A Brief Explanation of Mahāmudrā

Writings of Master Yuanyin

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Preface

The Ganges Mahāmudrā is an advanced practice in Esoteric Buddhism. It is practice without practicing; to practice is itself no practice. Where the path of language is cut off and the sphere of mental activity ceases, one investigates the point at which not a single thought arises yet there is clear, lucid awareness, and at which, though there is clear, lucid awareness, not a single thought arises. Then one realizes that afflictions are bodhi, deluded thoughts are wondrous functioning, emptiness and existence are nondual, essence and function are one suchness, and all phenomena are Buddhadharma.

At the advanced age of ninety-four, Master Yuanyin (the elder Mr. Li Zhongding) spared no effort in lecturing on the sūtras, expounding the Dharma, and writing books. Following Essentials of Buddhist Practice and Realization, this book is another monumental work. It repeatedly offers earnest instruction, sets everything forth without reserve, and is vivid, lively, and illuminating by analogy. It is indeed a precious raft for liberating sentient beings and an essential key to attaining Buddhahood. It is hoped that all people of aspiration and goodwill who read this book will open the eye of wisdom, enter the gate of formlessness, develop great

capacity and wondrous functioning, and cultivate inexhaustible vows of compassion, so as not to disappoint the elder's painstaking efforts.

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Preface

Today I will speak to you about Mahāmudrā. Mahāmudrā is the highest teaching of Esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism is divided into the successive stages of the Nine Vehicles; this belongs to the highest vehicle. In Tibetan it is called Atiyoga—the practice of complete union with the Heart-of-Heart. We have all practiced the Heart-of-Heart Dharma for a long time, and we should all have attained some results.

Some have already opened to their original nature and seen their intrinsic nature. Others, when their intrinsic nature manifested during meditation, may not have noticed it and let it slip by. Therefore, today I will explain what buddha-nature is and how it may be seen. And after seeing it, how does one further elevate oneself, bring forth wondrous functioning, and perfect the fruition of Buddhahood?

This is to remind and encourage everyone to progress together. Ganges Mahāmudrā is exactly the same as the Chan school. It does not teach the use of any particular method of practice; rather, it teaches no practice, no attainment, and no realization —directly pointing to the mind for the attainment of Buddhahood.

But no practice, no attainment, and no realization are the natural wisdom of the true suchness of one’s intrinsic nature. Only when we have realized this state can we speak of no practice, no attainment, and no realization; it is not mere empty talk. If one understands only a few principles but has not achieved unity of mind and circumstances, remains constrained by neither favorable nor adverse conditions, and moves freely in every direction, then to speak of no practice, no attainment, and no realization is entirely meaningless. Therefore, we shall explain Ganges Mahāmudrā to everyone.

What is called Mahāmudrā does not mean that there is some mudrā to be used for cultivation. It is unlike the Heart-of-Heart Dharma that we practice, which has six mudrās and one mantra and requires us to form mudrās and uphold the mantra in practice. This Dharma is a direct-pointing Dharma gate: it tells us directly what the true mind is, how to develop wisdom, and how to bring forth wondrous functioning.

Thus, this Dharma is a direct and straightforward Dharma gate of direct pointing. It is very useful for those who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, for the Heart-of-Heart Dharma likewise directly realizes the mind-ground without proceeding through form.

There are many kinds of Mahāmudrā. Ganges Mahāmudrā is the supreme Mahāmudrā Dharma gate among them. It requires no practices involving visualization, channels, winds, drops, yidams, and the like; nor is there any need to recite mantras. It directly points us to seeing our true nature and attaining Buddhahood. Therefore, it is the highest level of Dharma: the One True Dharma Realm.

What is the One True Dharma Realm? It is the wondrous essence of suchness that is our intrinsic nature; it is also the basis for attaining Buddhahood. Why is it called Mahāmudrā? Because our buddha-nature is so great that nothing lies beyond it, and so small that nothing lies within it. As it is said, “The great image has no form; the great sound is scarcely heard.” The greatest appearance is the appearance of no appearance; that which has no appearance to be seen is the greatest appearance.

Our intrinsic nature is neither empty nor existent, neither blue nor yellow, neither great nor small; it is none of all these things. Thus, to say that it resembles any one thing would be entirely wrong. Nothing can be compared to it, for it is formless, without appearance, and beyond comparison. It is immeasurably vast, exhausting empty space and pervading the dharma realm; there is nothing it does not encompass and no dharma it does not contain.

The hand is the mind, and the mind is the hand. As the common saying goes, “When the mind reaches it, the hand responds.” This is the principle. If there were no mind, the hand could not move. The seal means that our minds mutually accord with the Buddha’s mind. The Buddha’s mind is my mind, and my mind is the Buddha’s mind. Therefore, the sūtras say, “Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are without distinction.” They also say, “A thousand Buddhas and ten thousand Buddhas share one body.” This is precisely the meaning.

Therefore, Mahāmudrā is our great mind; it is our intrinsic nature. All things arise from it, appear through it, and change through it. This is called Mahāmudrā. Ganges Mahāmudrā is so excellent and so lofty that we shall now explain this precious Dharma openly to everyone.

Lecture One: An Explanation of the Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā—View, Meditation, and Conduct Integrated Within Mind

I. Mind, Buddha, and Sentient Beings Are Undifferentiated

“You should know that the lineage masters are no different from my own mind.”

As disciples of the Buddha, we should know that our minds—that is, our Buddha-nature—and the patriarchs of successive generations are neither two nor different. Here, the patriarchs of successive generations stand in for all Buddhas, because the Buddhas have already entered nirvāṇa. The Buddhadharma is now transmitted by the patriarchs; thus the patriarchs represent the Buddhas, and Buddhas and patriarchs are united as one.

Since our minds are no different from the lineage masters, they are likewise no different from the Buddha. At this point, some people may inevitably raise doubts: We are ordinary beings, while the Buddha is sacred; ordinary beings and sages are not the same, so how can they be undifferentiated? Such people do not know that the essential nature is neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. It is the same in ordinary beings and sages alike.

The reason the Buddha possesses vast spiritual powers and boundless wondrous functioning while we do not is that all the filth and accumulated grime upon the Buddha's essential nature have been completely cleansed away. Because we cling to the illusory appearances of things and entertain inverted deluded thoughts, we defile our intrinsic nature. It is like the sun being obscured by dark clouds: its light cannot shine forth, and so we cannot manifest spiritual functioning.

Yet no matter how thick the dark clouds may be or how they cover it, the sun remains there, and its light has never diminished in the least. Once the clouds disperse, the sun appears, radiating boundless light. Likewise, although our minds are defiled—because we cling to appearances—if we cleanse away that defilement and accumulated grime, we will be as luminous as the Buddha.

This is what is meant by saying that in sages it does not increase, and in ordinary beings it does not decrease. Because we are ordinary beings, we have not lost the luminous essential nature. It is simply that our attachment to inverted deluded thoughts and our deeply ingrained habitual defilements obscure our intrinsic nature, preventing its luminosity from manifesting. The fundamental essence remains the same.

Why is this said? It is extremely important, because we now seek to attain Buddhahood, transcend birth and death, leave saṃsāra, and liberate sentient beings. We must first know how to practice, and in practice the first requirement is correct view.

What is called view is the causal ground. At the outset, one must first know what to use in cultivation and how to cultivate; only then can one swiftly attain complete fulfillment. Otherwise, one will take many detours. Therefore, we must first know that our intrinsic nature is originally the same as that of all Buddhas, without

distinction. To use it for cultivation and realization is like using rice to cook a meal: there can be no failure to succeed.

Once we understand this, we will no longer doubt that we can attain Buddhahood, and our cultivation will bear fruit swiftly. Otherwise, the Buddha seems supreme and utterly beyond reach. We are all ordinary beings, so how could we become Buddhas? How could we attain realization through practice? Once doubt arises, we hesitate and cannot move forward, and attainment becomes impossible.

Faith is the mother of success. To accomplish anything, one must first have ample faith; without faith, nothing can be accomplished. For example, those who practice the Pure Land school must first have deep, unwavering faith that the Western Pure Land truly exists. If I simply make vows and practice Buddha-recitation, then at the time of death Amitābha Buddha will certainly come to guide me to rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

Then one must diligently practice Buddha-recitation; only at the time of death can one attain realization. If one's faith is not deep, if one half believes and half doubts —"Oh dear, my karmic obstacles are heavy. Can I be reborn in the Western Pure Land? I fear that perhaps I cannot"—then it will not work. Because one's doubts are unsettled, one lacks strength in practice and cannot press forward with single-minded effort; therefore one cannot succeed.

Thus faith comes first. This is true of everything, including worldly affairs. If I believe that something can succeed, I will be willing to work hard at it. Even if I encounter failure, I will not be afraid, but will redouble my efforts and continue. In the end, I will certainly accomplish it. Otherwise, at the first setback, one becomes disheartened and listless, and will inevitably accomplish nothing.

The opening sentence tells us that we must have faith: our intrinsic nature is no different from the Buddha's. Because the lineage masters represent the Buddha and are the same as the Buddha, our intrinsic nature is the same as the masters' intrinsic nature and therefore no different from Buddha-nature. In cultivating the Way, correct view is of the utmost importance. If one's view is mistaken, the result will inevitably be roundabout and tortuous, and one will take detours.

If we can truly have faith that our intrinsic nature is exactly the same as the Buddha's, without distinction, then so long as we practice, cultivate and permeate the fundamental essence, transform inverted deluded thoughts, and restore our Original Face—rather than cultivating the physical body or seeking outwardly—we will certainly attain Buddhahood.

When one has such faith, one no longer seeks outwardly. Otherwise, one rushes about seeking externally: today seeking the Buddha here, tomorrow seeking the

Buddha there, or exerting oneself upon the physical body. One seeks and seeks, only to end in emptiness, because one does not know that one's intrinsic nature is Buddha. Instead of seeking inwardly, one turns outward, and so wastes one's energy. To attain realization in practice, one should seek within one's own original mind.

Awaken the master within yourselves. Do not remain deluded; do not keep dreaming. The forms and appearances of the world are all false, all flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, unobtainable. Do not become lost in your wives, children, wealth, or social position; they are all fleeting as an epiphyllum bloom and cannot be grasped. Thus the Lotus Sūtra says: "Only this one true reality is real; the other two are not true."

The one and only true reality is the One True Dharma Realm—our true intrinsic nature. What is the Dharma Realm? The Dharma Realm is dharma-nature, also called true reality. Dharma refers to all dharmas, and realm means division or boundary. It encompasses all that exists and may broadly be divided into ten: the four noble realms and the six ordinary realms.

The four noble realms are those of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, and arhats. The six ordinary realms are the sentient beings of the six realms—humans, devas, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. All are manifestations of this nature. Thus, not only are the intrinsic natures of humans and all Buddhas alike; even the sentient beings of the six realms are no different from the true mind of the Buddhas. Alas, they are deluded by sounds and forms, burdened by deep karmic obstacles, and do not know it.

Therefore, the Buddha compassionately entered the world to awaken us: do not persist in clinging to dreams. You are all the same as me, the Buddha; awaken quickly and escape the suffering of birth and death in saṃsāra. When the Buddha saw the morning star and awakened to the Way on the eighth night of the twelfth lunar month, he said: "How wondrous! All sentient beings possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata. Yet because of deluded thoughts, inverted views, and attachment, they cannot realize them."

This shows that we sentient beings have not lost our Buddha-nature because of birth and death in saṃsāra. So long as we awaken, are not deluded by sounds and forms, and do not cling to them, we can restore our Original Face. Mahāmudrā is profoundly deep. From the very beginning, it reminds us that the minds of all lineage masters are the same as our own minds, without distinction. We should not think that they are beyond our reach.

Our minds are exactly the same as those of all Buddhas, without the slightest difference. Once this is firmly established, we do not doubt that we are Buddhas. We

have fallen into saṃsāra only because we are deluded and unaware, cling to appearances, and entertain inverted thoughts.

Now that we have awakened, are not deluded by appearances, and no longer grasp at them, we return to our original state. This is the first essential requirement for attaining Buddhahood. Therefore, this crucial statement is given at the outset. What follows explains how our minds are no different from those of all Buddhas, how we restore our original state, and how we bring forth wondrous functioning. This statement is the general outline and is extremely important.

“View, samādhi, conduct, and all forms of practice are contained within the mind.”

The three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are the three key instructions of Mahāmudrā, and they are also the essential points of cultivation in every dharma gate. Why is this so? Because the first requirement of practice is correct understanding and view. As explained above, our minds are no different from the minds of all Buddhas. This is called correct understanding and view, or correct view. When one’s view is correct, one’s causal ground is correct; when the causal ground is correct, the fruition can be correct.

Otherwise, one will certainly take a wrong path, mistake the way, and be unable to realize the true fruition. Hence it is said: “If the causal ground is not correct, the fruition will turn out twisted.” If a practitioner’s causal ground is not correct, that person will certainly take detours and ultimately fail. Therefore, this view is extremely important.

All ordinary beings have a view of the self. They cling to this physical body as “I,” clinging to it desperately. They want to care for the body well, eat well, dress well, and have everything well—all for the sake of this shell of a body.

Look at the countless sentient beings: who is not busy for the sake of this bodily shell? From morning to night, they are busy seeking its pleasures. The great and small affairs of this world are all pursued for the sake of this shell. People always wish to live in comfort and privilege while caring for it. In pursuit of enjoyment, they do not shrink from committing every kind of cruel and immoral deed. If they do not have something themselves, they seize it from others.

Wars in this world are fought over the seizure of things. If you will not give it to me, I will attack you, destroy your country, and take everything that is yours. Such banditry is all for the enjoyment of this bodily shell.

Not a single criminal act in society is unrelated to this bodily shell. Someone wants to eat well and enjoy themselves, but has no money—what then? They murder, set fires, and rob. Yet if you create bad causes, you will certainly undergo evil results.

The law of cause and effect is exact: sow melons and you reap melons; sow beans and you reap beans. There is not the slightest discrepancy. If you do evil at the causal stage, you will certainly undergo evil retribution in the result.

But these poor ordinary beings are foolishly deluded and do not awaken. They seek only immediate pleasure and disregard future evil results. If you wish to kill someone, you must face legal punishment and may lose your own head. If you rob others of their possessions, you will face prosecution and imprisonment.

Do you not consider whether you can escape after doing evil? Alas, it is all delusion! Present retribution is not the end of it; in the future you must also undergo the dreadful retribution of the hells. It is terrible indeed.

Some people do not understand this principle. They say, “You claim that one will undergo dreadful retribution, but why do we see some bad people now enjoying great blessings? Conversely, some good people suffer. Does that not mean cause and effect do not correspond?” They do not know that cause and effect must be viewed across the three lives.

There are two lines in the Buddhist scriptures: “If you wish to know the causes of past lives, look at what you receive in this present life; if you wish to know the results of future lives, look at what you do in this present life.” The blessings a person receives in this life result from good deeds done in the past. If that person now does evil, they will undergo evil retribution in the future. Moreover, their present blessings will diminish and their lifespan will be shortened.

When you now see a good person suffering, it is because he did bad things in the past and is only now undergoing their painful result. If he now does good deeds, he will imperceptibly lessen his evil retribution. He was originally meant to suffer a great deal, but it has now been mitigated. These karmic results are transformed invisibly, yet no one knows it.

The Buddha’s eye sees with perfect clarity. Thus it is said: “If you wish to know the causes of past lives, look at what is received in this life.” The Buddha’s way of seeing is unlike that of our ordinary eyes: what we cannot see, he can see. When the Buddha was in the world several thousand years ago, there were neither telescopes nor microscopes, yet he told us: “When people look at a cup of water, the Buddha sees millions of living creatures within it.”

He saw thousands upon thousands of creatures in a cup of water, with perfect clarity, whereas people could not see them. Now, with our naked eyes, we see only one sun in this world; only with astronomical telescopes can we see stars hundreds of millions of light-years away. Just as space contains other planets, suns, and stars, other planets also contain living beings.

But the Buddha knew this long ago and saw it very clearly. He told us that there are many worlds in space—worlds facing upward, worlds facing downward, slanting worlds, and so forth—and that there are also many suns. This is exactly what scientists say today; there is no difference. Thus the Buddha is one who knew beforehand and saw with perfect clarity, whereas people remain very confused. We should follow the Buddha's teachings in our conduct.

One's view must be correct. If one's view is incorrect, one will "wander blindly and meet with calamity." Buddhist scriptures speak of view-delusions and thought-delusions: that is, the delusions of incorrect views and of thoughts attached to objects. We have just discussed the view of the body, the first of our view-delusions. Next comes the extreme view.

Because one holds the view of the body, one sees that the body cannot remain in the world forever: it must die. Where does it go after death? Some say that after death there is nothing at all; this is the annihilationist view. Others say that something still exists; this is eternalism. One either clings to eternalism or attaches to annihilationism, falling to one of the two extremes. Not departing from these two extremes of annihilation and eternity is called the extreme view.

There is also the heterodox view, which denies cause and effect and claims that there is no cause and effect in the world. This harms people deeply. In the future, when such people descend into hell and suffer, they will know. There is no need even to speak of the future: retribution before one's very eyes does not fail. If you do evil, you may be executed or imprisoned. Can you escape it? Therefore, heterodox views are the worst and most harmful of all.

There are also the non-Buddhist views of attachment to views and attachment to rules and prohibitions. Attachment to views means deluded attachment to false views—that is, taking the preceding three views to be right view. Attachment to rules and prohibitions means deluded attachment to mortifying the body—undertaking various mistaken precepts and ascetic practices, taking them to be causes for rebirth in the blissful realms of humans and devas after death. For example, some heterodox cults now falsely claim that the end of the world has come and urge everyone to commit suicide quickly in order to ascend to heaven, causing people to kill themselves collectively.

These five views—the view of the body, the extreme view, the heterodox view, attachment to views, and attachment to rules and prohibitions—are all incorrect views. When one's views are incorrect, the results will inevitably go astray.

We know that mind is Buddha and Buddha is mind. Practice does not seek outside oneself; not clinging to the view of the body is correct view. When we recite the Buddha's name, we recite mind; to recite mind is to recite the Buddha. We apply

ourselves so that this mind may become straight and unbent, without attachment; we remove its tendency to abide and eliminate its tendency toward grasping, thereby recovering what is original. This is correct view.

Only by applying ourselves in this way can we attain accomplishment. Thus correct view is extremely important. Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi said: “Because practitioners differ in their views, the fruits of their cultivation and realization differ in five ways. First, those who cultivate while entertaining heterodox notions, seeking what is above and rejecting what is below, practice non-Buddhist dhyāna. Second, those who rightly believe in cause and effect but still cultivate through seeking and rejecting practice the dhyāna of ordinary beings.”

“Third, those who cultivate after awakening to the partial truth of the emptiness of self practice the dhyāna of the two vehicles. Fourth, those who cultivate after awakening to the truth revealed by the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena practice Mahāyāna dhyāna. Fifth, those who awaken to the fact that this mind is originally pure, originally free of afflictions, and inherently complete in its undefiled wisdom-nature, and that this mind itself is Buddha, practice the dhyāna of the highest vehicle. The Chan transmitted in Bodhidharma’s lineage is precisely this dhyāna.” From this we can see how important one’s view—which is also the causal mind—is in the course of practice.

What is samādhi? All practitioners know that, to attain Buddhahood and realize the Way, one must sit in meditation and enter samādhi in order to develop wisdom and perfectly realize bodhi. But there are many kinds of samādhi. Tathāgata dhyāna teaches the four dhyānas and eight meditative attainments. Practitioners gradually rise from the first dhyāna to the second and third, until they reach the summit of the fourth dhyāna; these are the four dhyāna attainments.

Above these, one proceeds from the sphere of infinite space to the sphere of infinite consciousness, then to the sphere of nothingness, and enters the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception; these are the meditative attainments of the four formless heavens. Together with the preceding four dhyāna attainments, they make eight kinds of samādhi. These are the samādhis realized through a gradual path of practice. Patriarchal Chan is different: it is sudden practice, sudden awakening, and sudden realization.

Its practitioners do not cultivate such samādhi. Rather, with the highest wisdom they open to what is original, directly realize Buddha-nature, and their minds naturally accord with samādhi. They say: Samādhi that has entry and exit is not great samādhi. Not being deluded when encountering circumstances is true samādhi. Only when the mind does not waver before any circumstance and is neither deluded nor confused by it can this be called great samādhi.

Samādhi is not merely being able to enter meditation while sitting, though one's mind is stirred by beauty and greedy at the sight of gold and silver. Some even believe that remaining seated and unmoving for days and nights, or for any number of years, is great samādhi. In fact, this is mistaken. It is not great samādhi, but only the cessation of feeling and perception. The dharma-attachment of their seventh consciousness remains active; they merely do not take hold of the external objects of the six sense faculties and falsely imagine that consciousness has ceased.

Once they emerge from samādhi and encounter circumstances, their reactions are even stronger than before they entered it. Such a state is not ultimate and is not great samādhi; therefore, the Chan school does not advocate cultivating this kind of samādhi. Let me give an example to demonstrate this. In the past, when the Sixth Patriarch encountered Chan Master Wolun, Wolun said: "Wolun has a skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts; when circumstances arise, his mind does not stir, and his bodhi grows day by day."

Chan Master Wolun was boasting of the profundity of his meditative skill. He said that his thoughts did not move all day long, that no circumstance could make him waver, and that his bodhi wisdom increased day by day. This samādhi may seem remarkable, but it is actually wrong. Why? You abide unmoving in samādhi and die there. When we become Buddhas, we become living Buddhas, not dead Buddhas.

A Buddha possesses lively, wondrous functioning; a Buddha is not one who sits there dead and unmoving. Therefore, this is not right samādhi.

Right samādhi has neither entry nor exit and can give rise to wondrous functioning. If you have the attachment of abiding in a "meditative skill," sitting immobile and unable to function, what use is that samādhi? Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch rescued him by saying: "Huìnéng has no skills." You have abilities, but I have none.

Speaking of abilities, many practitioners today are attached to "abilities": "I have spiritual powers; my abilities are great. You have no spiritual powers, so you have no abilities at all." They do not realize that by clinging to spiritual powers, they have already fallen into a fixed rut and died there.

Whenever practitioners abide in anything, the thing to which they cling obstructs the luminosity of their original nature, preventing them from seeing their true nature and attaining Buddhahood. Thus, even if you have spiritual powers, not only will you fail to attain Buddhahood, but you may instead become a māra in the future. To attain Buddhahood, the mind must be empty and pure, entirely free from attachment.

Therefore, the Sixth Patriarch said: "Huìnéng has no skills." That is, you have abilities, but I have none.

Why did he say this? The moment one speaks of having skills, one has already settled somewhere. Original nature is utterly pure and bare, not establishing a single dharma, unstained by a single speck of dust. As soon as one says that there is something, it is already no longer so. “Huìnéng has no skills” points precisely to where Wolun had settled.

“He does not cut off a hundred thoughts.” I do not extinguish all thoughts. Why not? Because I must give rise to wondrous functioning in order to liberate sentient beings. A Buddha is lively, and his wondrous functioning is boundless; he is not dead and unmoving. When the Buddha appears in the world to teach the Dharma, he must also use thought. Could he teach us the Dharma if thought did not move? Therefore, it is said: “He does not cut off a hundred thoughts.”

No thoughts need to be extinguished, for we still need to put them to use. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts,” and immediately continues: “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.”

If you extinguish the deluded mind, right mindfulness will also be gone, and you will be dead. For deluded mind arises from the true mind, just as waves arise from water. If the waves are extinguished, the water too will be gone.

If we extinguish the deluded mind, we become like earth, wood, metal, or stone. Can we still realize the Way? We become great rocks, great logs, or great clods of mud. Therefore, do not be impressed when someone enters samādhi for a week, for months, for years, or even for hundreds or thousands of years. It is of no use. To realize the great Way, one must develop a complete and sudden understanding, practice in accordance with reality, train tirelessly amid circumstances, and remain far removed from the deluded, illusory states manifested by one’s own mind. Only then can one accord with it. The practice of sitting stupidly is no good; it is dead samādhi and cannot realize the Way.

Let me give another koan to demonstrate that this is true. In the time when Śākyamuni Buddha was in the world, there was a woman seated beside him in samādhi. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva came and, seeing her, thought: How can this woman be so unaware of proper conduct as to enter samādhi beside Śākyamuni Buddha? She ought to withdraw far behind the Buddha.

Therefore, Mañjuśrī snapped his fingers before the woman, calling her to emerge from samādhi. Yet she remained utterly motionless and did not emerge. Seeing that she did not emerge, Mañjuśrī displayed his spiritual powers and lifted her to the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, but she still did not emerge from samādhi. Seeing that this did not work, Mañjuśrī cast her into the eighteen levels of hell, but still could not make her emerge from samādhi.

Śākyamuni Buddha said: “You cannot make her emerge from samādhi. Below, there is a Bodhisattva named Wangming who can make her emerge.” No sooner had he spoken than Bodhisattva Wangming arrived from below. The Buddha said: “You have come at just the right time. Please make this woman emerge from samādhi.” Bodhisattva Wangming snapped his fingers once before the woman, and she emerged from samādhi.

This koan is very perplexing. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva was the teacher of the Seven Buddhas—the teacher of seven Buddhas—and possessed inconceivably great wisdom. How, then, could he be unable to bring this woman out of samādhi? Wangming Bodhisattva, on the other hand, was merely a bodhisattva from the lower direction; how could he bring her out of samādhi with a single snap of his fingers? This koan must be understood in terms of its essence: this woman’s entering samādhi by grasping at an appearance was already a grave error.

As we have just said, if you abide in the appearance of samādhi, there is something to which you are attached, and that is wrong. To become a Buddha, one must not cling in the slightest, but dynamically give rise to wondrous functioning. One must not rigidly abide in samādhi.

The woman was first wrong in abiding in samādhi. Then what of Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva? He represents great wisdom. Is great wisdom not good? Yet what we ordinarily call wisdom is worldly cleverness and intellectual discrimination, not the great wisdom of prajñā. To become a Buddha, one must thoroughly eliminate this delusive wisdom.

Your cleverness and intelligence are precisely the cognitive hindrance, the ignorance of what is known; they obstruct the gate to realizing the Way and prevent awakening. When Confucius went to see Laozi in ancient times, Laozi told him, “Cast aside your wisdom.” That is, he told him to discard and overthrow his cleverness and intelligence, so that the mind would be utterly empty, possessing nothing at all and abiding nowhere. Only then could he realize the Way.

Therefore, we should not boast of our cleverness. Resorting to petty cleverness is a great hindrance. One must possess great wisdom while seeming foolish, with an unmoving mind and no attachment to anything, in order to accomplish the great Way.

For the mind to be settled and unmoving, with no attachment or clinging, does not mean being like wood or stone, without awareness or understanding. It means a mind that is lucid and clear, neither rejecting nor grasping, neither loving nor hating, and yet unmoving. We must understand, therefore, that true samādhi is not being deluded by circumstances and has neither entering nor leaving; it is not merely sitting motionless in dead stillness.

Then why could Wangming Bodhisattva bring her out of samādhi? Wangming signifies eliminating your worldly cleverness and intellectual discrimination. When one is forgetful, without knowing and without attachment, the great wisdom of prajñā appears before one. Thus, this koan is an illustration of the Dharma. It does not mean that Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva truly could not bring her out of samādhi, still less that Wangming was superior to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva.

Therefore, if we are to realize the Way, we must eliminate worldly cleverness and intellectual discrimination. At all times, let the mind be as empty and clean as if washed; inwardly, do not turn with thoughts; outwardly, do not be pulled along by circumstances. Practice diligently and reduce and reduce again; only then can accomplishment be attained.

The Sixth Patriarch said: “Who would have expected that intrinsic nature is originally pure! Who would have expected that intrinsic nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing! Who would have expected that intrinsic nature is originally unmoving! Who would have expected that intrinsic nature is originally complete in itself! Who would have expected that intrinsic nature can give rise to all phenomena!” Since intrinsic nature is complete with everything and lacks nothing, and is originally pure and no different from the Buddha, what could we fail to accomplish if we truly made the mind empty and free of defilement? Later, Dahui Zonggao composed a verse on this koan of emerging from samādhi: “Whether one can emerge or cannot emerge, this samādhi is not true samādhi.

”If you busy yourself here with emerging from samādhi and entering samādhi, this is not true samādhi but dead samādhi. True samādhi has neither entering nor leaving: it is thus in movement and thus in stillness. It is not dead stillness, sitting there without moving; rather, its wondrous functioning is boundless. Speaking and acting do not mean that one is no longer in samādhi. It means that the mind abides nowhere and, in movement, does not perceive movement.

If you abide in the appearance of stillness, that is not true samādhi. Even the two great bodhisattvas Wangming and Mañjuśrī, by making an issue of entering and emerging from samādhi, could not avoid departing from the original ground. The Chan school says: “If one is absent from it even for an instant, one is no different from a dead person.” To depart from the original ground is to lose one’s very life.

Therefore, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao concluded his verse: “Wangming and Mañjuśrī have lost their very lives.” These two great bodhisattvas, the Buddha, and the woman performed a drama for us, so that we might know how to apply ourselves in practice. This is extremely important. In our practice, we must never grasp at dead samādhi; we must be lively and unobstructed in all things.

Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, said: “Precisely when using the mind, there is precisely no mind in use; when there is no mind, it is precisely in use; in constant use, it is precisely absent.” This means that when we are doing things or speaking, the mind remains unstained, abiding nowhere and unmoving. It does not mean that one can attain samādhi merely by sitting motionless, only to become confused when affairs arise. Only to be equally at ease in stillness and activity is true samādhi.

What is conduct? It is all forms of practice: our cultivation, our actions, and our activities. View, samādhi, and conduct are of crucial importance to practitioners; thus, they are the three essentials of Ganges Mahāmudrā.

The view discussed above means that, when we first begin to practice, we must first set our understanding and view aright, so that we do not take a wrong turn. We must know what to do, how to practice, and what to use in cultivation. Thus, view is the practice of the causal ground. When we speak of becoming a Buddha, it is the mind that becomes Buddha, not the body. If one errs on the causal ground, the fruition will take a circuitous course.

We know that every dharma gate of practice is a practice of mind. Only when the mind is empty and pure, free from all clinging and defilement, can one realize the Way. Therefore, one must have right view and choose a dharma gate suited to one’s own capacities; this cultivation is conduct.

Only by practicing a method suited to one’s capacities, entering deeply into dhyāna, and opening great wisdom can one realize Buddhahood. This Mahāmudrā teaches the great Dharma of no practice, no attainment, no realization, no deliberate adjustment, and no distraction. It points out that the capacity that can speak, act, know, and be aware is itself Buddha. It instructs us to awaken directly and see our true nature: this is the unsurpassed wondrous Dharma that does not require gradual cultivation.

There are many dharma gates of practice: some partial, some complete; some sudden, some gradual. The practice of Ganges Mahāmudrā is a direct-pointing method among the complete and sudden teachings. It instructs us to see our true nature immediately, without cultivating any particular method.

Yet whether or not one practices a method, all is sustained by our true mind. Thus it is said that all forms of practice are encompassed by mind and are contained and embraced by mind. As the sūtra says: “Nothing does not flow forth from this dharma realm; nothing does not return to this dharma realm.”

Although Ganges Mahāmudrā directly points us to seeing our true nature immediately, without the need to practice any particular method, the delusive habits

accumulated over many lives cannot be eliminated all at once after seeing one's true nature. Therefore, it also teaches conduct: after seeing one's true nature, one must still safeguard realization continuously and meticulously, eliminate all habitual tendencies, enter the original ground of non-contrivance, and then thoroughly blend one's traces into it. Only then can one become continuous and undivided, perfectly integrated and unobstructed.

II. Naturally Arisen Right View

"View is to clearly know the One True Dharma Realm and the naturally arisen mind of the Tathāgata-garbha, in which immeasurable pure and defiled dharmas appear, complete with the meaning of naturally arisen equality."

What does "view" see? It is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. We must know that, in becoming a Buddha, we must first clearly understand the view and recognize this One True Dharma Realm and the naturally arisen mind of the Tathāgata-garbha. It shines forth at the gateway of our six sense faculties; only by diligently safeguarding it can we fully realize Buddhahood. The One True Dharma Realm is our true mind and intrinsic nature.

The term "One True" means that this one intrinsic nature alone is real, while all else is illusory. Dharma realm refers to the ten dharma realms discussed above—the four noble realms and the six ordinary realms. The One True Dharma Realm spoken of here is the essence of the four noble realms and six ordinary realms. It has neither noble nor ordinary, and therefore is called the One True Dharma Realm.

Our intrinsic nature is neither ordinary nor noble, utterly bare, and not establishing a single dharma. The naturally arisen mind of the Tathāgata-garbha is originally thus, without any contrivance. As it is said, Buddha-nature is naturally so; it is not something accomplished through later fabrication. "Naturally arisen" means originally thus.

The meaning of the Tathāgata-garbha mind has two levels. First, at the stage of ordinary beings, it is the Tathāgata-garbha (cang, "to conceal or store"): the Tathāgata's intrinsic nature is hidden within. Second, after you realize the Way, it is the Tathāgata-garbha (zang), a treasure treasury containing every wondrous function. Like a wish-fulfilling jewel that can shower down all treasures, it contains all wondrous functions within it.

To be complete with all wondrous functioning is the Tathāgata-garbha. Once the treasury is opened, it may be drawn upon without exhaustion and used without end. Such a great treasure is right at our side, yet we do not know it. How pitiable is that! How grievously mistaken! The Lotus Sūtra says: "A maṇi jewel is in one's own close-

fitting garment pocket, but alas, people do not know it and instead go outside to beg for food.

”This is truly the height of foolishness.

Alas, this is what sentient beings in the six realms are like! Cyclic existence in the six realms is like begging for food. Originally, one is a supremely honored and wealthy person, complete with everything; now one has fallen to begging in the streets. Is this not exceedingly unjust? Now you must be made to know and see your own original true nature, so that you do not die a wronged death. Therefore, Mahāmudrā tells us directly: not only human beings, but all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature of the Tathāgata; they simply cannot see it because it is obscured by ignorance, attachment, deluded thoughts, inverted views, afflictions, and the like.

If we can refrain from clinging to external appearances and completely eliminate all deluded thoughts and inverted views, we can restore the luminosity of our Original Face, and that lost great treasure will return to our hands.

This treasure is not outside. No one should seek or search for it outside; it shines forth at the gateway of your own six sense faculties. Simply turn the light inward and observe: when the preceding thought has ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen, take a cool glance, and you will understand that you have originally been Buddha.

Therefore, Mahāmudrā is a dharma gate of direct pointing: it directly points us to seeing our true nature. It does not require you first to investigate a huatou or arouse a sense of doubt before you can awaken. What is meant by seeing is not seeing something with the eyes, but directly experiencing it.

But how does one see this One True Dharma Realm? When you neither think good nor think evil, and no deluded thoughts arise, turn the light inward and examine: who is this one in whom not a single thought arises, who is lucid and clear, yet unlike wood or stone? Everyone may test this immediately: when not a single thought arises, see whether there is still lucid clarity. Is it without awareness like wood or stone? Clearly

it is not. It remains lucid and clear—hearing distinctly and seeing clearly—radiantly illuminating like a mirror reflecting things, yet without giving rise to discrimination, without the slightest mind of love or hate, grasping or rejecting. This lucid spiritual knowing without discrimination is our intrinsic nature—the One True Dharma Realm.

Therefore, view is to clearly know the One True Dharma Realm and the naturally arisen mind of the Tathāgata-garbha. This is the treasure innately possessed by

everyone. It is not elsewhere; it shines forth at the gateway of each person's six sense faculties.

Yet all sentient beings do not know this. They know only how to grasp at external appearances, thereby obscuring their own luminosity and falling into the ranks of beings in the six realms. Is this not lamentable? All we need do now is turn the light inward and recognize that this clear and distinct spiritual knowing, in which not a single thought arises, is originally our own intrinsic nature. It is the source of Buddhahood and the foundation for the accomplishment of all things and worlds. Thus it is said: "The innumerable manifested dharmas, defiled and pure, fully possess the meaning of intrinsic equality."

Let us first explain "the innumerable manifested dharmas, defiled and pure." All men and women, young and old, mountains and rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests—all are manifested by this mind of ours, the true mind. "Defiled" refers to polluted and undesirable things; "pure" refers to clean and beautiful things.

For example, this Sahā world of ours is an impure land, a defiled land; while the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is a Pure Land, a land of purity. Whether a Pure Land or an impure land, of what are they made, and by what are they manifested? They are all made and manifested by our One True Dharma Realm.

Therefore, the Buddhist scriptures say: "Nothing does not flow forth from this Dharma Realm; nothing does not return to this Dharma Realm." From this we can see that the mountains and rivers, the great earth, men and women, young and old that exist now are likewise manifested by this One True Dharma Realm. Without this One True Dharma Realm, how could there be mountains and rivers, the great earth, men and women, young and old? Someone may raise a doubt: How can mountains and rivers, the great earth, men and women, young and old be manifested by the One True Dharma Realm?

This requires a lengthy explanation. Before mountains and rivers and the great earth had taken shape, ancient Chinese called the state the primordial chaos of the cosmos, or undifferentiated chaos before its opening. The Buddhist scriptures call it the obscurity of emptiness illumined by awareness. Awareness is our original awareness. Every person and every sentient being possesses this awareness and this capacity for awareness.

Nature is energy; it is the innate capacity for awareness, the function that gives rise to awareness. Awareness itself is not at fault, but the trouble begins when one identifies with this awareness and determines that one truly possesses awareness. This is called producing illumination upon awareness. "Illumination" means being plainly aware that one has awareness. This is adding knowing upon knowing, placing a head atop one's head; this illumination then becomes ignorance.

Awareness itself is illumination, and illumination itself is awareness. But once illumination is produced upon awareness, division and opposition arise: one believes that, since one has an aware subject, there ought to be something of which one is aware—objects for oneself to perceive. In that primordial era of empty obscurity, before the earth had formed, there was nothing. Thus all began to move about in confusion, searching for things that could serve as objects of awareness.

But in the age of emptiness there was nothing; this is called emptiness. Because nothing could be found, all became a mass of confusion; this is called obscurity. The greater the obscurity, the more frantic the movement. Extreme movement gives rise to wind. Thus the great wind-wheel arose and rubbed against the earth element among the seven great elements—earth, water, fire, wind, space, the sense faculties, and consciousness—originally inherent in our One True Dharma Realm. The friction of earth and wind produced the fire element. As the fire element burned upward, the turbid sank and the clear rose, and thus a world composed of earth, water, fire, wind, and space came into being. The earth on which we now live arose in this way.

Thus this world—whether the earth, trees, sun, or moon—is formed from the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. These four elements are constituents inherent in our intrinsic nature, comparable to what chemists call elements.

Consider the earth. Its crust is the earth element; the water above and below the ground is the water element; fire in its core, which causes volcanic eruptions, is the fire element; and its ceaseless rotation, both axial rotation and revolution, is the wind element. Thus the earth is entirely composed of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind.

Even a great tree does not depart from earth, water, fire, and wind. Its hard trunk is the earth element; the moisture within it is the water element; its woody substance, which has the capacity to produce fire, is the fire element; and the circulation by which it absorbs nutrients, together with its swaying in the wind, is the wind element. Thus a great tree too is composed of the four great elements.

The same is true of human beings. The skin, flesh, and bones of the body are the earth element; blood and bodily fluids are the water element; the fire element is the heart, and everyone has a body temperature of 37°C; the wind element is our breathing, blood circulation, digestive circulation, and so forth—whatever moves ceaselessly belongs to the wind element. Thus all things are manifested by our true mind; this is called “the innumerable manifested dharmas, defiled and pure.” All worlds, Pure Lands and impure lands alike, are manifested by our mind.

Next comes: “fully possess the meaning of intrinsic equality.” What does this mean? It means that, whether Pure Lands or impure lands, all are manifested by the true

mind; all are equal, equal, and equal again.

We should not suppose that our impure land is brought about by the karma created by sentient beings, whereas Pure Lands are brought about by the pure minds of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and thereby give rise to a sense of inequality because purity and impurity differ. We must also understand that all forms and appearances are illusory; whether good or bad, beautiful or ugly, none can be grasped. Therefore, they are equal.

Although we have now fallen into the state of sentient beings, the One True Dharma Realm is equal. It is only because of ignorance that the luminosity of our intrinsic nature is temporarily obscured. Yet its fundamental substance remains neither defiled nor pure, unmoving and unchanging. The obscuring of its luminosity does not pollute its fundamental substance.

For example, suppose that a pearl is temporarily buried in mud. Its radiance is obscured and cannot be seen, but has its radiance thereby been lost? No. When you dig it out and wipe away the mud, the pearl shines exactly as before. The radiance of its fundamental substance is not lost because it has been covered by filth. Therefore, it is said that intrinsic nature does not increase in sages or diminish in ordinary beings; it is equal, equal, and equal again.

Because we do not understand this meaning of equality, we grasp and reject, love and resent. We think this is good and pure, while that is foul and bad. Yet all are manifested by our true mind. Therefore, one who has truly seen the Way neither grasps nor rejects, neither loves nor hates.

When, through practice, we remove ignorance and eliminate all defilement, attachment, affliction, and inverted views, we can restore the luminosity of intrinsic nature and reveal the originally pure Dharma body. At that time, the Pure Land is present here and now. There is a Pure Land in principle and a Pure Land in phenomena. The Pure Land in principle is our pure mind; this is called the mind-only Pure Land.

Speaking in terms of phenomena, beyond ten trillion Buddha lands from this world of ours lies the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Yet although that western world is far away, it is not separated from us, for our true mind pervades empty space and extends throughout the Dharma Realm. No matter the Pure Lands in the ten directions, none lies outside our true mind. It depends only on whether your mind is pure.

When the mind is pure, the Pure Land is not separated from you; it stands before you. When the mind is impure, separation inevitably arises, and it is ten trillion

Buddha lands away from you. Our mind fully possesses everything, and all practices are encompassed within the mind.

The sūtras say: “The three realms are mind-only; all phenomena are consciousness-only.” Apart from mind, nothing exists. Therefore, as we discussed above, deluded mind should not be extinguished. Why should deluded mind not be extinguished? Deluded mind is manifested by the true mind; without true mind, how could there be deluded mind? Without water, for example, how could there be waves? The waves represent deluded mind, and the water represents true mind. If you eliminate the waves, the water too will be gone. Therefore, deluded mind should not be eliminated; it need only be allowed to rest.

Thus it is said: when the frantic mind comes to rest, that is suchness. All dharma gates simply instruct us to let the deluded mind rest. Do not grasp at sagehood; simply let the mind rest. When the deluded mind comes to rest, that is enough.

Mahāmudrā is a Dharma gate of direct instruction. It tells us that, if we are to see the One True Dharma Realm, we must let the deluded mind rest. When not a single thought arises, turn the light inward and see the luminosity of intrinsic nature. This is one’s own Original Face. Do not seek any other marvelous or mysterious thing.

Once there is seeking, once there is something gained, one is attached to appearances. Not only will one never realize the Way; one may instead become a demon. Why? Because our intrinsic nature originally possesses everything and lacks nothing. It is therefore the tathāgata-garbha, a treasure storehouse. Once you open it, you can draw upon it without end; there is no need to seek anything externally.

Once there is seeking, the mind is neither empty nor pure. Abiding in appearances, one becomes a skandha demon. Therefore, after seeing the Way, we must safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly, diligently removing the old habitual tendencies of attachment. This is called cultivating the Way.

Why must this be done? After seeing the Way, one has merely recognized one’s own Original Face. The habitual tendencies of beginningless attachment have not yet been entirely eliminated. Since beginningless kalpas, one has grown accustomed to attachment to appearances, and these tendencies have accumulated. It is not very possible to make you immediately cling to nothing at all and remain pure and non-contriving.

For example, suppose a dark room has been sealed for many years. Once its doors and windows are opened, or an electric light is switched on, the darkness disappears and the room has light. Yet because it has been closed for so long, its moldy, stale odor cannot be removed at once. It must still be aired, swept, and washed over a

long period before the moldy odor accumulated over many years can gradually be eliminated.

Again, consider a foul latrine bucket that has held excrement for many years. Once the excrement has been emptied out, the stench still cannot be eliminated, because it has penetrated deeply into the wood and cannot be removed at once. It must be soaked, immersed, washed, and scrubbed over a long time before the stench can gradually be completely eliminated.

By the same principle, even if we suddenly see our Original Face, recognize our own true mind, and know that all things and innumerable appearances are manifested by our true mind, it is still difficult to eliminate all habitual tendencies at once, remain wholly unattached amid circumstances, and be entirely unmoved.

Therefore, after awakening, one is only at the stage of seeing the Way. One must still pass through the stage of cultivating the Way, diligently tempering oneself and practicing amid circumstances until the habitual tendencies of attachment to appearances and clinging to circumstances have been completely eliminated. Only then can one realize the fruition of Buddhahood. At that time, one enters the stage of realization of the Way.

At the time of seeing the Way, one is merely like a small child newly born—an infant who cannot yet walk, speak, or do things. One must gradually grow into an adult before one can gradually speak, walk, work, and even become a hero, an outstanding person, or a great figure. Therefore, after seeing the Way, we must still cultivate the Way before we can realize the Way.

However, the first and most important thing is to see the Way. If one has not seen the Way, one does not know what the Original Face is or what the true mind is. Doubts always remain within; one is constantly chasing after externals, with no master in one's own mind. Inevitably, one becomes inverted and attached to appearances, and in the end cannot realize the Way.

Therefore, practitioners must first see their intrinsic nature and understand what is fundamentally real. Only then can they begin to sweep away the illusory habitual tendencies of delusion. It is like turning on the light in a room: once one clearly sees where the filth is, what places are dirty, and where the rubbish lies, one can begin to clean it away.

If the light has not been turned on and the room is pitch-dark, not only is there no way to begin; even if one forces oneself to clean, one will inevitably bump into things here and there, bruising one's face, and still be unable to clean the room thoroughly.

Therefore, to realize the Way, one must first open the Buddha's knowledge and vision and understand that this One True Dharma Realm is inherently possessed by all sentient beings; it is not something produced through cultivation. The Chan school says, "The Way belongs to awakening, not to cultivation." This is the principle. When we truly understand this principle, our practice is on the right path.

As stated above, although truth may be awakened to suddenly, the habitual tendencies of attachment to appearances accumulated over many lives cannot be eliminated at once. They must still be safeguarded at every moment. Whenever a deluded thought arises, recognize it; upon recognizing it, dissolve it into emptiness; and do not abide even in that emptiness. Only then can one be perfectly integrated and unobstructed. Practice proceeds from shallow to deep and from unfamiliar to familiar. Only when it becomes completely familiar can one forget it; after forgetting it, one can transform. At that time, one can transform without obstruction.

Therefore, we must first maintain aware contemplation and gradually advance to quiescent illumination. Awareness means conscious knowing: when a thought arises, one must know it and not follow it. This is functioning with deliberate effort. If one sees that a thought has moved but cannot let it go, because one's meditative stability is insufficient to stop its continuation, that will not do. One must promptly rely on the Buddha's empowering support to cut it off.

Those who recite the Buddha's name should swiftly bring forth the sacred name of Amitābha Buddha and settle the deluded mind upon that name; then deluded thoughts cannot continue. Those who uphold mantras should bring forth the mantra, and the deluded thoughts will be redirected. Those who investigate Chan should attend to the huatou at every moment, and deluded thoughts will naturally not arise. But if deluded thoughts arise and one does not know it, instead following the thoughts along, then all is lost.

Therefore, after seeing the Way, one must safeguard it continuously and closely. When this safeguarding has become mature, there is no need to safeguard it any longer; one can advance from aware contemplation to quiescent illumination. Quiescence means unmoving: one no longer needs to employ awareness, and illumination is forgotten as well. There is naturally illumination without attachment to illumination. If there remains an illumination to which one clings, there is still abiding and still functioning with deliberate effort. When there is neither illumination nor non-illumination, one enters non-contrivance. Functioning without deliberate effort has exceedingly great efficacy. Only here can one enter the stage of non-retrogression.

"Fully endowed with the meaning of inherent equality" means that all things—good and bad, defiled and pure, long and short—are equal, equal, and again equal,

without distinction. This is because all sentient beings are Buddhas. Do not look down on animals such as oxen and horses; they too are Buddhas. It is only because they have committed many evils and their karmic obstacles are heavy that they have fallen into the three lower realms.

We must give rise to great compassion and vow to liberate all sentient beings, so that all may reach the shore of awakening. Only thus do we accord with the Buddha's original intent in appearing in the world to liberate sentient beings.

Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva adorns the hells while in the hells and liberates the sentient beings there. He widely employs Dharma power to awaken them from their deluded dreams, enabling them to know that the Buddha-nature of those suffering there has not diminished by even a fraction. It is only because they have failed to awaken, become attached to appearances, and created karma that they have fallen into hell to undergo punishment.

If they swiftly awaken, repent, and restore the luminosity of their own intrinsic nature, they immediately soar upward and transcend it. From this we can see that the first priority for practitioners is to realize the mind and see one's true nature. Only after seeing one's true nature will one no longer create karma and undergo retribution. Without seeing one's intrinsic nature, one cannot avoid blind cultivation; only after seeing one's intrinsic nature does one begin right cultivation.

After truly seeing one's intrinsic nature, one also understands that the Western Pure Land and the impure land in which we dwell are equally the same. The sūtra says: "As the mind is pure, so the Buddha land is pure."

When your mind is pure and undefiled, that very moment is the Pure Land. Once the mind is pure, there is no grasping or rejection; how could distinctions such as good and bad, beautiful and ugly remain? When the mind gives rise to discrimination, things go wrong: good and bad, beautiful and ugly then arise accordingly. People thereafter follow them with attachment, anger, grasping, and rejection, and inevitably create karma and undergo retribution.

Cultivating the Way is for the sake of leaving cyclic rebirth and transcending the three realms. Therefore, one must first correct one's view, recognize this mind of equality inherently possessed by everyone, and understand the meaning of equality among phenomena. Only then can one begin to eliminate habitual tendencies and transform consciousness into wisdom.

For practitioners to perfectly realize the fruition of Buddhahood, they must transform consciousness into wisdom. Consciousness is knowledge and the discriminating mind; it is the deluded mind by which ordinary beings cling to objects

and create karma. Only through diligent practice and transformation can one attain the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment and fulfill one's wish.

In the process of transformation, one first transforms the sixth consciousness into wondrous observing wisdom and the seventh consciousness into wisdom of equality. Only then can one transform the first five consciousnesses into wisdom that accomplishes what is to be done and transform the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom. Deluded consciousness cannot be transformed into the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment all at once. Thus the Sixth Patriarch said, "The sixth and seventh are transformed at the causal stage; the fifth and eighth are perfected at the stage of fruition." This is what he meant.

"You should know that the lineage masters are no different from my own mind." Since one who has seen the Way knows deeply that one's own mind is the Buddha-mind and the Buddha-mind is one's own mind, one's mind is not merely no different from the lineage masters; it is also without distinction from all things and circumstances. In such a state of mind, what attachment or aversion, grasping or rejection, could remain? If one still discriminates—"This is beautiful, I want to take it; that is ugly, I want to reject it"—then one's mind still lacks equanimity, and one has not truly seen the Way.

Therefore, we must understand that the One True Dharma Realm is originally neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, and fully endowed with all things. In other words, we are originally Buddhas. So long as we are not deluded or ignorant, do not follow deluded thoughts, and do not become attached to circumstances or chase after things, we can return home by the very road we came and restore our intrinsic nature.

Therefore, Mahāmudrā tells us: do not seek to cultivate something new; you inherently possess the suchness of Buddha-nature. Simply turn the light inward, attach to nothing, recognize each thought as it arises, and do not follow thoughts. This is right cultivation and right practice. But one must first have correct views. This is the practice at the causal stage: if one's views are incorrect, the fruition will be tortuous. Thus Mahāmudrā begins by saying that one's views must be correct.

Only after seeing one's intrinsic nature can one remain in samādhi at all times. Why? Because only after awakening does one deeply know that all appearances are unobtainable, that they are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, with nothing to grasp or cling to. Only one's intrinsic nature is real, even though one responds to circumstances according to the occasion while the mind remains unmoved. The Diamond Sūtra says: "Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere."

Only thus is there a living, vibrant great samādhi of boundless wondrous functioning; only such cultivation is the genuine practice of one who cultivates the Way. Therefore, the mind of a practitioner must be impartial and equal, without distinctions of intimacy or distance in dealing with people and things. If one still holds views of difference, one has not yet reached the realm of true equality.

Insight, samādhi, and conduct are all encompassed by mind and fully present within mind. Therefore, in studying Buddhism we should study the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate. It is like giving birth to a prince: just as the emperor's own son, the crown prince, will certainly become emperor in the future, so one will certainly become a Buddha in the future.

Cultivating other dharma gates is like earning merit in outer ranks: however good one's practice may be, one can only be enfeoffed as a king or marquis, not become the emperor—that is, become a Buddha. Especially today, people who practice qigong are all attached to the physical body. They work on the Microcosmic Orbit and the Macrocosmic Orbit, or even employ sorcery and tricks that deceive the eye, showing themselves off and fooling the ignorant. They think themselves clever, but in truth they are merely manipulating vital essences and spirits. However great your spiritual powers or however healthy your body, it will ultimately decay and cannot last. Hence the Chan school says, "When non-Buddhists cultivate the body, it must ultimately decay."

Therefore, when we apply ourselves, our views must be correct. We must know what the foundation of becoming a Buddha is, and then cultivate it diligently in order to attain the true fruition. Master Hanshan says in Direct Pointers to the Heart Sūtra: "The reason cultivation of prajñā succeeds so swiftly is that everyone possesses this wondrous nature of suchness."

The Buddhas realize it and regard it as marvelous spiritual powers and wondrous functioning; sentient beings are deluded about it and make it into vain thoughts and worldly toil. Thus they use it daily without knowing it, obscuring this fundamental reality and suffering hardships in vain. Is this not lamentable? If one can suddenly awaken to what one has inherently possessed, turn the light inward at once, and cultivate it through a single thought, then the emotional barrier of birth and death will suddenly collapse, just as a lamp can dispel a thousand years of darkness in a room. There is no need to seek other expedient means!" From this we can see that so long as we awaken, do not become deluded by material appearances, turn the light inward at every moment, and cultivate through the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, without relying on other dharma gates, we will certainly become Buddhas in the future.

III. The Mind-Ground Dharma Gate

Speaking of the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate reminds me of the Chan koan involving Huanglong and Lü Chunyang. Lü Chunyang cultivated Daoism, which emphasizes refining essence, vital energy, and spirit; gathering the great medicine and refining it into the great elixir, the so-called golden elixir; and transforming it into an infant, the indestructible yang spirit. When he visited Patriarch Huanglong, he had already accomplished the elixir and could project his yang spirit from his body.

After the Daoist golden elixir has been accomplished, one may travel among the clouds in all directions and visit spiritually accomplished teachers at renowned mountains. One day, as he passed Mount Huanglong, he saw purple clouds gathered over it like a canopy. Knowing that an extraordinary person was there, he went to pay a visit. Just then, Chan Master Huanglong was ascending the Dharma seat to teach, so he mingled with the crowd to hear what Huanglong would say.

Huanglong knew that he was Master Lü and wished to draw him into the Way. He therefore said sternly, “Today I will not teach the Dharma, for beside this seat there is one who steals the Dharma!” Lü Chunyang then resolutely stepped forward and asked Chan Master Huanglong, “Within a grain of millet is concealed a world; in a half-pint cauldron are boiled mountains and rivers.”

“What does this mean?” Huanglong pointed at him and said, “You guardian ghost of a corpse!” Lü Chunyang said, “Yet there is within my pouch medicine of immortality.” Huanglong said, “Even after eighty thousand kalpas, you will still fall into emptiness and annihilation.”

Lü Chunyang was greatly startled on hearing this. He then sent forth his flying sword at Huanglong. With a flick of his whisk, Huanglong sent the flying sword falling to the ground. For one who wielded a sword, to see his sword fall to the ground was to admit defeat. Lü Chunyang immediately knelt in homage and asked for instruction. Huanglong said, “I will not ask about cooking mountains and rivers in a half-pint cauldron; how can a single grain of millet contain the world?” Lü Chunyang attained great awakening on hearing these words.

What did he awaken to? He awakened to the formless mind. This formless mind is the root of becoming a Buddha and the root of realizing the great Way. This vast, formless energy capable of manifesting the yang spirit is the eternally indestructible true Buddha. In studying Buddhism and cultivating the Way, one must never cling to form and appearance. Forms and appearances are shadows of the true mind and will eventually decay.

Therefore, after Lü Chunyang suddenly awakened, he said: “Cast aside the gourd and bag; smash the qin. From now on, I will no longer refine the gold within water. Ever since I first saw Huanglong, I have realized that formerly I used my mind wrongly.” Water refers to mercury, an ingredient used in alchemical refinement.

Taoist alchemy emphasizes taking kan and filling li. Water is yin and is called kan; the gold extracted from it is yang and is called li. Taking kan and filling li means joining yin and yang to refine the golden elixir of the yang spirit. “From now on, I will no longer refine the gold within water” means that he no longer refines such things, because Patriarch Chunyang had recognized the true Buddha of the formless mind that is intrinsic nature. It is originally thus, naturally thus; it is not produced through contrived cultivation and refinement. Sentient beings are merely deluded by external objects and fail to recognize it. Now that he had recognized and understood it, he no longer clung to external objects.

In our practice, we must first understand what the root of becoming a Buddha is. Otherwise, if the direction is wrong, we will be a thousand miles off and have no hope of realizing the Way. For example, to cook rice, one must use rice; only then can it become cooked rice. If one uses mud and sand, then no matter whether one cooks it for several days or several tens of thousands of years, it can never become rice. Therefore, right view is extremely important.

What is the root? It is our One True Dharma Realm (intrinsic nature), and not anything else; it has nothing to do with practicing qi or refining elixirs. Once one recognizes intrinsic nature, one possesses right view. After seeing one’s nature, there should originally be no cultivation, nothing to attain, and nothing to realize. But if one’s habitual tendencies have not been exhausted and one’s mind still stirs upon encountering circumstances, then birth and death have not been transcended, and one must still cultivate.

Why is this said? Because after becoming a Buddha, even Buddhahood cannot be obtained—what else could there be to obtain? Therefore, there is nothing to attain. Since there is nothing to attain, what could one realize? Therefore, there is nothing to realize. With nothing to attain and nothing to realize, one is originally a Buddha and does not become one through cultivation; therefore, there is no cultivation. Yet because your habitual tendencies have not been exhausted, you must still cultivate.

How should one cultivate? Cultivation without cultivation means constant contemplation, without relying on any particular method of cultivation. Therefore, cultivation without cultivation is still necessary. After recognizing intrinsic nature, one understands that all forms and appearances in the world are manifestations of this One True Dharma Realm (intrinsic nature).

Therefore, nature is appearance, and appearance is nature; nature and appearance are nondual. Thus, Buddhism speaks of the Dharma gate of nonduality. The Heart Sūtra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” These forms and appearances are manifested by the essence of our One True Dharma Realm, which is wondrous presence and true emptiness. This does not mean that, when one hears “form is

emptiness," one should think that form is sheer nonexistence. That would be wrong. If it were sheer nonexistence, it would become a barren, annihilationist emptiness. Thus, when we say that all forms and appearances have no independent essence, no inherent nature, and are originally empty, we mean that all are empty in the sense of being unobtainable.

There are several kinds of what is called emptiness. Generally speaking, there are emptiness defined in opposition, annihilationist emptiness, analytical true emptiness, and so forth.

Ordinary beings understand emptiness as something defined in opposition: when things are present, there is existence; when things are absent, there is emptiness. Non-Buddhist paths teach annihilationist emptiness, maintaining that when a person dies, everything is entirely finished and nothing remains. The way seen by the two vehicles is analytical true emptiness: they separate the two dharmas of form and mind, taking form as the dharma of form and feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness as dharmas of mind. For example, the five aggregates are form, feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness.

The two vehicles say that form is the dharma of form, while feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness are dharmas of mind, and they separate them. They believe that in cultivating the Way, the body is useless and must be abandoned. But this is not so. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form; all forms and appearances, including our bodies, are the true mind.

For example, a mirror can reflect images. If a mirror could not reflect images, it would not be a mirror; it is called a mirror precisely because it can manifest images. Our fundamental essence is wondrous presence and true emptiness. Wondrous presence possesses all dharmas; it is not sheer nonexistence. Therefore, it can manifest the images of all things and perform wondrous functions.

If it could not manifest all things and perform wondrous functions, it could not be called the nature of true emptiness. Thus, "form is emptiness, and emptiness is form" means that all forms and appearances are manifested and brought about by the true mind, the nature of true emptiness.

The nature of true emptiness—the true mind—is formless and cannot be seen or touched. It must be reflected and manifested through phenomena and forms. This is a more thorough explanation. Hence the saying, "Phenomena are brought about by principle, and principle is manifested through phenomena." That phenomena are brought about by principle means that all things are accomplished through the underlying principle.

Where can this underlying principle—the formless One True Dharma Realm—be seen? It is seen in phenomena and manifested through things; hence it is said that principle is manifested through phenomena. For example, if we wish to build an airplane, we must first design a plan. Then an engineer guides the workers in manufacturing it according to that plan. Once it has been built, the airplane takes to the sky.

The airplane is a thing, a phenomenon with form. Its successful completion demonstrates that the design, drawings, and plans were correct, and thus the airplane can fly into the blue sky. If the drawings, plans, data, and so forth are incorrect, the airplane will be unable to fly, or it will fall from the sky.

The plan, drawings, and data are the underlying principle, while the airplane is the phenomenon. The airplane, as a phenomenon brought about through plans, drawings, and data, illustrates that phenomena are brought about by principle. Its successful completion proves that its design, drawings, and data are correct, illustrating that principle is manifested through phenomena. This is an analogy.

Our true mind is formless, yet its formless appearance is manifested in things. Today, mountains, rivers, and lands; men and women, young and old; the sun, moon, and stars; grasses, trees, and forests; and all manner of ever-changing things are manifestations of our One True Dharma Realm. Therefore, to see appearance is to see nature; nature and appearance are nondual.

In the past, patriarchs said, “The verdant bamboo is entirely dharmakāya; the lush yellow flowers are nothing but prajñā.”

Bamboo is an elegant thing. Su Dongpo composed a clever poem about bamboo: “Without bamboo, people become vulgar; without meat, people grow thin. If you wish to be neither vulgar nor thin, then have bamboo shoots fried with meat at every meal.”

Bamboo shoots fried with meat taste very good: one is neither vulgar nor thin. This shows that bamboo is a very elegant thing. When one sees verdant bamboo, that is our dharmakāya; when one sees lush yellow flowers, that is our prajñā wisdom.

Why is this so? Principle is revealed through phenomena. But does this mean that these things are entirely ourselves, and that we are entirely these things? It cannot be said that way. Why not? Long ago, Chan Master Dazhu said that if green bamboo were the Dharma-nature body, then when we eat bamboo shoots, would we not be eating the Dharma body? For example, if a bowl were your Dharma body and you smashed the bowl, then you would also have smashed the Dharma body.

That too is not right. Then is this statement ultimately right or not? How should it be understood? It should be said to be “neither one nor two”: they are neither entirely one entity nor wholly different from one another.

To say “not one” means that they are not the same. Our dharmakāya is formless, whereas things have form; in terms of appearance, they are not one entity. Yet nature does not depart from appearance, and appearance does not depart from nature. From the perspective of their inseparability, they are not two; they are one entity.

There are reflections in a mirror, and reflections can never be separated from the mirror. Can you remove the reflections from within a mirror? You cannot. If you wrap the mirror in cloth, the weave of the cloth is reflected within it, and reflections remain there.

If you turn the mirror toward the ground, objects beneath it are still reflected within it; if you turn it toward the sky, clouds, stars, sun, and moon in the sky are also reflected in it. There are always reflections in the mirror. Therefore, from the perspective of inseparability, the mirror is the reflection and the reflection is the mirror. Yet a reflection remains a reflection and a mirror remains a mirror. Thus, in terms of appearance, one has form and the other is formless; they are not one entity. This is “neither one nor two.” This principle must be thoroughly understood.

In the past, Patriarch Dongshan was crossing a river. He lowered his head to roll up his trouser legs, and at that moment saw his reflection in the water and suddenly awakened. He composed a verse containing the marvelous lines, “He is now precisely I, yet I am not now he,” demonstrating that he had indeed realized the Way. Here, qu does not mean a channel; it means “he.”

“He is now precisely I” refers to the reflection in the water as precisely myself; “yet I am not now he” means that I am not that reflection.

Why is he now I, while I am not he? The infinitely varied images in the world are all manifested by our true mind; therefore, all these images are my intrinsic nature. Yet I am not these images. This is called neither identity nor separation.

Not separation means that the dharmakāya is manifested without departing from these images. Not identity means that all these images are not myself. Buddhist principles are explained with great clarity, yet are also profoundly subtle. When we clearly understand these things and Buddha-nature, we know how to realize the essence and bring forth its function; otherwise, we remain confused.

Long ago, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao saw this verse by Patriarch Dongshan and thought: “Patriarch Dongshan awakened to the Way—so why are there still self and

other? Once one has awakened to the Way, there should be neither self nor other. Why, then, are there still self and other?" He had doubts about this. Only after he truly awakened thoroughly did he realize that neither "self in relation to other" nor "other in relation to self" can be obtained. Yet their being unobtainable does not mean that not even a single apparent form exists. All appearances remain unspoiled; they are all wondrous functioning of our true mind. Therefore, we must thoroughly clarify these questions.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says: "The nature of form is true emptiness; the nature of emptiness is true form." This nature is the true-empty essence of wondrous presence. It is utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust, without the slightest form or appearance. To say that it resembles any one thing is already wrong. This true-empty, all-capable essence is the basis that forms and manifests everything.

That is to say, this emptiness is not an emptiness in which nothing whatsoever exists; it is the emptiness of true emptiness and wondrous presence. For every form and appearance is manifested by the essential nature of true emptiness and wondrous presence; all are functions arising from our intrinsic nature. Apart from intrinsic nature, there are no forms or appearances. Therefore, all forms and appearances are intrinsic nature, and intrinsic nature is all forms and appearances.

Intrinsic nature is formless: it exists yet does not exist, is not empty yet is empty—true emptiness. Forms and appearances, by contrast, do not exist yet exist, are empty yet not empty—wondrous presence. Forms and appearances, true emptiness, and wondrous presence have never been different. Yet people in the world often cling to visible forms as truly existent, becoming deluded and entrenched in this fixation beyond breaking.

Out of compassion for sentient beings, the Buddha taught us to recognize the truth and emphatically pointed out: "Form is not other than emptiness; emptiness is not other than form." "Not other than" means that there is no difference between them.

Why is it said, "The nature of form is true emptiness; the nature of emptiness is true form"? Because it is empty in nature, it can manifest forms and appearances. If its nature were not empty, if it had already become a concrete entity with color and form, it could not manifest the various appearances. Why not? To give a very simple example: only when this room is empty can we move in tables, large cabinets, and so forth.

Conversely, if this room is piled full of things and there is no empty space left, then nothing else can be moved in. Thus, only because the essential nature is true emptiness and formless can it manifest all forms and appearances and transform them into the innumerable wondrous forms that differ in every way.

Precisely because intrinsic nature is formless and cannot be seen by the eyes, it is also called the wondrous essence. It cannot be found in any part of the body, inside or out. Open the skull and you will not find it; dissect the body or cut open the heart, and you will not find it either. It is neither in the brain nor in the heart. It leaves no trace and cannot be obtained.

That is to say, nature leaves no trace or appearance and cannot be seen by the eyes.

Although all the formed objects before our eyes can be seen through this “nature of seeing,” who can see this very nature of seeing itself? First, the eyes can see only things that have form. Second, the eyes can see only things that stand in opposition to them; what is not set before the eyes cannot be seen.

For example, can our eyes see themselves? Since they are not set in opposition to themselves, they cannot. Intrinsic nature is the absolute true mind, not something relative, and so it cannot be seen by the eyes. If it could be seen, that would not be true seeing.

Nature leaves no trace or appearance and cannot be seen by the eyes. Therefore, nature is true emptiness. Although it is true emptiness, it can respond to conditions and function. That is, when it encounters an object, it can give rise to consciousness and distinguish this from that. Thus, nature is also wondrous presence, not inert emptiness.

When the “nature of seeing” distinguishes all forms and appearances through the eyes, those forms and appearances then become manifest.

For example, when we see a person, how do we know that it is a person rather than something else? How do we know whether the person is male or female, Zhang San or Li Si? This depends entirely on the discriminations of consciousness; only then can that person's appearance become manifest. Since forms and appearances are manifested by the nature of seeing, forms and appearances are nature.

From this we may know that the six natures of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing function through the six sense faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, thereby manifesting all forms—that is, the six sense objects. Therefore, all forms and appearances, all phenomena, are manifestations of nature. Form cannot be apart from nature, nor can nature be apart from form. Apart from nature there is no form; apart from form there is no nature.

Someone may ask: taking the nature of seeing as an example, which comes first—forms and appearances, or seeing? Let us analyze this. If seeing comes first and forms and appearances come afterward, then seeing should be prior and forms and appearances subsequent.

But without forms and appearances, what could you see? How could one even speak of “seeing”? What is called seeing occurs only because there are forms and appearances, through which one sees what this is and what that is. Without forms and appearances, from where could the function of seeing arise? Therefore, the nature of seeing can display its function of seeing only through forms and appearances.

Conversely, if form comes first and seeing afterward, then form should be prior and seeing subsequent.

Yet without seeing, how could form be made manifest? If it has not been seen, how could one know that any form or appearance exists? That is, without the “nature of seeing,” how could this form or appearance manifest? If no one sees it, then even if the form exists, it is equivalent to not existing and cannot become manifest. Therefore, nature and appearance cannot be separated.

This is so with the nature of seeing; the functioning of such other natures as hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, and knowing is also so. Therefore, form and nature cannot be separated from one another. Since the essence of nature is emptiness, how could the essence of form differ from emptiness? Thus, form and emptiness are without any distinction: form is not other than emptiness, and emptiness is not other than form.

We often say that Buddhism is the dharma gate of nonduality. This is what it means: everything is nondual. For it is one yet two, two yet one. If you call it one, it is also two; if you call it two, it is also one. Originally it is a single whole and cannot be separated. If you insist on making distinctions, you will go astray.

We have repeatedly used water and waves as an example. Water and waves are also one, because both have wetness as their essence. Water has the appearance of stillness, whereas waves have the appearance of movement. Wind causes waves to arise on water, and the appearance changes from stillness to movement. Though the appearance changes and they seem to be two different things, they are one essence. Thus, they are one yet two, two yet one.

The principle of a mirror and its reflections is the same. Whatever material it is made of and whatever form it takes, so long as it is a mirror, it can reflect images. If it cannot reflect images, it is not a mirror. Since a mirror cannot be apart from reflections and reflections cannot be apart from a mirror, the mirror is the reflection and the reflection is the mirror. This is called the dharma gate of nonduality.

From the time we are born, once we acquire knowledge, we take all the images manifested by nature—the mountains, rivers, great earth, the myriad things of the universe, and so forth—to be truly existent, and we chase after insubstantial things.

That is, we see and recognize only the reflections, without realizing that they are manifested by the mirror's light; we do not recognize that mirror-light.

If we can recognize this mirror-light, we recognize Buddha-nature. Why? Reflections come and go, arise and cease, but mirror-light is always present. When a cat comes before a mirror, a cat appears; when a dog comes before it, a dog appears. The reflected images come and go, arise and cease, but the mirror-light never changes.

All appearances of the mountains, rivers, great earth, and so forth are likewise reflections within the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. We often speak of “seas turning into mulberry fields.” What is now a vast sea may in the future become mulberry fields; what was once mulberry fields may now have become a vast sea. For example, Yunnan in China was once a great sea, but has now become mountains and fields. Although these forms and appearances, like the reflections in the mirror just mentioned, continually change, come and go, arise and cease, mirror-light, like the essential nature, neither arises nor ceases and is thusness, unmoving.

Without a mirror, reflections cannot appear; without reflections, there cannot be a mirror. That is to say, nature cannot be apart from forms and appearances, nor can forms and appearances be apart from nature. Therefore, nature is form, and form is nature. This principle is Buddhism's dharma gate of nonduality. To penetrate this point is to realize the mind and see one’s true nature.

Do not think that realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature is an extraordinarily difficult matter that only sages can realize. Practitioners are often intimidated by these four words, believing the goal to be too lofty to attain and beyond the capacity of people today. Thus, at the mere mention of realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, they react as though speaking of a tiger and dare not approach it.

They believe that ordinary people like us cannot attain this realm, and that the only way out is to rely on the Pure Land school and seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land through the practice of Buddha-recitation. Once we reach the Western Pure Land and hear the Buddha teach the Dharma, we can then realize the mind and see our true nature. For ordinary faithful men and women, this is indeed absolutely true.

For we are now in the Dharma-ending age: sentient beings have dull faculties and heavy obscurations, and it is indeed difficult to attain accomplishment through practice in this Sahā world. Yet even in the Dharma-ending age, there is true Dharma; it is not that there are no people of superior faculties. We must never make a blanket judgment and treat everyone alike, placing realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature high up in the realm of sages and then not daring to take responsibility for it ourselves.

In fact, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is nowhere else; it is right before you, precisely where you are able to see, hear, act, and work. Turn the light inward for a single glance and recognize this numinous knowing as your own Buddha-nature; then the task of a lifetime of practice and study is complete. All sentient beings can see and hear, and therefore all sentient beings are Buddhas. This all-capable wisdom-nature is not diminished among ordinary beings and not increased among sages.

Since all sentient beings can see and hear and possess the Tathāgata's wisdom-nature, do not again elevate realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature to the realm of sages and consider it beyond reach.

As long as, at the point of these eight great functions—seeing, hearing, and so forth—you turn the light inward and recognize who it is that sees and who it is that hears; once you recognize this and affirm it without further doubt, then safeguard it continuously and closely. Do not let it be tainted by sensory objects; keep it ever empty and luminous. The moment a thought arises, immediately recognize and dispel it; the moment you become attached to an object, you are at once drawn along by it. If you can inwardly not turn with thoughts and outwardly not be moved by circumstances, why worry that you will be unable to realize bodhi completely?

Self-nature is the formless substance of true emptiness. Its nature is empty and non-abiding; material forms too are empty and unobtainable. Therefore, there is no need to seek after them or fret over gain and loss. The Diamond Sūtra says, "If one sees all appearances as non-appearances, one sees the Tathāgata." Once you understand the truth that nature and form are true emptiness, you will not fall upon sensory objects and be controlled or shaken by them. When you are your own master, you will not be deceived or controlled by your servants. By not abiding in any appearance, not clinging to any thing, and maintaining continuous and seamless contemplation at all times, you can enter the realm of realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature.

All appearances are manifestations of self-nature. Without self-nature, there would be no appearances, nor could any appearance be seen. It is because of the seeing nature that material forms can be seen. Since seeing appearances is itself seeing nature, and appearances are manifestations of the seeing nature that sees, appearances are nature, and nature is appearances.

Since nature is true and not false, material appearances too are true and not false. The Lotus Sūtra says, "Dharmas abide in their dharma positions; worldly appearances are ever abiding." This means that all worldly appearances are manifestations of nature. Because nature is true, appearances too are not false and are ever abiding. This is what is meant by "true emptiness and true form." Hence it is

said: when one thing is true, everything is true; when one thing is false, everything is false.

Someone asked, “Is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss ultimately real or false?” The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is neither real nor false; it is both real and false, and it is at once real and false. If you distinguish here between real and false, that is still the discrimination of deluded mind.

For the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is also a manifestation of Buddha-nature. Speaking in terms of appearances, whatever is manifested from nature belongs to nature. Nature is real, and so appearances are real; thus the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is real. Speaking in terms of the substance of nature, nature is real while appearances are shadows. The Diamond Sūtra says that all appearances are illusory.

All appearances are illusory shadows; thus the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is false. Let us not indulge in deluded thoughts and discriminations. Once we truly understand that nature and appearances are alike, and that form and emptiness are nondual, seeing appearances is seeing nature, and we can see self-nature through all material appearances.

Seeing nature is seeing appearances. Then, through nature, one can give rise to wondrous functioning, functioning freely and vigorously, vigorous and free, luminous and at ease, and completely realize bodhi. Buddha-nature possesses boundless wondrous functioning. Thus Mahāmudrā says, “The immeasurable manifestations of defiled and pure dharmas are fully endowed with the meaning of inherent equality.” Buddha-nature contains everything and can manifest without measure such realms and appearances as purity and defilement.

All these realms and appearances, every one of them, are equal, because our originally true mind is equal. Our minds and the minds of all Buddhas are equal and without duality: they do not diminish because we are ordinary beings, nor do they increase because the Buddhas have become sages. They are equal, equal, and yet again equal. Once we understand this principle, the mind has its master; when we cultivate the Dharma, we will not become deluded or confused. If you do not understand this principle of the true mind, you will seek outwardly, remain ever doubtful and inwardly unsettled, and fail to gain genuine benefit.

We study the Buddha Dharma in order to gain genuine benefit. Therefore, the Buddha Dharma is a Dharma for settling the mind and gaining genuine benefit; it is not like other non-Buddhist paths, which seek something to attain. Nowadays, many who study Buddhism want to develop spiritual powers and show them off before others in order to display themselves. Alas, this is mistaken. To cultivate a Dharma of

nonattainment with a mind that seeks attainment—is that not to go directly contrary to the Way?

From the very beginning of cultivating the Way, you must know that everything is unobtainable. Only our true mind—Buddha-nature—is real; all other dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows: unobtainable and not to be sought. Once you restore the luminosity of your own Buddha-nature, spiritual powers and wondrous functioning will manifest completely; without seeking them, you will attain them naturally.

Yet even when they manifest, you must not become attached to them. As soon as there is attachment, it becomes a rut, and you fall into it, unable to free yourself.

If your mind has anything in which it abides, the demon king will seize the opportunity to enter. In the future, you will be unable to attain Buddhahood, whereas becoming a demon will indeed be your lot. You must pay the utmost attention! Our study of Buddhism is fundamentally without practice, attainment, or realization. Yet in the course of this no-practice, no-attainment, and no-realization, there are always some signs.

We have previously discussed initial awakening. It is like being a small child: one must wait until the child grows into an adult before it can function. In the process of growing, there are inevitably stages. The duration of this process varies according to each person's faculties, method of practice, diligence, or laziness. Just after awakening, one has only reached the outskirts of the dharmakāya, not yet its center. Therefore, one must diligently temper the mind through circumstances, eliminate habitual tendencies completely, and advance upward in order to become a Buddha.

IV. Linji's Three Mysteries and Three Essentials

According to the doctrinal teachings, for us ordinary beings to become Buddhas requires passage through three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. The Chan school, however, does not speak in this way. The patriarchal Chan of the Chan school is a complete and sudden Dharma gate; it speaks of no practice, no attainment, and no realization, and does not speak of dhyāna or liberation. Even so, it is not entirely without stages. The Linji school speaks of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials.

Chan Master Linji said, "Within one phrase are three mysteries; within one mystery are three essentials." The Three Mysteries and Three Essentials are the essential purport of Chan Master Linji's teaching. Because he applied his mind with meticulous care and had personally passed through these stages, he explained the practice clearly and thoroughly, from the shallow to the deep and from the initial stage to the final one. He said, "In general, when expounding the school's vehicle,

one phrase must contain three mystery gates, and one mystery gate must contain three essentials."

Patriarch Linji spoke of three phrases. By this reasoning, three times three would make nine, giving nine mysteries; and since each mystery contains three essentials, there would be twenty-seven essentials. But this is not so. The three phrases are explained on three levels. We must investigate them thoroughly before we can understand the profundity of progressing from initial awakening gradually to consummation.

Yet throughout the ages, different teachers have each held their own view about what, precisely, the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials are. They have argued without end and remained deadlocked. Master Linji said, "One phrase contains three mysteries."

Before clarifying the Three Mysteries, we must first understand which phrase this one phrase is. If we do not understand this phrase, how can we investigate the Three Mysteries thoroughly? Master Linji originally said, "Within this lump of red flesh is a True Person of No Rank; it is the one who now expounds the Dharma and hears the Dharma."

This phrase is of the utmost importance. It is the general outline of the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. Only when one understands this phrase, recognizes the Original Face, and thereby recognizes the One True Dharma Realm can one go on to discuss the mysteries and essentials—the process of practice. Otherwise, it is like discussing military strategy on paper: empty talk is of no benefit.

Our Original Face, namely the One True Dharma Realm, is without practice, realization, or attainment. To comprehend this Original Face is only initial awakening; since habitual tendencies have not yet been eliminated, one cannot save oneself. One must still temper the mind through circumstances and advance ever higher before one can walk hand in hand with the Buddhas and patriarchs. Therefore, Master Linji divided this process of progressive advance into the Three Mysteries and Three Essentials. They describe three stages: from initial awakening and directly recognizing the school's principle, to safeguarding realization and tempering the mind through circumstances to eliminate habitual tendencies, to bringing forth great functioning and completely realizing one's intrinsic nature.

The first phrase, the mystery within the phrase: "Watch the puppets playing upon the stage; all their pulling depends entirely on the person within."

This refers to our first seeing of our true nature and recognition of our intrinsic nature. Our bodies can move, our hands can do work, our feet can walk, our eyes can see, our ears can hear, and our mouths can speak. What is it that makes all

these functions operate? If a single breath does not return, can this body still act? Can it still move? That would be impossible.

Then what is it that moves? “All their pulling depends entirely on the person within.” When we watch a puppet show, someone below pulls the strings; without someone pulling the strings, the puppets cannot move. Who is the one pulling the strings? The one who pulls them is our One True Dharma Realm, our intrinsic nature. To recognize the person who pulls the strings is our initial awakening to the Way and recognition of our intrinsic nature.

Does recognizing intrinsic nature mean that one has realized the Way? No. Master Linji said that one who recognizes this phrase still cannot save oneself and cannot yet escape the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. Since first seeing one’s nature is only at the edge of the dharmakāya, one is still like a small child. For this reason, Pure Land adherents criticize the Chan school. They say that Chan is not good, that it cannot end the cycle of birth and death, and that the Pure Land school is better because rebirth in the West is secure. Chan practitioners still have delusions of thought; they cannot yet transcend the six realms of rebirth or be liberated from segmented birth and death. This is indeed so.

However, when we practice the Chan school or other schools, it does not mean that, once we awaken to the original and see our intrinsic nature, everything is finished. We must still apply ourselves, safeguard realization continuously and closely, and work to eliminate habitual tendencies. Thus Chan speaks of herding an ox. The ox’s nature is very wild, so we must grasp its nose rope tightly and hold the whip high. Whenever its wild nature erupts, we lash and strike it.

That is, we must remain aware and watchful at every moment, attend to the huatou, keep watch over it, and not let it fall into deluded thoughts or be turned by circumstances. Only by applying ourselves at every moment and doing the work of safeguarding realization can we eliminate habitual tendencies completely and transcend birth and death.

How should one practice after awakening? This phrase is further divided into three essentials: the initial essential, the middle essential, and the highest essential.

What is the initial essential? The initial essential is seeing one’s nature. After seeing the original, you understand it without error and personally accept it. If you merely hear others speak of it and then give rise to doubt, that does not count. You must truly accept it yourself, without doubt, and affirm that this is our intrinsic nature. This is the initial essential. If you are only half-believing and half-doubting, that does not count.

Your footing must be firm. Even if the Buddhas and patriarchs were to appear in the world, you would not waver. This is not easy. Speaking of this reminds me of the koan of Official Yu Xiu's encounter with Chan Master Ziyu.

Official Yu Xiu asked Chan Master Ziyu, "What is Buddha?" The Chan master called, "Official!" Yu Xiu answered, "Yes?" Chan Master Ziyu said, "Just this is it; there is nothing else." This is Buddha: your response is Buddha; there is nothing else. "Oh—" The official understood and awakened to the Way.

But after hearing this, Chan Master Yaoshan said, "Alas, Magistrate Yu Xiu has been buried by Ziyu Mountain."

When these words reached Magistrate Yu Xiu, he thought, "Alas, perhaps my awakening was not right. Why did he say that Ziyu Mountain had buried me? Have I not realized the Way? Was I mistaken?" Doubt arose in him; he could no longer stand firm, and Chan Master Yaoshan hooked him with a single cast.

He hurried to Chan Master Yaoshan and asked, "Great Master, I heard that you said I had been buried by Ziyu Mountain and that my awakening was not right. Please instruct me." Hearing Yu Xiu speak this way, Yaoshan laughed and thought, "Sure enough, this man cannot stand firm; one cast of my hook and he has come."

He then said, "Very well. You ask, and I will answer." Magistrate Yu Xiu again asked his earlier question: "What is Buddha?" Unlike Chan Master Ziyu, Yaoshan did not directly point it out after calling Yu Xiu and receiving his response. Like Ziyu, Yaoshan called to him: "Magistrate!" Yu Xiu answered, "Yes!" Yaoshan immediately asked in return, "What is it?" Yu Xiu turned the light inward to examine what it was. "Ah!" At that moment, he realized the Way.

In fact, both were methods of direct pointing; only their techniques differed. One told you directly, while the other asked you a question in return. Since you ask what Buddha is, I must answer that question and cannot answer something irrelevant.

In answering the question, one does not directly speak of what Buddha-nature is like. One first calls to you, then answers in one of two ways. The first directly points out what it is that responds, as Chan Master Ziyu said: "This very thing is it; there is nothing else."

The other is Chan Master Yaoshan's question, "What is it?"—that is, asking in return who it is that answered me. Ah! This is Buddha! Thus he realized the Way. It appears very simple; it depends only on whether you can stand firm. If you truly stand firm, it is enough to tell you directly.

When Damei visited Mazu, he too asked Mazu, "What is Buddha?" Mazu replied, "Mind itself is Buddha." That is, your own mind is Buddha. Damei realized the Way

and immediately returned home.

Mazu still wanted to test whether Damei had truly realized the Way. After some time, he sent an attendant to test Damei: “Tell Damei that Mazu’s Buddhadharma has now changed. It is no longer ‘mind itself is Buddha,’ but ‘neither mind nor Buddha.’ See how he responds.” The attendant accepted the instruction and went to see Damei.

When Damei saw Mazu’s attendant arrive, he asked, “How is Mazu these days?” The attendant replied, “Ah, Mazu is very well!” Damei asked, “How is Mazu’s Buddhadharma?” The attendant said, “Mazu’s Buddhadharma is now ‘neither mind nor Buddha.’” Damei said, “Ha! That old fellow confuses people’s minds. Let him say ‘neither mind nor Buddha’; I simply maintain that mind itself is Buddha.” See how firmly he stood, without the slightest doubt. Thus, when we truly see the Way, we stand firm and do not doubt. This is the initial realization of the mind, the first essential point of the First Phrase.

What, then, is its middle essential point? Having realized the Way, one should safeguard realization. One awakening does not finish everything, because habitual tendencies remain. One must constantly attend to the huatou and safeguard realization. As we said above, when a Buddha-reciter’s thought stirs, they immediately bring up the Buddha’s name; one who upholds a mantra brings up the mantra; one who investigates Chan simply awakens and sees that the root cannot be found.

In the language of Mahāmudrā, the moment your mind stirs, cry “Peh!” and give a head-on shout, shouting away the deluded thought. This is the supreme oral instruction of Mahāmudrā for the practice of safeguarding realization. Therefore, all practitioners must undertake this work of safeguarding realization. Knowing how to safeguard realization is the middle essential point.

What is the higher essential point? We attend to it constantly and safeguard it constantly—safeguard, safeguard, safeguard. Once safeguarding has become mature, we cannot remain attached to safeguarding. Holding onto it and refusing to let go is purposeful effort. We must continue advancing upward, relinquish this “safeguarding,” and enter effortless functioning.

Yet after one has practiced safeguarding for quite a long time, it is not easy to relinquish it. One may wish to let it go but be unable to do so. This is the higher essential point of the First Phrase.

This explains the course of practice. We must understand that practice does not end with a single awakening. Of course, there are those who awaken suddenly, practice suddenly, and realize suddenly; after one awakening, they are completely clear. But

such people are great bodhisattvas returning to this world, not ordinary beings capable of doing this.

Great bodhisattvas returning to this world can awaken suddenly, practice suddenly, and realize suddenly. Yet in the past they too gradually cultivated in this way; they did not succeed all at once. We must know the hardships and sweetness involved and practice diligently. Therefore, I often tell people to practice diligently: it is not over once you have an awakening. One must enter from the side of the dharmakāya into the proper position of the dharmakāya, and then continue advancing upward.

The Second Phrase, Mystery within Meaning: “How could wondrous understanding permit a question from Asaṅga? How could bubbles and foam bear the function of cutting off the stream?”

Buddha-nature is formless and the source of all phenomena. It can only be illuminated and recognized through the light of wisdom; it cannot be seen with the eyes. One understands that all the infinitely varied phenomena of the world are shadows manifested and brought forth by our wondrous nature. Nature is appearance, and appearance is nature; nature and appearance are nondual, and wondrous functioning is boundless.

To truly understand these principles is indeed wondrous, yet there are still appearances to be seen and words to be spoken, so it is not yet truly wondrous. Only when one realizes that all luminosity and spiritual powers return to one’s own mind, abiding nowhere in the slightest, not establishing a single dharma, utterly bare, with no words to speak—only then is it truly wondrous. Therefore, the sūtra says, “Whenever there are words, there is no real meaning.”

One must understand to the point where there is no understanding that can be spoken, and be wondrous to the point where no wondrousness can be expressed; only then is it truly wondrous. Therefore, Master Linji said, “How could wondrous understanding permit a question from Asaṅga?” Having realized this point, even Asaṅga Bodhisattva, the most skillful of questioners, would be unable to open his mouth to ask a question. “How could bubbles and foam bear the function of cutting off the stream?” Bubbles and foam rise and respond to one another; this refers to questions and answers.

Ask a hundred questions and give a thousand answers; speak as profoundly and wondrously as you please—ultimately, there is still an understanding involved, and it is no more than bubbles and foam. Because none of this is true, none of it is the main point, it is compared to bubbles and foam.

No matter how many hundreds, thousands, millions, or billions of verbal questions and answers there may be, even if they gather like bubbles and foam into one great

mass, how could they bear the great capacity and great function of cutting off the streams of all things? Thus, “The one step beyond is not transmitted by a thousand sages.” It cannot be reached through language or understood through thought. One must let go of everything, practice concretely for oneself, and truly realize this state; only then can one illuminate and recognize it through the light of wisdom. Thus it is said, “How could wondrous understanding permit a question from Asaṅga? How could bubbles and foam bear the function of cutting off the stream?”

Here too there are three essential points: the initial, middle, and higher. They indicate the progressive deepening of practice. The higher essential point of the First Phrase discussed above is the practice of safeguarding realization. Once safeguarding has matured, one should no longer safeguard; to continue would be superfluous. One must forget it. Yet when one’s strength is insufficient, it is not easy to forget it all at once.

