

Essential Explanation of the Intermediate State

Compiled from Recordings of Master Yuanyin

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[Conclusion]

If this Dharma is practiced in accordance with its principles, those highly accomplished yogins who, at the time of death, are already able to transfer their consciousness for rebirth (phowa) need not enter the “intermediate state.” They can directly penetrate to the source and immediately realize the dharmakāya. Next are practitioners who have cultivated themselves and who, after the “intermediate state at the time of death,” can recognize the “clear light of dharmatā”; they too may soar directly upward.

Next, during the “intermediate state of dharmatā,” as the appearances of the “peaceful” and “wrathful” deities gradually arise over seven days, some may also attain liberation by recognizing even one of them, according to the convergence of conditions and differences in faculties. Since there are many perilous passages during the “intermediate state,” wherever one recognizes and awakens, one may be liberated there.

As for those of more sluggish and dull faculties, burdened by grave obstacles of evil karma, they descend into the “intermediate state of becoming” and wander alone, beset by doubt and fear. The types of instruction given there are more than one; they are like climbing a ladder. If one gains one rung but does not recognize it, one may recognize another rung and thereby attain liberation.

Moreover, for those with heavy karma and inferior faculties, who fail to recognize and are overwhelmed by terror and fear, there are still instructions for choosing a womb entrance, with step-by-step guidance that differs in each case. Even if one fails to recognize on one occasion, should one recognize on another and practice as taught, with the power of karmic affinity and contemplation, one may also be reborn in the higher realms and gain immeasurable merit and virtue.

Even those lower still, such as animals, may benefit from taking refuge in the Three Jewels. Once they have entered an evil realm, they may yet turn back and return to a human womb, obtaining a body endowed with leisure and favorable conditions

—“leisure” meaning the eight freedoms and “favorable conditions” meaning the ten endowments. In future lives, they may encounter lamas, spiritual masters, and good spiritual friends, keep their moral discipline intact, and attain liberation as they wish.

When this esoteric Dharma of instruction is applied during the “intermediate state of becoming,” it is precisely for sentient beings with wholesome karma, enabling them to continue their wholesome causes. It is like dredging an already blocked watercourse and clearing it so that the water may flow into its channel. Among all those whose sins are great and evil is extreme, none who hears this Dharma will be unable to attain liberation.

Why is this so? At that time, the supreme “peaceful” and “wrathful” deities all come to guide them, while demonic obstacles accompany them. As soon as they hear this Dharma, the appearances are transformed and they attain liberation. Further, because the deceased have already cast off their flesh-and-blood bodies and lost what they formerly relied upon, they are readily transformed.

During the “intermediate state,” although they may be wandering in any distant place, they possess subtle spiritual powers and can see. Upon hearing a summons, they immediately appear; upon being reminded, they immediately awaken. In an instant, they can redirect their minds and intentions. Therefore, this Dharma has exceedingly great benefit.

It is like a crossbow: once fired, it surely strikes the bull’s-eye. It is also like a huge log that a hundred people cannot lift: if it floats on water, then in but a moment it can travel freely at will and reach every place. Or it is like a fierce horse that is difficult to tame: when controlled with reins, it naturally becomes subdued.

Therefore, for all who have newly died, this Dharma should be repeatedly recited beside the corpse, if the corpse is present, until blood or yellow fluid flows from its nostrils. During this time, the corpse must not be moved. Furthermore, in accordance with the samaya of the yidam in whom the deceased had faith, perform the practice and dedicate the merit to the deceased. No living being may be killed.

Relatives and others must not wail or weep beside the corpse. Instead, they should do their utmost to perform Buddhist rites extensively for the deceased. In addition, other practices besides this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State may also be added and recited at the end of the text; this is even more excellent.

Furthermore, this Dharma should be regularly recited during one’s lifetime, and its words should be memorized thoroughly. Once one’s karmic recompense is exhausted and life comes to its end, when the signs indicating the time of death arise, if one still has the strength, one should recite it oneself and

contemplate the meaning of its words. If one's own strength fails, a companion should read aloud from this text, reciting in a clear voice and ensuring that every word and phrase is distinct. One will certainly attain liberation; there can be no doubt. Moreover, this Dharma

is a most profound instruction through which one need not practice meditative contemplation, but may attain liberation upon seeing the Dharma. It is also a most profound instruction for rescuing those burdened by grave karmic obstacles from narrow passages. Those with the affinity to encounter it must not forget these words, even if pursued by seven barking dogs. At the time of death, among the teachings spoken by all Buddhas and the powers of the Buddhas of the three times, there is none superior to this.

The Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State, called "Instructions on the Intermediate State That Liberate All Sentient Beings of One Essence," is complete.

May all be auspicious. Excellent!

Appendix

Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State

A Concise Visualization and Recitation Practice of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara, the Great Compassionate Protector

First visualize above your own head a white eight-petaled lotus, about one foot across. Upon it is a flat, white moon disc. Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara, the Yidam Protector, sits cross-legged upon the moon disc, about one foot high. He has two heads and four arms; his entire body is white. Above is the head of Amitābha Buddha, red in color.

The primary left and right hands are joined in prayer around a lotus. Of the second pair of hands, the left holds an open red-and-white lotus, and the right holds a crystal rosary. He wears a jeweled crown and is adorned with necklaces and ornaments.

At the Yidam's heart is a white eight-petaled lotus, about two inches across. Upon it is a white moon disc, in the center of which stands a white "sha" syllable. It is encircled by a mantra wheel, arranged from right to left, with each syllable upright and white. The mantra syllables proceed to the right, while the light turns to the left.

The practitioner then recites the mantra a number of times, at least 108 times, while visualizing the syllables of the mantra wheel emitting five-colored Buddha-light—white, blue, yellow, red, and green. The light expands ever further, filling the Buddha lands of the ten directions and making offerings to all Buddhas of the ten directions. The Buddhas of the ten directions likewise emit five-colored light in return. The two lights merge into one and dissolve into the “sha” syllable, the heart-seal of the Yidam.

Recite the mantra a number of times again, then visualize the “sha” syllable emitting five-colored light that universally illuminates the sentient beings of the six realms. The Buddhas of the ten directions likewise emit light, illuminating in return the sentient beings of the six realms. Through the merit of encountering this light, our karmic offenses are eliminated, and all immediately become the Yidam, no different from the Yidam. All emit great light in return; then this light again enters the Yidam’s “sha” syllable, from which white nectar flows forth.

It fills the Yidam’s entire body, then flows below the Yidam’s lotus seat and enters my whole body through the crown of my head. Black water flows from every pore of my body; this signifies the elimination of the karmic offenses I have accumulated since beginningless time. My whole body is thereby washed by the nectar, becoming luminous, pure, and white; my offenses are cleansed and my obscurations removed.

The Yidam praises me, saying that my obscurations have been purified and my karma eliminated. Great joy arises, and his body shrinks to the size of a grain of rice. Entering through the crown of my head, he descends into my heart. I then become the Yidam, radiant and unobstructed, endowed with all virtues.

Then, from the “sha” syllable at my heart, five-colored light shines forth to make offerings to the Buddhas of the ten directions. The Buddhas of the ten directions likewise emit light in return. The two lights merge into one and dissolve into the “sha” syllable in my own heart. Recite the mantra a number of times. From the “sha” syllable in my heart, great light shines forth, illuminating throughout the sentient beings of the six realms. The Buddhas of the ten directions likewise emit light, from which immeasurable and boundless nectar flows, eliminating the karmic offenses of the sentient beings of the six realms.

All become the Yidam and emit great light, illuminating my body in return. This light then dissolves into the “sha” syllable in my heart. Recite the mantra a number of times again, dedicate all merit to the sentient beings of the six realms, and conclude the practice. One should also maintain this visualization while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, and dedicate the merit to the peace and well-being of the nation and the peace of the world.

First: Great Compassion Heart Mantra

Oṃ, āḥ, sha, hūṃ.

Second: Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra

Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ



According to the foregoing ritual, this teaching was transmitted by Venerable Nona, “Chenglie Jiangcuo,” the twenty-fifth patriarch of the Nyingma school. It is best for practitioners to receive transmission from a lama master or acharya of the same lineage; this is most excellent. If that is not possible, one may respectfully face an image of Guru Padmasambhava, unroll and read the invocation, and visualize the Great Master as inseparable from the lineage of this practice and as transmitting this Dharma to oneself. Practicing accordingly is also relatively complete.

The minimum requirement is to recite this mantra 100,000 times. The Tibetan canon states: if one recites this mantra, the impoverished can obtain wealth and food, and women can obtain a male body.

Reciting it one to seven times can purify karmic obstacles accumulated over hundreds of billions of kalpas. Reciting it one hundred or one thousand times is equivalent to the merit and virtue of reciting the entire scriptural treasury. Reciting it ten thousand times can cut off the gates to birth and death in the three lower realms. Reciting it one million times leads to the stage of non-retrogression. Reciting it ten million times brings attainment of the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, nirmāṇakāya, and svabhāvakāya, realization of the bodhi body, and accomplishment.

When treating illness, empower pure water by reciting the mantra over it, and have the patient drink it. If one seeks worldly peace, happiness, and success, sincere prayer will fulfill every aspiration. Although this mantra has only six syllables, it is vast and complete, inexhaustible in wondrous function, and unsurpassed in majestic virtue. It is an extremely important practice within Esoteric Buddhism.

As an esoteric scripture says: “Oṃ represents the deva realm; ma represents the asura realm; ṇi represents the human realm; pa represents the animal realm; dme

represents the hungry-ghost realm; and hūṃ represents the hell realm.”

Reciting these six syllables can cut off saṃsāra and free one from the three realms. Moreover, the syllable om arises from bodhicitta and enters the initial stage of the ten faiths. Advancing from there, ma enters the stage of the ten abodes; ṇi, the stage of the ten practices; pa, the stage of the ten dedications; dme, the stage of the ten bhūmis; and hūṃ, the Vajra Vehicle, reaching the stage of great awakening. Reciting these six syllables enables one to transcend the ten bhūmis directly and attain unsurpassed awakening.

This is the profound meaning of the six ordinary realms as representations of Dharma. These six syllables are also the heart of all mantras, and are therefore called the Great Compassion Heart Mantra. Whether one has committed offenses or not, merely hearing this mantra can bring immediate liberation; how much more so if one sincerely seeks rebirth in the Pure Land. Thus, in assisting the deceased, one can certainly rely upon this merit for rebirth. Amitābha Buddha abides atop the Bodhisattva’s head, manifesting his guidance of sentient beings. Since this esoteric teaching repeatedly instructs that, if one has no Yidam, one should take the Great Compassionate Protector as one’s Yidam, this sacred image is respectfully placed at the beginning of the volume, together with this visualization and recitation practice, so that readers may have something upon which to rely.

The recorded teachings of Vajra Master Venerable Nona also state: “The Six-Syllable Mantra is the subtle heart-seal of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. It possesses immeasurable, boundless, and inconceivable merit and virtue and is praised by all Buddhas of the ten directions. To write the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra is equivalent to writing the Three Baskets of the Dharma treasure. To recite the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra purifies all karmic obstacles of the three times, liberates one from birth and death, and ultimately brings accomplishment.

“It can also cut off ignorance, open wisdom, subdue māras, cure illness, increase wealth, relieve poverty, dispel calamities, prolong life, rescue one from hundreds of thousands of hardships and sufferings, destroy greed, anger, and ignorance, close off the road of saṃsāra, and enable family members through the generations all to attain a higher rebirth. Even the insects in one’s stomach and intestines can attain the noble fruit. It further contains immeasurable samādhi dharma gates, and each day enables one to perfect the merit and virtue of the six pāramitās.

“All Vajra Dharma protectors and the eight classes of devas and nāgas joyfully protect and support one. Whatever Buddha land one wishes to be reborn in, one can fulfill that aspiration.

“Merit and virtue do not arise only through recitation, writing, and visualization. So long as this true mantra touches one’s body or hands, is heard by one’s ears, seen

by one's eyes, kept in one's home, written upon one's door, or displayed on banners and flags, any sentient being who comes into contact with this Dharma flavor gains the cause for liberation from birth and death, the virtue of jointly realizing the fruition of the path of bodhi, and the transformation of misfortune into good fortune and adversity into auspiciousness."

For all who have not yet become Buddhas, whatever they seek—long life, children, blessings, authority, the removal of dangers and disasters of earth, water, fire, wind, and space, or any other aspiration—will be fulfilled, each according to their wish, like a maṇi jewel. In sum, even if the Buddha's wisdom were to speak of the merit and virtue of the Six-Syllable Mantra, it could not exhaust it in kalpas. Even if one spoke only of the benefits recorded in the present Tibetan canon, it would take three years to finish."

Furthermore, for the merit and virtue of this mantra, one may read the Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Precious Ornamented King and thereby know its supreme excellence.

Mantra Wheel of the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra



The “sha” syllable is the heart-seal seed syllable of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. In older translations it is rendered as “héli”; it is a syllable formed from three combined sounds. Since people today are generally unfamiliar with Sanskrit, it is annotated

with the character “sha,” which may also be pronounced “xie.” In visualization, one should use the form indicated in parentheses



as the correct form.

Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Recite this text before performing the ritual.)

When a deceased person is at the point of death, one should first make an invocation and arouse vows. Before the Three Jewels, arrange actual offerings to the best of one's ability, or according to one's capacity visualize a vast ocean of offering clouds. Holding fine incense in one's hands, pay homage with utmost sincerity and make the following invocation and vows:

Buddhas and bodhisattvas, / Ever abiding in the ten directions, / Replete with great compassion, / With foreknowledge and sacred vision;

You are the refuge of sentient beings, / Never abandoning your vows of great compassion. / I pray that you descend and accept / These offerings sincerely presented.

All Compassionate Ones, / Whose wisdom and compassion, / All deeds and activities, / And mighty powers are inconceivable;

There is now one named [name], / Leaving this present world for that other realm, / Departing this world for another, / Having already cast off the body of flesh and blood.

Without support and without refuge, / Without rescue or assistance, / Amid the most extreme suffering, / Such are the appearances now arising.

The day is already late and the road exhausted; / Leaving home for a foreign land, / As though entering a realm of darkness, / Bewildered, one heads toward a precipice.

Terrified and frantic, one races through the wilderness, / Pursued by karmic force; / One may fall into boundless wastelands / Or drift upon the great ocean.

The body has no freedom, / Driven and tossed by the winds of karma; / One may enter the midst of battle / And be seized by cruel enemies.

There is nowhere to hide, / Or one encounters the messengers of Yama; / The demon guards are fully cruel, / And terrible beyond sight.

One undergoes all the sufferings of karmic result, / Dying and reviving without interval. / The strength to struggle is exhausted, / And one is tossed about in utter loneliness and misery.

From the perilous passage of the intermediate state, / Safely rescue and deliver them. / Alas, O Greatly Compassionate Ones, / May you not abandon your compassion and pity.

Do not forget your vast vows; / Enable them to escape all suffering. / I beseech the Buddhas and bodhisattvas: / May your compassionate light shine upon them.

Bestow the power of great compassion, / That they may be freed from the suffering of the intermediate state.

The foregoing verses should be solemnly and respectfully intoned by the ritual leader and recited after by the assembly three times. If only one person is performing the ritual, there is no need for responsive recitation.

Verses for Deliverance from the Perilous Passage of Fear in the Intermediate State
(Recite this text before performing the ritual.)

(I) Ever-abiding in the ten directions, / All Buddhas and bodhisattvas, /
Samantabhadra, peaceful and wrathful, / Holy assembly vast as the ocean;

Guru, Yidam, ḍākinīs, and Dharma protectors, / Descend into this place; / I earnestly pray that you listen / And grant your consent.

With utmost sincerity I take refuge / In the guru and ḍākinīs. / With your great compassionate hearts, / Kindly extend your guidance.

(II) Through delusion, one wanders in birth and death; / May hearing, contemplation, and cultivation / Illuminate reality as it is.

May the lineage masters guide me before; may the supreme mother ḍākinīs protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(III) When anger blazes and I wander in birth and death, may the light of great perfect mirror wisdom shine upon me.

May Vajrasattva guide me before; may Māmākī protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(IV) When pride blazes and I wander in birth and death, may the light of the wisdom of equality shine upon me.

May Ratnasambhava Tathāgata guide me before; may Buddha-Loanā protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(V) When desire blazes and I wander in birth and death, may the light of wondrous discerning wisdom shine upon me.

May Amitābha Buddha guide me before; may Pāṇḍaravāsīnī protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(VI) When jealousy blazes and I wander in birth and death, may the light of all-accomplishing wisdom shine upon me.

May Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata guide me before; may Tārā protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(VII) When ignorance blazes and I wander in birth and death, may the light of dharma-realm wisdom shine upon me.

May Vairocana guide me before; may Dhātṛīśvarī protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(VIII) When the five poisons blaze and I wander in birth and death, may the light of the union of the four wisdoms shine upon me.

May the Tathāgatas of the five families guide me before; may the mothers of the five families protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(IX) When deluded appearances blaze and I wander in birth and death, may the light that dispels fear shine upon me.

May all wrathful deities guide me before; may all wrathful mothers protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(X) When habitual tendencies blaze and I wander in birth and death, may the light of coemergent wisdom shine upon me.

May the heroic vidyādhara guide me before; may the assembly of ḍākinīs protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha-field of perfect awakening.

(XI) May the element of space not become my enemy; may I personally behold the blue-light Buddha-field.

May the element of water not become my enemy; may I personally behold the white-light Buddha-field.

May the element of earth not become my enemy; may I personally behold the yellow-light Buddha-field.

May the element of fire not become my enemy; may I personally behold the red-light Buddha-field.

May the element of wind not become my enemy; may I personally behold the green-light Buddha-field.

May all rainbow lights not become my enemy; may I personally behold all Buddha-fields.

May I know all sounds to be my own sounds; may I know all lights to be my own lights.

May I know all radiance to be my own radiance; may I myself recognize the appearances of the intermediate state.

May I directly realize the three kāyas amid the circumstances of the intermediate state.

The Six Root Verses of the Intermediate State (Recite this text before performing the ritual.)

(I) Alas! When the intermediate state of birth appears to me, may I forever abandon the idleness of a life without leisure.

May I hear, contemplate, and cultivate without distraction, realize true meaning, and directly realize the three kāyas with mind and circumstances clear and luminous.

Having once obtained this human body endowed with leisure and favorable conditions, may I not cast it away upon the path of delusion.

(II) Alas! When the intermediate state of dreams appears to me, may I forever abandon the heedlessness of ignorant, corpse-like sleep.

May I abide one-pointedly and without distraction in reality, safeguarding realization within dreams and cultivating illusory clear light.

May I not sleep long like an animal; may I cherish sleep and unite direct experience with practice.

(III) Alas! When the intermediate state of dhyāna appears to me, may I forever abandon every form of distraction and dullness.

May I abide without distraction or grasping in that which is free from extremes, and may I receive instruction in the two stages of generation and completion.

When all activities have ceased and I cultivate with one mind, may I not be carried away by the delusion of afflictions.

(IV) Alas! When the intermediate state at the time of death appears to me, may I forever abandon every craving, seeking, and attachment.

May I enter without distraction into the meaning of the clear instructions and freely realize for myself the vast, unborn expanse of space.

As I am about to leave this flesh-and-blood body of material obstruction, may I recognize that impermanent death has arrived.

(V) Alas! When the intermediate state of dharmatā appears to me, may I forever abandon fearful and terrifying appearances.

May I recognize all appearances as the wisdom of realization; may I know that these are the very appearances of the intermediate state.

At this moment, when great benefit hangs by a thread, why fear the peaceful and wrathful forms transformed by my own awareness?

(VI) Alas! When the intermediate state of becoming appears to me, may I maintain single-minded and wholehearted intention.

May I strive to continue the gathering of wholesome and excellent conditions; may I forever close the womb entrance and remember to turn back.

When pure appearances alone are needed, may I sever jealousy forever and cultivate the union of the master.

Death comes with no certainty and with extreme swiftness; it is futile to bear the burden of this life's meaningless deeds.

When great benefit is lost and resolve is unsteady, now I have already returned empty-handed.

The needed certainty lies in the supreme yidam practice. If I do not cultivate that supreme yidam practice now,

or if I do not abide at ease in the master's instructions personally proclaimed by great adepts,

I deceive myself—something I truly should not do. It is most important to understand these six root verses.

Prayer of Aspiration for Deliverance from Fear in the Intermediate State (Recite this text before performing the ritual.)

(I) When my karmic recompense is exhausted and I pass away, my relatives from this life will be unable to help me.

Wandering alone upon the path of the intermediate state, may the great compassionate power of the peaceful and wrathful deities

dispel the darkness of ignorance.

(II) Separated from beloved companions, I drift alone; the illusory appearances of my own awareness are about to arise.

May the compassionate power of all Buddhas come to my aid, so that the hardships of the intermediate state do not give rise to fear and terror.

(III) When the light of the five wisdoms appears at this time, may I recognize my original face without fear or dread.

When the forms of the peaceful and wrathful deities draw near, may I recognize the intermediate state and not be afraid.

(IV) If I am controlled by karmic force, may the great compassionate deities remove suffering and adversity.

When the natural sound of dharmatā resounds like thunder, may it be transformed into the sound of the six-syllable great mantra.

(V) If karma pursues me when I have no refuge or aid, may the yidam deity remove its suffering.

When karmic force pursues me and I have lost my protector, may I realize the samādhi of pure light.

(VI) When I arise by transformation in the intermediate state of becoming, may I not be led astray by Māras, even when I receive prophetic guidance.

When the power of whatever I think of comes to pass, may I not be confused or frightened by evil karma.

(VII) When the roars of fierce beasts arise, may they be transformed into the wondrous sound of the six-syllable Dharma.

When black winds, rain, and snow pursue me, may I realize the divine eye of wisdom-light.

(VIII) When I see beings of the same kind in the intermediate state, may I not give rise to jealousy and may I be reborn in a higher realm.

When intense affliction, hunger, and thirst arise, may I eliminate the sufferings of hunger, thirst, cold, and heat.

(IX) When I see my future parents united, may I contemplate them as the compassionate deity in union.

May I obtain mastery over birth for the benefit of others, and may I attain a light-body endowed with auspicious marks.

(X) If I have obtained an excellent rebirth, may I swiftly understand whatever I see and hear.

May all evil karma not follow after me, and may I diligently increase every merit and virtue.

(XI) In whatever place I am reborn, may I behold the yidam deity face-to-face in life after life.

Having been born, may I be able to speak and understand the great meaning, remember past lives without forgetfulness, and attain dhāraṇī.

(XII) May I know at once, merely by hearing, contemplating, or seeing, all qualities of greater, middling, and lesser degree.

May every place where I am reborn be auspicious, and may all sentient beings be at peace and happy.

(XIII) May I become just like the Buddhas and peaceful and wrathful deities in form, retinue, lifespan, and Buddha-field.

May I likewise attain their most excellent and beautiful names.

(XIV) Guru Padmasambhava of Uḍḍiyāna composed this prayer for deliverance from the fears of the intermediate state.

Until saṃsāra is emptied, may this profound and wondrous Dharma endure forever.

Invocation to the Dharmakāya Buddha Samantabhadra and Consort, and to the Lineage Masters, for Deliverance from Fear

To Samantabhadra, King of the Dharmakāya, in union with his consort, and to the Sixth Vajradhara: we invoke you to protect us from the fears of the intermediate state.

To the immeasurable assembly of peaceful and wrathful sambhogakāya deities, and to the guiding Vajrasattva: we invoke you to protect us from the fears of the intermediate state.

To the nirmāṇakāya master Ekajaṭī Vajra and the supremely wise Śrī Siṃha: we invoke you to protect us from the fears of the intermediate state.

To the vidyādhara Guru Padmasambhava and the king of the ocean of ḍākinī wisdom: we invoke you to protect us from the fears of the intermediate state.

To the treasure-revealer master Karma Lingpa and the great adept Sun-and-Moon Buddha: we invoke you to protect us from the fears of the intermediate state.

To the compassionate son, master of the Sun-and-Moon Dharma, and to Suru Candrarasmi: we invoke you to protect us from the fears of the intermediate state.

To the root master of profound kindness and to all lineage masters: we invoke you to protect us from the fears of the intermediate state.

Assembly of sacred beings of the yidam maṇḍala, and gatherings of all mother ḍākinīs, we invoke you to protect us from the terrors of the intermediate state.

Ocean of oath-bound protectors of the sacred teachings, vajra friends—brothers and sisters—we invoke you to protect us from the terrors of the intermediate state.

May all doubts in the intermediate state of birth be utterly dispelled; may we be freed from the illusory appearances of the intermediate state of dreams.

May we maintain the original face in the intermediate state of dhyāna; may attachment and longing be purified in the intermediate state at the time of death.

May we recognize for ourselves the intermediate state of dharmatā; may we not be held by grasping in the intermediate state of becoming.

The Nondual Invocation to Guru Padmasambhava

Dharmakāya Samantabhadra, the Sixth Vajradhara; our fundamental teacher, Vajrasattva, Bhagavān Śākyamuni, King of Sages;

Protector Amitāyus and Avalokiteśvara; before Guru Padmasambhava, inseparable from the two, we reverently invoke you.

The essential nature of body, the wondrous Mañjuśrī Yamāntaka; the essential nature of speech, the great and mighty voice of Hayagrīva;

The essential nature of mind, the true Heruka; before the Guru, the wish-fulfilling jewel, we reverently invoke you.

The glorious and victorious Heruka, radiant with virtues; the essential nature of karma, Vajra Youthful One;

The chief ḍākinī, mother of the aggregates, King of Perfect Completion; before the mighty great being adorned with a garland of skulls, we reverently invoke you.

Whose bodily form manifests illusorily as peaceful and wrathful deities; whose speech, in sound and melody, possesses the twelve branches;

Whose mind's thoughts are utterly lucid and all-pervading; before the chief ḍākinī and Guru, we reverently invoke you.

With body, you signify prophecies; with speech, you reveal the secret treasury; with mind, you entrust the mind-seal to fortunate disciples.

Out of compassion, you enjoined the Tibetans to commit it all to memory; before the most venerable great beneficent emanation, we invoke you.

Mindful of the profound kindness of the unsurpassed precious Guru, we pray that, as vowed, you will watch over us and gather us in.

In this evil age, we have no one but you upon whom to rely; we pray that the compassionate eyes of the Uḍḍiyāna emanation will look upon us.

May you bestow your power to avert the strife of this evil age, and grant the great blessing of the empowerment of wisdom.

May our capacity for ever-increasing experience, realization, and virtue be fulfilled, endowed with great strength to spread the teachings and benefit sentient beings,

So that, in this very body, we may directly realize the perfect state of Buddhahood.

The foregoing Nondual Invocation was personally proclaimed by Guru Padmasambhava and possesses exceedingly great power of blessing. This hymn was concealed in the Island of Karmic Oath-Bound Implements. It was later retrieved by the treasure revealer, the emanation Buddha Chökyi Dechen, and only then circulated in the world. In Kham and Tibet, it was originally regarded by Nyingma practitioners as a principal daily recitation; later, Vajra Master Kunga Lama of Western Kham brought it to inland China.

The Guru instructed: “Before any sādhana or sūtra, regardless of its kind, recite this hymn additionally. You will then receive the inconceivable power of blessing of the Great Master, enabling practitioners to attain realization swiftly.”

He further instructed: “When reciting this hymn, visualize yourself as the yidam. At the same time, visualize all sentient beings, enemies and loved ones gathered together, before you. Within a sphere of five-colored light appear the vast, originally pure buddhafield and the field of refuge. Light radiates from your own mind to invite the Buddhas of the ten directions, the root Guru, the great accomplished masters of India and Tibet, ḍākinīs, Dharma protectors, and all the assembly to gather together. Seated before them, with the three gates sincerely reverent, respectfully and faithfully make this aspiration: May all sentient beings be free from suffering and attain happiness, and accomplish unsurpassed Buddhahood.”

In order to gain such power to benefit sentient beings, I now aspire to resolve firmly to cultivate and realize the Buddhahood of the three-kāya Guru. Reflect further: in this degenerate age, if one wishes to attain such a supreme fruition, one can only invoke the blessings bestowed by the unsurpassed, greatly compassionate Guru Padmasambhava. As this hymn says, “In this evil age, we have no one but you upon

whom to rely.” Therefore, with sincere reverence and steadfast faith, recite this Nondual Invocation as set forth above.”

寂靜相尊唐卡



Introduction

Part One: Introduction

Today, we have the supreme auspicious affinity to study the Buddha-Dharma together with so many excellent and virtuous people. You must not underestimate yourselves, for all sentient beings possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous characteristics. As long as we arouse the resolve and practice the Dharma, recognize that all appearances in the world are false and unobtainable, cease pursuing them, turn our minds toward goodness, and liberate ourselves while liberating others, we are great bodhisattvas.

We often say that human birth is hard to obtain and the Buddha-Dharma hard to hear.

Indeed. Consider the countless sentient beings within the six directions and throughout the universe: how many obtain a human body? The beings born from wombs, eggs, moisture, and transformation are as numerous as the earth itself, while those who obtain a human body are as few as the soil beneath a fingernail—truly pitifully few. Yet insects and ants cover the ground everywhere, and the tiny creatures we commonly feed to fish are so numerous that one cannot know how many are caught in a single sweep of a net.

Thus, it is indeed true that human birth is hard to obtain. And how many of those who have obtained human birth are able to hear the Buddha-Dharma? Far fewer still.

Among all the people in the world, not many can hear the Buddha-Dharma. Even among those who can, still fewer hear sūtras of the definitive meaning of the Mahāyāna; and among those who hear the Mahāyāna Buddha-Dharma, fewer still arouse the resolve to practice diligently and realize their original nature. Most believers in Buddhism merely come into contact with its outer edges: they burn incense, bow before the Buddha, seek a little blessing, and plant a few wholesome roots. This can serve only as provisions for their future practice and realization of the Way.

Those who can truly understand the real meaning of the Buddha-Dharma and practice accordingly are exceedingly rare. The Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State, which we will discuss today, is the most secret of the secret teachings within Esoteric Buddhism. It is a secret Dharma treasure not lightly transmitted, a great Dharma through which one can attain accomplishment without first undergoing practice.

In the Pure Land school, the Chan school, and Esoteric Buddhism generally, one must practice Chan contemplation, sit in meditation, and enter samādhi before deluded thoughts can be stilled, one's original nature opened, and Buddha-nature directly seen. This Dharma does not require such practice. Once you understand what it means to attain Buddhahood and transcend birth and death, and receive

this secret instruction, you can attain liberation at the time of death. Therefore, it is the unsurpassed great Dharma, the most secret of the secret teachings.

That we are fortunate enough to hear this Dharma today is truly a blessing gained through wholesome roots planted over many lives and kalpas. Before expounding this Dharma, let us first look at “Background to the Translation” and the “Preface.” Having understood the course by which this Dharma has been transmitted and the basic knowledge necessary for practicing it, we will know its preciousness.

I. Background to the Translation

(I) Freedom from Suffering and Attainment of Happiness; The Three Kāyas and Four Wisdoms

We all live in this world: every day people are born, and every day people die. Some live for more than a hundred years; others live only a decade or so; still others die as soon as they are born. Though the length of a human life differs, it all passes in the blink of an eye.

Then where does human life come from, and where do we go after death? No one knows. Thus birth and death are a great matter. It was for this great matter of causes and conditions that the Buddha appeared in the world, to point out the way for us amid our confusion. He enables us to know where birth comes from and where death goes, to break through this baffling knot of doubt and solve this riddle.

Those without wisdom do not know where birth comes from or where death goes. They neither concern themselves with nor investigate this question. They think that being born into this world means merely dressing, eating, marrying, and having children, and so they muddle through an entire lifetime.

Long ago, Liang Qichao asked everyone this question: “What, after all, is the purpose of coming into this world?” Is it simply for you to dress and eat? Could it be that there is too much food and clothing in this world, with no one to eat or wear them, so you are called here to do so? Clearly not. Is it for you to marry, have children, and propagate future generations? If that were the sole purpose, one would be no different from maggots in a latrine—what meaning would there be in that? Clearly, that is not the case.

Then what is it for, after all? Yet the ignorant do not know and do not investigate. They simply come from a dream and return to a dream. Muddling through the decades in the blink of an eye—even to a hundred years—they pass an entire human life in a daze.

Among human beings, those who seek to investigate the truth of human life and the universe and break through the delusion of birth and death are indeed few.

Most people know only how to seek promotion and wealth, earn money, marry a wife, live a little more comfortably, and enjoy themselves; they are satisfied with this and never investigate the truth of human life and the universe or the value of human existence. Those with wisdom are unwilling to remain confused. They investigate: Where do we human beings ultimately come from? Where do we go after death? How did this universe come into being? Seeking a correct answer, they developed philosophy.

Many outstanding people, ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign, have investigated the origins of this world and of human life. Yet despite exhausting their ingenuity and mental powers, they have not obtained a true and correct answer. Some say it is mind-only; some say it is matter-only. Some speak of monism; others of dualism. But what is really the case? No true conclusion has been reached.

Only the Buddha can point out the way amid confusion, solve this riddle, and correctly tell us the origins of human life and the universe. That today we can hear this ultimate and definitive secret scripture of Mahāyāna Buddhism is truly unsurpassed good fortune.

This good fortune cannot compare with worldly prosperity. What is called worldly prosperity means somewhat higher status, somewhat greater income, and a somewhat more comfortable life. Yet no matter how well one lives, one cannot escape birth, old age, sickness, and death. When the time comes, one still goes naked and bare. No matter how much money one has, not a single cent can be taken along. Only after studying the Buddhadharma, understanding this truth, and understanding what human beings ultimately are, can one escape the trap of birth and death. This alone is the great good fortune of ultimate meaning.

When many intelligent people reach an impasse in their studies and cannot obtain an answer, they turn to religion to investigate whether they may find a true answer. "Where, after all, do human beings come from?" Different religions give different explanations. Christianity says, "They were created by God." Islam says, "They were created by Allah."

But if one investigates further: if God created us all, then who created God? There is no answer. Thus, only the Buddhadharma explains this thoroughly: it is not that one being created another. The Buddhadharma tells us that Buddha-nature has existed since beginningless time—"beginningless" means having no beginning.

What is this Buddha-nature? It is the capacity of our seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing; it is the functioning of seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing. When our

six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—meet the six sense objects—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas—conscious awareness arises.

Thus, the eyes see forms; the ears hear sounds; the nose smells fragrances and odors; the tongue tastes flavors; the body senses contact with the external environment; and the sixth consciousness, the brain, gives rise to awareness and discrimination. Therefore, mind pertains to knowing, body to awareness, eyes to seeing, ears to hearing, nose to smelling, and tongue to tasting. These are the functions of seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing. This is our intrinsic nature.

People cannot see this intrinsic nature, and so they think it does not exist. Yet this capacity is like electricity. When we connect the wires, install the light bulb, and turn on the switch, the lamp lights up. We cannot see the electricity, but the nerves of our brain are like electrical wires: they function by relying on this capacity.

If we cease to breathe—if the breath is cut off—the brain and its nerves remain, but they can no longer function. Therefore, when Chan practitioners cultivate, they investigate: “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” Who, after all, is reciting this Buddha’s name? It is you who recite it—but what do you call “you”? Do you call the body “you,” or do you call thought “you”?

This body is not you, because it is merely the house in which you dwell. Once Buddha-nature departs and leaves the body, your body can no longer recite. Nor is thought you, because thought is a reflection in the human brain of the objective external environment. Without an objective external environment, there would be no such thought.

If the body is not you, and thought is not you, then who are you, after all? Contemplate this huatou in your mind. A sense of doubt will arise and cut off your deluded thoughts. Precisely when subject and object both vanish, turn the light inward and see for yourself; then you will see this formless Buddha-nature. Though this Buddha-nature is formless, it has function.

It still exists! Thus, after all our investigation, we find that what the Buddhadharma teaches is the truth. Why? Because it must be directly realized before one can truly benefit from it.

When we cultivate until deluded thinking and deluded thoughts have ceased—when the preceding thought has ended and the following thought has not yet arisen, in true emptiness—it is utterly bare, unstained by a single speck of dust, yet clear and distinct, unlike wood or stone. What is this “clear and distinct” awareness? It is our faculty of awareness, our capacity capable of all things. It is also the Buddha-nature that everyone constantly seeks to realize the mind and

see one's true nature. If we focus on this, awaken to it, and experience it, and can then temper ourselves amid circumstances—neither delighting in favorable circumstances nor becoming irritated by adverse ones, and having no attachment, love, anger, grasping, or rejecting in response to circumstances—this is called “awakening”! Because the Buddhadharma has methods that enable us to break open the knot of delusion and personally see the intrinsic nature of human life and the universe, it is the only correct guide for human life.

Buddhism is non-theistic and differs from what other religions teach. Buddhism does not say that God or a deity creates and controls us; rather, we control ourselves and create ourselves. Therefore, it is said, “Everything is created by mind alone.” Other religions, however, posit a supreme true God or Lord who controls you.

Some who do not understand say: “Does Buddhism not say that after people die there are the Ten Courts of Yama? Yama Kings judge you; does that not mean that the Yama Kings control and dispose of you?” No. That is a misunderstanding. In fact, we control ourselves. Those who create wholesome karma receive wholesome results and go to good places.

Those who create unwholesome karma must undergo unwholesome retribution and go to bad and painful places. It is not the Yama Kings who control them. The Yama Kings are like our public-security bureau. For example, if we have done nothing unlawful, can the public-security bureau interfere with us? But if you commit a crime, it will not be lenient with you: it will arrest you, try you, and sentence you to prison.

Therefore, everything is controlled by oneself; no one else controls you. We say that by performing the ten wholesome acts one is reborn in heaven, while by being full of greed, anger, and ignorance and creating evil karma, one falls into hell. All this is created by oneself. The ten Dharma realms are but one mind.

The ten Dharma realms refer to the four noble realms and the six ordinary realms. The four noble realms are Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and arhats; the six ordinary realms are devas, humans, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. These ten Dharma realms are all created by our one mind.

What Buddhism calls “cause and effect and rebirth” tells us to understand the causal law that “plant melons and you reap melons; plant beans and you reap beans.” We should fear karmic retribution and, first of all, refrain from creating karma at the causal stage. Ordinary beings do not fear creating causes; they fear only receiving the results. Bodhisattvas fear only creating causes. If they do not create causes, they will not receive results.

For example, if we commit an unlawful act now, we create an unwholesome cause, and we will certainly face a lawsuit, trial, and imprisonment. If we have done no wrong, we will not undergo this unwholesome result.

Ordinary beings are not like this. They fear only the results and do not fear creating causes. In order to achieve their aims of enjoyment, they create evil karma by any means, and so society has many unlawful acts. Consequently, there are legal means of punishment such as criminal law and civil law.

In fact, it is precisely because people cling to this physical body as the self that they seek to indulge in enjoyment. Especially in today's world, where science is advanced and material goods are abundant, there are many enjoyments. People's material desires swell and are impossible to satisfy: having this, they still want that. Everything is high consumption.

When they do not have the necessary income, they cannot avoid doing unlawful things. Thus, unlawful incidents arise one after another in society, all for this reason.

Because we mistakenly take this physical body to be the self, we create the causes of karma and give rise to deluded feelings. Then, because of these false feelings and views, we create karma in accordance with our feelings and undergo retribution in accordance with our karma, revolving endlessly through birth and death. This shows that the Buddhist teaching of "cause and effect and cyclic rebirth" is an incontrovertible truth. Like the "law of causality" discovered by scientists, it is real, trustworthy, and incontrovertible.

When Buddhism speaks of the swift passage of impermanence, it tells us that human life is like morning dew—very brief indeed. Living to a hundred may seem like longevity, but in fact it passes in the blink of an eye. We are now already several decades old, yet when we look back, it seems as though those earlier events happened only yesterday. Several decades have passed in an instant. Thus, time passes very quickly.

The Buddha sees us as though we are born in the morning and die at night. A hundred years in our world is, to heavenly beings, only a brief moment. If we were in Tuṣita Heaven, one day there would equal more than three hundred years here.

Can a person here live for four hundred years? Even if such a person exists, it would be very rare; yet in their view, that would amount to only one day. Human life is brief, and we shall soon depart. What should we do? If we do not diligently apply ourselves to spiritual practice in the hope of transcending birth and death, can we say that we have done justice to this one passage through the world? The Buddha's many admonitory words all serve this purpose.

They sound an alarm for us, urging us to practice diligently without delay and not miss this precious human life. Therefore, do not cling any longer to this physical body. This physical body is not our true self; it is merely the house in which we dwell. The true person is our Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is the capacity for seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing that we discussed just now.

We must protect this capacity from being stained by adventitious defilements. These adventitious defilements are the “forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas” that we discussed just now. “Adventitious dust” is like dust: it is not the master and is therefore called a guest. If we become attached to these things, seeking enjoyment and resorting to any means to satisfy our desires, then we are in trouble.

Thus, Buddhism requires us to understand the principles of “cause and effect and cyclic rebirth” and “the swift passage of impermanence,” so that we may transform our lives, become genuine human beings, become persons of true character, and then transcend the human state to become Buddhas.

Human life does not last long. We must quickly let go and not chase after external objects. Let us return to the original pure realm—utterly bare, naked, and spotless—so that we do not suffer the pains of birth-and-death and cyclic rebirth in vain. We are now all caught in inverted deluded thoughts without realizing it.

After the Buddha awakened to the Way upon seeing the morning star on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, he said: “How wondrous! How wondrous! All sentient beings possess the Tathāgata’s wisdom and virtuous characteristics.” Why, then, do they not see this for themselves? It is because deluded thoughts, inversion, and attachment obscure their original nature. We are now all amid deluded thoughts, inversion, and attachment. The Buddha exhorts us to let go of everything, as though striking us on the head with a stick and telling us to awaken quickly from our dream.

The course of a human life is one unbroken succession of suffering. As for the suffering of birth, aging, illness, and death, we may have forgotten the suffering of birth. But look at how infants are born: they all cry out “Waa!”; none comes into the world laughing.

Why do they not laugh? While in the mother’s womb, they are warm, their skin is very tender, and they do not come into contact with external conditions. As soon as they emerge from the womb, the stimulation of cold air causes pain like being pricked by needles.

In the womb, the child originally has its head upward. When it is about to be born, its head must first turn downward; it is turned upside down and squeezed out through the mother’s pelvis, as though being forced through a narrow cleft between

two great mountains. The child suffers greatly and therefore emerges crying. Children suffer, and adults suffer as well.

In the delivery room, mothers also cry out in pain, as though they are dying. Old age is suffering too: the eyes grow dim and cannot see; the ears grow deaf and cannot hear clearly; the teeth fall out, and one cannot chew food. As the body ages and one's strength declines, one must depend on others for care and loses freedom and ease. Once illness arises, the suffering is even greater.

Everyone knows that even a minor toothache can be unbearably painful. As the saying goes, "A toothache is not an illness, but when it hurts, it can cost you your life!" How much more so with serious illnesses. If one develops cancer or the like, the pain is even more unbearable. I once saw someone with cancer who, in the end, rolled all over the bed in agony. Thus, illness is one of life's greatest sufferings.

When we speak of death, the suffering is still greater. At death, the four great elements disperse; it is like stripping the shell from a living turtle, an agony beyond endurance. The human body is formed by the coming together of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. At death, the earth element is the first to disperse.

When the earth element disperses, it feels as though Mount Tai were pressing upon the body: one is so heavy and oppressed that one cannot catch one's breath, and family members cannot move the person. When the water element disperses, it feels as though one's whole body were immersed in water, damp and unbearably uncomfortable. When the fire element disperses, the whole body burns with fever; the two cheekbones of a dying person become flushed red, which is a sign of the dispersal of the fire element. The dispersal of the wind element is more painful still.

It is like a great wind blowing away the surface of the earth layer by layer. The patient feels as though flesh and skin were being sliced away layer by layer with a knife. Later, when breathing is about to cease, there is only exhalation and no inhalation. A glob of phlegm from deep within is lodged in the throat, preventing breathing; when this phlegm finally drops, the breath ceases. The suffering is immense.

Thus, throughout a person's life, birth, aging, illness, and death are all very painful. Of course, there are other sufferings as well, such as the suffering of not obtaining what one seeks, the suffering of separation from those one loves, and the suffering of meeting those one hates. We shall not discuss them here.

Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng said: "Some people study Buddhism solely because they fear birth and death. There is another kind of person who arouses the great resolve to study Buddhism and realizes that sentient beings in the six realms were

all our parents in past lives. They sink in the sea of suffering, their heads repeatedly rising above and falling below the water, with no prospect of escape.”

“Therefore, they rely on Mahāyāna teachings and the spirit of selflessness: through contemplating impermanence, they transcend birth and death; further, they give rise to the four immeasurables, cultivate the six perfections and myriad practices, follow the bodhisattva path, and vow that all sentient beings may become Buddhas.” This explains that there are many different reasons for arousing the resolve to study Buddhism.

Some study Buddhism because they fear birth and death. They are alive now, but will suffer when they die; after death, where will they go? They do not know, so they come to study Buddhism in search of a destination. For example, those who now practice in the Pure Land school may be reborn in the Western Pure Land in the future. Others arouse the resolve in order to liberate sentient beings.

Thus, Buddhism distinguishes five vehicles. The first is the vehicle of ordinary beings: they know only to do good and avoid evil, and neither seek to transcend birth and death nor know how to do so.

For example, many people visit temples on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month to burn incense and pay homage to the Buddha. They do not truly understand what the Buddhadharma is, nor do they know how to transcend birth and death. They have merely touched the edge of the Buddhadharma. This is called the vehicle of ordinary beings, also called the human and deva vehicle.

The second is the arhat vehicle. Some cultivate solely in order to transcend birth and death for themselves. Knowing that birth and death are fearsome and that impermanence passes swiftly, they arouse the resolve to cultivate so as to escape the cycle of rebirth in the six realms as quickly as possible. This is the arhat vehicle.

The third is the pratyekabuddha vehicle, or vehicle of the solitary awakened ones. Like arhats, they are concerned only with their own liberation, but they are more perceptive than arhats: seeing a small sign, they understand what is significant; through causes, they awaken to results. Therefore, they practice the twelve links of dependent origination, unlike arhats, who investigate causes from results through the Dharma gate of the Four Noble Truths.

When no Buddha is in the world, they see flowers bloom and fall, awaken to emptiness, suffering, and impermanence, and realize the Way. Thus, they are slightly superior to arhats.

The fourth is the bodhisattva vehicle, whose practitioners arouse the resolve to cultivate in order to liberate sentient beings. Seeing that people throughout the

world suffer birth, aging, illness, and death, they first resolve to cultivate and attain liberation themselves, so that they may then liberate others.

For example, if someone falls into the Huangpu River and you want to save them but cannot swim yourself, how can you save them? You must first learn to swim and then learn lifesaving techniques. Simply knowing how to swim is not enough: when you try to rescue the person, they may cling to you desperately, and then you yourself will be unable to swim.

Therefore, the Buddhadharma teaches the six perfections and myriad practices, explaining how to liberate sentient beings and enabling people to understand the methods of helping others across. First liberate oneself, then liberate others: this is the bodhisattva vehicle. The fifth is the Buddha vehicle. It recognizes that all sentient beings possess this undefiled wisdom-nature, no different from that of the Buddha. There is no difference between them and Śākyamuni Buddha, Medicine Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, and the like.

It is only because of deluded thoughts and attachment that we mistakenly take this physical body to be the self and do not know that this capacity for awareness is our dharmakāya. We should now turn back without delay, let go of everything, restore our own inherent wisdom and virtuous characteristics, and perfect the fruition of Buddhahood. This is the Buddha vehicle. Although Buddhism is said to distinguish five vehicles, in truth they are all created by one mind; it is only because people differ in the degree of their aspiration that Buddhism is divided into five vehicles.

The Buddha teaches us that there is only the One True Dharma Realm: Buddha-nature is real, while everything else is false and impermanent. The earth on which we dwell is no exception. It cycles through arising, abiding, decay, and emptiness in four kalpas. Each of arising, abiding, decay, and emptiness is a middle kalpa, and each middle kalpa consists of twenty small kalpas.

Four middle kalpas make one great kalpa. When a great kalpa has passed, the earth will be destroyed. Scientists also say that in the future the earth will collide with another planet and be consumed by a great fire. The Buddhist sūtras likewise say that a great fire will destroy the earth. We shall not discuss this now. In short, everything is impermanent, and nothing can be clung to.

Therefore, to study Buddhism is to “contemplate impermanence.” That is, we are told to let go of everything and not cling, for there is fundamentally nothing lasting or real.

We are born into this world, and even those who live past a hundred see their lives pass in the blink of an eye. Besides, long life is rare. Why then be so calculating over fame, sensual pleasures, wealth, and profit, instead of being forgiving toward

others? For example, when we ride on a bus, we may quarrel as soon as someone bumps into us. They did not bump into you intentionally, so do not be so petty and calculating.

I once read a newspaper account that gave much food for thought: a sports reporter was interviewing people abroad. Because he was walking too hurriedly and carelessly, he stepped on an elderly foreign man's foot.

The elderly man instead apologized to him: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I was walking too slowly and held you up. If I had walked faster, you would not have stepped on my foot." The reporter could only blush. He had stepped on someone else's foot, yet the other person apologized to him. Look at the refinement of that person's character.

If we all possessed such a spirit, society would be peaceful and disputes would not arise. Learning Buddhism teaches us first to become persons of sound character and, further still, to become extraordinary persons. If everyone possessed noble sentiments and could yield themselves to others at all times and in all places, society would be peaceful, the nation prosperous and strong, and wars would not occur in the world.

Thus Buddhism benefits the whole world. Therefore, at every moment we should contemplate the impermanence of the self. We are all merely guests in this world. The poet Li Bai said: "Heaven and earth are the inn for the myriad things; time is the passing guest of a hundred generations."

Heaven and earth are a great inn. We merely stay in it for a while before departing. Why, then, should we fail to be courteous, cling stubbornly, and not treat others generously? Therefore, in learning Buddhism we must yield ourselves to others and eradicate all our attachments, greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. Only then can we realize the Way.

The reason we have greed is that we mistakenly take this physical body to be the self. We seek enjoyment and wish for long life.

After Qin Shi Huang became emperor, he wished to live a long life and enjoy forever the pleasures of being emperor. He sent people to seek an elixir of immortality. This was precisely a manifestation of greed. Today society is unsettled, and corruption and bribery are rampant; greed is also at work behind them. If we awaken to the fact that all things are illusory and unobtainable, what is there left to covet? We should instead do our utmost to seek the welfare of the public and accumulate some virtue.

As a common saying goes: "Leaving ten thousand pieces of gold to one's children is not as good as leaving them a single classic on accumulating virtue." This warns later generations that it is not good merely to leave money to one's descendants; it is

better to teach them to create blessings and accumulate virtue. If we know that everything is illusory and impermanent, we will no longer grasp or cling. Without clinging, we let go; once we let go, the mind becomes empty; when the mind is empty, our intrinsic nature appears before us, and we are liberated from birth and death.

This principle is very simple. It is easy to understand, but not so easy to put into practice, because our habitual tendency to cling is too deep. When you are told to let go, you cannot do so. Therefore, we must constantly study and train, struggle against ourselves, and only then can we gradually eliminate these old habits of attachment.

The four great vows of Mahāyāna Buddhism are: “Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to learn them. Afflictions are inexhaustible; I vow to cut them off. Sentient beings are limitless; I vow to liberate them. The Buddha Way is unsurpassable; I vow to attain it.” We must arouse these four great vows and conscientiously urge ourselves at every moment to practice diligently. It is not merely for our own liberation. The six perfections and myriad practices are generosity, precepts, patience, diligence, dhyāna, and wisdom.

The first is generosity. Why cultivate generosity? It is to cut off our stinginess and attachment. We are all extremely attached and miserly, unwilling to give. Once we are willing to give, our mind-capacity becomes vast.

The second is observing the precepts, which means keeping the mind from being stirred. If your mind is constantly agitated and deluded thoughts arise in profusion, that will not do.

The third is patience. This does not mean that, when we are about to lose our temper, we forcibly suppress our anger. No. If we did that, excessive liver-fire would make us ill. What should we do instead? Contemplate emptiness: nothing whatsoever can be obtained, and even the “self” does not exist.

If there is no self, where can there be insult? Without a self, who is there to undergo the insult? Contemplate in this way and, as the Diamond Sūtra says, there is “no mark of self, no mark of person, no mark of sentient being, and no mark of life span.” Without person or self, whence could insult arise? If there is no insult, what need is there for patience? Patience without the notion of patience is great patience.

For nothing has any independent existence; all forms arise through the coming together of causes and conditions. “Dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I declare to be empty.” Things do not exist in themselves; they exist only after causes and conditions converge. Therefore, do not cling to appearances any longer.

Without clinging to appearances, your mind becomes empty, and when the mind is empty, insult likewise disappears.

The fourth is diligence. Practicing the Dharma and learning Buddhism require diligence. How should one be diligent? By diligently eliminating one's deluded habits. That is why practitioners in the Pure Land school recite the Buddha's name tens of thousands of times each day: to sweep away deluded imaginings and deluded thoughts. Our deluded imaginings never cease, and deluded thoughts arise in countless forms. From morning to night, they turn endlessly in our minds.

Only when we sit down to recite the Buddha's name do we see the deluded thoughts: this thought arises, then that thought comes. When you are busily occupied, you do not see your deluded thoughts and may even think that you have none. In fact, they never cease; you simply do not see them.

This is like a cup of muddy water. While it is turbid, you cannot see the sand and silt. When the sand and silt settle and the water above becomes clear, only then can you see them. Likewise, only when our deluded thoughts and deluded mind become calm can we see that deluded thoughts are continuously moving. It is a good thing when we see deluded thoughts while meditating or reciting the Buddha's name, for the mind is gradually becoming calm.

Some people say that seeing deluded thoughts during meditation is bad, and that it would be better not to meditate. When they do not meditate, they cannot see their deluded thoughts, and they imagine that there are none. But this is not so. Deluded thoughts never cease and never stop. Therefore, we must practice diligently and without slackening: in this at dawn, in this at dusk; in this when displaced, in this when distressed.

At every moment, maintain contemplation. As soon as a thought arises, see it and do not follow it. If we truly practice in this diligent and unrelenting way, within three to five years we can break through and see our own intrinsic nature. Some practice for many years without success. Why? Because thoughts still arise constantly; they have not watched over them, nor have they practiced diligently.

If you watch over it at every moment, in only three to five years you will certainly bring thoughts to rest. You will certainly dissolve body, mind, and world into emptiness. Then, through ceaseless training amid circumstances and diligently eliminating habitual tendencies, you will ultimately become continuous and undivided. This is certain. Thus, we say that those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma must meditate at every moment.

This does not mean meditating for two hours and then, once you leave the cushion, letting a wild horse run free and allowing deluded thoughts to stir. Rather, you must

maintain continuous and seamless contemplation, watch over deluded thoughts, and not follow them. What does “meditation” subdue? It subdues deluded thoughts: see where a thought arises and do not follow it. Sitting means seeing one’s intrinsic nature. You must see your intrinsic nature at every moment. This nature is like your shadow: you cannot leave it even if you try.

Lay Buddhist Fu said: “Each night I sleep embracing the Buddha; each morning I rise together with him.” At night, while sleeping, one embraces the Buddha; in the morning, one rises together with the Buddha. This explains that one cannot be separated from one’s intrinsic nature. If we truly apply ourselves and practice diligently without slackening, I guarantee that you will attain realization within three to five years.

But if you are not so diligent, practicing or not practicing as you please—meditating once when you feel happy, and not meditating when you do not—then it will not do.

Or if, while meditating, you indulge in random thoughts—reciting the Buddha’s name or holding a mantra on the one hand while deluded thoughts turn endlessly in your mind on the other—what use is that? When we meditate, we must let go of everything wholeheartedly, like one utterly dead, and hold the mantra continuously with “mind reciting and ears hearing.” Only then is there a point of entry. Mind reciting does not mean reciting with the mouth; it means that the mind itself is reciting.

Your ears must clearly hear the sound of your own mantra or Buddha-recitation. You must keep your attention fixed on that sound. Master Hanshan said: “When we recite the Buddha’s name or hold a mantra, it should be like pushing a heavily laden cart uphill, exerting all our strength to push it onward.” It is like pushing a heavy cart uphill, not a light cart downhill. When pushing a light cart downhill, you need not exert yourself; with a whoosh, it rolls down.

If a cart is loaded with heavy things and must be pushed uphill, can you push it up without exertion? You cannot. Therefore, when reciting the Buddha’s name or holding a mantra, you must exert yourself as if pushing a heavily laden cart uphill. Merely meditating for two hours does not count. After leaving the cushion, you must constantly maintain contemplation: when a thought arises, do not follow it. Within three to five years, I guarantee that you will see your intrinsic nature. If you practice in this way and do not attain realization, come and scold me! But these are not my words; they were spoken by the great patriarchs. They have been proven through practice.

The fifth is dhyāna. Through diligent and unremitting practice, one attains dhyāna. Dhyāna means not being deluded by any circumstance and not allowing the mind to waver. When you see something good, do not become attached to it; do not let your

mind leap about, wishing to acquire it and make it your own. When you encounter something unpleasant or contrary to your wishes, do not become afflicted.

When the mind is truly empty, it remains constantly gathered in samādhi and is not deluded when events arise. Samādhi does not mean sitting there motionless as though dead, much less being unable to undertake important responsibilities. You must still speak, work, and walk as usual. It simply means that, while doing everything, the mind does not waver. It is like a mirror reflecting things.

All kinds of images appear in a mirror, yet the mirror does not move. The mirror does not say, "This is good, I want it; that is bad, I do not want it." It does not discriminate; it merely reflects objects. Whatever comes before it, it reflects.

If something is long, it manifests a long appearance; if short, a short appearance; if square, a square appearance; if red, red; if blue, blue. It neither takes nor rejects and makes no distinctions whatsoever. This is called the "realm of direct perception." This realm of direct perception is our Original Face. All practitioners cultivate in order to see their intrinsic nature, to see their Original Face.

Where, after all, is this noble nature—our Original Face? It is not elsewhere; it shines right before each person. When we simply let go of everything with a "snap," not a single thought arises; yet we are not unaware like wood or stone, but clearly and distinctly aware.

This clear and distinct numinous knowing is everyone's Original Face! Once we clearly see this nature, we must safeguard this Original Face at every moment. Before honor or slander, do not let the mind be moved; pay them no heed, and safeguard this mind of direct awareness. When this safeguarding has become fully mature and complete, there is no need to safeguard it any longer. Let it function freely in accordance with conditions, and the great Way will be accomplished. Thus, the Buddhadharma is not difficult when explained. So long as we are willing to act, willing to let go of everything, and persistently struggle with ourselves, we will certainly attain accomplishment.

The sixth is wisdom. This refers to the great wisdom opened through dhyāna, by which one understands the prior causes and subsequent results of all things, and understands why all sentient beings are born and die. Speaking of birth and death, we are originally neither arising nor ceasing; there is no birth and death. Why, then, do birth and death continually appear before us now? It is because the consciousness-mind stirs delusively.

If we can encounter circumstances without giving rise to mental movement or thoughts, and do not pursue circumstances, there is no birth and death. Therefore, birth and death are illusory. Nowadays, many who practice the Buddhadharma cling

to having somewhere to go at death, and even seek to know in advance where they will go.

In truth, once we have genuinely realized the Way, there is nowhere to go, because we have never died. We simply settle peacefully wherever we encounter circumstances, liberate sentient beings in accordance with conditions, and roam freely in the samādhi of playfulness—what destination could there be? Someone may say, “If you have awakened, you should know where you will go after death; this is called knowing your destination in advance. If you do not know your destination, then you have not realized the Way.”

This statement sounds quite correct, but it still requires careful examination. For when one has truly realized the Way, Buddha-nature pervades empty space and the dharma realm. It neither moves nor wavers; there is no coming or going. Every thing is its manifestation, and every place is its transformation. Where could it go? There is nowhere to go. If there were a place to go, would that not mean that one had never realized the Way?

Later in this book, two kinds of attainment are discussed. One is this: when the great light shines forth in the intermediate state at the time of death, if one can recognize that this light and the light emitted by the Buddha are one and not two, without any difference, then this is our own intrinsic nature. At that very moment, one is liberated and need not go anywhere.

The other is this: if our mind-capacity is small, and we do not dare to accept responsibility, not recognizing that this is Buddha-nature and the same essence-nature as that of all Buddhas, then we may take rebirth in the East or West in order to cultivate. Because one has not realized the Way, there is still somewhere to go. When we have truly realized the Way and attained accomplishment, there is no need to go anywhere.

There are four different teachings concerning nirvāṇa. The first is nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature. Our Buddha-nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing; it does not arise because the body is born, nor cease because the body dies. The intrinsic nature of all sentient beings is naturally so: originally neither arising nor ceasing, abiding throughout all antiquity. This is called nirvāṇa of intrinsic nature.

The second is nirvāṇa with remainder, realized by practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle. They have only resolved segmented birth and death (segmented birth and death is the birth and death of rebirth in the six realms; transformational birth and death is the arising and ceasing of thoughts). Their attachment to dharmas has not been removed; there is still a remainder left unresolved.

They still cling to the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind in dharmatā as self. Their thoughts have not yet been purified, and birth and death remain; hence it is called nirvāṇa with remainder. The third is the noble fruition realized by the Buddha, called nirvāṇa without remainder. Both attachment to personal self and the dharma-self view have been eliminated; person and dharmas are both empty, with not the slightest thing to be attained.

When both person and dharmas have been fully resolved, and the two forms of birth and death have both been relinquished—when transformational birth and death and segmented birth and death have both been fully resolved—this is nirvāṇa without remainder. The fourth is nirvāṇa without abiding anywhere. Without abiding anywhere means that there is no place in which to abide. There is no place that is not so; every place is so.

Therefore, when Śākyamuni Buddha departed, he said: “I have not left you. I am always before you; those whose eyes are pure can see me. Those whose eyes are clouded cannot see me.” We still have afflictions and attachments; this means that our eyes are impure. If afflictions and attachments are all gone and no deluded thoughts arise, then one has the pure dharma eye and can see the Buddha everywhere. Therefore, we should not cling to there being some particular location, some particular place. This is great wisdom opening forth in clouds; this is the six perfections and myriad practices.

To become Buddhas, we must follow the bodhisattva path, liberate sentient beings extensively, and accumulate merit and virtue; only then can we perfect the noble fruition. Otherwise, if merit and virtue are incomplete and our practice has not been fulfilled, we cannot become Buddhas. Following the bodhisattva path means liberating oneself and liberating others, awakening oneself and awakening others. “Bodhisattva” is Sanskrit, abbreviated in Chinese as “pusa.” Its Chinese semantic translation is “enlightened sentient being.”

This means awakening from and breaking through one’s own emotionally conditioned views, while enabling sentient beings to awaken as well. We all have emotionally conditioned views: we respect and cherish our own parents and children, but pay no attention to the parents and children of others. All this is the mischief of selfish affection. The love between men and women in particular is the very root of birth and death.

Why do we have these bodies? It is precisely because desire and love—because sexual desire between men and women—is intense that we have these foul bags of skin. So long as this desire and love continue, birth and death continue. “Enlightened sentient being” means awakening oneself and awakening others, liberating oneself and liberating others. This is the bodhisattva path.

Merely accomplishing the bodhisattva path is still not enough. One must cultivate over successive eons, advancing ever higher, and vow that all sentient beings will become Buddhas; only then can one perfectly realize Buddhahood. There are also many levels among bodhisattvas: the ten faiths, ten abodes, ten practices, ten dedications, ten bhūmis, and so forth. A great bodhisattva—a tenth-bhūmi bodhisattva—is still one level short of Buddhahood.

To give an analogy: when liberating sentient beings, a bodhisattva still retains the notion of entering and leaving the six realms, the notion of entering that realm and leaving this one. The Buddha, however, enters and leaves without entering or leaving, and liberates sentient beings without liberating them. This is the small difference between a Buddha and a great bodhisattva. Thus, when awakening and practice are complete—that is, when merit and virtue and wisdom are complete—one is a Buddha. Hence a Buddha is also called the “Honored One Complete in the Two,” the two being the complete fulfillment of merit and virtue and of wisdom. Awakening is great wisdom; practice is the merit and virtue of liberating sentient beings. Only when both awakening and practice are complete can one become a Buddha.

A Buddha fully possesses the three kāyas and four wisdoms. Of the three kāyas, the first is the dharmakāya, the second the sambhogakāya, and the third the nirmāṇakāya. What we cultivate now is all cultivation of the dharmakāya: we must open our Original Face and see the dharmakāya. Thus, whether it is the Pure Land school, the Chan school, or Esoteric Buddhism, all cultivate in order to realize and see the dharmakāya.

How is the sambhogakāya realized? Realizing the sambhogakāya is called differentiated wisdom: one must liberate sentient beings and accumulate merit and virtue. When we now open our Original Face and see the dharmakāya, this is fundamental wisdom; such is the root. Differentiated wisdom is obtained through liberating sentient beings.

Sentient beings have different dispositions. For example, some like spicy food, some like sweet food, and some like sour food; their tastes differ. Likewise, there are various differences in the study of Buddhism, such as ordinary beings’ Chan, Lesser Vehicle Chan, bodhisattva Chan, and Mahāyāna Chan. Sentient beings differ in capacity, and their aspirations also differ. Therefore, the dharmas they study differ as well.

When liberating sentient beings, if we have mastered all these dharma gates, we can respond to their capacities and act in accordance with conditions. We can then handle matters skillfully, without being out of place. By broadly forming wholesome

affinities and doing all good deeds, when our merit and virtue are complete, we will bring about the sambhogakāya.

If we do nothing for sentient beings, where will our merit and virtue come from? If we do not benefit humankind and act only for ourselves, we are self-liberated persons and have no merit and virtue. As the saying goes, “Arhats receive meager offerings.” One who is liberated only for oneself cannot become a Buddha. Thus, the sambhogakāya is the karmic result obtained when the resolve is aroused at the causal stage and merit and virtue have been perfected.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra explains this very clearly. When Sudhana saw the sambhogakāya of Maitreya Bodhisattva—Maitreya Bodhisattva of Tuṣita Heaven, of whom we speak—he exclaimed, “How majestic! How beautiful!” Maitreya Bodhisattva said to Sudhana: “You have attained fundamental wisdom, but have not yet attained differentiated wisdom; you do not yet have the sambhogakāya.”

“As for me, it is because I liberate sentient beings that my merit and virtue have become complete, bringing forth Maitreya’s Pavilion and this luminous sambhogakāya.” There are also two kinds of sambhogakāya: the self-enjoyment sambhogakāya and the other-enjoyment sambhogakāya.

The self-enjoyment sambhogakāya is the great body brought about by towering merit and virtue. The other-enjoyment sambhogakāya draws bodhisattvas to strive upward in practice; its size is not fixed. For lesser bodhisattvas, a lesser sambhogakāya appears; for great bodhisattvas, a great sambhogakāya appears. When bodhisattvas see this luminous and perfect sambhogakāya, it inspires courageous and diligent resolve, and they strive even harder, hoping soon to realize this beautiful sambhogakāya as well.

In the past, Śākyamuni Buddha saw another Buddha enter a luminous samādhi called the Fire-Light Samādhi. That Buddha’s bodily marks were incomparably splendid, and Śākyamuni greatly admired them, thinking, “I too want such a sambhogakāya!” He practiced diligently and made unceasing effort, thereby attaining accomplishment seven eons early. Thus, the time it takes a person to become a Buddha is not fixed.

We speak of becoming a Buddha in three great asaṃkhyeya eons. Asaṃkhyeya means an incalculable period of time. Its duration is not fixed; it depends on how we practice. If we apply ourselves with courageous diligence, the time is shorter. If we are lax and procrastinating, the time is longer.

The best example is Venerable Ānanda. He and Śākyamuni Buddha aroused the resolve to study Buddhism at the same time, yet by the time Śākyamuni Buddha had already become a Buddha of fruition, Venerable Ānanda had still not awakened. See

how great the difference was. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra was taught in order to liberate Ānanda.

This shows that the timing of attainment depends on how we apply ourselves; laxness will not do. Venerable Ānanda was foremost in learning. He only enjoyed hearing how this Buddha taught and how that Buddha taught. He heard very, very much and possessed abundant knowledge, but he did not apply himself in practice, so it was ineffective. We must practice with courage and diligence; then the time will be shorter.

To realize the sambhogakāya and attain differentiated wisdom, one must liberate sentient beings. Otherwise, one can attain only the fruition of an arhat and will not obtain the sambhogakāya.

What about the nirmāṇakāya? The nirmāṇakāya is perfect and free, able to manifest transformations without obstruction. It appears in response to the capacities and conditions of sentient beings, as stated in the Universal Gateway Chapter of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva: “To those who can be liberated by the body of a lay practitioner, it manifests the body of a lay practitioner and teaches the Dharma; to those who can be liberated by the body of an official, it manifests the body of an official and teaches the Dharma.”

How does one realize the nirmāṇakāya? One must bring one’s practice to the point where the subtle continuous stream is cut off. What is this subtle continuous stream? It is the mental factor of intention—namely, attention—among the five universal mental factors taught by the Dharma Characteristics School: attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition.

This attention is the worst of all: it is constantly discriminating, making distinctions about everything. Like a diver, it moves beneath deep water rather than on the surface, where it cannot be seen; and it moves with great speed. Only when we finally attain the Great Samādhi of Vajrasattva—that is, great samādhi—can we cut off this subtle continuous stream.

Then we can manifest hundreds of thousands of millions of transformation bodies and liberate hundreds of thousands of millions of sentient beings. To perfect the fruition of Buddhahood is to accomplish these three bodies. What are the four wisdoms? They are transformed from the eight consciousnesses; this is called transforming consciousness into wisdom: transforming the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom, the seventh consciousness into the wisdom of equality, the sixth consciousness into wondrous observing wisdom, and the first five consciousnesses into the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done.

The transformation of the eight consciousnesses into the four wisdoms proceeds in four steps: the sixth and seventh are transformed at the causal stage, while the eighth and fifth are perfected at the stage of fruition. Our present work of eliminating habitual tendencies amid circumstances is the transformation of the sixth and seventh consciousnesses. To transform the sixth consciousness is to transform our discriminating mind into a mind that does not discriminate but merely observes.

From birth, we like to make distinctions: this is one way, that is another way. We want what is good and reject what is bad; there are too many discriminations of self and others, right and wrong. We live amid discrimination all day long, so deluded thoughts fly about and we cannot transcend birth and death. The seventh consciousness is the transmitting consciousness. It is like the gatekeeper of an organization, transmitting to the eighth consciousness all the information sent by the first six consciousnesses.

The eighth consciousness is the storing consciousness. It is like our warehouse: it receives the information from the seventh consciousness and stores it within. The seeds in the eighth consciousness are innumerable—the seeds of many lives and kalpas are all within it. It is not easy to eliminate all these seeds; only a tenth-bhūmi bodhisattva can eradicate them completely. Therefore, we must diligently intensify our practice.

“The sixth and seventh are transformed at the causal stage” means that we must exert ourselves in transforming them during practice at the causal stage; only then can we proceed to transform the eighth and fifth consciousnesses and perfect the fruition of Buddhahood. In other words, only later are the eighth consciousness and the first five consciousnesses transformed into great perfect mirror wisdom, thereby fully realizing the fruition of Buddhahood.

At present, the eighth consciousness of all sentient beings is deluded: it takes hold of everything, good or bad, and refuses to let go. Upon becoming great perfect mirror wisdom, it merely reflects without stirring and no longer grasps. The first five consciousnesses are those of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. They are directed outward.

We commonly say, “Of eight brothers, one is foolish.” The eighth consciousness is foolish: it accepts everything, whether good or bad. “Five conduct business before the gate” refers to our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. The eye craves forms, the ear hears sounds, the nose smells fragrances, the tongue tastes flavors, and the body contacts objects. All are directed outward.

“One carries messages back and forth” refers to the seventh consciousness, which receives the information conveyed to it by the preceding six consciousnesses and

sends it to the eighth consciousness to be stored. “One among them is the most keen and capable” refers to the sixth consciousness, whose power is greatest. Thus, only by perfecting the three bodies and four wisdoms can one become a Buddha. One does not become a Buddha merely upon realizing the Way; one is still far from it. One must practice diligently.

The foundation of Buddhism is Mahāyāna teaching, not Hīnayāna teaching. Hīnayāna teaching is for oneself; Mahāyāna teaching is for everyone. “May sentient beings attain Buddhahood before I do”—this is the aspiration of a great-resolve bodhisattva. All of you should become Buddhas first; I shall become a Buddha last. This is how one should arouse the resolve.

People today do not think this way. Let alone Buddhahood, even for a small benefit they scramble to get ahead: “Oh! I am first, I am first!” When lining up, they want to stand first and get there before everyone else. This is the mind of ordinary beings. Therefore, in studying Buddhism, one’s mind-capacity must be great; the greater it is, the sooner one will become a Buddha. One must arouse a great resolve in order to accord with Buddhism’s spirit of serving the Dharma and benefiting others.

The principles discussed above are readily known to Buddhists, but how is the problem of birth and death to be resolved? Where does one begin in studying Buddhism? These questions leave many Buddhist practitioners at a loss. Some elderly men and women know only to recite the Buddha’s name and burn incense; they do not understand this question.

Others gain a little experience or indication through diligent seated meditation and then seek instruction from certain masters. The masters say, “I am sorry, I do not know and dare not speak carelessly.” They dare not explain, because they themselves have not practiced the Dharma and lack accomplishment. How, then, could they know how the problem of birth and death is resolved? In fact, Buddhism explains these principles very clearly.

