

Right View Is the First Essential for Buddhist Practice

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The first requirement in studying Buddhism is right view. What do we study Buddhism for? First set the goal right, then plan how to begin, what to study, and how to practice, so that one may perhaps attain the anticipated result. The ancients said: "If the causal ground is not correct, the result will be distorted."

That is, at the initial causal stage of studying Buddhism, one must first clearly understand why one is studying Buddhism. If this is not understood, the eventual result will not be complete. Not only will one take detours in practice, but there is also the danger of straying onto a wrong path. Therefore, right view is the foremost matter in studying Buddhism.

Last time, we discussed at length how practice can lead to realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature, how to safeguard it after seeing one's nature, and then how to let it function freely. Yet everyone still does not understand this very well. Thus, when someone says seemingly miraculous things to people who do not practice the true Dharma, they are easily drawn away.

In this present age, demonic teachings run rampant. Who knows how many evil people use all manner of tricks to deceive others, extort money, and lead them onto wrong paths. Therefore, one's view must above all be correct, lest one be deceived. This is extremely important. Today we shall again discuss the importance of right view.

There are many different kinds of views. Today, taking as our basis this article in the magazine Chan—"The Relationship Between Chan and Esoteric Buddhism"—we shall briefly discuss the respective views of the Chan school and Esoteric Buddhism,

whether their methods of practice are the same, and whether the results they realize are the same.

Besides the five kinds of views taught in Buddhism, there is the view of ordinary beings. The view of ordinary beings is the attachment to all things as truly existent, as if everything truly and concretely exists. Thus, people seek and grasp outwardly, pursuing things with insatiable greed. They thereby create karma, undergo karmic retribution, and remain unable to transcend birth and death. This is the view of ordinary beings. In studying Buddhism, we must relinquish this view.

In Buddhism, there are five kinds of views:

The first is the human and deva view. One knows that there is cause and effect, that one should do good and not do evil, help others, and sacrifice oneself. But one does not know how to study Buddhism or how to practice the Dharma. This is the human and deva vehicle. It can preserve one's human rebirth and may also enable one to be reborn in heaven and enjoy blessings in the heavenly realms.

The second is the arhat view. Such people also know cause and effect, but they incline toward biased emptiness and do not understand wondrous presence. If everything were utterly empty and nonexistent, what sort of world would there be? What Buddhist Dharma would remain to be practiced? The emptiness taught in Buddhism is not an emptiness in which nothing whatsoever exists. It is emptiness in which nothing can be grasped or obtained: wondrous presence and true emptiness, not biased emptiness.

What is meant by emptiness? It means that Buddha-nature has no form that can be seen: it cannot be seen or touched, and therefore it is called empty. But it is not an utter nothingness; it possesses spiritual awareness, and all functions arise from it. Our ability to see forms, hear sounds, work, walk, and so forth are all functions arising from Buddha-nature. All visible forms are illusory appearances manifested by Buddha-nature.

Without Buddha-nature, our bodies, eyes, ears, and so forth could not function. Likewise, without Buddha-nature, the myriad things in the universe could not appear.

For example, when we no longer draw breath, this body becomes like wood, without awareness. The eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, the mouth cannot speak, the hands and feet cannot move, the brain cannot think, and the world can no longer be constructed.

Thus, our present ability to speak, see, hear, and act is all the functioning of Buddha-nature. Therefore it is wondrous presence and true emptiness, not biased

emptiness. The two vehicles do not understand this principle. They empty only the personal self—that is, they know only that this body is unobtainable—and so they can transcend segmented birth and death. Yet they turn around and cling to dharma characteristics, believing that the dharma-self exists. The dharma-self means taking the earth, water, fire, and wind—the four great elements of Buddha-nature—as a self, believing that there is a dharma to practice, bodhi to realize, and birth and death to transcend. Thus, the two vehicles adhere to biased emptiness without understanding wondrous presence. They cling to dharmas; this is the wisdom of biased emptiness.

The third is the non-Buddhist view: those who practice while holding heterodox views. Such views mean attachment to annihilation or eternalism. Some say that after death one certainly still exists, perhaps as primordial matter, like wood, without awareness; this is incorrect. Others say that there is nothing, that death is the end. Thus they dispute. To posit eternalism is to claim that something exists permanently; to posit annihilation is to claim that there is nothing. Therefore, the non-Buddhist view is to seek Dharma outside the mind and practice while holding heterodox views.

The fourth is the bodhisattva view. It is the practice of one who relies on a profound understanding of cause and effect and the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena. Such a person knows that the personal self is unobtainable and that the dharma-self is also unobtainable. As stated above, the dharma-self refers to the most fundamental elements within our Buddha-nature: the earth, water, fire, and wind, the four great elements.

These elemental natures are like rice seeds and wheat seeds: when planted, they can grow rice and wheat. Our world and all things are produced from the earth, water, fire, and wind, the four great elemental natures of Buddha-nature. If one firmly clings to these elemental natures as a real self, one is still attached. The dharma-self is not empty, and one cannot realize the Way.

