也。以一句弥陀，打去妄念，寂然无念而不断灭，此是一心境界。	If one’s mind is not inverted in ordinary times, one will naturally be assured at the time of death. One mind means no mind—only this one true mind. The true mind is the mind of no-mind; it is not some separate mind. Use the single phrase “Amitābha” to drive away deluded thoughts. When there is serene thoughtlessness without falling into annihilation, this is the state of one mind.
上得此路，一门深入，勤修勿怠，力量日见充足，但问耕耘，莫问收成，有因必有果，不待死后，即生前亦不颠倒矣。凡一念起落，即一生死，妄念一起，假名为命始，妄念一去，假名为命终。	Having found this path, go deeply into one gate; cultivate diligently and do not grow lax. Your strength will increase day by day. Only ask about the cultivation, not about the harvest: where there is cause, there must be fruition. There is no need to wait until after death; even during this life, the mind will cease to be inverted. Every arising and passing thought is a birth and death. When a deluded thought arises, it is provisionally called the beginning of life; when a deluded thought departs, it is provisionally called the end of life.

今刻刻以慧照力，洞见其妄，即刻刻有临命终时，心不颠倒，非如此精进不可。然佛又虑大众心量之窄小，不足以付如是大事，若偏执一方为胜，心不广大，亦难成就，乃引十方佛，恒沙无量，同此护念，点到本经。	Now, by the power of wisdom's illumination at every moment, clearly see its falsity. Thus, at every moment, one is at the time of death, with the mind not inverted. Such diligence is indispensable. Yet the Buddha also feared that the capacity of the assembly might be too narrow to undertake such a great matter. If one stubbornly clings to one direction as supreme, one's mind is not broad, and accomplishment is likewise difficult. Therefore, he invokes the Buddhas of the ten directions, as countless as the sands of the Ganges, all of whom offer this protection and mindfulness, thereby referring to the present sūtra.
经者，非专指此文字经也，正指众生自性中之金刚藏也。再言此愿一发，当下成就，如已发愿、今发愿、当发愿者，若已生若今生若当生，如是广大圆融之念佛法，直是一超直入，开般若华，见实相佛，三根普被者矣。	A sūtra does not refer exclusively to this written sūtra; it refers precisely to the vajra treasury within the self-nature of sentient beings. Furthermore, once this vow is made, accomplishment occurs immediately: those who have made the vow, are now making the vow, or will make the vow, have already been reborn there, are being reborn there now, or will be reborn there in the future. Such is this broad and perfectly integrated Dharma of Buddha-recitation: it enables practitioners of all three capacities to enter directly in a single leap, open the flower of prajñā, and see the Buddha of true reality.
故上根人可生前见性成就，不往而往。中根人入于品位，有往生之资，到彼已，再闻法勤修以见性。下根人以心念之专，缘熟亦可往生，至少亦种善根于来世，总是同一证到菩提。	Therefore, those of superior capacity can realize their true nature and attain accomplishment during this life, arriving without going. Those of middling capacity enter the grades of rebirth and possess the provisions for rebirth; once there, they hear the Dharma again and cultivate diligently in order to see their true nature. Those of lesser capacity, through the singleness of their thoughts, may also attain rebirth when conditions mature; at the very least, they plant wholesome roots for future lives. In every case, it is the same realization of bodhi.
然而世人为五浊所蒙，无力信入，亦不敢信入，是为甚难，连说五个难字。呜呼，非此法之难也，自难之也。虽以佛菩萨之慈悲，无可奈何也。又古德先贤，劝人勤修净业，恐人怕难而不肯修，遂言其易，而不知又误于一易字，真是扶得西来东又倒矣。至此，愿诸仁且把难易二见收起，一心致力于念佛可也。	Yet worldly people are obscured by the five turbidities. They lack the strength to enter through faith, and they do not even dare to do so. This is exceedingly difficult; the word "difficult" is repeated five times. Alas! It is not that this Dharma is difficult; people make it difficult for themselves. Even the compassion of Buddhas and bodhisattvas can do