One way is vertical transcendence of the three realms—the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. Through studying Chan or Esoteric Buddhism, one eliminates one’s clinging habitual tendencies, greed, anger, and ignorance, and thereby leaves them behind. The other is horizontal transcendence of the three realms: studying the Pure Land school and practicing Buddha-recitation, seeking the Buddha’s compassionate guidance for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Thus, many people study Chan, Pure Land, Esoteric Buddhism, and so forth. They know where to begin, but how certain are they of becoming Buddhas? They have not deeply understood Buddhism’s profound principles, so naturally they do not know.

As for whether one has such certainty, there is in fact a way to test it: verify it at two extremes. One is when favorable circumstances bring success and everything goes smoothly according to one's wishes; the other is when adverse circumstances bring afflictions, nothing goes as one wishes, and one meets misfortune and failure everywhere.

In favorable circumstances, can the mind remain unmoved, without becoming so delighted that one loses all composure, while Buddha-remembrance still remains foremost? In adverse circumstances and afflictions, can one likewise remain free of unbearable anxiety and resentment, with Buddha-remembrance still foremost? If one can accomplish these two things, then at the time of death a practitioner of Buddha-recitation can be completely certain of rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

If, upon encountering favorable circumstances, one becomes carried away and forgets oneself, unable even to bring up the Buddha's name and knowing only pleasure and enjoyment; and if, upon encountering adverse circumstances and afflictions, one suffers unbearably and cannot bring up the Buddha's name, then one has no certainty of rebirth in the West.

Perhaps someone may ask, "That does not seem right. When our intermediate-state body emerges after death, will not the Buddha come to guide us? Would that not make rebirth certain?" Ah, you must know that the Buddha does not speak lies, falsehoods, or deceptive words. The Buddha will certainly come to guide us.

Yet because of our inverted views, afflictions, and attachments, we are like people drunk on strong wine—dazed and confused. When the Buddha comes to guide us, we cannot see him. How, then, can we go? Therefore, Master Lianchi said, "Many recite the Buddha's name, but few are reborn in the West." Master Lianchi was a great master of the Pure Land school; he would not have lied merely to frighten people.

Why are there "many who recite the Buddha's name, but few who are reborn in the West"? It is because their minds are not earnest and heartfelt in Buddha-recitation.

They recite the Buddha's name with their mouths, while their minds and thoughts continue to race about, thinking of this and that. We see many elderly women and men who, while reciting the Buddha's name, still gossip about the affairs of one family or another. What effect can such Buddha-recitation have? They lack one-pointed Buddha-recitation, and their thoughts remain very scattered.

Therefore, Śākyamuni Buddha taught us: "Hold fast to the name for one day, two days, or even seven days, with one-pointedness of mind without distraction; then that Buddha will appear before you."

If we can attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction, we will see the Buddha appear before us. But if our minds are in a state of confusion, we will not see the Buddha even if he comes. Chan Master Yongming Shou explained this very clearly: “The mind of one who recites the Buddha’s name is like a basin of water, while the Buddha is like the moon in the sky.” When the water becomes clear and pure, the moon appears within it.

When our minds are confused, it is like this basin of turbid water: the moon cannot appear, and neither can we see the Buddha. The Buddha comes from nowhere and goes nowhere; it is only when an image appears in our minds that he is called the Tathāgata.

When the pure karma of a Pure Land practitioner matures and rebirth is near, the Buddha’s image arises in that person’s mind. When we recite Amitābha Buddha, the Buddha manifests in the West in response to us; this is called the communion of response and accord. The Buddha’s manifestation in guiding sentient beings also has grades, for according to one’s accomplishment, the form one sees differs. Thus, rebirth in the West is divided into nine grades. Those of the lowest grade can see only a *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha; those of the middle grade see a *sambhogakāya* Buddha; only those of the highest grade can see a *dharmakāya* Buddha—that is, the Buddha of the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light.

There are three kinds of actual realization in practice for transcending birth and death. First, one must truly be able not to follow a thought when it arises: as soon as a thought arises, it dissolves without the slightest pause, like drawing on water. With a single stroke upon water, the water closes again, leaving not the slightest image or trace.

Like a bird crossing the vast sky, leaving no track of its flight, one can thereby attain freedom at the threshold of birth and death: one can go wherever one wishes, is not controlled by karmic force, and has mastery over taking rebirth. Second, amid the two conditions discussed earlier—the favorable and the adverse—one remains completely ordinary and the mind does not stir in the least.

When our minds do not delight in what is good or become troubled by what is not good, then segmented birth and death is ended. Therefore, for those who have just awakened through Chan inquiry, segmented birth and death has not yet ended.

Why? Because their habitual tendencies are strong and have not yet been eliminated; their minds still cannot avoid giving rise to feelings in response to circumstances. In the doctrinal teachings, this is called the failure to eliminate thought-delusions; therefore segmented birth and death has not ended. For this reason, Pure Land practitioners criticize the Chan school, saying that although Chan practitioners have awakened, their segmented birth and death has not ended, and

Pure Land is more secure and reliable. This is because thought-delusions have not yet been cut off.

The doctrinal teachings divide the coarse aspect of ignorance into view-delusions and thought-delusions. Thought-delusions are the mind's arising in response to objects and circumstances; view-delusions are erroneous views. Once one recognizes what is the right path and what is the wrong path, what is true and what is false, no longer takes the wrong path, and no longer clings with inverted views, then view-delusions have been eliminated.

The afflictions of views are easy to sever, but the afflictions of thought are difficult to sever! Habitual tendencies always make people love what they see as good and hate and become troubled by what they see as bad. The mind lacks equanimity; it is constantly stirred by delusion, and abiding attachments are hard to relinquish. Therefore, one cannot transcend birth and death, but must continue to revolve in the six realms, unable to escape birth and death. When one accomplishes the first kind—when thoughts arise, do not follow them—one can attain mastery over taking rebirth.

“Taking rebirth” means being able to choose one's rebirth: going wherever one wishes, to the West if one wishes to go West, or to the East if one wishes to go East. One is no longer bound by karmic forces and can be one's own master. When one accomplishes the second kind—when the mind is not carried away by circumstances—one attains mastery of transformation and is liberated from the two forms of birth-and-death—segmented and transformational.

The third kind is the cessation of the subtle continuous stream: everything dissolves into emptiness, and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment appears before one. Then one can manifest countless transformation bodies and liberate countless sentient beings. This is the true verification attained by all who exert themselves in practice and realize the Way. Our practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is like Chan meditation: both begin with the eighth consciousness and work on the mind-ground.

This differs from other forms of Esoteric Buddhism, and so it is called Chan-Esoteric practice. It is of one breath with the Chan school, though its initial method of practice differs slightly. Heart esotericism uses six mudrās and one mantra to open up one's original nature; it then employs the Chan method of safeguarding realization, diligently removing habitual tendencies, constantly observing the mind, and remaining aware in every circumstance. In this way, it accords with Chan.

Once contemplation has become fully mature, one realizes that quiescence is ever illuminating and illumination is ever quiescent. Having returned home and seated oneself securely, there is no longer any need to maintain awareness or to

contemplate. Only this is the true final assurance in all practices. Such practice is easy to speak of, but to accomplish it in truth still requires some effort. Without making some effort, you cannot accomplish it.

To speak of it without being able to do it means that one understands only principle but cannot put it into practice; this is of no use. Therefore, along the path of practice there are four distinct stages: the dharma realm of phenomena, the dharma realm of principle, the dharma realm in which principle and phenomena interpenetrate, and the dharma realm of the nonobstruction among phenomena. The dharma realm of the nonobstruction among phenomena means that no matter what one does, there is no obstruction; one can go anywhere. Yet one must go a step further and not establish even the conception of the nonobstruction among phenomena. Only then is one a true Chan practitioner, one who truly realizes the mind and sees one's true nature. This is the foundation for resolving the problem of birth and death, and the key to attaining Buddhahood!

(II) The Three Realms Are Mind-Only; All Phenomena Are Consciousness-Only

As we explained earlier, there are no more than two ways to attain Buddhahood and transcend birth and death: one is vertical transcendence of the three realms, and the other is horizontal transcendence of the three realms. The three realms are the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm.

The desire realm refers to the world of beings with sexual desire. It principally includes the six realms of devas, asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. Beings in the desire realm have life and physical bodies precisely because they possess sexual desire.

The intermediate-state body (what we ordinarily call the soul) sees a man and woman having intercourse; sexual desire then arises, and it becomes a third party. (There can also be a third party in a romantic relationship, but here this refers to the intermediate-state body.)

Because the intermediate-state body is principally composed of the wind element, the man and woman having intercourse cannot see it. When the man ejaculates, it is propelled into the woman's womb, and thus it takes rebirth. Therefore, to transcend birth and death, one must eliminate sexual desire. Nowadays everyone speaks of openness, including "sexual liberation," and things have become quite chaotic.

In my view, sexual desire should not be made open in this way. We should not engage in sexual liberation as Western countries do; creating disorder is not good. China's more conservative approach to sex is still somewhat better. The higher one

risers in the desire realm, the weaker sexual desire becomes. The desire realm has six heavenly levels alone, also called the Six Desire Heavens. Correspondingly, there are six forms of sexual desire: receiving desire, intercourse, embracing, holding hands, smiling, and looking.

The first level is the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings. According to the Buddhist scriptures, it is situated halfway up Mount Sumeru. Mount Sumeru is a great mountain, but this is figurative language, merely an analogy. The sun and moon both revolve halfway up Mount Sumeru. The Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings is divided among the four heavenly kings of the east, south, west, and north. The devas there still have sexual desire, namely “receiving desire.”

To experience desire means to entertain lustful thoughts. They are much like us humans: their lustful thoughts are still quite strong, only slightly less so. The second level is Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. This is where the Jade Emperor resides. The two characters *daoli* translate into Chinese as “thirty-three,” so it is also called the Heaven of the Thirty-Three.

This does not mean that this heaven has thirty-three levels. Rather, it is divided into the five directions of east, south, west, north, and center. Each of the four cardinal directions contains eight heavens arranged laterally; four times eight makes thirty-two, and with the central direction there are thirty-three. The Jade Emperor dwells in the central direction, governing the four directions of east, south, west, and north, and also managing our human world.

At this heavenly level, sexual desire is further diminished in comparison with the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings, but men and women must still have intercourse, namely “intercourse.” The sun shines downward from the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings—halfway up Mount Sumeru—upon the human world, and upward upon the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. In these places, when the sun rises it is daytime, and when it sets it is nighttime; one rising and one setting make a day, so time is relatively short.

The third level is the Yāma Heaven. In the Yāma Heaven, it is bright regardless of day or night. The opening of lotus flowers marks the day, and their closing marks the night, so a day there is very long. Sexual desire in the Yāma Heaven is further diminished from the preceding two heavens. To what extent? A mere embrace is enough, namely “embracing.”

It is like Westerners who embrace when they meet as a gesture of affection. The fourth level is Tuṣita Heaven, where sexual desire is still weaker. A man and woman need only hold hands, namely “holding hands.” It is like our shaking hands when we meet; there is no need even to embrace. The fifth level is the Nirmāṇarati Heaven,

where sexual desire is still fainter: a smile exchanged face-to-face is enough, namely “smiling.”

A man and woman merely smile at one another; they need not touch each other or even hold hands. The sixth level is the Paranirmita-vaśavartin Heaven, the highest heaven. There, a man and woman need not even smile; a glance at one another is enough, namely “looking.” Thus, receiving desire, intercourse, embracing, holding hands, smiling, and looking are all forms of sexual desire. When all these sexual desires have been eliminated, one is born in the form realm heavens.

The form realm is superior to the desire realm. It has exceedingly wondrous forms and appearances, though they are subtle and insubstantial, beyond the sight of our physical eyes. The form realm has the heavens of the four dhyānas: the first, second, third, and fourth dhyānas. Before Patriarch Bodhidharma came to China, Chinese Chan teachings spoke only of the “four dhyānas and eight samādhis.”

In the heaven of the first dhyāna, one can rise into the air and emit light. In the heaven of the second dhyāna, there is boundless joy, what people call being filled with Dharma joy. In the heaven of the third dhyāna, there is incomparable bliss, a bliss that nothing in the world can match.

If one's practice is good, one may taste this state and experience great bliss. The fourth dhyāna heaven is called the ground of purity through relinquishing thought. When one's meditative practice has become deep, even bliss is absent. The “utmost bliss” of the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss means that all has been transformed into emptiness, and even bliss cannot be obtained. If bliss still remains, there is still mind, still deluded thought and deluded ideation, and one has not yet realized the Way.

Upon reaching the fourth dhyāna heaven, one no longer abides even in form. Some people say, “My sexual desire is gone, but when I encounter an attractive person, I still want to take a look.” This means that attachment to form still remains. Thus, sexual desire is a coarse delusion, while form is comparatively subtle. In eliminating habitual tendencies, we must first eliminate sexual desire and then eliminate attachment to forms and appearances. If there is no beauty and no ugliness, and all are equal, then we leave the form realm and enter the formless realm.

The formless realm does not mean that there are no appearances whatsoever; rather, the higher one goes, the subtler and more wondrous they become. The higher one goes, the more tenuous they become. The formless realm consists of the four formless heavens: the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothing whatsoever, and the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. If we think emptiness can be attained and abide in

emptiness, we still cannot leave the formless realm. Therefore, one must abide nowhere; emptiness too cannot be obtained. Then one leaves the formless realm.

If desire has been eliminated, form has been eliminated, and one no longer abides in emptiness, then one has vertically transcended the three realms. Because vertically transcending the three realms is very difficult, there is an expedient Dharma gate, the Pure Land school, through which one may horizontally transcend the three realms. There is no need to ascend vertically through the levels one by one. It is like splitting bamboo: it has many joints, and splitting it lengthwise, joint by joint, is difficult. Splitting it crosswise requires breaking through only one layer.

Pure Land practice is a matter of breaking through this layer and horizontally transcending to the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. Whether we vertically transcend the three realms or horizontally transcend them, we must practice. Even a single layer must be broken through; otherwise, we still cannot escape the prison of the three realms. Nowadays, Pure Land practitioners do not apply themselves diligently, thinking that chanting and singing are enough.

If one cannot even break through this single layer, how can one be reborn in the West and leave the three realms? Therefore, those who practice the Pure Land must still attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction and achieve the Buddha-recitation samādhi.

The Buddha explains very clearly in the Amitābha Sūtra: “Uphold the name [of Amitābha Buddha] for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days, with one-pointedness of mind without distraction. When that person approaches the end of life, Amitābha Buddha and the assembly of sages will appear before them.”

Only in this way can one attain rebirth. In addition, the Esoteric Buddhist practice of phowa also teaches us horizontal transcendence. It is an expedient method that relies on the empowering support of Buddha's power, and it is comparatively simple: one need only successfully visualize the channels and bindus. (This book provides a detailed introduction to the practice of phowa.) Those who practice phowa with earnest and urgent resolve can accomplish it in seven days. But if we do not apply ourselves diligently, even seventy days will not suffice. Therefore, we must practice diligently.

If one's practice is good, the three wondrous, luminous states of emptiness, bliss, and luminosity should appear. Yet we must not become attached to appearances. If we become attached to the appearance of emptiness, we cannot leave the formless realm; if we become attached to the appearance of bliss, we cannot leave the desire realm—for this bliss is the bliss of sexual desire; and if we become attached to the appearance of luminosity, we cannot leave the form realm.

There is a Chan koan: a monk practiced very well, and at every moment it was as though a bright moon shone above his head. That is, at every moment it was as if a bright moon above his head radiated great light. He went to consult Patriarch Caoshan—Caoshan was Dongshan's disciple, hence the Caodong school—and asked, “What about a bright moon shining above one's head?” Patriarch Caoshan replied, “You are still a man below the steps.”

This means that he was still below the form realm. The monk then asked Caoshan, “Please, Master, in your compassion guide me up the steps.” Caoshan replied, “We will meet when the moon sets.” This koan is very well expressed. But does “when the moon sets” mean that the moon is gone and there is darkness? No. It means that, while in the light, we should not feel that there is light.

Just as fish in water do not sense the water, and we who are in the air do not sense the air, we are required neither to abide in the body transformed into emptiness, nor to abide in incomparable bliss, much less to abide in brilliant luminosity. If one abides nowhere in all circumstances, one attains accomplishment. As soon as there is any abiding, one falls into fixed patterns and cannot perfectly realize Buddhahood.

The Buddha says in the Diamond Sūtra, “All appearances whatsoever are illusory.” Some people understand this to mean that all appearances are empty. Yet emptiness does not mean the absence of appearances; everyone should take careful note of this. There are many understandings of emptiness: ordinary beings regard it as relative emptiness, also called stubborn emptiness; non-Buddhist paths regard it as annihilationist emptiness; practitioners of the two vehicles regard it as analytical true emptiness, also called biased emptiness; bodhisattvas newly entering the path regard it as true emptiness inherent in dharmas; whereas what the Buddha realizes is true emptiness as wondrous presence. We shall now explain these separately:

Ordinary beings understand emptiness in contrast to existence. A cup placed here exists; when it is removed, there is emptiness. Water in a cup exists; when the water is poured out, there is emptiness. When a person is alive, there is existence; when a person dies, there is emptiness. To mechanically oppose emptiness and existence in this way is the ordinary person's understanding of emptiness: relative emptiness.

Non-Buddhist paths believe that whatever has an appearance is illusory, that no appearances should remain, and that this is emptiness; they become fixed there. If that were so, one might as well burn down one's house, take off one's clothes and go without them, and not even eat; then everything would be empty. Such an understanding is mistaken. This is annihilationist emptiness.

The emptiness realized by practitioners of the two vehicles is analytical true emptiness—"analytical" means to analyze. Through analysis, they conclude that all phenomena are false and that only our dharmakāya is real. They believe that apart from appearances there is a separate dharma-self, thereby dividing material dharmas and mental dharmas into two parts.

They regard material dharmas as material dharmas and mental dharmas as mental dharmas, believing that to realize the wondrous essence one must leave behind material appearances. This is like a mirror and its reflections: they avoid the reflections and cling to the mirror's light. In fact, this is biased emptiness. We know that material dharmas have form and color and can be seen as appearances, whereas mental dharmas have no form and no appearance that can be seen—for example, our thoughts.

The two can be distinguished, but they cannot be separated. Such people do not know that material dharmas are manifestations of mental dharmas. They one-sidedly cling to mental dharmas and grasp at a dharma-self; this too is biased emptiness. Thus, practitioners of the two vehicles flee worldly dharmas and hide in deep mountains to cultivate, and so cannot attain completeness. First-bhūmi bodhisattvas—also called beginning bodhisattvas—are classified within the five teachings of both the Tiantai and Huayan schools.

The Tiantai school divides them into the Tripiṭaka, Shared, Distinct, Perfect, and Lesser Vehicle teachings; the Huayan school divides them into the Initial, Final, Sudden, Perfect, and Lesser Vehicle teachings. The Shared Teaching of the Tiantai school and the Initial Teaching of the Huayan school both refer to first-bhūmi bodhisattvas. They recognize that no phenomenal appearance has any inherent substance and that it is empty right then and there. There is no need to leave phenomenal appearances behind for there to be emptiness.

A cup placed here need not be removed for it to be empty. This is because the cup itself does not inherently exist; it is formed through the coming together of causes and conditions. For example, this thermos cup is made by combining a plastic casing and a glass liner.

The cup itself does not inherently exist; neither does the house itself, nor even our bodies themselves, which are also provisional combinations of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. All appearances are formed through causes and conditions. Therefore, one need not leave phenomenal appearances behind in order to practice; phenomenal appearances themselves are empty.

Although they understand this point and thus need not leave the world in order to perfect their practice, they still do not know that material appearances have boundless wondrous functioning. This is called the true emptiness of dharmas in

their essence. What the Buddha realizes is wondrous presence and true emptiness. Although beginning bodhisattvas know that material dharmas and mental dharmas are nondual, they do not yet know of wondrous functioning.

If one can know that material appearances have boundless wondrous functioning, then making use of material appearances is true emptiness and wondrous presence. For example, the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are harmful things that obscure the luminosity of our intrinsic nature, so one must “see that the five aggregates are all empty.” Yet conversely, the five aggregates are also wondrous functioning. The wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done makes use of the five aggregates to accomplish all undertakings.

For example, when Śākyamuni Buddha was born, he entered the womb as a prince and manifested a wondrous appearance: a physical body with the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics. This is form. To liberate sentient beings, he did not leave them behind or let go of them, but embraced and guided the vast multitude of sentient beings. This is feeling.

Sentient beings have different capacities, and different Dharma teachings must be given to them. Therefore, he had to consider how to teach the Dharma in a way suited to their capacities. This is perception. When, where, and by what method sentient beings should be liberated had to be carried out in concrete action. Some sentient beings had no affinity with the Buddha, so the Buddha had other sentient beings who did have affinity with them teach them the Dharma.

There was an old woman east of the city to whom the Buddha taught the Dharma—the Buddha taught the Dharma better than anyone—but she would not listen. She even covered her ears and said, “I will not listen, I will not listen.” The Buddha said, “Then I will display spiritual powers for you to see.” She closed her eyes and said, “I will not look, I will not look.”

The Buddha knew that he had no affinity with her, so he asked a child who did have affinity with her to teach her the Dharma, and she accepted it. Thus, in liberating sentient beings, the Buddha's conduct also differed according to circumstances. This is formations.

Consciousness is knowledge and accumulated experience. For us, the task is to transform consciousness into wisdom. Consciousness and wisdom are actually one thing, just as water and its waves are one: water is waves, and waves are water. Waves are like consciousness, and water is like wisdom. The Buddha's wisdom is most complete and his knowledge most extensive; he knows the capacities of all kinds of sentient beings. This is consciousness.

It is precisely by making use of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness that the Buddha liberates sentient beings. Thus, the five aggregates in turn become wondrous functioning. Beginning bodhisattvas still lack this further level of awakening at the level of principle concerning emptiness, and therefore are not yet ultimate. Only upon reaching the Buddha's realization of wondrous presence and true emptiness—true emptiness and wondrous presence, where presence is emptiness and emptiness is presence—is it ultimate.

True emptiness and wondrous presence means that, since there is Buddha-nature, it should give rise to wondrous functioning; wondrous functioning refers to the various differentiated appearances that are manifested. Wondrous presence and true emptiness means that these appearances are all manifested by the dharmakāya. They have no inherent existence and are themselves empty.

Therefore, essence—Buddha-nature—appearance—material appearance—and function—wondrous functioning—are inseparable. Where there is essence, appearance must manifest; where there is appearance, function must arise. For example, without a house, how could we shelter ourselves from wind and rain? Without appearance, where could dharma-nature be expressed? Therefore, the principle-essence, the dharma-nature body, is the basis for the accomplishment of all things and also the basis for attaining Buddhahood.

This is called “phenomena are accomplished through principle—the principle-essence accomplishes their phenomenal appearances—and principle is manifested through phenomena—the principle-essence is revealed through phenomenal appearances.” Thus, the Diamond Sūtra says, “All appearances whatsoever are illusory,” which is true emptiness; while the Amitābha Sūtra describes the magnificent and wondrous appearances of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, which is wondrous presence.

Some people do not understand and think, “Is this not a contradiction?” In fact, it is not contradictory. True emptiness is precisely wondrous presence, and wondrous presence is precisely true emptiness. There are always reflections in a mirror; without reflections, it could not be called a mirror. If it could not manifest appearances and give rise to function, it would not be Buddha-nature. Therefore, Buddha-nature has all kinds of wondrous functioning.

Images such as male-female union, drinking blood, nakedness, and wrath are all manifested by our own minds; they are not something separate outside the mind. Outside mind there is no dharma, and outside dharmas there is no mind. Our Buddha-nature is inherently complete with all wondrous functioning. It neither arises from anywhere nor ceases anywhere. It has neither beginning nor end; it has always been so.

It is precisely because we do not know this that we become deluded by material appearances, seek outwardly, create karma, undergo karmic retribution, and vainly endure the endless cycle of rebirth in the six realms. We should awaken immediately and no longer remain deluded.

Since our intrinsic nature possesses such vast wondrous functioning, why do we grasp only a tiny bit of false appearance outside ourselves and forget our vast Buddha-nature? Once we understand this principle, we should no longer pursue external circumstances, but simply accord with conditions and let things take their course. Because the causes created in previous lives differ, the results experienced in this life also differ.

This is what is meant by: "If you wish to know the causes of past lives, look at what you receive in this life. If you wish to know the results of future lives, look at what you do in this life." No one can escape the law of cause and effect. Therefore, each of us now has different affinities, karmic forces, physical conditions, and so forth. We need only live in accordance with conditions: if today's conditions are thus, then live through today in this way.

If tomorrow's conditions are otherwise, then live through tomorrow in that way. Do not harbor resentment in your heart, do not pursue things, and do not cling to tangible benefits. Be "a carefree person of the Way, beyond learning and contrivance."

So long as one can let go of everything, there are no obstructions; that is Buddhahood. Sixth Patriarch Master Huineng explained this very clearly: when the preceding thought clings to appearances and is deluded, one is an ordinary being; when the following thought awakens, one is a Buddha. It is that quick. There is no need for elaborate practice; one need only awaken, let go of everything, and not cling to appearances.

A four-line verse composed by National Teacher Shao expresses this well. He said: "At the summit of the Peak of Penetrating the Mystery, one does not recognize the human world; outside the mind there is no dharma, and the eyes are filled with green mountains." The summit of the Peak of Penetrating the Mystery means a mountain that is both wondrous and lofty, representing our Buddha-nature. "One does not recognize the human world" means that all things in the human world are false appearances and unobtainable, so one should not cling to appearances.

Our problem lies in clinging to appearances: material desires swell endlessly and are never satisfied. "Outside the mind there is no dharma"—the word dharma is used very broadly in Buddhism and may refer to all things and affairs, even abstract thoughts—means that dharma is mind and mind is dharma. All things and affairs are manifested by my own mind; they are all myself.

Thus, “Who but a sage can return the myriad things to oneself?” Everything is myself; everything is Buddha. The table is also Buddha, the chair is also Buddha, the house is also Buddha—there is nothing that is not Buddha, because all are manifested by our intrinsic nature. Once we understand this principle, we should no longer pursue material appearances.

Let go and live in accordance with conditions. This is easy, joyful, and free. How wonderful it is! Thus it is said, “The noble person is open and at ease; the petty person is always anxious.” Petty people are always worried about gain and loss: “Oh no, what if I do not succeed? What if I fail?” They spend all day in sorrow and affliction. This is the benefit of studying Buddhism: it can make us joyful and at ease, and grant us great freedom. It is clear that Buddhism is truly excellent for humankind.

Buddhist scriptures say, “The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only.” As we explained earlier, the three realms are the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. Because we have sexual desire, there is the desire realm. Within the desire realm are the six desire heavens, and sexual desire has six forms: desire through receiving, intercourse, embracing, holding, smiling, and looking. The higher the heavenly realm, the fainter sexual desire becomes.

When one has no need even to smile or look, sexual desire is completely absent. One then reaches the form realm, where form is subtler than desire. Although sexual desire is absent at this point, one still clings to material appearances. One likes what is attractive and dislikes what is unattractive; thus one has not yet gone beyond the form realm.

If there is neither beauty nor ugliness, and all are equal, one goes beyond the form realm and reaches the realm of emptiness. But if one abides in the realm of emptiness and believes that emptiness is something obtainable, one cannot go beyond the realm of emptiness. Thus, “the three realms are mind-only” means that the three realms are all created by our minds.

“All phenomena are consciousness-only” means that all things, affairs, and thoughts are transformed and manifested by our consciousness. All things, affairs, and thoughts are dharmas, while our discriminating mind is consciousness. Formerly, Master Hanshan entered samādhi and went to the Inner Court of Tuṣita to ask Maitreya Bodhisattva, “What is consciousness? What is wisdom?” Wisdom is wisdom, and consciousness is knowledge.

) Maitreya Bodhisattva said, “Discrimination is consciousness; non-discrimination is wisdom.” This is both simple and clear. We people are always discriminating: this is good, that is bad; this is large, that is small. That is consciousness. Therefore, all

things and phenomena, as well as thoughts, are “manifested by mind alone and transformed by consciousness alone.”

As long as we can “abandon defilement and return to purity, transforming consciousness into wisdom” (this phrase appears in the Consciousness-Only Treatise of the Dharma Characteristics School), we can become Buddhas. “Abandoning defilement and returning to purity” means abandoning and letting go of all that has been defiled—that is, all that involves attachment to appearances—and returning to nonattainment. Purity refers to nonattainment, not to purity as such. If there remains an idea of purity, there is still attainment.

Thus, “purity” here is what Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva taught us: “Gather in the six sense faculties, and let uninterrupted pure mindfulness continue” (this will be explained in detail later).

“Transforming consciousness into wisdom” means transforming our eight consciousnesses into the four wisdoms: transforming the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom, the seventh consciousness into the wisdom of equality, the sixth consciousness into wondrous observing wisdom, and the first five consciousnesses into the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done. So long as we can transform consciousness into wisdom, we can recover our Original Face and reveal anew our luminous, wondrous true mind.

This wondrous, luminous true mind is not the lump of flesh within our chest; rather, it is the capacity by which we see, hear, feel, and know. This is Buddha! Hence it is said: “It is this mind that becomes Buddha; it is this mind that is Buddha.” So long as we cultivate the mind and do not attach to appearances at any time or place, we will certainly attain realization. Buddha-remembrance in the Pure Land school also means mindfulness of mind.

Practitioners of the Pure Land school should understand that the land is mind and mind is the land; outside mind there is no land, and outside the land there is no mind. One should mindfully recite the Buddha’s name: “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” As Master Lianchi said, “With every sound, awaken the master within.” This means using the Buddha’s name to awaken our mind.

In the past, a great patriarch of the Pure Land school first struck the wooden fish and recited, “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” Later, when his mind became empty, pure, and bright, he recited, “My Amitābha Buddha, my Amitābha Buddha . . .” This is “It is this mind that becomes Buddha; it is this mind that is Buddha.”

Buddha is our mind, and our mind is Buddha. Do not seek a Buddha outside the mind any longer. To be reborn in the Pure Land in this way is the highest grade of the highest rebirth. If you attach to appearances, seek Buddha outside the mind,

and seek the land outside the mind, you can at most attain the lowest grade of the lowest rebirth. Therefore, we should realize that mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are all without distinction, and that communion between mind and Buddha forms an unbroken whole.

That is to say, our mind, the accomplished Buddha, and the vast multitude of sentient beings are all one body. They are equal, equal, and yet again equal, without the slightest distinction. Śākyamuni Buddha is Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha is Maitreya Buddha, and Maitreya Buddha is also sentient beings, for all Buddhas and sentient beings possess the same capacity for awareness. It is simply that people do not know this; when they are deluded, they are sentient beings.

Once one awakens and no longer attaches to appearances, one is Buddha. Thus, becoming a Buddha is not difficult, because we originally are Buddhas; we do not become Buddhas through later cultivation. So long as we are willing to let go, we can return to the source, recover our Original Face, and attain realization. Hence it is said: "Lay down the butcher's knife and become a Buddha on the spot."

We are originally Buddhas, yet if we still seek outwardly and refuse to let go, we cannot attain realization. It is like cooking rice: if one cooks it with rice, it will become rice; but if one cooks sand, it will never become rice. Thus it is said: "Those on non-Buddhist paths who cultivate the body will ultimately perish." The body is not Buddha; in the end, it will decay.

People who practice qigong today go astray when they become attached to the body, and they can never attain realization. Some ask, "Do not Buddhism and Daoism also speak of qigong?!" That is true. But it is only preliminary; its main purpose is to use qi to gather in the mind. (The Pure Land school also teaches a method of Buddha-recitation that gathers in qi.)

It means using qi to hold your mind, not abiding in qi. But the Microcosmic Orbit and Macrocosmic Orbit cultivated in qigong abide in qi and abide in the body; that is completely mistaken. Such people do not know that mind is Buddha; they do not know that our lively thoughts are Buddha. The body is like a house, while the numinous, wondrous true mind is the master within the house.

Those on non-Buddhist paths do not know to cultivate the mind and cultivate only the body. Therefore, they are utterly mistaken and cannot attain realization. For example, Lü Dongbin's cultivation was highly accomplished, and he had attained the great elixir. Carrying a precious sword on his back, he wandered through the four quarters on the clouds. When he came to Mount Huanglong, he saw purple clouds covering the summit and knew that someone who had realized the Way was on the mountain.

That person was Chan Master Huanglong Xuanji, a great Chan master who had realized the Way. Lü Dongbin decided to go up the mountain to have a look. Just then, Huanglong Chan Master's disciples invited him to ascend the Dharma seat and teach the Dharma. Huanglong Chan Master sat upon the Dharma seat, struck the table, and said, "Today I will not teach the Dharma. Someone has stolen the Dharma!" Lü Dongbin thought, "That must refer to me."

"You are all monks, whereas I am a Daoist. I have already realized the Way; need I fear you?!" Confident in his great abilities, he immediately stepped forward and said, "Monk, I would like to ask you a question: 'How can a world be contained in a single grain of millet, and mountains and rivers be cooked in a half-pint cauldron?'" A grain of millet means a grain of rice.

How can such a tiny grain of rice contain the entire world? And a half-pint cauldron is a very small pot, one that can cook only half a pint of rice; how can mountains and great rivers be put into it and cooked? He thought, "I have realized the Way and can manifest spiritual powers. Can Chan Master Huanglong do so?" Huanglong Chan Master pointed at him and said, "You corpse-guarding ghost!" Since those on non-Buddhist paths all cultivate the body in pursuit of immortality, he called him a corpse-guarding ghost.

Lü Dongbin laughed loudly and retorted, "But I have the medicine of immortality in my sack." The sack means a bag; here it refers to the body, this stinking bag of skin. He meant that, through gathering the great medicine within his body and refining the golden elixir, he had already refined the yang spirit and possessed the medicine of immortality, so he no longer needed this body. Huanglong Chan Master replied, "Even after a million kalpas, you will still fall into emptiness and destruction."

This means that he could live only a million kalpas longer than others. A kalpa is a measure of time. One great kalpa consists of four medium kalpas, and one medium kalpa consists of twenty small kalpas.

In one small kalpa, human life spans decrease from eighty-four thousand years by one year every hundred years until they reach ten years; this is called a decreasing kalpa. Then they reverse, increasing by one year every hundred years until they again reach eighty-four thousand years; this is called an increasing kalpa. One increasing kalpa together with one decreasing kalpa makes one small kalpa.

Someone calculated that a small kalpa is 1,334,400,000 years), but in the end he would still perish. At this point Lü Dongbin became impatient and enraged, and sent his flying sword after Huanglong.

Huanglong Chan Master flicked his whisk and knocked the sword to the ground. What was the reason for this? It was not that Huanglong Chan Master used spiritual

powers to contend with him and brush away the sword. Rather, this was a demonstration of the Dharma: it signified knocking down Lü Dongbin's views. Lü Dongbin then prostrated himself before Huanglong Chan Master and requested his instruction.

Huanglong Chan Master told him, "The yang spirit you cultivate is only a body transformed by the seventh consciousness. It too is unreal. Whatever has appearance will ultimately decay and perish. Only by recognizing the Buddha-nature that is true emptiness yet wondrous presence can one attain what is real." Later, Lü Dongbin took refuge in the Buddhadharma. Thus, only Buddhism is most thorough and ultimate.

We must understand the principles explained above and know that all appearances of circumstances are manifestations of our own intrinsic nature. As the Heart Sūtra says: "Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form." Form refers to all material appearances, while emptiness refers to our intrinsic nature.

That is to say, all material appearances are our intrinsic nature, as expressed in the saying, "The verdant bamboo is none other than prajñā; the luxuriant yellow flowers are all Dharma-nature." Once we thoroughly understand emptiness, we know that all material dharmas arise from our emptiness-nature; without our emptiness-nature, there would be no material dharmas.

Material dharmas include men and women, young and old, mountains, rivers, and the great earth; they arise from our emptiness-nature. Because no appearance can be obtained, it is called emptiness-nature; precisely because it is empty, it can give rise to the myriad dharmas. If it were not empty and had a fixed substance, it could no longer give rise to other dharmas. For example, before a cup is made, its materials can be made into all kinds of other things. Once those materials have been made into this cup, they can no longer be made into anything else. This is why intrinsic nature must be empty in order to give rise to the myriad dharmas.

Only after thoroughly understanding emptiness-nature and realizing that we ourselves are Buddhas can we understand the "Intermediate-State Deliverance Dharma" without falling into doubt.

This Dharma teaches us to directly realize a sambhogakāya Buddha. If we do not understand this, then when the Buddha-light appears, doubts will arise: "Am I a Buddha? I am an ordinary being—how could I become a Buddha?" If one regards oneself as an ordinary being incapable of becoming a Buddha, one becomes an adherent of the external three vehicles. Some people even fear the intensity of the Buddha-light and avoid it; that is still worse.

Therefore, everyone must understand and remember these principles. When the Buddha-light appears during the intermediate state, unite with it, and you will directly realize a sambhogakāya Buddha. This is not merely ascending to the Western Pure Land; going to the Western Pure Land is already a lesser attainment.

After understanding these principles, one must also act in accordance with them and realize the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena. (Principle refers to the principle-body, which has no appearance to be seen; phenomena refers to phenomenal appearances, which have appearances to be seen.) Someone says, “Does not the Diamond Sūtra teach, ‘All appearances whatsoever are illusory’? Therefore, I regard phenomenal appearances as false, not real.”

This view is incorrect. It makes principle and phenomena obstruct one another. On the one hand, all phenomenal appearances are the wondrous functioning manifested by intrinsic nature: phenomena are principle, principle is phenomena, and principle and phenomena are nondual. How, then, can they be false? On the other hand, it is also wrong to become attached to phenomenal appearances and take them as real; that too makes principle and phenomena obstruct one another. Therefore, Buddhism is the Dharma gate of nonduality.

In fact, there is neither true nor false. It is like the Tiantai school’s teaching of emptiness, provisional existence, and the middle. Emptiness means that there are no material forms, yet provisional appearances remain; these provisional appearances are wondrous functioning. Not abiding in either emptiness or provisional appearances is the middle. Not establishing even the middle is the meaning of the Middle Way. Therefore, the provisional is the true, and the true is the provisional. Do not discriminate between them! Even if you try to distinguish them, you cannot do so clearly.

All phenomenal appearances before us are manifested by our minds. For example, when we see a teacup, the teacup is Buddha; when we see a table, the table is Buddha. Without our underlying principle, how could these phenomenal appearances exist? Once we understand this principle, there will be no hindrance when we act.

Our fault is attachment to appearances: pursuing material desires, craving enjoyment, and comparing ourselves with others. Whatever others have, we want as well, and we resort to any means necessary in order to enjoy ourselves. Therefore, do not cling to phenomenal appearances, pursue illusory external objects, and forget the underlying principle. Even becoming an emperor is only a provisional appearance, unobtainable and gone in the blink of an eye.

When our minds are truly empty and pure, without attachment to appearances, we see our true nature at all times. Someone may say, “I see my true nature at all times;

whenever afflictions arise, I can see through them.” Is that seeing one’s true nature at all times? If one truly saw one’s true nature at all times, there would be no afflictions. When afflictions arise, one is not seeing one’s true nature. Clearly, such words are all boasting and falsehoods.

Therefore, we must constantly temper ourselves amid circumstances. For no matter how correctly one speaks of principle, it is useless if one fails as soon as something happens. Chan Master Dahui Gao rebuked such people: “Medicinal mercury: when it meets fire, it flies away.” One who can only speak of principle is like mercury: as soon as it encounters fire, it evaporates. That will not do. Therefore, we must constantly urge and temper ourselves. The moment we are about to become attached to appearances, we should immediately let go, return to the original, and return to non-attainment.

(III) Practices of the Three Traditions: Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism

Śākyamuni Buddha and Confucius were born at roughly the same time, during the Zhou dynasty. Buddhism was transmitted to China during the Eastern Han dynasty. The sūtras, vinaya, and treatises are known as Buddhism’s Tripiṭaka. The sūtras are teachings spoken by the Buddha and recorded by later generations; treatises are written by bodhisattvas on the basis of insights gained through their own practice, such as *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* and the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*; and vinaya refers to precepts, such as the precepts for bhikshus, śrāmaṇeras, and bhikshunīs. The Tripiṭaka is vast and profound, as unfathomable as the ocean.

The first form of Buddhism transmitted to China was the Chan school. (The Chan school is Buddhism’s supreme and unsurpassed true Dharma gate, while the Pure Land school is an expedient Dharma gate for horizontally transcending the three realms.) Chan may be divided into non-Buddhist Chan, Hīnayāna Chan, worldly Chan, and Mahāyāna Chan. For example, people who practice qigong today may train their breath and sit in meditation in order to open the channels and energies of the body; their aim is centered on qi.

Those who practice with such ulterior aims practice non-Buddhist Chan. “Ulterior aims” means that they practice not in order to transcend birth and death, but to pursue other purposes—for example, to make their bodies healthier or to live longer. Worse still, some seek spiritual powers in order to show themselves off and gain a little fame, reputation, profit, and support. All such practice pursued with ulterior aims is non-Buddhist Chan.

If one practices in order to transcend birth and death, but understands only that the physical body is without self and practices according to the principle of biased emptiness, this is Hīnayāna Chan. Because one has not eliminated attachment to dharmas, one takes the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—among the seven great elements of Buddha-nature (earth, water, fire, wind, space, faculties, and consciousness) to be a self. This is the dharma-self, and is called failure to eliminate dharma-view.

Those who practice according to the truth of biased emptiness practice Hīnayāna Chan. (“The truth of biased emptiness” is called in some dictionaries “the truth of partial true emptiness.” It means clinging one-sidedly to the truth that the self is empty, without knowing that dharmas too are empty. If one realizes the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena, there is nothing to grasp; then emptiness and presence interpenetrate, replacing biased emptiness. This biased view may also be called the principle of “the partial truth of self-emptiness.”)

Those who practice by means of the Chan methods of the four dhyānas and eight meditative attainments practice worldly Chan. If one understands that both person and dharmas are empty—so that there is no personal self and no dharma-self—and practices accordingly, this is Mahāyāna Chan. Of course, the absence of a dharma-self does not mean that there is no dharmakāya; it means that one does not cling even to the four great elements of the dharmakāya.

Just as we human beings have eyes, ears, noses, and mouths, we neither cling to particular sense organs nor become attached to the body as a whole. Our dharmakāya inherently possesses the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, but we must not cling to these four great elements as a self. As soon as there is any abiding, there is a self in dharmas.

Those who study Mahāyāna Chan realize the twofold emptiness of person and dharmas, without any partial attachment. By realizing that persons are without self, one can be liberated from segmented birth and death; by realizing that dharmas are without self, one can be liberated from transformational birth and death. Segmented birth and death is the birth and death of rebirth in the six realms. Each birth and death involves a bodily form that survives in the world for a period of time. Humans have human bodies, horses have horse bodies, and dogs have dog bodies.

When this body survives, that is called birth; when it decays, that is called death. This is called segmented birth and death. Transformational birth and death refers to the arising and ceasing of our thoughts, which change without limit. To be liberated from the birth and death of rebirth in the six realms is to be liberated from segmented birth and death. To be liberated from the birth and death of changing thoughts is to be liberated from transformational birth and death.

All dharmas are fundamentally unobtainable. If one thinks there are dharmas to be attained, or that dharmas bring real benefit, then dharma-view has not been eliminated. This means that there is a self in dharmas, and one cannot be liberated from transformational birth and death. Thus arhats realize the truth of biased emptiness, whereas those who realize the truth that both person and dharmas are empty are bodhisattvas.

Going a step further, one recognizes that our dharmakāya—that is, the aware nature capable of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and knowing—is no different from that of all Buddhas. Those who practice according to this truth practice the highest Chan. Those who practice this Chan must maintain contemplation at every moment, without allowing a single deluded thought to arise.

As soon as a deluded thought arises, transform it into emptiness and do not follow it. Whatever circumstances appear before you, do not be moved by them. If you train in this way for a long time, body, mind, and world will become empty, and you will directly realize your original nature—Buddha-nature. Of course, this cannot be accomplished all at once. Just as one thought subsides, another arises; one must continue struggling with them without ceasing.

When a thought arises, we must see it, not follow it, and pay it no heed. It may arise a hundred times, but I pay it no heed a hundred and one times. In the struggle of such nonattention, thoughts naturally dissolve without being deliberately made to do so. When not a single thought arises, suddenly—with a swish—subject and object both vanish, and the sense faculties and their objects fall away.

At that very moment, body and mind—that is, thought—the world, and empty space all disappear together without trace. One's innate Buddha-nature then stands clearly before one, and one directly realizes one's original nature. To cultivate in this way is the unsurpassed and highest "Mahāyāna Chan"! This is the Chan transmitted to us by Patriarch Bodhidharma.

Although the preceding kinds of Chan differ in their gateways and stages of entry, if one can enter deeply through a single gate and practice sincerely, all can be effective; none should be slighted or cast aside. Before Bodhidharma came, practitioners all cultivated the Chan methods of the four dhyānas and eight meditative attainments, and many realized the Way.

Since the Tang and Song dynasties, most people have cultivated the Patriarchal Chan transmitted by Bodhidharma. China's profound indigenous cultures of Confucianism and Daoism, combined with Bodhidharma's Chan teachings, produced a distinctive Chan style; consequently, even more people realized the Way. There are continuous and reliable historical records from successive generations that can be traced and examined.

The Patriarchal Chan transmitted by Bodhidharma does not establish words and letters; it directly points to the mind, and through seeing one's nature one becomes a Buddha. It directly tells us what Buddha is. People then had good faculties. They feared only not knowing; once they knew what Buddha was, they carefully safeguarded it and did not allow habitual tendencies to defile it. Constantly contemplating emptiness and no longer clinging to appearances, they could attain realization in only a few years—very quickly.

Therefore, the sudden-awakening Chan transmitted by Patriarch Bodhidharma is exceedingly good. There is no need for elaborate methods of practice, because we are originally Buddhas; we simply do not know it. For example, the Sixth Patriarch instructed Huiming: "Do not think of good; do not think of evil." Let everything go, and do not stir any thought. "Huiming remained for a long while" means that he stopped there without moving.

When he was still and not a single thought arose, the Sixth Patriarch directly instructed him: "At just such a time, what is your Original Face, Venerable Ming?" That is, at the very time when not a single thought arises, you are not wood or stone—wood and stone have no awareness—but are clearly and distinctly aware. That is your Original Face.

This is direct instruction—how excellent it is! Later generations did not understand this principle, and "that" became "which." "Which one is your Original Face, Venerable Ming?" Thus it became a question for people to investigate. It is like guessing a riddle: Which one? Which one? But the Sixth Patriarch was not asking in this way; he was giving direct instruction.

It was like Minister Yu Di asking Chan Master Ziyu, "What is Buddha?" The Chan master called out, "Minister Yu Xiu!" The minister responded, "Yes!" "This is it!" said Chan Master Ziyu: the very one that responds is it. Thereupon Minister Yu Xiu awakened.

How simple and refreshing! But had Minister Yu Xiu truly awakened? Had his feet truly touched the ground? Later, Chan Master Yaoshan, a disciple of Shitou Xiqian, wished to test Minister Yu Xiu and said, "Ah, I fear the minister has been buried in Mount Ziyu."

After hearing this, Minister Yu Xiu thought, "Could it be that I awakened incorrectly?" He hurried to pay respects to Yaoshan and said, "Please instruct me, Master. What is Buddha?" Yaoshan likewise called out, "Minister!" Minister Yu Xiu responded, "Yes!" This time Yaoshan changed his words and asked, "What is it?" Minister Yu Xiu said, "Oh..." This time he truly awakened.

When Chan Master Ziyu said, “This is it!” he was telling Minister Yu Xiu that this is Buddha. When Yaoshan asked in return, “What is it?” he too was telling Minister Yu Xiu that this is Buddha. These are all direct instructions. Later this no longer worked, because people of later times had inferior faculties. If you told them so directly, they would instead find nothing remarkable in it.

It is like inherited family property: because one did not earn it through one’s own sweat and labor, one does not take it seriously and squanders it recklessly. If one is given direct instruction, one may even say, “This is Buddha? Then why are there no spiritual powers or eloquence? Surely this cannot be it.” Such a person cannot take it up, much less safeguard realization.

Therefore, Chan later became the practice of arousing a sense of doubt and investigating a huatou. Even today, people investigate the lifeless huatou, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” They investigate it for decades without receiving any news, because they fundamentally cannot arouse a sense of doubt.

To investigate a huatou, one must arouse a sense of doubt: Who, after all, is reciting the Buddha’s name? Is it I who recite it? Then what am I? Is the body myself? The body is a provisional combination of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. If our breath no longer comes, while the physical body has not yet decayed, why can it no longer recite? Therefore, the body is not myself.

Is thought myself? Thought is the reflection of the external objective environment in the human brain. Without the external objective environment, there would be no thought; therefore thought too is not myself. Then who, after all, recites the Buddha-name “Amitābha Buddha”? To find the answer to this question, one must arouse a sense of doubt.

Once a sense of doubt arises, one continually reflects on this question: Who, after all, is it? In this way, one cuts off thoughts and deluded thinking. Thought is seized by this sense of doubt and can no longer wander aimlessly. Otherwise, our deluded thoughts are manifold and do not stop for even a second. Even when we are asleep, they do not stop; deluded thoughts remain manifold, and chaotic dreams arise in profusion.

Therefore Chan practitioners say, “Great doubt, great awakening; small doubt, small awakening; no doubt, no awakening.” This is the principle. When a sense of doubt does not arise, thought is always in motion and cannot be grasped. One cannot enter deeply into samādhi, the deluded mind cannot settle, and one’s intrinsic nature cannot appear before one. The true mind is wrapped in deluded thoughts and cannot be seen.

I have visited several monasteries and seen them murmuring there: “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name? Who is reciting the Buddha’s name? . . .” Alas, how dreadful! They have not aroused a sense of doubt; rather than reciting, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” they would be better off reciting Amitābha Buddha. Reciting Amitābha Buddha brings the responsive efficacy of the Buddha-name as fruition, as well as the empowering support of the merit and virtue generated when the Buddha first aroused the resolve at the causal stage. It is far more effective than reciting, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?”

We are now in the Dharma-ending age, when the Buddhadharma is in decline. No one is willing to apply themselves properly to cultivation. The present state of the Chan school is truly lamentable: the Dharma that is transmitted is not transmitted after one has personally realized one’s true nature, but by means of Dharma transmission certificates.

It is like a scroll used for painting: one takes a long sheet of paper and writes four large characters on it, “Treasury of the True Dharma Eye.”

Then one writes who the first patriarch was, who the second patriarch was, and who the third, fourth, and so on were. By the time it reaches me, it is now the thirty-fourth generation. If I transmit it to you, I write “thirty-fifth generation”; handing this scroll to you is then considered transmitting the Dharma to you. Yet the transmitter has not realized the Way, nor has the recipient realized the Way. Everyone muddleheadedly passes the scroll on, considering that realization of the Way and considering that the Dharma has a lineage of transmission. How could the Chan school fail to be swept away by such a manner of transmitting and receiving the Dharma?!

The Pure Land school appeared only long after the Chan school arose. It was established during the Eastern Jin dynasty by Dharma Master Huiyuan of Donglin Monastery on Mount Lu.

At that time, Dharma Master Huiyuan saw that many people were not suited to Chan meditation, so he established two Buddha halls: one Chan hall and one Buddha-recitation hall established on the basis of the three sūtras—the Amitābha Sūtra, the Sūtra of Immeasurable Life, and the Contemplation Sūtra of Amitāyus Buddha. He had those unsuited to Chan meditation enter the Buddha-recitation hall, and thus the Pure Land school arose.

The Pure Land school is comparatively accessible and convenient. Relying on the compassionate power of the Buddha to guide one, one can transcend the three realms horizontally and be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. But one must truly attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction. Within the Pure Land

school, intense disputes have arisen over one-pointedness of mind without distraction.

Some say: "We rely wholly on the Buddha's power; there is no need for one-pointedness of mind without distraction. It is enough simply to recite the Buddha's name with a scattered mind." (Reciting the Buddha's name with a scattered mind means reciting aloud while one's thoughts roam chaotically.) Others say: "I am afraid that will not do. The Buddha said that one must uphold the name with one-pointedness of mind without distraction before that Buddha will appear to guide one to rebirth." Thus practitioners of the Pure Land school also hold differing views.

Must one attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction? If casual Buddha-recitation were enough for rebirth, why did Master Hanshan say, "Though the mouth recites Amitābha, if the mind is scattered, shouting until the throat breaks is futile"? Therefore, one-pointedness of mind without distraction is still necessary.

One-pointedness of mind without distraction also has deeper and shallower levels, which can be analyzed in great detail: one-pointedness in phenomena, one-pointedness in principle, one-pointedness in principle and phenomena, and one-pointedness among phenomena. We shall not discuss the deeper levels, but only the simplest: the Buddha-name must be continually recited in the mind at every moment—"Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ."

When encountering even the finest circumstances, do not become so delighted that you lose yourself; continue, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." When encountering even the worst and most afflictive circumstances, do not become troubled; continue, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." The mind remains unmoved. This is one-pointedness in phenomena without distraction. One must be able to achieve this. If one cannot even do this, I fear rebirth in the West will be very difficult.

This is because the Buddha does not simply run up before you to guide you. Chan Master Yongming Shou once said in the Record of the Treasury Mirror: the Buddha is like the moon in the sky, reflected in a thousand rivers and ten thousand waters, while our minds are like those thousand rivers and ten thousand waters. One-pointedness of mind without distraction is like clear water; Amitābha Buddha can appear only in clear water.

If our minds are a complete muddle, like a pool of muddy water, then even if the Buddha comes, we cannot see him. Because no one is willing to apply themselves properly, this book says: in the present Dharma-ending age, even the universally practiced Buddha-recitation Dharma gate of the "Pure Land school" is difficult to practice conveniently.

The Pure Land school is actually very easy and convenient to practice: one need only recite the Buddha-name, "Amitābha Buddha." But why is it said to be "difficult to practice"? Because present-day practitioners are unwilling to apply themselves to Buddha-recitation. They merely put on appearances: they attend the morning service and evening service, strike instruments and chant, and count their daily practice as complete.

That is still comparatively good. Those who are worse do not even attend the services; they think only of performing sūtra and repentance rites to earn money. Is such cultivation of any use? It is of no use whatsoever! To seek rebirth in the West through Buddha-recitation, one must recite until attaining one-pointedness of mind without distraction. The Buddha said: "If one wishes to purify one's land, one must first purify one's mind; as one's mind is purified, so too is the Buddha-land purified."

If the mind is impure, it does not accord with the Pure Land, and one cannot be reborn in the Pure Land. In the Contemplation Sūtra, the Buddha taught that the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate has sixteen methods of contemplation. The last is called the contemplation of Buddha-recitation. How should one contemplate? When reciting the Buddha's name, one must recite in the mind and hear with the ears; that is, while reciting the Buddha's name, one's ears must listen clearly to the sound of one's own recitation.

This method of contemplation does not use the eyes to look; rather, it uses the ears to contemplate the sound of our Buddha-recitation. One uses the ear faculty to gather in and stabilize the mind faculty, preventing deluded thoughts from arising and thereby entering the samādhi of Buddha-recitation. If we can truly realize and enter the samādhi of Buddha-recitation, then when the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month arrives, we shall certainly be reborn in the West. Otherwise, it is difficult to say.

Therefore, when reciting the Buddha's name, one must let go of everything and quietly recite, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." At the same time, one quietly listens with the ears to the sound of one's own recitation. Only then can one gather the mind and enter contemplation. People today recite the Buddha's name without entering contemplation and are unwilling to put into actual practice the method taught by the Buddha; therefore, they see very little result.

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva taught us: "Gather in the six sense faculties and let pure mindfulness continue uninterruptedly." This teaches us that, when reciting the Buddha's name, we must gather the six faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind into this single Buddha-name.

The eyes do not look at other things; the ears do not hear other sounds, listening only to the sound of one's own Buddha-recitation; the nose does not smell

fragrances or odors; the tongue does not taste flavors or speak. Exerting all one's mental strength, one quietly continues reciting, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." Naturally, the deluded mind gradually comes to rest, and one peacefully enters samādhi.

Unfortunately, practitioners of the Pure Land school today are unwilling to do this. The words "pure mindfulness continues uninterruptedly" have profound meaning and are indeed very difficult to accomplish. They are not as simple as they appear from the words alone. Quietly reciting this Buddha-name does not by itself constitute uninterrupted pure mindfulness. It is something very profound, like the work of safeguarding realization until completion after awakening in the Chan school.

What is meant by "pure"? Only when subject and object both perish, and the sense faculties and their objects fall away, can it be called pure. While reciting the Buddha's name, when the mind that recites and the Buddha-name being recited simultaneously fall away—when there is neither subject nor object, and all is vast and utterly pure—there is a single pure thought. If there is a mind that recites the Buddha's name and a Buddha-name that is recited, there are subject and object; this is relative. Whatever is relative is illusory and unreal. Only the absolute is real.

Only our Buddha-nature is absolute. When you recite the Buddha's name now, the mind, the Dharma, and the Buddha-name are all relative; therefore, this is not pure mindfulness.

Only when Buddha-recitation has entered samādhi and subject and object have fallen away is it like our practice of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma: one recites the mantra until, at the very end, "snap!"—it falls away. The Dharma is gone, the person is gone, the mind is gone, and the world is gone. All is empty and pure, yet luminous knowing remains clear and ever-present. Only this is a single pure thought.

A single pure thought is a single moment of accord. This single thought is Buddha. With one thought in accord, one thought is Buddha; with thought after thought in accord, thought after thought is Buddha. When every thought is thus unmoved and every thought is Buddha, this is called continuing without interruption. See what a demanding practice this is! Speaking of accord, moreover, accord in stillness differs from accord in activity.

Accord in stillness means that while we are sitting in meditation, subject and object both perish, our Original Face is opened, and we accord with the Buddha. But if, after rising from the cushion and entering activity, we forget it again and chase after external circumstances, then we are no longer in accord. Thus, accord in stillness alone is insufficient; there must not be nonaccord in activity.

The practice must reach the point of being equally at ease in stillness and activity. In activity, one must not turn with circumstances, but remain clear and distinct, just as in stillness. This is still more difficult. Continuing means continuing without interruption: regardless of activity or stillness, one remains thus at all times, not merely for a time now and then at another time in a different way.

Because our habitual tendencies are deeply entrenched, when we sit in meditation and apply ourselves, we may often break free today but not tomorrow; perhaps only after many days do we break free once more. If thereafter we never break free again, that is merely a blind cat happening upon a dead mouse. Not only is it not the practice of continuity, it does not even count as awakening.

Even if one's practice advances and continuity can be maintained in stillness, if one is still carried away in activity, it cannot yet be called a continuous, undivided practice. Genuine continuity requires that, in activity too, one continue just as in stillness. Thus, although one is doing things, it is as if nothing has been done, with not the slightest attachment. After doing them, not the slightest trace of having done them remains. Only such continuity, equally at ease in stillness and activity, is called uninterrupted pure mindfulness.

Chan practice must likewise reach this point before it can be called becoming continuous and undivided. After Chan practitioners open their Original Face, they must further safeguard realization and nurture the sacred embryo, allowing it to develop and mature. The practice of safeguarding realization has two stages.

Safeguarding means protecting. When we have opened our Original Face and recognized the dharmakāya, we must guard it closely, not allowing it to become tainted by sense objects and thereby stagnate. We must attend to it constantly without forgetting it. Once this protection has reached full maturity, there is no further need to protect it. Let it function freely, independently and autonomously, without violation or obstruction. This is so because dharmatā is originally thus; it is not something deliberately contrived.

When practice reaches this point—the work of continuity equally at ease in stillness and activity—not only is Pure Land practice Chan and Chan Pure Land practice; Chan and Pure Land are not separate households. Even Confucius, at the end, said: “At seventy, I could follow my heart's desires without transgressing the bounds.” This shows that when practice has reached completion, there is no distinction among schools.

Some people who do not understand the true principles of Buddhism are always making distinctions, saying, “You belong to the Chan school, and I belong to the Pure Land school.” In fact, this is irrelevant. Others make distinctions by saying, “Pure Land is good and reliable; Chan is not good and is dangerous!” They do not realize

that they are the same. You say Chan is dangerous because you do not cultivate with all your heart and strength.

If you do not practice Buddha-recitation with one-pointed dedication, Pure Land is equally dangerous. Have you not seen Master Lianchi say, "There are many who recite the Buddha's name, but few who are reborn in the West"? You say Pure Land is good, but Chan is equally good. Since the Sixth Patriarch, have there not also been many who saw their true nature and realized the Way? Therefore, do not slander one another. All dharmas are good.

It depends only on whether a dharma is suited to your faculties; if it suits your faculties, it is a good dharma. Moreover, people make distinctions because they have not cultivated a dharma to completion. They rigidly cling to a single gate and become attached to one point, thereby giving rise to discriminating views. If one truly opens through and sees one's intrinsic nature, one is complete and understands that all schools are alike, without disagreement.

Therefore, our Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma is Chan, and it is Pure Land. It differs not in the slightest from the ten major schools of Chinese Buddhism; there are only some differences in how one begins the practice.

The principles taught by our Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma are entirely consistent with Chan. It likewise teaches that, after opening through and seeing one's intrinsic nature, one eliminates the delusions of views and thought and perfects the three kāyas and four wisdoms. It further teaches that when the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure; that one should make vows for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss; and, going a step further, that one may be reborn according to one's vows in other Pure Lands in every direction, rather than being limited to rebirth in only one Pure Land. Thus, our Heart-of-Heart Dharma is both Chan and Pure Land. But to put it into actual practice, one must apply oneself with one-pointed dedication; it cannot be accomplished merely by talking about it.

Pure Land school practice is in fact the same: one must also recite the Buddha's name single-mindedly and diligently, without laxity. But the Pure Land school as now taught differs greatly from the original meaning of Pure Land. Not only do people not enter samādhi through Buddha-recitation; they do not even seek Buddha-recitation samādhi. Some even say that it does not matter if one does not recite the Buddha's name, so long as one hears the Buddha's name once, one can be reborn in the West.

They have ravaged and ruined the Pure Land school beyond recognition. They truly are perverse offspring and demons' children clad in the garments of Buddhism. It would be strange indeed if such people did not descend into hell and suffer the torments of the mountain of knives and cauldron of boiling oil! The Pure Land

school originally had such practices as the “Sixteen Contemplations,” “Buddha-Recitation Samādhi,” and “Pratyutpanna Samādhi.” This shows that practitioners must cultivate them earnestly.

To practice “Pratyutpanna Samādhi,” one must recite the Buddha’s name while walking or standing from morning to night. One is not permitted to sit or sleep. This is extremely arduous and difficult to accomplish. Therefore, this book says: “Even the widely practiced Pure Land Dharma gate of Buddha-recitation is not easy to carry out conveniently.” This is very reasonable; it is indeed difficult to practice. Consequently, when the time of death comes, people are all in confusion.

To relinquish the body peacefully and with one-pointedness of mind without distraction is even more difficult to achieve, because they have not cultivated properly. Of course, there are people who can depart calmly and steadily, without the slightest hindrance; one cannot say that there are none at all. But they are very, very few. I once saw an elderly woman who received public assistance. She lived in great hardship and had no money.

At that time, the government gave her only eight yuan each month. She could only pick up a few vegetable leaves at the market to eat. She would put some leftover rice into a thermos, obtain some boiling water from the hot-water room, and let it swell into porridge to drink.

All day long she recited the Buddha’s name: “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” A week in advance, she knew that she was about to depart; this is called knowing the time of one’s death in advance. She told the attendant in the hot-water room, “I have already soaked my rice today; tomorrow I will not come.”

The attendant in the hot-water room asked her, “Where are you going?” She replied, “Ah, I am going on a long journey.” For the following week, no one saw her again. Someone said that the old woman had entered her room one evening and had never been seen coming out. They broke open her door and found that she had already passed away while seated on her bed. This was very good indeed!

From this we can see that Pure Land practitioners still need one-pointedness of mind without distraction in order to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Chan practitioners, on the other hand, must eliminate delusions and realize truth before they can attain Buddhahood and be liberated from birth and death. To eliminate delusions and realize truth means to eliminate the delusions of views, the delusions of thought, and the delusions of ignorance, and thereby realize one’s intrinsic nature.

Awakening means that one has already seen one’s intrinsic nature, but has only just reached the threshold of the dharmakāya and eliminated the delusions of views—

that is, conceptual views. Once one's views are correct, the mind will no longer waver. But the delusions of thought—that is, discursive thinking—have not yet been eliminated; when one encounters circumstances, thoughts still arise, and one cannot be liberated from segmented birth and death.

Therefore, the Pure Land school often says that this is a weakness of Chan: "Although Chan practitioners may awaken through investigating Chan, they still cannot transcend birth and death. The Pure Land school is more reliable: 'Once one sees Amitābha, why worry about not awakening?' When one is reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one realizes the stage of nonretrogression and becomes a bodhisattva in the final life before Buddhahood—that is, an equal-enlightenment bodhisattva—and no longer undergoes rebirth in the six realms."

It is true that many Chan practitioners gain a little intellectual understanding and think that they have awakened, while their actual practice has not kept pace. Some practitioners open through in their efforts and see their intrinsic nature, but this too is only an initial arrival at the threshold of the dharmakāya.

It is like having just climbed onto the edge of a stage, without yet reaching its center. One must continue applying oneself diligently. Only when the mind is completely empty and pure can one truly realize awakening. Therefore, one must temper body and mind amid circumstances. Master Shengguang, the second patriarch in the lineage transmitted by Bodhidharma, tempered his body and mind in brothels and wine shops.

Others said to him, "You are a monk—why do you still go to brothels and wine shops?" He replied, "I come here to temper my mind, to see whether it still moves." This is genuine practice. Of course, it is also wrong for Pure Land followers to speak so badly of Chan, because such remarks cause others to lose interest in studying Chan.

In fact, Chan and Pure Land have different points of departure. If Chan practitioners truly see their intrinsic nature, then even if their habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated, after seven rebirths in heaven and seven rebirths among humans they can be fully liberated. They will continue to rise to higher and higher states and will not return to the three lower realms. This is very good indeed! Now some people say, "Wuzu Jie, Caotang Qing."

This means that Chan Master Jie of Wuzu Mountain, though awakened, had not yet transcended birth and death; in a later rebirth he became Su Dongpo. They further say that Su Dongpo married several wives and was unable to leave home and cultivate. In fact, Su Dongpo was quite admirable; he did not forget his practice.

He cultivated both the Way and Buddhism, and he practiced diligently. He composed many poems, lyrics, and essays related to the Buddhadharma. It is said that in a subsequent rebirth he became Master Hanshan. Is this not good? Thus, Chan has its own distinctive features. Do not slander one another any longer; rather, you should praise one another, because each person has his own affinities and faculties. It is like eating: you enjoy sweet food, while another enjoys spicy food; each has his own preference. Therefore, all dharmas are equal, without superiority or inferiority.

Even while the Buddha was in the world, he foretold that in the Dharma-ending age, only the Pure Land school and Esoteric Buddhism would be most suited to people's capacities. The Chan school's style is lofty and steep; only those of the highest capacities can accord with it, while those of middling and lesser capacities cannot. Nowadays, Chan transmits the Dharma through Dharma certificates rather than through awakening; it has the name but lacks the reality.

This is truly regrettable and most unfortunate! In fact, Chan is the direct Dharma gate of Buddhism; the others are all expedient Dharma gates. The Pure Land school is simple and convenient, allowing horizontal transcendence of the three realms. Esoteric Buddhism has many Dharma gates, but very few people truly practice the great Dharma. Most practice methods for seeking spiritual powers in order to display themselves.

For example, before Master Haideng studied Buddhism, he practiced martial arts with his maternal uncle, who was a swordsman from Qingcheng Mountain in Sichuan.

One day, at the border of Sichuan, Master Haideng saw two young lamas smoking opium and said to them, "Hey! You are monks, yet you smoke opium and do not behave properly!" One young lama said, "Do not look down on us. You may have knives and swords, but if we recite a mantra, your knives and swords will be unable to cut through our arms."

Master Haideng shook his head to indicate that he did not believe it. The young lama said, "You do not believe me? Wait until I finish smoking, and then you may try." The young lama inhaled the opium with repeated puffs. Once he was invigorated, he muttered a mantra, rolled up his sleeve, and told Master Haideng to strike his arm.

At first, Master Haideng did not dare to cut him. He merely touched him lightly with the back of his knife, and with a smack the knife sprang back. He applied a little more force, and the knife sprang back again. Master Haideng thought, "Eh? It really does seem to work!" The young lama said, "Come on, strike hard with the blade. My method is very efficacious."

This time, Master Haideng lightly touched him with the blade, and with a smack the knife sprang back again. The young lama said, "Strike with force; it is all right." This time Master Haideng struck hard, and with a smack the knife sprang back again. At this, Master Haideng was convinced and began to arouse the resolve to study the Buddhadharma. Master Haideng said that this was how his affinity for studying Buddhism began.

Therefore, Master Tsongkhapa saw that, over time, abuses had arisen in Esoteric Buddhism. The disciples of the Red school were all occupied with such minor spiritual powers and did not cultivate the true Dharma, turning the Red school into a chaotic mess. He therefore discarded its dregs, retained its essence, reorganized its regulations, wore yellow robes, and established the Yellow school. Esoteric Buddhism now has many branches, including the Red, Yellow, White, and Flower schools.

But at present, most people who study Esoteric Buddhism seek spiritual powers rather than liberation from birth and death, and they have gone down a deviant path. What a pity! In fact, when our cultivation reaches a certain level, spiritual powers naturally manifest, and the six supernormal powers naturally become complete. Non-Buddhist paths also possess spiritual powers, but only the five powers of divine ear, divine eye, bodily mobility, knowledge of others' minds, and knowledge of past lives.

They do not have the power of the exhaustion of outflows. The power of the exhaustion of outflows is called the power of the Way: one is not attached to appearances at all, and all afflictions are utterly exhausted. Only a Buddha possesses all six supernormal powers. For example, Guru Padmasambhava is said to have ascended bodily and attained Buddhahood; his majestic powers were inconceivable. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva likewise possesses great majestic spiritual powers.

When our Heart-of-Heart Dharma practice reaches a certain level, spiritual powers may arise, yet we do not know where they come from. Spiritual powers are originally complete within us; they have no origin to begin with. So long as we do not cling to appearances and let go of everything, spiritual powers will manifest naturally. If we seek them, we will instead be unable to obtain them.

Regarding this Esoteric Dharma, lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng said: "Those who hear it must at least understand the 'doctrines of the nine vehicles' and possess an initial intellectual understanding of yoga. Only then can mind and seal correspond, allowing them to integrate and comprehend it fully, without obstruction between principle and phenomena." This requires those who hear this Dharma to possess considerable wisdom; it is not something that just anyone can understand.

Therefore, we shall first explain the “doctrines of the nine vehicles” of Esoteric Buddhism. The “nine vehicles” refer to the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles

(see the diagram below):

The outer three vehicles are the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva vehicles of Exoteric Buddhism. They chiefly expound doctrinal principles, enabling us to understand how to cultivate oneself into an arhat, a pratyekabuddha, or a bodhisattva, and how to realize Buddhahood. One must first understand these teachings before one can cultivate the Esoteric Dharma in depth.

If, before practicing the Esoteric Dharma, we do not understand any doctrinal principles at all, practice will be very difficult. It is like going somewhere: first, we must clearly ask which road to take and what vehicle to use, and only then can we set out. In this way, we will not go in circles or take detours.

The inner three vehicles are the Kriyā division, the Caryā division, and the Yoga division, which teach specific methods of actual practice. The Kriyā division, also called the Action division, consists of practices for pacifying disasters and increasing benefits. There are many disasters in the world today, and practices for pacifying disasters can help us bring such disasters to an end—for example, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and droughts.

Practices for increasing benefits can help us obtain certain benefits, such as health and longevity, fewer illnesses, abundant wealth, and plentiful harvests. The Caryā division refers to the initial practice of visualization. Esoteric practice generally begins with visualization.

For example, to practice “oṃ, āḥ, hūṃ” is to visualize white, red, and blue light respectively at the crown, throat, and heart. There is also the practice of Phowa. First, one visualizes an upward-curving lunar maṇḍala in the lower dantian—shaped like a crescent moon, curving upward rather than downward, and exceedingly bright.

From this foundation, visualize a channel arising, narrow below and broad above like the mouth of a trumpet, extending directly to the brahma aperture at the crown of the head. Visualize this channel as bright, as though illuminated by a fluorescent lamp, running directly from the perineum to the brahma aperture. At the bottom of this channel is a luminous drop, about the size of a mung bean, slightly smaller than a soybean.

After visualizing the crescent, channel, and luminous drop as bright, practice with the three-syllable formula. First use the syllable “hei.” This “hei” is shouted from the

lower dantian. With one shout of “hei—,” all the qi in the lower dantian is drawn upward, and the anus naturally contracts upward as well.

A mantra serves this function: its sound stimulates the qi. When the qi is driven upward, the luminous drop rises from below to the crown. But it must not leave; once it leaves, life is gone. This luminous drop is the eighth consciousness.

At this point, visualize one foot of Amitābha Buddha—this is called Amitābha Buddha Phowa—or one foot of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva—this is called Avalokiteśvara Phowa—pressing upon the brahma aperture at the crown, so that the luminous drop cannot escape. When the “hei—” qi has reached the crown, use the syllable “ga.” With “ga—,” the qi descends.

Everyone may try it: with “hei—,” the qi rises; with “ga—,” the qi falls. When it is finally time to depart, use the third syllable: “pa—,” and it goes out.