Therefore, the preceding phrase belongs to the Mystery within the Phrase. We speak of the Three Mysteries as the Mystery within the Phrase, the Mystery within Meaning, and the Mystery within the Essence. A phrase is a verbal phrase. Meaning is the great import that issues from the essence—the great import of the coming from the West. Meaning gives rise to verbal phrases, and through verbal phrases—through speaking and writing—one can teach everyone.

Thus, the first phrase, “Only watch the puppet show upon the stage; its pulling and guiding all depend on the one within,” is the Mystery within the Phrase, and it has three essential points. The next phrase, “How could wondrous understanding permit a question from Asaṅga? How could bubbles and foam bear the function of cutting off the stream?” is the Mystery within Meaning. It points to the great import that issues from our luminous fundamental essence, the One True Dharma Realm.

Only because there is meaning can it become verbal phrases. Verbal phrases undergo a thousand transformations and ten thousand variations; without meaning, how could words be expressed? At a meeting, when someone asks what your opinion is, what do they mean? They mean that words and phrases are expressed from meaning. This is the Mystery within Meaning. What is its initial essential point? At the higher essential point of the Mystery within the Phrase described above, one still cannot forget safeguarding realization.

When one has practiced here for a long time, one can forget it—forget safeguarding and no longer safeguard it. Thus, when practice reaches this point and one no longer safeguards, it is more relaxed and joyful than when one was safeguarding. As long as you still safeguard, you must carry a burden. Even if ninety-nine pounds of a hundred-pound load have been removed, one pound still remains. When even safeguarding is gone, one is truly about to enter non-contrivance, and naturally one

is relaxed and joyful. Yet although it has been forgotten, it may sometimes arise again; it is not yet thorough.

At the middle essential point, one truly enters non-contrivance, and not a single dharma can be found. At this time there is no within or without, no length or shortness, no blue or yellow—nothing at all. One has entered the proper position of non-contrivance.

When practice reaches this point, it is excellent indeed. It is like a bright mid-autumn moon shining overhead: you cannot push it away or pull it toward you. This symbolizes the level to which practice has advanced. Everyone possesses a luminous essence, yet because of inverted deluded thoughts and attachments, they do not see it. Now all these false things have been cleared away and are gone. When delusion is purified, luminosity naturally reveals itself, and the light appears. Thus, at this middle essential point, one is naturally filled with immeasurable peace and joy, as luminosity shines brightly.

At the higher essential point of the Mystery within Meaning, even non-contrivance cannot be found. At the middle essential point, non-contrivance still remains. Thus, when our practice reaches the stage of a seventh-bhūmi bodhisattva, there is still a non-contrivance to be entered; non-contrivance itself cannot yet be forgotten.

At the stage of an eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva, even non-contrivance is gone. This means that one's practice is yet more refined. Practice progresses layer by layer. At this point, there is no longer any so-called practice. What is practice? Ah—it is all gone.

This is the effortlessness of effort, whose efficacy is immense. All traces of practice and non-contrivance are thoroughly dissolved and eliminated; there is no longer even such a thing as non-contrivance. At this time one does not seek spiritual powers or transformations, yet spiritual powers arise naturally. When practice reaches this level, one has understood the two Mysteries and six essential points and can teach humans and devas. Therefore, Master Linji said: "If you realize this phrase, you can be a teacher of humans and devas." This is the higher essential point.

Thus, practice has its stages; one cannot ascend to heaven in a single step. It depends on how diligently each person applies themselves: never forgetting it at any moment, safeguarding it at every moment. Safeguard it until it becomes long familiar; when familiarity matures, forget it; when it is forgotten, it transforms, and one enters the realm of transformation.

At this point, has one completely arrived home? Not yet. There is still the mystery within essence: "When the seal of the three essentials opens, the cinnabar point is

narrow; before deliberation is allowed, host and guest are distinguished." This is the final line. Originally there was only one line: our single mind of quiescent extinction, the One True Dharma Realm. This One True Dharma Realm is elaborated into three levels, subtly indicating the process of practice, so that one will not vaguely speak of suchness or carelessly invoke Buddha-nature and mistake nonrealization for realization. Thus, one line becomes three.

The final line, the mystery within essence, is: "When the seal of the three essentials opens, the cinnabar point is narrow; before deliberation is allowed, host and guest are distinguished."

What is the cinnabar point? It is our true mind. "Narrow" means confined, not expansive. That is, at this time your cinnabar point—your true mind—is still not expansive, and its wondrous functioning is still limited. You must further train at the three crucial junctures.

What are these three essentials? They are not the initial essential, middle essential, and highest essential mentioned above, but the three essentials of body, speech, and mind. They are like the body, speech, and mind through which we cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, using the three mysteries to receive empowerment.

All dharma gates, as well as worldly dharmas, require practice through body, speech, and mind. Whatever school you cultivate or whatever work you do, you cannot be apart from body, speech, and mind. The body manifests dignified bearing. When your practice has reached a considerable level, your appearance and physical form undergo change; body and mind possess dignified bearing, and you set an example for everyone through your conduct.

One should not be drooping and dispirited, but dignified and imposing, full of vigor. Those who practice the Dharma must set an example through their conduct, especially in all their activities, serving as an example to all. Their living, eating, and daily conduct cannot be the same as those of ordinary people. They must strictly uphold the precepts and possess the marks of dignified bearing and of a great person.

Therefore, do not look merely at whether someone speaks well or adopts a lofty tone; look at the level of that person's conduct. If their conduct is poor and they cannot do what they say, that will not do. If they speak a yard but practice only a foot, that is worse still. Thus, not only Dharma practitioners but even worldly people must make their words and actions accord.

This is our dharma realm of the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena. When one further attains the dharma realm of the nonobstruction among phenomena, then everywhere and at every moment one manifests dignified bearing in one's

body. Mind refers to the great intent that issues from our fundamental essence—how to teach and transform sentient beings. This is mind.

Speech means that when speaking or teaching the Dharma, one responds according to the circumstances; there is no fixed Dharma, and one prescribes medicine according to the illness. Of course, at first one is not yet familiar with this. Gradually, after a period of experience, one becomes skilled at discerning capacities, clearly sees the occasion presented by every sentient being, and can teach the Dharma appropriately. These are the three essentials of body, speech, and mind.

Through such training, you open the seal of your cinnabar point—that is, your true mind—and thereby give rise to vast and boundless wondrous functioning. A seal is like the official seal of a government officer: whatever matter it is affixed to can be handled. Here, the seal refers to our mind; our mind is the seal. When the mind reaches this point, it brings forth great capacity and great functioning: there is nothing it does not know and nothing it cannot undertake. This is what is meant by "When the seal of the three essentials opens, the cinnabar point is narrow."

"Before deliberation is allowed, host and guest are distinguished" means that whenever any matter comes before you, you need not think it over or deliberate; you understand it all with perfect clarity. When we can attain this level of practice, we can become teachers of Buddhas and patriarchs.

But this does not mean becoming the teacher of Amitābha Buddha or Śākyamuni Buddha, for Amitābha Buddha and Śākyamuni Buddha have already attained Buddhahood. Rather, it means becoming the teacher of those who vow to become Buddhas and patriarchs in the future: guiding them onto the right path, enabling them to realize the great Way and attain Buddhahood. Hence one is called a teacher of Buddhas and patriarchs. That is, if a great person vows to attain Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings, you can serve as that person's teacher and model. Therefore, do not misunderstand this.

This line must likewise be divided into the initial, middle, and highest essentials. What, then, is the initial essential like? The highest essential of the mystery within intent mentioned above is already the functioning of complete dissolution and non-contrivance; it is great functioning without effort. What further practice could there be to discuss? There is none.

When there is none, one returns to the source and restores the original, returning from the wondrous to the plain. Originally, it is all supremely wondrous; for upon reaching luminous clarity directly before one—the level of an eighth-bhūmi bodhisattva—one brings forth every kind of spiritual power and wondrous functioning. Only by not abiding in spiritual powers and wondrous functioning can

we return from the wondrous to the plain. If you abide in spiritual powers and wondrous functioning, you cannot return; you will enter the path of demons.

Therefore, in practice one must not cling. Nothing whatsoever can be obtained; one must return to nonattainment. Thus the Heart Sūtra says: “Because there is nothing to attain, one attains anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi.” Only through nonattainment does one realize unsurpassed perfect enlightenment; if there is something to attain, it is spoiled. Here one returns from the wondrous to the plain: unattainable, unattainable—nothing whatsoever is attainable.

This plainness does not mean a plainness in which nothing at all exists. It is like water: plain, plain, plain—yet within its plainness there is a supreme flavor, an inexpressible and unsurpassable savor. This is only an analogy; it cannot be explained.

What is it like upon reaching the middle essential? One is all day long utterly unassuming, seemingly foolish and dazed, merely putting on clothes and eating meals. Thus the daughter of Layman Pang said, “Neither easy nor difficult: when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep.” The three members of that family each spoke words of the three barriers. Layman Pang spoke of breaking through the initial barrier: “Difficult, difficult, difficult—like spreading ten loads of sesame seeds upon a tree.”

His wife spoke of breaking through the second barrier: “Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the Westward-coming lies atop every blade of grass.” His daughter spoke of breaking through the final barrier: “Neither easy nor difficult: when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep.” Thus, on reaching the middle essential, one merely puts on clothes and eats meals.

When many people hear these principles, they feel that they are of little use. “How can there be no spiritual powers at all? Has one become a fool or an idiot?” Thus, as soon as people hear this, they no longer wish to listen. What they most enjoy hearing about is what spiritual powers may arise, what transformations may occur, and how great the wondrous functioning may be.

When they hear that it is merely a matter of putting on clothes and eating meals, they say, “Ah, there is nothing at all in it! One is like a fool or an idiot—how boring.” They find it lonely and tasteless. Therefore, only people of great wisdom can understand it; they know it intimately without doubt and delight in it.

Therefore, those who practice must truly be great persons; this is not something that people of merely petty intelligence and limited wisdom can accomplish.

When our practice reaches the middle essential of the mystery within essence, it has long since become plain, plain, plain—so plain that it cannot be put into words. How,

then, can it be described? Originally, it is neither conditioned nor unconditioned. Amid walking, standing, sitting, lying down, activity, stillness, social intercourse, and daily dealings, there is clear and solitary luminosity in every detail. This clear and solitary luminosity is like luminous clarity directly before one: it cannot be pushed away or pulled in, and there is not the slightest trace of interruption or continuity.

When the luminous clarity spoken of above in the mystery within intent appears, there is already a moon, but it is not yet very bright. Now the luminosity is incomparably brilliant: the moon's light has become the radiance of the sun. Therefore it is called luminous clarity directly before one.

What, then, of the highest essential? Ah, it is even more beyond speech. At this point it is difficult to open one's mouth or find words. When the World-Honored One saw Mañjuśrī and Mahākāśyapa finish striking the gavel, he descended from the seat. Since ancient times, great Chan masters, upon reaching this point, have simply brushed off their robes and returned to the abbot's quarters. This is because at this time even the sunlight of your luminous clarity is gone.

In former times, a monk asked Master Caoshan, “What is it like when the bright moon is directly overhead?” That is, what is it like when there is a moon shining above one's head? This practice has already reached the mystery within intent, but not yet the mystery within essence. When one reaches the mystery within essence, the moon becomes the sun and is still brighter.

Yet in the sayings of the Chan school, only the moon is used as a symbol; the sun is not mentioned. What is it like when the bright moon is directly overhead? Caoshan said, “You are still a man below the steps.”

You are still below the steps of the reception hall. Not only have you not entered the hall and inner chamber; you are still below the reception hall. That is to say, your practice is still far from complete. But this monk was also a determined man and would not let Caoshan go. He said, “Master, please receive me and lead me up the steps.”

That is, “Please lend me a hand, draw me up, and guide me into the hall and inner chamber.” Caoshan said, “We will meet when the moon has set.” When the moon above your head has fallen and is gone, then I will meet you. When practice reaches its culmination, everything is completely transformed and forgotten; there is nothing at all. But is this nothing at all annihilationist emptiness? As we said above, within flavorlessness there is a supreme flavor. It is not that luminosity has disappeared; rather, one is no longer consciously aware of it, no longer sees it, and no longer clings to it. Everything is completely transformed and forgotten, leaving no trace whatsoever.

V. The Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā

When we first see light, we feel that it is very bright. But once we become familiar with it, we no longer feel that we are in luminosity. For example, we now live amid air, but do you feel the presence of air? You do not.

But if you were shut in a room cut off from air, you would immediately feel stifled, as though you were about to die. At that point, you would want some fresh air, and only then would you sense the existence of air. After living in air for a long time and becoming accustomed to it, you no longer notice it.

The phrase “We will meet when the moon has set” means that you must not cling to luminosity. As long as you still have this something, it is a fixed pattern. With even the slightest attachment, you cannot attain Buddhahood. Therefore, we say that one must not cling to any spiritual powers or transformations; one should be as though there were nothing at all, as though foolish and dazed.

It is not that luminosity has disappeared, nor that spiritual powers have disappeared; rather, they are present, but one is no longer aware of them. For example, every one of us knows how to dress and eat. Do you still regard these as remarkable things? Dressing and eating are so ordinary that they are not worth discussing, and ordinary people therefore do not become attached to them. Now, when practice has reached this point and become utterly familiar, leaving not the slightest trace, everything becomes thoroughly assimilated and forgotten.

Our study of Esoteric Buddhism is the same. At the final stage of practice, it is like the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month. Does the moon still appear on the night of that day? That is to say, at that time you have forgotten everything and no longer abide in any light; you have truly arrived home. At this point, only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains, round and bright in solitary clarity. Nothing else remains; nothing at all remains.

The great wisdom of perfect enlightenment is awareness without anything to be aware of. There is no duality; if there is a subject that is aware and an object of awareness, something has gone wrong. Only when practice reaches this stage has one truly arrived home! Then one can gather all things in the universe back into oneself: all these things are oneself. Thus Master Sengzhao said, “Can it be only sages who unite the myriad things in themselves?” Is it only sages who can do this? Yes. How could ordinary beings do so? How could ordinary beings know that all these myriad things are themselves? Therefore, only sages can accomplish this.

Speaking of this brings to mind a Chan koan. A monastic asked Chan Master Dasui, “When the great trichiliocosm is destroyed, is the dharmakāya destroyed or not?” We

know that the great trichiliocosm passes through four stages—formation, abiding, destruction, and emptiness—and that it will eventually be destroyed.

When the great trichiliocosm is destroyed, is the dharmakāya destroyed or not? We all know that the Buddha taught that the dharmakāya is neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor wavering, neither changing nor altering: a wondrous essence ever fresh throughout all ages. Yet this visitor asked whether the dharmakāya is destroyed when the great trichiliocosm is destroyed. Were it us, we would immediately answer that the dharmakāya does not perish.

But such a response, which does not take account of the questioner's capacity, would be wrong. Why? In replying, one must follow the thread of the questioner's words and strike directly at the intent of the question, so that the questioner feels the pain and itch and, where thoughts can no longer proceed, suddenly turns back and sees the intrinsic nature. Without striking directly at the questioner, he cannot awaken.

Do not reason with him; reasoning at such a time is useless. Thus, Chan words are not words of reason. They are a double-edged blade: one edge kills you, and the other brings you to life, enabling you to find life within death. Therefore, Dasui replied, "The dharmakāya also perishes."

Oh! Does this not greatly contradict what the Buddha taught? Was he perhaps carelessly misusing words and misleading people, thereby destined to fall into the Vajra Hell? Yet if this answer were truly mistaken, why would Chan Master Touzi Qing, a great Chan master, burn incense, bow in reverence, and praise him as an ancient Buddha reborn? The reason is that all worldly things, whatever they may be, are transformations and manifestations of the Buddha-nature of us sentient beings—that is, the dharmakāya. Apart from the dharmakāya, nothing exists.

Therefore, the Lotus Sūtra says, "Dharmas abide in their dharma positions; the marks of the world are ever abiding." This means that every worldly thing is established in dependence on the dharmakāya. "Dharmas" refers to all things whatsoever, while "dharma positions" refers to the One True Dharma Realm—that is, our dharmakāya. "Dharmas abide in their dharma positions" means that every single thing in the world is a manifestation of the dharmakāya and is established in dependence on it. Thus, the marks of the world are the dharmakāya, and the dharmakāya is the marks of the world.

We know that phenomena are established through principle, and principle is manifested through phenomena; principle and phenomena are inseparable. Thus the sūtra says, "Nature and appearance are nondual; mind and environment are one." The marks of the world precisely manifest our dharmakāya. An ancient worthy said, "Amid the myriad forms, the solitary body is revealed." Since the dharmakāya is

ever abiding and indestructible, the marks of the world are naturally ever abiding as well.

From the surface appearance of the world, it seems that seas turn into mulberry fields and that everything changes in an instant, without lasting. How, then, can it be said to be ever abiding? In fact, the fundamental substance of things does not truly perish. When something perishes here, it arises there; it has merely changed locations.

Su Dongpo explained this principle well in his “Rhapsody on the Red Cliffs”: “Do you also understand water and the moon? What passes is like this, yet it has never truly gone away; what waxes and wanes is like that, yet in the end neither diminishes nor increases. Viewed from the standpoint of change, heaven and earth cannot remain unchanged even for an instant; viewed from the standpoint of the unchanging, things and I are both without end.”

Water flows on and on. Although it flows, it does not disappear merely because it has flowed on; the water continues in an unceasing torrent. The moon waxes and wanes, is bright or obscured, full or deficient. Nothing is lost when it is obscured or deficient, and nothing is added when it is bright and full. Despite fullness and deficiency, the substance of the moon remains as it is.

Layman Dongpo used water and the moon to show that the illusory appearances of all things change while their essential reality does not. He further explained that those whose minds are not open and who cling to illusory appearances see the world as seas turning into mulberry fields, changing in an instant; but broad-minded and discerning people recognize the one true essence of things and sentient beings, and thus know that all things in heaven and earth are ever abiding and unchanging.

Those who have truly realized the Way are thus free and at ease: whether they raise something horizontally or point to it vertically, all becomes a wondrous truth; whether they speak backward or forward, nothing is not a marvelous flower. How could this subtle delight possibly be described by brush and ink? Therefore, in our practice we must diligently exert ourselves and must not grow lax or drift along. We should realize the great Way within this lifetime and liberate vast numbers of sentient beings; only then shall we not have lived this life in vain.

“Only the light of prajñā can reveal the principle, enabling one to contemplate and discern with wisdom.” [View]

The first and foremost requirement in practice is correct view. As stated earlier, only when the cause is correct can the fruition be correct; if the cause is incorrect, the fruition will inevitably be distorted. View is the causal ground from which practice begins, so it must be upright. Especially at this present stage in the age of Dharma

decline, when fish and dragons are mixed together, heterodox teachings flourish, and all kinds of crooked paths run rampant without restraint, we practitioners must all the more possess the dharma eye that discerns teachings and recognize true teachers, lest we enter a wrong path and travel a needless road.

Speaking of views, it was explained earlier that, because practitioners differ in capacity and knowledge, there are many different kinds of views. Some people are generous and bold, high-spirited, capable of sacrificing themselves to benefit others, yet unwilling to study Buddhism. They believe that being upright and delighting in good deeds and generosity makes one the noblest kind of person in the world. This is the view of the human and deva vehicle.

Some people are self-righteous and disregard the life and death of others, saying, “Each person sweeps the snow before his own door and does not concern himself with the frost on another’s roof.” This is the biased-emptiness view of the Lesser Vehicle.

Some see another’s suffering as their own suffering and diligently cultivate the Way in order to save others. This is the bodhisattva view of the Mahāyāna.

Still others have been influenced by Buddhist learning and know that all sentient beings possess undefiled wisdom-nature like that of the Buddha. Deluded by external objects, they are unaware of it; but as soon as they turn the light inward, they can restore the luminosity of their intrinsic nature and give rise to all manner of wondrous functioning. This is the supreme Buddha view.

Others seek dharmas outside the mind and abide in attachment to spiritual powers. This is the heterodox view… …

In general, whatever one’s view may be, only a view that proceeds from great compassion and selflessly benefits others is right view; otherwise it is a wrong view. If one does not proceed from great compassion, then whatever path one cultivates, one will either fall into biased emptiness or cling to spiritual powers. One can never realize the correct samādhi in which emptiness and compassion are integrated, and therefore cannot perfect Buddhahood.

From this it can be seen that, in order to choose a correct causal-ground view for studying Buddhism, one must carefully discriminate with the great wisdom of prajñā; only then can one avoid error.

Unfortunately, modern Buddhist practitioners do not know what is correct. They all gravitate toward spiritual powers, believing that whoever has such powers possesses a great Dharma. They go to learn one kind of qigong or another kind of path, not knowing that those practices and teachings that bear the signboard of

Buddhism are heterodox teachings cultivated apart from mind and intrinsic nature. Their so-called spiritual powers are all possessions by ghosts, spirits, demons, and monsters, rather than genuine spiritual powers arising from one's own intrinsic mind.

Studying them is not only of no benefit, but also carries the danger of falling into demonic states. There are also fellow practitioners who have studied Buddhism for many years and should know that the correct path is to cultivate from the mind-ground—the root. Yet because their greed has not been extinguished and they cling to spiritual powers, they too have, as if driven by ghosts and gods, abandoned the true Dharma and followed those fraudulent demons and monsters, becoming their accomplices. These are all unjust sufferings brought about by the absence of prajñā wisdom and by incorrect view.

"That emptiness does not depart from great compassion; prajñā and bodhi are cultivated together in balanced union. Therefore, only the integration of emptiness and compassion is correct samādhi." [Samādhi]

There is another fork in the road of practice and realization that must be understood; otherwise one may mistakenly enter the biased-emptiness "samādhi of cessation." Some people regard suppressing thoughts so that none arise, and sitting motionlessly, as the ultimate. They sit in a stagnant pool, becoming like earth, wood, gold, or stone, and fall into yet another kind of lifeless birth and death. This too is the error of lacking great compassion and not considering how to give rise to functioning in order to liberate sentient beings.

As illustrated by the verse of Chan Master Wolun in the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch: "Wolun has a certain skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts. When facing circumstances, the mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day." This means that people who practice in this manner have taken a wrong road and cannot realize the Way.

You should know that although our dharmakāya is empty and without characteristics, its wondrous functioning is boundless; it is not dead stillness incapable of functioning. If one forcibly suppresses the intrinsic nature so that not a single thought arises, one not only falls into the samādhi of cessation but also has no way to thoroughly see the totality of the dharma realm. The intrinsic nature is empty because emptiness can encompass all things; it is not a lifeless or inert emptiness devoid of characteristics. Therefore, it does not depart from great compassion and gives rise to all kinds of wondrous functions for liberating sentient beings. Only when essence, characteristics, and function are all complete is this the totality of the dharma realm. Otherwise, if one is dead and motionless, how can one perfect both merit and wisdom and realize Buddhahood?

Therefore, in cultivating the Way, emptiness and compassion must be integrated; neither can be lacking.

What is called emptiness is wisdom: recognizing that everything is but images projected by one's own mind, unobtainable and not to be grasped; letting go completely, so that the mind is empty and clean as if washed. Compassion is merit and virtue: from the great compassionate mind arises the great vow to liberate sentient beings extensively. One tirelessly performs all kinds of good deeds that benefit sentient beings, without abiding in them, thereby accumulating merit and virtue. Only then can one realize Buddhahood at the fruition stage, in which wisdom and merit and virtue are both perfectly complete. Otherwise, cultivating wisdom without cultivating merit and virtue leads to "the arhat's scant offerings"; cultivating merit and virtue without cultivating wisdom leads to the incomplete karmic result of "an elephant wearing jeweled garlands."

If, in cultivating the Way, we establish right view and recognize that realizing our true nature is the foundation of attaining the Way; if we begin with the path of the joint cultivation of emptiness and compassion and apply ourselves diligently, then before long we can open up to what is original and directly see the Buddha-nature. We will then know that each and every thing is a manifestation of our own true nature, that at all times and in all places there is nothing but the wondrous functioning of prajñā. All is one, and one is all; how then could there be distinctions among persons, self, things, and sentient beings?

If there is even the slightest attachment or the smallest barrier of separation, one will inevitably be deluded by phenomenal appearances or by an old master's tongue, admit defeat in one's words and actions, and lose one's freedom.

A lay practitioner once went to interview the old master Xuyun. Master Xu asked, "What practice are you doing?" The lay practitioner replied, "I contemplate the mind." Master Xu asked, "Ah—have you seen the mind you contemplate?" The lay practitioner could not answer. Chan Master Xuyun said, "You still need to apply yourself well!" In fact, it would have been easy to answer. When asked, "Have you seen it?" he should have replied, "I have seen it."

Originally, one should not answer in this way, for the true mind is formless and cannot be seen with the eyes. Moreover, the mind is far removed from the sense faculties and their objects, solitary in its luminosity and shining alone; there is no opposing subject that contemplates and object that is contemplated. But in conversation with a great master, one may as well throw oneself across the tiger's mouth and see how he will bite. Chan Master Xuyun certainly would not let you pass. He would press on and ask, "You have seen it—where is the mind?" Then he would extend his palm and say, "Present it all in full."

This displays your true mind completely. The true mind is not elsewhere; it is always shining before you. What is difficult about answering? An ancient worthy said: “The Way is that from which one cannot be separated even for a moment; what can be separated from is not the Way.” The true mind has no appearance of interruption or continuity; therefore, it cannot be left. Since it cannot be left, it is always in samādhi, without entrance or exit.

If this samādhi has entering and leaving, it is not right samādhi. The samādhi of biased emptiness is samādhi without a great compassionate mind, and naturally is not right samādhi. Likewise, samādhi that has entering and leaving is not right samādhi. Right samādhi neither inclines toward emptiness alone nor has entrance or exit.

What is great samādhi? It is not being deluded by circumstances. Whatever circumstance appears before one, one is like what Confucian teaching describes: “Though Mount Tai collapses before one, one’s expression does not change; though a herd of deer rises to one’s left, one’s eyes do not blink.” One is utterly unmoved. Therefore, when practicing the Dharma, we must be like this at every moment: temper ourselves amid turmoil and train ourselves in walking, standing, sitting, lying down, and all human interactions. Do not learn the samādhi of biased emptiness or samādhi that has entering and leaving. You must learn right samādhi, in which emptiness and compassion are harmoniously integrated. Practicing right samādhi is the essential point of cultivating the Way.

“Those who possess right view and right samādhi accord with the sprouting seed of the Buddhas’ birth; this is the course of bodhisattva practice. Only the six perfections and myriad practices that benefit others are the wholesome capacities of practitioners.” Practice

When we possess right view and right samādhi for cultivating the Way, our efforts will not go astray, and attainment becomes easier. Therefore, cultivating the Way certainly requires right view and right samādhi. Without right view and right samādhi, it is like cooking sand in the hope of producing rice: there is no possibility of attaining the Way.

“Accord with the sprouting seed of the Buddhas’ birth” means that, when we possess right view and right samādhi, the sprout of bodhi has emerged and will surely grow strong, culminating in Buddhahood at the fruition stage. When the cause is right, the result is right; if the causal ground is not right, the fruition becomes distorted. This is the “course of bodhisattva practice”—the correct path for a bodhisattva’s cultivation (qu means “path”). We must practice in this way for it to count as following the bodhisattva path, and only then can we become Buddhas in the future.

The starting point of cultivation for us Mahāyāna practitioners is to benefit others, not to benefit ourselves, just as with a lifeguard at a swimming pool. To rescue someone who has fallen into the water, a lifeguard must first learn to swim and master lifesaving techniques. If one jumps into the water without first learning the skills needed to save others, not only will one be unable to save anyone, but one will drown first oneself.

Therefore, in learning Buddhism we must learn the Mahāyāna, learning Buddhism in order to liberate sentient beings, not merely for ourselves. To seek only one's own liberation from birth and death and rebirth in the Western Pure Land to enjoy blessings is not our aim. Those who seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land must also cultivate the great Way there and then return to liberate sentient beings. Only this accords with the spirit of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, in learning Buddhism, we must never depart from sentient beings at any time.

To return to the point: if we leave sentient beings behind, we cannot become Buddhas. Why? Because apart from sentient beings, neither our wisdom nor our merit and virtue can be perfected.

Do we not say that we must overcome the four kinds of delusion: delusions of views, delusions of thought, dust-like delusions, and ignorance? Dust-like delusions are the subtle delusions that follow the delusions of views and thought. That is, the seeds of our subtle afflictions and habitual tendencies are as numerous as mud and sand, as minute as dust. To overcome them and sweep them clean, we must temper ourselves in liberating sentient beings.

Why? Because the habits and habitual tendencies of sentient beings differ in every case. To liberate them, you must put aside yourself and follow others, accommodating and drawing close to them, before you can lead them through the gate. To do this, you must first sweep away your own habitual tendencies.

Otherwise, if your own habitual tendencies remain and you are arrogant and self-conceited, how can you accommodate others? Thus, one of the four means of embracing sentient beings practiced by bodhisattvas is cooperation—accommodating others. Only by working together with sentient beings can you draw them over.

Every sentient being has a different character and temperament. When you can adapt to them all and respond appropriately to each person's capacity, your own subtle, subjective habitual tendencies will be exhausted, your mind-capacity will become broad, dust-like delusions can be cut off, and wisdom can be perfected. Therefore, dust-like delusions can be brought to an end only while liberating sentient beings. Wisdom cannot be perfected unless it is applied to liberating sentient beings.

What about merit and virtue? If you do not serve the community, how can you accumulate merit and virtue? You must serve and sacrifice for the community. Śākyamuni Buddha, for example, sacrificed himself for the community on more than one occasion.

When sentient beings, burdened by heavy collective karma, suffered famine and had no food to satisfy their hunger, Śākyamuni Buddha transformed himself into an enormous animal, descended from heaven, and let everyone eat of him. After they had eaten their fill, he taught them the Dharma.

Thus, everyone received both the gift of food and the gift of Dharma, and was freed from the ocean of suffering of hunger, birth, and death. What a great model of learning Buddhism and liberating sentient beings! Since we study Buddhism, we must sacrifice and serve for sentient beings in order to accumulate merit and virtue. The Buddha is the Honored One Perfect in the Two Accumulations; to become a Buddha, one must possess both wisdom and merit and virtue in full.

Therefore, one can become a Buddha only in reliance on sentient beings. Without sentient beings, you fundamentally cannot become a Buddha; at most, you can become an arhat, while the view of dharmas has not yet been removed. This is because dust-like habitual tendencies cannot be transformed, wisdom is not perfected, and merit and virtue are even less complete. Thus, if you can become a Buddha, you should thank sentient beings. Sentient beings help you attain the Way. Without sentient beings, your habitual tendencies cannot be transformed, there is no means of accumulating merit and virtue, and you can never become a Buddha. Hence it is said, “Only the six perfections and myriad practices that benefit others are the wholesome capacities of practitioners.”

The six perfections and myriad practices are giving, moral discipline, patience, diligence, dhyāna, and wisdom. First, giving: giving to the community includes material giving, giving of Dharma, and giving freedom from fear. Second, observing the precepts: this means observing the precepts established by the Buddha. The most basic are the five precepts: not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not drinking alcohol. The purpose of observing the precepts is to purify the mind. Third, patience.

Everyone misunderstands patience, thinking that when others curse or strike them, they should merely endure it and remain unmoved. That will not do. If one does so for a long time, one will become ill. What is patience? There is no insult to endure. Patience is not endurance; it is acceptance and acknowledgment—it is truly yielding in one’s heart. The Diamond Sūtra says: “No mark of self, no mark of person.”

“No mark of self”: who curses whom? “No mark of person”: who curses me? Who curses whom, and who curses me—neither can be obtained; both are empty. If

someone insults me in some way, I accept it. With no self, their cursing is like wind blowing through trees; it passes, and that is all.

No mark of person, no mark of self: empty and unobtainable—this is the patience of the unborn dharmas! The patience of the unborn dharmas is truly accepting the truth of the universe and human life, understanding that the so-called great thousandfold world is entirely illusory, fundamentally without arising or ceasing. All things are manifestations of the wondrous functioning of our own intrinsic nature; all arise from causes and conditions: “Dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I say, are empty.”

Being empty, there is not a single dharma to be obtained. Where could there be arising? Without arising, where could there be ceasing? If all is absent, what is there to endure? Let me repeat: patience is not mere endurance. Patience means acceptance: the mind is truly empty, truly yielding, and free from contention. This is the practice of patience. Fourth, diligence.

To liberate sentient beings, one must attain the Way. Without attaining the Way, how can one liberate sentient beings? To attain the Way, one must be diligent. One diligently perseveres in order to liberate sentient beings, not for oneself. Fifth, dhyāna and samādhi: practice dhyāna and samādhi at every moment, so that the mind does not waver in response to circumstances and does not flow along with deluded thoughts. Sixth, great wisdom.

Only with great wisdom can one liberate sentient beings skillfully and expediently according to their differing capacities and conditions. All such good deeds that benefit others alone constitute bodhisattva practice; otherwise, one is not a bodhisattva. The Great Mahāmudrā of the Ganges is a great Dharma of Esoteric Buddhism; it does not discuss such minor teachings, and therefore goes directly to the essential point.

VI. Emphasis on Actual Practice

“If, furthermore, in a quiet place one lets go of all entanglements of affairs and conditions and diligently applies oneself with one-pointed mind, one will enter the originally pure essence of mind, certainly attain true liberation, and ascend to wondrous enlightenment.”

A practitioner who recognizes intrinsic nature and can also adapt amid noisy surroundings, fully enjoying its benefits, need not practice any particular Dharma. One need only move amid the dusty circumstances of the world and temper one’s own habitual tendencies.

But some people are not suited to this; their faculties are relatively weak. What should they do? There is a way: they can “again, in a quiet place, set aside all worldly involvements.” Find a pure and quiet place—for example, a secluded mountain forest or a relatively peaceful home environment. That is very good. But once you have found such a place, you must set aside all worldly involvements.

If you have found a pure and quiet place but your body is in a pure place while your mind is impure, it is still futile. Cultivation and realization of the Way depend on the mind. If your mind is in a complete muddle, full of wild thoughts, it is no different from being in a bustling market; it will not do. To realize the Way, you must set aside all worldly involvements. When you sit down to practice, you must put aside every matter; only then can your cultivation get underway.

Therefore, I often urge everyone that, when sitting down to practice, they should be as though dead: attend to nothing at all and cease indulging in idle thoughts.

Never think about how this matter should be handled, how that matter should be arranged, how your sons and daughters should be disciplined, and so on. If you keep thinking about such things while sitting in meditation, that is dreadful! We must attend to no affairs at all. Worst of all is sitting in meditation while still worrying about one’s children: “Ah, A-Mao, A-Gou, it is time. If you do not get up, you will be late. Get up—quickly, get up!”

Ah! With the mind divided in two and mental energy scattered like this, how can one sit well? I have seen many such cases. I am not making them up out of thin air; I have truly heard and witnessed them myself! Ah! Can one meditate well in this way? Therefore, when we sit down to practice, we cannot attend to any matter. We should regard ourselves as dead, unable to concern ourselves with so many things.

Let me emphasize this again: when sitting down to practice, set aside all worldly involvements and remain still as though you were dead. Only by doing this can you gain real benefit and attain correct samādhi. Otherwise, how could you attain samādhi? You simply cannot settle into it. Therefore, in practicing the Dharma, you must set aside all worldly involvements.

If you cannot let go, then even if there is a quiet place for you to go, do not go; going there would be futile. Your mind will still be in turmoil, and staying in a quiet place will be as lively as being on Nanjing Road. Therefore, the key to practicing the Dharma is truly being able to let go. Only by letting go can you advance single-mindedly.

If you can truly let go and cultivate single-mindedly, then whatever Dharma you practice will immediately correspond with your own mind.

One often hears people say: “Ah, so-and-so is so quick! He did not even sit very much, yet he realized his Original Face. Why have I sat for so long without experiencing such a state?” Ha, ha! His mind can let go and has become pure, so he can realize swiftly. Your mind cannot let go; it is in a complete muddle and cannot become pure. How could you have the experience of direct realization? Of course you cannot.

Therefore, the time spent in cultivation does not depend on its length, but on whether your mind is pure and whether your mind has died. To speak frankly: if your mind has truly died, then not long after you sit down, you will peacefully enter samādhi. States of Chan marked by ease, tranquility, and joy will naturally arise, and radiant light will naturally shine forth in abundance. If your mind is impure, where could realized states possibly come from? Naturally, there will be none. Thus, in practicing the Dharma, it does not matter whether the time is long or short; what matters is whether your mind is pure and whether your mind has died. This is the crucial point.

If you can truly let go of the myriad conditions and advance single-mindedly, then “one is immediately established in the originally pure essence of mind, will surely attain true liberation, and ascend to wondrous awakening.” “Immediately” means in this very life. Esoteric Buddhism speaks of attaining Buddhahood in this very life—that is, becoming a Buddha in this very life. Some people also interpret it as the character for “body,” meaning that this very body is to become a Buddha; Esoteric Buddhism has such a teaching.

Last time we discussed Dzogchen and Great Perfect Wisdom. These teachings speak of the body being able to attain accomplishment. Mahāmudrā is the precursor to Dzogchen. Dzogchen is divided into two parts: one is Trekchö, and the other is Tögal; one is cutting through, and the other is direct crossing.

Cutting through means decisively cutting off, right at the moment, all afflictions, deluded thoughts, and attachments, so that intrinsic nature clearly appears before one. Direct crossing means at once transcending the three realms and becoming a Buddha.

This Mahāmudrā is the practice of Trekchö: it directly points out that you need not employ any method of cultivation, but should immediately cut off deluded thoughts and see your true nature. Later we will also discuss correspondence with the three emptinesses; we will speak of that later, not now. Thus, Mahāmudrā is a very profound esoteric teaching that directly instructs you in realizing the Way.

If in this very life we can let go, we will certainly attain true great liberation on the basis of the originally pure essence of our nature. The originally pure essence of our nature means that our inherently possessed wondrous nature is originally pure and

free from contamination. Why is it now contaminated? Because we cling to appearances and pursue external objects, becoming deluded by external circumstances and failing to recognize what is original.

In former times, people had deep roots and light attachments. With a single point from their teacher, they understood; they could immediately take it up for themselves, cease being deluded, let go of circumstances, preserve and sustain their intrinsic nature, and remove their deluded habits. They realized the Way very quickly. What about people today? Their faculties have become dull, and their obstacles have grown heavy. You may speak until your throat breaks, yet they still cannot recognize it; they remain attached to circumstances and therefore must take many unnecessary detours.

My teacher, Mr. Wang Xianglu, once said: "Those who practice the Chan school may investigate the phrase 'Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?' for thirty years without departing from it, and only then open up to their original nature and personally see their Buddha-nature. We who practice Esoteric Buddhism can open up and see our true nature in three years." In terms of time, that is already ten times less than in the Chan school and is very rapid indeed.

But from the standpoint of intrinsic nature, even investigating Chan is unnecessary.

Whether three years or thirty years, they are all unnecessary detours! Since everyone is originally a Buddha, there is no need to investigate Chan here, nor to recite some "ong bala ..." while sitting here and exerting oneself in practice. Is that not like wearing a cangue and shackles, creating trouble where there is none, and merely exhausting oneself? Let go of everything and restore your intrinsically genuine Buddha-nature. Sleep when you wish to sleep, sit when you wish to sit—how lively, natural, and wonderful that is! As Layman Pang's daughter Lingzhao said: "Neither difficult nor easy: when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep."

Intrinsic nature is naturally so free and at ease, so why go to the trouble of digging out flesh to mend a sore, seeking affliction for oneself? Yet we must understand that what Lingzhao said concerns passing through the final barrier. Without first passing through the first two barriers spoken of by Layman Pang and his wife, one cannot do this. Although we possess the Tathāgata's Buddha-nature, our habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives are deep and heavy. Without a period of arduous training, and without removing those habitual tendencies, one cannot obtain genuine benefit.

Therefore, one must still investigate Chan and sit in meditation, taking an unnecessary detour in order to pass through the first two barriers. Layman Pang said: "Difficult, difficult, difficult—like spreading ten loads of sesame seeds upon a tree." Breaking through the first barrier is most difficult. When we first begin to exert

ourselves in practice, deluded thoughts fly about, samādhi cannot settle, and it is hard to see our intrinsic nature. It is as difficult as spreading sesame seeds upon a tree.

Pang's wife said: "Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the coming from the West is upon the tips of every blade of grass." This refers to breaking through the second, more difficult barrier. Once we have recognized our Original Face through practice, then it is easy, easy—extremely easy! Upon the tips of every blade of grass is the Original Face. "Upon the tips of every blade of grass" refers to every matter and every thing. What is there upon the tip? There is nothing at all upon the tips of every blade of grass! Is not everything then empty and pure? There are many such koans.

In ancient times, Chan Master Chuanzi studied together with Yunyan and Daowu under Chan Master Yaoshan, and they verified one another's awakenings. When he left Yaoshan, he said to his two Dharma brothers, Wú and Yán: "In the future, each of you should establish yourselves in one region and uphold Yaoshan's essential teaching. By nature I am unrestrained and fond of mountains and waters; I delight in myself and cannot shoulder the great responsibility of teaching and transforming sentient beings.

"Later, if you come to know where I reside and encounter a sharp and capable teacher of scriptures, send one to me. I will transmit to him what I have attained in this life, thereby repaying my teacher's kindness." He then went to the banks of Huating in Xiuzhou, floated about in a small boat, and ferried passersby across the water, living according to circumstances while awaiting the arrival of one with the proper capacity. Thus people called him "the Boat Monk."

Once Daowu went to Jingkou and encountered Jiaoshan teaching from the Dharma seat. A monk asked, "What is the dharmakāya?" Jiaoshan replied, "The dharmakāya is without appearance." He then asked, "What is the dharma eye?" Jiaoshan replied, "The dharma eye is without flaw." Daowu could not help laughing when he heard this. Jiaoshan then descended from the seat, bowed reverently, and asked for instruction.

Look at how earnest the ancients were. If this happened today, he would be met with a stick and certainly driven out. Jiaoshan humbly asked Daowu, "Master, there must have been something wrong with my replies just now, which caused you to laugh. Where was I mistaken? Please compassionately explain it to me." Daowu said, "I will not tell you, but you may go to Huating and seek Chan Master Chuanzi.

" Jiaoshan asked, "What sort of person is he?" Daowu said, "Above, he has not a single tile to cover him; below, not even enough ground to stand an awl upon. If you go, it would be best to change your clothes."

Jiaoshan therefore dismissed his assembly, changed his attire, and went to Huating to visit Chan Master Chuanzi. As soon as Chuanzi saw him, he asked, “Where does the teacher of scriptures reside?” Jiaoshan replied, “I do not reside in a monastery; if I reside, it is not like one!” Chuanzi asked, “If it is not like one, what is it like?” Jiaoshan said, “Before my eyes, there is nothing like it.”

Chuanzi asked, “Where did you learn this?” Jiaoshan said, “It is not reached by the ears and eyes.” Chuanzi said, “One fitting phrase becomes a tethering stake for a donkey through ten thousand eons.” He then asked, “With a line hanging a thousand feet, the intention is in the deep pool. Three inches from the hook, why do you not speak?” Just as Jiaoshan was about to open his mouth—smack! Chuanzi struck him with his pole and knocked him into the water.

As Jiaoshan had just climbed back into the boat, Chuanzi again said, “Speak! Speak!” Just as Jiaoshan was about to open his mouth—smack! He was knocked back into the water. At that moment, Jiaoshan suddenly attained great awakening and nodded three times. Chuanzi said, “Good, good, good—come up!” Why? At that time there was nothing in Jiaoshan’s mind; everything was empty and pure.

Empty and pure it was, yet not a blank emptiness. It was bright and unbewildered, clearly and distinctly aware; thus he could only nod once. Therefore, Pang’s wife said, “The meaning of the coming from the West is upon the tips of every blade of grass.” It is extremely easy: simply see beyond appearances. Do not cling to appearances, and it is extremely easy! Thus we say that seeing one’s true nature and awakening to the Way is not difficult—not difficult at all. Do not cling to appearances, and do not become attached to great spiritual powers!

But I often hear people say: “If this is awakening to the Way, why have I not developed great spiritual powers? Awakening to the Way should entail spiritual powers; without them, it is not awakening.”

Alas! In practicing the Dharma, we must understand the proper sequence. First, we must recognize our true nature, affirm it, and safeguard it. Safeguard it continuously and closely, until even the skin falls away cleanly and there is no attachment whatsoever. Then, whatever circumstances arise will not shake us, and naturally we will radiate great light.”

That light is not merely like one or two suns; it is like the radiance of hundreds of thousands of suns. At that time, the heavenly eye, heavenly ear, knowledge of others’ minds, knowledge of past lives, and spiritual powers will naturally all be unobstructed. In fact, everyone inherently possesses the great light. As the Amitābha Sūtra says: “The light of that Buddha is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction.”

The two words “that Buddha” have a very broad scope. Do not narrow them down and suppose that “that Buddha” refers only to Amitābha Buddha. Amitābha Buddha’s immeasurable light illuminates the lands of the ten directions, but the scope of “that Buddha” is not so limited. “That Buddha” means all the multitude.

“That Buddha” is that Buddha; it is not our physical body. The body is not the Buddha—do not misunderstand this. There is a Buddha within the body, just as a person lives within a house. That Buddha is “that Buddha”; it is the multitude. The intrinsic luminosity of all sentient beings’ true nature is incomparable and immeasurable, shining brightly throughout the lands of the ten directions without obstruction. Do you not believe it? Try practicing diligently for yourselves!

Now that you are listening to teachings on Mahāmudrā, you must recognize that the numinous knowing at the point where a thought ceases is Buddha-nature. Only this is real; all other appearances are false, mere shadows of true nature. Let go of everything. Recite the Buddha’s name, uphold mantras, and practice with wholehearted resolve. When the mind is truly empty, it radiates great light, and in this very life one can attain genuine liberation and reach the stages of Equal and Wondrous Enlightenment.

Esoteric Buddhism teaches attaining Buddhahood in this very life and reaching the stages of Equal and Wondrous Enlightenment. Whether we attain those stages depends on how we apply ourselves in practice.

If we apply ourselves deeply and continuously, we can accomplish this in this very life. If our practice is neither deep nor continuous, and we are lazy and lax—putting off until tomorrow what should be clarified today, and until the day after tomorrow what should be done tomorrow—then even if we keep postponing it until Maitreya Buddha descends into the world, we still will not realize the Way.

Even if we rely on the power of Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva to attain rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, we still must apply ourselves in practice. If you wish to be reborn there but remain attached to the wives, wealth, children, and worldly status of the Sahā world, this is what the ancients called “clinging to a post while trying to row a boat.” You cannot even set out, so how could you enter into responsive communion with Amitābha, become continuous and undivided with him, and be reborn in

the Western Pure Land? Therefore, you must first let go of everything. How can it work if you do not let go? National Master Yulin once said: “Those who wish to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss but cannot let go will not be able to go there.”

If you remain attached to the Sahā world and cannot let go, then do not recite the Amitābha Sūtra. It would be better to recite the Medicine Buddha Sūtra and make offerings to Medicine Buddha. Medicine Buddha made great vows to protect people, make all their affairs go smoothly, and fulfill their selfish desires.

If, in this world, you hope for wealth, he gives you wealth; if you hope for children, he gives you children; if you hope for high office, he gives you high office—fulfilling all people's desires. Once your personal wishes are fulfilled, bodhicitta may naturally arise: "Oh, all that I have obtained comes from the Buddha's blessings. The Buddhadharma is truly inconceivable." When you deeply appreciate the Buddha, you should then arouse the resolve to study Buddhism and practice the Dharma in order to realize the Way. Thus, reciting the name of Medicine Buddha and making offerings to Medicine Buddha brings great benefit!

If you truly wish to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, you must let go of everything. To practice while remaining attached to this Sahā world is to go contrary to the Way; it is of no use at all.

Yet merely saying that one has let go while inwardly being unable to let go, and being unwilling to practice diligently—remaining lazy and lax while hoping to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss—is like wishing to row a boat to the other shore while refusing to exert oneself at the oars. It is of no use at all. Therefore, whatever Dharma we practice, we must still apply ourselves. Without practice, it will not do to rely solely on the Buddha's power to guide us.

In fact, for rebirth in the Western Land, it is not only Buddha-recitation that can bring rebirth. One may also get there through Chan investigation, mantra recitation, or sūtra recitation accompanied by vows for rebirth. For Buddhas and bodhisattvas are not like worldly people in the Sahā world, whose minds are narrow: they do not refuse to guide you merely because you have not recited the Buddha's name. Rather, they give rise to unconditional great compassion, receiving everyone and liberating every being.

Regardless of what kind of sentient being one is, at the time of death Buddhas and bodhisattvas treat all equally, radiating light everywhere and guiding them toward rebirth in the West. It is only because sentient beings' karmic obstacles are heavy that they cannot connect with this light. Some even fear the Buddha-light because it is so intense, flee from it, and rush into the evil realms. Is this not tragic and lamentable? If we do not exert ourselves and rely solely on the Buddha's guiding power, we cannot attain rebirth, for the Buddha cannot simply pull us to the West.

If that were possible, the Buddha would have pulled us all there long ago. Why would we still be revolving in this Sahā world of the five turbidities, suffering as we do? The Buddha has three things he cannot do: he cannot transform another's

karma on their behalf, cannot make another person a Buddha on their behalf, and cannot liberate beings with whom he has no affinity. If you wish to be reborn in the West and wish to realize the Way, yet do not wish to apply yourself in practice, there is truly nothing more to say. Thus the ancient worthies said: “Though one takes another by the arm, one cannot make him walk; he must himself be willing before there can be a response.” All of you must be willing to practice diligently!

“But most important of all, let the body remain steady like Mount Sumeru, and let the mind be tranquil and clear, not drawn away by external circumstances; then one can practice anywhere.”

This emphasizes that among view, samādhi, and conduct, the most important thing is to keep the body settled and unmoving like Mount Sumeru. If you can sit steadily, the mind becomes settled; if the mind is unsettled, you cannot sit steadily. When the mind is unsettled, jumping about like a monkey, you certainly cannot remain seated.

When your mind is truly settled and your body remains unmoving like Mount Sumeru, this is the most important point in meditation. Therefore, we often ask: Can you remain motionless while sitting in meditation? Not yet? Then you must pay attention and train gradually. Do not be impatient. As long as you sit with perseverance, you will gradually become still.

Therefore, we repeatedly emphasize that the mudrā must not come apart. Only when your legs are so numb that you truly cannot endure it may you move them slightly; but do not move about carelessly. This applies when you first begin sitting.

Gradually, you should not move your legs either. As soon as you sit down, remain completely motionless. Only by not moving can you readily enter samādhi; how can you enter samādhi if you keep shifting about while seated? Thus, those who hold prayer beads in their hands while reciting the Buddha’s name will not attain samādhi, no matter how much they recite. Their mouths recite “Amitābha Buddha,” while their hands count the beads. Moving about in this way, they cannot enter samādhi no matter how much they recite.

If, moreover, they recite the Buddha’s name while discussing other people’s faults and merits, they are even less able to attain the samādhi of Buddha-recitation. Can reciting the Buddha’s name in this way bring rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss? That would be far too easy! Thus Master Lianchi lamented: “Many recite the Buddha’s name, but few are reborn in the West. Why? Because their minds are not earnest and urgent. Though their mouths recite the Buddha’s name, their minds wander wildly; for this reason, they cannot attain rebirth.” Patriarch Hanshan likewise said: “With the mouth reciting Amitābha while the mind is scattered, even shouting until one’s throat breaks is futile.”

“Let the mind be tranquil and clear, not drawn away by external circumstances; then one can practice anywhere.” Let the body remain steady and unmoving like Mount Sumeru, and let the mind be tranquil and clear like a cup of pure water without the slightest trace of mud or sand. Only then will you not be disturbed by external circumstances. When the mind is truly tranquil and clear, no external circumstance can shake you, and you can apply yourself in practice anytime and anywhere.

Those who have truly attained great samādhi have minds that are genuinely tranquil and clear; they can practice even on Nanjing Road. Though traffic streams past in endless flow, their minds do not stir in the least. But beginners cannot do this, so they must find a quiet place in which to practice.

Therefore, it was said above that one should find a relatively quiet place, set aside the myriad conditions, and practice diligently. When one has reached the later stage, one can practice anytime and anywhere. The ability to practice anywhere requires time; it is not expected that everyone will accomplish it immediately. At present, you are asked to be able to set your minds down at once in a quiet place. If you cannot set down your mind in a quiet place, what will you do in a noisy one?

No matter what Dharma you practice—Chan, Esoteric Buddhism, or the Pure Land school—you must set down your mind.

How else can you realize the Way? Never be like some people nowadays who practice the Pure Land Dharma gate and say, “I do not need that. In any case, I rely on Amitābha Buddha’s other-power to guide me; I do not need self-power. We need only recite Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, for ten breaths, and Amitābha Buddha will pull me up to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.”

Alas! This misunderstands the method of ten recitations. The method of ten recitations uses the breath to gather in the mind. Take one breath and recite, “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .”; then take another breath, do not let the mind move, and recite, “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” Repeat this ten times, using it as training to gather in the mind and keep it unmoving, eliminate emotional attachment, and attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land.

They do not know that the method of ten recitations was established specifically for people busy with worldly affairs who have no time to sit in meditation, using the breath to gather in the mind. Once the mind has been gathered in and does not move, one must preserve and keep watch over this state, training amid circumstances so that no matter what arises, one does not move. One cannot forget it as soon as one walks out the door. Therefore, one must practice diligently. Without diligent practice, rebirth in the Pure Land is difficult to attain. One cannot be reborn in the West merely by being careless and lazy!

“Or, if one is unable to do this, yet wholeheartedly inclines toward these three gates, one should not give rise to the obstructing karmic activities of greed, anger, and ignorance. In future lives, one can also turn suffering into happiness.”

If practitioners have poor foundations and cannot devote themselves single-mindedly to practice through the three gates of view, samādhi, and conduct, they nevertheless should not give rise to greed, anger, and ignorance or create all kinds of evil karma.

Greed, anger, and ignorance are the three poisons. All the evil karma we create arises from greed, anger, and ignorance. If you have no greed and are content with what you have, you will not do evil. But if you are dissatisfied and insatiably greedy—wanting more when you already have much, and wanting better when things are already good—your mind will never attain purity, and it will be impossible not to create evil karma.

This is because you are always insatiably greedy, single-mindedly wanting to seize everything that belongs to others. To achieve your aims, you will stop at nothing, even plotting for wealth and taking lives. Anger is a mind of hatred: when people or circumstances do not accord with your wishes or intentions, you resent others, and afflictions arise.

Greed and anger both arise from ignorance. Because one lacks wisdom and does not recognize the true-nature essence, but recognizes only false appearances and shadows, this is called ignorance. Owing to ignorance, one does not understand that everything in the world is false, that all things are empty and unobtainable, arise from causes and conditions, and have no inherent self-nature. Thus greed and anger arise; therefore, ignorance is fundamental. Without wisdom there is ignorance; ignorance is the absence of wisdom and light, a state of darkness.

The three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance are the worst things. They are poisons in our minds and evil karma. The three evil karmas of the body are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; the evil karmas of speech are divisive speech, harsh speech, frivolous speech, and false speech. Among the ten evil deeds, greed, anger, and ignorance are the worst; they are the roots of our suffering. If we overthrow these three poisons, the remaining seven will not matter so much and will naturally be transformed. Therefore, even if we cannot practice one-pointedly in the three gates of view, samādhi, and conduct as explained above, we should not give rise to thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance.

Greed, anger, and ignorance are great poisons and major obstacles to attaining Buddhahood. If we wish to transcend birth and death, attain Buddhahood, and liberate sentient beings, we must remove them. If these three evil things cannot be eliminated, you are finished and cannot attain Buddhahood.

If we can eliminate the three poisons—neither greedy, angry, nor ignorant—then, even if we cannot attain the great Way through one-pointedness in view, samādhi, and conduct, we can still transform suffering into happiness in future lives and will not go to bad places. That is, we may be reborn in the three good realms and will not fall into the three lower realms.

Those who practice the Chan school should make great vows to preserve the human body: they must attain Buddhahood and liberate sentient beings; they must attain accomplishment. When this vow is made great, it protects oneself so that one never loses the human body, but is reborn as a human life after life. Moreover, one's faculties will be deeply rooted, so that upon rebirth one can continue one's cultivation, attaining a thousand awakenings upon hearing a single teaching. This is one benefit of practicing the Chan school.

Mahāmudrā is also like the Chan school. Even if our minds are directed toward the three gates but we do not do well in the three gates of view, samādhi, and conduct, we should still not give rise to greed, anger, and ignorance or commit all kinds of evil karma. Then in the next life, too, we can transform suffering into happiness and will not go to the lower three realms.

VII. Directly Pointing to the Reality of One's Own Mind

"These three essentials—view, samādhi, and conduct—are vital to cutting off delusion and false thoughts, and are a dharma gate that directly points to the reality of one's own mind."

The three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are vital to cutting off delusion and false thoughts. Ordinary beings such as ourselves have delusions of view, delusions of thought, dust-like delusions, and other delusions. Delusions of view mean lacking right knowledge and right view and thus being deluded by external appearances.

Nowadays, many people who study Buddhism are confused in their views. They do not know what Buddha-nature is and cannot stand firm. For example, someone who has already aroused the resolve to study the Buddhadharma hears that a non-Buddhist practitioner of qigong possesses spiritual powers and great abilities, and thinks, "Ah, I had better practice qigong instead!" He no longer cultivates the Buddhadharma but studies non-Buddhist teachings instead.

Let me tell you a true example. At a certain mountain, there was a young monk serving as an administrator at a Buddhist academy established there. Hearing that a certain qigong master possessed spiritual powers, he stopped cultivating the Buddhadharma and began studying qigong in the hope of acquiring extraordinary abilities. He followed a non-Buddhist path. This is being deluded by spiritual powers.

Such delusion results from our lack of earnestness in studying Buddhism and from incorrect view, samādhi, and conduct. View is the first and most crucial matter in cultivating a method and studying the Way. If one's view is incorrect, one will inevitably be deluded in practice and take a roundabout path.

Confusion in one's view is a great enemy of practice. Therefore, in studying Buddhism, one must first establish right view and cut off delusions of view; only then should one cut off delusions of thought. What are delusions of thought? They are the various thoughts of attachment that arise in response to circumstances. The various delusions we have are caused by incorrect view.

Only when one's view is correct and delusions of view have been cut off can delusions of thought be cut off. Only then can one stand firm and not follow non-Buddhist paths. No matter how great the spiritual powers of non-Buddhist practitioners may be, if they have not attained the supernormal power of the exhaustion of outflows and do not recognize Buddha-nature, they certainly cannot transcend birth and death. We follow the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate; by recognizing what Buddha-nature is, we can transcend birth and death.

For example, when Patriarch Lü Chunyang met Patriarch Huanglong, Lü Chunyang had already accomplished the yang-spirit. Yet Huanglong said, "You are a corpse-guarding ghost." Lü Chunyang replied, "Ha, ha! I have medicine of immortality in my bag."

There are two interpretations of the medicine in the bag. One is external medicine: an alchemical golden elixir prepared and kept in one's pouch, an external elixir. The other is the foul skin bag—that is, the body. When the golden elixir has been refined to completion within the body, it is medicine of immortality; yet one should not guard this physical shell. Patriarch Huanglong said, "Even if you pass through eighty thousand great kalpas, you will ultimately fall into emptiness and extinction."

Even if you could live for eighty thousand great kalpas, you would still ultimately fall into emptiness. Since you do not recognize what Buddha-nature is, what use are spiritual powers? You are attached to appearances and take the yang-spirit to be real, but in fact it too is false, dreamlike, illusory, like a bubble and a shadow. It is merely an illusory body displayed through the wondrous functioning of our true mind.

For example, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and the body manifested by Amitābha Buddha are both Amitābha Buddha's mind-born body. A mind-born body is not merely a body; all realms, affairs, and things are mind-born bodies. Therefore, mountains, rivers, and the great earth are also our mind-born body. But because we do not recognize this, we separate them off, acknowledging only this body as myself and not mountains, rivers, and the great earth.

Mountains, rivers, and the great earth are composed of earth, water, fire, and wind, and our bodies are likewise composed of earth, water, fire, and wind. Our Buddha-nature can be great or small: "When great, there is nothing outside it; when small, there is nothing within it. Released, it fills the six directions; gathered in, it withdraws and conceals itself in the most secret place." Ignorance has merely shrunk it and confined it within your bodily cavity, so that you do not recognize that mountains, rivers, and the great earth are also our mind-born body.

Yet this mind-born body is also false. Amitābha Buddha must also relinquish his position, and the Land of Ultimate Bliss must change. When Amitābha Buddha relinquishes his position, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva will assume it. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's world will not be called the Land of Ultimate Bliss, but will be another world, even more beautiful and magnificent than Amitābha Buddha's present world.

Why is this so? Because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has returned by steering the boat of compassion backward: he is an ancient Buddha who has come again and will again attain Buddhahood. This is like performing a conjuring trick for you to see; do not take it as real. Once you take it as real, everything is wrong. If one thing is real, everything is real; if one thing is false, everything is false.

If you say that this Sahā world is false, then the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is also false. If you say that the Land of Ultimate Bliss is real, then the Sahā world is also real. In truth, they are neither real nor false, both real and false—at once real and false. Distinguishing real from false is your discriminating, deluded mind; in truth, there is no discrimination.

Therefore, once you understand this principle, your mind will not abide in appearances. If you do not understand it, you always abide in appearances and constantly discriminate: "The Western world is beautiful and real; the Sahā world is ugly and false." In truth, this is all the fault of lacking right view and being deluded by circumstances.

We ordinary beings are all deluded by circumstances. Thus, when Śākyamuni Buddha awakened to the Way upon seeing a bright star during the night of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, he said, "All sentient beings possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous characteristics. Why do they not know this themselves? Because they are obscured by deluded thoughts, inverted views, and attachments." They do not know and are deluded. Therefore, if we are to realize the Way, we must cut off the root of delusion.

To cut off the vital root of delusion, one must first have right view. This is of primary importance. After establishing right view, apply yourself to cultivating right samādhi. Train constantly: let the body be as unmoving as Mount Sumeru, and the mind as

still as deep water without a ripple. Enter deeply into dhyāna, open wisdom, and directly realize intrinsic nature.

After recognizing intrinsic nature, one must diligently contemplate, safeguard realization continuously and seamlessly, not be drawn by circumstances outwardly or turn with thoughts inwardly, and neither attach to appearances nor abide in circumstances. Temper the mind through circumstances and exhaust habitual tendencies. Then the true mind radiates great light, illuminating the ten directions; all deluded mind, deluded thoughts, and deluded notions become the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. At every place and at every time, all is the manifestation and functioning of our Buddha-nature. All actions at every time and place are for the benefit of everyone, not for oneself. This is prajñā's wondrous conduct.

Thus, the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct are said to be the three secret instructions of Mahāmudrā and also the essential methods of cultivation in all dharma gates. They are vital to cutting off delusion and false thoughts, and are a dharma gate that directly points to the reality of one's own mind.

The practice of Ganges Mahāmudrā is a direct-pointing method within complete and sudden teaching. It directly points us to the wondrously luminous essence of the true mind—free from cultivation, adjustment, and distraction—as it is immediately present, and is a dharma gate that accomplishes the fundamental reality of the great Way.

When we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we must still form mudrās and recite mantras one-pointedly. In Chan investigation, we must still arouse a great sense of doubt. In Buddha-recitation, we must also gather in the six sense faculties and maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness. Only then can we realize the Way. Thus understood, to realize the Way we must all undergo a period of cultivation and realization; this does not equal the loftiness and subtlety of Mahāmudrā.

You should know that Mahāmudrā's fundamental teaching is that there is nothing at all to cultivate; it simply points you to recognize your own wondrously luminous true mind. Buddha-nature is neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor wavering, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. What is there to cultivate? Buddha-nature is never distracted, so what is there to adjust? Thus it is without cultivation, without adjustment, and without distraction.

Therefore, all practice is a roundabout path! But without practice, can one recognize that this numinous knowing free from thoughts is one's own intrinsic nature and thereby realize the Way? You should know that Mahāmudrā is the final, decisive

method of the White School. At the outset, one must still undergo a period of arduous cultivation before one can enter the state of Mahāmudrā practice.

Therefore, if we wish to open up our original nature, directly realize intrinsic nature, and accomplish the great Way, we must still engage in one-pointed Buddha-recitation, arouse a great sense of doubt, and diligently recite mantras with continuous and seamless practice. We must not slacken even slightly. Although we are discussing Esoteric Buddhism's Mahāmudrā, we do not divide according to schools; we discuss Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism together.

In fact, Mahāmudrā and the Chan school are cut from the same cloth: both directly point to the mind's nature, enabling people to become Buddhas on the spot and preventing them from taking needless detours. They are Dharma gates of perfect and sudden awakening. Yet after several talks, everyone still does not fully understand "form" and "emptiness."

Last time, someone asked me whether this "emptiness" is an emptiness apart from form. For example, there is now a house, and so many men, women, young people, and elders gathered together. Must one leave behind the house and the men, women, young people, and elders—so that there are no forms—before that is "emptiness"? No. He did not understand the meaning of form and emptiness. Therefore, we need to understand clearly the principles of form and emptiness. Only by understanding the essential teaching of Mahāmudrā can we practice more smoothly; otherwise, we will inevitably take needless detours.

What, then, are form and emptiness?

I have previously cited the Chan koan in which Chan Master Qin Batuo questioned Dharma Master Shenggong. Today, let us take it up and discuss it again. At that time, Dharma Master Shenggong was renowned throughout the country and enjoyed the great reputation expressed in the saying, "When Shenggong expounded the Dharma, even stubborn stones nodded."

Qin Batuo came to visit Shenggong and asked him, "Master, you are already so old, yet you still expound sūtras. What sūtra are you expounding?" Shenggong replied, "I am expounding the Prajñā Sūtra." As we know, the Great Prajñā Sūtra comprises six hundred fascicles and is specifically concerned with form and emptiness. Its abridged version is the Diamond Sūtra, and the abridged version of the Diamond Sūtra is the Heart Sūtra. The Heart Sūtra says, "Form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness; emptiness is form." This is precisely the meaning of form and emptiness.

Chan Master Qin Batuo asked, "Oh? Then what is called form?" (What is form?) Shenggong replied, "The gathering together of many minute particles is called form."

The many minute particles are what the Buddha referred to in the Diamond Sūtra when he asked Subhūti about “all the motes of dust in the three-thousand great-thousand world system.” This great world is entirely formed by the aggregation of motes of dust.

The houses and other things we see today are likewise aggregations of minute particles. Why? Bricks, tiles, timber, reinforcing steel, and cement are all minute particles. Are not bricks and tiles simply earth? Clay is made into bricks and then fired in a kiln. And what about timber? It comes from great trees.

Where do great trees come from? A tree grows gradually when a seed draws nourishment from the soil and receives the sun’s rays; it is an aggregation. Everything is compounded, an aggregation of many minute particles. No thing of any particular kind exists in itself. Originally, none has an independent substance; all are “aggregations of many minute particles.”

Chan Master Qin Batuo then asked, “What, then, is called emptiness?” Shenggong replied, “When many minute particles lack self-nature, this is called emptiness.” That is, the motes of dust do not exist independently; they are compounded from other things.

Scientists today say that all matter is compounded from chemical elements—for example, water is composed of the two elements oxygen and hydrogen. Chemical elements are composed of atoms; atoms are composed of atomic nuclei and electrons; and atomic nuclei and electrons are compounded from still smaller elementary particles.

Elementary particles are not truly “elementary,” either; they are compounded from still subtler things. Analysis proceeds all the way to “wave-particle duality”—they are like waves and like particles; yet they are neither waves nor particles. In fact, the Buddhist sūtras spoke long ago of “dust motes adjacent to empty space”—minute particles bordering on emptiness.

At this point, everyone may understand it in this way: before things are compounded, there is nothing at all, and that is emptiness. Thus, “the aggregation of many minute particles is form; before they aggregate, there is emptiness.” Yet this is not what Buddhism means by “emptiness.”

Shenggong did not say, “The aggregation of many minute particles is form; before they aggregate, there is emptiness.” He put it very well: “The lack of self-nature in many minute particles is emptiness.” The many minute particles also have no inherent substance—they lack self-nature. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form; it is not the emptiness of “nothing whatsoever.” The emptiness of “nothing whatsoever” is annihilationist emptiness. The “emptiness” of which Shenggong

spoke is emptiness of self-nature—our own original nature. All forms are manifestations of our original nature. Our original nature is Buddha-nature, the root of all forms.

Why is it called “Buddha-nature” rather than “Dharma-nature”? What is the difference between them?

Dharma-nature is the root of all dharmas. All things and events, including our thoughts, are called dharmas. In the Buddhist sūtras, the scope encompassed by dharma is extremely broad. All things and events, even our thoughts, are produced by our spiritually luminous true nature and are manifestations of its wondrous functioning. Since our spiritually luminous true nature is the root of all dharmas, it is called Dharma-nature.

Buddha-nature is the basis for becoming a Buddha. When we have completely eliminated deluded thoughts, utterly cut off ignorance, and restored the Original Face, the wondrous functioning of this spiritually luminous true nature becomes fully complete. The three kāyas and four wisdoms are then fully present; that is becoming a Buddha. It is not that there is some other Buddha to become. Since our spiritually luminous true nature is the basis for becoming a Buddha, it is called Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature and Dharma-nature both refer to the One True Dharma Realm, namely, our spiritually luminous true nature. Thus, this spiritually luminous true nature is the root of all Buddhas and the source of all phenomena.

“Form” is “emptiness.” All forms are manifested by our spiritually luminous true mind; all forms are our spiritually luminous true mind, and the spiritually luminous true mind is all forms. One should not leave all forms behind in search of emptiness. That would be the emptiness of nothing whatsoever, and that is mistaken. Therefore, Shenggong said, “The aggregation of many minute particles is form; their lack of self-nature is emptiness,” rather than, “Before the many minute particles aggregate, there is emptiness.”

At this point, Qin Batuo questioned him further: “What is it like before the many minute particles aggregate?” Since Shenggong said that the aggregation of many minute particles is form, is that truly form? He had not reached the root of the matter. In fact, form is our self-nature, for without self-nature there would be nothing capable of manifesting form. Yet Shenggong said, “The aggregation of many minute particles is form.”

Then what of the many minute particles before they aggregate? What are they before aggregation? Shenggong was at a loss—at this point he could no longer answer. This shows that Shenggong had not fully penetrated the meaning of form and emptiness. In fact, the answer is quite simple. When asked, “What is it like

before the many minute particles aggregate?" one may answer, "At midnight, the sun shines red." Midnight is the third watch of the night.

In the middle of the night, the sun shines bright red—"At midnight, the sun shines red." There is another answer as well. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra provides one directly: "The nature of form is true emptiness." The form of nature is the form of our true mind; it is wondrous presence and true emptiness. This true emptiness is not a dead void.

"The form of nature"—does nature have form? Perhaps that sounds mistaken. We know that Exoteric Buddhism says that our "wondrously present true mind," or Buddha-nature, has not the slightest form—it is formless. Yet Esoteric Buddhism teaches that there are subtle marks and extremely fine forms.

For example, it is not quite correct to say that the four formless heavens have no form whatever; extremely fine forms still exist there. Thus, Esoteric Buddhism and Exoteric Buddhism differ slightly in what they teach. But this form is not coarse; it is fine, subtle, and extremely subtle form. Why is "the nature of form" true emptiness? Because it fills empty space and pervades the dharma realm; it is everywhere. Thus, empty space is it, and it is empty space—they are not two separate things.

Shenggong did not truly understand the meaning of form and emptiness. Nevertheless, when he said, "The aggregation of many minute particles is called form; their lack of self-nature is called emptiness," he went a step beyond our understanding of emptiness as something apart from forms.

He did not speak of nothing whatsoever. He said that the many minute particles have no self-nature. It is like a house: it has no independent substance and does not exist in itself; it is made through the combination of reinforcing steel, cement, bricks, and tiles. A sofa chair likewise does not exist in itself; it is made through the combination of springs, wooden boards, leather, and so forth.

No thing has an inherent substance in itself. Therefore, lacking self-nature is called emptiness; being without form is not what is called emptiness. Some say that emptiness should not have forms, and that if there are forms, it is not emptiness. That is a misunderstanding. The emptiness of which we speak is "wondrous presence and true emptiness." That is, all forms are manifested by our self-nature. Without this nature—without our spiritually luminous true mind—there would be no mountains, rivers, great earth, sun, moon, stars, men, women, young people, or elders. Their existence today is the manifestation of this spiritually luminous true mind.

Why explain this principle? The purpose is to enable everyone to understand that these forms are originally our true mind itself. Do not leave forms behind in search

of the true mind; if you seek the true mind apart from forms, you will not find it. Buddha-nature is said to have boundless wondrous functioning because the forms it manifests are infinitely varied and its wondrous functioning is boundless.

Once you recognize this truth, you neither grasp at nor become attached to forms. Let all forms appear without obstruction, and it becomes easier to see the true mind and perfectly realize Buddhahood. If you do not know where the mind is, your practice has no place to take hold.

For example, when you recite the Buddha's name, if you do not know where the Buddha-name comes to rest, reciting "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." becomes a search for a Buddha outside your own mind. You seek the Buddha in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, beyond ten billion Buddha-lands from the Sahā world, without knowing that your mind itself is Buddha and Buddha is your mind. The Buddha is not elsewhere; the Buddha is right in your own mind. There is no need to seek elsewhere. Therefore, when Qin Batuo asked Shenggong about the meaning of form and emptiness, Shenggong's answer was incorrect.

Chan Master Qin Batuo further asked Shenggong, "Apart from the Prajñā Sūtra, what other sūtras do you expound?" Shenggong replied, "I also expound the Nirvāṇa Sūtra." Qin asked, "What is the meaning of nirvāṇa?" Shenggong replied, "Nir means non-arising, and vāṇa means non-ceasing."

Qin asked, "Is non-arising and non-ceasing nirvāṇa?" Shenggong replied, "Yes." Qin said, "That is nirvāṇa as fruition in a Buddha."

"Where, then, is nirvāṇa at the causal stage?" Shenggong could not answer. He asked, "Does nirvāṇa have two meanings? Nirvāṇa is all the same, is it not? How can it have two meanings?" Seeing that Shenggong did not grasp his meaning, Qin Batuo picked up a ruyi and asked Shenggong, "Do you see it?" Shenggong replied, "I see it."

Qin asked, "What do you see?" Shenggong replied, "I see the Chan master holding a ruyi scepter in his hand." Qin Baduo flung the ruyi scepter to the ground with a smack and asked, "Do you still see it?" Shenggong replied, "I do." Qin asked, "What do you see?" Shenggong replied, "I see the ruyi scepter in the Chan master's hand falling to the ground."

Qin Baduo burst into laughter and said, "Judging by your understanding, you have not gone beyond the ordinary course. How can your name resound throughout the universe?" This meant that his understanding had not gone beyond the ordinary; like an ordinary person, he clung to appearances and followed whatever was in the master's hand. At this point, Master Yuanyin picked up a book and asked, "What is this?" Everyone answered, "A book—a Buddhist scripture."

The master laughed and said, “Ah! You are clinging to it—ha, ha!” Well, even when this thing is thrown to the ground, you still follow the circumstances. You do not know that form is emptiness and emptiness is form. Why, then, is his reputation still so great? What a grave injustice! Qin turned and left.

Shenggong had many disciples, and they were bewildered. “Oh dear, why is this? Could it be that our master taught incorrectly?” They therefore caught up with Qin Baduo and asked, “Dharma Master, Dharma Master, how do you explain form and emptiness?” Qin Baduo replied, “It cannot be said that what your master taught was wrong. It is only that he did not understand the meaning of form and emptiness at the level of cause; he understood only form and emptiness at the level of fruition.”

The disciples asked, “What is form and emptiness at the level of cause?” Chan Master Qin Baduo said, “Because a single particle is empty, all particles are empty; because all particles are empty, a single particle is empty. Within the emptiness of a single particle there are no many particles; within the emptiness of many particles there is no single particle.” If one particle is empty, a single mote of dust is fundamentally empty and has no intrinsic substance; that is, it is without self-nature. If one particle is empty, then the other particles are naturally empty as well.

By the same reasoning, all particles are empty. “Because all particles are empty, a single particle is empty”—if all particles are empty, if every mote of dust is empty, then a single particle is empty as well. “Because a single particle is empty, there are no many particles”—if even one particle is empty, what many particles could there be? “Because all particles are empty, there is no single particle”—since all particles are empty, can one still find even a single mote of dust? By saying, “Many particles are empty; a single particle is empty. A single particle is empty; many particles are empty,” he meant that all things whatsoever are unobtainable.

All forms and appearances are the wondrous functioning of our true mind. Therefore, to understand the meaning of form and emptiness, we must truly understand it and see our true nature amid circumstances; there is no need to leave circumstances in order to see our true nature. If, pointing to a tree, someone asks, “What is this?” and you say, “It is a tree,” you are clinging to it. If you say, “It is not a tree,” you violate and depart from the circumstances.

What, then, is it? In other words, one may say, “You cannot fool this monk.” This single phrase neither clings to either side, yet reveals the numinous knowing that cannot be deceived, and thereby one is freed. The Chan school uses methods of release, so that one is not bound by the object of form. When someone questions you, it is to see whether you cling to existence or to emptiness. If you cling to neither side, a single phrase releases you.

Yet one cannot say, “I am neither empty nor existent,” for that is still merely reasoning and will not do. One must utter a wonderful phrase that, in its literal wording, does not cling to emptiness or existence, yet implicitly contains both emptiness and existence; only then does it accord with the subtlety of the Way. To realize this state, one must contemplate at every moment and understand that all appearances are manifestations of self-nature: do not cling to appearances, yet do not depart from them.

This is what the Chan school calls “neither identical with nor separate from.” Once one understands this, one can exercise wondrous functioning with perfect integration. Worldly dharmas, too, do not depart from principle and phenomena. As it is said, phenomena are accomplished through principle—successful affairs are carried out in reliance on the principle of emptiness; principle is revealed through phenomena—only when an affair has been accomplished is the principle revealed. Without principle, no affair can be accomplished; without affairs, principle cannot be revealed. Thus it is said that principle and phenomena are perfectly integrated.

What is principle? Let us give an example. When scientists design something and wish to manufacture it, they must first set out formulas and calculate the data. These formulas and data are principle. By carrying out the construction according to the formulas and data, they make the thing.

For example, when building a house, we first draw up blueprints for the number of stories and the desired design, then calculate how much reinforcing steel, cement, and other materials will be needed. The workers then build according to the blueprints, and the house is completed. If it is well built, this proves that the blueprints were correct—that the principle was correct. If it is poorly built, the blueprints were wrong and the principle was incorrect. Thus, phenomena are accomplished through principle, and principle is revealed through phenomena.

Principle and phenomena cannot be separated: phenomena are principle, and principle is phenomena. We must understand this and constantly train ourselves amid circumstances, tempering our true mind. Therefore, we must understand the meaning of form and emptiness, and never interpret emptiness as a void in which nothing whatsoever exists. This emptiness is wondrous presence and true emptiness; it is our wondrous mind, our true mind.

Where is the true mind? It is right within phenomena and appearances; it does not depart from them. Yet it is also wrong to cling to phenomena and appearances, for clinging to them is attachment to phenomena. In our Chan school there are two sayings: “Lush yellow flowers are none other than prajñā; verdant bamboo is entirely the dharmakāya.”

Great Pearl Monk said, “If verdant bamboo is the dharmakāya, then when people eat bamboo shoots, they are eating the dharmakāya! Bamboo grows from bamboo shoots. When we stir-fry bamboo shoots and eat them, are we not eating up the dharmakāya?” Therefore, it is wrong to cling to the dharmakāya or to phenomena and appearances. But what about departing from phenomena and appearances? To fall into emptiness by leaving them behind is also wrong.

Therefore, one must neither identify with nor depart from them; one must see one’s true nature through phenomena and appearances, without abiding in attachment to anything. Thus the Diamond Sūtra says, “One should give rise to this mind without abiding anywhere.” Do not cling to anything; let the wondrous functioning of the true mind be present at every moment. “Arising” means manifesting: your wondrous true mind of wondrous presence becomes present. Therefore, we must remain non-abiding at every moment and temper this non-abiding true mind.

VIII. The Dharma Must Suit the Recipient

In cultivating a practice, whether we cultivate the Pure Land school, the Chan school, or Esoteric Buddhism, we must work in this way. For example, when we recite the Buddha’s name, should we cultivate contemplation? What is contemplation? Contemplation is Chan contemplation; it is the cultivation of samādhi. When reciting the Buddha’s name, let the mind recite and the ears hear, quietly listening to the sound of the Buddha-recitation. Only then can one gather in the mind and enter samādhi. This is contemplation in Buddha-recitation.

Buddha-recitation is not the singing of folk songs. Still less may one recite “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha” while talking with someone else; that will not do. One must cultivate contemplation in Buddha-recitation, and contemplation is the practice of Chan. There are many kinds of Chan: ordinary-person Chan, Lesser Vehicle Chan, Mahāyāna Chan, Chan of the Supreme Vehicle, and non-Buddhist Chan.

So-called ordinary-person Chan and Lesser Vehicle Chan both involve differentiating notions in the mind. What are differentiating notions? They are distinctions in the mind. One mistakenly takes mind and dharmas to be on separate paths, and emptiness and form to be different things; one clings to appearances in seeking physical health, or believes that mind dharmas are not form dharmas and form dharmas are not mind dharmas, or practices Chan on the principle of biased emptiness. All such views are differentiating notions.

What about non-Buddhist Chan? It too carries differentiating notions in the mind. It either falls into emptiness—leaning toward annihilation—or clings to existence, attaching to a “yang spirit” or a spiritual self. None of the above is the true Way of Chan. In practicing Chan, we must first understand the correct cause and set our

views straight. Then we must select and cultivate a true Dharma suited to our own capacities, so that we do not stray onto a mistaken path.

To make this clearer for everyone, let us explain non-Buddhist Chan, Lesser Vehicle Chan, Mahāyāna Chan, and the like once more. To admire the Buddha Way and reject the Sahā world is called "the mind of aspiration and aversion." In the Pure Land school, this is considered very good: one should recite the name of Amitābha with both aspiration and aversion fully present, hoping to go to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and leave this Sahā world.

From the perspective of Chan practice, however, this "fullness of aspiration and aversion," any mind that aspires upward and rejects what is below, is ordinary-person Chan. It has not entered sagehood and remains within the state of ordinary beings. Non-Buddhists, too, aspire upward and reject what is below: they seek to become immortals and to leave the world of ordinary beings. They do not understand that immortals are ordinary beings and ordinary beings are immortals; Buddhas are ordinary beings and ordinary beings are Buddhas. They are originally one substance. Therefore, aspiring upward and rejecting what is below, they seek outside the mind and do not know that self-nature is the truth. For this reason they are called non-Buddhists.

Those who practice after awakening to the principle that the personal self is empty, yet biased toward the true, practice Lesser Vehicle Chan. They already know that body and mind are formed from the four great elements and the five aggregates. The body consists of earth, water, fire, and wind. The mind is thought, and thought is mind; mind consists of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. Together with the physical body formed of the four great elements, these are called the five aggregates.

Practitioners of Lesser Vehicle Chan know that things formed from the four great elements and the five aggregates are false and unreal. They are unlike ordinary beings such as ourselves, who cling to this body, take it to be the self, and wish to protect it—to dress well, eat well, live well, and have everything be good—thereby creating karma and undergoing karmic retribution.

Lesser Vehicle sages know that the four great elements and five aggregates are false. They know that this "personal self," namely the body, is empty and unreal. Yet they fall into biased emptiness. What emptiness are they biased toward? They say, "After I leave the six realms of rebirth, I shall dwell in the Pure Land beyond the realms"—that is, the Pure Land beyond the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm—and abide there without moving.

They cling to the natures of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—as self. Their attachment to dharmas has not been resolved, and they still do not

know or understand that all illusory appearances are manifestations of the wondrous functioning of our true mind. Therefore, although they have awakened to the emptiness of the personal self, they are “biased toward the true”: they are biased toward this true mind, which is real and not false. They do not know that “the false is the true, and the true is the false; the wholly false is the true, and the wholly true is the false.”

Without the false, how could there be the true? Without the true, how could there be the false? Thus, the false is the true, and the true is the false. If you distinguish true from false here, that is still deluded mind, still discrimination. For example, people consider the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss to be true and this Sahā world to be false; therefore, they reject the Sahā world and aspire to be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is a distinction between true and false.

In fact, the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is true, and our Sahā world is also true. Why? Because the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is manifested by the Buddha-nature of Amitābha Buddha and all the supremely virtuous beings; therefore, it is a Pure Land, manifested by a pure mind. Our Sahā world is manifested by the minds of sentient beings burdened by karmic obstacles; therefore, it is the Sahā world of the five turbidities.

But what is the karmically obstructed mind—the ālaya consciousness? It is our Buddha-nature; it is our true mind. For this eighth consciousness—the ālaya consciousness—is precisely the true mind. If it were not the true mind, where could ālaya consciousness come from? It is called ālaya consciousness because it combines arising-and-ceasing with non-arising-and-non-ceasing. Remove the arising-and-ceasing portion, and that is the pure substance. Therefore, ālaya consciousness does not depart from the pure substance. Although it is a defiled aspect, it is still the true mind!

What is the true mind like? It is unmoving: so when pure, and so when defiled. It is like our dreaming while asleep: one moment we are frightened, the next delighted; for a while we are emperors, then beggars. Yet our bodies have not left the bed; we remain lying there, unmoving.

Our true mind is unmoving. It neither arises nor ceases, neither comes nor goes; it is neither in motion nor stillness, neither defiled nor pure. It has never moved. Everything is manifested by it; apart from it, nothing exists. Thus, if you call things real, the Sahā world is real; if you call things false, the Western Pure Land is also false.

Why? All appearances whatsoever are illusory. One must not cling to appearances.

What are appearances? All appearances are shadows of the true mind, shadows appearing in a mirror. Do not take the shadow for the mirror! Do not identify with the shadows in the mind. They are merely shadowy appearances; why take them to be real? Thus, calling something real or false is all discrimination of our deluded mind. It is "neither real nor false, yet both real and false; both real and false as such." Simply remove the discriminating mind.

The sages of the two vehicles do not understand this truth. They believe there is something real: their attainment of sagehood is real, while ordinary beings revolving in the six realms are false. Therefore, this is not yet the highest Chan; it is Chan of the two vehicles.

Those who cultivate on the basis of the truth revealed through realizing the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena practice Mahāyāna Chan. We have discussed the Chan of ordinary beings, the Chan of non-Buddhist paths, and Hīnayāna Chan. By the time one reaches Mahāyāna Chan, one has already awakened: the self is unobtainable, and dharmas too are unobtainable. As we have just said, the Hīnayāna sages—the arhats and pratyekabuddhas—realize only the emptiness of personal self; they do not realize the emptiness of dharma-self.

Dharma-self means that, beyond personal self, one takes the four great elements to be a self; beyond personal self, one believes there is a dharmakāya to cultivate, Buddha-Dharma to attain, nirvāṇa to realize, and birth and death to transcend. Thus dharmas are still regarded as existing, and dharma-self is not empty. Going a step further, however, there is no personal self and no dharma-self. Everything whatsoever is manifested by my true mind of wondrous functioning, and this true mind of wondrous presence is itself empty in nature; nothing can be obtained. Yet even realizing the principle that both personal self and dharma-self are empty is not ultimate; it is not the best.

What, then, is best? It is what we are now discussing: if one suddenly awakens that one's own nature is originally pure, entirely free of afflictions, and that undefiled wisdom-nature is inherently complete; if one truly believes without doubt that this mind is Buddha—then one has gone a step further. This is the highest Chan.

That is to say, if we understand that our own mind is originally pure and undefiled, originally without afflictions, and inherently complete with undefiled wisdom-nature —"defiled" means conditioned dharmas involving thought and contrivance; "undefiled" means the absence of all contrivance, things being naturally so, the absence of all afflictions, and the inherent completeness of great wisdom—then this mind is Buddha, no different from Buddha. This is the best.

Since we are Buddha and no different from Buddha, why do we not know it? Since the mind is originally pure and originally without afflictions, why do we now have so

many afflictions and lack purity altogether? What is the reason? It is because ignorance is at work! Because of ignorance, we indulge in deluded thoughts and discrimination, become deluded by external circumstances without realizing it, run after circumstances, and drift along with deluded thoughts.

The reason we create karma, undergo karmic retribution, and revolve endlessly in the six realms is that we are deluded and unaware. Therefore, I do not tire of explaining the truth in detail so that everyone may awaken.

All sentient beings possess this true mind of wondrous presence. When Śākyamuni Buddha awakened to the Way upon seeing the morning star on the eighth night of the twelfth lunar month, he said: “How wondrous, how wondrous! All sentient beings throughout the great earth possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata.” Why are they not aware of this? It is simply because they are inverted by deluded thoughts, cling to afflictions, and do not know it.

Thus, when we expound the sūtras, we point out the way to those who are lost and explain the wondrous, luminous true mind that we inherently possess. Buddha-nature is not elsewhere; it shines forth from right before our faces.

How does it shine forth? Who is it that sees things? Who is it that hears sounds? Who is it whose nose smells fragrances and odors? Who is it whose tongue speaks? Who is it that knows sour, sweet, bitter, and pungent tastes? Who is it that encounters external objects? Who is it that walks? Who is it that works? All this is the wondrous functioning of our intrinsic nature shining forth. We must recognize it! If we awaken to the Way at this very moment, that is sudden awakening.

Our mind is originally so pure, originally without even the slightest affliction, and originally complete with the wisdom of the Tathāgata. This mind is Buddha! Do not seek Buddha outside yourselves. Those who understand this principle and cultivate accordingly practice the highest Chan.

If one does not understand this principle, one cultivates blindly, takes detours, and goes around in circles; however long one circles, one cannot get out. Therefore, the causal ground must be correct. One must understand this principle and know at every moment that we ourselves are Buddha; Buddha is not elsewhere.

Perhaps you will ask: “If I am Buddha right now, why do I not manifest spiritual powers? Buddha has three insights and six supernormal powers!” An ancient master said: “Recognize that the frozen pond is wholly water, and rely on the warmth of the sun to melt it.” This is a metaphor. In winter, when it is cold, the water in a pond freezes into ice; yet the ice is itself water. To recognize means to know.

“Recognize that the frozen pond is wholly water” means to recognize that the frozen pond is entirely water—by analogy, that sentient beings are originally Buddha. “Rely on the warmth of the sun to melt it” means to depend on sunlight to melt the ice. Only after it melts can it serve the function of irrigation. Ice is solid and cannot flow—by analogy, sentient beings do not possess the three insights and six supernormal powers.

After it melts, it can flow and may irrigate the fields—by analogy, Buddha possesses the three insights and six supernormal powers. Next comes: “Awaken to the fact that the ordinary being is Buddha, and rely on the power of the Dharma for permeating cultivation.” To awaken that the ordinary being is Buddha means that we awaken and know that the mind of an ordinary being is Buddha-mind. To rely on the power of the Dharma for permeating cultivation: “rely on” means to receive assistance—that is, to make use of something.