	nothing about this. Moreover, ancient virtuous teachers urged people to cultivate pure karma diligently. Fearing that people would shrink from difficulty and refuse to practice, they therefore called it easy, not realizing that they would again mislead people through this single word “easy.” Truly, as soon as you prop someone up on one side, they fall over on the other. At this point, I hope that you will set aside both views of difficulty and ease, and devote yourselves single-mindedly to Buddha-recitation.
念佛法，实有改善之必要。最忌打七时，出声连念，口不停歇，接连四十九天，往往伤气，胸口胀痛，为终身之病，极不易治，因而怨恨疑谤者有之。	The practice of Buddha-recitation truly needs improvement. The greatest taboo is, during a seven-day retreat, to recite continuously aloud without resting the mouth, for forty-nine consecutive days. This often injures the vital energy and causes distending pain in the chest, becoming a lifelong illness that is extremely difficult to treat. Some therefore become resentful, doubtful, and slanderous.
故净七至多四七，七中每日念佛，由七八小时，加至十二小时，不得再多，不得出声，必结弥陀印，手印勿放散。例如早一点半起身，先盥洗，大小便。	Therefore, a Pure Land seven-day retreat should last no more than four periods of seven days. During the retreat, the daily time for Buddha-recitation may be increased from seven or eight hours to twelve hours, but no more. One must not recite aloud, and one must form the Amitābha mudrā without letting the mudrā fall apart. For example, rise at 1:30 in the morning, first wash and attend to bodily needs.
二点上座，连四小时，六时下座，用早膳，八时上座，十二时下座，午餐，二时上座，六时下座，夜餐，八时睡。此是整日修，不可再多，如每日念七八小时者，时间再定，不必太拘。	Sit at 2:00 and continue for four hours. Rise from the seat at 6:00, take breakfast, sit again at 8:00, and rise at noon for lunch. Sit again at 2:00, rise at 6:00 for dinner, and sleep at 8:00. This is a full day of practice and must not be increased further. For those who recite the Buddha’s name seven or eight hours daily, the schedule may be arranged separately; there is no need to be overly rigid.
七中，主七者常须开示，并考问各人座上情况，时加纠正。在座上，不许观光观相，只守定三要，一要手印勿散，二要念佛勿停，唇微动而无声，三要心毋妄动。念来勿理，亦勿压制妄念，亦勿幻起诸相，见光见佛，引起魔见。	During the retreat, the retreat leader must regularly give instruction, inquire into each person’s experience on the cushion, and make corrections when needed. While seated, do not contemplate lights or appearances; simply maintain the three essentials of samādhi: first, do not let the mudrā

	come apart; second, do not cease Buddha-recitation, letting the lips move slightly but without sound; third, do not allow the mind to move deludedly. When thoughts arise, do not attend to them, but neither suppress deluded thoughts. Nor should one conjure up various appearances, such as seeing light or seeing a Buddha, thereby giving rise to demonic views.
此系大概，其细则甚繁，当另订之。最好集十数人，约期四七，定时为暮春或秋末冬初，邀请一主七人，关内立诸禁条，约护关者二人，四七日中，要克期求证，一期不成，则隔一二月，再行二期，至多三期。	This is only a general outline; the detailed rules are numerous and should be established separately. It is best to gather ten or more people, set a date for four periods of seven days, preferably in late spring or at the end of autumn or beginning of winter, invite a retreat leader, establish various prohibitions within the retreat quarters, and appoint two retreat attendants. During the twenty-eight days, one should strive to attain realization within the appointed period. If one period is unsuccessful, after an interval of one or two months, undertake a second period, with no more than three periods in all.
行者果肯痛切，无有不证三昧者。如证得三昧，方可参考禅宗用功法，密宗加持法以为缘助，如是生西决有把握矣。至此境界，庶可以入大势至菩萨圆通念佛法矣。	If practitioners are truly earnest and resolute, none will fail to realize samādhi. Once samādhi has been realized, they may then refer to the Chan school's methods of practice and Esoteric Buddhism's methods of empowerment as supporting conditions. In this way, they will certainly be assured of rebirth in the Western Pure Land. At this stage, one may perhaps enter Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva's perfect-penetration method of Buddha-recitation.
因菩萨念佛，都摄六根，无一时无一处不是念佛，礼佛供养，亦是念佛。在在见到性空，正是念佛。所谓净念相继，打成一片。彼菩萨者，决不必手持念珠，口诵六字，早课夜课以为用功，余时又茫茫荡荡去也。凡至心净业者，其亦以斯言为可教乎。	For when that bodhisattva recites the Buddha's name, he gathers in the six sense faculties: at no time and in no place is he not reciting the Buddha's name. Bowing to the Buddha and making offerings are also Buddha-recitation. Wherever he is, seeing emptiness of nature is precisely Buddha-recitation. This is what is called uninterrupted pure mindfulness, becoming continuous and undivided. Such a bodhisattva certainly need not hold prayer beads in hand, recite the six-character name aloud, and regard morning and evening services as practice, only to drift about in confusion the rest of

