Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935)

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The Sixty Types of Mind

Sentient beings have immeasurable habitual tendencies; broadly classified, they amount to eighty-four thousand. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra condenses them into sixty, calling them the sixty minds, each with its own characteristics. They are explained here in a still more concise manner. Practitioners should use this to examine themselves: Which kind of mind is strongest in me? That is the deepest manifestation of my affliction. What antidote should I apply? Then habitual tendencies will naturally be eliminated, and fundamental wisdom will steadily grow stronger. A concise explanation follows:

1. The mind of greed: Upon encountering an object, one immediately grasps at it, defiling the pure mind. It must manifest outwardly, just as seeing smoke tells one that there is fire. The root of greed lies within and obstructs every entry into the Way. Greed for wealth, fame, profit, or even the flavor of the Dharma is all an affliction. The antidote is to empty all things.

2. The mind free of greed: This is contrary to the preceding mind, but it is the conduct of not being greedy without wisdom. For example, while earnestly practicing, one may become negatively attached to biased emptiness and cease to seek anything; one does not arouse a great resolve, but merely seeks a little satisfaction, fails to exert oneself diligently, or falls into annihilationism. The former is excessive grasping; this is excessive relinquishment. Both are afflictions. The antidote is neither grasping nor relinquishing, but arousing the great resolve and taking up the responsibility.

3. The mind of anger: When one cannot obtain what one greedily seeks, hatred arises. The antidote is a mind of loving-kindness.

4. The mind of loving-kindness: This is contrary to anger, but it is merely sentimental benevolence and obstructs entry into the great Way. The antidote is to understand cause and effect, seek the ultimate, and attend to what is fundamental.

5. The mind of delusion: In whatever one undertakes, one cannot discern with wisdom and is beset by many confusions. The antidote is to open prajñā.

6. The mind of intellect: This is the petty intelligence of the world, making contrived distinctions—this is superior, that inferior—and regarding itself as right. It does not realize how limited an individual's knowledge and views are. The light of a firefly cannot set Mount Sumeru ablaze. The antidote is humility and freedom from self-importance.

7. The mind of doubt: This arises when one is overly calculating about personal profit, loss, advantage, and harm, unwilling to suffer even the slightest disadvantage. One hesitates and cannot decide in dealing with affairs, losing one's bearings whether advancing or retreating. The antidote is a spirit of sacrifice and courage.

8. The mind of rash decision: This means making decisions too quickly, without distinguishing right from wrong, and thereby mishandling matters. The antidote is to examine things through wise contemplation and not give undue weight to personal feelings.

9. The obscured mind: One says that a matter need not be doubted, yet remains indecisive and full of misgivings. This is somewhat like the seventh mind: the former is subtle, this one coarse; the former is excessive, this one falls short. The antidote is likewise the illumination of wisdom.

10. The mind of clarity: One claims to understand everything clearly, yet excessive scrutiny becomes an error. One does not realize that worldly affairs are inherently impermanent and can scarcely be expected to reach perfection. The antidote is not to demand perfection.

11. The accumulating mind: Having obtained one superior Dharma, one accumulates oneself around it and rejects all other teachings. Those who delight in Esoteric Buddhism, for example, may claim that apart from it there is no other Dharma; practitioners of the Pure Land may do the same. Thus begins the gradual opening of sectarian divisions and disputes. The antidote is an impartial and expansive mind.

12. The contentious mind: One delights in debating right and wrong, even arguing crookedness into straightness. One does not realize that argument itself is contrary

to the meaning. The antidote is noncontention.

13. The disputatious mind: This is inward self-contention. For example, after reflecting and arriving at one meaning, which would be enough, one immediately raises objections oneself and gives rise to thought after thought. The antidote is to take to heart Ji Wenzi's saying, “Think thrice, then act.”

14. The mind of noncontention: One relinquishes both right and wrong, only to end up having no position at all and being unable to distinguish good from evil. The antidote is clear discernment and prompt decision.

15. The heavenly mind: This refers to a natural habit of expecting every wish and desire to be fulfilled, like the pleasurable karmic rewards in the deva realms, which come naturally without effort. One then practices in the same way, without applying oneself diligently. This can obstruct bodhi. One should understand that nothing comes naturally: causes must be planted before results can arise. The antidote is not to crave saving effort.

16. The asura mind: Although one knows the benefit of liberation, one is accustomed to the karmic results of birth and death, sinks within them, and does not move forward. The antidote is to contemplate the world as impermanent, suffering, and empty.

17. The dragon mind: Greed for wealth, goods, and sensual beauty, like that of a dragon. The antidote is contentment.

18. The human mind: Favor and resentment are sharply distinguished; repayment and requital are pursued with great exactness; and at every turn one establishes a personal self. The antidote is to proceed toward the great Way.

19. The woman's mind: This is a mind of many desires. The antidote is contemplation of impurity.

20. The self-willed mind: One seeks for everything to accord with one's wishes and fulfill one's desires. One should contemplate that dharmas have no inherent nature and come together through causes and conditions; how could everything possibly conform to one's wishes? This is the antidote.

21. The merchant's mind: This means analyzing too minutely and making excessively thorough calculations and plans, which inevitably leads to entanglement and becomes a serious affliction. The antidote is to cultivate swift wisdom.

22. The farmer's mind: Like a farmer cultivating the fields, one wants to understand every detail before applying effort. Those studying the Dharma likewise first wish to hear extensively before seeking the Dharma. Those who now study the Dharma

Characteristics School merely seek intellectual understanding and neglect practice in actual circumstances; they labor without result. One should consider a poisoned arrow entering the body: it must be treated quickly, not subjected to extensive questioning before it is removed. Therefore, the antidote is to cultivate sharp wisdom.

23. The river mind: Like river water that depends on its two banks, or drifts without stability, the mind is not one-pointed. The antidote is to concentrate the mind on a single object.

24. The pond mind: People greedily seek fame and profit without ever being satisfied, like water collecting in a pool that receives everything. The same is true in studying the Dharma: greed for much prevents one from becoming refined and single-minded. The antidote is few desires.

25. The well mind: One thinks in ever greater depths, wishing always to be unfathomable to others. The antidote is to be straightforward, clear, and easy to understand.

26. The guarding mind: Worldly people guard their possessions and lives as a turtle withdraws its head. This is a habitual tendency of the śrāvaka and cannot receive the great vehicle. The antidote is great compassion and benefiting all people universally.

27. The miserly mind: Everything one does is for oneself. Even wholesome dharmas are jealously concealed and not shared with others. The antidote is to remember that all things are impermanent and that benefiting others is thereby benefiting oneself.

28. The cat mind: This is like lying in wait to catch birds and animals, holding one's breath and awaiting an opportunity rather than pressing forward swiftly, then seizing the chance when convenient. In relation to the Dharma, one may uphold it without practicing, hoping for favorable conditions. Or, having received kindness, one may fail to remember to repay it; this too is the mind of a cat. The antidote is to practice swiftly upon hearing the Dharma and always remember others' kindness.

29. The dog mind: One is pleased and satisfied with little. Because of meager blessings and conditions, one's aspirations are inferior. Having gained a small portion of wholesome Dharma, one thinks practice cannot be carried through and does not seek what is higher and more excellent. This too is a habit of the śrāvaka. The antidote is to make one's mind as vast as the ocean.

30. The garuḍa mind: This bird constantly relies on its two wings for its power. Such a person likes to gather followers and establish influence as a source of support,

and thus has little inclination to advance independently. The antidote is independence, like the lion king, relying on no companions or assistance.

31. The mouse mind: Such a person delights in petty destruction, doing unreasonable and useless things. When seeing something being accomplished, one likes to create openings through which to frustrate and ruin it. The antidote is a vast and luminous mind.

32. The mind of singing and chanting: One delights in using ornate language and elegant phrases as Dharma giving, but cannot inwardly realize natural wisdom. One merely learns superficialities and gains no real benefit. The antidote is to seek practical substance.

33. The dancing mind: One delights in spiritual powers and transformations, displaying all kinds of unprecedented things. This can obstruct the pure mind and is called an affliction. The antidote is not to crave minor worldly signs of attainment.

34. The drum-beating mind: One arouses the resolve to warn sentient beings, but one's zeal is too hasty; one pursues small benefits and thereby obstructs the conditions for great undertakings. This too is an affliction. The antidote is to seek the ultimate Dharma for liberating sentient beings.

35. The house mind: This is like a house protecting the body by keeping far from all evils. It is the same as the guarding mind. The antidote is to benefit others.

36. The lion mind: In all practice, one is not in the least timid or weak; like the lion king, one sees no difficult task under heaven. The antidote is to recognize that there is no superiority or inferiority, that all are equal, and to wish that all sentient beings may universally excel.

37. The owl mind: This is the mind of an owl, which thrives in the darkness of night. Those who prefer solitude, shut their doors, and practice secretly in darkness resemble it. The antidote is to remember that light and darkness are nondual, stillness and bustle are not different, and not to give rise to dualistic views.

38. The bird mind: One is constantly alarmed and apprehensive; even toward friendly people, one harbors suspicion, fear, and distrust. The antidote is to cultivate a settled and fearless mind.

39. The rākṣasa mind: In the midst of a wholesome act, unwholesome thoughts suddenly arise. For example, building a Buddha stūpa or temple is a great merit, yet one suddenly fears harming small insects or troubling the donors and therefore stops. The antidote is to weigh the benefits and distinguish what is weighty from what is light.

40. The thorn mind: One has the disposition to initiate harmful actions everywhere, causing much injury and obstruction and making those nearby uneasy. Or, having made a gift, one later regrets it. The antidote is swift repentance and elimination of such faults.

41. The cave mind: One seeks arts of longevity and immortality, waiting to see future Buddhas, like dragons and asuras hidden deep beneath the sea in caverns. The antidote is to hear the Dharma and realize the Way quickly in this very life; one should not linger fruitlessly.

42. The wind mind: One seeks every Dharma without exception and plants wholesome roots everywhere, like wind that reaches every place. But one does not realize that rocky fields produce no crops, and seeds are wasted in vain. The antidote is careful selection and freedom from greed for abundance.

43. The water mind: Like water washing things, one insists on exposing their filth and removing it. In practice, one becomes one-sidedly attached to purity, thereby obstructing the pure mind. The antidote is to contemplate the true aspect: from the beginning there has been no defilement; dualistic views arise from oneself, and the very act of seeing is defilement.

44. The fire mind: Its nature is fiery and impatient, excessively fierce and violent. In seeking the Dharma, one wants immediate accomplishment and thereby causes much failure and injury. The antidote is the water of gentleness and loving-kindness.

45. The mud mind: One is wholly ignorant, like mud, and one's disposition is likewise muddy and bogged down. The antidote is to seek a good spiritual friend, who can skillfully open and guide one.

46. The mind of manifest color: Like undyed silk, it takes on whatever color it encounters, becoming red or purple according to the dye, without any mastery of its own. Upon seeing evil matters, one also follows along and enters into them. The antidote is self-mastery and not being turned by others.

47. The plank mind: Like a plank in water, it can carry things only according to its capacity; when the limit is exceeded, it cannot bear them and eventually overturns and casts them off. A practitioner specializes in one Dharma and knows no others, no longer admiring any other wholesome practices, and therefore makes no further progress. The antidote is to arouse a vast mind and study the bodhisattva practices.

48. The deluded mind: This is inverted confusion, as when one wishes to go west but instead turns east, because the mind is scattered and disordered. The antidote is to make the mind one-pointed, carefully discerning, and peaceful.

Forty-Ninth: Poisoned Mind. It is like dying from poison: neither wholesome nor unwholesome thoughts arise; one is numb and unfeeling, drifting with circumstances. As an antidote, one should arouse great compassion and all wholesome qualities, and abandon the annihilationist view.

Fiftieth: Silk-Rope Mind. One falls into an annihilationist view; the mind is no longer lively, as though bound by a silk rope. This is an especially grave obstruction. As an antidote, one should give rise to right wisdom and cut off this wrong view.

Fifty-First: Shackled Mind. It is like having both feet locked in shackles, unable to move forward. Those who delight in sitting quietly and cultivating a dead samādhi are likewise constrained by the Dharma in relation to the Dharma. As an antidote, one should remain lively and responsive in all circumstances, so that stillness and disturbance are without interruption.

Fifty-Second: Cloud Mind. One is constantly burdened with anxious thoughts, like the man of Qi who worried that the sky would fall. As an antidote, one should cultivate equanimity and distance oneself from worldly sorrow and joy.

Fifty-Third: Field Mind. Like a good field that is weeded and cleared of rank growth, one strives to make it completely clean. Such a person likes to adorn the body and insists that it be bright, clean, and splendid. As an antidote, one should reflect that these are useless matters and instead cultivate the field of blessings in the mind-ground.

Fifty-Fourth: Salt Mind. Just as salt is salty by nature and becomes ever saltier as it penetrates more deeply, this person's thoughts proceed ever more deeply through repeated rumination. One should know that investigation has no end and cannot be resolved through conjecture. As an antidote, one should decide quickly.

Fifty-Fifth: Razor Mind. One believes that shaving off one's beard and hair is itself called leaving home, and asks what more need be sought. This mind is most harmful, for it shaves away even the roots of goodness, so that they cannot sprout again. In recent times, monastics have considered themselves already endowed with the outward marks and deportment of the precepts, and therefore to be the Jewel of the Saṅgha. They seek no further the precepts of the mind or to become monastics who are fields of merit. Lay practitioners likewise fail to distinguish the genuine from the false; they respect monastics without respecting the Jewel, thus fostering their arrogance and leading them astray. As an antidote, one should shave away the poison of ignorance and practice genuine leaving home.

Fifty-Sixth: Meru Mind. This mind is arrogant and self-important, and does not even respect one's teachers, monastics, or parents. As an antidote, one should practice filial devotion, obedience, and humility.

Fifty-Seventh: Ocean Mind. Like the ocean, which contains everything, one claims all excellent things for oneself and considers no one comparable. Meru seeks height; this mind seeks breadth. As an antidote, one should practice humility.

Fifty-Eighth: Hole Mind. It is like a vessel with a hole, which becomes a leaking vessel and is unfit for use. At first, such a person arouses the resolve and receives the precepts completely and without deficiency; before long, however, leaks in the Dharma gradually arise. Like a broken vessel, it cannot retain the water of Dharma. As an antidote, one should carry one's practice through from beginning to end.

Fifty-Ninth: Rebirth-Seeking Mind. The meaning of this mind is not fully explained. Presumably, people cultivate in order to dedicate the merit toward a future rebirth and seek its fruition, without distinguishing good from evil or black from white. As an antidote, one should cultivate only pure dharmas.

Sixtieth: Monkey Mind. This mind is the general characteristic of the sixty types of mind. It describes in the strongest terms all kinds of grasping and seeking: unstable like a monkey's mind. This one mind is absent from the Sanskrit original. As an antidote, one should realize the mind and see one’s true nature, seek meditative stability, and awaken wisdom.

These sixty types of mind are all matters of habitual tendencies, 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 point from which to work on the various muddled views. Yet after realizing the mind, habitual tendencies still remain, and one must set to work to eliminate them. Practitioners must by no means become one-sidedly attached, believing that once they have realized the mind, the matter is finished; there still remains something like the grief of losing one's parents. Nor should others become one-sidedly attached 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, or those who share the same understanding and practice, can know the ultimate truth of the matter.

The sixty types of mind are as described above; practitioners may use them to verify themselves.

I shall now further explain the direct and expedient methods for eliminating spiritual ailments, as follows:

Direct and Expedient Methods for Eliminating Spiritual Ailments

I. How Can One Be Selfless?

The capacity of mind is inherently neither great nor small. But once there is a self, there are limits; the more firmly one clings to self, the narrower one's scope becomes. One should arouse a vast mind to remedy this.

For example, of two people, one poor and one wealthy, the wealthy person's experience and knowledge are broader, and the means at his disposal and the scope of his affairs are also more expansive. The poor person's experience and knowledge are narrow, and so is his capacity of mind. If he suffers even a slight loss or suddenly becomes rich, he may be unable to bear it. Thus, the greater the power of emptiness through selflessness, the greater one's merit and virtue. Contemplate that all things in the world are equal, with neither enemies nor intimates, and attachment to self and others will loosen.

Contemplate that all things in the world are impermanent and unreal, and thoughts of gain and loss will fade. Contemplate that all dharmas are like illusions and shadows: they cannot be grasped as real, yet neither should they be rejected one-sidedly; then dharma-views will disappear. The self that is taken as self may be a great self or a small self. If one takes the Tathāgata-garbha nature, which neither arises nor ceases, as the great self, then this self can ultimately suffer not the slightest loss, nor can it receive the slightest increase.

Regard all worldly things as of no use; so-called fame and profit merely provide temporary play for me. What is there to rejoice over in gaining them, or to grieve over in losing them? One will naturally separate from them. Worldly people take the false for the true and suffer because they have never truly recognized it. If they truly recognized what is false, they would certainly not grasp and cling to it.

Among the twelve links of dependent origination, ignorance comes first, forcefully expressing the suffering of blindness. Therefore, the measure of a person's development is determined by the extent of his ability to benefit others. To be willing to benefit others is to relinquish self; not to relinquish self is to harm others. Harm need not necessarily consist of killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct.

A single thought of self establishes boundless calamities. Suppose one acquired the supernormal power of the heavenly ear and heard all the sounds and speech of the world—harmonious or coarse, intimate or hostile—none would fail to concern oneself. Alas! If you wish to know the calamities of war in this world, simply listen to the resentful quarrels within families. Gathering as causes countless views of self, attachments to self, self-centered greed, and self-centered contention, one then seeks peace under heaven as their result. This is like carrying firewood to put out a fire, only to burn oneself as well; the result is precisely the opposite. How foolish!

II. How Can One Cut Off Greed?

Greed belongs to the domain of fruition; there must first be some grasping as its cause. There are two causes: first, contact; second, habitual conditioning. Contact occurs when mind encounters objects, when the six external sense objects connect with the six internal sense faculties, and one unconsciously receives them. Comparative discrimination then forms perceptions; these perceptions develop into formations, and one proceeds to recognize what things and affairs are.

These form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness combine inseparably and are called the five aggregates; this is the present state arising from the contact of mind and objects. The second cause is habitual conditioning. Such habits are preferences accumulated in former lives; present circumstances stir up these accumulated habits and further foster them.

Therefore, when mind encounters objects, and even when habitual conditioning is at work, greed has not yet formed. It arises only because the delusive obstruction of ignorance leaves external objects unemptied and the inner mind unemptied; this gradually deepens until, at the stage of fruition, one becomes greedy without realizing it. The method of eliminating greed is none other than seeing that the five aggregates are all empty. Yet this seeing, too, belongs to the five aggregates. If the seeing has not been emptied, one still clings to dharmas. The empty aspect of all dharmas means that this seeing is merely an empty dharma.

When the seeing is empty, subject and object are naturally forgotten. By this emptiness, one does not mean that there is no seeing, nor that there is no subject and object. When practice matures, liberation comes naturally. The essential key lies in the single word knowing. Its subtlety, ingenuity, and directness are inconceivable; I came to understand it myself when lecturing on the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment for the second time.

III. How Can One Eliminate Anger?

It is said: have no greedy attachment. There are two methods. First, at the causal stage, have no greedy attachment and see that aversion and affection are nondual.

Second, at the stage of fruition, one should restrain and transform it. What is meant by restraining? Restraining means stopping it. First, consider the future troubles it will bring; second, consider how anger harms the body: it can make the breath short and the mind unsettled, deplete the blood and exhaust the spirit, and thereby shorten one's life. Beginners should use this method. But this does not mean suppressing it and holding the energy in, where it congeals in the heart and chest and instead causes illness. One should therefore transform it. Transformation means dissolving it imperceptibly.

First, contemplate that everything before one is nothing but a result. From where did its causes come? The fault lies with oneself; then it is transformed. Second, contemplate that this trains one's mind and is a cause and condition that aids the Way; one should even be grateful for it, and then it is transformed. Third, when one absolutely cannot endure it, quickly recognize the situation and leave, or shift the mind elsewhere; this too transforms it. Practitioners may ask themselves how this is so. The sūtra says, “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” But how does one refrain from extinguishing it?

IV. How Can One Be Free of Ignorance?

It is said: perfectly illuminate the aspect of pure awakening, and ignorance is suddenly shattered.

V. How Can One Have Certainty?

Having certainty while awake does not count; having certainty in dreams does not count either. Even knowing in principle where the master is when one sleeps without dreams does not count. To say that one has certainty is not certainty. Who, after all, has certainty? Only when one truly knows who one is does this count as certainty.

VI. How May One Die Content?

To know the unborn is the Way: if one hears the Way in the morning, one may die content in the evening.

VII. How Can One Discriminate Well?

Suppose that in a solemn place of the Three Treasures, someone offers a Buddha a filthy vessel. On seeing it, one is neither startled nor afraid. Though one still discriminates, one is unmoved by the discrimination. This is good discrimination.

VIII. How Can One Avoid Being Bound by the Dharma?

Know that these lecture notes are indeed an unnecessary elaboration, no more than painting legs on a snake. Yet, to urge people to apply themselves to practice, they cannot be dispensed with. Once one thoroughly awakens to effortless diligence, one will no longer be bound by the Dharma.

IX. How Can One Be Liberated?

Originally there is no bondage. Do not seek liberation, and one is liberated.

I shall now briefly set forth one or two Methods of Answering Inquiries, in order to inspire the function of prajñā.

1. Suppose someone asks, “What kind of person can the Buddha not liberate by any means?” Reply, “What kind of person can the Buddha liberate by means?” Then ask in return, “Ultimately, does the Buddha liberate sentient beings, or do sentient beings liberate themselves?” (“Should” must not be rigidly interpreted as meaning that there is no alternative, for fundamentally there is no fixed dharma.)

2. Suppose someone asks, “Those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma often claim to have attained realization. What proof do they have?” Reply, “Those who cultivate and realize know it for themselves; although they know it, they cannot convey it to those who have not practiced.”

3. Suppose someone asks, “It is said that attaining Buddhahood through practice takes three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. How should this be understood?” Ask in return, “From what time does an asaṃkhyeya begin to be counted, and at what time does it end? And what do the three characters a-seng-qi mean?”

4. Suppose someone asks, “Why are afflictions themselves bodhi?” Reply, “Because bodhi itself is affliction.” Or say, “Water freezes into ice, and ice melts again into water; they are not two waters.”

5. Suppose someone asks, “Why is it said that seeking to eliminate afflictions only aggravates the illness?” Reply, “Because one is seeking to eliminate them.” Then add, “This is not to say that afflictions should not be eliminated; it is only that, when the root has not been understood, one instead increases worldly toil. Before the old illness has cured itself, why invite a new one?”

6. Suppose someone asks, “What state are you in now?” Reply, “I eat my own meal; I do not know whether you are full.”

7. Suppose someone asks, “After the Buddha's passing, should the precepts be taken as fundamental?” Reply, “No.” The person will surely be greatly startled. Then add, “It is not a matter of precepts or no precepts; the only question is whether they are upheld. The Buddhadharma will not perish; it perishes in those who call themselves followers of the Buddhadharma.”

8. Suppose someone asks, “Who are those who call themselves followers of the Buddhadharma?” Reply, “The one who is now questioning me is one.”

9. Suppose someone asks, “Why is the meaning of this treatise so lofty?” Reply, “A treatise is itself without meaning; meaning itself is not lofty. If meaning can be discoursed upon, it is subject to thought and deliberation. If there are high and low, how can there be equality? What need is there to practice Buddhahood? No contention, no contention.”

10. Suppose someone asks, “What is an arrogant person?” Reply, “One who says that there is arrogance.”

11. Suppose someone asks, “Why is the Chan school foremost?” Reply, “The Chan school cannot speak; it has never called itself foremost.”

12. Suppose someone asks, “Why does the Buddha have a special transmission outside the teachings?” Reply, “The Buddha never had a separate transmission, for the Buddha never established teachings, nor did he establish inside and outside. It is you, sir, who makes such distinctions.”

13. Suppose someone asks, “How can one attain Buddhahood?” Reply, “Only one who can enter the realm of Māra can attain Buddhahood.” If asked how to enter Māra's realm, reply, “Dualistic views are Māra-views. To proceed from duality to nonduality—where there is neither Buddha nor Māra—is it.”

14. Suppose someone asks, “Why do practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma also speak of the Chan school?” Reply, “Originally, it is neither esoteric nor Chan; yet it is not apart from esoteric practice and not apart from Chan. Still, it is not Chan-esoteric practice.”

15. Suppose someone asks, “Why do Chan practitioners mix in so many habits of ridicule and sarcasm?” Reply, “This is a manner of expression and differs from habitual tendencies. Rigidly clinging to a manner of expression and not understanding adaptation—this is habitual tendency.”

16. Suppose someone asks, “Is Pure Land practice the most secure path?” Reply, “No.” The person will surely disagree. Then add, “Precisely because the Pure Land path is so secure, students become lax and practice only one-tenth of Pure Land practice. That is why it is not.”

17. Suppose someone asks, “Why do you especially say that attaining Buddhahood in this very life is easy?” Reply, “It is not I who say so; it is the Buddha. In my foolish view, even this very life is still an expedient. My greed is most intense: I insist on attaining Buddhahood at this very moment. The sūtras say, ‘[One] should attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect awakening,’ yet I have never seen anyone dare to read ‘should’ so as to acknowledge attaining Buddhahood at this very moment. Again, the sūtras say, ‘Know that this person is the Tathāgata; with the Buddha's wisdom, he fully knows this person,’ and so on. Yet I have never seen anyone dare to place a full stop after ‘Tathāgata’ and acknowledge that they themselves are the Tathāgata.”

18. Suppose someone asks, “What is meant by wild Chan?” Reply, “Wildness is not Chan. Wild means unrestrained; what the world calls wild Chan is this. But whether

one is wild or not, unrestrained or not, is known through one's own realization and cannot be measured by others.”

19. Suppose someone asks, “What is a spiritual friend?” Reply, “One who can know oneself and can also recognize a spiritual friend is a spiritual friend.”

20. Suppose someone asks, “Why does the Chan school so often employ startling actions?” The answer should be: “It is to make you give rise to doubt—doubt yourself. If you can raise doubt within yourself, you will be willing to seek instruction and investigate. The reason for deliberately displaying such startling things is to test whether you can be frightened, whether you can be taken in, and whether you can thereby awaken. It is all to make you leap out of this circle, not to contend with you over superiority or inferiority.”

21. Suppose someone asks, “What is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma practice?” You should answer, “When you directly realize that the Pure Lands of the ten directions are unobtainable, it is not the purity of Pure Land, not the Chan of Chan, not the esotericism of Esoteric Buddhism, nor the Dharma of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. It is the Heart-of-Heart.”

22. Suppose someone asks, “How does one propagate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?” You should answer, “Seek only doubt and slander, not praise for propagating it; do only what is real, and do not engage in much disputation.”

23. Suppose someone asks, “How can one seal the mind?” You should answer, “The mind is unobtainable—what is there to seal?”

The Buddhadharma has no fixed dharma; how could there be any dharma to teach? When you are able to apply this prajñā dharma for yourselves, take care not to speak of it lightly to those who do not understand, lest you mislead them and cause them to lose heart. As for the dharma gate of discerning capacities, the dharma gate of transmitting the Dharma, and the esoteric teaching of the hidden meaning of tantric union, you already know them. They should not be spoken of to those who have not practiced; therefore, they should not be made public and should be omitted from the record.

Mencius said, “The way of learning is nothing other than recovering the strayed mind.” Yet do you know whether what is recovered is what was lost, from where it is recovered, and, once recovered, how it is to be placed? If you know that ultimately there is no mind to recover, then we are merely making needless trouble. Do you understand?”

Methods of Answering Inquiries

I shall now briefly set forth one or two methods of answering inquiries, in order to inspire the functioning of prajñā.

1. Suppose someone asks, “What kind of person can the Buddha not transform by any Dharma?” Answer, “What kind of person can the Buddha transform by Dharma?” Then ask in return, “After all, does the Buddha liberate sentient beings, or do sentient beings liberate themselves?” (The word “should” must not be rigidly interpreted as meaning that it cannot be otherwise, for there is fundamentally no fixed Dharma.)

2. Suppose someone asks, “Practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma often claim realization. What evidence is there?” Answer, “Those who practice and realize know for themselves; though they know it, they cannot explain it to those who have not practiced.”

3. Suppose someone asks, “It is said that attaining Buddhahood through practice takes three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. How is this to be understood?” Ask in return, “From what time does an asaṃkhyeya begin to be counted, and at what time does it end? And what do the three characters a-seng-qi mean?”

4. Suppose someone asks, “Why are afflictions themselves bodhi?” Answer, “Because bodhi is itself affliction.” Or say, “Water freezes into ice, and ice melts back into water; they are not two waters.”

5. Suppose someone asks, “Why is it said that wishing to eliminate afflictions only aggravates the illness?” Answer, “Because of the wish to eliminate them.” Then add, “This is not to say that afflictions should not be eliminated. It is only because the root has not been understood that worldly toil is instead increased. If the old illness has not been removed of itself, why invite a new illness?”

6. Suppose someone asks, “What state are you in now?” Answer, “I eat my own food; I do not know whether you are full.”

7. Suppose someone asks, “After the Buddha’s passing, should the precepts be regarded as fundamental?” Answer, “No.” They will surely be greatly startled. Then add, “It is not a question of precepts or no precepts, but only of whether they are upheld. The Buddhadharma will not perish; it perishes in those who follow the Buddhadharma.”

8. Suppose someone asks, “Who are those who follow the Buddhadharma?” Answer, “The one now questioning me is such a person.”

9. Suppose someone asks, “Why is the meaning of the treatise so lofty?” Answer, “A treatise is not meaning, and meaning is not lofty. If meaning can be discussed, it

becomes an object of thought and deliberation. If there are high and low, how can there be equality? Why practice the Buddha Way? No contention, no contention."

10. Suppose someone asks, "What is an arrogant person?" Answer, "One who speaks of there being arrogance."

11. Suppose someone asks, "Why is the Chan school the foremost?" Answer, "The Chan school cannot speak and has never called itself foremost."

12. Suppose someone asks, "Why does the Buddha have a special transmission outside the teachings?" Answer, "The Buddha never had a separate transmission, for the Buddha never established teachings, nor did he establish inner and outer. It is you, sir, who make such distinctions."

13. Suppose someone asks, "How can one attain Buddhahood?" Answer, "Only one who can enter the realm of Māra can attain Buddhahood." If they ask how to enter the realm of Māra, answer, "Dualistic views are Māra's views. Enter nonduality through duality: where there is neither Buddha nor Māra."

14. Suppose someone asks, "Why speak of the Chan school while practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?" Answer, "Originally, it is neither esoteric nor Chan, yet it is not apart from esoteric practice or Chan. Still, it is not Chan-esoteric practice."

15. Suppose someone asks, "Why do Chan practitioners mix in so many habits of mockery and sarcasm?" Answer, "This is a manner of expression and differs from habitual tendencies. Rigidly clinging to a manner without understanding adaptation is itself habitual tendency."

16. Suppose someone asks, "Is Pure Land practice the most reliable?" Answer, "No." They will surely disagree. Then add, "It is precisely because Pure Land practice is so reliable that students become careless, practicing only one-tenth of the Pure Land teaching. Therefore, it is not."

17. Suppose someone asks, "Why do you particularly say that attaining Buddhahood in this very life is easy?" Answer, "It is not I who say so; it is the Buddha who says so. In my foolish view, even this very life is still an expedient. My greed is most severe: I want to attain Buddhahood right now. The sūtras say, 'One shall attain unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment,' yet I have never seen anyone dare to read 'shall' as 'at once' and acknowledge attaining Buddhahood right now. Again, the sūtras say, 'Know that this person is the Tathāgata; with the Buddha's wisdom, he fully knows this person,' yet I have never seen anyone dare to place a full stop after 'Tathāgata' and acknowledge for themselves that they are the Tathāgata."

18. Suppose someone asks, "What is meant by 'wild Chan'?" Answer, "Wildness is not Chan; 'wild' has the sense of uncultivated. What the world calls 'wild Chan' is this. Yet

whether one is wild or not, uncultivated or not, is known through one's own realization and cannot be measured by others."

19. Suppose someone asks, "What is a good spiritual friend?" Answer, "One who can know oneself and can also recognize a good spiritual friend is himself a good spiritual friend."

20. Suppose someone asks, "Why does the Chan school so often display startling behavior?" Answer, "It is to make you raise a doubt—and the doubt is doubt about yourself. If you can raise doubt yourself, you will be willing to seek out and consult a teacher. The reason for deliberately displaying the startling and extraordinary is to test whether you can be frightened or not, and whether you will be taken in or not; from this comes awakening or nonawakening. It is all to make you leap out of this circle, not to contend with you over superiority or inferiority."

21. Suppose someone asks, "What is the practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?" Answer, "When you directly realize that the Pure Lands of the ten directions are unobtainable, it is not the purity of Pure Land, not the Chan of Chan, not the esoteric practice of esoteric practice, nor the Dharma of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. It is the Heart-of-Heart."

22. Suppose someone asks, "How should the Heart-of-Heart Dharma be propagated?" Answer, "Seek only doubt and slander, not widespread praise; do only practical things, and do not engage in much contention."

23. Suppose someone asks, "How can one seal the mind?" Answer, "The mind is unobtainable; what is there to seal?"

The Buddhadharma has no fixed Dharma; how could there be any Dharma to speak? When you are able to apply this prajñā Dharma for yourselves, take care not to speak of it lightly to those who cannot understand, lest you mislead them and cause them to lose heart. As for the Dharma gates of discerning capacities, transmitting the Dharma, and the esoteric meaning of the tantric practice of the two bodies, you already know them. They should not be explained to those who have not practiced; therefore, they are not made public and should be omitted from the record.

Mencius said, "The way of learning is nothing other than recovering one's lost mind." Yet does one recover what was lost or not? From where is it recovered? Once recovered, how is it to be placed? If one knows that, ultimately, there is no mind to recover, then we people are merely making unnecessary trouble. Do you understand?

Summary

The three sections discussed above cannot exhaust even one ten-thousandth of the matter.

The Section on Inspiring Potential is spoken for those who arouse the resolve, so that they may bring forth the supreme, vast mind and directly enter the Avataṃsaka Dharma realm, thereby setting their cause aright. Just as anything that receives something must have a vessel: a large vessel holds much, and a small vessel holds little.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra takes buddha-nature as its principle. If people are to become Buddhas, they must first have their vast minds awakened. As it is said, this sūtra is not entrusted into the hands of other sentient beings, but only to great-minded ordinary beings. The Avataṃsaka's adornment of fragrance and light is meant to expand their mind-capacity, making it a vessel capable of receiving Buddhahood. Sentient beings do not believe that their own nature is vast and nondual with the Buddha; they are incapable of receiving this teaching and are not fit to be told of the subtle wonder of the Avataṃsaka.

Everyone can become a Yao or a Shun. To establish such a great vow is what the sages approve; it is called aspiring to lofty purpose, not arrogance. Arrogance is arrogance toward others. Yet if one strives to improve oneself, this too is called arrogant, conceited, and perverse—how absurd and petty that is may readily be seen. What is meant by a vessel? Although the Buddha taught the Avataṃsaka for bodhisattvas, his expectations for sentient beings were such as these. This is the Avataṃsaka's causes and conditions. When sentient beings repay the Buddha's kindness, it is certainly not enough merely to make offerings; they need only arouse the great mind and shoulder the responsibility.

Next comes the Section on Right Cultivation, spoken for those who are diligent. Its guiding principle is not confined to any particular method; it establishes no sectarian boundary, transmits the teaching according to the recipient's capacity, does not prize empty talk, carefully guards against every ailment, and prevents entry onto mistaken paths.

Then comes the Section on Verification of Realization, spoken for those seeking verification, to prevent their doubts and retreat midway and to provide a little material for comparison and confirmation.

In sum, a thousand words and ten thousand phrases are not as good as the practitioner's own decisive resolution. With such resolve, one immediately accomplishes the Buddha Way. Earlier, I used a dark room as an analogy: a person dwelling in it is no different from a blind person; however much effort is expended, it ultimately comes to nothing. Therefore, two great keys must be decisively established. First, turn on the light to see the grime, and shut off the back door to

stop its source. Second, clear out the accumulated objects in the room, so that it will never again become dirty.

Only when the light is turned on does one first see the result of accumulated grime before one's eyes, and then see the cause by which grime enters through the back door. This first crucial step allows not the slightest concession. The present section on inspiring potential and establishing the cause enables one first to know the practices at the causal stage: they lie solely in awakening and wisdom. After realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one's eyes naturally become clear and bright. Once ignorance is shattered, the back door naturally closes; cause and effect become thoroughly clear, and grime no longer enters.

This is the distinctive intent, shared by the Chan and Esoteric schools and unlike that of other schools: to begin at the root.

The accumulated grime is the obscurations and habitual tendencies amassed since beginningless time. Although ignorance has been shattered, the habits have not yet been stirred, and there remains a state like mourning one's dead parents. One must therefore exert oneself fully in cleaning, gradually removing them completely. The sole instrument for cleaning is prajñā. This cannot be completed in a single lifetime; yet only after turning on the light and closing the door does everything become proper work, so that one may avoid blind cultivation and blind practice, laboring without result.

When practitioners themselves understand their original nature, see their own accumulated grime, and are able both to prevent its entry and to clean it away, they will naturally no longer permit themselves to shrink back or procrastinate. Why? The difficulty of splitting bamboo lies in the first joint. Once the first joint has been split, it naturally cleaves downward with the grain, and one cannot stop. A sūtra says, “At the very first arousal of the resolve, one immediately becomes a Buddha.” How much more so for one who has already understood the root!

The function of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is to awaken the root: attaining samādhi, giving rise to wisdom, and realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature—this is turning on the light. It enters Chan through esoteric practice, arouses prajñā, and cleans away accumulated habits to remove the grime. Essence and function are unified; principle and phenomena interpenetrate. The teacher awakens, while one applies it oneself. The value of these lecture notes is no more than that of a broom: use it for a time, and discard it when it is no longer needed.

If one can truly refrain from giving rise to a view of self, directly shoulder the task, not take one's ears for one's eyes, and not shrink back out of fear of difficulty; if, from arousing the resolve, one advances diligently, and from diligence proceeds to practice and realization; if one turns this empty talk into actual affairs; and further,

through taking up investigation, inquiring into it, and gaining personal understanding, points out what is mistaken in what has not been fully explained and supplements what has not been exhausted—using this to inspire those to come and join in this great work of transformation—then one truly repays the Buddha's kindness above and does not fail the painstaking intentions of Master Dayu over the years.

As for the profound essentials of the secret treasury, and the practices of the stages of forbearance in the Benevolent Kings Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, you may seek confirmation from Master Dayu; the causes and conditions must await another day. As for those who have not practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, please do not first show them the Section on Verification of Realization. If you read it yourself, please do not give rise to doubts. It harms no one else; you merely cause yourself distress. Take care.

Someone may ask: Earlier it was said that, if one tries letting go of the myriad conditions, one can immediately and suddenly transcend the ten bhūmis. But if there is a “letting go,” how can it be the ten bhūmis? And if there are the “ten bhūmis,” how can one speak of letting go? Please answer on my behalf.

Notes:

1. The Buddha-Heart Sutra is the abbreviated title of The Buddha-Heart Sūtra, Also Corresponding to the Great Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī.

2. The ten great vows: (1) Have complete faith in every Buddha; find no obstruction in any dharma; regard the pure community of monastics as one regards one's teacher. (2) Uphold the precepts without deficiency, keep the mind constantly in samādhi, recognize the empty characteristics of all dharmas, and remain equally unattached. (3) Be compassionate toward sentient beings, diligently observe the precept against killing, regard sentient beings as oneself, and be unable to bear eating their flesh. (4) When people ask for something, give with an impartial mind; be gentle and humble, without allowing arrogance to arise. (5) Do not violate the original

vow; always benefit oneself and others; do not praise oneself or see others' faults. (6) Whether poor or rich, noble or lowly, one's nature is fundamentally nondual. Let one's speech always be gentle, bringing joy to others; let one's intentions be honest and straightforward, far from flattery; accord with human feelings and skillfully transform conventional truth. (7) Understand and earnestly put into practice the Buddha's teachings and admonitions; protect and uphold the Buddhadharma as one protects one's own life; rescue and protect sentient beings without seeking recompense. Even if sentient beings are arrogant, do not let the mind retreat.

(8) Do not disparage the true Dharma or cause others to disparage it; do not slander the Three Jewels or cause others to slander them. When there are those who disparage them, explain skillfully and kindly, enabling them to enter through faith and not fall into the net of wrong views. (9) Always guard right mindfulness; do not fail in private places. Let superior conduct be firm, never weary of fatigue; make vast vows, gather in the mind without retreating, always abide in the Mahāyāna, and destroy wrong views. (10) Practice every part of the Dharma being cultivated throughout; keep the esoteric mudrās pure, and do not defile their seals. One must practice for one's own benefit and that of others, not for fame, reputation, profit, or gain.

3. The third chapter, “The Conduct of Bodhisattvas,” of the Benevolent Kings Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra for the Protection of the Nation states: “All bodhisattva mahāsattvas rely on the five kinds of forbearance as their practice: the forbearance of subduing, the forbearance of faith, the forbearance of conformity, and the forbearance of the unborn, each of which has superior, middling, and lesser grades; and the forbearance of quiescent cessation, which has higher and lower grades. This is called the bodhisattvas' practice of prajñāpāramitā.”

The initial stage of the forbearance of subduing is this: at the stage of the nature of habitual seeds, one cultivates the practices of the ten abodes; at the stage of the nature of innate seeds, one cultivates the ten pāramitās; and at the stage of the nature of the Way-seeds, one cultivates the ten dedications. Next, bodhisattvas of the forbearance of faith—namely, those at the bhūmis of Joy, Freedom from Defilement, and Emission of Light—can sever the bonds of the three obscurations of afflictions associated with form. Next, bodhisattvas of the forbearance of conformity —namely, those at the bhūmis of Blazing Wisdom, Difficult to Conquer, and Manifest Presence—can sever the bonds of the three obscurations of afflictions associated with mind.

Next, bodhisattvas of the forbearance of the unborn—namely, those at the bhūmis of Far-Going, Immovability, and Good Wisdom—can sever the habitual tendencies of the three obscurations associated with form and mind. Next, as for the forbearance of quiescent cessation, Buddhas and bodhisattvas alike rely upon this forbearance. In vajra-like samādhi, one abides at the lower stage of this forbearance and is called a bodhisattva; upon reaching its higher stage, one is called All-Knowing. Contemplating the ultimate truth and severing the marks of ignorance, one is equal enlightenment.

Explanatory Notes and Origin

Explanatory Notes

I. This record of lectures is divided into three sections and consists of the teachings given by Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu. The first is the Section on Inspiring Potential, taking the inspiration of great resolve and responsibility as its cause; the second is the Section on Right Cultivation, taking the transmission and actual cultivation of a practice suited to the recipient as its condition; and the third is the Section on Verification of Realization, taking awakening through practice and its confirmation through Mind-Seal as its fruition. We have respectfully selected and recorded its essential points for publication, for the benefit of fellow practitioners.

II. This association was originally called the Buddhist Studies Association and was later reorganized as Mind-Seal Vihara. Master Xiang taught the Dharma here for two years, giving more than four hundred lectures. He instructed students tirelessly and without interruption. Countless fellow refuge-takers realized the mind and recognized their own intrinsic nature. Regrettably, no records were preserved of the lectures given in the jiǎxū year (1934). This volume contains only the lectures given in the yǐhài year (1935), and is therefore entitled Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935).

III. In transmitting the Dharma, this association does not restrict itself to any one method. It is neither Pure Land, Esoteric Buddhism, nor Chan; teachings are transmitted according to the recipient's capacity. Yet precepts, samādhi, and wisdom are all naturally upheld. It takes recognizing one's own intrinsic nature through the dhāraṇī method as its essence, uses the prajñā method to inspire expedient means as its function, and takes realization of perfect enlightenment through the Pure Land method as its ultimate destination. When speaking of precepts, it emphasizes the essence of the precepts and guards against attachment to them; when speaking of samādhi, it teaches right samādhi and eliminates erroneous views; when speaking of wisdom, it verifies the power of wisdom and guards against arrogance. Its essential meaning is fully contained in these lectures.

IV. This record of lectures must not be read cursorily. Its essential meaning lies wholly in its subtle and hidden places. If one carefully rereads it from beginning to end four or five times, while simultaneously practicing the method and investigating it, one will surely one day awaken suddenly. Otherwise, one will have only a textual understanding.

V. The passage on the Heart-of-Heart Dharma following the Section on Right Cultivation is especially important for beginners. Those practicing the method from afar may make use of this expedient means and should study it carefully while sitting in meditation.

Background

[Respectfully Recorded by Fellow Practitioners]

This association has operated for several years and has transmitted the Dharma to several hundred people. Fortunately, all have put it into practice and cultivated with devotion, deeply comprehending the essential points of the Dharma. Such causes and conditions are inconceivable. This year, the association has continued its work and has again invited this unworthy person to lecture and transmit the great Dharma. I feel deeply ashamed of my inadequacy.

May all of you who propagate the Dharma arouse the great vow to benefit living beings, strive to spread it widely, repay the four benefactions above, and relieve the three sufferings below. Let us jointly investigate the Dharma gates of Buddhist practice, benefiting ourselves and others, so that those who have not yet aroused the resolve may themselves enter the gate of arousing it; those who have already aroused the resolve may enter together upon the path of diligence; and those already diligent may proceed directly into the hall of cultivation and realization. These are the aspirations at three levels. Above, we rely on the Buddha's compassion; below, on the strength of the assembly. Together, let us shoulder unsurpassed bodhi and advance diligently without retreating. These few words may serve as our words of aspiration before the Buddha. I also wish this association immeasurable blessings and benefits in the future.

The lectures given by this association on such days as the first, third, and fifth are intended to guide beginners. Much of what is taught repeats last year's lectures, now supplemented with new ideas. Last year's teachings had no fixed sequence; some were profound and some elementary, with no established method. Those learning Buddhism have always suffered most from failing to clarify the fundamentals and beginning midway, leaving their understanding half-formed and immature; in time, they gradually encounter difficulties.

Now, without wearying of what may seem elementary, we shall begin again from the start and provisionally establish a sequence. Those who have heard these teachings before may review the old and thereby know the new; those who have not heard them may correct themselves from the causal ground onward. This is of the greatest importance. Lay Practitioner Du Youqiao and others have again made the resolve to record and publish each lecture for circulation. Thus, those who hear the Dharma later may connect with the preceding text. Handouts will be distributed as the lectures proceed, then collected and bound into a volume, so that they may be passed on to benefit others and everyone may remain in accord. Those at a distance who wish to read the handouts may obtain them through fellow members.

The Buddhist Studies Association has the nature of a cooperative endeavor. Good roots belong to the practitioners themselves, while causes and conditions depend upon teachers and spiritual friends; when these are brought together, unsurpassed merit and virtue are accomplished. Thus, one cannot accomplish such adornment

with merit and virtue through only slight good roots, blessings, and causes and conditions. At the outset, however, it depends upon the teacher's and spiritual friends' inspiring one's potential, and upon one's own faith.

First, one inspires the person's potential, observes which dharma gate accords with that person, and transmits the appropriate method; this is called the right Dharma. Further progress then depends on one's own devout cultivation: one must work diligently and steadfastly, relying only on perseverance. The teacher then serves as a guardian, constantly observing the practitioner's conduct, assessing mental states, guarding against mistaken views, and forestalling errors, so that the practitioner does not become wild or unrestrained and may arrive at clear awakening. This is called opening the eye of the true Dharma.

Further progress again depends upon one's diligent cultivation after awakening, without laziness. Yet when samādhi and wisdom are not balanced and essence and function are not integrated, the teacher must correct and instruct at every point, disciplining the practitioner and carefully examining the subtle and extremely subtle distinctions in mental states. At this time, whenever practitioners gain a somewhat superior experience, their speech becomes unrestrained and their spirit grows heedless. This is a stage that must be passed through.

It is like practicing sword dancing: one's strength gradually becomes ample, but one's technique is not yet complete. With the slightest carelessness, two errors result. Therefore, cooperation must continue to the end. Those of superior capacity may not relax until at least two years have passed. Yet the Dharma has no fixed method, for this teaching differs from Chan and Pure Land, and methods of practice vary accordingly. Moreover, each person's capacities also differ.

What we cultivate is the attainment of the fundamental; our aim is Mind-Seal and genuine benefit. This association is not engaged in the study of doctrinal theories and words, yet neither does it discard doctrinal teachings. We simply clarify those points that are concise and essential, using them to support further cultivation. Its method may be summarized as follows; this is also the Mind-Seal school's guiding principle:

I. Explain elementary teachings in a comprehensive way to inspire potential, strengthen faith, and correct the cause.

II. Taking Mind-Seal as the core principle, prajñā as the function, dhāraṇī as the method, and the Pure Land as its ultimate destination.

III. First clarify the essence, then activate its function; verify the mind-ground and develop Buddha-wisdom. Enable practitioners to see directly the form of prajñā and attain accomplishment in this very life.

IV. Use emptiness to break through ignorance and gradually eliminate habitual tendencies, enabling sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation. Apply the Buddha Dharma to conventional truth, eliminate emotional views, gain genuine benefit, and continue until one knows one's own mind as it truly is.

V. Cultivate the fundamental great precepts at the causal stage, and diligently practice the ten great vows of The Buddha-Heart Sutra .

VI. Break through all doubts and perplexities, transforming delusion, karma, and suffering into samādhi, wisdom, and emptiness.

Three Periods and Three Sections: These several points can certainly establish a foundation in this very life; therefore, they are divided into three periods.

The first is the period of explaining principle, the second the period of actual cultivation, and the third the period of verification. The lectures are likewise divided into three sections: first, the Section on Inspiring Potential; second, the Section on Right Cultivation; and third, the Section on Verification of Realization. Esoteric Dharma is a distinctive teaching. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma also differs from other esoteric practices. Do not discuss it with those who have neither practiced nor realized it. If this gives rise to their doubts or slander, that is our own fault, not theirs. Learning consists in knowing for oneself; do not rashly speculate about others' mental states or compare yourself with them in a contest of superiority. To claim attainment without having attained is to claim knowledge without knowing; the error is equally grave. Because the Dharma is to be held in reverence, one must be cautious at the causal stage.

Section on Inspiring Potential

For the sake of Mind-Seal, and because the causal ground must be correct, we shall first explain the Section on Inspiring Potential. Qi means to inspire: to inspire the potential of the assembly, arouse in them faith, earnest resolve, and the courageous resolve to put the teaching into practice, so that they may accord with the sūtras and treatises taught by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Thus they turn delusion into awakening, cross beyond suffering and adversity, and transcend birth and death.

Further, this inspires each person's inherent roots and gives them the true Dharma according to whether their capacities are sharp or dull. Capacities may be sharp or dull, but there is no fixed Dharma; that which accords with one's capacity is correct. We therefore first expound the Dharma to inspire and guide them, and to test and observe them. This is the preliminary expedient before the transmission of Dharma in this assembly, enabling beginners first to understand how to arouse bodhicitta, the initial step in entering the Buddha's path.

Of all dharma gates, arousing the resolve is the foremost difficulty and the foremost essential matter. A sūtra says, “The moment one arouses the resolve, one becomes a Buddha.” This single thought is of immense and inconceivable consequence; practitioners must not dismiss it as merely an initial step. In every worldly undertaking, there must be a primary reason: “Why?”

Why have you all come to hear the Dharma? Before hearing it, each of you should ask yourself: Why have I come here to hear the Dharma? Now remain silent for one minute. In this single minute, the state of mind of you all will already have progressed, already transcending to the other shore. This is self-nature questioning itself. For to ask oneself a question is to contemplate one's own nature in reverse; to turn back is to reach the shore—this is the turning of a single thought.

To enter sagehood from the ordinary state requires only this one turn. For forty-nine years, the Buddha taught immeasurable wondrous Dharma only to teach sentient beings this one turn. Yet the Buddha's difficulty is that he cannot turn on another's behalf. People must question themselves, contemplate their own nature in reverse, and themselves turn suffering into happiness and delusion into awakening. It is not that people cannot do so; it is that they do not do so. Thus the Buddha cannot make the crossing on anyone’s behalf. Each person must liberate themselves.

The wise seek the mind, not the Buddha; the foolish seek the Buddha, not the mind. For thousands of years, practitioners have undergone arduous cultivation for decades, taken the wrong path, and failed to reach the ultimate. The crucial point lies here. This point is the practitioner's initial causal ground. If the causal ground is not correct, the more one cultivates, the more confused one becomes. I have personally suffered in this way, and so I urge you all to examine yourselves and make the root clear. If the causal ground is correct, the ground of fruition will also be correct in the future. Never take what has gone before lightly.

But some may say: if one does not seek the Buddha but seeks only oneself, why must the Buddha expound the Dharma, and why must I study Buddhism? This is an entirely valid question. Yet when the Buddha descends into the world, he comes as a physician; if sentient beings were not ill, the Buddha would have no use. It is precisely because sentient beings are ill that medicine is indispensable. Those who are ill should note three things: first, the patient; second, the physician; third, taking the medicine.

If one disregards the patient and does not ask about taking medicine, but seeks only the physician's blessing, what use is that? To say that one does not seek the Buddha does not mean discarding the physician and the medicine; to seek oneself does not mean leaving behind the physician and the medicine. Once the illness is cured,

however, the physician and medicine are no longer needed. One may then transmit all dharma gates to other patients; this is benefiting oneself and benefiting others.

What, then, is the method of seeking oneself? Worldly people are deluded and do not understand how to consult a physician. Is not consulting a physician meant to cure illness? Yet surely one does not abandon the treatment of one's present illness and merely ask the physician to guarantee that one will not become ill in the future. Today's students of Buddhism devoutly worship the Buddha and seek future blessings, but do not remove their present suffering and habitual tendencies. How is their folly any different?

Worldly people seek future blessings precisely because of their present suffering. They do not know that relieving present suffering is itself a blessing; there is no need to wait for future blessings. Future matters have their own cause and effect and must not be reversed or confused. Those in the heavenly realms and those who enjoy wealth and rank among humans often refuse to cultivate. Precisely because their present blessings are so great, they indulge in ease and pleasure and do not know to reflect upon themselves; thus they mislead themselves. Therefore, to remedy all illnesses, one must distinguish cause and effect clearly and recognize the path clearly.

First, know the illness: one must first recognize where one's own illness lies. This illness concerns birth and death and is of the utmost gravity. Then one must courageously arouse the resolve, sincerely seek a physician, and honestly take the medicine. Second, understand the physician: one must recognize the physician's responsibility and its significance, and whether one can rely entirely on the physician without relying on oneself. Third, use the medicine: one must understand the medicine's nature, how it should be used, and what reactions it may produce as it removes the illness.

Sweating, vomiting, and purging are precisely the removal of illness; they are not the addition of illness. If one becomes doubtful because of them, that is a great mistake. These three levels are ordinary knowledge for patients; why can those who study Buddhism not be the same?

To know one's own illness is simply to know the suffering of human life. Worldly people do not understand the meaning of suffering. They think that lacking adequate clothing, food, and shelter is suffering. They do not know that this is merely apparent suffering, suffering judged by comparison, and not yet true suffering.

There are certainly people in the world whose clothing, food, and shelter are all sufficient, yet they remain anxious and unsettled; they may not even obtain a peaceful meal or a peaceful night's sleep. Why is this? In times of disorder, the

wealthy suffer even more pain and fear. From this we know that suffering does not truly lie in such things. The fundamental suffering of human life lies in mistakenly taking this one lifetime to be all there is, believing that when this life ends, everything ends.

Thus those who indulge themselves end up creating karma and committing evil, indulging in licentious luxury and dissipation. They think that after death and so forth, since they will see nothing, it is definitively nonexistent. With this annihilationist view, what reckless deed would they not commit? The present world war, international conflicts, human cruelty, and even suicide all arise from this error of a single thought. It misleads oneself and others and grows ever more intense.

Therefore one must first understand the principle of cause and effect across the three periods of time. If there were no cause and effect, evil people need not receive retribution and good people would have no result; what kind of world could there then be? Therefore cause and effect is called a law; it is fundamentally unshakable. Cause and effect extend through the three periods of time. Everything in this life necessarily arises from prior causes and necessarily turns into later results. Of two children born to the same parents, one may become a thief and the other a sage.

Different fruits arise from different causal grounds. Causes include remote causes and immediate causes; results likewise include present results and later results. Cause and result succeed one another like a wheel, turning upward or downward, toward good or bad, according to what people themselves create. Therefore, not understanding the three periods of time is not understanding cause and effect. If cause and effect are not understood, there is no way to enter into faith in the Buddhadharma. Such a person will ultimately sink into the round of suffering and cannot be saved.

The hardships people undergo in this life all arise from karma created through prior causes. Evil karma from past lives is a remote cause; laziness and deceit are immediate causes. Although a poor person may suffer because of evil causes from past lives, if they can be diligent, prudent, and honest, they create another good cause and may thereby turn misfortune into good fortune, or transform what is heavy into what is light. This too is the law of the transformations of cause and effect; its power still rests in human hands.

When people today, before their clothing, food, and shelter have been adequately provided for, investigate the causes of their immediate fears, they are no more than the following: the hardships of daily life; demand exceeding supply; insufficient production; everyone's greed for convenience and desire to gain without labor; the ease with which the powerful acquire things and the ease with which the licentious seek them; people's lack of morality; killing, theft, and sexual misconduct

becoming habitual; superstitious attachment to greed, anger, and ignorance; short-sightedness, seeking only immediate advantage through inverted views; not understanding the three periods of time or cause and effect; lack of awakening; not hearing the true Dharma; being busy all day with no time for this; and the lack of adequate clothing, food, and shelter.

When people's clothing, food, and shelter have already been adequately provided for, the fears that bring future suffering likewise arise from no more than the following: the world's lack of peace; the abundance of thieves; the preponderance of evil over good among humankind; inequality between rich and poor; the greed and stinginess of human hearts; unwillingness to give; not understanding the three periods of time, cause and effect, and the principle of recompense for giving; lack of awakening; not hearing the true Dharma; being busy with no time for this; and being unsatisfied despite having adequate clothing, food, and shelter.

In brief, the suffering of sentient beings is entirely karma they create themselves; at root, it is due to lack of awakening. Because they are not awakened, they become greedy. Whether they crave wealth, fame, or profit, they all cling to the word “I.” Thus the self is the root of all suffering. Now, at the beginning of cultivation, the aim is to use the Buddhadharma to remove the root of one's own illness. Therefore we must explain the Buddha, explain the Dharma, and explain the Saṅgha.

Having understood what these three are, we must then explain the self. To understand the basis of the self is to consult the physician, obtain a prescription, and remove the illness. Scholars in recent times often delight in what is lofty and profound and seek quick results. When they study Buddhism, they also enter by way of the middle rather than the beginning. Thus their roots are not firm and their foundation is unclear. Even after cultivating for many years, they cling rigidly to words, mix in views of self, and consequently cannot understand the meanings in an all-encompassing way. From this arise sectarian divisions, disputes over superiority and inferiority, doubt, slander, and regression. All of these belong to this illness. Therefore, one must be especially careful with the causal ground.

Explaining the Buddha

Buddha means great awakening. It is an honorific title established on the basis of his virtues, not the name of a particular individual. The Sanskrit word buddha was transliterated into Chinese in full as (Fótuó) and abbreviated as (Fó); it is one of the Tathāgata’s ten epithets. It is also called wisdom-awakening: awakened oneself and awakening others. It refers to one whose awakening is complete and wondrous. It is also called all-knowing wisdom, for it knows clearly and distinctly the principle and phenomena of all dharmas, without any delusion; hence the name Buddha.

Ordinary beings are unawakened; those of the two vehicles awaken themselves but cannot awaken others; bodhisattvas awaken themselves and others, but their practice is not yet complete; the Buddha, however, has perfect enlightenment. The title Buddha has the same meaning as such words as sage and worthy. When it is said, “The Master is surely a sage,” it means that Confucius's state of mind had entered the realm of sagehood. All people can become Yao or Shun, and all sentient beings can become Buddhas; this is the meaning.

A state of mind belongs to mind. Mind is called the ground, and also the field of intrinsic nature. A field possesses the wondrous capacity for unceasing growth; therefore intrinsic nature is called Buddha-land and Buddha-seed. Buddha-land does not refer only to the land of Śākyamuni Buddha's manifestation. There are two kinds of Buddha: causal Buddhas and fruition Buddhas. Fruition Buddhas include Śākyamuni Tathāgata and others who have already accomplished Buddhahood.

A causal Buddha means that my mind and all sentient beings, at the causal ground, can all become Buddhas. Thus it is said, “Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings—these three are without distinction.” The nature of awakening is originally equal in all, and all can become Buddhas. Upon cultivating to the ground of awakening, it is also called the Buddha-ground, opening Buddha-wisdom, opening the Buddha's knowledge and vision, and the Buddha-eye. The Buddha-eye is formed by combining the dharma eye, wisdom eye, heavenly eye, and physical eye.

The eye is mind. Sentient beings are collectively divided into ten realms, and the ten realms are mind alone. The Buddha is the highest among the ten realms. Only the Buddha is not called a sentient being; the other nine realms—bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, śrāvakas, devas, humans, asuras, animals, ghosts, and hell beings—are all called sentient beings, because their afflictions have not been eliminated. To enter Buddhahood from the ordinary state, one should rely on the Dharma; this is called the Buddhadharma.

The Dharma is like a vehicle by which one crosses over; this is called the Buddha vehicle. It is divided into the lesser vehicle, the two vehicles, and the great vehicle. By this one understands the Way; it is called the Buddha Way and the Buddha Seal. The Way is the supreme treasure of the worldly and supramundane realms, beyond comparison; therefore it is called the Buddha Treasure. When Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha accord and seal one another, the Treasure appears. The three are one. Therefore everyone possesses Buddha-nature, and everyone can become a Buddha, just like Śākyamuni Buddha.

Becoming a Buddha does not mean emitting light, sitting upon a lotus, or changing one’s form. We bow to and revere the Buddha every day because we admire the virtues of Śākyamuni Buddha and wish to learn from and emulate him, attaining the

same luminous perfect enlightenment. It is like revering Confucius: one willingly studies to become a sage, not to become Confucius; nor can Confucius make one into a sage.

Yet one cannot avoid relying on an image for contemplation and emulation; thus Buddhist images are established and used as mirrors. But if one has a mirror and cannot reflect upon oneself, it is ultimately of no benefit. Looking into a mirror without removing one's defilements is likewise of no benefit. Only practitioners who cultivate sincerely and do not deceive themselves may be called children of the Buddha or children of the Dharma. The Tathāgata has many titles; they will now be briefly explained.

1. Tathāgata: this means that the mind comes from nowhere and goes nowhere; hence it is called the Tathāgata. 2. Worthy of Offerings: this means being worthy to receive offerings from all sentient beings. 3. Perfectly and Universally Knowing: this means being able to know all dharmas universally. Knowing all dharmas to be without distinction is called perfect knowing; wisdom that encompasses all without exception is called universal knowing.

4. Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct: this refers to knowledge of past lives, the heavenly eye, and the exhaustion of outflows, known as the three insights; it is so called because all are fully perfected. 5. Well Gone: this means ascending to the highest state and never returning again. 6. Knower of the World: this means being able to understand all the afflictions and purity of the world. 7. Unsurpassed One: this means that among dharmas, nirvāṇa is unsurpassed, and among sentient beings, the Buddha is unsurpassed; he may also be called a great being.

8. Tamer of Men: this means being able to regulate and guide all sentient beings. 9. Teacher of Humans and Devas: this means being the honored teacher among humans and devas. 10. Buddha: this means awakening—awakening oneself, awakening others, and perfecting awakening and conduct. 11. World-Honored One: this means possessing all the foregoing honored titles and being revered by all humans and devas in the world. 12. Bhagavān: this means possessing six honorable qualities: (1) sovereignty, (2) blazing splendor, (3) dignity, (4) renown, (5) auspiciousness, and (6) nobility. All the foregoing are alternate names for the World-Honored One and merely express his supreme virtues.

Explaining the Dharma

Dharma, in Sanskrit, is dhamma; it means that which pervades all things. Only the Buddha is called the Dharma King, for he penetrates all phenomena. Dharma also means a method, like a boat that can ferry people out of danger; it is called the Dharma raft or Dharma boat. Human intrinsic nature can give rise to all phenomena; it is called the Dharma body, and also Dharma-nature. When one

cultivates to the point of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one becomes a Dharma-body Buddha.

Understanding difficult Buddhist principles without being deluded by them is called dharma-patience. Understanding and realizing the principle of the unborn is called patience with the unborn dharmas. Being able to understand the true Dharma and use it to liberate others is called the dharma eye, also called the purified dharma eye. The sūtras and teachings spoken by Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past and recorded in writing are called Dharma canons or Dharma maṇḍalas. Their divisions into categories are called dharma gates.

The Dharma has no fixed dharma; all may bring people to life, and thus it is called Dharma milk. When expressed from writing in speech and sound, it is called the Dharma sound; the Dharma sound reaches throughout the ten realms. Since all sentient beings share this same mind, there are ten dharma realms. Sentient beings cling rigidly to dharmas and do not understand transformation; their suffering is thereby multiplied ten thousandfold. This is called attachment to dharmas, also called dharma views and dharma bondage. One should seek a good spiritual friend as one's teacher, who entrusts one with the true Dharma; such a person is called a Dharma teacher.

The teacher employs various expedient dharma gates to open up my wondrous Dharma lotus. The lotus is my mind, my essence; the wondrous Dharma is the wondrous functioning of my mind. This enables me to attain the unsurpassed wondrous truth, whose meaning is boundless; hence it is also called the flavor of the Dharma and Dharma food. Because its joy and delight are immeasurable, it is called Dharma joy and Dharma bliss. Today's gathering for study, common discussion, and mutual liberation is called a Dharma assembly.

To transmit the treasure of the One Vehicle Dharma from one person to another in order to liberate others, without allowing it to cease, is called the Dharma wheel's constant turning. Each of you possesses unsurpassed capacity, sufficient to shoulder the Tathāgata's anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi. This is to be a vessel of the Dharma, just as a vessel can hold things. In sum, the Dharma saves people's wisdom-life and is therefore called Dharma medicine. When the King of Physicians uses it to save the world, those able to enter this maṇḍala are said to have a Dharma affinity.

Yet all things are empty, and the Dharma too is borrowed for temporary use. Once an illness is cured, medicine must no longer be used; otherwise it becomes a disease of the Dharma. While medicine is now being used, one must cultivate until realizing the empty characteristics of all dharmas; only then may one relinquish the Dharma. Human life is impermanent, and opportunities are hard to encounter again. The time must not be lost.

Explaining the Saṅgha

Saṅgha means an assembly, an assembly of those with virtue. Just as one monk alone does not constitute a saṅgha, there must be at least four people for it to be called a saṅgha; there are saṅghas of ten and saṅghas of twenty, and they must be people of moral conduct. Even virtuous lay practitioners, when gathered together, may be called a saṅgha. Any monk who does not understand the Buddhadharma and does not understand the mind-ground cannot be called a treasure, for he has departed from the Buddhadharma. We revere the Three Treasures.

The Three Treasures are the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Awakening to it is called Buddha; taking it as the norm is called Dharma; harmonizing with it is called Saṅgha. What does this refer to? What is this thing? It refers only to the treasure of the mind. The monastics who have broken the precepts, of whom the Buddha spoke in the past, were those who still possessed the substance of the precepts and dignified deportment; this does not refer to those today who observe not the slightest precept. They lack even the substance of the precepts, and the outward marks of the precepts are also lost.

If persons of inferior wisdom hear this, they may think that, since there is such expediency, they need only aspire to become monastics who have broken the precepts. Would not the future of the Buddhadharma then be in danger? Moreover, once monks drift into business, it is only natural that they pursue what worldly people favor.

What worldly people favor is of such a low level; how could they then fail to deceive people with sūtra recitations and repentance rites? If the prevailing custom were changed, so that in performing meritorious deeds people did not emphasize outward form but instead invited virtuous elders to explain the meaning of the sūtras, valuing the gift of Dharma and then making offerings in return, they would naturally turn to studying the sūtras as well. This might enable monks to understand, at least somewhat, the principles of the Buddhadharma, and the merit and virtue would be inconceivable. Yet the degeneration of the saṅgha should not be blamed on the Buddhadharma; this must be clearly distinguished.

Explaining the Self

The self is what a person calls oneself. Once attachment to self is firm, self-love grows ever deeper. The hardest things to break are the view of self, the sense that “I am,” and the mark of self. Over time these become habits and fixed dharmas; hence they are called the self-dharma. Not knowing that Buddhism distinguishes between the true self and the provisional self, people should first understand the three bodies if they wish to understand what the self is. The first is the form body: the physical body of skin, hair, bones, and flesh, possessing form and color.

The hard elements, such as bones and flesh, are earth; blood, bodily fluids, and moisture are water; warmth is fire; and breathing is wind. This body is compounded of earth, water, fire, and wind, and is merely borrowed from one's parents; it is also called the karmic-result body. One creates one's own causes and forms one's own results. Because the causal conditions of past lives differ, the resulting conditions of wisdom or foolishness, beauty or ugliness, early death or long life are unequal.

From childhood to maturity, one's childhood appearance has already changed and vanished; from maturity to old age, one's mature form has already changed and vanished; from old age to death, one's aged condition is completely transformed and gone. Death need not wait until the moment of dying: even before death, one is constantly changing and unreal, like a shimmering mirage, like a banana tree, like a bubble or a shadow.

It may also be compared to an electric light bulb: though the bulb has no true reality, electricity relies on it to emit light; thus it is the provisional self. The second is the Dharma body, the person's spiritual nature. That which does not move is called nature; when thoughts arise in response to circumstances, it is called mind. It is thus at the age of three, and remains thus at thirty, sixty, or even one hundred and sixty; its nature never changes or perishes.

When one sees red or tastes a delicious flavor, and so forth, old and young are alike; there are not two because of age. If there were a difference, it would be due to dim eyesight or other illnesses, not an illness of one's inner intrinsic nature. This thing is numinous and wondrous, inconceivable. All worldly dharmas arise from it; therefore it is called the Dharma body.

The Dharma body is neither existent nor nonexistent. If it is said to exist, it cannot be grasped and shown to others; if it is said not to exist, human beings are not wood or stone, and apart from it the provisional designation is death. Having it, one seems to live on without end, though in truth there is originally neither arising nor ceasing, and it is eternally unchanging. This is the true self. Only because the root of attachment gives rise to craving and clinging does one enter a mother's womb, receive a portion of the mother's physical substance, and come into being as a human; animals are the same.

This may again be compared to electricity. Without a light bulb, electricity has no means to emit light; the bulb may break and perish, but electricity never perishes. This is called the true self. The third is the manifestation body: when the form body and Dharma body unite, they give rise to all kinds of wondrous functions and unpredictable transformations. This is like lamp light, formed through the union of a lamp and electricity. Thus, the form body is the appearance, like the lamp; the

Dharma body is the essence, like electricity; and the manifestation body is the function, like the light.

It is also all the affairs and things of the world. The three are distinct yet not separate; therefore the three bodies are nondual. Birth and death are merely provisional names, established by people through the view of self. Since my physical body is only a temporary combination of causes and conditions, when dispersed it becomes minute particles; how then can it be clung to as a self? And the so-called true self is also empty in nature. Mind is originally unborn, provisionally existing in dependence on circumstances; thus it is called the illusory mind.

All the evil we do, suffering we undergo, and habits we acquire arise from the mischief of this illusory mind. Therefore, to capture bandits, capture their king; without entering the tiger's den, how can one obtain its cub? Practitioners must begin with realizing the mind, with boundless courageous diligence; only then is there a way out. Otherwise, they will forever sink in cyclic existence. There are also two kinds of self: the personal self and the dharma-self. The personal self is attachment to self; the dharma-self is attachment to dharmas.

Attachment to self is the coarse aspect of self; attachment to dharmas is its subtle aspect. Breaking attachment to self is still relatively easy, but breaking attachment to dharmas requires the great wisdom of Vajra prajñā. Vajra prajñā is complete in everyone and has been there from the beginning, but the treasure chest has not been opened: one has wealth yet cannot use it. Therefore one relies on the Three Treasures—the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—to open it and awaken one's potential. People differ in capacity—greater or lesser, sharp or dull.

For those of lesser capacity, first enable them to have faith in the Buddha, then guide them to have faith in themselves. For those of greater capacity, directly enable them to have faith in themselves; they will then resolutely undertake this without doubt. Afterward, urge them to cultivate in actual practice, and mind and Buddha will naturally become one. Those of lesser capacity are willing to practice but difficult to transform; those of greater capacity awaken easily but are indolent in practice. Those of lesser capacity are excessively rigid in observance—this is their habitual tendency; those of greater capacity are lax and arrogant—this is theirs.

Yet in treating the illness of those of lesser capacity, the difficulty lies in the illness; in treating the illness of those of greater capacity, the difficulty lies in the teacher. When persons of greater capacity develop doubt midway, if this is not decisively resolved for them, their faith becomes impure. Thereafter they retreat and cease practicing, or take their mistaken view to be correct and in turn mislead others, spreading the poison of non-Buddhist paths. Their original intention may also have been to arouse the resolve and do good, but their own capacity is insufficient; one

blind person leading many blind people—the harm of this cannot be fully described. Therefore, a Dharma suited to the recipient is paramount; one must examine carefully at every moment and adapt it. There is absolutely no single dharma that can be universally applied. The Buddha taught eighty-four thousand methods precisely to counteract each different root of illness, because capacities differ.

Studying the Buddha's teaching is a matter of abandoning suffering and seeking happiness, an exceedingly joyful thing; it is certainly not something dry, desolate, or obscure. If, at the outset, one forces people to do what is difficult for them, this is contrary to human feeling. What does not accord with human feeling is not Buddhadharma. Buddhadharma places great importance on constantly accommodating sentient beings, using expedient means everywhere and gradually guiding them in. Once they themselves feel the terror of birth and death, they will naturally strive diligently.

Since beginningless time, worldly people have clung exclusively to the word "self." If they are immediately taught no-self, and at the outset are lectured on the Heart Sūtra and Diamond Sūtra, it is like sending a child directly to university. To demand that they be without the mark of self and give without marks—is this not forcing people to do what is difficult for them? I, on the contrary, want people first to speak of having a self, first to develop knowledge of the self. Once they recognize the self, only then will they be willing to advance.

The suffering of people in the world lies precisely in their not understanding what is going on: everywhere they deny the self, everywhere they struggle against themselves, everywhere they desperately fight with themselves—committing suicide, and so forth. This is giving everything away, the extreme of selflessness; yet, pitiably, they die still confused. Thus all the causes and fruits of suffering in the world are entirely self-created and self-received. It is like a madman who has no idea what sort of mind he has or what he himself is. Therefore, people must first have a self—provided it is a great self; to enlarge it is precisely the meaning here.

Human beings are one class of animals. Yet their number is small: the entire population of the earth is only two billion. In a spoonful of water from a summer ditch, however, the microorganisms are as countless as the sands of the Ganges. Thus, human birth is indeed difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, all sentient beings are endowed with spiritual awareness and all possess Buddha-nature; in essence, they are equal.

The reason they cannot function in the same way is that they create different causes and therefore obtain different fruits. Each has its wondrous functions and innate abilities: birds fly, beasts run, fish swim, and dragons soar. Each has its own strengths beyond human reach. What is precious in human beings is wisdom, which

birds and beasts likewise cannot attain. Having obtained a human body is like having entered a university: in the blink of an eye one graduates, and with one step may leave the school. A human body is difficult to obtain and precious in this way; how then can there be no self?

Human beings and all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, yet human beings alone can cultivate themselves to Buddhahood because the potential fruition contained within their causes differs. All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, including human beings. This is like copper in a mine: although it is all copper, it is mixed with sand. Human beings alone have already been refined from copper ore into copper ingots, and from copper ingots melted into sheets of copper. With only a little polishing, they become copper mirrors. The others remain either ore or copper ingots and cannot yet be directly polished into mirrors. Therefore, their essence is the same but their functions differ. Human life is precious in this way; how then can there be no self?

Since human beings are the spiritual beings among all things, and the mind is the sage among all things, this is the sagely spirit. What one wishes to attain for oneself, one enables others to attain; what one wishes to establish for oneself, one establishes for others. Of all the work of liberating beings throughout the immeasurable three-thousandfold worlds, only human beings can undertake the burden. Such is the magnitude of the responsibility; how then can there be no self?

The Buddhadharma is a tool for great initiative and great function. To shoulder the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi—if not I, then who? If everyone were willing to be so active, transforming a family through oneself, extending this from a family to a nation, and advancing from a nation to the world, the responsibility would be so grave. How could one seek only one's own liberation, depart, and leave matters behind, abandoning one's parents, siblings, and spouse in this world to suffer while oneself leisurely enjoys ultimate bliss? How could such an inferior thought be the Buddha's original intention? Therefore, rebirth in the Western Pure Land is like entering a school to study: after graduating, one returns to save the world.

If the causal ground is not upright, one will instead achieve only one's own liberation. Yet the initiative of the Buddhadharma surpasses that of any other undertaking; how then can there be no self?

The self is boundless and immeasurable. If people can truly know the self, they will see the true self. Whether greed, anger, or ignorance; whether precepts, samādhi, or wisdom; whether sage, worthy, or human being; whether ghost, animal, or hell-being—all are freely chosen by oneself. The chooser is the mind. To understand this mind is the true self, the great self.

Whether one turns one's mind from delusion to awakening, from disorder to samādhi, and from foolishness to wisdom also lies within one's own power of judgment. For the sake of liberating the multitude of beings, one endures every hardship and suffering. This has always been the work of a great person, and it should indeed be so; this too lies within one's own power of judgment. If, at the slightest disappointment, minor setback, or failed romance, one becomes resentful and commits suicide, showing such lack of promise, how can one shoulder national calamities or undertake great affairs? Such people consider the Buddhadharma passive, yet they actively engage in this hopeless business. They are truly deluded upon deluded; the reason is that they do not understand the great self.

What, then, does it mean to understand the self? It means understanding the reason for human life: are other people and I one or two? One who penetrates the nonduality of self and others is called nengren. Ren consists of two persons, indicating that the two mutually communicate. To fulfill oneself is loyalty; to extend oneself to others is empathy. To fulfill loyalty and empathy is nengren. To penetrate the nonduality of oneself and things—to know that all things are complete within oneself and that oneself communicates with all things—is called investigating things.

Thus, to be nengren and investigate things is to be a sage or worthy; to realize the mind is to be a bodhisattva or Buddha. All take the human being as their original ground. It is like obtaining precious jade as raw material and then carving it to make a Buddha. Carving is cultivation. The Buddha too was originally an ordinary being and had also been confused and inverted. He merely became aware early, awakened, turned back, and cultivated himself; thus he became greatly awakened.

Having obtained the qualifications to become a Buddha directly, how can one drift along and sit idly by, thereby missing the opportunity? Since one knows what it means to be human, one should immediately rise and pursue it directly. Life is impermanent; once lost, the opportunity is gone for ages. Yet practice must also advance in proper sequence: it cannot be too slow, nor can it be rushed. Blind cultivation and reckless training bring toil without accomplishment and will inevitably give rise to doubt and retreat.

First understand that the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—are models for us. Next understand that I and the Buddha are originally nondual in essence. Ordinary beings are originally awakened; this is called original awakening. Because awakening seeks illumination, it turns into false awakening and loses what is original. Hearing the Buddhadharma and opening wisdom is called initial awakening. When one attains awakening, it is called awakening at the level of principle. When knowledge and practice are united, and principle and phenomena interpenetrate, it is called realized awakening. When habitual tendencies have been removed, awakened conduct perfected, and essence and function are suchness, it is called

right awakening—that is, great awakening, wondrous awakening, and perfect enlightenment. The following table compares the similarities and differences in the nature-seeing of sages and ordinary beings.

Table of Similarities and Differences in the Essence and Function of Nature-Seeing in Sages and Ordinary Beings (= indicates similarity; − indicates difference)

Sages − Ordinary Beings

(Source) = (Source)

Essence = Essence

Electricity = Electricity

Light = Light

Function − Function

Illuminates the ten directions without obstruction − Obscured and blocked, unable to illuminate

Awareness − Ignorance

Awakening is enduring − Delusion is temporary

Consciousness = Consciousness

Discrimination = Discrimination

Consciousness transformed into wisdom − Wisdom transformed into consciousness

Transforms objects − Is transformed by objects

At ease − Bound

Master − Slave

Has the power of wisdom − Lacks the power of wisdom

Vajra prajñā is manifest − Vajra prajñā is hidden

Ever clearly aware − Now clear, now obscure

Transcends birth and death; birth and death and nirvāṇa are all empty − Does not transcend birth and death; does not know what birth and death are

Sober − Drunk

Drinks alcohol; drinks every day yet is never intoxicated − Is drunk by alcohol; drunk every day and bound by alcohol every day

Without habitual defilements − Entirely habituated to defilements

Merit and virtue − Karmic obstacles

Sense faculties and their objects fall away − Sense faculties and their objects become entangled

Mind and objects are both empty − Uses objects to bind the mind

Clearly understands cause and effect − Does not understand cause and effect

Awakening comes first − Awakening comes afterward

Illuminates beforehand − Regrets afterward

Sees all things as delusive − Sees all delusions as real

No self − Clings to self

Direct perception fully illuminates − Inferential understanding probes deeply

Outflows exhausted − With outflows

Empty − Not empty

Mind is unobtainable − Mind is everywhere

Has samādhi and wisdom − Lacks samādhi and wisdom

Understands worldly dharmas in order to comprehend the supramundane − Does not understand worldly dharmas yet seeks the supramundane

Samādhi − Agitation

Activity and stillness are both samādhi − Activity and stillness are both agitation

Penetrates the three divisions of time − Cares only for the present

At ease − Not at ease

Knows the dharma of suffering and happiness − Does not know suffering and happiness

Ultimate happiness − Utter suffering

Samādhi, wisdom, and emptiness − Delusion, karma, and suffering

Seeks for oneself − Seeks the Buddha

Spirit = Spirit

Able to penetrate all things − Unable to penetrate anything

Realizes samādhi − Merely holds emotional views

Original awakening = Original awakening

May suddenly become deluded midway = May suddenly become deluded midway

Awakens − Does not awaken

Refuses to become deluded again − Lets oneself drift in cyclic wandering

Seeks awakening − Does not seek awakening

Cultivates − Does not cultivate

Seeks the ultimate Dharma − Does not seek the ultimate

Attains great awakening − Remains forever deluded

Buddha-nature = Buddha-nature

Buddha at the stage of fruition − Buddha at the causal stage

Like water = Like water

Wet nature = Wet nature

Clear − Turbid

Able to perform all wondrous functions − Unable to perform wondrous functions

Already clarified − Not yet clarified

Returns to = Returns to

From the preceding table, one should know that sages and ordinary beings are originally nondual in essence. Only because ordinary beings are deluded do they create all kinds of karma and consequently undergo all kinds of suffering. Delusion and karma are suffering; without suffering, there is no delusion and karma. Those who habitually do evil mostly harm others. Thus, to understand suffering is to know

the illness; only upon knowing the illness will one be willing to seek a physician and take medicine.

Explaining Suffering

Human life has eight kinds of suffering: first, the suffering of birth; second, the suffering of aging; third, the suffering of illness; fourth, the suffering of death; fifth, the suffering of not obtaining what one seeks; sixth, the suffering of separation from those one loves; seventh, the suffering of meeting those one hates; and eighth, the suffering of the blazing of the five aggregates. There is also another suffering: the suffering of not hearing the Buddhadharma and not knowing suffering, called the suffering of suffering.

People also suffer the three calamities and eight difficulties. “Difficulties” are difficulties in advancing on the Way. Not being able to hear the Buddhadharma is the greatest hardship in human life. What are the eight difficulties? First, hell; second, hungry ghosts; third, animals. Those who enter these three lower realms either undergo uninterrupted suffering or are ignorant and without understanding, and so cannot hear the Buddhadharma.

Fourth, being born in the northern continent of Uttarakuru, where people live for a thousand years, have sufficient clothing and food, suffer no illness or hardship, and have no wish to hear the Dharma. Fifth, being born in the long-life heavens—that is, the form realm and formless realm heavens—where one is likewise attached to joy and pleasure and does not wish to hear the Dharma. Sixth, being blind, deaf, mute, or otherwise unable to see or hear the supreme truth of the Buddhadharma. Seventh, possessing worldly wisdom and clever eloquence—that is, being self-confident, fond of contentious argument, and priding oneself on cleverness—which can also obstruct the Way. Eighth, being born before or after a Buddha, in an age when no Buddhadharma is available to be seen or heard. These are the eight difficulties. As for the three calamities, they are warfare, epidemics, and famine.

The general cause of all suffering begins with birth. The emergence of something from nonexistence is called birth. Between birth and death, one has already passed through many inverted causes, conditions, and results of suffering. The result in turn becomes a cause, and the cause again produces a result; suffering upon suffering never ceases. Since beginningless time, who knows how many thousands upon thousands of sufferings we have endured? The sufferings of old age, sickness, and death have already been determined at the time of birth and cannot be escaped.

From birth to death, one must pass through old age and sickness. The causes of old age and sickness are the following four kinds of suffering: first, the suffering of not obtaining what one seeks, which manifests in two ways: sound and activity.

Sound consists of the disputes of buying and selling, the cries of street vendors, the cries of children, and people's noisy quarrels and complaints. All arise because what is sought has not been attained. The more one wishes to achieve one's aim but cannot obtain it, the louder the clamor becomes. Activity consists of rushing about busily, pursuing and coming and going. Before what one seeks is obtained, one fears not obtaining it; once it has been obtained, one fears losing it again.

The two sufferings of separation from what one loves and meeting with what one hates then follow in succession. When the impulses of desire burn like fire, how can one avoid old age and sickness? Separation demonstrates that all things are impermanent and must not be grasped as real. They are originally only provisional combinations, so why take the false for true?

This applies not only to people but also to things. It is not only separation that is suffering: attachment even before separation occurs is suffering. Because of the causes, conditions, and results of suffering, one can never avoid it. The wise do not wait until separation occurs; they have already seen through its causes. There is no other wondrous method: simply recognize that all is empty, false, and unreal. Then attachment has no ground in which to take root, and suffering has nothing on which to depend.

Meeting with what one hates is precisely the opposite side, yet its suffering is equal. One thing accords with my wishes, another does not; yet both are impermanent. When the seven sufferings torment one together, the anxious mind burns like fire. This is the blazing of the five aggregates. The five aggregates are form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. When these five aggregates remain knotted together and cannot disperse, interlinked and unable to be released, they are called the five aggregates.

Form refers to the six sense faculties joining with the six sense objects; both alike are form, and both alike are illusory. Feeling is the arrival of contact, which I receive. Perception is the stirring of thought. Formations are the flow of the discriminating mind. Consciousness is the knowing that follows sensation and discrimination. The five aggregates arise simultaneously, and suffering and pleasure arrive simultaneously as well. Whether it is good or evil, gain or loss, the blazing fires of desire that sear us wave after wave are not thereby diminished in the least. All arise from the entanglement of form and mind. The eight sufferings cannot be separately analyzed; collectively, they are simply called unease.

Everything in the world belongs to the realm of opposites. Doing evil is certainly suffering, but doing good while expecting recompense also creates distinctions of gain and loss, abundance and scarcity, coming and going, self and others. If even one part is not commensurate, there is one part of suffering. If the recompense

exceeds by one part what I have given, I may be satisfied for a time, but the other person will feel uneasy. Unease gives rise to the intention of seeking compensation from me, and I in turn become fearful.

Therefore worldly dharmas are not ultimate, and suffering can never finally be avoided. The origin of all worldly suffering is delusion. Delusion means confusion; actions performed out of confusion are called karma, and karma brings about the fruition of suffering.

All worldly evil arises from delusion. Out of delusion, people create evil karma, believing there is no cause and effect and that no one will know. They may even force their arguments, defend and conceal their faults, and invoke freedom as a pretext. Such people are deeply superstitious. Because you are deluded, the Buddhadharma asks you to have faith—faith in what is real, not faith in what is false. Through layer upon layer of analysis and every kind of demonstration, the causes of delusion are made clear, and only then can one realize where the root of suffering lies.

Suffering has no fixed definition. For example, a house may be furnished only moderately. A wealthy person who sees it may feel extremely uncomfortable, whereas a poor person may consider it blissful. Spicy sauce is delicious to people from Sichuan and Yunnan, while a child may find it bitter; yet after becoming accustomed to it, the child may in turn find it pleasurable.

Thus the root of suffering lies in the mind's habits. The mind is enticed by external circumstances and unjustly creates this suffering for itself.

But how does the mind form these habits? They arise from discrimination and comparison. Discriminating good and bad, wholesome and unwholesome, favorable and adverse, right and wrong—all are assumptions established by one's own deluded views since beginningless time. Without asking whether they are right or wrong, one clings to them as right. The firmer this attachment, the less willing one is to relax it. Over time, it becomes a fixed pattern that one refuses to alter. This is the general cause of delusion.

Then, using habits that are not in accord with the Dharma to compare with other things, one sees everything as failing to accord with one's wishes and thus becomes miserable. The discriminating mind may be stronger or weaker, and suffering correspondingly deeper or shallower. According to whether the force of attachment is tight or loose, suffering lasts longer or shorter. For example, children have little experience of human affairs, so they discriminate less, cling less, and suffer less. But if a child is suddenly beaten or scolded and receives a severe shock, the child will not forget it, because the powers of attachment and discrimination are strong.

Since suffering has no fixed definition, it can be transformed into pleasure. What cannot be transformed is true suffering. How can it be transformed? First, one must know suffering. People in the world often do not believe that they themselves are suffering beings; thus, those willing to cultivate are all people who have already tasted hardship to the full. People also often do not believe in future suffering. For example, on a clear day they certainly do not believe that the roof will leak. Unless one possesses great wisdom, one will not prepare early. This is the suffering of not knowing suffering.

In teaching people the Dharma of suffering and pleasure, the Buddha first tells them that all things are impermanent. Precisely because they are impermanent, nothing can be relied upon. Second, he teaches the ultimate Dharma gate: because worldly dharmas are not ultimate, they must in the end return to suffering. If one can understand that all is impermanent, then one who ordinarily relies on wealth will not become attached to it. Such a person is taught to give, so as to practice letting go until the conception of impermanence is thoroughly familiar.

If one has already let go of everything to which one clings, then when sudden suffering comes, one may have a method with which to withstand it. How, then, can one come to know and end suffering? One can only be urged to arouse the resolve. To arouse the resolve means to give rise to the resolve to realize the mind. One must truly put faith, vows, and practice into effect. If one does not understand that the root of suffering truly lies in the mind's lack of clarity—what is called delusion, karma, and suffering, whose root lies in delusion—then one cannot proceed. The appearance of the mind must indeed be understood. A sūtra says, “Know your own mind as it truly is.” In forty-nine years of teaching, the Buddha said only this one sentence.

Since we must realize the mind and know suffering, we cannot avoid investigating the appearance of the mind. One must question one's own mind, undergo suffering, and know suffering. Only after realizing the experience of going from suffering to happiness can one relieve the suffering of others. The method for overcoming suffering is: first, recognize suffering; second, endure it; third, understand it; fourth, train through it; fifth, realize its emptiness. The concrete practice will be explained in the following Section on Right Cultivation. The verse says:

To uproot suffering, one must uproot its root; to uproot its root, one must know the root.

To know the root requires thorough awakening; to awaken thoroughly, one must realize the mind.

Realizing the mind lies in attaining nothing; when nothing is attained, the root of suffering is exhausted.

If ordinary people do not enter into suffering, how can they understand the meaning of suffering?

To know suffering is already to transform it; once transformed, suffering falls away.

Suffering and pleasure are originally relative; worldly pleasure is itself suffering.

When unstained by either suffering or pleasure, this is called transcending birth and death.