For example, when one is about to depart at death, first use the syllable “hei” to raise the luminous drop to the crown. Then remove the foot of Amitābha Buddha, or Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, that is pressing upon the crown. Finally, with “pa—,” the crown opens, the luminous drop leaves, enters the heart of Amitābha Buddha or Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and one is reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

This is the practice of Phowa. The Pure Land school also has visualization practices; the Sūtra of Sixteen Contemplations teaches sixteen kinds of visualization. The Yoga division refers to correspondence. That is, our minds must correspond with the Buddha’s mind; mind and Buddha commune and become an undivided whole. In practice, one’s words and conduct must accord with each other; this is correspondence. It will not do to say much but do little, while greed, anger, and ignorance remain very strong. Therefore, one must constantly correspond, above with the Buddha and below with sentient beings, through loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

The secret three vehicles refer to Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Mahāyoga—mahā means great, and yoga means union—refers to entering samādhi through upholding true words, that is, reciting mantras, and realizing the wondrously luminous state. This wondrously luminous state refers to emptiness, bliss, and luminosity. Emptiness means transforming the body into emptiness; bliss means incomparable joy; and luminosity means radiating great light.

According to the practice of the four dhyānas and eight meditative absorptions, the second dhyāna heaven is joy, while the third dhyāna heaven is bliss. This bliss is a light, peaceful joy beyond comparison with any worldly pleasure. After realizing the

wondrously luminous state and experiencing emptiness, bliss, and luminosity, one must not abide in them.

If one abides in emptiness, one cannot leave the realm of emptiness; if one abides in bliss, one cannot leave the desire realm; if one abides in luminosity, one cannot leave the form realm. Therefore, even upon realizing the wondrously luminous state, one must not cling to appearances, but return to nothing to be attained.

Anuyoga means perfect correspondence—*anu* means perfection. It means that Buddha-nature is originally thus: it is originally the wondrously luminous state, and every sentient being is originally complete with emptiness, bliss, and luminosity. These are not acquired through practice. When one awakens to this—“Oh! A Buddha is not made by our practice; it is originally so!”—one awakens.

Thus, the Way is not cultivated but awakened to. Atiyoga is a level higher than Anuyoga. Atiyoga is the correspondence of Great Perfection—*ati* means Great Perfection. It means that we ourselves are Buddhas, originally complete with all wondrous functions. This is the essential point of Great Perfection. The rainbow-body practice, Mahāmudrā practice, and our Heart-of-Heart Dharma are all Great Perfection practices.

“Great Perfection” is the highest teaching of the Red School of Esoteric Buddhism and is the same practice as “Mahāmudrā.” Mahāmudrā is the preliminary practice for cultivating Great Perfection; in Tibetan it is rendered as *Trekchö*, meaning “cutting through.” Mahāmudrā compares our intrinsic nature to a great hand that pervades the entirety of empty space and the dharma realm.

For example, Sun Wukong could travel 108,000 li with a single somersault, yet no matter how he leapt about, he could not escape the palm of the Tathāgata’s hand. Our mind-capacity is just this vast; this is our Buddha-nature. To practice Mahāmudrā is to realize correspondence with the three spaces, that is, to realize the mind and see one’s true nature. The three spaces are inner space, outer space, and secret space.

Inner space means transforming our bodies into emptiness. Therefore, we often say that in practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, it will not do if the body has not been transformed into emptiness and a body still remains. Outer space refers to the space outside the body. Secret space refers to our intrinsic nature, namely Buddha-nature. Our Buddha-nature is originally empty; originally, there is nothing there.

There are no distinctions of male or female, young or old, blue, yellow, red, or white. Yet it is not annihilationist emptiness, not a state in which there is absolutely nothing; rather, it is the numinous and wondrous true mind, namely wondrous presence. Wondrous presence is presence without being present, and non-presence

that is nevertheless present; it has no appearance that can be seen. Therefore, it possesses great function and great energy. When we unite inner space, outer space, and secret space into one, this is the great emptiness. This great emptiness is not the absence of all awareness; rather, it is clear and distinct, with lucid spiritual knowing. This is the realm of Trekchö, namely Mahāmudrā.

The three essential elements of Mahāmudrā are view, samādhi, and conduct. One must bring view, samādhi, and conduct into unity. First, our view must be correct: we must understand what our intrinsic nature is. We must know that intrinsic nature is possessed by all sentient beings; it neither arises nor ceases, neither increases nor decreases, is neither defiled nor pure, and neither moves nor wavers.

Then we know that all things in this world are illusory and unreal: “All dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I say, are empty.” As long as we let go of everything to which we cling and restore our lively and vibrant intrinsic nature, accomplishment is attained. Thus, when one’s view is correct, one has the power of samādhi.

Because we know that external forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas are all false, all as worthless as straw, we no longer cling to appearances. Once we possess the great treasure of Buddha-nature, we no longer want the external straw. In the Buddhist sūtras, our most precious Buddha-nature is praised as the “maṇi jewel,” which can bestow every treasure. It can bring forth all things.

When our minds are settled, our conduct can be in harmony. This is yoga, that is, correspondence. If what we say is one thing and what we do is another, that will not do, because our conduct has not been cultivated to that level. Thus, “conduct” means being able truly to realize it.

After practicing Mahāmudrā and realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, one further practices the Great Perfection Tögal method, meaning “direct crossing,” also called the rainbow-body practice. In the Chan school, one first awakens; after awakening, one then wears away one’s habitual tendencies amid circumstances, thoroughly polishing away the so-called delusions of views, delusions of thought, dust-like delusions, and delusions of ignorance. When one no longer clings to any appearance at all, accomplishment is attained.

Esoteric Buddhism has one more expedient method of guidance than the Chan school: the Tögal method. Tögal unites the five lights within our bodies with the five lights of the external world, so that light reflects upon light and they merge into one light. The five lights within our bodies are: first, far-reaching water light, the light radiated from our eyes.

Are our eyes not watery and bright? This is because channels extend directly to the eyes. Second, soft white channel-light, the light radiated by the various channels. Those who practice qigong speak of the ren channel, du channel, central channel, and so forth. When these channels all radiate light, this is called soft white channel-light.

3. The light of the physical heart is the light emitted from our heart. 4. The light of the Dharma-realm essence is the luminosity of our own nature. 5. The pure light of realm-nature means that our entire body is a dharma realm; the whole body is light. The five outer lights are sunlight, moonlight, lamplight, waterlight, and black light.

Darkness is also a kind of light. The practice of the rainbow body uses these five outer lights to stimulate the five lights within our body. Do we not now have lasers? A ruby capable of emitting light is placed in a laser chamber and struck by an intense electric light, thereby stimulating the gem's own light. This is laser light.

Laser light is powerful and can penetrate steel plates. The practice of the rainbow body uses external light to stimulate the light of our intrinsic nature. When the five outer lights and the five lights within the body merge into one, the entire body undergoes a transformation from quantitative to qualitative change and becomes a body of light.

At the time of death, with a “boom—,” one transforms into a beam of light and departs. This is attaining Buddhahood in this very body, which differs from attaining Buddhahood in this very life (one refers to the “body” of the physical body, the other to the “life” of one lifetime).

Attaining Buddhahood in this very life means being able to attain Buddhahood during this lifetime in the world; yet at death one does not transform into light, and a body remains behind. If the body also transforms into light and one attains Buddhahood, this is attaining Buddhahood in this very body.

The best result of accomplishing the practice of the rainbow body is that no nails or hair remain: body and mind both merge into the dharma realm and become a body of light. In a less successful practice, the fingernails and hair remain, while everything else transforms into light. In the least successful case, the body cannot transform into a rainbow body but instead shrinks—that is, the body becomes smaller. For example, the remains of Chan Master Wuxia, enshrined in the Hundred-Year Palace on Mount Jiuhua, shrank to less than two feet. After being gilded, they were placed in a Buddhist shrine for people to venerate. That is what is meant by shrinking.

To practice the rainbow body, one cannot work; one must enter retreat and practice continuously from morning to night. If one practices for a while and then goes off to

work, it will not do. This is because this practice consists of looking either at sunlight or waterlight; then either at waterlight or moonlight; then either at moonlight or lamplight; then either at lamplight or black light.

In short, one must sit in meditation and practice the Dharma all day long in order to attain accomplishment; otherwise, one cannot transform into light. Therefore, those without time or favorable external conditions cannot undertake this practice. For example, if you are to look at waterlight, there must be water. Thus, the practice of the rainbow body is very difficult.

Even after accomplishing the practice of the rainbow body, one must not abide in or cling to it. If one clings to the rainbow body, one is merely a wandering spirit in the dharma realm and cannot fully realize Buddhahood. This is because Buddha-nature is originally empty. Our mind is like the vast empty sky: utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. All appearances are manifested by the Buddha-nature that we inherently possess.

Buddha-nature fully possesses all appearances and all capacities. Precisely because everything is empty can everything exist. Buddhist doctrine is the most complete and thorough. Other religions, however, always posit some thing, always have some point of attachment. If one abides in some one thing, one cannot possess everything completely and perfectly.

It can thus be seen that, at its highest level, Esoteric Buddhism says exactly the same thing as the Chan school: it too is formless. Form-based practices are all guiding methods, preliminary methods for gathering in practitioners; formless practice alone is the supreme Dharma. The Chan school, in fact, is also Esoteric Buddhism, not Exoteric Buddhism. "Esoteric" means the Tathāgata's secret cause: no dharma can be seen.

Does not the Śūraṅgama Sūtra speak of "the Great Buddha-Crown, the Tathāgata's secret cause, and the ultimate meaning of cultivation and realization"? Our Buddha-nature has no form that can be seen and no sound that can be heard. Since it is without sound and form, how can it be seen? Therefore, the Great Buddha-Crown cannot be seen (so long as mind accords with mind). This is the Tathāgata's secret cause; this is what is secret.

It is like when Huiming asked the Sixth Patriarch, "Is there anything still more secret?" The Sixth Patriarch replied, "The secret lies at your side; once it is spoken to you, it is no longer secret." This means that the secret lies within yourself; what can be explained to you is not the secret. Earlier, we discussed the Chan school's non-Buddhist Chan, ordinary-person Chan, Hīnayāna Chan, Mahāyāna Chan, and supreme-vehicle Chan.

Non-Buddhist Chan is practiced with heterodox views: it posits dharmas outside the mind, seeking what is higher and rejecting what is lower. Such practitioners do not know that high and low are equally the same, that sentient beings are Buddhas and Buddhas are sentient beings. Ordinary-person Chan is not practiced with heterodox views; it is based on right faith in cause and effect, while still seeking what is higher and rejecting what is lower. Hīnayāna Chan is practiced after awakening to the truth of biased emptiness; it regards this body as not-self and falls into biased emptiness. Mahāyāna Chan, also called bodhisattva Chan, is practiced after awakening to the twofold emptiness of dharmas and self. Supreme-vehicle Chan is awakening to the fact that we ourselves are Buddhas and Buddhas are ourselves.

We lack not the slightest thing of the Tathāgata's intrinsic nature; it is exactly the same as that of the Buddha. To practice in this way is supreme-vehicle Chan. Is this not the same as the Great Perfection of Esoteric Buddhism?! Thus, at the highest point, Esoteric Buddhism and the Chan school are exactly the same.

(IV) If One Hears the Way in the Morning, One May Die Content in the Evening

"It is said that in the Tibetan esoteric tradition there are two methods by which one may attain Buddhahood without practice: one is the 'practice of phowa,' the transference of consciousness for rebirth; the other is this very Dharma." How wonderful it would be if one could become a Buddha without practice! Everyone wants to obtain such a Dharma.

Can one truly become a Buddha without practice? Actually, no. We discussed the "practice of phowa" earlier. So-called non-practice means that one need not practice meditative contemplation, but one must still practice visualization. And although this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State says, as this scripture states, "This Dharma is a profound instruction through which one attains liberation without practicing meditative contemplation," if we become thoroughly familiar with its contents and never forget them at any moment, that too amounts to practice. Therefore, do not try to get something for nothing.

The practices we cultivate today all involve meditative contemplation. Contemplation means contemplative awareness: watching where thoughts arise and not following them as they run away. The Pure Land school's "Pratyutpanna Samādhi" and "Buddha-Remembrance Samādhi" are both meditative contemplation.

The Contemplation Sūtra of Amitāyus Buddha teaches sixteen methods of contemplation: contemplating the sun, contemplating the sacred realm of the Pure Land, contemplating Amitābha Buddha, and so forth. The easiest, contemplation of

Buddha-recitation, is the sixteenth contemplation. One must listen through the ear faculty to the sound of one's own Buddha-recitation, clearly distinguishing every word. Those in the Pure Land school today who recite the Buddha's name with a scattered mind cannot enter contemplation.

As they recite the Buddha's name, their deluded thoughts race about, and they also indulge in idle talk; thus their practice has no strength. They think that, since Amitābha Buddha made great vows to come and guide us, all that is needed is to believe that the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss exists and recite the Buddha's name a little. After all, they say, we are reborn while carrying karma. The karma we have created can be carried away with us, all the way to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Is it really so easy? Actually, this is mistaken. Rebirth while carrying karma is indeed possible, but one must understand that karma is the stirring of thoughts in the mind. Once a thought stirs, ignorance arises. Therefore, Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna says, "Ignorance as the cause gives rise to the three subtle characteristics." These three subtle characteristics are the characteristic of karma, the characteristic of transformation, and the characteristic of manifestation. When a thought stirs and ignorance arises, this is the characteristic of karma—the characteristic of creating karma.

Originally, we had no characteristics, for the dharmakāya is without characteristics and contains not a single thing. The Four Books also say, "When primordial chaos first opened." In the time of chaos there were originally no characteristics. It was simply that we were all restless, with deluded thoughts wildly stirring. This is called suchness failing to remain undisturbed, and one's own mind stirring in disorder.

We think that if there is awakened nature, there should be something to see. Why, then, do we see nothing? Why is it empty? Because we pursue characteristics, the stirring becomes even more intense—stirring added upon stirring. Thus, the characteristic of karma arises from stirring. The process of turning from nonexistence to existence is called the characteristic of transformation. Finally, when characteristics manifest out of chaos, this is called the characteristic of manifestation.

Thus, the three subtle characteristics in "ignorance as the cause gives rise to the three subtle characteristics" are karmic obstacles. These karmic obstacles cannot be entirely resolved through one lifetime of practice. Even at the stage of an equal enlightenment bodhisattva—after the tenth bhūmi come equal enlightenment and wonderful enlightenment—there remains one final portion of ignorance that has not been shattered. This is karma. To be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must still carry it along; hence the term rebirth while carrying karma.

This does not mean that it is all right to sit in meditation and recite the Buddha's name, practice the Dharma, and at the same time do a few bad deeds and create some karma. It must not be understood this way. If we have already placed faith in the Buddha and practice the Dharma, we must not create karma again. To commit wrongdoing again is knowingly violating the Dharma, which makes the offense all the more grave. Those who do evil must descend into hell; this does not mean that they can carry it with them into rebirth.

Therefore, we must be careful and never misunderstand the meaning of rebirth while carrying karma. We should practice every good and do many wholesome deeds. We should do no evil; however slight a bad deed may be, do not do it. Those who practice the Pure Land school today think: "We can be reborn while carrying karma; if we recite the Buddha's name ten times at the moment of death, we can be reborn in the West. It does not matter if we do not practice now."

If you do not practice now, will you be able to recite at the moment of death? Being able to recite then depends on applying effort now. I have seen many people whose four elements were dispersing at death. They suffered terribly and could not recite at all; they did not even wish to listen: "Oh, this is unbearable! My mind is in utter turmoil."

Why is this? Because their minds are not pure, and they cannot bear to leave this world. They were born here and will die here. Their relatives, gold and silver, wealth, fame, and status are all in this world. Added to this is the unbearable suffering of the four elements dispersing. At such a time, when asked to recite the Buddha's name, they cannot do so. To be able to recite the Buddha's name at death depends on applying effort now.

One must have strong meditative stability. When illness and pain come, it should still be possible to recite the Buddha's name and to raise up right mindfulness. How can one rely on that brief moment at death without applying effort now? In the past, a Dharma brother of ours said the same thing: "It does not matter if I do not apply effort now. When I am about to die, one week of practice will be enough."

Does not the Amitābha Sūtra say, "If for one day, two days ... or even seven days, one attains one-pointedness of mind without distraction, that Buddha will appear before one"? Later, I saw that not only was he unable to practice for a week; he was in such pain and confusion that he no longer knew how to apply effort. Thus, it is not enough merely to boast. Ten recitations at death and rebirth while carrying karma are not so simple. If we want to be secure, we must apply ourselves well now and attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction.

The Chan school is the same: it too does not depart from meditative contemplation. For example, the Dharma Characteristics School cultivates Consciousness-Only

contemplation, the Tiantai school cultivates Great Calming and Contemplation, and there is also investigation of huatou; all are forms of meditative contemplation. In investigating a huatou, one must arouse a sense of doubt and concentrate one's whole body and mind upon it until they congeal into a single mass. If one can truly do this, good news will come.

What is to be feared is that the mind is scattered and cannot arouse a sense of doubt. Therefore, one must enter deeply into meditative contemplation. Esoteric Buddhism places even greater emphasis on meditative contemplation. It employs the empowerment of the three mysteries: body—mudrā; speech—mantra; and mind—contemplation. When the hands form mudrās and the legs are folded in meditation, so that neither hands nor feet move, this is the mystery of body. When the mouth continuously upholds a mantra, this is the mystery of speech. Mind means contemplative awareness; this is the mystery of mind.

Therefore, Esoteric Buddhism likewise cannot do without contemplation. Form-based esoteric practice in particular does not depart from meditative contemplation: contemplating seed syllables, light, Buddhas, moon discs, sun discs, channels, winds, and bright drops, and so forth. There is not a single practice that does not employ meditative contemplation.

Yet this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State differs from other teachings. It directly instructs us that, when each person dies, the light of death manifests and light radiates forth. This light does not radiate because of practice; even those who have not practiced radiate light after death. This is because intrinsic nature is fully endowed with luminosity, but we are deluded by material forms and do not awaken to it.

Therefore, if we remember very clearly the process described in the scripture, then, when death comes and the consciousness-spirit emerges, a Dharma companion at our side can remind us. Once we awaken and merge with the luminosity of intrinsic nature, we can attain realization.

It is like performing in a play: if an actor onstage forgets a line, a prompter beside the stage gives him a reminder, and he remembers and knows what to do. In this sense, this scripture is indeed a Dharma gate through which one may attain liberation without practicing meditative contemplation. But do not try to get this advantage too cheaply.

As soon as you hear that practice is unnecessary, you stop practicing and let loose like wild horses! That would be disastrous. If you do not diligently practice the Dharma now, you will have no skill whatsoever. When death comes, you will be like one drunk on strong old wine—dazed and muddled. Even if someone beside you reminds you, you will be unable to awaken.

Moreover, the manifestation of luminosity does not last long—only about the time it takes to eat a meal. At most, after half an hour, the karma created during one's life appears before one scene after another, like a film. Then one follows these karmic obstacles and misses the opportunity for liberation. That would be most regrettable. In addition, it will not do if, at the time of death, one lacks favorable conditions.

In the Amitābha Sūtra, the Buddha repeatedly instructs us: one cannot be born in that land with few wholesome roots, merits, virtues, and conditions. Thus, the right time and favorable conditions are very important. For example, when a person near death is sent to a hospital for emergency treatment, the doctor injects a long cardiac needle and performs artificial respiration with repeated thumping motions.

The person near death is already suffering terribly. Can such treatment allow that person to remain at ease? Can this Dharma be performed for that person? It cannot. Therefore, it is best to be careful and prudent. Everyone should still apply themselves well in practice.

Furthermore, people's capacities differ. Some hear of Pure Land practice at an early age, yet do not practice well; they merely perform the morning and evening services casually. Others never know of this Dharma until the moment of death, when a virtuous teacher tells them: "Reciting the Buddha's name can lead to rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss."

If they have great wholesome roots, they may then let go of everything and immediately raise up right mindfulness: "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha ...". With this single thought, they too may be reborn in the West and transcend. Therefore, one cannot make sweeping generalizations. It is indeed possible to attain liberation without practicing meditative contemplation, but since we can apply more effort now, it is better to do so, lest at the moment of death we lack favorable conditions, fail to attain liberation, and miss this lifetime.

If, while alive, we practice without success and do not attain Buddhahood, we must rely on this Dharma to be liberated during the intermediate state. Even Tsongkhapa, the founding patriarch of the Yellow Hat school of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, attained realization through the intermediate-state liberation Dharma. During his lifetime, he had to reform the regulations of the Red Hat school, removing the dross, preserving the essence, and strictly upholding the precepts.

As a teacher of an age, he had to lead the community and labor on everyone's behalf. He had little time for his own cultivation, and this delayed his own progress. Therefore, we must diligently apply ourselves and must not be careless. Why do we fail to attain Buddhahood through practice while alive? Frankly, it is because we ourselves are unwilling to apply effort and unwilling to let go of everything. Greed, anger, and ignorance remain very strong.

If we truly are willing to let go, there is no one who cannot succeed. “Lay down the butcher’s knife and become a Buddha on the spot.” So long as one is willing to let go, it is immediately so! For we are originally Buddhas. Once we awaken, we understand: ultimate reality is without characteristics; it is clear, lucid knowing. It is a vast energy that encompasses everything.

All appearances are false and unobtainable. We must wear away our habitual tendencies amid circumstances. The moment we become attached to an appearance, we must quickly become sharply aware; the Chan school calls this “herding the ox.” It means grasping the ox’s reins tightly and raising the whip high: the moment attachment to an appearance arises, strike it. If we do this, we will surely attain realization.

Thus, those who fail to attain realization during their lifetime do so because they are unwilling to practice diligently. They seek comfort now: eating rich food, dancing, playing mahjong—how delightful! Alas, they are deeply attached to appearances and unwilling to let everything go.

How can one succeed without practicing diligently?! We are originally Buddhas. As long as we remove our habitual tendencies, break through ignorance, and cease clinging, how could we fail to attain realization? Do not discriminate between this Dharma as high and that Dharma as low. Once one becomes a Buddha, one knows: “Dharmas are equal; there is neither high nor low.”

Śākyamuni Buddha long ago knew that sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age would be unwilling to practice diligently. For our sake, he specially established the Pure Land Dharma gate, relying on the compassionate power of the Buddha to guide us to rebirth; otherwise, there would have been no need for a Pure Land Dharma gate. Later, Guru Padmasambhava also taught us the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State, as the final deliverance in a human life. The various Dharma gates were all established by Buddhas and bodhisattvas out of urgent compassion, according to the capacities of different people; it is not that the dharmas themselves are high or low.

Now that you have the karmic affinity to encounter this book, you should indeed rejoice beyond measure. After revolving through the six realms over countless lives and kalpas, we now finally have the assurance of liberation. To receive such great blessings, our wholesome roots cannot have been planted merely before one, two, or three Buddhas. Do not take this lightly. You must constantly recollect and thoroughly memorize the contents of this sūtra. When the time of death comes, a single reminder will enable liberation.

No matter who they are—intelligent or foolish—there is no one who is not greedy for life and afraid of death; everyone wishes to live a few more years. As the

common saying goes, “Even a wretched life is better than a good death.” This means that even the best death is not as good as remaining alive in this world and enduring a little suffering. When we ordinarily speak of fear, what we truly fear is death.

If you are no longer afraid even of death, what is there left to fear? Some people say, “I am afraid of ghosts and monsters.” They fear being seized by ghosts and monsters—yet they still fear death. In truth, “death” is merely the breakdown of this body; our intrinsic nature does not perish. Thus, as Confucius said, “If one hears the Way in the morning, one may die content in the evening.”

This saying is a fitting description of this Dharma (see page 41 of the original book). Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism have much in common. In particular, we should study well the Analects written by Confucius, because it speaks entirely of worldly dharmas. “Buddhadharma is in the world; awakening is not apart from the world.” We must thoroughly understand the guiding principles, constants, human relationships, and norms of worldly dharmas.

If one does not understand worldly dharmas and does not even possess adequate character, can one still become a Buddha? Therefore, ethics and morality are even more important for Buddhist practitioners. “If one hears the Way in the morning, one may die content in the evening.” This means that if one can hear this great Way in the morning and understand these principles, then even if one dies that evening, there is no fear and nothing to regret.

For we have not squandered this life: our Dharma body has been liberated and our wisdom-life has been saved. We can leave the cycle of rebirth in the six realms and will no longer die. In fact, we have never truly had birth and death, because Buddha-nature neither arises nor ceases, neither comes nor goes, neither moves nor wavers, neither increases nor decreases, and is neither defiled nor pure.

Some people say, “Buddhadharma cultivates only intrinsic nature and not life-force; that is no good. Daoism’s joint cultivation of intrinsic nature and life-force is better.” Alas, such people are truly confused! Our Buddha-nature encompasses both intrinsic nature and life-force; this itself is their joint cultivation.

Buddha-nature is all-capable. It endures from time immemorial and neither arises nor ceases—is this not long life? What life could be longer than this? Yet the yang-spirit cultivated by Daoists is such that “even after a million kalpas, it still falls into empty extinction.” How can it be compared with our Buddha-nature? The yang-spirit is merely a mind-born body produced by the seventh consciousness; it too is false.

Buddha-nature alone is immeasurable life. The three syllables Amitābha mean immeasurable life and immeasurable light. Does not immeasurable life already encompass life-span? What need is there for joint cultivation of intrinsic nature and

life-force? The physical body will ultimately decay, for whatever is formed must decay, and whatever is born must die. This is dialectics.

The Diamond Sūtra says, “What is called Buddhadharma is not Buddhadharma.” This too is dialectics. Thus Engels said, “Dialectics originally came from Buddhism.” Yet some people are still not satisfied and seek joint cultivation of intrinsic nature and life-force, cultivating this body instead. This is mistaken. It is called the ascetic cultivation of the body by a non-Buddhist path; the body must inevitably decay.

The body is a house. What use is there in cultivating the house? We should cultivate the person within the house—that is, Buddha-nature. Therefore, once we truly hear the great Way and receive this essential purport, we need no longer fear death. Especially after reading this book, when consciousness-spirit emerges at death and sees the states of the intermediate state, it will naturally awaken to reality as it is. For Buddha-nature is originally great luminosity.

We cannot radiate light because we are deluded and caught in inverted thoughts. When the breath ceases and the four elements disperse, the pain leaves us dazed and unconscious. Deluded thoughts cannot arise at that time, and then light shines forth. This is called the appearance of the death-light. Although we radiate light then, we are like someone drunk on strong wine and know nothing at all.

This luminosity endures for a while, after which karmic obstacles appear before us scene by scene, like a film. Our consciousness-spirit follows these images in movement and is thereby drawn away by karmic obstacles. The luminosity during this period of dazed unconsciousness is the same as the light that shines forth when our meditation opens up. We must recognize it: this is our Original Face.

At that time, with a single reminder, one can merge with the luminosity, realize the sambhogakāya Buddha, and attain liberation. Therefore, bright light is good, while dim light is not. If one prefers dim light, one will fall into the three lower realms. Once one understands this, one will not mistakenly enter a deluded path, take the wrong road, or be afraid upon seeing such states. All fear is ultimately fear of death.

I often tell practitioners: “Do not be afraid of whatever states you see. If you do not fear death, what is there to fear?” One of our fellow practitioners experienced the activation of his channels and energies while practicing. “Bang!” Something burst open. “Oh no! This is terrible—my life is gone! My head is going to burst open!” He was terrified. In fact, there is no need to fear; the head cannot burst open.

This is merely the activation of the channels and energies, helping us open the channels, as qigong practitioners call opening the Conception Vessel, Governing Vessel, and eight extraordinary channels. Vibrations occur as they open; this means that the body is undergoing change. What is there to fear? If the body undergoes no

change, it shows that we have not practiced well. When practice is done well, the body will undergo changes.

If you see meditative appearances, still less should you be afraid; they are all false. Some people see pythons, ferocious tigers, or lions and cry, "Oh! I am frightened to death!" What is there to fear? Because our minds are not empty and pure, the sixth consciousness manifests these states. As long as we pay them no heed, they immediately disappear.

In the past, one of our Dharma brothers was meditating when a huge hairy hand, as large as a palm-leaf fan, came down—"smack!"—and covered his face. "Oh no, this huge hairy hand is going to smother me to death!" He hurriedly recited this mantra and that mantra; he recited them all, but it still did not work.

At last, having no other recourse, he thought, "If I die, I die. In any case, Master has said that this physical body is false. If this body is smothered to death, so be it." The moment this thought arose, the huge hairy hand immediately disappeared. This shows that such things are all illusory and unreal. No dharma and no mantra is equal to the emptiness and purity of our own mind.

When the mind is truly empty and pure, all states disappear. Therefore, while meditating, do not be afraid of whatever states you see; they are all false. Remember: "All appearances are illusory." Even if you see a Buddha, do not rejoice. If a Buddha comes, cut down the Buddha; if a demon comes, cut down the demon. All are unobtainable.

The Buddha's teachings are highly comprehensive and harmonious; the more knowledgeable people are, the more they love to study them. Nowadays, many Europeans and Americans no longer believe in Catholicism or Christianity and instead have converted to Buddhism. This is because Buddhadharma is scientific and can be verified. Among the Buddha's teachings, what people find most difficult to accept is rebirth in the six realms.

Some people say, "How can there still be rebirth in the six realms after death? We cannot see or touch it, so perhaps it does not exist." In fact, it certainly does exist! As long as we proceed and practice according to a definite method, when our practice reaches a certain level, we can see that rebirth in the six realms truly exists. Their forms are simply too subtle for our physical eyes to see.

For example, we cannot see the forms of the form realm or the formless realm. The forms of the form realm are subtle and wondrous, superior to those of the desire realm. Nor is the formless realm entirely without any form; rather, the higher it is, the more subtle and attenuated it becomes. When science becomes still more

advanced and developed, it will be able to photograph the intermediate-state body. Then everyone will believe and no longer doubt.

The intermediate-state body is what we ordinarily call the soul or consciousness-spirit; it most certainly exists. It turns about in this way: doing good deeds and benefiting humankind leads to rebirth in the heavens, while doing bad deeds and creating evil leads to descent into the hells. This is not false in the least.

Others say, "Why do people not know about their previous lives? Is it because they have drunk the soup of forgetfulness?" Actually, it is not. Rather, they become unconscious through entering the womb, remaining in the womb, and emerging from the womb. Entering the womb means that, when a man ejaculates, the intermediate-state body is propelled into the mother's uterus.

A man's semen has a foul odor, and the mother's uterus is also a confused mass of blood and flesh. After the intermediate-state body remains for nine and a half months in such a turbid environment, it becomes dazed and unconscious. This is called the intermediate state of remaining in the womb (to be explained in detail later). At birth, with the head down and feet up, it is turned upside down and forcibly squeezed out through the pelvis as though caught between two great mountains.

After passing through these three stages of entry, abiding, and exit, one becomes unconscious and no longer knows anything of one's previous life. Only a Buddha can pass through entry, abiding, and exit without becoming confused.

Then someone may ask, "How is it that some people know about their previous lives?" Indeed, there are such cases. Newspapers and magazines once reported that a Hollywood star in the United States had been reborn in Bulgaria and knew about his previous life. He recounted the events of that life, and when people investigated them, they found them entirely accurate.

In places such as Yunnan and Guizhou in our country, there have also been several children who knew about their previous lives. Why is this? It is because their karmic affinities were favorable: just as a child was about to be born, they drove out the preceding intermediate-state body and seized its place for themselves. This is called "seizing a womb."

It is like seizing a house during the Cultural Revolution: driving someone else out and moving in oneself. Thus, because they did not pass through the three stages of entry, abiding, and exit, they knew about their previous lives. This shows that the cycle of rebirth in the six realms is not at all false; death is not the end of everything.

The Buddha's words are not unsupported claims; he verified them personally. No one should have the slightest doubt.

Otherwise, when the Buddha was in the world, there were no microscopes. How, then, could the Buddha have said that while people see a cup of water, the Buddha sees millions of tiny creatures within it? At that time there were no telescopes either. How could the Buddha have said that there are countless suns and countless worlds in the sky?

Now all these things can be verified: there are indeed many bacteria in water, many suns, and many worlds. Can we not now travel by spacecraft to the moon? They say that there are no people or living beings on the moon, but in fact there are people on both the moon and the sun.

Everyone may say, "Oh, that cannot be right! Wouldn't people on the sun be burned to death?" In fact, the people on the sun and moon do not have bodies like ours. Our bodies require oxygen; without it, we cannot survive. Their bodies cannot be burned, and we cannot see them.

The human naked eye cannot even see the ghosts in our human world; how could it see the people on the sun and moon? If you wish to see them, you must cultivate the Dharma diligently. But never become attached to appearances: once you do, you become a demon. Therefore, not a single word spoken by the Buddha is mistaken. The Buddha is one who speaks what is so, speaks truthfully, and does not deceive.

This Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing: Instructions on the Intermediate State also admits of no doubt. Even where you do not understand, do not doubt. Master Taixu said, "Set aside for the time being what you do not understand; do not doubt it or slander it." Later, cultivate more deeply and gradually. Once your practice reaches a certain level, you will understand. The Buddha's words contain no error; they are not false. Unlike people nowadays, who are always deceiving others. Medicine is meant to cure illness, and human life is of paramount importance, yet some people manufacture counterfeit medicine to harm others. It is truly terrible.

(V) An Explanation of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State

The title Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State is rather cumbersome in translation. Put simply, it means "the teaching for liberation through hearing in the bardo." The two characters *zhongyou*, "intermediate state," refer to the intermediate-state body. This is the subtle body that exists after the previous body has perished and before the next body has formed; among its elements, wind predominates.

Our present bodies are dominated by the earth element and burdened by their physical shells. The intermediate-state body lacks this great encumbrance, so it possesses minor spiritual powers, though not the complete spiritual powers of a Buddha. The intermediate-state body undergoes a birth and death every seven days.

After a person dies, the intermediate-state body during the first seven days is relatively tall. By the second seven-day period, the first intermediate-state body has died and a second is reborn, but it is shorter than the first. The later they come, the shorter they become, and the worse the rebirth. Thus, the earlier assistance is given, the better.

This teaching enables the intermediate-state body to attain liberation upon hearing the instructions. It is therefore one of the precious scriptures of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, a supreme Dharma established by Guru Padmasambhava.

Guru Padmasambhava came from India to Tibet and laid the foundation of the Nyingma school, or Red School. He was therefore the founding patriarch of Tibet's Nyingma school, though not the founding patriarch of Tibetan Buddhism as a whole. His transmission was mind-seal to mind-seal—the Buddhas and patriarchs all transmitted in this way: I understand it in this manner and realize the Way in this manner; another understands it in this manner and likewise realizes the Way.

Everyone's realization of the Way is the same, like writing impressed by the same seal, with no difference at all. This is called mind-seal to mind-seal. Because Guru Padmasambhava realized the Way by ascending bodily, he saw with complete clarity the states people experience at death.

Out of compassion for us, Guru Padmasambhava knew that a human birth is difficult to obtain. So that those whose practice in life had not been complete would not miss this opportunity again, and so that we might have one final chance for liberation at the time of death, he recorded the conditions seen during the intermediate state and the methods for attaining liberation.

After writing it down, he concealed it in a mountain cave. It was neither transmitted nor known to anyone. Why was this? Because the transmission of every Dharma requires the right time and conditions. Likewise, in our practice, only when the time and conditions mature can we open to our Original Face and directly realize Buddha-nature.

Later, Guru Padmasambhava himself manifested as Master Karma Lingpa and brought forth this esoteric teaching, which had been hidden in the mountain cave, for circulation. The origin of Esoteric Buddhism in China was similar. The Buddha wrote the esoteric texts in his time and concealed them in an iron stūpa. Later, when

the time and conditions had matured, Bodhisattva Nāgamātā—namely, the bodhisattva Master Nāgārjuna—retrieved them from the iron stūpa and propagated them.

As everyone knows, none of the Buddhas of the three times ever explained the forty-nine-day process after a person's death, much less how liberation may be attained after death. Many methods in the Buddhist scriptures require cultivation before one can attain Buddhahood. The only teaching by which one can attain Buddhahood without cultivation is Guru Padmasambhava's Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Instructions in the Intermediate State.

Guru Padmasambhava saw that sentient beings—especially those in the Dharma-ending age—were unwilling to apply themselves wholeheartedly to cultivation. His compassionate sorrow was profound, and he left us this supreme esoteric teaching. Indeed, how many people today are willing to practice wholeheartedly and diligently? Most are merely careless and perfunctory.

Because they do not truly apply their minds, even an excellent Dharma will not accord with their practice, and their bodies will not dissolve into emptiness. For example, some people recite the Buddha's name without uniting mind and mouth: their mouths recite while their minds do not. Even as they recite the Buddha's name, they calculate this and that, their thoughts utterly confused.

I have seen many elderly women and men reciting the Buddha's name while gossiping about one neighbor's affairs and another's shortcomings. They are not reciting the Buddha's name properly at all! Therefore Master Hanshan said: "Those who recite the Buddha's name should be like someone pushing a heavily laden cart up a mountain, straining with all their strength from behind." That is, the Buddha's name must be present in the mind, each character passing through the mind one by one.

Those who hold mantras must do the same: let each character of the mantra pass through the mind one by one, and let the ears clearly hear the sound of the mantra being recited. This is called "the mind recites and the ears hear." If one practices in this way, one will certainly enter samādhi, and the body will certainly dissolve into emptiness.

How could the body dissolve into emptiness if one does not practice in this way? Some people still retain a sense of their bodies yet think they have attained emptiness. Ask them, "Can you still hear sounds outside?" They reply, "Yes, I can."

Then it is not emptiness! When one is truly empty, sound disappears, the entire world disappears, and only clear, solitary luminosity remains. "Clear" means distinctly lucid; "solitary luminosity" means the absolute true mind, with no second

thing. They may further say, “I can hear sounds, but I do not discriminate the content of what is being said.”

That does not count as entering samādhi; one is still far from it. If you have not dissolved into emptiness or attained pure emptiness, how can you have broken free? Thus Guru Padmasambhava, out of compassion for us, wrote down this teaching for delivering beings in the intermediate state, so that people may be awakened at death.

Of course, if we can truly cut off delusion and realize truth, we need not rely on this teaching. When circumstances arise, our minds do not move and do not cling to appearances; we attain realization while alive. An ancient worthy said: “One who is truly awakened is, in life, a source of blessings and virtue; in death, a sambhogakāya Buddha.”

This means that one who is truly awakened can bring benefit to the masses while alive, and at death is a sambhogakāya Buddha, with no intermediate-state body. Thus, people of the highest capacity do not enter the intermediate state. Those who are truly reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss also have no intermediate-state body. As soon as their breath ceases, they see Amitābha Buddha come to guide them, and they are reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Clearly, those of genuinely highest capacity have no need of teachings for delivering beings in the intermediate state.

Yet we should understand that horizontally transcending the three realms and being reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is very difficult; vertically emerging from the three realms by cutting off delusion and realizing truth is even more difficult. This is because realization of the dharmakāya is not something practitioners of middling or lesser capacities can attain. The habitual tendencies accumulated through countless lives and kalpas are very heavy, like a foul latrine whose accumulated filth over many years cannot have its stench removed all at once.

This is what is meant by: “Although truth is suddenly understood—the principle is known—deluded feelings are difficult to cut off; clinging habits and deluded emotions remain very strong.” Clearly, some practitioners of Pure Land, Chan, and Esoteric Buddhism are mistaken in thinking that there is no need to become familiar with the Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State. Take Chan investigation, for example: practitioners of middling and lesser capacities do not easily awaken.

Chan practitioners must arouse a sense of doubt, yet many cannot do so and merely repeat a huatou. In that case, it would be better to practice the Pure Land method of Buddha-recitation: with the Buddha there to guide one, one may be reborn in the

Western Land of Ultimate Bliss at death, which is somewhat easier to accomplish. Yet Buddha-recitation will not suffice unless one attains one-pointedness of mind without distraction.

The Buddha guides sentient beings with unconditional great compassion. Even if you do not believe in the Buddha or recite the Buddha's name, Buddhas and bodhisattvas will still compassionately come to guide you. But at that time, your mind may be as confused as a pool of muddy water, unable to see the Buddha coming to guide you. You may even see the intense Buddha-light and flee from it in fright.

Therefore, people in the Dharma-ending age have inferior capacities. Even rebirth in the Pure Land is not something everyone can achieve. Master Zhiyi, the founding patriarch of the Tiantai school, established doctrinal teaching and contemplation in order to guide sentient beings, thereby delaying his own practice. When he was to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss at death, he said: "I have obtained only the middle grade."

In this light, we still need to rely on the Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State. By becoming familiar with this teaching, you will understand what the states of the intermediate state after death are truly like. When those states appear, if someone beside you gives a reminder, you can attain liberation; even those of lesser capacity can be reborn in a Buddha's Pure Land and receive its genuine benefit.

Accounts of "the brief life story of Guru Padmasambhava's manifestations" are found in books, so I will speak only briefly here. Eight years after Śākyamuni Buddha entered parinirvāṇa, Guru Padmasambhava was born upon a lotus in the sea of Dhanakośa in western India. He was miraculously born through the combined force of Amitābha Buddha's great vows, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's great compassion, and Śākyamuni Buddha's great wisdom.

We often say, "The lotus rises from the mud yet remains unstained." Here the lotus symbolizes the Dharma: purity and freedom from defilement, the simultaneity of cause and effect, and perfect unobstructedness. Guru Padmasambhava possessed the wisdom of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas. He came from western India to Tibet and laid the foundation of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism.

Thus, he was the great patriarch of Tibet's Red School, the Nyingma school of Esoteric Buddhism; at that time, the esoteric religion in Tibet was the irregular Black School. Later, the Yellow School, White School, Flower School, and others branched out from Esoteric Buddhism. Guru Padmasambhava attained Buddhahood by ascending bodily, unlike the patriarchs of the Chan school, who left physical bodies behind after entering parinirvāṇa.

Some left bodies that did not decay, such as the physical body of Chan Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch, which still remains at Nanhua Monastery. The patriarch Shitou Xiqian—Huineng’s Dharma grandson, originally his disciple, because when he went to visit the Sixth Patriarch, the latter was about to enter parinirvāṇa and told him to study under his Dharma brother Qingyuan Xingsi—also left an incorrupt body. During Japan’s invasion of China, it was stolen by a Japanese dentist and is now enshrined in a museum in Japan, where it is opened once a year for public viewing.

The scriptures transmitted in China were all translated from Indian languages. Before the Śūraṅgama Sūtra reached China from India, Master Zhiyi, the founding patriarch of the Tiantai school, heard its name and bowed toward the west every day, hoping that the sūtra would soon be transmitted to China.

Yet among the various Buddhist canons circulating in monasteries at that time—such as the Qisha Canon, the Long Canon, and the Taishō Canon—there was not only no scripture called “the teaching for delivering beings in the intermediate state”; even layman Sun Jingfeng had never heard its name. Thirty years before translating this scripture, layman Sun Jingfeng took refuge with the Vajra Master Nona.

What is called vajra can destroy everything, yet nothing can destroy it. Here, too, it is symbolic, signifying indestructible firmness. The guru signifies one who can destroy all evil demons for us and enable us to perfect the fruition of Buddhahood. A true vajra guru must possess such merit and virtue. When Master Nona came from Tibet to transmit the Dharma in inland China, he visited Shanghai.

Among the several great masters who transmitted the Dharma in Tibet, Master Nona was the wisest. He was thoroughly versed in prajñā. The other masters understood only the ritual procedures of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism and were not yet proficient in prajñā. At that time, Buddhism flourished in both Kham and Tibet, with Esoteric Buddhism being the most outstanding.

The Practice of Phowa was widely transmitted, and many people in Shanghai practiced it at that time. The Practice of Phowa is very simple. In Tibetan Vajrayāna, one generally practices this Dharma first and then practices other Dharmas. Even if one fails to accomplish the other practices, it does not matter, for the Practice of Phowa remains as a safeguard. One may be reborn in the Western Pure Land and continue practicing there.

Later, lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng took another Mongolian teacher, Master Bao Khenpo, as his guru. Master Bao Khenpo told him that there was an exceptionally secret and precious scripture: the very text now being discussed, Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State.

At that time, however, Master Bao Khenpo kept it so secret that he would not even reveal the scripture's title. He also told him that anyone who heard it seven times could attain Buddhahood without practicing. After hearing this, lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng was puzzled: "How could there be such an easy thing? How could one succeed without practicing? I am afraid there is no such thing. Master Bao Khenpo is probably just deceiving me." Yet that was not so.

Why is it said that one must hear it seven times? Because after hearing it once or twice, people often do not pay attention; after hearing it seven times, they become thoroughly familiar with it and remember it. Christianity also speaks of "accomplishment in seven days." From beginning to end, this is one week, one complete cycle.

But this number should not be fixed rigidly. Must it be exactly seven times—would eight or ten times not do? The point is that one must bring it to completion and become thoroughly familiar with the scripture. If we have heard it seven times and are still not familiar with it, then we should hear it several more times. It is like the Chan practice of undertaking a seven-day retreat; the meaning is the same.

A "seven-day retreat" signifies that, from beginning to end, one must obtain immediate results, succeed in seated meditation, and realize the fruit within a set period. If one does not attain realization in seven days, one undertakes another seven-day retreat. Thus one continues with a first seven, a second seven, and so on, until completion is reached. Even after becoming familiar with it, one must not forget it; one must constantly keep the teachings of the scripture in mind.

We must remember these teachings: when the time comes for us to emit light, that light is ourselves. If, during the intermediate state, we see the light and merge with it, we will certainly attain Buddhahood. Therefore, this scripture truly possesses immeasurable merit and virtue! Those without blessings cannot hear it. That all of you can hear it today is truly unsurpassed good fortune—boundless good fortune! You should regard it as a rare encounter.

Master Bao Khenpo kept the scripture's title secret and would not disclose it, not because he was conservative, but out of respect. He feared that if he told everyone too casually, people would fail to value it and instead treat it lightly. For example, when we speak of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, we say, "Seeing one's true nature is not difficult, and realizing the mind is also very easy."

When some people hear this, they think it is so simple that they do not pay attention to it, do not respect it, and simply let it pass. In fact, seeing one's true nature is not difficult. As explained earlier, what is called "nature" is the energy or capacity of our seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing.

The capacity by which the eyes see things and the ears hear sounds is our Buddha-nature! There is nothing remarkable about it; it is very simple. Yet after hearing this, some people do not take it seriously. It enters through one ear and leaves through the other, becoming mere passing wind by the ear. The ancients were not like this.

Unless they did not know, once they heard, “This is it!” they immediately treasured it, safeguarded it with continuous and seamless contemplation, and never relaxed their vigilance for a moment.

People nowadays think that “this” is nothing remarkable. Some do not even have the blessings to consider it or accept it, and they doubtfully ask, “This is Buddha-nature? If this is Buddha-nature, why do I not have spiritual powers?” Alas! They do not realize that they have merely heard a little news of it; they have not yet emptied out the physical body and the world, nor have they directly realized it.

One must completely shatter and empty out the physical body, thoughts, the world, and empty space. Yet emptying them out only once is still not enough. The habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives and kalpas are deeply rooted; they cannot be eliminated in a single stroke. Of course, this should not be stated too rigidly. There are also people of great capacity who return to this world and can reach the end all at once, attaining success immediately. But such people are very, very rare.

Therefore, regarding practice, the Buddha says in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra that there are “two methods of practice.” The Śūraṅgama Sūtra is a precious scripture that explains this in great detail. One method is: “In principle, awakening is sudden; through awakening, all is simultaneously extinguished.”

This means that one instantly understands the principle that the nature of seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing is our Original Face. At the moment of awakening, everything is extinguished and vanishes completely, and spiritual powers greatly manifest. Although such people do exist, they are exceedingly rare. Far more commonly, there is sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation—the other method of practice taught in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra: “Phenomena are not eliminated all at once; their causes are exhausted gradually, in sequence.”

“Phenomena are not eliminated all at once” means that one must gradually cultivate in the realm of phenomena, removing the habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives and kalpas bit by bit. That is, “Ignorance is broken through stage by stage, and the dharmakāya is realized stage by stage.” When realization reaches completion, spiritual powers naturally manifest in full. “Their causes are exhausted gradually, in sequence” means that one must slowly cultivate and realize step by step.

Therefore, Chan practitioners say, “Though awakening in principle is said to be sudden, deluded emotional attachments are difficult to eliminate abruptly.” Deluded emotional attachments refer to our clinging to false feelings, cognitions, and views—our self-knowledge and self-views. These cannot be eliminated all at once; they must gradually be removed. In other words, this is called tempering the mind through circumstances. Having just understood a little of the principle, we cannot immediately manifest spiritual powers.

After understanding the principle, what matters most is to practice and realize it in accordance with that principle. One must temper oneself amid circumstances, remain constantly aware, and diminish and diminish again. One must eradicate all clinging habitual tendencies and the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. When not even a trace of habitual tendency remains, one realizes the Way. Thus, there are many methods for realizing the Way: some involve sudden awakening, others gradual cultivation. It depends on how you undertake them. If habitual tendencies remain unchanged and you cannot undertake the practice, what will you do at the critical moment of birth and death? Then one must rely on the “Dharma of Deliverance in the Intermediate State” for deliverance.

More than twenty years before lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng translated this scripture, he saw a book called *Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State*. It had been translated from Tibetan into English by Dr. Evans, a professor at Oxford University in England, and Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup. Later, Chinese lay practitioner Zhang Miaolian, also known as Bodhi Miaoding, translated it into Chinese from the English version.

Later still, he saw another version translated into Chinese from the English by lay practitioner Zhao Hongzhu. Its Chinese, however, was in four-character verse lines. Such verse resembles poetry and hymns and was a level above Zhang Miaoding’s translation. But because it had to rhyme, its meaning differed somewhat.

The Tibetan name of this book is “Bardo Thödol,” also known as “the Tibetan practice for liberating the deceased.” “Bardo” means the intermediate state: the intermediate-state body between the destruction of the former body and the formation of the later body. “Thödol” means that, after hearing the teachings, the intermediate-state being can attain liberation—that is, liberation through hearing.

Everyone may find this strange: can a person still hear after death? Yes, they can. This is because our seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are not the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, or body; they are our Buddha-nature. Scientists today also say that it is not the eyes that see things, but the brain. If the brain does not function, the eyes cannot see.

Likewise, it is not the ears that hear sounds, but the brain. If the brain does not function, the ears cannot hear sounds either. Moreover, the sounds heard by the ears are coarse, and this is called hearing. The sounds heard by the brain are subtle, and this is called apprehending. Thus, the title of this scripture contains both the characters for “hearing” and “apprehending.”

Some people have conducted experiments in which, during surgery, a very weak electric current was passed into the brain. The brain could then hear music in the air that human ears could not hear, whereas people nearby could not hear it. This is because those nearby were listening with their ears rather than with their brain nerves, and so they could not hear it.

From this, we can see that we do not see things with our eyes either. The eyes are like eyeglasses; only through the functioning of the brain can they see. As the saying goes, “When the mind is absent, one looks but does not see; one listens but does not hear.” This means that when we are not attentive, we can neither see what is before us nor hear sounds beside us.

The brain discussed here and the intermediate-state body are both manifestations of the seventh consciousness. This is because the appearance of self and attachment to self are formed in the seventh consciousness. If one’s practice is good, the seventh consciousness can leave the physical body; this is the mind-born body. It is also what Daoists call the yang spirit.

It has spiritual powers. Without relying on the physical body or on the eyes, ears, nose, or tongue, it can see, hear, and apprehend. Therefore, when we speak to the intermediate-state being, it hears us with complete clarity. In fact, it is also speaking with us. After death, the consciousness—the intermediate-state being—emerges.

At first, it does not know that it has died. Only when it hears its family weeping and crying out in great sorrow, and sees its corpse lying on the bed, does it realize: “I have died!” It also calls out to its family, is deeply saddened, and cannot bear to leave them. It still wants to enter the physical body again, but cannot get back in, because the body has already decayed.

It is like an electric lamp: if the bulb is broken, it will not light up again even when the electricity comes. At such a time, the person grieves and weeps, wandering about in confusion. The intermediate-state body is at just such a stage. Therefore, you must explain things to them well and must not weep. If you weep, they will also weep nearby; their minds will become utterly confused, and they will be unable to attain liberation. The Pure Land school likewise teaches that, when a person dies, no one should weep. Instead, assist them in Buddha-recitation and help them attain rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is the reason.

When the lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng saw these two translated versions, he learned that such a book did indeed exist, although the Tibetan original had not yet been seen.

He was deeply moved: “Before this book reached the central land, known as the land of Mahāyāna Buddhism, it had unexpectedly already reached Western Europe!” At present, many countries in Europe and America are studying the Buddhadharma. Many highly educated people, after reading Buddhist sūtras and comparing them with Christianity’s Old and New Testaments—that is, the Bible—feel that the Buddhist sūtras are extremely comprehensive and harmonious, and very good.

Consequently, many people have converted to Buddhism. This shows that the propagation of every dharma requires the right time and conditions. Since this book has already reached Europe and America, there is no need to keep it secret any longer. Now that we are able to see it, we are indeed fortunate. The merit and virtue of the lay practitioners Zhang and Zhao in propagating the Dharma are truly worthy of praise.

However, Eastern and Western cultures differ, and their modes of expression are not quite the same. With regard to names, for example, Chinese people place the family name first and the given name last, whereas in the West the given name comes first and the family name last. The ways of expression therefore differ. Moreover, a single sentence often contains many implicit meanings; it is not simply one sentence with one meaning. Chinese characters in particular often have multiple meanings.

Therefore, when Western European scholars translate the profound Buddhism of the East, certain gaps in understanding can easily arise. Moreover, in the esoteric divisions of Buddhism, there are innumerable Buddhas, and their names are also many. For instance, the Buddhas of the six directions mentioned in the Amitābha Sūtra have many names and epithets. The specialized terminology and technical names in the sūtras are even more numerous.

It is very difficult to explain the meanings of terms clearly without becoming attached to their literal meanings. We often say: “To interpret meaning by relying on the words brings grievance upon the Buddhas of the three times; to depart from the sūtras by a single character is to speak like Māra.” This means that one cannot explain the meaning merely according to the words. It is no good if the meaning contained in the sūtras is not brought out. Thus, the greatest difficulty in expounding sūtras lies in what is called “pinpointing the central meaning.”

That is, one must bring out the essential meaning: identify the most important central idea and show how it can enable us to awaken and see our true nature.

Technical terms may be set aside; one must bring out the central idea. This is called setting aside the words and determining the meaning.

If you do not understand it yourself, how can you write it out? Yet the translation by the lay practitioners Zhang and Zhao was first rendered from Tibetan into English and then retranslated from English into Chinese.

Therefore, the lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng surmised that, even when working from the same original, literal translation, free translation, or a combination of the two could produce different results. Even translations made at different times by the same person would be difficult to make entirely identical. How much more so after two successive translations! Some textual errors and omissions of meaning were unavoidable.

It would be best to see the Tibetan original and translate it into Chinese according to the original text, thus making the contents more complete. Because Lay Practitioner Sun was highly proficient in Tibetan—his statement in this book that he knew only a little Tibetan was an expression of modesty—he wished to obtain the Tibetan original and collate it. He had this aspiration, but though he wanted to obtain the original text of this sūtra, he could not do so. It was as if something were buried in his heart, and it remained constantly on his mind.

“Where there is a will, there is a way!” After Khenpo Bao had entered parinirvāṇa, the original text of this precious sūtra was unexpectedly discovered while his scripture chest was being sorted.

Lay Practitioner Sun felt as though he had obtained a priceless treasure, and at last his long-cherished wish was fulfilled. The entire sūtra was a handwritten manuscript, not a printed text, because this sūtra had been written by Guru Padmasambhava on palm leaves. In Tibet and India, sūtras were written on bodhi-tree leaves, which were called palm leaves.

The original contained more material than the English translation, comprising fourteen categories of material, which we shall discuss later. For example, the “Dazhuo Mantra Text” in the book contains many mantras, all appended at the end of the book, which can liberate the intermediate-state body from the painful karma of transgressions. In the translation by the lay practitioners Zhang and Zhao, only the names of these mantras appear.

There is also the “Collected Verses for Dissolving Karma,” which consists of verses for eliminating karmic obstacles. Such verses are equivalent to gāthās: lines of four characters, five characters, seven characters, and so forth. None of this material appears in the translation by the lay practitioners Zhang and Zhao.

After comparing the texts, he found that the translation by the lay practitioners Zhang and Zhao was not sufficiently complete. Lay Practitioner Sun Jingfeng therefore aroused the resolve to devote all the energy of his life to retranslating it. At first he produced only a draft. Later, fearing that there might be inappropriate wording or imperfections, he revised and organized it many times before storing it in a chest. When he reached the age of seventy—he had not yet reached seventy when he did the translation—he feared that the manuscript might be scattered or lost. He therefore organized it again, arranged it in proper order, and completed the translation of this precious sūtra.

To enable readers to understand and remember the sūtra, Lay Practitioner Sun annotated all its technical terms and additionally appended two maṇḍala charts. In this way, the structure of the entire sūtra became interconnected. When we write essays or books, their structure must be interconnected, just as the blood vessels and channels of the human body must also be unobstructed.

Our bodies contain yin and yang polarities. When our thoughts are disordered and deluded thoughts arise in profusion, the yin and yang polarities do not unite. Therefore, we must cultivate practice. When the mind becomes truly pure, the yin and yang polarities naturally merge, and the eight extraordinary channels naturally become unobstructed. But one must not seek this intentionally. To seek it intentionally is deluded thinking and deluded thought, which instead obstructs the vital-energy channels. Simply let go of everything, and the vital-energy channels will naturally flow freely.

A “maṇḍala” is a sacred site or ritual ground in which Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and their retinues gather in complete fullness. Those who practice Esoteric Buddhism all have maṇḍalas.

The maṇḍala of our Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma takes Śākyamuni Buddha as its principal figure. Below him is Maitreya Bodhisattva; below Maitreya Bodhisattva is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva; and below Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the Youth of Light. On the two sides are Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, the Four Great Vajra Protectors, and others.

Because the establishment of the Buddhist altar belongs to the Youth of Light, after he secretly learned the Heart-of-Heart Dharma’s secret mantra from the Buddha, he was able to perform great functions. This is why the Youth of Light appears in the Heart-of-Heart maṇḍala. There are many kinds of maṇḍalas: one is the samaya maṇḍala, another is the great maṇḍala, and there is also the activity maṇḍala, namely the karma maṇḍala.

The great maṇḍala is the ritual ground described above, where the retinue gathers in complete fullness. The samaya maṇḍala is a ritual ground in which Buddhas and

bodhisattvas, holding different implements and forming different mudrās, gather together to represent the different vows made by each Buddha and bodhisattva. The activity maṇḍala is a ritual ground that displays the Buddhas' and bodhisattvas' accomplishment of various activities.

In short, a maṇḍala is a sacred site, ritual ground, or diagram of directions in which the retinue gathers in complete fullness. It is generally divided into the five directions—east, west, south, north, and center—and the Five Buddhas, representing our five great wisdoms. The one belonging to the center is the most important: the wisdom of the essential nature of the dharma realm, which is the luminosity of our own true nature.

The other four great wisdoms are these: transforming the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom; transforming the seventh consciousness into the wisdom of equality; transforming the sixth consciousness into wondrous observing wisdom; and transforming the first five consciousnesses into the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done. In fact, our Buddha-nature inherently has no fixed direction; it is one great circle. Directions are used to illustrate the Dharma. For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss lies to the west of our world, but farther west of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss there is still west. Relatively speaking, would not the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss then be in the east? Therefore, one cannot speak of it in fixed and absolute terms.

This sūtra contains images of Buddhas naked and in union, as well as wrathful images drinking blood, which most people cannot accept. They wonder: how can Buddhist sūtras contain such images? We shall now discuss this in particular.

Why do the Buddhas manifest naked images in union? On the one hand, they appear in response to the capacities of sentient beings. Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism was taught for Tibetans—though of course it is also taught for sentient beings generally. Tibetans are highly attached to appearances, and when told that we are all Buddhas, they cannot accept it.

They think: "If we are Buddhas, why can we not manifest spiritual powers? Nor do we possess omnipotence! Therefore, we are not Buddhas but ordinary beings." They must be given fur hats, dressed in the Buddha's robes, and adorned in this way before they believe that they themselves are Buddhas. Thus, they require a certain kind of form.

They also say: "To transcend birth and death and become a Buddha, how could transformation-birth be possible without yin and yang?" Therefore, the Buddhas manifest images in union in accordance with their capacities and conditions. In fact, our human bodies themselves contain yin and yang. Our bodies are provisionally

compounded from the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. Fire belongs to yang, and water belongs to yin.

Ordinarily, because of deluded thoughts, inverted views, attachment, and pursuit of external objects, yin and yang do not unite, and we do not perceive them. If one's practice is good and the mind becomes truly empty and pure, one can clearly feel something like two electric currents within the body—'whoosh'—joining together. This is what Daoism calls the infant and the maiden, with the Yellow Matron as their matchmaker.

That is, one visualizes the central yellow court within the pericardium as an "infant"—the so-called yang spirit. This is entirely a practice of visualization. So long as one applies the mind in visualization, one can succeed, because everything is created by mind alone. Thus, every one of us possesses yin and yang; it is not necessary that only a Buddha-father and Buddha-mother constitute the union of yin and yang.

On the other hand, the image of union is used to illustrate the Dharma. The Buddha says in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: "All sentient beings establish their life-nature because of sexual desire." We human beings have physical bodies because of the mind of sexual desire. At the intermediate-state stage, the mind of sexual desire is likewise present and has not diminished in the slightest. When it sees karmically connected parents having intercourse, sexual desire stirs, and it drifts over to enter the womb.

Thus, birth comes from sexual desire. If we now wish to escape the cycle of birth and death and attain Buddhahood, we must also break free at this very point. Images of deities in sexual union signify that birth comes from here and liberation is achieved from here; they are symbolic teachings. If you still harbor sexual desire and your mind is stirred when you encounter such a state, you cannot be liberated from birth and death.

It is no more than empty talk. We must be able, amid sexual desire, to free ourselves from the pleasure of desire; when we see an image of deities in sexual union, our minds must not be moved in the least. Only then are we truly liberated from birth and death; otherwise, it is impossible. Thus, Esoteric Buddhism has practices of sexual union. Guru Padmasambhava said: "The practice of sexual union must not be attempted lightly."

This practice is a two-headed snake: one head leads directly upward to transcendence, while the other leads straight down to hell, for the slightest stirring of the mind leads to hell. Many people, in order to satisfy their sexual desires, deceive others by saying, "Let us practice the method of sexual union, and we can

transcend birth and death.” They do not realize that this not only cannot liberate one from birth and death, but leads one to hell.

Therefore, once you understand this principle, do not attempt it lightly. In ordinary life, engage in more contemplation; when you see images of deities in sexual union, never allow your mind to be stirred. The Buddha explained this very clearly in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra: “When naked bodies are displayed, it is like chewing wax.” That is, when naked bodies appear before you, it should be like putting candle wax in your mouth and chewing it: it has no flavor at all.

Thus, the most profound and important matter is the test of actual experience; it is absolutely no child’s play. The Buddha has no fixed form, but manifests forms in response to the minds of sentient beings; these are called responsive transformation forms. The Buddha manifests images of deities in sexual union in order to liberate us, to see whether we truly possess meditative stability and whether we can enter samādhi amid the pleasure of desire. This is called the samādhi of desire-pleasure. You should understand that images of deities in sexual union appear in response to the capacities of sentient beings and are also symbolic teachings. Do not have doubts.

Why do wrathful forms that drink blood appear? Because the Buddha has two kinds of bodies: one is the body of the True Dharma Wheel, and the other is the body of the Command Wheel. The body of the True Dharma Wheel has the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics, the marks of wisdom, merit, and virtue; all sentient beings who see it give rise to joy. The body of the Command Wheel, also called the body of a Wisdom King, takes such forms as wrathful, terrifying, and blood-drinking forms. It is so that Māra, seeing them, will be frightened and warned not to create disturbances. Thus, wrathful images are likewise symbolic teachings. Do not be afraid when you see wrathful images.

We discuss these matters in order to prevent people from developing doubts about forms such as those of sexual union and wrathful forms, and thereby falling into error. It is to prevent, when such states appear in the future, the arising of wrong thoughts that cause one to doubt and slander the Buddhadharma: “Why do images of deities in sexual union still appear? That cannot be right, can it?” You should know that the Buddha manifests forms in response to the capacities of sentient beings. This signifies that we are born from here and die through here.

Nothing can be obtained; all are illusory appearances manifested by our own minds. When our minds are truly pure, there is not a single appearance. This is the unsurpassed great luminosity, the sambhogakāya Buddha. If our minds are not pure, then all kinds of appearances arise. Thus, whether such appearances arise or not depends on whether our minds are pure.

For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is divided into four pure lands. The lowest is the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages; above it is the Land of Expedient Means with Residue; above that is the Land of True Reward and Adornment; and highest is the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. The pure land into which one is reborn depends on the quality of one's practice. In the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light, there are no appearances, because this is originally the nature of Buddhahood.

Appearances arise only because we cling to them. Take dreams as an analogy: if we practice well and ordinarily keep our minds pure and free of attachment to appearances, then we will have no dreams when asleep. But if we give rise to thoughts in response to circumstances during the day, thinking this and that, then after falling asleep we will dream, and all manner of states will appear.

Long ago, the teacher of Patriarch Gaofeng asked him, "Can you be your own master in ordinary life?" He replied, "I can be my own master." This was very good; to be able to be one's own master in ordinary life is already no easy matter.

For instance, if there were a bar of gold here, our hearts would leap: "Oh! How wonderful it would be if that gold were mine!" When a lustful person sees a beautiful woman and his mind is stirred, he follows after her. This is called: it is not form that bewilders people; people bewilder themselves. When someone fond of drinking smells the fragrance of wine, his mouth waters with craving. These are all instances of being unable to be one's own master.

If, upon encountering such states, one can remain unmoved, that is still only the first step. Therefore, Patriarch Gaofeng's teacher asked him again, "Can you be your own master while dreaming?" He replied, "I can be my own master even in sleep and dreams." Dreaming is a state of partial unconsciousness; death is a state of profound unconsciousness, because the dispersal of the four elements is extremely painful.

If one can be one's own master in dreams, one's practice has progressed. Some people can be their own masters in ordinary life, but become confused in dreams. Thus, it was already quite remarkable that Patriarch Gaofeng could be his own master in dreams.

His teacher pressed further: "Can you be your own master when there are no dreams and no thoughts? When there are no dreams and no thoughts, where is the master?" That is, when there are neither dreams nor thoughts, where is the master? He could not answer. "Ah, no, no! Quickly investigate!" said his teacher. Thus, in practice one must advance ever higher.

Once we understand the meaning of images of deities in sexual union and wrathful images, then, when we see such forms in the intermediate state, we should no longer give rise to inverted and deluded views. We should know that all these forms are manifested by our own minds.

Our minds are like a mirror: all forms are reflections appearing in the mirror. If we can remain unmoved by any state, then in the intermediate state we can merge with the luminosity and realize the sambhogakāya Buddha.

It is very difficult to realize the sambhogakāya Buddha while alive. Yet, if we practice honestly and diligently, we can realize the three bodies—the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya—while alive. When, through practice, we uncover our original nature and see our intrinsic nature, this is the dharmakāya Buddha. If we then continue practicing diligently to remove habitual tendencies, so that the mind becomes truly empty and pure, we can transform circumstances, transform the physical body, manifest spiritual powers, and realize the sambhogakāya Buddha. Going a step further, we can manifest a mind-born body; this is the accomplishment of the nirmāṇakāya.

Upon realizing the third-bhūmi bodhisattva stage, one can manifest a mind-born body. A body produced by the mind faculty of the seventh consciousness is called a mind-born body. Upon realizing the fifth-bhūmi bodhisattva stage, one can manifest three mind-born bodies; this is what Daoism calls “one qi transforms into the Three Pure Ones.” Thus, Daoism and Buddhism also have many points in common. But what Daoism teaches is not ultimate or thorough; it always remains attached to some appearance.

Because the mind-born body transformed by the seventh consciousness is still illusory, it is only wondrous functioning arising from the essential nature of Buddhahood and must not be clung to. Bodhisattvas of the eighth bhūmi and above can manifest mind-born bodies complete in every kind. They can manifest not only human bodies; whatever they wish to manifest, they can manifest—high mountains, great rivers, trees, houses, and so forth. They can manifest all kinds of forms.

This is mastery of transformation. It depends on how we practice. The first step is to refrain from following thoughts as they arise. The moment a thought arises, one sees it and does not follow it, but remains clear and fresh, lucid and distinct, without leaving the slightest trace.

In this way, one can attain mastery over taking rebirth: one may take rebirth wherever one wishes. The second step is to regard good and bad as equal—neither delighting in what is good nor becoming annoyed by what is bad—and then one can attain mastery of transformation. The third step is to extinguish the subtle continuous stream, so that everything is transformed into emptiness and the great

wisdom of perfect enlightenment shines forth clearly. Then one can manifest countless transformation bodies and liberate countless sentient beings.

Therefore, while alive, if we practice according to progressively deeper methods such as Dzogchen and the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we can realize these attainments. If we have not practiced well during this life, there is still, at the end, the Dharma of Liberation in the Intermediate State, which can enable us to realize the sambhogakāya Buddha. That we have the karmic affinity today to hear this unsurpassed great Dharma is truly boundless good fortune!

People commonly say that after death one sees all kinds of states. Some people, after dying, see terrifying sights such as King Yama, ghostly guards, the Black and White Impermanence spirits, and ox-headed and horse-faced demons. Others who have committed many evil deeds see such terrifying sights even before death. I have seen several such people, and they were Buddhists.

Of course, they had violated the precepts and had not practiced well. When hellish states appeared at the time of death, they were filled with terror and muttered to themselves: “Oh! So-and-so has come to collect a debt; so-and-so has come to demand my life.”

Why does this happen? It is because people create karma during life, and at death their own consciousness causes mischief, transforming into these states. Once people are entangled in such states, they cannot be liberated. In truth, it is all the mischief of our consciousness, because every appearance is manifested by our own nature; there is no King Yama or ghostly guard existing apart from ourselves.

Thus it is said: outside mind there is no dharma, and outside dharma there is no mind. When such a situation arises, one should comfort the person and remind them: quickly recite the Kṣitigarbha Sūtra and seek the protection of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva. In this way, one can help them eliminate karmic obstacles and attain liberation. As soon as their minds become settled, the terrifying states will dissolve. If their minds remain unsettled, they will truly fall into hell.

Does hell really exist? No—it too is an illusory appearance. Yet for one who is actually in it, it is not nonexistent. Consider dreams: when we dream of pleasant states, we are happy; when we dream of unpleasant states, we are afraid. Only after waking do we think, “Oh, that was merely a dream; in fact, there was nothing at all.” But before waking, it still exists.

Illusory appearances are not altogether nonexistent. They appear solely through karma and are transformed solely by consciousness; they are all manifestations of karmic consciousness. As soon as our minds become truly empty and pure, these

states disappear. Someone may say, “Then I may as well do bad things, since everything is empty anyway.”

Ah! A person whose mind is truly empty and pure will not do bad things. Only those whose minds are not empty and pure, and who still have greed, anger, and ignorance, do bad things. When states appear before people who have done bad things, they suffer the reproach of their own consciences; even if they wish to empty them away, they cannot.

For example, some people who have committed grave karma will, during the intermediate state, see seven vicious dogs chasing and biting them (this is called “the pursuit of seven barking dogs”), or see yakṣas coming to spear them and tigers and wolves pursuing them, driving them toward evil destinations. In their panic and confusion, they are chased into hell or the animal realm.

Then there are those who kill chickens, ducks, and pigs. Because their karma of killing is so grave, at the time of death they see red-hatted and green-hatted figures all coming after them, and flee in terror. This is why we urge everyone to eat vegetarian food and refrain from killing. If you can eat vegetarian food, do so as much as possible. If you cannot, temporarily eat a little of the three kinds of pure meat—that is, meat from an animal whose killing one has not seen, not heard, and which was not killed for oneself—but do not kill living beings and create further karma, lest you undergo retribution.

This shows that these terrifying visions arise because our minds are not empty and pure, and we create karma through attachment to appearances. If our minds are at peace, sacred images and Buddha images will appear. If our minds are thoroughly empty and pure, even Buddha images cannot be found, for the dharmakāya is without form.

As the Diamond Sūtra says, “All appearances are false and unreal.” We fail to awaken and take them to be real. Do not suppose that whatever can now be grasped, touched, or seen is real, imagining that we truly have husbands and wives, children, gold, silver, and treasures.

I see many men and women embracing one another—one load of stinking dung embracing another load of stinking dung—taking mawkishness for delight. Yet these are all false appearances. It is just like dreaming while asleep: all of it is a dream-state. Once we understand these principles, we must ordinarily temper ourselves amid circumstances, so that in any circumstance we can remain unmoved in mind and free from attachment to appearances.

Only by practicing diligently in this way can we awaken. For example, when we practice Buddha-recitation and enter deeply into Buddha-recitation samādhi, body,

mind, and world all dissolve into emptiness. Only the clearly manifest true reality remains before us. At that time, it is as though we have been called awake from a dream: there is not the slightest circumstance at all. Where then are mountains, rivers, earth, men and women, young and old, gold, silver, and treasures? Practice must reach this point. It is not a matter of sitting in meditation and seeing some fine experience; those are all false appearances, not real. True reality is without form, so do not be deceived.

This sutra states: “During the intermediate-state body, one wanders without support and eventually sees three great sheer cliffs—one white, one black, and one red—bottomless in their depth. These are evoked by the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance that the person possessed during life.”

After a person dies, the intermediate-state body manifested by the seventh consciousness sees its own corpse lying on the bed and hears family members weeping and calling its name. Only then does it know that it has died. Yet it still wants a body and tries to enter the corpse, but can no longer get in, because the body has already decayed. It then becomes panicked and confused, without support or refuge, drifting here and there.