One must further realize the twofold emptiness of self and phenomena: people's bodies and all phenomena are unobtainable, and the earth, water, fire, and wind—the four great elemental natures of intrinsic nature—are also unobtainable. Only then can one transcend the two forms of birth and death and realize the Way. Once one becomes attached to appearances, something obstructs the mind, veiling its intrinsic luminosity so that it cannot shine forth with complete clarity. Thus, this too must be emptied away before one can truly become a Buddha. This is the bodhisattva view.

The fifth is the Buddha's view. If one can understand that we ourselves are Buddhas and that all sentient beings are Buddhas—not only that I alone am a Buddha, but

that everyone is a Buddha—and practices the Dharma with this view, this is the Buddha's view.

The first thing in studying Buddhism and practicing the Dharma is to establish this Buddha's view and recognize clearly that we all possess, just as the Buddha does, undefiled wisdom-nature: originally pure and inherently free of afflictions. This mind is Buddha; one does not use some method to cultivate oneself into a Buddha.

It is only because we do not understand, and take external things to be real, that we resemble those with the view of ordinary beings, believing that all external things truly exist and pursuing them with insatiable greed. If we understand that everyone possesses Buddha-nature, are not deluded by external appearances, let go of everything, and return to the original source, we become Buddhas.

A Buddha is not something made through practice; Buddhahood is originally complete. Thus it is called the naturally genuine Buddha of intrinsic nature; it has always been so. It is only because we are deluded by external appearances, take the wrong road, greedily grasp without satiety, create karma, and undergo karmic retribution that we fall into the six realms of rebirth, unable to transcend birth and death.

Seeing our pitiable condition—that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature yet do not know it, and here, in a state of confusion, create karma and undergo karmic retribution, suffering in vain through the cycle of birth and death—the Buddha appeared in the world and taught the Dharma. He calls on us all to awaken from this dream and not cling. If we can let go, we become Buddhas. Therefore, the way is swift and convenient; it is not without hope. Do not doubt, saying, "Alas, I have no hope. Our karmic obstacles are heavy; we cannot become Buddhas." Such a view is mistaken. Therefore, the first requirement is right view.

This is taught in Exoteric Buddhism, and Esoteric Buddhism teaches it as well. It too speaks of several kinds of views.

The first is the view of ordinary beings: believing that everything exists and clinging without relinquishing or letting go.

The second is the non-Buddhist view: positing annihilation or eternalism, which is attachment. Those who posit eternalism hold that there is something obtainable: "I have an immortal spirit, and it exists forever." They do not know that this immortal spirit also arises from our seventh consciousness. It is still an illusory appearance, not our naturally genuine Buddha-nature. Therefore, this immortal spirit still has a limited lifespan.

Formerly, Patriarch Lü Chunyang met Chan Master Huanglong. He believed that he had refined an immortal spirit and would never die, but Chan Master Huanglong said to him, "Even if you endure for a million kalpas, you will still fall into emptiness and extinction." At most, you may live longer than ordinary people, but after a million kalpas, you will still return to nonexistence.

For wherever there is birth, there must be cessation. Without cessation, how could there be birth? This is dialectical principle: since something has already arisen, it will certainly perish in the future. But our Buddha-nature is naturally genuine, neither arising nor ceasing. It was not born at some particular time. Thus it is said that since beginningless time, it has always been just so.

The third is the śrāvaka view, namely the arhat view. It teaches the principle of biased emptiness and does not understand the wondrous presence of Buddha-nature.

The fourth is the Consciousness-Only view. What is Consciousness-Only? It is China's Dharma Characteristics School. The Treatise on the Perfection of Consciousness-Only, which Dharma Master Xuanzang brought back from India after obtaining the scriptures, is the school's most important scripture and treatise. It teaches three natures: first, the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment; second, the nature of dependence on others; and third, the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

What is the nature of dependence on others? It means that all things arise in dependence on other things. For example, this cup did not originally exist; porcelain clay was placed in a kiln and fired, becoming a cup. A table also did not originally exist; it was made from wood.

In Buddhist scriptures, this is called arising from causes and conditions: things arise when related conditions come together, and this is called the nature of dependence on others. From the perspective of this nature, all things have no independent substance; they are formed through dependence on other things. Since things did not originally exist, one does not cling to appearances. One then enters the nature of absolute reality and perfection and sees one's intrinsic nature.

If one clings to appearances, does not recognize the illusory appearances of the nature of dependence on others, and regards all these things as truly existent, pursuing them, that is the nature of pervasive discrimination and attachment. It is to cling everywhere, believing things truly exist; this is deluded thought. Thus, the first nature is deluded view. The second is to know that all things originally lack any substantial entity, that they are illusory and unreal, and not to cling. Not clinging is letting go; then one realizes intrinsic nature—the nature of absolute reality and perfection.

The fifth is the Madhyamaka view. It holds that all things originally have no independent existence; they are true emptiness and wondrous presence. Dependent arising is empty of inherent nature: all things exist through the conjunction of related conditions, while their fundamental substance is nonexistent.

The sixth is the innate view: all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and are all Buddhas. Do not belittle yourself by thinking, "I am an ordinary being on the lowest ground, not a Buddha," thereby holding an inferior view. You must boldly take responsibility: I am Buddha.