How to Transcend Birth and Death

Once the root of suffering has been clarified, we may speak of transcending birth and death. Buddhist practitioners often do not understand what birth and death are. They generally take one as alive before death and dead only after one has died, and suppose that if one does not return after death, one has truly transcended birth and death. Such talk is truly like a blind person speaking of darkness; it does not even understand the principle of cause and effect and rebirth.

To understand the principle of birth and death, one must first understand what undergoes birth and death, and what the principle of that thing truly is. Only by understanding birth and death can one speak of the method for transcending birth and death. The reward body is the physical body. It is inherently subject to arising and ceasing and is impermanent. Though it exists, its existence is only temporary; ultimately it is illusory and unreal, and therefore it is called empty.

When it reaches the time of transformation and destruction, ordinary beings naturally regard it as death. But in the eye of wisdom, it was already dead before it died; before its transformation and destruction, it had already been transforming and perishing again and again. There is nothing remarkable about it.

As for the nature that is neither arising nor ceasing, it exists forever. Ordinary beings cannot see it and therefore cling to its nonexistence. Those with the eye of wisdom clearly see its nature and see that it is constant and unchanging, so there can be no question of birth and death. Hence it is said that nirvāṇa and birth and death are equally like flowers in empty space. For one has understood that the turning of birth and death is precisely the turning of the illusory mind.

The turning of the illusory mind is like a wheel, suddenly rising and falling in the dusty ocean of the six realms. This is called the ocean of birth and death. Its ceaseless revolutions are called the wheel of birth and death. This illusory mind spins a cocoon and binds itself, becoming ever more entangled and bound; this is called the bondage of birth and death. Like a dream from which one does not awaken, it is called the long night of birth and death. When the Buddha appears in

the world to liberate sentient beings, he liberates only this illusory mind, turning it from delusion to awakening; this is called transcending birth and death.

“Transcending” means understanding: realization at the level of principle. It also means liberation, enabling one not to create causes and undergo results: realization in actual circumstances. This is life's one great matter; hence it is said that the matter of birth and death is great. Yet the physical reward body cannot truly be said to undergo birth and death, and the Dharma nature, being ever present, likewise cannot truly be said to undergo birth and death.

Only the illusory mind creates mischief. Through delusion, it takes the false for true, and thus there is the revolving cycle of birth and death. If one knows it to be flowers in empty space and does not take it as real, there is no revolving cycle, nor is there any body or mind to undergo that birth and death.

It is not that a state without birth and death is artificially produced, for original nature is inherently without birth and death. But ordinary beings do not understand the principle of birth and death, so sages can only explain illusion in terms of illusion and provisionally posit birth and death. Those of lesser faculties do not understand birth and death; they merely fear death. Those of somewhat greater faculties seek only to transcend birth and death, believing that there really is a birth and death to be transcended.

Those of great faculties know that birth and death do not lie in the physical reward body, but only in the revolutions of the illusory mind; the illusory mind is birth and death. Those of the highest faculties recognize that the mind is unobtainable, that originally there is no birth and death and no nirvāṇa. Yet for the sake of sentient beings, they do not incline exclusively toward emptiness or abandon existence. They speak to them of transcending birth and death so that they may awaken for themselves and know that birth and death are their own deluded, illusory mind. To transcend birth and death, first transcend the illusory mind. When the mind knows itself to be illusory, its illusion is extinguished, and one has truly transcended birth and death.

Birth and death are provisionally named in two ways. The first is segmented birth and death: one relinquishes a particular segmented body and is reborn in another form. For example, when a person dies, they cast off the segmentation of this body and become an ox or sheep; when oxen or sheep die, they too relinquish their segmented bodies. Such ceaseless turning is called segmented birth and death. The second is transformational birth and death, which is transformation in one’s state of mind. For example, one advances from an ordinary being to an arhat, and then becomes a bodhisattva. This is a transformation of mind, not a change of physical form. When one reaches the ground of eternal quiescence and immovability,

transformational birth and death comes to an end; this is called complete illumination and profound quiescence, and one then ascends to the ground of Buddhahood.

In sum, the segmented body takes rebirth in accordance with the root of attachment: whatever realm one is attached to, one receives the body of that realm. Attachment arises from the illusory mind; when the illusory mind turns from delusion to awakening and does not cling to illusory circumstances, body and mind no longer undergo that birth and death. One must first transcend segmented birth and death, and then proceed to eliminate attachment to dharmas; this is to transcend transformational birth and death. In our cultivation, we must first realize the mind and see our true nature. After directly realizing fundamental wisdom, we must diligently eliminate habitual tendencies; only then can we truly transcend birth and death.

The birth and death of ordinary beings first arises from birth itself. One first takes an object as one's basis. For example, when a person sees a pig, an image of a pig first arises in the mind and is impressed upon the brain. Morning and evening, it remains there. Once this has become habitual over time and causes, conditions, and fruition mature, they naturally converge, and the person becomes a pig.

If nothing at all is established and all images in the mind are extinguished, then even if various scenes appear, one already knows them to be illusory. They pass without remaining and leave no trace. Since external objects have nothing to which they can attach, the field of one's nature does not undergo transformation. The twelve links of dependent origination are nothing more than attachment and grasping leading into birth and death; their root lies in ignorance. To transform ignorance is awakening. If one understands how birth comes about, one can understand how death comes about.

If one does not understand birth, how can one understand death? Since birth itself does not truly exist, on what could death depend? If one understands that birth and death are produced by the illusory mind of ignorance, this is transcending birth and death at the level of principle. If one actually cultivates, seeking to realize the mind and free oneself from bondage, and painfully uproots one's own habitual tendencies, this is transcending birth and death in actual practice.

The matter of birth and death is indeed grave. This thing called birth and death is the movement and functioning of a single thought in the illusory mind of ignorance. It proceeds from subtle to coarse distinctions, becomes firmly fixed as one's nature, and is habitually taken for granted without awareness; thus it is easy to enter but difficult to leave. Yet nothing in the world is difficult: a journey of a thousand miles begins beneath one's feet. If practitioners truly regard birth and death as fearful,

they should uproot its root and first break through ignorance. But if one does not know what ignorance is, what can one do? It will be explained in detail below.

Explaining Ignorance

Ignorance means darkness and delusion; when one awakens, there is clarity. Ignorance refers to a dark and dull mind. In Sanskrit it is called avijñā, and it is formed from the six great root afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, pride, and wrong views. Their habitual conditioning binds and entangles one, like smoke clouding the eyes and causing blindness.

In examining doctrinal categories, ignorance is said to have four kinds, five kinds, or even as many as fifteen kinds. Such excessively fine distinctions instead lead practitioners to doubt that there really is an ignorance and to think of ways to destroy it. They do not know that ignorance is simply the illusory mind's deluded attachment: it has no substantial entity and is not like an object that can be broken. If it could be broken, some form would remain after its breaking, just as fragments of a broken bowl remain.

But this is not so. Clarity and darkness are opposites and cannot coexist: where there is clarity, there is no darkness; where there is darkness, there is no clarity. It is also like a dark room: when light appears, it is bright; when the light departs, it is dark. Thus ignorance cannot properly be said to be broken; it should be said to be extinguished. When a deluded person turns toward awakening, delusion is extinguished and awakening appears; that person is no longer deluded. When someone enters a dream, one cannot call it waking; once they have awakened, one cannot call it a dream, for waking extinguishes the dream.

How could a dream be broken apart bit by bit? Therefore, when awakening opens, ignorance is extinguished. Before awakening, there is still ignorance and still birth and death. Yet sages and ordinary beings alike have thoughts, and their illusory minds arise in the same way. The difference is that ordinary beings do not recognize the illusory mind or know awakened illumination. Conditioned by objects, they bind themselves and thereby become deluded, create karma, undergo suffering, and fall into the sea of birth and death.

Sages know this to be the wondrous functioning of the illusory mind. As it arises, it is empty; it leaves not the slightest trace. Illusory objects and the illusory mind are both unobtainable; therefore, sages transcend to the other shore. If, when we encounter circumstances, we can remain without a clinging mind, letting them pass without retaining them, then the seeds in the store consciousness become empty and pure and cannot bear fruit. This is what is meant by the severing of the seeds of birth and death.

Thus the seven evil karmic actions of body and speech, such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, begin with the three mental karmas of greed, anger, and ignorance, called the three poisons. These three poisons in turn begin with the seeds in the store consciousness. Such seeds are the illusory mind's attachments, mistakenly drawing external objects into the store consciousness through clinging. They accumulate and are nurtured over time. Though the seeds are innumerable, they do not go beyond three kinds: establishing a self, opposing others, and setting up dualities.

Thus good and evil, favorable and adverse, right and wrong, self and other, and all kinds of comparative judgments arise in succession as causes. Greed, anger, and ignorance form the conditions as the convergence of all seeds. Layer upon layer, they advance until they culminate in killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct—the full collection of evils—and the bondage of birth and death turns like a wheel as its result.

If one knows that all is illusory, then at the causal stage both mind and objects are empty, and one will not cling to circumstances and draw them into the store consciousness. With no seeds within and no conditions without, how could anything arise? It is like making firecrackers: if there is no gunpowder inside, then even with a fuse, they can scarcely explode. The reason the illusory mind clings to objects and draws them in is truly delusion and unawareness: it mistakes the false for the real and is wrongfully deceived. This is called ignorance. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra says, "Ignorance is the father and attachment is the mother." This means that they are the root of birth and death and the source from which all seeds arise; therefore, they must be eradicated.

Explaining Karmic Obstacles

Someone may say, "Ignorance certainly should be eradicated, but what if one's karmic obstacles are deep and heavy?" One should ask in return, "What exactly are karmic obstacles?" If such a thing truly existed, it should be brought forth; the person would surely be at a loss. For those of sharp faculties, this alone may bring awakening. But those of dull faculties are not yet ready for this, so it must be explained in detail.

Karmic obstacles are precisely your habitual tendencies. A lazy person who enjoys ease and comfort has such a habitual tendency, and therefore cannot advance on the Way. A person who practices austerities may be too rigid and unable to function freely; this too is a habitual tendency and likewise prevents progress on the Way. Or someone may be excessively doubtful and given to speculation, with views of self continually arising; this is also a habitual tendency and still more prevents progress

on the Way. All these are unwholesome karma that can obstruct the Way; hence they are called karmic obstacles.

But karma is not necessarily evil. Pure karma, the ten wholesome deeds, and the like are all wholesome karma. Karma means intentional action; in Sanskrit it is called karma, meaning the work that one does. There are three kinds: bodily karma, verbal karma, and mental karma.

Of these three kinds of karma, those directed toward good are called white karma, and those tending toward evil are called black karma. Cultivating worldly dharmas produces defiled karma, while supramundane dharmas produce undefiled karma. Karma that is neither wholesome nor unwholesome is called indeterminate karma. For those cultivating the six realms, there is also deva karma, human karma, ghost karma, and so forth. From cause to fruition, when conditions are complete, fruition ripens. When habitual tendencies are deep and their force is strong beyond control, this is karmic conditions and karmic power.

What cannot be escaped is called karmic fruition, karmic suffering, and karmic retribution. That in which one sinks and from which it is difficult to emerge is called the sea of karma. Being bound by habitual tendencies without release is called karmic bondage. The ceaseless turning that follows from this is called the wheel of karma. When, at death, a moonlike disk suddenly appears, illuminating the good and evil of one's lifetime and giving rise to a multitude of thoughts, this is called the karmic mirror. Yet all these are fixed karma created by one's own mind. Only those who have realized the mind-ground understand that karma is established by the mind. Knowing the mind to be illusory, they know karma too is not existent. With a single turn, it is empty; this is inconceivable power. As for karma that obstructs the Way, there are karmic obstacles, and obstacles have five kinds; however, as this belongs to proper cultivation, it will be discussed only briefly.

Methods for Eliminating Karmic Obstacles

The root lies in extinguishing ignorance. When ignorance is extinguished, karmic obstacles dissolve of themselves without needing to be eliminated. The coarse aspects of karmic obstacles can be seen, but their subtle aspects are not easily perceived. In Buddhadharma there is no distinction between great and small: if a thought of killing arises, even though one has not killed, it is as if one had killed. Yet when this thought of killing turns, it is empty; emptiness is purity. The only difficulty is being unable to turn it. Therefore, whenever a thought arises that contains views of self or emotional attachment, whether great or small, it is a karmic obstacle.

But eliminating thoughts does not mean cutting off or extinguishing thoughts; it simply means turning thoughts. Without turning, there is attachment; attachment is bondage. From the intention to kill to the act of killing, all comes from lacking the

strength to turn, and thus one follows the current downstream, unable to recover. This is the root of birth and death and is called emotional attachment; all of it can obstruct the Way.

The depth or shallowness of karmic obstacles is simply the depth or shallowness of one's accumulated habits. What is easily removed is a shallow karmic obstacle; what is difficult to remove is a deep karmic obstacle. Moreover, when thoughts can be let go, turned quickly, and become empty with a single illumination, they are shallow. If they cannot be let go, cannot be turned, and cannot be brought under illumination, they are deep.

Nevertheless, to state the essential point, one cannot eliminate karmic obstacles without understanding cause and effect. To understand that the causal ground of karmic obstacles is originally empty in nature is the Buddha's realm. People of inferior and dull faculties cannot be told this, for they may fail to understand cause and effect or the ultimate truth, mistake emptiness, and fall into an evil path. Therefore, they must first be guided by ritual forms.

Instruct them to keep the precepts and not indulge themselves; gradually open for them the path of prajñā; encourage them to change their temperaments and habits. When their capacity matures, directly point it out to them in accordance with their potential, enabling them to awaken with open clarity. As for rebirth while carrying karma in the Western Pure Land, this karma refers to the afflictions of views and thoughts that have not yet been severed. Upon seeing the sublime realm of the West and yearning for it, one is still subject to such afflictions.

But at death, when one's own strength is insufficient and one has no assurance at all, the aid of this right mindfulness can provide considerable support. One will naturally rise beyond the three lower realms. Without attachment to this world and with one-pointedness of mind without distraction, one attains rebirth.

After attaining rebirth, one's old habitual karmic powers have not yet been eliminated. Thereafter, one receives conditioning in the West. In time, when maturity is reached, one again awakens to the fact that the nature of sin and merit is empty, originally without arising or ceasing. The flower of wisdom opens, and one sees the Buddha of one's own nature. If karma itself does not exist, how can one speak of eliminating it?

Those who do not understand the mind-ground or cause and effect speak one-sidedly of eliminating karma rather than explaining it in terms of karma itself. They take karmic obstacles to be something truly existent. Therefore, without relying on prajñā, there is no way to eliminate karmic obstacles. Strive, strive; prepare early, and do not panic at the last moment. Human birth is difficult to obtain—how could one enter an evil realm again? Since practitioners understand the suffering of birth

and death, with ignorance as its cause, karmic obstacles as its condition, and suffering as its result, they should seek a means of liberation. Yet the meaning of liberation remains to be explained.

Explaining Liberation

Liberation has two meanings. First, it means explanation: explaining in order to remove doubt. Second, it means understanding: understanding the principle in order to free the mind. In Sanskrit it is called mokṣa, meaning freedom from bondage and the attainment of ease. To free oneself from the bondage of delusion and karma and escape the suffering of the three realms is called liberation. This bondage is self-created, unlike bondage imposed by others. The latter is bondage by another; this is self-bondage. The former is bondage with form; this is formless bondage.

The other binds me to the body; this self-bondage binds the mind. The other has only one or two kinds of bondage; this has as many as eighty-four thousand kinds. The other is released by the hand; this is released by wisdom. For release from the other, one seeks another person; for this release, one seeks oneself. The other bondage must be untied before one is freed; this bondage is freed without being untied. Yet this is not truly without untying: those with the eye of wisdom see that its root is already empty. Since there was originally no bondage, how could there be any release?

It is only for those of dull faculties that one cannot avoid speaking of so many technical terms. Those who seek liberation resemble prisoners seeking release because they lack freedom, yet this is not so, for originally there is no bondage. But sentient beings do not understand this. Those today who bustle after fame and profit are either bound by fame, bound by profit, or bound by both. They are exerting themselves to scheme and pursue them ever more deeply, with no time to spare; how could they be willing to relax and seek liberation?

Only when they experience suffering do they begin to realize such truths as suffering, emptiness, and impermanence. Yet before they become aware of it, they are already suffering in countless ways. Deluded by hopes and expectations, they fail to recognize their suffering, still imagining that, once their hopes are fulfilled, all suffering will be dispelled. They do not know that human affairs are impermanent and that it is exceedingly difficult for things to turn out as one wishes.

For example, a lottery has a top prize of five hundred thousand, while perhaps a million people desire it. In the end, only one person obtains what they hoped for, while the number of disappointed people runs into countless tens of thousands. Before the drawing, the burning unease of desire is as indescribable as the distress, resentment, and vexation of disappointment afterward. Thus, it is true that there is

originally no bondage, yet the present unease is not unreal. Simply because they fail to recognize this, people needlessly bind themselves. The one who tied the bell must untie it: since one is bound in the mind, one must also be liberated in the mind. To be liberated in the mind, one must first understand the principles of cause and effect and of the coming together of conditions.

On Cause and Effect

Cause is the originating cause, and fruition is the fully developed result. Between cause and fruition there must be conditions; if the conditions are insufficient, the fruition will not be complete. The so-called four conditions are: first, causal conditions; second, object conditions; third, immediately preceding conditions; and fourth, dominant conditions. Within conditions there are also countless minor causes and minor results. For example, thirst gives rise to thoughts of tea: this is a causal condition. Thinking of tea leads one to brew tea: this is an object condition.

From being thirsty, to thinking of tea, brewing tea, steeping tea, drinking tea, and quenching thirst, the sequence cannot be disordered; this is the immediately preceding condition. From thirst to thirst being quenched, there are many intervening processes, each progressively advancing; this is the dominant condition. Layer upon layer, there are causes and effects; everywhere, conditions can be transformed. Whether good or bad, none falls outside these four principles.

If, in brewing tea, one scalds one's finger, becomes angry, resents another person, and then quarrels, this transforms yet another causal condition into a different result. Cause and effect may extend across the three divisions of time, or, more immediately, exist right before us. Each instant is itself a cause and effect. No matter how great or small an affair, it cannot escape the law of cause and effect. All science is inseparable from cause and effect in every respect, with various conditions assisting in bringing results to completion.

The arising of causes and the ripening of results are both called birth. For example, in planting a tree, sowing the seed is the cause; watering, fertilizer, and sunlight are the conditions; and sprouting branches, flowering, bearing fruit, and producing seeds are the result. This is birth. Then the living tree is the cause; the yellowing, falling, and withering of its leaves, and its being cut down by an axe, are the conditions; and its branches and trunk becoming firewood, being burned, and turning into ashes are the result. This is cessation.

This is one birth and one cessation. Birth is conditionally arisen, and cessation is conditionally arisen; therefore, they do not arise and cease of themselves, for a single seed cannot by itself become a tree, bear fruit, and become firewood. Nor do they arise and cease from another, for even if other conditions come together, without a seed there can ultimately be no tree, firewood, ashes, and so forth.

Nor do they arise and cease jointly, for in a joint arising there is no primary subject and no inherent nature; ultimately, for whom would it be? It cannot be found. Therefore it is said that what arises through conditions is empty of inherent nature: though present, it cannot be grasped. Nor do they arise and cease without cause, for this birth and cessation are both results; if there were originally no cause, there could certainly be no result of birth and cessation.

The mind is also thus: it does not arise of itself, from another, jointly, or without cause. Indeed, all things arise and cease through conditions in this way. Thus, the mind arises through causes and conditions and ceases through causes and conditions; it illusorily arises and illusorily ceases, and ultimately cannot be grasped. The various sufferings and vexations of today are likewise bondage through causes and conditions and liberation through causes and conditions. Because the mind is deluded, it takes external circumstances as conditions and binds itself.

Because the mind is clear, it takes awakened contemplation as its condition and is liberated. Yet all conditions are empty and cannot be grasped. Ordinary beings are foolish and do not understand cause and effect. They fear only results, not causes, because causes cannot be seen while results are right before their eyes. Cause and effect are easy to enter but difficult to escape, yet people continually take them lightly. The two vehicles fear causes and refuse to create them; this too is fearing results.

Bodhisattvas are not ignorant of cause and effect, while Buddhas understand cause and effect with clear, ever-present knowing. Since there were prior causes, there must now be results; one can only undergo what must be undergone. There is no question of favorable or adverse circumstances. As for future matters, prior causes bring later results: such cause, such conditions, such result, such retribution, such experience.

Before acting, one is already clearly aware and discerning, and thus naturally does not lightly create causes and undergo their later results. Therefore, realizing the mind is the master key to every undertaking. Using mind to illuminate mind is prajñā; yet only by understanding the essence of mind can one activate the function of prajñā. This is the most essential point in the Section on Inspiring Potential. From this, some suddenly open prajñā; from this, some decisively resolve their doubts; and from this, some plant wholesome roots. This is the subtle meaning of liberating the sentient beings of one's own nature at the causal stage.

Discerning Mind and Intrinsic Nature

What is mind? Mind is that which arises through the coming together of things, as when the eye and visual forms come together, or the ear and sounds come together. The inner six sense faculties are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and

mind; the outer six sense objects are visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. When faculties and objects come together, cognition arises; thus there are the six consciousnesses, and this is called the conscious mind.

Therefore, that which arises in dependence on external circumstances is thought; that which measures and assesses in accordance with thought is mind; that which discriminates on the basis of such assessment is consciousness; that which pursues and investigates is ideation; that which decides on the basis of consciousness is the view of self; and that which firmly holds this view and refuses to change is emotional attachment. Using the power of wisdom-light to direct this ideation, mind, thought, consciousness, and view, and thereby transform them, is awakened contemplation.

To realize that wisdom too is empty, and to be able to relinquish greatly and abide nowhere, is the wondrous function of prajñā. In truth, all these are the mind's illusory arising and illusory ceasing. Each arising and ceasing is a birth and a death, a cause and a result, a single cycle of turning. To abide in this is bondage; not to abide is liberation.

Yet mind neither enters nor leaves, neither comes nor goes, and still less has birth and death. Originally it is not deluded; it is originally unobtainable. From where, then, can liberation be spoken of? The answer is that mind is originally awakened, yet now there plainly appears to be delusion—what is to be done? It is like a person who was originally not ill, for whom medicine would not even be discussed. But if the person has in fact fallen ill, with fever and headache, one cannot cling to the illness as illusory and insist that it does not exist.

Though one clearly knows that after the illness is cured, nothing can be grasped, one must still use illusion to dispel illusion. Again, compare a drunk person with a sober person: although in every respect they are completely nondual, the drunk person's actions are wild and disordered, and cannot be said not to exist. The difference between ourselves and the Buddha is likewise only that between drunkenness and sobriety.

People in the world often divide realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature into two separate matters; nor can they distinguish mind from nature. This is why it is difficult to inspire their potential. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism all speak of nature in the same way, representing it by a circle. In Confucianism it is called humaneness, the great Way, the highest good, the Mandate of Heaven, luminous virtue, the vast and flowing qi, the imperial norm, heavenly principle, the ever-abiding, mind-nature, and the primal origin.

In Buddhism it is called the tathāgata-garbha, suchness, great perfect mirror wisdom, wisdom of the essential nature of the dharma realm, perfect enlightenment, bodhi, Vairocana, dharma-nature, dharmakāya, the Buddha Way,

wondrous mind, nirvāṇa, vajra prajñā conscious mind, ālaya, the five wisdoms, the ninth consciousness, the boundless body, and return to the origin. In Daoism it is called the mysterious, the golden elixir, the valley spirit, the supreme purity, the limitless, deathlessness, the great Way, and so forth. All three traditions establish provisional names, too numerous to count; but the thing itself is one, and these merely indicate this empty nature.

Now, let the clear quiescence and immovability of nature be compared to water. When, in response to circumstances, a thought moves, that thought is mind, comparable to waves stirred up by wind. Water has the potential to form waves, but waves are not actually inherent in water. Since the waves exist because of wind, this is called illusory arising. When the wind stops and the waves cease, their cessation returns to water; this is called illusory cessation. Because they illusorily arise and illusorily cease, they cannot be grasped; because they lack inherent nature, they are empty.

Water and waves are two yet one. Nature alone originally has neither arising nor ceasing; though a thousand myriad ages pass, it undergoes no change. Because it cannot be seen yet is not empty, it is called true emptiness that is not emptiness. Because its presence cannot be seen, yet its wondrous functioning is as inexhaustible as the sands of the Ganges, it is called wondrous presence that is not presence. This is neither born nor extinguished, neither defiled nor pure; therefore, that which is clear, quiescent, and unmoving is nature.

This immovability is not like the immovability of wood or stone. It remains vibrant and alive: when it encounters circumstances, thoughts arise, illusorily arising and ceasing, yet ultimately unobtainable—this is mind. Mind arises from intrinsic nature. The character consists of , “mind,” and , “arise,” indicating that intrinsic nature is that from which mind arises.

When mind ceases, its cessation returns to nature. Therefore, its point of arising cannot be seen: whence it comes cannot be known. If it is said to arise in dependence on circumstances, then it should arise from those circumstances and not be connected with anything inherent; nature would seem to have no part in it. If it is said to arise in dependence on nature, then without circumstances how could a thought arise? In nature, a thought cannot arise from nothing.

Therefore, know that it exists through the provisional conjunction of causes and conditions. Just as a bell sounds because it is struck, the emergence of sound is also provisionally present through the conjunction of various causes and conditions. This is why its point of arising cannot be grasped.

When it ceases, where does it go? This cannot be known. If it is said to cease in circumstances, no increase is seen in those circumstances. If it is said to return and

cease in nature, then when mind arises no diminution is seen in nature, and when mind ceases no increase is seen in nature. It is precisely like water: when there are waves, the water need not decrease; when waves cease in water, the water need not increase. Moving yet unmoving—this is why its point of cessation cannot be grasped.

Because it cannot be grasped, it does not arise; because it does not arise, there is nothing that can cease. This is what is meant by neither arising nor ceasing. From this we know that arising is illusory arising and cessation is illusory cessation; both are merely provisional names. What does illusory arising mean? It means arising in dependence on others, according to the Dharma Characteristics School. Nature originally has three aspects: first, the nature of dependence on others; second, the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment; third, the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

The nature of absolute reality and perfection means the true aspect that is originally complete and originally accomplished. Suddenly enticed by external objects, one gives rise to thoughts in dependence on others. Failing to awaken to this, one takes it as illusory, then pervasively calculates and clings to it. The problem does not lie in arising in dependence on others, but in attachment. The fault in attachment does not lie in pervasive calculation, but in firmly clinging to it. Thus one's intrinsic nature becomes confused. Yet this confusion is only temporary; intrinsic nature can never increase or diminish. Therefore it is called the eternally unchanging nature of the tathāgata-garbha.

Non-Duality of Nature and Mind

If nature is the essence and mind is the function, essence and function are nondual. When a thought arises, wind forms waves. Whether it is good or evil, with a single turn it is empty; in its very substance it vanishes. The distinction between sages and ordinary beings also lies in this single turn. Turning away from evil and toward good lies in this single turn. To transcend the ordinary and enter sagehood is fundamentally very easy.

Yet mind is both the most alive and the most dead. People always refuse to turn this mind toward goodness. Even with the strength of nine oxen and two tigers, it will not move in the slightest. This is because the karmic force of the obstinate mind is strong; it is difficult to tame and subdue. Even the Buddha can do nothing about it. Without one's own initiative, it cannot turn.

But how can it turn? One need only awaken; awakening itself is turning. The intrinsic nature of ordinary people is originally complete and lacks nothing, and is therefore called fundamental awakening. It is originally wondrous, and is therefore also called the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment. Unfortunately, they are drunk as

though mad. Though all are equally drunk, drunkenness has degrees; yet a drunk person is no different in nature from a good person.

Those who have awakened first go to rescue those who have not yet awakened. This is called practicing the bodhisattva path: impartially and compassionately liberating all. Though a drunk person may be wild, one must not despise him, for his original nature has not been damaged in the slightest. He is merely confused for the moment and unable to be clear-minded. Once he awakens, he is no different at all from a good person. Thus afflictions and bodhi are in truth nondual.

Both are empty in nature and unobtainable; therefore they are said to be identical.

Long ago, someone asked what it meant to say that afflictions are themselves bodhi. I asked him to raise his hand, then asked him to put it down. I then asked, “Did your hand make one raising and one lowering?” He said, “Yes.” I asked again, “Were that raising and lowering performed by two hands, or by this same hand?” He said, “The same hand.” I then asked, “Are raising and lowering two?” He said, “Two.” I asked, “Is the hand one?” He said, “One.” He suddenly awakened to this principle and departed joyfully.

Thus drunkenness and sobriety, too, are nondual; this is originally so. Yet people refuse to let go. Once this turn has been made, what can be done? When they enter the gate of practice, their greed and laziness all arise, and they rely entirely on the Buddha, wanting the Buddha to let go of this hand for them and to awaken for them. What can be done? What can be done? Tracing the matter to its source, the reason is that they have never understood the character of mind and intrinsic nature.

Interacting Faculties and Objects

One cannot help seeing and hearing. To force oneself not to see or hear is the annihilationism of non-Buddhist paths. Forcefully suppressing one’s practice will inevitably produce serious illness: one either falls into a dead sea or turns into a mad demon.

If one follows seeing and hearing as they flow and turn, this is the grasping after conditions of ordinary beings. Such grasping means being passively carried along by delusion and karma, losing one’s mastery. Therefore one must still maintain clear, ever-present knowing in all things, adding the practice of seeing clearly. Know them to be flowers in empty space, and there will be no further turning in the cycle. This is a principal passage of the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment. Its difficulty lies in the single word “knowing,” which encompasses such states as awareness and illumination, realization of emptiness, freedom from delusion, and immovability. Without cultivation and realization, one simply does not know.

Mind as the Treasury

What is meant by “treasury”? It refers to the storehouse consciousness. Consciousness is further divided into the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth consciousnesses, which will now be explained separately.

The fifth consciousnesses are the first five consciousnesses: eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousness. They arise in relation to forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile objects. They are like attendants at a doorway who receive messengers and goods into a warehouse; they store what has not yet entered the warehouse.

The sixth consciousness is mental consciousness: the thoughts aroused by the preceding five consciousnesses. It is like a special agent who receives and carries goods into the warehouse.

The seventh consciousness is consciousness that discriminates through inference. It distinguishes what is good, evil, or indeterminate, and clings obstinately without relaxing its hold. It is the storehouse of attachment to self. It is like a person who inspects goods and determines their quality. It is the general cause of suffering and the ancestor of afflictions; in Sanskrit, it is called manas consciousness.

The eighth consciousness is the storehouse consciousness. “Store” has three senses: the capacity to store, encompassing storage, and storage grasped through attachment to self. The capacity to store means having the ability to store: once something is stored, it does not emerge again; no matter how many years pass, not the slightest bit can be removed. Encompassing storage means that its scope can contain everything: things as great as mountains, rivers, the sun, moon, and earth, and as small as mustard seeds, grains of rice, and tiny insects, are all contained within it. It is like a great warehouse, in which all things—large and small, good and bad, impure and pure—are stored. In Sanskrit, it is called ālaya consciousness.

The ninth consciousness is the empty and pure aspect of the eighth consciousness. Although the eighth consciousness is likened to a warehouse, it is originally empty and pure. Though goods are carried in and out, coming and going in confusion, the warehouse itself does not move because of this. It is neither defiled nor pure, neither comes nor goes, and is originally spotless and immaculate. It is therefore separately called the ninth consciousness. The ninth consciousness is called the pure consciousness; in Sanskrit, it is called amalavijñāna.

All these consciousnesses are fundamentally one entity and have no inherent reality. These provisional names are established merely to awaken people’s understanding, to explain how the mind gives rise to causes and thereby creates karma.

When worldly people create karma through their causal actions, they fall into cause and effect and are not easily rescued. This is why the three karmas of body, speech, and mind are not easily purified. What is bodily karma? Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. What is verbal karma? Divisive speech, harsh speech, false speech, and frivolous speech. What is mental karma? Greed, anger, and ignorance. These are the three poisons, collectively called the ten evil acts. Add the word "not"—not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, and so forth—and they become the ten wholesome acts.

Mental karma is primary, the cause; verbal karma is the lead, the condition; bodily karma is the completion, the fruition. If one does not save the root at the level of cause, but merely makes amends at the level of result, there will ultimately be no benefit. In this assembly, we cultivate the precepts by beginning with samādhi and wisdom. Samādhi and wisdom are themselves precepts—the precepts of mind, the so-called fundamental great precepts—though this does not dispense with the forms and deportment of the precepts.

Practice begins with cultivating the mind and working at the root. This is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, in which function arises from essence. Therefore, in speaking of the dependent arising of mental karma, I do not tire of repetition. People suffer because they do not recognize their own illness. The Buddha therefore described the various habitual tendencies. There are one hundred and sixty types of mind; the Mahāvairocana Sūtra condenses them into sixty types, so that practitioners may each turn the light inward and examine themselves.

Zengzi examined himself three times a day. These "three examinations" must not be understood as three separate occasions; if one examined oneself only three times daily, it would be much like exposure to the sun for one day and cold for ten. These "three" are the three periods of a day: the beginning, middle, and end. That is, there is no day or time when one should not do this. Do so day after day and month after month; over time it will become natural, and to go three months without departing from benevolence will not be difficult. All the ailments of the mind are habitual tendencies. Their root is nothing other than the binding of faculties and objects, the mutual entanglement of form and mind. It is like a mirror: when it faces an object, an image appears; when there is no external object, the mirror itself is empty. Yet there are differences.

1. When a mirror faces an object, an image appears; when the object goes, the image vanishes. When the mind encounters an object, a thought arises; when the object goes, the image remains, because of grasping after conditions.

2. When an object outside a mirror is gone, there is no image. But when an external object of the mind has vanished, the thought still remains, because the mind grasps

after conditions out of thin air and establishes all kinds of images.

3. A mirror necessarily retains an image when facing an object, but when the mind encounters an object, it need not retain one—for example, seeing without seeing, or not binding the mind to anything. Moreover, one endowed with wisdom, whose direct perception is complete, can also cut off everything.

4. A mirror retains only one image when facing an object and cannot transform it. When the mind encounters an object, however, it may not only retain an image but also transform it, producing limitless illusions. With wisdom, it can further turn toward another mental state.

From this we can see that mastery truly lies in our own hands. Fools do not recognize the master within; they allow themselves to be carried along in the flow. Unable to transform things, they are transformed by things. They may even be turned by the sutras they read, forming a dead understanding that cannot function.

Sages establish teachings with realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as the primary aim, wishing people to realize bodhi. Bodhi is without form or name; it is the unobtainable, perfectly wondrous, clear, and aware mind. Worldly people mistakenly take bodhicitta to mean a good or compassionate mind, believing that refraining from evil is the manifestation of bodhi. This is truly insufficiently clear: if the causal ground is not understood, how can fruition be perfected? Moreover, bodhicitta is provisionally given five names:

1. Bodhi of arousing the resolve: knowing delusion and seeking awakening, one arouses the resolve and begins practice. This means arousing the resolve to realize bodhicitta.

2. Bodhi of subduing the mind: knowing how to use mind to restrain mind and subdue its coarse and weighty accumulated habits. Yet suppression is not ultimate; since the mind has not yet become empty, this cannot be called bodhi.

3. Bodhi of realizing the mind: clearly knowing the true character of one's mind as it really is and realizing its empty and pure ground.

4. Bodhi of arriving beyond: leaving this shore of birth and death and reaching the other shore of nirvāṇa. At this point, one has still not left behind deliberate effort.

5. Unsurpassed bodhi: having entered the state of all-pervading perfection and reality, one attains great accomplishment. This is true bodhi.

Therefore, at the level of principle, one can understand that intrinsic nature is originally perfect bodhi and that Buddha-nature is equal in all; this is becoming a Buddha in the dharmakāya. At the level of phenomena, one cultivates and realizes

samādhi, sees the true marks of reality, and realizes the mind and sees one's true nature; this is becoming a Buddha in the sambhogakāya. As for becoming a Buddha in the nirmāṇakāya through the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena, the complete removal of habitual tendencies, and the development of spiritual powers, this cannot be accomplished in a single lifetime; it requires an inexpressible length of time.

Time is kalpas; this is called asaṃkhyeya kalpas. A means "without," and saṃkhyeya means "countless quantity": it means immeasurable kalpas, that is, there is no fixed period of time. It may be accomplished in one lifetime, or in tens of millions of lifetimes. The wise seek the mind and transcend in an instant; fools seek externally and cannot realize it even in tens of millions of lifetimes. What practice, then, can be called transcendent? Apart from the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, there is no other method.

Within the three realms, mind is primary. Mind is called the ground; through this Dharma of mind one enters the dharma realm, and therefore it is called a dharma gate. Those able to contemplate the mind attain ultimate liberation; those unable to contemplate it sink at once.

In the Contemplation of the Mind chapter of the Mahāyāna Birth Stories Sūtra on Contemplation of the Mind-Ground, Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, said: "This dharma gate is the supreme secret mind-ground dharma gate of the Tathāgatas of the ten directions. This dharma gate is the gate through which all ordinary beings enter the Tathāgata's sudden awakening. This dharma gate is the true and correct path by which all bodhisattvas proceed toward great bodhi. This dharma gate is the subtle jewel palace of Dharma bliss personally enjoyed by the Buddhas of the three times. This dharma gate is the inexhaustible treasury that benefits all sentient beings. This dharma gate can lead all bodhisattvas to the realm of sovereign wisdom at the summit of the form realm. This dharma gate can liberate all sentient beings from the perils of birth and death."

I have now briefly cited several passages. All proceed through the gate of prajñāpāramitā, directly realizing the field of mind and knowing one's own mind as it truly is. This is called the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. The Secret Lord of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra refers to the lord of heart esotericism. The equal and secret empowerment of body, speech, and mind is the gate of entry: first, the secret of the body is mudrā; second, the secret of speech is mantra; third, the secret of mind is wondrous contemplation.

The third is the expedient addition of this enjoyment body; it is the dharmakāya of Vairocana, pervading all things. This signifies the perfection of the bodhisattva's practices and is therefore given this name. In truth, it is the inconceivable mind of

the equal dharmatā of all sentient beings. The sutra says, “Relying on this dharma gate,” and so forth; the gate is precisely this gate. Therefore, apart from prajñā, the provisions for learning the Buddha’s teaching are cut off.

Dharmas arise from mind; names are established on the basis of dharmas. The mind that gives rise to them has no location, and the dharmas that arise likewise have none. Mind and objects are both empty and without location. Thus, without mind, there are no names at all. Since the mind responds to things in accordance with conditions, all belong to the emptiness of conditions.

For forty-nine years the Buddha taught the Dharma for no purpose other than liberating the minds of sentient beings and bringing them peace and happiness. No sentient being fails to seek peace and happiness; their struggles, killings, cunning pursuits, and deceitful acquisitions all arise from seeking their own happiness. Yet they do not know that this happiness is not ultimate. Worldly happiness stands in opposition to and dependence upon suffering; it all arises from habitual comparison.

Today’s happiness is tomorrow’s suffering; the happiness of having is the suffering of lacking. Therefore it is not ultimate, and such happiness is temporary and difficult to preserve for long. Moreover, as the mind races outward, people forget the root, believing that suffering and happiness lie in the body’s toil and rest. The Buddha wishes them to awaken to what Dharma can truly bring ultimate peace to the mind.

People of the world do not even know their own minds, much less how to bring them peace. Thus disputes proliferate, and even after hundreds and thousands of years no final conclusion has been reached. People spend their entire lives rushing about for no reason other than to find a way to attain peace. Yet how peace is to be attained so that one’s wishes are fulfilled has never truly touched upon the mind itself. When people seek wealth and emolument, they ask themselves how they may make their minds content. This shows that what they hope for is still the mind’s own fulfillment and peace. But human affairs are impermanent, and the eight sufferings press in from every side. There is no true happiness, only the suffering of many kinds. Unable to illuminate this with wisdom, people are therefore called deluded.

From youth and vigor through old age and death, human life never departs from the eight sufferings mentioned above. Yet what people fail to recognize is the suffering of the blazing five aggregates. Most terrifying is the suffering of death. First, people mistakenly suppose that with a single death they will be annihilated forever. Second, they grieve that the property, wife, and children acquired through a lifetime of labor must soon be left behind. Third, they wonder what destination awaits them after death.

Because these doubts remain unresolved, fear arises. The more afraid they are, the less willing they are to let go; and the less they let go, the less willing the mind is to release its hold. Thus, at death, they undergo indescribable confusion and suffering. Seeing this, people instead suppose that such is inevitably the condition at death; the seed of their fear of death has already been planted. The root of this is failure to understand the mind-ground. Without clarity regarding the mind-ground, there is no way even to begin the method of settling the mind.

All who possess wisdom seek liberation from this, yet do not obtain the method. Bodhisattvas employ compassion and wisdom together to liberate them, teaching them the method of settling the mind. But they do not begin by speaking of peace; they first speak of mind, so that people may understand ultimately that there is originally no birth and death, that mind cannot be grasped, and that suffering and happiness therefore have nothing on which to depend.

To depend means to abide. Abiding in attachment means that mind and objects stand opposed to each other and cannot both be empty; calculation and discrimination arise in dependence on conditions, and suffering and happiness are born because the mind has attachments in which it abides. Yet non-abiding does not mean a stubborn emptiness, like the insentience of wood or stone. It is precisely clear, ever-present knowing without attachment; this is called non-abiding. It does not mean that there is no attachment because there is sheer nothingness.

The sūtra says, “One should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere.” One must not only refrain from abiding in suffering, but also refrain from abiding in happiness; even non-abiding itself must not be abided in. Yet one abides in this place of no abiding. This is the true mind that ever abides, and thus it is called the Pure Land and called Ultimate Bliss. What is called ultimate bliss is the utmost peace. Do not discuss peace and unrest as opposites. This word peace means true and ultimate peace, a peace beyond all naming and description.

When one understands this wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment, one sees that, being fundamentally neither arising nor ceasing, it is neither pure nor defiled, neither hidden nor manifest. The Second Patriarch could not find his mind; the First Patriarch then acknowledged that his mind had been settled. Thus the root of all birth and death and the eight sufferings was shattered. This depends on investigating one’s own mind; there is no Dharma to be transmitted. It is only that one’s strength in ordinary times is insufficient and the path is still unfamiliar, so you are taught to practice earnestly for yourself. Practice is not the pursuit of spiritual powers; it is the pursuit of samādhi giving rise to wisdom, so that by the power of prajñā all bonds are broken. This is nothing other than settling the mind. Yet among all the greatest spiritual powers under heaven, is there any greater than settling the mind?

Because people of the world do not understand the method of settling the mind, they take the pursuit of wealth and fame and the satisfaction of desire to be peace of mind. In the end, they become ever more confused, adding suffering upon suffering; nothing need be said of the rest. Even practitioners of the Way who have obtained the essential method of settling the mind still do not dare trust themselves. They often say that their karmic obstacles are profound and that they have no means of freeing themselves. This is due to not understanding karmic obstacles.

As stated earlier, if one wishes to eliminate karmic obstacles, the first thing is to understand clearly what karmic obstacles are. Once this is understood, they dissolve of themselves without needing to be eliminated. Thus, before the mind-ground is clear, every stirring of mind and movement of thought is a karmic obstacle; one's temper and habitual tendencies are karmic obstacles. Karmic obstacles are unlike a criminal case on file, where the case may be dismissed and the offense pardoned. They are bonds tied within the mind.

For example, when someone kills another person and flees, the act of killing is an impulse of karmic force, and fleeing is likewise an impulse of karmic force. Even if the authorities do not investigate, the victim's family does not pursue the matter, or a pardon is granted, the terror in that person's conscience and the confusion at the time of death are precisely past karma that has not been resolved.

Again, in killing bandits or enemies, one may have no choice but to use armed force. If one does not seek personal emolument, rank, or territory, but, like King Wen, becomes angry once and brings peace to the realm, then one may remain at ease in body and mind. What karmic obstacle could there be? Still more so when greed, anger, and ignorance do not mingle in the mind. This is what is meant by: when principle is understood, the mind is at peace.

Unease is precisely delusion, karma, and suffering. To break through delusion, karma, and suffering is nothing beyond samādhi, wisdom, and emptiness. Samādhi gives rise to wisdom; wisdom realizes emptiness; and in emptiness, without being fixed, there is samādhi. Wisdom means intelligence; the wise are not deluded. People of the world are deluded because they lack wisdom. Lacking wisdom, they cannot distinguish true from false, and instead recognize what is false as true. If one can empty all that one possesses, one naturally understands that worldly dharmas are all insubstantial.

What is called defiled is like a leaking cup: it may at first be full of water, but before long the water leaks away, and therefore it is called defiled. Buddhadharma is a supramundane dharma, a truth of ultimate reality. Truth means that it cannot be shaken. It is like a cup without leaks, whose water never drains away, and is

therefore called undefiled. Buddhadharma is that by which worldly dharmas are understood. Once worldly dharmas are understood, that itself is Buddhadharma. Apart from worldly dharmas, there is no Buddhadharma.

Therefore, Buddhadharma is enlightenment inseparable from the world. When one thoroughly understands without obstruction the defiled worldly dharmas and the undefiled supramundane dharmas, and the two kinds of defilement are utterly purified without remainder, this is called the supernormal power of the exhaustion of defilements. This is the sixth supernormal power, the highest dharma gate, absent from non-Buddhist paths and unique to the Buddha Way. It is absent from all other religions and unique to Buddhism.

For those studying Buddhism, this must be given foremost priority. Thus opening prajñā-wisdom is the fundamental provision for attaining Buddhahood and the first crucial key to realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature; there is no second path by which one may pass through. The Benevolent Kings Sūtra says: "All rely on this gate to attain perfect enlightenment. For one to become a Buddha by going beyond it, there is no such possibility."

This is because the root illness of sentient beings is simply delusion and unawareness, and there is likewise only this one path among all Dharma gates for treating it. Though throughout immeasurable hundreds of millions of kalpas Buddhas appear in the world in every kalpa, the way of every Buddha is the same: this one Dharma. Only its application differs, adapting in response to the capacities of beings. Yet when one returns to unsurpassed bodhi and realizes entry into the ocean of Vairocana's nature, there has never been a second way. As for its names, the various sūtras differ slightly. A brief list follows:

1. the ever-constant and unchanging nature of the Tathāgata-garbha; 2. storehouse consciousness; 3. Tathāgata-garbha; 4. the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment; 5. the wondrous, still, luminous mind; 6. return to the origin; 7. the ocean of Vairocana's nature; 8. great perfect mirror wisdom; 9. dharmakāya; 10. mind-ground; 11. field of nature; 12. mind-treasure; 13. bodhicitta; 14. the gate of pure bodhicitta; 15. vajra prajñā;

16. true reality; 17. suchness; 18. treasure storehouse; 19. Buddha-nature; 20. true child; 21. secret treasury; 22. the ocean of sarvajñā; 23. mind-king; 24. vajra secret traces; 25. the master of the house; 26. the single eye; 27. the mani jewel; 28. the primordial constant; 29. the great self; 30. .

Although the names differ in the various sūtras, their meaning is not two. This is also called the great secret of all Buddhas, and is also called the supreme Mahāyāna. The supreme Mahāyāna is not what non-Buddhist paths can know. What is meant by great is mahā, which has seven meanings:

1. Great Dharma: this means the vast, profound, and secret treasury of all Buddhas. Vairocana pervades all places, and this vehicle is only for great persons.

2. Great arousing of the resolve: this means single-mindedly aspiring to equal great wisdom, giving rise to inexhaustible vows of compassion, and vowing to bestow the Dharma universally upon sentient beings throughout the dharma realm.

3. Great faith and understanding: this means that when one first sees one's nature and clearly realizes the Way, one possesses immeasurable merit and virtue, can reach Buddha-lands as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, and brings sentient beings to accomplishment through great causes and conditions.

4. Great nature: this means the intrinsically pure mind, the vajra treasure storehouse, which lacks nothing and is shared by all sentient beings.

5. Great reliance: this means the great support of sentient beings in the dharma realm, like a hundred rivers flowing toward the sea, and grasses and trees growing in reliance upon the great earth.

6. Great time: this means a lifespan vast and long, extending beyond the three divisions of time. The secret function of the lion's vigorous leap of spiritual powers has never ceased.

7. Great wisdom: this means that all dharmas are boundless, equal to empty space, and the mind's natural wondrous wisdom is likewise boundless. Because of these seven causes and conditions, among all Mahāyāna Dharma gates it is like clarified butter; therefore it is called the supreme Mahāyāna. The sūtra says, "Its nature is ever firm and solid, immeasurable as empty space." This precisely expresses the supreme virtue of this wondrous mind.

At the Lotus Dharma assembly, the Buddha caused all sentient beings to open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha's knowledge and vision. Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, directly pointed to the human mind: see one's nature and attain Buddhahood. Yet sentient beings' minds are turned by things; they crave sounds and cling to forms, are bound by sensual desires, and are shaken by the eight worldly winds.

If people understand that all worldly phenomena are impermanent, like illusions and dreams, like lightning and dew, and understand this principle so that they no longer crave or remain deluded, then the substance of this mind remains thusness, unmoving. All dharmas are without intrinsic nature; because they are without intrinsic nature, all can become Buddhas.

Therefore, the Diamond Sūtra says: "All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and also like lightning. One should

contemplate them thus." This is to contemplate the principle that all dharmas are without intrinsic nature.

What is meant by being without intrinsic nature? Without what sort of nature? It means without the nature of characteristics, without the nature of exhaustion, without the nature of arising, without the nature of ceasing, without the nature of self, without the nature of non-self; indeed, without the nature of bodhi, without the nature of the dharma realm, and without the nature of empty space. Knowing that all dharmas are without intrinsic nature, one can know all wisdom, attain all wisdom, see one's nature, and become a Buddha.

Buddhadharma is not passive. Therefore, the two vehicles, which seek liberation for themselves without liberating sentient beings, are reproved by the Buddha, who calls such persons scorched sprouts and rotten seeds. Such people cannot attain Buddhahood; thus it is better to fall into hell than enter the two vehicles. Those who cultivate Mahāyāna Dharma must arouse Great Vows, sustain great compassion, realize great wisdom, and establish great conduct.

To arouse Great Vows is to vow that throughout life after life one will generate bodhicitta, relinquish one's body, life, and possessions, and rescue sentient beings—not only enabling them to attain peace and happiness, but also enabling them to understand clearly the nature of mind, so that they may become Buddhas. To sustain great compassion is to take the mind of great compassion as one's foundation, pitying sentient beings who do not understand true principle and suffer anguish in vain, and vowing to rescue them and bring them peace and happiness.

To establish great conduct is to practice the six pāramitās, benefiting oneself and others. To realize great wisdom is to realize the wisdom of the fundamental nature of the dharma realm and accomplish fundamental wisdom, so that one knows without exception the principles of the dharma realms in the ten directions; this is called the wisdom of all wisdom. What is called great is the nature of sentient beings' minds: in its utmost smallness, it has no inside, so that not a mote of dust can enter it; in its utmost greatness, it has no outside, so that there is not a single dharma it does not encompass.

What is called a vehicle has the meaning of carrying. It can carry people onward directly to the ocean of sarvajñā. The ocean of sarvajñā is the ground of the wisdom of all wisdom. This ocean is within the nature of sentient beings' minds; thus one knows that this ocean is not far away and that the mind-treasure is ever present. Compared with the mind-treasure, worldly treasures are no treasures: the jade disc of Zhao is not a treasure, and the pearl of Sui is not precious enough. If one can realize the mind and see one's true nature, external things cannot move one's mind. In a single instant, this treasure manifests of itself. When one personally awakens to

it, it is truly not attained from another; this is seeing one's nature and attaining Buddhahood.

Sentient beings differ in wisdom or foolishness solely because of differences in where the power of their minds is directed. Discrimination thus gives rise to wisdom and foolishness; yet all equally possess this wisdom of fundamental reality. Covered over by deluded emotional attachments and inverted views, they cannot manifest or perceive it. It is like an eye obscured by a film, or a hand rendered disabled and unable to function, though its inherent capacity has not been lost.

People possess wisdom without manifesting it, just as someone may possess treasure yet suffer poverty. Is this not tragic? Let us cite a passage from the "Chapter on the Manifestation of the Tathāgata" in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra to explain its meaning. The general sense of the sūtra passage is this: Suppose there were a great scripture as vast as three thousand worlds, recording in full all the affairs within a great trichiliocosm. Although this great scripture is so vast, it is entirely contained within a single mote of dust. Nor is this true of only one mote of dust: each and every one of innumerable motes of dust is likewise so.

Then there is a person of lucid and penetrating wisdom, endowed with the heavenly eye, who sees this scripture within the motes of dust and realizes that it brings no benefit at all to sentient beings. He then thinks: "I shall break open these motes of dust, bring forth this scripture, and enable sentient beings to benefit from it."

This is like the Tathāgata, who, with the pure eye of wisdom, universally observes all sentient beings and says: "Wondrous indeed, wondrous indeed! How is it that these sentient beings fully possess the wisdom of the Tathāgata, yet remain foolish and deluded? I shall teach them the noble path, enabling them forever to leave behind deluded thoughts and attachments, so that within themselves they may see vast wisdom no different from that of the Buddha," bringing benefit, peace, and happiness, and so forth.

The explanation is as follows: the great trichiliocosm-sized scripture represents the wisdom of the Tathāgata; its presence within every mote of dust means that it is within the minds of all sentient beings. That every mote of dust is thus endowed means that all sentient beings possess vast wisdom. Yet although sentient beings possess such wisdom, it is covered by deluded emotional attachments, and they cannot turn inward and illuminate it. It is like a great treasury of gold lying buried in the ground: without the guidance of one endowed with the heavenly eye, how could it be discovered?

Therefore, one must hear the principles taught in the sūtras and teachings, understand that everyone possesses vast wisdom within the mind, and consider how to awaken it. Then one may obtain the unsurpassed treasure and bring benefit

to beings without end. It is regrettable only that people do not know this. If one understands this principle, one will make no distinctions of honor or lowliness, nobility or poverty, superiority or inferiority among all sentient beings; the light of impartial wisdom will naturally reveal itself.

The mind's numinous wonder is inconceivable. The subtler the substance, the greater its force; the heavier the substance, the weaker its force. Thus the force of earth is inferior to that of water, the force of water to that of fire, the force of fire to that of wind, and the force of wind to that of mind. The force of mind is formless and is supreme among forces. Spiritual powers and transformations that enter the inconceivable are the power of mind. I shall briefly cite several passages to explain the mind:

1. The Commentary on the Awakening of Faith says: "It is easy to believe that Śākyamuni was in the past and Maitreya will come in the future. But to lead people to believe that suchness within the minds of sentient beings is the common basis of ordinary beings and sages alike—that when deluded, it gives rise to the endless six realms, and when awakened, to the unceasing Three Jewels—this is rare indeed."

2. The Sūtra of Mindfulness of the True Dharma says: "Devas, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals are ever guided by the mind as their chief."

3. The "Chapter on Contemplating the Mind" in the Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Mind-Ground of Original Birth says: "What is mind? What is ground?" Mañjuśrī replied: "Within the three realms, mind is the chief; mind is called the ground. Those who can contemplate the mind ultimately attain liberation; those who cannot ultimately sink into saṃsāra."

4. The Sūtra of the Irreversible Dharma Wheel says: "At that time, three bodhisattvas, having offered māṇḍārava flowers to the Buddha before the World-Honored One, spoke thus: 'We have developed profound faith and understanding in this Dharma and are free of all doubt.'"

5. The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra says: "The World-Honored One said to Vajramati: 'Good man, with the Buddha eye I observe all sentient beings. Amid the afflictions of craving, anger, and ignorance, they possess the wisdom of the Tathāgata, the eye of the Tathāgata, and the body of the Tathāgata, seated cross-legged in full lotus posture, dignified and unmoving. Good man, although all sentient beings are within the various realms and embodied in afflictions, they possess the tathāgatagarbha, ever undefiled and fully endowed with virtuous marks, no different from myself.'"

6. The Yanye Sūtra says: "The bhikshus said to Śāriputra: 'The Buddha is not separate from our honored self. Why is this so? Because I am not apart from the Buddha, and the Buddha is not apart from me.'"

7. Before Dīpaṅkara Buddha, the Buddha offered five lotus blossoms, signifying that the five aggregates are empty in nature. His mind had no attachment, and he suddenly entered the gate of nonobstruction; thus he received the prophecy and the name Śākyamuni.

8. The Diamond Sūtra's Elucidation of Its Tenet says: "The Diamond Sūtra is the gate through which all Tathāgatas awaken to the mind. To recognize the deluded mind of ignorance is the true mind of wondrous wisdom; therefore it is called awakening to the mind." It also says: "Among the lands of the ten directions, the supreme, foremost, and rarest Dharma is the One Vehicle Dharma alone. It is simply the one mind: mind is Dharma, and Dharma is mind. What further dharma could one abide in? Therefore it speaks of non-abiding. If, apart from mind, one believes there is another dharma to be obtained, attachment arises in the mind; to abide in dharma-marks is to be like a person without eyes."

9. The Treatise on the Treasury says: "To know that existence is subject to decay, and to know that nonexistence does not perish—this is true knowing. Not reckoning existence and nonexistence is precisely not reckoning either existence or nonexistence; it is the non-discriminating knowing of intrinsic nature."

10. Chan Master Shuimian said: "The single word 'knowing' is the gateway to all wonders. The mind of numinous knowing is true nature itself and is no different from the Buddha."

11. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: "Excellent, excellent! How is it that the Tathāgata is within the body, yet one does not realize it?"

12. A treatise says: "The Buddha teaches all dharmas in order to liberate all minds. If I have no mind at all, what use are all dharmas to me?"

From the passages listed above, we can see that throughout the Buddha's forty-nine years of teaching, he spoke only one sentence: the mind is unobtainable. Although the Buddha taught, it was as though he had never taught, because dharmas are originally empty. If the mind does not arise, the myriad dharmas do not arise. Mind pervades every place, and every place pervades mind. Once this is understood, one immediately enters one's own tradition. Those who do not realize that mind pervades every place mistakenly imagine that dharmas exist outside the mind; all is then inverted.

If one does not understand that the formless is precisely form, one is an ordinary being attached to marks. If one understands that form is precisely formlessness, one becomes greatly awakened to mind-only. Therefore, one must not seek awakening by grasping at marks, nor realize truth by abandoning marks. Neither clinging to nor departing from them, the nature of awakening reveals itself.

Conclusion: The Dharma gates for inspiring potential cannot be exhausted. Here they have been discussed only in outline, so that everyone may gain a general understanding. First arouse great vows, establish the core principle, and clarify the origins of learning Buddhism. Learning Buddhism further divides into three phases: first, the phase of inspiring potential; second, the phase of right cultivation; and third, the phase of verification. This is the first phase. But why does one wish to learn Buddhism? One should ask oneself: Do I seek myself, or do I seek the Buddha? Which is more important?

Only after recognizing the fundamental place of one's own delusion and error can one sincerely and urgently seek medicine. The medicine is the Three Jewels. But what are Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, and what makes them treasures? Once the Three Jewels are understood, we may proceed to explain the self. First begin from the existence of self, without falling into empty annihilation; then attain selflessness, without falling into emotional views and birth and death. One then knows that emotional views and birth and death are nothing but suffering.

We then explain suffering. Once the meaning of suffering is understood, one fears birth and death and seeks liberation from them. Yet one must understand how one is drawn into birth and death; at the root lies ignorance. Therefore we explain ignorance. This ignorance vainly creates all kinds of karma, and so we explain karmic obstacles. How are karmic obstacles eliminated? Only through liberation; therefore we discuss liberation. But without understanding the causes, one cannot attain the true reality; therefore we discuss cause and effect.

The arising and ceasing of cause and effect is the circulation of the illusory mind. Thus we discern mind and intrinsic nature, so as to know the marks of mind and what intrinsic nature is, and directly realize bodhi; therefore we discuss bodhi. This echoes the Mind-Seal school's core principle on page four: "prajñā as the function." It emphatically states that without prajñā, the provisions for learning Buddhism are cut off, just as a worker who loses the proper tools, though possessing great strength, can scarcely put it to use.

Inspiring potential means inspiring the capacity for prajñā. This prajñā is not possessed by the Buddha alone; everyone possesses it fully. Prajñā, rendered in Chinese as "great wisdom," still does not fully convey its meaning. It should be called "the great wisdom that thoroughly comprehends the principles and phenomena of worldly and supramundane dharmas, perfectly integrating them without obstruction." Only these sixteen Chinese characters can suggest even a fraction of its meaning. If one asks how this prajñā may be awakened, one must enter the path of right cultivation.

Explaining the Buddha

Buddha means “great awakening.” It is an honorific title established on the basis of its virtues, not the name of any particular person. The Sanskrit word buddha was transliterated into Chinese in full as (Fótúo) and abbreviated as (Fó). It is one of the Tathāgata’s ten epithets and is also called “wisdom-awakening”: awakening oneself and awakening others. It denotes the perfect and wondrous completeness of awakening. It is also called “all-knowing,” for it awakens to and knows the principle and phenomena of all dharmas, clearly and distinctly, without any delusion; hence it is called Buddha.

Ordinary beings are unawakened; those of the two vehicles awaken themselves but cannot awaken others; bodhisattvas awaken themselves and others, yet their practice is not complete; whereas a Buddha is one of perfect awakening. The title Buddha has the same meaning as such terms as sage and worthy. “Surely the Master is a sage?” means that Confucius had entered the realm of sagehood. Everyone can become a Yao or a Shun; all sentient beings can become Buddhas—this is the meaning.

A realm belongs to the mind. The mind is called the ground, and also the field of nature. A field has the wondrous capacity for unceasing production and growth; therefore intrinsic nature is called the Buddha-land and the Buddha-seed. This does not refer only to the Buddha-land in which Śākyamuni Buddha manifested in response. There are two kinds of Buddha: causal Buddhas and fruition Buddhas. Fruition Buddhas include Śākyamuni Tathāgata, who has already attained Buddhahood.

Causal Buddhas are those whose minds, and whose causal ground as sentient beings, can all become Buddhas. Thus it is said, “mind, Buddha, and sentient beings: the three are without distinction.” The nature of awakening is originally equal in all, and all can become Buddhas. When cultivation reaches the ground of awakening, it is also called the Buddha-ground, the opening of Buddha-wisdom, the opening of Buddha-knowledge and vision, and the Buddha-eye. This is formed by combining the dharma eye, wisdom eye, divine eye, and fleshly eye.

The eye is the mind. Sentient beings are collectively divided into the ten realms, and the ten realms are mind-only. Buddha is the highest of the ten realms. Only a Buddha is not called a sentient being; the other nine realms—bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, śrāvakas, devas, humans, asuras, animals, ghosts, and hell beings—are all called sentient beings, because their afflictions have not yet been cut off. To enter Buddhahood from the ordinary state, one should rely on the Dharma; this is called Buddhadharma.

The Dharma is like a vehicle by which one crosses over; it is called the Buddha-vehicle. It is divided into the Lesser Vehicle, the two vehicles, and the Great Vehicle.

Through it one realizes the Way; it is called the Buddha Way and the Buddha-seal. The Way is the supreme treasure of the worldly and supramundane realms, beyond comparison; therefore it is called the Buddha-treasure. Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha accord and confirm one another, and thereby the treasure appears. The three are one. Thus everyone has Buddha-nature, and everyone can become a Buddha, just like Śākyamuni Buddha.

Becoming a Buddha does not mean emitting light, sitting on a lotus flower, or changing one's form. When we bow to and revere the Buddha each day, we do so out of admiration for the virtues of Śākyamuni Buddha, wishing to study and emulate them, and to share the same luminous and perfect awakening. It is like honoring Confucius and willingly studying to become a sage; it does not mean becoming Confucius, nor can Confucius make me into a sage.

Nevertheless, one cannot avoid relying on an image for contemplation and emulation; thus Buddha images are established and used as mirrors. Yet if one has a mirror but cannot reflect upon oneself, it is ultimately of no benefit. Looking into a mirror without removing one's stains is likewise of no benefit. If practitioners can cultivate sincerely and not deceive themselves, they may be called children of the Buddha and children of the Dharma. There are approximately many names of the Tathāgata; let us briefly discuss them.

1. Tathāgata: the mind comes from nowhere and goes nowhere; hence it is called Tathāgata. 2. Worthy of Offerings: worthy to receive the offerings of all sentient beings. 3. Right and Universal Knower: able to know all dharmas universally. Knowing that all dharmas are without distinction is called right knowing; wisdom that leaves nothing uncovered is called universal knowing.

4. Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct: knowledge of past lives, the divine eye, and the exhaustion of the outflows are called the three insights; this title is so called because all are practiced to perfection. 5. Well Gone: the foremost and highest ascent, never to return again. 6. Knower of the World: able to understand all the afflictions and purity of the world. 7. Unsurpassed Person: among dharmas, nirvāṇa is unsurpassed; among sentient beings, a Buddha is unsurpassed. He may also be called a great being.

8. Tamer and Guide of Men: able to regulate and control all sentient beings. 9. Teacher of Devas and Humans: the revered teacher among devas and humans. 10. Buddha: awakening—awakening oneself and awakening others, with awakening and practice complete. 11. World-Honored One: possessing the various honorific titles above and therefore revered by all humans and devas in the world. 12. Bhagavān: one possessing six kinds of venerability: freedom, blazing splendor, dignity, renown,

auspiciousness, and nobility. All the above are alternative names for the World-Honored One and merely express the World-Honored One's highest virtues.

Explaining the Dharma

Dharma, in Sanskrit dharma, means that which pervades all things. Only a Buddha may be called the Dharma King, for he comprehends all phenomena. Dharma also means a method: like a boat that can carry people out of danger, it is called the Dharma boat or Dharma vessel. A person's original nature can give rise to all phenomena; it is called the dharmakāya, or Dharma-nature. When one cultivates to the point of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, one becomes a dharmakāya Buddha.

To understand difficult Buddhist principles without confusion is called dharma-patience. To understand and realize the principle of the unborn is called the patience of the unborn dharma. To understand the true Dharma and use it to liberate others is called the dharma eye, also called the purified dharma eye. The sūtras and teachings spoken by Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the past and recorded in writing are called Dharma scriptures or Dharma maṇḍalas. Their divisions into categories are called dharma gates.

There is no fixed dharma; all can bring people to life, and thus it is called Dharma milk. What is expressed through writing in language and sound is called Dharma sound; Dharma sound pervades the ten realms. Because all sentient beings share the same mind, there are the ten dharma realms. Sentient beings stubbornly cling to dharmas and do not understand change; their suffering is thereby multiplied ten thousandfold. This is called attachment to dharmas, also called dharma views and dharma bondage. One should seek a good spiritual friend as one's teacher; one who entrusts one with the true Dharma is called a Dharma teacher.

Using various skillful means and dharma gates, the teacher opens the lotus flower of my wondrous Dharma. The lotus flower is my mind, my essence. The wondrous Dharma is the wondrous functioning of my mind. It enables me to attain the unsurpassed wondrous truth, whose meaning and flavor are immeasurable; hence it is also called Dharma flavor and Dharma food. Because its joy and delight are immeasurable, it is called Dharma joy and Dharma bliss. Today's gathering for study, joint discussion, and mutual liberation is called a Dharma assembly.

To transmit the treasure of the One Vehicle Dharma from one person to another in order to liberate others, without allowing it to cease, is called the ever-turning Dharma wheel. Each of you possesses unsurpassed faculties, sufficient to shoulder the Tathāgata's anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi. This is what is called a Dharma vessel, like a vessel capable of holding things. In sum, the Dharma saves people's wisdom-

life and is therefore called Dharma medicine. When the King of Physicians uses it to save the world, one who can enter this maṇḍala is said to have Dharma affinity.

Yet all things are empty, and the Dharma too is only borrowed for the time being. Once illness is cured, medicine must no longer be used; otherwise it becomes a sickness of the Dharma. While medicine is properly being used, one must cultivate until realizing the empty characteristics of all dharmas; only then may one relinquish the Dharma. Human life is impermanent, and favorable conditions are hard to encounter again. The time must not be lost.

Explaining the Saṅgha

Saṅgha means a community, specifically a community of virtuous people. As the saying goes, one monk alone does not constitute a saṅgha; there must be at least four people before it may be called a saṅgha. There are saṅghas of ten and saṅghas of twenty, and they must consist of persons of moral conduct. Even virtuous lay practitioners, when gathered as a community, may also be called a saṅgha. Any monk who does not understand the Buddhadharma and has not realized the mind-ground cannot be called a jewel, for he is separated from the Buddhadharma. We pay reverence to the Three Jewels.

The Three Jewels are the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Awakening to it is called Buddha; taking it as the norm is called Dharma; harmonizing with it is called Saṅgha. What does “it” refer to? What is this thing? It is simply the treasure of mind. When the Buddha once spoke of monastics who have broken the precepts, he meant those who still possessed the essence of the precepts and proper deportment, not those today who observe not the slightest precept. They lack even the essence of the precepts, and have also lost their outward forms.

If those of inferior wisdom hear this, they may think that, since this is so expedient, it is enough simply to vow to become a monastic who has broken the precepts. Would not the future of the Buddhadharma then be in peril? Moreover, when monks drift into business, it is only natural that they pursue what worldly people prefer.

Worldly people's preferences are so low in level; how could they then refrain from deceiving people through sūtra recitations and penitential rites? If the prevailing custom were changed, so that making merit did not place importance on outward form, and instead people invited virtuous elders to explain the meaning of the sūtras, valuing the gift of Dharma, and only then made offerings in return, the monastics would naturally also turn to studying the sūtras. This might enable them to understand, at least somewhat, the principles of the Buddhadharma, and the merit and virtue would be inconceivable. Yet the degeneration of the monastic

community should not be blamed on the Buddhadharma; this must be clearly distinguished.

Explaining the Self

The self is what a person calls himself. Once attachment to self has become firm, self-love grows ever deeper. The hardest things to break are the view of self, the sense of “I am,” and the mark of self. Over time these become habits and fixed principles; hence they are called the dharma-self. Not knowing that Buddhism distinguishes between a true self and a provisional self, one must first understand the three bodies in order to understand what the self is. The first is the physical body: a corporeal form of skin, hair, bones, and flesh, possessing appearance and materiality.

What is hard, such as bones and flesh, is earth; what is moist, such as blood and bodily fluids, is water; warmth is fire; and breathing is wind. This body is formed by the union of earth, water, fire, and wind, borrowed from one's parents. It is also called the karmic-retribution body. One creates one's own causes and reaps one's own fruits. Because the causes laid down in past lives differ, the resulting fruits differ in wisdom and foolishness, beauty and ugliness, and length of life.

From childhood to maturity, the appearance of childhood has already changed and vanished; from maturity to old age, the form of maturity has already changed and vanished; and from old age to death, the condition of old age is completely transformed and extinguished. Death need not wait until the time of dying: even before death, one is constantly undergoing unreal transformations. It is like a mirage, like a banana tree, like bubbles and shadows.

It may also be compared to an electric light bulb. Though the bulb is not substantial, electricity uses it to give forth light; thus it is the provisional self. The second is the dharmakāya, which is a person's spiritual nature. What does not move is called nature; when one encounters an object and thoughts arise, this is called mind. It is so at the age of three, and it is still so at thirty, sixty, or even one hundred and sixty; its nature never changes or vanishes.

For example, when seeing red or tasting a delicious flavor, the old and the young are alike; there are not two because of age. If there appears to be a difference, it is due to dim eyesight or other illnesses, not to any illness in the inner essential nature. This is spiritually wondrous and inconceivable. All worldly phenomena arise from it; hence it is called the dharmakāya.

The dharmakāya is neither existent nor nonexistent. If one calls it existent, it cannot be grasped and shown to others; if one calls it nonexistent, people are not wood or

stone, and to depart from this provisional name is called death. Having attained this, one seems to continue through birth after birth, yet one does not know that there is fundamentally no arising or ceasing, and that it is ever constant and unchanging. This is the true self. It is only because the root of attachment clings greedily that one enters the mother's womb, receives a portion of the mother's physical body, and is born as a human being. Animals are the same.

This may again be compared to electricity: apart from the light bulb, electricity has no means of emitting light; the bulb may perish, but electricity never perishes. This is called the true self. The third is the nirmāṇakāya. When the physical body and the dharmakāya unite, they give rise to all kinds of wondrous functions and unpredictable transformations. This is like light, produced by the union of a lamp and electricity. Thus the physical body is the appearance, like the lamp; the dharmakāya is the essence, like electricity; and the nirmāṇakāya is the function, like light.

It is also all the affairs and things of the world. The three are distinct yet not separate; hence the three bodies are nondual. Birth and death are merely provisional names, established by people through their view of self. Since my physical body is provisionally compounded through causes and conditions, when dispersed it becomes minute particles; from where, then, does one grasp it as a self? And what is called the true self is likewise empty in nature. Mind is originally unborn and arises provisionally in dependence on objects; hence it is called the illusory mind.

All the evils we commit, all the sufferings we undergo, and all the habits we acquire arise from the mischief of this illusory mind. Therefore, to catch a thief, catch the king; without entering the tiger's den, how can one obtain the tiger cub? Practitioners must begin with realizing the mind, with boundless courageous diligence; only then is there a way out. Otherwise, they will forever sink into the round of suffering. Moreover, there are two kinds of self: the personal self and the dharma-self. The personal self is attachment to self; the dharma-self is attachment to dharmas.

Attachment to self is the coarse aspect of self, while attachment to dharmas is its subtle aspect. Breaking attachment to self is still relatively easy, but breaking attachment to dharmas requires the great wisdom of vajra prajñā. Vajra prajñā is fully possessed by everyone and has been there from the beginning; it is merely that the treasure chest has not been opened, so one has wealth but cannot use it. Therefore one relies on the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha to open it and awaken one's potential. People's capacities differ—greater or lesser, sharp or dull.

For those of lesser capacity, first lead them to have faith in the Buddha, then guide them to have faith in themselves. For those of greater capacity, lead them directly to have faith in themselves. They will then resolutely undertake this without doubt; afterward, urge them to cultivate in actual practice, and naturally mind and Buddha will become one. Those of lesser capacity are willing to practice but difficult to transform; those of greater capacity awaken easily but are lazy in practice. Those of lesser capacity are excessively scrupulous and restrictive—this is their habitual tendency. Those of greater capacity are lax and arrogant—this too is their habitual tendency.

Yet in treating the illness of those of lesser capacity, the difficulty lies in the illness itself; in treating the illness of those of greater capacity, the difficulty lies with the teacher. When those of greater capacity develop doubts midway, if no decisive determination is given to them, their faith will no longer be pure. From that point, they may withdraw and cease practicing, or take their own view as correct and thereby mislead others, spreading the poison of non-Buddhist paths. Their original intention may also have been to arouse the resolve and create merit and virtue, but their own strength is insufficient; one blind person leads a multitude of blind people, and the harm cannot be fully described. Therefore, the Dharma must above all suit the recipient's capacity; one must continually observe carefully and adapt it. There is absolutely no single dharma that can be applied universally. The Buddha taught eighty-four thousand methods precisely to counteract the different roots of illness, because capacities differ.

Studying Buddhism is a matter of leaving suffering behind and seeking happiness; it is an extremely joyful undertaking, not something bleak, desolate, or obscure. If, at the outset, one forces people to do what is beyond them, that is contrary to human feeling. What does not accord with human feeling is not Buddhadharma. Buddhadharma emphasizes constantly according with sentient beings. It uses skillful means everywhere, gradually leading them in. Once they themselves feel the terror of birth and death, they will naturally strive diligently.

Since beginningless time, worldly people have clung exclusively to the single word “self.” If one immediately teaches them no-self, beginning with the Heart Sūtra and Diamond Sūtra, it is like sending a small child directly to university. To require them to be without the mark of self and to give without marks—is this not forcing people to do what is beyond them? I would instead first have people speak of having a self, first have them know the self. Once they recognize the self, then they will be willing to advance.

Worldly people are suffering precisely because they do not understand what is going on: everywhere they find no self, everywhere they struggle against themselves, everywhere they fight desperately with themselves, even to the point of suicide.

Even total giving, the ultimate in selflessness, leaves them pitiably confused until death. Thus all the causes and fruits of suffering in the world are entirely self-created and self-received. It is like a madman who has absolutely no idea what his own mind is or what his own body is. Therefore, teach people first that they have a self; one need only have the great self. “The king, please enlarge it”—this is the meaning.

Human beings are one class of animals. Yet their number is small: throughout the earth there are only two billion people, whereas in a spoonful of water from a summer ditch, the minute organisms are as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges. Thus human birth is indeed difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, all sentient beings are spiritually endowed, all possess Buddha-nature, and their essence is equal.

The reason they cannot function in the same way is that they create different causes and obtain different fruits. Each has wondrous functions and innate abilities: birds fly, beasts run, fish swim, and dragons soar. Each has its own strengths, beyond human capacity. Human beings are precious because of wisdom, which birds and beasts likewise cannot attain. To obtain a human body is like already entering university; in the blink of an eye one graduates, and with a single step may leave the school. Human birth is difficult to obtain and precious in this way; how can one speak of no self?

Humans and all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, but humans alone can cultivate to Buddhahood because the potential fruition contained within their causes differs. For example, all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, humans included. This is like copper in a mine: though it is all copper, some is mixed with sand. Human beings alone have already been refined from copper ore into copper ingots, and from copper ingots melted into copper sheets. With only a little polishing, they become copper mirrors. The others remain either ore or ingots and cannot yet be polished directly into mirrors. Hence the essence is the same, but the function differs. Human birth is precious in this way; how can one speak of no self?

Human beings are the most spiritually endowed among all things, and the mind is the most sacred among all things; this is what is meant by spiritual capacity. What one wishes to attain oneself, one enables others to attain; what one wishes to establish oneself, one establishes for others. Of all the work of liberating beings throughout the immeasurable three-thousand worlds, only human beings can shoulder it. Since the responsibility is so great, how can one speak of no self?

Buddhadharma is a tool for great initiative and great function. If one is to shoulder the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi, who is it if not oneself? If everyone would undertake this initiative, transforming a family through one's own person, extending

this from a family to a nation, and from a nation to the world, the responsibility would be so weighty. How can one seek only one's own liberation, depart and leave everything unattended, abandon one's parents, siblings, and spouse to suffer in this world, while oneself roams at ease in the Land of Ultimate Bliss? How could such an inferior thought be the Buddha's original intention? Therefore, rebirth in the Western Pure Land is like entering a school for further study; after graduating, one returns to save the world.

If the causal ground is not right, this becomes merely seeking one's own liberation. Yet the initiative of Buddhadharma is beyond comparison with any worldly undertaking; how can one speak of no self?

The self is boundlessly vast. If one can truly know the self, one sees the true self. Whether greed, anger, or ignorance; whether precepts, samādhi, or wisdom; whether sage, worthy one, or human; whether ghost, animal, or hell-being—all are freely chosen by oneself. That which chooses is mind. To understand this mind is the true self, the great self.

To turn my mind from delusion to awakening, from disorder to samādhi, and from ignorance to wisdom is also within my power of judgment. To liberate the multitudes, enduring every hardship and suffering, has always been the work of a great person; this too is within my power of judgment. If, over a slight disappointment, a minor setback, or a failed romance, one becomes so grief-stricken and indignant as to commit suicide, being so lacking in spirit, how can one shoulder national calamities or undertake great responsibilities? Such people consider Buddhadharma negative, yet they actively engage in such spiritless acts. They are truly deluded upon deluded; the reason is that they do not understand the great self.

What, then, does it mean to understand the self? It means understanding the reason for human life: are other people and I one or two? One who comprehends that self and others are nondual is called capable of benevolence. Ren consists of two persons, indicating mutual connection. To fulfill oneself is loyalty; to extend oneself to others is reciprocity. To fully embody loyalty and reciprocity is to be capable of benevolence. To comprehend that oneself and things are nondual, that all things are complete within oneself, and that oneself is interconnected with all things, is called investigating things.

Thus, to be capable of benevolence and to investigate things is to be a sage or worthy one; to realize the mind is to be a bodhisattva or Buddha. All take the human being as their original ground. It is like obtaining a precious jade as raw material and then carving it into a Buddha. The carving is cultivation. The Buddha, too, was originally an ordinary being and once experienced delusion and inverted views. He

merely became aware of it early, awakened, turned back, and cultivated; thus he became greatly awakened.

Human beings have already obtained the qualifications to become Buddhas directly; how can they delay and sit idly by, making mistakes? Once people know what makes them human, they should immediately rise and press forward. Life is impermanent; once it is lost, it becomes an eternal loss. Yet the practice must also proceed in stages: it cannot be delayed, but neither can it be rushed. Blind cultivation and reckless practice bring labor without result and will inevitably give rise to doubt and withdrawal.

First understand that the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are our examples. Next understand that oneself and the Buddha are fundamentally nondual in essence. Ordinary beings are originally awakened; this is called original awakening. Because awareness becomes manifest, it turns into deluded awareness and loses what is original. Hearing the Buddhadharma and opening wisdom is called initial awakening. When awakening is attained, it is called awakening at the level of principle. When knowledge and conduct are one, and principle and phenomena interpenetrate, it is called awakening through realization. When habitual tendencies have been eliminated, awakened conduct perfected, and essence and function are thusness, it is called right awakening—namely great awakening, wondrous awakening, and perfect awakening. The following table compares the similarities and differences in the essence and function of the nature seen by sages and ordinary beings.

Table of Similarities and Differences in the Essence and Function of the Nature Seen by Sages and Ordinary Beings (= indicates similarity; − indicates difference)

Sages − Ordinary beings

(Origin) = (Origin)

Essence = Essence

Electricity = Electricity

Light = Light

Function − Function

Illuminates the ten directions without obstruction — obscured and blocked, unable to illuminate

Brightness — ignorance

Awakening is enduring — delusion is temporary

Consciousness = consciousness

Discrimination = discrimination

Transform consciousness into wisdom — consciousness transformed

Transform objects — be transformed by objects

At ease — bound

Master — slave

Possesses the power of wisdom — lacks the power of wisdom

Vajra prajñā is manifest — Vajra prajñā is hidden

Ever clearly aware — alternately clear and obscured

Transcend birth and death; birth and death and nirvāṇa are all empty — fail to transcend birth and death; do not know what birth and death are

Sober — drunk

Drinking wine—drinking every day without ever becoming drunk — being drunk by wine—drunk every day and bound by wine every day

Free of habitual defilement — entirely habitually defiled

Merit and virtue — karmic obstacles

Sense faculties and their objects fall away — sense faculties and their objects become entangled

Mind and objects are both empty — bind the mind through objects

Clearly understand cause and effect — do not understand cause and effect

Awakening comes first — awakening comes later

Illuminate beforehand — regret afterward

See all things as delusive — see all delusions as real

No self — attachment to self

Direct perception illuminates perfectly — inferential knowledge probes deeply

Outflows exhausted — with outflows

Empty — not empty

Mind is unobtainable — mind is everywhere

Possesses samādhi and wisdom — lacks samādhi and wisdom

Understand worldly dharmas in order to realize the supramundane — fail to understand worldly dharmas yet seek the supramundane

Samādhi — movement

Movement and stillness are both samādhi — movement and stillness are both agitation

Comprehend the three times — attend only to the present

At ease — not at ease

Know the dharma of suffering and happiness — do not know suffering and happiness

Ultimate bliss — utter suffering

Samādhi, wisdom, and emptiness — delusion, karma, and suffering

Seek for oneself — seek the Buddha

Spirit = spirit

Able to penetrate all things — unable to penetrate anything

Realize samādhi — rely only on emotional views

Original awakening = original awakening

May suddenly become deluded midway = may suddenly become deluded midway

Awaken — fail to awaken

Refuse to remain deluded — allow oneself to continue in saṃsāra

Seek awakening — do not seek awakening

Cultivate — do not cultivate

Seek the ultimate Dharma — do not seek the ultimate

Attain great awakening — remain deluded to the end

Buddha-nature = Buddha-nature

Buddha at the stage of fruition — Buddha at the causal stage

Like water = like water

The nature of wetness = the nature of wetness

Clear — turbid

Able to perform all wondrous functions — unable to perform wondrous functions

Those already clarified — those not yet clarified

Return = return

Seeing the preceding table, one should know that the essential nature of sages and ordinary beings is originally nondual. It is only because ordinary beings are deluded that they create all kinds of karma and consequently undergo all kinds of suffering. Delusion and karma are themselves suffering; without suffering, there is no delusion or karma. Those who have long done evil are, for the most part, suffering people. Thus, to understand suffering is to know the illness; only when one knows the illness will one be willing to ask a physician to prescribe medicine.

Explaining Suffering

Human life has eight kinds of suffering: the suffering of birth; the suffering of aging; the suffering of illness; the suffering of death; the suffering of not obtaining what one seeks; the suffering of separation from those one loves; the suffering of encountering those one resents and hates; and the suffering of the blazing intensity of the five aggregates. There is also another suffering: the suffering of not hearing the Buddhadharma and not knowing suffering. This is called suffering upon suffering.

Human beings also suffer from the three calamities and eight difficulties. “Difficulties” means obstacles to progress on the Way. Being unable to hear the Buddhadharma is among the greatest hardships of human life. What are the eight difficulties? First is hell; second, hungry ghosts; third, animals. Those who enter these three realms either suffer without interruption or are ignorant and unknowing, and thus cannot hear the Buddhadharma.

Fourth is being born in Uttarakuru, the northern continent, where people live for a thousand years, have ample clothing and food, and suffer no illness; nor do they

wish to hear the Dharma. Fifth is birth in the long-life heavens—that is, the form-realm heavens and the formless-realm heavens—where beings are likewise attached to pleasure and do not wish to hear the Dharma. Sixth is being blind, deaf, mute, or dumb, so that there is no means by which one can be made to see or hear the supreme truth of the Buddhadharma. Seventh is worldly intelligence and eloquence: those worldly people who are excessively self-confident, delight in contentious argument, and affect cleverness can likewise obstruct the Way. Eighth is being before or after a Buddha: that is, being born in an age when no Buddhadharma is available to be seen or heard. These are the eight difficulties. As for the three calamities, they are war, epidemic, and famine.

The general cause of all suffering begins with birth. The arising of what was previously nonexistent is called birth. In between, one passes through many inverted causes, conditions, and results of suffering. Results in turn become causes, and causes again produce results; suffering upon suffering continues without end. Since beginningless time, we have suffered countless sufferings without knowing suffering. The sufferings of aging, illness, and death have already been determined at birth and cannot be escaped.

From birth to death, one must pass through aging and illness. The causes of aging and illness are the following four kinds of suffering: first, the suffering of not obtaining what one seeks. It manifests in two ways: sound and activity.

Sound includes the sounds of buying, selling, trading, and disputing; the cries of street vendors; the crying of children; and people's noisy quarrels and complaints. All arise because what is sought has not been attained. The more one wishes to achieve an aim but cannot attain it, the louder the clamor becomes. Activity means rushing about, chasing here and there. Before obtaining what one seeks, one fears not obtaining it; having obtained it, one fears losing it again.

The next two sufferings—separation from those one loves and encountering those one resents and hates—follow one after another. The impulses of desire burn like fire; how then could one avoid aging and illness? Separation demonstrates that all is impermanent and cannot be grasped as real. Things are originally provisional combinations, so why take the false for the true?

This is true not only of people but also of things. It is not merely separation that causes suffering; even before separation, attachment itself is suffering. Because of causes, conditions, and results of suffering, one can ultimately never escape it. The wise do not wait until separation occurs; they first see through the causes of suffering. There is no other wondrous method: simply recognize that all is empty, illusory, and unreal. Then attachment has no ground in which to take root, and suffering has nothing on which to depend.

Encountering those one resents and hates is the reverse side of the matter, yet its suffering is exactly the same. One thing accords with my wishes, another does not; yet both are invariably impermanent. When the seven sufferings torment one together, the mind burns with anxiety: this is the blazing intensity of the five aggregates. The five aggregates are form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. When these five aggregates remain bound together without dispersing, linked and unresolved, they are called the five aggregates.

Form refers to the six sense faculties joining with the six sense objects; together they are called form, and together they are illusory. Feeling is the arrival of a sensation, which I receive. Perception is the stirring of thought. Formations are the ongoing flow of the discriminating mind. Consciousness is the cognition that follows sensation and discrimination. The five aggregates arise simultaneously, and suffering and pleasure likewise arrive simultaneously. Whether it is good or evil, gain or loss, the successive flames of desire scorch without diminishing in the least. All of this arises from the entanglement of form and mind. The eight sufferings cannot truly be analyzed separately; collectively, they are simply called unease.

Everything in the world is relational and opposed. Doing evil is certainly suffering; but when one does good while expecting recompense, distinctions arise between gain and loss, abundance and scarcity, coming and going, self and others. If even one part is not commensurate, there is one part of suffering. If the recompense exceeds what was given even by one part, I may be satisfied for a time, but the other person will feel uneasy. Unease gives rise to the intention of seeking recompense from me, and I in turn become afraid.

Therefore worldly dharmas are not ultimate, and suffering can never finally be avoided. The arising of all worldly suffering comes from delusion. Delusion means confusion; actions produced from confusion are called karma, and karmic results bring suffering.

All evil in the world arises from delusion. Deluded beings create evil karma, thinking there is no cause and effect, thinking that no one will know. They may even use forceful arguments, gloss over their faults, disguise themselves under the name of freedom, and yet they are all deeply superstitious. Because you are deluded, the Buddhadharma asks you to have faith: faith in what is true, not faith in what is false. By analyzing layer upon layer and demonstrating in many ways, it clarifies the causes of delusion; only then can one realize where the root of suffering lies.

Suffering has no fixed definition. For example, a room may have only average furnishings. A wealthy person who sees it may feel extremely uncomfortable, while a poor person may consider it blissful. Chili sauce is a delicacy to people from Sichuan

and Yunnan, but a child may find it bitter. Yet if the child becomes accustomed to it, it may in turn become pleasurable.

Thus the root of suffering lies in the habits of the mind. The mind is enticed by external objects and unjustly creates this suffering for itself.

But how does the mind form such habits? They arise through discrimination and comparison. Distinctions of good and bad, wholesome and evil, favorable and adverse, right and wrong, are all posited by one's own deluded views since beginningless time. Without asking whether they are right or wrong, one clings to them as right. The firmer this attachment, the less willing one is to relax it; after a long time, it becomes an established rule that one refuses to alter. This is the general cause of delusion.

Then, comparing other things with these improper habits, one sees everything as failing to accord with one's wishes and consequently becomes afflicted. The discriminating mind may be stronger or weaker, and suffering correspondingly deeper or shallower. According to whether the force of attachment is tight or loose, suffering lasts longer or shorter. For example, children have little experience of human affairs, and thus have less discrimination, less attachment, and less suffering. But if a child is suddenly beaten or scolded and receives a severe shock, the child will not forget it, because the powers of attachment and discrimination are strong.

Since suffering has no fixed definition, it can be transformed into happiness. What cannot be transformed from suffering is truly suffering. How can it be transformed? First, one must know suffering. Worldly people often do not believe that they are suffering beings. Therefore, those willing to practice are all people who have already tasted hardship in full. People likewise often do not believe in future suffering. For example, when the weather is clear, they certainly do not believe that the roof may leak. Unless one has great wisdom, one will not willingly prepare early. This is the suffering of not knowing suffering.

The Buddha teaches people the Dharma of suffering and happiness. First, he tells them that all is impermanent; precisely because all is impermanent, nothing can be relied upon. Second, he teaches the ultimate Dharma gate. Because worldly dharmas are not ultimate, they inevitably return to suffering. If one can understand that all is impermanent, then one who ordinarily relies on wealth will not thereby give rise to greed and attachment. One is taught to practice generosity so as to train in letting go, until the understanding of impermanence becomes thoroughly familiar.

If one has already let go of everything to which one clings in ordinary times, then when suffering suddenly comes, one may have a method with which to resist it.