Therefore, we urge everyone not to cling to appearances. In fact, we can do without a body. For example, when delivering the deceased, we admonish these departed spirits: “The physical body is the root of suffering. Quickly relinquish this physical body; do not cling to it any longer. We are now reciting the Rebirth Mantra for you and sending you on your way, so that you may not suffer again.”

But because of attachment, the intermediate-state body still wants a body and so wanders without settling. In its wandering, it sees three sheer cliffs—one red, one white, and one black—bottomless in their depth, blocking its way. Why does this occur? It is evoked by the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance that this person possessed during life. Greed is insatiable craving; it belongs to fire and is red.

Anger is a mind of hatred and is white. Ignorance is stupidity and lack of wisdom, and is black. When greed, anger, and ignorance are all fully present, they are seeds for hell; when greed is heavy and anger and ignorance comparatively light, one enters the hungry ghost realm, which is why hungry ghosts breathe fire from their mouths; when anger is heavy and greed and ignorance comparatively light, one enters the asura realm; and when ignorance is heavy and greed and anger comparatively light, one enters the animal realm. Therefore, do not be afraid upon seeing these three sheer cliffs. So long as the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance are extinguished, the three great sheer cliffs will disappear.

If greed, anger, and ignorance are still very strong in us, these evil circumstances will manifest in the future and entangle us. Therefore, after reading this sutra, everyone

should awaken and urge themselves to practice diligently without delay. Do not continue to indulge greed, anger, and ignorance; none of them can be obtained.

What is there still to crave?! Even if one has hundreds of millions in family wealth, not a single penny can be taken along at death. Leaving it to one's descendants actually harms them. "Accumulating virtue surpasses accumulating gold." Accumulate virtue for your descendants, and in the future their attainments will all be good.

Leaving a great deal of money to one's descendants is instead harmful, because they do not know how difficult it was to earn. They squander it recklessly and create much karma, and their blessings are soon exhausted. In the past, a young Shanghai silver-shop owner named Yang Jingwu squandered the entire silver shop his father had left him. In the end, he became a destitute vagrant and froze to death by the roadside.

Therefore, we should understand that the things of this world are all illusory and unreal. Do not remain attached to or infatuated with material appearances; quickly let them go. To be deluded by material appearances is superstition. Those who do not understand Buddhism say that we are superstitious, but in fact they are the superstitious ones. They are deluded by material appearances, concerned only with selfishness, and pursue appearances as though they were real.

By doing so, they create karma, undergo retribution, and revolve through the six realms with no end in sight. Thus they are the superstitious ones. Once we understand that all these things are false appearances and cannot be obtained, we need no longer compare ourselves with others.

Each person has their own causes and conditions. If someone is now enjoying blessings, it is because they did well in past lives. If our present circumstances are poor, it is because we did poorly in past lives; from now on, we need only do well again. Some people cannot let go and insist on comparing themselves with others. When they cannot obtain what they want, they resort to corruption and theft, and in the end they will inevitably be punished by the law. Therefore, it is best that we live in accordance with circumstances.

In the cycle of rebirth through the six realms, we emerge and sink again and again, muddleheadedly drowning in the bitter sea of birth and death. We are like maggots in a cesspit, wriggling up and down while imagining ourselves happy and carefree. Yet when people see such maggots, they think, "Oh! How utterly filthy!"

Buddhas and bodhisattvas look upon us in the same way and think, "You sentient beings are truly pitiful. You are like maggots in a cesspit, yet you imagine yourselves happy. In truth, you suffer greatly."

We truly suffer. For example, to stay alive in this world, we must eat. To eat, we must go shopping. After buying food, we must wash it; after washing it, we must fry or boil it; only when it has been cooked can we eat it. Before buying, washing, and cooking, we must work to earn money. Without money, how could we buy anything? Thus we remain busy all day long.

It is not like this in the heavens. The karmic result in the heavens is favorable: whatever one wishes to eat arrives as soon as one thinks of it, with no need to buy, wash, or cook it. Therefore, if we do good deeds now, we may in the future be born in the heavens and enjoy blessings. But once these blessings are exhausted, we must still descend again to suffer; and if we create karma, we must descend into hell, where the suffering is even greater. Therefore, such blessings are not ultimate.

Only by leaving the cycle of rebirth in the six realms is there ultimate liberation. As we practice the Buddhadharma now, it is as though we have encountered a life-saving boat in the bitter sea of rebirth through the six realms. It can help us cross the bitter sea and reach the other shore; this is called the compassionate vessel that ferries all across. Should fierce winds and waves arise and threaten to capsize the boat, it is also equipped with life rings, inflatable boats, and other devices to help us.

Therefore, Buddhism has many skillful methods, such as the Chan school, Esoteric Buddhism, and the Pure Land school. Esoteric Buddhism in particular has the greatest variety of skillful methods, of every kind. The Nine Vehicles of Esoteric Buddhism discussed earlier encompass everything. These methods can keep us from sinking and enable us to leave the bitter sea of birth and death as soon as possible.

And this sutra is the most expedient and reliable method. Not only is it equipped with life rings, but it also has a propeller—namely, an electric motor—so that it can operate entirely automatically and carry us to the other shore without our exertion. It is therefore called an assured dharma gate for directly reaching the other shore.

Great Vajradhara Buddha said: “Though one kills Brahmins daily and accumulates the five uninterrupted karmas, if one encounters these instructions, all will undoubtedly be liberated.” The Brahmins who kill daily are a sect of Indian Brahmanism. Like Catholicism and Christianity, it too has many different sects.

Our Buddhism also has many schools: the Pure Land school, Chan school, Esoteric Buddhism, Dharma Characteristics School, Caodong school, and so forth. The Brahmins who kill daily are among the lowest of sects; what they do are evil deeds that bring rebirth in the five uninterrupted hells.

The uninterrupted hell has two meanings. First, suffering there has not the slightest interval. Second, there are no partitions within its chambers: a hundred people

crammed into one room are squeezed to an unbearable degree, and one person in that room is squeezed in just the same way.

Great Vajradhara Buddha tells us that even if one has committed sins as grave as those leading to the five uninterrupted hells, one can still be liberated so long as one encounters this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation in the Intermediate State. Why? It is like having a nightmare while asleep and being terribly frightened: as soon as someone wakes you, the nightmare is gone.

This sutra awakens us from evil circumstances. Once awakened, we are liberated—just that quickly. For everything is a false appearance and cannot be obtained. Do not think that what exists now is real; what exists now is likewise a false appearance and cannot be obtained. Those whose practice is well developed know that once the mind is empty and pure, the great earth sinks level and empty space shatters to pieces—where then is this world? Everything is gone. Therefore, I say that there is fundamentally no hell; it depends only on whether you can awaken.

How exceedingly fortunate we are to hear this Dharma. Even if we do not attain realization while practicing it, at the time of death there is still this assured dharma gate. We must now understand this practice thoroughly and memorize it well, cultivating the seeds of the eight consciousnesses until they mature. At the final moment, when someone beside us gives a reminder, we can awaken and be liberated. This shows how extraordinarily sublime this sutra is.

Therefore, those who encounter this scripture must never give rise to doubts or slander by clinging to their own views. Such personal views are mainly directed at the union practice discussed in the scripture. I have heard several people say, “Everything else in this scripture is good, but the union practice is not.” Others say, “What is this union practice of Father-Buddha and Mother-Buddha? It is no good, no good.”

To speak this way is wrong. If we wish to transcend birth and death, it would be best to be free of views of male and female. How can one transcend birth and death while retaining such views? We have already explained union before. First, it is a symbolic teaching. Our human bodies themselves contain yin and yang: birth comes from this, and death departs through this.

Birth and death arise from the union of father and mother. If we now wish to free ourselves from birth and death, we must also emerge from here. Second, Buddhas manifest in response to the capacities of sentient beings.

If, at the time of death, sentient beings’ minds are empty and pure and they can truly be utterly bare, no appearances manifest. It is precisely because our minds are

impure that we see terrifying visions: seven dogs barking and chasing us, yakṣas pursuing us, jackals, wolves, tigers, leopards, and the ten kings of hell.

Rather than this, would it not be better for wholesome appearances—such as the united appearance of Father-Buddha and Mother-Buddha—to manifest and liberate us? How good that would be! Third, this scripture was written by Guru Padmasambhava in accordance with the customs and habitual attachments of the Tibetan people.

Because Tibetans' cultural level was relatively low and they were strongly attached to appearances, they would not believe if told that there are no appearances. They would think, "Without appearances, how could I have been born? There must be a father and mother for one to be born." Thus the Buddha manifested for them as Father-Buddha and Mother-Buddha.

Just as the "Universal Gateway" chapter of the Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva says: "To those who can be liberated by the body of a magistrate, he manifests the body of a magistrate and teaches the Dharma; to those who can be liberated by the body of a woman, he manifests the body of a woman and teaches the Dharma." Union manifests in response to the causes and conditions of sentient beings. Fourth, if we truly wish to be liberated from birth and death, we must withstand the test of actual circumstances.

It is not enough merely to speak of it or to understand it in principle. When union manifests before you, can you remain unmoved? Only when one can resolve it in actual circumstances can one become a sambhogakāya Buddha. If one cannot resolve it in actual circumstances, one can attain only the dharmakāya. This Dharma enables us to go beyond the dharmakāya and realize sambhogakāya Buddhahood.

The dharmakāya is only the first step. One must realize the sambhogakāya and then attain the nirmāṇakāya; only then is realization complete. To realize sambhogakāya Buddhahood, one must withstand tests in actual circumstances: seeing the appearance of union should be no different from not seeing it at all, with the mind entirely unmoved. This is the final test.

Moreover, when our minds are truly pure, what single-body appearance or union appearance could there be? There are no appearances at all—only one great luminosity. Thus the teachings of Esoteric Buddhism are profound. Never allow personal views to give rise to doubt or even slander of this Dharma; to do so brings adverse karmic retribution.

In the past, when Master Hongyi had just become a monastic, he saw the union practice of Esoteric Buddhism and said, "What kind of demons and monsters are these in Esoteric Buddhism? How can there be such things?" Later, after deep study,

he came to understand it and wrote a Repentance Text. In his Repentance Text, he said: “Formerly, because I did not understand, I spoke recklessly and slandered Esoteric Buddhism.”

“Now I deeply repent.” He also warned later generations not to speak recklessly about what they do not understand. Those who are interested may consult Master Hongyi’s Repentance Text. There are many things we do not understand, and no one must slander this Dharma on the basis of personal views.

Because this great Dharma is the supreme treasure among the secret teachings, it is exceedingly precious. It enables us immediately to realize the perfectly complete wisdom of the innate awakening of the self-nature of the one great dharma realm. The one great dharma realm is the One True Dharma Realm, complete with the ten dharma realms. It is our own self-nature, our dharmakāya.

Our dharmakāya is originally great awakening, the one and only perfect enlightenment; it did not awaken only later. Therefore, it is also called the perfectly complete wisdom of original awakening. The Sixth Patriarch said: “Who could have expected that the self-nature is originally complete? Who could have expected that the self-nature is originally endowed with all things?” Thus it is perfectly complete and endowed with everything, capable of all things and knowing all things.

Why, then, do sentient beings not know this now? It is because they are deluded by material appearances and have forgotten their original Buddha-nature. All day long they quarrel and bustle about in confusion, take what is false for true and what is true for false, and are burdened with layer upon layer of afflictions. Their wisdom is thereby obscured, and their luminosity cannot manifest. Our practice is undertaken in order to recover the Original Face.

Thus this Dharma enables us to uncover what is original, realize the accomplishment of the dharmakāya, then the accomplishment of the sambhogakāya—the sambhogakāya being a light-body—and, further, the accomplishment of the nirmāṇakāya. It teaches us, when great luminosity shines forth during the intermediate state, to unite with the light of all Buddhas and thereby realize sambhogakāya Buddhahood, perfecting the wisdom of the innate awakening of the self-nature of the One True Dharma Realm. Therefore, it is a most secret and profound Dharma.

This great Dharma is also the heart-essence of Adharma Samantabhadra King Tathāgata. Adharma Buddha is a great Buddha; translated into Chinese, the name is Samantabhadra King Tathāgata. Because Esoteric Buddhism emphasizes actual cultivation and also gives great importance to images, practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism regard Adharma Buddha as the first Buddha to attain realization.

In Exoteric Buddhism, there is neither a first Buddha to attain realization nor a last Buddha to attain realization; it is one great circle without beginning or end. This way of explaining it is more complete.

If there were a first, people would ask who taught that first one. It is like someone asking a Catholic, “Human beings were created by God, but who created God?” This is not entirely complete.

In truth, all sentient beings are Buddhas. What first Buddha or non-first Buddha could there be? Whichever Buddha formulates rules of teaching to instruct sentient beings is the first Buddha. In Esoteric Buddhism, this refers to Samantabhadra King Tathāgata. This Dharma is his heart-essence and is therefore extremely precious. It is like Patriarch Bodhidharma, who accepted many disciples.

When he was nearing death, he examined his disciples to see what their understanding was like. After examining them, he said: “You have attained my skin; you have attained my bones; you have attained my flesh. Only Master Shengguang has attained my marrow”—meaning the heart-essence of the Buddhadharma. Therefore, Master Shengguang was able to become the Second Patriarch of the Chan school in China.

This Dharma is also the supreme, most secret great Dharma of the Tibetan Nyingma school founded by Guru Padmasambhava. The Nyingma school has many teachings: some realize the essence, and some bring forth its function. But this Dharma is not an indirect or roundabout teaching; it is a supreme great Dharma through which one can directly realize the Way.

For example, if we now wish to practice Esoteric Buddhism, we are first made to perform 108,000 full prostrations, recite the Four Refuges 108,000 times, recite the Hundred-Syllable Mantra 108,000 times, and offer maṇḍalas 108,000 times. Completing these practices takes more than ten years. Then one practices preliminary visualization methods, followed by corresponding practices. There are also many kinds of corresponding practices, all indirect and roundabout; they are unlike this Dharma, through which accomplishment can be attained immediately. It is truly most fortunate that everyone can now hear this Esoteric Dharma.

Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng completed the translation of this scripture, thereby fulfilling his own aspiration as well as the long-cherished wishes of the elderly lay practitioners Zhang Miaoding, Zhao Hongzhu, and Qu Wenliu—whose Dharma name was Faxian, who was known as Master Faxian, and who was Lay Practitioner Sun Jingfeng’s Dharma brother—so that it may widely benefit sentient beings.

Lay Practitioner Sun Jingfeng was very modest. He said that his learning was shallow, his cultivation insufficient, and that he was already advanced in age and his energy

had declined; therefore, omissions and oversights were unavoidable.

Accordingly, on the one hand, he hoped that worthy and virtuous experts—namely, wise and learned persons; before practitioners advance from the first bhūmi to the tenth bhūmi of bodhisattvahood, there are the three worthy stages of the ten abodes, ten practices, and ten dedications—would carefully examine and annotate this scripture and correct its errors.

On the other hand, he hoped that readers would not skim through this scripture carelessly, but would calm their minds and study it attentively and single-mindedly. Once they understand it, they should also tell others and help them. The excellence of Mahāyāna Buddhism lies precisely here: one should not stop at self-liberation, but liberate oneself and others, awaken oneself and others.

One must not keep it hidden away as a personal treasure and refuse to let others see it. When the time and conditions have matured, it should be widely distributed, circulated, publicized, and explained in detail. The failing of many Buddhist disciples today lies in their closed and exclusionary ways. To enter a temple, one must buy an admission ticket; otherwise, one cannot even enter.

Even after buying a ticket and entering, there is no propagation of the Buddhadharma. One must also bring money before anyone will recite sūtras or perform penitential rites. Thus the Buddhadharma is being swept away—how truly regrettable! This is inferior even to Christianity: there is no need to buy an admission ticket, nor is one required to pay merely to offer prayers. They open their doors and invite people in to hear the teaching.

Compared with Christians, we Buddhists fall far short. We do even worse in social welfare. Christians help one another, whereas among Buddhists, each says that the other is no good, and they slander one another.

Buddhism's doors should be open. There should be no division between this side and that; the true meaning of Buddhism should be explained and proclaimed in detail for all people. We must liberate sentient beings from the sea of suffering—this is Buddhism's original intent. If one merely performs Buddhist rites to earn money, what benefit can such Buddhism bring to society or to human relations and moral life? It thereby degenerates into superstition, which is even worse.

Most pitiful of all are those who are ill and near death. We should explain things to them in detail and help them understand. For the deceased, one should speak into their ear and tell them not to be afraid. The voice should not be too soft; it should be somewhat louder, but not excessively loud, because the ear faculty of the deceased is more than nine times as sensitive as ours.

We now all have a physical shell, but the deceased have no physical shell and therefore possess the five supernormal powers: divine eye, divine ear, spiritual powers, knowledge of others' minds, and knowledge of past lives. They can drift thousands or tens of thousands of miles and arrive at once. They can hear everything we say to them, and at the same time they are speaking to us, but we cannot hear them.

Especially when he sees his own corpse lying across the bed, he realizes that he has died. He becomes extremely anxious, wanting to have a body, and runs about wildly. Moreover, when the karmic obstacles of those who have created evil karma manifest and frightening appearances pursue them, they become even more panicked and are driven to unfavorable places.

Therefore, explain to the deceased at their ear: "Whatever realm you now see, do not be afraid. These realms are all illusory appearances. Only the light is real. If you unite with the light, you can leave the cycle of rebirth in the six realms and realize the Way." How wonderful and expedient this is! This Dharma is truly excellent.

Then dedicate the merit of saving sentient beings in this way—that is, offer it—to all sentient beings, hoping that they may cut off their emotional attachments and views. For sentient beings are all beings of feeling. Thus the two words bodhisattva (bodhi-sattva) mean "awakened sentient being." One must awaken to and break through emotional attachments and views, and sever the root of attachment. Attachment is a bad thing.

Because attachment gives rise to water—for example, when people who are close to one another part, they weep and cannot bear to leave; when they see food they love, saliva flows from their mouths. The nature of water is to flow downward; it cannot flow upward. Only when it is pumped upward can it flow from below to above. Therefore, those who wish to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss must certainly sever emotional attachments and views.

If emotional attachments and views are not severed, and one remains attached to one's family and children, one cannot be reborn in the West. For the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is a Pure Land, located in the heavens. Flowing downward, one cannot ascend and fly to the West. Therefore, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra says, "Pure thought brings flight." That is, if emotional attachments and views have all been severed and one thinks only of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one can ascend and fly there.

While flying, the sacred realm of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss will appear before one. Chan Master Zibo and Master Hanshan also said: "Buddha-recitation must continue until the root of attachment has been severed. If the root of attachment cannot be severed, Buddha-recitation is of no use."

The above is the “Background to the Translation.” Through this “Background to the Translation,” it is hoped that people now and in the future will understand the origin and general contents of this sūtra, recognize its preciousness, and never regard it lightly.

II. Preface

(I) Types of Intermediate States

In Esoteric Buddhism, the intermediate states are divided into six: the first three and the latter three. The first three are the Intermediate State of Birth, the Intermediate State of Dreams, and the Intermediate State of Dhyāna; the latter three are the Intermediate State at the Time of Death, the Intermediate State of Dharmatā, and the Intermediate State of Becoming.

We shall now introduce them one by one:

1. The Intermediate State of Birth (also known as the Intermediate State in the Womb)

This refers to the time when, during sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, the intermediate-state body is stirred by sexual desire and acts as a third party. At the moment the man ejaculates, it is swept into the womb and forms a fetal sac; this is the intermediate state in the womb. This period lasts nine and a half months. Because the mother's body is made of flesh and blood and the womb is turbid, the intermediate-state body becomes muddled after dwelling there for nine and a half months. Moreover, the process of birth is very painful. Thus, after people are born, they do not know the events of their previous lives; it is not because they have drunk some soup that causes forgetfulness.

2. The Intermediate State of Dreams

This refers to the various states that appear when we are asleep and dreaming. In dreams, we too possess all six sense faculties: we can see, hear, and touch. We can grasp anything; when we encounter pleasant states, we like them, and when we encounter unpleasant states, we are afraid. They are extremely vivid, exactly the same as when we are awake.

When you look at picture books or comic strips, they depict this quite vividly: someone is dreaming, and several circles are drawn—“Eh—”—then the consciousness-spirit comes out. Dreaming is like this: when the consciousness-spirit emerges, it sees all kinds of states. This is the intermediate state of dreams.

3. The Intermediate State of Dhyāna (also known as the Intermediate State of Meditative Absorption)

This refers to the states seen when the consciousness-spirit emerges as we meditate and enter samādhi. As we explained earlier, the seventh consciousness is inherently able to emerge, but because our six sense faculties are impure, they bind it.

When the six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—confront the six sense objects—forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas—thoughts arise in the mind and all kinds of states appear. This is consciousness.

When we meditate, however, the mind is relatively calm and the six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—do not take in external objects—forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas. With nothing obscuring it, the consciousness-spirit can emerge. Yet what emerges at this time is a yin spirit, not a yang spirit. Others cannot see this shadowy form (nor can you see the intermediate-state body, because it is predominantly composed of the wind element). This is the intermediate state of dhyāna.

4. The Intermediate State at the Time of Death

This refers to the time just after a person has stopped breathing, when they are muddled and dazed, as if drunk on strong old wine, and are in a state of confusion. This stage lasts approximately three and a half to four days and is called the intermediate state at the time of death. Ordinarily, when we perform seven-day rites for a deceased person, we count from the day on which breathing ceases.

But in this practice, the first seven-day period is counted only from the fifth day after the deceased person's death. Since the intermediate-state body in the stage of confusion understands nothing, it does not really know when we perform Buddhist services for it. Therefore, when observing the seven-day rites, the period of the intermediate state at the time of death should not be counted.

5. The Intermediate State of Dharmatā

This refers to the time four days after a person has died, when the deceased person's consciousness-spirit gradually awakens from its state of confusion. At this time, its spiritual powers are greater than ours, and its capacities for seeing, hearing, sensing, and knowing are nine times stronger than they are for us now. It can see farther and hear more clearly than we can; wherever it thinks of going, it arrives as soon as it drifts there. Its spiritual powers at this time are karmic powers—that is, spiritual powers manifested by karmic obstacles and retribution obstacles. This period begins on the fifth day and lasts fourteen days. This is the intermediate state

of Dharmatā. Together with the preceding four days of the intermediate state at the time of death, it totals eighteen days.

6. The Intermediate State of Becoming

This refers to the period after eighteen days following death—that is, after the intermediate state of Dharmatā has passed—until before rebirth in the womb. During the intermediate state of becoming, the intermediate-state body must enter a womb, and the cycle of birth and death begins anew.

(II) Types of Attainment in Esoteric Practice

In Esoteric Buddhism, attainments may be divided into three kinds: 1. attainment in this very life; 2. attainment in the intermediate state; and 3. attainment through bodily transformation. We shall introduce them separately below:

1. Attainment in This Very Life

In all Dharma teachings—whether Chan, Pure Land, or Esoteric Buddhism—one may realize the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya in this very life. That is, while we are alive, we can cultivate and realize these three kāyas.

The Chan school directly points to seeing one's true nature. Upon immediate awakening, one can realize the dharmakāya; this is the most direct Dharma gate. Esoteric Buddhism has many methods, but they may broadly be divided into two stages: the generation stage and the completion stage. The generation stage begins with what is absent: one visualizes the channels, winds, and essences; practices the ninefold Buddha-wind; trains in deep breathing; and, once the visualization succeeds, brings forth what was absent into presence.

The completion stage consists in further transforming what is present into emptiness and, finally, not abiding even in emptiness. In this way one realizes the dharmakāya. In Esoteric Buddhism, however, one must first practice the generation stage and then the completion stage; one cannot begin directly with the completion stage. In other words, one must first practice form-based esoteric practice and then formless esoteric practice, thus taking one more detour than the Chan school.

Our Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma, however, is direct and immediate: at once it reaches the completion stage, without taking a detour. This is because nothing whatsoever can be obtained. The body is unreal, the world too is unreal; all are illusory and insubstantial. Practicing the Heart-of-Heart Esoteric Dharma can cause our body, mind, and world all to vanish away. When the great earth is leveled and empty space shattered, one can realize the dharmakāya.

Thus, although the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is described as Esoteric Buddhism, it is in fact a Chan teaching and is therefore also called Chan-Esoteric Buddhism. The Pure Land school, too, can realize the dharmakāya in this very life, though its followers do not speak of it this way. They use different terms, calling it “Buddha-recitation samādhi” or “When the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to the unborn.” The flower means the flower of the mind.

Our physical heart is shaped like a lotus bud. Before a lotus bud opens, it resembles the hearts of pigs and cattle sold in the market.

There are two situations in which the flower of the mind opens. One refers to the time of death: when the final breath ceases, it activates the death point beside the heart, and then the heart bud opens with a rush. The eight consciousnesses can then depart; once they depart, the person dies. The other refers to the opening of the flower of the mind when, through diligent seated practice, one opens the channels and winds.

Thus, the opening of the flower refers to the opening of the flower of the mind, and seeing the Buddha means seeing the Buddha of one’s own true nature—that is, seeing the appearance of the formless. At that time one realizes the dharmakāya. From this it can be seen that Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism are mutually connected. Chan is Pure Land, Pure Land is Esoteric Buddhism, and Esoteric Buddhism is Chan. But Pure Land practitioners today do not speak of these matters, nor are they willing to cultivate diligently.

They also say: “What need is there for one-pointedness of mind without distraction? No need, no need. At the end of life, ten recitations bring rebirth in the West while carrying karma.” Once this is said, the matter is spoiled! No one is willing to practice diligently. Thus Master Lianchi long ago said, “Those who recite the Buddha’s name are many; those reborn in the West are few!” He asked himself, “Why? It is because their Buddha-recitation lacks earnest urgency.”

That is, their Buddha-recitation is not earnest or urgent. They are unwilling to apply their minds, unwilling to let go of everything, unwilling to relinquish attachment to the physical body, to family, or to worldly pleasures.

They do not know that there is no happiness in this world. Living in this world is like a fish in dwindling water. This was taught by the Buddha: like fish living in water that diminishes day by day, what happiness can there be? When death approaches, can one still be happy? Therefore, whether one practices Chan, Pure Land, or Esoteric Buddhism, one must let go of everything and practice diligently. Only by realizing the dharmakāya can one attain mastery over birth and death.

Does realizing the dharmakāya alone mark the end, so that everything is then settled? No. As we said earlier, merely arriving at the edge of the dharmakāya is not enough. One must go beyond the dharmakāya and abide properly in the dharmakāya.

If one has awakened only to a little principle, yet cannot penetrate circumstances and remains very attached to appearances, then one becomes flustered and afflicted when adverse circumstances arise; when favorable circumstances arise, one delights in them so greatly as to forget oneself. Can one then realize the Way? Only when one can penetrate circumstances can the physical body be transformed, become a luminous sambhogakāya, and realize the Buddha of the reward body.

It is not that one cannot realize the Buddha of the reward body while alive; it depends on how one practices. The Buddha explained this very clearly in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra: all phenomenal appearances, the mountains, rivers, and great earth are things within the wondrous luminous mind. That is, all things, including the mountains, rivers, and great earth, are manifestations of our true nature; they are all ourselves.

Our bodies, of course, are also things within the wondrous luminous mind. If we can transform the mountains, rivers, and great earth, then we can likewise transform the physical body. Thus, if we can penetrate circumstances, the physical body can be transformed; it can radiate great light and realize the reward body. Naturally, this light manifests little by little; it cannot suddenly shine forth in great and perfect fullness.

This is like the light seen by the intermediate-state body as described in this scripture: first, one sees light like mist; gradually, one sees light like the pale white glow that appears in the east when the sun rises; then the light gradually brightens; then a lunar disk appears; then a solar disk appears; and then light as brilliant as hundreds of thousands of suns appears. In this way, one gradually realizes the Buddha of the reward body.

What about the nirmāṇakāya? It too can be attained in this very life. The Buddha did not discuss this in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, but he did in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. Therefore, one should read several different sūtras. The Buddha explained clearly in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra that, upon realizing the third-bhūmi bodhisattva stage, one can manifest a mind-born body. This is the nirmāṇakāya.

To realize the nirmāṇakāya, one must temper oneself amid circumstances, never forgetting contemplation at any time and diligently removing habitual tendencies. When one understands that all things are unreal, that they are all things within our wondrous luminous mind and cannot be obtained, one will no longer become angry or quarrel with others. If someone wants something, simply let them take it.

Why struggle and contend? It is because we each cling to our own views and refuse to let go, thinking this is right and that is wrong, that disputes arise. In fact, there is originally neither right nor wrong; it depends on the angle from which we look. Different perspectives bring different understandings, and so people come into conflict with one another.

In fact, if everyone lets go and discusses matters calmly, asking, “How do you see it?” and “How do I see it?”, then once the matter is made clear there is no need for further quarrelling. For example, regarding this cup, one person says it is best placed here, while you say it is best placed there. If the other person does not agree, it is fine to follow that person’s view. We should relinquish ourselves and accord with others.

Does not the Chapter on the Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva say that we should always accord with sentient beings? Those who study Buddhism should always accord with sentient beings and train themselves in this respect. By advancing ever upward, one can realize the Buddha of the *nirmāṇakāya*.

If you always think that you are right and others are wrong, when will your habitual tendencies ever be eliminated? When will you realize the Buddha of the *nirmāṇakāya*? Even if you break through and see a little of the *dharmakāya*, you still cannot transcend birth and death; you still cannot realize the reward body, much less the *nirmāṇakāya*.

Therefore, true attainment requires that one continually train oneself amid circumstances and have no selfishness. Wang Yangming once spoke of “investigating things and extending knowledge,” meaning that one must remove desires for external things and eliminate the view of self. The view of self is the worst: one always thinks oneself right and others wrong, taking oneself as the center. Family disharmony also arises for this reason. If the view of self is removed, the family will be harmonious and all dharmas will flow freely.

Thus, while living in this world, it is not that we cannot realize the *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*; it depends on how we practice. This book says, “Attain Buddhahood in this very body and realize the Buddha of the *dharmakāya*.” This is only one way of speaking. Let us develop it further: it is not only the Buddha of the *dharmakāya* that can be realized in this very life; all three *kāyas*—the *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*—can be realized in this very life.

2. Attainment in the Intermediate State

If, while alive, we have not cultivated the Dharma well and have not realized the *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*, then we still have an opportunity for attainment after death.

This Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State enables the deceased, during the intermediate state—that is, the fifty-three days after death—to hear the instructions of this Esoteric Dharma, transcend saṃsāra, and attain liberation. This is called attainment in the intermediate state. If one has not attained realization while alive and then misses these fifty-three days after death, it is most regrettable.

Birth and death must then begin anew. One must again enter a womb, undergo karmic retribution, and sink into the cycle of rebirth in the six realms, not knowing when liberation will be attained. This is because human birth is difficult to obtain and the Buddha Dharma difficult to hear. Among the countless sentient beings, fewer than one percent obtain a human body.

There are only several billion people on our planet, but who knows how many bacteria there are? And among those who obtain a human body, how many can hear the Buddha Dharma? Shanghai has more than thirteen million people; how many of them can hear the Buddha Dharma? Fewer still are those who hear the Buddha Dharma and truly have faith in the true Dharma.

Most merely go to temples to burn incense, bow to the Buddha, and seek blessings. Therefore, while alive, we should practice diligently. If we cannot attain realization through practice, we may still attain it during the intermediate state with the aid of this Dharma. This shows how precious this scripture is.

The two words “intermediate state” in this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State refer to the latter three of the intermediate states mentioned above. It refers to the yin-body, predominantly composed of the wind element, during the interval after the former body has perished and before the later body has formed. Each period of seven days constitutes one birth and death; over seven times seven, or forty-nine days, there are seven births and deaths.

During the first seven days, the intermediate-state body is comparatively tall. With each succeeding seven-day period, it becomes shorter, and afterward it grows ever shorter and smaller. It is best for it to be liberated during the first seven days; the longer the delay, the worse it is. However, in the following situations there is no intermediate-state body: those who do good deeds and ascend directly to heaven, and those who do evil deeds and descend directly into hell, have no intermediate-state body; nor do those who cultivate the Way and are directly reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. Apart from these, all have an intermediate-state body.

According to its duration, the intermediate-state body after death can be divided into three stages: the intermediate state at the time of death, the intermediate state of dharmatā, and the intermediate state of becoming. How can one attain liberation in each of these stages? We shall explain them separately below.

(1) During the intermediate state at the time of death, one may attain the dharmakāya Buddha

The intermediate state at the time of death refers to the three and a half or four days following a person's death. This period is also called the stage of consciousness being dulled and cut off. Consciousness here means the consciousness-spirit. When a person has just died, it is like when we are in shock or have been put under general anesthesia before surgery: one loses consciousness and knows nothing. This is the stage of consciousness being dulled and cut off.

Remember that this period comprises the three and a half or four days after death. During it, the great clear light must appear twice. (How exactly does this light appear? We shall discuss that later.) Each appearance is very brief, lasting no more than the time it takes to eat a meal, after which the clear light disappears. Before long, the karmic obstacles we have created manifest, and the clear light is obscured.

During this period, if, through Dharma teaching, instruction, and direct guidance, we awaken, we can realize the dharmakāya Buddha. Thus attainment can come quickly. Yet few can attain realization during the intermediate state at the time of death, because the overwhelming majority are then unconscious. Therefore, anyone wishing to attain realization at the stage of consciousness being dulled and cut off must possess a certain degree of meditative stability and cultivation.

This depends on diligent cultivation in the present. If, while alive, we truly realize the dharmakāya, then we can attain realization at the stage of consciousness being dulled and cut off. If our cultivation is deep, then even if no one recites for us or gives us reminders at that time, we can still attain realization. Therefore, the most important thing now is to practice diligently.

(2) During the intermediate state of dharmatā, one may attain the sambhogakāya Buddha

Three and a half or four days after death, one enters the intermediate state of dharmatā. At this time, one has already regained awareness and is no longer unconscious and bewildered. The clear light of dharmatā manifests repeatedly. This period lasts fourteen days; together with the preceding four days of the intermediate state at the time of death, it totals eighteen days.

There are as many as twenty-one methods of guidance during the intermediate state of dharmatā. Since the experiences differ each day, each guidance is different. See how compassionate the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are! With so much instruction, even those with the gravest karmic obstacles ought to be liberated.

Therefore, I think that in the future there will be no need to go to a temple to ask monastics to perform the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths. The flaming mouths refer to hungry ghosts in the hungry ghost realm, whose mouths emit fire and who cannot eat. Performing the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths means making offerings to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas associated with the hungry ghost realm and asking them, in their compassion, to enable these ghostly beings to obtain food and liberation.

When people have just died, they have not yet entered the hungry ghost realm, so there is simply no need to perform the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths. Could it be that all the deceased have committed such grave offenses and must inevitably enter the hungry ghost realm? Therefore, it is inappropriate to perform the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths for someone who has just died. Rather, one should instruct them according to this scripture: “What is your present condition? How does the light appear? How do you unite with the clear light?”

“Which Buddha has now come to liberate you?” and so forth. It is better to guide them in this way. During the intermediate state of *dharmatā*, because there is no physical body to weigh one down and nothing to obscure it, the luminosity of one's intrinsic nature manifests. Naturally, this luminosity reveals itself little by little.

Just as this scripture describes: first, one sees a light like a mist; gradually, one sees a light like the pale white glow in the east when the sun is rising; then, little by little, it grows brighter; then the disk of the moon appears; then the disk of the sun appears; and finally, a light as brilliant as a million suns appears.

If you recognize this clear light and unite with it, you realize the luminous sambhogakāya and thereby attain the sambhogakāya Buddha. Of course, the dharmakāya Buddha is included within this as well, because the dharmakāya is fundamental. It is like a great tree: the dharmakāya is its roots, the sambhogakāya its trunk, and the *nirmāṇakāya* its branches and leaves.

The attainment of the sambhogakāya Buddha by the intermediate-state body refers to realization within these fourteen days of the intermediate state of *dharmatā*. How sublime it is to directly realize the sambhogakāya Buddha during the intermediate state of *dharmatā*! Guru Padmasambhava, out of compassion for us, has taught us this profound and wondrous Dharma—which is not even explained in the Buddhist sūtras. We truly should count ourselves exceedingly fortunate!

(3) During the intermediate state of becoming, the principal concerns are “closing the womb entrance” and “choosing a womb entrance”

After passing through the fourteen days of the intermediate state of *dharmatā*, the deceased enters the intermediate state of becoming. Conditions in the intermediate

state of becoming are comparatively worse. During the first seven days of the intermediate state of dharmatā, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas come to guide one in their bodies of the Wheel of the True Dharma; during the latter seven days, they come in their bodies of the Wheel of Command—that is, as Wisdom Kings.

Wisdom Kings are wrathful forms that subdue māras; their appearance is terrifying and frightening. If our karmic obstacles are heavy and we have not been liberated in either of the first two intermediate states, we can only fall into the intermediate state of becoming. In the intermediate state of becoming, the various experiences illusorily manifested by karma all arise. Thus, as we said earlier, deliverance becomes less effective the later it comes.

The methods of deliverance during the intermediate state of becoming principally concern “closing the womb entrance” and “choosing a womb entrance.” There are as many as twenty-four methods of guidance during this period, three more than in the intermediate state of dharmatā. Choosing a womb entrance means selecting a good place in which to take rebirth. Closing the womb entrance means shutting it off, so that one does not go to a bad place.

In the past, when Master Xuanzang traveled to India to seek the scriptures, he saw a mountainside as he was crossing the Himalayas and said, “There is a great practitioner inside there.” So they searched and searched, eventually finding traces of what seemed to be a cave. Over the long passage of time, rocks, earth, trees, and undergrowth had completely blocked its entrance.

They dug it open and indeed found a practitioner sitting inside. This practitioner had entered the samādhi of cessation, intending to wait until a Buddha appeared in the world to teach him the Dharma. Once one enters the samādhi of cessation, one remains there for thousands, even tens of thousands, of years. Master Xuanzang awakened him. When he saw Master Xuanzang arrive, he said, “Ah! A Buddha has appeared in the world to liberate me.”

Master Xuanzang said, “I am not a Buddha. The Buddha entered parinirvāṇa many years ago. Why have you hidden yourself here?” He replied, “Oh! I have been waiting for a Buddha to appear in the world and liberate me!” Unexpectedly, he had remained in the samādhi of cessation for too long and had missed the opportunity. Deeply saddened, he wept.

Master Xuanzang said, “Do not weep. Your body has been useless for so many years. Go to Zhendan—that is, China. When you see tall buildings, glazed tiles, and yellow walls, take rebirth there.” This was helping him choose a womb entrance. So he took rebirth in the household of Yuchi Gong.

He later became Chan Master Kuiji, Xuanzang's great disciple in the Tang dynasty, also known as the Three-Cart Master. The guidance of this Dharma during the intermediate state of becoming is intended to enable the intermediate-state body to take rebirth in a good place, where favorable conditions allow it to hear the Buddhadharma, rather than in a bad place or a borderland where the Buddhadharma cannot be heard. This is what this book calls “taking rebirth and becoming a *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha.”

In truth, this does not mean that one realizes the *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha immediately upon taking rebirth. For even after being reborn and practicing again, one may not necessarily realize the *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha. Just as none of us has studied the Buddhadharma for only one lifetime: if we had studied it for only one lifetime, we could not possibly practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma or hear such a sublime Dharma of deliverance in the intermediate state.

Thus, in this book, “taking rebirth and becoming a *nirmāṇakāya* Buddha” means taking rebirth in a good place, encountering the opportunity to study Buddhism, practicing diligently, and advancing ever higher, so that all three *kāyas*—the *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*—may be attained and the three *kāyas* and four wisdoms brought to perfection.

From this we can see that, with this Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State, even if one has not realized the *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya* while alive, one still has an opportunity for attainment after death. However, one must certainly understand the teachings of this esoteric Dharma and commit its contents to memory. At the time of death, one must also have favorable conditions; this is very important.

For example, many people die sudden deaths, perhaps being unexpectedly run over outside, and have forgotten this scripture's teachings. If they also lack favorable conditions at that time, where can they go to hear the Dharma? Therefore, we must pay close attention to these matters while we are alive. We should practice the Dharma well in ordinary times, so that when the experiences of the intermediate state appear, even without anyone to remind us, we will naturally awaken and be able to recognize and accept it when the clear light manifests. In this way, we can attain the *sambhogakāya* Buddha.

3. Attainment Through Rebirth

This means that although we have not attained Buddhahood while alive, at death we can be reborn in a Buddha's Pure Land and continue cultivating there until we attain Buddhahood. For example, the Pure Land school and the phowa practice of Esoteric Buddhism are dharma gates for attaining Buddhahood through rebirth. This is because, when one is reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one is still an

ordinary being and not yet a Buddha. One must continue to cultivate and advance ever higher, rising from the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages to the Land of Expedient Means with Residue, then from the Land of Expedient Means with Residue to the Land of True Reward and Adornment, and finally to the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. Then one attains Buddhahood. This is attainment through rebirth.

(III) This is the most expedient path to liberation for practitioners of middling or lesser faculties, ordinary beings, and even those who have committed grave offenses.

People of the highest capacity who have ordinarily practiced the great teachings, such as Dzogchen, Mahāmudrā, and our Heart-of-Heart Dharma (within Esoteric Buddhism, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the highest vehicle and the heart-essence of Dzogchen), and have already realized the dharmakāya, have no need for this Esoteric Dharma. When the dharmakāya manifests at death, they can recognize it.

Therefore, when one ordinarily sits well in meditation, the sense faculties and their objects fall away, everything disappears, and the breath ceases—it is as though one had died. Everyone feels somewhat afraid at that point: “Oh! Why has my breathing stopped?” Thinking they are about to die, they become alarmed. Yet we will not die, so there is no need to be afraid.

Others say that at such a time they experience embryonic breathing. That is, there is no breathing through the nose, but something is still moving within the lower dantian. I tell them: “You have attained a meditative state, but it has not yet dissolved into emptiness. Embryonic breathing remains, so this will not do. You still have not realized the mind and seen your true nature; you have not awakened.”

At awakening, there is nothing at all—only clear, ever-present knowing. How could there be such a thing as embryonic breathing or no embryonic breathing? If we truly reach this point, we will not be afraid when death approaches. Having already experienced the cessation of breath, we know what death is like. At that time we will not be disturbed in the least, but will pass away peacefully. This is called “sitting free and dying standing.” Therefore, those who have cultivated to this level do not need this Esoteric Dharma; they can take charge themselves and realize the Way.

This Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State is intended specifically for people of middling or lesser capacities, ordinary beings, and those who have committed grave offenses. Why can even

those who have committed grave offenses attain accomplishment upon encountering this Dharma? Because all things are originally empty. Karmic obstacles do not truly exist.

The so-called hells are also empty; they do not truly exist. It is like killing someone in a dream: because we are attached and deluded, we take it to be real. Only after waking do we know that it was a dream and that nothing was ever there. Thus, all karmic obstacles are originally created by one's own deluded feelings, deluded thoughts, and false notions.

If we were not deluded by inverted thoughts, how could we kill or set fires? How could we steal what belongs to others? Even now, we are all dreaming. All day long, people argue and quarrel, stubbornly clinging to their own views. You say that I am wrong, and I say that you are wrong; each insists on arguing the matter to the end. In truth, neither is right; all are dreaming.

If everyone stopped dreaming and understood that all things are false appearances, there would be no more quarreling. When we apply ourselves well in practice and truly enter samādhi, body, mind, and world will all completely dissolve into emptiness; only luminous spiritual awareness remains. That is the moment of awakening from the dream. Therefore, I urge you all to let go quickly: nothing can be obtained.

The purpose of this Dharma is to awaken us quickly when, after death, we encounter adverse states. It is like someone calling to us while we are asleep and having a nightmare: "Wake up! Wake up quickly!" As soon as we awaken, the nightmare immediately vanishes. But rather than awakening only at the time of death, it is better to awaken now.

We should promptly practice now and lay a foundation. Do not continue to cling to appearances or become attached. At that time, if someone beside us recites this sūtra for us, our consciousness will awaken as soon as it hears it, and we can attain liberation during the intermediate state of Dharmatā and realize the sambhogakāya Buddha. Otherwise, if our attachment is too strong, we will be so dazed and confused then that even calling out will not awaken us.

This sūtra is exceedingly wondrous. Even if we are illiterate or have never seen it, that is no obstacle. As long as we can hear the pith instructions on the intermediate-state teachings—even better, of course, if we can read them—we can be liberated. Even if one hears them only once, one can be liberated despite having committed the five uninterrupted offenses.

The five uninterrupted offenses are killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, causing the Buddha's body to bleed, and disrupting the saṅgha.

In society, we often hear of people killing their own parents; this is killing one's father or mother. Killing an arhat means killing someone who has attained the fruit of arhatship. Causing the Buddha's body to bleed means injuring the Buddha's body so that it bleeds. Disrupting the saṅgha means disrupting the monastic community.

A gathering of four or five monastics is called a saṅgha, also a harmonious saṅgha. One monastic alone does not constitute a saṅgha, but is called a heshang—a cleric, also called a bhikshu. Originally, everyone lived together, united in mind and purpose, applying themselves to practice, encouraging and spurring one another on, and realizing the Way together. How fine that would be.

But monasteries are no longer like this. Everyone forms factions. You say that I am wrong, and I say that you are wrong; people sow dissension and undermine unity. This is called disrupting the saṅgha. These five offenses are the gravest and are called the five uninterrupted offenses. Those who commit them must descend into the uninterrupted hell. There are eighteen levels of hell, and the greatest of them is the Avīci hell.

The uninterrupted hell is one kind of Avīci hell. "Uninterrupted" has two meanings. One is that there is no break in the time of suffering, not even for a minute or a second. The other is that however large the room is, your body is equally large, so that you are crushed and pinned to death.

Whether there are thousands upon thousands of people in that room, or only one or two, they are all packed together without any gap, crushed nearly to death. It is like being squeezed onto a public bus in China, so crowded that one can scarcely breathe. Those destined for the uninterrupted hell go there as soon as they die. They have no intermediate-state body.

Even after committing such grave offenses, one can be liberated simply by hearing the teachings of this Dharma. You may say, "Can it really be so easy? Can those who have committed such great offenses also be liberated?" Indeed, they can. As we explained earlier, all karmic obstacles are originally empty; they are all flowers in empty space, the moon reflected in water, dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows.

It is only because we have not awakened that they remain. Once we awaken, karmic obstacles disappear. Thus it is said: "When one realizes it, karmic obstacles are originally empty; when one does not realize it, one must still repay one's past karmic debts." Realization means clear understanding and awakening.

When you understand, and the mind is truly empty, karmic obstacles become empty and hell disappears. If you do not understand, if the mind is not empty and you still cling to appearances, then your karmic obstacles remain. You must repay your past karmic debts and descend into the uninterrupted hell to suffer.

Therefore, at the most critical moment, this sūtra calls to awaken us: “Hey, so-and-so, wake up quickly! These are all false appearances, all manifestations of karmic force; none can be obtained.

Now the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are emitting great light and have come to receive you. Merge with the light, and you will become a Buddha!” Is that not liberation? Thus, even the greatest karmic obstacles can be overcome.

Yet human attachment is very strong. Long ago, a practitioner cultivated to the fourth fruit of arhatship and developed knowledge of former lives. He learned that in a past life he had killed his father, one of the five uninterrupted offenses. He was deeply distressed, feeling that his karmic offense was exceedingly grave, and could not remain seated in meditation.

The Buddha knew of this and said to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva: “This arhat has developed knowledge of former lives and discovered that he killed his father in a past life. He is very unsettled. Let us two put on a little performance to save him.” Thereupon Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva drew his sword and killed the Buddha. Oh! Causing the Buddha’s body to bleed is even more serious—more serious than killing one’s father.

Seeing this, those nearby said, “Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva will fall beyond the Iron Ring Mountains and descend into hell.” The Buddha said, “Do not be alarmed. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva has no intention of killing the Buddha; nothing can be obtained.

This teaches us that, so long as we do not cling to appearances, all things are empty and unobtainable. If we still cling to appearances, all kinds of evil arise from our minds. As it is said: “When the mind arises, the various offenses arise; when the mind ceases, the various offenses cease.” When the mind is empty and pure, there is no offense. It is like killing someone in a dream: after awakening, there is nothing at all.

Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva was awake, so he had no offense. Without an offense, how could he fall beyond the Iron Ring Mountains? At that moment, the arhat awakened and his mind became calm. Therefore, to save a person, one must save the mind. Having heard me say this, do not conclude: “Then I may as well kill someone; it does not matter. At the time of death, you need only call out to me once, and I will be liberated.”

That will not do. Learning the Buddha Dharma is meant to make our minds empty and pure, to awaken us. If you awaken and your mind is truly empty, why would you still kill anyone? If you go and kill someone, that proves your mind is not empty. Therefore, I urge you all to take great care and no longer cling to appearances.

Even those who have committed such grave offenses can be liberated and, in a single instant, attain the stage of an equal enlightenment bodhisattva, which is above that of a tenth-bhūmi bodhisattva.

This principle is very profound and not easy for ordinary people to understand: how can someone who has committed such grave offenses suddenly become an equal enlightenment bodhisattva? In fact, this is what the Buddha meant in saying that everything is created by mind alone. When we truly awaken and understand, we are equal enlightenment bodhisattvas.

The Sixth Patriarch explained this very clearly in the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch: “The preceding thought in delusion is an ordinary being; the succeeding thought in awakening is a Buddha.” This means that in a single instant, the preceding thought is still deluded and the succeeding thought awakens—then one is a Buddha. It happens in the transition, very quickly. Buddha-recitation in the Pure Land school is based on this principle.

“Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” This is transformation. Formerly, we recited greed, anger, and ignorance; now, by reciting the Buddha, do we not transform into a Buddha? You all know that Zhao Mengfu was a great man of letters, calligrapher, and painter. His calligraphy was excellent, and so were his paintings.

One day, he was painting Eight Steeds, in which he had to paint eight horses, each in a different posture. He pondered what form each of the horses should take.

At that moment, his wife brought him lotus-seed soup. As she pushed open the door, she was startled; with a bang, the bowl fell to the ground. Zhao Mengfu was startled: “Oh! What happened?” His wife said, “Just now I saw that you had completely taken on the form of a horse!” Zhao Mengfu had thought so deeply about horses that even his own body had taken on the form of a horse.”

So he thought: “When I think of a horse, I become horse-like. If I think of the Buddha, will I not become a Buddha?” Good! “I will stop painting horses and paint Buddhas instead.” Zhao Mengfu was very intelligent, and thereafter he painted Buddhas. Thus it is said that everything is created by the mind alone. This is the reason for our constant visualization. Everything is created by our own intrinsic nature.

Of the ten Dharma realms, the worst is the hell realm (if you continually do evil, you will fall into hell), yet it too is created by ourselves. As long as we constantly think of becoming Buddhas, we can become Buddhas. The principle is that simple. It does not depend on others helping us; it depends on transforming our own thoughts. Others’ help merely awakens us.

As long as we can immediately awaken and turn ourselves around, even the gravest offenses can be eliminated. Therefore, those who have done bad things in the past should no longer harbor any anxiety in their hearts: simply let everything go. But from this point onward, do not do bad things again!

“Mantric yogis of Vajrayāna with middling or higher capacities, who have practiced the two stages of generation and completion and have undertaken various practices such as reciting heart mantras, need not wait for the period of the Intermediate State of Dharmatā; they will be welcomed back to the Pure Land by vidyādhara heroes, ḍākinīs, and other beings.” The generation stage means bringing forth what was previously absent.

For example, at present we cannot see what is within our bodies. Through visualizing the channels, bindus, Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and so forth, we can see them once the visualization has succeeded. The completion stage means returning from existence to nonexistence: after bringing something forth, one transforms what exists into emptiness. For all forms are false. For example, bindus are merely our eighth consciousness; they are still consciousness-spirit.

Only by transforming that too into emptiness can one realize the dharmakāya Buddha. Finally, when one again brings forth existence from nonexistence, wondrous functioning and spiritual powers arise, and one gains mastery over transformation. This is the completion stage. When we practice the formless Dharma, we begin by practicing the completion stage. After transforming existence into emptiness and realizing the dharmakāya Buddha, we must diligently eliminate habitual tendencies.

The process of eliminating habitual tendencies is that of bringing forth existence again from nonexistence. When habitual tendencies have been completely eliminated, one can manifest wondrous functioning and spiritual powers. Thus, the generation stage is a form-based Dharma for initial entry, whereas the completion stage is a formless Dharma.

Mantric yogis of Vajrayāna with middling or higher capacities who have practiced both the generation and completion stages are those who practice Esoteric Buddhism and correspond with mantra recitation. They have practiced and recited the various heart mantras of Buddhas and bodhisattvas—for example, the most widespread Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, the heart mantra of Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara, “Om maṇi padme hūṃ”; the heart mantra of Amitābha Buddha, “Om, amidewa sha”; and the heart mantra of Guru Padmasambhava, “Om beima bieza hūṃ.” They need not wait for the period of the Intermediate State of Dharmatā; during the Intermediate State at the Time of Death, they will be welcomed back to the Pure Land by vidyādhara heroes, ḍākinīs, and other beings.

Vidyādhara means a wisdom king who terrifies demons. Such beings are very valiant; when demon kings see them, they are extremely frightened and dare not come to cause trouble. Ḍākinīs are all the deities who protect the Dharma. The Pure Land does not refer only to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. All the worlds in the ten directions are Pure Lands, and one may go to any of them. Therefore, everyone should still diligently practice the Dharma while alive.

Even if one's capacities are poor and one is a person of the very lowest capacity, if one has deep and unwavering faith in the practices of Esoteric Buddhism, does not give rise to wrong views, and practices them morning and evening, then one can also attain liberation upon hearing this Dharma. Nowadays many people slander Esoteric Buddhism. Pure Land school adherents in particular say that Esoteric Buddhism is no good and will lead one into demonic states, whereas Pure Land is good.

To speak of Esoteric Buddhism in this way is to undermine it and slander the Buddhadharma. They do not realize that doing so creates offenses. The Pure Land school is good; we cannot say that it is not. But the Pure Land school likewise cannot do without Esoteric Buddhism: it also recites the Ten Minor Mantras, the Rebirth Mantra, the Great Compassion Mantra, and the Śūraṅgama Mantra.

Since the Pure Land school cannot do without Esoteric Buddhism, how can it still say that Esoteric Buddhism is not good? Is that not nonsense?! Therefore, do not entertain doubts about Esoteric Buddhism, do not hold wrong knowledge or wrong views, and do not undermine Esoteric Buddhism. That is very bad. In fact, such people are pitiable: before they even know what Esoteric Buddhism is, they speak irresponsibly about it.

It is like Master Hongyi, whom we discussed earlier. Before he understood it, he too said that Esoteric Buddhism was not good. Later, when he saw the scriptures of Esoteric Buddhism, he said: "Ah! How complete they are—everything is included. I have truly committed an offense!" For this reason, he specifically wrote a "Text of Repentance."

Some people merely repeat what others say. Before they even know what Esoteric Buddhism is, they slander it; this is wrong view. If one can truly have faith in Esoteric Buddhism and refrain from giving rise to wrong views, then one attains liberation upon hearing this Dharma. Therefore, the most important things for realizing the Way are faith and confidence.

Does Exoteric Buddhism not also teach that one must fully possess the ten stages of faith?! A bodhisattva proceeds in order through the ten stages of faith, the ten abodes, the ten practices, and the ten dedications, finally reaching the ten bhūmis. If one's faith is not even complete, how can one realize the Way? Therefore, after

hearing this Dharma, those who have deep and unwavering faith can attain liberation even if their capacities are of the very lowest kind.

For Dharma teachers who study Exoteric Buddhism, this Liberation in the Intermediate State Dharma is also extremely important. The Pure Land school, Chan school, Dharma Characteristics School, and so forth all belong to Exoteric Buddhism.

Although the Dharma teachers who study these exoteric teachings may uphold the precepts with great strictness—unlike today, when there are many monastics who have broken the precepts—and may expound the Dharma with dazzling eloquence, they have not wholeheartedly practiced and recited the heart mantras of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Nor do they know the true meaning of esoteric mantras, that is, true words; still less have they formed affinities with any Buddhas or bodhisattvas. For example, practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma recite the Maitreya Mantra forty-nine times daily in order to form an excellent affinity with Maitreya Bodhisattva.

Therefore, when they reach the realm of the intermediate state and consciousness-spirit emerges, they are utterly bewildered and understand nothing at all.

Sometimes, when they see terrifying wrathful forms or the dual forms of Buddha-fathers and Buddha-mothers embracing one another, they may think wildly: “How could Buddhas and bodhisattvas have such forms? No, no; they must be demon kings.” They take all these wrathful forms of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to be demon kings.

They do not know that Buddhas manifest wrathful forms in order to terrify demons. For example, the Dharma protector Mahākāla in Esoteric Buddhism, called the Great Black Deity in China, has fresh blood in his mouth, tramples upon a woman, holds a stūpa in his left hand and a skull in his right hand, and appears extremely terrifying.

He is unlike the Dharma protector Wei Tuo Bodhisattva, whose form is compassionate and majestic. This is because Wei Tuo Bodhisattva is a body of the Dharma-wheel of right teaching, while Mahākāla is a body of the Dharma-wheel of command. When you see a wrathful form or a dual form, do not react as though you had encountered an enemy and give rise to anger.

Some even slanderously say, “Esoteric Buddhism is no good,” “Esoteric mantras are no good,” or “Only our Dharma is the best,” displaying arrogance and conceit. There is now a so-called “Supreme Master Qinghai,” who says that there is no need to recite the mantra of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva or the mantra of Amitābha Buddha; one need only recite the name of Supreme Master Qinghai.

Such words are words of great arrogance; she is a great demon king! Because of slandering the Esoteric Dharma, one will fall into the ravine of evil destinies, descending into the deepest Avīci hell of the evil realms. “Ravine” means a bottomless pit, “destiny” means a realm, and evil destinies are evil realms. Therefore, everyone must study this Dharma well while alive and understand it clearly. For Dharma teachers of Exoteric Buddhism, frankly speaking, this too is an indispensable and important element.

(IV) The Extraordinary Merits of This Esoteric Practice

After we die, we enter the dark and lightless underworld realm, where we are dimly unaware of east or west. This scripture is like a lighthouse in that realm, pointing out the way for us in the world of the dead, so that we do not lose our way or fall into the abyss.

Furthermore, it can enable us to transcend the cycle of birth and death. Thus, this scripture is also called an everlasting life-insurance policy. Nowadays, many people who practice the Pure Land school are uncertain whether they can attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land, and they are very worried, because Buddha-recitation for rebirth in the West must reach one-pointedness of mind without distraction—at the very least, one-pointedness of mind without distraction at the level of phenomena.

Now that we have this precious scripture, however, there is no need to be afraid even if we have not practiced Buddha-recitation well. At the time of death, as long as someone teaches and guides us, we can be liberated and saved.

Thus, being able to hear this Dharma is like obtaining a life-saving straw in the middle of the ocean; it is equivalent to receiving an insurance policy. How truly fortunate this is! Therefore, one should often read this supremely excellent Esoteric Dharma with utmost sincerity and reverence.

One should ponder deeply and savor the meanings of the words and sentences in this book. Han means that the meaning is deeply contained; yong means, as when we chant poetry, to reflect deeply; and wanwei means to bring forth and manifest the true meaning and subtle flavor of this scripture, understanding it profoundly. Do not merely skim through it carelessly. Understand the meaning of every word, and truly comprehend the purport of this Dharma.

One must memorize and contemplate the peaceful and wrathful maṇḍalas and the assembly of one hundred deities in this scripture. Peaceful means quiescent; wrathful means angry.

As we have explained several times before, the Buddha has two types of body: one is the majestic, solemn, and compassionate body of the Wheel of True Dharma, namely the peaceful division; the other is the fearsome wrathful body of the Teaching-Command Wheel, also called the body of a Wisdom King, namely the wrathful division. Its purpose is to instruct sentient beings and command māras and demon kings to submit to Buddhism.

A maṇḍala is the ritual ground where Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and their retinues gather in perfect completeness; it is also a Dharma center such as the one where we are now speaking the Dharma. The assembly of one hundred deities refers to a great assembly as numerous as the ocean, not to precisely one hundred individuals. For example, the lotus-pond assembly in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss described in the Amitābha Sūtra may be called an assembly of one hundred deities. We must carefully contemplate these images and memorize them.

With regard to the images in this scripture of the father Buddha and mother Buddha embracing in union, one must absolutely not give rise to inverted deluded views: “Oh! Were there even things with sexual imagery at that time?” Once a lustful thought arises, it ruins everything. Or one may say, “Perhaps this book is not trustworthy,” thereby slandering this Dharma.

One might originally have obtained great benefit, but once one gives rise to inverted deluded views, one receives no benefit and cannot attain liberation. Moreover, one incurs the offense of slandering the Dharma; this is called “further incurring the fault of slandering the Dharma.” Li originally means disaster, but here means to possess, obtain, or undergo. To slander this Dharma is to commit a grave offense; that would be terrible.

We have discussed this point many times, but let us say a little more about it now. The images of union are representations of the Dharma. They signify that we originally possess a union of yin and yang. Our buddha-nature and dharma-nature—the fundamental basis of all dharmas is called dharma-nature, while the basis for becoming a Buddha is called buddha-nature—originally possess the function of this union of yin and yang.

Did not the Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, say, “How could I have expected that intrinsic nature can give rise to the myriad dharmas”?! This means that our essential nature inherently possesses the function of generating the myriad dharmas, and the myriad dharmas arise through the union of yin and yang. Thus, images of Buddhas in union contain a most supreme and secret meaning. One must never entertain perverse thoughts about this supreme secret meaning, nor regard it as sexual pleasure.

For example, our present body is provisionally formed through the combination of earth, water, fire, and wind. The fire element is yang, and the water element is yin. Daoism also speaks of the infant and the jade maiden, with the Yellow Matron acting as their matchmaker. Thus, our bodies themselves contain yin and yang poles.

Ordinarily, the yin and yang poles in the human body do not meet. But when we practice until we enter samādhi, we can clearly perceive two currents of electricity within the body joining together with a “whoosh—”; this is the union of yin and yang.

Therefore, our present physical body itself is a union of yin and yang. Why should anyone slander or doubt this?! Thus, do not entertain perverse thoughts about images of union, and do not regard them as images of sexual intercourse between men and women.

If we truly understand this secret meaning and do not indulge in wild thoughts, then at the time of death we will not forget it, because we have been permeated and familiarized with it during life. Xun means that I explain and you listen; xi means becoming familiar. Once I asked everyone, “We have discussed union many times. Tell me, what is meant by union?” As a result, not a single person could explain it. How terrible! You had not become familiar with it. Therefore, we must become familiar with, understand, and clearly comprehend the contents of this scripture.

If we truly understand all the principles discussed above, and in addition possess our own wisdom—that is, our buddha-nature, which inherently possesses infinite and vast wisdom, a wisdom that arises from our own mind and intrinsic nature—this is prajñā, also called wisdom of inner self-realization.

It is not experiential knowledge acquired from outside. Such knowledge is merely worldly cleverness and intellectual brilliance, petty cleverness unrelated to true great wisdom.

When the realm of the intermediate state appears, we will then be suddenly enlightened: “Naturally, one will recite the words of the scripture and its verses as fluently as a flowing stream; one will not be alarmed or frightened by the peaceful and wrathful forms; one will give rise to right faith in the images of Buddhas in union; and one will thereby realize the Buddha stage through nondual interpenetration.” This scripture contains many verses.

Verses are like poems or hymns with four or five characters to a line, and they may be recited like songs. At that time, the intermediate-state body has an especially strong memory, nine times stronger than ours now.

As soon as you speak, it understands. It can recite the words of these scriptures and verses as swiftly as flowing water; it is no longer alarmed or afraid of the Buddha’s

body of the Teaching-Command Wheel; and on seeing the image of the father Buddha and mother Buddha embracing in union, it can give rise to right faith and exclaim in admiration: "Excellent! This is a representation of the Dharma. Such is the way things inherently are: we originally possess both yin and yang.

In this way, the Buddha is ourselves and we are the Buddha; like water and milk, they interpenetrate and become one. There is no Buddha apart from oneself, nor oneself apart from the Buddha. The Pure Land school teaches in the same way: mind and Buddha commune and become continuous and undivided. When Buddha-recitation reaches this degree, you are Amitābha Buddha, and Amitābha Buddha is you. There is no Amitābha Buddha apart from you, nor you apart from Amitābha Buddha. This is realizing the Buddha stage through nondual interpenetration and union as one."

"The intermediate-state body possesses all six sense faculties and has karmically induced supernormal powers. It is nine times more intelligent and quick-witted than during life. The ear faculty in particular is most acute: those who were hard of hearing during life can, even from afar, respond when called and arrive without any obstruction."

As we explained before, the intermediate-state body possesses all six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. It is not the case that, once the corpse has been left behind, there are no longer six sense faculties, because its eight consciousnesses still remain. The eight consciousnesses are the root from which the seventh consciousness, sixth consciousness, and first five consciousnesses arise.

Because of supernormal powers induced by karma, the intermediate-state body can then see farther and hear more finely. Yet it possesses only the five supernormal powers, not the supernormal power of the extinction of outflows. These five powers are not as profound, far-reaching, or vast as those of a Buddha, but the intermediate-state body is nine times more intelligent and quick-witted than when a person is alive, and its ear faculty is especially acute.

In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Buddha asked Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva which of the six sense faculties of sentient beings in our Sahā world could bring the quickest and most immediate benefit when used for practice. Mañjuśrī chose the ear faculty: "The true teaching substance in this region is purity through hearing sound." For example, if someone is asleep and you gently call, "So-and-so," that person wakes as soon as he hears it.

If you show him something, he cannot see it and will not wake. If you give him food, he does not know it and cannot eat it. When we are awake, even if a mountain lies between us, we can hear someone call out. Yet the eyes cannot see through even a single sheet of paper. This shows that the ear faculty is the keenest.

Likewise, the intermediate-state body has the keenest ear faculty. If you call its name and speak to it, it can hear. Even a deaf person—that is, someone hard of hearing—can respond when called and arrive after death, though far away. For example, if someone dies in another place and the bad news arrives, you call the person's name: "So-and-so, please come here to receive offerings.

Though he died far away, he will drift here at once because he possesses the supernormal power of spiritual locomotion; all mountains and rivers are unable to obstruct him. This is what the scripture means when it says: "The six sense faculties are all endowed with powers of awareness; moving freely, one travels without obstruction."

Our physical body is predominantly composed of the earth element, and therefore encounters obstructions. We cannot rise high when we wish to, and we cannot cross a river without a boat or bridge. But the intermediate-state body is predominantly composed of the wind element. Having departed from the material body of flesh and blood, it has shed one burden. It has no material form, and can therefore move without obstruction.

The intermediate-state body is the consciousness-spirit transformed by the seventh consciousness. Consciousness-spirit is divided into yang spirit and yin spirit. A yang spirit has strong practice and can manifest forms; a yin spirit has weak practice and cannot manifest forms. If we could truly project the spirit, nothing could obstruct us. If someone tells a lie, we would know it as soon as we heard it.

Someone said, "I projected my spirit and came upon a great river. There was no bridge, so I could not cross it. I could only appeal to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and later Avalokiteśvara helped me across." I said that this was sheer nonsense. How could that be spirit projection? It was ghost projection. If one had truly projected the spirit, one could simply drift across; how could one be unable even to cross a great river? Clearly, this is deceiving people! There are now many heterodox cults outside, with no one knows how many erroneous views. None of this is spiritual power; it is all false, intended only to deceive people.

During the intermediate state of stupor (the intermediate state at the time of death), the intermediate-state body is still muddled and confused, as though asleep. When the intermediate state of dharmatā arrives, it becomes lucid. At that time, it wanders alone, without a companion.

Why does it wander? Because, at that time, terrifying realms brought about by karmic obstacles appear before it scene by scene, like a film. Moreover, its body is gone, and it does not know where to go or where it can find another body. Thus, frightened and bewildered, not knowing where to turn, it drifts east and west.

At such a time, as soon as it hears someone expounding the Dharma to it, giving it instructions, and teaching it, “You should do this and that . . .,” it gladly follows. For example, if we tell it, as this scripture teaches: “Do not be afraid. These appearances are all manifestations of your own intrinsic nature; none of them is real,” then, upon hearing that they are unreal, it will no longer be afraid.

Or one may tell it: “At this time, light is appearing. This is your own light. The Buddha is also emitting light to guide you. If you merge with this light, you will be liberated.” Upon hearing this, it can attain realization by merging with the light.

This scripture contains many verses based on the Buddha-light, all intended to instruct the deceased. So long as the words are not misread, the deceased can awaken suddenly upon hearing them. Once they understand that these appearances are all unreal, they will no longer be afraid. Therefore, there is no need to invite someone to perform the Flaming Mouth ritual, for the deceased do not enter the realm of hungry ghosts immediately after death.

It is better to save the deceased in accordance with this scripture’s teachings. During the intermediate state of *dharmatā*, this scripture gives the deceased twenty-one instructions; during the intermediate state of becoming, it gives twenty-four instructions, for a total of forty-five. Through so many instructions, “even one as stupid as an animal can be led to take refuge in the Three Jewels” (p. 50 of the original text).

We know that animals are the most ignorant. When people are excessively ignorant, they are reborn as animals. As we explained earlier, people have the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. Possessing all three—greed, anger, and ignorance—constitutes the seeds of hell; predominance of greed constitutes the seeds of hungry ghosts; and predominance of ignorance constitutes the seeds of animals.

Through so many instructions in this scripture, even the most ignorant person can be led to take refuge in the Three Jewels. To take refuge means to return home, to come back; to rely means to depend upon.

The Three Jewels refer to the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. At the very least, this can prevent one from losing one’s human body. Do not underestimate the human body: it is difficult to obtain. Those who do not obtain a human body are countless—thousands upon thousands, tens of thousands upon tens of thousands—whereas those who obtain one are exceedingly few. There are only several billion people in the entire world; how many beings have failed to obtain a human body, no one knows.

Those who not only retain a human body but are also born in favorable realms are even fewer. In this world, there are good people and bad people. Some have

excellent family circumstances, while others live in severe poverty and hardship; the latter are people in unfortunate destinies.

For example, spirits that have just emerged from hell cannot immediately be reborn as human beings. They are first reborn in the animal realm, as mosquitoes or flies, for instance, so that people can kill them at once. Only afterward are they gradually reborn as human beings. When they are first reborn as humans, they are invariably very foolish and live lives of great hardship.

This Dharma can enable even those of the very lowest capacities not to lose their human bodies and to be born in good places with favorable conditions and the Buddha-Dharma, where they may cultivate the Buddha-Dharma until they attain Buddhahood. Yet even worthy people, though they conduct themselves very well in this world, cannot escape the cycle of rebirth in the six realms if, while alive, they have not heard the instructions of this scripture.

In Buddhist practice, there are stages of sages and worthies: the ten abodes, ten practices, and ten dedications are called the three stages of worthies, while the ten bhūmis are called the stages of sages. There are also sages and worthies in the human world. Becoming a sage is difficult, but becoming a worthy is relatively easier. For example, Confucius had seventy-two worthy disciples. That is, he had seventy-two good students, all of whom treated others well and were willing to help and relieve them.

Although they are good and virtuous people, if they have not heard this scripture, or have not understood its teachings, and know nothing of the various states of the intermediate period after death, they can only continue to revolve in the great ocean of birth and death.

Even if one is reborn in heaven through the ten wholesome actions—the ten wholesome actions do not mean doing ten good deeds, but refer to the three aspects of body, speech, and mind. The body has three faults: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; the mind also has three faults: greed, anger, and ignorance; and speech has four faults: divisive speech, harsh speech, frivolous speech, and false speech.

When the three aspects of body, four of speech, and three of mind are all wholesome, these are the ten wholesome actions—yet even rebirth in heaven does not bring liberation from birth and death. At most, one may rise to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, where the Jade Emperor resides. When one's blessings have been exhausted, one falls again and still cannot escape the cycle of rebirth in the six realms.

This Dharma is the finest secret Dharma gate by which one can attain Buddhahood without entering meditation or cultivating the Way. We need only read this scripture thoroughly seven times and regularly recall it without forgetting it; then, at the end of life, we can be liberated. Thus it is also praised as the sole Dharma gate by which one can attain Buddhahood without practice.

Although this is how it is described, continually keeping the words of the scripture in mind now is in fact itself practice. If we read the text and then forget what we have read, that is a serious problem: at the end of life, we will not be liberated. Therefore, we must constantly remember and become familiar with the contents of the scripture. This is equivalent to practicing without practice. This Dharma is also “the heart essence of the Continuation Tantras among all teachings.”

“Continuation Tantras” refers to the final step among all teachings, while “heart essence” refers to the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate trains the mind and is of the utmost importance. It is not a form-based practice—for example, qigong is practiced to exercise the body, and this is a form-based practice.

Because we all inherently possess Buddha-nature, at that time it naturally emits light; this luminosity is ourselves. This is the heart essence of the final step among all Dharma gates. These principles are extremely important. They are not intended solely for saving the deceased; they can also serve as a guide to the basic facts of birth and death in human life.

Our Buddha-Dharma, which people call Buddhism, is truly intended to educate those living in this world, not merely to save the dead. Buddhists today have misunderstood this: temples are all occupied with performing Buddhist rites, making money, and saving the spirits of the dead. They cannot expound the scriptures or educate people.

In fact, genuine Buddhism should teach everyone how to conduct themselves in society, how actively to serve the public, and how to attain liberation at death. It should enable everyone to know and understand these basic matters. Thus Buddhism is both religion and philosophy, both science and sociology.

(V) Fourteen Important Points to Observe When Assisting the Deceased

We must memorize these fourteen points of attention one by one. It would be bad to make mistakes. We shall now explain them separately.