Because we can assume the responsibility of being Buddhas, our conduct must accord with the level of a Buddha: we must truly be able to let go of everything, bring forth wondrous functioning, and be open, unrestrained, and at ease. Therefore, if we acknowledge that we are Buddhas, we must continuously correspond with wondrous conduct, utterly eliminate all our former attachments and bad habits, and restore our original nature. This is our great wisdom.

The final kind is the Great Perfection View. The Great Perfection View is that all wondrous presence is manifested by our intrinsic nature. Nature is appearance, and appearance is nature; nature and appearance are nondual. Emptiness is presence, and presence is emptiness; emptiness is presence, and all that is present is the manifestation of our wondrous nature.

Therefore, one does not see one's nature apart from appearances, nor grasp appearances apart from nature. All appearances are manifested by our wondrous nature. For example, before constructing a house, an engineer must first design the plans. In designing them, one must use the brain, consider how the house should be built, and calculate how much material will be needed. All of this must pass through the brain.

How does the brain's functioning arise? It functions through the activity of our Buddha-nature. When a person's heart has stopped beating and the person has died, even if the brain is undamaged, why can it no longer function? It is because the Buddha-nature has left the body, and so it no longer functions.

It is like an electric lamp. Once the power grid and wires have been installed, the lamp will not light unless electricity is supplied; only after the current is switched on does it light up. Buddha-nature is like electricity. All these functions are functions of Buddha-nature, and all appearances are created, manifested, and perceived by Buddha-nature.

Therefore, all appearances are myself, and I am all appearances. This is the Great Perfection View. Presence is emptiness, and emptiness is presence; it is neither empty nor existent, neither existent nor empty. If you call it empty, the three-

thousandfold great thousand world-system and its myriad forms clearly exist. If you call it existent, all appearances are unobtainable; they are like reflections in a mirror.

Our Buddha-nature is great perfect mirror wisdom, brilliantly illuminating the great thousand worlds in all ten directions. Therefore, where there is Buddha-nature, there are all appearances. These appearances are the wondrous functioning of our mind and the manifestation of our nature. Buddha-nature itself has no appearance that can be seen, yet it can manifest everything; therefore, appearances are our intrinsic nature. This is the Great Perfection View.

We must now set our view aright and understand that we are not utterly empty of everything. The Chan school says that we must understand wondrous presence; this means that our Buddha-nature exists. Although Buddha-nature has no appearance that can be seen, it can bring forth all wondrous functioning and manifest all illusory appearances. Recognize that these illusory appearances are manifested by our own nature, and do not become attached to them. In this way, practice progresses quickly.

Because one neither clings to emptiness nor attaches to existence, one can realize the Way. Therefore, the first requirement is that one's view be correct. It is not that emptiness means that nothing at all exists. To incline one-sidedly toward emptiness and cast everything away is also mistaken.

In the past, the great Greek philosopher Socrates studied philosophy and also discovered that nothing can be obtained. Thus, people of great wisdom know that phenomenal appearances are empty and unobtainable. But he inclined one-sidedly toward emptiness; he did not understand wondrous presence and discarded everything.

At night he slept in a culvert, needing no house. He carried a cup tied to his trouser pocket and used it to scoop water from the river. One day he saw children playing outside and drinking water cupped in their hands. When he saw this, he thought, "Oh, I do not need a cup either," and threw the cup away, drinking water from his cupped hands. This was far too one-sidedly attached to emptiness.

Thus, heterodox views either posit eternalism or cling to annihilation. Many people who practice qigong today cling to existence: they cling to qi and take the vital essence, qi, and spirit as existent, adhering to eternalism. They do not know that these are illusory appearances and not real. Non-Buddhists call essence, qi, and spirit the three treasures, but their root is actually in our Buddha-nature. Without Buddha-nature, essence, qi, and spirit cannot arise. Essence, qi, and spirit are brought forth by our Buddha-nature. Therefore, we must recognize the root.

In studying Buddhism, the first thing is to set our view aright. Our Buddha-nature is neither empty nor existent. If you say it exists, it has no appearance that can be obtained; if you say it is empty, it has wondrous functioning, manifests all appearances, and performs all functions. It can speak, hear, do things, and walk.

Neither empty nor existent, one does not attach to either side, nor establish a middle. Without the two sides, there is no middle; only when there are two sides is there a middle. To study Buddhism with this view is naturally to realize perfect fruition and become a Buddha.

Therefore, right view is extremely important. Today I would again remind you all about right view: recognize this true view. Do not incline toward emptiness and think that everything is nonexistent. Still less should you cling to existence, thinking that everything truly exists and rushing to pursue it with insatiable greed. That is even more mistaken.

Therefore, we neither incline toward emptiness nor attach to existence. In all affairs, we act in accordance with conditions: whatever we have today, we make use of, without comparing ourselves with others. Our great error is comparing ourselves with others. "Oh, someone else has a garden villa, while I do not; I must find a way to get one too. Other people travel about in cars, while I do not; I must find a way to get one as well."

When they cannot obtain these things, they will not hesitate to do evil—even murder and arson—and thus create karma and undergo karmic retribution. Once we understand this principle, we accord with conditions in all things: if something is available, we use it; if it is unavailable, we do not seek it. Everything is an illusory appearance. Each person has their own causes and conditions, because the karma created by each of us is different.