How, then, can one be enabled to know and end suffering? There is only the encouragement to arouse the resolve. To arouse the resolve means to give rise to the resolve to realize the mind. One must truly put faith, vows, and practice into effect. If one does not understand the root of suffering, one does not understand that it truly lies in the mind's lack of clarity. In the formula "delusion, karma, and suffering," the root lies in delusion. Yet one must understand the characteristics of the mind. A sūtra says, "Know your own mind as it truly is." In forty-nine years of teaching the Dharma, the Buddha spoke only this one sentence.

Since we must realize the mind and know suffering, we cannot avoid investigating the characteristics of the mind. We must question our own minds. One must undergo suffering, and one must know suffering; only after realizing the experience of moving from suffering to happiness can one relieve the suffering of others. The method of overcoming suffering is, first, to recognize suffering; second, to endure it; third, to understand it; fourth, to train through it; and fifth, to realize its emptiness. The specific practice will be explained in the following Section on Right Cultivation. A verse says:

To uproot suffering, uproot its root; to uproot its root, know its root.

To know the root requires thorough awakening; to awaken thoroughly, one must realize the mind.

Realizing the mind lies in nonattainment; when there is nonattainment, the root of suffering is exhausted.

If ordinary people do not enter into suffering, how can they grasp its meaning?

To know suffering is already to transform it; once transformed, suffering falls away.

Suffering and happiness are inherently opposed; worldly happiness is itself suffering.

When unstained by either suffering or happiness, this is called transcending birth and death.

How to Transcend Birth and Death

Now that the meaning of suffering and its root have been clarified, we may speak of transcending birth and death. Buddhist practitioners often do not understand what birth and death are. They generally take being alive before death to be birth, and dying to be death; they further think that if one does not return after death, one has truly transcended birth and death. Such talk is truly like blind people discussing darkness; it does not even understand the principle of cause and effect and rebirth.

To understand the principle of birth and death, one must first understand what undergoes birth and death, and what this thing truly is. Only after understanding birth and death can one speak of the method for transcending them. The body received as karmic recompense is the physical body; it is inherently arising and ceasing, impermanent. Though it exists, its existence is only temporary; in the end it is illusory and unreal, and is therefore called empty.

When it reaches the time of transformation and dissolution, ordinary beings naturally regard it as death. From the perspective of the eye of wisdom, however, it was already dead before its death; even before it transformed and dissolved, it had long been continually transforming and dissolving. There is nothing strange about it.

As for the nature that neither arises nor ceases, it exists forever. Ordinary beings cannot see it and therefore cling to it as nonexistent. Those with the eye of wisdom clearly see their own nature and see that it is eternally unchanging, so there can be no question of birth and death. Thus it is said that nirvāṇa and birth and death are equally like flowers in empty space. For one has understood that the cycle of birth and death is the circulation of the illusory mind.

The circulation of the illusory mind is like a wheel: amid the dusty ocean of the six realms, it suddenly rises and suddenly falls. This is called the sea of birth and death. Its ceaseless revolving is called the wheel of birth and death. This illusory mind spins a cocoon and binds itself; the more it entangles itself, the more tightly it is bound. This is called the bondage of birth and death. Like a dream from which one does not awaken, it is called the long night of birth and death. When the Buddha appears in the world to liberate sentient beings, he liberates only this illusory mind, turning it from delusion to awakening. This is called transcending birth and death.

To transcend means to understand and to realize at the level of principle; it also means to be liberated, so that one does not create causes and undergo results, which is realization at the level of phenomena. This is the one great matter of human life; hence it is said, “Birth and death are a great matter.” Yet the physical body of karmic recompense cannot truly be said to undergo birth and death; nor can the dharma-nature, which constantly abides.

It is only the illusory mind that makes mischief. Because of delusion, it takes the false for the true, and thus there is the revolving cycle of birth and death. If one knows it to be like flowers in empty space and does not take it as real, there is no revolving cycle, nor is there any body or mind that undergoes that birth and death.

It is not that freedom from birth and death is something artificially made, for one’s intrinsic nature has always been free from birth and death. But ordinary beings do not understand the principle of birth and death, so sages can only speak provisionally of illusion in terms of illusion, positing birth and death. Those of lesser

faculties do not understand birth and death; they merely fear death. Those of somewhat greater faculties seek only to transcend birth and death, believing that there really is a birth and death to be transcended.

Those of great faculties know that birth and death do not lie in the physical body of karmic recompense, but only in the circulation of the illusory mind; the illusory mind itself is birth and death. Those of the very highest faculties, however, recognize that mind cannot be obtained: originally there is no birth and death, nor is there nirvāṇa. Yet, for the sake of sentient beings, they do not incline solely toward emptiness or abandon existence. They speak to them of transcending birth and death so that they may awaken for themselves, knowing that birth and death are their own deluded, illusory mind. To transcend birth and death, one must first transcend the illusory mind and know the mind to be illusory. When the illusion is extinguished, one is liberated. This is truly transcending birth and death.

Birth and death provisionally have two names. The first is segmented birth and death: one abandons one segmented existence and is reborn into another. For example, when a person dies, that person abandons this segment of existence and is reborn as an ox or a sheep. When an ox or sheep dies, its segmented body is likewise abandoned. Such revolving is called segmented birth and death. The second is transformational birth and death, which is transformation in one's mental state. For example, one progresses from an ordinary being to an arhat, and then becomes a bodhisattva. This is a transformation of mind, not a change of physical form. When one reaches the ground of eternal quiescence and immovability, transformational birth and death is ended; this is called perfectly luminous and profoundly quiescent, and one then ascends to the Buddha-ground.

In sum, one receives a segmented body in accordance with the root of attachment. Whichever realm one is attached to, one receives the body of that realm. Attachment arises from the illusory mind. When the illusory mind turns from delusion to awakening and does not cling to illusory circumstances, there is no body or mind that undergoes that birth and death. One must first transcend segmented birth and death, then proceed to eliminate attachment to dharmas, thereby transcending transformational birth and death. In our cultivation, we must first realize the mind and see one's true nature. After directly realizing fundamental wisdom, we must diligently eliminate habitual tendencies; only then can we truly transcend birth and death.

The birth and death of ordinary people begins with birth. They first take an object as their basis. For example, when a person sees a pig, an image of a pig first arises in the mind and is imprinted in the mind. Morning and evening, it remains there. When this has continued for a long time and causes and conditions ripen, they naturally come together, and the person becomes a pig.

If nothing is established and all mental images are extinguished, then even though various scenes may appear, one already knows them to be illusory. They pass without remaining and leave no trace. Since external objects have nothing to which they can attach, the field of one's nature does not undergo transformation. The twelve links of dependent origination involve nothing beyond craving and grasping leading into birth and death; their root lies in ignorance. To turn ignorance around is awakening. When one knows why birth occurs, one can understand why death occurs.

If one does not know birth, how can one know death? Since birth is not truly existent, on what could death depend? If a person understands that birth and death are created by the ignorant, illusory mind, this is transcending birth and death at the level of principle. But only by actually practicing, seeking to realize the mind and untie its bonds, and painfully eliminating one's own habitual tendencies does one transcend birth and death at the level of phenomena.

How great indeed is the matter of birth and death! This thing called birth and death is simply the stirring of a single thought in the ignorant, illusory mind, which then begins to function. From subtlety it enters into coarseness, becoming firmly established as one's nature. One grows accustomed to unawareness; it is easy to enter but difficult to escape. Yet nothing in the world is difficult: a journey of a thousand miles begins beneath one's feet. If practitioners can deeply recognize birth and death as fearful, they should pull out its root and first break through ignorance. But if one does not know what ignorance is, what can be done? This will be explained in detail below.

Explaining Ignorance

Ignorance means darkness and delusion; with awakening, there is illumination. Ignorance refers to a dark and dull mind. In Sanskrit it is called Aweila; it is formed from the six fundamental afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, pride, and wrong views. Their habitual conditioning binds and entangles one, like smoke that clouds the eyes and causes blindness.

In examining doctrinal terms, one finds that ignorance is classified into four kinds, five kinds, and even as many as fifteen kinds. Such excessively fine distinctions instead lead practitioners to suspect that there truly exists a single ignorance and to consider how to destroy it. They do not know that ignorance is simply the illusory mind's deluded attachment: it has no substantial entity and is not like a material object that can be broken. If it could be broken, some form would remain after its destruction, just as fragments of a broken bowl remain.

But this is not so. Light and darkness are opposites and cannot coexist: where there is light, there is no darkness; where there is darkness, there is no light. It is like a dark room: when light appears, it becomes bright; when the light departs, it becomes dark. Therefore, one cannot say that ignorance is broken; one should say that it is extinguished. When a deluded person turns toward awakening, delusion is extinguished and awakening appears; that person is no longer deluded. It is like entering a dream: one cannot call it waking. Once one has awakened, one cannot call it a dream, for waking means that the dream has vanished.

How could a dream be broken apart bit by bit? Therefore, when awakening opens, ignorance is extinguished. Before awakening, there is still ignorance and still birth and death. Yet sages and ordinary beings alike have thoughts, and in both the illusory mind arises. The difference is that ordinary beings do not recognize the illusory mind or awakened awareness. They become bound by circumstances and thereby give rise to delusion, create karma, undergo suffering, and fall into the ocean of birth and death.

Sages know this to be the wondrous functioning of the illusory mind. As it arises, it is empty; no trace of it can be found. The illusory circumstances and the illusory mind are both unobtainable, and thus they transcend to the other shore. If, when encountering circumstances, we can remain without a clinging mind, letting them pass without leaving a trace, then the seeds in the storehouse consciousness will become empty and pure and cannot bear fruit. This is what is meant by the cutting off of the seeds of birth and death.

Thus the seven evil karmic acts of body and speech, such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, begin with the three mental karmas of greed, anger, and ignorance, which are called the three poisons. These three poisons in turn begin with the seeds in the storehouse consciousness. These seeds are the illusory mind's attachments, formed over time by mistakenly drawing external circumstances into the storehouse consciousness and nurturing them there. Although the seeds are innumerable, they do not go beyond three kinds: establishing a self, setting oneself against others, and opposing one thing to another.

Thereupon, good and evil, favorable and adverse, right and wrong, self and other, and all kinds of discriminative comparisons arise in profusion as causes. Greed, anger, and ignorance, formed by the convergence of all these seeds, serve as conditions. Layer upon layer they advance until they culminate in killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct—the consummation of accumulated evil—while the binding of birth and death turns like a wheel as its result.

If one knows that all is illusory, then at the causal stage both mind and circumstances are empty. One will not grasp at circumstances and bring them into

the storehouse consciousness. With no seeds within and no conditions without, how could anything arise? It is like making firecrackers: if there is no gunpowder inside, then even with a fuse, they can scarcely explode. The reason the illusory mind draws circumstances in through grasping is truly that, in delusion and unawareness, it mistakes the false for the real and is wrongfully deceived. This is called ignorance. The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra says, “Ignorance is the father and craving is the mother.” This refers to the root of birth and death, from which all seeds arise; therefore, it must be eradicated and extinguished.

Explaining Karmic Obstacles

Someone may say, “Ignorance should indeed be eliminated, but what is to be done when one’s karmic obstacles are profound?” One should ask in return, “What sort of thing are karmic obstacles?” If such a thing truly existed, one ought to be able to produce it; yet they would certainly be at a loss. Those of sharp faculties may awaken at a single point. But the capacities of duller people are not yet suited to this, so it must be explained in detail.

Karmic obstacles are precisely your habitual tendencies. A lazy person who delights in ease has such a habitual tendency and therefore cannot progress on the Way. An ascetic who is overly rigid and cannot be flexible likewise has such a habitual tendency and cannot progress on the Way. Or someone may be overly doubtful and given to speculation, with views of self arising unchecked. This too is a habitual tendency, and such a person is even less able to progress on the Way. All these are unwholesome karma and can obstruct the Way; hence they are called karmic obstacles.

Yet karma is not necessarily evil. Practices such as cultivating pure karma and the ten wholesome deeds are all wholesome karma. Karma means intentional action; in Sanskrit it is called karma, meaning deeds that are performed. There are three kinds: bodily karma, verbal karma, and mental karma.

Of these three kinds of karma, that which tends toward good is called white karma, while that which tends toward evil is called black karma. Cultivating worldly dharmas produces defiled karma; cultivating supramundane dharmas produces undefiled karma; and entering what is neither good nor evil produces indeterminate karma. For those cultivating the six realms, there are also deva karma, human karma, ghost karma, and so forth. From cause to fruition, when conditions are complete, the fruition ripens. When habitual tendencies are deep-rooted and their force is strong beyond further control, this is karmic conditioning and karmic force.

That which cannot be escaped is karmic fruition, karmic suffering, and karmic retribution. That in which one sinks and finds it difficult to emerge is the ocean of

karma. When habitual tendencies bind one so that one cannot break free, this is karmic bondage. That by which one revolves without cease is the wheel of karma. When, at the time of death, a moonlike disc suddenly appears, illuminating all the good and evil deeds of one's life, and myriad thoughts arise in succession, this is the karmic mirror. Yet all these are determinate karma fashioned by one's own mind. Only those who have realized the mind-ground understand that karma is established by mind; knowing the mind to be illusory, they know that karma too does not exist. With a single turn, it becomes empty: this is inconceivable power. As for karma's obstruction of the Way—karmic obstacles—there are also five kinds of obstruction, but these belong to proper cultivation and will be treated only briefly here.

Methods for Eliminating Karmic Obstacles

The fundamental matter is to extinguish ignorance. When ignorance is extinguished, karmic obstacles dissolve of themselves, without needing to be deliberately eliminated. Yet the coarse aspects of karmic obstacles can be seen, while their subtle aspects are not easily perceived. In the Buddhadharma, there is no distinction between great and small: if one gives rise to the intention to kill, then, although one has not killed, it is as if one had already done so. But once this thought of killing is turned around, it is immediately empty; emptiness is purity. The difficulty lies only in being unable to turn it around. Therefore, whenever a thought arises that contains a view of self or emotional attachment, whether coarse or subtle, it is a karmic obstacle.

But removing thoughts does not mean cutting off or extinguishing thoughts; it means only turning them around. If they are not turned around, one becomes attached to them; attachment becomes bondage. From the intention to kill to the act of killing, all occurs because one lacks the strength to turn the thought around and thus goes with the current, unable to pull oneself back. This is the root of birth and death, and is therefore called emotional attachment; all such attachments can obstruct the Way.

The depth or shallowness of karmic obstacles is simply the depth or shallowness of one's accumulated habitual tendencies. What is easy to remove indicates shallow karmic obstacles; what is difficult to remove indicates deep karmic obstacles. Further, when thoughts can be let go of, turned around quickly, and seen to be empty as soon as they are illuminated, the obstacles are shallow. When they cannot be let go of or turned around, and one cannot even raise the illuminating awareness, the obstacles are deep.

Nevertheless, to state the essential point: in the matter of eliminating karmic obstacles, one must understand cause and effect. To understand that karmic

obstacles are originally empty in nature at their causal ground is itself the realm of the Buddha. This cannot be spoken of to dull people of lesser capacity, for fear that, failing to understand cause and effect or the ultimate truth, they may instead be misled by emptiness and fall into evil paths. Therefore, they must be regulated by ritual procedures.

Warn them not to give themselves over to dissipation; gradually open the path of prajñā for them; urge them to change their temperaments and habitual patterns. When their capacity has matured, give them a direct instruction suited to their potential, enabling them to awaken openly and completely. As for rebirth in the Western Pure Land while carrying karma, this karma refers to the view-and-thought delusions that have not yet been cut off. Upon seeing the splendid realm of the West, one develops longing for it; this itself belongs to delusion.

But when one's own strength is insufficient at death, if, at a time of having no assurance whatsoever, one receives the aid of this right mindfulness, one can naturally gain considerable strength. One will certainly transcend the three lower realms, not cling to this world, and, with one-pointedness of mind without distraction, attain rebirth.

After attaining rebirth, one's old habitual karmic forces have still not been removed. Thereafter, one is steeped in cultivation in the Western Pure Land; after a long time, when one matures, one further awakens to the fact that the natures of sin and merit are empty, originally neither arising nor ceasing. The flower of wisdom opens, and one sees the Buddha of one's own nature. If karma itself does not exist, how can one speak of eliminating it?

Those who do not understand the mind-ground or cause and effect speak one-sidedly of eliminating karmic obstacles, without explaining them in terms of karma. They take it that karmic obstacles truly exist; therefore, without relying on prajñā, there is no way to eliminate them. Strive, strive: make your preparations early, and do not panic at the last moment. Human birth is difficult to obtain; how could one enter the evil paths again? Having understood the suffering of birth and death, practitioners recognize ignorance as the cause, karmic obstacles as the condition, and suffering as the result, and should seek a means of liberation. Yet they may not know the meaning of liberation.

Explaining Liberation

Liberation has two meanings. First, it means explanation: to explain is to dispel doubt. Second, it means understanding: clarifying the principle so as to free the mind. In Sanskrit, it is called mokṣa, meaning freedom attained by release from bondage. To free oneself from the bondage of delusion and karma and escape the

suffering of the three realms is called liberation. This bondage is self-imposed, unlike being bound by another person. The latter is bondage imposed by others; the former is self-imposed bondage. The former is bondage with form; this is bondage without form.

The former binds my body; this binds the mind itself. The former has only one or two kinds, whereas this has as many as eighty-four thousand kinds. The former is untied by the hand; this is untied by wisdom. Release from the former depends on others; release from this depends on oneself. The former must be untied before one is free; here, one is free without any need to untie it. Yet this is not to say that there is no understanding: with the wisdom eye, one sees that the root is already empty. Originally there was no bondage, so how could there be liberation?

It is only for people of dull faculties that one cannot help speaking of so many technical terms. Those who seek liberation seem like prisoners seeking freedom because they cannot act freely, but this is not so, since originally there is no bondage. Yet sentient beings do not understand why this is so. Those today who bustle about for fame and profit are bound either by fame or by profit, or by both fame and profit. They are exerting themselves to scheme and pursue these ever more deeply, with no time to spare; how could they be willing to relax their grip and seek liberation?

Only when they experience suffering do they begin to realize the meanings of suffering, emptiness, and impermanence. Yet before they feel it, they are already suffering in countless ways. Deluded by hopes and desires, they do not recognize their suffering; instead, they believe that once their hopes are fulfilled, all suffering will be removed. They do not know that human affairs are impermanent and that it is exceedingly difficult for everything to turn out as one wishes.

For example, the top prize in a lottery may be five hundred thousand, while perhaps a million people desire it. In the end, only one person's wish is fulfilled, while countless others are disappointed. Before the drawing, the burning agitation of desire, and after the drawing, the suffering of disappointed resentment, are equally indescribable. Thus, it is true that there is originally no bondage, yet the present unease is not unreal. Merely because one does not recognize this, one needlessly binds oneself. The one who tied the bell must also untie it: since the bondage arises in the mind, it must also be released in the mind. To release it in the mind, one must first understand the principle of cause and effect and the coming together of causes and conditions.

On Cause and Effect

Cause is the initiating factor, and fruition is the complete result. From cause to fruition, there must necessarily be conditions in between; if the conditions are insufficient, the fruition will be incomplete. The so-called four conditions are: first, the causal condition; second, the object-condition; third, the immediately preceding condition; and fourth, the dominant condition. Within conditions there are again countless minor causes and minor results. For example, thirst gives rise to the thought of tea: this is a causal condition. Thinking of tea leads one to brew tea: this is an object-condition.

From thirst, to thinking of tea, brewing tea, steeping tea, drinking tea, and quenching thirst, the successive order must not be confused. This is the immediately preceding condition. From thirst to the quenching of thirst, there are many intervening processes, each progressively enhancing and advancing the next; this is the dominant condition. At every level there are causes and effects, and everywhere conditions can be transformed. Whether good or bad, none falls outside these four meanings.

If brewing tea causes one to scald a finger, which gives rise to anger, resentment toward others, and conflict, this transforms into another causal condition and produces a different result. Cause and effect may extend across the three periods of time, or, more immediately, be present right before us. In a single instant there is cause and effect. Whether matters are great or small, none can escape the law of cause and effect. All sciences likewise never depart from cause and effect, bringing about results with various conditions as aids.

When causes arise and fruits ripen, this is all called arising. For example, in planting a tree, sowing the seed is the cause; watering, fertilizer, and sunlight are the conditions; and the sprouting of branches, flowering, and bearing fruit are the result. This is arising. Then the tree itself becomes the cause; the yellowing and falling of leaves, drying and withering of wood, and cutting with an axe are the conditions; and the branches and trunk becoming firewood, being burned, and turning to ashes are the result. This is cessation.

This is one arising and one cessation. Arising is conditionally arisen, and cessation is conditionally ceased; therefore, they are not “self-arising and self-ceasing,” for a single seed cannot by itself become a tree, bear fruit, and become firewood. Nor are they “other-arising and other-ceasing,” for although other seeds and conditions may come together, without a seed there can ultimately be no tree, firewood, ashes, and so forth.

Nor are they “arising and ceasing from both,” for if they arise from both, there is no principal agent and no inherent nature. Ultimately, whose arising and ceasing would it be? It cannot be found. Therefore it is said that conditionally arisen things are

empty of inherent nature: though they appear to exist, they cannot be grasped. Nor do they arise and cease without causes, for this arising and cessation are both results; if there were no initial cause, the result of arising and ceasing could never come about.

Mind is likewise so: it does not arise from itself, from another, from both, or without cause. Indeed, all things arise and cease through conditions in this way. Therefore, mind arises through causes and conditions and ceases through causes and conditions; it illusorily arises and illusorily ceases, and ultimately cannot be grasped. The various sufferings and afflictions of today are likewise bonds of causes and conditions, and are released through causes and conditions. Because the mind is deluded, it relies on external circumstances to bind itself.

Because the mind is clear, it relies on awakened contemplation for liberation; yet all conditions are empty and cannot be grasped. Ordinary beings are foolish and do not understand cause and effect. They fear only results, not causes, because causes cannot be seen while results lie before their eyes. Cause and effect are easy to enter into but difficult to escape, yet people often take them lightly. The two vehicles fear causes and are unwilling to create causes; this too is fearing results.

Bodhisattvas are not ignorant of cause and effect, while Buddhas clearly understand cause and effect. Since there are prior causes, there must now be results; one can only undergo them as they are, without speaking of favorable or adverse circumstances. As for future matters, there are prior causes and later results: such a cause, such conditions, such a result, such retribution, and such an experience of it.

Before acting, they are already clearly aware through awakened contemplation, and thus naturally will not lightly create causes and undergo their later consequences. Therefore, realizing the mind is the master key to all undertakings. To illuminate mind with mind is prajñā; yet one must realize the essence of mind before the function of prajñā can be activated. This is the most crucial point in the Section on Inspiring Potential. Through this, some suddenly open prajñā; through this, some dispel their doubts and attain certainty; and through this, some plant wholesome roots. This is the subtle meaning of liberating the sentient beings of one’s own nature at the causal stage.

Discerning Mind and Intrinsic Nature

What is mind? Mind is something that arises through the coming together of conditions—for example, the eye and visual forms come together, or the ear and sounds come together. The inner six faculties are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; the outer six sense objects are forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. When faculties and objects come together, consciousness

arises. Thus there are the six consciousnesses, and this is called the consciousness-mind.

Therefore, that which arises in dependence on external objects is thought; that which measures and evaluates in accordance with thought is mind; that which discriminates on the basis of such measurement is consciousness; that which pursues and seeks is conception; that which is determined through consciousness is the view of self; that which firmly holds this view and refuses to adapt is emotional attachment. Using the illuminating power of wisdom to direct thought, mind, consciousness, and views, transforming them, is contemplation.

To realize that wisdom, too, is empty, and to be able to let go completely and abide nowhere, is the wondrous functioning of prajñā. In truth, all these are merely the mind's illusory arising and ceasing. Each arising and ceasing is a birth and a death, a cause and an effect, a single round of cyclic turning. To abide in this is bondage; not to abide in it is liberation.

Yet mind has neither entry nor exit, neither coming nor going, and still less birth and death. It was never deluded to begin with, nor can it be obtained; so from where can liberation be spoken of? The answer is: mind is originally awakened, yet there plainly appears to be delusion now—what then can be done? It is like a person who was originally not ill, of whom one could not speak of medicine; but once that person has in fact become ill, with fever and headache, one cannot cling to its illusory nature and insist that it does not exist.

Although one clearly knows that, once the illness is removed, nothing can be obtained, one cannot help using illusion to eliminate illusion. Again, compare a drunken person with a sober one: though in every respect they are completely nondual, the drunken person's actions are wild and disordered, and one cannot say that they do not exist. Compared with the Buddha, we are likewise distinguished only by being drunk or not drunk.

People in the world often divide realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature into two separate matters; moreover, they have no way to distinguish mind from nature. This is why it is difficult to inspire their potential. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism all speak of nature in the same way, using as its representation. In Confucianism, it is called benevolence, the great Way, the highest good, the mandate of Heaven, luminous virtue, the vast and flowing qi, the imperial norm, heavenly principle, the ever-abiding, mind-nature, and the origin.

In Buddhism, it is called the Tathāgata-garbha, suchness, great perfect mirror wisdom, wisdom of the essential nature of the dharma realm, perfect enlightenment, bodhi, Vairocana, dharma-nature, dharmakāya, the Buddha Way, wondrous mind, nirvāṇa, vajra, prajñā, consciousness-mind, ālaya, the five wisdoms,

the ninth consciousness, the boundless body, and return to the origin. In Daoism, it is called the mysterious, the golden elixir, the valley spirit, the Supreme Clarity, the limitless, the deathless, the great Way, and so forth. All three traditions establish provisional names, too numerous to count; but the thing itself is one, and these names merely indicate this empty nature.

Now, let the clear quiescence and immovability of nature be compared to water. When thoughts move in response to objects, these thoughts are mind, comparable to waves arising because of the wind. Water has the potential to form waves, but waves are not inherently present in water. Since the waves arise because of the wind, this is called illusory arising. When the wind ceases, the waves subside and return to water; this is called illusory cessation. Because their arising and cessation are illusory, they cannot be obtained; because they lack inherent nature, they are empty.

Water and waves are two yet one. Nature alone is originally without arising or ceasing; even after thousands upon thousands of ages, it does not change. Because it cannot be seen, yet is not empty, it is called true emptiness that is not empty. Because its existence cannot be seen, yet its wondrous functioning is as inexhaustible as the sands of the Ganges, it is called wondrous presence that is not presence. This thing neither arises nor ceases, is neither defiled nor pure; thus, that which is clear, quiescent, and unmoving is nature.

This immovability is not like the immovability of wood or stone; it remains vibrantly alive. When it encounters circumstances, thoughts arise, illusorily arising and ceasing; yet the mind is ultimately unattainable. Mind arises from intrinsic nature. The character xing (, intrinsic nature) consists of xin (, mind) and sheng (, arising), indicating that intrinsic nature is that from which mind arises.

When mind ceases, it returns to nature. Therefore, its place of arising cannot be seen: from where does it come? This cannot be known. If one says it arises in dependence on objects, then it should arise from the objects and have nothing to do with itself; nature would seem to have no involvement. If one says it arises in dependence on nature, then without objects, how could thoughts arise? Thoughts cannot arise from nowhere within nature.

Thus we know that it exists through the provisional conjunction of causes and conditions. Just as a bell rings when struck, so the production of sound is provisionally present through the combination of various causes and conditions. This is why its place of arising cannot be obtained.

When it ceases, to where does it go? This cannot be known. If one says that it ceases in objects, no increase can be seen in the objects. If one says that it ceases by returning to nature, then when mind arises, no diminution of nature can be seen;

when mind ceases, no increase of nature can be seen. It is just as when water has waves: the water is not necessarily diminished; when waves subside into water, the water is not necessarily increased. Moving yet unmoving—this is why its place of cessation cannot be obtained.

Because it cannot be obtained, it does not arise; because it does not arise, there is nothing that can cease. This is what is meant by neither arising nor ceasing. From this we know that arising is illusory arising, and ceasing is illusory cessation; both are merely provisional names. What does illusory arising mean? It means the nature of dependence on others, according to the Dharma Characteristics School. Nature originally has three aspects: first, the nature of dependence on others; second, the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment; and third, the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

The nature of absolute reality and perfection means the true aspect that is originally complete and originally accomplished. But when one is suddenly enticed by external objects, thoughts arise in dependence on others. Failing to recognize this as illusory, one then universally calculates and clings to it. The problem does not lie in the nature of dependence on others, but in abiding in attachment; and the problem with abiding in attachment does not lie in universal calculation, but in firmly clinging to it. Thus one's original nature becomes confused and disordered. Yet this confusion is only temporary; the original nature certainly undergoes neither increase nor decrease. Therefore it is called the ever-constant, unchanging nature of the Tathāgata-garbha.

Non-Duality of Nature and Mind

If intrinsic nature is the essence and mind is the function, then essence and function are nondual. When a thought arises, wind gives rise to waves. Whether it is good or evil, once it turns, it is empty; it vanishes right where it is. The distinction between sage and ordinary being likewise lies in this single turn. Turning away from evil and toward good lies in this turn. To transcend the ordinary and enter sagehood is fundamentally quite easy.

Yet the most alive thing is the mind, and the most dead thing is also the mind. Worldly people grow old refusing to turn this mind toward goodness; even with the strength of nine oxen and two tigers, it will not move in the slightest. This is because the karmic force of the obstinate mind is so strong: difficult to tame and difficult to subdue. Even the Buddha can do nothing about it. Unless one acts on one's own, it cannot be turned.

But how can it be turned? One need only awaken: awakening itself is the turn. The original nature of ordinary people is inherently complete and lacking nothing; hence

it is called original awakening. It is originally wondrous, and so it is also called the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment. Unfortunately, people are like those drunk to the point of madness. Though all are alike drunk, drunkenness has degrees of depth; yet a drunkard is no different from a sober person.

Those who awaken first go to guide and rescue those who have not yet awakened; this is called practicing the bodhisattva path, impartially and compassionately liberating all. Though drunkards may be mad, they must not be slighted, for their original nature has not been damaged in the least. They are merely confused for a time and unable to be clear-minded. Once they awaken, they are wholly nondual with sober people. Thus afflictions and bodhi are in truth nondual.

Both are empty in nature and unobtainable; hence they are said to be identical.

Long ago, someone asked what it meant to say that afflictions are themselves bodhi. I told him to raise his hand, then told him to lower it. I then asked, “Did your hand make one raising and one lowering?” He replied, “Yes.” I asked again, “Were that raising and lowering done by two hands, or by this one same hand?” He replied, “By the same hand.” I then asked, “Are raising and lowering two?” He replied, “They are two.” I asked, “Is the hand one?” He replied, “It is one.” At once he awakened to this principle and departed joyfully.

This shows that drunkenness and sobriety too are nondual; this is originally so. Yet people refuse to let go and make this turn—what can be done? Once they enter the gate of practice, all their greedy and lazy habits emerge, and they rely entirely on the Buddha, wanting the Buddha to let go of this hand for them and to awaken for them. What can be done? What can be done? Tracing matters to their source, this is because they have never truly understood the true appearance of mind-nature.

Interacting Faculties and Objects

One cannot simply refuse to see or hear. To force oneself not to see or hear is the annihilationism of non-Buddhist paths; forcibly suppressing one’s practice will inevitably lead to serious illness. One will either fall into a dead sea or turn into a mad demon.

If one merely follows along with the ceaseless flow of seeing and hearing, this is the grasping after conditions of ordinary beings. Such grasping is to be passively carried along by delusion and karma, losing one’s autonomy. Therefore, one must still maintain clear, ever-present knowing in all things, adding the practice of seeing clearly: know them as flowers in empty space, and there will be no further cyclic turning. This is a principal passage in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment. The difficulty lies in the single word “know,” which encompasses such states as

awareness, realization of emptiness, freedom from delusion, and immovability. Without practice and realization, one cannot know it.

Mind as the Treasury

What is meant by “store”? It refers to the store consciousness. Consciousness is further divided into the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth consciousnesses, which will now be explained separately.

The fifth consciousnesses are the first five consciousnesses: eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousness. They arise in correspondence with forms, sounds, scents, tastes, and tactile objects. They are like attendants at a gateway receiving envoys, welcoming goods and cargo into a warehouse, where they are stored but have not yet entered within.

The sixth consciousness is mental consciousness: the thoughts aroused through the first five consciousnesses. It is like a special agent who receives transported goods and takes them into the warehouse.

The seventh consciousness is the consciousness that discriminates by inference. It distinguishes good from evil, as well as what is morally indeterminate; it clings obstinately and will not let go. It is the store of self-love and attachment. It is like a person who inspects goods and determines their quality. It is the general cause of suffering and the ancestor of afflictions. In Sanskrit it is called manas consciousness.

The eighth consciousness is the store consciousness. “Store” has three meanings: the capacity to store, containing storage, and the store of self-love and attachment. The capacity to store means having the ability to store: once something has been stored, it does not emerge again. No matter how many years pass, not the slightest bit can be removed. Containing storage means that its scope can encompass everything: things as large as mountains, rivers, the sun, moon, and earth, and as small as mustard seeds, grains of rice, and tiny insects are all contained within it. It is like a great warehouse in which all things—large and small, good and bad, impure and pure—are stored. In Sanskrit it is called ālaya consciousness.

The ninth consciousness is the empty purity of the eighth consciousness. Although the eighth consciousness is likened to a warehouse, it is originally empty and pure. Though goods are brought in and taken out, coming and going in disorderly profusion, the warehouse itself does not thereby move. It is neither defiled nor pure, neither coming nor going; originally white and pure, without blemish. It is therefore also called the ninth consciousness. The ninth consciousness is called the white-pure consciousness; in Sanskrit it is called amalā consciousness.

All the foregoing consciousnesses are fundamentally one entity and have no inherent reality. These provisional names are established only to awaken people's eyes and ears; they merely explain how the mind gives rise to causes and creates karma.

When worldly people create karma from causes, they fall into cause and effect and are not easily rescued. This is why the three karmas of body, speech, and mind are not easily purified. What is bodily karma? Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. What is verbal karma? Divisive speech, harsh speech, false speech, and frivolous speech. What is mental karma? Greed, anger, and ignorance. These are the three poisons and are collectively called the ten evil acts. Add the word “not”—not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, and so forth—and they become the ten wholesome acts.

Mental karma is primary: it is the cause. Verbal karma leads onward: it is the condition. Bodily karma brings completion: it is the fruition. If one does not save the root at the level of cause, but merely tries to make amends at the level of fruition, there will ultimately be no benefit. In this association, we cultivate the precepts by beginning with samādhi and wisdom. Samādhi and wisdom are themselves precepts—the precepts of the mind, the so-called fundamental great precepts—yet the observances and deportment of the precepts are not thereby discarded.

Practice begins with cultivating the mind and working at the root. This is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, in which function arises from essence. Therefore, in explaining the dependent arising of mental karma, we do not tire of repeating ourselves. People suffer because they do not know their own illness. The Buddha therefore explained the various habitual tendencies: there are one hundred and sixty types of mind, which the Mahāvairocana Sūtra condenses into sixty types, so that practitioners may each turn their awareness back upon themselves and reflect inwardly.

Zengzi examined himself three times a day. These “three examinations” cannot mean merely three occasions; if one examined oneself only three times daily, it would almost be like exposing something to the sun for one day and leaving it in the cold for ten. These three are the three periods of a day: the first, middle, and last periods. That is, there is no day and no time when one should not do this. Do so day after day, month after month; in time it becomes natural, and one will go for three months without departing from benevolence. All the mind's illnesses are habitual tendencies. Their root is no more than the mutual binding of faculties and objects, with form and mind entwined together. It is like a mirror: when it faces an object, an image appears; without an external object, the mirror is itself empty. Yet there are differences.

1. When a mirror faces an object, an image appears; when the object departs, the image vanishes. When the mind encounters an object, a thought arises; when the object departs, the image remains, because of grasping at conditions.

2. When an object outside a mirror departs, there is immediately no image. When an object outside the mind vanishes, thoughts nevertheless remain, because the mind grasps at conditions out of empty space and establishes all kinds of images.

3. When a mirror faces an object, it necessarily retains an image. When the mind encounters an object, it need not retain one—for example, one may look without seeing, without the mind becoming attached. Moreover, those who possess wisdom, whose direct perception is already complete, can also cut off everything.

4. When a mirror faces an object, it retains only one image and cannot transform it. When the mind encounters an object, it can not only retain an image but also transform it, creating immeasurable illusions. If one has wisdom, one can further redirect the mental state.

From this we may know that authority truly lies in our own hands. The foolish do not recognize the master within; they allow themselves to drift in the round of change. Unable to transform objects, they are transformed by objects. They may even be turned by the sūtras they read, forming a dead understanding that cannot function.

The sages establish teachings with realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature as their main aim, wishing people to realize bodhi. Bodhi is without form and without name; it is the unobtainable, perfect, wondrous, lucid, and aware mind. Worldly people mistakenly understand bodhicitta as a good or compassionate mind, believing that merely refraining from evil is the manifestation of bodhi. This is truly far from clear. If the causal ground is not understood, how can the fruition ground be perfectly fulfilled? Bodhicitta has five provisional names:

1. Bodhi of arousing the resolve: knowing delusion and seeking awakening, one arouses the resolve and begins practice. It means arousing the resolve to realize bodhicitta.

2. Bodhi of subduing the mind: knowing how to use the mind to restrain the mind and subdue its coarse and weighty accumulated habits. Yet suppression is not ultimate; the mind has not yet become empty, so this is not called bodhi.

3. Bodhi of realizing the mind: clearly knowing the true appearance of one's mind as it truly is, and realizing its empty and pure foundation.

4. Bodhi of reaching the other shore: leaving this shore of birth and death and reaching the other shore of nirvāṇa. At this stage, one has not yet gone beyond deliberate effort.

5. Unsurpassed bodhi: having entered the realm of pervasive fullness and perfect reality, this is great accomplishment and is true bodhi.

Thus, at the level of principle, one can understand that one's own nature is originally complete bodhi and that Buddha-nature is equal in all; this is becoming a Buddha in the dharmakāya. At the level of phenomena, one cultivates and realizes samādhi, sees true reality, realizes the mind and sees one’s true nature; this is becoming a Buddha in the sambhogakāya. As for becoming a Buddha in the nirmāṇakāya through the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena, the complete elimination of habitual tendencies, and the development of spiritual powers, this cannot be accomplished in a single lifetime; it requires an inexpressible length of time.

Time here means kalpas, called asaṃkhyeya kalpas. A means “without,” and saṃkhyeya means “number”; thus it means kalpas beyond number, that is, without a fixed duration. It may take one lifetime, or it may take tens of millions of lifetimes. The wise seek the mind and transcend in an instant; the foolish seek externally and cannot realize it even in tens of millions of lifetimes. If one asks what can truly be called liberation, apart from the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, there is no other Dharma.

Within the three realms, mind is primary. The mind is called the ground; by means of this Dharma of mind, one enters the dharma realm, and it is therefore called a dharma gate. Those who can contemplate the mind attain ultimate liberation; those who cannot contemplate it sink immediately.

In the Chapter on Contemplating the Mind of the Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Mind-Ground Contemplation of the Buddha’s Past Lives, Mañjuśrī, the Dharma Prince, said: “This Dharma gate is the supreme, secret Mind-Ground Dharma Gate of the Tathāgatas of the ten directions. This Dharma gate is the gateway by which all ordinary beings enter the Tathāgata's sudden awakening. This Dharma gate is the true and right path by which all bodhisattvas advance toward great bodhi. This Dharma gate is the wondrous jeweled palace of Dharma bliss personally enjoyed by all Buddhas of the three times. This Dharma gate is an inexhaustible treasury that benefits all sentient beings. This Dharma gate can lead all assemblies of bodhisattvas to the realm of freely wielded wisdom at the culmination of the form realm. This Dharma gate can liberate all sentient beings from the perils and difficulties of birth and death.”

We now cite only a few of these statements. All proceed through the gate of prajñāpāramitā, directly realizing the mind-ground and knowing one's own mind as it truly is. This is called the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. The Secret Master in the Mahāvairocana Sūtra refers to the master of heart esotericism. The equal and secret empowerment of body, speech, and mind is the gate of entry: first, the secret

mudrās of the body; second, the mantras of speech; third, the wondrous contemplation of mind.

The third is the expedient empowerment of this enjoyment body; this is the dharmakāya of Vairocana, pervading everything. This signifies the perfection of a bodhisattva's meritorious practice, and is therefore so named. In reality, it is the inconceivable mind of the equal dharmatā of all sentient beings. The sūtra says, “Relying on this Dharma gate,” and so forth; the gate is this very gate. Therefore, apart from prajñā, the provisions for studying Buddhism are cut off.

Dharmas arise from mind; names are established on the basis of dharmas. The mind that gives rise to them has no location, and so too do the dharmas that arise. Mind and objects are both empty and have no fixed place. Therefore, without mind there are no names whatsoever; as the mind responds to objects according to conditions, all belong to the emptiness of conditions.

For forty-nine years the Buddha taught the Dharma solely to liberate the minds of sentient beings and bring them peace and happiness. No sentient being fails to seek peace and happiness; their contention, plunder, killing, cunning pursuit, and deceitful acquisition all arise from seeking their own peace and happiness. Yet they do not know that this peace and happiness is not ultimate. Worldly happiness and suffering are mutually opposed and mutually conditioned; both arise from habitual comparison.

Today's happiness becomes tomorrow's suffering; the happiness of having becomes the suffering of lacking. Therefore it is not ultimate, and such happiness is temporary and difficult to preserve forever. Moreover, as the mind races outward, people forget the root and believe that suffering and happiness lie in the body's toil or ease. The Buddha wished to awaken them to the Dharma by which the mind can find ultimate peace.

Worldly people do not yet know the mind; how much less can they speak of settling it. Thus disputes proliferate, and even after hundreds or thousands of years, no ultimate conclusion has been reached. People spend their lives rushing about for nothing other than a way to find peace. How must one find peace for one's wishes to be fulfilled? They never touch upon the mind itself. When worldly people seek wealth and position, they should ask themselves: what would make my mind truly content? This shows that what hopes is still the mind, and that one seeks only the fulfillment and peace of one's own mind. Yet human affairs are impermanent, and the eight sufferings press in from every side. There are no real joys, only the experience of manifold suffering. Unable to illuminate this with wisdom, people are therefore called deluded.

From youth through maturity, old age, and death, human life never departs from the eight sufferings mentioned above. Yet people do not recognize this because of the suffering of the blazing five aggregates. Most terrifying is the suffering of death. First, people mistakenly believe that death means eternal annihilation. Second, they grieve that the wealth and family acquired through a lifetime of striving—property, spouse, and children—must soon be left behind. Third, they wonder what destination they will have after death.

Because these doubts remain unresolved, fear arises. The more they refuse to let go, the less the mind is willing to release; thus, at death, they are inverted and suffer indescribably. Seeing this, people instead say that it is simply the inevitable condition of dying. Their fear of death has already been planted because they fundamentally do not understand the mind-ground. Since the mind-ground is unclear, there is even less possibility of beginning the practice of settling the mind.

Those possessed of wisdom all seek liberation from this, but do not obtain the method. Bodhisattvas, exercising compassion and wisdom together, liberate them by teaching the method of settling the mind. Yet they do not first speak of peace; they first speak of mind, so that people may understand ultimately that birth and death are originally nonexistent, the mind is unobtainable, and suffering and happiness therefore have nothing on which to depend.

To depend means to abide. Abiding attachment sets mind and objects in opposition, so that they cannot both be empty. Calculation and discrimination arise according to conditions, and the arising of suffering and happiness comes from the mind's abiding attachment. But non-abiding does not mean the inert emptiness of wood or stone, devoid of awareness. It is precisely clear, ever-present knowing without attachment; therefore it is called non-abiding. “Without” means not attaching; it does not mean sheer nothingness.

The sutra says, “One should give rise to a mind that abides nowhere.” One should not only not abide in suffering, but also not abide in happiness; even non-abiding itself should not be abided in. Yet one abides in this place of non-abiding. This is the true mind of constant abiding; hence it is called the Pure Land and the Land of Ultimate Bliss. “Ultimate bliss” means the utmost peace. Do not discuss peace and non-peace as opposites. This word “peace” means true and ultimate peace, a peace beyond all naming and description.

Understand this wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment: because it is fundamentally neither arising nor ceasing, it is neither pure nor defiled, neither hidden nor manifest. When the Second Patriarch sought for his mind and could not find it, the First Patriarch immediately acknowledged that his mind had been pacified. The root of all birth and death and the eight sufferings is thereby utterly

broken through. This lies in investigating one's own mind; it is not a dharma that can be transmitted. It is only because your ordinary strength is insufficient and the path is still unfamiliar that I instruct you to cultivate earnestly for yourselves. Cultivation is not the pursuit of spiritual powers; it is precisely the pursuit of samādhi, from which wisdom arises. By the power of prajñā, one breaks through every bond. It is nothing more than pacifying the mind. Yet is there any spiritual power greater than pacifying the mind?

Worldly people do not understand the method of pacifying the mind. They take the pursuit of wealth and fame, and the fulfillment of desires, to be peace of mind. In the end, the more they pursue these things, the more inverted and confused they become, adding suffering upon suffering; nothing need be said of the rest. Even practitioners of the Way, having obtained the essential method of pacifying the mind, still dare not trust themselves. They often say that their karmic obstacles are profound and that they have no means of freeing themselves. This is because they do not understand karmic obstacles.

As stated earlier, if one wishes to eliminate karmic obstacles, the first thing is to understand clearly what karmic obstacles are. Once this is understood, they dissolve of themselves without needing to be eliminated. Therefore, before the mind-ground is clear, every stirring of the mind and movement of thought is a karmic obstacle; one's temper and habitual patterns are karmic obstacles. Karmic obstacles are unlike crimes entered into official records, which may be expunged and their penalties removed. They are bonds tied to the mind.

For example, when someone kills another person and flees, the act of killing is an impulsion of karmic force, and fleeing is also an impulsion of karmic force. Even if the authorities do not investigate, the victim's family does not pursue the matter, or he receives a pardon, the terror in his conscience and his confusion at the time of death are precisely his past karma remaining unresolved.

Again, consider killing in battle or killing an enemy. When troops must be used out of necessity, and not for one's own gain, rank, or territory—when, as with King Wen, one becomes angry once and peace is brought to all under heaven—then one may remain at ease in body and mind. What karmic obstacle is there? Moreover, if the mind is not mixed with thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance, this is what is meant by: when principle is understood, the mind is at peace.

Unease is precisely delusion, karma, and suffering. To break through delusion, karma, and suffering is nothing other than samādhi, wisdom, and emptiness. Samādhi gives rise to wisdom; wisdom realizes emptiness; and through emptiness, one is settled without being fixed. Wisdom is intelligence; one who is wise is not deluded. Worldly people are confused because they lack wisdom. Lacking wisdom,

they cannot distinguish the true from the false; instead, they mistake what is false for what is true. If one can empty all that one possesses, one naturally understands that worldly dharmas are all insubstantial.

What is called defiled is like a leaking cup: it may initially be full of water, but before long the water leaks away; hence it is called defiled. Buddhadharma is supramundane dharma, the truth of ultimate meaning. “Truth” means that which cannot be shaken. It is like a cup without leaks, whose water will never drain away; hence it is called undefiled. Buddhadharma is what enables one to understand worldly dharmas. Once worldly dharmas are understood, that itself is Buddhadharma. Apart from worldly dharmas, there is no Buddhadharma.

Therefore, Buddhadharma is awakening inseparable from the world. When one thoroughly comprehends without obstruction both defiled worldly dharmas and undefiled supramundane dharmas, and the two kinds of defilement are completely exhausted without remainder, this is called the supernormal power of the exhaustion of the defilements. This is the sixth supernormal power, the highest dharma gate, absent from non-Buddhist paths and unique to the Buddha Way. It is absent from all other religions and unique to Buddhism.

For those who study Buddhism, this must be the foremost concern. Thus, developing prajñā-wisdom is the fundamental provision for attaining Buddhahood and the first crucial key to realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. There is no second path by which one may pass through. The Benevolent Kings Sūtra says: “All depend on this gate to attain perfect enlightenment. For anyone to become a Buddha apart from this, there can be no such possibility.”

This is because the root illness of sentient beings is simply delusion and unawareness. The dharma gate that counters it is likewise only this one path. Though throughout immeasurable hundreds of millions of kalpas, Buddhas appear in the world in every kalpa, the Way of every Buddha is the same: this one dharma alone. Only its application differs, adapting to and responding to the capacities of beings. But when one returns to unsurpassed bodhi and realizes entry into Vairocana’s ocean of intrinsic nature, there has never been a second. As for its names, the various sutras differ slightly. A brief list follows:

1. the ever-unchanging nature of the Tathāgata-garbha; 2. store consciousness; 3. Tathāgata-garbha; 4. the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment; 5. the wondrously still and luminous mind; 6. return to the source; 7. Vairocana’s ocean of intrinsic nature; 8. great perfect mirror wisdom; 9. dharmakāya; 10. mind-ground; 11. field of intrinsic nature; 12. mind treasure; 13. bodhicitta; 14. the gate of pure bodhicitta; 15. vajra prajñā

16. ultimate reality; 17. suchness; 18. treasury; 19. Buddha-nature; 20. true child; 21. secret treasury; 22. ocean of sarvajñā; 23. mind-king; 24. vajra secret traces; 25. the master of the house; 26. the one eye; 27. the wish-fulfilling jewel; 28. primal constancy; 29. the great self; 30. .

Although the names differ in the various sutras, their meaning is not two. It is also called the great secret of all Buddhas, and the supreme Mahāyāna. The supreme Mahāyāna is beyond the knowledge of non-Buddhist paths. The word “great” means mahā, and it has seven meanings:

1. Greatness of dharma: this refers to the vast, profound, and secret treasury of all Buddhas. Vairocana pervades every place, and it is the vehicle only of great beings.

2. Greatness of arousing the resolve: this refers to single-mindedly aspiring to equal great wisdom, giving rise to inexhaustible vows of compassion, and pledging to bestow the Dharma universally upon sentient beings throughout the dharma realm.

3. Greatness of faith and understanding: this refers to the time when one first sees one’s true nature and realizes the Way. One then possesses immeasurable merit and virtue, can reach Buddha-lands as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, and, through the causes and conditions of the great matter, brings sentient beings to accomplishment.

4. Greatness of intrinsic nature: this refers to the self-natured pure mind, the vajra treasury of jewels, which lacks nothing and is shared by all sentient beings.

5. Greatness of reliance: this refers to the great support of sentient beings in the dharma realm, just as a hundred rivers flow toward the sea and plants and trees grow in reliance on the great earth.

6. Greatness of time: this refers to a life span long and far-reaching, extending beyond the three divisions of time, whose secret spiritual function, like the lion’s vigorous leap, has never ceased.

7. Greatness of wisdom: this refers to the boundlessness of all dharmas, equal to empty space; the mind’s natural wondrous wisdom is likewise boundless. Because of these seven causes and conditions, among all Mahāyāna dharma gates it is like ghee; therefore, it is called the supreme Mahāyāna. The sutra says, “Its nature is ever firm and steadfast, measureless as empty space.” This precisely expresses the supreme virtues of this wondrous mind.

At the Lotus Dharma assembly, the Buddha enabled all sentient beings to open, reveal, awaken to, and enter the Buddha’s knowledge and vision. Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, directly pointed to the human mind: see one’s true nature and attain Buddhahood. Yet sentient beings’ minds are turned by external things; they crave

sounds and cling to forms, are bound by sensual desires, and are shaken by the eight worldly winds.

If people understand that all worldly phenomena are impermanent, like illusions and dreams, like lightning and dew, and if, understanding this principle, they no longer crave or remain deluded, then this mind-essence remains thus and unmoving. All dharmas lack intrinsic nature; because they lack intrinsic nature, all can become Buddhas.

Therefore, the Diamond Sūtra says: “All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and also like lightning. One should contemplate them thus.” This is to contemplate the principle that all dharmas have no intrinsic nature.

What does it mean to say that they have no intrinsic nature? It means they have no nature of characteristics, no nature of exhaustion, no nature of arising, no nature of ceasing, no nature of self, no nature of non-self; indeed, no nature of bodhi, no nature of the dharma realm, and no nature of empty space. Knowing that all dharmas have no intrinsic nature, one can know all wisdom, attain all wisdom, see one’s true nature, and become a Buddha.

Buddhadharma is not passive. Therefore, the two vehicles, which seek their own liberation without liberating sentient beings, are reproved by the Buddha, who calls such persons scorched sprouts and rotten seeds. Such people cannot attain Buddhahood. Thus, it is better to fall into hell than to enter the two vehicles. Those who cultivate Mahāyāna Dharma must make great vows, maintain great compassion, realize great wisdom, and establish great conduct.

To make great vows means to vow that throughout life after life one will arouse bodhicitta, relinquish body, life, and possessions, and liberate sentient beings—not only enabling them to attain peace and happiness, but also enabling them to clearly realize mind and intrinsic nature, so that they become Buddhas. To maintain great compassion means to take the mind of great compassion as one’s foundation, to pity sentient beings who do not understand the true principle and suffer affliction in vain, and to vow to rescue and free them so that they attain peace and happiness.

To establish great conduct means to practice the six pāramitās, benefiting oneself and others. To realize great wisdom means to realize the wisdom of the original nature of the dharma realm, accomplish fundamental wisdom, and thoroughly understand the principles of the dharma realms in the ten directions. This is called the wisdom of all wisdom. What is called “great” is none other than the mind-nature of sentient beings. At its smallest, it has no within: not a single mote of dust can enter it. At its greatest, it has no without: there is not a single dharma it does not encompass.

What is called “vehicle” has the meaning of carrying. It can carry people onward directly to the ocean of sarvajñā. The ocean of sarvajñā is the ground of the wisdom of all wisdom. This ocean of sarvajñā is within the mind-nature of sentient beings. Thus, this ocean is not far away, and the mind treasure is always present. Compared with the mind treasure, worldly treasures are not treasures at all: the Jade of Zhao is no treasure, and the Pearl of Sui is not precious enough. If one can only realize the mind and see one’s true nature, external things cannot move one’s mind. In a single instant, this treasure reveals itself. When one personally awakens to it, it is truly not obtained from another. This is seeing one’s true nature and attaining Buddhahood.

Sentient beings are wise or foolish solely because the focus of their mental power differs. Discrimination then gives rise to distinctions of wisdom and foolishness. Yet in truth, all share this fundamental wisdom, though it is covered by deluded emotions and inverted views and therefore cannot become manifest. It is like an eye with a film over it, or a hand made disabled, unable to function, though its inherent capacity has not been lost.

That people possess wisdom which does not manifest is like possessing wealth and treasures while suffering poverty. Is this not tragic? Here I cite a passage from the “Manifestation” chapter of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra to explain its meaning. The general sense of the sutra passage is this: suppose there is a great scripture as vast as three thousand worlds, recording in full all the affairs of the great trichiliocosm. Although this great scripture is so vast, it is entirely contained within a single mote of dust. Not only is one mote of dust like this; each and every one of all the immeasurable motes of dust is likewise so.

Then there is a person of clear and penetrating wisdom, endowed with the heavenly eye, who sees that this scripture lies within the motes of dust yet brings no benefit at all to sentient beings. He thinks: “I shall break open these motes of dust and bring forth this scripture, so that sentient beings may benefit from it.”

This is analogous to the Tathāgata, who, with the pure eye of wisdom, universally observes all sentient beings and says: “How wondrous! How wondrous! Why do these sentient beings possess the wisdom of the Tathāgata, yet remain foolish and deluded? I shall teach them the noble path, enabling them forever to leave behind deluded thoughts and attachments and, within themselves, behold vast wisdom no different from that of the Buddha, bringing benefit and happiness,” and so forth.

The explanation is as follows: the great scripture of the trichiliocosm is the wisdom of the Tathāgata; its being within every mote of dust means that it is within the mind of every sentient being; and every mote of dust being thus means that all sentient beings possess vast wisdom. Yet although sentient beings possess such wisdom, it is covered by deluded emotions, so they cannot illuminate within. This is like a great

treasury of gold buried uselessly in the earth: without the guidance of one with the heavenly eye, how could it be discovered?

Therefore, one must hear and understand the principles taught in the sūtras, and know that within everyone's mind there is vast wisdom. One should consider how to awaken it, thereby obtaining the unsurpassed treasure and benefiting beings without limit. It is only regrettable that people do not know this. If one understands this principle, then toward all sentient beings one will make no distinctions of honorable or lowly, noble or base, high or low; the light of impartial wisdom will naturally reveal itself.

The numinous subtlety of the mind is inconceivable. The subtler the substance, the greater its force; the heavier the substance, the weaker its force. Thus, the force of earth does not equal that of water; the force of water does not equal that of fire; the force of fire does not equal that of wind; and the force of wind does not equal that of mind. The power of mind is formless and supreme. Spiritual powers and transformations enter the inconceivable; these are the powers of mind. A few passages are cited below to explain the mind:

1. The Commentary on the Awakening of Faith says: "It is easy to believe in Śākyamuni of the past and Maitreya of the future. But to have people believe that the suchness within the minds of sentient beings is the common basis of ordinary beings and sages alike—that when deluded by it, the six destinies are endless, while when awakened to it, the Three Jewels never cease—this is rare indeed."

2. The Sūtra of Mindfulness of the True Dharma says: "Devas, humans, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals are always led by the mind."

3. The Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Mind-Ground Contemplation of Original Births, "Chapter on Contemplating the Mind," says: "What is mind? What is ground?" Mañjuśrī said: "Within the three realms, mind is primary. Mind is called the ground. Those who can contemplate the mind ultimately attain liberation; those who cannot ultimately sink into the round of birth and death."

4. The Sūtra of the Dharma Wheel of Non-Retrogression says: "At that time, three bodhisattvas, having offered mañjuṣaka flowers to the Buddha before the World-Honored One, spoke thus: 'In this Dharma we have given rise to deep faith and understanding, without any doubt.'"

5. The Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra says: "The World-Honored One said to Vajramati: 'Good man, with the Buddha-eye I observe all sentient beings. Amid the afflictions of desire, anger, and ignorance, there are the wisdom of the Tathāgata, the eye of the Tathāgata, and the body of the Tathāgata, seated cross-legged in full lotus posture, solemn and unmoving. Good man, although all sentient beings are within the

various destinies and within bodies of affliction, they possess the tathāgatagarbha, ever undefiled and fully endowed with virtues and marks, no different from myself.'"

6. The Sūtra of the Goose's Flank says: "The bhikṣus said to Śāriputra, 'The Buddha is not other than our honored one. Why? Because I am not separate from the Buddha, and the Buddha is not separate from me.'"

7. Before Dīpaṃkara Buddha, the Buddha offered five lotus stalks, signifying that the five aggregates are empty in nature. With his mind unattached, he immediately entered the gate of nonobstruction and thereby received the prediction and the name Śākyamuni.

8. The Diamond Sūtra: Discerning Its Tenets says: "The Diamond Sūtra is the gateway through which all Tathāgatas awaken to mind. To understand the deluded mind of ignorance is the true mind of wondrous wisdom; hence it is called awakening to mind." It also says: "Among the lands of the ten directions, the supreme, foremost, and rare Dharma is only the One Vehicle Dharma, which is simply the one mind. Mind is Dharma, and Dharma is mind. What further dharma could one abide in? Therefore it is said, 'non-abiding.' If, apart from mind, one believes there is a dharma to be obtained, attachment to mind arises; if one abides in dharma-marks, one is like a person without eyes."

9. The Treatise on the Treasury of Treasures says: "Knowing that existence has decay, and knowing that nonexistence has no ruin—this is true knowing. To make no calculation concerning existence and nonexistence is not to calculate existence or nonexistence; this is the non-discriminating knowing of one's own nature."

10. Chan Master Shuimian said: "The single word 'knowing' is the gateway to all wonders. The mind of numinous knowing is true nature itself and is no different from the Buddha."

11. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: "Excellent, excellent! How is it that the Tathāgata is within their bodies, yet they are unaware of it?"

12. A treatise says: "The Buddha taught all dharmas in order to liberate all minds. Since I have no mind at all, what use have I for all dharmas?"

From the passages listed above, we may know that during the Buddha's forty-nine years of teaching, he spoke only one sentence: "Mind is unobtainable." Although the Buddha spoke, it was the same as never having spoken, because dharmas are originally empty. If the mind does not arise, the myriad dharmas do not arise. Mind pervades every place, and every place pervades mind. When this is thoroughly understood, one immediately enters one's own essential teaching. Therefore, one

who does not awaken to the fact that mind pervades every place falsely supposes that dharmas exist outside the mind; this is wholly inverted.

If one does not understand that the markless is precisely marks, one is an ordinary person who grasps at marks. If one understands that marks are precisely markless, one becomes one who has awakened to mind-only. Therefore, one must neither grasp at marks in seeking awakening nor leave marks behind in realizing the true. Neither identifying with nor departing from them, awakened nature reveals itself.

In conclusion: the methods of inspiring potential cannot be exhausted. Here they have been outlined broadly, so that everyone may gain a general understanding. First arouse great vows, establish the core principle, and clarify the origin of learning the Buddha's teaching. Learning the Buddha's teaching is further divided into three periods: first, the period of inspiring potential; second, the period of right cultivation; and third, the period of verification. This is the first period. But why should one learn the Buddha's teaching? One should ask oneself in return: Is one seeking oneself, or seeking the Buddha? Which is more important?

Only after one recognizes the fundamental point of one's own delusion and error can one sincerely and urgently seek medicine. The medicine is the Three Jewels. But what is Buddha? What is Dharma? What is Saṅgha? And what makes them treasures? Once the Three Jewels are understood, one may proceed to explain the self: first begin from the existence of self, without falling into emptiness, nothingness, or annihilation; then attain selflessness, without falling into emotional views and birth and death. Only then does one know that emotional views and birth and death are nothing but suffering.

One then explains suffering. Once the meaning of suffering is understood, one fears birth and death and seeks liberation. Yet one must understand how one is drawn into birth and death; its root still lies in ignorance. Therefore, ignorance is explained. This ignorance wrongly creates all kinds of karma; therefore, karmic obstacles are explained. As for how karmic obstacles may be eliminated, the answer is liberation alone; therefore, liberation is discussed. But without understanding the originating causes, one cannot obtain the true picture; therefore, cause and effect are discussed.

The arising and ceasing of cause and effect are the circulation of the illusory mind. Thus mind and intrinsic nature are discerned, so that one may know the marks of mind and what intrinsic nature is, and directly realize bodhi; therefore, bodhi is discussed. This echoes the statement on page four concerning the Mind-Seal school's core principle, "prajñā as the function," emphasizing that without prajñā the provisions for learning the Buddha's teaching are cut off. It is like a worker losing his useful tools: even with great strength, he can scarcely put it to use.

To inspire potential is to inspire the potential for prajñā. This prajñā is not possessed by the Buddha alone; everyone possesses it fully. Prajñā, in Chinese, means “great wisdom,” yet this does not exhaust its meaning. It should be described as “the great wisdom that thoroughly comprehends worldly and supramundane dharmas, principle and phenomena, in perfect harmony and without obstruction”; only then can one approximate even a fraction of its meaning. If one asks how this prajñā may be awakened, one must enter the path of right cultivation.

Section on Right Cultivation

The True Intent of Practice

Among those in the world who practice, many do not understand why they practice, what they practice for, or the meaning of their conduct. Though they prominently display the signboard of practice, what they do and what they cultivate are entirely at odds. As for whether their methods of practice are correct, that need not even be mentioned. At the very outset of practice, practitioners must not be in the least confused. Do not deceive yourselves with falsehood; only then will you avoid misleading others and further increasing your offenses. This is what is meant by first setting the causal ground right.

Filial piety, fraternal respect, loyalty, trustworthiness, and the like are the foundations on which a person stands in the world. It is precisely because people are not filial and respectful to their elders that they must cultivate filial piety and fraternal respect. These two terms were originally used to instruct and reform the degenerate among humankind. If people truly were not animals, filial piety and fraternal respect would have no use; if people truly were free of afflictions such as greed, anger, and ignorance, there would be no need to cultivate through the Buddhadharma. Therefore, before practicing, first ask yourself: Is your mind truly at peace? Have you truly eliminated greed, anger, and ignorance? If not, then you cannot simply dismiss practice as superstition and abandon it.

People in the world become so accustomed to falsehood that it seems natural to them. They do not realize that they may deceive others, but how can they deceive themselves? They may speak falsely, but how can they do so when an event actually arises? They may be false in ordinary times, but how can they be false at death? Thus, although everything else may be feigned, practice cannot be feigned. One originally practices in order to cast off falsity and cultivate truth; if one seeks falsehood again through practice, it is like a sick person seeking counterfeit medicine and thereby seeking death. How foolish! Practitioners must not go astray at this point.

People originally need not practice; it is precisely because their conduct is not in accord that they need to practice. Dharma in itself is neither wrong nor right; that which accords with one's conduct is right. Methods of practice likewise are neither right nor wrong in themselves; that which suits the recipient and accords with the conditions is right. Dharma is like medicine: when a dharma is suited to the recipient, it is called right practice.

Human beings naturally possess an inherent nature; therefore it is said, "What Heaven decrees is called nature." To act in accordance with one's nature is called the Way; therefore it is said, "Following one's nature is called the Way." Yet, having lost one's original state, one relies on Dharma in order to restore it; therefore it is said, "Cultivating the Way is called teaching." Teaching is the gift of Dharma. Nature is the essence, and the Way is its function. To speak of nature and the Way of Heaven is to speak of the Original Face.

To see the Original Face, one must first remove the karmic obstacles of ignorance and illuminate one's luminous virtue; that is, one restores one's original virtue through practice. But what is the appearance of this original virtue? It is originally pure, originally neither arising nor ceasing, originally capable of all things, with essence and function such as they are. It is originally luminous and nondual with the Buddha; only because of obscurations is it unseen in delusion. It is just like a drunkard: nothing whatsoever is lacking, but he is confused and inverted; once the wine wears off, he recovers. There is truly no difference. Though easy to say, this is very difficult for people to believe. Therefore, faith is the mother of practice.

The Buddha said that during the final forty years of the Dharma-ending age, explaining the nature of the Tathāgata-garbha to people would be the most difficult of all difficulties. Making the water of the great ocean dry by dripping feathers into it would still be easier; this, he said, would be more difficult still. It is not that giving the Dharma is difficult; rather, it is difficult for sentient beings to believe that they themselves are Buddhas.

For the moment, let us not speak of this profound Buddhadharma. Even when one merely says that human life is suffering, people still do not believe it. They plainly suffer and remain confused and inverted; all things are plainly impermanent, yet they delight in them without weariness. How could they be willing to believe? Only after receiving a severe blow do they awaken to the emptiness and suffering of impermanence; such people are already of superior capacity. Still others do not awaken even at death. As it is said, there are eight kinds of people with whom even the Buddha can do nothing.

First are mute people: this also refers to those whose mouths can speak but who do not speak of the true path. Second are deaf people: this also refers to those whose

ears can hear but who cannot hear the truth. Third are people in hell: when people are covered by ignorance and commit evil, they are people in hell. Fourth are people among hungry ghosts: this refers to those who seek greedily without satiation and cling miserly to what they possess. Fifth are people among animals: this refers to those who do not understand principle and righteousness.

Sixth are people in borderlands: this refers to those who give rise to wrong views and believe that people are annihilated after death. Seventh are people in the long-life heavens: this also refers to those who eat their fill all day and apply their minds to nothing. Eighth are those who receive the Dharma but do not diligently put it into practice. Though the Buddha has a compassionate heart, even he can do nothing for these eight kinds of people. People in the world are deluded, taking whatever cannot be seen with their eyes as unreal; this is why they are difficult to persuade and transform.

For example, consider a large piece of wood with a nail driven into it. When the nail is first driven in, half of it remains outside, so it is still easy to know of it. But as it is gradually driven fully into the wood, then over a long time becomes sealed beneath dust and mud, perhaps with glue and lacquer added, the surface becomes smooth and no trace can be seen. Even if one tells them, “There is a nail inside,” they will surely not believe it. This is the first difficulty in believing the Dharma.

If one then tells them that this nail must be pulled out, or else the wood will gradually rot and be damaged, they will surely not believe it. This is the second difficulty in believing the Dharma. Once they do believe, if one tells them that the nail is in a certain place and direction, and that they need only investigate deeply through one gate rather than searching in many places, they will surely not believe it. This is the third difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Once they have deep faith without doubt, remove the obscurations of glue and lacquer, and discover the nail head, one tells them that it certainly can be extracted. Yet they again fear the difficulty and do not believe. This is the fourth difficulty in believing the Dharma. If one tells them that there are various implements and skillful means—drills, pliers, and the like—they rely on themselves and their own strength, place no trust in others, and do not heed the instruction given. This is the fifth difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Once they have begun, one further instructs them in the method of extraction: first tighten it, then loosen it; shake it to make it move; remove the coarse part first, then the subtle part. Yet they again become confused and do not believe. This is the sixth difficulty in believing the Dharma.

When one formally tells them that this nail and the wood were originally unrelated, that it was wrongly driven in, and that this mind is ultimately unlike a nail—not an

object possessing form—then, if they simply recognize that originally there is no nail and that the very substance is empty, it will disappear of itself without being pulled out, they find it even more difficult to believe deeply. This truly is the most difficult of all difficulties: the seventh difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Today I tell you directly where the nail is and the principle by which it disappears of itself without being pulled out. Unless one has deep faith, how can one's faith remain free of resistance? This is why the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is so lofty that few can respond to it. Some practice for one or two thousand meditation sessions and still do not know how to apply it. In truth, they have not heard the essential meaning or understood the standpoint of this Dharma; instead, they doubt the Dharma and slander the teacher. Alas! What more can be said?

At the beginning of practice, one must first establish the main threads and nuances of practice. Once there is an outline, everything can proceed in an orderly way. Those who become doubtful and retreat midway all do so because the foundation has not been understood; they still act from emotional views. Within the section on right cultivation, faith, vows, and practice are set forth as the three great outlines, while realization belongs to the section on verification. First decide what to believe, then make vows. Once true vows have been made, one cannot fail to put them sincerely into practice. Thus, how to have faith in Dharma, how to make vows regarding Dharma, and how to practice Dharma are each divided into categories and explained one by one. Let us first discuss faith.

Right Faith

The Buddha taught the Dharma for forty-nine years; the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of scripture, with their thousands of words and myriad sayings, seek only to lead people to recognize the Original Face and believe that they are originally awakened rather than deluded. But why are they deluded? One must investigate this until one understands the reason; only then will one be willing to fear suffering and arouse the resolve.

The strength of one's resolve varies according to whether one's investigation is clear or unclear. Some people know absolutely nothing of suffering, and naturally they are wholly unwilling to arouse the resolve. Others have already aroused the resolve but are complacent and lax, half clear and half obscured; therefore, their resolve lacks urgency.

Still others, though earnest in their efforts, progress very slowly and do not gain intimate benefit from practice. This is because their understanding is not thorough: their faith is present but not firm, their vows have been made but are not great, and their practice is maintained but not constant.

The sūtras say that arousing the resolve is the first great difficulty. To arouse the resolve is to arouse the resolve of faith, vows, and practice. Believe that you are originally a Buddha, becoming unaware only because of delusion. Now that you understand why, so long as you are willing to practice and turn back, in this very life you can certainly see your true nature and attain Buddhahood. Resolving never to give up on yourself is called faith.

Having understood this principle and seen the suffering of sinking in saṃsāra and the happiness of the other shore, one naturally wishes to attain Buddhahood in this very life, without again wasting time through complacency. This is called vow. Having made the vow, one must put it into practice in one's affairs. This is called practice. The foregoing is principle; this is phenomena. When principle and phenomena accord, faith, vows, and practice are united as one.

The state of such unity has degrees of depth, and therefore the realization attained also has degrees of depth. Others cannot measure it; only one oneself knows. Those who know the Original Face and cherish vows to benefit themselves and others should determine a right path for people.

First set the causal ground right, so that they understand cause and effect and understand that, on the causal ground, they originally lack nothing and are not in the slightest different from the Buddha. They fail to attain the result only because they are unwilling to bring this forth. Since we bear this responsibility of exhortation, we must teach them to believe fully, greatly, and earnestly; otherwise, we will mislead others and harm their wisdom-life. The crucial point lies here. How can we not be cautious?

Faith means decisiveness without doubt. If even one or two hesitations remain, it is not faith. What does it mean to have complete faith? It means faith in principle and faith in phenomena, faith that is complete and whole, neither one-sidedly attached nor confused. Those who arouse faith should do as follows:

1. Believe that cause and effect are nondual: where there is a cause, there is a result. The Buddhas who have already attained fruition include Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Bhaiṣajyaguru. Before all fruition Buddhas became Buddhas, their Buddha-nature on the causal ground was originally complete. They too had once been confused and inverted; they turned from delusion to awakening, from awakening to practice, and from practice to realization. The process they passed through in the past is no different from ours today.

2. Believe that my present fundamental essence is originally innate awakening; the land is precisely mind, and originally it is a Pure Land. Only because of delusion have I become confused and inverted. Yet Buddha-nature is never destroyed and lacks

not the slightest thing; on the causal ground, one can completely attain Buddhahood.

For example, two pieces of jade can equally be carved into Buddhas. One has already been carved, while the other has not. The uncarved one must certainly be carved with the same majesty and lifelike perfection as the one already carved; only then does it accord with the right path. If one harbors an inferior and self-deprecating attitude, does not dare to accept that one is the same as the Buddha, and for the present leaves a little unlike the Buddha, intending to carve it only in a future life; if one mistakes the meaning of accepting one's rightful responsibility for arrogant self-conceit, then one's faith is incomplete.

3. Believe that not only am I thus, but that all classes of sentient beings equally possess Buddha-nature, and that I respect them as I respect the Buddha. Someone may unfortunately be a cat in this life while I am a human being; in another life I may become a cat, while that cat becomes a human. It may practice first, attain accomplishment, and come first to liberate me. How then could I slight or look down upon it?

Therefore, students of Buddhism should consider the three periods of time and must not judge the depth or shallowness of another's practice by the length of time they have practiced in this life. Only with such faith will one avoid falling into arrogance and self-conceit or looking down on later learners; nor will later learners abandon themselves because of this. Therefore it is said, "Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are without distinction." To understand principle but not penetrate phenomena is not complete faith.

4. Believe that the Dharma taught by the Buddha must not be rigidly grasped without flexibility. There are definitive teachings and nondefinitive teachings. Rely on the meaning, not on the words; do not cling to individual sentences or characters. When the Buddha teaches Dharma, a few words often explain many meanings. Never use emotional views to measure the intent of sages, clinging rigidly to the ancient and making faith dead rather than living. Take, for example, faith in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Do not rigidly cling to the West as the Land of Ultimate Bliss and suppose that the East must therefore be a land of suffering. You should know that, after describing all the adornments of the Western Land, the Amitābha Sūtra makes clear that there are Buddha lands throughout the ten directions. It plainly speaks of Pure Lands in the ten directions. Only because sentient beings are too changeable in temperament, vacillating and unable to practice single-mindedly, was the Western Land provisionally introduced. It is further explained that "west" is spoken of only when

reckoning from the Sahā world; it is designated as west merely by convention, so that one will not become attached to it. Such flexible faith alone is great faith.

V. Believe that, although one's Buddha-nature is complete, it is covered over by beginningless habitual tendencies. One's own efforts are by no means sufficient to cut them off; one must rely on the Buddha's power and the blessings of the Three Mysteries, so that results may be seen more swiftly. The more earnest one's faith, the firmer one's practice.

VI. Believe that every form of cultivation will inevitably encounter all kinds of māras and hardships. Only by remaining constant over a long time can one achieve accomplishment. Constancy over time means steadfastness; remaining unchanged means sincerity. Only through steadfast and sincere practice does faith become genuine and earnest.

VII. Believe that the transmission from master to master is itself the transmission of the Buddha. A spiritual friend is nondual with the Buddha. With complete reverence comes complete intimacy, and with complete intimacy comes complete benefit.

VIII. Believe that all dharmas are unsurpassed, for all were taught by the Buddha. It is only because times differ and sentient beings differ in capacity that there is no fixed dharma: teachings change in accordance with capacity. The Buddha has not entered nirvāṇa; the Dharma wheel constantly turns. To slander the Dharma is thus no different from slandering the Buddha.

IX. Believe that every kind of dharma gate has its own stages, and that these differ from one another. Each person's realization also differs. Do not rashly speculate about another's state, thereby forgetting your own practice and attainment.

X. Believe that even in the age of the decline of the Dharma there are people of sharp faculties. Buddhas and bodhisattvas cannot necessarily be seen in physical form; they cannot be sought through appearances or sounds.

XI. Believe that claiming attainment when one has not attained, or claiming realization when one has not realized, is false. Yet conjecturing by one's own thoughts is also false: to call what one does not know knowledge is equally unreal and equally a great delusion.

XII. Believe that to see one's nature is to become a Buddha. One should directly undertake this here and now: the Buddha does not deceive us, and in this life we can certainly realize the mind and see our true nature. This is sudden awakening and Buddhahood. Yet beginningless accumulated habits have not been eliminated and cannot be wholly swept away in this single life. The manifestation of supernormal powers and Buddhahood are in fact two different matters.

XIII. Non-Buddhist paths may also possess the five supernormal powers, but these differ from Buddhist realization. In Buddhism, one first seeks to open great wisdom; only after realizing the power of exhausting the outflows do the five supernormal powers arise. Then one will not be carried away by circumstances and fall into decline.

XIV. Believe that the cause of human suffering is simply the bondage of mental states and habitual tendencies. Once one knows to cut off habitual tendencies, one enters the proper path of cultivation and cuts off all suffering.

XV. Believe that all karmic obstacles and the cycling through the six realms are merely the activity of a mind of habitual tendencies. Heavy habits produce heavy karma; light habits produce light karma. To remove all karmic obstacles, one should investigate the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate.

XVI. Believe that in this age of decline, the Buddhadharma is waning, each generation worse than the last. If I do not resolve the matter in this very life, when shall I wait? If you encounter a spiritual friend, do not pass empty-handed through a mountain of treasure. Time will not return. You must not retain even the slightest thought of waiting. Only such faith is genuine and earnest.

Great Vows

Faith is the mother of the myriad practices, and vows are foremost among all undertakings. Whether an undertaking is good or evil, before it is done there must first be an aspiration. A vow is itself practice; practice and vows constitute true faith. To practice without a vow cannot be called faith; to make a vow without practicing cannot be called faith and vows. When faith is firm, practice has strength; when vows are great, one's undertakings are vast. As the causal ground is, so too is the ground of fruition. Therefore, one's vows must be vast.

Vast in what regard? It means setting one's aspiration high; this is the great vow. Buddhism is active: one should make the vow to rescue and liberate innumerable sentient beings throughout the great thousandfold worlds, and to eradicate such afflictions as greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, pride, and wrong views. In brief, one must actively turn from wrong to right, from the ordinary to the noble, from seeking one's own liberation to benefiting others, and from afflictions to bodhi.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: "This sūtra is not entrusted to the hands of ordinary sentient beings, nor even to bodhisattvas of the provisional vehicles; it is entrusted to great-resolve ordinary beings," and so forth. Great-resolve ordinary beings are those who, before practicing, first arouse correct and great vows.

The sūtra also says, “Upon first arousing the mind, one immediately becomes a Buddha.” Such is the power of vows. One should therefore not yield when righteousness calls. Not yielding does not mean contending greedily with others; it means not placing one’s vows behind those of others, and courageously acting when one sees what is right. It also comes from firm and earnest faith, from which vows naturally arise. The sūtra says, “Relying on sentient beings, great compassion arises; relying on great compassion, bodhicitta is aroused; relying on bodhicitta, one attains perfect and complete awakening.” Thus great vows give rise to great practice and lead one into the Mahāyāna stage. Therefore, vows must be vast, urgent, true, and not empty. Let us now speak further of vows.

I. Vow to see one’s nature and become a Buddha in this very life. Do not hesitate.

II. Vow to enter the proper path of cultivation through right view, to cut off the views of sentient beings, and to open the Buddha’s view.

III. Vow not to give rise to inferior wisdom or petty vows, thereby failing the compassionate blessings and expectations of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

IV. In order to repay the four debts of gratitude, vow to liberate all sentient beings so that they all become Buddhas. I will skillfully guide them through what I have realized.

V. Vow to rely on the fourteen stages of forbearance in the Benevolent Kings Prajñā Sūtra, cultivate diligently and vigorously, and never retreat from my original vows.

VI. Vow that, when this life of karmic retribution comes to its end, I may be reborn according to conditions in whatever land is appropriate—for example, in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Lapis Lazuli Buddha Land, or, after attaining accomplishment, return to the Sahā world to liberate sentient beings.

VII. Vow to arouse the four immeasurable minds, not to slight later learners, not to be arrogant or conceited, and to liberate all equally with compassion.

VIII. Vow to follow Samantabhadra’s Ten Great Vows, benefiting oneself and others, and dedicate the merit to the innumerable lands and innumerable sentient beings of the dharma realm.

If one takes the highest standard as one’s model, one attains only the middle; how much less if one takes a lower standard as one’s model. Therefore, the first requirement in making vows is that they be great. Buddhas and bodhisattvas will certainly not regard you as arrogant because your vows are great. Everyone can become a Yao or a Shun; do not yield when righteousness calls—this is an ancient and clear teaching. Yet empty vows without practice are no different from falsehood. We shall next discuss practice.

Putting into Practice

Practice means putting into practice; to verify principle through actual affairs is called practice, and it is the most important aspect of the section on right cultivation. Sentient beings suffer only because they encounter obstacles everywhere and do not understand why. This is an obstacle of principle. When they act, they incur fault; this is an obstacle of phenomena. Now, with regard to Buddhist principle, if one truly believes and does not doubt, principle is unobstructed. When practice brings realization, phenomena are unobstructed. When principle and phenomena interpenetrate, one enters the gate of nonduality: this is the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena. When essence and function are thusness itself and one attains great freedom, there is nonobstruction among phenomena. Yet without actual practice, realization can never be attained. Let us now speak further of practice.

I. The foremost principle of practice is not deceiving oneself. One must be earnest, urgent, and real. Without actual practice, one cannot attain realization or receive its benefit.

II. The aim of practice is steadfastness. Advance diligently and do not retreat. “Diligent” means single-minded; “advance” means not retreating, so that one benefits day by day.

III. The foremost principle of practice is not being self-righteous, lest views of self arise midway and lead to doubt and retreat.

IV. In practice, one should choose a dharma appropriate to one’s capacity. For someone in the twilight of life, one should seek only simple cultivation and need not pursue profound textual research. Study of the Dharma Characteristics School would merely be labor without benefit. One must make one’s own decision.

V. In practice, one should constantly keep faith and vows in mind, as though someone were behind one urging one onward, so that one does not retreat.

VI. Practice must be flexible; one must not rigidly cling to dead methods. If for a time there is no spiritual friend to determine the matter for me, I should assess my own position and circumstances. What I cultivate should proceed from broad to focused, advancing stage by stage, until I certainly reach an ultimate teaching. It is like entering a school with graduation as one’s goal: one should progress and advance a grade each year. How could remaining in the same grade be considered fidelity to one’s original vow? The vow to study immeasurable dharma gates is intended to prevent the fault of obstinate inflexibility; it does not mean greedily pursuing too much without practical application. Therefore, one should seek out and draw near to a spiritual friend.

VII. In practice, rely on the Dharma, not on persons. If one is swayed by personal feelings, one is placing one's very life in the hands of personal feelings. If a dharma is appropriate to one's capacity, one must never doubt the Dharma because of a person and thereby mislead oneself.

VIII. In practice, diligent effort is ascetic cultivation; it does not mean entering deep mountains and wearing poor clothing or eating poor food. All dharmas are remedies. Those who are indulgent and crave comfort must be made to accustom themselves to hardship in order to remove accumulated habits. But if one becomes rigidly attached to hardship, one will inevitably retreat midway or become false. This too depends upon flexible application.

IX. In practice, do not seek quick results. Haste prevents arrival. One should persevere constantly, as in accumulating wealth: over time it becomes abundant. If one removes the fault of craving quick results, meditative stability will also arise from this.

X. In practice, one must guard in advance against māras and hardships. Without encountering māras, one cannot become a Buddha. If doubt and retreat arise along the way, that is a māra of the mind. One need only persist without slackening—neither hasty nor slow, neither grasping nor rejecting. If a slightly superior state appears, never become self-satisfied; guard against the māra of delight taking advantage of an opening. Therefore, do not seek visions of light or Buddhas, nor seek supernormal powers beforehand.

XI. In practice, one must choose a path. Since methods of cultivation differ from one another, they cannot all be discussed on the same level. Some begin with the Pure Land, some with Chan or Esoteric Buddhism; some cultivate beginning with the eight consciousnesses, some beginning with the sixth and seventh consciousnesses; some rely on their own power, while others rely on the Buddha's power. One should not rigidly adhere to a single method, but apply the teaching according to capacity and choose a suitable path, so as not to enter a wrong road. (Therefore, the responsibility for transmitting a teaching lies with the master.)

XII. In practice, one must trust and take refuge in a spiritual friend. A spiritual friend does not simply mean someone who is learned; what is valuable is one who skillfully knows my capacity, recognizes my illness, gives the correct Dharma, and leads me onto a swift path. For example, another may be an eminent Chan master who thoroughly understands the essentials of the Dharma, while my capacity permits only Pure Land Buddha-remembrance. If he nevertheless guides me by the huatou method, causing me to practice for a long time without response, he is not a spiritual friend. Thus, although a sick person cannot do without relying on a physician, one must also have the capacity to make one's own decision.

XIII. Practice places importance on one's own cultivation. Do not draw in the mental states of others and forcibly compare or reconcile them with your own. This will inevitably produce doubt and confusion, or give rise to jealousy, thereby misleading oneself.

Realization means that one's intrinsic nature accords with the Buddha. Since it belongs to the section on verification of realization, it will be discussed only briefly here. Practitioners must not divide faith, vows, practice, and realization into four separate matters. When faith is great, vows are great; when faith and vows are united, this is the first step of practice. Practice is the journey toward fulfilling the purpose of faith and vows, gradually bringing realization. Thus, with each step of practice, faith and vows are realized to that extent. When practice is complete, faith and vows are complete, and realization is complete as well.

Practice turns in accordance with faith and vows; realization is perfected in accordance with all three. One is all, and one pervades all. The foolish forcibly divide them into four; the wise certainly know them to be one. Yet when actual realization is reached, even the one cannot be found. Though it cannot be found, one continues thought after thought without weariness or disgust. Thus know that one's effort cannot borrow even the slightest thing falsely from another; above all, do not deceive yourself.

Master Yangming spoke of the unity of knowing and acting, but regrettably did not explain the method. In fact, it is the same principle. The first step is intellectual understanding, in which there is no obstacle at the level of principle. The second step is knowing through practice: with each step one practices, one knows one step, and there is no obstacle in phenomena. The third step is realized knowing, the unity of knowing and acting—what is called the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena, and so forth.

The foregoing is only a general outline. We first draw forth faith and vows as the initial step of practice, to help sustain it. For if one practices without constancy, one cannot attain realization. Although the extent of one's practice and the completeness of one's accomplishment depend on the firmness of one's own faith and the greatness of one's vows, they also rely on the responsibility of the guiding teacher.

If sentient beings possess great aspirations but are not encouraged to arouse them, this is to mislead them and impair their wisdom-life. We know that in the Dharma-ending age, people of great capacity are few; yet they are not altogether absent. How could one abandon medicine merely because there is no illness? Practitioners are guided by what they first receive; from the outset, they should be urged to arouse a great resolve. If they truly cannot arouse one, nothing can be done about

it; nevertheless, the seed has already been planted, and in the end it will become a wholesome root.

The key to studying Buddhism is, first, that one's causal ground be right. To make the causal ground right, one must clearly recognize faith, vows, and practice, and carry them out with both feet firmly on the ground; then there is nothing one cannot realize. Realization is realized by oneself; others cannot know it. Thus, when one practices for oneself, one alone knows it. Do not seek recognition from others, nor need one seek to know and compare oneself with others' states. Comparison falls into inferior views; it is the discriminating view of sentient beings in the three realms and must never be entertained.

Discerning Main Threads and Nuances

At the beginning of practice, one should first lay out the main threads and nuances. Take faith, vows, and practice as the guiding outline and main thread, and then divide the particulars into subsidiary headings and nuances. The headings of practice are: A. What is to be cultivated? B. What is used to cultivate it? C. What Dharma is used to cultivate it? D. What is the method of cultivation? E. What constitutes ultimate completion in cultivation? F. What are the stages of cultivation? Each of these six divisions, moreover, has its own sequence.

Yet empty talk is useless; what is precious is personal practice. Merely listening to lectures without practicing is only intellectual understanding, not realization in actual experience. A painted cake cannot satisfy hunger and is ultimately of no use. Worldly people fear poverty and greedily seek wealth and possessions, not knowing that to lack the Way is true poverty—the poverty of life after life. Moreover, the wealth, fortune, and blessings of this life are also cultivated over former lives. It is regrettable that this cultivation was not thorough, and so one receives only a small recompense rather than a great reward. Therefore, those who hear the true Dharma and practice it are people of truly great wealth and nobility. It is lamentable that worldly people cannot distinguish the genuine from the false.

A. What Is to Be Cultivated?

Having read the Section on Inspiring Potential, practitioners should naturally have no doubt and know for themselves that what they cultivate is Buddhahood. But what is a Buddha? The answer is that a Buddha is one who is greatly awakened. Sentient beings are inverted and confused because they are not awakened, and thus fall into the fruition of suffering. Therefore, in this life one must cultivate the Buddha at the causal stage and attain accomplishment in this very life. It is like shooting an arrow at a target: this is not blind or misguided cultivation. Thus one should constantly arouse great vows, vowing swiftly to open awakened wisdom, attain Buddhahood in this very life, and liberate sentient beings. Therefore, beyond taking

refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, one must take refuge in one's own great bodhicitta. This is the first goal of practice.

B. What Is Used to Cultivate It?

Having heard the Dharma many times, practitioners naturally understand that cultivation means cultivating the mind. Yet if the mind cannot be obtained, what is there to cultivate with? The answer is: precisely use the mind to cultivate the mind, and cultivate until one realizes that the mind cannot be obtained. Only when one truly realizes that there is no wisdom and no attainment is there genuine attainment. As the sūtra says, to attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi is to realize the unborn; it is simply to know that nothing can be obtained.

C. What Dharma Is Used to Cultivate It?

The Dharma upon which one relies for practice is a most important question, yet it depends not on the Dharma but on the person. Simply put, one applies whatever medicine is appropriate to a person's illness; there is no fixed Dharma. The saying, "Rely on the Dharma, not on the person," is addressed to teachers. In relation to practitioners, it should be said, "Rely on the person, not on the Dharma." People are not all alike; no single Dharma can be rigidly applied to everyone.

The saying, "Rely on the meaning, not on the words," is addressed to those who rigidly cling to language. They do not understand what distinction there truly is between words and meaning: words express meaning, and this too is a Dharma. But since there is no fixed Dharma, one takes meaning as living and flexible. In truth, all dharmas are empty; who is there to rely upon? The saying, "Rely on wisdom, not on consciousness," emphasizes wisdom; it does not discard consciousness. Apart from consciousness there is no wisdom. Transforming consciousness into wisdom is also a Dharma.

The saying, "Rely on definitive meaning, not on nondefinitive meaning," means that one should seek what is ultimate. But what is ultimate, and what is not? One should employ expedient means with perfect adaptability: neither Dharma nor non-Dharma is precisely definitive meaning; this too means that there is no fixed Dharma. In short, one must be alive and flexible, not rigidly attached. Yet there are also fixed dharmas. Is this not contradictory? There are, however, words that can reconcile it.

Sentient beings suffer and wander through birth and death. They are like blind people entering the mountains: at every movement they stumble and fall. Having no eyes is their fundamental suffering; opening their eyes is the sole gateway to ending suffering. The true intent of studying Buddhism is to dispel delusion and turn toward awakening, to open the Buddha's knowledge and vision. Only by relying on the Dharma gate of prajñā can one ascend to the other shore.