	the time. Can those who sincerely cultivate pure karma not take these words as instruction?
或又问曰：如今之念佛者，早课夜课，果有效否？而老太太念佛，其心专在身后福报，更不知净土之所以然，果亦有效否？曰：一样有效，只式微耳。	Someone may further ask: “Do the morning and evening services of those who now recite the Buddha’s name actually have any effect? And when elderly women recite the Buddha’s name with their minds fixed solely on posthumous blessings, without even understanding the basis of the Pure Land—does this also have any effect?” The answer is: “It has the same effect, only in diminished measure.”
盖念佛人，不问其功行之深浅，其脑海中，已印下种子，无论如何，总比不念是好。不必作时间相，久之还由此一印中成就，我人不可轻慢后学也。惟念佛法，初为持名，尚不得谓为真念佛。	For those who recite the Buddha’s name, regardless of the depth or shallowness of their practice, have already imprinted a seed in their minds. Whatever happens, this is always better than not reciting. One need not form concepts of time; after a long while, one may still attain accomplishment through this single imprint. We should not slight later students. Yet the practice of Buddha-recitation begins with upholding the name, and this still cannot be called true Buddha-recitation.
若到能念之时，其先已具几种条件：一、深信西方极乐世界，香光庄严，因缘殊胜，愿力坚强者，决可往生，不因凡夫而可限之也。盖即心即佛，心空即佛，正一心时，已非凡夫境界。	Before one can truly recite the Buddha’s name, several conditions must already be present: First, one must deeply believe that the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is adorned with fragrance and light, possesses exceptional causes and conditions, and that those with firm vows will certainly attain rebirth; ordinary beings cannot be excluded from it. For mind itself is Buddha, and when mind is empty, it is Buddha. When one is truly one-pointed, one has already gone beyond the realm of ordinary beings.
虽暂而非久，以愿力坚强故，久久仍可打成一片，具有阿　跋致之资格。	Though this may be temporary rather than lasting, because one’s vows are firm, in time one can still become continuous and undivided, possessing the qualifications of avaivartika.
二、深信往生者，全是化境，此心圆遍十方，即是十方诸佛之所护念，魄力亦不觉雄厚，于化境中，无一处不是佛境，不是西方，此时无边身自然显发，不必定在佛堂中念佛，亦不必定分东西南北也。	Second, one must deeply believe that rebirth is entirely a transformed realm. This mind pervades the ten directions and is therefore protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas of the ten directions. One’s strength of spirit naturally becomes great. Within the transformed realm, there is no place

	that is not a Buddha realm, not the Western Pure Land. At such a time, the boundless body naturally manifests. There is no need to recite the Buddha's name only in a Buddha hall, nor any need to distinguish east, west, south, and north.
三、真能念佛者，即不持名，或应付寻常事，终不失此虚空寂照。如自己之姓名相似，虽颠倒中，亦不忘失，此是净念相继时也。四、以专一之至，其余果皆非所愿，金台银台，为方便下愚者而设。	Third, one who can truly recite the Buddha's name, even without upholding the name or while attending to ordinary matters, never loses this empty, quiescent illumination. It is like one's own name: even amid confusion, one does not forget it. This is the time of uninterrupted pure mindfulness. Fourth, when concentration reaches its utmost, all other fruits are no longer what one seeks. Golden platforms and silver platforms were established as expedient means for those of lesser capacity.
云接引者，是方便初学者使其放心，如扶醉汉回家，有赖引接。我自己既不迷醉，回家熟路，何劳接引乎。具此胆力，全由定力中来，无有不往生者矣。今因念佛不得其法，又少缘助，久而无功，遂生怠心。	To speak of being guided and received is an expedient for beginners, putting their minds at ease. It is like supporting a drunken man on his way home, when he needs someone to lead him. But if I am not drunk or confused and already know the way home well, why should I need guidance? Such courage comes entirely from the power of samādhi; then there are none who will fail to attain rebirth. Nowadays, because people do not obtain the proper method of Buddha-recitation and lack supporting conditions, they practice for a long time without result and thus become discouraged.
或感觉自己一无把握，又见他人习气未除，遂生恐怖。此切切不可，当继续虔修，一心念佛，惟方法须有所变通耳。又念佛久无成就者，原因还在平时不着力，虽有早晚课，终不免一曝十寒，故不问修何法门，都重在下座用功。而下座不用功者，原因在不会用功，茫然无所措手，此急须商榷者也。	Some feel they have no assurance at all, and, seeing that others' habitual tendencies have not been eliminated, become fearful. This must absolutely not be so. Continue cultivating devoutly and recite the Buddha's name single-mindedly; only the method must be adjusted. Moreover, the reason those who have long recited the Buddha's name have not attained accomplishment still lies in their failure to apply themselves in ordinary life. Though they have morning and evening services, they inevitably practice only sporadically. Therefore, no matter which dharma gate one cultivates, the essential point is practice off the meditation cushion. Those who do not practice off the cushion fail to do so because they do not know how to practice; they are at a loss as to where to

	begin. This is a matter that urgently requires discussion.