Just as the work and occupations that people now undertake differ, so does the karma they create; naturally, the results they receive also differ. Some people have high incomes and enjoy relatively better circumstances, while others have very low incomes and enjoy relatively poorer circumstances. These cannot be made equal. Why? Because the karma created in past lives differs.

Past lives are the cause, and this life is the result. Because the causes created in the past differ, the results experienced in this life also differ. In this life, we again act and create karma. We often seek to satisfy our own desires, bully others, and put others down in order to climb upward ourselves. Thus we do evil.

Therefore, in the course of life, we sometimes do good and sometimes do evil; people are a mixture of good and evil. If there were no evil, one would ascend to heaven and would no longer be in the human realm.

Within the six realms of rebirth, those with both good and evil enter the human realm; those who are purely good and without evil ascend to heaven; those who are purely evil, full of greed, anger, and ignorance, descend into hell; those with especially strong anger enter the realm of asuras; those with especially strong greed enter the realm of hungry ghosts; and those with especially strong ignorance enter the animal realm. Everything is created by mind. We create it ourselves and undergo the results ourselves; it is not governed by anyone else.

To study Buddhism and realize the Way is a great blessing for us. Among the multitudes of sentient beings, how many can have faith in Buddhism? Very few. Those who have faith in Buddhism are already fewer than those who do not, but how many truly believe and deeply believe in cause and effect? Fewer still.

Many people who profess faith in Buddhism merely burn incense, bow before the Buddha, and seek the Buddha's blessings in order to gain good fortune. Such faith does not count as genuine faith in Buddhism. One must understand that one is a Buddha and that all sentient beings are Buddhas. One must then practice, eliminate one's deluded mind, deluded thoughts, and deluded notions of attachment, greed, anger, and ignorance, and perfect the Buddha Way. Only then does one truly have faith in Buddhism.

Therefore, for us now to truly have faith in Buddhism is an immeasurably great blessing. Only in this way can we leave the six realms of rebirth. Today you have all come to study Buddhism and cultivate the Way. This is a great blessing, so you must be guided onto the right path: recognize that we are all Buddhas and that sentient beings are all Buddhas. So long as we let go, we can become Buddhas. This is extremely important.

Turning to our practice, what we are now transmitting is the Heart-of-Heart Dharma. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma is a supreme Buddhist teaching within Esoteric Buddhism. As we explained last time, Esoteric Buddhism has the stages of the nine vehicles: the outer three vehicles, the inner three vehicles, and the secret three vehicles.

The Heart-of-Heart Dharma belongs to the highest teaching among the secret three vehicles: the final, incomparable, corresponding Great Perfection Dharma. It corresponds to the Great Perfection of the Nyingma school. You may wonder: the Great Perfection is the highest Buddhist teaching of the Nyingma school, but the Heart-of-Heart Dharma does not belong to that school's Great Perfection. How, then, can it correspond to it? Let us now explain.

The Great Perfection teachings of the Nyingma school are divided into two parts. One is Trekchö (cutting through), rendered in Chinese as "direct cutting": whenever a deluded thought arises, cut it off immediately, do not follow it as it wanders on, and

allow the true mind to appear. The latter part is Tögal (“direct crossing” or “leap-over”), translated as “sudden transcendence”: through practicing it, one can transcend the three realms and bring the cycle of birth and death to an end. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma practices just this direct cutting and sudden transcendence.

It is formless esoteric practice. It is cultivated through one mantra and six mudrās, directly realizing one’s nature without having to cultivate any form as an intermediate stage. In form-based practices, one must first cultivate an appearance and then dissolve that appearance into emptiness before one can see one’s intrinsic nature. This requires many detours and cannot effect direct cutting and sudden transcendence.

Our intrinsic nature has no form that can be seen, touched, or heard. People therefore have no way to begin with it directly. For this reason, Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism must take many detours: one first performs the four preliminary practices, such as full prostrations, and then performs preliminary visualization practices, visualizing forms so that one has something to work with. Only then can one go on to practice methods for seeing one’s nature.

Great Perfection Trekchö also first requires the cultivation of channels, winds, and drops. One begins with the winds, visualizing the channels and the three channels and seven chakras: the three channels—the central, left, and right channels; and the seven chakras—the crown, brow, throat, heart, navel, dantian, and base chakras. After these visualizations are complete, one then contemplates these appearances as empty.

This is called the preliminary practice of Great Perfection Trekchö; it is an expedient means prior to cultivation.

We use six mudrās and one mantra, without visualizing any channels. We immediately gather our deluded mind into a single mantra: while reciting, the mind recites and the ears listen. Recite the mantra with the mind, and clearly hear with the ears the sound of your own recitation. In this way, grasp the deluded thoughts of the mind faculty so that deluded thoughts do not proceed, and one can immediately enter deeply into samādhi.

This way of cultivation is the Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration through the Ear Faculty of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. Among the six sense faculties of sentient beings in the Sahā world, the ear faculty is the most acute. For example, the eyes can see many things, even at a great distance, but when separated by a sheet of paper, they cannot see. The ears are different: even with a great mountain between them, they can still hear sounds.