What do we use for assistance? We use the power of the Buddha-Dharma; we rely on its power to help us cultivate. Although we may have awakened, it is only awakening at the level of principle, only initial awakening—we have only just begun to awaken. Our habitual tendencies are still very heavy and cannot be eliminated all at once. Therefore, we must rely on the power of the Dharma to help us. At every moment, we permeate and cultivate it: we use such methods as Buddha-recitation, forming mudrās, upholding mantras, and attending to the huatou so as to arouse a sense of doubt, thereby transforming the deluded and defiled seeds in the field of our eighth consciousness into pure seeds and transforming habitual tendencies into wondrous functioning.

After understanding the principle, we must still cultivate with the aid of the Buddha-Dharma. Without cultivation, it cannot become actual; it is useless. It is certainly not enough merely to speak of it and understand it. That will not do! Perhaps you now realize that everything is false, let go of everything, and cling to nothing. Yet once you leave here and stroll down the street, it may all vanish at once.

Several friends have told me: “Ah! Today I went to the crematorium, and my heart turned to ashes. When a person can no longer draw breath and is burned to ashes, nothing remains. What is there to cling to? I will not cling, I will not cling!” Their minds become dead and empty. But before they have gone very far, they want everything again. Their habitual tendencies are heavy! Therefore, we can only speak of sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation.

Actually, “sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation” is not logically consistent: if gradual cultivation is still needed, then there has been no sudden awakening. This is how the Prajñā Sūtras speak. But it will not do to state matters too loftily, for we do not have such capacity. Therefore, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra

teaches two approaches: awakening to principle is sudden, while cultivation in practice is gradual.

Once the principle is explained, some immediately awaken. After awakening, all their habitual tendencies disperse; they want nothing, and at once become empty and pure. Such people do indeed exist, but they are few—extremely few. They possess the very highest capacities and have returned again. Those who have not returned again cannot achieve thorough realization the instant they awaken. Yet today's sudden awakening is yesterday's gradual cultivation.

It has been built up through gradual cultivation and accumulation in the past, further in the past, and still further in the past; thus today, with a snap, one breaks free. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says that awakening to principle is sudden, while cultivation in practice is gradual. This originally refers to two Dharma gates: one is the perfectly sudden method, and the other the gradual method.

The very few of the very highest capacities, those who have returned again, awaken immediately upon hearing the principle. At the very moment of awakening, all habitual tendencies are already extinguished, and spiritual powers and wondrous functioning may immediately manifest. Most people of middling or lesser capacities must, after awakening, temper themselves amid circumstances, gradually remove their habitual tendencies, and only then slowly bring their functioning into play.

Now we may as well combine these two Dharma gates into one: what is called "awakening to principle is sudden, while cultivation in practice is gradual." We cultivate by combining the sudden and gradual approaches.

Why do we say this? Because this is the Dharma-ending age: sentient beings have dull capacities and heavy obstacles, and cannot awaken suddenly, cultivate suddenly, or realize suddenly. Thus we can only combine the two Dharma gates into one. After awakening at the level of principle, safeguard realization, diligently remove habitual tendencies, and gradually develop supernormal powers and realize fruition.

Combining sudden awakening and gradual cultivation is, strictly speaking, not logically consistent. Yet it accords with present circumstances, so we may borrow the expression. This principle is not easy to explain clearly, so let us cite a story from the time when Śākyamuni Buddha was alive.

Two disciples seated beneath Śākyamuni Buddha were discussing a statement the Buddha had made. Each argued according to his own reasoning, and neither would yield. So they went to ask the Buddha: "Buddha, which of us two has an understanding that accords with your meaning?" The Buddha said, "Neither of you accords with my meaning, but both of your interpretations can be used." Why?

Because they accord with actual circumstances! Therefore, for now we can only speak of sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation.

How, then, should one practice? Pure Land practitioners recite the Buddha's name: "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha." They use this Buddha-name to sweep away the defilements, habitual tendencies, and afflictions in their minds. As soon as an affliction arises, they loudly recite "Amitābha Buddha," turning the mind empty and dissolving it into emptiness. What about Chan practitioners? They continually attend to the huatou.

The moment an affliction stirs, ask: "Who are you?" Give yourself a blow right on the head: "Who has stirred this affliction? Who is it that stirs affliction?" To strike directly with this blow is to attend to the huatou. When an affliction arises, practitioners of Esoteric Buddhism immediately recite a mantra to transform it. Although the methods differ, the principle is the same.

Do not say, "My Pure Land school is good, and your Chan school is wrong"; or "My Chan school is good, and your Pure Land school is wrong"; or "My Esoteric Buddhism is good, while your Chan and Pure Land schools are both wrong." This is sectarian division and shows that you have not yet attained thorough realization.

Once you have attained thorough realization and wondrous functioning arises, you will say: Chan is good, Pure Land is good, and Esoteric Buddhism is good—they are all means. There are many gateways of skillful means, but no second road in returning to the source. We rely on the power of the Buddhadharma, apply ourselves to practice, sweep away our habitual tendencies, and dissolve our afflictions into emptiness. Then, "When ice melts, water flows and moistens, revealing the efficacy of cleansing and irrigation; when delusion is exhausted, the mind becomes open and unobstructed, responding with the function of penetrating luminosity." When the flower of the mind opens into clarity, spiritual powers manifest and wondrous functions are boundless. These are realized through practice. Can one do without practice? No! Therefore, one must practice.

Someone asked: "When an awakened person's life comes to an end, where does the spiritual nature go?"

This is a major question. After realizing the Way, where does one go? Many people ask this. A person from Hong Kong wrote me a letter asking whether, at death, one who has awakened should know in advance where he will go—that is, should know the destination beforehand. If he does not know the destination beforehand, then he has not awakened.

Is this correct? No. Why not? Once one has truly awakened, there is no birth, no death, no coming, and no going. What destination could there be? As I just

explained, this wondrously present true mind is subtle matter, and subtle matter is space. What destination does space have? If you have a destination, there is still coming and going, still birth and death; you still have not awakened.

The letter writer did not understand this principle, and so he asked: when this present lifetime ends and one dies, where does one go? This is not only his question but everyone's question. Therefore, today I shall use a passage by Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi to discuss this matter further. Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi said:

All sentient beings, without exception, possess the nature of awakening: numinously bright and empty yet quiescent, no different from the Buddha. Yet, from beginningless kalpas onward, they have never realized it. Mistakenly clinging to the body as the mark of self, they give rise to feelings such as love and aversion. Following these feelings, they create karma; following karma, they undergo retribution. Thus they undergo birth, aging, sickness, and death, revolving in saṃsāra through long kalpas.

Yet the nature of awakening within the body has never undergone birth or death. It is like being driven about in a dream while the body itself remains at ease; it is like water becoming ice while its wet nature does not change. If one can awaken to this nature, it is the dharmakāya. It is originally unborn, so what support could it depend on? Bright and never obscured, clearly and ever-presently knowing, it comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. Yet through many lives of mistaken attachment, habits become second nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure continue in a subtle stream.

Although the truth may be suddenly realized, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once. One must constantly be aware of them, diminishing them again and again. It is like the wind suddenly ceasing while the waves gradually subside. How could the practice of a single lifetime immediately equal the powers and functions of all Buddhas? One need only take empty quiescence as one's own essence and not identify with the physical body; take luminous knowing as one's own mind and not identify with deluded thoughts. Whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them at all. Then, even at the time of death, karma will naturally be unable to bind one.

Though there is an intermediate state, one is free to go wherever one wishes, taking up temporary residence among devas or humans as one chooses. If thoughts of love and aversion have already vanished, one will no longer receive a body of segmented birth and death, and can naturally transform the short into the long and the coarse into the wondrous. If the subtle continuous stream has entirely ceased, and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains brightly present, one can respond

to circumstances by manifesting countless transformation bodies to liberate sentient beings with affinities. This is called Buddha.

Let us now explain this passage by Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi:

“All sentient beings, without exception, possess the nature of awakening: numinously bright and empty yet quiescent, no different from the Buddha.” All sentient beings—not only human beings, but also ants, insects, flies, lions, monkeys, and so forth—without exception possess the nature of awakening. Which sentient being lacks this nature? Look at a mosquito: if you have blood here, it immediately flies over to bite you.

As for flies, if you hold up a piece of steamed cake, they can fly from a great distance to land on it. They possess the nature of awakening. There is even less need to speak of human beings. The nature of awakening is the nature of awareness. Do you know when your stomach is hungry? Do you know that the weather is warm today? These are all functions of awareness. Therefore, all sentient beings possess the nature of awakening.

“Numinously bright and empty yet quiescent” means numinous and bright, luminous and transparent, clearly distinct. It is luminosity, yet its luminous knowing is clear and distinct, thusness itself, unmoving. This “bright” has two explanations: “empty” means empty of all things, with not a single thing established; “quiescent” means neither moving nor wavering, neither coming nor going. “No different from the Buddha” means no difference whatsoever from Śākyamuni Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Maitreya Buddha, and all other Buddhas.

“Yet, from beginningless kalpas onward, they have never realized it. Mistakenly clinging to the body as the mark of self, they give rise to feelings such as love and aversion.” Beginningless means without a beginning; nor will there be an end in the future. It goes round and round, always like this. “They have never realized it” means that they have never awakened and have never known that they themselves possess a great treasury.

The Lotus Sūtra gives this analogy: a person has a wish-fulfilling jewel sewn into his clothing but does not know it. This jewel can rain down all precious treasures, so he is not poor. He possesses everything; whatever he wants, it provides. Yet he does not know this and goes outside to beg for food. Our present cycling through the six realms and wandering amid birth and death is like begging for food.

One possesses a great treasury without knowing it and has never realized it. “Mistakenly clinging to the body as the mark of self” means that, through mistaken attachment, one fails to recognize the true and instead takes the false for real. This body is not originally oneself, yet one takes it for oneself. The body is like the house

in which we dwell, and there is someone inside it. Who is that person? It is our numinously bright true mind.

Not knowing this, one takes the “house” to be oneself: “This body is me! This body is me!” “Thus they give rise to feelings such as love and aversion.” One then produces feelings of love and aversion. I like this and dislike that; this person treats me well, that person does not. There are many discriminating thoughts, all of them deluded thoughts. What one likes, one claims as one’s own; what one dislikes, one seeks to overthrow. Thus one creates karma and undergoes retribution.

“Following these feelings, they create karma; following karma, they undergo retribution. Thus they undergo birth, aging, sickness, and death, revolving for a long time.” Birth and death do not originally exist; they arise because, after developing feelings such as love and aversion, we create karma according to our minds. We may want something but fail to obtain it. If it belongs to someone else, we may rob them or kill them. This creates the karma of killing.

Once karma has been created, one must undergo retribution and revolve through the six realms. Wholesome karma leads to heaven; evil karma leads to hell. Thus one revolves for a long time through birth, aging, sickness, and death. Alas! Birth and death did not originally exist, yet one falls into birth and death. One appears and disappears in the six realms, being born and dying again and again, unable to attain liberation.

“Yet the nature of awakening within the body has never undergone birth or death. It is like being driven about in a dream while the body itself remains at ease; it is like water becoming ice while its wet nature does not change.”

Although we revolve through birth and death in the six realms, our nature of awakening has never undergone birth or death. It does not arise because you are born, nor does it perish when your physical body dies. When you fall into hell, it does not suffer; when you ascend to heaven, it does not rejoice. It is originally unborn and undying, empty, numinous, and non-abiding; it has never been born or died, nor has it ever moved.

It is like being pursued and threatened with death by evil people in a dream, terrified beyond measure and fleeing wildly, while one’s body in fact lies peacefully and motionlessly on the bed. It is also like water becoming ice while its wet nature remains unchanged. This illustrates that although we revolve through the six realms, Buddha-nature remains unchanged.

“If one can awaken to this nature, it is the dharmakāya. It is originally unborn, so what support could it depend on?” If we can awaken to the fact that this nature of awakening is the dharmakāya, and understand that our nature of awakening is the

root of all phenomena, then it has originally never arisen and never ceased. Why should there be any place upon which it depends? Once you have truly awakened, you need not depend on anything and need not have any destination.

I remember someone from Wenzhou who said something quite amusing. He claimed to have awakened. Someone asked him, “We are not practitioners of the Pure Land Dharma gate who seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. We practice the Chan school. After we enter parinirvāṇa, where do we go?” See how he answered. He said, “You can attach yourself to grass or trees—on a stone, on a large tree, on withered grass; any of these will do.”

Oh no! That turns one into a spirit attached to grass and trees. How could that be acceptable? To attach oneself to grass or trees is the attachment of a ghostly soul that clings to having a body. In Shanghai’s Fuxing Park there is said to be a thousand-year-old bodhi tree of extraordinary spiritual efficacy, and everyone goes to worship it. In fact, it is a ghost, a spirit ghost attached to the tree.

To attach oneself to grass or trees after death is to become a ghost. What kind of realization of the Way is that? In fact, it has nothing to do with the Way; it is all false. Our nature of awakening is “originally unborn, so what support could it depend on?” One should not depend on anything. Those who attach themselves to grass and trees have never glimpsed even the slightest trace of the nature of awakening.

Long ago, there was an old broken stove that had been abandoned for many years. A spirit was attached to it and appeared in someone’s dream, saying: “Make offerings to me at this stove. Whatever you want, I will give it to you.” People said, “There is a deity in this stove; let us all make offerings to it!” Many people came to make offerings, and the spirit fulfilled their wishes.

As word spread from one person to ten, and from ten to a hundred, this broken stove became extremely famous. There was a Chan master in that area, a disciple of National Teacher Huian. Seeing that this spirit attached to the broken stove was causing everyone to kill living beings in order to make offerings to it, thereby creating karma, he went to teach it the Dharma.

Taking up his Chan staff, he struck the stove with a dong, dong, dong and said, “I ask you: you are made of bricks, tiles, and mud; where does your numinous awareness come from? Where does your spirit come from? Bricks, tiles, mud, and water have neither numinous awareness nor spirit. The one that has conscious awareness is your own mind. What are you doing attached to this brick-and-mud stove?” With a single point from the Chan master, this wretched stove spirit awakened: “That is right! The spirit is not in the bricks, tiles, and mud; it is in my own mind! I must quickly abandon this wretched stove!” That night, he came to bow in thanks to the Chan master and then ascended to heaven.

Later, everyone called this Chan master the “Stove-Breaking Monk,” and his real name was forgotten instead. Even it understood that one should not cling to the body; can we cling to grasses and trees? Therefore, do not rely on anything! We are originally unborn and originally have nothing on which to rely!

“Numinous luminosity is never obscured; there is clear, ever-present knowing. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere.” Once you have truly realized the Way, there is clear, ever-present knowing and numinous luminosity that is never obscured. Everywhere is myself. Wherever there are affinities, one manifests there. This is called “nirvāṇa without fixed abode.”

There is no fixed place; one can manifest anywhere, so long as there are affinities. Once one has truly awakened thoroughly, how could there still be a fixed place? To have a fixed place is not to have awakened. “Numinous luminosity is never obscured” means that there is not the slightest appearance of dullness or obscurity. “Clear, ever-present knowing” means utter clarity. This knowing is uninterrupted; it is called ever-present knowing.

It is not that one knows now and then does not know a while later; that is of no use. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. If it has not come, where could it go? Where there is coming, there is going; where there is going, there is coming. These are all relative, and whatever is relative is false. It is the absolute true mind; therefore, there is no coming or going, no entering or leaving.

IX. Knowing One’s Own Mind as It Truly Is

The following instructions explain how we should practice and realize the Way, thereby attaining Buddhahood.

“Yet through many lives, deluded attachment has become habitual and has formed one’s nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure flow on in subtle continuity.” What we are now discussing is the highest vehicle of Chan: “One’s own mind is Buddha, and Buddha is one’s own mind.” If you can hear this Dharma and deeply believe it without doubt, then the wholesome roots you have planted were not planted before merely one, two, three, four, or five Buddhas, but over many lives and countless kalpas.

Yet over many lives and countless kalpas, we have made deluded attachments habitual. We cling to external circumstances as real, cling to the body as the self, and have formed these habits.

“Oh! This body is myself; it is most precious—no one must touch me!” Yet it is really a stinking bucket of excrement. What is so precious about it? A Qing-dynasty emperor fell in love with a consort whose body was said to give off a fragrant scent.

This Fragrant Consort was from Xinjiang and was said to have an unusual bodily fragrance. But what fragrance was it? The foul smell of a fox! Yet the old emperor called it a fragrance.

This shows that there is no fixed standard for whether anything is beautiful or not. Whatever you like is good; otherwise, you dislike it. Or, once something has become habitual, even what is not good no longer seems bad. As the saying goes, “Long accustomed to a shop of salted fish, one no longer smells its stench.” Once habits are formed, they become deeply entrenched and difficult to reverse. This is an incontrovertible truth.

Upon hearing this, some may think: “This body is myself. Everyone else thinks so too, yet you say that the body is not myself. Who would believe you?” Alas! Through many lives and countless kalpas, we have deludedly clung to external objects. We have become accustomed to this, and it has become a habit.

Thus we develop all kinds of views toward ourselves, objects, and circumstances. In all things, we judge and assess by our own likes and dislikes: we grasp what accords with our minds and discard what does not. Thus there are “joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure flowing on in subtle continuity.” Joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure, fear, alarm, and grief are found in everyone. When something accords with one’s state of mind, one is beaming with delight; when it offends one’s state of mind, one flies into a rage. When one loses something, one is unhappy; when one finds something pleasing, one beams with joy. All these are subtle continuous flows.

Subtle continuous flow means that extremely subtle deluded thoughts are ceaselessly in motion.

The most fundamental deluded mind consists of the five universal mental factors: intention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. These five universal factors are in fact a single thought of good or evil arising in the mind. They exist within the eight consciousnesses and continuously stir all the wholesome and unwholesome seeds within them. They are exceedingly subtle; therefore, this is called the continuous flow of arising and ceasing.

This so-called continuous flow is like water flowing without rest. Yet it is not like the surging waves of the sea or the rolling billows of rivers; it is like a quiet stream flowing ever so subtly.

In fact, it flows extremely fast—so fast that its movement does not show. Ordinarily, you cannot see it and suppose that it is motionless. These are subtle and extremely subtle deluded thoughts. We have previously spoken of coarse delusion: deluded thoughts that arise when encountering objects. If we understand that objects are our mind and that mind is objects, then we will not cling.

When there is no clinging, coarse deluded thoughts do not arise. Yet the seeds of subtle delusion remain. They are subtle and extremely subtle. You see them as though they were motionless, but in fact they are still moving very quickly. How can this subtle continuous flow be cut off? Only by entering deeply into the Great Samādhi of Vajrasattva can one see and eliminate it. Anything short of the Great Samādhi of Vajrasattva is ineffective. Therefore, one must enter deeply into samādhi.

Those who practice Buddha-recitation must certainly attain Buddha-recitation samādhi; without attaining Buddha-recitation samādhi, it will not do. Chan practitioners, too, must arouse a great sense of doubt. Once great doubt has arisen, deluded thoughts do not move, and the sense of doubt envelops the whole body. When the time and conditions arrive, it bursts open with a "pa!" and one can directly see one's true nature.

Those who study Esoteric Buddhism are the same. The three mysteries of body, speech, and mind are empowered; borrowing the Buddha's power to bless us, they propel us forward. When causes and conditions ripen—"pa!"—it explodes, cutting off this subtle continuous flow! This subtle continuous flow is extremely subtle, and you cannot see it. You must practice; only when you become settled in samādhi can you see it.

For example, in a cup of muddy water, you cannot see the silt and sand within it. Once it settles, the water above becomes clear, and only then can you see how much silt and sand lies below. When it is shaken and turbid, you cannot see it. You must first become settled in samādhi before you can see the subtle continuous flow.

"Although the truth is realized suddenly, these feelings are difficult to remove all at once." We say that mind is Buddha and Buddha is mind.

This is the truth. Although you may suddenly realize it—"Yes, yes! We are originally Buddhas. If we were not Buddhas, how could we speak? How could we ask, 'Who is reciting the Buddha's name?' If we were not Buddhas, how could we recite the Buddha's name? If we were not Buddhas, how could we write? How could we walk?"—when this body no longer receives a breath, it does not move. Its movement is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature.

The truth may be suddenly realized and understood, but "these feelings are difficult to remove all at once." Feelings here means deluded feelings, including emotional attachment. Emotional attachment is difficult to remove! An ancient worthy said, "If one remembered the Buddha as one remembers one's beloved, one would have realized the Way long ago!" If we remembered the Buddha as we remember romantic attachment, we would have realized the Way long ago.

For ordinary beings, emotional attachment is difficult to relinquish. It encompasses a broad range: love between men and women, between mothers and children, between husbands and wives, and attachment to sensual pleasures, among other things. There are also many hobbies, such as a fondness for antiques, stamp collecting, calligraphy and paintings, gardening, and raising birds. There are simply too many things that people love.

For women, the most difficult attachment to sever is maternal love. Once they have a child, they carry the child in their minds forever and can never forget; even at death, they cannot let go: "I cannot bear to leave my child!" Once, when an elderly woman who recited the Buddha's name was near death, we urged her: "Let go and be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss." She said, "I will not go. I cannot bear to leave my children and grandchildren!" So deluded—how could she be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss?

All ordinary beings are like this: "These feelings are difficult to remove all at once." To remove them all at once means to remove them immediately. Our emotional attachments are very difficult to eliminate at once, so we can only undergo sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation. After sudden awakening, we cultivate gradually. There is no other way, yet this accords with the dispositions of sentient beings in our present Sahā world.

Do not make grand claims, saying that you have sudden awakening, sudden practice, and sudden realization, and therefore need not practice—that there is no practice, no attainment, and no realization. It is easy to say these things, but can you truly do them? Boasting is useless; you must truly accomplish it. If you merely boast, Yama will not let you off; he will still send you an invitation. Only when you have truly accomplished it can Yama's invitation be canceled.

"One must constantly observe, diminishing and diminishing again; as the wind suddenly ceases, the waves gradually settle." One must observe for a long time; this is practice.

For those who practice the Pure Land school, this means taking up the Buddha's name. When thoughts arise, quickly raise the Buddha's name high and recite it loudly: "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha …" In this way, transform the deluded emotions.

Deluded emotions must be transformed; otherwise, they will not do. "Diminishing and diminishing again" means reducing deluded emotions day by day, reducing your habitual tendencies, afflictions, and attachments day by day—reducing them, reducing them, and reducing them again. Deluded emotions cannot be removed in a single day. "As the wind suddenly ceases, the waves gradually settle."

When the wind blows, waves immediately arise. After the wind stops, the waves still surge and can only gradually come to rest. Therefore, an ancient worthy said, “Though the wind has ceased, the waves still surge; though principle has appeared, thoughts still intrude.” When “principle has appeared,” the truth has appeared and one has awakened; yet “thoughts still intrude,” for deluded thoughts still invade. Therefore, they must be removed gradually.

“How could the cultivation of a single lifetime immediately equal the powers and functions of all Buddhas?” After practicing for one lifetime, one may wish immediately to possess the three insights and six supernormal powers of all Buddhas, and the same powers as all Buddhas. This cannot be done. Although the three insights and six supernormal powers have not yet manifested in us, we must deeply believe without doubt: our mind is precisely the Buddha-mind; apart from it, there is no Buddha-mind.

At this point, I would like to discuss an important issue with everyone. I once heard someone say, “The severance of the preceding and following divisions of time is not awakening; only when subject and object are both forgotten is it awakening.” In fact, he does not understand what it means for the preceding and following divisions of time to be severed. He does not recognize the original nature, yet pretends to possess great capacity. He has not read the scriptures, yet speaks recklessly.

Long ago, when Dharma Master Chengguan was explaining the Avataṃsaka Sūtra to Emperor Wu Zetian (do not think that Emperor Wu Zetian was bad! She was an awakened emperor. The opening verse that you now recite—“The unsurpassed, profound, and subtle Dharma is rarely encountered in hundreds of millions of eons;”

“Now that I can see, hear, receive, and uphold it, may I understand the Tathāgata’s true meaning”—was composed by Emperor Wu Zetian in praise of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, and is now used as the opening verse for all sūtras), he told her: “When not a single thought arises, the divisions of before and after are cut off; the illuminating essence shines forth, and this is the Thus-Thus Buddha.” When not a single thought arises, the divisions of before and after are cut off.

The prior division is the preceding thought; the later division is the succeeding thought. The divisions of before and after are cut off with a snap. The illuminating essence is the essence that can illuminate all things and give rise to all wondrous functions—our intrinsic nature. To shine forth means not clinging to any appearance; the Thus-Thus Buddha means that this is Buddha! See how clearly this is stated. Yet some people do not understand and say that cutting off the divisions of before and after is not awakening. They do not know what it means for those divisions to be cut off, yet they pretend to be good spiritual friends. Are they not

harming people? Not knowing themselves, they still delude others; they will fall into hell as swiftly as an arrow.

When a thought ceases right now and there is clear, distinct knowing, what is this?! Apart from this, if you seek Buddha-nature elsewhere, you will not find it. Do not suppose that without the three insights and six supernormal powers, or without powers and functions equal to those of all Buddhas, one has not awakened or is not Buddha. It is not the case that cultivation in this single lifetime enables one to possess the great spiritual powers and wondrous functions of all Buddhas.

Initial awakening to the Way is only like a newborn little child. Although a little child does not have an adult's powers and functions, cannot work, walk, or eat, and must be fed and held by others, you cannot say that the child is not human. Initial awakening to the Way is Buddhahood at the causal stage. You must be aware of it at every moment and protect it at every moment.

Safeguard and sustain it continuously and closely; diminish and diminish again, reducing your habitual tendencies and afflictions day by day. Then this "little child" will grow up into an adult, fully endowed with powers and functions. Applying yourself after understanding the original nature is called true cultivation after awakening. Without awakening, it is blind cultivation and aimless practice. For example, if you recite the Buddha's name without awakening to the original nature, you are reciting a Buddha outside the mind.

Those of us who recite the Buddha's name should know that reciting Amitābha Buddha is meant to awaken our own master, so that this master is constantly awake. Do not become attached to forms and appearances, do not be carried along by circumstances, and do not entertain the ordinary feelings of deluded grasping and attachment. Only by doing this can you succeed. This is extremely important!

"Take empty quiescence as your own essence; do not take the physical body to be yourself. Take spiritual knowing as your own mind; do not take deluded thoughts to be yourself." We must understand that this physical body—this fleshly body, this shell—is not ourselves. Our true essence is empty yet quiescent: unmoving and unshakable, neither coming nor going, neither arising nor ceasing. It is not this bodily shell.

This bodily shell gradually changes, from youth to old age, and from old age to death. Do not identify with this fleshly body. The fleshly body is material form, and this material form is not oneself. By all means, do not take this physical body to be yourself; take empty quiescence to be yourself.

This Buddha-nature—empty yet quiescent, neither coming nor going, unmoving and unshakable—is ourselves! "Take spiritual knowing as your own mind; do not take

deluded thoughts to be yourself." What are deluded thoughts? Any thought in which one abides is a deluded thought. When a thought arises and the mind settles on it, abiding in and attaching to something, that is a deluded thought. When thoughts arise without abiding or attaching, that is the wondrous functioning of the true mind.

This clear and distinct spiritual knowing is the true mind; it is not dead. If you sit there motionless, forcibly suppressing thoughts so that not a single thought arises, you become a great stone or a great piece of wood. Therefore, clear and distinct spiritual knowing, without attachment or grasping, without love or hatred, is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Wherever there is abiding or discrimination, there are deluded feelings.

But one point must be understood clearly: it is not that discrimination is impermissible, but that one discriminates without abiding. That person is good—I know it; that person is bad—I also know it. This does not mean failing to distinguish good from bad and becoming a muddleheaded fool. Is a muddleheaded fool the true mind? No. One must know good and bad, yet have neither hatred nor love, neither grasping nor rejection.

It is not that, on seeing a good person, you become pleased, or on seeing a bad person, you become disgusted. We do not reject bad people either. Why? We should instruct them, have compassion for them, and help them turn themselves around. That is the right way. This is what the true mind is like. Therefore, it is quite easy to distinguish the true mind from the deluded mind. At every moment, do not take the deluded mind to be yourself. Know that clear, distinct spiritual knowing, without abiding in appearances, is the true mind. As soon as there is abiding, it becomes a fixed mold and falls into appearances.

"Whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them. Then, when the time of death comes, karma will naturally be unable to bind you." This speaks of the moment of death. How can one gain mastery over taking rebirth at death? One must ordinarily practice "whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them."

If our deluded thoughts have not yet been entirely eliminated, then the moment another deluded thought arises, we must immediately become aware of it and not follow it. If the deluded thought is strong and, though aware of it, you cannot cut it off, quickly recite the Buddha's name, uphold a mantra, or raise up a huatou and ask where this deluded thought comes from, thereby dissolving it. If you realize it only after following the deluded thought a long way, then it is too late.

The speed of this awareness and the rapidity of eliminating thoughts are matters of the strength of one's practice. It is like the difference in brightness between candlelight and electric light. At first you may be able to illuminate things, but later

you can scarcely see; only after a deluded thought has persisted for a long time do you recognize it. That is candlelight.

Once practice has become fully mature, you can see a thought the moment it arises. It is like a powerful light shining before you: every hollow and uneven place can be seen clearly, and when walking at night you will not fall into pits or ravines. This is electric light. You have then reached the stage of being quiescent yet ever illuminating, illuminating yet ever quiescent. You need not deliberately illuminate; illumination occurs naturally. The depths of practice here differ greatly.

In our practice, we must be aware at every moment and apply ourselves continuously and closely. If, out of twenty-four hours in a day, you practice for only one or two hours and do not practice during the other twenty-two, you are far too lax and indolent, and it will be difficult for your practice to advance. Therefore, amid the four dignified postures of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, we must practice and remain aware at every moment. Then our practice will progress.

Furthermore, whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them. Do not decide that a particular deluded thought is good and then follow it. Someone may have a pleasant dream and, upon awakening, be reluctant to let it go, continuing to think about it. Dream experiences are inherently false, so why cling to them? If you became an emperor in a dream, are you truly an emperor? If you obtained great ingots of gold in a dream, did you truly obtain them? If you become attached to them, are you not foolish? People are foolish in just this way!

Chan Master Guifeng explained to us with painstaking earnestness: whenever deluded thoughts arise, do not follow them; do not run after them. If we can truly do this, then “when the time of death comes, karma cannot bind us.” To bind means to tie up. All sentient beings follow their karma: those with wholesome karma ascend to heaven, while those with unwholesome karma descend to hell. If one can truly refrain from following deluded thoughts when they arise, then karma cannot tie one up, and one can be free.

“Though there may be an intermediate state, one is free to go wherever one wishes, taking rebirth in heaven or among humans at will.” One who has truly awakened to the Way has no intermediate-state body, nor does one reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. What is the intermediate state? It is when the previous body has already perished, but the subsequent body has not yet arisen.

The previous bodily shell has already broken down, but one has not yet been born into the next bodily shell. The body in this intermediate realm is the intermediate-state body. The intermediate-state body is predominantly composed of the wind element, and therefore possesses the five supernormal powers. Of the six supernormal powers, it lacks the power of the exhaustion of outflows; it possesses

only limited aspects of the five powers, not the great five supernormal powers of a Buddha.

Because the intermediate-state body has limited aspects of the five supernormal powers, it has the power of spiritual travel: wherever there are parents with whom it has karmic affinity, it can drift there in an instant, whether thousands or tens of thousands of miles away. It has the divine eye, so it can see thousands or tens of thousands of miles away. Those reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss go to the West and have no intermediate-state body. Those who descend to hell likewise have no intermediate-state body.

Once they have descended into hell, how could they have an intermediate-state body? The other several realms all have intermediate-state bodies. “Though there may be an intermediate state, one is free to go wherever one wishes.” If one can truly refrain from following thoughts when they arise, karmic obstacles cannot seize, bind, or obstruct one. Wherever one wishes to go, one can go, freely and at ease.

“Taking rebirth in heaven or among humans at will” means taking rebirth, as one wishes, either in heaven or among humans. This is the most elementary level of practice: although deluded thoughts cannot yet be completely eliminated, when they arise, one can refrain from following them. At this stage, even though there is an intermediate state, one can still be free and at ease. If deluded thoughts arise and one follows them, that is disastrous; one cannot be free. Thus, this is the most basic step, the lowest level.

“If thoughts of love and aversion have already been extinguished, one will no longer receive a segmented body.” Love means liking or fondness; aversion means dislike or disgust. The mind of love and hatred is gone. It is not that, because this is good, I grasp it, while because that is bad, I reject it.

Since all things are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows, why distinguish good from bad? What is there to love or hate? This must be genuinely accomplished. If someone explains it to you and you can outwardly act accordingly, but when others are absent you still harbor feelings of love and aversion, that will not do. Thoughts of love and aversion have already been extinguished; extinguished means eliminated. Once thoughts of love and aversion have been eliminated and are no more, one will no longer undergo segmented birth and death and will emerge from the cycle of birth and death. Of course, attachment to dharmas has not yet been removed.

“One can naturally transform the short into the long and the coarse into the wondrous.” This speaks of function. Such a person can transform freely: what is short can be made long, and what is poor and coarse can be made wondrous and

refined. They can transform; even the cycle of rebirth in the six realms can be transformed into something marvelous. Everything is transformed.

Do you not often ask, “To what stage has my practice reached?” You may examine and verify it for yourselves: First, when deluded thoughts arise, do you refrain from following them? If you can do this, you will be free and at ease in every direction. Going a step further, if you can extinguish the mind of attachment and aversion—having neither likes nor dislikes, and seeing everything as equal, equal, and again equal—then segmented birth and death will be eliminated, and you will attain mastery of transformation.

Going still further: “If the subtle continuous stream is entirely stilled and extinguished, and only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains, clear and radiant, then one can manifest countless transformation bodies in response to circumstances, liberating sentient beings with whom one has affinities. This is called Buddhahood.” This is the supreme vehicle.

Our practice is meant to bring about the complete stilling and extinction of the subtle continuous stream, eliminating all the seeds of subtle deluded thoughts, directly realizing the state in which “only the great wisdom of perfect enlightenment remains, clear and radiant,” and perfecting the fruition of Buddhahood.

If, in this life, we can realize our true nature and break through the first barrier, then further temper the mind amid circumstances, diligently eliminate habitual tendencies, and train until we are unbound by favorable and adverse circumstances and unobstructed in every direction, then, after breaking through the heavy barrier, we may advance still further. When the subtle continuous stream has been entirely eliminated, great light will shine forth, radiating throughout the ten directions without obstruction. Do not seek spiritual powers; spiritual powers will come to you of themselves. Thus one can manifest countless transformation bodies in response to circumstances and liberate sentient beings with whom one has affinities. This is how Buddhas and bodhisattvas respond to beings’ needs, manifesting bodies according to conditions in order to liberate sentient beings.

There are three kinds of mind-born body: first, the mind-born body of the blissful proper experience of samādhi; second, the mind-born body awakened to the Dharma’s intrinsic nature; third, the mind-born body complete in all kinds, arising without deliberate action. By sitting in meditation and entering deeply into samādhi, deeply into meditative absorption, one can produce the mind-born body of the blissful proper experience of samādhi. The mind faculty is the seventh consciousness; the body manifested by the mind faculty of the seventh consciousness is called a mind-born body.

One transforms from few into many, until at last countless transformation bodies are all complete. In the state of being complete in all kinds and arising without deliberate action, mountains, rivers, great earth, towers, terraces, pavilions, and the like can all be manifested and transformed.

At what level must one's practice reach before the subtle continuous stream can be severed? "Subtle" means that we cannot presently see it. Only after practice has penetrated deeply into the Great Samādhi of Vajrasattva can it be seen: "Ah! There are so many seeds of subtle delusion, moving so intensely."

Once you know that it is moving, eliminate it. Yet when it no longer moves, it is still not enough if there remains an idea of "not moving"; even nonmovement must be relinquished. Break through that, and the domain of the aggregate of consciousness will be shattered. The aggregate of consciousness is the last of the five aggregates. When it is shattered, accomplishment is attained. Therefore, we must practice and cultivate; that is, we must truly cultivate after awakening. But if you have not awakened, and do not know the true mind or understand the principle, how can you cultivate? Therefore, recognizing the true mind and understanding the principle are of utmost importance; that is why the mind-born body awakened to the Dharma's intrinsic nature is most important.

Today I explained once again the meaning of form and emptiness, and again emphasized the importance of recognizing the true mind—that is, having correct understanding. I also explained why one must recognize the true mind, and where practitioners ultimately go at the time of death. You must practice in this way at every moment: "One must constantly be aware and diminish it again and again."

We must maintain awareness at every moment: "Oh, a thought has arisen. Oh, I am attached to appearances again. Oh, a deluded thought has arisen." Quickly do not move; do not run after it. This is what is meant by diminishing it again and again.

Do not speak of awakening once and for all; I fear that is not easily accomplished. Do we not often hear people say, "Oh! Why do I still have so many thoughts?" You see, it is no easy matter to eliminate thoughts completely and thoroughly. Therefore, one must constantly be aware and diminish them again and again.

How, then, can one examine whether one has made progress? One should look back and compare oneself with the past: How attached and troubled was one before? If now there is a little less attachment than before, and one is more even-tempered and peaceful, then there has been progress. Progress is good, for knowing that one has progressed can strengthen one's confidence. During practice, bodily heat and the manifestation of light are all favorable signs. But we must not seek them. Once we seek them, all is lost: that is abiding and attachment; that is deluded thought and emotion.

After awakening, we should let our practice proceed naturally, like flowing water, rushing on without pause. Do not linger or abide; do not run after circumstances or flow along with deluded thoughts. Diminish our deluded thinking and habitual tendencies again and again, eliminating them completely, and only then can we accomplish the great Way. This is the essential secret of practice. Therefore, without recognizing the true mind, practice is of no benefit; having recognized the true mind but not knowing the essential secret, one cannot attain accomplishment.

Ten: Essential Teachings of the Pure Land

When we recite Amitābha Buddha's name, we are awakening our own minds; we are not seeking Amitābha Buddha in the West. When we vow to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, our minds resonate with Amitābha Buddha's mind. This involves both self-power and other-power.

Once we understand the function of Buddha-recitation, we use the Buddha's sacred name to remove the defilement and afflictions within our minds, and use the Buddha's light to shine clearly upon us and eliminate our karmic obstacles. Then, if we vow to be reborn in the West, we can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. How does this rebirth occur? One must sever the root of attachment. If one can do so, success is certain.

If you still cling lovingly to this world, then no matter how much you insist, "I have other-power, I have other-power, I have other-power," you ultimately cannot be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Since the root of attachment has not been severed and you remain bound to this Sahā world, how can you depart? In truth, other-power is self-power, and self-power is other-power; self and other are nondual.

To divide self-power and other-power into two is mistaken. In cultivation, we must practice both together, combining self-power and other-power. Relying only on other-power is of no use if self-power does not advance. For if you do not eliminate deluded thoughts and remain attached to this Sahā world, other-power cannot pull you along. If Buddhas and bodhisattvas could simply pull us along, they would have pulled every one of us across long ago.

How do Buddhas and bodhisattvas guide beings to rebirth in the West? They emit light to illuminate you. If you do not open your eyes, then even if they shine upon you, you cannot see their light. What use is that? Therefore, Chan Master Yongming Yanshou said: Our minds are like a basin of water, while Buddhas and bodhisattvas are like the moon in the sky.

Amitābha Buddha emits light to shine upon us. If our minds, like water, have become pure, the moon's reflection can appear in them. This is the communion of

response between beings and the Way: other-power and self-power are joined together. But if the water of our minds is a basin of filthy water, it cannot reflect the moon.

It is not that the Buddha does not shine upon you. The Buddha has no such unequal mind; the Buddha shines universally and clearly, while your own mind is deeply defiled. Therefore, blind people do not see light, and filthy water does not reveal the moon's reflection. This is entirely our own misunderstanding; it is not that the Buddha does not shine upon us. Therefore, we must practice both together, with both other-power and self-power.

To be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must let go of everything and earnestly recite the Buddha's name: "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." thereby awakening one's own mind. The other's mind is one's own mind, and one's own mind is the other's mind; they become continuous and undivided, and there is communion between mind and Buddha. At the time of death, that Buddha appears before one.

"At the time of death" does not refer only to the time of physical death; it also refers to the time when the root of birth and death is severed. What is the time when the root of birth and death is severed? It is when our deluded emotions, deluded thoughts, and deluded mind die away and are cut off. That is the time of death, because the root of our birth and death is precisely these deluded emotions, deluded thoughts, and deluded mind.

Where, originally, do we have birth and death? It is only because these deluded emotions, deluded thoughts, and deluded mind cling to forms and appearances, create karma, and undergo retribution that there is cycling through the six realms and illusory birth and death. When we single-mindedly recite the Buddha's name, and our practice matures, then, once the time and conditions arrive, with a snap our deluded emotions, deluded thoughts, and deluded mind are severed, and the root of birth and death comes to an end.

"At the time of death, that Buddha appears before one." "That Buddha" means that Buddha, Amitābha Buddha; it is the Buddha of our own intrinsic nature, and the Buddha of our own intrinsic nature is Amitābha Buddha. "Appears before one" means that one's original nature appears before one. This is called, "When the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to the unborn." When the flower of the mind opens and one sees the Buddha of one's own intrinsic nature, one has awakened.

"Awakens to the unborn" means awakening and seeing one's originally unborn and undying intrinsic nature. This is the Pure Land school—this is the true Pure Land school! We must never shift the great matter of birth and death entirely onto

Amitābha Buddha. Do not say, “This is other-power. Amitābha Buddha, if you do not save me, it is your fault, not mine.”

That is incorrect. If you have not severed your own deluded emotions, deluded thoughts, and deluded mind, how can that Buddha appear before you? How can you awaken to the unborn? This is entirely your own fault. How can you blame Amitābha Buddha?

The Pure Land school is the Chan school, and the Chan school is the Pure Land school. This was taught by the great virtuous teachers of old: “Chan is the Chan of the Pure Land; the Pure Land is the Pure Land of Chan.” Chan is Pure Land, and Pure Land is Chan. They cannot be divided into two and regarded as two separate matters; they are indeed one and the same.

For example, Master Yongming Yanshou was a Chan master; how did he become a great patriarch of the Pure Land school? Master Lianchi was also a Chan master, and Master Chewu was also a Chan master. How did they all become great patriarchs of the Pure Land school? Chan and Pure Land originally breathe through the same nostril. It was only because later people did not understand the principle that they forcibly divided Chan from Pure Land.

When we vow to be reborn in the West, our resolve must be sincere and earnest; do not harbor doubts. The vow must be earnest, not merely something spoken aloud. There must also be genuine practice. If the mind has a vow but no practice, it cannot be saved. Attend to this in the morning and attend to this in the evening; attend to it in displacement and attend to it in hardship. If you do not forget it at every moment, you will soon realize the Way.

Those who cultivate Chan are the same: one must constantly be aware, safeguard at every moment, and attend to the huatou. Those of us who practice Esoteric Buddhism are the same. I have repeatedly said that in cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, one cannot rely only on two hours of seated meditation. Contemplation after leaving the meditation cushion is most important; it is even more important than practice on the cushion. After leaving the cushion, temper the mind through circumstances and see whether your mind is empty. This is the most crucial point.

I often hear people say, “Oh, I was furious today! How could so-and-so be so terrible?” Let me ask you: are you a Buddhist practitioner or not? What is there to be angry about? If you are learning Buddhism, you should not harbor anger.

All is empty: there is no person and no self, no self and no other. What is there to be angry about? If you still get angry, then you have not truly learned Buddhism; you are not constantly aware, nor are you tempering the mind through circumstances.

The more adverse the circumstances and the more aggravating the people and events, the more they can train you. Let us see whether you still become angry. If you do, then you have not been trained. How can you become a Buddha without such training? Adverse circumstances are actually also beneficial circumstances: they train you and reveal whether you have awakened.

Do not say that adverse circumstances are bad. Whether they are bad depends on whether you have awakened, and on whether you know how to use such circumstances to train yourself. As Buddhist practitioners, whether we practice Chan, Pure Land, or Esoteric Buddhism, we must at every moment temper the mind through circumstances. Without doing so, there can be no attainment.

Our wondrously luminous true mind belongs neither to existence nor to nonexistence. If you say that it exists, it has no form that can be seen and no sound that can be heard. If you say that it does not exist, then in speech and silence, movement and stillness, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, there is nothing in which it is not functioning. Ancient worthies compared it to “the taste of salt in the sea” and “the blue in a pigment”: though it cannot be seen with the eyes, it is not in fact absent.

Śākyamuni Buddha told us that it is a great treasury of true emptiness and wondrous presence, wondrous presence and true emptiness. What is called true emptiness is distinct from blank emptiness and annihilationist emptiness. Because of wondrous presence, emptiness is not mere emptiness. What is called wondrous presence is distinct from illusory existence or substantial existence. Because of true emptiness, existence is not truly existence: it is nonexistence that yet appears as existence.

Next, speaking in terms of appearances and functions, it is likewise neither existent nor nonexistent, neither nonexistent nor existent. If you say that it does not exist, the myriad forms appear distinctly before us, and its wondrous functions are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. If you say that it exists, all forms and appearances arise from causes and conditions and have no self-nature; the affairs and functions that arise are like the moon reflected in water or flowers in empty space, impossible to grasp. The Heart Sūtra says, “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.”

This means that form and emptiness are nondual, neither existent nor nonexistent. All phenomenal appearances are manifestations of the wondrous essence of true emptiness, yet that wondrous essence of true emptiness cannot exist separately from forms and appearances. For example, when water gives rise to waves, water cannot be found apart from the waves. In our practice, we must neither cling to forms and appearances as substantially real nor depart from them, abandoning

existence and attaching to emptiness. Therefore, whether practicing samādhi while on the meditation cushion or functioning after leaving it, we must make no choices of grasping or rejecting. Only then can we accord with the principle of the Middle Way and enter the great path of true emptiness and wondrous presence.

However, everyone still does not fully understand the principle of form and emptiness. Therefore, above I have further explained the meaning of form and emptiness, cited the recorded sayings of Chan Master Guifeng Zongmi, reiterated the importance of recognizing the true mind, and discussed where practitioners ultimately go at the time of death. This is so that everyone may enter into the central principle of Mahāmudrā, avoid needless detours in practice, and proceed directly toward the great path of true emptiness and wondrous presence.

Lecture Two: The View of Mahāmudrā—Recognizing the Dharmakāya

I. Clarifying Coarse Deluded Thoughts: Neither Grasping nor Indulging

Let us now return to Mahāmudrā. Earlier, we explained that Mahāmudrā is a practical Dharma gate that directly points us to the true mind. Mahāmudrā is the One True Dharma Realm; it is our true mind, the essential nature that is without cultivation, without correction, and without distraction. Yet, to enter the realm of Mahāmudrā practice, one must initially undergo arduous cultivation. Without undertaking the practice, you cannot recognize that this knowing awareness free of thoughts is your own intrinsic nature and thereby realize the great Way. Why is this? Mahāmudrā says:

“Coarse deluded thoughts that turn with circumstances obscure the original appearance of one’s own mind.”

What are coarse deluded thoughts that turn with circumstances? When we encounter an object, a thought arises; we cling to conditions without cease. Seeing this, we think of this; seeing that, we think of that. We can never put things down in our minds, and we indulge in chaotic, topsy-turvy, reckless thoughts. This is called coarse delusion. Coarse delusion is like dark clouds obscuring the sun: it conceals the bright original appearance of our own mind. Therefore, it must be eliminated.

If coarse delusion is not cut off, one’s practice will not get on track. Why? While sitting in meditation, you are wholly caught up in inverted deluded thoughts, thinking of this and that; off the cushion, you turn with circumstances and cling to conditions without cease. You simply cannot see the original appearance of your own mind. This is drifting through birth and death! How can your practice get on track, and how can you attain the great Way?

“Though one has received direct instruction, one still cannot see it. Therefore, one should first clarify coarse delusion. Thus it is taught: At the outset, let the mind rest openly and at ease, neither grasping nor indulging.”

Where is the true mind, and what is it like? This has already been directly pointed out many times. If, after receiving direct instruction, we still cannot see it, this shows that our deluded mind is very strong. We should then undertake the practice to cut off coarse delusion.

There is an order to awakening and realizing the Way; accordingly, there is also an order to practice. What is that order? At the beginning of practice, one must cut off the coarse delusion that turns with circumstances. What is coarse delusion? Deluded thoughts that think of this upon seeing this, think of that upon seeing that, give rise to mind in response to objects, and cling to conditions without cease are called coarse delusion. When we practice, we ignore them and let everything go; this is cutting off coarse delusion.

When coarse deluded thoughts have ceased, subtle deluded thoughts remain—namely, certain ideas in our minds. Those of you who have practiced know that when we stop the coarse deluded thoughts, subtle thoughts emerge one after another without our noticing. These emerging thoughts are called subtle delusions; in the Dharma Characteristics School, they are called “mind.”

The five universal mental factors taught by the Dharma Characteristics School are possessed by everyone, by all sentient beings: attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition. These are the most fundamental deluded mind. Yi is the mind faculty.

It is constantly in motion, like a fish moving beneath the water. It moves very swiftly. On the surface, one cannot see it moving, yet it flows on continuously without stopping. These are subtle and extremely subtle deluded thoughts.

These extremely subtle deluded thoughts are also called the subtle continuous stream. They are most subtle: where they are clear and unmoving, they resemble swiftly flowing water that appears not to move at all. In fact, they move with great speed, beyond what human eyes can perceive. Only by entering the Great Samādhi of Vajrasattva can one see them. Therefore, even after coarse delusion has been cut off, there remain subtle delusion, very subtle delusion, and extremely subtle delusion—not to mention that when we first begin to practice, we have merely managed to keep the body still.

How can we see these extremely subtle deluded thoughts? We can only settle the mind and meditate, first clarifying coarse delusion. Then we can see the subtle and extremely subtle deluded thoughts, cut them off, and directly realize the original

appearance of our own mind. Therefore, we must first break through coarse delusion.

How should one practice? Mahāmudrā instructs us in this way: “At the outset, let the mind rest openly and at ease, neither grasping nor indulging.” At the beginning of practice, we must first let our minds be entirely open and at ease. Do not abide in anything; do not have afflictions, constraint, or bondage. Be open and unconstrained, and let everything go. Confucian teaching says, “The noble person is open and at ease; the petty person is ever anxious.”

The petty person calculates gain, loss, benefit, and harm within the mind, turning them over and over. Because of concern over gain and loss, such a person is always anxious. The noble person is not troubled by gain or loss; everything is of no consequence, and so such a person is open and unconstrained. We who practice the Dharma are great noble persons and true persons of resolve. All the more, we must be open and unconstrained, let everything go, and rest openly without abiding.

Tantan means level and straight, without bends or twists. When the mind has no twists, the direct mind itself is the place of practice. Dangdang means sweeping everything away until it is empty, without abiding in anything. Thus one is utterly open, at ease, and free. Mahāmudrā tells us that we must first practice in this way.

If we cannot do this, if there is attachment in the mind and it keeps turning without cease, then we must apply the Dharma as an antidote. How? By “neither grasping nor indulging.” To grasp means to seize and hold it down; to indulge means to let it run free. We should neither grasp it nor indulge it, but let it be naturally.

When we practice, if we grasp thoughts too tightly and dare not let them move at all, we will gradually become lifeless. Yet neither should we allow thoughts simply to arise unchecked, for that falls into indulgence, and that too is wrong. When a thought comes, do not attend to it. This is neither grasping nor indulging.

In fact, the practice of all Dharma methods is the training of not attending to thoughts. It is not that thoughts do not come or do not arise. Let them come and let them arise; if you do not attend to them, they will naturally dissolve. Whether one practices Buddha-recitation, mantra recitation, or Chan inquiry, when thoughts come, one must neither grasp nor indulge them.

In fact, thoughts cannot be grasped or suppressed; they will come. As the ancient worthies said, “Though the wind has ceased, the waves still surge.” When thoughts come to a practitioner of Buddha-recitation, do not attend to them, but take up the Buddha’s name. When thoughts come to a Chan practitioner, do not attend to them, but take up the huatou. When thoughts come to one practicing Esoteric Buddhism, do not attend to them, but take up the mantra.

Give single-minded attention to the Buddha's name, the huatou, or the mantra, and deluded thoughts will naturally be transformed. With regard to thoughts, it is not that we prevent them from arising, nor that we let them run freely; rather, we transform them. This is alive, not dead. Last time, we mentioned Chan Master Wolun's verse: "Wolun has a skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts. When encountering objects, the mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day." This suppresses thoughts so that they do not arise; it is lifeless and will not do. One must neither grasp nor indulge them—one must not attend to them.

It is certainly not good when deluded thoughts arise, but if you suppress them to death, all is lost. Deluded thoughts arise from the true mind, just as waves arise from water. If you suppress deluded thoughts to death, it is like eliminating the waves and thereby leaving no water; the true mind will no longer be alive. We know that the true mind is vital and dynamic: it contains all things, gives rise to all dharmas, and manifests wondrous functioning. If you truly suppress deluded thoughts to death, the true mind will become like earth, wood, metal, or stone, unable to manifest wondrous functioning.

Earth, wood, metal, and stone constitute one of the twelve classes of living beings. They are insentient. At first glance, they may seem unrelated to us, for humans and all beings within the six realms of rebirth—devas, humans, asuras, hungry ghosts, animals, and hell beings—are sentient, possessing notions of sentience and attachment.

Human beings are creatures with feelings, whereas earth, wood, metal, and stone are inert and insensible, dead and unmoving. They appear to have nothing to do with us. But this is not so. Although the twelve classes of living beings differ in kind, all are manifestations of one numinous true nature, of the One True Dharma Realm. They share the same root and origin as human beings and are not of a different kind.

Buddha-nature is originally true and real, capable of giving rise to all dharmas and fully endowed with all wondrous functions. Yet, because we cling to external appearances, are enveloped by ignorance, abide in objects, cling to emotional attachment, create karma, and undergo karmic retribution, we lose the true mind. Thus the One True becomes divided into inner and outer aspects.

The inner true aspect is our own body and mind. The outer true aspect consists of mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, grasses, trees, forests, and all other things outside us—what are called external objects.

Yet all of these are ourselves! Because of ignorance, we take a small portion of earth, water, fire, and wind, bind it within this fleshly shell, and regard it as ourselves, while disregarding the greater portion of earth, water, fire, and wind and

considering it external. Thus there are the twelve classes of living beings. In fact, whether sentient or insentient, all share one root. Therefore, the sūtra says: "Sentient and insentient beings alike perfect the wisdom of all seeds."

The insentient too are ourselves. To perfect the wisdom of all seeds together means the Buddha's wisdom, the wisdom of all seeds: above, it can know the Dharma functions of all Buddhas—that is, it can fully know the Buddhadharma of all Buddhas; below, it can know the causal seeds of all sentient beings.

Nowadays, some practitioners who attain a slight experience have someone tell them in their ear what will happen, who has arrived, and what that person looks like. This is being reported to them by an ear-reporting spirit.

But some people imagine that they possess wisdom and spiritual powers, able to foresee who will come and what events will occur. They become complacent: "Ah, how wonderful! I have foreknowledge." In fact, it is not wonderful at all! This is a transmitting ghost causing mischief. If you remain attached to it for long, it will exploit you and harm you.

How does such a ghost come about? When this person was alive, he specialized in forming factions for private gain, assisting evil, and stirring up lawsuits—that is, helping others commit evil deeds, helping them litigate, plotting for wealth, taking lives, and so forth. Having created karma deserving of the hells, he fell into the hells and suffered there. After his suffering in the hells is exhausted and he emerges, the habitual tendencies from his former life—forming factions for private gain and specializing in evil—still remain and are very strong. Thus, he attaches himself to people and takes them as his own body, telling them certain things about the future. That is why he is called a transmitting ghost; he is no good thing.

When we practice, we should not hear someone telling us this or that in our ear and suppose that we have spiritual powers. This is not a good thing; it is a ghost! The sūtras speak of several kinds of ghosts. For example, one who is greedy for wealth may have loved banknotes and wanted gold while alive—the more, the better. Because of greed, such a person created evil karma and fell into the hells. After the suffering there has ended, the habit of greed remains: seeing anything, he wants it. Upon encountering grasses and trees, he thinks they are wonderful and takes them to be himself.

Thus they attach themselves to grasses and trees, manifesting their powers and causing mischief. It is said that there is a very efficacious bodhi-tree spirit in Shanghai's Fuxing Park. People flock there, praying and worshipping, and every sort of problem is resolved; it is said to be most efficacious. This is the mischief caused by strange ghosts that attach themselves to grass and trees.

There are also lustful men and women. Since lust is a fire of desire, they are burned by this fire of desire when they descend into hell. After they have undergone this suffering and emerge, because lustfulness is frivolous, they take form upon encountering wind and make wind their substance. These are ba ghosts—female demons. There are also those that take great mountains and great waters as their substance. What ghosts are these? They are called wangliang: ghosts of wrong views.

This is because in their previous lives these people held incorrect views, were arrogantly self-important and self-righteous, and, whenever others differed with them, used schemes and tricks to harm them. Therefore, they descended into hell.

After they have undergone their suffering and emerge, because they were wildly arrogant and self-important, they take the essences of the sun and moon as their own substance. Seizing the light of the sun and moon, they attach themselves to mountains and waters and manifest their powers. Thus everyone says that such places are extraordinarily efficacious.

For example, not long ago it was widely rumored that there was a Water-Sprinkling Avalokiteśvara in Hangzhou. There is a stone on Ziyang Mountain which ordinarily appears to be merely a smooth, bare stone, with nothing on it. But when water is poured over it, an image of Avalokiteśvara appears, and people call it the Water-Sprinkling Avalokiteśvara. People tell one another that the place is extraordinarily efficacious, and come from all directions to seek water there to drink, hoping to cure every illness. In fact, this is a ghost that takes the essences of the sun and moon as its substance.

This shows that all ghosts and spirits, and even such things as earth, wood, metal, and stone, are ourselves! For this reason, it is said that “sentient and insentient alike perfect all-encompassing wisdom.” Our Buddha-nature is originally able to know the causal seeds of all sentient beings, and also to know that the wondrous Dharma of all Buddhas is the complete and perfect great prajñā essence.

II. The Teaching of the Insentient

Last time, someone asked: sentient beings can perfect all-encompassing wisdom—this can be understood—but how can insentient things do so? How can insentient bricks, tiles, wood, and stones perfect all-encompassing wisdom? How can they become Buddhas? Today I will explain this further. Bricks, tiles, wood, and stones are all our own intrinsic nature.

Who discovers bricks, tiles, wood, and stones? Do we not discover them when our numinous light shines upon them? Whose numinous light is this? It is our Buddha-nature. Wherever the numinous light of our Buddha-nature shines, all sentient and insentient things—mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, and stars, men

and women, young and old, birds and beasts—are shadows of Buddha-nature; all are manifestations of Buddha-nature.

You are Buddha; therefore, everything illuminated by your numinous light is Buddha. Just as, in a country, if I am the king, everything within that land is mine, so too, if you are Buddha, the light of your Buddha-nature shines clearly throughout the ten directions, pervading empty space and filling the dharma realm. Nothing is not illuminated by the numinous light of Buddha-nature. Therefore, everything is Buddha; not one thing is not Buddha.

But if we do our practice poorly and do not know how to use the mind flexibly and wondrously, instead suppressing our thoughts to death, we become like earth, wood, metal, and stone. Long ago, there were two people practicing beside a great mountain. They sat there without moving, until grass grew on their heads and in their ears; they became like wood and stone. This was the result of practicing by suppressing thoughts to death.

Therefore, all things are ourselves; all are our Buddha-nature. Every form and appearance that we see is Buddha. For this reason, stools, chairs, tables, stands, and so forth are all Buddha; not one is not Buddha. Thus it is said: “The luxuriant yellow flowers are none other than prajñā; the verdant green bamboo is entirely dharmakāya.” Whether flowers or bamboo, all are transformations of Buddha-nature; all are Buddha! This question appears difficult to understand, but once the principle is understood, it is not difficult. Let us now discuss a koan concerning this question.

Long ago, Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie also could not understand this question. He went to Patriarch Guishan to seek instruction and asked, “I have recently heard of National Teacher Nanyang Zhong’s saying about the insentient teaching the Dharma, but I have not yet fathomed its subtleties.” Guishan asked, “Do you still remember it?” Dongshan replied, “I remember.” Guishan said, “Try recounting it once.” Dongshan then related the matter.

“A monk asked, ‘What is the mind of the ancient Buddha?’ The National Teacher replied, ‘Walls and tiles and rubble are.’ The monk asked, ‘Are not walls, tiles, and rubble insentient?’” (Walls, tiles, and rubble are dull and unknowing, without consciousness, whereas a Buddha is an awakened one, knowing everything and capable of everything.

How can walls, tiles, and rubble, being unconscious, dull, and unknowing, be the mind of the ancient Buddha? If that is what you say, then walls, tiles, and rubble are not insentient after all, are they? This was the monk’s counter-question.) The National Teacher replied, ‘They are.’ (These words contain a profound and wondrous meaning. Since sentient and insentient alike perfect all-encompassing wisdom, it is

only through discrimination that the distinction between sentient and insentient arises.

If there is no discrimination, all sounds and forms, mountains, rivers, the great earth, and even food, drink, and the relations of men and women are complete within mind-nature, and not a single dharma can be grasped. What sentient or insentient things could there then be? Because dharmas are taken as graspable, people then classify them into categories, loving and hating, accepting and rejecting; thus afflictions arise in profusion and the cycle of rebirth continues without end.

As explained earlier, our bodies are originally formed through the provisional combination of the four elements and are no different from insentient things. It is only because the true mind is enveloped by ignorance and becomes the deluded mind, bound within the shell formed by the provisional combination of the four elements and clung to as oneself, that deluded knowing arises.

Otherwise, would our bodies not be the same as walls, tiles, and rubble? But the monk did not understand this principle, and therefore had the following doubt.) The monk asked, ‘Can they also teach the Dharma?’ (Because Buddhas teach the Dharma to liberate sentient beings, and ancient Buddhas can teach the Dharma, if insentient things are the mind of ancient Buddha, then surely they too can teach the Dharma.

This monk, like us ordinary beings, always remained caught up in what is seen and heard among objects of sense, without seeing the nature that sees and hears.) The National Teacher replied, ‘They are constantly teaching, blazing forth in their teaching, without interruption.

’ (The insentient do not teach intermittently, teaching at one time and not at another. They teach at every moment; the sound of their teaching is immense, like a raging fire burning fiercely, and their teaching never ceases. We are often attached to what we see and hear and do not know that no teaching is the true teaching. When a sound is heard, we say that it is heard; when no sound is heard, we say that nothing is heard.

In fact, not hearing a sound is also hearing: you hear the absence of sound! Therefore, no teaching is true teaching. Because the greatest sound is rarely heard, the greatest sound is soundless. If one says there is a sound to be heard, it is not true hearing, because one is attached to the object heard. The nature of hearing lies neither in sound nor in silence.

Sound arises and ceases, and is therefore false; nature has no point of interruption, and is therefore true.) The monk asked, ‘Why do I not hear it?’ The National Teacher replied, ‘You yourself do not hear; do not hinder those who hear.’ (It is you yourself

who do not hear, because you obscure your Buddha-nature and are attached to audible sounds, not knowing that non-hearing is true hearing.

Looking further, who is it that hears what is not heard? Who is it that hears the absence of sound? You say that you do not hear, but it is radiating light through your ear faculty—why do you not know this? You hear silence; is that not hearing? To hear silence—is that not precisely hearing? When you hear sound, you give rise to discriminations in accordance with the sound and run after it.

But when there is silence and no discrimination, that is precisely when your hearing nature is present; therefore, it is true hearing. You yourself do not hear, but you cannot obstruct that which is able to hear! Here the National Teacher rebukes, instructs, and reminds the monk.

At the very time when there is no sound to be heard and the hearing nature is truly hearing, you say that you do not hear. It is simply that you yourself are not alert and do not understand; yet the hearing nature remains distinctly clear!) The monk asked, ‘May I ask what person can hear it?’ (Throughout the entire earth, there is not one person who does not hear.

Who does not hear? Who lacks the nature of hearing? So long as one does not cling to sounds, who is not brightly manifest hearing nature? Alas, one does not cast even a glance at one’s own insight!) The National Teacher replied, ‘All the sages hear it.’ (All sages—Buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and the like—can hear it; ordinary beings cannot.

There is a flaw in the National Teacher’s reply, for everyone is originally Buddha. The dharmakāya is without characteristics, and neither ordinary nor sage is established; how could there still be any distinction between sage and non-sage? Pressed hard by this [illegible character], the National Teacher temporarily used this statement as an expedient to veil his eyes, but the monk saw through it and pressed the question further.

) The monk asked, ‘Does the Venerable Monk also hear it?’ (Can you yourself hear it? Since the National Teacher said that all sages hear it, this question pressed him to the point where he could scarcely answer. If he said that he heard it, he would be praising himself; if he said that he did not, then the National Teacher would be neither a sage nor a teacher.) The National Teacher replied, ‘I do not hear it.’ (He could only confess his guilt.

) The monk asked, ‘Since the Venerable Monk does not hear it, how do you know that the insentient can teach the Dharma?’ (A good, forceful question: using the National Teacher’s own spear to strike back at him, the monk left him nowhere to evade.) The National Teacher replied, ‘It is precisely because I do not hear it. If I

heard it, I would be on a par with the sages, and you would not hear me teach the Dharma.

’ (Fortunately, I do not hear it. If I did hear it, I would be a sage, and you would not hear me teach the Dharma. The monk’s question was originally difficult to evade, but the National Teacher was a master of Chan and had his own way of turning about. “It is precisely because I do not hear it”—with this clever turn, he transformed danger into safety. Yet wherever there are words, there is no real meaning.

Originally there is no Dharma to teach, and originally there is no one to hear the Dharma. If there were still a Dharma to teach and someone to hear it, that would be attachment to the marks of person and self. Therefore, when the National Teacher said, ‘You would not hear me teach the Dharma,’ he was also speaking against himself.) The monk pressed him closely: ‘Then sentient beings have no share in it.’

’ (If this is so, sentient beings cannot hear the insentient teaching the Dharma. Would there then be no hope of realizing the Way?) The National Teacher replied, ‘I teach for sentient beings, not for the sages.’ (The National Teacher shifted the thrust of his response.

) The monk asked, ‘What happens after sentient beings hear it?’ (The monk kept the National Teacher firmly pinned down: after sentient beings have heard you teach, what will happen?) The National Teacher replied, ‘They are no longer sentient beings.’

The National Teacher skillfully turned the monk’s challenge back. If sentient beings can hear the insentient expound the Dharma and recognize this hearing-nature that neither arises nor ceases, they transcend the ordinary and enter the sacred; therefore they are not sentient beings. The Diamond Sūtra says: “Sentient beings, sentient beings—the Tathāgata says they are not sentient beings; this is merely called sentient beings.”

Sentient beings? Where are there any sentient beings? All sentient beings are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; none is real. Sentient beings are sentient beings precisely because they have not awakened. If they awaken at this very moment, they are no longer sentient beings. Yet, so long as they do not awaken within the dream, they cannot but be sentient beings; therefore, they are merely called sentient beings.

Therefore, quickly awaken from the dream! Someone once said, “You say that everything is nonexistent? For example, if my ear were struck deaf, it could no longer hear sounds, but this still exists, does it not? The phenomenon of my ear having become deaf still exists; it cannot be empty.” This person was clinging to

appearances and fastening them to the mind, without awakening. Quickly awaken! Do not keep dreaming.

For example, in a dream we may be beaten by someone or have our heads cut off. Yet once we awaken, we have not in fact been beaten or killed, and our heads remain perfectly intact.

When your ear is struck deaf, this deafness is actually an illusory appearance, unobtainable just like being beaten or killed in a dream. Therefore, do not cling to the dream; quickly empty it! Quickly awaken! Once you awaken, nothing remains. After Guan Gong was beheaded by Lü Meng, he cried out in agony, "Give me back my head! Give me back my head!"

When Master Zhizhe learned of this, he went to liberate him. The Master sat cross-legged, blocking Guan Gong's path. Guan Gong thought, "This monk is truly bold to dare block my path. I shall show him something." Then—whoosh!—a violent wind arose, sending flying sand and stones straight at him, but Master Zhizhe did not move in the slightest.

Guan Gong thought, "You are not afraid of violent winds and flying sand, so I shall move a great mountain here to frighten you." A great mountain then came crashing down, covering heaven and earth, yet Master Zhizhe still did not move in the slightest. Guan Gong was now impressed: "This monk has genuine skill!" He hurried forward and bowed in homage.

Master Zhizhe then expounded the Dharma to Guan Gong: "Here you are crying, 'Give me back my head! Give me back my head!'"

"When someone cuts off one of your heads, you demand that they return it to you. But how many heads did you cut off and kill during your lifetime? Can you return them to others? Moreover, though your head is gone, you have not lacked anything at all. Why? Because you have merely lost this illusory physical body, while your spiritual knowing and true mind have not diminished in the least."

We have spoken of taking empty quiescence as the essence; do not take the physical body as the essence. Empty space is your true body; the bodily shell is not the true body, but is merely like a house. Take spiritual knowing as the mind; do not take deluded thoughts and false thinking as the mind. Deluded thoughts and false thinking are not real; they are products of clinging to appearances and grasping at objects.

The nature of spiritual knowing is the faculty of awareness that knows cold and heat, pain and itch. It does not abide in appearances; it has neither head nor tail, neither name nor word. In the past, the Sixth Patriarch, Master Huineng, asked the

assembly: “I have one thing: it has no head or tail, no name or word, no back or face. Do any of you recognize it?” Shenhui stepped forth and said: “It is the source of all Buddhas and Shenhui’s Buddha-nature.”

The Sixth Patriarch said: “I told you that it has neither name nor word, yet you call it the source and Buddha-nature. In the future, you will merely become a follower of the school of intellectual understanding, fit only to build a thatched hut and cover your head.” The nature of spiritual knowing—our intrinsic nature—is formless and nameless. To call it one thing is already wrong. The moment Shenhui added a name to it, it had already become a deluded thought.

Therefore, do not take deluded thoughts as the mind; recognize the nature of spiritual knowing.

This was the Dharma that Master Zhizhe expounded to Guan Gong: your sense that your head hurts is the deluded mind’s attachment. Your bodily shell has already been destroyed and no longer exists, so what pain could there be? Once the mind is empty, you shine forth with great radiance; Buddha-nature is luminously clear—what question can there be of pain or no pain? After Guan Gong received Master Zhizhe’s instruction, he awakened and formed the resolve to become a Dharma-protecting deity.

Thus, once sentient beings awaken from the dream and recognize their intrinsic nature, which neither arises nor ceases, they transcend the ordinary and enter the sacred; they are no longer sentient beings. Therefore, when National Teacher Zhong of Nanyang said that sentient beings who hear the insentient expound the Dharma are no longer sentient beings, this is what he meant.

The monk again asked: “The insentient expound the Dharma—what scripture supports this?” He had never heard that the insentient could expound the Dharma. Was there any basis for it? From which scripture did it come? Surely it was not something the National Teacher had invented himself? The monk would not let go of the National Teacher. The National Teacher replied: “Certainly. If one’s words are not grounded in the scriptures, they are not fit for a gentleman to discuss.”

“Have you not seen the Avataṃsaka Sūtra say: ‘Lands speak, sentient beings speak, and everything throughout the three periods of time speaks’?” The National Teacher said that the monk was quite right: if the insentient expounding the Dharma had no basis in scripture, it would be meaningless and not something a gentleman should say.

He then cited a scripture. The Avataṃsaka Sūtra says, “Lands speak, sentient beings speak, and everything throughout the three periods of time speaks.” That is, every particle of dust and every land expounds the Dharma. “All sentient beings”

encompasses everything: whether the sentient world or the insentient world, nothing does not expound the Dharma. The past, present, and future—the three periods of time—all expound the Dharma. This was National Teacher Zhong of Nanyang's instruction to that monk. Chan Master Dongshan did not understand it, so he related this koan to Patriarch Guishan.

After hearing it, Guishan said, "I too have this here, but such a person is rarely encountered." This expounding of the Dharma by the insentient is also found here. One must encounter someone of corresponding capacity before the occasion and the person can accord; hence, "such a person is rarely encountered." Dongshan Liangjie respectfully requested, "This humble one has not yet understood. I beg the Master for instruction." Guishan raised his fly-whisk and said, "Do you understand?"

This itself was the insentient expounding the Dharma. Could Dongshan comprehend it? The insentient expounds the Dharma without sound, but that does not mean it does not expound the Dharma. For example, flowers bloom and flowers fall: this is the insentient expounding the Dharma. Flowers are insentient. When they bloom, they are delicate and beautiful, but before long they wither and fall away. What Dharma do they expound? They expound the Dharma of impermanence.

The river flows past with a rushing sound. Flowing water does not abide; it does not remain. It flows past today, flows past again tomorrow, and never ceases. This flowing water tells us that the illusory appearances of all things change, while their essence has never changed. Su Dongpo understood this principle and said, "That which passes on is thus, yet it has never gone away."

Flowing water is insentient, yet it too expounds the Dharma. Thus, the insentient is constantly expounding the Dharma. It is not that it does not expound the Dharma; you simply do not know it. When Guishan raised his fly-whisk, he was asking: who is it that raises the fly-whisk? It is not only speaking aloud that constitutes expounding the Dharma; this very raising is an exposition of the Dharma.

Yet Dongshan Liangjie still did not understand, so he said, "I do not understand." Dongshan honestly admitted that he did not understand and had not comprehended. In fact, this was the most immediate point. For once you think that you understand and comprehend, that is a view based on discriminating consciousness, and there is some principle to be grasped.

On the contrary, when you do not understand, you are precisely at the time when not a single thought arises. Immediately turn the light inward: what is this? At that very moment, you see your true nature. Unfortunately, Dongshan always assumed that there was still some principle to be found; he misunderstood the meaning and missed the opportunity. Dongshan then said, "Please, Master, explain it." Guishan said, "The mouth born of one's parents can never speak it for you."

This fleshly mouth born of one's parents can never explain it to you. Why? Because no matter how much one says, one can never reach it. Language cannot express it, and thought cannot attain it: "the way of words is cut off, and the activity of mind is extinguished." The moment it is spoken, it misses the mark; the moment it is known, it is no longer it.

Here Guishan was intimating to Dongshan that non-speaking is true speaking and non-hearing is true hearing; this is the insentient expounding the Dharma. Regrettably, Dongshan still remained confused and did not understand. People often cling to the six sense-object realms of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas that correspond to seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing. That is, they cling to what is seen and heard, so that if there is nothing seen and nothing heard, they think there is nothing at all.

Do they not know that the true nature which is capable of seeing and hearing when there is nothing seen or heard has never been interrupted, bears no trace of continuity, and is thus and unmoving? Therefore Buddha-nature is also called "thusness." This shows how dense and deeply rooted people's habitual tendencies of deluded attachment are.

Moreover, Guishan's statement, "The mouth born of one's parents can never speak it for you," has another meaning: cultivation can only be undertaken by oneself, and Buddha-nature must be awakened to by oneself. An ancient worthy said, "What enters through the gate is not a family treasure." What enters through the ears enters through a gate, since the gates of the six sense faculties all face outward. Principles taken in through the ears are not your own treasure. Only what you awaken to yourself is real. There is no benefit at all in asking me to explain it to you; later you will resent me for it.

This brings to mind Patriarch Xiangyan, who encountered the same problem. Patriarch Xiangyan and Patriarch Guishan were both disciples of Patriarch Baizhang.

Patriarch Xiangyan was thoroughly familiar with the Buddhist scriptures. Whenever someone asked him about the Dharma, he would often answer one question with ten answers, and he considered himself quite remarkable, secretly praising himself: "My wisdom is as vast as the sea!" Yet while Baizhang was still alive, he had not attained realization through Chan practice. After Baizhang passed away, he had no choice but to go to his elder Dharma brother Guishan to study Chan.

Guishan said to him, "Dharma brother, I have heard that under our late teacher Baizhang, when asked one question, you gave ten answers; when asked ten questions, you gave a hundred." Xiangyan hurriedly replied, "I would not dare." Guishan said, "That is merely your cleverness and quick wit, conceptual

understanding and discriminating consciousness—the root of birth and death. I now have a question for you. Let us see whether you can answer it."

Outwardly, Xiangyan casually asked, "What question is it?" But inwardly he thought, "What question could there possibly be that I cannot answer? Hmph!" Guishan said, "I will not ask you anything else. I ask only this: before your parents gave birth to you, what was your Original Face? Try saying a single word." When Patriarch Xiangyan heard this, his mind was utterly blank.

Guishan then went back to his quarters and reviewed from beginning to end the scriptural and treatise passages he had read in ordinary times, seeking a single sentence with which to respond, but in the end he found nothing. He sighed to himself, "A painted cake cannot satisfy hunger." He repeatedly begged Guishan to explain it plainly. Guishan said, "If I were to explain it to you, you would revile me later. What I say would be mine alone and, in the end, would have nothing to do with you."

"You should go and investigate for yourself!" Patriarch Xiangyan then burned all the writings he had previously read, took leave of Guishan, and went to investigate on his own. He investigated in the morning and at night, at every moment whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down.

One day, while weeding in the fields, he struck a stone with his hoe. He picked up the stone and casually tossed it away; it hit a bamboo stalk with a crack. He was suddenly awakened and opened to his original nature. He then returned, bathed, burned incense, and from afar paid reverence to his Dharma brother Guishan, praising him: "The Master's great compassion surpasses that of my parents. Had you explained it to me then, how could there have been what has happened today?"

Thus, the work must be done by oneself. Therefore Patriarch Guishan said to Dongshan, "The mouth given you by your parents will ultimately not speak for you." Explaining it to you is of no use; you must investigate for yourself. Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie was unable to awaken. Feeling that the opportunity was not right, he asked again, "Is there anyone who, like you, aspires to the Way?" Guishan then directed him to investigate with Chan Master Yunyan.

Dongshan took leave of Guishan and went directly to Yunyan. He recounted the preceding koan of insentient things expounding the Dharma, then asked Chan Master Yunyan, "When insentient things expound the Dharma, who can hear it?" Chan Master Yunyan replied, "The insentient can hear it." National Master Nanyang Huizhong said, "The sages can hear it," but Chan Master Yunyan said that the insentient can hear it. In truth, a pure and empty mind is itself sagehood.

Neither sages nor ordinary beings are established; everything is absent. Every thing and every point manifests the wondrous form-body and extends the broad, long tongue to proclaim the sound of Dharma. It speaks blazing and without end; it speaks endlessly and without limit. This is how the insentient expound the Dharma. What, then, does it mean that "the insentient can hear it"? It means that when you have extinguished and entirely eliminated emotional views, and do not cling to any sights, sounds, or objects of the sense-fields, you can hear the insentient expounding the Dharma and awaken to see your true nature.

We have said before that people have two bad things: emotion and thought. If deluded emotion and love are cut off, that is good. Why? Because emotion arises from love, love can produce water, and water by nature flows downward and cannot ascend to heaven; therefore, it must be cut off.

For example, when we encounter food we love to eat, saliva arises. If someone we dearly love is about to leave, or is going far away, tears cannot help but flow. If a loved one dies, we weep even more bitterly. As for the love between men and women, there is no need even to speak of it. Water is by nature moist: all water is moist, and it flows downward.

Thus, the qing in "love" sinks downward. If we wish to be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, we must rise upward; if we sink downward, there is no hope. Therefore, we must cut off emotional views completely. If love is not completely cut off, one cannot be born in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Thus, emotion is a bad thing.

Thought is somewhat better. This thought is not wild and wandering thought; wild and wandering thought is still emotion. It is because we have emotion that we indulge in such thoughts. For example, if we love someone, we devise every possible means to possess that person. If that person already has a partner, we think of some way to get rid of the partner and then possess that person.

You see this sort of thing written in dramas and novels; without it, they would not become dramas or novels. This creates karma, and karma brings karmic retribution. Wild and wandering thought is really emotional love, and it will not do either.

Then what is this thought? It is the method of cultivation through focused visualization: imagining how we may escape the realm of sentient beings and realize the Original Face; or visualizing the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, fixing the mind on the West, and earnestly practicing Buddha-recitation. This is somewhat better. But ultimately, thought is no more acceptable than emotion.

Why? Without emotion, how could there be thought? Without thought, how could there be emotion? Emotion and thought are inseparable. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra says

that if we genuinely cultivate visualization in secret, the seventh consciousness can leave our physical body or transform into the object imagined. This is called “pure thought brings flight,” but it is not yet true purity. When one is truly pure, even thought is absent.

If there is still a Buddha to recite, one is not yet truly pure. When one is truly pure, there is nothing at all; only that is the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. Yet when we practice Buddha-recitation and seek rebirth in the West, we must not demand too much. It is enough to be born in the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages.

Thus, when Buddha-recitation brings emotion to an end, pure thought brings flight, and one can be reborn in the West; it is not difficult. During practice, simply focus exclusively on how wonderful rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is, how radiant Amitābha Buddha is, and how he comes to welcome us. When, at parinirvāṇa, we rise in flight, the sacred realm of the West will naturally appear. Seeing Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, and the other bodhisattvas coming to welcome us, we shall fly to rebirth in the West.

“Pure thought brings flight” is the manifestation of the sacred realm through the wholesome roots of mature pure karma in Buddha-recitation. At present, when we speak of the Pure Land, we speak only of the West; but the Śūraṅgama Sūtra speaks of the Pure Lands in the ten directions, where one is reborn according to conditions, not only in the Western Pure Land. From this we know that, to seek rebirth in a Pure Land, one must completely cut off emotional love and deluded emotion.

Therefore, accomplished cultivators are free of emotional views; if you have emotion, it will not do. What is a bodhisattva? It is an abbreviation of the Sanskrit bodhisattva, translated into Chinese as “awakened sentient being.” It means first awakening through all one’s own emotional views, not clinging to any sights, sounds, or objects of the sense-fields, and clearly realizing one’s intrinsic nature; only then can one help others awaken from their deluded dreams, sweep away deluded emotion, and leave the sea of suffering together. This is why Chan Master Yunyan said, “The insentient can hear it.”

Dongshan pressed him closely, asking, “Does the Master hear it?” Even now, Dongshan remained thoroughly obtuse. Yunyan replied, “If I heard it, you would not hear me expounding the Dharma.” This was exactly the same as National Master Huizhong’s teaching. If I could hear it, I would not expound the Dharma to you.

Why? First, if I heard it, I would be equal to all the sages. The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya of all the sages are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma. In their true dharmakāya, the sages neither speak nor hear. If I

heard it, I would, like the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, have realized the Way. Neither ordinary beings nor sages could then be found; one would abide in neither ordinary being nor sage, and everything would be absent. Could you still hear me expounding the Dharma? Take note: the absence of everything is not annihilationist emptiness.

Rather, it is presence without abiding: speaking yet not speaking, not speaking yet speaking. It is not stubbornly clinging to silence, still less clinging to there being something spoken. All actions and undertakings are merely provisional; there is not even a Buddha, and even the word "Buddha" is a provisional name of expedient means. If there were still something beyond all Buddhas, then a Buddha would not be a Buddha. Therefore, do not abide in appearances. To truly realize the Way is to have not a single thing.

Second, if I heard it, I would be the same as the insentient. The insentient take non-speaking as their true speaking; there are no spoken words. How then could you hear me expounding the Dharma today? Furthermore, if I heard it, I would be attached to the sense-object of sound, with something to which I abide; my dharma-self view would not yet be eliminated. How then could I be a teacher of others? Therefore, I do not hear. Non-hearing is true hearing! That is, "no words are spoken"; there are no words to speak.

You must thoroughly grasp the meaning beyond words. You understand only dharmas expressed in language, dharmas that can be spoken. The words you now hear me speak are all spoken words and are not true reality.

Now, in speaking to you in this way, I want you to grasp the meaning beyond words, to understand beyond words, and thereby clearly see the true speaking that is without speaking and the true hearing that is without hearing. Yet Dongshan still did not understand and asked again, "Why can I not hear it?" He asked Yunyan, "If insentient things expound the Dharma, I should be able to hear it. Why can I not hear it?" He was still attached to

the sense-objects of sound and form. What meaning is there in pursuing them in this way? Why not turn the hearing back to hear your own nature? It shines right before your face! Is this not your naturally hearing and hearing through non-hearing? People in the world are all so obtuse; how pitiful! At this point, Yunyan, like Guishan, raised his whisk.

Had Dongshan seized this moment and asked himself in return, "Who is it that sees this whisk being raised?" and vigorously applied himself right there, he would have awakened immediately. Unfortunately, he missed it again. Yunyan asked, "Do you hear it still?" Though the raised whisk made no sound and spoke no words, the great sound is rarely heard; it was utterly clear, like thunder filling the ears. Why? Because

soundless sound is the greatest sound. This is called “the great sound is rarely heard.”

We people are often attached to audible sound and seek understanding where sound can be heard. But if you truly wish to see your nature, you cannot be attached to what is audibly heard. Audible and inaudible sound are merely the arising and ceasing of sound, whereas our faculty of hearing shines before us at every moment; it has neither intervals nor continuity.

Therefore, an ancient worthy said: “After wind and rain, peach blossoms line both banks; where can a horse’s hooves avoid the fallen red petals?”

Both sides of a narrow path are planted thick with peach trees. After a great wind and rain, the path is covered with peach blossoms. When riding a horse through that place, how could its hooves avoid the petals scattered all over the ground and fail to tread on them? This means that Buddha-nature is functioning at all times and in all places; there is no time when it is absent and no place where it is absent. Can you avoid it? Therefore, do not discriminate between appearances and non-appearances, sound and silence.

When we do not see light, we see darkness; seeing darkness is still seeing. When we do not hear sound, we hear silence; hearing silence is still hearing. Is this not evidence that the nature of seeing and the nature of hearing are neither arising nor ceasing?

Unfortunately, Dongshan answered, “I do not hear.” He was attached to sound: because he heard no sound, he said that he did not hear. It was like making alluring eyes at a blind man; he missed it right before his face. What a pity! Yet we must say that it was fortunate that he did not hear. Had there been hearing, he would again have been attached to appearances; non-hearing is true hearing.

Yunyan said, “When I expound the Dharma, you still do not hear it; how much less could you hear insentient things expounding the Dharma?” When I speak to you in this way and raise the whisk, there is no sound, yet there is still a movement. If you neither hear nor comprehend even this, how could you comprehend the true speaking and true movement that are without speech or motion? People in the world are all so foolish: they cling to the karmic delusions of forms and sounds that they see and hear, never turning the light around for a glimpse of the nature that sees and hears, speaks and moves.

This nature is the originally true Buddha! Some even mistakenly think that not hearing a sound means no hearing, and not seeing light, shadows, forms, or appearances means no seeing. Do they not realize that this seeing-nature and hearing-nature are constantly radiating light directly before them, never obscured

and never interrupted? Even when there is no sound to hear and no appearance to see, there is still seeing and still hearing. For hearing the absence of sound is still hearing, and seeing the absence of appearances is still seeing. How, then, can one say that there is neither seeing nor hearing?

Dongshan then asked, “What scripture teaches that insentient things expound the Dharma?” This was the same as the question posed to the National Teacher by the monk in the preceding koan. Chan Master Yunyan replied, citing the Amitābha Sūtra: “Have you not seen where it says, ‘Water, birds, and forests all recite the Buddha and recite the Dharma’?”

At this, Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie suddenly awakened somewhat. He had finally entered realization of the soundless through sound; at last he had understood and awakened. He blurted out this verse: “How wondrous! How truly wondrous! Insentient things expounding the Dharma is inconceivable. If one listens with the ears, one will never understand; only by hearing sound at the eye can one know.”

How truly marvelous and strange! That insentient things can expound the Dharma is beyond words and inconceivable, utterly beyond imagination! Can insentient things expound the Dharma? They can. If you use your ears to listen, you cannot understand, for the Dharma expounded by insentient things has no sound. Only by listening with the eyes can you comprehend its subtle wonder.

The eyes cannot hear sound, yet no sound is precisely the wondrous sound. From this it can be seen that Chan Master Dongshan understood sound and, through sound, understood the soundless. But he had not yet understood that the soundless is sound and sound is the soundless; he had not yet reached complete and ultimate realization.

There are many other koans in which awakening occurs through sound. Let us give another example. In former times, Chan Master Yuanwu Keqin served as an attendant under Chan Master Wuzu Fayan and studied Chan with him.

One day, a scholar came to consult Wuzu Fayan. Wuzu said to him, “If you ask about intrinsic nature and the dharmakāya, did you read ‘The Little Beauty Poem’ when you were young? Two lines in that poem are very similar to this: ‘Again and again she calls Little Jade for no reason at all; she only wants her beloved to recognize her voice.’”

This means that she repeatedly calls, “Little Jade! Little Jade!” Little Jade is a maidservant. Why does the young lady call her? For no reason. Then why call her? Her purpose is to let her lover hear the call and know that she is here. In other

words, she deliberately sends him a message, for he recognizes her voice; hearing the call, he knows that she is here.

This is using a secular poem to speak of Chan. Let us use this poem to ask in return: Who produces this calling voice? And who hears it? Are these not all functions of intrinsic nature? Are they not all manifestations of true nature? Chan Master Wuzu Fayan's citation of this poem contains profound meaning.

Originally, all forms and all sounds have no inherent meaning; they are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, all unobtainable. This accords with the first line, "for no reason at all." Yet everything is a function of intrinsic nature and a manifestation of true nature. This accords with the second line, "recognize her voice." Its purpose is to inspire us all to recognize our own Original Face.

Yuanwu Keqin, listening nearby, immediately had an awakening. As he left the abbot's quarters, a large rooster happened to crow loudly, "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" from atop the fence. Hearing it, Yuanwu Keqin was suddenly stirred to spiritual insight. Touching upon the word "voice" in Wuzu Fayan's phrase, "she only wants her beloved to recognize her voice," he suddenly attained great awakening. Is this not sound? This is the manifestation of intrinsic nature. No image can be apart from a mirror; once apart from the mirror, where could an image remain? Everything whatsoever is a function of true nature and a manifestation of true nature.

From the preceding explanations of several koans, we should not mistakenly interpret hearing sound at the eye as a supernormal power. Many practitioners like spiritual powers and often mistakenly believe that only when the ears can read characters, the eyes can hear sounds, and the six sense faculties function interchangeably and manifest spiritual powers can one hear insentient things expounding the Dharma.

They do not realize that insentient things expounding the Dharma is speaking without speaking. It is not a subtle sound that you can hear only when you no longer listen with your ears or look with your eyes.

Hearing sound at the eye is not a supernormal power. When Chan Master Dongshan said, "Only by hearing sound at the eye can one know," he meant that we should not abide in the ear faculty. Rather, amid sounds that can be heard without sound, where deluded thoughts do not arise, and where feelings are stirred by circumstances, we should turn the light inward and inwardly comprehend that this wondrous, lucid true mind—in which not a single thought arises—is precisely it.

When we recognize our own Original Face and understand that everything whatsoever is a function and manifestation of the true mind, then we can

understand that “the insentient are the sentient, and the sentient are the insentient.”

Mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, walls, tiles, and rubble are ourselves! Why? Are not mountains, rivers, and the great earth within empty space? Can they exist outside empty space? No. Our true mind is like empty space: however vast empty space is, so vast is our true mind.