First: The “Method for Delivering Beings in the Intermediate State” is the common Tibetan method for assisting the deceased. In our Chinese regions, however,

assisting the deceased generally consists of inviting monastics to recite sūtras and perform the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths ritual, because many people in China do not know of this Dharma.

This scripture explains the different states we encounter on each day after death, and what we should do at that time. It also explains how we should instruct the deceased and what occurs after they are liberated. According to the accounts of Tibetan practitioners, there was a great lama who cultivated the Way very well and had already realized the supreme state in which birth and death are alike.

Birth itself is death, and death itself is birth; there is no birth or death. “Alike” means unmoving.

Having realized this level, the great lama experienced the entire process of death: what it is like when breathing ceases, when light appears, and when one sees which Buddha. He experienced, one by one, the states described in the scripture for each day, and the result corresponded exactly to what this scripture says.

This fully proves that this scripture is correct and admits of no doubt. It is like Patriarch Lü Chunyang, who, after realizing the Way, wished to experience what beheading felt like and how painful it was. After experiencing it, he said: “It was as though one had balanced a cauldron of boiling oil on one’s head and walked forty li, until one was scalded to death.”

This is called “samādhi of play,” and the Tibetan great lama was the same. Therefore, whether one is reading the scripture or performing the Dharma for the deceased, one should have a most sincere heart and place complete faith in this scripture. One should recite it attentively and reverently according to its text, or explain it to the deceased according to its text; one must not be careless.

In this way, “both the living and the dead obtain great benefit.” The person who teaches the Dharma to the deceased is the “living,” and the person who has died is the “dead”; both receive great benefit. The deceased naturally receives great benefit by being liberated and attaining Buddhahood, while the person performing the Dharma also gains great merit and virtue by delivering sentient beings.

Furthermore, as the person performing the Dharma recites the text to the deceased again and again, they become familiar with it. Each recitation leaves a deeper impression, so that the text becomes deeply imprinted in their eighth consciousness and their foundation becomes secure. When the time of death arrives, even if no one performs the Dharma for them, they will immediately understand when the states of the intermediate state appear, and will be able to liberate themselves.

Second: The Buddhist teachings—the three baskets and twelve divisions—are vast as an ocean, broad and profound. Those who have not studied them cannot avoid sighing before such immensity, not knowing where to begin. Yet the thousands of sūtras and treatises do no more than point directly to sentient beings' intrinsic nature. Thus, understanding one's own original mind and seeing one's own true nature are the essence of Buddhism and the key to realizing the Way.

This scripture is a supreme Dharma of the Esoteric teachings. It contains many principles and technical terms that are not found in the scriptures of Exoteric Buddhism.

Lay Practitioner Sun feared that, when assisting the deceased, practitioners might become doubtful because they were uncertain whether the deceased could comprehend the meaning of the scripture. He therefore again calls readers' attention to this point: if one studies this Dharma for oneself, one should thoroughly master, become familiar with, and understand the meaning of the scripture.

If one is performing the Dharma for another person, one need only proclaim this scripture aloud according to its text. Yet one must keep one's mind one-pointed, articulate clearly, and distinguish every word and sentence; then the deceased will certainly be liberated. Why? First, this Dharma possesses the blessings of great power, and the efficacy of reciting this scripture is the same as that of reciting esoteric mantras, that is, true words. Second, during the intermediate state, the deceased's six sense faculties are nine times sharper than they were in life. Even an illiterate person who was foolish and dull in life can be immediately liberated upon hearing the teachings of this scripture.

Third: After someone dies in our Chinese regions, it is customary to invite monastics to perform the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths ritual in order to assist the deceased. The Feeding of the Flaming Mouths is a major Dharma of Esoteric Buddhism, also called the Yoga Feeding of the Flaming Mouths. The two characters "Flaming Mouths" have two meanings. One describes the hungry ghosts of the hungry ghost realm.

The hungry ghosts of the hungry ghost realm all emit fire from their mouths, like flames. Since they cannot eat, they are called "Flaming Mouths." The Buddha relates in the Ullambana Sūtra that Maudgalyāyana's mother, because of her heavy karmic obstacles, fell into the hungry ghost realm and could not eat.

Maudgalyāyana wished to save his mother and brought her food, but as soon as she took it in her hands, it turned into charcoal and could not be eaten. Thus hungry ghosts suffer greatly. The other meaning of "Flaming Mouths" refers specifically to the Buddha who presides over the hungry ghost realm. In each of the six realms, a

Buddha presides. Since Buddhas are greatly compassionate, they seek to benefit all sentient beings.

The hungry ghosts of the hungry ghost realm suffer so greatly that the Buddha also wishes to deliver them. He therefore manifests as a hungry ghost, with fire issuing from his mouth just like theirs. Since he must accord with sentient beings and draw near to the hungry ghosts, he can then teach them the Dharma. It is like Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, who, in order to deliver pigs, manifests a pig's body and stays among them.

Only by manifesting in the same kind can one conveniently guide them. Thus, the Buddha dwelling in and presiding over the hungry ghost realm is called "Flaming Mouths." The Yoga Feeding of the Flaming Mouths asks the Buddha to confer blessings through the power of the Dharma, so that the flames in hungry ghosts' mouths may be extinguished, enabling them to receive Dharma food and be delivered.

Is this custom good? Certainly, if the deceased has truly become a hungry ghost and is starving to death for lack of food, then performing a Feeding of the Flaming Mouths ritual to help them is a good thing. It greatly benefits hungry ghosts. Buddhism should benefit both the sentient beings who are alive in this world, the realm of the living, and those who have died, the realm of the dead. This is called benefiting both the living and the dead.

Hungry ghosts originally cannot eat; if they can now be enabled to eat and be delivered out of the hungry ghost realm, how good that is! But one must note that the Yoga Feeding of the Flaming Mouths is directed toward hungry ghosts in the hungry ghost realm; it is not a universally applicable method for assisting the deceased.

For during the intermediate state, not every person who has died has karmic obstacles so heavy that they must fall into the hungry ghost realm. This is especially not so during the intermediate-state period, within the forty-nine days. The six realms turn in accordance with karma: those who do good deeds and cultivate wholesome karma in this world ascend to the heavens; those whose good and evil karma are mixed are reborn in the human realm; and the hells, hungry ghosts, and animals are the three lower realms, the worst realms.

If the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths is performed for everyone after death, would that not mean assuming that everyone is so bad that they must fall into the hungry ghost realm? Therefore, this is not right. Those of us who cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, after completing the six mudrās, will not fall into the three lower realms through the blessings of Dharma power and the Buddha's blessings.

What use, then, is the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths for us? During the intermediate-state period, there is no need to perform it. It is better instead to perform the Dharma for the deceased using Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State. Explain to them the course and circumstances of death, and teach them to recognize the clear light. They can then be delivered and realize the sambhogakāya Buddha. This is the most beneficial method of deliverance for the deceased. Therefore, it is better to use this Dharma in place of the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths.

Inviting monastics to perform the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths and conduct Buddhist services may appear to be doing good, but in fact it is not good. You invite monastics to conduct services, and others do the same, with the result that monastics have no time to cultivate the Dharma.

In the past, a patriarch of the Nanshan school addressed the social conditions of his time, saying: “These lay practitioners now all invite monastics to conduct Buddhist services. In fact, they are harming these teachers! Not only do they gain no merit and virtue; they also incur wrongdoing.” This is because monastics did not leave home in order to conduct Buddhist services and earn money.

They left home to cultivate practice and realize the Way, to be liberated from birth and death, and to leave the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. You cause them to have no time to cultivate the Way; they are busy from morning to night rushing from one sūtra-recitation and repentance service to another. Thus, you not only gain no merit and virtue but also incur wrongdoing. I therefore urge everyone not to do this.

Furthermore, when these teachers accept your requests but lack time or cannot keep up, it is inevitable that some falsehood will be mixed in. I have personally seen temples where, when there were not enough people to conduct a ritual, they casually pulled in two country people simply to make up the numbers. These people did not know how to recite sūtras or strike the Dharma instruments.

They put monastic robes on them. When someone beside them told them to strike, they would bang away, not knowing when to stop; only when someone beside them told them to stop would they stop. All this is quite false. And do the sūtra recitations and repentance services they perform really count? They do not. For when a Water and Land Dharma Assembly is held, a yellow proclamation must be issued.

The yellow paper states how many copies of each sūtra are to be recited. But because one Water and Land Dharma Assembly follows immediately after another, they simply have no time to recite them, and so they recite fewer than required.

Two Dharma teachers personally told me: “Alas! We do not know how we can repay the debt we owe for these sūtras. The proclamation states how many copies of the

Lotus Sūtra must be recited, but we did not have time to recite them, so we used the Universal Gateway Chapter of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva instead.”

Therefore, these teachers naturally also incur wrongdoing, because they do not accord with the scriptures and have incurred a debt of sūtra recitations. A debt is hard to repay! Yet this wrongdoing is caused by lay practitioners. Thus, it is better to use this Dharma in place of the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths. Everyone should become familiar with and master this Dharma, so that whenever someone dies somewhere, you can go and help deliver the deceased. This is better. It benefits the deceased more, enabling them truly to be liberated, and thus the merit and virtue are greater.

The Feeding of the Flaming Mouths was not spoken by the Buddha. It was compiled by great patriarchs on the basis of the principles taught by the Buddha, using related mantras. For example, the ritual text used for the Feeding of the Flaming Mouths contains many lines written by Su Dongpo. Academician Su was excellent in literature, poetry, lyrics, and rhapsodies.

The manuals used for the flaming-mouth rite are not all the same, but the mantras in them are identical. Flaming-mouth manuals contain many different mantras, such as the Food-Transformation Mantra; all these mantras are excellent. Our daily-service books also contain them. No dharma gate—whether the Pure Land school, the Chan school, or any other school—can do without Esoteric Buddhism or Esoteric mantras.

In carrying out the practice of liberation in the intermediate state, “it is best for an eminent monk who has studied Esoteric Buddhism or possesses precepts and conduct, or for a lay practitioner well versed in the practice of phowa and this Dharma, to give specialized instruction and recite it for others, taking it as an occupation.”

There are many lamas in Tibet, but in the interior it is very difficult to encounter lamas, acharyas, or vajra masters. (Acharya is translated into Chinese as vajra master; such a person can instruct sentient beings and transmit the Dharma.) It is also difficult to encounter people of genuine attainment. There are now many monastics in China, but more than half have little understanding of the Buddhadharma.

An eminent monk who possesses precepts and conduct is one who fully observes the precepts and has not broken them. Nowadays, among monastics, those who have broken the precepts are many, while those who uphold them are few. Of every ten, eight or nine have broken the precepts. I have seen this myself: when Saturday was nearly over, they took off their monastic robes, put on lay clothes, donned hats, and went out. Who knows what they went out to do?

Some drove home in cars to see their wives and children. When I was teaching the Dharma on Mount Putuo, I saw a monastic performing a Buddhist rite for someone. His wife and a whole group of children came and called to him: “We are harvesting the rice now—come home quickly!” Can this still be called being a monk?! They had all broken the precepts; they did not even look like monastics.

If one does not fully possess precepts and conduct, one cannot be called a monk. Thus, eminent monks who fully possess precepts and conduct are indeed very rare today. If lay practitioners are thoroughly familiar with the practice of phowa or with this Dharma—being well versed means being thoroughly familiar—they may also be invited to recite for the deceased. But lay practitioners ordinarily have jobs and do not have time to devote themselves specifically to recitation.

Therefore, I urge everyone to study Esoteric Buddhism, because the latter part of this Dharma consists entirely of Esoteric mantras; reciting these mantras is studying Esoteric Buddhism. Thus, it would be best if some acharyas, lamas, eminent monks who fully possess precepts and conduct, or lay practitioners familiar with this Dharma could take this as their work. (This was stated by lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng.)

Among the three hundred and sixty trades, one may also take this matter as an occupation. But if one takes it as an occupation and collects money to make a living, that is not good. To do so is to peddle the Tathāgata; it is to use the Dharma of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas as a tool of business. When the Buddha was in the world, he did not recite sūtras or mantras for people in order to deliver the spirits of the dead.

There is nothing like this in the Buddhist sūtras either. So how did the performance of Buddhist rites arise? In the past, monks practiced diligently in mountains and forests. Some put up thatched huts in the mountains, while others lived in hermitages or temples. Because these monastics did not work and could not support themselves, lay practitioners at the foot of the mountain often brought them offerings.

Having received offerings, the monastics had to give something in return. Thus, when something occurred in a lay practitioner’s household, the monastics would help by reciting a few lines of sūtra, chanting a few mantras, and dedicating the merit. This is how Buddhist rites arose. Gradually, they became a matter of taking money. Then, gradually, fixed rules were established: fifty thousand yuan for one water-and-land rite, five hundred yuan for one universal-Buddha rite, and so forth.

In fact, there is nothing of this sort in the Buddhist sūtras. If one takes it as an occupation and helps deliver the deceased without taking payment, it is greatly beneficial for those who have died. Because one benefits others, one thereby

performs great merit and virtue without realizing it. Conversely, if one does it for payment, it becomes spoiled and there is no merit. Therefore, we say: "Rejoicing in others' merit is the greatest merit.

"When you encounter such a matter today, good! I will help you and recite some mantras for you, without hoping to receive any compensation from others. That is best. The more you recite for others, the more familiar you become with it yourself. Each additional recitation makes you more familiar with it. When you are about to die in the future, you will not need anyone else's help; you will understand for yourself. As soon as the light appears, unite with it, and you will be liberated. Thus, doing this brings two benefits in a single act: it benefits both the dead and the living. How good that is!

Fourth point: The complete Esoteric practice may be carried out in four stages:

First stage: Signs of death should appear in a person who is near death—that is, someone about to die; *bin* means "near." There are two broad categories of death signs. The first is the deterioration of the five faculties: the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body begin to fail. When the eye faculty fails, vision becomes unclear.

Ordinarily, our eyes have brightness. When the eye faculty fails, they become like pearls that have lost their luster, without radiance; the eyeballs also become dull and motionless. The eyeballs of people with mental illness may likewise be dull and motionless. When a person is about to die and the eye faculty fails, it is like this and can be seen. When the ear faculty fails, one can no longer hear sounds.

You may call to the person, but he cannot hear you. This is the failure of the ear faculty. When the nose faculty fails, the nose bridge becomes crooked. When the tongue faculty fails, speech becomes labored and sluggish. It is like being tonguetied: one cannot speak clearly. After becoming drunk, one likewise cannot speak clearly.

When the body faculty fails, the body becomes so heavy that it cannot be moved even by lifting it. This is the first kind of death sign—the deterioration of the five faculties. Everyone must remember this clearly. When these signs appear, know that the person is nearing death and the practice must be performed for them. Do not miss the time. The second death sign is the dissolution of the four elements. While we are alive, the four elements are integrated.

Now, as death approaches, the four elements begin to dissolve—*rong* means "to melt"—and to fail. Our skin, muscles, and bones all belong to the earth element. When the earth element fails, the body becomes rigid, extremely heavy, and unable to move. Blood, saliva, and other flowing substances belong to the water element. At that time, the blood congeals, and the heart is about to stop beating.

Body temperature belongs to the fire element; when it fails, the body becomes cold. Each of us has a temperature of thirty-six or thirty-seven degrees. When the body faculty is about to fail, the fire element is about to fail and the body becomes cold. Therefore, if we touch the person and there is still warmth in the body, things are still all right. If the body gradually becomes cold, the fire element is dissolving. Breath—our respiration—belongs to the wind element.

When it fails, there is only exhalation and no inhalation—that is, one can no longer breathe in. When a person is about to die, there is phlegm in the throat, called “phlegm from the ocean floor,” making a “gurgle ... gurgle ...” sound; even inhaling does not clear it. When this final phlegm drops, the breath ceases. These are the two kinds of death signs, to which both the patient’s family and those performing the practice must pay particular attention.

When these signs appear, one should perform the “practice of phowa” for the person. How is the practice of phowa performed? We have explained it earlier: visualize the central channel as bright, like a fluorescent lamp, with a luminous point in its center. Use “hei—” to raise it, then use “ga—” to lower it.

At the moment of departure, use “pa—” to strike this luminous point out, and one will be liberated.

If the deceased practiced phowa during life, has opened the channel, and has received verification, then when the signs of death appear, one need only remind the person: “Now the time has come. Be attentive: use ‘hei—’ to raise it, and after raising it, use ‘pa—’ to break through it. In this way, you can be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.”

It is sufficient simply to remind the person in this way, but this applies only to someone who has received verification in practicing phowa. Now, in Tibet, do they not insert kuśa grass into the brahma aperture at the crown of the head? Our bodies have nine apertures, and the brahma aperture is one of them. People simply do not know this aperture; after parting the hair with kuśa grass, they insert it and it goes in.

But this does not mean that the channel has truly been opened. It merely gives the practitioner some reassurance: “Oh, my channel has opened.” In fact, it has not. How could it be open before one has even visualized it? One must visualize the channel as open and bright. Inserting kuśa grass is only a symbolic opening of the crown; it is not a genuine opening of the crown.

In a genuine opening of the crown, yellow fluid should flow from the top of the head. It is the same when a person dies: fluid will always flow from one of the apertures. A genuine opening of the crown requires verification. A person who has truly practiced

and received verification needs no further help from others and can attain liberation on their own. We need only give a reminder. In addition, we may help by reciting many mantras for delivering the deceased, such as the “Six Realms Vajra Mantra,” the “Mantra of Liberation Through Hearing,” and the “Great Secret Mantra of Original Awakening,” among others.

What if someone has not practiced phowa? There is also a method for helping them. Those of us who have practiced Esoteric Buddhism all know how to direct and emit qi. At this time, visualize the person’s spiritual essence being pushed upward from the soles of the feet, all the way to the crown of the head; then, with “pa—,” break it open and send it out. One may help the person practice in this way.

But this can be done only by someone who has attained a considerable level in Esoteric practice. Otherwise, the qi you emit will lack power. What if the person has ordinarily not practiced Esoteric Buddhism and has never studied it? Lay practitioner Sun also devised a method: the following texts should be recited for that person. First, Instructions on Seeking the Great Way Through the Clear Light.

Second, Instructions on the Dissolution of the Four Elements. Third, Verses for Arousing the Resolve to Recognize the Clear Light at the Time of Death. Fourth, Direct Instructions on the Clear Light. For now, we need only know the names of these texts; their contents will be explained later. These passages need not be recited for someone who practiced phowa during life.

For someone who has never studied Esoteric Buddhism, they should be recited over and over, without counting the number of recitations. Our practice of delivering the deceased is divided into several stages, and this is the first stage. It must be done while the person has not yet ceased breathing; if it is done after the breath has ceased, it will be too late. Therefore, everyone must understand these passages and become fluent in reciting them, so as to be able to help others.

Second stage: When all the signs of death have appeared in the deceased—that is, the decay of the five faculties and the dissolution of the four elements discussed earlier—and breathing has completely ceased (the preceding discussion concerned the time before breathing had ceased; now we are discussing the time after it has ceased, so everyone should note this), then after another twenty or thirty minutes, begin additionally reciting the following sūtra verses.

That is: fifth, Visualization of the Yidam and Maṇḍala; sixth, Instructions on the Intermediate State of Dharmatā and the Six Essential Verses; and seventh, Instructions for Recognizing One’s Original Nature. Together with the four passages discussed earlier, these make seven passages. Recite these seven passages in rotation until the period of the intermediate state at the time of death has ended.

If you wish to liberate someone, do not fear inconvenience. You cannot merely recite the texts twice and consider the matter finished. Recite them without counting the number of times. The deceased may not have heard the earlier recitations but may hear the later ones, and thereby be liberated. Therefore, from three and a half to four days after death, recite them every day without counting the number of repetitions. Do not invite monks to perform the Flaming Mouth ritual.

For during these four days, the deceased is in the period of the intermediate state at the time of death, still in a state of confused stupor, and the consciousness remains unclear and muddled. Therefore, recite the texts many times in the hope that the deceased may hear them. Upon hearing them, the deceased will be liberated. This is the practice of the second stage.

These seven sets of verses are all intended to teach the deceased to recognize the Original Face. It would be best if we ourselves could clearly recognize the Original Face now. The Original Face is the face that has no face; everyone should take careful note of this. It is not a male appearance or a female appearance, an old appearance or a young appearance, a long face or a round face.

There are no appearances at all! True reality is without appearance; it is the great light. In practicing the Dharma to realize the mind and see one's true nature, we seek to recognize the Original Face. In the past, Chan practitioners investigated the question, "What were you like before your parents gave birth to you?" Now that our parents have given birth to us, we have such appearances as male or female, fat or thin.

So what were we like before we were born? There was a master who investigated this huatou at every moment. He did so for several years without attaining awakening. One day, while out for a stroll, he happened upon two neighbors fighting. One struck the other, and the other cursed back; it was utterly ugly and foul.

Someone came out to break up the fight: "Oh dear! You are neighbors who see one another every day. How can you behave in such a shameless manner?" On hearing, "How can you behave in such a shameless manner?" he exclaimed, "Oh!" and awakened. It was precisely the face that has no face! If there is a face, it is not it.

Someone once asked me, "Today my meditation was very good. I saw the form of a spirit; perhaps I am a spirit?" I told him that he had seen a ghost! Whatever has appearance is not it. Therefore, we must recognize the Original Face now, so that we may more readily be liberated when in the intermediate state at the time of death.

Third stage: On the fifth day after the deceased has stopped breathing, the period of the intermediate state at the time of death has passed, and the deceased is no

longer sunk in confused stupor. At this time, the intermediate-state body gradually regains clarity and begins to understand somewhat. This is the period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā. The period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā is the time when the light of intrinsic nature manifests in great fullness.

If the deceased awakens at this time and immediately merges with the light, they can transcend and become a sambhogakāya Buddha. During this period, in accordance with the provisions of this Dharma, recite one kind of sūtra verse each day. Which sūtras and verses should be recited is all explained very clearly later. But they must be recited in sequence; do not reverse the order.

This should be recited for fourteen days. Together with the preceding three and a half to four days of recitation, it makes eighteen days in all. This is the practice of the third stage. That is, there is one practice before death, one practice after death during the period of the intermediate state at the time of death, and now another during the period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā. Altogether there are three practices, which everyone must remember well.

Fourth stage: After the period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā has passed—that is, eighteen days after death—the period of the intermediate state of becoming begins, and rebirth is imminent. The fourteen days during which the light of intrinsic nature manifests have passed. At this time, the karmic obstacles created during life appear one scene after another, like a film.

Those who created wholesome karma follow their wholesome karma, while those who created unwholesome karma follow their unwholesome karma and enter the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. Therefore, the earlier one is liberated, the better; the later one is liberated, the worse. Best of all is liberation within the first four days, whereby one can become a dharmakāya Buddha. If one cannot be liberated then but is liberated between the fifth and eighteenth days, one can attain realization as a sambhogakāya Buddha, which is also very good.

But if one still cannot be liberated after the eighteenth day, one enters the period of the intermediate state of becoming, which is not very auspicious. This sūtra also contains methods of rescue during this period: helping us choose a womb and close the womb entrance. That is, it helps us take rebirth in a good place and return in another body to practice again. This is still better than falling into the three lower realms.

This sūtra is divided into an upper and a lower volume. The upper volume contains methods for rescuing beings during the intermediate state at the time of death and the intermediate state of Dharmatā; the lower volume contains methods for rescuing beings during the intermediate state of becoming. During the period of the intermediate state of becoming, the entire text of the lower volume should be

recited continuously for thirty-five days. Together with the preceding days, this makes fifty-three days in all.

Our present practice of the seven sevens consists of seven periods of seven days, making forty-nine days, without counting the preceding four days. If those four days of the intermediate state at the time of death are included, the total is fifty-three days. All fifty-three days must be completed in recitation. Nowadays, people often perform only one seven-day observance when reciting sūtras—the first seven days.

When the second through seventh seven-day periods arrive, they perform the rite only on the seventh day rather than every day; this is not good. During these fifty-three days, recitation and offerings should be made every day. One cannot recite only once on the seventh day. The implementation of Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State may be divided into four stages. The intermediate state of becoming is the fourth stage.

Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng feared that people would find daily recitation tiresome and the text excessively long, so he had everyone recite it in sections. Recite one volume over three days. On the first day, begin and recite through Instruction 12. On the second day, recite from Instruction 12 through Instruction 19. On the third day, recite from Instruction 19 to the end of the volume. Recite one volume over three days, repeating the cycle until the full seven sevens have been completed.

This is somewhat less demanding. Yet I think it is still best to recite every day. Before we had obtained Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State, we would recite the Kṣitigarbha Sūtra and the Diamond Sūtra. Reciting the entire Diamond Sūtra and Kṣitigarbha Sūtra takes far longer than the lower volume of this sūtra, yet in those days we still recited them every day.

Now, when there is a deceased spirit in the home, one should recite every day and should not find it tiresome! It is best to recite the entire text. Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng's three-day division was an indulgence for everyone, because he feared that they would find it tiresome.

The deceased enters the period of the intermediate state of becoming from the nineteenth day after breathing has ceased. At this time, one should not only recite the entire lower volume; for greater assurance, it is even more complete to recite together the methods of rescue from the preceding three stages. Are you again finding it too long and even more bothersome? For the sake of liberating sentient beings, I think we should not fear inconvenience. For benefiting others is benefiting ourselves, and it serves as provisions for our own future rebirth. First, it generates merit and virtue; second, it familiarizes us with the practice. How good this is! Therefore, do not fear inconvenience.

Fifth point: During these fifty-three days of performing the practice, on which day can the deceased be liberated? At what time can the deceased be freed? None of us can know. Unless we have cultivated some kind of spiritual powers, we are all utterly in the dark. We can only recite in sequence from beginning to end.

To recite from the intermediate state at the time of death to the intermediate state of Dharmatā, and then from the intermediate state of Dharmatā to the intermediate state of becoming—reciting in this way every day—is excessively long. Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng feared that everyone would find it troublesome, so he devised a method: make appropriate reductions according to the circumstances of the deceased during life. This, too, reflects Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng's painstaking concern.

If the deceased did many good deeds during life, they will not fall into the three lower realms, and one may therefore read somewhat less. But if this person did many bad deeds during life, the danger is great, and more should be read for them. Thus, one must judge the circumstances carefully.

If this person practiced very well during life, it is enough simply to recite through the intermediate state at the time of death; there is no need at all to recite the subsequent sections on the intermediate state of Dharmatā and the intermediate state of becoming. But if the person did not practice diligently during life, then the entire text must be recited. Thus, the recitations should be appropriately reduced according to the deceased's conduct and cultivation during life.

As for how to reduce them, the text itself provides no rules. This was an idea devised by Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng himself. Based on the meaning of the text, he drew out implications that were not explicit and formulated a method of reduction. Below, we shall discuss separately the three methods he devised: A, B, and C.

A: This method is much like what we discussed above. For someone who practiced Esoteric Buddhism during life—so it is still good to practice Esoteric Buddhism extensively during life—or who did not practice Esoteric Buddhism but was very familiar with Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State and observed the precepts, it is sufficient to recite for them through the end of the intermediate state at the time of death, the second stage.

Being fully endowed with observance of the precepts is very important. This means that the person practices all wholesome deeds and commits no evil. If one has practiced Esoteric Buddhism but still does bad things, that will not do! Doing bad things is equivalent to not having practiced the Dharma at all. We may only benefit living beings; we must not commit even the slightest bad deed. Do not commit an evil merely because it is small, and do not fail to do a good deed merely because it is small.

Even if a good deed is only the size of a sesame seed, we must do it. Even if an evil deed is only the size of a sesame seed, we must not do it. I see that many practitioners nowadays do not observe the precepts. Otherwise, this saying would not be so widespread in the world: “If you want to find the black-hearted, look among those who eat vegetarian food and follow the Way.”

“The vegetarian path refers to us Buddhist believers. That is, many people believe in the Buddha while still doing bad things. In this way, they lack moral discipline. Doing bad things creates karma, and karmic obstacles, like dark clouds, obscure the luminosity of one’s true nature. At death, the luminosity of one’s true nature cannot manifest, and one will not easily be liberated.”

If one does not do bad things and truly possesses moral discipline, one has great breadth of mind and is generous and openhearted; the luminosity of one’s true nature can then readily be stimulated. Because one has done no bad things, there are no karmic obstacles to obscure that luminosity. For such a person, it is sufficient to help them by reciting for three and a half to four days during the intermediate state at the time of death.

It is simply a matter of reminding them: “At this time, you are about to radiate light. There are four transformations: appearance, increase, attainment, and near-attainment. Finally, like a clear sky stretching ten thousand miles without a cloud, there is a great radiance. Simply merge with that light, and you will be liberated.” There is then no need to recite the texts for the intermediate state of Dharmatā or the intermediate state of becoming.

B. This method is intended for those who did not practice Esoteric Buddhism while alive but did practice Exoteric Buddhism—for example, the Pure Land school or the Chan school—and who possess moral discipline. Possessing moral discipline is very important; that is, they uphold the precepts with great strictness. For such persons, recitation may continue until the end of the third phase, the period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā.

They can then be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. This method is performed for only eighteen days; after that, there is no need to recite the texts for the intermediate state of becoming, because one who has been born in the West no longer undergoes rebirth in saṃsāra.

C. This method concerns the worst possible case: those who practiced no Dharma at all while alive, never recited the Buddha’s name, never chanted mantras, and lacked wholesome conduct. To lack wholesome conduct is simply to know how to take advantage of others. Ah, everyone wants to take advantage of others—that is the worst thing.

Thus we often say, “Suffering a loss is a blessing.” In fact, we have not suffered any loss at all. What loss is there? Yielding to others is good; it is virtue. Those with virtue possess wholesome roots. But if one only knows how to take advantage of others, harming them for one’s own benefit, that is a lack of virtue and a lack of wholesome roots.

Without wholesome roots, one will not receive a good karmic result in the future. Therefore, for those who did not believe in the Buddha or recite the Buddha’s name during life, who also did bad things and lacked wholesome conduct, all the texts must be recited from beginning to end after their death, for a period of fifty-three days. One must not slacken or shorten it.

Moreover, for such persons, the entire text of the second volume must be recited immediately after death as well. Note that one does not begin reciting the entire second volume only on the nineteenth day. Because they did bad things, lacked wholesome conduct, and have heavy karmic obstacles, one cannot wait until eighteen days have passed: the adverse states of the intermediate state of becoming will already appear and drag them into the hells.

As for the three situations described above, whether to add or reduce any texts depends entirely on the circumstances, as assessed by the deceased’s family and the ritual practitioner. The circumstances must be carefully considered; do not make a mistake. From this we can see that it is most important, while alive, to do more good deeds, practice Esoteric Buddhism more, cultivate diligently, and directly realize one’s true nature. Then there is no need to recite through the third phase; the first and second phases will suffice. How wonderful that would be!

Earlier we said that there is no way of knowing when the deceased has been liberated. Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng devised a method for us: after each period of the intermediate state is completed, seek the guidance of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas by drawing lots.

Prepare several lots, writing “already liberated” or “not yet liberated” on them. Before the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, quiet the mind and pray sincerely, asking for their guidance: “Has so-and-so been liberated?” Then draw one lot.

If the lot says “already liberated,” this indicates that the person has already been liberated, and there is no need to perform further rites. If it says “not yet liberated,” you must perform the subsequent rites for them. For example, after the period of the intermediate state at the time of death, four days, has passed, seek the guidance of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas by drawing lots.

If the deceased has already been liberated, the rites may be stopped. If not, the rites for the period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā must be performed. After the

period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā, eighteen days, has passed, again request the guidance of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas by drawing lots. If liberation has been attained, there is no need to perform the rites for the period of the intermediate state of becoming.

If liberation has not been attained, the rites for the period of the intermediate state of becoming must still be performed. It is best to use the method of drawing lots only occasionally. Do not ask today, then ask again tomorrow; ask tomorrow, then ask again the day after tomorrow. That will not do—it turns the matter into a game.

One must pray sincerely and devoutly for the guidance of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas as to whether the subsequent rites still need to be performed. This method is quite applicable. In the past, Master Yanshou, that is, Master Yongming Yanshou, was a great master of both the Chan school and the Pure Land school.

The Chan school has such lineages as Linji, Weiyang, Caodong, Yunmen, and Fayan. Master Yongming Yanshou was a disciple of the Fayan school. Because he later took refuge in the Pure Land school, the Fayan school came to an end with him. At that time, he could not decide whether to practice Chan or Pure Land, so he used the method of drawing lots to seek guidance before the Buddha.

He prepared several lots marked “Chan school” and “Pure Land,” and prayed sincerely before the Buddha. The first and second lots he drew both said Pure Land school, but he was still not reassured. In all, he drew seven times, and every lot said Pure Land. He therefore decided to practice the Pure Land school. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are very compassionate: if we sincerely seek their guidance, there will invariably be a response, as immediate as an echo.

It is like striking a bell: strike it once, and it sounds once. This is a response as immediate as an echo; it is the communion of response and resonance. Thus, as long as our hearts are sincere, there can be a response. This is a method devised by lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng; it is not found in the scripture. But this method may also be used.

Sixth point: If someone dies while away from home, in a foreign place, and a telegram or letter arrives stating, “So-and-so died on such-and-such year, month, and day,”

then, once the family receives the news, they should calculate from the date of death according to the provisions of the scripture, determine which period of the intermediate state the deceased is then in, and use the texts for that period to instruct the deceased so that they may be liberated.

If the death occurred within three and a half or four days, that is the period of the intermediate state at the time of death. If it is from the fifth through the nineteenth day, that is the period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā. If it is after the nineteenth day, including the nineteenth day, it is the period of the intermediate state of becoming. This is how the calculation should be made.

Because news received by telegram or letter comes late, we do not know immediately when someone dies. There is no need to make up the recitation of the various texts and verses for periods that have already passed. For example, if the telegram arrives when it is already the nineteenth day and the deceased is then in the period of the intermediate state of becoming, there is no need to make up the texts for the earlier period of the intermediate state at the time of death or the period of the intermediate state of Dharmatā, because reciting them would be of no use.

Seventh point: When performing the rites, do not make the arrangements overly elaborate. According to the scripture, it is enough to offer some fruit and food before the deceased; offerings should also be made before the Buddha. Since we are to recite the sūtras and verses and seek the blessings of the Buddha's power, offerings should be made. At the bedside of a patient or where the body is laid out, there should not be many people talking noisily; the place should be kept quiet.

It is enough for the person performing the rites to recite the scriptures and mantras for the deceased. If many people are talking and there is disorder, the deceased or patient will not be able to hear the scriptures clearly.

I have seen many people of the Pure Land school assisting the deceased or sick by reciting the Buddha's name in what they call an assistance-in-recitation group. Their voices are so loud! They even beat wooden fish: "Dong, dong ... Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha ..." It is far too noisy. This disturbs the consciousness of the patient or deceased and prevents it from becoming calm.

Therefore, it should be quieter. Do not recite so loudly, and do not beat the wooden fish; it is too clamorous. Quiet recitation is sufficient. Above all, family members must avoid wailing. Loud sobbing is the worst, for it makes the consciousness of the dead even more confused and panicked. This is not good. Do not cry! Crying instead stirs up their attachment.

I remember clearly that there was once a Gongdelin vegetarian restaurant in Suzhou. Its proprietor practiced the Pure Land school with single-minded devotion. Thus, he opened a vegetarian restaurant, refrained from killing, and did good deeds. At the time of his death, auspicious signs appeared, and he had already seen Amitābha Buddha arriving.

But just then, his concubine came and wept over him: “My dear, what will become of me after you die?” With this crying, his mind became confused. Once his mind was confused, inverted deluded thoughts arose and karmic appearances manifested. The favorable state of the Pure Land vanished, and the Buddha’s appearance also disappeared. His concubine had disrupted everything.

That is not good. Therefore, family members should not wail. Another point is that living beings must not be slaughtered. Do not think that, because someone is near death, you should kill a couple of soft-shelled turtles to nourish their body; that would be disastrous! Doing so sends them to their death. There is also the so-called “tofu meal” at funerals.

Killing more living beings and preparing several tables of food is the worst thing. I have seen many households hold tofu meals where everyone eats meat, drinks alcohol, and plays drinking games as if it were a celebration, with not the slightest sorrow. Such conduct has nothing to do with a funeral and brings no benefit at all to the deceased. We must not do these things.

Eighth point: Everyone should note that, while the dying person’s breathing has not yet ceased, the family should move the body into the lion’s reclining posture. The lion’s reclining posture is the auspicious posture: lying on the right side. Because the heart is on the left, it should not be pressed upon.

When a person is dying, the heart envelope (what this scripture calls “dudī”) is about to open, and the eighth consciousness emerges. Therefore, one should not lie on the right side with pressure on the heart. Place the left hand on the left knee and support the head with the right hand. This scripture also says to use a nasal plug to block the right nostril so that the breath passes through the left nostril, but I do not think this is necessary.

The auspicious sleeping posture will do. This is how a lion sleeps, so it is also called the lion sleeping posture. In Exoteric Buddhism there is a book called *Scenes at the Time of Death*. It discusses ten signs that appear when a person is nearing death and what we should do at that time.

One point it makes is that when a person is about to die and the four elements are dispersing, one should not touch the body, thereby increasing the person’s suffering and giving rise to anger. When a person is on the verge of death, moving the body causes great pain.

It is like when we are just about to fall asleep: if someone touches us, we may become angry as well: “Oh! How annoying! I was just about to fall asleep, and your touch woke me up.” Long ago, there was a king who was dying in the summer.

Someone was using a fan to drive away the flies, but carelessly touched the king's nose with it.

He had been very peaceful and was about to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. But when he was touched, he became angry; as soon as anger arose, he became a poisonous snake. Thus he was harmed. Therefore, when the dying person is near death, there should be quiet. Do not touch them or poke their body. If you wish to move the body into the lion sleeping posture, you must assess the circumstances.

If the person can still move and has not truly ceased breathing, it is permissible to help them into the lion sleeping posture. But if they are just about to cease breathing, do not move them. Let them be as they are: if they lie to the left, let them lie to the left; if to the right, then to the right. Do not interfere. Everyone must pay close attention to this point! It is worst to send someone who is about to die to the hospital.

When a person is about to stop breathing, hospitals give cardiac injections, perform artificial respiration, and move them about so much that they suffer terribly. Even if they are about to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, they may be pulled back. Moreover, one should wait at least eight hours after breathing has ceased before dressing the body. Eight hours is still somewhat too short; it is best to wait until after twenty-four hours.

This is because at that time the person is in a confused and unconscious stage: the outer breath has ceased, but the inner breath has not yet ended. Those of us who practice meditation know that when one truly enters samādhi in sitting meditation, the outer breath ceases and is no longer perceptible, while the inner breath remains. One still must not move the person at this time. If moved, they may still become angry and give rise to resentment.

Therefore, whether to move the body must be considered carefully according to the circumstances. Everyone must have practical experience and not be careless. I have seen many people who, at death, lose control of their bowels and bladder, and others say, "Oh, quickly clean them up." But at this time the person may depart in an instant, and must not be moved; let them be. If you lift or move them and they become angry, it will be disastrous, and they will be unable to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Thus, under no circumstances should they be moved at this time!

Point Nine: Whatever practice one ordinarily cultivates, and whichever Buddha or bodhisattva one takes as primary, should be regarded as one's object of reliance (yi means to rely upon; zhi means that, having relied upon it, we no longer move and enter samādhi). This is one's yidam. "Yidam" refers to a particular Buddha or bodhisattva in whom one ordinarily has faith and whom one cultivates.

For example, if we practice the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, our yidam is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, the Four-Armed Avalokiteśvara. If we practice the Pure Land teachings, Amitābha Buddha is our yidam. If we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, our yidam is the Great Wish-Fulfilling Bodhisattva. The Great Wish-Fulfilling Bodhisattva is a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

According to Tibetan custom, whether of the Red, Yellow, White, or Black schools, all recite the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra. It is like the people of Han China reciting “Namo Amitābha Buddha”; everyone knows how to recite it. Nowadays even children can recite it. There is a television serial, *The Legend of Jigong*, with a song that goes, “Namo Amitābha Buddha, Namo Amitābha Buddha . . .” Now even children can sing it. It can plant various wholesome roots in them, and that is also very good!

What if the deceased did not practice any Dharma during life and had no yidam? In that case, take the Great Compassionate Protector and Amitābha Buddha as the yidams. The Great Compassionate Protector—*hu* means one who supports, cherishes, and protects us—refers to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. He aroused great compassion and vows to liberate all sentient beings.

Why take Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as the yidam? Because everyone in our region knows Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and every household enshrines an image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Thus it is easy for the image to be impressed upon the mind of the deceased. Even people who do not believe in Buddhism may keep an image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva at home as an ornament.

I have seen many homes with an image of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva placed on top of the piano as an artwork.

That is also very good! It is praise for the venerable appearance of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Furthermore, in Han China, ordinary people, even children, know Amitābha Buddha. Therefore, when conducting the ritual, it is also good to add Amitābha Buddha of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss after the Great Compassionate Protector, taking him as a yidam and protector. This makes it easier for the deceased to understand and realize: “Oh! I am going to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Amitābha Buddha.” Thus we may apply this flexibly, so long as it does not violate the intent of this scripture.

Point Ten: If, after the seven sevens—that is, after fifty-three days—the deceased is examined by drawing lots and is found not to have been liberated, and not to have fallen into another realm of rebirth, then this is bad indeed. They have gone to none of the six realms and are still wandering about everywhere. At this time, the mind-born body of the intermediate state may change with its thoughts and may possibly transform into a hungry ghost, or appear as a ghostly being in space. These are what

we commonly call wandering spirits and wild ghosts; one need not be in the hungry ghost realm to be a ghost. With no one to liberate them, they suffer greatly.

All around us, throughout the spaces above and below, dwell rākṣasas, evil ghosts, and ghostly beings of heterodox paths. Chimei and wangliang are the four great kinds of evil ghosts. How could there be no ghosts? Ghosts are everywhere, but do not be afraid. So long as our minds are upright and bright and we pay them no heed, ghosts will avoid us from a great distance.

But if a person's mind is dark and they constantly do evil, ghosts have an opportunity to take advantage. Therefore, it is best to be upright in one's conduct. The rākṣasas and evil spirits dwelling in all directions and throughout the space above and below possess spiritual powers and can manifest all kinds of miraculous transformations.

Nowadays many people who practice qigong say, "I have acquired extraordinary abilities." But this is not so! It is because these evil spirits and rākṣasas have attached themselves to their bodies that they can manifest various miraculous transformations. Ghosts that have just emerged from hell had sought all kinds of spiritual powers during their former lives, before falling into hell.

After their punishment in hell is completed and they emerge, they specialize in attaching themselves to human bodies and displaying spiritual powers. Many people become attached to appearances and desire spiritual powers, which happens to accord with the wishes of these ghosts. As soon as your mind stirs, they attach themselves to you. Then you have spiritual powers and can show them off before others. In fact, all this is the doing of ghostly beings.

For example, "viewing the deceased" is a case of possession by ghostly beings. It is not that the relatives of some particular person have truly been summoned by the female medium; rather, wandering spirits and wild ghosts are causing mischief. Such female mediums are people whose minds are abnormal and improper, filled with heavy yin influences.

Only then can ghostly beings readily attach themselves to them, and they use one another to deceive people: "I will help you display a few minor spiritual powers and earn some money; you make offerings to me." Because wandering spirits and wild ghosts have no one to liberate them, they seek offerings and wish to be delivered.

Then how can such a female medium know another person's family affairs? Because the ghost attached to her has a few minor spiritual powers and can ask the local earth deity. For example, tomorrow Zhang San is coming to the medium for a viewing of the deceased. The ghost goes to ask the earth deity: How many people

are in Zhang San's household? Who is coming tomorrow morning? What are the circumstances? In this way, it comes to know these things.

The next day, Zhang San comes for a viewing of the deceased. Once the medium is possessed by the ghost, she tells him how many people are in his family and what their circumstances are, and every word is correct. "This medium is truly efficacious!" everyone says, and they believe her. But in fact it is these ghostly beings causing mischief. Long ago, I knew such a female medium.

The ghost attached to her said directly: "I am a wandering spirit with nowhere to dwell. I help her in this way, and she helps me; we simply make use of each other!" Therefore, do not believe female mediums who claim to view the deceased; it is all false. Those of us who practice must first of all not seek spiritual powers, but make the mind wholly empty and non-abiding.

For intrinsic nature is formless; it is like a clear sky extending ten thousand miles without a cloud, with nothing at all in it. We must constantly empty and purify our minds; only then can we realize the Way. Once we become attached to appearances or seek something, chimei, wangliang, and all such beings will come. Therefore, everyone must pay attention to this point.

In the second volume of this scripture, in its discussion of the intermediate state of becoming, there is a Dharma Gate for Protection Against Life-Seizing Ghost Soldiers. Life-seizing ghost soldiers are an evil realm of experience brought about after death because people committed too many evil deeds while alive. These evil circumstances drive us toward the worst places, driving us toward hell. Hence they are called life-seizing ghost soldiers.

At that time, hail, violent winds, fierce tigers, poisonous snakes, life-seizing ghost soldiers, and many other evil circumstances appear everywhere. All these are evoked by the evil deeds the deceased committed during life; they are called the karmic mirror platform. In the Chapter on the Ten Kings of Hell, there is also a karmic mirror platform. Within this karmic mirror platform, all the evil deeds we have committed appear before us.

At this time, if the mind-born body produced by our seventh consciousness arises—the seventh consciousness is the mind faculty, which clings to the existence of a self. If it did not cling to the existence of a self, there would be no such shadow body; there would instead be the great light-body, the dharmakāya, and one would become a Buddha.

Thus it is still the seventh consciousness that is at work and causing mischief, giving rise to the mind-born intermediate-state body—that is, the bardo body. Before it has been reborn in any realm, it remains adrift and without support. Because

adverse states appear before it, it becomes deeply anxious and afraid and cannot exercise mastery.

One moment it thinks, “Shall I go here?” and the next, “Shall I go there?” Such restless and unsettled thoughts are called changing thoughts. At this time, these changing thoughts may manifest illusorily as hungry ghosts breathing fire, or transform into solitary ghosts and wandering spirits such as *rākṣasas*, malevolent specters, and evil ghosts.

Thus, all these are produced by changes in one’s thoughts under the pursuit of adverse states. For everything is created by the mind. Do these adverse states truly exist? They do not truly exist; they are evoked by the bad deeds and karmic obstacles we have created, and are manifestations of our own deluded mind. As long as we understand in our hearts that nothing can be obtained, we need only awaken at once.

Therefore, at this time the person performing the ritual should follow this scripture: call the deceased by name, inform and instruct them, and tell them not to be afraid: “All this is manifested by your own nature; it is all illusory appearance.” Tell them to awaken quickly and free themselves from the adverse states. This is the “Dharma Gate of Protection from Life-Seizing Ghostly Agents.” It means preventing and protecting us from being driven by life-seizing ghostly agents, so that we may escape adverse states and not fall into the evil realms.

The deceased may fail to attain liberation within forty-nine days, becoming a solitary ghost or wandering spirit and suffering greatly.

Thus, Tibet has a custom of making offerings for the deceased within the first hundred days after death. Offerings are also made on the anniversaries of the deceased’s birth and death, as well as on annual festivals—such as Qingming Festival, the Mid-July Festival, the first day of the tenth lunar month, and New Year’s Eve in Han Chinese regions. Scriptures are recited for them, and rites are performed to help them cross over.

This is out of fear that the deceased may not have attained liberation and may have fallen among solitary ghosts and wandering spirits. Therefore, these observances are performed in remembrance. The same is true in Han Chinese regions.

How may we help deceased parents, relatives, or other solitary ghosts and wandering spirits who have no one to rely on? And how may we help when we see others killing chickens, ducks, or pigs? The appendix to this scripture contains several methods that may be consulted and adopted. One may consider which *sūtra* to use in which circumstances and which mantra to use in which circumstances.

For example, when remembering one's parents or relatives, one may recite the Great Light Mantra, the Mantra of Liberation through Hearing, the Great Secret Mantra of Primordial Awakening, the Six-Realms Vajra Mantra, the Kṣitigarbha Mantra, the Hundred-Syllable Mantra, and so forth. These mantras are especially suitable for remembering parents and relatives. This shows how comprehensive the contents of this scripture are.

Eleventh point: Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng explains for us the various true words and secret mantras in the appendix. Secret mantras are symbols transformed from the minds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in Chan absorption; in Chinese they are called true words. They gather in all dharmas and assemble all courage. Reciting a mantra is like sending a telegram to communicate with Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

A mantra is like a telegram code: its power is great, yet its recitation is very simple. He gives several examples. The Mantra of Liberation through Hearing has only five syllables: "A bi jia dang ga." We should recite this mantra aloud; when the deceased hear it, they will attain liberation.

It is very simple. Reciting these five syllables has the same merit and power as reciting the entire scripture. This is the blessing of the power of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. There are also other mantras, such as the Great Secret Mantra of Primordial Awakening, which is the heart mantra of Samantabhadra King Tathāgata.

As we explained earlier, Samantabhadra King is Ādharma Buddha. In Esoteric Buddhism, he is the first Buddha, namely the dharmakāya Buddha. This mantra has only seven syllables: "Ma ma guo lin sa man da."

The Six-Realms Vajra Mantra is "A a xia sa ma ha." There is also the Mantra of the Ocean Assembly of the Hundred Peaceful and Wrathful Deities. "Peaceful" refers to the peaceful division, the compassionate and majestic body of the wheel of true Dharma; "wrathful" refers to the wrathful division, the fierce and fearsome body of the wheel of command, namely the body of the Wisdom Kings. "Ocean assembly of the hundred deities" means that there are many Buddhas and bodhisattvas, not merely one hundred.

Like the Lotus-Pool Assembly in the Western Pure Land, they are beyond count. This mantra is the dhāraṇī of the peaceful and wrathful maṇḍalas of this scripture; a single recitation is equivalent to reciting the entire scripture. It is excellent. Thus, the power of reciting mantras is great. We say that reciting the Kṣitigarbha Mantra is even better than reciting the Kṣitigarbha Sūtra.

Reciting the Kṣitigarbha Mantra once is equivalent to reciting the entire Kṣitigarbha Sūtra. It is both simple and concise, yet its power is inexhaustible. The Vajra That Cuts Mantra is the Vajra That Cuts Dhāraṇī. Dhāraṇī means "total retention": it

gathers all meanings and retains all dharmas. That is, it is a true word or secret mantra.

Reciting the Vajra That Cuts Mantra Dhāraṇī once is equivalent to reciting ninety million copies of the Diamond Sūtra. The power of reciting one copy of the Diamond Sūtra is already great; that of reciting ninety million copies is even more extraordinary.

The power of the Diamond Sūtra truly is great. Let me tell you a true story related by a colleague: a married couple were very devoted to each other. After the husband had died, he appeared to his wife in a dream.

He said, "I am suffering greatly after my death. Please recite some scriptures for me and help me cross over." While alive, he had not needed this, but after dying he asked his wife to recite scriptures and perform rites to help him cross over. His wife thought, "How can I recite scriptures for him? I am a member of the Communist Party! Besides, I do not know how to recite scriptures."

Then her younger sister thought of a solution: establish a memorial tablet at a temple. Temples nowadays all have memorial tablets. A longevity tablet is made of red paper and costs one thousand yuan. A tablet for assisting the deceased is made of yellow paper and costs five hundred yuan. So she established a tablet for assisting her husband after death. Three days later, she again dreamed of her husband.

On both occasions when he appeared, she could see only his upper body, not his lower body. He said, "It was good that you established a memorial tablet for me, but it has not helped me much. There are many tablets there, and the people reciting the scriptures are not doing so with one-pointed sincerity." This is true. The monastics who recite the scriptures do so carelessly and perfunctorily.

"It would be better for you to recite them for me yourself. Recite three copies of the Diamond Sūtra." She replied, "But I do not know how to recite the Diamond Sūtra." He said again, "Go obtain a copy of the Diamond Sūtra. You can read, so simply recite the words as written." She then consulted with her younger sister, and they obtained a copy of the Diamond Sūtra.

Every morning, before dawn, she rose and recited the scripture for her husband. She could not let anyone see her, for she was a member of the Communist Party—how could she recite scriptures? So she had to rise before dawn to recite for her husband.

Three days later, she saw her husband in a dream, but he was no longer only half visible. Joyfully, he told his wife, "It is all right now. You recited the Diamond Sūtra for

me, and I have already been helped across.” This shows that the Diamond Sūtra has great power, while the power of the Vajra That Cuts Dhāraṇī is even more inconceivable.

In the directional diagram of the peaceful maṇḍala in Esoteric Buddhism, there are five Buddhas of the five directions. For example, in the east is Akṣobhya Buddha, whose mantra is the “Rebirth Mantra of Eastern Akṣobhya Buddha”; in the west is Amitābha Buddha, whose mantra is the “Rebirth Mantra of Amitābha Buddha.”

Everyone is familiar with Amitābha Buddha, for those who practice Pure Land and seek rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss recite the name of Amitābha Buddha. Śākyamuni Buddha is our fundamental teacher. The dharmakāya of Śākyamuni Buddha is Vairocana Buddha, his sambhogakāya is Rocana Buddha, and his nirmāṇakāya is Śākyamuni Buddha.

His mantra is the “Mantra of the King Who Eliminates All Evil Destinies.” It can help the deceased eliminate their sins and karmic transgressions, enabling them to be reborn in a higher state rather than fall into the three lower realms—hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals, each of which has its own overseers. These mantras are all indispensable when assisting the deceased.

Some people say, “Is not the Buddha of the east the King of Lapis Lazuli Light Buddha?” Yes, but one should know that there are many Buddhas in the east. There are seven Lapis Lazuli Buddhas alone, and the King of Lapis Lazuli Light Buddha is one of them. He is the Medicine Buddha whom we commonly invoke for eliminating calamities and extending life. Thus, there are very many Buddhas; there is not only one Buddha in each direction.

We select whichever Buddha has the strongest affinity with our Sahā world. Thus, in the east we select Akṣobhya Buddha, namely Vajrasattva. In Esoteric Buddhism, he is the most important Buddha and is also called Mahāvairocana Tathāgata. We will introduce these matters later. For now, everyone need only know that Buddhas are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, not merely one.

In fact, all sentient beings are originally Buddhas. They have merely become deluded and obscured their Buddha-nature. When they see something attractive, they want it; when they hear a pleasant sound, they want to hear it. Deluded by sounds and forms, they forget and lose sight of their intrinsic nature. Therefore, everyone is a Buddha, inherently endowed with the Tathāgata’s wisdom and virtuous characteristics.

As long as we can let go of everything and know that forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas are all worldly dust and toil, dreamlike, bubblelike, and shadowlike—mere illusory appearances that cannot be obtained—then turn the

light inward to contemplate our own Buddha-nature. Do not run after the six sense objects of form, sound, odor, taste, touch, and dharmas; return to the original, and one becomes a Buddha. Thus, there are very many Buddhas throughout the ten directions.

The four directions are east, south, west, and north; above and below make two further directions; and the southeast, northeast, southwest, and northwest corners make four more. Together, these are the ten directions.

When we cultivate, some people descend rather than ascend, and they become frightened: “I am going down; I am going to hell!” Do not be afraid. The lower direction is also a Buddha-land; it does not mean that one has gone to hell. A koan explains this clearly: a woman entered samādhi in the presence of Śākyamuni Buddha.

Everyone felt somewhat alarmed and uneasy. At that time, female monastics were called the “second saṅgha,” while male monastics were the “great saṅgha.” Women were expected to step back and back again; they were not to stand at the front. Therefore, everyone thought that this woman should not have acted in this way.

At that time, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva—who represents wisdom and is the teacher of the seven Buddhas—wanted to bring this woman out of samādhi. He tried every possible means: he raised her to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, but she did not emerge from samādhi; he cast her down into the eighteenth level of hell, but she still did not emerge from samādhi. Śākyamuni Buddha said, “You cannot bring her out of samādhi. Below, there is a Bodhisattva named Wangming who can bring her out of samādhi.”

No sooner had he spoken than Wangming Bodhisattva arrived from below. This shows that there are also Buddhas and bodhisattvas below. Does not the Amitābha Sūtra also speak of the six directions? Therefore, do not assume that going downward means going to hell. That is not so.

In fact, directions do not inherently exist. There is no east, south, west, north, the four intermediate directions, above, or below. It is only because we have discriminating minds—thinking that one has gone up or come down—that directions are distinguished. Buddha-nature is originally a great circle, containing nothing at all; every direction is the same. Therefore, when assisting the deceased, it is enough to recite the mantra of a Buddha in one direction.

Those who practice the Pure Land school need only recite Amitābha Buddha’s mantra. If we knew all the mantras and recited them all for the deceased, assisting them across so that they might receive the empowering blessings of all Buddhas,

that would be all the more extraordinary. The most important thing when reciting mantras for the deceased is to have unwavering faith.

You must have unwavering faith! If you harbor even the slightest doubt, or even come merely to test the practice—"Is reciting this mantra of any use? I fear it is of no use!"—then all is lost. Your strength will be diminished. Therefore, you must not entertain the slightest doubt. Just as in the Pure Land school, for rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must possess the three conditions of faith, vows, and practice.

these three are like the three legs of a tripod: not one can be lacking, and they are of utmost importance. First, one must have faith. When we perform a ritual and confer blessings upon the deceased, we must believe that we ourselves are Buddhas, that the power of this mantra is certainly immense, and that it can surely lift them across and enable them to ascend to the Pure Land. One must believe absolutely, without the slightest doubt.

The same applies when we perform the practice of phowa for the deceased. Visualize yourself as a Buddha, and use your Dharma power to push the person's breath upward from the soles of the feet, up to the crown of the head, and out through the brahma aperture. Do not entertain the slightest doubt. Do not say, "Perhaps my power is insufficient? Perhaps it will not work?" That would be no good.

Faith is of the utmost importance in our faith in the Buddha. Therefore, in the stages of practice, the first is the stage of the Ten Faiths. Yet before one has truly realized one's intrinsic nature, subtle doubts remain, and one does not fully believe. Only after truly realizing one's intrinsic nature can one truly believe. Thus, when performing the ritual, we must have faith and must not harbor the slightest trace of doubt.

Likewise, in our present practice, we must believe that we will certainly attain Buddhahood. With this faith, you can attain accomplishment. For we are originally Buddhas. It is only because of inverted deluded thoughts, mistaking the forms and appearances of the external world for truly and substantially existent, and clinging to them without letting go, that we lose sight of our intrinsic nature.

Our present practice is to quiet deluded thoughts and the deluded mind. Once we know that all external forms and appearances are false, illusory, and unreal, we will certainly attain accomplishment. Second, after developing faith, one must also make great vows. Great vows are bodhicitta: the vow to attain Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings. This power, too, is immense.

We speak of several powers that are exceedingly great. First, the power of the Dharma is boundless. Second, karmic power is boundless: the force of the karma we

create is immense, and the cycle of rebirth in the six realms holds us through the pull of karmic power, preventing our liberation. Third, the power of vows is boundless. When one truly makes great vows, their power is tremendous.

Those who practice Esoteric Buddhism, the Chan school, or the Pure Land school must all make great vows. Because Chan practitioners are sustained by the power of their vows, even if they do not awaken in this life, they can awaken when they return in the next round of rebirth. Sustained by the power of their vows, they will not lose human birth; after being born, they can awaken profoundly upon hearing a single teaching and advance ever upward.

After Chan practitioners truly realize the mind and see their true nature, even if their habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated and the delusions of thought have not yet been cut off, at most they ascend to heaven seven times and return to the human world seven times; then birth and death are ended. Therefore, Pure Land practitioners should no longer say that Chan is inferior. So long as we have the power of vows, we can become continuous and undivided with the power of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and response will accord with our invocation. You invoke all Buddhas, and all Buddhas respond to you.

By the same principle, when you invoke the consciousness-spirit of the deceased, the consciousness-spirit of the deceased will also respond to you. In other words, the consciousness-spirit of the deceased is gathered in by your power; it will then heed your instruction and can realize a sambhogakāya Buddha. Third, after making great vows, one must put them into actual practice. This is practice.

Only by truly cutting off delusion and realizing truth can one fully realize the fruit of Buddhahood. If one merely makes vows without practicing diligently, those are empty vows. Even when assisting the deceased, one must perform the ritual earnestly and meticulously. Thus, the three indispensable conditions of practice—faith, vows, and practice—are equally important when we assist the deceased.

Therefore, when we recite the mantras mentioned above, so long as our faith remains unwavering, we can enter into responsive communion with the deceased. Receiving the empowerment of the mantras' power, the deceased can be liberated. No karmic obstacles can hold them bound. Free from the entanglement of karmic obstacles, they can realize a sambhogakāya Buddha. Therefore, when assisting and empowering the departed, we should recite every mantra in the appendix. These mantras are not long, but their power is immense. The merits and virtues they possess are extensively explained in the appendix to this scripture, so they will not be explained one by one again here.

Twelfth point: Someone once asked, "Esoteric Dharma is transmitted secretly through empowerment and must not be publicly taught. Does our public

explanation of this Dharma now violate the rules of Esoteric Buddhism?" Indeed, Esoteric Dharma must be transmitted through secret empowerment. The first reason is that Esoteric Dharma should not be transmitted to those who are not suitable vessels.

That is, when transmitting Esoteric Dharma, one must see whether the recipient's capacity is adequate. If a person's capacity is inadequate, transmitting Esoteric Dharma to them will be of no use, because they will be unable to practice it successfully. Second, Esoteric Dharma should not be transmitted to unworthy persons. One must see whether the recipient is truly upright and genuinely good.

Esoteric Dharma includes many kinds of practices: methods that activate function, methods that realize essence, and so forth. In particular, if methods that activate function are transmitted to an unworthy person—that is, someone of improper intention—they may misuse these methods to do evil and harm others. Esoteric Dharma may be transmitted only to those who are truly upright and good.

Otherwise, after transmitting it to an unworthy person, if that person uses Esoteric Dharma to harm others, the one who transmitted the Dharma—the teacher—bears the blame. For this reason, Esoteric Dharma cannot be transmitted carelessly and must be transmitted secretly. Practices such as our Heart-of-Heart Dharma and the Great Perfection practice of the Nyingma school are transmitted secretly. Even so, our intention to liberate sentient beings is equal and without distinction.

However, this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State is used to save the departed. It is the final act of rescue performed for the deceased at the time of death; it is not a method that activates function, nor can it harm anyone else.

Therefore, this Dharma differs from other esoteric teachings. It may be openly circulated, widely promoted, and explained in detail; it need not be secretly taught only to one person. Even if many people are in the room, it may be recited aloud for the deceased.

Let everyone hear it, so that a seed may be planted in the field of the eighth consciousness and a wholesome affinity formed: "Oh, Esoteric Buddhism also has this method of deliverance!" In this way, everyone can know this Dharma and can escape the cycle of birth and death. How wonderful that would be! Therefore, it should be explained to everyone in full detail, and the meaning of every passage of the scripture should be made clear.

When we recite this scripture for a dying person, because of the blessings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, there is no need to be overly concerned with whether the person performing the ritual has practiced Esoteric Buddhism, possesses

spiritual attainment, or has Dharma power. It is enough that the person understands the meaning of the sentences in the scripture and speaks clearly.

It will not do if one is confused about the scripture, for confusion will lead to mistakes. Nor will it do if one cannot speak clearly while reading and reciting, because unclear speech makes it difficult for the deceased to understand; if they hear incorrectly, one may harm them. Everyone must pay especially careful attention to these two points.

In fact, the “secret” spoken of in the Buddhadharma refers to the secret treasury of our Buddha-nature. As it is said: “I possess a treasure, hidden within the mountain of form.” This means that we have a great treasure, secretly concealed within this physical shell of form, constituted of the four great elements.

Our practice is to open it up and find it, but this requires diligent cultivation. People today have shallow capacities and heavy karmic obstacles. They are unwilling to apply themselves earnestly and are merely perfunctory. I have heard many people say that while they recite the Buddha’s name and hold mantras, their thoughts still run wild.

They think of this and that. They tell themselves not to think, yet the thoughts simply will not cease. Why can they not cease? It is because, in the activities of daily life, we are too attached. We do not know that these are all fantasies, all false; we pursue them relentlessly and refuse to let them go. Thus, when we sit down, deluded thoughts do not stop for even a moment.

If, during the day, we can truly maintain mindful contemplation at all times and in all places, knowing that all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas are illusory and unobtainable; if we do not attend to them but function in accordance with conditions, then, when we sit down, deluded thoughts will surely be few. So long as we are truly willing to let go, there is no one who cannot succeed.

For we are originally Buddhas. The saying, “Lay down the butcher’s knife and become a Buddha on the spot,” is entirely true. People simply refuse to let go. They are always calculating gains and losses: how to become wealthy, how to gain promotion, and how to enjoy themselves more fully.

If you are scattered and restless during the day, can deluded thoughts fail to arise when you sit down? Can you avoid dreaming when you sleep? They are all chaotic, inverted dreams. This will not do! Therefore, you must still apply yourself now. If, by chance, your practice is not properly carried out, there is still this method of deliverance at the end. Liberation during the intermediate state is easiest, because the physical shell is already gone.

As soon as consciousness emerges, it is exceedingly bright and alert. Upon hearing the instructions, it merges with the luminosity of its intrinsic nature and realizes the Way. I do not say this to encourage you not to practice diligently now. It is not that it does not matter if you fail to practice now, because later I will still have this Dharma by which you can finally be liberated. The more diligently we practice now, the better.

For if our practice is truly well accomplished now, we shall be liberated during the intermediate state at the time of death, without having to wait for the intermediate state of dharmatā. As soon as we stop breathing and emerge from the physical shell, we will transcend it. We will not need someone else to recite this scripture for us in order to be liberated. How wonderful that would be! Therefore, it is better to practice diligently now.

If you refuse to let go now, you will still have to let go when you reach the intermediate state. When you are in the intermediate state, can you remain attached to your family and refuse to let go? Can you still transcend it? Therefore, the great virtuous ones of old all said: "To be reborn in the Western Pure Land, one must be willing to leave this Sahā world; otherwise, it is like rowing while tied to a post."

"Rowing while tied to a post" means fastening a boat's mooring rope to a wooden post on the shore and then rowing from the boat. Can the boat move that way? If you wish to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss yet remain attached to your family and cannot bear to leave them, it is just like rowing while tied to a post: your efforts are wasted.

Therefore, you must let go. Even if you do not let go, you will have to do so at death; rather than letting go then, it is better to let go now. For you cannot obtain these things in the first place! When the body itself is not truly there, can there be possessions outside the body? Can there be wives, children, gold, silver, and treasures? Everyone remains attached thought after thought, not knowing that these are all deluded thoughts, all a dream, and refusing to awaken.

This shows how difficult it is to awaken from emotional attachments and views. Therefore, bodhisattva means "one awakened to sentient beings": one must awaken from and utterly remove these emotional attachments and views. Thus Śākyamuni Buddha set us an example. He was a prince, able to become a king, and he had a wife and son; yet he still left home and departed from them.

Yet many among us are like bees drilling into honey, wanting to stand above all others as emperors or presidents, wielding great power and having whatever they desire. Such conduct creates karma. Our wives and children are merely brought together with us by a convergence of causes and conditions. What causes and

conditions? The causes and conditions of debts. Either you owe them, or they owe you.

When your descendants are filial to you, they owe you; when they are not filial to you, you owe them. All are entangled together by karmic debts. People are deluded and fail to awaken. If everyone could truly awaken, let go of everything, and abandon all attachment, there would not be a single person who could not realize the Way. Thus, when we reach the intermediate state, we must still avoid delusion.

The later passages of the scripture make the same demand of us: do not remain attached to family and children; all things are unobtainable. Still less should you cling to the body. This body is a great root of calamity, a great burden! To carry it is to carry the source of karmic obstacles. Human suffering and human affliction arise because of this body. If there were no such body, all would be well.

Therefore, we must now understand this principle and cease identifying with the physical body. A Chan verse puts it very well: “Take empty quiescence as the essence; do not identify with the physical body. Take spiritual knowing as the mind; do not identify with deluded thoughts.” Taking empty quiescence as the essence means being like empty space—quiescent and unmoving, without anything at all. This is your true original essence.

The physical body is false, so do not identify with it. Taking spiritual knowing as the mind means being clearly aware without clinging to appearances, and calming deluded thoughts. Deluded thoughts are unceasing discrimination and unrelenting attachment. Therefore, this scripture teaches us to let go of everything and recognize the luminosity. In this way, we are liberated.

Point thirteen: the preceding point stated that anyone who is articulate and able to explain this text clearly may perform the ritual. Here it again emphasizes that Esoteric Buddhism places primary importance on transmission from teacher to disciple; this is a further clarification. Indeed, the most important thing in Esoteric Buddhism is transmission from a master—that is, lineage transmission.

Therefore, when liberating the deceased, one should respectfully, earnestly, and sincerely invite—not casually or frivolously—“a Vajra Ācārya master who has received this Dharma to transmit this practice; only then is it in accordance with the Dharma.” Ācārya means Vajra Master. Vajra signifies indestructibility, the wisdom of the true Dharma.

Therefore, it is best to invite a Vajra Master to transmit this Dharma. The four words “in accordance with the Dharma” are somewhat too fixed and not quite appropriate; it would be better to say, “more in accordance with the Dharma.”

What if one lacks these causes and conditions and there is no Vajra Master? Then one should respectfully and with utmost sincerity visualize oneself as Guru Padmasambhava, teaching this scripture to the deceased and liberating them. Thus, Esoteric Buddhism places great emphasis on visualization. Whatever practice one cultivates, one visualizes oneself as its particular yidam.

This Dharma was transmitted by Guru Padmasambhava, so it is enough to visualize yourself as Guru Padmasambhava. There must be no doubt about this. Do not say, "I am an ordinary being; how could I be Guru Padmasambhava?" You must not think in this way. As I transmit the Dharma to the deceased and liberate them, I myself am Guru Padmasambhava. Have no doubt whatsoever.

It is like releasing living beings: when we buy fish, snails, turtles, and the like, and release them to liberate them, we should visualize ourselves as the Buddha. Therefore, do not doubt; visualize yourself as Guru Padmasambhava. If you are unfamiliar with Guru Padmasambhava, then visualize yourself as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. This is addressed to those of us in the Chinese lands.

For in the Chinese lands, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is revered most highly. You see Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva enshrined in every household, because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has the closest affinity with sentient beings in our Sahā world. When the Buddha entered parinirvāṇa, he entrusted Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, saying: "You have the closest affinity with the Sahā world. After I enter parinirvāṇa, you must care for and protect the sentient beings of the Sahā world, enabling them all to leave suffering and attain happiness, and to turn calamity into good fortune when they meet with danger."

He did not entrust Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva alone, but also entrusted Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, saying: "You too have affinity with the sentient beings of this world. You must broadly extend deliverance to the sentient beings of the Sahā world." Therefore, Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva widely liberates sentient beings in the hells.

If you cannot visualize yourself as Guru Padmasambhava, then visualize yourself as Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, also known as Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator. Why is this bodhisattva also called the Sovereign Contemplator? Because Avalokiteśvara was this bodhisattva's Dharma name at the causal stage.

When this bodhisattva practiced the Dharma, she began with perfect penetration through the ear faculty: she realized the Way by hearing the sounds of the world, and thus was called Avalokiteśvara. This method is to contemplate: Who is it that hears the sounds I hear? Ask yourself: "Who is hearing these sounds?" At that time, she was practicing on an island. The sea tides sometimes rose and sometimes fell.

When the tide rose, the sea made a sound—“whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh”—and she heard it. She then asked herself, “Who is it that hears the sound?” When the tide fell, the wind and waves grew calm, and there was no sound. She again asked herself, “Who is it that does not hear the sound?” Thus she realized the Way: sound is a sense object of hearing, and such an object arises and ceases.

When the sea tide rises, the sound of “whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh” is heard. When the tide falls, the wind and waves are calm, and there is no sound. Thus the sound of the sea arises and ceases, but our nature of hearing neither arises nor ceases. That is, the capacity or function that can hear sounds neither arises nor ceases.

When you do not hear a sound, do you not still hear that there is “no sound”? It is not that you hear nothing. Ordinary people think that not hearing a sound means not hearing at all. Yet even though you do not hear a sound, your nature capable of hearing remains.

Therefore, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the name from the causal stage, while Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator, is the name received after realizing the Way. It is also a Dharma gate of practice: constantly contemplate, take dharmatā as yourself, and do not take the deluded, inverted physical body as yourself. Thus the Chan school asks: “Who is it that recites the Buddha’s name?” The one who recites the Buddha’s name is not our physical body.

This physical body cannot recite the Buddha’s name, for when the breath ceases, though the physical body has not yet decayed, why can it no longer recite? In truth, the one able to recite is our inherent capacity, our function—that is, Buddha-nature. Contemplate our Buddha-nature: there is nowhere it is absent; it is present everywhere. It is not that it is in one place and not in another. This is called Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator.

When Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva realized the Way, she attained great freedom. When we leave suffering and attain happiness and gain great freedom, this too is called attaining freedom. Thus Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator, is the Dharma name of the fruition stage. Her great compassion is deeply felt; she sees all sentient beings as though they were her own children.

Yet we sentient beings of the Sahā world are full of selfishness. We recognize only our own children and disregard those of others. As for our own children—oh, how precious they are! They cannot be touched in the slightest. As for others’ children, even if they were beaten to death, it would be none of our concern. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is not like this. Her compassion is deeply felt, and she cares for us at every moment.

Therefore, practitioners of the Pure Land school who seek rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss also cannot be apart from Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. They must also recite the name of Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator, and recite the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, thereby constantly receiving Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's protection. Thus, visualize yourself as Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator.

If you do not dare to accept that you yourself are Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator—or Guru Padmasambhava—then visualize Avalokiteśvara, the Sovereign Contemplator—or Guru Padmasambhava—as your master, either above the crown of your head or in the space before you.