For example, when someone is asleep, you may hold up a sheet of paper for him to see, but he will not wake up; call out to him, however, and he wakes at once. Therefore, the ear faculty is the most sensitive, and it is best to practice by means of the ear faculty.

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra explains this very clearly. Twenty-five great masters—all great bodhisattvas—each describe their own methods of practice. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva says that he entered through the ear faculty. In the end, the Buddha asks Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva to choose which faculty the sentient beings of the Saḥā world should use in practice for the greatest appropriateness and speed. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva selects Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva’s Dharma Gate of Perfect Penetration through the Ear Faculty.

Because the ear faculty is the sharpest, we now use it to listen to the sound of our own mantra recitation. This gathers in the mind faculty, so that the sixth consciousness does not move. This method of practice is more direct, and more “cutting through,” than the practice of Great Perfection.

Everyone should take note: when practicing, the mind must recite and the ears must hear. One must practice in accordance with the Dharma. It is absolutely no use to recite a mantra with the mouth while thinking about other matters, reciting with the mouth but not with the mind. The same applies to Buddha-recitation. If one recites Amitābha Buddha while one’s mouth recites but one’s mind is scattered and filled with confused thoughts, the Buddha’s name cannot be properly recited. In the future, one will not be able to ascend to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, because the mind is too confused.

If the mind is not pure and tranquil, then when the Buddha manifests, one will not see him. Master Yongming Yanshou—who was both a great patriarch of the Chan school and a great patriarch of the Pure Land school—said: “Though one recites Amitābha with a scattered mind, even shouting until one’s throat breaks is futile.”

Why did he say this? He said that the mind is like water: when the water of the mind is pure and tranquil, it is like the clear water of a river, in which the reflection of the moon in the sky appears.

Amitābha Buddha is like the moon in the sky, and our minds are like water. If the water is not clear and tranquil, the moon in the sky cannot appear in it. If the mind is not clear and tranquil, Amitābha Buddha cannot manifest within your mind. Then you will not see Amitābha Buddha come to guide you, and you will be unable to attain rebirth.

Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva teaches us to “gather in the six sense faculties and maintain uninterrupted pure mindfulness.” We must use the sacred name of

Amitābha to gather in the six faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; recite Amitābha Buddha in purity and tranquility; and recite until attaining one-pointedness of mind without distraction. Only then can we attain rebirth in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. We know that among the six sense faculties, the mind faculty is the hardest to gather in. As soon as one becomes still, deluded thoughts arise.

Because we are accustomed to activity, we do not notice them unless we become still. At times the mind is in turmoil and we do not even know it, but once we become still, they are easily seen. Why is this? When water becomes clear and tranquil, the mud and sand settle, and we can see them. When the water is unsettled, we cannot see the mud and sand. Thus, once we sit down, we see them.

Deluded thoughts are confused and inverted, and it is difficult to keep them from arising. Therefore, we must use the method of mental recitation and listening with the ears to gather in the six sense faculties, interrupt deluded thinking, and let body and mind fall away. Then our original Buddha-nature manifests. Thus, practicing in accordance with the Dharma is extremely important; without such practice, one cannot see one's true nature.

All of you who practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma have practiced for a long time and should have attained some realization. Why? Because you are originally Buddhas. So long as you are willing to let go, you can recover your original nature and realize the Way. Why, after practicing for so long, have you still not succeeded? It is because you have not practiced in accordance with the Dharma.

The first kind of person who does not practice in accordance with the Dharma sits for a while and then stops, stops and then sits again. Today they sit; tomorrow they say that they are unwell or too busy, and so they let their practice lapse. One cannot practice in this way. It is like cooking rice: before it is cooked, one takes it off the stove, lets it cool, then cooks it again, and takes it off again. The rice will become hard. In studying the Dharma and practicing, we are like a boat moving against the current: if we do not exert ourselves to pole the boat forward, the current will carry it downstream. Therefore, intermittent practice is no good.

The second kind is those who do not practice with mental recitation and listening with the ears. Their ears are not listening; while reciting a mantra, they are simultaneously entertaining deluded thoughts: "What should I do about this? How should I resolve that?" This is not practice in accordance with the Dharma. Such a deluded mind cannot be cut off; and if it cannot be cut off, how can one open up one's original nature? How can one see one's intrinsic nature?

The third important reason is that one does not maintain contemplation after leaving the meditation cushion, but forgets it. One practices diligently while seated,

but after rising follows deluded thoughts and runs after circumstances. This is like exposing something to the sun for one day and freezing it for ten; consequently, it is very difficult for one's practice to make progress.

This is especially so in the present turbulent times. For instance, when everyone is trading stocks, their minds are wholly on stocks: "Oh! Has the stock I bought made money? Has it gone up? Has it fallen? Have I lost money?" They are filled with confused and inverted deluded thoughts and do not maintain contemplation. In applying oneself, one must maintain contemplation at all times. The moment a thought arises, see it; do not follow it. One must clearly know that what can speak, see, and hear is one's own intrinsic nature. Only by not being turned by circumstances will one succeed. Unless these faults are corrected, one cannot realize the Way.