The true mind pervades empty space and the entire dharma realm. The ten dharma realms are all within my mind, and everything in empty space is within my mind; therefore mountains, rivers, and the great earth are not outside my mind. The Zuo Commentary says, “Under all heaven, there is no land that is not the king’s land; along all the shores within his domain, there are none who are not the king’s subjects.”

I am a Buddha, and they too are Buddhas—all are Buddhas! Therefore, “the insentient are the sentient, and the sentient are the insentient.” Furthermore, insentient things are earth, water, fire, and wind. The earth, for example, is composed of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. The earth moves, rotating on its axis and revolving in orbit; movement is wind. It has a crust, which is hard; this is the earth element. There is water on its surface and underground; this is the water element. Its core contains intensely hot, molten material, and volcanoes often erupt on its surface; this is the fire element.

The earth possesses all four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind; it is formed by the four great elements. A “seed-nature” is so called because it can give rise to things; thus, the seed-natures of the four great elements can give rise to the myriad things. Our Buddha-nature possesses the seven great elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space, faculties, and consciousness; hence they are called the seven great elements.

All worldly things arise from these seven great elements: “sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of the seed.” Therefore, the insentient are the sentient, and the sentient are the insentient; whether sentient or insentient, all are ourselves. Since all are ourselves, what distinction remains between sentient and insentient? Once this principle is understood, we know that a table is also a Buddha, a chair is also a Buddha, a brick is also a Buddha, and a roof tile is also a Buddha. There is nothing that is not a Buddha. All sentient and insentient things are Buddhas!

We have discussed through koans that the insentient are the sentient, and that “sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of the seed.” Yet many people still do not fully understand. It is therefore necessary to explain further why sentient and insentient are the same, and in what respects they are the same. The following is a summary.

First: all insentient things are things of the wondrously luminous true mind. The true mind is the Buddha-mind; therefore, the insentient are the sentient. The true mind is not, as our deluded mind imagines, obscured by ignorance and shrunk into something as small as a body.

Once your practice opens it up, you discover that it originally pervades empty space and the entire dharma realm. However vast empty space is, so vast is the true mind. Chan Master Xuefeng Yicun said, “The true mind resembles an ancient mirror: however broad and vast empty space is, so broad and vast is the ancient mirror.”

Why is it said to resemble an ancient mirror? “Ancient mirror” means that it did not first come into being in the present age; it illustrates that our true mind has existed since beginningless time. And why is it compared to a mirror? Because a mirror can reflect the myriad things, and the profusion of all appearances can manifest in it. So too does our true mind illuminate the great thousandfold world, encompassing realms as numerous as the sands of the Ganges without obstruction.

“Realms as numerous as the sands” means immeasurable and boundless worlds, too numerous to count, like the sands of the Ganges. There are very many worlds in empty space. Science now proves that extraterrestrial beings exist, and that there is more than one star like the sun. The more advanced science becomes, the more it can prove that what the Buddha taught is true and not false.

Our true mind is like empty space, and all worlds are within our mind. Since the worlds are within our mind, are not insentient things also within our mind? For example, the houses we build are insentient. They are on the earth, the earth is in empty space, and therefore are not the houses also in empty space? Thus all insentient things are within my mind. Because they are within our mind, we say that our true mind spiritually contains the myriad things.

The myriad things are within my true mind, and the true mind is the Buddha-mind. If the myriad things are not Buddhas, what are they? Thus it is said that there is no distinction between insentient and sentient. Why must we understand this principle? Because once we understand that the insentient are the sentient, our mind-capacity becomes vast enough to contain the myriad things, and we no longer cling to appearances and grasp at them. Practice can then more easily advance. Therefore, we must have a correct and clear understanding that the insentient are the sentient. This is the first point.

Second: all insentient things are composed of the four great elements, and the four great elements are elemental seeds of the true mind. For example, the earth is insentient and is also composed of the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. The same is true of a great tree: it is composed of the four great elements and is insentient; neither has emotional attachment.

Does not the earth's movement—its rotation and revolution—constitute the wind element? Is not its hard crust the earth element? Are not the oceans on the surface and groundwater beneath the surface the water element? Is not the fire within the earth, which emerges in volcanic eruptions, the fire element? Thus all are earth, water, fire, and wind.

Trees are the same. When a tree sways incessantly, is that not because of the wind element? Its trunk is the earth element; if you strip away the bark, water comes forth —this is the water element. The tree itself has the nature of fire and can be burned —is that not the fire element? Thus, all are composed of the four great elements. Earth, water, fire, and wind are the basic elements of our buddha-nature; they are the natures of the four great elements.

A nature is a seed capable of giving rise to things, like rice seed and wheat seed. When rice seed is planted, it grows into rice; when wheat seed is planted, it grows into wheat. Thus, a seed means that which can generate and grow. Our buddha-nature, therefore, is an all-capable substance: all things are created by it, all things are devised by it, and all things are manifested by it. Hence, all things are our buddha-nature! Do not regard them as things outside ourselves; they are all ourselves!

Third point: Who discovers insentient things? Who makes them? Apart from our buddha-nature, they cannot be discovered. For example, suppose there is a tree here with a flower on it. If we do not look at it, who could know that there is a flower on the tree? Then who sees the flower? Is it the eye? It is not the eye.

Modern scientists also understand that it is not the eyes that see things, but the functioning of the brain. For if the brain does not function, the eyes cannot function and cannot see things. Yet scientists only know that the brain enables the six sense faculties to function; they cannot go a step further and know that the brain itself cannot function on its own.

The brain's nerves are merely like an electrical grid. To function, they still need an input of energy—electricity. If no energy is supplied, the brain has no motive power and cannot function. It is like an electric lamp: if the electrical energy does not come, it cannot shine.

What is this energy? It is our buddha-nature. When buddha-nature departs, although the brain remains, it cannot function. Thus, every word and action, every movement and gesture of ours, is the wondrous functioning of buddha-nature. Apart from buddha-nature, we cannot function. Therefore, our ability to see insentient things with our eyes is a manifestation of buddha-nature, and insentient things too are brought about by buddha-nature.

Why is this so? For example, we have a thought: How should this flower be planted and cultivated? We then study the techniques of growing flowers and cultivate them carefully, so that the flowers bloom luxuriantly. What else is this but the functioning of our buddha-nature? If a person's buddha-nature has departed, the body is like a stone. Could that person still use the mind? Could the hands and feet still move? Could flowers still be cultivated? Who built the houses? People built them.

If engineers, craftsmen, and masons were apart from buddha-nature, could their brains still operate, their hands and feet still move, and could they still design plans and construct houses? Thus, all insentient things are also manifestations of our buddha-nature; they are made by buddha-nature. Therefore, apart from buddha-nature, there are no insentient things at all. Could insentient things exist apart from buddha-nature? Absolutely not.

Therefore, insentient things are sentient beings; they are buddha-nature. These insentient things are like images reflected in a mirror, while the mirror is like our true mind and buddha-nature. Our true mind and buddha-nature are great perfect mirror wisdom, which illuminates the ten directions without obstruction; nothing in the worlds of the ten directions is not manifested or seen.

A mirror's reflecting objects is only an analogy; it is insufficient to describe great perfect mirror wisdom. Are the things before us, or the light appearing before our eyes, great perfect mirror wisdom? No, no—they are still far from it. A mirror can manifest images, and the mirror of mind can illuminate all appearances. Images cannot be apart from a mirror. Can an image leave the mirror? Apart from the mirror, the image no longer exists.

An image cannot be apart from a mirror, and appearances cannot be apart from mind. Apart from mind, appearances have nowhere to manifest; without images, there would be no mirror. Likewise, apart from appearances, the true mind would have no means of manifesting itself. The true mind has no appearance that can be seen; it must manifest through phenomenal appearances. Thus, the true mind can bring forth all things, and, conversely, all things manifest the true mind. Mind and appearances are subtle in this way. Therefore, mind is appearance and appearance is mind; an image is the mirror and the mirror is the image. Thus, insentient things are sentient beings. This is the third point.

Fourth point: Insentient things are originally buddha-nature. It is only because of ignorance and nonawakening that we mistakenly take a small portion of the four great elements to be our bodies, discard the vast majority of the four great elements as things outside the body, and designate them as insentient. Hence arises the deluded discrimination between sentient and insentient.

From the examples analyzed above, we can see that all insentient things are originally manifestations of buddha-nature. Sentient beings, simply because of ignorance, unknowingly take a small portion of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind—as their own physical bodies, while discarding more than ninety percent of the four great elements outside themselves as things external to the body. They therefore distinguish:

"This is sentient, and that is insentient." In fact, everything is oneself. This is the fault of ignorance! Therefore, if we practice effectively and break through ignorance, we will realize that mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests—none is other than ourselves.

Taking myself as the center, you and everything around me are images within my mind; taking you as the center, all this is an image within your minds. As a saying aptly puts it: "Each sentient being fully possesses the dharma realm." What does "the full body of the dharma realm" mean? The dharma realm is the One True Dharma Realm, which is also the true mind. When everything is complete and not even the slightest bit is lacking, this is called the full body.

Full in what sense? Fully possessed by each sentient being, while sentient beings may each possess it. You are you, I am I, and he is he; Zhang San is Zhang San, and Li Si is Li Si. What does each possess? Each possesses the full body of the dharma realm: every person has the true mind, lacking not the slightest fraction.

For example, you are in my mirror and I am in yours; we mutually encompass one another without obstruction. Again, suppose there are many electric lamps in a room: the light of this lamp and the light of that lamp merge with one another, and each light encompasses the others without mutual rejection. From this we may know that insentient things and sentient beings are one body. It is only because we are ignorant and unawakened that we falsely give rise to discrimination. Once ignorance is broken through, we can truly realize the wondrous functioning of the true mind and will no longer regard insentient things as external objects.

Fifth point: Insentient things are earth, wood, metal, and stone. If we practice improperly and suppress deluded thoughts to death, we become insentient, becoming earth, wood, metal, and stone. Earth, wood, metal, and stone are one of the twelve classes of living beings. The Diamond Sūtra speaks of ten classes of living beings, while the Śūraṅgama Sūtra speaks of twelve.

Some say that the six realms of rebirth are all sentient and have nothing whatsoever to do with insentient things. But in fact, if you practice improperly, or engage in the practices of a non-Buddhist path and suppress yourself to death, you may also turn into earth, wood, metal, and stone, becoming insentient. From this perspective, are sentient beings not also insentient?

Therefore, once we understand that mountains, rivers, the great earth, men and women, young and old, sentient and insentient—all are manifestations of our buddha-nature and are all ourselves, our practice must be empty, luminous, and non-abiding: neither grasping nor indulging. Not grasping means that, when deluded thoughts arise, we do not suppress them and forbid them to move, thereby becoming earth, wood, metal, and stone. Not indulging means that we do not let deluded thoughts arise recklessly and wander through birth and death.

With regard to deluded thoughts, neither suppress nor follow them. Let them come; I pay them no heed. Deluded thoughts are not absent; they are present. Deluded thoughts formed over countless kalpas and lives—do you imagine that as soon as you begin practicing, they will disappear? That is hardly easy; it cannot be done. Therefore, in our practice we first cut off coarse delusions. Coarse delusions are the false thoughts produced when we respond to circumstances with a discriminating mind.

How do we quell coarse delusions? We must know that circumstances are unobtainable; they are all shadows manifested by our intrinsic nature. Our true mind is the mirror, and everything else is an image. Hold to the mirror; do not grasp the images. If we do not cling to shadowy appearances, the true mind does not move, deluded thoughts do not arise, and coarse delusions cease. If coarse delusions do not cease, your sitting meditation is in vain.

For example, while sitting in meditation, you think about this and that concerning your son, or about how your daughter is doing, and then you cannot sit well. If your thoughts further proliferate—how to spend your money, what things to buy, how cheap the goods are somewhere, how one person is good and another bad, and so forth—can you still sit well? You cannot.

Coarse delusions must cease. Do not concern yourself with the images in your mind. Images in a mirror cannot be grasped. Someone may say, “The images in a mirror cannot be grasped, but I can grasp the things that appear before me. Look, I have grasped this pen.”

Ah, you are dreaming! This is a dream state. Things in a dream do indeed seem to be grasped: delicious food seems to be eaten, one talks happily with good friends, and one feels alarmed and afraid upon meeting enemies. But when the dream ends, there is nothing at all. What we are experiencing now is a dream state. Do not cling to appearances; none of it can be grasped.

When a single breath does not return, nothing can be taken away. Since you will have no choice but to let go in the future, why not let go early and save some mental effort? If you wish to awaken, you must practice.

Those who recite the Buddha's name and those who uphold mantras must concentrate their mindfulness and cut off deluded thoughts, so that body, mind, and world all vanish and dissolve into emptiness. Only the clear, ever-present true mind then appears before them. It is like awakening from a dream: everything seen and obtained in the dream becomes empty and is gone. What could there be to grasp? Thus, all present appearances are mere shadows—never objects to be sought!

Therefore, it is necessary to explain this clearly to you now, so that you may understand the principle that sentient beings are insentient things. Do not engage in deluded discrimination; let go, let go. Insentient things are sentient beings, and sentient beings are insentient things—what appearance is there still to cling to?

If you truly apply yourselves wholeheartedly, it will be easy to enter samādhi when you sit down to practice. Once coarse delusions have been cut off, subtle delusions will still come to intrude. Do not fear them, nor suppress them; simply disregard them. At the point where deluded thoughts cease, the true mind manifests. “When arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent cessation appears before one.” This is nirvāṇa.

Neither arising nor ceasing is nirvāṇa; continual arising and ceasing is the deluded mind. When all deluded thoughts and deluded emotions have been extinguished, this buddha-nature that neither arises nor ceases manifests.

Why is it that you cannot sit properly when practicing? You must reflect on yourself: What is your mind still clinging to? Why do you still cling to it? Quickly let it go! Everything is but a shadow within our minds—why cling to it? It cannot be grasped; it is false, it is empty. Let it go! If you truly let go, whether you recite the Buddha’s name or uphold a mantra, subject and object will both vanish, the sense faculties and their objects will fall away, and your buddha-nature will naturally reveal itself in awakening.

Whether you have seen your true nature or not, do not ask others; experience it for yourself. The supreme flavor of awakening is like a mute person dreaming: it cannot be told to others, though one understands it inwardly.

I have repeatedly discussed the question of form and formlessness, striving to explain it clearly and thoroughly. My purpose is to ensure that everyone’s view is correct. This is precisely the essential meaning of first establishing the view in Mahāmudrā. Taking understanding and view as its principle is the heart of the Buddhadharma. Only when one’s view is correct and one recognizes what buddha-nature is can one readily begin the work of practice. If one does not recognize buddha-nature, one cannot avoid practicing blindly. Thus, Mahāmudrā is not merely

a mudrā and a mantra for us to practice; it first explains the principle of the view, corrects one's understanding, and enables one to recognize what buddha-nature is.

From the foregoing discussion, I believe everyone has now understood such questions as why the insentient are precisely the sentient, why all insentient things are Buddhas, and how "the sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of all-aspects."

Once you truly understand that "the sentient and insentient alike perfect the wisdom of all-aspects," then, if someone asks you, "What is Buddha?" you will not be left staring blankly and at a loss. Simply point to any object. Above heaven and below earth, above the sun and below the moon, inside and outside the window, bright flowers and dark willows—all these insentient things are Buddha! Whatever you casually pick up becomes a wondrous truth; how convenient that is.

Above, we discussed the insentient expounding the Dharma. How do the insentient expound the Dharma? We explained one level of principle: dharmas that can be spoken in words or heard as sounds are not the true Dharma. The true Dharma is beyond speaking: "The path of words is cut off, and the way of mental activity is extinguished." That is, words cannot reach it and thought cannot grasp it. Any dharma involving words and speech is not the true Dharma.

Although we cannot hear the insentient expounding the Dharma, they are indeed expounding it, because the greatest sound is rarely heard. Non-speaking is true speaking; non-hearing is true hearing. Hearing sound is not the true Dharma. Thus it is said, "If you listen with the ears, you will ultimately find it hard to comprehend; only when the eyes hear sound can it be known."

You may have a question in your mind: If no sound can be heard, how can it be said that the insentient are expounding the Dharma? Because the truly wondrous, profound, and subtle meaning cannot be expressed; it can only be apprehended in silent understanding and known spiritually.

If you abide in words and speech, you will not realize the true meaning. Hence it is said, "If you listen with the ears, you will ultimately find it hard to comprehend." Do not abide in sound! The wondrous meaning cannot be heard: "Only when the eyes hear sound can it be known." Why? The insentient expound the Dharma when circumstances stir feeling and the mind receives the meaning: it is a subtle spiritual state in which the mind opens and meaning is understood through hearing without hearing.

When, in practice and inquiry, you reach the point of non-speaking and non-hearing, where deluded thoughts do not arise, you can encounter circumstances, have your feelings stirred, and grasp their profound meaning. Just as Dongshan asked his two

teachers, “Can you hear the insentient expounding the Dharma?” Both teachers gave the same answer: “If I could hear it, you would not hear me expounding the Dharma.”

This means that true hearing is non-hearing. If I could hear it, I would be attached to appearances; and if I were attached to appearances, I would not be qualified to expound the Dharma to you. This was the point explained last time; we can add something further.

The true dharmakāya of all Buddhas is without speaking and hearing. The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not the true Buddha; they involve speaking and hearing. Therefore, “The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma.” If there is speaking and hearing, can one still remain attached to words and speech? As just explained, if I could hear, I would be the same as all Buddhas—I would be a Buddha. The true dharmakāya of all Buddhas is without speaking; therefore, I could not expound the Dharma here. If I can expound the Dharma, then I am not the same as all Buddhas. This is another level of meaning.

We ordinary beings are attached to appearances at every moment. Whenever the eyes see an object or the ears hear a sound, we immediately use our own views to discriminate good and bad, beauty and ugliness. Those who have truly seen their nature, amid all sounds and forms, see without seeing and hear without hearing. But if one abides in the dust of sound or in forms and appearances, one becomes an ordinary being.

Therefore, it is said that if I could hear, I could not expound the Dharma to you. If I heard, I would be attached to appearances. Once attached to appearances, would I still be qualified to expound the Dharma to you? No. Below, I shall summarize several meanings implicit in the patriarch’s words:

First, if I could hear, I would be attached to the dust of sound and would have something to which I abide. Subject and object would stand opposed, attachment to dharmas would not have been eliminated, and I would not be a person of the Way; thus, I would not be qualified to expound the Dharma.

Second, if I could hear, I would be the same as the insentient. The insentient take non-speaking as true speaking, not verbal speech; therefore, you would not hear me expounding the Dharma.

Third, if I could hear, I would be equal to the sages. Yet the reward and manifestation bodies of the sages are not the true Buddha, nor are they the ones who teach the Dharma. The true dharmakāya of the sages is without speaking and hearing. What I now say to you is merely an expedient means of guiding you.

III. The Five Ranks of Lord and Minister in the Caodong School

We discuss these principles in order to help you all understand that forms and sounds cannot be grasped, so that you may at all times empty and purify your minds and preserve the true mind. Without preserving the true mind, one cannot realize the Way. To preserve the true mind, one must first have correct understanding and view, and see the true mind's intrinsic nature. Why must this be so? We may use the Chan school to verify it.

Someone may ask: The Ganges Mahāmudrā of which we speak belongs to Esoteric Buddhism, so how can we use Chan koans from The Compendium of the Five Lamps to verify it? Because the principles taught in Esoteric Buddhism are exactly the same as those of the Chan school and the Pure Land school, without the slightest difference.

In all schools of the Buddhadharma, terminology may differ, but the ultimate principle is the same. Thus Pure Land is Esoteric Buddhism, Esoteric Buddhism is Chan, and Chan is Pure Land. All are methods for realizing the Way taught by the Buddha; only the means employed differ, while the fruition they realize is not different.

The Ganges Mahāmudrā is the highest vehicle of Esoteric Buddhism and is very close to the Chan school. Therefore, it must be verified through Chan principles. Among the five houses of Chan, what is taught by the Caodong school corresponds most closely with Esoteric Buddhism. The Caodong school teaches the Five Ranks of Lord and Minister, five positions by which we open the Buddha's knowledge and vision from the knowledge and vision of ordinary beings.

Opening the Buddha's knowledge and vision is the stage of seeing the Way. The next stage is the stage of cultivating the Way; after that comes the stage of realizing the Way, in which the fruition of Buddhahood is attained. The five positions include these three successive stages—the stage of seeing the Way, the stage of cultivating the Way, and the stage of realizing the Way—and this is the same as what Mahāmudrā teaches. Mahāmudrā likewise begins with the stage of seeing the Way.

How does the Caodong school see the Way? It speaks of the upright position and the partial position. The upright position represents essence, emptiness, and principle; the partial position represents function, form, and phenomena.

The first position: "Within the upright, there is the partial. Before the moon shines in the first watch of the night, do not blame us for meeting without recognizing one another; faintly, old resentments still remain." This is the position of ordinary beings. Ordinary beings are like the night before the moon appears in the first watch: utterly dark.

Why? Because they do not know what buddha-nature is. They recognize only external forms, and, covered by ignorance, their minds are entirely dark. “Do not blame us for meeting without recognizing one another”: every moment, we dwell within buddha-nature and meet buddha-nature, yet we do not recognize it.

In our everyday activities of eating, drinking, rising, and resting, if buddha-nature were not functioning, how could we move at all? For example, when we rise in the morning, wash our faces, brush our teeth, go out, buy vegetables, go to work, and carry out our duties—who is doing these things? Who is this? We may as well ask ourselves as Chan asks, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?”

You say: if it is not intrinsic nature, then who is it? Since it is intrinsic nature, why do we meet without recognizing one another? Do not complain that intrinsic nature is difficult to recognize. In truth, it is because we are attached to appearances, ignorant, and without wisdom. Ignorance is like the dark night: in the vast darkness, how could we recognize one another when we meet? “Faintly, old resentments still remain”: “faintly” means not clearly apparent.

The habitual tendencies of ordinary attachment are faintly at work there. We merely greedily seek, pursue, and cling to external things, unwilling to turn the light inward and examine who it is that can move and who it is that can function. If we can turn the light inward and ask, “Who is this?” then we will recognize it.

Thus, “within the upright, there is the partial” means that we originally abide in the upright position of principle and buddha-nature, but because we are unaware of it, we fall into the partial position and become attached to phenomenal appearances there. The upright position is the essence of principle; the partial position is form and appearance. The upright is emptiness; the partial is existence. Emptiness and existence, principle and phenomena, essence and appearance are all relative. This is the partial within the upright: attachment to the partial position. The five great schools of Chan differ in their methods of guiding people, but the principles taught by the Caodong school are easy to understand. This is the first position—the position of ordinary beings, who do not recognize buddha-nature.

The second position: “Within the partial, there is the upright. At dawn, an old woman encounters an ancient mirror; clearly face to face, there is no other reality—do not, still deluded, mistake the reflection for your head.” This is the stage of seeing the Way. In the everyday activities of the partial position, the essence of principle now appears: amid dressing and eating, one realizes at every moment that it is one’s own buddha-nature that is functioning. One has seen the Way; this is the stage of seeing the Way.

Earlier, we spoke of complete darkness; now there is brightness. “Dawn” means daybreak: the sky is about to grow light, and sunlight appears. The phrase “old

woman" is wonderfully expressive. What does "old woman" mean? An old woman has white hair; as day is about to break, whiteness becomes visible. "Encountering an ancient mirror" means looking into a mirror. A mirror is bright and thus symbolizes light.

When an old woman encounters an ancient mirror, dawn has broken and brightness has appeared. When practitioners exert themselves to this dawning light, they see their own intrinsic nature. Thus it is said, "At dawn, an old woman encounters an ancient mirror." "Clearly face to face, there is no other reality" means that a reflection appears in the mirror. "Clearly" means plainly and distinctly; "face to face" means directly before one another.

You meet face to face with the reflection in the mirror. The reflection appearing in the mirror is you, and you are the mirror. Apart from this reflection, is there any other reality? There is none. Thus it is said, "Clearly face to face, there is no other reality."

For example, when Master Lingyun opened the door and saw a stretch of peach blossoms in full bloom, he was suddenly greatly awakened: "Ah! If it is not my own nature that manifests this appearance, then whose manifestation is it? Apart from my own nature, where could these peach blossoms be seen? Conversely, apart from the image of the peach blossoms, how could the mirror of my own nature be manifested?" Thus, with a backward glance of the light, he recognized that what was plainly before his face was nothing other than the true reality, and he saw his original nature. Likewise, Patriarch Dongshan awakened when he saw his own reflection while crossing a river.

Earlier, he had asked about insentient things expounding the Dharma. His teacher explained it to him, and although he had some awakening, he did not yet understand it thoroughly and still had some doubts.

One day, as he was about to cross a river, he lowered his head to roll up his trouser legs and saw his own reflection appear in the water. "Ah!" Only then was he suddenly greatly awakened, and he composed this verse: "Never seek it from another, for it will grow ever more distant from you. Now I go on alone; everywhere I encounter it. It is now precisely I, yet I am not it. One must understand in this way to accord with suchness."

What does this verse mean? "Never seek it from another" means that when we cultivate the Dharma and study the Way, we should not chase after things outside ourselves or seek from others. Only what we awaken to ourselves is real. For example, those of us who recite the Buddha's name recite Amitābha Buddha's name and pray to Amitābha Buddha in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss: "Come pull me along! Come pull me along!"

This is seeking from another, and it is incorrect. Therefore, Master Lianchi said that Buddha-recitation is “with every sound, awakening the master of the house.”

Buddha-recitation is meant to awaken the master of our own house. Do not remain confused, do not fall asleep, and do not cling to appearances; be awake! The myriad appearances are all images within the mind; do not cling to appearances! Our capacity for awareness is Buddha-nature; it is Amitābha Buddha. To seek from another is to seek outwardly.

To pray outwardly and ask Amitābha Buddha to pull you along is mistaken. Amitābha Buddha gives rise to the great compassion that is without conditions: there is no one he does not receive and no one he does not save. But he does not pull you along; rather, he emits light to illuminate and guide you. You need only enter that light. To expect Amitābha Buddha to come and pull you along will not do.

Therefore, Chan Master Yongming Yanshou said: “When a practitioner’s pure karma has matured, the mind-ground is pure and accords with the Buddha; only then does one see the Buddha appear before one and guide one to rebirth in the West. Though the Buddha appears before one, there is in fact no coming or going. It is like the moon in the sky, appearing simultaneously in a thousand rivers and ten thousand waters, while the moon itself is not divided. The mind is like water: if the mind is impure, it is like turbid water, in which no reflection appears.”

“Therefore, one whose mind is confused and disordered is like a person blind from birth who cannot see the sun, even though the Buddha emits light to guide them.”

The Buddha is like the moon in the sky, while the mind with which we recite the Buddha’s name is like water. If the water is clear, the moon’s reflection appears in it, and the image of the Buddha appears in your mind. If the mind that recites the Buddha’s name is impure, then although the moon shines upon you just the same, your mind is like muddy, polluted water, and the moon’s reflection cannot appear. Amitābha Buddha is no longer seen.

Therefore, “Never seek it from another.” If you look and seek outwardly, it will “grow ever more distant from you.” To seek outside the mind is to be a hundred and eight thousand li away from Buddha-nature.

Buddha-nature is nowhere else; it shines from your very face. Who is it that sees things? Who is it that hears sounds? Who is it that smells fragrance and stench? Who is it that speaks? Who is it that moves? If this is not my Buddha-nature, what is it? Why seek it from another? “Now I go on alone” means that, wherever and whenever I may be, I neither grasp nor reject external things. Everything is “alone,” absolute; no duality and no opposites are seen.

The absolute true mind is “alone”: absolute, without a single thing, and without opposites. When Emperor Wu of Liang asked, “What is the highest meaning of the noble truth?” Patriarch Bodhidharma replied, “Vast emptiness—nothing holy.” Emperor Wu then asked, “Who is standing before me?” The Patriarch replied, “I do not know.”

Why did he say, “I do not know”? Knowing is relative: you know me, and I know you. But I am one alone—the absolute true mind. It is absolute; who is there to know whom? With the absolute true mind, to speak of knowing or not knowing is to speak from two sides.

If one can be like this, then “everywhere I encounter it”: at all times and in all places, this absolute true mind can manifest, and at all times and in all places one can see the self-nature of suchness. “It is now precisely I”: it refers to the reflection. Mountains, rivers, the great earth, the sun, moon, stars, and all other things are none other than my reflections; all are my manifestations.

But “I am not it”: this dharmakāya of mine is without appearance. Although all reflections are my manifestations, I am not the reflections. That is, although all these appearances are none other than me, I am not any of these appearances, because the dharmakāya is without appearance. Even if you were to remove all appearances, since none of them is me, I would not be diminished in the least.

Therefore, do not cling to appearances. All appearances are unobtainable; not establishing a single dharma is correct. “One must understand in this way to accord with suchness.” Practitioners should understand in this way; only then can the true mind abide constantly and accord with the unmoving suchness, without being swayed by any circumstances or objects.

No place is apart from my true mind; it follows like a shadow follows a form. Therefore, at every moment we should not pursue anything outwardly. To recite the Buddha’s name is to be mindful of one’s own mind. To recite Amitābha Buddha’s name is to awaken one’s own mind and cease clinging to appearances.

“When the old woman who had lost her dawn encounters an ancient mirror, what is plainly before her face is nothing other than the true.” This is you! If you leave it and seek elsewhere, you will not find it; there will be nothing. Therefore, we repeatedly point out to you all that this true mind and aware nature are oneself; apart from them, there is nothing at all.

If you think that what lacks the five supernormal powers—divine eye, divine ear, knowledge of past lives, knowledge of others’ minds, and spiritual travel—is not the true mind and aware nature, then you are mistaken.

Although, through instruction, you have recognized the wondrously luminous fundamental essence—the true mind and aware nature—you still have a great many habitual tendencies of deluded thoughts and attachments accumulated over countless lives and kalpas, and they have not yet been removed. How could supernormal powers arise all at once? It is like a mirror covered with a thick accumulation of dust: how can it reflect things? You must wipe and polish it until it is bright, and then it can shine forth clearly.

But first you must obtain the mirror. If you do not obtain the mirror, what could you wipe or polish? Therefore, after receiving instruction and recognizing what the wondrously luminous fundamental essence is, you must diligently remove habitual tendencies, restore the luminosity of our fundamental essence, and then bring forth its various wondrous functions, accomplish the great Way, and fully possess all spiritual powers.

Therefore, Chan Master Guifeng said: “Recognize the frozen pond as entirely water—delusion in its entirety is itself true—and borrow the warmth of the sun to melt it away. Awaken to the fact that the ordinary being is itself Buddha—ordinary beings are Buddhas—and rely on the power of the Dharma for permeating cultivation—only after awakening can one cultivate. When the ice melts, the water flows and moistens, thus revealing its power to irrigate and cleanse. When delusion is exhausted, the mind becomes empty and unobstructed—falsehood is swept away and defilement cleared—and its function of responding, manifesting, and radiating unobstructed light appears, clearly illuminating the myriad things and the whole universe. Supernormal transformations in phenomena cannot be accomplished in a single day; they emerge through gradual permeating cultivation.”

In studying Buddhism and cultivating the Dharma, the first essential is to recognize one’s original nature and be certain that this which can speak and act is our true mind. Stand firm at the root, without the slightest doubt; then safeguard it well, bring it forth in full radiance, and realize the noble fruition. Mahāmudrā requires us first to affirm Buddha-nature and then begin the work of practice.

If this point cannot be affirmed, one will have no way to begin later, and the practice cannot be accomplished. Therefore, Patriarch Dongshan spoke well: “What is plainly before one’s face is nothing other than the true.” Apart from this reflection, if you seek elsewhere, there is nothing to find. Buddha-nature is our capacity for awareness: the capacity that knows cold and warmth, shade and sunshine, fullness and hunger, pain and itch. You must safeguard it at every moment.

The final line, “Do not remain deluded, mistaking the reflection for the head,” means that you yourselves should no longer be deluded and should no longer chase after

reflections. The story of mistaking the reflection for the head is an example spoken by the Buddha in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra.

The Buddha said that in the city of Śrāvastī there was an actor named Yajñadatta. One day, he looked into a mirror and saw only the face made up for performance reflected in it, but did not see his own Original Face. Mistaking it for a monster, he was so frightened that he ran about wildly for no reason and went outside to search for his head. Yet his head was still upon his shoulders and had never been lost.

This is a metaphor to urge us not to be deluded by external appearances and thereby mistake our Original Face. Yet you still mistake reflections for reality at every moment. In fact, those reflections are illusory appearances manifested by you; why take the false for the true? Women find it hardest to let go of their children and think of them all day long.

And what about men? The young are fond of girlfriends, while the old are fond of money. Confucius said well: "When young, before one's vital energies are settled, one should guard against sexual desire. … When old, as one's vital energies decline, one should guard against acquisitiveness." All this is greedily mistaking reflections for reality. Do not mistake reflections for reality. Let go. "Do not remain deluded, mistaking the reflection for the head" means that amid the myriad false appearances—the biased—one recognizes the true mind—the upright—and is no longer deluded by reflections. This is the second position: the upright within the biased—the stage of seeing the Way.

The third position is: "Coming from within the upright: from within emptiness there is a path that leaves the dust. If only one does not violate the present taboo, one surpasses the eloquent worthies of former dynasties whose tongues were cut out." This is the stage of cultivation. Previously, we discussed the stage of seeing the Way. The upright is the upright position, the upright position being the essential principle. To arise from the essential principle and function within activity, tempering oneself in function until one's habitual tendencies are entirely worn away—this is coming from within the upright.

"From within emptiness there is a path that leaves the dust." We say that all things are nonexistent and empty, but this nonexistence and emptiness are not annihilationist emptiness or absolute nothingness. This nonexistence, this emptiness, is the essential principle of not clinging to any appearance. If at every moment you can be empty and not cling to appearances, and follow this path, you can leave the three realms and emerge from saṃsāra.

In truth, when we are empty, empty, empty at every moment, it is not the emptiness that stands in opposition to existence; it is not annihilationist emptiness. Do not fear

falling into emptiness. The ancients said: “Empty, empty, empty—in emptiness one achieves success. Once the roots have been cultivated, why fear snow and wind?”

When the mind is truly empty and pure, Buddha-nature manifests. Before us appears a bright, broad road by which we can leave behind the dusty realm of the three realms.

We sentient beings are all amid the dust of the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm, revolving through the six realms with no end in sight. If we can truly stand firm at every moment, clearly recognize our own intrinsic nature, and constantly safeguard it, then whenever a thought arises, immediately become aware of it and remove it, we can leave the three realms, emerge from the sea of suffering, and accomplish the great Way.

For example, when deluded thoughts arise in those of us who recite the Buddha’s name, we raise the Buddha’s name: “Amitābha Buddha.” This cuts off your deluded thoughts, cuts off your attachments, and cuts off your afflictions. When anger flares up, immediately recite “Amitābha Buddha.” If that is still not effective, recite “Amitābha Buddha” aloud or loudly. In this way, you cut off your afflictions.

If you do not do this, you will be carried away by circumstances, with deluded thoughts flying about without cease. How can you realize the Way? Therefore, the first essential is to recognize your own Original Face and know that it is the appearance of the formless, an all-capable essence that can give rise to wondrous functioning. Constantly safeguard it and temper yourself amid all favorable and adverse circumstances. Only then can you attain liberation. This is most important. Hence the saying, “Within nonbeing there is a road that leads beyond the dust.”

“If one can simply avoid touching the taboos of the present age, that is better than the eloquence of having one’s tongue cut out under a former dynasty.” This is even better put. What is a taboo? When people give names, they observe naming taboos. For example, if an emperor’s name contains the character zheng ( ), then your own names may not use that character; it must be avoided, for one may not have the same name as the emperor.

Likewise, if the names of your father or grandfather contain the character ming ( ), then your own name may not use ming; it should be avoided, since it is inappropriate to share a name with one’s elders. “Not touching the present ruler”: the present ruler means the emperor. This serves as an analogy for our Buddha-nature; that is, one must never violate it.

Take my fist as an example. To call it a fist is to offend it, but if it is a fist and you do not call it a fist, you violate it. To offend it is wrong, and to violate it is also wrong. What does it mean not to offend it? It means that when one has truly applied

oneself in practice and recognized one's own Buddha-nature, one must still not keep saying, "This is my Buddha-nature."

To abide in Buddha-nature is also unacceptable. Even if one's practice reaches the point where awareness itself is gone, one must not abide there. Thus it is said: "If there is awareness and illumination, one is still within birth and death and cannot attain liberation. To abide in a sacred state is also conditioned and cannot be ultimate." Ordinary beings, to be sure, have neither awareness nor illumination; all day long they are muddled and confused, as though dreaming.

Laozi once said, "People of the world are clear and sharp; I alone am muddled." If the people of the world are all muddled and confused, how can they be called clear and sharp? Those who are "clear and sharp" are clever in pursuit of fame and profit. But by "muddled," Laozi meant that one's practice has reached the ultimate point: great wisdom seems like foolishness, and there is not the slightest abiding.

Therefore, in practice one must both recognize one's intrinsic nature and not abide in it, thinking that one has attained something. This is what "not offending the present" means. The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: "At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it. Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing. In the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality." Only when practice reaches this point is it ultimate.

Thus, in the end, even a Buddha cannot be obtained. "Cannot be obtained" does not mean that one does not become a Buddha; it is precisely becoming a Buddha. For Buddha is also merely a provisional name, and not a single thread is obtainable. If you suppose that there is a Buddha to be attained, you have not yet become a Buddha. As the teacher of Chan Master Dongshan said in the koan mentioned earlier: "If I were to hear the insentient speak the Dharma, I would be equal to all the sages."

To be equal to all the sages means that there is a Buddha in my mind; but if there is a Buddha, that is not the true Buddha. Therefore, even the view that one is equal to the Buddha entails an obstacle at the stage of Buddhahood. Thus, only when you have not even the knowledge and views of Buddha, when everything is entirely clear and pure, is there true purity. Hence: "So long as one does not offend the present taboo, one surpasses the talented men of former dynasties who had their tongues cut out."

There is an allusion here. Long ago, there was a man whose name I have forgotten. His wisdom was extraordinarily great. When the emperor and corrupt ministers cut out his tongue, he used the blood from his severed tongue to write characters. Yet our realization of the Way far surpasses the talent of a man with a severed tongue.

Such talent is only worldly cleverness and eloquence, a small wisdom; prajñā is great wisdom. This concerns practice—the third position.

The fourth position is: “Arriving within the reciprocal. When two blades meet in combat, there is no need to evade them. A skilled hand is like a lotus in fire, naturally possessing the aspiration to soar to the heavens.” Some say it was originally not called “arriving within the reciprocal.” Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie said “arriving within the reciprocal,” but this was perhaps a printing error; it should be “arriving within the biased.” I believe this explanation is correct.

“Arriving within the reciprocal” means that the upright and biased are combined, that is, joined together. The third position, “coming from within the upright,” indicates that one functions from within the noumenal essence of the upright position. The fourth position should then explain that, amid the everyday affairs of the biased position, one can achieve the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena. Therefore, “arriving within the biased” is correct. “Arriving within the biased” means that, throughout the day while engaged in affairs, one does not depart from the upright position, achieves the nonobstruction of principle and phenomena, fears neither adverse circumstances nor afflictions, and gives rise to wondrous functioning. This too is a stage of cultivating the Way.

“When two blades meet in combat, there is no need to evade them.” In battle, when swords and spears come and go, do not be afraid and need not dodge them. This is an analogy for not fearing or becoming troubled amid any adverse circumstance. If there is a disobedient child in your household, you should not become distressed.

Ah! None of this can be obtained—none of it can be obtained. Let the child be disobedient; you need only spend a little more money. Go ahead and spend it, because I owe you a debt; when one owes a debt, one repays it. It is only right. It does not matter, so do not become troubled.

“When two blades meet in combat, there is no need to evade them.” When adversity comes, can you evade it? You cannot, so there is “no need to evade.” Speaking of evasion recalls a koan. A disciple asked Chan Master Dongshan, “When cold and heat come, how can one avoid them?” Chan Master Dongshan said, “Go to the place where there is neither cold nor heat.”

The disciple again asked, “What is the place where there is neither cold nor heat?” Dongshan said, “When it is cold, the venerable one freezes to death; when it is hot, the venerable one swelters to death!” What does this mean? When it is warm, do not form the thought of warmth; when it is cold, do not form the thought of cold. If thoughts of cold and warmth arise, discriminating mind arises, and afflictions appear before you.

What should one do when adversity stands before one? Two lines of poetry put it well: “Make the boiling cauldrons and charcoal furnaces cease with a single breath; command the sword trees and knife mountains to crumble with a single shout.” Boiling cauldrons, charcoal furnaces, sword trees, and knife mountains—I do not fear them in my mind. With one breath I make them cease; with one great shout I destroy them. Let adversity come as it may: if my mind does not move, it ceases.

Take note: this does not mean that, when adversity comes, I think about how to evade it, nor does it mean trying to eliminate afflictions. Rather, we must let our minds rest. Nothing matters; nothing can be obtained; there is nothing to fear. If you want to kill me, then come and kill me: “I offer my head to the white blade, as though a spring breeze were being cut.” My mind does not move. Let adversity come as it may; I do not evade it—this is “when two blades meet in combat, there is no need to evade them.” My mind does not waver and is not afraid—this is what “make them cease with a breath; command them to crumble with a shout” means.

“Arriving within the reciprocal” concerns the stage of cultivating the Way. Cultivating the Way means constantly tempering ourselves amid adverse circumstances, neither startled nor fearful, and able to withstand tests. Only then can we realize the wondrous fruition through genuine practice. Thus: “A skilled hand is like a lotus in fire, naturally possessing the aspiration to soar to the heavens.” One who is truly skillful is one whose practice has advanced; such a person is not like a lotus blooming in a pond, but like a lotus blooming in fire. Therefore, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao said that lay practitioners have twenty times the strength of monastics.

Chan Master Dahui Zonggao was an outstanding great patriarch of the Chan school. He said, “Such great elders as Yang Wengong, Li Wenhe, and Zhang Wujin thoroughly penetrated it; their strength surpassed that of us monastics twentyfold.” These three were lay practitioners of the time who had realized the Way.

Why did Chan Master Dahui say this? Because our habitual tendencies are heavy. We have both discriminative attachment to self and discriminative attachment to dharmas, and moreover the innate twofold attachments to self and dharmas. Even if one suddenly opens to one’s original nature and directly realizes Buddha-nature, the innate twofold attachments have not yet been cast off. The third verse of the Consciousness-Only Verses says: “Upon arousing the initial resolve and reaching the Ground of Joy, the innate [attachments] still manifest, binding and dormant.”

Without undergoing a period of arduous tempering after awakening, and without wearing away the innate twofold attachments amid circumstances and affairs, one cannot easily reach the ultimate ground. Monastics have “one robe and one bowl; in their daily responses to conditions, they do not have so many hostile adversaries that obstruct the Way. With one mind, they investigate this matter.” But laypeople,

“whether opening or closing their eyes, encounter nothing but resentful foes that obstruct the Way.”

Monastics “fight their way in from outside,” while laypeople “fight their way out from inside.” What do “inside” and “outside” mean here? Inside what, and outside what? They refer to worldly dust and toil. Worldly dust and toil are like “a great mass of fire,” conditions that obstruct the Way.

Monastics dwell in a pure place where they are not burdened by family and relatives. They are like those outside a great fire, like white lotuses in a pond. Laypeople dwell amid worldly dust and toil. They are like those inside a great fire; if they can realize the Way, they are like red lotuses in fire. Chan Master Dahui said, “Those who fight their way in from outside have weaker strength; those who fight their way out from inside have stronger strength.”

All sages throughout history who realized the Way endured every hardship, suffered greatly, labored greatly, and underwent all manner of trials before realizing the Way. If one fears hardship and fatigue, and cannot withstand the tempering and testing of adverse circumstances, one cannot realize the Way.

Our fundamental teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha, also endured every hardship and underwent all manner of trials. At last, seated beneath the bodhi tree, he made a great vow: “If I do not realize the great Way, I will never rise from this seat!” Then, on the night of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, he saw the morning star and realized the great Way.

In a previous life, even when King Kali cut and mutilated Śākyamuni Buddha’s body, his mind did not move. What a great resolve for the Way! He set us an example: in cultivating the Way, one must possess this kind of steadfast patience through hardship in order to attain accomplishment.

Speaking of circumstances that temper body and mind, there is actually no need deliberately to seek suffering for oneself. Even now, we constantly find ourselves amid all kinds of adverse circumstances. As the proverb says, “Things that go contrary to one’s wishes are eight or nine out of ten.” In everyday life, adverse circumstances that conflict with our wishes arise at every moment.

There are now many disasters in the world. Contention over self and others arises everywhere, right and wrong proliferate, and each sentient being has their own karmic obstacles; every household has its troubles. Some people do not yet know suffering—this is “the suffering of suffering.” Fortunately, we now know to cultivate the Way. We must stand firm, not be moved by these dreamlike, dusty, shadowy affairs, not fear hardship, and press courageously ahead. Until we realize the Way, we vow never to rest. Thus, “A capable hand is like a lotus in the fire.”

“Clearly possessed of an ambition that soars to the heavens”: a true person has great aspirations that soar to the heavens, fears neither hardship nor adversity, and does not bow before setbacks or failure. To cultivate the Way, one must have the bearing of a true person—able to practice great giving, unconstrained by minor details; unafraid when adversity comes and not delighted when favorable circumstances arrive; proceeding according to one’s own course and pressing courageously ahead. Without such bearing, it is difficult to succeed in practice.

The reason Śākyamuni Buddha taught the Pure Land school was that he feared we might be timid and fainthearted, afraid that the journey was too long and thus not dare to practice. Therefore, he spoke of a good place to rest along the way: in the West there is a Land of Ultimate Bliss, and when your life comes to an end, Amitābha Buddha will come to guide you to rebirth there. Go there with confidence; do not be afraid! Thus, the Buddha Dharma is best because it provides everything: there are teachings for the timid and teachings for the bold.

In fact, the Chan school is not dangerous. You need only make a great vow: “I shall certainly become a Buddha and liberate sentient beings; until I succeed, I vow never to rest!” Sustained by this great vow, you will never lose your human body; when you emerge again, hearing one teaching will bring a thousand awakenings. Frankly speaking, those who fear hardship do not easily become Buddhas, because they cannot temper their habitual tendencies.

Do not suppose that in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss there is no need to cultivate, and that one can simply enjoy oneself comfortably and thereby realize the Way. How could it be so easy? The sūtras say that the water, birds, and sounds of the wind in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss all proclaim the sound of the Dharma. What Dharma sound do they proclaim? “They expound the sounds of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and nonself.”

They teach us not to cling to that beautiful world, indulge in pleasure, and neglect diligent practice. That world too is empty and illusory; clinging brings suffering. All appearances are impermanent; there is nothing to grasp and nothing to which one should remain attached. We must let go, let go, and let go again.

The sūtra also says that one should “eat and then walk in meditation.” Some people mistakenly think that in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, after eating one has nothing to do but stroll about for amusement. This is entirely wrong. “Eating” should be read as “feeding back”: having filled oneself with the food of Dharma through cultivating the Way, one should then “walk in meditation” throughout the ten directions, in turn giving sentient beings the food of Dharma—that is, liberating sentient beings extensively.

By liberating sentient beings, one tempers one's own habitual tendencies; only in this way can one realize the Way. Otherwise, one cannot realize the Way. If we are to realize the Way, we must temper our habitual tendencies while liberating sentient beings and accumulate merit and virtue; only then can we perfectly fulfill the fruition of Buddhahood.

Why? Because the habitual tendencies of sentient beings all differ. To liberate them, you must set yourself aside and accommodate others; to accord with them, you must first eliminate your own habitual tendencies. Only then can you constantly accord with others. Therefore, among the ten great vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is the vow to "constantly accord with sentient beings."

This is not easy to accomplish. Only when one truly accomplishes it and exhausts one's own habitual tendencies can one sever dust-like delusions; only then can one's mind-capacity become vast, and vast spiritual powers and wondrous functioning will arise naturally without being sought. Thus, to cultivate the Way one must have the bearing of a true person—"clearly possessed of an ambition that soars to the heavens." What has been discussed above is training amid circumstances and still belongs to the stage of cultivating the Way. We must undergo arduous tempering in order to attain the state in which principle and phenomena are unobstructed.

The final position, "Arrival within Both," is where the upright position and the partial position draw together and merge as one. In Patriarch Dongshan's "Verses on the Five Ranks of Ruler and Minister," the ruler represents the upright position and the minister the partial position. Since ruler and minister merge, it is called "Arrival within Both." There are also several lines of verse: "Arrival within Both. Who dares join in without falling into being or nonbeing? Everyone wishes to leave the ordinary stream, yet in the end returns to sit amid the charcoal."

What does "Who dares join in without falling into being or nonbeing?" mean? We have previously explained that it is incorrect to say that our Buddha-nature exists, and also incorrect to say that it does not exist. Ordinary beings love to cling: if they say it exists, they cling to existence; if they say it does not exist, they cling to nonexistence. They take both as principles to be understood.

In fact, Buddha-nature is neither existent nor nonexistent; neither not-existent nor not-nonexistent. None of these can be grasped. Buddha-nature is originally just so. If you say it exists, it has no appearance that can be obtained; if you say it does not exist, it can give rise to wondrous functioning. Is this not neither existent nor nonexistent? Buddha-nature is thus, and phenomenal appearances are thus as well.

Take a teacup as an example. It has no self-nature; the cup itself does not inherently exist. It is formed by kneading clay and then firing it in a kiln. Yet if you say it does not exist, its form is plainly present and it can be used for drinking water or tea. Is

this not neither existent nor nonexistent? The essential nature of Buddha-nature is neither existent nor nonexistent, and all phenomenal appearances in the world are likewise neither existent nor nonexistent.

“Who dares join in without falling into being or nonbeing?” When chanting poetry or composing music, I sing one line and you respond with one line; this singing and responding is called joining in. Who dares join in? At this final position, it becomes difficult to open one’s mouth and formulate words: to speak of existence is wrong, and to speak of nonexistence is also wrong. One can only be without speech and without hearing.

At the assembly on nirvāṇa, the World-Honored Śākyamuni said: “If one says that I have entered extinction, that person is not my disciple; if one says that I have not entered extinction, that person is likewise not my disciple.” Everyone, would you say that the Buddha entered extinction or not? How can one count as a disciple of the Buddha? “Neither existent nor nonexistent,” someone in the audience interjected.

No. To say “neither existent nor nonexistent” is also wrong, for you are still caught in the concept of “neither existent nor nonexistent.” Then how should it be expressed? Leaving behind existence, nonexistence, neither existence nor nonexistence, and neither not-existence nor not-nonexistence—how would you speak of it? “The mirage displays many wondrous colors; after the rain, the rainbow is especially lovely.”

“Everyone wishes to leave the ordinary stream.” The ordinary stream refers to ordinary beings, because they all drift and turn within the bitter sea of birth and death in the six realms of rebirth. To leave the ordinary stream is to be liberated from birth and death and escape the bitter sea of birth and death in the six realms of rebirth. Everyone who has come here today wishes to become a Buddha and escape that bitter sea of birth and death.

“Yet in the end returns to sit amid the charcoal”: “in the end” means ultimately. “Returns to sit amid the charcoal” means returning to the place where you originally were.

Before we practice the Dharma, afflictions and attachments obscure the luminosity of our intrinsic nature. Through practicing the Dharma, we gradually restore that luminosity. Why, then, do we finally return to sit amid black charcoal? Is this statement mistaken? It is not mistaken. This is how Esoteric Buddhism speaks of the final stage of practice: when one’s practice has reached completion, it is like the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month.

On the last day of the twelfth lunar month, can one still see the moon that night? There is a popular joking excuse for defaulting on a debt: “I will repay you when

there is a moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month." Is there a moon on that day? No. Since there is none, the debt is never repaid.

Why, when cultivation of the Way reaches its ultimate point, is it likened to the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month? Because even when one's practice reaches a great outpouring of luminosity and a great manifestation of spiritual powers, one has not yet reached the ultimate stage. One must bring everything back into one's own mind, with not a single dharma remaining, utterly bare and unstained by a single speck of dust. Only then is the work complete; therefore, this is represented by the position of complete darkness.

Moreover, when practice has reached completion, there is no birth and death to transcend, for Buddha-nature is originally without birth and death, and the six realms are all the Tathāgata's ocean of quiescence. Thus, one comes and goes freely, liberating sentient beings in accord with conditions. Having passed the final barrier, the six realms of rebirth are precisely transcendence of birth and death, and transcendence of birth and death is precisely the six realms of rebirth; birth and death and nirvāṇa are both unobtainable.

"Yet in the end returns to sit amid the charcoal": the end is the same as the beginning. When one has truly arrived home, it is as though there had been no cultivation at all. Buddha-nature is a great perfect circle, without beginning or end. But do not misunderstand this as meaning that, after becoming a Buddha through practice, one returns to become an afflicted sentient being. The Buddha's state is this: afflictions are unobtainable, bodhi is unobtainable, sentient beings are unobtainable, and even Buddhas are unobtainable. There is nothing to grasp and nothing to abandon. Sentient beings give rise to thoughts in response to objects, falsely cling, and falsely grasp. How could these be the same?

This "Arrival within Both" concerns the stage of realization of the Way. Yet if there is only the stage of realization and no stage of seeing the Way, what could one realize? One must first have the stage of seeing the Way. Apart from the stage of seeing the Way, it is impossible to enter the stage of realization. Therefore, the Mahāmudrā of the Ganges begins with the stage of seeing the Way, which shows how important that stage is.

Today two lay practitioners asked me about these "Five Ranks of Ruler and Minister," so I have used their content and sequence to compare them with the Mahāmudrā of the Ganges. The sequence of the Five Ranks of Ruler and Minister is: the upright within the partial, the partial within the upright, coming from within the upright, arrival within both, and arrival within both. The first two are stages of seeing the Way, the middle two are stages of cultivating the Way, and the last is the stage of realizing the Way. It is the same with the Mahāmudrā of the Ganges: one must first

see the Way—that is, realize the mind and see one's true nature, or "see the principle"—and this is very important.

Because many people do not yet fully understand "sentient and insentient alike perfect the all-knowing wisdom," we shall explain it further. Before we knew it, the discussion had ranged far and wide. Yet it has never departed from the "seeing the principle" of Mahāmudrā; as the saying goes, "Though there may be ten thousand changes, they never depart from their source."

IV. Dispelling Attachment to Emptiness, Bliss, and Luminosity

Earlier we said that in doing the practice one should "neither restrain nor indulge": neither suppress deluded thoughts so that they cannot arise, becoming like earth, wood, metal, or stone; nor indulge deluded thoughts and let them arise wildly, thereby wandering in birth and death. We now continue:

"To be free of deluded thoughts is the self-nature that abides in non-contrivance; it is wisdom-light."

If we can be free of deluded thoughts—not only when seated in meditation practicing the Dharma, but at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—this is the self-nature that abides in non-contrivance. This is the manifestation of the Original Face. At all times and in all places, do not cling to appearances, and let the mind abide in not even the slightest trace; this is called non-contrivance. It does not mean doing nothing. When there is work to do, simply do it.

All day long one eats, yet has never bitten a single grain of rice; all day long one wears clothes, yet has never had a single thread hang upon one. This is called the non-abiding mind. The non-abiding mind is our natural intrinsic nature. However, when one first sees one's intrinsic nature, one has no spiritual powers or wondrous functioning; this is called the plain dharmakāya. It is like buying a piece of plain cloth with no pattern or color.

The mind that can abide in non-contrivance is the pure dharmakāya; it is wisdom-light. Some say that this pure dharmakāya has no wondrous function of spiritual powers and that its light is not very great.

This is because you still have something on which to abide: you are attached to "abiding in non-contrivance." This is not genuine non-abiding; it is the deluded feeling that obscures your intrinsic nature. After deluded feeling has been removed, and thought after thought does not cling to appearances, wisdom-light can manifest. You must not stir the mind to seek it, for it is luminous from the very beginning.

For example, a precious jewel has light, but if it is covered by a layer of mud, its light cannot shine forth. Once the mud is removed, the light naturally radiates. Is there any need to seek another light? Therefore, seek nothing. Simply remove deluded thoughts, and wisdom-light will naturally manifest.

“If one cultivates by taking the conditioned as the Way, one will surely fail to awaken to the original source.”

Conversely, if we cultivate in a conditioned manner, with something on which the mind abides, then something obstructs us, and it becomes difficult to realize the Way.

“Conditioned” means having something one seeks. To take what one seeks as “the Way” is deluded mind; it is attachment and abiding. It is a hundred and eight thousand miles removed from the true mind, which is empty, numinous, and non-abiding. In this way, one can absolutely never awaken to the Original Face. Failing to understand the true mind and recognize one’s origin is blind cultivation and blind practice. To hope to realize the Way in this manner is like “cooking rice with sand”: it can never succeed.

For example, practitioners of the Pure Land may pray to Amitābha Buddha in the West: “Come and pull me along! Come and pull me along!” This is cultivation with a conditioned mind, and it is very difficult for them to resonate with Amitābha Buddha.

Because they do not know what mind is or what Buddha is, they divide mind and Buddha into two sides. They pursue, hope for, and cling to something. Their minds are not pure, so they can absolutely not be reborn in the Western Pure Land.

Nowadays, quite a few Buddhist practitioners want to become rich. This is especially so among lay practitioners from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, and among overseas Chinese: when they come to study the Dharma, they ask, “Is there any method that will enable me to prosper in business?” They study Buddhism not to transcend birth and death, but to become rich. Most Dharma students in mainland China want to develop spiritual powers. All this is conditioned cultivation.

Those who cultivate in this way will surely fail to awaken to the original source. They can absolutely not awaken or directly realize the Original Face, because their intention is improper: they still cling to appearances and seek something. One must cleanse the mind until it is empty and pure, wanting nothing and clinging to nothing. Only by cultivating in non-contrivance can one accord with what is fundamentally real. The moment one seeks something, one goes directly contrary to the Way and cannot realize it.

If you say that you want only spiritual powers, that is even more wrong. If you seek spiritual powers, Māra will seize the opportunity to cause trouble, manifesting as a Buddha to delude you. Taking him for a true Buddha, your mind will blossom with joy, and Māra will take the opportunity to enter your mind and turn you into a demon. Even the Buddha will be unable to save you.

Therefore, those who cultivate by taking the "conditioned" as "the Way" "will surely fail to awaken to the original source." They will absolutely not awaken, recognize the root, or know what the root and Buddha-nature are; they can absolutely not realize the Way. How could one realize the Way while clinging and abiding somewhere? Becoming a demon, however, is certainly within reach!

Therefore, when we cultivate the Dharma, we must recognize the root, seek nothing, and know that we are originally Buddhas. We need only eliminate our deluded feelings; there is no need to seek anything. Once you seek something, you are heading toward becoming a demon. Demons possess spiritual powers. They know when your mind stirs, and then they come. Thus, when the inner demon stirs, the outer demon arrives.

What is an inner demon? Having something on which to abide is the inner demon. Once the mind clings to appearances, outer demons seize the opportunity to enter; when the mind does not cling to appearances and does not stir, outer demons find no door through which to enter. If demons come, I pay them no heed: "All appearances are false and unreal." If a Buddha comes, slay the Buddha; if a demon comes, slay the demon. Since nothing is attainable, how could they enter? Do not fear demons. Demons are manifested by the mind. If your mind is not demonic, then no matter how great the powers of outer demons may be, they cannot enter.

When we study Buddhism and cultivate the Dharma, the causal ground must be correct. First, we must clearly understand this: our numinous, lucid true mind of clear, ever-present knowing is Buddha. Apart from this, there is no Buddha. The thousand Buddhas and myriad Buddhas are originally one body, one reality, with this true mind of clear, ever-present knowing. No matter what form of Buddha appears before us, we pay it no heed.

Once you know that all appearances are false and that nothing is attainable, and that only this wondrously lucid true mind is the true Buddha, you will not fall into demonic states and can realize the great Way. Otherwise, if the mind is impure and has attachment and seeking, one will surely invite demons, enter demonic states, and become a demon; this has not the slightest connection with the Way. Therefore, Mahāmudrā emphasizes that those who cultivate by taking the "conditioned" as "the Way" will surely be unable to awaken to and see their intrinsic nature, and cannot realize the great Way.

“This is the innate wisdom of one’s own mind from the very origin. Yet although beginners in practice may wish to abide naturally and steadily in the original source, what they abide in does not go beyond such attainments as attachment to bliss, luminosity, and no-thought.”

This wisdom-light free from conceptual knowing is not obtained from outside; it is an inherent capacity of one’s own mind.

Yet even if beginning practitioners greatly wish for the mind to rest naturally within the pure original source, they cannot do so. Because they do not understand the Original Face, they still fall into conditioned cultivation. What they abide in does not transcend such attainments as bliss, luminosity, and no-thought—that is, emptiness. Do such attainments exist? They do.

Take bliss, for example. When your practice reaches the blissful state of the third dhyāna, no worldly pleasure can compare with it. Yet do not greedily abide in it. Although it exists, you must treat it as though it did not and not become attached to it.

If you greedily abide in bliss, luminosity, or no-thought, it is harmful. Attachment to no-thought is especially harmful, because this no-thought is dead. If you sit there without moving and without a single thought, you become like earth, wood, metal, or stone; you have suppressed your own mind to death.

Attachment to bliss means that the demon of joy has come; attachment to luminosity means that the demon of luminosity has come; attachment to no-thought means that the demon of emptiness has come. But the luminosity of our intrinsic nature is great luminosity. Although it shines brightly throughout the ten directions without obstruction, it does not proclaim itself to be luminosity or abide in the appearance of luminosity.

If you abide in the appearance of luminosity, obscured by that appearance, you obscure the boundless wondrous functions of your essential nature. Therefore, you must not abide in luminosity. When we sit in meditation, we must not seek to see light or Buddhas; even seeing light is not acceptable. This does not mean that you are forbidden even to look at it; rather, you must not greedily abide in it. Having seen it, you should treat it as though you had not seen it.

Why? Because the light that first arises is faint. If your thought stirs even slightly, the luminosity disappears. When luminosity comes and you neither heed it nor stir, it grows ever greater; but once you heed it and thought stirs, the luminosity is obscured. Therefore, if you cultivate with ulterior designs, then at best you merely abide in bliss, luminosity, or no-thought; at worst, you are about to fall under

demonic influence. Because you seek something, demons seize the opportunity to enter. Therefore, do not cultivate with ulterior designs!

“One should cast off attachment to such states of attainment as these. Only then, abiding suddenly and directly, does the naked and thoroughly lucid original essence of intrinsic nature appear.”

When we practice, we should cast off the states of attainment mentioned above—bliss, luminosity, no-thought, and the like. Why? Because these are merely reflections of preliminary states of samādhi. The naked original essence of intrinsic nature has not yet appeared. One merely has a slight semblance of such states beyond that of a beginner.

Attainment in practice is not awakening. For example, Patriarch Gaofeng’s teacher asked him, “Amid the vast activity of daytime, can you remain master?” A practitioner must remain master amid all the circumstances of daily activity, neither being drawn by circumstances nor following them. Only then does one have a small measure of meditative stability and some slight resonance with the original essence.

Therefore, his teacher asked whether, amid daily activity, he could see through all circumstances: neither delighting in joy, nor taking pleasure in pleasure, nor grieving in sorrow, nor suffering in suffering; neither treating emptiness and purity as emptiness and purity; and remaining undisturbed by circumstances. Could he remain master? Patriarch Gaofeng said, “I can remain master.”

The teacher further asked, “Can you remain master in dreams?” When asleep and dreaming, one knows it is a dream-state and does not waver. Whatever comes, one is unafraid: if a tiger comes, there is no fear, for it is false; if an enemy comes, there is no fear, for it is false; even if great wealth comes, one does not want it, for all is false. This is remaining master in dreams.

To remain master in dreams requires ten times the strength needed during the day. When awake, we are merely deluded; when asleep, we are deeply deluded. If, in deep delusion, you can still know clearly and lucidly that this is an illusory state, a dream-state, and your mind does not waver, that strength is immense.

For us to remain master at the time of death, we must first be able to remain master in dreams. At death there is great delusion; dreaming is lesser delusion. If one cannot remain master in lesser delusion, one will be even less able to remain master in great delusion. Patriarch Gaofeng’s practice and abilities were excellent, and he replied, “I can remain master.”

Patriarch Gaofeng answered twice, “I can remain master.” This was indeed excellent practice, a model and example for later students like ourselves. We study Buddhism

and cultivate the Way in order to remain master at the shore of birth and death, rather than being dragged down by karmic obstacles and sinking into the sea of suffering.

To accomplish this, we must first train ourselves to remain master in daily life, not be turned by favorable and adverse circumstances, and not be moved by the deluded feelings of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure. In favorable circumstances, do not rejoice; in adverse circumstances, do not grieve. Regard everything as flowers in empty space and illusory shadows—unattainable, neither clung to nor abided in. Only then can one remain master in dreams. If one cannot even do this, how can one speak of transcending birth and death? The root of birth and death is precisely that deluded thoughts do not cease and one grasps at circumstances.

There was a laywoman in Ningbo who was sitting in meditation when someone suddenly came to report that her son had fallen into the water. She sat there without moving. Someone rebuked her: "How can you be so heartless? Your own flesh and blood has fallen into the water, yet you will not go save him?" She remained utterly unmoved and continued her practice as before.

Her meditative stability is good, but it is not right to stand by and watch someone die; that would be cruel. What, then, is the right thing to do? One should still save the person, but without letting the mind move—having saved them, it is as though one had done no saving at all. This does not mean sitting there without moving in the slightest. Yet, having said that, her cultivation is quite good. Had it been us, we would already have been in utter confusion.

A family's home caught fire. The mistress of the house remembered that her child was still inside, panicked, and rushed into the house. She grabbed at the bed and ran out, only to see: "Oh no! I was wrong—I brought out a pillow." She immediately fainted, and the child was burned to death. You see, this is the result of being thrown into utter confusion!

Therefore, whether or not you are shaken amid circumstances is a major test; this, too, is cultivation. In his daily life, Patriarch Gaofeng could remain in command and unshaken no matter what happened; his cultivation was quite good. If one can remain in command even in dreams, one's cultivation is all the more extraordinary.

His teacher saw that his cultivation was indeed quite good and wished to test his capacity for awakening. He therefore asked him further: "When there are neither dreams nor thoughts, where is the master?" Gaofeng was startled: There are no dreams and no thoughts—then where is the master? He pondered this from every angle, but in the end could not answer. His teacher told him to investigate it.

(Master Yuanyin said: “All of you, answer on Patriarch Gaofeng’s behalf: when there are neither dreams nor thoughts, where is the master?” Everyone remained silent. The master said, “Shall I try answering for you?” Then he shouted sternly, “Precisely!”) Patriarch Gaofeng continued his investigation and later awakened. After awakening, Patriarch Gaofeng entered a closed retreat at Lion Cliff on Mount Tianmu.

Thus, cultivation is one thing, and capacity for awakening is another. If, in our cultivation, we can dispel states arising from practice—such as bliss, luminosity, and thoughtlessness—and cultivate until subject and object both vanish, and the sense faculties and their objects fall away, so that the divisions of past and future are cut off, then with a sudden “snap,” there is an abrupt explosion: inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world; and even empty space all shatter at once and vanish into nothingness. One then suddenly abides unmoving.

At this time, although there is nothing at all and one abides unmoving, one is not like wood or stone. Rather, there is clear, numinous knowing, and our “original fundamental essence of naked and thorough self-nature” appears.

Therefore, no matter which school we practice, we must cultivate until subject and object both vanish and mind and phenomena both fall away. Then, with a “snap”—“the great earth sinks level and empty space shatters”—the original fundamental essence of self-nature, in which there is nothing at all yet everything is clearly distinct, can appear. For example, in the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate, with the Buddha-name “Amitābha Buddha . . . ,” gather in the six sense faculties and hold fast to the eye, ear,

nose, tongue, body, and mind faculties. Recite until they truly return to one: when there is no mind that can be minded and no thought that can be thought, recitation itself is gone, and the Buddha is gone as well. With a “snap,” one immediately and directly sees the true Buddha and is reborn in the Buddha-land.

Those of us who study the Heart-of-Heart Dharma are the same. With the Buddha-Heart Mantra, “Oṃ boluo boluo . . . ,” gather in the six sense faculties; let the mind recite and the ears hear, without allowing the mind to wander outward. When the time and conditions arrive, with a “snap,” both the one who recites and that which is recited instantly fall away, and the thorough, non-abiding original self-nature appears cleanly and clearly.

Cultivation must be undertaken. Otherwise, one cannot open up one’s original nature and see one’s own intrinsic nature. Merely talking about theory is like drawing cakes to satisfy hunger; it is of no use. We must be able to remain in command in daily life. If, whenever something happens, you cannot manage and

cannot remain in command, then you are like medicinal mercury, which flies away when it meets fire; you cannot withstand birth and death.

Do the work of cultivation, open up the original nature, and awaken from the dream. Once you know that everything is dreamlike, why let the mind be stirred? All favors and grievances, rights and wrongs, disappear; hence the saying, “With awakening, both are dissolved.” All things are dreamlike. Without awakening, one clings to them as truly existent; once awakened, it is like ice melting in hot water, and all karmic obstacles become empty. This is what is ordinarily meant by: “Once understood, karmic obstacles are originally empty.” Therefore, cultivation must be undertaken. Without it, how could the time and conditions for awakening ever arrive? How could one open up the original nature?

Someone asked me how long cultivation takes. That depends on whether your practice is continuous and seamless. If it is intermittent, it will not do. If our practice is continuous and seamless—sitting in meditation today and tomorrow, without interruption—and, after rising from meditation, never forgetting to maintain contemplation, without following circumstances, then in no more than three to five years you will thoroughly see your intrinsic nature.

Why do we say that practitioners of the Heart-of-Heart Dharma should complete one thousand meditation sessions? It means that three years of earnest practice will suffice. If you do not apply yourself continuously and seamlessly, but practice for a while and stop, stop and practice again—fishing for three days and drying the nets for two—then not only will three to five years be insufficient; even thirty to fifty years will be insufficient.

Others ask, “What happens after one has completed one thousand sessions?” This question has already been explained many times, but I shall repeat it once more. One thousand sessions means that the Heart-of-Heart Dharma relies upon the empowering support of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Its method is extraordinary: if you practice earnestly and conscientiously for three years, you will certainly open up the original nature and directly see your self-nature. If you practice in a dilatory, intermittent manner, working only sporadically, then not only will one thousand sessions fail to reveal your intrinsic nature; even three or five thousand sessions will not enable you to see your nature.

Others ask, “After one thousand sessions, do we no longer practice the Dharma?” As we said last time, even if you are of the highest capacity and awaken suddenly, the habitual tendencies accumulated through many lives and kalpas cannot be eliminated all at once. You must still maintain contemplation at all times, tempering the mind through circumstances and reducing them again and again, until your habitual tendencies are exhausted. Cultivation after awakening is true cultivation

through non-cultivation. This does not mean not cultivating; rather, it means not becoming attached to sitting in meditation and falling into states of bliss, thereby turning them into the obstacle of attachment to dharmas.

Conversely, if your meditative stability is insufficient and you are still shaken by circumstances, then you must undertake additional meditation sessions and strengthen your stability before you can pass this crucial barrier. If your stability is adequate, you need only remain alert at all times. This requires no effort at all and is exceptionally easy and economical; it does not mean that you must still practice this Dharma or accumulate that merit, keeping yourself frantically busy with formal dharmas.

Whether or not you have awakened, doing cultivation on the level of formal dharmas is merely a waste of energy and an invitation to trouble; it is of no use. Thus, the less effort cultivation requires, the better; the more relaxed it is, the better. The more strenuous it is, the worse.

V. Instantly Severing Deluded Thoughts and Bringing Self-Nature Before You

“Urgently call out the word ‘pei!’ and instantly cut off the stream of deluded thoughts.”

When a deluded thought arises, urgently call out “pei!” This is the essential instruction of Mahāmudrā for cutting off deluded thoughts. Those who practice Buddha-recitation do not need this method; they need only raise up the Buddha-recitation and recite “Amitābha Buddha” once. When deluded thoughts arise, other practitioners should urgently call out “pei!” and immediately become keenly alert. With a “snap,” the source and stream of deluded thoughts is cut off.

For example, when we think of getting rich, we say, “Pei! What wealth? Daydreaming!” In this way, the deluded thought is cut off. If deluded thoughts are forceful—that is, if greed is heavy—and “pei!” cannot cut them off, then one must recite a mantra and rely on the Buddha’s power to eliminate them.

“When the coarse deluded mental factors are stilled and one abides in samādhi, one is freed from the realm of clinging to all dharmas. Self-nature then becomes bright and thoroughly clear, and the nakedly manifest wisdom free from mind abides just as it is.”

Still the coarse deluded mental factors. (Our mind king and mental factors include eight principal consciousnesses and fifty-one mental factors. Of these, the worst are the five universal mental factors: attention, contact, feeling, perception, and volition.

“Attention” is the mind faculty. Its stirring force is immense and has never ceased. Do not think that it stops when you sleep; it continues generating dreams. Only in

the Great Samādhi of Vajrasattva can it finally be stilled.) This means stilling the coarse delusions that arise when the mind encounters objects. Only then can one abide unmoving in a state of samādhi.

If, in practicing the Dharma, one can encounter circumstances without giving rise to mind, one already has considerable skill. We human beings constantly give rise to deluded thoughts in response to circumstances and endlessly cling to conditions, thinking from this to that and from that to this, without cease.

If the mind that clings to conditions can stop, one can peacefully enter samādhi and be free from all false realms of deluded thought and clinging. Our self-nature then appears brightly, thoroughly, and utterly bare—clear and evident before us—and thereby opens the great prajñā wisdom that is free from arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence; empty, numinous, non-abiding, and unmoving just as it is.

That is to say, the first step in cultivation is to still the coarse delusions of giving rise to mind in response to objects. Going further, one leaves behind the realm of clinging to conditions, and the mind no longer moves in confusion. Our original self-nature then appears distinctly, limpidly, and nakedly. The luminous great wisdom, unmoving just as it is and free from the deluded mind, also appears.

Thus, the Buddhadharma is wondrous: it teaches us to recognize the truth and not follow false appearances. If we are deluded by false appearances, we remain in cyclic rebirth within the six realms. Once we leave false appearances behind and recognize the true mind, we transcend them, attain great spiritual powers, and gain great benefit.

Therefore, if we truly wish to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, it is not enough to casually recite the Buddha's name a few times or chant a few passages of scripture. We must use Amitābha Buddha's sword of wisdom to cut off our infatuated attachment to the false appearances of the Sahā world. Only then can we be reborn in the West.

Thus it is said, "Pure thought brings flight." This is what we ordinarily call the initial meditative stability: through cultivation, even if a real Buddha were to appear, one simply recites, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." There is nothing else. One's every thought is Buddha; Buddha is one's every thought; the whole Buddha is thought, and the whole of thought is Buddha. Then one will certainly be reborn in the West.

But if you are not like this—if you recite "Amitābha Buddha" a few times, sometimes mindfully and sometimes not, while thinking about this matter and that—then it will not do. Someone asks why those who practice the Buddha-recitation Dharma gate

must recite sūtras. Reciting sūtras is meant to help you understand the truth. The Buddhist scriptures say that, to attain the highest grade of the highest rebirth, one must read and recite Mahāyāna scriptures. Why? Because reading and reciting Mahāyāna scriptures enables one to understand principle.

Understand that all are originally Buddha: sentient beings are Buddha. It is only because we are deluded and cling to appearances that we forget our own nature. We should not be deluded or abide in appearances, nor should we crave merit and virtue. Merit and virtue are our own mind; the self-mind is the mother of great accomplishment. The completion of great accomplishment is Buddhahood. Whether we human beings undergo rebirth in the six realms or are reborn in the Western Pure Land is brought about by the mind.

The root of all myriad virtues is the mind. All myriad virtues arise from the mind: "Nothing does not flow forth from this Dharma realm; nothing does not return to this Dharma realm." Therefore, the mind is the root; it is the root of all dharmas. The reason I ordinarily ask everyone to read and recite Mahāyāna sūtras is to help us understand this principle.

The Pure Land Dharma discussed here is the Mahāyāna Pure Land Dharma, and its principle is of one piece with that of the Chan school. The Pure Land school is Mahāyāna Buddhism that universally embraces practitioners of all three capacities. It does not merely liberate those of middling and lesser capacities; it encompasses all three capacities. All share the same mind: the Pure Land is mind, and mind is the Pure Land.

The Amitābha Sūtra says, "From here westward, passing through a hundred thousand koṭis of Buddha lands, there is a world called Ultimate Bliss." These hundred thousand koṭis of Buddha lands are the ten perfections and myriad practices. That is, one uses generosity, precepts, patience, diligence, dhyāna, wisdom, skillful means, vows, strength, and knowledge to cultivate the mind until it is empty and great wisdom opens. Once the mind is empty, one has crossed beyond the hundred thousand koṭis of Buddha lands and arrived in the West.

Therefore, the West is not far away; it is right before you. Simply put, when your mind abides nowhere and all is empty, your mind is Buddha and Buddha is your mind. Here is the West, and the West is here; in this very moment, you are reborn in the West. Do not wait until after death. Be reborn in the West while alive—this is genuine rebirth in the West. If you cannot be reborn in the West while alive and wait until death to be reborn there, it may be difficult indeed.

"Thoroughly comprehend and depart from all extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence; transcend the realm of discrimination by language and ideation; and naturally abide in the wisdom-nature realm beyond words and

thought. This refers to the intrinsic wisdom of the dharmakāya, yoga, and the school of realization."

This means that we must clearly understand that such relative views as arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence are false. We must leave behind these extreme views and transcend the relative realm of discrimination by language and the mind faculty. Then we naturally abide within the originally inherent nature of vast, luminous wisdom, where there are no words to speak and no thoughts to stir.

"Thoroughly comprehend" means to understand clearly and penetrate completely. To depart from all extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence means to leave behind all kinds of extreme views, such as arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence. Views such as arising and ceasing and existence and nonexistence are all relative, deluded knowledge and deluded views. Like a mirage, they are false and unreal; they do not accord with the meaning of the Middle Way, and are therefore called extreme views.

Yet we live at all times and in all places immersed in the deluded realm of relativity, distinguishing good from bad, right from wrong, and long from short. We have never departed from the extremes of arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence. For example, to suppose that a person exists while alive but becomes absolutely nothing after death is an extreme view.

If we can recognize that everything arising through relativity is merely a false shadow and cease pursuing it, then, where the deluded mind comes to rest, we can thoroughly comprehend the inherently present, absolute true mind. The true mind is Buddha-nature: neither existent nor nonexistent, neither long nor short, neither arising nor ceasing, neither good nor bad, neither beautiful nor ugly. Everything is beyond all such descriptions. Language cannot describe it, and thought and reasoning cannot fathom it; fundamentally, no discrimination exists in it. This is what is meant by "transcending the realm of discrimination by language and ideation."

The realm of discrimination by language and ideation is the realm in which language and consciousness discriminate. When we speak, the mind faculty in the brain is continually stirring; thus, discrimination between right and wrong, good and bad, long and short goes on without cease, and relative views blaze forth.

For example, some people recite the Buddha's name while talking: "Amitābha Buddha, how terrible my daughter-in-law is; Amitābha Buddha, how wonderful my daughter is." This is the realm of discrimination by language and ideation. How can that do? If one could be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss in this way, then there would be many people reborn there.

We must cut off deluded emotions and extreme views, abide in nothing, and recite wholeheartedly, “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” When the whole mind is Buddha, Buddha is my mind, and my mind is Buddha—when mind and Buddha commune and become continuous and undivided—only then can one be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Therefore, we must transcend the realm of discrimination by language and ideation, understand that these realms are all false and unobtainable, neither follow nor be turned by them, and let go of everything, again and again. For example, a brahmin held māndārava flowers in both hands as an offering to the Buddha. The Buddha instructed him, “Put them down.” The brahmin put down the flowers in one hand. The Buddha again said, “Put them down.”

The brahmin then put down the flowers in his other hand. When the Buddha again said, “Put them down,” the brahmin was utterly perplexed and quickly asked, “I have put down the flowers in both hands. There is nothing left—what is there still to put down?” The Buddha said, “I am telling you to put down the outer six sense objects, the middle six consciousnesses, and the inner six sense faculties—put down everything.”

This means that inwardly, in the middle, and outwardly, all is released; nothing whatsoever can be obtained. Upon hearing this, the brahmin awakened. Therefore, to transcend the realm of discrimination by language and ideation, let go of everything, again and again, release everything completely, and naturally abide in the wisdom-nature realm beyond words and thought.

To be beyond words and thought is to transcend language and thinking. The wisdom-nature realm beyond words and thought is the great wisdom inherently possessed by one’s own nature, transcending language and thinking. If you transcend the realm of discrimination by language and ideation, you will naturally abide in this great wisdom and enjoy its inexhaustible benefit.

It is very difficult to be natural at every moment and cultivate without even the slightest deliberate effort. We all cultivate with deliberate effort. From the first bhūmi through the seventh bhūmi, bodhisattvas still cultivate with deliberate effort; only from the eighth bhūmi through the tenth bhūmi is cultivation without deliberate effort. It is not easy for ordinary beings like us to reach cultivation without deliberate effort all at once. Therefore, we must proceed step by step, from cultivation with deliberate effort to cultivation without deliberate effort.

What is cultivation with deliberate effort? It is to remain continually aware and watchful, guarding and caring for oneself. The moment a thought stirs, immediately alert yourself: “Ah, do not move. I see you.”

If you are not aware, you cannot see it, and you may run after thoughts for a hundred thousand miles without even knowing it. Therefore, continually being aware and watchful is cultivation with deliberate effort. When watchfulness has become fully familiar, there is no need deliberately to be aware; it watches naturally, and naturally does not waver. Still yet ever luminous, luminous yet ever still—this is cultivation without deliberate effort. In the end, even stillness cannot be obtained, and even luminosity cannot be obtained. Only then have you truly arrived home.

Only by practicing in this way at every moment can we progress from cultivation with deliberate effort to cultivation without deliberate effort. We cannot ascend to heaven in a single step.

How is this practice to be done? Be awake at every moment and abide in the vast, luminous wisdom in which there are no words to speak and no thoughts to stir—what the Chan school calls "the path of words is cut off and the road of mental activity is ended."

When our mind does not move, it is naturally luminous and responds with exceptional swiftness. If your mind is stirred, clings somewhere, or has afflictions, your responses become very dull. This is because you have been carried away by circumstances; the mind's light is obscured by circumstances and cannot shine luminously, so your responses become dull.

If you can abide at all times in the wisdom-nature realm beyond words and thought, where speech cannot be obtained, thought cannot be obtained, and nothing whatsoever can be obtained, you will naturally know with complete clarity. Then all spiritual powers and wondrous functions will come forth. If you do not practice in this way but want spiritual powers, can you obtain them? No, you cannot.

Ordinary beings are constantly calculating and discriminating, worrying over gain and loss; therefore, they cannot attain peace and ease. We cultivate and realize the Way in order to leave behind deluded thoughts, remove attachment, restore the luminosity of our original nature, and bring forth great potential and great function. Our Buddha-nature is like the sun: its light is immeasurable, but it is obscured by deluded thought and discrimination, so it cannot radiate great light or manifest great spiritual functions.

When dark clouds disperse, the sun radiates great light. When deluded thoughts and attachments are left behind, the various spiritual powers and wondrous functions are attained naturally without being sought. The Mahāvairocana Sūtra says: "When a bodhisattva abides in this cultivation and study, before long, through diligent practice, one attains the samādhi that removes all obscurations. Having attained this, one abides on equal footing with all Buddhas and bodhisattvas. One

will develop the five spiritual powers and gain dhāraṇīs of immeasurable eloquence."

What does "a bodhisattva abides in this" mean? It means abiding in the wisdom-nature realm beyond words and thought. In this state, one further cultivates diligently in order to remove habitual tendencies. Before long, all five spiritual powers will arise together, and one's eloquence will be unobstructed. The five spiritual powers are the divine eye, divine ear, knowledge of others' minds, knowledge of past lives, and spiritual power of movement.

The Buddha has six spiritual powers. Beyond the five powers, there is the power of extinguishing all outflows: all places of outflow—deluded thoughts, attachments, discriminations, afflictions, and the like—are utterly purified.

That is the "wisdom-nature realm beyond words and thought." In cultivation, we first attain the power of extinguishing all outflows and naturally abide in the wisdom-nature realm beyond words and thought. This is also called the intrinsic wisdom of the dharmakāya, also called yoga, and also called the school of realization. The dharmakāya is without characteristics; being without characteristics, it is not without any characteristics. It neither increases in Buddhas nor decreases in sentient beings. The intrinsic wisdom of the dharmakāya is the great wisdom that transcends all relativity and all worldly wisdom. "Yoga" means correspondence. Correspondence with what? Correspondence with the dharmakāya Buddha. This is precisely the school of realization.

To understand clearly and lucidly that all relative views—arising and ceasing, existence and nonexistence, and so on—are false; to leave behind these extreme views; to transcend the relative realm of discrimination by language and the mind faculty; and then naturally to abide within the great-wisdom nature that is inherently complete, naturally luminous, and without words to speak or thoughts to stir—this refers to the intrinsic wisdom of the dharmakāya.

There are five great wisdoms realized through practicing the Dharma and realizing the Way: great perfect mirror wisdom, wisdom of equality, wondrous observing wisdom, wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done, and dharma-realm essence wisdom. In the Ganges Mahāmudrā, dharma-realm essence wisdom is called the intrinsic wisdom of the dharmakāya. The intrinsic wisdom of the dharmakāya is the comprehensive wisdom of all modes; it transforms the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom.

Great perfect mirror wisdom is the last to be fully realized. The Sixth Patriarch said, "The sixth and seventh consciousnesses are transformed at the stage of causes; the fifth and eighth are transformed at the stage of fruition." That is, in cultivating the Way, one first works on the sixth and seventh consciousnesses, because the sixth

consciousness has the greatest force: at all times and in all places, it is making discriminations and stirring restlessly.

When the deluded thoughts of the sixth consciousness cease to move, no messages of deluded thought are transmitted to the seventh consciousness, and the seventh consciousness is transformed. The seventh consciousness is the transmitting consciousness: it receives the messages sent by the sixth consciousness and then conveys them to the eighth consciousness.

When, in the course of cultivating causes, the sixth and seventh consciousnesses are transformed into wondrous discerning wisdom and the wisdom of equality, the eighth consciousness and the first five consciousnesses subsequently transform into great perfect mirror wisdom and the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done, because there are no deluded seeds left to store and no interference from the sixth consciousness.

Therefore, from the standpoint of eliminating habitual tendencies through cultivation amid circumstances, the transformation of consciousness still begins with the sixth consciousness; the eighth consciousness must be transformed later. It is impossible to transform the eighth consciousness directly into great perfect mirror wisdom all at once. When we work constantly on the sixth consciousness, deluded thoughts cease to move, and we no longer follow external circumstances.

Buddha-remembrance, Dharma-remembrance, and Saṅgha-remembrance transmit sacred and pure seeds to the seventh consciousness, which then transmits them to the eighth consciousness. Thus defiled seeds are transformed into pure seeds, enabling one to be reborn in the West and transcend birth and death.

Thus, among the eight consciousnesses, the seventh consciousness constantly examines and deliberates, clinging to the appearance of self. It distinguishes self from others, considers itself right and others wrong, and is exceedingly arrogant and conceited. It always takes itself as primary, appropriates everything for itself, and is insatiably greedy. Therefore, the seventh consciousness is the worst. Hence, practicing the Dharma through a seven-day retreat means overthrowing the seventh consciousness.

In truth, all sentient beings are equally such; where is there a self? Yet people's attachment to self is intense. They regard others as inferior, think that no one else is capable, and believe that only they themselves are best. Thus relationships among people become unequal. Once the seventh consciousness is transformed, there is no longer any distinction of self and others, right and wrong, gain and loss. Everything is the same, and all dharmas are equal and without difference.

Although we now study the Buddhadharma, as long as the seventh consciousness has not yet been transformed, we cannot avoid such inequality. For example, Pure Land practitioners say that the Pure Land school is the very best and that other teachings are worthless; those who study Chan say that Chan is supreme and that all the others are inferior; those who study Esoteric Buddhism say that Esoteric Buddhism is the most complete and that the rest are not very good.

Alas! To affirm oneself and reject others is due to not having truly realized the wisdom of equality and to the mind's lack of equanimity. In fact, all dharma gates are alike. They are tools and means, not the goal. Our goal is to attain Buddhahood.

If you succeed through this means, and I succeed through that means, then when both of us succeed, are we not the same? Hence it is said: "There are many gateways of expedient means, but the return to the source is not two." All dharmas are alike; therefore it is said: "These dharmas are equal, with neither high nor low." The reason for inequality is the mischief of the seventh consciousness.

Therefore, once our seventh consciousness is transformed, there is equality. All distinctions of right and wrong, self and others are equal; all oppositions are equal. Equal, equal—everything is equal—and then one thoroughly realizes the great Way. When the sixth consciousness is transformed into wondrous discerning wisdom, its deluded discriminations concerning right and wrong, gain and loss become the wisdom that perfectly observes all things and deals with them correctly.

For example, how should this matter be handled most appropriately? How should that person be arranged in a reasonable way? How should a bad person be transformed, so that he turns from bad to good and from ordinary to noble, and so forth? Wondrous discerning wisdom is clear, fresh, unmoving, and unshakable: direct perception becomes inferential perception, and inferential perception becomes direct perception.

Direct perception reveals forms in accordance with their measure, without adding discrimination. Inferential perception requires comparison: whether something is good or bad, long or short, right or wrong. Upon realizing this wisdom, one clearly discerns right and wrong, gain and loss, yet has no attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejection. One handles all matters equally, yet is not unaware of right and wrong, long and short. This is a great function of wisdom. When the first five consciousnesses are transformed into the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done, seeing forms with the eyes, hearing sounds with the ears, smelling fragrances with the nose, tasting flavors with the tongue, and encountering circumstances with the body are all functions of that wisdom.

Our ability to think, work, create, and invent—that is, the four great wisdoms discussed above—depends entirely on the functioning of dharma-realm essential-

nature wisdom. In Mahāmudrā, dharma-realm essential-nature wisdom is called the wisdom of the essential nature of the dharmakāya; it is fundamental wisdom. The Yogācāra view takes "view" to mean knowledge and understanding, while "yoga" means correspondence, that is, dharmas in correspondence with the mind.

Mahāmudrā instructs you to remain in correspondence at all times: ordinary beings correspond with the Buddha, and one's own mind corresponds with empty space. This is what is meant by sealing space, sealing water, and sealing clay. To remain in correspondence at every moment is yoga. The Yogācāra view refers to the understanding of constantly corresponding with one's originally inherent nature.

VI. Without Recognizing One's Own Nature, Practice Is of No Benefit

"If one practices without recognizing this, one has not departed from the functioning of mind and from views of the conditioned; one remains far removed from the path of the Great Perfection of one's own nature and cannot attain the radiant wheel of non-practice."