The Heart Sūtra says that bodhisattvas and even the Buddhas of the three periods of time all rely on prajñāpāramitā. This meaning must never be shaken; even if sages were to arise again, they could not alter what I say. This is a fixed Dharma. Yet the blindness of blind people varies in depth, and karmic obstacles vary in heaviness. Accordingly, the methods used to open prajñā differ. Awakening wisdom and becoming a Buddha is the destination; whether one travels by boat or cart to reach it, there is no fixed method of conveyance. As for those who rigidly cling to a single Dharma and cannot adapt, while considering themselves diligent, one can only leave them to it.

The Mahāyāna and the two vehicles are merely provisional names. Because sentient beings have different causes and conditions, and their faculties are sharp or dull, the teachings are divided into greater and lesser vehicles. In truth, Buddha-nature is equal: there is only the One Vehicle, with no other vehicle. As the sūtra says, “This Dharma is equal, without high or low.” When worldly people mistakenly cling to one Dharma as superior or another as inferior, how are they different from passing judgment on the Buddha?

To distinguish one teacher’s practice as profound and another’s as shallow is likewise no different from examining and grading teachers; it becomes a great delusion. Practitioners should know that every Dharma is unsurpassed and every gate is foremost. The teacher’s responsibility is to offer the Dharma most suited to the recipient’s capacity; otherwise, the teacher misleads others and impairs their wisdom-life. The practitioner’s responsibility is to penetrate deeply into one gate; otherwise, craving many teachings brings no benefit, wastes one’s time, and is most regrettable.

I shall now briefly discuss the various schools as follows:

I. Chan School

When Buddhism came to China, the capacities of the people of Zhendan were extraordinary. The Hīnayāna teachings gradually declined, while the Chan school became the most powerful underlying influence. Regardless of gender, age, social status, literacy, Buddhist or non-Buddhist affiliation, all delighted in reading the Diamond Sūtra and the Heart Sūtra. Even a person guilty of the ten evil deeds could turn around and suddenly awaken, entering the gate.

The character of the Chinese people is unlike that of any other people: commoners disdain princes and nobles; they esteem righteousness and admire chivalry; they do not sharply distinguish between self and others in matters of money; and they can yield when at a disadvantage. Although they fall short of complete refinement and are somewhat lacking in orderly method in worldly affairs, their spirit is bold, free,

and expansive, delighting in freedom and ease. Without Chan potential cultivated in former lives, this could never be so.

Moreover, anyone capable of committing great evil possesses sharp faculties. Once such a person turns around, lays down the butcher's knife, and becomes a Buddha on the spot, it shows that this person’s roots from former lives are close to Chan. As for the other Dharma gates, all take return to the source as ultimate. The various teachings are all called such-and-such a school, with a name placed before “school”; Chan alone is directly called the school, for it is the school of all schools.

Chan is only an empty name; in this sense, every Dharma is Chan. It is only because capacities differ that some enter Chan directly. Such people are of the highest capacity, but they are now exceedingly rare. Moreover, there is a lack of qualified teachers and students. Chan relies upon one’s own power, and without ten or twenty years one cannot penetrate the three barriers and directly see true reality. In the present age it seems unsuited to most people, and widespread application is difficult. One can only use an indirect route to reach it: enter Chan through the Pure Land, or use Esoteric Buddhism for confirming realization in reverse. By borrowing the Buddha’s power and combining it with one’s own power, accomplishment can be attained more swiftly. This is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to return to the source through Esoteric Buddhism.

II. Vinaya School

This is the school of precepts and discipline. The Vinaya was established by the Buddha; precepts are observed by practitioners. Confucianism has the three things to revere, the three reflections, and vigilance in solitude; all these are precepts. Daoism establishes registers of merits and demerits; these too are precepts. In Buddhism, the ordinary foundation is the five precepts: abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants.

There are also the eight precepts; the bodhisattva precepts comprise ten major precepts and forty-eight minor precepts; bhikshus have two hundred and fifty precepts, and bhikshunīs five hundred. In truth, there are eighty-four thousand precepts, expressing the prohibition of evil thoughts in every situation and every state of mind. Thus, precepts have the meaning of prohibition, and this itself is cultivation. The visible aspects of precepts are called their marks and observances, such as the three thousand dignified deportments and eighty thousand subtle practices.

The invisible aspects are called the virtue of precepts, the qualities of precepts, the mind of precepts, and the fragrance of precepts. Taking the fragrance of mind as precepts does not depart from the essence of precepts; here, attaining the precepts means realizing the empty mind. The former precepts restrain the ten evil deeds;

these restrain the roots of the ten evil deeds. Receiving precepts is merely a ritual formality; what matters is observing them in everyday life. To possess only the marks of precepts without their essence is to violate the fundamental great precepts and is called a great falsehood.

Therefore, one first speaks of precepts, learns precepts, and attains precepts, and only then confers precepts; originally, there is such a sequence. But for beginners, when explaining precepts, one first teaches abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and so forth. This remedies the result. Advancing further, one restrains greed, anger, and ignorance. This remedies the cause—that is, the mind. Advancing further still, one restrains the point from which greed, anger, and ignorance arise, realizes the empty mind, and uproots their source. This is truly attaining the precepts: it remedies the cause within the cause, the mind within the mind.

All schools cultivate precepts. The Chan school observes precepts through non-observance, maintaining the highest discipline—something ordinary people cannot even dream of. Esoteric Buddhism employs the empowerment of the three mysteries: the three karmas are like locks. When the hands form mudrās, bodily karma has no way to arise. When the mouth holds mantras, verbal karma has no way to arise. When the mind abides nowhere, mental karma has no way to arise. These precepts arise naturally; they are not empty words. This is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to cultivate precepts through Esoteric Buddhism.

III. Tiantai School

This school takes the practice of calming and contemplation as its core. It is to contemplate mind with mind; when contemplation reaches the ultimate ground, emptiness, provisional existence, and the middle are all not established. Yet relying on one's own power, it is not easy to reach ultimate completion. Nowadays, the Tiantai school only lectures on calming and contemplation without actual practice. In the Mind-Seal school's practice on the meditation cushion, cultivating and realizing samādhi is the cultivation of calming; off the cushion, constantly maintaining awareness and contemplating emptiness is the activation of contemplation. Yet because it relies on the Buddha's empowering blessings, its realization differs. This is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to cultivate calming and contemplation through Esoteric Buddhism.

IV. Dharma Characteristics School

This is the Consciousness-Only school. Its purpose is that worldly people cling firmly to appearances; therefore, it has no choice but to discuss appearances in order to dismantle them, ultimately leading to the word emptiness. If people had sharp faculties and directly broke through appearances, there would be no need for such labor. The four-line verse of the Diamond Sūtra could at once sweep everything

clean away. Yet people now merely discuss Consciousness-Only without practicing it, thereby losing its original intent.

The division into the schools of nature and characteristics has existed for a long time. The Buddha's intention was to enable everyone to break through appearances, remove afflictions, and take realization of the mind-ground as fundamental. Yet the opposite has occurred: Buddhist learning has instead been treated as an object of scientific research. If one could truly investigate it and realize emptiness, one could also attain liberation.

Yet some enter the sea to count its sands, thinking they have made a good calculation for themselves. They add fetter upon fetter, forcibly dividing hearing, contemplation, and cultivation into three separate stages. Mistakenly believing that in this life one may only hear, that one may not yet contemplate, much less cultivate, they do not realize that what is taught is principle, while verification in actual practice lies in cultivation. To proceed from hearing to contemplation is itself right cultivation; if one does not contemplate, it is equivalent to not having heard. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma does not grasp at appearances. During meditation, one is not permitted to seek visions of light or Buddhas; everything is to be shattered. This is the principle by which our Mind-Seal school uses esoteric practice to break attachment to appearances.

V. The Pure Land School

Pure Land means that the mind is free of defiled attachment. Returning to the original source, it pervades the ten directions; the path of language is cut off, and the activity of mind comes to an end. Defilement cannot be established, nor does purity exist. This is the truly unsurpassable Pure Land. Yet sentient beings are by nature too restless to concentrate on one thing. Therefore, the Buddha specifically taught of a single Western Land in order to strengthen their faith and vows; later generations accordingly established it as a school.

Pure Land and Chan were originally not separate schools. This Dharma universally embraces practitioners of all three capacities. Practitioners of middling and lesser faculties have the Western Pure Land as a destination toward which to gather their minds, while those of superior faculties directly realize the Pure Land as mind-only. They may both plant causes and attain fruition; flower and fruit occur simultaneously, as with the lotus. Therefore, it is also called the Lotus school. Those who practice the fourth mudrā of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma may be reborn in the Western Pure Land. From this, one may know that Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism are likewise not separate.

In Esoteric Buddhism, the great Amitābha practice is cultivated together with longevity practices; the principle is the same. Yet the Pure Land is exceedingly subtle

and wondrous. Those who do not understand the mind-ground do not know its wonder; they either regard it as roundabout and remote or find it insipid. I have often compared it to clear water from a pure spring: only one who can savor its clarity and subtlety has genuine skill. Now that I study esoteric practice, I understand the wondrousness of the Pure Land. This, too, is the principle by which our Mind-Seal school returns to the Pure Land through esoteric practice.

VI. Esoteric Buddhism

It is also called the Mantra school. Mantras are the language of the dharmakāya Tathāgata. Because they reveal the true characteristics of all dharmas and accord with reality as it is, they are also called dhāraṇīs, meaning comprehensive retention: they encompass all dharmas and retain immeasurable meanings. As Master Kōbō said, a single character contains a thousand principles. They are also called "brightness," referring to the radiant wheel of the Tathāgata's wisdom, which manifests the pure and perfect luminosity of its own essence.

When they are recited, they can eliminate the karmic obstacles of ignorance. They are also called "secret," meaning subtle, hidden, and comprehensive, because mantras are expressions inwardly realized by the dharmakāya Tathāgata. Thus Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva compared them to secret passwords in an army. They are also called yoga, meaning the correspondence of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind. Through the empowerment of the three mysteries, one will certainly attain Buddhahood in this very body—a supreme benefit unknown even to those at equal enlightenment and the tenth bhūmi.

Maṇḍala is a Sanskrit term meaning cyclical, complete, and fully endowed. There are four kinds, each inseparable from the others, representing the perfect adornment of the myriad virtues of the dharmakāya Tathāgata. What are these four?

1. The Great Maṇḍala: the forms and excellent marks of Buddhas and bodhisattvas as depicted in colored paintings. (All sentient beings in the dharma realm.)

2. The Samaya Maṇḍala: the vajras, lotuses, swords, wheels, jewels, and various mudrās held by the deities. (The world of material objects.)

3. The Dharma Maṇḍala: the seed syllables and mantras of each Buddha, bodhisattva, and deity. (Written mantras.)

4. The Karma Maṇḍala: the postures, standing and sitting, joyful and wrathful expressions, dignified bearing, and activities of the deities. (All ritual actions and undertakings are karma.)

Esoteric Buddhism has two divisions: doctrinal forms and practical forms. Doctrinal forms concern the scope and distinctions of the teachings and principles. In

summary, there are two: first, the gate of distinguishing Exoteric and Esoteric teachings, which differentiates the superiority and inferiority of the two teachings, assesses the relative depth of the ten stages of abiding, and clarifies the unsurpassable true meaning of Esoteric Buddhism; second, the gate of what is distinctive to one's own school, which concerns the names and meanings of its various subtle principles, limited to this school and beyond the reach of other schools. Its two great scriptures are the Mahāvairocana Sūtra and the Vajraśekhara Sūtra. Therefore, its teachings and principles are explained through the true meanings of such letters as a and ha; collectively, this is called doctrinal forms. Practical forms, by contrast, concern the rules of cultivation. There are four kinds, called the four secret methods:

1. Pacification: eliminating the offenses, karmic obstacles, and inauspicious matters of oneself and others.

2. Increase: removing suffering, extending life, and gathering supramundane merit and virtue.

3. Subjugation: subduing one's own ignorance and disturbances, and counteracting a nation's enemies.

4. Attraction: receiving others' respect and affection, and giving rise to a great, unobstructed, impartial mind of compassion.

Wherein lies the ultimate difference between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism? The exoteric is expedient; the esoteric is true and real. Although the two teachings differ in speed, slowness, superiority, and inferiority, their ultimate destination in attaining unsurpassable bodhi is one. In Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna, Aśvaghoṣa Bodhisattva generally indicates that attaining Buddhahood through Exoteric Buddhism necessarily requires three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. Mantra Esoteric Buddhism alone specifically expounds the principle of attaining Buddhahood in this very body.

Through the cultivation of a single thought, a single lifetime, and a single moment, one fully possesses immeasurable merit and wisdom, transforming the defiled physical body of an ordinary being into the unsurpassable fruition and virtue of Mahāvairocana's dharmakāya. Therefore, the Great Wonderful Vajra Sūtra says: "Without transforming the dharmakāya, one attains the undefiled fruit." This is the profound principle distinctive to this school.

Moreover, Esoteric Buddhism begins cultivation from the eight consciousnesses, seeking the cause on the basis of the fruition. Such schools as Pure Land, Dharma Characteristics, and Tiantai all begin cultivation from the six consciousnesses, seeking the fruition on the basis of the cause; therefore, they differ in speed.

Esoteric Buddhism relies upon the empowering strength of Vairocana's majestic virtue to realize immeasurable samayas in an instant. Through inconceivable methods, it can transform the innate seeds of attachment to self in practitioners and give rise to vajra seeds.

This is the fundamental point in which it differs from other schools. How could those who have not cultivated Esoteric Buddhism measure the Buddha's intent by the views and perceptions of ordinary beings? Esoteric Buddhism includes East Asian Esoteric Buddhism and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism.

During the Tang dynasty, Japanese students came to study in China and honored Master Kōbō as their patriarch. Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism is the esoteric tradition transmitted in Tibet. First there was the Red school; later Tsongkhapa appeared and separately established the Yellow school. Their methods are largely similar, with minor differences. The Yellow school proceeds step by step according to a fixed sequence and tends more toward form-based practice, whereas the Red school also cultivates formless Esoteric Buddhism.

In former times, Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, transmitted the Chan school in the Eastern Land and the formless esoteric vehicle in Tibet. Living Buddha Nona explained this in great detail. Among the recently transmitted teachings of the Great Seal, the essential gateway of the Mahāyāna path, is an essential gateway for sudden entry into true wisdom; it speaks extensively of the principle of dharmakāya meditation. But in the beginning, the Red school transmitted its teachings to unsuitable persons, and thus the harmful tendency toward biased emptiness became widespread; some even committed evil deeds. This did not suit the capacities of the Tibetan people, and this was why Tsongkhapa emerged.

East Asian and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism both cultivate the return of the myriad dharmas to the One, using the one characteristic to eliminate all characteristics. Yet they have not reached the principle of asking where the One returns. Only the Chan school directly points to the mind-ground and does not proceed through stages. Among recent transmissions, only the Dharma transmitted by Living Buddha Nona has somewhat incorporated Chan, with which it accords. He repeatedly praised the Heart-of-Heart Dharma as the unsurpassable esoteric vehicle.

As for the founding patriarch of the Mind-Seal school, Master Dayu was truly its patriarch. He first left home on Mount Lu and cultivated Pure Land practice. Later, while paying homage to the sūtras, he became gravely ill and nearly died; he later encountered bandits and again nearly died. Thereafter, in samādhi, he saw the Venerable Samantabhadra, who conferred empowerment upon him and transmitted the great Heart-of-Heart Dharma, together with various secret mudrās and mantras. After seven years of arduous cultivation, he attained realization,

descended the mountain, and opened the Mind-Seal Dharma gate, becoming the patriarch of the Mind-Seal school.

This Dharma penetrates all schools, verifies the mind-ground, and opens a new field beyond Esoteric Buddhism. It must not be transmitted recklessly: it is bestowed when the recipient's capacities accord. It cannot be measured by reason; only actual verification reveals it. It neither grasps at appearances nor rejects all appearances. Taking Mind-Seal as the core principle, prajñā as the function, dhāraṇī as the method, and the Pure Land as its ultimate destination, its practice differs greatly from those of other schools, and the speed of its realization also differs from other methods. Some are taught Chan meditation; others receive different esoteric practices, through which they are gradually introduced as preliminary expedient means. What has been said above concerning the various schools is only a general outline.

If practitioners wish to ask which Dharma they should cultivate, this may first be discussed. Before this association transmits a Dharma, it first examines the person's capacities, circumstances, available time, physical strength, and so forth, and only then imparts the Dharma, so as to avoid the fault of doubt and retreat midway. As for the methods of practice, they should be explained as follows.

D. Methods of Practice

We have now entered the Section on Right Cultivation; this is of the utmost importance!

I. Cultivating Merit and Wisdom Together

The Buddhadharma fundamentally aims to save the world, teaching people to liberate themselves from all suffering and adversity; to eliminate such evils as deceit, cruelty, harming others, and benefiting neither oneself nor others; to enable people to be peaceful and at ease; not to give rise to needless fears; not to plant needless evil causes; and not to undergo needless painful results. Then the world will naturally be at peace. "Great" means universal and extensive. If everyone held an attitude of equality, how could they create such karma as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech?

Yet all the various sufferings and afflictions before our eyes, whether one has money or not, arise from scant blessings. Those who have money do not use it to create blessings, but allow it to be exhausted. They do not plant fields of blessings for the future, and become impoverished in their own lifetimes, or their children and grandchildren squander everything. Those without money do not understand the causes of their poverty: it is all due to miserliness in past lives. The more karma one

creates, the more severe one's suffering becomes. The wise worry about causes, not results; the noble worry about the Way, not poverty.

Understand that the sufferings of this life are like a shortage of grain this year: the cause is that too little was planted last year. If one cultivates and sows seeds today, one will surely harvest next year. One must never borrow next year's grain in advance, nor may one say that there will be no next year. Those who do so are people of scant blessings.

Because of the conditions of scant blessings, it is difficult to encounter a good spiritual teacher. If one has merit and virtue, various causes and conditions will naturally lead one into Buddhism. Thus, whether one has blessings does not depend on being poor or wealthy. A poor person willing to cultivate has the mark of truly great wealth and nobility.

I have often said that if a person seeks wealth, this is the mark of poverty; if one were not poor, why would one seek it? If a person seeks rank, this is the mark of lowliness; if one were not lowly, why would one seek it? The root lies in one's own perception of oneself as poor and lowly. Appearances are created by the mind; causes necessarily bear results. This is not harsh criticism. In general, for people given to excessive worry, adverse conditions gradually become complete, and before long they will certainly encounter setbacks or reversals. Worry necessarily brings poverty, and vexation necessarily brings illness; these are inherently connected.

Moreover, people of scant blessings must inevitably be busy with clothing, food, and shelter, and have no leisure for cultivation. They are the most pitiable of people. Therefore, when encountering a person of scant blessings, one should first enable that person to cultivate blessings and remove the obstacles to entering the Way. Those who have blessings should be enabled to cultivate wisdom while also nurturing their blessings. This is called cultivating merit and wisdom together; it is not something that a person without blessings can undertake.

The method of cultivating blessings emphasizes giving. Of the six pāramitās, giving is first and is called planting a field of blessings. Those who have money and are generous need not necessarily be urged to give. But those who are miserly or impoverished should be encouraged to give more: first, to teach them generosity and eliminate their habitual greed; second, to plant various wholesome roots and support their causes and conditions. This is not comparable to worldly ways of emphasizing personal favors and weighing amounts according to wealth or poverty.

With the inferior views of ordinary beings, people seek the Buddha solely to seek blessings, believing that blessings are something the Buddha can bestow and that they can obtain simply by asking. If they do not obtain them, doubt and slander

arise. Others seek the Buddha for wisdom, believing that wisdom too is something the Buddha can bestow and that they can obtain simply by asking. If they do not obtain it, they likewise give rise to doubt and slander. In recent times, there are many who seek the Way but few who practice it; many who cultivate the Way but few who realize it. All of this is due to this fault.

Practitioners should know that merit and wisdom must be cultivated together. The Buddha merely points out the Dharma gate, teaching you to plant wholesome causes first, so that you may later obtain the rewards of merit. If you seek wealth and honor, you should eliminate miserliness and first cultivate generosity. If you seek to open wisdom, you should draw near to good spiritual friends, and you must likewise first cultivate generosity. To cultivate merit is itself true wisdom. Whoever truly possesses wisdom will surely be willing to eliminate greed and anger in order to create merit. Thus, cultivating merit is precisely cultivating wisdom. Foolish people forcibly divide the two; this too is a most biased attachment.

II. Samādhi and Wisdom Mutually Support One Another

When worldly people enter the Way, they too know to seek samādhi. “Knowing where to stop, one can then become settled” is the samādhi spoken of by the Confucians and adopted by the Daoists. Yet this is merely stillness and cannot be called samādhi. Samādhi means being equally settled in activity and stillness; it means remaining undeluded when encountering circumstances; it means engaging with everything while remaining unstained by everything, without attachment or abiding.

Samādhi and wisdom are not two. They are provisionally named as two: when there is samādhi, wisdom is present within samādhi; when there is wisdom, samādhi is present within wisdom. They mutually support one another, like fire and its light. Though their names may be two, they cannot be separated. Worldly people seek samādhi by forcibly suppressing thoughts so that none arise, and by cutting off seeing and hearing; they take this to be samādhi. How are they any different from wood or stone? This is to die in empty nothingness and fall into annihilationism. When activity returns, they will inevitably become deranged and turn demonic.

Moreover, worldly people mistakenly cling to samādhi and wisdom as two separate matters, and thus distinguish between having much samādhi and little wisdom. They do not know that this is not the ultimate teaching. Samādhi and wisdom are inherently equal, with no distinction of greater or lesser. It is only because worldly people have habitual tendencies—some favor activity and some favor stillness—that those who favor activity are said to have more wisdom, while those who favor stillness are said to have more samādhi. In truth, both are still far from samādhi and wisdom. Samādhi and wisdom should arise from the essence and function through

their mutual support and interpenetration. Right view free from delusion is called samādhi. Samādhi means right concentration. The various names for meditative concentration are now explained below.

(1) Samādhi: this is the general name for all forms of concentration. It encompasses all dharmas, holds immeasurable meanings, and gathers in the mind in all meditative concentrations.

(2) Śamatha: this means cessation, regulation, and extinguishing. It can regulate the unwholesome dharmas of the faculties, so that there is no defiled attachment. It also means tranquility and is called the characteristic of samādhi.

(3) Samāpatti, also called samā: it means cancellation, or expedient cessation in accordance with conditions. It is rendered here as “equal attainment,” meaning that within equanimous maintenance one can attain a superior stage: maintaining evenly, free from both torpor and restlessness, one reaches supreme samādhi and the stage of the sages.

(4) Dhyāna: this is rendered as “quiet contemplation,” with quiescent cessation as its meaning. Samādhi and wisdom interpenetrate; thus, there is contemplation within stillness. It is therefore not an indeterminate state. It differs from the Tiantai threefold contemplation, for that system investigates the natures and characteristics of all dharmas and develops understanding through their meanings. Here, practice is more often based on mind: no object of contemplation is established; the two extremes are stilled, and discrimination ceases.

(5) Vipaśyanā: this is rendered as contemplation. It means illuminating principle with wisdom and is therefore called right view; it is also called clear seeing. When contemplative practice is accomplished, object and wisdom accord with one another, and one clearly sees one’s nature without obscuration.

(6) Upekṣā: cessation and contemplation are equal. Cessation is samādhi, and contemplation is wisdom. It also means neither contending nor proceeding, and may be called relinquishment: one does not contend over annihilationism or eternalism, nor proceed within emptiness or existence, because one relinquishes the two extremes.

(7) Madhyama: this means not clinging to the Middle Way. The Middle Way too is only a provisional designation and should not be established.

(8) Vitarka and vicāra: these are rendered as initial examination and sustained investigation, and are also called awareness and contemplation. The stirring of the coarse mind is called awareness; the discrimination of the subtle mind is called contemplation.

(9) Samādhi: this is rendered as harmonizing, upright concentration; it is also called right thought, right concentration, and right reception. It means that when one enters this samādhi, one does not receive any dharmas.

In sum, samādhi and wisdom mutually support one another and all return to the gate of the syllable A. A signifies that all dharmas are originally unborn. Arising is dependent arising and is originally unobtainable. Upon realizing and entering the ocean of Vairocana's nature, this single syllable alone is taken as the true mantra, through which one freely establishes the great maṇḍala. Ordinary beings lack wisdom and cannot clearly contemplate the source of all dharmas; they falsely suppose that there is arising. Thus, the profound secret treasury is concealed by sentient beings themselves; only through realization can it be known.

All true mantras do not depart from the fifty letters; they are all the general characteristics of the Buddhadharma. The syllable A stands first and encompasses them all. Each of these fifty letters is a gate to liberation. Liberation means attaining the forbearance of the unborn dharmas through samādhi and wisdom. If worldly people understood this meaning, realized the unborn, and gave rise to no appearances, what evil could they commit? What offense could they violate? And what precepts would there then be to uphold? Such precepts are implicit within samādhi and wisdom and cannot be fathomed by foolish people, who rashly conclude that practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism and Chan observe no precepts. Yet the Dharma gate of observing precepts must also be explained, for it is convenient for beginners.

III. Integrating the Essence and Characteristics of the Precepts

Precepts have two aspects: their essence and their characteristics. The characteristics concern deportment; how could they be discarded? Yet without their essence, they verge on falseness. The essence of the precepts belongs to mind. Although mind is without characteristics, if one still retains an idea of "without characteristics," this remains a characteristic and therefore still belongs to the realm of characteristics. One must reach pure emptiness and selflessness, with no agent of action, no action performed, no one who observes precepts, and no precepts observed. Only then does one truly and completely possess the great precepts.

Those of inferior wisdom do not understand this. Some foolish people mistakenly take it to mean breaking the precepts and run about shouting their objections. Others mistakenly believe that the Chan school advocates freedom and indulgence, and that there is originally no need to uphold precepts; thus they become unrestrained and dissipated. One side wants to overthrow them, and the other wants to preserve them, but in truth neither understands the meaning of precepts. This is why matters come to such a state.

Precepts have the mind of restraint, and the Dharma provides standards for it; hence they are called discipline. Sentient beings are inverted, and their three karmas are impure. For those of lesser capacity, one first enables them to understand the characteristics of the precepts. Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct have manifest forms that can be seen, and they can readily understand them. Therefore, one first teaches the five precepts and also clarifies the law of cause and effect to confirm them, thereby restraining their conduct. This is restraint with respect to results.

For those of higher capacity, one teaches the essence of the precepts. Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct are results; where is their cause? One then knows that greed, anger, and ignorance are their roots. If the karma of intention is pure, evil karma naturally ceases. This is to restrain the mind: when the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure. This is restraint with respect to causes. For those of the highest vehicle, one teaches that essence and characteristics are nondual, and that both are empty through conditions. Mind cannot be obtained; on what could evil depend in order to arise? When subject and object are both forgotten, this is called the mutual support of samādhi and wisdom.

If there is defiled attachment, it is called breaking the precepts. Nothing is stricter than this in the precepts and discipline. Therefore, the precepts of non-precept are called the great precepts. After the Buddha entered parinirvāṇa, he instructed sentient beings to take the precepts as their teacher. This means relying on one's own mind and using this Dharma to regulate it. If one merely keeps the external forms and deportment without seeking within one's mind, one is instead led into falseness. How could that be right? There are many worldly people who do evil and act falsely; this is precisely their ailment. When practitioners speak of precepts, are they not afraid of breaking them? I shall therefore tell them how frightening the karmic consequences of breaking precepts are.

(1) Those who commit killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct create their own karma and receive its results themselves. If they are willing to undergo retribution, let them boldly do as they please. For anyone who does not understand the principle of cause and effect through the three periods of time, first explain to them the cause and effect of the three periods of time and the harm of breaking precepts. Once they truly and deeply believe, they will naturally cease creating evil karma. But this applies to those who have not yet understood Buddhist principles.

(2) As for lay practitioners who already understand Buddhist principles, how could they fail to know the precepts and discipline? Yet they still do not understand what is called breaking precepts, because their mind-ground is not yet clear. If breaking precepts meant only committing killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct, then the Buddha's precepts would be only one part, and all the rest could be abandoned.

Therefore, know that the precepts of mind are the precepts. For now, let us not discuss such profound meanings as mind being empty and free of defilement.

It is enough to speak simply: not giving rise to evil thoughts is observing the precepts. But what are evil thoughts? One should tell them that greed, anger, and ignorance are as culpable as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. If one's own mind is impure and constantly gives rise to vexation and disturbance, blaming Heaven and resenting others, this is a grave breach of precepts, for where there is a cause there must be a subsequent result. Therefore, hating someone for breaking precepts is itself breaking precepts. If one does not understand this principle, one is no different from someone who denies cause and effect, which is even more frightening.

Bodhisattvas do not see the faults of others. This has two meanings. First, "not seeing" means not blaming them and not giving rise to a view of self in determining their right and wrong. Second, "not seeing" means not abiding in attachment and not taking their faults to heart. The former is compassion for their transgressions; the latter is wisdom that does not grasp at appearances. This is what is called the dual operation of wisdom and compassion. Bodhisattvas never depart from the Mahāyāna vow: generosity restrains greed, great compassion restrains anger, and prajñā restrains ignorance. Thus, cultivating every dharma does not depart from the Buddhadharma or from the precepts. Yet inwardly and outwardly one must be alike, and essence and characteristics must be integrated. Only then can one be said to have attained the precepts; otherwise, one cannot escape delusion.

IV. Integrating Samādhi, Wisdom, and Emptiness

All Dharma gates of the pāramitās—whether six, ten, or even eighty-four thousand—take prajñā as their chief. The three baskets and twelve divisions of the teachings never ultimately depart from this Dharma gate. Wisdom realizes emptiness and thereby naturally becomes samādhi; samādhi can give rise to wisdom; wisdom in turn realizes emptiness. Together, they are like a turning wheel, whose wondrous functioning is inexhaustible. Cultivating these three has no before or after; they are activated simultaneously. This is the most essential point and must receive special attention.

You have associated with one another for a year. Speaking impartially, would those who have realized through practice hope that others knew it? Moreover, each knows for themselves whether something is cold or warm; how could others know? Yet, in order to avoid misleading people in the future, it is necessary to understand the reason clearly. The benefits you have received truly come from the purity of your faith and your earnest effort in practice. You have not failed the many years of

ascetic practice, the doubts and slanders endured, and the painstaking efforts to spread the Dharma undertaken by my revered teacher, Master Dayu.

Moreover, all of you have passed through doubt and slander. Later, your spirit of inquiry became strong: unwilling to take what you heard as though it were what you had seen, you yourselves practiced six or nine sessions every day, trained in contemplation, and practiced according to the Dharma. You then turned toward Right Faith. Unless you had truly received real benefit, how could you have come to such deep and unwavering faith?

You should know that among fellow practitioners, some have practiced three or four thousand sessions and still do not understand the reason, nor can they apply the practice. Where exactly does the cause lie? Do you know? You have investigated together for only a year, yet your own sense of what you have gained differs. Wherein lies the cause? What you have gained lies in practice within non-practice. What is practice within non-practice? It means that even when not formally practicing, one is still practicing.

You have deeply grasped the subtlety of the practice. You do not cultivate only when seated in the Buddha hall; rather, you are willing everywhere to train in contemplation and realize emptiness, applying prajñā even in places of recreation. You train until you gather the mind into oneness; this is precisely putting it into function. This is not true of this practice alone. Whether one cultivates Pure Land or Chan, every Dharma should be practiced in this way and can be practiced in this way. It is not that Dharma methods themselves are divided into sudden and gradual; the fault lies in practitioners' failure to understand how to apply them.

How could cultivation be limited to two hours? Throughout the six periods of day and night, constantly abide in the ocean of vows; remain vigilant at every moment, contemplate the mind in accordance with circumstances—this is called right cultivation. What is called practice on the meditation cushion is only cultivation of the essence. Entering śamatha is called cessation; through cessation one attains samādhi, and ignorance suddenly vanishes. Once the root is attained, do not worry about the branches. This is the marvelous secret of capturing the king before capturing the bandits.

What is called practice off the meditation cushion is simply applying it everywhere. Dhyāna is quiet contemplation and is called contemplation. Contemplation gives rise to wisdom; wisdom's contemplation realizes emptiness; and application removes habitual tendencies. The depth of the work varies, but there is no fixed Dharma and no fixed time. With much practice, one becomes proficient. These are the two great outlines, advancing together like two wheels; never neglect either one. It is also like testing a blade: the former is sharpening, and this is using it. Without using it, one

does not know whether it is sharp or dull; without sharpening it, it cannot become keen. In brief, one must contemplate the mind without interruption. In walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, everywhere is practice, and everywhere wondrous functioning arises.

Ordinary people's cultivation necessarily proceeds through stages: first, practicing in order to seek awakening; second, practicing correctly after awakening. Practice undertaken to seek awakening is fundamentally the opening through ignorance and turning onto the right path. This depends on the instruction that enables one to enter realization from a good spiritual teacher, together with one's own strenuous effort in inquiry and investigation. There will surely come a day of sudden breakthrough. The word hu is a term used in Chan circles, referring to the vast and open state of mind at the time of awakening.

Proper cultivation after awakening means, after prajñā has opened, clearing away habitual tendencies and entering the time of true practice. This practice consists simply in constantly maintaining awareness and contemplating emptiness. The books of Chan koans and recorded sayings are to be used after one has awakened, as aids for practicing their application; they are not to be read before awakening in the hope of attaining awakening. Before awakening, reading them is useless and instead gives rise to views of self and increases various ailments. As for the saying that there is no cultivation, attainment, or realization, it does not mean abandoning cultivation, attainment, and realization. It means neither grasping nor abiding, forgetting both subject and object, and further recognizing that all things arise from conditions and have no substantial entity.

What are called cultivation, attainment, and realization are also provisional names established when conditions converge. Maitreya Bodhisattva's explanation of the Diamond Prajñā Sūtra says: "Neither conditioned nor apart from it is the nirvāṇa of all Tathāgatas." This means neither grasping conditioned dharmas nor departing from conditioned dharmas. Neither grasping nor rejecting is the realm of the Tathāgata's nirvāṇa. Thus, existence and nonexistence are nondual: though one engages with phenomena, the mind remains unstained. This is called emptiness.

Yet some people are attached one-sidedly to emptiness. They think, "All sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, so why need I cultivate further? And why must I liberate others?" They do not understand that saying sentient beings are Buddha in their fundamental essence is like saying that a drunkard is originally not drunk. Yet because of wine, he is deluded and is now acting perversely; he cannot be left unaided. If one is biased toward emptiness, that emptiness is equivalent to attachment to existence. In the end, one has never truly realized emptiness.

Worldly people do not understand the meaning of emptiness and take annihilation and nonexistence to be emptiness. Sages understand emptiness as the fact that all things lack self-nature and substantial entity; nothing can be obtained. Though things exist, they do not truly exist, so there is nothing to grasp as real. The cause of sentient beings' suffering lies in taking the false for the true and clinging to a self. Bound by form and bound by mind, they are never liberated and ultimately suffer.

The sages pity them and therefore teach the emptiness of circumstances, mind, and all dharmas. To empty the mind is to empty circumstances; not clinging is realization of emptiness. Only upon realizing emptiness does one understand no-self, and no-self is the cessation of suffering. Therefore, at the causal stage one must first open the Buddha's knowledge and vision; the Buddha's knowledge and vision is prajñā. With prajñā, one breaks through emptiness: emptiness means non-clinging, and even non-clinging is not clung to. This is pure emptiness and no-self; neither suffering nor pleasure has any basis.

Worldly people fear falling into emptiness. This fear of falling means that they have not realized emptiness. A group of overly cautious people all say that they fear falling into emptiness; this is because they do not understand its meaning. Still others misunderstand emptiness and then claim that there is no cause and effect, committing all kinds of evil. Because they are fundamentally unenlightened, “vast and unbounded, they encounter calamity and misfortune”—this is precisely what the saying means.

Practitioners must avoid speaking of prajñā to confused people, lest they create many offenses of doubt and slander. Yet one cannot refrain from first testing the dharma gate in order to awaken their potential; one should observe whether their capacity is suitable for instruction and only then teach them. Moreover, to speak rashly of prajñā is a grave offense. The fault, however, is not in speaking, but in speaking rashly.

People today discard prajñā altogether; this is abandoning food for fear of choking—truly delusion upon delusion. Therefore, to speak to those who should not be spoken to is delusion; not to speak to those who can be spoken to is also delusion. To speak to others when one cannot speak properly oneself is delusion; not to speak to others when one can speak properly oneself is likewise delusion. Thus, one must understand the meaning comprehensively. One must never abandon the medicine on this account, nor suspect the illness because of the medicine. Its living application lies in the person; what fault is there in the medicine? I shall now explain for you the meanings of the eighteen emptinesses.

Emptiness does not mean the emptiness of air, space, or a void, for such emptiness still has an appearance. An empty bowl, for example, possesses the appearance of

emptiness; when it is filled with food, that appearance disappears. Therefore, emptiness does not mean the absence of seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing.

This emptiness means that, through the power of prajñā, one realizes that every affair and every object lacks self-nature and substantial entity, and exists only provisionally through the convergence of causes and conditions. This is what is called emptiness. The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says: “Śāriputra, if a bodhisattva wishes to abide in inner emptiness, outer emptiness, inner-and-outer emptiness, emptiness of emptiness, great emptiness, emptiness of ultimate meaning, conditioned emptiness, unconditioned emptiness, ultimate emptiness, beginningless emptiness, dispersal emptiness, emptiness of nature, emptiness of inherent characteristics, emptiness of all dharmas, unobtainable emptiness, emptiness of no dharma, emptiness of existing dharmas, and emptiness of both no dharmas and existing dharmas, that bodhisattva should study prajñāpāramitā.” The meanings of these eighteen emptinesses are briefly explained below:

(1) Inner emptiness: “Inner” refers to the six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The eye is empty because it lacks self and what belongs to self, and so forth.

(2) Outer emptiness: “Outer” refers to the six sense objects—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. Form is empty because it lacks self and what belongs to self, and so forth.

(3) Inner-and-outer emptiness: within the combined twelve sense bases, there is no self and nothing belonging to self, and so forth.

(4) Emptiness of emptiness: this breaks through the preceding three emptinesses; that is, the three emptinesses are themselves empty.

(5) Great emptiness: this is the emptiness of the ten directions. Since the ten directions are boundless, it is called great. From the standpoint of the western direction, the west is boundless; every place has a west, and thus it is called empty.

(6) Emptiness of ultimate meaning: ultimate meaning refers to the true characteristic of all dharmas. What cannot be destroyed or ruined is called the true characteristic. Yet this true characteristic is also empty. Why? Because it is empty, there is neither reception nor attachment. If the true characteristic of all dharmas existed, there would be something to receive and attach to. But the true characteristic is precisely non-characteristic, and should not be received or grasped.

(7) Conditioned emptiness: conditioned dharmas arise from the coming together of causes and conditions, such as the five aggregates, twelve sense bases, and eighteen realms; therefore, they are empty.

(8) Unconditioned emptiness: unconditioned dharmas are said to be without causes and conditions, neither arising nor ceasing, like empty space. An objection may be raised: conditioned dharmas may be empty because they lack self-nature, but how can unconditioned dharmas also be empty? The answer is that without conditioned dharmas, there would be no unconditioned dharmas. The true characteristic of conditioned dharmas is itself the unconditioned. Because the conditioned is empty, the unconditioned is also empty; the two are not different.

(9) Ultimate emptiness: ultimate emptiness demolishes all dharmas, leaving nothing remaining; hence it is called ultimate emptiness. This ultimate emptiness is itself empty, without the opposition of void and real. If anything remained, it could not be called ultimate emptiness.

(10) Beginningless emptiness: because all dharmas have no initial point, sentient beings have no beginning. Moreover, covered by ignorance and bound by attachment, they come and go in birth and death, and their beginning cannot be found. Breaking through this beginningless dharma is called beginningless emptiness.

(11) Dispersal emptiness: dispersal means the characteristic of separation. Dharmas exist through combination. For example, a cart is formed from spokes, rims, shafts, and hubs; when these are assembled, there is a cart, but when they are scattered apart, the name “cart” is lost. A person is called a person because of the combination of the five aggregates and four great elements; when they are separated, no person can be found.

(12) Emptiness of nature: the nature of all dharmas is always empty. They continue provisionally and therefore seem not to be empty. For example, water is naturally cold, but when fire is applied it becomes hot; when the fire ceases for a long time, the water returns to coldness. As a sūtra says: “The eye is empty of self and what belongs to self.” Why? Because its nature is inherently so.

(13) Emptiness of inherent characteristics: all dharmas have two kinds of characteristics: general characteristics and particular characteristics. Both are empty; hence this is called emptiness of inherent characteristics. General characteristics include, for example, the fact that all things are impermanent. Particular characteristics mean that, although all dharmas are impermanent, each has its own distinct characteristic: earth has the characteristic of solidity, fire the characteristic of heat, and so forth.

(14) Emptiness of all dharmas: all dharmas include inner and outer, beautiful and ugly. They arise with the mind and are empty because they have no intrinsic substance.

(15) Unobtainable emptiness: all dharmas, including nirvāṇa without remainder, are unobtainable and therefore empty.

(16) Emptiness of no dharma: “No dharma” means that a dharma has already ceased. What has already ceased is absent; this is called emptiness of no dharma.

(17) Emptiness of existing dharmas: “Existing dharmas” are dharmas that exist through the coming together of causes and conditions. Since their true nature is absent, this is called emptiness of existing dharmas.

(18) Emptiness of both no dharmas and existing dharmas: the characteristics of both no dharmas and existing dharmas are unobtainable. This is called emptiness of both no dharmas and existing dharmas.

These are the eighteen emptinesses. All dharmas are empty because they lack self. “Self” means sovereign mastery. When dharmas are apart from conditions, they cannot arise by themselves; therefore, they naturally have no sovereign mastery. Without sovereign mastery, there is no self.

Since things arise from the coming together of causes and conditions, they are empty. Since neither beginning nor end can be obtained, they are empty. Since they are merely manifestations of mind, they are empty. Know that the myriad dharmas all manifest from mind and entirely lack intrinsic substance; therefore, they are called empty. If one wishes to abide in this gate of the eighteen emptinesses, one should study prajñā. Practitioners must not, because I speak of emptiness, fall into emptiness; nor must they fear falling into emptiness because I speak of it. Falling into emptiness and fearing emptiness are both attachments to existence and remain the inverted birth and death of delusion. Know that not a single dharma has ever gone beyond the numinous terrace of one's wisdom-nature. The wise will understand this for themselves; but without relying on prajñā, one is like a person entering darkness and sees nothing.

To empty all circumstances is called severing the bondage of form; to empty all mind is called severing the bondage of mind. When these two bondages of form and mind are severed, one will no longer regress. Yet residual habits remain and must still be cultivated away. When even the residual habits connected with the bondages of form and mind are completely removed, this is ultimate attainment. Then samādhi and wisdom are unified and function together; their wonder is like an inexhaustible treasury.

V. Undertaking the Great Resolve

If one aims for the highest, one attains only the middle; therefore, arousing a great resolve is the first essential gateway to entering the Way. If one's aspiration is great,

one's accomplishment will necessarily be great, for cause and effect are accomplished simultaneously. Only one who can undertake this meaning is a seed of the Tathāgata, born into the family of the Tathāgata. This is also called the power of one's fundamental vow.

How fortunate we are to be born in this present age: not only do we hear the true Dharma, but we also receive and uphold it. Relying above on the Buddha's compassion, we are shown an inexhaustible treasury. It is like a poor son encountering one with heavenly sight, who points out treasure buried in the ground, and who thereby suddenly becomes rich. If one is overly modest and thinks oneself not destined for wealth, one will remain poor for life. To undertake is to shoulder a burden: to shoulder the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi is the Buddha's entrustment. Why, then, must one be timid and self-effacing, imagining that yielding one's virtue is admirable? Thus, arousing a great resolve is the first critical pass in practice.

VI. One Must Truly Leave Home

The meaning of leaving home is subtle. The Buddha established shaving the head and wearing dyed robes as leaving home in order that people might depart from the afflictions of household and worldly life. A person's ties with family are the deepest and longest-lasting, and emotional attachment binds them most strongly. Without severing these bonds of attachment, there is no way to enter the Way. Thus, one longs for the quiet of mountains and forests, delights in being far from worldly toil, and leaves it behind. The Buddha had to teach in this way for those of lesser capacities. Yet there are also lay practitioners who outwardly have spouses and property, dwell daily amid afflictions, and yet remain unstained, their minds apart from worldly toil. These are those who have truly left home.

Therefore, lay practitioners should leave home while remaining at home: though the body remains in the household, the mind has already departed. Bhikṣus, however, should leave home in both senses: body and mind should both leave home, forever severing afflictions. This is what the Buddha taught for those of superior capacities. As for bodhisattvas who have realized the mind, the great matter is already concluded: they have entered the stage beyond learning, and the mind neither departs nor enters; nor are there any afflictions.

They manifest the appearance of a bhikshu solely in order to teach and transform sentient beings and to expound the Dharma; it may also express dignified deportment. Thus, leaving home is acceptable, and not leaving home is also acceptable. In all cases, do not deceive yourself or others; this is called truly leaving home. As for returning to lay life, the Buddha's regulations permit it. If one retains the body of a bhikshu but one's mind is constantly disturbed and one remains

attached to fame, reputation, gain, and support, one has in fact returned to lay life and has also broken the precepts. Such a person is not a saṅgha member worthy of offerings and is no different from an evil person. As for those who are pure and virtuous, whether bhikshus or lay practitioners, all are called treasures of the Saṅgha. This must be understood.

VII. Guard Carefully Against the Eight Taboos

What are the eight taboos? First, seeking spiritual powers. Second, living in excessive doubt. Third, seeking speed while harboring a waiting mind. Fourth, being bound by personal feelings and relying on others. Fifth, rigidly clinging to one's faults. Sixth, not following the rules. Seventh, losing awareness and illumination. Eighth, claiming attainment when one has not attained, claiming realization when one has not realized, and judging the inner states of others. These are called the eight taboos because violating them can obstruct the Way; therefore, they must be avoided.

First Taboo: Spiritual Powers

The root of seeking spiritual powers is greed for attainment. When the causal ground is improper, the harm it causes becomes all the greater. There is no one in the world who does not seek spiritual powers, yet people do not know what shen is or what tong means. They practice blindly, misleading themselves and others. There is also a group of people who, like those who stop eating for fear of choking, have never understood this matter. Fear arises from their doubts, and they dare not proceed. They even dare not cultivate the supreme Mind-Seal Esoteric Vehicle transmitted by the Buddha, and they obstruct others from practicing it, thinking this to be compassion. It is like an incompetent doctor who kills someone through the wrong medicine: rather than blame the doctor, they ban the medicine. The fault lies with the incompetent doctor; what blame belongs to the medicine? How profoundly deluded this is!

There is a shen associated with the blood and vital energies of the human body. What is stored within is called essence; what manifests outwardly is called spirit. The mind is the master, while essence, energy, and spirit are its servants. These spiritual powers are the unobstructed functioning of mind and intention—the spiritual powers of mind. They extend from oneself to others and arise from essence as function. Spiritual force may be greater or lesser, and the power of penetration may be keen or dull. Human spiritual powers are inherently possessed. It is like fire in a lamp: fire inherently has light. If fire does not emit light, it is not because it lacks light; the fault lies in obstruction and lack of free passage. One is obscured by the seven emotions and six desires, so that the essence is present but its function does not arise.

People do not understand spiritual powers and therefore mistake transformations and illusions for spiritual powers, greatly misleading themselves. Such transformations and illusions are merely magical arts, akin to techniques; they cannot be performed without something on which to rely. Spiritual powers are not like this.

The Treatise on the Treasury states: There are five kinds of spiritual powers. The first is demonic powers, such as old foxes transforming themselves, or spirits of wood and stone attaching themselves to people. The second is karmic-result powers, such as ghosts and spirits foreknowing events, divine dragons concealing and transforming themselves, or those who cultivated the heavenly eye in former lives without completing it and who, as children in this life, have unusually keen sight and hearing.

The third is dependent powers, such as traveling by means of talismans, medicinal concoctions, mantra-water, or emitting light to summon spirits—cases that necessarily rely on something. These first three are only provisionally called powers; in truth, they are not powers, for they are not ultimate and will inevitably regress.

The fourth kind, spiritual powers, comprises five: the heavenly eye, heavenly ear, knowledge of others' minds, knowledge of former lives, and spiritual travel. Though called powers, they may be ultimate or nonultimate. For those without the Way, they are nonultimate and will eventually regress; moreover, they are dangerous, for one may become deranged, turn demonic, and fall into the great hells. The ultimate kind will be explained in detail below. The fifth is powers of the Way: the Way is their essence, and the preceding five spiritual powers are their function.

Buddhists chiefly seek to attain powers of the Way, beginning with the six supernormal powers. The sixth power, which stands above the five powers, is the power of the exhaustion of outflows. Worldly dharmas involve outflows, while supramundane dharmas are without outflows. To penetrate both without being tainted or attached by either is called the exhaustion of outflows. In cultivating the six supernormal powers, one must first realize the mind-ground, unfold awakened wisdom, and realize pure emptiness as one's essence. Only then may one respond to and transform the myriad things, meeting circumstances without a calculating mind as one's function.

Therefore, the Treatise on the Treasury also states: There are three kinds of wisdom: true wisdom, inner wisdom, and outer wisdom. Extensive knowledge of past and present and understanding worldly affairs are outer wisdom. Cutting off afflictions and making the mind quiet is what the Lesser Vehicle cultivates; this is inner wisdom. Neither is ultimate and therefore neither is called true wisdom. In true wisdom, sages and ordinary beings are nondual, emotional views are all empty, one

realizes that there is nothing at all, and essence and function are such as they are. This is called true wisdom, and it is precisely powers of the Way. What we cultivate is powers of the Way as essence and the five spiritual powers as function. To activate function before attaining the essence will inevitably lead to downfall and bring later consequences. This is deeply frightening.

Taoist practitioners regard developing the five spiritual powers as the highest standard. They forcibly suppress the six consciousnesses and habitual tendencies, using methods of subjugation to develop the five spiritual powers. Yet their fundamental nature has not been emptied. When powerful external circumstances arise, they become either joyful or sorrowful, and demons take the opportunity to enter. For example, when the heavenly eye opens without obstruction and they see matters involving their own grievances and resentments, they may unconsciously become angry and thereby fall.

Or they may see scenes of attraction between men and women and, without realizing it, let their feelings shift and enter a womb. Because the roots of greed, anger, and ignorance have not been removed but only temporarily suppressed, once they react they can no longer be controlled.

If one first realizes the emptiness of dharmas and later develops the five powers, then, when all circumstances arise, there is no distinction of beauty or ugliness, intimacy or estrangement, affection or aversion, joy or anger. One remains impartial and free, beyond anything that can be shaken; favorable and adverse circumstances are alike. Such spiritual powers possess both essence and function and are called ultimate. Otherwise, before one has attained the root, one is instead misled by spiritual powers; thus they are not ultimate. Craving spiritual powers is itself rooted in greed and also belongs to an inferior penchant for novelty. If one uses them to seek fame, profit, and reverence, one has not left behind the greed for gain and loss. How can this be called the Way?

In the practices of our association, the first rule is that one must not seek spiritual powers. Seeing light, seeing Buddhas, and the like while sitting in meditation are all produced by the deluded mind. This is strictly prohibited as a major precept. Therefore, we repeatedly warn practitioners lest, after attaining even a slightly exceptional state, the demon of delight enter their hearts. Thus, the Way and techniques must be clearly distinguished. During the past year, several hundred people have practiced these methods in our association, and fortunately none has developed such disorders, because their causal ground is correct and their aspiration is lofty.

The Taoist five spiritual powers are attained through strenuous effort. The Buddhist five spiritual powers are naturally realized after one has realized the mind. Taoists

may attain the five spiritual powers with function but without essence. Although their initial intention is directed toward the Way, they later unknowingly drift into mere technique; thus it is technique rather than the Way. When Buddhists realize the five spiritual powers, they establish essence before function and employ techniques as the Way.

The Taoist five spiritual powers may regress and lead to downfall; they are temporary attainments. Buddhism has no such defect, and its attainment is called ultimate. Taoism specializes in employing the five spiritual powers, whereas Buddhism uses them only when there is no alternative.

Taoists regard the five spiritual powers as miraculous; Buddhists regard them as utterly ordinary.

Non-Buddhist practitioners of spiritual powers may also possess the five powers, but they lack the power of the exhaustion of outflows. The original intent of studying Buddhism is to seek liberation, free from bondage. One should value only the power of the exhaustion of outflows. Once all outflows are exhausted, one thoroughly understands both worldly and supramundane dharmas; this is the true Buddha Way.

If one focuses exclusively on spiritual powers, the mind is held captive by them. This is greed for attainment. Not only will one be unable to transcend birth and death, but one will also enter deeply into demonic obstacles and may even become deranged. This is most lamentable. Ancient worthies distinguished powers of the Way from spiritual powers in order to clarify this point. In cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, realizing one's true nature and realizing the mind are primary, thereby accomplishing formless siddhi. Siddhi means great accomplishment; it is not something that those who delight in lesser teachings can conceive.

Those who have traditionally cultivated Japanese Esoteric Buddhism or Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism often delight in speaking of spiritual powers. Such practitioners mislead themselves; the fault does not lie in the Dharma. Spiritual powers do not come from outside. When the mind is still, it is rich in wondrous capacities: naturally, everything is understood and every situation is met appropriately. By the power of wisdom, one employs wondrous methods. If it benefits sentient beings, everything may serve as skillful means; but if it is for one's own greedy acquisition, even the slightest degree belongs to birth and death.

Others hear mention of spiritual powers and turn pale at the sound of them, stopping eating for fear of choking. They take Esoteric Dharma to be demonic Dharma and slander the Buddha and the Dharma. They are truly pitiable.

They do not know that when Buddha-recitation reaches one-pointedness of mind without distraction and samādhi is realized, one may then travel spiritually in the Pure Land—whether one has already been reborn there, is reborn there in this life, or will be reborn there in the future. If this is not spiritual power, what is? People's capacities are attached to forms: they insist that only what can be seen is spiritual power, while regarding the wondrous truth that cannot be seen as empty and false. Buddhadharma neither grasps appearances nor departs from them. It takes Mahāprajñā as its principle; therefore, there is no need to see light or Buddhas and thereby invert the mind. One need only contemplate one's own nature inwardly, thoroughly realize the unborn, and have a mind free of hindrances; spiritual powers are then naturally present.

Within the minds of sentient beings are inherently complete the causes of the three greatnesses of essence, characteristics, and function. Since essence is great, characteristics are great, and function is great, what kind of spiritual power would not be present? These causes of the three greatnesses can become the fruition of the three bodies—the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. Sentient beings do not lack them; they simply do not know. The reason they do not know is that they cling to phenomenal appearances and, through delusion, are separated from true principle.

The Diamond Sūtra states: “Ordinary people greedily cling to affairs.” Therefore, all sūtras and treatises demolish sentient beings' attachments to the appearances of body, mind, and phenomena. The Record of Auxiliary Practices says: “If one cultivating samādhi suddenly develops spiritual powers, one must quickly abandon them, for dharmas with outflows are false.”

Buddhadharma values being without outflows and without grasping, and it honors prajñā. Prajñā can dissolve all appearances. Simply resting in principle is itself penetration in phenomena; but if one exclusively seeks powers, one will necessarily be obstructed by principle. Penetration in principle is nothing other than expounding the gate of the One Vehicle and realizing the principle of the unborn. When a single word accords with the Way, one realizes nirvāṇa amid birth and death. When one directly sees and understands the principle, one attains perfect enlightenment amid the dusts of toil. In an instant, one is transformed from ordinary to sage; in a moment, conditioned existence becomes emptiness. Is this not the greatest spiritual power? “All under heaven return to benevolence” expresses precisely this meaning.

Therefore, practitioners should first realize the power of the exhaustion of outflows. All other powers are deviant and false, not genuine. What is deviant is not right; it gives rise to confused thoughts and deludes one from one's intrinsic nature. One must never vainly hope for them.

In light of the foregoing, there is no need to discuss demonic powers, karmic-result powers, or dependent powers. Among the five spiritual powers—the heavenly eye, heavenly ear, knowledge of others' minds, and so forth—Buddhadharma also possesses them. They are here collectively called deviant and false because they have only the function of spiritual powers, without the essence of powers of the Way. Powers of the Way belong to the exhaustion of outflows. Spiritual powers are shared by non-Buddhist paths and the two vehicles, whereas powers of the Way are elucidated only by the Mahāyāna Dharma.

Buddhadharma values only powers of the Way, not spiritual powers; yet it does not discard spiritual powers altogether. One is simply not permitted to employ them before one's strength has matured, lest two kinds of error arise. Thus the Treatise on the Treasury also states: “Wisdom has deviant and right forms; powers have genuine and false forms. Unless one's dharma eye is keen and clear, it is difficult to discern them. Therefore, people in the world often believe in the false and deviant, and seldom believe in the genuine and true. This is why this wondrous principle is difficult to reveal.”

A quiet mind is the Lesser Vehicle's entry into the annihilationist view. What true wisdom reveals, however, is the realization in essence that there is nothing at all and that purity and impurity are nondual. This is the essential way of breaking attachment to dharmas. Without breaking attachment to dharmas, one cannot speak of the essential teachings of the Mahāyāna. Therefore, the Mahāyāna teaches that all phenomena are such as they are and are manifested only by mind. Such teachings all clarify entry into the Dharma gate of nonduality. Then principle and phenomena interpenetrate completely, cause and effect penetrate one another, and the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers is fully present before one.

In sum, the wondrous function of spiritual powers lies in the wondrous penetration of opening the wisdom eye and dharma eye. The wisdom eye knows people's capacities, whether sharp or dull; the dharma eye knows what Dharma should be applied to which persons in order to liberate them. Together, these constitute the Buddha eye; there is not some separate Buddha eye. These spiritual powers proceed from within to without. First penetrate yourself; first liberate yourself from habitual tendencies and afflictions. When you have cleared away your various karmic obstacles, penetration will naturally open.

Yet to eliminate karmic obstacles, one must rely on prajñā to sweep them away. This is the great spiritual power sought by bodhisattvas. This may further be demonstrated through the Mahāvairocana Sūtra, the Prajñā Sūtra for Humane Kings Who Protect the Nation , the Heart Sūtra, and other texts.

The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: “When this bodhisattva realizes the gateway of the pure bodhicitta, it is called the Way of the First Dharma-Light. When a bodhisattva abides here and diligently cultivates for no long time, he will attain the samādhi that removes all obscurations.” People often misunderstand this bodhicitta to mean the mind of great compassion, as though it were merely a transformation from an evil mind to a good mind, which they call arousing bodhicitta. One should know that bodhi itself is unobtainable; realizing that all things are unobtainable is bodhicitta.

The Way of the First Dharma-Light refers to ascending from the first bhūmi to the tenth bhūmi. “Way” means “bhūmi.” It means that only after one has cultivated and realized samādhi, understood that mind is unobtainable, and directly seen the true reality may one abide here. To abide here means to abide in prajñā. Without prajñā, there is no means to sweep away all obscurations. Through diligent cultivation for no long time, one naturally attains the samādhi that removes obscurations, and the five spiritual powers will arise.

Spiritual powers are originally fully possessed by everyone; they are not possessed only by Buddhas and bodhisattvas while sentient beings alone lack them. Sentient beings are obstructed by beginningless ignorance and therefore cannot manifest these powers.

Precisely because they are originally complete, they cannot be given or taken away. One can only cultivate and realize them oneself, through a definite course: first, cultivate in order to seek awakening, realize samādhi, and directly see true reality; second, after awakening, undertake proper cultivation and use the power of prajñā to sweep away obscurations; third, as the obscurations gradually clear, spiritual powers naturally manifest. Only such spiritual powers never regress.

They are not like the spiritual powers developed by non-Buddhist paths through forcibly imposed meditative concentration, which ultimately regress when one encounters circumstances and gives rise to delusion. Therefore, to develop the five spiritual powers before attaining the samādhi of pure emptiness is most dangerous. Because the mind of aversion and attachment has not yet been removed and one cannot regard all things with equanimity, all kinds of strange appearances come before one's eyes. To be carried along by them is precisely the inverted round of birth and death.

There are said to be five kinds of obstruction:

1. The obstruction of afflictions: in its coarse aspect, this means the six fundamental afflictions—greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, pride, and wrong views. In its subtle aspect, it means the eighty-four thousand habitual tendencies. All these are accumulated habits from former lives that obstruct one's capacity to enter the Way.

2. Karmic obstruction: because one has created countless sinful karmas in the past and present, even though one may now have the causes and conditions for attaining the Way, one's former karmic offenses have not yet been cleared away and thus naturally give rise to various hindrances and difficulties.

3. Obstruction by the Dharma: although one has already practiced, because one slandered the Dharma in former lives, one cannot encounter a good spiritual friend. “Good” means skillful; “spiritual friend” means one who knows a person's capacity and guides that person beneficially by means of the proper Dharma. The proper Dharma is that which precisely accords with the person's capacity, just as medicine accords with an illness; it is not confined to any particular kind of medicine.

For example, if a person's capacity accords with the Pure Land, but one teaches that person Chan or Esoteric Buddhism, which do not accord with that capacity, one is not a good spiritual friend. If a person's capacity for prajñā is already mature, one should skillfully guide that person so as to accomplish the siddhi of formlessness; if one nevertheless continues to teach form-based dharma gates, one is likewise not a good spiritual friend. Although this is the teacher's fault, it is also the karmic result of that person's having doubted and slandered the Dharma in former lives, or having begrudged teaching it to others.

4. Obstruction by livelihood: although one has heard the proper Dharma, one is busy making a living and has no time to practice, and therefore encounters many hindrances.

5. The obstruction of what is known: although one has encountered a good spiritual friend and heard the proper Dharma, various causes and conditions cannot come together—for example, arrogance and conceit—which are sufficient to hinder the perfection of prajñā. These are called the five obstructions. Thus one can see that the various causes and conditions obstructing the gate of entry into the Way must be opened by clearing karmic obstacles and entering this gate. This is still prajñā; without prajñā, there is no means to remove all obscurations.

Moreover, unless the coarse obscurations are removed, one cannot cultivate the perfection of prajñā. The Heart Sūtra says that bodhisattvas, and even the Buddhas of the three periods of time, attain unsurpassed bodhi through prajñāpāramitā. If one realizes one's true nature and becomes a Buddha, how could one see one's true nature without relying on prajñā?

The Renwang Sūtra says: “Before vajra samādhi, all knowledge and views cannot be called seeing. Only the Buddha suddenly comprehends and possesses all-knowing wisdom; only then can knowledge and views be called seeing.” This seeing is prajñā. The Buddha is called the Greatly Awakened One, possessing the wisdom of all wisdom, the unsurpassed great radiance and great spiritual power.

The Renwang Sūtra also says: “Upon realizing vajra samādhi, it is as though one has ascended a lofty platform and surveys everything universally, with nothing not fully understood. One is identical with the realm of reality, equal to dharmatā, perfect in the treasury of virtues, and abides in the position of the Tathāgata. One may go to the Buddha-lands of the ten directions, benefiting and bringing happiness to sentient beings, comprehending true reality, and being no different from the Buddha.” The Buddha-lands spoken of are not fixed places, and the sentient beings referred to are not limited by closeness or distance, intimacy or estrangement.

The Renwang Sūtra also says: “All Tathāgatas throughout the dharma realm of the ten directions rely on this gate to attain Buddhahood. If anyone says that Buddhahood can be attained apart from this, that is the teaching of Māra, not the teaching of the Buddha. Therefore, you should know thus, see thus, and faithfully understand thus,” and so forth.

The Buddha spoke with such decisiveness because he feared that later generations would be deluded by the obstruction of what is known and unable to enter through faith. One should know that this gate is precisely the gate of prajñāpāramitā. However far one goes, one does not depart from this. If someone says that the study of prajñā is not ultimate, then what Dharma, I ask, could be ultimate? Would this not turn the definitive sūtras spoken by the Buddha into nondefinitive teachings? Their intention is in fact to favor the power of the Buddha while neglecting one's own power.

They believe that the Buddha's miraculous transformations and blessings can make them Buddhas in the twinkling of an eye, and that the only evidence of Buddhahood visible to others is spiritual powers. They therefore mistakenly take spiritual powers to be Buddhahood itself and cast prajñā behind them. They do not know that becoming a Buddha means awakening to all dharmas through wisdom that accords with reality, and is therefore called awakening. A Buddha is one who is awakened, and awakening is simply an abbreviated name for prajñā.

“Miraculous transformations” was formerly translated as “spiritual power.” The majestic spiritual power of the Tathāgata exceeds all measure; it is the self-realization of the threefold bodhi. Even tenth-bhūmi bodhisattvas have not yet entered that realm. Only if one personally realizes and enters the gate of the three mysteries can one correspond with the Buddha; only then may the Buddha's power of blessing be added. It arises in response to capacities and comes together upon meeting conditions; it comes about naturally and cannot be forced.

Therefore, although the Buddha's power is vast, not everyone can receive his blessing. Otherwise, all sentient beings would already have been liberated by the Buddhas of the past.

Because of the power of their great compassionate vows in the past, the Buddhas wish to bring benefit to all sentient beings and universally reveal various dharma gates. Yet people can spread the Way; the Way cannot spread people. The secret essential treasury of the Tathāgata is one's own treasure. One must cultivate in accordance with the Dharma, and only when one reaches an equivalent degree can one receive the Buddha's blessing. How could there be distinctions of greater or lesser favor, intimacy or estrangement, between Buddhas and sentient beings? Moreover, the causes and conditions for accomplishment differ for each person. When one's own capacities and conditions have not matured, the power of prajñā is not yet sufficient, and emotional views obscure one, they obstruct one's entry into the Way.

Such people do not blame themselves but doubt the Dharma; to doubt the Dharma is itself evidence that the power of prajñā is insufficient. Nor do they know that spiritual powers manifest only after prajñā has swept away the five obstructions. Furthermore, if spiritual powers are such that everyone can see them, they are not spiritual powers, because such seeing is no different from that of sentient beings. If a magician or illusionist also claims spiritual powers, and by the power of spells blesses herbs so that all kinds of unprecedented things appear, can that person thereby be called a Buddha?

They make only this one mistake at the causal stage, and it causes the whole undertaking to go wrong. Therefore, practitioners who seek great spiritual powers have an improper causal ground and belong to Māra's retinue. This is specifically listed first among the eight prohibitions. Take care not to mislead yourselves.

The Second Prohibition: Excessive Doubt and Fickleness

Doubt arises from not understanding why things are as they are and from placing too much weight on gain and loss. Fickleness arises from unsteady faith, craving quick results, and practicing without constancy. Both result from an inborn tendency to covet convenience. Whenever one studies something—whether a craft, farming, or commerce—three years are required for completion; there is absolutely no principle by which one can succeed in only a few months. How much more is this so in studying Buddhism, and how much more with one's habitual tendencies from many lives!

Before a matter has been settled, one predicts and discriminates according to one's own views; or, before one's understanding is genuinely sound, one fixes one's own opinions and judges matters to be right or wrong. Yet inwardly one never has certainty, and afterward one hesitates and remains undecided. This is called doubt. In its coarse aspect, it is delusion; in its subtle aspect, it is doubt. When something cannot be done, if one does not distinguish right from wrong and blindly follows

along in confusion, that is delusion. When one clearly knows that something is impossible yet cannot overcome one's emotional views, and one's mind wavers in turmoil, that too is delusion. When the subtle continuous flow of mental activity calculates and remains confused and uncertain, it has entered into doubt.

The karmic actions created and sufferings endured by worldly people are beyond recounting. Yet they also suffer because they do not know their suffering, and the bitterest of sufferings is not understanding the mind-ground. If the mind-ground is clear, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished. The mind is master of all and is called the mind-king. If a king loses his position, the country will inevitably fall into disorder. Therefore, dispelling doubt is like establishing a ruler in a country to quell disorder; it is the first step in the work of realizing the mind.

Doubt and faith are direct opposites: lack of faith is doubt. If one wishes to arouse faith, one must first dispel doubt. Once doubt is dispelled, one must be resolute and never retreat; only then can one enter the path of diligent progress. The doubts and retreats that occur midway today belong to this illness, and its importance is therefore immense.

The method for dispelling doubt should begin with inquiry and practice. First is inquiry: regard yourself as a most honest person, be humble and open-minded, and ask about matters when you encounter them. In ancient times, even those in high positions should not have been ashamed to ask those below them. How then can beginners seeking good spiritual friends fail to be humble and receptive? Ask about each matter in order to resolve your doubts. This is called inquiry.

Second is actual practice. After receiving instruction from a good spiritual friend, one may understand the principle but not yet realize it in actual experience; one will inevitably return to doubt and delusion. Therefore, one must actually cultivate and practice, bringing principle and phenomena into mutual harmony, until there is no hindrance at all within the mind. Only then is doubt said to have been dispelled. This is called practice. But are inquiry and practice separate? No: inquiry itself is practice; they need not be rigidly divided into two. Inquiry opens the opportunity for practice, and practice in turn creates the conditions for inquiry. Ask as you practice, and practice as you ask; each advances the other. If one merely asks but does not practice, it is ultimately of no benefit.

There are two kinds of doubt: doubt before an undertaking and doubt during or after it. Doubt during or after an undertaking still has some reason, but doubt beforehand is the operation of emotional views: one fabricates things out of nothing, and naturally doubts ever more deeply. Some thereby become ill or deranged; these are among the most miserable people in the world. Yet such doubt is already a result, arising from anxiety over gain and loss. Anxiety is the cause of

doubt and also arises from circumstances; it is not entirely fabricated from nothing. But when one need not doubt a matter, or could refrain from doubt but instead repeatedly worries about it, this is merely unnecessary entanglement and self-inflicted disturbance by an ordinary person.

Practitioners often doubt the Dharma and doubt people, and their disposition consequently becomes fickle. This is great delusion and great falsity. The inferior tendencies of people are no more than two: greed and the desire to save trouble. First, they seek to expend no effort and attain accomplishment quickly. Second, they crave abundance in order to surpass others. Third, the illness of clinging to existence over many lives binds them tightly and is difficult to undo. If they gain nothing, they suspect that it is biased emptiness and that their labor has been fruitless, so they wish to change course and begin anew.

Fourth, practitioners are constantly swayed by human sentiment, echo whatever others say, take their ears for eyes, and delight in making irresponsible remarks. Fifth, in the course of practice, favorable and adverse circumstances arise unpredictably, and progress and regression are uncertain; if they doubt because of adversity, thoughts of retreat soon arise. Sixth, people's habitual tendencies often delight in displaying their abilities and being different, and in producing empty theories to advertise their own superiority; they thus forget the transgression of slandering the Dharma.

Not understanding the meaning of relying on the Dharma rather than on persons, one slanders the Dharma because of particular people, forgetting the reason for this principle: this is the seventh error. Others’ inner states are not for me to presume to fathom; yet I make discriminating inferences and rashly judge their right and wrong: this is the eighth error. All of these arise because one has not clarified one’s own fundamental ground.

III. Avoid Seeking Speed and Entertaining a Waiting Mentality

It is a good thing for practitioners to be courageous and diligent. But diligence means being single-minded, and progress means not retreating. To remain thus from morning to evening, neither hasty nor slow, and without interruption—this is called diligence. It does not mean greedily seeking much and pressing ahead fiercely; excessive eagerness, too, is greed. Whoever begins at too high a level will certainly be unable to sustain it. Whoever anxiously seeks results will inevitably become coarse and restless, and the practice undertaken will certainly be difficult to accomplish.

Nowadays, those who seek teachings everywhere yet fail to gain practical benefit after practicing for ten or twenty years do so because they have too many dharma gates. They seek results too quickly, practice for too short a time, and hold their

views of the teachings too deeply. In the end, they understand a hundred methods but accomplish nothing at all. This is the error of greedily seeking speed and rushing forward.

Conversely, one may drift along and waste the opportunity. Having gained even a slight superior experience, one becomes self-satisfied and gives rise to a waiting mentality. The two words “carelessness and indulgence” are the greatest obstacles to the Way, for if one does not advance, one retreats.

Practitioners begin halfway along the path, having never worked from the fundamental ground. They often neglect even basic Buddhist principles; after a long time, they are ashamed to ask again, muddle through, and allow themselves to remain confused. This is the first error.

If the fundamental ground has not been clarified, they remain in the dark as to where practice must ultimately end. Moreover, they imagine that, once the time is ripe, their practice and conduct will naturally become complete; so they let things take their course and wait for the time. This is the second error.

In practice, one must first seek awakening; only after awakening does proper cultivation begin. If one gains even a slight awakening, that is precisely when the work begins. Yet one may wish to let things proceed naturally and freely, without seeking thoroughness, and in the end sink into decline. This is the third error.

When the work of practice reaches subtle and minute levels, it is most difficult to distinguish clearly. The whiteness of a white bird and the whiteness of white snow are two, not one. At this point one must not be in the least vague. If one drifts along and lets things go, merely waiting for the time to arrive and imagining that with enough time one will certainly understand thoroughly, this is the fourth error.

Letting things proceed naturally and a waiting mentality are entirely different. Once one has realized the mind and entered the state in which things proceed naturally, one still must not be careless in the slightest. One must investigate to the utmost ultimate point, and then move from ultimate thoroughness to ultimate familiarity. When familiarity becomes complete, subject and object are naturally forgotten. Only then may one let go.

As the saying goes, after awakening one should feel as though one has lost one’s parents. How can one take letting things go as freedom, force oneself to act at ease, and abandon the work? In short, one knows one’s own work of practice. Let us now use planting a tree as an analogy. At the outset of practice, one must first distinguish the nature of the soil and determine what should be planted. After planting the seed, although no sprout may be seen for a time, one must never doubt that it will

not grow and dig it up to inspect it. One need only water it daily and diligently carry out one's proper task.

When sprouts appear, do not rejoice. One need only guard carefully against wind, rain, flood, drought, insects, and ants. Even after flowering and bearing fruit, one should not impatiently pick and eat it; one need only tend it and wait for the time. Only then does one enter the stage in which things proceed naturally. If, upon first seeing sprouts, one simply lets them go untended and waits for them to grow by themselves, this is another error of the waiting mentality. The former is excess; this is deficiency. Both are obstacles to practicing the Way and should therefore be avoided.

IV. Avoid Personal Feelings and Reliance on Others

Those beginning practice often follow others blindly, using their ears as their eyes. To rely on a good spiritual teacher is, of course, proper; but one must not be governed solely by personal feelings. For example, the method first practiced is like the physician first consulted: this is a matter of personal feelings. But if the physician and medicine are unsuitable and no effect is seen after a long time, one should consult another physician. One must put one's life first and must not let personal feelings lead one into error.

Those who readily change physicians and medicines mostly act from personal feelings, but this is also because their suffering is not truly urgent to them. If one takes oneself as the point of reference and clearly examines the relation of benefit and harm, then, when medicine proves ineffective, one should first awaken to this oneself and promptly change the prescription, without the slightest hesitation or vacillation. There is no reason to give undue weight to personal feelings. If the medicine is effective and one's life is at stake, how could one change course because of personal feelings? Thus the control lies with oneself. Never rely on others or use one's ears as one's eyes.

Practitioners often suffer from not knowing: first, they do not know their own fundamental faults; second, they do not know who is a good physician; third, they do not know which medicine is excellent; fourth, they do not know under what circumstances medicine may be called effective; fifth, they do not know that after taking medicine there will inevitably be various reactions, and so they stop out of doubt and fear. Thus, before practicing, they blindly follow others; while practicing properly, they blindly train; and after gaining a slight experience, they become self-righteous. Error upon error—how painful this is!

V. Avoid Rigidity and Attachment as an Affliction

Practitioners are like workers: they cannot do without skillful thought, for skill brings twice the result with half the effort. The Buddhadharma has no fixed method. Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land practice, for example, are provisional methods for returning to the source. Yet because people's capacities differ, the methods also vary accordingly. If one rigidly clings to them without flexibility, there is no way for spiritual responsiveness to be awakened. How then can one reach the state of freedom and ease and ascend to the land of utmost bliss?

Therefore, single-mindedness differs from rigid adherence. If one aspires to go west but suddenly longs to be born in the east, this cannot be called single-mindedness. One should know that east and west are the same blissful place of practice; east and west are merely provisional names. In the four directions and above and below, there are Buddha lands adorned in their various ways. I should first purify my own mind and acquire the qualifications for rebirth. Then east is possible and west is possible; in every case one may attain rebirth according to one's vow. This is called flexibility.

If one rigidly clings to a single method, believing that the Western Pure Land is the only land of bliss and that there are no others, such attachment to views is so firm that rebirth is truly difficult. Sentient beings' sickness and suffering are nothing but attachment to self. Learning the Buddha's teaching is precisely for removing attachment to self. If, through cultivation, one adds another layer of the affliction of attachment, is this not suffering added to suffering?

All deeply ingrained habitual tendencies arise from the affliction of attachment. Mazu's rigid adherence to seated meditation was such an affliction, for which Nanyue rebuked him. Other traditions are not free from the same illness. Yet there is also a group of people greedy for convenience and clever shortcuts, who think that ten recitations are enough to attain rebirth. They regard this as extraordinarily easy, merely waiting until death to make an effort, assuming that the Buddha will naturally come to guide them. This is truly like rejoicing at the sight of wealth in a dream. Therefore, they must be urged not to become careless and indulgent.

Yet sentient beings are difficult to guide: when helped up in the west, they fall over again in the east. One must be skillful in adjusting matters, like tuning the strings of a lute: if they are too loose, they produce no sound; if too tight, they break. First, one must awaken living and responsive spiritual intelligence. Second, one must make people understand the benefits and harms, so that they themselves feel the urgency. When applying oneself, one should be like leading troops against the enemy, advancing without looking back. When not applying oneself, one should let everything go and regard it as though nothing were happening, while the mind remains ever lively and responsive. Only such work is called diligence.

VI. Avoid Failing to Follow the Rules

Every method of practice must have a lineage of transmission. For beginners, the responsibility lies with the teacher; after one has received it with faith, one must practice in accordance with the method. If one takes one's own views as correct and alters the method, accomplishment is truly difficult. Formerly, practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma were required to maintain the practice for two hours. One person thought that he recited mantras faster than others and that an hour and a half was sufficient for 1,080 repetitions. He therefore practiced without following the rules. In the end, it proved ineffective, and he instead suspected that the practice of others was inauthentic. He then doubted the Dharma and slandered the teacher. This is truly a great taboo.

Therefore, before transmitting a teaching, one should be extremely careful, examining the person's health, available time, and the coordination of all conditions, so that abuses will not arise. Those who receive the teaching should make honesty, sincerity, and earnestness their chief principles. Asking many questions can dispel doubts, but self-awareness is also essential.

VII. Avoid Losing Awareness and Illumination

This is practitioners' greatest fault. Those who practice for decades without gaining the slightest benefit suffer precisely from this fault. Practice is undertaken at particular times, but its application lies in daily life. The work of awareness and illumination is the practitioner's sole aim and the only method for cutting off suffering and realizing truth.

Sentient beings are confused and afflicted solely because they are unaware. When external objects come to entice them, whether favorable or adverse, they are vainly carried along in cyclic wandering. If, through the power of wisdom, one maintains awareness and illumination, recognizes their falsity, and finds inner and outer both empty, one will not be swayed or deluded. Naturally, there will be neither joy nor anger; one will not create evil causes, give rise to evil conditions, or undergo painful results. Awareness is initial awakening at the causal stage; it awakens before events arise and is therefore called the awakening of great wisdom. Illumination is the practice of resistance: when all circumstances arise, amid the battle between human and heavenly forces, one can distinguish gain and loss, benefit and harm, decisively advance or withdraw, and remain unmoved and unshaken. Then one's strength naturally becomes sufficient.

Therefore, at all times, in all places, and in every matter, one should remain alert and contemplative, never forgetting this. Practitioners often divide practice time and ordinary time into two separate things, thinking that walking, standing, sitting, lying down, and dealing with others in daily life are not practice. This is the first error.

Practitioners do not know that awareness and illumination are precisely the training of the mind amid circumstances. Because they do not understand the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, they do not know how to use the mind. This is the second error.

Practitioners speak of emptiness, but the activities they undertake remain not empty. Because they cannot maintain awareness and illumination, they have no way to realize emptiness. This is the third error.

Practitioners do not know that awareness and illumination are the most important dharma gate of practice: the more one trains, the better; and the more one encounters provoking circumstances, the more one can verify one's own strength in samādhi and wisdom. Yet they seek only blessings and rewards, cannot receive great benefit, and cannot put it to great use. This is the fourth error. To forget is to forget the reason for practice; it is to drift along without urgency. This is why there are many who understand the Way but few who practice it, and many who practice the Way but few who realize it.

VIII. Avoid Claiming Attainment Before It Is Attained

To claim realization before realization has been attained, to assess others' inner states, to aim excessively high, and to boast and become vain—these are habitual tendencies of sentient beings. Many are also led astray by competitiveness. For example, one may understand the principle of contemplating emptiness and imagine that one can thereby realize emptiness. But when circumstances arise, one is still not empty and afflictions remain as before; one's strength is not yet sufficient. One cannot truly avoid the ridicule of those who know.

Yet if one has genuinely attained realization to one or two degrees, then even though principle and phenomena have not yet merged for the time being, there will ultimately come a day when one reaches the goal through diligence. But if one has not clarified the fundamental ground and nevertheless claims realization, then one has not even understood the principle, much less realized it in practice. This is truly delusion upon delusion. For example, non-Buddhist paths do not know what realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means, yet they rigidly adhere to particular bodily apertures or claim attainment through contemplating a lunar disc, then call this realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. This is the height of confusion and difficult to remedy.

Moreover, one alone knows one's own work of cultivation, for it belongs to the mind-ground. How can it be judged by outward appearances? Conjecture is delusion, and assessment is also affliction. Therefore, others' superiority or inferiority need not cause me anxious concern. Once one becomes involved in winning and losing, one unknowingly falls into jealousy and anger arises. One's own practice and conduct then instead become lax and regress. One must be careful.

These eight kinds of errors concern the fundamental conditions for practicing the methods of every tradition. Whether one practices Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism, all should be as described above. Next, let us discuss the methods of each tradition.

The aim of Dharma practice is to reach the other shore; this is pāramitā. Pāramitā means returning to the source, and the source is the origin.

There are many dharma gates for returning to the origin. Some take Chan meditation as their means of returning to the source, and this is called the Chan school; some take Pure Land methods as their means of returning to the source, and this is called the Pure Land school; some take Esoteric methods as their means of returning to the source, and this is called the Esoteric school. Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism are methods, not the origin; they are boats, not the other shore. Only when the choice to employ or set them aside rests with oneself, without being bound by methods, can this be called the other shore. Steadfast resolve is indispensable, but partial attachment must not arise.

Those who study Buddhism should aspire to cast off their bonds and seek liberation, living freely and at ease and removing every suffering and adversity. Among all sufferings and adversities, bondage to dharmas is the most painful. The deeper one's habitual tendencies, the heavier one's bonds. Chan has Chan habits, Pure Land has Pure Land habits, and Esoteric Buddhism has Esoteric habits; and the habit of considering oneself right in each case is the beginning of sectarian disputes. Practitioners seek the samādhi of non-contention; to engage in argument is most shameful.

Yet at times one cannot avoid distinguishing or contending. Such distinction and contention are called proper causes; they must not involve personal feelings, nor should they provoke the other party's anger. They should be handled with an even mind and calm spirit. If capacities are not mutually attuned, do not oppose the other person; opposition will only drive them farther away. This applies not only to others but also to oneself: one must humbly discipline oneself, correcting one's faults whenever they are recognized. If one does not correct them, one does not truly know them. Do not suppose that only killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct are faults. Whenever the mind-ground remains unclear and cause and effect unresolved, one is entangled everywhere; with every movement one incurs fault. All of it is wrongdoing.

The Earth Store Sūtra says: "Every stirring of the mind and every movement of thought is evil, bound by karmic force; there is no escaping its guilt." This is to be helplessly swept along, not knowingly to offend; how lamentable.

VIII. A Brief Account of the Practices of the Various Schools

Although this association is a Mind-Seal practice center devoted specifically to the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, it also propagates Chan, Pure Land, and the other schools. Here is a brief account of their methods of practice: first, the Pure Land Dharma gate; second, the dhyāna Dharma gate; and third, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma gate.

The Pure Land Dharma Gate

For forty-nine years the Buddha taught the Dharma, employing various skillful means, all for the purpose of gathering the mind into oneness and reaching the point at which not even one thing can be obtained. Such means liberate from suffering and respond to capacities; there is no fixed dharma. The Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation is likewise one kind of skillful means. One must not cling exclusively to holding the name as Buddha-recitation. To contemplate one's own nature inwardly, study sūtras and treatises outwardly, and in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, or in dealing with others—all of this is Buddha-recitation.

For hundreds and thousands of years, many have practiced Buddha-recitation, yet few have attained realization. There are five reasons: first, they do not understand what kind of mindfulness this mindfulness is, or what the Buddha is; second, they seek an easy advantage and cannot endure hardship; third, they do not understand the essential point of mind, and their strength is insufficient; fourth, they divide into schools and factions, giving rise to views of purity and impurity; fifth, they have not obtained the key to the Dharma gate of holding the name.

One must first understand what this thing called Buddha-recitation is, and what this thing is that suffers all day long, is turned upside down, and wanders through birth and death. Only then should one undertake Buddha-recitation. Once the mind-ground is clear, then I do not depart from the Buddha, and the Buddha does not depart from me; Buddha and self share one light, essence and function are such as they are, everywhere is the Pure Land, and every place is the West. If one strives diligently in this way, rebirth in the Western Pure Land is not difficult. One will certainly attain avaivartika in this very life.

Pure Land practice requires dual cultivation, not single cultivation. What is single cultivation? It is to believe only in Amitābha Buddha of the West, make vows oneself for rebirth there, rely on the Buddha to come and guide one, yet make no effort oneself to reform and remove habitual tendencies. This is called single cultivation.

What is dual cultivation? It is to understand one's own original mind-ground: its light is immeasurable, its life is immeasurable, and it is nondual with Amitābha. In the communion of response and resonance, the ten directions are entirely the West. Everywhere, if this mind is present, the Buddha comes without coming, and I go without going. There is no distinction between self and other face to face. Morning and evening, here it is; the Sahā world does not differ from the West. Every

utterance is Buddha-recitation; there is no one able to recite and nothing recited. Water does not leave the fish, yet the fish forgets the water. Without establishing a view of Amitābha or a view of purity and impurity, one is at once reborn. This is dual cultivation.

But if one speaks of it while the mind does not put it into practice, clings to the name, and does not contemplate with the mind, this is called single cultivation. When mind and speech correspond, this is called dual cultivation. In fact, dual cultivation is easy and single cultivation difficult. Dual cultivation brings freedom and ease, whereas single cultivation is laborious. Dual cultivation decisively brings rebirth; single cultivation will certainly bear no fruit. Only such practice is right cultivation and right conduct.

Before practicing Buddha-recitation, however, one must possess several prerequisites: first, one must recognize what the Pure Land is; second, one must understand the meaning of the three characters Amitābha and what it is in oneself that is reborn in the Pure Land; third, one must understand the stages of the Dharma gate of cultivation. If these three matters are not understood, then even if one holds the name ten thousand times, one is merely like a parrot learning human speech, entirely useless. This is what is called being turned by the sūtra, rather than turning the sūtra.

The Pure Land has both the Pure Land of principle and the Pure Land of phenomena. The Pure Land of phenomena is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, a Buddha-land that truly possesses the magnificence of its dependent and principal recompenses. The Pure Land of principle is the pure land of my own intrinsic nature. The mind pervades all places, and all are the West; the ten directions do not differ from the West. Therefore it is called perfect enlightenment.

Let us further explain the two characters Pure Land separately. Purity means sweeping away all habitual tendencies and being free from contamination. Land refers to the original mind-ground. The wondrous substance of my original awakening is also originally of immeasurable light, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction; its life too is immeasurable and boundless, identical and nondual with the Buddha. Amitābha and I have never truly been separated by coming and going. In delusion, they are ten thousand miles apart: the West becomes Avīci. In awakening, they are but an inch apart: Avīci itself is the West. Thus the sūtra says, “If one wishes to purify one’s land, one must first purify one’s mind; as one’s mind is purified, so is the Buddha-land purified.”

Amitābha means suchness that is unmoving, neither arising nor ceasing—the treasury-nature of Vairocana, of great freedom and ease. A means non-arising; mi means my great freedom and ease; and tuo means suchness that is unmoving. Since

the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment, my fundamental essence, is identical with Amitābha, “rebirth” is only an expedient expression used of necessity. Since there is neither coming nor going, why speak of going? Since there is neither arising nor ceasing, why speak of birth? Thus, that which is reborn is not my physical body of appearances, but my Tathāgata-garbha nature, which has always been without arising, ceasing, coming, or going—constant and unchanging. The four matters of faith, vows, practice, and realization are set forth below.

First, faith does not mean merely believing that the West is a magnificent Buddha-land and thereby counting as having faith. One must also deeply believe that one’s own intrinsic nature is Amitābha, that one can originally become a Buddha in the same way, that all people can become Yao and Shun, and that all sentient beings can become Buddhas. The only difference is between delusion and awakening.

This faith is exceedingly difficult. If one’s faith does not turn back, then with a single thought of pure faith one has already planted every good root in the presence of immeasurable millions of Buddhas and has gone beyond the state of ordinary beings. Therefore, unless one’s faith is true, firm, and earnest, the power of one’s vows will not be strong. The ancient worthies said: It is easy to believe in Buddhas as fruition, such as believing that Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and the other Buddhas are Buddhas. It is difficult to believe in Buddhas as causes—that all sentient beings and oneself can become Buddhas at the causal stage. Therefore this is called the Dharma difficult to believe. The sūtra says, “Upon first arousing the mind, one immediately attains great awakening.” Thus faith is the mother of all practices.

Second, vows means making vows; a vow is an aspiration. What is the work of a person of learning? It is said: to uphold one’s aspiration. To make vows is to establish an aspiration; to vow to become a Buddha is to establish the unsurpassed aspiration. But if one concentrates solely on vowing for rebirth in the West, admiring its meritorious adornments of form, one has not yet departed from greedy attachment and has not truly made vows.

The sūtra says: “Those who delight in lesser dharmas are attached to the views of self, person, sentient being, and life span; therefore they cannot hear, receive, read, or recite this sūtra.” Thus one’s vows must be great. Great vows bring great attainment; small vows bring small attainment. To hold a great thing, one must have a great vessel. To attain such meritorious adornments, one must make great vows, saying: “I now vow to be reborn in that land in order to become a Buddha myself and to liberate all sentient beings, not out of greed for gain.” This is genuine vow-making. Therefore the sūtra contains three instances of “one should make vows.”

Third, practice means cultivation. Cultivation does not mean merely holding the name. One should at all times grow weary of and renounce birth and death, and in

every thought remain mindful of Amitābha. Hold the name with the mouth and keep it in mind continuously and seamlessly; then one attains the state of the yoga of the three mysteries. As pure dharmas gain strength, defiled dharmas lose strength. One can refrain from thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance because mindfulness of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha has gained strength. If one does not think of this, one must think of that; if one does not think of the Western Pure Land, one thinks of hell.

It is as easy as turning one's hand over. The hand is not two; how could the mind be different? It is present at this very moment—there is no need for hesitation. With such single-minded and sincere cultivation, for one day up to seven days, the mind will not become inverted; and even a mind that is not inverted cannot be obtained. Naturally, one attains one-pointedness of mind without distraction. One mind is no mind; when mind cannot be obtained, this is right cultivation.

Moreover, cultivation is the breaking of the turbidity of views. If one holds a view of purity, then a view of impurity immediately arises in opposition; this cannot be called practice. The sūtra says: "This Dharma is equal, without high or low." The Buddha taught this Pure Land Dharma gate as a skillful means for sentient beings, yet he did not permit the view of sentient beings. Because Mañjuśrī held a view of Buddha, he was even reproached with being sent to the Iron Enclosure. Therefore, if one's views are impure, one's mind is impure; and if the mind is impure, the land is impure. Thus faith must be firm and vows great; only when they are joined together is there right practice. It is not merely holding the name that is called practice.