The purpose of practice is to open up our original nature and see our intrinsic nature. If we practice heart esotericism in accordance with the Dharma, we will certainly be able to accomplish this swiftly. As we practice and recite mantras, when recitation can no longer continue, suddenly the mind that recites and the mantra being recited both fall away at once. Inwardly, body and mind; outwardly, the world—all dissolve into emptiness together; even empty space is shattered.

Yet this is not annihilation. There remains a clear and numinous knowing; that is the manifestation of intrinsic nature. After intrinsic nature manifests, however, habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives still remain and have not yet been entirely removed. Therefore, Great Perfection still requires the practice of Tögal: that is, safeguarding intrinsic nature so that deluded habits gradually diminish and realization and experience increase. This is exactly the same as what we call post-awakening preservation. One must carefully safeguard intrinsic nature.

In genuine practice, one no longer speaks of there being practice. Whether one practices or does not practice are both dualistic ways of speaking; one simply maintains contemplation at all times and removes one's habitual tendencies. Great Perfection, however, contemplates light so that the body is transformed into a rainbow body. Our heart-esotericism practice is a Chan-school method and does not cling to bodily appearances. Therefore, it does not emphasize whether or not one is transformed into a rainbow body. If one becomes attached to the transformation of the body into a rainbow body, one may instead be reproached as "a wandering ghost in the universe" and be unable to fully realize the noble fruition.

We are originally Buddhas, so seeing our true nature is not difficult. We can now use Chan koans to explain directly to everyone what intrinsic nature is, and point out how to see one's true nature directly in the present moment. Chan directly points

out to everyone how to see their true nature; there is no need to investigate any huatou.

For example, you ask the master, “What is Buddha?” The master points it out to you: “What else could the one conversing before you be but Buddha?” Or he may say to you, “You yourself are Buddha!” Or he may call out to you; when you respond, he tells you, “Just this is it!” And so forth. When Bodhidharma came from India, he directly pointed to the mind: see one’s true nature and attain Buddhahood. There was no particular place for people to apply effort.

Later, because people’s faculties became dull, they did not dare, or were unwilling, to accept direct pointing. They thought that it was nothing remarkable, so the patriarchs changed to the investigation of huatou. This occurred after the Song dynasty. In investigating a huatou, one arouses a sense of doubt and uses it to block deluded thoughts and cut them off, thereby opening up one’s original nature. This adds an extra gate to pass through and a further detour to travel.

Form-based Esoteric Buddhism directly points out what intrinsic nature is only at the end; this is called instructing one to see the school’s principle. To see the school’s principle is to make us understand our own intrinsic nature—that is, to see our true nature. It is direct instruction in seeing one’s true nature. Therefore, the most profound Esoteric Buddhism is Chan. Chan is unsurpassed esoteric practice, the highest level of Esoteric Buddhism; Chan and Esoteric Buddhism are no different.

It is mistaken to regard Esoteric Buddhism and Chan as two different things. Chan is Esoteric Buddhism, and Esoteric Buddhism is Chan. From the outset, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma says that it takes Chan as its essence and Esoteric Buddhism as its function: it makes use of mantras and mudrās, and relies on the Buddha’s empowering blessings, to open up one’s original nature and directly realize one’s intrinsic nature. After realizing intrinsic nature, it takes the Pure Land as its ultimate destination, returning to the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light of the One True Dharma Realm.

The Western Land of Ultimate Bliss has four lands: the Land of the Common Residence of Ordinary Beings and Sages, the Land of Expedient Means with Residue, the Land of True Reward and Adornment, and the Land of Eternal Quiescent Light. The Land of Eternal Quiescent Light means that all of space and the entire dharma realm are Pure Land. There is no particular location, no distinction of east, south, west, or north; all is Pure Land.

Because our dharmakāya is the One True Dharma Realm, pervading all of space and the entire dharma realm, it is not divided into locations and has neither defilement nor purity. If there were purity, it would not be so; without impurity, how could there be purity? Thus it is unstained by a single speck of dust, utterly bare, and not

establishing a single dharma. Therefore, it is not ultimate merely to reach the Pure Land; one must realize that the ten directions are all Pure Land.

Last time, we also pointed this out to everyone directly: Buddha-nature is not elsewhere. It is the clear, numinous knowing free from thought at the point where thought ceases. When all deluded thoughts have been let go and not a single one arises, this does not mean that there is no awareness; there is still clear and distinct knowing. This clear and distinct numinous knowing is our Buddha-nature. Therefore, seeing one's true nature is not difficult.

Do not treat it as a riddle and speculate: "Oh, I have realized the Way—I have seen yellow, red, and green things." That is irrelevant; it is seeing ghosts. Seeing one's true nature is seeing of non-seeing; there is not a single thing.

For example, if all of you now cut off your thoughts, think of nothing, and all appearances remain within your field of vision, yet you do not cling to any object or person—though there are many people and many things, you see without seeing. You do not know who is Zhang San or Li Si, what this is or what that is. This thought-free numinous knowing, capable of seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing, is precisely a person's intrinsic nature.

If I see Zhang San, Li Si, a teacup, a parasol, and so forth, that is a problem: it is attachment to appearances. The sūtra says: "When seeing sees seeing, that seeing is not true seeing." If you have something that you see, then it is not true seeing. Therefore, "seeing cannot reach it," and "seeing must leave seeing." Only by leaving one's own seeing is there true seeing.