If one does not recognize one's own wondrous mind, lacks correct understanding, does not know to begin practice from buddha-nature, and instead clings to appearances and seeks outwardly, then one has not departed from the functioning of the deluded mind. This is a conditioned and erroneous view. It is utterly unrelated to the "path of the Great Perfection of one's own nature," and one cannot attain the "radiant wheel of non-practice."

The Great Perfection of one's own nature means that buddha-nature is inherently complete and originally perfect; it does not arise from acquisition or from cultivation. The radiant wheel of non-practice means that buddha-nature is originally of immeasurable luminosity, illuminating the lands of the ten directions, fully endowed with all wondrous functions, and capable of giving rise to countless transformations. The radiant wheel is not produced through practice; it is inherently possessed by one's own mind.

Therefore it is said: "The Way does not belong to practice; it belongs to awakening." To awaken to the Way is to awaken, understand, and enter into true mind, thereby returning to one's original state. It means that while practicing the Dharma, at the point where thought ceases, one realizes one's original true nature with a sudden sound.

After awakening, must one still practice? Yes, one must practice. The two attachments to self and dharmas, accumulated since beginningless time, still remain, and one cannot yet unfold great spiritual functions. One must eliminate these two attachments before thoroughly realizing the source. How, then, should one practice? This depends on the weight of each person's habitual defilements, and

different methods are used. The best, however, is practice within non-practice, using the method of contemplation.

The Mahāmudrā method is this: whenever a deluded thought arises, one gives a sharp shout of “Pei!” and cuts off the deluded thought, thereby safeguarding the true mind. Yet we may also use other methods, such as Buddha-recitation or mantra recitation. When a deluded thought arises, recite Amitābha Buddha or uphold a mantra. Do not follow the deluded thought; transform it instead. This too can safeguard the true mind.

Or, when a deluded thought arises, one may suddenly awaken with stern clarity, and everything dissolves into emptiness; the deluded thought then subsides. Therefore, one can attain the “radiant wheel of non-practice” only after directly realizing this wondrous, luminous true mind. If one does not understand what true mind is, one cannot attain it.

“If one has not received verification of the view, then even if one practices, there is no state in which realization can be safeguarded and allowed to function. Therefore, verifying the view is the foremost priority.”

The view refers to correct knowledge and correct understanding: through the permeation of right knowledge and right view, one comes to recognize one’s own nature.

If you still do not recognize your own nature, then “even if you practice, there is no state in which realization can be safeguarded and allowed to function.” Even if you diligently exert yourself in cultivation, you cannot attain the “radiant wheel of non-practice,” because there is no state in which to safeguard realization—you do not know what to safeguard. That is, you are still uncertain about the correct knowledge and correct view discussed above; you do not recognize your own nature, your footing is unsteady, and you remain unsettled.

If you are still in doubt, what can you safeguard? For example, if we have a small child, we must carefully care for and protect the child: do not let the child go hungry or become cold, and do not let the child fall. We attend to the child in every possible way and raise the child to maturity. But if you have no child at all, whom would you protect?

Safeguarding and letting be are two stages of practice: first safeguard, then let be. It is like caring for a child. First one must protect the child; when the child grows up, one lets the child go, allowing independence and self-reliance—to do things and work independently, without needing supervision.

Safeguarding and letting be may seem to consist of only two words, but in actual practice one must travel a long road. To undertake this practice, one must first see one's own nature. If one has not seen one's own nature, what is there to safeguard? And what is one's own nature? Much has already been said above: it is the nature that is now able to see and hear. Recognize it; do not doubt it; safeguard it well.

How is it safeguarded? It is "not that one does not see, nor that one does not hear," but rather that one has clear, lucid awareness without clinging to seeing or hearing. In daily life, this does not mean refusing to look at things or refusing to listen to sounds; it means not discriminating between good and bad, beauty and ugliness, and not giving rise to attachment, aversion, grasping, or rejection.

See as much as you wish and hear as much as you wish, while inwardly there is nothing at all—"vastly open, without abiding." This is safeguarding. Once safeguarding has matured, there is no need to safeguard further. Let it go: one may go anywhere and do anything, yet not abide in anything at all. Then one reaches the state of nonobstruction among phenomena and effortless freedom.

Concerning "the nonobstruction among phenomena," Chan Master Zhenjing Kewen composed this verse: "In all affairs there is no obstruction; freely at ease as one wishes, holding a pig's head in one's hand, reciting the pure precepts with one's mouth, driven out of a brothel, with wine debts still unpaid, at a crossroads, untying the cloth sack."

Holding a pig's head in his hand, he gnaws at its meat while reciting the precepts: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct . . . "I eat vegetarian food; I have just come out of a brothel!" Ha, ha, ha! "Driven out" means being expelled. A brothel is a house of prostitution. He had spent all his money there and was driven out by the madam.

He owed money for drink, and the tavern came to collect the debt. He was so poor that he had no means to repay it. Thus disheveled and destitute, he was nevertheless carefree, at ease, and free of worry. Some may ask: Holding a pig's head and reciting the pure precepts . . . if he does not eat vegetarian food, has he not broken the precepts? Not at all! He had never eaten meat; he was vegetarian.

Why? Their mind is empty, and they are free of attachment to appearances. They never think that meat tastes good and so eat more of it, or that vegetables taste bad and so eat less of them. To have no mind of love and hate, grasping and rejecting—that is vegetarianism. Conversely, although some people are vegetarians, they are attached to flavors: "This dish tastes good and is delicious; that dish tastes bad and is unpalatable!" They are extremely particular, which is no different from not being vegetarian. If our minds are truly empty and pure, then eating is no different from not eating; even if one is holding a pig's head, it does not matter.

But to return to the point: if you have not realized this stage and simply indulge yourself in this way, then you will plunge into hell like an arrow! If your mind is not truly empty and pure, karma will cling to you and bind you, refusing to let you pass.

Here is a Chan koan of this kind. Long ago, there was a Chan master who loved to eat beef. He said, “Eating is not eating!” But was his mind empty and pure? No! He merely said it with his mouth; inwardly, his mind could not become empty, so karmic obstacles clung to him and demanded repayment of his debts. When this Chan master took his last breath, he entered a cow’s womb and became a cow to repay his debt.

One day, a farmer led the cow out and encountered Chan Master Baozhi. At a glance, Master Zhi said, “Oh! Isn’t this So-and-so Chan Master? Didn’t you say, ‘Eating is not eating’? You should not have become a cow. How did you come to become a cow to repay your debts?” The cow’s face streamed with tears!!! It then dashed itself to death.

Therefore, if one has not reached the stage of genuine emptiness and purity, yet speaks such wild boasts, one will descend into hell. We are determined to realize the great Way. We should speak only in accordance with the stage we have realized, and must not act recklessly! To reach the stage of the nonobstruction among phenomena, one must first attain a completely correct view and clearly see the true mind; then one must go further, eliminating deluded habitual tendencies and entering non-contrivance.

Cultivation with attachment to appearances, or contrived cultivation, can never realize the nonobstruction among phenomena.

Nowadays, some people whose minds are not empty and pure foolishly seek spiritual powers. This is disastrous! Not only will they fail to become Buddhas; they are instead liable to become demons! If you desire spiritual powers, a demon will manifest such powers in your mind and transform itself into the appearance of a Buddha for you to see. Thinking it a true Buddha, you will happily cling to it, and the demon will then take up residence in your mind. The demon king will further expand his influence by having you teach the Dharma and lead in a group of demon offspring and descendants. All this results from attachment to appearances. Therefore, we must not be attached to appearances or cultivate through contrivance.

“Therefore, verification of realization of the essential principle is paramount.” This is the most important statement. To realize the essential principle is to clearly see one’s intrinsic nature. The Ganges Mahāmudrā places realization of the essential principle in the foremost position, and the Caodong school’s “Five Ranks of Lord and Vassal” likewise emphasizes this point. The Linji school has the “Three Mysteries and

Three Essentials"; among them, the first essential of the "mystery within the phrase" is to recognize one's own original mind and see one's own intrinsic nature. This likewise emphasizes the same point.

"Thereafter, one can verify the wisdom that abides in itself. This is abiding in one's own intrinsic nature; it is not sought from another, nor was it absent in the past and present now." (This is the first essential.)

One must first realize and see one's intrinsic nature; only then can one bring forth the "wisdom that abides in itself." After clear awakening, safeguard one's intrinsic nature so that it is not lost. Diligently apply oneself and sweep away deluded habitual tendencies. If, amid any favorable or adverse circumstances, one's mind can remain like still water, without the least restless movement, then the various wondrous functions of spiritual powers will arise naturally without being sought.

"Abiding in one's own intrinsic nature" means that it is inherently complete within one's own mind and naturally issues from the original mind. "Not sought from another" means that it is not attained by cultivating some method, nor bestowed upon us by Buddhas or bodhisattvas, much less manifested through possession by ghosts or spirits. "Nor was it absent in the past and present now" means that it was not absent before and present only now; it has been there from the very beginning.

Someone asks, "You say it has been there from the very beginning, so why do I not have it now?" Your deluded thoughts and deluded habitual tendencies have not yet been completely removed! First, you must recognize buddha-nature and clearly awaken to the fact that the capacity to see and hear is intrinsic nature itself. Then safeguard it at all times: do not attach to appearances, and do not run after circumstances. When this safeguarding has matured and the mind has become truly empty and pure, spiritual powers will naturally manifest.

If it is not "abiding in one's own original mind," if it has not been developed by oneself, then it is irrelevant. Once one's last breath ceases, all such powers are gone, and one will not even know where one is going.

Having done evil deeds, one must still descend into hell; this is very dangerous! Here in Shanghai, there have been several so-called people "with spiritual powers." As they approached death, the spirits possessing them left. At that point, not only did they lose their spiritual powers, but their bodies suffered intensely. Mentally, they were even more remorseful and deeply tormented by their consciences. They could only cry, "Pain! Suffering!" and fell into the three lower realms. Those of us who cultivate the true Dharma must take this as a warning!

Lecture Three: Mahāmudrā Samādhi—Familiarizing Oneself with the Dharmakāya

I. Afflictions Are Bodhi

“Let the mind be like a flowing river: abide naturally and spontaneously. Do not establish or reject its rising and falling; then you will realize the intrinsic character of the dharmakāya.”

In our practice, we must let the mind be like a flowing river, bending wherever it bends and turning wherever it turns. We should abide without any subjective fixation, letting everything proceed naturally in accordance with conditions, free of self-view and without obstruction. At all times, let things flow on as peacefully and freely as water. This is how practice should be done.

We ordinary beings are burdened by layer upon layer of self-interest and manifold deluded thoughts. We want everything to accord with our own wishes: “I want it this way, so it must be this way”; otherwise, afflictions arise in our minds. Thus our karmic obstacles are profound, and we cannot realize the Way.

Now that we are applying ourselves to cultivating the Way, we must change these deluded habits of fixation. We must be able to accord with conditions and adapt to circumstances: bend when it is time to bend, turn when it is time to turn, and not stubbornly cling to our own views. For example, in our work, whether we are promoted or demoted should make no difference. We should not rejoice at promotion or become upset at demotion.

Since everything is for serving the people, rather than for ourselves, we must be able to rise or step down as circumstances require. Having studied Buddhism, we know that all sounds, forms, wealth, and gain are like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water: they cannot be sought or obtained. When the mind is constantly empty and quiescent, there are no afflictions. Then every matter can be discussed reasonably, every responsibility can be shouldered selflessly, and we can press forward courageously in our work.

If everyone acted in this selfless way for the sake of others, society would be peaceful, the nation would prosper, and the country would become strong and wealthy. Thus, studying Buddhism is greatly beneficial to society and the human mind, and it truly ought to be vigorously promoted.

When we do things, we should not concern ourselves with success or failure, but simply do our utmost. Do not rejoice in success or become upset by failure; sum up experience, correct mistakes, and press on with renewed effort. If we can make our

thoughts open and upright, without crookedness or selfishness, unmoved and unwavering, we will naturally realize the Original Face of the dharmakāya.

Likewise, when a thought arises, do not give rise to the idea that "the mind's light is obscured by dark clouds"; nor, when deluded thoughts subside, give rise to the idea of "eliminating" them. For as soon as thoughts of "leaving" and "getting out" arise, delusion is added to delusion. There is still attachment, and liberation cannot be attained. Mahāmudrā teaches acting without contrivance, remaining unstained by everything, and naturally according with conditions at all times. This is a higher and more difficult level of practice. If one cannot do this for the time being, one must undertake other practices, which will be discussed later.

Therefore, we must be like this at all times. When thoughts arise, neither heed nor suppress them, nor follow them. Let everything proceed naturally in accordance with conditions; respond to the myriad circumstances without abiding. This is the intrinsic character of our dharmakāya. Our own dharmatā is originally like this: it can give rise to wondrous functioning in response to circumstances; it is not something dead and motionless. Its responsiveness is exceedingly swift—faster than the speed of light.

Ordinary beings respond slowly because they have so many deluded thoughts. It is like the sun obscured by dark clouds: its light cannot shine forth, and its powers consequently diminish. The manifestation of spiritual powers occurs when deluded thoughts have been completely exhausted and the mind's capacities can function fully. All sentient beings possess buddha-nature, and buddha-nature inherently possesses boundless spiritual powers and wondrous functions.

So long as we can be as unselfconscious as flowing water and let things take their natural course, as the saying goes, "Fallen flowers have intention; flowing water has no mind," and at all times let everything proceed naturally and freely, we can restore the intrinsic character of the dharmakāya and manifest great spiritual powers. The intrinsic character of the dharmakāya does not mean that not a single thought arises, or that one is stiff and knows nothing at all. It is lively and vital, giving rise to function in accordance with conditions, with boundless wondrous activity. So-called no-thought does not mean that no thought whatsoever arises; rather, when thoughts arise without abiding, this is called no-thought. Emptiness is precisely presence, and presence is precisely emptiness!

Speaking of emptiness and presence, their relationship is of tremendous importance to Buddhist practitioners. Only after one thoroughly understands this relationship can one make rapid progress. Those who practice always say that everything is empty and that one should not cling to presence, whereas ordinary

beings cling to presence in everything they do. Emptiness and presence thus seem to be irreconcilable opposites.

This is because people understand “emptiness” and “presence” differently. When ordinary beings speak of emptiness, they mean that nothing whatsoever exists. In Buddhadharma, emptiness means only the absence of inherent nature; it does not mean the absence of provisional appearances. Thus it is said that form itself is emptiness, not that emptiness is spoken of apart from provisional appearances.

The emptiness of which we speak is not the emptiness of ordinary beings, in which nothing at all exists. It is the emptiness of not abiding in provisional appearances—the emptiness in which “emptiness is presence, presence is emptiness, and emptiness and presence are nondual.” Therefore, no-thought does not mean that not a single thought arises; it means that when thoughts arise, one neither follows nor abides in them. This principle must be thoroughly understood. The true emptiness of buddha-nature does not mean that it does not manifest, for whenever it functions, it necessarily manifests.

If emptiness had no appearances, it would not be intrinsic nature. For where there is mind, there are necessarily appearances: mind is appearance, appearance is mind, and mind and appearance are nondual. As I said last time, a mirror must have reflections; without reflections, it could not be called a mirror. Thus buddha-nature must be able to manifest forms and appearances. Without such appearances, it could not be called buddha-nature, for without wondrous functioning, buddha-nature would become dead emptiness or stagnant emptiness. But buddha-nature is not stagnant emptiness. It is spiritually luminous and all-pervading, capable of giving rise to every wondrous function and manifesting all manner of forms and appearances. Therefore it is said, “The myriad forms and phenomena are complete within the mind.”

At this point, let me tell you a story. In Zhenjiang there is Jinshan Monastery, which has a precious treasure that protects the monastery. This treasure is Su Dongpo’s jade belt, made of square pieces of jade strung together with gold thread. How did this jade belt come to remain at Jinshan Monastery? Su Dongpo and Chan Master Foyin, the abbot of Jinshan Monastery, were close friends.

Su Dongpo was an excellent poet and writer, a Buddhist believer and practitioner as well, and he prided himself on having reached the point of being unmoved by the eight worldly winds. Chan Master Foyin wished to test the depth of his practice, so he deliberately disparaged him, saying, “Su Dongpo’s poetry is worthless dog shit.” Hearing this, Su Dongpo became quite angry and launched an expedition to demand an accounting, crossing the river in a fury to confront Chan Master Foyin. Foyin

laughed and said, “So much for being unmoved by the eight worldly winds—one fart has blown you across the river!” This is a humorous story.

On one occasion, Su Dongpo came to Jinshan Monastery to visit Chan Master Foyin. The master was then leading the assembly in seated meditation in the Chan hall. It was the period of silence, when outsiders were not to enter. Knowing the rule, Su Dongpo sat waiting in the reception hall for Chan Master Foyin to come out. After one incense stick had burned down, another was added, so the master came out very late.

Su Dongpo waited for a long time and became very impatient. When the incense period ended and silence was lifted, Chan Master Foyin came out. “Ah, Academician Su, please sit, please sit.” Su Dongpo said, “Hah! You still ask me to sit? I want to sit on the head of you bald donkey!” They were close friends and were joking; he was calling the Chan master a “bald donkey.”

Hearing this, the Chan master said, “Oh, you want to sit on this old monk’s head? Fine, fine, fine. I have a question for you. If you can answer it, this old monk’s head may serve as your seat. But if you cannot answer it, you must remove the jade belt you are wearing and give it to us as a treasure that protects the monastery.”

Su Dongpo burst into laughter: “Ask whatever question you please. I can give ten answers to every one question. I have many marvelous interpretations and broad explanations.”

Chan Master Foyin said, “Good. Let me ask you: the four elements are fundamentally empty, and the five aggregates are nonexistent. Where will you sit?” He meant: you want to sit on my head, but my body consists of the four elements and five aggregates, which are empty and without anything real. How can you sit on it? Su Dongpo thought: the four elements are empty, the five aggregates do not truly exist, and everything is nonexistent—then I have nothing to land on. Where can I sit? I cannot sit in empty space. . . . He pondered back and forth, paced around three times, and could not answer for the moment.

Chan Master Foyin seized the opportunity and called to a young novice: “Come, remove his jade belt. He cannot answer.” Thus Su Dongpo’s jade belt remained at Jinshan Monastery as a treasure that protects the monastery. This is a koan of emptiness within presence and presence within emptiness.

In fact, this question is not difficult to answer. Emptiness is not stagnant emptiness, and presence is not real presence. Emptiness does not obstruct presence, nor does presence obstruct emptiness. Emptiness is presence, presence is emptiness; mind is appearance, and appearance is mind. Thus one might answer, “True emptiness does not obstruct wondrous presence; I shall sit right on the head of your provisional

appearance!" Or one could simply sit down in a chair and say, "Thus I sit!" Or raise one finger and say, "I sit right here!" Or, better still, raise a finger and ask him, "Where do you sit?" Such answers may be produced at hand; there is no need to rack one's brains.

Someone asked a lecturer on the Diamond Sūtra, "If there is no appearance of a person and no appearance of self, then who speaks and who hears?" This question seems difficult: if there is neither person nor self, then there is no speaking and no hearing. Can one still lecture on and listen to sūtras here? Yet the Diamond Sūtra demolishes attachment to appearances in order to reveal intrinsic nature; it does not teach stagnant emptiness. Though phenomenal appearances are empty, buddha-nature is not empty.

One may answer, "It only says that there are no appearances; it does not say that there are no persons." Our buddha-nature is wondrous presence that is not truly present, and true emptiness that is not empty. If everyone clearly understands the principle of emptiness and presence, and then further safeguards realization continuously and seamlessly at all times, neither abiding in appearances nor falling into emptiness, one can fully realize the great Way. Otherwise, whenever we encounter circumstances and appearances, we become stuck and lose our freedom. When will we ever be finished?

There are many such koans in the Chan school. During the reign of Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty, a prime minister invited the senior monks of every school and tradition to hold an unrestricted assembly. This meant that there was no concealment whatsoever: each set forth his own view, directly and freely revealed intrinsic nature, and fully realized the great Way.

A lecturer on the Avataṃsaka Sūtra said, "According to the teachings of our school, attaining Buddhahood requires three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. Yet the Chan school says that one can become a Buddha with a single blow or shout. This is wholly inconsistent with the Buddha's teaching."

"Now I ask all the great Chan adepts present: if with one shout you can penetrate the Five Teachings taught by the Avataṃsaka school, I will admit that one can become a Buddha with a single blow or shout. But if you cannot penetrate the Five Teachings, that is the teaching of Māra."

Which of you will come forward and explain?" The Huayan school divides the Buddhadharma into five teachings: the Lesser Vehicle Teaching, the Initial Mahāyāna Teaching, the Final Mahāyāna Teaching, the Sudden Mahāyāna Teaching, and the Perfect Mahāyāna Teaching. Their doctrines progress from shallow to profound, and their practices advance step by step. Among the eminent Chan masters attending

the gathering was Patriarch Yuanwu Keqin, who was over eighty years old and the teacher of Chan Master Dahui Zonggao.

He glanced at Chan Master Jingyin Cheng, who was in his forties. Jingyin Cheng understood his meaning, stood forth, and said to the Huayan lecturer, “Your question is not difficult to answer. It is not worth troubling the great patriarchs present to explain it to you. Let this junior elder explain it to you.”

“Let us first settle the doctrines of the five teachings. The Lesser Vehicle Teaching holds that things exist, that there is a path to attain, nirvāṇa to realize, and birth and death to transcend. The Initial Mahāyāna Teaching speaks of emptiness. The Final Mahāyāna Teaching speaks of neither emptiness nor existence: it is neither empty nor existent. The Sudden Mahāyāna Teaching speaks of emptiness as existence and existence as emptiness. The Perfect Mahāyāna Teaching speaks of neither emptiness nor existence, neither existence nor emptiness, with perfect interpenetration and no obstruction.”

“Is that correct?” The Huayan lecturer replied, “Correct!” Chan Master Jingyin Cheng gave a great shout and asked the assembly, “Did you hear that?” The assembly replied, “We heard it!” Cheng said, “Since you heard it, there was something. You have passed through the Lesser Vehicle Teaching.”

At that time, Emperor Huizong was seated among the crowd, disguised in blue robes and a small cap. He had instructed the prime minister not to reveal his identity, so that he could listen carefully to the explanation. After a while, the sound faded away. Cheng again asked, “Can you hear any sound now?” The assembly replied, “No!” Cheng said, “No sound is emptiness. You have passed through the Initial Teaching.”

He continued, “What is absent now was present just now; therefore it is not emptiness. What was present just now is absent now; therefore it is not existence. Is this not neither emptiness nor existence? You have passed through the Final Teaching.”

“Furthermore, without the presence just now, what could we now call emptiness? Without the emptiness now, how could we speak of the presence just now? When we speak of existence, emptiness is within existence; when we speak of emptiness, existence is within emptiness. Is this not emptiness as existence and existence as emptiness? You have passed through the Sudden Teaching. And what is the Perfect Mahāyāna Teaching? I give a shout, yet do not use it as a shout. Though I shout, it is as if I had never shouted: at all times and in all places, do not cling to appearances.”

“When eating, do not bite onto a single grain of rice. When dressing, do not let a single thread of cloth catch on you. However busy one may be at work, it is as though one had never worked.”

“This is the essential meaning of the Diamond Sūtra: ‘Give rise to this mind without abiding anywhere.’ When speaking of existence, not even the finest hair is established; when speaking of emptiness, it pervades realms as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Abiding in neither emptiness nor existence, it is perfectly interpenetrating and without obstruction. This is the supreme Perfect Mahāyāna Teaching, the highest realm spoken of in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra—the dharma realm of the nonobstruction among phenomena. This is also the essence of the Chan school.”

When the assembly heard this, all were convinced and praised it, and Emperor Huizong nodded repeatedly as well. The Buddhadharma is truly the most sublime religion and the finest philosophy of life. Since we can have faith in it, accept it, and put it into practice, what worries need we have about success or failure, gain or loss? The Ganges Mahāmudrā teaches the supreme Buddhadharma. Since we have been so fortunate to hear this teaching, we should practice in accordance with it, allowing the mind at all times to function naturally like a flowing river, without abiding or clinging. Only then can we realize the intrinsic aspect of the dharmakāya.

“When a thought arises in the mind, know it to be the functioning of wisdom. This is so in contemplation and at all times. Therefore, whether one is heedless and does not practice, or diligently accumulates practice, its dharma-nature neither increases nor decreases.”

When a thought arises in the mind, one should know that it is the functioning of wisdom, the wondrous functioning of dharma-nature. This is so not only during contemplation, but at all times. Therefore, when one is heedless and does not practice, dharma-nature does not decrease; when one diligently accumulates practice, dharma-nature does not increase. Dharma-nature itself neither increases nor decreases.

Many of us, when practicing Buddhism, often suppress our thoughts so that none arise. We imagine that sitting with not a single thought arising for ten days or half a month, or even for ten or eight years, is good practice. We do not realize that this is cultivating a dead samādhi. It brings no genuine benefit and cannot free one from the three realms. It merely suppresses thoughts temporarily; once it is disturbed, deluded thoughts arise with even greater force than before.

Even if it is not disturbed, what use is there in sitting there rigidly? Prolonged dead samādhi turns one into earth, wood, metal, or stone. Genuine practice requires lively training amid circumstances. Know that where thoughts arise is the wondrous functioning of one’s intrinsic nature. If one does not cling to appearances, wisdom increases day by day. In our practice, we must become living Buddhas, not dead Buddhas. We must bring forth all kinds of wondrous functions to benefit and bring

happiness to sentient beings; only then does it have value. If one merely sits motionless, does one not become a clay bodhisattva?

As explained earlier, after seeing one's intrinsic nature, one must diligently remove habitual tendencies amid circumstances. Contemplation is the best means for removing habitual tendencies. Contemplation is the wondrous functioning of buddha-nature. It is not only during contemplation that this is wondrous functioning; it is so at all times. For example, traveling through mountains and waters, visiting relatives and friends, watching opera, and dancing are all wondrous functioning.

It is not that one cannot watch opera, but one must not be watched by the opera or carried away by its plot.

While watching, one repeatedly gives rise to joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure along with the separations and reunions, sadness and delight in the drama. Afterward, one cannot forget it and remains preoccupied with it, with the mind constantly turning over the plot: this person is so good, that person so bad. This is what it means to be watched by the opera. How can that do? Watching opera can also be used to practice and train the mind: see whether the mind can be moved by it.

If one can reach the state of "a wooden person watching flowers and birds," that is good practice. But this does not mean being unaware of who is good or bad in the drama, or unaware of its plot. If one knew nothing at all, would one not become a pool of dead water? It is not that one does not know, but that one does not discriminate, grasp, or reject, and is not moved by the plot.

Watching without watching, not watching yet watching, with no abiding whatsoever. "The affairs of the human world are always but a play." We cannot let go of this or that, yet in truth all of it is as unreal as a play. When one breath does not return, the play is over. Why cling to it?

When we practice diligently and conscientiously, the dharmakāya does not increase by a fraction. When we are heedless, the dharmakāya does not decrease by a fraction. In other words, when we become Buddhas, the dharmakāya does not increase by a fraction; when we become sentient beings, it does not decrease by a fraction. Ascending to heaven does not increase it by a fraction, and descending into hell does not decrease it by a fraction.

It has no arising or ceasing, coming or going; it remains unchanged throughout the ages. A "living Buddha" in America named Lu Shengyan once said, "When one practices, buddha-nature—the heavenly mind—ascends to heaven, while the evil mind that is bad descends underground."

If one rises and the other descends, then one true mind has been divided into two. That would be truly disastrous! Some Dharma teachers say when lecturing on the sūtras, “If we do bad deeds, the deluded mind that does those bad deeds goes to hell, while the true mind rises to heaven.” This too divides the true and deluded into two minds.

They do not know that the true mind, or buddha-nature, and the deluded mind are originally one. The deluded mind is the true mind, and the true mind is the deluded mind.

For example, when water, which symbolizes the true mind, gives rise to waves, which symbolize the deluded mind, the waves are water and water is the waves. How could there be two? Someone may ask, “If there are not two, why do people speak of three hun and seven po souls? Do not three hun and seven po make ten?” If that were so, would one person not become ten people? No. What is called hun belongs to yang; it is bright, selfless, upright energy. What is called po belongs to yin; it is dark, defiled, and perverse thought.

The three hun and seven po mean that a person has relatively little brightness, only three parts, and much darkness and that which cannot bear the light, seven parts. It does not mean that one person is divided into ten things. If we drive out all seven portions of the dark and perverse mind, transform them, and turn them entirely into light, we realize the Way.

Patriarch Lü Chunyang was called “Pure Yang” because all his po had been transformed away: all darkness had become light, and he attained the Way of the immortals. Therefore, the true mind and the deluded mind are not two things. If you descend into hell, the true mind also goes down into hell with you, but its light does not diminish, it is not defiled, and it does not suffer.

It is like a pearl wrapped in filthy mud: the pearl’s light does not diminish. If you ascend to heaven, it does not rejoice, nor does its light increase. Our intrinsic nature is at every moment neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor wavering, neither arising nor ceasing.

“When one knows greed, anger, afflictions, and feelings of suffering and pleasure to be naturally so, one attains the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya.”

The reason we have feelings such as greed, anger, afflictions, suffering, and pleasure is that they are all the natural wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. Without the dharmakāya, such feelings could not arise. Yet these varying emotional transformations—at times happiness, at times sorrow and affliction—are all the mischief of the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance.

When we encounter something unsatisfactory, we become afflicted; when we seek but cannot obtain, we become angry; when our wishes cannot be fulfilled, we suffer grief and resentment; when our desires are fulfilled, we feel delight and happiness. All these feelings are empty and without intrinsic nature; they are deluded thoughts that arise in response to circumstances. As it is said, "The myriad dharmas are originally at ease; people alone make trouble for themselves." This is all because of fundamental ignorance.

When ignorance is mentioned, practitioners are all afraid, for this is the thing that harms us and causes us to revolve through the six realms. Without it, we would long ago have become Buddhas. But do not fear it. Ignorance is not truly existent; it is merely a deluded thought, an illusion. As soon as we awaken, we illumine and break through it.

Because it is not something truly existent, it cannot be smashed apart with any physical object. We need only awaken to the fact that greed, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and the like are deluded feelings arising from our clinging mind's attachment to circumstances; they are deluded thoughts of ignorance. They are inherently thus, empty and without anything at all. "Inherently thus" means "originally so, not intentionally fabricated."

Once we understand this wondrous principle, all suffering, pleasure, and afflictions dissolve the moment we awaken. As the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: "Knowing illusion is itself liberation; no expedient means are required. Liberation from illusion is itself awakening; there are no gradual stages." We often speak of "deep and weighty karmic obstacles." What are karmic obstacles? Karmic obstacles are your attachment to appearances.

If you are not attached to appearances, you will have no afflictions at all; then where could karmic obstacles come from? All painful and pleasant experiences are like dreams while we sleep. Within a dream, nightmares and beautiful dreams seem vividly real, but once you awaken, nothing remains. Therefore, if we can awaken sharply, let go of everything, and refrain from attachment to appearances, we attain the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. This wondrous functioning is not difficult: we need only remain awake at all times and never abide in appearances.

Some people say: "Oh! Investigating Chan and studying Esoteric Buddhism are difficult; it is easier simply to recite the Buddha's name and seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land!" In fact, they are mistaken. Buddha-recitation, Chan practice, and Esoteric practice are all the same; there is no distinction of difficulty or ease. One simply chooses a dharma gate suited to one's own faculties.

Buddha-recitation uses the Buddha's name to sweep away the accumulated grime on one's mind-ground, and uses name-recitation to bring oneself to wakefulness.

Master Lianchi said that Buddha-recitation is “each sound calling the master of the house awake.”

That is, one sincerely recites the sacred name, sound after sound, to awaken one’s own intrinsic nature. Do not abide in appearances; do not cling to circumstances. Thus one directly sees Buddha-nature and may attain rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss at the time of death. Chan practice is the same: one continually attends to the huatou, watching to see where deluded thoughts arise from.

As soon as a thought arises, ask it, “Where do you come from?” Strike it head-on with a blow. This deluded thought was never there to begin with; it is an illusory phantom. Strike it, and it vanishes. This is the same as Buddha-recitation: both are intended to exhaust deluded thoughts, thereby directly realizing the original nature.

Yet some say that they are not the same. They say that in Buddha-recitation, Amitābha Buddha, Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva, and the bodhisattvas of the Lotus Pond assembly come to guide one to rebirth in the Western Pure Land, enabling one to transcend the three realms horizontally, whereas Chan practice cannot do this. In fact, they too are mistaken. Guidance and horizontal transcendence do exist, but such guidance and transcendence do not mean that someone pulls you there.

Chan Master Yongming explained this very clearly: the Buddha is like the moon in the sky, while the mind is like a basin of water. Only when the mind is pure can the moon’s reflection appear. If the mind is impure—if it is muddy water—then although the moon is in the sky (although the Buddha shines his light upon you, you cannot see it), its reflection cannot appear. Then you cannot be reborn in the Western Pure Land.

Master Hanshan said that one must recite the Buddha’s name with effective effort and cut off the root of attachment in order to have any hope of rebirth in the Western Pure Land. The root of attachment is the deluded stirring of love and desire born of ignorance; it is the root of birth and death. Unless it is cut off, the mind is like muddy water, in which the moon’s reflection cannot appear.

It is not that the Buddha does not come to guide you or does not shine his light upon you; it is simply that you yourself cannot see it, just as a blind person cannot see the sun. Moreover, when Chan practitioners apply themselves and their mind-ground becomes empty and pure, that is the Pure Land. For mind itself is the land, and the land itself is mind. The Buddha said: “If one wishes to purify one’s land, one must first purify one’s mind. As one’s mind becomes pure, so the Buddha-land becomes pure.”

When the mind is pure, the Buddha-land is pure. At that time, if you vow to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, Amitābha Buddha will surely, in his compassion, guide you there. Amitābha Buddha is not like us ordinary beings. Ordinary beings have feelings of love and aversion: if you have formed a good affinity with me, I will guide you; if you have not formed an affinity with me, I will ignore you.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas practice great compassion without conditions; they do not hold such inferior views. If you have not formed an affinity with me, then I shall form one with you and compassionately guide you. In terms of Esoteric Buddhism, Amitābha Buddha does not care whether you recite the Buddha's name or practice some other dharma gate: when you are at the time of death, he shines his light upon you and guides you to rebirth in the West.

Moreover, he shines upon and guides not only those who practice, but also those who do not practice and those who commit evil. Yet people who commit evil have deep and weighty karmic obstacles; they cannot see the Buddha's light, or, seeing its intensity, become frightened and flee. They lack the blessings for rebirth in the West. The Amitābha Sūtra says: "One cannot attain birth in that land with few good roots, blessings, and conditions."

Good roots, blessings, and conditions: not one of these three can be lacking. To be reborn in the Western Pure Land, one must possess all of them. It is not enough merely to recite "Amitābha Buddha" carelessly a few times.

All you bodhisattvas, we must truly apply ourselves and completely still the deluded mind before we can realize the Way. Mahāmudrā teaches a dharma gate of the mind-ground. The One True Dharma Realm—the Flower Treasury World—is Mahāmudrā. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is within this Mahāmudrā; it does not lie outside it.

The Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is on the thirteenth level of this Mahāmudrā, while the Land of True Reward and Adornment is on the twentieth level of the Flower Treasury World. Our Sahā world is likewise on the thirteenth level, parallel to the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages in the West. The Buddha said: "From here westward, passing a hundred thousand koṭis of Buddha-lands, there is a world called Ultimate Bliss."

That is, going westward from here brings one to the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. So long as we have unwavering faith, perform all wholesome deeds, make vows, and dedicate the merit toward rebirth there, we can all go. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas will not reject us. It is not the case that one cannot go simply because one has not recited the sacred name of Amitābha Buddha.

Some say, “I have recited the Buddha’s name too little; I am afraid I may not be able to go.” This is incorrect. Whether one is reborn in the West does not depend on how much one has recited; this is not a business transaction. Rather, it depends on the quality of one’s Buddha-recitation—whether one’s mind is sincere and pure. If your mind is truly pure, a single thought at the time of death can bring rebirth in the West.

If we can truly reflect that all forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects, and dharmas are flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water, impossible to seek or obtain, then, letting go of one thing, we let go of everything. If, with a pure and undefiled mind, we recite “Amitābha Buddha” once, this single thought of pure mind can accord with the Buddha and bring rebirth in the West. There is no need for ten recitations, a hundred recitations, or tens of millions of recitations; it depends on whether, at the time of death, one can maintain one-pointedness of mind without distraction and clear right mindfulness.

At the time of death, to have a mind free from confusion, an undistracted awareness, and clear right mindfulness—this is the attainment of profound Buddha-recitation samādhi. To reach this level of practice depends on the accumulated effort of diligently clearing away deluded habitual tendencies now.

Therefore, in applying ourselves now, we must sincerely let go, let go, and let go again, making the mind pure and undefiled. Only then can we be assured of rebirth in the West in the future. This too is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. We unite the Chan school, the Pure Land school, and Esoteric Buddhism because they are originally one. Do not distinguish Esoteric Buddhism, Chan, and Pure Land; they are originally one Buddha school.

II. Natural Abiding Without Cultivation

“If one does not understand natural, spontaneous functioning, deluded thoughts will inevitably race about, and one will fall into the state of ordinary deluded beings. Therefore, one should always remain inseparable from natural abiding without cultivation.”

At all times and in all places, every action we undertake is the wondrous functioning of the true mind, and all forms are our own manifestation bodies. We should naturally accord with the various causes and conditions, respond and act as needed, and do our utmost to bring benefit to the community. This is called “natural, spontaneous functioning.”

If one does not understand or penetrate the principle of “natural, spontaneous functioning,” one will inevitably become attached to circumstances and cling to the mind. Deluded thoughts will fly about as one greedily seeks without satisfaction to

fulfill one's desires. Then one buries a fine living Buddha beneath the identity of an ordinary deluded person. We practice the Dharma in order to see our true nature and realize the Way, without attachment to anything.

If one wishes to develop spiritual powers, obtain something, or ask Buddhas and bodhisattvas to bless one with promotion and wealth, one has gone directly contrary to Buddhist practice. Now we need only remain naturally at ease and non-abiding at every moment, dwelling amid the realm of delusion without superimposing any further knowing, yet not becoming like wood or stone. Clearly and distinctly, we respond to conditions and circumstances. This is Buddhist activity.

As we explained earlier, do not take this physical body to be the self; take empty quiescence as the essence. Do not identify with deluded thoughts; take luminous knowing as the mind. To practice through the dharma gate of the mind-ground is like cooking rice with rice: one will certainly make a meal. To practice otherwise is like trying to cook rice with sand: however much effort one expends, one cannot make a meal.

Once we understand that this mind of luminous knowing—pure, undefiled, and clear—is Buddha, we no longer become attached to appearances. We then naturally serve the community, temper ourselves amid affairs and circumstances, eliminate all deluded habitual tendencies, and perfectly realize Buddhahood. Otherwise, deluded thoughts will inevitably race about, and we will fall into the state of ordinary deluded beings, unable to transcend birth and death.

We ordinary beings have been habituated to attachment to appearances through lives upon lives and kalpas upon kalpas; this cannot be changed all at once. Not only do we pick and choose in food and daily living, but we also endlessly pick and choose among Dharma practices. One person says, "The Pure Land school is good and reliable; the Chan school is dangerous and unreliable." Another says, "Esoteric Buddhism is good."

Still another says, "Esoteric Buddhism is not good either; it is filled with demonic influences." Oh, this is good, that is not good . . . all of this is like blind people feeling an elephant: making arbitrary distinctions and speaking nonsense.

They do not know that the Dharma taught by the Buddha is equal, equal, and again equal. The Buddha merely taught different dharma gates in response to the differing capacities of different people; this is called "prescribing medicine according to the illness." It is like eating: if you enjoy sweet foods, you choose sweet foods; if you enjoy sour foods, you choose sour foods.

If those who like sour foods say that sweet foods are bad, and those who like sweet foods say that sour foods are bad; if Buddha-recitation practitioners say that Chan is

dangerous, though Chan is not in fact dangerous; or Chan practitioners say that Esoteric Buddhism has demonic influences, though Esoteric Buddhism in fact has no such influences—this is all merely giving undue weight to one's own preferences and making arbitrary distinctions. Not only does it bring affliction upon oneself, but it also unwittingly incurs the offense of slandering the Dharma.

Practice whichever school you prefer, but do not say that other schools are inferior. Every school is the same. If you say Chan practice is difficult, practicing other schools is not easy either; if you say Buddha-recitation is easy, practicing other schools is not difficult either.

Layman Pang said: "Difficult, difficult, difficult—spreading ten loads of sesame oil atop a tree."

This means that beginning practitioners do not understand the key to practice, so it is exceedingly difficult for them—like "a sticky fish climbing a slippery pole." The scales on a fish are sticky and slick; how could it easily climb an oily bamboo pole? But once this is pointed out, one realizes that the very one capable of speaking, acting, crying, and laughing is our own intrinsic nature. It radiates light before our very faces all day long, without the slightest concealment. There is no need to search or pray for it; simply let go of everything.

As the saying goes, "One may wear out iron shoes searching everywhere, yet find it without the slightest effort." Therefore, Laywoman Pang immediately responded: "Easy, easy, easy—the meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the West is atop the hundred grasses." It is not difficult at all; investigating Chan and realizing the Way are very easy indeed.

"Atop the hundred grasses" means atop every thing whatsoever. The implication of "atop" is to see apart from appearances, rather than looking downward and becoming attached to appearances. The capacity to perceive things apart from appearances is the wondrous functioning of intrinsic nature. Is this not very easy? Therefore, in our practice we should not divide ourselves by schools and sects, calling this difficult and that easy. We need only recognize at every moment this true mind, which is apart from appearances and yet clearly aware. Do not mistake the shadow for it; a shadow cannot be grasped.

Although the principle may now be understood, the habitual tendency to abide in appearances, accumulated through lives and kalpas, will still come to assail us. Chan Master Guifeng said: "Deluded attachments from many lives become habitual and seem to form one's nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure continue in a subtle stream. Though true principle may be suddenly comprehended, these feelings are difficult to remove at once. One must constantly examine them and diminish them

again and again." Therefore, we must constantly remain aware: whenever a thought arises, immediately recognize it and dispel it.

If deluded thoughts are powerful and cannot be transformed at once, recite the Buddha's name or uphold a mantra to transform them. The Buddha's name and mantras are swords of wisdom, used to sever the deluded mind and emotional thoughts that cling to appearances; their power is inexhaustible. So long as we recite them sincerely, we will certainly receive the blessings of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, realizing the Way presents no great difficulty.

Likewise, to be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, practitioners of any school need only make the vow and can attain rebirth. As we often say, Buddha-remembrance has a wide scope. It is not only reciting "Amitābha Buddha" that counts as Buddha-remembrance: chanting sūtras is also Buddha-remembrance; doing good deeds without attachment to appearances is also Buddha-remembrance; remaining lucidly aware is also Buddha-remembrance.

Why? Because Buddha means awakening. If you are not deluded at every moment and dedicate the merit toward rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, is this not Buddha-remembrance? The Pure Land school says that to attain the highest grade of the highest level of rebirth, one must "read and recite Mahāyāna." Why read and recite Mahāyāna? It is to enable you to understand principle—to understand from where such phenomena as birth and death arise, and how birth and death may be transcended.

Only when you understand these principles, empty out the deluded mind, and remain wholly without attachment can you attain the highest grade of the highest level of rebirth. If you abide in appearances and cling to them stubbornly, thinking that this world is bad and that you wish to go to the West to enjoy blessings, then you have gone astray. Even if you can go there, you will attain only the lowest grade of the lowest level of rebirth. Since your mind is not empty and pure, you can be reborn only in the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages, not in the Land of Expedient Means with Residue or the Land of True Reward and Adornment.

What is Chan? It is the originally free and pure mind—the "Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, wondrous mind of nirvāṇa" spoken of in the Chan school. Is this wondrous mind of nirvāṇa not the Pure Land? Is it not also the secret treasury of Esoteric Buddhism? Thus Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism may appear to be three schools, but in reality they are one.

Esoteric Buddhism has many methods for rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, such as the practice of phowa, the Great Amitābha practice, and the practice of transference of consciousness. All lead to rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate

Bliss. Reciting Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva's name likewise leads to rebirth in the West, because Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is in the West. He too radiates light upon you and guides you to rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

The reason rebirth has nine grades lies precisely in whether one is attached to appearances or not. If you understand that mind is the land and the land is mind, that birth is no birth and no birth is birth, and remain wholly without attachment to appearances, then within no birth there is no impediment to rebirth. Such rebirth is wondrous functioning. No birth does not mean dying and remaining motionless there. Unceasing birth is precisely no birth, and no birth is precisely unceasing birth. Only then does one attain the wondrous truth of no birth.

"Therefore, one should always abide without departing from the great natural state of non-practice." What is called non-practice means that "practice within non-practice is right practice." Mahāmudrā is the highest vehicle of Esoteric Buddhism. It does not require you to recite mantras, form mudrās, or practice any particular method. Let everything unfold naturally and spontaneously, with no attachment whatsoever. Such practice is abiding in the great natural state.

It is the same after awakening in the Chan school: practicing without practice, without the need for antidotal measures. Antidotal dharma gates are methods for eliminating delusion, practiced specifically in response to each person's habitual tendencies. For example, those with strong sexual desire specially cultivate contemplation of impurity or contemplation of white bones; those especially fond of talking specially observe silence. These are expedient methods for quelling delusion and returning to the true.

Mahāmudrā does not require such antidotal measures. It teaches us that all forms and appearances are manifestations of intrinsic nature, all wondrous functioning of the true mind. To remain without abiding at every moment is the great practice of practicing without practice. When thoughts arise in one who recites the Buddha's name, recognizing them immediately renders them empty; this itself is Buddha-remembrance. It is not necessary to recite "Amitābha Buddha" in order for it to count as Buddha-remembrance.

Yet one's practice must accord with one's own capacity; one must not be confined to a single pattern. There are several different ways of Buddha-remembrance: when a thought arises, recognize it at once—this is Buddha-remembrance of true reality; contemplate that you yourself are Amitābha Buddha—this is visualization Buddha-remembrance; contemplate the Buddha's excellent marks and characteristics—this is contemplation of the Buddha's form; never depart from the phrase "Amitābha Buddha"—this is name-recitation Buddha-remembrance.

In our practice, we must choose a method suited to our own dispositions; only then can we gain twice the result with half the effort. If, when thoughts arise, you cannot recognize them and immediately empty them, then recite the Buddha's name. If silent recitation still does not work and thoughts continue to move, then recite "Amitābha Buddha . . ." aloud. In every case, you must cut off your deluded thoughts and transform them into no-thought.

Although both are Buddha-remembrance, there is a great difference in power and effect between understanding this principle and not understanding it.

Those who recite the Buddha's name without understanding principle remain attached to appearances, clinging constantly to Amitābha Buddha in the West. Those who recite the Buddha's name with understanding know that Buddha-remembrance borrows Amitābha Buddha's sacred name to sweep away the filth in our minds and turn around the afflictions and ignorance of our attachment to appearances, so that we may realize the same pure Buddha-nature as Amitābha Buddha. Because the methods of practice differ, the grades of rebirth in the West will also differ accordingly. This practice without attachment to appearances is "abiding in the great natural state of non-practice." Abiding without abiding is called natural abiding.

A Chan master taught in this way: "Where there is a Buddha, do not remain; where there is no Buddha, pass quickly through." Where there is a Buddha, do not stay; where there is no Buddha, quickly pass on.

This means that one must neither cling to existence nor incline toward emptiness. Neither of the two extremes of existence and nonexistence is established, nor is there anything in between. This is the meaning of the Middle Way, and also the Tiantai school's threefold contemplation of emptiness, provisional existence, and the middle in one mind. Thus appearances are not nonexistent; they arise illusorily and function.

If true nature could not manifest illusory appearances and function through them, it would be stagnant water. What value would Buddha-nature then have? We practice in order to eliminate completely the deluded habits of clinging to illusory appearances, not to sit rigidly and motionlessly. If we can awaken, never abiding in appearances and not clinging to dharmas in our practice, then we are on the right path and have entered "abiding in the great natural state of non-practice."

"At all times, recognize the view directly pointed out; it encompasses everything."

No matter the time or place, take the intrinsic nature indicated by direct pointing as right view. Truly realize that this mind of ours is the One True Dharma Realm. The One True Dharma Realm encompasses everything; the myriad forms and

phenomena are all contained within it. Every form and appearance is the wondrous functioning manifested by one's own mind. Therefore, do not become attached to appearances.

Whether circumstances are favorable or unfavorable, whether they accord with your mind or run counter to your wishes, do not concern yourself with them. Then you see your true nature at every moment. The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch says: "A person who sees the true nature must see it immediately upon hearing the words. If this is so, even when wielding a sword on the battlefield, one can see it." But if, upon going into battle, one has notions of entering and leaving birth and death in one's mind, this will not do.

Even if I were killed, it would not matter: "I meet the white blade with my head, as though a spring breeze were cutting me." Ha ha! If it is cut off, let it be cut off. Once this bodily shell is cut off, our true mind is neither increasing nor decreasing, neither arising nor ceasing; it remains openly present and cannot be cut off. This is the bearing of one who has seen the true nature.

In former times, when Chan Master Yuangui of Mount Song was seated in meditation, he saw an emperor standing before him with many attendants, imposing and majestic.

When the emperor saw that the Chan master did not rise to greet him, he was greatly displeased. He asked the Chan master, "Do you recognize me?" The Chan master replied, "I see Buddhas and sentient beings as equal. How could I regard you differently?" The emperor said, "I am the Mountain Spirit, holding authority over birth and death. I can make people live and can make them die. How can you look upon me in an ordinary way?" The Chan master

laughed and said, "I am originally unborn. Can you make an unborn person die? As I see it, the body and empty space are nondual; you and I are nondual. Can you damage empty space and yourself? Even if you could, my true mind is neither arising nor ceasing."

"What you can damage is only my physical body; you cannot damage my true mind. You have not yet realized this true mind, so how can you speak of making me live or making me die?" The Mountain Spirit was stunned by his words: "Ah, I have never heard this teaching. Is there truly an undying true mind?" The Chan master continued his instruction: "For example, you are now a great spirit, but you too were once a human being. Because you were upright, incorruptible, and impartial as a human being, and performed many good deeds, you have now become a great spirit who wields authority over birth and death."

“But who became the Mountain Spirit? The bodily shell you had when you were human has already vanished; it is the consciousness-spirit that became the Mountain Spirit. Your consciousness-spirit differs from our Buddha-nature by only a little. What is this difference? Ignorance is present. With ignorance, Buddha-nature becomes the consciousness-spirit; when ignorance is completely removed, the consciousness-spirit returns to Buddha-nature.”

“Even while ignorance remains, Buddha-nature is not diminished in the slightest, for it neither increases nor decreases. Who is now acting as the Mountain Spirit? It is precisely this Buddha-nature, neither arising nor ceasing—yet you do not know it at all!” After receiving the Chan master’s instruction, the Mountain Spirit awoke as if from a dream. At once he bowed to Chan Master Yuangui as his teacher and took refuge in the Buddhadharma.

And what kinds of spirits are those that manifest efficacy by attaching themselves to grasses and trees? They are ghosts! When they were alive, they were insatiably greedy and committed offenses, so they fell into hell. After their sufferings in hell were exhausted and they emerged, their habitual greed still remained. When they encounter grasses or trees, they attach themselves to them, and those grasses or trees then appear efficacious. This is truly the mischief of greedy ghosts, not that of any deity.

Deities are great ghost kings; their spiritual powers exceed those of other ghosts, but they are all attached to appearances. Therefore, at all times, we must take as essential the recognition of the true mind indicated by “direct pointing and seeing the essential principle.” The mind-capacity is like empty space: the vast array of phenomena is all included within our intrinsic nature of mind.

If we are to recover our original capacities, we must begin now: let go of everything, recognize this Buddha-nature at all times, and do not abide in appearances. As soon as there is any abiding or attachment, promptly recite the Buddha’s name, promptly recite mantras; best of all, awaken and let it immediately become empty. If you practice with an understanding of this principle, whether you cultivate Pure Land, Chan, or Esoteric Buddhism, attainment will be easy and swift. If you practice without understanding this principle, it will be difficult to attain the true fruition.

“Do not apply distinct methods of subduing and counteracting to the arising and ceasing of each individual deluded thought.”

This means that, in subduing and counteracting deluded thoughts, one must not begin with the arising and ceasing of each separate deluded thought. One must work instead at the fundamental root from which deluded thoughts arise.

Ordinary beings have many deluded thoughts. Some are intensely lustful, some are intensely greedy for wealth, and some are intensely fond of fame. Each person's habitual tendencies of deluded thought differ. If one discriminates among them and counteracts them one by one, using delusion to treat delusion, the delusion becomes even worse. If one begins at the point where the deluded mind stirs, then one solution resolves a hundred problems, and one may sit securely at home.

The doctrinal schools also have methods of counteraction. For example, the perfection of giving among the "six perfections and myriad practices" is an essential method for counteracting our narrow mind-capacity and miserliness. Again, the five precepts—refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and alcohol—are dharma gates for counteracting the restless stirring of our deluded minds. The bhikshu precepts number more than two hundred, yet all are simply intended to prevent the mind from stirring. Therefore, the greatest precept is the precept of the mind.

The moment the mind stirs, one violates the precepts; it is not only a violation once an act has been carried out. In the past, a disciple asked his master, "Master, what is meant by breaking the precepts?" The master said, "When the woman next door is washing her face and applying powder, and you hear the sound of her hairpins and ornaments, that is breaking the precepts." Why does hearing such sounds constitute breaking the precepts? Because upon hearing the sounds, you become attached to appearances. Hairpins and ornaments are women's adornments; once you become attached to the appearance of a woman, other thoughts arise.

Mahāmudrā is practiced from the root and does not teach counteracting every kind of deluded thought one by one. After seeing one's intrinsic nature, attend to it constantly, without allowing this mind to become attached to objects, and constantly contemplate emptiness. Use the true mind to encompass everything: the vast array of phenomena, and phenomena in their vast array, are all things within the wondrously luminous true mind.

The mind is fundamental. If, when encountering every circumstance, the mind does not stir and one pays no heed to anything, what difficulty could there be in attaining accomplishment in this very life? But if one practices at the branches and twigs, discriminating among deluded thoughts and counteracting them one by one, the task becomes unbearably tedious. That truly is far, far too difficult! Not teaching counteraction is the practice of Mahāmudrā. If this is unsuited to any of you, you may also practice dharma gates of counteraction. For example, if lust is strong, practice contemplation of impurity, contemplation of white bones, and so forth; choose different methods of practice according to each person's circumstances.

III. The Meeting of the Mother and Child Clear Lights

“Deluded thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya’s wisdom of primordial awakening.”

Deluded thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya’s wisdom of primordial awakening. The dharmakāya is without characteristics, yet there is no characteristic that it does not possess. To say that it is without characteristics means that the essential substance of the dharmakāya has no concrete form that can be seen. To say that it lacks no characteristic means that the vast array of phenomena, and phenomena in their vast array—all things possessing form—are manifestations of the dharmakāya. Not a single thing possessing form exists outside the dharmakāya.

Deluded thoughts and afflictions are things with characteristics, so of course they are not outside the dharmakāya. Where do deluded thoughts and afflictions come from? Their source is dharmatā, and dharmatā is the root from which all dharmas arise. Buddha-nature is the root of becoming a Buddha. Dharmatā and Buddha-nature may be spoken of as two different things, but in fact they are one; neither is separate from the dharmakāya.

Primordial awakening is the originally complete capacity for awakening; it is the luminous and knowing true mind inherently possessed by everyone. This true mind can give rise to vast wisdom, bring forth all wondrous functions, and manifest an infinite variety of forms. Therefore, whether they are deluded thoughts or afflictions, they are all wondrous functions of the essential substance of the dharmakāya.

The dharmakāya is fundamental. Without this foundation, how could deluded thoughts and afflictions exist? Only where there is water can there be waves. Water is fundamental, while waves are the appearance of water in motion. Only where there is a mirror can there be reflections. The mirror is fundamental, and its capacity to produce reflections is its wondrous function. Only where there is the dharmakāya can there be deluded thoughts and afflictions. The dharmakāya is fundamental, and deluded thoughts and afflictions are all manifestations of the dharmakāya’s wisdom of primordial awakening. Without the dharmakāya, deluded thoughts and afflictions would have no basis from which to arise.

“Their intrinsic nature is itself the true reality of the luminosity of the dharmakāya’s essential substance.”

The intrinsic nature of deluded thoughts and afflictions is itself a true and unfailing manifestation of the luminosity of the dharmakāya’s essential substance. Luminosity is mentioned here. The essential substance of the dharmakāya is fully endowed with immeasurable light; it is a great light treasury.

In the course of practice, some people see red light, some see yellow light, some see blue light, and some see green light—every kind of color. If you practice Tögal of Dzogchen, you must observe light. When the light expands, you will see bindus.

At first these bindus are white. As you continue observing, they become colored: five colors, six colors, seven colors—all appear. This is the light of our own intrinsic nature, elicited by sunlight, moonlight, lamplight, and so on.

The principle is the same as that of modern laser technology. A ruby is placed in a laser device and irradiated with intense light from a pulsed xenon lamp. Stimulated by this light, the ruby's own light at a particular frequency is suddenly emitted. As the saying goes, the eyes are the windows of the soul.

According to the theory of Esoteric Buddhism, the eighth consciousness—the ālaya consciousness—is located within the pericardium, and two channels connect the pericardium with the eyes from behind. In the Esoteric Buddhist practice of observing light, outer light enters through the eyes and stimulates the dharmatā light inherently present in our own minds. Its principle is no different from laser technology. Thus, Esoteric Buddhism is quite scientific.

According to the theory of Chinese medicine, the five viscera and six bowels are connected throughout the body by the meridians, and each finger corresponds to particular internal organs. Forming mudrās is a way of arranging the positions of the internal organs, while mantra recitation uses mantra sounds to stir the vital energy.

Mantra sounds are not shot into the void; it is not the case that one may casually recite anything at all. Rather, they are symbols into which Buddhas and bodhisattvas transformed their own minds while in meditative absorption. When you recite a mantra with concentration and it corresponds to the symbols emitted by Buddhas and bodhisattvas, you can resonate with Buddhas and bodhisattvas and receive their power of blessing. This accords with the scientific principle of "resonance." Thus, Esoteric Buddhism is quite scientific; it is not superstition.

The Ganges Mahāmudrā of which we are now speaking is practice without practice: in all times and places, it functions spontaneously and naturally. This most readily resonates with Buddhas and bodhisattvas, because Buddhas and bodhisattvas all function spontaneously and naturally.

We must first recognize our own true mind and understand that all things, including deluded thoughts and afflictions, are wondrous functions manifested by our own true mind. This is the "seeing the essential principle" discussed earlier; it is what the Chan school calls realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. Then, in all times and places, protect it, never becoming attached to appearances anywhere or at any time.

When this protection is complete, one realizes the Way. This dharma is very direct and straightforward; it is not a method of counteracting things one by one. Practice without practice is true practice. Thus Mahāmudrā is said to be a practice of the unsurpassed vehicle. Do not fear deluded thoughts or afflictions. Deluded thoughts and afflictions are wondrous functions arising from the dharmakāya.

Simply let these deluded thoughts and afflictions subside. When the frenzied mind subsides, that is bodhi; it does not mean that they must be removed. Just as removing the waves would leave no water, if deluded thoughts and afflictions were removed, would not the dharmakāya itself also be removed? How could the dharmakāya be removed? One simply lets deluded thoughts and afflictions subside, rather than removing them.

Do not think that deluded thoughts and afflictions are bad. They are precisely manifestations of the true mind, and they are also what display spiritual powers and bring forth wondrous functions. Ganges Mahāmudrā teaches us to recognize this wondrous principle: while engaged in every kind of work, do not cling to material appearances, but transform the deluded mind and deluded thoughts into wondrous functions of the true mind.

“Knowing this is called the luminosity of abiding in the essential substance.”

To understand this principle is called “the luminosity of abiding in the essential substance.” Abiding means not moving.

If you can know that deluded thoughts and afflictions are all wondrous functions of the essential substance, and can let them subside without stirring, this means not clinging or abiding while doing things, but responding in accordance with conditions. Such “knowing” is the light of “abiding in the essential substance” emitted by the dharmakāya. Abiding also carries the sense of being securely established, of standing firmly on one’s heels; in the Chan school, this is called “planting one’s heels on the ground.”

Recognize that the very place from which the deluded mind arises is the true mind, and do not search elsewhere. This is to stand firmly on one’s heels.

Why still seek a master to open your crown and transmit a dharma to you? Can a master open your crown and enable you to realize the Way? To speak frankly, there is no such thing! If a master could open your crown and enable you to realize the Way, then the Buddha, being so compassionate, would long ago have opened everyone’s crowns and enabled all to realize the Way. Why, then, would there still be so many ordinary beings? Saying that one will open your crown is merely symbolic, to offer you some comfort, make your state of mind joyful and settled, and thereby make it easier for you to enter the Way.

Once we understand this principle, we must apply ourselves diligently and open our own crowns, without relying on others. Clearly recognize that the true mind is not elsewhere: the very place where deluded thoughts and afflictions arise is our true mind. Protect it at all times, and do not be carried away by deluded thoughts.

As soon as thoughts begin to wander, quickly recite the Buddha's name or quickly recite a mantra, transforming the deluded thoughts away. This turning the light inward is a wondrous method for protecting the true mind. In practice, one must look inward, not outward. There are too many things outside: fine food, fine clothes, amusements. . . . All of these are merely shadows, utterly unobtainable. If you follow them, you are finished.

You must remain settled and unmoving, stand firm, and exhaust the old habit of clinging to appearances. Then you will naturally emit great light. In fact, we are always emitting light: the moment a thought stirs, light is emitted. But this is deluded light. The light emitted by the deluded mind is deluded light; only the light emitted by the true mind is true light. What is deluded light? When deluded thoughts arise through clinging to appearances, that is deluded light. Deluded light, too, has luminosity.

Scientists in the former Soviet Union invented a machine capable of photographing the light emitted by the human body. According to reports, this halo is seven or eight centimeters thick. Deluded light is limited, whereas true light is without limit. If we can constantly protect this inherently existing portion of true light, it will shine ever more brightly, until it illuminates the Buddha lands in the ten directions without obstruction.

This is the great light treasury inherently possessed by our own mind. We should abide in this way. This is abiding in non-abiding: it is not abiding upon anything, but having your mind settled, without wavering or doubt.

"When one becomes familiar with the distinctive characteristic of the view that directly points to the luminosity of intrinsic nature, this is called the luminosity of initial awakening in the practice of the path."

Above, we discussed the luminosity of original awakening: deluded thoughts and afflictions are aspects of the luminosity of original awakening. Now we will discuss the luminosity of initial awakening. What is it? It is the luminosity of "directly pointing to intrinsic nature." It is directly pointed out to you: the spiritually knowing mind in which not a single thought arises, yet which is clear and distinct, is Buddha-nature, the One True Dharma Realm, and Mahāmudrā.

To recognize it in this way is to see the principle, and this is the luminosity of initial awakening. Yet we have long been accustomed to clinging to appearances

throughout immeasurable kalpas. “Giving rise to mind in response to circumstances” is a familiar path, whereas “utterly free from abiding” is unfamiliar to us. We must therefore undergo a process of “turning the familiar into the unfamiliar and the unfamiliar into the familiar.” This is what is called the process of “protecting,” and it is also the process of “contemplation.”

“When one becomes familiar with its distinctive characteristic, this is called the luminosity of initial awakening in the practice of the path.” Familiar means mature. It does not mean maturity in clinging to appearances, but maturity in contemplation, maturity in realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature: never abiding in appearances and having not the slightest doubt. This is called “becoming familiar with its distinctive characteristic.”

Suppose that, after hearing this, we remain half-believing and half-doubting: “Is this really Buddha-nature? Is this truly the foundation of becoming a Buddha? Surely not! If it were, great spiritual powers ought to manifest. Why are there no spiritual powers?” This is because you have not become familiar with it; it is still unfamiliar to you. If we have no doubt whatsoever and can attend to it at all times, this is the luminosity of initial awakening in the practice of the path.

This is true practice. It need not have any particular form; it need not take the form of sitting meditation, Buddha-recitation, or mantra-recitation. Rather, the moment a deluded thought arises, you see it. Do not run after it or heed it, and it immediately turns into emptiness, utterly unobtainable.

This is so in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. You cannot tell that such a person is practicing, yet in fact he is practicing at all times and in all places. This is practice on the mind-ground, called “the luminosity of initial awakening in the practice of the path.”

Why is it called “luminosity”? The moment a thought arises, you can see it. If there were no luminosity, how could you perceive it? Someone says, “My Buddha-recitation is poor. I have recited for a long time, yet I still have many deluded thoughts.”

I would say that your recitation is quite good. When deluded thoughts arise, you can perceive them—this is the luminosity of initial awakening. Deluded thoughts are like dust floating about in a room; without light, you cannot see them.

If a ray of sunlight enters, you will discover just how much dust there is. Therefore, seeing deluded thoughts during meditation or Buddha-recitation is a good thing, not a bad one. This is the luminosity of initial awakening: awakening has begun. The next step is not to follow deluded thoughts and not to heed them, but to recite the Buddha’s name or mantra with complete concentration, the mind reciting and the

ears hearing, clearly and distinctly. Deluded thoughts will then naturally subside. This is “the luminosity of initial awakening in the practice of the path.”

“To abide spontaneously in the non-discriminating essence and path—the distinctive characteristics of these two luminosities—is what is called the meeting of the mother and child luminosities. (Original awakening is the mother; initial awakening is the child.)”

Deluded thoughts and afflictions are the luminosity of original awakening; seeing the principle and practicing the path are the luminosity of initial awakening. The luminosity of original awakening is the “luminosity of essence,” while the luminosity of initial awakening is the “luminosity of the path.” The distinctive characteristics of these “two luminosities of essence and path”—although the respective appearances of these two luminosities differ, they are one in their essence and are without discrimination.

We abide spontaneously in this, in the non-discriminating essence of these two luminosities. This is what is called “the meeting of the mother and child luminosities.” The mother is the luminosity of original awakening; the child is the luminosity of initial awakening. The meeting of mother and child means that original awakening unites with initial awakening, and the two luminosities become one. The practice for liberating the intermediate-state body is based on this principle. The intermediate state is also called the intermediate existence.

After a person dies, there is a state of “unconsciousness” lasting three and a half to four days. Then the “intermediate-state body” arises, resembling a three-year-old child. Within forty-nine days, it undergoes birth and death seven times and manifests all kinds of appearances.

So-called “unconsciousness” is profound coma. During unconsciousness, deluded thoughts do not stir, because the body’s four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind have dispersed, and the faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body have lost their ability to apprehend external objects. When deluded thoughts do not stir, the luminosity of intrinsic nature is about to manifest. Yet this luminosity is called death-light, light emitted after death; it arises twice within three to four days.

Each manifestation of this death-light does not last long—only as long as a meal—and then, with a flash, it vanishes. Death-light is also the light of intrinsic nature. If one can seize it at the moment it manifests and recognize it in time, one immediately realizes the Way. Death-light is the mother light; being able to recognize it is the child light.

To recognize it in time is the meeting of mother and child. If they unite in time, one can suddenly realize a sambhogakāya Buddha. This is the first stage of “liberation in

the intermediate state”—the intermediate state at the time of death. If one cannot recognize it in time, this opportunity is missed.

Then the intermediate-state body arises and manifests various karmic appearances. Those who did good deeds in life see favorable appearances, while those who did evil see unfavorable ones. Both beautiful and terrifying appearances will manifest. At the same time, during each of the first fourteen days, Buddhas and bodhisattvas emit intense lights of various colors and appear in yab-yum forms to guide them.

At this time, if one does not fear the intense light or give rise to wild discriminating thoughts, but unites with it in time, one can also be reborn in a Buddha land of the Pure Land.

On the fourth day after the intermediate-state body arises, the Buddha of Infinite Light in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss emits an intense red light and appears in yab-yum union, face to face and embracing White-robed Buddha Mother. If, at that time, you can refrain from discrimination, astonishment, and fear, and resolutely unite with it, you can immediately be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

The first fourteen days, during which Buddhas and bodhisattvas come to guide one, constitute the second stage of “liberation in the intermediate state”—the intermediate state of Dharmatā. This is immediately followed by the third stage of “liberation in the intermediate state”—the intermediate state of becoming. The book Appendix to the Esoteric Teaching of Liberation Through Hearing in the Intermediate State explains this in great detail, so I will not say more here.

When we practice meditation and can perceive deluded thoughts, this is a good thing. Do not give rise to doubt; continue practicing diligently. When the practice matures, with a snap, everything falls away. The child light and mother light unite as one—one great light treasury! Then the Way is realized.

The same is true for those who recite the Buddha’s name. At all times and in all places, they maintain a single Buddha-name. When their practice has matured over a long time, the mind that recites and the Buddha who is recited both fall away at once. There is no one who recites and no Buddha that is recited; all is vividly clear and distinctly known. This too is the union of child and mother, the “meeting of the mother and child luminosities.”

“Most important is not to forget the luminosity that is the distinctive characteristic of the view one has already recognized, and, with respect to deluded thoughts and afflictions arising amid circumstances and activity, not to engage in any suppression, affirmation, grasping, or rejection.”

Do not forget the “luminosity that is the distinctive characteristic of the view one has already recognized.” What is this luminosity? Our ability to perceive all things is the wondrous functioning arising from the essential substance of the dharmakāya.

Perceive things without being turned by them, and understand that this capacity for perception is precisely our own intrinsic nature. Thus, see intrinsic nature in appearances—see intrinsic nature through appearances. This is seeing the principle. Seeing the principle is also the wondrous functioning arising from the dharmakāya; it is also the luminous manifestation emitted by the dharmakāya’s own substance. This luminous manifestation is an appearance without appearance, called “the luminosity that is the distinctive characteristic of seeing the principle.”

This is not something seen with the eyes or heard with the ears. Earlier we discussed insentient things expounding the Dharma: “If one listens with the ears, one will never understand; only when one hears sound at the eye faculty does one know.” That speaks of hearing sounds with the eyes. Here, we speak of seeing luminosity with the ears.

How can the eyes hear? How can the ears see? The capacity to perceive all things and hear all sounds is our intrinsic nature. Apart from intrinsic nature, nothing whatsoever exists. If one can recognize this, it is the luminosity that is the distinctive characteristic of seeing the principle. Can this luminosity be seen with the eyes? That is why we speak of seeing with the ears. Is this really seeing? It is tacit accord, experience, realization, and intuitive comprehension.

With respect to deluded thoughts and afflictions that arise in circumstances and activity, do not give rise to thoughts of suppressing them, affirming them, grasping them, or rejecting them, because all things are illusory shadows and there is nothing to grasp or reject. You must neither heed nor attend to them and give rise to no thought whatsoever; only then does one accord with the wonder of the Way. Suppression means covering over; expulsion means driving away. Both are forms of repression.

Affirmation means following them. For example, you lose money in business, and affliction arises. Then you think, “I am a Buddhist practitioner. I should not be so afflicted. Why do I still give rise to affliction? This is not good, not good!” The more you think about it, the more remorseful you become, and the more affliction you create. This is suppression and expulsion.

Again, suppose you are already able not to be moved by the success or failure of affairs. You regard your meditative stability as strong: “The eight worldly winds cannot move me; I sit upright upon a purple-golden lotus.” What a fine state this is! This is affirmation.

This is how we should practice: whether in activity or stillness, favorable or adverse circumstances, ease or affliction, all are ultimately unobtainable; do not take any of them to heart. Even rejection or dispelling, establishing or setting up, grasping or relinquishing—let none of them enter the mind.

When deluded thoughts and afflictions arise, neither follow them nor pay them any heed. Let them arise and cease; simply awaken sharply. As we have already explained, if your practice reaches the point of having "neither love nor aversion," then after death you will no longer revolve through the six realms.

One "not forgetting" and one "not arising" are most important. Do not forget "beholding the self-luminous radiance of the principle," and do not give rise to thoughts of "rejecting, dispelling, establishing, grasping, or relinquishing." This is of utmost importance. Do not forget that the capacity to see, know, speak, and act is the wondrous functioning of intrinsic nature; become familiar with it at every moment.

When deluded thoughts and afflictions arise, do not suppress them or follow after them. Have no rejection or dispelling, no establishing, no love or hatred, no grasping or relinquishing; all is ultimately unobtainable. Be open and at ease, ordinary and natural, with an even mind. Let all such things quietly fade away of themselves. However much winds and clouds may change, I myself have neither joy nor sorrow. Let the mind remain ever empty, the breath ever even, and the intention ever light. We must practice in this way at all times and in all places. This practice is useful in every school.

IV. Frequently Removing the Powers of Bliss, Luminosity, and No-Thought

"If, after long sustaining such a state, the powers of bliss, luminosity, and no-thought arise and obscure the original face of the primordial source, one should strip away this shell. Only then can the aspect of intrinsic nature appear utterly bare. This is wisdom becoming luminous from within."

If the state of not forgetting and not arising discussed above is sustained over a long period, states such as "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" will appear. These are initial states of entering the Way, brought forth by the power of practice. Bliss is happiness, luminosity is light, and no-thought is emptiness of mind: the state of "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" appears.

The mind within is empty and pure, and one feels incomparably at ease. It is as though the body were gone, and one feels as light and relaxed as if a heavy burden had been set down.

One feels joyful and delighted, incomparably happy—one hundred times happier even than “welcome rain after a long drought, meeting an old friend in a distant land, the wedding night by candlelight, or success in the imperial examination.” No worldly happiness can compare with this happiness. (Among the four dhyānas and eight meditative attainments, this bliss arises at the third dhyāna; only upon reaching the fourth dhyāna does it dissolve.)

The intrinsic luminosity reveals itself, bright and lucid, like a full moon shining overhead. Whether awake or dreaming, one is bathed in light. Is this state of “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” good? It is good enough; but if you abide in it and give rise to thoughts such as, “Wonderful! I have attained emptiness and purity; I have happiness; I emit light,” then it becomes harmful. It will obscure the original face of the primordial source.

What is the original face of the primordial source? It is precisely the intrinsic nature that has been repeatedly emphasized above. If you become attached to the appearances of “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity,” it is like wrapping a layer of skin around intrinsic nature. How could you then see intrinsic nature? You should strip off this layer of skin and not abide in “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity.”

I have repeatedly cautioned you all: in practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, you must not seek visions of light or visions of Buddhas. This does not mean that you are forbidden to see them; rather, you must not become attached to appearances. Intrinsic nature is neither bright nor dark. To call it bright is wrong; to call it dark is also wrong. As we explained earlier, when practice reaches its culmination, it is like “the moon on the thirtieth day of the twelfth lunar month”: no light is seen.

Yet this is not darkness. It is like a person in the air not perceiving the air, or a fish in water not perceiving the water; “when one enters a room filled with orchids and remains there long, one no longer notices their fragrance.” Neither grasping nor rejecting, one becomes wholly assimilated and forgets all distinctions. To say that it is not permitted means that you must not abide in appearances. Abiding in appearances is “establishing” and “grasping”; these are all deluded attachments.

Only by removing these deluded attachments can one thoroughly awaken to what is original.

The Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration through the Ear Faculty of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva is the same when practice reaches its later stages: “the awareness and its object become empty; the empty awareness reaches ultimate perfection; that which empties and that which is emptied both cease.” When the aware subject and the object of awareness have become empty and pure to the utmost perfection, the emptier and the emptied also disappear; even emptiness is no more. Only then does “when arising and ceasing have ceased, quiescent cessation appear before one.”

That which empties and that which is emptied arise and cease; likewise, the experiencer and object of bliss, and the experiencer and object of luminosity, arise and cease. When all these things that arise and cease have completely disappeared, the great nirvāṇa of "quiescent cessation," which neither arises nor ceases, clearly appears before one. Quiescence means that, though quiescent, it ever illumines; through illumination it gives rise to responsive functioning in myriad ways. Cessation means that, though illumining, it is ever quiescent; quiescence is thusness, unmoving. Being unmoving in suchness is called "Thus"; responding to myriad circumstances is called "Come." How could the state of the Tathāgata be compared with the ordinary "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity"? This alone is true Buddhahood.

One should strip away the shell of "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity," so that the aspect of intrinsic nature can appear utterly bare. "This is wisdom becoming luminous from within": this is the light of wisdom issuing from the inner mind. It is true luminosity, able to illuminate the ten directions without obstruction. The luminosity of "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" is limited and cannot illuminate the ten directions.

"Therefore, one should repeatedly remove bliss and luminosity. It is said: 'The spring water surges forth—a marvelous rushing torrent.'"

Therefore, one should repeatedly sweep away "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity." Chan practice is the same. Once a monk asked Caoshan, "What is it like when the bright moon shines overhead?" It is as though a bright full moon shines overhead and the mind is filled with light: "Surely my practice is adequate now—what do you say of this state?" Chan Master Caoshan replied, "You are still a man below the steps."

At this point in practice, one is still below the steps, not yet having entered the hall or inner chamber; one remains far from the goal. The monk said, "Please, Master, receive me onto the steps." He was asking the master, out of compassion, to guide him up the steps, so that he might enter the hall and inner chamber. Caoshan said, "We shall meet when the moon has set." After the moon has set, we shall meet again. (Master Yuanyin asked the assembly, "How do you meet when the moon has set? After the moon has set, how do you meet?" The assembly remained silent for a long while. The Master said, "Stop! Stop! Do not think any further." Then he flicked his sleeves and returned to his quarters.)

"The spring water surges forth—a marvelous rushing torrent." Spring water races down with the force of the mountain; its waves surge mightily and its current is powerful. Such a torrent is difficult to restrain. This is a metaphor for practice reaching a certain level, where subtle wisdom bursts forth like a surging torrent of spring water, impossible to hold back.

In his day, Master Hanshan was highly gifted in literary composition and skilled at writing poetry and lyrics. He practiced until he had forgotten all his poetry and lyrics. When someone asked him to compose a poem, he could not produce a single line. Later, someone brought him several Tang poems and asked him to recite them. As soon as he recited Tang poetry, poetic lines immediately sprang forth.

There was no need to think at all; it was like a mountain flood bursting forth, impossible to stop and, once released, impossible to contain. Master Hanshan knew that this was not right: he could not allow literary inspiration to obscure Buddha-nature. He therefore resolutely cut off this seeming marvel of "the spring water surging forth as a rushing torrent" with a sharp "snap." All such things are shells that can obscure the original face of the primordial source. "If what should be cut off is not cut off, one will instead suffer its disorder"; one should decisively strip them away.

"When the power of bliss and luminosity arises, together with such signs as present-life joy and delight, the 'po' (P), which can gather them through the skillful means of forceful mindfulness, and the 'ei' (ei), which can cut through them through prajñā, suddenly descend from above, breaking through the shell of attachment to the power of greed. (The two Tibetan syllables above combine as 'po-ei' (Pei), namely the character pei [ ], transliterated as po-zha.)"

When the powers of bliss and luminosity arise, together with appearances of worldly joy and pleasure, forcefully recite "Pei!" Let this "Pei!" fall sharply from above to break through the shell of attachment to the powers of "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity," allowing intrinsic nature to appear clearly before one. The Tibetan letter "P" is pronounced po and carries the meaning of "skillful means that can gather in."

To gather in means to embrace and contain; the letter "P" has the skillful-means quality of containing all wondrous meanings. The Tibetan letter "ei" is pronounced ei and carries the meaning of "prajñā that can cut through." To cut through means to sever and remove; the word "Pei" has the prajñā quality of removing every obstruction. Pronounced pei, it can contain all wondrous meanings and remove every obstruction. This "Pei!" is indeed excellent.

V. Cultivating the "Great Practice of Non-Practice"

"If, at all times, one can sustain and allow the spontaneous functioning of the essential point of severing reliance on signs of the path, and thoroughly realize the ineffable intrinsic nature, then there is no difference between entering samādhi and emerging from samādhi, nor between practice on the meditation cushion and practice off the cushion."

As stated above, at all times one must safeguard and allow the spontaneous functioning of "the essential point of severing reliance on signs of the path, and the ineffable intrinsic nature."

Signs of the path are validations of one's cultivation of the Way. One constantly checks how one's practice is going and to what degree one has cultivated: Have emptiness, bliss, and luminosity appeared? If even a little appears, one becomes enormously delighted and the mind often clings to it.

Others have not experienced emptiness, bliss, and luminosity or spiritual powers, yet their minds are always thinking of such things and using them to assess themselves: "Why have I received no sign? Why have spiritual powers not manifested? Perhaps I am incapable? Perhaps this Dharma is ineffective?" With such things lodged in the mind, let alone realizing the Way, even states of emptiness, bliss, and luminosity will be obstructed and will not appear.

As we explained earlier, emptiness, bliss, and luminosity arise in the course of practicing the Dharma in meditation and safeguarding realization of intrinsic nature. Even if they appear, one should leave them behind with a single "Pei!" If they do not appear, that is one less obstruction—is that not even better? Yet for those who truly exert themselves in cultivating the Way, emptiness, bliss, and luminosity will naturally unfold during practice.

One simply must not pursue them. Let them unfold naturally without abiding in them, and there will be no obstruction. To sever reliance on signs of the path means to leave behind and put an end to such validations. The essential point is the key point. Severing the use of experiences such as "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" to validate one's attainment in cultivating the Way is the key to realizing the Way and the essential point of practice.

Intrinsic nature is precisely the dharmakāya. The dharmakāya is without marks, yet not without marks; it is inexpressible and beyond conceptual thought. However one may speak of it, it has no appearance that can be described; however one may think of it, there is nothing that can be thought. What language cannot express and thought cannot conceive is called "the path of words is cut off, and the road of mental activity is ended."

A sūtra says: "Only this one true reality exists; the other two are not real." Any marked thing that can be spoken of or conceived is wholly false and unreal, altogether unobtainable. Only this intrinsic nature, in which "the path of words is cut off, and the road of mental activity is ended," is the one true and unfalsified reality. It is called "true reality," and this is the "one seal of true reality" of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

We should never forget the essential point of abandoning the criteria of verification, and should not use experiences such as “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” to test whether we have realized the Way. At all times, allow this “inexpressible intrinsic nature” to function naturally, neither grasping nor rejecting amid all circumstances. This safeguarding realization must not be abandoned even for a moment. Thorough realization means clear and penetrating understanding.

When practitioners safeguard realization in this way, until intrinsic nature becomes clearly and thoroughly evident, “what is familiar becomes unfamiliar, and what is unfamiliar becomes familiar.” Such a person is one who has attained thorough realization. At this point, practice in entering samādhi and emerging from samādhi is no different; cultivation on and off the meditation cushion is likewise no different.

Great samādhi has no entering or leaving. If, when entering samādhi, the mind can settle, but after emerging from samādhi it again runs after external circumstances, then this is not great samādhi; it is not true samādhi.

In genuine great samādhi, one is in samādhi at every moment. Whether the Chan hall is quiet or a bustling city is clamorous, whether one sits in meditation and enters samādhi or is busy at work, it is all the same: there is no difference in one’s conduct. True cultivation is no cultivation; not cultivating is the great cultivation.

In practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we do not cultivate only by forming mudrās and reciting mantras while on the meditation cushion. More importantly, when off the cushion, we must not depart from continuous contemplation for even a second. I have long told you all that contemplation is the primary practice, while seated meditation is an auxiliary practice. Yet there are still quite a few who neglect contemplation. I emphasize again here: contemplation is a primary practice that must not be neglected! Contemplation is precisely the “safeguarding realization” just discussed. On the cushion, while forming mudrās and reciting mantras, one continually gathers in this mind; off the cushion, through continuous and seamless contemplation, one likewise continually gathers in this mind. There is no difference in cultivation on and off the meditation cushion!

“This is the great cultivation of non-cultivation, the wisdom that naturally abides in equality and pervades all. It is the yoga of a river: without even a hair’s breadth of cultivation or correction, yet without a moment’s distraction.”

The practice of the Ganges Mahāmudrā is “the great cultivation of non-cultivation.” True practice has no outward appearance of cultivation. One may look as though one is not practicing, but in fact one practices at every moment. This is the great cultivation of non-cultivation, because one is contemplating at every moment and protecting one’s own numinous awareness at every moment.

Having no appearance of cultivation is called “non-cultivation.” When all is altogether unobtainable, and even “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” are unobtainable, this is called “non-attainment.” One is originally a Buddha; one need only extinguish deluded thoughts and attachments, without adding anything further. One originally possesses all wondrous functions in their entirety; this is called “non-realization.” This is what is meant by “non-cultivation, non-attainment, and non-realization.”

Non-cultivation is originally neither arising nor ceasing; non-attainment is inherently empty and quiescent; non-realization means that one is originally a Buddha. This is the “wisdom that naturally abides in equality and pervades all.” Equality means impartiality, and pervasion means universality: naturally abiding in the great wisdom that is equal and all-pervading.

Equality and pervasion mean that at all times, in all places, and among all people, all are equal. No one is higher than I, nor am I higher than anyone else; nor is my Dharma higher while your Dharma is lower. Yet people delight in contention. Each clings to his own view, believing that what he says is the truth and slandering others, judging right and wrong, good and bad from his own standpoint.

For example, there is a kind of automatic umbrella that is very convenient to use but not durable; before long, it breaks. People call it a “short-lived umbrella.” Consumers in our country consider such umbrellas poor, because we like things that are sturdy and durable.

Yet in the eyes of foreigners, this kind of umbrella is very good! It is easy to use and inexpensive, good value for the price, and can simply be thrown away after use. We are not accustomed to throwing things away, so we say that the umbrella is no good; they are accustomed to throwing things away, so they say that it is very good.

In fact, an umbrella is simply an umbrella. The umbrella itself is neither good nor bad; judgments of good and bad are merely discriminations of people’s deluded minds. As it is said, “All things are originally at rest; fools disturb themselves.” If the “wisdom that naturally abides in equality and pervades all” shines forth clearly, and no mind of discriminating, grasping, or rejecting arises, then you can hear the “short-lived umbrella” expounding the Dharma.

We have previously discussed “the insentient expounding the Dharma.” How can the insentient expound the Dharma? If you cannot hear the insentient expounding the Dharma, it is because ignorance obscures your true mind and your discriminating mind remains plainly present. Consequently, your faculty of awareness can extend only throughout your body. If your head is struck, your head hurts; if your foot is struck, your foot hurts.

But if this chair is struck, you have no sensation. If you break through ignorance, remove the habitual tendency to give rise to mind in response to objects, and sweep away the mind of discrimination, grasping, and rejecting, then awareness can pervade all things. Your mind-capacity will be like empty space, with nothing outside your mind. Then you will extend across the ten directions and exhaust the three divisions of time, knowing and understanding all things.

The sun, moon, and stars; the vast universe; mountains, rivers, and the great earth; flowers, birds, insects, and fish—all sentient and insentient things are within your mind. Like the jewels in Indra's net, their lights reflect one another, and each jewel encompasses all the others. Others are within your mind, and you are within theirs; within you is me, and within me is you. Bring forth a single one, and it is the whole.

It is like a modern "laser holographic photograph": any tiny portion contains the information of the entire photograph. This is "equality and pervasion." To become so, one must undertake cultivation. How does one cultivate? "It is the yoga of a river: without even a hair's breadth of cultivation or realization, yet without a moment's distraction."

Yoga means correspondence. The yoga of a river means corresponding like a river. Look at river water: where the riverbed bends, it flows in bends; where the riverbed is straight, it flows straight. Everywhere it corresponds to its environment. It is not that it can only flow straight and cannot bend, nor that it can only bend and cannot flow straight.

Our true mind is originally like a river, corresponding to all circumstances. Was this not explained earlier? "Deluded thoughts and afflictions are all aspects of the dharmakāya's innate awakened wisdom." The dharmakāya is our true mind; it is intrinsic nature.

It has always neither come nor gone, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. It has always had "not even a hair's breadth of cultivation or correction," and also "not a moment's distraction." This is the root of all things. As we work at practice from the root, we too should be like a river, corresponding to all circumstances, without success or failure, gain or loss, love or hate, grasping or rejecting.

Do whatever needs to be done. While doing it, do so in an orderly and well-managed way; once it is done, it is as if it had not been done, leaving no trace in the mind. In this way, wisdom and skill arise readily at hand; one can be busy without confusion, handle much without disorder, and work very efficiently. But if one has hopes and fears beforehand and carries the burden of one's thoughts, one will not be able to act with ease. Then afterward, one may become smug and delighted by success or

dejected and angry over failure: “The wind of joy blows down the bodhi tree; the fire of anger burns down the forest of merit and virtue.” That is no longer yoga.

We should be like a river: when it bends, bend; when it runs straight, run straight. When wind comes and raises waves, that too does not matter. Joy, laughter, anger, and scolding are all wondrous functions of Buddha-nature. It is all right to show some temper.

Why? If you are too accommodating, the other person may think you weak and easy to bully. Their desires may swell further, and they may suddenly harm many people; how could that be acceptable? At such a time, one needs “the heart of a bodhisattva and the face of a rākṣasa”: become angry and reprimand them, or even give them a beating, so that they quickly turn back. This is education! Therefore, those of us who study Buddhism cannot always be weak and timid. When we see harmful conduct, we should become angry when anger is called for.

Is it really anger? Anger is only an outward appearance, a means of educating people. It does not mean that one has inwardly lost control, or that a mind of hatred has arisen.

In the past, there was a garden steward under Chan Master Liangshan Yuanguan. A garden steward manages the vegetable garden, growing vegetables for the community to eat. He asked Liangshan, “What should one do when it is difficult to guard against the thief in the house?” The thief in the house is a metaphor for deluded thoughts. If one follows deluded thoughts, the luminosity of intrinsic nature is obscured; it is as though the “thief in the house” of deluded thoughts has stolen one’s Dharma treasure.

What should one do when deluded thoughts arise? Liangshan said, “Recognizing it, one is not wronged.” If you can see it and recognize it as a deluded thought, simply do not follow it. Then you are not wronged.

If you follow it—whether by clinging to it or suppressing it, both are following it—then your cultivation has been in vain. Would that not be a shame? But the garden steward was an awakened person. He was not content merely to say this and hear it; he wanted a face-to-face presentation, to hold firmly to the crucial point and not let go of the huatou.

After several questions and answers, he suddenly asked, “What if a torrent suddenly overturns mountains?” If one suddenly has a great outburst of temper, like a mountain flood bursting forth and washing down mountains, what should one do? Chan Master Liangshan stepped down from the Dharma seat, seized the garden steward, and said, “Ācārya, do not let the corners of this old monk’s robe get wet!” Not even the corners of the robe may be wetted; this symbolizes an unmoving mind.

That is, however much temper you show, you must keep hold of your mind and not allow it to move in the slightest!

At this point, there is “not even a hair’s breadth of cultivation or correction, yet not a moment’s distraction.” There is neither samādhi nor distraction; both samādhi and distraction are unobtainable. They are equal and such, such and equal.