A single utterance of Amitābha suddenly transcends the grave sins of birth and death accumulated through eighty billion kalpas. The prior and later limits are both cut off; the workings of mind are hidden. It is originally the Dharma of non-arising and also the unsurpassed esoteric vehicle.

The sūtra version translated by Master Xuanzang emphasizes right mindfulness and contemplation, whereas the version translated by Master Kumārajīva emphasizes holding the name. In fact, they are nondual: when one contemplates, one does not depart from oral recitation; when one recites orally, one does not depart from the activity of mind. The ancients gave equal weight to contemplation and recitation; they were not like people today, who obstinately cling to one side and cannot adapt. Esoteric Buddhism explains Amitābha in four ways: superficial and abbreviated, profound and secret, secret within the secret, and profound secret within the secret. Yet these amount to no more than the meaning that Amitābha of the West and Amitābha of one's own intrinsic nature are identical and nondual. Thus a single utterance of Amitābha is originally Esoteric Buddhism; it cannot be severed and divided into separate households.

Fourth, realization means actual realization: realization is the thorough comprehension gained when mind and states are experienced as one. The sūtra says, “Only a Buddha together with a Buddha can fully realize and know.” This means mind seals mind: only one oneself knows, and others cannot fathom it. Moreover, realization follows the three of faith, vows, and practice. As one cultivates faith, vows, and practice, so is one’s realization. If one thoroughly understands the empty characteristics of all dharmas, then in terms of principle there is naturally no cultivation, attainment, or realization. But when principle and phenomena are perfectly integrated, how could cultivation ever be abandoned? When one cultivates, realization is contained within it.

The Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation relies on the Buddha’s power. But if the power of one’s response is weak, the power of the Buddha’s response is likewise weak. For ten years I practiced Buddha-recitation, yet from beginning to end I did not dare believe that I had a firm grasp. In the autumn of the eighteenth year of the Republic, after practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, I returned to Buddha-recitation and only then understood its subtle wonder and awakened to the meaning and state of avaivartika. One-pointedness of mind without distraction must certainly be achieved in ordinary times; it can never be arranged at the last moment.

Therefore, in addition to the Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation, one should investigate Esoteric Buddhism as a principal support; its states are truly inconceivable. I acknowledge my former many faults: I stubbornly divided Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism into separate schools, a fault equal to slandering the Buddha. When the Buddha was alive, there was originally no division between Chan and Esoteric Buddhism. Later generations temporarily made distinctions as an expedient, in order to seek single-mindedness; they did not deliberately establish sectarian boundaries.

The ultimate source is not two, though skillful means have many gates. If one stubbornly clings to one’s own views and strictly differentiates sectarian boundaries, one remains attached. How then can one attain liberation?

Consider this: when one realizes the tolerance of the non-arising of dharmas, even mind does not exist. Who is there to make distinctions? Who is there to realize? In his prayer of aspiration, Master Lianchi wrote, “May I behold Amitābha Buddha amid Chan contemplation and in the state of dreams,” and so forth. How could he have been one who rejected the Chan school? People today rigidly insist that they will practice nothing but Pure Land and oppose Esoteric Buddhism, yet they themselves recite the Rebirth Mantra.

Therefore, holding to the Buddha’s name is one of the expedient methods for cultivating the Pure Land. All dharmas are Buddhadharma; by cultivating every

wholesome dharma, one attains unsurpassed bodhi. How could it be that, if one cultivates another method, Amitābha would not permit one to be reborn? Now, using the single phrase “Amitābha,” recite until the myriad dharmas return to the One; then recite until even the One is unobtainable. Only then is accomplishment attained.

Even if one practices another method, one may attain accomplishment in the same way; yet one’s aspiration and vow toward the West must not be divided. When recitation reaches the point at which one thought is no thought, this is called true recitation; when a single mark is markless, this is called true suchness. Upon seeing true suchness, the mind naturally has no thoughts to which it is bound. Freedom from binding thoughts is liberation. The sūtras say that liberation is the Tathāgata and is nirvāṇa. Practitioners must never resign themselves to being inferior and limited, thinking that this cannot possibly be accomplished in this life. Still less may they regard others as likewise inferior and limited. To hold such a view is arrogant conceit; it shows that one does not understand the Pure Land and will certainly be unable to attain rebirth there.

In the method of Buddha-recitation, beginners should recite in unison with the assembly, with their pitch harmonizing with that of the group. There is no need to voice every character aloud. Use the breath method to regulate and tame the mind; whenever you pause to change or rest the breath, mental recitation should nevertheless remain unbroken.

First, one should harmonize one’s voice with that of the assembly. Next, reciting with a smaller group is better than reciting with a large group, and reciting alone is better than reciting with a small group. Reciting the six-character name is not as good as reciting the four-character name, and reciting the four characters is not as good as reciting one character. The original sound of Namo Amitābha Buddha is Namo Amitābha Buddhāya. In principle, it should be recited only after formal transmission, no different from practicing Esoteric Buddhism.

What is meant by emphasizing one syllable is to stress one syllable among the four, for example the tuo syllable; this creates space for visualization and is most effective. Moreover, the time spent in Buddha-recitation must not be too long. What is best is for each thought-moment of recitation to remain unbroken. Ideally, recite for fifteen minutes and then meditate for fifteen minutes, alternating visualization and recitation.

People today prize large numbers and regard a loud voice as superior. They do not even distinguish what merit and virtue are, foolishly treating the merit of Buddha-recitation as though it were paper money deposited in a treasury. Their stupidity is beyond comparison.

For the moment, let us provisionally establish a scale of merit and virtue: when Buddha-recitation becomes one degree proficient, that is one degree of merit and virtue; when one receives ten degrees of benefit, that is ten degrees of merit and virtue; when one removes one degree of habitual tendency, that is one degree of merit and virtue; when one removes ten degrees of habitual tendency, that is ten degrees of merit and virtue. Proficiency lies in one's own mind, and one's own mind is the treasure house. If one says that realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is merit and virtue, then practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, after completing one thousand meditation sessions and being instructed in how to bring it into function, will surely know for themselves the subtle wonder of the Pure Land Dharma. I previously wrote a book entitled Amitābha Mind Essentials, which may be consulted.

Cultivating the Dharma Gate of Chan Meditation

The Chan school is a special transmission outside the teachings, beyond the reach of words and expression. It employs only mind-seal, yet there is no mind that can be sealed. Without outward evidence, how could there be authentication? Therefore, the Buddha held up a flower to reveal the potential, and Mahākāśyapa responded with a smile. It does not fall into verbal formulations or into annihilationism, but directly realizes the essential point of mind: Mahāprajñāpāramitā. Those who are not of the very highest capacities cannot comprehend and awaken to it.

The one teaching in which the people of the East may take pride before the whole world is Chan. Students of this school possess minds that are lively, free, and at ease, while their spirit is lofty, unrestrained, and graceful. Though the mind sweeps away existence and ranges freely in emptiness, it does not fall into nihilism; though their practice is single-minded and pure, they do not delight in pedantic attachment. Because they possess such Dharma vessels, they can receive it.

When Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, came to the East, the proper causes and conditions had already matured. What he transmitted was no separate dharma: he merely pointed directly to seeing one's original nature. Free from thoughts, one attains it; he taught people to realize it directly for themselves. Only after the Song dynasty did the method of huatou arise, such as investigating, "Who was I before my parents gave birth to me?"

By the Ming dynasty, the Chan school was gradually declining. Chan masters such as Dufeng first introduced Buddha-recitation. This recitation meant right mindfulness and contemplation: practitioners were taught to investigate, "Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" Gradually, Chan and Pure Land were cultivated together. Later generations further turned huatou into chanting and reading, without understanding the school's essential intent. Thus, they shifted from biased

emptiness into wild abandon and came to be rejected by the world. More recently, people have even thrown it aside altogether because of choking, refusing to eat thereafter; or they openly attack it vehemently, declaring that everyone in the world is of dull faculties in the Dharma-ending age and that entering the Chan school is like encountering snakes and scorpions. Is not such rebellious arrogance deplorable?

They do not understand that, as practitioners proceed from the ordinary to the noble, Dharma gates may indeed be immeasurable, but their ultimate return to the source is not two. Without arriving at Chan, one cannot be called ultimate. What are called the most secret and unsurpassed Pure Land are all meditation. When not a single thought arises, this is called Chan; when one sits and sees one's original nature, this is called meditative stability. Only on reaching this state can one be called truly pure; only then is it supremely esoteric.

For people of the very highest and sharpest capacities, entering is like stepping through the door into a room: one push, and they are inside. But people of dull faculties stand somewhat farther from the room and must be led in gradually. How could there be a fixed method for leading them in? Before the time has come when they can be pushed, even a hundred or a thousand pushes will leave them outside the room. A blow or a shout may bring sudden awakening; a single abrupt cry may do the same—but only when it meets the right person at the right moment.

Therefore, the Chan school places great importance on teachers and students, and on expediently guiding people in. People of modern times have capacities that are too slight: the hardships of livelihood are heavy, their obstacles are too thick, and they have no leisure for single-minded cultivation. They lack both teachers and conditions, and their own strength and circumstances are ultimately insufficient. They should rely on the Buddha's power, using Pure Land or Esoteric Buddhism as a preliminary guide. Once their potential has opened, they are then pressed onward step by step, until they reach the end of the mountains and waters, where the road is cut off and the valley ends. Then they will naturally awaken with complete clarity and personally see the original landscape.

Without undergoing a great death, one cannot attain a great birth. Only after one has awakened with vast clarity may one be permitted to consult the recorded sayings, polishing and refining one's realization until it is bright and pure. Before penetrating the three barriers, one must not be lightly approved. As for all the teaching and guiding methods within the school, customs have differed from the Tang and Song dynasties until now; how could they be copied rigidly? Such cases as "the cypress tree in the courtyard" and "three pounds of flax" could point and guide according to the occasion because those objects were then present. Thus, if one says that Chan practice has a fixed method, it can no longer be called Chan.

Today the Buddha teaches a fixed dharma, and tomorrow he teaches a non-fixed dharma. Non-Buddhists are alarmed and frightened, considering it a perilous path; how could they be addressed concerning the supreme Dharma? Since the Heart-of-Heart Dharma has become available in the world, entering the Chan school has become most direct and expedient. If one practices according to the Dharma, success may be assured. Yet this is something one knows for oneself, as one knows cold and warmth. First take dhāraṇī as the method and prajñā as the verification, thereby adorning one's own Pure Land. This is true Chan practice.

Cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma Gate

The great Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the highest formless Esoteric Vehicle. Those who lack a spirit of great fearlessness would not dare to believe in it and practice it. In Tibet, one must first cultivate form-based esoteric practice for twenty years or more before one may practice this Dharma. But people of the East have different capacities and may proceed directly to profound cultivation.

When this Dharma is first practiced, the responsibility rests with the teacher: without examination, it must not be transmitted casually. Around 1928 and 1929, Acharya Dayu established centers in Beijing, Shanghai, and other places. At that time, fifty or sixty thousand people sought the Dharma, and several hundred received transmission each day. There was no time to discuss the essential points of the Dharma in detail, so the world came to regard it as ordinary Esoteric Buddhism. More than half discontinued their practice midway or gave rise to doubt and slander. Of those who maintained unwavering faith, received close personal instruction, and gained some understanding of the essential point, fewer than two hundred remain today.

At present, Master Dayu has retired into seclusion at Hángāo and has temporarily withdrawn from worldly ties. He has instructed fellow disciples in various places to spread and teach the Dharma. Though I possess only a superficial understanding, I presumptuously take the seat and form with you all this unsurpassed and excellent affinity. I feel deeply ashamed.

Fortunately, during the past two years all the practitioners have received benefit, Dharma affinities have flourished day by day, Chan and Esoteric Buddhism have come together, and this land has become pure. Thus, all past doubts and slanders concerning the Heart-of-Heart Dharma will also, through your personal realization, melt away of themselves without argument. How could the merit and virtue involved for future practitioners be conceived or measured? There is in fact no need to restate the practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, but to facilitate those who come later and benefit later students, it seems necessary to explain it in detail.

In terms of its classification, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma belongs to the Esoteric division. Yet it enables practitioners to realize directly the mind-field, and thus also connects with Chan and Pure Land; it fuses Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism in a single crucible. It breaks all attachment to dharmas and reaches the utmost ultimate ground. Its ritual procedures are also extremely simple: there is no need to prepare the various offerings. Regardless of sex, age, or social status, anyone able to sit for two hours may practice it and may attain meditative stability within a set period.

Meditative stability naturally gives rise to wisdom. Therefore, one cannot discuss the essential point of mind with those who have not sat for more than one hundred sessions, enabling them to understand the essence and bring it into function. The wonder of this Dharma lies in suddenly opening into clarity amid darkness and complete lack of interest, personally seeing true suchness and realizing samādhi. Because each person's habitual tendencies differ, the speed of their responses and the appearances that arise also differ accordingly. Therefore, during practice, one should remain close to teachers and Dharma friends in order to ask questions and consult them. Otherwise, having barely attained meditative stability and encountered an experience, one may suddenly become doubtful and cease sitting. This is an extremely common problem.

In cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the emphasis lies on tempering the mind through circumstances after leaving the meditation seat. By the power of wisdom's illumination, see that everything is illusory, and the mind will naturally be without attachment. Without attachment is non-abiding; non-abiding is what is called no-thought. It does not mean that one neither sees nor hears. This Dharma is the unsurpassed wondrous method for gathering in the mind: from realizing the mind, one empties circumstances; from emptying circumstances, one empties the mind; from emptying the mind, one empties emptiness itself; from emptying emptiness, one reveals one's nature; from revealing one's nature, one attains complete illumination; and from complete illumination, one reaches lucid quiescence. Thus one enters the supremely subtle realm of the Heart-of-Heart.

The cultivation of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma may be roughly divided into five periods: first, the period of completing the six mudrās; second, the period of continuing to practice; third, the period of seven-day retreats; fourth, the period of completing one thousand meditation sessions; and fifth, the period of letting go and practicing no further. This Dharma requires at most one thousand sessions. If one refuses to let it go after that, one develops the illness of attachment to dharmas. Yet after completing the six mudrās, some people refuse to sit further. These two kinds of people are the most numerous, and this is greatly regrettable.

The root illness of sentient beings lies only in habitual tendencies. Unless their root is removed, the work is not thorough. This root lies latent within one's nature; the Heart-of-Heart indicates that nature. In the initial cultivation of this Dharma, one seeks meditative stability. Attaining stability is its essence; from stability, wisdom arises, and the arising of wisdom is its function.

While sitting, cultivate cessation; this is the essence. After leaving the seat, cultivate contemplation; this is the function. When cessation and contemplation advance together, meditative stability and wisdom support each other, and essence and function are united. When the essence is great, the function is great; when the essence is small, the function is small. Yet practitioners often do not bring it into function. They exert themselves by sitting for only two hours each day, but ordinarily refuse to investigate, bring it into function, and practice contemplative awareness. Therefore, they obtain very little effect and then doubt that the Dharma is not ultimate. This is like sharpening a knife without trying to use it: one never learns whether the blade is sharp or dull, yet faults the sharpening as incorrect and foolishly gives rise to views of self. Is this not regrettable?

The cultivation of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma differs greatly from other Dharma gates. At the beginning, it is easy to attain meditative stability, but midway through practice one may instead feel increasingly disordered. This is precisely the time of great progress, and practitioners must never become doubtful and retreat. It is like two bowls of muddy water: in one, leave it still and unmoving, so that the mud settles and the water naturally becomes clear. Though the result appears quickly, it is not ultimate; with the slightest disturbance, it becomes turbid again.

In the other, gradually remove the mud. Naturally, there is much stirring; but the more it is stirred, the more mud is removed. Once it has been stirred until thoroughly clean, one need no longer fear disturbance or overturning. It is also like a sick person who, after taking medicine, must undergo reactions such as sweating, vomiting, and diarrhea before the illness is eliminated.

When worldly people seek meditative stability, they often regard rigidly remaining motionless as stability. This is stillness, not meditative stability. Meditative stability means being equally at ease in stillness and activity, with stability and disturbance not two. Whatever circumstances may appear—gain and loss, defamation and praise, commendation and ridicule, suffering and pleasure—when the eight worldly winds arrive, receive them without being stained; remain unchanged and unmoved. This is right meditative stability.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma can truly be cultivated to such states. Yet those of inferior wisdom will surely stare in astonishment and exclaim, "This is the realm of the Buddha. How could ordinary beings like us possibly achieve it? This must be the

deluded inversion of a mad demon; he does not know his own limits," and so forth. Those who hear such words will certainly become doubtful, withdraw, and cease to study, thereby harming themselves through inaction. This is merely a human failing and must absolutely be avoided. Practitioners should have a valiant spirit and a spirit of adventure. There is no easy gain without labor in this world—how much less in studying Buddhism!

Japanese Esoteric Buddhism and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism emphasize form-based practice, with extremely strict ritual procedures, majestic Buddha images, and considerable expense. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma alone is not constrained by any of these things and does not require a particular place. As long as one practices in accordance with the Dharma and completes the required time, one can attain accomplishment. Patiently quiet the breath; there is no other method.

First, do not seek spiritual powers. Second, do not seek visions of light or Buddhas. Should any states appear before you, do not rejoice in them, nor doubt or fear them. Regard them as products of illusion and ignore them altogether. Do not be impatient while sitting. If someone comes to disturb you, or a child cries, do not become annoyed or resentful. Whenever something runs contrary to your wishes, use it to train the mind and transform its accumulated habits. Whenever annoyance or resentment arises, give rise instead to joy. After long habituation, this will become natural, and the light of equal wisdom will manifest.

In practicing the Dharma, reverence and earnestness are paramount. Reverence keeps one from being careless, and earnestness enables one to endure; thus samādhi will not be difficult to attain. After leaving the meditation cushion, lively contemplation is paramount. Liveliness can dissolve rigid habitual tendencies, and contemplation can examine the depth or shallowness of one's daily practice; thus functioning will not be difficult to bring forth.

Thereafter, in assessing the capacities of others, one will likewise become increasingly skilled through this practice, and the wisdom eye will open without one's being aware of it. To attain samādhi and realize the essence, one may rely on the Dharma, for it has mantra and mudrā. But the opening of wisdom and the arising of function depend entirely on oneself; one must constantly contemplate and practice. Take great care not to become lax. Modern practitioners may practice for many years while their afflictions remain unchanged. This is the fault of refusing to practice bringing forth function. They mistakenly regard worldly dharmas and Buddhadharma as two wholly separate things. The Sixth Patriarch said, "Buddhadharma is in the world; awakening is not apart from the world." If one does not rely on external circumstances to train the mind, one will go far astray.

For those who practice this Dharma, the essential point is that the mind not become lax; it does not lie in damaging the body or undergoing suffering. Therefore, among precepts, the precept of mind is foremost. Holding a mudrā with the hands is the secret of body; thus bodily karma such as killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct does not arise. Holding a mantra in the mouth is the secret of speech; thus verbal karma such as divisive speech and other evils does not arise. When the mind is clear and empty, this is the secret of mind; thus mental karma such as greed, anger, and ignorance does not arise.

This is the precept of non-precept: it restrains those who are unaware. Contemplation after leaving the meditation cushion, realizing emptiness, is precisely the prevention of potential faults and the stopping of evil at the causal stage; it is restraint before evil arises. Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct are results; at the causal stage, they belong to greed, anger, and ignorance. Yet greed, anger, and ignorance are themselves results, whose causal ground is not realizing the mind. Therefore, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma directly realizes vajra prajñā. It is the supreme wondrous gate for awakening to the mind and uprooting fundamental karmic obstacles.

Among Dharma gates of practice, actual practice is primary; merely discoursing on doctrine is entirely useless. In Esoteric Buddhism, one not only practices personally but also relies on the Buddha's power, and thus has a sure basis. One cultivates the three virtues of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom, entering into them without consciously knowing it.

Chan and Esoteric Buddhism have always differed from other schools. They begin practice with the eight consciousnesses, tracing from fruition back to cause, and first realize the great perfect mirror wisdom—the so-called fundamental wisdom, that is, non-discriminating wisdom—also called formless siddhi.

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch also discusses this briefly. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma does not depend on the length or depth of one's previous practice. One must undergo examination by an empowerment master, but even those who do not know a single character, or who have never practiced before, may receive the Dharma transmission. Moreover, in practice no particular location is required; one may sit and practice anywhere. There is no need to enter a ritual maṇḍala or prepare various offerings. According to Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, ordinary people cannot afford the ritual implements and procedures; this Dharma is expedient in that respect.

When practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, one is temporarily not permitted to consult sūtras or treatises, lest they divide the mind. Even sūtras already examined or read may be set aside for the time being. After completing one hundred

meditation sessions and realizing samādhi, the essential point of the mind will be opened, and one's understanding and state of mind will naturally differ. When one takes up the sūtras again, one will certainly encounter an entirely different realm. At this time, one should constantly draw near to good teachers, who can provide guidance and correction. Only after thorough awakening may one read the sūtras, so that one is not turned by them.

Originally, Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism had no Red and Yellow schools. The esoteric teachings of the Red school were considered the most complete, but their efficacy was so great as to verge on the mysterious. When they were transmitted to unsuitable persons, harmful abuses proliferated. Tsongkhapa, patriarch of the Yellow school, had no choice but to come forward and reform its teachings. Yet although the old abuses were eliminated, new problems arose.

Because everything studied had to follow a fixed sequence and could not exceed prescribed periods, the system became too rigid. It prevented those of sharp faculties from attaining accomplishment quickly, which is greatly regrettable. For example, in Tibet one must practice such teachings as the formless esoteric vehicle and the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for twelve to twenty years. Although this is the prescribed rule, people differ in the sharpness or dullness of their capacities; some may waste their time and be unable to proceed directly to profound cultivation.

Although lamas may themselves have deep practice, they cannot fully understand the capacities of people in the Eastern lands. Qualified teachers are too scarce; therefore, the esoteric vehicle received in the Eastern lands consists only of outward forms and has not reached its profound essentials. Recently, only Master Nona has taught the formless esoteric practice and gradually provided guidance. Among all the lamas, he alone understood the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

They do not know that the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is inherently present in both Japanese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. It is the Buddha's authentic transmission, not the private invention of any individual.

Therefore, when practicing the Dharma, one must first understand its meaning, never forget the fundamental at any point, and not be misled by the Dharma itself. Esoteric Buddhism receives the blessings of all Buddhas, whose aid is immense. It is like an airplane that assists a traveler, but the person must ultimately start it and set it in motion. To say that the Buddha can make someone into a Buddha is like saying that, when a person sits in an airplane, the airplane will automatically rise into the sky. Can there be such a principle? The first habitual tendency of practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism is to seek the mysterious and to rely entirely

on the Buddha, while not opening or setting themselves in motion. They become partial to ritual procedures and do not understand the essential point of mind. Since

their own mind-ground remains unclear, their habitual tendencies are ultimately difficult to eliminate. The airplane never takes flight; after studying Esoteric Buddhism for ten years, their afflictions remain unchanged, they seek countless teachings, and their suffering is as it was before. Fairly speaking, can this be the Dharma's fault? What are the three secrets? They are body, speech, and mind. To what do the secrets return? They return to purity. Purity of mind-ground is the clear proof of spiritual benefit. When a sick person takes medicine, efficacy is what matters; why debate whether the medicine is superior or inferior? In addition, there are several points to note in practicing Esoteric Buddhism:

1. In holding a mantra, accurate pronunciation is the foremost principle. Whenever one receives a mantra, after reciting it until moderately familiar with it, one should again ask the empowerment master to correct its pronunciation and intonation. The characters and phrases have rules concerning stress, lightness, divisions, and whether sounds are joined or separated; each must be carefully studied. One must not merely resemble the sound but also embody its spirit. With familiarity, it will become natural.

2. Offerings such as incense, flowers, water, and lamps are all symbolic teachings. Their purpose is to bring one's own Vairocana Buddha-nature into accord with the Buddha. Incense symbolizes freedom from impurity; flowers symbolize wondrous functioning; water symbolizes limpid purity; and lamps symbolize light. All symbolize the tathāgata-garbha nature of oneself and sentient beings, adorned with wondrous virtues and nondual with the Buddha. Contemplate that you yourself are also a Buddha. The main emphasis lies in the mind-ground; hence it is said, "Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings: the three are without distinction." During practice, these form-based methods are borrowed temporarily for no more than gathering in the mind.

3. Ritual procedures have their established Dharma gates; one must never devise them according to one's own ideas. This emphasizes transmission from a teacher. Practice according to the periods and number of sessions prescribed by the teacher, concentrating single-mindedly on one gate and penetrating deeply into it; one will certainly gain something. If one aims too high, hankers after the distant, and changes course whenever one sees something different, one will inevitably attain nothing.

4. In practicing Esoteric Buddhism, one must avoid discussing the Dharma with practitioners of Exoteric Buddhism. Because their standpoints differ, misunderstandings are frequent, and these in turn often give rise to doubt and confusion, hindering diligent practice. Esoteric Buddhism and the Chan school generally begin with the eight consciousnesses: they first break through ignorance and then remove obscurations. Their foundations are simply different. Exoteric Buddhism regards breaking through ignorance as extremely difficult, requiring

passage through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. Yet an asaṃkhyeya means an inexpressible span of time. One cannot assess Buddhist practice solely in terms of this lifetime, and there is no fixed time for either slowness or speed. Those attached to the marks of words cannot be spoken to about this.

In the present age, because the environment is unfavorable, people's minds increasingly tend toward unrest, and dealing with worldly affairs becomes ever more difficult. People commonly suffer from three deficiencies: first, weak and illness-prone bodies; second, a lack of meditative stability; third, weak powers of discernment. Because the body is weak, illnesses are frequent; all progress is impeded, while one's lifespan declines. One may die early in middle age or become disabled by illness, which is most regrettable.

The only remedy lies in cultivation and nourishment. Cultivation gathers in the mind and sees one's true nature; nourishment regulates the breath and calms the spirit. When the mind has a master, the vital energy is naturally sufficient; essence is firm and spirit flourishes, so illness may be dispelled and life prolonged. Insufficient meditative stability largely arises from physical weakness. Only a strong body can endure exertion and engage in devout practice. When meditative stability is strong, wisdom is sufficient, and one's power of discernment naturally becomes broad and far-reaching.

Buddhadharma actively liberates sentient beings; it is not passively concerned only with one's own liberation. For elderly people, the road home is already near; they should practice swiftly and leave the paths of suffering early. The fourth mudrā of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma can bring rebirth in the Western Pure Land and assist the causal conditions for their Buddha-recitation and rebirth.

Middle-aged people are actively engaged in worldly affairs. If they feel their energy is insufficient or their meditative stability inadequate, and if they become anxious and timid when matters arise, thereby often mishandling affairs, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma can enable them to attain samādhi within a set period. Samādhi and wisdom support one another, with immense significance for the work of an entire lifetime.

Young people have insufficient powers of discernment, and their minds are easily unsettled. Once enticed by external objects, they fall into degradation. If they practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, their foundation can become firm; moreover, what enters first takes precedence, and the scope for developing their undertakings will be immeasurable. Therefore, everyone can practice this Dharma. Women at home who wish for less illness, suffering, and vexation will find practicing this Dharma an especially supreme and wondrous instruction. Alas, people today have

scant blessings: receiving this Dharma is already extremely difficult, and how much more regrettable it is to receive it yet not practice it.

For those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, after completing one hundred meditation sessions, complexion and physical strength gradually improve. Its various benefits cannot be fully described. I shall now further explain the essential points of practice, though I can describe only one ten-thousandth of them. At the most subtle and profound level, none but one who has realized it personally can know it. You will soon be able to draw near to this unworthy teacher for further verification of realization, and your understanding will be more complete. The conditions lie ahead; where there is aspiration, there is accomplishment. Be at ease for a while.

Essential Points for Practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma

First: Arouse a Vast Resolve

When beginners practice the most vast, supreme, perfect, and complete great Dharma of the Heart-of-Heart, they truly cannot accord with it unless they arouse a vast resolve. The following ten points are briefly set forth:

1. With respect to the Dharma, one should give rise to pure faith. This is what is called right faith. The firmer one’s faith, the less likely one is to retreat midway.

2. Arouse an impartial mind. From Buddhas above to sentient beings below, regard all as equally impartial. Toward those who do not practice the Dharma or who disparage it, do not give rise to arrogance, pride, or anger. Do not praise yourself, and do not look for the faults of others.

3. Do not form the mudrās you hold at improper times; do not use them when impure; and do not employ the Dharma for fame, reputation, profit, or gain.

4. Do not disparage the Dharma yourself by transmitting it carelessly, and do not disparage the Dharma of others. First put an end to your own disparagement, and do not cause others to disparage it. If others disparage it, that is the same as your own disparagement. Those who hold sectarian views are not disciples of the Buddha.

V. Keep the precepts without transgression; constantly gather the mind in samādhi; cultivate the precept against killing and all wholesome practices.

VI. Revere the Buddha, revere the teacher, and also revere spiritual friends. Do not give rise to jealousy or erroneous views toward fellow practitioners.

VII. At all times arouse a vast and expansive mind, taking the liberation of all sentient beings as your aim.

VIII. Let your resolve and faith be firm; do not shrink from toil or fatigue.

IX. Cultivate the six perfections to counteract all afflictive attachments: generosity counteracts stinginess, upholding the precepts counteracts greedy defilement, forbearance counteracts anger and evil, diligence counteracts laziness, dhyāna counteracts distraction, and prajñā counteracts unawareness.

X. Seek wisdom and insight wholeheartedly; first break through ignorance, and do not rashly seek spiritual powers.

Read these ten points once each day as a reminder, so that the mind does not become heedless.

Second: The Stages of Practice

I. Do not be hasty in taking your seat. First read the mantra text until you know it well; take your seat only after you can recite it from memory.

II. There are five methods of mantra recitation: (1) recitation while counting; (2) recitation without counting; (3) loud recitation—when dullness or sleepiness arises, recite aloud several dozen times; (4) soft recitation; and (5) vajra recitation, in which the mouth moves slightly without making a sound, while one hears oneself very clearly. When seated for practice, use vajra recitation.

III. The Six Mudrās:

(1) The Bodhicitta Mudrā is the king of all mudrās. When practicing it, one must especially avoid giving rise to anger.

(2) The Mudrā for Accomplishing Bodhicitta is specifically for eliminating karmic obstacles and removing all grave illnesses.

(3) The Mudrā of Direct Transmission of Bodhi: before forming this mudrā, first recite the Three Refuges—"I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Saṅgha"—three times. Burn three kinds of incense: sandalwood, frankincense, and aloeswood, each separately. Those unable to obtain these may burn a single burner of other incense instead. Nor is it necessary to keep incense burning continuously for two hours, for during practice one should not smell fine incense, lest it disturb the vital energy.

(4) The Tathāgata-Mother Mudrā: before forming this mudrā, first recite "Homage to the Buddhas of the Ten Directions" seven times. Do not recite the mantra loudly; use

vajra recitation.

(5) The Tathāgata Well-Gathered Dhāraṇī Mudrā: when practicing this mudrā, recite “Homage to All Buddhas of the Three Times” three times every morning, direct the mind toward the Ten Directions and take the Three Refuges, and burn incense as for the third mudrā.

(6) The Tathāgata-Speech Mudrā: before practicing, first recite the Three Refuges. When finished, release the mudrā above the crown of the head.

Practice each mudrā for eight sessions, that is, eight times. Complete the first mudrā before proceeding to the second, and continue in sequence. Each session lasts two hours: it may exceed the time, but must not fall short. You may practice two or three sessions a day, but be sure to gauge your own strength and never greedily undertake too much. Complete eight sessions for each mudrā. After completing all six mudrās in sequence, add one further session of the first mudrā; if any of the others was not practiced in accordance with the method, add one session for it as well. This completes the six mudrās, and one will never again enter the three lower realms.

After completing the six mudrās, you must not become heedless. Continue to practice one session daily, exclusively practicing the fourth mudrā. After approximately six or seven sessions, add one session of the second mudrā. If practicing three sessions daily, or five or six sessions daily during a seven-day retreat, practice the fourth mudrā in all sessions and the second mudrā in the final session. The remaining first, third, fifth, and sixth mudrās need no longer be practiced.

After any seven-day retreat in which you have practiced five or six sessions a day, if you judge your strength to be ample and are capable of vigorous progress, then on the fifteenth day of a long lunar month you may practice nine sessions, seeking to complete ten thousand recitations in one uninterrupted stretch. Do this once each month. On that day practice only the fourth mudrā, not the second; nevertheless, practice according to your strength. Those who practice one uninterrupted session daily will certainly realize the mind after one year. Those seeking speed may undertake three seven-day retreats, totaling three weeks, practice for three or four months, and regularly draw near to spiritual friends; they too may attain wisdom and insight.

IV. The six mudrās must not be practiced out of sequence. You must complete them in order before undertaking a seven-day retreat. Unless one has completed such a retreat, one may not sit for nine sessions or practice the samādhi mudrā. Before completing one thousand sessions, do not become heedless. Once one thousand

sessions have been completed, further formal practice is unnecessary and serves no purpose; one need only apply it in daily life.

V. The most important points during practice are these: before two hours have elapsed, do not leave your seat, release the mudrā, stop reciting the mantra, or speak. Do not recite the mantra too quickly or too slowly; approximately twelve recitations per minute is the standard.

When taking your seat, do not attend to any other matter. Cover the mudrā with yellow cloth, disregard everything else, recite the mantra with the mouth, form the mudrā with the hands, and let the mind think of nothing. This is called the correspondence of the three mysteries. To practice until attaining the formless siddhi is accomplishment. The time of practice is unrestricted, though the best time is from five or six in the morning until seven or eight. In cold weather, do not practice too early. After each two-hour session, wholeheartedly make great vows and dedicate the merit to all sentient beings; this is of first importance.

After completing the six mudrās, you must recite the Maitreya mantra aloud forty-nine times each day and observe this for life. This is planting seeds at the causal stage and differs from other mantras. During practice, it is most important to eat little. After eating, wait at least an hour and a half before taking your seat.

Third: Preparations for Practice

I. Offerings: in the center, offer one image of Śākyamuni Buddha, three cups of water, three mirrors, three halberds (or knives in their place), three incense burners, and three portions of food, such as fruit. Place two vases with flower offerings to the right and left, and light one lamp in the center. Those without the means may offer as much or as little as they wish.

If, after accomplishing the practice, you wish to perform a great ritual for the benefit of the public, set up three altars in three sections. The central and first section should be white, for practicing the Buddha Way; the upper and second section should be red, for practicing the bodhisattva way; and the lower and third section should be blue-green, for practicing the Vajra Path. Within the altar area, lay one carpet and mark a central circle, divided into white, red, and blue-green. From the center, each dimension should extend eight feet. These are offerings for the altar area; for ordinary daily practice, there is no need to set up an altar. This Dharma differs from other esoteric practices in that it does not depend on forms; thus even poor people may conveniently practice it themselves.

II. Personal equipment: (1) a square of yellow cloth to cover the mudrā; (2) a wound clock or watch, or incense in its place—each stick should burn for approximately two hours; (3) a spittoon; and (4) a blanket for covering the legs and a meditation

cushion. The sitting portion of the cushion should preferably be six or seven inches high. Cross the legs beneath you; full lotus is not required. For full lotus, the seat should be level and the rear cushion should not be high. For half lotus, the rear cushion may be raised two or three inches.

III. Precautions: (1) There must be no drafts from the windows. Do not take your seat in a windy or cold place, and do not wear a hat. The room should be slightly warm, but do not become overheated. (2) The door should not be locked, so people may come and go. It is advisable to ask someone to watch outside the door and attend to matters as needed. Even if a child cries loudly and causes disturbance, it does no harm; never become angry, but use it to train the mind not to be moved.

(3) Do not keep a kettle of water boiling in the room, nor cats or dogs, lest they cause disturbance. (4) Unless there is an extremely urgent matter, do not allow anyone to notify you, and do not leave your seat. Even if notification is necessary, it must be given quietly. (5) Relieve yourself and wash your hands before taking your seat. After leaving your seat, strictly avoid urinating within five minutes, lest it harm the vital energy.

Moreover, when taking your seat, drink little water and eat little porridge. Overeating readily causes dullness. In warm weather, you may practice barefoot. (6) When the practice period is complete, do not leave your seat hastily. First stretch your legs and arms, rub your palms, and massage your face to harmonize the blood and vital energy; then descend slowly. After leaving your seat, it is advisable to walk more.

(7) When sitting, do not raise the head too high, lest the mind become scattered; nor lower it too much, as this easily causes coughing. Do not lean the back against anything, for prolonged leaning may injure the lungs. Hold the mudrā at the chest; do not lie down. Keep both arms slightly close to the sides. Lower the eyes as though closed. Strictly avoid becoming dull, releasing the mudrā, and falling asleep. There is no need to prepare tea, for the mouth will not become thirsty. Keep the waist straight and still; do not repeatedly stretch and contract it, lest the waist become sore. When first sitting, minor discomforts may arise, but after a while one will settle. These are old illnesses surfacing, not new illnesses, so do not become anxious.

(8) If, while sitting, you suddenly seem to fall asleep but the mudrā does not come apart and mantra recitation does not stop, this is not dullness or sleep. It is precisely the sign of samādhi appearing. Do not doubt it and interrupt the practice.

Fourth: What Constitutes Ultimate Accomplishment in Practice?

What does one practice to attain before it can be called ultimate accomplishment? First one must understand what one is practicing. The answer is: Buddhahood, that is, awakening. To pass from the ordinary to the noble is simply to turn from delusion to awakening, transform consciousness into wisdom, and open the Buddha's knowledge and vision. Yet Exoteric Buddhism holds that Buddhahood requires three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas; Esoteric Buddhism teaches attaining Buddhahood in this very life; the Chan school points directly to the source of mind and teaches immediate Buddhahood; and the Pure Land tradition teaches becoming a Buddha after rebirth in that land. Which should one follow? The answer is that each has its own standpoint and causes and conditions; this does not mean that the teachings differ in superiority, speed, or conflict. Let us discuss this briefly.

I. Exoteric Buddhism refers to those who have never studied Buddhism. It is like first entering elementary school: one must spend a certain number of years before progressing through middle school and high school to university, and must spend further years there. One cannot skip grades and leap ahead at once. This is a provisional formulation based on principle. Asaṃkhyeya originally means an inexpressibly great number, and no fixed endpoint can be specified. Learning Buddhism necessarily extends across the three divisions of time. Though one's study in this life may be shallow, because of causes and conditions from former lives, one may later surpass others or even enter university directly. It must not be limited by worldly, discriminating views. Moreover, Exoteric Buddhism relies on one's own power, so accomplishment is comparatively difficult; it cannot be discussed on the same temporal basis as Esoteric Buddhism.

II. Esoteric Buddhism relies on the Buddha's power and receives the empowerment of the three mysteries; this is the distinctive teaching of its own tradition. Just as a child cannot climb a mountain but relies on the mother's strength to carry them, so, because the causes and conditions differ, accomplishment can be attained in this very life.

III. The Chan school points directly to the source of mind, and one may suddenly awaken upon hearing the words. Such people are of the highest capacity; because they cultivated diligently in former lives, their causes and conditions are complete in this life. They enter the hall in a single step and therefore can become Buddhas immediately.

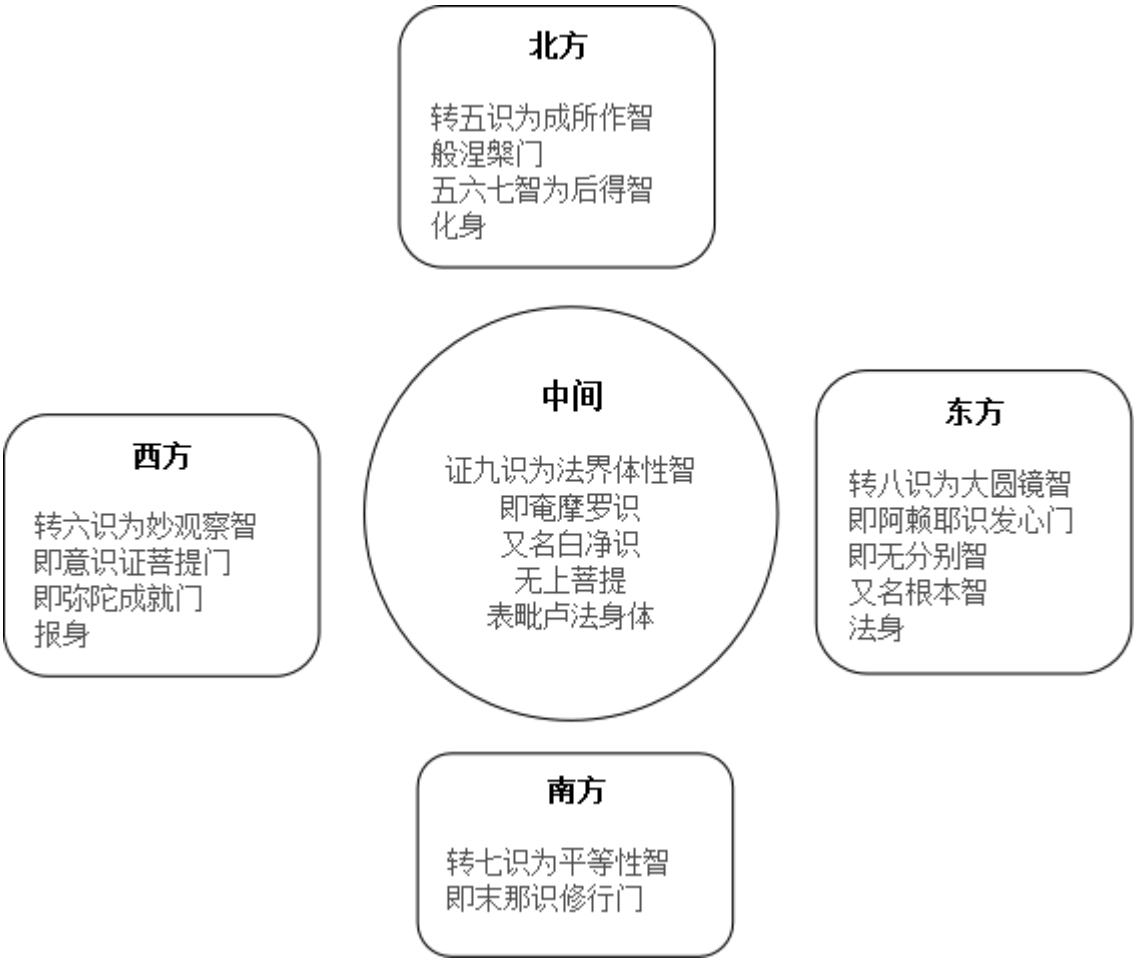
IV. The Pure Land method is originally Esoteric Buddhism. Its vows are directed exclusively toward the Western Pure Land, with rebirth there as its sole aim. One seeks only rebirth in the West, and naturally, when the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha. Its aspiration is not to see one's nature in this very life, but to complete one's training and graduate in another world. The Buddha's power upon which it

relies is directed toward rebirth as its goal. To realize one's intrinsic Pure Land and attain purity and adornment is what becoming a Buddha means.

The Buddha taught the Pure Land Dharma gate so that those of superior capacity might realize it in this very life and bring the fruition stage to perfect completion; he also opened an easy and expedient Dharma gate for those of lesser capacity, enabling them to plant seeds at the causal stage. Yet present-day Pure Land practitioners have turned this supremely subtle and wondrous great Dharma of the Pure Land into a convenience for those of timid resolve and inferior wisdom. Those who are not vessels for this Dharma naturally find it difficult to receive it; some regard it as slow and circuitous, concerned only with their own liberation. This is deeply regrettable. In short, the Pure Land Dharma is no different from Chan or Esoteric Buddhism. Accomplishment through rebirth is certainly possible, and accomplishment in this very life is also possible; the causes and conditions simply differ.

V. The Chan and Esoteric schools begin their practices from fruition and seek out the cause, cultivating from the eight consciousnesses. They first reveal the dharmakāya and realize fundamental wisdom—that is, great perfect mirror wisdom, also called non-discriminating wisdom. Other schools begin from the cause and seek the fruition, cultivating from the sixth and seventh consciousnesses. Their practices at the causal stage truly differ; therefore, the speed with which they realize fruition also differs. The Esoteric Buddhist chart of transforming the nine consciousnesses into the five wisdoms is set out below.

Chart of Transforming the Nine Consciousnesses into the Five Wisdoms



VI. The Chan and Esoteric schools first break through ignorance and afterward eliminate habitual tendencies. Often, the great matter has already been clarified while habitual tendencies remain. Yet their roots have already been loosened, and one has the power of wisdom's illumination; it is no longer like the former state of being deluded and unaware. Other schools are the reverse: they first eliminate habitual tendencies and wish to break through ignorance only after these tendencies have been purified. They do not know that before ignorance has been broken through, they are merely forcefully suppressing habitual tendencies and exerting effort to subdue them; this is not their eradication at the root. Though such practice may show results temporarily, in the long run the counterforce becomes strong, and it is as if one had not practiced at all. It is not thoroughgoing. At death, one often becomes confused and inverted; this is precisely the fault.

VII. The Chan and Esoteric schools regard breaking through ignorance and seeing one’s true nature in this very life as Buddhahood. If one relies on the Buddha’s power, this can indeed be realized in this life. To eliminate habitual tendencies completely, however, is not originally something that can be accomplished in one lifetime. Exoteric Buddhism, on the other hand, generally regards Buddhahood as attained only after ignorance has been broken through, the five spiritual powers have arisen, habitual tendencies have been completely eliminated, and everything

has been perfected, as in the case of Śākyamuni Buddha. This is like planting a fruit tree: one party considers it accomplished when it first bears fruit.

The other considers it accomplished only when the fruit is ripe and edible, picked, and placed in a vessel. One has no temporal marks: before and after are nondual. The other clings to fixed forms and provisionally establishes stages. One has the strength to undertake it and regards it as only natural. The other is overly solemn about it and consequently distinguishes difficulty from ease. Unless each point is clearly distinguished and explained, partial attachments and sectarian disputes will cause students much suffering.

In sum, what differs among the methods of practice of the various schools is their ritual forms and points of departure; what they share are their aim and final destination. In seeking to develop wisdom, cross over to the other shore, and be liberated from birth and death, all schools are alike. There are several essential instructions: once practitioners have them, entering the gate will not be difficult.

Four Essential Instructions

(I) First understand the true meaning of practice. Buddha-recitation, sitting meditation, and the cultivation of methods cannot be called actual practice; they can only be called training—for example, training one's strength in preparation for a journey. If one lacks the strength to travel, this in turn proves that one's training has been insufficient. Therefore, after leaving the Buddha hall and rising from one's seat, in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, amid all people and affairs and in every kind of conduct, lies actual practice. If one feels that one's strength is insufficient at such times, then

one should further train and cultivate, and practice many methods to support it. This is primary; that is secondary. Yet people reverse them, forget their true meaning, and thus give undue weight to the latter while slighting the former. Naturally, the results they obtain are meager. This is the first instruction.

(II) What is meant by actual practice? In actual practice after leaving the Buddha hall, one must first understand the wonder of putting it into function. Its essential instruction lies in the two words "do not forget." Whatever the matter or place, never depart from vigilance; attend to everything everywhere. One need only become accustomed to using this mind. To use it is awareness and illumination. Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only delayed awareness. If one is not aware, one is carried away by circumstances and led off by them. Once one has been led far away,

one does not know how to return; this is wandering. People have long been thoroughly accustomed to greed, anger, and ignorance; nor has this come about through practice of merely a day or a night. Today, in turning from rawness back to

familiarity, one must likewise develop a habit. When one does not forget moment after moment, one's practice has become thoroughly mature, entering the transformed state in which one cannot stop even if one wishes to. One is then "learning and constantly putting it into practice"; the joy of this may be known. This is the second instruction.

(III) A concise explanation of practice: practice means returning. "Restrain oneself and return to propriety; then all under Heaven returns to benevolence." Returning to the original is to have nowhere that one cannot penetrate; all things are complete within oneself. Only then is the work of fully extending knowledge and investigating things accomplished. Therefore it is called returning to benevolence. Yet restraining oneself is the cause, and returning to propriety is the result; restraining oneself and returning to propriety are again the cause, while all under Heaven returning to benevolence is the result. Restraining oneself is the first step of practice. To restrain oneself is to control one's mind. All activity is created by mind; because the mind grasps at conditions, thoughts become deluded. When the mind is held to one place, there is no defilement or attachment. With neither delusion nor truth, one has returned through practice to the original.

"One place" must not be rigidly grasped as though there were a particular place called one. One has no fixed meaning; pervading every place without the slightest attachment is what is called one place. This one place is a round, all-pervading, vast place free of attachment; it is not the sharp and exclusive "one" to which the myriad dharmas return. Without actual cultivation and realization, one cannot understand this intuitively. Just employ the single word "illuminate." When illumination becomes mature, one can avoid forgetting; by not forgetting, one is neither deluded nor moved. This is what is called practicing prajñāpāramitā deeply. This is the third instruction.

(IV) The process of entering practice: progress in practice must have a process. It is like climbing a mountain: from the bottom upward, there must be stages. For those of sudden capacity, who originally go straight to the summit, there is no need to speak of this. But for beginners, expedient means are indispensable. There are five stages in the work of illumination: first, knowing illumination; second, illuminating emptiness; third, illuminating quiescence; fourth, emptiness of emptiness; fifth, quiescent illumination.

Knowing illumination means knowing how to put it into function, and knowing that without illumination one cannot transform. Opening this wisdom of awareness is actual practice after awakening, but it begins with understanding and then proceeds to practical cultivation. Illuminating emptiness means that without illumination one cannot realize emptiness; here one has already entered practice. Illuminating quiescence means one has entered the state of profound quiescence. Yet at times

one forgets illumination; as soon as one becomes slightly and keenly aware, one is again profoundly tranquil. The emptiness of emptiness is also illumination: through the power of illumination, one empties that emptiness.

Quiescent illumination is the state of constant quiescence and constant illumination. There is never a time when one is not quiescent and never a time when one is not illuminating. Whether illuminating or not illuminating, all is quiescent; one does not even know oneself to be illuminating or quiescent. In brief, when practice is mature, one enters a transformed state.

All bondage to birth and death is simply the opposition of mind and circumstances. Mind and circumstances are not separate: external circumstances are mind, and the circumstances within the mind are also mind. Using mind to break through mind, one breaks through both mind and circumstances. This is collectively called breaking through ignorance. “Breaking through” means emptiness; it does not mean smashing something apart. For if there remains an appearance of breaking through, it cannot be called emptiness. Ignorance and illumination stand in opposition; when there is illumination, ignorance cannot stand. Here, “break through” means extinguish,

and when extinguished, it cannot be found. The essential instruction for extinguishing ignorance lies in the single word “illuminate.” If one cannot illuminate, or does not know what to illuminate, the root problem is simply insufficient strength of samādhi and wisdom: one does not know how to put it into function. Yet the overall instruction for putting it into function still lies in the single word “illuminate.” Illumination transforms; transformation lets go and moves elsewhere; the fundamental substance is thereby empty. For example, once ignorance is transformed, it cannot be found. Once empty, there is samādhi. Therefore, illumination is transformation; transformation is emptiness; emptiness is samādhi; samādhi is freedom from delusion; freedom from delusion is freedom from wandering; freedom from wandering is freedom from birth and death.

Turning this around, there is no illuminator and nothing illuminated; thus there is no so-called emptiness, samādhi, freedom from delusion, freedom from wandering, and so forth. In the end, birth and death themselves cannot be found. This is one who can truly transcend birth and death. Turning it around once more, since all fundamental substances cannot be found, then whether one illuminates or does not illuminate, transforms or does not transform, is empty or is not empty—even whether one transcends birth and death or not—the ultimate reality is equally nondual, and nothing is impossible. Thus it is wonderful, and not being thus is also wonderful. This is truly to enter the Dharma gate of nonduality in transcendent freedom; even transcending is no longer anything that can be transcended. This is ultimate transcendence of birth and death.

Once this principle is clear and there is no confusion whatsoever, ignorance has been broken through. Only habitual tendencies remain deep and heavy, and they seem not to be eliminable in this very life. There are nine stages, distinguished as follows: (1) coarse within coarse; (2) subtle within coarse; (3) very subtle within coarse; (4) coarse within subtle; (5) subtle within subtle; (6) very subtle within subtle; (7) coarse within the very subtle; (8) subtle within the very subtle; (9) very subtle within the very subtle.

These nine types indicate the relative depth of the mind's bondage. Up to very subtle within the coarse is the state of the first bhūmi: ignorance has already been broken through, and bondage to form has been severed. Very subtle within the subtle pertains to the third through sixth bhūmis, where bondage to mind has already been severed.

Very subtle within the very subtle pertains to the eighth bhūmi and above. The residual habitual tendencies of the two bondages of form and mind have already been severed, and one gradually enters the stage of equal enlightenment. Only when the very subtle within the very subtle has been exhausted is great awakening fully perfected; this cannot be accomplished in one lifetime. It is like a child in the womb or a newborn infant: though not yet like an adult, it cannot after all be called nonhuman. Likewise, though one cannot equal the Buddha's complete great awakening, one cannot after all be called other than a Buddha.

Attainment in this very life is attainment of this Buddhahood. To nurture the sacred embryo is to nurture the sacred embryo of one who has already become a Buddha. Foolish people cling to appearances and cannot be spoken to about the essential teachings of the Mahāyāna. Only those whose faith does not recoil, who are neither startled nor afraid, are fit for it.

The Process of Illumination, Transformation, Emptiness, and Samādhi

Rigid Relaxed

Long Short

Large Small

Strange Unafraid

Two Nondual

Forced Natural

Existence Emptiness

Emptiness Emptiness of Emptiness

Hindrance Nonattachment

Bondage Liberation

Raw Mature

Consciousness Wisdom

Confusion Unmoved

Wandering Cessation

Drawn Along Freedom

Emptiness of Emptiness Not Empty

Powerless Replete with Strength

Partial Complete

There is no way from here to there without the illumination of wisdom. As the occasions of illumination increase day by day, its power naturally becomes sufficient, and the sense faculties and their objects naturally fall away. Only this is actual practice. This is the fourth instruction.

The foregoing has briefly explained the methods of practice. Yet once they have fallen into verbal formulations, how could they be ultimate? Thus one knows that the ultimate point lies in the practitioner's own realization within the mind; it cannot be expressed in words. I, too, am merely making unnecessary fuss—ha, ha!

V. Stages of Practice

How could methods of practice have fixed forms? If there were fixed stages, there would be fixed dharmas. Yet for beginners, they should be made definite, so that practice may be simple, direct, and swift. After the gathering, these matters may be taught individually in person: perhaps Pure Land practice before esoteric practice, or esoteric practice before Chan. They may then be discussed further.

As for relying on teachers and spiritual friends in practice, it is nothing more than seeking discussion and arriving at a decision. Once one obtains the essential instruction, one achieves twice the result with half the effort; once one gains its benefit, one will naturally be unwilling to turn back. With my limited and partial understanding, I discuss with you all the Dharma gates for studying Buddhism. Though I have not reached their depths, perhaps I will not mislead others. If there

are doubts, or if you consider anything inappropriate, please offer direct instruction with an honest mind. If we examine and verify matters together, we shall not be far from Mind-Seal.

The True Intent of Practice

Most practitioners in the world do not understand why they practice, what they practice for, or what their conduct signifies. Though they prominently display the banner of practice, what they do and what they cultivate are entirely at odds. As for whether their methods of practice are correct or incorrect, that need not even be discussed. At the very outset of practice, practitioners must not be in the least confused. They must not deceive themselves with falsehoods; only then will they avoid misleading others and further increasing their own wrongdoing. This is what is meant by first rectifying the causal ground.

Filial piety, fraternal respect, loyalty, trustworthiness, and the like are the foundations upon which a person establishes oneself. It is precisely because people lack filial piety and fraternal respect that they need to cultivate them. The words “filial piety” and “fraternal respect” were originally used to educate the degenerate among humankind. If people truly were not like animals, filial piety and fraternal respect would have no use; if they truly were free from the afflictions of greed, anger, and ignorance, there would be no need to cultivate the Buddhadharma. Therefore, before practicing, first ask yourself: Are you truly at peace of mind? Have you truly eradicated greed, anger, and ignorance? If not, then you cannot simply call it superstition, discard it, and decline to practice.

People in the world habitually falsify things until it becomes second nature. They do not realize that they may deceive others, but how can they deceive themselves? They may speak falsely, but how can they falsify matters when the moment of action arrives? They may deceive themselves in ordinary times, but how can they do so at the time of death? Thus, everything may be falsified, but practice cannot be falsified. Practice originally seeks truth by casting off falsity; if one practices only to seek further falsity, it is like a sick person seeking counterfeit medicine and thereby seeking his own death. How foolish! Practitioners must not lose their way at this point.

People originally need not practice. It is precisely because their conduct is not in accord that they need to practice. Dharma itself is originally neither deviant nor correct; what accords with one's conduct is correct. Methods of practice are likewise originally neither right nor wrong; what suits the recipient and accords with conditions is correct. Dharma is like medicine: when a teaching suits the recipient, it is called correct practice.

Human beings naturally possess an inherent nature; therefore it is said, “What Heaven ordains is called nature.” The implementation of that nature is the Way; therefore it is said, “Following nature is called the Way.” Yet people have lost their original state and rely on Dharma in order to restore it; therefore it is said, “Cultivating the Way is called teaching.” Teaching is the gift of Dharma. Nature is the essence, and the Way is its function. To speak of nature and the Way of Heaven is to speak of the Original Face.

To see the Original Face, one must first eliminate the karmic obstacles of ignorance and make one's bright virtue shine forth—that is, restore one's original virtue. But what is the appearance of this original virtue? It is originally pure, originally neither arising nor ceasing, originally capable of all things, with essence and function such as they are. It originally possesses light and is nondual with the Buddha; it is only because of obscurations that one is deluded and does not see it. It is like a drunken person: nothing at all is lacking, but he is simply confused. Once the effects of drink wear off, he recovers; in truth, there is no difference. Yet although this is easy to say, people find it very difficult to believe. Thus faith is the mother of practice.

The Buddha said that, during the remaining forty years of the Dharma-ending Age, to teach people about the nature of the tathāgatagarbha would be most difficult of all. Making the waters of the great ocean dry up by dripping chicken feathers into them would still be easier; this would be the most difficult of all, and so forth. It is not that giving the Dharma is difficult; rather, it is difficult for sentient beings to believe that they themselves are Buddhas.

Let us set aside this profound Buddhadharma for now and speak only of the fact that human life is suffering. Even this they will not believe. They plainly suffer and are confused; all things are plainly impermanent, yet they delight in them without weariness. How could they be willing to believe? Only when they suffer a great blow do they awaken to the emptiness and suffering of impermanence; such people already have superior capacities. Others do not awaken even at death. As it is said, there are eight kinds of people for whom even the Buddha can do nothing.

First are mute people: those whose mouths can speak but who do not speak the true path are called mute people. Second are deaf people: those whose ears can hear but who cannot hear the truth are called deaf people. Third are people in hell: when people are covered by ignorance and commit evil, they are people in hell. Fourth are people among hungry ghosts: those who seek greedily without satiety and are miserly and unwilling to give. Fifth are people among animals: those who do not understand principle and righteousness.

Sixth are people in borderlands: those who give rise to deviant views, believing that people are annihilated after death. Seventh are people in the long-life heavens:

those who spend their days eating their fill and never apply their minds to anything. Eighth are those who receive the Dharma but do not diligently put it into practice. Though the Buddha is compassionate toward these eight kinds of people, even he can do nothing. Worldly people are deluded and take what their eyes cannot see to be unreal; this is why they are difficult to instruct.

For example, consider a large piece of wood with a nail driven into it. When the nail is first driven in, half of it remains outside and can still be readily recognized. But as it is gradually driven into the wood, and after a long time becomes covered with dust and clogged with mud, perhaps with glue and lacquer applied as well, the surface is smooth and no trace can be seen. Even if one tells them, “There is a nail inside,” they will certainly not believe it. This is the first difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Then one tells them that this nail must be pulled out; otherwise, over time the wood will rot and be damaged. They will certainly not believe it. This is the second difficulty in believing the Dharma. Once they do believe, one further tells them that the nail is in a particular place and direction, and that they need only enter deeply through one gate and investigate it, without searching in many places. They will certainly not believe it. This is the third difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Then, when they have deep faith without doubt, they remove the obstructing glue and lacquer and uncover the head of the nail. One tells them that it can certainly be removed, but they again fear the difficulty and do not believe. This is the fourth difficulty in believing the Dharma. Then one tells them that there are various Dharma instruments, such as drills and pliers, as well as various expedient means. Yet they trust only themselves and rely on their own strength, placing no trust in others and refusing to heed what they are taught. This is the fifth difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Once they begin, one further tells them the method for pulling it out: first tighten it and then loosen it; shake it until it moves; remove the coarse portion, then remove the subtle portion. Yet they again become confused and do not believe. This is the sixth difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Then one formally tells them that this nail and the wood were originally unrelated; the nail was driven in unjustifiably. This mind is ultimately not comparable to a nail, nor is it an object possessing form. One need only recognize clearly that there was originally no nail: in its very substance it is empty, and without being pulled out it will disappear of itself. Yet this is even more difficult for them to believe deeply. This is truly the most difficult of all—the seventh difficulty in believing the Dharma.

Today, when one directly tells them where the nail is and explains the principle that it disappears of itself without being pulled out, how can those without profound faith avoid resisting it? This is why the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is so lofty that few can

harmonize with it. Some have practiced one or two thousand meditation sessions and still do not know how to apply it. They have not truly heard the essential meaning of this Dharma, nor understood its standpoint; instead, they doubt the Dharma and slander the teacher. Alas! What more can be said?

At the beginning of practice, one must first establish its main threads and framework. Once there is an outline, everything can proceed in an orderly way. All who become doubtful and retreat midway do so because the foundation has not been clarified; they are still acting on the basis of emotional views. In the section on right cultivation, faith, vows, and practice constitute the three great outlines, while realization belongs to the Section on Verification of Realization. First determine what one believes, and then make vows. Once one has made true vows, there is no possibility of failing to put them sincerely into practice. Accordingly, how to have faith in the Dharma, how to make vows in relation to the Dharma, and how to practice the Dharma are each divided into categories and explained one by one. Let us first discuss faith.

Right Faith

For forty-nine years the Buddha expounded the Dharma—the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of the canon, in thousands upon thousands of words—solely to enable people to recognize their Original Face and trust that they are originally awakened, not deluded. But why are they deluded? They must investigate this thoroughly for themselves before they will fear suffering and arouse the resolve.

The strength of one's resolve varies because one's investigation may be clear or unclear. Some people know nothing at all of suffering and therefore have no willingness whatsoever to arouse the resolve. Some have already aroused it, but they drift along carelessly; being half clear and half obscured, they lack deep urgency.

Others apply themselves earnestly, yet progress exceedingly slowly and receive no immediate benefit, because their understanding is not thorough. Though they have faith, it is not firm; though they have made vows, they are not great; though they uphold their practice, they are not constant.

The sūtras say that arousing the resolve is the foremost difficult matter. To arouse the resolve is to arouse the mind of faith, vows, and practice. Have faith that you are originally a Buddha; only because of delusion are you not awakened. Now that you understand the reason, if you are willing to cultivate and turn back, you can certainly realize your true nature and attain Buddhahood in this very life. Never willingly demean or abandon yourself. This is faith.

Having understood this principle and seen the suffering of sinking in saṃsāra and the joy of the other shore, one will naturally seek to attain Buddhahood in this very life, without further drifting along and wasting one's opportunity. This is vow. Having made vows, one must put them into practice in actual circumstances. This is practice. The foregoing is principle; this is phenomena. When principle and phenomena accord, faith, vows, and practice are united as one.

There are depths and shallows in the state of this unity, and thus there are depths and shallows in the realization attained. Others cannot measure it; only one oneself knows. Having recognized the Original Face, we who embrace the vow to benefit ourselves and others should establish for people a definite right path.

First set the causal ground right, so that they understand cause and effect and understand that their own causal ground is originally complete and lacking nothing, not the slightest bit different from that of the Buddha. They fail to attain the fruition only because they are unwilling to bring it forth. Since we bear this responsibility to guide others, we must teach them to have complete faith, great faith, and urgent faith; otherwise, we shall mislead their wisdom-life. The crucial point lies here. How could we fail to be careful?

Faith means being decisively free of doubt. If there is even one or two hesitations, it is not faith. What does it mean for faith to be complete? It means faith in principle and faith in phenomena, faith that is whole and complete, neither one-sidedly attached nor confused. Those who arouse faith should do as follows:

1. Have faith that cause and effect are nondual: where there is a cause, there is a result. Buddhas who have already attained fruition include Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Bhaiṣajyaguru. Before all fruition Buddhas became Buddhas, the Buddha-nature on their causal ground was originally complete. They too had once been inverted and deluded; they went from delusion to awakening, from awakening to cultivation, and from cultivation to realization. The course they previously underwent is no different from ours today.

2. Have faith that my present fundamental essence is originally innate awakening; the land is none other than mind, and is originally a Pure Land. Though delusion has produced inversion, Buddha-nature is never destroyed and lacks not even the slightest bit. Thus, on the causal ground, I can fully attain Buddhahood.

It is like two pieces of jade, both equally capable of being carved into a Buddha. One has already been carved, and the other has not. The uncarved piece must certainly be carved with the same splendor as the one already carved, lifelike in every detail; only then does it accord with the right path. If one harbors a deferential and self-belittling attitude, not daring to undertake the responsibility of being equal to the Buddha, and insists for the present on retaining some dissimilarity, intending to

carve it only in a future life, then one mistakes the principle of not yielding one's rightful responsibility for arrogant self-conceit. This is incomplete faith.

3. Have faith that not only am I thus, but that all sentient beings of every kind equally possess Buddha-nature, and I respect them as I respect the Buddha. If, through misfortune, one is a cat in this life while I am a human being, then in another life I may become a cat while the cat becomes a human being. That being may cultivate first, attain realization, and come first to liberate me. How then could I slight or look down on them?

Therefore, those who study Buddhism should consider matters in terms of three lives. One must not judge the depth or shallowness of another's cultivation and accomplishment by how long or briefly they have practiced in this present life. Only with such faith will one not fall into arrogance and self-conceit or slight later learners; nor will later learners abandon themselves on that account. Hence it is said: Buddha, mind, and sentient beings are no different in their essential nature. To know the principle but not understand phenomena is not complete faith.

4. Have faith that one must not cling rigidly and inflexibly to the Dharma taught by the Buddha. There are definitive teachings and nondefinitive teachings; one should rely on the meaning, not on the words, and should not cling to chapters, passages, or individual characters. When the Buddha expounds the Dharma, few words often convey many meanings. Never measure the intent of the sages by one's own views and feelings, cling to the old without adaptation, or have dead rather than living faith. This applies, for example, to belief in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

To rigidly maintain that the West alone is ultimate bliss and that the East must therefore be a land of suffering is mistaken. One should know that, after describing all the splendors of the Western Land in the Amitābha Sūtra, it expressly points out the Buddha lands of all ten directions. It clearly speaks of Pure Lands in all ten directions. Yet because sentient beings are too changeable in disposition, vacillating and unable to practice single-mindedly, the Buddha had no alternative but to introduce the single place called the West. He also explained that it is westward from here—that is, reckoning from Sahā as the starting point and provisionally calling that direction west—so that people would not become one-sidedly attached. Such living faith is great faith.

5. Have faith that, although one's Buddha-nature is complete, it has been covered by habitual tendencies since beginningless time. One's own power is certainly insufficient; one must rely on the Buddha's power and the empowerment of the three secrets. Only then will progress be swift. The more urgent one's faith, the firmer one's practice.

6. Have faith that all cultivation necessarily encounters various demonic difficulties. Only through enduring constancy without change can one achieve accomplishment. Endurance is what is meant by “old,” and unchanging constancy is what is meant by “true”; only through sincere and steadfast cultivation does faith become genuinely urgent.

7. Have faith that transmission from master to master is the Buddha’s transmission itself; a good spiritual friend is nondual with the Buddha. The more completely one is respectful, the more immediate the connection; the more immediate the connection, the greater the benefit received.

8. Have faith that all dharmas are unsurpassed, because all were taught by the Buddha. Only because ages differ and sentient beings differ in capacity is there no fixed Dharma; it changes in accordance with capacities. The Buddha does not enter nirvāṇa, and the Dharma wheel constantly turns. To slander the Dharma is therefore the same as slandering the Buddha.

9. Have faith that the various dharma gates each have their own stages and differ from one another, and that each person’s realization also differs. Do not recklessly speculate about others’ states and forget your own cultivation and accomplishment.

10. Have faith that even in the Dharma-ending age there are people of sharp faculties. Buddhas and bodhisattvas cannot be seen in physical form; they cannot be sought through forms or sounds.

11. Have faith that to claim attainment when one has not attained, or realization when one has not realized, is false. Yet to conjecture by one’s own thoughts is also false: to claim knowledge when one does not know is equally unreal and equally a great delusion.

12. Have faith that to realize one’s true nature and attain Buddhahood must be directly acknowledged here and now: the Buddha does not deceive me, and in this very life I can certainly realize the mind and see my true nature. This is sudden awakening and Buddhahood. Yet the accumulated habitual tendencies of beginningless time have not been eliminated and cannot be entirely swept away in this lifetime. The inability to develop supernormal powers and attain Buddhahood are, in fact, two different matters.

13. Non-Buddhist paths also possess the five supernormal powers, but these differ from Buddhist realization. In Buddhism, one first seeks to open great wisdom; only after realizing the supernormal power of the exhaustion of defilements should one develop the five supernormal powers. Then one will not be turned by circumstances and fall into decline.

14. Have faith that the cause of human suffering is simply bondage by mental states, circumstances, and habitual tendencies. Knowing how to cut off habitual tendencies is to enter the right path of cultivation and to cut off all suffering.

15. Have faith that all karmic obstacles and the round of rebirth in the six realms are merely the activity of a mind governed by habitual tendencies. Heavy habits bring heavy karma, and light habits bring light karma. To eliminate all karmic obstacles, one should investigate the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate.

16. Have faith that in this age of decline the Buddhadharma is waning, each generation falling short of the last. If I cannot resolve the matter in this very life, for what time shall I wait? Should you encounter a good spiritual friend, do not pass through a mountain of treasures empty-handed. Time does not come again. Never entertain even the slightest thought of waiting. Only such faith is genuine and urgent.

Great Vows

Faith is the mother of all practices, and vows come before all undertakings. Whether an undertaking is good or evil, before it is done there must first be an aspiration. A vow itself is practice, and the practice of vows is true faith. To practice without a vow cannot be called faith; to make vows without putting them into practice cannot be called faith and vows. When faith is firm, one has the strength to practice; when vows are great, one's undertakings are vast. As the causal ground is, so too will be the ground of fruition. Therefore, one's vows must not fail to be vast.

Vast in what regard? In upholding lofty aspirations; this is the great vow. The Buddhadharma is proactive: one must vow to save the immeasurable sentient beings of the great chiliocosm; one must eradicate such afflictions as greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, pride, and wrong views. In brief, one must actively turn from wrong to right, from the ordinary to the noble, from self-liberation to benefiting others, and from afflictions to bodhi.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says: “This sūtra is not entrusted to the hands of ordinary sentient beings, nor even to bodhisattvas of the provisional vehicles; it is entrusted to ordinary beings of great resolve,” and so forth. Ordinary beings of great resolve are those who, before they practice, first arouse correct and great vows.

The sūtra further says, “At the very first arousing of bodhicitta, one immediately becomes a Buddha.” Such is the power of vows. One should also not yield when righteousness calls; this does not mean competing greedily with others, but rather not allowing one's vow to fall behind others and having the courage to act when one sees what is right. Yet this also depends on faith being firm and earnest; then vows

naturally arise. The sūtra says, “Relying on sentient beings, great compassion arises; relying on great compassion, bodhicitta is aroused; relying on bodhicitta, one attains perfect awakening.” Great vows thus give rise to great practice and enable one to enter the Mahāyāna stage. Therefore, one's vows must be vast, earnest, genuine, and true. We shall now speak further of vows.

1. Vow to realize the mind's true nature and attain Buddhahood in this very life; do not hesitate.

2. Vow to enter the path of correct practice through right view, to cut off the views of sentient beings, and to open the Buddha's knowledge and vision.

3. Vow not to give rise to inferior wisdom or petty vows, thereby failing to live up to the compassionate blessings and expectations of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

4. To repay the four benefactions, vow to liberate all sentient beings so that they all attain Buddhahood; using what I have realized, I will skillfully guide them.

5. Vow to rely on the fourteen stages of forbearance in the Benevolent Kings Prajñā Sūtra, cultivate diligently and energetically, and never retreat from my original vow.

6. Vow that, when this life of karmic retribution comes to an end, I may, in accordance with conditions, be reborn in whatever land is appropriate—for example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss or the Eastern Lapis Lazuli Buddha Land—or, having attained realization, return again to the Sahā world to liberate sentient beings.

7. Vow to develop the four immeasurable minds; do not slight later students, do not become arrogant or self-conceited, and extend compassion equally to liberate all.

8. Vow to follow Samantabhadra's Ten Great Vows, benefiting oneself and others, and dedicate the merit to the immeasurable lands and immeasurable sentient beings of the dharma realm.

If one aims for the highest, one may attain only the middle; how much less if one aims for the lower? Therefore, the first requirement in making vows is that they be great. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas will never regard you as arrogant because your vows are great. Everyone can become like Yao and Shun; do not yield when righteousness calls—this is an ancient and clear teaching. Yet empty vows without practice are equivalent to falsehood. We shall now explain practice.

Implementation

Practice means actual practice. To realize phenomena through principle is called practice, and it is the most important part of the Section on Right Cultivation. Sentient beings suffer only because they encounter obstructions everywhere and do not understand why. This is an obstruction of principle. Whenever they act, they incur fault; this is an obstruction of phenomena. Now, if one truly believes in Buddhist principle without doubt, principle is unobstructed. If one gains realization through practice, phenomena are unobstructed. When principle and phenomena interpenetrate, one enters the gate of nonduality: principle and phenomena are unobstructed. When essence and function are thusness, one attains great freedom: there is nonobstruction among phenomena. Yet without actual practice, realization can never be attained. I will therefore speak further about practice.

1. Practice takes not deceiving oneself as its foremost principle. One must be deeply earnest and genuine, for without actual practice one cannot attain realization or receive its benefit.

2. Practice takes steadfastness as its aim. One must be diligent and not retreat. Diligence means single-mindedness; advancing means not retreating, so that one gains benefit every day.

3. Practice takes not regarding oneself as right as its foremost principle, lest views of self arise midway and give rise to doubt and retreat.

4. In practice, one must choose a method, with suitability to one's capacity as the highest consideration. For someone in the twilight of life, it is enough to seek a simple practice; there is no need for profound and detailed textual investigation. Study of Dharma characteristics would only be futile and unbeneficial. One must make one's own decision.

5. In practice, one should constantly keep faith and vows in mind, as though someone were behind one, urging one onward. Do not retreat.

6. Practice must be flexible; one must not rigidly cling to dead methods. If, for a time, there is no good spiritual friend to make a decision for me, I should assess my own position and circumstances. What I cultivate should proceed from broad to concise, advancing step by step, until I certainly attain an ultimate realization. It is like entering a school and continuing until graduation: one should advance each year and move up a grade. How could one regard repeating a grade as remaining faithful to one's original vow? The vow to study the immeasurable dharma gates is meant to prevent the fault of obstinate, inflexible attachment; it does not mean greedily pursuing many teachings without practical application. Therefore, one should seek out and draw near to good spiritual friends.

7. In practice, one should rely on the Dharma, not on persons. If one is swayed by personal feelings, one is handing one's very life over to such feelings. If a Dharma is suited to one's capacity, one must never doubt the Dharma because of a person and thereby mislead oneself.

8. In practice, diligence is arduous cultivation; arduous cultivation does not mean retreating into deep mountains or subsisting on poor clothing and food. All dharmas are remedial measures. Those given to laxity and comfort must be trained to endure hardship, thereby removing accumulated habitual tendencies. But if one becomes rigidly attached to hardship, one will surely retreat midway or lapse into pretense. This too depends on flexible application.

9. Practice must not seek quick results. Haste prevents attainment. One should persevere, like accumulating wealth: over time, one becomes rich and well provided for. If one removes the fault of craving rapid results, meditative stability will also be attained thereby.

10. In practice, one must guard in advance against māra-obstacles. Without encountering māras, one cannot become a Buddha. If doubt and retreat arise along the way, these are māras of the mind. One need only persevere without slackening, neither hurrying nor delaying, neither grasping nor rejecting. If one gains even a slightly superior state, one must never become self-satisfied, lest the māra of joy seize its opportunity to enter. Therefore, one must not seek visions of light or Buddhas, or seek spiritual powers beforehand.

11. In practice, one must choose a path. Since methods of cultivation differ from one another, they cannot be discussed as though they were all alike. Some begin with the Pure Land, some with Chan or Esoteric Buddhism; some cultivate beginning with the eight consciousnesses, while others begin with the sixth and seventh consciousnesses; some rely on their own power, while others rely on the Buddha's power. One should not rigidly cling to a single method, but apply what accords with the practitioner's capacity and choose a suitable path, so as not to enter a wrong way. (Therefore, the responsibility for transmitting a teaching lies with the teacher.)

12. In practice, one must trust and take refuge in a good spiritual friend. A good spiritual friend does not simply mean someone who is learned; what is important is one who skillfully understands my capacity, recognizes my affliction, applies the correct Dharma, and guides me onto a direct path. For example, someone may be a distinguished master of the Chan school and deeply versed in its essential teachings, while my own capacity is suited only to Pure Land Buddha-recitation. If he were nevertheless to guide me by the method of investigating huatou, so that after long cultivation I could not attain accord with it, he would not be a good spiritual friend.

Therefore, although an ill person cannot do without relying on a physician, that person must also possess the capacity to make their own decision.

13. Practice places importance on one's own cultivation. Do not invoke the experiential states of others and force comparisons or correspondences with your own; this will inevitably lead to doubt and confusion, or to jealousy, and thereby mislead you.

Realization means that one's intrinsic nature accords with the Buddha. Since this belongs to the Section on Verification of Realization, I will speak of it only briefly here. Practitioners must not divide faith, vows, practice, and realization into four separate things. When faith is great, vows are great; the union of faith and vows is the first step of practice. Practice is the path to fulfilling the purpose of faith and vows, gradually enabling realization. Thus, with each step of practice, faith and vows are realized one step further. When practice is complete, faith and vows are complete, and realization is complete as well.

Practice develops in accordance with faith and vows, and realization becomes complete through all three. One is all, and one pervades all. Fools forcibly divide them into four; the wise certainly know them to be one. Yet when actual realization is reached, even the one cannot be obtained. Though it cannot be obtained, it continues thought after thought, without weariness or aversion. Thus one knows that this work cannot be borrowed or falsified in the slightest; above all, one must not deceive oneself.

Mr. Yangming spoke of the unity of knowledge and action, but regrettably did not explain the method. In fact, it is the same principle. The first step is intellectual understanding, in which there is no obstruction at the level of principle. The second step is understanding through practice: with each step of practice, one knows one step more, and there is no obstruction at the level of phenomena. The third step is realized knowing: knowledge and practice are united, which is what is meant by the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena, and so forth.

The foregoing gives only a general outline. I first presented faith and vows as the initial step of practice in order to support perseverance, for without perseverance in practice, realization cannot be attained. The extent of one's practice and the completeness of one's accomplishment depend on the firmness of one's own faith and the greatness of one's vows, but also on the responsibility of one's guiding teacher.

If sentient beings have great resolve but are not encouraged to arouse it, this is to mislead others in their wisdom-life. One knows that in this age of Dharma decline, those of great capacity are few, but they are not entirely absent. How could one abandon medicine merely because there is no illness? Since practitioners tend to be

governed by their first impressions, they should be asked from the outset to arouse great resolve. If they truly cannot arouse it fully, nothing can be done; nevertheless, the seed has already been planted, and in the end it will become a wholesome root.

The crucial point in learning Buddhism is, first, that the causal ground be correct. For the causal ground to be correct, one must clearly recognize faith, vows, and practice, and carry them out with one's feet firmly on the ground; then there is no realization that will not be attained. Realization is realized by oneself; others cannot know it. Therefore, if one cultivates oneself, one knows it for oneself. Do not seek to have others know, nor need one seek to know the states of others in order to compare oneself with them. Comparison falls into inferior views; it is the emotionally conditioned view of sentient beings in the three realms, and must absolutely be avoided.

Discerning Main Threads and Nuances

At the beginning of practice, one must first discern the main threads and nuances, taking faith, vows, and practice as the guiding framework, and then dividing the various points into headings and subheadings. The points of practice are as follows: A. What is to be cultivated? B. What is used to cultivate it? C. By what Dharma is it cultivated? D. What is the method of cultivation? E. To what point must one cultivate before it is ultimate? F. What are the stages of cultivation? Each of these six divisions, moreover, has its own sequence.

Yet empty talk is useless; what matters is practice for oneself. Merely listening to teachings without practicing is only intellectual understanding, not experiential realization. A painted cake cannot satisfy hunger; in the end, it is useless. Worldly people fear poverty and greedily seek wealth, not knowing that to be without the Way is true poverty—poverty life after life. Moreover, the wealth, blessings, and good fortune of this life were cultivated in past lives; regrettably, the cultivation was not thorough, and so one receives only a small recompense rather than great fulfillment. Therefore, those who hear the true Dharma and practice it are people of truly great wealth and nobility. How lamentable that worldly people cannot distinguish the genuine from the false.

A. What Is to Be Cultivated?

Having read the Section on Inspiring Potential, practitioners should naturally have no doubts. They know that they are cultivating Buddhahood. But what is a Buddha? The answer is that a Buddha is one of great awakening. Sentient beings are inverted in their views, and because they are unaware, they fall into the fruits of suffering. Therefore, one must cultivate in this life, cultivating the Buddha at the causal stage and attaining accomplishment in this very life. This is like shooting an arrow at a

target, not practicing blindly. Thus one should constantly arouse great vows: may awakening and wisdom swiftly unfold; may one attain Buddhahood in this very life and liberate sentient beings. Therefore, beyond taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, one must also take refuge in one's own great bodhicitta. This is the first goal of practice.

B. What Is Used to Cultivate It?

Having heard the Dharma many times, practitioners naturally understand that practice is the cultivation of mind. But since mind is unobtainable, what is there to cultivate with? The answer is: precisely use mind to cultivate mind, cultivating and realizing until mind is unobtainable. Only when one truly realizes that there is no wisdom and nothing to attain is there genuine attainment. The sūtra says that one attains anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi: this is to realize the unborn and to know that all is unobtainable.

C. By What Dharma Is It Cultivated?

The Dharma on which one relies for cultivation is a very important question. Yet it does not depend on the Dharma, but on the person. Put simply, whatever illness a person has, that is the medicine to be used; there is no fixed Dharma. The saying, “Rely on the Dharma, not on the person,” applies to what a teacher says. When it concerns the person, however, one should say, “Rely on the person, not on the Dharma.” People are not alike, so one cannot rigidly apply a single Dharma to everyone.

The saying, “Rely on meaning, not on words,” is directed at those who cling rigidly to written words. They do not know what difference there is, after all, between words and meaning: words express meaning, and thus they too are a Dharma. Yet because there is no fixed Dharma, meaning is taken as living and flexible. In truth, all dharmas are empty; who, then, is there to rely upon? The saying, “Rely on wisdom, not on consciousness,” emphasizes wisdom; it does not discard consciousness. Apart from consciousness there is no wisdom; transforming consciousness into wisdom is also a Dharma.

The saying, “Rely on definitive meaning, not on nondefinitive meaning,” means that one should seek what is ultimate. But what is ultimate, and what is not? It should be expressed through skillful means that are comprehensive and unobstructed. What is neither Dharma nor non-Dharma is precisely definitive meaning; this too means that there is no fixed Dharma. In short, one must act with flexibility, not with dead attachment. Even so, there are fixed Dharmas. Is this not contradictory? Yet words can reconcile it.

Sentient beings suffer and wander through birth and death. They are like blind people entering the mountains: whenever they move, they stumble and fall. Having no eyes is their fundamental suffering; opening their eyes is the only gateway to freedom from suffering. The true intent of studying Buddhism is to remove delusion and turn toward awakening, to open the Buddha's knowledge and vision. Only by relying on the gate of prajñā can one ascend to the other shore.

The Heart Sūtra says that bodhisattvas and even the Buddhas of the three times all rely on prajñāpāramitā. Never waver in this principle. Even if sages were to arise again, they could not alter what I say. This is the fixed Dharma. Yet the eye diseases of blind people vary in severity, and their karmic obstacles in thickness. Thus the methods used to open prajñā differ. Opening wisdom and becoming a Buddha is the destination; to reach it, one may travel by boat or by cart—there is no fixed vehicle. As for those who rigidly cling to one Dharma and cannot adapt, while considering themselves diligent, one can only leave them to it.

The Mahāyāna and the two vehicles are merely provisional names. Because sentient beings have different causes and conditions and faculties that are sharp or dull, distinctions of great and lesser vehicles have arisen. In truth, Buddha-nature is equal: there is only the One Vehicle, with no other vehicle. The sūtra says, “This Dharma is equal, without high or low.” Worldly people mistakenly cling to one Dharma as superior or another as inferior to it. How is this different from judging the Buddha?

They further distinguish one teacher's cultivation as profound and another's as shallow. How is this different from examining and grading teachers? It becomes a great delusion. Practitioners should know that every Dharma is unsurpassed and every gate is foremost. The responsibility for transmitting a Dharma lies with the teacher, for what is foremost is suitability to the recipient's capacity; otherwise, the wisdom-life of others will be harmed. The responsibility for practicing a Dharma lies with oneself, for what is foremost is to enter deeply into one gate; otherwise, craving many methods brings no benefit and only wastes time, which is most regrettable.

Let us now briefly discuss the various schools:

I. Chan School

When Buddhism came to China, the capacities of the people of China were exceptional. The teachings of the Lesser Vehicle gradually declined, while the Chan school became the most powerful underlying force. Regardless of sex, age, social rank, literacy, whether within Buddhism or outside it, all delighted in reading the Diamond Sūtra and the Heart Sūtra. Even a person who has committed the ten evil deeds can turn back and immediately awaken, entering the gate.

The character of the Chinese people is unlike that of other peoples: commoners may disdain princes and nobles; they esteem righteousness and delight in chivalry; they do not sharply distinguish mine from yours in matters of money; and they can yield when they suffer loss. Although they may fall short of complete refinement in worldly affairs and lack systematic order, their spirit is free, expansive, and broad, delighting in freedom and ease. Without Chan potential cultivated in past lives, this could not be so.

Moreover, anyone capable of great evil has sharp faculties. Once such a person turns around, lays down the butcher's knife, and becomes a Buddha on the spot, that person's roots from former lives are close to Chan. As for the other dharma gates, none fails to take return to the source as ultimate. All teachings are called such-and-such a school, their names placed first; only the Chan school is directly called “the school,” because it is the school of all schools.

Chan is but an empty name; in this sense, all dharmas are Chan school. Yet because capacities differ, some enter Chan directly. Such people have the very highest capacities, but there are now very few of them, and qualified teachers are lacking. Moreover, Chan relies on one's own strength. Without ten or twenty years, one cannot penetrate the three barriers and directly see true reality. At present it seems unsuited to most people, and it is very difficult to make it widely accessible. One can only use an indirect route: entering Chan through the Pure Land, or using Esoteric Buddhism for confirmatory realization. By relying on the Buddha's power together with one's own strength, accomplishment is then swift. This is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to return to the core principle through Esoteric Buddhism.

II. Vinaya School

This is the teaching of precepts and discipline. Discipline is established by the Buddha; precepts are upheld by practitioners. Confucianism has the three things to hold in awe, three forms of self-examination, and vigilant solitude; all of these are precepts. Daoism establishes registers of merits and demerits; these too are precepts. In Buddhism, the ordinary teaching takes the five precepts as fundamental: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and alcohol.

There are also the eight precepts; the bodhisattva precepts consist of ten major precepts and forty-eight minor precepts; bhikṣus have 250 precepts, and bhikṣuṇīs 500. In fact, there are eighty-four thousand precepts, an expression indicating that at every place and in every state of mind, evil is prohibited from arising. Thus precepts carry the meaning of prohibition, which is itself cultivation. The visible aspects of precepts are called their marks and observances, such as the three thousand deportments and eighty-four thousand subtle practices.

The invisible aspects are called the virtue of precepts, the quality of precepts, the mind of precepts, and the fragrance of precepts. Taking the fragrance of mind as precept, all of these do not depart from the essence of precepts. Here, attaining the precepts means realizing the empty mind. The former precepts guard against the ten evil deeds; these guard against the root of the ten evil deeds. Receiving precepts is only a ritual formality; what matters is upholding them in daily life. To possess only the outward marks of precepts without their essence is to violate the fundamental great precept; this is called a great falsehood.

Therefore, one first explains the precepts, studies the precepts, and attains the precepts, and only afterward confers them; there is originally such an order. But when explaining precepts to beginners, one first teaches abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and so forth; this remedies the result. Advancing further, one guards against greed, anger, and ignorance; this remedies the cause, namely the mind. Advancing still further, one guards against the point from which greed, anger, and ignorance arise, realizes the empty mind, and uproots their source. This is truly attaining the precepts: it remedies the cause within the cause, the mind within the mind.

Every school cultivates precepts. The Chan school uses non-precepts as precepts and upholds the highest discipline, beyond anything ordinary people could imagine. Esoteric Buddhism employs the empowerment of the three mysteries, and the three karmas are as though locked: when the hands form mudrās, bodily karma has no way to arise; when the mouth recites mantras, verbal karma has no way to arise; when mind is non-abiding, mental karma has no way to arise. These are precepts realized naturally, not mere empty words. This is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to cultivate precepts through Esoteric Buddhism.

III. Tiantai School

It takes the method of calming and contemplation as its core principle: one uses mind to contemplate mind, until at the ultimate stage neither emptiness, provisional existence, nor the middle is established. Yet relying on one's own strength, it is not easy to reach the ultimate. Today's Tiantai school merely teaches calming and contemplation without actual practice. In the Mind-Seal school's seated practice, cultivating and realizing samādhi is the cultivation of calming; maintaining awareness and contemplating emptiness at all times after leaving the cushion is the functioning of contemplation. Because it relies on the Buddha's empowering support, its realization is different. This is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to cultivate calming and contemplation through Esoteric Buddhism.

IV. Dharma Characteristics School

That is, the Consciousness-Only school. The intention of this school is that worldly people cling firmly to appearances. Therefore, it must speak in terms of appearances in order to dismantle them, finally leading to the single word “emptiness.” If worldly people had sharp faculties and could directly break through appearances, there would be no need for such labor. The four-line verse of the Diamond Sūtra could at once sweep everything clean away. Yet worldly people also merely discuss Consciousness-Only without practicing it, thereby losing the original intent.

The division between the Nature and Characteristics schools has existed for a long time. The Buddha's intent was to enable everyone to break through appearances, remove afflictions, and take realizing the mind-ground as fundamental. Yet the opposite has happened: Buddhist learning has instead been treated as scientific research. If such research can truly realize emptiness, liberation is still possible.

But to enter the ocean and count its sands, imagining oneself clever, is to add fetters upon fetters. People forcibly divide hearing, contemplation, cultivation, and realization into three separate stages, mistakenly believing that in this life they may only hear teachings and may not yet contemplate them, much less practice them. They do not know that what is spoken is principle, while experiential realization lies in practice. To contemplate after hearing is itself right cultivation; not to contemplate is equivalent to not having heard. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma does not take hold of appearances. During seated practice, one is not permitted to seek visions of light or Buddhas; everything is shattered. This is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to break through appearances through Esoteric Buddhism.