Non-seeing is your Buddha-nature. Therefore, seeing appearances without attachment to appearances, and seeing nothing, is true seeing. Thus, realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature is not difficult. Someone boasts: "My Buddhadharma is excellent. Come study the Dharma with me—not for six months, not even for six days; in six hours I will teach you to see your true nature."

In fact, seeing one's true nature does not take even one minute; one can immediately make everyone understand what it is to see their true nature. But people often do not dare to accept it at this point. "This is seeing one's true nature? Perhaps it is not. If this really is my intrinsic nature, why have I not developed spiritual powers?" Everyone is obstructed and deluded by spiritual powers.

They do not actually know what spiritual powers are. When we speak and everyone hears, what is that if not spiritual power? If it were not the functioning of the spirit, this body could neither hear nor speak. The body is like a robot: without electricity, it cannot move. Its present ability to speak and hear is the wondrous functioning of Buddha-nature.

Buddha-nature can do anything, and so it is called shen; it lacks nothing, and so it is called tong. Buddha-nature can do everything and penetrates everything; nothing obstructs it. Once you become attached to appearances, you no longer penetrate. If you fixate on this cup, you do not see the rest; then you are no longer unobstructed. If you are unattached, with no signposts blocking the way, all things lie within your field of vision, and your understanding is unobstructed.

Thus, all wondrous functioning is spiritual power. Layman Pang said that carrying water and hauling firewood are wondrous functions of spiritual power. Everyone is constantly within the wondrous functioning of spiritual powers without knowing it. To insist that spiritual power means being able to do what others cannot, while one oneself can—that is truly a grievous misunderstanding.

In fact, the three insights and six supernormal powers are not difficult to attain. Why? Because practitioners first see their nature, then eliminate their old habitual tendencies, and only afterward gain these powers. Chan masters call this: “Once you obtain the root, you need not worry about the branches.” When one has just realized the Way and only then understands the principle, one still cannot fully penetrate matters as they appear.

At this point, one cannot yet save oneself. The habitual tendencies accumulated over many lives remain, obscuring the wondrous functioning of one’s intrinsic nature. These habits must be eliminated before spiritual powers can manifest. This corresponds to what the Great Perfection teachings call the main practice. Therefore, after seeing one’s nature, one must apply oneself further: at every moment cut off thoughts and safeguard [realization]. All appearances are unobtainable; do not abide in anything. Then, naturally, the day will come when one perfectly realizes the fruit of sagehood.

Do not think that this initial awakening is of no use. It is upon this initial awakening that one will later develop great spiritual powers and realize the great Way. For without understanding this true nature, there is no way to begin applying oneself. One must recognize and safeguard this intrinsic nature in order to practice properly; this is called true cultivation after awakening.

Safeguarding oneself is like an infant just born: none of its functions can yet operate, so it must rely on adults for protection. But you cannot say that an infant is not a human being merely because its functions have not yet developed. It is a human being; one need only protect it until it grows up. Thus, this point of realizing the Way is most important. Do not take it lightly. Safeguard [realization] continuously and closely; whenever a thought arises, cut it off.

Some people misunderstand, thinking that it is enough simply to see a thought clearly. This is utterly mistaken! To abide clearly in that thought is delusion added

upon delusion; it is not intrinsic nature. Only when a thought has ceased and there is clear, distinct awareness is it intrinsic nature.

Merely seeing a thought arise is not the point. If, on seeing a thought arise, you become attached to its appearance, you are an ordinary being: you take that thought to be real and thereby enter a mistaken path. When you see a thought arise, do not run after it; cut it off. Do not get this wrong! In the work of safeguarding, the more continuous and meticulous the safeguarding, the better.

All material forms are shadows manifested by our true nature; in other words, they are our transformation bodies. Everything is transformed and fashioned by our true mind; all are our transformation bodies.

We must all accomplish the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. At the point where a thought ceases, clear and distinct awareness is our dharmakāya. The luminosity that clearly illumines all things is our sambhogakāya. All things are shadows manifested by our Buddha-nature; not clinging to or pursuing them is our nirmāṇakāya.

When the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya are all complete, is that not becoming a Buddha right here and now?! Thus, becoming a Buddha is not difficult; do not say that it is very difficult. You are all Buddhas and can all attain it right here and now; the three bodies can all be perfected right here and now. Do not place Buddhahood on a path that is unattainably lofty, highly complicated, and extremely difficult.

It is mistaken to think in an inferior way that we are all ordinary beings, while becoming sages and patriarchs is only the affair of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. You must acknowledge and undertake this yourselves: I am a Buddha; all sentient beings are Buddhas; there are no sentient beings that are not Buddhas. At all times abide nowhere, and thereby perfectly fulfill our Buddhahood.

Since one is a Buddha, one must have the bearing of a Buddha. A Buddha does not abide in anything and has no attachment to any thing. Do whatever needs to be done, for our Buddha-nature can give rise to every wondrous function and can do anything. Yet do not cling to anything and attain nothing. To become a Buddha is to become one who attains nothing. Do not go recklessly pursuing spiritual powers.