You say, “I have entered samādhi here!” But then you still have “samādhi.” Where there is samādhi, there must necessarily be distraction, because samādhi is spoken of in contrast to distraction. If there were no distraction, why speak of samādhi? Where there is truth, there must be falsehood; where there is good, there must be evil; where there is beauty, there must be ugliness. If there were no falsehood, evil, and ugliness, would there be any need to speak of truth, goodness, and beauty? Our minds must become truly equal, with neither distraction nor samādhi, neither correction nor dissipation. Only when practice reaches this level will it do.

“The verse says: ‘Never cultivated, never departed; nor departing from the meaning of non-cultivation.’”

This verse is divided into three parts: first, “never cultivated”; second, “never departed”; third, “nor departing from the meaning of non-cultivation.”

“Never cultivated” means the great cultivation of non-cultivation just discussed: not the slightest corrective cultivation, yet not a single moment of dissipation.

This does not mean doing no practice at all; practice must still be undertaken. Hence, “never departed”—one has not departed from doing the practice. Yet you must not abide in doing practice: having done it, it is as though nothing had been done. This is “nor departing from the meaning of non-cultivation.” Practice may certainly be done, but do not give rise to the view that one is doing practice. Doing is unobtainable, and departing is also unobtainable.

Practice is like crossing a river by boat. While the boat is still midstream, one cannot leave it; if one left the boat then, would one not fall into the current—the stream of birth and death—and drown? Once the boat reaches the far shore, however, one must leave it. If one does not leave the boat, how can one reach the far shore of nirvāṇa, unborn and undying? When practice has truly reached completion, there has neither been cultivation nor departure; there is neither this shore nor the far shore; there are neither six realms into which one may fall nor a Buddha Way to attain; there is neither birth and death to transcend nor nirvāṇa to realize.

“There is no birth and death to transcend” is true transcendence of birth and death; “there is no nirvāṇa that can be realized” is what may be called truly realizing nirvāṇa. This is not something accomplished merely by talking about it; only

realization brings knowledge. As the saying goes, “Like a person drinking water, one knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm.”

“On this fundamental path of the Great Perfection of intrinsic nature, there are those who attain such realization as the character ‘ ’ (understanding the perfect Dharma in accordance with its full measure), or who attain liberation all at once. This is the wondrous functioning of all dharmakāyas manifested by the great separation of form and mind; there is no one who cultivates and nothing to be cultivated.”

Great Perfection practice includes several methods, the most important of which are Trekchö (cutting through) and Tögal ("direct crossing" or "leap-over"). Trekchö means cutting through at once: immediately cutting off deluded thoughts, the deluded mind, and deluded habitual tendencies. Tögal means sudden transcendence: suddenly crossing beyond the bitter sea of birth and death. The sequence is first to practice Trekchö and then Tögal.

One must first cut through at once—that is, first see one’s own nature. To see one’s own nature is to see the root. Mahāmudrā constantly points us toward seeing our own nature. Thus, Mahāmudrā is the forerunner of Great Perfection and its root. One may even say that Mahāmudrā is Great Perfection; hence it is called “the fundamental path of Great Perfection of one’s own nature.”

There is a “ ” character on the Buddha’s chest. The character “ ” is not originally read as wan. Because it signifies the majestic adornment of myriad virtues and purity unstained by defilement, people came to read it as wan. The majestic adornment of myriad virtues and purity unstained by defilement mean “understanding the perfect Dharma in accordance with its full measure.” The character “ ” turns to the right, as it is written.

Some say that a Buddha whose chest bears a right-turning “ ” character is a true Buddha, while one with a left-turning character is a false Buddha, and that this is how one distinguishes true from false Buddhas. But Māra can also manifest the appearance of a Buddha—how, then, would you distinguish it? Others say that if the “ ” character on a Buddha’s chest emits light that makes people’s minds cool and refreshed, it is a true Buddha; if it makes their minds feverish and troubled, it is a false Buddha.

All this is making an issue of appearances and does not address the root. We say that only the formless is the true Buddha; whatever has form is a false Buddha. For “The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya are not the true Buddha, nor are they the one who teaches the Dharma.” The sambhogakāya manifests an appearance of light, and the nirmāṇakāya manifests an appearance of physical form. The Diamond Sūtra says: “If one sees me by form, or seeks me through sound, that person follows a wrong path and cannot see the Tathāgata.”

The Buddha's nirmāṇakāya has the thirty-two marks and eighty subsidiary characteristics, but this is a false body. If you take hold of this false body, you cannot see the Tathāgata. Only the dharmakāya is the true Buddha, and the dharmakāya is formless. The sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya both have form, so neither is the true Buddha. From the ultimate standpoint, however, the false is the true and the true is the false; the wholly false is itself true, and the wholly true is itself false.

Without the dharmakāya, from where could the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya appear? Can the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya manifest apart from the dharmakāya? Just as waves cannot appear apart from water, and reflections cannot appear apart from a mirror, the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya cannot manifest apart from the dharmakāya.

Where is the dharmakāya? The dharmakāya is precisely the myriad phenomena before our eyes! Apart from the dharmakāya, the myriad phenomena have no way to appear. We see intrinsic nature through appearances: nature is appearance, and appearance is nature. Distinguishing true from false is merely the discriminating activity of our own deluded minds. The dharmakāya is without appearances; being without appearances, it is not without any appearance. This is simply how the dharmakāya has always been. Those who attain realization such as the character " " have accomplished the majestic adornment of myriad appearances and purity unstained by defilement; this is "understanding the perfect Dharma in accordance with its full measure."

"Or suddenly attains liberation": whether we practice Buddha-recitation, investigate Chan, or practice Esoteric Buddhism, we should be practicing at every time and in every place, without leaving it even for a moment. It should be so while walking, sitting, sleeping, eating, and attending to affairs. After a long time, when practice matures, upon encountering the right circumstance, it suddenly snaps!

The deluded habit of clinging to material appearances has been formed over many lives and kalpas. It is because of this that there is rebirth in the six realms. Like a rope, it binds you and prevents your Buddha-nature from manifesting.

Now, as you diligently practice the Dharma, you must wear through this rope until it grows finer and finer, finer and finer. In the end, when it is as thin as a hair, it suddenly snaps. This is called "suddenly attaining liberation." If you do not diligently practice, you will not attain sudden liberation. The instant of sudden liberation need not occur during a meditation session.

I have repeatedly told you all that, in practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, one does not necessarily open to one's Original Face while seated in meditation. It may happen while walking, while sleeping and dreaming, or while attending to affairs:

suddenly, inwardly one does not see body and mind, outwardly one does not see the world, and it suddenly opens.

But you must practice continuously and seamlessly. If you practice today and stop tomorrow, fishing for three days and drying the nets for two, or if you practice during meditation sessions but let the wild horse run loose once you leave the cushion, that will not do. You will not have worn the rope of deluded thought and attachment thin, and so it will not break. We should practice at all times, abide in "the fundamental path of Great Perfection of one's own nature," and, when practice matures, "suddenly attain liberation."

"This is the wondrous functioning of all dharmakāyas manifested by the great separation of form and mind." To attain realization such as the character " ," or to attain liberation all at once, is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. This wondrous functioning is manifested by the great separation of form and mind. "Form" refers to the physical body, this bodily shell of ours; "mind" refers to the deluded mind of delusive thoughts and attachments.

Our minds always abide in this bodily shell and cling to it as "I." This is the view of the body, the first of the five delusive views. Delusion means confusion; therefore, this bodily shell is the "shell of ignorance." The great separation of form and mind means no longer clinging to this bodily shell as self. Once this "shell of ignorance" is broken open, the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya manifests.

Among those who study Buddhism, quite a few pursue spiritual powers. Seeking spiritual powers is most undesirable. Once there is seeking, one cannot understand the perfect Dharma in due measure or suddenly attain liberation. In other words, seeking spiritual powers obstructs seeing one's nature. Seeing one's nature is fundamental: once the root is attained, there is no need to worry about the branches.

If you simply abide in your intrinsic nature, practice at every moment, and daily reduce your deluded mind and deluded habitual tendencies—diminish and diminish, diminish and diminish—then suddenly, they break apart, and spiritual powers and wondrous functioning naturally appear before you. They are not obtained through seeking. Spiritual powers obtained through seeking are of no use. Whatever is obtained through seeking is conditioned dharma and cannot be relied upon.

Some people claim to possess spiritual powers and to be able to foresee the future. In fact, this is dependent powers: they rely on a "spirit that reports in the ear." What is such a spirit? It is the "spirit ghost" we discussed earlier. Because of its heavy greed in past lives, it committed grave evil and consequently fell into hell to suffer greatly.

When its karmic retribution has been exhausted, it leaves hell. Yet because its habitual greed remains, it is reborn in the realm of hungry ghosts, where it often attaches itself to people and feeds on their vital essence and blood. If a person's mind is empty and non-abiding, it cannot attach itself; if a person pursues spiritual powers, that provides precisely the opportunity it needs.

Ghosts have "ghost powers." If you are exploited by one, it will tell you in your ear, "Tomorrow someone will come," or, "Such-and-such will happen," and the next day it indeed happens. If you mistakenly think that you possess spiritual powers, you have fallen for its trick. In fact, this has nothing whatever to do with spiritual powers. Do not listen to it, pay it no heed, and do not rely on it. If you rely on it, you will become entangled by it and will be unable to realize the Way.

We must not pursue spiritual powers. We must practice continuously and seamlessly at all times and in all places, paying no heed to any state or circumstance. If we proceed diligently in this way for a long time, we will suddenly open to our Original Face: subject and object both fall away, sense faculties and their objects fall away, and liberation is attained at once. The falling away of sense faculties and their objects is "the great separation of form and mind"; when subject and object both fall away, there is no practitioner and no practice.

At this point, there is "no practitioner and nothing practiced." Buddha-nature is originally perfect and complete, endowed with everything. Its wondrous functioning is boundless and can manifest the myriad existent things. If we persist in diligent practice, one day we will suddenly break free, and the state in which there is "no practitioner and nothing practiced" will appear brightly before us. Then all spiritual powers and wondrous functioning will be attained without seeking. We must have a steadfast mind, persevere without interruption, keep the mind empty and non-abiding at all times, and return every circumstance to our intrinsic nature. Only then will complete attainment be possible.

VI. Methods of Cultivating Samādhi for Ordinary Beings of Lesser Capacity on the Gradual Path

"If one has not attained stability, one is an ordinary person of lesser capacity on the gradual path, giving rise to manifest deluded thoughts and being swayed by external forces. One must still leave behind places of noise and distraction and diligently cultivate the complete concentration that firmly gathers the mind. Otherwise, even after long practice, no signs of the Way will arise."

Not having attained stability means lacking a stable mind and being unable to persevere. The method of practice discussed earlier—the great practice of non-practice—is spoken for those of superior capacity. Their foundations are excellent;

they can heed the teachings of Mahāmudrā and diligently apply themselves upward. This is what enables them to attain stability.

If one is not such a person and cannot persist in diligent practice, then one has not attained stability.

Those who have not attained stability are always lax and procrastinating, always finding excuses not to practice: perhaps recently they have felt unwell, caught a cold, or developed a cough; perhaps there is too much to do today and no time; perhaps the surroundings are noisy and too bustling.... In short, today will not do; let us wait until tomorrow.

Thus it is always "tomorrow after tomorrow—how many tomorrows there are!" When will such a person ever attain accomplishment in practice? Such people certainly "give rise to manifest deluded thoughts and are swayed by external forces": they chase after delusive thoughts and are moved by circumstances. They are therefore "ordinary persons of lesser capacity on the gradual path." Their capacities are inferior, and they are suited to the gradual path of cultivation over three great asaṃkhyeya kalpas. In this life, they can only plant various wholesome roots; it will not be easy for them to realize the Way in this lifetime.

Yet those who have not attained stability do not have absolutely no hope of realizing the Way in this life. "One must still leave behind places of noise and distraction and diligently cultivate the complete concentration that firmly gathers the mind." Inwardly, do not be turned by deluded thoughts; outwardly, do not be moved by circumstances. One must possess sufficient meditative stability; this stability is called "the firm gathering of meditative concentration."

One must leave behind bustling and noisy places, for such places stir the mind into disorder. One must find a peaceful and pure place and diligently cultivate meditative concentration in order to acquire the necessary stability. If one persists in practice in this way, there is still hope of accomplishment in this life. Otherwise, "even after long practice, no signs of the Way will arise."

In a bustling city, lacking meditative stability, the mind follows circumstances; and if one is unwilling to leave the city for a pure place to cultivate meditation, then even if one practices a particular dharma gate for a long time, no "signs of the Way" will arise. The "signs of the Way" spoken of here are the "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" discussed earlier.

But did we not say that one should cast aside "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity," and urgently cry out "Peh!" to strip away their outer shell? Yes. That is because you must directly realize the View. You must not cling to "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity," much less regard attaining them as realizing the Way.

This is not to say that “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” are bad. They are good, certainly, but even good things are better absent. If the mind of seeking and abiding arises toward “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity,” one cannot thoroughly realize the fundamental path of the Great Perfection of one’s own nature. Therefore, we do not discuss “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” in detail. But since we have now raised the matter of “signs of the Way,” let us say a little about the gradual stages:

In seated meditation and the cultivation of concentration, there are eight stages: coarse abiding, subtle abiding, desire-realm concentration, access concentration, the first dhyāna, second dhyāna, third dhyāna, and fourth dhyāna. So-called “signs of the Way” verify which stage one has reached. For example, in Buddha-recitation, if one can keep the mind on the Buddha’s name without letting it become scattered, this is “coarse abiding”: one has only subdued coarse delusion.

Going further, when the mind remains closely fixed and unmoving, becoming continuous and undivided with the Buddha’s name—outside the mind there is no Buddha, and outside the Buddha there is no mind—this is “subtle abiding,” which further subdues subtle delusion. Going still further, the mind suddenly becomes open and clear, and the body seems like clouds or a shadow, floating in space; one feels that one has left one’s seat. This is “desire-realm concentration.”

The “three realms” are the desire realm, form realm, and formless realm. The hells, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, and the six heavens all belong to the desire realm. Above these are the first, second, third, and fourth dhyānas; these four heavens belong to the form realm. Higher still are the heavens of the formless realm, divided into four levels: the sphere of infinite space, the sphere of infinite consciousness, the sphere of nothingness, and the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception.

Having reached “desire-realm concentration,” one continues to practice. If the body and world suddenly dissolve into emptiness, this is “access concentration”: one has left the desire realm but has not yet reached the form realm, and has not yet entered the first dhyāna. When one’s practice advances further, so that inwardly one does not perceive body or mind and outwardly one does not perceive the world, one has reached the first dhyāna. The first dhyāna possesses the “eight sensations and ten virtues.”

The “eight sensations” are movement, itching, lightness, heaviness, cold, warmth, smoothness, and roughness. One feels that the body has disappeared, yet these eight sensations arise. They need not all appear at once, but they do not go beyond these eight kinds.

Movement is a buoyant, floating sensation, surpassing worldly revelry; itching is an exhilarating sensation, surpassing worldly sensual pleasure.... In short, all eight

sensations are extremely comfortable and joyful. Since joy and bliss arise through freedom from desire, the first dhyāna is called the “stage of joy and bliss born of withdrawal.”

The “ten virtues” are emptiness, luminosity, concentration, wisdom, wholesome mind, pliancy, joy, bliss, liberation, and accord. These already include “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity.” Those with concentration are not confused; those with wisdom are not deluded; those with joy are not sorrowful. Together with wholesome mind, pliancy, liberation, and accord, these are all exceptionally fine states; hence they are called the “ten virtues.”

Only by relinquishing the experiential sensations of the first dhyāna’s eight sensations and ten virtues can one enter the second dhyāna. The second dhyāna is called the “stage of joy and bliss born of concentration”: joy and bliss arise within concentration. Only by relinquishing the “joy” of the second dhyāna can one enter the third dhyāna. The third dhyāna is called the “stage of sublime bliss free from joy,” in which a subtle bliss surpassing joy arises. Only by relinquishing every experiential sensation can one enter the fourth dhyāna. The fourth dhyāna is called the “stage of purity through relinquishment and mindfulness.” At this point there is purity and equanimity, and all experiential sensations, such as “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity,” are absent.

What we cultivate is Mahāyāna Chan, complete and sudden Chan; we are not cultivating the gradual meditation described above. Naturally, we do not discuss this step-by-step work, yet neither are we apart from it. Whatever state we encounter, we pay it no heed, and these sensations soon pass. We take seeing one’s true nature as our principle and do not concern ourselves with such matters.

Not concerning ourselves with them does not mean that they are absent; these processes still occur, but merely flash by. Ganges Mahāmudrā is Mahāyāna Buddhism. It regards “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” as an outer shell that must be stripped away before the appearance of one’s own nature can stand utterly bare before one. But ordinary persons of lesser capacity on the gradual path lack stability of mind and always chase after circumstances.

A lustful person sees a young and beautiful woman, and his mind runs after her; a glutton sees fine food before him, and his mind becomes restless. Whether on or off the cushion, such people always let wild horses run loose. Not to mention directly realizing the View: even “emptiness, bliss, and luminosity” will not appear before them. Therefore it is said of such people that “even after long practice, no signs of the Way will arise.”

“Therefore, cultivate in retreat, so that habitual defilements may not easily arise in one’s conduct and observances. Only then can the wisdom that verifies the Way on

its own ground in fundamental concentration—that is, the wisdom that verifies the power of the Way—merge with differentiated wisdom, or the wisdom gained after emerging from concentration."

Leave places of noise and distraction, find a peaceful and pure place, and practice in retreat. This can prevent one's "conduct and observances" from being polluted by habitual tendencies. "Conduct and observances" means one's practice and ritual regulations.

For example, when we cultivate the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, if after leaving the cushion we forget to maintain contemplation and the mind is turned by external circumstances, this pollutes our practice. If, while on the cushion, we cannot raise the mantra and the mind drifts along with deluded thoughts, this pollutes the ritual observances. What is called "habitual tendencies" means that what is repeatedly practiced becomes one's nature: habits become natural. The greatest habitual tendency of ordinary beings is that their minds arise in response to objects; they are always attached to appearances.

For example, when someone who loves wealth sees an opportunity to get rich, his heart pounds wildly, and he cannot sleep well at night. Layman Pang once said, "Much gold confuses the mind." When money becomes abundant, the mind becomes disordered. He therefore sank his immense fortune in the riverbed. He wanted only to realize the mind and see his true nature; he did not want gold and silver possessions that obstructed practice of the Way. This was a true practitioner of the Way, and he eventually attained great accomplishment. Are there still people like this today? Of course, one cannot say there are none at all, but they are indeed very few.

Ordinary persons of lesser capacity on the gradual path are easily defiled by habitual tendencies in their conduct and observances. If they can cultivate in retreat, "only then can the wisdom that verifies the Way on its own ground in fundamental concentration—that is, the wisdom that verifies the power of the Way—merge with differentiated wisdom, or the wisdom gained after emerging from concentration." The wisdom that verifies the Way on its own ground in fundamental concentration is fundamental wisdom.

The merging of fundamental wisdom and differentiated wisdom is what was discussed earlier as "the meeting of the child and mother luminosities." This means that ordinary persons of lesser capacity on the gradual path can also attain accomplishment in this life if they cultivate in retreat. After "the wisdom that verifies the Way on its own ground in fundamental concentration," this passage adds a parenthetical explanation: "that is, the wisdom that verifies the power of the Way."

Verification means to test and confirm. What is confirmed? A practitioner of the Way naturally confirms the power of the Way; this is the wisdom that verifies that power. By what do you verify the power of the Way? Apart from the numinous knowing in which not a single thought arises and yet there is clear awareness, what else is there? This is the "nature" in realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. This is fundamental wisdom. "Differentiated wisdom" also has an explanation: "or the wisdom gained after emerging from concentration." Here "emerging" means transcending—transcending both concentration and non-concentration. This is wondrous functioning. Differentiated wisdom is wondrous functioning.

"Although retreat practice has support and protection, it depends upon the practice grounded in the essence of fundamental concentration."

Retreat requires someone to provide support and protection. There are two kinds of retreat attendants: external attendants and internal attendants. External attendants take care of your food and daily needs. While you are practicing in the retreat room, you cannot go out to buy vegetables, nor do you have time to cook, so someone must support you; this is external support. Internal support consists in guiding your practice, preventing you from entering demonic obstacles, and instructing you in realizing the great Way."

Although one may have support while practicing in retreat, the main thing is still to "rely on practice grounded in the fundamental essence of samādhi." The fundamental essence of samādhi is one's own nature. One's own nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. Yet, because ignorance has stirred delusively since beginningless kalpas and the mind arises in response to objects, we have fallen into the six realms.

The person who tied the bell must untie it. We must still rely on our own diligent practice to break through ignorance; we cannot depend on others.

If those who support practitioners in retreat could attain the Way on our behalf, Śākyamuni Buddha and Amitābha Buddha would long ago have liberated us all. How could there still be so many ordinary beings? Nor is rebirth in the Western Pure Land so easy. Amitābha Buddha cannot simply pull you there; you must diligently practice Buddha-recitation and sever the root of attachment before you can be reborn in the West.

Master Yinguang said that, to be reborn in the West, one must have "the Sahā seal broken and the Pure Land document completed." If the root of your attachment remains unsevered—if you crave gold, silver, and treasures, and are attached to wife and children—then clearly your "Sahā seal" has not been broken. How, then, can you be reborn in the West?

Therefore, even when practicing in retreat, we must not depend on those who support the retreat. We must still apply ourselves diligently, open up the fundamental wisdom inherently possessed within us, and unite it with differentiated wisdom. Only then can we realize the Way.

“But if one does not know how to nurture differentiated wisdom and bring it into accord with one’s conduct and ritual observances, then merely relying on counteractive methods will be futile. One will be unable to overcome other conditions and will consequently be drawn by the conditions of deluded thoughts into the hindrances of ordinary delusion.”

Differentiated wisdom is spoken of in relation to fundamental wisdom. To attain fundamental wisdom is to “see the principle”—to realize the mind and see one’s true nature. Thereafter, one must still temper oneself amid circumstances in order to bring forth vast wondrous functioning. Differentiated wisdom is this wondrous functioning.

To nurture differentiated wisdom means to safeguard and sustain fundamental wisdom continuously over a long period, to temper oneself constantly amid circumstances, and to protect the true mind so that immeasurable wondrous functioning may arise. Conduct and ritual observances refer to practice conduct—standards of behavior—and ritual procedures.

For example, when we practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, constantly maintaining contemplation off the meditation cushion, neither following thoughts nor being moved by circumstances, is practice conduct. Sitting in practice for at least two hours every day, without dispersing the mudrā or interrupting the mantra while on the cushion, is ritual procedure. Counteractive methods refer to those discussed earlier: if sexual desire is strong, one practices contemplation of impurity; if the scattered mind is strong, one enters retreat to specialize in cultivating dhyāna, and so forth.

Yet if one does not know how to nurture differentiated wisdom and unite it with standards of conduct and ritual procedures for practice, but cultivates solely through counteractive methods, such cultivation will be futile and will not overcome the assaults of external conditions. Why? Because “without recognizing the fundamental mind, studying the Dharma is of no benefit.”

Merely employing counteractive methods not only causes vexation, but also easily leads to attachment to appearances. Not only will one be unable to overcome the influence of external factors, that is, one’s environment; one will also be entangled by internal factors, namely deluded thoughts, and thereby fall into the “hindrances of ordinary delusion.” The ignorance of ordinary beings is the ignorance among

greed, anger, and ignorance. Since it obstructs realization of the Way, it is called the "hindrances of ordinary delusion."

VII. Thoroughly Realizing the Dharmakāya and Safeguarding It in Luminous Quiescence

"Therefore, long-term safeguarding and nurturing, together with thorough realization of differentiated wisdom, are especially essential."

Thus, long-term safeguarding and nurturing, thorough realization of differentiated wisdom, and safeguarding and tempering oneself amid circumstances are especially important. But how does one safeguard and nurture differentiated wisdom over the long term and thoroughly realize it?

"There is no other method: simply do not depart from the view of the inherently stable dharmakāya. Without discriminations of 'subject and object' or 'right and wrong,' function naturally and spontaneously, safeguarding [awareness] in luminous quiescence. This is the calming and contemplation of non-discriminating wisdom, the inherent aspect of unconditioned, co-arisen suchness, and the essential point of all practice."

Recognize that the dharmakāya is inherently stable: it neither comes nor goes and is wholly unmoving. This right knowledge and view is called "the view of the inherently stable dharmakāya." Upon entering into this right view, there is no "person who practices," no "dharma that is practiced," no right or wrong, and no discrimination. One functions freely and naturally, naturally and freely; lucid without confusion, quiescent yet in great samādhi. The great Way is formless, and one's own nature is tranquil and vast. The dharmakāya is thusness, unmoving; it is the essence of great samādhi. It does not depend on whether you believe in it or whether you make efforts to enter samādhi.

How does one safeguard and nurture differentiated wisdom over the long term and thoroughly realize it? There is no other method: simply do not abandon "the view of the inherently stable dharmakāya." At every moment abide in your own nature, temper yourself amid affairs and circumstances, do not cling to appearances, and do not entertain discriminations such as "subject and object" or "right and wrong." This is most important.

People are always beset by a profusion of deluded thoughts, discriminating about everything: this is good and that bad, this is right and that wrong, this is true and that false—discriminating without cease.

If at every moment you can leave behind discriminations such as "subject and object" and "right and wrong," neither abiding in appearances nor clinging to

circumstances, then all things are unobtainable, and even unobtainability is unobtainable. This is one's own nature lucidly present at every moment; it is never departing from "the view of the inherently stable dharmakāya." "The Buddhadharma is not much," and it sounds easy to say, but it is not enough merely to understand it upon hearing it. It must be put into actual practice.

Only by working in this way at every moment can it be put into actual practice. One must "function naturally and spontaneously, safeguarding [awareness] in luminous quiescence." Quiescence means that not a single thought arises; it has the sense of "unmoving," and unmoving is samādhi. Luminosity means clear and distinct awareness; it has the sense of "contemplation," and contemplation is wisdom.

To safeguard the spiritually knowing awareness in which "not a single thought arises, yet all is clear and distinct" is the mutual integration of samādhi and wisdom: wisdom within samādhi and samādhi within wisdom. Wisdom without samādhi is wild wisdom; samādhi without wisdom is dead samādhi. Therefore, for ordinary beings of lesser capacity who proceed gradually, merely entering retreat to cultivate samādhi is not enough. After leaving retreat, they must still temper themselves amid affairs and circumstances, so as to safeguard and nurture differentiated wisdom over the long term and thoroughly realize it.

"Functioning naturally and spontaneously" means adapting to conditions; "safeguarding [awareness] in luminous quiescence" means remaining unchanged. Adapt to conditions without changing; remain unchanged while adapting to conditions. Whether one gains great wealth or is reduced to abject poverty, it makes no difference. If there is porridge, eat porridge; if there is rice, eat rice. Do not give rise to discriminating, grasping and rejecting, or seeking and clinging thoughts.

An ancient worthy said: "Luminosity within quiescence is right; luminosity with deluded thoughts is wrong. Quiescence within luminosity is right; quiescence without awareness is wrong." This is an exquisite essential instruction for "long-term safeguarding and nurturing, together with thorough realization of differentiated wisdom." It not only contains samādhi within wisdom and wisdom within samādhi, but also prevents dead samādhi and wild wisdom.

"This is the calming and contemplation of non-discriminating wisdom, the inherent aspect of unconditioned, co-arisen suchness, and the essential point of all practice." The calming and contemplation discussed here is not the Tiantai school's Great Calming and Contemplation, nor any other method of calming and contemplation. It is the "calming and contemplation of non-discriminating wisdom"—calming and contemplation practiced by wisdom free of discrimination.

Quiescence is calming, and luminosity is contemplation; calming is samādhi, and contemplation is wisdom. "Unconditioned" means vast and free of contrivance. "Co-

arisen" means the myriad phenomena. "Suchness" means originally thus. The three terms unconditioned, co-arisen, and suchness vividly evoke the formless true reality of the dharmakāya.

"The essential point of all practice" means the core of every Dharma gate of cultivation. No Dharma gate of practice can depart from luminous quiescence, from the mutual support of samādhi and wisdom, or from calming and contemplation. When those who practice Buddha-recitation direct their minds to the Buddha's name, other thoughts do not arise; this is calming. When they hear each syllable of the Buddha's name clearly and distinctly, this is contemplation.

For those who investigate Chan, the sense of doubt envelops the entire body, leaving no opportunity for deluded thoughts to arise; this is calming. Bringing up a huatou (critical phrase) with clear and distinct awareness is contemplation. It is the same for us who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma: binding the mudrā and reciting the mantra gather in body and mind; this is calming. With the mind reciting and the ears hearing, listening clearly and distinctly, this is contemplation. Mahāmudrā teaches us to "function naturally and spontaneously, safeguarding [awareness] in luminous quiescence": quiescence is calming, and luminosity is contemplation.

At the end of the Ming dynasty, Chan Master Miyun Yuanwu was abbot of Tiantong Monastery in Ningbo. At that time, many thatched huts stood around Tiantong Monastery, where monks diligently investigating Chan lived in solitary practice. One winter solstice, Chan Master Miyun instructed an attendant to deliver cotton-padded garments to the monks in the huts. One elder monk in a hut said to the attendant, "This old monk has the robe his mother gave him at birth; he has no need of winter clothes."

The attendant reported these words to Chan Master Miyun. Chan Master Miyun said, "This monk seems to have some realization, but I fear it is not genuine. Examine him further through his words." He then instructed the attendant to ask again, "What garment did you wear before your mother was born?" The elder monk could not answer. Chan Master Miyun then instructed him to investigate the huatou, "What garment did you wear before your mother was born?"

Three years later, the elder monk passed away. He had not broken through the huatou and had not uttered a single turning word. After his cremation, countless relics were found. Many people exclaimed, "So many relics! This elder monk's practice must have been excellent!" Chan Master Miyun said, "Ten hu of relics cannot compare with a single turning word. Try answering on his behalf."

Not only were those who praised the relics unable to answer, but none of the five hundred monks then at Tiantong Monastery could answer either. Chan Master

Miyun Yuanwu sighed, “As numerous as the sands of the Ganges are those who practice the Way, yet not one awakens.” Their inability to answer was due to their failure to enter into “the inherent aspect of unconditioned, co-arisen suchness.” If they had entered into such true reality, they would have answered without deliberation.

One might answer him: “The tender peach and plum blossoms have scarcely faded, when fresh chrysanthemums and pear blossoms bloom anew.” The tender peach and plum blossoms have just withered, and fresh chrysanthemums and pear blossoms have opened in succession. What does this mean? It fully reveals “the inherent aspect of unconditioned, co-arisen suchness.”

Earlier, we discussed insentient things teaching the Dharma and “The myriad dharmas return to the One; where does the One return?” Where does the One return? At every time and place, it does not depart from the dharmakāya; at every time and place, it does not depart from one’s own nature.

These flowers are all insentient, yet insentient things too can teach the Dharma. None of this departs from my dharmakāya. One’s own nature is thusness, unmoving, yet undergoes limitless transformation. Its unmoving thusness is called the dharmakāya; its limitless transformations are called the sambhogakāya and nirmāṇakāya. The three bodies are originally one body.

Some people always think that only the manifestation of many human bodies counts as the nirmāṇakāya. They do not know that the myriad phenomena, in all their vast array, are all our nirmāṇakāya.

The sun, moon, and stars; mountains, rivers, and the great earth; chickens, ducks, dogs, and cats; tables and benches; food, clothing, and daily life; men and women, young and old—all are the self-characteristics of what is unconditioned, coemergent, and naturally so. All flow forth from the One True Dharma Realm; all are our manifestations.

It is only because of your deluded thoughts, attachments, and deliberate discriminations that the marks of self, person, sentient being, and life span arise groundlessly. Thus you bury the naturally perfect great Buddha within the six realms, conjure up the cycle of rebirth in the six realms where there originally are no six realms, and conjure up a boundless sea of suffering where there originally is no suffering. Now, if you make a firm resolve and practice the Dharma diligently, ridding yourself of the habitual tendencies toward attachment and discrimination formed over beginningless kalpas, you can attain realization immediately and be liberated right where you are.

“If one enters the net of contrivance with a discriminating mind, there will be no time of liberation.”

Some people take spiritual powers as the standard for realizing the Way. They think that only with spiritual powers can one accomplish anything, and they are always discriminating and speculating: so-and-so has spiritual powers; so-and-so does not. Do you yourself have spiritual powers? If you do not, how can you distinguish whether others have them? More importantly, spiritual powers cannot serve as the standard for liberation.

Ghosts and spirits all possess spiritual powers. Does that mean they are all liberated? If they were all liberated, why would Buddhist rites be performed to ferry them across? Seeking spiritual powers means falling into the net, the net of contrivance. Once one falls into that net with a discriminating mind, there will be no time of liberation.

Buddha-recitation, too, is for protecting our inherently luminous essence and for removing the discriminating mind. If you keep distinguishing how many times you have recited the Buddha’s name and worrying over and over—“Is three hundred recitations a day too few? I have recited for only one year; can I be reborn in the Western Pure Land?”—these are all discriminating thoughts.

Whether Buddha-recitation is done well depends crucially on its quality. Master Hanshan said, “Though the mouth recites Amitābha, if the mind is scattered, shouting until the throat breaks is still in vain.” If the quality is poor, no number of recitations will help. One must eliminate the discriminating mind. It is the worst thing: once it arises, one falls into the net of contrivance and cannot be reborn in the Western Pure Land.

Buddha-recitation leads to rebirth in the Western Pure Land; although one is reborn, there is no real birth, and although one goes, there is no real going. This is an unconditioned dharma: non-contrivance, yet nothing is left undone. Though there is no going, one nevertheless goes; though there is no birth, one nevertheless is reborn. Therefore, the great patriarchs of the Pure Land school said, “Rebirth is certainly attained, yet in truth there is no going.” Birth and cessation, coming and going—all are discriminating thoughts.

The Buddhadharma is an unconditioned dharma, so one should remove the discriminating mind. Buddha-recitation requires deep faith, earnest vows, and vigorous practice; it does not require a discriminating mind. Still less should one contend for superiority or slander other dharma gates. That is an even stronger discriminating mind: not only does it lead one into the net of contrivance and prevent liberation, but it also incurs the fault of slandering the Dharma.

“This is the naked wisdom of the dharmakāya abiding in itself, the awakened nature of mind that has never been deluded from the beginning; it must be resolutely protected and sustained without interruption.” (The above is the second secret meaning.)

The non-discriminating calming and contemplation discussed above is the wisdom of the dharmakāya as it has always been: abiding without abiding. It does not come from outside or from another person. It is an inherent virtue fully revealed by one’s own nature, never covered over in the slightest, but naturally and nakedly manifest. Therefore, it is called “the naked wisdom of the dharmakāya abiding in itself.”

If you earnestly follow this dharma gate of non-discriminating calming and contemplation, practice diligently, and sustain for a long time this “naked wisdom of the dharmakāya abiding in itself,” all great spiritual powers will naturally be attained without being sought. But if you have a mind that seeks spiritual powers, you fall into the net of contrivance; not only will you be unable to attain liberation, but even spiritual powers will fail to manifest. If the discriminating mind that seeks spiritual powers is exploited by spirits, ghosts, or demons, causing them to possess your body, the consequences are even more unthinkable.

This “naked wisdom of the dharmakāya abiding in itself” is the clear, distinct, numinous knowing in which not a single thought arises. It is the awakened nature of mind in which there originally is neither delusion nor awakening.

“Opening, revealing, awakening to, and entering transcend the ten realms; the myriad forms are naturally such, without delusion or awakening.” The sun, moon, and stars; mountains, rivers, and the great earth; men and women, young and old; every affair and every thing—all are naturally and spontaneously so, all possess Buddha-nature, and all are dharmically so. There is neither delusion nor awakening; therefore, this is called “the awakened nature of mind that has never been deluded from the beginning.”

The awakened nature has never been deluded, nor does there exist anything called awakening. Entering the Buddha realm does not increase it; passing through the hells does not diminish it. Yet because it is covered by ignorance and because of deluded attachment and grasping, Buddha-nature cannot be revealed. This is provisionally called “delusion.”

As long as one strives to cultivate the Way, breaks through ignorance, tempers oneself amid circumstances, and removes the habitual tendencies of giving rise to thoughts in response to objects, deluded attachment, and deluded grasping, one can restore one’s naturally genuine intrinsic nature. This is provisionally called “awakening.” Delusion and awakening are both provisional names. Once we break through ignorance, neither delusion nor awakening can be obtained.

Buddha-nature does not belong to either delusion or awakening. Even when wrapped in ignorance, the luminosity of its intrinsic nature remains and has never increased or decreased by the slightest amount. “In pursuing learning, one increases daily; in pursuing the Way, one diminishes daily.” What practitioners must diminish is only the habitual tendencies of ignorance. Naturally genuine Buddha-nature has never been deluded or awakened, and has never increased or decreased.

Failure in practice results from not having properly protected and sustained this naturally genuine Buddha-nature. Thus it is said, “It must be resolutely protected and sustained without interruption.” This is of the utmost importance. To be resolute means to make great vows and establish a great determination. To protect and sustain means neither to turn with thoughts nor to be moved by circumstances; while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, never depart from this, and never depart from one’s intrinsic nature even for a second. To sustain without interruption means that it cannot cease at any moment.

If one practices only intermittently—fishing for three days and drying the nets for two, advancing one step and retreating two—and cannot sustain it without interruption, one cannot realize the Way. For example, in practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, if one sits only one session a day, that is merely two hours, leaving twenty-two hours.

If one lets the wild horse run free for twenty-two hours and cultivates samādhi for only two, less than one-tenth of one’s time, how can one realize the Way? Still more, if one practices today and stops tomorrow, one certainly cannot realize the Way. Therefore, we say that contemplation is the principal practice, while seated meditation is an auxiliary practice.

Contemplation means neither turning with thoughts nor being moved by circumstances, so that one does not depart from one’s intrinsic nature even for a second. This is precisely for the sake of protecting and sustaining it without interruption. Pure Land practice is the same. Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva taught us the method of Buddha-recitation: “Gather in the six sense faculties, and let pure mindfulness continue without interruption.”

To continue without interruption means to sustain without interruption. Pure mindfulness means that one’s skill in Buddha-recitation has become fully mature, so that the mind that recites and the Buddha who is recited both fall away at once. There is no subject and no object, neither purity nor defilement, and naturally genuine Buddha-nature shines forth clearly before one. Only this can be called “pure mindfulness.”

Some people misunderstand this, thinking that continuously reciting “Namo Amitābha Buddha” is itself uninterrupted pure mindfulness. In fact, it falls far short.

One must understand: “Though the mouth recites Amitābha, if the mind is scattered, shouting until the throat breaks is still in vain.” The Pure Land school does not make low demands; its demands are very high.

Nowadays, some people are lazy and unwilling to apply themselves. They carelessly recite a few Buddha-names without wholeheartedness—which is no different from not reciting at all—yet imagine that they will be reborn in the Western Pure Land. If they cannot be reborn there, they say it is Amitābha Buddha’s fault. They even instruct others that one-pointedness of mind without distraction is unnecessary. Alas! How can one not be grieved to the utmost when such a magnificent Pure Land school—one that exhausts the three divisions of time vertically, extends throughout the ten directions horizontally, universally embraces practitioners of all three capacities, and receives both the sharp and the dull—has been misunderstood in this way?

Resolutely protecting and sustaining without interruption is the second essential secret meaning. What, then, is the first essential secret meaning? It is the “recognition of the principle” discussed earlier. Mahāmudrā is the One True Dharma Realm, and the One True Dharma Realm is our naturally genuine Buddha-nature. It is present at all times and in all places; the vast array of phenomena and all myriad forms are its manifestations.

One must first see one’s true nature before one can protect and sustain it. If you have not seen this naturally genuine Buddha-nature, what is there for you to protect and sustain? In brief, first is realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature; second is continuous and seamless safeguarding realization. These are the first and second essential secret meanings.

Lecture Four: The Practice of Mahāmudrā Does Not Depart from the Dharmakāya

I. The Importance of Recognizing the Essence-Wisdom of Liberation

“Meditative stability is essential to practice. Without the power of the path that comes from liberating wisdom, one merely remains in the practice of resting and cannot yet transcend the form and formless realms, because one is unable to restrain the conditions giving rise to greed and anger, and the currents of karmic activity.”

“Essential to practice” means practice of the utmost importance. The “meditative stability” in “view, meditative stability, and practice” is precisely such essential practice. Liberating wisdom refers to the view of the school and safeguarding discussed earlier. The power of the path that comes from liberating wisdom is the

power to give rise, from the view of the essence, to immeasurable wondrous functioning. This is what the Chan school calls great capacity and great function.

Here, “resting” means resting the mind and quieting thoughts. The practice of resting is to suppress thoughts so that they do not arise—the work of “using a stone to press down grass.” Merely remaining in the practice of resting means stopping only at the stage of suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise.

Earlier we mentioned the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness. Here, the form and formless realms refer respectively to the four dhyāna heavens of the form realm and the four formless heavens of the formless realm. This passage means that although cultivating meditative stability, even to the point of entering retreat to specialize in its power, is an essential practice, if one merely rests the mind and quiets thoughts without the power of realizing the essence and bringing forth its function, this is still worldly meditation. Though one has transcended the desire realm, one has not yet transcended the form and formless realms and remains within the heavenly realms of the six realms of rebirth.

Why is this so? “Because one is unable to restrain the conditions giving rise to greed and anger, and the currents of karmic activity.” Such a person may rest the mind and quiet thoughts, and greed and anger can temporarily be subdued, but the conditions that give rise to greed and anger remain. Yuan means conditions. “The conditions giving rise to greed and anger” are the conditions under which greed and anger arise.

Why can resting the mind and quieting thoughts not restrain the conditions giving rise to greed and anger? Because one does not recognize one’s intrinsic nature, and the habitual tendency to give rise to mind in response to circumstances remains. When circumstances arise, one is not free but is turned by them. For example, when a beautiful woman appears before you, you may try to restrain lust by viewing her as a white skeleton or as skin enclosing pus and blood. Yet this is still only a remedial method.

Fundamentally speaking, all appearances whatsoever are illusory; every appearance is a shadow manifested by the true mind. If the true mind shines forth clearly, the appearances of male and female cannot be found at all. When the true mind shines forth clearly and one does not lose oneself in circumstances, this is the power of the path that comes from liberating wisdom. Without this power, one will be deluded by circumstances and turned by them.

Deluded, one creates karma; through karma, one undergoes retribution. Causes produce fruits, and fruits become causes: the cycle of rebirth in the six realms has no time of release. This is “the currents of karmic activity.” The “meditative stability” of resting the mind and quieting thoughts can only temporarily subdue greed and

anger; it cannot restrain the conditions that give rise to them. In the Chan school, this is called “soaking a stone in cold water” or “dead water does not harbor dragons.” Once the power of meditative stability wanes and habitual tendencies surge forth, greed and anger become even stronger. Like grass pressed down by a stone, it grows again once the stone is removed. Naturally, such practice cannot restrain the currents of karmic activity.

“Because one has not attained the power of the path of a resolute mind, one gives rise to greedy attachment in favorable conditions involving pleasant and desirable objects, and to anger and resentment when adverse conditions are obstructive—for example, one gives rise to thoughts of painful feeling in response to illness and pain.”

Not having attained the power of the path of a resolute mind means not recognizing one’s intrinsic nature. If you recognize your intrinsic nature, know that things are all unreal, know that things are all shadows of the true mind, and have absolutely no doubt about this, then when encountering circumstances your mind will not stir and you will not cling to appearances. Therefore, we must directly realize our intrinsic nature.

Mahāmudrā points us to seeing our nature, teaches us to diligently safeguard it, temper ourselves amid circumstances, and directly realize it through that tempering. In the course of such training, we must empty body, mind, and world, truly see our intrinsic nature, and thereby attain “the power of the path of a resolute mind.” Without training, there will be no such power.

As you listen to this teaching here, you may seem to have great strength; yet once you step outside, you immediately forget it. What use is that? You must still practice steadily and earnestly.

I will now introduce two methods of practice. One is that, after hearing the teaching and recognizing your intrinsic nature, you safeguard it at every moment: “Morning, let it be here; evening, let it be here; in wandering and displacement, let it be here; in hardship and distress, let it be here.” Safeguard it at every moment so that it does not move. Whenever a thought arises, turn it back at once; do not follow it. Persist in this over a long period.

The other is to cultivate a specific dharma gate: Buddha-recitation, Chan investigation, or the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. Do not practice only while seated; practice also off the cushion. Contemplate at all times and safeguard realization continuously and closely. Only then will there be results. Otherwise, when you see something beautiful, your mind will still stir; when you encounter adverse circumstances, you will still become angry and resentful. This is what is meant by “giving rise to greedy attachment in favorable conditions involving pleasant and

desirable objects, and to anger and resentment when adverse conditions are obstructive."

"For example, one gives rise to thoughts of painful feeling in response to illness and pain." Let us now give several examples of illness arising as a condition, to see how the ancient worthy ones treated such conditions. Chan Master Mazu Daoyi was an outstanding great patriarch of the Chan school, known as "Master Ma." He instructed more than a hundred disciples who realized the great Way; they went to various places and taught throughout the land.

In his later years, Master Ma fell ill. The monastery steward came to inquire after him: "How has the Venerable One been lately?" Master Ma said, "Sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha." What does this mean? A sun-face is daytime, symbolizing health; a moon-face is nighttime, symbolizing illness. Buddha means awakening.

In the daytime he was in awakening, and at night he was also in awakening; he was thus when healthy and thus when ill. Though only six characters long, these words plainly and concisely express Master Ma's "power of the path of a resolute mind." Chan Master Ciming Chuyuan of the Song dynasty was likewise an outstanding great patriarch of the Chan school. In his later years, he suddenly suffered a stroke, and his mouth became crooked.

His attendant anxiously stamped his feet: "What can be done? All your life you have rebuked the Buddha and scolded the patriarchs, and now this has happened to you." What can be done? All your life you rebuked the Buddha and scolded the patriarchs; now retribution has come. Chan Master Ciming said, "Do not worry. I shall straighten it for you." You need not worry; I will simply straighten it.

As he spoke, he straightened his mouth with his hand, and the crooked mouth immediately returned to normal. Illness and pain are also karmic obstacles: "Once understood, karmic obstacles are originally empty; if not understood, one must still repay past debts." For a great patriarch who has realized the Way, if karmic debts are to be undergone, they are undergone; if they are not to be undergone, they are not.

The body is like a house: eventually it will deteriorate. If it can be inhabited, inhabit it; if it cannot, simply abandon it. If it deteriorates and you still cling to it unwilling to let it go, suffering comes. Such suffering is of your own making. When Chan Master Chongyun Zhihui entered parinirvāṇa, he wrote a verse for everyone to see: "I have a dwelling place, built and roofed by my parents."

"I have lived in it for eighty years, and lately I find it damaged. I long ago planned to move elsewhere, but the matter involves attachment and aversion. When it

collapses, neither it nor I will obstruct the other." Having finished writing, he sat in the lotus posture and passed away.

Nor is it necessarily always like this. Let us give another example. When Chan Master Cuiyan Kezhen was about to enter nirvāṇa, he manifested an extremely painful appearance of illness. On a mat spread on the ground, he tossed and turned without ceasing.

His attendant wept and said: "All your life you have rebuked the Buddha and scolded the patriarchs. Why has this now happened to you?" Had you not rebuked the Buddha and scolded the patriarchs all your life, how could this have happened now? Master Cuiyan stared at his attendant for a while, then sharply rebuked him: "Do you also hold such a view?" He then sat in the lotus posture and told the attendant to burn incense.

As soon as the incense smoke rose, the Chan master entered parinirvāṇa. Everyone, since Master Cuiyan had the assurance to pass away seated, why did he still manifest such a painful appearance of illness? He was teaching the Dharma with his body: suffering itself is liberation, afflictions themselves are bodhi, and birth and death themselves are nirvāṇa. How could he ever have "given rise to thoughts of painful feeling in response to illness and pain"?

If you "give rise to thoughts of painful feeling in response to illness and pain," that is serious indeed: the demon of illness will energetically torment you. If the mind does not dwell on the illness and pain—"If you hurt, then hurt; it does not matter, it is nothing"—you may instead no longer feel the pain.

For example, when practicing the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, your fingers may hurt greatly from forming mudrās. Do not think of your hands; concentrate your attention on the mantra. Forget your hands, and you will no longer feel their pain. But as soon as a joyful thought arises—"Ah, my hands no longer hurt"—the pain immediately returns. Thus, whether one feels pain ultimately depends on whether the mind accepts it.

So long as our minds are empty and non-abiding, illness too can be cured; even if there is pain, we do not experience it as suffering. The Pure Land school says: "At the time of death, the body is free of the suffering of illness, the mind is not confused, and the thoughts are not scattered." Freedom from the suffering of illness means not being afflicted by illness; it does not necessarily mean that not even the slightest illness occurs.

If, when ill, one does not think of the illness but simply recites the Buddha's name —"Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ."—concentrating one's attention on the Buddha's name and feeling no suffering, that is freedom from

the suffering of illness. But if your mind becomes scattered and you think about the pain—"Oh! Oh!"—then it hurts unbearably.

If you ordinarily practice with great diligence and have deep skill, then there is no question of illness or no illness, pain or no pain. "When the mind can turn things, it is the Tathāgata." If one truly achieves an empty, non-abiding mind, illness too can be transformed. It is like Chan Master Ciming, who moved his hand and immediately restored to normal the mouth that had been crooked from a stroke. Even with somewhat shallower skill, one can avoid suffering on account of illness.

Therefore, we must keep the mind empty and pure at every moment. If our minds are not empty and pure, then when illness presses upon us at death, we suffer and feel distressed, and the mind becomes unsettled. I have seen many Pure Land practitioners who, at the time of death, are urged: "You must now strive to recite the Buddha's name. This is the critical moment; you are about to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. The critical moment has come—quickly recite the Buddha's name."

Do you know what they say? They say, "Oh! Why recite the Buddha's name now? I am almost dying from the pain. It is unbearable; I cannot recite it." They simply do not recite, because their minds have become scattered. Our present diligent practice of Buddha-recitation is preparation for that single moment at death. If at the time of death one can keep the mind from scattering and continue, "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .," then rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is absolutely assured. Everyone, practice diligently! There are truly far too many examples like this to recount.

"Whatever arises is a manifestation of the functioning of self-nature. Therefore, recognizing the essence-wisdom of liberation is of utmost importance."

We have just said that one must not "give rise to craving and attachment in pleasant and favorable circumstances, or anger and resentment amid adverse circumstances and obstructing conditions, as when one experiences painful feelings in response to illness." Why should one not think this way? Because "whatever arises is a manifestation of the functioning of self-nature." Do not regard pleasant circumstances and favorable conditions as good, adverse circumstances and obstructing conditions as bad, health as good, and illness as bad.

Where do these adverse circumstances, obstructing conditions, and even illnesses that seem bad come from? They are all manifestations of self-nature. Without self-nature, how could such circumstances and conditions exist? We must awaken keenly and understand that these circumstances and conditions, even the mind of anger, are manifestations of self-nature. Then anger will naturally cease. Self-nature itself is

neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing, neither coming nor going, neither moving nor wavering.

Without the self-nature of bodhi, even afflictions would not exist, just as waves cannot exist without water. Precisely because waves are themselves water, it is said that “afflictions are bodhi.” In cultivating the Way, we must remain keenly aware at all times. As soon as an affliction arises, awaken sharply; with that awakening, one returns to the original ground, and clarity naturally appears before one. The affliction immediately becomes unobtainable. This is the essence-wisdom of liberation.

“Therefore, recognizing the essence-wisdom of liberation is of utmost importance.” Thus, recognition of the essence-wisdom of liberation is extremely important. Recognize the mind of luminous knowing, not deluded thoughts; recognize the essence of empty quiescence, not the physical body. As soon as a deluded thought arises, awaken sharply. The mind of luminous knowing comes forth, and the deluded thought instantly disintegrates and vanishes. Do not take the physical body to be the self. Once you cling to this shell of flesh, trouble begins. The physical body is like a house: it is not “I,” but only a temporary dwelling. We must cultivate in this way at every moment.

II. Methods for Eliminating Deluded Thoughts: Not Departing from the Dharmakāya

“If one has not attained the essential point of arising and ceasing of thoughts, then all deluded thoughts that leak out become karmic causes of rebirth. Therefore, whether deluded thoughts are coarse or subtle, one must let their arising and ceasing vanish as they arise, and cultivate through careful safeguarding. That is, neither indulge them until they blaze forth nor use one thought to cure another. Simply contemplate them without departing from the natural original essence, preventing continuity, like drawing in water: as one draws, the marks disappear.”

The essential point of arising and ceasing is the crucial key to the arising and ceasing of thoughts. What is this key? “The green mountains originally do not move; white clouds come and go freely.” The green mountains symbolize self-nature, and the white clouds symbolize deluded thoughts. Self-nature neither moves nor wavers, while deluded thoughts arise and cease. Although thoughts arise and cease, “once recognized, they are no enemy.” Recognition is precisely attaining the essential point of arising and ceasing.

If you do not recognize this, and a deluded thought arises without your knowing it, then you have not attained the essential point of arising and ceasing. “If one has not attained the essential point of arising and ceasing, then all deluded thoughts that leak out become karmic causes of rebirth.”

In the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we emphasize that “contemplation is the primary practice, while seated meditation is an auxiliary practice.” This is to highlight the function of contemplation. When deluded thoughts come, one must see them, awaken sharply at once, and not attend to them. If you fail to see them, you are plainly following deluded thoughts along. This is “leakage.” Such leaking deluded thoughts are all karmic causes of rebirth in the six realms.

If you follow thoughts, you will inevitably be turned by circumstances. Once attached to circumstances, you create karma; having created karma, you undergo karmic retribution, and thus rebirth in the six realms has no end in sight. It is like a bucket with a hole: all the water of self-nature’s wondrous functioning leaks away, and one falls into the state of an ordinary being in the six realms. Falling is the karmic result; leakage is the karmic cause.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” The first half teaches us not to leak—to let no deluded thought pass unnoticed, but to awaken sharply so that it does not arise. Fearing that we might misunderstand and undertake the deadened practice of suppressing thoughts, it immediately adds the second half: “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.”

Nor should you eliminate all deluded thoughts. Why? So that boundless wondrous functioning may arise and innumerable sentient beings may be liberated. If the true mind can take the lead, then speech and conversation, every gesture and movement, and every stirring of mind and thought are all wondrous functions of self-nature.

An immortal with five spiritual powers asked the Buddha, “What is that one additional power?” He possessed five spiritual powers, while the Buddha possessed six. What was that one? The Buddha called his name: “Immortal with Five Powers!” He answered. The Buddha said, “That is the one you asked me about.” In the calling and response, the question and answer, the wondrous functioning of self-nature is vividly revealed.

This is “that one additional power”—the power of the exhaustion of outflows. Exhaustion of outflows means not leaking in the slightest; all leakage has been utterly ended. Thus, although the true mind may appear foolish, and great wisdom may seem simple, if no thought ever arose, how could boundless wondrous functioning appear? If all waves were extinguished, would that not leave a pool of dead water? Therefore, “with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.”

When one recognizes the true mind and lets it take the lead, deluded thoughts become wondrous functioning. When one does not recognize the true mind and lets deluded thoughts take the lead, there is leakage, and this becomes a karmic cause

of rebirth. This is the “essential point of arising and ceasing.” Again using green mountains and white clouds as a metaphor, let us offer a verse on this essential point: “White clouds fill the green mountains, yet the green mountains remain; green mountains are themselves green mountains—how could white clouds obstruct them?”

“Therefore, whether deluded thoughts are coarse or subtle, one must let their arising and ceasing vanish as they arise, and cultivate through careful safeguarding.” Deluded thoughts may be coarse or subtle. What is the difference? Coarse delusion means giving rise to a mind in response to circumstances: delighting in favorable circumstances, grieving in adverse circumstances, and unconsciously following circumstances along.

We must first cut off this coarse delusion and understand that all external circumstances are illusory, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water—utterly unobtainable. The Diamond Sūtra says: “All conditioned dharmas are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows; like dew and like lightning. One should contemplate them thus.” Here, “should” also carries the sense of accommodating and dealing with them.

With regard to all external circumstances, whether favorable or adverse, simply deal with them as necessary, while also contemplating them in this way: regard them all as unobtainable, like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, morning dew, and lightning. If one contemplates in this way at every moment, over time one will no longer be moved by external circumstances and will have basically cut off coarse delusion.

After this, habitual tendencies still remain. These are seeds of habitual tendencies in the field of the eighth consciousness. Even if you do not think of them, they may leap forth on their own; this is called the surfacing of seeds. Such deluded thoughts are subtler than the coarse delusion just discussed, but they are not yet subtle delusion. During seated meditation, it is easier to notice the stirring of these seeds. We still neither attend to nor follow them, and thus peacefully enter samādhi. The deluded thoughts seen in samādhi are subtle delusions, like hidden underwater currents, surging and moving. Without entering deeply into dhyāna, one simply cannot see subtle delusions.

Whether deluded thoughts are coarse or subtle, “one must let their arising and ceasing vanish as they arise, and cultivate through careful safeguarding.” When a deluded thought comes, you must notice it. Then awaken sharply, neither attend to it nor follow it, and it will naturally dissolve without trace. This is called “letting arising and ceasing vanish as they arise”: through your awakening, the arising and ceasing of thought is transformed into emptiness.

If you do not notice them or do not awaken sharply, deluded thoughts will continue moving without cease; one thought follows another without interruption, becoming a karmic cause of rebirth. “Careful safeguarding and cultivation” means properly safeguarding and correcting oneself. What is safeguarded, and what is corrected? Safeguard the true mind of luminous clarity and non-abiding; correct the deluded thoughts that flow on without stopping.

Once you notice a deluded thought, awaken sharply at once; immediately let its arising and ceasing vanish. Do not follow it for some distance before awakening. Some people know when a deluded thought has arisen, but they are reluctant to stop. They say, “Let me consider it a little longer. Let me think it through before I awaken.”

Since you already know it is a deluded thought, why continue thinking about it? Is this not utter foolishness? It is plainly being carried along by deluded thoughts. One should not act this way. Quickly awaken sharply and let arising and ceasing vanish. At all times, safeguard our true mind: clear, ever-present knowing, without abiding or attachment. This is “careful safeguarding and cultivation.”

“That is, neither indulge them until they blaze forth nor use one thought to cure another.” To indulge means to let loose—to release a wild horse and follow thoughts along. To make them blaze means allowing thoughts to burn on without stopping: from Zhang San one thinks of Li Si, from Li Si one thinks of Zhao Wu, and so on, flowing on without rest. It is like a great fire: the more it burns, the fiercer it becomes.

To indulge thoughts so that they continue blazing without interruption is to “indulge them until they blaze forth.” We must not indulge them in this way; we must quickly transform them.

How are they transformed? There are two methods. The first is to consider within oneself: what will be the consequence of indulging them until they blaze forth? It will be unimaginable. They will become karmic causes of rebirth in the six realms, with suffering beyond endurance. Quickly awaken sharply, allowing self-nature to appear clearly before you.

If the force of deluded thoughts is strong and sharp awakening cannot transform them, use the second method: promptly recite the Buddha’s name or recite a mantra, replacing deluded thoughts with Buddha-remembrance or right mindfulness. Both methods are ways of not “indulging them until they blaze forth,” but one must absolutely not “use one thought to cure another.”

What does it mean to use one thought to cure another? It means raising a deluded thought to suppress the original deluded thought: “Oh, this thought is deluded. It is

bad, bad—quickly, do not move." This is using one thought to cure another. Why is this not good? It produces two possible results.

One result is that you cannot suppress the deluded thought, and it becomes precisely a case of "deluded thoughts flowing on." The other is that, even if you can control it temporarily and suppress the thought into death, it is like "pressing down grass with a stone: when the stone is removed, the grass grows again." Once thoughts have been suppressed into death, one becomes like earth, wood, metal, or stone—dead.

Such deadened samādhi is temporary. Even if you can remain in samādhi for hundreds or thousands of years, once the power of samādhi wanes, deluded thoughts will return with even greater force. Rebirth in the six realms will continue as before, and this is still not ultimate. Therefore, we do not use one thought to cure another, nor do we suppress thoughts into death. We transform them, turning them around through a sharp awakening. When our strength is insufficient, we recite mantras or the Buddha's name.

"Simply do not depart from the natural fundamental essence; contemplate it so that [deluded thoughts] do not continue, like drawing on water—each stroke vanishes as it is made." The natural fundamental essence is our innate Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is unborn and undying, unmoving and unshakable, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing. Contemplation is the "sudden, solemn awakening" discussed just now.

Simply awaken suddenly and solemnly, and return to the natural fundamental essence. We must remain constantly inseparable from this natural fundamental essence. When a deluded thought arises, awaken suddenly and solemnly, so that it cannot continue. If a deluded thought arises and you do not even know it, that will not do.

Thus, "contemplation" has two meanings: first, when a deluded thought arises, you must know it; second, there is the sudden, solemn awakening. There is an analogy called "a cat catching mice," in which deluded thoughts are compared to mice. One must have a cat's vigilance: the moment a mouse pokes out its head, it is immediately noticed. In the Chan school this is called "attending to the huatou"; to attend to it means to keep watch over it.

This thought of "keeping watch" is right mindfulness. In cultivation, right mindfulness must not be lost. Right mindfulness is like the bailiff at the entrance to a government office, stopping idlers and forbidding them to enter. Right mindfulness is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature. If right mindfulness is lost, then either one fails to notice the swirling of deluded thoughts, or one practices a dead, fixed samādhi and becomes like earth, wood, or stone. These are two wrong paths in

cultivation. Therefore, the Chan school calls for arousing the sense of doubt; the Pure Land school calls for upholding the Buddha's name; Esoteric Buddhism calls for reciting mantras and forming mudrās; and Mahāmudrā instructs us to "not depart from the natural fundamental essence and contemplate it."

What is the purpose of contemplation? "So that [deluded thoughts] do not continue." That is, do not allow deluded thoughts to persist; cut them off. Thus, we say that the function of Buddha-recitation is to cut off deluded thoughts. The Buddha's sacred name is a sword of wisdom: "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." When the Buddha's name is present, it naturally cuts off deluded thoughts invisibly.

If, while reciting the Buddha's name, one is at the same time caught up in confused deluded thoughts, then that is not Buddha-recitation. When reciting the Buddha's name, there must certainly be both calming and contemplation; the mind recites, and the ear hears. When the mind recites the Buddha's name and deluded thoughts do not arise, this is calming; when the ear hears the Buddha's name with clear and distinct awareness, this is contemplation. In every Buddhist practice, the purpose is to prevent deluded thoughts from continuing without interruption. "Like drawing on water—each stroke vanishes as it is made." Let the arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts be like drawing on the surface of water: as one draws, the marks disappear, leaving not the slightest trace; arising and ceasing vanish as they occur.

"Although deluded thoughts may cease of themselves, this is not yet purity, for one merely knows the deluded thoughts and is still unable to cut off the turbulent stream of delusion and karma."

Even if deluded thoughts do not arise and naturally cease, this still does not count as purity. Some people are perplexed: if deluded thoughts have ceased, should that not be purity? Why is it said not to count as purity? Because one "merely knows the deluded thoughts and is still unable to cut off the turbulent stream of delusion and karma."

The state of merely knowing deluded thoughts—knowing that they are deluded thoughts, yet not recognizing the true mind—will not do. Only after recognizing the true mind can one cut off the turbulent stream of delusion and karma. Turbulent delusion means becoming confused upon encountering circumstances, so that the mind becomes disturbed.

Seeing gold ingots, the mind stirs restlessly: one wants to become rich. Seeing physical beauty, the mind stirs restlessly, and the fire of lust burns within . . . These are all turbulent delusions. You clearly know that these are all shadows, all false, all unobtainable, yet you still cannot cut them off. Why? Because you know only the realm of deluded thoughts and do not recognize the true mind.

You do not know what the true mind is, so you have no strength. When you encounter circumstances, your mind still stirs; thus, you cannot cut off the turbulent stream of delusion and karma. We ordinary beings have lost our original nature, take external things to be ourselves, pursue objects and circumstances, create karma, and undergo retribution in an unceasing flow like running water. Past karma is like seeds planted in the field of the eighth consciousness. How can it be cut off? Only by realizing the true mind and cutting off the root can it be ended. Therefore, if one wishes to cut off the turbulent stream of delusion and karma, one must realize the true mind; merely knowing that deluded thoughts cease by themselves is not enough.

“One must, at the very time one knows that deluded thoughts cease of themselves, recognize and know the wisdom-nature in which one’s own consciousness is plainly seen; then one naturally abides.”

The “wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness” is the fundamental consciousness: the eighth consciousness returns from delusion to awakening and is transformed. Once the eighth consciousness is transformed, it is the amalavijñāna, also called the pure white consciousness. This is what is meant by “transforming consciousness into wisdom”: transforming the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom.

To “plainly see” the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness means clearly seeing great perfect mirror wisdom; that is, one’s intrinsic nature luminously appears before one. It is also the luminous presence of the true mind’s spiritual knowing: not a single thought arises, yet knowing remains clear and distinct. Only in this way can one cut off the turbulent stream of delusion and karma. To “plainly see the wisdom-nature of one’s own consciousness” is not difficult. What is difficult is not understanding or recognizing it—that is, not “knowing and recognizing” it.

In the Chan school, “knowing and recognizing the wisdom-nature in which one’s own consciousness is plainly seen” is called “seizing it in one grasp”; in the Pure Land school, it is called “When the lotus opens, one sees the Buddha and awakens to the unborn”; in Esoteric Buddhism, it is called “entering attainment of siddhi.”

At the very time one knows that “deluded thoughts cease of themselves,” one must “immediately know and recognize the wisdom-nature in which one’s own consciousness is plainly seen.” When there are no deluded thoughts, one must recognize the true mind, recognize our genuine Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is wisdom-nature—the nature of wisdom—because all practices, all spiritual powers, and all wondrous functions arise from it. Therefore, it is called “wisdom-nature.”

Merely knowing that the arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts vanish as they occur, without recognizing the true mind, still cannot cut off the turbulent stream of delusion and karma. One must recognize the true mind and further know that the

deluded mind arises from the true mind. When the deluded mind is cut off, what is this clear, ever-present knowing in which not a single thought arises? This is precisely the true mind, precisely great perfect mirror wisdom. At the point where deluded thought ceases, one must recognize and experience the true mind.

If one cannot seize it in one grasp, one "misses it face to face," and then cannot see one's nature. What is meant by "seeing one's nature"? It means understanding clearly: understanding that the deluded mind is unobtainable, and understanding that the deluded mind is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Where the deluded mind comes to rest, one immediately "grasps" the true mind.

This does not mean using the hand to grasp some thing. The true mind is formless and without characteristics: "To call it something is already to miss it." It is not that some perceptible thing exists and awaits your grasp. Rather, you must experience it, recognize it, and affirm it. When the deluded mind comes to rest, recognizing the true mind is of the utmost importance.

I have repeatedly reminded everyone: when "the divisions of before and after are cut off"—when the preceding thought has already ceased and the following thought has not yet arisen—what is this? At that moment, you should exert yourself vigorously, recognize the true mind, affirm the true mind, believe in it deeply without doubt, and assume responsibility for it. Once you recognize the true mind, you will no longer cling to appearances, and all deluded thoughts will be transformed into wondrous functioning.

The true mind has no form or appearance. Whatever has form or appearance is false appearance, is shadow, and is utterly unobtainable. Knowing this, we will not cling to things with form and appearance. Only then do we have strength to relinquish appearances, cast aside appearances, and not abide in appearances. If one does not recognize what is real, one will always be deluded by what is false.

"When the false is taken as real, the real also becomes false." Because one does not recognize what is real, one cannot avoid taking the false as real; then one "takes a thief for one's father" and buries the true mind. This is an exceedingly important matter. One must recognize where deluded thoughts come from and what they are. Deluded thoughts are not bad things; they are the wondrous functioning that arises from our true mind.

Do not fear deluded thoughts. Simply do not follow them; recognize their Original Face; do not cling to circumstances, abide in circumstances, or attach to appearances. At every moment, when a thought arises, awaken; when a thought arises, cut it off. At the point where a thought ceases, the "wisdom-nature of one's own consciousness" will luminously appear before you. What is called "no-thought" does not necessarily mean that not a single thought arises.

If not a single thought arose, one would become like earth, wood, or stone. That is annihilation and an indeterminate state, not no-thought. No-thought means that when thoughts arise, one does not abide in them.

A monk asked Zhaozhou, “Does a newborn child also possess the six consciousnesses?” A newborn infant knows nothing; surely it does not give rise to thoughts in response to circumstances or become swept away by deluded imaginings. Does an infant possess the six consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind? In fact, the infant serves as an analogy in asking what “no-thought” is. Zhaozhou replied, “A ball struck atop rushing water.”

The monk then asked Touzi, “What is the meaning of ‘a ball struck atop rushing water’?” Touzi replied, “Thought after thought does not linger.” If one strikes a ball atop swiftly rushing water, can the ball remain still? In an instant, it is swept away. “Not lingering” means non-abiding. Thus, when thoughts arise without abiding, that is no-thought; no-thought does not mean that there are no thoughts at all.

We have repeatedly pointed out that, at the point where a thought ceases, that which is clear and distinct is the mind of our spiritual knowing. This is the true mind; this is Buddha-nature as suchness. Buddha-recitation is recitation of this Buddha. Buddha means awakening. To recite the Buddha is to remain awake in thought after thought; this is the true meaning of Buddha-recitation. If one does not understand this true meaning and recites the Buddha’s name in a muddled way, it is equivalent to not reciting the Buddha’s name at all.

My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, once said that if those who recite the Buddha’s name for many years do not attain wondrous functioning or strength, they should promptly change to Esoteric Buddhist practice. After practicing Esoteric Buddhism and attaining correspondence and samādhi, they may return to Buddha-recitation and will then know where Buddha-recitation leads. Therefore, for us who study Buddhism, it is most important to recognize the source of deluded thoughts and, where deluded thoughts come to rest, recognize the true mind.

After recognizing the true mind, “one naturally abides.” Abiding without abiding is called naturally abiding. One is natural and steady, vividly aware yet tranquil, tranquil yet vividly aware; no longer shaken by circumstances and no longer troubled by deluded thoughts. Only by studying Buddhism in this way does one genuinely gain strength. Otherwise, one is practicing incorrectly.

Some people say, “I have already recited so many sūtras, and I still must recite so many more. I must fulfill my vow!” Doing such things is precisely to remain unawakened from a great dream; it is not genuine cultivation or genuine Buddhist practice. To truly study Buddhism, one must recognize the intrinsically non-abiding, wondrously luminous true mind; remain constantly awake and abide nowhere in

every circumstance. Only then is there hope of attaining Buddhahood. What use is there in reciting so many Buddha-names, reciting so many sūtras, marking little red dots, burning them, and fulfilling vows? Clinging to appearances in this way, can one attain Buddhahood? One cannot.

“Where deluded thoughts cease, purity is immediately attained; this is still more important. (Merely recognizing deluded thoughts cannot cut off delusion.)”

Where those deluded thoughts cease, the originally pure true mind immediately appears. When waves subside, is that not pure water? Recognizing this true mind is even more important. (Merely recognizing deluded thoughts, without recognizing the true mind, cannot cut off the turbulent stream of deluded karma.) We have already discussed this at length.

“The arising and ceasing of thoughts occur simultaneously, like drawing on water: as soon as one draws, it vanishes. They are originally all pure. They arise and cease of themselves, continuously and seamlessly, without interruption; then one attains spontaneous functioning.”

As soon as a thought arises, it does not lodge in the mind; it immediately ceases of itself and leaves no trace. This is called “the arising and ceasing of thoughts occur simultaneously.” It is much like drawing on water. As soon as a thought arises, it is as though we had made a stroke upon water—the water of the mind. When the thought ceases of itself, it is like a drawing made on water: its trace is gone.

Thus it is said, “As soon as one draws, it vanishes; they are originally all pure.” The Buddha said, “During my forty-nine years in the world, I have not spoken a single word.” This means that as one draws, it vanishes; once something has been said, it is as though it had not been said. The Chan school says, “All day long one eats, yet has never bitten a single grain of rice; all year long one wears clothes, yet has never had a single thread hanging on oneself.” This does not mean not eating or not wearing clothes. Once one has eaten or worn them, it is finished; one does not discriminate or calculate over them. Only when the mind is empty and pure in this way can one realize the Way.

“They arise and cease of themselves, continuously and seamlessly, without interruption; then one attains spontaneous functioning.” As soon as deluded thoughts arise, they naturally disappear. This is what was discussed earlier: “The green mountains originally do not move; white clouds come and go as they please.” My green mountains—the true mind—do not move, while you, the white clouds—deluded thoughts—may come and go. Let them come and go; once they have come and gone, they are gone. This is called “arising and ceasing of themselves.”

“Continuously and seamlessly, without interruption” refers to practice. Practice is difficult, and its difficulty lies precisely here. Continuous means lasting; continuously means persisting for a long time. Seamless means without gaps; seamlessly means without interruption. “Continuously and seamlessly” means proceeding in this way over a long period without interruption. “Without interruption” means continuing without stopping.

Practice must be carried on in this way. If we can truly practice in this manner, we will certainly succeed within three to five years. Even three to five years is a long time. My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, once said: “I guarantee attainment within a year and a half. If you do not attain it, come and ask me.” This is true! If we can “continue seamlessly, without interruption,” how could we fail to attain realization? We will certainly attain it. The problem is that we cannot “continue seamlessly, without interruption”; we practice for a while and then stop, like fishing for three days and drying the nets for two.

This passage is very important, so I shall repeat it once more: when deluded thoughts come to a stop, that which is utterly pure and lucidly distinct is the intrinsic nature of suchness. Apart from this, nothing else is it.

Do not harbor doubts there: “Could this not be it? If it is, why have I not developed spiritual powers?” If you think this way, it is ruined; you have become attached to the demon of spiritual powers.

Do you not wish to see spiritual powers? I will show them to you now: Is it not a spiritual power that I am speaking here? Is it not a spiritual power that you are listening here? Is it not a spiritual power that you walked here? These are all spiritual powers; they are all wondrous functioning of the intrinsic nature of suchness. The intrinsic nature of suchness is shen; tong means being without obstruction. When the mind abides nowhere, it naturally functions without obstruction.

Yet our present spiritual powers are only minor ones. So long as we protect the intrinsic nature of suchness “continuously and seamlessly, without interruption,” in time great spiritual powers will develop. When great spiritual powers manifest in the future, they will depend on this very point today—on this very point of “recognizing the true mind.”

Our present recognition of the true mind is like a little child who has just been born. It still cannot function as an adult does, so we must protect it. Once it has grown up, it can function like an adult.

An adult is equivalent to a Buddha, while we are now like small children. We seek the protection of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, while also protecting it ourselves. Practicing through the combined strength of others and ourselves is called

“nurturing the noble embryo”: protecting and nourishing it over a long time until it matures. Once it has grown up, it can manifest wondrous functioning like a Buddha.

What will happen if you do not protect it? This little child will die prematurely; the infant will die before growing into an adult. If, after hearing this, you do not believe it and think, “Oh dear, perhaps this is not it after all,” and then seek elsewhere, it will die prematurely.

If you do not protect it, it cannot grow up, cannot become a Buddha, and cannot develop great spiritual powers. Recognizing this point is extremely important! My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, often said: “The great golden-winged garuḍa travels ten thousand miles with one stroke of its wings, yet it all depends on the force of that point beneath its feet.” Unless the great golden-winged garuḍa presses its feet down, it cannot take flight.

Have you seen country people catch eagles? They dig a narrow trench, narrower even than an eagle’s body, and place several newly hatched chicks inside. The chicks chirp and chirp. The eagle, with its keen eyes, circles overhead. “Ah, there are chicks below!” It swoops down to seize them.

Its body cannot enter, so it becomes wedged over the trench. It stretches its claws inside, but they cannot reach the ground and grasp only empty space. Its wings beat “flap, flap” against both sides, yet it cannot fly away, and the country people capture it. Why can it not fly? Because “its feet cannot touch the ground.” Our present recognition of the true mind is precisely like having one’s feet touch the ground. Otherwise, we too cannot fly and cannot bring forth boundless wondrous functioning.

If we can truly continue seamlessly, without interruption, then “we attain spontaneous functioning.” According with conditions and functioning spontaneously, we are free and at ease. People have afflictions because they cannot function spontaneously. They have too many demands of one kind and another: they want wealth, promotion, successful children—demands without end.

But if you did not formerly practice generosity, how can you become wealthy? If you did not formerly serve the public, how can you be promoted? When what one seeks cannot be obtained, afflictions are endless. If one recognizes the true mind and knows that all things are unobtainable, one can accord with conditions and function spontaneously, free and at ease.

What is the use of seeking those things? Not to mention that they may not be obtained; even if they can be obtained, one comes naked and goes naked, born empty-handed and dying empty-handed. Yet, in pursuing one’s aims by any means, one creates all kinds of karma, which follows one and cannot be driven away. In the

end, one must undergo karmic retribution. Wake up quickly! Practice diligently! Only in this way can one function spontaneously, free and at ease.

III. Relying on Deluded Thoughts to Cultivate the Dharmakāya

“Therefore, when deluded thoughts arise, let them arise (the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says, ‘yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it’). You should know that whatever arises is all conduct of the Way within the originally pure nature. When practice reaches this point, there is no trace of sticking or stagnation; deluded thoughts are all conduct of the Way, as countless as the sands of the Ganges. For no-thought is precisely thought, and thought is precisely no-thought; thinking yet not thinking, not thinking yet thinking.”

When deluded thoughts arise, simply let them arise; do not suppress them. This does not mean indulging them. Indulgence means ceaselessly pursuing conditions. To “let them arise” means having no such pursuit at all. The words quoted in parentheses from the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment—“yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it”—have already been explained.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment presents four statements in succession: “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts; yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it; dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing; in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality.” These four statements are four stages of practice: coarse, subtle, very subtle, and extremely subtle.

The coarse stage is the first statement: “At all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts.” At any time, do not give rise to deluded thoughts or pursue external objects. This is a broad explanation and the initial stage of practice. The subtle stage is the second: “Yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” Why not extinguish it? As we explained earlier, it is because wondrous functioning must arise; one cannot suppress deluded thoughts to death. Yet one must neither follow them nor indulge them. This requires a proper sense of measure and is somewhat subtler.

The third stage is: “Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing.” What does dwelling amid the realm of delusion mean? It means being in the state of neither suppressing nor indulging deluded thoughts. In fact, such realms as the sun, moon, and stars; mountains, rivers, and the great earth; people, self and others, sentient beings; flowers, birds, fish, and insects are all “realms of delusion,” all accumulated from deluded thoughts.

Without the accumulation of deluded thoughts, there would be no such realms of people, self, and others. Because we do not recognize the intrinsic nature of

suchness, ignorance moves delusively, we pursue appearances of objects, and these appearances thereby arise.

Yet we continue to take the false for the real, clinging to and grasping at delusion. How deluded this is! Because of delusion, we create karma; because of karma, we undergo karmic retribution. From where there originally were no six realms, the cycle of rebirth in the six realms is set in motion; from where there originally was no suffering, a boundless sea of suffering is set in motion. You may say, “These seem quite real to me. How have I not realized that they are realms of delusion?” This is the very subtle stage.

Your mind is coarse, so it cannot perceive these subtle realms. You must undertake subtle practice. How is subtle practice carried out? “Dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing.” Within the state of neither suppressing nor indulging deluded thoughts, do not add any further knowing.

Why should one not add further knowing? Because all things with appearances are realms of delusion, and they are also manifestations of the true mind. The realm of delusion is the true mind, and the true mind is the realm of delusion. Without the true mind, where could realms of delusion come from? It is like there being no waves without water and no reflections without a mirror. Therefore, do not discriminate over, accept, or reject this realm of delusion. This is “not superimposing any further knowing.”

The fourth stage is: “In the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality.” Our minds are always caught in such opposites as existence and nonexistence, truth and falsity. In fact, all of this is the mischief of the discriminating mind. Existence and nonexistence, truth and falsity, and the like are all mere frivolous discourse.

To say that it exists is the “slander of exaggeration.” It is just so; if you further assert that it “exists,” you are plainly “putting a head on top of a head,” gratuitously exaggerating it. That is tantamount to slandering it.

To say that it does not exist is the “slander of diminution.” It is originally utterly unobtainable; what is there to diminish? If you further say that it is “nonexistent,” is that not the “slander of diminution”? To say that it both exists and does not exist is the “slander of contradiction”—a self-contradiction. To say that it neither exists nor does not exist is the “slander of idle speculation.”

Existence, nonexistence, both existence and nonexistence, and neither existence nor nonexistence: all four propositions are slanders of the Dharma! The same is true of such relative dharmas as true and false—they are all likewise. Only by realizing the true nature of suchness can one leave behind all such opposites. At the slightest

deviation, one falls into opposites such as existence and nonexistence, true and false. This is exceedingly subtle.

“Do not discern what is the ultimate reality” means that one should not discriminate, saying that this is true and that is false. The true is precisely the false, and the false precisely the true; true is false, false is true; neither true nor false, neither false nor true; both true and false, both false and true. For example, if in cultivating the Pure Land we say that the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is real while this Sahā world of ours is false, that is mistaken.

If the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is real, then this place of ours is real as well; if the Sahā world is false, then the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is false as well. Why do I say this? Because all things flow forth from the One True Dharma Realm; all are derivatives of the true nature of suchness, waves in the great ocean of perfect enlightenment. As it is said, “Nothing does not flow from this Dharma Realm; nothing does not return to this Dharma Realm.”

This Dharma Realm is the great ocean of perfect enlightenment. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is a Pure Land because it is brought forth through the vow-power of Amitābha Buddha and the pure minds of all the great bodhisattvas. Our Sahā world is an impure land because it manifests through sentient beings such as ourselves clinging to circumstances and creating karma.

Creating karma through clinging to circumstances is also a wondrous function of the true mind! From the standpoint of the true mind, all is real; from the standpoint of shadows, all is false. “All appearances are empty and false”; the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, too, is a shadow of the true mind. Once one recognizes the wondrous essence of the true mind, rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss is absolutely assured. “Mind is the land, and the land is mind.”

“As the mind is purified, so the Buddha-land is purified.” What is called “being reborn in the Pure Land” is in fact being reborn in the Pure Land within one’s own mind. Naturally, this requires no effort at all and entails no coming or going. Therefore, a great patriarch said: “Those who are born are certainly born; those who go do not truly go.”

“Know that whatever arises is the conduct of the Way within the original, fundamental purity of intrinsic nature.” We should know that all our functions, all the thoughts that arise, and all the things we perceive are the “conduct of the Way” within the “original, fundamental purity of intrinsic nature.” This original, fundamental purity of intrinsic nature is the true nature of suchness. Conduct of the Way means the acts of cultivating the Way; this is precisely the wondrous functioning of the true nature of suchness. We should know that everything which arises is the wondrous functioning of the true nature of suchness.

“When practice reaches this point, there is not the slightest sticking or stagnation; all deluded thoughts are conduct of the Way, as countless as the sands, in wondrous functioning.” When practice reaches this point means that one’s practice has reached such a stage. What stage? Clearly knowing that whatever arises is conduct of the Way within the original, fundamental purity of intrinsic nature. When practice reaches this point, there is not the slightest sticking or stagnation.

Clinging to deluded mind and deluded circumstances without letting go is called “sticking”; stopping short and failing to advance on the unsurpassed Way is called “stagnation.” Without sticking, one no longer abides in appearances or discriminates and chooses; the mind naturally becomes empty and open. Without sticking, there must be no stagnation; one will necessarily advance swiftly on the great path of practice. Then all thoughts that arise become “conduct of the Way, as countless as the sands, in wondrous functioning.”

The Ganges is a great river in India. Its sand is very fine, and one can imagine how innumerable its grains must be. Buddhist scriptures often use “the sands of the Ganges” as a metaphor for a vast quantity. “Wondrous functioning as countless as the sands” means infinitely many wondrous functions. As just explained, conduct of the Way means the acts of cultivating the Way. Commonly, people say that a certain great Dharma master has profound conduct of the Way.

This means that the foundation of that person’s cultivation is deep. Thus, conduct of the Way can also refer to one’s foundation in practice. Upon reaching this stage, not the slightest sticking or stagnation remains. Deluded thoughts then become conduct of the Way and can give rise to immeasurable, boundless wondrous functions.

“No thought is precisely thought; thought is precisely no thought; thinking without thinking, and not thinking yet thinking.” Is it not good to have no deluded thoughts? Why, then, did we just say that “all deluded thoughts are conduct of the Way, as countless as the sands, in wondrous functioning”? Because no thought is precisely thought, thought is precisely no thought; thinking without thinking, and not thinking yet thinking.

Earlier, when we discussed the four statements in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment, we analyzed existence and nonexistence, true and false, and the like sufficiently. Here we shall not repeat at length the explanation of “no thought is precisely thought . . . not thinking yet thinking.” I trust that everyone can draw inferences from one example and understand this correctly.

In brief: no thought is precisely thought. What thought is there? Right mindfulness; right mindfulness is clear, distinct awareness. Thought is precisely no thought: there are no mistaken thoughts, for mistaken thoughts are thoughts of “sticking and stagnation.” Thinking without thinking is like “hitting a ball on rushing water”—“each

thought does not linger." Not thinking yet thinking means "where deluded thoughts cease, purity is immediately attained."

Compare these with the four statements in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: no thought is precisely thought—at all times, do not give rise to deluded thoughts (there is a thought of "not giving rise to deluded thoughts"); thought is precisely no thought—yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it; thinking without thinking—dwelling amid the realm of delusion, do not superimpose any further knowing; not thinking yet thinking—in the absence of such knowing, do not discern what is the ultimate reality (do not discriminate or choose; this is pure right mindfulness).

The Tang-dynasty layman Pang composed a verse: "Having a son, I do not marry him off; having a daughter, I do not give her in marriage. The whole family gathers together, speaking only of the unborn."

The Song-dynasty layman Yang Jie, not wishing to yield to the worthies of old, replied with a verse: "When a son is grown, he must marry; when a daughter is grown, she must be married. Why seek such idle leisure, and speak further of the unborn?" Chan Master Haiyin Xin, seeing these two verses, also composed one: "I have no son to marry and no daughter to give in marriage. When sleepy, I simply sleep. Why concern myself with talk of the unborn?"

Seeing how these three people of old wrote, I too composed a responding verse: "If there is a son, let him marry; if there is a daughter, let her marry. Sons upon sons and grandsons upon grandsons—this is speaking of the unborn." Everyone, can you detect the slightest trace of "sticking and stagnation" in these four verses? If you ask, "The four verses advocate different views; in the end, should one marry or not? Should one give one's daughter in marriage or not?" then you yourself are sticking to the words. "To interpret meaning according to the words is to wrong the Buddhas of the three times!" We can only "hang our mouths on the wall."

"At the very moment a thought arises, one does not see that there is any thought that can arise; this is called no thought. It is not, as ordinary people imagine, that no thought means that not a single thought arises."

What is called no thought does not mean that not a single thought arises. Rather, although thoughts arise, one does not abide in or cling to them, nor does one linger or stagnate in them. The no thought of "not a single thought arising," as ordinary people imagine it, is suppressing thoughts so that they do not arise. They think that having no thoughts at all is good practice.

In fact, one dies right there. Not only can one not realize the Way; one may instead become like earth, wood, stone, or metal! Have you not seen the koan of the Sixth

Patriarch rescuing Chan Master Wolun? At first, Wolun thought that suppressing thoughts so that they did not arise was good practice, and so he wrote this verse: “Wolun has a skill: he can cut off a hundred thoughts. When facing circumstances, his mind does not arise; bodhi grows day by day.”

Seeing that he had entered a dead end, the Sixth Patriarch rescued him, saying: “Huineng has no skill and does not cut off a hundred thoughts. When facing circumstances, thoughts arise again and again; how could bodhi grow?” Giving rise to mind is precisely not giving rise to mind; stirring a thought is precisely not stirring a thought. The Sixth Patriarch was without abiding! “When facing circumstances, thoughts arise again and again” means giving rise to wondrous functioning. If one does not give rise to mind or stir thoughts, one dies right there. What wondrous function could then arise? Could one still teach the Dharma to others? No.

Bodhi is one’s intrinsic nature: neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. It is not diminished in ordinary beings; even in hell it is no less. It is not increased in sages; even upon becoming a Buddha it is no more. In ancient times, someone asked a great Chan master, “What is it like after awakening?” The master replied, “It does not increase by a fraction.” He then asked, “And before awakening?” The master replied, “It does not decrease by a fraction.” Therefore, Wolun was mistaken in saying, “Bodhi grows day by day.”

“Relying on the arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts to regulate and cultivate the dharmakāya, all deluded thoughts that appear are thereby transformed into the wondrous benefit and use of intrinsic nature. Even the coarse manifestations of deluded thoughts arising from the five poisons can all be endowed with the radiant power of liberation inherent in intrinsic nature, and luminosity and emptiness become benefit and use.”

To regulate and cultivate the dharmakāya through the arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts means that when a deluded thought arises, one promptly awakens, recognizes it, and does not follow it—not that one suppresses it until it is dead and motionless. One must remain awakened and contemplative at all times, and not follow deluded thoughts. If one follows them and clings to circumstances, that will not do.

Therefore, the Pure Land school emphasizes Buddha-recitation at every moment, not to make you greedily seek quantity or cling to marks of merit and virtue, but to awaken you, enable you to recognize the dharmakāya, and safeguard the dharmakāya. In our practice, we must cultivate with deluded thoughts; there is no second method. Whether reciting the Buddha’s name, reciting mantras, or investigating Chan, the purpose is to regulate these deluded thoughts.

Thus, relying on deluded thoughts to regulate and cultivate the dharmakāya means practicing with deluded thoughts: cutting them off and not allowing them to continue without cease. All Buddhadharma regulates and cultivates the dharmakāya; all of it is practice with deluded thoughts. Do not treat Buddha-recitation as the accumulation of meritorious acts with form; that is mistaken. Therefore, Master Lianchi said, “With every sound, awaken the master of the house.” Buddha-recitation is for awakening the master of the house and enabling you to awaken.

If one understands how to practice with deluded thoughts, relying on them to regulate and cultivate the dharmakāya, “all deluded thoughts that appear are thereby transformed into the wondrous benefit and use of intrinsic nature. Even the coarse manifestations of deluded thoughts arising from the five poisons can all be endowed with the radiant power of liberation inherent in intrinsic nature, and luminosity and emptiness become benefit and use.”

Thus, all deluded thoughts that arise are adjusted so that they manifest the wondrous benefit and use of intrinsic nature. Even coarse deluded thoughts manifested by the five poisons of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness can be endowed with the power and luminosity of liberation inherent in intrinsic nature, entering a state of luminous emptiness. That is to say, one can transform the poison of the five aggregates into the wondrous benefit and use of intrinsic nature, making it a tool for our cultivation and realization, and provisions for attaining Buddhahood.