V. Pure Land School

The Pure Land is the mind free from defiled attachment. Returning to the original source, it pervades the ten directions; the path of words is cut off, and the workings of mind are extinguished. Defilement is certainly not established, nor does purity exist. This is the truly unsurpassed Pure Land. Yet sentient beings are too restless by nature to remain single-minded, so the Buddha specifically taught a Western Land in order to strengthen their faith and vows. Later generations then established it as a school.

Pure Land and Chan were originally not separate. This Dharma universally embraces practitioners of all three capacities. Those of middling and lesser faculties have the Western Pure Land as a place toward which to gather their minds; those of superior faculties directly realize the Pure Land as mind-only. Thus they can both plant causes and bring fruition to completion, with flower and fruit simultaneous, like a lotus. For this reason, it is also called the Lotus school. Those who practice the fourth mudrā of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma can attain rebirth in the Western Pure

Land; from this, one may know that Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism are likewise not separate.

In Esoteric Buddhism, the practice of Amitābha's great Dharma, supplemented by longevity practices, rests on the same principle. Yet the Pure Land is so subtle and wondrous that those who have not realized the mind-ground do not know its marvels; they either regard it as remote and circuitous or find it tasteless. I have often compared it to clear spring water: only one who can savor its pure subtlety has genuine skill. Now that I study Esoteric Buddhism, I have come to know the subtle wonder of the Pure Land. This, moreover, is the intent of our Mind-Seal school: to return to the Pure Land through Esoteric Buddhism.

VI. Esoteric Buddhism

It is also called the Mantra school. Mantras are the language of the dharmakāya Tathāgata; they can reveal the true characteristics of all dharmas and accord with reality as it is. They are also called dhāraṇīs, meaning "total retention": they encompass all dharmas and retain immeasurable meanings. As Master Kūkai said, a single syllable contains a thousand principles. They are also called vidyās, referring to the radiant wheel of the Tathāgata's wisdom, which manifests the pure and perfect luminosity of its own essence.

When they are recited, they can eradicate the karmic obstacles of ignorance. They are also called "secret," meaning subtle, hidden, and comprehensive, because mantras are words inwardly realized by the dharmakāya Tathāgata. Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva compared them to secret passwords in an army. They are also called yoga, meaning the correspondence of the three mysteries of body, speech, and mind. Through the empowerment of the three mysteries, one will certainly attain the supreme victory of Buddhahood in this very body, which even equal-enlightenment bodhisattvas of the tenth bhūmi do not know.

Maṇḍala is a Sanskrit term meaning cyclical, complete, and fully endowed. There are four kinds, none separate from the others, representing the perfect adornments of the myriad virtues of the dharmakāya Tathāgata. What are these four?

1. Great Maṇḍala: the painted forms and physical marks of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. (All sentient beings in the dharma realm.)

2. Samaya Maṇḍala: the vajras, lotuses, swords, wheels, jewels, and various mudrās held by the deities. (The world of material objects.)

3. Dharma Maṇḍala: the seed syllables and mantras of each Buddha, bodhisattva, and deity. (That is, written mantras.)

4. Karma Maṇḍala: the deities' forms of sitting and standing, their joyful and wrathful demeanor, and their ritual activities. (All ritual practices and activities are karma.)

Esoteric Buddhism is divided into two approaches: doctrinal teachings and ritual forms. Doctrinal teachings refer to the scope and distinctions of doctrine and principle. They may be summarized in two divisions. First is the approach of comparing Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism, distinguishing the relative superiority and inferiority of the two teachings, assessing the shallowness and depth of the ten stages of abiding, and clarifying the unsurpassed true meaning of Esoteric Buddhism. Second is the approach unique to one's own school, which concerns the names and meanings of various subtle principles, limited to this school and beyond the reach of other schools. The two great scriptures are the Mahāvairocana Sūtra and the Vajraśekhara Sūtra. Thus, the teachings and principles are explained through the true meanings of such syllables as a and ha; collectively, this is called doctrinal teachings. Ritual forms, by contrast, refer to the rules of practice. There are four kinds, called the four secret practices:

1. Pacification: eliminating the karmic obstacles and inauspicious circumstances of oneself and others.

2. Increase: dispelling suffering, extending life, and gathering supramundane merit and virtue.

3. Subjugation: subduing one's own ignorance and disturbances, and counteracting the enemies of the state.

4. Reverence and Love: receiving others' respect and affection, and giving rise to the unimpeded, impartial mind of great compassion.

Wherein lies the difference between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism? The exoteric is expedient; the esoteric is true. Although the two teachings differ in speed, slowness, superiority, and inferiority, their ultimate destination—the attainment of unsurpassed bodhi—is one. In the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna, Aśvaghoṣa Bodhisattva generally indicates that the attainment of Buddhahood through Exoteric Buddhism necessarily takes three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. Mantra Esoteric Buddhism alone specifically expounds the principle of attaining Buddhahood in this very body.

Through practice in a single thought, a single lifetime, and a single moment, one fully possesses immeasurable merit, wisdom, and transforms the defiled physical body of an ordinary being into the unsurpassed fruition and virtue of Mahāvairocana's Dharma body. Therefore, the Great Wonderful Vajra Sūtra says:

“Without transforming the Dharma body, one attains the undefiled fruition.” This is the profound principle unique to this school.

Moreover, Esoteric Buddhism begins its cultivation with the eight consciousnesses, seeking the cause on the basis of the fruition. Schools such as Pure Land, Dharma Characteristics, and Tiantai all begin with the six consciousnesses, seeking the fruition on the basis of the cause; hence the difference in speed and slowness. Relying on the empowering force of Vairocana’s majestic virtue, Esoteric Buddhism realizes immeasurable samayas in an instant. By inconceivable methods, it can transform the innate seeds of attachment to self in practitioners and give rise to vajra seeds.

This is the fundamental point in which it differs from other schools. How can those who have not practiced Esoteric Buddhism measure the Buddha’s intent by the views and feelings of ordinary beings? Esoteric Buddhism includes Japanese Esoteric Buddhism and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism.

Japan sent students to China during the Tang dynasty and reveres Master Kūkai as its patriarch. Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism is the Esoteric Buddhism transmitted in Tibet. At first there was the Red school; later Tsongkhapa emerged and separately established the Yellow school. Their methods are broadly similar, with minor differences. The Yellow school proceeds step by step according to a fixed sequence and tends more toward form-based practice, whereas the Red school also cultivates formless Esoteric Buddhism.

In former times, the First Patriarch Bodhidharma transmitted the Chan school in the East and the formless Esoteric Vehicle in Tibet. The Living Buddha Nona explained this in great detail. Among the recently transmitted teachings, such as the essential gateway of Mahāmudrā, is a key method for directly entering true wisdom, which greatly expounds the principle of dharmakāya meditation. Yet in the beginning, the Red school transmitted it to unsuitable persons, and thus many abuses tending toward biased emptiness arose; some even committed evil deeds. This did not suit the capacities of Tibetans, and that is why Tsongkhapa emerged.

Japanese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism both cultivate the return of the myriad dharmas to the One, using the single characteristic to eliminate all characteristics. Yet they have not reached the principle of where the One returns. Only the Chan school directly points to the mind-ground and does not proceed through stages. In recent times, only the teachings transmitted by the Living Buddha Nona have somewhat incorporated Chan and accorded with it. He greatly valued the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, praising it as the unsurpassed Esoteric Vehicle, as he stated repeatedly.

As for the founding patriarch of the Mind-Seal school, the revered Master Dayu was truly its patriarch. He first entered monastic life on Mount Lu and cultivated Pure Land practice. Later, while paying homage to the scriptures, he became gravely ill and nearly died; he later encountered bandits and again nearly died. Then, in samādhi, he saw the venerable Samantabhadra empower him and transmit the great Heart-of-Heart Dharma, together with various secret mudrās and secret mantras. After seven years of arduous cultivation, he attained realization, descended the mountain, and opened the Mind-Seal Dharma gate, becoming the patriarch of the Mind-Seal school.

This Dharma connects with all schools and verifies the mind-ground, opening a new path beyond Esoteric Buddhism. This Dharma must not be transmitted rashly: it is bestowed when the recipient is suitable. It cannot be fathomed by reasoning; only actual realization reveals it. It neither grasps at characteristics nor discards them. Taking Mind-Seal as the core principle, prajñā as the function, dhāraṇī as the method, and the Pure Land as its ultimate destination, its practice differs greatly from that of other schools, and the speed of realization likewise differs from that of other methods. Some are taught Chan inquiry; others receive other esoteric teachings and are gradually guided in, as preliminary expedient means. The various schools described above have likewise been presented only in outline.

If practitioners wish to ask which Dharma they should cultivate, they may first discuss the matter. Before transmitting a practice, our association first examines the person’s capacity, circumstances, available time, physical strength, and so forth, and only then transmits the Dharma, in order to prevent the drawback of doubt and withdrawal midway. As for the methods of practice, they should be explained as follows.

D. Methods of Practice

This section has entered the Section on Right Cultivation and is of the utmost importance!

1. Cultivating Merit and Wisdom Together

The Buddhadharma fundamentally aims to save the world, teaching people to liberate themselves from all suffering and adversity; to eliminate such evils as deceit, cruelty, harming others without benefiting oneself; to enable people to be at peace and at ease; not to give rise to needless fear; not to plant needless evil causes; and not to undergo needless painful results. Then the world will naturally be at peace. “Great” means universal and vast. If everyone held a view of equality, how could they commit the karma of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech?

Yet the various sufferings before our eyes, whether one has money or not, all arise from scant merit. Those with money do not use it to create merit, but exhaust it; they do not plant fields of merit for the future, and become poor in their own lifetime, or their descendants squander and ruin their inheritance. Those without money do not understand the cause of their poverty: it is all brought about by stinginess in past lives. The more karma one creates, the more severe one's suffering becomes. The wise worry about causes, not results; exemplary people worry about the Way, not poverty.

Understand that the suffering of this life is like a shortage of grain this year, caused by planting too little last year. If one cultivates and plants seeds today, one will surely harvest next year. One must never borrow next year's grain in advance, nor may one say that there will be no next year. Such people are all lacking in merit.

Because of the causes and conditions of scant merit, it is difficult to encounter a good spiritual teacher. If one has merit and virtue, all kinds of causes and conditions will naturally lead one into the Buddhadharma. Thus, having or lacking merit does not depend on being poor or rich. A poor person willing to cultivate bears the marks of truly great wealth and nobility.

I have often said that one who seeks wealth bears the mark of poverty—if not poor, why seek it? One who seeks status bears the mark of lowliness—if not lowly, why seek it? The root lies in regarding oneself as poor and lowly. Appearances are created by mind; causes necessarily bear results. This is not harsh talk. In general, for those much given to anxiety, adverse conditions gradually become complete, and before long there will certainly be unfavorable or inverted circumstances. Anxiety inevitably brings poverty; vexation inevitably brings illness. They are intrinsically connected.

Moreover, people lacking in merit must busy themselves with clothing, food, and shelter and have no leisure at all for cultivation; they are the most pitiable. Therefore, when encountering those lacking in merit, one should first enable them to cultivate merit and remove their obstacles to entering the Way. Those who have merit should be enabled to cultivate wisdom while also nurturing their merit. This is called cultivating merit and wisdom together. Only those with merit can undertake it.

The method of cultivating merit places emphasis on giving. Of the six pāramitās, giving is first and is called planting a field of merit. Those who have money and are generous need not necessarily be urged to give. But those who are stingy or poor should be encouraged to give more: first, to teach them generosity and remove their habitual greed; second, to plant wholesome roots and assist their causes and

conditions. This is not comparable to worldly ways of speaking sentimentally of human relations and judging amounts according to whether people are poor or rich.

With the inferior views of ordinary beings, people seek the Buddha solely for blessings, believing that blessings are something the Buddha can bestow and can be obtained by asking; when they do not obtain them, doubt and slander arise. Others seek the Buddha for wisdom, believing that wisdom too is something the Buddha can bestow and can be obtained by asking; when they do not obtain it, they likewise give rise to doubt and slander. In recent times, many seek the Way but few practice it; many cultivate the Way but few realize it. All this is due to this failing.

Practitioners should know that merit and wisdom are to be cultivated together. The Buddha merely points out the Dharma gate, teaching you to plant wholesome causes beforehand and thereby obtain fortunate karmic results later. If you wish for wealth and status, you should eliminate stinginess and first practice giving. If you wish to open wisdom, you should draw near to good spiritual teachers and likewise first practice giving. One who wishes to cultivate merit has true wisdom; if a person truly has wisdom, they will certainly eliminate greed and anger in order to create merit. Thus cultivating merit is precisely cultivating wisdom. It is quite a biased attachment for foolish people forcibly to divide them into two.

2. Samādhi and Wisdom Mutually Support Each Other

When worldly people enter the Way, they also know to seek samādhi. “Knowing where to stop, one can then become settled” is the samādhi spoken of by Confucianism and adopted by Daoism. Yet this is merely quietude and cannot be called samādhi. Samādhi means being equally settled in movement and stillness; it means not being deluded upon encountering circumstances; it means engaging with everything without being stained by anything, free from attachment and abiding.

Samādhi and wisdom are not two. They are provisionally named as two: when there is samādhi, wisdom is within samādhi; when there is wisdom, samādhi is within wisdom. They mutually support each other, like fire and light. Though their names may be two, they cannot be divided. Worldly people seek samādhi by forcibly suppressing thoughts so that none arise, and by cutting off seeing and hearing; how are they different from wood and stone? This is to die in emptiness and nothingness, falling into annihilationism. When activity returns, one will inevitably become deranged and demonic.

Moreover, people in the world mistakenly cling to concentration and wisdom as two separate matters, and thus distinguish between those with much concentration and little wisdom. They do not know that this is not the ultimate teaching. Concentration and wisdom are originally equal, with no distinction of more or less. It is only because people have habitual tendencies: some prefer activity, while others prefer

stillness. Thus, those who prefer activity are called rich in wisdom, and those who prefer stillness are called rich in concentration. In fact, both are still far from concentration and wisdom. Concentration and wisdom should give rise to function from their essence, mutually supporting and integrating with one another. Unconfused right view is called samādhi concentration; samādhi means right concentration. The various names of meditative concentration are now explained as follows.

(1) Samādhi: this is the general name for all forms of concentration. It encompasses all dharmas and retains immeasurable meanings; it is the gathering of the mind in all meditative concentrations.

(2) Śamatha: it means stopping, regulating, and extinguishing. It can regulate the unwholesome dharmas of the faculties so that there is no defiled attachment. It also carries the meaning of tranquility and is called the characteristic of concentration.

(3) Samāpatti, also called samā: it means canceling out, or expediently stopping in accordance with conditions. It is rendered here as “equal attainment,” meaning that within equal maintenance one can reach a superior stage—maintaining equanimity, free from both torpor and restlessness, and attaining superior concentration and the stage of the noble ones.

(4) Dhyāna: this is rendered as “quiet contemplation,” with quiescence and cessation as its meaning. Concentration and wisdom are integrated; it is quiet yet contemplative, and therefore not an indeterminate state. It differs from the Tiantai three contemplations, for those investigate the natures and characteristics of all dharmas and generate understanding through their meaning. Here, however, the emphasis is more on forming practice through the mind: no object of contemplation is established, the two extremes are stilled, and discrimination ceases.

(5) Vipaśyanā: this is rendered as “contemplation.” It means illuminating principle with wisdom, and is therefore called right view; it is also called clear seeing. When contemplative practice is accomplished, object and wisdom accord with one another, and one clearly sees one’s nature without obscuration.

(6) Upekṣā: it means equality of stopping and contemplation. Stopping is concentration, and contemplation is wisdom. It also means neither contending nor acting, and may be called relinquishment: one neither contends over annihilationism and eternalism nor acts upon emptiness and existence, thereby relinquishing the two extremes.

(7) Madhyama: this means not clinging to the middle way. The middle way itself is also a provisional designation and should not be established.

(8) Vitarka-vicāra: this is rendered as “searching and examining,” and is also called awareness and contemplation. The stirring of the coarse mind is called awareness; the discrimination of the subtle mind is called contemplation.

(9) Samādhi: this is rendered as regulated, upright concentration, and is also called right thought, right concentration, and right reception. It means that when one enters this concentration, one does not receive any dharmas.

In sum, concentration and wisdom support one another and ultimately enter the gateway of the syllable A. A signifies that all dharmas are originally unborn. Arising is dependent arising and, fundamentally, cannot be obtained. One realizes entry into the ocean of the nature of Vairocana; this single syllable alone serves as the true mantra, freely establishing the great maṇḍala. Ordinary beings lack wisdom and cannot clearly contemplate the source of all dharmas, mistakenly asserting that there is arising. Thus, the profound secret treasury is concealed by sentient beings themselves; only through realization can it be known.

All true mantras do not depart from the fifty letters, which are the general characteristics of the Buddhadharma. The syllable A stands first and encompasses all. Each of these fifty letters is a gateway to liberation. Liberation means attaining the patience with the unbornness of dharmas through concentration and wisdom. If people fully understood this meaning and realized the unborn, without giving rise to any characteristics, what evil could they commit, and what offense could they violate? Then what precepts would remain to be upheld? This is how the precepts are hidden within concentration and wisdom; foolish people cannot fathom it and rashly conclude that Esoteric and Chan practitioners have no precepts. Yet the Dharma gate of upholding precepts must still be explained, so as to benefit beginners.

III. Integrating the Essence and Characteristics of the Precepts

Precepts have two aspects: their essence and their characteristics. Their characteristics pertain to deportment and cannot be discarded. Yet without their essence, they approach falsity. The essence of precepts belongs to the mind. Although mind is without characteristics, if there remains even an idea of “without characteristics,” it still belongs to characteristics. One must reach pure emptiness and selflessness, with no one who acts, nothing acted upon, no one who upholds precepts, and no precepts to be upheld. Only then does one truly and completely possess the great precepts.

Those of limited wisdom do not understand this. Some foolish people mistakenly take it to mean destroying the precepts, and run about raising cries of alarm. Others mistakenly believe that the Chan school advocates free and unchecked indulgence, and that there is no need to uphold precepts; consequently, they become licentious.

One side wants to overthrow them, and the other wants to preserve them, but neither understands the meaning of precepts, and thus matters come to this.

Precepts involve a mind of restraint; when it is regulated by Dharma, this is called discipline. Sentient beings are inverted in their understanding, and their three karmic activities are impure. For those of lesser capacity, one first enables them to understand the characteristics of precepts. Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct have observable outward forms, which they can readily understand. Therefore, the five precepts are first taught, along with the law of cause and effect to demonstrate them, so that their conduct may be restrained. This is restraining them with regard to results.

For those of higher capacity, the essence of precepts is taught. Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct are results; where are their causes? One then knows that greed, anger, and ignorance are their roots. If the karma of the mind is pure, evil karma is naturally eliminated. This is restraining the mind; when the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure. This is restraining them with regard to causes. For those of the highest vehicle, the nonduality of essence and characteristics is taught: all alike are empty through conditions, mind cannot be obtained, so upon what could evil arise? When subject and object are both forgotten, this is called the mutual support of concentration and wisdom.

If there is defiled attachment, it is called breaking the precepts. Nothing is stricter than this in the discipline of precepts; therefore, the precepts of non-precept are called the great precepts. After the Buddha entered parinirvāṇa, he instructed sentient beings to take the precepts as their teacher. This means relying on one's own mind and using this Dharma to regulate it. If one merely observes outward forms and deportment without seeking within the mind, this only leads to hypocrisy. How could that be right? Many people in the world commit evil and practice hypocrisy precisely because of this fault. When practitioners speak of precepts, is it not because they fear breaking them? I shall therefore tell them how terrible the karmic consequences of breaking precepts are.

(1) Those who commit killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct reap what they themselves have done. If they are willing to undergo the retribution, they may boldly go ahead and do it. For anyone who does not understand the principle of cause and effect across the three periods of time, first explain the cause and effect of the three periods of time and the harm of breaking precepts. If they truly believe it, they will naturally cease committing evil karma. But this applies to those who have not yet understood Buddhist principles.

(2) Lay practitioners who already understand Buddhist principles surely know the precepts. Yet they still do not understand what is meant by breaking precepts,

because the mind-ground has not been clarified. If breaking precepts meant only committing killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct, then the Buddha's precepts would comprise only one part, and all the rest could be discarded. Thus one knows that the precept of mind is the true precept. For now, let us not discuss such profound matters as the mind being empty and free from defilement.

We need only speak of what is plain and accessible: not giving rise to evil thoughts is upholding precepts. But what are evil thoughts? One should tell them that greed, anger, and ignorance are equal in wrongdoing to killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. If one's mind is not pure and constantly gives rise to vexation and disorder, blaming Heaven and resenting others, this is a grave breaking of the precepts, for where there is a cause, there must be a subsequent result. Therefore, hating someone for breaking precepts is itself breaking precepts. If one does not understand this principle, one is no different from denying cause and effect, which is even more terrible.

Bodhisattvas do not see the faults of others. This has two meanings. First, not seeing means not blaming them, not giving rise to a view of self in order to judge their right and wrong. Second, not seeing means not clinging to their faults or taking them to heart. The former is compassion for their transgressions; the latter is wisdom that does not grasp at characteristics. This is what is called the joint operation of wisdom and compassion. Bodhisattvas never depart from the Mahāyāna vows: giving is used to guard against greed, great compassion to guard against anger, and prajñā to guard against ignorance. Thus, cultivating every dharma never departs from the Buddhadharma or from precepts. Yet inward and outward must be as one, and essence and characteristics must be integrated. Only this is called attaining the precepts; otherwise, one cannot escape delusion.

IV. Integrating Concentration, Wisdom, and Emptiness

All Dharma gates of the pāramitās, whether six, ten, or even eighty-four thousand, take prajñā as primary. The three baskets and twelve divisions of the canon ultimately do not depart from this Dharma gate. When wisdom breaks through to emptiness, concentration naturally arises; concentration can give rise to wisdom, and wisdom in turn penetrates emptiness. Combined, they revolve like a wheel, and their wondrous functioning is inexhaustible. Cultivating these three has no sequence of before and after; they are activated simultaneously. This is the foremost essential point and must receive special attention.

My friends, having associated with one another for a year, let us speak fairly: those who have cultivated and realized for themselves do not expect others to know it. One alone knows whether one is warm or cold; how could others know? Yet, to avoid misleading people in the future, we cannot fail to understand the reason for it.

The benefit you have gained truly lies in purity of faith and earnest practice. You have not failed the years of ascetic practice, the many doubts and slanders endured, and the painstaking propagation of the Dharma by my revered teacher, Patriarch Dayu.

Moreover, we have all passed through doubt and slander. Later, with a strong spirit of exploration, we refused to take our ears as our eyes. We personally practiced six or nine meditation sessions daily, trained in contemplative awareness, and cultivated according to the Dharma, thereby turning toward right faith. Had we not truly received real benefit, how could we have become so deeply convinced and free from doubt?

You should know that among fellow practitioners of this Dharma, some have practiced three or four thousand sessions and still do not understand the reason for it or know how to bring it into function. Where does the cause lie—do you know? We have investigated together for only a year, yet our own experience of what we have gained differs. Where, then, does the cause lie? What you have gained lies in practice within non-practice. What is practice within non-practice? It means that even when not formally practicing, one is still practicing.

You have deeply grasped the marvel of this practice. You do not cultivate only while sitting in meditation in the Buddha hall; rather, you are willing everywhere to train in awareness, contemplate emptiness, and apply prajñā—even in places of play and recreation. You train the mind to gather and return to oneness; this is precisely bringing it into function. This is not unique to this Dharma. Whether one cultivates Pure Land or Chan, every dharma should be practiced in this way and can be practiced in this way. It is not that dharmas are divided into sudden and gradual; the fault lies in practitioners' failure to understand how to bring them into function.

How could cultivation be confined to two hours? Throughout the six periods of day and night, one should constantly abide in the ocean of vows, remain vigilant at every moment, and observe the mind in response to circumstances. This is called right cultivation. What is called cultivating while seated is merely cultivating the essence. Entering śamatha is called stopping; through stopping, one attains concentration, and ignorance is suddenly extinguished. Once the root is obtained, do not worry about the branches. This is the wondrous key of capturing the chief before capturing the bandits.

What is called cultivation after leaving the seat is simply bringing it into function wherever one may be. Dhyāna, quiet contemplation, is called contemplation. Contemplative awareness gives rise to wisdom; wisdom's contemplation realizes emptiness, and application removes habitual tendencies. Achievement may be deep or shallow, there is no fixed Dharma, and no fixed time. With much practice, one

becomes proficient. These are the two great outlines; they advance together like two wheels and must never be neglected in favor of one another. It is also like testing a blade: the former is sharpening, and this is using it. Without using it, one does not know whether it is sharp or dull; without sharpening it, it cannot become keen. In brief, one must observe the mind at every time and moment. Walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, everywhere is cultivation, and everywhere wondrous functioning arises.

Everyone's course of cultivation necessarily has stages. First, one cultivates in order to seek awakening; second, after awakening, one cultivates correctly. Cultivating in order to seek awakening means fundamentally opening up ignorance and turning onto the right path. This depends on the instruction that enables one to awaken and enter from a good spiritual friend, and on one's own arduous effort in investigation. There will surely come a day of a sudden "hu" sound. Hu is a term used in the Chan school, describing the vast and open state at the time of awakening.

Correct cultivation after awakening means that, after prajñā has opened, one sweeps away habitual tendencies and enters the time of genuine work. This work consists solely in constantly raising awareness and contemplating emptiness. The books of koans and recorded sayings in the Chan tradition are for those already awakened to use in training how to bring realization into function; they are not to be read before awakening in an attempt to gain awakening. Until the time of awakening, reading them is useless and instead gives rise to views of self, increasing one's ailments. As for speaking of no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization, this does not mean abandoning cultivation, attainment, and realization. It means precisely not clinging or abiding, with subject and object both forgotten; moreover, all things arise through conditions and have no substantial entity.

What is called cultivation, attainment, and realization is also a provisional designation established when conditions converge. Maitreya Bodhisattva's explanation of the Diamond Prajñā Sūtra says: "Neither conditioned nor apart from conditioned are the nirvāṇas of all Tathāgatas." This means neither grasping conditioned dharmas nor departing from conditioned dharmas. Neither grasping nor abandoning—this is the realm of the Tathāgata's nirvāṇa. Thus existence and nonexistence are nondual: though engaged in phenomena, the mind remains unstained. This is called emptiness.

Yet some people cling one-sidedly to emptiness. They think, "Since all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature, why must I cultivate further, and why must I liberate others?" They do not realize that although the essential nature of sentient beings is Buddha, it is like saying that a drunkard is originally not drunk: deluded by alcohol, he is now upside down and confused and cannot but be rescued. If one is biased

toward emptiness, that emptiness is equivalent to clinging to existence; after all, one has never truly realized emptiness.

Worldly people do not understand the meaning of emptiness, taking annihilation and nonexistence to be emptiness. Sages understand emptiness as follows: all things lack self-nature and substantial reality; all are unobtainable. Though they exist, they do not truly exist, so there is nothing to grasp as real—this is emptiness. The cause of sentient beings' suffering lies in mistaking the false for the true and clinging to a self. Bound by form and bound by mind, they can never be liberated and ultimately remain in pain.

The sages pity them and therefore teach the emptiness of objects, mind, and all dharmas. To empty the mind is to empty objects; nonattachment is realizing emptiness. Only upon realizing emptiness does one understand no-self, and no-self is the cessation of suffering. Therefore, at the causal stage one must first open the Buddha's knowledge and vision. The Buddha's knowledge and vision is prajñā. With prajñā one breaks through attachment to emptiness: emptiness means nonattachment, and one does not even cling to nonattachment. This is pure emptiness and no-self, in which neither suffering nor happiness has any basis.

Worldly people fear falling into emptiness. This very fear of falling means that they have never realized emptiness. A group of overly cautious people all say that they fear falling into emptiness; this is because they do not understand its meaning. Still others misunderstand emptiness and consequently claim that there is no cause and effect, committing all kinds of evil. Because they have fundamentally not understood, they encounter the calamity described as "vast and boundless confusion bringing disaster and misfortune." This is precisely its meaning.

Practitioners must take great care not to speak of prajñā with confused people, lest many offenses of doubt and slander arise. Yet one cannot avoid using tentative skillful means to awaken their potential, observing whether they are receptive to such teaching before imparting it to them. Moreover, to speak carelessly about prajñā is a grave offense. The offense, however, does not lie in speaking of it, but in speaking falsely.

People today discard prajñā altogether; they give up eating for fear of choking—truly, this is delusion upon delusion. Thus, to speak to those to whom one should not speak is delusion; not to speak to those to whom one may speak is also delusion. To speak to others when one cannot speak of it oneself is delusion; not to speak to others when one can speak of it oneself is also delusion. Therefore, one's understanding must be complete. One must never abandon the medicine on this account, nor doubt the illness because of the medicine. Its living application lies with

the person; what fault is there in the medicine? I shall now explain for you the meanings of the eighteen kinds of emptiness.

Emptiness does not mean the emptiness of air, of space, or of a void, for such emptiness still has form. An empty bowl, for example, possesses the appearance of emptiness; when it is filled with food, that appearance of emptiness disappears. Therefore, emptiness does not mean the absence of all seeing, hearing, sensation, and knowing.

What is called emptiness here is the realization, through the power of prajñā, that every matter and thing lacks self-nature and substantial reality, and exists only provisionally through the coming together of causes and conditions; this is therefore called emptiness. The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says: "Śāriputra, bodhisattvas who wish to abide in inner emptiness, outer emptiness, inner-and-outer emptiness, emptiness of emptiness, great emptiness, emptiness of the ultimate meaning, conditioned emptiness, unconditioned emptiness, ultimate emptiness, beginningless emptiness, dispersal emptiness, emptiness of nature, emptiness of intrinsic characteristics, emptiness of all dharmas, emptiness of the unobtainable, emptiness of nonexistence of dharmas, emptiness of existing dharmas, and emptiness of both nonexistent and existing dharmas should study the Perfection of Wisdom." The meanings of these eighteen kinds of emptiness are briefly explained below:

(1) Inner emptiness: "Inner" refers to the six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The eye is empty because it has no self or anything belonging to a self, and so forth.

(2) Outer emptiness: "Outer" refers to the six sense objects—forms, sounds, scents, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. Form is empty because it has no self or anything belonging to a self, and so forth.

(3) Inner-and-outer emptiness: Within the combined twelve sense bases of inner and outer, there is no self or anything belonging to a self, and so forth.

(4) Emptiness of emptiness: This refutes the preceding three kinds of emptiness; that is, the three kinds of emptiness are themselves empty.

(5) Great emptiness: This is the emptiness of the ten directions. The ten directions have no boundaries, and thus it is called great. Speaking in terms of the western direction, the west has no limit; every place has a west, and thus it is called emptiness.

(6) Emptiness of the ultimate meaning: The ultimate meaning is called the true aspect of all dharmas. That which cannot be destroyed or ruined is called the true

aspect. Yet this true aspect is also empty. Why? Because this true aspect is empty, without reception or attachment. If the true aspect of all dharmas existed, it could be received and grasped; but the true aspect is precisely no aspect and should not be received or grasped.

(7) Conditioned emptiness: Conditioned dharmas are those produced by the coming together of causes and conditions, such as the five aggregates, twelve sense bases, and eighteen realms. Therefore, they are empty.

(8) Unconditioned emptiness: Unconditioned dharmas are called free of causes and conditions; they neither arise nor cease and are like empty space. An objector asks, “It is understandable that conditioned dharmas are empty because they lack self-nature. But why are unconditioned dharmas also empty?” The answer is: “Without conditioned dharmas, there would be no unconditioned dharmas. The true aspect of conditioned dharmas is itself the unconditioned. Since the conditioned is empty, the unconditioned is also empty, for the two are not different.”

(9) Ultimate emptiness: Ultimate emptiness destroys all dharmas, leaving nothing remaining; thus it is called ultimate emptiness. This ultimate emptiness is itself empty: there is no opposition between void and real. If anything remained, it could not be called ultimate emptiness.

(10) Beginningless emptiness: Since all dharmas have no initial boundary, sentient beings have no beginning. Moreover, because they are covered by ignorance and bound by attachment, they come and go in birth and death, and their beginning cannot be found. To refute this beginningless dharma is called beginningless emptiness.

(11) Dispersal emptiness: Dispersal means the characteristic of separation. Dharmas exist through combination. For example, a cart is made from spokes, rims, shafts, and hubs; when these are combined, there is a cart, but when they are scattered and separated, the name “cart” is lost. A person is called a person because the five aggregates and four great elements are combined; when these are separated, no person can be found.

(12) Emptiness of nature: The nature of all dharmas is always empty. They merely continue provisionally, and therefore seem not to be empty. For example, water by nature is cold, but through the addition of fire it becomes hot; when the fire ceases for a long time, the water returns to coldness. As a sūtra says, “The eye is empty, without self or anything belonging to a self.” Why? Because its nature is naturally so.

(13) Emptiness of intrinsic characteristics: All dharmas have two kinds of characteristics: general characteristics and particular characteristics. Both are empty, and this is called emptiness of intrinsic characteristics. General

characteristics are such things as the fact that all things are impermanent. Particular characteristics mean that although all dharmas are impermanent, each has its own distinct characteristic: earth has solidity as its characteristic, fire has heat as its characteristic, and so forth; each is distinct.

(14) Emptiness of all dharmas: All dharmas may be inner or outer, beautiful or ugly. They arise through mind and are empty because they lack a self-entity.

(15) Emptiness of the unobtainable: All dharmas, up to and including nirvāṇa without remainder, are unobtainable; therefore, they are empty.

(16) Emptiness of nonexistent dharmas: Nonexistent dharmas are dharmas that have already ceased. A dharma that has already ceased is nonexistent; this is called emptiness of nonexistent dharmas.

(17) Emptiness of existing dharmas: Existing dharmas are all dharmas that exist through the coming together of causes and conditions. Since their true nature does not exist, this is called emptiness of existing dharmas.

(18) Emptiness of both nonexistent and existing dharmas: The characteristics of these nonexistent and existing dharmas are all unobtainable. This is called emptiness of both nonexistent and existing dharmas.

These are the eighteen kinds of emptiness. All dharmas are empty because they lack a self. “Self” means a ruler or controller. When dharmas are apart from conditions, they cannot arise by themselves; thus they naturally have no controller. Having no controller, they have no self.

Because things arise through the coming together of causes and conditions, they are empty. Because neither their beginning nor their end can be obtained, they are empty. Because they are manifested solely by mind, they are empty. Know that all the myriad dharmas arise from mind and entirely lack self-entity; therefore, they are called empty. If you wish to abide in this gate of the eighteen kinds of emptiness, you should study prajñā. Practitioners, do not fall into emptiness because I speak of emptiness, nor fear falling into emptiness because I speak of emptiness. Falling into emptiness and fearing falling into emptiness are both attachment to existence; they remain the inverted course of birth and death. Know that there has never been a single dharma that can go beyond the numinous terrace of one’s wisdom-nature. The wise will understand this for themselves; but without relying on prajñā, one is like a person entering darkness, unable to see anything.

To empty all objects is called cutting off the bondage of form; to empty all mind is called cutting off the bondage of mind. Once the two bondages of form and mind are severed, one will no longer regress. Yet residual habitual tendencies have not

been eliminated, so one must continue cultivating until the residual habits associated with the two bondages of form and mind are eliminated completely. At that point, samādhi and wisdom become one and function mutually; their wonder is like an inexhaustible treasury.

V. Undertaking with Great Resolve

Aim for the highest, and one will attain only the middle; therefore, arousing a great resolve is the foremost gateway to entering the Way. If one's aspiration is great, one's accomplishment will surely be great; cause and effect are accomplished simultaneously. Only those able to undertake this principle are seeds of the Tathāgata, born into the Tathāgata's family. This is also called the power of original vows.

How fortunate we are to have been born in this present age. Not only do we hear the true Dharma, but we also uphold it. Relying above on the Buddha's compassion, we are shown an inexhaustible treasury, like a poor son who meets a person with the heavenly eye who points out buried treasure, whereupon he suddenly becomes rich. If one is overly modest and believes that one has no share in such wealth, one will remain poor for life. To undertake is to shoulder the burden of the Tathāgata's unsurpassed bodhi; it is what the Buddha has entrusted to us. Why, then, need one retreat in excessive caution and humility, imagining that yielding virtue is admirable? Therefore, arousing a great resolve is the first critical pass in cultivation.

VI. Truly Leaving Home

The meaning of leaving home is profound. The Buddha established that shaving the head and wearing dyed robes constitutes leaving home, wishing people to depart from the afflictions of household and worldly life. A person's ties to family are the deepest and longest lasting, and the bonds of affection and love are also the strongest. Without severing the bonds of love, there is no way to enter the Way. Thus, one admires the quiet seclusion of mountains and forests, delights in distance from worldly toil, and abandons these things to depart. The Buddha taught in this way for people of lesser capacities, for he could not avoid doing so. Yet there are also lay practitioners who outwardly have wives, children, and property, and who dwell daily amid afflictions without being stained by them; their minds have departed from worldly toil. These are those who have truly left home.

Therefore, lay practitioners should leave home while remaining at home: though the body remains at home, the mind has already departed. Bhikshus, however, should leave home in both respects: body and mind both leave home, and afflictions are forever cut off. This is what the Buddha taught for people of superior capacities. As for bodhisattvas who have realized the mind, the great matter has already been

settled. Having entered the stage beyond learning, their minds neither depart nor enter, and they have no afflictions.

They merely manifest the appearance of bhikshus in order to teach sentient beings and expound the Dharma; this may also express dignified deportment. Therefore, leaving home is acceptable, and not leaving home is also acceptable. In all cases, do not deceive yourself or others: this is called truly leaving home. As for returning to lay life, the Buddha's regulations permit it. If a bhikshu does not return to lay life bodily, but his mind is constantly disturbed and he does not forget fame, reputation, profit, and support, then he has in fact returned to lay life and has broken the precepts. He is not a saṅgha member who is a field of merit and is no different from an evil person. As for pure and virtuous people, whether bhikshus or lay practitioners, all are called jewels of the Saṅgha. This must be understood.

VII. Carefully Guard Against the Eight Taboos

What are the eight taboos? First, do not seek spiritual powers. Second, do not live in excessive doubt. Third, do not seek quick results or wait with expectation. Fourth, do not be governed by human sentiment or rely on others. Fifth, do not rigidly cling to fixed methods. Sixth, do not fail to follow the rules. Seventh, do not lose wakeful awareness. Eighth, do not claim attainment when it has not been attained, claim realization when it has not been realized, or measure the inner states of others. These are called the eight taboos, because violating them can obstruct the Way; therefore, they must be avoided.

First Taboo: Spiritual Powers

Those who seek spiritual powers are rooted in greed for gain. When the causal ground is improper, the harm grows all the greater. Everyone in the world seeks spiritual powers, yet they do not know what "spiritual" is or what "power" is. They cultivate blindly and train blindly, misleading themselves and others. There is also a group who, having choked, refuse to eat; without ever understanding this principle, they give rise to fear from doubt and dare not proceed. They do not even dare to cultivate the unsurpassed Mind-Seal Esoteric Vehicle transmitted by the Buddha, and they obstruct others from cultivating it, believing this to be compassion. It is like an incompetent physician who kills someone with the wrong medicine: instead of blaming the physician, one prohibits the medicine. The fault lies with the incompetent physician; what blame belongs to the medicine? How utterly deluded this is.

The spiritual capacity associated with a human body and its vital energies is called essence when stored within and spirit when expressed outwardly. The mind is the master; essence, energy, and spirit are its servants. These spiritual powers are the unobstructed functioning of mind and intention—the powers of mind-spirit. They

extend from oneself to others and arise as function from essence. Spiritual power may be greater or lesser, and its functioning may be nimble or dull. Human spiritual powers are inherently present, like fire in a lamp: fire inherently has light. If fire does not shine, it is not that it lacks light; the fault lies in obstruction and blockage. One has the essence but does not give rise to its function, because one is obscured by the seven emotions and six desires.

Because people do not understand spiritual powers, they take transformations and illusions to be spiritual powers, thereby greatly deceiving themselves. Transformations and illusions are magical arts, akin to techniques; they cannot be performed without relying on something. Spiritual powers are not so.

The Treatise on the Treasury states: “There are five kinds of spiritual powers. First are demonic powers, such as old foxes that transform, or spirits of wood and stone that attach themselves to others. Second are karmically acquired powers, such as ghosts and spirits that know things in advance, divine dragons that conceal themselves or transform themselves, or those who cultivated the heavenly eye in former lives without bringing it to completion and who, as children in this life, have unusually keen sight and hearing.”

Third are dependent powers, such as traveling by means of talismans, medicines, mantras, or consecrated water, and emitting light to summon spirits; all such things necessarily depend on some support. These first three are only provisionally called powers; in truth, they are not powers, because they are not ultimate and must inevitably recede.

The fourth kind is spiritual powers, of which there are five: the heavenly eye, heavenly ear, knowledge of others’ minds, knowledge of former lives, and spiritual powers of movement. Although these are called powers, there are two kinds: ultimate and nonultimate. For one without the Way, they are nonultimate and will eventually recede; they also entail danger—one may become deranged, become possessed by demons, and fall into the great hells. The ultimate kind will be explained in detail below. Fifth are powers of the Way: taking the Way as their essence and the preceding five spiritual powers as their function.

Buddhists take the attainment of powers of the Way as primary and first set to work on the six supernormal powers. The six supernormal powers stand above the five powers; they include the power of ending the outflows. Worldly dharmas have outflows, while supramundane dharmas are without outflows. To be unobstructed in both, without attachment or defilement in either, is called ending the outflows. To cultivate the six supernormal powers, one must first understand the mind-ground, develop awakened wisdom, and realize pure emptiness as one’s essence. One then

responds to and transforms the myriad things, without a mind that clings to objects, as one's function.

Thus the Treatise on the Treasury also states: "There are three kinds of wisdom: true wisdom, inner wisdom, and outer wisdom. Broad knowledge of past and present and fluency in worldly affairs are outer wisdom. Cutting off afflictions and making mind and intention tranquil is what the Lesser Vehicle cultivates; this is inner wisdom. Neither is ultimate and therefore neither is called true. True wisdom is that in which sages and ordinary beings are nondual, emotional views are all empty, one understands that no thing exists, and essence and function are such as they are. This is called true wisdom." This is precisely the power of the Way. What we cultivate takes powers of the Way as essence and the five spiritual powers as function. To activate function before attaining the essence will surely lead to downfall and bring future consequences; it is greatly to be feared.

Daoist practitioners regard the development of the five spiritual powers as their highest aim. They forcibly suppress the six consciousnesses and forcibly eliminate habitual tendencies, using methods of subjugation to develop the five spiritual powers. Yet their fundamental ground has not been emptied. When powerful external circumstances arise, they may become joyful or sorrowful, and demons then seize the opportunity to enter. For example, once the heavenly eye opens without obstruction, one may see all the vexing and resentful matters that concern oneself, become angry without realizing it, and thereby fall.

Or one may see scenes of men and women in love, have one's feelings unconsciously stirred, and enter a womb. Because the roots of greed, anger, and ignorance have not been removed, they may temporarily be suppressed and fail to arise; but once they react, they can no longer be controlled.

If one first realizes the emptiness of dharmas and only afterward develops the five powers, then when all circumstances appear, there is no distinction of beauty or ugliness, intimacy or estrangement, affection or aversion, joy or anger. One remains equal and at ease, incapable of being shaken, and is the same amid favorable and adverse circumstances. Such spiritual powers possess both essence and function and are called ultimate. Otherwise, if one has not attained the fundamental ground, one will instead be misled by spiritual powers; thus they are not ultimate. Craving spiritual powers is itself a root of greed and also an inferior disposition of curiosity. If one relies on them to seek fame, profit, and reverence, one has not left behind greed over gain and loss. How could this be called the Way?

In the practices of our association, the first rule is that seeking spiritual powers is not permitted. Seeing lights, seeing Buddhas, and the like while sitting are all produced by the deluded mind. This is established as a major precept. Therefore, we

repeatedly warn practitioners, guarding against their attaining even a slightly exalted state and allowing the demon of delight to enter their hearts. Thus the Way and techniques must be clearly distinguished. During the past year, several hundred people in our association have practiced these methods, and fortunately none has suffered such ailments, because their causal ground is correct and their aspiration is lofty.

The Daoist five spiritual powers are attained through strenuous effort. The Buddhist five spiritual powers are naturally realized after understanding the mind. Daoists who attain the five spiritual powers have function without essence. Although their initial intention is directed toward the Way, they later unconsciously drift into techniques; thus they are techniques rather than the Way. When Buddhists realize the five spiritual powers, essence comes before function, and they employ techniques as the Way.

The Daoist five spiritual powers may recede and lead to downfall; they are temporary attainments. Buddhism has no such defect and calls this ultimate attainment. Daoists specialize in using the five spiritual powers, whereas Buddhists use them only when unavoidable.

Daoists regard the five spiritual powers as miraculous; Buddhists regard them as utterly ordinary.

Non-Buddhist paths concerned with spirits likewise possess the five powers, but they lack the power of ending the outflows. The original intent of studying Buddhism is to seek liberation, free from bondage. One should value only the power of ending the outflows, for when all outflows have been ended and one thoroughly understands both worldly and supramundane dharmas, this is the true Buddha Way.

If one places exclusive importance on spiritual powers, the mind is held by those powers; this is greed for gain. Not only will one be unable to be liberated from the two forms of birth-and-death, but one will sink deeply into demonic obstacles and may even become deranged. This is most grievous. The ancient worthies distinguished powers of the Way from spiritual powers in order to clarify this principle. In cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, realizing one’s true nature and understanding the mind are primary, culminating in the attainment of formless siddhi. Siddhi means great accomplishment; it is not something that those who delight in lesser practices can conceive.

Those who have long cultivated Japanese Esoteric Buddhism or Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism often delight in speaking of spiritual powers. Such practitioners mislead themselves; it is not the fault of the Dharma. Spiritual powers do not come from outside. One who is tranquil has a mind replete with marvels; naturally, all things are

unobstructed and everywhere accord. With the power of wisdom, one employs wondrous methods. If it benefits sentient beings, everything may serve as an expedient; but if it is for one's own greedy acquisition, then even the slightest fraction belongs to birth and death.

Others, upon hearing of spiritual powers, turn pale at the mention of a tiger and, having choked, refuse to eat. They regard Esoteric Buddhism as demonic practice, slander the Buddha and slander the Dharma. They are most pitiable.

When Buddha-recitation reaches one-pointedness of mind without distraction and one realizes samādhi, one may at that very moment roam the Pure Land spiritually —whether one has already been reborn there, is now reborn there, or will be reborn there. If this is not spiritual power, what is it? People's faculties are attached to appearances: they insist that only what can be seen is spiritual power, while taking the wondrous truth that cannot be seen to be unreal. Buddhadharma neither grasps appearances nor departs from them. It takes Mahāprajñā as its principle. Therefore, there is no need to see lights or Buddhas and thereby turn one's mind upside down. One need only inwardly contemplate one's own nature, thoroughly realize the unborn, and let the mind be without obstruction; spiritual powers are freely present therein.

Within the minds of sentient beings are inherently complete the causes of the three great aspects: essence, appearance, and function. Since essence is great, appearance is great, and function is great, what spiritual power is not fully present? The causes of these three great aspects can become the fruition of the three bodies —the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. It is not that sentient beings lack them; they simply do not know this. The reason they do not know is that they cling to phenomenal appearances and are deluded into separation from true principle.

The Diamond Sūtra states: "Ordinary beings are attached to such things." Therefore, all sūtras and treatises dismantle sentient beings' attachments to the appearances of body, mind, and phenomena. The Record of Supplementary Practice states: "If one cultivating samādhi suddenly develops spiritual powers, one must immediately abandon them, for conditioned dharmas are unreal."

Buddhadharma values being without outflows and without grasping, and honors prajñā. Prajñā can dissolve all appearances. Simply resting securely in principle is itself unobstructed functioning in phenomena. But if one seeks powers exclusively, one will surely be obstructed in principle. Unobstructed principle is nothing other than expounding the gate of the One Vehicle and realizing the principle of the unborn. When a single word accords with the Way, one realizes nirvāṇa amid birth and death; upon directly perceiving the clear principle, one attains perfect

awakening amid the dusts of toil. In an instant, one is transformed from ordinary to sage; in a moment, the conditioned becomes empty. Is this not the greatest spiritual power? That all under heaven returns to benevolence means just this.

Therefore, practitioners should first realize the power of ending the outflows. All other powers are deviant and false rather than true. What is deviant is not upright; confusion arises in the mind, and one becomes deluded about one's true nature. One must never vainly hope for them.

From the foregoing, demonic powers, karmically acquired powers, and dependent powers need not be discussed further. Among the five spiritual powers, the so-called heavenly eye, heavenly ear, knowledge of others' minds, and so forth are also possessed in Buddhadharma. They are now collectively called deviant and false because they have only the function of spiritual powers and lack the essence of powers of the Way. Powers of the Way belong to the ending of the outflows. Spiritual powers are shared by non-Buddhist paths and the two vehicles, whereas powers of the Way are elucidated only by the Mahāyāna Dharma.

Buddhadharma values only powers of the Way, not spiritual powers; yet it does not discard spiritual powers altogether. It simply does not permit their use before one has attained sufficient strength, in order to prevent two kinds of error. Thus the Treatise on the Treasury also states: "Wisdom may be deviant or correct, and powers may be true or false. Unless one's dharma eye is keen and clear, it is difficult to distinguish them. Therefore, worldly people often believe in what is false and deviant and seldom believe in what is true and correct. This is why this wondrous principle is difficult to reveal."

Tranquility of mind and intention is the Lesser Vehicle's entry into the annihilationist view. What true wisdom illuminates, however, is the understanding in essence that no thing exists and that purity and impurity are nondual. This is the essential path for breaking attachment to dharmas. Without breaking attachment to dharmas, one cannot speak of the essential teaching of Mahāyāna. Therefore, the Mahāyāna teaches that all phenomena are such as they are and are manifested only by mind, and so forth. All this clarifies entry into the dharma gate of nonduality. Then principle and phenomena interpenetrate, cause and effect thoroughly connect, and the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers is entirely before one's eyes.

In sum, the wondrous function of spiritual powers lies in the wondrous unobstructed functioning of the wisdom eye and dharma eye. The wisdom eye knows people's capacities, whether sharp or dull; the dharma eye knows which Dharma should be applied to which persons in order to liberate them. Together, these are the Buddha eye; there is not some separate Buddha eye. These spiritual powers proceed from within to without. First become unobstructed in yourself; first

liberate yourself from habitual tendencies and afflictions, and eliminate your various karmic obstacles. Then unobstructed functioning will naturally open.

But to eliminate karmic obstacles, one must rely on prajñā to sweep them away. This is the great spiritual power sought by bodhisattvas. Let us further confirm this through the Mahāvairocana Sūtra, the Benevolent Kings' Prajñā Sūtra for Protecting the Nation, and the Heart Sūtra.

The Mahāvairocana Sūtra states: "When this bodhisattva realizes the gate of the pure bodhicitta, it is called the first stage of the Dharma's luminous path. When a bodhisattva abides here and diligently cultivates for no long time, they attain the samādhi that removes all obscurations." People often misunderstand this bodhicitta as a mind of great compassion, as though it were merely a transformation from an evil mind to a good mind, which they call arousing bodhicitta. Yet bodhi is inherently unobtainable; realizing that everything is unobtainable is bodhicitta.

The first stage of the Dharma's luminous path means ascending from the first bhūmi to the tenth bhūmi. "Path" means bhūmi. It means that one must cultivate and realize samādhi, understand that mind is unobtainable, and directly see the true aspect before one may abide here. To abide here means to abide in prajñā. Without prajñā, one cannot sweep away all obscurations. By diligently cultivating for no long time, one naturally attains the samādhi that removes obscurations and will develop the five spiritual powers.

Spiritual powers are originally complete in everyone; they are not possessed by Buddhas and bodhisattvas alone while sentient beings alone lack them. Sentient beings are obscured by beginningless ignorance and therefore cannot manifest these powers.

It is only because this is originally complete that it cannot be given or taken away. One can only cultivate and realize it for oneself, passing through a definite process: first, cultivate in order to awaken, realize samādhi, and directly behold true reality; second, after awakening, undertake proper cultivation, using the power of prajñā to sweep away obscurations; third, as the obscurations gradually clear, spiritual powers naturally manifest. Only such spiritual powers never regress.

They are not like the spiritual powers produced by non-Buddhist paths through forcibly imposed meditative concentration, which ultimately regress when one encounters circumstances and gives rise to delusion. Therefore, to develop the five spiritual powers before attaining the samādhi of emptiness is most dangerous. Since the mind of aversion and attachment has not yet been removed, one cannot regard everything with equanimity. All manner of strange appearances come before one's eyes; to be carried along by them is precisely the upside-downness of birth and death.

There are said to be five kinds of obstacles:

1. The obstacle of afflictions: in its coarse aspect, this consists of the six fundamental afflictions—greed, anger, ignorance, doubt, pride, and wrong views. In its subtle aspect, it consists of the eighty-four thousand kinds of habitual tendencies. All these are accumulations from former lives that obstruct one's capacity to enter the Way.

2. Karmic obstacles: because one has created countless wrongs and evil deeds in the past and present, although one may now have the karmic conditions for attaining the Way, one's former wrongs have not yet been eliminated and naturally give rise to various hindrances.

3. Obstacles to the Dharma: although one has already practiced, because one slandered the Dharma in former lives, one cannot encounter a good spiritual guide. “Good” means skillful; a “knower” is one who understands a person's capacities and guides them beneficially with the true Dharma. “True Dharma” means that which precisely accords with the person's capacity, just as medicine must suit the illness, without being confined to any particular kind of medicine.

For example, if a person's capacity is suited to the Pure Land, but one teaches that person Chan or Esoteric Buddhism, which does not suit that capacity, one is not a good spiritual guide. If a person's capacity for prajñā has already matured, one should guide that person expediently so that they attain the siddhi of formlessness; if one instead continues to teach a form-based dharma gate, one is likewise not a good spiritual guide. Although this is the teacher's fault, it is also the karmic result of that person's doubting or slandering the Dharma in former lives, or begrudging instruction to others.

4. Obstacles of livelihood: although one has heard the true Dharma, one is busy making a living and has no leisure for practice, and thus encounters many hindrances.

5. The obstacle of knowledge: although one has encountered a good spiritual guide and heard the true Dharma, various causes and conditions do not come together—for example, arrogance and conceit—which are sufficient to obstruct prajñāpāramitā. These are called the five obstacles. Thus one may know that all kinds of causes and conditions obstruct the gate of entering the Way. To open karmic obstacles and enter this gate still requires prajñā; without prajñā, there is no means to remove all obscurations.

Nor is it the case that one must first remove the coarse obscurations before cultivating prajñāpāramitā. The Heart Sūtra says that bodhisattvas, and even the Buddhas of the three times, all attain unsurpassed bodhi through prajñāpāramitā. If

seeing one's nature and becoming a Buddha does not rely on prajñā, how can one see one's nature?

The Sutra for Humane Kings says: “Before the vajra samādhi, all knowledge and views cannot be called seeing. Only the Buddha, who instantaneously comprehends and possesses all-knowing wisdom, has knowledge and views that may be called seeing.” This seeing is prajñā. The Buddha is called the Greatly Awakened One; possessing the wisdom of all-knowing wisdom, he is the unsurpassed great radiance and great spiritual power.

The Sutra for Humane Kings further says: “Upon realizing vajra samādhi, it is as if one has ascended a lofty platform and surveys all things universally, with nothing not thoroughly understood. One accords with the true limit, is equal to dharmatā, perfects the treasury of virtues, and abides in the Tathāgata's stage. One may travel to the Buddha-lands of the ten directions, benefit and bring joy to sentient beings, comprehend true reality, and be no different from a Buddha.” The “Buddha-lands” mentioned do not refer to any fixed location, and the sentient beings so called are not limited by closeness or distance, intimacy or estrangement.

The Sutra for Humane Kings further says: “All Tathāgatas throughout the dharma realm of the ten directions attain Buddhahood by relying on this gate. If anyone says that Buddhahood can be attained apart from this, that is the speech of Māra, not the speech of the Buddha. Therefore, you should know thus, see thus, and have faith and understanding thus,” and so forth.

The Buddha spoke with such decisive clarity precisely because he feared that later people would be deluded by the obstacle of knowledge and unable to enter through faith. You should know that this gate is the gate of prajñāpāramitā. Though ninety-nine streams return to their source, none departs from this. If one says that studying prajñā is not ultimate, then what Dharma could one study that would be ultimate? Would that not make the Buddha's definitive teachings into nondefinitive teachings? Their intention is in fact to emphasize the Buddha's power while neglecting one's own power.

They believe that the Buddha's miraculous transformations and blessings can make them Buddhas in an instant. Since the proof of becoming a Buddha must be something people can see, they mistakenly take spiritual powers to be Buddhahood itself, and thus put prajñā out of mind. They do not understand that becoming a Buddha means awakening to all dharmas through wisdom that accords with reality; hence it is called awakening. A Buddha is an awakened one, and awakening is simply an abbreviated name for prajñā.

“Miraculous transformations” was formerly translated as “spiritual powers.” The majestic spiritual power of the Tathāgata surpasses all limits; it is self-realized

perfect enlightenment. Even tenth-bhūmi bodhisattvas have not yet entered this realm. Only when one has personally entered the gate of the three mysteries can one correspond with the Buddha; only then can the Buddha's power of blessing be bestowed. It arises in response to capacities and comes together upon meeting conditions; it arrives naturally and cannot be forced.

Therefore, although the Buddha's power is vast, not everyone can receive its blessing. Otherwise, all sentient beings would have been completely liberated by the Buddhas of the past.

Because of the great compassion and vows formed in the past, the Buddha wishes all sentient beings to receive benefit and universally reveals various dharma gates. Yet people can spread the Way; the Way does not spread people. The Tathāgata's treasury of essential secrets is one's own treasure-house. One must cultivate according to the Dharma, and only when one reaches an equal degree can one receive the Buddha's blessing. How could the Buddha distinguish between sentient beings as favored or neglected, close or distant? Moreover, the conditions for accomplishment differ for each person. When one's own capacities and conditions are not mature, the power of prajñā is insufficient, and emotional views cover one over, they obstruct one's entry into the Way.

Such people do not blame themselves but doubt the Dharma; to doubt the Dharma is precisely to lack sufficient power of prajñā. They further do not know that spiritual powers manifest only after prajñā has swept away the five obstacles. Moreover, spiritual powers that enable everyone to see them are not spiritual powers, because such seeing is no different from that of ordinary sentient beings. If one calls the illusions of a magician spiritual powers—when the magician's mantras bless herbs and produce all kinds of unprecedented marvels—could one then call that magician a Buddha?

They err only at this one point at the causal stage, yet this causes the whole undertaking to go wrong. Therefore, practitioners who seek great spiritual powers have an incorrect causal basis and belong to Māra's retinue. This is especially listed first among the eight prohibitions. Take care not to mislead yourselves.

The Second Prohibition: Excessive Doubt and Fickleness

Doubt arises from not understanding why things are as they are and from placing too much weight on gain and loss. Fickleness arises from unstable faith, greed for quick results, and a lack of constancy in practice. Both result from a disposition that greedily seeks convenience. In learning any skill, whether craft, farming, or commerce, one must complete at least three years of training; there is no possibility of accomplishment in only a few months. How much more is this so in studying

Buddhism, and how much more with the habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives!

Before a matter is settled, one may use one's own views to predict and discriminate, or, without truly understanding the principle, fix one's own view and judge something right or wrong. Yet inwardly one has no assurance, and afterward one again hesitates and remains undecided. This is called doubt. In its coarse aspect, it is delusion; in its subtle aspect, it is doubt. For example, when something cannot be done, if one does not distinguish right from wrong but muddleheadedly follows it anyway, that is delusion. If one clearly knows it cannot be done, yet cannot overcome one's own emotional views and so becomes agitated and unsettled, that too is delusion. When such subtle fluctuations continue, with inferential comparisons leaving one confused and uncertain, one has entered into doubt.

There is no end to the karma people create and the suffering they undergo. Worse still, they suffer without knowing that they suffer. The greatest suffering of all is not understanding the mind-ground. If the mind-ground is clear, there is nothing that cannot be done. Since the mind is master of all, it is called the mind-king. If a king loses his position, the state will surely fall into disorder. Thus, destroying doubt is like establishing a ruler in a state in order to end disorder; it is the first step in the work of realizing the mind.

Doubt and faith stand in direct opposition: not having faith is doubt. If one wishes to arouse faith, one must first destroy doubt. Once doubt is destroyed, one must resolutely not retreat; only then can one enter the path of diligent progress. The doubt and retreating midway seen today belong to this illness, and its consequences are therefore extremely serious.

The method of destroying doubt should begin with inquiry and practice. First is inquiry: one should regard oneself as a most honest person, be humble and modest, and ask whenever one encounters a matter. Even those of high position in ancient times should not have been ashamed to ask those below them; how then can beginners seeking a good spiritual guide fail to receive things with humility? Ask about each matter in order to dispel one's doubts. This is called inquiry.

Second is actual practice. After receiving instruction from a good spiritual guide, one may understand only the principle and not verify it in actual experience; in the end, one will inevitably again turn to doubt and delusion. Therefore one must actually cultivate, so that principle and phenomena fully interpenetrate and there is no hindrance at all within the mind. Only this is called destroying doubt. This is called practice. But are inquiry and practice separate? It may be said that inquiry itself is practice; they need not be rigidly divided into two. Inquiry opens the occasion for practice, and practice can create the conditions for inquiry. Ask as you practice and

practice as you ask, each advancing the other. If one merely asks without practicing, it will ultimately be of no benefit.

There are two kinds of doubt: doubt before an undertaking and doubt midway through or after it. Doubt midway through or afterward may still be understandable, but doubt beforehand is the operation of emotional views, an unfounded fabrication; naturally, the more one doubts, the deeper the doubt becomes. Some thereby become ill or deranged; these are among the most miserable people in the world. Yet this doubt is already an effect, arising from anxiety over gain and loss. Anxiety is the cause of doubt and also arises in relation to matters; it is not wholly groundless. But when one need not doubt a matter, or could avoid doubt yet repeatedly worries over it, that is merely seeking trouble and tormenting oneself.

Practitioners often doubt the Dharma and doubt people, and consequently become fickle. This is great delusion and great falsity. Human failings are no more than two: greed and seeking ease. First, one seeks to attain accomplishment quickly without expending effort. Second, one greedily seeks much in order to surpass others. The illness of attachment to existence accumulated over many lives is difficult to unbind; when one gains nothing, one suspects biased emptiness and feels that one's labor has been fruitless, and so wishes to change course. This is the third.

Fourth, practitioners often let themselves be swayed by human sentiment, echo whatever others say, use their ears as their eyes, and delight in making irresponsible remarks. Fifth, the course of practice does not always proceed favorably or adversely, nor are progress and regression fixed; if one doubts because of adversity and immediately gives rise to the thought of retreating, this is another fault. Sixth, people habitually enjoy advertising their abilities and displaying their differences, delighting in empty theories to show their superiority, and thus forget the sin of slandering the Dharma.

Seventh, they do not understand the meaning of relying on the Dharma rather than on persons, and often slander the Dharma because of a person, forgetting the underlying reason. Eighth, another person's inner state is not something I can recklessly assess, yet one makes comparisons and distinctions and rashly judges it right or wrong. All this results from not having clarified one's own root.

The Third Prohibition: Seeking Speed and Waiting Passively

It is originally a good thing for practitioners to advance vigorously and diligently. But diligence means being single-minded, and progress means not retreating. To be so in the morning and so in the evening, neither hasty nor slow, and without interruption—this is called diligent progress. It does not mean greedily seeking much and rushing ahead fiercely. Wanting things to be excessively good is also greed. Those who begin at too high a level will certainly not endure; those eager to

see results will inevitably become coarse and restless in spirit, and what they cultivate will certainly be difficult to accomplish.

Those today who seek teachings everywhere and, after practicing for ten or twenty years, gain no actual benefit all suffer from having too many dharma gates. They seek results too quickly, practice for too short a time, and are too deeply attached to Dharma views. In the end, they understand a hundred teachings but accomplish nothing at all. Such are those greedy for speed and hasty progress.

Conversely, some drift along and let errors accumulate. Having obtained even a slight favorable experience, they become self-satisfied and give rise to a waiting mind. The two words “indulgence and laxity” are the greatest obstacles to the Way, for if one does not advance, one retreats.

Practitioners often begin halfway along the path, never having worked from the root. They frequently neglect even the most elementary Buddhist principles; after a long time, ashamed to ask again, they muddle through and let their confusion continue. This is the first error.

If the root has not been clarified, they remain blind as to where practice should ultimately lead. Yet they imagine that, when the time is ripe, their practice will naturally come to perfection, and so they let things drift while waiting for the time. This is the second error.

Practice should begin with seeking awakening; only after awakening does correct cultivation begin. When one has attained even a slight awakening, that is precisely when the work begins. Yet one may wish simply to let things proceed spontaneously and freely, without seeking thorough realization, and in the end sink into decline. This is the third error.

When the work of practice reaches its subtle and minute stages, it is most difficult to distinguish clearly. The whiteness of a white bird and the whiteness of snow are two, not one. At this point one must not be at all vague. If one follows the old course and lets things drift, merely waiting for the time to come, imagining that in time one will surely understand everything thoroughly, this is the fourth error.

Moreover, spontaneous functioning and an attitude of waiting are utterly different. Once practitioners have realized the mind and entered the state of spontaneous functioning, they still must not be the least bit lax. They must investigate to the ultimate point, then proceed from the ultimate point to complete maturity. When maturity is perfected, subject and object are naturally forgotten; only then may one let go.

It is said that after awakening one should feel as though one has lost one's parents. How can one mistake letting things drift for freedom, force oneself to appear at ease, and abandon the work? In short, one knows one's own practice. Let us take planting a tree as an analogy. At the beginning of practice, one must first discern the nature of the soil and determine what should be planted. Once the seeds have been sown, though no shoots may appear for a time, one must never dig them up to see whether they are growing, merely because they have not yet sprouted. One need only water them daily and diligently carry out one's proper task.

When shoots appear, do not rejoice either; simply take care against wind, rain, flood, drought, insects, and ants. Even after flowering and fruiting, one should not impatiently pick and eat the fruit, but only tend it and wait for the proper time. Only then does one enter the period of spontaneous functioning. If, upon first seeing the shoots emerge, one simply lets them go untended and waits for them to grow by themselves, this is again the error of an attitude of waiting. The former is excess; this is deficiency. Both are obstacles to practicing the Way and should therefore be avoided.

IV. Avoid Personal Considerations and Reliance on Others

Beginning practitioners often follow others blindly, using their ears as their eyes. To rely on a good spiritual teacher is proper in itself, but one must not be governed entirely by personal considerations. For example, an initial practice is like the first physician one consults: choosing that physician may be a matter of personal considerations. But if the medicine is unsuitable and no effect is seen after a long time, one can only consult another physician. One must place one's life first and not again allow personal considerations to lead one astray.

Those who readily change physicians and medicines may mostly be acting from personal considerations, but this also arises because their own suffering is not truly urgent to them. If one takes oneself as the basis and carefully examines what is beneficial and harmful, then, when medicine proves ineffective, one will first awaken one's own vigilance and promptly change the prescription, without the slightest hesitation or vacillation. If medicine is effective and one's life is at stake, how could one change course because of personal considerations? Therefore, the control lies with oneself. Never rely on others or use one's ears as one's eyes.

Practitioners commonly suffer from not knowing: first, they do not know their own fundamental faults; second, they do not know who is a good physician; third, they do not know what is good medicine; fourth, they do not know under what circumstances medicine is effective; fifth, they do not know that various reactions necessarily arise after taking medicine, and so they stop because of doubt and fear. Thus, before practicing, they blindly follow others; while practicing correctly, they

train blindly; and after gaining a slight experience, they become self-righteous. Error upon error—how painful this is!

V. Avoid Rigid Attachment

Practitioners should be like craftsmen: they cannot do without ingenuity, for ingenuity achieves twice the result with half the effort. The Buddhadharma has no fixed method. Suppose Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, and Pure Land practice are provisionally used as methods of returning to the source. Since people's capacities differ, the methods must change accordingly. If one rigidly clings to them without flexibility, spiritual responsiveness has no way to emerge. How then can one attain the state of freedom and ease and reach the land of ultimate bliss?

Therefore, single-mindedness differs from rigid clinging. If one aspires to go west but suddenly longs to be born in the east, this cannot be called single-mindedness. One should know that east and west are the same blissful place of practice; east and west are only provisional names. In the four directions, above and below, there are Buddha lands splendidly adorned. I should first purify my own intention and acquire the qualifications for rebirth. Then east is possible and west is possible; wherever I aspire to be reborn, my aspiration will be fulfilled. This cannot be called flexibility.

If one rigidly clings to a single method, thinking that the Western Pure Land is the only land of bliss and that there are no others, such firmly entrenched attachment makes rebirth truly difficult. Sentient beings' suffering arises solely from attachment to self. Learning Buddhism is precisely meant to remove attachment to self. If, through practice, one adds another layer of the disease of attachment, is this not adding suffering upon suffering?

All deeply ingrained habitual tendencies arise from the disease of attachment. Patriarch Mazu rigidly clung to seated meditation; this was called the disease of attachment, for which he was rebuked by Nanyue. Other traditions are no different in having this illness. Yet there is also a class of people who greedily seek convenience and shortcuts. They think that ten recitations are enough to secure rebirth—what an extraordinary bargain! They merely wait until the moment of death to exert themselves, assuming that the Buddha will naturally come to guide them. This is truly like rejoicing at finding wealth in a dream. Thus they must be urged not to become lax.

Yet sentient beings are difficult to guide: support them on the west, and they topple over on the east. One must skillfully make adjustments, as when tuning a lute: if the strings are too loose, they produce no sound; if too tight, they break. First, awaken their lively spiritual responsiveness; second, explain the benefits and harms so that they themselves feel the urgency. When practicing, be like a commander leading troops against an enemy, pressing forward without turning back. When not

practicing, let everything go and regard it as though nothing were happening, while the mind remains ever lively and vibrant. Only such practice is called diligence.

VI. Avoid Failing to Follow the Rules

Every method of practice must have a teacher's transmission. For beginners, the responsibility lies with the teacher; after one has faithfully received the teaching, one must practice in accordance with it. If one takes one's own views as correct and alters the method, accomplishment is truly difficult. In the past, someone practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma was required to practice for two hours. He thought that he recited the mantra faster than others and that an hour and a half was enough to complete 1,080 repetitions. So he practiced without following the rules. In the end, there was no result; instead, he suspected that the practice of others was inauthentic, and thus he doubted the Dharma and slandered the teacher. This is truly a grave taboo.

Therefore, before transmitting a Dharma practice, one should be extremely careful, examining physical condition, available time, and the coordination of all circumstances, so that no abuses arise. Those who receive the Dharma should chiefly be honest and earnest. Asking many questions can dispel doubts, but self-awareness is also essential.

VII. Avoid Losing Awareness and Contemplation

This is the greatest fault of practitioners. Those who practice for decades without gaining the slightest benefit are suffering precisely from this fault. Practice occurs at particular times, but its application lies in everyday life. The work of awareness and contemplation is the practitioner's sole aim and the sole means of cutting off suffering and realizing truth.

Sentient beings suffer in their upside-down delusion solely because they lack awareness. When external objects come to entice them, whether favorable or adverse, they are vainly swept along in cyclic existence. If, through the power of wisdom, they are aware and contemplate, recognizing such things as illusory, then inwardly and outwardly both are empty. They will not be swayed or deluded; naturally, they will neither rejoice nor grow angry, create no evil causes, give rise to no evil conditions, and undergo no painful results. Awareness and contemplation is the initial awakening at the causal stage: awareness comes before events, and is therefore called the awakening of great wisdom. Contemplation is practice in resistance. When all circumstances arise, amid the struggle between humans and devas over gain and loss, benefit and harm, one can decisively advance or withdraw without moving or wavering, and one's strength naturally becomes sufficient.

Therefore, at all times, in all places, and in every matter, one should remain alert and contemplate; one should not forget this. Practitioners often divide meditation periods and ordinary life into two separate matters, thinking that walking, standing, sitting, lying down, dealing with people, and handling affairs in daily life are not practice. This is the first error.

Practitioners do not know that awareness and contemplation are precisely training the mind in response to circumstances. Because they do not understand the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, they do not know how to use the mind. This is the second error.

Practitioners speak of emptiness, yet the activities they undertake still cannot be empty. Because they cannot maintain awareness and contemplation, they have no way to realize emptiness. This is the third error.

Practitioners do not know that awareness and contemplation are the most essential method of practice: the more one trains, the better; and the more stimulating the circumstances one encounters, the more one can verify one's own strength in samādhi and wisdom. Yet they seek only blessings, cannot receive great benefit, and cannot put it to great use. This is the fourth error. To lose this awareness is to forget the reason for practice; it is to drift along without urgency. This is why there are many who understand the Way but few who practice it, and many who practice the Way but few who realize it.

VIII. Avoid Claiming Attainment Before Attainment

To claim realization without realization, to assess others' inner states, to aspire too high, and to exaggerate out of vanity—these are habitual tendencies of sentient beings. Many are also led astray by competitiveness. For example, one may understand the principle of contemplating emptiness and imagine oneself able to realize emptiness. Yet when situations arise, one is not empty after all, and afflictions remain as before; one's strength is still insufficient. One cannot truly avoid the ridicule of those who know.

Still, if one has genuinely realized even one or two portions, though principle and phenomena have not yet integrated for a time, there will eventually be a day when one reaches the goal through diligent practice. But if the root has not been clarified and one claims realization, then even the principle has not been understood, much less its realization in actual experience. This is truly delusion upon delusion. Non-Buddhist paths, for example, do not know what realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature means, yet they rigidly cling to particular bodily apertures, or achieve a visualization of a moon disk and then proclaim that they have realized the mind and seen their true nature. This is the most inverted confusion and is difficult to remedy.

Moreover, one alone knows one's own practice, for it belongs to the mind-ground. How can it be judged by outward appearances? Speculation is delusion, and assessment is also affliction. Therefore, another person's superiority or inferiority need not cause me anxious concern. Once one becomes involved in winning and losing, one unconsciously falls into jealousy and anger. One's own practice then instead declines and grows slack. One must be careful.

These eight kinds of errors concern the fundamental conditions for practicing the Dharma gates of every tradition. Whether one practices Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism, one should proceed in this way. Next, let us discuss the practices of the various traditions.

The aim of Dharma practice is to reach the other shore: this is pāramitā. Pāramitā means returning to the source; the source is the origin.

There are many Dharma gates for returning to the source. Some take Chan meditation as their means of return, and are called the Chan school; some take Pure Land practice as their means of return, and are called the Pure Land school; some take Esoteric Buddhism as their means of return, and are called the Esoteric school. Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism are methods, not the source; they are boats, not the other shore. The choice to use or relinquish them lies with oneself. Only when one is not bound by Dharma methods can one be said to have reached the other shore. One must not lack constancy, but neither should one be narrowly attached.

The aim of learning Buddhism is to cast off bonds, seek liberation, live freely and at ease, and remove all suffering and adversity. Among all sufferings and adversities, bondage to Dharma methods is the most painful. Those with deep habitual tendencies are heavily bound: Chan has Chan habits, Pure Land has Pure Land habits, and Esoteric Buddhism has Esoteric habits. The habit of each considering itself right gives rise to the beginnings of sectarian contention. Practitioners seek the samādhi of non-contention; disputation is most shameful.

Yet at times one cannot avoid making distinctions or engaging in debate. Such distinction and debate must be for the sake of what is right; they must not involve emotional antagonism or provoke the other party to anger. They should be handled calmly and evenly. If capacities are not in accord, do not oppose the other party; opposition will only drive them farther away. This applies not only to others but also to oneself: one must humbly discipline oneself, and when one recognizes a fault, one must certainly correct it. If one does not correct it, one has not truly recognized it. Do not suppose that only killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct are faults. Whenever the mind-ground has not been clarified and cause and effect have not

been resolved, one is entangled everywhere; whenever one acts, one incurs blame. All of this is wrongdoing.

The Earth Store Sūtra says: “Every stirring of mind and movement of thought is nothing but evil, bound by karmic force. There is no escape from culpability.” This is being helplessly swept along, not knowingly committing wrong; how pitiable it is.

VIII. A Brief Account of the Practices of the Various Traditions

Although this association is a Mind-Seal practice center specializing in the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, it also propagates Chan, Pure Land, and the other traditions concurrently. Here is a brief account of the practices of these traditions: (1) cultivating the Pure Land Dharma gate; (2) cultivating the dhyāna Dharma gate; and (3) cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma gate.

Cultivating the Pure Land Dharma Gate

For forty-nine years, the Buddha expounded the Dharma, employing various skillful means, all solely to gather the mind into oneness and arrive at the point where even the One is unobtainable. These skillful means liberate beings from suffering and respond to capacities and circumstances; they are not fixed methods. The Dharma gate of Buddha-remembrance is also one kind of skillful means. One must not cling exclusively to holding the name as Buddha-remembrance. To contemplate one’s intrinsic nature inwardly, to study sūtras and treatises outwardly, and, while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, in dealing with people and circumstances—to do all this is Buddha-remembrance.

For hundreds and thousands of years, many have practiced Buddha-remembrance, but few have attained realization. There are five reasons: first, they do not understand what kind of thought this remembrance is, or what the Buddha is; second, they seek an easy advantage and cannot endure hardship; third, they do not understand the essential point of mind, and so lack strength; fourth, they divide into schools and sects, giving rise to views of defilement and purity; fifth, they do not obtain the key to the method of holding the name.

First, one must understand what this thing called Buddha-remembrance is, and what this thing is that suffers all day long, is turned upside down, and wanders through birth and death. Only then should one practice Buddha-remembrance. When the mind-ground is clear, then I do not leave the Buddha, and the Buddha does not leave me; Buddha and I share the same luminosity; essence and function abide in suchness. Everywhere is the Pure Land; every place is the West. If one strives and advances diligently in this way, rebirth in the Western Pure Land is not difficult. Non-retrogression can certainly be realized in this very life.

Cultivating the Pure Land requires dual cultivation, not single cultivation. What is single cultivation? It is to believe only in Amitābha of the Western Pure Land, make vows for one's own rebirth there, depend on the Buddha to come and guide one, yet make no effort oneself to change and remove one's habitual tendencies. This is called single cultivation.

What is dual cultivation? It is to understand one's own original mind-ground: its luminosity is immeasurable, its life is immeasurable, and it is nondual with Amitābha. In the communion of response and resonance, the ten directions are entirely the West. Everywhere and in every place, if this mind is present, the Buddha comes without coming, and I go without going. No distinction can be made between oneself and the one before one. Morning and evening abide herein; the Sahā world is no different from the Western Pure Land. Every utterance is Buddha-remembrance. There is no one capable of remembering and nothing remembered. Water does not leave the fish, yet the fish forgets the water. Establish no view of Amitābha and no view of defilement or purity. At that very moment, this is rebirth. This is called dual cultivation.

But if one speaks of it with the mouth while the mind does not practice, clings to the name, and does not undertake visualization in the mind, this is called single cultivation. When mind and mouth correspond, this is called dual cultivation. In fact, dual cultivation is easy, while single cultivation is difficult. Dual cultivation brings ease and freedom; single cultivation, on the contrary, is laborious. Dual cultivation assuredly brings rebirth; single cultivation is absolutely without result. One must cultivate in this way for it to be right cultivation and right practice.

Before practicing Buddha-remembrance, however, several prerequisites must be fulfilled: first, one must recognize what the Pure Land is; second, one must understand the meaning of the three characters Amitābha and what it is in oneself that is reborn in the Pure Land; third, one must understand the stages of the method of cultivation. If these three matters are not clear, then even if one holds the name ten thousand times, one is merely like a parrot learning human speech, entirely without use. This is what is called being turned by the sūtra, rather than turning the sūtra.

The Pure Land has both the Pure Land of principle and the Pure Land of phenomena. The Pure Land of phenomena is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, where there truly is a Buddha-land adorned with the dependent and principal retributions. The Pure Land of principle is the pure land of my own intrinsic nature. Mind pervades every place; all is the West. The ten directions are no different from the West; therefore it is called perfect enlightenment.

Let us further explain the two characters Pure Land separately. Pure means sweeping away all habitual tendencies and being free of defilement. Land refers to the original mind-ground. The wondrous substance of my original awakening is likewise of immeasurable luminosity, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction. Its life is also immeasurable and boundless; it is of one substance and nondual with the Buddha. Amitābha and I have never truly been separated by coming and going. In delusion, we are ten thousand miles apart, and the Western Pure Land becomes Avīci; in awakening, they are but inches apart, and Avīci is the Western Pure Land. Therefore, the sūtra says: "If one wishes to purify one's land, one must first purify one's mind. As one's mind is purified, so is the Buddha-land purified."

Amitābha means suchness, immovability, neither arising nor ceasing—the Vairocana treasury-nature of great freedom. A means non-arising; mi means my great freedom; tuo means suchness and immovability. Since the wondrous mind of perfect enlightenment, my fundamental essence, is the same as Amitābha, "rebirth" is merely an expedient expression used out of necessity. Since there is neither coming nor going, why speak of going? Since there is neither arising nor ceasing, why speak of birth? Thus, that which is reborn is not my physical body of appearances, but my tathāgata-garbha nature, which has always been free of arising, ceasing, coming, and going, and is ever constant and unchanging. I shall now further set forth the four points of faith, vows, practice, and realization.

First is faith. It is not enough merely to believe in the magnificent Buddha-land of the West and count that as having aroused faith. One must also deeply believe that one's own intrinsic nature is Amitābha, that one can inherently become a Buddha in the same way, that all people can become like Yao and Shun, and that all sentient beings can become Buddhas. The only difference is between delusion and awakening.

This faith is exceedingly difficult. If one's faith does not turn back, then with a single thought of pure faith one has already planted various wholesome roots before immeasurable millions of Buddhas; one is no longer in the realm of ordinary beings. Therefore, unless one's faith is genuine, firm, and earnest, the power of one's vows will not be strong. The ancient worthies said: It is easy to believe in the fruition Buddha—for example, to believe in Buddhas such as Śākyamuni and Amitābha. It is difficult to believe in the causal Buddha—that all sentient beings and we ourselves, at the causal stage, can become Buddhas. Thus, this is called a Dharma difficult to believe. The sūtra says that when one first arouses the resolve, one immediately becomes greatly awakened. Therefore, faith is the mother of all practices.

Second are vows: making vows. A vow is an aspiration. What is the task of a person of purpose? It is to uphold an aspiration. To make vows is to establish an aspiration;

to vow to become a Buddha is to establish the unsurpassed aspiration. But if one single-mindedly vows only to be reborn in the West, admiring its meritorious adornments of form, one has still not left behind greedy attachment. This is not genuine vow-making.

The sūtra says: “Those who delight in lesser dharmas are attached to the views of self, person, sentient being, and life span; thus they cannot listen to, receive, read, or recite this sūtra.” Therefore, one’s vows must be great. Great vows bring great accomplishment; small vows bring small accomplishment. To carry a great object, one must have a large vessel. If one wishes to accomplish such merits and adornments, one must make great vows, saying: “I now vow to be born in that land so that I may become a Buddha and liberate all sentient beings, not out of greed for gain.” This is genuine vow-making. Therefore, the sūtra contains three instances of “one should make vows.”

Third is practice: cultivation. Cultivation does not mean merely holding the name. One should constantly grow weary of birth and death and never forget Amitābha from thought to thought. With the mouth holding the name and the mind remembering it, continuously and seamlessly, one attains the state of the yoga of the three mysteries. When the pure dharma has strength, the defiled dharma has no strength. One can refrain from thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance because thoughts of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha have strength. If one does not think of this, one must think of that. One must think of the Western Pure Land.

Otherwise, one thinks of hell—it is as easy as turning over one’s hand. A hand is not two; how could the mind be otherwise? It is right here at this very moment; there is no need for hesitation. If one cultivates with such single-minded sincerity, from one to seven days, the mind will not be inverted. Even a non-inverted mind cannot be obtained. One naturally attains one-pointedness of mind without distraction. One mind is no mind; mind cannot be obtained. This is right cultivation.

Furthermore, cultivation is the breaking of the turbidity of views. If there is a view of purity, then a view of defilement immediately arises in opposition; this cannot be called practice. The sūtra says: “This Dharma is equal, without high or low.” The Buddha expounded this Pure Land Dharma gate as a skillful means for sentient beings, yet he did not permit the view of sentient beings. Mañjuśrī, because he held a view of Buddha, was even demoted to the Iron Enclosure. Thus, if one’s views are impure, one’s mind is impure, and the land is impure. Therefore, only when firm faith and great vows are combined can there be right practice; merely holding the name with the mouth is not what is meant by practice.

One utterance of Amitābha suddenly transcends the grave offenses of birth and death accumulated over eighty billion kalpas. The limits of past and future are both

cut off. The workings of mind are secret; this is inherently the unborn Dharma and also the unsurpassed secret vehicle.

The sūtra version translated by Dharma Master Xuanzang emphasizes right mindfulness and contemplation, whereas the version translated by Dharma Master Kumārajīva emphasizes holding the name. In truth, they are nondual: during contemplation, one does not depart from oral recitation; during oral recitation, one does not depart from the activity of mind. The ancients gave equal weight to contemplation and recitation; they were not like those today who rigidly cling to one side. Esoteric Buddhism explains Amitābha in four ways: the superficial and abbreviated, the profound and secret, the secret within the secret, and the profound within the secret. Yet all are simply concerned with Amitābha of the West and Amitābha of one's intrinsic nature being of one substance and nondual. Thus, one utterance of Amitābha is inherently Esoteric Buddhism; it cannot be split apart into separate households.

Fourth is realization: actual realization. To realize means that mind and states are experienced, comprehended, and penetrated. The sūtra says: "Only a Buddha together with a Buddha can fully know it." This means sealing mind with mind: only one knows it oneself; others cannot fathom it. Moreover, realization changes in accordance with the cultivation of faith, vows, and practice. However one cultivates faith, vows, and practice, so too is what one realizes. If one thoroughly understands that all dharmas have the characteristic of emptiness, then in terms of principle there is naturally no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization. Yet when principle and phenomena are perfectly interfused, how could cultivation ever be discarded? When one cultivates, realization is present within it.

The Dharma gate of Buddha-remembrance relies on the Buddha's power. But if one's responsive power is weak, the power of response is also weak. I practiced Buddha-remembrance for ten years and never dared trust that I had grasped the essential point. In the autumn of the eighteenth year of the Republic, after cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, I returned to the practice of Buddha-remembrance. Only then did I understand its subtle wonder and awaken to the meaning of non-retrogression. One-pointedness of mind without distraction must certainly be attained through ordinary practice; it can never be managed at the last moment.

Therefore, in addition to the Dharma gate of Buddha-remembrance, one should investigate Esoteric Buddhism as a primary support. Its states are truly inconceivable. I acknowledge that my former offenses included forcibly separating Pure Land and Esoteric Buddhism; this offense is equivalent to slandering the Buddha. When the Buddha was alive, there was no division between Chan and Esoteric Buddhism. Later people temporarily divided them, as a matter of

expediency, in order to seek single-mindedness; they did not deliberately establish separate sectarian boundaries.

As it is said, “The return to the source is not two, but skillful means have many gates.” If one stubbornly clings to one’s own views and strictly distinguishes sectarian boundaries, one remains attached. How then can one be liberated?

Consider this: when one realizes the patience with the unborn dharmas, even mind is no longer present. Who is there to make distinctions? Who is there to realize? In Master Lianchi’s text of vows, he says: “May I see Amitābha Buddha amid Chan contemplation and in dreams,” and so forth. How could he have excluded the Chan school? People today rigidly insist that nothing but Pure Land practice should be cultivated and oppose Esoteric Buddhism, while they themselves recite the Rebirth Mantra.

Therefore, one should know that holding the name is one skillful means for cultivating the Pure Land. All dharmas are Buddhadharma. By cultivating every wholesome dharma, one attains unsurpassed bodhi. How could it be that one practices another Dharma and Amitābha refuses permission for rebirth? Now, borrowing one utterance of Amitābha, recite until the myriad dharmas return to the One; then recite until even the One is unobtainable. Only then is accomplishment attained.

Even by holding another Dharma, one may attain accomplishment in the same way. Yet the power of one’s vow toward the West must not be divided. When recitation reaches the point where one thought is no thought, this is called true remembrance; when one characteristic is without characteristics, this is called the true characteristic. Upon seeing the true characteristic, the mind naturally has no binding thoughts. To have no binding thoughts is liberation. The sūtra says that liberation is the Tathāgata and is nirvāṇa. Practitioners must never resign themselves to being inferior and limited, thinking that it is certainly impossible to accomplish this in the present life. Still less may they regard others as inferior and limited. Those who hold such a view are afflicted by overweening pride; they do not understand the Pure Land and will certainly not attain rebirth.

At the beginning of Buddha-remembrance practice, one should join the assembly in recitation, harmonizing one’s tone with that of the group. It is unnecessary to voice every character aloud. One should use a breath-regulation method to discipline the practice. Whenever one pauses to change breath and rest, mental recitation should nevertheless remain unbroken.

First, recite in unison with the assembly; next, recite with others. Reciting with others is not as good as reciting with a small group; reciting with a small group is not as good as reciting alone. Reciting the six characters is not as good as reciting the four;

reciting the four characters is not as good as reciting one. The original sound of Namo Amitābha Buddha is “Namo Amitābhāya.” In principle, one should also recite it only after receiving the proper transmission; this is no different from maintaining esoteric practice.

By “emphasizing one syllable” is meant stressing one syllable among the four—for example, emphasizing the syllable tuo in Amituofo. This creates space for visualization and is especially effective. Nor should the time spent in Buddha-recitation be too long; what is most important is that the recitation continue thought after thought without interruption. It is best to recite for fifteen minutes, meditate in samādhi for fifteen minutes, and alternate between visualization and recitation.

People today consider large numbers superior and loud voices lofty; still less do they distinguish what merit and virtue are. They mistakenly treat the merit and virtue of Buddha-recitation as though it were paper money deposited for storage in the underworld. How utterly foolish they are!

For the time being, let us provisionally establish a scale of merit and virtue: to the extent that Buddha-recitation becomes thoroughly familiar, there is merit and virtue to that extent; to the extent that one benefits from it, there is merit and virtue to that extent; to the extent that one eliminates habitual tendencies, there is merit and virtue to that extent. Familiarity lies in one’s own mind, and one’s own mind is the treasury. If one says that realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature through recitation is merit and virtue, then after practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and completing a thousand sessions, one will be told how to apply it; one will surely come to know for oneself the subtle wonder of the Pure Land teaching. I previously wrote a book entitled Essentials of Amitābha’s Mind, which may be consulted.

Cultivating the Dharma Gate of Chan Meditation

The Chan school is a special transmission outside the teachings, beyond the reach of words and expression. It is sealed only by mind, yet mind has nothing that can be sealed. Without a manifest verification, how could there be confirmation? Therefore, the Buddha held up a flower to reveal the potential, and Kāśyapa responded with a smile. It does not fall into verbal explanation or annihilationism, but directly realizes the essential point of mind: mahāprajñāpāramitā. Unless one possesses the very highest capacities, one cannot comprehend and awaken to it.

The one thing for which people of the Eastern Land may be proud before the whole world is the Chan school. The minds and states of its students are exceptionally lively and free, while their spirit is bold, untrammeled, and refined. Though the mind sweeps away both emptiness and existence, it does not fall into nihilism; though their practice is focused and pure, they do not delight in pedantic attachment. Possessing such vessels for the Dharma, they are able to receive it.

When Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, came east, the proper causes and conditions had matured. What he transmitted was no separate Dharma: he merely pointed directly to seeing one's intrinsic nature. Free from thoughts, one attains it; he taught people to understand directly for themselves. Only after the Song dynasty did the method of huatou arise, such as investigating, "Who was I before my parents gave birth to me?"