To think that only one who possesses spiritual powers is a Buddha is mistaken! If you pursue spiritual powers, not only will you fail to obtain them, but you may become possessed by demons; you will have a share in becoming a demon. Buddha and demon are like one hand: here, when awareness is clear and distinct and there is no attachment to appearances, there is Buddha; there, when attachment to appearances arises, there is demon.

If you become complacent—"Oh, I have become a Buddha; I have spiritual powers"—then you have not become a Buddha; you have become a demon. Spiritual powers are inherently possessed by everyone; they are not possessed by you alone. Everyone is the same. What is there to marvel at or exaggerate? Thus, there is nothing in which to take complacent delight. Everything is unobtainable; attaining nothing is what it truly means to become a Buddha.

When one truly becomes a Buddha, even Buddha is unobtainable. Chan Master Zhaozhou said, "I do not delight in hearing even the single word 'Buddha,'" and this is its meaning. Therefore, one must not constantly abide in the thought, "I am a Buddha." The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment explains this very clearly: "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.

"The realm of delusion consists of mountains, rivers, the great earth, grasses, trees, and forests. These things are accumulated from our deluded thoughts; this is because we do not understand the functioning of true nature. But after understanding it, these states are all manifested by our Buddha-nature and are transformations of our dharmakāya. Yet one must not have this 'mind of knowing' or abide in the thought of becoming a Buddha. One must no longer give rise to thoughts of true or false, real or unreal.

Therefore, after awakening, deluded imaginings, deluded thoughts, and deluded mind all become wondrous functions of my Buddha-nature. Today I will give you a further explanation: deluded mind, deluded imaginings, and deluded thoughts become delusion through attachment to appearances.

Conversely, without attachment to appearances, all thoughts are wondrous functions of our Buddha-nature; all thoughts are functions that bring all things to accomplishment, wondrous functions of our Buddha-nature. For Buddha-nature to give rise to wondrous functioning does not mean sitting still and guarding against movement. That is sitting behind a dark mountain, sitting in a demon's cave. One cannot become a Buddha that way; even sitting for tens of millions of years, one cannot become a Buddha.

For one is dead there, motionless, and does not know what a Buddha is. A Buddha is one who now has boundless wondrous functioning without attachment to appearances—who can speak, teach, act, and perform every kind of work, without abiding in anything: the lively, numinous, wondrous true mind. This is a true Buddha. Therefore, pay attention: discern well what a true Buddha is, and do not follow deviant paths.

Nowadays there are very many deviant demons and heterodox paths; they are everywhere, all deceiving people, making them difficult to distinguish at first. Yet

genuine discernment is not difficult: listen to what someone says and observe what they do; see whether their words and conduct are consistent. If they say one thing but do another, then what they say is fundamentally demonic talk.

Some people also do evil deeds, give them a pleasant-sounding name, and finally claim, “I am doing this to train your discriminating and attached minds.” They commit evil themselves while claiming to train others—this is truly shameless, self-deceiving talk meant to deceive others. Therefore, we must carefully observe whether their conduct is upright; we must not merely listen to their wild claims and believe them to be true.

You must understand that we practice the Dharma in order to recover our true nature and directly see our intrinsic nature. After directly seeing intrinsic nature, we must constantly temper ourselves amid circumstances and eliminate our own deluded habits.

You must never seek the Dharma outside the mind or focus on channels, energies, and lights. Know that our intrinsic nature is a great light treasury. It is not merely a matter of seeing a little red, white, or black light. It is the great light that brightly illumines the ten directions, the great light in which the Pure Lands of the ten directions appear all at once. It is not something you can attain at present.

At present, the first thing you need is awakening and seeing your nature: understand that, at the point where a thought ceases, clear and distinct awareness is Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is not where a thought arises, much less is it directly seeing a thought arise. It is seeing a thought arise without following it; at the point where the thought ceases, clear and distinct awareness is Buddha-nature. Do not get this wrong.

Moreover, thoughts without attachment to appearances give rise to wondrous functioning, whereas thoughts attached to appearances are deluded imaginings that create karma. You must distinguish this clearly and must not be vague about it. Today I have explained to you clearly and without error what it means to see one’s nature and become a Buddha, what deluded imaginings are, and what wondrous functioning is. I have pointed it out clearly for you, so do not enter a wrong path.

Once you have a way to verify what is demonic and what is correct, you will not take a wrong path and be deceived by others. Otherwise, even if people spoke to you of demonic teachings, you would not know. I hope that you will all apply yourselves well. The Pure Land school is also excellent: one-pointed Buddha-recitation and rebirth in the Pure Land are excellent. Better still is to see one’s nature and become a Buddha right here and now, then make vows for rebirth in the Pure Land, so that one may attain the highest grade of the highest rebirth.

Therefore, go deeply into one method. Do not walk a little on this path and a little on that path, only to accomplish nothing in the end. You must go deeply into one method and apply yourselves well. When practicing the Dharma, you must keep the mind on the practice and hear it with the ears. When off the meditation cushion, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you must contemplate at all times and eliminate your own deluded habits. Attachment to appearances is mistaken; never become attached to appearances. Take care!