If we set our own minds in order—without abiding in appearances, without abiding in circumstances, and without afflictions—we will gain great benefit. “Wondrous benefit” means subtle and wonderful experience; it is deeply beneficial. To gain benefit is good, but craving enjoyment is harmful. Benefit and enjoyment differ by only one character in Chinese, yet the difference between them is as vast as heaven and earth.

If one insists on eating well, dressing well, making friends with the opposite sex, dancing, going to movies, and indulging in glittering nightlife and extravagant pleasures, then, when these conditions are unavailable, commits crimes in order to enjoy them, that is disastrous. This is craving enjoyment.

If at all times the mind is empty and non-abiding, peaceful and at ease, and does not chase after external circumstances, then it is perfectly fine to have only porridge to eat today or only a dilapidated thatched hut in which to live. To be broad-minded, content at heart, happy in knowing sufficiency, and at ease in accordance with conditions—this is wondrous benefit.

When we understand how to work with deluded thoughts and set our own nature in order, we will naturally gain wondrous benefit. As it is said, “With an even mind, all naturally comes to an end.” An even mind means that there is not the slightest crookedness within; it is straightforward and candid. “All naturally comes to an end” means that the mind is utterly empty, without the slightest affliction.

How wonderful this is! Thus, learning the Buddha Dharma brings great benefit and opens great wisdom. Learning the Buddha Dharma is not a matter of seeking something; once there is something sought, it goes wrong. Seeking blessings or spiritual powers is not learning the Buddha Dharma; seeking wealth or official rank is even less so.

Everything is false, like flowers in empty space and the moon reflected in water; in the end, it all comes to nothing. Therefore, we must constantly recognize the true mind, cultivate the Dharma body by working with deluded thoughts, and not allow deluded thoughts to obscure the true mind. Recognize that deluded thoughts are the wondrous functioning arising from the true mind. Then, by not abiding in appearances, one will gain genuine benefit and give rise to no afflictions.

Conversely, if one does not know how to cultivate the Dharma body by working with deluded thoughts, afflictions will be endless and desires impossible to satisfy. Having one hundred, one wants one thousand; having one thousand, one wants ten thousand; having ten thousand, one wants millions and hundreds of millions. There will never be a time of satisfaction, and affliction and suffering will likewise have no end.

“All deluded thoughts are wondrous functioning arising when intrinsic nature penetrates circumstances.”

This further explains the arising of deluded thoughts. Although deluded thoughts arise from the true mind, without circumstances and conditions they would have no basis for arising. Such circumstances and conditions are what is meant by “the realm penetrated by intrinsic nature.” As we have repeatedly explained earlier, the sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, earth, people, self and sentient beings, flowers, birds, insects, and fish are all manifestations of intrinsic nature.

Yet why, among the circumstances and conditions of ordinary beings, are there so many differences? This is because of the nature of karma. Ordinary beings do not recognize their intrinsic nature and therefore are deluded. Because of delusion, they create karma; because of karma, they undergo karmic retribution. Through collective karma, mountains, rivers, and the great earth are manifested; through individual karma, the twelve classes of living beings are manifested. As the causes of good and evil differ, so too do the circumstances and conditions that are manifested.

The various differing circumstances and conditions all resonate within intrinsic nature and are fully comprehended within intrinsic nature. They have no substantial reality and are empty and unreal. From the standpoint of intrinsic nature, causes are within it, and results are within it as well. Intrinsic nature transcends cause and effect. The various differing circumstances and conditions are all "the realm penetrated by intrinsic nature"; this is what is called "the object aspect of the eighth consciousness."

The "perceiving aspect of the eighth consciousness," moreover, discriminates among and accepts or rejects the "object aspect." Such discrimination, acceptance, and rejection are what are called "deluded thoughts." The same eighth consciousness—ālaya consciousness—is the eighth consciousness when one is deluded, and the "mind of the Tathāgata-garbha" when one is awakened. Therefore, if one can "cultivate the Dharma body by working with deluded thoughts"—turning back from delusion and returning to awakening—then "all deluded thoughts are wondrous functioning arising when intrinsic nature penetrates circumstances." Deluded thoughts are wondrous functioning arising from the true mind!

"Protect and sustain it with a mind that neither accepts nor rejects, for its arising and ceasing have not transcended the realm of the sovereign wondrous functioning of the Dharma body."

As the name implies, "deluded thoughts" are thoughts that are false and unreal. Because they discriminate among, accept, and reject false and unreal external circumstances, their "discrimination, acceptance, and rejection" are likewise false and unreal. Although deluded thoughts are "deluded," they are wondrous functioning of the true mind. Once one recognizes the true mind, one must carefully "protect and sustain it."

Protect means to guard, and sustain means to maintain: guard it carefully and maintain its position as "master." Thus, the true mind is also called "the master." How should it be protected and sustained? "Protect and sustain it with a mind that neither accepts nor rejects": protect and sustain the true mind by neither accepting nor rejecting external circumstances.

With regard to all external circumstances, do not give rise to discriminating thoughts: "This thing is good; I must obtain it," or "That thing is bad; I must discard it." Do not harbor a mind of love and hate, acceptance and rejection. To remove this mind of love and hate, acceptance and rejection is to protect the true mind. The reason we cannot attain liberation is precisely our love, hate, acceptance, and rejection. "Ah, this gold is so good—I must get it!" "This place is bad—leave it quickly!"

Speaking of this brings to mind a modern Chan koan. There was a Dharma teacher in Hangzhou who said: “Although quite a few people lecture on the Diamond Sūtra, one question is enough to stump them.

The Diamond Sūtra says that there is no appearance of person, no appearance of self, no appearance of purity, and no appearance of defilement. So here is a pile of excrement: since you are without appearances, eat it!” This is not a challenge to those who lecture on the Diamond Sūtra; it is a challenge to the meaning of the Diamond Sūtra itself. In fact, his question is easy to answer. One could reply, “Please carry it here in your mouth.”

You want me to eat it, do you not? Then please carry it over here in your mouth! That is a polite answer. If one were not being polite, one could thunder at him: “Hey! You, a Dharma teacher, have actually been buried by a pile of excrement.” When he sees that pile of excrement, he becomes attached to its appearance; it is as though he has been buried by the excrement. This is all the mischief of a discriminating mind of love and hate, acceptance and rejection. Therefore, we must not give rise to a mind of love and hate, acceptance and rejection toward external circumstances. This is protecting and sustaining the true mind.

Why must we protect and sustain the true mind in this way? “For its arising and ceasing have not transcended the realm of the sovereign wondrous functioning of the Dharma body.” The arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts have not transcended the realm of the “sovereign wondrous functioning of the Dharma body.” The wondrous functioning of the Dharma body encompasses everything and is therefore called “sovereign.” The arising and ceasing of deluded thoughts naturally remain within the realm of the sovereign wondrous functioning of the Dharma body; they do not go beyond the scope of the true mind’s wondrous functioning. Therefore, although deluded thoughts arise and cease, if I do not follow them, am not led along by them, and am not moved by them, that is protecting and sustaining the true mind.

“Although deluded thoughts possess the material appearances of ignorance, their own nature has not departed from the purity of the wisdom Dharma body.”

The Heart Sūtra says, “Clearly seeing that the five aggregates are all empty.” The five aggregates are also called the five skandhas: form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. The aggregate of form belongs to material phenomena, and material phenomena have appearances. Men and women, young and old, mountains, rivers, the great earth, plants, and forests are all material appearances. Feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are mental phenomena, and mental phenomena have no appearances.

Deluded thinking belongs to mental phenomena, but why is it said that deluded thoughts "possess the material appearances of ignorance"? To give rise to deluded thoughts is to abide and to grasp. What does one grasp? One grasps the false appearances of material phenomena—one grasps material appearances. As soon as a deluded thought arises, there is an image of material appearance in the mind. Therefore, deluded thoughts are said to "possess the material appearances of ignorance."

In truth, mental phenomena are material phenomena, and material phenomena are mental phenomena. Apart from the true mind, where could there be two dharmas? Yet because of ignorance, once mental phenomena stir, they become the shadow of material phenomena; hence they are called "the material appearances of ignorance." The material appearances of ignorance are likewise false, unreal, and unobtainable. If you can "cultivate the Dharma body by working with deluded thoughts," then "all deluded thoughts that appear are transformed into wondrous benefit of intrinsic nature." Why can deluded thoughts be transformed into wondrous benefit? Because "their own nature has not departed from the purity of the wisdom Dharma body."

The "own nature" discussed here means "one's inherent nature." The inherent nature of deluded thoughts is false and unreal. It may also be said that deluded thoughts have no intrinsic nature; they are like "flowers in empty space"—as though one sees flowers in the sky.

This occurs because the eyes are diseased and a film has grown over them, causing one to see flowers in the sky; in fact, there are no flowers in the sky. The film over the eyes is a metaphor for the deluded thoughts and attachments of one's own mind; seeing flowers in the sky is a metaphor for taking the unreal to be real and falsely grasping and clinging.

This not only mistakes empty space for reality—failing to see the true nature of suchness—but also fails to see where real flowers arise; nor can it understand that deluded thoughts and deluded objects are both wondrous functions of the true mind. Ignorance and deluded thoughts are like "flowers in empty space" (in ancient usage, and were interchangeable): they have no substantial reality and are all illusory.

But why can they arise? It is because we possess a numinous and lucid true mind. The true mind is like the great ocean, and deluded thoughts are like its waves. Without the great ocean, there are no ocean waves; without the true mind, whence could deluded thoughts come? The true mind is the wisdom Dharma body, and it is originally pure. Therefore, the inherent nature of deluded thoughts has not gone beyond "the purity of the wisdom Dharma body."

The Song of Realization says: “The true nature of ignorance is itself Buddha-nature; the illusory empty body is itself the Dharma body.” The true nature of ignorance is true suchness and Buddha-nature; the body, originally empty like an illusion or magical transformation, is the wisdom Dharma body. This is because the false body and mind do not go beyond the scope of the pure wisdom Dharma body. This is true reality; this is the One True Dharma Realm.

“Therefore, within the illumination of the vast and unceasing light, the intrinsic nature of deluded thoughts is originally empty.”

What is “the vast and unceasing light”? It is our wisdom Dharma body. The Dharma body is incomparably vast, eternally unceasing, and immeasurably luminous. The Amitābha Sūtra says: “The light of that Buddha is immeasurable, illuminating the lands of the ten directions without obstruction. Therefore, he is called Amitābha.” Amitābha means Immeasurable Light and Immeasurable Life.

Immeasurable Light is the “vastness” of space, and Immeasurable Life is the “unceasingness” of time. Amitābha is “the vast and unceasing light.” Whether we practice Buddha-recitation, investigate Chan, or cultivate Esoteric Buddhism, we are all cultivating the mind. When the mind becomes empty and pure, great light will shine forth.

Why does this light not shine forth now? Because it is obscured by ignorance, like a pearl wrapped in mud: its light is no longer seen. Yet though it is unseen, it is still there. In fact, this light has never left us. In daily life—in work, writing, creative invention, and so forth—it is still this light, still the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya; it has simply not been fully brought forth. Within the illumination of this “vast and unceasing light,” the inherent nature of every deluded thought is originally empty and quiescent.

Do not fear deluded thoughts. When deluded thoughts cease, that is the true mind. When they arise, let them be like drawings on water: as soon as they are drawn, they vanish. Do not let them linger or become attached to them. Immediately awaken with lucid awareness; as they arise, they cease and vanish. The Pure Land school invokes the Buddha’s name, the Chan school arouses a sense of doubt, and Esoteric Buddhism upholds mudrās and mantras—all in order to transform deluded thoughts and safeguard the true mind.

If you practice in this continuous and seamless way, you will surely attain accomplishment within a few years. What is to be feared is that we are unwilling to do this, unwilling to safeguard [the mind] continuously and seamlessly. Instead, we allow deluded thoughts to fly about unchecked and indulge them, letting them blaze up like a great fire. If we indulge them until they burn fiercely, accomplishment will be impossible.

Therefore, once you recognize that the intrinsic nature of deluded thoughts is originally empty, do not fear them. They are the wondrous functioning of the true mind; they are conduct on the Way. The purpose of Buddha-recitation, Chan meditation, and esoteric practice is all to cut off deluded thoughts and not wander along with them. If there are no "leaking deluded thoughts," the "karmic causes of saṃsāra" are cut off.

"If one practices and sustains this continuously over a long period, deluded thoughts will naturally arise and be regulated; activity and stillness will be undifferentiated, and one will attain an indestructible abiding."

To be with this in the morning and with this in the evening, to remain with this in displacement and adversity, to practice at every moment and not give rise to false thoughts wherever one may be—this is called "continuous habituation over a long period." Practice means putting it into effect, actually doing it; sustaining means persevering, remaining thus continually. If one "practices and sustains this continuously over a long period," then "deluded thoughts will naturally arise and be regulated; activity and stillness will be undifferentiated, and one will attain an indestructible abiding."

"Naturally arise and be regulated" means that you need not subdue them; they subdue themselves. Our practice is like herding an ox. At first, we must train and control it at every moment. Once it has been tamed, there is no need to control it, for it obeys you on its own. At that point, you can give rise to thoughts when you wish, and refrain from giving rise to thoughts when you do not wish.

Giving rise to thoughts is for putting them to use. If there is no need to use them, no thought arises; then cultivation has succeeded. Ordinary beings cannot be masters of their thoughts: even when they do not want thoughts to arise, they still arise, jumping out of the mind on their own. Hence they are called "deluded thoughts." If practitioners are likewise unable to control their thoughts, their practice has not been done well. They need to correct their understanding and apply themselves diligently.

"Activity and stillness will be undifferentiated" means that whether one is active or still, sitting in meditation or working, there is no distinction; it is all the same. If I tell you to give rise to a thought, you do so; if I do not tell you to give rise to a thought, you do not. Activity and stillness are equally at ease.

Even when a thought is arising, one does not see where it arises from. This means that at every moment there is no thought that can arise. It does not mean stagnant water, with not a single thought at all; it simply means non-abiding. Upon reaching this stage, one "attains an indestructible abiding" and will not be destroyed. This

physical body of ours will decay and die; when its conditions are exhausted, the four elements will separate. But the dharmakāya will not be destroyed.

To attain an indestructible abiding is to realize the Way. Mahāmudrā teaches us to practice on the mind-ground. There is no need to cultivate any other dharma gate; one need only apply oneself directly on the mind-ground. Maintain contemplation at every moment, like drawing on water, with no abiding whatsoever. If one practices in this way, deluded thoughts will gradually be naturally subdued, and one will form the fruition of the Way, attaining an indestructible abiding. Thus, the practices of the highest class of Esoteric Buddhism are the same as those of the Chan school. Chan likewise teaches you to practice without contrivance. Therefore, the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate is extremely important.

“When its efficacy reaches the utmost, deluded thoughts of joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety may still appear, just as they do in ordinary beings; yet one does not, like them, cling to the reality of arising and decay, accumulate karmic activities, and be carried along by the force of desire.”

“When its efficacy reaches the utmost” means that our practice of contemplation has reached its utmost point.

At this time, “deluded thoughts of joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety may still appear, just as they do in ordinary beings.” One worries when encountering misfortune, rejoices when encountering good fortune, and still has doubts and concerns when doing things—though certainly not doubts about one’s teacher or the Dharma, and certainly not doubts concerning the fundamentals. Such joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety are all deluded thoughts, the same as the joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety of ordinary beings.

“Yet one does not, like them, cling to the reality of arising and decay.” That is, one does not, as ordinary beings do, cling to the circumstances one enjoys, grieves over, or worries about as truly existent. Though thoughts of joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety may stir, one does not cling to them rigidly. Knowing that “all appearances are illusory,” one does not regard anything as having an entity that can arise or an entity that can decay.

Ordinary beings take the realms of deluded thought to be real. Their minds are constantly uneasy; they brood over them, calculating from morning to night. Afflictions, afflictions! The lives of ordinary beings are spent amid deluded thoughts and afflictions. How painful this is! This is delusion.

Because of delusion, one creates karma; because of karma, one undergoes karmic retribution. This is what is meant by “accumulating karmic activities and being

carried along by the force of desire." Ordinary beings cannot be masters of themselves, but are carried along by the force of desire.

Those who truly apply themselves to cultivation, those whose efficacy has reached the utmost, may still have deluded thoughts of joy, sorrow, doubt, and anxiety, but these pass as soon as they turn. They are not carried along by the force of desire; they do not brood over matters or calculate endlessly from morning to night. That is the difference. When they encounter something sad, it is not that they do not weep; when they encounter something joyful, it is not that they do not laugh.

But after a brief cry or a hearty laugh, it passes, and the mind remains even and open. Those whose efficacy has reached the utmost are not people who cannot laugh when joyful or cry when sad; they are not corpses or wooden figures. When practice reaches that point, joy, laughter, anger, and scolding are all Buddhadharma; they are all conduct on the Way.

IV. Essential Points of Mahāmudrā Practice and Several Possible Deviations

"When a thought arises, first recognize the appearance of the deluded thought; its appearance then vanishes, as when one meets an old acquaintance. Next, the deluded thought will necessarily vanish by itself, like a knot in a snake undoing itself. Finally, the deluded thought disappears imperceptibly, neither beneficial nor harmful, like a thief entering an empty house. This is the most essential and wondrous method of liberation."

When a deluded thought arises, at the very beginning of practice one merely recognizes the various appearances of the deluded thought, and its appearance immediately vanishes, as when one encounters someone one knew before. Yet after this familiar person has left, an image still remains in the mind. Though the deluded thought has vanished, its lingering image remains.

Next, one's practice has improved somewhat. Deluded thoughts will necessarily arise and vanish on their own, like a knot tied in a snake that unties itself—the clinging mind has loosened. When practice reaches its final stage, "the deluded thought disappears imperceptibly, neither beneficial nor harmful." It is not that the arising of a deluded thought is harmful, nor that its cessation is beneficial. Rather, there is neither benefit nor harm, and it naturally fades away.

Though deluded thoughts may arise, I know them to be the wondrous functioning of the true mind, and so I do not abide in them. They naturally vanish, and I no longer discriminate with regard to deluded thoughts. Some practitioners enjoy making distinctions: "Ah, my deluded thoughts have ceased. That is good; my practice has progressed." Or, "Oh no, my deluded thoughts have arisen again. How harmful! I have regressed."

In truth, deluded thoughts originally have no intrinsic nature and are neither good nor bad. So long as we practice earnestly, in the end we will no longer give rise to discriminating thoughts of “benefit” and “harm,” and deluded thoughts will fade away at any moment. “Like a thief entering an empty house”: it is like a thief entering an empty room, where there is nothing to steal. “This is the most essential and wondrous method of liberation”: this is the most essential and wondrous method for liberation from deluded thoughts.

Because this is “the most essential and wondrous method of liberation,” let us explain these three stages of practice once more. When a deluded thought arises, first recognize it and do not follow it; then the deluded thought vanishes. But at first, the power of recognizing deluded thoughts is insufficient. Although the deluded thought vanishes, its image is not absent from the mind; it still remains.

It is like encountering an old acquaintance. Though the person has already left, the mind begins to churn: “I have not seen this person for many years. How was he in the past? How is he now?” The person has gone, but the image remains. Though the deluded thought has vanished, its lingering image still remains. This is because one’s power is insufficient.

Next, one further recognizes deluded thoughts and knows that they will necessarily vanish by themselves; one’s power is more sufficient than before. Yet the illusory appearance of the deluded thought remains and only vanishes after lingering for a while. This is like “a knot in a snake undoing itself.” A snake cannot tie itself in a knot. If you tie a knot in it, after some time it will untie itself. When practice reaches this point, even after the “old acquaintance” leaves, the mind will no longer churn. This is a further step beyond the earlier stage.

Next, one recognizes that deluded thoughts are neither beneficial nor harmful, and that their arising and ceasing have nothing to do with oneself. This is because the true mind neither moves nor wavers. The arising of deluded thoughts does not diminish my true mind by even a fraction, nor does their cessation increase it by even a fraction. The true mind neither increases nor decreases. Therefore, deluded thoughts are neither beneficial nor harmful; let them arise and vanish as they do.

Recognizing this point is most important; accomplishing it is best and most wondrous. If, after a deluded thought has arisen, it still circles in our minds and cannot be cast aside, and we continue to calculate and reconsider it, this is because our power is insufficient.

Many people are like this. They have a dream at night, and after waking they continue to think about it: what was this dream like, what did it mean? They even want to tell others about it. If we can do this—know that it is a dream, leave it alone, and leave not the slightest trace of it in the mind—then we have power. Meeting an

old acquaintance, a knot in a snake undoing itself, and a thief entering an empty house: these are different stages in how we regard deluded thoughts and in the power by which we eliminate them. Examine for yourselves at which stage you are able to eliminate deluded thoughts.

“To know how to cultivate but not how to liberate is the same as the dhyāna heavens.”

One may know that one should practice and that one should not follow deluded thoughts, yet not know that “all deluded thoughts are wondrous functions arising within the realm of the self-nature’s thorough penetration.” This is called “knowing how to practice but not knowing how to understand.” One knows only how to cultivate the Way, but does not know what the true mind is. If one does not recognize the true mind, one is no different from those in the dhyāna heavens. If you diligently apply yourself in this way, then even if you reach the utmost point and have considerable meditative power, if you do not recognize the true mind, you can be reborn only in the first, second, third, or fourth dhyāna heavens. You still do not leave the form realm. To say nothing of liberation, you do not even reach the formless realm.

“If one does not possess such practice based on the essential points of understanding the Dharma, then even if the mind can remain firmly established in dhyāna, one still falls into the dhyāna of the higher realms.”

If one lacks practice based on such essential points of understanding the Dharma, this is precisely “knowing how to practice but not knowing how to understand.” “Even if the mind can remain firmly established in dhyāna” means that the mind can remain unmoving and enter deep meditative absorption, staying unmoved for one, two, or three years, or even for one or two kalpas, or for thousands, millions, or billions of kalpas.

“One still falls into the dhyāna of the higher realms” means that one merely falls into the dhyāna of the four dhyāna heavens or the four formless heavens. This is still the dhyāna of the form and formless realms, still within the three realms; it is not liberation. Without recognizing the true mind, one cannot leave the three realms and is no different from non-Buddhists. Why can non-Buddhists not leave the three realms? Because they do not know what the true mind is.

Non-Buddhists cling to the yang spirit, considering it truly real and indestructible. The yang spirit is what Buddhism calls the mind-born body: a body produced by the seventh consciousness, the mind faculty. It is still an illusory shadow.

The Diamond Sūtra says: “All appearances are illusory.” Everything possessing appearance is false; the yang spirit is false as well. It does not leave the three realms

and is not ultimate. Only by recognizing the self-nature of suchness and diligently safeguarding it can one, through such practice, accomplish the great Way.

We have said again and again: everyone must safeguard the Dharma body of suchness well! Maintain clear, ever-present knowing; remain non-abiding at all times; and safeguard it continuously and seamlessly. In time, you will naturally realize the great Way and certainly attain accomplishment. Recognizing the true mind is like obtaining rice: then, by cooking it over a fire, one can make it into a meal.

What is meant by cooking it over a fire is safeguarding it at all times, never allowing deluded thoughts to disturb it anywhere, and not following deluded thoughts. When the mind is empty and non-abiding, the result will certainly be Buddhahood. This is extremely important. If one does not practice in this way, then even if one's meditative power is profound and one remains in dhyāna for a long time, one still cannot realize the great Way.

Many people today are fond of meditative power: "Oh my, this Dharma teacher's practice is excellent—he has been in meditation for a week." "No, no! That Dharma teacher's practice is even better—he has been in meditation for three months." Here we must give him a great shout: "No! That is dead absorption. It can absolutely never realize the great Way!" True dhyāna means not being deluded when encountering circumstances and remaining non-abiding at all times.

If you are settled while sitting there but unsettled once you leave the meditation cushion, can that work? No, it cannot. Therefore, without recognizing the Dharma body of suchness, blind cultivation and blind practice can never lead to realization of the Way. One must recognize the true mind and apply oneself to safeguarding it in order to accomplish the great Way. This is a crucial principle that we Buddhists must understand.

"If one takes knowing where deluded thoughts arise and abide as sufficient, one is no different from inferior, deluded people."

Some people apply themselves to practice and, once they know where deluded thoughts arise and abide, are satisfied. They say: "Oh, I understand. I know both where deluded thoughts arise and where they abide. Where do deluded thoughts arise? They arise from circumstances; deluded thoughts are reflections of circumstances. Where do they abide? They abide in circumstances."

Deluded thoughts indeed arise from circumstances; without circumstances, there are no deluded thoughts. "The mind is originally unborn; it exists because of circumstances." This was spoken by Vipaśyin Buddha. Yet from where do

circumstances arise? If one is satisfied merely with knowing where deluded thoughts arise and abide, then one "is no different from inferior, deluded people."

The Buddhadharma is the supreme and wondrous Dharma: settled without madness, wise without delusion. Inferior, deluded people are not the Buddhadharma. Those who "take knowing where deluded thoughts arise and abide as sufficient" have the lowest capacities. What use is it merely to know where deluded thoughts arise and abide? One must recognize the Dharma body of suchness and apply oneself upon that Dharma body, contemplating and safeguarding it at all times and in all places; only then can one realize the Way. To know only where deluded thoughts arise and abide, while imagining that one will realize the Way, is like cooking rice with sand: even after countless kalpas, it cannot become rice.

"Or one may incline exclusively toward emptiness and seek such conceptualizations as the Dharma-body seal of confirmation; yet when adverse conditions arise, one's cultivation cannot free one from bondage to circumstances, and one instead reveals one's own faults."

Those who take knowing where deluded thoughts arise and abide as sufficient are naturally persons of inferior capacity, for they cling to circumstances and consider them truly existent. Yet it will not do to "incline exclusively toward emptiness" either. Clinging to existence is certainly wrong, but falling into emptiness is wrong as well.

Why? Because our Dharma body is neither empty nor existent; it is emptiness and existence at once. It is not empty, nor is it existent: to call it existent is wrong, and to call it empty is also wrong. In "seeking the Dharma-body seal of confirmation," seal means verification and confirmation, while correspondence means accord. To seek the Dharma-body seal of confirmation means to seek verification and accord with the Dharma body. If you fall into one-sided emptiness, you do not accord with the Dharma body; how can you be verified as corresponding with it? Therefore, this can only be called "conceptualization." The Dharma body does not fall within conceptualization; once it falls within conceptualization, it violates the Dharma body. All kinds of conceptualization that cling to emptiness or existence fail to accord with the Dharma body.

"Yet when adverse conditions arise, one's cultivation cannot free one from bondage to circumstances, and one instead reveals one's own faults." When these people who incline toward emptiness encounter adverse or unfavorable conditions, the practice they have undertaken cannot free them from the bondage of those circumstances, and they become bound by them instead.

Their "emptiness" is merely conceptualization; when something happens, they can no longer empty it. Their "emptiness" contains an emptiness as something existent

—does this not become “existence”? In the past, there was an elderly gentleman in Pudong, Shanghai, who said: “You speak of emptiness, emptiness—then why are there still mountains and rivers, the earth, men and women, young and old?” He understood “emptiness” to mean “there is nothing at all,” which differs from our understanding of emptiness.

When we speak of emptiness, we mean emptying appearances: do not abide in appearances, but take them as unobtainable. “All appearances are illusory” means only that one should not cling to appearances; appearances still exist. Without appearances, how could wondrous functioning arise? If this house did not exist, how could we shelter from wind and rain? If this stool did not exist, how could we sit securely? “All dharmas arising from causes and conditions, I say, are emptiness.” To lack an inherent entity and self-nature is what is meant by emptiness; it does not mean that appearances do not exist.

Conceptualizing “emptiness” is of no use; when circumstances arise, one can no longer empty them. Our self-nature is neither empty nor existent; it is emptiness and existence at once. Existence is emptiness, and emptiness is existence. The very substance of “existence” is unobtainable: this alone is true emptiness. If one clings to one-sided emptiness and does not recognize the self-nature, one has no strength and cannot penetrate circumstances.

If one recognizes the self-nature, all kinds of circumstances are merely its wondrous functioning. They are like images in a mirror and waves upon water. Once one recognizes the mirror and knows the water, one will not be deluded by images and waves, and all circumstances will naturally be easy to empty. If one does not recognize the self-nature, one cannot empty them. First and foremost, we must recognize the Dharma body of suchness. This is of the utmost importance. Therefore, realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature is fundamental. Whatever school you practice, you must take realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature as the basis. Without realizing the mind and seeing one’s true nature, it will not do.

If one merely understands where deluded thoughts arise and abide, or inclines toward one-sided emptiness without recognizing the self-nature, then, when adverse conditions arise, the power of one’s practice cannot free one from the bondage of circumstances, “and one instead reveals one’s own faults.” Ordinary beings do not recognize true emptiness. When adverse circumstances appear and obstruct them, they are filled with doubts and therefore slander the Buddhadharma.

They say: “This should be empty—so why can it not be emptied? It still exists! Then the Buddhadharma must be wrong in speaking of emptiness.”

This is how celestial beings in the four formless heavens are. They cultivate emptiness absorption, but when the kalpas of that absorption come to an end, they

emerge from it. Seeing external circumstances, they give rise to doubt: “Eh? They are said to be empty, so why do they still exist? The Buddha’s teaching deceives people—the Buddha is a fraud, a fraud.” They still cling to appearances. Clinging to appearances creates karma; creating karma brings retribution.

When they in turn slander the Buddhadharma, they fall into hell. This is what is meant by “one instead reveals one’s own faults.” Therefore, we must recognize the true meaning of the Buddhadharma and understand what Buddha-nature is. This is most important. Buddha-nature is neither empty nor existent; it is emptiness and existence at once, both empty and existent. If you cling to emptiness and fall into emptiness, practicing without recognizing your original nature, you cannot succeed in practice. The result is that you create unwholesome karma and bring forth faults in yourself instead.

V. Originally Pure Amid Delusion

“Arising-and-ceasing extinction, spontaneous extinction, and extinction through concentration are all the spontaneous extinction of deluded thoughts; amid delusion, the original nature is pure.”

Since deluded thoughts can arise, they can also cease. There are three forms of cessation: arising-and-ceasing extinction, spontaneous extinction, and extinction through concentration. In arising-and-ceasing extinction, a later deluded thought arises and extinguishes the preceding one. In spontaneous extinction, a deluded thought extinguishes itself. In extinction through concentration, one applies oneself and enters samādhi, thereby eliminating deluded thoughts.

These ways in which deluded thoughts are eliminated differ in speed and in the strength involved. Whatever method is used to eliminate them, deluded thoughts eliminate themselves; therefore, “all are the spontaneous extinction of deluded thoughts.” In truth, deluded thoughts themselves are illusory and unobtainable; there is not really anything that is extinguished or not extinguished. When one does not abide in them, they are regarded as extinguished.

Once deluded thoughts have ceased, “amid delusion, the original nature is pure”: with the cessation of deluded thoughts, there is the originally pure Dharma body of suchness. A sūtra says: “Cease the mad mind, and that itself is bodhi.” How does the deluded mind arise? “The mind is originally unborn; it exists because of circumstances”—as Vipaśyin Buddha clearly stated. The deluded mind exists because of circumstances; without external circumstances, there is no deluded mind.

Yet circumstances, like the mind, are illusory and unobtainable. “The mind is not mind by itself; because of circumstances, it is mind. Circumstances are not

circumstances by themselves; because of mind, they are circumstances." Mind and circumstances arise in mutual opposition; apart from either one, the other does not exist. Therefore, our late teacher, Mr. Xianglu, said: "Circumstances too do not truly exist; they likewise are illusory shadows."

So long as you understand that all external objects are like dreams, illusions, and flowers in empty space, without any substantial reality; do not cling to conditions or give rise to deluded thoughts; then the spirit is tranquil and wisdom clear, intrinsic luminosity shines alone, and the true mind is bright and pure. Like a mirror reflecting objects, it neither grasps nor rejects, neither loves nor hates. It is distinctly clear, yet not a single thought arises; not a single thought arises, yet it is distinctly clear. At that very moment, you directly realize the suchness dharmakāya, without needing to undertake any further clumsy practice beyond quieting the mind.

If you truly recognize the suchness dharmakāya, then deluded thoughts are the wondrous functioning of the suchness dharmakāya, and delusion itself becomes purity. It is like recognizing that waves are water itself: if you do not cling to the appearance of waves, there is no need to wait for them to subside, for the waves themselves are water. This is the profound meaning of "intrinsically pure amid delusion."

The central point being taught here is to recognize deluded thoughts and not fear them. Deluded thoughts are the wondrous functioning of the true mind. So long as you do not follow them, you can cut them off; they are intrinsically pure amid delusion. As deluded thoughts arise and cease, there is the fundamentally pure suchness dharmakāya. The suchness dharmakāya is originally pure; it does not become impure because deluded thoughts arise. So long as you do not follow deluded thoughts or allow them to sway you, and constantly attend to the suchness dharmakāya, protecting it continuously and seamlessly, you will inevitably realize the great Way and attain Buddhahood in time.

"This dissolution of mistaken understanding is the sole essential point of the direct realization of self-liberation."

Earlier, we spoke of being intrinsically pure amid delusion. From where does delusion arise? Delusion arises in dependence on objects. If there were no objects, there would be no deluded thoughts. Although deluded thoughts arise in response to deluded objects, our true mind is not defiled by them; it remains pure.

We have used a pearl as an analogy. For example, though a pearl is wrapped in mud, the pearl itself remains pure and luminous; it does not become dirty and black merely because it is wrapped in mud. Once the mud is removed, the pearl remains as luminous as ever. Therefore, one need only recognize the true mind and need not fear deluded thoughts.

To extinguish an incorrect understanding of deluded thoughts, untie the inner knot of fearing them, and thereby recognize the true mind is called “dissolving mistaken understanding.” “This dissolution of mistaken understanding is the sole essential point of the direct realization of self-liberation.” Direct realization means being wholly revealed, without discrimination, like a mirror reflecting objects.

When it reflects a round object, a round image appears; when it reflects a square object, a square image appears. When it reflects ten thousand taels of gold, the mirror does not rejoice; when it reflects a heap of excrement, the mirror does not grow angry. This is direct realization. Direct realization manifests in accordance with the forms of objective things, without adding the least deluded discrimination. If one discriminates, “This is good and that is bad; this is long and that is short; this is beautiful and that is ugly,” that is inferential cognition.

In cultivating the path of liberation, we transform the eighth consciousness into great perfect mirror wisdom, illuminating the ten directions in radiant clarity. The myriad forms and appearances all manifest within our true mind, without the slightest love, hatred, grasping, or rejection. This is the “direct realization of liberation.” Although a mirror is used as an analogy, it is not entirely like a mirror. Manifesting forms according to objective circumstances is like a mirror.

Yet a mirror has no discriminating capacity and no awareness. We have awareness: we know right and wrong, long and short, gain and loss, but have no love, hatred, grasping, or rejection. Just as the sūtra says: “Skillfully distinguish the characteristics of all dharmas, yet remain unmoved in the ultimate truth.” Though one discriminates, it does not enter the mind. This is direct realization together with inferential cognition.

If there were only direct realization, we would become fools and dullards, unable even to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad, or long from short. How could that do? Practice must be lively and vital: we constantly employ the true mind of direct realization for the function of inferential cognition.

Inferential cognition is what is called deluded thought. Therefore, we must understand the principle stated by the Buddha in the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: “yet, with regard to deluded mind, do not seek to extinguish it.” Use it when it is needed; being able to use it is wondrous functioning. This is the profound meaning of “dissolving mistaken understanding.” This dissolution of mistaken understanding is the direct realization of liberation; it is the “sole essential point,” the one thing of supreme importance.

Recognizing the true mind is of the utmost importance. Where is the true mind? The true mind shines before every person.

Where is this luminosity? I see things, hear sounds, smell fragrances and odors, and know all kinds of circumstances—this is luminosity! Some people single-mindedly try to eliminate deluded thoughts. But after their deluded thoughts have ceased and the true mind appears before them in radiant clarity, they fail to recognize it and instead continue practicing the cessation of thought.

If they practice in this way for a long time, they become deadened and cannot attain lively, vital wondrous functioning, because they do not recognize the true mind. As we said earlier, merely quieting deluded thoughts without knowing the fundamental essence is useless. One must recognize the fundamental essence at the point where deluded thoughts cease. This alone is of supreme importance.

“It is also the distinctive essential marvel of the unsurpassed Dharma gate of Great Perfection of intrinsic nature.”

Great Perfection has specific practices that can be cultivated, but what is discussed here is the “Great Perfection of intrinsic nature.” Intrinsic nature is originally complete and without lack. It originally fills empty space and pervades the dharma realm: however vast empty space is, so vast it is; the worlds of the ten directions and all sentient beings are complete within intrinsic nature.

Whether it is the Pure Land school, Esoteric Buddhism, the Chan school, the Dharma Characteristics School, the Tiantai school, the Huayan school, or any other, none can be apart from this wondrously luminous true mind. “Nothing does not flow forth from this dharma realm, and nothing does not return to this dharma realm.” This dharma realm is the One True Dharma Realm, the wondrously luminous true mind.

The Great Mahāmudrā of the Ganges is a “supreme Dharma gate” that directly enters the “Great Perfection of intrinsic nature.” Supreme means exceptional, and victorious means excellent: this is an exceptionally excellent teaching, incomparable with other teachings and “distinctive” from them. Common means shared; not shared means different. This is the highest vehicle of Esoteric Buddhism; the other vehicles within Esoteric Buddhism do not teach in this way.

The highest Esoteric Dharma and the Chan school speak with one voice. The Pure Land school does not teach in this way; it emphasizes one-pointed Buddha-recitation and rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss.

After reaching the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one continues to cultivate beside the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, attaining the stage of non-retrogression—avaivartika. There are subtleties within this, but ultimately one still returns to the One True Dharma Realm, so we will not elaborate here. Every dharma gate has its own wonders and its own capacities to which it responds; ultimately, all return to the One True Dharma Realm.

The Great Mahāmudrā of the Ganges enters directly, without detours, and differs from all other practices. This is precisely "the distinctive essential marvel of the unsurpassed Dharma gate of Great Perfection of intrinsic nature." Essential means the key point, and marvel means subtle wonder. Its distinctive essential marvel is its unique key point and unique wonder, unlike those of other dharma gates.

"Possessing this essential marvel, whatever afflictions or deluded thoughts arise all manifest as the dharmakāya."

To possess this essential marvel is to recognize the wondrous functioning of the true mind. After possessing it, "whatever afflictions or deluded thoughts arise all manifest as the dharmakāya." Whatever afflictions may arise—illness, the loss of a romantic relationship, career failure, and so forth—when afflictions proliferate and deluded thoughts swirl, they all manifest as the dharmakāya.

For "deluded thoughts and afflictions are all aspects of the dharmakāya's innate awakened wisdom." Just as there can be no waves without water, how could there be afflictions and deluded thoughts without the true mind? When afflictions and deluded thoughts arise, that itself is the manifestation of the dharmakāya. Everyone should understand that this statement is extremely important.

When afflictions proliferate and deluded thoughts swirl, immediately recognize that this is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, and the afflictions and deluded thoughts will at once disintegrate and melt away. Once you recognize the dharmakāya, you no longer follow deluded thoughts. If you do not recognize the dharmakāya, you follow deluded thoughts, and your afflictions become endless, even to the point of wanting to commit suicide. Nowadays, some people whose love affairs have failed are so afflicted and miserable that they want to kill themselves and cannot go on living. They do not recognize the dharmakāya; they do not know that afflictions and deluded thoughts are all the wondrous functioning of the true mind!

The Universal Gateway Chapter of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva says: "If there are those who uphold the name of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, even should they enter a great fire, the fire cannot burn them, through the majestic spiritual power of this bodhisattva. If they are carried away by great waters and invoke his name, they will immediately find shallow ground."

No matter how great the fire of your afflictions or how high the waves of your deluded thoughts, so long as you turn the light inward and recite, "Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva," then—ah!—you recognize that this is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Those afflictions and deluded thoughts immediately subside. This is the key, the most important key.

Many people study Buddhism for years without knowing this key. They do not recognize the true mind and do not know where it is. Unable to find it, what do they do? They go looking for it in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss—what an immense distance that is! In fact, the true mind shines right before you. The Great Mahāmudrā is excellent because it tells us directly and plainly what the true mind is.

You are blessed and have mature conditions, and therefore can hear this great Dharma. Having heard this great Dharma, do not fail yourselves. Constantly protect the true mind, knowing that wherever deluded thoughts arise is the wondrous functioning of the true mind, and recognize the true mind through deluded thoughts. If you practice in this way for one year, two years, or three to five years, how could you fail to realize the Way? You will certainly succeed.

Last time I mentioned that my teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, said: “Practice need not take two or three years. You will succeed in a year and a half; if you do not succeed, come and ask me.” Yet we are always unwilling to practice, constantly following our habitual tendencies. How can we succeed that way?

“Deluded thoughts all become wisdom; adverse conditions become aids; afflictions become the path of practice.”

If one possesses this “distinctive essential marvel of the unsurpassed Dharma gate of Great Perfection of intrinsic nature,” then “deluded thoughts all become wisdom.” At the very time when deluded thoughts fly about and afflictions proliferate, make a resolute turn: “Ah! This is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya!” Being able to turn in this way is great wisdom.

To encounter circumstances with direct realization and employ inferential cognition, without clinging to, adhering to, or abiding in circumstances, does not mean being unable to distinguish beauty from ugliness or right from wrong. This is wisdom. If, after making distinctions, you grasp or reject, abide in circumstances and let them cling to your mind, and follow circumstances until you are miserable beyond endurance and trapped, that is deluded thought. In truth, deluded thought is wisdom; the key is whether you know this.

Thus, “with regard to all deluded thoughts, do not seek to extinguish them.” If the dharmakāya of suchness is the master, deluded thoughts become servants or attendants. When the master directs the servants to do things, this is the wisdom of accomplishing what needs to be done. When the true mind is the master, the first five consciousnesses—eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body—are transformed into the wisdom of accomplishing what needs to be done. The true mind directs them: “Look and see what this is for me; listen and hear what sound this is for me; smell and tell me whether it is fragrant or foul; taste and tell me whether it is sour or sweet. . . .”

Seeing, hearing, awareness, and knowing are all transformed into the wondrous functioning of the true mind—deluded thoughts are wholly turned into wisdom.

“Adverse conditions become supportive companions.” Everyone likes the Western Pure Land. Everywhere in the Western Pure Land, conditions are favorable; nothing is unsatisfactory. The ground is gold; there are pools of the seven treasures, water of the eight virtues, water birds and groves of trees, and the sounds of wind and birds—all proclaim the Dharma. Everything is good, and there are no enemies or adversaries.

It is unlike this Sahā world of the five turbidities, where afflictions and adversaries are innumerable.

For example, there are many unsatisfactory things at work: one person steps on your foot, another kicks your leg. Family life may also be far from agreeable: you think one way, while she insists on another; you do something one way, while she does it another. The home is likewise full of quarrels and disputes. But you should understand that these adverse conditions are companions that help you realize the Way. They keep you alert and prevent you from abiding in circumstances.

When you know that these adverse conditions are suffering, the wish for liberation arises: “Oh, this world is so painful! Quickly, I must escape suffering!” How does one escape suffering? By recognizing the true mind and not running after circumstances. Otherwise, you become attached to this world and are reluctant to leave it. Thinking it truly pleasant and comfortable, you will neither study Buddhism nor practice the Dharma, and then you cannot realize the Way.

I once met an overseas Chinese Frenchman who had a great deal of money. His warehouse was connected to the railway, so trains could enter it. He also believed in the Buddhadharma and did many good deeds. Whenever he returned to China to visit relatives, he would make offerings at temples. I said to him, “You believe in the Buddhadharma and are willing to give. It would be even better if you yourself cultivated and practiced the Buddhadharma.”

“Simply doing good deeds and giving is the cultivation of goodness and blessings; it cannot enable you to realize the Way. You must also cultivate wisdom. Only by cultivating both blessings and wisdom can you realize the Way. Therefore, you still need to study and practice the Buddhadharma.” He said, “No, no. I am too comfortable and happy. I do not need to undergo hardship in practice.” He was immersed in his blessings, content with his present circumstances, and no longer wished to practice. If people are like this, how much more so are devas?

If one encounters all kinds of adverse conditions, suffers every hardship, and feels great pain, then one should arouse a great resolve to escape suffering. How does

one escape suffering? Quickly study and practice the Buddhadharma. Thus it is said, “Adverse conditions become supportive companions.”

Adverse conditions help you temper yourself amid circumstances, testing whether your mind still abides in them. If your mind is truly empty, there is no such thing as favorable or adverse, nor any question of following along or not following along. Among Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s Ten Great Vows is the vow to “constantly accord with sentient beings.” To constantly accord with sentient beings is to go along with them at all times.

You like spicy food? Fine—I will eat spicy food with you. You like sweets? Fine—I will eat sweets with you. You want to play ball? Fine—I will play ball with you. You want to dance? Fine—I will dance with you. You want to believe in Christianity? Fine—I will believe in Christianity with you. Nothing matters in itself.

Why? It tempers the true mind. I am empty and obtain nothing; everything is the wondrous functioning of the true mind. Going along with you is also wondrous functioning, so that I may embrace and guide you. This is called embracing others by sharing their activities. Among the bodhisattva’s four means of embracing others is embracing others by sharing their activities.

Many practitioners do not wish to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Why? Because the Western Pure Land offers favorable conditions, and it takes too long to realize the Way there. One day in the Western Pure Land is equivalent to one great kalpa here. How many days are there in a great kalpa? Too many to calculate.

One great kalpa comprises four medium kalpas, and one medium kalpa comprises twenty small kalpas. How long is each small kalpa? Suppose that human life spans are eighty-four thousand years. Every hundred years, the life span decreases by one year, until it reaches ten years. Then, every hundred years, it increases by one year, until it again reaches eighty-four thousand years. This increase and decrease constitutes the duration of one small kalpa.

Eighty such small kalpas make one great kalpa. How many days is that? One day in the Western Pure Land is equivalent to such an immense span of time here.

Moreover, conditions there are favorable, and everything accords with your mind. Whatever you want is what you get: whatever kind of house you wish to live in, such a house is available; whatever clothes or things you wish to use, they are all available. Therefore, habitual tendencies are not easily eliminated, and realizing the Way takes a long time.

Therefore, many bodhisattvas of great resolve say, “You go to the Western Pure Land; I will temper the true mind in the Sahā world, amid adverse conditions.” This is

the spirit of a bodhisattva of great resolve—rare indeed and worthy of esteem! “A true hero has aspirations that soar to heaven; he does not proceed to Brahmā Heaven or a pure land.” Not going to Mahābrahmā Heaven or the Pure Land—this is the bearing of a true hero.

If you truly possess the bearing of a great hero, you must be able to withstand tempering. If you cannot withstand it and are drawn in by Māra, becoming one of Māra’s offspring, then all is lost. If you cannot endure such tempering, it is better to go to the Western Pure Land, where conditions are far more secure than here. Therefore, there is no fixed Dharma; it depends on each person’s courage and capacity, and nothing is immutable. As we now practice the Dharma and cultivate, when we encounter adverse circumstances, do not lose heart. They are supportive companions that help you realize the Way.

I have a Dharma brother whose wife believed in Christianity and took him to a church. He said, “Fine, fine, I will go with you.” After hearing the pastor’s sermon, he said to her, “I accompanied you to hear the pastor preach. You should also accompany me to a temple to hear a great Buddhist teacher expound the Buddhadharma.” She said, “No, no. That is the demon king.”

“You must not go either. Let us go home.” So he went home with her. It may seem that this was an adverse condition, but he was not afraid. “You cannot wear me down. I accord with you; my mind is empty, and I am thoroughly carefree and at ease.” Thus, their marital relationship was very good.

She asked, “Are you saying that I am the demon king?” He replied, “No, I say that you are very good; you are a great bodhisattva.” She said, “I am not a great bodhisattva. I am the Lord God.” He immediately replied, “Fine, fine! You are the Lord God.”

These are all supportive companions, tempering your empty mind. A poem puts it well: “Empty, empty, empty—success is attained within emptiness. When the roots are firmly cultivated, why fear snow and wind?” When the roots are firm, one need not fear heavy snow or violent winds. When all adverse circumstances arise, do not fear them; know that they are companions assisting us on the Way. Adverse conditions are also good things, so do not fear them.

“Afflictions become progress on the Way.” Speaking of progress on the Way, some people say that Lady White has only five hundred years of attainment, whereas Fahai has one thousand years of attainment. In fact, that is all mythology; there was no Lady White at all.

If we know how to make use of afflictions and awaken amid them—“This is the wondrous functioning of my true mind!”—then afflictions help us realize the Way, and afflictions become progress on the Way. The greater the afflictions, the higher

one's attainment on the Way. If you can withstand the tempering of afflictions, your mind becomes empty and your strength grows great. You can then be tempered and grow amid the blazing fire of afflictions. This is what is meant by "A lotus born in fire is never destroyed"; it is an extraordinary accomplishment. A lotus growing in water cannot withstand fire; once scorched, it is finished. A lotus growing in fire alone has powerful vitality.

"Without abandoning saṃsāra, abide in purity."

Saṃsāra is the cycle of rebirth in the six realms: devas, humans, asuras, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. To truly transcend birth and death does not necessarily mean leaving the cycle of rebirth in the six realms. Why? If you merely abide in a pure land beyond the realms—the pure lands beyond the desire, form, and formless realms—then you are only an arhat of the Lesser Vehicle.

If one is to become a Buddha, one must have the conduct of a bodhisattva of great resolve: liberating sentient beings within the six realms and not abandoning saṃsāra.

Let me now relate a koan. After a Chan master passed away, someone asked his disciple, "In what pure land was your master reborn? Was it the Western Pure Land, the Eastern Pure Lapis Lazuli World, or the Inner Court of Tuṣita?" He replied, "My master went neither east nor west."

The questioner asked, "If he went neither east nor west, where did he go?" The disciple replied, "At an eastern household he became an ox; at a western household he became a horse."

The questioner said, "You are insulting your master!" The disciple laughed and said, "Ha ha! Heaven, Heaven! What an injustice, what an injustice!" What he meant was: "I am praising my master, yet you say that I am insulting him. What an injustice! My master's attainment was profound, and he had such assurance that he dared to 'become an ox at an eastern household and a horse at a western household,' entering even among other kinds of beings, 'without abandoning saṃsāra, abiding in purity.' Do you have such assurance? I am praising him, but you do not understand." Thus, this cry, "Heaven, Heaven!" contains great subtlety.

Chan Master Zhaozhou, known as the "Ancient Buddha of Zhaozhou," spoke with great subtlety. His words were soft and yielding like a ball of cotton, yet you could not squeeze them. Why? Needles were hidden in the cotton: squeeze it, and it pricks your hand. Once, he wished to go to Mount Tiantai to see Amitābha Buddha. Who was Amitābha Buddha? Chan Master Fenggan was an emanation of Amitābha Buddha.

Under Chan Master Fenggan were Hanshan and Shide, emanations of Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva and Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. When Chan Master Zhaozhou arrived at Mount Tiantai, it had just rained, and many ox hoofprints were clearly imprinted on the ground. He saw a boy riding on an ox's back and playing a flute. This boy was Hanshan.

The boy asked Zhaozhou, "Venerable, do you still recognize an ox?" Venerable is an honorific for a monastic. He was asking Chan Master Zhaozhou, "Do you still recognize an ox?" If he had answered, "I recognize it," he would have fallen into the trap, proving that he had not yet transcended the ordinary state of clinging to circumstances and attaching to mind. Another Chan master, Danxia Tianran, once asked a visiting monastic, "Where have you come from?" The monastic replied, "From below the mountain."

Xia said, "Have you eaten?" The monk replied, "I have eaten." Xia said, "Does the person who brought you food to eat have eyes?" The person who gave you food—did he have eyes? That is, he mistook you for someone worthy and made offerings to you, a worldly fellow clinging to objects and attaching to mind. Chan Master Zhaozhou was a great master; he would not fall for this.

Hanshan asked, "Senior monk, do you recognize the ox?" Zhaozhou replied, "I do not recognize it." This is like Patriarch Bodhidharma's reply to Emperor Wu of Liang. Emperor Wu asked, "Who is this standing before me?" Bodhidharma replied, "I do not know."

Did Patriarch Bodhidharma not even recognize himself? Did Chan Master Zhaozhou not even recognize an ox? That is not the meaning. To fix one's attention on knowing or not knowing is already mistaken.

Patriarch Bodhidharma's reply, "I do not know," addressed the "who" in the question; Chan Master Zhaozhou's reply, "I do not know," addressed the "ox" in the question. The two replies came from the same mold: both sweep away all attachments, transcend every opposition of subject and object, do not cling to "who" or to "ox," and lay bare the pristine, radiant, spiritually aware true mind in its entirety.

When Hanshan heard Chan Master Zhaozhou answer, "I do not know," he pointed at the ox's hoofprints and said, "These are the five hundred arhats touring the mountains." Zhaozhou asked, "If they are arhats, why have they become oxen?" Hanshan said, "Heavens! Heavens!" What does this mean? It means: your discriminating mind is blazing fiercely.

All sentient beings are Buddhas and possess the Tathāgata's wisdom and virtuous characteristics, yet you still distinguish arhats from oxen by their footprints! With "Heavens! Heavens!" Hanshan had Zhaozhou cornered. But Zhaozhou was, after all,

a great master, skilled at turning around where there seems to be no room to turn. Like taiji push-hands, he deflected a thousand pounds with four ounces; thus he burst into laughter.

Hanshan asked, “What are you doing?” Why are you laughing? Zhaozhou said, “Heavens! Heavens!” This means: when you ask, “What are you doing?” there is still some thing to which you cling. Hanshan praised him: “This fellow truly acts like a great person!” You possess the bearing of a great person and the manner of one who is liberated.

The Chan school teaches us to see our true nature at all times, to see it in every activity, and not to run after circumstances. Chan Master Yongjia said: “Walking is Chan, sitting is Chan; whether speaking or silent, moving or still, the essence remains at peace.” Chan, Chan: everywhere is Chan, and at every moment there is the essential principle. Thus it is said, “Every day is a good day.” Therefore, one does not abandon saṃsāra in order to abide in purity. The fundamental essence is pure; everywhere is a bodhimaṇḍa. Where, then, is there any appearance of saṃsāra to be obtained?

VI. Effortless Practice

“Free oneself from the fetters of defilement and purity; cultivate and correct oneself without effort, allowing things to function spontaneously.”

When one endlessly discriminates between defilement and purity, one becomes entangled and bound by the concepts of defilement and purity. To be liberated from such bondage is what is meant by “free oneself from the fetters of defilement and purity.”

The Diamond Sūtra says, “Give rise to that mind without abiding anywhere.” “Should” means to accord with; “without abiding” means not clinging. To accord with all conditions without clinging, and to give rise to the spiritually wondrous mind that abides nowhere—this is “cultivating and correcting oneself without effort.”

Bodhisattvas below the eighth bhūmi all cultivate and correct themselves with effort. For example, we teach everyone to attend to their original nature at every moment; such attending is cultivation and correction with effort. Yet you cannot do without it, for habitual tendencies are strong. Once you forget, you again abide in appearances and circumstances, and again follow deluded thoughts.

Therefore, one must constantly attend to contemplation and awareness. This is the method for transforming effortful practice into effortless practice. Only bodhisattvas above the eighth bhūmi can “cultivate and correct themselves without effort, allowing things to function spontaneously.” To cultivate and correct oneself means

not to be scattered, but to keep right mindfulness bright and clear at every moment —alert yet still, still yet alert.

In effortless practice, even the mind that contemplates and observes is absent. Only this is "cultivating and correcting oneself without effort." Please note: this does not mean that you are now expected to accomplish it immediately; rather, you must proceed from effortful practice to effortless practice. While cultivating and correcting yourself with effort, do not suppose that this practice is enough, or imagine that you have already completed your cultivation.

We must advance, advance, and advance still further. The eighth, ninth, and tenth bhūmis do not count as the end; even equal enlightenment and wondrous enlightenment do not count as the end. Only ultimate enlightenment—the perfect accomplishment of Buddhahood—brings the work to completion. Therefore, strive diligently in practice; only when the work has reached its ultimate point can one function spontaneously. Begin with "cultivating and correcting oneself with effort." Without this, how can one reach the level of "cultivating and correcting oneself without effort"? At the point where deluded thoughts cease, recognize the true mind and protect it at all times. This is most important.

"If one lacks the power of the path of understanding the Dharma, then even the loftiest view and the most profound cultivation bring no benefit to the mind."

"Understanding the Dharma" means recognizing the dharmakāya. If one merely practices rigidly, or expounds principles very well, yet does not recognize the dharmakāya, one lacks "the power of the path of understanding the Dharma." Without this power, "even the loftiest view and the most profound cultivation bring no benefit to the mind." The loftiest view means understanding many principles and explaining them well.

Profound cultivation means being very skilled in seated meditation and entering samādhi deeply. Without recognizing the dharmakāya, these alone will not do. Chan Master Xiangyan was originally a disciple of Chan Master Baizhang. He was very intelligent and thoroughly versed in sūtras, treatises, and Chan sayings: ask him one question and he could answer ten. Yet he lacked the power of the path of understanding the Dharma; he had not recognized the dharmakāya.

After Chan Master Baizhang entered parinirvāṇa, Xiangyan went to consult his senior fellow disciple, Chan Master Weishan. When Weishan saw Xiangyan arrive, he said to him: "I have heard that under our late teacher Baizhang, when asked one question you could answer ten, and when asked ten you could answer a hundred. This is your intelligence and quickness, your conceptual understanding and discriminating thought—the root of birth and death."

“Before your parents were born, try saying one phrase.” Xiangyan was stumped and could give no answer. He searched the scriptures and the writings he had read, yet could not find a single answer. He sighed to himself: “A painted cake cannot satisfy hunger.” Repeatedly, he begged Chan Master Weishan to explain it to him. Weishan said, “If I explained it to you, you would later revile me. What I say is mine; it would ultimately have nothing to do with you.”

Therefore, if one does not possess the power of the path of understanding the Dharma, cultivating the mind brings no real benefit. Xiangyan then burned the writings he had ordinarily read and said indignantly: “For the rest of this life I will not study the Buddhadharma. I will simply be an itinerant monk living on gruel and rice, sparing my mind and spirit from toil.”

He then wept as he bade farewell to Chan Master Weishan and went to live in an abandoned ancient temple, a site associated with National Teacher Nanyang Zhong. There he farmed and fed himself. By burning his writings and no longer studying the Buddhadharma, he swept away the “loftiest view”; by living as an itinerant monk on gruel and rice, sparing his mind and spirit from toil, he set aside the “most profound cultivation.”

Yet he never forgot the huatou, “Before your parents were born.” The Chan method of investigating a huatou was vigorously promoted by Chan Master Dahui Zonggao in the Song dynasty and became widespread in Chan circles. Chan Master Xiangyan lived in the Tang dynasty, when direct pointing was more commonly used in the Chan school and huatou investigation had not yet become prevalent. Xiangyan may be said to have opened the way for the practice of investigating a huatou.

Whether walking, sitting, or working in the fields, he investigated it, just as the saying goes: “Walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, never depart from this.” He not only cast aside worldly fame and profit to leave home and study the Way, but also swept away all concepts such as “awakening” and “realizing the Way,” concentrating his mind on one point. As he continued in this way for a long time, good news was about to come.

One day, while clearing land to plant crops, he struck a tile shard with his hoe. He picked it up and threw it; it happened to strike bamboo by the edge of the field with a crack. The great dream of birth and death was shaken awake, and in that instant his original nature opened before him. Ah! So that is how it is. In the Chan school this is called “breaking through the investigation”—breaking through the huatou one has been investigating.

Then what is one’s face before one’s parents were born? Chan Master Xiangyan did not explain it. Fortunately, he did not; otherwise, “before your parents were born”

could no longer serve as a huatou for investigation. Once there is a ready-made answer, the sense of doubt cannot be aroused.

By the Song dynasty, huatou investigation had become widespread through Chan Master Dahui's advocacy. There was a monk who likewise investigated the huatou, "Before your parents were born."

Unlike Chan Master Xiangyan, he did not burn his writings, cease studying the Buddhadharma, live as an itinerant monk on gruel and rice, and spare his mind and spirit from toil. He had not thoroughly swept away the loftiest view and the most profound cultivation; thus he could not spare his mind and spirit from exertion, and he investigated the huatou too urgently.

After a long time, he became deranged. Muttering constantly to himself, he slept in the streets and alleyways. Yet he never forgot, at any time or place, "the original face before one's parents were born." One day, he encountered two brothers fighting, and their uncle stepped in to stop them.

The uncle said: "When your father was alive, he was a man of standing…" Here, "having a face" means having dignity and prestige. When the monk heard the words "having a face," he foolishly squeezed into the crowd of onlookers, trying to find this face.

The uncle reproached his two nephews: "You are fighting—what sort of behavior is that? You have no face at all!" When the monk heard "no face," empty space suddenly shattered and the great earth sank into stillness; the true suchness of reality appeared brightly before him. He broke through the investigation and awakened. From then on, he was no longer mad or deranged, but went about freely and at ease.

"No face" is the reality of signlessness; it is one's own nature. Merely knowing the theory of signlessness, without seeing one's own nature, does not reach the actual ground. No matter how brilliantly one speaks, it is of no use. It must be realized deep within the mind-ground: only by clearly seeing one's own nature can one pass through all kinds of circumstances.

After Chan Master Xiangyan broke through the investigation and realized the Way, he bathed, burned incense, and bowed from afar in the direction of Weishan, saying: "Venerable Master, your great compassion surpasses that of my parents. Had you explained it to me then, how could there have been this day?" He then composed this verse: "One strike and all that I knew was forgotten; no further cultivation is required. In every movement, I carry forth the ancient path, without falling into the mechanism of silent stillness. Everywhere there are no traces; beyond sound and form is majestic deportment."

“Those who have realized the Way everywhere all speak of the highest capacity.” This verse reached Guishan. Chan Master Guishan said to his foremost disciple, Chan Master Yangshan, “This fellow has penetrated it.” But Yangshan said, “This has been composed through the workings of discriminating consciousness. Let me examine him myself.” He wanted to test Xiangyan personally.

When Yangshan met Xiangyan, he said, “The Master praises you, junior brother, for having awakened to the great matter. Try speaking of it.” Xiangyan cited the preceding verse. Yangshan said, “This was achieved through retained learning from former habits. If you have genuine awakening, say something else.” Xiangyan then composed another verse: “Last year I was poor, yet not truly poor; this year I am poor, and only now am I truly poor.”

“Last year, though poor, I still had enough ground to stand an awl upon; this year, even an awl has nowhere to stand.” Yangshan said, “I acknowledge, junior brother, that you understand the Tathāgata Chan, but you have not even dreamed of Patriarchal Chan.” Chan Master Xiangyan then composed another verse: “I have a device: I blink my eyes and look at him. If someone does not understand, I call for a novice monk.” Yangshan was overjoyed on hearing this and reported to Guishan, “Fortunately, Junior Brother Xian understands Patriarchal Chan.”

Chan Master Xiangyan’s Dharma name was Zhixian, so Yangshan called him “Junior Brother Xian.” He originally studied Chan under Chan Master Baizhang, but later awakened under the encouragement of Chan Master Guishan and became Guishan’s disciple. We should not stray too far afield here, so we will not explain this koan further; leave it for you to penetrate for yourselves.

Do not be misled by the number of people listening here now. Without “the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma,” one may not be able to stand firm. The moment they hear someone say, “My Dharma is so good, so wondrous, so advanced,” they immediately slip over to it, wanting to learn its “supreme view.”

The moment they hear someone say, “My Dharma has such tremendous power and can produce such great spiritual powers,” they immediately follow along, wanting to learn its “profound cultivation.” They do not know that the true mind is fundamental. “Without the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma, even with the support of a supreme view and profound cultivation, it brings no benefit to the mind.”

Your theories cannot withstand birth and death, and your spiritual powers do not amount to liberation. Without recognizing the root, they are of no use. If one has not attained the supernormal power of the exhaustion of outflows, then even if one has developed the five spiritual powers, they are demonic powers. Not only do they fail to bring liberation; they also entail the danger of entering a demonic path. This is

because, “Without the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma . . . it brings no benefit to the mind.”

“If the force of afflictions has not subsided, this is not the true Way.”

Why is “the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma” so important? Because without this power of the Way, one does not recognize the true mind that is without characteristics. That is what is meant by, “If the force of afflictions has not subsided, this is not the true Way.” If the force of afflictions in your mind has not receded and you remain constantly amid afflictions, then this is not the great Way of true liberation. In studying Buddhism, we must recognize the root and thereby gain this “power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma.” Only this is “the true Way”; we must not follow heterodox and demonic paths. If one follows heterodox and demonic paths, one will eventually become a child or descendant of demons, not a Buddha.

“If one obtains this wondrous essential principle of thoughts arising and ceasing of themselves, then, even without the support of practices based on a supreme view or the conditions for profound methods of cultivation, one’s intrinsic nature can certainly be liberated from the bondage of the two attachments.”

Once we recognize that deluded thoughts are fundamentally unobtainable, there is no need to attend to or suppress them; simply let them arise and cease on their own. At the point where arising and ceasing vanish as they occur, delusion itself is originally pure. Turning the light around for a single glance, seize it in one stroke and thereby recognize the true mind; then one obtains “this wondrous essential principle of arising and ceasing of themselves.”

When meditating, do not pay attention to thoughts as they arise. Simply continue holding the mantra and let the thoughts arise and cease on their own. If you try to suppress them, muttering inwardly, “Do not arise, do not arise,” your chest will feel oppressed, and you will become tense, miserable, and uncomfortable. This is why many people feel tightness in the chest: they are too tense.

As long as you do not follow thoughts and simply let them arise and cease on their own, you will feel relaxed and at ease. Over time, you will enter samādhi; as your mantra practice deepens, you will gradually enter samādhi and then develop wisdom from samādhi. This is so in meditation and in daily life as well. It is like standing at the intersection of Nanjing Road and Tibet Road, a bustling area of Shanghai, where people and vehicles come and go.

Their coming has nothing to do with you. If you do not pull at them, they pass on. When thoughts arise, just let them arise. They arise and cease on their own and do not last long; naturally, they disappear. But if thoughts arise and you do not know it, that is a problem.

You are plainly following deluded thoughts without knowing it; you are plainly grasping at conditions and abiding in them. How can that still be cultivation? Therefore, it is extremely important to see thoughts without following them, letting them arise and cease on their own. “If one obtains this wondrous essential principle of thoughts arising and ceasing of themselves, then, even without the support of practices based on a supreme view or the conditions for profound methods of cultivation, one’s intrinsic nature can certainly be liberated from the bondage of the two attachments.”

“Practices based on a supreme view” means the “supreme view” mentioned in the preceding sentence. “The conditions for profound methods of cultivation” means “profound cultivation.” Even if one has a “supreme view” to uphold and “profound cultivation” to rely upon, these are not dependable. “The power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma,” namely “the wondrous essential principle of arising and ceasing of themselves,” is what is most important.

The preceding sentence says that if one does not obtain this wondrous essential principle, then even with lofty views and deep cultivation one will not attain liberation. This sentence says that if one obtains this wondrous essential principle, then even without lofty views and deep cultivation one can attain liberation. From the negative and positive sides respectively, these two sentences emphasize the importance of “the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma.”

In fact, only obtaining this wondrous essential principle qualifies as the supreme view, and only possessing this power of the Way qualifies as profound cultivation. The loftiness and profundity of the view and cultivation mentioned earlier are characterized and relative loftiness and profundity. Obtaining this wondrous essential principle and possessing this power of the Way are transcendent, free of characteristics, and absolute loftiness and profundity.

“One’s intrinsic nature can certainly be liberated from the bondage of the two attachments.” The “two attachments” are attachments to the two sides, and they may be explained in many ways: attachment to good or bad, existence or nonexistence, right or wrong, emptiness or existence; and attachment to personal self and attachment to dharmas. There are many forms of the two attachments; all incline toward one side or the other. “Attachment to personal self” means taking this body or these thoughts to be oneself.

“This is me; I am primary. None of you may resist me; you must all comply with me, carry out my opinions, and obey my will.” Then arrogance and pride all arise. The two vehicles, namely arhats and pratyekabuddhas, have eliminated attachment to personal self, but they still have attachment to dharmas—the belief that there is a dharma to cultivate and a path to accomplish.

The Mahāyāna Emptiness school speaks of emptiness. Its view is lofty and its theory subtle and precise. Yet one must not become attached to it; attachment becomes "attachment to emptiness." The Mahāyāna Existence school, such as the Dharma Characteristics School, speaks of existence. Its view too is lofty and its theory subtle and precise. Yet one must not become attached to it; attachment becomes "attachment to existence."

Over many lives and kalpas, people have become accustomed to attachment and are deeply entangled and bound by the "two attachments"—this is "the bondage of the two attachments." They bind us, preventing us from attaining liberation. But if you obtain "the wondrous essential principle of arising and ceasing of themselves" and possess "the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma," they cannot bind you for long. You will certainly be able to free yourself from "the bondage of the two attachments."

"If one reaches the Isle of Gold, it is impossible to find any other stone."

The Isle of Gold is a place made entirely of gold. Does such a place exist? More than that—there are places even better. The Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss is better than the Isle of Gold. In the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, it is impossible to find a stone. Its towers, terraces, palaces, and pavilions are not made of stone or brick; they are formed from the seven treasures, exceptionally solid and filled with light.

If you arrive at the "Isle of Gold"—a place made entirely of gold, where you cannot find a single other stone that is not gold—then "it is impossible to find any other stone." This is a metaphor: if we obtain the wondrous essential principle of arising and ceasing and possess the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma, it is like arriving at the Isle of Gold, where there is nothing but gold. Likewise, there is nothing but liberation; one can attain only liberation and nothing else. One will certainly realize the Way.

"Whatever deluded thoughts of movement or stillness arise are all simply the already-present true state of samādhi."

This means that whatever deluded thoughts arise—whether thoughts of movement or thoughts of stillness—can only be the already-present true state of samādhi; they are no longer deluded thoughts. Just as with "reaching the Isle of Gold, where it is impossible to find any other stone," once one reaches this point, there is only the true state of samādhi, and no deluded thoughts can be found. Why can deluded thoughts be transformed into the true state of samādhi? Because one has obtained the wondrous essential principle of arising and ceasing and possesses the power of the Way that elucidates the Dharma.

You may ask: deluded thoughts are all active, so are there also deluded thoughts of stillness? Yes. Seeking stillness is also a deluded thought. Single-mindedly seeking to enter samādhi, insisting on remaining in samādhi for several kalpas, abiding in samādhi, and treating a state of samādhi as something to be attained—these are deluded thoughts of stillness. Therefore, we say that when meditating, one should not anticipate entering samādhi.

To seek samādhi the moment one sits down is precisely a "deluded thought of stillness." Once such a deluded thought arises, that meditation session will not go well. Enter naturally and in accordance with conditions; do not concern yourself with whether samādhi has been attained. Simply continue holding the mantra without interruption, reciting one phrase after another, and you will naturally enter samādhi. Again, when you clearly know that the environment does not permit it and the conditions are not present, yet insist on going to some secluded place to practice, this too is a "deluded thought of stillness." Deluded thoughts of movement are even more numerous: wanting this and wanting that are all deluded thoughts of movement.

Although there are many deluded thoughts of movement and stillness, all of them are already-present true states of samādhi. When thoughts arise and cease, do not attend to them. Constantly recognize the true mind, acknowledge the Original Face, and do not follow deluded thoughts. Then one naturally attains liberation, and this is naturally a state of samādhi.

As we have said, samādhi does not mean merely sitting motionless like a corpse. Rather, it means not being deluded by circumstances: whenever any state presents itself, my mind remains unmoved. This is the great samādhi that neither enters nor exits.

For example, a lovely maiden of sixteen—what is she? A skeleton of white bones, a foul shell of a body, reeking with stench. What is there to admire? Why does your heart stir when you see her? Why do you run after her? It is plainly the mind of sexual desire playing tricks. "A lovely maiden of sixteen, her body like soft butter; a sword at her waist cuts down ordinary men. Though no one sees heads fall, in secret it destroys them until their bones and marrow wither."

Sexual desire is the root of birth and death! Everyone, if sexual desire is not cut off, you cannot be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. Some say, "But sexual relations between husband and wife are proper." Ha! So-called proper sexual relations between husband and wife are merely a provisional way of speaking in accordance with your habitual tendencies. Knowing that you cannot immediately cut off sexual desire between husband and wife, it is said that such relations are proper, with the intention of forbidding sexual misconduct.

Speaking ultimately, even proper sexual relations must be cut off! Why? To be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must eliminate the mind of sexual desire. If sexual desire is not cut off, one cannot be pure and will not accord with the Pure Land. How, then, can one be reborn there? The mind of sexual desire is the worst. Even if you have developed spiritual powers, once sexual desire arises, those powers are gone.

After Chan Master Yunmen was a king for three lifetimes, his spiritual powers were completely gone. In a previous life, he had been a human king, with three palaces, six courts, and seventy-two consorts. There were too many women, and all his spiritual powers were lost. In India there was a great arhat whose physical body could fly. A king invited this arhat to the palace to receive an offering, and the arhat flew into the palace at once.

The king reverently received the great arhat and had the queen come out to offer him wine. The queen was exceedingly beautiful, and when the arhat saw her, his mind stirred for just a moment. In that very moment, his spiritual powers vanished, and he could not fly back. There are many more examples of this kind. Therefore, the mind of sexual desire must not stir!

“If one again seeks the self-nature obscured by delusion, it cannot be found at all.”

After recognizing one’s self-nature, one must safeguard and sustain it continuously and seamlessly at all times and in all places. In time, one will realize the Way. If one then turns back to seek the ignorant, deluded thoughts that obscure self-nature, they can no longer be found—“If one again seeks the self-nature obscured by delusion, it cannot be found at all.” Someone asks, “Having recognized Buddha-nature and no longer being deluded, will one become deluded again after attaining Buddhahood?” You need not worry.

The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment says: “It is like smelting gold ore: gold does not come into being because of smelting. Although it is originally gold, it is ultimately perfected through smelting. Once it becomes true gold, it never again becomes ore.” Here, “smelting” means what we now call refining. Gold ore inherently contains gold; gold is not produced by refining, for “gold does not come into being because of smelting.”

This illustrates that sentient beings inherently possess Buddha-nature; it is not that they originally lacked Buddha-nature and acquire it through practice. Yet although one recovers the gold originally present in the ore, it is ultimately brought to perfection through the means of smelting—“Although it is originally gold, it is ultimately perfected through smelting.”

This illustrates that although sentient beings possess the “wisdom of original enlightenment” and are fundamentally awakened, they also possess ignorance and afflictions because of deluded thoughts and attachments. Therefore, they must cultivate in order to attain the “wisdom of initial enlightenment.” When initial enlightenment accords with original enlightenment, ignorance is shattered and afflictions are cut off, and the inherently possessed Buddha-nature can be revealed. “Once it becomes true gold, it never again becomes ore.” This illustrates that once one realizes the Way, one will never again become deluded.

Lecture Five: Conclusion—Naturally Genuine Reality Is the True Mahāmudrā

I. The Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā Form a Unified Whole

“The three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct are the heart of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times, the summit of all vehicles; hence they are called the mother of all Buddhas.”

We have previously explained that “view” is to understand the One True Dharma Realm and the Tathāgata-garbha mind as it naturally is: the immeasurable manifestations of defiled and pure dharmas are inherently endowed with the meaning of equality. Only the “view as principle” is right view. “Meditation” is not dead absorption, but living absorption. Thus, only the integration of emptiness and compassion is right meditation.

“Conduct” means inwardly not being carried along by deluded thoughts and outwardly not being moved by circumstances, allowing the mind to abide naturally and effortlessly like a flowing river, while safeguarding clear awareness and quiescence. This alone is right conduct. The three essentials are these three key points. “The three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct are the heart of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times.” The three times are the past, present, and future.

The heart of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times is called true suchness of intrinsic nature, the wondrous mind of nirvāṇa, the One True Dharma Realm, the wondrously luminous true mind, the true aspect of suchness, the Tathāgata-garbha mind, the great ocean of perfect enlightenment, thusness, bodhi, dharmakāya, Buddha-nature, dhāraṇī, the Great Buddha-Crown, the master of the house, the bottomless bowl, the stringless lute, the inexhaustible lamp, the rootless tree, the hair-blowing sword, the land of non-contrivance, the maṇi jewel, the lock without a key, and even the mud ox, wooden horse, source of mind, mind-seal, mind-mirror, mind-moon, mind-pearl, and so forth.

Though the names are many, their meaning is in fact one. The “secret” in “secret intent” means that it has no form to be seen, cannot be spoken of, and has no Dharma that can be taught; it is not an object of language. It does not mean deliberately keeping it secret and refusing to tell people. Though inexpressible, it is nevertheless the center. This is the “seal of the one true aspect” of Mahāyāna Buddhism, by which one judges whether something is Mahāyāna Buddhism. If it departs from this guiding principle and cannot speak to this point, it is not Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The Great Collection Sūtra says: “In the Dharma-ending age, though hundreds of millions practice, scarcely one attains the Way; only by relying on Buddha-remembrance can they cross beyond birth and death.” Nian, remembrance, means the mind of the present moment. Buddha means awakening—namely, true suchness of intrinsic nature and the seal of the one true aspect.

The practice of the three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct keeps the mind awake in thought after thought and never apart from the seal of the one true aspect. This is precisely “Buddha-remembrance through the true aspect.” The Contemplation Sūtra of Amitāyus Buddha teaches sixteen methods of contemplation. Practicing these sixteen contemplations is also Buddha-remembrance, called “Buddha-remembrance through visualization”; in every contemplation, one never departs from the wondrously luminous true mind.

To gaze upon the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss and the sacred form of Amitābha Buddha, with its wondrous and majestic marks; to have wholehearted faith and joy and aspire to be reborn in that land—this too is Buddha-remembrance, called “Buddha-remembrance through contemplating the form.” In every instance, it does not depart from the wondrously luminous true mind.

To uphold the sacred name of Amitābha Buddha, with the mind reciting and the ears hearing; to gather in the scattered and troubled mind and transform deluded thoughts into thoughts of the Buddha; to carry a single phrase, “Namo Amitābha Buddha,” through from beginning to end—this is called “Buddha-remembrance through holding the name.” How could Buddha-remembrance through holding the name ever depart from the true mind by even half a step? If the mouth recites but the mind does not practice, that is not Buddha-remembrance.

Master Hanshan said: “If the mouth recites Amitābha while the mind is scattered, shouting until the throat breaks is still in vain!” In the Dharma-ending age, if practitioners wish to cross beyond birth and death, they must rely solely on the various methods of Buddha-remembrance that “gather in the six sense faculties and maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness.” Mahāmudrā is the most direct; it is

precisely Buddha-remembrance through the true aspect. It is precisely the heart of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times.

“The summit of all vehicles.” Esoteric Buddhism classifies the Buddha Dharma into nine successive vehicles: the three outer vehicles, the three inner vehicles, and the three esoteric vehicles. Ganges Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen both belong to the highest level. Therefore, the three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct are said to be the summit of all vehicles—like reaching the pinnacle of a jeweled pagoda. “Hence they are called the mother of all Buddhas”: they are the mother of all Buddhas throughout the ten directions and three times. All Buddhas appear in the world in reliance on this Dharma, and all dharmas are derived from it.

“The foregoing three essentials are the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition of Dzogchen of intrinsic nature. Within the realm of thorough realization of intrinsic nature, these four are gathered into a single whole, the ultimate essential of practice. They are also the key to meditation and conduct being one.”

“The view, meditation, conduct, and fruition of Dzogchen of intrinsic nature” refers to the four stages of Dzogchen practice. The three essentials mentioned above are the three essentials of right view, right meditation, and right conduct. They are the heart of the secret intent of the Buddhas of the three times—that is, our own true-suchness nature. The purpose of Dzogchen practice is to realize the mind and see one’s true nature, thereby attaining Buddhahood.

Without right view, there can be no right meditation; without right meditation, there can be no right conduct. How then could there be right fruition? A sūtra says: “If the causal ground is not right, the fruition will be distorted.” Therefore, only through right view, right meditation, and right conduct can one realize true suchness and Buddha-nature and finally attain Buddhahood. Thus, the three essentials of view, meditation, and conduct are the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition of Dzogchen of intrinsic nature.

“These four” refers to the four stages of practice: first establish the right view of liberation; then cultivate meditation to subdue the scattered mind; after the mind is settled, temper it amid circumstances through the six perfections and myriad practices; and finally attain Buddhahood. “The realm of thorough realization of intrinsic nature” is the state of mind of “Dzogchen of intrinsic nature.” In this state, view, meditation, conduct, and fruition are gathered into one aspect and become a single whole, incapable of separation. This is the ultimate essential of practice, its most crucial core and key point.

“They are also the key to meditation and conduct being one”: conduct is meditation, and meditation is conduct. Meditation and conduct cannot be separated. Nor can view, meditation, and conduct be separated; they must merge into a single whole.

For only after one's view is correct does one know what great meditation without coming or going is and avoid falling into dead absorption. Only then does one know how to cultivate conduct "without deliberate effort," avoid taking detours, proceed directly toward true suchness, and finally attain Buddhahood.

"At whatever time one realizes naked wisdom-nature, at that very time one obtains the view as principle of one's intrinsic wisdom."

Naked wisdom-nature is our Buddha-nature: naked and utterly pure, without form or appearance, luminously aware and quietly illuminating, with nothing concealed. Buddha-nature is great wisdom, the great wisdom that knows everything and can do everything. Whenever one realizes this naked wisdom-nature, one thereby "obtains the view as principle of one's intrinsic wisdom."

To obtain the view as principle of one's intrinsic wisdom is to recognize one's intrinsic nature, enter great perfect mirror wisdom, and see the guiding principle; it is realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. After seeing the principle, one no longer seeks externally, seeks no Dharma outside the mind, and no longer falls into a non-Buddhist path. However great the manifestations of spiritual powers there may be, I remain wholly unmoved here, with my footing firmly established. If one has not realized this stage, one cannot stand firmly and will inevitably be shaken.

Formerly, there was a hermitage master at the foot of Mount Nanquan. Someone told him, "Nanquan the monk has recently appeared in the world. Why not go and pay him respects?" Nanquan the monk had come forth to teach the Dharma and liberate sentient beings; why would he not go to see him? The hermitage master said that even if not only Nanquan appeared in the world, but a thousand Buddhas arose, he still would not go.

This meant that he had already recognized his original nature, stood firmly on his feet, and would not be shaken. When Chan Master Nanquan heard of this, he instructed his disciple Chan Master Zhaozhou to test him and see whether his footing was truly grounded. Zhaozhou went and bowed to the hermitage master, but the master ignored him and remained seated unmoving on his Chan bed.

Zhaozhou passed from west to east, then from east to west, but the hermitage master still ignored him. The hermitage master had planted his feet firmly: even if a living Buddha appeared in the world, he would not heed him. He had already recognized his own Original Face—clear and distinct, naked and utterly pure, with not a single thing present.

Having already realized this, what could he still seek? Having already attained mastery of spiritual powers, this freedom and ease itself was great spiritual power. Everyone, take note: freedom and ease are great spiritual power; strange and

unusual things are not great spiritual power. Zhaozhou had no recourse. With a crash, he tore down the hermitage master's curtain and said, "The grass-bandit has suffered a crushing defeat."

You dare not speak. You are no great person, but a grass-bandit; you have suffered a crushing defeat. The hermitage master still ignored him, and Zhaozhou had no recourse but to admit defeat and return to the mountain. Back on the mountain, he told his teacher that the hermitage master had attainment: no matter what he did, the man would not move. Chan Master Nanquan said, "I have always doubted this fellow."

I had long suspected whether he had truly planted his feet firmly. You could not stump him, so let me test him again. The next day, Chan Master Nanquan took a novice monk, a bottle of tea, and three teacups to the hermitage. Throwing them onto the ground, he said, "Yesterday's, yesterday's."

The hermitage master asked, "What is 'yesterday's'?" Yesterday I remained thus and unmoved, and your disciple was utterly helpless—what does that show? Now the fox's tail had been exposed: there was still some "what" needing explanation! Chan Master Nanquan patted the novice on the back and said, "You deceived me into coming, deceived me into coming." Then he flicked his sleeves and returned. I have seen through you. There is still something in you; you have still been moved. Your footing is not yet grounded, and you still fall far short.

In our practice, we must stand firmly on our feet. Whatever qigong or whatever great spiritual powers you may have, if you follow a non-Buddhist path, I will not follow you. I practice the Mind-Ground Dharma Gate; I recognize intrinsic nature, and in the future I will certainly attain the fruit of sagehood. If you do not know what intrinsic nature is, you ultimately cannot attain the fruit of sagehood.

We have previously discussed the koan of Patriarch Lü Chunyang. He had already accomplished the yang spirit, yet Patriarch Huanglong called him "a corpse-guarding ghost." Lü Chunyang said, "Yet within my bag I possess the medicine of immortality."

"Within my bag" refers to the body. "Do you not call me a corpse-guarding ghost? Within the corpse that I guard—in this bag—there is medicine of immortality." This medicine refers to the "golden elixir," the yang spirit, attained through cultivation. Patriarch Huanglong said, "Even after eighty thousand eons, you will ultimately fall into emptiness and extinction." You will still fall into emptiness; you will merely live longer than other people.

The yang-spirit is a body manifested by the seventh consciousness—the manas consciousness—and is called the mind-born body. It is illusory and unreal. If one does not recognize the true mind, one still falls into empty annihilation. If one

recognizes the true mind, one is carefree and at ease, without abiding in any appearance at all. First attain the power of the exhaustion of outflows—the penetration of the Way. This alone is true penetration and is fundamental. Once penetration of the Way has been attained, there is no need to worry about not attaining the five spiritual powers. Obtain the root, and there is no need to worry about the branches. This point is very important; you must take note of it. That is: at the very moment one realizes the naked nature of wisdom, one gains the view of the wisdom of one's own nature.

"Although view and samādhi are discussed separately, in essence they are one."

Although view and samādhi are discussed separately, they are not two things, but one entity. What is called "view" is recognizing the Original Face. Only with correct understanding can one know what the great samādhi without coming or going is, and only then can one have right samādhi. Conversely, only upon attaining right samādhi can one have correct understanding.

Neither view nor samādhi is separate from our own nature; both flow forth from it. In terms of their essence, they are truly the same thing. Not only are view and samādhi "one in essence"; view, samādhi, and conduct are likewise one entity, none of them separate from our wondrous, luminous true mind.

II. Mahāmudrā Is the Essence of the Nine Vehicles of Buddhism

"Those who thus practice the infallible essential path of the primordial purity of the Great Perfection of their own nature truly stand at the summit of the nine vehicles."

"The Great Perfection of one's own nature" has already been explained above. "Primordial purity" means that one's own nature is originally complete and originally pure. "The infallible essential path" is a path of practice that is without error and of the utmost importance.

"Those who thus practice the infallible essential path of the primordial purity of the Great Perfection of their own nature"—how should they practice it? It is precisely the method of practice described above as the "three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct." One must first recognize the fundamental essence and then begin practice from that essence.

Recognize that deluded thoughts and afflictions are precisely the wondrous functioning of the fundamental essence. Neither follow them nor suppress them; let them arise and cease of themselves, and let arising and ceasing vanish accordingly. One need only recognize the fundamental essence and gather everything back into it. This is how one practices this "infallible essential path." To deviate from this path is to go astray.

Many people who practice qigong have gone down wrong paths and developed deviations; this is, of course, to have lost the essential path. Some people practice Chan without knowing the correct method and likewise go wrong. They pursue dead samādhi and become like wood or stone; this too is to have lost the essential path.

Some also practice the Pure Land incorrectly. They treat Buddha-recitation as though it were coins or banknotes, and burn the Buddha's name as though it were paper money, depositing it in King Yama's treasury for use after death. What kind of Pure Land dharma gate is that? There were many such people in the past, and there are still quite a few today. They are utterly mistaken. The Pure Land school is for rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss; who told you to go to King Yama? Is this not turning things upside down? All these are cases of losing the essential path.

Those who practice this infallible essential path "truly stand at the summit of the nine vehicles." When we previously discussed "the pinnacle of all vehicles," it was mentioned that Esoteric Buddhism divides the Buddha Dharma into nine successive vehicles: the three outer vehicles, the three inner vehicles, and the three esoteric vehicles.

Let us now briefly explain these nine vehicles. The three outer vehicles are the śrāvaka vehicle, the pratyekabuddha vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle. They refer to such teachings as the Four Noble Truths, the twelve links of dependent origination, and the six perfections and myriad practices, as practiced by arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas; broadly speaking, they refer to Exoteric Buddhism. The three inner vehicles refer to the practices of the Kriyā, Caryā, and Yoga divisions.

The Kriyā division is also called the division of ritual activity and includes practices of increase, pacification, magnetization, and wrathful subjugation. These are methods that function in accordance with sentient beings' wishes; they are also expedient methods of guidance—"first entice them with what they desire, then lead them into the Buddha's wisdom"—and are not ultimate. The aim of the practices of the Caryā division is to transcend birth and death and leave the sea of suffering; only then does one enter actual cultivation.

One begins with visualization and practices the channels, winds, and vital essences, as in the practice of phowa. Yoga means "union." In the practices of the Yoga division, phenomena accord with principle, words accord with conduct, above one accords with all Buddhas, and below one accords with sentient beings. From this unfold the three levels known as the three esoteric vehicles.

The three esoteric vehicles are Mahāyoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga. Mahāyoga means union with the Great Perfection: one dissolves into emptiness such formed things as

the channels and winds produced through visualization, so as to accord with the formless dharmakāya. Anuyoga means union with unsurpassed perfection: taking the realm and wisdom as the gateway of entry, one further transforms all appearances into a single true characteristic.

Atiyoga means union with incomparable perfection, further uniting the three vehicles into the single great mantra vehicle. “Those who thus practice the infallible essential path of the primordial purity of the essence of the Great Perfection of their own nature truly stand at the summit of the nine vehicles.” This is the supreme dharma gate. In the great mantra vehicle, there is no mantra to recite; in Mahāmudrā, there is no mudrā to form. At this point, “nothing does not flow from this dharma realm, and nothing does not return to this dharma realm.” Therefore it is called the “summit.”

“The paths of all the other vehicles merely follow along as scaffolding and aids for this essential path.”

Since this infallible essential path is the summit of the nine vehicles and the supreme vehicle, “the paths of all the other vehicles”—that is, the other eight vehicles—“merely follow along as scaffolding and aids for this essential path.” The various other dharma gates are merely followers, scaffolding, and aids for this essential path.

Tai means a platform or step; it is only a staircase on which we tread to reach the top. Jia means a framework; for example, when building a house, one erects scaffolding, but it is only used temporarily. “Aids and companions” are merely a kind of help or accompaniment, not the principal practice.

To realize the Way, one must practice this “infallible essential path.” The other methods are merely scaffolding and aids. Without practicing this Mind-Ground Dharma Gate, one cannot realize the Way.