When assisting the deceased, you recite the scriptures together with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. With the Buddha-power and blessings of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, your doubts are dispelled, and you can recite boldly and confidently. In fact, we should have no doubts; we should recognize that we ourselves are Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

Especially in the intermediate state, one must be able to recognize that the clear light is oneself. If one unites with it, one becomes a sambhogakāya Buddha. If one does not dare to accept this, one falls short; one then thinks that this light is emitted by the Buddha to guide us, and follows it to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. In that case, one still cannot realize sambhogakāya Buddhahood.

Thus, a person's attainment depends on courage and insight, and on the capacity of the mind. Those with great courage, great resolve, and broad mind-capacity can become great vessels. If your courage is slight and your mind-capacity narrow, you will not succeed. Thus, one's capacity is of great importance.

If you do not dare to accept that you are Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, then visualize Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva above your head or in the space before you, and recite along with her. In this way, too, you can receive blessings. Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng also devoted great care to this; he took into account the varying capacities of all sentient beings.

By doing this, the living person—that is, the one teaching the Dharma for the deceased—the deceased person, and others present who hear this teaching can all receive benefit. Of course, when the proper causes and conditions arise later, one should still ask a vajra master to confer the transmission as a supplement, for this is the rule in Esoteric Buddhism.

This Dharma arose entirely from the great compassion of Guru Padmasambhava. He sought to liberate the deceased, hoping that those who have died might leave the sea of suffering, escape the cycle of rebirth in the six realms, and reach the other

shore. Therefore, we must not use this Dharma to make money. Everyone should take note of this. Nowadays, many people do such things merely to earn money.

For example, many people who have not become monastics nevertheless perform Buddhist rites and recite sutras for the deceased in order to make money. Such people are truly in a grave situation! I am not trying to frighten you. Do not create the cause for hell merely for temporary gain. This must not be done. When we assist departed spirits, we should do so from compassion, like Guru Padmasambhava, not for the sake of making money.

Guru Padmasambhava and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva are both masters of this Dharma. Guru Padmasambhava is said to have been accomplished through the union of the embodiments of Amitābha Buddha, Śākyamuni Buddha, and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva; therefore, Guru Padmasambhava is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Like Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, he never leaves us.

However, people in the Chinese regions are quite unfamiliar with Guru Padmasambhava. Many do not even know how to recite his yidam mantra: “Om Āḥ Hūṃ Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hūṃ.” Tibetans recite it so fluently that it becomes: “Om Pema Vajra Hūṃ.”

If we recite it often, Guru Padmasambhava will constantly appear before us and constantly liberate us, enabling us to leave suffering and attain happiness and to be reborn in his land. Like the other Buddhas, he also has a land—a Buddha-land. Here in our country, everyone readily believes in the spiritual responses of the greatly compassionate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

Just as the Universal Gate Chapter of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva says: whatever calamity you may face, you need only recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva to gain liberation. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is able, at all times and in all places, to hear the sounds of those who invoke her and come in response.

Time means time, and place means space. “Always able” means able to do so continually and regularly—not able today but not tomorrow, able a moment ago but not now. Thus, this means that no matter the time or place, whenever we invoke Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, she can manifest herself and hear the sounds of suffering in order to respond.

She hears the suffering of sentient beings and observes the cries of suffering in the world in order to liberate people. If you recite, “Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva . . .,” she hears you and comes in response to your invocation. If you think of her, she can appear before you. There is a book called Records of Avalokiteśvara’s Spiritual Responses, which records many remarkably efficacious events.

It is not good for some people to conduct experiments. Does the Universal Gate Chapter of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva not say, “Entering fire, one is not burned; entering water, one does not drown”? Yet someone may try it: lighting a candle, reciting, “Homage to the Greatly Compassionate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva . . . ,” and then putting a hand into the flame. “Oh! It hurts terribly!”

“Does it not say that one who enters fire is not burned? Why does it still hurt when I am burned?” Ah, this is no good: one is not sincere, but is testing Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. We must not interpret the scriptures merely according to the words; they must be explained dynamically, not rigidly. “Entering fire, one is not burned” has many meanings. Here, fire refers to the fire of afflictions.

When our minds are in turmoil, it is like fire burning a forest of merit and virtue. When the fierce fire of afflictions arises, invoke Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and know that everything is empty; then the afflictions disappear. Is this not entering fire without being burned? Therefore, when explaining the Dharma, we cannot interpret everything entirely according to the literal wording. What does the water in “entering water, one does not drown” refer to? It refers to the water of attachment.

Look: when people who love one another are separated, they shed tears. When food that you enjoy is placed before you, saliva flows from your mouth. Thus, this “water” refers to the water of attachment.

If, at such times, you invoke Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and know that everything is an insubstantial false appearance, an illusion—unobtainable like flowers in empty space or the moon reflected in water—then the water of attachment will be gone. Is this not entering water without drowning? Thus, when the scriptures are explained dynamically, everything can be understood; it is not good to explain them rigidly, word by word. The greatly compassionate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is everywhere and can manifest herself at every moment. When we truly undergo hardship and invoke Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, we can attain liberation.

Fourteenth point: according to the former customs of our country, after a person died, the body was left on the bed for the first three days and was not placed in a coffin. After three days, it was placed in a coffin, but the lid was not closed and the nails were not driven in; this was called the minor encoffining. After seven days, the coffin lid was closed and nailed shut; this was called the major encoffining.

Thus, the former custom was minor encoffining after three days and major encoffining after seven days, but this cannot be done now. In hospitals, before the breath has completely ceased, people say, “This will not do; this will not do. Send them to the morgue immediately.” Therefore, it is somewhat better nowadays to die at home. Yet even at home, one must consider the time and circumstances.

If it is summer and the weather is very hot, the body cannot be kept for three days. In that case, it may be kept for a time in the refrigerated storage of a funeral home. Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng conjectured that this Chinese custom may also have arisen because, within three or four days, the deceased person's consciousness has not yet completely left the body and remains in a state of confusion and stupor.

The better a person's meditative practice, the more slowly they depart; the poorer the practice, the more quickly they depart. But during the first three and a half to four days, the body must absolutely not be cremated. If it is sent to the funeral home and cremated at that time, it would be disastrous. For within three or four days, the person's consciousness may not yet have completely departed; it may even be a case of apparent death, and the person may possibly revive.

Such cases truly do occur. When I was lecturing on the scriptures at Huangya, someone told me: "Formerly, I did not believe in rebirth in the six realms at all. Now I truly believe in it without the slightest doubt." I asked, "What was the reason?" He said, "When I was ill and hospitalized, something happened to me. At the time, my illness was not serious."

"The other patients were playing cards, and, having nothing to do, I watched nearby. Then I saw a woman in the air beckon to me, and I followed her. At that time, I no longer had any sensation in my body. I drifted and drifted until I came to a place. There was a great iron gate covered with many nails, and above it were written the two characters 'Underworld.'"

"The woman instructed me: 'Wait for me at the gate. You must not come in. I am going to call someone.' After saying this, she went inside. I waited and waited, and after a long time she still did not come out. So I ran inside and saw that it was gloomy within, with rooms one after another. Then, to my surprise, I saw one of my friends."

"This friend said: 'I asked for you to come because I have something to entrust to you. My mother has been devastated since I left her; she has wept terribly. She has cried one eye blind, and the other is nearly blind. So I asked you to come and convey a message: tell her that I am doing well here and ask her not to grieve any longer.'"

"Also, there is no one at home to care for my mother. You are my good friend, and I would like to entrust her care to you. Will you agree?' 'I agree! I agree!' I said. 'Good! Then I will quickly send you out; it is not good to remain here.' So he sent me out, and I drifted and drifted until I arrived at the hospital."

"With a thud, I fell back down. Then I saw the doctors administering oxygen and giving me cardiac injections. They said, 'Ah, good, good—he has come back to life!' I asked, 'What happened?' They said, 'Oh! You had just died.'"

One of the card players said: “Just then, with a thud, your body collapsed onto me. I saw that you had stopped breathing and had no pulse.” His consciousness had departed, and his physical body had collapsed onto one of the card players. Seeing that he had no breath, everyone hurriedly called the doctors to revive him.

He said: “I had no idea such things could happen; I never expected them to be real! Because I had already died at that time, they sent a telegram to summon my mother.”

I told my mother what had happened and asked, “Did the son of so-and-so, our neighbor, die? Did she weep herself blind in one eye, with the other nearly blind as well?” My mother said, “Yes.” Thereafter, I supported his mother as he had asked.

Only after encountering this incident did I believe that the six realms of rebirth truly exist.” What this person described was apparent death. At the woman’s single summons, his consciousness drifted out after her; he had not truly died. Therefore, within three or four days, the physical body may be only apparently dead and may possibly revive.

The Buddha’s rule is that, after monastics die, they are not placed in coffins but cremated seated in a cremation vessel. You have all seen one, have you not? It is a cremation vessel with the cremated person’s name affixed to the outside. Because a fire must be lit, there is an opening at the bottom of the vessel.

The dying person is seated cross-legged inside it. Firewood is piled beneath, oil is poured over it, incense is offered, and then the fire is lit for cremation. Because incense is offered, there is a fragrant smell as it burns. But this is done only after twenty-one days, not immediately. If the body is burned before three or four days have passed, the consciousness-spirit has not yet departed.

If you burn the person, the suffering will be unbearable; therefore, the body cannot be burned so soon. According to this scripture’s instructions, after a person dies, although the outer breath has ceased—that is, breathing through the nose has stopped—the inner breath has not yet ceased—that is, embryonic breathing remains. It is the same when we cultivate: when one’s practice is good and one enters samādhi, breathing ceases.

Yet embryonic breathing remains and continues to move in the lower dantian, and the eighth consciousness has not yet departed. The eighth consciousness is also called the “consciousness of warmth and life.” If the body still has warmth when touched, the person has not yet died. For one who has entered the cessation of sensation and perception, the eighth consciousness has not departed. The entire body may be cold, but the region of the heart has not yet grown cold.

The eighth consciousness remains within the pericardium, and the inner breath—embryonic breathing—remains. When practitioners realize embryonic breathing, they have not thereby seen their true nature, because this body has not yet dissolved into emptiness. Only when it has completely dissolved into emptiness, so that even empty space no longer exists and only the absolute true mind manifests before one, is that seeing one's true nature. Therefore, attaining embryonic breathing merely indicates excellent meditative skill; it is not seeing one's true nature.

Embryonic breathing is also called the stage in which consciousness is stifled into cessation. The consciousness-spirit is shut within and has not disengaged from the physical body, just as when someone has been knocked unconscious or has gone into shock from illness. In shock, one also ceases to breathe; in ordinary terms, this is called fainting. For ordinary people, this period after death usually lasts three and a half to four days. Practitioners with meditative stability can maintain it for four to seven days.

Only after seven days can the consciousness-spirit completely leave and no longer remain stifled within the body. Therefore, a person must not be cremated immediately after death. After the body is sent to the funeral home, it is best to preserve it for several days with embalming fluid or in cold storage. Immediate cremation is very undesirable.

Cremation is now practiced throughout the country. This method is very good and clean.

In the past, we had to buy coffins and burial plots for interment in the earth, which was very wasteful. Some people were extremely particular: they wanted orchidwood coffins or hardwood coffins, along with many grave goods. It was truly excessive. Nowadays, many treasures are excavated from ancient tombs for public exhibition—but what significance does that have for the dead? Cremation is better: once everything is reduced to ashes, that is the end of it.

After a person dies, there are already many matters for the family to attend to, and then there is also the funeral procession, which is very troublesome. In the past, funeral processions were grand affairs. I remember that in Shanghai at that time, one did not know how many people were involved; it was like sending out an army—truly extraordinary. Cremation is now a very good method, with many advantages.

It can save money, material resources, and time, and the land saved can be used to grow crops. In the past, graves were built with great elaboration, like large gardens; this was truly wasteful. The Buddha's method is to economize: everything is burned. But the Buddhist rule is not to burn the body immediately. The deceased is seated in

a Buddha shrine or in a cremation vessel; later, the body was seated for several days in a wooden shrine.

If someone has attained profound practice, the body may remain uncorrupted for a long time. For example, the manifestation body of Chan Master Wuxia at the Hundred-Year Palace on Mount Jiuhua has remained intact. I remember that in the past there was the monk Yekai of Tianning Monastery in Changzhou. During the Qing dynasty, he had been a Hanlin scholar before leaving home, and his practice was also very good.

When he was about to pass away, he instructed his disciples beforehand: "After three days, open the vessel and look. If my physical body has not decayed, then it may be gilded. If it has decayed, simply cremate it. And these prayer beads belong to xxx; please return them for me." Having arranged everything, he walked into the cremation vessel himself and sat cross-legged.

The monastics practicing Buddha-recitation gathered around his cremation vessel and recited for him, "Fundamental Teacher Śākyamuni Buddha." Because he belonged to the Chan school, not the Pure Land school. After three days, they opened the vessel and found dark spots on his body, indicating that it had begun to decompose. Everyone then cremated Chan Master Yekai's body.

Lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng repeatedly and earnestly advised: "For the safety of the deceased, one must never die in the morning and be cremated that evening." After death, the consciousness-spirit has not yet departed. If the body is burned, the person's suffering is unbearable. This suffering harms the deceased: once anger arises, they will fall into the realm of poisonous snakes, fierce tigers, and other such beings, and can no longer be reborn in the Western Pure Land.

Not only does the physical body suffer; it also prevents the accomplishment of the dharmakāya. Therefore, for the sake of safety, one absolutely must not die in the morning and be cremated that evening. The body should be sent to a refrigerated room at the funeral home and kept there for several days; it should not be cremated immediately. At the very least, after three days, a memorial service may be held at the funeral home before cremation.

If the funeral home has no refrigeration facilities, temporarily purchase a thin, inexpensive coffin; there is no need to be particular. A thin coffin costs less, and since it will eventually be burned, what use is there in buying a thick one? Thus, buy a thin coffin to contain the body temporarily, and cremate it after seven days. Or follow the Muslim method.

The Muslim method is very good. After washing the deceased clean, they wrap the entire body from head to toe in white cloth and place it in a box. A Muslim coffin is

simply a box made of very thin boards. When its bottom is pulled out, it falls away; thus it is called a removable-bottom coffin. It is very small and light.

At burial, the bottom of the box is pulled away and the body is placed into the earth, just like the box used for playing mahjong: pull it, and it comes apart. It is unlike the thick, cumbersome coffins made in popular custom. Muslims rent their coffins from the mosque. They use one temporarily and return it to the mosque afterward rather than burying it.

However, as I understand it, if you are not Muslim, the mosque will not rent one to you. After the body has been laid out for seven days, the consciousness-spirit has already departed, and it may then be cremated. In this way, the deceased gains peace, while the living can also save financial and material resources. There are fewer matters and less trouble, and the family can be more at ease and unhindered in their work. This passage was added by lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng in the hope that everyone would take care not to cremate someone who dies in the morning that same evening. The body should be kept for a week, or at the very least for three or four days, before cremation.

The foregoing is the “Preface.” We will now begin the main text.

Main Text

Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State (Tibetan title: Bardo Thödrol)

The Heart-Transmission Treasury of Guru Padmasambhava, Founding Patriarch of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism

Retrieved and disseminated by the treasure revealer, Master Vidyādhara Karma Lingpa, from Mount Kamboda by the Golden River

Respectfully translated by Sun Jingfeng (Shougu Vajra), a Vajrayāna disciple of Nomen

This scripture was composed by Guru Padmasambhava, the founding patriarch of the Nyingma school of Esoteric Buddhism. Since the causes and conditions of the time had not yet matured, after completing the scripture he concealed it in a mountain cave and did not immediately circulate it. Later, he manifested again as Master Vidyādhara Karma Lingpa and retrieved the scripture from the place where it had been concealed—Mount Kamboda by the Golden River—for dissemination. It has now been translated by the lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng, a Vajrayāna disciple.

Main Text, Volume One: The Intermediate State at the Time of Death and the Intermediate State of Dharmatā

Verse of Refuge and Homage

Dharmakāya Amitābha, Infinite Light

Sambhogakāya Lotus Peaceful and Wrathful Deities

Nirmāṇakāya Lotus-Born Master, Protector of Sentient Beings

Before the Three-Kāya Guru, I respectfully pay homage.

The intermediate state at the time of death lasts from the moment a person has just stopped breathing until three and a half to four days afterward. During this time, the intermediate-state body is in a confused and dazed phase and has not yet left the physical body. On the fifth day, the bardo body emerges from the body and becomes lucid. At this point, the intermediate state of Dharmatā begins, lasting fourteen days.

“Refuge and homage” means taking refuge, paying homage, and seeking blessings. To take refuge is to rely upon (refuge means returning home, and relying means depending upon); homage means reverential prostration. To seek blessings means to request the bestowal of blessings. Thus, the Verse of Refuge and Homage means relying upon our Dharma progenitor, Guru Padmasambhava, paying homage to him, and requesting his blessings.

“Amitābha, Infinite Light” means that Amitābha Buddha possesses immeasurable light and immeasurable life. He possesses all qualities; his Dharma power is boundless, and his light is beyond measure. This indicates that our dharmakāya—that is, Buddha-nature—is the root of all dharmas. “Lotus” refers to the Lotus Body.

The “Peaceful” Deities are the bodies that turn the wheel of true Dharma, wondrous in appearance and solemnly adorned, with the thirty-two marks and eighty excellent characteristics. The “Wrathful” Deities are the bodies that command and instruct, namely the bodies of the Wisdom Kings, whose special purpose is to subdue demons. Thus, here “Lotus,” “Peaceful,” and “Wrathful” Deities all refer to our supremely revered Buddhas and bodhisattvas and represent our sambhogakāya.

“Nirmāṇakāya ‘Lotus-Born Master,’ Protector of Sentient Beings” means that Guru Padmasambhava was miraculously manifested through the combined transformation of Śākyamuni Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, and Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva; hence he is called the nirmāṇakāya “Lotus-Born Master.” Protector of sentient beings means that Buddhas and bodhisattvas are the reliance and protectors of the multitude of sentient beings. Thus, this Verse of Refuge and Homage means that before the guru who embodies the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya, we should repeatedly make reverential prostrations and sincerely pray for the blessings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

For yogis of middling capacity, the expedient means for liberation in the intermediate state is this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing. Its meaning has three divisions: the introduction, the main explanation, and the conclusion.

Why does the text speak of yogis of middling capacity rather than yogis of superior capacity? Because people of superior capacity practice well and, before dying, have already realized their own Buddha-nature. They can attain liberation without having to wait for the intermediate-state realm to appear. Therefore, this Esoteric Dharma is the most expedient dharma gate of liberation for practitioners of middling capacity. Yogis are those whose practice has become spiritually consonant.

Yogis of middling capacity have not realized the dharmakāya during their lifetime and cannot transcend birth and death while alive. Yet, during the intermediate state after death, they can attain liberation by hearing the teachings of this Dharma. This Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State is divided into three parts: the introduction, the main explanation, and the conclusion. The introduction is the guidance given before teaching the Dharma to the deceased.

The main explanation is the principal section of this scripture; it tells us, step by step, how to attain liberation. The conclusion is the final recapitulation and summary. Just as our scriptural lectures also have an introductory section, a principal section, and a circulation section, the introduction corresponds to the introductory section, the main explanation to the principal section, and the conclusion to the circulation section.

[First] Introduction

This expounds the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State. In Vajrayāna, practitioners are divided into three capacities—superior, middling, and lesser. Those of superior capacity rely on the “graduated

stages of guidance.” These mean that practitioners first begin with Exoteric Buddhism; after attaining a corresponding degree of cultivation and penetrating emptiness, they then enter the maṇḍala empowerment of Esoteric Buddhism and receive the great Dharma. They progressively cultivate the two stages of generation and completion, and at the time of death attain liberation through these graduated stages of guidance.

From the very beginning of practice, they rely on this “guidance” and will certainly attain liberation. If they have not attained liberation, then in the intermediate state at the time of death (the period when life ends is called the intermediate state at the time of death), they need not practice phowa, the practice of transferring consciousness for rebirth, but may proceed directly to Buddhahood.

Fu means to lay out, and chen means to expound. The introduction explains how practitioners of superior, middling, and lesser capacities attain liberation through the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State. What enables those of superior capacity to attain liberation cannot enable those of middling capacity to do so, and still less those of lesser capacity. Thus, the methods of liberation differ for practitioners of superior, middling, and lesser capacities.

In the parentheses, the translator explains the stages of Esoteric Buddhist practice. That is, those who practice Esoteric Buddhism must begin with Exoteric Buddhism. If they do not understand its doctrinal principles, they cannot practice Esoteric Buddhism, for doctrinal principles are general principles, whereas esoteric practice consists of concrete methods. It is like studying: one must first understand the principles, and only then can one put them into practice.

The Pure Land school is the same: one must first understand the doctrinal principles and then recite the Buddha’s name—this is cultivation. If one does not understand any of the principles at all, how can one practice? Therefore, practice must begin with Exoteric Buddhism. After one’s study of doctrine has reached a certain level, it is best to enter Esoteric Buddhism only after penetrating emptiness.

To penetrate emptiness means to understand that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. One no longer takes emptiness to be inert emptiness, annihilationist emptiness, analytical emptiness, or emptiness realized through direct contemplation of dharmas, but understands the principle of wondrous presence and true emptiness, of true emptiness and wondrous presence. (For this passage, see “Background to the Translation, II.”)

Yet for those who have not cultivated Exoteric Buddhism to a sufficient degree, it is not easy to penetrate emptiness. Therefore, one should first penetrate emptiness and then engage in the actual practice of Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism is cultivated through such methods as mantra recitation and forming mudrās.

Compared with Exoteric Buddhism, it has the additional expedient of blessings—the power of blessing from Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

We have already discussed mantras. They are symbols transformed from the minds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in dhyāna. Reciting esoteric mantras is like sending telegrams to Buddhas and bodhisattvas: the mantra is the secret code, and the mudrā is like an antenna.

Through forming mudrās and reciting mantras, we can connect our own energy with the energy of the universe—that is, with the energy of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In this way, Buddhas and bodhisattvas bless us. Exoteric Buddhism relies entirely on one's own power; for example, Chan inquiry has no blessing-power from Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Therefore, Esoteric Buddhism has such expedient methods: they require comparatively less effort and make attainment comparatively easier. To enter Esoteric Buddhism, one must undergo “maṇḍala empowerment and receive the great Dharma.” A maṇḍala is a place of practice: a place is set up in which the recipient of the teaching receives empowerment. Empowerment is a ritual, for Buddhism originated in India.

At that time, when an Indian prince succeeded to the throne and was about to become king, a minister was invited to conduct a ritual for him; this ritual was empowerment. Therefore, out of respect, the transmission of esoteric Dharma likewise follows this custom by conducting an empowerment ceremony. The empowerment for each practice differs because the mantras used differ.

After empowerment and transmission of the Dharma, one progressively cultivates the two stages of generation and completion. “Generation” means bringing forth what was not previously present and cultivating visualization practices with form. The most elementary visualization practices are visualizations of the yidam, the maṇḍala, and so forth.

For example, to practice “oṃ, āḥ, hūṃ” is to visualize red, white, and blue light respectively issuing from the crown, throat, and heart of the yidam and entering our own hearts. Then all our habitual tendencies and impurities are consumed and removed. This is bringing forth what was not previously present, and it is a method of the generation stage.

The completion stage is to dissolve into emptiness what has been visualized as present from what was not present; even the light cannot be obtained. It is like being in the air all day without noticing that there is air: one must return to non-attainment. Thus the Heart Sūtra says: “Because there is nothing to attain, bodhisattvas, relying on prajñāpāramitā, attain anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi.” Non-

attainment is true attainment; to have something attained is incorrect. Thus, the completion stage ultimately returns to non-attainment.

The practice of Esoteric Buddhism should proceed gradually according to its stages and must not skip ahead. Nowadays, some people have not completed the preliminary stage properly but want to practice the next stage. For example, Dzogchen practice has two parts: Trekchö and Tögal. Some have not even completed Trekchö properly, yet they practice Tögal.

How can they attain accomplishment in this way? If Trekchö has not been completed, the mind is still moving. A moving mind is like a mirror that shakes while we look into it, so the image it reflects is unclear. Therefore, one must first complete the preliminary practice. Once it is complete, the mind is like a motionless mirror, and the reflected image appears vividly before one. Some people have not practiced Trekchö at all and do not even know what state is attained through accomplishing Trekchö, yet they practice Tögal. Is this not reckless? Therefore, it will not do to proceed recklessly without a teacher's transmission.

Whichever Dharma we practice—Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism—once practice reaches a certain level, it is the same: we can all realize our own luminosity and realize the mind and see one's true nature. Those who have reached this level are practitioners of superior capacity. When we ordinarily apply ourselves to practice and are about to open to our original nature and see it, the breath is about to cease.

At this point, most people become greatly alarmed: "Oh no! My breath is about to stop—I am going to die!" Frightened, they withdraw, which is most regrettable. Therefore, at this point one must not be afraid. To realize and see one's intrinsic nature and break free of this physical shell, the breath must cease. This is called "the empty sky shatters and the great earth sinks level."

Those of superior capacity have already realized this stage, so they are not afraid at death. They have already "died" before and are familiar with it; thus, they can attain liberation calmly and securely.

Therefore, those of superior capacity do not need the practice of deliverance in the intermediate state, nor do they need phowa. Even if they are somewhat bewildered at death, they can still attain liberation simply by following the "graduated stages of guidance." Guidance means telling them, "You are now emitting light. Merge with the luminosity, and you can attain liberation." Upon hearing this, they immediately awaken: "Oh! My luminosity has appeared." They then attain accomplishment. Therefore, applying oneself to practice while alive is of utmost importance.

Yogins of middling capacity will certainly attain liberation through this esoteric Dharma at the time of death. If they have not attained liberation, they will be liberated when the intermediate state of dharmatā appears. The period from three and a half to four days after life has ended is called the intermediate state of dharmatā. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing with utmost earnestness.

Even if those of middling capacity have not realized their intrinsic nature while alive, that does not matter. By relying on this practice of deliverance in the intermediate state, they will certainly attain liberation. This Dharma is especially sublime, for it repeatedly reminds us: what stage we are now in, what light is appearing, which Buddha has come to guide us, and which bodhisattva has come to protect and support us.

Thus, we attain liberation during the intermediate states—the intermediate state at the time of death, the intermediate state of dharmatā, and the intermediate state of becoming. With the aid of this esoteric Dharma, even those of the very lowest capacity need not be afraid. In “yogins of middling capacity,” yoga means correspondence: the Dharma we practice must correspond with our minds, and the minds of ordinary beings must correspond completely with the mind of the Buddha.

Above, one corresponds with the mind of the Buddha; below, one corresponds with the minds of sentient beings. Therefore, when practicing the Dharma, we must be wholeheartedly focused, deeply reverent, and utterly sincere. Only then can we cut off deluded thoughts and correspond with the Dharma. For example, practitioners of the Pure Land school must recite the Buddha’s name in correspondence with it. Merely voicing the Buddha’s name while the mind remains in turmoil is not correspondence.

In Buddha-recitation, one must have the mind recite and the ears hear. Mantra recitation is the same: one must hear the sound of the mantra clearly and distinctly, so that there is communion between mind and Buddha and the two become continuous and undivided. Only this is correspondence.

If those of middling capacity do not attain liberation during the three and a half to four days of the intermediate state at the time of death—when that intermediate state has two manifestations of light—there is no need to worry. If, because their karmic obstacles are heavy, they still do not awaken or attain liberation after many reminders, they can yet attain liberation when luminosity appears in the intermediate state of dharmatā, from the fifth through the eighteenth day after death.

For at that time Buddhas repeatedly emit light to guide us, and bodhisattvas come to protect and support us. Thus, liberation can still be attained during the

intermediate state of dharmatā. But we must be sincere and reverent toward this Dharma and must not regard it lightly. We should hold it earnestly in our hearts at every moment and never forget it.

I. The Practice of Phowa

First, when a yogic practitioner shows the signs of death (before ordinary people die, signs of death first appear; see “Preface”—“Important Points to Observe When Assisting the Deceased,” point 4), one should carefully observe them and thereby practice the method of self-liberation through observing the signs of death. When all the distinctive signs of death have appeared, perform the practice of Phowa. Recall the instructions and liberate yourself.

We have already explained in the preface that, whoever it may be, signs of death appear before the breath ceases. These include such phenomena as the body becoming heavy, breathing becoming labored, and the tongue swelling, among others. (See point 4 of “Important Points to Observe When Assisting the Deceased” in the preface.)

When assisting the deceased, we must carefully observe the dying person. If the person practiced Phowa during life, then, when the signs of death appear, instruct them as follows: “At this time, do not panic, do not suffer, and do not be reluctant to leave your family. Birth, aging, illness, and death are the ordinary course of human life.”

“Where there is birth, there must be death. Everyone dies; this is dialectics. Therefore, remain calm. Do not grieve, and do not let the mind become scattered.”

“Now the critical moment has arrived; the situation is most urgent. You have practiced Phowa, so now concentrate on visualizing the bindu being raised with a ‘Hey—’ to the crown of the head. Then visualize moving aside the feet of Amitābha Buddha or Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Then, with a ‘Pa—,’ the bindu goes out and enters the heart of Amitābha Buddha or Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.”

“You will then be able to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.” If the deceased did not practice Phowa during life, then, when the signs of death appear, the person assisting the deceased must help them practice it.

At that time, use visualization as before. The person assisting the deceased concentrates their breath in their hands, then pushes the breath upward from the soles of the deceased’s feet to the heart, then to the throat, and then to the crown of the head. While pushing, they visualize; finally, with a “Pa—,” they visualize the deceased’s consciousness-spirit leaving through the crown of the head. This method

is very effective. This final passage is extremely important for a person, so everyone may use this method to help the deceased.

If transference has already been accomplished—that is, if the consciousness-spirit has been transferred to the Pure Land through the practice of Phowa—there is no need to practice this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing. If this has not been accomplished, recite this teaching aloud beside the deceased's body. If the body is not present (see Note 1 for details), perform this practice while seated on the deceased's bed or at their residence.

How can one know whether the deceased's consciousness-spirit has already been transferred to the West? There is a method: measure the deceased's body temperature.

See whether the soles of the feet grow cold first, then the legs, then the abdomen, and then the chest, while the crown of the head remains warm at the end. This proves that the consciousness-spirit has departed through the crown of the head. This is called "sainthood at the crown," meaning that one has ascended to the Buddha's Pure Land. However, when checking, test gently; do not press too hard.

Nor should you press here once and there once. When a person is at the point of death, they suffer greatly; if you touch them, they may become intensely irritated. In the past, there was a king who also practiced the Buddhadharma. When he was about to depart, he had someone fan him to drive away the flies. By accident, the fan struck his head with a smack.

This was disastrous: in a fit of anger, the king became a python and could no longer ascend to the West. Therefore, do not check the body temperature here once and there once. Everyone must take note of this point. If the deceased's consciousness-spirit has already ascended to the Pure Land through the practice of Phowa, there is no need to practice the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State.

There is likewise no need to recite the scripture and mantras that follow. If the deceased's consciousness-spirit has not left through the crown of the head, this proves that they have not gone to the West. Then recite this esoteric teaching aloud beside the deceased. If there are many people in the deceased's room, it is best for one person to lead the recitation and for the others to recite along; the sound should not be excessively noisy.

[Note 1]

Note: If the deceased is far away, one may also request by letter a photograph taken during their lifetime, a corner of a garment worn close to the body, or an object

used by the deceased during life. Place it before oneself and call the deceased by name; the deceased may then respond to the call and arrive.

Note 1 tells us that if the deceased did not die at home but elsewhere—that is, if “the body is not present”—this is no problem. One may take a photograph, a corner of a garment worn close to the body (simply cut off one corner), or an object used by the deceased during life, place it before the deceased’s memorial tablet, and call their name.

If the person is named Zhang San, call out: “Zhang San, please come and receive the offerings. I will explain the Dharma to you and can help liberate you.” Speak to them in this way, and the deceased can respond to the call and arrive. Once a dead person’s consciousness-spirit emerges, it is freed from the physical body and no longer obstructed, and thus possesses spiritual powers—though not spiritual powers as complete as those of a Buddha, for it does not possess the supernatural power of the exhaustion of outflows. Even if separated by thousands or tens of thousands of miles, the deceased can still perceive it. When you call their name, they drift over at once, very quickly. Therefore, when such a situation arises, perform the practice in this way.

II. Instructions for Recitation

At this point, the ritual practitioner should first recite the following “Verse of the Power of Truth” three or seven times, summoning the spirit of the deceased to come before them and hear the Dharma.

Verse of the Power of Truth

(This verse must be recited before each performance of the ritual.)

By the power of my sincere intention and the blessing power of the Tathāgata,

And by the power of the dharma realm, whatever objects are contemplated

May, as appropriate, swiftly appear without obstruction.

The ritual practitioner—that is, the person assisting the deceased—should recite the “Verse of the Power of Truth” three to seven times before each performance of the ritual. “Truth” means ultimate truth, that is, true reality. “Power” means that we inherently possess every wondrous function and spiritual power; we possess genuine power. So long as we arouse the resolve and call the deceased by name, we can summon them, teach them the Dharma, and enable them to understand it. The “Verse of the Power of Truth” is explained below.

“I” refers to the ritual practitioner; “intention” means willingness and wholehearted sincerity; and “power” means strength. “By the power of my sincere intention” means that I wholeheartedly and willingly wish to assist this departed spirit and perform this good deed. I myself inherently possess this power, because everyone possesses the all-capable dharma nature.

So long as we act with wholehearted sincerity, together with the blessing power of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, we possess this power of sympathetic response. For at all times and in all places, whether or not we cultivate a practice, we cannot be apart from the blessing power of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the ten dharma realms—that is, the four noble and six ordinary realms.

Therefore, practitioners of the Pure Land school should not only recite Amitābha Buddha’s name, but also recite the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, seeking Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s blessings at every moment. The Buddha also says in the Lotus Sūtra: “This person practices the Lotus Sūtra and cultivates the Lotus samādhi; how should he be blessed?”

If we do good deeds, even spirits and deities will protect and support us. If we do evil deeds, not only will the Buddhas and bodhisattvas shake their heads at us —“How can this sentient being commit evil?”—but even spirits and deities will punish us. Thus, when we commonly say, “There are spirits three feet above one’s head,” this is what it means.

This is true. Do not think that no one sees a person doing evil. In fact, spirits and deities see everything with perfect clarity; you cannot hide it from them. Therefore, now that we are liberating a departed spirit and doing a good deed, we receive the blessings of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the powers of the ten dharma realms. The devas, dragons, and eight classes of beings will all protect and support us.

“Whatever objects are contemplated” refers to what I imagine and seek. “May, as appropriate” means that all can receive a sympathetic response. “Swiftly appear without obstruction” means that they can swiftly appear without any obstruction whatsoever.

Thus, the “Verse of the Power of Truth” means that, through my own power, together with the blessing power of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the ten dharma realms, whatever I seek can receive a sympathetic response. I can then accomplish this task and liberate the deceased, without any obstruction. Therefore, so long as we have not the slightest doubt, once we recite this verse, the deceased can arrive in response and swiftly appear before us.

Once the preceding verse has been recited, the spirit of the deceased has already been summoned. Immediately visualize them as having come to remain before you

and hear the Dharma, and begin reciting the scriptures. At this time, the deceased's relatives, loving spouses, and others must not weep, lest they hinder the performance of the ritual. When performing the ritual, if the body is present, then, as the deceased's outer breath is about to cease, a lama, a venerable accomplished master, a friend whom the deceased revered during life, or a fellow student or companion should bring their lips close to the deceased's ear—without touching it—and recite this esoteric teaching of liberation through hearing.

By reciting the “Verse of the Power of Truth” three to seven times, we can summon the spirit of the deceased. At that time, we visualize the departed spirit as having come before us to hear the Dharma. We may then recite the scriptures for the deceased. The general meaning of the scriptures is to tell the deceased: Do not let the mind become confused. Let go of everything, unite with the light, and you can be liberated.

Therefore, at this time the deceased's family members—their husband or wife, children, parents, and so forth—must not weep. Once they weep, the deceased's mind becomes confused and they can no longer take in this teaching. We weep here because we cannot bear to part from them; they too may weep because they cannot bear to part from us. In this way, their rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is hindered.

Practitioners of the Pure Land school say the same: when a person is dying, no one should weep; they should only help the person recite the Buddha's name. With the blessings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, they may be guided to rebirth in the West. If we cannot restrain ourselves at such a time, we should go outside to weep. For weeping in the room hinders both the deceased and the ritual practitioner.

When assisting the deceased, if the body is present, the ritual should be performed for the deceased while their outer breath is about to cease but has not yet stopped. It should be performed by a lama—that is, a Tibetan monastic, called a monk in Chinese regions—or by a venerable accomplished master, that is, one who has attained accomplishment in the Way, or by a friend whom the deceased revered during life—that is, someone whom the deceased deeply trusted and admired while alive.

If none of the above persons can be found, then find a companion who was congenial with the deceased and shared their outlook to perform the ritual. To enable the deceased to hear this esoteric teaching clearly, the practitioner should not remain too far away, but should bring their lips close to the deceased's ear without touching it, leaving a little space.

[Next] Main Explanation

III. Conducting the Recitation

In explaining the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing, first make offerings to the Three Jewels. Those of means who are able to prepare offerings should arrange them abundantly. If one's means are insufficient, one may concentrate the mind and visualize immeasurable, supremely fine offerings, manifested by the mind, filling all of space (that is, there are no materially existing offerings; rather, one visualizes and manifests innumerable excellent offerings filling empty space). Next, recite the following texts:

- (1) Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
- (2) Verses for Deliverance from the Perilous Passage of Fear in the Intermediate State
- (3) The Six Root Verses of the Intermediate State
- (4) Prayer of Aspiration for Deliverance from Fear in the Intermediate State

These four verse texts (all found in the appendix at the end of Volume Two) should each be recited three to seven times, according to the time available.

Before we recite the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing for the deceased, we must first make offerings to the Three Jewels. This is preparatory work for performing the ritual on behalf of the deceased. Offerings should accord with one's financial circumstances. If a family is wealthy and able to prepare offerings, it may offer more.

Because esoteric practice requires the establishment of an altar and the making of offerings, it may be said that Esoteric Buddhism is practiced by the wealthy. Elderly people may have seen an esoteric altar. In the past, an esoteric altar was set up at Jing'an Temple in Shanghai. It was solemnly arranged, richly supplied with offerings, and prepared with great care.

The offerings consisted of gold, silver, treasures, pearls, and agate, and required a great deal of money. The materials applied to the maṇḍala images were all precious, not ordinary pigments: yellow was gold, made by grinding gold into powder; green was jadeite; white was silver; and red was agate. Thus, the wealthy had the means to make offerings.

If we are relatively poor and unable to make offerings, then we offer according to our means and circumstances. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas do not discriminate between good and poor offerings. They will not say, "Because your offerings are good, I will bestow more blessings upon you; because you cannot make offerings, I

will ignore you.” That is the view of ordinary beings. Why, then, do we still prepare offerings? It is to express our wholehearted sincerity.

A Buddhist sūtra recounts that a beggar came to make an offering to the Buddha. After begging and begging, he finally obtained a little rice. He picked out the whole, round, good grains one by one. When Śākyamuni Buddha was teaching him the Dharma, he offered this small amount of rice, whereas affluent households did not think twice about offering ten or eight loads of rice.

Yet Śākyamuni Buddha said, “This beggar’s merit and virtue are exceedingly great. Although he is very poor, his heart is deeply sincere.” Therefore, we should make offerings according to our ability; they need not be extravagant. Those who have the means may offer more.

If one’s means are insufficient, one may visualize one’s small offering as large as Mount Sumeru, transforming it into immeasurable and boundless excellent offerings that fill all of space and pervade the dharma realm, to be offered to all Buddhas. This is visualized offering. Because our dharmatā fills empty space and pervades the dharma realm, we have this capacity.

It does not matter if there are no material things. So long as we visualize with all our heart and with sincere intention, that is sufficient. Thus we say that regularly making an offering of the incense of the mind is the finest and unsurpassed offering. Once the altar offerings have been arranged, we begin to recite the four verse texts mentioned above.

The first verse text is the Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The second verse text is the Verses for Deliverance from the Perilous Passage of Fear in the Intermediate State.

The third verse text is the Six Root Verses of the Intermediate State.

The fourth verse text is the Prayer of Aspiration for Deliverance from Fear in the Intermediate State.

We shall now explain them one by one:

Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (Recite this text before performing the ritual.)

Whenever a deceased person is approaching the end of life, one should first make an invocation and arouse vows. Before the Three Jewels, arrange materially existing offerings to the best of one’s ability, or, according to one’s own capacity, visualize a

vast ocean of offering clouds. Holding fragrant incense in one's hands, pay reverence with utmost sincerity, and make the following invocation and vows:

As we have already explained, before performing the ritual one must prepare offerings to the Three Jewels to the best of one's ability. The wealthy may offer more, and the poor may offer less.

If one truly has nothing, that is no obstacle. Wholeheartedly visualize offerings as vast as an ocean and as numerous as clouds in the sky. Then, holding fine incense in one's hands, invoke the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and pay homage to them with all one's sincerity. Next, make the invocation and vows according to the words below. (The preceding passage is only explanatory and should not be recited; what follows is the main text of the Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.)

All Buddhas and bodhisattvas, ever abiding throughout the ten directions,

Perfect in great loving-kindness and compassion, foreknowledge, and sacred vision.

The meaning of these lines is very simple, and everyone can understand it. They ask the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions to abide in the world always. In truth, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas have never left us. When Śākyamuni Buddha entered parinirvāṇa, he said, "I have not left you. Sentient beings with pure eyes can see me; those with clouded eyes think that I have left." In truth, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas do not abandon sentient beings and always abide in the world. Yet this does not mean abiding motionlessly in one place; it is nirvāṇa without abiding anywhere.

The Buddhas and bodhisattvas benefit sentient beings and are replete with great loving-kindness and great compassion. We can attain Buddhahood only by relying on sentient beings. If no sentient beings suffered, how could we arouse great compassion? Without great compassion, we would not make great vows; without great vows, there would be no great conduct. In the title Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, the character for "practice" is pronounced heng, as in conduct, and it arises from vows. Thus, sentient beings are our provisions for attaining Buddhahood. We must possess great loving-kindness and great compassion; without compassion, one can never attain Buddhahood.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas can know what happened in the past and what will happen in the future; this is "foreknowledge." Buddhas and bodhisattvas possess the functioning of the physical eye, heavenly eye, wisdom eye, and dharma eye, seeing everything; this is "sacred vision." We sentient beings are obscured by deluded thoughts, inverted views, and attachments, and thus cannot uncover these capacities.

So long as we diligently cultivate the Dharma and break through our deluded thoughts, inverted views, and attachments, these spiritual powers can manifest. After death, when people leave the physical body, they too can have foreknowledge and the heavenly eye and can see very far, though not as perfectly as the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

A refuge for sentient beings, never forsaking the vows of great compassion,

We pray that you descend and accept these offerings, both actual and mentally presented.

“Refuge” means something upon which one relies. That is, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are our support and continually protect and sustain us. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas indeed do not abandon their great compassionate vows to guide sentient beings; at every moment, hearing cries, they rescue beings from suffering. Therefore, we should pray for the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to descend to our altar and accept our wholehearted offerings—offerings actually upheld by our own intrinsic nature—and help us deliver this deceased person.

All compassionate venerable ones, with wisdom and wisdom, and compassion,

Your every undertaking possesses inconceivable power.

“All compassionate venerable ones” refers to the many Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Below, we shall see the various Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and holy mothers in each of the five directions—east, south, west, north, and center—very many indeed.

“Wisdom and wisdom” is one of the three wisdoms. The three wisdoms are all-knowledge, the wisdom of all-knowledge, and omniscience of all aspects.

All-knowledge means that our intrinsic nature possesses every kind of wisdom and can know everything. It includes the path of the Lesser Vehicle—the wisdom of arhats and pratyekabuddhas—and is collectively called all-knowledge. The wisdom of all-knowledge excludes the wisdom of the Lesser Vehicle’s arhats and pratyekabuddhas; only the wisdom of Buddhas and bodhisattvas is called wisdom and wisdom.

Omniscience of all aspects refers to all the various discriminating wisdoms and consciousnesses in the realm of distinctions. One must understand that the forms and appearances of all dharmas ultimately return to one—that is, they return to our Buddha-nature. Thus, all-knowledge, the wisdom of all-knowledge, and omniscience of all aspects differ in this way. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas possess incomparable compassion, perfect and unobstructed wisdom, and immense, inconceivable power.

For example, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva possesses immense power and can accomplish anything. When we cultivate to that level, we too shall have such great power. This power is beyond what our thinking can imagine; therefore it is called “inconceivable power.”

Now there is one named so-and-so, leaving this present world for that other place,
Departing this realm for another, already released from the body of flesh and blood.

When assisting the deceased, one must not say, “Now there is one named so-and-so”; one should say, “Now there is Zhang San,” or “Now there is Li Si.” Say whatever the deceased person’s name is. This passage means that the deceased has left the flesh-and-blood body of the present world and is going elsewhere.

Without reliance and without refuge, without rescue or aid,

The appearances now manifest are those of utmost and extreme suffering.

The day is already late, the road exhausted; leaving home for a foreign land,

As though entering a dark and shadowy place, lost and heading toward a precipice.

After death, once the intermediate-state body emerges, it drifts about everywhere, without support or reliance. People are accustomed to attachment, taking this body to be the self. Once they leave the body and see the corpse lying on the bed and hear family members weeping, they know that they have died.

At that time, they are deeply grieved and still want the body, trying to enter it again. But the physical shell has already decayed, and they cannot get back into it. Then they are utterly at a loss and uneasy, drifting east and west, whirling about everywhere like a headless fly. They have neither support nor anyone to protect or assist them.

It is truly agonizing! Moreover, at this time all the karmic obstacles he created during his lifetime appear before him scene by scene like a film: vicious dogs in pursuit, black winds and violent rain, hailstorms, yakṣas, tigers, wolves . . . it is terrifying beyond measure. There are also thunderous sounds—“Boom, boom, boom!”—and intense lights shining upon him.

There is truly no road left to take, as when the sun is about to set—the day is ending and the road is exhausted. His home no longer belongs to him, and attachment is of no use. He can only leave home for a foreign place, another dark and deserted place (you means deserted; ming means dark). In his bewilderment (wang means not knowing what to do), he sees three great precipices, transformed from his greed, anger, and ignorance, blocking his way. He is utterly distressed and terrified.

In terror, he rushes into a trackless forest, / Pursued by karmic force.

He may fall into a boundless wilderness, / Or drift upon the great ocean.

Mang means boundless and limitless. That is, the deceased, in panic and confusion, runs into an endless forest. Many dreadful forms pursue him from behind: tigers, wolves, ghosts, yakṣas, and so forth. These are all manifestations of karma he created during his lifetime. Some people cannot act freely; fleeing these adverse states, they run here and there until they are driven into hell, fall into a boundless wilderness, or hide in the great ocean.

The body has no freedom, / For karmic winds buffet and drive it.

He may enter the midst of battle, / And be seized by vicious enemies.

Karmic wind refers to the great wind brought about by karmic force. The Lotus Sūtra contains this line: “The karmic wind blows one down into the land of rākṣasa ghosts.” This means that if you do evil, this karmic wind will blow you into the land of rākṣasa ghosts—that is, into the realm of hungry ghosts.

Once, a physician asked a Chan master, “What does ‘the karmic wind blows one down into the land of rākṣasa ghosts’ mean?” The Chan master replied, “You are not fit to ask such a question.”

Upon hearing this, the physician became angry: “Ah! I am not fit to ask such a question?! Although I am not a great teacher, I am at least a great man of letters. How am I unfit to ask such a question?!” The Chan master then said, “Ah! This is precisely being blown down into the land of rākṣasa ghosts by the karmic wind.”

“I said only that you were not fit to ask such a question, and you immediately became angry. Is that not being blown down into the land of rākṣasa ghosts by the karmic wind?” This Chan master explained it very well. Whenever we become angry, we fall into the land of rākṣasa ghosts.

Therefore, we must be extremely careful! Some say, “Perhaps becoming angry once is no great matter?” No great matter indeed! Anger is karmic wind: it burns down your forest of merit and virtue and blows you into the land of rākṣasa ghosts. Because karmic winds buffet and drive one about, the intermediate-state body has no freedom and cannot be its own master. It may be blown into a battlefield, seized and hung up by enemies, and made to suffer terribly.

There is no place to take one in, / Or one encounters Yama’s messengers.

The ghostly guards are fully cruel; / To behold them is utterly terrifying.

Look: when people reach this point, there is no place left for them to find shelter. Their suffering has truly reached its extreme. Or they encounter messengers sent by King Yama—White Impermanence, Black Impermanence, yakṣas, and the like. These ghostly guards are exceedingly cruel. They throw you into cauldrons of boiling oil, impale you upon mountains of blades, and cast you into the eighteen levels of hell. Ah! It is truly dreadful, enough to fill one with fear at the very sight.

One undergoes all the sufferings of karmic fruition; / Without interval, one dies and revives.

The strength to struggle is exhausted; / One is cast about, utterly lonely and miserable.

The various sufferings endured during the intermediate state are all the results of karma created during our lifetime. Therefore, we must not do evil. Creating karma includes both wholesome and unwholesome karma. When we do good deeds, we create wholesome karma. For example, Buddha-recitation and cultivating Dharma practices are pure karma, which is very good. By creating wholesome karma, one may ascend to the heavens and enjoy blessings.

Doing evil is creating unwholesome karma, and one must descend into hell to suffer. In the Avīci Hell, one is made to die forever and yet can never truly die. One is stabbed to death with knives and then made to revive.

Why? So that one may suffer without cease. After reviving, one is thrown again into a cauldron of boiling oil. After being fried to death in the cauldron, one revives; after reviving, one must undergo the punishment of roasting, and after dying from that punishment, one revives again and goes on to suffer the punishment of mire.

The Avīci Hell makes you die and revive, revive and die again, without even a moment's interval, causing you to suffer forever. You suffer until all strength is exhausted and you no longer have the power to hold yourself up. This is what we commonly call the suffering of being cast adrift and displaced. Thus, during the intermediate state, people suffer beyond all bearing.

May all Buddhas and bodhisattvas / Extend their compassion and protection.

For those here awaiting rescue, / Be their refuge and support.

Bestow upon them the power of blessing, / Protecting them from the sufferings of the intermediate state.

Avert the red winds of karma, / And send back the terrors of Yama.

We make great vows and pray that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, in their compassion and pity, will rescue and protect the deceased. The deceased is also awaiting deliverance. We ask the Buddhas and bodhisattvas to grant him their grace and blessings, protect him—this is the power of blessing—give him something on which to rely, and free him from the various sufferings of the intermediate state. May they halt the red winds of the intermediate state—the great fiery light stirred up by karmic obstacles—send back Yama’s messengers, such as the ghostly guards who pursue life, and cause the adverse states manifested by karmic obstacles to vanish.

From the perilous, narrow passage of the intermediate state, / Safely rescue and deliver them.

Alas, great compassionate ones, / May you not forsake your compassion.

The deceased are in the perilous, narrow passage of the intermediate state. A gorge is a dangerous place hemmed in by two mountains, like the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River. They are in grave danger. They must be safely rescued and delivered so that they may escape danger. “Alas, great compassionate ones” is an appeal to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. This passage prays that the Buddhas and bodhisattvas will not abandon their vows of great compassion, but will pity and bless these deceased persons and rescue them all.

Do not forget your vast vows; / Enable them to escape all suffering.

We implore the Buddhas and bodhisattvas: / May your compassionate light shine upon them.

Having made their vast vows, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas will not forget them. Sentient beings should likewise always keep in mind the Four Vast Vows: “Sentient beings are boundless; I vow to liberate them. Afflictions are inexhaustible; I vow to eradicate them. Dharma gates are immeasurable; I vow to learn them. The Buddha Way is unsurpassed; I vow to attain it.” “Enable them to escape all suffering” means enabling the deceased to be freed from suffering. We earnestly implore the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, praying that their compassionate light may shine upon the deceased and bless all sentient beings.

With the hook of great compassionate light, / Do not let them enter the three lower realms.

Most noble ones of the Three Jewels, / May you compassionately embrace and receive them.

Bestow the power of great compassion, / Enabling them to escape the sufferings of the intermediate state.

This describes the great loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas: their light is like a hook that can catch hold of the deceased and prevent them from falling into the three lower realms. The three lower realms are the three evil destinies: hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. Among the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, the Buddha is the most supreme. We pray that the Buddha, in great compassion, will embrace and receive the departed spirit of the deceased, bestow grace and blessings, and by the power of great compassion enable the deceased to escape the sufferings of the intermediate state, rescue them from its adverse states, and further enable them to realize the dharmakāya or sambhogakāya, thereby leaving behind the three realms and the cycle of rebirth in the six realms.

The foregoing is the “Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.” Much of the content in these verses is repetitive. When reciting them, we may reorganize them and use only a few concise, essential lines, so long as we do not depart from their important meaning.

Verses for Deliverance from the Perilous Passage of Fear in the Intermediate State
(Recite this text before performing the ritual.)

(I)

Ever-abiding Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions,

Samantabhadra, peaceful and wrathful, and the oceanic assembly of holy beings,

The Buddhas and bodhisattvas are ever-abiding throughout the ten directions. They do not dwell in only one direction; rather, they are everywhere—in the east, south, west, north, the four intermediate directions, above, and below.

The “Samantabhadra” in these verses is not the Samantabhadra Bodhisattva spoken of in mainland China. In Tibetan, it refers to the Buddha Ādharma; translated into Chinese, this is Samantabhadra Tathāgata, namely the Mahāvairocana Buddha of Esoteric Buddhism—the dharmakāya Buddha, revered in Esoteric Buddhism as the first Buddha. As we have explained, “peaceful” refers to the compassionate, majestic, and perfect body of the Wheel of True Dharma.

“Wrathful” refers to the vajra body, the wrathful body that terrifies māras. Thus, “Samantabhadra,” “peaceful,” and “wrathful” refer to the body of the Wheel of True Dharma and the body of the Wheel of Command of Samantabhadra Tathāgata. “The oceanic assembly of holy beings” refers to the retinues surrounding the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who are as numerous as the ocean. Every Buddha has many retinues. For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss also has an oceanic assembly of holy beings: Amitābha Buddha is its teaching master, Avalokiteśvara

Bodhisattva is foremost, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva is second, and there are many, many other bodhisattvas.

Guru, yidam, ḍākinīs, and Dharma protectors,

Descend here; we earnestly implore you to heed and grant our request.

For every Dharma practice we cultivate, there is a yidam. For example, when cultivating the practice of phowa, if we cultivate Avalokiteśvara phowa, we take Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva as the yidam; if we cultivate Amitābha phowa, we take Amitābha Buddha as the yidam. Again, when cultivating the Cundī practice, we take Cundī Bodhisattva as the yidam. The yidam is our highest guru.

The bodhisattva retinues beneath the yidam are ḍākinīs, like the flying celestial beings depicted in our paintings. We earnestly implore the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the ḍākinīs, and the Dharma protectors to grant our request and descend upon this ritual site, helping us deliver the deceased.

With utmost sincerity, we take refuge in the guru and ḍākinīs.

With hearts of great compassion, / Pity us and descend to guide us.

“Utmost sincerity” means the utmost reverence, without the least deluded thought. “Taking refuge” means returning; “taking refuge with one’s life” means entrusting one’s entire life to the guru, ḍākinīs, Dharma protectors, and the like. That is, our very life and destiny must rely completely on the guru. Therefore, we pray that the yidam guru, in great compassion, will take pity on us and guide us.

(II)

Because of delusion, we wander in birth and death

Hearing, contemplation, and cultivation illuminate us in accordance with reality

All material forms are unobtainable; they are all like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows. Yet sentient beings are stubbornly deluded amid sights and sounds, taking them to be real and giving rise to all kinds of deluded emotional attachments. The root of such attachments lies in clinging to this physical body as oneself; thus, upon seeing something good, one thinks, “I want it; I love it.” Love is deluded attachment; when love arises, water flows downward.

Those who wish to be reborn in the Western Land of Utmost Bliss must not have romantic love. With romantic love, one cannot ascend to heaven. Thus love is the worst thing; it is the root of wandering in birth and death.

If we are to escape the six realms of rebirth, we must listen to the Buddha Dharma. After listening, we should also reflect: Is what the Buddha Dharma teaches the truth? Were the things I previously did and thought mistaken? Should they be corrected? After reflecting, one should actually practice. If one merely listens without reflecting, it is as though one had not heard it.

One may have listened and reflected, but without actual practice it is likewise as though one had not heard. Therefore, hearing, contemplation, and cultivation are all indispensable. “Illuminating in accordance with reality” means actually carrying out what we have heard and understood. To illuminate means to contemplate. When we contemplate with the mind, luminosity will appear.

The lineage guru guides us from the front

The Victorious Mother and ḍākinīs protect us from behind

The lineage guru is the guru who transmits the Dharma to us. He will help us and guide us in how to proceed. The Victorious Mother gives birth to all dharmas. As explained earlier, the Buddha Father represents the principal aspect of Buddha-nature, while that which gives rise to the various wondrous functions is the Buddha Mother. Mother means that which can give birth. Children are all born of their mothers.

Thus, all wondrous functions are born of the maternal source, while the maternal source is inherent in the principal aspect. This is the practice of the divine union. We must never give rise to lustful thoughts about it. This verse means that the lineage guru guides us from the front, while the Victorious Mother and ḍākinīs—including all devas, nāgas, and the eight classes of beings—protect us from behind.

May I be freed from the intermediate state’s fearful and perilous passage

And be escorted upward to the Buddha-land of perfect awakening

We pray to be freed from the various sufferings and terrifying evil circumstances of the intermediate state, and to be escorted to the pure lands of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Perfect awakening means attaining Buddhahood.

(III)

With blazing anger, we wander in birth and death

The luminosity of great perfect mirror wisdom shines forth

Chen means anger, and hui means losing one’s temper. “Blazing anger” means becoming enraged and flying into a violent rage, burning like a fierce fire. This is one

of the causes of wandering in birth and death. How wonderful it would be if we did not become angry at all. Yet we simply cannot manage it. People often become angry involuntarily; being able not to become angry is very difficult.

Those who cultivate the Dharma must diminish and diminish again, eliminating this bad habit. Of course, this cannot be accomplished in a day or two, but if we work at it day by day, we will succeed. When we transform the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom, it can clearly illuminate the great thousandfold world, and we transform consciousness into Buddhahood.

Vajrasattva guides us from the front

Māmakī Mother protects us from behind

In Esoteric Buddhism, there are the Five Buddhas of the five directions: east, south, west, north, and center. Vajrasattva is a Buddha of the east. The east signifies arising, while vajra means indestructible. Those who have read the Diamond Sūtra know that a vajra can destroy everything, while nothing can destroy it. Sattva means enlightened sentient being, that is, enabling all sentient beings to awaken.

Vajrasattva and the Samantabhadra Bodhisattva spoken of in China are one in essence but bear different names. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is the eldest son of all Buddhas. When he received a crown-touching prophecy from Mahāvairocana Tathāgata—Samantabhadra Tathāgata in Esoteric Buddhism—Mahāvairocana Tathāgata placed a vajra in his hand. Thus he is called Vajrasattva, and also Vajrapāṇi.

Vajrasattva holds a very high position in Esoteric Buddhism; he is its second Buddha. The first is Mahāvairocana Tathāgata. This verse means that Vajrasattva guides us from the front, while Māmakī Mother protects us from behind.

“Māmakī” is written in some places as “Mangmangji” and in others as “Momaoji.” Although the translations differ, their meaning is the same. Mā means mother, and makī means capable of giving birth. Māmakī Mother is the mother capable of giving birth to all kinds of wondrous practices. She protects us from behind. Why is this so? It is symbolic, again referring to the union of Buddha Father and Buddha Mother. The Buddha Father guides from the front, and the Buddha Mother escorts from behind.

May I be freed from the intermediate state’s fearful and perilous passage

And be escorted upward to the Buddha-land of perfect awakening

The meaning is the same as the last four lines of section (II).

(IV)

With blazing arrogance, we wander in birth and death

The luminosity of the wisdom of equality shines forth

Greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt are the five dull afflictions, which are very difficult to eliminate. Among a hundred people, I would say that all one hundred have anger. Everyone thinks this way: “Only I am the best; I am the highest; none of you are any good.” Such conceit and arrogance! Their tempers are great and their attachments very strong. This is called blazing arrogance.

Because of arrogance, one is not humble; the mind is neither empty nor pure, and luminosity cannot manifest. Thus the cycle of birth and death has no end. The Buddha has no arrogance; he sees all sentient beings as Buddhas. Therefore, if we see every sentient being as equal, there will be no arrogance.

Yet we humans do not even regard other humans equally, much less other sentient beings. We think ourselves lofty above all others, who are inferior to us. Other kinds of sentient beings, such as chickens and cats, matter even less to us. This is arrogance. We must transform the seventh consciousness into the wisdom of equality, remove attachment to self, and see all sentient beings as equal, equal, and equal again. Then we can emit great luminosity that clearly illuminates the great thousandfold world.

Ratnasambhava Tathāgata guides us from the front

Buddhalocanā Buddha Mother protects us from behind

Ratnasambhava Tathāgata is the Buddha of the south. Our intrinsic nature is a maṇi jewel, capable of producing countless treasures. When cultivation is accomplished, one possesses every treasure; this is Ratnasambhava Tathāgata. Ratnasambhava Buddha guides us from the front, while Buddhalocanā Buddha Mother protects us from behind. The name of this Buddha Mother is “Buddha Eye.” The Diamond Sūtra speaks of the Buddha eye, heavenly eye, dharma eye, fleshly eye, and wisdom eye. Buddhalocanā Buddha Mother signifies seeing everything and encompassing everything.

May I be freed from the intermediate state’s fearful and perilous passage

And be escorted upward to the Buddha-land of perfect awakening

The meaning is the same as the last four lines of section (II).

(V)

With blazing desire, we wander in birth and death

The luminosity of wondrous discerning wisdom shines forth

We humans are deluded and ignorant, insatiably greedy, with desires like a bottomless abyss. If we have a thousand, we want ten thousand; if we have ten thousand, we want a hundred thousand, a million, ten million, or a hundred million. There is never any satisfaction: the more, the better. Yet no matter how much you covet, you cannot take it with you. You come empty-handed and depart empty-handed.

Why is it said that after enjoying oneself in heaven, one must still descend into hell? Because having too much money and indulging in too much enjoyment is a crime! I think it is better to do more good deeds, but people are unwilling to do so. Hence, blazing desire leads to wandering in birth and death. In this way, one cannot escape the three realms. We must transform the sixth consciousness—our ordinary consciousness—into wondrous discerning wisdom.

Among our eight consciousnesses, the sixth consciousness has the strongest power and is especially prone to becoming attached to appearances, because it constantly follows the first five consciousnesses. If the sixth consciousness did not cause trouble, the first five consciousnesses would all be fine.

For example, our eyes constitute eye consciousness. Like a camera taking a photograph, they never discriminate what an appearance is, whether it is good or bad, or whether it is wanted. They merely pass direct perception to the sixth consciousness—that is, they transmit information to the sixth consciousness and let it decide.

The sixth consciousness constantly discriminates: “What is this? Is it good or bad? Do I want it?” It then sends the information to the seventh consciousness, which in turn passes it to the eighth consciousness to be stored. Thus things are stored in an endless cycle.

The more seeds are stored in the eighth consciousness, the more they increase, and it is never full—just as a small computer disk can contain an unknown amount of information. Whenever one encounters a matter with corresponding conditions, they manifest in response. Therefore, the sixth consciousness is very powerful. Our cultivation must begin with the sixth consciousness.

That is, we must constantly contemplate the sixth consciousness and prevent it from moving. When circumstances appear, do not pay attention to them. They are all false, so what is there to cling to? Simply live in accordance with conditions. By doing so, one can “transform the sixth and seventh at the causal stage; perfect the eighth

and first five at the stage of fruition." The sixth and seventh consciousnesses must be transformed at the causal stage before the eighth consciousness and the first five consciousnesses can be perfected.

Therefore, we should not pursue enjoyment, for enjoyment creates karma. Our minds should always be empty and pure; what matters most is to hold compassion in our hearts and liberate sentient beings. We must constantly contemplate and practice. This is the Dharma gate of contemplating the mind; it is Chan practice, the Chan school. If we never forget contemplation at every moment, we can realize the Way in no more than three to five years.

Yet people forget at every moment. As soon as circumstances present themselves, they forget and go running after those circumstances. Thus, the difficulty in our practice lies in not forgetting. If, amid walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, one never forgets to maintain contemplative awareness, there is no one who will fail to become a Buddha. On the other hand, it will not do to practice in a rigid, lifeless way.

Our practice must also be lively and vital. Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch said, "When encountering circumstances, mental functions arise," and "Do not cut off the hundred thoughts." This is what he meant.

In our practice, we should "inwardly not be carried along by deluded thoughts, and outwardly not be turned by circumstances." That is, whatever happens, do not keep calculating it over and over in the mind; do not abide in any circumstance, but let everything pass without leaving a trace. If we practice in this way, we will certainly attain realization. Thus, the first great difficulty in practice is not forgetting contemplative awareness; the second is being unable to avoid rigidly clinging to it. Rigid clinging is like dead water that does not harbor dragons; practice must be lively and vital. If we truly realize the wisdom of wondrous observation and no longer abide in appearances, we can radiate great light that illuminates everything without exception.

Amitābha Buddha guides us from the front;

the White-Robed Buddha Mother protects us from behind.

The Buddha of Immeasurable Light is Amitābha Buddha, a Buddha of the West. Translated, Amitābha means "Immeasurable Light" and "Immeasurable Life." Thus, Amitābha Buddha guides us from the front, while the White-Robed Buddha Mother protects us from behind. The White-Robed Buddha Mother is Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. We speak of White-Robed Avalokiteśvara because white robes signify purity free of defilement.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state;

may I be led upward to the Buddha-land of perfect enlightenment.

The meaning is the same as that of the last four lines of section (II).

(VI)

With jealousy blazing fiercely, one wanders in birth and death;

the light of the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done shines forth.

Jealousy is our worst habitual tendency. People's jealousy is very strong. If someone is even a little better than I am, I become jealous. Thus people are most prone to "red-eye disease": their eyes turn red with jealousy. If you are even a little better than I am, I spread rumors to slander you and pull you down.

This is very harmful. Jealousy is therefore as fierce as a blazing fire. Our wandering in birth and death is caused by greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. When the first five consciousnesses—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—are transformed into the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done, there is no need for discrimination. Whatever one wishes to see appears before one; whatever sound one wishes to hear can be heard. This is the shining forth of light.

Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata guides us from the front;

Tārā Buddha Mother protects us from behind.

Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata is the Tathāgata of the North. True emptiness is empty yet not empty, existent yet not existent; it is not annihilationist emptiness. Thus, the true emptiness of which we speak is emptiness emptied even of itself: this emptiness, too, must be emptied. If you abide in emptiness, it becomes annihilationist emptiness. When emptiness itself is emptied, this is called Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata. Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata guides from the front, while Tārā Buddha Mother protects from behind. Tārā means that nothing whatsoever is lacking; not even the slightest deficiency remains.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state;

may I be led upward to the Buddha-land of perfect enlightenment.

The meaning is the same as that of the last four lines of section (II).

(VII)

With ignorance blazing fiercely, one wanders in birth and death;

the light of the wisdom of the dharma realm's nature shines forth.

Everyone has greed, anger, and ignorance. The reason people have greed and anger is ignorance. If we were not ignorant, we would not become greedy. Knowing that everything is empty and false, what would there be to crave? It is because we do not understand that all appearances are empty and false, and take them to be truly existent, that our greed becomes insatiable.

Therefore, among greed, anger, and ignorance, ignorance is fundamental. If a person's ignorance is truly blazing fiercely, that person will wander in birth and death and eventually fall into the animal realm. Animals are very ignorant. Thus, ignorance is the root of wandering in birth and death. The wisdom of the dharma realm's essential nature refers to the light of our intrinsic nature, which has always been inherently present. When greed, anger, and ignorance are removed, the light of intrinsic nature appears.

Vairocana guides us from the front;

the Mother of Dharma Sovereignty protects us from behind.

Vairocana is the dharmakāya Buddha—the Mahāvairocana Tathāgata, also Samantabhadra Tathāgata. He is the Buddha of the central direction and guides from the front. Dharma sovereignty means being at ease with every dharma; fundamentally, there is not even any dharma. Dharmas are originally without dharma-nature and are all emptied; therefore, there is nothing with which one is not at ease. The Mother of Dharma Sovereignty means that all dharmas are fundamentally nonexistent.

Therefore, Śākyamuni Buddha's verse on transmitting the Dharma says: "The Dharma that is fundamentally Dharma has no dharma; the dharma of no dharma is also Dharma. Now, when transmitting the dharma of no dharma, how could any dharma ever be dharma?" Where is there any dharma? So long as there is a dharma, there is still attachment to dharmas. When dharmas are empty, attachment to dharmas also disappears. Nothing can be obtained; this is called the Mother of Dharma Sovereignty. She protects from behind.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state;

may I be led upward to the Buddha-land of perfect enlightenment.

The meaning is the same as that of the last four lines of section (II).

(VIII)

With the five poisons blazing fiercely, one wanders in birth and death;

the combined light of the four wisdoms shines forth.

The five poisons are the greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt discussed above. Because they blaze so fiercely, we wander in birth and death. The light of the four wisdoms refers to great perfect mirror wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done, and the wisdom of wondrous observation. When the light of these four wisdoms is joined together—excluding the wisdom of the dharma realm’s essential nature—it naturally shines brightly everywhere.

The Tathāgatas of the five families guide us from the front;

the Buddha Mothers of the five families protect us from behind.

We have already discussed the Buddhas of the five families of the east, south, west, north, and center: Vajrasattva in the east, Ratnasambhava Tathāgata in the south, Amitābha Buddha in the west, Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata in the north, and Vairocana in the center. The Tathāgatas of the five families guide us from the front, while the Buddha Mothers of the five families—Mother “Mamaki,” Buddha-Eye Buddha Mother, the White-Robed Buddha Mother, Tārā Buddha Mother, and the Mother of Dharma Sovereignty—protect us from behind.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state;

may I be led upward to the Buddha-land of perfect enlightenment.

The meaning is the same as that of the last four lines of section “II.”

(IX)

With deluded circumstances blazing fiercely, one wanders in birth and death;

the light that dispels fear shines forth.

“Deluded circumstances blazing fiercely” refers to the deluded circumstances of life and those of the intermediate state. In life, we cling to appearances; being deluded by appearances is deluded circumstance. After death, the intermediate-state body is likewise deluded by the circumstances of the intermediate state; this too is deluded circumstance. Because we are deluded by circumstances, we create karma, undergo retribution, and wander in birth and death. To dispel the terrifying appearances of the intermediate-state realm, we must illuminate them with light, so that we may attain liberation.

All wrathful deities guide us from the front;

all wrathful Mothers protect us from behind.

“Wrathful” refers to wrathful forms, also called the forms of Wisdom Kings, which can make people extremely fearful. The wrathful deities guide from the front, while

all the wrathful Mothers—where there are Buddha Fathers, there are Buddha Mothers—also manifest terrifying forms and escort us from behind.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state;

may I be led upward to the Buddha-land of perfect enlightenment.

The meaning is the same as that of the last four lines of section (II).

(X)

With habitual tendencies blazing fiercely, one wanders in birth and death;

the light of innate wisdom shines forth.

Habitual tendencies blazing fiercely means that every ordinary person's habitual attachments are very strong. We always think that things must be done this way, and that they will not do if done otherwise. For example, people from Sichuan, Hunan, and Guizhou all enjoy spicy food. Gradually they become accustomed to it, and without spice they cannot eat their meals. Habitual tendencies are habits gradually formed in this way.

Once such habits are formed, they are difficult to change. Take smoking, for example. Many people quit and then smoke again, smoke and then quit again, but even after repeated attempts they cannot give it up. In the end, they still smoke. Hence the saying: "Rivers and mountains may be changed, but one's disposition is hard to alter." This refers to how difficult our habitual tendencies are to change.

Those of us who study Buddhism must change these habitual tendencies. We must constantly go against them, oppose them, and struggle with them. When they demand one course, you must insist on doing otherwise and see whether you can get past it. Only then can habitual tendencies be changed and the light of wisdom appear. Thus, for those who have only just awakened, their habitual tendencies have merely been stirred a little; they remain deep and strong.

To eradicate habitual tendencies completely, one must undergo repeated tempering amid circumstances; they cannot be changed in a day or two. Therefore, Chan Master Guifeng said, "One must constantly remain aware." This is the conclusion reached through the practice of the great worthies of old. "One must constantly remain aware" means that, over a long period and at every moment, one observes and examines oneself to see whether one still commits these habitual tendencies.

Only by diminishing them again and again can one accord with the Way. People's habitual tendencies are simply too strong. For example, people want to eat chicken and shrimp; every day they kill chickens, creating who knows how much karma, and

who knows how many lives are contained in a bowl of shrimp. Others say, “I do not eat major meat; I do not eat pork. I eat minor meat, such as snails.” Alas! In eating a bowl of snails, who knows how many lives you consume? Thus, deeply rooted habitual tendencies must certainly be changed.

Innate wisdom refers to the fact that the light of our intrinsic nature has been present from birth, indeed from beginningless time. Yet innate ignorance accompanies it. Innate wisdom is constantly obscured by innate ignorance.

Someone asks, “If I now practice diligently and attain realization, will ignorance arise again in the future?” Such a person does not understand that ignorance is innate ignorance: from beginningless time, it has existed together with Buddha-nature. It is like a cow’s two horns. A calf is born with two horns; they do not grow one at a time.”