By the Ming dynasty, the Chan school was gradually declining. Chan masters such as Dufeng then began to introduce Buddha-recitation. This recitation was right mindfulness and contemplation: people were taught to examine, "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" Gradually, Chan and Pure Land were cultivated together. Later people further turned huatou into chanting and reading aloud. Failing to understand the school's intent, they shifted from biased emptiness into wild abandon and came to be rejected by the world. More recently, because of choking, they have abandoned eating altogether: they simply discard it, or publicly attack it with great vehemence, declaring that everyone in the world is of dull capacity in the Dharma-ending age and that entering the Chan school is like encountering snakes and scorpions. Is not such arrogant, perverse madness deeply regrettable?

They do not know that, although practitioners proceed from ordinary beings to sages through immeasurable dharma gates, their ultimate return to the source is not two. Without arriving at Chan, one cannot be called ultimate. What is called the most secret and supreme Pure Land is entirely Chan meditation: when not a single thought arises, this is called Chan; when one sees one's intrinsic nature while sitting, this is called meditative stability. Only upon reaching this state is one truly pure, and only this is supremely secret.

For those of the very highest sharp capacities, entering is like going through the door into a room: one push and they are inside. Those of dull capacity stand somewhat farther from the room and must be led in gradually. But how could there be a fixed method for leading them in? Until the time has come for a push, even a hundred or a thousand pushes will leave them outside the room. A blow or a shout may bring sudden clarity; a single "hū!" may do so as well—but it depends only upon the person whose potential has ripened.

Therefore, the Chan school places great importance on teacher and student, and on skillful means for leading one in. People's capacities in recent times are too slight: life is difficult, their karmic obstructions are too heavy, and they have no leisure for concentrated practice. They lack both teachers and favorable conditions; their own strength and conditions are, after all, insufficient. They should rely on the Buddha's power, using Pure Land or esoteric practice as a preliminary guide. Once their potential has opened, they should then be pressed onward step by step, until they reach a point where mountains and rivers are exhausted, the road is cut off, and the

valley ends. Then they will naturally awaken with sudden clarity and personally see the original landscape of their own ground.

Without undergoing a great death, one cannot attain a great birth. Only after one has awakened in vast clarity may one be permitted to consult the recorded sayings, polishing oneself until bright and clean. Before penetrating the three barriers, one must not be lightly approved. As for all the methods of opening and guiding the Dharma within the school, how could one mechanically copy those of the Tang and Song dynasties when customs have differed from then until now? Expressions such as “the cypress tree in the courtyard” and “three pounds of flax” could serve as spontaneous pointers because those objects happened to be present at the time. Therefore, if one says that Chan practice has a fixed method, it cannot be called Chan.

Today the Buddha teaches a fixed Dharma, and tomorrow he teaches a nonfixed Dharma. Non-Buddhists are alarmed and frightened, considering it a dangerous path; how could they be fit to discuss the supreme Dharma? Since the Heart-of-Heart Dharma has come into practice in the world, entering the Chan school has become exceedingly simple and direct. If one practices according to the Dharma, success may be assured. Yet only one who drinks the water knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm. First take dhāraṇī as the practice method and prajñā as the verification, adorning the Pure Land of one’s own nature; this is truly to practice the Chan school.

Cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma Gate

The great Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the highest formless esoteric vehicle. Those without a spirit of great fearlessness would not dare to believe in it and practice it. In Tibet, one must practice form-based esoteric practice for twenty years or more before one may practice this Dharma. People of the Eastern Land have different capacities and can therefore proceed directly to profound cultivation.

When this Dharma is first practiced, responsibility rests with the teacher; without examination, it is not transmitted recklessly. Around the seventeenth and eighteenth years of the Republic, Acharya Dayu established teaching centers in Beijing, Shanghai, and other places. At that time, fifty or sixty thousand people sought the Dharma, and several hundred were initiated each day. There was no time to discuss the essentials of the Dharma in detail. Thus the world came to regard it as ordinary Esoteric Buddhism. More than half abandoned the practice midway or gave rise to doubts and slander. Of those who held unwavering faith, personally remained at his side, and gained some grasp of the essential point, fewer than two hundred remain today.

At present, Master Dayu lives in seclusion in Hankou, temporarily withdrawing from worldly ties. He has instructed his fellow disciples separately to spread the teaching widely in all directions. With my shallow and partial understanding, I presumptuously take this seat and form with you all this unsurpassed and excellent affinity. I feel deeply ashamed.

Fortunately, during the past two years all the practitioners have received benefit, the Dharma affinity has flourished day by day, Chan and esoteric practice have merged, and this land has become pure. Thus, through your direct realization, all the former doubts and slanders concerning the Heart-of-Heart Dharma will dissolve of themselves without argument. How could the merit and virtue involved for future practitioners be conceived? There is originally no need to restate the method of practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Yet, to accommodate newcomers and benefit later students, the explanation cannot but be detailed.

In terms of classification, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma belongs to the esoteric division. Yet it enables practitioners to directly realize the mind-ground and thus also connects with Chan and Pure Land; it fuses Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism in one furnace. It breaks through all views of dharmas and reaches the utmost ultimate ground. Its ritual forms are also extremely simple: there is no need to prepare various offerings. Regardless of sex, age, social standing, or rank, anyone able to sit for two hours may practice it and can attain meditative stability within a fixed period.

Meditative stability naturally gives rise to wisdom. Therefore, one who has not sat more than a hundred sessions cannot be told the essential point of mind, so as to understand the essence and initiate its function. The wonder of this Dharma lies in suddenly opening into clarity amid a dark and dull state devoid of all interest, personally seeing the true marks, and realizing samādhi. Because each person's habitual tendencies differ, the speed of their responses and the appearances arising in response also differ accordingly. Thus, while practicing, one should often remain close to teachers and Dharma friends in order to seek instruction. Otherwise, just after gaining meditative stability in sitting and experiencing a state, one may suddenly become doubtful and cease sitting. This illness is also extremely common.

In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the essential point lies after rising from the seat: tempering the mind through circumstances. Through the power of wisdom's illumination, see that all things are illusory, and the mind will naturally have no attachment. Having no attachment is non-abiding; non-abiding is what is called no-thought. It does not mean that not seeing and not hearing constitute no-thought. This Dharma is the supreme wondrous method for gathering in the mind: from realizing the mind one empties circumstances; from emptying circumstances one empties the mind; from emptying the mind one empties emptiness; from emptying

emptiness one reveals intrinsic nature; from revealing intrinsic nature one illumines completely; and from complete illumination one enters profound quiescence. Thus one enters the most wondrous and ultimate state of the Heart-of-Heart.

The practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma may roughly be divided into five periods: first, the period of completing the six mudrās; second, the period of continuing to practice further; third, the period of seven-day retreats; fourth, the period of completing one thousand sessions; and fifth, the period of relinquishing the practice and no longer practicing it. This Dharma requires at most one thousand sessions. If one refuses to relinquish it, one develops the illness of attachment to dharmas. Yet after completing the six mudrās, some refuse to sit any longer. These two kinds of people are the most numerous, and it is deeply regrettable.

The root of sentient beings' illness lies solely in habitual tendencies. Unless their root is pulled out, the work is not thorough. This root lies latent within intrinsic nature. Heart-of-Heart indicates that intrinsic nature. At the beginning, the practice of this Dharma seeks meditative stability: attaining stability is its essence; from stability wisdom arises, and bringing forth wisdom is its function.

While sitting, one practices calming; this is the essence. After rising from the seat, one practices contemplation; this is the function. Calming and contemplation advance together, and meditative stability and wisdom support one another. Essence and function are unified: when the essence is great, the function is great; when the essence is small, the function is small. Yet practitioners often fail to bring forth the function. They exert themselves in seated meditation for only two hours each day, but ordinarily refuse to investigate and bring forth its function, training in contemplation. Therefore they gain very little benefit and then doubt that the Dharma is ultimate. It is like sharpening a knife but never testing it: one will never know whether it is sharp or dull, yet one blames the sharpening method for being incorrect and rashly gives rise to self-view. Is this not regrettable?

Practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma differs greatly from other dharma gates. At the beginning, it is easy to attain meditative stability; by the middle stage, one instead feels increasingly confused and scattered. This is precisely the time of great progress, and practitioners must not doubt or retreat. It is like two bowls of muddy water: in one, one keeps it still and does not move it, allowing the mud to settle so that the water becomes clear by itself. Though the effect appears quickly, it is not ultimate; with the slightest stirring, it becomes turbid again.

In the other case, one gradually removes the mud. Naturally there is much stirring; the more it is stirred, the more mud is removed. When it has been turned over until it is completely clean, one no longer fears agitation or overturning. It is also like a

sick person who, after taking medicine, must undergo reactions of sweating, vomiting, and diarrhea before the illness is eliminated.

People of the world seek meditative stability and often regard rigidly remaining motionless as stability. This is stillness, not stability. Meditative stability means being equally at ease in stillness and activity, and not seeing stability and disturbance as two. Whatever circumstances appear—gain and loss, slander and praise, acclaim and ridicule, suffering and pleasure—when the eight worldly winds come, receive them without being stained; remain unchanged and unmoved. This is right meditative stability.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma can indeed be practiced to such states. Yet a group of people of inferior wisdom will surely stare wide-eyed and exclaim: “This is the Buddha’s state. How could ordinary beings such as ourselves accomplish it? This must be mad delusion, without any sense of proportion,” and so forth. Those who hear them will surely doubt, retreat, and cease learning, thereby sitting in self-inflicted error. This is merely the working of ordinary human sentiment and must never be accepted. Practitioners should possess a courageous heart and a spirit of exploration. There is no bargain in this world by which one gains something without labor—how much less in learning the Buddha Dharma!

Japanese Esoteric Buddhism and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism emphasize form, with extremely strict ritual procedures, magnificent Buddha images, and incalculable expense. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma alone is not bound by anything and does not select a location. So long as one practices in accordance with the Dharma and fulfills the required time, one may attain accomplishment. Patiently calm the breath; there is no other method.

First, do not seek spiritual powers. Second, do not seek visions of light or Buddhas. Should any such states appear before you, do not rejoice, doubt, or fear; regard them as illusory manifestations and pay them no heed. Do not be impatient while sitting. If someone comes to disturb you, or a child cries, you must not become annoyed or resentful. Whenever something goes against your wishes, use it to train the mind and transform your habitual tendencies. Whenever annoyance or resentment arises, give rise instead to joy. With long practice, this will become natural, and the light of impartial wisdom will appear.

In practicing the Dharma, reverence and earnestness are paramount. Reverence prevents carelessness, and earnestness enables endurance; thus samādhi is not difficult to attain. Off the meditation cushion, lively contemplation is paramount. Liveliness can transform rigid habitual tendencies, and contemplation enables one to assess the depth or shallowness of one’s daily practice; thus function is not difficult to bring forth.

Thereafter, in assessing the capacities of others, one will likewise progress through increasing familiarity with this practice, and the wisdom-eye will open without one's being aware of it. To attain samādhi and realize the essence, one may rely on the Dharma, for it has mantras and mudrās. But the opening of wisdom and the bringing forth of function depend entirely on oneself; one must continually contemplate and practice, and must take great care not to become lax. Practitioners of recent times may cultivate for many years while their afflictions remain unchanged. This is the fault of their unwillingness to practice bringing forth function. They mistakenly regard worldly dharmas and the Buddha Dharma as two wholly separate matters. The Sixth Patriarch said, "The Buddha Dharma is within the world; awakening is not apart from the world." If one does not rely on external circumstances to train the mind, one will stray far from the mark.

For those who practice this Dharma, the essential point is that the mind not become lax; it does not lie in harming the body and undergoing suffering. Therefore, among precepts, mental precepts are supreme. Holding the mudrā is the secret of body: without giving rise to bodily karma, killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct cease. Upholding the mantra is the secret of speech: without giving rise to verbal karma, malicious speech and other evils cease. When the mind is clear and empty, this is the secret of mind: without giving rise to mental karma, greed, anger, and ignorance cease.

This is the precept beyond precepts; it restrains those who are unaware. The contemplation and realization of emptiness off the meditation cushion is precisely guarding against faults and preventing evil at the causal stage; it is restraining them before they arise. Killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct are fruits; at the causal stage they belong to greed, anger, and ignorance. Yet greed, anger, and ignorance are also fruits; at the causal stage they belong to not realizing the mind. Therefore, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma can directly realize vajra prajñā. It is the unsurpassed wondrous gate for awakening to the mind and uprooting fundamental karmic obstacles.

Among Dharma gates of practice, actual practice is primary; merely discoursing on doctrinal principles is entirely useless. Esoteric Buddhism involves not only one's own actual practice but also reliance on the Buddha's power, and therefore offers a definite assurance. One cultivates the three virtues of precepts, samādhi, and wisdom and enters into them without realizing it.

The Chan and Esoteric schools have always differed from other schools. They begin practice with the eight consciousnesses, seeking the cause through the fruition: first realizing great perfect mirror wisdom, the so-called fundamental wisdom, namely non-discriminating wisdom, also called formless siddhi.

The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch also discusses this briefly. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma does not depend on the length or depth of one's previous cultivation. One must undergo examination by an empowerment master; even those who cannot recognize a single character, or who have never practiced before, may receive the Dharma transmission. Moreover, practice is not restricted by place: one may sit and practice anywhere. There is no need to enter a maṇḍala or prepare various offerings. According to Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, ordinary people may lack the means to provide the ritual implements and observances; this method is expedient in that respect.

When practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, one is temporarily not permitted to consult sūtras and treatises, for fear that they may divide the mind. Even sūtras previously studied and read should be set aside for the time being. After one has completed one hundred meditation sessions, attained samādhi, and opened the essential point of the mind, one's understanding will naturally differ. When one then resumes reading the sūtras, one will certainly enter a different state. At this time, one should constantly draw near to good spiritual friends, who can inspire and correct one. Only after thorough awakening may one read the sūtras, so that one will not be turned about by them.

Originally, Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism had no Red and Yellow schools. The esoteric Dharma of the Red school was considered the most complete, but because its efficacy was so great and it was close to the mysterious, transmitting it to unsuitable persons gave rise to many abuses. Tsongkhapa, patriarch of the Yellow school, had no choice but to come forward and reform its teachings. Yet although the old abuses were eliminated, new maladies arose.

Because all that was studied had to follow a fixed sequence, with no surpassing of the prescribed time limits, it became too rigid. This instead prevented those of sharp faculties from attaining realization quickly, which is greatly regrettable. For example, in Tibet, practices such as formless esoteric practice and the Heart-of-Heart Dharma necessarily require twelve to twenty years. Although this is the established rule, people differ in the sharpness or dullness of their capacities; some may waste time in vain and be unable to proceed directly to profound cultivation.

Although lamas may themselves possess deep practice, they cannot fully understand the capacities of people in China. Teachers and qualified disciples are too scarce; consequently, the Vajrayāna received in China has only ritual forms and has not reached the profound essentials. Only recently has Master Nona revealed formless esoteric practice and gradually provided guidance. Among the lamas, he alone understood the Heart-of-Heart Dharma.

They do not know that the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is inherently present in both Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. It is the Buddha's orthodox transmission, not an individual's private invention.

Therefore, in practicing the Dharma, one should first understand its meaning and never forget the root principle, lest one be misled by the Dharma itself. Esoteric Buddhism receives the blessings of all Buddhas, whose assisting power is tremendous. It is like an airplane assisting a traveler, but ultimately the traveler must set it in motion himself. If one says that the Buddha can make a person become a Buddha, it is no different from someone sitting in an airplane and expecting the airplane to rise into the sky by itself. Could there be such a principle? The foremost habitual tendency of practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism is seeking the mysterious: everything is entrusted to the Buddha.

Yet they themselves neither awaken nor act. They lean excessively toward ritual observances and do not understand the essential point of mind. Since their own mind-ground is unclear, their habitual tendencies are ultimately difficult to eliminate. The airplane never takes flight: after studying Esoteric Buddhism for ten years, their afflictions remain unchanged; though they seek innumerable teachings, their suffering is as it was before. Judging fairly, can this be the Dharma's fault? What are the three secrets? They are body, speech, and mind. To what do the secrets return? They return to purity. Purity of the mind-ground is the clear proof of its benefit. When a sick person takes medicine, efficacy and response are what matter; why discuss whether the medicine is superior or inferior? In addition, there are several points to note in practicing esoteric Dharma gates:

1. In upholding mantras, accurate pronunciation is the primary principle. When learning a mantra and one has become somewhat familiar with its recitation, one should again ask an empowerment master to correct its sounds and tones. There are rules concerning stress, phrasing, continuity, and breaks in the syllables and sentences, and each must be carefully studied. One must acquire not only resemblance in sound but also resemblance in spirit. With familiarity, it becomes natural.

2. Offerings of incense, flowers, water, lamps, and the like are all symbolic Dharma. Their purpose is to bring one's own Vairocana Buddha-nature into accord with the Buddha: incense symbolizes freedom from impurity, flowers wondrous functioning, water clear purity, and lamps luminosity. All symbolize the Tathāgata-store nature of oneself and sentient beings, adorned with wondrous virtues and nondual with the Buddha. Contemplate yourself also as a Buddha. The main principle lies in the mind-ground; hence it is said, "Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are no different." During practice, these form-based methods are borrowed temporarily only to gather in the mind.

3. Ritual observances have their established Dharma gates. One must never devise them according to one's own ideas. This places importance on transmission from teacher to disciple. Practice according to the prescribed time periods and number of sessions, concentrating single-mindedly on one gate and entering deeply into it; one will certainly gain something. If one aims too high and changes one's mind whenever one encounters something different, one will surely accomplish nothing.

4. In practicing Esoteric Buddhism, one must avoid discussing the Dharma with practitioners of Exoteric Buddhism. Because their standpoints differ, misunderstandings are frequent; these in turn create doubt and confusion and hinder diligent progress. Esoteric Buddhism and the Chan school often begin practice with the eight consciousnesses, first destroying ignorance and then removing obscurations; their foundations are simply different. Exoteric Buddhism regards destroying ignorance as an extremely difficult matter, requiring the passage of three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. It does not know that asaṃkhyeya means an inexpressible period of time. One must not judge Buddhist practice solely by this lifetime, and there is no fixed time for its slowness or swiftness. Those attached to the marks of words cannot be spoken to about this.

In the present age, because conditions are unfavorable, people's minds are increasingly unsettled, and dealing with worldly affairs becomes ever more difficult. People commonly suffer from three deficiencies: first, weak bodies and frequent illness; second, a lack of meditative stability; third, weak discernment. Because the body is weak, illness is frequent; while all progress is hindered, one's lifespan declines. Some die early in middle age, while others become disabled by illness. This is most regrettable.

The only remedy lies in cultivation and nourishment. Cultivation gathers in the mind and sees one's true nature; nourishment regulates the breath and calms the spirit. When the mind has a master, the vital energy naturally becomes sufficient; essence is stabilized and spirit flourishes, so illness may be removed and life prolonged. Insufficient meditative stability mostly arises from bodily weakness. Only when the body is strong can one endure labor and practice devoutly. When meditative stability is strong, the power of wisdom is sufficient, and discernment naturally becomes far-reaching.

The Buddha Dharma actively liberates sentient beings; it is not a passive pursuit of one's own liberation. For elderly people, the way home is already near; they should urgently practice swiftly and leave the realms of suffering early. The fourth mudrā of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma can bring rebirth in the Western Pure Land and assist the causes and conditions for their Buddha-recitation and rebirth.

People in middle age are engaged in conditioned activity. If they feel their energy is insufficient or their meditative stability inadequate, and if they become anxious and timid when encountering affairs, thereby often mishandling them, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma can enable them to attain samādhi within a set period. Samādhi and wisdom then mutually support one another, with immense significance for one's life work.

Young people lack discernment, and their minds are easily shaken. Lured by external objects, they readily fall into degeneration. If they practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, their foundation can become firm; moreover, when the first influence takes hold, the development of their undertakings will be beyond measure. Therefore, everyone can practice this Dharma. Women who have no pressing household affairs and wish to suffer less illness, distress, and vexation will find this practice an unsurpassed wondrous instruction. Yet people in the world have scant blessings: receiving this Dharma is already extremely difficult. How much more regrettable it is to receive it and not practice it.

For those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, after completing one hundred meditation sessions, their complexion and physical strength gradually improve. Its many benefits cannot all be described. I shall next explain further essential points of practice, though I can relate only a tiny fraction of them. At the most subtle and profound level, those who have not realized it for themselves cannot know it. Before long, you may draw near to this foolish teacher and receive further verification, thereby gaining a more complete understanding. The causes and conditions lie ahead; where there is resolve, there is accomplishment. You may rest at ease for now.

First: Arouse a Vast Resolve

When beginners practice the most vast, supreme, perfect, and complete great Dharma of the Heart-of-Heart, if they do not arouse a vast resolve, they truly cannot accord with it. The following ten points are briefly set forth:

1. Toward the Dharma, give rise to pure faith—namely, Right Faith. The firmer one's faith, the less likely one is to retreat midway.

2. Arouse an impartial mind. From Buddhas above to sentient beings below, regard all equally. Toward those who do not practice the Dharma or who disparage it, do not give rise to arrogance or anger. Do not praise yourself, and do not look for the faults of others.

3. Do not form the mudrās you uphold at improper times; do not use them when impure; and do not employ the Dharma for fame, reputation, or profit.

4. Do not disparage this Dharma by transmitting it recklessly, and do not disparage other dharmas by slandering them. First put an end to your own slander, and do not cause others to slander. If you cause others to slander, it is the same as slandering yourself. Those who harbor sectarian views are not disciples of the Buddha.

5. Keep the precepts without breach, constantly gather in the mind in samādhi, and cultivate the precept against killing together with all wholesome conduct.

6. Revere the Buddha and revere the teacher; also revere good spiritual friends. Toward fellow practitioners, do not give rise to jealousy or wrong views.

7. Constantly arouse a vast resolve, taking the liberation of all sentient beings as your aim.

8. Let resolve and faith be firm, and do not shrink from labor or fatigue.

9. Cultivate the six perfections to counter all afflicted attachments: generosity to counter miserliness, upholding precepts to counter greedy defilement, patience to counter anger and evil, diligence to counter laziness, dhyāna to counter distraction, and prajñā to counter unawareness.

10. Seek only penetrating wisdom; first destroy ignorance, and do not recklessly seek spiritual powers.

Review the above ten points once each day as a reminder, so that the mind does not become lax.

Second: The Stages of Practice

1. Do not be eager to begin sitting practice. First become thoroughly familiar with the mantra text; begin sitting only after you can recite it from memory.

2. There are five ways of reciting mantras: first, recitation while keeping count; second, recitation without keeping count; third, loud recitation—when drowsy or sleepy, recite it aloud several dozen times; fourth, soft recitation; and fifth, vajra recitation, in which the lips move slightly without making a sound, while one hears it very clearly oneself. When sitting for practice, vajra recitation is appropriate.

3. The Six Mudrās:

(1) The Bodhicitta Mudrā is the king of all mudrās. When practicing it, one must strictly avoid giving rise to anger.

(2) The Bodhicitta-Accomplishment Mudrā is specifically for eliminating karmic obstacles and curing all serious illnesses.

(3) The Mudrā for Directly Bestowing Bodhi: Before forming this mudrā, first recite the Three Refuges three times: “I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Dharma, I take refuge in the Saṅgha.” Burn three kinds of incense: sandalwood, frankincense, and agarwood, each separately. Those unable to provide these may burn a single burner of other incense instead. Nor is it necessary to keep incense burning for two hours, for during practice one should not smell overly fragrant incense, lest it disturb the vital energy.

(4) The Tathāgata-Mother Mudrā: Before forming this mudrā, first recite “Homage to the Buddhas of the Ten Directions” seven times. The mantra must not be recited loudly; use vajra recitation.

(5) The Tathāgata Well-Gathered Dhāraṇī Mudrā: When practicing this mudrā, each morning recite “Homage to All Buddhas of the Three Times” three times; with one’s mind directed toward the ten directions, take refuge in the Three Jewels. Burn incense as for the third mudrā.

(6) The Tathāgata-Speech Mudrā: Before practicing, first recite the Three Refuges. When finished, release the mudrā above the crown of the head.

Practice each mudrā for eight sessions—that is, eight times. After completing the first mudrā, practice the second, proceeding in sequence. Each session lasts two hours; it may run over time but must not fall short. Two or three sessions may be practiced daily, but one must assess one’s own strength and never greedily undertake too much. Complete eight sessions for each mudrā. After the six mudrās have been practiced in sequence, add one further session of the first mudrā; for any of the others that were not performed in accordance with the method, add one session as well. This completes the six mudrās, and one will never again enter the three lower realms.

After completing the six mudrās, one must on no account become lax. Continue to practice one session daily, focusing exclusively on the fourth mudrā. After about six or seven sessions, add one session of the second mudrā. If practicing three sessions daily, or five or six sessions daily during a seven-day retreat, practice the fourth mudrā in all sessions and the second mudrā in the final session. The first, third, fifth, and sixth mudrās need no longer be practiced.

After any seven-day retreat in which one has practiced five or six sessions daily, if one finds that one’s energy is ample and one can proceed vigorously, then on the fifteenth day of a thirty-day lunar month one may practice nine sessions, seeking to complete ten thousand recitations in one uninterrupted stretch. Do this once each month. On that day practice only the fourth mudrā, not the second; but one must practice according to one’s strength. Those who practice one session daily without interruption will certainly realize the mind after one year. Those seeking rapid

progress may undertake three seven-day retreats, totaling three weeks, practice for three or four months, and regularly draw near to a good spiritual friend; they too may attain penetrating wisdom.

4. The six mudrās must not be practiced out of sequence. They must be completed in order before one may undertake a seven-day retreat. Unless one has completed such a retreat, one may not sit for nine sessions or practice the samādhi mudrā. Before completing one thousand sessions, do not become lax. Once one thousand sessions have been completed, there is no need to practice further; further practice is of no use. One need only apply it in daily life.

5. The most important points during practice are these: before the two hours are complete, one must not leave the seat, release the mudrā, stop reciting the mantra, or speak. Do not recite the mantra too quickly or too slowly; about twelve recitations per minute is appropriate.

When sitting, do not concern yourself with other matters. Cover the mudrā with yellow cloth; disregard everything else. Simply recite the mantra with the mouth, form the mudrā with the hands, and let the mind think of nothing. This is called the correspondence of the three mysteries. To practice until attaining formless siddhi is accomplishment. The time of practice is not fixed, but the best time is from five or six in the morning until seven or eight. In cold weather, do not begin too early. After each two-hour session, sincerely make great vows and dedicate the merit to all sentient beings. This is of primary importance.

After completing the six mudrās, one must recite Maitreya Bodhisattva's mantra aloud forty-nine times every day and maintain this for life. This plants seeds at the causal stage and differs from other mantras. The foremost requirement during practice is to eat lightly. After eating, wait at least an hour and a half before sitting.

Third: Equipment for Practice

1. Offerings: In the center, make offerings to one image of Śākyamuni Buddha: three cups of water, three mirrors, three halberds (or knives in their place), three incense burners, and three portions of food, such as fruit. Place two vases, one on each side, offer flowers, and burn one lamp in the center. Those without means may offer whatever they have, in whatever quantity they can.

After accomplishment, if one wishes to perform a great ritual for the benefit of the public, three altars should be set up in three enclosures. The first, central enclosure should be white and used for cultivating the Buddha Way; the second, upper enclosure should be red and used for cultivating the bodhisattva way; and the third, lower enclosure should be green and used for cultivating the Vajra Path. Within the altar, lay one carpet, with a central circle divided into white, red, and green; from the

center, it should measure eight feet in both length and width. These are offerings for the altar; for ordinary practice, there is no need to set up an altar. This Dharma differs from other esoteric practices in that it does not rely on forms; thus even poor people may conveniently practice it on their own.

2. Personal equipment: (1) A piece of yellow cloth to cover the mudrā. (2) A wound clock, or incense in its place—each stick lasting about two hours. (3) A spittoon. (4) A blanket for covering the legs, and a sitting cushion. The sitting portion of the cushion should preferably be six or seven inches high, with both legs crossed below; full lotus posture is not necessary. For full lotus, the seat should be level and the rear cushion must not be high. For half lotus, the rear cushion may be two or three inches higher.

3. Precautions: (1) There must be no draft through the windows. Do not sit in a cold, windy place, and do not wear a hat. The room should be somewhat warm, but one must not become overheated. (2) The door should not be locked; people may come and go. Someone should preferably keep watch outside the door and attend to matters as needed. Even if children cry loudly and cause disturbance, it does no harm; do not become angry, but use this to train the mind not to be moved.

(3) Do not keep a kettle of water boiling in the room, or cats and dogs, so as to avoid disturbance. (4) Except in an extremely urgent matter, do not permit anyone to notify you, nor leave your seat. Even if a notification must be given, it should be spoken softly. (5) First urinate and wash your hands, then take your seat. After leaving the seat, strictly avoid urinating within five minutes, lest it harm the vital energy.

Also, before sitting, drink little water and eat little porridge. Overeating easily causes drowsiness. In warm weather, one may go barefoot. (6) When the practice period is complete, do not hastily leave the seat. First stretch the legs and arms, rub the palms and massage the face, harmonize the blood and vital energy, and then rise slowly. After leaving the seat, it is good to walk more.

(7) While sitting, do not tilt the head too far back, lest the mind become scattered; nor lower it too far, as this easily causes coughing. Do not lean the back backward, for prolonged leaning can injure the lungs. Hold the mudrā at the chest; do not recline. Keep both arms slightly close to the ribs. Lower the eyes as though closed. Strictly avoid becoming drowsy, releasing the mudrā, and falling asleep. There is no need to prepare tea, for the mouth will naturally not become thirsty. Keep the waist straight and still; do not repeatedly stretch and contract it, lest the waist become sore. At the beginning of sitting, there may be minor discomforts, but after a little time one will settle. These are old illnesses surfacing, not new illnesses; do not become anxious.

(8) If while sitting one suddenly seems to fall asleep, yet the mudrā does not come apart and mantra recitation does not cease, this is not drowsiness or sleep. It is precisely a sign of samādhi appearing. Do not doubt it and interrupt the practice.

E. What Constitutes Ultimate Attainment in Practice?

What must one attain in practice for it to be ultimate? One must first understand what one is practicing. The answer is: practicing to become a Buddha—that is, practicing until awakening. To enter sainthood from ordinary existence is simply to turn from delusion to awakening, transform consciousness into wisdom, and open the Buddha's knowledge and vision. Yet Exoteric Buddhism requires three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas to attain Buddhahood; Esoteric Buddhism enables one to attain Buddhahood in this very life; the Chan school directly points to the source of mind, enabling one to become a Buddha at once; and in the Pure Land tradition one becomes a Buddha after being reborn in that land. Which, then, should one follow? The answer is that each has its own standpoint and causes and conditions; it is not that the dharmas differ in superiority, inferiority, speed, or conflict. Let us discuss this briefly.

1. Exoteric Buddhism refers to those who have never studied Buddhism. It is like beginning elementary school: one must spend a number of years before advancing through middle school and high school to university, requiring yet more years; one cannot skip grades and leap ahead at once. This is a provisional formulation based on principle. Asaṃkhyeya originally means an incalculable multitude, and there is no way to specify when it ends. In studying Buddhism, one must comprehend the three divisions of time. Though one's study in this life may be shallow, because of causes and conditions from former lives one may later surpass those who began earlier, or enter university directly. One must not impose limitations according to worldly views and discriminations. Moreover, Exoteric Buddhism relies on one's own power, so accomplishment is comparatively difficult; it cannot be discussed as though it were on the same timetable as Esoteric Buddhism.

2. Esoteric Buddhism relies on the Buddha's power and receives the blessing of the three mysteries. This is its distinctive teaching. Just as a child who cannot climb a mountain relies on its mother to carry it, so, because the causes and conditions differ, accomplishment in this very life is possible.

3. The Chan school directly points to the source of mind, bringing sudden awakening at the very words spoken. Those of the highest capacity have diligently practiced in former lives, and in this life their conditions are already complete; they enter the hall in a single step and may therefore become Buddhas at once.

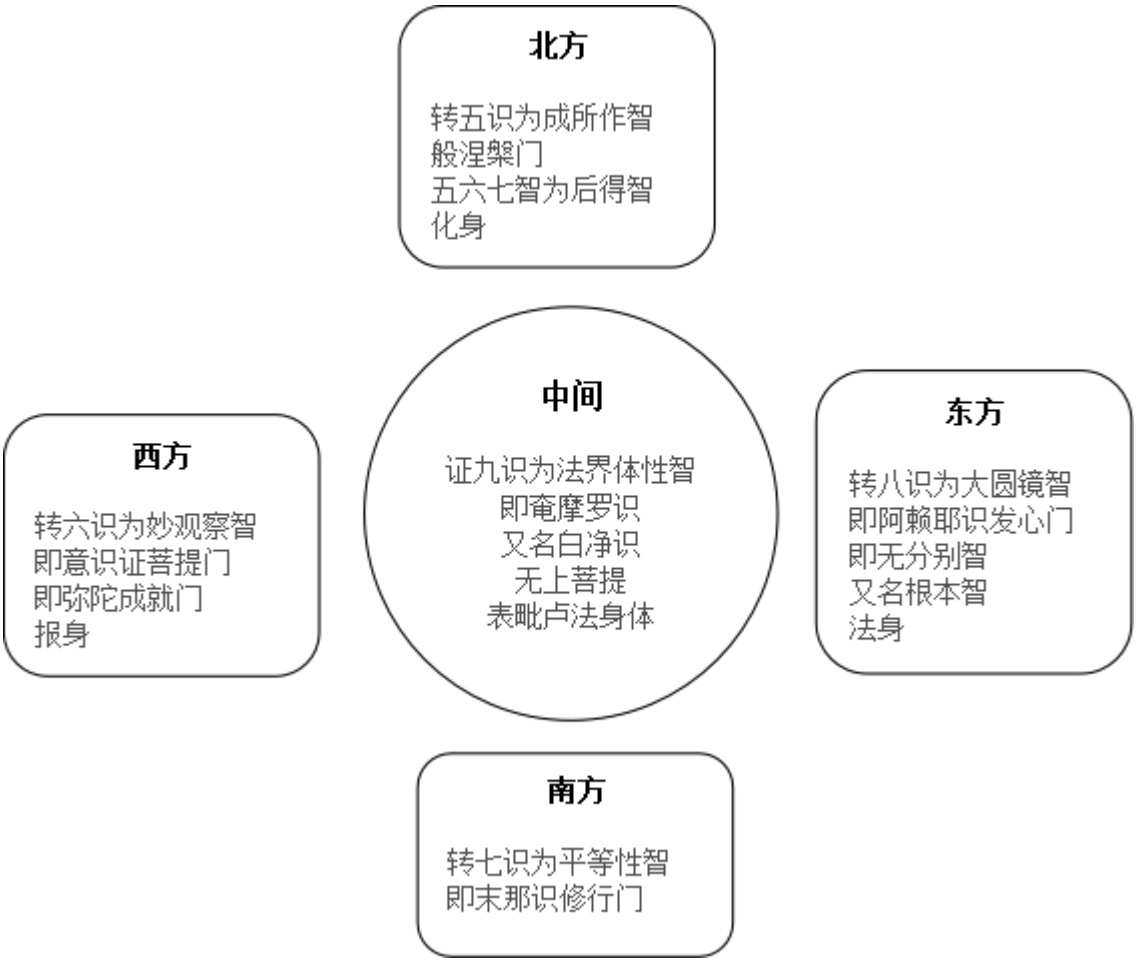
4. The Pure Land method originally belongs to Esoteric Buddhism. Its vows are directed solely toward the West, with rebirth as their sole aim. Those who seek only

rebirth in the Western Pure Land may naturally see the Buddha when the lotus opens. Their aspiration is not to see their true nature in this very life, but to complete their studies in another world. They rely on the Buddha's power, with rebirth as the endpoint. Yet once one has fully understood the Pure Land of one's own nature and attained purity and adornment, this is the meaning of becoming a Buddha.

The Buddha taught the Pure Land Dharma gate so that those of the highest capacity might realize it in this very life and bring the fruition stage to complete perfection; he also opened a simple and expedient Dharma gate for those of lesser capacity, enabling them to plant seeds at the causal stage. Present-day Pure Land practitioners have turned this supremely subtle and wondrous great Dharma of the Pure Land into a convenience for timid people of inferior wisdom. Those who are not vessels for this Dharma naturally find it difficult to receive, or regard it as slow and as merely seeking liberation for oneself. This is deeply regrettable. In sum, the Pure Land Dharma is no different from Chan and Esoteric Buddhism: accomplishment through rebirth is certainly possible, and accomplishment in this very life is also possible; causes and conditions simply differ.

5. The methods of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism seek the cause from the fruition, beginning with cultivation of the eight consciousnesses. They first reveal the dharmakāya and realize fundamental wisdom, namely great perfect mirror wisdom, also called non-discriminating wisdom. The methods of other traditions seek the fruition from the cause, beginning with the sixth and seventh consciousnesses. Their practices at the causal stage are truly different; consequently, the speed of attaining fruition also differs. Below is a chart showing how Esoteric Buddhism transforms the nine consciousnesses into the five wisdoms.

Chart of Transforming the Nine Consciousnesses into the Five Wisdoms



VI. The Chan and Esoteric schools first destroy ignorance and then remove habitual tendencies. Often, though the great matter has already been clarified, habitual tendencies remain. Yet their roots have already been loosened, and one possesses the power of wisdom's illumination; it is no longer like the former state of delusion and unawareness. Other schools are the reverse: they first remove habitual tendencies, intending to destroy ignorance only after those tendencies have been purified. They do not realize that, before ignorance is destroyed, they are merely forcibly suppressing habitual tendencies and exerting effort to subdue them, rather than uprooting them fundamentally. Though this may show results temporarily, over time the counterforce becomes great, and it is as if one had not practiced at all. It is not thorough; at the moment of death, one often falls into confusion. This is precisely the fault.

VII. The Chan and Esoteric schools regard destroying ignorance and seeing one's true nature in this very life as Buddhahood. If one relies on the Buddha's power, this can certainly be realized in this life. The complete removal of habitual tendencies, however, was never something that could be accomplished in this life. Exoteric Buddhism, on the other hand, often maintains that one becomes a Buddha only after destroying ignorance, developing the five spiritual powers, removing habitual tendencies completely, and perfecting everything, as did Śākyamuni Buddha.

This is like planting fruit trees: one view regards the first bearing of fruit as accomplishment; the other permits the term accomplishment only when the fruit has ripened, become edible, and been picked and placed in a vessel. The first recognizes no temporal marks: before and after are nondual. The second clings to fixed forms and provisionally establishes stages. The first has the strength to undertake the matter and regards it as natural. The second is overly solemn about it and thereby divides it into difficult and easy. Unless these matters are explained clearly one by one, students will suffer from partial attachments and sectarian disputes.

In sum, the methods of practice in the various schools differ in ritual forms and points of view, but their goals and final destination are the same. In seeking to open wisdom, reach the other shore, and be liberated from birth and death, all schools are alike. Here are several essential instructions: once practitioners have obtained them, entry will no longer be difficult.

Four Essential Instructions

(I) First understand the true meaning of practice. Buddha-recitation, meditation, and the performance of practices should not be called cultivation; they can only be called training—for example, training one's strength in preparation for a journey. If one lacks strength while traveling, this proves that one's training has been insufficient. Thus, after leaving the Buddha hall and rising from meditation, amid walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, in all human affairs and every kind of activity, lies true practice. If one feels that one's strength is insufficient at such times, one should resume training.

One should further cultivate and perform various practices to support it. This is primary; that is secondary. Yet people reverse the order, forgetting the true meaning and thus emphasizing the latter while slighting the former. Naturally, the results they obtain are slight. This is the first essential instruction.

(II) What is meant by true practice? In true practice after leaving the Buddha hall, one must first understand the wonder of putting it into operation. Its essential instruction lies in the two words "do not forget." Whatever the matter or place, do not depart from vigilance; attend to everything everywhere. One need only become accustomed to using this mind. To use it is awareness and illumination. Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only delayed awareness. Without awareness, one is seized by circumstances and carried away by them. Once one has been carried far away,

one does not know how to return; this is wandering. Everyone is already thoroughly familiar with greed, anger, and ignorance, for they were not cultivated in a day or a night. If today one turns what is raw into what is familiar, one must likewise develop

a habit. When one does not forget at every moment, one's practice has become fully mature and entered the transformed state in which one cannot stop. One has learned and practiced it regularly; the joy of this can be known. This is the second essential instruction.

(III) A simple explanation of practice. "Cultivation" means returning. "Overcome oneself and return to propriety, and all under Heaven returns to benevolence." To return to one's original nature is to find nothing one cannot penetrate; all things are complete within oneself, and only then can one fully accomplish the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge. Therefore it is called returning to benevolence. But overcoming oneself is the cause, and returning to propriety is the result; overcoming oneself and returning to propriety are again the cause, while all under Heaven returning to benevolence is the result. Overcoming oneself is the first step of cultivation. To overcome oneself is to restrain one's mind. All fabrication is mind; because the mind clings to conditions, thoughts become deluded. When the mind is restrained in one place, there is no attachment; with neither delusion nor truth, one has returned through cultivation to the original nature.

"One place" must not be rigidly grasped as though there were an actual single place. "One" has no fixed meaning. To pervade all places without the slightest attachment is called one place. This one place is the all-pervading, vast place of nonattachment; it is not the sharp, exclusive one of "the myriad dharmas return to the One." Without practice and realization, one cannot understand this intuitively. Simply use the single word "illuminate." Once illumination becomes mature, one can refrain from forgetting. From not forgetting come freedom from delusion and immovability. This is what is called deeply practicing prajñāpāramitā. This is the third essential instruction.

(IV) The process of entering practice. Progress in practice must have a process, like climbing a mountain: from below to above, there must be stages. Those of sudden capacity ascend directly to the summit from the outset, so this does not apply to them. But for beginners, expedient guidance is indispensable. The process of illumination has five stages: first, knowing illumination; second, illuminating emptiness; third, illuminating quiescence; fourth, emptying emptiness; fifth, quiescent illumination.

Knowing illumination means knowing how to put it into operation, and knowing that without illumination one cannot transform. Opening this wisdom of awareness is true practice after awakening, but it begins with understanding and proceeds to actual practice. Illuminating emptiness means that without illumination one cannot realize emptiness; here one has already entered practice. Illuminating quiescence means that one has entered the realm of profound quiescence, though one sometimes forgets illumination; as soon as awareness is slightly aroused, one again

becomes profoundly still. Emptying emptiness is also illumination: through the power of illumination, one empties emptiness itself.

Quiescent illumination is the state of constant quiescence and constant illumination. There is never a time when one is not quiescent, nor a time when one is not illuminating. Whether illuminating or not illuminating, all is quiescent; one does not even know oneself to be illuminating or quiescent. In brief, when practice is mature, one enters the transformed state.

All bonds of birth and death are simply the opposition of mind and circumstances. Mind and circumstances are not separate: external circumstances are mind, and the circumstances within the mind are also mind. Using mind to break mind, one breaks both mind and circumstances. This is collectively called destroying ignorance. “Destroying” here means emptiness; it does not mean smashing something apart. For if there remains an appearance of destruction, it cannot be called emptiness. Ignorance and illumination stand in opposition: when there is illumination, ignorance cannot stand. This word “destroy” means extinction,

and what is extinguished cannot be obtained. The essential instruction for destroying and extinguishing ignorance lies in the single word “illuminate.” If one cannot illuminate, or does not know what is to be illuminated, the fundamental reason is insufficient power of samādhi and wisdom: one does not know how to put it into operation. Yet the general instruction for putting it into operation still lies in the single word “illuminate.” Illumination transforms; transformation relinquishes one thing and turns to another; the fundamental essence is thereby empty. Once ignorance is transformed, it cannot be obtained; once empty, there is samādhi. Therefore, illumination is transformation; transformation is emptiness; emptiness is samādhi; samādhi is freedom from delusion; freedom from delusion is freedom from wandering; freedom from wandering is freedom from birth and death.

Turn this around: there is no illuminator and nothing illuminated. Thus there is no such thing as emptiness, samādhi, freedom from delusion, freedom from wandering, and so forth. In the end, birth and death too cannot be obtained. This is one who can truly transcend birth and death. Turn it around once more: since every fundamental essence cannot be obtained, then whether one illuminates or does not illuminate, transforms or does not transform, is empty or not empty, and even whether birth and death are transcended or not, in ultimate reality all are equal and nondual; nothing is unacceptable. Thus it is wondrous, and not thus is also wondrous. This is truly to enter the Dharma gate of nonduality with transcendent freedom; even transcending itself leaves nothing to be transcended. This is ultimate transcendence of birth and death.

Once this principle is understood and no doubt remains, ignorance has been destroyed. Yet habitual tendencies are deeply rooted and seem impossible to eliminate in this life. There are nine stages, distinguished as follows: (1) coarse within the coarse; (2) subtle within the coarse; (3) very subtle within the coarse; (4) coarse within the subtle; (5) subtle within the subtle; (6) very subtle within the subtle; (7) coarse within the very subtle; (8) subtle within the very subtle; (9) very subtle within the very subtle.

These nine categories indicate the relative depth of the bonds within the mind. Up to “very subtle within the coarse” is the realm of the first bhūmi: ignorance has already been destroyed and the bondage of form has been cut off. “Very subtle within the subtle” comprises the third through sixth bhūmis, in which the bondage of mind has already been cut off.

“Very subtle within the very subtle” is the eighth bhūmi and above. The residual habitual tendencies of the two bondages of form and mind have already been cut off, and one gradually enters the stage of equal enlightenment. Only when the very subtle within the very subtle has been exhausted is great awakening complete; this cannot be accomplished in this life. It is like an infant in the womb or a newly born child: though unable to equal an adult, it cannot be called nonhuman. Likewise, though unable to equal the Buddha’s perfect great awakening, one cannot be called other than a Buddha.

Attainment in this very life means attaining this Buddhahood. To nurture the sacred embryo means to nurture the sacred embryo of one who has already become a Buddha. Foolish people cling to appearances and cannot be taught the essential teachings of the Mahāyāna. Only those whose faith does not recoil, who are neither startled nor afraid, are capable of receiving them.

The Process of Illumination, Transformation, Emptiness, and Samādhi

Rigid loosened

Long short

Large small

Strange unafraid

Two nondual

Forced natural

Existence emptiness

Emptiness emptying emptiness

Obstruction nonattachment

Bondage liberation

Raw familiar

Consciousness wisdom

Confusion immovability

Wandering cessation

Being drawn along freedom

Emptying emptiness not empty

Lack of strength abundant strength

Partial complete

To get from this to that, there is no other way than wisdom's illumination. As the occasions of illumination increase day by day, one's strength naturally becomes sufficient, and the sense faculties and their objects naturally fall away. Only this is true practice. This is the fourth essential instruction.

The foregoing has briefly explained the methods of practice. Yet once they have fallen into verbal explanations, how can they be ultimate? Therefore, know that the ultimate point lies in the practitioner's own realization in the mind; it cannot be expressed in words. I too have been meddlesome—ha ha.

J. Stages of Practice

How can there be a fixed method of practice? If there are stages, there is a fixed Dharma. Yet for beginners, determinations must be made in order to make their progress simple, swift, and direct. After the gathering, these may be imparted individually in person: perhaps Pure Land practice first and then Esoteric practice, or Esoteric practice first and then Chan. This can be discussed further.

What one relies on teachers and fellow practitioners for in practice is simply to gain discussion and arrive at a decision. Once one obtains the essential instruction, one achieves twice the result with half the effort; once one experiences its benefit, one will naturally be unwilling to retreat. With my limited and partial understanding, I discuss with you all the methods of learning the Buddhadharma. Though I have not reached their profundity, perhaps I will not mislead others. If you have doubts or

consider anything inappropriate, please offer your instruction with a straightforward mind, and let us examine and verify matters together. Then we shall not be far from Mind-Seal.

Section on Verification of Realization

The Dharma gates of cultivation comprise no more than two: cultivating in order to awaken, and proper cultivation after awakening. To cultivate in order to awaken is to awaken to this mind-ground, recognize one's original nature, and first break through ignorance. Proper cultivation after awakening is, after realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, to activate the wondrous function of prajñā and sweep away habitual tendencies. The former clarifies the essence; the latter activates its function. Samādhi and wisdom support one another, and essence and function are unified.

All you fellow practitioners have studied and cultivated together here for two years. You recognized your original nature early on and have already begun to put it into function. This is precisely the time to proceed from cultivation to realization. Since there is something awakened to and realized, it should be examined and confirmed, lest one fall into empty and delusive fabrication. Therefore, this section on verification is presented, that you may use it as a mirror for self-examination.

Realization means being mutually sealed with the Buddha; it means returning to and realizing the ground of awakening. What is the seal? It is simply mind. What is awakening? It is simply mind. When one fully understands this unobtainable mind, that is seeing the Buddha; this is called Mind-Seal. What is cultivated is this, and what seals is also this. Ordinary beings, departing from original awakening, mistakenly enter the path of delusion; thus they rely on the Buddhadharma to cultivate a return to original awakening.

Yet the features of original awakening have long been forgotten. It is like a miser who does not know what generosity is, or a cruel person who does not know what benevolence is. Having become habituated to what seems natural, these tendencies penetrate deeply and are hard to uproot. They instead regard miserliness and cruelty as proper, and call generosity and benevolence foolishness; they may even be frightened by them. In human relations, there is only mutual deception and manipulation, creating this world of fraud, cruelty, and fear. Is this not an extreme inversion?

Now that I study the Buddha's teachings, I merely seek to restore what is original. This is nonduality with the Buddha, and nonduality is mutual sealing. It is like copying an ancient painting so faithfully that it is a perfect likeness; there is no need

for false modesty. One need only examine one's conscience: if its luminosity equals that of the sages and worthies, and if one is as free and at ease as a Buddha, then one too is a sage and a Buddha, and may dwell in this without doubt.

But if, upon examining oneself, one finds one's mind still as darkly venomous as hell, and as foolish as a pig or deer, then one is no more than a hell-being, pig, or deer; this cannot be escaped. Therefore, the section on verification is a mirror by which practitioners examine themselves and a ruler by which they measure themselves. It allows not the slightest falsification or accommodation; empty words are absolutely useless and merely deceive oneself. Thus verification is one's own verification. Those who do not share one's view and practice, or who are not above one, cannot confirm one's realization. Those whose paths differ cannot make plans together—how much less those who differ in every respect.

The Buddhadharma does not merely save individuals; it truly saves the world. What is called false culture is in truth barbarism. Buddhism regards great superstition as something that must be overthrown—but not through attack. Rather, people must spontaneously give rise to shame and naturally overthrow it themselves, subduing it without even realizing it. As the saying goes, "Attacking a city is inferior; attacking the mind is superior."

I have previously discussed the Chinese people: their position is the lowest, yet their spiritual vision is the highest; their drive for advancement is weakest, yet their aspiration to transcend is strongest. Their movement is direct, not lateral. Their latent power lies in their capacity to soften the other side, for they have deeply grasped the subtle art of winning hearts and settling minds. This cannot be judged by temporary gains and losses.

In brief, the spirit of the Chinese people is rooted in mind-only; settling the mind is its sole guiding principle. So long as the mind is at peace, all else may be relinquished. In the present age, yielding may seem a weakness; yet if all humanity yielded in this way, how could there have been the terror of the World War of 1914?

In all cultured nations, people delight in yielding virtue to others. What they do not yield concerns moral principle; what they do not contend for concerns private gain. The distinction between righteousness and profit is very clear. The world's present bleak condition is still the gift of greed and conflict of mind; its vital energy has not yet recovered, and no one is seen to have awakened.

If people could be guided and transformed by the Buddhadharma, so that everyone actively pursued true culture and did not harm themselves or others through falsity, their lives would naturally be long. Therefore, if one wishes to transform others, one must first transform oneself; if one wishes to transform the world, one must first

transform human minds; and if one wishes to transform human minds, one must broadly spread the Buddhadharma and awaken people's wisdom.

The Buddhadharma is the touchstone by which the world's civilization and barbarism are tested. The world may decay, and all things may come to an end, but the Buddhadharma neither decays nor ends, because the power of mind neither decays nor ends. Now, beginning with one person's cultivation and realization, its transformative influence extends to immeasurable multitudes. All sentient beings will ultimately one day share the same seal and the same ground. The worlds of the ten directions will, in the end, be pure. Therefore it is said that the Buddhadharma is vast and boundless.

The saying that there is no cultivation, no attainment, and no realization speaks in the strongest terms of the original emptiness of all dharmas and of the need not to grasp at anything. It is a true statement made only after one has cultivated, attained, and realized. Only when both subject and object are empty does one possess such a state. Since one is now indeed cultivating, how can one say that there is no realization? Yet verification has no fixed method: everywhere may serve for examination, and every place is Mind-Seal. If one can be thus, then every place is called Buddha-remembrance, and wondrous functioning arises.

The depth of one's practice of faith, vows, and conduct determines the realization obtained through verification. Within faith and vows, one realizes as one practices; it need not necessarily be divided into four stages. But before samādhi has been realized, no experience may be called verification, because it is not ultimate, one may repeatedly regress, and doubts arise of themselves.

The course of practice changes according to each practitioner's habitual dispositions. At times one may seem to regress while actually advancing; at times something may seem right while actually being wrong. Without examples and verification, misunderstandings will inevitably arise. Thus, unwillingly, one must speak of there being realizations and attainments.

Verification concerns a dharma that, by its nature, cannot be expressed. Once it falls into verbal formulation, it becomes flawed speech. Moreover, what accords with person A may not necessarily seal person B; what is realized by person C may not necessarily be accessible to person D. Each person must understand it for themselves. Do not cling to words and mislead yourself; only then can one truly bring forth great function.

The greatest difficulty for practitioners is that, after strenuous effort, they are not without realization; yet while they are making progress, no one verifies it for them. They then become doubtful and stop, turn to another method, or enter a wrong path. How is this different from a seriously ill person who has just shown signs of

recovery, only to lose the physician midway and thereby suffer a fatal delay? The patient may then fail to recover, previous efforts may be lost, or another illness may develop.

Such are those in the Chan school who become dry and still like wooden puppets; those in Esoteric Buddhism who become attached to supernatural marvels; and those in the Pure Land school who single-mindedly seek only their own liberation. There are also those who have realized samādhi but do not know what samādhi is like, or who have not seen true reality yet stubbornly insist that true reality is something visible. Although this is self-delusion, the teacher also bears blame.

Verification is one's own verification; it is not like a tangible object that can be weighed or measured. Yet there is no harm in setting up a provisional ruler as an aid to comparison and verification. After strenuous practice, students will naturally have some realization. But because of their habitual arrogance, they are unwilling to seek verification from others. In the former case, there is no one to verify them; in this case, they consider themselves right. They may fail to make further progress, or turn reckless and unrestrained. Though this error results from the absence of a teacher, it is also the retribution of one's own arrogance. It is precisely the obstacle of dharmas among the five obscurations, and must not be ignored.

The Sixth Patriarch said: "The Buddhadharma is in the world and is not apart from awakening in the world." If one understands human feelings and circumstances, one is not far from realizing the mind. All the various situations before one fall within the eight worldly winds. Use them for examination and verification; when one's own mind knows things as they truly are, this is called Mind-Seal. Although I now present this section on verification for my fellow students, it does not cover even one ten-thousandth of the matter. If each of you cultivates diligently without retreating, and makes daily progress, there will surely be further verification of this.

Master Zeng said: "Each day I examine myself three times." The three examinations do not mean examining oneself three times; they mean the three periods of each day: the beginning of the day, midday, and the end of the day. This strongly expresses that one should inwardly examine oneself at every moment. Examination is reflection and inward contemplation. The inward is established through the outward; thus there is neither inward nor outward, and mind and circumstances are suchness. The body itself is mind. This deeply grasps the subtlety of activating function.

We should learn from Master Zeng's three examinations and ask: Can my cultivation fail to be diligent? Can I gather in my mind without becoming careless? Has my contemplation been lost? If one examines oneself in this way, there is none who will not achieve great accomplishment. To apply diligent right contemplation to what is

not yet settled in principle is called investigation; when an event arises and one awakens and turns with the circumstances, this is called contemplation. In truth, principle and phenomena are nondual: in an instant, before and after are clearly penetrated, and great function arises all at once. The result gained through investigation and contemplation is called realization; what accords with the mind-ground method is called the seal. A thousand words and ten thousand phrases lie only in this single turning of thought.

To turn quickly is to awaken quickly. Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only delayed awakening. It is like entering a dangerous path: the danger lies in not being aware; awareness itself is turning back to the shore. Again, after death, the intermediate state drifts without a master, drawn along by karmic force; this is entering danger. This karmic force is the emotional views to which we stubbornly cling and which we do not dissolve. If one's wholesome force is strong in ordinary times, one enters the wholesome; if one's unwholesome force is strong, one enters the unwholesome—like willow down carried by the wind.

It has not the slightest control of its own. Once awareness arises, it is like encountering an object and coming to a stop: one no longer drifts. Not only does one cease drifting; one can turn around and emerge. All kinds of functions arise from this, and the power of supportive conditions immediately becomes strong. Whether one moves toward good or evil depends on the coming together of the same conditions. Yet doing evil is easy and turning toward good is difficult, because habitual inclinations are weighted to one side. At the critical juncture of birth and death, everything depends on one's ordinary practice of a single contemplative illumination. When willow down is flying about, one must have the strength to hold fast; this depends solely on activating function in ordinary life and continually practicing wisdom-contemplation.

The ancients said: "When the force of defiled dharmas is weak, the force of pure dharmas is strong." It is always a matter of the mind's turning, always a matter of activating function here and now; there are differences of familiarity or unfamiliarity, swiftness or slowness. Do not wait until the critical moment in panic and rely on others' assistance. Thus we know that cultivation is cultivated in action: activating function and practicing contemplation in ordinary life are the foremost important task. Inner examination is nothing other than observing one's own mind. Never lose contemplation in any circumstance; this is right contemplation. But one must cultivate after awakening; only then is it called proper cultivation, only then does it become truly useful, and one's effort is not wasted. The discussion is divided as follows.

A. Verification of Practice on the Meditation Cushion

While seated in meditation, there is originally nothing to verify through contemplation. The moment one seeks to verify through contemplation, the mind is again divided. Whatever circumstances arise—favorable or adverse, whether one sees light or sees Buddhas—are all illusory appearances and must never be grasped. One should reflect that all appearances are false and unreal. (This reflection too is false and unreal, but when it is appropriate and useful, one need not insist that it is false.) Neither welcome such appearances with admiration nor drive them away with aversion. The wonder lies in the two words “do not attend to.” Simply do not attend to them: then it becomes truly useful, one ceases wandering, and this is verification.

Those who cultivate visualizations in Japanese or Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism use one visualization to eliminate myriad thoughts. Accomplishing the visualization is only the first step in gathering in the mind and returning it to oneness; one must never deludedly cling to it as true. It is like having sores and ulcers all over the body, festering on every side, and using medicine to contract them into a single boil, concentrating the poison in one place. The filth and poison remain no different. One should neither cling to it nor abandon it, but must uproot it completely; only then is there true purity.

Practitioners in recent times often delight in accomplishing visualizations and then become vainly arrogant. Some even take seeing a moon disk to be realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature. They do not know that this is only an initial expedient, still far from the main point. If one knows it to be illusory, one should promptly let it go and enter the state of pure emptiness.

What distinguishes the Heart-of-Heart Dharma from other methods lies fundamentally in not grasping appearances. Yet people cannot be without thoughts; to be without thoughts is to fall into annihilationist emptiness. When there are thoughts, there cannot be no appearances. When one sits until scattered thoughts fly about and all kinds of fantasies come before one’s eyes, if one gives rise to the thought of detesting and cutting them off, that itself is an appearance. One need only not attend to them. Not attending to them means letting them be, without concern for their coming or going.

Do not welcome them with delight or longing: this is non-grasping. Do not reject them with aversion or keep them at a distance: this is non-abandonment. Neither grasping nor abandoning is true non-grasping of appearances. Thus we know that the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the unsurpassed dharma gate, supreme among dharmas, taught by the Tathāgata for those of the highest vehicle. When, during meditation, the body suddenly feels hot, cold, and so forth, these are changes in the circulation of blood and vital energy. Since each person's physical constitution differs, such experiences must occur when one moves from activity into stillness; there is nothing strange about them. They are relatively beneficial rather than

harmful, but they are not lasting and will disappear after a long time. Do not delight in them or seek them.

When, during meditation, you feel oppressed and impatient, this is fundamental ignorance stirring within. You need only be calm, resolute, and forbearing, struggling against habitual tendencies. After hundreds or thousands of surges and descents, it is like a boat traveling on the sea: now encountering fierce winds and towering waves, now smooth and steady waters. The boat itself has no mind, and its master has no fear. Deal with everything calmly, without the slightest confusion; endure with firm resolve, and before you know it, you will have reached the other shore. Only in this way can you attain right samādhi. The restless, active habitual tendencies accumulated since beginningless time are thereby transformed. Thus, after sitting for a long time, you will no longer feel oppressed; freedom from such oppression is verification of progress in attaining samādhi.

When thoughts are especially confused during meditation, this too verifies progress, for the seeds of ignorance are all surfacing at once. Treat them with the same disregard; deal with them calmly and let them take their natural course. Likewise, when external circumstances are distracting, or children are crying and making a disturbance, remaining unshaken amid them is verification that the power of samādhi has advanced. Therefore, those cultivating great samādhi and great wisdom do not seek mountains and forests or delight in quietude; they train in the state in which activity and stillness are nondual. This is what those who turn inward and maintain aware contemplation should understand.

After sitting for several hundred sessions, you may instead feel that your 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, they cannot bear its heat, but after a long time they no longer notice it. When they no longer notice it, that is precisely the attainment of fearlessness; therefore, it is verification.

When miscellaneous thoughts arise in profusion during meditation, coming and going, arising and falling, this shows that the grasping mind has shortened and its force has loosened. It also verifies that thoughts are being turned more quickly and that the power of aware contemplation is strong. Sentient beings' accumulated habits are merely restlessness. If you can sit for two hours without feeling oppressed, and can exercise self-control, this is verification of initial samādhi.

Once samādhi is attained, the fingers naturally cease to ache. The mouth continues to uphold the mantra without stopping, while seeing and hearing remain clear and distinct. Though clear and distinct, one is not drawn away or carried along by circumstances; this is samādhi. Sometimes one may seem to lapse into sleep or

unconsciousness, yet the mouth continues to uphold the mantra and the hands remain in mudrā without relaxing. This is right samādhi, not dull sleep.

Sometimes one sits for an hour before entering samādhi; sometimes one enters it within a few minutes; sometimes the mind is extremely agitated. All of these equally indicate progress, and there is no need to force distinctions of superiority or inferiority. Being able to let things take their natural course is itself the power of right samādhi. After a long time, one passes from an empty state that seems dim and obscure into lucid, pure emptiness—that is, though seeing no images and hearing no sounds, one remains clearly aware. Then body and mind suddenly fall away, sense faculties and their objects fall away, empty space shatters, and the great earth sinks into stillness. The true reality of the markless then appears before one.

At times you may not necessarily be settled while sitting, yet be very settled when not sitting; or you may be the same whether sitting or not sitting. Then the time when everything forms an unbroken whole is not far off. While sitting, never weigh or speculate about such states, for that will instead make the mind unsettled. Simply disregard them, and do not mislead yourself.

B. Verification of Practice Off the Meditation Cushion

Verification after leaving the meditation cushion is nothing other than training the mind amid circumstances, and circumstances differ in being favorable or adverse. To respond to them in accordance with conditions depends solely on prajñā. Prajñā, rendered in Chinese as “great wisdom,” is the great wisdom that thoroughly comprehends worldly and supramundane dharmas as perfectly interfused and nondual. Respond to an illusory circumstance that cannot be obtained with an illusory mind that cannot be obtained. Knowing that it is illusory, respond to it; do not take it as real, nor abandon it as illusory. Neither play nor not-play, one enters the playful samādhi. This is called the manifestation of great function. The meanings of these terms are briefly explained below.

How do samādhi and wisdom support each other? The visible sign of the power of samādhi is its functioning after one leaves the meditation cushion. Functioning is the opening of wisdom, and being able to recognize one's own progress is also the opening of wisdom. Wisdom reveals samādhi, and samādhi supports wisdom. This is called the mutual support of samādhi and wisdom.

How does one realize samādhi? Samādhi, rendered in Chinese as “right concentration,” does not mean being like wood or stone, motionless because one neither sees nor hears. Rather, it means seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing without being carried along, deluded, or moved. When beginners practice, they may experience the states described above; or, when practicing for a long time, four or

five hours may seem to pass in an instant. This is not drowsiness or losing track of time, but right samādhi. Again, one may fix one's eyes on one place while simultaneously hearing with the ears and responding with the mouth, dealing correctly with each matter without error, while the place on which the eyes rest does not shift. This is called the simultaneous, interchangeable functioning of the six sense faculties, and it is verification of samādhi.

How can there be no-thought? Thoughts cannot be cut off, nor can they be annihilated. When mind and circumstances meet, there is necessarily some discrimination. Ordinary beings drift about in discriminative assessment; this is the activity of consciousness, called discrimination on the level of consciousness. Sages discriminate without abiding or clinging; they use wisdom to transform consciousness, and this is called discrimination on the level of wisdom. If one discriminates yet does not discriminate, it still belongs to direct perception; because one's power is sufficient, this is also called complete direct perception. Thus thoughts do not bind one. It is like a mirror reflecting objects: it takes on forms according to the objects, yet the mirror retains no image; neither, however, does it fail to reflect. This is called no-thought. Deluded thoughts may be cut off, but need not be annihilated; discrimination on the level of wisdom is also no-thought.

How does one see true reality? Know that all appearances are illusory, yet do not discard the illusory. To know illusion is to be free of it; to be free of illusion is awakening. Yet awakening too is illusory. Therefore, mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sense faculties, the body, and the material world are all likewise. Seeing this single appearance of illusion is true reality. A sūtra says: “True reality is precisely non-appearance; it is not some other appearance.”

All Mahāyāna sūtras take true reality as their primary essence. The present thought of each of us has never departed from any appearance. Discursive consideration, discrimination, language, and writing are established in dependence on falsehood. One must be free of appearances within appearances: engaging with them means they are not nonexistent, while being free of them means they are not existent. With no alternative, this is provisionally called true reality. Those who understand this meaning are said to see true reality.

How does one break through ignorance? To know that it is ignorance is to break through it; to know how ignorance arises dependently is to break through it; to know that everything is illusory and not be carried along by it is to break through it; not giving rise to views of aversion or attachment is to break through it; thoroughly realizing that all things are unobtainable is to break through it; knowing that ignorance was originally nonexistent, and is not like a substantial entity that can be seen, heard, or grasped, is to break through it; knowing that ignorance itself arises from the nature of perfect enlightenment, and that discriminative assessment is

only provisionally established to reveal the true and the false, is to break through it. Yet unless one has realized samādhi and seen true reality, this is not true knowing and cannot be called true breakthrough.

What are habitual tendencies? Habitual tendencies are accumulated habits—the familiar patterns of everyday life. Once one has understood the mind-ground, ignorance may be broken, but one's strength is still insufficient and one's power of resistance weak; one may still be overcome by circumstances. This is called habitual tendencies. Sometimes, even when ignorance has not been broken, habitual tendencies may temporarily diminish, but this is merely the result of suppression. It is like water becoming clear as the sediment sinks to the bottom: the roots have not been pulled out, and once it is stirred, the water becomes even more turbid than before. For one who has broken through ignorance, although habitual tendencies remain, they are greatly different from those of the past and are transformed day by day. There are several indications:

1. Afflictions arise easily but are easily transformed; what once lasted a long time can be shortened.

2. Long-standing habits and preferences suddenly change.

3. Fear naturally lessens, and ideas of gain and loss gradually fade.

4. When encountering something startling or frightening, or something improper or unwarranted, one no longer persists in discriminative assessment as before.

5. The power of emptiness gradually increases; thus one discerns cause and effect ever more clearly and has stronger judgment when events arise.

6. One experiences tranquility and joy each day, often feeling light and at ease without knowing why.

7. Interests change from time to time: what was faint may become intense, and what was fervent may become cool. Yet there is always a transcendent inner state, unlike either passivity or activity.

8. One's temperament becomes increasingly even. One feels less attachment to people and things formerly most loved, and less aversion toward matters and people formerly most disliked, gradually approaching equanimity toward enemies and loved ones.

9. The body becomes increasingly healthy and vigorous, one is less easily angered, and one's spirit and complexion become radiant.

10. Memory differs from before. One may seem forgetful about trivial matters, but is especially keen and precise in matters requiring concentrated attention.

What is nonduality? Thoroughly realize that all things are originally empty. Whether self and others, good and evil, right and wrong, long and short, favorable and unfavorable, gain and loss—all are illusory, arising through the conjunction of conditions. Though one knows distinctions, one does not abide in dualistic appearances. This is called entering nonduality, and is also called non-discriminating wisdom.

What is great perfect mirror wisdom? After realizing samādhi, seeing 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 mutually support each other. Direct perception is then complete, the fundamental has been attained, and the great matter has been clarified. Wisdom is like a round mirror, pervading the dharma realm; hence it is so called. It is also called fundamental wisdom and non-discriminating wisdom, terms that strongly emphasize realization of its essence.

What is the wondrous function of prajñā? In learning the Buddha Dharma, there are no more than two crucial points. First, without eyes, one sees nothing. Second, when sunlight shines brightly, one sees the various colors. Ordinary people are stained by accumulated habits and have long dwelt in ignorance. Before realizing the mind, they are like people in a dark room, where objects lie confused and disordered. They wish to put the room in order, but have no eyes and see nothing at all. Even if they exhaust much effort, the disorder remains, and their labor is wasted.

One must first open the wisdom-eye and break through ignorance, as if first turning on an electric lamp. Only after seeing the various colors can one arrange each item in order without wasting effort.

Although these two crucial points occur in an instant, in truth they require one asaṃkhyeya kalpa. Thus, even after ignorance is broken, habitual tendencies remain; even after the electric lamp is lit, the room's disorder remains unchanged. One must use prajñā to sweep away habitual tendencies, just as one sorts and puts each object in order. Since every object differs, the response to each differs; therefore it is called skillful means, and its wondrous functions are as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges. How could there be a fixed method? This wondrous function proceeds 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 function.

What is spontaneous functioning? Spontaneous functioning means remaining unchanged while according with conditions. Letting things take their natural course,

one never regresses. It is like ice and snow on a mountaintop that melt in the sun, becoming springs and waterfalls and entering mountain gullies and small streams, where they may still turn, curve, and stagnate. Only when they flow into a great river do they roll ceaselessly eastward and eventually enter the sea. This means that only those who are undeluded and do not regress may function freely and spontaneously. Yet sometimes people indulge themselves without restraint and consider themselves unimpeded. They do not realize that the very words “consider themselves” are a great obstruction: claiming attainment when one has not attained is a great falsehood.

If practitioners possess the foregoing forms of verification, they can assess themselves amid all kinds of human affairs and circumstances. Through them, they can also verify the extent of their own strength. If such verification is present, do not rejoice; if absent, do not worry. Since there is originally neither arising nor ceasing, Buddha-nature is not lost. Realization merely comes sooner or later. Human birth is difficult to obtain, so one should resolve the matter early in this very life and avoid falling again. There is no other secret: simply apply the mind at every moment and give rise to the wondrous function of prajñā. The Mind-Seal method for meeting circumstances is briefly set forth below.

I. Verification in Dealing with Others

In dealing with people, there are no more than two paths: liking and disliking. A sage said, “Those who, while liking someone, recognize that person’s faults, and while disliking someone, recognize that person’s good qualities, are rare indeed under heaven.” Everyone must have one person whom they love most dearly and one whom they detest most intensely. One is “what I love,” and the other is “what I hate.” Both love and hatred belong to the self. Because of self-love, one clings to these two views. Now that one is practicing, one should break through these discriminations of the two views, reflect inwardly, and ask oneself the following:

(I) With regard to the person I love most dearly, can I lessen my thoughts of attachment? At first, not knowing that love itself is affliction, one calls it the suffering of loving desire, yet takes it to be delightful and clings to it firmly. A mother, for example, fears only that her child may not live long and worries all day long, without realizing that this is suffering. Later, one recognizes love as a great affliction, yet has no way to break through attachment.

Next, contemplate impermanence and emptiness, and determine that separation must ultimately occur. There is originally neither joy nor sorrow to speak of. Yet ideals and facts are hard to reconcile, and one is ultimately unable to break through it. Next, the Dharma view can break it through: when principle and phenomena are united, and this can be realized amid phenomena without stirring the mind, then the

suffering of loving desire has truly been severed. This may be accepted as verification of realization.

(II) With regard to the person I detest most, can I lessen my resentment and aversion? Proceed step by step in the same way as above. For example: 1. Can I refrain from recalling past wrongs? 2. Can I forgive them? And can I forgive them without forcing myself? 3. Can I recognize their strengths? 4. Can I arouse the resolve to liberate them? 5. If they again harm me, can I remain unmoved? If so, emotional views have loosened and may be accepted as verification of realization.

(III) Suppose there are two people before me, one loved and one disliked. If there is a matter to entrust, can I treat them equally? Can I avoid feigning equality in order to gain a reputation?

(IV) When dealing with physical beauty, high rank, worldly enemies, violent people, shameless scoundrels, or followers of non-Buddhist paths, can my state of mind remain at ease? This is true practice. Examine it carefully as verification of realization.

II. Verification in Relation to Things

Everyone has things they love most—whether preferences, hobbies, or customary habits. Without exception, they take what accords with their wishes as joy and what opposes their wishes as suffering. What they enjoy and what they suffer bind the mind.

To break through these two, one relies solely on the illumination of wisdom. Its function should operate precisely when one is in the midst of attachment: reflect that everything in the world is impermanent, and that what I delight in cannot ultimately be relied upon. Before long, there must be one of two separations. First, it may leave me: when it is destroyed or lost, suffering and distress must arise. Second, I may leave it: when I die or am separated from it by distance, suffering and distress must likewise arise.

Knowing that it ultimately belongs to impermanence, one should explain this to oneself at the very moment attachment arises. The mind’s firmness will naturally loosen, and the flames of acquisitive craving will naturally be checked.

Yet, knowing that it cannot be relied on for long, one may suddenly give rise to a mistaken one-sided view. For example, if someone loves a bottle, the firmness of that attachment may lead them to devise every possible means of preserving it. Thus arise two attachments. The first is dead attachment: after someone dies, the object they loved is buried with them as a funerary possession. The second is obstinate emptiness: clinging one-sidedly to emptiness, one destroys the object at

the height of one's attachment to it so that it will not remain. This is not truly severing attachment. Knowing that the object is difficult to retain and fearing that someone else may obtain it, one first destroys it oneself. These are all one-sided views: one clings firmly, while the other tends toward annihilation. Both are ignorant delusions.

The wise do not find fault with things; they observe the mind. Clearly knowing impermanence, they may still love what they presently possess. Yet because of the illumination of wisdom, they love without clinging. Without clinging, there is no bondage; this is called non-abiding. Therefore, when something is gained, they do not abide in joy; when it is lost, they do not abide in suffering. When both having and not having are relinquished, this is called accordance with liberation. In my present encounters with favorable and adverse circumstances, can I respond naturally? Even if not naturally, how strong is my capacity to resist? This is what should be examined inwardly as verification of realization.

III. Verification in Adverse Circumstances

When people find themselves in adverse circumstances, their various anxieties are entirely sufferings produced by comparison. For a poor person, poverty is originally suffering, but after becoming accustomed to it over time, they no longer feel it as suffering. This suffering arises when circumstances that were favorable turn adverse. All of it belongs to self-generated deluded views. There are roughly three hindrances: first, comparison concerning one's social standing; second, discomfort with one's daily living conditions; and third, fear of the future. The more one compares, the more worries arise. To break through this suffering, one relies solely on samādhi and wisdom. Through the power of samādhi and wisdom, one sees that adverse circumstances arise as a reaction to favorable circumstances: favorable conditions are the cause, and the adverse reaction is their result.

First understand the cause: see that what I cling to as favorable was never inherently existent, but is empty through conditions. What joy or suffering is there to speak of? What obstructs us here are precisely the three hindrances listed above. Things themselves cannot obstruct me; it is only my own mind that obstructs itself.

Now break through the notion of "face." Face is nothing but vanity. Worldly people do not recognize truth and falsity or distinguish right from wrong. They do not regard evil conduct as a loss of face; instead, they regard poverty as a loss of face. This is precisely the great delusion, great inversion, and great stupidity of worldly fools.

Yet concern for face is itself an attachment, and is only human nature. Because people fail to distinguish right from wrong and are lured by vanity, they act perversely and contrary to reason. They do not recognize benefit and harm or

distinguish what is weighty from what is trivial. They seek only the immediate satisfaction of clothing, food, and shelter, taking this as glory, and do not hesitate to sacrifice everything. From minor matters to great ones, killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and false speech are brought about under compulsion. This is why the world can never be at peace.

The pivotal point between order and disorder lies in small causes with great results. If one does not go along with corruption, one should take care not to be distressed over vain reputation and face. The ancients said: “Better to be cursed by petty people than despised by people of virtue.” Such are the relative weight of gain and loss.

With this illumination of wisdom, the matter of face can naturally be let go without obstruction. Deluded hopes and acquisitive greed, together with evil thoughts and actions that depart from the proper path, will also cease thereby. Moreover, peace of mind does not necessarily depend on seeking bodily comfort. Whether one is at ease or ill at ease in daily life also changes with the mind. As for a peaceful life, one should make every effort to arrange it, but should not forcefully demand that it must be obtained.

But do not be greedy for gain. When the mind is settled, the spirit is calm and vital energy flourishes; favorable conditions will naturally converge, and fear of the future will naturally dissolve. The future belongs to the future; I may wait until it arrives and then address it. There is no need to be anxious beforehand. In short, the stronger the power of wisdom, the more spaciously one can respond. This can in turn verify the depth or shallowness of one’s practice, inwardly confirming it in one’s own mind.

IV. Verification in Favorable Circumstances

The reason sentient beings are called sentient beings is that they do not understand cause and effect. Because they do not understand, they fall into causes without recognizing them beforehand, become bound by results without knowing how to free themselves, and repeatedly create causes and receive results upon results. Thus suffering becomes beyond description.

Practitioners aspire to leave suffering behind and seek liberation. Liberation means relinquishment. What worldly people are least willing to relinquish is their present happiness and comfort. If they seek wealth and obtain it, they cling to it as happiness; how could they relinquish it? Favorable circumstances do not refer only to pleasant external situations. Even attachment to dharmas that one personally regards as correct is itself an exceptionally firm favorable circumstance. If one can resolutely relinquish it and realize it as empty, one is not far from the Way. The most difficult things to break through in favorable circumstances are:

(I) The pension one has obtained through hardship and difficulty in old age.

(II) Rich and delicious foods one enjoys eating.

(III) The praise of others and praise offered to one's face.

(IV) The merit and virtue one has created.

(V) Romantic affection between men and women; this is the root of birth and death.

(VI) A firmly unshakable view of self, or a view of one-sided emptiness.

(VII) The superior states that practitioners feel they have attained.

Of the items above, the first through fifth cannot be broken through without realizing emptiness; the sixth cannot be broken through without emptying emptiness; and the seventh cannot be broken through without the power of the nonempty lasso. To realize emptiness means to realize that all things are empty, thereby breaking through existence. Emptying emptiness means emptying that which has been taken as empty, for even realization is illusory and is not yet ultimate.

The nonempty lasso means realizing and knowing that all things are originally empty, without distinguishing emptiness from existence; not clinging to either extreme, not establishing a middle way, and entering the state of unobstructed nonduality. Only those of great power can reach this. Further, when favorable circumstances are examined in this way, they are themselves adverse circumstances. From this one knows that favorable and adverse are nondual. The emptiness of persons is easy; the emptiness of dharmas is difficult. Understanding in principle is easy; realization in actual circumstances is difficult.

What is difficult is reversing accumulated habits. Practitioners should not draw back merely because it is said to be difficult. The course of practice does not go beyond two methods: first, arousing the resolve. Once the resolve is aroused, one is not far from entering the Way. Second, awakening. Once awakened, one understands the root and no longer turns back.

Therefore, after arousing the resolve, only in seeking awakening does one have a practical method. After awakening, only in removing habitual tendencies does one have a practical method. Having a method is itself accomplishment; it is only a matter of time.

It is like dwelling in a dark room and never seeing what is inside. Though one may feel about by touch, it is still of no use. Once the electric light is switched on, one

sees all kinds of things. Even if it is switched off again and darkness returns, what one has seen is never forgotten or lost; thus there is no regression.

Therefore it is said that when one first arouses the resolve, one immediately becomes a Buddha. Yet this is not what is meant for people of inferior wisdom and dull faculties. Here lies the difficulty of learning the Buddha's teaching; here also lies why it is not easily believed; and here lies why people are unwilling to undertake it. As for their unwillingness to undertake it, this is certainly because samādhi and wisdom are insufficient, but also because their merit and virtue are too slight. It is difficult for them to encounter the instruction of a good spiritual friend, and so faith has no means to be aroused.

Tempering the mind through circumstances has two paths, favorable and adverse. These are the circumstances of hatred and love in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment, arising from the conditions of the view of self and thus dividing into the eight worldly winds. The eight worldly winds are gain and loss, blame and praise, acclaim and ridicule, suffering and pleasure. Worldly practitioners cultivate only half of them. They pay close attention to their habitual tendencies amid the four adversities of loss, blame, ridicule, and suffering, yet often neglect the four favorable circumstances of gain, praise, acclaim, and pleasure. Why? Because the fundamental root of greedy self-benefit has not been removed, and they remain attached to the view of ascetic practice, unable to perfect its meaning.

V. Verification When Arousing Compassion

The three meanings of compassion, great compassion, and bodhicitta are often confused and not distinguished by worldly people. Compassion has not yet left behind self-love; it places undue emphasis on results and loses sight of causes because its perspective is narrow. It is like the benevolence of a woman: indulgent and doting affection.

Great compassion, by contrast, places the utmost emphasis on causes, clearly penetrates what comes before and after, and thoroughly comprehends cause and effect. It does not give rise to compassion merely because of immediate and partial suffering. If A kills B, one with ordinary compassion pities B and hates A. One with great compassion pities A as well as B, and is further concerned for C: knowing that the karmic retribution for killing continues in an endless cycle, one also fears that others may imitate it. This is called great loving-kindness and great compassion.

As for directly realizing true reality and perfectly penetrating nonduality, one knows that suffering and pleasure are both unobtainable, that there is no doer and no recipient. Realizing the state of pure emptiness is called great bodhicitta. It is not like worldly people who take bodhicitta to be compassion, as though it were truly some object that could be aroused.

Thus, to arouse bodhicitta is to arouse the resolve to realize the mind of pure emptiness that is ultimate reality. The essence of this bodhicitta is unmoving. Though all appearances of good and evil arise and perish illusorily, the awakened essence is not stirred in the slightest.

Foolish people do not understand this. Covered over by emotional views and ignorance, they cannot realize it. Practitioners should instead examine themselves: when encountering all kinds of suffering, what scope of mind do they bring forth, and how does its movement appear? The greater one's mind-capacity, the less clinging there must be. Once there is abiding, one falls into inferential knowledge and cannot perfect direct knowledge. Non-abiding is freedom from defilement. To abide nowhere and remain undefiled amid all circumstances—even in thoughts of transcending birth and death and attaining nirvāṇa—is the mark of true bodhi. Hence it is said: arouse bodhicitta in reliance on great compassion.

VI. Verification During Playful Engagements

In the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle, one cannot be free of 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, yet neither does it discard them. Since all dharmas are Buddhadharma—neither dharma nor non-dharma—it enters nondual accord and establishes nothing. Thus dharmas may be transformed into wondrous functioning. The Buddha transmitted this verse of the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: "The Dharma that is fundamentally Dharma has no Dharma; the Dharma of no Dharma is also Dharma. Now, when the no-Dharma is entrusted, how could any dharma ever be Dharma?"

Yet how could it ever not be Dharma? Practitioners nowadays rarely understand skillful means. They commonly divide proper cultivation and playful engagement into two separate matters, considering one absolutely good and the other absolutely evil; thus people regard them as heaven and hell.

They do not understand that circumstances are neither good nor evil: bondage makes everything evil, while liberation makes everything good. Yet even liberation is not to be established; when good and evil are free of bondage, this is called the highest good, namely true liberation. One should examine this in one's own mind, not lay blame upon circumstances. There is no fixed dharma; medicine is prescribed according to the illness. The medicine I prescribe is intended for those whose condition it suits; it is not something everyone may take indiscriminately.

People often boast of emptiness, yet do not dare test themselves against their habitual tastes and accumulated inclinations in daily life. This can only be called

restraint. To reject them and remain undefiled is not yet to be acknowledged as true emptiness. As one's practice advances, one must test oneself again, thereby verifying the strength of one's own capacity. Ask yourself what you are capable of, and act accordingly. Only then can one know whether it is truly so.

For example, someone may be unable to endure wind because of illness and therefore seek treatment from a doctor. If that person never again encounters wind, how could the recovery be tested? Only after again facing wind and frost without the least fear can one truly be said to have recovered robust health.

People today, choking once, give up eating; because of medicine, they refuse to acknowledge their illness. This is certainly misguided. Yet when one's practice has not reached maturity, to insist that things must be so and to indulge oneself without restraint is also misguided. Such a state depends first on a qualified teacher and second on one's own awakening; outsiders need not anxiously trouble themselves with misplaced compassion. If, instead, they indiscriminately condemn everything, acting from emotional views and making reckless judgments of right and wrong, it is like others seeing a physician cut open and treat a grave illness, and, unable to bear the sight of blood, objecting out of sentimental weakness. How could that be the original intent of great compassion to liberate living beings?

(This section was originally intended for those engaged in cultivation and realization; it is not a method of practice for beginners.)

Regarding verification in playful engagements: first, one should practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. After completing the six mudrās and undertaking a full hundred sessions, one may, in the course of ordinary social interactions, use this to test one's meditative stability. It may also serve as a remedy for those who delight in dry quiescence and soon fall into annihilationism, or who develop thoughts of world-weariness. There is no fixed dharma here. This should be discussed with those who understand; it is difficult to speak of with ordinary people.

The sūtras say, "Do not be startled, frightened, or afraid." One must cultivate this capacity here. Bhikshus who observe deportment have no such opportunities. In the past, the Second Patriarch entered samādhi as play; later generations who imitate him fall ill. In my humble view, it is permissible only if one possesses the aspiration of Yi Yin.

A person's true disposition often reveals itself in play and gambling. To be able to let go of what one loves most is true liberation. To transform intensity into moderation is true progress. To remain unstartled and unafraid is true equanimity. To see as though one had not seen is true realization of emptiness. In all things, one should seek a lively and vital freedom.

VII. Verification When the Mind Clings to Nothing

When the mind is not bound to anything, there are two kinds: having nothing on which to rely, and abiding nowhere. Having nothing on which to rely is like drifting without a master: the mind has nowhere to rest, and, having nothing to do, one does not know what to do in any direction and suffers from a sense of meaninglessness. This refers to an unmastered novice who has not undertaken cultivation.

Abiding nowhere means that the mind is free of bonds and defilement, with nothing it cannot do; essence and function are such as they are, yet unmoving. It is like a bird flying through the sky: one cannot say that it leaves no trace, nor can one definitely point to a trace as existing, nor rigidly insist that there is none. It is transcendent and at ease beyond such distinctions. This refers to one who has already attained accomplishment.

Yet there is another condition. When practitioners reach the midway point, they are between these two states. At times they too feel masterless and do not know what to do. When the reaction sets in, they inevitably blame Heaven and others, grow weary of the Dharma, and resent themselves. At such a time they are most easily shaken and deluded. If someone tells them that a certain dharma is especially swift and effective, or that a certain teacher has profound attainment and is fit to be their teacher, they unconsciously shift with others' opinions. They do not realize that there is no teacher whom they will not worship,

and no dharma that they will not seek. Although this belongs to greed for too much, it is not necessarily the greatest harm. The trouble is that the mind lacks a master, and they seek attainment too urgently. In the end, they understand every teaching yet accomplish nothing; in ordinary times they remain afflicted, and at death they are just as panicked. This is truly a grave illness.

Therefore, at such a time one should keep the mind constantly watchful and not become lax. Moreover, the first step toward laziness is nonattachment: this shows that one's mind is not earnest, or that one takes oneself to be right and lets oneself drift away. This too is wandering. Spontaneous functioning and wandering may seem alike, but they differ. In the former, the great matter has already been resolved and all has become continuous and undivided; one does not let go wherever one may be, but arrives naturally, is not moved by circumstances, and remains unchanged while according with conditions. Thus spontaneous functioning is possible. In the latter, the root has not been clarified; one is turned by circumstances and has no inner master. This is called wandering. In such situations, arrogance can easily arise. Practitioners must remain vigilant at all times.

VIII. Verification Regarding 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: setting off fireworks inside it cannot fail to cause a fire, and is naturally dangerous. Yet if even one spark falls within, in time it will all burn alike; one must not arbitrarily distinguish the two as major and minor matters. Again, if sand enters the eyes, one is blinded; if powdered pearls or fragments of jade enter them, how is the blinding any different?

Practitioners are like those washing soiled clothes. Soap is used to remove the dirt, yet the soap itself is also a stain. Water is used to wash away the soap, yet the water too is impure. Only when the soap is gone and the water has dried can it be called truly clean.

Now we borrow Buddhadharma to gather in the mind. So long as we have not gone beyond deliberate effort, we naturally cannot discard dharmas. But if we rigidly cling to them as real, how is this different from removing dirt but not soap, or removing soap but not water? Would that not be delusion? Thus, though nothing need be discarded, nothing may be clung to.

The mind contains the three poisons; it is like setting off fireworks and burning oneself. If there is even a view of Buddha, a single spark has fallen within. The Buddha himself taught the Dharma to set the fire, and he also taught the Dharma to put out the fire. He feared that later people would not understand and would only keep setting fires without extinguishing them. Therefore, truly repaying the Buddha's kindness means remembering that the Buddha has no dharma to teach, and that I too have no dharma to practice. This is also like washing clothes to remove dirt: dirt is not absent, yet cleanliness too is not established. Wash as one may, in the end pure emptiness cannot be obtained. To let go at this most subtle and minute point is to be one of great freedom.

IX. Verification Regarding Views of Winning and Losing

The mentality of winning and losing is a sentient being's emotional view. It depends on the object of contention, arbitrarily dividing it into superiority and inferiority, without realizing that both are the same habitual tendency—and one of the most difficult habitual tendencies to eliminate.

During diligent practice, one may make a slight use of it for encouragement; but at the stage of verification it must not be present. Once self and others are established, it is wrong. Those who have always loved victory are bound to be arrogant toward others; those arrogant toward others are bound to cling to self, and their minds lack equanimity. This is the most firmly rooted basis of birth and death and must be removed without delay.

Those with true accomplishment cannot be displayed in words or measured by their conduct. Whether acting contrary to convention or in accord with it, they are unfathomable even to ghosts and spirits: transcendent beyond things, yet not apart from human feeling. In responding to those who come, they may deliberately show a losing position, first to test the other's competitive mind and second to spare them distress, while further wishing to arouse their sense of doubt for inquiry. Such a person is thereby invisibly embraced and contained. If they can awaken to this themselves, they will henceforth leap out of this circle; otherwise, they will sink in hell for a long time. The Earth Treasury Sūtra speaks of the Hell of Much Contention; it is established by just such people.

X. Verification of the Stages in Cultivation and Realization

After completing two or three hundred sessions of the Heart-of-Heart practice, one's inner state naturally opens and brightens. By five or six hundred sessions, one experiences daily peace and joy. As each person's capacities differ, the verification also differs somewhat. Let us briefly discuss what may be realized, without distinguishing superior from inferior.

(1) One may suddenly attain ease and joy, a comfort truly beyond description, and continually wish to regain it. Yet this seems merely to be tranquil ease: one has attained the essence but has not yet brought forth its function.