If one does not recognize the true mind, how can one realize the Way? If one does not know that the arising and manifestation of deluded thoughts from the true mind is precisely wondrous functioning, or that deluded thoughts are the appearance of the true mind’s innate wisdom, but merely suppresses thoughts so that they do not arise, then even if one suppresses deluded thoughts to death, one still cannot realize the Way. If one understands what deluded thoughts are, does not fear them, lets them arise and cease of themselves, and lets arising and ceasing vanish accordingly, without following them—how relaxed and joyful this is! The breath no longer feels constrained, the head no longer feels swollen, and in time one will certainly realize the great Way.

“When one sees the luminous aspect of the prajñā of one’s own nature, which is primordially pure, the functioning of the prajñā born of samādhi becomes still more intense, like the cascading waters of a summer waterfall.”

Primordially pure means originally pure. The luminous aspect of the prajñā of one’s own nature refers to the light manifested by one’s own nature—the great wisdom of prajñā. It does not refer only to light seen during meditation. The light seen during meditation is bright light, but the “luminosity” of which we speak here does not necessarily mean visible brightness.

All wondrous functioning is luminosity. For example, when the mind turns and one knows how a matter should be handled or how a person should be received, this too is luminosity. One need not see visible light for there to be luminosity; all wondrous functioning is the luminous aspect of wisdom.

“When one sees the luminous aspect of the prajñā of one’s own nature, which is primordially pure,” when one sees the luminosity of wisdom arising from the originally pure Buddha-nature of suchness, then “the functioning of the prajñā born of samādhi becomes still more intense.” The wondrous wisdom arising from right samādhi functions more extensively. Intense means blazing and flourishing, burning fiercely like flames.

One may not even seek spiritual powers, yet spiritual powers arise naturally. As we said before, after recognizing the dharmakāya, one must continually safeguard it in practice—not following deluded thoughts and not being led along by circumstances. This is samādhi. When one remains gathered in samādhi at all times and in all places, wisdom eventually arises from samādhi and its functioning becomes still more extensive, “like the cascading waters of a summer waterfall.” In summer, ice and snow melt, water sources are abundant, and there is much rainfall; thus waterfall waters flow without ceasing, vast in force and momentum. This illustrates the inexhaustible wondrous functioning of prajñā-wisdom.

“From the primordial abiding of emptiness arises great compassion, entering boundless compassion and sympathy; this too occurs naturally.”

The Dharma-nature and Buddha-nature are empty in their nature and are therefore called emptiness. All things possess emptiness and cannot be grasped; this is called the emptiness of nature. Their nature is empty; this is the true nature of emptiness. This emptiness has always remained unmoving and unshaken, neither arising nor ceasing, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing. This is called primordial abiding.

“From the primordial abiding of emptiness arises great compassion.” One must give rise to great compassion, not merely concern oneself with transcending one’s own

birth and death, but also rescue the vast multitude of sentient beings. “Entering boundless compassion and sympathy”: boundless means without limits, infinitely vast. The compassion of ordinary beings is limited compassion. Toward whom are they compassionate? Toward their own children.

“My son—my dear one, my precious treasure!” But other people’s children? “Let them be; I do not care.” “I dutifully support my own parents, but other people’s parents? I do not care, I do not care!” The scope of such compassion is far too narrow. Boundless compassion means having compassion for sentient beings in all directions, throughout the worlds of the ten directions, and vowing to liberate sentient beings throughout the ten directions.

“This too occurs naturally.” It is a spontaneous matter. If one can succeed in cultivation, one naturally enters boundless compassion and great compassion wells up of itself. Some people say that arhats lack great compassion, but this is not actually so. It is only that they have not yet realized the fourth fruit of arhatship. Upon reaching the fourth fruit, great compassion will likewise arise spontaneously in them.

When they first arouse the resolve, they contemplate the three realms as a prison and regard birth and death as an enemy. It is like some people who practice the Pure Land today and say, “Once I reach the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, I will never return, because this world is too painful and full of afflictions.”

If they are truly reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, they will still return. Why? Having heard the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Lotus Pond Assembly expound the great Dharma, they will feel ashamed. To realize the Way, one must liberate sentient beings extensively; without liberating sentient beings, one cannot realize the Way! They too will “enter boundless compassion and sympathy; this too occurs naturally.”

If one realizes the fourth fruit of arhatship and sees all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas liberating sentient beings within the six realms, how could one remain seated here without moving? One would feel quite ashamed. It is like being in the same work unit: everyone else is working, while you alone sit there doing nothing. Would that not be embarrassing? Then the mind of “great compassion without conditions, and great compassion based on oneness of self and others” naturally arises. This is called “turning from the lesser to the greater.” Turning from the lesser to the greater is also the natural course of things.

“When the essential path of the joint operation of emptiness and great compassion is directly realized, the various practices, like the rivers flowing into the sea, each manifest their functions of themselves, like the sun and its light.”

When one truly realizes “emptiness,” one no longer has the personal attachments of ordinary beings. The feelings of ordinary beings are concerned only with their own wives and children; they do not care about others. Once the mind is empty, the great wisdom of prajñā shines forth clearly, and the feelings of ordinary beings vanish completely. Being without personal attachment is great love; the mind of great compassion naturally arises.

This is the “joint operation of emptiness and great compassion”; this is the “essential path”—the essential point of cultivating the Way and the essential point of realizing the Way. Direct realization means shining forth clearly before one. When this essential path of the joint operation of emptiness and compassion shines forth clearly, “the various practices, like the rivers flowing into the sea, each manifest their functions of themselves.” The ocean is where hundreds and thousands of rivers converge, and each river has its own distinct function.

The Yangtze and Yellow Rivers likewise have many tributaries, and each of these smaller tributaries has its own distinct function. Here boats can travel and goods can be transported; there irrigation is possible and rice can be grown; other places abound in fish and shrimp.

This is a metaphor for realizing emptiness and universally giving rise to great compassion: within the cycle of rebirth in the six realms, one can perform different wondrous conduct in every time and place to liberate sentient beings. “Like the sun and its light” means that they are inseparable, just like the sun and its light.

Only when there is a sun is there light, and only then can you see things. Without the sun, one is in darkness and cannot see things. The relationship between emptiness and great compassion is inseparable, just like that between the sun and its light: where there is a sun, there is light; without a sun, where could light come from? The sun is a metaphor for emptiness, and light a metaphor for great compassion. The two are intimately united and inseparable.

“Thus, joining with the provisions of merit and virtue, widely undertake practices that benefit others, thereby bringing the true principle of view to perfect fulfillment and serving as an aid to unstained quiescent bliss.”

To realize emptiness is to possess wisdom; to manifest great compassion is to possess merit and virtue. Only by widely liberating sentient beings and serving them does one acquire merit and virtue. If one has wisdom alone but no merit and virtue, or lacks sufficient provisions of merit and virtue, one cannot become a Buddha. This is because a Buddha is the “Doubly Complete Honored One,” complete in wisdom and complete in merit and virtue.

Therefore, we must cultivate merit and wisdom together. If one cultivates only wisdom and emptiness, without cultivating merit or doing things for sentient beings, one's merit and virtue will not be complete, and one cannot bring Buddhahood to fulfillment. Arhats have a lesser aspiration: they attend only to their own liberation, do not liberate sentient beings, and do not serve them. They possess sufficient wisdom but not sufficient merit and virtue, and therefore cannot become Buddhas. They will inevitably turn from the lesser to the greater.

"Thus, joining with the provisions of merit and virtue": zi means capital, and liang means provisions for the path. The provisions for realizing the Way are as indispensable as travel expenses for a journey. Therefore, one must certainly arouse a great resolve and arouse bodhicitta, cultivating merit and wisdom together, in order to bring Buddhahood to fulfillment.

When great bodhisattvas first arouse the resolve, they do so in order to liberate sentient beings extensively. They say, "I study Buddhism not for myself, but for sentient beings. For example, sentient beings are about to drown in the great ocean. I want to save them, but if I cannot swim and do not know lifesaving techniques, how can I save them? My studying Buddhism in order to liberate myself is like first learning to swim and learning lifesaving techniques."

After learning these skills and becoming capable, I will liberate sentient beings. Self-liberation is only the means; liberating sentient beings is the aim. Studying Buddhism is for sentient beings, not for oneself. This is a bodhisattva of great resolve. If one arouses a lesser aspiration and seeks only to escape the cycle of birth and death for oneself, one can attain only the fruit of arhatship and cannot be called a bodhisattva. This is the difference between Mahāyāna bodhisattvas and Hīnayāna sages.

When realized wisdom of emptiness joins with the provisions of merit and virtue, one "widely undertakes practices that benefit others." To undertake them widely means doing many such things, not merely a few. Practices that benefit others are matters beneficial to sentient beings, and one must do many of them. Doing one good deed is easy; doing so over a long time is difficult, and doing so every day without interruption is more difficult still.

Take contemplation, for example. To contemplate for a while is easy, but not to forget it at every moment is very difficult. Yet nothing in the world is difficult for one with determination. If you can continue contemplating without forgetting it at any time for seven days, it will no longer be difficult afterward.

The Amitābha Sūtra says: "If, for one day, two days, three days, four days, five days, six days, or seven days, one attains one-pointedness of mind without distraction, then at the time of that person's death, Amitābha Buddha and the assembly of

sages will appear before them." If one can avoid forgetting at every moment for seven days, it will thereafter be less easy to forget.

To widely undertake practices that benefit others means doing things beneficial to sentient beings abundantly and over the long term, being willing to sacrifice oneself and help others, "thereby bringing the true principle of view to perfect fulfillment and serving as an aid to unstained quiescent bliss." Use "widely undertaking practices that benefit others" to bring the "true principle of view" to perfect fulfillment—to make the principle you have seen genuinely complete and perfect.

Let us now explain "quiescent bliss." Only when even bliss is unobtainable can it be called quiescent bliss. If bliss still remains, it is not yet right, because bliss and suffering are opposites: where there is bliss, there is suffering; even in bliss, suffering is present. In quiescent bliss, bliss itself is unobtainable—how, then, could there be suffering? The "Land of Utmost Bliss" is bliss at its utmost, yet even bliss is unobtainable.

Worldly meditative absorption is the same. The second dhyāna is joy, and the third dhyāna is bliss. Upon reaching the fourth dhyāna, the "ground of purity through equanimity and mindfulness," even bliss is unobtainable, and there is purity. "Unstained quiescent bliss" is quiescent bliss that has never been defiled. This is precisely the wondrously luminous true mind, the One True Dharma Realm, and the great ocean of perfect enlightenment.

Take "widely undertaking practices that benefit others" as an aid to "unstained quiescent bliss." Great compassion accompanies emptiness, and the six perfections and myriad practices accompany prajñā wisdom. Earlier, much was said about how to practice in order to open wisdom. But opening wisdom alone is not enough; one must also "widely undertake practices that benefit others" and cultivate merit and virtue. There are many practices that benefit others, and they will not be explained in detail here. We should do our utmost to help sentient beings: those with money contribute money, and those with strength contribute strength. Exhaust all that we can do. Even saying a kind word that helps another is good.

III. Summary of the Three Essentials of Mahāmudrā

"The three essentials are these: know the characteristics of one's own mind; observe the original characteristics of one's own mind by relying on the arising of deluded thoughts in dependence upon objects and conditions, and recognize the intrinsic nature of the dharmakāya. (This is view.)"

The three essentials are the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct. This passage concerns "view."

To know the characteristics of one's own mind is to know the appearance of one's own true mind. Does the true mind have an appearance? The true mind is without characteristics; this is called emptiness. To know the characteristics of one's own mind means to understand that such concepts as "self," "person," "sentient being," and "life span" have no basis at all; everything is utterly unobtainable, completely empty and without abiding, and all phenomena are empty. At the same time, one must know that the true mind has boundless wondrous functioning, and that deluded thoughts and afflictions are all wondrous functions arising from it.

Observe the original characteristics of one's own mind by relying on "deluded thoughts arising in dependence upon objects and conditions, arising as thoughts follow them." Where do deluded thoughts come from? They arise in dependence upon objects and conditions. Deluded thoughts manifest as they follow external objects and conditions; this is the dependent arising of deluded thoughts. Rely on this dependent arising of deluded thoughts to observe the original characteristics of one's own mind.

Deluded thoughts arise because of circumstances. If there were circumstances alone but no true mind, deluded thoughts could not arise either. For example, circumstances are wind, the true mind is water, and deluded thoughts are waves. Without water, wind alone cannot produce waves. Deluded thoughts that arise in dependence upon circumstances can arise only because there is a true mind. Therefore, from the dependent arising of deluded thoughts, one can observe the original characteristics of one's own mind.

It is like seeing water when one sees waves; thus one "recognizes the intrinsic characteristics of the dharmakāya." Our true mind—the dharmakāya—is originally without characteristics. Yet when circumstances arise, the true mind, in dependence upon them, manifests deluded thoughts. Through the arising of deluded thoughts, one can infer the true mind in reverse and recognize the intrinsic characteristic of the formless dharmakāya. An eyeball alone cannot see things.

Through the wondrous functioning of intrinsic nature, visual consciousness arises by means of the eyeball as an instrument, and only then can things be seen. If this formless dharmakāya did not give rise to visual consciousness, one would look without seeing.

When one falls ill and one's foot hurts—"Oh! It hurts unbearably!"—this too is a wondrous function of the true mind. Only when the formless dharmakāya gives rise to tactile sensation through the nervous system as an instrument can one feel pain. Otherwise, how would you know there was something wrong with your foot? Without the true mind, you would neither feel pain nor cry out in pain.

To know the true mind through the dependent arising of deluded thoughts is what is called “view.” The Mahāmudrā of the Ganges repeatedly explains this Mahāmudrā view. I too have repeatedly explained it here. If you still do not know it, that will not do. In truth, it is not that you fail to understand or do not know; rather, doubt still remains. This is the “one seal of true reality” of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Do not doubt any longer.

“Merge deluded thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, and become familiar with the dharmakāya. (This is samādhi.)”

The “samādhi” of which we speak does not mean sitting rigidly without moving. Then how does one abide in samādhi? Abide in it in this way: “Merge deluded thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, and become familiar with the dharmakāya.” Merge deluded thoughts and the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya into one. The wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya is deluded thought, and deluded thought is the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya; they are neither two nor different.

Again, take waves and water as an analogy. Not only are waves entirely water when they subside; even when they have not subsided, they are entirely water. Why speak at first of waves subsiding? Because then there is a state of “stillness,” which is easier to recognize. After recognizing it, one must still cast off this appearance of stillness; only then is the task complete.

Sentient beings are accustomed to clinging to appearances; they are familiar with the mental path of recognizing what has form, but are still quite unfamiliar with the mental path of realizing the formless. This requires a process of “making what is unfamiliar familiar and what is familiar unfamiliar.” The Buddha’s eighty-four thousand Dharma gates are all such processes. Mahāmudrā is the most direct: it points directly to “transforming deluded thoughts into the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya.”

If you can assume it directly, then “in a single thought, one traverses three asaṃkhyeya kalpas”; you directly become familiar with the dharmakāya. Only this is truly the great samādhi of neither entering nor leaving.

At this point, you need not fear deluded thoughts. Let them arise as they will; they are all wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya. So long as you pay them no heed, do not abide in objects, and do not cling, but contemplate in this way at all times and in all places, you will gradually become familiar with the dharmakāya. You may say: “Eh! Why are you still speaking of a process of practice? Such contemplation is not a direct familiarization with the dharmakāya.”

“Yes! That is because you have not assumed it directly, so I have no choice but to speak this way. If you truly assume it without doubt, what is there left to contemplate?! You must be exceedingly careful in assuming this matter. What is real cannot be false, and what is false cannot be real. ‘Like one who drinks water, one knows for oneself whether it is cold or warm.’ You yourself know most clearly in your own mind.”

If you cannot assume it without doubt, then you must still contemplate at every moment while walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Speaking is wondrous functioning; doing work is also wondrous functioning. See everything in this way. Once you are thoroughly familiar with it, you recognize only the dharmakāya and not external objects. This is called realizing the great Way. At that point, even contemplation is no longer needed.

“When thoughts cease, remain steadfast and settled; when thoughts do not continue, do not forget the vision of the dharmakāya. (This is practice.)”

The preceding and following sentences of this passage discuss “practice.” The practice of Mahāmudrā of the Ganges never departs from the wondrously luminous true mind; it is the practice of the highest vehicle. If understood at a superficial level, it is very likely to be misconstrued. Let us analyze these words on two levels.

The first level: “When thoughts cease, remain steadfast and settled.” “When thoughts cease” means at the point where a thought ceases, when deluded thoughts come to rest. “Steadfast and settled” means that the mind does not waver but peacefully enters samādhi. “When thoughts do not continue, do not forget the vision of the dharmakāya.”

“When thoughts do not continue” means that not a single thought arises; this is “cessation.” “Do not forget the vision of the dharmakāya” means clear and distinct awareness; this is “contemplation.” You can certainly tell that this explanation concerns the practice of seated meditation and entering samādhi, the practice of cessation and contemplation.

We have already spoken a great deal about Mahāmudrā of the Ganges. You will surely say: “This seems not to be the practice advocated by Mahāmudrā of the Ganges, yet is this passage not saying exactly this?” Actually, this is not its meaning. It is merely a rough reading of the literal words, or rather, the surface meaning of the passage. “To interpret meaning according to the words makes one the enemy of the Buddhas of the three times.” Now let us go a level deeper, into its inner import, and explain these words.

The second level: “When thoughts cease, remain steadfast and settled” does not mean that thoughts cease when not a single thought arises. For “deluded thoughts

and afflictions are all aspects of the dharmakāya's innate awakened wisdom." If, in a single thought, one turns the light inward and recognizes the dharmakāya, then deluded thoughts are no longer deluded thoughts. Recognizing the dharmakāya rather than deluded thoughts is what is meant by "thoughts cease."

"When thoughts cease, remain steadfast and settled" means that, on the basis of recognizing the dharmakāya rather than deluded thoughts, one firmly and steadfastly recognizes the dharmakāya. This is the great samādhi of neither entering nor leaving.

"When thoughts do not continue, do not forget the vision of the dharmakāya": if one forgets that "deluded thoughts and afflictions are all aspects of the dharmakāya's innate awakened wisdom," then deluded thoughts become deluded thoughts again. This means that thoughts continue and the dharmakāya is forgotten. If one remains vigilant at all times and in all places, firmly recognizing the dharmakāya, then the very thought is no-thought. This is "thoughts do not continue, and the vision of the dharmakāya is not forgotten."

The first sentence speaks of "the cessation of thoughts"—recognizing the dharmakāya, that is, seeing the principle and realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature. If one can be "steadfast and settled," then one has settled the matter once and for all. If one has not yet attained steadfastness, there is the following sentence. The following sentence is the practice of continuous and seamless contemplation that safeguards realization.

The Diamond Sūtra says: "Give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere." Here, "give rise" refers to responding to affairs, objects, and the myriad situations. When people come and go, one must still respond accordingly, and it is unavoidable that thoughts arise and the mind stirs. Yet this is wondrous functioning of one's intrinsic nature. So long as one does not abide or become attached, and does not follow thoughts, that is enough. Even as a thought arises, one does not see any thought that can arise. This is called being steadfast and settled.

It does not mean that not a single thought arises and that one sits there lifeless and unmoving. We make use of deluded thoughts in dealing with people and things and handling daily affairs, but we do not follow deluded thoughts along. Our true mind still neither abides nor follows; it neither moves nor wavers. "Thoughts do not continue" means not allowing deluded thoughts to continue without interruption, endlessly grasping at conditions.

One associates Zhang San with Li Si, Li Si with Zhao Wu, and Zhao Wu with Wang Liu . . . Deluded thoughts fly about without ceasing; that is where the trouble lies. At such a time, one must awaken sharply and pay them no heed; then the deluded thoughts are cut off. Yesterday someone asked me about investigating Chan. He

said that he liked to investigate Chan and inquire, “Who is it that recites the Buddha’s name?” but could never arouse a sense of doubt.

I said to him: To investigate Chan, you must arouse a sense of doubt; if you cannot arouse it, that is a problem. Alternatively, change methods. When a thought arises, ask where it comes from. This is not paying heed to the thought, but thoroughly tracing its point of arising. When the thought subsides, ask where it goes. This is not holding on to the thought, but observing where it ceases.

It is like a cat catching mice. The cat crouches at the entrance to a mouse hole; the moment a mouse pokes out its head, the cat immediately pounces. The mouse is a metaphor for deluded thought. Be ever vigilant like the cat: the moment a deluded thought shows its head, immediately investigate where it comes from. When the deluded thought subsides, observe where it ceases. This is the Chan dharma gate of investigation; its purpose, too, is to ensure that “thoughts do not continue.”

If you practice in this way for a long time, the continuity of thoughts changes from familiar to unfamiliar, while the noncontinuity of thoughts changes from unfamiliar to familiar. When the practice matures and you encounter a stimulus or condition, the mind that sees and the thought that is seen both vanish without trace in a single instant. With a “ha!” subject and object both perish, and the sense faculties and their objects fall away. Then you realize the great Way.

What is called “not forgetting the vision of the dharmakāya” is still an exercise in practice: remaining vigilant at all times and in all places, and not forgetting the dharmakāya. This is the practice aspect of “view, samādhi, and conduct”; one still occupies the position of cultivation. At the moment of sudden realization of the great Way, even the vision of the dharmakāya cannot be obtained.

In the past, there was a monk skilled at expounding the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra. Chan Master Dongshan asked him, “It cannot be known by wisdom, nor recognized by consciousness—what kind of words are these?” He replied, “Words praising the dharmakāya.” Chan Master Dongshan said, “To call it the dharmakāya is already praise.”

Once it is called the dharmakāya, it has already been praised. To add the laudatory words “it cannot be known by wisdom, nor recognized by consciousness” is all the more like putting a head on top of one’s head—an unnecessary addition. These are the words of one who has arrived home. Chan Master Dongshan regularly instructed students to “walk the bird path.” The bird path is a narrow road, a winding goat trail.

A monk asked Dongshan, “Master, you regularly instruct students to walk the bird path. What is the bird path?” Chan Master Dongshan replied, “It meets not a single person.” On a great highway, traffic is dense and there are very many people;

walking the great highway symbolizes the profusion of distracting and deluded thoughts. The bird path is a narrow, secluded trail, usually traveled by no one; walking the bird path symbolizes a mind still as water, with not a single thought arising.

The monk further asked, “How does one walk it?” Dongshan said, “You must go with no self-interest beneath your feet.” Walking the bird path refers to the course of the mind; having no self-interest beneath one’s feet means being selfless in one’s mind-ground. When the mind-ground is selfless, heaven and earth are vast. Why do deluded thoughts fly about and why do we cling without letting go? They all arise from one’s own private interests. If the mind-ground is selfless, deluded thoughts cannot be found.

The monk again asked, “If one walks the bird path, is that not the Original Face?” Dongshan countered, “Venerable, why are you inverted?” The monk said, “In what respect is this student inverted?” Chan Master Dongshan said, “If you were not inverted, why would you mistake a servant for the master?” The Original Face is the master; walking the bird path is a method of practice, merely wondrous functioning —a servant, not the master.

If one takes “walking the bird path” to be the Original Face, one mistakes a servant for the master. Is that not inversion? The monk again asked, “What is the Original Face?” Chan Master Dongshan said, “Not walking the bird path.” When speaking of the Original Face, there is no need even to walk the bird path.

Therefore, “When thoughts cease, remain steadfast and settled; when thoughts do not continue, do not forget the vision of the dharmakāya” is only a method of practice. Strictly speaking, these words are not ultimate. They are not yet the Original Face; one is still “walking the bird path,” still on the way. When the practice has become mature, with a “ha!” one opens to the original. Even the vision of the dharmakāya cannot be obtained; then one “does not walk the bird path,” and in truth has never walked any bird path at all.

IV. The Essential Point of Mahāmudrā

“Let the mind attend to the eyes, and the eyes attend to emptiness: this is the essential point of all essential points. (One must study the Yangdön practice.)”

“Let the mind attend to the eyes, and the eyes attend to emptiness.” When we practice, the mind must remain alert, with the mind attending to the eyes—this is what is called the “mind’s eye.” Bai Juyi wrote in his later years: “How can one save the mind’s eye? With a single utterance of Amitābha.” This too mentions the “mind’s eye.” The eyes attend to emptiness; that is, the mind’s eye contemplates emptiness. It means emptying everything, so that nothing whatsoever can be obtained.

When you see anything at all, do not let it hang in the mind; it is as though you had not seen it. Though seeing, there is nothing seen; this does not mean closing the eyes and not seeing. Though hearing, there is nothing heard; this does not mean plugging the ears and not hearing. “It is not that one does not see, nor that one does not hear; one knows clearly and distinctly, without attachment to seeing or hearing.” Practice in this way, and you will certainly realize the great Way.

“This is the essential point of all essential points”: it is the essential point among all essential teachings of mind. Practice has its key instructions, and this is the most important key instruction of all. For this “essential point of essential points,” one may consult what is taught by Yangdön. Yangdön is a lineage of Esoteric Buddhism. Its meaning is that all dharmas are indivisible, and that sentient beings in the five destinies all possess pure bodies.

The pure body is the dharmakāya. The bodies of devas, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings are all the pure dharmakāya. As Chan Master Yongjia says in his Song of Realizing the Way: “The true nature of ignorance is itself Buddha-nature; this illusory, empty body is itself the dharmakāya.” These are the words of one who has reached home. When Esoteric Buddhism is cultivated to its highest class, it converges with the Chan school; hence Chan is called the “great Esoteric Buddhism.”

“Without the Mahāmudrā of the fourth empowerment in the Vajrayāna, it cannot be called Mahāmudrā.”

Here the discussion concerns the Esoteric Buddhist regulations concerning “empowerment.” Let us briefly explain the origin of empowerment. Empowerment was a custom in ancient India. When a crown prince ascended the throne, an empowerment ceremony was performed for him. Water from the four great seas was used, with jewels, fragrances, and rare precious objects placed in the seawater.

The prince would then mount an elephant, and the water would be poured over his head along its tusks. This form was used to bless the king with peace, health, and long life, and to bless the nation with peace, prosperity, strength, and abundant harvests. Empowerment is a symbol of auspiciousness. Śākyamuni Buddha, in accordance with sentient beings, also bestowed empowerment upon the assembly in accordance with this custom.

Thus, the ritual procedures for empowerment were transmitted within Buddhism, and Esoteric Buddhism places great importance on empowerment. But what is meant here by the “fourth empowerment”? Esoteric Buddhism teaches four kinds of empowerment and five locations. Let us explain them below:

The first empowerment: light empowerment. Light is emitted to shine upon the crown of the Buddhist disciple’s head.

The second empowerment: nectar empowerment. Nectar water is used to confer empowerment upon the Buddhist disciple.

The third empowerment: seed empowerment. One visualizes a seed mantra and visualizes it entering the practitioner's heart.

The fourth empowerment: mudrā empowerment. Forming mudrās with the hands, one bestows blessings upon five locations of the practitioner's body.

These five locations correspond to the Five Buddhas of the Five Directions; thus, the fourth empowerment is also called the "Five Buddha Empowerment."

First: the center. Mahāvairocana Tathāgata (some sūtras say Amitābha Tathāgata). It represents the wisdom of the essential nature of the dharma realm. It is applied to the practitioner's forehead.

Second: the south. Ratnasaṃbhava Tathāgata. It represents the wisdom of equality. It is applied to the practitioner's right shoulder.

Third: the north. Amoghasiddhi Tathāgata. It represents the wisdom of accomplishing what is to be done. It is applied to the practitioner's left shoulder.

Fourth: the east. Akṣobhya Tathāgata (Immovable Tathāgata). It represents great perfect mirror wisdom. It is applied to the practitioner's heart.

Fifth: the west. Amitābha Tathāgata (some sūtras say Mahāvairocana Tathāgata). It represents the wisdom of wondrous observation. It is applied to the practitioner's throat.

In the Five Buddha Empowerment ceremony, blessings are conferred upon the practitioner's five locations—the forehead, right shoulder, left shoulder, heart, and throat. This is called the "fourth empowerment." Esoteric Buddhism stipulates that one can be said to have received the Mahāmudrā practice only after undergoing the fourth empowerment ceremony. Without having received the fourth empowerment, it cannot be considered Mahāmudrā.

In fact, such human empowerment ceremonies are merely formalities. True empowerment awaits the time when you realize the level of an equal enlightenment bodhisattva and receive empowerment from the Buddhas of the ten directions; only that is true empowerment. India is the birthplace of Buddhism. When Indian kings transmitted the throne, they used the form of empowerment, and Śākyamuni Buddha also used this form to confer empowerment upon people. Thus, the ritual procedures of empowerment were transmitted within Esoteric Buddhism. Nowadays, when Esoteric Buddhism transmits a practice, it confers empowerment upon students.

“Reality as it is—that is true Mahāmudrā. Neither cultivating nor correcting, and free from distraction: this is its supreme dharma gate.”

“Reality”: only suchness and Buddha-nature can be called real, and thus it is called the “true mark.” The true mark is without marks; without marks, yet without no marks. “As it is” means that it is originally so. Our Buddha-nature is originally so real; it has nothing to do with cultivation. It is originally of immeasurable luminosity and inexhaustible wondrous functioning.

Because it is obscured by ignorance, it manifests as ordinary beings—this too is wondrous functioning. Reality is not false, and things are originally so: “that is true Mahāmudrā.” Mahāmudrā is the One True Dharma Realm; it is our wondrously luminous true mind. This is true Mahāmudrā.

The fourth empowerment is only a form and may not be true Mahāmudrā. Forming a mudrā or practicing a method may likewise not be true Mahāmudrā. True Mahāmudrā is our true mind. It does not need to be cultivated; it has fundamentally never required correction and has never been distracted.

Only if there were distraction would correction be needed. Since it has no distraction, what is there to correct? “Neither cultivating nor correcting, and free from distraction: this is its supreme dharma gate.” This is the dharma gate of the supreme vehicle. This dharma gate is to recognize the true mind directly in the present moment. Only then can one be said truly to have attained Mahāmudrā.

To recognize the true mind directly in the present moment and safeguard it, so that it does not chase after circumstances—this is the supreme dharma gate of Esoteric Buddhism, and Chan is the same. A Chan student asked his teacher, “What is Buddha?” The teacher replied, “If I tell you, I fear you will not believe it.”

The disciple said, “Master, if you speak truthfully, how could I dare not believe you?” The teacher said, “If you believe, you are Buddha.” The disciple immediately awakened: “Oh, so that is how it is!” After accepting this, the disciple safeguarded realization continuously and closely. After several years of practice, he realized the great Way. He was able to realize the Way because he could immediately accept it and practice continuous, close safeguarding realization.

The supreme dharma gate of Esoteric Buddhism is the same as that of Chan. It also teaches this way: right now, you know cold and heat, pain and itchiness. This capacity for awareness is your true mind; you need only safeguard it at all times. You must know that all circumstances are the wondrous functioning of the dharmakāya, and recognize the true mind through circumstances. The true mind is like a mirror, and circumstances are like reflections. Recognize only the mirror, not the reflections.

To practice in this way is the Mahāmudrā of the supreme vehicle, the most complete dharma gate, and the swiftest path to Buddhahood.

"'Emptiness, bliss, and luminosity'—luminosity is also called wisdom. Emptiness is no-thought, and so they are also called 'bliss, luminosity, and no-thought.'"

When we previously discussed the "signs of the Way," we spoke of emptiness, bliss, and luminosity. These are three kinds of experience that naturally arise during the process of earnest practice and cultivation of the Way. Luminosity does not necessarily mean visible light; it refers to the manifestation of intrinsic luminosity, and so luminosity is also called wisdom. When there are no deluded thoughts and yet one knows with complete clarity, when the mind is empty and clean as though washed, this is the experience of "emptiness."

"Emptiness is no-thought, and so they are also called bliss, luminosity, and no-thought." At times, "emptiness, bliss, and luminosity" are also called "bliss, luminosity, and no-thought." Bliss means ease and joy. This joy cannot be compared with any worldly pleasure. Luminosity means the wondrous luminosity of the true mind. When Buddha-nature radiates great light and prajñā wisdom manifests, one is necessarily open, radiant, free, and at ease. No-thought does not necessarily mean that not a single thought arises. Thoughts may arise, but one does not abide in them; in their very substance they are empty. This is called "no-thought."

We have already discussed this at length when speaking of the "signs of the Way," so we will not say more here.

"Without giving rise to a mind that seeks to cultivate or correct, and with no distraction whatsoever, safeguard your own mind. Such non-abiding, non-seeking, and spontaneous functioning, without departing from the luminous and pure essential nature of one's own mind, is like holding a bright lamp in one's hand and illuminating the darkness. This is truly safeguarding samaya."

Not giving rise to a mind that seeks to cultivate or correct is what was just called "neither cultivating nor correcting." Having no distraction whatsoever is what was just called "free from distraction." Neither cultivating nor correcting, and free from distraction: this is its supreme dharma gate. "Safeguard your own mind" means to safeguard the wondrously luminous true mind through this supreme dharma gate.

The wondrously luminous true mind is the wisdom of original awakening. It is originally without marks, originally non-abiding, and originally unmoving. It pervades empty space and fills the dharma realm; originally, it has no distraction. Whether one ascends to heaven or descends to hell, it remains eternally unchanged. Therefore, when we practice safeguarding realization—that is, safeguarding our own mind—we should not give rise to any mind of counteraction, grasping, rejection, or

correction. Only by letting go of everything at all times and in all places, remaining open, numinous, and non-abiding, can we accord with the true mind. Only in this way can we realize the great Way.

Non-abiding means having no attachment; non-seeking means not chasing after conditions; spontaneous functioning means adapting to circumstances. Everything arises in response to causes and conditions, so do not let your mind be stirred by conditioned arising. Whatever the circumstances are, I am simply as they are. When circumstances change, I change along with them. Do not add any personal opinion; accord with all causes and conditions.

If you insist on making your own decisions—wanting this or that—or if you conform only reluctantly, then it will not do. “Such non-abiding, non-seeking, and spontaneous functioning, without departing from the luminous and pure essential nature of one’s own mind” means that such non-abiding, non-seeking, and spontaneous functioning does not depart from the luminous and pure essential nature of one’s own mind—that is, one’s intrinsic nature. To depart means to violate or go beyond it.

Intrinsic nature is originally unmoving and unshakable, yet you are restless and unsettled. Intrinsic nature is originally without coming or going, yet you continually come and go. Intrinsic nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing, yet you are endlessly arising and ceasing.

This is to depart from the luminous and pure essential nature of your own mind! Intrinsic nature is originally neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither coming nor going, neither increasing nor decreasing. Yet you are restless, coming and going, arising and ceasing. This is not in accord. We must accord with our intrinsic nature at every moment: non-abiding, non-seeking, and spontaneous functioning, never departing from the luminous and pure essential nature of our own mind in any place or circumstance.

If you can do this, then “it is like holding a bright lamp in one’s hand and illuminating the darkness.” It is like holding a bright lamp in your hand: all darkness is dispelled, and everything before your eyes is bright. Then there is no need to fear potholes ahead or walking at night. To avoid falling into a deep pit, one must illuminate the darkness.

Otherwise, if there is a pit ahead, you will not know it. Therefore, when facing circumstances, do not let your mind be stirred. “When the old man at the frontier lost his horse, how could one know it was not a blessing?” “Misfortune leans upon fortune; fortune harbors misfortune.” If you see what appears to be an excellent opportunity to get rich and your mind is stirred, that opportunity may very well harm you.

Why do I say this? If you become wealthy, kidnappers may come, seize you, and extort ransom from you—would that not become a bad thing? The lay practitioner Pang Yun of the Tang dynasty sank his immense family fortune in the Xiang River. He said, “Too much gold unsettles the mind.” When wealth and treasures become abundant, the mind becomes disturbed; they also arouse others’ envy and keep you from living in peace.

Wealth is a source of calamity; do not want it! If we recognize only the wondrously luminous true mind, do not follow circumstances, and are not deluded by money, beauty, and the like, then buddha-nature will constantly manifest before us and the mind will no longer be disturbed. To be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, one must likewise attain one-pointedness of mind without distraction. Once the mind is scattered, rebirth is impossible.

At all times and in all places, we must be non-abiding, without attachment to conditions, and allow things to function spontaneously, without deviating from the pure fundamental essence of the mind of self-nature. It is like holding a bright lamp that dispels the darkness. If one can do this, one is “properly upholding samaya.” What is samaya? It means equality, vows, and non-transgression.

Equality means that Buddhas and all sentient beings are equal: the luminous and pure fundamental essence of their own minds is entirely the same, without distinction of high or low. Originally, there is no sea of suffering; only because sentient beings falsely cling and falsely grasp does the boundless sea of suffering appear as an illusion. Vows mean resolving to liberate everyone from the sea of suffering and making great vows to save sentient beings.

We should learn from Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva: “Until the hells are empty, I vow not to become a Buddha.” We should learn from Samantabhadra Bodhisattva, accommodating sentient beings constantly and rolling about with them in the six realms. Non-transgression has just been explained, so it will not be repeated here.

At all times and in all places, we must remain alert. Do not be deluded by circumstances; constantly remove defilements and obscurations, and rid ourselves of our contaminated habits. If, upon encountering the slightest setback, you retreat, saying, “Oh! This is too painful. My hands hurt, my feet are numb—I will not practice any longer, I will not practice any longer,”

or if your heart feels oppressed and miserable and you think it would be better to relax and drift along—going to see a show or chatting with friends—then, while watching and chatting, you will unknowingly enter the three lower realms. If you truly wish to transcend birth and death, you must make great vows. You cannot fear hardship; you must exert yourself diligently in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. Relying only on two, three, or four hours of seated meditation is not enough.

You must remain alert at every moment, not be deluded by circumstances, and protect your pure original nature. This is “properly upholding samaya.”

“If one continues to discriminate and cling, would that merely be a transgression of samaya?!”

Conversely, if discrimination does not cease and clinging is not relinquished, how could this merely be “a transgression of samaya”? It is not merely a transgression of samaya, but the seed of rebirth in the six realms and the seed of hell. Discrimination and clinging plainly reveal the restless stirring of the deluded mind and an unwillingness to let go of one’s own private interests.

How can one who practices in this way accord with the vast and open great Way? Everyone, take heed! Non-discrimination certainly does not mean being unable to distinguish beauty from ugliness. What we mean is that one must not let “discrimination continue without cease,” allowing thought after thought to follow in succession, unable to stop like a vehicle with failed brakes. When functioning, good and evil are clearly distinguished, and right and wrong remain evident; once the function is over, however, there is no adhesion, no love or hatred, grasping or rejection, and no trace left behind.

If one can be thus, then immediate perception becomes inferential knowledge, and inferential knowledge becomes immediate perception; this is not discrimination. Whether something is good or bad is perfectly clear in the mind, but one does not favor good people or detest bad people. We hope that bad people will change into good people and that good people will advance still further.

In the past, someone in a monastic community stole something. This violated the precept against stealing, and he committed the offense repeatedly. The monastery steward wished to expel him from the community. He wept bitterly and begged to repent. Since this was not his first offense, however, the steward would not accept his repentance and insisted on expelling him.

But the abbot wished to keep him and give him another chance to reform. The steward and several upright practitioners said to the abbot, “If you keep him, we will all leave this place.” The abbot said, “Even if all of you leave, I will still keep him.” The steward said, “We may leave, but let us make the matter clear.

You keep him but not us. Among so many of us, is there not even one good person? Are we inferior to a monastic who has broken the precepts?” The abbot said, “It is precisely because every one of you is better than he is that I keep him and do not keep you. Wherever you go, you can continue practicing.

If he leaves, who will take him in? Other than falling into degradation, could there be any other outcome for him?" These words deeply moved everyone, and none of them left. The precept-breaking monastic was especially moved. From then on, he single-mindedly strove to improve himself. Not only did he never steal again, but he also diligently cultivated, and later attained realization.

Therefore, non-discrimination certainly does not mean failing to distinguish black from white or right from wrong. Rather, it means unconditional great loving-kindness and great compassion based on the identity of self and others, without loving, hating, grasping, or rejecting for one's own private benefit. This is immediate perception becoming inferential knowledge, and inferential knowledge becoming immediate perception. Although immediate perception involves no discrimination, inferential knowledge still recognizes beauty and ugliness.

Our buddha-nature possesses awareness; it is not like wood or stone. Yet there must be no discrimination or clinging. If there is discrimination and clinging, this is more than a transgression of samaya: it is the seed of rebirth in the six realms and may even lead one into hell. Discrimination and clinging bring endless future troubles!

"Only those who forever abandon discrimination and clinging, give rise to their minds while abiding nowhere, can completely perceive the true meaning of all the teachings of the Tripiṭaka, without remainder."

As explained above, if one does not leave behind discrimination and clinging, one not only transgresses samaya but also creates endless future troubles. Therefore, one must "forever abandon discrimination and clinging." Even if you possess a vast family fortune, you cannot cling to it. Can you preserve it? You cannot. For you must eventually die, and after death you cannot take even a single penny with you; you still depart empty-handed.

In the end, you must let it go. Even if you are unwilling to let it go, you must do so. Why not be wiser and let it go now, thereby gaining great wisdom and great benefit? Not to mention the time of death—even now, you may not be able to keep it. Śākyamuni Buddha said that wealth is "shared by five households." It is not your own; you share it with five households.

Which five households? Water, fire, thieves, rulers, and relatives. Your possessions may be swept away by floodwaters, burned up by fire, stolen by thieves, confiscated by rulers, or contested by relatives. How can they be your own? Once any of the five households comes to take them, whether or not you are willing, you must let them go.

Therefore, let us be wiser and no longer discriminate or cling. We must "forever abandon discrimination and clinging, give rise to the mind while abiding nowhere." To be free of discrimination and clinging at all times and in all places is called "forever abandoning." When the mind does not crave or cling and the intent does not adhere or stagnate, this is called "abiding nowhere." It does not mean that the mind is like dead ashes; rather, lively wondrous functioning manifests before us. This is called "giving rise to the mind."

If this is truly so, then "one can completely perceive the true meaning of all the teachings of the Tripiṭaka, without remainder." If we can truly abide nowhere at all times and in all places, and bring forth the spiritually luminous, lively true mind of wondrous functioning, then we can thoroughly perceive the true meaning of the Buddhadharma and comprehend it without remainder.

If we engage in dead practice—"A withered tree leans against a cold cliff; through three winters, not a breath of warmth"—at most we may attain arhatship, yet we still remain within transformational birth and death. Why? Because such a person abides unmoving in a pure land beyond the three realms and dies there; this is another level of birth and death. Ordinary beings undergo segmented birth and death; arhats undergo transformational birth and death.

Therefore, we must bring forth the mind of non-abiding, the mind of boundless wondrous functioning. The Diamond Sūtra says, "Give rise to the mind while abiding nowhere." The Sixth Patriarch awakened upon hearing this. In response to the verse of Master Shenxiu: "The body is like a bodhi tree; the mind is like a bright mirror stand. Constantly polish and wipe it, and do not let it gather dust."

The Sixth Patriarch composed this verse: "Originally, bodhi has no tree, nor is the bright mirror a stand. Originally there is not a single thing; where could dust alight?" Master Shenxiu clung to existence, while the Sixth Patriarch's verse inclined toward biased emptiness. You speak of existence, and I speak of emptiness. In fact, both were partial views, so the Fifth Patriarch said, "He has not yet seen his true nature."

Some people believe that the Fifth Patriarch feared that Shenxiu's supporters would harm the Sixth Patriarch, and so deliberately made this false statement. In fact, it was not false. If it were false, why would the Fifth Patriarch have asked the Sixth Patriarch to enter the abbot's room at the third watch and then given him further instruction? The Fifth Patriarch explained the Diamond Sūtra to the Sixth Patriarch, and when he came to "Give rise to the mind while abiding nowhere," the Sixth Patriarch attained great awakening on the spot.

Ah! It turned out that self-nature is originally lively and vibrant; it is not an emptiness in which there is nothing at all, nor is it dead and motionless. The Sixth Patriarch exclaimed: "Who would have expected self-nature to be originally pure? Who would

have expected self-nature to be originally unborn and undying? Who would have expected self-nature to be originally complete in itself? Who would have expected self-nature to be originally without movement? Who would have expected self-nature to be capable of giving rise to all phenomena?"

The Sixth Patriarch said "Who would have expected" five times: he had come alive. Before this, Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch, had in fact understood biased emptiness, a dead emptiness. "Originally there is not a single thing; where could dust alight?" This emptiness had been carried to an extreme, and it too was not ultimate. The Fifth Patriarch saw that he was excellent material, so he struck the mortar three times with the staff in his hand and left, signaling for him to enter at the third watch. He then explained the Diamond Sūtra to him, causing him to awaken suddenly.

Therefore, we should not engage in dead practice but in living practice, bringing forth wondrous functioning at every moment. "He is now precisely I": all are my reflections, all are my wondrous functioning. But "I am not he": neither may we cling to wondrous functioning. We need not fear sentient beings or fear the existence of māras. These are all wondrous functioning; they are not a sheer nothingness.

Some say that the Diamond Sūtra teaches emptiness, that there is nothing at all. This is an erroneous understanding, incorrect! The Diamond Sūtra teaches boundless wondrous functioning and reveals the true mind. The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss truly exists; there is such a wonderful realm: ground of gold, lotus ponds of the seven treasures, water possessing eight virtues, and the sounds of wind and birds proclaiming the Dharma.

It is just that wonderful; of course it truly exists—how could it not? Yet it is wondrous presence, not substantial existence. Originally, it is nonexistent; it is transformed through the vow-power of Amitābha Buddha and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Lotus-Pond Ocean Assembly. Stagnant emptiness is mistaken, and substantial existence is also mistaken. True emptiness is wondrous presence: empty yet not empty, existent yet not existent; not empty yet empty, not existent yet existent.

If you can do this, you will "forever be free from discriminating attachment"; you will "give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere"; and you will "thereby thoroughly perceive, without remainder, the true meaning of all the teachings of the Tripiṭaka." The vast and boundless teachings of the Tripiṭaka and the twelve divisions of Buddhist scriptures will all be clearly understood in your mind. There is not one teaching in the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions that does not describe the true mind. Once you comprehend the true mind, you have grasped the true meaning.

You are then one of the family, no longer an outsider. Naturally, you see everything in your own home at a glance, with nothing left over. In the Tripiṭaka and twelve

divisions of scriptures, there will be nothing that you doubt or fail to understand, nothing that you cannot explain. You will know it all, with nothing remaining.

“In practice without contrivance, contemplating the mind is most essential.”

“Practice without contrivance” means effortless practice. Using the mind to cultivate the mind is effortful practice: there is a mind that engages in cultivation and a mind that intends to cultivate. Effortful practice is the initial stage; gradually one transitions to effortless practice, namely, “practice without contrivance.” In practice without contrivance, “contemplating the mind is most essential”; contemplating the mind is of greatest importance.

As we explained earlier, contemplating the mind means vigilantly watching where thoughts arise. When a thought comes, ask where it comes from; when it subsides, ask where it goes. Contemplating the mind is contemplation: observe it and keep it in view. In this way, thoughts will not arise and cease chaotically in an unceasing flow.

If you do not contemplate, deluded thoughts fly about and considerations multiply by the thousands; yet you become accustomed to this and do not feel that there is disorder. How can that do? Therefore, you must remain alert and watch them carefully. You must clearly distinguish the true mind from the deluded mind. The mind that contemplates is still the deluded mind, because it too involves stirring the mind and giving rise to thoughts.

Without the true mind, this deluded mind could not arise. The deluded mind arises from the true mind and is its wondrous functioning. While it is functioning—while you are contemplating the mind—do not discriminate whether it is the true mind or the deluded mind.

When the deluded mind is used until it no longer moves, the mind that contemplates and the thought being contemplated will simultaneously fall away. Then subject and object both vanish: the mind that contemplates and the thought contemplated are both absent. Without contemplation, subject and object cannot both vanish and you cannot break free. Therefore, you must contemplate.

Buddha-recitation is also contemplation, and also calming and contemplation. “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .” The practitioner's thoughts are gathered in by the Buddha's name, and the thoughts no longer move; this is calming. Recite for yourself and listen for yourself, hearing it with clear, distinct awareness; this is contemplation. Even without reciting aloud, if you mentally recite Amitābha Buddha and hear it clearly and distinctly, this is illumination.

Attending to the Buddha's name without mixing in other thoughts is calming; clearly seeing the Buddha's name, lucid and distinct, is contemplation. Contemplating the mind does not mean contemplating the physical heart; it means contemplating thoughts in the mind. In cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, we too contemplate the mind. During meditation, we hold the mantra: the mind recites and the ears hear, every syllable is distinctly recited and heard with clear awareness. Off the meditation cushion, we contemplate, vigilantly watching where thoughts arise, like a cat catching mice. The instant a thought arises, we see it; we do not turn with thoughts or move with circumstances. To know a thought as soon as it arises is what the Chan school calls “recognizing it.” Once it is recognized, it no longer causes trouble.

Some people say, “I was fine before I recited the Buddha's name; I had no deluded thoughts. But once I began Buddha-recitation, things became bad—my deluded thoughts became unbearable in number.” Has Buddha-recitation made things worse? No. In fact, before you recited the Buddha's name, your mind was already in great disorder; you simply did not notice it. You followed deluded thoughts and chased after circumstances, continually turning in the six realms of rebirth.

Now that you recite the Buddha's name, your mind has become quiet, and you see your deluded thoughts and the causes of saṃsāra. This is an excellent thing. It is like a room with a small hole: a ray of sunlight shines in, and you see dust flying in that beam of light. Where there is no light, you cannot see the dust.

In fact, dust is everywhere; once sunlight shines upon it, it appears. Thus, seeing thoughts is a good thing: it is the first appearance of wisdom-light. To hope that thoughts will cease arising all at once is like hoping to ascend to heaven in a single step. How could it happen so quickly? This is a common failing among students: all want to succeed at once, to become Buddhas at once. It is not so easy.

Yet it is not difficult either. Once you know the method, put it into practice—practice today, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow—and after several years of effort, you will certainly succeed. There is no such thing as succeeding all at once, or succeeding in a single day.

In cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, some people sit for two hours each day and still find it painful. After forcing themselves to sit for a few days, they cannot persist. The problem is a lack of perseverance. They then switch to casually reciting the Buddha's name: their mouths say, “Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . .,” while deluded thoughts fly about in their minds. Will that do? It is equivalent to not reciting the Buddha's name at all. It will not do.

V. View, Cultivation, Conduct, and Fruition

“Only by transcending all extreme views, attachments, and pervasive discriminations does one attain the true king among views.” (View)

All of you hold extreme views. What are extreme views? Clinging to existence and clinging to nonexistence are the extremes of existence and nonexistence; clinging to good and clinging to bad are the extremes of good and bad. There are also the extremes of long and short, right and wrong, gain and loss, emptiness and existence, and many others. Whenever there is duality, there are two extremes; all are extreme views. Extreme views are the ordinary being's dualistic views.

What is attachment? Fixating on a matter and being unable to let it go or free oneself from it is attachment. What is pervasive discrimination? It is calculating and scheming about everything, unable to let go of a single thing and wanting everything. This is what the Dharma Characteristics School calls the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment. Every ordinary being revolving in the six realms is like this; there is not one who does not calculate and contend.

Some people say that they do not want this or that. Do not believe them; in fact, they want everything. “Fish is what I desire; bear's paw is also what I desire”: they want both fish and bear's paw. If they say that there is one thing they do not want, it is only because they know that “the two cannot be had together.”

In truth, none of it can be obtained! Alas, all of this is pervasive attachment and calculation. As practitioners, we must let these things go—let go of everything. If we cannot let go, that will not do. Letting go is transcending. “Only by transcending all extreme views, attachments, and pervasive discriminations does one attain the true king among views.” Only by acting in this way does one have right view and become the king among views.

Why? Because only by doing this can one accord with our intrinsic nature. “View” means recognizing our intrinsic nature, recognizing our Original Face. If you do not “view” in this way, how can you recognize intrinsic nature? Only by letting go of, leaving behind, and transcending all extreme views, attachments, and pervasive discriminations can one truly become the king among views.

“In cultivation, only when one remains utterly undistracted in the luminous essence of one's own mind does one attain the true king among cultivation.” (Cultivation)

View, samādhi, and conduct: we have just discussed “view”; now we discuss samādhi. Samādhi is “cultivation.” “Only when one remains utterly undistracted in the luminous essence of one's own mind does one attain the true king among cultivation.” The luminous essence of one's own mind is our own intrinsic nature. Its light is boundless and its wisdom inexhaustible; therefore, it is called the luminous essence. Luminosity is inherent in our fundamental essence.

One must not be distracted in the slightest, nor be lured away from the fundamental essence of intrinsic nature by external circumstances. If you chase after circumstances and indulge in random thoughts, then you are distracted. At every moment, you must see intrinsic nature clearly and preserve it. Only then is this truly the king among cultivation.

We are all accustomed to chasing after circumstances. Only after running one hundred and eight thousand miles do we realize, “Oh! How did I follow deluded thoughts so far away? Pull back!” But by then it already feels too late. There is a Chan saying: “Do not fear the arising of thoughts; fear only awakening too late.” It tells us to remain constantly vigilant and aware, and not to turn with deluded thoughts.

If you have followed deluded thoughts for a long time and a great distance before becoming aware of it, that is not good. Thoughts may arise, but the moment one arises, I can see it. Once I see it and do not pay attention to it, it is illuminated and dissolved. To illuminate and dissolve it is to be utterly undistracted. This is truly the king among cultivation.

“In conduct, only when one abides in the luminous essence of one's own mind, without contrivance and without seeking, does one attain the true king among conduct.” (Conduct)

Conduct means putting the teaching into practice. How should one practice? “Only when one abides in the luminous essence of one's own mind, without contrivance and without seeking, does one attain the true king among conduct.” Here again, the luminous essence of one's own mind is mentioned. One must abide in this fundamental essence of boundless light and inexhaustible wisdom, “without contrivance and without seeking.” Without contrivance means not deliberately fabricating anything, but allowing everything to function naturally in accordance with conditions.

When some people cultivate a practice, they do not cultivate according to the Dharma. They are always devising clever additions of their own; this is deliberate contrivance. Without seeking means seeking nothing at all. Do not seek spiritual powers or seek to enter samādhi. The more you seek to enter samādhi, the less able you are to enter it; the more you seek spiritual powers, the less they will manifest.

This is because you have given rise to deluded thoughts, which obscure the intrinsic luminosity. “Without contrivance and without seeking” is the proper way; only thus is one the “true king among conduct.” If you do not cultivate in this way, then even if you practice diligently, you cannot realize the Way. For if you do not know what the luminous essence of your own mind is, it is like cooking rice with sand: you can never succeed.

First, you must understand what the luminous essence of your own mind is, and then safeguard it. Whether reciting the Buddha's name, holding a mantra, or contemplating, the purpose is to safeguard this luminous essence of your own mind. This is a prerequisite and is extremely important. If you apply yourself in this way, you will certainly attain accomplishment; hence it is called the “king among conduct.” If you do not know what the luminous essence of your own mind is, all your practice is blind cultivation and aimless training. You will only keep circling on the outside, never reach the center, and ultimately cannot realize the Way.”

“If we speak of the fruition of the Way, one must have no seeking and no abiding with regard to sage and ordinary person, high and low, nirvāṇa and birth and death. One must truly embody the unsurpassed principle of remaining unchanged while according with conditions, and according with conditions while remaining unchanged; being still yet ever illuminating, and illuminating yet ever still. Only when one is equal to all Buddhas is this the fruition.” (Fruition)

The Ganges Mahāmudrā continually emphasizes the three essentials of view, samādhi, and conduct. What is this for? It is for realizing the fruition of sagehood. View, samādhi, and conduct are merely the means; realizing the fruition of sagehood is the aim. “If we speak of the fruition of the Way,” that is, if we ask what counts as realizing the fruition of sagehood, then one “must have no seeking with regard to sage and ordinary person, high and low, nirvāṇa and birth and death.”

Whether sage or ordinary person, high or low, nirvāṇa or birth and death—these are all discriminations of our deluded mind. We are originally Buddhas and have never departed from the great Way.

Our fundamental essence is neither arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing. Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are without distinction. What, then, are sage and ordinary person, high and low, birth and death, and nirvāṇa? At the ultimate point, these opposites do not exist. What is there still to seek? When one truly realizes the fundamental essence, there are no sages and no ordinary people. Sages and ordinary beings are one body; all are the original luminous self-nature.

Since there are no sages and no ordinary people, what high or low could there be? There is no “I am above and you are below,” or “you are above and I am below.” There is no arrogance or conceit. Everyone is equally such; high and low are originally unobtainable.

Nir means not arising, and vāṇa means not ceasing. Since the fundamental essence has never arisen or ceased, what nirvāṇa is there to speak of? And if there is no nirvāṇa, what birth and death could there be? Thus, there is originally no birth and death; is it not superfluous to speak further of transcending birth and death?

Fundamentally, none of these things exists, so what is there to pursue? Hence it is said, “all are without seeking.”

“No abiding”: true nirvāṇa is “nirvāṇa without abiding anywhere.” We have discussed before that there are four kinds of nirvāṇa. First, nirvāṇa of self-nature. Self-nature is our true mind; it is originally neither arising nor ceasing, originally nirvāṇa. Second, nirvāṇa with remainder. This is realized by the sages of the Lesser Vehicle, who have not yet ended transformational birth and death; hence it is called “with remainder.” Third, nirvāṇa without remainder.

Transformational birth and death, too, has been ended, and all things have vanished. This is the nirvāṇa realized by the Buddha according to the teachings of the Lesser Vehicle. Fourth, nirvāṇa without abiding anywhere. Even Buddha is unobtainable; only this is true nirvāṇa. This is what is meant by “birth and death and nirvāṇa are equally like flowers in empty space.”

At this point, anything may be present and one may be anywhere—there is nothing that is not present and nowhere one cannot be. “What has always been true is delusion, and now all delusions are true. If one merely returns to the nature as it originally was, not a single dharma is new.” With no abiding, not even abiding in nirvāṇa, one can abide everywhere.

We discussed earlier: after parinirvāṇa, where does one take rebirth? In the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the Eastern Pure Lapis Lazuli World, or the Inner Court of Tuṣita? “One should give rise to the mind without abiding anywhere.” To abide somewhere is already mistaken. The Buddha is fundamentally without characteristics, accords with all conditions, and constantly accommodates sentient beings. The Buddha goes along with sentient beings: wherever there are affinities, there the Buddha goes to liberate sentient beings, without any fixed dwelling place.

Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva does not take birth in the Pure Land, but liberates sentient beings in the hells: “Until the hells are empty, I vow not to attain Buddhahood.” Do you think Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva has not attained Buddhahood? Do you think Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva is not in the Pure Land? In truth, the hells are originally empty. Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva attained Buddhahood long ago and is always, everywhere, within the Pure Land. To sentient beings, it is hell, because they have minds of hell—the minds in which greed, anger, and ignorance blaze fiercely. Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva has no mind of hell; everywhere is the Pure Land.

“No abiding” means “truly embodying the unsurpassed principle of remaining unchanged while according with conditions, and according with conditions while remaining unchanged.” To accord with conditions while remaining unchanged is to accord with the conditions of all sentient beings. If sentient beings are in heaven, I

go to heaven; if sentient beings are in hell, I go to hell. Whether ascending to heaven or entering hell, one's intrinsic nature remains unchanged.

Going to heaven does not add even a fraction or make it a fraction purer; entering hell does not diminish it even a fraction or make it a fraction more defiled. Gold, for example, may according to conditions be made into rings, necklaces, or bracelets. Its forms may change according to conditions, but gold's fundamental essence does not change: gold remains gold.

According with conditions while remaining unchanged means that although the fundamental essence of gold does not change, its forms can change. This is precisely wondrous functioning; the true mind fully possesses immeasurable wondrous functions. Remaining unchanged while according with conditions is the fundamental essence; according with conditions while remaining unchanged is wondrous functioning. "Being still yet ever illuminating, and illuminating yet ever still": stillness means being tranquilly unmoving; the fundamental essence is tranquilly unmoving. Illumination illuminates all phenomena; the ability to illuminate all phenomena is wondrous functioning.

This, too, concerns the fundamental essence and wondrous functioning. We discussed awareness-illumination earlier: at all times one must remain awakened and alert, and not be carried away by circumstances. Later, however, even awareness must be relinquished. As long as there is awareness to maintain, there is contrivance. Only without contrivance can it be called non-contrivance. When practice has matured, there is no need deliberately to raise awareness-illumination; it arises naturally.

Not deliberately raising awareness-illumination is stillness; naturally being aware and illuminating is illumination. This is "being still yet ever illuminating." What does "illuminating yet ever still" mean? Although wondrous functioning is manifest, the fundamental essence remains thusness itself, unmoving. Only when practice reaches this point can it be said to have come home. If awareness-illumination still remains as something one maintains, one has not yet come home. Yet one cannot become like this all at once; one must always pass through the stage of deliberately raising awareness-illumination.

Be aware and illuminate, again and again; illuminate until it becomes thoroughly familiar. It is like a person in the air who forgets that there is air. "It is like entering a room of fragrant orchids: after smelling their scent for a long time, one no longer notices it." One becomes wholly assimilated and forgets it.

Like all Buddhas, "remain unchanged while according with conditions, and accord with conditions while remaining unchanged"; like all Buddhas, "be still yet ever illuminating, and illuminate yet ever still." This is to be equal to all Buddhas. "Only

when one is equal to all Buddhas is this the fruition": only then does one count as having realized fruition. When we begin to apply ourselves, we must know what our intrinsic nature is.

After knowing our intrinsic nature, we must constantly observe the mind and maintain awareness-illumination. By practicing in this way, we can realize Buddhahood. If we neither maintain awareness-illumination nor practice, how can we realize fruition? It is impossible to ascend to heaven in a single step; no one is born a Buddha. For ignorance still remains, and one is always attached to characteristics.

As soon as an infant has awareness, it knows that its body is important; it, too, has strong selfishness. If it has something, it will not give it to you; if you take it, it cries and fusses. This is all because of ignorance. Therefore, to realize the fruition of the Way, one must begin by opening right understanding and right view.

The first step: "Pa!"—the original nature suddenly opens up. Ah! This is my self-nature! The second step is to apply oneself at all times and in all places to safeguard it. The third step is realization of fruition. If today you can truly recognize your self-nature and then engage in Buddha-recitation, you will certainly receive great benefit. At this point, Buddha-recitation differs from how you practiced it before.

Previously, when reciting the Buddha's name, you did not know what "recitation" was; you knew only to seek toward the West. Now you understand: Ah! Each recitation of the Buddha's name is a recitation of my self-nature, making my own mind pure. "Amitābha Buddha, Amitābha Buddha . . ." Sweep away all the defilement in your own mind; uproot all its attachments and afflictions. Then Buddha-recitation brings genuine benefit. Therefore, opening right understanding and right view is extremely important; view comes first. Only when the view is right can one attain right samādhi, and only then does the practice of the Dharma count as right conduct.

VI. The Necessity of Practice

"No-thought is not indeterminate blankness (which is beginningless ignorance)."

"No-thought" is not indeterminate blankness. What is indeterminate blankness? It is being like wood or stone, without a single thought—the so-called "blank emptiness of indeterminacy." This blank emptiness of indeterminacy is the "cessation of feeling and perception": feeling and perception are extinguished, one receives no information whatsoever from the external world, and all mental activity has ceased.

Blank emptiness of indeterminacy is "beginningless ignorance." It is not a good thing, so do not regard it as one. Some people pursue it and worship it.

“Oh my, so-and-so’s practice is excellent—he can enter samādhi and remain unmoving for a week!” “Why, so-and-so’s practice is even better—he has not moved for an entire month!” “Goodness, so-and-so has already been sitting for three years!” These are all blank emptiness of indeterminacy. Even if you could enter samādhi for eighty-four thousand kalpas, at most you would attain the samādhi of the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception. That is still worldly dhyāna, still within the cycle of rebirth in the six realms; it is not liberation.

To become a Buddha is to become a living Buddha, lively and active in manifesting flexible, wondrous functioning. It is not to sit there motionlessly like a corpse. What use is it to sit there motionlessly like a corpse?

During the Tang dynasty, Dharma Master Xuanzang traveled to India to seek the scriptures. When he reached the region of the Himalayas, he saw purple clouds forming a canopy over a mountain and knew that someone must be cultivating the Way in its mountains. So everyone went searching.

There had originally been a cave in the mountain, but after many years trees had fallen and grass had grown, concealing it. They searched and searched. Suddenly, someone noticed what seemed to be a cave and tried digging there. They dug in and found that it was indeed a cave, with a person sitting inside. Xuanzang’s disciples said, “This person is dead. Look—he is cold as ice, with only skin wrapped around a skeletal frame.”

Dharma Master Xuanzang felt his chest and found it still slightly warm. This showed that he was not dead: his eighth consciousness had not yet departed. The eighth consciousness is the consciousness of warmth and life-span; the slight warmth in his chest showed that his life-span remained. Dharma Master Xuanzang struck a qing chime, and the practitioner emerged from samādhi. Opening his eyes, he saw Xuanzang and exclaimed, “Ah! The Buddha has come to teach me the Dharma!”

He had sat there waiting for Śākyamuni Buddha to appear in the world and teach him the Dharma. Thus, on seeing Dharma Master Xuanzang, he thought Śākyamuni Buddha had come to guide and liberate him. Dharma Master Xuanzang said, “I am not Śākyamuni Buddha. Śākyamuni Buddha entered parinirvāṇa many years ago.”

Śākyamuni Buddha appeared in the world around the time of King Zhao of the Zhou dynasty, whereas Tang Xuanzang lived during the reign of Li Shimin of the Tang dynasty; a very long time had already passed. The practitioner wept: “Alas! I missed the opportunity. I was waiting for Śākyamuni Buddha to appear in the world and liberate me, never imagining that the Buddha had already entered parinirvāṇa.”

Dharma Master Xuanzang said, “Do not weep. Śākyamuni Buddha’s Dharma is still here. I am going to the Buddha-land to obtain the true scriptures, and in the future I

will return to Zhendan and greatly revitalize the Buddhadharma."

"This body of yours is no longer of use. You have sat for more than a thousand years in meditation (he had entered samādhi for more than a thousand years, not merely three or five years), and it can no longer be used. Change to another body. Quickly go to Zhendan and be reborn there. When you grow up, it will be time for me to return as well. You must be reborn in a place of lofty mansions and glazed-tile roofs; do not go to a small place."

The practitioner then went to be reborn, entering the household of Yuchi Gong and becoming a young prince (Yuchi Gong's nephew). Once this practitioner entered samādhi, he remained there for more than a thousand years. His practice must have been quite good, must it not? No! This cessation of feeling and perception is of no use. It is like moving a stone onto grass: once the stone is removed, the grass grows again, even more vigorously.

After he grew up, he became attached to appearances and indulged in sexual misconduct. He caused a great calamity and was imprisoned in the Imperial Ancestral Temple, where he was to be beheaded. Yuchi Gong was a meritorious official, and his family had been enfeoffed as princes. When a prince was to be executed, he was first imprisoned in the Imperial Ancestral Temple. But if he became a monastic, he could avoid execution, so he had no choice but to become a monk.

Yet he still wanted to take women, musicians, fine food, and amusements with him. These things filled three large carts. People mockingly called him the "Three-Cart Monk." Later, Dharma Master Xuanzang awakened him to his previous life, and he suddenly came to his senses, abandoning all "three carts." He was Dharma Master Kuiji, Xuanzang's foremost disciple. He later attained a high degree of realization and became the second patriarch of the Dharma Characteristics School.

Therefore, we must practice with lively responsiveness. Sitting there rigidly and lifelessly is of no use. True samādhi is not being deluded when encountering circumstances. No matter what happens, my mind does not become disturbed; whatever woman may appear before me, my mind does not stir; no amount of treasure can move my mind. This is true samādhi.

If the mind stirs upon encountering circumstances and one then suppresses it, that is still not true samādhi; the mind of arising and ceasing remains. Why does a first-fruit arhat still undergo seven births in heaven and seven births among humans? It is because the mind of arising and ceasing still remains. When a thought comes, one immediately becomes alert and at once extinguishes it—this too is a mind of arising and ceasing. Where there is arising and ceasing, one must return seven times to the human and heavenly realms. In our practice, we must do genuine work, protecting

the true mind at all times and in all places so that it is not lost. No-thought does not mean blankness or indeterminate consciousness. It is extremely important to understand this clearly.

“Further, it differs from ordinary people outside the path.”

It differs further from non-Buddhists and ordinary beings. Seeking the Dharma outside the mind is the non-Buddhist path. Non-Buddhists also value no-thought, but their no-thought is lifeless. The qigong cultivated by ordinary people has not departed from attachment, though they too speak of no-thought. Their no-thought is even less genuine no-thought.

They are attached to qi: now it goes to the baihui point, then to the dantian, then again to the yongquan point; there are the great and small circulations, and so forth. Can such things be called no-thought? Therefore, the no-thought of which we speak differs from the no-thought of non-Buddhists and ordinary beings and has nothing whatever to do with their practices.

“From non-awareness comes initial awakening. Initial awakening is the child light born from fundamental awakening, and it merges with the mother light.”

All of us practice by proceeding “from non-awareness to initial awakening.” Formerly we were not awakened; through entering the Way and cultivating practice, we begin to awaken. I am now teaching the Dharma in the hope that you will begin to awaken. The light of wisdom emitted by initial awakening “is the child light born from fundamental awakening.” Fundamental awakening is our buddha-nature.

Fundamental awakening is the “mother light,” while initial awakening is the “child light.” The child light is born of the mother light, just as a mother gives birth to a child. “And it merges with the mother light” means that initial awakening merges with fundamental awakening. When child and mother unite, one realizes the Way; when they do not unite, one cannot realize the Way.

One must contemplate continually and not become attached to external circumstances. This is the process by which initial awakening merges with fundamental awakening. When initial awakening and fundamental awakening merge into one, child and mother unite. For example, in cultivating the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, the fourth mudrā is the “Tathāgata Mother Mudrā.” The mother can give birth to the child; when child and mother unite, one thereby realizes the great Way.

The Pure Land school teaches likewise: “The Tathāgatas of the ten directions cherish sentient beings as a mother remembers her child. If the child flees, what use is the mother’s remembrance? But if the child remembers the mother just as the mother remembers the child, then throughout life after life mother and child will not be

separated by any distance." These were the words of Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva. When we engage in Buddha-recitation, the Buddha is the mother and we are the children. The Buddha is always guiding us at every moment.

If the child remembers the mother just as the mother remembers the child, then mother and child unite, and realization of the Way comes swiftly. The Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions of the teachings all issue from the same source. One must grasp this central guiding principle. If one truly understands it, one can penetrate the Tripiṭaka and twelve divisions of the teachings. If one does not grasp this central guiding principle and instead takes passages out of context, everything becomes fragmented and one will not know where to turn. Therefore, seeing one's true nature at all times is most essential.

"Though the school of direct seeing is established, realization is still impossible without cultivation."

Although we have established the school of direct seeing, possess correct understanding, and clearly know what intrinsic nature is, knowing that only cultivation based on this intrinsic nature enables one to realize the Way, this does not mean that cultivation is unnecessary. Can one realize the Way without practicing it? No. Thus it is said, "realization is still impossible without cultivation"; this does not mean that one can realize the Way without cultivation.

"Gold-bearing sand possesses the nature of gold, but it is not yet gold itself. It must undergo the work of smelting and refining."

Gold-bearing sand is sand containing gold—that is, a gold-bearing mineral deposit. "Gold-bearing sand possesses the nature of gold" means that, in essence, it contains gold and has the quality of gold. "But it is not yet gold itself" means that although it contains gold, it is not yet wholly pure gold; it is still mixed with impurities such as sand.

"It must undergo the work of smelting and refining" means that it must undergo a process of smelting and refining to remove impurities such as sand before it can become pure gold.

By analogy, although all sentient beings, like gold-bearing sand, possess the wisdom and virtuous characteristics of the Tathāgata and fully possess buddha-nature, like possessing the nature of gold, they still have ignorance, deluded thoughts, and attachments. They are not Buddhas at the fruition stage. In other words, although sentient beings possess buddha-nature, they are not yet Buddhas, just as gold-bearing sand is not yet gold itself.

They must undergo a process of cultivation—the work of smelting and refining—suddenly breaking through ignorance and then completely removing deluded thoughts and attachments before they can become Buddhas. This passage uses the refining of gold ore as an analogy to emphasize the importance of cultivation. How should one cultivate? Read on.

VII. The Three Gates of Cultivation

“The three gates of cultivation: bodily cultivation means abandoning all activities, such as worldly affairs that bring no benefit and other supramundane practices, and simply remaining at ease and unencumbered, allowing the body to abide in tranquility.”

The three gates of cultivation refer to bodily cultivation, verbal cultivation, and mental cultivation. Esoteric Buddhism emphasizes the empowerment of the three mysteries, namely body, speech, and mind. The three gates of cultivation likewise refer to body, speech, and mind. First is “bodily cultivation,” a method of cultivation founded on this body of flesh and blood.

“Abandoning all activities” means staying away from all kinds of activities. “Such as worldly affairs that bring no benefit” refers to things in this world that are of no benefit—for example, playing mahjong. It brings no benefit and squanders, wastes, precious time.

Perhaps quite a few among you enjoy playing mahjong. You may even use “one person short of four” as an excuse, gathering four people together every day for several rounds of play. This will not do. One must not engage in unbeneficial activities. Not doing unbeneficial worldly things is itself cultivation—bodily cultivation.

“And other supramundane practices” means that there are many methods of supramundane cultivation, but it will not do to practice one today and another tomorrow. One must go deeply into a single gate, uphold one Dharma method, and cultivate it through to the end. Today one hears Zhang San say that this method is good and practices it; tomorrow one hears Li Si say that another method is good and goes off to practice that one.

In this way, changing from one thing to another, even though the practices are all wondrous supramundane dharmas, one will gain no result, because the mind is not single-minded and cannot accord with the wondrous Dharma. Moreover, many methods are unbeneficial. For example, there is a mantra by which one can bore a hole through a knife. This is an unbeneficial method, of no benefit for liberation. Seeing that one can bore a hole through a knife, one becomes delighted: “Good, I will practice this method.” What use is practicing it?

I once heard a monk speak of the circumstances that led him to leave home. Before becoming a monastic, he practiced martial arts, learning boxing and swordsmanship from his maternal uncle. One day, at the border of Sichuan, he saw two young Tibetan lamas smoking opium.

He could not stand the sight and intervened: “Hey! You are monastics—how can you smoke opium?” The young lamas said, “Do not judge us merely because we smoke opium; we have magical abilities.” He asked, “What magical abilities do you have?” Seeing that he carried a knife, the young lama said, “Strike me with the knife you carry. Once I recite a mantra, you will be unable to cut me.”

Hearing this, he found it very strange and quickly asked, “Is there really such a method?” The young lama replied, “Of course. If you do not believe it, try it. But first wait until I have finished smoking my opium.” After a while, he had finished smoking. “Come, I will recite the mantra, and you strike.” In fact, the man did not dare truly to cut him. The knife was very sharp, and if he severed the lama’s hand, it would be difficult to deal with the consequences.

He struck with the back of the knife, and the knife sprang back. “Oh! How did you make my knife bounce back?” The young lama said, “I would not be afraid even if you struck with the blade.” “You really are not afraid?” “Of course not.” “If it is cut off, I will not take responsibility!” “You need not take responsibility. Just strike.”

This time he truly struck with the blade, and the knife again sprang back. He was convinced and thought, “The Buddhadharma is truly remarkable—better even than the martial arts I practice.” This was the circumstance through which he began studying the Buddhadharma. Yet this was actually an unbeneficial method; there is no use in learning it.”

“Simply abide with the body at ease and open.” This means allowing the body to abide in ease and openness, without any hindrance—not tense or busily occupied. The Heart Sūtra says: “Because there is no hindrance, there is no fear. Far removed from inverted deluded thoughts, one ultimately attains nirvāṇa.” Where there is hindrance, there will be fear and inverted deluded thoughts.

Without hindrance, the mind is empty, and one’s heart becomes open and level. Thus, “The noble person is open and at ease; the petty person is ever anxious.” Petty people are always calculating gains and losses, continually anxious and unable to get through the day; noble people are broad-minded, open, at ease, and free. Please note: allowing the body to abide in ease and openness is cultivation of the body. If one is constantly calculating gains and losses inwardly, then one is not in accord with this.

When one is at ease and open, allowing the body to abide, the mind is free of afflictions and concerns, always calm, peaceful, relaxed, and joyful. Then the body will be healthy, and illness will seldom arise. Only by abiding in the world in this way can one apply oneself to cultivating the Dharma. This is cultivation of the body.

“Cultivation of speech: cease all useless worldly talk and mantra recitation; be quiet as a valley.”

The second of the three gates of cultivation is cultivation of speech: cultivation in the sphere of speaking and conversation.

Telling jokes, flattering someone, disparaging some matter, and so forth—such idle worldly talk is of no benefit to the path of liberation; it is all useless worldly speech. Arguing over the rights and wrongs or merits and faults of particular people and matters is even more frivolous discourse. In the Black Teaching of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism, there are many mantras that are not for cultivating the path of liberation but for controlling others; these are useless mantra recitations.

Do not speak of or recite such things. “All useless worldly talk and mantra recitation should cease.” As we study the Buddhadharma and cultivate the path of liberation, we must enter deeply through one gate; we should not blindly meddle with other things. Do not speak useless worldly words, nor recite useless mantras or liturgical services.

We should achieve the “three reductions”: few concerns in the mind, few words in the mouth, and little food in the stomach. People have a bad habit: once they have finished their work and have a little free time, they chatter endlessly about Zhang San, Li Si, and Wang Ermazi. That will not do for cultivating the path of liberation.

Is it not perfectly good to remain quietly silent? “Quiet as a valley” means not speaking too much, while inwardly remaining calm and quiet, like a secluded empty valley. “In the deep valley, echoes speak amid the evening mist.” If you have a question and ask me, I will answer you in full detail and without weariness; but when there is no question, I do not engage in discriminating thought. I simply leave the mind open and empty—“The great void drinks in light and dissolves all estrangement.”

“Cultivation of mind: leave behind frivolous theorizing, calculation, and comparative thoughts; even intentional visualization should cease. (Precisely when mind is applied, there is precisely no mind to apply.)”

The third of the three gates of cultivation is cultivation of mind: cultivation in the sphere of thought and consciousness.

What use is there in clinging inwardly to a whole set of empty theories unrelated to the path of liberation? Analyzing and inferring them is “frivolous theorizing”; pondering and evaluating them is “calculation.” One should “leave behind frivolous theorizing, calculation, and comparative thoughts.” Let the mind be empty and pure, far removed from frivolous theorizing and calculation, and further removed from comparative thoughts.

One compares everything—but what is there to compare? Am I better, or are you better? Am I superior, or are you superior? Such intentions lack equanimity; they are precisely deluded discriminatory thoughts. These “comparative thoughts” must all the more be left behind.

“Even intentional visualization should cease.” Visualization is a method of practice, as we mentioned earlier. To imagine some object is still contrived cultivation. For example, in “visualized Buddha-remembrance,” one imagines Amitābha Buddha above one’s head and contemplates oneself as Amitābha Buddha. All visualization is intentional activity: it deliberately sets thought and consciousness in motion.

Even this visualization and intentional activity must cease. It is enough simply to contemplate well: the moment a thought arises, see it; once it is seen, do not attend to it or follow it. Visualization is a gradual method. After visualization has succeeded, one must further apply oneself to dissolve the image that has been formed; only then can one see one’s true nature.

My teacher, Master Wang Xianglu, offered an analogy for this. Suppose a large area of sores breaks out on the body and medicine is used to treat them. The sores then draw together, draw together, and draw together again, until finally they contract into a small opening, and eventually into a single point. Everywhere else has healed, and only this one point remains. This illustrates successful visualization.

Yet this one point is still a sore! If it is not removed, it will recur later. Therefore, one must go a step further and dissolve the image formed through visualization. Only then can one settle the matter once and for all, and only then does one truly realize the dharmakāya. If the image is not dissolved, true nature cannot manifest. Thus, the method of visualization requires crossing one additional threshold.

All form-based esoteric practice requires crossing one additional threshold: in the end, the image must be dissolved. How is it dissolved? One must further apply oneself, visualizing the image as large—larger, larger, until it becomes boundless and infinite; then the image disappears. Conversely, visualize it as small—smaller, smaller, until nothing at all remains.

One method enlarges it, the other reduces it; in this way the image is dissolved. Once the image has been dissolved, one sees true nature—but only after crossing

one additional threshold. Mahāmudrā is the most direct Mahāyāna Mind-Ground Dharma Gate and does not require these processes. Hence it says, “Even intentional visualization should cease.” Mahāmudrā does not follow this path or cross these successive thresholds. The moment a thought arises, see it; once it is seen, do not attend to it. Simply safeguard the true mind.

The sentence in parentheses is taken from a verse by Chan Master Niutou Farong, also known as Lanrong, and serves as an annotation to “cultivation of mind.” Chan Master Niutou Farong’s verse is excellent, and everyone likes to quote it. Most quote these four lines: “Precisely when mind is applied, there is precisely no mind to apply; when no mind is precisely applied, constant application is precisely absent.”

The complete verse has eight lines: “Precisely when mind is applied, there is precisely no mind to apply. To discuss names and characteristics in roundabout ways is laborious; to speak directly entails no cumbersome burden. When no mind is precisely applied, constant application is precisely absent. Now, in speaking of the place of no mind, it is no different from mind.” When one is applying oneself in practice, yet finds no thought arising, this is “Precisely when mind is applied, there is precisely no mind to apply.”

To discourse in roundabout ways on Buddhist names and characteristics is tiring and laborious; to point directly to the source of mind and say nothing superfluous is neither so cumbersome nor so burdensome. This is: “To discuss names and characteristics in roundabout ways is laborious; to speak directly entails no cumbersome burden.”

The great Way is formless, and the true mind is without characteristics. Though formless and without characteristics, it functions everywhere and at all times. Although all things and events are its wondrous functioning, when one seeks its very substance, it cannot be found at all. This is: “When no mind is precisely applied, constant application is precisely absent.” Now that we directly point out and speak of this “no mind,” it is no different from “mind”: “In speaking of the place of no mind, it is no different from mind.”

VIII. Immediately Realizing the Path of Unsurpassed Perfect Awakening

“From the crown of the head to the soles of the feet, be empty as a bamboo tube. Let the mind be equal to empty space, transcending all discrimination; leave behind dullness, agitation, and indeterminate blankness, and bring forth equanimity, sustained concentration, lucidity, and quiescence. With spiritual clarity free from grasping, rejecting, and attachment, abide in the originally wondrous, luminous, and pure essential nature. This is Mahāmudrā samādhi.”

“From the crown of the head to the soles of the feet, be empty as a bamboo tube” means that from the top of the head to beneath the feet, one is empty like a bamboo tube: the entire body and mind contain not a single thing. Consider a bamboo tube: place it on water and it drifts with the current; when it bends, it bends with it. Whether high or low, sinking or floating, it does not concern itself. If a wave strikes it down, it immediately rises again, sinking and floating with conditions. A person accomplished in practice is like this: “Freely adapting to conditions, let oneself sink or float at will; transformed into spring mud, one protects the multitude of blossoms.”

“Let the mind be equal to empty space, transcending all discrimination” means that one’s heart should be as vast as empty space, making no distinction between beauty and ugliness and able to contain everything. Empty space contains all things. When towering buildings are erected, empty space does not say that it cannot contain them. When houses are demolished, empty space does not become any more spacious; when houses are enlarged, empty space does not become cramped.

When airplanes fly overhead, empty space does not concern itself. When dark clouds mass and lightning flashes and thunder roars, empty space has never changed its expression; it does not mind. Our true mind has always been like empty space and has never moved. Now that we recognize the true mind, we must let “the mind be equal to empty space, transcending all discrimination.” Whatever happens, I remain unconcerned.

Empty space can contain all things, and so can I. The worlds of the ten directions are within empty space, and the worlds of the ten directions are also within my mind. Nirvāṇa is non-abiding; one can go anywhere and is not confined to a single place. Let the heart be as vast as empty space, as broad as empty space, as non-abiding as empty space, and as unattached as empty space.

Empty space is not without things, yet it has no hindrance at all. To “transcend all discrimination” is to go beyond and cut off every thought of discrimination, grasping, and rejection. Discrimination, grasping, and rejection are all deluded thoughts; all deluded thoughts must be cut off.

“Leave behind dullness, agitation, and indeterminate blankness, and bring forth equanimity, sustained concentration, lucidity, and quiescence.” To leave behind means to depart from them. Dullness means torpor and drowsiness. “When the lazy ox takes to the road, it has many sleepy affairs”: like a lazy ox, it does not become sleepy when it is off the road, but once it sets out, it begins to doze. Some people are fine when they are not sitting in meditation, but once they sit, they become drowsy and sleep with a loud snore.

Agitation means restlessness and an abundance of deluded thoughts. One sits there with thoughts rising and falling chaotically. It is absolutely impossible to practice effectively in this way. We must avoid dullness and agitation, but we must also not fall into indeterminate blankness. Indeterminate blankness means that even right mindfulness is absent, as if one were a piece of wood or stone; that will not do either. One must be clearly aware, with right mindfulness bright and present. We often speak of contemplating the mind, contemplating the mind: one must keep it under contemplation and not fall into indeterminate blankness. Right mindfulness must still be present.

“Equal” means balanced, and “maintain” means to sustain evenly. Alert clarity is contemplation; it is wisdom. Quiescence is cessation; it is samādhi. What is called “equally maintaining samādhi and wisdom” means that quiescence and alert clarity are balanced, with neither higher nor lower. It is not that alert clarity is greater and quiescence less, or that quiescence is greater and alert clarity less; they are equal in measure and maintained evenly. It is both clearly discerning and serenely unmoving; it is both serenely unmoving and clearly discerning. Samādhi and wisdom are one entity: within samādhi there is wisdom, and within wisdom there is samādhi. Only because they are one entity can they be maintained equally.

“Spiritually luminous, without grasping, rejecting, or attachment.” The true mind is spiritually luminous: its numinous light shines alone, far transcending the sense faculties and their objects; its numinous light illumines in quiescence, clearly and distinctly. There is no grasping, no rejecting, and still less any attachment. It is nimble and lucid, like trying to catch a gourd floating on water: catch it on the left and it turns left; catch it on the right and it turns right; one can never catch hold of it. Earlier, it was compared to “empty like a bamboo tube.” Like a gourd, a bamboo tube floating on water is incomparably nimble and luminous, and cannot be grasped. Only when there is no grasping, rejecting, or attachment can there be spiritual luminosity. Grasping, rejecting, and attachment must all be completely let go.

“Abiding in the inherently wondrous, luminous, and pure essence is the samādhi of Mahāmudrā.” Where does one abide? One abides in the “inherently wondrous, luminous, and pure essence.” The true mind is inherently boundless in wondrous functioning, inherently immeasurable in luminosity, and inherently pure and undefiled. This is the essence of the true mind. To abide in the true mind’s original essence is precisely “non-abiding.”

Because the true mind’s original essence has no form or appearance, how can one abide in what is formless? One abides without abiding—this is the samādhi of Mahāmudrā. Nowadays people often speak of Mahāmudrā. What is Mahāmudrā? The true mind’s original essence is Mahāmudrā. Have you all understood clearly? Do

not ask again how Mahāmudrā forms a mudrā—whether it is with the left hand or the right hand. The true mind's original essence is Mahāmudrā. Boundless in wondrous functioning, immeasurable in luminosity, pure and undefiled: abiding without abiding is the samādhi of Mahāmudrā.

"Practice constantly in this way, and then, suddenly in an instant, it will be as though a lamp were lit in a dark room: light fills the space."

What I have just explained are the three gates of cultivation through body, speech, and mind. "Practice constantly in this way": if you practice in this way continually, you will suddenly come alive in a marvelous manner. "Suddenly in an instant, it will be as though a lamp were lit in a dark room: light fills the space." In an instant, it is as though a lamp suddenly lights up in a dark room. The mind's intrinsic luminosity reveals itself, and everything becomes brilliantly clear.

What is this? This is awakening: the bottom drops out of the bucket, and one's original nature opens forth. A great treasury of luminosity has opened; the mind's light shines brightly throughout heaven and earth, and the worlds of the ten directions are complete within your mind. Before reaching this point, even if there is some awakening, it can only be called "a crack opening in the mind." With only a single ray of light, it does not yet count.

When one reaches this point, it is like a great explosion: with a "boom," empty space shatters, the great earth sinks away, and person, self, and world all vanish without remainder. When will this happen? One cannot know. When the time and conditions arrive, it suddenly breaks free with a "snap." There is no fixed place; it need not happen anywhere in particular.

Must it happen at home? Must it happen while sitting in meditation? Not necessarily. Sometimes it happens on the road, sometimes in a public place, and sometimes in dreams. It may manifest in any of these situations. When practice has matured and the time and conditions have arrived, it manifests naturally. This is called "when the water arrives, the channel is formed."

When water flows in, the channel naturally comes to completion. Without water, the channel cannot be said to be complete. You need only continue practicing in this way; when the time and conditions arrive, it will suddenly come. This "suddenly" is extremely important: it does not mean some specified time.

If there were a specified time, you would develop a mind of waiting. You must not "wait for awakening with the mind." You cannot wait for awakening. As soon as a waiting mind arises, things go wrong: it will never come, and you will never attain awakening.

Those of us who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma must take note: do not count your sessions! Do not keep saying, “I have already sat several hundred sessions; how many more until I reach a thousand?” Do not count them. Quickly let this go. Counting the number of times will not do; this is a waiting mind, and it is unacceptable. The experience of breaking free erupts suddenly. When practice has matured, it will naturally erupt.

Do not have a waiting mind; simply practice diligently. When you hear me say “boom,” do not think it is like hearing thunder. It is not. It is only a kind of inner experience: you feel a “boom,” but others cannot hear it. The most important thing is to practice well. If you practice, it will naturally come; if you do not practice, it will not come. If you anticipate it and wait for it, with this waiting mind, it will not come either.

“The self-nature of nirvāṇa and the wisdom-light of innate original awakening manifest in their entirety. One immediately realizes the path of unsurpassed right awakening.”

What is “the self-nature of nirvāṇa”? It is the self-nature that is originally neither arising nor ceasing.

“The wisdom-light of innate original awakening.” Innate means arising simultaneously with our life. Original awakening means being awakened from the very beginning; it does not begin to awaken only at some particular time. The wisdom-light of innate original awakening is the luminous wisdom inherently possessed by one’s own mind, present from the very beginning.

“Manifest in their entirety” means that they manifest completely, without the slightest concealment; that is, one sees and realizes them directly. Now, when I speak and you listen, the teaching enters through your ears, through the gate of the ear faculty. “What enters through a gate is not a family treasure.” You must realize this point for yourself. With a “snap,” your original nature opens forth, and you directly realize it for yourself once—only then does it count.

“One immediately realizes the path of unsurpassed right awakening”: one immediately realizes the supreme path of right awakening—unsurpassed complete, perfect awakening. At this time, you will know that talk of birth and death, discussion of nirvāṇa, whether something is thorough or not, ultimate or not—all of it is mere empty elaboration! At this time, you can manifest in person to teach the Dharma and, for sentient beings with whom you have affinity, “cause them all to enter nirvāṇa without remainder and thereby liberate them.”

All of you! Apply yourselves! Press forward diligently! Practice diligently! Press forward diligently!