It is this innate ignorance that obscures our wisdom and causes us to cling to appearances and undergo retribution. If we break through and utterly eliminate ignorance, we will no longer be deluded, nor will we create karma and undergo retribution. It is like gold taken from a mine: before it is refined, it is mixed with sand and stone; once refined into pure gold, it will no longer be mixed with sand and stone. Thus, when we break through ignorance, we will no longer be deluded.

Heroic vidyādhara lead the way before me

The assembly of ḍākinīs protects me from behind

Heroic beings are wrathful manifestations one rank below Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Yet they are all wholesome beings who protect the Buddhadharma. For example, yakṣas can be very frightening, but they are also excellent Dharma protectors. Nowadays people perform the incense practice: “Incense, incense, incense...” Where does the incense come from? They are one group among the Eight Legions of Devas and Nāgas: the gandharvas, the incense-burning beings. The Eight Legions of Devas and Nāgas all protect us, and this is very good. They lead the way before us, while the assembly of ḍākinīs protects us from behind.

May I be delivered from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state

And be led onward to the Buddha-land of perfect awakening

The meaning is the same as that of the last four lines of section (II).

(XI)

May the element of space not become my enemy

May I personally behold the blue-light Buddha-land

May the element of water not become my enemy

May I personally behold the white-light Buddha-land

May the element of earth not become my enemy

May I personally behold the yellow-light Buddha-land

May the element of fire not become my enemy

May I personally behold the red-light Buddha-land

May the element of wind not become my enemy

May I personally behold the green-light Buddha-land

Buddha-nature has seven great elements: earth, water, fire, wind, space, the faculties, and consciousness. This verse speaks of five of them: earth, water, fire, wind, and space. The faculties and consciousness are not discussed here. The faculties are our five faculties, and consciousness is our discriminating mind. The five great elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space are the most important.

All mountains, rivers, lands, grasses, trees, and forests are formed from earth, water, fire, wind, and space. People simply do not know this, and do not believe it: how can mountains, rivers, and the great earth also be me? They think that only this body is me, and that mountains, rivers, and the great earth have nothing to do with me. They do not know that mountains, rivers, and the great earth are likewise formed from earth, water, fire, wind, and space.

Earth, water, fire, wind, and space are the five great elements within Buddha-nature. An element is like a seed, capable of growing things. For example, when rice seed is planted, rice grows and produces many grains. Likewise, the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space can give rise to very many things.

The earth, sun, moon, and stars all arise from them. The earth itself makes this quite clear: its crust is the earth element; its oceans, rivers, and groundwater are the water element; the underground fire that produces volcanic eruptions is the fire element; the earth's rotation and revolution belong to the wind element; and the earth is hollow within—if it were not hollow, how could it turn?—which belongs to the space element.

Thus, all things are the same: they are all ourselves. Because of ignorance, we take a small portion of earth, water, fire, and wind as ourselves and identify this physical body as the self. Yet this physical body is merely a pus-filled sac formed from the

union of the father's semen and the mother's blood; it grows into a human body in the womb, and people then take this body to be the self.

All this is due to deluded thoughts and attachment. Buddha-nature pervades empty space, extends throughout the dharma realm, and is present everywhere. So long as deluded thoughts do not stir, body, mind, and world all dissolve into emptiness, and nothing remains.

Then we understand that this earth is originally ourselves. Thus it is said: "One who gathers the myriad things back to oneself—is such a one not a sage?!" A sage understands this principle: all the myriad things are oneself. As the wife of Layman Pang said: "Easy, easy, easy—the meaning that came from the West is atop the hundred grasses." The hundred grasses do not refer only to grass, but describe all things. Among all things and events, what is not me?! All are myself. We must understand this principle.

The sūtras say: "May the element of space not become my enemy." When we see a great void, we should not be afraid. Someone told me, "While meditating, a huge void suddenly appeared. I was about to fall into it. I was terrified!" That is the space element appearing; do not be afraid. If you are still afraid while practicing meditation now, you will be even more afraid when you reach the realm of the intermediate state.

"May I personally behold the blue-light Buddha-land." We know that when the weather is clear, the sky becomes blue. A cloudless, azure sky is blue light. Why is this so? Because our intrinsic nature itself possesses seven-colored luminosity, and the space element belongs to the blue-light Buddha-land.

"May the element of water not become my enemy; may I personally behold the white-light Buddha-land." The water element belongs to white light, which is also inherent in our intrinsic nature. Therefore, when we see a great flood, we should not be afraid.

"May the element of earth not become my enemy; may I personally behold the yellow-light Buddha-land." Why is the earth element yellow light? Because the Buddha's land has golden ground, it is called the yellow-light Buddha-land. All these are inherent in the luminosity of our intrinsic nature. Therefore, when we see a vast, uninhabited, boundless expanse of land, we should not be afraid.

"May the element of fire not become my enemy; may I personally behold the red-light Buddha-land." A great fire is red light. When we see a great fire, we should not be afraid; it is all manifested by our own nature.

“May the element of wind not become my enemy; may I personally behold the green-light Buddha-land.” The wind element is the appearance of green light. When a great wind arises, do not be afraid; this too is manifested by our own nature.

May all rainbow light not become my enemy

May I personally behold all Buddha-lands

After earth, water, fire, wind, and space, rainbow light appears. Rainbow light is the great luminosity radiated when the Buddha-lights of all the above colors unite as one, just as the sun radiates when its seven-colored lights merge together. May this rainbow light not become my enemy; may I personally behold all Buddha-lands.

May I know all radiances to be my own radiance

May I personally recognize the appearances of the intermediate state

May I directly realize the three kāyas within the intermediate state

During the intermediate-state period, there are also sounds of explosions, thunderclaps, and great firecrackers. Know that these sounds are manifested by one’s own nature; they do not come from outside. Therefore, do not be afraid. Our own nature possesses this capacity and these sounds.

The red, blue, white, green, yellow, and all other lights that we see are also lights emitted by ourselves; they do not come from outside. Hui means radiant light. The glittering, flickering light that shines forth is called hui. All appearances in the intermediate state are manifested by our own intrinsic nature; they are not something else. May we directly realize all the appearances and dharmas of the intermediate state, as well as the three kāyas—the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya.

The foregoing material has been compiled from recordings of Master Yuanyin’s explanations. The Six Root Verses of the Intermediate State and the Prayer of Aspiration for Deliverance from Fear in the Intermediate State may be found in the appendix. What follows are the original text and original preface compiled and translated by the lay practitioner Sun Jingfeng.

Chapter 1: Changes at the Time of Death

Section One: Instructions on the Intermediate State at the Time of Death

A. Instructions on the First Clear Light in the Initial Phase of the Intermediate State

First, in the “intermediate state at the time of death” (the clear light is the innate original light, possessed by everyone in the dharmatā, which now manifests; see detailed note five), for those who still find it difficult to become thoroughly practiced and proficient in the instructions of the sūtras, or for ordinary beings who have already received the stages of guidance, perform this practice so that they may recognize the luminosity of their own essence, thoroughly penetrate the source within the emptiness devoid of substantial meaning, soar straight upward, and immediately realize the unborn dharmakāya. The procedure is as follows:

A. Instructions on the First Clear Light in the Initial Phase of the Intermediate State

First, for those in the “intermediate state at the time of death” (the clear light—the innate light complete in everyone within dharmatā—now manifests; see detailed note 5 in the appendix) who still find it difficult to become thoroughly familiar with and master the instructions given in the scripture, or for ordinary beings who have already received the successive guidance, perform this practice so that they may recognize the luminosity of their fundamental nature, penetrate the source within the emptiness devoid of substantial meaning, soar straight upward, and immediately realize the unborn dharmakāya. The procedure is as follows:

IV. Instructions for Practice

If, when one encounters a deceased person, it is possible to invite the lineage master of Esoteric Buddhism from whom that person received empowerment, this is most excellent. Failing that, one should seek a fellow practitioner and Dharma companion who received the samaya precepts together with the deceased, or a genuine spiritual friend of the same Dharma lineage. If none can be found, one should seek an intelligent person who clearly understands the words and meaning of this text and can read aloud fluently in a clear voice, and have that person recite it repeatedly in accordance with the scripture. Upon hearing this Dharma, the dying person will certainly recall the meaning of the master's instructions and, without

interval, recognize the intrinsic clear light and attain liberation. There can be no doubt of this.

When performing the practice, it should be done after the outer breath has ceased and the light of wind and wisdom has entered the “central channel avadhūtī” (the light of wind and wisdom is what the lay practitioners Zhang and Zhao translated from the English text as “psychic heat”).

The Sanskrit avadhūtī, also called awadhūtī, is the central channel within the human body. Our life-channel is contained here; external winds also gather here and are enveloped by the wind-energy that sustains life (that is, the light of wind and wisdom). It never moves: if it moves, illness arises; if it opens, death follows.). Consciousness then further manifests as the clear light free from conceptual elaboration (that is, the intrinsic clear light free from conceptual elaboration).

Then the breath reverses course and escapes from the central channel into the left and right channels. At this time, the appearances of the “intermediate state” suddenly arise. The practice must be performed while the breath in the left and right channels has not yet disappeared. The required period is while the inner breath remains, approximately the time of one meal (about twenty or thirty minutes).

When the deceased person's breath is about to cease but has not yet stopped, the practitioner should first perform the practice of phowa, the transference of consciousness for rebirth, enabling the person to accomplish transference. If this has not been accomplished, call the deceased by name, recite the following text, and tell them:

(1) Instructions on Seeking the Great Way Through the Clear Light (Recite this text when the outer breath is about to cease but has not yet stopped.)

Alas! Good son [name] (if female, say “good woman”; the same applies hereafter): the time has now come for you to seek the true great Way. Your breath is ceasing but has not yet ended. In the “intermediate state,” regarding what is called the initial clear light, you must first recall the meaning of your master's instructions.

When your breath thereafter ceases completely, amid the limpid, empty quiescence of all dharmas, with nothing remaining, clear emptiness appears—boundless within emptiness, wholly transparent, naked, and undefiled. At that time, your own inner wisdom of realization (this wisdom is the lucid wisdom inherent in us from the very beginning, the appearance of inner realization; it is the luminous essence of wisdom in one's own mind. For details, see such sūtras as the Prajñā and Avataṃsaka.) suddenly appears. Know that this is your Original Face. I too shall at that time assist you with these instructions.

Give the foregoing instruction into the deceased person's ear before the outer breath ceases—that is, before the final exhalation. Repeatedly exhort them, without counting the repetitions, so that it is deeply impressed upon the deceased person's mind.

Then, before the outer breath has ceased, the body should be repositioned in advance. Have the person lie on the right side in the lion's posture (lying on the right side, with the left leg bent; place the left palm over the left kneecap, support the right cheek with the right hand, and close the right nostril with the little finger, leaving only the left nostril for exhalation. This is the auspicious sleeping posture in Esoteric Buddhism). Then count the pulse.

If the deceased appears to have fallen into sleep and the pulse temporarily stops, press firmly and urgently, but only enough to prevent sleep. At that time, the light of wind and wisdom can remain in the “central channel *avadhūtī*” and will not reverse course again. The person's consciousness will certainly depart through the brahma aperture at the crown of the head (see Note Two).

[Note Two]

Note: The human body has nine apertures: the two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, one mouth, one urethra, and one anus. In addition to these nine apertures, there is another aperture at the exact center of the crown, called the brahma aperture. For practitioners of phowa, the so-called opening of the crown and insertion of a blade of grass refers to this aperture.

When ordinary people are dying, only if their consciousness leaves the body through this aperture are they on the proper path to rebirth. If it leaves through any other aperture, they fall into the course of *saṃsāra*. As the *sūtras* say: “From the crown, sages depart; from the eyes, one rises to heaven; from the chest, to hungry ghosts; from the abdomen, to animals; from the knees downward, to the hells.”

This means that when a person is dying and the outer breath has ceased, if the body grows cold from above downward to the soles of the feet, yet the soles still feel warm to the touch, this is a sign of rebirth in hell. Because of the gravity of evil karma, consciousness leaves the body through the lowly anus; thus one knows that the person has fallen into hell. If it leaves through the eyes, one is born in the heavenly realm. Such are indeed the principles of karmic causation and rebirth, of rising and sinking in the cycle.

Although instructions have been given beforehand, the practice must still be performed at that time. What is called the initial Dharma-nature clear light of the intermediate state, which is also the mind-seal of the *dharmakāya*, then appears

and does not return. It is the single source from which the continuity of saṃsāra of all sentient beings arises.

Moreover, when the outer breath has ceased but the inner breath has not yet ended—that is, when wind (here, wind refers to the light of wind and wisdom) enters the awadhūtī—this is what ordinary people call the “state of swooning” (a general term for fainting or unconsciousness; Western medicine calls it apparent death. At this time, consciousness has not yet completely left the body). The duration of this state is not fixed; it depends on the quality of the body and the sequence of the channels and winds.

In general, those who have cultivated steadily, whose meditative stability is firm, and whose channels are relatively superior remain in this state longer. Taking advantage of this crucial moment, give these instructions repeatedly and earnestly, encouraging them to arouse the resolve. This must be done before yellow fluid emerges from the apertures (after the outer breath has ceased, wind practitioners will inevitably have yellow fluid discharge from one aperture).

For those who committed many evil acts in life and whose vitality and meditative strength are weak, this fluid emerges especially quickly. In the quickest cases it flows out immediately after the breath stops; in slower cases, it may take as long as the time of a meal. The slower it is, the better.). One must repeat the practice again and again. For those of extremely grave evil karma or weak channels, the fluid may emerge so quickly that they cannot remain even for the snap of a finger. Others can remain for the duration of one meal.

According to the scriptures: “An ordinary person's swoon lasts three and a half days” (other scriptures also state a period of four days; for those with meditative strength, it may be extended to one seven-day period). Therefore, ordinary people can remain for three and a half days before realizing the clear light. These instructions should be given urgently and with great earnestness.

When practitioners are dying, if they have the ability to practice on their own, they will naturally accord with it and enter realization of the clear light, without needing another's assistance. If they lack such ability, select a Dharma companion whose mind and wisdom are in accord with theirs (meaning one whose mind is united with that of the deceased) to remain at the bedside. For the instructions on the dissolution of the four elements (see Note Three), call the deceased by name, recite the following text, and tell them:

(2) Instructions on the Dissolution of the Four Elements (Recite this text together with text (1) before the breath ceases.)

Now the signs of the “earth element” dissolving into the “water element” are appearing! (Note: Two further sentences should occur here: “the water element dissolves into the fire element” and “the fire element dissolves into the wind element.” Any lama performing this practice can add and recite them. They were omitted from the original scripture, but the practitioner must recite them in sequence.)

[Note Three]

The human body is formed by the union of the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. At death, the four elements disintegrate in a fixed sequence. First, earth dissolves into water, and one feels the suffering of being crushed beneath a mountain. Next, water dissolves into fire, and one feels cold and damp, as though immersed in icy water. Then the cold dampness vanishes and becomes moist heat, as though one were in hot water.

Next, fire dissolves into wind, and one feels the body blown by wind and transformed into fine dust. When the four elements disintegrate, the suffering is as unbearable as stripping the shell from a living tortoise. Only those who have cultivated in ordinary times, know in advance that their time has come, and are welcomed by the Buddhas with empowering strength may have this suffering reduced or avoided.

As each sign of death appears in the deceased, the person performing the practice must, in a soft and low voice, repeatedly exhort and call to them at the ear:

Attend carefully! Attend carefully! Please arouse the noble mind; listen attentively and do not become confused.

If the deceased is a teacher, elder, or senior, simply add this exhortation: “Revered teacher! (or honored elder), please focus your attention carefully!”

For Dharma brothers and sisters of the Vajra family, or for ordinary people, call them by name and recite the following verses for arousing the resolve to recognize the clear light at the time of death (see Note Four), telling them:

(3) Verses for Arousing the Resolve to Recognize the Clear Light at the Time of Death (Recite this text when the outer breath is about to cease, together with the preceding text (2) and the following text (4).)

Alas! Good son [name], what is called death is now upon you! You should reflect and arouse this noble resolve, saying to yourself: “Alas! The time of my death has now arrived. In this condition of death, I must vigorously arouse the compassionate mind of bodhicitta.”

For the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings throughout the realm of space, within this very state attain the supreme siddhi of Mahāmudrā (Mahāmudrā is one of the great Tibetan practices of accomplishment; siddhi means attainment). Having attained it, benefit all sentient beings. Even if you do not attain it in this life, recognize it in the state of the “intermediate state” and attain the “Mahāmudrā body of union in the intermediate state.” Manifest in response to conditions, benefiting and bringing happiness to all sentient beings equal to space. Focus your mind, arouse the resolve to accord with this, and hold fast without relinquishing it. You must also remember without losing the instructions transmitted by your master and the regular practices you have cultivated in daily life.

[Note Four]

The sequence in which the four elements dissolve at the beginning of death has already been described in Note Three above. After the wind element dissolves, it next dissolves into the [space element]. At the end of the final breath, all the blood in the body is gathered into the central channel avadhūtī. At this time, three drops of blood throb in sequence, and three long breaths are exhaled.

The first exhalation extends one cubit, the second two cubits, and the third four cubits; then the outer breath ceases completely. Then the white clear drop bestowed by the father at conception rapidly descends from the crown of the head, giving rise to various experiences of knowing.

These are divided into outer and inner modes of awareness. Outer awareness is like the scene of moonlight shining brightly; inner awareness is like a hazy, mist-filled state. These are signs of the clear light appearing at the beginning of death. In the technical terminology of Esoteric Buddhism, they are called the states of [clarity], [increase], and [attainment], a process that must be undergone at the beginning of death.

First, one experiences the appearance of the clear light; then the red clear drop bestowed by the mother at conception rises swiftly from below the navel. Outwardly, it is experienced as a scene like sunlight shining; inwardly, it is like the light of drifting fireflies. This is called the “appearance stage.” Before long, one passes into the “increase stage.” At this time, the white and red clear drops unite, and the consciousness within the mind also unites at the same time.

Outwardly, it is experienced as the dark, moonlike shadow that appears within the sun during a solar eclipse; inwardly, it is like an oil lamp covered with a translucent shade. This is called the “attainment stage.” From this, one further enters the “near-attainment stage.” At this time, everything is empty, with nothing whatsoever.

Outwardly, it appears like the dawning light in the eastern sky at daybreak; inwardly, it is like a clear sky stretching for ten thousand miles without a cloud. The three stages of appearance, increase, and attainment described above, extending to “near-attainment,” are the initial course experienced after death: after the dissolution of the five elements, from the earth element through to near-attainment.

At the stage of “near-attainment,” the clear light appears. This is also called the “clear light of death.” It lasts only a very brief time. If one has cultivated in ordinary times, upon seeing this clear light of death one can recognize it. Like a child meeting its mother, the two lights of mother and child merge into one; then, without passing through the intermediate state, one manifests the Dharma nature. Otherwise, the intermediate state appears again.

From the dissolution of the wind element into the space element ... until the appearance of the near-attainment stage, this is the first instant after death. What is meant by persons of the highest capacity not passing through the intermediate state and attaining Buddhahood as the dharmakāya occurs precisely at this time. Thereafter, one descends into the second instant, which is therefore the sambhogakāya intermediate state. After death, when a person’s breathing has completely ceased and all consciousness has been lost, only the hearing of the ear faculty remains distinctly clear. Even if one was deaf during life, this presents no obstacle. Therefore, when these instructions on the clear light are given, they are most easily understood, and liberation may be attained.

The ritual practitioner places his lips close to the ear. His voice must be extremely clear, without allowing a single instant of deluded thought to intrude, so that the deceased may experience it. When the outer breath has completely ceased, he should firmly press the pulse points on both sides and clearly say the following. If the deceased is one’s teacher or a spiritual friend more venerable than oneself, say: “Venerable one, the clear light of suchness itself is now appearing before you. Please begin the practice at once.”

If the deceased is a peer or another person, inform them by means of the following “Direct Instructions on the Clear Light”:

(4) Direct Instructions on the Clear Light (Recite this text several times into the deceased person’s ear when the outer breath is about to cease but has not yet stopped.)

Alas! Good son (name), listen attentively and do not let your mind be distracted! The wondrous, clear, pure light of Dharma nature is now beginning to appear before you. You must recognize it at once.

Alas! Good son (name), your present consciousness is the body of self-realized wisdom itself: bright and radiant. No substantial entity, form, appearance, color, or intrinsic nature can be found; it is empty, lucid, and clear. This is Samantabhadrī, Mother of the Dharma Nature. Through your own inwardly realized wisdom, within the original emptiness, it is empty, quiescent, and open. Your own inwardly realized wisdom, quiescent yet illuminating, is never extinguished, radiant and resplendent. This is Samantabhadra Tathāgata of realized wisdom.

(For the phrases “Samantabhadrī, Mother of the Dharma Nature” and “Samantabhadra Tathāgata,” see the notes appended below.) In your own inwardly realized wisdom, no substantial entity whatsoever can be found; its essence and characteristics are empty and quiescent. Your own inwardly realized wisdom abides resplendently and clearly, beyond all discrimination. This is the Tathāgata’s dharmakāya. Luminosity and emptiness are inseparable; abiding within the great mass of light, this is the indestructible Buddha of light beyond birth and death. Recognizing this is supreme. Recognize the empty and luminous nature of your own inwardly realized wisdom as Buddha; seeing it directly for yourself within that inwardly realized wisdom is to abide within the Buddha’s mind-seal.

Recite the foregoing aloud and clearly three to seven times. Once the deceased understands it, first, they recall the guru’s instructions; second, they experience their own inwardly realized wisdom as utterly bare and undefiled, and realize that it is the clear light; third, they recognize their own Original Face, become the dharmakāya beyond separation and union, and are certainly liberated.

B. Instructions on the Second Clear Light in the Second Phase of the Intermediate State

B. Instructions on the Second Clear Light in the Second Phase of the Intermediate State

If the deceased can recognize the initial Clear Light (that is, the Clear Light of the initial phase described above), liberation is attained at once. If recognition is not possible and fear, doubt, and terror arise, the so-called Second Clear Light will appear before them. It arises after the outer breath has ceased, in about the time it takes to eat a meal.

According to the force of the wholesome or unwholesome karma accumulated during life, the light of wind and awareness escapes from the central channel into the left and right channels, then emerges through the openings of the sense faculties. The consciousness suddenly becomes clear and open, for approximately the time it takes to eat a meal; this also depends on the quality of the channels and

on whether cultivation has been practiced. At that time, consciousness leaves the body. One does not yet realize that one has died, and may see one's relatives just as in life and also hear their weeping. At this time, karmic delusions have arisen, but fierce appearances have not yet manifested, and the terrors of Yama have not yet arrived. The person performing the rite should urgently give the following instructions.

Here, practitioners are further divided into practitioners of the Completion Stage and practitioners of the Generation Stage. (Yogis who have received Esoteric teachings and have begun to enter into contemplation of the yidam maṇḍala are called practitioners of the Generation Stage; those who subsequently cultivate the winds, channels, and luminous drops within their own bodies are called practitioners of the Completion Stage.)

For a practitioner of the Completion Stage, call the person's name three times and give guidance according to item (4) in the preceding section, "Direct Instructions on the Clear Light." For a practitioner of the Generation Stage, recite aloud the visualization of the yidam and maṇḍala that the person had habitually cultivated and mastered during life. That is, call the deceased by name, recite the following text, and say:

(5) Visualization of the Yidam and Maṇḍala (Recite this text repeatedly, beginning about half an hour after the deceased has stopped breathing.)

Alas! Good son [name]: enter into contemplation of the yidam you have personally revered. (This refers to the yidam cultivated and revered by the deceased during life. If one practiced the method of Avalokiteśvara, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is one's yidam; if one practiced the method of Mañjuśrī or Amitābha, then Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva or Amitābha Buddha is one's yidam.) Do not let your mind become distracted. Strive earnestly and long for it; concentrate upon the yidam. Contemplate all appearances as without inherent nature, like the moon reflected in water. Never regard them as substantial realities.

After clearly informing the person in this way, if the deceased is an ordinary person (that is, an ordinary person who has not received any teachings of either Exoteric or Esoteric Buddhism), say:

You should contemplate and cultivate Great Compassionate Avalokiteśvara. (The Avalokiteśvara transmitted in Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism has two faces and four arms; see the image at the beginning of this volume.)

Having spoken thus, instruct the deceased how to visualize. Even if one did not recognize [the Clear Light] during the "earlier intermediate state," one can recognize it at this time; do not doubt it. Further, if one received instruction from a teacher

during life but did not cultivate it sufficiently to become proficient, and therefore cannot personally recognize the Clear Light in the intermediate state, then a guru or a fellow practitioner must provide guidance and explanation.

Further, even if one was able to cultivate proficiently, but at the time of death was afflicted by severe illness and could not remember and recognize it, these instructions on the intermediate state are indispensable.

Further, if one had become proficient in cultivation during life but had violated one's vows and lost one's samaya (pledges), thereby entering an evil realm, these instructions must on no account be omitted. In sum, if recognition can be attained in the "initial intermediate state," that is best of all. If it cannot be attained, then through clear guidance in the "second-phase intermediate state," the wisdom of recognition can become lucid, and liberation may still be attained.

Further, at the time of the intermediate state, one possesses a kind of "illusory body" and does not yet know whether one is dead or not dead. When consciousness suddenly becomes clear and open, and one realizes the meaning of these instructions, the mother and child lights naturally meet (see Note Five), shining brilliantly and incapable of being defiled. Just as sunlight dispels darkness, this radiance destroys karmic force, and liberation is attained.

Next, the so-called "second-phase intermediate state" gradually arises and manifests as a mind-born body. The deceased can see appearances just as one saw them during life. If one can recognize these instructions at that time, one will naturally benefit. For at this time, the delusive appearances of karma have not yet arisen, and everything can readily be transformed.

[Note Five]

The mother light arises from one's own dharmatā; it does not come from outside. The child light is obtained through one's own regular cultivation; it does not arise from within. In other words, the mother light is one's own fundamental light, while the child light is the Buddha-light.

During the three and a half days after death, the Clear Light manifests twice. When consciousness suddenly becomes clear and open, if one realizes the meaning of these instructions as recited by the person performing the rite, the mother and child lights mutually absorb one another. Like a child meeting its mother and entering her embrace, one becomes a Buddha.

When practitioners cultivate the Generation Stage during life, they visualize, in order to practice the fusion of the two lights, the Buddha-light of the yidam being invited to merge with their own mother light. The light visualized through this power of

visualization is called “empty light”; it is not the actual child light. If one has practiced the Dharma during life and is well trained, then when the initial intermediate state manifests after death and the true child light is invited forth, it may joyfully unite as a child meeting its mother, without the danger of failing to recognize one another upon meeting. These instructions are therefore used to guide deceased persons who had no cultivation during life, so as to liberate them.

Section Two: Instructions on the Intermediate State of Dharmatā

C. Instructions for the Third Phase of the Intermediate State

C. Instructions for the Third Phase of the Intermediate State (The third phase of the intermediate state is the Intermediate State of Dharmatā.)

Although the foregoing instructions may not enable one to recognize the clear light of the ground of being (that is, the clear light of the initial phase of the intermediate state), those who can recognize the clear light of the second phase of the intermediate state will attain liberation. If the deceased is bound by karma and, after the above instructions have been given repeatedly, their consciousness is not reached and liberation is not attained, then what is called the “third phase of the intermediate state,” namely the “Intermediate State of Dharmatā,” immediately arises.

This third phase of the intermediate state is counted from three and a half or four days after the Intermediate State at the Time of Death. Karmically produced illusory, confusing, and bewildering appearances then arise before one. At that time, these esoteric instructions for the Intermediate State of Dharmatā must be recited urgently; this is of the utmost importance. The power and benefit of this teaching are exceedingly great.

At this time, the consciousness of the deceased, as if newly awakened from sleep or a dream, is relatively clear. Although they can see their relatives weeping and wailing, clearing away the eating utensils, removing and changing clothing, tidying the bedclothes, and cleaning the room, none of those people can see them. Although they can hear what others say, when they call to them, there is no response at all.

Their mind then becomes distressed, and they realize that they have died. Seeking rebirth, they linger uncertainly, wanting to depart. At that time, the three kinds of appearances—"sound," "light," and "rays"—all arise before them. They become exhausted amid the three conditions of "terror," "dread," and "fear," not knowing where to go. At that time, these "Esoteric Instructions for the Intermediate State of Dharmatā" must urgently be administered: call out their name and recite the following verse, proclaiming it aloud:

(6) Instructions on the Intermediate State of Dharmatā and the Six Essential Verses (Recite this text repeatedly, as much as possible, before the fourth day after death.)

Alas! Good son (so-and-so), do not let your mind be scattered. Listen with earnest attention! There are six kinds of intermediate states: the Intermediate State of Birth (also called the Intermediate State in the Womb), the Intermediate State of Dreams, the Intermediate State of Dhyāna (also called the Intermediate State of Meditative Absorption), the Intermediate State at the Time of Death (also called the Intermediate State at the End of Life), the Intermediate State of Dharmatā (also called the Intermediate State of Reality), and the Intermediate State of Becoming (also called the Intermediate State of Rebirth through the Four Elements).

Good son, at this time you will pass through the latter three intermediate states: the Intermediate State at the Time of Death, the Intermediate State of Dharmatā, and the Intermediate State of Becoming. All three now appear before you. Since yesterday, the clear light of Dharmatā has appeared to you in the Intermediate State at the Time of Death, but you were unable to recognize it; therefore, you now wander here without support. Now the Intermediate State of Dharmatā and the Intermediate State of Becoming have both arisen. Recognize what is pointed out in these instructions, and do not be confused.

Alas! Good son, what is called death has now come upon you. In leaving this world, you are not alone; everyone is the same. Do not crave or cling to this present life. Even if you crave and cling to it, you cannot remain here for long. As you wander through the cycle of birth and death, do not cling with longing. You need only remember the guru and the Three Jewels.

Alas! Good son, however terrifying the appearances of the Intermediate State of Dharmatā may be as they arise before you, keep these words in mind and do not forget them. With utmost sincerity and right mindfulness, act in accordance with their meaning. Here are the essential verses of instruction:

Alas!

Now the Intermediate State of Dharmatā appears before me; all appearances of terror, dread, and fear must cease.

Regard the appearances that arise as my own realized wisdom; know that they are the realm of the intermediate state.

At this moment of great and crucial opportunity, do not fear the peaceful and wrathful forms manifested by your own consciousness.

Give the foregoing instructions so that they may be heard, enabling the deceased to remember these words. Even if all kinds of terrifying appearances arise, they will surely recognize them and know that they are their own Original Face. Keep this firmly in mind and do not forget it.

(7) Instructions for Recognizing One's Original Nature (Recite this text repeatedly for the deceased before the fourth day after death.)

Alas! Good son (so-and-so), when your body and mind separate, the pure, unblemished appearance of Dharmatā—the subtle, wondrous clear light of intrinsic nature—shines brilliantly, startling and awe-inspiring, like shimmering heat haze over a springtime plain. This vision appears to everyone. Do not be afraid or terrified; do not be alarmed. Know that it is the primordial light of your own Dharmatā.

Moreover, from within the light bursts forth the great, resounding primordial sound of Dharmatā, like a thousand thunderclaps sounding all at once. Recognize it at once: this too is the primordial sound of your own Dharmatā. Remain calm and do not be confused; do not be afraid or fearful. At this time, you already possess what is called a mind-born body formed by habitual tendencies; you are no longer a physical body of flesh and blood subject to obstruction. Though sound, light, and rays arise before you, they cannot harm you, for you now have no cause of death. If you can recognize the original appearances manifested by your own consciousness, you will know that this is the intermediate state.

Alas! Good son, if you do not recognize the original appearances present here and now, then no matter how you may have contemplated and cultivated in the human world, if you have not encountered these essential instructions, you will surely become frightened by “light,” terrified by “sound,” and fearful of “rays.” If you do not understand the essential points of these instructions, you will fail to recognize the three—“sound,” “light,” and “rays”—and will continue to wander in the ocean of suffering of birth-and-death and saṃsāra.

Chapter 2: Karmic Illusions in the Intermediate State of Dharmatā

D. Attaining Recognition of the Peaceful Deities During the First Week

Day One Recitation (On the fifth day after death, two Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Alas! O noble son (name): You have been unconscious for three and a half to four days. As you revive from unconsciousness, you will ask yourself, “Why am I now experiencing such appearances?” You must understand that this is the intermediate state. At this time, as you are about to reenter saṃsāra, all appearances manifest as luminous Buddha-bodies, and the whole of space appears as a deep-blue light.

At that time, in the central Secret Adornment Buddha-land (also called the Buddha-land of the Courageous Manifestation of the Bindus, or the Heaven of Profound Luminosity), the World-Honored One, Vairocana Tathāgata (also called Mahāvairocana Tathāgata, or the Buddha Whose Light Pervades All).

whose body is white, sits upon a lion throne, holding an eight-spoked golden wheel and embracing the Mother Sovereign of the Dharma Realm of Space face to face. They appear before you. This is the inherently pure blue light of the aggregate of form. It shines dazzlingly, adorned with bindus and subtle points of light, brilliant and limpid. It radiates from the hearts of the male and female deities, Vairocana Tathāgata and his consort, directly into your heart; it is so dazzling that you cannot bear to open your eyes or look directly at it.

At the same time, there also appears before you a white light of the deva realm that is not frightening. Driven by the karmic force of ignorance, you fear the blue light and wish to flee from it. You become terrified of the light of the wisdom of the dharma-realm's intrinsic nature, while taking delight in the non-dazzling white light of the deva realm and wishing to enter it.

I now tell you: at this time, do not fear or flee from that brilliant, limpid, shining, dazzling blue light. It is what is called the light of the wisdom of the dharma-realm's intrinsic nature of the Tathāgata. Deeply give rise to faith and delight in it, arouse a yearning heart, and say to yourself, “This is the compassionate, gracious light of the World-Honored One Vairocana.” Quickly take refuge and pray reverently.

Then the World-Honored One Vairocana will guide you out of the perilous passage of the intermediate state. Do not take delight in, crave, or cling to the non-dazzling white light of the deva realm. If you become attached to it, you will fall into the deva realm and again revolve through the six realms. This will obstruct the path of liberation. Therefore, avert your eyes and do not look upon it. Instead, delight in the flickering, dazzling blue light; arouse a fervent resolve; yearn for the World-Honored

One Vairocana Tathāgata; focus your mind wholeheartedly; recite the following verse; and make this aspiration after me:

Alas!

When blazing ignorance drives me through saṃsāra, may the light of the wisdom of the dharma-realm's intrinsic nature shine upon me.

May Vairocana lead me before, and the Great Sovereign Mother protect me behind.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of the intermediate state and brought to the Buddha-land of perfect awakening.

If you make this aspiration with such reverence and fervor, you will become rainbow light and merge into the hearts of the male and female deities, Vairocana and his consort. In the central realm of Dense Array, you will attain Buddhahood in the aspect of perfect enjoyment.

Day Two Recitation (On the sixth day after death, six Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Although the foregoing instructions have been given, some, owing to the karmic obstacles of anger and hatred, fear light and radiance and flee from them. Though they make this aspiration, they remain deluded and fail to awaken. On the second day, the sacred assembly of Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata comes to guide them, while the light of the evil karma of the hell realm also appears at the same time. The following instruction should again be given: call the deceased by name and recite these words:

Alas, son of good family (so-and-so), listen attentively and do not be distracted! On this second day, the white pure light of the water element will appear before you. At that time, in the eastern blue Buddha-land of Manifest Joy (Sanskrit: Abhirati; Tibetan: Enbar Gawa).

the World-Honored One Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata, whose body is blue, holds a five-pronged vajra and sits upon an elephant throne, embracing Mother Māmakī face to face, appears before you. The two bodhisattvas Kṣitigarbha and Maitreya, together with the two female deities Lasya, the Dancing Maiden, and Puṣpa, the Flower Maiden, surround them in an ocean of rainbow-light maṇḍalas. All six deities appear together.

This is the inherently pure white light of the aggregate of consciousness, namely the wisdom of the great mirror. This light shines dazzlingly, adorned with bindus and subtle points of light. It radiates from the hearts of the male and female deities,

Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata and his consort, directly into your heart; it is so dazzling that you cannot bear to open your eyes or look directly at it.

At the same time, a smoky gray light of the hell realm that is not dazzling also appears before you together with the light of wisdom. Controlled by the karmic force of anger and hatred, you fear the white light and wish to flee from it; instead, you take delight in the non-dazzling smoky gray light of the hell realm and wish to enter it. I now tell you: do not fear or flee from that shining, dazzling, brilliant, transparent white light. It is the complete power and function of the intrinsic nature of your own directly realized wisdom. Within that light, clearly recognize it.

Abide naturally and calmly, and give rise to faith, delight, and yearning for it. If you recognize the light of the intrinsic nature of your own directly realized wisdom, then, even if you have not made a devout aspiration, the light of all Buddhas will merge with you without duality or distinction, and you will attain Buddhahood.

If you do not recognize it as the original light of your own directly realized wisdom, then have faith in it, delight in it, and yearn for it, saying to yourself, "This is the compassionate, gracious light of Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata." Quickly take refuge and pray from the depths of your heart. Reflect that this is the hook of great compassion of Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata, and do not flee from it.

Know that even if you wish to flee, it cannot be separated from your body. Therefore, do not be afraid; delight in it and pray. Then Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata will come to guide you and draw you out of the perilous passage of the intermediate state. Do not take pleasure in the non-dazzling smoky light of the hell realm.

This is an alluring light produced by the accumulated karmic obstacles of your blazing anger and hatred. If you cling to that light, you will fall into the realm of Naraka, hell, and sink into a mire of unbearable suffering, with no prospect of release. This obstructs the path of liberation. Therefore, avert your eyes and do not look upon it; cut off anger and hatred; do not crave or cling to it. Instead, deeply revere the bright and shining white light, focus wholeheartedly before Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata, arouse fervent longing, recite the following verse, and make this aspiration after me:

Alas!

When blazing anger and hatred drive me through saṃsāra, may the light of the wisdom of the great mirror shine upon me.

May Vajrasattva lead me before, and Mother Māmakī protect me behind.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of the intermediate state and brought to the Buddha-land of perfect awakening.

If, with utmost sincerity and reverence, you make this aspiration and recite the preceding verse, you will become rainbow light and merge into the hearts of the male and female deities, the World-Honored One Vajrasattva Akṣobhya Tathāgata and his consort. In the eastern Realm of Manifest Joy, you will attain the sambhogakāya and become a Buddha.

Day Three Recitation (On the seventh day after death, six Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Although the foregoing instructions have been given, some pudgalas—another name for sentient beings—are arrogant and conceited, with grave karmic offenses. They fear the hook of great compassion and flee from it. On the third day, the World-Honored One Ratnasambhava Tathāgata and his sacred assembly come to guide them, while the light of the human realm also appears at the same time. The following instruction should be given: call the deceased by name and recite these words:

Alas! O noble son (name): Listen attentively and do not be distracted. On this third day, a yellow, pure light of the earth element appears before you.

At that time, in the southern yellow Glorious Buddha-Land—Tibetan: Peldan, meaning auspicious or splendid—the World-Honored One Ratnasambhava Tathāgata, whose body is yellow, holds a precious wish-fulfilling jewel and sits upon a horse throne, embracing Buddha-Eye Mother face to face, appears before you. The two bodhisattvas Ākāśagarbha and Samantabhadra, together with the two female deities Mālā and Dhūpā, the Incense Maiden, surround them in an ocean of rainbow-light maṇḍalas. All six deities appear together.

This is the inherently pure yellow light of the aggregate of feeling, namely the wisdom of equality.

This light shines dazzlingly, adorned with bindus and subtle points of light. It radiates from the hearts of the male and female deities, Ratnasambhava Tathāgata and his consort, directly into your heart; it is so dazzling that you cannot bear to open your eyes or look directly at it. At the same time, a pale-yellow light of the human realm that is not dazzling also appears before you together with the light of wisdom, shining directly into your heart.

Controlled by the karmic force of arrogance, you are terrified of that dazzling yellow light and wish to flee from it. Instead, you take delight in and wish to enter the non-

dazzling pale-yellow light of the human realm. I now tell you: do not fear or flee from that shining, dazzling, brilliant, transparent yellow light.

It is the complete power and function of the intrinsic nature of your own directly realized wisdom. Within that light, clearly recognize it; abide naturally and calmly; and give rise to faith, delight, and yearning for it. If you recognize the light of the intrinsic nature of your own directly realized wisdom, then, even if you have not made a devout aspiration, the light of all Buddhas will merge with you without duality or distinction, and you will attain Buddhahood.

If you do not recognize it as the original light of your own directly realized wisdom, then have faith in it, delight in it, and yearn for it, saying to yourself, “This is the compassionate, gracious light of Ratnasambhava Tathāgata.” Quickly take refuge and pray from the depths of your heart. Reflect that this is the hook of great compassion of Ratnasambhava Tathāgata, and do not flee from it. Know that even if you wish to flee, it cannot be separated from your body. Therefore, do not be afraid; delight in it and pray.

Then Ratnasambhava Tathāgata will come to guide you and draw you out of the perilous passage of the intermediate state. Do not take pleasure in the pale-yellow light of the human realm. It is an alluring light produced by the habitual tendencies accumulated through your blazing arrogance. If you cling to it, you will fall into the human realm and again undergo the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death. You will sink into the mire of birth and death, with no prospect of liberation. This obstructs the path of liberation.

Therefore, avert your eyes and do not look upon it; abandon arrogance and cut off habitual tendencies; do not crave or cling to that light. Instead, deeply give rise to faith and delight in the brilliant, dazzling yellow light. Focus wholeheartedly, yearn for the World-Honored One Ratnasambhava Tathāgata, recite the following verse, and make this aspiration after me:

Alas!

When blazing arrogance drives me through saṃsāra, may the light of the wisdom of equality shine upon me.

May Ratnasambhava Tathāgata lead me before, and Buddha-Eye Mother protect me behind.

I pray to be delivered from the perilous passage of the intermediate state and brought to the Buddha-land of perfect awakening.

If you make this vow with utmost sincerity and reverence, you will become rainbow light and merge into the hearts of Ratnasambhava Tathāgata and his consort. In the

southern “Glorious Pure Land,” you will attain the perfect sambhogakāya.

Day Four Recitation (On the eighth day after death, six Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

With the foregoing instructions, even those of the lowest capacity will certainly be liberated, without doubt.

Yet there are those who have committed grave offenses, violated their samaya vows, severed their roots of goodness, or the like, and still cannot recognize it. Controlled by desire and karmic obstacles, they are frightened by the “sounds” and “lights” and flee from them. Thus, on the fourth day, the sacred retinue of the World-Honored One “Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light” (that is, Amitābha Buddha) appears to guide them, while the dull red light of the “realm of hungry ghosts,” produced by greed and miserliness, also appears at the same time. The instructions should be given by calling the deceased by name, reciting the following, and saying:

Alas, noble son (so-and-so), listen attentively and do not be distracted! Today, the fourth day, the pure red light of the “fire element” appears before you. At that time, in the western red “Pure Land of Utmost Bliss,” the World-Honored One “Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light,” whose body is red, holds a lotus flower and sits upon a jeweled peacock throne. Embracing face to face with the “White-Robed Mother,” he appears before you. The two bodhisattvas “Avalokiteśvara” and “Mañjuśrī,” together with the pair of “Gīti Devī” (the goddess of song) and “Āloka Devī” (the goddess of lamps), surround them within an ocean of rainbow-light maṇḍalas. All six appear together.

This is the primordially pure red light of the “aggregate of perception,” namely the “wisdom of wondrous discernment.”

This light shines brilliantly, adorned with bindus and subtle points of light, dazzling the eyes so that one cannot bear to look upon it. From the hearts of the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light and his consort, it shines before you and pierces directly into your heart. Do not fear it or shrink from looking at it. At the same time, however, a dull, non-dazzling red light of the “realm of hungry ghosts” also shines before you together with the light of wisdom. Do not delight in it or become attached to it.

At that time, controlled by the karmic force of intense desire, you will fear the dazzling red light and wish to flee from it. Instead, you will take pleasure in and wish to enter the dull, non-dazzling red light of the realm of hungry ghosts. I now tell you: at this time, do not fear the brilliant, dazzling, transparent red light, and do not flee from it.

It is the complete power and function of the intrinsic essence of wisdom directly realized within yourself. Within that light, abide clearly, spontaneously, and at ease. Moreover, place your faith and longing in it. If you recognize the luminosity of the intrinsic essence of wisdom directly realized within yourself, then, even if you lack sincere aspiration, the light of all Buddhas will merge with you, without duality or distinction, and you will attain Buddhahood.

If you do not recognize it as the light of the intrinsic wisdom directly realized within yourself, then place your faith and longing in it and think to yourself: "This is the gracious light of great compassion of the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light." Quickly take refuge and pray with deep sincerity. Reflect that this is the hook of great compassion of the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light, and do not flee from it. Know that, even if you wish to flee, it cannot be separated from you. Therefore, do not be afraid; gladly pray for it.

Then the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light will come to guide you, drawing you out of the perilous passage of the intermediate state. Also, do not become attached to the dull, non-dazzling red light of the realm of hungry ghosts. It is the light that comes to entice you through the accumulated habitual tendencies of your intense desire. If you become attached to it, you will fall into the realm of hungry ghosts and suffer the most unbearable torment of hunger and thirst. This will become an obstacle, blocking the path to liberation.

Therefore, do not become attached to it. Cut off your habitual tendencies and do not give rise to craving. Instead, rejoice in the brilliant, dazzling red light and focus your longing upon the World-Honored One, the Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light, and his consort. Recite the following verse and make this aspiration after me:

Alas!

Driven by intense desire, I wander in birth and death; may the light of the wisdom of wondrous discernment shine upon me.

May the Buddha of Immeasurable Light guide me before, and the White-Robed Buddha Mother protect me behind.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha Land of perfect awakening.

If you make this aspiration with such sincere and reverent devotion, you will become rainbow light and merge into the hearts of the World-Honored Tathāgata of Immeasurable Light and his consort. In the western "Pure Land of Utmost Bliss," you will attain the perfect sambhogakāya.

Day Five Recitation (On the ninth day after death, six Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

With the foregoing instructions, even those of the lowest capacity have all been liberated. Yet although the instructions have been given, there are some sentient beings who, long habituated to their ingrained tendencies, are ultimately controlled by their powerful habits and cannot overcome them. Dominated by the evil karma of jealousy, they become fearful of the “sounds” and “lights” and fail to recognize the hook of great compassion.

Thus, by the fifth day, they still wander without refuge. At that time, the gracious light of great compassion of the sacred retinue of the World-Honored One “Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata” comes to guide them. At the same time, the light of the “asura realm,” evoked by the affliction of jealousy, also comes to entice them. The instructions should then be given by calling the deceased by name, reciting the following, and saying:

Alas, noble son (so-and-so), listen attentively and do not be distracted! Today, the fifth day, the pure green light of the “wind element” appears before you.

At that time, in the northern green “Glorious Perfect Pure Land,” the World-Honored One “Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata,” whose body is green, holds a crossed vajra and sits upon a jeweled garuḍa throne. Embracing face to face with “Samaya Tārā,” that is, Green Tārā, he appears before you. The two bodhisattvas “Vajrapāṇi” and “Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin,” together with the pair of “Gandha Devī” (the goddess of ointment) and “Naivedya Devī” (the goddess of food offerings), surround them within an ocean of rainbow-light maṇḍalas. All six appear together.

This is the primordially pure green light of the “aggregate of formations,” namely the “wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done.”

This light shines brilliantly, adorned with bindus and subtle points of light, dazzling the eyes so that one cannot bear to look upon it. From the hearts of Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata and his consort, it shines before you and pierces directly into your heart. At the same time, the dull, non-dazzling dark green light of the “asura realm,” produced by jealousy as its cause, also appears before you together with the light of wisdom.

Do not give rise to either love or aversion toward it; cultivate equanimity. (To abide in a state that is neither suffering nor pleasure is called equanimity.) Nor should you delight in it. At that time, controlled by the karmic force of intense jealousy, you will fear the dazzling green light and flee from it. Instead, you will take pleasure in and wish to enter the dull, non-dazzling dark green light of the asura realm.

I now tell you: at this time, do not fear the brilliant, dazzling, transparent green light, and do not flee from it. It is the complete power and function of the intrinsic essence of wisdom directly realized within yourself. Within that light, abide clearly, spontaneously, and at ease. Moreover, place your faith and longing in it.

If you recognize the luminosity of the intrinsic essence of wisdom directly realized within yourself, then, even if you lack sincere aspiration, the light of all Buddhas will merge with you, without duality or distinction, and you will attain Buddhahood.

If you do not recognize it as the light of the intrinsic wisdom directly realized within yourself, then place your faith and longing in it and think to yourself: "This is the gracious light of great compassion of Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata." Quickly take refuge and pray with deep sincerity. Reflect that this is the hook of great compassion of Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata, and do not flee from it. Know that, even if you wish to flee, it cannot be separated from you. Therefore, do not be afraid; gladly pray for it.

Then Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata will come to guide you, drawing you out of the "perilous passage of the intermediate state." Also, do not become attached to the dull, non-dazzling dark green light of the asura realm. It is the light that comes to entice you through the accumulated karmic force of your intense jealousy. If you become attached to it, you will fall into the asura realm and undergo the most unbearable suffering of conflict and contention. This will become an obstacle, blocking the path to liberation.

Therefore, cut off your habitual tendencies and do not crave or become attached to it. Instead, give rise to faith and joy in the brilliant, dazzling green light and focus your longing upon the World-Honored Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata and his consort. Recite the following verse and make this aspiration:

Alas!

Driven by intense jealousy, I wander in birth and death; may the light of the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done shine upon me.

May Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata guide me before, and the Samaya Mother protect me behind.

May I be freed from the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddha Land of perfect awakening.

If you make this aspiration with such sincere and reverent devotion, you will become rainbow light and merge into the hearts of the World-Honored "Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata" and his consort. Thereupon, in the northern "Glorious Garden Pure Land," you will directly realize the perfect sambhogakāya and attain Buddhahood.

Day Six Recitation (On the tenth day after death, forty-two Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

During the preceding five days, instructions have repeatedly been given. However meager one's merit and favorable conditions may be, if one could not recognize it the first time, one should recognize it the second time. One need only recognize a single one of them; none will fail to be liberated.

Yet there are also those who have received such instructions many times but whose habitual tendencies are deeply rooted and have accompanied them throughout beginningless time. They have never become familiar with the pure signs of wisdom. Controlled by karma, though shown how to recognize them, they are still led astray by evil habitual tendencies. The hook of great compassion cannot draw them in, and they become fearful of the "lights" and "radiances," again sinking into birth and death. Therefore, on the sixth day, the Buddha-and-consort pairs of the five Buddha families, together with their retinues, all appear before them at once. At that time, the lights of the six realms also all appear. The instructions should be given by calling the deceased by name, reciting the following, and saying:

Alas, noble son (so-and-so), listen attentively and do not be distracted! Up through yesterday, each of the Tathāgatas of the five Buddha families appeared in its respective form. Although instructions were given, you were drawn by evil habits and became afraid of them; therefore, you remain here even today.

If you had earlier recognized the original lights of wisdom of the Tathāgatas of the five Buddha families as the appearances of your own intrinsic essence, you would already have become rainbow light within the body of each Buddha family and become a perfect sambhogakāya. Because of your ignorance, however, you still wander here. Therefore, observe carefully and do not be distracted. The complete appearances of the five Buddha families, known as the "light in which the four wisdoms are united," now come to welcome you. You must recognize them.

Alas, noble son: the pure lights of the four elements, in four colors, now appear before you.

At this time, the paired Father-and-Mother deities of Vairocana of the central "Ghanavyūha Buddha-field," together with their retinues, all appear before you; the paired Father-and-Mother deities of Vajrasattva of the eastern "Manifest Joy Buddha-field," together with their retinues, all appear before you; the paired Father-and-Mother deities of Ratnasambhava of the southern "Glorious Buddha-field," together with their retinues, all appear before you; the paired Father-and-Mother deities of Amitābha of the western "Sukhāvatī Buddha-field," together with their retinues, all appear before you; and the paired Father-and-Mother deities of Amoghasiddhi of the northern "Perfect Victory Buddha-field," together with their

retinue, all emerge from an ocean-like maṇḍala of rainbow light and appear before you.

Alas, noble son! In addition to these paired deities of the five families, there are also the four gatekeeping Wisdom Kings: Trailokyavijaya, Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, and Amṛtakunḍalin; and the four gatekeeping Wisdom Consorts: the maiden holding the hook, the maiden holding the lasso, the maiden holding the chain, and the maiden holding the bell; as well as the Buddha of the god realm, Indra; the Buddha of the asura realm, “Contentious Mind” (Sanskrit: Vimalacitra).

Its Tibetan name is Tasangri, or it is translated as “Pure Mind.”; the Buddha of the human realm, Śākyamuni Lion; the Buddha of the animal realm, Lion of Good Abiding; the Buddha of the hungry-ghost realm, Flaming Mouth; and the Buddha of the hell realm, Dharma King. All these World-Honored Buddhas—the six Buddhas of the six realms—appear before you. In addition, Samantabhadra Tathāgata and Samantabhadrī Buddha-Mother, the paired Father-and-Mother deities of Samantabhadra, progenitors of all Buddhas (see Note 6), also appear before you. In all, there are forty-two sambhogakāya Buddhas, emerging from within and without your own mind to appear before you. All these are manifestations within your own originally pure realm; you should recognize them.

[Note 6]

Samantabhadra Tathāgata, rendered in Sanskrit as Adharma, means “unborn and naturally so.” The Tibetan transliteration, Kuntuzangpo, refers to the primordial dharmakāya Tathāgata.

(Śākyamuni Buddha is the transformation body of the primordial Tathāgata.) This means that the dharmakāya is intrinsically suchness itself, complete in wisdom and virtue, pervading the dharma realm, beyond thought and free from verbal formulation, without beginning or end, neither cultivated nor realized. It appears in the utterly bare form of the paired bodies; hence there is Samantabhadrī Buddha-Mother. In the doctrine of the Nine Vehicles of the Nyingma school of Tibet, this deity is revered as the highest and unsurpassed one.

In this scripture, the paired Father-and-Mother deities of Samantabhadra stand at the head of the forty-two peaceful deities; therefore they are called the progenitors of all Buddhas.

Moreover, in the preceding “Direct Instructions on the Clear Light” in this text, there are the phrases “Dharmatā Samantabhadra Father and Mother” and “Realization-Wisdom Samantabhadra Tathāgata.” These briefly indicate that the functions of the “Dharmatā” and “realization-wisdom” of this paired deity are originally one with us and cannot be separated from us. The principles involved here cannot be

understood without a profound grasp of the supreme esoteric teachings of Tibet. However, since the name of this deity is unfamiliar to people in Han China, and since the two characters Puxian are the same as those in Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, one of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas, I append this note here for fear that people may misunderstand.

Alas, noble son! These Buddha-fields do not exist elsewhere; they are originally complete in the four directions and the center of your own mind. Now they emerge from your own mind and appear before you. Nor do those Buddha bodies come from elsewhere; they are naturally formed through the inherently complete powers and functions of your own inner realizing wisdom. Therefore, you should recognize them as such.

Alas, noble son! Those Buddha bodies are neither large nor small, but equal in size. They are adorned in form and color, seated upon thrones, and each bears its own emblem. These Buddha bodies form five groups, all in paired forms. Around each group are five-colored circles of light. Among them, the male deities are bodhisattvas of the twofold Vajradhara family, and the female deities are Wisdom Consorts of the twofold Vajradhara family. Thus the entire maṇḍala is formed and appears fully before you all at once. These are the yidams upon whom you rely as your refuge; you should recognize them.

Alas, noble son! From the bodies of these paired Father-and-Mother deities of the five Tathāgata families flows the light of the union of the four wisdoms, exceedingly subtle and wondrous. Like dazzling sunlight, it shines upon your mind and appears before you.

First, from the breast of Vairocana shines the light of the wisdom of the dharma-realm's essential nature. It appears blue, brilliant and dazzling. A platform of light touches and illumines your mind, merging with it as one. Upon that platform are blue luminous points, arising together with the light; like an inverted turquoise canopy, they shine resplendently and dazzle the eyes. Above them, five luminous points of intrinsic nature serve as ornaments, without boundary or center; adorned with luminous points and tiny points of light, they appear before you.

From the breast of Vajrasattva shines the light of great perfect mirror wisdom, appearing white. Upon the platform of light are white luminous points, like an inverted bright mirror, adorned with luminous points and tiny points of light, appearing before you.

From the breast of Ratnasambhava shines the light of the wisdom of equality, appearing yellow. Upon the platform of light are yellow luminous points like an inverted golden cup, adorned with luminous points and tiny points of light, appearing before you.

From the breast of Amitābha shines the light of wondrous discerning wisdom, appearing red. Upon the platform of light are red luminous points, like an inverted coral jeweled canopy, adorned with luminous points and tiny points of light, appearing before you. The bases of the wisdom-lights of these four Buddhas are complete in radiance, exceedingly clear and dazzling to the eyes. They are likewise adorned with five luminous points of intrinsic nature, without boundary or center; everywhere they are adorned with luminous points and tiny points of light, all identical with the light of the wisdom of the dharma-realm's essential nature. What thus appears is intimately connected with your own mind, united and corresponding with it, arising naturally.

Alas, noble son! All these lights are manifestations of the inherently complete powers and functions of your own inner realizing wisdom; they do not come from outside. Therefore, merge with them unobstructedly, and do not be afraid. Gather your mind and enter samādhi; abide calmly in non-discrimination. In this very state, the bodies and lights of the Buddhas merge with your body as one, and you become a Buddha.

Alas, noble son! The Buddha-light of the wisdom of accomplishing activity alone does not shine upon you here, because the powers and functions of your own inner realizing wisdom are not yet complete; therefore it does not appear.

Alas, noble son! This is what is called “the light of the union of the four wisdoms,” also known as “the four secret apertures of Vajrasattva.”

At this time, you should recall the essential oral instructions formerly given by your guru. If you can recall the meaning of those instructions, faith and joyful acceptance will arise with regard to the present state. It will be like a mother and child meeting, or like meeting an intimate old acquaintance long familiar to you: you will recognize it at once, without any doubt. Regard the appearance of your own essential nature as the Original Face, and have faith that it is the immutable true path of pure dharmatā. Then the “samādhi of continuous flow” will arise; merging into the body of spontaneous great activity of realizing wisdom, you will attain Buddhahood through the sambhogakāya of enjoyment and never again regress.

Alas, noble son! Simultaneously with the wisdom-lights, the six impure delusive appearances—the six lights of the six realms—also appear before you: the undazzling white light of the god realm, the undazzling dark-green light of the asura realm, the undazzling pale-yellow light of the human realm, the undazzling dull-blue light of the animal realm, the undazzling dull-red light of the hungry-ghost realm, and the undazzling smoky-gray light of the hell realm. The lights of these six realms likewise appear before you together with the wisdom-lights.

At that time, do not grasp at any of these lights; abide calmly without any object of fixation. If you become fearful of those pure wisdom-lights and become attached instead to the impure lights of the six realms of saṃsāra, you will take on the bodies of beings in the six realms and toil in the great ocean of suffering of birth and death, with no time of liberation.

Alas, noble son! If you have not received the instructions indicated by your guru's teachings, you may become frightened and afraid of the Buddha bodies and pure lights described above, while instead becoming enamored of the impure lights of saṃsāra.

Do not be like this now! Revere and joyfully trust the pure wisdom-lights, brilliant and dazzling to the eyes, and say to yourself: "The lights of great compassion and wisdom of the World-Honored Tathāgatas of the five families appear before me in compassion, to gather me in. I must quickly take refuge." Do not crave or cling to the lights of the six realms, which are delusive appearances. With wholehearted concentration, yearn for the paired Father-and-Mother deities of the World-Honored Tathāgatas of the five families, and recite the following verse, making this aspiration after me:

Alas!

When the five poisons blaze, I wander in saṃsāra; the light of the union of the four wisdoms shines upon me.

May the Tathāgatas of the five families guide me before, and the Wisdom Mothers of the five families protect me behind.

May I be freed from the impure illusory lights of the six realms and be led across the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state.

May I be sent upward to the five pure lands.

By making this aspiration and reciting it, and by recognizing the appearance of one's essential nature, one merges with it without duality and becomes a Buddha. Those of middling capacity, through devout and earnest recognition, are liberated at once. Those of lesser capacity, through the power of their pure vows, cut off the gateways to rebirth in the six destinies, realize the actual state of the union of the four wisdoms, and attain Buddhahood through the secret apertures of Vajrasattva.

Day Seven Recitation (On the eleventh day after death, ten Vidyādhara Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Further, very many are liberated through such detailed instruction and recognition. Yet people of the very lowest capacities, who in human life have never been imbued

with the true Dharma, who have grave karmic obstacles, or who have broken their samaya commitments, are deluded by karmic force. Although instructions are given, they do not recognize them and continue to drift in saṃsāra. On the seventh day, the holy assembly of the Vidyādhara family of the “Pure Ḍākinī Buddha-field” comes to guide them. At that time, the light of the animal realm, generated by the afflictive ignorance, also comes to lure them.

Alas, noble son [name]: listen attentively and do not be distracted! On this seventh day, naturally pure multicolored light appears before you. At this time, the sacred assembly of the Vidyādhara deities of the “Pure Ḍākinī Buddha-field” comes to guide you, merging into an ocean-like maṇḍala of rainbow light.

At the center of the maṇḍala is the “Vidyādhara of Supreme Maturation,” named Padma Dance Lord, whose body is adorned with the splendor of the five-colored lights. His Wisdom Consort, the “Red Wisdom Ḍākinī,” embraces his body. Holding a curved knife in his right hand and a skull-cup filled with blood in his left, he assumes a dancing posture. With a wrathful gaze mudrā, he looks into space and appears before you.

In the east of the maṇḍala is the “Earth-Dwelling Vidyādhara,” whose body is white and whose expression bears a slight smile. His Wisdom Consort, the “White Ḍākinī,” embraces his body. Holding a curved knife in his right hand and a skull-cup filled with blood in his left, he assumes a dancing posture. With a wrathful gaze mudrā, he looks into space and appears before you.

In the south of the maṇḍala is the “Vidyādhara with Mastery over Life,” whose body is yellow and splendidly adorned. His Wisdom Consort, the “Yellow Ḍākinī,” embraces his body. Holding a curved knife in his right hand and a skull-cup filled with blood in his left, he assumes a dancing posture. With a wrathful gaze mudrā, he looks into space and appears before you.

In the west of the maṇḍala is the “Mahāmudrā Vidyādhara,” red in body and slightly smiling. His consort, the “Red Ḍākinī,” embraces him. Holding a curved knife in his right hand and a skull cup filled with blood in his left, he assumes a dancing posture. With the mudrā of a glaring gaze, he looks into space and appears before you.

In the north of the maṇḍala is the “Spontaneously Accomplished Vidyādhara,” green in body, with an expression half wrathful and half smiling. His consort, the “Green Ḍākinī,” embraces him. Holding a curved knife in his right hand and a skull cup filled with blood in his left, he assumes a dancing posture. With the mudrā of a glaring gaze, he looks into space and appears before you.

Around these vidyādharas are assembled innumerable ḍākinīs and celestial mothers: the ḍākinīs of the eight great charnel grounds, the ḍākinīs of the four

castes, the ḍākinīs of the three abodes, the ḍākinīs of the ten abodes, the ḍākinī mothers of the twenty-four sacred places, as well as vīras, vīrās, kiṃkaras, Dharma protectors, and their retainers—all clad in the six bone ornaments and bearing thighbone trumpets, skull drums, and rākṣasa-skin standards.

They also bear human-skin banners and canopies, human-skin flags, ointment made from human fat, and innumerable kinds of musical instruments. Filling all worlds and flooding them with blood, they shake heaven and earth as they all appear before you. Every sound of music likewise resounds as though to split the brain; amid great clamor, they approach while performing various dances. Those of the deceased whose samaya is complete come to welcome them; those whose samaya has been broken come to admonish them.

Alas, noble child! The intrinsically pure, coemergent wisdom-light of your habitual tendencies possesses the five colors. Like multicolored threads, it ripples across the sky, flickering and shimmering, brilliant and transparent, dazzling and overwhelming to the eye. From the hearts of the lords of the five families of vidyādhara, it shines directly into your heart. Too brilliant to look upon, it appears before you. At the same time, a non-dazzling blue light of the animal realm also appears together with the wisdom-light.

At that time, moved by habitual tendencies and drawn along by the delusive appearances, you will fear the five-colored light that appears there and wish to flee from it. Instead, you will become attached to the non-dazzling light of the animal realm and wish to enter it.

Yet do not be alarmed or afraid of the dazzling five-colored light that appears there. Recognize it as wisdom-light. From within that light, the intrinsic sounds of the nature of all dharmas will arise, like a thousand thunderclaps sounding at once—booming and shaking all around, roaring loudly, mingled with the sounds of wrathful mantras—and all will appear before you.

Do not be afraid in this state. Do not flee or fear. Recognize it at once as the power and functioning of the wisdom that realizes your primordial state. As for the non-dazzling blue light of the animal realm, do not crave or cling to it. If you become attached to it, you will fall into the ignorant animal realm and suffer the misery of being driven by delusion and ignorance, with no prospect of escape for a very long time. Therefore, do not become attached to that light. Instead, rejoice in the brilliant, dazzling light complete with the five colors. With one-pointed concentration, earnestly seek and yearn for the World-Honored Vidyādhara Acharyas. Reflect to yourself as follows:

“Holy vidyādhara, vīras, ḍākinīs, and all holy ones, come now before me to guide me into that pure abode of the ḍākinīs. May all you holy ones, in your compassion,

heed and grant my prayer. I, a sentient being, have not amassed the provisions in the past. May the Tathāgatas of the three times and the holy ones of the five families receive me with the light of great compassion. Alas, how lamentable that, through my ignorance, I have failed to recognize this and have squandered time until now! Before you holy vidyādhara, I earnestly pray that from this time onward you never abandon me. Draw me in with the hook of compassion, and lead me to rebirth in the pure ḍākinī realm.”

Concentrate and pray in this way. Recite the following verse, and make this aspiration together with me:

Alas!

Holy assembly of vidyādhara, graciously heed this prayer; please wield compassion and guide me onto the true path.

With habitual tendencies blazing fiercely, I wander in birth and death; may the light of coemergent wisdom shine forth.

May the heroic vidyādhara lead the way before me, and may the ḍākinī Buddha-mothers protect me from behind.

May I be freed from the fearful, perilous passage of the intermediate state and be led upward to the Buddhafield of perfect awakening.

If you make this aspiration sincerely and earnestly as above, you will be transformed into rainbow light and absorbed into the hearts of the assembly of vidyādhara. You will then certainly be born in the pure ḍākinī Buddhafield. All those of the lineage of spiritual friends need only recognize this according to the instructions above, and they can attain liberation. Even if they have habitual tendencies of evil karma, they will certainly be liberated.

This concludes the direct instructions on the clear light of the intermediate state at the time of death, as well as the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing: Instructions on the Peaceful Appearances in the Intermediate State of Dharmatā.

E. Attaining Recognition of the Wrathful Deities During the Following Week

General Overview

I shall now explain the appearances that arise in the wrathful phase of the Intermediate State of Dharmatā. As with the peaceful phase described earlier, there are seven successive perilous passages, and instructions have already been given

for each of the experiences encountered. Even if one fails to recognize one of them, innumerable beings attain liberation by recognizing another. Yet although many are thus liberated, there are also many whose evil karma is grave, whose karmic obstacles are piled as high as mountains, who are habituated to entrenched tendencies, and whose delusive confusion of ignorance is endless and undiminished. Even when given these instructions, they still do not attain liberation but continue to drift and sink in saṃsāra; such people are indeed very numerous.

Moreover, the peaceful holy assemblies, vidyādhara, and ḍākinīs who previously came to guide the deceased have now passed away. Next, the fifty-eight blazing blood-drinking wrathful deities appear—the preceding assembly of peaceful deities transformed on the same basis. Their positions in the directions are the same as those of the peaceful deities; only their manifested forms and appearances differ.

These wrathful appearances are produced by the intensified force of the three states of terror, fear, and dread, and are exceedingly difficult to recognize. One's innate wisdom lacks mastery within, and one falls into a stupor—bewildered and then awakening, awakening and then bewildered, repeating this cycle without being able to govern oneself. If, while lucid, one is able to recognize them, liberation is also easy.

Why is this so? When the three states of terror, fear, and dread arise, one's innate wisdom no longer runs about in distraction, but abides single-mindedly and strives with vigor. In such circumstances, if one does not encounter these instructions, then even vast learning like an ocean is of no avail.

There are also great masters who uphold the precepts and masters of the Exoteric Vehicle who, if they become confused at this point and fail to recognize these appearances, must still drift through the cycle of birth and death. Ordinary people are even more numerous. Terrified and panic-stricken by the three states of terror, fear, and dread, they fall into the ravines of the evil destinies and suffer greatly without end. Yet mantra-yoga practitioners are different: even those of the very lowest capacity, upon seeing the blood-drinking wrathful holy assembly, recognize it as they would an intimate friend or old acquaintance. Deeply trusting it to be their own yidam, they may merge with it without duality and attain Buddhahood.

There are also those who, while alive in the human world, cultivated visualization of these blood-drinking wrathful holy assemblies—that is, the generation stage—made offerings to them, and praised them. Even those who had merely seen painted images or sculptures of these deities will, when their forms appear before them at this time, recognize them as familiar and immediately attain liberation.

There are also great masters who uphold the precepts and masters of the Exoteric Vehicle who, however diligently they may have practiced true Dharma conduct

during life and however skillfully they may have taught the Dharma, display no signs at death such as sacred bone relics, relics, or rainbow light.

This is because, during life, they never applied their minds to the secret mantras; they slandered and disparaged them, and formed no karmic connection with the mantra holy assemblies. Therefore, even when the experiences of the intermediate state appear before them, they do not recognize them. On suddenly seeing what they had never previously seen, they react as though meeting an enemy and immediately give rise to anger. Through this condition, they proceed to the evil destinies.

Thus, although one may be thoroughly versed in the precepts and in the doctrinal teachings of nature and characteristics, if one's mind lacks the actual practice of mantra, signs such as sacred bone relics, relics, and rainbow light will not appear. This is simply how it is.

As for mantra practitioners, even if they are of the very lowest capacity, coarse and uncouth in bearing, unskilled in teaching the Dharma, and unable to practice in accordance with principle, if they nevertheless have deep faith in the Mantra Vehicle Dharma, do not give rise to wrong views or doubts in the face of those experiences, and are able to practice, they will still attain liberation at that time. Although their conduct in the human world may have been improper, at death at least one auspicious sign will appear: sacred bone relics, relics, rainbow light, a Buddha image, or another such sign. This is because the power of mantra blessings is supreme.

Mantra-yoga practitioners of middling capacity or above, who have cultivated the two stages of generation and completion and practiced recitation of the heart mantra and other disciplines, need not fall into the Intermediate State of Dharmatā. When their breath is about to cease but has not yet stopped, vidyādhara heroes, ḍākinīs, and others will surely come to welcome them to a pure ḍākinī realm.

The signs of this are: not a single cloud in the sky, dazzling rainbow light, showers of flowers, fragrant incense, celestial music resounding in unison, and clear, ringing sounds. Sacred bone relics, relics, Buddha images, and the like also appear. Such are its extraordinary signs.

Therefore, for those who uphold the precepts, masters of the Exoteric Vehicle, mantra practitioners who have broken their samaya, and all ordinary beings, apart from this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing, there is no other expedient means.

Those great practitioners who have cultivated Dzogchen, the highest attainment practice of the Tibetan Nyingma school, Mahāmudrā, the highest attainment practice of the Tibetan Kagyü school, and the like, are able during the Intermediate

State at the Time of Death to recognize the clear light and realize the dharmakāya. They do not require this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing, for when they recognize it in the Intermediate State at the Time of Death, they have already realized the dharmakāya, as stated above.

When, in the Intermediate State of Dharmatā, the peaceful and wrathful experiences appear, if they are recognized, one realizes the complete sambhogakāya. Further, if one recognizes the Intermediate State of Becoming, one realizes the nirmāṇakāya and is reborn in a favorable realm. Having encountered this Dharma, one may have an opportunity for practice in future lives.

This Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing is a Dharma for attaining Buddhahood without cultivation; that is, a Dharma through which one attains liberation solely by hearing. It is also a Dharma that leads those with grave karmic obstacles out of perilous passages; a Dharma by which distinctions are decisively made in a single instant; and a Dharma by which one realizes equal enlightenment in a single instant. Truly, it is profound! There has never been a sentient being who, upon encountering this teaching, has fallen into an evil destiny.

When this Dharma is used together with the mantra text of Takdrol—Tibetan for “liberation through a nominal designation, the wish-fulfilling jewel,” also called the Sūtra of Wondrous Wisdom of the Unconditioned Instant, a mantra text through which one attains liberation by wearing it on the body—it is like adorning a golden maṇḍala with jade ornaments, making it all the more exquisite.

Day Eight Recitation (On the twelfth day after death, six Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

As explained above, the importance of Liberation Through Hearing has already been shown. I shall now give instructions for the time when wrathful appearances arise in the Intermediate State of Dharmatā. At this point, call the deceased by name and recite the following, telling them:

Alas, noble son [name], listen without distraction! Previously, when the peaceful appearances of the Intermediate State of Dharmatā arose, you did not recognize them, and so you still wander without support. Now, on the eighth day, the blood-drinking wrathful holy assembly appears before you. Do not be confused; recognize it.

Alas, noble son [name], listen well! On this eighth day, the Lord of Great Auspiciousness of the blood-drinking Buddha family, the Blessed One named Buddha Heruka, will appear. His body is dark brown. He has three faces, six arms, and stands with four legs outstretched. His right face is white, his left face red, and his central face dark brown. His whole body is enveloped in blazing fire-like light.