(2) One may suddenly perceive this mind as vast and inconceivable, and see ever more clearly the causal ground and fruition of matters. This is gradually entering the state of ease born of great compassion; function has already arisen.

(3) One's joy gradually comes to feel plain. There is no sense of having gained something, nor any sense of accomplishment. Instead, one enters emptiness and undifferentiated vastness, while the true essence inwardly fills one. This is gradually entering the state of ease in quiescent cessation.

(4) In passing through these three kinds of ease, one must undergo countless reactions. Even old accumulated habits may all break forth at once. This is because one's previous practice was suppressive. Those who do not understand call it regression; in fact, the work of carrying things out is at its busiest, and all old defilements are being swept out of the house. This is beneficial, not harmful. If one again becomes attached to them and keeps them, that is a great mistake.

(5) At times, one may suddenly enjoy playing with words and composing verses, or delight in arguing extensively with others. These too are seeds among one's old defilements. If they are somewhat better than the rest, once carried out they need not be cherished again.

(6) At times, one may suddenly weep bitterly. There are two conditions: one is fear of birth and death, perhaps fearing that one will not make it in this life; the other arises without expectation, perhaps tears of overwhelming joy. Though they differ somewhat, both are merely seeds surfacing and then coming to an end.

(7) At times, one suddenly sees that mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters; one also sees the many faults of others and considers only this dharma right. This is precisely when one has gone deeply in but has not yet turned oneself around. If one then undergoes a further reversal, the light of equanimous wisdom will arise and one will enter the nondual state.

(8) At times, one suddenly develops a waiting mind, thinking that after a long time one will naturally attain realization. Such a habit arises entirely from laxity and from a lack of earnestness.

(9) At times, one suddenly loses confidence 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) At times, one suddenly becomes eloquent and speaks in an unending stream, but before long recognizes that what one formerly said was mistaken. This is because the power of wisdom is not yet sufficient and one's assessment is not comprehensive, so one lacks complete clarity. Yet from this point onward, one makes daily progress.

(11) During this time, one naturally senses progress from month to month and differences from day to day, yet does not know why it is so.

(12) Fear does not readily arise of itself, because concern with gain and loss has faded.

(13) As for the speed of the power of contemplation: because mind and circumstances stand in relation to one another, without contemplation they do not turn; without turning, they do not become empty. This power also gradually increases in the following stages:

(1) One first encounters a circumstance and then brings forth contemplation, but must exert oneself fully to do so.

(2) On encountering a circumstance, contemplation follows; although it comes afterward, one need not exert oneself to bring it forth.

(3) On encountering a circumstance, one immediately knows to contemplate it. There is a slight sequence, but one has not yet gone beyond knowing.

(4) On encountering a circumstance, one immediately contemplates it; the two arise simultaneously.

(5) Contemplation comes first, and circumstances follow afterward, though at times it is forgotten.

(6) Circumstances follow the mind's contemplation, and contemplation is always foremost, though one still attends to the act of contemplation. (The foregoing belong to the stage of deliberate application.)

(7) One does not know that there is contemplation, yet has not departed from it. One clearly knows that circumstances exist, and they are originally without obstruction.

(8) Ever quiescent, ever illuminating.

Practitioners should ask themselves at which stage they stand.

(14) During this time, arrogance may suddenly arise: one may look down on later learners, glare angrily at those who are stubborn and unreceptive to transformation, or indulge in literary displays and compose verses. All these are seeds of habitual tendencies from previous lives. Whoever one may be, one must pass through this process. People call it “wild Chan.” If one can again cleanse oneself with deep earnestness, one will naturally reach complete purity. Although one has acquired this Chan malady, it is already no small matter; compared with those who have received no news at all, the difference is greater than that between heaven and earth.

(15) During this time, when one attains an excellent state, various views immediately arise. These views are naturally loftier than one's former views, so one delights in them, preserves them, and refuses to let them go. In worldly terms, these are preconceived opinions; in Buddhadharma, they are what one knows. Clinging to what one knows and not seeking the ultimate obstructs the Way. This is a stage that must be passed through, and also a verification when one's practice is half-advanced. If it is not broken through, it turns into a serious illness.

11. Verification When Reading Sūtras and Treatises

Before one's eyes have opened, one is often misled when reading sūtras. Within less than a hundred years after the Buddha's passing, errors had already entered the sūtra texts. When Ānanda was old, he saw a boy misreading a sūtra passage and corrected him, but the boy would not listen. If it was so even then, how much more so is it today—and how much more so among those rigidly attached to textual criticism?

Therefore, if one values the wording and not the meaning, inevitably no sūtra can be read. Even in the Heart Sūtra's two hundred and sixty characters, those who do not understand the meaning of nonattainment and attainment take them to be contradictory. The demise of Buddhadharma in the latter age will surely begin with textual criticism and excessive disputation, leaving later generations with no way to begin. I can state this with certainty. Those of merit turn instead into sinners—how lamentable!

One should read sūtras from a detached standpoint: first understand the sūtra's purport, then comprehend its principles. Do not let the purport be obscured by theoretical interpretations, nor let the principles be constrained by words; that is, do not let one's own mind be bound by sūtras and treatises. The Buddha's teaching is like a physician prescribing medicine for illness: it treats another person's illness and was not spoken specifically for me. It may be used for reference, but should not be taken directly for one's own use. One should use dead words in a living interpretation. Thus it is said that the Tathāgata has taught nothing.

There are two ways of reading sūtras: before practice and after practice; the mental landscape differs in each case. When reading sūtras, one should investigate what cannot be understood. 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 cut off conceptual continuation and assume it directly? This can verify the extent of your strength.

If later people alter the Dharma taught by the Buddha, they enter hell; this must be understood. Yet what the Buddha taught is the meaning of the sūtras, not their wording. If the wording is incomplete, it harms the meaning; this too must be understood. Whether one enters hell depends only on whether one alters the meaning. Yet there are too few people in later ages who practice and realize, so it is better to retain the old wording. Those without genuine strength must not initiate such changes, lest blind followers imitate them. Having found nothing through textual criticism, they may simply sever wording and meaning together, leaving disconnected fragments; that would be a grave error.

12. Verification Regarding Habitual Defilements

Learning Buddhism is nothing other than changing habitual tendencies and transforming one's disposition. When the mind becomes habituated to defiled circumstances, this is called temperament; ordinary people call it one's innate nature. A proverb says, “Mountains and rivers may change, but one's nature is hard to alter.” This strongly asserts how difficult habitual tendencies are to remove, yet it does not understand that this is mistaken.

Original nature is inherently without defilement. It is not spoiled through defilement, nor accomplished through freedom from defilement. It is like a drunk person, who is not in the least different from when sober, except for a single inversion. Yet this inversion does not cause the person to lose their human nature. Once sober, they are 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.

From this we know that ultimately there is not a single deluded person in the world: every person is a Buddha, every person is awakened. Yet drunkenness and inversion do exist for the moment. Because there is ultimately neither corruption nor admixture, these temporarily present habitual tendencies are called only illusory existence. Within this illusory existence, we provisionally posit degrees of depth and shallowness, provisionally name good and evil, and provisionally distinguish what is easy to change from what is difficult to remove. All is originally illusory, while awakened nature does not move; for the time being, one may verify oneself through these illusory appearances.

The ease with which habitual tendencies can be removed lies 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 become Buddhas, because their clinging mind is looser. Attachment to self is the root of birth and death. Those attached to self must love themselves; those who love themselves must assert themselves; those who assert themselves must seek perfection; those who seek perfection must compare and calculate; those who compare and calculate must worry excessively; excessive worry brings excessive doubt; excessive doubt brings deep scheming; deep scheming brings subtle crookedness; subtle crookedness brings lack of clarity; and lack of clarity leads to timidity.

Timidity leads to entanglement; entanglement leads to rigid attachment; rigid attachment is difficult to transform; what is difficult to transform cannot be liberated. One goes ever deeper, and one's habitual defilements grow ever thicker. During life, one is unwilling to give away or loosen one's hold on any object, affair, or view. At death, one enters the lower realms; through self-love and attachment, one likewise finds it difficult to emerge.

But why do people have all these faults? It is simply the error of not clearly understanding principle. Lack of clarity comes from failing to distinguish true from false; this failure comes from being unable to empty oneself of all possessions; this inability comes from lacking wisdom; lack of wisdom comes from lacking samādhi; lack of samādhi comes from lacking the Dharma; lack of the Dharma comes from lacking fortunate conditions; and lacking fortunate conditions comes from insisting

that oneself is right, failing to receive others with humility, and distancing oneself from spiritual friends. In the end, one sinks into decline.

If practice does not attend to one's own habitual tendencies, it is equivalent to never having practiced. Unless fundamental ignorance is removed, there is no way to deal with habitual tendencies, and one can never become a Buddha. If you wish to verify the speed or slowness of your practice, ask only whether your disposition is straightforward and open or crooked and entangled. If one reflects on this, one cannot help but shudder. The sūtras say that a woman must transform into a man's body before becoming a Buddha. This means that one's disposition must turn from yin to yang, from crookedness to straightforwardness. The straightforward mind is the place of practice. Straightforwardness is the empty mind free from defilement; it has nothing to do with male or female. Therefore the sūtras say that Buddhadharma is neither male nor female, not that it is without male and female.

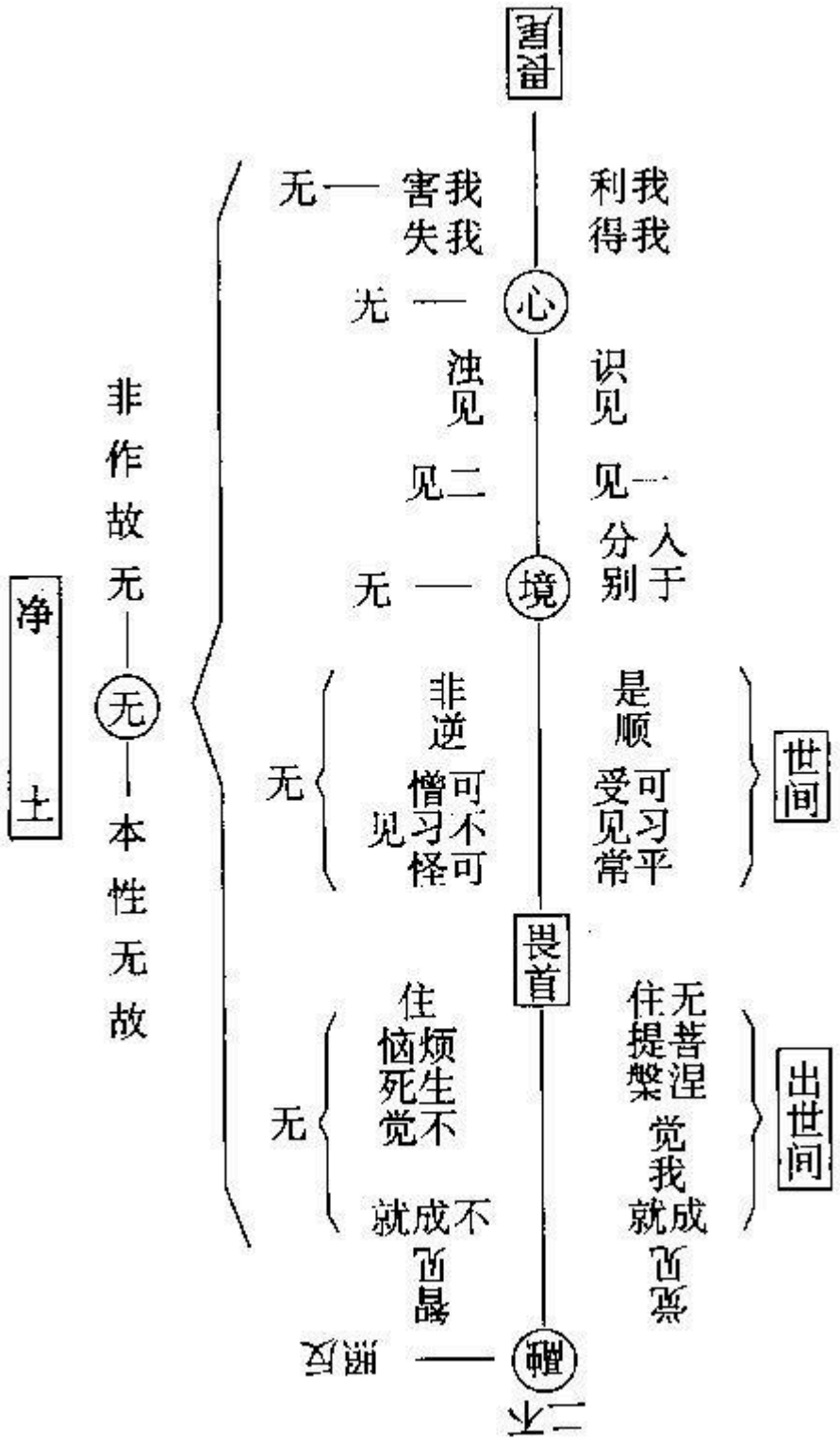
13. Verification in the Face of Extraordinary Events

The sūtras speak of “not being startled, frightened, or afraid,” of “faith that does not turn back,” and of “giving rise in a single thought to pure faith.” Such statements can all be used to examine the depth or shallowness of a practitioner's emotional views. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have clung to self. Outwardly, they seize upon coarse external objects; from the delusive arising of the marks of self, discrimination occurs, and thus arise the marks of self, person, sentient being, and life span. Inwardly, they realize subtle mental objects; from the delusive arising of the view of self, pervasive discrimination occurs, and thus arise the views of self, person, sentient being, and life span.

Circumstances are not inherently favorable or adverse. Only when something exceeds what one's view of self expects do doubt and fear arise; at their extreme, they result in inversion and madness. Tracing this to its origin, there are causes of suspicion and disbelief. In truth, all these are emotional views within the mark of self —illusory and unreal—which are gradually nurtured and developed. As the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, one nurtures this ignorance without realizing that one is nurturing it into growth.

Emotion is self-love, and views are attachment to self. The illness indeed arises from these, and it is likewise removed by them. Whoever regards strange events as strange has simply seen too little and cannot transform. If one regards them as ordinary, or clearly understands them to be nondual, one's doubts naturally dissolve. Yet one who dissolves such doubts still relies on views: the former view is consciousness, while the latter view is transformed into wisdom. First use wisdom to break through consciousness, and then use wisdom to break through wisdom itself.

Use illusion to extinguish illusion; when there is nothing to extinguish, this is called the supreme truth of no wisdom and no attainment. Going further, even truth is not established; “supreme” is also only a provisional name. I do not cling to self, and the strange is not seen as strange. Could this be possible without great samādhi and freedom from delusion? I shall now reveal the hidden sources of the mental states of alarm and fear in response to events.



In sum, breaking through this habit of comparison is also nothing apart from views. First, do not attend to it: with awareness foremost, know it to be originally illusory; this is the power of direct perception that naturally does not attend to it. Second, use a view to break through a view: as one uses a sword to cut an object, then uses the sword to cut the sword. This employs deliberate application as a skillful means. Let me offer two matters for investigation:

1. Customs. These are conventional views, among the most difficult things to break through, because the few cannot prevail against the many. Those who reform customs must forcefully seek to break them, but this is not called breaking through; it is only changing customs, replacing one custom with another. One should first use wisdom to dispel others' confusion, without opposing them. Where no ultimate conclusion can be reached, one provisionally establishes what brings peace to the majority and preserves it as an expedient; this itself is ultimate. Within oneself, however, one never ceases to know clearly. One does not rise and sink with convention, but sees all circumstances as naturally thus, with nothing extraordinary to speak of. Then one enters the ground of pure awakening.

2. Unexpected events. Whenever an unexpected event occurs, its magnitude is irrelevant. Because we do not recognize impermanence, cling to things as truly existent, and fail to distinguish the false, we are shaken by them. Moreover, when something is unanticipated and suddenly heard of, fear often arises. Those with wisdom, before the event bears fruit, fully understand at the stage of its causes that it is certainly ultimately impermanent and entirely subject to arising and ceasing.

For example, when children are born, parents know they are lovable and naturally hope that they will grow to adulthood and live long lives. Yet each has their own causes and conditions and their own life span. At the gathering of relatives and friends to celebrate the birth, the future scene of illness, death, and funeral has already been determined. Why should this cause harm? It is so with people, and so with things. If one constantly maintains this wise contemplation and enters the gate of nonduality, all future sufferings are relinquished.

They are abandoned. The wonder of Buddhadharma is like receiving a vaccination: it first removes future fear, so that one is prepared in advance. Therefore, when unexpected news is suddenly heard, there is no fear. This rescues one at the stage of causes, and is naturally more complete than worldly methods that remedy only the results.

Sentient beings have immeasurable habitual tendencies; when enumerated, they amount to eighty-four thousand categories. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra abbreviates them to sixty, saying that there are sixty kinds of mind, each with its corresponding characteristic. They are explained here still more concisely. Practitioners should use

this to inquire into themselves: Which kind of mind is strongest in me—that is, which manifestation of my affliction is deepest? What antidote should I apply? Then habitual tendencies will naturally be eliminated, and fundamental wisdom will grow ever stronger. A concise explanation follows:

1. The mind of greed: This means grasping at whatever object one encounters, thereby defiling the pure mind. It must manifest outwardly, just as seeing smoke reveals the presence of fire. Greed has its root within and obstructs every entry into the Way. Greed for wealth, fame, profit, or even the flavor of the Dharma is all an affliction. The antidote is to empty all things.

2. The mind free of greed: This is contrary to the preceding mind, yet it is a practice of non-greed without wisdom. For example, when one is earnestly cultivating, one may nevertheless lapse into passive, biased emptiness and non-greed, failing to arouse the great resolve; one seeks only meager satisfaction, fails to make diligent progress, or falls into annihilationism. The former is excessive grasping; this is excessive rejection. Both are afflictions. The antidote is neither grasping nor rejecting, but arousing the great resolve and taking responsibility.

3. The mind of anger: This is resentment arising because one cannot obtain what one greedily seeks. The antidote is a compassionate mind.

4. The mind of compassion: This is contrary to anger, but it is merely sentimental benevolence and obstructs entry into the great Way. The antidote is to understand cause and effect, seek the ultimate, and attend to what is fundamental.

5. The mind of ignorance: In whatever one undertakes, one is unable to discriminate with wisdom and is beset by many delusions. The antidote is to develop prajñā.

6. The mind of cleverness: This is the petty cleverness of the world, making contrived distinctions—this is superior, that is inferior—and taking oneself to be right. One does not realize that one's own knowledge and views are extremely limited; the light of a firefly cannot set Mount Sumeru ablaze. The antidote is humility and freedom from arrogance.

7. The mind of doubt: This arises when one is overly calculating about personal gain and loss, unwilling to suffer the slightest disadvantage. One then hesitates and cannot decide in dealing with affairs, losing one's bearings whether advancing or retreating. The antidote is a spirit of self-sacrifice and courage.

8. The mind of rash decision: This means making decisions too quickly, without distinguishing right from wrong, and thereby mishandling matters. The antidote is to investigate through wise contemplation and not to place undue weight on personal feelings.

9. The dark mind: One says that a matter should admit of no doubt, yet one remains doubtful and indecisive. This is somewhat like the seventh mind: the former is subtle, while this is coarse; the former is excessive, while this falls short. Here too, the antidote is the illumination of wisdom.

10. The mind of clarity: One says that everything is understood, yet excessive scrutiny becomes a fault. One does not realize that worldly affairs are inherently impermanent and can scarcely be expected to reach perfection. The antidote is not to demand perfection.

11. The mind of accumulation: Having obtained one excellent Dharma, one accumulates oneself around it and accepts no other Dharma. Those who delight in Esoteric Buddhism, for example, may think that apart from it there is no other Dharma; practitioners of the Pure Land may do the same. This gradually opens the way to sectarian disputes. The antidote is an impartial and expansive mind.

12. The contentious mind: This is delighting in debating right and wrong, even arguing that what is crooked is straight. One does not realize that argument itself is contrary to meaning. The antidote is non-contention.

13. The disputatious mind: This is inward self-litigation. For example, after reflecting and arriving at a valid meaning, one may still raise objections for oneself, giving rise to thoughts in endless succession. The antidote is to savor the principle of Ji Wenzi's saying: "Think three times, then act."

14. The mind of non-contention: This means abandoning both right and wrong, until one ends up having no position at all and cannot distinguish good from evil. The antidote is clear discernment and prompt decision.

15. The heavenly mind: This means having a natural habit of expecting every wish and need to be fulfilled, as with the pleasant karmic results in the heavenly realms, which arise naturally without exertion. One then brings this attitude into practice as well, expecting it to proceed naturally without arduous effort. This can obstruct bodhi. One should understand that nothing can arise naturally without causes; one must plant causes in order to obtain results. The antidote is not to crave saving effort.

16. The asura mind: Though one knows the benefit of liberation, one remains habituated to the karmic results of birth and death, sinking into them and failing to advance. The antidote is to contemplate the impermanence, suffering, and emptiness of the world.

17. The dragon mind: This is greed for wealth, possessions, and sensual pleasure, like that of dragons. The antidote is contentment.

18. The human mind: One sharply distinguishes favors from grudges, and is extremely exacting in repaying beneficence or retaliation. Everywhere one establishes self and others. The antidote is to turn toward the great Way.

19. The female mind: This is a mind of many desires. The antidote is contemplation of impurity.

20. The mind of self-mastery: One seeks for everything to accord with one's wishes and fulfill one's desires. One should contemplate that dharmas have no inherent nature and come together through causes and conditions; how could everything possibly conform to one's wishes? This is the antidote.

21. The merchant's mind: This means analyzing too minutely and making overly comprehensive calculations. One inevitably becomes bogged down in details, and this becomes a serious affliction. The antidote is to cultivate swift wisdom.

22. The farmer's mind: Like a farmer tilling the fields, one wants to know every detail before exerting effort. A student of the Dharma likewise first wishes to hear extensively before seeking the Dharma. Those who now study the Dharma Characteristics School merely hear and understand its principles while neglecting practical cultivation; they labor without result. One should consider that when a poisoned arrow enters the body, it must be treated urgently; one should not ask extensive questions before removing the arrow. Therefore, the antidote is to cultivate keen wisdom.

23. The river mind: This is like river water, relying on its two banks or drifting without stability; the mind is not one-pointed. The antidote is to concentrate the mind on a single object.

24. The pond mind: People greedily seek fame and profit without ever being satisfied, like water gathering together and receiving everything without exception. It is the same in studying the Dharma: craving too much prevents one from becoming proficient in any one thing. The antidote is few desires.

25. The well mind: One thinks in ever deeper and more profound ways, always seeking to be unfathomable to others. The antidote is to be straightforward, clear, and easy to understand.

26. The guarding mind: Worldly people protect their possessions and lives, like a turtle drawing in its head. This is a habitual tendency of the śrāvakas and cannot receive the great vehicle. The antidote is great compassion and benefiting all people universally.

27. The miserly mind: Everything one does is for oneself; even wholesome dharmas are cherished and kept secret rather than bestowed upon others. The antidote is to

remember that all things are impermanent and that benefiting others is precisely benefiting oneself.

28. The cat's mind: This is lying in wait to catch birds and beasts, holding one's breath and waiting for an opportunity rather than advancing quickly, taking action only when circumstances are favorable. In relation to the Dharma, it is to uphold it without practicing, hoping to wait for favorable conditions. It is also a cat's mind to receive kindness without remembering to repay it. The antidote is to practice promptly upon hearing the Dharma and always remember others' kindness.

29. The dog's mind: One is pleased and satisfied with obtaining a little. Because of meager blessings and conditions, one's aspirations are inferior. Having gained a small portion of wholesome Dharma, one thinks practice cannot be brought to completion and does not seek what is higher and better. This too is a śrāvaka habit. The antidote is to make one's mind as vast as the ocean.

30. The garuḍa mind: This bird constantly relies on its two wings for its power. Such a person enjoys gathering followers and building influence, taking these as a support, and thus has little inclination to advance independently. The antidote is independence: like the lion king, do not rely on companions or assistance.

31. The rat's mind: Such a person enjoys petty destruction, engaging in irrational and useless acts. When others have accomplished something, they like to create gaps through which to undermine and ruin it. The antidote is a vast and luminous mind.

32. The mind of singing and chanting: One delights in using ornate words and elegant phrases as Dharma giving, but cannot inwardly realize natural wisdom. One merely learns the superficial trappings and gains no real benefit. The antidote is to seek practical reality.

33. The dancing mind: One delights in spiritual powers and transformations, displaying all kinds of unprecedented marvels. This can obstruct the pure mind and is called an affliction. The antidote is not to crave minor worldly signs of efficacy.

34. The drum-beating mind: One arouses the resolve to warn sentient beings, but one's zeal is too hasty; pursuing small benefits obstructs the conditions for great matters. This too is an affliction. The antidote is to seek the ultimate Dharma in order to liberate sentient beings.

35. The house mind: This is like a house sheltering the body, keeping one far from all evils. It is the same as the guarding mind. The antidote is to benefit others.

36. The lion mind: In all cultivation, one has not the slightest timidity. Like the lion king, one sees no difficult task under heaven. The antidote is to recognize that there

is neither superiority nor inferiority, that all are equal, and to wish that all sentient beings may universally prevail.

37. The owl mind: This is the mind of the owl, which thrives in the darkness of night. Those who like dwelling quietly and practicing in darkness behind closed doors resemble it. One should remember that light and darkness are nondual, stillness and bustle are not different, and not give rise to dualistic views. This is the antidote.

38. The bird mind: One is constantly fearful and anxious; even toward friendly people, one harbors suspicious fear and mistrust. The antidote is to cultivate a settled and fearless mind.

39. The rākṣasa mind: In the midst of a wholesome act, an unwholesome thought suddenly arises. For example, building a Buddha stūpa or temple is a great merit, but one suddenly fears harming small insects or burdening the donors and therefore stops. The antidote is to weigh the benefits and distinguish what is weightier from what is lighter.

40. The thorn mind: This is the disposition to give rise everywhere to harmful actions, causing much injury and obstruction and making those nearby uneasy. It is also like giving alms and then regretting it afterward. The antidote is to repent and eliminate it without delay.

41. The cave mind: This means seeking the arts of immortals for longevity and freedom from aging, waiting to see the Buddhas of the future, like dragons and asuras hidden deep beneath the sea in profound caves. The antidote is to hear the Dharma and realize the Way swiftly in this life; one should not linger uselessly.

42. The wind mind: One seeks every Dharma and plants wholesome roots everywhere, like the wind that reaches everywhere. Yet one does not realize that stony fields yield no crops, so seeds are wasted in vain. The antidote is careful discernment and freedom from craving for too much.

43. The water mind: Like water washing things, one insists on exposing their filth and washing it away. In practice, one becomes attached one-sidedly to purity, which instead obstructs the pure mind. The antidote is to contemplate the true reality: from the beginning there has been no defilement; dualistic views arise from oneself, and the very act of seeing is defilement.

44. The fire mind: One’s nature is irritable and hasty like fire, excessively fierce and violent. One seeks the Dharma and wants immediate accomplishment, thereby causing much failure and injury. The antidote is the water of gentleness and kindness.

45. The mud mind: One is wholly ignorant, like mud, and one’s nature is likewise muddy and bogged down. The antidote is to seek a good spiritual friend who can skillfully open one up.

46. The manifest-color mind: Like undyed silk thread, it takes on whatever color it encounters; according to the dye it manifests as red or purple, having no mastery of its own. On seeing evil deeds, it too follows along and enters into them. The antidote is self-mastery and not being turned by others.

47. The plank mind: A plank in water bears objects according to its capacity; when its limit is exceeded, it cannot bear them and eventually tips them off. A practitioner exclusively cultivates one Dharma, knows nothing of others, and no longer admires other wholesome teachings; from this point, one makes no further progress. The antidote is to arouse a vast mind and study bodhisattva conduct.

48. The deluded mind: This is inversion and confusion, as when one wishes to go west but instead turns east, owing to the scattering of the mind. The antidote is to make the mind one-pointed, carefully discerning, and peaceful.

Forty-Nine: The Poisoned Heart. Like one who dies from poisoning, it gives rise to neither wholesome nor unwholesome thoughts; numb and unfeeling, it follows circumstances as they turn. Generate great compassion and all wholesome qualities, and counteract it by abandoning the annihilationist view.

Fifty: The Silk-Rope Heart. Falling into an annihilationist view, the mind is not lively, as though bound by a silk rope. This is an especially grave obstruction. Give rise to right wisdom and cut off this wrong view as its remedy.

Fifty-One: The Shackled Heart. Like feet bound in shackles and unable to move forward, it is found in those who delight in sitting quietly and cultivating a dead samādhi; with respect to the Dharma, they are also constrained by the Dharma. As its remedy, be ever lively and responsive in all circumstances, so that stillness and disturbance are without interval.

Fifty-Two: The Cloud Heart. It is constantly full of anxious thoughts, like the man of Qi who worried that the sky would fall. Practice equanimity, and counteract it by leaving behind worldly sorrow and joy.

Fifty-Three: The Field Heart. Like a good field that is weeded of all wild growth and filth, seeking complete cleanliness, such a person delights in adorning the body and strives to make it bright, clean, and impressive. Reflect that this is useless, and counteract it by cultivating the field of blessings in the mind-ground.

Fifty-Four: The Salt Heart. Just as salt is salty by nature and becomes saltier the deeper it penetrates, this person's thoughts proceed ever more deeply by turns.

Know that inquiry has no end and cannot be settled by conjecture; make a swift decision as its remedy.

Fifty-Five: The Razor Heart. One believes that shaving off one's beard and hair is sufficient to be called leaving home; what more is there to seek? This mind is most harmful, for it shaves away even the wholesome roots, so that they cannot grow again. Monastics in recent times consider themselves complete in the marks and deportment of the precepts, and thus call themselves a jewel of the Saṅgha. They seek no further the precepts of mind, but become monastics who serve as fields of merit. Lay practitioners, too, fail to distinguish the genuine from the false; they revere monastics but not the Jewel, fostering their arrogance and misleading them. As its remedy, shave away the poison of ignorance and practice genuine renunciation.

Fifty-Six: The Mount Meru Heart. This mind is haughty and self-important, and does not even respect teachers, monastics, or parents. Counteract it with filial devotion, obedience, and humility.

Fifty-Seven: The Ocean Heart. Like the ocean, which contains everything, it claims every excellent matter for itself: there is no one who can compare with it. Mount Meru seeks height; this mind seeks breadth. Counteract it with humility.

Fifty-Eight: The Hole Heart. 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 fully and without deficiency; before long, however, leaks in the Dharma gradually arise. Like a broken vessel, it cannot retain the water of Dharma. Counteract it by carrying things through from beginning to end.

Fifty-Nine: The Rebirth Heart. The meaning of this mind is not yet clear. Presumably, people cultivate in hopes of dedicating the merit toward future rebirth and obtaining its fruition, without distinguishing good from evil or black from white. Counteract it by cultivating only wholesome dharmas.

Sixty: The Monkey Heart. This is the general characteristic of the sixty minds, describing in the strongest terms their various forms of grasping at conditions: unsettled, like a monkey's mind. This one mind is missing from the Sanskrit text. Counteract it by realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, seeking samādhi and opening wisdom.

The above sixty minds all concern 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 be set about and eliminated. Practitioners must

not cling one-sidedly, thinking that once they have realized the mind, the matter is finished; there still remains the matter of grieving as though one's parents had died. Nor should others cling one-sidedly and conclude that someone has not realized the mind simply because that person's habitual tendencies have not yet been removed. Only the person themselves knows this by realization, or those who share the same view and practice can recognize its ultimate truth.

The sixty types of mind are as described above, and practitioners may use them to verify themselves. I shall now set forth several direct and expedient methods for eliminating spiritual ailments:

Direct and Expedient Methods for Eliminating Spiritual Ailments

I. How Can One Be Selfless?

Mind-capacity is originally neither large nor small. But once there is a self, there are limits; the more firmly one clings to self, the narrower one's scope becomes. One should give rise to a vast mind to remedy this.

For example, of two people, one poor and one wealthy, the wealthy person sees and hears more broadly, and has greater means and a broader sphere of activity. The poor person's knowledge and experience are limited, and thus the mind-capacity is small. A slight loss, or a sudden gain in wealth, may be more than that person can bear. Therefore, the greater the power of emptiness without self, the greater one's merit and virtue. Contemplate all things in the world as equal, without enemies or intimates, and attachment to self and others will loosen.

Contemplate all things in the world as impermanent and unreal, and thoughts of gain and loss will fade. Contemplate all dharmas as like illusions and shadows, not to be grasped as real, yet not to be rejected one-sidedly, and attachment to dharmas will disappear. The self that I take as self includes a great self and a small self. Take the unborn and undying nature of the Tathāgata-garbha as the great self; then the self ultimately suffers not the slightest loss, nor is there the slightest thing that can increase it.

Regard all worldly things as useless. So-called fame, profit, and the like merely provide temporary play for me. Why rejoice at gaining them, or grieve at losing them? Naturally, one becomes detached from them. Worldly people take the false for true and suffer because they have never truly recognized it. If they truly recognized what is false, they would certainly not grasp or cling to it.

Of the twelve links of dependent origination, ignorance comes first, emphasizing the suffering of blindness. Therefore, the level of human beings is judged by the extent of their capacity to benefit others. Whoever is willing to benefit others relinquishes

self; whoever does not relinquish self harms others. Harm need not necessarily consist of killing, stealing, or sexual misconduct.

A single thought of self establishes endless calamities. Suppose one gained the supernormal power of the divine ear and heard all the sounds and speech in the world—harmonious or coarse, intimate or hostile—and not one of them were unrelated to self. Alas! If you wish to know the causes of warfare in the world, simply listen to the resentful quarrels within families. When immeasurable views of self, attachments to self, greed for self, and contention for self are gathered as causes, yet one seeks peace under heaven as their result, it is like carrying firewood to put out a fire: one only burns oneself, and the result is precisely the opposite. How foolish!

II. How Can One Cut Off Greed?

Greed concerns fruition and must first have something taken up as its cause. There are two causes: contact and habitual conditioning. Contact means that mind and object confront one another: the six external sense objects come into contact with the six internal sense faculties, and one unconsciously receives them. Comparative measurement and discrimination then form conception; as this conception turns into formation, one proceeds to recognize what thing or matter it is.

These form, feeling, conception, formation, and consciousness combine inseparably and are called the five aggregates; they are the active state in which mind and object make contact. The second cause is habitual conditioning. Such conditioning consists of preferences carried over from previous lives; the present circumstances stir up accumulated habits and further contribute to their formation.

Thus, when mind encounters objects, and even when habitual conditioning is present, greed has not yet formed. Only because ignorance and delusive obscurations leave external objects unemptied and the inner mind unemptied does this deepen gradually until, at the stage of fruition, one becomes greedy without realizing it. The method for eliminating greed is no more than seeing that the five aggregates are all empty. Yet this seeing is itself among the five aggregates; if the seeing has not been emptied, one still clings to dharmas. The empty characteristics of all dharmas mean that seeing is merely one empty dharma.

If seeing is empty, subject and object are naturally forgotten. This emptiness does not mean that there is no seeing, nor that there is no subject and object. When the practice matures, liberation comes naturally. The essential key lies in the single word knowing. Its skillful directness is inconceivable; one may come to understand it for oneself when the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment is taught for the second time.

III. How Can One Eliminate Anger?

It is by having no attachments. There are two methods. First, at the causal stage, have no attachments, seeing hatred and love as nondual.

Second, at the stage of fruition, one should restrain and transform it. What is meant by restraining? Restraining means stopping it. First, consider its future disasters; second, consider how anger harms the body: it can shorten the breath and agitate the mind, deplete the blood and weary the spirit, thereby shortening life. Beginners should use this method. But it does not mean suppressing the anger and retaining the energy, letting it knot in the chest and thereby cause illness. It should instead be transformed. Transformation means dissolving it invisibly.

First, contemplate that everything before you is nothing but a result. Where did its cause come from? The fault lies with me; then it is transformed. Second, contemplate that this is training my mind and is a cause and condition that aids the Way; one should even be grateful for it, and then it is transformed. Third, when there is absolutely no way to endure it, promptly recognize the moment and leave, or turn the mind elsewhere; this too transforms it. Practitioners may ask themselves how this is done. The sūtra says, “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” Then ask: how does one not extinguish it?

IV. How Can One Be Free of Ignorance?

It is by completely illuminating the characteristics of pure awakening, thereby suddenly breaking through ignorance.

V. How Can One Have Certainty?

Having certainty in ordinary waking life does not count; having certainty in dreams does not count either. Even knowing intellectually where the master is when one sleeps dreamlessly does not count. To say that one has certainty is not certainty. Who, after all, has certainty? Only when one truly knows who it is does one have certainty.

VI. How Can One Be Ready to Die?

Knowing the unborn is the Way: if one hears the Way in the morning, one may die content in the evening.

VII. How Can One Discriminate Well?

For example, in a solemn place of the Three Jewels, someone offers a filthy vessel to the Buddha. Seeing it, one is neither startled nor afraid. Though one still discriminates, one does not move with the discrimination. This is good discrimination.

VIII. How Can One Avoid Being Bound by the Dharma?

Know that these lecture notes are indeed superfluous, no more than adding legs to a snake. Yet, to encourage people to apply themselves to practice, they cannot be dispensed with. Once one thoroughly awakens to effortless diligence, one is no longer bound by the Dharma.

IX. How Can One Be Liberated?

Originally there is no bondage. Do not seek liberation, and one is liberated.

I shall now briefly present one or two methods of answering inquiries, in order to inspire the functioning of prajñā.

1. Suppose someone asks, “What kind of person can even the Buddha not liberate through the Dharma?” Answer, “What kind of person can the Buddha liberate through the Dharma?” Then ask in return, “In the end, does the Buddha liberate sentient beings, or do sentient beings liberate themselves?” (The word “should” must not be rigidly understood as meaning that there is no alternative, for originally there is no fixed dharma.)

2. Suppose someone asks, “Those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma often claim to have attained realization. What evidence is there?” Answer, “Those who practice and realize know it for themselves. Though they know it, they have no way to explain it to those who have not practiced.”

3. Suppose someone asks, “It takes three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas to cultivate Buddhahood—how is this to be understood?” Ask in return, “From what time does an asaṃkhyeya begin to be counted, and at what time does it end? And what do the three characters a-seng-qi mean?”

4. Suppose someone asks, “Why is it said that afflictions are bodhi?” Answer, “Because bodhi is affliction.” Or say, “Water freezes into ice, and ice melts again into water; they are not two different waters.”

5. Suppose someone asks, “Why is it said that wishing to eliminate afflictions only adds to the illness?” Answer, “Because of the wish to eliminate them.” Then add, “This does not mean that afflictions should not be eliminated. It is only because the root has not been understood that one instead increases worldly toil. If the old illness has not been removed of itself, why invite a new illness?”

6. Suppose someone asks, “What state are you in now?” Answer, “I eat my own meal; I do not know whether you are full.”

VII. Suppose someone asks, “After the Buddha’s passing, should the precepts be taken as fundamental?” Answer, “No.” They will surely be greatly startled. Then say further, “It is not a matter of precepts or no precepts, but only of whether they are upheld. The Buddhadharma will not perish; those of the Buddhadharma perish.”

VIII. Suppose someone asks, “Who are those of the Buddhadharma?” Answer, “The one now asking me is.”

IX. Suppose someone asks, “Why is the meaning of the treatise so lofty?” Answer, “Discourse is itself not meaning, and meaning is itself not lofty. If meaning can be discoursed upon, there is conceptual thought; if there is high and low, how can there be equality? Why practice to become a Buddha? No contention, no contention.”

X. Suppose someone asks, “What is an arrogant person?” Answer, “One who speaks of there being arrogant people.”

XI. Suppose someone asks, “Why is the Chan school the foremost?” Answer, “The Chan school cannot speak; it has never called itself the foremost.”

XII. Suppose someone asks, “Why does the Buddha have a special transmission outside the teachings?” Answer, “The Buddha never had a separate transmission, for he never established teachings, nor did he establish inside and outside. It is you, sir, who make such distinctions.”

XIII. Suppose someone asks, “How can one become a Buddha?” Answer, “Only one who can enter the realm of Māra can become a Buddha. If asked how to enter the realm of Māra, answer, ‘The dualistic view is the Māra-view. From duality, enter nonduality: where there is neither Buddha nor Māra.’”

XIV. Suppose someone asks, “Why discuss the Chan school when practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?” Answer, “Originally, it is neither Esoteric Buddhism nor Chan; yet it is not apart from Esoteric Buddhism and not apart from Chan. Still, it is not a combination of Chan and Esoteric Buddhism.”

XV. Suppose someone asks, “Why do Chan practitioners have so many habits of mockery and sarcasm?” Answer, “This is a manner of approach and differs from habitual tendencies. Rigidly clinging to one manner and not understanding adaptation—this is habitual tendency.”

XVI. Suppose someone asks, “Is Pure Land practice the most reliable?” Answer, “No.” They will surely object. Then say further, “It is precisely because the Pure Land is so reliable that students become lax; they practice only one tenth of the Pure Land. Therefore, it is not.”

XVII. Suppose someone asks, “Why do you especially say that attaining Buddhahood in this very life is easy?” Answer, “It is not I who say so, but the Buddha. In my foolish view, attaining Buddhahood in this very life is still only an expedient. My greed is strongest: I want to become a Buddha this very moment. The sūtras say, ‘One should attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi.’ Yet I have never seen anyone dare to read the character dang in the departing tone, thereby acknowledging Buddhahood in the present moment. Again, the sūtras say, ‘Know that this person is the Tathāgata; with the Buddha’s wisdom, he fully knows this person,’ and so forth. Yet I have never seen anyone dare to punctuate the sentence after ‘Tathāgata,’ thereby acknowledging oneself to be the Tathāgata.”

XVIII. Suppose someone asks, “What is meant by ‘wild Chan’?” Answer, “‘Wild’ is not Chan; wild has the sense of uncultivated. What the world calls wild Chan is this. But whether one is wild or not, whether one is uncultivated or not, is known through one’s own realization and cannot be measured by others.”

XIX. Suppose someone asks, “What is a good spiritual friend?” Answer, “One who can know oneself, and who can also recognize a good spiritual friend—such a person is a good spiritual friend.”

XX. Suppose someone asks, “Why does the Chan school so often display startling actions?” Answer, “It is to make you give rise to doubt. Doubt means doubting yourself. When you can raise doubt yourself, you will be willing to seek instruction and investigate. The reason for such deliberately startling displays is to test whether you can be frightened or not, whether you will be taken in or not, and thereby whether you will awaken or not. It is all to make you leap out of this circle, not to compete with you over superiority or inferiority.”

XXI. Suppose someone asks, “What is the practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?” Answer, “When one realizes that the Pure Lands of the ten directions are unobtainable, it is not the purity of Pure Land, not the Chan of Chan, not the esoteric practice of Esoteric Buddhism, nor the dharma of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. It is Heart-of-Heart.”

XXII. Suppose someone asks, “How should one propagate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma?” Answer, “Seek only doubt and slander, not widespread praise; do only practical things, and do not engage in excessive disputation.”

XXIII. Suppose someone asks, “How can one seal the mind?” Answer, “The mind is unobtainable—what is there to seal?”

The Buddhadharma has no fixed dharma; how could there be any dharma to expound? When you gentlemen can ask yourselves whether you are able to apply this prajñā dharma, take care not to speak of it lightly to those who cannot

understand, lest you mislead them and cause them to lose heart. As for teachings adapted to capacities, methods of transmitting the Dharma, and the esoteric meaning of the tantric dual-body practice, you gentlemen already know these. They should not be discussed with those who have not practiced; therefore, they are not made public and should be omitted from the record.

Mencius said, “The way of learning has no other: it is simply to recover one’s lost mind.” Yet does one know whether what is recovered is truly what was lost? From where is it recovered? After recovering it, how is it to be placed? If one knows that ultimately there is no mind to recover, then we people are indeed making much needless trouble. Do you understand?

A. Verification of Practice on the Meditation Cushion

During meditation, there is originally nothing to verify. The moment one seeks verification, the mind divides again. Whatever states may arise—favorable or adverse, visions of light or of Buddhas—are all illusory appearances. On no account should one cling to them. Bear in mind that all appearances are unreal and deceptive. (This thought, too, is unreal; but when it is useful, there is no need to insist that it is unreal.) Do not welcome them with delight, nor reject them with aversion. The marvel lies in the two words “do not attend to.” Simply do not attend to them: this is practical and effective; it is not wandering astray, and it is verification.

Those who practice visualizations in Japanese or Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism originally employ a single visualization to eliminate the myriad thoughts. Accomplishing the visualization is only the first step in gathering the mind into one. 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 abscess, concentrating the poison in one place. This foul poison is precisely nondual. It must neither be clung to nor left alone; it must be uprooted completely before there can be true purity.

Practitioners in recent times often delight in accomplishing visualizations and then become arrogantly self-important. Some even take seeing a moon disc as realizing the mind and seeing their true nature. They do not know that this is merely an initial expedient and far from the essential point. If one knows it to be illusory, one should promptly relinquish it and enter for oneself into the realm of pure emptiness.

What fundamentally distinguishes the Heart-of-Heart Dharma from other methods is that it does not grasp appearances. Yet people cannot be without thoughts; to be without thoughts is to fall into annihilation. Where there are thoughts, there cannot be no appearances. When, in meditation, scattered thoughts fly about and all kinds

of fantasies appear before one's eyes, if one gives rise to the thought of loathing and cutting them off, that too is an appearance. One need only not attend to them. Not attending to them means letting them be, without concern for their coming or going.

Do not welcome them with delight: this is not grasping. Do not reject them with aversion: this is not casting them aside. Neither grasping nor rejecting is truly not grasping appearances. Thus we know that the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the unsurpassed dharma gate, the supreme among all methods, taught by the Tathāgata for those of the highest vehicle. During meditation, one may suddenly feel heat, cold, and so forth in the body. These are changes in the circulation of blood and vital energy. Because each person's physical constitution differs, they are states that must be passed through when moving from activity to stillness, and there is nothing strange about them. They are, comparatively speaking, beneficial rather than harmful. These states do not last; after a long time, they disappear. Do not delight in them or seek them.

Feeling stifled and impatient during meditation is fundamental ignorance stirring within. One need only be calm, resolute, and forbearing, struggling against habitual tendencies. After several hundred or thousand surges and descents, it is like a boat traveling on the sea: now violent winds and huge waves arise; now the waters are calm and smooth. The boat has no mind, and its master has no fear. Deal with all this calmly, without the slightest disorder; remain strong in resolve and endure it with one's head bowed. Before one realizes it, one has reached the other shore. Only in this way can one attain true samādhi. The restless, frivolous habitual tendencies accumulated since beginningless time are thereby transformed. Thus, after sitting for a long time, one no longer feels stifled; not feeling stifled is verification of progress in samādhi.

When the mind is exceptionally chaotic during meditation, this too is verification of progress, for the seeds of ignorance are all being stirred up. Apply the same practice of not attending to them: respond calmly and let matters take their natural course. Similarly, when external circumstances are distracting or children are crying and making a disturbance, if one remains unshaken, this is verification of progress in the power of samādhi. Therefore, those cultivating great samādhi and great wisdom do not long for mountain forests or delight in quietude; they train in the state in which stillness and activity are nondual. This is what those who reflect inwardly and maintain wakeful awareness should understand.

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 spiciness: at the first taste, it is unbearably hot, but after a long time one no longer notices the heat. When one no longer notices it, fearlessness has been accomplished. Therefore, this is verification.

When scattered thoughts arise in profusion during meditation, going as they come and falling as they arise, this verifies that the clinging mind has diminished, its force has loosened, and the turning of thoughts has become swift. It is also verification that the power of wakeful awareness is strong. Sentient beings' accumulated habits are nothing but restlessness. If one can sit for two hours without feeling stifled and can exercise self-control, this is verification of initial samādhi.

When samādhi is attained, the fingers naturally cease to ache. The mouth continues to hold the mantra without stopping, while seeing and hearing remain clear and distinct. Though clear and distinct, do not let them be drawn away to flow along with circumstances; this is samādhi. At times, one may seem to lapse into a stupor or fall asleep, yet the mouth continues to hold the mantra without stopping and the hands remain in their mudrā without loosening. This is true samādhi, not drowsy sleep.

At times, one may not settle into samādhi until after sitting for an hour; at other times, one may settle into samādhi in only a few minutes; and at times the mind may be extremely agitated. All of these are equally progress, and there is no need to force distinctions of better or worse. Being able to let them take their natural course is itself true power of samādhi. Only after a long time does one pass from the emptiness of seeming drowsiness and dimness into bright, pure emptiness—when, though seeing no images and hearing no sounds, one is nevertheless clearly aware. Then, suddenly, body and mind drop away; the sense faculties and their objects fall away; empty space shatters, and the great earth sinks level. The reality of no appearances then manifests before one.

At times one may not necessarily be settled in samādhi while sitting, yet be quite settled when not sitting; or one may be the same whether sitting or not. The time when practice becomes continuous and undivided is then not far off. While on the meditation cushion, never measure or analyze such states, for this only makes one unsettled. Simply do not attend to them, lest you mislead yourself.

B. 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 accord with conditions depends solely on prajñā. Prajñā, rendered in Chinese as "great wisdom," is the great wisdom that thoroughly comprehends worldly and supramundane dharmas as perfectly interfused and nondual. With the illusory mind, which cannot be grasped, one responds to illusory circumstances, which likewise cannot be grasped. Clearly knowing them to be illusory, one responds without taking them as real or rejecting them as illusion. It is neither play nor not-

play; one enters the samādhi of play. This is called the manifestation of great functioning. Let us first briefly explain the meanings of these terms.

What is meant by samādhi and wisdom supporting each other? The visible evidence of the power of samādhi lies in its functioning after one rises from the meditation cushion. To function is itself to open wisdom; to know that one is making progress is also to open wisdom. Wisdom reveals samādhi, and samādhi supports wisdom. This is called samādhi and wisdom supporting each other.

What is meant by realizing samādhi? Samādhi is rendered in Chinese as “right concentration.” Concentration does not mean being motionless like wood or stone, seeing and hearing nothing. Rather, it means seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing without being carried along, confused, or swayed. When one first practices, one may experience the various states described above; or, during a longer practice session of four or five hours, it may suddenly seem to have passed in an instant. This is not drowsiness or forgetfulness of time; it is right concentration. Again, while the eyes are fixed on one place, one may simultaneously hear and answer others, attending to each matter without error, while the gaze remains unmoved. This is called the simultaneous mutual functioning of the six sense faculties, and it is evidence of realizing samādhi.

What is meant by no-thought? Thoughts cannot be cut off, nor can they be extinguished. When mind and circumstances meet, comparative discrimination inevitably occurs. In ordinary beings, comparative discrimination wanders and roams; this is the activity of consciousness, called discrimination on the level of consciousness. Sages also make comparisons, but without attachment; they use wisdom to transform consciousness, and this is called discrimination on the level of wisdom. If there is comparison yet no comparison, it still belongs to direct perception; because its power is sufficient, it is also called perfected direct perception. Thus, thoughts are present but unbound: like a mirror reflecting things, taking form according to each thing, yet retaining no image. Nor does it fail to reflect. This is called no-thought. (Deluded thoughts may be cut off, but need not be extinguished; discrimination on the level of wisdom is likewise no-thought.)

What is meant by seeing the true reality? Know that all appearances are illusory, yet do not dispense with illusion. Knowing illusion is itself freedom from it; freedom from illusion is awakening. Yet awakening too is an illusion. Therefore mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sense faculties, the body, and the material world are all likewise. Seeing this single illusory nature of all appearances is the true reality. A sūtra says: “The true reality is precisely no appearance”; it is not some separate appearance.

All Mahāyāna sūtras take the true reality as their proper substance. Our present single thought has never departed from all appearances. Conceptual thought, discrimination, language, and writing are established in dependence upon falsity. One must, precisely amid appearances, be free of appearances: to be precisely amid them is not nonexistence, while to be free of them is not existence. Out of necessity, this is forcibly called the true reality. Those who understand this meaning are said to see the true reality.

What is meant by breaking 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 illusion and not be swept along by its flow is itself to break through it. Not giving rise to views of aversion and attachment is itself to break through it. To comprehend that all is unobtainable is itself to break through it. To know that ignorance has never inherently existed, and is not like a concrete 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. Yet for those who have not realized samādhi and seen the true reality, this is not genuine knowing and cannot be called genuine breaking through.

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 power is not yet sufficient and one's resistance is weak; one may still be carried away by circumstances. This is called habitual tendencies. Sometimes, even when ignorance has not been broken through, habitual tendencies may diminish, but this results only from suppression. It is like water becoming clear when the mud settles to the bottom: the root has not been removed, and once it is stirred, the turbidity becomes even worse than before. For one who has broken through ignorance, however, although habitual tendencies remain, there is a great difference from the past, and one sees progress day by day. There are approximately several indications:

1. Afflictions arise easily but are easily transformed; what formerly lasted long may become short-lived.

2. One's habits, tastes, and preferences suddenly change.

3. Fear naturally lessens, and notions of gain and loss gradually fade.

4. When encountering startling or frightening events, or improper and unreasonable conduct, one no longer clings as firmly to one's comparative judgments as before.

5. The power of emptiness gradually increases; therefore one observes cause and effect ever more clearly and gains stronger judgment when matters arise.

6. Each day brings peaceful joy; one often feels light and at ease, without knowing why it is so.

7. Interests change from time to time: what was faint may grow intense, and what was ardent may grow cool. Yet in every case there is a detached state of mind, unlike either passivity or activity.

8. One's disposition grows more even day by day. Toward persons and things one formerly loved most, or affairs and persons one most detested, one feels a loosening of attachment, gradually approaching impartiality toward enemies and loved ones.

9. The body becomes increasingly healthy and vigorous; one is less prone to anger, and one's complexion becomes radiant.

10. One's memory differs from before: one seems readily to forget trivial matters, yet regarding matters requiring single-minded attention, one alone feels especially keen and sharp.

What is meant by nonduality? Comprehend 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 are illusory, arising from the coming together of conditions. Though one knows distinctions, one does not abide in the two aspects. This is called entering nonduality, also called non-discriminating wisdom.

What is meant by 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 bring forth function from essence, enter the gate of nonduality, and have samādhi and wisdom support each other. Direct perception is then perfected, the root has been attained, and the great matter has been understood. 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 emphatically express realization of its essence.

What is meant by the wondrous functioning of prajñā? In methods of Buddhist practice there are no more than two crucial points. First, without eyes, one can see nothing. Second, when daylight shines brightly, one sees the many colors. Ordinary people, stained by accumulated habits and long immersed in ignorance, are, before realizing the mind, like persons in a dark room. The things in the room are scattered and disordered; wishing to put them in order, they have no eyes and can see

nothing. Even if they exhaust great effort, everything remains disordered, and their labor is wasted.

Only by first opening the eye of wisdom and breaking through ignorance—like first switching on an electric light—can one see the many colors and then arrange each thing in turn, without wasting effort.

Although these two crucial points occur in an instant, they actually require an asaṃkhyeya kalpa. Thus, though ignorance is broken through, habitual tendencies remain; though the electric light is turned on, the room remains in disorder. One must use prajñā to sweep away habitual tendencies. This is like sorting out the various objects: each object differs, and the response to each differs. Hence there are skillful means and wondrous functions as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges—how could there be a fixed method? This wondrous functioning issues 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 meant by spontaneous functioning? Spontaneous functioning means remaining unchanged while according with conditions. Letting things take their natural course, one never regresses. It is like ice and snow on a mountaintop: when they meet the sun, they melt into springs and waterfalls, entering mountain gullies and small streams, where they may still wind, turn, and stagnate. Only upon flowing into a great river do they roll ceaselessly eastward and, sooner or later, finally enter the sea. This means that only those who are neither confused nor regressing may enjoy freedom in spontaneous functioning. Yet some indulge themselves without restraint, believing themselves unobstructed. They do not know that the very words “believing oneself” are a great obstruction. To claim attainment before attaining it becomes a great falsehood.

If practitioners possess verification of the foregoing points, they may assess themselves amid all kinds of human affairs and circumstances. The measure of their own strength is likewise verified thereby. If it is present, do not rejoice; if it is absent, do not worry. Since there is fundamentally no arising or ceasing and Buddha-nature is not lost, realization differs only in being early or late. Human birth is hard to obtain; one should resolve the matter early in this very life, lest one fall again. There is no other secret: simply maintain vigilant awareness at every moment and bring forth the wondrous functioning of prajñā. We shall now briefly indicate how the Mind-Seal Dharma may be verified when encountering circumstances.

I. Verification in Dealing with People

In dealing with people, there are no more than two paths: liking and disliking. A sage said, “Those who like someone yet know that person’s faults, and who dislike

someone yet know that person's virtues, are rare in the world." Everyone has a person they love most dearly and a person they detest most intensely. One is the object of my attachment, the other of my anger. Both attachment and anger belong to the self. Because of self-love, one clings to these two views. Now that one practices, one should break through these discriminating views and reflect inwardly, asking oneself the following:

(1) With regard to the person I love most dearly, can I lessen my thoughts of attachment? At first, one does not know that attachment itself is an affliction, called the suffering of passionate attachment. One even regards it as joyful and clings to it firmly. A mother, for instance, fearing only that her child may not live long, worries all day without recognizing her suffering. Later, one knows attachment to be 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, but ideals and facts are hard to reconcile, and one remains unable to break through attachment. Then one sees that the Dharma can break through it: principle and phenomena become one, and one can realize this amid affairs without the mind being moved. Only then is the suffering of passionate attachment truly cut off, and this may be accepted as verification.

(2) With regard to the person I detest most, can I lessen my hatred and aversion? Proceed step by step as above. For example: first, can I refrain from recalling past wrongs? Second, can I forgive that person—and forgive without forcing myself? Third, can I recognize that person's strengths? Fourth, can I arouse the resolve to liberate that person? Fifth, if that person again harms me, can I remain unmoved? If so, emotional and subjective views have loosened, and this may be accepted as verification.

(3) Suppose a person I love and a person I dislike are both before me, and a matter is entrusted to me: can I treat them equally? Can I refrain from ostentatiously displaying equality in order to gain a reputation?

(4) When dealing with beauty, the eminent and powerful, worldly enemies, violent people, rogues, petty people, or followers of non-Buddhist paths, can my state of mind remain at ease? This is genuine practice; investigate it carefully as verification.

II. Verification in Dealing with Things

Everyone has things they love most—perhaps tastes or customary habits. Without exception, they take what accords with their wishes as joy and what runs counter to their wishes as suffering. What they enjoy and suffer binds the mind.

To break through these two, one must rely solely on the illumination of wisdom. Its function should be applied precisely when attachment is strongest. Reflect instead that everything in the world is impermanent. What I love cannot ultimately be relied upon. Before long, there will be one of two separations: first, it may leave me—when it is destroyed or lost—and suffering will inevitably arise; second, I may leave it—when I die or become far removed from it—and suffering will likewise inevitably arise.

Knowing that it is ultimately impermanent, one should explain this to oneself at the very time attachment arises. The hardened mind will naturally loosen, and the blaze of greed will naturally be restrained.

Yet, knowing that it cannot be relied on for long, one may mistakenly give rise to biased views. For example, someone who loves a vase deeply may, because of that strong attachment, devise every possible way to preserve it. This gives rise to two attachments. The first is dead attachment, as when someone dies and uses a beloved object as a burial offering. The second is obstinate emptiness: clinging one-sidedly to emptiness, one destroys the object at the height of one's attachment so that it will not remain. This is not truly cutting off attachment. Knowing it will be difficult to keep, and fearing that another may obtain it, one destroys it first oneself. These are both biased views: one clings firmly, while the other tends toward annihilation. Both belong to delusion and folly.

The wise do not lay blame upon external things; rather, they examine the mind. Clearly knowing impermanence, they recognize that what exists today may still be loved without harm. For the sake of wisdom's illumination, they love without attachment. Without attachment, there is no bondage; this is called non-abiding. Thus, when something is gained, they do not abide in joy; when it is lost, they do not abide in suffering. Both being and nonbeing are relinquished; this is called according with liberation. When I encounter such circumstances, can I remain natural in both favorable and adverse conditions? Even if I cannot yet do so naturally, how strong is my resistance? This is what should be examined and verified through reflection.

III. Verification When Facing Adverse Circumstances

When people are in adverse circumstances, they experience various uneasinesses, all of which are sufferings produced by comparative judgment. Poverty, for example, is originally suffering; yet after becoming accustomed to it over a long time, one no longer feels it as suffering. This suffering is the adversity that arises when favorable conditions turn adverse. All such suffering belongs to self-generated deluded views. Broadly speaking, there are three hindrances: first, comparative concern about one's public image; second, unfamiliarity in one's daily living; and third, fear of the future. The more one makes comparisons, the more worries one has. The only means of

breaking through this suffering is samādhi and prajñā. By the power of samādhi and prajñā, one sees that this adversity arises as a reaction to favorable circumstances: favorable conditions are the cause, the reaction is adversity, and adversity is the result.

First, then, clarify the cause. See that what I cling to as favorable was never inherently existent; it is empty by virtue of conditions. What, then, is there to speak of as suffering or happiness? What now obstructs us are precisely the three hindrances listed above. Affairs cannot obstruct me; it is only my own mind that obstructs itself.

Now let us break through the matter of public image. Public image is nothing but vanity. Worldly people do not recognize truth and falsehood or distinguish right from wrong. They do not regard wrongdoing as a loss of face, but regard poverty as a loss of face. This is precisely the great delusion, great inversion, and great stupidity of the world.

Yet concern for public image is itself a preference and a normal human sentiment. The problem is failing to distinguish right from wrong, being enticed by vanity, and thereby acting perversely and contrary to principle; one does not know benefit from harm or distinguish what is weighty from what is slight. One seeks only temporary satisfaction in food, clothing, and housing, taking this for glory, and does not hesitate to sacrifice everything. From minor matters to major ones, killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and falsehood are committed under compulsion. This is why the world is never at peace.

The turning point between order and disorder lies in small causes with great results. If one does not join in the filth, one should take care not to be distressed over vain public image. The ancients said, “Better to be reviled by petty people than despised by noble people.” Such is the difference in weight between gain and loss.

When this is illuminated by wisdom, the matter of public image can naturally be released, without obstruction. Deluded hopes of greedy acquisition, together with evil thoughts and deeds that depart from proper conduct, will likewise cease. Moreover, peace of mind does not necessarily require seeking bodily ease. Whether one is at ease or ill at ease in daily living also turns upon the mind. As for a peaceful life, one should certainly make every effort to provide for it, but not compulsively demand that it be obtained.

Do not, however, greedily seek gain. When the mind is settled, the spirit is peaceful and vital energy flourishes; circumstances will also naturally come together, and fear of the future will naturally be dispelled. The future belongs to the future; I may wait until it arrives before speaking of it—it is not necessary to be anxious beforehand. In sum, the stronger one’s wisdom-power, the more spaciously one can respond. This

in turn verifies the depth or shallowness of one's practice and is an inward verification in the 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 beforehand; they are bound by results without knowing how to free themselves. They repeatedly create causes and receive result upon result, 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 the happiness and comfort immediately before them. 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 agreeable external conditions. The attachment to dharmas that I myself take to be right is precisely the most firm and secure favorable circumstance. If one can resolutely relinquish it and realize it as empty, one is not far from the Way. The most difficult favorable circumstances to break through are:

(1) The pension obtained through toil and hardship in one's old age.

(2) Rich and savory foods one enjoys.

(3) Public praise and praise given to one's face.

(4) The merit and virtue one has performed.

(5) Affection and pleasure between men and women—this is the root of birth and death.

(6) An unwavering view of self, or a view of biased emptiness.

(7) The exceptional states that practitioners believe they have attained.

Of the foregoing items, realization of emptiness is required to break through the first through fifth; emptying even emptiness is required to break through the sixth; and the power of the Unfailing Lasso is required to break through the seventh. To realize emptiness means to realize that everything is empty, thereby breaking through attachment to existence. Emptying emptiness means emptying that which has been taken as empty, for even realization is illusory and is not yet ultimate.

The Unfailing Lasso means realizing and knowing that all is originally empty, without distinguishing emptiness from existence; one does not cling to the two extremes, does not establish a middle way, and enters the state of unobstructed nonduality.

No one without great strength can reach this. When favorable circumstances are examined in this way, they are themselves adverse circumstances. From this, one knows that favorable and adverse are nondual. Emptiness of persons is easy, but emptiness of dharmas is difficult; understanding in principle is easy, but realizing it in practice is difficult.

What is difficult is reversing accumulated habits. Practitioners should not shrink back because they fear difficulty. The course of practice does not go beyond two dharmas: first, arousing the resolve; once the resolve is aroused, entry into the Way is not far off. Second, awakening; once awakened, the root is clearly understood and there is no further regression.

Therefore, after arousing the resolve, only by seeking awakening is there a practical method; after awakening, only by removing habitual tendencies is there a practical method. Having a method is itself accomplishment; it is only a matter of time.

It is like being in a dark room and never seeing what is inside. Though one may feel about by touch, it is of no use. Once the electric light is switched on, one sees all kinds of things. Even if it is switched off again and darkness returns, what one has seen is never forgotten or lost; thus there is no regression.

Thus it is said that at the first arousing of the resolve one immediately becomes a Buddha. Yet this is not what is meant for people of inferior wisdom and dull faculties. Here lies the difficulty of studying Buddhism; here also lies why it is not easily believed and why people are unwilling to undertake it. As for those unwilling to undertake it, this is certainly because their samādhi and prajñā are insufficient; it is also because their merit and virtue are too shallow for them to encounter the instruction of a good spiritual friend, and thus their faith has no means of being awakened.

Training the mind through circumstances is divided into the two avenues of favorable and adverse conditions. These are the circumstances of hatred and love spoken of in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment; arising from conditions based on the notion of self, they become the eight worldly winds. The eight worldly winds are gain and loss, defamation and praise, acclaim and ridicule, suffering and pleasure. Practitioners in the world train only half of them. They pay great attention to their habitual tendencies amid the four adversities of loss, defamation, ridicule, and suffering, yet often neglect the four favorable conditions of gain, praise, acclaim, and pleasure. Why? Because the fundamental root of greed for personal gain has not been removed, and they further cling to the view of arduous practice, without being able to perfect its meaning.

V. Verification When Arousing Compassion

Compassion, great compassion, and bodhicitta are three distinct meanings that people often confuse. Compassion still does not depart from self-love; it places undue emphasis on results while forgetting causes, because its view is limited. The benevolence of a woman—indulgent and doting affection—is an example.

Great compassion, by contrast, places the greatest emphasis on causes. It thoroughly understands before and after, and penetrates cause and effect. It does not arouse compassion merely because of the partial suffering presently seen. If A kills B, one with ordinary compassion pities B and hates A. One with great compassion pities A as well as B, and further considers C: first, knowing that the retribution for killing cycles endlessly; second, fearing that C may imitate it. This is called great loving-kindness and great compassion.

As for directly realizing the true aspect and thoroughly penetrating 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 great bodhicitta. It is not like the worldly view that takes bodhicitta to be compassion, as though there were truly some thing that could be aroused.

Therefore, to arouse bodhicitta means to arouse the resolve to realize the pure emptiness of the true aspect. The essence of this bodhicitta is unmoving. Although all appearances of good and evil illusorily arise and cease, the essence of awareness is not stirred 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 all kinds of suffering circumstances, what scope of mind do they bring forth, and what are the characteristics of its movement? The greater one's scope of mind, the less one's clinging mind must be. To abide is to enter comparative judgment, and direct awareness cannot then be complete. Non-abiding is nondefilement. To abide nowhere and remain undefiled amid all circumstances—even in thoughts of seeking to transcend birth and death and attain nirvāṇa—is the mark of true bodhicitta. Therefore it is said: rely on great compassion to arouse bodhicitta.

VI. Verification in Play

In the Lesser Vehicle teachings, 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, yet it does not discard them either. Since all dharmas are Buddha-Dharma—neither dharma nor non-dharma—it enters accordance with nonduality. Nothing is established, and thus dharmas may be

transformed into wondrous functioning. The verse by which the Buddha transmitted the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye says: “The Dharma is originally dharma without dharma; what is without dharma is also dharma. Now, as I transmit the dharma without dharma, when have dharmas ever been dharma?”

Yet when have they ever not been dharma? In recent times, few practitioners understand skillful means. They often divide proper practice and play into two separate matters, regarding the one as absolutely good and the other as absolutely evil; consequently, they see them as heaven and hell.

They do not know that circumstances themselves are neither good nor evil. Where there is bondage, everything is evil; where there is liberation, everything is good. Yet even liberation is not established, and good and evil are likewise unbound. This is called the supreme good, namely true liberation. One should examine the mind and should not blame circumstances. Dharma has no fixed dharma; medicine is prescribed according to the illness. The medicine I use is administered to those whose condition it suits; it is not something everyone may take indiscriminately.

People often boast that they are empty, yet dare not test themselves against their ordinary preferences and accumulated habits. This can only be called restraint. To reject them and remain undefiled by them is not yet to be affirmed as true emptiness. When one’s practice has advanced, one must test oneself again, in order to verify the strength of one’s own capacity. Ask yourself what you can do, and then act accordingly; only thus can it be known whether it is truly so.

For example, suppose someone cannot be exposed to wind because of an illness and therefore seeks treatment from a physician. If that person never encounters wind again, how could one test whether the illness has been cured? Only after again facing wind and frost without the least fear can one truly be said to have recovered robust health.

Nowadays, some abandon food because of choking, or refuse medicine because of illness; this is certainly unreasonable. Yet when one’s practice has not reached maturity, it is equally unreasonable to insist that one must act in this way and thereby indulge oneself without restraint. This state of mind depends first on teacher and student, and second on one’s own awareness. Outsiders need not trouble themselves with compassionate anxiety. If, however, one indiscriminately rejects everything, allowing emotional views to govern and rashly judging right and wrong, it is like a physician cutting open a patient to treat a serious illness while others see only the bleeding and cannot bear it. How could such womanly benevolence 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.)

With respect to verification in matters of play, one should first practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. After completing the six mudrās and practicing a full hundred meditation sessions, one may, amid ordinary social engagements, use such circumstances to test one's meditative stability. Those who delight in barren and quiescent states and before long fall into annihilationism, or develop thoughts of world-weariness, should instead use this to remedy themselves. There is no fixed dharma here. It should be spoken of to those who understand; it is difficult to discuss with ordinary people.

The sūtra says, "Do not be startled, frightened, or afraid." One should train oneself in this. A bhikṣu who observes proper deportment will naturally have no such occasions. In former times, the Second Patriarch entered the samādhi of spontaneous play; when later people imitate him, it becomes an illness. In my foolish view, it is permissible only if one has the aspirations of Yi Yin.

A person's genuine disposition often reveals itself in play and gambling. If one can let go of what one loves most, that is true liberation. If one can turn what is intense into what is mild, that is true progress. If one can remain unstartled and unafraid, that is true equanimity. If one can look on as though seeing nothing, that is true understanding of emptiness. In all cases, one should seek living vitality.

VII. Verification When the Mind Is Free of Attachment

When the mind is tied to nothing, there are two possibilities: first, having nothing on which to rely; second, non-abiding. Having nothing on which to rely is like drifting aimlessly without a master: the mind has nowhere to rest, and, having nothing to do, one does not know what to do in any direction and suffers from a sense of tastelessness. This refers to an unmastered novice who has not undergone cultivation.

Non-abiding means that the mind is free from binding defilements and nothing is impossible. Essence and function are suchness and unmoving, like a bird flying through the sky: one cannot say that it leaves no trace, cannot definitely point to it as existent, and cannot rigidly cling to it as nonexistent. It is transcendently free and at ease. This refers to one who has already attained realization.

Yet this is different again. When practitioners reach the midway point, they are between these two states. At times they too feel masterless and do not know what to do. When the reaction sets in, they inevitably resent Heaven and blame others, grow weary of the Dharma, and hate themselves. At this time they are most easily shaken and confused. If someone says that a certain Dharma is especially swift and effective, or that a certain teacher's attainment is profound and that he is worthy to be one's teacher, they unconsciously shift with other people's opinions. They do not realize that there is no teacher whom they do not seek to follow,

and no Dharma that they do not seek. Though this is greed for too much, it may not immediately be greatly harmful. Yet because the mind lacks mastery and they seek results too urgently, they finally come to understand every teaching but accomplish nothing. In ordinary times, their afflictions remain as before; at the time of death, they are 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 of laziness is non-attachment. This shows that one's resolve is not earnest, or that one considers oneself right and simply lets things go; this too is drifting. Spontaneous functioning and drifting may seem alike, but they differ. In the former, the great matter has already been resolved and one has become continuous and undivided; one does not let go in any circumstance. It comes naturally: one is not moved by circumstances and remains unchanged while according with conditions. Thus spontaneous functioning is possible. In the latter, the fundamental matter has not been clarified; one is turned by circumstances and lacks self-mastery. This is called drifting. In such places, arrogance easily arises. Practitioners must be constantly 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 filled with cotton, wood, gasoline, and other inflammable materials: if fireworks are set off inside, it cannot fail to burn. This is naturally dangerous. Even if but a single spark falls within, in time the whole will burn together. These two matters must not rashly be distinguished as major and minor. It is also like getting sand in one's eyes: one is then confused. Whether it is sand, powder, pearls, or fragments of jade, how does the confusion differ?

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 unclean. Only when the soap is gone and the water has dried can it be called truly clean.

Now we borrow the Buddhadharma to gather in the mind. Before one is free from deliberate effort, one naturally cannot discard the Dharma. But if one rigidly clings to it as real, how is this different from removing the dirt but not the soap, or removing the soap but not the water? Is this not delusion? Therefore, although nothing need be discarded, one must not become attached to anything.

The mind contains the three poisons, like setting off fireworks and burning oneself. But if there is even a view of Buddha, a single spark of fire has fallen within. The Buddha himself teaches the Dharma to set the fire, and he also teaches the Dharma to put out the fire. He fears precisely that later people will not understand, but will merely set 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, in the end pure emptiness cannot be obtained. To let go at this most subtle and minute point is to be greatly free and at ease.

IX. Verification Concerning Views of Victory and Defeat

The mentality of victory and defeat is a sentient being's emotional view. Whatever the object of contention may be, people arbitrarily divide it into superior and inferior, not realizing that both are the same habitual tendency—and one of the most difficult habitual tendencies to remove.

During diligent practice, it is permissible to borrow this mentality a little for encouragement; but at the stage of verification, it must not remain. If self and others are posited, this is already wrong. Those who delight in winning are inevitably arrogant toward others; those arrogant toward others inevitably cling to self, and their minds lack equanimity. This is the most deeply rooted basis of birth and death and must be removed at once.

A person of genuine practice 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 feelings. In responding to those who come, such a person may deliberately display defeat—first, to test their desire for victory; second, to spare them distress; and further, to arouse their sense of doubt for investigation. Such people are then invisibly encompassed by this guidance. If they can awaken to it themselves, they will thereafter leap out of this circle; otherwise, they will sink in hell for a long time. The Earth Store 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 mental state naturally opens and brightens. By five or six hundred sessions, one experiences increasing peace and joy each day. People's capacities differ, so their verification differs somewhat. Let us briefly discuss what may be realized; there is no need to distinguish superiority and inferiority.

(1) One may suddenly attain ease and joy, a comfort truly beyond description, and repeatedly wish to obtain it again. Yet this seems to be only quiet ease; one has attained the essence but has not yet aroused 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 affairs. This is gradually entering the state of great compassion and ease; function has already arisen.

(3) This joy gradually comes to seem plain. There is no mind that seeks victory and no mind of attainment. Instead, one enters emptiness and undifferentiated wholeness, while the true essence fills within. This is gradually entering the state of quiescent-extinction ease.

(4) Having passed through these three kinds of ease, one must undergo countless reactions in between. Even accumulated old habits may all emerge at once. This is because one's earlier practice was suppressive. Those who do not understand call it regression, but in fact the work of moving things out is at its busiest: all old defilements are being swept out of the house. This is good, not bad. If one again cherishes them and keeps them, that is a great mistake.

(5) One may suddenly enjoy playing with words and composing verses, or enjoy arguing at length with others. These too are seeds among old defilements. If they are somewhat better, once they have been moved out, there is no need to cherish them again.

(6) One may suddenly pass through a period of weeping bitterly. There are two states: one is fear of birth and death, or fear that one will not make it in this life; the other arises unexpectedly, and tears flow from extreme joy. Though somewhat different, these too are merely seeds turned out and finished.

(7) One may suddenly see that mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters. One may also see all sorts of faults in others, considering nothing right except this Dharma. This is precisely when one has gone deeply in but has not yet turned around. If one undergoes another reversal, the light of equanimous wisdom 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 it. Such a habit arises wholly 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 has not dared to take responsibility and one's power of resolve is weak; hence this doubt arises.

(10) One may suddenly become eloquent and unrestrained in speech, yet before long recognize for oneself that what one previously said was wrong. This is because the power of wisdom is still insufficient and one's assessment has not been

comprehensive, so there is a lack of complete clarity. Nevertheless, from then on one improves daily.

(11) One may feel that each month brings a month's progress and each day brings a day's difference, without knowing why it is so.

(12) Fear does not easily arise, because the mind of gain and loss has grown faint.

(13) The speed or slowness of contemplative awareness depends on the opposition of mind and circumstances. Without awareness, there is no transformation; without transformation, there is no emptiness. Its strength gradually increases in the following sequence:

(1) One first encounters a circumstance and then brings forth awareness, but must exert oneself fully to raise it.

(2) One encounters a circumstance and then brings forth awareness. Although awareness comes afterward, one need not exert effort to raise it.

(3) Upon encountering a circumstance, one immediately knows to bring forth awareness. There is a slight sequence, but one has not yet gone beyond knowing.

(4) Upon encountering a circumstance, one immediately illuminates it; both arise at the same time.

(5) Awareness comes first, as though the circumstance were afterward, though at times awareness is forgotten.

(6) Circumstances follow the mind's illumination; awareness is always in the forefront, though one still attends to awareness itself. (The foregoing belong to the stage of deliberate effort.)

(7) One does not know that there is illumination, yet has not departed from illumination. One clearly knows that circumstances are present, yet originally there is no obstruction.

(8) Ever quiescent, ever illuminating.

Practitioners should ask themselves which position they occupy.

(14) One may suddenly become arrogant, look down on later students, resent those who are rigid and cannot change, or indulge in literary play and compose verses. All these are seeds of habitual tendencies from past lives. Whoever one may be, one must pass through this process. Worldly people call it wild Chan. If one can again earnestly cleanse oneself, one will naturally reach complete purity. Although one has

contracted this Chan illness, it is already not easy; how much greater is this than those who have received no news at all?

(15) Upon attaining a favorable state, one may give rise to various views. These views are naturally loftier than one's former views, and one delights in them and retains them, unwilling to let them go. In worldly affairs, these are fixed preconceptions; in the Buddhadharma, they are what one knows. Clinging to what one knows and not seeking the ultimate blocks the Way. This is an inevitable stage and also a verification when one's practice is halfway advanced. If it is not broken through, it turns into a serious illness.

XI. Verification When Reading Sūtras and Treatises

Before one's eye has opened, reading sūtras often leads one astray through the sūtras themselves. Not even a hundred years after the Buddha's passing, errors had already entered the sūtra texts. At that time Ānanda was already old. Seeing a boy misread a sūtra passage, he corrected the boy's error, but the boy would not listen. It was already thus then; how much more so today, especially among those who rigidly cling to textual criticism?

Therefore, if one values the words but not the meaning, no sūtra can be read. For example, in the two hundred and sixty characters of the Heart Sūtra, there are "no attainment" and "attainment"; those who do not understand their meaning take them as contradictory. The decline of the Buddhadharma in the latter age will certainly begin with textual criticism and excessive disputation, leaving later people with no way to begin. I can say this with certainty. Those of merit are turned into sinners—how lamentable!

When reading sūtras, one should occupy a transcendent standpoint: first understand the sūtra's purport, then comprehend its principles. Let the sūtra's purport not be obscured by theoretical reasoning, and let theoretical reasoning not be constrained by words; that is, do not let one's own mind be bound by sūtras and treatises. The Buddha's teaching is like prescribing medicine for an illness: it treats others' illnesses and was not spoken specifically for me. One may use it for reference, but should not directly take it for one's own use. Dead words should be given a living interpretation. Therefore it is said that the Tathāgata has nothing to teach.

There are two ways of reading the sūtras: before practice and after practice; the inner meaning differs in each case. When reading the sūtras, one should investigate what seems incomprehensible. The Diamond Sūtra says, "All Buddhas and their teachings arise from this sūtra." What sūtra is this? If they arise from the Diamond Sūtra, then from where does the Diamond Sūtra itself arise? The sūtra also says,

“You should know that this person is the Tathāgata.” At such points, whether one can decisively recognize and take this on determines the measure of one’s strength.

If later generations alter the Dharma spoken by the Buddha, they will fall into hell; this must be understood. Yet what the Buddha spoke is the meaning of the sūtras, not merely their wording. If the wording is incomplete, it may impair the meaning; this too must be clearly understood. Whether one falls into hell depends solely on whether one has altered the meaning. Yet there are too few in later ages who have cultivated and realized the Dharma. It is therefore better to retain the old wording. Unless one truly possesses such strength, one should not initiate such revisions, for fear that blind followers, finding no basis in textual research, will simply sever wording and meaning together, leaving only disconnected fragments. That would be a grave error.

12. Verification Regarding Habitual Defilements

There is nothing else to learning Buddhism: one simply changes one’s habitual tendencies and transforms one’s disposition. When the conditioning of one’s mental environment becomes habitual, it is called temperament; ordinary people call it one’s innate nature. As the 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 does not understand that this is not so.

Original nature is inherently without defilement. It cannot be ruined through defilement, nor can it be accomplished through nondefilement. It is like a drunken person, who is not in the slightest different from what he was before becoming drunk; there is only a moment of confusion. Yet he does not lose his human nature because of that confusion. When he sobers up, he is wholly intact. If one seeks the drunkenness and confusion, they cannot be found at all. From beginning to end, there is neither accomplishment nor ruin.

Thus we know that, ultimately, there is not a single deluded person in the world: every person is a Buddha, every person is awakened. Yet present drunkenness and confusion do exist. But because there is ultimately neither corruption nor admixture, these temporarily existing habitual tendencies are merely called illusory existence. Within this illusory existence, we provisionally posit degrees of depth and shallowness, 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. For the moment, verification may be made within these illusory appearances.

The habitual tendencies most easily removed lie in being straightforward and open: straightforwardness is without crookedness, and openness is without entanglement.

Those who are straightforward and open will find it easier to become Buddhas, for 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 assert themselves; those who assert themselves necessarily seek perfection; those who seek perfection necessarily make comparisons; those who make comparisons necessarily worry excessively; those who worry excessively necessarily become suspicious; those who are suspicious necessarily become deeply calculating; those who are deeply calculating necessarily become subtly crooked; those who are subtly crooked necessarily lack clarity; those who lack clarity necessarily become timid.

The timid necessarily become entangled; the entangled necessarily cling obstinately; those who cling obstinately are hard to transform; those hard to transform cannot attain liberation. Step by step they sink deeper, and their habitual defilements grow ever thicker. During life, they are unwilling to give away or loosen their hold on any object, affair, or view. At death, they enter the lower realms, and, through their own self-love and attachment, find it difficult to get out.

Why do people have all these faults? It is simply the error of not clearly understanding principle. Lack of clarity arises from failing to distinguish true from false; this failure arises from being unable to empty all possessions; this inability arises from a lack of wisdom; lack of wisdom arises from a lack of samādhi; lack of samādhi arises from lacking the Dharma; lacking the Dharma arises from lacking fortunate conditions; and lacking fortunate conditions arises from taking attachment to self as right, refusing with an open mind to accept others, and distancing oneself from spiritual friends. In the end, one sinks into decline.

If, in practice, one does not attend to one's own habitual tendencies, it is the same as never having practiced. Unless one removes fundamental ignorance, there is no way to deal with habitual tendencies, and one can never become a Buddha. If you wish to verify the speed or slowness of your practice, simply ask whether your disposition is straightforward and open or crooked and entangled. If you reflect on this, you should tremble without feeling cold. The sūtras say that one must transform a female body into a male body before becoming a Buddha. This refers to human disposition: it must turn from yin to yang, from crookedness to straightforwardness. "The straight mind is the place of practice." Straightforwardness is the undefiled empty mind; it has nothing to do with male or female. Therefore the sūtras say that the Buddhadharma is neither male nor female, yet it is not without male and female.

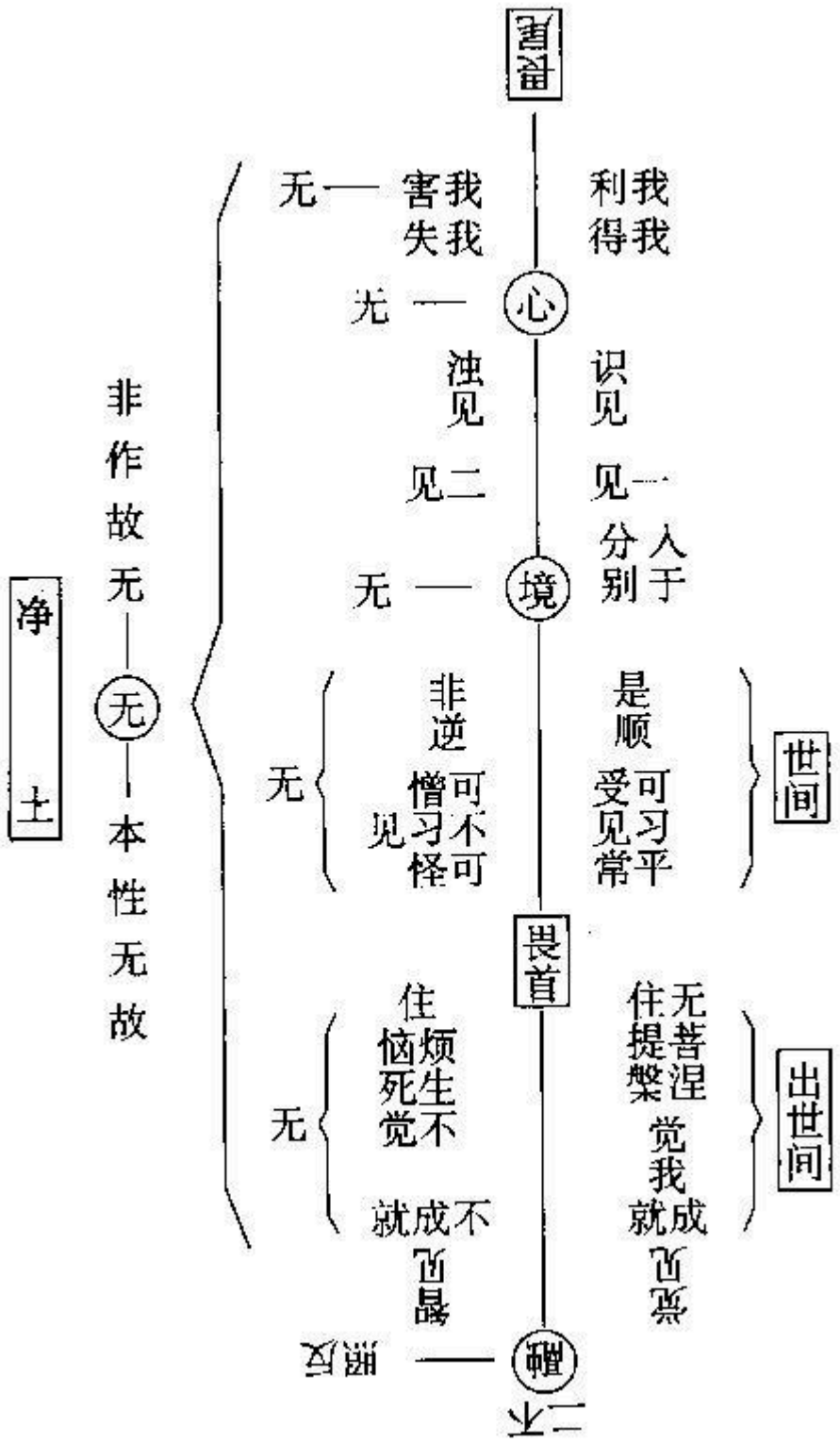
13. Verification in the Face of Extraordinary Events

The sūtras say, “Neither startled, terrified, nor afraid”; or, “Faith that does not turn back”; or, “One thought giving rise to pure faith.” Such statements can all be used to assess the depth or shallowness of a practitioner’s emotional views. Since beginningless time, sentient beings have clung to self. Outwardly, they grasp the coarse division of objects; from the false arising of the mark of self, they discriminate, and thus there arise the marks of self, person, sentient being, and life span. Inwardly, they experience the subtle division of mental states; from the false arising of the view of self, they give rise to pervasive discrimination, and thus there arise the views of self, person, sentient being, and life span.

Circumstances are not inherently favorable or adverse. Only when something exceeds the expectations of one’s view of self do doubt and fear arise. At their extreme, they result in confusion and madness. Tracing this back to its origin, there is the cause of hesitation, doubt, and disbelief. In truth, all of these are emotional views within the mark of self—illusory and unreal—which are gradually nurtured and formed. This is what the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment calls “nurturing this ignorance,” without realizing that one is nurturing it until it grows large.

Emotion is self-love, and views are attachment to self. Illness certainly arises from these, and illness is also removed through these. Anyone who considers strange events strange must simply have seen too little and be unable to adapt. If one regards them as ordinary, or understands them as nondual, one’s doubt naturally dissolves. Yet what dissolves this doubt still relies on views: the former view is consciousness, while the latter view is transformed into wisdom. First use wisdom to dismantle consciousness, and then use wisdom to dismantle wisdom.

Use illusion to extinguish illusion; when there is nothing left to extinguish, this is called the highest truth of no wisdom and no attainment. Going further, even truth is not established: “highest” 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 and freedom from delusion? I shall now uncover and explain the hidden origins of the mental processes that give rise to alarm and fear when confronting events.



In sum, breaking through this method of comparison does not lie outside of views. The first way is not to attend to it: with awakening foremost, one knows it to be originally illusory, and naturally does not attend to it; this is the strength of direct perception. The second is to use one view to break another, like using a sword to cut an object and then using the sword to cut the sword. This skillfully employs

deliberate effort as an expedient means. Let me offer two examples for investigation:

1. Customs. These are conventional views, among the hardest things to break through because the few cannot prevail over the many. Those who reform customs forcibly seek to break them, but this is not called breaking through them; it is merely changing one custom for another. One must first use wisdom to dispel others' delusion and confusion, without opposing them. Where no ultimate resolution is possible, one provisionally establishes the majority as a means of preserving social peace; this itself is the ultimate resolution. Yet within oneself, one never fails to know clearly and distinctly. One does not drift up and down with convention, but sees all circumstances as naturally thus, originally without anything remarkable to speak of. Then one enters the ground of pure awakening.

2. Unexpected events. Whenever an unexpected event occurs, regardless of whether it is large or small, we are shaken because we do not recognize impermanence, cling to it as real, and fail to distinguish the false from the true. Moreover, when something is not anticipated and we suddenly hear of it, fear often arises. Those with wisdom, before the event bears its result, thoroughly understand it at the causal stage and determine that it is ultimately impermanent, wholly belonging to arising and ceasing.

For example, when children are born, we know they are lovable. As parents, we naturally hope they will grow up and live long lives. Yet each has his or her own causes and conditions and allotted lifespan. At the feast where relatives and friends offer congratulations on the birth, the future scene of illness, death, and funeral has already been determined. What harm is there in this? People are thus, and things are thus as well. If one constantly maintains this wise contemplation and enters the gate of nonduality, then all future suffering may be completely given away and

relinquished. The wonder of the Buddhadharma is like receiving a vaccination: it first removes future fear, so that one is prepared in advance. Thus, upon suddenly hearing of an event, one is without fear. This remedies matters at the causal stage and is therefore more complete than worldly methods that remedy only the result.