His nine eyes are wide open, glaring wrathfully and fearfully; his brows rise like lightning; his fangs protrude; and he roars with laughter, making the sounds “a-la-la” and “ha-ha,” as well as “ga-u” and great, piercing cries. His red and yellow hair blazes upward. His crown is adorned with skulls symbolizing the sun and moon, while black serpents and freshly severed human heads adorn his body.

Of his six hands: the upper right holds a wheel, the middle right an axe, and the lower right a sword; the upper left holds a bell, the middle left a skull-cup, and the lower left a plow.

The consort, named Buddha Krodhīśvarī, embraces his body. With her right arm she clasps his neck, and in her left hand she holds a red conch-shell bowl containing male essence, which she offers to his mouth as he sucks it with a slurping sound and a thunderous roar. Wisdom-fire issues brilliantly from the pores within the blazing vajra flames. With his right leg bent and his left extended, he stands upon a garuḍa throne.

This emerges from the central region within your brain and appears before you in this form. Do not be startled or afraid; do not give rise to terror! Recognize it at once as the body of your own innate wisdom, as your own yidam. Do not be startled or fearful! In truth, it is still the united father-and-mother form of the Blessed One Vairocana. Therefore, do not be afraid. If you can recognize it, you will immediately attain liberation.

If these clear instructions are given and it is recognized as one's yidam, one may merge with it without duality and realize the complete sambhogakāya.

Day Nine Recitation (On the thirteenth day after death, two Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

If one again recoils in fear and flees without recognizing it, then on the ninth day the Blessed One of the blood-drinking Vajra family will come to guide the deceased. For these instructions, call the deceased by name and recite the following, telling them:

Alas, noble son [name], listen without distraction! Now, on the ninth day, the Blessed One of the blood-drinking Vajra family, named Vajra Heruka, will appear. His body is dark blue. He has three faces, six arms, and stands with four legs outstretched. His right face is white, his left face red, and his central face blue.

Of his six hands: the upper right holds a vajra, the middle right a skull-cup, and the lower right an axe; the upper left holds a bell, the middle left a skull-cup, and the lower left a plow. The consort, named Vajra Krodhīśvarī, embraces his body. With her right arm she clasps his neck, and in her left hand she holds a red conch-shell

bowl containing male essence, which she offers to his mouth. The two bodies embrace.

This emerges from the eastern region within your brain and appears before you. Do not be startled or afraid; do not give rise to terror! Regard it as the body of your own innate wisdom, as your own yidam. Therefore, recognize it and do not be afraid! In truth, it is still the united father-and-mother form of the Blessed One Vajrasattva. Rejoice in it! If you can recognize it, you will immediately attain liberation.

If these clear instructions are given and it is recognized as one's yidam, one may merge with it without duality and realize the complete sambhogakāya.

Day Ten Recitation (On the fourteenth day after death, two Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

As explained above, there are also people with grave karmic obstacles who give rise to fear in the face of these experiences, flee from them, and fail to realize them. Now, on the tenth day, the Blessed One of the blood-drinking Jewel family will come to guide the deceased. For these instructions, call the deceased by name and recite the following, telling them:

Alas, noble son [name], listen carefully! Now, on the tenth day, the Blessed One of the blood-drinking Jewel family, named Ratna Heruka, will appear. His body is dark yellow. He has three faces, six arms, and stands with four legs outstretched. His right face is white, his left face red, and his central face dark yellow.

Of his six hands: the upper right holds a jewel, the middle right a celestial staff, and the lower right a club; the upper left holds a bell, the middle left a skull-cup, and the lower left a steel trident. The consort, named Ratna Krodhīśvarī, embraces his body. With her right arm she clasps his neck, and in her left hand she holds a red conch-shell bowl containing male essence, which she offers to his mouth. The two bodies embrace.

This emerges from the southern quarter within your brain and appears before you. Do not be startled, afraid, or fearful of it! Recognize it as the body of your own realized wisdom—your yidam—and recognize it at once; do not be afraid! In truth, it is the father-and-mother union of the Blessed One Ratnasambhava Tathāgata. Therefore, revere it and delight in it with faith. If you recognize it, you will be liberated immediately.

If this is clearly explained to you as above, and you recognize it as your yidam, you will merge with it inseparably and realize the Buddha-body of perfect enjoyment.

Day Eleven Recitation (On the fifteenth day after death, two Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Although instructed as above, because one is imbued with habitual tendencies, fear arises and one again flees, failing to recognize it as one's yidam and seeing it instead as Yama, the Dharma King. Thus one fails to attain recognition. Then, on the eleventh day, the blood-drinking Blessed One of the "Lotus Family" comes to guide the deceased. For these instructions, call the deceased by name, recite the following passage, and tell them:

Alas, noble son (so-and-so), listen attentively and do not be distracted! On this eleventh day, the blood-drinking Blessed One of the "Lotus Family," named "Lotus Heruka," appears. His body is dark red; he has three faces, six arms, and stands with four legs extended. His right face is white, his left face blue, and his central face dark red.

Of his six hands, the upper right holds a lotus, the middle right a celestial staff, and the lower right a club; the upper left holds a bell, the middle left a skull-vessel filled with blood, and the lower left a ḍamaru. His consort, named "Lotus Krodhīśvarī," embraces his body: with her right arm she encircles his neck, while in her left hand she holds a red conch filled with male semen and offers it to his mouth. The two embrace in union.

This emerges from the western quarter within your brain and appears before you. Do not be startled, afraid, or fearful of it! In truth, it is the father-and-mother union of the Blessed One Amitābha Tathāgata. Therefore, rejoice in it and revere it. If you recognize it, you will be liberated immediately.

If this is clearly explained to you in this way, you will recognize it as your own yidam, merge with it inseparably, and realize the Buddha-body of perfect enjoyment.

Day Twelve Recitation (On the sixteenth day after death, two Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Although instructed as before, one is drawn outward by the habitual tendencies of evil karma; fear arises, and one again flees. Because one does not recognize these as one's yidam, one fails to recognize them. Then, on the twelfth day, the blood-drinking assembly of the "Karma Family" comes to guide the deceased. Thereafter come the eight great charnel-ground goddesses, the eight animal-headed goddesses of the directions, the wrathful animal-faced female guardians of the four gates, and the twenty-eight powerful yoginīs, including the "Wangjiu Mothers," who have diverse faces. If they are not recognized, fear immediately arises. Therefore, instruction must be given.

At this time, call the deceased by name, recite the following passage, and tell them:

Alas, noble son (so-and-so): on this twelfth day, the blood-drinking Blessed One of the Karma Family—karma being a Sanskrit word meaning activity—is named “Karma Heruka.” His body is dark green; he has three faces, six arms, and stands with four legs extended. His right face is white, his left face red, and his central face dark green. He manifests a fierce and terrifying aspect.

Of his six hands, the upper right holds a sword, the middle right a celestial staff, and the lower right a club; the upper left holds a bell, the middle left a skull, and the lower left holds a plow. His consort, named “Karma Krodhiśvarī,” embraces his body: with her right arm she encircles his neck, while in her left hand she holds a red conch filled with male semen and offers it to his mouth. Their faces meet as they embrace in union.

This emerges from the northern quarter within your brain and appears before you. Do not be startled, afraid, or fearful of it! Recognize it at once as the body of your own realized wisdom—your yidam—and do not be afraid. In truth, it is the father-and-mother union of the Blessed One Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata. Therefore, revere it and give rise to deep longing. If you recognize it, you will be liberated immediately.

If this is clearly explained to you as above, you will recognize it as your own yidam, merge with it inseparably, and realize the Buddha-body of perfect enjoyment.

Thus, in accordance with the essential instructions bestowed by the guru, recognize these as appearances of the fundamental nature, nothing but your own inner realized wisdom. It is like a lion’s skin: one who has seen it knows it to be skin and is immediately relieved; but one who does not know that it is lion skin becomes frightened. If its meaning is explained and clearly pointed out to such a person, the fear immediately vanishes. So it is with this Dharma.

The blood-drinking assembly is immense in form, with massive limbs, as vast as space; when it appears, fear will certainly arise. But if one hears these instructions and receives clear guidance, one immediately realizes it as an appearance of the fundamental nature or recognizes it as one’s own yidam. Then the clear light cultivated during life, the son clear light, and the naturally arisen clear light thereafter, the mother clear light, meet. In lucid relief, like meeting an old acquaintance, one awakens suddenly to realization. Without these instructions, even worthy persons can scarcely avoid falling back and revolving in the great ocean of birth and death.

Day Thirteen Recitation (On the seventeenth day after death, sixteen Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Thereafter, the eight great charnel-ground goddesses and the various animal-headed goddesses all emerge from the deceased’s brain and appear before them.

For these instructions, call the deceased by name, recite the following passage, and tell them:

Alas, noble son (so-and-so), listen attentively and do not be distracted! From the eight directions in your brain, eight goddesses now emerge and appear before you. Do not be afraid of them! They are described in detail as follows:

From the eastern quarter of your brain emerges the white “Jiwuli Mother,” holding aloft a human corpse-bone staff in her right hand and a skull filled with fresh blood in her left; she appears before you.

From the southern quarter of your brain emerges the yellow “Ziwuli Mother,” holding a drawn bow and arrow.

From the western quarter of your brain emerges the red “Bolomohe Mother,” holding a makara banner.

From the northern quarter of your brain emerges the black “Peiduo-li Mother,” holding a vajra in her right hand and a skullcap filled with fresh blood in her left.

From the southeastern quarter of your brain emerges the reddish-yellow “Busijiasi Mother,” holding human entrails in her right hand and taking food with her left.

From the southwestern quarter of your brain emerges the dark-green “Jiasimoli Mother,” holding a skullcap filled with fresh blood in her right hand and stirring it with a vajra in her left, threateningly taking it up and drinking it.

From the northwestern quarter of your brain emerges the pale-yellow “Zhandali Mother,” tearing apart a human corpse; with her right hand she plucks out its heart, and with her left she eats its body.

From the northeastern quarter of your brain emerges the dark-yellow “Simisheli Mother,” tearing apart a decaying corpse and eating it.

These “Jiwuli Mothers” abiding in the eight directions also surround the blood-drinking deities of the five directions. They emerge from your brain and appear before you. Do not be afraid or fearful of them!

Alas, noble son (so-and-so): beyond this outer circle—that is, beyond the eight directions described above—there further appear before you the eight animal-headed goddesses of the directions, the “Poluomen Mothers”:

In the east is the dark-purple lion-headed “Senghe Maiden,” her hands crossed, a corpse held in her mouth, shaking her mane.

In the south is the red tiger-headed “Viyaghrimukha Maiden,” her hands crossed downward, staring intently with bared teeth and furrowed brows.

In the west is the black fox-headed “Sirilamukha Maiden,” raising a sharp blade in her right hand and holding human entrails in her left, chewing them and sucking blood.

In the north is the dark-blue wolf-headed “Śvanamukha Maiden,” tearing apart a corpse with both hands and staring intently.

In the southeast is the pale-yellow vulture-headed “Kṛtamukha Maiden,” carrying a huge corpse on her shoulder and raising bones in her hand.

In the northeast is the blue owl-headed “Hulumukha Maiden,” holding a vajra in her right hand and raising a knife in her left, cutting and eating human flesh.

In the southwest is the dark-red owl-headed “Gaṅgamukha Maiden,” likewise carrying a huge corpse.

In the northwest is the black crow-headed “Kākamukha Maiden,” raising a skullcap in her left hand and holding a sharp sword in her right, cutting out hearts and livers.

These eight animal-headed goddesses of the directions, the “Poluomen Mothers,” also surround the five blood-drinking deities. They emerge from your brain and appear before you. Do not be afraid or fearful of them! Know that whatever appears must all be recognized as appearances of the original nature, the functioning of realized wisdom.

Day Fourteen Recitation (On the eighteenth day after death, thirty-six Buddhas come to guide the deceased.)

Alas, noble son (so-and-so): on this fourteenth day—note: this sentence is found in the English translation but not in the Tibetan text—the wrathful animal-faced goddesses who guard the four gates emerge outwardly from your brain and appear before you. You must recognize them at once. They are described as follows:

From the eastern quarter of your brain emerges the white “Tiger-Faced Maiden,” holding a hook in her right hand and raising a red skull filled with fresh blood in her left.

From the southern quarter of your brain emerges the yellow “Pig-Faced Maiden,” holding a noose.

From the western quarter of your brain emerges the red “Lion-Faced Maiden,” holding a chain.

From the northern quarter of your brain emerges the green “Snake-Faced Maiden,” holding a bell.

Each of these four women holds a skull-vessel filled with blood in her left hand. These wrathful female guardians of the four gates all emerge from your brain. Know that they are your yidams, and therefore recognize them.

Alas, noble son (so-and-so): beyond the circle of the thirty wrathful Herukas, there further appear before you twenty-eight powerful yoginīs, the “Wangjiu Mothers,” with diverse and unusual faces, holding various weapons. They emerge from your brain and appear before you. Do not be afraid of them. Recognize all that appears as the functioning of the realized wisdom of your original nature. At this critical moment, when the greatest obstruction is encountered, carefully discern them. Therefore, recollect the guru’s instructions!

Alas, noble son: from the east of your brain emerge the dark-purple “Ox-Headed Rākṣasī,” holding a vajra and a skull-vessel lid; and the reddish-yellow “Snake-Headed Brahmā Maiden,” holding a lotus.

A dark-green “Leopard-Headed Great Goddess,” holding a “trident”; a blue “Monkey-Headed Desire Goddess,” holding a “wheel”; a red “Bear-Headed Virgin Goddess,” holding a “short spear”; and a white “Brown-Bear-Headed Indra Goddess,” holding a “string of intestines.” Thus the six Yoginīs of the East emerge from the eastern corner of your brain and appear before you. Do not be afraid of them!

Alas, noble son! From the south of your brain emerge: a yellow “Bat-Headed Vajra Goddess,” raising a “sharp blade”; a red “Makara-Headed Peaceful Goddess,” holding a “treasure vase”; a red “Scorpion-Headed Nectar Goddess,” holding a “lotus”; a white “Kite-Headed Moonlight Goddess,” holding a “vajra”; a green “Fox-Headed Staff-Bearing Goddess,” holding a “staff”; and a dark-yellow “Tiger-Headed Rākṣasī Goddess,” holding a “blood-filled skull.”

Thus the six Yoginīs of the South emerge from the southern corner of your brain and appear before you. Do not be afraid of them!

Alas, noble son! From the west of your brain emerge: a dark-green “Vulture-Headed Flesh-Eating Goddess,” holding a “staff”; a red “Horse-Headed Joyful Goddess,” holding a “body cavity”; a white “Roc-Headed Great-Power Goddess,” holding a “rod”; a yellow “Dog-Headed Rākṣasī Goddess,” holding a “vajra” in one hand and cutting with a “knife” in the other; a red “Hoopoe-Headed Passionate Goddess,” drawing a bow and arrow; and a green “Elk-Headed Wealth-Protecting Goddess,” holding a “treasure vase.”

Thus the six Yoginīs of the West emerge from the western corner of your brain and appear before you. Do not be afraid of them!

Alas, noble son! From the north of your brain emerge: a blue “Wolf-Headed Wind Goddess,” unfurling a banner; a red “Sheep-Headed Wondrous-Garland Goddess,” holding a “human spike” (a pointed implement for piercing people); and a black “Boar-Headed Hai Goddess,” holding a “toothed cord” (a cord passed through the teeth).

A red “Crow-Headed Vajra Goddess,” holding a “child’s corpse”; a dark-green “Elephant-Headed Great-Nose Goddess,” holding a “great corpse” and drinking blood from its skullcap; and a blue “Snake-Headed Water Goddess,” holding a “snake lasso.” Thus the six Yoginīs of the North emerge from the northern corner of your brain and appear before you. Do not be afraid of them!

Alas, noble son! In addition, four Yoginīs who guard the four gates emerge from your brain and appear before you.

From the eastern corner of your brain emerges a white “Cuckoo-Headed Vajra Goddess,” holding a “hook”; from the southern corner emerges a yellow “Goat Vajra Goddess,” holding a “lasso”; from the western corner emerges a red “Lion-Headed Vajra Goddess,” holding a “chain”; and from the northern corner emerges a green “Snake-Headed Vajra Goddess,” holding a “bell.” These four gate-guarding Yoginīs all emerge from your brain and appear before you. The foregoing twenty-eight sovereign goddesses are manifestations of the self-arisen power and function of the wrathful deity Heruka; therefore, you should recognize them.

Alas, noble son! From the empty and quiescent aspect of the dharmakāya appear the peaceful deities; know that they are your Original Face. From the luminous aspect of the dharmakāya appear the wrathful deities; therefore, recognize them. When the fifty-eight blood-drinking sacred deities emerge from your brain and appear before you, if you understand that all appearances are the original light of your own inner realized wisdom, you will immediately merge inseparably with the blood-drinking deities and realize Buddhahood.

Alas, noble son! If you do not recognize them at once, you will inevitably be frightened and seek to flee, again undergoing great suffering and finding liberation difficult. If you do not recognize them thus, you will see all the blood-drinking sacred deities as Yama, the Dharma King, and become fearful of the blood-drinking yidams; terrified and fainting away, you will take the appearances of your own nature to be demonic appearances and thus sink into the ocean of birth and death. But if you are without fear, you will realize Buddhahood.

Alas, noble son! Among these sacred assemblies of peaceful and wrathful deities, those of great size are as vast as space; those of medium size are as vast as Mount Sumeru; and even the smaller ones are eighteen times the accumulated height of your own body. Do not be afraid of them.

The sentient and material worlds appear as bodies of light, and all appearances manifest as forms of light. You should recognize them all as the innate luminosity of your own inner realized wisdom. When your own light and body merge inseparably, you will realize Buddhahood. Child of the Buddha! Whatever terrifying appearances arise before you, recognize them all as manifestations of your own consciousness; do not be afraid. Recognize the clear light as the original light of your own inner realized wisdom. If you recognize it thus, you will undoubtedly attain Buddhahood in this very body at once. This is what is meant by “realizing equal enlightenment in an instant.” Therefore, accept it with wholehearted faith.

Alas, noble son! At this time, if you fail to recognize them and become frightened, all the deities of the peaceful assembly will appear in the form of the protector Mahākāla (the great Dharma protector of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, the “Great Black One”), and all the deities of the wrathful assembly will appear in the form of Yama, the Dharma King. The appearances of your own nature will turn into demonic appearances, and you will sink into the bitter ocean of birth and death.

Alas, noble son! If you cannot recognize the true aspect, then even if you are thoroughly versed in all sūtras and treatises and practice the Dharma for kalpas, you will ultimately not attain Buddhahood. If you recognize the true aspect, a single essential point and a single word or phrase can enable you to realize Buddhahood. If you do not recognize the true aspect, then immediately after death, in the Intermediate State of Dharmatā, the form of the King of Yama will appear. The great forms of Yama, the Dharma King, are as vast as space; the medium ones are as vast as the king of Mount Sumeru; and even the smaller ones are eighteen times the accumulated height of your own body. Countless in number, they fill the world and appear before you.

They bite their lips and gnash their teeth; their eyes are like glass, their hair bound upward, their bellies huge and waists slender. Their hair is tied in topknots, and they hold instruments of punishment in their hands. Their mouths emit cries of “Kill!” They drink and devour brains, tear bodies and heads apart, and gouge out and eat hearts. In such forms, they fill the world and come before you.

Alas, noble son! When such appearances arise before you, do not be afraid and do not give rise to fear. Know that your present body has become a body born of habitual tendencies and mind. Though you encounter cutting and slaughter, you will not die. In truth, it is the very nature of your emptiness; therefore, do not be afraid.

The King of Yama and the like who appear are likewise manifestations arising from the original light of your own inner realized wisdom; therefore, they have no substantial reality to be found. Emptiness cannot be harmed by emptiness. Apart from the manifestations of the power and function of your realized wisdom, none of the peaceful, wrathful, or blood-drinking assemblies, nor the various forms with animal heads, rainbow light, Yama, or other terrifying images, has any substantial reality to be found.

If you can recognize them thus, all fear will immediately be dispelled, and you will merge inseparably with them and realize Buddhahood. But if you cannot recognize them, reflect to yourself: "These are my yidams, who have come to guide me and draw me out of the perilous passage of the intermediate state; therefore, I should take refuge in them." You must also have deep faith and joyful trust, recollect the Three Jewels, and recall the yidam you yourself revered during life (if the deceased did not practice Esoteric Buddhism during life and had no fixed personal yidam, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva may be taken as that person's yidam). Then invoke the sacred name and chant:

Holy yidam, I pray that you will hear and grant this! I now wander amid the hardships of the intermediate state;

I pray only that you will swiftly come to rescue me; receive me in great compassion and protect me!

You should also recall the name of your guru and make this invocation:

I now wander in the intermediate state. I pray that you will swiftly come to rescue me; do not forsake your great compassion, but bestow your gracious protection upon me.

You should also make prayers and aspirations to the sacred assembly of blood-drinking deities. Recite the following verse after me:

Alas!

When I wander in the intermediate state, with habitual tendencies raging, may terrifying and fearsome appearances be cast aside.

May the peaceful and wrathful sacred assemblies guide me before, and may the wrathful mothers, sovereign in the dharma realm, protect me behind.

I pray that they will ferry me across the perilous passage of fear in the intermediate state and send me upward to the Buddha-stage of perfect enlightenment.

Now I travel alone, separated from all my relatives and friends; before me are only empty images reflected by my own mind.

I earnestly pray that the Buddhas will rescue me with the power of great compassion; may all fears and terrors of the intermediate state be removed.

When the light of the five wisdoms appears, may I not be frightened or afraid, but recognize it as my true aspect.

When the forms of the peaceful and wrathful assemblies appear, may I have firm faith, be without fear, and recognize them as the intermediate state.

If, through karma, I must undergo every kind of suffering, may the yidam deities remove my afflictions and hardships.

When the dharmatā yidams sound like a thousand crashing thunders, may they at once be transformed into the sound of the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra.

When karma pursues me and I lack protection, may the Great Compassionate One become my refuge.

When I suffer pain through karmic habits, may I realize the samādhi of blissful pure light.

May the realms of the five great elements not become hostile to me; may I behold the pure lands of the five Buddha families.

If one makes such aspirations with reverence and earnestness, all terror will certainly disappear at once, and one will definitely realize the Buddhahood of the sambhogakāya. Therefore, this is of the utmost importance. Recite it wholeheartedly three to seven times. No matter how grave the deceased's karmic offenses or how meager their blessings and affinities, there has never been one who did not attain liberation. Yet if there should be someone who, even after the ritual has been performed for them many times, still fails to recognize and thus receive deliverance, they will subsequently enter the later intermediate state, namely, the Intermediate State of Becoming. Its instructions are explained in detail in the following volume.

F. Summary of the Sublime Merits of This Dharma

This esoteric teaching is the heart essence of the tantric teachings among all dharmas, the essential instruction on the intermediate state: liberation is attained simply through hearing it. If one sees it, one likewise attains liberation. At the time of death, people are generally confused by every kind of habitual tendency. Apart from

this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing, there is no other expedient means.

As for practitioners of the highest capacity, if they have long cultivated and become familiar with the practice, have received pointing-out instruction and experiential realization concerning the wisdom of realization, then, when body and mind separate and dharmatā manifests, their recognition is especially powerful at the first appearance of the clear light in the intermediate state at the time of death. Therefore, while still alive, they should adopt this teaching as a daily recitation and commit it to memory without forgetting it. This is of the utmost importance. They should also immerse themselves in the words and meanings of this text.

They should ponder them until they thoroughly understand them, attend to them in accordance with the Dharma, recite them at the three times of day, and make this their habitual practice. If they understand the meaning of the sentences clearly and keep them firmly in mind, then even if a hundred ghosts were to drive them away, they would not forget the meaning of these sentences. Moreover, anyone who hears this teaching even once may attain liberation, even if that person has accumulated the gravest uninterrupted offenses.

Therefore, this subtle and wondrous esoteric teaching should be widely recited aloud before an assembly, so that people may hear it once. Even if they do not understand its meaning, when they are in the intermediate state, their inner wisdom of realization will suddenly become lucid, and their power of memory will be nine times greater than it was during life. At that time, they will be able to remember every word without forgetting a single one.

Therefore, it should be explained widely and in detail to people in the world; it should be recited aloud before the sick; and it should also be recited beside the ears of the deceased. This wondrous teaching should be disseminated widely. Those with karmic affinity who encounter this teaching are exceedingly fortunate. Those who have not accumulated the provisions of wholesome roots, or have not purified their defilements and obscurations, will find it very difficult to encounter it. Even if they do encounter it, they will find it difficult to accept it with faith, and will merely lose this great benefit. Anyone who reads this teaching need only refrain from giving rise to inverted and deluded views concerning it in order to attain liberation. Therefore, it should be treasured most highly.

End of the Instructions on the Intermediate State of Dharmatā.

Main Text, Volume Two: Instructions on the Intermediate State of Becoming

Verse of Homage

I take refuge in the venerable protectors: the guru and the Three Jewels.

May they compassionately receive us, that liberation may be attained in the intermediate state.

The instructions on the intermediate state in the first volume have reached the intermediate state of Dharmatā; we shall now expound the method of liberation in the intermediate state of becoming.

Chapter 1: The Realm After Death

The preceding volume has already given detailed instructions concerning the intermediate state of Dharmatā. Yet there are still those who have not realized the true nature of dharmas and who possess evil karma, apart from those who have realized it and possess pure conduct and wholesome karma, and those who have practiced as instructed and attained liberation. Because their karmic force is intense, they do not understand reality; or, carried along by karmic force, they are terrified and fearful. Although they have received the instructions, they themselves lose the opportunity for liberation. If, by the end of the second seven-day period, they still have not attained recognition, recite the following text so that it may be impressed upon their minds.

A. The Arising of the Intermediate-State Body and Its Special Abilities

The ritual officiant should first make offerings before the Three Jewels to the best of their ability, and in accordance with the Dharma recite such verses as the Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In every respect follow the provisions set forth under “Conducting the Recitation” in the preceding volume: call the deceased by name and recite the following instructions three to seven times.

[Instruction 1]

Good son (so-and-so), listen carefully and do not be distracted! After death, a person may fall into hell, or be born in the heavenly realms, or become an “intermediate-state body.” This is called an “extraordinary body.”

After death, you first pass through three and a half or four days of unconsciousness. When you awaken, you encounter the assemblies of holy beings in the Intermediate State of Dharmatā—the peaceful and wrathful deities. Wisdom-light shines

brilliantly; various manifestations appear as skillful means to guide you. Yet, regrettably, being ignorant and unaware, you feared to attain recognition. Delaying and misleading yourself, you have come to the present moment, still thinking that you have only just awakened from a dream. At the same time, you have become a luminous body, resembling the physical body you possessed in life. As a verse of esoteric scripture teaches:

You will obtain an illusory form resembling your former body, the body in which you are to be born.

The perceptive capacities of the six sense faculties are all fully endowed; you travel freely, unobstructed in movement.

You possess karmically derived supernormal powers and transformations; those of the same kind are seen by heavenly pure eyes.

This verse teaches precisely the appearances you now experience. The luminous body is explained in the scriptures as “the body in which you are to be born, resembling your former body.” This means that the body the deceased will assume resembles the body adorned by the corresponding blessings brought about by the past karma of a previous life. It is called a “mind-born body.” Yet it is illusory and unreal, and turns according to karma.

Thus, if through your own past karmic force you are destined to be born in the heavenly realm, the appearances of that realm immediately manifest before you. Or, if you are to be born in the realm of asuras, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, or hell beings, the appearances of each realm likewise manifest in accordance with what you are to experience. All this is karmic fruition, like a shadow following its form.

What is meant by “resembling your former body”? The words “former body” implicitly refer to the flesh-and-blood physical body you had until three and a half or four days after your death. The words “to be born” refer to the circumstances of the place in which you will be reborn. Therefore, the scriptural phrase “the body in which you are to be born, resembling your former body” should be understood as referring both to the physical body you have cast aside and to the physical body you will assume when you are born again in the future.

Whenever you encounter such appearances of a body to be born, do not, under any circumstances, give rise to desire for such a body, nor should you be timid or fearful. If fear gives rise to craving, you will again fall into the cycle of birth and death and suffer without end.

Until yesterday, you still had not recognized the Intermediate State of Dharmatā, and so have wandered until now, without a place of refuge. You should now follow

the instructions transmitted by your guru. Do not let your mind become scattered; settle yourself well, and allow things to be naturally as they are, without contrivance. Then the realm of wisdom you inwardly realize—the primordial clear light—will naturally appear before you. If you can truly do this, you will attain liberation and will not again enter the womb gate of rebirth.

If you cannot do so, then with faith, joy, and reverence, visualize your guru, yidam, or the Great Compassionate Protector above your crown, sheltering you. With intense longing and delight, pray sincerely, maintain single-minded faith, and above all hold fast without losing it.

If, upon receiving the foregoing instruction, the deceased can understand it and persevere in accordance with what has been taught, they will attain liberation and no longer fall into the bitter ocean of birth and death. If, drawn by karmic force, they still fail to understand and attain recognition, call the deceased by name again, recite the following passage, and tell them:

[Instruction 2]

Good son (so-and-so), listen carefully and do not be distracted! The verse above says, “The perceptive capacities of the six sense faculties are all fully endowed.” This means that, during your life, you may have been blind, hard of hearing, unable to walk well, or afflicted by impairments of the faculties. But now, in the intermediate state, your eyes can see, your ears can hear, and your six sense faculties are unimpaired. You are keen and alert, complete in every respect. This proves that you have left the world and are wandering in the intermediate state. Understand this principle and keep it firmly in mind.

Further, “you travel freely, unobstructed in movement” means that you have now received the mind-born body of the intermediate state. Having already been freed from the obstructive flesh-and-blood body, you possess various special abilities and can go wherever your thoughts lead.

You may pass through boulders, mountains, hills, earth, houses, and even Mount Sumeru and the four continents, traveling wherever you wish without obstruction. Only Bodh Gaya—the Vajra Seat in India, where all Tathāgatas of this fortunate eon manifest their attainment of Buddhahood—and the impure gateway of a mother’s womb cannot be passed through. Even Mount Sumeru, king of mountains, presents no hindrance to your coming and going through it. This proves that you have entered the intermediate state. You must now understand this well, earnestly remember your guru and yidam, and pray with utmost sincerity to the Great Compassionate Protector. This is of the greatest importance!

[Instruction 3]

Alas! Good son (so-and-so), “you possess karmically derived supernormal powers and transformations” does not mean that such powers result from the merits of your practice or from supernormal powers realized through meditative concentration. Rather, they are supernormal powers brought about by karmic force and belong to karmic similarity—whereby the result flows from the cause and the branch from the root, so that cause and result, root and branch, resemble one another.

In a single instant, you can circle the four continents and Mount Sumeru. In but a moment, you can arrive wherever you wish, just as a strong man can extend or bend his arm. Whatever you recollect or seek—whether you remember it or not—there is nothing that cannot manifest. You are now able to manifest freely without obstruction. Recognize this and ask your guru to confirm it.

[Instruction 4]

Alas! Good son (so-and-so), “those of the same kind are seen by heavenly pure eyes” means that, in the intermediate state, all the appearances of beings of the same kind, equal in karma, are fully seen. Those destined for birth in the heavenly realm can likewise see one another, and the same is true in the other realms. Yet you must not become attached to them; instead, cultivate visualization of the Great Compassionate Protector.

Further, “seen by heavenly pure eyes” means that this occurs through the power of blessings equal to those of devas. Those who have truly cultivated meditative concentration may also see through heavenly pure eyes, but they do not see everything. When they focus upon what is before them, they see; when they do not focus, they do not see. If their minds wander outward, they likewise cannot see.

B. The Special Conditions of the Intermediate-State Body

[Instruction 5]

Alas! Noble son (name): relying on this intermediate-state body, you behold the familiar scenes of the earthly world—relatives and old friends—as in a dream. Though you see them, when you approach and speak to them, none hears you or responds.

You see only that mourning has begun in your home and that your relatives are wailing and weeping. Then you think, “Could I now be dead? What am I to do?” As soon as this thought arises, you experience intense suffering, like a fish being fried in a hot cauldron; you are now undergoing this yourself. Yet you have already

passed into another world. Though you torment yourself in vain, what benefit is there? Do not cling! If you had a guru during your lifetime, pray to your guru. At the same time, visualize your yidam or the Great Compassionate Protector and pray; then your suffering will cease of itself and your fears will be dispelled.

[Instruction 6]

Alas! Noble son (name): driven onward by the winds of karma, impelled and pursued, you can scarcely govern yourself and have lost your freedom. Your inner realizing wisdom has nothing on which to rely. You are like feathers swept up by the wind, left to rise and fall at its will; or like one riding wildly upon an untamed horse, jolted painfully as it races on, gasping without respite, drifting without support.

Suddenly, you again hear people calling your name and weeping. Though you tell them not to cry, those who weep take no notice and ultimately pay no heed. Again you think, “Am I dead?” Thereupon you experience great suffering once more. But now, do not grieve.

Moreover, the light you see, whether day or night, is like the grayish-white, pale light of dawn. You may remain in the “intermediate state” for one week, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, six weeks, or up to seven weeks—forty-nine days. Ordinarily, however, the suffering of the “intermediate state of becoming” lasts twenty-two days; yet its duration is not fixed, but depends on karmic force.

[Instruction 7]

Alas! Noble son (name): during this period, a red wind from the ocean of karma, terrifying and unbearable, blows fiercely from behind you, thrusting and driving you onward. Do not be afraid of it. Know that it is merely an appearance manifested by the deluded realm of your own consciousness.

There also appears before you a place of utter darkness, most difficult to endure. At this time, sounds of “striking” and “killing” arise, and all kinds of terrifying enemies confront you. Do not be afraid of them.

Furthermore, for those with grave and extreme evil karma, flesh-eating ghosts and man-eating *rākṣasas* appear, each holding various weapons and shouting amid a clamor of “Strike!” and “Kill!” They howl and surge forward, rushing straight at you in a most ferocious manner. Various terrifying wild beasts also appear, pursuing you. Violent winds and storms, heavy snow and dense fog, crowds in pursuit, and wild assaults all come crashing upon you. Great sounds also arise, like mountains collapsing and seas roaring, like raging fire bursting forth, or like furious winds howling—every kind of tremendous noise, so terrifying that one nearly loses consciousness.

Then you flee in every direction without choosing a path, until at last you encounter three immense precipices—one white, one black, and one red. Their cliffs are thousands of fathoms high, their depths unfathomable; every avenue of escape is cut off, and you are about to fall into one of these three great precipices, in imminent peril. Alas! Noble son: these three precipices are “greed,” “anger,” and “ignorance.” They are not material things. At this time, know that you are in the “intermediate state of becoming.” Recite the name of the Great Compassionate Protector, call your own name, and chant:

Great Compassionate Protector, noble Avalokiteśvara, guru and Three Jewels, compassionately bestow your blessings.

I beg you only to rescue me from this perilous passage; do not let me be carried along into the three lower realms.

Pray thus with utmost earnestness, and do not forget it!

[Instruction 8]

Furthermore, if there are those who have accumulated provisions and practiced the pure teachings of the Buddha, protectors of merit and guides of bliss will come before them to welcome them. As for those whose good and evil karma were equal during life, they experience neither suffering nor pleasure; there merely appears a dim, dull, and neutral state.

Noble son (name): whatever appearances arise, whenever any pleasurable form, sound, smell, taste, or touch of the five desires presents itself, do not crave or cling to it. Remove every thought of seeking, and simply say to yourself:

I offer all these wholesome pleasures to the guru and the Three Jewels.

This means that if you experience pleasant sensations, contemplate single-mindedly offering them to the guru and the Three Jewels; do not seek to enjoy them yourself. If an appearance of neither suffering nor pleasure, of equanimity, arises, then, through your inner realizing wisdom, abide without contrivance, adjustment, or distraction in the state of Mahāmudrā. This is most essential!

[Instruction 9]

Noble son (name): at that time, should you come upon bridges, the eight great sacred stupas, monasteries, or other such places, you may rest there only briefly and cannot remain long. Because your consciousness has separated from your body and you can no longer act freely, you become dejected, afflicted, and sorrowful. The consciousness that is aware becomes vague and unsteady, having lost its support. Then you think: “Alas! I am dead. What am I to do?” As soon as this thought arises,

your heart grows despondent; overwhelmed with grief, acute and intense suffering crowds before you.

Now that you cannot remain in any one place and must go elsewhere, do not entertain various hopes and wishes. Simply abide in the originally unmoving state of your own inner realizing wisdom. As for food, you may partake only of that specially prepared for you; you have no right to taste other offerings.

At this time, none of your relatives or friends can serve as your aid. All this is the appearance of the mind-born body wandering in the “intermediate state of becoming.”

At this time, suffering and pleasure arise in accordance with karma. You yourself see your home and surroundings, your relatives, and even your own corpse. Again you painfully think: “I am now dead—what am I to do, what am I to do?” Overcome by despair, you become anxious and despondent, thinking: “If only I could obtain a body, what could I not do?” Thinking thus, you drift back and forth, seeking a physical body. Such appearances are now already present to you.

Even if you try more than nine times to enter your corpse, because the intermediate state of Dharmatā has already lasted so long, your body may have frozen in winter, decayed in summer, been cremated by your relatives, buried in the earth, cast into water, or given to birds of prey and wild beasts to devour. Though you wish to reenter it, you cannot.

Because you have nowhere to dwell, your mind becomes extremely unhappy. Suddenly, you feel yourself being hurled into mountain cliffs and rock crevices. In this way, you now undergo every kind of suffering. This is the “intermediate state of becoming.” In seeking a body for yourself, you gain nothing but suffering. Do not give rise to attachment to a body; remain calmly in spontaneous non-contrivance.

If, in accordance with the foregoing instructions, the consciousness of the deceased can practice as taught, liberation will naturally be attained amid the states of the “intermediate state.”

C. The Scene of Judgment in the Underworld

As instructed above, if there are those who, through the force of evil karma, are unable to attain recognition despite having been instructed, then call the deceased by name again, recite the following text, and tell them: [Instruction 10]

Alas, son of noble family (name): Listen carefully! You are now undergoing all these sufferings because of karma you yourself have created; no one else can bear them

in your stead. Only by wholeheartedly praying to the Three Jewels can you receive protection.

If you do not pray in this way, do not know how to practice Mahāmudrā meditation, and do not meditate on the yidam, then a deity responsible for good, innate from birth, will count the good deeds you performed in life with white pebbles; and a deity responsible for evil, likewise innate from birth, will count the evil deeds you performed in life with black pebbles. They will then come to lead you away. (The deities responsible for good and evil are referred to in Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism simply as the five innate deities: deities that are born with a person, never leave the body, and preside over good and evil in five locations of the body. They are similar to the Three Corpse Deities in Chinese Daoist scriptures. Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism has a specific practice lineage for them.)

At that time, you will be utterly terrified and distraught, trembling with fear. You may attempt to lie, saying, “I have committed no evil.” Then King Yama will say: “I have a karmic mirror that can reflect and reveal.” He will then show you the mirror. All the wholesome and unwholesome karma you created while alive will appear clearly within it, without the slightest error. Though you may lie, it will be of no benefit.

King Yama will then tie a rope around your neck and drag you down from the hall. He will cut off your head, split open your heart, pull out your intestines, suck out your brain fluid, drink your blood, eat your flesh, and gnaw your bones. Though you suffer, you will not die. Though your body is shattered, it will become whole again, and you will again be cut to pieces and once more undergo great suffering.

At this time, when they count your good and evil deeds with pebbles and drag you away, do not be alarmed or afraid, and do not lie. Do not fear King Yama or the prison guards. Know that you are now a “mind-born body”: even if you are cut, killed, shattered, or dismembered, there is no cause for death. In truth, your body is inherently empty in its essential nature; why need you be afraid?

The appearances you see are illusory appearances produced by the delusion of your own consciousness, mere forms in empty space. Through your own habitual tendencies, you have become a “mind-born body,” yet its very substance is empty and originally without form. Because it is formless, it cannot be grasped through touch. All that has been described above is a transformation of illusory appearances produced by your own consciousness. Thus, in the external world there appear King Yama, prison guards, deities, ghosts, blood-drinking rākṣasas, ox-headed demons, and the like, but in fact no real thing can be found.

Know that this is now the “intermediate state.” Practice Mahāmudrā samādhi. If you do not know how to practice it, investigate through contemplation, to the extent of your ability, what the intrinsic nature is that gives rise to fear in your body, and

penetrate it. You will then realize that this intrinsic nature is wholly unobtainable and empty; this is the dharmakāya. This emptiness is not a nothingness devoid of everything; it is the emptiness that is “not empty in accordance with reality.”

The lucid arising and manifestation of awareness is the esoteric meaning of the sambhogakāya. Luminosity and emptiness are nondual and originally inseparable; in its very substance it is empty, and emptiness and luminosity are undifferentiated—utterly bare and unobstructed. Abiding at that very moment amid unbearable conditions is the svabhāvikakāya. Moreover, its inherent power and functioning manifest everywhere without cessation; this is the nirmāṇakāya of great compassion.

Alas, son of noble family: Remain still and observe; do not let your mind scatter. If you recognize and realize the four kāyas described above, liberation is certain, and there can be no doubt that you will attain Buddhahood. This is the dividing line between Buddhas and sentient beings. At this moment, it is most important that your mind not become scattered! Otherwise, you will remain forever trapped in the mire, with no time when escape may be hoped for.

It is said, “In the distinction of a single instant lies the attainment of perfect awakening in a single instant.” Now is precisely that time. Before yesterday, because of distraction, you had already missed the opportunity for liberation. Thus, as soon as the “intermediate state” appeared, you could not recognize it, and fear immediately arose. If you again lose this opportunity through distraction, the compassionate gaze of the holy beings will be cut off midway, and you will be unable to attain liberation; you will have no choice but to follow your karma.

With the instructions above, even if recognition is not attained, liberation may still be gained. If the deceased is an ordinary person who does not know how to practice meditation, call the deceased by name again, recite the following text, and tell them: [Instruction 11]

Alas, son of noble family (name): If, having received the above instructions, you do not know how to practice meditation, then recollect the Buddha! Recollect the Dharma! Recollect the Saṅgha! Pray to the “Great Compassionate Protector”! Whenever any frightening appearances arise before you, meditate only on the “Great Compassionate Protector” and your yidam. If, while alive, you received a name bestowed by an empowerment master and have requested it, recite that name and the name of your root guru, and state them before the Dharma King Yama. Then, even if you have fallen into a perilous gorge of sheer cliffs and precipices, nothing will be able to harm you, and you will certainly be freed from suffering.

D. Redirecting the Power of All Thoughts

If, through the foregoing instructions, you are able to recognize [these appearances], you will certainly be liberated. If you are still unable to attain liberation, then, in order to admonish you earnestly once more, call the deceased by name again and recite the following, saying: [Instruction 12]

Alas, good son (so-and-so): At this very moment, the appearances before you shift in an instant from joy to sorrow. The sensations of pain and pleasure are most intense, rushing upon you like arrows shot from a crossbow. Whenever such alternations of tension and release occur, let them take their course; purify yourself of thoughts of love and hatred, and the appearances will subside of themselves. If you possess the causes for rebirth in heaven, appearances of the heavenly realm will immediately arise.

If your relatives during your lifetime did not understand cause and effect, killed many living beings, and made offerings and prayed for blessings on your behalf, impure appearances will arise for you, and intense anger will flare up. This will continue the process of taking rebirth, and you will be born in hell. (When living beings are killed for the deceased, the karma of such killing weighs heavily upon the deceased, who must undergo its retribution.

When the deceased is in the intermediate-state body and sees this, they immediately cry out for it to stop. Yet their relatives pay no heed and continue killing as before, whereupon intense angry thoughts arise. Therefore, instruct the deceased now that angry thoughts must never arise; otherwise, they will be born in hell.) For this reason, anger must never arise!

Moreover, you may become greedily attached to the inheritance you left behind, or learn that your possessions have been seized and enjoyed by others, and thus give rise to anger toward them. You should know that, even if greed and anger arise, there is nothing you can do about it, and it will bring you no benefit. Therefore, do not crave or cling to the inheritance you left behind. Decisively cast it aside: whoever may enjoy or seize it, do not begrudge them, but maintain a mind of generosity. Sincerely and reverently contemplate offering it to the guru and the Three Jewels, and abide in a state free of greed and attachment.

Furthermore, if someone performs rites for liberating the deceased on your behalf, reciting the “Gangani Dhāraṇī” and the “King Mantra for Eliminating All Evil Destinies” (these are the two principal mantras for liberating the deceased; the Gangani is the rebirth mantra of Akṣobhya Buddha of the East; both are included in the appendix), and so forth, but does so in a manner that is neither pure nor in accordance with the Dharma.

the ritual practitioners may be drowsy or negligent; they may violate samaya, have impure discipline, behave carelessly and slight the true Dharma, or desecrate the orthodox teaching by using the Black Religion's rites for the dead.

Because you possess subtle karmic powers, you can witness this. You may then lose right faith in the monastics performing the practice, give rise to wrong views, and become fearful and uneasy. Having understood this, you may think to yourself, "Alas! I have been deceived by them!" Your mind will become disappointed, dejected, and unhappy. You will then have no faith or understanding regarding pure appearances, give rise to wrong views, and lose right faith. Thus, the process of taking rebirth will continue, and you will certainly be born in an evil destiny, which will bring you no benefit.

If the spiritual friends whom your descendants have invited perform Buddhist rites for you, however impure these may be, you should think to yourself: "This impurity is an appearance of my own consciousness. How could the sacred words of the Buddhist scriptures be impure? It is like looking into a mirror when one's own body is dirty: it is my own appearance that is impure. Moreover, these spiritual friends are members of the saṅgha; their speech is the true Dharma, and their minds embody the nature of the Buddha. Therefore, I should take refuge in them and form a conviction of their excellence. With all my heart, I should delight in pure appearances. As my descendants continue to perform Buddhist rites for me, I shall certainly receive benefit." Give rise to this thought of pure appearances, and never forget it.

Furthermore, if you have causes for rebirth in the evil destinies, appearances of the evil destinies will immediately arise. Yet your descendants and relatives may perform pure Buddhist rites for your karmic offenses, unmingled with heterodox sorcery. When you see the invited guru and acharya performing excellent rituals with body, speech, and mind, joy and great delight will arise in your heart. As soon as this thought arises, the process of taking rebirth will continue; although there may be causes for falling into the evil destinies, through this merit you will certainly be transformed and rise to a higher realm. Therefore, do not give rise to thoughts of impurity. Do not discriminate or become partial even in your faith and delight in pure appearances. You must be extremely careful.

Alas, good son (so-and-so): In summary, your intrinsic wisdom of direct realization now has nothing upon which to rely. At its slightest stirring, appearances of wholesome and unwholesome states arise, and these can exert great force. If unwholesome appearances arise, do not dwell on them in your mind. Instead, recall any one of the practices you cultivated during your lifetime. If you cultivated no practice, let your heart rejoice; take refuge with utmost sincerity, pray to the Great Compassionate Protector, and earnestly make the following aspiration:

Alas!

Now I journey alone, parted from all family and friends; before me are only empty appearances reflected by my own mind.

I beseech the Buddhas' power of great compassion to rescue me; may the fears and terrors of the intermediate state be dispelled.

When, through karmic conditions, I endure every kind of suffering, may the yidam deity remove my hardships and afflictions.

When the intrinsic sound of dharmatā resounds like a thousand crashing thunderclaps, may it at once become the sound of the six-syllable great mantra.

When karma pursues me and I have nowhere to turn for protection, may the Great Compassionate One be my refuge.

When I undergo suffering at the mercy of karmic habits, may I realize the samādhi of blissful pure light.

Relying on the preceding prayer, recite it firmly and earnestly. You will certainly receive guidance and attain your wish; there is no deception in this. Thus instructed, once recognition occurs, liberation is attained.

E. The Dim Lights of the Six Realms of Ordinary Existence Appear

Further, through repeated practice and recitation as described above, liberation should be attained. If one is constrained by karmic force and still finds it difficult to understand, repeat the instructions and recite them many times for the person; great benefit will naturally result. At this time, call the deceased by name again, recite the following text, and tell them: [Instruction 13]

Alas, good son (name): If you have recalled but failed to retain the various instructions given above, then at this time the form of your former body will gradually disperse, vanish, and no longer be seen, while the body of your next existence will become increasingly distinct. Overwhelmed with sorrow and distress, you will think: "Alas! I have suffered so much. Whatever body I am to enter, I must go and seek it." Once this thought arises, you will rush to and fro, drifting and wandering, not knowing where you are going. At this very time, the cycle of rebirth in the six realms appears. The stronger the karmic affinity with a particular realm, the more intensely that realm's light will appear.

Alas, good son (name): Listen carefully! What are the lights of the six realms? The light of the deva realm is grayish white; that of the asura realm is dark green; that of the human realm is pale yellow; that of the animal realm is dark blue; that of the hungry ghost realm is pale red. Only the light of the hell realm is like smoke or mist. When these lights appear, the color of your body will take on the light-color of the realm in which you are karmically destined to be born.

Alas, good son (name): At this time, these instructions are of the utmost importance. Whatever light appears, you should regard it as light radiated by the Great Compassionate Protector. Visualize its light slowly approaching you; it is the supremely compassionate noble Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. This is an exceedingly profound and essential instruction, capable of closing off the place of rebirth.

Or, if you have previously practiced any yidam, contemplate it as an illusory realm, wholly without inherent nature. Continue this contemplation for a long time, and you will know this as the “pure illusory body.” Then contemplate the form of the yidam: from the outside inward, let it gradually vanish until it cannot be found. Then abide for a moment in the dharma realm, in a state of non-attachment to luminosity and emptiness.

Then contemplate the yidam again, and next contemplate the clear light, alternating between these contemplations. Next contemplate your own inner wisdom of realization; it too gradually vanishes from the outside inward. Emptiness pervades everything, luminosity pervades everything, and the dharmakāya pervades everything. Abide equally in the dharmakāya, free from conceptual elaboration and appearances. Through this state, one can naturally close off the place of rebirth and attain Buddhahood.

Chapter 2: Methods of Rebirth

F. Avoiding Rebirth by Closing the Womb Entrance

There are also many who, although they have practiced and can earnestly aspire, have not cultivated and trained sufficiently in ordinary times. When they still fail to recognize [the signs], they fall into unconscious confusion and wander about the womb entrance. Here, the instructions for closing the womb entrance are of the utmost importance. Call the deceased by name again, recite the following passage, and tell them:

[Instruction 14]

Alas! Noble child (name): As explained above, if you still do not recognize [the signs], then at this time, driven by karmic force, you may go upward, move horizontally, or look downward. Such appearances are about to arise. At this time, you should contemplate and remember the “Most Compassionate Supreme One.”

Furthermore, as stated before, violent winds and rain, heavy snow and thick mist, hailstones and darkness, crowds giving chase, and various other appearances will arise. Though one may wish to flee, those with scant merit and virtue instead flee toward places of suffering; those endowed with merit and virtue are able to reach places of peace and happiness.

Noble child! At this time, the place in which you will be reborn, or the realm into which you will be born, will immediately appear before you in every aspect. At this crucial moment, there are many extremely profound essential instructions. Do not be distracted; listen with one-pointed attention! Because you previously did not recognize the various essential points of these instructions, and because your cultivation has been very weak, you must choose your destination and go there. Listen with one-pointed attention.

Here are methods for closing the womb entrance, which are extremely important. There are two methods for closing the womb entrance: (1) the method of closing it with respect to the person who may enter; (2) the method of closing it with respect to the persons to be entered.

(1) Instructions for Preventing the Deceased from Entering the Womb Entrance

Alas! Noble child (name): If you have practiced any yidam, contemplate whatever appears as illusory, entirely without inherent nature, clearly reflected like the moon in water. If you do not have a particular yidam, take “the Supreme Compassionate Holy Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva” as your yidam and visualize him clearly, brilliant and radiant.

Next, contemplate the yidam withdrawing from without to within and vanishing without trace. Wherever it goes, contemplate it as returning to the luminous emptiness that cannot be apprehended. This is a most profound essential point and a wonderful method for not entering the womb entrance; therefore, you should contemplate in this way. If at that time you still cannot close it, you will be preparing to enter a womb. Listen again to the following instructions:

(2) Instructions for Closing the Womb Entrance to Be Entered

Furthermore, the profound instructions for closing the womb entrance to be entered are divided here into five steps. Listen carefully!

1. The First Step in Closing the Womb Entrance

[Instruction 15]

Here is a verse:

Alas!

Now that the intermediate state of becoming appears to me, / I must keep my mind wholly single and sincere.

Strive to sustain the meeting of excellent conditions; / Sever the womb entrance forever—remember to turn back.

When diligent purity of appearance is the sole necessity, / Sever jealousy forever and cultivate the Guru in union.

Recite the foregoing verses for them in a clear voice, exhorting and arousing their mind. Have them contemplate as the text directs and practice in sequence. This is most essential, most essential!

The meaning here is as follows. “Now that the intermediate state of becoming appears to me” means that you have now fallen into the condition of the intermediate state of becoming, as you can verify from its appearances. Now try looking into water or a mirror: you will not see your form or complexion, nor will there be any bodily shadow to be seen. This is because you have already left behind the solid flesh-and-blood body of your former life and have become a mind-born body, drifting without support. This is the clear sign that you have fallen into the intermediate state of becoming. Therefore, keep your mind wholly single and sincere, making “single-minded devotion” your sole priority.

It is like controlling a horse with reins: concentrate your mind and gallop forward, for fear that evil karma may pull you away and change your intention. While you were human, if you had formed the resolve to remember any one of the true Dharma, the empowerment instructions of a guru, sacred scriptural texts, or this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State, then “strive to sustain the meeting of excellent conditions” and do not be distracted.

You must know that the boundary between ascending and descending lies precisely at this moment. To lose [this opportunity] through negligence in this single instant is for the manifestation of suffering to arrive; to keep the mind one-pointed in this single instant is for the manifestation of peace and happiness to arrive. Therefore, you must “keep your mind wholly single and sincere” and “strive to sustain the meeting of excellent conditions.” Now the time has come to close the womb entrance: this is what is meant by “sever the womb entrance forever—remember to turn back” and “when diligent purity of appearance is the sole necessity.”

As stated above, at this time one must first purify the womb entrance and then explain the method of closing it. There are altogether five steps. The first step has already been explained; the second, third, fourth, and fifth steps will now be explained. Remember and retain them well.

2. The Second Step in Closing the Womb Entrance

[Instruction 16]

Alas! Noble child (name): At this time, the appearance of a man and woman in union will again appear before you. When you see it, firmly maintain the intention not to enter between them. Contemplate the male and female parents in union as the guru and consort, bow to them, hold the intention of making offerings, revere them with utmost sincerity, request the true Dharma, and concentrate wholeheartedly. You will certainly be able to close the womb entrance.

If it still does not close and you are bound to enter a womb, then contemplate the male and female parents in union as your yidam, or contemplate the yidam as the body of the Great Compassionate Protector in union with consort. Make offerings to them, transform offerings through your mind—that is, offer articles visualized by your own mind—and present them. Request that they grant you siddhi. If you do this with utmost sincerity, you will be able to close the womb entrance.

3. The Third Step in Closing the Womb Entrance

[Instruction 17]

Furthermore, if, as explained above, the womb entrance still has not been closed and you are about to enter it, the third step now sets forth instructions for eliminating love and aversion. There are four kinds of birth: birth from an egg, birth from a womb, spontaneous birth, and birth from moisture. Of these four kinds, birth from an egg and birth from a womb are alike.

As stated before, a man and woman in union will appear before you. At that time, you enter their womb through desire or aversion. Once you enter the womb, you may be reborn as a horse, a chicken, a dog, a human being, or any other being.

If you are to be reborn as a male, you will perceive yourself in male form, feel deep aversion toward your father, and give rise to thoughts of desire for your mother. If you are to be reborn as a female, you will perceive yourself in female form, feel deep jealousy toward your mother, and give rise to attachment for your father. Through these causes and conditions, you then enter the womb entrance. At the very time when the male and female red and white vital essences unite, you experience “innate bliss” (innate bliss is one of the four blissful experiences in Esoteric Buddhism).

Thereupon appearances of dullness and confusion arise amid bliss and ideation, and you congeal into the fetal body called kalala (the embryo during its first week in the mother's womb is called kalala), then arbuda (the embryo during its second week in the mother's womb is called arbuda). When you eventually emerge from the womb and open your eyes, you may find yourself instead as a dog, suffering in a dog's kennel.

Thus, you may be in a pigsty or an ant nest, or be born as a calf or a lamb. You will be unable to return, and in your foolish ignorance, at a time of despair, you will undergo every kind of suffering and affliction. Thus you may wander on without end, perhaps entering hell or being born among hungry ghosts, endlessly revolving within the six realms and oppressed by immeasurable sufferings. Or you may become a mahoraga (a great-bellied crawler). Such people cling without awakening and feel no fear at all. How pitiful and lamentable—indeed, it makes one's heart tremble to speak of it.

Without the excellent instructions of a guru, how could one avoid falling into the perilous cliffs and caves described above? Once one has fallen in, one sinks in birth and death, with no foreseeable time of escape. Therefore, listen to what I say and keep these instructions firmly in mind. The instructions now being given, for stopping love and aversion and closing the womb entrance, should be carefully heard and retained.

The foregoing lines, "Sever the womb entrance forever—remember to turn back; when diligent purity of appearance is the sole necessity; sever jealousy forever and cultivate the Guru in union," refer precisely to this. Was it not stated above? If you are to be reborn as a male, you desire your mother and resent your father; if you are to be reborn as a female, you desire your father and resent your mother. Thus these appearances arise from jealousy. At this time, there is a profound essential instruction. Alas! Noble child, when deluded thoughts of love and aversion arise, immediately contemplate as follows:

Alas! Sentient beings such as I, burdened by heavy evil karma, sink into birth and death, relying on love and aversion. If we do not free ourselves, we remain engrossed in love and aversion and trap ourselves in birth and death. For long kalpas we sink into the great sea of suffering, immeasurable and boundless, never able to escape. From this moment on, I shall abandon love and aversion and never again indulge in them. Ah! Henceforth, I shall never again give rise to love and aversion.

Reflect in this way, reproach and admonish yourself, focus your mind with utmost sincerity, and maintain it with vigorous strength. As the scriptures say:

Only this vow / Can close the womb entrance.

Alas! Noble child (name): Do not let your mind be distracted. Keep your thought wholly single and maintain it with utmost sincerity. This is most essential!

4. The Fourth Step in Closing the Womb Entrance

[Instruction 18]

Although the instructions above have been given, the womb entrance may still not be closed and you may be about to enter it. There is then a further instruction on “illusion and unreality” to close the womb entrance. Contemplate as follows:

Alas! Alas! The male and female parents in union, violent rain and wind, thunderous crashes, fearful appearances—all the animate and inanimate worlds, and every appearance of substantial form, are by nature like illusions. However they may appear, they are ultimately not real. All are illusory and unreal, like dreams and phantasms, impermanent and unfixed. Why become attached? Why be afraid? This is seeing something where there is nothing. All dharmas arise originally from mind; the nature of mind is like an illusion and is originally nonexistent. If you wish to reach the other shore, how could this be possible?

Alas! From the very beginning, you have remained deluded and unenlightened. You have taken what is nonexistent to exist, what is false to be real, and what is illusory to be true. This has gone on for a long time, and you have sunk in birth and death down to the present. If you still do not understand illusion and unreality, you will forever sink into the sea of suffering and fall into the mire of manifold sufferings. How could there be an end? Therefore, contemplate all this.

Like dreams and illusions, like echoes in an empty valley, like a mirage, like forms and shadows in a mirror, like flowers in empty space before the eyes, like the moon in water—even for an instant, if you seek their reality, it cannot be found. Therefore, keep your mind wholly single and sincere, discard thoughts that grasp things as real, and sustain your concentration without interruption. You will surely awaken in dismay and turn back in good time. Once you are single-mindedly resolved and understand that these are unreal, the womb entrance will close of itself.

5. The Fifth Step in Closing the Womb Entrance

[Instruction 19]

Moreover, although the essential points of the preceding instruction on contemplating things as illusory have been practiced, one may still cling to them as real. If the womb entrance has not been closed and signs of confusion upon entering the womb are about to arise, the following instruction on the “Clear Light” is given.

Good son (so-and-so): Although you have practiced in this way, the womb entrance alone has not yet been closed. Now, in the fifth step, contemplate and cultivate the “Clear Light” in order to close the womb entrance. The method of visualization is as follows:

Alas! Contemplate that all dharmas / Are none other than my own mind. / This mind itself is empty, / Unborn and free from annihilation.

Contemplate in this way, settling the mind in the naturally abiding realm of “non-doing.” It is like pouring water into water: they naturally blend together. Settle the mind upon its original source; let it be natural and move freely within it. Remain at ease, and in the original state that requires no contrivance, remain thus, unmoving. Then the womb entrances of the four modes of birth will certainly be closed.

Above, the profound instructions for closing the womb entrance have been set forth in many forms of guidance. Among practitioners of the higher, middling, and lesser capacities, there is none who cannot be liberated.

Why is this so? First, the consciousness in the intermediate state possesses defiled spiritual powers; upon hearing what I say, it immediately comes before them. Second, although they may have been blind or deaf during life, at this time all six sense faculties are complete, and they can understand every utterance. Third, because they are constantly pursued by terror and fear, they carefully look after their own welfare; their minds are undistracted and their memory is strong. Once they reflect on what I say, it immediately comes before them. Fourth, their consciousness has lost its former support and longs for pleasant experiences; once instructed, they immediately comply and are easily guided.

Moreover, at this time the power of memory is clear and keen, nine times greater than during life. Even if they were dull in life, at this time, through the force of karma, their inwardly realized wisdom shines forth in clear radiance. They are able to comprehend all teachings thoroughly and grasp their essential point. Therefore, if Buddhist rites are performed for the deceased at this time, they will certainly be effective and equally beneficial.

Therefore, during the seven periods of seven days after death, it is most essential to earnestly read and recite this Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing for the deceased. If liberation is not attained through one instruction, it will be attained through the next; if liberation is not attained through the next, it will still be attained by repeating the instructions many times.

G. Choosing a Womb Entrance

Moreover, the karmic force of sentient beings is inconceivable. There are many who, from time without beginning, have cultivated too little wholesome karma and whose unwholesome karmic habits are strong. Because their karmic obstacles are too heavy, even when instructions are repeatedly given and they concentrate their minds with utmost sincerity, they still find liberation difficult. Since previously they were unable to close the womb entrance, there are now profound instructions for choosing a womb entrance, as follows:

First recite the “Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,” then recite the “Four Refuges” (both are found in the appendix). Next, call the name of the deceased, recite the following text, and address them thus:

Alas, noble son [name]: Listen attentively! Although the preceding instructions you encountered have already been given to you once, you did not understand them. Now the womb entrance has not been closed, and the time for taking rebirth has arrived. Therefore, you must choose a womb entrance for yourself. Give rise to earnest faith and joyful trust; listen carefully and receive these teachings in faith without forgetting them.

1. An Overview of the Various Places of Rebirth

[Instruction 20]

Alas, noble son [name]: Signs of where you will take rebirth now appear before you. Recognize them at once and observe them carefully. Determine which continent is superior, so that you may choose accordingly.

If you are to be reborn in Eastern Videha, you will see an ornamented lake, where geese and wild ducks, male and female, chase one another and play upon the water. Do not go there; immediately turn your thoughts around and return. Even though you may encounter happiness there, it is a continent where the Buddhadharma cannot spread. Therefore, do not enter it.

If you are to be reborn in Jambudvīpa, you will see resplendent palaces. Should you seek rebirth there, it is acceptable to enter.

If you are to be reborn in Aparagodānīya, you will see an ornamented lake with herds of mares and stallions. Do not go there either; immediately turn back. Although this continent is rich and abundant, it is a continent where the Buddhadharma cannot spread. Therefore, do not enter it.

If you are to be reborn in Uttarakuru, you will see a lake ornamented with cattle, or a lake ornamented with trees. If you are born there, you will have the five grasping views—the view of self, wrong view, extreme view, attachment to views, and attachment to rules and prohibitions. Recognize this at once: you must not enter

there either. Although that continent possesses long life and blessings, it is also a continent where the Buddhadharma cannot spread. Therefore, do not enter it.

The general conditions of rebirth in the four continents have been explained one by one above. You must distinguish them clearly and take care not to enter rashly.

Moreover, if you are to be reborn in a heavenly realm, you will see exquisite celestial palaces made of many precious treasures. Your mind will delight in them. If the blessings you have accumulated lead you to that realm, you may go there to take rebirth.

If you are to be reborn in the realm of asuras, you will see pleasing forests and trees, or circles of fire revolving toward one another. Do not enter there either; immediately turn your thoughts around and return.

If you are to be reborn in the animal realm, you will see mountain caves, rock caverns, frightening deep hollows, and dense, pervasive smoke and mist. You must never enter.

If you are to be reborn in the realm of hungry ghosts, you will see vast desolate plains, devoid of human habitation, with no grass or trees above; fissures in the earth and shallow hollows, dark and profound; or densely wooded continents and islands.

If you go there, you will be born in the realm of hungry ghosts and undergo all kinds of suffering from hunger and thirst. Under no circumstances must you enter; immediately turn your thoughts around and return. Be resolute and do not go.

If you are to be reborn in the hell realm, compelled by unwholesome karma, you will hear singing, or find yourself without freedom, unable to resist and forced to enter. You may see dark continents and islands, black houses, red houses, or dark pits in the earth. When such various appearances arise, if you enter even one of them, you will undergo in the hells unbearable suffering from cold and heat, with no prospect of release. You must firmly resolve never to go there.

At that time, it is essential to recite the foregoing instructions in rotation.

2. The Dharma Gate for Protection from the Life-Seizing Demon Attendants

[Instruction 21]

Alas, noble son [name]: Even if you wish not to go, you are not in control. The prison guards summoned by karma pursue you from behind, and you lose your freedom and find it difficult to resist. Other prison guards and life-seizing demon attendants drag you from the front. Black mist, a fierce red wind of karma, roaring sounds,

violent wind and rain, heavy snow and thick fog, hailstones, and icy blades press in upon you.

Such scenes appear before you. As you seek to flee and look for a place of refuge, you again see the splendid houses described above, or cliffside caverns, underground holes, dark secluded paths, or lotuses and the like (for there are also those in the heavenly realms who are miraculously born from lotuses). Wishing to escape, you enter one of them without careful discernment, and are then shut within it. You hide there, afraid to come outside, but from that point onward you will be unable to leave.

The reason you do not wish to leave is that you think you will encounter suffering as soon as you go out. Thus you become attached to the place where you are staying. If you were to leave, you would again fear the terrifying appearances of the intermediate state. Doubt and fear consequently arise in abundance, and so you hide without moving. Yet once you enter and take on any body whatsoever, you will undergo all manner of pain. All these are appearances by which ghosts and demons obstruct you. At this time there is also a most profound and essential instruction. Listen carefully, retain it, and do not forget it!

At such a time, when you are pursued by prison guards, have no control over yourself, and various terrifying appearances arise, you must, in an instant, give rise to deep faith and visualize the “Great Victorious Heruka” (the Blood-Drinking Deity), “Horse-Headed Wisdom King” (a wrathful deity in Esoteric Buddhism), “Vajrapāṇi Bodhisattva,” or the yidam that you cultivated and revered during your life. Visualize before you a fearsome wrathful wisdom king of immense form and massive limbs, capable of crushing every obstacle and adversity into fine dust.

Through the blessing of that deity’s great compassionate power, you may free yourself from the prison guards and gain the freedom calmly to choose a womb entrance. This is a profound and authentic instruction; preserve it and do not forget it.

Noble son [name]: There are also the heavens of meditative absorption, where rebirth occurs through the power of samādhi. As for hungry ghosts, malevolent spirits, rākṣasas, and the like, during the intermediate state they transform their thoughts and thereby become hungry ghosts, malevolent spirits, or rākṣasas. They can display all kinds of miraculous transformations and become mind-born bodies.

There are as many as eighty-four thousand types of hungry ghosts dwelling throughout the space above and below, as well as forms of hungry ghosts appearing illusorily in space. All belong to mind-born bodies of the intermediate state, produced through the transformation of thoughts, and thus possess such bodies. At that time, if you can recollect the meaning of the Mahāmudrā of emptiness, that is

supreme. If you cannot practice this, then practice illusory yoga. If you cannot do even this, do not become attached to any thought whatsoever. Visualize and cultivate the yidam, the Great Compassionate Protector, and you will naturally realize the sambhogakāya Buddha. (Illusory yoga is also a highest esoteric practice of attainment in the Kagyü school of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism.)

H. Choosing Between Transference of Consciousness to the Pure Land and Rebirth in the Human Realm

[Instruction 22]

First, the instructions for transference to the pure realm of the ḍākinīs are as follows. Make this aspiration and recite to yourself:

Alas! How grievous is my suffering! From beginningless kalpas until today, this body has sunk into the mire of birth and death; now I must cast it off. In past lives I have long encountered many Buddhas, yet I have not attained liberation. This is truly lamentable. I have now grown weary of saṃsāra; it is dreadful and repugnant, and I must flee from it without delay. The time has come. Therefore, I aspire to be born by transformation in a lotus at the feet of Amitābha Buddha, the World-Honored One, in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Reflect in this way, pray with fierce earnestness, focus the mind wholeheartedly, and yearn with all sincerity.

Or, according to the Buddha-field in which you yourself have faith and delight, aspire to be born in the eastern “Land of Manifest Joy,” the Buddha-field of Akṣobhya Tathāgata; in the central Ghanavyūha Land, the Buddha-field of Vairocana; in the northern “City of Wealth,” the abode of Vajrapāṇi Bodhisattva and Vaiśravaṇa, King of the Devas; before Guru Padmasambhava in the western “Lotus Light Palace” of Oḍḍiyāna; or in any Buddha-field of your own faith and delight. Seek it joyfully and concentrate upon it; with utmost sincerity and reverence, do not let the mind become scattered. Make the aspiration for rebirth there, and you will immediately be born in that land.

Again, if you wish to go to the Inner Court of Tuṣita and draw near to the compassionate Maitreya, simply recite to yourself: “Now that I am in the intermediate state, the time is ripe. I shall go to the Inner Court of Tuṣita and draw near to the compassionate Maitreya.” Yearn for this with fierce earnestness and focus the mind wholeheartedly. You will then be born by transformation from a lotus womb before the Compassionate One.

Rebirth Through Entering a Womb and Returning to the Human World

[Instruction 23]

Next, if you are unable to be reborn in a Buddha-field and wish to enter a womb, or if circumstances compel you to enter a womb, there are now instructions for choosing a womb entrance within impure saṃsāra. Listen carefully! As explained above, carefully choose the continent in which to be born. By means of your supernormal power, observe everywhere, and you may enter a land where the true Dharma of the Buddha flourishes.

When one is to be born through a particular womb entrance, an impure mass of blood appears. One imagines it to have a fragrant taste and becomes attached to it, and is thereby born there. Therefore, whenever any of the various appearances described above arise, do not give rise to attachment, nor to feelings of love or aversion. You must only choose a good womb, focus the mind wholeheartedly, and joyfully seek it. This is of the utmost importance. At this time, make the following aspiration:

Alas! For the benefit of sentient beings, may I be born as a wheel-turning king; or into a brahmin family, like the king of great sāla trees; or as the child of a great accomplished master; or into a family lineage of pure and undefiled true Dharma transmission; or into a family whose parents possess complete right faith. For the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings, may I take a body endowed with every blessing and merit.

Having made the aspiration above, then enter that womb with resolute intention. At the same time, bless the womb with radiant light, envision it as a sublime palace, and further envision the Buddhas and yidams of the ten directions, together with the Great Compassionate Protector, compassionately blessing you as you enter the womb. This is essential.

Furthermore, when choosing a womb, because of karmic force, one often mistakes a good womb for a bad one and, conversely, mistakes a bad womb for a good one. Therefore, at that time, the essential points of selection are extremely important. The instructions are as follows:

When the appearance of a good womb arises, do not give rise to attachment or love. When the appearance of a bad womb arises, do not give rise to aversion or dislike. Toward good and bad alike, neither grasp nor reject; be free from both love and aversion, and abide in a state of equanimity. This is the profound essential point for entering a womb.

With the foregoing instructions, except for a certain class of recipients able to receive them, there are those whose afflictions of deeply ingrained, pernicious habitual tendencies are difficult to eradicate; those unable to relinquish love and

aversion; those of lesser faculties burdened by grave offenses; and those as dull as animals. Such persons should be led to take refuge in the Three Jewels in order to avert these obstacles. Call the deceased by name again, recite the following passage, and tell them:

[Instruction 24]

Alas, good son or daughter [name]: since you are unable to choose a womb entrance and cannot relinquish love and aversion, whatever appearances may arise, as explained above, you need only recite the names of the Three Jewels, take refuge with reverence, and pray to the Great Compassionate One. Hold your head high and proceed with focused attention. Recognize the Original Face of the intermediate state. Immediately dispel all attachment and longing for the relatives, children, intimate family members, and close friends of your former life, for none of these can benefit you. You may enter the white light of the deva realm or the yellow light of the human realm. You may enter splendid jeweled palaces and delightful gardens.

After giving the above instructions, repeat them many times, up to seven times. Then recite three times each: (1) Verses Invoking the Blessings of All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; (2) Verses for Deliverance from the Perilous Passage of Fear in the Intermediate State; (3) The Six Root Verses of the Intermediate State; and (4) Prayer of Aspiration for Deliverance from Fear in the Intermediate State. Next recite: (5) Verses for Liberating Karmic Habits; and (6) the Takdrol Mantra Text. (The preceding four texts are found in the appendix, and texts five and six in the supplementary appendix. If time is too pressing, these recitations may be omitted.)